

# The VANISHING FLEETS

BY ROY NORTON  
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## SYNOPSIS.

"Vanishing Fleets," a story of "what might have happened," opens in Washington with the United States and Japan near war. Guy Hillier, secretary of the British embassy, and Miss Norma Roberts, chief aide of inventor Roberts, are introduced as lovers. Japan declares war and takes the Philippines. Guy Hillier starts for England. Norma Roberts leaves Washington for the Florida coast. Hawaii is captured by the Japs. All ports are closed. Tokyo learns of missing Japanese fleet and whole world becomes convinced that United States has powerful war agency. England decides to send a fleet to American waters as a Canadian protection against what the British suppose is a terrible submarine flotilla. Hillier is sent with a message. Fleet mysteriously disappears. The Kaiser is missing. King Edward of England is confronted by Admiral Bevin of the United States. The Dreadnaught, largest of England's warships, is discovered at an impossible point in the Thames. The story now goes back to a time many months before the war breaks out, and inventor Roberts visits the president and cabinet, telling of an exhibiting a metal production. This overcomes friction when electrified and is to be applied to vessels to increase speed to over 50 miles an hour. A city for the manufacture of the mysterious discovery is built on the coast of Florida. Dr. Roberts' first attempt to electrify plates proves a failure.

## CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

"It's all right this time," the inventor assured him. "Wild current and wet floor before, badly insulated handle, too. All fixed up now. Won't be any accident this time," and so on, making the final inspection of his apparatus as he talked. Norma reviewed her father's work, to be certain that all was well, and then at a nod from him took her station at the other monster which had not been used hitherto. There was a simultaneous movement on their part, and, as if suddenly endowed with a soul, the lights once more flashed here and there, glaring at them with sinister contempt—Frankensteins under control!

The admiral, fascinated by the mystery of science, stared at the white-haired old man who was calmly watching his play of colors, and then at the girl who with equal self-possession and coolness manipulated the strange currents beneath her hands. They were animated as by one mind, throwing their levers and switches to and fro at identically the same moment without looking at each other, and the click of the closing currents came in unison. Not until then did they step back from their stations and interchange what seemed to the admiral mutual glances of congratulation.

"That assistant of mine is a wonder!" was all the old man said as he came over, dragged a stool up beside that on which the officer sat, and gleefully rubbed his hands together. "She thinks more clearly than I do."

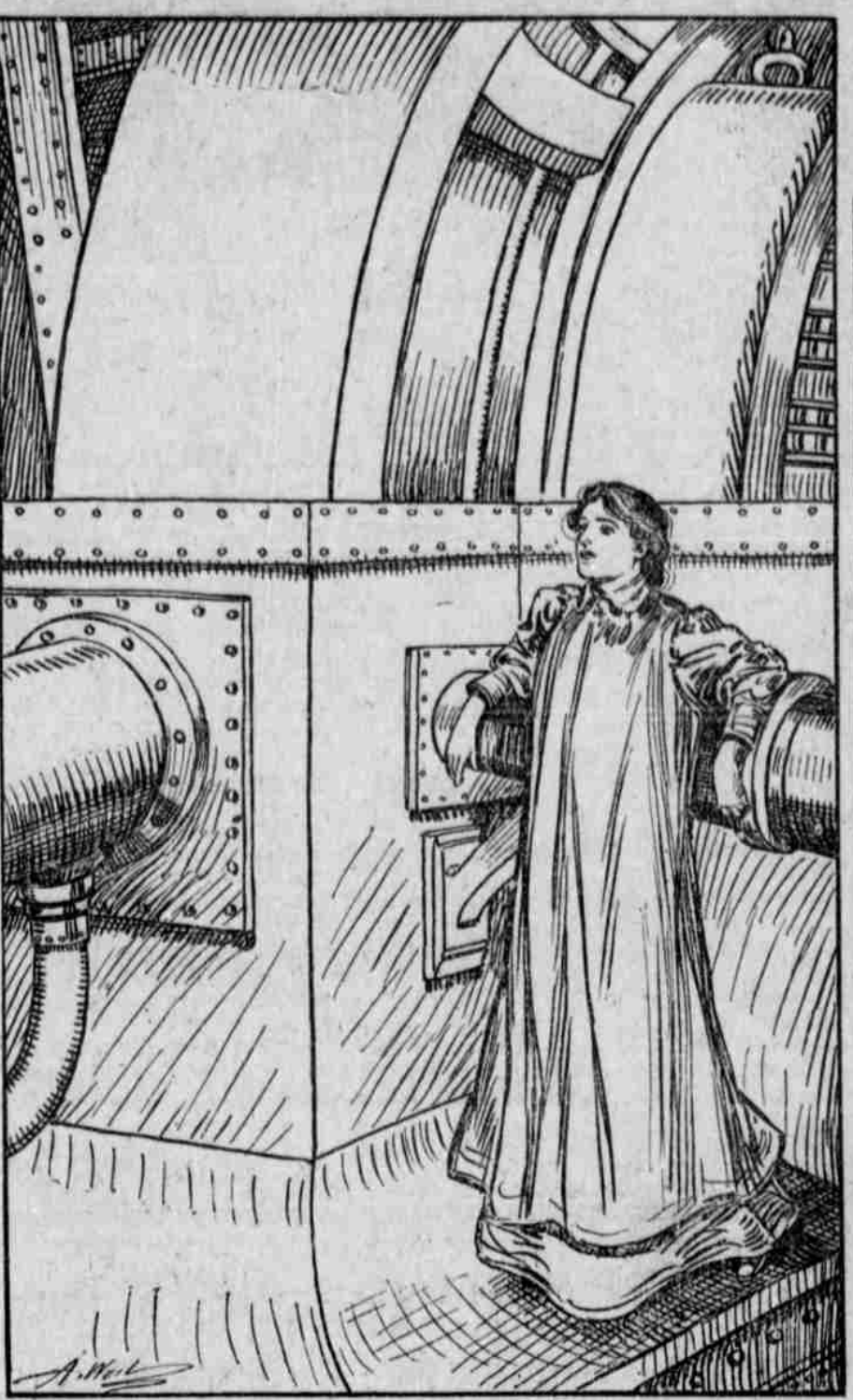
Brockton, who had been tense as a violin string and had almost forgotten to breathe, drew a long breath and looked at the girl, who had been leaning against the wall as though exhausted, but was now watching the slowly cooling metal. He would have asked questions; but the inventor turned to him and with an air of triumph said:

"I wish you would invite all those who were here when we made the first test. Then you will have the explanation unless I am again mistaken."

The admiral obeyed, and even as the cooling sprays were sifting over the great pieces of metal they came trooping in from the work which they had resumed. There were men from the draughting rooms with pencils behind their ears, engineers from the outside with shirt sleeves rolled up and forgotten diagrams under their arms, and one man came from the laboratory absentmindedly carrying a test tube, balancing it so that he might spill none of the liquid which it contained. Norma was now resting calmly against one of the huge dead machines.

In a tone of unusual gravity Roberts addressed them. "Boys," he began—they were all boys to him—"you have witnessed the accidental discovery, I believe, of the most powerful force the world has ever known. You have been fortunate. In more than 70 years of life I, who have spent the time in strange studies and stranger work, have had no privilege so great. You have all been kind to my daughter and to me, and I am glad you are here now." He paused for a moment, seeing with introspective eyes all the great events of his life. Then, recalling himself from this review, he turned to Jenkins as a kindred spirit, and to a boyish officer who stood near at hand.

"You two," he said, indicating them with his hand, "may have the honor of picking up those plates."



Norma Was Now Resting Calmly Against One of the Huge Dead Machines.

With the absolute precision of training, the officer's heels came together and his hand to his cap in quick salute. He strode to the plates, and stood opposite Jenkins, while the spectators craned forward, speculating as to what freak of madness was to be demonstrated. Jenkins, grave and un-questioning, looked across at his companion, nodded to him, and together they stooped and caught a handhold. Together they gathered their muscles as if for some prodigious exercise of strength, and simultaneously strained upward.

To the amazement of those within the room the great masses of metal came up with such ease that they were lifted breast high without perceptible effort.

"Higher, higher!" called the old inventor, springing toward them and gesturing with his hands. The plates rose until they were held with finger tips, and breathless suspense en-chained the spectators.

"Now stand from under! Let go of them! Let go of them!" yelled Roberts, dancing up and down in excitement; but the men still held on as if rendered powerless by astonishment.

"Stand from under!" commanded the admiral; and discipline again mastering them they obeyed, springing back in the apprehension that the two immense plates might by some necromancy come crashing down and disappear through the floor. With something almost like a sob, so great had been his mental strain, Jenkins stood transfixed. The admiral gave a gasp, and with one hand poised in the air stood like a statue. A hammer fell from the hand of one of the engineers standing behind, and the man who had been tightly clutching the test tube opened his fingers and let it crash to the floor. In this tinkling sound of broken glass on cement, another gave a sharp ejaculation and took an involuntary step forward.

They had witnessed the first positive exhibition of true levitation, a solid body suspended in the air without support. They had seen in times past with complacency, knowing that it was dependent upon optical illusion, the conjurer's trick, mystifying to the outward sense but readily explainable in the light of investigation; but here before them, beyond the range of charlatany, in perversion of all known physical laws, there hung motionless in the air, dependent upon itself for its flotation, a great mass of metal that but a short time before would have been beyond the power of their combined strength to lift.

And standing placidly beneath it, enjoying their surprise and supremely triumphant, stood a quiet little old man smiling up at his daughter, whose hand he was holding.

CHAPTER XVI.  
An Invincible Arm.  
The officers, still doubting their senses, stood before this uncanny manifestation like men in a world of unreality. From without, for some unaccountable reason, the varied clamor of industry had subsided to silence, and the soldiers' song was finished. Even the yellow light of the afternoon which filtered through the window panes appeared strange, spectral, and unearthly. In the shadow of that massive thing which hovered above them, Nature seemed bent on the revocation of her laws, and for an instant their senses reeled in the struggle for comprehension.

"Old Bill!" Roberts broke the spell. He reached up and touched the tip of a finger to the mass and moved it gently toward them with no more exertion than would be necessary to push a toy balloon. There was no levity in him when he addressed them, but rather the simple grandeur of one who has wrested from Nature one of her greatest powers, and was now preparing to harness it for all time, a slave to peace, progress and the welfare of his fellows.

"My friends," he said, "by the discovery of an alloy of metal and metalloids we have created a new substance, which when an electrical current of certain potentiality is passed through it becomes intensely radioactive; infinitely more so than radium. Through these machines," and here he waved his hand at the twin apparatus in the rear, "my daughter and I have produced electrical manifestations hitherto unsuspected and unknown. The metal itself, while radioactive to a certain degree, does not become intensely so without the application of the excitant current." He pulled the plate down till it rested on the floor, and stood upon it, while they, still awed, waited for his further exposition.

This morning, by an accidental contact which lasted until the plate had torn itself loose and broken the current, I saw to the full the possibilities it contained. The impact of the emanations, or radioactive corpuscles, against the sheet of insulation and tank at the bottom drove it through the floor and into the ground, because the corpuscles which flew off in the other direction were unimpeded, free and harmless. Had the excitant current been maintained, the plate would have hurried itself indefinitely toward the center of the earth."

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WEIL

the alloy in my lower plate that it merely offsets gravitation, and put my sheet of insular substance between; and there we have levitation. Those two plates are working against each other with nearly equal force, the balance being disturbed only in ratio to gravitation.

"The solution of the flying machine!" Jenkins shouted excitedly, and Roberts, appreciating the engineer's quick understanding, smiled and responded:

"Yes, just that." "But what will furnish its propulsion?" asked Jenkins, whose mind was traveling over the possibilities of rapid flight. The others evinced their interest by craning forward.

"It will furnish its own," the scientist answered, "because by the use of the apparatus behind it we can excite its radioactivity to any degree that might be safe. More plainly, the moment the current excites and therefore increases the power of the lower plate, a lifting energy could be exerted which would destroy the equilibrium of levitation and drive the plates into the air with a force corresponding to the strength or character of the current. Or, on the other hand, if the upper plate was similarly excited, thus liberating its corpuscles, the plate would be driven toward the earth."

The admiral, who had been slowly following this dissertation, seemed suddenly to have grasped its entire meaning, and thrust himself out from the group with both hands extended and gesticulating rapidly. "Then all you have to do," he said, "is to put on either end of your airship a freeboard made of this metal, capable of excitation and insulated on its inner surface, and you would thereby be able to drive your craft in either direction at any speed you might wish!"

"That's it exactly," answered Roberts and Jenkins in unison. The inventor continued:

"I can heat a freeboard, however, because I shall apply my electrical current in such a way as to send all the corpuscles of radioactive matter in any direction I may choose. I could with this alloy even create magnets of unknown power. I can build a craft in sections where magnets and radioactive surfaces will alternate."

He was growing excited as the magnitude of the scope of his discovery dawned upon his imagination. Norma calmed him down; but the admiral, infected with these visions, took up the strain and enthusiastically expatiated to his companions. To him the skies were already filled with flying ships that were to swoop down over an enemy, drop terrific bombs of high explosives, and thus sweep the seas. But future events, he was to learn, cannot be predicted with certainty.

"Well, well!" he said, briskly. "What next?"

"Your engineers must assist me in drawing plans. We shall want great quantities of new material and electrical equipment, and must have them soon; because when we get well under way we should be able to create two or three of these radioplanes each day."

The great plates were locked in, and the group repaired to one of the offices, where for hours the inventor elaborated his scheme of control, the mechanical means of which were to be worked out and drawings made by the engineers. And as they toiled over their plans, there spread from mouth to mouth throughout the strange colony the story of the marvelous conception, until even the most prosaic workman found himself dreaming and speculating over his task. Before dusk had crowded the light from the skies, the Columbia, under a full head of steam, picked her way out to meet the ocean swells, and headed for Miami, where she was to send a message to Washington, calling for strangely assorted supplies and notifying the anxious naval men that the dry dock would not be needed.

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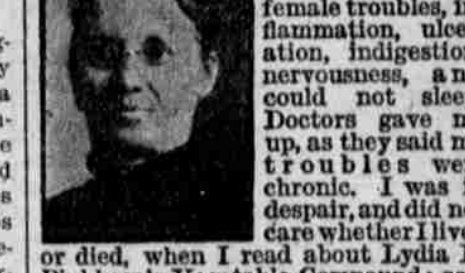
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