

Condition

Yellow Vol. 2

Clive G.
Cornish

Condition

Yellow Vol. 1

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CONDITION YELLOW

A Novel

by

Clive Grierson Cornish

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FOREWORD

This novel is based on events which are a matter of public record, but all persons depicted herein are completely fictitious.

If by chance there has been put into the mouths of characters words and phrases which an individual has used or claims to have used, I can only say that certain words and phrases were standard political currency on the Pacific Coast in the period of which I have written, and no person can claim a monopoly of them. Certainly they should not be used for purposes of identification.

Two chronological liberties have been taken in this book.

The first occurs in chapter eleven, in which I felt it was necessary to reduce to a semblance of order the incredibly chaotic series of edicts which poured forth from official and semi-official sources in January and February of 1942. Had these been put down unabridged and in the order in which they

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were issued, the reader would become as confused as the Japanese-Canadians for whose guidance they were originally published.

The second occurs in chapter twenty-two, wherein the date of the "repatriation" questionnaire has been advanced by a full two years, making it coincidental with the American segregation measures.

The number of Japanese-Canadians who "volunteered" for repatriation was about 10,000 out of a total population of approximately 25,000, while in the United States, under similar circumstances, the number of Japanese-Americans repatriated was reported as 8,000 out of a total population of some 125,000.

To those who claim that no overt coercion was used in Canada I submit the above figures without comment.

Lest, however, American readers feel disposed to bask in self-righteousness at this comparison, may I say that the events chronicled in this novel could, with few changes, have taken place in any one of the three Pacific Coast states.

In this country the dispersal of the Japanese-Canadians across Canada resulted in a completely unforeseen increase in the speed of assimilation. Japanese surnames in the telephone directories of the Prairies and Eastern Canada now are no longer an oddity. Furthermore, the offspring of the so-called "inter-racial" marriages have grown up to be handsome men and good-looking women.

As for the economic losses suffered by those whose possessions and property were so abruptly expropriated in

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1942, the chances of compensation grow less as time goes by. Modern governments subscribe to the modern version of "the King can do no wrong."

Ethnic minorities last a long time, but not forever, and the years will soften the edges of injustice. History books will recount the shameful treatment of the Japanese-Canadians, but their descendants will not spend time brooding over it. They will become unhyphenated Canadians, whole-heartedly interested in the day to day business of living.

Vancouver
British Columbia

Clive Grierson Cornish

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PROLOGUE

In the year 2573 of the Heavenly Kingdom--equivalent to 1913 A.D. in Western chronology--Fortune smiled on Takao Muro and his recently acquired wife, Tama. For as many of his thirty-two years as he could remember Takao had fought the icy seas of Northern Hokkaido for what he considered a living, and now at last, according to the imposing official document which had arrived that morning, he and his wife were granted permission to emigrate to Canada.

From Vancouver, in far off British Columbia, letters had come for the past six years and always they brimmed with wonderment at a land of plenty. The letters had come from Ichiro, Takao's eldest brother, who had slipped into Canada in 1907, the last year of unrestricted immigration. Ever since the day the first of the letters had arrived, Takao Muro had tried to join his brother, but always an implacable demon

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called 'Gentlemen's Agreement' had stood in the way. Now, (doubtless because of the piety and devotion he had shown towards the spirits of his ancestors) the demon was pacified.

When two months later Takao and his wife arrived in Vancouver it was fortunate that their knowledge of the English language was limited. Otherwise they would have been distressed by the jesting reference of Mr. Anthony, the immigration officer, to 'three of a kind,' a remark occasioned by the physical condition of Tama.

Presently the couple were settled in the city's Little Tokyo and the child was born. His parents recalled the polite smiles of the immigration officer, whom they understood was a personage delegated by the King of Canada to welcome new subjects, and they did their humble best to show their appreciation of the King's solicitude by naming the child Anthony.

Shortly afterwards Anthony Muro was duly registered with the Japanese Consulate as a citizen of Japan, and thus, from the time of his birth, Tony enjoyed the dubious distinction of belonging to two countries, neither of which were quite sure they wanted him.

For reasons which they could not surmise and despite many subsidized petitions by the local Buddhist priest, Takao and Tama Muro were not further blessed with children. And perhaps it was just as well.

In 1923, with a glorious splurge of savings, they returned to their homeland for a visit, and when the last tremors of the

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quake of that year has passed, the bodies of Takao and Tama lay deep beneath the ruins of a cheap waterfront hotel in Yokohama.

The loss of his parents made no lasting impression on ten-year old Tony, principally because his bachelor uncle Ichiro put off telling him until a year later, by which time their absence had become a normal condition of his life. He grew up in a succession of crowded boarding-houses, a sturdy self-reliant youngster, and his uncle insisted, as if it were some compensation for his orphaned status, that Tony finish high school and enter the University of British Columbia. Tony co-operated by earning enough at odd jobs in vacation to pay for his courses. He made a place for himself on the University rugby team, kept up in his studies and doubtless would have been graduated as a Bachelor of Arts had not tragedy struck a second time.

Ichiro was caught in the folds of a seine net as it tumbled over the stern of a seiner surrounding a school of sockeye salmon. With dignity and courage, knowing too well the futility of struggle, five fathoms below the sun-specked surface of the Gulf of Georgia he quietly died.

Tony soon found that life in a boarding-house and attendance at the University were financially incompatible. One day in mid-semester he went downtown, picked up a telephone book and selected therefrom the name of the insurance company listed in the blackest type. It was a branch office of the Paragonian Mutual Fire and Casualty. Tony walked in and said, "I want to

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sell insurance for your company."

"Fine!" said young Mr. O'Leary, the branch manager. "You can start today." It was the middle of the depression and he would have said the same thing to an Eskimo. In this case, however, his impulsive action later gave his head office much pleasure and considerable profit, and a part of both were in due course remitted to Mr. O'Leary. This pleasant consequence resulted in a warm friendship between Mike O'Leary and Tony Muro which did much to advance the latter's business fortunes.

But not all of his progress was due to this initial good luck. Circumstances had made Tony industrious, but Nature had done more for him. She had endowed him with a warm, easy friendliness, and this, plus an unusually even temper, had made him one of those rare but fortunate beings, a man without an enemy.

Now, at twenty-eight, he possessed three precious things, a triad most men strive for all their lives and not often attain: He owned a prosperous business, acknowledged many friendships and had the digestion of a horse.

He had rarely been more unhappy in his whole life.

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