

THE MISSING FLEETS

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY NORTON

SYNOPSIS.

"Vanishing Fleets," a story of "what might have happened" opens in Washington with the United States and Japan on the verge of war. Guy Hillier, secretary of the British embassy, and Miss Norma Roberts, a young girl, are introduced as lovers. At the most important moment Japan declares war. Japan takes possession of the entire country in a state of turmoil because of the government's indifference. Guy Hillier starts for England with secret messages and is compelled to leave Norma Roberts, who with military officers also leaves Washington with serious expedition for an isolated point on the Florida coast. Hawaii is captured by the Japs. All ports are closed. Japan is first approaching western coast of America. Sisco, Japanese spy, discovers exact preparations for war. He is carrying presidential cabinet. He unearths source of great mystery and then, murmuring, "The Nippon," flees to Pacific coast. Sisco is shot down just as journey to get awful news to Japan seems successful. Japan announces intention to attack seaports. Tokio learns of missing Japanese fleet and whole world becomes convinced that United States has some powerful war secret. Sisco, in order to send message to American waters as a Canadian, is a terrible submarine. Hillier is also sent to Canada to attempt to force his way through American lines with message to the president in order that protection for the fleet may be assured. Japan appeals to Britain for aid. British fleet departs, amid misgivings of English. Fleet mysteriously disappears, a sailor picked upon on a raft being the only evidence of the loss. Powers begin to fear for their safety. Hillier makes a failure of effort to deliver message to the president. War between Great Britain and Germany is threatened. The Kaiser disappears.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

The secret service men had already become convinced that the team belonged within the city, and so, as a forlorn hope rather than in the belief that any clew would be gained, they employed the gypsy, giving him license to adopt whatever means seemed the most likely to discover and identify the horse. With Romany cunning, he immediately secured a seat facing one of the most fashionable parkway drives, where he remained for hour after hour, apparently occupied in smoking a short black pipe, and presenting no marked difference in appearance from that of a hundred other loungers.

It was on the second day of the trader's watch that he jumped to his feet and excitedly ran after a passing turnout, until he could attract the attention of a mounted officer, who had been posted on the driveway for the purpose of assisting him in case his quest should develop anything worth following. The man pointed to the carriage ahead, and in broken German asserted his conviction that it was the one which had been used in the abduction. The officer, after giving him hasty instructions to report to headquarters, galloped down the boulevard in pursuit.

Much excitement was caused by the gypsy's story, and a group of the most prominent officials awaited the return of the mounted officer. One hour passed, and still another, before he appeared, and suspense by this time was at high pitch. They began to look at the horse trader with considerable suspicion, fearing a canard, and were almost on the point of sending others to search for the missing officer, when the latter appeared, clanking his spurs across the tiled floor of the entryway. He looked sheepishly about him before saying anything, and then addressing the captain, said: "This man is either mistaken or else the affair promises to be more serious than we at first believed."

"Well," said his superior questioningly, "what about the carriage?"

The officer leaned over and spoke in a confidential tone. "The carriage was that of the American ambassador!"

The captain started back as if paralyzed. He imparted the news in an undertone to his comrades in the room and the excitement grew. They dared go no further in this quest without consulting those of higher authority, and gathered into a private chamber, taking the Romany with them, where they waited till they were joined by the supreme head of the secret service department. This latter, in person, questioned both the gypsy and the officer who had followed the carriage. All that could be elicited from the horse trader was that he had been accustomed to observe animals closely all his life, was positive that he could not be mistaken, and finally, in a fit of sudden wrath, he swore that he would stake his life on this having been the animal which passed him on the night of the Kaiser's disappearance. He even went further and asserted that the harness of the horses was the same which he had seen on that occasion.

The mounted officer was equally certain that the turnout was that belonging to the embassy, because he had observed it before, and knew the ambassador by sight, and this was the reason why he had made no arrest. He said that he had been prepared to do so when he overtook the team, but, identifying the occupant, decided to run no risk of detaining so important a personage, and contented himself with following the carriage throughout its journey and till it was housed. He then dismounted, and by a pretext engaged one of the stable men in conversation, learning thereby that the ambassador had no horses other than these two. He had not deemed it advisable to make any further inquiries for fear of arousing suspicion.

The head of the secret service department saw that he was facing a very grave responsibility. He sent messages calling together the most important men in the government, and within an hour the findings were laid before them. They found themselves in a singularly embarrassing predicament. To take any action which might offend the representative of a nation which was already engaged in triumphant war, and of which the whole world stood in terror and apprehension, was something to be avoided.

Even to suggest to the ambassador of the United States that he was suspected of having abducted the Kaiser, an act of lese majesty in itself, was something which might arouse that man to appeal to his home government and topple Germany itself into an imbroglio which could end only in defeat. The attitude of America, up to the moment when communication ceased, had been friendly. Therefore, there seemed no logical reason for her taking any such unheard of action as that of interference with the person of his majesty. The consensus of opinion was that the situation was too delicate to admit of any ordinary methods, and that there was only one thing to do—keep the embassy under constant surveillance until by secret service methods they might learn what if any connection the ambassador or those about him had with the disappearance.

The gypsy received the promised reward, and from that hour on the American embassy was unceasingly watched day and night from without and within.

CHAPTER XI.

A King Is Lost.

Wearied by hours of suspense, days of anxiety and nights of alarm, the king of England sought relaxation. A period of disaster had reached its cul-



With a Salute, His Equerry Handed Him the Message.

mination where nothing much worse might be predicted. Germany had other occupations than those of aggression, and was now distraught in its effort to find the missing ruler, from whom no word had been received and of whom no information had been obtained. The American dread had been somewhat for days, and the first grief for the loss of the great British fleet had lost its poignancy and was becoming only a bitter recollection to be calmly discussed and speculated upon. After weeks of storm and stress there had come a lull in which England waited for winds more kind.

London had lived so long in misery that it had become callous, hardened, and enveloped in an air of gloom, conditions resembling those of that period of terror which overtook it in the great plague, but which led men by work and pretense of gaiety to seek forgetfulness. Once more the music halls opened, the theaters made their announcements, signs appeared on the boardings and old habits began in a sort of half-hearted way to resume their sway.

In this epoch of abnormality the atmosphere June and sent upon the huge city a June fog, which settled down to that of the hour. And through it in quest of relaxation rose England's king. On leaving the palace he had no definite plan or destination; but the glare of the theaters lured and beckoned insistently to their wealth of light and entertainment, and he yielded.

His coming was unheralded, and attention was attracted to the presence only when the manager, following time-established custom, which for bade the turning of one's back upon a king, preceded him with steady bow to the royal box and took his place beside the equerry while the visitor entered. The hippodrome was to be honored. Within the box the royal guest seated himself behind the partially drawn curtains, where he could lock out upon the bizarre performance and feel himself near a throng of persons. There was some satisfaction at least in mere proximity to companionship.

With languid interest and half ab-

sorption he glanced over the program, paying but small attention to what it contained. A herd of performing elephants galloped clumsily round in the ring below, obeying the shrill, nervous shouts of a woman clad in red tights, and then sedately marched out through an aperture by the side of the stage when the act was ended. A man clad in an ill-fitting dress suit, evidently the heritage from some predecessor, came to the front of the stage and began an ornate, rambling, and ungrammatical speech, announcing some wonderful exhibition which was about to take place. The monarch, suddenly aware of the voice, caught only the last words declaring it to be the "great event of the evening," and leaned back in his cushioned chair, his mind again reverting to the vicissitudes of government.

His reverie was disturbed by a conversation taking place at the door of his box. "The gentleman was very insistent that it should be delivered at once, otherwise I should not have brought it," he heard the manager of the theater say apologetically.

"Is there no place in the world where I can remain undisturbed?" the king muttered wearily, and then called aloud: "Send that note in, whatever it may be."

With a salute his equerry handed him the message, which he idly held in his hand for a few moments before opening it, looking half abstractedly out of his box to where a man was being hoisted aloft and through an opening in the arched roof above. More or less indifferently he tore open the envelope and withdrew a card, at which he stared with a puzzled frown, as if doubting his senses. Surely this could be no jest. Upon it was scrawled:

"Admiral Robert Bevins of the United States says desires a brief audience with his majesty upon matters which can be discussed in person only. If permissible, may he en-

standing. The name alone had sufficient weight to preclude the curt refusal of such an extraordinary request. If this was the friend of his younger days, nothing but an errand of the utmost importance could have induced him to seek an audience under such circumstances, and, on the contrary, if his visitor proved to be a nonentity or crank, the guard would give protection and summary punishment.

The door of the cabinet slid back, and a grim, scarred, weather-beaten man stood surrounded by the royal body guard. In utter astonishment that it should be the admiral stand before him, the sovereign rose from his seat and took a step forward.

They stood for a moment, the king and the admiral, and then slowly grasped each other's hand, casting the restraint of situation and the difference of position completely aside.

"Bevins," the monarch said, "for God's sake what brings you here in a time like this? Is there no limit to your daring and nothing at which your country will hesitate? Do you come as a friend or as an American?"

"Both," answered the officer, standing squarely on his feet and looking steadily into the gray eyes, which persistently scrutinized him as if seeking to read the cause of his visit.

There came another instant's pause, and the king with a gesture invited him to be seated. The guard discreetly withdrew and closed the door of the cabinet.

Bevins continued: "I must apologize for intruding upon you; but I have journeyed a long way to deliver a message which permits of no delay."

"In an official capacity then?" queried the monarch dryly.

"Yes, official and friendly. I was chosen for this mission not only because of our known friendship, but for the reason that I could explain certain events to you better than any man living."

The king nearly forgot the distrust which he had felt first, and almost yielded to the impulse to drop all ceremony and ask his guest for an explanation then and there. He half rose and grasped the arms of his chair. His lips opened to interrogate, and then his life's training and restraint resuming their hold, his tongue gave a dry click, and he again assumed a posture of reserve. It was difficult to assume an air of composure when every instinct of king and man called out to him to ask impetuously the one before him for the unraveling of the skein of events and the story of the fate of the British fleet. He veiled his curiosity, his emotion and his excitement behind a mask of polite reserve.

But what was coming next? His visitor, who had hesitated, now went on: "This is no time nor place for me to say what I have to; but as an emissary of my government I am asked to induce you, your prime minister and the first lord of the admiralty to grant me a private audience."

The king, impatient, curious and anxious, was yet relieved by what he heard. There was nothing very unusual in a request for a private audience under such circumstances, and he had hope that from it might come elucidation of all which he most wished to know. The morrow then would at least bring some ease of mind and some relief from uncertainty. Before he could reply the voice resumed:

"The audience must be granted to-night."

"To-night, to-night!" The sovereign forgot his aplomb, leaned his body toward his companion, and thrust his chin forward. There had been something in the use of the word "must" and the astonishing declaration that the interview should be conceded at once that aroused a little spark of resentment. And yet he was filled with a curiosity akin to anger.

The admiral was quick to read his royal host's annoyance, and hastened to conciliate. "Your majesty, as your friend I ask you not to misconstrue anything I may say. I am asking as a favor that I be allowed my own time and way—yes, that I even may be permitted to suggest the conditions of the meeting. Believe me, it is for the best."

The king was motionless and speechless for what seemed a long time. From his viewpoint of head of a nation and bound to maintain its dignity, and a man with a man's anxieties and anxious to learn from a friend's lips the story of the last month's secrets and disasters, he was considering what was best to do.

In an oddly repressed tone he answered with another tentative question. "As a friend I received you in my box, and now on this same basis I ask you if this communication of yours is so important and urgent that I cannot take its due course according to official custom?"

"Beyond official ways, your majesty, imperative and urgent," was the response; "otherwise I should not have chosen this unusual method of approaching you, nor asked for such an unusual audience in such haste and at such an unseemly hour."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HE JUST IMAGINED IT

Sick Patient Didn't Feel Pain of Operation, but Thought So.

A German surgeon in the Franco-Prussian war had occasion to lance an abscess for a poor fellow, and, as the sore was obstinate, it became necessary to use the knife twice. The operation was not a very painful one, but the patient declared that it had nearly killed him, and when a third resort to the lancet was proposed, he protested that he could never go through the operation alive.

The surgeon promised to make it easy for him and, calling up a few of the loungers, ordered one of them to hold his hands close over the patient's eyes, and two others to grasp his hands firmly.

"This arrangement," explained the doctor, "is said to prevent pain in such an operation. Now, lie perfectly quiet, and when I say 'Now!' prepare yourself."

The surgeon at once began quietly with his work, and in a short time had completed the operation without the least trouble, the patient lying as quiet as though in sleep.

When all was done the surgeon laid aside the knife and said, "Now!" Such a roar came from the lips of the sick man as seldom is heard from any human being. He struggled to free himself, yelling: "Oh, doctor, you're killing me!"

Shouts of laughter soon drowned his cries and he was told that the operation had been all over before the signal was given. It was a good joke, but it is doubtful if the poor fellow could ever be made to believe that he did not feel actual pain after that fatal "Now!"—Tit-Bits.

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