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Chronicles of the Secret Service

Written by Alexander Wilson

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Chronicles of the Secret Service

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THE CHINA DOLL

‘Have you ever read the fable of the wolf and the lamb, Carter?’ asked Sir Leonard Wallace, leaning back in his chair, and looking up at his assistant.

The tall, good-looking young man with the wavy hair and bronzed complexion smiled.

‘Well, yes, sir,’ he replied. ‘I suppose everyone has.’

He wondered what was in his chief’s mind. Sir Leonard did not ask such questions, as a rule, unless there was reason behind them.

‘Not everyone,’ disagreed Wallace. ‘That is rather an exaggerated statement to make. Still, Aesop’s Fables are probably as widely read as anything written or told ever has been. It is pretty evident, however, that the powers that be in Japan know all about the wolf and the lamb. Japan has cast herself for the part of wolf and a play neatly arranged, to be produced and directed by herself.’

‘Who plays the part of the lamb, sir?’ asked Carter.

‘China, of course. Poor helpless China, with her internal troubles, her disruption, her family quarrels is an easy prey for the voracious wolf. Japan has had her eyes on China for years. The time has now come when she thinks she is powerful enough to strike the blow. It will not happen all at once. She is too cute for that. Besides the Oriental method of torture indicates a gradual process. China will be annexed in a succession of cuts – eaten up slice by slice so to speak. And as she has commenced over Manchuria and Jehol so she will continue. China is held responsible for provocation just as the wolf put the blame on the poor lamb before devouring her. I’ve sent warning after warning to London. America has suggested a joint action which Japan would not dare face, but we are not ready to take any steps just now. Think of it! It makes me feel blasphemous. Of course I must admit to a feeling of admiration for the Japs. They have chosen their time well, and with amazing nerve and skill, when Europe is staggering about like a drunken man from one crisis to another. Well, I’ve done my best to point out what should be done and the necessity for quick action. I can do no more than that. There is one thing I can do and will do, though, before I leave this colony. I shall rout out, lock, stock and barrel, the nest of the Japanese spies here.’

‘But I thought—’ commenced Carter.

‘So did I,’ interrupted the other grimly; tapped a document lying before him on his desk with a shapely forefinger. ‘This proves otherwise. It was brought to me this morning by a messenger from Winstanley. As you were out I opened it myself.’ He held it up to Carter. ‘Read it!’

The young man, who appeared greatly interested now, took

the sheets of foolscap covered with typescript, displaying the stamp of the Inspector-General of Police on each page, and commenced eagerly to peruse them. Sir Leonard removed the lid of the large tobacco bowl standing before him on the desk; proceeded to fill his pipe, making use of his artificial hand with amazing celerity and adroitness. When the tobacco was lit and burning to his satisfaction, he sat puffing away contentedly as though he had not a care in the world, watching with approval the keen, interested expression on the face of his young assistant as the latter stood by his side reading.

Sir Leonard Wallace and Carter were in Hong Kong; had been there for some months. At the earnest request of the British governor, Sir Leonard had accepted the appointment of acting governor in order to investigate with the fullest authority and on the spot a gigantic plot to defraud the government of Hong Kong. He had taken with him Carter as his private secretary while Cousins had been sent to the colony to act independently. His investigations and those of his colleagues had been entirely successful and, at the time this narrative opens, Wallace's periods of office as governor was drawing to a close. To be exact, there were but three weeks to run.

The conspirators had planned not only to deplete the Treasury, by means of forged government bonds, fictitious loans, and fraudulent contracts, but had been handing over to a Japanese consul secret information of a naval and military character concerning the defences of Hong Kong. It appeared that an agent of Japan had obtained possession of information regarding the conspiracy and a list of all concerned in it. This had been used as a lever to force the principals to supply the Japanese consul with the

details he demanded. Naturally, when Sir Leonard Wallace had brought all this to light, a strongly-worded protest had been sent by the British government to Japan. As a result of this the consul had been relieved of his appointment, and ordered to return to Japan, while the Japanese government, as was only to be expected, denied all knowledge of any espionage activities in Hong Kong. Sir Leonard Wallace, however, had not been prepared to allow the consul to depart so easily. Directly information reached him that the official had been relieved of his appointment, and was, therefore, no longer a privileged person, he had given instructions for him to be subpoenaed as a witness against the ringleaders of the conspiracy. The Japanese had attempted to evade this and sail for his own country, whereupon he had been promptly arrested. His evidence had proved valuable at the trial but he had also been forced to part with information about his own activities. Wallace possessed methods of his own of exacting items of that kind from recalcitrant spies. Yumasaki, the ex-consul, discovered that fact to his sorrow. Afterwards he had been escorted to a ship and not left until she sailed for Japan.

Carter finished his perusal of the sheets of paper with a soft but prolonged whistle. He placed them on the desk in front of Sir Leonard.

‘Then we couldn’t have cleared them all out, sir,’ he commented.

‘Obviously not,’ replied the governor, removing the pipe from his mouth, and tapping out the ashes into a tray. ‘There must have been others hidden away somewhere. Yet I could have sworn Yumasaki had told me all. There’s no getting completely inside an Oriental mind, though,’ he added with a sigh. ‘Well,

we start again, Carter, and we have three weeks to make a clean sweep.'

'I wonder how Ransome found all this out. It's pretty good work on his part.'

'Very good work,' agreed Sir Leonard. 'He's a splendid man, but I think his popularity as a policeman has a lot to do with it. Those Chinese detectives under him would go through fire and water for him. It's what I've always contended. Treat a Chinaman well, and you can trust him up to the hilt; he'll do anything for you.'

'I can't quite see why these spies are remaining here,' observed Carter. 'After the manner in which you descended on the others, sir, followed by that rigid scrutiny of the papers of every Jap in the colony, I should have thought they would have waited a bit before commencing again; at least, until your term of office was over. They must know you will soon be leaving.'

Sir Leonard smiled.

'They probably thought I would not expect their activities to recommence so soon. They didn't anticipate Ransome and his sleuths being kept on the watch.'

'But what can they hope to discover now?'

'You must remember Yumasaki only received the plans of the fortifications from Collinson. He badly wanted the chart, promised him, showing the exact position of the minefields, lists of the number and calibre of the big guns, and a plan depicting the location of all magazines and other military and naval stores. He never received those. We ascertained that. Thank God he didn't. Collinson and Ferguson have run Great Britain into an expenditure of millions of dollars, as it is, by handing over plans

of the fortifications. If every defensive scheme in the colony had to be altered, as well as the fortifications, the expense would be colossal. Besides, Japan naturally is anxious to keep watch, if she can, on the new scheme of fortifying the island. The more I think of it,' he added, lying back in his chair, and regarding the young man by his side, 'the more bothered I feel. This desperate anxiety to know all there is to know about our defences, taken in conjunction with Japan's operations in China, can only mean one thing: she anticipates a continuation of trouble in Europe and eventually a war into which Great Britain will be drawn. When that time comes, she will sail her warships into Hong Kong having, as she hopes, made herself perfectly acquainted with all defensive measures, and annex the colony confident that we shall be too heavily engaged elsewhere to offer resistance. The same, I imagine, applies to Singapore, but that's not my pidgin – at the moment. In the meantime, she will continue with her policy of slicing off bits of China as a punishment for pretended affronts gradually consolidating herself in that country.'

He suddenly sprang to his feet, and began to pace to and fro in the large, well-furnished apartment.

'Heavens!' he exclaimed. 'Were there ever such blind, inept fools as those at home? When I get back, Carter, I'll have so much to say about their lack of vision and dilatoriness that they'll – they'll want to make me Governor of the South Pole or somewhere as far away as possible to get rid of me.'

Carter smiled. He knew how caustic Sir Leonard could be and his opinion of certain statesmen. He imagined the bad time his chief would give them when he did return to England. The young man had seldom seen Wallace so deeply moved. It was

a rarity for the Chief of the British Secret Service to display his feelings in such a manner; an eloquent proof of how seriously he regarded the Japanese menace.

Wallace continued his pacing for some time, his chin sunk on his breast, his artificial hand pushed deep into his coat pocket, the other firmly gripping his pipe. Carter remained by the desk watching him, making no attempt to speak. He knew the signs. Sir Leonard was deep in thought; that astute mind of his turning over the fresh problem that confronted him, and the young man, acting as secretary, knew better than to interrupt the brain that had once been described as the most brilliant in England. At length, Wallace returned to his chair, and sat down.

‘What a pity Cousins went back to England!’ he remarked. ‘He would have been extremely useful now. Still, it’s no use bothering about that.’ He became silent again, his hand caressing his determined, well-shaped chin as his mind continued to grapple with the news that had caused him such perturbation. Presently he picked up the report from the Inspector-General of Police and read it through for perhaps the twentieth time. Occasionally he murmured fragments aloud as though they in particular impressed themselves upon him. “A Japanese sailor from a *Maru* boat drunk with *samsui* was taken to the central police station and, in the ordinary course of routine, searched. Among the articles found on him was a document which Superintendent Ransome decided was in Japanese cipher . . . Mr Ransome, who knows the language well, set to work to get at its meaning, being convinced that such a letter in the possession of an illiterate seaman must have some particular significance.” Bright of Ransome,’ approved Sir Leonard, ‘and brighter still that he succeeded in deciphering the document.

I should rather like to have that young man in the Intelligence Service.’ He continued to read on, again murmuring certain parts of the report aloud. At last he threw down the sheets of paper, and looked up at Carter. ‘In short,’ he declared, ‘a drunken Japanese seaman is found to possess a coded document which turns out to be a message obviously from Japanese espionage agents in this colony to a central headquarters in Tokyo. It contains nothing very significant except the fact that difficulties are great, more agents are required, and great care must be taken in smuggling them into the colony. Neither the address of the Tokyo headquarters is given nor, and this is more important, is that of the agents in Hong Kong. The fact that the seaman, on recovering from his drunkenness, seemed so appalled when he found his precious letter had been taken from him, and committed *hara kiri* directly he was questioned and realised it had been decoded, proves that he was acting under very stringent orders. It’s a great pity that knife of his was lying within his reach when they were examining him. Still, I suppose we can’t blame them; they could hardly have anticipated such an action on his part, and he must have been extraordinarily quick. Clever of the Japs, you know, Carter, to use common seamen as messengers. Who would be likely to suspect them? If this fellow hadn’t slipped up and got drunk, we might have continued comfortably to believe Hong Kong was quite free of the spy menace. Poor chap, he took the only possible way out for him. The trouble is, his masters in this colony will know all about his arrest, death and, of course, guess the reason why he committed suicide. In other words, they will know we are wise to them again.’

‘Ransome’s investigations will already have told them that, sir, won’t they?’

‘Not necessarily. According to this’ – he tapped the report – ‘the superintendent’s Chinese detectives did all the tracing of the sailor’s movements from the time he left the ship until he was picked up drunk. Chinese are the craftiest people in the world, and obviously Ransome’s bunch are particularly gifted. The pity of it is that such good work should have had such a negative result. Ring up Sir Masterson Winstanley, Carter, and ask him to come along to see me directly after tiffin. I can’t manage it this morning owing to the visit of the arts and crafts deputation and my appointment at the Happy Valley to open the new sports club. Lord!’ he sighed. ‘How glad I shall be when I can shed all this ceremonial nonsense.’

Sir Leonard had all along found the role of acting governor of a colony, with its continuous succession of public duties, extremely irksome. That type of appointment did not appeal to him at all; nevertheless, although he had kept always foremost in mind the real reason for his presence in Hong Kong, he had not in any way neglected his multifarious social and official obligations. He had, in fact, proved himself an ideal governor. The manner in which he had handled a terrible situation, with murder stalking grimly any who threatened to prove of danger to the conspirators, had won the admiration and respect of everyone. There was a general desire that he should continue to hold his appointment for, at least, the usual period of five years; the Legislative Council had asked his permission to send a strongly-worded request to Westminster that his services be retained. Sir Leonard, however, quickly put an end to all hopes in that direction. While thanking the council for the confidence shown in him, he made it quite clear that he himself had no intention of remaining in the colony as governor.

As usual, he and Lady Wallace entertained several guests to luncheon but, directly afterwards, he went to his study, where he found the Inspector-General of Police, Sir Masterson Winstanley, already awaiting him. Without preamble, except to invite the Chief of Police to take a chair, he plunged into the matter which was uppermost in his mind.

'Thanks for the detailed and clearly-worded report concerning this Japanese affair, Winstanley,' he acknowledged. 'That young man of yours, Ransome, is to be highly commended for his enterprise and zeal.'

'I am glad to hear you say that, sir,' returned the IG. 'At the same time, I am deeply sorry all his work was allowed to go for nought, owing to the stupidity of the inspector in allowing the sailor's belongings to lie within the man's reach. There was no intention of making a charge. The Jap was only arrested to allow him to sober up. He'd been making a nuisance of himself. His belongings, with the exception of the letter, had been placed on the desk ready to be handed back to him. Nobody anticipated his taking the action he did.'

'Of course not,' agreed Wallace. 'I think you are being rather unfair to the inspector in calling him stupid. And, in any case, if the Jap had been stopped from committing *hara kiri*, I don't suppose we'd ever have obtained any useful information out of him.'

'I'm pretty certain you would have done,' replied Sir Masterson. 'I haven't forgotten how you made Yumasaki speak!'

'H'm,' grunted Sir Leonard. 'It appears I failed to get him to say anything. The fellow was cleverer than I thought. Tell me exactly what happened at the police station.'

'Superintendent Ransome was sitting at the desk, the

Japanese letter before him with its decoded translation. The inspector was standing by his side, a European sergeant a couple of yards away, and two Indian constables behind the seaman, who was, of course, standing facing Ransome. The fellow got into a terrible state of panic when he realised the letter was in the hands of the police. Then as soon as Ransome made him aware he knew the contents, and began questioning him, he suddenly sprang forward, grasped the knife and, before hands could be laid on him, had plunged it to the hilt into his abdomen. Ransome tells me it was a ghastly sight.'

'It must have been. And was nothing of any significance discovered at all while the superintendent's detectives were engaged in tracing the fellow's movements?'

Winstanley shook his head, his stern, dark face expressing his regret.

'You have seen the report, sir,' he remarked. 'Nothing has been left out.'

'I realise that. I was merely anxious to know if there was some little action, a movement, anything in fact, that may have been remarked by those who saw the sailor, mentioned to your men but thought too insignificant to note.'

Again the IG shook his head.

'The detectives spent the whole night at the job,' he declared, 'and you have read of the success that attended their efforts. As far as we know, everything he did and everywhere he went from the time he left his ship until his arrest, was discovered and noted.'

'Splendidly efficient work that, Winstanley,' approved Sir Leonard. 'It couldn't have been easy especially as he seemed always on his own.'

‘Those men of Ransome’s *are* efficient, sir. I take a great deal of pride in them.’

‘And in him,’ smiled the governor. ‘Well, there is to my mind one very significant fact which you have all apparently overlooked.’

‘What is that?’

‘The seaman went from one drinking den to another, and he was always alone! It doesn’t seem to have occurred to anyone that there was anything curious in that. And yet it strikes me as being most interesting. Sailors all the world over are congenial souls and fond of company. If they don’t go ashore in port with their mates, they very soon pick up companions. This man did neither. He was all the time by himself, as far as your men have been able to ascertain.’

‘He was probably acting under orders.’

‘Of course he was. That’s obvious. But don’t you see my point? His instructions were that he was to meet someone who would give him a communication. Now a man entrusted with a mission of such importance would not ordinarily go and get drunk. In fact, he would be chosen for his reliability, wouldn’t he?’ Winstanley nodded, wondering what was coming. ‘The last thing,’ went on Sir Leonard, ‘he would do, one would imagine, would be to make a round of drinking dens. Now a sailor on his own, without any mission but to enjoy himself, who went pub crawling would pick up companions. This fellow did not – we presume his orders debarred that – but apparently his orders did not prohibit him from going to those drinking places. Your investigations show that he came ashore at six or thereabouts, went straight to the Fan Tan saloon, where he stayed drinking for half an hour, sitting alone at one of the tables in the place. Leaving there, he went from one to

another, remaining in each about the same period of time. In all, he visited six saloons. At twenty minutes past nine, he was arrested on the Praya, where he was found to be drunk. The fact that he was there indicates that he was not on his way to visit another den, but was returning to his ship. From all this, I gather that, although his instructions were to avoid companions, he was expected to visit drinking saloons. In other words, the person who gave him the letter was to meet him in one or other of those places. The regularity of the period he spent in each shows clearly that he was working to a timetable. In order not to be too conspicuous he had to have a drink or more in each. As it happens, the fact that he remained so steadfastly alone did make him conspicuous, for which we have reason to be grateful, because I doubt if his movements could have been traced otherwise. Obviously his employers did not anticipate the possibility of his getting drunk. Perhaps he hadn't a very strong head, or the fascination of *samsui* was too much for him and he was unable to resist taking more than he could hold. Anyhow that doesn't matter.'

'But,' objected Winstanley, 'the belief that he was met in one of those saloons doesn't help us much.'

'Oh, yes, it does,' disagreed Sir Leonard. 'We have narrowed the search down to one place. He undoubtedly received the letter in the last saloon he visited, otherwise the presumption is he would have gone to another. Had he received it in a previous one there would have been no point in his continuing his pilgrimage.'

'By Jove! I can see now what you've been driving at, sir. The last place he went to was that new dancing and drinking hall, the China Doll.'

'Exactly. That's where he was met and given the letter.'

‘But why did he have to go to so many? Surely his appointment could have been made for one specific place.’

‘There may have been a hundred and one reasons. You must remember we have been very severe on wiping out Japanese espionage in this colony, and the agents here now have found it necessary to be ultra-cautious. The man who eventually met the sailor may be known to your men and, as a police watch is always kept on these drinking dens, he was forced to be rigidly careful.’

Sir Masterson did not seem altogether satisfied with that.

‘Ransome’s Chinese are extraordinarily thorough,’ he remarked, ‘and have the patience of their race almost to an exaggerated degree. I don’t know myself how they did it, but they seem to have traced every movement of the sailor’s. Not once in their report, as you will have read in the transcription from my office, is there the suggestion that he may have met someone who passed something to him. It seems certain that he remained alone always.’

‘That means nothing,’ returned Sir Leonard. ‘It is perfectly easy to transfer an object like a letter from hand to hand unobserved when two persons are in the act of passing each other, or even from table to table – underneath, of course – when contiguous as they are in those places.’

‘Not so easy, when one of the parties as drunk as the Jap must have been by the time he got to the China Doll.’

‘There’s a good deal in that,’ nodded Wallace, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

‘Isn’t it likely,’ hazarded the Chief of Police, ‘that the agent who gave him the letter was an employee? A bartender or a waiter would entirely escape notice, if he passed it to him in the act of serving him.’

‘In that case, the man would be in one saloon only. There wouldn’t have been any reason for the seaman to visit six.’

‘No; that’s true.’

They discussed the matter for some time longer, the Inspector-General leaving with the promise that he would order Ransome to concentrate his men on obtaining a complete list of everyone, as far as possible, who had been on the premises of the China Doll between eight-thirty and nine-fifteen the previous night. Special attention was to be paid to Japanese patrons and, if there had been any, their places of residence were to be immediately subjected to a visitation and intensive search.

‘I’m afraid I haven’t a great deal of hope that anything will come of that,’ remarked Sir Leonard, as the two men shook hands. ‘Still I can think of nothing more promising at the moment. I have a feeling that something very significant has eluded your men, probably because it is too obvious to have been noticed. I haven’t the faintest idea what it may be or how the notion got into my head, but I have been puzzling it out ever since I first read your report. Tell Ransome to set his men investigating everything of which they previously took no notice, because it was part of the scheme of things. You get my meaning?’

Sir Masterson Winstanley did, and departed with his own mind in a state of extreme perplexity. He had had so much to do with Sir Leonard Wallace and seen such evidences of the cleverness of a brain that seldom missed anything, and seemed capable of thinking several moves ahead of that of an ordinary individual, that he felt now the governor, without at the moment knowing what it was, had hit on the one point that would probably mean success in the investigations. It was perhaps only natural that the Inspector-General

of Police should be anxious to fathom the elusive item upon which the governor was placing so much importance. As his rickshaw took him speedily to police headquarters, the uniformed coolies trotting along with rhythmic leg and arm movements, he continually muttered to himself: 'Too obvious to have been noticed! Now what the devil could fit in that was so much in the scheme of things that it might have been overlooked by observant fellows like Ransome's Chinese detectives?'

In the meantime, Sir Leonard had taken to pacing his study again, puffing clouds of smoke from his pipe as he strove to fathom that which was eluding him. For half an hour he tramped to and fro, quite forgetful that he needed rest in view of the fact that there was a garden party to attend later in the afternoon, that he afterwards was to receive the two unofficial Chinese members of the Legislative Council, Sir T'so Lin Tao and Sir Peter Hing Kee in audience, and that he and Lady Wallace were giving a great dinner and ball that night. For the time being his mind was devoted, to the exclusion of all else, to chasing something which he was certain would provide him with a very valuable clue. All at once he stopped dead. His steel-grey eyes gleaming triumphantly, he gave vent to a little chuckle.

'Of course,' he murmured. 'Fancy taking all this time to remember a fact like that.'

He did not remind himself that that which he had recollected, and connected with the present certainty, that Japanese agents were again busy in Hong Kong, had been the merest passing mention of something lacking, at the time, any interest whatever. It is a tribute to that retentive mind of his that an item so small should have been stored away and now

resurrected. He left his study, walking along the corridor to his secretary's office. Carter was engaged in perusing, and signing, a pile of official-looking documents. He looked up as Sir Leonard entered the room; immediately rose to his feet.

'Carter,' commenced the governor, 'do you remember that Yumasaki was said to be rather keen on a Chinese dancing girl?'

The young man's brow wrinkled in thought for a moment or two; then:

'Yes, sir,' he asserted; 'I do vaguely remember something of the sort. Wasn't she called—?'

He paused frowning, as he strove to recollect the name. Sir Leonard watched him with a smile on his face. Presently, as Carter's memory failed to respond, the chief prompted it.

'She was called the "China Doll",' he declared. 'Am I not right?'

Carter whistled softly; his eyes gleamed.

'You are, sir – not a doubt of it. And the last place the Japanese sailor was known to visit last night is called the China Doll!'

'Ah! You have caught the significance. Leave those papers for a while, and set to work to find out all you can about the dancing girl – who she is, what she's doing, and so on; also if there's any connection between that drinking den and her. Go warily, and don't let it be thought the inquiries are coming from Government House. When you have your information, come along to me. I'll probably be dressing for the garden party.'

He turned, and walked out of the room, leaving Carter to start his inquiries at once.