

the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

SYNOPSIS: *Washed ashore by a young federal agent who loves her. Rushing to Absalom's Harbor, he boards the yacht and finds in a locked cabin, Fanning shot dead and Janet in a faint, a gun beside her. Neill rouses her to the dazed liners kept up the river and hides her in the best suite. Back at the village hotel, he resumes his fisherman role to watch developments. The village is hysterically excited over the murder. Button Billings, justice of the peace, is called.*

Chapter 15

Blood On Your Knee

A TALL gaunt old man in decent Sunday blacks came down the companionway behind Neill and pushed through with an air of authority. He had a thin gray beard that waved with every movement and an expression of grim pety. He looked like a picture out of an old book. This was Mr. Button Billings, justice of the peace. Neill breathed a little easier. No special danger here.

As a matter of fact, as soon as Mr. Billings entered the after cabin a conflict of authority arose. "What's this? What's this?" he wanted to know. "Why didn't you wait for me?"

Virgil looked at him with a mixture of respect and exasperation. He tossed his badly chewed cigar through the porthole and stuck a fresh one in his mouth. "We are just looking into the evidence, Mr. Billings.

"That is my job." Virgil let him have his way. Mr. Billings stood in the middle of the cabin stroking his shaven upper lip, looking down at the body, looking all around. He frowned at the stricken steward on the sofa. "Did he do it?" he asked Virgil. The man jumped up with a cry. "No, sir! No! It was me who found him! He was stiff and cold then. He—"

Mr. Billings silenced him with a wave of the hand. "All in good time. We'll sit on him first." "That's not the way they do it," Virgil burst out. "They collect the evidence first, and then hold the inquest."

"It's nothing to me what's done in other places," said Mr. Billings. "We have our own ways. Always when a body is found we sit on it immediately."

"We don't know who he is yet," said Virgil. "He called himself Barrett, but there's no proof of it." "Well, if we don't know who he is, then he's an unknown person," said Mr. Billings crushingly. "They'll call us Hicks in the paper," muttered Virgil.

The old man ignored the remark. "This place is too small to hold it here," he said. "We'll carry him ashore."

"The evidence is here." "What evidence?" "The gun, the bullet that was shot out of it, the smashed door. I will swear in a jury among those present, and they can view the evidence."

"We ought to take steps to catch the murderer first."

Mr. Billings flattened him with a gesture. "We will proceed in due order, Virgil."

A jury was duly sworn in by Mr. Billings had a testament in his tail pocket—and with difficulty steered around the little cabin. Twelve solemn-faced fishermen and clerks, they took their responsibilities seriously. Mr. Billings then requested them to carry the body up on deck and to lay it in one of the skulls alongside.

The Jury's Verdict
VIRGIL, desperately rolling the cigar between his teeth, made another plea for delay. "Anyhow, wait till Mark Bonniger comes." Mr. Billings drew himself up. "What's Mark Bonniger got to do with it?" "I have requested him to take charge of the case."

to death by person or unknown." Neill could scarcely believe his ears. Was it possible they were going to drop the whole thing? No such luck. When he saw Virgil Longcope's shrewd eyes and active ears he knew it wasn't going to be dropped.

Virgil was the only source of information as to what was really happening. Neill was unable to get hold of him again, but the nature of his activities leaked out of the little office from time to time. Mark Bonniger, it appeared, was away from home, and they were telephoning all over for him. Meanwhile Virgil had got the governor himself on the phone, and had arranged that as soon as Bonniger was found he should be sworn in as a special officer. Thus he got ahead of Mr. Button Billings.

Virgil had a keen sense of the value of publicity. He telephoned the news to the Washington and Baltimore newspapers and it was said that the reporters were racing down in a fleet of cars.

"I'm going to have this matter handled right!" Virgil was heard to shout. "I'm gonna put Absalom on the map!" Neill's breast tightened, hearing this. He dreaded the reporters just now.

This Man Bonniger
NEILL felt an anxious curiosity concerning this Bonniger whose name was on everybody's lips. His fate and Janet's depended on the kind of man he proved to be. By keeping his ears open and asking an occasional question, he built up a mental picture of Bonniger.

A quiet man. A widower in his middle forties, and the last representative of a family that had been prominent in the county since it was first settled. The Bonnigers were not the sort of people that money stuck to, and the family estate had declined since the Civil war, but Mark still had good tobacco and corn land and blooded riding horses. He lived alone in his old house, "Lordship's Grace," 20 miles up river.

Mark Bonniger's neighbors regarded him with a mixture of familiarity and awe. They felt that he belonged to them though they rarely saw him. He was a great traveler and would be away for months at a time without anybody knowing of it until he got back. He never went around, but he had good friends. Like Virgil, Virgil thought the world of him. Virgil had been trying for years to get him into public life, like all the Bonnigers before him.

Chiefly, however, the men spoke of Bonniger's insight into character. "You can't fool Mark Bonniger! He'll let you think you are fooling him, but he is fooling you," Virgil Longcope, he made no mistake when he picked Mark Bonniger to solve this case. Mark Bonniger can see further into a stone wall than most men." And so on.

All this was disquieting. Neill saw that in remaining on the spot he had cast himself in a difficult role. His thoughts turned to Janet. He wished that he had her hidden further away. Too dangerous to try to move her now. He longed to be with her.

Later he learned that Mark Bonniger had been found and was being rushed to Annapolis so that the governor could swear him in.

As he was circulating in the hotel lobby, picking up a word here and there—it was only idle gossip to the crowd, but to Neill it meant everything—he happened to glance at the letter rack behind the desk and was surprised to see a letter in his box. Upon his asking for it, a plain white envelope was handed him. Nothing but the room number was written on it. Inside he found a half sheet of note-paper with a note pencilled in a clerkly hand:

You been going round all morning with blood on your knee. You better wash it out before the investigator comes.

It was like an unexpected icy shower. Taking care to keep his face, Neill went quietly up the stairs. In his room he started at his reflection in the mirror. It was true! There was a brownish-red stain on his left knee as big as a quarter.

He must have got it when he had knelt beside Fanning's body in the cabin of the yacht. The breeches were an old, soiled pair, and one spot more had escaped his notice. The thought of his carelessness brought the sweat out on him. A trained sleuth, it seemed, could be as blind a fool as any crook when it came to covering his own tracks.

He slipped out of his breeches in order to wash them. An ugly anxiety made him set his jaw. Who had written this note? It brought back to mind the unexplained happenings of the night before. Who was the sharp-eyed individual watching his every move? Who was there in Absalom's who knew so much about him? And how much more did he know?

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



TURGENIEF—RUSSIAN novelist, WAS TAUGHT NO RUSSIAN AS A CHILD... HE PICKED UP THE LANGUAGE IN WHICH HE ACHIEVED IMMORTALITY FROM FAMILY SERVANTS...

THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY TWO LEFT-HANDED THROWING 3RD BASEMEN IN THE HISTORY OF MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL... W. CARPENTER, Cincinnati, A. A., AND W. KEELER, New York, N. I.

THE MALE STAG-BEETLE HAS JAWS LONGER THAN ITS BODY—YET THEIR GRIP IS EXCEEDINGLY FEEBLE...

THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG—MOST IMPORTANT ENGAGEMENT OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, STARTED BECAUSE SOME CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS NEEDED SHOES!

Battle of Gettysburg.
For want of the nail the shoe was lost;
For want of the shoe the horse was lost;
For want of the horse the rider was lost;
For want of the rider the battle was lost;
For want of the battle the kingdom was lost;
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

This nursery jingle, with a few alterations, might well have been written to fit the events surrounding the battle of Gettysburg. Strange as it seems, it was for want of shoes that the battle was started and for want of victory that the cause of the Confederacy was lost.

With many of his men either barefooted or poorly shod, Major General Heth, commanding a division of Confederate troops, sent a brigade under Pettigrew to Gettysburg for supply of shoes on June 30, 1863. They were about to enter Gettysburg when advance scouts discovered the presence of Yankee troops.

Pettigrew hastily returned to Confederate headquarters and reported his discovery, whereupon Lee marched his army on Gettysburg to find out what union force was there. In doing so he precipitated the battle of Gettysburg, the turning point of the civil war.

Ivan Turgeneff, Russian aristocrat of the 19th century considered it degrading to speak the language of their own country. Their children were usually tutored in French, German and English, but no Russian was taught them. Such was the case with Ivan Turgeneff, ranked one of the world's greatest novelists. His knowledge of Russian, the language, with which he won his greatness, was almost entirely picked up through associating with the family servants.

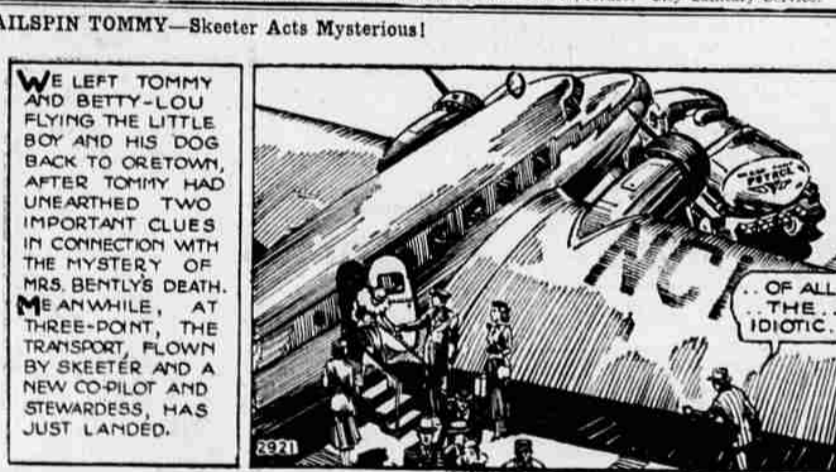
Tomorrow: Where Are Birds Used as Christian Missionaries?

COAST RAILROAD HEARING SLATED
GRANTS PASS, Sept. 16.—(AP)—The interstate commerce commission has designated Examiner Molster to conduct hearings October 13 in Portland on three phases of railroad from the Rogue river valley to the sea.

C. H. Demaray, recover of California and Oregon Coast railroad, said the applications of the city of Grants Pass to acquire the remaining interest in that road and to continue it to Crescent City, Calif., would be heard.

Also before the examiner will come the case of the Gold Coast railroad, which Gilbert E. Gable would construct from Port Orford to a junction with the Southern Pacific at Leiland, north of here.

Phone 542. We'll haul away your refuse. City Sanitary Service.



TAILSPIN TOMMY—Skeeter Acts Mysterious!

WE LEFT TOMMY AND BETTY-LOU FLYING THE LITTLE BOY AND HIS DOG BACK TO ORETOWN, AFTER TOMMY HAD UNEARTHED TWO IMPORTANT CLUES IN CONNECTION WITH THE MYSTERY OF MRS. BENTLY'S DEATH. MEANWHILE, AT THREE-POINT, THE TRANSPORT, FLOWN BY SKEETER AND A NEW CO-PILOT AND STEWARDESS, HAS JUST LANDED.

You been going round all morning with blood on your knee. You better wash it out before the investigator comes.

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Mark Bonniger takes charge of the investigation, tomorrow.



THE NEBBS—Just Wait and See

AL WINKER, FREDONIA, MO., WANTS EMMAT MARRI NEBB'S BROTHER-IN-LAW, ERNIE, VICTOR WALMONT ROCK ISLAND, ILL. WANTS EMMAT MARRI POTTS BECAUSE HER MONEY WOULD STRENGTHEN THE BANK AUGUSTA H. TROUP, WINE OF ALBANY, CALIF. WANTS EMMAT TO MARRY AMBRIDGE POTTS

SAY, MAX TELLS ME THIS GUY ARDLEY DOESN'T OWN ANY PART OF HIS BUSINESS... HE BOUGHT IT FOR A THIRD PARTY, MAX SAYS HE'S CROOKED AND HE HATES HIM

JUST WHAT I THOUGHT ABOUT HIM

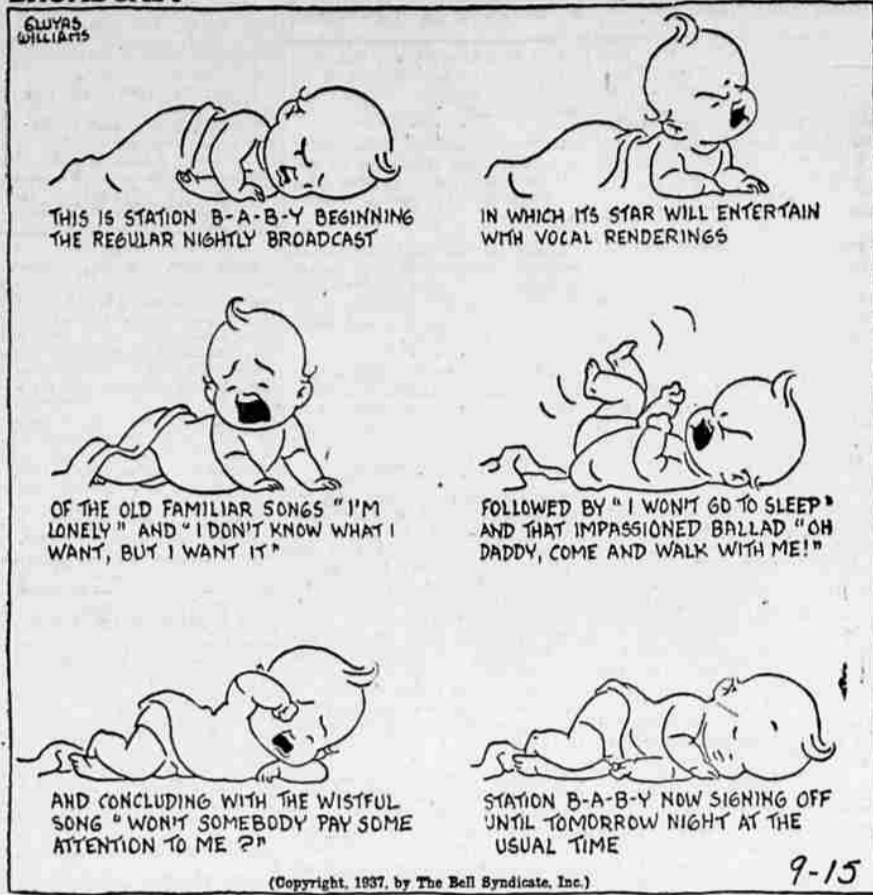
I GOT A GOOD PICTURE OF HIM TAKEN AT THE MAX-LUTHER BATTLE... IT'S A GOOD LIKENESS

NOW IF I CAN ONLY GET SOME OF HIS FINGER PRINTS MY FRIEND FREEMAN, WILL GET HIS RECORD IF HE HAS ONE

LEAVE THAT PART TO ME... I'LL BRING YOU HIS FINGER-PRINTS SO PLAIN IT WILL LOOK LIKE HE POSED FOR THEM

BROADCAST

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



THIS IS STATION B-A-B-Y BEGINNING THE REGULAR NIGHTLY BROADCAST

IN WHICH ITS STAR WILL ENTERTAIN WITH VOCAL RENDERINGS

OF THE OLD FAMILIAR SONGS "I'M LONELY" AND "I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT, BUT I WANT IT"

FOLLOWED BY "I WON'T GO TO SLEEP" AND THAT IMPASSIONED BALLAD "OH DADDY, COME AND WALK WITH ME!"

AND CONCLUDING WITH THE WISTFUL SONG "WON'T SOMEBODY PAY SOME ATTENTION TO ME?"

STATION B-A-B-Y NOW SIGNING OFF UNTIL TOMORROW NIGHT AT THE USUAL TIME

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S'MATTER POI

By C. M. PAYNE



I'LL PULL YER NOSE OUT A FOOT, AN' LETTUT SNAP TBACK IN YER FACE!

DO IT! DO IT! DO IT!

OKAY POP?

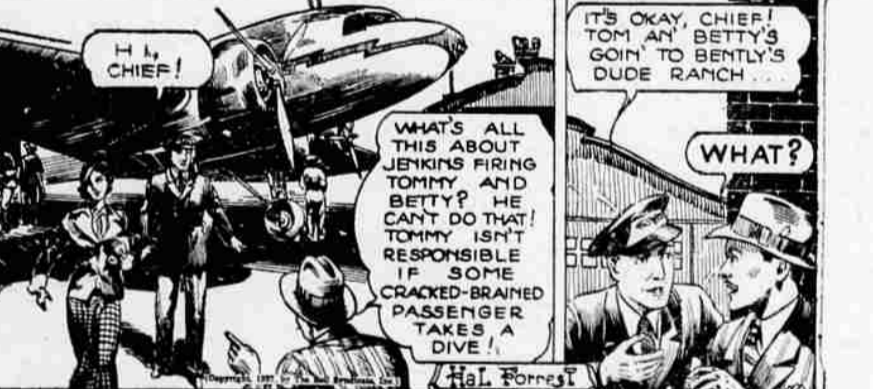
S'MATTER?

GONNA SNAP MUR NOSE.

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BE NWEBSTER'S CAREER—"Apple Blossom!"

By HAL FORREST



H.I. CHIEF!

WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT JEBKINS FIRING TOMMY AND BETTY? HE CAN'T DO THAT! TOMMY ISN'T RESPONSIBLE IF SOME CRACKED-BRAINED PASSENGER TAKES A DIVE!

IT'S OKAY, CHIEF! TOM AN' BETTY'S GOMIN TO BENTLY'S DUDE RANCH.

WHAT?



FIRST, MAY I LET YOU SEE A PICTURE? AFTER YOU'VE LOOKED IT OVER I'LL GO ON—

CERTAINLY, MR. JORDAN—

GEE, SHE SURE IS A LOVELY LOOKING GIRL!

SHE'S EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD TO ME, SON—

I'M HER GRANDFATHER AND ALSO I'M HER ONLY RELATIVE—YOU'VE JUST LOOKED AT JULIET JORDAN, BEA THE APPLE OF MY EYE!



LEWIS ENJOYS CHAT WITH ROOSEVELT ON 'MUTUAL INTERESTS'

By SOL HESS

In an address on September 3, Lewis asserted that "it ill behooves one who has supped at labor's table and who has been sheltered in labor's house to curse with equal fervor and fine impartiality both labor and its adversaries when they become locked in deadly embrace."

Prior to his talk, Mr. Roosevelt had used the Shakespearean quotation, "A plague on both your houses," with reference to extremists in the summer's steel strikes in which the CIO was involved.

Home Well Posted
MARTINS FERRY, O.—(UP)—Quarantine regulations have hit doubly the home of Roy Stewart and his children. Two signs, one for measles and one for whooping cough, are displayed.

WINDOW GLASS—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows reasonably. Trowbridge Cabinet Works.