the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

Sy... ...ted federal age... ...et, a Baltimore girl. She keeps a date with wealthy, flashy Prescott Fanning who kidnaps her aboard his yacht. Next day a mysterious phone call tells Neill Janet's in trouble on the yacht at Absalom's Harbor. Rushing there, he finds, in a locked cabin, Fanning shot dead and Janet in a faint, a gun beside her. Neill rows her to the disused liners kept up the river and hides her in the best suite. Returning to the village hotel, he resumes his role of visiting fisherman to watch developments. Horace Kettering, a Baltimore lawyer, and his son arrive to fish.

Chapter 14

Absalom's Agog

KETTERING threw up his head and sniffed the fresh morning air. "This is great, gentlemen. A man works himself near to death in the city, and what does he get out of it? A couple of day's fishing a year!"

"Work's a damn bad habit," said Longcope.

Kettering turned to Neill. "And you?" he asked.

"Ford Wheatley."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Wheatley. You're a stranger in the village, I take it?"

Yes. Down for the fishing like yourself."

"Fine! You must come out with my son and me as our guests . . . Well, I'll be seeing you, gentlemen." He saluted them and climbed back in the car. The son had not opened his mouth.

There was something about his busy tongue and darting eyes that made Neill uneasy. This was not a man that he could trust.

"A talkative cuss!" he remarked.

"Yeah," said Virgil turning the cigar. "Looks like a case of the fox fathering the bull pup."

At that moment Neill saw a whitecoated figure appear on the Nadji's deck, run wildly forward and disappear through a door. He forgot the Ketterings. The man reappeared on deck with his two mates. They ran into the after house. Presently they came on deck again, flung themselves anyhow into the dinghy and started pulling crazily for the shore. Neill steeled himself.

Virgil, who had not noticed anything amiss, was talking amiably about the city slickers he had known. The men in the dinghy tied their little boat to the wharf in front of the store and came running across the road, white-faced and staring with horror. Virgil broke off suddenly.

"What the heck is the matter with these three fellers?"

"Police!" they gasped out. "We want the police. . . . Where can we find the police?" All three were young men without experience, and they had completely lost their heads. There was a steward in his white coat and two sailors.

Their hysterical excitement made Virgil sore. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "We ain't got no police here. What do you want police for?"

All tried to explain at once. "Murder, mister! . . . There's been a murder aboard the yacht! . . . The owner is murdered! . . . A bullet right through his head! . . . Must have been shot last night when we was ashore. . . . We slept on board all night without knowing it. . . ."

Virgil stood up suddenly. "Murder!" he gasped. "My God!"

Neill's nerves quivered at the sound of the ugly word. "Murder!" he echoed. "How terrible!"

"And the girl is gone!" cried the steward.

"What girl?" demanded Virgil.

All three explained together. "We had a girl on board. . . . The boss' girl. . . . And she's gone! . . . How could she get off? The other boat's on the davits. . . ."

"One at a time!" shouted Virgil waving his hands. "You, Jake, run and fetch the doctor. You men come in the store!"

Too Much For Virgil

NEILL followed them inside. As a stranger, he was disregarded. Virgil, being the leading citizen, felt that it was up to him to take command of the situation but it was a bit too much for him. He flung his derby on the counter and ran his hands through his hair as if he would tear it out. "Keep cool! Keep cool!" he shouted.

Every time he asked a question he got three answers. The crew it seemed, could not agree on the simplest statement of fact. Out of the confusion Neill could only pick a phrase here and there.

"Found him when I took his morning coffee down. . . . In the girl's cabin. . . . The door was busted in. . . . There was a hell of a fight while we were ashore. . . . You're crazy! It was the boss himself busted the door in! . . . Nothing else was disturbed. . . . We don't know who the girl was. . . . Real nice quiet girl. . . . We were aboard last night before 10:30. . . ."

It was no part of Neill's game to try to bring order out of the confusion. He listened, nerves taut.

Virgil looked at him in a distracted fashion, forgetting he was a stranger. "Reckon I better call up the county constable."

"It's the obvious thing to do."

"But he's a farmer. He don't know nothing."

"Call him anyway."

Virgil sent his clerk running to make the call.

"And Mr. Button Billings, the J. P.," he went on pulling his hair, "he'll have to be in on this. He's an old grandmother, that's what he is. Oh, my God! He'll ball everything up, and the newspapers will call us hicks, and moss-backs and stick-in-the-muds!"

Neill said nothing. If things got balled up it would be fine.

"If I only knew where to lay my hands on the proper man to handle the case!" said Virgil. After taking an agitated turn back and forth, his face cleared. "I know what I'll do. I'll get Mark Bonniger. He's a man-of-the-world. And he's one of us. We don't want no foreigners horning in. Mark will tell us how to do everything right."

When the clerk returned, he was sent back to call up Mark Bonniger and also the justice of the peace. "Tell Mr. Button Billings to come straight to the yacht. He lives across the harbor."

Virgil ran out of the store, accompanied by the crew. At the door they met the doctor coming in and carried him with them. All five of them piled into the yacht's dinghy, loading her almost to the gunwale. "No more room," they cried, when Neill started to follow them, and rowed away. Neill was left on the wharf. He looked around for another skiff, but there were too many watching them now.

Pawing For 'Evidence'

LIKE a wireless flash, word of the murder had spread from one end of the village to the other. Men, women and children stopped everything and came running to to the harbor. Nothing like this had ever happened in Absalom's. House work was suspended, the stores shut up and fish left without ice. The excitement in every face made Neill sore. What is it to them? he thought.

At first they contented themselves with lining up along the harbor road, staring out at the yacht and passing the same bits of information back and forth. Then one man jumped in his skiff. Immediately there was a stampede for the skiffs and a whole flotilla set out rowing swiftly to the yacht. Women and children were left ashore.

Neill was unable to obtain a place in a skiff until Jake the fisherman got the idea of starting a ferry at two bits a head. Thus some minutes passed before he got aboard the yacht.

The saloon below was packed to suffocation. The men had pulled off their hats out of respect to the dead, and were pushing and shoving to get a glimpse through the door of the after cabin. Neill worked his way through them. Everything that happened here was of vital importance to him. He was tall enough to look over a good many heads and he saw Virgil and the doctor, helped by the two sailors, examining the body, searching his pockets and so on. The young steward sat on the starboard locker holding his head between his hands.

Everything in the room—including the gun—was being well pawed over in the search for "evidence," and Neill smiled grimly to himself. Lucky he had only these hicks to deal with! He saw Virgil pick up the bullet on the floor beside the port seat locker, and hold it up for all to see.

Virgil was continually issuing orders without taking any steps to see if they were carried out.

"Quit your shoving, men! Ain't you got no sense of what is fitting? . . . The girl must have swum ashore. She couldn't have got far. You, Tom Bolling, organize a posse among the men and search the woods across the harbor. Send a car up the road, somebody, to stop at every house and ask if she appeared for shelter!"

A voice from the crowd said: "Somebody stole my skiff last night."

"Well then, maybe she tried to escape in that," said Virgil. "A woman could row far. All you men that have motor-boats organize a search up both shores of the river and into the creeks. What like girl was she?"

The two sailors attempted to describe Janet. Very little could be gathered from their efforts, except the pink dress and the black velvet cape.

"She musta had a guy helping her," said a voice.

"What guy?" asked Virgil.

"How the heck should I know? Who was it busted in the door?"

"The dead guy."

"Maybe he was already inside and the door was locked."

Neill stiffened. This was getting too close to the truth.

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Despite Virgil's efforts, Mr. Button Billings moves the body and holds an inquest, tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

Winning Handshake

Strange as it seems, a handshake of congratulation and an umpire's misinterpretation of baseball rules won the championship of the Three-Eye (Indiana, Iowa, Illinois) league for Bloomington in 1935.

Playing against Springfield for the league pennant, Bloomington was behind in the seven-game series, two games to three, on September 18. At bat in the third inning of the sixth game for Bloomington team was Julian Foster, first baseman. Leaning on a fast one, he craked out a homer and proceeded to jog around the around the bases. Rounding third he was given a congratulatory shake of the hand by his manager, Herschel Martin. Umpire Pat Pohl promptly ruled him out, evidently basing his decision on Rule 49, Section 17, which reads:

"If, in the judgment of the umpire, the coacher at third base by touching or holding the runner physically assists him in returning to or leaving third base, the runner is out. The runner, however, should not be declared ount if no play is being made on him."

Obviously, Umpire Fohl was wrong in calling the base runner out under the circumstances, but the game proceeded in accordance with his ruling and Springfield ended up the victor by a score of five to two. As this was Springfield's fourth victory, the team left the field confident that they had won the championship.

A protest on the "handshake ruling" was lodged by the Bloomington team and L. J. Wylie, president of the Three-Eye league, ordered the Springfield team to replay the game. Whn Springfield refused to continue the series, President Wylie awarded the championship to Bloomington—in spite of the fact that Springfield had won the series four games to two. A handshake had won it!

Washington I. O. U.

One of the wealthiest men of the day in property holdings, George Washington was frequently short of ready cash. In this predicament at the time of his inauguration, he was forced to borrow expense money to make the trip to New York for the inaugural ceremony.

Tomorrow: What Great Battle Was Fought Because of Shoes?

Just 4 Acres—Not County

SALEM, Sept. 20.—(AP)—A jury in the Klamath county circuit court next week will determine whether a four acre tract of land, desired by the state highway commission, is worth $112,310 or the more modest sum of $175.

Born With Teeth

PORTLAND, Sept. 20.—(AP)—Dentally speaking, the five-day old son of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Smith had a head start at birth, but he was pulling away from the field rapidly today. Born with one tooth, the infant now has five.

Deer Causes Deaths

SAN JOSE, Cal., Sept. 20.—(AP)—A deer that bounded into the path of an auto driven by Henry Davis, 56, San Francisco, overturned the machine, killing Davis and injuring his wife, Mary, 56, near here last night.

Wool Prices Ebb

WASHINGTON Sept. 20.—(AP)—The agriculture department reported today the domestic wool situation has not materially changed in the past month, but that wool prices at recent Australian and British sales tended downward.

Pepper Cases

Green peppers, cut in halves and simmered for 10 minutes make tasty cases for creamed or escalloped mixtures such as macaroni and cheese or escalloped fish. After the peppers have been filled put them in the oven for five minutes or so to brown the tops.

Oil Home Devices

Oil electrical household devices such as the washing machine, vacuum cleaner and the floor polisher at least once a year. Be sure to follow the instructions which come with the equipment.

Buy Your Dog A Bracelet

PARIS—(AP)—Costume jewelry is the latest contribution to canine elegance. Necklace and bracelet sets for poodles consist of gold chain collars, useful to hold a leash, and gold chain anklets, purely decorative. Both fasten with key and padlock of the same precious metal.

Football Frocks Arrive

NEW YORK—(AP)—Football frocks have come to town. One of the smartest is a two-piece model of beige wool, whose bodice has two horizontal colored bands representing the college colors.

Sequins For Glitter

NEW YORK—(AP)—Glittering sequins embroidery trims hundreds of new fall frocks. Among the motifs which brighten sober dresses are stained glass window patterns, fireworks designs and Louis XV bow-knots.

THE WORLD AT ITS WORST — By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

S'MATTER POP — By C. M. PAYNE

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Preserving the Evidence! — By HAL FORREST

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—So What? — By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—The Low-Down — By SOL HESS