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a nation's salvation. In this light he loomed to gigantic proportions, and seemed possessed of Titanic power. Oblivious to the others in the room, his restless eyes gleamed and probed those of his friend.

"Paul," he said in an oddly constrained voice, dropping back to the boyhood phrase, "I can make good. I'm at my country's service, and I've made no mistake in what I said." He swung sharply round to the others, and his clenched hands swept the air in a sudden frenzy of determination. He was the enthusiast once more, daring, dreaming, positive, and sanguine.

"Send me the two best engineers in the navy and the two best supply men to-morrow morning. I'll tell them what we need, and they can tell me how soon they can deliver it where I want it. I'll want machinery and apparatus, supplies and assistants. Money and men! Money and men! They can't beat us! They can't beat us!"

His hands came back to his sides. He folded the precious pieces of metal into their coverings, while the others stood silently by, and, as if abashed by his own outburst, bade them a curt "Good night," and walked from the room. The others, with the burden of reticence upon them, filed after him one by one, contemplating the strange change which might be wrought by this night's work, and wended their way to their homes.

The fog settled down closer and impartially spread itself over the river, the White House, and the patrolman on his beat, but until the dawn came stealthily peering over it all the President wrapped in thought, sat at his desk, and in imagination saw invincible ships of war bound out to certain victory. And all his hope was founded on a war for peace.

PART II., CHAPTER II.

LIKE criminals afraid of the light, and seeking the cover of darkness, a score of the most distinguished men of the United States, occupying its most responsible positions, and bearing the burden of government, came to the White House, which loomed massive and apparently untenanted. They came singly, obeying the instructions given them, left their conveyances at a distance, and walked unattended to the dark portals, which opened and closed behind them. All were aware of the portentous reason for their visit, and the importance of the utmost secrecy. Observant indeed would have been the foreign spy who could have surmised that they were gathering to discuss a plan involving the defense of the nation, or the acceptance of a challenge to war.

There were only two visitors who came together, the inventor and his daughter, and they were the last to enter the room, where those who preceded them were divided into groups round four officers of the navy, who were answering questions, quoting figures, and volunteering details which were not written. The men at the head of the nation were preparing to plunge headlong into what under less immediate menace would have seemed a sea of folly ready to submerge them and their country.

The entrance of Norma was the signal for an abrupt halt in the conversation, and some of those who were not entirely familiar with the part which she played in her father's work looked at her disapprovingly.

He, interpreting these glances, introduced her as his assistant, and concluded by saying "I can't do anything without her. She knows more about my work than I do myself, and as far as I know she's the only woman living who can keep her mouth shut."

They smiled at his manner and cynicism, while the President tendered her a seat at his side and waited for the others to resume their chairs.

"All of you are familiar now with the possibilities of the invention offered by Doctor Roberts—"

"And his daughter Norma," interjected the inventor.

The President accepted the alteration and continued without a halt,—"and have gone over the reports of the four most expert men in the United States navy, who have passed the day with the inventor and his daughter in their laboratory, are convinced of the merit and practicability of the discovery, and have prepared statements of what supplies would be needed, the time in which they could be obtained, and their approximate cost."

There was a look of acquiescence, and the Secretary of the Navy, who had been paying no heed whatever to the chief executive's remarks, rustled the reports in his hand as he turned another page to scan its contents. The room became still again, and the speaker went on.

"Doctor Roberts tells us that he does not regard himself as beyond the experimental stage; but further experiments cannot decrease known values, and may perhaps add to them. This invention as it stands, in the opinion of the four men who have passed the day in testing it, is sufficient to enable us within three months to combat successfully any nation which might begin hostilities."

Norma looked at her father admiringly; but he seemed oblivious to all those round him, and sat absorbed in thought his eyes fixed in a blank stare of concentration into space, and the thumbs of his clasped hands revolving round each other aimlessly. The President reached over to a mass of papers before him, referred to some of them in quest of data, and then looked very grave and earnest as he continued in a lower voice.

"Extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures. We are without precedent, and are confronting an emergency of such immense

import that those of us who were here last night believe it is a time when all rules, official routine, and regular methods must give way in behalf of quick accomplishment. We have no time in which to seek special appropriations; but must take it upon ourselves to lay upon the various budgets which are now open for the considerable sums necessary to prosecute this work."

One or two, who were evidently late arrivals and had not heard the earlier discussions, looked at each other with some hesitation. It was hard to drop routine and dip into the nation's treasury on such short consideration. The high dignity of the presiding officer, however, forbade any interruption, and he went on unchallenged.

"The absolute preservation of our secret is recognized by all as a vital necessity, and to obviate all leakages the members of the army and navy board suggest that our work be carried on in one of the most secluded of the Florida keys. On this they purpose to erect a plant adequate to cast and perfect the metal on which we depend, and as rapidly as possible apply it to the vessels of our navy, which will be sent there as quickly as preparations can be made for their reception."

Norma, who had not been informed of this part of the project, gave a start of protest, foreseeing that she too would have to share in this isolation and become an exile until the experiments were concluded. Her father turned a questioning look toward her, and then reached over and patted her hand in sympathy. The President was steadily summing up the situation.

"The Navy Department will attend to purchasing supplies, including machinery and crude metals necessary for the first work, while Doctor Roberts will place his orders for apparatus, and all will be consigned to the collier Penobscot, which will transport them to the chosen spot. The gunboat Harper will accompany her, and will be the first boat to be experimented upon and equipped with the new plates. Rear Admiral Brockton will be assigned to her command for the present. These two ships will sail from New York harbor, together with a small transport which will carry such engineers and mechanics as the Navy Department may select for a work of this importance. Communication will be maintained by such means as seem best to Admiral Brockton, and more men and supplies will be despatched from time to time as required. It is needless to say that the entire experimental work, the casting of the plates, and the general supervision of everything will be under the direction of Doctor Roberts."

"And his assistant," the inventor again interjected.

The Secretary of the Navy, obeying a suggestion from the chair, read off a long list of figures, explaining them as he went, and concluding with an unqualified endorsement of the plan. So infectious was his blunt enthusiasm and confidence, that those who at first had hesitated at the irregularity of the procedure found themselves won over, and bound with complete unanimity into a coterie which was to assume responsibility for a war. And thus was the issue accepted.

The early hours of the morning were upon them as they dispersed, but Norma, resting back in the corner of the cab which conveyed her homeward, did not share the elation of her father, who was already building workshops, conducting new experiments, and equipping a navy. Yesterday she had looked forward to confiding the story of their great success to Guy Hillier, for in the preceding month, when she and her father had been trembling on the very verge of a great discovery in unknown fields, she had given no intimation of their work or their prospects, planning this surprise, and now, by the rigid embargo of silence thrust upon her, her dream was dissipated. To her the production of this radioactive metal had meant a goal; but now, that it was reached and she was anxious to satisfy a heart hunger she had been given another task, and was to undergo more silence and repression and another siege of work in a world of figures of test tubes and retorts, a slave to the lamp of science and her father's success. Not even the knowledge that she was sacrificing herself on the altar of duty to country, whose protection and welfare were burdens that she must share, palliated the bitterness of holding love aloof. And in this light the triumphs of invention seemed hollow and the night filled with dreariness.

There were no more regular meetings of those who conspired for the national good; but it was a season of terrific activity, and February was yet young when there sailed away from New York harbor one night a gunboat, a collier, and a small transport, whose destinations were unknown, and which slipped their moorings in silence and passed down the bay with scarcely a sound to announce their departure.

On board the gunboat were men accustomed to unquestioning obedience, and on the transport was a little army of skilled mechanics and engineers who had been called from their usual occupation by imperative orders and requested to tell none but their families that they might be absent for several months. There was not a man aboard any of the craft who had not taken a pledge of absolute secrecy.

The collier, black and massive, was loaded almost beyond her carrying capacity, and even on her decks were piled lumber and great sheets of corrugated iron, bearing evidence of full holds below. And all this cargo had the history of rushed work behind it. Strange pieces of machinery, sections of engines, powerful dynamos, and unheard of apparatus were stowed away with cases of chemicals, and the mines of the North, the West, and the South had contributed crude metals or pur-

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