

# Farewell to Manzanar

ten

## **The Reservoir Shack: An Aside**

*My brother-in-law Kaz was foreman of a reservoir maintenance detail, the only crew permitted to work or to leave the camp limits the night of the riot. At the back gate they were issued four pickax handles, to protect themselves in case the inu-hunters found them “cooperating” at a time like this.*

*They drove out there, checked the chlorine shed, toured the perimeter, then trooped into a little shack that had been set up with four cots. It was like a fireman’s watch. Each crew spent twenty-four hours on standby, making periodic checks, clearing the debris, doing whatever was necessary to keep the water moving into camp.*

*The shack had one window, but when they turned off the light and stretched out on the cots, you could barely see its outline, the night was so dark. Kaz lay there trying to see the line between the dark inside and the dark outside the shack, and he thought he saw something pass across the window but called it his imagination and shut his eyes.*

*A moment later the door crashed open. A flashlight was blinding him. He felt the sharp jut of a gunsight against his cheek.*

*Someone yelled, “All right, you Japs, up against the wall!”*

*He jumped out of bed and saw four MPs with Tommy guns, a sergeant and three privates. While Kaz backed to the wall to join his crew, that gun barrel stayed right against his cheek. The MPs kept yelling, “C’mon Japs, move it. Move it!”*

*Kaz finally found his voice. “Hey! What’s the matter with you guys?”*

*The sergeant in charge was wild-eyed, scanning the room as he fanned the air with his Tommy gun, sure he had uncovered a nest of saboteurs. He was about the same age as Kaz, early twenties.*

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*"What the hell are you doing out here?" he yelled.*

*"We're the reservoir crew."*

*"Nobody's supposed to leave the camp! You know that!"*

*"Somebody's gotta be out here all the time. Regulations."*

*The sergeant spotted the ax handles on the floor by each cot and kicked one with his boot.*

*"What the hell are these for then?"*

*"The rioters. If they found us here they'd throw us all in the reservoir."*

*The sergeant squinted suspiciously.*

*Kaz said, "Go on back to the gate and check it out."*

*The sergeant kicked all the ax handles into a pile and scooped them up. "I'm taking these with me. Don't nobody move till I get back."*

*He left. The reservoir crew didn't blink until he returned with the clearance half an hour later. They stood there watching the three jittery privates, who had backed up against the opposite wall, as fearful as these four Japs they had to guard as Kaz and his men were of the unsteady weapons they knew could go off at any moment.*

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eleven

## Yes Yes No No

27. Are you willing to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?

\_\_\_\_\_ (yes) \_\_\_\_\_ (no)

28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization? \_\_\_\_\_ (yes)

\_\_\_\_\_ (no)

--from the *War Relocation Authority Application for Leave Clearance, 1943*

Later in December the administration gave each family a Christmas tree hauled in from the Sierras. A new director had been appointed and this was his gesture of apology for all the difficulties that had led up to the riot, a promise of better treatment and better times to come.

It was an honest gesture, but it wasn't much of a Christmas that year. The presents were makeshift, the wind was roaring, Papa was drunk. Better times were a long way off, and the difficulties, it seemed, had just begun. Early in February the government's Loyalty Oath appeared. Everyone seventeen and over was required to fill it out. This soon became the most divisive issue of all. It cut deeper than the riot, because no one could avoid it. Not even Papa. After five months of self-imposed isolation, this debate was what finally forced him out of the barracks and into circulation again.

At the time, I was too young to understand the problem. I only knew there was no peace in our cubicle for weeks. Block organizers would come to talk to Papa and my brothers. They would huddle over the table a while, muttering like conspirators, sipping tea or one of his concoctions. Their voices gradually would rise to shouts and threats. Mama would try to calm the men down. Papa would

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tell her to shut up, then Granny would interrupt and order him to quit disgracing Mama all the time. Once he just shoved Granny across the room, up against the far wall and back into her chair, where she sat sniffing while the arguments went on.

If the organizers weren't there, Papa would argue with Woody. Or rather, Woody would listen to Papa lecture him on *true* loyalty, pacing from bunk to bunk, waving his cane.

"Listen to me, Woodrow. When a soldier goes into war he must go believing he is never coming back. This is why the Japanese are such courageous warriors. They are prepared to die. They expect nothing else. But to do that, you must *believe* in what you're fighting for. If you do not believe, you will not be willing to die. If you are not willing to die, you won't fight well. And if you don't fight well you will probably be killed stupidly, for the wrong reason, and unheroically. So tell me, how can you think of going off to fight?"

Woody always answered softly, respectfully, with a boyish and submissive smile.

"I will fight well, Papa."

"In this war? How is it possible?"

"I am an American citizen. America is at war."

"But look where they have put us!"

"The more of us who go into the army, the sooner the war will be over, the sooner you and Mama will be out of here."

"Do you think I would risk losing a son for that?"

"You want me to answer NO NO, Papa?"

"Do you think that is what I'm telling you? Of course you cannot answer NO NO. If you say NO NO, you will be shipped back to Japan with all those other *bakatare!*"

"But if I answer YES YES I will be drafted anyway, no matter how I feel about it. That is why they are giving us the oath to sign."

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“No! That is not true! They are looking for volunteers. And only a fool would volunteer.”

Papa stared hard at Woody, making this a challenge. Woody shrugged, still smiling his boyish smile, and did not argue. He knew that when the time came he would join the army, and he knew it was pointless to begin the argument again. It was a circle. His duty as a son was to sit and listen to Papa thrash his way around it and around it and around it.

A circle, or you might have called it a corral, like Manzanar itself, with no exit save via three narrow gates. The first led into the infantry, the second back across the Pacific. The third, called *relocation*, was just opening up: interned citizens who could find a job and a sponsor somewhere inland, away from the West Coast, were beginning to trickle out of camp. But the program was bogged down in paperwork. It was taking months to process applications and security clearances. A loyalty statement required of everyone, it was hoped, might save some time and a lot of red tape. This, together with the search for “loyal” soldiers, had given rise to the ill-fated “oath.”

Two weeks before the December Riot, JACL leaders met in Salt Lake City and passed a resolution pledging Nisei to volunteer out of the camps for military service.<sup>1</sup> In January the government announced its plan to form an all- Nisei combat regiment. While recruiting for this unit and speeding up the relocation program, the government figured it could simultaneously weed out the “disloyal” and thus get a clearer idea of exactly how many agents and Japanese sympathizers it actually had to deal with. This part of it would have been comical if the results were not so grotesque. No self-respecting espionage agent would willingly admit he was disloyal. Yet the very idea of the oath itself--appearing at the end of that first chaotic year--became the final goad that prodded many once-loyal citizens to turn militantly anti-American.

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1. At the time this move was widely condemned, and *inu* charges escalated. That was, in fact, one of the causes for Tayama's beating. Since then history has proved the JACL was right. Mike Masaoka, who pushed the resolution through, understood that the most effective way Japanese Americans could combat the attitudes that put them in places like Manzanar was to shed their blood on the battlefield. The all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team was the most decorated American unit in World War II; it also suffered the highest percentage of casualties and deaths. They were much admired, and the JACL strategy succeeded. This was visible *proof* that these 110,000 people could be trusted.

From the beginning Papa knew his own answer would be YES YES. He agreed with Woody on this much, even though it meant swearing allegiance to the government that had sent him to Fort Lincoln and denying his connections with the one country in the world where he might still have the rights of a citizen. The alternative was worse. If he said NO NO, he could be sent to Tule Lake camp in northern California where all the "disloyal" were to be assembled for what most people believed would be eventual repatriation to Japan. Papa had no reason to return to Japan. He was too old to start over. He believed America would win the war, and he knew, even after all he'd endured, that if he had a future it still lay in this country. What's more, a move to Tule Lake could mean a further splitting up of our family.

This was a hard choice to make, and even harder to hold to. Anti-American feeling in camp ran stronger than ever. Pro-Japan forces were trying to organize a NO NO vote by blocks, in massive resistance. Others wanted to boycott the oath altogether in a show of noncooperation or through the mistaken fear that *anyone* who accepted the form would be shipped out of camp: the NO NOS back to Japan, the YES YESS into an American society full of wartime hostility and racial hate.

A meeting to debate the matter was called in our mess hall. Papa knew that merely showing his face would draw stares and muttered comments. YES YES

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was just what they expected of an *inu*. But he had to speak his mind before the NO NO contingent carried the block. Saying NO NO as an individual was one thing, bullying the entire camp into it was quite another. At the very least he didn't want to be sucked into such a decision without having his own opinion heard.

Woody wanted to go with him, but Papa said it was a meeting for "heads of households" only and he insisted on going alone. From the time he heard about it he purposely drank nothing stronger than tea. He shaved and trimmed his mustache and put on a silk tie. His limp was nearly gone now, but he carried his cane and went swaggering off down the narrow walkway between the barracks, punching at the packed earth in front of him.

About four o'clock I was playing hopscotch in the firebreak with three other girls. It was winter, the sun had already dropped behind Mount Whitney. Now a wind was rising, the kind of biting, steady wind that could bring an ocean of sand into camp at any moment with almost no warning. I was hurrying back to the barracks when I heard a great commotion inside the mess hall, men shouting wildly, as if a fire had broken out. The loudest voice was Papa's, cursing.

*"Eta! (trash) Eta! Bakayaro! Bakayaro!"*

The door of the mess hall flew open and a short, beefy man came tearing out. He jumped off the porch, running as his feet hit the ground. He didn't get far. Papa came through the doorway right behind him, in a flying leap, bellowing like a warrior, "Yaaaaaah!" He let go of his cane as he landed on the man's back, and they both tumbled into the dirt. The wind was rising. Half the sky was dark with a tide of sand pouring toward us. The dust billowed and spun as they kicked and pummeled and thrashed each other.

At the meeting, when Papa stood up to defend the YES YES position, murmurs of "*Inu, inu*" began to circulate around the mess hall. This man then jumped up at



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the speaker's table and made the charge aloud. Papa went for him. Now, outside in the dirt, Papa had him by the throat and would have strangled him, but some other men pulled them apart. I had never seen him so livid, yelling and out of his head with rage. While they pinned his arms, he kicked at the sand, sending windblown bursts of it toward the knot of men dragging his opponent out of reach.

A few moments later the sandstorm hit. The sky turned black as night. Everyone ran for cover. Two men hustled Papa to our barracks. The fighting against the wind and sand to get there calmed him down some.

Back inside he sat by the stove holding his teacup and didn't speak for a long time. One cheekbone was raw where it had been mashed into the sand. Mama kept pouring him little trickles of tea. We listened to the wind howl. When the sand died down, the sky outside stayed black. The storm had knocked out the electricity all over the camp. It was a cold, lonely night, and we huddled around our oil stove while Mama and Woody and Chizu began to talk about the day.

A young woman came in, a friend of Chizu's, who lived across the way. She had studied in Japan for several years. About the time I went to bed she and Papa began to sing songs in Japanese, warming their hands on either side of the stove, facing each other in its glow. After a while Papa sang the first line of the Japanese national anthem, *Kimi ga yo*. Woody, Chizu, and Mama knew the tune, so they hummed along while Papa and the other woman sang the words. It can be a hearty or a plaintive tune, depending on your mood. From Papa, that night, it was a deep-throated lament. Almost invisible in the stove's small glow, tears began running down his face.

I had seen him cry a few times before. It only happened when he was singing or when someone else sang a song that moved him. He played the three-stringed *samisen*, which Kiyoko and I called his "pinko-pinko." We would laugh together when we heard him plucking it and whining out old Japanese melodies. We would hold our ears and giggle. It was always a great joke between us,



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except for those rare times when Papa began to weep at the lyrics. Then we would just stare quietly--as I did that night--from some hidden corner of the room. This was always mysterious and incomprehensible.

The national anthem, I later learned, is what he had sung every morning as a schoolboy in Japan. They still sing it there, the way American kids pledge allegiance to the flag. It is not a martial song, or a victory song, the way many national anthems are. It is really a poem, whose words go back to the ninth century:

*Kimi ga yo wa chiyoni  
yachiyoni sa-za-re i-shi no i-wa-o to  
na-ri-te ko-ke no musu made.*

May thy peaceful reign last long.  
May it last for thousands of years,  
Until this tiny stone will grow  
Into a massive rock, and the moss  
Will cover it deep and thick.

It is a patriotic song that can also be read as a proverb, as a personal credo for endurance. The stone can be the kingdom or it can be a man's life. The moss is the greenery that, in time, will spring even from a rock. In Japan, before the turn of the century, outside my father's house there stood one of those stone lanterns, with four stubby legs and a small pagodalike roof. Each morning someone in the household would pour a bucketful of water over this lantern, and after several years a skin of living vegetation began to show on the stone. As a boy he was taught that the last line of the anthem refers to a certain type of mossy lichen with exquisitely tiny white flowers sprinkled in amongst the green.

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## Part 2

twelve

### **Manzanar, U.S.A.**

In Spanish, Manzanar means “apple orchard.” Great stretches of Owens Valley were once green with orchards and alfalfa fields. It has been a desert ever since its water started flowing south into Los Angeles, sometime during the twenties. But a few rows of untended pear and apple trees were still growing there when the camp opened, where a shallow water table had kept them alive. In the spring of 1943 we moved to Block 28, right up next to one of the old pear orchards. That’s where we stayed until the end of the war, and those trees stand in my memory for the turning of our life in camp, from the outrageous to the tolerable.

Papa pruned and cared for the nearest trees. Late that summer we picked the fruit green and stored it in a root cellar he had dug under our new barracks. At night the wind through the leaves would sound like the surf had sounded in Ocean Park, and while drifting off to sleep I could almost imagine we were still living by the beach.

Mama had set up this move. Block 28 was also close to the camp hospital. For the most part, people lived there who had to have easy access to it. Mama’s connection was her job as dietician. A whole half of one barracks had fallen empty when another family relocated. Mama hustled us in there almost before they’d snapped their suitcases shut.

For all the pain it caused, the loyalty oath finally did speed up the relocation program. One result was a gradual easing of the congestion in the barracks. A shrewd house-hunter like Mama could set things up fairly comfortably--by

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Manzanar standards--if she kept her eyes open. But you had to move fast. As soon as the word got around that so-and-so had been cleared to leave, there would be a kind of tribal restlessness, a nervous rise in the level of neighborhood gossip as wives jockeyed for position to see who would get the empty cubicles.

In Block 28 we doubled our living space--four rooms for the twelve of us. Ray and Woody walled them with sheetrock. We had ceilings this time, and linoleum floors of solid maroon. You had three colors to choose from--maroon, black, and forest green--and there was plenty of it around by this time. Some families would vie with one another for the most elegant floor designs, obtaining a roll of each color from the supply shed, cutting it into diamonds, squares, or triangles, shining it with heating oil, then leaving their doors open so that passers-by could admire the handiwork.

Papa brought his still with him when we moved. He set it up behind the door, where he continued to brew his own sake and brandy. He wasn't drinking as much now, though. He spent a lot of time outdoors. Like many of the older Issei men, he didn't take a regular job in camp. He puttered. He had been working hard for thirty years and, bad as it was for him in some ways, camp did allow him time to dabble with hobbies he would never have found time for otherwise.

Once the first year's turmoil cooled down, the authorities started letting us outside the wire for recreation. Papa used to hike along the creeks that channeled down from the base of the Sierras. He brought back chunks of driftwood, and he would pass long hours sitting on the steps carving myrtle limbs into benches, table legs, and lamps, filling our rooms with bits of gnarled, polished furniture.

He hauled stones in off the desert and built a small rock garden outside our doorway, with succulents and a patch of moss. Near it he laid flat steppingstones leading to the stairs.

He also painted watercolors. Until this time I had not known he could paint. He loved to sketch the mountains. If anything made that country habitable it was the

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mountains themselves, purple when the sun dropped and so sharply etched in the morning light the granite dazzled almost more than the bright snow lacing it. The nearest peaks rose ten thousand feet higher than the valley floor, with Whitney, the highest, just off to the south. They were important for all of us, but especially for the Issei. Whitney reminded Papa of Fujiyama, that is, it gave him the same kind of spiritual sustenance. The tremendous beauty of those peaks was inspirational, as so many natural forms are to the Japanese (the rocks outside our doorway could be those mountains in miniature). They also represented those forces in nature, those powerful and inevitable forces that cannot be resisted, reminding a man that sometimes he must simply endure that which cannot be changed.

Subdued, resigned, Papa's life--all our lives--took on a pattern that would hold for the duration of the war. Public shows of resentment pretty much spent themselves over the loyalty oath crises. *Shikata ga nai* again became the motto, but under altered circumstances. What had to be endured was the climate, the confinement, the steady crumbling away of family life. But the camp itself had been made livable. The government provided for our physical needs. My parents and older brothers and sisters, like most of the internees, accepted their lot and did what they could to make the best of a bad situation. "We're here," Woody would say. "We're here, and there's no use moaning about it forever."

Gardens had sprung up everywhere, in the firebreaks, between the rows of barracks--rock gardens, vegetable gardens, cactus and flower gardens. People who lived in Owens Valley during the war still remember the flowers and lush greenery they could see from the highway as they drove past the main gate. The soil around Manzanar is alluvial and very rich. With water siphoned off from the Los Angeles-bound aqueduct, a large farm was under cultivation just outside the camp, providing the mess halls with lettuce, corn, tomatoes, eggplant, string beans, horseradish, and cucumbers. Near Block 28 some of the men who had been professional gardeners built a small park, with mossy nooks, ponds,

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waterfalls and curved wooden bridges. Sometimes in the evenings we could walk down the raked gravel paths. You could face away from the barracks, look past a tiny rapids toward the darkening mountains, and for a while not be a prisoner at all. You could hang suspended in some odd, almost lovely land you could not escape from yet almost didn't want to leave.

As the months at Manzanar turned to years, it became a world unto itself, with its own logic and familiar ways. In time, staying there seemed far simpler than moving once again to another, unknown place. It was as if the war were forgotten, our reason for being there forgotten. The present, the little bit of busywork you had right in front of you, became the most urgent thing. In such a narrowed world, in order to survive, you learn to contain your rage and your despair, and you try to re-create, as well as you can, your normality, some sense of things continuing. The fact that America had accused us, or excluded us, or imprisoned us, or whatever it might be called, did not change the kind of world we wanted. Most of us were born in this country; we had no other models. Those parks and gardens lent it an Asian character, but in most ways it was a totally equipped American small town, complete with schools, churches, Boy Scouts, beauty parlors, neighborhood gossip, fire and police departments, glee clubs, softball leagues, Abbott and Costello movies, tennis courts, and traveling shows. (I still remember an Indian who turned up one Saturday billing himself as a Sioux chief, wearing bear claws and head feathers. In the firebreak he sang songs and danced his tribal dances while hundreds of us watched.)

In our family, while Papa puttered, Mama made her daily rounds to the mess halls, helping young mothers with their feeding, planning diets for the various ailments people suffered from. She wore a bright yellow, long-billed sun hat she had made herself and always kept stiffly starched. Afternoons I would see her coming from blocks away, heading home, her tiny figure warped by heat waves and that bonnet a yellow flower wavering in the glare.

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In their disagreement over serving the country, Woody and Papa had struck a kind of compromise. Papa talked him out of volunteering; Woody waited for the army to induct him. Meanwhile he clerked in the co-op general store. Kiyo, nearly thirteen by this time, looked forward to the heavy winds. They moved the sand around and uncovered obsidian arrowheads he could sell to old men in camp for fifty cents apiece. Ray, a few years older, played in the six-man touch football league, sometimes against Caucasian teams who would come in from Lone Pine or Independence. My sister Lillian was in high school and singing with a hillbilly band called The Sierra Stars--jeans, cowboy hats, two guitars, and a tub bass. And my oldest brother, Bill, led a dance band called The Jive Bombers--brass and rhythm, with cardboard fold-out music stands lettered J. B. Dances were held every weekend in one of the recreation halls. Bill played trumpet and took vocals on Glenn Miller arrangements of such tunes as *In the Mood*, *String of Pearls*, and *Don't Fence Me In*. He didn't sing *Don't Fence Me In* out of protest, as if trying quietly to mock the authorities. It just happened to be a hit song one year, and they all wanted to be an up-to-date American swing band. They would blast it out into recreation barracks full of bobby-soxed, jitter-bugging couples:

*Oh, give me land, lots of land  
Under starry skies above,  
Don't fence me in.  
Let me ride through the wide  
Open country that I love . . .*

Pictures of the band, in their bow ties and jackets, appeared in the high school yearbook for 1943–1944, along with pictures of just about everything else in camp that year. It was called *Our World*. In its pages you see school kids with armloads of books, wearing cardigan sweaters and walking past rows of tarpapered shacks. You see chubby girl yell leaders, pompons flying as they leap

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with glee. You read about the school play, called *Growing Pains* “. . . the story of a typical American home, in this case that of the McIntyres. They see their boy and girl tossed into the normal awkward growing up stage, but can offer little assistance or direction in their turbulent course . . .” with Shoji Katayama as George McIntyre, Takudo Ando as Terry McIntyre, and Mrs. McIntyre played by Kazuko Nagai.

All the class pictures are in there, from the seventh grade through twelfth, with individual head shots of seniors, their names followed by the names of the high schools they would have graduated from on the outside: Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, Herbert Hoover, Sacred Heart. You see pretty girls on bicycles, chicken yards full of fat pullets, patients back-tilted in dental chairs, lines of laundry, and finally, two large blowups, the first of a high tower with a searchlight, against a Sierra backdrop, the next a two-page endsheet showing a wide path that curves among rows of elm trees. White stones border the path. Two dogs are following an old woman in gardening clothes as she strolls along. She is in the middle distance, small beneath the trees, beneath the snowy peaks. It is winter. All the elms are bare. The scene is both stark and comforting. This path leads toward one edge of camp, but the wire is out of sight, or out of focus. The tiny woman seems very much at ease. She and her tiny dogs seem almost swallowed by the landscape, or floating in it.



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thirteen

## Outings, Explorations

Once we settled into Block 28 that ache I'd felt since soon after we arrived at Manzanar subsided. It didn't entirely disappear, but it gradually submerged, as semblances of order returned and our pattern of life assumed its new design.

For one thing, Kiyo and I and all the other children finally had a *school*. During the first year, teachers had been volunteers; equipment had been makeshift; classes were scattered all over camp, in mess halls, recreation rooms, wherever we could be squeezed in. Now a teaching staff had been hired. Two blocks were turned into Manzanar High, and a third block of fifteen barracks was set up to house the elementary grades. We had blackboards, new desks, reference books, lab supplies. That second, stable school year was one of the things *Our World* commemorated when it came out in June of 1944.

My days spent in classrooms are largely a blur now, as one merges into another. What I see clearly is the face of my fourth-grade teacher--a pleasant face, but completely invulnerable, it seemed to me at the time, with sharp, commanding eyes. She came from Kentucky. She wore wedgies, loose slacks, and sweaters that were too short in the sleeves. A tall, heavysset spinster, about forty years old, she always wore a scarf on her head, tied beneath the chin, even during class, and she spoke with a slow, careful Appalachian accent. She was probably the best teacher I've ever had--strict, fair-minded, dedicated to her job. Because of her, when we finally returned to the outside world I was, academically at least, more than prepared to keep up with my peers.

I see her face. But what I hear, still ringing in my mind's ear, is the Glee Club I belonged to, made up of girls from the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. We rehearsed every day during the last period. In concert we wore white cotton blouses and dark skirts. Forty voices strong we would line up at assemblies or at

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talent shows in the firebreak and sing out in unison all the favorites school kids used to learn: *Beautiful Dreamer*, *Down By the Old Mill Stream*, *Shine On Harvest Moon*, *Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

Outside of school we had a recreation program, with leaders hired by the War Relocation Authority. During the week they organized games and craft activities. On weekends we often took hikes beyond the fence. A series of picnic groups and camping sites had been built by internees--clearings, with tables, benches, and toilets. The first was about half a mile out, the farthest several miles into the Sierras. As restrictions gradually loosened, you could measure your liberty by how far they'd let you go--to Camp Three with a Caucasian, to Camp Three alone, to Camp Four with a Caucasian, to Camp Four alone. As fourth- and fifth-graders we usually hiked out to Camp One, on the edge of Bair's Creek, where we could wade, collect rocks, and sit on the bank eating lunches the mess hall crew packed for us. I would always take along a quart jar and a white handkerchief and sit for an hour next to the stream, watching it strain through the cloth, trickling under the glass. Water there was the clearest I've ever seen, running right down off the snow.

One of our leaders on these excursions was a pretty young woman named Lois, about twenty-five at the time, who wore long braids, full skirts, and peasant blouses. She was a Quaker, like so many of the Caucasians who came in to teach and do volunteer work. She also had a crush on a tall, very handsome and popular Nisei boy who sometimes sang and danced in the talent shows. His name was Isao. In order to find a little free time together, Lois and Isao arranged an overnight camping trip for all the girls in our class. We took jars for water, potatoes to roast, and army blankets and hiked up Bair's Creek one Friday afternoon to a nice little knoll at the base of the mountains.

All the girls were tittering and giggling at the way Isao and Lois held hands and looked at each other. They built us a big driftwood fire that night, and told us ghost stories until they figured we had all dozed off. Then they disappeared for a

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while into the sagebrush. I was still awake and heard their careful footsteps snapping twigs. I thought how hard it would be to walk around out there without a flashlight. It was years later that I remembered and understood what that outing must have been for them. At the time I had my own escape to keep me occupied. In truth, I barely noticed their departure. This was the first overnight camping trip I'd ever made. For me it was enough to be outside the barracks for a night, outside the square mile of wire, next to a crackling blaze and looking at stars so thick and so close to the ground I could have reached up and scooped out an armful.

If I had been told, the next morning, that I could stay outside the fence as long as I wanted, that I was free to go, it would have sent me sprinting for the compound. Lovely as they were to look at, the Sierras were frightening to think about, an icy barricade. If you took off in the opposite direction and made it past the Inyos, you'd hit Death Valley, while to the south there loomed a range of brown, sculpted hills everyone said were full of rattlesnakes. Camp One was about as far as I cared to venture. What's more, Block 28 was "where I lived" now. One night was plenty, one night every once in a while, to explore whatever was out there.

You might call that the image for a whole series of little explorations I began to make during the next year, looking for some place "outside," early gropings for that special thing I could be or do for myself.

In addition to the regular school sessions and the recreation program, classes of every kind were being offered all over camp: singing, acting, trumpet playing, tap-dancing, plus traditional Japanese arts like needlework, judo, and kendo. The first class I attended was in baton twirling, taught by a chubby girl about fourteen named Nancy. In the beginning I used a sawed-off broomstick with an old tennis

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ball stuck on one end. When it looked like I was going to keep at this, Mama ordered me one like Nancy's from the Sears, Roebuck catalogue. Nancy was a very good twirler and taught us younger kids all her tricks. For months I practiced, joined the baton club at school, and even entered contests. Since then I have often wondered what drew me to it at that age. I wonder, because of all the activities I tried out in camp, this was the one I stayed with, in fact returned to almost obsessively when I entered high school in southern California a few years later. By that time I was desperate to be "accepted," and baton twirling was one trick I could perform that was thoroughly, unmistakably American--putting on the boots and a dress crisscrossed with braid, spinning the silver stick and tossing it high to the tune of a John Philip Sousa march.

Even at ten, before I really knew what waited outside, the Japanese in me could not compete with that. It tried--in camp, and many times later, in one form or another. My visit to the old geisha who lived across the firebreak was a typical example of how those attempts turned out. She was offering lessons in the traditional dancing called *odori*. A lot of young girls studied this in order to take part in the big *obon* festival held every August, a festival honoring dead ancestors, asking them to bring good crops in the fall.

She was about seventy, a tiny, aristocratic-looking woman. She took students in her barracks cubicle, which was fitted out like a little Buddhist shrine, with tatami mats on the floor. She would kneel in her kimono and speak very softly in Japanese, while her young assistant would gracefully swing closed knees or bend her swanlike neck to the old geisha's instructions.

I sat across the room from her for an hour trying to follow what was going on. It was all a mystery. I had never learned the language. And this woman was so old, even her dialect was foreign to me. She seemed an occult figure, more spirit than human. When she bowed to me from her knees at the end of the hour, I rushed out of there, back to more familiar surroundings.

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Something about her fascinated me though. For a while I tried to keep in contact with her lore via the reports of two girls from my class, Reiko and Mitsue, who had stayed on as students. Because they came from wealthy families and spoke and understood both English and Japanese, they had high opinions of themselves. Whenever I pressed them for details of what they'd learned, they would tease me.

"A good dancer must have good skin," Reiko would say. "In order to have good skin you must rub Rose Brilliantine Hair Tonic on your face and rub cold cream in your hair."

I went home and did this secretly, when no one else was around, and waited for my skin to become the skin of an odori dancer.

"You have to think about your clothing," Mitsue would tell me. "A good dancer is recognized by her clothing. You should wear your stockings inside out and never, *never* wear any underpants."

I did this too, on the sly, until Mama asked me why my socks were always inside out, and why I was wearing nothing underneath my dress. She was not amused when I explained it to her. She told me to stay away from those girls, they were just being mean, and if I wanted lessons from the old geisha woman, Mama herself would take me over there and arrange it. I shook my head and told her no, I didn't want to do that right now. I had another kind of dancing in mind.

This time it was ballet. I had never seen ballet. I'd only heard of it. But it sounded like something I would want to do. In Ocean Park I had taken tap-dancing lessons; my older brothers would coax me to perform for visitors, and it gained me a lot of attention. In camp I had already danced in a couple of talent shows. When the word came around that a woman was offering ballet lessons, I showed up, with three other young girls. It was a dusty day anyhow, and there wasn't much you could do outside.

The classroom was an abandoned barracks. No one had lived there for months. Light showed through the warped planking. It was almost like going back

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two years to the day we first arrived, except that a piano sat on the bare, splintered boards, and here was a thirtyish Japanese woman, with her hair pulled back in a chignon, wearing a pink tutu, a pair of pink toe-dancing shoes, and no tights.

At the piano sat a young girl with glasses on, studying some sheet music in the not quite adequate light from a single overhead bulb. When we were all in the room and seated on the floor, she began to play, and the dancer began to dance as if she were the one trying out, not us. She twirled, and she leaped from wall to wall, flinging her arms. She had been a good dancer once, but now she was overweight, and sad to watch, even in the eyes of a ten-year-old who had never seen this kind of dancing.

I was intrigued by her strange, flat-toed shoes, badly frayed, worn down by the boards. I stared too at her legs. I could not stop watching them while she spun, sidestepping knotholes. They were thick, white, blue-veined, tapering sharply from the quivering thighs, the kind of legs my older sisters would have called *daikon ashi* (*daikon* means horseradish; *ashi* is leg).

She began to show us a few steps and tricks, beginning with the splits. She hoisted herself and reversed her torso and came down again with her legs spread. I winced, sure the planks would tear her skin. Then she got the four of us up to try first position, which I did mainly out of courtesy, in order not to hurt the feelings of this heavy woman with her *daikon ashi* and her shredded shoes.

After showing us the first three ballet positions she sat down to rest. She took her shoes off. Her toes were showing blood. I noticed then the lines in her face, the traces of gray in her black hair. I felt so sorry for her I decided to go ahead and sign up for her course. But once I left that room, back out into the dusty, wind-flurried afternoon, I never did return. Ballet seemed then some terrible misuse of the body, and she was so anxious to please us, her very need to hold on to whatever she had been scared me away.



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Among my explorations during these months, there was one more, final venture into Catholicism. The Maryknoll chapel was just up the street now and easy to get to. I resumed my catechism. Once again I was listening with rapt terror to the lives of the saints and the martyrs, although that wasn't really what attracted me this time. I had found another kind of inspiration, had seen another way the church might make me into something quite extraordinary.

I had watched a girl my own age shining at the center of one of their elaborate ceremonies. It appealed to me tremendously. She happened to be an orphan, and I figured that if this much could befall an orphan, imagine how impressive I would look in such a role.

I had long observed her from a distance, a slim and lovely girl, and always aloof, because of the way other kids treated orphans there, as if a lack of parents put you somehow beneath everyone else. I confess I felt that way myself. Orphans were in a class apart. In Block 28 we saw them often. "Children's Village," where Sister Suzanne and Sister Bernadette put in a good deal of time, was as near to us as their chapel--two blocks away in the opposite direction. Each day about a dozen of them, including this girl, would come trooping past our barracks on the way to a catechism lesson. On days I intended to go, I would wait till they were half a block ahead, so I wouldn't be seen arriving in their midst.

This girl had already been baptized. What I witnessed was her confirmation. She was dressed like a bride, in a white gown, white lace hood, and sheer veil, walking toward the altar, down the aisle of that converted barracks. Watching her from the pew I was pierced with envy for the position she had gained. At the same time I was filled with awe and with a startled wonder at the notion that this girl, this orphan, could become such a queen.

A few days later I let it be known that I was going to be baptized into the church and confirmed as soon as the nuns thought I was ready. I announced this to the Sisters and they rejoiced. I announced it at home, and Papa exploded.



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"No," he roared. "Absolutely not!"

I just stood there, stunned, too scared to speak.

"You're too young!"

I started to cry.

"How are you going to get married?" he shouted. "If you get baptized a Catholic, you have to marry a Catholic. No Japanese boys are in the Catholic church. You get baptized now, how are you going to find a good Japanese boy to marry?"

I ran to Mama, but she knew better than to argue with him about this. I ran to the chapel and told Sister Bernadette, and she came hurrying to the barracks. She and Papa had become pretty good friends over the months. Once every week or so she would visit, and while he sipped his apricot brandy they would talk about religion. But this time, when she came to the door and called "*Wakatsuki-san?*" he met her there shouting, "No! No baptism!"

She raised her eyebrows, trying to stare him down.

He rose to his full height, as if she, about the size of Mama, were the general of some invading army, and said, "Too young!"

"Old enough to know God!"

"Who knows anything of God at ten?"

This made her angry. At any other time they would have taken an hour hearing each other out. But now, when she opened her mouth to reply, his upheld flat palm stopped her. He was not going to argue. He wouldn't even let her past the door.

In exasperation she glared at him, then turned and walked away. I ran to my bunk, devastated, and wept, hating him. I was too ashamed to go back to catechism after that. I just hated Papa, for weeks, and dreamed of the white-gowned princess I might have become. Late afternoons, practicing my baton in the firebreak, angrily I would throw him into the air and watch him twirl, and catch him, and throw him high, again and again and again.

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