

*Jake Greenberg and two new friends are carrying secrets and the Japanese secret police must stop them.*

## **On the Blue Express to Shanghai**

By Howard Turk

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*On the*  
**BLUE EXPRESS**  
*to* **SHANGHAI**

**HOWARD TURK**



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## Tientsin, China. April, 1921

A tall, slim woman in her mid-twenties stood at the railing of the P and O passenger ship, *Aquitania*. She watched as the crewmen put down the gangway over the oily Hai River. The woman had short light brown hair cut in the latest fashion and elegant clothes that whispered of Paris.

A small band was playing a jaunty tune on the dockside, and one deck below passengers gathered, eager to go ashore after a 26 day voyage from London. On the street beyond the dock, she could see a large black automobile and two men in dark suits.

They are waiting for me, she thought. The great adventure begins. A flutter of nerves was beginning to build in her stomach.

“Miss Wakefield.”

“Thank you, Captain Westcott.” The ship’s master, a large, white-haired man near retirement, was carrying her special suitcase that had been stored in the *Aquitania*’s safe room since London. Inside the suitcase was her camera.

He put the suitcase down with a sigh. “All good, Miss Wakefield. Lock secure and the seal unbroken. But the thing weights a ton. Or, he said with a smile, at least forty pounds. You carrying rocks to China?”

“I’m stronger than I look, Captain. You’ve been very kind. I was concerned about traveling alone. But you made the trip quite comfortable for me.”

He winked at her and whispered, “Can you tell me now? What was a good-looking young lady, with great blue eyes, and a posh accent doing traveling alone to this dump?”

Lucinda Wakefield laughed and touched his arm. “I’ve told you as much as I could.”

“At least you didn’t insult my intelligence with some song-and-dance story. You get marks for that.”

“Thank you, Sir. I like good marks. I told you the contract I signed required complete confidentiality. It was easier, really, and more honest than some made up story. It’s not that much of a thing. I have a bit of a special talent. I do a little job here and go home. Coming out here was wonderful. I’ve seen places I had only dreamed about visiting. Then I go back and get married.”

“Engaged?”

“Yes.” She pulled off her glove and held up her left hand to show him her diamond ring.

“I must be getting old. I never noticed. Well, all the best luck in the world, young lady.” Westcott looked out at the scene on the dock for a moment---at the tide of passengers and porters laden with luggage and trunks moving toward the terminal building. “Those two with the fancy car waiting for you?”

“I think so.”

“If I was a betting man, I’d say they are government men. Regular people aren’t allowed to park there.”

Lucinda smiled. “Could be.”

Westcott nodded. “Look, I don’t know how much you really know about out here. But be very careful. China is a mess. What passes for a government in Peking is hopeless. They hardly have a grip on the city. The countryside is full of warlords and bandits and up north the Japs are looking to bite off more of the country. Even Tientsin isn’t the safest place.”

Lucinda gave Westcott a peck on his cheek. “Thank you again. I’m sure I won’t be in any danger.”

“At least I can carry your special suitcase down to the dock.”

“You are a gentleman and a scholar.”

Westcott smiled. “Just an old China hand, Miss Wakefield.”

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A short, portly, but very stylishly dressed man left the black automobile and approached Lucinda. He was late twenties or early thirties, she guessed.

“Miss Lucinda Wakefield?” He said the words in a tone that suggested he was bored with a job that was clearly beneath him.

“Yes, I’m Lucinda Wakefield.” She put down the heavy suitcase. Lucinda knew the type. She had dealt with them all her life. Moneyed, but a second son, maybe even a third son. An influential father would have slipped him into the church, or the military, or the SIS, the Secret Intelligence Service.

“I’m Richard Montegue,” the portly man said. “Is the camera in there?”

“Yes it is, Mr. Montegue. A Thorton Mark 3, their latest model. I was told in London that I was to be met by Major Williamson.”

“I’m sorry. Major Williamson had other matters to attend to. And London’s cable only said you would be on the *Aquitania*. Not who would meet you. May I see your passport?”

Lucinda opened her purse, and handed the passport to Montegue.

The short man looked at the picture, nodded, and handed the passport back to Lucinda. “My car is over there.”

“Mr. Montegue, I would like to see your passport. I don’t know you. I am certainly not getting in an automobile without some indication that you are with the SIS.”

Montegue glared at her for a second as he took out his diplomatic passport and handed it to her. “Diplomatic service. My cover is assistant passport control officer at the consulate here. Are you satisfied?”

“Thank you, Mr. Montegue. Yes.”

The second man ambled over to them.



“Is Montegue being an officious bastard again?” He stuck out his hand. “Davy Archer. I’m your pilot on this little trip.”

“Very glad to meet you, Mr. Archer.” She smiled. Archer was an antidote to Montegue. He was a rangy, relaxed man, who spoke with a touch of an Australian accent. A cowboy, she thought. “What plane do we have, Mr. Archer?”

“Davy, please. We’re using a deHaviland bomber, a DH 9. The problem was finding something that had the range we needed. It’s a slow bugger, but it’ll get us there and back. We’ve more or less modified it to take your camera. Basically, put a hole in the bottom of the plane. Just waiting for the camera to make final adjustments and to see how the old thing flies with it in place.”

“Let’s get to the car, please,” Montegue said.

Archer picked up Lucinda’s two suitcases and put them in the backseat.

“I’ll be staying at the Bristol Hotel in the British Concession. I had my bags sent there from the ship. London said it’s safe and one of the better hotels.”

Montegue sighed heavily. “I booked you into the Victoria. It’s also in the British Concession. I’ll cancel the Bristol and have your bags sent to the Victoria. It is a much better choice. London doesn’t know about local conditions. The Victoria has a fine restaurant, far better than the Bristol. About safety, the British Concession *is* safe, much better than the French or the Italian, naturally. Certainly better than the Russian or Japanese areas. And don’t go into the Chinese city by yourself.”

With that bit of local briefing done, Montegue turned and entered the backseat of the Austin Touring Car, sitting next to Lucinda's suitcases.

Archer took her arm and walked her around to the passenger seat. He whispered, “The SIS isn’t what it was during the war, Miss. They’re flying on fumes, so to speak.”

“And you, Mr. Archer. What do you do out here?”

“Odd jobs. The RAF sent me here and I stayed on after the war. I keep my mouth shut, do my job, and don’t ask too many questions.”

With Archer behind the wheel, they worked their way through the narrow, crowded streets of Tientsin. Lucinda was fascinated by the crowds, the noise, the color, and the smells of a city where much of life is lived in the open.

“Do you know what is expected of you?” Montegue asked.

“Of course.”

“Frankly, I don’t know why London would send a woman for this job. There is some danger.”

“Mr. Montegue, I am very good at what I do. I was hired by the city of London last year to do an aerial montage of the city.” She was immediately annoyed with herself. SIS London hired her. She didn’t need to justify her being here to this popinjay. “I was briefed in London on the dangers and the importance of the mission.”

“You won’t have a second chance, you know. The Japanese are building an airfield at Dairen for a squadron of fighter planes.”

“I know,” she lied.

“We are sure,” Montegue continued, “they are cheating on the naval treaty even before it is signed. The Japanese are secretly building a new type of fighting ship, an aircraft carrier, a very large one, at Dairen, in Chinese territory. What we need is proof. Your film will be our proof. I hope your nerves are steady, Miss Wakefield.”

“My nerves are fine, Mr. Montegue.” She turned to the passing scene to calm herself. They didn’t mention danger at the War Office in London. Or fighter airplanes. Just a flyover, a warship under construction, she was told. The clearest possible images were needed, and back to Tientsin. A bit of a



lark, Colonel Peters had said. What else didn't they tell me? she wondered. She was, after all, a portrait photographer---well-to-do family shots mostly---with a sideline of aerial photography now and then to clear out the cobwebs. Was she in over her head? The SIS had come to her. Was it her photographic skill or the family name that got her the job? Or maybe SIS London didn't really know what was going on in China.

"Here we are, Miss Wakefield," Davy Archer said, as he pulled up in front of the Victoria Hotel. "Made it through the city traffic once again," he said with a laugh.

"Thank you, gentlemen," she said, smiling at Archer, pulling herself back from her speculations.

"I will call you," Montegue said, "when the aircraft is ready and the weather looks favorable. I suggest you take your meals in the hotel's restaurant. Good solid British food. Safe. The Sincere Department Store is the best for shopping. A branch of the famous Shanghai store. The ladies seem to like it and it's just down the street. On San Ching Road. Can't miss it."

I'm going to strangle that man, she thought, if I don't get away.

"Ah. Something else, Miss Wakefield. Your dress. It will attract attention here."

"Because of the length? Mid calf is the style in London for women my age."

"I'm sure, but things are very much behind the times here. Your dress would probably do at night for a party. Perhaps you could purchase a longer day dress at Sincere."

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Montegue."

Davy Archer came around and opened the car door.

"Thank you again. I'll wait for your call, Mr. Montegue." She stepped out of the car, smiled a goodbye to Archer, and

hurried into the hotel followed by a hotel porter with her suitcases.

The Victoria was almost what she thought it would be, a fusty old hotel with a gloomy lobby decorated with heavy furniture, and potted plants. Queen Victoria could have stayed here. Or the Boxers during their rebellion. But her room was comfortable enough---a four poster bed, wide windows, heavy drapes, and, wonder of wonders, a flush toilet in the bathroom.

“Now,” she said to herself, “all I need to do is wait and not go crazy.”

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A travel-weary Jake Greenberg stepped down from the Shenyang local. He was a tall man, over six feet, in his late twenties, but looked older. He was thick in the shoulders, suggesting a past of manual labor. His dark hair was cut short and his hazel eyes were of a man who had seen too much war.

He put down his suitcase and looked around Tientsin’s central railroad station. Better than most, he thought. And there were signs of civilization. He took a deep breath and smiled. British police, tall Sikhs in yellow turbans and khaki uniforms, patrolled the station along side small dark Indochinese police of the French Concession. One more train to go before he got to Shanghai, Jake thought. He had been slowly making his way south since leaving the civil war in Siberia---weeks of delays, broken down track, failing locomotives, terrible cold, endless snow, bad food, and worse hotels. He was dirty, smelly, and exhausted.

He picked up his suitcase and walked toward the entrance with only a slight limp. His left knee was hurting again, a souvenir of what people were calling the Great War, “the war to end all wars.” Back then he was Sergeant Greenberg of the

48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of the Canadian Army. That, he thought, seemed like a thousand years ago.

He walked out of the station and paused on the top step of the long stairway to the street. The sun was shining and there was an optimistic feeling of Spring in the air. The heavy coat that had seen him through the coldest Siberian winter in fifty years felt like it weighed a ton now. The sign in English and Chinese indicated that he was on Tien Wei Road in the British district. He pulled a neatly folded envelope out of his pocket. Some time ago a fellow traveler, an Englishman, had said that the Victoria Hotel was good. He had marked it down.

Jake went down the steps. He was immediately surrounded by rickshaw men all shouting their price. Not knowing what they were saying, Jake pointed at one, a small thin puller standing at the edge of the mob and said, "You."

The rickshaw man, wearing a light-colored shirt, black pants and rubber sandals, led Jake to his black deluxe. It had rubber tires. Jake knew from experience that it was a good sign. Cobblestone streets and old-fashioned metal wheels were a bad combination.

The little man pointed to himself and said, "Tan."

Jake pointed to his chest, "Jake."

"Where go, Mr. Jake? Tan turned away from Jake and bowed to an old man shuffling down the sidewalk carrying his yellow bird in a birdcage and got a nod in return.

I guess I'm in real China now, Jake thought. "I want the Victoria Hotel." he said slowly.

"Can do." Tan held up seven fingers. "Copper."

Pennies, Jake thought, and gave Tan ten. "Victoria Hotel, savvy?"

"Me savvy."

Jake boarded Tan's rickshaw, pleased that his few words of Pidgin English, the street language of China, had worked. So far, so good, he said to himself.

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At the Victoria, Jake took off his heavy coat and handed it to Tan. "My no wantchee. Coat too heavy."

"This b'long number one," Tan said with a grin and carefully folded up the coat.

Jake walked into the gilded lobby of the Victoria. He took a moment to locate the reception desk in a secluded corner, and strolled over. He noted that the bellman made no effort to take his suitcase. He was not, Jake was sure, the kind of guest the Victoria wanted.

The well-dressed man behind the desk was a blond of medium height. His name, according to the name plate on the desk, was Alex Nordstrom. He eyed Jake through small round glasses with dismay.

"I would like a room with a bath for one or two nights," Jake said.

"Sir," Nordstrom said in a kindly tone, "we have seen many exiles from the fighting in Siberia pass through the city. Very few stay at the Victoria. There are much more modestly priced hotels I can recommend. The room you would want is ten dollars American a night. We don't take Chinese or Russian money. Pounds, francs, or dollars only."

Jake pulled a roll of dollars out of his pocket and peeled off two tens. "Two nights, Mr. Nordstrom. I'll pay for any extras when I check out."

"Ah. Very good. Your name, Sir?"

"Greenberg. Do you have a barbershop and a restaurant?"

“We do. First rate facilities.” Nordstrom paused. “I presume, Mr. Greenberg, that you have come from Siberia. I have heard that the Communists, the Reds, are winning.”

“Not winning, Mr. Nordstrom. Won. The Whites are done. It may take some time, but it is all over.”

“Unfortunate.” Nordstrom brought up the ledger from under the desk. “Would you sign the register and may I see your passport?”

Jake handed him his passport.

“Ah. American. I’ve heard that the American Army is leaving Siberia.”

“That’s right. Going home. We never knew exactly what we were supposed to do there. It was a mess. I was a civilian worker, Mr. Nordstrom, so I wasn’t told much. Just did my job.” Jake wanted no more questions about Siberia. It had been a long bloody retreat east from Omsk to the freezing little village where he and the US Army parted company. As far as he knew, their train was the last one out of Omsk before the Reds took over. Being last was never a good place to be.

“Mr. Greenberg, there is a question I must ask. Are you carrying a weapon? House rules require that we lock up any weapons.”

Jake nodded. He had an Army Colt .45 in a shoulder holster. He took it out, checked the safety, and handed it to Nordstrom.

“It will be returned to you when you check out. Is there anything else?”

“Yes. I’d like my clothes washed and cleaned and I would like you to book a first class sleeper for me on the next Blue Express heading to Shanghai.”

“The clothes are no problem, Sir. And any other train, we can do. Not the Blue, unfortunately. Very crowded. You must book it yourself at the Central Station.”

Jake sighed. It was a game he had played too often.

“May I suggest a stratagem?”

“Of course.”

“Wait until the last minute to go to the ticket office at the station. In my experience, the clerk holds back a few tickets and there are always people who don’t show up. Offer the clerk an incentive. It doesn’t have to be much. Five dollars American is sufficient. That should get you a first class ticket.”

“Thank you, Mr. Nordstrom.”

“You are welcome, Mr. Greenberg. Unfortunately, the next Blue does not go until the day after tomorrow. A chance to look around our city, perhaps? We offer many other services. A massage? Manicure? An automobile and driver to tour the city? We can also suggest night clubs for any taste. If you are looking for companionship, we can provide very high-class, discrete, women. Chinese, Russian, Korean, even English.”

“Thank you again, Mr. Nordstrom. All I want right now is a bath and some sleep.”

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Jake slept a solid twelve hours. When he finally got his bathroom chores done except for shaving, he found his suit cleaned, and his shirts laundered, all hanging on the hallway door knob with the rest in a neat package on the floor. The good life, he thought. No one is stealing your clothes at the Victoria.

He was suddenly starving, but he longed for a shave, the kind he got at his favorite barbershop back home. Shaving in Siberia had been a miserable business, more often than not with ice water and rusty blades. It was that or grow a ratty beard down to your chest with all that implied.

Jake was very late getting to the restaurant for breakfast. Aside from two waiters in gleaming white uniforms passing the time quietly chatting by the kitchen door, the only other person

in the breakfast room was a very good-looking Western woman sitting alone by the window.

For a moment Jake considered going over and introducing himself. Sharing a meal, nothing more than that. Just two travelers far from home. But he took a table well away from the woman. No, he said to himself. He didn't have the puff for a social adventure. He was not an easy-talking man and the scars from his long love affair with an English nurse in Siberia were still too fresh.

He ate slowly, wishing he had a newspaper. He had been out of touch on the slow trip out of Siberia. There had been Chinese and Russian newspapers along the way, but nothing he could read. His Russian was far too limited for that. Maybe it was just as well, he thought with a sigh. There could be no good news out of that place.

Across the room, the woman paid her bill and stood up. She was dressed oddly, he thought. Almost as if she were dressed for riding, but not in this climate. She had leather boots that came up almost to her knees, heavy-looking gray jodhpurs-like slacks tucked into them, a thick black sweater, the kind a fisherman would wear and a bright blue scarf. She picked up a wool and leather jacket from the back of her chair and walked toward Jake.

She was dressed far too warm for riding. Sailing? He hadn't seen a decent map for some time, but Tientsin was well up the Hai River from open water. He smiled at her and nodded, a sort of strangers' greeting.

The woman walked to Jake's table and handed him her newspaper. "I think I got the last *Peking and Tientsin Times*."

"Thank you," Jake said, standing up. "Jake Greenberg is the name. You are?"

"Lucinda Wakefield. Enjoy your day, Mr. Greenberg."

"I'll try. You too."



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The clouds that had brought rain earlier had moved out leaving pot holes filled with water on the unpaved road. After half an hour's drive outside Tientsin, Davy Archer swung the black Napier sedan off the paved road to Pei-t'tang onto a smaller, rougher road that led to a large barn and a grass airstrip. On the barn were the words, Tientsin Flying Club, painted in large white letters.

Lucinda asked, "Is there really a flying club here?"

Montegue shook his head. "All done as cover for this operation. A lot of time and money has been expended so that the Japanese don't catch on." He studied her for a moment, as if wondering whether, as a woman, she fully understood the importance of her role. Then he looked away.

Damn him, Lucinda thought as they walked around to the airstrip side of the barn. At the sight of the biplane, Lucinda sucked in her breath, hoping that Montegue and Archer didn't notice. She tried to put on the air of a professional, like someone looking over a race horse or a prime steer. In fact, all biplanes looked the same to her.

"I'll fly the thing from the rear cockpit," Davy Archer said. "The front seat has more room. We installed the camera in the bottom so you can lean forward over it out of the wind stream. Also, I rigged up a telephone so we can talk. Not sure it'll work, but if it does, we can sing popular songs to each other all the way to Dairen."

"And back," Lucinda added with a smile. The DeHaviland looked awfully small to make it all the way across the Gulf of Po Hai.

"That's the plan, Miss. We've stripped it down, got rid of anything that's not essential, and added some extra fuel tanks. We'll be okeydokey."

“Today we test out the camera,” Montegue said to Lucinda. “Fly around the city. Take some pictures. We have a film developer standing by if you need him.”

“Probably won’t need him, Mr. Montegue. I can tell how good the pictures are by looking at the negatives.”

“If all goes well, you two will leave tomorrow, at dawn. The weather people say the clouds will move off and it will be clear all the way to Dairen.”

Archer spoke to one of the ground crew. “We’re gassed up, Miss,” he said.

“Well, let’s get going,” Lucinda said with a lot more bravado than she felt.

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After breakfast Jake wandered across the Victoria’s lobby, nodded a hello to Nordstrom, the reception clerk, and stepped outside. It would be a steamy day. Cloudy. He didn’t mind. After Siberia it would have to get really hot before it bothered him. He declined the doorman’s offer of a taxi or a rickshaw. But a few coins in the Russian’s large hand produced a rough map of the city and tourist advice in the doorman’s halting English. While Jake missed a lot of the doorman’s intelligence, he got the point that the British Concession was safe, but expensive, while the French and Italian sections were more fun and cheaper.

He wandered down San Ching Road, the main street of the British Concession, toward the Sincere Department Store looming in the distance. Compared to the main streets of other towns in his journey south, San Ching Road sparkled. Its one and two-story shops looked prosperous, painted in bright colors. The food carts along the curb had people lined up. Just the fact that the streets and sidewalks were paved was a big deal. Not all that common in the towns he visited on his journey south

from Siberia. Up there, cold made the roads usable, but when the snow melted, it was mud season. The sidewalk crowd---Chinese, a few whites and even fewer brown faces---seemed happy enough compared to the grim-faced Russians. Whatever they were doing here, Jake thought, it was working.

But he felt naked without his gun. Jake kept touching the place under his left arm where it should be. He had had the .45 with him just about every minute of the last year---from the time he left American Army Headquarters in Vladivostok, throughout the trip to Omsk, and now to Tientsin---until he handed it to Nordstrom at the hotel. Not easy to get used to civilization, he thought.

He went into an attractive tailor shop, Famous Hong's, the sign said. He declined an offer of a suit with a vest made in twenty-four hours, but did buy a good white shirt and a tie selected by the tiny Mrs. Hong. He had heard from travelers that the dining car on the Blue Express was more formal than on other trains.

Farther down the street, Jake stopped on the sidewalk and window-shopped at a leather store, Tai-mei Leather Products, and glanced back the way he had come. Habit. He didn't go into the shop, but walked slowly on toward Sincere, glancing in shop windows now and then. He even went into two stores. A tall, skinny Oriental man wearing a black Western suit, white shirt, and a black tie was keeping pace with him, stopping when he went into shops. He really felt naked now. Who is this guy? Jake wondered, and why is he following me? He wasn't hard to spot. Aside from the undertaker's suit, he wore a black fedora with a small red feather in the hatband.

Was his tail trying to be seen? As casually as he could, Jake searched the opposite side of the street, looking for the classic two or three person tailing team. No one, man or woman,

seemed interested in him. They were either very good or the guy following him was an amateur.

Jake stepped into the lobby of the Sincere. A modestly dressed young Chinese woman, one of a number of young hostesses, came forward and asked, in very good British English, if she could assist him.

“I could use some help, Young Lady. The Men’s Clothes department.”

“I will be glad to show you,” the young lady said. “My name is Mary. The Men’s Department is on the second floor. We must ride up the escalator.”

Jake followed the girl up the escalator, keeping an eye out for his tail. On the second floor, as they walked past the Camera Department, she said, “We have a very good selection of men’s suits and...”

“Stop, Mary,” Jake said. “That man just getting off the escalator. Is he Chinese?”

She looked at Jake, her eyes widened with interest. “No. Japanese,” she said. “I have seen him several times. Are you in trouble, Sir?”

“I don’t think so, but the man has been following me today.”

“He may be some kind of policeman.”

“Oh. What else do you know about him?”

“I’m afraid that is all I know. I heard him speak Japanese to another man once and one of the girls said that he spoke harshly to a Chinese man, something a policeman would do.”

“Thank you, Mary. Let’s go buy some clothes.”

All right, Jake said to himself. That’s something. A Japanese, a sort of policeman perhaps. But what is he doing following me around the British part of town? A Japanese working for the British? Not likely. The Brits use Indians, Sikhs mainly, for their police. Not going to worry about it, he thought. I’ll be gone in a day or two.

## TWO

Colonel Tokuzo Komai of the Imperial Japanese Army stood at the window of his office and looked out at the Hai River and beyond at the French section of Tientsin. He was a trim gray haired man in his sixties who had worked his way up the ranks to colonel in charge of the military barracks in the Japanese Concession.

“Not happy, my friend?” Commander Nakamura, chief of the naval detachment, asked.

Komai sighed. “Not at all. I asked you here to be a witness. Let me explain. I’m from a poor family. Farmers. No influence at all. But I am expecting a subordinate, a Captain Saito, who is from a rich family, a very rich family indeed. He has an uncle who is an important man on the General Staff. He is brash and quick-tempered, and considered to be a rising star in the secret police, the *Kempei Tai*. I would like you to just listen in. Would you?”

“Of course. I...” Nakamura was interrupted by a knock on the door. Komai’s secretary, a small, round Japanese woman near forty, stepped into the room and closed the door.

The Captain is here,” she said.

“Have him wait.”

The woman smiled, bowed with a nod of her head, and slipped out the door. Komai turned to his friend. “That is all the control I have. Make him wait a few minutes. The organization chart means nothing.”

“The *Kempei Tai* has always been a special service. Nothing new there,” said Nakamura. “The real question is: Is he Black Dragon Society? Those people will drive us into a war we can’t win.”

“I don’t know. I do know that his uncle, the general, is Black Dragon.” Komei sighed again. “I have to assume that this arrogant little prick is too.”

Komai rested his head against the back of his leather chair and closed his eyes. “Pardon me, I have to relax for a moment or I’ll kill him.”

“Now that would be interesting,” Nakamura said with a grin. “I think real military men would never convict you. We’ve all had that type under us.”

After ten minutes, Komai said, “Time to let him in, my friend.” He reached across his desk and pushed the toggle switch to change the light over his door from red to green.

Captain Saito marched into the office, eyes straight ahead, his face a stiff mask. He stopped at the prescribed distance from Komei’s desk, snapped his heels together, and saluted. “Here as requested, Sir.”

“Thank you, Captain. This is Commander Nakamura. I thought the Navy could benefit from your briefing.”

Hajne Saito was a stiff-backed little man, short and wide, and not at all handsome. If it was not for his perfectly tailored uniform, he would be considered dumpy. But he was smart and very ambitious, with a rich man’s sense of entitlement and a small man’s sense of inferiority.

“Please begin, Captain,” Komei said, not asking Saito to sit. Saito snapped into parade rest from attention.

“Sir, I am embarrassed to say we really are not clear on what the British are up to. I am sure in the next few days it will all be made evident. I have all my intelligence staff working to uncover their plans. We know this: They are planning some operation against us. My agents have uncovered that. But they are clever, those British. Their secret service is good. My agents say they have been waiting for something or someone.

That something may have occurred. A man who claims to have come from Siberia arrived by train yesterday.”

“What name does this man use, Captain?” Colonel Komei asked. “Did he have papers?”

“His name is Greenberg and his papers were correct. But to the British that’s nothing. I had a man following him. So far he is playing the tourist. He plans, he says, to take the Blue Express train to Shanghai.

Another arrival. A woman came on the P and O liner, the *Aquitania*, about the same time as Greenberg. Both are staying at the Victoria Hotel. We find that interesting. I doubt that she is important. The woman maybe one of those odd, rich English women who wander around the world on their own, playing at various things. But she might also be a low-level courier. They spoke briefly this morning in the hotel’s breakfast room and she passed him a newspaper.

“A friendly gesture” Commander Nakamura asked, “or something ominous?”

“All foreigners are our enemies, Sir. I believe it was not a simple action. Probably there was some message in the newspaper or money or a gun. That’s what they do. We will keep this Greenberg under surveillance until we understand what their game is.” Captain Saito paused. “That is all for now, Sir.”

“Thank you, Captain. I would like an update. Say, this time tomorrow.”

“Yes, Sir.” He went back to attention, snapped a salute, did an about face, and marched out the door.

“Well,” Colonel Komei said to his friend, “what do you think?”

“Maybe he’s right, but it is too early to tell. I would not think he’s the best man for intelligence work,” Commander Nakamura said. “Far too rigid in his thinking. The woman



could be the important one and the man not so much. Or, they could be simple travelers. That is the problem with the *Kempei Tai*. Can you get rid of him or move him?"

Komei smiled sadly and shook his head. "Only if he wants to go. And why should he? He has his own command and a budget that comes from *Kempei Tai* headquarters in Tokyo. I wouldn't move if I were Saito. He wants glory and promotions, probably looking to find himself a war, or stir one up."

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The first glow of light was showing over the Gulf of Po Hai when Davy Archer swung the Napier sedan onto the dirt road leading to the airstrip.

As Archer pulled up behind the barn they used as a hanger, Richard Montegue covered a yawn as he turned to Lucinda. "All calm and ready, Miss Wakefield?"

Lucinda detected a bit of a probe in his voice. "All set if Davy is. Shame you can't come along, Mr. Montegue," she said in her best upper-class drawl. "It will be an interesting day. Front line sort of thing, you know." In fact, she was so scared her hands shook and her stomach was way past butterflies, but she was determined not to give Montegue the pleasure of knowing it.

"Davy," she said, "why don't you check the gas. I'll see that the camera and film are all right."

"No need," Montegue said. "I ordered that done last night."

"Did *you* do it?" Lucinda asked.

"Of course not. We have people for that."

"I'll do it," she said.

Archer smiled at Lucinda, shook his head, and went off to do as she asked.

Half an hour later one of the ground crew, who was warming up the DeHaviland, took Archer aside. "Everything

checks out, even the intercom.” Archer passed the word to Lucinda.

“You sounded surprised,” Lucinda said. “Or are you trying to scare me?”

“Believe me. I won’t have to manufacture problems. Is the camera okay?”

Lucinda nodded. “Film too.”

“We have a really long over-water flight ahead.” He handed her a paper bag and a bottle of water. “The sandwich is cheese and pickle. Go easy on the water. As I said, we have a long flight.” He pointed to an outhouse by the barn. “I suggest a last minute stop.”

“Thank you. Back in a minute.”

Archer was walking around the DeHaviland with a clipboard doing a last minute check when she got back.

“Old pilots and bold pilots, Miss Wakefield, but damned few old bold pilots.”

“I’ve heard that before, Davy. I’m all for being careful.”

“Just so you’re prepared, we’re taking off heavy. Extra gas and a fairly rough runway. It won’t be a pretty takeoff.” Archer shook Lucinda’s hand. “Here’s to good luck, Miss. Tally-ho.”

Archer changed places with the ground crew man in the rear cockpit who had just finished checking out the instrument panel. Lucinda put on her cold weather gear and slipped into the front cockpit.

Archer revved up the engine. Lucinda glanced over at Montegue and the ground crew standing solemnly by the barn, as the DeHaviland waddled onto the grass strip. Lucinda was terrified. This was not like flying in England. She squeezed her mouth tight shut. At the head of the airstrip, Archer locked the brakes and pushed the throttle to maximum, the DeHaviland’s engine roared. The airplane shook violently.

My God, she said to herself as she tightened her seat-belt. Finally Archer released the brakes. The DH9 shot ahead, bumping over the rough ground like some crazed animal. Their speed increased as did the bouncing and heaving. The plane left the ground for a moment, then settled back. The trees at the end of the airstrip were growing larger and larger. Then, at what seemed to Lucinda to be the last second, the DeHaviland staggered into the air.

The rice fields below slowly fell away and Lucinda, to her amazement, suddenly relaxed. The sun was showing on the edge of the horizon, the sky was clear, and they were on their way.

“How was that?” Archer’s voice sounded tinny coming through her earphones.

She flipped a switch on a metal box attached to the right side of her cockpit. “Scary. Over.” Lucinda pushed the switch back to receive.

“I decided not to sing to you,” Archer said. “Figured it would be too much. Just sit back and hope the weather people got it right. Over.”

“Will do. And your singing just might be too much. Over.”

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At the hour and a half mark, Lucinda was struggling to stay awake. Her eyes were growing heavy and she yearned for a cup of coffee. All she could see was water as they flew over the Gulf of Po Hai. Inside the cockpit the only instruments she cared about were the altimeter, the compass, and the fuel gauge. She realized she should have had Archer explain what the other dials meant. A little late for that.

“Hello up there,” Archer’s voice startled her. “We should see land in fifteen minutes or so. The wind is from the east. Pushed us a little off course, I think. Look to the right. About

two-o'clock. We have some clouds building up around where we're heading. Thought you might want to know. Over."

The need for sleep vanished as Lucinda studied the billowing high cumulus clouds. If that buildup is over the shipyard, they could perhaps stay in the clouds until the last minute, she thought. But that would be really dangerous. Maybe too dangerous. Many pilots, even experienced ones, became disoriented in clouds and crashed. That was why so many mail pilots fly low and follow railroad tracks. She remembered her one close call: She was doing a night shoot. A full moon over a lake. The moon was perfectly reflected in the lake, and for a moment, she and the pilot thought that the reflection was up and the moon was down. They were into a spin before they realized their mistake and it was a terrifying minute or two before the pilot could bring them out of it. She remembered taking her hands away from the stick and the pilot pushing it full forward, then he jammed the left rudder pedal going down to the floor boards before he regained control. When she had bad dreams, they were about that flight.

"I have the camera set for five thousand feet. Are we going higher or lower? Over."

"I don't know yet. It depends on the weather and what they have on the ground. If they have anti-aircraft guns, we maybe have to go higher. The plan was always to make one pass, turn, do another pass, then get out of there. This is not the fastest plane in the world. Let's wait until we get closer. Keep an eye out. Over."

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Ten minutes later Lucinda pushed the switch on her radio. "I can see land," she said into her speaker. "It's low and there are clouds, but I'm pretty sure it's land. Over."

“Your eyes must be better than mine. Get a better look. I’ll kick the right rudder a bit. The plane will do a flat slide to the right. Look left. Over.”

She held up her hand against the sun and strained to see. “It’s land,” Lucinda said. “But no Dairen. Over.”

“The wind must have been stronger than I figured. When we get closer to land, we’ll turn to the right, east, and follow the coast until we hit Dairen. Don’t worry, they haven’t moved it. Over.”

“That was helpful. Over.”

It was fifteen minutes before a city came into view. Too small to be Dairen and no shipyard. Lucinda had kept glancing at her map and the fuel gauge, willing it to not sink so fast. Suddenly they were flying through filmy, low scattered clouds. Lucinda looked up at the thick cumulus above them, hoping that the heavy clouds were not going to come lower.

She was watching the clouds, more concerned about getting a clear shot than looking ahead.

“There it is,” Archer almost shouted through her earphones. “The city. Dairen. We’re going down to four thousand feet. Get ready. Over.”

“I can’t see the shipyard. Oh wait. There it is. My God,” Lucinda sucked in her breath. “I can’t believe that ship is so big. It’s like a long city.” She took a deep breath to calm herself. “We need to go higher. Four thousand is probably too low to get a picture of the whole ship. Over.”

“Okay, but we might be going through some light scud much higher. How about forty-five hundred? Over.”

“Try it.” Lucinda felt the aircraft lift higher. She unhooked her seat belt and wiggled forward to hunch over her camera. “Hold it. Hold it.” She checked her camera. “That should just do it.” Lucinda was adjusting the focus when the DeHaviland suddenly lurched to the right. “What? Over.”

“Anti-aircraft shells. Near miss. I’ll fly straight and level along the shipyard. Don’t look. Get your pictures and we’ll get out of here. Starting pass one.”

Lucinda snapped shot after shot, adjusting the angle and the focus, as the airplane rocked to the pressure waves of near misses.

“They are good,” Archer said. “Turning back now. Starting pass number two.” Archer said.

Lucinda felt the aircraft lean to the left in a long slow turn. The shells were exploding closer now. “They’re getting the range.”

Archer was holding the DeHaviland on course when a shell blew up just off the wingtip. The airplane violently rolled to the right in the blast before Archer got it under control. Lucinda was thrown against the side of her cockpit. Shrapnel had ripped through plane’s fabric. A chunk of Lucinda’s seat was torn away, but luckily she had been hunched forward over her camera.

“You okay?” Archer shouted. “Over.”

“Yes. You? Over.”

“Got nicked at little. But okay. We’ll make it.”

Lucinda was so concentrated on working her camera to get enough angles for three dimensional viewing that she was only vaguely aware that the noise of exploding bursts of anti-aircraft shells around them had slowed.

“Oh shit,” Archer said through her earphones. “Oh, pardon me, Miss. They already have fighter planes and an airfield. We heard that they were building a field, but it was not supposed to be finished. How much more time you need? Over.”

Lucinda reached back and pushed the radio switch. “Just a few minutes more. I need a few more shots. Over.”

“Make it fast. Over.”

The DH9 lurched to the left as a shell burst close enough to poke shrapnel through the fabric in the tail.

Lucinda swore to herself as she frantically clicked and moved film forward.

“Can’t wait. We got to get outta here.”

Lucinda had to hang on as the DH9 rolled around to the left and upwards at full power toward the thick clouds. She closed the camera and fought her way into her damaged seat and strapped herself in. Her heart was beating as it never had before. She willed the DeHaviland to go faster. “Come on airplane,” she said to herself, “get in those clouds.”

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*Kempei Tai* First Lieutenant Enji Tanaka stared at the DeHaviland, his mouth hanging open in amazement. For several seconds he was frozen in place. This was his first assignment out of military school and he didn’t know what to do without orders. Then he came to life. He turned and ran to the security building where he pulled the switch that activated the deafening woop-woop-woop alarm. In a few minutes soldiers were streaming out of their barracks---some to guard the gates of the shipyard, others to man anti-aircraft guns, still others to drive armored cars along the fence line.

His colonel came running out of the security building his face an angry red.

Before he could speak, Tanaka shouted, “Plan A, Colonel.” He pointed at the biplane.

The colonel stopped short, breathing hard, but not taking his eyes off the DeHaviland as it flew over the shipyard. He started to speak, but at that moment the anti-aircraft artillery began firing at the DeHaviland.

The colonel watched the DeHaviland for a moment more. “No bombs?” he shouted.



“No, sir.”

“That is bad, Lieutenant. Very bad.”

Tanaka was confused. What, he wondered, could be worse than bombing the great ship under construction? But he didn't dare ask.

“Telephone the airfield. Tell them to shoot that thing down. Then meet me at the Telegraph Office.”

Lieutenant Tanaka was so shaken, he forgot to salute before he ran off.

At the Telegraph Office, Tanaka found the Colonel pacing the floor dictating a message to *Kempei Tai* headquarters, Tientsin. “...can only conclude that the biplane's mission was to photograph our aircraft carrier under construction. Highest priority that those photos be destroyed. Repeat. Highest priority.” The colonel paused for a moment, then told the operator to sign his name to the message.

As if noticing Tanaka for the first time, the colonel turned to him and said, “Walk with me.”

Outside the Telegraph Office, the colonel said, “Do you know what's going on today?”

“No, Sir.”

The Colonel nodded to himself. “We are building the world's largest ship, a new kind of warship, and we are doing it in secret. That is why we are building it in Dairen, not in Japan. To keep it secret from the Western powers. There is a treaty being negotiated on the size and number of warships that is unfair to Japan. This ship breaks that treaty. This will cause grave problems for our government. That is why, Tanaka, photographs are worse than bombs.”

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In the clouds everything went dark and cold and wet.

“Can you see anything?” Lucinda asked. “I can’t. It’s like the worst London pea soup fog. Over.”

“The good thing is the Japs can’t see us. If they don’t run into us, we’ll be good soon. The Jap pursuit planes are fast as hell, but don’t have the range. Over.”

The damp cold seemed to cut through Lucinda’s flying jacket. She buttoned the top button and pulled on her gloves. It didn’t help. Condensation was blown up her windscreen, making her feel even colder. Worse, she could not see down or even much beyond the wingtips. She fought the fear growing in her chest of going into a spin. Which way was up? She needed something to do, to get her mind occupied.

“How do you do it?” she said into her microphone. “Fly without being able to see? Over.”

“Flying in the sunshine is easy, Miss. Fog, night, clouds are hard. A lot of pilots can’t or won’t do it. It’s called instrument flying. See that gauge on the dashboard with the ball in the middle? That’s called the turn and bank indicator. You use that with the altimeter and the compass.” Archer grunted out a hard laugh. “Then you hope for the best. Over.”

“I could do without the last part. How are we doing on gas? Over.”

“We should be good if we don’t get blown off course too much. Over.”

For the next few minutes Lucinda occupied herself watching the gauges and the fuel level. Then, suddenly, she was exhausted and hungry. But she couldn’t find the sandwich or the bottle of water. The maneuver to get into the clouds probably sent them into some far corner, she thought. The cold was making her shake. Wrapping her arms around herself, she sat back in her seat and willed herself to be strong. We have to come out of these clouds soon, she thought.

Fifty minutes from Dairen, Lucinda finally thought she could see light ahead. Then they were into thinning clouds, then suddenly they broke into the sunshine. She felt as if she were re-born: sun on her face, warmth, and blue sky. *Ah, life*, she thought.

“How soon do you think till we land? Over.”

“Hope it’s soon,” Archer said. “I think we have an electrical problem. I’ve been smelling something. We might have to put down quick. Do you have a gun, by any chance? Over.”

“No. Why? Over.”

“Might be no trouble, but you can’t tell. Could be bandits or warlord country or it could be fine. Here’s what we do. Same as before. Hit land and follow the coast west. Full power. Over.”

Fifteen minutes later. Lucinda shouted into her microphone. “I see land. Bless it. Over.”

“That’s good. I’m getting a little smoke back here out of the radio box.”

Oh Lord, she thought. How bad? Lucinda unbuckled her seat-belt and half stood, fighting against the wind. She twisted around to look at the rear cockpit. Archer was sitting at an angle to the left, but she couldn’t see any smoke. Archer motioned for her to sit and she did. At least we will be over land soon, Lucinda said to herself.

“Don’t use the radio anymore. Keep an eye out for Tientsin. When you see it, raise your hand. Over and out.”

Individual houses and little fishing villages along the coast came into view as Archer eased the DeHaviland lower. Only a few minutes later she saw the fringe of a large city. Tientsin. She was sure. Yes. There was the river. Lucinda raised her hand. At the same time Archer pulled the aircraft into a sharp

banking turn. To Lucinda that meant he knew where he was and they were headed home. Yay! she shouted silently.

A few minutes later she could see the airstrip and the barn. They flew past the barn to check the direction of the wind at the windsock, then Archer turned on the downwind leg. Lucinda knew this from her London flights. At five hundred feet they flew past the barn, turned left, then left again onto final approach. They hit the runway hard and bounced back into the air. Then the truly wonderful feeling of tires touching the earth for good.

To Lucinda's surprise Archer didn't turn and taxi back to the barn. He just cut the power and the aircraft sat at the end of the strip. Lucinda stood up and turned to Archer as Montegue and the ground crew ran to the DeHaviland. Archer was slumped forward.

"Archer's hurt," Lucinda yelled.

"I'm alright," Archer said raising his head. "Just a little nick. Shrapnel. Plugged it with my scarf."

Lucinda watched as a burly ground crew man stood on the wing root and helped Archer out of the rear cockpit and onto the ground.

"I can walk," Archer said, pushing away the ground crew man.

"There's blood all over your jacket," Montegue said. "Bring the film, Miss Wakefield. We need to get him patched up."

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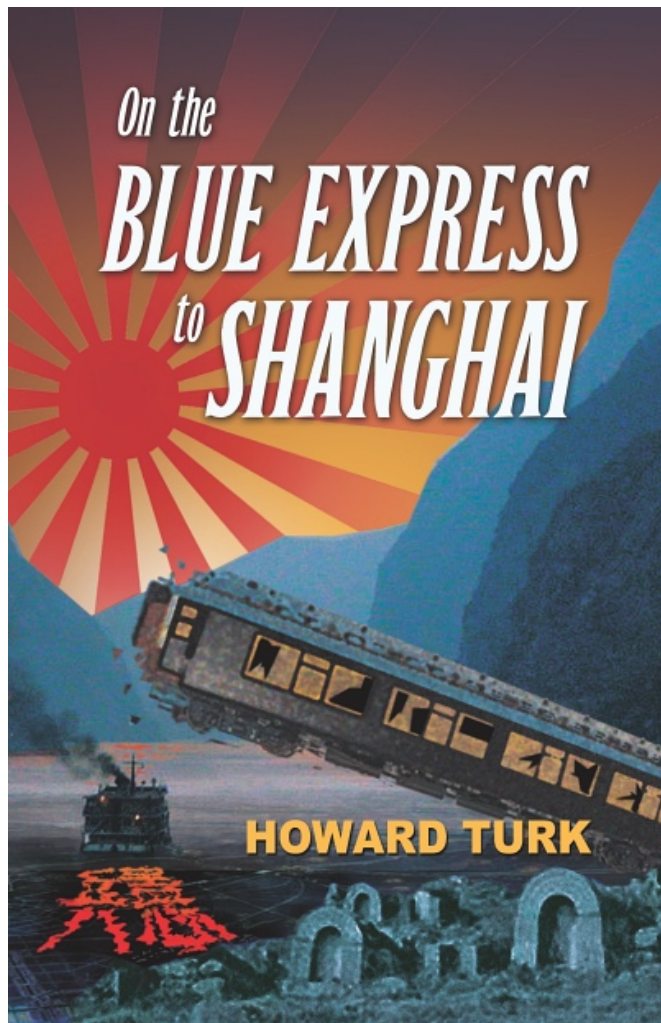
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