Farewell to Manzaar Plot Overview

On the morning of dDcember 7, 1941, Jeanne Wakatsuki says farewell to Papa’s sardine fleet at San Pedro Harbor in California. But soon the boats return, and news reaches the family that the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Papa burns his Japanese flag and identity papers but is arrested by the FBI. Mama moves the family to the Japanese ghetto on Terminal Island and then to Boyle Heights in Los Angeles. President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066, which he signs in February 1942, gives the military the authority to relocate potential threats to national security. Those of Japanese descent in America can only await their final destination: “their common sentiment is *shikata ga nai”* (“it cannot be helped”). One month later, the government orders the Wakatsukis to move to Manzanar Relocation Center in the desert 225 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

Upon arriving in the camp, the Japanese Americans find cramped living conditions, badly prepared food, unfinished barracks, and swirling dust that blows in through every crack and knothole. There is not enough warm clothing to go around, many people fall ill from immunizations and poorly preserved food, and they must face the indignity of the nonpartitioned camp toilets, an insult that particularly affects Mama. The Wakatsukis stop eating together in the camp mess halls, and the family begins to disintegrate. Jeanne, virtually abandoned by her family, takes an interest in the other people in camp and begins studying religious questions with a pair of nuns. However, after Jeanne experiences sunstroke while imagining herself as a suffering saint, Papa orders her to stop.

Papa is arrested and returns a year later. He has been at Fort Lincoln detention camp. The family is unsure how to greet him. Only Jeanne welcomes him openly. Jeanne has always admired Papa, who left his samurai, or warrior class, family in Japan to protest the declining social status of the samurai. She looks back fondly on the style with which he has always conducted himself, from his courting of Mama to his virtuoso pig carving. Something has happened to Papa, however, during his time at the detention camp, where the government interrogators have accused him of disloyalty and spying. The accusation is an insult and has sent Papa into a downward emotional spiral. He becomes violent and drinks heavily, and nearly strikes Mama with his cane before Kiyo, Papa’s youngest son, saves her by punching Papa in the face.

The frustration of the other men in camp eventually results in an event called the December Riot, which breaks out after three men are arrested for beating a man suspected of helping the U.S. government. The rioters roam the camp searching for *inu,* a word that means both “dog” and “traitor” in Japanese. The military police try to put an end to the riot, but in the chaos they shoot into the crowd, killing two Japanese and wounding ten others. The same night, a patrol group accosts Jeanne’s brother-in-law Kaz and his fellow workers and accuses them of sabotage. The mess hall bells ring until noon the following day as a memorial to the dead. Soon after, the government issues a Loyalty Oath to distinguish loyal Japanese from potential enemies. Camp opinion about whether to take the oath is divided. Answering “No No” to the loyalty questions will result in deportation, but answering “Yes Yes” will result in being drafted. Both Papa and Woody, one of his sons, endorse the “Yes Yes” position, and Papa attacks a man for calling him an*inu,* or collaborator. That night, Jeanne overhears Papa singing the Japanese national anthem, *Kimi ga yo,* which speaks of the endurance of stones.

After the riots, camp life calms down and the Wakatsuki family moves to a nicer barracks near a pear orchard, where Papa takes up gardening. Manzanar itself begins to resemble a typical American town. Schools open, the residents are allowed to take short trips outside the camp, and Jeanne’s oldest brother, Bill, even forms a dance band called The Jive Bombers. Jeanne explores the world inside the camp and tries out various Japanese and American hobbies before taking up baton twirling. She also returns to her religious studies and is just about to be baptized when Papa intervenes. Jeanne begins to distance herself from Papa, while the birth of a grandchild draws Mama and Papa closer than ever.

By the end of 1944, the number of people at Manzanar dwindles as men are drafted and families take advantage of the government’s new policy of relocating families away from the west coast. Woody is drafted and, despite Papa’s protests, leaves in November to join the famous all-Nisei 442nd Combat Regiment. While in the military, Woody visits Papa’s family in Hiroshima, Japan. He meets Toyo, Papa’s aunt, and finally understands the origin of Papa’s pride. In December, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the internment policy is illegal, and the War Department begins preparations to close the camps. The remaining residents, out of fear and lack of prospects, try to postpone their departure, but eventually they are ordered to leave. Papa decides to leave in style and buys a broken-down blue sedan to ferry his family back to Long Beach.

In Long Beach, the Wakatsukis move into a housing project called Cabrillo Homes. Though they fear public hatred, they see little sign of it. On the first day of sixth grade, however, a girl in Jeanne’s class is amazed at Jeanne’s ability to speak English, which makes Jeanne realize that prejudice is not always open and direct. She later becomes close friends with the girl, Radine, who lives in the same housing project. The two share the same activities and tastes, but when they move to high school, unspoken prejudice keeps Jeanne from the social and extracurricular successes available to Radine.

Jeanne retreats into herself and nearly drops out of school, but when Papa moves the family to San Jose to take up berry farming, she decides to make another attempt at school life. Her homeroom nominates her to be queen of the school’s annual spring carnival, and for the election assembly she leaves her hair loose and wears an exotic sarong. The teachers try to prevent her from winning, but her friend Leonard Rodriguez uncovers the teachers’ plot and ensures her victory. Papa is furious that Jeanne has won the election by flaunting her sexuality in front of American boys. He forces her to take Japanese dance lessons, but she stops taking them after a short time. As a compromise, she wears a conservative dress to the coronation ceremony, but the crowd’s muttering makes her realize that neither the exotic sarong nor the conservative dress represents her true self.

In April 1972, much later in life, Jeanne visits the Manzanar site with her husband and two children. She needs to remind herself that the camp actually existed, because over the years she has begun to think she imagined the whole thing. Walking through the ruins, the sounds and images of the camp come back to her. Seeing her eleven-year-old daughter, Jeanne realizes that her life began at the camp just as her father’s life ended there. She recalls Papa driving crazily through camp before leaving with his family, and she finally understands his stubborn pride.