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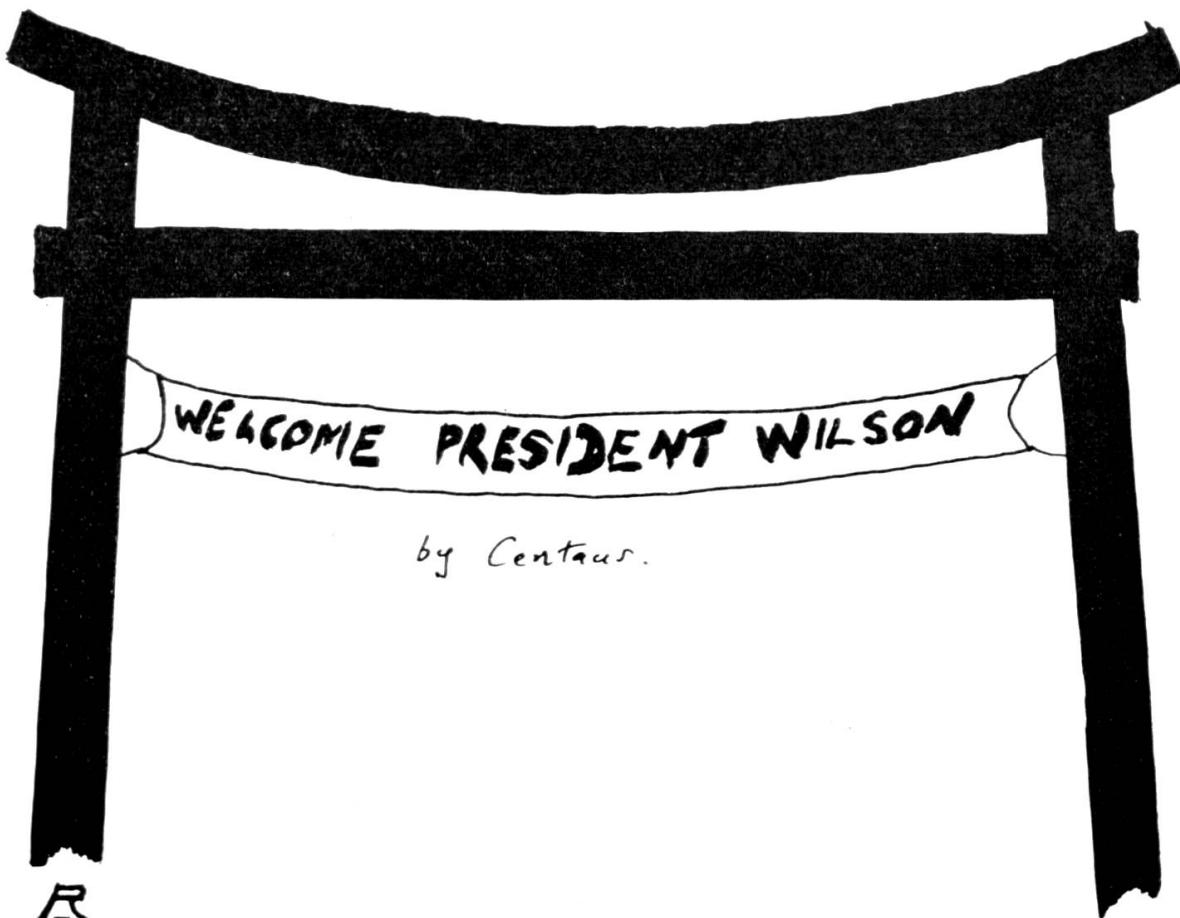
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How long is it since I came to Japan this time? Three weeks—or is it three hours, or even three minutes? Our time together should not be measured in ordinary mathematical units but rather in heartbeats, for the heart is after all the most accurate recorder of such time. When I am with you it beats faster and time flies; when we are parted time drags as it slows down again, and when it misses a beat altogether as it did this morning I hang over an abyss in which time has no meaning at all. But the calendar says three weeks, Tadashi, three wonderful weeks—the time together we had always dreamed of having but had never dared hope for. It's three years now since I joined this ship and started calling here regularly, and after the bad luck that had dogged my affairs of the heart until then it was nothing short of a miracle that I met you on only my third visit here.

What a long time ago that seems now, yet I remember it as if it were only last night. I can still never understand your working at that gay bar, though, even for as short a time as you did: you don't strip too well, you know, and not even your most devoted admirer would give you much of a rating for sexual efficiency. But never mind the gay bar now; it served to bring us together and I never go in these days except in the nature of a pilgrimage to the spot where our meeting took place. I spend my evenings now in the 'legitimate' bar you went to, and feel so proud to see your expert hands mixing the drinks, raising the long spoon to your lips for a taste, those same lips which an hour later are mine to taste to the full.

Others see only Tadashi the barman, but I see Tadashi my companion. Tadashi my friend, to whom I could turn for any form of assistance that did not require

money to render; and Tadashi my lover, whose satiny little body fills my arms with rapture and my nights with enchantment. Do they know? It's hardly likely, for you no more look gay than I do. Would they care? It's hardly likely, in this country where there are rigid codes of behaviour concerning almost everything but sex, and yet as I sit at the bar I am conscious that we two are sharing a secret that is hidden from them, and feel rather smug.

People say that Japanese boys never form such alliances for the sake of romance and that it's only ever to help eke out their low wages. But we know better, don't we? You never ask me for money, but it's my pleasure to spend it on you, and there are always New Year and Midsummer when I can send you a few pounds to help you along without running the risk of insulting you. Over a period I suppose it costs me more than taking out boys from the gay bar. They say one should not become emotionally entangled with bar people, male or female, as it will only end in heartbreak or trouble; rather pick up with somebody new every trip and seek security in numbers. All I can say to that is to repeat that we know better—and how much and how much they miss!

I myself had no intention of becoming emotionally involved. You were new, you were shy, you spoke only a few words of English and didn't reckon to go out with foreigners, and if I hadn't arrived on a night when you were the only disengaged boy I very much doubt whether I should ever have got to know you at all. And what a night that was! You were just as clumsy in bed as you were awkward in the bar (to be honest, you haven't improved much), but under the gaucherie I discovered a vein of sweetness that made me forget the amatorial skills of the other boys and your shortcomings in that direction and remember only how much I wanted to see you again. I was so dismayed when I returned next trip and found you had left, that out of charity the barman told me where you were working. I found your bar and stayed until it closed, after which you suggested I spend the few nights not in a hotel but in your room, and we have gone on from there.

It did not go very deep at first; in fact I guarded against it. How could a boy of twenty-two reciprocate the feelings of a man of thirty-five? Recalling my own feelings at that age, when any man over about twenty-five seemed positively middle-aged, I considered it well-nigh impossible, but in the face of your transports of joy on my arrival and your near-despair at my departure, my misgivings were at first shaken and finally destroyed altogether. You say so often how lonely you are between my visits, how in the tick-tock of the alarm-clock I gave you my voice seems to speak to you and how whenever you look in the mirror my face appears in imagination beside your own. Sentimental little Tadashi! But I was touched to note that you had hung up the small pictorial calendar I sent you, a little bit of England in faraway Japan, and it was you who suggested the rings—remember the day we picked out the onyx together and I had it cut in halves and set in similar rings as a symbol? It eases my loneliness to know that no matter when I look at my ring you are wearing its identical twin, golden and durable, on your finger.

«Do you love me?» How often is the question asked lightly, and answered lightly! And how often do I ask you the same question, as earnestly as a prayer, and then we kiss again, and you snuggle closer... There were times I used to wonder whether your heart were in it or you were only obliging me, if your sensitive nature were in any way revolted by the mechanics of homosexual love-making, or even if you were not really gay at all, perhaps, but you gave me your

assurance so many times that it was not so that I believe you. I want to believe you—I must believe you. For I love you, Tadashi, I love you with all my being, in the warmth of my blood when I am here and in the aching of my lonely heart when I am away from you.

I suppose our relationship as we knew it was doomed from the start in that Japanese Custom dictates that all males should wed (being paired off by match-makers like a couple of canaries if necessary) and that I could hardly expect to stay in this ship on this run for the rest of my life, but what kind of a man is it who looks before he leaps when love comes into it? And I didn't even leap, it happened without my realising it was happening, and now the end has come I am caught completely off my guard. Is it indeed the end? My senses are in such a whirl I cannot for the life of me think of a way out just now.

Confused pictures dance through my brain in the same manner as they are supposed to appear to a drowning man, haunting and taunting rather than giving comfort in recollection. Our first meeting and first night together, outings to shops, cafes and entertainments, that wonderful week-end when we took in the Gion Festival at Kyoto and the Girls' Theatre at Takarazuka, the time we stayed at the mountain resort and the only room we could get was the Honeymoon Suite and the maid leered at us when she took us into it—she knew! Then this present visit, which commenced as an ordinary call, then just as we were leaving an explosion in the ship which has necessitated our staying here for survey—three weeks already and repairs not even commenced. Three weeks of bliss during which our hearts have grown closer and closer together, our delight flawed only by the lurking realisation that this could not go on forever and my ceaseless enquiries yielding no leads towards my either getting employment in Japan or being able to take you home with me.

And now to-day! I suppose we knew the blow must fall some time, but we were quite unprepared for the time and manner of its falling. Our neighbour bursting in at six with a patter of excited Japanese which conveyed the dread news that your sister was terribly ill away down in Southern Japan and you must leave immediately if you wanted to see her alive. How passionately you kissed and clung to me! Perhaps you sensed in some way that this was to be 'good-bye' and not just a mere 'au revoir', although your return journey would take only two or three days. I could make no move to restrain you as family ties are sacred in Japan and I loved you too much to make parting only more difficult. I gave you money for the fare and left you at the station on my way to the ship. Here, as if I had not already had enough for one day, I was greeted with the news that in view of the results of the survey the owners have decided to sell the ship here for scrap and abandon this run altogether, and officers and crew are to be ready to leave for home to-morrow afternoon! I have wandered numbly around all day, packing up what I want to take home and throwing out three years' accumulation of rubbish (thank goodness my paper-work is always up to date). Perhaps it is better to part like this, even with so much left unsaid. In a sense it's like dying—although it is inevitable we are never ready for it, and if we had a lifetime to spare we should still never get everything said. But how to tell you all this? I have learned what Japanese I know because I still can't understand a good deal of your funny English, but how can I do justice to my feelings in a letter? I did give you my promise that I would stay in the ship in case you were able to telephone me, but I shall have to go home to collect my things. Perhaps a last lie-down in the quiet of your room—our room—will inspire me

to the impossible task of setting down what I feel, in English you will understand . . .

Kenneth Hamilton shook himself out of his reverie. His face felt hot and creased where it had been buried in his elbow as he sprawled over his desk in the purser's office and there was a little wet patch in the blue serge where an unbidden tear had soaked it. Apart from the distant roar of riveting from the dockyard the ship was quiet; apparently everyone else had already gone ashore for a last visit to the shops, a farewell evening in their favourite bars or a final night in bed with their mistresses, or all three. He turned out of the ship's typewriter a sheet of paper with «*My dearest Tadashi*» on it, crumpled it up and tossed it into the basket, put the cover on the typewriter and went out to shower and to change. He was about to step ashore when he remembered some money drawn for wages advances but not yet paid out; returning to the office he took it from the safe and counted it, made an entry in the book and signed it, turned out the light and locked the office. Four tens and a five, forty-five thousand yen. Plus five he had with him, fifty pounds would make a worthy parting gift for Tadashi! In the circumstances, better to leave the money itself rather than buy something he possibly would not want.

He had a few tram-tickets left, so waved away a taxi at the dockyard gate and walked to the main road, savouring for the last time the little suburban shops as he passed. The tram sped on, past the railway station and the market, along the bund, then inland past the mighty Daimaru department store at the end of the shopping street, which was spanned by a large banner reading WELCOME R. M. S. ORSOVA. How Japanese! «Hail, fellow, well met (come ashore and spend up)!» You've got to hand it to them—while they may not be terribly sincere, they have the knack of making you feel welcome and important and you always fall for it, even though you know at the back of your mind that they're only after your money . . . hey, the watch! His musings were cut short by the remembrance that his watch was ashore being repaired; sprinting out of his seat and thrusting his ticket into the hand of the motorman he sprang to the ground as the door slammed to after him.

The shopping street was gay with plastic cherry-blossoms, adding a touch of Spring to the afternoon as they danced in the breeze which was also stirring the little Japanese and British flags that sprouted in pairs from the shop verandas. The sonorous roar of her syren warned that the *Orsova* must shortly be getting under way; it was a pity they could not travel home in her since go they must.

«*Harro, Ken-san!*» Hamilton winced at the sound of the voice he least wanted to hear at that stage. It belonged to Minoru, a bar-boy with whom he had consorted before taking up with Tadashi. He was without doubt the sexiest person he had ever met in his life—a sexual athlete, a sexual gymnast, a sexual virtuoso—for stamina, for variety of positions, for sheer technique and anatomical knowledge, Minoru had no peer. Sensual as a cat, he enjoyed physical commerce with a frank and lusty abandon that shocked the conservative Hamilton, besides leaving him like a limp rag next morning; between Minoru's drive and Tadashi's almost sacramental approach there could have been no greater contrast. Even so, Minoru was very good company, intelligent, perceptive, witty, and he had not broken with him entirely out of dislike—at first more because he could not stand the pace and latterly because he was in love with Tadashi. In spite of this, Minoru's animal magnetism still attracted him strongly

and he had often returned compulsively to the old haunt just to say «hallo». They would have a couple of drinks and exchange pleasantries, Minoru would make lewd comments on the marital relations between Ken and Tadashi which sickened him less by their ribaldry than by their penetrating shrewdness, then would send him away with a sardonic laugh and a searing good-night kiss which left him shaken and aflame, physically aching for Tadashi's embrace wherein he could slake his passion and cleanse away Minoru's tarnish, and vowing he would never enter the bar or see him again. Without Tadashi's being there to take away the wicked taste afterwards, even to meet him now in the street like this was somehow to desecrate a precious memory.

«Harro, Ken-san!» the voice persisted as its owner fell into step with him. «You no speaking Minoru? What for you rooking so sad? To-day you no see Tadashi?» «Hallo, Minoru,» Hamilton said without enthusiasm. «No, not seeing him to-day.» «Maybe he miss you, eh, why you no go to he house, give him big supp-rise?» «Well, if you must know, I am going home to-morrow and will probably never come back—finish, you understand? And to-day, of all days, Tadashi's sister has taken ill and he's had to go down to see her. So as well as leaving to-morrow I must go without even being able to say good-bye to him. And you ask me why I look sad!» Minoru appeared vastly interested. «Ah, so! You buy now present for Tadashi, souvenir for Tadashi, yes?» «He has plenty of souvenirs. I shall leave him some money and write him a letter; I'm just collecting my watch from this shop.» He turned into the watchmaker's. Minoru followed. «To-night you rast night in Japan,» he said as the old man turned away to his workbench where the watch was not quite ready. «Night time you come bar? Tadashi no here, I think maybe you roneree!» His hand stole deftly out, fondling secretly, intimately. Hamilton's throat went dry and he shuddered slightly. He pushed the hand away roughly. «No, I am *not* coming to the bar. For one thing I promised Tadashi I'd stay aboard while he was away, and for another thing I don't need anything any of you lot can give me on my last night here!» Minoru laughed, unabashed. «Rong time before you good friend for Minoru. But I no good for you. Too much *hotta-pants*, that you say!» «I certainly did, and still do—you live both by sex and for it: you're nothing but a penis that's grown a body to carry it around!» «Ha, ha, that very funny I think! I say that in bar. To-night prenty Meriken boy from President ship. Some time two Meriken boy come with Minoru to three person private bath, have good time in water. Prenty arm, prenty reg, pren—» «Oh, shut up!» cried Hamilton, revolted, as the watchmaker turned towards them. «I go now have dinner,» said Minoru as they left the shop. «Maybe you change mind, coming in bar,» he added cryptically. «You no pay for drink, no pay for 'good time', I give rast-night present! Before-time, we good friend. I still good friend for you. You no forget Minoru!» He was no longer bantering, and as he turned and looked earnestly into the other's face Hamilton was amazed to see his eyes bright with tears. Then with a quick squeeze of the hand he was gone, striding away down the street and up a side-lane.

What the devil did *that* mean? Sentiment was the last thing one could expect from Minoru. Should he, after all, go to the bar? No, it could possibly lead to a bawdy conclusion of the type he despised. Minoru had been making passes at him for the last two years without success and he was not going to give in on this, the last night, as soon as his lover was out of the way. Besides, what if Tadashi rang up? It wouldn't sound too good if the watchman told

him to ring the bar number, and a promise was a promise, last night or not. He walked back to the Daimaru tram-stop, colliding with a man carrying a roll of cloth and a ladder which in his preoccupation he had not noticed.

With a heavy step he turned the corner and went into the house. So this was to be his last visit to what had become his home in a deeper sense than he had ever known. He kicked off his shoes, shuffled into a pair of house-slippers and knocked at the landlady's door. «Have you a key to Mr. Tadashi's room?» He addressed her in halting Japanese as she spoke no English whatever. «To-morrow I must go back to England and now I must take away my things. As Mr. Tadashi is away I cannot use his key.» «Yes, he went to work about ten minutes ago», replied the old woman, reaching down a loop of string with several keys threaded on it. «This key is for his door.»

His heart pounding, Hamilton ran upstairs. Ten minutes ago? Oh, no, she always gabbled on at such a pace, forgetting his Japanese was poor. And yet there was no mistaking a simple expression like 'ten minutes'. He opened the door—and clung to it for support as he looked around the room. His insides contracted into a tight ball as though an unseen hand were squeezing them. He hastened back downstairs to the *benjo* as Mother Nature asserted herself.

He staggered weakly back upstairs, still unable to believe his eyes, but it was all real enough. Apart from the evidence of such anonymous items as the clock, the mirror and the furnishings he had provided, he might have been in another room; there was no trace of his ever having been there. His clothes, his attaché case, everything personal had been swept away. His calendar had been taken down and replaced by another larger one, featuring for that month a bleached St. Paul's dome above some flowering fruit-trees and entitled WASHINGTON, D. C.—*The Capitol in Spring*, under which was written in an American hand: «*These cherry-trees came from Japan!*» In the corner where his Chinese scroll had been hung with such honour, there stood a baseball-bat covered with signatures and a baseball-cap on the nail above it. Near the cap hung a flannel pennant emblazoned S. S. PRESIDENT WILSON. On the little table, the frame which had contained a photograph of himself and Tadashi under the cherry-blossoms now displayed a coloured picture of Tadashi and a bulky tow-haired American in khaki uniform clasping hands over a ship's lifebelt. The bed-linen had been changed and one of the two little pillows had been put away.

So that was it. So that was who the 'sick relative' was, and the neighbour had been brought in to assist the fabrication; the 'railway journey' would occupy the same time as the other ship's stay in port and the promise to stay aboard awaiting a telephone call would keep him out of the way and avoid any embarrassing meetings. So that was why he had pleaded tiredness during the last week or so whenever Ken's embraces had become too ardent—so he'd have a good head of steam when the other bloke arrived! So that, too, was what Minoru had been getting at: apparently the gay bar was a party to the deception and he was being torn between his loyalty to Tadashi, his temptation to gossip and what was evidently a genuine affection for his former client who was now being duped so shamelessly. But putting away one of the pillows—what a finishing touch to the preparations, what an adornment to perfidy! Then later getting it out and ostentatiously putting a clean slip on it while prattling away about how lonely he had been of nights, how wonderful it was to see his only real friend again and so on, the same old spiel probably served for both of them—and how

many others besides? *Passim e sine delectio*, 'everywhere and without pleasure', wasn't that how Ancient Rome defined a prostitute? He had been right, then, about the *sine delectio*, and this was coming to look pretty much like *passim*.

In the cupboard behind the sliding screens a jumble of Tadashi's clothes ingeniously concealed his missing things. Among them, in an envelope bearing a Japanese postmark, was a letter he read with interest. Commencing «*Hi, Sugar*» and signed «*Mitch*», it announced the ship's arrival in Japan and her itinerary: arriving here this afternoon and sailing to-morrow evening. Poor silly Mitch, did he know? That was his funeral; he, Hamilton, was vacating the field and Mitch could find out for himself, same as he had had to do. In extracting his own letters from a box of Tadashi's correspondence, he noted with a certain grim satisfaction that the remainder, judging from the addressing, were not all from Mitch. And there, tossed away in a tin with old razor-blades and the like, was the onyx ring. He slipped it into his pocket, then twisted off his own ring and dropped it in after the other with a sigh.

In the landlady's little shop he slipped a ten-yen piece into the red telephone, dialled a number and put his hand over the mouthpiece. «*Moshi-moshi?*» said Tadashi's voice in his ear, the same voice which an hour ago would have sent his spirits soaring and his pulses racing but now left him cold and completely unaffected. He was surprised to feel no pain—but that would come later. «*Moshi-moshi?*» He resisted a momentary temptation to say 'Hi, Sugar!' and replaced the receiver quietly. There was proof positive, then, if indeed it were necessary. «When will you be coming back to Japan?» cackled the landlady as he returned the keys. «Never!» he replied with feeling.

The tram rumbled along, stopping tediously at every station. The shopping street looked much the same, its sham cherry-blossoms nodding mockingly in the breeze. But the little Union Jacks that had fluttered so bravely before had now been replaced by miniature Stars and Stripes, while the big banner now read WELCOME PRESIDENT WILSON. Well, the lesson had been there for all to see, but he had applied it to everybody except himself. Hamilton found himself doubled up with hysterical laughter.

A familiar figure was sauntering along the bund. In a flash he sobered up and rushed to the window. «*Minoru!*» he shouted, «*Minoru!*»

Minoru looked around, then suddenly smiled, waved and walked briskly back after the tram.

Book-Review

Jess Stearn, The Sixth Man

reviewed by Sir John Wolfenden in the «*Sunday Times*», London

Mr Stearn's book is on an entirely different level. One man in every six is a homosexual (undefined) and homosexuals (undifferentiated) provide plenty of material for gossip-column writing of the most trivial kind. It is not clear what useful purpose is served by collecting and offering to the public such a hotch-potch of banalities.