THE VANISHING FLEETS

By Roy Norton

Associated Sunday

"Show him in!" he said to the equa-FF, and then expectantly watched the or, wondering whether he was to face an adventurer or an imbecile. Between the king and the officer whose name appeared on the card was an intimacy of more than 30 years standing. The name alone had sufficlent weight to preclude the curt refunal 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 elreumstances, and, on the contrary, If his visitor proved to be a nonentity or crank, the guard would give protecion and summary punishment.

The door of the cabinet slid back. and a grim, scarred, weather beaten sonn stood surrounded by the royal



a Salute, His Equerry Handed Him the Message

guard. In utter astonishment that it should be the admiral standing lefore 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 ed each other's hand, casting the tesin of situation and the difference sition completely aside.

vins," the menarch said, "for God's sake what brings you here in a se like this? Is there no limit to daring, and nothing at which country will healtate? Do you as a friend or as an American?" "Both," answered the officer, standag squarely on his feet and looking ily into the gray eyes, which perently scrutinized him as if seeking

wond the cause of his visit. There came another instant's pause the king with a gesture invited to be seated. The guard diseetly withdrew and closed the door of the cabinet.

Bevins continued: "I must apologize r intruding upon you; but I have neyed a long way to deliver a meswhich permits of no delay." an official capacity then?

ed the monarch dryly. official and friendly. I was sen for this mission not only bethat I could explain cer-

in bring." The king nearly forgot the distrust he had felt first, and almost elded to the impulse to drop all cereony and ask his guest for an explaad grasped the arms of his chair. His ened to interrogate, and then, his life's training and restraint reby olick, and he again assumed a pos- summated. Neither occupant of the se an air of complacence when every instinct of king and man called of expectancy, waiting for the king's out to him to ask impetuously the one next words. The success or failure skein of events and the story of the them, and in this light they seemed fate of the British fleet. He veiled his of almost tragic consequence. curiosity, his emotion and his excitement behind a mask of polite reserve. But what was coming next? His visiter, who had hesitated, now went on. time; and the other, relieved by this may what I have to; but as an emis- and deep-drawn sigh of relaxation sary of my government I am asked to

me a private am.

The king, impilient, curlous and anxious, was yet relieved by what he beard. There was nothing very un usual in a cope t for a private andience under - mutances, and he had hope that from it would come elucidation of all which he must wished to know. The morrow then would at least bring some case of mind and some relief from uncertainty. Hefore he could reply the voice re

The audience must be granted to night.

"To night, to night!" The sovereign forgot his aplomb, leaned his body to ward 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

The king was motionless and speech less 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 anxie ties and anxious to learn from a friend's lips the story of the last month's secrets and disasters, he was onsidering what was best to do.

In an oddly repressed tone he an swered with another tentative ques "As a friend I received you in my box, and now on this same basis ask you if this communication of yours is so important and urgent that it 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 summon a king, a prime minister and the highest official of the earth's most mighty navy to a private inter view at midnight! Even in times like these it seemed preposterously impudent; but this man came as a friend from the land of silent terror which threatened to conquer the world, was undoubtedly in deadly earnest, and was a means of information between what had actually happened and what was to come.

'Time will not wait, even for kings," quoted the monarch with some undershade of bitterness, and from his guest came the whispered return:

time cannot wait, even for

kings." The monarch slowly settled back into the hollow depths of his chair and, as if seeking a moment's respite to review the situation, looked upward at the hangings of his box and then out toward the garish lights of the stage. The hush of expectancy over the house ause of our known friendship, but had reached a climax of intensity, and voice was shouting toward the roof in deliberately prolonged tones: "Are-From somewhere you-all-ready?" above them came a faint response. "Yes," and then with speed gathered by its long flight through the air ation then and there. He half rose there came flashing comet-like from high above an extended splotch of white, the sound of a sharp splash, and a burst of applause as the "event ning their hold, his tongue gave a of the evening," a high dive, was conre of repose. It was difficult to us- royal box paid any attention to this feat. Bevins remained in an attitude afore him for the unraveling of the of his enterprise might depend upon

"What do you propose?" the ruler asked, again facing the admiral as though there had been no lapse of This is no time nor place for me to sign of assent, gave an involuntary

"If your majesty will be so kind, I uce you, your prime minister and faink it best that I should meet you in he first lord of the admiralty to grant the palace within an hour after your

IN BOTTLES

departure from this theater. That will give leeway for the other gentle men to respond to the summons and be there at the appointed time."

The band struck up "God Save the King," in token of the closing of the performance, and from where they were they could see the audience standing, in total ignorance of the presence of his majesty and unaware of the fact that a momentous inter-



They Stood for a Moment, the King and the Admiral.

view, involving life and death, peace and war, and the welfare of empire was being conducted in a tiny overhanging box above them, while i leering mask of tragedy stared hollow eved from the stage as if in mockers The king and the admiral were both on their feet, the one looking absentmindedly through an aperture, his mind concentrated on the decision he must make, and the other watching and waiting with breathless suspense Below the throng began a steady movement toward the exits, constant ly dissipating itself, and the house was almost emptied before the officer

"Very well, you may come, and I shall have the others sent for at

Hevina gave a quick start of exultation; but his companion continued without a pause:

"I shall be there within half an hour, and shall instruct the guard at the outer gate to admit you immediate ly on your arrival."

His companion held up a hand as if forgetting something. "If your maj-esty pleases, I should prefer that you instruct the guard at the private en-

trance leading from the garden in the rear. To this also the king acceded at-

tributing it to a desire for concealment on the part of his companion. who almost at once made his adjeu, passed out beyond the curtains through the door, and joined the last of the lagging crowd. The fog bad not abated, but seemed even more penetrable than in the earlier hours of the evening and rendered tent's Here and the ever more difficult. the glow and halation of ma :lighting up a tiny radius in the gloves A constable kept calling: "Keep close to the wall! Keep close to the wall!" his voice sounding from a long distance and muffled. Cabmen were insistently shouting, and when Bevins came to the first street crossing he

It was the king driving to his resi-At Buckingham palace, where the royal banner was hanging sodden from its staff, the guards with bushys coated with the perspiration of the night, tramped briskly to and fro at the great iron gates in front as well as past the gates of the garden on Buckingham road, a half mile in the rear. The time of the appointment was past when the goard at the private entrance received the expected visitor with a comment of surprise and apol ogy that he had not been accompanied through the gardens by the further

"Very thoughtless and unusual, kir he said, "and 131 report them at once

"No, no, don't do that. Favins who stood at attention, his face be hastily requested. "I wished to come traying no sign of anything unusual. By his majesty's permission," alone. he added, and the man conducted him to the private audience chamber, where he was given a seat

The prime minister entered only a few minutes later and stared hard at Revins, evidently trying to recall whether or not they had met before, stood like a statue. The prime minis and seeming to remember something ter's hand was half poised in the air familiar in the face. They waited without speaking until the lord of the admiralty appeared, showing from his in an attitude of awe-struck questiongarb that he had been compelled to ing. hasten his coming; and then came the

"Gentlemen," he said, turning to the ishment. others, "this is Admiral Robert Bevins of the United States navy

Had he said: "Gentlemen, here is an assassin with a pocketful of bombs, the effect on the members of his cabinet could have been hardly less marked. Bevins bowed and extended his hand to each in turn, assuring them of his friendliness. The king himself without parley conducted offered each in turn a cigar, after which he looked inquiringly at his guest, who answered by drawing from his pocket a sealed dispatch, which he delivered. It was torm open and read in silence, passing from hand to hand, after which the admiral, without prolude, plunged into his subject.

patches I have brought, the United States wishes nothing more than complete harmony. It has been compelled for the sake of peace to adopt rather unprecedented methods, which I can assure you will at least revolutionize all methods of warfare as generally understood. The letter is to reassure his majesty."

The two members of the ministry looked at each other in strained suspense, and eagerly waited for the American to continue, which he did after brief thought, in which time he gravely studied the king's face. "It has not been pleasant for my

country to take the steps it has; but there were no othe, means of establishing and maintaining-perhaps forever-a continued state of peace. Gentlemen, I believe that the day of war has nearly seen "its sunset. I be pets where the noise of their feet was lieve if you will intrust yourselves to deadened, and across tiled floors my care for the next few hours, under my assurance as a representative of turbed the silence. Only once did the my government and as a friend of his king halt, and that was for Bevins to majesty's, that so harm will come to indicate whether it was desirable to any of you, that I can convince you pass through the private door or into of what I have said, as well as of the the broader corridor leading toward uselessness of strife."

Again there was silence, while those in the room looked at each other questioningly.

"Yes, it will require your leaving the palace," the admiral continued as if responding to an interrogation, and then with grim humor added, "that potwithstanding the disappearance of the kaiser and his chancellor.

The ministers shook their heads, to dicating that it was impossible. The monarch, however, sat steadily watch ing and listening, flicking the ash now and then from his cigar and smoothing an end of leaf which had pulled

"The reason this is necessary," the floer hastened to add. "Is that your people will never understand the powor of the United States nor be it on less distinguished testimony than that which you will be able to render Even then it will be hard for them to comprehend that my country is in possession of an engine of war that could bring all nations to its feet, or anni hilate them if it chose.

was almost run down by a slow moving His hearers stiffened up for a moautomobile whose eyes stared at him ment, reading in this placid assertion suddenly like those of a great beetle.

"No, it not a menace to you or the world, if you will but grant my wish. Gentlemen, I am asking you to be my guests in the name of humanity, which is above all rulers and above all governments!" His voice was vibrant and almost pleading in his anxiety to gain his point.

The king alone seemed half inclined to go. "I have known Bevins for 30 years," he said slowly, "and we have been very good friends, indeed intimate at times, and I would intrust my life in his keeping; but a man and a king are two different beings. As a man I would go at once; but as the representative head of a nation I cannot take the risk unless there is no other way."

The minister and the lord of the admiralty spoke together in their disapproval, and besought their superior to refuse such a demand under any and all conditions. Bevins saw that he was losing his point, and stepped

into the breach. "Wait'" he begged, rising to his feet. "Will your majesty permit me to bring other proof that what I ask

in for the best?" The king nodded

"Then grant me an order to the guard at the door which will enable me to pass without interruption and return

There was the pressure of a button an order to the equerry to do as the visitor wished, and the officer bowed himself out of the room.

His majesty's advisors began an impassioned appeal that he should under all circumstances refuse to leave the security of his palace. They pointed out the dangers which might assail him in many ways, despite the fact that his visitor was his friend; but to all of these advices he made no reply, lounging in a careless attitude and blowing wreaths of smoke toward the shaded electric lights above his There was a rap at the door and it was thrown open by an equerry,

into the room entered another visitor, followed by Bevins, who closed the door after him. The materialization of a ghost could have created no greater surprise. The king dropped his cigar on the carpet and, like his companions, jumped to his feet and and remained there while the lord of the admiralty shoved his head forward

The king broke the silence. "Field" is that you?" he asked, in utter aston-

"Yes, your majesty, it is I," and he advanced to meet the king, who suddenly held out his hand.

The others rushed forward almost incoherent in greeting the admiral who had sailed away in command of the great fleet of demonstration and had been given up as dead.

Field was apparently enjoying the situation, and waited until they began them to a more private room, and to ask question before expressing his views. "I am under my word of honor, or I might say parole-

"Not that." Bevins interrupted. "You

are not a prisoner. "Well, under promise then, that I shall say nothing concerning the mystery which I now thoroughly understand." He made a little grimace as "As will be witnessed by the dis- if the subject brought up unpleasant recollections of defeat, and went on: "I am here to-night as the guest of our friend the admiral. He has told me of his failure to convince you that what he asks is necessary, and I have come to add my arguments to his. urging upon you to do as he says. He has told you the truth when he says that it may mean an end to war."

The ministers and the lord of the admiralty looked shocked; but the king made a decision without hesitancy. "I will accept, and believe it best that the others should accompany me." It was conclusive.

They donned their light coats, and when the monarch stepped from his wardrobe a moment later he, too, was garbed for his trip and preceded them down the hallways, through corridors and arched doors, over heavy carwhere the ring of their boot-heels disthe front of the palace. They chose the former course, passed the wender ing sentry at the door, and out into the night. The odor of June flowers came to them on every side through the weird veil of fog, and from the frive beyond the pile of stone and brick came the steady clattering of horses' hoofs. They walked closely together, the king holding Bevins arm. The sentry heard their feet steadily crunching out over the grayeled walks, started at the sound of a melancholy, far-reaching whistle, wondering whether it was a signal of some strange import, and then resumed his usual motionless attitude

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The king and his ministers had been taken by the fog, the night and the mystery.

CHAPTER XII.

The Dreadnought Returns. The falling of the heavens would

have created little more consternation and excitement in London than the sight which met the residents' even on the morning following the king's visit to the Hippodrome. The fog which settled unexpectedly on that night of June dissipated itself as stealthily as it had come, and floated out with the dawn, leaving in its stead a clear sky. And then, as if a rare discovery he I hoen made simultaneously by thousands instead of one. I swarm of people, defying the rush of motors, of omnibuses and bansoms, debouched on the Thames embankment by the stately rile of buildings where parliament convenes, filled the roadsteads, jammed each other against the river wall, and scorned the constables, who vainly strove to maintain order and uninterrupted traffic.

There, resting serenely on the bosom of the river where in times before Roman galleys had floated, was the pride of the British navy, the Dreadnought. Neither an officer of the watch, a sailor, nor a marine bestrode her decks. Inert and untenanted, silent and lifeless, she lay close by the great gray buildings like the last survivor of a defeated army who had crept home to bring a report of disaster and was resting in the shadow of the last refuge. Her unmasked guns stared wide-eved and mournful; from her crippled funnels came no wisp of curling smoke; from her channels stretched no anchor chains; and she paid no heed to the vagaries of the sluggish current: her prow which had defiantly parted so many seas was nosed into the mud in helplessness; but as an only solace there floated from her stern the unsullied banner of the United Kingdom, and whipped as she was she had come back to her people with colors still flying. The miracle of her position was

reater than the marvel of her return; for above and below that spot on the river were bridges impassable for a boat of half her size, beneath which tugs and other craft were wont to lower their jointed stacks. In all the world there was no known strength. or mechanical contrivance that could

transport over shallows and bridge 22,000 tons of steel, and then leave t in this prohibited place. Her very appearance bore mute testimony of ingular strife. True, she was intact to a point flush with the great steel domes which held her menacing and frowning guns; but her fighting masts, her top rig, and the upper bands of her funnel were riven off as if by one devasting line shot taken full abeam or square astern. The wreckage of this hamper had been removed, so that no debris littered her deserted decks.

For many days of gloom it had been accepted as a fact that nothing but annihilation could account for the disappearance of the squadron which had degredly sailed away into the mysterious west to vanquish a terrible and unknown enemy or meet a glorious death. Little hope had been sustained as the days of silence went by that any explanation of that defeat might be forthcoming, or that any vessel might return; and now before London's gathered populace was a grim relic which only added to conjecture From no source could the secret of this mysterious visitation be learned; and so the crowd watched and walted.

A boat, whose flag distinguished her as being of the river patrol, obeyed a hall from the shore, pulled notally up the stream against the outgoing tide, and circled round the leviathan as though suspecting danger from within Her chief officer, after due caution and receiving no response, cautiously directed her along side, and boarded the Dreadnought over the starboard quarter. The ever increasing crowd along the embankment drew in its breath in expectancy, waiting for a revelation. It heard him shout "Be-low, there!" and leaned forward. listening for whatever response might be given; but nothing was heard save the steady lap of the water and the farthest sounds of early river traffic.

(CONTINUED NEXT SUNDAY)

Before the Russian war the street allway system of Tokio was less than one mile in length. Now the mileage one hundred miles, with a revenue last year of \$775,000. At the end of the franchise-fifty years-all the system is to pass to the municipality of Tokion on liberal terms. From the start the company has paid good dividends regularly. Already the municipality thinks of buying the property

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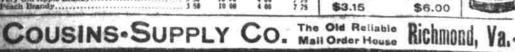
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