

THE FORGOTTEN FLEET MYSTERY

by Van Wyck Mason

SYNOPSIS

On the wharf in Patuxent, Maryland, ex-Colonel Donald Colby, late A. D. C. to General Gonzalo Gutierrez, beats up Tod Ferguson, burly oysterman, for insulting Geneva Benet, daughter of Capt. Benet of the "Amerika." Ferguson was fired by Benet and infers someone was murdered on the ship. Later, Geneva confides in Colby that she had brought two men from Leonardstown to work for her father. "They were afraid to stay but you wouldn't be," she says. A new look creeps into Colby's eyes. "Young lady," he demanded crisply, "shall we talk?" Geneva tells Colby that her father is in charge of a fleet of old liners laid up by the Shipping Board awaiting purchasers. It is impossible to get a watchman since three men have disappeared. Colby takes the job. On the pier, the girl calls to the "Monticello" on which she lives with her father. The ghostlike ships and eery atmosphere fill Colby with foreboding. Dutton, one of the watchmen, picks up Geneva and Colby in a rowboat. As they near the "Monticello," three shots and a shriek pierce the air. The girl fears for her father. Leaving Geneva on the "Monticello," Colby and Dutton go in search of the captain. The decks of the "Kronprinzessin Cecilie" (rechristened the "Mount Vernon") were familiar to Colby. He had heard them echo to the dainty feet of countesses and later, to the hobnails of American doughboys. In one of the staterooms, Colby is sure he smells blood. Suddenly, he and Mears, the "Mount Vernon's" watchman, hear a faint scraping sound as of an animal stealthily advancing.

CHAPTER VI

On hands and knees they advanced over the gritty naked floor boards and twice halted when vague sounds of activity floated in from what Mears said was a stair landing. The snuffing noise grew louder and sweat crept out to streak Colby's face with tiny acid rivulets.

Mears, a black blur against a

black background, recoiled suddenly.

"What's wrong?" "I'm gonna put on the light—" and before Colby could prevent it the other had switched on his flash. Before them was a door, shut tight—an ordinary oak door, but from under it a stickily bright streamlet crawled towards the breathless pair. Colby understood why his companion had started—Mears was wiping his hand on a nearby dust cover.

"Put out that light," Colby's command was trenchant as a surgeon's scalpel. "Want to make a shining target of us," his heart thudding like the tom-tom of a Sioux.

Mears obeyed and darkness closed in again like a maddening blanket of musty black velvet.

Again a penetrating and ominous silence ruled over the great liner, a silence in which the scurrying of mice and rats along some distant passageway could be distinctly heard. Colby felt Mears creeping up alongside and threw of the safety catch of Hartney's pistol.

"Stay where you are," he whispered, "and turn on the light when I throw open the door."

When five minutes had passed and no sound beyond those mysterious subtle noises had struck the listeners' ears, Colby reached up and felt the door handle make a cold streak across his palm.

"Ready?" "Check!"

In almost a single motion he pushed open a door, sank flat onto the dusty floor and threw off the safety catch of Hartney's battered .32. Every sense geared to sharpness he took in the scene when Mears' flashlight shatter the blackness with a stabbing blue-white beam. So much had the eerie surroundings affected him that he, whose nerves were generally as of steel, almost shot when he caught a glimpse of a man in a brass-buttoned officer's coat crouching against the wall opposite the door.

Just in time he checked himself; the revealed figure, gold toothed, elderly and semi-bald, sat inert, weakly slumped against the rich oak panelling of the passage staring steadily into the light from beneath bushy gray brows. Beyond a blink of blood shot gray eyes the man in the passage made no motion, just sat with gray head sagged forward on chest—looking, looking into the light. Colby ceased wondering at this lassitude when he noted how down the front of the vision's faded blue cotton shirt trickled two bright rivulets that had collected on the floor into a shiny little pool.

"Who's that," he flung at Mears who had apparently been stricken speechless.

"My God, it—why it's Capt'n Benet."

Benet! Then that curious girl's premonition had come true!

then recoiled.

"What's wrong?" Mears came forward bravely enough.

"Another one in here—see?" In silence both the searchers studied a second figure lying face down, with the lower part of the body sprawled across a wide grand staircase, which had once conducted Princes, divas and Pittsburgh millionaire to the glittering first class dining saloon.

"Bring that light here." Colby knelt by the side of the wounded man whose strenuous breathing they had heard.

Mears objected, "No—let's take a look at this one."

"Don't be a damn fool, he's dead and this man isn't. Can you talk, Captain Benet?" He bent low over the stricken head watchman. "Who shot you?"

The other by a severe effort made a noise, rendered inarticulate by bloody froth rising to his lips, his pale brown eyes, however, glared in force of utility into Colby's. It was terrible to watch the man's efforts to speak, to read his realization that he was unable to deliver what must have been a vital message. There he was, practically dead with only his eyes alive.

Mears strode over, battered features rigid and bright with sweat and gestured with his automatic.

"Com on—we're fools to stay like this," he snapped. "We make swell targets—"

"Shut up! Who shot you Captain?"

Captain Benet's glaring eyes wandered to that shadowy, eloquently lax figure half on the stairs, then wavered and had started to rise when darkness swooped down on the landing like a smothering cloak. Mears' flashlight had gone out!

In a single silent leap Colby was instantly six good feet away from his former position. "Put on that blasted light!" he rasped. "Put it on or I'll drill you."

"Sh-h-h," warned the other. "Don't you hear?"

What fixed Colby's attention was a small near sound, magnified by the unearthly silence of this great liner. He thought it had come from behind a door to his left.

Having long since oriented the hall in his mind, the ex-Colonel was able to leap with the lithe speed of a jaguar past Benet's limp form, fling open the door and hurl himself at a figure only hinted at by the light of a porthole. His arms were around someone who struggled with the ferocity of a trapped animal. Then a fleeting jet of flame lit what had once been the barber shop and a report cracked, deafening as a field piece in the confined space. Ears ringing and coughing be-

gan to sound. "What's wrong?" Mears came forward bravely enough.

"Another one in here—see?" In silence both the searchers studied a second figure lying face down, with the lower part of the body sprawled across a wide grand staircase, which had once conducted Princes, divas and Pittsburgh millionaire to the glittering first class dining saloon.

Pacific Fleet Chief



Official U. S. Navy Photo

Here's the most recent photograph of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet, who directed U. S. forces in the important battle of Midway. The picture is the work of a navy photographer assigned to the fleet under the admiral's command.

cause of the acrid powder fumes. Colby bore his antagonist to the floor and in so doing realized that this was a woman in his arms!

"Hey. What the hell? Shall I turn on the light?"

"Yes," the ex-soldier panted, his eyes now full of soft fragrant hair. The more he saw of this curious affair the less he was liking it.

When light flooded the dusty barber shop a bitter smile twisted Colby's lips, for there outlined against the dark linoleum were the dusty features of Geneva Benet! Lord, how huge and bright were her blue eyes—how furiously scarlet grew her cheeks to find Donald Colby very firmly seated on her stomach and grinning at her with a savage, mirthless grin.

"Miss Geneva! Fer Gawd's sake what you doin' here?" Colby, bending on her an inscrutable sardonic look, got up and stood over her, his scarred features alert, wary and hard as the bronze they resembled.

"Yes, just what are you doing here, ma'am?" The girl, her sweated breast wildly aheave, raised herself to a sitting position and her deadly pale features were rigid with emotion of some kind. "It—it's a mistake. I—I thought you were the others."

Don't lie! I wasn't born yesterday," Colby snapped and with one eye on Mears planted a scuffed shoe on a small automatic which had flown from the girl's fingers, "you knew we were going to search the Mount Vernon!" A furious uncer-

tainly shook him. This latest development came as a sort of Et tu, Bruto?—Trust. Whom could he trust? Not Hartney; Mears perhaps, but certainly not Dutton—the fellow had a fundamentally evil face.

He felt rather like a man who, with foolhardy courage, has entered a swamp only to realize that that log he thought to be solid was treacherously afloat, that that ground yonder which had looked firm was nothing but a morass of poisonous snakes were among vines he had counted on a last support.

(To be Continued)

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NOTICE OF SALE

On Monday, July 27th, 1942, at 11:00 o'clock, a. m. at the Courthouse door in the Town of Waynesville, Haywood County, N. C., I will offer for sale at public outcry to the highest bidder for cash the following described lands and premises situate in said County and State, to-wit:

Being Lot No. 1 of the Underwood tract, BEGINNING at a stake in the old Turner line, corner of Lot No. 2, and runs N. 5° E. 32 1/2 poles to a stake, corner of the W. B. Ferguson 3-7/10 acre tract; thence with the line of the same three calls as follows: N. 87° W. 14 poles to a stake on West bank of road; North 13 poles to a stake; N. 15° E. 9 poles to a stake on top of ridge; thence up ridge as follows: S. 75° W. 12 poles; S. 67° W. 7 poles; S. 25 1/2° W. 5 poles; S. 28° W. 8 poles; S. 41° W. 16 poles with Giles line to a stake; S. 28° W. 8 poles to a stake in road; thence with same S. 64° W. 6 poles; S. 47° W. 6 poles; S. 24 1/2° W. 10 1/2 poles to a stake in forks of road, corner of Lot No. 2; thence with same, S. 88° E. 58 poles to the BEGINNING, containing 17 1/2 acres, as per survey and plat of O. O. Sanford.

EXCEPTING and RESERVING from the foregoing tract or parcel of land the following lots or parcels of land heretofore conveyed by W. C. Medford et ux, to the following grantees:

D. L. Putnam et ux, dated May 1, 1920, recorded Book 55, page 412; D. L. Putnam dated March 8, 1921, recorded Book 59, page 11; Sam Melton et ux, dated January 2, 1922, recorded Book 59, page 127; T. C. Norris and J. C. Norris, dated November 11, 1922, recorded Book 59, page 372; Jerry Liner and Hugh J. Sloan, dated February 16, 1925, Book 63, page 550; Record of Deeds of Haywood County; reference is hereby made to the above deeds and records for full and perfect description of the lands herein excepted.

Sale made pursuant to the power of sale contained in that certain deed of trust from Mary Moody and husband, Fred H. Moody, to A. T. Ward, Trustee for Haywood Home Building & Loan Association, dated April 30th, 1941, recorded in Book 42, at page 364, Haywood County Registry, default having been made in the payment of the indebtedness secured therein, and reference is hereby made to said instrument and record for all the terms and conditions thereof.

This June 23rd, 1942.

A. T. WARD, Trustee.

No. 1202—July 2-9-16-28.

NOTICE OF SUMMONS BY PUBLICATION

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA, COUNTY OF HAYWOOD. L. A. MILLER vs. HATTIE N. MILLER.

The defendant above named will take notice that an action has been commenced against her in the Superior Court of Haywood County for the purpose of securing an absolute divorce on the grounds of two years separation and the defendant will further take notice that she is required to appear at the office of the Clerk of the Superior Court in Waynesville, North Carolina, not later than thirty days from the 31st day of July, 1942 and answer or demur to the complaint herein filed or the plaintiff will demand the relief herein sought.

This the 8th day of July, 1942. C. H. LEATHERWOOD, Clerk of Superior Court of Haywood County. No. 1205—July 9-16-23-30.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA, COUNTY OF HAYWOOD.

ON MONDAY, the 27th day of July, 1942, at the Courthouse door in the Town of Waynesville, North Carolina, at eleven o'clock A. M., the undersigned Superintendent of Education of Haywood County will sell to the highest bidder for cash that certain tract or parcel of land lying and being in Pigeon Township, Haywood County, and which was formerly used for school purposes, which said tract or parcel of land has become useless for said school purposes, and which was formerly known as Garden Creek school property, and is described in metes and bounds as follows:

TRACT I: BEGINNING on a stake on top of a ridge, and being the corner of James H. Plott and Smathers and runs N. 32° W. 14 poles and to the line to a White Oak in the Plott and Smathers line; thence with said line two calls back to the BEGINNING, containing 44 square poles more or less.

TRACT II: BEGINNING on a White Oak, it being the corner of a lot conveyed by Mrs. Harriett Smathers to the County Board of Education, and runs S. 72 1/2° East 11 poles and 9 1/2 feet to a stake; thence N. 67° East 16 poles to a stake; thence S. 11 1/2° West 4 poles and 12 1/2 feet to a stake in Plott and Smathers line; thence with said line three calls to the BEGINNING, Containing One acre and 36 rods, more or less.

The Board of Education reserves the right to reject any and all bids at said sale. This the 23rd day of June, 1942. HAYWOOD COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION. By Jack Messer, Superintendent of Education. No. 1200—June 25-July 2-9-16