

# The Wireless Death

By C.S. Raymond

In the early morning the crowd which spent most of the night at the bulletin-board were gathering again. At no time had the place been entirely deserted. Several men had never been out of eyesight of the bulletin. One of them, a shock-headed youth in overalls and wearing the cap of a government electrician, sat on the stone curbing by the entrance to the power station, smoking a small black pipe, seemingly more occupied with meditation than observation.

At the men who were now gathering about the board, were coal miners on their way to the shafts. Here and there were electricians. The vastness of the station from which they had been driven more than suggested that the crowd stood, the buildings being partially hid in a grove of trees.

The groups of miners and electricians were almost silent. They seemed to have exhausted comment and surprise, and to be waiting for the tangible to take place of conjecture.

## On the Verge of War.

In Washington the federal news editor apparently had worn out himself and his staff in keeping up a detailed account of the all-night session of Congress. As daylight came, the service wobbled, and what had been a connected, well-sustained story of congressional proceedings had slumped to a series of jerky bulletins of which the last had come a half-hour before, reading:

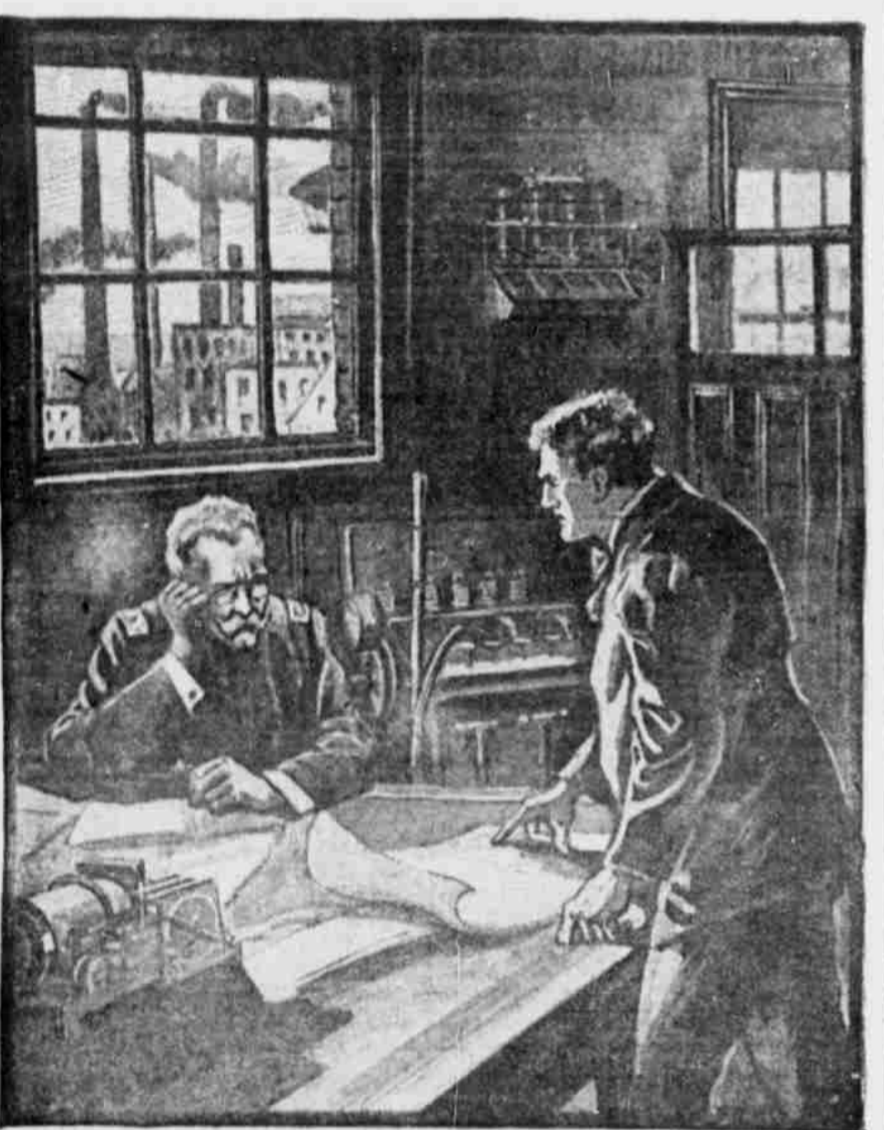
"Williams still has the floor. He is making no headway against the majority. War seems inevitable."

To the men starting for the shafts, this carried no news which they had not known before they had gone away, a few hours earlier, to get such sleep and rest as they could.

While they stood watching, another bulletin came:

"Congress has taken an hour's recess for breakfast. No action."

The coal miners in the crowd read this, and then started for work. Soon there were left only a few scattered



HE WAS HELD SPELLBOUND BY THE VEHEMENT EXPLANATION.

groups; but the shock-headed electrician still sat on the curb and smoked his black pipe.

## Mail by Airship.

A speck developed in the eastern sky and drew nearer, enlarging rapidly. Then the Washington mail came into sight, and landed at the aeroplane station near the entrance to the power station. A mail clerk came down the elevator after the sacks had been thrown into the chute. He was questioned eagerly by the men still standing about the bulletin board, but had nothing of news later than that which the bulletins had given them.

As he stood talking, another message was flashed on the board:

"Williams says that opposition to the majority will cease. War will be declared before night."

At the shock-headed youth arose suddenly from the curbstone, walked rapidly through the gates and on into the grounds of the power station.

## Central Power Station.

The Susquehanna Coal and Power District, supplying not only Washington, but New York with electricity for all purposes of light, heat, and power, was the largest of the government power areas into which the country was divided. Its coal mines were of the greatest extent, its power station gigantic, and its employees an army. New York with its millions, and Washington with its institutions, secured all power from the wires charged by the dynamos of the Susquehanna District.

The shock-headed electrician kept his rapid stride through the grounds until he came to a one-story brick building marked over its doorway, with the word "Administration." It was surrounded by beds of sweet-peas, which a gardener then was watering. The young man went up the gravelled walk without looking to right or left, pushed open the door, went to the right, and knocked at a closed door.

He was told to enter, and did so, taking off his cap.

A middle-aged, gray-haired, spectacled man sat at a desk in the center

itself no thought of the inevitable product of incompetence urged into action by rashness.

In all this unprepared country, no one appreciated so thoroughly the impending danger as did Montrus, the unfortunate commander-in-chief of the small military force.

## Commander in Despair.

He had been dean of the Department of electricity in the national university, when transferred to the military service, having prior to this been an instructor in one of the national military schools. In appearance he was scholarly, his figure spare and bent, his hair and eyes gray, and his face unlined.

He was alone in his office, looking out of the window across the Potomac—the only inactive figure in the War Department—when one of his aides entered the room.

"Curtis had been located," said the aide. "He is at Kiel. We got his signal followed by some code which is being transcribed."

Another aide came in.

"Curtis says he is effectually hidden, and can send electrigraphs if we can make them."

"Where is he?" asked Montrus eagerly.

## Scouting the Upper Air.

"He says he is out of the path of their scouts, and thinks he is safely posted. He must be above them."

"Can you reach him?"

"We have, but he warns us not to try often. I suppose his position is precarious at best."

"Tell him to send what he can," answered Montrus. "I'll go into the tower to take it."

A hundred yards farther up the Potomac, stood a gigantic tower, the exact longitude and latitude of which was burned in the memory of every operative in the secret service. To this, Montrus and his aides hastened, being carried directly to the summit by a lift.

While the aides adjusted the films and reflector of the electro-photographer, Montrus stood at the railing looking out over the peaceful river scene and drumming his fingers on the wooden bars.

"I think it is coming," said one of the aides finally; and the general stepped over to adjust about his head the hood which shut all light from the eyes looking at the reflector.

## Looking Across the Ocean.

At first this remained in black and inky darkness. Then came little waves of dim light which rippled across its surface. These ripples became stronger; indistinct shapes, unrecognizable and mystic, seemed to rise out of its depths. They cleared away, and there grew up in their place the forms of a city's roofs and towers, which stood revealed in distinct outlines for a moment and then seemed to drop further and further down into the reflector.

White, fleecy clouds came between the eye and the city's roofs, the latter growing less and less distinct. There was a sweep of a dark object athwart the clouds. It crossed the entire reflector, blotting it out in black again, but light followed almost instantly. Again nothing but the white clouds, but finally a far-off flock of specks, which came nearer and nearer until they stood out each distinctly and separately, clear-cut in outline and identity. There they stood.

## Aerial Torpedo Boats.

Montrus almost held his breath as he ran his eyes over them. For ten minutes he studied. Then he drew the hood from his head, and looked out over the river scene again.

"A hundred, I should say," he remarked at last, quietly, but in great bitterness. "Every one ready. In twenty-four hours from the time those awful foals in Congress declare war, those hundred torpedo ships will be here. Tell Curtis we've seen enough."

With that he went back to his office, and in moodiness took his post by the window again. Nothing he could plan could avert the calamity he had seen in readiness. Presently one of the aides came in again.

"A government electrician is outside," he announced, "and insists on seeing you. We have done everything to get rid of him but throw him off the grounds."

The man stopped and waited expectantly.

"Tell him—," said Montrus angrily, but stopped. "Let him in," he concluded, sullenly.

## Young Inventor to the Rescue.

The aide went out and came back with the shock-headed electrician who had spent the night before by the bulletin-board. His embarrassment was great, but his earnestness equalled it. The former showed in his awkward posture and twitching fingers; the latter, in the direct look with which he sought the general's eyes.

"Well," exclaimed Montrus, sharply. "I have a concentrator—I want you to look at it—I thought—," he began excitedly, but ended brokenly in the face of a cold stare from Montrus.

"Here it is," he concluded, unfolding the prints.

Montrus cast one careless and a second interested glance at the plans. He drew up a chair and studied them, the moodiness giving away to keen appreciation. Then he pushed them away.

"You seem to have something," he said. "Some other time—, if there's anything left of this country, some other time I'll look at them. But not now. I can't now."

## Death to Distant Fleet.

"But you don't understand," exclaimed Atsins, quickly and vehemently. "Now's the time, don't you see? That will direct a million volts—two million volts—accurately, to any distance, at any object. Man, if it works, if it will do it—don't you see?"

Montrus stared at the shock-headed boy in a daze.

Atsins held himself in check and leaned forward.

"Will the ships at Kiel ever leave their moorings if it works?" he asked, drawing in his breath sharply. The two men looked at each other, and as Montrus stared, he saw also in his mental vision those hundred dark shapes on the face of the reflector.

Then he pressed a series of buttons on his desk, and men entered from different doors.

"Take this young man, Mr. —?"

"Not a name," said Atsins. "Just an idea."

"Take this idea," continued Montrus,

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