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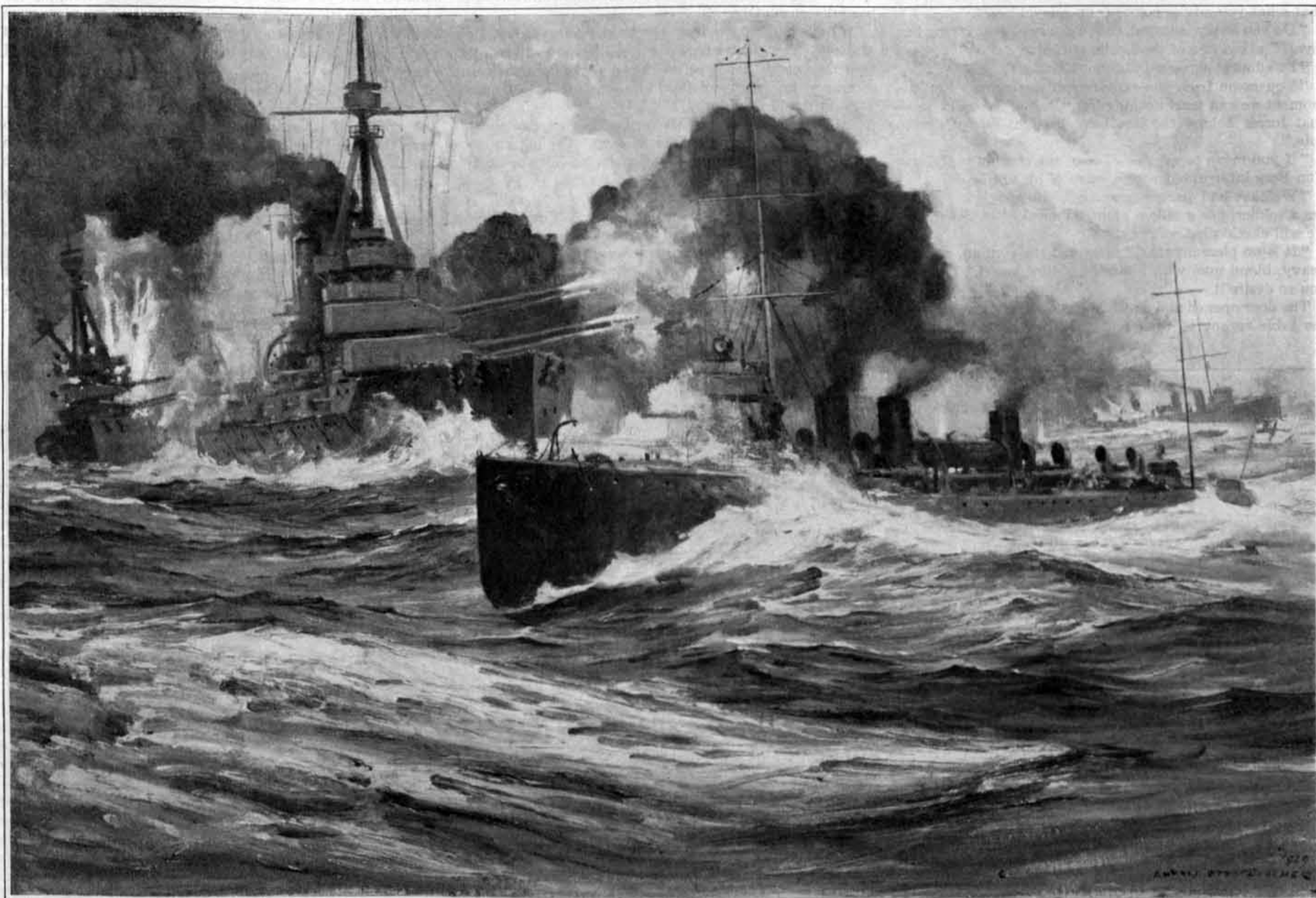
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THE DEATH VOYAGE



Some Destroyers, German or British, Fought Their Way Through the Crowd and Succeeded in Driving Home Their Attack Upon the Battleships, With Certain Death for Their Reward

IT WAS a winter evening, and as I sat by a dwindling fire in the twilight, my mind hit upon a strange line of thought. Musing over the great crises of history, I could see that the chief actor in each had always come to a dividing of the ways where it was within his choice to take the one path or the other. He took the one, and the annals tell us what came of it. But suppose that he had taken the other? Is it possible for the human imagination to follow up the course of events which would have resulted from that? A series of fascinating alternatives passed through my brain, each involving a problem of its own. Had Cæsar remained faithful as a general of the republic, and refused to cross the Rubicon, would not the whole story of Imperial Rome have been avoided? Had Washington persuaded his fellow countrymen to wait patiently until a liberal majority in the British Parliament righted their wrongs, would not Britain and all her Dominions now be an annex to the great central power of America? If Napoleon had made peace before entering upon the Russian campaign—and so on, and so on.

As I brooded thus, a modern instance came into my mind, and so, half sleeping, and with my eyes fixed upon the red embers, there came a series of pictures, a vision, if one

By A. CONAN DOYLE

ILLUSTRATED BY ANTON OTTO FISCHER

may so call it, which, with realistic detail duly added, might be translated into some such narrative as this:

It was a dull November day in the little Belgian town of Spa. It was very easy to see that some great event had occurred—some event which had stirred the townspeople to their depth. Business had ceased, and they stood in excited, gossiping groups along the sidewalks. Among them there wandered great numbers of German soldiers in their gray-green uniforms, some of them so worn with service that they presented every shade of color. These men were as excited as the civilians, and choked the streets with their noisy, gesticulating assemblies. Boys carrying newspapers rushed wildly here and there. The whole place was like an ants' nest stirred up suddenly by some intrusive stick.

Suddenly the groups fell apart to give space for a huge motor car, containing four officers and two civilians, who were clearly men of importance, to judge by the attention which they excited. The lionlike face which looked fiercely out at the undisciplined groups of soldiers was one which was familiar to every bystander, since Spa had been for so long the center of German military activity. It was old Marshal von Berg himself. Beside him, lost in thought, sat a high naval officer, his clean-shaven face seamed with furrows

of care. It was the famous Admiral von Speer. Two other high generals and two statesmen fresh from Berlin completed the group. The car roared down the main street, turned hard to the right, swung round between the pillars of an ornamental gate, and halted presently before the stuccoed front of the Villa Froneuse. Sentries on either side of the door presented arms, a red-plushed butler appeared in the opening, and the illustrious deputation vanished into the house, while curious faces and staring eyes lined the railing, for it was rumored that some eventful decision was to be reached that day, and that the moment of fate had arrived.

The deputation was ushered into the large hall, decorated in white and gold, and from the end of it they entered a spacious lounge, or study, where they seated themselves round a table.

"The Emperor was expecting you," said the butler. "He will be with you presently." He walked silently, as one who is at a funeral, and closed the door gently.

The party was clearly ill at ease. They looked at one another in a questioning way. It was the naval officer who broke the silence.

"Perhaps it would be best, sir, if you opened the matter," said he to the great soldier. "His Majesty knows that what you advise comes from a loyal heart."

"Do you imply, admiral, that our advice is anything but loyal?" asked one of the Berlin statesmen.

The admiral shrugged his shoulders.

"You come from the center of disturbance. For the moment we can trust nothing from Berlin. We only know that forces behind the line have brought our affairs to ruin."

"If you mean to say —" cried the civilian hotly, but Von Berg interrupted with a wave of his arm.

"We have had discussion enough," he growled. "But I am a soldier, not a talker. Do you speak, Von Stein, and we will check what you say."

"It is no pleasant task," answered the civilian, a large, heavy, blond man with a flowing yellow beard. "Still, if you so desire it —"

The door opened and a man entered. The six men round the table sprang to their feet and their heels all clicked

together. The Emperor bowed stiffly, and motioned that they should be seated. His keen gray eyes glanced from the face of one to the other, as if to gather what their message might be. Then, with a wry smile, he seated himself alone at the farther end of the table.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I hear that you have been determining the fate of your Emperor. May I ask the result of your deliberations?"

"Your Majesty," said Von Stein in answer, "we have carefully considered the situation, and we are all of one mind. We feel that Your Majesty's safety is endangered if you remain here. We cannot answer for what may happen."

The Emperor shrugged. "If Germany falls, it can matter little what happens to individuals," said he.

"Germany may stumble, Your Majesty, but she can never fall. Sixty millions of people cannot be wiped from the map. There will soon come a period of reconstruction, and who can say how necessary the presence of Your Majesty may be at such a time?"

"What are your views, field marshal?" the Emperor asked.

Von Berg shrugged his massive shoulders and shook his head disconsolately.

"I have had reports from the seven armies today, Your Majesty. The greater part of the soldiers are still ready to fight the enemy. They refuse, however, to fight their own comrades, and many of the battalions are out of hand."

"And the navy, admiral?"

"It is hopeless, Your Majesty. The red flag flies on every ship in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. The officers have been set ashore. There is little violence, but the Soviets command the vessels."

"And the civilians, Herr von Stein?"

"They will support the war no longer, Your Majesty. They are weary of it all, and ask only for peace."

"Do they realize the consequences if we lay down our arms?"

"Erzberger and his party are at the French headquarters making such terms as they can. Perhaps, sire, it may not be so bad as you think."

"We need not deceive ourselves. We have only to ask ourselves what our own terms would have been had we been the victors. It means the loss of our fleet, of our colonies, and of all that was built up under my care in the last twenty-five years. And why, why, has this terrible thing come upon us?"

"Because the nation behind the line has failed us."

"But why has it failed us?" There was a cold gleam of anger in the Emperor's eyes, and he looked from one to the other for an answer.

"They were tried too hard, Your Majesty. There is a limit to human endurance. They could go no further."

"It is false!" cried the Emperor hotly, and he struck the table with his hand. "It is because you did not trust them. It is because they were forever misinformed, as I was misinformed, so that they lost all confidence in you and me and everyone."

"Misinformed, Your Majesty?"

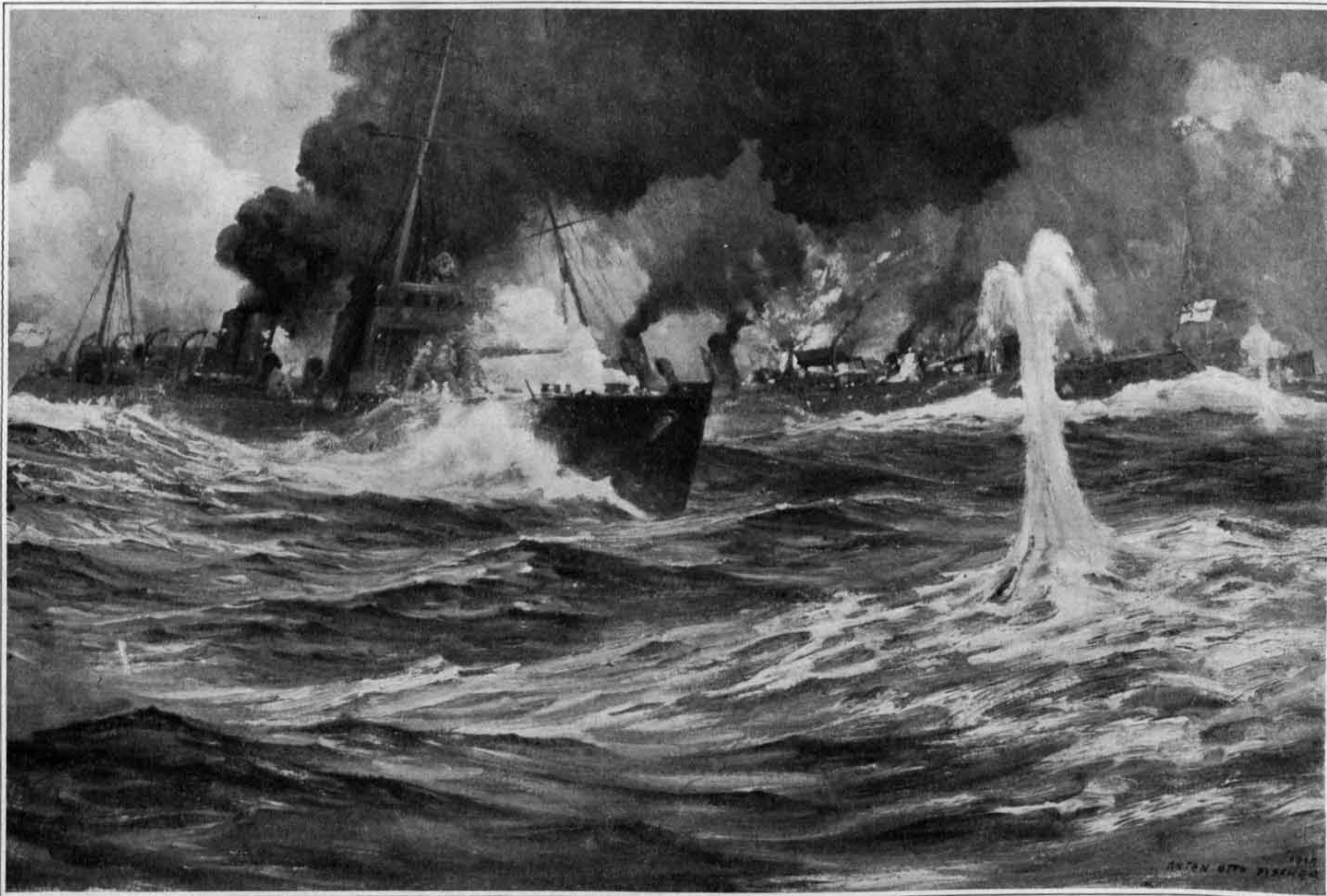
"Yes, misinformed at every turn. I might well use a stronger word. I am not accusing you individually, gentlemen. I speak of the various services which you represent; though indeed you are yourselves not guiltless in the matter, and you have helped, each of you, to supply me with information which was false, so that all my plans were built upon an unsound foundation. We might have had peace with honor at any time, had I known all that I know now."

The members of the council moved uneasily in their seats. It was the second civilian, a small, dark, bristled-haired man, clean-cut and alert like a well-bred terrier, who was the first to speak. "Your Majesty may perhaps be putting blame upon us which might be justly borne by more august shoulders," said he.

"Be silent," said Von Berg roughly. "We want none of your Berlin insolence here."

"We want the truth, which the Emperor has so seldom had in the past!" cried the radical deputy. "Has he not told us so himself? Has not everyone said what would please him rather than what is true, and has he not been too confiding and complaisant in accepting such assurances?"

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Like Fighting Dogs, Half Smothered in Foam, They Tore Through the Sea, Their Sides Almost Touching and the Flashes of Their Guns Licking the Very Paint From the Bulwarks of Their Opponents

THE DEATH VOYAGE

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"Enough, Brunner!" cried the admiral angrily. "We are here to hear the Emperor, not to listen to speeches from the left bench. . . . But, Your Majesty, your accusation is a grave one. How and when have your counselors failed you?"

"At every turn," said the Emperor bitterly. "There is hardly one vital promise ever made to me or to the nation which has not proved to be false. Take your own service, Admiral von Speer. Is it not a fact that your authorities assured us that if we had indiscriminate U-boat warfare from February, 1917, onwards, we must starve England out, and so win? Was it not said again and again? Now it is November, 1918, and where is this starvation of England?"

"Events were too strong for us, Your Majesty."

"A wise counselor foresees events. And you, Von Berg, did not you and Ludendorff assure me that when the Russians broke away and our Eastern armies were available for action in the West, we would drive the French behind Paris and the British into the sea?"

"We nearly did so, Your Majesty."

"There was no qualification in your assurances. You all declared that it would be so. And did not every military leader assure me in 1914 that the British might be disregarded upon the land, and yet these papers"—he beat upon a wallet which lay upon the table—"show me that in the last four months they have taken from us more prisoners and guns than all the Allies put together. Can you excuse such miscalculations as that?"

The great soldier sank his eyes.

"I have never underrated the British," he said.

"But my advisers did. And the Americans! Did not my statesmen say that they would not come into the war? Did not my sailors say that they could not bring an army to Europe? Did not my soldiers say that they had no army to bring? And now"—he caught up the wallet and shook it at the council—"they have over a million men available, and there are American naval guns which are sweeping the roads between Montmedy and Conflans, the only line of retreat of my Eastern armies. . . . This could not happen. That could not happen. But it has all happened. Is it a wonder that the people should lose heart when every promise is broken?"

A thin, austere general in spectacles who had not yet spoken, now joined in the debate. His voice was cold, harsh and precise; a man of definite routine and fixed ideas.

"Your Majesty, any recriminations now are out of place. The question is immediate and pressing. There are Bolsheviks within fifteen miles of Spa, and if you should fall into their hands, no one can foresee the consequences. Your life is in danger and the responsibility for your person rests with us."

"What, then, do you advise, General von Groner?"

"We are unanimous, sir, that you should at once cross the Dutch border. General von Hentz suggested it. It is but a few miles, and your own special train waits in the station."

"And where should I go when I cross the border?"

"We have gone so far, Your Majesty, as to telegraph to the Dutch Government. We have not yet received a reply. But we cannot wait. Your own train affords every accommodation and carries your personal servants. All else can be settled later. Let us hear you are at Eyden, and our minds will be at ease."

The Emperor sat for some little time in silence.

"Would this not appear," said he at last, "as if I were deserting my people and my army at a moment of need? There is my personal honor to be considered."

"So long, sire, as you are acting upon the advice of your council, you can hardly be called to account," said Von Groner.

"A man's honor is his own private affair, and no one can lessen his responsibility," the Emperor answered. "I think that I may now dismiss you, gentlemen. You have advised me to the best of your ability, and the rest remains with me. If you will wait, Von Berg, and you, admiral, I would have a last word with you."

The others bowed and filed out from the room. The Emperor advanced toward his two great servants, both of whom had risen to their feet.

"In you," he said, placing his hand upon the old field marshal's sleeve, "and in you, admiral, I recognize two men who represent the honor of my army and my navy. You, of all men, are judges upon such a point. Tell me now, as between man and man, since there is no longer any question of Emperor and subject, would you advise me to go to Holland?"

"We would," the two men said in a breath.

"Would you consider that in doing so my honor was quite untouched?"

"Undoubtedly, Your Majesty. We have now to treat for terms. The American President has ventured to say that he will not treat with you. Everything will be at a deadlock until you go. You are best serving the country by sacrificing your own feelings and vanishing from the scene."

The Emperor pondered for a minute or more, with his brows drawn down over his eyes and a deep frown of concentrated thought upon his face. At last he broke silence:

"Let us go back a hundred years for our lesson. Suppose the Emperor Napoleon had refused to give himself up or resign: what would have followed?"

"A hopeless war with senseless slaughter, which would have ended in his death or capture."

"You misunderstand me. Suppose that he had never left the field of Waterloo, but had thrown himself inside a square of his Old Guard and had perished with them. What then?"

"What would have been gained, sire?"

"Nothing, perhaps, to France, save as an example. But would his memory not be greater? Would he not seem now like some wonderful angel of destruction who had set foot upon the earth, if we were not disabused by that anticlimax of St. Helena?"

The field marshal shook his rugged head.

"Your Majesty is a better historical student than I," said he. "I fear that I have enough upon my hands now, without going back a hundred years."

"And you, Von Speer? Have you nothing to say?"

"If you insist upon an answer, Your Majesty, I think that Napoleon should have died at Waterloo."

The Emperor grasped him by the hand.

"You are a kindred soul. I have your assurance that my honor is safe, whatever course I take. But there is something even higher than honor. There is that super-honor which we call heroism, when a man does more than is required of him. Napoleon failed to find that quality. And now I wish you farewell, gentlemen. Be assured that I will think carefully over what you have told me, and I will then announce my action."

The Emperor sat with his head resting upon his hands, listening first to the clank of spurred feet in the hall, and then to the rumble of the heavy motor. For half an hour or more he was motionless, lost in thought. Then he sprang suddenly to his feet and raised his face and hands to the heavens.

"God give me the strength!" he cried. He rang the electric bell and a footman appeared.

"Tell Captain von Mann that I await him."

A moment later a young fresh-faced officer with quick intelligent eyes had entered the room and saluted.

"Sigurd," said the Emperor, "there are likely to be very serious times before us. I hereby free you from any personal allegiance to me. From what I hear, Prince Max of Baden has probably of his own initiative freed all Germany by now."

"I have no wish to be freed. You are always my master and my Emperor."

"But I would not involve you in a tragic fate."

"I wish to be involved."

"But if it means death?"

"Even so."

"What I say I mean in a literal sense. You will die if you follow me far enough."

"I ask for no better fate."

The Emperor grasped the young man's hand. "Then we are comrades in a great venture!" he cried. "Now, sit beside me here at the table and let us discuss our plans. No ignoble suicide will end your Emperor's career. There are nobler ways of dying, and it is for me to find them."

There was a curious scene at the Spa station that night, though none save the three actors in it were aware of it. It was in the station-master's room, which had the door barred and the curtains drawn. Three men sat round a circular table, with a strong lamp above them, beating down upon their heads.

Outside, the trains clanked and whistled and roared, while the hubbub upon the platform showed that all was anarchy and confusion. Yet, regardless of all this, the man whose very duty it was to set the matter right sat at the table with such a look of astonishment upon his face that it was clear that he was oblivious of the turmoil outside. The station master, Baumgarten, was a smart, alert, youngish man, such a man as one would expect to find attached to army headquarters, and he was giving his whole attention now to what the elder of his two visitors was explaining. This man, who, like his companion, was dressed in civilian dress—a loose-fitting suit of gray tweeds—was studying a railway map, while his younger companion looked over his shoulder.

"There is but one change, Your Majesty," said the station master.

"So I see," answered the Emperor, placing his finger upon Cologne. "Once through that point we are safe. But it is all important that we should not be recognized."

"Alas, sire, your face is so well known that it is impossible you should escape notice."

"Think, man, think!" cried the younger man impatiently. "Surely you can plan it out."

Baumgarten scratched his puzzled head and paced the room in perplexity. Then suddenly there came an inspiration. He stopped and turned to the table.

"There is a refrigerator car, Your Majesty. It has just come through with vegetables from Holland. We can shut off the refrigerating apparatus. It is of course closed and windowless. If Your Majesty would condescend—"

"Drop titles," said the Emperor, looking round him suspiciously.

"Well, sir, if you would consent to travel in so humble a fashion, we could have it marked 'Not to be opened' and sent through to Kiel with the next train."

"Excellent. It could not be better. See that some food and water are placed in it."

"And a bed, Your—ah, a bed, sir."

"Tut, tut! Straw will serve us well. Can we get on at once?"

"Within half an hour. But how can you cross the platform here unseen?"

"I had anticipated that difficulty," said the aide-de-camp. He drew a bandage from his pocket. "If, sir, you would not mind acting the part of an officer who is wounded in the face, I could easily disguise you."

"My wound is in the heart," said the Emperor. "But how about the civilian clothes?"

"People will not stop to reason in such times as these." With a few deft twists the young man passed the bandage over the Emperor's brow and then diagonally across the telltale mustache. "Now, sir, I think you are safe."

"Well done, Sigurd. We will wait here, Herr Baumgarten, and when you give the word, we are ready."

And so it was that thirty-six hours later the station master of Kiel, known to be a loyalist, opened the locked doors of a refrigerator van, from which emerged a middle-aged man bandaged as from a severe face wound, and his young companion, who looked after him with touching care. The pair were cold and stiff, but the station master hustled them rapidly into his own room, where hot coffee was waiting, and a warm stove.

"Anything I can do, sire. You have but to command."

"Presently you shall learn," said the Emperor. "Meanwhile you will take this note, or send it by a trusty hand, to Admiral von Drotha. When he comes, you will show him in to us."

An hour later a very amazed officer in the uniform of the Imperial Navy entered the humble room. He was quivering with emotion and eager zeal. He sank upon his knee before the Emperor, who raised him to his feet.

"My dear admiral, the days of such things are passed. Has not Prince Max declared that I have abdicated; though I confess that it was news to me! This is my throne now." He waved his hand toward the station chair.

"You are always our Emperor."

"Yes, here—here"—and the speaker struck his breast—"I am always the Emperor. God has given me the charge, and only He can relieve me from it. But in these times I ask for no response and no favor from others—save only one. But it is a supreme and onerous one. I wonder if your loyalty will rise to it?"

"It will rise to any height, sire. What is it?"

"That you should die with me."

"Sire, it is my greatest ambition." Tears of devotion ran down the face of the honest sailor. The Emperor also passed his hand across his eyes.

"I have had false friends," he said, "but there are true hearts also in the world. Now sit here, admiral. These are rather different surroundings from the Potsdam palace, where last we two met. But we have privacy, and that is essential. I have come to Kiel to lead my fleet out against the English."

The admiral gasped. "But, sire, the men are in mutiny! They have driven the officers ashore! How can we man our ships?"

"They will come. They will come. They are Germans, and will not let their Emperor go out to die alone; for I am going, admiral, if it is only one torpedo boat which takes me out."

"And I am the commander of that torpedo boat!" cried the admiral.

"And I on the deck," said Sigurd von Mann.

"But what do you propose, sire? You have some definite plan in your head?"

"Yes, admiral, I have thought out every detail. In the first place, can you name any large room where some hundreds of men can be privately assembled?"

"Yes, sire. Count von Waldorf has a dancing hall attached to his villa which would exactly meet your requirement. The count, I need not say, is loyal to the core."

"If we could pass the word round to all the officers and assemble them there, I would appeal for their support and cooperation."

"Sire, I know the feelings of my comrades. To ask such a question is pure loss

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of time. There is not a man of the officers' corps of the German Navy who would shrink from following you. You have only to signify your desire, and they are ready to meet it."

"Then so much time is gained, and every hour now is of importance. Everything is cracking both on the line and behind it. We must act at once or we may be stopped. What of the men?"

"I fear, sire, that they will not come. It might even be dangerous for them to know that you are in the town."

"Danger is nothing. When death is the certain end, who cares for danger upon the way! I take your word, admiral, as to the officers. Are there any who are loyal and trustworthy among the men?"

"There are many such, sire, but they are in a minority."

"They will serve as our messengers. Collect as many as you can. Send by their hand letters to every vessel. Ask the men to send their delegates, three for a large ship, two for a light cruiser, one for a small unit, to the saloon of which you speak. Say that at three o'clock their Emperor would wish to speak with them. Call me Wilhelm von Hohenzollern if you wish. It matters not what they call me, so long as they will come."

"Sire, they will come. And a bodyguard of your faithful officers will surround you. They will only approach you over our bodies."

"Not an officer, admiral. I must trust the men, or our cause is lost. You and Captain von Mann. No others. Send me a closed motor car, and warn your friend, Count von Waldorf, that I am coming. I will see you again at three o'clock."

Long before the time mentioned, all Kiel was buzzing with excitement. The news had spread like wildfire that the Emperor was in the town, and that he was in the Villa Waldorf. Great crowds assembled in the streets, and here or there a red flag fluttered over them, but there was no demonstration. Utter amazement was the prevailing sentiment. That he should come here of all places—the very center of revolutionary disturbance. That he should put his head into the lion's mouth. Amazing! Still more wonderful was it when an open car bearing a bearded officer in an admiral's uniform made its way slowly through the crowd and its occupant entered the villa. That thin, eager face was well known to all—the face of Henry, younger brother of William, and head admiral of the fleet. What was going on? What could it mean? Were they planning a coup d'état? If so, they would soon find out that revolutions are not so easily set aside. So growled the crowd as it stood watching the white-stuccoed face of the palatial villa.

And now the delegates began to assemble. In twos and threes they elbowed their way through the crowd, amid a good deal of rough chaff. Many had red handkerchiefs slung ostentatiously round their necks or red ribands in their caps. Soon the great hall, with its splendid hangings and polished oak floor, began to fill up. The red velvet seats which lined it were filled with sailors, and the body of the hall was also crammed. Everyone was smoking and the air was a blue haze. Someone started a revolutionary song, and it rolled and echoed round the high, vaulted roof. In the very midst of it the Emperor appeared. The song was cut off in an instant, and every eye was upon that small upright figure with the dangling arm, and upon that earnest, care-worn face which looked down upon them from the band dais at the end. He was clad now in a rough blue pilot jacket, and seemed far more a man of the sea, one of their own kind, than ever he had done in his lordly trappings. A kindly wave of human sympathy went out to him. Those who were seated rose to their feet. Two men who had uttered shrill whistles of disapproval were bundled out of the hall.

The Emperor moved to the front and laid his hand upon the gilt rail. His brother Henry, Admiral von Drotha, and young

Sigurd von Mann stood behind him. When he spoke, it was in a firm voice which rang through the hall.

"I speak," said he, "as a German to Germans. I thought it right to come here and see you face to face. I am not talking politics. There is no question of empire or republic in my mind. I have but one thought, my personal honor, the honor of my fleet, and the honor of my country."

There was no question that he had already captured his rough audience, as earnest honesty will always capture an audience. The sea of weather-beaten faces were all strained with attention. Their eyes were riveted upon the speaker.

"They are surrendering at Berlin. Is that any reason why we should surrender at Kiel? The army has fought most bravely, but it is worn out and can fight no more. It is not I who have left the army, but the army has left me. The navy, too, has fought bravely. But it is not worn out. It has fought no general action."

"Skager-Rack!" cried many voices.

"Yes, you did well at Skager-Rack. But your battle was not with the British fleet. It was with two or three squadrons at the most. We have still to pit our strength fairly against theirs. I am told that it is hopeless. I am told that their numbers make it impossible. There is nothing hopeless or impossible to brave men. And if it is hopeless or impossible, is it not at the worst better that we and our ships should lie at the bottom of the North Sea than that they should be surrendered without a blow? Would you stand by and let such a thing be, you men of the German fleet? Or are you ready to die with your Emperor?"

He flung out his arm in an eloquent gesture of appeal, and then a proud, happy smile passed over his face. For he had won his cause. A forest of outstretched hands, a lake of flushed, eager faces, a roar of deep-toned voices—the navy would die with its Kaiser!

"Quick, William! Strike at once!" whispered his brother.

"You will come with me. I knew that you would. Then carry my word to your comrades. Say that no unwilling man need come. Let them stay ashore. But you and I and all true German hearts will sail together upon the death voyage of the German fleet. Go, and do what I have told you."

There was a rush of heavy feet, and in a few minutes the hall was cleared and every exit filled with pushing, struggling men. In some strange way the crowd outside had in an instant learned what was afoot, and had caught the flame. The whole town was in an uproar of cheering. Flags broke out on every flagstaff, the German war flag on the same pole as the red ensign of revolution. On that the sailors were firm. The war flag might go up, but the red flag should not come down. All day and all night the Soviets held their heated meetings, where again and again dissentients were struck down by those who wished to go. News came back from Wilhelmshaven that the excitement had spread there, that all officers had been recalled to their ships, that the crews were at their quarters and that the engineers were stoking their fires. Soon the fleet would be ready to start.

The next few days saw an uninterrupted flow of vessels through the canal, to join the main fleet which lay in the Jade. Some delay was caused by the breakdown of a light cruiser, which blocked the passage near Neu Wittenbek, but this was finally overcome, and by the evening of the third day the ships had collected, either in the vicinity of the Jade or in the Wilhelmshaven Roads. That night a council was held in the wardroom of the new battleship Bayern, at which all the German chiefs were present, including the Emperor, who insisted upon taking a subordinate place, while Von Speer, who had hastened from Spa at the first whisper of what had happened, presided over the deliberations. Vice admirals and captains of capital ships—forty in all—crowded the room,

gloom, and yet determination, upon every face.

"I understand, Your Majesty, that your commands are that there shall be a fight to a finish?"

"That is my wish and my order," the Emperor answered. "The fleet is to be sunk, and it is better that it take as many of the enemy as possible with it."

"We have to face the cost," said the admiral. "It means the death of Your Majesty."

"I desire no better fate."

"And of twenty-five thousand officers and men."

"Is there anyone in this council who shrinks from it?" asked the Emperor.

There was silence. All were ready. The fleet was ready.

"But with all respect," said a young vice admiral, "is it necessary that we talk as if defeat were inevitable? We held the English at Skager-Rack. May we not do so again?"

"Besides," said another, "our fleet is now stronger—far stronger than then. Have we not added the Bayern and Baden, great ships with fifteen-inch guns, whereas we had nothing over twelve inches at the Skager-Rack. And the Hindenburg too! Is she not an addition? And the new fire control? May we not have a surprise for the English?"

"It is too late," said Von Speer. "If we win the victory, we have no fatherland to which to return." He took a telegram from his pocket and read it aloud:

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT SEVERELY CONDEMNS THE MAD PROJECT OF A SORTIE UPON THE PART OF THE FLEET, WHICH CAN LEAD TO NO RESULT SAVE UNNECESSARY LOSS OF SHIPS AND MEN. THE REPORT OF IT HAS SERIOUSLY IMPEDED THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN ARMISTICE. YOUR ALLEGIANCE TO THE GOVERNMENT DEMANDS THAT YOU INSTANTLY ORDER THE SHIPS TO RETURN TO THEIR ANCHORAGE.

A growl of indignation rose from the officers as their admiral replaced the paper in his pocket.

"I think you will agree with me, gentlemen, that our allegiance is due to our Emperor, and to him alone."

"Have you answered it?" asked the Emperor.

"No, sire. Our deeds will answer it. But I have drawn up a message here which, with your consent, I would wish to send to the British commander in chief. It runs thus: 'The High Sea Fleet does not consent to any armistice. It proposes to come out at once, and hopes on Monday to be seventy miles due west of Heligoland if the mine clearing permits. Should we be delayed, you will no doubt have the courtesy to wait for us.'"

"Excellent!" cried the Emperor, and all the council clapped their hands.

"Then it shall go at once," said the admiral.

"Might not the enemy lay their submarines at the spot?" asked one captain.

"We shall not be too exact as to the spot. Our light cruisers will guide the enemy to where we are. But as to what you say, Captain Muller, concerning the addition to our fleet, and to the Skager-Rack, it is well to have no illusions. The enemy has not been idle. We are in close touch with all that he has done. If we can build and improve and organize, so can they. You are aware that they lost two great ships because there was no cut-off from the turrets to the magazines. That has now been remedied. The protection of their decks and the roofs of their turrets are stronger now against plunging fire. Their shells have more explosive power. They have added many powerful ships to their squadrons. I have their names here. There is the Ramillies, the Resolution, the Renown, the Repulse—all with fifteen-inch guns. They have a squadron, too, of American battleships, and American naval history shows that they will be well handled and well fought. The odds against us are greater than ever. We can but swear to fight to the death. For myself, I swear it."

He raised his hand as he spoke, and every officer in the room, including the Emperor, did the same. "We swear it!" they cried. Nobly, as this record will show, did they fulfill their oath. That was the final word of the last council of war ever held on the High Sea Fleet. With set and somber faces they bade one another farewell; the captains returning to their vessels, while the admirals remained to plan their future with their leader.

It was just one day later that two admirals sat talking very earnestly together in the cabin of the commander in chief of the British Grand Fleet. One was that commander himself. The other was the American, Bradman, whose fine squadron, comprising the New York, Wyoming, Florida, Delaware, Arkansas and Texas, was the latest addition to the most formidable collection of war vessels ever assembled in the history of the world. Through the open porthole of Beaton's cabin one could see them riding at anchor with the Stars and Stripes flying over them, while beyond, line after line of mighty battleships, of giant cruisers, and of smaller craft, under St. George's flag, choked the great bay. Beyond lay the low barren shore of Scapa—as sad and bleak a prospect as any in the world.

Beaton, his handsome face wearing a puzzled frown, was reading aloud to his colleague the German wireless message.

"What do you make of that, Bradman?" he asked, looking up at his companion.

"Say, it's just fine on the face of it!" the American answered. "Too good to be true, I guess."

"I don't know. They have not much choice, have they? I think it is what we should do if things were reversed. They can scuttle their own ships in harbor or they can come outside and have them scuttled by our guns, taking a few of our own to the bottom with them. It seems to me to be reasonable, and the first thing that brave men would think of."

"Maybe so. But it might be a trap all the same."

"Well, we won't walk into a mine field if we can help it. Our light craft will look out for that. Anyhow, I think we should let them have an answer." He took up a pencil and scribbled upon a card: "Very good. We shall be there." "How's that?"

"That's the idea."

Beaton rang the gong and handed the message to a young officer in attendance. "No need for code, Duncan. Send it as it stands." Then, as the door closed, he turned to the great map of the North Sea, which was now so crisscrossed with pencil marks and bearings as to be almost worn out. "That being so, Bradman, I suppose we should take it seriously and make our preparations. The poor devils would not have a chance, for we are two to one; but from what we saw of them at Jutland, I'll promise you that they will put up a very fine fight."

"Yes, they side-stepped you there," said Bradman, with a sly twinkle.

"Maybe so. But it's difficult to take chances when on our side the war is lost if our fleet is lost, while the other fellow lays no such stake upon the table. That was our trouble at Jutland. We could not risk the rough and tumble of a night action. We have a free hand now, and every man in the British fleet wants a fight to a finish."

"I'll answer for my squadron, too," said Admiral Bradman, and the two sailors bent over the chart.

The day of the great adventure and of the supreme sacrifice had come. The German fleet had assembled now in Heligoland Bay and, shortly after dawn, started upon its last terrible voyage, its mine sweepers having for two days swept a clear passage. In front of the magnificent array were two squadrons of light cruisers, forming the screen of the fleet. Then came the battle cruisers in double line, Derfflinger, Seydlitz, Moltke, and Von der Tann—the old squadron which had already endured so much and

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won the respect of every British sailor. Von Lippert was in command. They were strengthened now by the mighty Hindenburg, but her sister ship, the Mackensen, was not yet ready for service. Behind the cruisers came the magnificent line of the battleships, led by the strongest squadron just out of the builder's yard—the Bayern, flying the flag of Von Speer and carrying the Emperor on board, the Baden, and two others. All these great ships carried eight fifteen-inch guns and had a speed of twenty-two knots. Behind them were the four powerful ships of the König class—König, Grosser Kurfürst, Kronprinz, and Markgraf. They carried ten twelve-inch guns. Then came four Kaisers—ships as strong as the Königs and rather faster. Astern of these, the great line extended across the whole visible circle of ocean, giant behind giant, the Friedrich der Grosse, Ostfriesland, Thüringen, Heligoland, Oldenburg, Posen, and many more, while even the very old ships, such as the Deutschland or the Schleswig-Holstein, which carried four heavy guns, but were incapable of more than sixteen knots, had fallen in behind and panted along to share the fate of their comrades. There was no need for hurry, and the whole fleet steamed at reduced speed, while on every side the destroyers kept guard against surprise.

In this they were but partially successful, as the Posen was struck by an English submarine and had to stagger back into port in a sinking condition. The submarine itself—M-16—was destroyed by the depth charges showered around it.

The Allied fleet had to start long before dawn in order to keep its tryst. If the German array had been formidable, this could only be described as terrific. Apart from a swarm of light cruisers and destroyers, the van was led by the Lion, which still bore upon her plates the dents of former battles. Behind her in single line came the Tiger, bearing the flag of Rear Admiral Morton, and astern were the Australia and Princess Royal. Even more formidable were two new vessels, which, on account of their peculiar qualities, operated apart. These were the Renown and Repulse, carrying fifteen-inch guns and capable of attaining the amazing speed of thirty-two knots.

The light-battleship squadron, under Admiral Thoms, which had shown its fine qualities at Jutland, where for a time it had been under the fire of a large part of the German fleet, followed the cruisers. They were, as before, the Malaya, Valiant, Warspite and Barham, with the Queen Elizabeth added, all armed with fifteen-inch guns. Behind them in double column came the new prides of the British service—the Ramillies, Resolution, Revenge, Royal Sovereign, and Royal Oak—twenty-three-knot vessels carrying eight fifteen-inch guns each. Behind them again was the splendid American squadron of six vessels already named, with their fourteen-inch guns and twenty-one knots of speed. The thick smoke from their funnels showed that they were coal-burning ships. So, squadron after squadron, the great armada passed out from Scapa, with the strange unwieldy airplane carrier, Furious, like a huge Noah's ark, in the rear. Far out on each flank were the heavy cruisers Inflexible, New Zealand, Indomitable, and others, while swarms of light cruisers and destroyers covered the ocean up to the horizon in every direction. The heavier ships formed into six columns outside the bay, and the whole majestic procession moved at eighteen knots toward the southeast.

It was at 2:30 in the afternoon that two British seaplanes reported a German Zeppelin in lat. 55.46 North, long. 5.14 East, and attacked it unsuccessfully. Following it up, they saw and reported the thick fringe of scouts which preceded the High Seas Fleet. The news was wirelessed to every vessel in the Allied armada and assured them for the first time that the German challenge was not empty bravado, and that the great day had really come when this long-standing quarrel should be fought to

an end. Battle flags were broken out upon every ship, and Beaton increased his speed to twenty knots, even at the risk of leaving his slower craft behind. The swift battle cruisers were sent on independently at full speed to hold the enemy until the main fleet should arrive. It was a fine day, but there was a brisk breeze from the southeast, and the great cruisers, running at twenty-eight knots, had their foredecks almost under water, and the spray as high as their funnels, while they thundered through the racing waves. At 2:40 came the news that the light cruiser Phaeton had been sunk by a German submarine. A few minutes later the same fate had befallen the Inconstant. Then came word that a Zeppelin had been destroyed by the anti-aircraft guns of the scout Arethusa.

Shortly after three, cocoa and light food were served out to the crews and the bugles blew for action stations. News from the scouts was now coming in thick and fast, and the sound of heavy firing could be heard from the flagship in the southeastern direction. Seaplane No. 7042, launched from the Furious, had flown the whole length of the German fleet, and though brought down with a broken wing, managed to wireless her observations of their total force, which proved to be surprisingly accurate, considering the difficult circumstances of the reconnaissance. For this valuable service Flight Lieutenant Oliver was very specially mentioned in dispatches.

The great fleets were now rapidly closing, and the Fourth British Light Cruiser Squadron was fiercely engaged with the Ninth German Squadron of scouts. As the British main fleet came roaring along down upon the battle, the whole horizon was dotted with these smaller vessels, many of them smothered in foam from the shells which were falling thickly around them. At four o'clock the head of the heavy cruiser squadron was engaged with the Derfflinger, which led the German battle cruisers. The action had fairly begun.

And here I pause. Was it to describe that great epic, that Armageddon of the sea, that my vision was intended? Was it not rather to trace the alternate fates of that desperate and unhappy man who stood at the parting of the ways, where one led to life with honor, and the other to death with heroism? And yet his tragedy was so involved with this far greater one that my dream could scarce deal with one except through the other. Therefore, with no more detail than is necessary to give reality to the picture, I will write what the eye of imagination has seen.

As each side desired to fight rather than to maneuver, the covering squadrons of light cruisers, having done their duty in reporting the enemy, fell upon one another with the utmost fury. A whole series of desperate duels was begun at a range of 7000 yards, shortening to 5000. So engrossed were the little fellows in their own combats that they paid hardly any attention to the heavier ships which passed through their mêlée, and which could each have sunk any one of them with a shot. The old rule of the sea by which ships of the line did not fire upon frigates still held good, and the scouts were left to settle their quarrel among themselves.

At first the Germans had the better, for their gunnery was perfect, and their destroyers pushed boldly into the fight. The Daring, Dryad, Calliope, Donegal and Lancaster were all sunk by gunfire or torpedo, while the Carnarvon drew out of the line in a sinking condition. On the other hand, the Stettin and Berlin were both sunk early in the fight, and the Pillau was put out of action.

As the day wore on, fresh British light craft and destroyers joined in the fray, and weight of metal and of numbers overbore the gallant Germans. The Stuttgart, München and Frankfurt were all sunk by gunfire, while the British lost only the Carnarvon, which was finally torpedoed by the Regensburg. This fighting was desperate and bloody, but it was a mere digression from the main business of the day. As to

the destroyers, the flotillas on either side charged headlong at the capital ships of the enemy, and then, meeting halfway, each drove desperately to prevent the other from reaching its mark. Like fighting dogs, half smothered in foam, they tore through the sea, their sides almost touching and the flashes of their guns licking the very paint from the bulwarks of their opponents.

On every side one saw shattered and blazing wrecks, for the oil fuel turned each stricken boat into a funeral pyre for its crew—a proper burial for men who, on either side, came of the Viking blood. Some destroyers, German or British, fought their way through the crowd and succeeded in driving home their attack upon the battleships, with certain death for their reward. The Marlborough was struck again, as she had been at Jutland, and this time sank with all hands. The Orion, too, was badly damaged, and fell out of the line with a list of twelve degrees to port. The New York and Renown were both hit, but neither sustained serious damage, for their water-tight bulkheads stood firm. In every case the secondary armament disposed of the brave little assailant. The German line suffered even more heavily than the British. Captain Hase's ship, the Derfflinger, had a huge hole blown in her bows, and sank by the head. The Kaiserin and the Grosser Kurfürst were each of them sunk, and the Oldenburg was crippled. An American squadron under Captain Bosnell of the Cushing distinguished itself in this work. On either side no notice was taken of casualties.

The stricken must look after themselves. The deadly lock of battle held the rest to their work.

Beaton had deployed his main fleet to either flank in the hope of placing an Allied ship on each side of a German, but Von Speer had rapidly altered his line ahead into double column to meet the danger. Now it was a fair gun duel, opening at 17,000 yards and closing in until only 12,000 yards separated the giants who moved parallel to one another, with no maneuvers, save that each ship would sheer in or out to baffle the enemy's aim. The German range finders were the better, and they were the quicker on the mark, but the British guns were heavier and there was little to choose in the shooting. Thus it was that numbers were bound to tell. Ship after ship in the German line went up in flame and smoke.

The British had learned the lesson of Jutland, and though the heavy shells of the new fifteen-inch German guns plunged repeatedly through the roofs of turrets, exterminating the crews of the guns and putting them out of action, there was no passage for that murderous back-flash which had formerly reached the magazine and destroyed the ship. The deck protection was still too weak, however, on either side, and the destruction of ships was due again and again to plunging fire which penetrated to the vitals. Thus it was with many Germans, and thus, too, with the Tiger, Inflexible, Florida, Repulse and Collingwood, all of which shared the fate of the Queen Mary.

A gray figure—gray in dress and gray in face—stood for hours at the side of the bridge of the flagship. It was the Emperor. A telescope with magnifying power of fifteen diameters enabled him to view the terrific scene. Hour after hour he saw and realized the awful thing that had come upon the earth. Men of the same blood and culture, men sprung from the same Northern stock, were locked in this horrible wrestle, which could only end in death. Who can say what his thoughts might have been at such a time!

They flashed back to dwell upon his splendid father, the kindly golden-bearded giant, and upon the Englishwoman, his mother. Yes, half the blood in his own veins flowed from the same source as that which was in the crews of the gray ships over yonder. By what extraordinary mis-handling of chances and by what evil ordering of events had it come about that he

was now in such deadly conflict with them? Why was it necessary, when Germany was already conquering the world by its industry and circling the globe with its colonies? It was useless to go back upon the past. Far off, many years ago, some wrong path was taken, and this was whither it had led. It was the twilight of the gods—the most fearsome thing in all the history of the human race. They held him responsible, and yet he knew that he was but a puppet in the hands of fate, moving forward in some predestined and unavoidable fashion upon a terrible course.

But who was responsible—surely there must be responsibility somewhere. Was it the hand which drafted that mad ultimatum to Serbia? Was it the Czar and his premature mobilization? Was it Von Tirpitz, with his colossal sea plans, now at that moment reaching their tragic result? Was it to Von Schlieffen, with his scheme of marching through Belgium, which must bring England into the war? Was it his Uncle Edward, who had always been so suspicious of him? Or was it his chancellor's act, when, in 1902, he had refused with contempt an offer of an alliance from England?

Each and all of these facts seemed to his tired brain to have had something to do with this awful conclusion. At his feet lay a shattered body, the blood from which had splashed his high boots and left stains upon his gray overcoat. It was his faithful aide-de-camp, Von Mann, true to death, as he had promised. And that mangled corpse, that premature death when youth was at its best, was typical of ten million others for which so many held him responsible. He shuddered at terrible visions rose before him. They were interrupted by Von Speer, who approached him on the bridge. The admiral had been hit on the shoulder by a splinter, and his face was white and drawn.

"How goes it now, admiral?" asked the Emperor.

The sailor shrugged his shoulders.

"As to the fleet, we have lost nine battleships and four great cruisers. The Hindenburg has just gone up. Our own two after turrets have both been shot away, the top is off one of the fore ones, and we have only two guns in action. We are, as you can see, on fire at both ends, and only a part of our funnel is standing. There is water in the engine room and the stokers are drowning. We can do no more."

"What of the English? I have seen several of their ships go up."

"The battle now covers a line of fifteen miles. Many of the aeriels have been shot away. But it is likely that they have lost ship for ship with ourselves."

"And what now?"

"There is nothing for it but to fight our ships to the water's edge."

At this moment a midshipman ran upon the bridge with a message.

"The voice tubes are cut, sir," he cried as he saluted; "I was told to bring it by hand."

The admiral tore open the paper.

"It is a wireless from Beaton," he said. "It runs: 'Surely honor is satisfied. No men could have done more. Why this useless slaughter? You have only five ships left in a condition to give battle. I can stand off and outrange you, so as to sink you from a distance which you cannot reach. I should hate to kill brave men in such a way. Admit your honorable and inevitable defeat, and strike your flag.'"

"Never!" said the Emperor.

"Never!" echoed the admiral.

But at that moment there came that which settled the matter. Some say that the salvo was fired from the Delaware, some that it came from the Lion. Out of eight shells, four fell direct upon the deck of the Bayern and plunged down into her magazines. With a roar, the mighty vessel went up into the air. In the instant of impact, conscious of what the next few seconds would bring, Emperor and admiral shook hands. Many survivors have testified to

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seeing that salute. It was the last gesture of the German Imperial house and of the German High Sea Fleet. At that very moment the southern horizon was broken by the smoke of many hurrying vessels. The Harwich flotilla was arriving, fresh and eager. It was the end.

Late that night, when the sun had sunk and left only a pink glow in the west, the British commander looked proudly and yet ruefully upon the scene of that terrible epic. In every direction shattered wrecks were blazing, and men floated upon scattered spars or upon rafts, while swift torpedo boats flew from one to the other on their

errand of saving life. Admiral Beaton stood upon his bridge, worn and weary, darkened by all the shadows of reaction.

"Might I suggest, sir, that we send a message to the fleet?" said the high officer at his elbow.

"To what is left of the fleet," said Beaton with a wan smile; "I hear their Emperor

went down with their flagship. My message, Murdoch, would be to fly our flags halfmast in memory of a brave man."

So ran my vision of an alternative. And yet it may be that Fate was wiser, and that the path upon the level was better than that upon the hilltops.