

1800 words

HOME COMING

Ever since I'd heard that the Gripsholm was repatriating Americans who had been interned in Japan since the war broke out, I'd been impatiently waiting for the publication of the passenger list. It was finally released the day before the Swedish boat left Lisbon for New York, and I eagerly scanned the list for familiar names. Much to my delight, the name of Jack Carson was included. There were half a dozen other names that I recognized as belonging to casual acquaintances; Carson was a special friend of mine whom I'd gotten to know quite well in Japan. He was the vice-consul at Yokohama when I was there, and I used to run into him quite often. It had turned out that he was from my home town and knew some of the kids I knew.

Some weeks after I'd seen the Gripsholm passenger list, I noticed a small item in the local paper saying that Jack Carson, former vice-consul at Yokohama and graduate of the local high school in 1933, was visiting the town. I tore down to the hotel he was reported to be staying at and asked for him. The desk clerk phoned up to his room announcing my presence, and Carson told him to send me up; so, without waiting for the elevator, I climbed three flights of stairs and knocked on his door.

After reading reports of the treatment the interned Americans were receiving in Japan, I'd expected him to be changed, but I wasn't prepared for the shock I felt when I opened the door and saw him. The last time I'd seen Jack was when I'd gone to his office to tell him that I was leaving ^{Japan} at that time,

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he was 6' 2" tall and was packing about 200 pounds of solid flesh. In one of our conversations, he told me that he used to play tackle on the Rutgers football team in his undergraduate days. Now, I scarcely recognized him. His face was all sunken, and the way his clothes hung on him, he couldn't have weighed more than 160.

I forgot the greetings that I'd been planning on ~~to~~ my way up the stairs and could only gasp, "My God, Jack! what the hell have they been doing to you?"

He just gave a wry smile and answered, "Don't worry, Kaz, I'm getting my blubber back--darn it."

"Well, it's swell seeing you again even if you don't seem to be all there," I said, feebly trying to be funny.

For half an hour we sat around exchanging general comments. He asked about our mutual acquaintances, and I supplied him with as much news as I could. I wanted to hear about his experiences in the Japanese concentration camp, but didn't want to be blunt about it, fearing that he might have some painful memories; whenever we approached the subject, he switched to something else or gave broad evasive statements.

He did tell me that he was on the Asama Maru heading for Honolulu when they heard about the war breaking out. "The tub just put about and headed back for Yokohama," he said. "When we got there, all the passengers were herded into concentration camps."

I wanted to know how the fellows I'd gotten acquainted with were faring. I imagined that the lot of the nisei would
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be even harder than that of the caucasians if they refused to forsake their allegiance to the United States in favor of Japan.

"Do you remember Dick Fujimoto?" I asked. "He's the fellow from Hawaii that used to go down to the consulate with me once in awhile."

Jack's face grew grave. "Sure, I remember Dick; I meant to tell you about him," he replied.

"Yeah," I said, "I've been worrying about that kid. You remember when I came back I took one of the last boats to leave Japan? Well, Dick and I wanted to come home together and went down to all the agents in Yokohama looking for tickets. Well, there were a lot more people who wanted tickets than there was room for; so we had to draw straws. I was one of the lucky ones, but Dick had to stay behind. He was disappointed as hell, but took it pretty well. 'I'll be over on the next boat, I guess,' he told me; 'don't eat all the pineapple and steaks when you hit Honolulu; leave some for me.' But he didn't make the next boat either because his folks in Hawaii wrote me that he was unable to get passage."

Jack pulled out a pipe from his coat pocket and carefully packed it with tobacco. "Dick was a pretty good swimmer, wasn't he?" he asked.

That puzzled me, but I replied. "Like a fish; some of the other kids from Hawaii told me that he's as good as Kiyoshi Nakama who's cracking all kinds of records at Ohio State along with Bill Smith, but what's that got to do with it?"

Jack used two matches lighting his pipe. "I'll come to

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that pretty soon: I meant to tell you; Dick was on the Asama Maru with me. He travelled third class, of course, but I recognized him as the fellow that used to come into the consulate with you and got acquainted with him; so he was up in my state-room quite a bit, and once in awhile, we'd go swimming together."

"Is he in a concentration camp now?" I asked impatiently.

"It can't be explained as simply as all that," Jack replied.

"Don't tell me he turned traitor and joined those mugs in Japan?" I asked sharply. "Dick wouldn't do that; I know some guys who might, but not Dick."

Jack nursed the pipe along for awhile, smiled, and said, "Don't get impatient, Kaz; of course Dick wouldn't turn traitor. Let me begin at the beginning and I'll tell you all I know about him."

"Sure, okay." I settled back and tried to relax as best I could.

"You know that we transferred all our records to the embassy in Tokyo and closed up our consulate a few weeks before the war broke out. There wasn't anything more for me to do, and so I was recalled. I booked passage on the Asama and discovered that Dick was on the same boat. As I've told you, I recognized him, and, after a bit, we got to be pretty chummy. He used to tell me how he felt about a lot of things; you know how confiding you get when you're on a boat. He told me that it was the first time in months that he was enjoying himself. 'Just think,' he told me, 'in a little more than a week, I'll

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be able to eat poi and pineapple and steak two inches thick and fried chicken and decent chop suey and ham and eggs; I'll be able to smoke decent cigarettes, drink cokes and decent coffee, good old Kona coffee, the best in the world.' "

"Sounds like Dick okay," I said, "and I don't blame him; I felt the same way. I'm not a Hedonist, but it's certainly funny how you come to realize how much you miss the simple pleasures that you'd always taken for granted when you don't have them. The first thing I did when I got back was eat three hamburgers and guzzle two giant malts."

Jack relit his pipe which had gone out. "No, Dick wasn't a Hedonist either. He didn't just talk about food; he said something else too. 'Gosh,' he told me, 'it's really swell to be able to say what I feel like saying, to read anything I want to read without fear of a plainclothesman* sitting down beside me and snatching whatever I'm reading out of my hand to see whether or not I'm reading something that will corrupt me against some fanatical dodo's idea of "the new order." ' "

"Yeah," I interrupted, "I know just how he felt. I remember the time I lost my notebook of impressions that I'd jotted down at random. Like a damn fool, I'd written my name and address in it. I thought that some cops would come and drag me off to the hoosegow, but I guess they never found it, or, if they did, they couldn't decipher my hand-

*Am not sure of the division of this word and cannot find it in my dictionary (Funk and Wagnalls: College Standard Dictionary).

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writing."

"Lucky for you," said Jack, puffing reflectively.

"Something else Dick told me was that he'd always taken liberty so much for granted ~~xxx~~ before that he didn't realize what it meant. 'To be sure,' he said, 'liberty and freedom are only half-realized ideals in the half-assed democracy that is America, but I'd a hell of a lot rather live in a half-assed democracy than a perfect whatyoumaycallit like that joint we just left.' But he didn't usually fly off like that; more often, he was happy with anticipations of the future rather than morose with the discomforts of the past. Seven days after we'd left Yokohama, he came up to me and said, 'Only three ~~xx~~ more days to Hawaii now, practically swimming distance.'

"He was supposed to come up to my room for a game of bridge the afternoon we found out that war was on between the States and Japan. I'm not much of a navigator, but I thought that the ship had been acting kind of crazy all morning; the way we were poking along, I thought we might be having some kind of mechanical difficulty, but in the afternoon, they told us about the war, and the ship put about. I didn't know quite what to make of it; it ~~xxx~~ seemed pretty fantastic to me, but we were headed westward again. I thought Dick would come running up to see me, but he didn't even come up to see about the bridge game. That evening, I thought the poor kid was brooding down in his cabin and decided to

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go look for him. By that time, orders had been issued for us to stay in our rooms, but I managed to get permission to go down: I couldn't find him anywhere and neither could ~~xxx~~ anyone else."

I was shocked, but taking advantage of Carson's pause, I started to ask, "Gosh, you don't suppose--?" I was afraid to voice the thought in my ~~xxxxx~~ mind.

Jack sort of shook his head, "That's all I know about him. The crew looked all over for him on the way back to Yokohama, but couldn't find him." He shook his head again and added, more to himself than to me, "One and a half days from Honolulu, that's about 750 miles; still, there are other small islands around that area." He shook his head again.

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Paper #1

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