

the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

SYNOPSIS: When flashy Prescott Fanning abducts Janet from Baltimore on the yacht, she gets word to Neil, a young federal agent who loves her. Dashing to Abolam'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 nearby in a disused liner, then joins Mark Bonniger, keen local investigator, to keep tabs on developments. Returning from a trip to the liner, Neil is seized, bound and blindfolded by a tough who wants Fanning's "stuff." Queer little Eyster, who hated Fanning, helps Neil escape. Next day Kettering, a Baltimore lawyer, has a word with Neil.

Chapter 24

In The Clothes Cupboard

"ANY news in the case?" Kettering asked.

"Nothing's broken," said Neil. Kettering lowered his voice. "Is the federal government interested in this case?"

He asked the question with a malicious smile that made Neil uneasy. He regretted that Kettering had been told who he was. "Why no," he said easily. "Why?"

"Oh, just your being here."

"That was an accident."

"Remarkable coincidence. Don't work too hard on the matter? How much did he know? Were the Ketterings connected with the events of the night before?"

He was still looking for the answers when Bonniger came up. They rowed out to the Nadi, taking Walter, the steward, with them to answer any questions about the yacht that might arise. Walter was a blond, characterless young man, still badly shaken by his experiences of the past 24 hours. He smoked one pipe after another. On the yacht they found Constable Forsythe. Walter was left with him while Bonniger and Neil went below.

The cabins showed the effect of the crowd that had swarmed through them on the previous day. Practically everything movable had been carried away for souvenirs. The lock on the door of the after cabin which had been partly wrenched off when the door was forced, was now missing.

"How do they expect me to reconstruct what happened?" grumbled Bonniger.

They stood in the doorway without speaking, searching the little cabin for footprints. It was a luxurious room with a pair of twin beds, seat lockers under the portholes on each side and a spacious, chintz-covered easy chair. At the foot of the beds an ugly brown stain had dried on the rug.

Neil's eyes flew to the door of the clothes cupboard to the door of the beds. The sight of it stirred up painful feelings in him. He would have liked to believe that the real killer of Prescott Fanning had locked himself in that closet, but the story was too far-fetched.

Building Up Theories

BONNIGER said: "All agree that Fanning was found lying on his back with his feet to the door and his head near the foot of the bed on the left as you look in. That's where the blood stain is. He must have been moved the instant he fell, because there's no blood anywhere else in the room."

Neil was not inclined to help Bonniger out in his reasoning.

"I know he was moved," Bonniger went on, "because a man shot in the back naturally falls on his face, especially if he's leaning forward. The bullet entered the base of Fanning's skull, came out of his forehead and then struck the drawer under the port seat locker. It was almost spent and has left only a slight dent in the wood. Its course indicates that Fanning was lurching far over when he was shot, and the easy chair was where they say it was, he was bending over that chair. . . . Do you agree?"

"Absolutely," said Neil grimly. "You'd beat a professional!"

Bonniger shook his head like a puzzled dog. "Every theory I try to build up runs into a contradiction. The most natural explanation is that Fanning broke in the door with the intention of attacking the girl. But if he had such an aim, why had he given her a key to lock herself in with?"

"Perhaps he had no such intention in the beginning," suggested Neil. "Perhaps he didn't expect to be repulsed, and when he was repulsed he was crazy."

"That's a point," said Neil. "But having broken in violently, how could he be so foolish as to let the girl get behind him?"

Neil shrugged his shoulders. He went to the door of the clothes closet and tried it. It was locked. "We ought to have a look in here," he said. "I'll ask Walter where the key is."

He spoke to the steward from the companionway. "Where is the key to the clothes closet in the after cabin?"

"Isn't it in the door?" returned Walter.

"If it was, I wouldn't be asking you for it."

"It has always been in the door."

"Was it in the door when you discovered the body?"

"I couldn't tell you that, sir. I didn't notice such things."

"Are there any duplicate keys?"

"There's a bunch of keys in the pantry. I'll fetch them."

Neil returned to Bonniger with the keys. After trying several, he was able to unlock the door and throw it open. The closet was empty. "Have you your magnifying glass?" he asked.

It was handed over. "What's in your mind?"

"Nothing as yet. But it seems funny that anybody should make away with the key."

Before using the glass, Neil pounced on a little bright object lying on the floor of the closet. "Look at this!" he cried.

It was a tiny spoon-shaped piece of nickel that had been broken off another piece. Bonniger turned it over on his hand. "Do you know what it is?"

"Sure. It's for cleaning out the bowl of a pipe. It's part of a little combination gadget that is sold to smokers." Neil had dropped to his knees and was searching the floor of the closet through the glass. "Look!" he said, handing over the glass. "Crumbs of bread and shreds of tobacco."

Bonniger looked. "What do you make of that?" he asked.

Neil crumbled some of the bread and some of the tobacco between thumb and finger. "The bread is dry, but not completely dry," he said. "The tobacco is fairly fresh. It cannot have been lying there more than two days. Within the past 48 hours some man has been concealed in this closet. While he was shut up here he ate some bread and he filled his pipe."

"He couldn't smoke his pipe if he was hiding."

"He couldn't light it, but a confirmed smoker gets a certain amount of satisfaction out of a dry smoke." Neil was picking up shreds of tobacco, examining them under the glass and tasting them. "He smoked a mixture containing Latakia, perique, burley and perhaps other tobaccos. It would be an expensive mixture."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Bonniger. "This puts a new complexion on the case."

"Are you telling me?" cried Neil. He was so happy he could hardly play his part. Janet had not lied to him. It was not she who had shot Fanning.

"They're Both Guilty!"

BONNIGER argued quite differently. "Now we know where the man came from," he said. "She brought him on board with her!"

"What?" cried Neil.

"Sure! It's as plain as a pikestaff! No wonder she came aboard willingly. It was a job between the two to get Fanning."

"What for?"

"For his money and valuables. Neil's eyes flew to the door of the clothes cupboard to the door of the beds. The sight of it stirred up painful feelings in him. He would have liked to believe that the real killer of Prescott Fanning had locked himself in that closet, but the story was too far-fetched.

Neil rubbed his lip. This was ridiculous, but it was dangerous too. According to his premises, Bonniger's reasoning was perfectly correct. Janet was innocent, but every hour that passed strengthened the case against her. It would be fatal to come out into the open until he could produce the real killer.

Neil said dryly: "If you are right, how about the door?"

"Oh, when they went out they would lock the door and then break it in to make it appear as if Fanning had asked for what he got. After they had broken in the door they would put the key on the inside."

It was an ingenious explanation though perfectly false. Neil thought: By God, as long as I live I will never convict a man on circumstantial evidence! He said: "Well, anyhow, our job is to catch the man."

"And the girl," added Bonniger. A new anxiety seized Neil. If Bonniger gave the press this new slant on the case, popular opinion would run high against the missing girl. So far, public opinion had been indulgent towards her because it was believed that she had been lured aboard the yacht. But if people thought that she had plotted with another man to bring about Fanning's death, every hand would be raised against her.

The thought suddenly leaped into Neil's mind. Eyster! That's who it was! It is exactly the crazy sort of thing he would do! This was the "arrangement" he had talked about. He was always bragging and showing Fanning. He sneaked aboard the yacht! It was Eyster who shot Fanning and that's why he's sucking up to me now!

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Suspecting Eyster, Neil goes to his room, Monday, to question him.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



Edwin Booth did not suffer in the least. Never again did he appear on a Washington, D. C., stage, however.

In 1867, Booth obtained permission from President Johnson to have his brother's body removed from under the flagstones of a Washington arsenal where it had been and with great secrecy had the remains transported to Baltimore where it was interred in the family burial ground.

Passel in a Jest

Habeas Corpus, the law compelling authorities to show legal reasons for holding a person prisoner, is considered one of the most important pieces of legislation ever passed in English history. Here is the strange story of its enactment by the English House of Lords, 1679, as told by Bishop Burnet, noted clergyman and historian of the time.

Lords Gray and Norreys were named to be tellers. Lord Norreys being a man subject to vapors, was not at all attentive, so a very fat lord coming in, Lord Gray counted him for 10, as a jest at first but seeing Lord Norreys had not observed it, he went on with the mis-reckoning of 10, so it was reported the House had declared that they who were for the bill were the majority, though indeed it went to the other side.

SON OF MINISTER DIES IN AUTOMOBILE CRASH

McMINNVILLE, Oct. 1.—(AP) Sheriff G. W. Manning of Washington county today identified the body of a boy killed in an automobile crash near Dundee as Jack Warner, 14, son of Rev. and Mrs. J. M. Warner of Ebensburg, Wash.

The boy, reported missing from his home since last Tuesday, has been visiting sons of Mrs. Ethel Carter, McMinville in the Warner's former home.

30-Year Romance

NEWCASTLE, Wyo. (UP)—A romance which had melted for 30 years was consummated recently when Mrs. Helen A. Rogers, 66, of Morrill, Neb., and Charles D. Douglas, 74-year old Upton, Wyo., rancher, eloped and were married at Gering, Neb., despite protests of their children.

Good Hay Crop

CLARKSDALE, Miss. (UP)—The prospects are favorable for a sufficiently profitable hay crop atop levees in this area to finance the maintenance of the water barriers for twelve months. Green Seals, secretary of the levee board, predicted that enough hay will be grown on the levees to provide funds for maintenance.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Bently 'Falls' for Betty-Lou!

WELL TAKE UP YOUR GUESTS AS PASSENGERS AT TWO DOLLARS A HEAD. FOR SHORT HOPS

EH? OH SURE! YES, OF COURSE.

AND WE'LL GIVE YOU WHATEVER YOU THINK IS FAIR AS YOUR PERCENTAGE, MISTER BENTLY

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN A CUT.

BUT, I'LL EXPECT TO HAVE A COUPLE OF FRIENDLY VISITERS. WHEN THAT LAW SUIT COMES UP.

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Reporting In

WELL, WHILE MOTHER'S LITTLE TOOTIE, OUR NEW BOSS, FINDS A PLACE FOR HIMSELF AND WOUND TO SLEEP

YOURS TRULY BETTER BE GETTIN' BUSY— GUESS I'LL RING THE CONTINENTAL FOLKS PRONTO!

STRALE TALKING—FROM HARDPAN GULCH—YEAH, LET ME TALK TO MR. GRABBER

...AND THAT'S THE WHOLE STORY MR. GRABBER— JORDAN'S NUTS, I THINK— WHY, THIS WEBSTER KID AIN'T DRY BEHIND THE EARS YET... OH, DON'T WORRY— I'LL HANDLE THINGS

THE NEBBS—It's a Secret

MR. POTTS WONT LET ME GET INTO MY SAFETY DEPOSIT BOX AND HE WONT LET ME DRAW \$5000 I GOT IN HIS BANK UNLESS I TELL HIM WHAT I WANT IT FOR

HE CANT DO THAT UNLESS HE'S YOUR CONSERVATOR— IS HE THAT?

WELL IF HE ISNT YOUR CONSERVATOR, HE'S GOT NO RIGHT TO HOLD YOUR MONEY— TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH I DONT THINK HE'S GOT IT!

THAT'S WHAT I TOLD HIM AND HE SAID HE'S MAKIN' ALL MY INVESTMENTS AND IF HE THINKS IT'S ALL RIGHT, I CAN HAVE IT.

YOU DIDNT TELL HIM? THAT'S RIGHT, WELL FIND A WAY TO GET IT.

City by GLUYAS WILLIAMS

IS CALLED DOWNSTAIRS TO BE SHOWN TO MOTHER'S FRIEND

SCRATCHES BACK OF LEG WITH FOOT, AS MOTHER SAYS TO SHAKE HANDS LIKE A NICE GIRL

AFTER A GOOD DEAL OF SQUIRMING EXTENDS THE WRONG HAND

WHILE MOTHER AND FRIEND START THE PERSONAL REMARKS, AMUSES HERSELF STANDING ON SIDES OF HER FEET

STANDS WITH ONE FOOT ON THE OTHER, TRYING TO MOVE UNDERNEATH FOOT

FASTENS ATTENTION ON CRACK IN CEILING, STANDING ON ONE LEG AND HOLDING THE OTHER

REALIZES VISITOR HAS ASKED HER A QUESTION AND BEGINS TO WRIGGLE AND TIE HERSELF INTO KNOTS

WRIGGLES INTO TEA TABLE, AND UNDER COVER OF THIS DIVERSION, ESCAPES FROM ROOM

GLUYAS WILLIAMS 9-25 (Copyright, 1937, by The Bell Syndicate, Inc.)

S'MATTER POI By O. M. PAYNE

NO! YOU CANT MELT THE GOLDFISH AND GET THE GOLD!

OH OH

AND DONT BE TRYING IT EITHER

UNDERSTAND? DONT BE TRYING IT!

MM

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Morgenthau Mum On Budget Balance

WASHINGTON, Oct. 1.—(AP)—Secretary Morgenthau declined today to predict whether the treasury will achieve a balanced budget this fiscal year.

President Roosevelt has said government income and outgo will be balanced in the next fiscal period, which begins next July 1.

The treasury is making a survey designed to bring about all possible government economies in the current year.

Pussy In Tractor Runs Four Hours

MONROE, Wis. Oct. 1.—(AP)—A cat that entered a small opening into the tread of Jack Erb's tractor probably had four feet today.

Erb operated the tractor on a road project for four hours continuously. The cat kept on keeping moving as the tread revolved about the cog wheels. Several times Erb thought he heard cat sounds, but could see nothing. When he stopped the tractor the animal ran through the opening into a woods.

Another California Boast

VISALIA, Cal. (UP)—Frank Durbell does not think so much of the famous English fog. After living a few years in England and a few years in the San Joaquin valley, he declares the latter can produce fogs that would make the English variety look tame.

FOHTLAND, Oct. 1.—(AP)— An order on file in circuit court today established the state inheritance tax on the estate of the late Emma L. Corbett at \$136,396.61. The appraised value reached \$784,642.87 and beneficiaries had sought to have the federal tax of \$128,876.85 deducted.