

Outline: 1st draft

NIGHT OVER WATER

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Projected 150,000 words

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I

Wednesday, 8 am to 12 noon, GMT

England

1. It is 6 September 1939. At the port of Southampton, on the south coast of England, a huge flying boat is moored on the estuary. It has attracted a crowd of spectators with binoculars. This is a Boeing 314, known as the Pan Am Clipper, the largest and most luxurious airliner ever built.

Specially designed for the first-ever transatlantic air passenger service, the Clipper carries forty of the world's most privileged people across the ocean in twenty-four hours (instead of the five days taken by the fastest ship). This is the art deco equivalent of the Concorde.

But, unlike the Concorde, this aircraft has space. On its main deck the passengers sit in lounges. Gourmet meals are prepared in the kitchen - from scratch, even the potatoes being peeled on board - and served in the dining room accompanied by fine wines. At night the divan seats convert to bunk beds, just like on the Orient Express. There is even a honeymoon suite. Because of the \$675 round-trip fare - half the cost of a small house - the passengers are mainly royalty, movie stars and millionaires.

There is a large upper level which includes the spacious flight deck. The captain supervises a crew of five: pilot, co-pilot, navigator, engineer and radio operator. In fact there are two complete crews, working alternate four-hour watches. Off-duty crew have a day room and sleeping quarters.

Transatlantic air passenger travel is only a few weeks old. This service was inaugurated by Pan Am in July. But today's flight will be the last. Last Sunday, on the day this aircraft arrived at Southampton, Britain declared war on Germany; and Pan Am has now cancelled the service. (Historical note: In fact the service was cancelled a week earlier, after Hitler invaded Poland; so this is a fictional flight.)

Our point-of-view character is the engineer, Ted Deacon, 30. The eldest son of a poor New England smallholder, he was brought up in a strict churchgoing family, went to college on a football scholarship, and became a Naval officer working on flying boats. He is a firm believer in the Protestant work ethic, which has got him where he is today. He is handsome, healthy and recently married. And his life is in ruins.

He inspects the four 1500-horsepower engines - the most powerful ever built - which will lift the forty-ton plane into the air at 2 pm today. Behind each engine is a space big enough to allow a man to stand upright, reached by a crawlway in the wing, so that the engines are accessible during flight. Deacon

leans against the cold metal bulkhead with his eyes closed. He is in a trap and he sees no way out.

2. At a large country house in Dorset, the Isley family are having breakfast before leaving to catch the Clipper to New York. They are going to live in America for the duration of the war.

The Isleys are a rich and wildly eccentric family of English aristocrats. The father, Lord Isley, is a founder member of the British Union of Fascists. He hates all foreigners, except white Colonial types such as Americans and Australians whom he regards as exiled British. He also hates catholics and communists, and the mere mention of suffragettes can still enrage him. He is a family tyrant who wields absolute authority over his wife and children. He has always refused to send his daughters to school, and they have received a haphazard education from governesses and tutors.

His half-American wife Verne is a vague, ethereal beauty famous for her fabulous jewelry. She is no less eccentric than her husband: she eats only uncooked food, she will have nothing to do with doctors, and she is never seen carrying anything.

Their eldest child, Elizabeth, a large, horsy girl of 21, is a great admirer of the Nazis. She has visited Berlin several times, she speaks German well, and she has twice dined with the Fuehrer himself.

The second child, Margaret, is our point-of-view character. Intelligent, warm-hearted and innocent, she is a feminist and a socialist. Her grasp of international politics is firm but she can be surprisingly ignorant about ordinary life. The other side of her innocence is a disarming candour. She has a way of turning her clear, wide-eyed gaze on you and saying something that pierces your heart.

There is also a slightly manic fourteen-year-old boy, Percy. Although he is afraid of Father (as they all are) he has a streak of mischief which is irrepressible. He informs new servants of imaginary house rules, such as that they must go barefoot on Fridays. Once he told the whole village that his father had died in the night. He is not so much rebellious as uncontrollable.

Over breakfast they quarrel about the war. Elizabeth is angry that her native country is at war with the regime she idolizes. Father says Britain and Germany should unite and declare war on the Soviet Union. Margaret says Britain has crucially weakened its position by pusillanimously condoning a Fascist takeover in Spain.

Percy says he has discovered that one of his great-grandmothers had the maiden name of Fishbein, and he therefore considers himself partly Jewish. Father is horrified - this is, after all, the secret nightmare of all racists - and there is terrific consternation until Percy admits he is making it up.

Margaret is angry and frustrated about being forced to go to America. Like so many young British people she felt passionately about the Spanish Civil War and is ashamed of her country's cowardice in that situation. Now, at last, her country is going to war against Fascism - and she is being whisked off the USA. She has pleaded with her father to let her stay but he will not listen. She does not know what else to do.

3. Harry Fane, 25, is a bold, charming thief who has had a successful short career. His method of operation is to date upper-class girls in order to gain access to wealthy homes and rob them. He has broken many young hearts. His great interest in life is jewelry: he loves it and knows a great deal about it.

For some time now he has been restless. Although he has done well, he never gets more than a tenth of the retail value of anything he steals. It would be almost as easy to make money as a legitimate jeweller. He is also a little weary of the empty-headed socialites with whom he is obliged to spend most of his time. But at heart he is an idle and dishonest man, and he might have continued in his rut indefinitely - but that he has at last been caught.

He is able to get bail, but he faces a long jail sentence if he is convicted. Released from a London police station on Wednesday morning, he decides to skip the country.

He gets on his motorcycle and drives to a working-class neighbourhood in south London. There he goes into a small house occupied by a woman with a baby. Harry does not live here but the child is his. He goes to the bedroom and opens a locked box. In it are several hundred pounds and a US passport.

He gives the girl a hundred pounds - enough for her to live on for years.

She is not grateful. "You're running away, aren't you," she says bitterly.

Harry is not moved. "I'm going to America," he says.

4. Two lovers are sharing a late breakfast in bed at a hotel in Southampton before taking the Clipper to New York. Diana Losely, 35, is a quiet, attractive woman who has left her arrogant, overbearing husband Mervyn and run away with shy, charming Michael Adler, an American writer of radio comedy scripts.

Diana has never been happy with Mervyn. She is fond of him but afraid of him too. He is a successful businessman in the northern industrial city of Manchester, a heavy smoker and a whisky drinker, a forceful, go-getting type who has casually dominated her all their married life. For years she has wished she had the courage to leave. Now Michael has given her that courage.

All the same, she is biting her nails about having left Mervyn. She is fearful of how hurt he will be and also about how angry he will be. Indeed, she never quite worked up the nerve to tell him she was going, and in the end she left him a note - which, she realises, looking anxiously at her watch, he must be reading about now.

5. Peter and Nancy Black, brother and sister, inherited a midsized fashion business. They have a swanky dress shop on Fifth Avenue, a tailoring factory on the Lower East Side and two textile mills in South Carolina. Peter runs the store, which loses money; Nancy runs the factory, which makes a fortune; and the mills are looked after by managers and make small profits.

The business is a private corporation. Peter and Nancy have 40% each. Their Aunt Tilly has 10%, and the remaining 10% is held by Danny Riley, their late father's somewhat disreputable old lawyer.

Nancy is our point-of-view character. She is 35 years old, divorced with no children. She is competitive and impatient, and men often accuse her of lacking femininity, although she is attractive. She would like to be married again and have children, but the men who fall for her tend to be weak (like her ex-husband) and the ones she likes treat her as one of the boys.

It is she who is responsible for the success of the company. It had run down somewhat as her father aged, but she brought new

business to the factory with up-to-date designs, introduced cost controls to limit the losses made at the store, and found honest local men to run the mills.

She is somewhat discontented with her position in the company. She is older and smarter than Peter, but he is chairman of the board simply because people expect to see a man in the chair. Nevertheless they both know she makes the money.

When war broke out they were in Paris: Peter was buying from the couturiers for his store and Nancy was frantically sketching everything to be copied in her factory. Now they are returning to the States on a ship due to leave today from Liverpool, on the north-west coast of England.

By accident Nancy now learns that Peter is plotting against her. Behind her back he has arranged to sell the company to Nat Ridgeway, the millionaire owner of Multitex Inc, a giant clothing company. The deal provides for Peter to continue to run the store, but there is no role for Nancy. The board meeting to approve the deal has been called for tomorrow. Peter is returning today on the Pan Am Clipper.

Nancy is appalled by his treachery and heartbroken at the prospect of losing the company she has built up. But the other directors - Aunt Tilly and Danny Riley - are likely to follow Peter's lead if Nancy is not there.

She checks the schedules. The Clipper takes off at 2 pm today. There is no way she can get from Liverpool to Southampton

by then - not by train, car or even plane, assuming she could find a plane. However, the Clipper touches down at Foynes, in the Shannon estuary on the west coast of Ireland, taking off again at 6 pm - and she could get to Foynes by then if she could charter a plane.

She goes out to an airfield where she may be able to get a plane. There is only one pilot there, a tall, attractive man in his thirties. He tells her quite rudely that he is not for hire. She talks to him, and learns that he is going to Foynes to meet the Clipper. He is chasing after his runaway wife, and his name is Mervyn Losely.

He agrees to give her a ride.

II

Wednesday, 12 noon to 5 pm GMT

Southampton to Foynes

6. Passengers are served lunch at the Clipper pier before boarding. Margaret Isley spots the movie star Lulu Bell, the French banker Baron Philippe Gabon, and the White Russian Princess Lavinia. She also meets or notices Diana Losely, Peter Black and Harry Fane. At one point she overhears her brother

Percy earnestly telling an elderly woman passenger about his Jewish great-grandmother.

Over lunch, Elizabeth Isley drops a bombshell. She is not coming to America. Instead she will make her way to Germany to fight for the Nazi cause.

There is an almighty row. Father says: "I absolutely forbid it!" But Elizabeth is 21 and she has some money of her own. She leaves, taking her luggage, to catch a ship to Lisbon in neutral Portugal.

Watching her father, Margaret realises that beneath his anger he is badly shaken. His world is falling apart. And she dimly sees the possibility that she, too, might escape from him.

7. The huge engines roar, the fifteen-foot propellers spin, and the massive vessel ploughs across the estuary in a waterfall of spray and lifts gracefully into the air. On the flight deck, Ted Deacon recalls the day his life turned into a nightmare.

He was on leave, at home on the smallholding in Massachusetts that he inherited from his father. (It is not a viable farm: he leases the fields, and uses his leave to keep the woodlands tidy.) At noon he put down his tools and walked back to the farmhouse, hungry for a lunch cooked by his pretty wife Carolina.

When he entered the house she was naked, tied to a chair, with a man standing over her.

Three other men jumped Deacon and wrestled him to the ground.

The leader of the group was a large, pugnacious individual called Tony Joe. He explained what they wanted. On the Clipper's next return flight Deacon must fix the engines so that the plane would be forced down in the sea at a precise location in the Bay of Fundy, off the coast of Maine.

Deacon said it was not that easy, but Tony Joe cut him off. "You'll find a way - if you want your pretty wife back in one piece."

They would not tell him their purpose, but now he is able to figure it out. First to board today, and now occupying a curtained-off cabin to themselves, are FBI agent Ollis Field and, handcuffed to him, Frank Spuntino, who has been extradited from England on charges of murder and extortion.

Deacon can guess the rest. There will be a fast boat waiting to rendezvous with the Clipper when it comes down. Spuntino will be taken off the Clipper and will disappear in the boat.

Deacon was brought up with a powerful sense of right and wrong, and it breaks his heart to co-operate with the Mob. Spuntino is a murderer who will surely kill again - and every death will be on Deacon's conscience.

He recalls his father telling him how to deal with bullies at school. "These people are mean, but they're not smart," the

old man would say. Tony Joe is not smart. Ted thinks he ought to be able to outwit him.

What he needs to do is set some kind of trap. The trouble is, anything he does must not take effect until he has got Carolina back. Maybe he can put some kind of poison in Spuntino's food, so that the man is forced to seek medical help twenty-four hours later.... It's not much of an idea, but it's a start. There must be something.

8. For Diana Losely the thrill of escaping with her lover is spoiled. Michael has met up with Lulu Bell, the movie star. It turns out they worked together in radio comedy years ago. They chat and reminisce, and Diana realises she has left the world she knows behind, and is going blind into a world that is all too familiar to Michael. She feels jealous, resentful and homesick. She decides to get off the plane at Foynes.

9. Meanwhile, her husband's plane develops engine trouble over the Irish Sea and comes down at Dublin. Mervyn tries to fix it himself. Nancy impatiently suggests finding a mechanic. Mervyn rejects the idea crossly. She goes off on her own and finds a mechanic, who is able to fix the engine instantly.

Mervyn and Nancy snap at one another constantly. They are similar personalities, both impatient over-achievers. Nancy is

constantly exasperated by him, but at the same time she cannot help thinking that he is a rather attractive man.

10. Harry Fane has a lot on his mind. He has jumped bail, he is travelling on a false passport, and he is posing as a wealthy American. It would, he knows, be foolish of him to rob anyone on this flight, for the suspect list is too short.

But as cocktails are served over the Irish Sea he sits in the main lounge mesmerised by Lady Verne Isley. He knows of her fabulous collection of jewelry. Even now she is wearing a diamond-and-ruby brooch in the shape of a cockerel that Harry recognises to be the work of Louis Cartier.

He strikes up a conversation with the daughter, Margaret, employing the charm that has melted the hearts of so many girls of her age and social station. She is oddly impervious to it, however, and disconcertingly direct in her conversation. Paradoxically he takes to her. There is something very seductive about her combination of innocence and candour.

Although the conversation does not go exactly as he wishes, nevertheless he manages to find out that the family is going to the USA for the duration of the war. When people flee a country at the outbreak of war, he reasons, they never leave their jewelry behind. Lady Isley's entire, priceless collection must be somewhere aboard this aircraft.

III

Wednesday, 5 pm (GMT) Thursday, 1 am, GMT

Foynes to mid-Atlantic

11. The Clipper lands at Foynes and Ted Deacon is no nearer a solution to his dilemma. However, inside the terminal building he is surprised to get a phone call.

It is Tony Joe. "A few words of encouragement," he says, then he puts Carolina on. She is unhurt but terribly frightened, and she pleads with Ted to do what they want. He promises.

Tony Joe is merely making sure of Ted - but the call is a tactical error which Ted now turns to advantage.

Ted says: "Carolina has to be on the boat that meets the Clipper."

Tony Joe says: "You can't make no demands - "

"Yes, I can," says Ted. "You've got Carolina, but I've got Frank Spuntino. One word from me and he's off this plane."

There is a silence as Tony Joe realises the tables have been turned.

Ted says: "It will be a straight swap, Carolina for Frankie, or there's no deal. Call me at Botwood to confirm that she will be there." And he hangs up.

He has regained the initiative, and he feels better.

12. Diana Losely tells Michael Adler that she has changed her mind and she is getting off the plane now. Michael is distraught. They go into the terminal building and are shocked to find Mervyn waiting there.

During the ensuing confrontation, Mervyn is so arrogant and condescending that Diana realises she does not want to go back to him after all, and she gets back on the plane with Michael.

To their horror, Mervyn boards too.

13. As the Clipper takes off, Nancy confronts Peter, who is with his buyer, Nat Ridgeway, a man of about sixty. Triumphantly, she tells them she will attend the board meeting and oppose the sale.

Stung, Peter says it will make no difference, because he has Danny Riley's vote sewn up. Nancy does not doubt this: Danny Riley is nothing if not corruptible. Assuming Aunt Tilly sides with Nancy, that will make it fifty-fifty - and the issue will be decided by the casting vote of the chairman, Peter.

Nancy is not yet ready to give up. She notices that Ridgeway does not seem pleased with this turn of events, and guesses correctly that he did not know that Peter was working behind Nancy's back. She asks Ridgeway if he still wants to do

this shady deal. Ridgeway replies: "I've made a deal and I'll stick to it."

Bitterly disappointed, Nancy talks it over with Mervyn Losely, who is himself a businessman. He says: "If you're so sure Danny Riley is corruptible, haven't you got something you can use against him?"

Nancy realises she has. Some years ago Riley was involved in bribing a judge and Nancy protected him.

Now she persuades the captain to let her send a radio message to her lawyer in New York, instructing him to call Riley and question him about that judge.

14. The main lounge is converted to a dining room and a seven-course dinner is served.

Percy Isley sits down wearing a yarmulke. His father hits the roof.

After a few more drinks Lord Isley starts talking loudly and offensively about Jews. However, he is no longer in rural Dorset among his tenants, and the other passengers will not sit still for it. Eventually the captain comes and tells him to shut up. Isley is humiliated, and Margaret is even more resolved to get away from him.

15. Harry Fane steals Lady Isley's brooch then gives it back to her, pretending she has dropped it. As he pins it to her Dior

jacket his hand brushes her breast. She flushes but does not move away.

Harry continues to flirt with her. Eventually he gets a look inside her cabin bag. There are no jewels there. That means her collection is in the hold.

Harry resolves to get into the hold before this plane lands at New York.

IV

Thursday, 1 am to 9 am GMT

Mid-Atlantic to Botwood

16. People start to get ready for bed. They go into either the Men's Retiring Room or the Ladies' Powder Room and change into elegant nightwear: striped pyjamas, embroidered nightdresses, silk dressing-gowns and leather carpet-slippers. When they emerge, their seats have been turned into curtained bunks, each with its own window, ventilator, light, parcel shelf and clothes hanger.

Diana and Michael retire early, to get away from Mervyn. Diana lies awake, thinking and agonizing over Mervyn and Michael.

17. Margaret Isley has a long conversation with Nancy Black. They get on well. Eventually Margaret says: "Would you give me a job?" She explains that she is desperate to get away from her father. Nancy is sympathetic. "I'll employ you - if I've got a job myself."

18. The flight deck gets a radio message for Ollis Field, the FBI agent. The Bureau has received information that the Mob have a man on board the plane. Field goes through the passenger manifest trying to identify suspects. Ted Deacon looks on, knowing that the Mob's man is himself.

19. The plane comes down at Botwood, Newfoundland, at 8 am Greenwich Mean Time, 3 am Eastern Standard Time. Some passengers disembark, others stay in bed. Harry explores the upper deck, which includes the flight deck, crew sleeping quarters, wing crawlways and baggage holds. He locates the holds but is unable to get in unobserved.

20. In the terminal, Nancy gets a call from a frantic Danny Riley. "People are asking me about that judge!" Nancy says: "I'll protect you - if you vote with me tomorrow." Riley agrees. Nancy is triumphant.

V

Thursday 4 am to 8 am ESTBotwood to Shediac

21. Just before take-off, Deacon gets a call. Tony Joe agrees to his terms - Carolina will be on the boat.

Now Deacon makes an anonymous phone call to the Canadian coastguard, saying that smugglers will be making a landing this morning in the Bay of Fundy.

Deacon is playing a dangerous game and he knows it.

22. The plane takes off. Margaret Isley tells her father that when they get to the US she is going to get a job, find a place to live, and save up enough money to return to Britain, where she will join the Navy.

Isley summons all his resources of authority to undermine her. He pours scorn on her independence and her professed desire to join in the war against Fascism, and says she will not last a single day in any kind of military organisation. She knows nothing of everyday life, he points out. He is sure she will be useless under fire.

If he is right it is only because of the way he has brought her up, of course; but this thought is no consolation to her.

She burns with shame and longs for a way to prove her courage.

She will have her chance sooner than she imagines.

23. Mervyn tells Diana she is free to go with Michael: he will no longer stand in the way of her happiness.

Diana is furious with him. She knows perfectly well that he no longer wants her because he has fallen for Nancy Black; and she is angry with him for cloaking self-interest in a false generosity. She yells at him and calls him a hypocrite. Mervyn definitely gets the worst of it.

Afterwards, Michael points out that for the first time in her life she has stood up to Mervyn. She realises she is really free of him at last.

24. The Clipper lands at Shediac, New Brunswick, at 7 am EST. Once again Harry stays on board. This time he is able to get into the hold.

He locates the Isleys' luggage and opens it. He is astonished to find a pistol in one of the cases. He opens a wardrobe trunk and finds all Verne's jewelry in there.

He is about to transfer it to his own suitcase when he is interrupted. He hides inside the wardrobe trunk.

People come into the hold. He realises from their conversation that they are searching for him. He gathers that someone has discovered that he is travelling on a false passport.

(In fact it was the FBI, who found that the person under whose name Harry is travelling was dead. They now think Harry is the Mob's man on the plane.)

However, Harry's total disappearance has them flummoxed, and they are forced to conclude that he got off the plane and somehow sneaked away from the terminal.

25. Peter asks Nancy to have a peace talk. They go to a private room in the terminal building. Peter locks Nancy in.

Mervyn finds her and frees her. She is so happy that she kisses him. The kiss turns into a long, passionate embrace. They realise they are in love.

But the Clipper has taken off without them.

Undaunted, they charter a small seaplane and take off in pursuit.

VI

Thursday, 8 am to 1 pm EST

Shediac to New York

26. Deacon tampers with the fuel supply to the engines and the Clipper comes down in the sea at the right place.

A boat comes alongside. Everyone except Deacon assumes it is there by chance and is going to offer assistance.

Tony Joe comes aboard with three henchmen and Carolina. Carolina falls into Ted's arms and the mobsters pull guns.

27. The passengers and crew are herded into the forward end of the plane - all except Harry Fane, hidden in the hold with a million pounds worth of jewelry and a pistol. He watches from a hidden vantage point.

His plan until now has been to stay inside Lady Verne's trunk until it reaches her hotel. He doesn't know whether the intervention of the Mafia is good or bad for him. He watches and waits.

They get Spuntino's handcuffs off and are about to leave when they get a warning, over their boat radio, of a huge coastguard presence in the bay. Suspecting a trap, Tony Joe decides to take Carolina along as a hostage.

Then everyone hears the sound of another plane.

28. When Nancy sees the Clipper on the water below, her first thought is that now she will surely get to New York before Peter and defeat him. Her second thought is that she no longer cares quite as much as she did about this: suddenly she is seeing her future with Mervyn. Her third thought is that the people in the Clipper may need help.

Mervyn lands the seaplane and they go aboard the Clipper. They are held at gunpoint. Tony Joe decides to take their seaplane.

29. Margaret is scared to death. But it occurs to her that the Mafia are the same as the Nazis, people who rule by fear. She is still stinging from her father's scorn. He was right, she now realises: she does not have the courage to fight.

As the Mob are leaving, Ted Deacon goes for it. Ollis Field joins in. They overpower and disable three of the four intruders, then both are shot and wounded by Tony Joe. Margaret finds her courage. She picks up a pot of hot coffee and throws it at Tony Joe. This turns the tables, but only for a moment. She finds herself looking down the barrel of Tony Joe's gun. A shot rings out, and Tony Joe falls. Harry Fane emerges from hiding, carrying a gun.

It is all over.

30. In the aftermath, Nat Ridgeway offers Nancy a directorship in his company. She asks for, and gets, the job of

overseeing his extensive British operation. That way she can be with Mervyn. She will also take Margaret with her.

The end