

the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

SYNOPSIS: Wealthy, flashy Prescott Fanning abducts Janet from Baltimore on his yacht. She gets word to Neil, a young federal agent who loves her. Rushing to Abalone's Harbor, he boards the yacht and finds, in a locked cabin, Fanning shot dead and Janet in a faint, a gun beside her. Neil hides her in the disused liners up the river. Back at the village he resumes his fatherman role to watch developments, offering to help Mark Bonniger, a keen local man who takes charge of the investigation. Kettering, a Baltimore lawyer, is on hand to fish, and queer little David Eyster, who hated Fanning, shows up.

Chapter 18

Dangerous Conference

HAVING accepted Neil, Bonniger's grave way was disposed to be friendly. After dinner in the hotel he suggested that he and Neil and Kettering should sit down somewhere and discuss the case.

"I'd be glad to hear any suggestions you or Kettering may have to offer."

Neil hardened with a sense of the danger of such a conference. He must appear to be working with them, while he played his own hand. He must study every word that he uttered. Bonniger was not the sort of a man to be easily confused by false issues. Above all he must take care not to overplay his hand. At the same time Neil was conscious of the grim humor of the situation. To be asked to sit down and discuss the best way of catching himself!

"Kettering, I think, should be told who you are," said Bonniger, "if you have no objections."

"That's all right with me," said Neil, "as long as the newspaper boys don't get hold of it."

"I will protect you with the press."

They took possession of the little parlor back of the hotel office, and locked the door to keep out the ever-present mob. The motor bus had arrived, and Bonniger had been closeted with McGee, the engineer. Neil's chief anxiety at the moment was to learn if McGee had said anything to Bonniger about calling him up at the Stafford.

If he had, it wouldn't lead the investigator directly to Neil, because he was registered at the Stafford under an assumed name. But Bonniger would be able to get a good description of him at the hotel.

"What did you get from McGee?" asked Neil carefully.

"McGee's story corroborates the other three as to the events leading up to the murder," said Bonniger. "McGee himself is outside suspicion because he went to town on Tuesday morning. I got one new thing out of him. He confessed to leaving a gun where the girl could get it. He was sorry for her. I showed him the gun with which Fanning was shot, and he identified it as his."

Neil was relieved in mind. Kettering was much impressed when he was told who Neil was. "It's providential that you should be here," he said.

"I don't know," said Neil. "Murder is a little out of my line."

"I've never solved a murder," said Kettering, "but I've defended more than one murderer."

Neil did not care much for Kettering. He was too wordy. He had an idea that Bonniger did not fancy him either. But the man had a bright mind. He could pounce on the weakness of an argument. Bonniger and Kettering made a formidable combination to be up against. Neil let them do most of the talking.

Theorizing
BONNIGER laid out the known facts. He took it for granted that the missing girl had shot Fanning. "Strange that nothing has turned up today to establish her identity," he said. "The story has been out on the streets of Baltimore for hours, but nobody has come forward to tell us who she is. Nobody has reported a girl missing. If I am to believe the stories of the crew, she was a girl of remarkable beauty. Such a one ought to be well known."

For Neil this was all to the good. "The evidence suggests that some man helped her to escape from the yacht," Bonniger continued. "It may have been a friend, or it may have been a stranger bent on rescuing a woman in distress. It's easy for a beautiful girl to find men to help her, of course. But neither girl, man nor skill has been seen since they left the yacht. Where did they go? How could a beautiful girl in a pink evening dress and black velvet wrap disappear without having been seen by someone?"

"Perhaps the skiff swamped out in the bay and they were drowned," said Kettering.

"It's a possibility," Neil put in a word for Janet. "If Fanning attacked the girl, she was justified in shooting him."

"Certainly," Neil would have to prove that she had not previously encouraged his advances. The crew testified that she seemed to come aboard the yacht willingly."

Kettering offered an alternative theory, that one of the crew might have shot Fanning before coming ashore to the movies.

Bonniger would have none of it. "Suppose one of these men shot Fanning to save the girl from him. Is it likely they would go ashore and leave her alone with the body?"

"Perhaps they procured a skiff for her," suggested Neil.

"Impossible. It was broad daylight when the crew came ashore and 50 people saw them. They went directly to the movie theater and paid their way in."

"No," Bonniger continued, "I questioned each man separately this afternoon, and their stories hung together. Fanning, the girl and another couple came aboard Monday night and had dinner. Jolly party; plenty of champagne. Later the other couple went ashore. When the yacht started down the bay, the crew suspected that the girl might have been abducted because she had brought no baggage aboard. And as Walter, the steward, said: 'She was the kind of a girl who might lead a man to do something crazy!'"

"Yet they stood for it," said Neil angrily. "What kind of men were they?"

Bonniger looked a little surprised at his indignation. (Steady! Neil warned himself.) "Well, they weren't sure of it because, they said, she didn't cry or carry on in any way."

"Some women don't cry when they're in trouble. They turn stony,"

"Quite right. Anyhow, you can't expect men of that sort to play the part of heroes. Fanning was their boss. . . . The gun clinches the case against the girl," Bonniger said firmly. "She fired the shot. I take it, and her helper came on the scene afterwards."

The Crew Saw Him
NEILL had the sense of a net slowly being drawn around him and Janet. You only assume that she had a helper," suggested Neil. "There is no proof of it."

Bonniger sprang a surprise on him. "Certainly there is proof. The three men who were sleeping on board saw him."

"Saw him?" echoed Neil. "How could that be? . . . When?"

"They couldn't tell me the hour. Sometime in the middle of the night."

"In the middle of the night!" "What is there about that which is so surprising to you?"

Once more Neil was warned not to betray so much as their final case. He laughed. "Oh, nothing," he said, "only it was fixed in my mind that Fanning was shot and the girl got away before the crew returned from the movies."

"Certainly Fanning was killed and the girl's friend came on the scene before the crew got back," said Bonniger, "because they heard neither the shot nor the breaking in of the cabin door. But it appears from their stories that the two did not make their final getaway until some hours later."

Neil concealed his confusion behind a wooden face. "What did the crew tell you?" asked Kettering.

"They returned to the yacht at 10:15. All was quiet aboard and they turned in. They slept in the forepeak. Some time later the steward, Walter, said he was awakened by a noise on deck. A few moments were lost while he was awakening his mates, and they were pulling on their pants."

"When they stuck their heads out of the fore hatch, the man was on deck. He saw them and went over the side like a streak. They could only see him dimly. They couldn't describe him beyond the fact that he was a big man. He pulled away swiftly in the dark. They thought at the time that it was a robber."

"What about the girl?"

"They didn't see her. I assume that she threw herself in the bottom of the skiff to escape observation."

This explanation explained nothing so far as Neil was concerned. So there had been another visitor to the yacht after he and Janet had left it. Who was it? he asked himself. What was he after?

"Where do you suppose this guy was when the crew came back?" asked Kettering. "If he had a skiff with him they must have seen it."

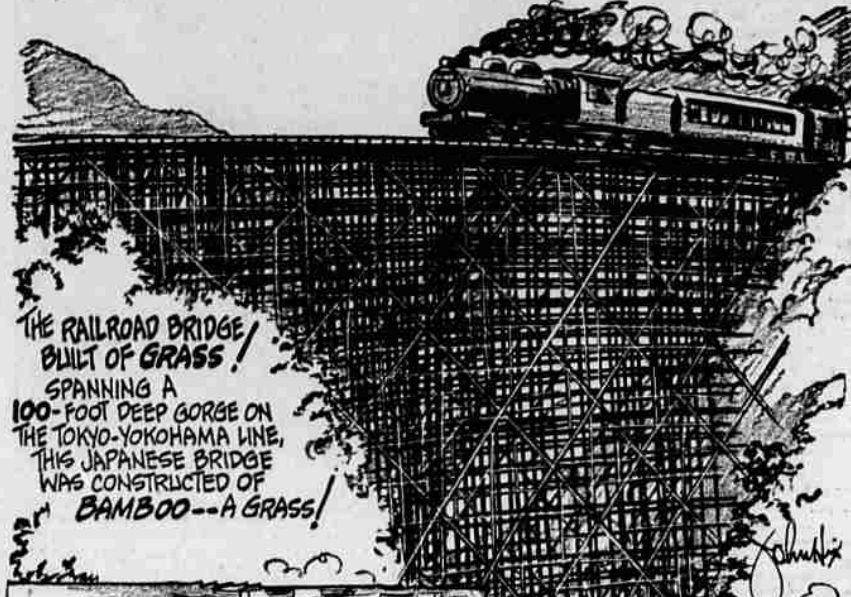
"I am supposing that he heard the crew coming," said Bonniger, "and rowed off a little way in the dark to give them time to get below and go to sleep."

"Sure!" said Kettering. "This was a false deduction, though a natural one, and Neil could afford to smile at it."

Neil swaks back to Janet with clothes and supplies, Monday.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



THE RAILROAD BRIDGE BUILT OF GRASS! SPANNING A 100-FOOT DEEP GORGE ON THE TOKYO-YOKOHAMA LINE, THIS JAPANESE BRIDGE WAS CONSTRUCTED OF BAMBOO--A GRASS!

IT COSTS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT FIVE MILLION DOLLARS TO ISSUE A BILLION \$1.00 BILLS

JAMES O'NEILL, ST. LOUIS BROWNE, LED THE MAJOR LEAGUES IN DOUBLES, TRIPLES AND HOMERS IN THE SAME SEASON--1887

EDISON RECEIVED HIS U.S. PATENT ON THE PHONOGRAPH IN LESS THAN 2 MONTHS--ONE OF HIS PATENTS REQUIRED 7 1/2 YEARS

Money Costs
"It takes money to make money." is an old adage—and as just as true for the United States as for any of its citizens. Every thousand pieces of paper currency cost the government about five dollars to print and deliver.

The cost of issuing paper money is even higher than these figures indicate, due to the fact that all paper money ultimately wears out. When a bill reaches the Federal Reserve Bank or Treasury after being spent once too often, it is destroyed and a new one is issued to take its place. Thus, strange as it seems, when a one-dollar bill is re-issued for the 200th time, the government will have paid approximately its face value to keep it in circulation.

It is cheaper, of course, to issue paper money of larger denomination in relation to its face value. There is no appreciable difference in the cost of issuing a one-dollar bill as compared to a ten-dollar bill. During the fiscal year 1937, the U. S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing printed and delivered 960,190,200 pieces of paper currency with a total face value of \$3,798,204,000. This was issued at an approximate cost of \$5,000,000.

Phonograph Patent
Because most modern inventions result from the contributions of many minds, it is often difficult to establish priority. When Thomas Edison filed his application with the U. S. Patent Office for a "phonograph of speaking machine," in 1877, however this was far from true. So sweeping revolutionary was the idea of reproducing sound with a machine that patent officials issued the inventor a patent 57 days after it was applied for. His patent on a system of electrical distribution was not granted until more than seven and a half years after he applied for it. The application was filed in January, 1880, and the patent was granted in August, 1887.

Edison filed application for a patent on the phonograph in Great Britain almost six months before he applied for one in the United States.

Hirohito Prays To Sun Goddess Kin
TOKYO, Sept. 24.—(AP)—Emperor Hirohito, in ancient ceremonial robes, today celebrated the festival of the autumnal equinox in honor of his ancestors, the sun goddess, as the 124th of an unbroken line of rulers.

The members of the imperial family and the government were present in the shrine of the palace as the emperor prayed to his ancestors for special protection and guidance in the undeclared war in China.

Faces 100 Duels
BUDAPEST.—(UP)—Joseph Palfy, mayor of Szeged, near-by, received 100 challenges to fight duels from local nazis because he refused to discuss the proposition to name two streets after prominent defunct anti-Semites.

The Swedish state and private railways give language courses for their employees. Courses which last 18 months are given in English and German.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Starting the Act!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Question & Answer



THE NEBBS—Leave It to Max



MAIL

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

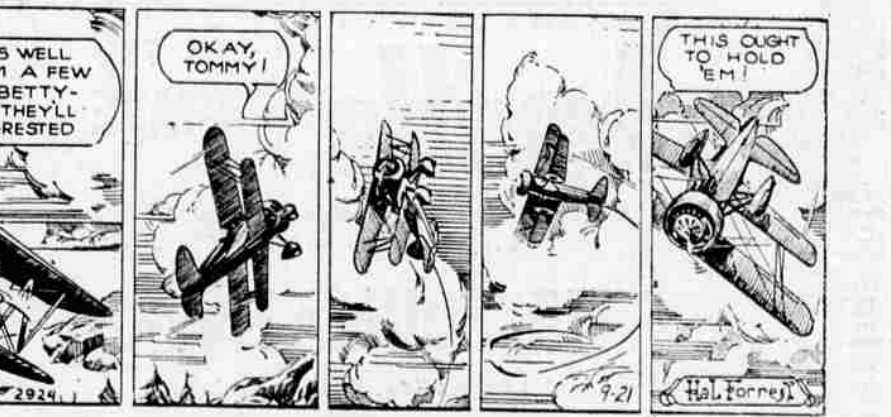


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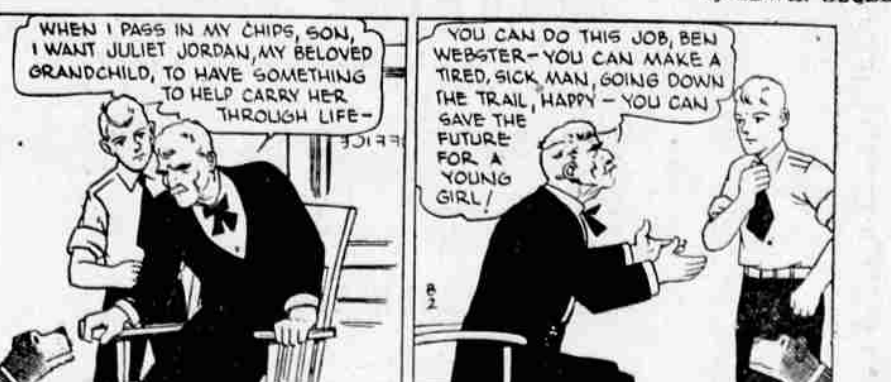
By C. M. PAYNE



By HAL FORREST



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HERS



Tailor's Stance

Ruined By Crash

BUFFALO, N. Y., Sept. 24.—(AP)—A bicycle-automobile collision cost Gottlieb Hoffstetter his position in life.

So a jury awarded him \$4500 damages, because he can't sit cross-legged anymore.

Hoffstetter, 73, is a tailor.

Educated Bovine

Has Bag Of Tricks

KEARNEY, Neb., Sept. 24.—(AP)—Queenie is by no means an ordinary cow.

Delos Wilkins, her owner, says she eats ginger snaps off a plate at a table, smokes a pipe, lies down and snores, waltzes, balances on a saw and generally behaves as no other cow ever does in public.

Use Mail Tribune want ads.

Middle-Aged Diana

Gets Four Pointer

PENDLETON, Sept. 24.—(AP)—Sprightly Mrs. Dora Lane Moyer, 63-year-old Pendleton woman, makes no apologies for her age. Already she is numbered among the successful hunters who have bagged their deer this season.

On the second day she was hunting in the Lehman Springs district of the Blue mountains when a four-point buck came in sight. Cautiously she drew aim and brought down the 160-pound animal.

Thrilled? "It's more fun to fish," she said.

Smokers Wreak Damage
PARADEIRA, Cal.—(UP)—Out of 392 forest fires that inflicted a damage of \$657,490, local authorities estimate that 1,342 of the fires were caused by people who carelessly threw away cigarette or cigar stubs.