



When West Marries East.

The Hospital, a lambent stream of consciousness narrative...

When preparing to enter hospital for a 3 week induction, I considered all the things to take to fill the gaps between waiting rooms. Now I would finally find time to sort out the newspaper clippings collected over a 10 year period. I could start studying for the Proficiency in Japanese level 2 exam, and while I was at it I could as well take some more CD's of classical music to listen to. Oh yes, and I would need my world-band receiver to catch the BBC on shortwave. Internet access was still not available at the hospital I had found out, as with the public telephone machines they had no socket to wire up my handheld Win CE computer, so I had advised my clients that urgent work had to go through text messaging over my mobile. I was basically set, I thought...

Checking in on Monday went smoothly; the hospital's administrative machinery seemed well oiled. I had no weight in excess, only my toothbrush and carry-on luggage so to speak, no boarding pass needed, no restrictions on the use of electronic devices as digital cameras etc. I was ready for take-off.

My wife Nongkie completed all formalities and I got the next day's schedule for the liver biopsy that would determine the exact damage caused by the HCV genome 2b type of virus. She left for work shortly after lunch, on schedule; they can make trains run on time with intervals of 3-4 minutes and even seem to manage to make people run on time. We're definitely and extraordinarily in sync -a lucky two of a kind with our timing. The coming week was going to be Obon, a week of national holiday when people return to their home town, visit their ancestors graves, invite them to join the reunion of the living and send them off when the party is over.

The hour of death has come, surrender! Give up all that you've cherished, all that you've ever cared for, there is nothing to hold on to, no one to rely on, it's all over. You got to let go. No more struggle or fights, there's nothing more to achieve; no more speculations on might, there's nothing more to accomplish, no more must, no more life or death; no more right or wrong there's only the process of letting go, with every breath one more step closer to death. Leave this world in peace, all in life is accomplished. No one is going this last mile for me; I am entirely on my own though nobody left me alone. I radiate a look of serenity from within my face lying there in my coffin and tell myself there is no vision nor eye to perceive it, no pleasant or disgusting sensations to the taste buds or sound objects for the ear to

attach to, nor fragrances for the nose to hold on to, they're all deceiving thought formations the mind is creating to disguise the fact that I'm actually dead. But I'm unconcerned, it will all cease. A sunset dawns the nightfall, I'll rest in peace but hopefully not in eternity. With that thought I fell asleep.

The next morning half a bowl of rice and a small bowl of thin miso soup was to balance me enough to go through with the dreaded liver biopsy. The first time I was going to experience a surgical procedure under local anesthesia. I felt composed but I'm sure some degree of apprehension could be seen in my eyes. The curtain was drawn, Nongkie was shut out. What a stage! A bed against the wall in a small room stuffed to the ceiling with medical supplies for the ward; Dr. H, a stern looking specialist informed me of the procedures as they went on. Pre-anesthesia medication numbed my right arm stretched above my head. Disinfecting the area twice, two shots of the anesthetic. Check the effectiveness. He had warned me earlier of the possible complications and had me sign a form of consent. Most important it was to keep my breath, up to one minute and lie completely still while he went in between my ribs. I had practiced keeping my breath, and 45 sec. went effortlessly. What I hadn't realized was that I had to keep it with lungs only filled to less than half capacity. With an ultra sound device he scanned the area, following on a 17 inch Toshiba monitor and got a visual of where exactly he was going in to pinch a piece of liver tissue to determine the extent of damage caused by HCV and other substance abuse. When he pierced I thought seeing a fountain of blood shooting out, but I kept my breath, my nose under the cover, my eyes not blinking at the hands of the clock's face. 30 sec top, a clack like from a pistol fired without ammo and biopsy finished was the announcement.

A drowsy couple of hours followed. A wounded soldier from the cyber battles of previous weekends -the Saturday before 14 hours of computing in a row, half an hour break. Mission accomplished: a new website up, changes to the old one uploaded. Now let's see if programming my body to stay motionless would be as flawless: two hours on my right side to stop internal bleeding first and then two more on my back needed let the wound heal. The anesthesia was wearing off but the haze didn't lift. Nongkie was by my side, I wanted to say something just for making a sound; leave me to myself I'll be OK, but bravery was unwarranted for. I was glad she stayed. She is not the type who needs much talk anyway. I've grown accustomed to her ways of doing without saying; in fact it's nice to be in her presence without much talk. Time passes so slow when your mind has given up on all things that it needs to catch and coerce into its control. I saw that day leave, the night come and slid into a dreamless sleep as far as I know.

The next day my first Interferon shot was on the agenda. I was prepared for the showdown I had told Nongkie. I had seen it all before, all of the possible side effects; starting with influenza-like symptoms of fatigue, nausea or vomiting, high fevers, sore throat, aching muscles, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, depression, visual distortions entailing delusions and suicidal tendencies; the one Nongkie feared most seeing me ending up in. But I assured her that at no single moment ever since we were reunited in 1991 there has been such. I may have been overworked at one time with symptoms of a psychotic nervous breakdown subsequent to a heavy work load and too long time sustained high stress levels; you can call me reckless working through the night, stubborn for going to work after only a morning shower, you can call me self-destructive, you can call me names but you can't call me suicidal. I don't see how you can keep up your face when you gut your belly open.

Even the hair loss side-effect never experienced before -tendencies to pull it out yes- wasn't worrying me as statistics show that when Interferon treatment is over, the hair grows back. The whole top notch package comes at a top notch price: you wouldn't expect less for such an all inclusive experience yes? Or no, you'd expect they'd pay you for this kind of guinea pig treatment.

If not Nongkie had -in the bureaucratic labyrinth- found some application forms for government support: refunding 60% of the initial cost, the bill would have amounted to more than a month's salary for the first 16 days...

I guess that despite all my pep talk telling Nongkie that I could handle a worsening of rheumatism she must have been worried seeing me knocked out with high fever at the end of the first day on Interferon. It took three full days to return to normal body temperatures. Three days to slow down to a hospital rhythm, monotonous routines of body function check-ups like temperature, blood pressure, pulse, stool and urine, sleep and appetite, shower and gargle. The more exciting: drawing blood for tests and the doctor's visits for hearing the results.

Believe me that I had to study feverishly -literally- to catch up with all the hospital terminology, this time I just couldn't get by with my basic vocabulary of mHhem for yes and the short É for pardon? I needed such as effectiveness of HCV treatment, 2-b genome, infection of the sweat gland or spite lymph nodes, inflammation of the prostate, prescription of antibiotics, hypodermic injection, intravenous drip, symptoms and complications. Showing the skin rash where Interferon was intramuscularly injected went without saying but how do you show your mental state as composed or unconcerned? Just by pulling up your shoulders and making faces and gestures? This is after all the Far East and gestures and face expressions are read quite differently.

But a smile always does it. My boss at the studies overseas agency always smiles and shows in a good mood when things are going badly wrong.

Ever tried the smile as a valve to let off steam when fuming that things are out of control? Now that I regained some confidence -the psychiatric had assessed me stable- I qualified for the treatment, didn't I? Some inexplicable happiness welling up –still, I question the smile on my face: something must be terribly wrong.

10 pm and the lights go out, far too early to fall asleep the first weekend after bedridden for a week with exception then of the occasional escapades to the smoking area on the roof of the 6th floor. I fall asleep fairly quickly nevertheless. I must have been born tired is the last thought.

Was it in the dead of the night that I catch myself again dreaming of being in Denmark? Caught up in people and situations, though Denmark doesn't look like Denmark at all, rather like Darjeeling at the foothills of the Himalayas, the place where I converted to Buddhism in my early twenties. But the people are not Newari, Sherpa, Tibetan, Bhutanese or Brahmins on a holiday in their Ambassador Indian built cars to get away from the scorching heat to retreat in this old British colonial summer resort, they are blond straw haired Nordic types, horse riding, bonfire feasting, friendly, inviting, hospitable. I want to break loose, I keep on thinking I must get back to Japan, I've got a wife waiting there, but I keep on returning their friendly smiles, always say yes to whatever is asked of me, explain to them that Darjeeling comes from the Tibetan rDorje Ling meaning the place where a thunderbolt struck down. How many times is this dream going to repeat itself? Enough obsessions, enough of compulsory mechanical mind movements like a 'perpetuum mobile'. The break of dawn shines feebly through the closed ochre curtains, it's 5 am, yellow my surprise.

All is quiet still; it's nice to listen to silence without having your ears buzz for lack of noise. I'm soaked in sweaty pajamas, the two elderly patients by the window side have turned off the air conditioner, I don't mind. I change to dry underwear and hang up my pajama vest on the hook for I.V. drip, chew some dry fruit Nongkie brought me, rearrange the sweat towel on my bed, punch the plastic ball filled pillow in shape, stare in front of me, empty of past, present or future, breath, brush off every attempt of my mind to trick me into speculations on pending test results, deny physical discomfort but recognize that my nicotine level is now dangerously low after 10 hours abstinence. Almost an hour rushed by. I stand up, and with a bit of wobbly first steps I'm on my way out to the roof balcony on the 6th floor. At 6 sharp a nearby temple gong is echoing against a high rise apartment building. Since when did I exchange my prayer beads for a nicotine stick dosed at 0.3mg nicotine and 3mg tar? In the morning ode of birds I spot 3 temples, two on this side of the Tama River and one on the other. A white heron is catching its breakfast alongside a fisherman. The cicadas warm up to a day of competitive chirping, one two three strokes and a long extended one in cannon chorus.

The Bucharito or Cho-rTen in Tibetan, Stupa adopted in English from Sanskrit that I imagine seeing in the temple yard turns out to be just a waste burner. OK, I'm not infallible, if so I'd be the pope today. The big building half way up the mountain across can't possibly be the one I pass by on my cycling trips, now can it? The hidden valley I grew so fond of must be behind that mountain range.

Could be that road in the distance between the patches of bamboo forest is the one I cycle back to the main valley. What curve is it that the Tama River takes out there in the far distance? Ōme is indeed the last township west of Tokyo -at the borders of the province and at the borders of provenance. Just 10 km further up and the mountains steeply plunge in narrow valleys I know, though they're still the foothills to the Japanese Alps that stretch to the other side of Honshu facing Korea.

The breeze scents of tobacco to my nostrils. Foolish to argue perhaps that mankind has been smoking since he was able to make fire. We should have become wiser by now and there is no way to turn the clock back to Stone Age.

Shambling back to my room for breakfast at eight, the first -in a day long parade of people and faces resembling those I used to work with closely- gives me a wake up call look. There is this early morning cleaner who looks the twin Japanese version of Patrick O'Really with his hairstyle of Michael Angelo's David, Irish though -naturalized Dane, and who recently died of cancer. I stop zooming in; the slide show backward in time continues however. Can Japanese faces all really be classified into certain types? The classical Noh mask faces, the Kabuki play faces, Raku-go faces, scroll painting faces, porn woodblock print faces, red-drunk salary men faces and tittle-tattle housewife faces? They themselves claim that because of the centuries if not millenniums of isolation the gene pool to further diversity was rather limited. Indeed, all women have straight pubic hair and almost uniform nipples. People remind me of certain episodes in my making a home in Japan.

Can I ever say Japan is my home? Where is home? Home is where the heart is rapped Frank Zappa with his Mothers of Invention long before Hip Hop wrapped up the rock we guys of the sixties swore having replaced religion with or any other non flower power life philosophy for that sake. How far has the clock been turned back? But one face I can't put a place or time on, nor name for that sake. It keeps coming back before my mental eye and it is not the Dane who coolly gave his advice not to fill Usha, the Nepalese refugee, up with a round belly right away... I see her type also here, with a T-shirt proclaiming: And God Created Woman... Was that God a man perhaps? When was last I called on a God to perform a miracle and give my hysterical mind the thing I wanted most? Does blackmail work? I want to know where and when and who was the man that keeps haunting my memory for recognition, for identification, was he alive? If so what had become of him? I must be living among the dead. Having exhausted my primary Chi I move around on secondary Chi, borrowed of others, sucked into this empty capsule without their consent, addictive vampirism.

André was his name, no not that André from the health food store where I used to puff salty rice waffles with sesame. It is the Macrobiotic cook damn it, the one who did so well in the Coffee House that I ran until the Suzuki method proved inadequate to keep students of the Academy of Arts across the street on track of expressing their psychedelic explorations. What had become of him over the years? No clue...

Who cares knowing about the ones that are out of sight? No old friends ever came looking for me, no matter how passionately I played the lost son. I guess I'll accept excuses that they're not the writing types and that keeping in mind suffices to hold their spiritual bubble inflated. And now that I'm at it, I might as well consider what I'd answer today to the question once asked me here: "And who do you think you are? An executive?" I must have looked very much of a freshman then in the dark blue three piece pin striped business suit of my brother in law and was quite taken aback by the accusingly asked question that I promptly answered: "Just an English teacher" while in fact I was teaching German at the International Journalist Center of the Japanese Television NHK. Today I'd probably done better saying Comet Halley, watch me; you might not see me again in your lifetime. Or answer the question with a question like the Jesuits do: what does a shooting star not visible to the naked eye sound like?

It's good to have a caring family, father, mother, sisters, kids, an aunty, an uncle and his extended family in Switzerland, in-laws not to omit. The nicest that's ever written to me until now was by the only friend that I bothered to keep in contact with for over 35 years is: Don't be sorry, it's no bother to send my thoughts to a brother. Aikido teacher with a heart...

The protuberances of mind ease off with breakfast. Nongkie had been so considerate to request bread instead of rice in the morning, so the rice was replaced all right but the rest stayed basically: dishes with fish and pickled vegetables, miso soup with clams and occasionally egg and jam. The diet of rice for lunch and rice for dinner continued with 6 days a week fish and once meat. Mind you when I say meat, I mean thin slices of stir fried pork prepared in seaweed or seaweed laver or sea tangle or kelp. I'm always surprised how good it tastes a fish and meat dish mix, the Tofu or Soya bean curd with hairy Wakame or dried seaweed. Another surprise is that everybody takes it for granted that I eat up all, the Umeboshi or pickled salty plum of every single meal no exception. Even the fermented Soya beans in the slimy whipped white of egg that is known as Natto and to most foreigners a horrifying taste equal to rotten eggs. Not to me, but I must admit that there is one particular sauce I do not care for all that much: to me it tastes like used car tires. Nobody so far has commented on that. May be they never tried to chew used car tires, me neither as a matter of fact...

Nobody uses table manners expressions either before or after meals, no comments like oi-shi-katta. Nobody with the same inane for mulish questions: What's your

favorite Japanese food, can you use chopsticks... I learned to cut and butter my buns with chopsticks...

The nurse comes and asks all right? And upon my affirmative response dutifully notes 'zenbu' down on my 'karte' as the German term for medical record is used in Japan. More than once am I asked if I had eaten 'Gohan' and replied: "dono gurai deshita ke"; checking the dietary chart that comes with the meal's menu, I proudly announced: "Hai 200 gr!" hiding my malicious intent with an innocent look revealing just that from between my now slid eyes. The nurse apologized as a matter of routine, not quite sure whether I was pulling her leg or being foreigner confused by the use of Gohan which both mean boiled rice and meal; she paused, blinked her eyes, and thought perhaps how to say it in English but before uttering a single English vowel rephrased: "Could you eat up your meal?" in Japanese. She awarded me with a bright triumphant smile at my response 'Zenbu'. She had been able to make herself understood to a foreigner. It made her day. Since then none of the nurses have ever tried again to ask me nonchalantly 'Gohan wa?' They ask in full: did you eat up your meal? To which I say Hai, sakana no kawa dake tabemasen deshita / yes, except the skin of the fish -to which they laugh. Humor it is said is the most difficult to use in any language. I do not immediately give that my full endorsement.

The weekend concluded quietly, routinely, with prescribed rest that I found difficult to extend over one hour periods. Nongkie was given a 'Da-me' to taking me out for a walk down to the river or a spot of shopping, blessed by supermarket cornucopias. I believed her the apotheosis of common sense, but Da-me...

Only a minor anxiety crept up when the lights went out. I couldn't fall asleep right away. What were the new test results going to show? I had no confidence in them showing the same positive outlook as the initial ones. The doctor had been keen on emphasizing the clinical data and the facts and figures and they only had revealed cautious optimism, he had not tried to talk me out of my bug-eyed fear. Taken into account that enlargement of the spleen, chronic inflammation of the prostate, and indications of rheumatic tendencies all did not paint a particularly rosy picture of this bloody liver's ecology, I'd be damned if I'm not doomed to one of Dante's deepest visions of hell. Reflections on the initial shock effects that the dawn of the end was upon me were returning only stronger, more persistent. Another rehearsal perhaps? What do you rely on when you can't even believe what you perceive? A trompe l'oeil, perambulations from optimism to doubt to fear? My purview Past Point Pleasant - free-floating paranoia embellished by the suspicion that nothing is what it seems. Where am I now reclusive expert on psychic phenomena freaked by my own dreams of imminent death, playing with briny relish to crank up the atmosphere? I feel lethargic, but as long as you can give the devil a name, pin a learned word on the unknown, you've got it under control, that's at least what you could call finely honed musings. How does it feel to a holy man when he hits his big toe under the seat in front of him before taking off in a jet plane to New York? Does

he say fuck you or fuck me? Does he fart and then says shit? Or more politely 'holy shit' while lowering the eyes on the back of his head?

My friend Robert Lowman in Bangkok text messaged me on my mobile: Sorry to hear that you're in hospital. Sounds serious. Have you been sick long? What are your prospects in the long term? I wanted to reply immediately I'm not sick; it's my liver that's been piling up such a load of 2-b genome C viruses that I could very well turn out yellower than the yellowiest of Asians. I'm OK, a little identity crisis may be, but I've known nothing else in my life; a mid-life crisis according to the wise men's books may be, but this has been going on for years, there's nothing new under the sun since 9/11. I'm not my liver, but confess my liver surely isn't happy with me. I missed out on getting together in Colombo and Sri Lanka when you were still working there, and fell short of sending you a present for your new flat on the 26th floor in Bangkok but keep hopes of traveling together again high. If not Laos or Angkor Vat, a beach holiday in Malaysia is may be more appropriate than jungle adventures there or go Moonlighting in Mandalay, Myanmar.

I fell short of everything. Instead I grab my computer and boot the dictionary; I look up the word constipation. It's been damn 5 days I haven't relieved myself and my bowels start protesting the pressure. The Flemish expression equivalent to holding your breath in times of fear or danger that my mother used to say but in much dirtier words (holding your shit/tightening your asshole) has come to mind a number of times and I've been wondering if this folk saying holds any reality. Prunes help me only fart and this is considered very embarrassing here. Unlike slurping your food which is a must to heighten taste burping is out of question, so I have to be mindful of where I am because at home I do burp loudly after good dinner; it's a Tibetan custom to express satisfaction I explained Nongkie and went on that old habits die hard. I know she says, and adds I've heard your mother doing so but she's not Tibetan... Nongkie is so sweet, says little but talks book chapters in one remark.

She came the Tuesday late afternoon before next day's Interferon shot to make sure I had understood the doctor correctly and ask him for his prognosis for the x-time. The blood test results as I understood were not looking good. Most alarming to me was the fact that my WBC (white blood cell) count had dropped to 1/3 of normal levels in one week, that Hb (hemoglobin) was steadily dropping, and that the ratio of Neutro was just hovering above absolute minimum. Hence I was going to receive a 50% reduced dose of Interferon but could keep the supplementary anti viral drug at 800 mg per day. If next blood tests showed a further decline in these latest findings I would have to stop treatment all together. Blood-curdling you could say. It resulted in some cringe-making efforts, drawing a portrait of a self destructive product of dysfunctional childhood, a psychological cripple who is somehow able to translate the prodding of his unconscious into writing. Gazing into the rearview mirror of my life, reliving long-ago affairs and missed opportunities from the vertiginous vantage point of late middle age, a perfunctory and curdled portrait of a narcissistic old man refusing to think smaller, more

spiteful and timorous thoughts and just wants to reconnoiter old territory with the licks of love.

We watched the sunset from the roof balcony on the 6th floor that evening.

Not much to talk about, we sat and held hands, watched the sun set behind the mountains without much ado. The breeze coming in turned Nongkie cold, she forgot her cardigan at home and I tried to warm her holding her tight from behind. 5 to 8pm: closing visitor hours were announced and we went down to the hospital entrance. For the first time in my life she kissed me openly in public view.

An emotional good bye followed. As she turned back to throw me hand kisses I realized just how much she really meant to me and how much I mean to her. She faded as a stranger, a vision of a pretty woman with whom I wish to become old, everlasting love. Thank you so much for letting me back into your life, you made me so very happy. I was not to see her for the next five days.

Wednesday morning I was told that blood was gonna be drawn and after the result I was to get the Interferon 50 instead of 100. I dare not ask whether the injection was subjected to the blood test result, but 2 hours later I got it much to my relief. The following day the doctor on his morning round showed me the blood test result. WBC count had slightly picked up, Hb slightly up, PLT (blood plates) still low and Neutro ratio above the level where treatment would be called off. Even the GOT and GPT, the liver enzymes that ensure liver function had returned fully to normal levels whereas 6 months ago they were at 7.5 times higher in a danger zone that could very well lead to a total collapse. How do you teach a mind as turbulent as mine not to issue cheques that a body can't cash?

I called Nongkie the good news. She coughed her heart out while telling me she had high fever and that it was probably a cold. Our local clinic was still two days to opening after the Obon holidays so she had to manage with over the counter medicine. No way to get together any time soon again.

I had to put my mind on something else in the meantime, speculating doesn't really help Nongkie txt messaged me. How fortunate she joined the hordes of gadget owners two months ago. Though she opted out of having the Global Positioning System and TV programmes, we could now make live conference calls and exchange video and music files; video games we're not into but roaming the internet for a visual of a good restaurant nearby made sense in particular when you can decide on the menu and reserve a table on the fly. Oh, and ... by the way you can also make a telephone call with this 110 gr. gadget, purchase price: 0 Yen, free communications between us when subscribing to a family plan for three years. Call it Made in the Horn of Cornucopia. I wonder when they're going to pay us for using one of their new models now in the pipeline. For the time being it is just one more item on a long list of consumer goods like ball point pens, umbrellas, handkerchiefs, memo pads, tissue paper etc. that are now available for free

everywhere in Japan.

I took out my Sony World-band Receiver, put in the recharged batteries and looked forward to listening to a BBC in depth programme. I hadn't used it since we have the BBC on line over the Internet, so no need to scan for the ever changing bandwidths. How disappointing that nothing worked, no sound, no background light on the big digital display just completely dead. I always have a small tool set for fine mechanics with me on travels and also this time I did not hesitate to screw the radio apart and see if there were an internal backup battery that had gone flat over the years but no, nothing of the kind. At least when I screwed it all together again I wasn't left with a number of screws spare. Never mind, I also had a CD player and at least 15 hours of classical music with me so out with it. Same procedure, same result, nothing worked. Damn it, are we getting superstitious?

I had considered to buy a Nano i-pod for the occasion, but busy as I had been with converting music files to Nongkie's mobile phone's media player, I hadn't even transferred new music to the flash memory card of my handheld computer. What the heck, so be it. I certainly was not knocked out so quickly. I still had newspaper clippings to sort out. A full grown collection since 1996, it had only gathered dust among the many other files in my working room. Now was the time to classify them according category, language literature and book reviews, science and technology, news topics in depth, environment and nature travel destinations. Remarkably absent were articles on financial markets, Bloomberg and other PR articles for investors, they fill a considerable number of pages in the International Harold Tribune that I read periodically. You'd expect me to read up on these as a would-be teacher of Business English. Even as I limn lascivious accounts of the comfortable intimacy of our long marriage, a cozy cosseted life, clinging to quixotic dreams with each other in what has to become our dotage, so blissful you might start your stopwatch to clock its downfall. But one of these red herrings has to produce some flesh, while goading to confront lingering questions about morality and mortality; I'm an old hand at delineating the destruction of innocence.

Nurses, the younger ones that is with their hair up in a fashionable but not always sexy way, show a keen interest in what this strange exotic bird's private parts might look like. I had already experienced this once before when one of them gleamed over the shoulders of the doctor performing a prostate examination through the rectum. Even Nongkie present there had noticed it.

Here one of them who looked young enough to be an intern took the liberty to examine my abdomen below the belt line for possible swollen glands or lymph nodes on her own without apparent reason to me other than curiosity. She was indeed in a position of authority and exercised it: please on your back... I was ready to accept the fact that she was on top of almost everything but me, but refrained from suggesting to go on and climb on board in the saddle verbally. My eyes may not have adequately expressed the welcome invitation so I just kept returning the

innocent smiles on her classical Japanese face.

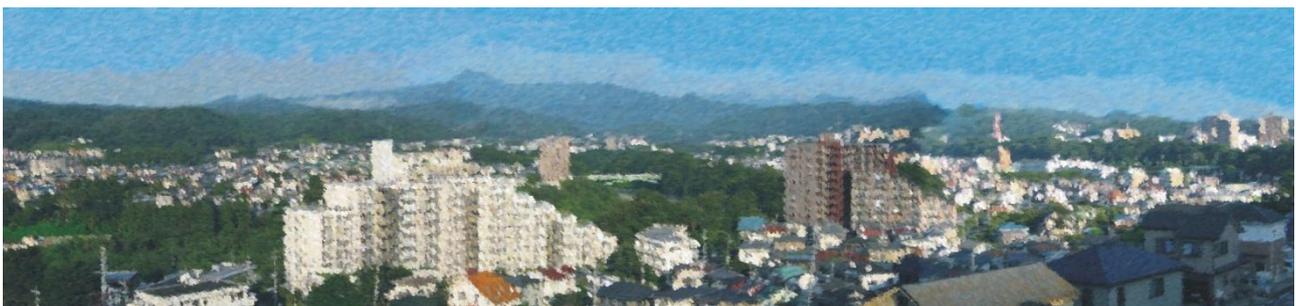
She kept talking while smiling: itai desu-ka / pain? I can't replicate Japanese speaking while smiling, but shaking 'negative' with my head and a iye-iye murmur is the closest I get. She shortly lifted my pajama pants and seeing I had underpants beneath completed her examination. Nongkie called it "temptation" with a twilight smile of a naughty boy on her face. For some reason the unknown Miss Sato was taken of the roll of patients where I was on. May be she was reprimanded that her personal interest in me went beyond her professional duties, so I made no more speculations about furthering her keen innocent interest.

By the time Nongkie came to fetch me back home I learned to walk up straight and relaxed, not like a charging bull one day and like a beaten dog the next, restored my ability to sit cross legged for extended periods of time and humbled by the fact that I let my health deteriorate to such an extent. I came to realize that -for how many years is it now that I have said I've never been working so hard in my life, then I started following the Japanese way of softening the hardships of life, still in superlatives like I've never been so busy in my life, but now I frequently think silently I've never been so tired in my life - to the extent that I don't know what to do to make it through the day. Partying, work, women and wine, momentous fender benders with down-to-earth atonement at the end of the day, who am I to say?

Quite a few acquaintances we befriended with have moved on, to other Asian countries following up on their careers or following their dick into short lived romances, others moved back to their home country with wives who either seeking to break out of this tightly knitted society here or just because they dutifully follow their husbands wish to return with a trophy from his drifting years and shipwrecked relationships. One would under any circumstance beg them farewell, with or without best wishes for going to raise a family and well-wishers who widening their own horizons are on the receiving end, conclude with irreplaceable proof of having left a provincial town somewhere. And there those who come to a point of no return – An Anāgāmi, a non-returner, but you should never say never.

Gerrit Slembrouck

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Panorama from Ome hospital painted