

the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

SYNOPSIS: When *Flashy Prescott* Fanning abducts *Janet* from Baltimore on his yacht, she gets word to *Neill*, a young federal agent who loves her. Dashing to *Abraham's Harbor*, he boards the yacht and finds, in a locked cabin, *Fanning* shot dead and *Janet* in a faint, a gun beside her. *Neill* hides her nearby in a drowsy liner, then joins forces with *Mark Bonwiger*, keen local investigator, to keep tabs on developments. *Neill* takes food and clothes to *Janet* and loses faith in her story of innocence when she produces \$500 of *Fanning's* money. She runs on deck to give herself up.

Chapter 21

Attack In The Dark

FEARING that *Janet* would cry out, *Neill* clapped a hand over her mouth, and started dragging her along the deck, resisting every foot of the way. With great difficulty he got her through the door of the booby hatch, and closed the door behind them. He sat down on the iron stairs to recover his breath, holding her close.

Janet suddenly broke into tears and clung to him, and by that time he knew the crisis had passed. He had never loved her so well as at that moment. He wanted to laugh.

"Oh, Honey, what a fright you gave me!"

"How could you say such things to me?"

"By God, I'm sorry now! If you don't believe in me, I don't care what happens!"

"I do! I do! I will never doubt you again!"

"How can I be sure that you mean it?"

"I love you better than my life!" he murmured. "We can't quarrel. We're in this thing together. What happens to one happens to the other. We're like two parts of the same body. If we separated it would ruin us both!"

Gradually she quieted down. They returned through the ship hand in hand. *Neill* was sore and at the same time immensely tender. He did not believe her story. In the ears of the trained detective it had a fatally fictitious sound; but he loved her far too well to question it further. It doesn't matter, he told himself; she is my girl and I'm bound to stick to her anyhow.

When they entered the suite, the candle was still burning as they had left it. *Janet*, who had been considerably perturbed about during the struggle on deck, ran into the bedroom to comb her hair.

Neill lit a cigarette. As he waited for *Janet* to gradually come to him that the room had been visited during their absence. The cushions of the couch had been disarranged; one of the drawers in the bureau was pulled out a little. Suddenly chilled with fear, he ran out on the veranda. The window where the ladder hung was open again.

He broke into a cold sweat. His position appeared truly terrible to him. It seemed impossible to leave *Janet* alone if her refuge had been discovered. And equally impossible to stay with her. They had no fringing water. Almost worse than the danger was the mystery that surrounded the unknown spy. If he was aware of everything they did, why didn't he show himself? Why didn't he denounce them? What was he after?

Meadow Lark's Call

JANET called to *Neill* from the parlor and he went in, forcing himself to smile.

"Much as I hate to do it, I must send you away," she said. "You had no sleep last night. Unless you could sleep here?" she added wistfully.

"I suppose I must go," he said flatly. "Listen, *Janet*. When I leave you, you must take the gun."

"What good would that do me? If you were attacked, you could use it, couldn't you? It is the right of every human creature."

"I suppose I could. . . What has made you suddenly anxious?"

"Nothing. But I mustn't neglect any precautions." He started pulling in the length of twine that hung overboard.

"What are you doing that for?"

"There are too many people hanging around these parts," he muttered. "The ships are objects of curiosity. Somebody might come around in a boat and see the string hanging down."

"How will you let me know when you come?"

"I will whistle. Do you know the call of the meadow lark?"

"She shook her head. "When you hear that tomorrow night let the string down with a small object tied to it so that it will fall true. Hold on to the string and I will twitch it four times, wait a second and twitch it four times more. Then you will know it's me and you can let down the ladder."

"Why all these precautions?"

"*Neill* grinned until his face hurt. "It's just because you mean so much to me. I worry every moment I am away from you." He looked at all the doors into the corridor to make sure that the bolts were fastened. "You're pretty safe here. Certainly nobody can

get in from the river. If anybody should try to smash these doors you can throw down the ladder and escape by swimming."

"Why imagine anything so terrible?"

"We must be prepared. Promise me you'll do what I tell you."

"All right."

He went down the ladder feeling as if he had left the best part of himself behind. He half expected to find his skiff gone. But it was there just as he had left it. Whoever had come and gone that way had had a skiff of his own.

Neill reflected that the spy must have been actually hidden in the suite at the moment when he had come back and shut the windows.

Whoever it was, he was gone now. *Neill* rowed all around the ships and searched up and down the shore. No skiff. He finally tied his skiff in the place where it belonged, and started back across the fields the way he had come, looking over his shoulder at every other step and pausing often to listen. It was a dark night and he could see only a yard or two.

Coming to the state road, he lay down in the weeds behind the wire fence, peering through and listening. His intention was to wait until the motorcycle policeman had passed on his patrol. All *Neill's* attention was directed on the road and for a moment or two he neglected to look behind him. He had no warning of danger. Suddenly a powerful figure dropped on his back, knocking the wind out of him and pinning him down.

Captive

NEILL struggled with all his power. It was useless. He was borne down under an incredible weight of bone and muscle. The man planted a knee on the base of his skull crushing his face into the earth so that he could not cry out. He hit him repeatedly on the side of the head until *Neill* became groggy, and was unable to fight back when his arms were dragged behind him and tied together. Then his ankles.

The man turned him over and patted his eyes and his lips shut with strips of surgeon's tape that he had ready for the purpose. In the brief second that *Neill* could see him he was just a shapeless bulk of humanity looming between him and the sky. He flung himself down beside *Neill*, panting hoarsely after his efforts.

Neill heard the motorcycle coming down the road, and exerted himself to shout. Only feeble groans issued from his sealed lips. The policeman, deafened by the sound of his own exhaust, swept on, and the man lying beside *Neill* chuckled. After a minute or two the motorcycle roared past again. The sound died away up the road.

The man rose and, picking up the helpless *Neill* as if he had been a child, dropped him over the fence. Once more the breath was pretty well knocked out of him. The man scrambled after and picking *Neill* up, carried him across the road and threw him over the fence on the other side. *Neill* wondered shakily how much of this the human frame could stand.

He was picked up again and shouldered like a sack of meal. The man set off across another field for a while and, picking up the man from the watered field, he was canted at an angle, but a rail kept him from rolling off.

He heard the man climbing aboard. He was picked up again and dropped through what appeared to be an open hatch in the hold. This was the hardest fall he had had and he lay partly stunned. There was water in the hold, and he wondered if he would drown, without great caring. But it did not cover him. It was bilgewater in the bottom of the old hulk. The smell was horrible.

The man dropped into the hold and for a few minutes was mysteriously busy beside *Neill*, breathing hoarsely. *Neill* heard the star of a rope. As his full senses returned and with them a renewed desire to live, the sustenance was agonizing. What was the brute preparing? *Neill* groaned and rolled in his bonds and was rewarded with another kick.

Neill sends his captor on a wild goose chase, tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



THE BIRTHSPOT OF PRESIDENTS!
EIGHT PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES WERE BORN WITHIN 50 MILES OF THE SAME TOWN--
HADENSVILLE, Virginia



JOHN LAND—A SEAMAN, WAS ARRESTED FOR BREAKING INTO JAIL AT WARRENTON, OREGON, 1897—

JOE KELLY—Santa Clara Co., PUNTED 25 YARDS BACKWARDS!—Vs. U. of Cal., 1935—

Birthspot of Presidents
Strange as it seems, a circle with a 50-mile radius drawn around the town of HadenSVille, Va., will encompass the birthplace of eight presidents of the United States. Washington, Monroe, Madison, Taylor, Jefferson, Tyler, W. H. Harrison and Wilson were the presidents born within this area.

Backward Punt
Back in punt formation on University of California's 39-yard line in 1935, Santa Clara Quarterback Joe Kelly attempted a "coffin corner" kick. The results of the punt brought him more fame than if he had kicked the pigskin out on the half-inch line. Coming to earth on the line of scrimmage the ball took a bad bounce, headed back into Santa Clara territory and came to a stop on the Bronco's 36-yard line—a 25-yard punt backward!

Song Exchange
John Bull, 17th-century English musician, wrote a tune which became the national anthem of four nations and a patriotic song of two others when he composed the music of his country's "God Save the King." In the United States it is the tune of "My Country 'Tis of Thee," in Germany "Heil dir im Siegerkranz," in Switzerland "Ruff du Mein Vaterland," in Denmark "Heil dir, dem Liebedeend," and in Norway "Gud Sign Vor Konge Gud."

Salesman Injured In Klamath Crash
KLAMATH FALLS, Sept. 28.—(AP)—Tom Tubbs, Bellingham, Wash., salesman, is in serious condition at a hospital here as a result of injuries suffered near Dairy on the Lakeview highway late Sunday, when brakes locked on the car in which he was driving. The machine ran up a bank on one side of the road, then somersaulted backward.

Minor Crime Wave Rolls Over Eugene
EUGENE, Sept. 28.—(AP)—Four residences and a lumber office were burglarized in a minor "crime wave" here last night, city police reported.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Bluffing!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Hardpan Gulch

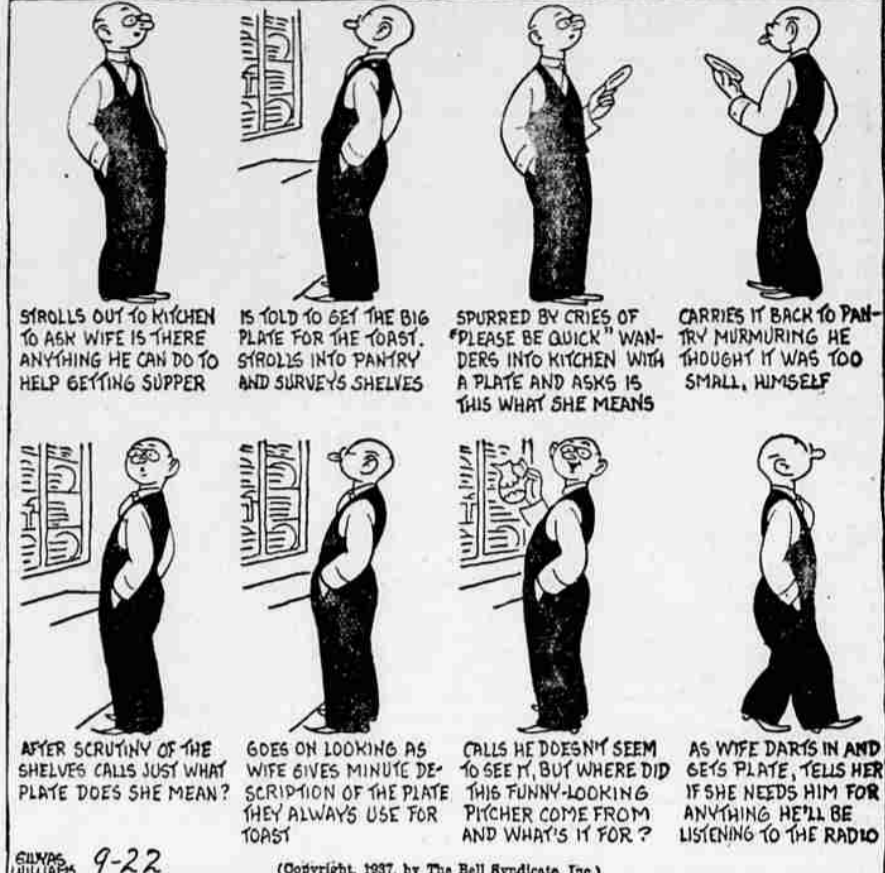


THE NEBBS—Pressing the Issue



THE FAMILY ALBUM—HELPING HAND

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



S'MATTER POF



By HAL FORRESTER



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HOFF



Yellowstone Park Closure Postponed
WASHINGTON, Sept. 28.—(AP) Secretary Ickes said today that at President Roosevelt's request an order closing Yellowstone national park to travel on September 26 had been revoked.

Grant Permit For Malheur Oil Drill
SALEM, Sept. 28.—(AP) Permission to drill for oil a mile south of Vale in Malheur county was granted by the state land board today to Lewis Lilly, Boise oil operator.

To Study Japan
BERKELEY, Cal. (UP)—In an effort to create a better understanding with the Far East, the University of California has established a new course in the history and government of Japan.

Flew the Coop
HATTENBURG, Miss. (UP)—Julius Edmund O. Mathison of the Forrest county jail has learned that "ball" could be hit. His two pet vipers departed through an open window.