

the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

SYNOPSIS: When flashy Prescott Fanning abducts Janet from Baltimore on his yacht, she gets word to Neil, a young federal agent who loves her. Dashing to Absecon 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 nearby in a disused outhouse, then joins Mark Bonniger, keen local investigator, to keep tabs on developments. Returning from a trip to the ship, Neil is seized and bound by a husky opponent who wants to know where Fanning's "stuff" is. Neil sends him on a wild chase and is struggling to free himself when queer little Eyster comes, cuts him loose.

Chapter 23 Spy In Room 18

"WALK along in the edge of the water so we can't be followed," Neil said.

After splashing through the shallow water for a hundred yards or so, they made a wide detour around the course that Neil's assistant had taken across the field and back.

"How did you find me?"

"Well, that's quite a story," said Eyster. "I was listening to you moving around in your room tonight."

"Listening, where?"

"My room is number 15 next door to yours. I heard you come out and go down the back stairs and I followed."

"Well, it's just my way," said Eyster with his crazy grin. "I like to know what folks are up to."

"Go on," said Neil grimly.

"I soon found out I couldn't follow you without being caught at it. In the upper part of the village there was a person moving. So I gave it up and came back to the hotel to wait for you. I waited and waited and you didn't come, so I went out again to look for you. It was only by accident that I found your tracks."

"How come?"

"Well, I had gone through the village when I heard the cop coming on his motorcycle and I went over the fence into the field alongside. I didn't want to be questioned. In that field I found your tracks where you had crossed and come back again."

"How did you know they were my tracks?"

"I have followed you before," said Eyster giggling. "There was another set of tracks coming back, a hell of a big foot. Somebody had followed you."

"How do you know he had followed me?"

"Because in places his track preceded yours."

"Pretty good. Go on."

"Well, the coming-back tracks brought me to a place where there had been a struggle. I picked up a flashlight there."

"It's mine," said Neil.

"Beyond that place I couldn't find your tracks; only the big man's. He went over the fence. I couldn't figure out what he was doing with you. I looked around, and across the road I found where he had gone across another field and come back again. So I followed his tracks and came to the old ship and looked in her. Was I surprised?"

Neil's feelings were mixed upon hearing this. If the story was true, he owed Eyster a debt that could never be repaid. But was it true? The man had such a furtive, mysterious air that Neil couldn't trust him. Was it not possible that Eyster and the other were working together? The big man had changed his purpose perhaps, and sent Eyster back to free Neil.

"Do you know who attacked me?" asked Neil grimly.

"No. Do you?"

Neil was pretty sure then that he was lying.

"Well, I certainly am obliged to you for coming to my help."

Eyster laughed in his queer, noiseless fashion. "Comes hard, don't it, to be beholden to me?"

Neil said nothing.

The village was asleep when they returned. They met nobody.

News Of The Girl

NEILL was up at six, sore in every joint. He anxiously consulted the mirror and found his face was not as badly marked as he feared. For the man's blows had mostly fallen on bony places. But there was an ugly bruise on one cheek.

When he opened his door to go out he was aware that a door down the corridor moved a little and that an eye was applied to the crack. So the any was still on the job. The number of the room was 18. Neil fiddled with his lock while he debated whether to force the door open and have a look at the man. He decided against it. On Janet's account he dared not risk a showdown.

He found Bonniger already busy with his ham and eggs in the dining room. He showed a calm front that filled Neil with envy. This ease couldn't get under his skin. Neil himself was as tense as a hunted animal.

"Sit down!" said Bonniger. His stern face relaxed in a smile. Evidently he had decided to like Neil. It increased the danger.

"Thanks," Neil placed himself so that he could watch the bottom of the stairs. Nobody came down while he sat there. But there was the back stairway.

"Good God!" said Bonniger, when he got a look in his face. "What have you been up against?"

Neil seized on the first lie that offered itself. He recollected a rowdy resort. "I dropped into Kinney's for a drink last night and got into a little mix-up."

Bonniger frowned. "This is a local option county. Kinney has no right to sell hard liquor. I'll speak to the sergeant."

"Don't do it," said Neil quickly. "You'll only get me in wrong with the bunch. Let's stick to the big case."

Bonniger shrugged. "I've been on the telephone half the night. They've given me a private wire into Longcope's office."

"Any news of the girl?"

"Plenty."

Neil looked up startled.

"No reliable news," said Bonniger. "I mean she's been reported from all over the state; from Silchester across the bay; from Lower Blenheim 30 miles up the river; from Baltimore and even from as far west as Frederick."

"She must be pretty spry."

"Sure, if it was all true, but such reports always spring up in a sensational case. They are started by people trying to horn in on it. The worst of it is, they've all got to be run down. The state police are doing it."

Neil bent on diverting his mind from the facts, said: "She must have got clear of this vicinity or else she's dead."

"Nothing in it," said Bonniger coolly. "In my opinion she's very much alive, and not a thousand miles away from here, either."

Neil looked at him, but the calm face gave nothing away.

"What was the report from Silchester?" Neil asked.

"A fisherman in the Cherry river says that he saw a skiff rowing in from the bay at 6 o'clock on Wednesday with a woman sitting in the stern wearing a black wrap of some kind and a man rowing."

Neil helped the false clue along as well as he could. "The mouth of the Cherry river is 25 miles from here. That would make it about right if there was a strong pair of arms at the oars."

Bonniger was not impressed. "Sure, but if the fisherman wanted to lie he could have worked that out from what he read in the newspapers yesterday."

Dope On Fanning

"ARE you going to investigate?"

"Why should I? My job is here. I've got a good bit of dope on Fanning since I saw you."

"What's that?"

"I sent a photograph, measurements and fingerprints up to New York, and they have found him in their rogues' gallery. His right name is Lester Patchin, but he has used a string of aliases. Gilt-edge swindler, get-rich-quick artist and so on. He served a term in Massachusetts. Lately, police say, he has dropped out of sight."

"What was he doing in Baltimore?"

"That I can't tell you yet."

"Well, he wasn't there for his health."

"I believe you."

"What's the program for today?"

"I'm going out to the yacht to look things over."

"Want me to come along?" suggested Neil offhandedly. "Two pair of eyes are better than one."

"Sure, glad to have you."

"I suppose you haven't identified the girl yet?"

"Not a clue!" said Bonniger. "That's the biggest mystery of all."

Neil felt more like breakfast.

When they had finished, Bonniger went away to the store to receive a report. Wickes was in the hotel office counting the previous day's takings, and Neil lingered under pretense of lighting his pipe.

"Who you got in room 18?" he asked.

Wickes glanced at the register. "Guy called Ira Buckless took that room Tuesday night. I put in a couple of other guys last night. Don't know their names."

"What like guy is this Buckless?"

"Dead. I couldn't tell you, mister. I got such a crowd!"

Neil went on to the store porch to wait for Bonniger. Horace Kettering came along with a cheerful greeting.

"Morning Wheatley!"

"Morning, Mr. Kettering."

"Look, Wheatley, my son was called up to town last night by the sickness of his wife. I hate to go fishing alone. Won't you join me, today?"

"Thanks a lot," said Neil. "Certainly is kind of you. But this darn morning isn't so interesting. I can't tear myself away."

Kettering laughed. "Oh well, if you prefer murder to fishing, I can't do anything for you. Another day, I hope."

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Neil makes an exciting discovery on the yacht, tomorrow.

Rain Badly Needed For Winter Wheat

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30.—(AP)—Crop experts at the weather bureau reported today rain was badly needed in "practically all districts of the winter wheat belt."

They said rains during the past week "were inconsequential and general moderate rain is needed to condition the soil for plowing and seeding in delayed areas, and to insure germination."

Planting of winter grains has been retarded in wide areas because of dry soil, the bureau said.

EUGENE, Sept. 30.—(AP)—Parking an automobile on an incline cost Mrs. Pearl Muliken, 37, her life. The machine started to roll, and in attempting to stop it she was injured so seriously she died.

Missionaries Urge U. S. Aid For China

SHANGHAI, Sept. 30.—(AP)—Thirty Southern Methodist missionaries, protesting against "Japanese aggression," today urged the United States to take action helpful to China.

In a cable message to the church's headquarters in Nashville, Tenn., they urged that "the American people and government be aroused to exert diplomatic and, if necessary, economic pressure upon the aggressor."

TOKYO, Sept. 30.—(AP)—A moderate but lengthy earthquake shook a wide area of Japan this morning. No deaths and no damage was reported. The quake affected the cities of Tokyo and Yokohama and northwestern and central Honshu prefecture.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



Shot That Sank a Navy

Liberia, the American-founded negro republic of Africa, declared war on Germany in 1917. On April 10 of the following year, a German submarine emerged from the waters off Monrovia, Liberia's capital, bombarded the city, destroyed a wireless station and sent the republic's entire naval force to the bottom with one well-aimed torpedo. Liberia's "entire navy" consisted of a single ship, the "President Howard." The German submarine was sunk a short time later by a British cruiser.

The rest of Liberia's participation in the world war consisted of sending several hundred laborers to France.

Animal Dam Builders

Just about the last word in economy is the method used by engineers of the U. S. soil conservation service in building check dams in the south-west. When the engineers want a check dam built in a gully they choose a site, throw in tree branches and other litter, then leave the rest to the pack rats. Rarely does the "bait" fail to work.

Pack rats, upon running across the engineers' bait, build their nests there, using stones, weeds, cactus, sticks, etc., for construction materials. Rains add to the dam thus built by depositing silt and debris on the pack rats' nest. The resulting dam, engineers say, is just about as navy" consisted of a single ship, the "President Howard." The German submarine was sunk a short time later by a British cruiser.

In many places three and four feet deep. As silt fills in above, pack rats build the dam higher and higher until further cutting in the wash is halted.

It is not just a bit or miss proposition, according to the U. S. department of agriculture. The engineers keep accurate accounts on their animal helpers and know just about how large a job the rats can handle successfully and about how long it will take them to complete the job. Cactus plants are especially favored as nest building materials by pack rats in Arizona. The cactus usually takes root and by growing makes the dam more effective as time passes.

Tomorrow: What Great Law Was Passed Because of a Joke?

PRIVY PURSE CLERK CONFERS WITH DUKE

PARIS, Sept. 30.—(AP) A visit to the Duke of Windsor by T. H. Carter, chief clerk accountant of the privy purse office of the king's household in London, gave rise to conjecture today that the former British monarch's financial affairs were under discussion.

Carter made the trip to Paris yesterday especially to see the duke.

Lord Peel Dies.

LONDON, Sept. 29.—(AP) Lord William Robert Wellesley Peel, chairman of the royal commission on Palestine, died yesterday, it was announced today.

Use Mail Tribune want ads. Closing time for Too Late to Class.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—On Dangerous Ground!

TOMMY AND BETTY-LOU, PRETENDING THAT THEY LOST THEIR JOBS WITH THE THREE POINT AIRWAYS, AFTER BENTLY INSTITUTED SUIT AGAINST THE COMPANY CHARGING NEGLIGENCE IN THE DEATH OF HIS WIFE, ASKED THE DUDE RANCH OWNER IF HE WOULD GRANT THEM A CONCESSION TO TAKE HIS GUESTS ON FLYING TOURS. BENTLY TELLS THEM TO COME UP TO HIS PRIVATE OFFICE. 2929



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Any Orders?

WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT MR. JORDAN'S LETTER, MR. STRALE?

TEE, HEE, HEE, HEE!

HERE, KID READ IT YOURSELF - NAW, NEVER MIND -

OKAY, MISTER BEN WEBSTER - MR. JORDAN'S MADE YOU BOSS OF THIS HERE RAILROAD AND THAT MEANS YOU'RE MY BOSS, TOO -

ANY ORDERS, CHIEF?

NOT RIGHT NOW, MR. STRALE -



THE NEBBES—Nothing Doing

HERE WE HAVE EMMA AT THE BANK TO GET \$10,000 FOR AN INVESTMENT HER "GOOD" FRIEND ARDEN WANTS TO MAKE... WILL IT BE SUCCESSFUL AND WILL SHE GET HER MONEY BACK? ONLY TIME WILL TELL.



SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



FRED PERLEY HAD JOTTED DOWN A BRIEF ADDRESS FOR HIS WIFE TO MAKE IN INTRODUCING THE MAYOR AT A MEETING OF THE CLUB; BUT UNFORTUNATELY SHE GOT THE WRONG SIDE OF THE PAPER ON WHICH HE HAD SCRIBBLED SOME OPINIONS OF THE MAYOR, USED IN HIS SPEECH THE NIGHT BEFORE AT THE TAXPAYERS' PROTEST MEETING

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S'MATTER POF By C M PAYNE



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By HAL FORBES

By EDWIN ALGER

By SOL HESS