

# the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

**SYNOPSIS:** Neill, a young federal agent, finds his beloved Janet, a gun and Prescott Fanning's freshly shot body locked in a cabin on Fanning's yacht at Absalom's Harbor, Md. Neill hides her nearby in a doused liner, then joins Mark Bonniger, local investigator. Neill learns Janet didn't shoot the flashy scoundrel, but has to find out who did to save her. He suspects queer little Eyster, who hated Fanning. Ira Buckless, Fanning's hulking bodyguard, is arrested. Neill also distrusts Kettering, a lawyer down from Baltimore to fish. Buckless casts suspicion on Neill who knows he is in a tight spot.

Chapter 35

## The Eyster Saga

ONCE again Neill and Bonniger met at the breakfast table before any of the other guests of the hotel came down stairs. Neither had had more than a couple of hours' sleep. Bonniger's manner was still outwardly friendly, but the warmth that Neill had had a glimpse of was gone. He said: "I see that you have the same idea as me. It's the early bird that gets the ham and eggs."

"That's right," said Neill. "When the mob charges, staff-work in the kitchen breaks down."

Bonniger went on: "Our first job is to check this tough guy Buckless' alibi."

Neill was surprised. "Our first job? Evidently you expected to catch him up by mine. I believe that nothing was changed. Neill became wary."

"Suppose you and I make a quick trip to Baltimore for that purpose?" Bonniger went on. "If we start as soon as we finish eating, we can get back here almost before we are missed."

"Sure," said Neill. He thought: He doesn't mean to let me out of his sight.

They set out in one of the police cars before the village was up and doing. Constable Mattingly drove them. Mattingly, a fine physical specimen like all his mates, was pretty sheepish as a result of his escapade up the road the night before, and anxious to make good. He drove like a streak.

From the corner of the back seat, Bonniger conversed in his grave fashion. Avoiding all reference to the case in hand, he was trying to draw Neill out as to his past life. He was like a keen-eyed surgeon, scalpel in hand, and Neill in order to protect himself let his head nod as if he found it impossible to keep awake. Bonniger finally let him alone and Neill, with his eyes closed, mulled over his own problems. All depended on whether Buckless' alibi would stand up.

The address furnished by Buckless led them to the modest office of J. Harvey Brager, a young man who combined the occupations of yacht broker, shipping agent and dealer in marine supplies.

"Sure, I sold Ira Buckless the yacht Nadji," he said, "and that's where my responsibility begins and ends. I never met Fanning."

He went on to describe the trip to Absalom's on Tuesday night, corroborating Buckless in every particular. "I am a methodical kind of fellow and I made note of the time. We filled up at the gasoline station on Hanover street at 8:25 and I left Buckless in Absalom's at 10:20. I was back home in Baltimore at 12:15."

They left him. So Buckless' alibi was watertight. Neill was badly let down, and perhaps Bonniger also. As Buckless was cleared, his manner towards Neill hardened.

"That eliminates Buckless. We know that the movies were out at 10:15, and that the crew immediately returned aboard the yacht. Fanning was shot before Buckless arrived on the scene."

It was scarcely necessary to go to the filling station. But they did, and the story was confirmed.

## The Detective's Report

THEY sat in the car to discuss the next move. Bonniger said: "To me there is something queer in the story this fellow Eyster told. But since you and he have both testified that you spent Tuesday evening together, I reckon there is no use trying to pin anything on him."

Neill guessed from the dryness of his tone that Bonniger was only trying to draw him. He said nothing. He felt now that Eyster must be their man, but could not say so.

"Anyhow, let's check up Eyster's story," said Bonniger.

This suited Neill. He didn't care if he was proved a liar so long as he obtained positive evidence against Eyster.

They went to headquarters to enlist the assistance of the police in searching for a taxicab that had made a trip to Absalom's on the previous Tuesday.

While they were there, additional information was forthcoming. It transpired that when Eyster's name was first brought into the case a headquarters detective named Penty had been assigned to look up his antecedents. The trail had led him to Canandaigua, a town in New York state,

from which he had just now returned. The commissioner had him in to tell Bonniger what he had gathered. It was all in the day's work to Penty. He told his story without a trace of feeling.

"Eyster up to a couple of years ago was a manufacturer of straw hats in New York state and doing well. He had a sim and a ding young and couldn't marry till he was above 45."

"He marries a girl that worked for him in the factory. A sweet, pretty, gentle kind of girl. She was poor and he gives her the nice things she never had before. For a couple of years they was as happy as a pair of clams at high water, though she was 25 years younger than him. Built an elegant little home and all."

"Then she gets to running around with a slick, showy kind of guy, the usual thing. It was going on some time before Eyster gets on to it. When the show-down comes, she runs off with the slick guy, leaving Eyster flat. He went through hell. And that wasn't the worst of it, because a year later she comes back to her husband sick and ready to die. This slick fellow, it seems, was an out-and-out swine. Treated the girl something awful. The folks didn't know his name."

"He takes his wife back and gets doctors and nurses and all. But she dies anyhow and Eyster they says wasn't never no good after that. He sells his business and just bums around. They said when the money was spent they reckoned he would just jump off a wharf somewheres. But his sole aim and desire was to square with that slick guy before he died."

The hard-boiled grin with which this story was told somehow gave it a sharper edge for Neill. Taken with what he knew already, it was certainly true, and he felt that the poor little devil who could blame him for shooting the man who had wronged him so?

Both Eliminated?

AS BONNIGER and Neill proceeded to the Lord Baltimore hotel, Bonniger said: "Had you heard any of this?"

"No details, but I had guessed there was something of this sort in his life."

"But if it was Eyster, where does the girl come in?"

Nevertheless at that moment they both felt that they were about to solve their case, and they were almost friends again.

In the hotel a good feeling was shattered. In answer to Bonniger's question, the clerk said: "Mr. Eyster checked out at nine o'clock Tuesday morning."

Neill stared at him incredulously. "Are you sure?" he demanded.

"At nine o'clock, I said goodby to him when he left."

"Was he tight?" asked Bonniger.

"Oh, no. Sober as a judge."

Bonniger had left word at police headquarters that he could be found at the Lord Baltimore and he was now called to the phone.

Neill waited outside the booth in a state of blank discouragement. If Buckless and Eyster were both eliminated, where was he to look for Fanning's killer?

Bonniger said on coming out: "The police have found the taxi driver who took Eyster down to Absalom's on Tuesday morning."

"So that lets Eyster out," said Neill dully.

"Not altogether. The taxi-driver said he was sober. Why should he lie unless he was implicated?"

"The man who shot Fanning was carried down on the yacht."

"That's an interesting theory. But, after all, the crumbs of bread and tobacco are not conclusive. I'm convinced that Eyster had something to do with it."

"That didn't help at all, Neill. He knew now that Eyster was innocent of the killing."

While they were talking, a bell-boy came by. It was the boy that Neill had talked to on his first visit to the Lord Baltimore. "The boy recognized him and grinned."

"Hare ye, mister? Well, that big guy Fanning that you was asking me about, he got his, didn't he? The crazy little guy that was talking to you, he beat it next day. It would be a great note, wouldn't it, if it was him got Fanning?"

Neill stared hard at the boy. "You've got me wrong, kid. I never heard of Fanning until he was killed."

"My mistake," he said with a grin, and started on.

But Bonniger had overheard, and Neill without looking at him, knew how he was hardening.

"One moment," Bonniger said to the boy. "Give me your name, please. I may want to call you later. My name's Bonniger."

The boy, scared now, gave his name. "I don't know nothing."

"All right. Beat it."

He lost no time in obeying.

"Come on," said Bonniger to Neill without looking around.

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Tomorrow, Buckless threatens to reveal Janet's hideout.

# STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

**CUSTOMS INSPECTORS WERE ONCE SCAVENGERS...**

**"STAR" a horse owned by Sam Miller, Baytown, Tex., IS NATURALLY MARKED ON ONE SIDE WITH A "LONE STAR," SYMBOL OF HIS NATIVE STATE, AND A MAP OF TEXAS ON THE OTHER...**

**FLOWER OF THE DESERT - THE NIGHT-BLOOMING CACTUS OPENS ITS BUDS IN 90 SECONDS... A SINGLE FLOWER WILL PERFUME THE AIR OVER ONE SQUARE MILE...**

**WIZARD OF BOWLING!**  
ANDY VARIAPAPA, NEW YORK, KNOCKS DOWN TWO PINS ON ADJOINING ALLEYS WITH ONE SHOT... MAKES A BALL STOP HALF WAY DOWN THE ALLEY AND RETURN TO HIM... AND BOWLS STRIKES WITH HIS FEET!

McKnight Syndicate, Inc. 10-14-37

**Flower of the Desert.**  
"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Thomas Gray in this manner paid an allegorical tribute to the wild flowers of the American desert. One of the strangest of our desert flowers is that of a cactus, commonly called the night-blooming cereus. Sensitive to darkness, it opens rapidly when the light of day falls—often in only one and a half minutes! So permeant is the delicious odor of this flower that it can be detected as much as a half mile away. Many of the cereus blossoms reach well over a foot in diameter.

**Scavengers**  
Next time a customs official burrows through your luggage in search of a bottle of contraband perfume, call him a "scavenger." That's just what he used to be in the Middle English period, customs inspectors included among their multitudinous duties the care of public streets and were officially known as scavengers, for obvious reasons.

**Bowling Wizard**  
Andy Variapapa is unofficially considered by the American Bowling Congress to be this country's outstanding trick-shot bowler. Easy for Andy but nonetheless spectacular is his "boomerang" shot. This alley artist flips a 16-pound ball with such a tremendous amount of reverse spin that it will roll 20 or 30 feet, stop, and roll right back to him!

Then Andy can place the ball at the foul line, kick it into a wide curve to strike either the number 7 or 10 spare. Or, for diversion, he will set two pins up in one alley and one in the adjoining alley. With a single shot, he gets all three—by striking the two pins in No. 1 alley so that one hops over into No. 2 alley to strike the third pin!

Variapapa's coup is his famous "tunnel shot." He lines up 1 pins in two rows just wide enough to permit the ball to roll between them. Then he gracefully flips the ball down the "tunnel" with just enough "English" to clip off the last pin in the left-hand row!

## PART OF CHILD'S FOOT IS FOUND IN MAIL BOX

SEATTLE, Oct. 14.—(AP)—Sheriff's officers today investigated the discovery of part of a child's right foot in a residence mailbox.

Mrs. Jessie Hitchcock found the foot. Dr. J. L. Worcester of the

## OREGON REGISTRATION HITS ALL-TIME HIGH

EUGENE, Oct. 14.—(AP)—A new all-time enrollment record at the University of Oregon was reached today when registration figures revealed that 3,102 students were enrolled. The figures exceed the previous record of 3,095 by seven.

## TAILSPIN TOMMY—Tommy Tries to Trap Bentley!

**BENTLY WAS ALL READY TO MAKE A PASSENGER FLIGHT WITH BETTY-LOU WHEN RITA STEPPED UP AND REMINDED THE GIRL PILOT THAT SHE HAD PROMISED TO TAKE HER UP FIRST! THE DUDE RANCH OWNER IS CHAGRINED AND MAKES AN ANGRY RETORT.**

WHAT RIGHT HAVE YOU TO... IT'S ALL RIGHT, MISTER BENTLY! YOU CAN FLY WITH ME TOMORROW!

SHE IS!

MISS BARNES SEEMS TO BE AN EXPERT FLYER!

AND SHE IS A WIZARD AT PARACHUTE JUMPING. GREAT SPORT! EVER TRY IT, MR. BENTLY?

NOT ME! I WOULDN'T RISK MY NECK ON ONE OF THEM FOR ANY AMOUNT!

By HAL FORREST

## BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Easy Victory

TRY TO TAKE A POKE AT ME, WILL YA?

THAT'LL HOLD YOU AND—OUCH!

GOTCHA NOW, YOU MANGY CUR!

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART! JOIN YOUR BOSS!

By EDWIN ALGER

## THE NEBBS—A Friend in Need

HELLO, ARDLEY, MY NAME'S FLINT—EX-CROOK DE LUXE.

YES, I'VE HEARD ABOUT YOU, MR. FLINT.

YOU MADE THE REMARK THAT I WENT STRAIGHT AND EVERYBODY RESPECTED ME AND YOU WERE TRYING TO DO THE SAME AND EVERYBODY WAS AGAINST YOU.

YES, I SAID THAT BUT IT WAS NO REFLECTION ON YOU, BUT JUST AS A MATTER OF COMPARISON.

IF YOU WANT TO GO STRAIGHT, COUNT ON ME, ARDLEY—YOU STAY RIGHT HERE IN TOWN AND MARRY MISS GRUNTLEY—I KNOW YOU LOVE HER BECAUSE YOU TOLD HER SO AND NO ONE IS GOING TO KEEP YOU FROM GETTING HER.

GEE, THAT'S FINE, MR. FLINT, THANKS FOR YOUR INTEREST IN ME, BUT MAYBE MISS GRUNTLEY WOULDN'T HAVE ME NOW AFTER THE "BOOSTING" NEBBS GAVE ME.

By SOL HESS

## EXTORTION ATTEMPT WINDS UP IN ASYLUM

NEW YORK, Oct. 14.—(AP)—Wubur Rothar, 42, former seaman and Bronx tenement janitor, who was indicted for attempting to extort \$2,000 from George Palmer Putnam, the publisher, under the pretense that he knew where Amelia Earhart Putnam could be found alive, was committed to Matteawan state hospital for the criminal insane today.

Rothar wrote Putnam a letter in which he said he had been a member of a ship which found Miss Earhart, wife of Putnam, on an uninhabited Pacific island shortly after she and her navigator were lost last July while making a round-the-world flight.

## INCREASE IN ARMY SOUGHT FOR FRANCE

PARIS, Oct. 14.—(AP)—An increase of nearly 20 percent in the French army budget for 1938 was asked today by Minister of National Defense Edouard Daladier.

The minister, in a tentative combination of the ordinary and extraordinary budget submitted to parliament for study, asked 12,900,000,000 francs (about \$425,700,000) for next year, as compared with 10,900,000,000 francs (about \$359,700,000) for 1937.

Nearly 10,000 men would be added to the land forces, which already number more than 680,000 in France and her colonies.

Georgia produces one-half of the country's turpentine.

The National Civil Service Reform League was formed in Newport, R. I., in August, 1891.

**WINDOW GLASS**—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows reasonably. Frowling's Glass Works.

# THE WORLD AT ITS WORST

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

PASSING A WORLD SERIES BROADCAST DURING A CRITICAL NINTH INNING WHEN YOUR PASSENGERS WON'T EVEN LET YOU SLOW DOWN, BECAUSE THEY ARE ANXIOUS TO GET HOME

GLUYAS WILLIAMS (Copyright, 1937, by The Bell Syndicate, Inc.) 10-8

# 'S MATTER POP

By O. M. PAYNE

WHERE'S MY FOOTBALL? LOST IT

I'LL NEVER SPEAK TO YOU AS LONG AS I LIVE!

LET'S SEE?

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By HAL FORREST

# By EDWIN ALGER

# By SOL HESS