

the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

SYNOPSIS: About Baltimore on Prescott Fanning's yacht, Janet gets word to Neil, a young federal agent who loves her. He dashes to Absalom's Harbor, 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 dunes liner, then joins Mark Boninger, keen local investigator, to keep tabs on developments. He thinks Janet shot Fanning until he learns a man was hiding in a closet on the yacht. Then he suspects and quizzes queer little Eyster, who hated Fanning. Also in the picture are Kettering, a Baltimore lawyer down to fish, and Ira Buckless, a tough who has been trailing Neil.

Chapter 26 Following Eyster's Clue

"FANNING used to go to a fine apartment house on Charles Street Avenue," Eyster said. "Sometimes I seen him go in. Sometimes I picked him up coming out. I don't know who he went to see there. I got thrown out when I went in to ask. I wasn't the kind of looking guy who could go in such a house. But you could."

"This sounded like a valuable lead to Neil," Eyster said, grinning. "You'll find it on the bureau."

"Don't go!" Eyster said. "Tell me more about Fanning. Did he see you coming? Did he say anything?"

Prudence warned Neil to string him along. "Don't like to talk about it," he muttered.

A look of doubt appeared in Eyster's face. "It was you smoked Fanning, wasn't it?"

"You wouldn't expect me to admit it in so many words, would you?" Neil answered grinning. Eyster's face cleared. "No! No! You don't have to admit anything to me, fellow! You're all right! You're a grand guy!"

Neil went downstairs rubbing his lip. The theory he had so hopefully erected on the way up was already tottering. But it had not fallen. He was far from convinced that Eyster had not shot Fanning.

He found Boninger in the little office back of the store, engulged in the detail of his job. Messengers were continually coming and going, reports arriving from the local search parties and by phone from the state police in other counties. Boninger was making arrangements to have the harbor dragged for a body.

Neil's whole attitude toward the case had changed now. Satisfied that Janet was in no way implicated, he was as keen to solve the case as Boninger was. Also now he could let his real liking for Boninger come out.

"Look, Mark," he said. "If we could find out what Fanning was up to in Baltimore, it would be a long step forward. It would lead us direct to the solution."

"Well, I'm not sure I can go as far as that with you," Boninger said, smiling at his enthusiasm. "But at that, it's important. I have a man on the job, but he hasn't got anywhere."

"Suppose I go up to town and look into it, outside of what anybody else is doing," said Neil. "Fanning had become a kind of public figure and I ought to be able to pick up something."

"Certainly is good of you to suggest it," said Boninger. "I hate to cut in on your vacation."

"Not at all," said Neil. "I'm interested in this."

"All right. I'll give you a police car and a constable to drive you. Get something to eat first."

The Stoop-Shouldered Man
NEILL ordered an early lunch in the hotel, and sat down to eat it in such a position that he could watch all who came and went in the lobby adjoining. It was a curiously assorted crowd—villagers, county people, newspaper men and plain jays.

Finally his search was rewarded. Through the door from outside came a great hulking figure with a head disproportionately small, and repulsive flattened features.

As soon as Neil laid eyes on him he guessed that this was his man. When the milling crowd opened sufficiently for him to get a look at his feet, he saw crumbs of loose earth clinging to the big shoes.

The man pushed through to the desk to ask a question and afterwards turned to enter the bar on the other side where beer and soft drinks were sold. When he presented his back Neil received another shock. He had seen that back before, with shoulders so heavy they were bowed under their own weight, letting the arms hang down in front like an ape's. The stoop-shouldered man! Here was the substance of the shadow that had dogged Neil from the start.

He had not yet spotted Neil. A

solitary, sullen man, he spoke to nobody and when others good-naturedly joshed his size, he made believe not to hear. He drank his beer alone. Probably playing a lone hand, Neil figured. Eyster knows him, but he is in terror of him. Certainly it must have been one or another of these two who had shot Fanning.

When he had finished eating, Neil strolled out and paused at the door. "Wicksey," he asked "who is the big fellow at the bar—the stoop-shouldered man?"

"That's the guy you was asking about this morning, Ira Buckless is the name."

"When did he come?"

"Late Tuesday night."

"How did he get to Absalom's?"

"I couldn't tell you, mister. I just see him walk in the door. The hotel keeper's face sharpened with curiosity. 'Why do you ask?'"

"Oh, nothing. Thought I had seen him before somewhere."

As Neil made his way to the door, Buckless happened to turn and their eyes met. An ugly look came into the big man's face; hatred and defiance. That look said: Well you know me and I know you! What are you going to do about it? And Neil had to take it. He and Janet were in this man's power.

He paused on the porch to think things through. He was not so keen to go to Baltimore. Still, he thought, it's clear that Buckless isn't afraid of me. He's not going to run away. I'll only be gone a few hours and I may be able to bring back the proof I need. He went down the steps.

A Rich Old Lady
AT TWO o'clock Neil was deposited at the door of a handsome modern apartment house on Baltimore's finest street. The door-man and the elevator boy were negroes. Neil showed them the photographs of Fanning, but they shook their heads. Never had seen such a person, they said. After all, the photographs of a dead man do not convey much.

"I know he was a frequent visitor to somebody in this house," said Neil. "Picture a man six feet two in height, slim and broad shouldered, black hair and eyes, rosy skin, very fine looking. Always elegantly dressed, fond of unusual shirts and cravats."

The two negroes glanced at each other, grinning. "Miss Rayner's friend," they said.

"Who is Miss Rayner?"

"Don't you know Miss Emma Rayner, boss? Everybody knows her. One of the richest women in Baltimore. She real old now, and never goes out no more."

"Looked at the photographs again. That's the gentleman what come to see her all right, but he look different when he's dead."

"Well, most of us do," said Neil. "What name did he give when he came here?"

"Didn't give no name."

"Don't you have to send the names up?"

"Yes sir, boss. But the first time he come somebody brought him and after that we was to let him up whenever he come."

"What other gentlemen call on Miss Rayner had recently?"

"Nobody but her lawyer, Mr. Osgood, and her agent, Mr. Barney."

Neil made a memo. "Well, show me up now," he said.

The negroes hesitated, but he faced them down. The door of Miss Rayner's apartment was opened by a neat colored maid.

"Do Miss Rayner know you?" she asked.

"No."

"Taint no use then, Miss Rayner see no gentlemen callers she don't know."

"Tell her it is somebody from Mr. Prescott Fanning."

She presently returned saying "Please to step this way, sir."

Neil was introduced to an immense living room crowded from end to end with the furnishings and gimcracks that old ladies like to gather around them. Though it was a fine June day, all the windows were closed and there was a little wood fire burning. At first he thought he was alone in the room, but presently he distinguished a tiny figure buried in a deep chair before the fire. She looked about 80, but her sunken cheeks were bravely painted and she wore an elaborately curled auburn wig.

"You come from Mr. Fanning?" she said eagerly. "I was expecting to hear from him."

Neil was considerably taken aback, because she spoke of Fanning in the present tense. "He was a friend of yours?" he stammered.

"I know him, certainly. What would have brought him here?"

This was uncanny. "How long have you known him?" asked Neil, sparring for time.

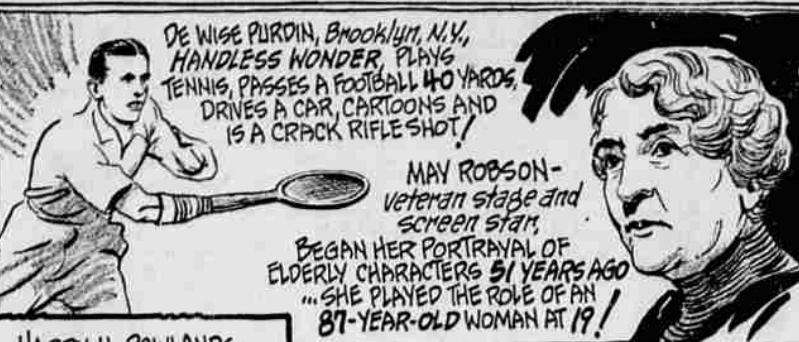
"Oh, several months," she said impatiently. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Who introduced you to him?"

Miss Rayner sat up. "Young man, I don't know you. I don't propose to be cross-examined by a stranger in my own house! Who are you and what do you want?"

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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Railway to Nowhere
"Standing on a double track, Half a world behind each back." So wrote Bret Harte to honor completion of America's first coast-to-coast railway system in 1869. And a "double track" it was, to be sure, at least for a distance of more than 300 miles stretching east and west from the junction of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific tracks at Promontory Point, Utah.

Progress on the great project that was to open a new world for agricultural and industrial development was so slow during the first year that the Union Pacific crew had laid only 40 miles of track and Central Pacific completed but 136 miles. As a stimulus, congress offered a bounty of from \$64,000 to \$96,000 a mile for work done in the mountainous country. Thus began a contest between the two rival companies to see who could lay the most track before the two lines met.

Early in 1869 the road was complete—all but the actual meeting of the two branches. But the government had altered the original charter that defined the eastern boundary of California as the meeting place and had not fixed another specific junction.

Consequently construction engineers of both lines "arbitrated" by simply keeping on laying track and reaping a rich bounty, although the rival crews had passed each other and were rapidly receding in opposite directions! The farce continued until Union Pacific reached a point 225 miles west of the final meeting place and Central Pacific pushed on 80 miles past Promontory Point, near Ogden, Utah!

Finally a halt was called and through communication was effected on May 10, 1869, Union Pacific sold 50 miles of its extra track to Central Pacific and scrapped the rest. The entire project, totaling 1,800 miles of track, took only three years, six months and ten days to complete at a cost to the government of \$830,000,000.

Tomorrow: What U. S. vice-president resigned office.

JAPANESE YOUTH WINS FARM TOGA
PORTLAND, Ore., Oct. 4.—(AP)—Henry Kuwabara, Japanese youth of 21, speaking on "S. O. S.—Save Our Soil," carried off first honor in the annual oration of future farmers of America's public speaking contest here Saturday night.

Second place went to Melvin Ehlers, Twin Falls, Idaho, and third to Robert Stults, Clatskanie, Ore. The remaining two contestants were Ernest Hamilton, Chehalis, Wash., and Glen H. Cooley, Bozeman, Mont.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Rita Is Jealous!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Jason's Amusement!

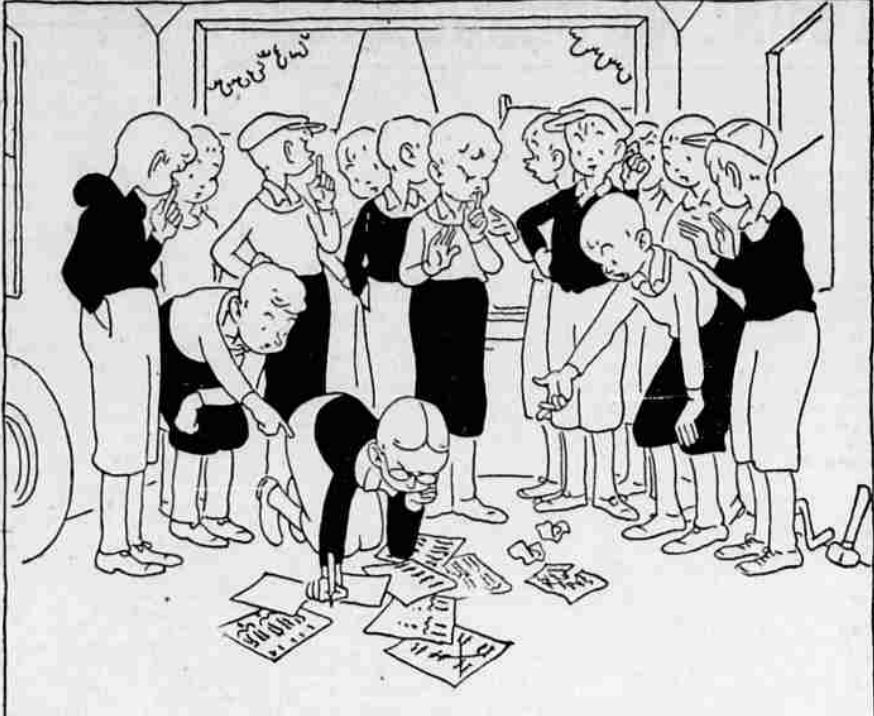


THE NEBBS—Poor Butterfly



THE NEIGHBORHOOD LEAGUE

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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S'MATTER POF By C. M. PAYNE



By HAL FORREST



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HESS



TURKEY BOOSTED AS FOWL TO ADORN GOVERNMENT SEAL

SALT LAKE CITY, Oct. 4.—(AP)—A western-wide campaign was launched today to elevate the turkey from a platter in the center of a Thanksgiving Day table to a position of the United States seal.

It's bird eat bird in the northwest Turkey Growers' Association campaign to depose the white-headed eagle from his position on papers of state and silver pieces.

"Inasmuch as the eagle, now known as the national bird, is not peculiar to America but is also claimed as emblematic by other countries," growers contend in a resolution passed in convention here, "and the turkey, as proven by history, science and the appetites of the American people, is by far the nobler and more typically American, be it resolved . . . that the proposal to have the turkey replace the eagle as the national bird of the United States of America be adopted as just and fitting."

Senators and congressmen of 14 western states will receive copies of the resolution with the suggestion that they see what can be done about it.

Bar Meet Set
KANSAS CITY, Oct. 4.—(AP)—The American Bar association will hold its 1938 convention at Cleveland, starting July 28, its board of governors decided today.