No-No Boy

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN OKADA

John Okada was born in Seattle in the early 1920s to first-generation Japanese immigrant parents. He went to college in Seattle, at the University of Washington, but the Second World War interrupted his education. Okada and his family were interned by the United States Government, first at the Puyallup Assembly Center in Washington, and then at an internment camp in Minidoka, Idaho. A year and a half after the U.S. Government began interning its Japanese citizens, it reinstated the draft for them. Okada did not wait to be drafted, instead enlisting as soon as he was allowed. He served as an interpreter, and eventually rose to the rank of sergeant. After the war, Okada completed his first Bachelor's degree at the University of Washington in English Literature, earned a MA at the Columbia University Teacher's College, and then earned a second Bachelors in Library Science, again from UW. Okada then moved to Detroit with his wife and two children. There, he wrote *No-No Boy*, his first and only novel, which received no attention from the Japanese community or the greater literary community at the time. Although he continued to write for the rest of his life, Okada died at 47 without ever seeing the enormous positive critical and cultural response to *No-No Boy*, which began in the 1970s with the beginning of the Asian American literary movement.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

No-No Boy takes place in a Japanese-American community in the immediate aftermath of World War II. To fully understand the novel, one must understand the role of Japan in WWII, and the American government's treatment of its Japanese-American citizens. Japanese immigration to the United States began in the late 1860s, during the first years of the Japanese Meiji period, which marked a turn from feudal isolation to increased Westernization. Japanese immigration to the States remained steady for two decades, spiking after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 radically restricted Chinese immigration, and then stopping almost entirely after the Immigration Act of 1924, which was created with the specific intent of preventing non-white people from entering the United States. Although many new Japanese immigrants were now barred from entering the country, first generation immigrants living in the U.S., known as Issei, began to settle down and have families. The Issei's second-generation children, known as Nisei, were often as American as they were Japanese, which created stark generational divides. World War II began in 1939, but the United States' involvement truly began in 1941, when Pearl Harbor in Hawaii was bombed by the Japanese military. Although other U.S. enemies included Germany and Italy, and hundreds of thousands of citizens of German and Italian descent lived in America and potentially retained fondness for, or loyalty to, their countries of origin, the United States government moved to intern approximately 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry, ostensibly to contain any security risk Japanese men and women still loyal to Japan might pose to their adopted home. Although the United States imprisoned its own citizens and stripped them of their constitutional rights, it nonetheless held them accountable to the draft, forcing young Japanese American men to answer a loyalty questionnaire, including questions 27 and 28, which asked "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" and "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?" Those who answered yes to both questions were allowed to serve in the military, but those who answered no to both were branded "no-no boys," and imprisoned for the duration of the war.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

No-No Boy is often cited as the very first work of Asian American Literature. Although this is not literally true, and other books had been written by first- or second-generation Asian authors living in America—books like Yung Wing's 1909 autobiography *My Life in China and America* or Etsuko Sugimoto's 1925 autobiography *A Daughter of the Samurai* predated Okada's novel by decades—*No-No Boy* was directly responsible for the birth of the Asian American Literary movement. Discovered in a used bookstore by a group of young Asian American men, *No-No Boy* helped inspire Frank Chin, Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong to publish *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, the first anthology of its kind. This anthology, and *No-No Boy*'s rediscovery, marked the birth of a movement that included works by Asian American authors and their specific cultural experiences in America. Other works similar to *No-No Boy* include Monica Sone's memoir *Nisei Daughter* (1953), which tells about her experience as a Japanese-American woman and her time in internment camps during WWII, Hisaye Yamamoto's *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* (1988), also about her experience as a Japanese-American woman and about the differences between first- and second-generation immigrants, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's memoir (co-written with husband James D. Houston) *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973)

about her time in an internment camp, and Julie Otsaka's *When the Emperor was Divine*, which also deals with the internment camps and racism toward Japanese Americans during and after World War Two.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** No-No Boy
- **When Written:** 1950s
- **Where Written:** Detroit, Michigan
- **When Published:** 1957
- **Literary Period:** Asian American Literature, Post-War Fiction
- **Genre:** Realistic Fiction
- **Setting:** 1940s Washington
- **Climax:** Kenji and Mrs. Yamada's deaths
- **Antagonist:** The U.S. Government, Racism and Prejudice
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

A Second Chance. John Okada spent the last years of his life working on a second novel, and after his death his widow, Dorothy, attempted to get publishers interested in his unfinished book. Greeted with general apathy, Dorothy burned her husband's notes and writing.

Day Job. Okada never made significant money from his fiction. Instead he worked at a public library and then as a technical writer.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel opens as Ichiro, a no-no boy and second-generation Japanese American man, returns home to Seattle. World War II has just ended, and Ichiro is free for the first time in four years. He has spent two years in an internment camp, and the next two in prison, after he refused the draft.

Ichiro moves in with his parents, Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada, who own a grocery store where they live and work. He also joins his younger brother, Taro, who resents Ichiro and his parents. Taro feels American, and does not understand his Japanese family. Ichiro's relationship with his mother and father is also fraught, as he believes they raised him to be too Japanese, and this loyalty to them and to Japan caused him to reject the draft. Ichiro regrets his decision, and feels he has ruined his life. He faces discrimination from others in the Japanese community who did fight for the United States, as well as general anti-Japanese discrimination from people of other races and ethnicities.

Ichiro does his best to resume his normal life and explore options for his future. He spends some time with his friend, Freddie, another no-no boy who has been free for several weeks but remains unemployed, drinking, gambling, and partying. Disturbed by this, Ichiro begins to see Freddie as a cautionary tale.

Ichiro runs into an acquaintance, Kenji, near his old university. Kenji lost most of his left leg while serving in the United States Military, but holds no hate in his heart for the army, or for Ichiro for not serving. **Kenji's leg** has remained infected even after amputation, and he believes he only has a few years left to live. Still, he is happy with his life and would not trade it for anything. Ichiro and Kenji quickly become friends, and spend the day and night together, their friendship fully cemented when Kenji defends Ichiro from two Nisei teenagers who attack him for his rejection of the draft.

Kenji takes Ichiro to meet his friend Emi, a young woman whose husband is overseas and has refused to come home. Ichiro and Emi sleep together, and in the morning Emi argues with Ichiro that his life is not over—there is the potential for happiness in his future.

Kenji has to go to Portland for another surgery on his leg, and invites Ichiro to go with him. In Portland, Ichiro drops Kenji off at the hospital and applies for jobs as he waits for his friend to complete surgery. He meets with an engineer, a white man named Mr. Carrick, who feels that the United States was wrong in interning its Japanese citizens, and who offers Ichiro a job on the spot as a kind of reparation. Kenji rejects the offer, but is happy to see that there are people in the world free from prejudice.

Ichiro visits Kenji in the hospital. His friend is clearly sick, and expects to die. He tells Ichiro to go home and mend his relationship with his family instead of staying in Portland. Ichiro leaves and returns to Seattle in Kenji's car. He drops the car with Mr. Kanno, Kenji's father, who tells him that Kenji died that afternoon.

Mrs. Yamada believes Japan won WWII, despite all evidence to the contrary, and insists that the U.S.'s apparent victory was simply propaganda. Ichiro and Mr. Yamada have done their best to convince her otherwise, and finally, before Ichiro leaves for Portland, they seem to have a breakthrough. Unfortunately, however, the breakthrough completely destroys Mrs. Yamada, and when Ichiro returns home one day he finds that his mother, desperately unhappy in America and unable to return to Japan, has killed herself.

The next week after his mother's funeral, Ichiro begins to look for work in Seattle. He meets with Gary, a fellow no-no boy who now works at the Christian Rehabilitation Center, a charitable commune where he paints signs in the daytime and paints for himself at night. Gary believes imprisonment saved his life and helped clarify his purpose. Although Ichiro did not feel that way, he is inspired by how contented Gary seems to

be.

In the evening Ichiro goes out with his friend Freddie one final time. Freddie is in a downward spiral, picking fights, smoking and drinking. The two go to a club where Freddie has been in fights before, and he is dragged outside by a man named Bull who wants to teach him a lesson. Ichiro intervenes, and Freddie runs to his car and takes off, but drives erratically and crashes into a wall, killing himself. Standing stunned in the aftermath, Ichiro begins to believe that there might be a future for him after all, if he will forgive himself and allow himself to choose happiness and community.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ichiro Yamada – The protagonist of the novel, Ichiro is a twenty-five-year-old "no-no boy," who has just returned to Seattle for the first time in four years. He has spent two years in an internment camp, and two years in prison for refusing the draft. Ichiro returns home to live with his parents, Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada, and his brother Taro, with whom he has a fraught relationship. He blames his mother, especially, for raising him as a Japanese man and not an American one, which prevented him from fully assimilating into U.S. culture, and, he believes, caused him to reject the draft. Ichiro is constantly conflicted. He resents his parents, but also feels guilty for resenting them because their lives are also difficult. He wants to lead a normal life, but feels as though he has ruined his future and does not deserve any opportunities. He wants to believe in an America in which there is no prejudice and discrimination, but after his treatment by the government and by the nation's citizens he can barely believe this is possible. Over the course of the novel Ichiro reconnects with old friends and considers different potential futures. In the end, he decides not to make any rash decisions. Instead, he will stay in Seattle with his father, and work to get his life back to where it was before the war. His closest friends are Freddie and Kenji, and he begins a romance with Emi.

Mr. Yamada – Mr. Yamada is Ichiro and Taro's father, and Mrs. Yamada's husband. He moved to the United States from Japan as a young man, with the intention of earning enough money that he could move back to Japan and live a comfortable life. Instead, he's stuck in the U.S. without much hope of returning to his home country, unable to feel American, but unlikely to see Japan again. He runs a grocery store with Mrs. Yamada, and drinks heavily to deal with the pain of his wife's mental illness and the prospect of living in America forever. He loves Ichiro but doesn't understand him, offering him money as a way to bridge the gap between them. After Mrs. Yamada dies Mr. Yamada seems freer and happier. Without his wife, whose mental life was firmly rooted in Japan, Mr. Yamada is allowed to finally put down roots in his adopted home.

Mrs. Yamada – Mrs. Yamada is Ichiro and Taro's mother, and Mr. Yamada's wife. Although she has lived in the United States for over three decades, she still loves Japan, and has no affinity for or loyalty to her adopted home. She believes she will return to Japan eventually, and that Japan is inherently superior to the U.S. Even after Japan loses WWII, she continues to believe that the United States is running a propaganda campaign and Japan is the winner, and that the Emperor will be sending out boats to bring the most loyal of his subjects home. She is wrong, and her inability to accept reality is an illness that destroys her life and her relationship with everyone around her. Mrs. Yamada hates America, and only loves her husband and Ichiro because she believes they are as loyal to Japan as she is. Eventually, Ichiro and Mr. Yamada break through to Mrs. Yamada, explaining that Japan really did lose the war, and has been totally decimated. Unable to fully process this reordering of her world, and faced with realization that she will never be able to return to the Japan of her youth, Mrs. Yamada kills herself.

Taro Yamada – Taro is Ichiro's younger brother, the son of Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada. Unlike Ichiro, who feels torn between his Japanese and American identities, Taro feels distinctly American, dropping out of school on his eighteenth birthday to join the military. He resents his brother, whose inner conflict has motivated Taro to double down on his American-ness. Not long after Ichiro returns home, Taro helps two of his friends attack him—they resent Ichiro because he is a no-no boy. Even after his mother's death Taro does not return home, and has seemingly severed all ties to his family.

Kenji Kanno – Kenji is a veteran and an old acquaintance of Ichiro's. The two reconnect after Ichiro is released from prison and spend several days together. Kenji has progressive ideas about how the world should be—he dreams of a future in which there is no animosity between people of different races or ethnicities. He has no animosity towards Ichiro for not fighting in the war, fully understanding why he made the decision he did. Kenji and his family provide a stark contrast to Ichiro and his. Kenji gets along well his father, Mr. Kanno, and his many siblings, and they all genuinely love and respect each other. **Kenji's left leg** was amputated after a battlefield injury, but constant pain and infection have forced doctors to cut it shorter and shorter. Although Kenji knows he does not have much time left to live, he is happy with his life, and embraces his fate. Kenji eventually dies in the hospital, telling Ichiro that he hopes there are no races in heaven, and everyone can see each other as equals.

Freddie Akimoto – One of Ichiro's friends from before the war, and a fellow no-no boy. After being released from prison, Freddie is unable to readjust to society, instead just gambling, drinking, and having sex with his neighbor, 2-A. He picks fights and lives in constant fear of retaliation. Ichiro doesn't enjoy spending time with him, but understands that Freddie lives

such a wild life to prevent himself from falling into a deep depression. Still unable to function in society, Freddie dies in the novel's final chapter, driving his car away from a fight and crashing into the wall of a nearby building.

Emi – A twenty-seven-year-old Japanese-American woman who lives by herself on a farm outside of Seattle. Emi and Kenji are close friends, and Kenji introduces Emi to Ichiro, with whom she begins an affair. Emi's husband Ralph served in the United States military but, ashamed that his brother repatriated to Japan, refuses to return home. Emi is left sad and lonely, but is receptive to the love and kindness of Kenji, and, eventually, Ichiro.

Mr. Carrick – An engineer who offers Ichiro a job as his company. Mr. Carrick is a white man who feels incredible guilt and shame regarding the United States' treatment of its Japanese citizens. Although Ichiro turns down Mr. Carrick's offer, the knowledge that there are decent people out there free from prejudice inspires and motivates Ichiro to continue looking for work.

Mr. Kanno The father of Kenji, Hanako, Toyo, Tom, and Hisa. Like the Yamadas, he first came to America from Japan in order to get rich and then return home. Unlike the Yamadas, however, Mr. Kanno accepted that his Nisei children grew up more American than Japanese. Though he still considers himself Japanese, he has come to think of America as his home now because it is his children's home, and his love for them is more important to him than national loyalty. Mr. Kanno was confused by Kenji's decision to volunteer to fight for America—the country that put him in an internment camp—but accepts his son's decision. In general, he is shown to be the opposite of Mrs. Yamada: a loving, understanding parent who is able to bridge the generation gap with his children through communication and acceptance of their American identities.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Eto Minato – Eto is a young veteran from Seattle. He and Ichiro knew each other before the war, but now that Ichiro is a no-no boy Eto has no respect for him, and actively harasses him and Freddie.

Gary – A no-no boy who has found a job painting signs at the Christian Rehabilitation Center. He believes that his incarceration was the best thing that ever happened to him, as it gave him a sense of clarity and purpose.

Tommy – A friend of Ichiro's from the internment camp. Tommy was religious and encouraged Ichiro to attend local churches with him. When Ichiro noticed the white parishioners discriminating against a black man, Ichiro refused to return—but Tommy was just grateful that they weren't discriminating against *him* for being Japanese.

Ralph – Mike's brother and Emi's husband. Ralph served in the military during WWII, but was so ashamed by his brother's behavior that he has refused to come home, signing on for increasingly longer deployments.

Mike – Ralph's brother and Emi's brother-in-law, Mike is a middle-aged man whose family was from Japan but who was born in California. Mike fought in WWI, but was so upset by the prospect of internment at the beginning of WWII that he decided to repatriate to Japan.

Mrs. Ashida – A family friend of Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada.

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Reiko Ashida – The teenage daughter of Mrs. Ashida and Mr. Ashida. A family friend of Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada.

Mrs. Kumasaka – A family friend of Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada. The mother of Bob, a soldier who died in the army.

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Bob Kumasaka – A young man the same age as Ichiro, who served in the United States military and was killed in service.

Jun – A young Japanese man who served with Bob in the military.

2-A – A woman who lives in the same apartment as Freddie. The two frequently have sex but it is unclear if they have any romantic feelings for each other.

Baxter Brown – A white professor at Ichiro's former university.

Bull – An argumentative Japanese-American man who often hangs out at the Club Oriental. He has no respect for no-no boys.

Mr. Maeno – A Japanese-American farmer who lives on Emi's land. He offers Ichiro a job, but Ichiro repeatedly turns him down.

Hanako – Kenji's sister.

Toyo – Kenji's sister.

Tom – Kenji's brother.

Hisa – Kenji's sister.

Birdie – An African American friend of Gary's. The two of them worked together at a foundry until harassment and threats forced Gary to leave.

Jim Eng – The Chinese owner and manager of the Club Oriental.

Rabbit – An African American man who works at a shoeshine parlor and as an (unconfirmed) pimp.

Mr. Morrison The manager at the Christian Rehabilitation Center, where Gary works and Ichiro interviews. He speaks some Japanese and offers Ichiro a job.

TERMS

Issei A first-generation Japanese immigrant. A person living in the United States who was born in Japan.

Nisei A second-generation Japanese immigrant. A person born in the United States whose parents were born in Japan.

No-No boy A man who was drafted by the United States Army and answered "no" to two questions regarding his loyalty to the U.S. in a document known as the "loyalty questionnaire." These questions were Question 27, which asked, "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" and Question 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?" Men who answered "no" and "no" were imprisoned, and only released upon the conclusion of WWII.

Jap A derogatory term for a person of Japanese ancestry.

Hiroshima A city in Japan. The United States dropped one of two atom bombs onto the city, helping guarantee Japan's surrender and the end of WWII, but killing tens of thousands of civilians in the process.

Nagasaki A city in Japan. The United States dropped one of two atom bombs onto the city, helping guarantee Japan's surrender and the end of WWII, but killing tens of thousands of civilians in the process.

Repatriate To return or be sent back to one's country of origin.

Internment Camp A prison camp where people are sent without a trial. The United States government interned over 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry during WWII. The government claimed that these people posed a potential security threat, as some of them might be loyal to the Japanese government. Notably, however, the government did not imprison people of German or Italian ancestry, who would ostensibly pose a similar potential security threat. In hindsight, many agree that the internment of Japanese Americans was based as much on racism as on a desire to increase national security.

Phonograph A record player.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

JAPANESE VS. AMERICAN IDENTITY

At the center of *No-No Boy* is the question of what it means to be American, and what it means to be Japanese. The protagonist, Ichiro, is a second-generation Japanese-American immigrant. His parents were born in Japan and moved to the United States with the intention of returning to Japan when they had become wealthy, and they remain loyal to Japan even after decades in America. Ichiro, in contrast, was born in America, and has become at least "half an American." He does not speak Japanese well, and has never visited Japan. Although he and he parents both live in Seattle, they experience the city differently. For Ichiro, the city is home—the only world he has ever known. For his parents, however, Seattle is just a pit stop on their way to a more comfortable retirement in their home country. Questions of national and cultural identity are often complicated for second-generation immigrants, and this is especially true for the second-generation Japanese-Americans who, like Ichiro, were forced to declare allegiance to either America or Japan during World War II. This group, known as the Nisei, found themselves unable to be fully Japanese or fully American, torn between the country in which they grew up and the country of their ancestors. By pointing out the downsides of rigid conceptions of national identity, especially those that ask people to declare their allegiance to one part of themselves at the expense of another, Okada ultimately seems to argue that national and cultural identity can and should be fluid.

Many of the characters in *No-No Boy* live in America but cling tightly to their Japanese identity. Even those who had begun to feel American in the years and decades leading up to the second World War are shocked out of any sense of loyalty to their adopted nation when the government rounds them up and locks them in internment camps—under the pretense that they are not truly American, and pose a threat to national security because of their loyalty to the enemy nation of Japan. Ichiro describes how his parents "had lived in America for thirty-five years without becoming less Japanese and could only speak a few broken words of English and write it not at all." They were uninterested in assimilating into American society, having come to the United States with the intention of staying only temporarily. When Ichiro is drafted, he refuses to fight for America and is imprisoned. Ichiro understands how his rejection of the draft appears to others. He feels that he is looked upon with contempt, and that in their gazes people are saying to him, "This is America, which is for Americans. You have spent two years in prison to prove that you are Japanese—go to Japan!" In this way, Ichiro notes how others create an opposition between Japanese identity and American identity, effectively denying him the right to be both at once. Because he refuses to fight for America, others label Ichiro un-American and fully Japanese, although he himself feels that his identity is much more complex than that.

Tens of thousands of Nisei, and even some Issei (first generation Japanese immigrants), attempt to prove their Americanness by risking their lives for America at war. This was an especially difficult decision, as most Japanese men were drafted only after being imprisoned in internment camps by the government under the pretense that they were in fact *not* true Americans. By fighting for their country these men hoped to prove the government wrong. Although Ichiro himself refuses to fight for America, he understands why so many young men agreed to enlist. He knows that "for each and every refusal based on sundry reasons, another thousand chose to fight for the right to continue to be Americans because homes and cars and money could be regained but only if they first regained their rights as citizens, and that was everything." During a hearing before the draft board, one young man argues that he should fight for the United States because he is a "good American." He says, "maybe I look Japanese and my father and mother and brothers and sisters look Japanese, but we're better Americans than the regular ones because that's the way it has to be when one looks Japanese but is really a good American. We're not like the other Japanese who aren't good Americans like us. We're more like you and the other, regular Americans." According to this young man, a "regular American" is a white American, and being a "good" Japanese-American means acting less Japanese. The two identities, at least during wartime, are presented as mutually exclusive.

Some Nisei, feeling that they are neither fully Japanese nor fully American, struggle to find a clear sense of identity. This dilemma becomes especially fraught when they are called for the draft and must decide whether they will fight for America or be imprisoned for their loyalty to Japan. After being released from prison, Ichiro extensively meditates on whether he is American or Japanese. He sees his mother as his primary tie to Japan, and blames her for preventing him from becoming fully and happily American. He explains, "there came a time when I was only half Japanese because one is not born in America and raised in America and taught in America and one does not speak and swear and drink and smoke and play and fight and see and hear in America among Americans in American streets and houses without becoming American and loving it." However, he is still "half my mother," and "thereby still half Japanese," and this is the part of him that wins when he is forced to choose whether or not to reject the draft. Although Ichiro became American by virtue of being born in America, his loyalty to his mother, which he curses and regrets, prevented him from feeling American enough to fight for America in the war.

Ichiro also recalls the arguments of his fellow Japanese-American men who were called upon to answer the draft. Each had a complicated split identity, although each felt differently about the ways in which he was both Japanese and American. One man says that the government "can't make me go in the army because I'm not an American," arguing that if he were truly an American they "wouldn't have plucked me and mine from a life that was good and meaningful and fenced me in the desert like they do the Jews in Germany." Although this man had once felt like an American, the government's treatment of him and his family had convinced him that, whatever he had felt before, he had been mistaken. Another man argues that, "I'm a good American and I like it here but you can see that it wouldn't do for me to be shooting at my own brother; even if he went back to Japan when I was two years old and couldn't know him if I saw him, it's the feeling that counts, and what can a fellow do?" Although he *is* American, he cannot help that part of his family remains Japanese, leaving him with a feeling of deep connection to a country that is now an enemy of the United States.

Many of the characters within *No-No Boy* see the question of identity as a simple one: Japanese people are those loyal to Japan, while Americans are those loyal to America. In reality, however, the intersections between personal history and national identity are more complicated. For Ichiro and many Japanese-Americans like him, it is hard to choose between the country where they were raised and the country of their ancestry. Similarly, it is hard to choose between Japan—a country many of them have never even seen—and America, a country that has disenfranchised them as citizens and corralled them into internment camps before finally calling them to risk their lives in the American military. To be Japanese or to be American, *No-No Boy* shows, is not a mutually exclusive proposition, as many within the novel think it to be. Instead, to be a human—and especially to be a second-generation immigrant—is always to have more than one identity, and to contain those identities fully and simultaneously despite what others may see as their contradictions.

FAMILY AND GENERATIONAL DIVIDES

The Japanese characters in *No-No Boy* are divided into Issei, who are first-generation immigrants from Japan, and Nisei, second-generation Japanese-Americans who were born in the United States to Japanese parents. Although there is variation within each generation, most first-generation Japanese immigrants in *No-No Boy* speak Japanese and little English, and came to the United States with the goal of making money and then returning home. The second-generation Japanese immigrants, however, grew up speaking English, and while many of them understand Japanese, they do not speak it as well. Unlike their parents, who feel distinctly Japanese, the Nisei are as engaged in American culture as they are in the culture of their families. In some families, the divide between parents and children is more severe, while in others, the parents and children have values that more directly align. Across generations in all families, however, communication is never easy, and life is never simple

as a result. First- and second-generation Japanese-Americans are shown to have certain cultural and ideological differences. The book suggests that the only way to overcome these differences is to practice empathy, and to communicate openly. The bonds of family are strong and difficult to break, but the wellbeing of a family is dependent on its members willingness to empathize with each other, and understand the differences between generations.

Two family dynamics are explored in depth in *No-No Boy*. The first is that of Ichiro's family, in which there is a sharp generational divide, and parents and children do not get along, nor do they understand each other. Ichiro's parents find tradition important, and are inflexible when it comes to change, which makes it difficult for them to embrace the Americanization of their children. Mrs. Yamada is especially rigid in her worldview. When Ichiro returns from prison after refusing to fight for America in World War II, she tells him "I am proud that you are back…I am proud to call you my son." Ichiro understands that what she means is "she had made him what he was and that the thing in him which made him say no to the judge and go to prison for two years was the growth of a seed planted by the mother tree and that she was the mother who had put this thing in her son." Ichiro's mother is glad to have succeeded in instilling a sense of Japanese identity in her son, but is seemingly uninterested in how he has grown into his own person. Although she believes that they are alike, Ichiro has difficulty feeling love for "the woman who was his mother and still a stranger." Even as his mother feels pride that her son rejected the draft, Ichiro feels cursed by his duty to her. He believes "she's killed me with her meanness and hatred." Ichiro's mother has little desire to understand him, and even less desire to understand her younger son, Taro, who is even more American. Taro desperately wants to join the army. His mother does not understand, but Ichiro does. He sees that his brother "was not a son and not a brother…because he was young and American and alien to his parents, who had lived in America for thirty-five years without becoming less Japanese…and because Taro hated that thing in his elder brother which had prevented him from thinking for himself." Although Ichiro attempts to reach out to his brother, Taro has fully rejected Ichiro and his parents, refusing even to come to his mother's funeral later in the novel. Without a willingness to practice empathy, there is no way for the family to understand each other and live peacably together. When they can only see each other as inaccessible strangers, they are unable to be happy individually, and are unable to work towards common goals, financially, professionally, or personally.

The second family dynamic explored in the novel is that of Kenji's family. Kenji's family gets along much better than Ichiro's, and is a testament to how it is possible for families to grow and change together, remaining loving, open, and honest, if they are willing to put in the effort. When Mr. Kanno was in the internment camp, he went to talks by a sociologist who tried to "impart a message of great truth"—that "the old Japanese, the fathers and mothers…did not know their own sons and daughters." This sociologist wondered, "how many of you are able to sit down with your own sons and own daughters and enjoy the companionship of conversation? How many, I ask?" He went on to argue that "If we [the Nisei] are children of America and not the sons and daughters of our parents, it is because you have failed. […] This is America, where you have lived and worked and suffered for thirty or forty years. This is not Japan." As a result, he argues, the Nisei will naturally be different than the Issei, with different cultural identities, different interests, and different priorities. This is something Kenji's father hears, understands, and internalizes, while Ichiro's parents by contrast do not understand the sociologist's message. As a result, Kenji's father puts in the effort to understand his children, and gets along well with all of them. This is perhaps because Kenji's father has begun to embrace and acknowledge America as his home, just as it is his children's home, but it is also simply because he trusts and loves his children and honors their choices. For example, when Kenji went to war, his father "[acceded] to his son's wish because his son was a man who had gone to war to fight for the abundance and happiness that pervaded a Japanese household in America and that was a thing he himself could never fully comprehend except to know that it was very dear." Additionally, Kenji's father has given up on moving back to Japan. Instead, "this country which he had no intention of loving [America] had suddenly begun to become a part of him because it was a part of his children and he saw and felt in their speech and joys and sorrows and hopes and he was a part of them." Unlike Ichiro's family, and Ichiro's mother specifically, who refuses to see the ways in which her son is American, Kenji's father sees that his children are American, and so he too tries to become more American so he can remain connected to them. As a result, Kenji and his father love each other and connect easily. Kenji cannot lie to his father, and speaks to him candidly about the pain in his **leg** and his fears for the future.

Regardless of the specific type of relationship each family has, the bonds of family remain important to each character's identity, and prove difficult to break. Those without strong families feel lonely and unfulfilled. Emi, for example, is alone without her mother, father, or husband, Ralph, and struggles to lead a happy, meaningful life. Similarly Freddie, cut off emotionally from his family and society, struggles to find purpose and direction. Even as he resents his mother, Ichiro still feels an obligation to her and his father. He writes that they are "a mother and son thrown together for a while longer because the family group is a stubborn one and does not easily disintegrate." Ichiro plans to move to Portland and abandon his family, but changes his mind. His "past had been shared with a mother and a father and, whatever they were, he too was a part of them and they a part of him and one did not say this is as far

as we go together, I am stepping out of your lives, without rendering himself only part a man. If he was to find his way back to that point of wholeness and belonging, he must do so in the place where he had begun to lose it." Ichiro understands that to truly begin a new life he must first reckon with his old one. The man who he has become was shaped by his family, whether he likes it or not, and so he must make peace with the idea of family, if not his actual family members, before he can truly grow.

The immediate family unit, and the larger family network made up of relatives spread across America or still living in Japan, is central to the lives of the characters in *No-No Boy*. However, just because these relationships are important, doesn't mean they are always caring or positive. Because there are such intense generational divides between parents born in Japan and children born in the United States, members of both generations must put in additional effort to understand each other's perspectives in order to live with one another. The members of Ichiro's family are unable to empathize with each other, and everyone suffers because of it, feeling isolated and misunderstood. In contrast, Kenji's family has put time and effort into understanding the struggles and experiences of different generations, and their relationships are warm and positive as a result, with siblings and parents providing each other with love, comfort, and safety.

HEALING IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

Every character in *No-No Boy* is dealing with the aftermath of World War II and the effect it had on their lives—and each person has had a different experience. Every Japanese person was interned, but afterwards some were imprisoned, while others went to war. Although the experience of war is different from person to person, what most characters have in common is a desire to heal from their emotional or physical pain and move on with their lives. Okada presents three categories of people, doing their best to cope in the aftermath of war: those who have accepted the past and are attempting to move on, those who have refused to re-assimilate into daily life, and those who have yet to settle and decide how to move forward. Ichiro, the novel's protagonist, has yet to figure out his life or future after being released from prison, and also watches members of his family and community struggle to readjust to post-war life. He sees that those who commit to accepting the past and moving forward are given a chance at a future and inner peace, whereas those who refuse to address their emotions or to try and live a normal life become stuck in the past, unable to ever be fully happy.

Some characters are able to accept the painful realities of the past and attempt to move forward. The novel presents this as the best-case scenario in the aftermath of war. Kenji fought in WWII, where he lost his leg. Although it was originally amputated below the knee, an infection forces doctors to continually whittle away at it. While he currently has **eleven inches** of leg left, Kenji knows that over time he will have less and less, and suspects that his leg will eventually kill him. He and Ichiro discuss whose life is worse, each asking the other if he would trade places with him if he could. Ichiro would happily take Kenji's place, but Kenji has come to terms with his life and his illness, and explains, "When it comes to the last half inch and it starts to hurt, I'll sell the car and spend the rest of my life sitting here with a drink in my hand and feeling good." Ichiro understands that Kenji is saying no to the hypothetical trade. He is content with his life, despite the ways he remains crippled by the past.

Towards the end of the novel, Ichiro meets Gary, another no-no boy who has found employment as a sign painter. Gary is content with his new life, explaining, "" died in prison. And when I came back to life, all that really mattered for me was to make a painting...What was unfortunate for you was the best thing that ever happened to me." Gary was reborn in prison, and sees his new life as a second chance, and he intends to make the best of it. He has a mission and a purpose, and so is able to see his imprisonment as a necessary evil on his way towards a brighter future.

Other characters are unable to cope with the trauma of the past, and therefore are unable to move forward. Although *No-No Boy* is a complex novel, and not moralistic, the lives of the characters who struggle to process their emotions and move into the future are markedly less happy and more difficult than the lives of characters who succeed in doing so. Mrs. Yamada, Ichiro's mother, struggles to move on after the war. Although she was not enlisted, she suffered in an internment camp, and now refuses to accept the truth of America's victory and Japan's defeat. Early in the novel, she receives a letter addressed "To you who are loyal and honorable Japanese," informing her that "the Japanese government is presently making preparations to send ships which will return to Japan those residents in foreign countries who have steadfastly maintained their faith and loyalty to our Emperor." She believes that Japan won the war, and that ships are coming to take her back to her pristine, undefeated homeland. Ichiro sees this belief as crazy, and describes his mother's denial of the truth as a kind of "weird nightmare." It causes her to reject reality, and she begins to think that letters from her relatives in Japan asking for aid are part of a government conspiracy. When Ichiro and his father force his mother to come to terms with reality, the shock literally kills her. She receives a letter from her sister that causes her to realize that America really has won the war, and the Japan she knew has been destroyed by bombs and Allied troops. Having never fully committed to life in America, and unable to return to the home she loves, she kills herself.

Ichiro's friend Freddie, a fellow no-no boy, is also unable to adjust to life after the war. He's been out of prison for a few

weeks longer than Ichiro, and although Ichiro initially goes to see his friend for comfort, he can tell that Freddie "could be of no help to anyone else because he too was alone against the world which he had denounced." Freddie "was waging a shallow struggle with a to-hell-with-the-rest-of-the-world attitude, and wasn't being very successful." As the novel progresses, Freddie makes it clear that he has no desire to reintegrate into society. He has no job, no dreams of the future. Ichiro compares Freddie's life to "being on a pair of waterskies, skimming over the top as long as one traveled at a reasonable speed, but, the moment he slowed down or stopped, it was to sink into nothingness that offered no real support." Freddie, who lives life at high speeds to avoid spending any time on self-reflection, eventually dies as a result of his inability to slow down. First he picks a fight, and then he speeds away and is killed in his getaway car.

Many of the central characters in *No-No Boy* die before the novel is over. Kenji dies as a result of his war injury, Mrs. Yamada kills herself, and Freddie dies in a car crash. However, these deaths are different in important ways. Although Kenji suffers both physically and mentally, he has come to peace with his life—including his past and his future. He tells Ichiro he would not trade his life for Ichiro's, and although he is unlucky, he is settled in his life and looks to the future without fear. Meanwhile, both Ichiro's mother and Freddie are desperately unhappy, each unsuccessfully searching for ways to escape their misery. Ichiro observes his friends and family, and is given the opportunity to decide how he wants to proceed. He sees that those who are unable to cope with the past are unable to live in the present or imagine a future. He sees that, although the wartime traumas of internment and imprisonment may never disappear, there are ways to cope and move forward that would allow him to live a full life, while dwelling in the pain of the past only leads to greater suffering.

PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION, AND RACISM

Ichiro, the protagonist of *No-No Boy*, experiences discrimination from many sides. He is discriminated against by white Americans for being Japanese, and he is also shunned by many of his fellow Japanese-Americans because he refused the draft and went to prison. Experiencing this kind of hatred and prejudice makes Ichiro extremely sensitive to the mistreatment of others. Instead of becoming angry at his own mistreatment, however, he is more frustrated by a world in which there is so much animosity between people who are essentially the same. Ichiro sees that many minority groups, although subjected to mistreatment, only find others to mistreat in turn. Race, ethnicity, and perceived national allegiances are used to discriminate against people and deny them opportunities. However, Ichiro's optimism in the face of intense discrimination raises the possibility of a future in which there is no racism or prejudice, and in which every member of society can live together peacefully, if America's citizens can look past each other's physical or cultural differences to their underlying humanity.

In *No-No Boy*, every Japanese and Japanese-American character has faced intense mistreatment and discrimination because of their race. Indeed, institutional discrimination against the Japanese is at the heart of *No-No Boy* and the history of Japanese immigrants in America. Laws regarding where Japanese people could live and work led many of them into segregated neighborhoods and low-paying jobs. When WWII began, and Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor, anyone with Japanese ancestry living in America was rounded up and sent to internment camps, where they were kept in extremely poor living conditions for four years. As one no-no boy points out when he is called to fight for the United States Army, the United States operated according to a clear double standard in rounding up only Japanese people, since the enemy forces in World War II were also German and Italian. As this unnamed no-no boy argues, why, if "you couldn't have loyal Japanese when Japan is the country you're fighting…how about the Germans and Italians that must be just as questionable as the Japanese or we wouldn't be fighting Germany and Italy? Round them up… what do you think they'll say when you try to draft them into your army of the country that is for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" Notably, only the non-white Japanese were deemed to be a threat, while German and Italian Americans were allowed to continue living their lives. This no-no boy's prescient observation underscores the racism behind the internment of the Japanese during World War II.

No-no boys, in addition to facing discrimination because they are Japanese, face an additional level of hatred and disdain because of their refusal to prove themselves "good Americans" by fighting in the war. Conversely, some Issei, like Ichiro's mother Mrs. Yamada, look down upon the second-generation Japanese men who *did* choose to serve. Yet Ichiro and his fellow no-no boys like Freddie and Gary are also rejected not just by mainstream (white) American society, but by many of their fellow Japanese friends and family. Upon being released from prison, one of the first people Ichiro meets is Eto, another Japanese man, but one who served in the military. Eto is friendly until he realizes that Ichiro is a no-no boy, at which point he calls him a "rotten, no-good bastard," and spits on him. Freddie explains how many of the no-no boys are working the "same crummy jobs," for the "same rotten pay. Before the war the Japs got what the white guys didn't want. Now, if we want work, we take the jobs the good Japs don't want." Thus, even within a marginalized community, the no-no boys are further marginalized.

Discrimination was, of course, widespread in mid-century America, and took many forms. Ichiro sees the ways that different minority groups pick on each other, and he sees little

solidarity, despite the fact that many people are experiencing similar struggles. He is relieved and inspired by brief moments with men and women who seem to be able to look past differences of race, ethnicity, and nationality, but knows these moments are few and far between. Ichiro observes, "One only had to look about to see all the hatred in the world. Where was all the goodness that people talked about, the goodness of which there was never quite enough to offset the hatred?" He thinks specifically of a church in Idaho, which he visited when working as a migrant farmhand during his internment. At one church he felt immediately unwelcome, and after the service a white man leaned out of his car and told Ichiro and his friend, Tommy, that "One Jap is too many" and they shouldn't come back. Several weeks later, Tommy found a different, ostensibly more accepting church. Ichiro went for several weeks, until one week he noticed an old black man standing in the back of the church. No one set out a chair for him, and no one acknowledged him. This upset Ichiro, who saw that although this church was willing to accept the Japanese, they were unwilling to accept African Americans. Tommy argued that, because this church liked them, they were "in no position to stick out [their] necks." Ichiro rejects this response, and refuses to return to a church that he feels is discriminating against anyone.

Unfortunately, however, discrimination works in many directions. Ichiro notes, "half a billion Chinamen…hated the ninety million Japanese and only got hatred in return." Early in the novel some African American men on the street tell him to "Go back to Tokyo." Ichiro recognizes that so many people are "on the outside looking in," and turn against each other to prove that they are the most American in hopes of gaining mainstream acceptance by "true" white Americans. Still, Ichiro remains committed to tolerance, and has a "place deep down inside where tolerance for the Negroes and the Jews and the Mexicans and the Chinese and the too short and too fat and too ugly abided because he was Japanese and knew what it was like better than those who were white and average and middle class and good Democrats or liberal Republicans." He rarely meets others with similar tolerances for people unlike them, but his heart is warmed when he does. Mr. Carrick, an engineer in Portland, is one such man, who offers Ichiro a job for more pay than he would have given to a white applicant. Although Ichiro turns him down, Mr. Carrick becomes a symbol of a more accepting America, and one that even takes action to acknowledge and undo its sins of racism—an America that Ichiro could learn to love again.

In the book's final pages, Ichiro feels "a glimmer of hope," imagining a future where racial divisions are not so strong, and where discrimination and prejudice are not so prevalent. Although he has been raised in a world where racism determines governmental policy itself, he is not so jaded as to believe the world cannot change for the better. Although Ichiro is treated poorly by white Americans, black Americans, and even fellow Japanese Americans, his belief in a future where America can become the melting pot it has often claimed to be suggests there is hope for the nation after all.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ELEVEN INCHES OF KENJI'S LEG

Kenji lost much of his leg during WWII, but due to an untreatable infection, he has been forced to have it amputated shorter and shorter. When the novel begins, his leg is eleven inches long, but it has begun to hurt again, and he knows he will soon lose more of it. When Kenji and Ichiro discuss their respective futures, they use Kenji's eleven inches of leg as a stand in for the time left in his life. While Ichiro has "fifty years, maybe sixty," Kenji sees his life in terms of the physical length of his leg, which he anticipates will translate to a year or two more of life. Ichiro would happily trade his half-century of life for Kenji's eleven inches of leg. To Ichiro, Kenji's leg is a symbol of his earned American-ness. Kenji was injured in the war and is now a veteran and therefore an American who deserves his place in America and deserves the respect of its other citizens. Although Ichiro knows Kenji might die from his injury, Ichiro would still rather know death was approaching than continue to feel like a man who was neither Japanese nor American, with no life and no future.

DISCHARGE PIN

Ichiro encounters a young Japanese-American waiter in a restaurant in Portland who is wearing a discharge pin on his shirt. This pin most explicitly means that the young man was honorably discharged from the United States military, and, during the war, it would have signaled that, although he was not fighting in the army, he had tried to. The pin serves as proof that this man is a veteran, and that he served his country, but the pin disturbs Ichiro. Although he understands the young man's desire to prove that he has earned his place in America, he also knows the pin is only necessary because the young man looks Japanese, and he knows he will not be respected or treated as an American unless he has additional evidence of his dedication to his home. Ichiro is upset that the young man feels the need to assert himself this way. He believes every person should be treated with kindness and respect, and that if a person believes America is their home, others should accept this and treat them as citizens. Additionally, Ichiro is upset that Japanese Americans are having their Americanness questioned. After

being discriminated against and sent to internment camps, although the majority of people had done nothing wrong, many young men were still loyal enough to America to enter its army. Despite this—being told they were not American, and then risking their lives for America—many men of Japanese descent still have their loyalty called into question. Ichiro recognizes that this sense that Japanese people are un-American is not based in fact or logic, instead, it is based in white supremacy and racism, and the belief that true Americans look a certain way, and immigrated only from certain countries.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the University of Washington Press edition of *No-No Boy* published in 1976.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Walking down the street that autumn morning with a small, black suitcase, he felt like an intruder in a world to which he had no claim. It was just enough that he should feel this way, for, of his own free will, he had stood before the judge and said that he would not go in the army. At the time there was no other choice for him. That was when he was twenty-three, a man of twenty-three. Now, two years older, he was even more of a man.

Christ, he thought to himself, just a goddamn kid is all I was. Didn't know enough to wipe my own nose. What the hell have I done? What am I doing back here? Best thing I can do would be to kill some son of a bitch and head back to prison.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears on the very first page of the novel. It is the reader's introduction to Ichiro and his situation. Ichiro has just returned to Seattle after four years away—he spent two years in an internment camp, and then two years in prison after rejecting the draft for World War II.

Ichiro regrets his decision to reject the draft, and his regret will haunt him throughout the novel. He believes that he has ruined his own life, as he thinks he will be judged for his time in prison, as well as his perceived allegiance to Japan (and rejection of America, as telegraphed by his rejection of the draft). He believes he is unemployable, unlovable, and incapable of forming relationships, personal or professional, with other people of Japanese descent or non-Japanese Americans. In fact, he feels he has so jeopardized his future that he would be better off without one at all—in prison for the rest of his life, where he could not be judged for being Japanese, or for being a "no-no boy."

However, although Ichiro now believes he made the wrong choice, he knows that at the time he made the only choice possible. Because America had interned him, Ichiro did not feel loyal to his country, and could not accept the draft. Additionally, he felt loyal to his family, and his mother specifically, who remained loyal to Japan even after many years abroad. Still, although he can understand and rationalize his decision, Ichiro understands that it will cost him, and has nothing but pessimism for the future.

The round face wasn't smiling any more. It was thoughtful. The eyes confronted Ichiro with indecision which changed slowly to enlightenment and then to suspicion. He remembered. He knew.

The friendliness was gone as he said: "No-no boy, huh?"

Ichiro wanted to say yes. He wanted to return the look of despising hatred and say simply yes, but it was too much to say. The walls had closed in and were crushing all the unspoken words back down into his stomach. He shook his head once, not wanting to evade the yes but finding it impossible to meet them...

"Rotten bastard. Shit on you." Eto coughed up a mouthful of sputum and rolled his words around it: "Rotten, no-good bastard."

Surprisingly, Ichiro felt relieved. Eto's anger seemed to serve as a release to his own naked tensions. As he stooped to lift the suitcase a wet wad splattered over his hand and dripped onto the black leather. The legs of his accuser were in front of him. God in a pair of green fatigues, U.S. Army style. They were the legs of the jury that had passed sentence on him. Beseech me, they seemed to say, throw your arms about me and bury your head between my knees and seek pardon for your great sin.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada, Eto Minato (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Freshly out of prison, where he served a two-year sentence for rejecting the draft, Ichiro Yamada is back in his

hometown of Seattle. Eto Minato, a young Japanese man Ichiro remembers from before WWII, is initially excited to see a familiar face, but his mood darkens when he realizes that, unlike him, Ichiro is not a veteran.

Ichiro contemplates treating Eto in the same aggressive way Eto has treated him, but decides not to, as Ichiro believes he *deserves* this disdain. He believes his decision to reject the draft is the "cross" he must now bear forever.

Although he had seemingly seen no evidence of it before meeting Eto, Ichiro suspected that his status as a no-no boy would ruin his life. He expected to experience discrimination and harassment, and is strangely satisfied to see his expectations validated. Indeed, fearing harassment turned out to be worse than the harassment itself. Additionally, Ichiro sees the harassment as justifiable punishment for his crime—a kind of extended prison sentence. But if he can tolerate the harassment, he seems to believe he can make up for his "sin," and redeem himself in his own eyes, and the eyes of society.

❝ The war had wrought violent changes upon the people, and the people, in turn, working hard and living hard and earning a lot of money and spending it on whatever was available, had distorted the profile of Jackson Street. The street had about it the air of a carnival without quite succeeding at becoming one. A shooting gallery stood where once had been a clothing store; fish and chips had replaced a jewelry shop; and a bunch of Negroes were horsing around raucously in front of a pool parlor…

He walked past the pool parlor, picking his way gingerly among the Negroes, of whom there had been only a few at one time and of whom there seemed to be nothing but now…

"Jap!" …

"Go back to Tokyo, boy." Persecution in the drawl of the persecuted…

Friggin' niggers, he uttered savagely to himself and, from the same place deep down inside where tolerance for the Negroes and the Jews and the Mexicans and the Chinese and the too short and the too fat and too ugly abided because he was Japanese and knew what it was like better than did those who were white and average and middle class and good Democrats or liberal Republicans, the hate which was unrelenting and terrifying seethed up.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Jackson Street was historically a Japanese and Chinese neighborhood, but when most of its Japanese residents were interned, it began to change. Ichiro has not been home in four years, and so is easily able to spot the differences. Instead of a commercial center where people could live and work, with clothing and jewelry stores, the area has become a kind of vice district, home to semi-legal establishments intended only for pleasure. This is offensive to the Japanese people who were kicked out of their homes—not only did they lose four years of their lives, but they also lost the neighborhood they had called home upon their return.

In Seattle, as in all of America in the 1950s (and still today), African Americans suffered intense discrimination. Despite this, these particular black men attempt to gain some cultural and societal status by harassing Ichiro. By harassing him they perhaps hope to prove that, although they both belong to outsider groups, they are on a higher societal rung. By calling Ichiro a "Jap," and telling him to go back to Tokyo, a city he has never visited, these men try to undermine Ichiro's status as a legitimate American, and his claim on the neighborhood that once belonged to him and his family.

Although often understanding of the differences between people and tolerant of those unlike him, Ichiro is angered by this harassment. He acknowledges that there is often a place inside him that allows him to accept everyone and understand their individual struggles, but today he is unable to turn the other cheek when he is called names and denied claim to his country.

"I am proud that you are back," she said. "I am proud to call you my son."

It was her way of saying that she had made him what he was and that the thing in him which made him say no to the judge and go to prison for two years was the growth of a seed planted by the mother tree and that she was the mother who had put this thing in her son and that everything that had been done and said was exactly as it should have been and that that was what made him her son because no other would have made her feel the pride that was in her breast.

He looked at his mother and swallowed with difficulty the bitterness that threatened to destroy the last fragment of understanding for the woman who was his mother and still a stranger because, in truth, he could not know what it was to be a Japanese who breathed the air of America and yet had never lifted a foot from the land that was Japan.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada, Mrs. Yamada (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Ichiro has returned home and is seeing his mother for the first time in two years. His relationship with her is complicated. Mrs. Yamada is an Issei, a first-generation immigrant from Japan. Her identity is firmly Japanese, and she is loyal only to Japan. Ichiro, in contrast, is Nisei, a second-generation person of Japanese descent. He was born in America and has known no country other than America. Although he grew up around Japanese culture, he has never visited Japan and does not feel any real loyalty to it.

However, in the crucial moment when Ichiro was called upon to accept or reject the draft, he could only think of Japan and his mother and America's mistreatment of him, and so chose to reject America and embrace Japan. Mrs. Yamada recognizes that Ichiro's rejection of Japan was her doing. Growing up in America it would have been easier for him to be loyal to America, but because Mrs. Yamada is his mother—and she refused to embrace America, and instilled in him a second-hand love of Japan—Ichiro is torn between the two countries.

Ichiro always does his best to see the good in other people, and to try and understand those unlike him. His mother is unlike him, born and raised in a country so different from America. Still, he tries to understand her, although he is aware that he will never fully know why she is the way she is. However, Ichiro severely regrets his decision to reject the draft, and knows it is partially because of his loyalty to his mother. Because he is angry at himself for making this decision, his anger spills over and becomes resentment towards the mother he blames for his choice.

"Why don't you do something about it?"

"I tell [Taro]. Mama tells him. Makes no difference. It is the war that has made them that way. All the people say the same thing. The war and the camp life. Made them wild like cats and dogs. It is hard to understand."

"Sure," he said, but he told himself that he understood, that the reason why Taro was not a son and not a brother was because he was young and American and alien to his parents, who had lived in America for thirty-five years without becoming less Japanese and could speak only a few broken words of English and write it not at all, and because Taro hated the thing in his elder brother which had prevented him from thinking for himself. And in this hate for that thing, he hated his brother and also his parents because they had created the thing in their eyes and hands and minds which had seen and felt and thought as Japanese for thirty-five years in an America which they rejected as thoroughly as if they had never been a day away from Japan.

Related Characters: Mr. Yamada, Ichiro Yamada (speaker), Taro Yamada, Mrs. Yamada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Although Ichiro and Taro were both born in America, to the same parents, and only have a seven-year age difference, the two men could hardly be more different. Although Ichiro feels American, his mother's influence has made him somewhat loyal to her, and, therefore, to Japan. In contrast, Taro has grown up fully American, and his American identity is built around his rejection of a Japanese one. Additionally, coming of age in an internment camp has ironically made Taro only more American, further rejecting the Japanese identity that made him the target of government persecution (as opposed to rejecting the American government that locked him up, like Ichiro did).

If Taro is fully Americanized, his parents are still fully Japanese. Taro has refused to embrace any aspects of the Japanese culture his parents have tried to instill in him. In contrast, his parents have refused to assimilate, barely

learning the language, and refusing to call America home. Ichiro is stuck halfway in the middle, half Japanese, half American, unable to fully relate to either his parents or his brother.

> "Oh, yes, the picture of Japan." She snickered. "He is such a serious boy. He showed me all the pictures he had taken in Japan. He had many of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I told him that he must be mistaken because Japan did not lose the war as he seems to believe and that he could not have been in Japan to take pictures because, if he was in Japan, he would not have been permitted to remain alive... I told him that what must really have happened was that the army only told him he was in Japan when he was someplace else, and that it was too bad he believed the propaganda. Then he got so mad his face went white... It is not enough that they must willingly take up arms against their uncles and cousins and even brothers and sisters, but they no longer have respect for the old ones. If I had a son and he had gone in the American army to fight Japan, I would have killed myself with shame."

"They know not what they do and it is not their fault. It is the fault of the parents..." Ichiro's mother looked at him with a look which said I am a Japanese and you are my son and have conducted yourself as a Japanese and I know no shame such as other parents do because their sons were not really their sons or they would not have fought against their own people.

Related Characters: Mr. Ashida, Mrs. Yamada (speaker), Ichiro Yamada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Yamada has visited her old friend, Mrs. Ashida. Ichiro has just returned home from prison, and so it is traditional to visit family friends who will welcome him back. Mrs. Yamada is delusional, and believes that Japan won WWII. She believes the American government is feeding its citizens propaganda, and that the Japanese emperor will soon send ships to collect his loyal subjects and bring them back to their home country. Mrs. Ashida shares Mrs. Yamada's delusion, and the two discuss the son of a family friend, who fought for America in Japan, and who brought back photos of the destruction wrought by the Allied forces and the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Mrs. Yamada and Mrs. Ashida refuse to believe the evidence in front of their very eyes. They are so dedicated to the fantasy of an intact Japan, the Japan of their youths that is waiting patiently for their return, that they refuse to confront the reality of the war. Mrs. Yamada sees her belief in Japan's victory as a necessary component of her loyalty to Japan. She also sees Ichiro's behavior—his rejection of the draft—as an embrace of Japan and a show of loyalty to her home country. If he had accepted the draft, and fought for the U.S. against Japan, she would have seen it as a personal attack, and a rejection of both her country and herself.

> The mother was crying now, without shame and alone in her grief that knew no end. And in her bottomless grief that made no distinction as to what was wrong and what was right and who was Japanese and who was not, there was no awareness of the other mother with a living son who had come to say to her you are with shame and grief because you were not Japanese and thereby killed your son but mine is big and strong and full of life because I did not weaken and would not let my son destroy himself uselessly and treacherously.

Related Characters: Mrs. Yamada, Bob Kumasaka, Mrs. Kumasaka, Mr. Kumasaka, Ichiro Yamada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Ichiro and Mrs. Yamada have gone to visit two families with whom they have been close for many years. The second of these families, the Kumasakas, have recently lost their son, Bob, who enlisted in the U.S. army and was killed in service. Ichiro did not know this when he went to visit, but Mrs. Yamada did and chose not to tell her son. By bringing him to the Kumasakas' home, she hopes to show him that he made the right decision in choosing to reject the draft. Mrs. Yamada has no sympathy for her supposed "friends." Instead, she believes that they raised their son to be too American, and because of this he enlisted, and subsequently died. She sees Mr. and Mrs. Kumasaka as responsible for the death of their son, because they did not raise him to be sufficiently Japanese. In contrast, she believes she succeeded as a mother because her son was Japanese enough to reject the draft, and that because he rejected the draft, he did not die in the war. This kind of judgmental dogmatism is then contrasted with the raw, human grief of a mother mourning her son—as Mrs. Kumasaka weeps, she

does not care about nationalities or cultural loyalties, but only about the loss of her child.

> ...he was thinking about the Kumasakas and his mother and kids like Bob who died brave deaths fighting for something which was bigger than Japan or America or the selfish bond that strapped a son to his mother. Bob, and a lot of others with no more to lose or gain then he, had not found it necessary to think about whether or not to go into the army. When the time came, they knew what was right for them and they went.
>
> What happened to him and the others who faced the judge and said: You can't make me go in the army because I'm not an American or you wouldn't have plucked me and mine from a life that was good and real and meaningful and fenced me in the desert like they do the Jews in Germany...
>
> And some said: You, Mr. Judge, who supposedly represent justice, was it a just thing to ruin a hundred thousand lives and homes and farms and businesses and dreams and hopes because the hundred thousand were a hundred thousand Japanese and you couldn't have loyal Japanese when Japan is the country you're fighting and, if so, how about the Germans and Italians that must be just as questionable as the Japanese or we wouldn't be fighting Germany and Italy? Round them up. Take away their homes and cars and beer and spaghetti and throw them in a camp and what do you think they'll say when you try to draft them into your army out of the country that is for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? ...
>
> And then another one got up and faced the judge and said meekly: I can't go because my brother is in the Japanese army and if I go in your army and have to shoot at them because they're shooting at me, how do I know that maybe I won't kill my own brother? I'm a good American and I like it here but you can see that it wouldn't do for me to be shooting at my own brother; even if he want back to Japan when I was two years old and I couldn't know him if I saw him, it's the feeling that counts, and what can a fellow do? Besides, my mom and dad said I shouldn't and they ought to know.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada (speaker), Mrs. Yamada, Bob Kumasaka

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

After visiting Bob Kumasaka's family, Ichiro reflects on his decision to reject the draft. Bob decided to enlist, embracing the American side of his identity, and died as a result. Unlike his mother, Ichiro does not believe that Bob was justly killed for turning away from his Japanese roots—instead, Ichiro envies Bob, who was able to look past America's mistreatment of him and fight for it anyway. Ichiro believes that fighting for America was the right thing to do, and he recognizes that his own confused loyalty to his mother, and by extension to Japan, prevented him from making the same choice as Bob.

Ichiro remembers the various (and extremely reasonable) arguments other no-no boys made as they rejected the draft. Some argued that they had been treated as though they were not American, and therefore it was unfair to expect them to fight for America, a country that had already rejected them. Others argued that as people of Japanese descent, they were being unfairly discriminated against. If they were being interned because they were a threat to America, then people of Italian and German descent, who also came from countries at war with America, should prove to be similar threats. These people saw that the imprisonment of Japanese Americans was as much the result of racism, and fear of people who did not look white, as it was about national security. Finally, some men argued that although they loved America, they were still connected to Japan in significant ways (such as having family members fighting on the other side). As Ichiro notes later, his rejection of the draft was a combination of many reasons—the belief that America had already rejected him, loyalty to Japan, and an obligation to his Japanese family.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Time would ease the rupture which now separated him from the young Japanese who were Americans because they had fought for America and believed in it. And time would destroy the old Japanese who, living in America and being denied a place as citizens, nevertheless had become inextricably a part of the country which by its vastness and goodness and fairness and plentitude drew them into its fold, or else they would not have understood why it was that their sons, who looked as Japanese as they themselves, were not Japanese at all but Americans of the country America. In time, he thought, in time there will be a place for me. I will buy a home and love my family and I will walk down the street holding my son's hand and people will stop and talk with us about the weather and the ball games and the elections. I will take my family to visit the family of Freddie, whom I have just left as I did because time has not yet done its work, and our families together will visit still another family whose father was two years in the army of America instead of two years in prison and it will not matter about the past, for time will have erased it from our memories and there will be only joy and sorrow and sickness, which is the way things should be.

And, as his heart mercifully stacked the blocks of hope into the pattern of an America which would someday hold an unquestioned place for him, his mind said no, it is not to be, and the castle tumbled and was swallowed up by the darkness of his soul, for time might cloud the memories of others but the trouble was inside of him and time would not soften that.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada (speaker), Freddie Akimoto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel Ichiro worries that he has destroyed his life by rejecting the draft. In this passage, however, he briefly allows himself to believe that he could have a happy future. Ichiro speculates that although at the present moment the division between him and Japanese men who fought in the army seems unbridgeable, in ten or fifteen years they will be united in their Japanese and American identities, and can be civil to each other, even outright friendly. In this imagined future, Ichiro's rejection of the draft would not prevent him from being happy, from getting a job, and from starting a family.

Unfortunately, Ichiro cannot convince himself of this future for long. He believes the discrimination he has experienced in the past few days will continue on forever, and that even if it doesn't, his own guilt will rob him of any potential for happiness. This is an important theme to watch throughout the novel, as Ichiro slowly becomes more optimistic as time goes on.

For a brief moment Ichiro felt a strange exhilaration. He had been envying Kenji with his new Oldsmobile, which was fixed to be driven with a right leg that wasn't there any more, because the leg that wasn't there had been amputated in a field hospital, which meant that Kenji was a veteran of the army of America and had every right to laugh and love and hope, because one could do that even if one of his legs was gone...

[Ichiro] gripped his knees with his hands, squeezing the hard soundness of the bony flesh and muscles, and fought off the sadness which seemed only to have deepened after the moment of relief. Kenji had two years, maybe a lifetime if the thing that was chewing away at him suddenly stopped. But he, Ichiro, had stopped living two years ago.

I'll change with you, Kenji, he thought. Give me the stump which gives you the right to hold your head high. Give me the eleven inches which are beginning to hurt again and bring ever closer the fear of approaching death, and give me with it the fullness of yourself which is also yours because you were man enough to wish the thing which destroyed your leg and, perhaps, you with it but, at the same time, made it so that you can put your one good foot in the dirt of America and know that the wet coolness of it is yours beyond a single doubt.

Related Characters: Kenji Kanno

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Ichiro so deeply regrets his decision to reject the draft, and so intensely believes that he has ruined his life, that he would do anything in order to feel like a true American again, one worthy of living in the country that first rejected him, and then that he rejected. Although Kenji is literally dying from an injury sustained during WWII, Ichiro envies him. Ichiro sees Kenji's amputated leg as a status symbol. It seems to prove that Kenji fought for his country, and sacrificed his body for his country, and therefore deserves to be accepted and respected by his country. In contrast,

Ichiro feels neither accepted nor respected, and furthermore believes he does not deserve any kind of positive treatment because he ruined his own life rejecting the draft.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"If it were [possible], Ken, if it were and there was just half an inch to trade for my fifty years, would you then?"

Kenji thought about that for a long while. "When it comes to the last half an inch and it starts to hurt, I'll sell the car and spend the rest of my life sitting here with a drink in my hand and feeling good."

"That means no, of course."

"That means no, yes."

"Thanks for being honest."

…

So they sat silently through the next drink, one already dead but still alive and contemplating the next fifty or sixty years more of dead aliveness, and the other, living and dying slowly. They were two extremes, the Japanese who was more American than most Americans because he had crept to the brink of death for America, and the other who was neither Japanese nor American because he had failed to recognize the gift of his birthright when recognition meant everything.

Related Characters: Kenji Kanno, Ichiro Yamada (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Kenji enlisted before he could be drafted, and fought for America in WWII. In contrast, Ichiro rejected the draft and was sent to prison for two years because of this. Ichiro believes that his rejection of the draft and his prison sentence have ruined his life. He sees Kenji's life, which will likely be cut short by his injury, to be the superior one. Although Kenji has fewer years left to live, Ichiro doesn't feel as though Kenji has ruined his life. Instead, Ichiro feels Kenji has earned the right to live proudly in America, whereas he has destroyed any hope at being a true American by wasting his chance to be in the American military.

Although Kenji recognizes the direness of his situation, he, unlike Ichiro, has come to terms with his present and future. He understands that he might die, and he accepts this fact and continues to live his life as best he can. Kenji's desire to continue living his life instead of trading for Ichiro's doesn't necessarily imply that Kenji thinks Ichiro's life is worse. Instead, it demonstrates that Kenji has learned to cope with his problems, and does not envy Ichiro's intense unhappiness and fear of the future.

"…We're American and …we're Japanese and sometimes the two don't mix. It's all right to be German and American or Italian and American or Russian and American but, as things turned out, it wasn't all right to be Japanese and American. You had to be one or the other."

Related Characters: Emi (speaker), Kenji Kanno, Ichiro Yamada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Kenji introduces Ichiro to his friend Emi, and the two have several conversations about what it means to be Japanese and what it means to be American. In this moment, Emi calls out the racism of America. The government did not imprison people of German and Italian descent, even though they also came from countries that, like Japan, were enemies of America in WWII. Although Japan was not a more dangerous enemy, it was only people of Japanese descent who were interned. Emi recognizes this policy for what it is—racism based on the idea that the Japanese, who are not white, unlike Germans or Italians, can never be "truly" American, and cannot ever be truly loyal to America simply because they do not look like the white American ideal.

"Mike was born in California and went to college there. He knocked around for a while and was doing graduate work in Louisiana when the war, the first world war, started. He'd left California because he didn't like the way the white people treated the Japanese and he was happy in Louisiana because they treated him like a white man there. So, when the war came, he wanted to get into it and did. He spent a year in France, came back, joined the VFW, returned to California, and got into the produce business. He did well, got married, and had two children. Then the second war started. When talk about the evacuation started, he wouldn't believe it. He was an American and a veteran of the first war. He thought there might be justification in interning some of the outspokenly pro-Japanese aliens, but he scoffed at the idea of the government doing such a thing to him. When it became apparent that the government proposed to do just that, he burst into a fury of anger and bitterness and swore that if they treated him like a Japanese, he would act like one. Well, you know what happened and he stuck to his words. Along with the other rabidly pro-Japanese, he ended up at the Tule Lake Center, and became a leader in the troublemaking, the strikes and the riots. His wife and children remained in this country, but he elected to go to Japan, a country he didn't know or love, and I'm sure he's extremely unhappy."

"I can't say I blame him."

"I'm sure he wishes he were back here."

…

[Ichiro] patted her back awkwardly, trying to think of what to say to soothe her.

"Ralph won't come back because of Mike. He's ashamed," she whimpered. "How am I to tell him that it makes no difference what Mike has done? Why is it that Ralph feels he must punish himself for Mike's mistake? Why?"

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada, Emi (speaker), Jun , Ralph, Mike

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Emi's husband Ralph, a man of Japanese descent, enlisted in the army but now refuses to come home. Lonely and sad, Emi's only friend seems to be Kenji. She spends her days farming and hoping Ralph will return. Kenji has introduced Emi to Ichiro, and the two sleep together, and then have a long conversation the next morning, in which Emi explains what happened to her husband.

Ralph is ashamed of his brother Mike, and so refuses to return to America. He is ashamed that Mike acted out; he is ashamed that Mike aligned himself with pro-Japanese radicals, and he is ashamed that Mike was deported. Ralph sees Mike as Japanese and anti-American, and worries he will be seen that way because of his relationship to him. However, by remaining in the army, Ralph can remain in constant service of America, reaffirming every day that he loves his country and belongs there (even though he isn't there in person anymore).

This is an unhealthy way to deal with the traumatic aftermath of his brother's deportation, and it affects more than just Ralph himself. Ralph's refusal to come home has ruined Emi's life as well, and has prevented her from moving on and resuming her post-war life.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"I came to America to become a rich man so that I could go back to the village in Japan and be somebody. I was greedy and ambitious and proud. I was not a good man or an intelligent one, but a young fool. And you have paid for it."

"What kind of talk is that?" replied Kenji, genuinely grieved. "That's not true at all."

…

"I will go with you."

"No." He looked straight at his father.

In answer, the father merely nodded, acceding to his son's wish because his son was a man who had gone to war to fight for the abundance and happiness that pervaded a Japanese household in America and that was a thing he himself could never fully comprehend except to know that it was very dear. He had long forgotten when it was that he had discarded the notion of a return to Japan but remembered only that it was the time when this country which he had no intention of loving had suddenly begun to become a part of him because it was a part of his children and he saw and felt in their speech and joys and sorrows and hopes that he was a part of them. And in the dying of the foolish dreams which he had brought to America, the richness of the life that was possible in this foreign country destroyed the longing for a past that really must not have been as precious as he imagined or else he would surely not have left it. Where else could a man, left alone with six small children, have found it possible to have had so much with so little?

Related Characters: Kenji Kanno, Mr. Kanno (speaker), Mrs. Yamada, Mr. Yamada, Ichiro Yamada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

The Kanno family provides a stark contrast to the Yamadas, even though both families include Issei parents who were born in Japan and moved to the United States, and Nisei children who were born in American and feel American. Ichiro's parents have remained steadfastly loyal to Japan, and believe that if their children become more loyal to American than to Japan, they have failed as parents. Mrs. Yamada especially only feels connected to Ichiro because of what she perceives as their shared love of Japan, and has said explicitly that if he ever declared love or allegiance to America, it would kill her.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Mr. Kanno. Mr. Kanno loves his children unconditionally. Although he once loved Japan, because he loves his children more than he loves himself, when he saw that they were becoming American he was able to shift his loyalty—because his children are American, he loves America. Further, because his children will likely stay in America, Mr. Kanno has given up dreams of retuning to Japan, instead seeing America, the home of his immediate family, as his home as well.

Even in this brief conversation the difference between the Yamadas and the Kannos is clearly illustrated. Whereas Ichiro struggles to have meaningful conversations with his parents, and neither parent nor child puts significant effort into protecting the others' feelings, Mr. Kanno and Kenji clearly love and respect each other. Their conversation is part of an ongoing dialogue built on affection and trust.

❝ It had mattered. It was because he was Japanese that the son had to come to his Japanese father and simply state that he had decided to volunteer for the army instead of being able to wait until such time as the army called him. It was because he was Japanese and, at the same time, had to prove to the world that he was not Japanese that the turmoil was in his soul and urged him to enlist. There was confusion, but, underneath it, a conviction that he loved America and would fight and die for it because he did not wish to live anyplace else. And the father, also confused, understood what the son had not said and gave his consent. It was not a time for clear thinking because the sense of loyalty had become dispersed and the shaken faith of an American interned in an American concentration camp was indeed a flimsy thing. So, on this steadfast bit of conviction that remained, and knowing not what the future held, this son had gone to war to prove that he deserved to enjoy those rights which should rightfully have been his.

Related Characters: Mr. Kanno (speaker), Mrs. Yamada, Mr. Yamada, Ichiro Yamada, Kenji Kanno

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Kanno wonders if he made the right decision when he allowed Kenji to go into the army. He struggled to walk the line between being a respectful father who allowed his children to make their own decisions, and protecting his children from danger. Mr. Kanno recognizes that Kenji felt he needed to join the army to prove he was truly American, and so, despite the danger, Mr. Kanno felt he could not take this away from his son.

In contrast, Mrs. Yamada would have forbidden Ichiro from going into the American military, and has even said that if he had done so, she would have interpreted it as rejection of both her and Japan, and would have died as a result. Mrs. Yamada can only think about how her children's actions reflect on her, while Mr. Kanno hopes that his children's actions are making them happy.

Mr. Kanno was concerned that Kenji would be injured in battle (which he eventually was), but Mr. Kanno was also worried that Kenji would be discriminated against. Although as an American soldier Kenji was just as American as his white comrades, Mr. Kanno recognized that racist anti-Japanese sentiments were prevalent in society and in the military, and even Kenji's self-sacrificing enlistment might not prevent others from seeing him as less than fully American.

❝ ...It was on this particular night that the small sociologist, struggling for the words painstakingly and not always correctly selected from his meager knowledge of the Japanese language, had managed to impart a message of great truth. And this message was that the old Japanese, the fathers and mothers, who sat courteously attentive, did not know their own sons and daughters. "How many of you are able to sit down with your own sons and own daughters and enjoy the companionship of conversation? How many, I ask? If I were to say none of you, I would not be far from the truth." He paused, for the grumbling was swollen with anger and indignation, and continued in a loud, shouting voice before it could engulf him: "You are not displeased because of what I said but because I have hit upon the truth. And I know it to be true because I am a Nisei and you old ones are like my own father and mother. If we are children of America and not the sons and daughters of our parents, it is because you have failed. It is because you have been stupid enough to think that growing rice in muddy fields is the same as growing a giant fir tree. Change, now, if you can, even if it may be too late, and become companions to your children. This is America, where you have lived and worked and suffered for thirty and forty years. This is not Japan."

Related Characters: Mr. Kanno

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

During Mr. Kanno's time in the interment camp, a young Japanese-American sociologist came to talk to many of the Issei. He argued that the generational divide between them and their Nisei children was almost insurmountable. They were Japanese, and their values and culture were Japanese, while their children were American, and had been influenced less by the culture of their parents than the culture of their immediate environment. Because of this, the sociologist argues, the parents and children fundamentally cannot relate to each other, but it is the parents' responsibility to acknowledge this and attempt to connect with their children, or risk losing them forever.

Mr. Kanno had already done his best to accept the ways in which his children were different from him, and had been able to allow them to live their lives without his oversight. Still, this conversation likely helped him be an even better and more attentive, considerate parent. In contrast to this is the Yamada family. Mr. and Mrs. Yamada are incredibly different from their children, but instead of acknowledging these differences and attempting to bridge the divide, they effectively freeze out Taro, who they cannot relate to, and do their best to force Ichiro into the mold of a perfect Japanese son, because that is the only way they can understand him.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ ...As he thought about Mr. Carrick and their conversation time and time again, its meaning for him evolved into a singularly comforting thought. There was someone who cared. Surely there were others too who understood the suffering of the small and the weak and, yes, even the seemingly treasonous, and offered a way back into the great compassionate stream of life that is America. Under the hard, tough cloak of the struggle for existence in which money and enormous white refrigerators and shining, massive, brutally-fast cars and fine, expensive clothing had ostensibly overwhelmed the qualities of men that were good and gentle and just, there still beat a heart of kindness and patience and forgiveness.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada (speaker), Kenji Kanno, Mr. Carrick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

After Ichiro drops Kenji off at the hospital in Portland, he looks for work in the city. The first job he applies for asks him to account for the last several years of his life, but, realizing he will likely be rejected on the basis of his prison time, Ichiro leaves the building, application incomplete. He then finds an engineering firm, where the kind lead engineer offers him an exceptional salary, specifically because he is Japanese, and because he, Mr. Carrick, feels guilty about and responsible for the mistreatment of America's Japanese citizens.

Although Ichiro doesn't accept the job, feeling that, because he was a no-no boy, he is not truly American and does not deserve it, he appreciates Mr. Carrick's kindness. Mr. Carrick is the first white man to treat Ichiro as someone worthy of respect, someone deserving of a future. Ichiro isn't quite convinced that he deserves happiness or stability, but this is an important moment in his development, because, for the first time, he sees that a normal life could be possible.

Where is the place that they talk of and paint nice pictures of and describe in all the homey magazines? Where is that place with the clean, white cottages surrounding the new, red-brick church with the clean, white steeple, where the families all have two children, one boy and one girl, and a shiny new car in the garage and a dog and a cat and life is like living in the land of the happily-ever-after? Surely it must be around here someplace, someplace in America. Or is it just that it's not for me? Maybe I dealt myself out, but what about that young kid on Burnside who was in the army and found it wasn't enough so that he has to keep proving to everyone who comes in for a cup of coffee that he was fighting for his country like the button on his shirt says he did because the army didn't do anything about his face to make him look more American? ... Even Mr. Carrick. Why isn't he in? Why is he on the outside squandering his goodness on outcasts like me? Maybe the answer is that there is no in. Maybe the whole damned country is pushing and shoving and screaming to get into someplace that doesn't exist, because they don't know that the outside could be the inside if only they would stop all this pushing and shoving and screaming, and they haven't got enough sense to realize that.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada (speaker), Mr. Carrick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

Ichiro considers the future. After rejecting the draft, he believed he had destroyed any hope of a normal life. He believed he would be discriminated against for being un-American, for his prison time, and for looking Japanese. However, after meeting Mr. Carrick, a kind white engineer who offered him a job and did not care that he was neither white nor a veteran, Ichiro is beginning to reconsider the options available to him.

Ichiro has observed that many people in America treat each other badly because they are all hoping that by mistreating others, they can assert themselves as superior, true Americans. Each outsider group imagines that if they can only prove themselves, they will be granted access to a kind of picture-book America, with a "red-brick church," and "happily ever after" for everyone. Ichiro, however, has begun to realize that this is only a fantasy of America. He suspects that competition between Americans is all for nothing, and that there is no true happy suburb where he could live this idyllic life. Instead, Ichiro realizes that the real world could be like the fantasy world, but what prevents people from enjoying it is their own fear, prejudice, and bigotry.

"Have a drink for me. Drink to wherever it is I'm headed, and don't let there be any Japs or Chinks or Jews or Poles or Niggers or Frenchies, but only people. I think about that too. I think about that most of all. You know why?"
He shook his head and Kenji seemed to know he would even though he was still staring out the window. "He was up on the roof of the barn and I shot him, killed him. I see him rolling down the roof. I see him all the time now and that's why I want this other place to have only people because if I'm still a Jap there and this guy's still a German, I'll have to shoot him again and I don't want to have to do that. Then maybe there is no someplace else. Maybe dying is it. The finish. The end. Nothing. I'd like that too. Better an absolute nothing than half a meaning..."

Related Characters: Kenji Kanno (speaker), Mr. Kanno, Ichiro Yamada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Ichiro goes to visit Kenji in the hospital after his surgery, and it is clear that Kenji is sicker than ever. Kenji believes he is going to die, and discusses what he hopes the afterlife will be like. Kenji has known his death was coming for years, and so has more or less made peace with it. Still, he hopes that the things he hates about the world will not be present after death, specifically the divisions between people that caused the war, in which he lost his leg and life.

Kenji recalls shooting a German man in battle, and imagines that the two will meet again in the afterlife. Kenji hopes that in the afterlife there are no longer racial, religious, national, or cultural divides, because then the same prejudices that divided people in life would continue to divide them in death.

Kenji is also comfortable with the idea that there is no afterlife at all. After having considered the end of his life carefully, he has no hopes or expectations. He would rather have the light switch of his life turn off than live in an afterlife in which he would have to deal with the bigotry of the present.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ As he shouted, Ichiro listened and, it was as if he were hearing about a stranger as the man spoke of the girl baby born in the thirty-first year of the Meiji era to a peasant family, of her growing and playing and going to school and receiving honors for scholastic excellence and of her becoming a pretty young thing who forsook a teaching career to marry a bright, ambitious young man of the same village. And as the large man transported the young couple across the vast ocean to the fortune awaiting them in America, Ichiro no longer listened, for he was seeing the face of his dead mother jutting out of the casket, and he could not believe that she had ever been any of the things the man was saying about her.

Related Characters: Mrs. Yamada, Mr. Yamada, Ichiro Yamada

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

At Mrs. Yamada's funeral, Ichiro realizes how little he knew about his mother. Up until this point, Ichiro had only understood that he and his mother were very different. She was a first-generation immigrant from Japan; he was an American of Japanese descent. She did not understand how he could love America, and he could not feel the same love for, and loyalty to, Japan. Still, Ichiro had done his best to treat his mother with empathy and respect, preserving what goodwill he could in his small, fragile family.

Now, however, although Ichiro had known there were differences between him and his mother, he sees that no matter how much effort he had put in she would have remained unknowable to him. Her life was so different than his, and she made so little effort to communicate the details of how she grew up and how she became the way she was, that her past became a black box. Had Ichiro known these details of her life when she was alive, perhaps he could have gotten along with her better. However, a happy, healthy parent-child relationship requires both parties to put in the work, and even if Ichiro had done additional work to understand his mother, if she was uninterested in understanding her son, their relationship would never fully improve.

❝ He was enjoying it and he felt that Emi was too. This is the way it ought to be, he thought to himself, to be able to dance with a girl you like and really get a kick out of it because everything is on an even keel and one's worries are only the usual ones of unpaid bills and sickness in the family and being late to work too often. Why can't it be that way for me? Nobody's looking twice at us… Everything's the same, just as it used to be. No bad feelings except for those that have always existed and probably always will. It's a matter of attitude. Mine needs changing. I've got to love the world the way I used to. I've got to love it and the people so I'll feel good, and feeling good will make life worth while. There's no point in crying about what's done. There's a place for me and Emi and Freddie here on the dance floor and out there in the hustle of things if we'll let it be that way. I've been fighting it and hating it and letting my bitterness against myself and Ma and Pa and even Taro throw the whole universe out of perspective. I want only to go on living and be happy. I've only to let myself do so.

Related Characters: Mr. Yamada, Mrs. Yamada, Taro Yamada, Mr. Carrick, Freddie Akimoto, Kenji Kanno, Emi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Ichiro and Emi go out dancing. This is a significant moment because, just like when Mr. Carrick offered Ichiro a well-paying job, he finally feels as though he can live an unrestricted life. Dancing with Emi, and being treated just like any other couple as opposed to being harassed or singled out because they are Japanese makes Ichiro feel somewhat optimistic about the future. Ichiro also realizes in this moment that his future happiness depends on his own attitude as much as it does the attitude of others. If he can let go of his "bitterness," both against himself for his past decision to reject the draft, and against his parents for raising him in such a way that he would reject the draft, perhaps he can live a happy life.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"It was good, the years I rotted in prison. I got the lead out of my ass and the talk out of my system. I died in prison. And when I came back to life, all that really mattered for me was to make a painting. I came home and said hello to the family and tried to talk to them, but there was nothing to talk about. I didn't stay. I found a room next to the sky, a big, drafty attic atop a dilapidated mansion full of boarders who mind their own business. Old friends are now strangers. I've no one to talk to and no desire to talk, for I have nothing to say except what comes out of my paint tubes and brushes. During the day, I paint for my keep. At night, I paint for myself. The picture I want is inside of me. I'm groping for it and it gives me peace and satisfaction. For me, the cup is overflowing."

He turned and the peace he spoke of was clearly written on his face: "What was unfortunate for you was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada, Gary (speaker), Freddie Akimoto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

Gary, a fellow no-no boy, has managed to find make a life for himself since his release from prison. Unlike Freddie, who is unhappy and unable to imagine a better future, and unlike Ichiro, who is not sure he deserves happiness, Gary believes that his incarceration changed and saved his life.

Gary loves to paint, and prison clarified this for him. Now, he paints all day and night, and feels as though his life has a purpose. Although Ichiro's passion and calling is likely not visual art, it is important for him to hear Gary's story. After spending most of the novel doubting whether or not happiness would even be possible for him, by observing Gary, Ichiro can see that, if he allows himself, he could go on and live a rich full life, despite his status as a no-no boy.

A few days later Tommy, reluctant to lose one who had appeared such a promising recruit, tried to justify the incident. "The ways of the Lord are often mysterious," he had said. "There are some things which we cannot hope to understand. You will feel better by next Sunday."

"Save the holy crap for yourself," he had replied. "Seems to me like you goddamned good Christians have the supply spread out pretty thin right now."

And then Tommy had revealed himself for the poor, frightened, mistreated Japanese that he was. "Holy cow!" he had exclaimed in a frantic cry, "they like us. They treat us fine. We're in no position to stick out our necks when we've got enough troubles of our own."

"Good deal. You hang on to it, will you? Son of a bitch like you needs a good thing like that."

Related Characters: Tommy, Ichiro Yamada (speaker), Freddie Akimoto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

While Ichiro was interned he was forced to do farm work around the Midwest. In many of these predominantly white communities, Ichiro and his fellow Japanese internees faced discrimination and harassment. One of his friends, Tommy, was religious, and liked going to church. He found a church that was okay with Japanese men sitting in on services, and brought Ichiro along. Ichiro liked the church, until one day he noticed the parishioners actively ignoring a black man who came in for the service. Ichiro recognized this behavior as racism, and refused to return.

Tommy argues that, because the church accepts him and Ichiro, they should be grateful and not jeopardize their fragile positions. Ichiro, however, having experienced race-based discrimination both from other Midwestern churches and from the American government itself, refuses to be complicit in a community that would exclude anyone. He sees it as hypocritical and unjust, and so, although it means that he will be unable to participate in the church, he feels it is the right choice to reject them altogether.

Chapter 11 Quotes

Ichiro put a hand on Bull's shoulder, sharing the empty sorrow in the hulking body, feeling the terrible loneliness of the distressed wails, and saying nothing. He gave the shoulder a tender squeeze, patted the head once tenderly, and began to walk slowly down the alley away from the brightness of the club and the morbidity of the crowd. He wanted to think about Ken and Freddie and Mr. Carrick and the man who had bought the drinks for him and Emi, about the Negro who stood up for Gary, and about Bull, who was an infant crying in the darkness. A glimmer of hope—was that it? It was there, someplace. He couldn't see it to put it into words, but the feeling was pretty strong.

He walked along, thinking, searching, thinking and probing, and, in the darkness of the alley of the community that was a tiny bit of America, he chased that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart.

Related Characters: Ichiro Yamada (speaker), Emi, Kenji Kanno, Gary, Mr. Carrick, Bull, Freddie Akimoto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

This is the final passage of the novel. After fighting with Bull in the alleyway, Freddie drove off in his car, clipping the front of another vehicle and killing himself accidentally in a gruesome crash. Now, in the tragic aftermath, Ichiro considers the future. Freddie's death is the conclusion to a chapter in Ichiro's life, as well as a warning of what his life could be. Like Ichiro, Freddie was a no-no boy, but unlike Ichiro, Freddie had no hope for the future, living instead in a self-destructive way that eventually led to his death. Ichiro can see that, if he gives up hope like Freddie, he is giving up any chance at a future, unhappy or otherwise.

In contrast, Ichiro has seen other potential futures. He's met Gary, also a no-no boy, who has discovered his passion and now lives comfortably painting signs by day and his own artwork at night. He's also met Mr. Carrick, a white man who believed that Ichiro deserved employment and happiness. Although at the beginning of the novel Ichiro thought his life was ruined, now he sees that there are in fact options open for him.

Ichiro is also given hope by the diverse crowd at the crime scene. Although united by tragedy, the sense of the community of people united in shock and grief seems proof to him that one day the people of America will be able to see past their ethnic, racial, and religious differences, and unite as a single nation.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Ichiro arrives at the Seattle bus station. It is the first time he has been back to Seattle in four years. He has just spent two years in an internment camp, and then two years in prison.

Ichiro lived on the West Coast and had Japanese ancestry. As a result, he, like 10,000 others of Japanese descent, was labeled a threat and imprisoned by the U.S. government for the first half of WWII.

Although he grew up in Seattle, Ichiro feels "like an intruder" there now. He regrets refusing to go into the army two years previously. He thinks that now the best thing for him would be to kill someone and return to prison.

After his internment, Ichiro was sent to prison for refusing the draft. Now, he anticipates receiving discrimination on all sides, which makes home and "freedom" seem less welcoming.

A young man in military fatigues crosses the street towards Ichiro. He recognizes him as Eto Minato. Ichiro tries to avoid him but Eto chases him down, calling him by his nickname, Itchy, and reintroducing himself. However, when Eto realizes that Ichiro was not in the army, his demeanor shifts and he becomes angry. He remembers that Ichiro was a no-no boy. He spits on him, and threatens to pee on him the next time they meet.

At first, Eto believes that he and Ichiro have something in common—a shared American identity, which they "earned" fighting in the war. However, when he realizes his mistake he turns against Ichiro. Eto, a veteran, sees Ichiro as a threat to his own American assimilation. Because people like Ichiro remained loyal to Japan (in practice at least) by refusing to fight for America, Eto worries non-Japanese Americans will assume all people of Japanese ancestry are also "traitors."

Ichiro feels as though "the walls had closed in." He sees Eto as representative of "the jury that had passed sentence upon him." However, he doesn't blame Eto for his behavior. Ichiro feels as though he has doomed himself, "driven the nails" of his disgrace in "with his own hands."

Ichiro is a hopeless and pessimistic character at this point—he regrets his decision to choose Japan over America, and understands why he is discriminated against. He believes he made the wrong choice, and accepts that his life will be worse because of it forever.

Ichiro walks towards Jackson Street, which houses Seattle's Japantown. A group of black men harass him, calling him "Jap!" and telling him to "go back to Tokyo." Ichiro thinks derogatory thoughts in return, realizing that the space inside him that formerly housed tolerance for "the Negros and the Jews and the Mexicans and the Chinese and the too short and too fat and too ugly" is now filled with hate instead.

Although in the 1940s African American people were still heavily discriminated against both culturally and legally, this sense of oppression does not motivate these men to treat Ichiro, the member of another oppressed group, with any empathy. Ironically, they tell him to go back to Japan, a place he's never lived and has no real loyalty to.

Ichiro makes it to his new home—a grocery store his parents have purchased since leaving the internment camp. Mr. Yamada described it to him in a letter, written in simple Japanese characters with explicit directions "as if he were a foreigner coming to a city for the first time." This infuriates Ichiro.

Ichiro was not born in Japan and speaks little Japanese. Meanwhile, his parents were born in Japan and speak mostly Japanese. Although Ichiro deals with discrimination because he appears Japanese, he does not even have the benefit of feeling like he belongs to Japanese culture at all.

Mr. Yamada greets his son happily. Ichiro's father speaks mostly in Japanese; Ichiro speaks mostly in English. This is common in mixed-generation immigrant families, the narrator says. Mrs. Yamada has gone to the bakery to buy bread, and Ichiro argues with his father that this is a waste of time and money. They eventually cool down, sitting down in the back of the shop to talk. Ichiro's father asks Ichiro about prison. Ichiro jokes that it was fun, and then says he doesn't want to dwell on it.

Ichiro and his parents are almost from different worlds. His parents are first-generation immigrants who intend to return to Japan, their true home. Ichiro was raised by his parents, who instilled in him their values, but he has no connection to Japan, and is as American as he is Japanese—which in this divisive society seems to mean he cannot be fully either.

Mrs. Yamada comes home. She tells Ichiro she is proud to call him her son. Ichiro understands that what she is really saying is that she is glad that she influenced him so powerfully as a child, instilling in him a Japanese identity that prevented him from enlisting in the American army.

Mrs. Yamada remains loyal to Japan. America is not her home, but a temporary layover on her return to the country she loves. She loves Ichiro not for who he is as a person, but because she believes he is just like her—Japanese through and through.

Ichiro feels bitterness towards Mrs. Yamada, even as he works to understand her. She is both "his mother and still a stranger," because he cannot understand what it is like to "be a Japanese who breathed the air of America and yet had never lifted a foot from the land that was Japan."

While Mrs. Yamada assumes that she understands her son, Ichiro knows for certain that he *does not and cannot understand his mother, who grew up in such a different world than he did, and who still clings so fiercely to that world—she has never even "lifted a foot" from Japan.*

Ichiro retreats to the bedroom and flings himself into bed, chain-smoking and thinking. He blames Mrs. Yamada for his past actions—he feels that she "cursed" him, and that her influence forced him to reject the draft and go to prison. He feels like she hammered away at his personality and his happiness, killing him "with her meanness and hatred."

Mrs. Yamada raised Ichiro to be Japanese, refusing to accept any part of her son that could be seen as American. However, living his life in America, Ichiro feels cursed by an inability to fully assimilate, as he is still tied to Japan by his mother.

Mrs. Yamada comes to fetch Ichiro for lunch. The family does not speak as they eat. Finally Ichiro's mother breaks the silence, telling Ichiro he must go back to school. She argues that he will have "unlimited" opportunities in Japan with a college degree. Ichiro isn't sure he wants to go back to school, and is shocked by his mother's belief that they could return to her home country.

The U.S. ensured Japanese surrender in WWII by dropping two devastating atom bombs. These bombs, in addition to a more conventional military invasion, led to massive destruction of the country and its infrastructure. Mrs. Yamada refuses to accept that this is true, instead preferring to believe that her home country remains pristine and victorious, waiting for her return.

Mrs. Yamada shows Ichiro a letter sent from Sao Paulo, ostensibly from the Japanese government, that claims it is sending ships to collect loyal Japanese people living around the world. The letter brings her comfort, as it proves to her that "we are not alone." This letter upsets Ichiro, who describes it as a kind of "weird nightmare," a confirmation of his mother's insanity.

Mrs. Yamada feels abandoned and alone in America. It is difficult for her to imagine that she will spend the rest of her life in a country she does not love, and instead invests in a fantasy that she has not been abandoned by her government—that Japan won the war, and that she will be able to return.

Mrs. Yamada tells Ichiro they'll discuss it later. She assures him that his doubts will disappear, because he is her son. Although he says nothing, Ichiro thinks to himself that he is no longer her son. He feels he is only half Japanese, because he was born in America and has lived among American culture and American people for so long. His connection to his mother guaranteed he would never become fully American, and he resents that his loyalty to her made him feel too Japanese to enlist.

Mrs. Yamada believes that her oldest son is exactly like her. She thinks that, because he rejected the draft, he has the same unwavering loyalty to Japan, and the same confidence in its ability to come out of the war unscathed. Ichiro, however, is only half like his mother. He is also half American, and remains conflicted and torn.

Ichiro continues his internal monologue. He asserts that he is not Mrs. Yamada's son, and he is "not Japanese" and "not American." He wishes he could be fully either, but he cannot be. For this he blames a world in which countries fight each other, he blames his mother, and he blames himself.

One of Ichiro's central conflicts in the novel is the question of whether or not he is Japanese or American, and whether he can be truly happy torn between two enemy nations. His mother is responsible for making him feel Japanese, but he also takes responsibility for listening to her.

Upset, Ichiro goes to sleep. The next morning, his younger brother shakes him awake. Taro is uninterested in talking to Ichiro, who tries to engage him anyway. Taro tells Ichiro he plans to go to the army after high school. Although Taro does not say it explicitly, Ichiro understands that Taro feels compelled to enlist because Ichiro did (and could) not.

Ichiro feels torn between American and Japanese identities, but Taro feels fully American. Seeing how Ichiro's rejection of the draft ruined his life, Taro has reacted by swinging in the opposite direction—rejecting his Japanese family and any allegiance to the home of his ancestors.

Taro, Ichiro, Mrs. Yamada, and Mr. Yamada eat in silence. Taro eats quickly and leaves. Ichiro's father explains that Taro never studies. Ichiro wonders if his parents can do anything about this. Ichiro's father says no, he has no control over his youngest son—the war has made him "wild like cats and dogs."

Although Mr. and Mrs. Yamada feel some connection with Ichiro because Ichiro feels some connection with Japan, Taro's embrace of everything American and rejection of everything Japanese includes a necessary distancing from his family.

Ichiro understands that Taro is fully American, whereas his parents, even after thirty-five years in America, have remained fully Japanese, and this is why they cannot understand each other. Taro hates that Ichiro remained Japanese enough to be unable to think for himself, and so is rebelling against his entire family. Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada only came to America to make money, and say they plan on returning to Japan "pretty soon."

Mr. and Mrs. Yamada have been unable and unwilling to assimilate. Because they always planned to return to Japan, they saw their time in America as a layover, and did not invest in any kind of American identity. Their children, meanwhile, have known no other country, and so have difficulty loving both America, which their parents do not love, and also Japan, which they have no connection to.

Mrs. Yamada takes Ichiro to see two family friends, the Ashida family and the Kumasaka family. These families are from the same village in Japan, and have been close for decades. It is customary to visit one another when a family member is about to leave for a big trip or has just returned. Ichiro doesn't want to go, but doesn't resist.

Moving to America from Japan was incredibly lonely, so families are joined together to create new social networks in their new, foreign home. Although Ichiro doesn't want to go, he understands it is tradition, and doesn't want to argue with and disrespect his mother.

At the Ashidas house, Mrs. Ashida and Mrs. Yamada discuss pictures of Japan taken by the son of a family friend stationed in Japan. His photos show the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but both Mrs. Ashida and Mrs. Yamada believe these photos are fake, or else taken somewhere other than Japan. Mrs. Yamada says that if Ichiro had both joined the American army to fight Japan and lost respect for his elders, "I would have killed myself." Ichiro sees his mother's "madness…was in mutual company."

Both Mrs. Ashida and Mrs. Yamada miss Japan, and have been unable to find healthy ways to deal with their unhappiness. Instead of acknowledging that the US won WWII, devastating Japan on its path to victory, both women insist on believing a convoluted conspiracy theory, in which their homeland is intact and just as they remember it, waiting for their return.

Mrs. Yamada shares the South American letter with Mrs. Ashida. They commiserate with each other about how many of their friends falsely believe that Japan lost the war. Unhappy and uncomfortable, Ichiro insists that they leave.

Once again, Mrs. Yamada and Mrs. Ashida are unable to cope with the idea that the Japan they know and love is gone. Instead, they have bought into a fantasy.

Mrs. Yamada insists they visit the Kumasaka family next. The Kumasakas lived in an apartment above their dry-cleaning shop before the war, but have now purchased a house. Ichiro sees this as a rejection of Japan, and a decision to fully commit to living in America. Mr. Kumasaka and Mrs. Kumasaka greet Mrs. Yamada and Ichiro. They explain that they "finally decided that America is not so bad."

Although the Kumasaka family initially employed similar logic to Mrs. Yamada and Mrs. Ashida—refusing to put down roots in America—they've finally admitted to themselves that they will not return to Japan, and will do their best to make America feel like home.

Mrs. Yamada sits on the couch and proudly declares that Ichiro "has suffered but I make no apologies for him or for myself. If he had given his life for Japan, I could not be prouder." She continues, saying that it is hard to be a mother, not just to give birth but to raise a child you are proud of. Some people succeed, and some fail.

Mrs. Yamada sees Ichiro's rejection of the draft as a rejection of America, and she sees this rejection of America as loyalty to Japan and loyalty to her. The Kumasakas' son enlisted in the U.S. military, and with this lecture Mrs. Yamada is cruelly implying that the Kumasaka family failed to raise a good Japanese child.

Ichiro asks the Mr. Kumasaka and Mrs. Kumasaka where their son, Bob is. Mr. Kumasaka is shocked by the question. His son died in the army. He can't believe Mrs. Yamada hasn't told Ichiro. Mr. Kumasaka calls Jun, one of Bob's friends from the army, into the room. Jun is staying with the family on his way home. Mr. Kumasaka asks Jun to tell them about Bob, and how he died.

Mrs. Yamada has brought Ichiro to the Kumasakas' home to show him that he made the right choice in rejecting the draft. She is proud of Ichiro, who she sees as Japanese, and has only disdain for Bob, who she believes sacrificed his Japanese identity to fight for America, and therefore deserved to die. It's becoming clearer how extreme and imbalanced she has become.

Mrs. Kumasaka cries as Jun recounts Bob's death. Ichiro recognizes that in her "bottomless grief" she "made no distinction as to what was wrong and what was right and who was Japanese and who was not." Mrs. Kumasaka similarly doesn't realize that Mrs. Yamada has brought Ichiro to her house to punish her by showing that her son, who remained dedicated to Japan, is alive.

Mrs. Yamada has no empathy for anyone but herself and her immediate family, and sees loyalty to Japan as the most important quality a person can have. In contrast, Mrs. Kumasaka does not care that her son was loyal to Japan or America—she simply wishes he were still alive.

Mrs. Yamada gets up and leaves without saying goodbye. Ichiro apologizes to Mr. Kumasaka for his mother, calling her "crazy" and a "goddamed Jap!" Mr. Kumasaka urges Ichiro to "try to understand her," as Ichiro leaves.

By calling Mrs. Yamada a "Jap," Ichiro distances himself from her, implying that she is Japanese (and that this is something undesirable and inferior) and that he is not.

Ichiro does not want to go home; instead, he walks and thinks. He considers his bond with Mrs. Yamada. He feels like his decision to reject the draft was selfish. He considers how Bob was able to do what was right for *him* and go into the army.

In hindsight, Ichiro regrets his decision to reject the draft. He feels that he was only looking out for his own interests, and his own hurt pride at having been interned. He did not consider how serving in the army would benefit a country he genuinely does like.

Ichiro thinks back to when he stood before the judge with many other Japanese American men who had been drafted. He remembers their various answers for why they would not serve. Some men argued that they had been treated by the US government the way the Nazis treated the Jews. Others argued that it didn't make sense that only Japanese people were sent to camps and not Germans or Italians. Others said they had brothers in Japan and couldn't fight against their own families. Some pled to be released from the camps.

During WWII, Japanese Americans were rounded up and put in internment camps. Although Japan was an enemy of the U.S., notably German American and Italian American families were not similarly rounded up. This created understandable resentment in the Japanese community, and provided justification for many young men as to why they would not answer the draft.

Ichiro sees that for every man who could not fight for America, thousands were able to see past their parents' allegiance to their home country. He admits to himself that Mrs. Yamada was not to blame—instead, he blames his own weakness. He considers various men he knew who, despite the injustices committed against them by the American government, willingly enlisted.

Ichiro regrets his behavior because he worries he's ruined his future. Although he used to blame his mother for making him too loyal to Japan, he now believes his behavior was also his own fault for being unable to think for himself. He acknowledges that the U.S. government did treat him poorly, but also believes that doesn't excuse his behavior.

Ichiro eventually makes it back to the grocery store. Mr. Yamada is drunk, which surprises Ichiro, and is going through a stack of letters from Japan. Mr. Yamada tells Ichiro that Mrs. Yamada is sick, and that he cannot do anything to help her. He has received letters from family in Japan asking for help, money, clothes, and food, but Mrs. Yamada doesn't believe they are suffering, claiming the letters are propaganda, and refuses to send anything. This is hard for Mr. Yamada to deal with, and so he drinks. Ichiro goes to bed. As he leaves, Mr. Yamada apologizes to his son for going to prison for him and Mrs. Yamada. Ichiro tells him to "forget it."

Mr. Yamada knows that his wife is delusional, but does not know how to cope with this. Instead of dealing with his emotions constructively, he turns to alcohol, which numbs them. Mr. Yamada is further troubled by his inability to help his relatives back in Japan, who need him, but who Mrs. Yamada refuses to help because she believes they are lying about Japan losing the war.

CHAPTER 2

In the morning Ichiro wakes up, feeling as though he is still in prison. Although he his now technically free, he believes "the prison which he had carved out of his own stupidity granted no paroles or pardons. It was a prison of forever."

Ichiro believes that he has ruined his entire future. Although his prison sentence was only two years long, he carries with him the guilt and shame of his incarceration.

At breakfast, Mrs. Yamada tries to tell Ichiro that Bob Kumasaka died because of his mother—because "she did not conduct herself as a Japanese and, no longer being Japanese," he is dead. She explains that because she and Mr. Yamada remain Japanese, they are alive, and so is Ichiro. However, if Ichiro were to enlist, or even consider enlisting, he would kill his parents.

Mrs. Yamada's Japanese identity and loyalty to Japan are so important to her that the idea that her son could love America would kill her. Mrs. Yamada has no empathy for the Kumasaka family, believing that Bob made the objectively wrong decision, and paid the price for his choice, all because his parents raised him incorrectly.

Ichiro tells Mrs. Yamada that she's crazy. She brushes off his insult. She's been called crazy before by "they who claim to be Japanese," but she believes she is strong and not crazy. Ichiro snaps and yells at her. He insists that what she's passed along to him is "not your strength, but your madness."

Mrs. Yamada believes that only people like her are truly Japanese, and anyone who disagrees with her only "claims" to be Japanese. Because she choses to disregard the opinions of so many people, she is able to maintain her worldview unchallenged.

Ichiro gets up to leave, and Mr. Yamada tries to stop him. Ichiro punches him in response. Mrs. Yamada slumps to the floor in shock. Ichiro stands for a moment, calming down. He apologizes to his father, who offers him some of the whisky he's been drinking. Ichiro decides to leave and go find an old friend, Freddie Akimoto.

Ichiro is overwhelmed by his family. His mother's insistence that Japan won the war and that anyone who fought for the U.S. is not truly Japanese is hard for him to deal with. Although he was raised to respect his family, his own guilt combined with their conspiracies is too much to bear.

Ichiro takes the bus to Freddie's apartment. He knocks on the door but a woman ("2-A") opens the apartment next door and tells him that Freddie sleeps late. Ichiro knocks harder until his friend wakes up. Freddie has been out of prison for five weeks. He tells Ichiro that they made a mistake going to prison, and he's been trying to make up for the two years he lost. Ichiro presses Freddie, wondering what life has really been like. Freddie admits it's been hard.

Freddie and Ichiro made similar choices, both rejecting the draft and going to prison. Because Freddie has been out for a few more weeks than Ichiro, Ichiro looks to him to see what his life could be like. Freddie does not provide a particularly encouraging blueprint, however, as he has had difficulty readjusting to life and dealing with residual guilt and shame.

Freddie says he's been having sex with the woman in apartment 2-A, but most mostly he's been sitting at home alone. His old friends either greet him quickly and rush off, or pretend not to know him. Ichiro tells Freddie how Eto spit on him, but feels he deserved it. Freddie tells Ichiro, "Nobody's got a right to spit on you."

Ichiro believes that he deserves prejudicial treatment. He thinks that because he made a mistake in rejecting the draft, he deserves to be punished. In contrast, Freddie believes their imprisonment was punishment enough, and that other people do not have the right to treat them like second-class citizens.

Ichiro decides to leave. Freddie invites him to play poker with him and other no-no boys. Ichiro explains that he needs a little time to "straighten out." Freddie counters that after two years in prison, he's had all the time he needs.

Ichiro is discouraged by Freddie's life. He does not want a future in which he can only hang out with other similarly marginalized no-no boys.

CHAPTER 3

Ichiro walks down Jackson Street, away from Freddie. He wonders if he and the other no-no boys have "renounced their American-ness" irrevocably. He asks himself, "was there no hope of redemption?" He remains an American with the rights of a citizen, and predicts that in time people will forget his crime.

Ichiro spends much of his time and mental energy worrying about his future, and how the decisions of his past have affected his life. He worries that because he rejected America for a moment, it will reject him forever.

Ichiro imagines a future in which "there will again be a place for me." He'll buy a home and start a family. He and Freddie will visit the families of men who went to the army, instead of to prison, and the difference between them will be irrelevant. He is hopeful in his heart, but in his mind he believes there is no happiness in his future.

Ichiro hopes that his status as a no-no boy will not isolate him forever. Although he experiences prejudice now, he hopes that with time people will forget, and instead a shared Japanese American identity will reunite him with his peers.

Ichiro gets on a bus, which takes him towards the university where he used to study engineering. He loved being in school, and believes that his education was something he would have gone into the army and killed for.

Constantly struggling with regret, Ichiro often imagines how a different situation could have led him to make a different decision. He thinks if he had remembered the things he liked about America, he would've been able to fight for it.

Ichiro thinks that being American and fighting for America is complicated and "incomplete" "if one's face is not white and one's parents are Japanese"—and especially Japan is one of America's enemies. Ichiro feels that he "forgot" the things about America that he treasured. However, Bob, Jun, and thousands of others did not.

Ichiro understands that the promise of the American Dream is fully available only to those who are white. Almost everyone else is excluded, but nonetheless expected to dedicate their bodies and their lives to a nation that does not fully accept them.

Ichiro gets off the bus at the university and goes to the office of a former professor, Baxter Brown. He had not planned to visit, but now he feels compelled. Mr. Brown doesn't seem to recognize his former student, who reintroduces himself. Mr. Brown notes that the evacuation was "tough," and tells Ichiro he has a "right to be sore." Ichiro insists that he has moved on. Mr. Brown asks Ichiro if he served, and Ichiro says he didn't, but is relieved that he is not forced to admit he is a no-no boy.

Ichiro lives in constant fear of revealing his status as a no-no boy, which he knows from experience often turns others against him, as they perceive him as un-American. Although Mr. Brown's acknowledgement of the trauma of internment suggests he would be sympathetic to Ichiro's decision, Ichiro is nonetheless nervous.

Mr. Brown encourages Ichiro to return to school, although it is too late to enroll this quarter. Although the conversation is pleasant, as he leaves Ichiro reflects that the interaction felt lifeless and impersonal. He wonders if this is his problem or Mr. Brown's. He suspects he "reduces the conversation to the inconsequential" because he feels he has forfeited the right to hear about the life he could have led.

Ichiro is actively sabotaging his own life. He is so convinced that his decision has ruined his future that he then begins to ruin his own future by ignoring opportunities and refusing to interact with people who he fears will judge him.

Ichiro eats lunch at a nearby diner. As he sits and eats, an old acquaintance of his, Kenji, taps him on the shoulder. The two sit and talk, and then Kenji invites Ichiro on a drive. His car is a brand-new Oldsmobile. Kenji says it's a present from "Uncle Sam." Ichiro had noticed Kenji walked with a cane, but in the car he can see that his **right leg** has been amputated above the knee. Kenji explains that he got the car as a reward for being a good patient, but "it wasn't worth it."

Unlike Ichiro, Kenji chose to serve in the U.S. military, and he was rewarded for his service and for the injuries sustained in battle. Although Kenji doesn't feel the reward is enough for what he has lost, compared to many of the other individuals and families Ichiro has interacted with since his release, Kenji is shockingly well adjusted.

Ichiro things that he would trade both legs to be in Kenji's position. He feels that, although his body is strong, it is "only an empty shell."

Ichiro is so unhappy with his life that he would trade body parts to feel confident that he had earned a place in America.

Ichiro asks Kenji about this leg. Initially it was amputated below the knee, but it continued to hurt, and the doctors realized there was some kind of infection, and were forced to amputate higher and higher. The leg has begun to hurt again, and Kenji knows he will have to go in for an additional amputation. He expects to live for two more years at most, if the rottenness cannot be cured. Kenji also says sometimes he thinks about killing himself. Ichiro is surprised and angry to hear this. Kenji explains that he has **eleven inches of his leg left**, whereas Ichiro has fifty or sixty years of life. He wonders which Ichiro would rather have.

Kenji has everything Ichiro wants. Although Kenji has lost a leg, Ichiro feels that his status as a respected veteran is easily worth the loss of limb. This is why he is so shocked that Kenji would ever contemplate suicide. Kenji sees the eleven inches of his leg as a ticking clock, representing the limited amount of he has left.

As horrible as Kenji's situation is, Ichiro says he would still trade with his friend. This confession surprises the veteran. Ichiro explains that he was a no-no boy. Kenji did not know this, but does not judge him for it. Ichiro believes that Kenji has earned the right to stand tall, and to call America his own. Kenji notes that both men have big problems. Ichiro tells Kenji he would trade with him, even for just two inches of leg.

Ichiro is so unhappy with his life that even the looming threat of death would not discourage him from trading his life with Kenji's. Because Kenji has no ill will towards Ichiro, it is difficult for him to understand the discrimination Ichiro has experienced, which makes his life feel so unlivable.

Kenji drops Ichiro off at home and the two make plans for later in the evening. At home, Taro is playing solitaire in the kitchen. He turned eighteen today, and so has dropped out of school and plans to join the army. Both Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada are upset, but Ichiro understands Taro's perspective. Taro feels like he is not rejecting his family, because Ichiro already rejected Taro when he refused the draft.

Taro feels fully American, and so, when Ichiro rejected the draft, effectively choosing Japan over America, Taro felt that Ichiro was choosing his Japanese parents over his American little brother. Now, Taro sees dropping out of school and joining the army as a way to rebuke the brother who he feels rebuked him.

Taro feels Mrs. Yamada's influence and needs desperately to free himself. However, he doesn't say this. Instead he just packs a bag and leaves. Mr. Yamada watches Taro go—"not a son but a stranger…an enemy leaving to join his friends."

Taro is so much more American than his family that he is practically a stranger to them. Having seen the way his mother's influence corrupted and confused Ichiro, Taro knows he must escape while he can.

Ichiro, Mr. Yamada, and Mrs. Yamada stand stunned in Taro's absence. His mother lets out a single cry, and then composes herself, asking about nickels as "if Taro had never been born." Mr. Yamada gets back to work. Ichiro realizes that "the strength of Japan had failed," and he knows that his mother understands this as well.

Mrs. Yamada only takes ownership of her sons as long as they remain loyal to her and to Japan. Now that Taro has left, she feels that he is not Japanese and therefore not her son.

CHAPTER 4

That evening Ichiro and Kenji gamble in Chinatown for a while, before moving to a nearby bar. Ichiro notes that this neighborhood is at once "part of America" but can "never be wholly America."

America is often portrayed as a melting pot that ostensibly welcomes people from other nations and cultures, but in reality those who do not look "American" (and white) often have difficulty fully integrating.

Kenji and Ichiro go to Club Oriental, a nightclub and bar. There they drink and talk. Kenji encourages Ichiro not to blame himself for where he is in his life. Still, Kenji tells Ichiro he would not trade **half an inch** for Ichiro's long life. Instead, he'd just sell his car and sit in the Club Oriental drinking happily.

Although Ichiro envies Kenji's status as a veteran and an American who has earned his place, the best part of Kenji's life seems to be his contentment with it. Although he, like Ichiro, is suffering, he is doing his best to live free from doubt, shame, or resentment.

Kenji and Ichiro sit in silence for a while. Kenji, although Japanese, is "more American than most Americans," while Ichiro is "neither Japanese nor American."

Ichiro believes that because Kenji fought for America, he is truly American. In contrast, because Ichiro was unable to fight but now regrets his choice, he is neither American nor Japanese.

A Japanese man named Bull comes into the club with a white woman. He invites Kenji to come sit with him, but rescinds the invitation when he sees Ichiro, who he recognizes as a no-no boy. Kenji refuses to engage with Bull, who insults Ichiro, but Ichiro feels shame and bitterness well up within him. Ichiro begins to drink heavily, and Kenji implores him to slow down. Ichiro admits it doesn't even help.

Ichiro lives in constant fear of being harassed for being a no-no boy, and when it happens it merely reaffirms what he already believed—that no one, not even his Japanese American peers, will accept him. Although Kenji does accept and care for Ichiro, Ichiro sees this as a lucky exception.

Ichiro gets up to go. He thanks Kenji for being kind to him, and offers a kindness in return: he will leave, and Kenji can return to his life. Kenji doesn't accept this offer, but their argument is interrupted by the appearance of Taro, who wants to talk to his brother outside.

Ichiro believes that no only has he ruined his life, but that everyone else's life would be better if they did not associate with him. Kenji, who thinks Ichiro does have a future ahead of him if he chooses to embrace it, disagrees with this pessimistic assessment.

Taro convinces Ichiro to come talk outside. Kenji wants to come, but Ichiro tells him to hold back. Outside, two of Taro's friends confront Ichiro, and begin to attack him. They call him a "Jap," and accuse him of being homesick for Japan. They kick him to the ground and pull his pants off. One boy leans over him with a knife, but is interrupted by Kenji, who hits them with his cane until they leave.

Ichiro and Taro's relationship has been totally destroyed by Ichiro's perceived rejection of America and, by extension, his American brother. Taro's friends, whose race is not identified but who are likely also of Japanese ancestry, feel so distant from their Japanese identity that they are comfortable using anti-Japanese slurs towards those they perceive as more Japanese than they are.

Ichiro gets up, and he and Kenji return to Kenji's car. As they drive, Ichiro considers Bull's treatment of him, which he understands. He understands that the white woman with him "was a compensation for his lack of acceptance." Ichiro feels like he can forgive Bull, but not Taro. Kenji drives swiftly out of the city. He wants Ichiro to meet one of his friends.

Ichiro understands that many Japanese veterans returned to the U.S. only to continue to face discrimination. Frustrated by this treatment, they are able to take out their anger on him. Taro, however, was not a veteran, and as Ichiro's brother, he should be held to a higher standard.

Ichiro falls asleep, and when Kenji arrives at the farmhouse he leaves him in the car, going inside to greet Emi. They talk about her family. Her father is in Japan and unhappy. Her husband Ralph, a soldier who committed to another term of service in Germany, has not written to her. She still loves him but feels confused and lonely.

Emi lives a lonely life, and treasures her friendship with Kenji. Emi's family is unhappy because they either felt too Japanese to stay in America, like her father, or too American to return to a place where they will be treated as second class, like her husband.

Kenji advises Emi to divorce Ralph, but she says it's none of his business. He apologizes, and she gets up to make coffee as a peace offering. Ichiro has woken up and now comes into the house. He notices a piano and sits down to play. Emi comes out to check on the men, and is shocked by Ichiro's resemblance to Ralph. Kenji claims he hadn't noticed. Emi recovers from her surprise and sits with Ichiro on the piano bench. The two play chopsticks together.

Emi, lonely and abandoned by her husband and family, is immediately drawn to Ichiro. His physical appearance helps endear her to him, and although Kenji acts as though this is a surprise to him, he likely brought Ichiro to meet Emi because he had noticed this very similarity, and wanted to make both his friends a little less lonely.

Ichiro and Emi sit down on the sofa and talk to Kenji. Ichiro tells Emi he was in prison, but she does not hold it against him.

Emi is yet another person who does not judge Ichiro because he is a no-no boy, and thus another indication that his future might not be so bleak.

Kenji suggests staying the night. He claims the couch, but tells Ichiro he will sleep in the bedroom with Emi. Ichiro is confused and appalled, but Kenji insists that Emi likes him, and "needs" him, or someone like him. Kenji argues that he himself "only half a man," and Ichiro infers that Kenji is sending him in as a kind of substitute. Kenji shrugs, and tells Ichiro he can sleep wherever he wants.

Kenji recognizes that both Emi and Ichiro are lonely. Emi has no nearby family, and Ichiro feels distant from his. By getting together, even for a night, Kenji suspects each could feel a little more cared for.

Ichiro joins Emi in bed. At first he lays stiffly, but then she takes his hand and they talk. She tells him that she lives alone, her mother died in 1939, and her father asked to be repatriated. Her father, like Mrs. Yamada, believed Japan won the war. Now, living there, her father no longer believes this to be true.

Emi's father provides a picture of the potential consequences of refusing to believe America won the war. Unable to believe the truth, he moved to a country devastated by years of war and a continuing military occupation.

Emi and Ichiro continue talk about their parents' sicknesses. Ichiro feels that he has ruined his life. He believes he is not crazy now, but was, briefly. Emi suggests it is because, for some reason, one cannot be both American and Japanese, although it is fine to be American and Italian or American and German. Thinking about this, Ichiro begins to cry, and Emi holds him.

Emi and Ichiro recognize that having a split identity—both American and Japanese—is difficult, and prevents them from living fully in either world. However, they also understand that white Americans with foreign ancestry have an easier time integrating.

Ichiro wakes up in the morning to find Emi gone. He searches for her outside, where she is weeding in a field. Ichiro sees a man working nearby. Emi tells him it's Mr. Maeno, a farmer who leases her land. Ichiro used to think their work was crazy, year-round, sunup until sundown, but now he envies farmers because they have a purpose. He tells Emi he envies her, too, and Kenji. Emi is irritated. She thinks he is needlessly bitter.

Ichiro believes that everyone else's life is easier than his. He is so convinced that there is no hope for him to live normally because of his prison sentence and his rejection of the draft, that he envies even those with objectively difficult lives. Emi sees this, and believes Ichiro is blind to the possibilities of his future.

Emi explains that just because Ichiro feels hopeless, doesn't mean there is no hope. Ichiro dismisses her, and she responds angrily. She points out he's able-bodied and intelligent. He has the ability to move on and have a good life. Although America made a mistake "when they doubted" him, by releasing him from prison they admitted to their mistake. Ichiro, she suggests, should forgive America and be grateful, and try to prove that he is an American.

Emi can see what Ichiro cannot—that with time, and a thick skin, he will be able to reintegrate and lead a fairly normal life. Although Emi agrees that the government treated him unfairly, she knows that if he is unable to forgive his country and move on, then he truly will never be happy.

Ichiro isn't fully convinced by Emi's argument. She tries one last time. She asks him to imagine how full of patriotism he felt as a child, singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at school assemblies. She asks him to recapture that feeling, and then understand that both he and his country made mistakes.

Emi believes that the only way for Ichiro to overcome the trauma of his past is to learn to love America again, purely and innocently in the same way that a child might.

Emi tells Ichiro a story about Ralph's brother, Mike. He was born in California, where he went to college. He fought in World War I, returned, and started a produce business. When Japanese people began to be evacuated at the start of WWII, Mike refused to go, arguing that if his country would not treat him as a citizen he would not act like one. As a result, he was deported to Japan. Now, Ralph is too ashamed of his brother's actions to come home. Emi wishes that Ralph would see he doesn't have to punish himself.

Mike felt betrayed by America. Although he had fought for it and proved his dedication, he was nonetheless treated as though he wasn't a citizen with rights. This is not unlike how Ichiro and many of the other no-no boys felt. Emi's story is meant to serve as a warning to Ichiro, and as perspective that it could always be worse. Ichiro can live happily in America if he allows himself to.

Emi and Ichiro reenter the house. Kenji has woken up and started preparing breakfast. Emi takes over. As she cooks, they talk. Kenji is going to Portland tomorrow to the VA hospital, and invites Ichiro along. After breakfast, the two men prepare to leave. Kenji kisses Emi on the cheek, but she responds by kissing him on the mouth. She tells him "I'll wait for you," and stands in the driveway waving and crying as they drive away.

Emi has almost no one in her life. Her mother has died, her father has left, and her husband refuses to return home. Kenji seems to be her only friend, the sole member of her surrogate family. He has seemingly introduced her to Ichiro in the hopes that, if he dies, she will still have another person to rely on.

CHAPTER 5

Kenji drops Ichiro at home. Mrs. Yamada wonders where Ichiro has been, and he explains that he was with Kenji. Mrs. Yamada says Kenji is not truly Japanese, as he "fought against us," bringing shame to his family and to himself. Ichiro becomes angry but tries not to lash out. Mrs. Yamada urges him not to see Kenji again. Ichiro tells her he's seeing him tomorrow.

Mrs. Yamada's rigid commitment to Japan makes her inflexible and cruel. Because Kenji fought for America she believes he is not Japanese, and because he is not Japanese she believes he deserved his battlefield injury.

Ichiro feels his anger fade, and instead he feels pity for Mrs. Yamada, whose dedication to Japan has made her sick. He wonders if it was really so crazy of her to refuse to accept a country that refused to accept her or her sons, or even men like Kenji, who fought for it but remained second-class citizens.

Although Ichiro feels that his mother is crazy, he begins to understand her. It is logical that she would commit more fiercely to her love of Japan when America, her adopted home, made it clear it did not respect her or her children.

Ichiro wishes he could talk to Mrs. Yamada, who is also a stranger. He wonders what it was like to be Japanese, what it was like to come to America. He thinks if he knew more about her perhaps he could understand her. But he doesn't ask her anything. Instead he remains silent as she rifles through a stack of letters, finds one from Japan, and gives it to Ichiro to give to Mr. Yamada.

Ichiro again feels the divide between his mother and himself. He knows this is because they have had different experiences, and because, despite her best efforts, he was raised as both American and Japanese, and therefore she will never be fully able to understand (or control) him.

Mr. Yamada lewdly asks Ichiro what he was up to. Ichiro jokes that he had fun, but "not enough to make up for two years." He suddenly imagines how hard life must have been for his father, working on the railroad, spending his money on gambling, drinking, or prostitutes once a month when they were allowed to go to town. Ichiro understands how it must have felt pointless to be in America without saving money, but at the same time it was so difficult to save.

Ichiro is having a series of insights into his parents' inner lives. He had never before considered the ways his father must have suffered in order to have a comfortable life in America, and how his comfortable life in America was always merely meant to be a temporary stopover before returning, rich, to Japan.

Ichiro delivers the newest letter to Mr. Yamada. It's from Mrs. Yamada's sister. Mr. Yamada calls his wife into the room and insists she read it. When she refuses, he reads it to her. The sister calls Mrs. Yamada by her nickname, "Kin-chan." She writes how hard it is in Japan now, and how much she would appreciate some meat, or powdered milk, or candy for her children. She apologizes for writing shamelessly, but she needs help. Mrs. Yamada tries to get her husband to stop reading, but Mr. Yamada will not. He skips to an anecdote from her childhood, that only Mrs. Yamada's sister could possibly know.

The Yamadas have been receiving letters from Japan for weeks. These letters explain the devastation in Japan and ask for assistance, but because Mrs. Yamada refuses to believe Japan lost the war, she also chooses to believe the letters are fake. Ignoring these pleas makes it easier for Mrs. Yamada to live the lie that one day she will return to the Japan of her youth.

After finishing the letter, Mr. Yamada goes to chop cabbage in the kitchen. Mrs. Yamada sits, the truth and the untruth fighting in her mind. Finally, she concludes that her sister must have been tortured to reveal the truth. She takes the letter to the bedroom. Ichiro and Mr. Yamada wonder if Mrs. Yamada is beginning to see reality.

Mrs. Yamada is so committed to her fantasy of an undefeated Japan that she will complete any necessary mental gymnastics in order to keep her life intact. However, the fact that this letter is from her sister and contains intimate details about her makes it more difficult for her to maintain her conspiracy.

Ichiro decides that he has to get away from his parents. He believes that they messed up their own lives and his life, and he can never move on and forget the past as long as he is around them.

Ichiro believes that his connection to his parents has only held him back—forcing him to reject the draft, and now to live in a strange state of delusion in which Japan has supposedly won the war.

At lunch, Mrs. Yamada refuses to get up and eat. Distressed, Mr. Yamada begins to backslide, agreeing that the letter "could be nothing," and maybe it isn't her sister after all. This frustrates Ichiro, but his father explains that he's afraid for his wife.

Mrs. Yamada has previously been unable to deal with the reality of the U.S. winning WWII, and now, when faced with the truth, she is unable to continue living a normal life.

As they talk, Ichiro realizes that Mr. Yamada thinks Ichiro did the right thing by going to prison. This shocks Ichiro. He believes he made a huge mistake and ruined his life for his mother, father, and Japan. He tries to explain this to his father, who doesn't understand. He tells Mr. Yamada this—"you're a Jap. How can you understand?" He continues, saying that his father will never understand his wife, Ichiro, or Taro. For a second Mr. Yamada seems poised to fight back, but then he deflates. Ichiro leaves the table to help a customer in the store.

Even though Ichiro gets along with his father better than he gets along with his mother, in this moment he realizes that even he and his father are on opposite sides of an enormous generational and cultural divide. By calling Mr. Yamada a "Jap," a derogatory term, Ichiro further "others" his father, indicating that he considers his father to be Japanese (and therefore something undesirable), while Ichiro himself remains something else entirely—not accepted as American, but certainly not Japanese.

CHAPTER 6

Kenji returns home. He lives with his father in a two-story house at the top of a hill. Mr. Kanno is sitting on the porch and warmly greets his son. Kenji has brought a gift: two fifths of whisky. His father jokes that he'll drink it in two days, and the pair laugh together, "the father because he loved his son and the son because he both loved and respected his father, who was a moderate and good man."

Kenji's family is presented in stark contrast to Ichiro's family. Kenji and his father talk often and openly, whereas Ichiro's family has difficulty communicating at all. Further, Mr. Kanno drinks moderately, whereas Mr. Yamada has become an alcoholic in his attempts to escape reality.

Kenji and Mr. Kanno sit down at the kitchen table. Mr. Kanno is grateful for his children, and is proud of the lives they lead. His daughters are both happily married, and his sons have good jobs. He only has to work a few days a week to support himself.

Again in stark contrast to Ichiro's family, Mr. Kanno is proud of his children for the lives they lead independently of him. In Ichiro's family, his mother is only proud of him for following closely in her footsteps.

Mr. Kanno notices that Kenji winces in pain when he moves his **leg**. Mr. Kanno almost starts to cry with worry, but then distracts himself by getting a glass of the new whisky for both of them. As they drink, Kenji's father tells him about how he came to America, "greedy and ambitious and proud," just hoping to make money. He feels like his son has paid the price for his foolishness. Kenji disagrees.

While Mr. Kanno regrets coming to America because he sees his choice as the reason his son is in pain, Kenji does not blame his father. In contrast, Ichiro's parents are still ambitious and money-oriented, and feel proud of their son's behavior, while he, in turn, regrets it and blames them.

Kenji tells Mr. Kanno that he is going to the hospital tomorrow. His father offers to come, but Kenji shuts him down. Kenji's father does not argue. He knows that he will never fully be able to understand how his son was able to fight for America. He thinks of how he abandoned the idea of returning to Japan when he saw how America had become a part of his children. He also understood how incredible it was that he was able to raise six children alone, without resorting to begging or borrowing.

Mr. Kanno has grown to love America in a way Ichiro's family has not. Mr. Kanno sees that America has become a part of his children, and because he loves his children, he loves America. Furthermore, he understands that some opportunities were only available to him because he was in America, and he will forever be thankful for this.

Mr. Kanno reveals that Kenji had enlisted in the army on his own, instead of waiting for the draft. This was both a desire to prove his commitment to America, and to express his genuine love for his country. Kenji went to war to "prove that he deserved to enjoy those rights which should rightfully have been his."

Kenji did love America enough to enlist, but he also saw his enlistment as a way to prove *that he was truly American. By volunteering as opposed to waiting to be asked, even after internment and mistreatment, he meant to send a message about what a true American looks like. (And it's important to remember, of course, that the average white American man would feel no such pressure to risk his life just to prove his American-ness.)*

Mr. Kanno remembers how, when he was in the internment camp, a week after Kenji had gone into the army, a neighbor's son in the military had returned to see his family. This soldier was bitter—in the army he was only allowed to clean the toilets and handle garbage, and when the president came to visit he was hidden away, guarded by his fellow soldiers. Kenji's father had wondered, then, if he had done the right thing allowing his son to fight, even when he might be fighting other Japanese people.

Mr. Kanno let Kenji go into the army because Mr. Kanno (unlike the Yamada family) respects his son and trusts his decisions. However, seeing the mistreatment of another soldier of Japanese descent by the American military gave him second thoughts. Although this young man was serving his country, he still was not treated equally as a citizen because he was Japanese.

Kenji goes to take a nap and Mr. Kanno goes to the grocery store. As he walks, he remembers a young sociologist who had held meetings at the internment camp. This young man tried to explain to the assembled Issei that they did not know their own children. Their children, Nisei, were often the sons and daughters of America, not Japan, and not their parents. The sociologist argued that this was a failure on the part of the Issei, and that they had been unable to realize that they had to raise a child differently in America than in Japan.

The young sociologist makes the point that the Issei and Nisei are inherently different. One group was born in Japan, and many in that group intend to return. As a result, they've never seen America as a home. In contrast, their children were born and raised in America, and have difficulty connecting with the country of their parents, which they've never seen and maybe never will.

After Mr. Kanno returns home he cooks the chicken. His daughter Hanako arrives and helps make a salad, and her brother Tom comes soon after with store-bought lemon meringue pie. Tom is in a good mood, until his father explains that they're all having dinner because Kenji has to return to the hospital. The family is hungry, but waits to wake Kenji. When he eventually comes downstairs he apologizes, but they do not mind. They eat together, briefly discussing the surgery. Kenji lies and says he thinks it is only an issue with his brace being too tight.

Once again, Kenji's family is shown in stark contrast to Ichiro's. The family cooks together, and talks openly and easily. They love each other, and care about each other's wellbeing. They privilege Kenji's happiness over theirs, and are happy to wait for him although they are hungry. Kenji, too, cares about his family's wellbeing, lying for their sake so they don't worry about him.

After dinner two more of Kenji's siblings, Hisa and Toyo, arrive with their husbands and children. They talk and laugh as a baseball game plays in the background. During a lull in the conversation, Kenji decides to leave. He understands that his family has come to send him off, but he doesn't want to have a formal goodbye.

Kenji loves his family, but knows that a formal goodbye will be too painful for everyone. He decides to protect all of their emotions by sneaking away.

Mr. Kanno follows Kenji outside and stops him on the porch. His father can tell something is worse about **Kenji's leg** this time, which Kenji confirms. Kenji says he's scared. Kenji's father asks him to call every day. Kenji agrees, and pulls out of the driveway. His father stands on the porch, waving goodbye.

Mr. Kanno and Kenji have a close relationship, and Mr. Kanno cannot let his son go without a goodbye. Kenji is honest with his father in a way he has not been honest with his siblings, revealing that he is worried he is going to die.

Kenji drives to the Club Oriental. He feels comfortable there, known and liked. He feels this is what it must be like to be white in America everywhere—comfortable no matter where you go. Just as he is thinking this there is a scuffle at the entrance. A Japanese boy has tried to bring two black men in with him, which is not permitted. Another Japanese man in the bar makes a comment about how if you let one black man in, soon the bar will be "black as night." Upset, Kenji leaves the club. He wonders if there is "no answer to the bigotry and meanness and smallness and ugliness of people."

Like Freddie and Ichiro, Kenji fears the future, but unlike those two men, he has made peace with his fate. Kenji understands that even as a veteran, he does not receive the same treatment as white men in America, even those who did not serve. However, even as he understands the privileges he does not have, he sees his own oppressed group of people discriminating against others, feeling no empathy for those with whom they actually have much in common with.


Kenji considers a series of vignettes in which one group of people could be bigoted against another: a European immigrant upset when a black man sits next to her on the bus. A Chinese girl dating a white boy who feels that she has "risen in the world." An Italian restaurant that will not serve to a Jewish and Japanese man. A young Japanese man who hates the "not-so-young Japanese" man who he sees as more Japanese than himself, and this middle-aged man in turn hates older Japanese men who are more Japanese still.

Kenji understands that just because a person has experienced prejudice doesn't mean they will not then discriminate against another group. In these anecdotes he reveals how certain members of minority groups will still look down on others, even if their desire to be recognized as rightful Americans (or simply human beings with rights and value) is essentially the same.

Kenji drives to Ichiro's house. Through the glass of the store he sees Mrs. Yamada placing cans of evaporated milk on a shelf, then knocking them off. He watches so intently that he's surprised when Ichiro comes out, dressed and ready to go. He asks Ichiro about his mother, but Ichiro just explains that she's snapped, although she'd been "crazy a long time."

After reading the letter from her sister, it seems, something inside of Mrs. Yamada snapped. Although she refuses to admit Japan did in fact lose the war, she is unable to continue living in her delusion. Instead, this ritual seems to be a way to restore and then destroy order, perhaps symbolizing the destruction of her post-war fantasy of Japanese victory.

Ichiro and Kenji drive quickly out of Seattle. They stop for coffee and Ichiro takes over driving. He drives faster and faster, eventually attracting the attention of a police officer. Kenji convinces Ichiro to switch seats with him, so the police officer will give Kenji the ticket. The police officer makes Kenji drive back through town to the speed limit sign, asking if they can read it even though they're Japanese. The cop tries to convince Kenji and Ichiro to bribe him, but they don't. Instead, he writes them an expensive ticket, claiming they were drunk driving and attempting to bribe. Kenji throws the ticket out as soon as they're out of the town.

Although Ichiro is technically breaking the law, the cop's treatment of him and Kenji is rooted in racism as much as it is rooted in a desire to keep the streets safe. By forcing Kenji and Ichiro to read the sign—even though they are both American citizens born in America, and clearly speak English—the cop makes clear his belief that anyone who does not look white does not look American, and is therefore undeserving of respect and dignity.

Two hours later Ichiro and Kenji arrive in Portland and have breakfast. Kenji tells Ichiro to drive his car back to Portland when he's ready. Ichiro is happy to stay, and has even considered looking for a job in Portland, but Kenji reveals that he worries "this is it."

Ichiro struggles when thinking about his future, because although his life might be long, he cannot imagine opportunities for it. Kenji, in contrast, can see that his life is short, and is forced to come to terms with his imminent death.

Ichiro drops Kenji off at the hospital. Kenji shakes Ichiro's hand and comments that the cop will have to come a long way to catch up with him. Ichiro tells his friend he'll see him soon. Kenji cautions him not to wait too long.

Kenji jokes about his future and his death, but has ultimately accepted it. He has said goodbye to his father and to his family, and knows there is nothing left for him to do.

CHAPTER 7

Feeling lonely, Ichiro drives back into the city and rents a hotel room. He finds a newspaper and looks at the classified ads. The first job that stands out to him is a job as a porter. He heads to a nearby hotel, where he is ushered into the employment office. He easily answers the questions on the front of the form, but realizes he cannot account for the past two years of unemployment. He gets up and leaves without finishing the application.

Although briefly optimistic, Ichiro once again is made to feel as though he ruined his future by rejecting the draft. Because he feels undesirable, he believes any prospective employer who found out about his past would automatically find him undesirable as well. Essentially, he feels like an imposter, who people only connect to because they don't know the "real" him.

Ichiro stops for coffee in a diner, and considers two other classifieds he had circled in the newspaper. Although concerned he will encounter the same problem at each new job site, he pushes himself to keep searching for work.

Although it is not clear why Ichiro has suddenly become so proactive, his decision to continue to look for jobs signifies a growing interest in his future wellbeing.

Ichiro decides to look at a draftsman position in a small engineering firm. He drives to the office of Carrick and Sons, and waits in the lobby for Mr. Carrick to see him. Eventually, the receptionist leads him down to the basement, where Mr. Carrick is building his own snowplow. Mr. Carrick is immediately warm and friendly. He easily pronounces Ichiro's name, and speaks a little Japanese to him. Mr. Carrick explains that he used to have close Japanese friends, although they moved east after their internment ended.

Mr. Carrick is only the second white character, after Mr. Brown, Ichiro's former professor, to treat Ichiro with any kindness, and the first who goes out of his way to make Ichiro feel comfortable and optimistic about his future. Mr. Carrick genuinely seems to understand the plight of people of Japanese ancestry in America and the devastation of internment, and therefore understands what Ichiro has gone through and how he must be feeling.

Mr. Carrick tells Ichiro that he thinks the government made a mistake interning its Japanese citizens. Mr. Carrick used to feel like a proud American, but his country's behavior has changed his mind. Ichiro sees that Mr. Carrick's apology is genuine, but he does not know how to respond.

Mr. Carrick complicates the idea of an American identity. Although he is recognized as American and given rights, he doesn't feel American because he is embarrassed of how his country treated its Japanese citizens.

Mr. Carrick asks Ichiro when he wants to start. He offers him $265 a month, $300 after a year. Ichiro knows it would be so easy to take the job, and knows too that because he is Japanese, Mr. Carrick is offering him more than the listed salary of $200. But Ichiro feels the job is not for him—it is for another Japanese person "who was equally as American" as Mr. Carrick. He asks for some time to consider.

Mr. Carrick is ashamed of how his country has treated Ichiro and other people with Japanese ancestry. He is trying to personally make up for the discrimination Ichiro has faced. This, the book suggests, is the best way for white Americans to reject their country's systemic racism—not just learning to "tolerate" others, but actively seeking to make reparations and undo past mistakes. However, Ichiro believes that because he rejected the draft, he is undeserving of any kindness.

Ichiro decides to come clean. He stands to leave and tells Mr. Carrick he's not a veteran. Mr. Carrick doesn't understand at first, but when Ichiro explains that he refused the draft, Mr. Carrick is not upset. He apologizes to Ichiro—he is sorry Ichiro did what he felt he had to do. He hopes Ichiro will not blame himself. Ichiro says it's hard not to, but also blames his mother, and the situation. It was unfair first to be treated as un-American, and then asked to prove his Americanness.

Ichiro assumes that Mr. Carrick will treat him differently once he discovers the truth about Ichiro's past, as this has often been Ichiro's experience. However, Mr. Carrick doesn't care. He understands what Ichiro seems not to—that whether or not Ichiro rejected the draft he remains American, and it was extremely unfair to be expected to commit to fighting for America when his country had just treated him with such disrespect.

Ichiro and Mr. Carrick shake hands and then Ichiro leaves. Although he does not expect to take the job, meeting Mr. Carrick comforted him. He realizes "there was someone who cared," and that perhaps he could forgive a country that still has good, kind people in it.

Mr. Carrick's kindness has demonstrated to Ichiro that perhaps he hasn't ruined his future after all. He realizes there might be other people out there like Mr. Carrick, who will accept him and help him.

Ichiro returns to his hotel. He sleeps for many hours and wakes late in the evening. He decides he will return to Seattle. He believes he cannot begin a new life until he has reckoned with his old one—he has shared so much with his mother and his father that he knows that, to find "wholeness and belonging," he must return to "the place where he had begun to lose it." Ichiro decides not to take the job, but writes Mr. Carrick a thank-you note on hotel stationary, trying to explain how important Mr. Carrick's kindness was, and how it has changed his outlook on life.

Ichiro's interaction with Mr. Carrick has shifted his sense of the future—he realizes he might have one after all. But to have a future free from the baggage of his past, he understands he must extricate himself from his family, who he has for so long blamed for his current misery. However, the only way to untangle himself is to return home and mend or make peace with their complicated relationship.

Ichiro leaves the hotel in search of food. He remembers hearing about Burnside Café, and seeks it out. Inside, a Japanese teenager wearing a **discharge pin** seats him and takes his order. Ichiro can tell the boy recognizes him as Japanese, and is suddenly filled with disgust. He understands that it is nice that immigrants from the same country in America can recognize each other and help each other out, but also sees that this kind of nationalism only furthers divisions and prejudices.

Ichiro recognizes that there is the potential for solidarity between people of Japanese descent, just as there is solidarity between people of Chinese descent in America. Still, he wishes that unconditional acceptance of strangers also applied to those who were of other racial or ethnic groups. The teenager's discharge pin indicates that he served in the army, and therefore is seen by most as a "true" American. This makes Ichiro angry, partly because he feels the boy should be accepted as American regardless of army service.

The boy asks Ichiro if he is Japanese, and he lies, first saying he's a decorated veteran, and then that he's Chinese. The boy says that it's fine, "I like Chinese," and Ichiro pushes back that there's no reason he shouldn't. The boy is flustered and leaves Ichiro alone for the rest of his meal. Ichiro finishes eating and leaves, happy to get away from the Japanese teenager who felt the need to wear a **discharge pin** to prove his worth as an American.

Ichiro takes out his frustration at racism and discrimination in the United States on this teenager. He understands the teen is being extra kind to him because he recognizes Ichiro as Japanese, and Ichiro tests this kindness by seeing if it would apply to someone of a different background. His issue is not with kindness being extended to people from the same country of origin, but of that kindness then being withheld from people with different backgrounds.

Back in his hotel room, Ichiro wonders if the "land of happily-ever-after" could ever be accessible to him. Or, if he forfeited it, will it be available to the teenager with the **discharge pin**? What about African Americans back in Seattle? Even though they have told him to go back to Tokyo, he recognizes these men are also "on the outside looking in." Ichiro recognizes that Mr. Carrick is also on the outside.

Ichiro understands that although many minority groups discriminate against each other, they share a common plight: they have been denied the rights and privileges promised to "true" Americans, and hope by abusing others that they can elevate themselves in contrast.

Ichiro considers that maybe everyone is on the outside, "pushing and shoving and screaming to get into someplace that doesn't exist," not understanding that if everyone got along, maybe "the outside could be the inside."

Ichiro and other characters often fantasize about the ideal America that white people must experience, but Ichiro here realizes that perhaps everyone struggles in their own way, and imagines that life would be better if all people were more accepting.

The next morning, Ichiro drives to the hospital. Visiting hours haven't begun, but he slips upstairs to Kenji's room. Kenji says he thinks he is going to die. The doctors haven't confirmed it, but he can tell they agree.

Kenji is able to calmly discuss his death, because he has spent much of the time since his original amputation coming to terms with his illness and accepting his fate.

Kenji advises Ichiro to return to Seattle. Although the harassment from other Japanese people, especially those in the army, has been difficult, Kenji tells Ichiro to stick it out. He explains that even when people who were not no-no boys returned, they faced discrimination of their own, including name-calling and vandalism. Kenji says that the men who have harassed Ichiro are probably doing it because they blame him for their own harassment.

Kenji and Ichiro both recognize that people who harass others are often responding to harassment they themselves have received. For example, the Japanese men and teenagers who have made Ichiro's life so difficult are lashing out only because they have been harassed and made to feel un-American.

Kenji doesn't like how Japanese people cluster together. He sees it as a kind of internment camp of their own making. Ichiro points out that this happens with many ethnic or religious minorities. Kenji agrees that this is true, but it doesn't make it right. He tells Ichiro to go back to Seattle until the other Japanese men living there leave him alone, then to move far away and marry a girl who is not Japanese.

Kenji believes that if people would be more willing to befriend or even marry those unlike them, there would be less racism and prejudice in the world. His advice to Ichiro is to begin this project himself, de-segregating the Japanese community through his own personal and intimate relationships.

Kenji tells Ichiro that he's going to write to Ralph, and tell him that Ichiro and Emi are hitting it off. Kenji tells Ichiro to tell Emi he's been thinking about her—and he's been thinking about Ichiro too.

Kenji recognizes both Ichiro and Emi's loneliness, and hopes that in his absence his friends can take comfort in each other.

Kenji says he hopes that wherever he's going, there won't be Japanese, or Jewish, or Chinese, or black people—instead there will be "only people." He remembers shooting a German when he was serving in the army. He hopes that, in the afterlife, there won't be distinctions between Japanese and Germans because "I'll have to shoot him again." Kenji acknowledges there might not be anything after he dies, but he doesn't mind. Ichiro says goodbye, choking up as he leaves the room.

Kenji believes the afterlife can only be truly heavenly if there is no opportunity for prejudice, discrimination, or divisions between people. He feels that as long as there are labels and national alliances there will be differences between people that force them to treat each other badly. He has made peace with his future and so can look towards death without fear or regret.

Ichiro takes seven hours to drive back to Seattle, where he first visits Emi. She is working in the field, and seeing the Oldsmobile she assumes Kenji has returned. She is disappointed to see Ichiro. She invites him inside anyway, and they talk about Kenji. She says she loved him, but in a different way than she loves Ralph, and in a different way than she could see herself loving Ichiro.

Kenji has done his best to set up a relationship between his friends. Emi has no real family, and is unmoored and lonely. Ichiro has a family, but receives no comfort or emotional support from them.

Ichiro tells Emi about Mr. Carrick's job offer. Emi notes that Mr. Carrick "sounds like the kind of American that Americans always profess themselves to be." Ichiro begins to worry that just because there was one Mr. Carrick in Portland, there is no guarantee there are other people in the world like him.

Although many people believe they are true Americans because they were born in America, or have white skin, Emi feels that being American should be as much about integrity and personal values as it is about looking the part.

Emi tells Ichiro that her neighbor, Mr. Maeno, would give Ichiro work. He thanks her but turns down the offer. Mr. Maeno is Japanese, and Ichiro is still thinking about what Kenji told him—to marry a girl who's not Japanese and distance himself from his community. Emi thinks Kenji was joking, but Ichiro isn't sure. Emi asks if Kenji is really going to die, and when Ichiro says yes, Emi begins to sob. Ichiro prepares to leave. He tells her Ralph will come back, because Kenji will write to him. Ichiro wants to comfort Emi, but cannot. He gives her a kiss on the forehead and leaves.

Ichiro has decided to live his life according to Kenji's advice. Ichiro doesn't genuinely believe that distancing himself from the Japanese community is the best decision, but without any direction of his own it is as good a directive as any to follow.

CHAPTER 8

At Ichiro's house, Mr. Yamada returns from the liquor store with three bottles of alcohol. He begins drinking immediately.

Mr. Yamada is unable to deal with his problems—his unhappiness in America, his sick wife—in a constructive or productive way, choosing to drink heavily instead of working to address them.

Mr. Yamada goes to the kitchen and sees Mrs. Yamada's untouched plate of food. She has not eaten in two days. Instead of eating, she has been lying or sitting in silence, or else "doing crazy things" like stocking shelves and then knocking the cans off. She had also gone outside in the rain, standing there getting soaked and ignoring his pleas to return inside.

Just as Mr. Yamada has difficulty dealing with his emotions productively, after Mrs. Yamada was forced to come to terms with the fact that Japan lost WWII, she struggles to address her grief in a healthy way.

Mr. Yamada implores Mrs. Yamada to eat, and she considers for a second, before turning back to the bedroom and haphazardly packing a suitcase. Mr. Yamada begins to cry and drink in the next room. Eventually, the noise of packing stops. Mrs. Yamada has locked herself in the bathroom and turned on the bathtub faucet.

The couple continues their destructive behaviors. The Yamadas are extremely dysfunctional, and although they have been married for decades, they are unable to understand each other's pain or comfort each other. Instead, each of them is left to try to cope alone.

Mr. Yamada continues to drink. He thinks how Mrs. Yamada's sister calls her Kin-chan again now that times are hard, and how he used to call his wife Kin-chan during happier times. He remembers meeting Mrs. Yamada and her family for the first time, and how he and his wife had sex before their wedding, in an alley standing up at their engagement party. He wonders if this premarital sex was the fatal mistake—if this is why they suffer now.

Mr. Yamada is unable to imagine a better future or cope with his depression in the present, because he cannot pinpoint where the problems came from. Because he believes his suffering comes from past premarital sex, he has no way of moving forward. He cannot change the past, and therefore is left to numb himself to the present.

Mr. Yamada calls out to his sons, Taro and Ichiro, but they are not home and do not respond. He begins drinking again, heavily, accidentally choking and falling to the floor where he lies there, exhausted.

Mr. Yamada looks to his family for strength, but unlike in Kenji's family, there is no easily accessible support network in place.

Ichiro returns to Seattle. He believes he will never see Kenji or Emi ever again. He misses them and Mr. Carrick already, three people who had been kind to him and had not cared about his past.

The kindness of a few select people has reminded Ichiro that there is kindness in the world, and that his future might not be as dark as he had feared.

Ichiro drives to Kenji's house. He rings the doorbell and greats Mr. Kanno, who invites him inside. Mr. Kanno asks how Kenji was that morning, and Ichiro lies that he seemed to be in "excellent spirits," and would be out soon. Mr. Kanno stops Ichiro, tells him his son kept no secrets from him, and asks for the truth. Ichiro tells Mr. Kanno how Kenji looked sick and tired, and was sure he was going to die. Mr. Kanno wonders about Kenji's mind, and Ichiro says he was weak but talking lucidly. Mr. Kanno is glad. Then he reveals that Kenji died at three that afternoon. He is glad his son went quickly and did not suffer.

Ichiro is not close with his family, and so has no sense of how close Kenji and his father are. Although Ichiro is trying to be kind to Mr. Kanno, because he and Kenji were so open with each other, and Mr. Kanno knew Kenji was sick, the kindest thing Ichiro could do would be to tell the truth openly.

Mr. Kanno offers to drive Ichiro home. As they drive, he tells Ichiro that he will go down to Portland to make arrangements for a small funeral. Kenji didn't want to be buried in the Seattle Washelli cemetery, although Mr. Kanno thinks it nice that Japanese people are now allowed to bury their dead there, after many years as an all-white cemetery.

Even in death, Kenji remains committed to his principles and his interest in desegregation. Just as he hopes the afterlife is full of people of all races coexisting happily, and just as he has cautioned Ichiro not to marry a Japanese woman and live in a Japanese neighborhood, Kenji does not want his body buried among only people who are just like him.

Ichiro remarks that Kenji "deserved to live." Mr. Kanno adds that Kenji deserved to be happy. Sometimes, Mr. Kanno confides, he thinks he should have stayed in Japan, and then maybe Kenji would still be alive.

While Ichiro's parents regret coming to America because it has made them lose their children culturally, Mr. Kanno cares about his children's happiness and wellbeing more than about his own attachments to the past.

Mr. Kanno drops Ichiro off at his home. Ichiro is confused by the quietness and smell of whisky. The floor is covered with water, and he makes his way to the locked bathroom door. Frightened, he breaks it down, and discovers Mrs. Yamada's body draped over the edge of the overflowing bathtub. She has killed herself.

During and immediately after WWII, Mrs. Yamada lived in a fantasy. She wanted more than anything to return to Japan, but if the U.S. won the war, that would mean the Japan she loved was gone. Instead, she lived in a delusional reality. However, when the fantasy was punctured, and she no longer had any hope of returning to the home she loved, Mrs. Yamada felt she had nothing left to live for.

Ichiro turns off the water, and pulls Mrs. Yamada out of the tub. He feels nothing. He thinks that she has been (figuratively) dead for a long time. He thinks Mrs. Yamada made a mistake leaving Japan, and coming to America. He thinks she failed in raising her children, and although she was close with Ichiro, she did not create him entirely in her image, and he was not entirely Japanese. Ichiro wonders if it would have been better if his mother had succeeded in making sure he was not American at all. Ichiro feels sorry for Mrs. Yamada. He hopes that she is free now, and can return to the Japan of her youth and memories.

Ichiro understands that not only did Mrs. Yamada miss her native Japan, she felt she had failed to bring Japan with her. Perhaps if her children had acted fully Japanese, with no love for America, her life would have been easier. Ichiro suspects his life might have been easier too, as so much of his angst comes from being torn between the country he has grown up in and the country of his ancestors.

Ichiro moves Mrs. Yamada's body to the bedroom and looks up the coroner's name in the phonebook. When he turns on the light to read more clearly, he sees his Mr. Yamada's body on the floor. His father is not dead, only drunk, and Ichiro shakes him by the shoulders and tells him that his mother is dead. Mr. Yamada responds, "Mama sick. Papa sick… Everybody sick," and collapses to the floor again.

Although Mrs. Yamada and Mr. Yamada were both struggling, they were unable to help each other. They both found the present bleak and the future impossible to imagine, but did not communicate these emotions, and did not work to solve their problems together, instead trying to suppress their emotions separately.

CHAPTER 9

Mrs. Yamada's funeral is held seven days after her death. Ichiro sent Taro a telegram, but his brother does not come. Mr. Yamada, meanwhile, loves the attention he has gotten in the wake of his wife's passing.

Although there is no single appropriate way to deal with grief, Ichiro's fragmented family does not even seem to mourn their matriarch.

Ichiro sits in the front row of the Buddhist church where the funeral is held, and considers the casket in front of him. Mr. Yamada spent money on a fancier one, when a simple simpler model would have worked. His father has been sober since Mrs. Yamada's death, and has instead been "drunk with the renewal of countless friendships" and the attention from the community.

Mr. Yamada has showcased only unhealthy coping mechanisms throughout the novel. Although finally sober, his mood since his wife's death signifies that he has not fully processed it and allowed himself to feel the grief that will allow him to move forward.

At the service a priest speaks, followed by a series of old men. Ichiro feels as though he is "hearing about a stranger." He has trouble believing that Mrs. Yamada was ever, young, pretty, and sane. After the funeral, as the hearse takes the casket to the funeral parlor for cremation, Ichiro tells Mr. Yamada that he feels sick. Mr. Yamada insists Ichiro come along with him, but Ichiro instead spies Freddie across the parking lot, and joins his friend in the car.

Ichiro had felt the generational and cultural divide between himself and his mother, but it becomes even more explicit when comparing his own early life to hers. He had known in theory that her upbringing was Japanese while his was more American, but now, for the first time, he understands exactly what that meant for his mother.

Ichiro knows he should see Mrs. Yamada's funeral through, and understands that she sacrificed to give him the life he had, and probably meant well. Still, he believes she made him make the wrong decision in front of the draft board, although now he understands what should have been done, and what should be done in the future. She is dead, and Ichiro is free, and he will do his best to find work and live a normal life.

Ichiro has slowly come to terms with his relationship to his family, and worked towards forgiving them and himself for the decision he made in front of the draft board. He believes that he can only go on to live a normal life if he lets go of his guilt and resentment, and his mother's death has helped him move on.

Freddie takes Ichiro to a drive-in where they get hamburgers and coffee. They talk about their lives. Freddie thinks Ichiro is stuck in a rut, but Freddie believes he is "livin' it up," drinking, going out, and having sex with 2-A. Freddie is jumpy because he cut Eto after Eto harassed him at a bar, and now Eto's friends are after him. They have already tried to hit him with a car, and he anticipates they'll try to hurt him again.

Unlike Ichiro, Freddie is making no effort to make peace with his past in order to live a more pleasant future. Instead, he is making increasingly dangerous decisions, sabotaging any hope at a stable, happy life.

The conversation moves to their families. Ichiro is not hungry, perhaps because of grief, and Freddie tries to be sympathetic. Freddie remarks that he wouldn't be sad if his parents died, but "guys like you take it hard." Freddie, in contrast, believes his parents are "old country" and should never have left Japan. He blames them for messing him up, and so feels no pity for them.

Ichiro's relationship with his parents is complicated, and he resented his mother and didn't want to stay at the funeral, but he nonetheless understands what a key role she played in his life, and feels grief because of it.

Freddie also observes that his parents have nothing left to live for. Ichiro is surprised by this insight, but agrees. The Issei who have been unable to assimilate have nothing to do but save money and try to return to Japan. Ichiro tries to get Freddie to engage in a deeper conversation, but Freddie cannot, or will not. Ichiro is reminded that Freddie is "constantly concerned with living," because if he ever tries to slow down, he will "sink into the nothingness" below.

The Issei who cannot assimilate or who have no desire to put down roots in America are left with little to live for. Because the devastation of WWII means they cannot return to the Japan of their youth and memories, those who cannot or refuse to embrace America struggle to find a sense of belonging in their lives. This was certainly true of Mrs. Yamada. Although Freddie is not an Issei, he too feels that he has little to live for. He, like Ichiro at the start of the novel, believes he has no future.

After eating, Freddie and Ichiro drive around town. Freddie is driving dangerously fast, but will not slow down. They talk about working. Freddie recommends Ichiro try visiting Christian Reclamation Center, where other no-no boys have been able to get jobs. He has a friend, Gary, who works at the Reclamation Center now, after being forced to give up a job at a foundry.

Ichiro believes that he needs a job in order to start securing a stable future. Freddie, in contrast, is not working, and seems to have no desire to make a future for himself. However, both of them face the same challenge in finding work—many people discriminate against the Japanese, and those who don't still often discriminate against men who rejected the draft.

Freddie drops Ichiro off at the family store. Ichiro makes tea and plays with Taro's old deck of cards. He thinks back to his childhood, when he would listen to the radio or a phonograph, which Mrs. Yamada disliked. One day, while he was gone, she came into his room and smashed the phonograph to pieces, even cutting apart the wires. She denied him access to music, comic books, and other aspects of American culture. He thinks that she should have made some small concessions, and that doing so would have "kept her sons a part of the family."

Mrs. Yamada was so committed to preventing her children from becoming Americanized that she was willing to sacrifice their happiness and her own personal relationship to them. However, by so aggressively rejecting America, which became a part of her sons despite her best intentions, she could not help but reject her sons themselves.

Ichiro hears a knock at the door. Emi has come to visit and give her condolences for Mrs. Yamada's passing. Ichiro invites her inside and they talk. She tells him that Ralph has asked to get a divorce. She also tells him Mr. Maeno has offered him a job again, which he turns down. She tells him she's lonely, and asks Ichiro to come see her again, but he responds that he's not good for her. Emi turns to leave.

Emi is lonely because she has no family left. Her mother has died, her father has returned to Japan, and her husband, after years away, finally wants to divorce her. Kenji was her only close friend, and now she only has Ichiro. Ichiro rejects Mr. Maeno's job offer because of Kenji's advice—to do his best to interact with people who are not Japanese in order to better integrate the world.

Before Emi can leave, Ichiro changes his mind and decides to join Emi, and the two of them go dancing. They find a club with an orchestra and dance together. Ichiro is happy. He feels like it doesn't matter that he rejected the draft, and it doesn't matter that he's Japanese. He feels the way he used to—and realizes that maybe he can change his attitude and "love the world the way I used to." There is room for him in the world if he can see past his bitterness.

Over the course of the novel Ichiro is reminded that, although he believes he made a mistake in rejecting the draft, his life is not ruined and there is something left for him to live for. In this moment, Emi's company helps him see the potential in his future. Additionally, a rare moment in which he doesn't feel like an outsider makes him think that a future without racism really is possible.

After dancing for a while, Emi and Ichiro sit down. They don't speak, but smile at each other. A middle-aged man comes over, and although Ichiro is suspicious, he relaxes when the man buys them a drink. Emi and Ichiro discuss the man. Ichiro wonders if he had Japanese friends, or is Japanese but doesn't look it, or if he just liked the look of him and Emi.

Although this stranger does not have the same effect on Ichiro as someone like Mr. Carrick, he is an important reminder that there are good people in the word, and that although Ichiro is Japanese and rejected the draft, people can and will still accept him.

Ichiro arrives home late that night. Mr. Yamada is tying up packages to send to Japan. Mr. Yamada doesn't expect he will be lonely after Mrs. Yamada's death. He will keep the store and plans to make improvements to it. Mr. Yamada even seems happy, although his wife has just died. Ichiro thinks, "the packages were the symbol of his freedom," and his new future.

Even if Mr. Yamada does miss his wife, her insistence in living in a fantasy prevented him from living a real, happy life. Now, Mr. Yamada can acknowledge his starving and struggling Japanese family, and begin to put down roots in America, which his wife would never have allowed.

Ichiro sees that Mr. Yamada was not sick like Mrs. Yamada had been. Now that Mrs. Yamada has died, he is able to "exercise his reasonable ways." He tells Ichiro it is important to live in the real world. Although life is not always happy, it can still be good. Mr. Yamada tells Ichiro he can take his time readjusting to society. He can go back to school if he wants, but he doesn't have to. Ichiro knows Mr. Yamada is doing "what he should have long ago," but believes it is too late.

Unlike Mrs. Yamada, Mr. Yamada understands that what will make his son happy is not a rigid commitment to Japan and his Japanese identity. Although Mr. Yamada does not fully know or understand his son, he is happy to give him the space and time he needs to recover and secure a future for himself.

CHAPTER 10

The next morning, Ichiro takes the bus down to the Christian Rehabilitation Center. He walks from the gated entrance through piles of garbage and discarded furniture, where workers are picking through for salvageable objects. Ichiro wonders if the attendants, like the junk they work with, "would ever see good days again."

The Rehabilitation Center is a charitable organization that employs people who would otherwise have trouble finding work: primarily people with disabilities, or addictions. Although Ichiro is healthy and able-bodied, his status as a no-no boy makes him believe he is essentially unemployable.

Ichiro makes his way to the Administrative Offices, where Mr. Morrison, the manager, invites him in for an interview. Mr. Morrison speaks a little Japanese, and reveals that he spent fifteen months in Japan before the war.

Mr. Morrison, like Mr. Carrick before him, not only does not discriminate against Ichiro, but does his best to make him feel comfortable by displaying his familiarity with the Japanese language.

Ichiro explains that he found out about the job through Gary. He tells Mr. Morrison that he and Gary have the same "problem." Mr. Morrison asks Ichiro why he refused to comply with the draft. Ichiro doesn't fully understand himself, explaining that it was a mixture of things—"the evacuation, the camp, my parents…"—but that he regrets it now.

Mr. Morrison refers to Gary's rejection of the draft as a "problem," and although Ichiro increasingly believes that he can have a happy future despite this black mark, he refers to it is a "problem" in his past as well. Although he's spent the weeks since his release (and the years in prison) considering why he made the decision he did, the more he thinks about it the more Ichiro understands that there was no single factor that led to him rejecting the draft. Instead, it was a combination of who he is, his family, and the U.S. government and citizens' treatment of him.

Mr. Morrison explains that he likes his job, helping people who need it. But being confronted with helping Gary and Ichiro, who are able-bodied, young, and educated makes him feel "useless," because he cannot fix what is wrong. Still, Mr. Morrison is happy to offer Ichiro a job for $35 a week. Ichiro thinks back to Mr. Carrick's offer of $260 a month, and says he will consider it.

Like Mr. Carrick, Mr. Morrison is moved to help the Japanese men who come to him. Unlike Mr. Carrick, who believed he could genuinely give Ichiro a better, more financially stable future, Mr. Morrison is skeptical that he is helping Gary, Ichiro, and others like them at all, realizing that their problem is as much internalized shame as it is external prejudice.

Ichiro finds Gary on his way out. Gary is working on painting letters onto the side of a van, but takes a break and speaks with Ichiro. Gary's life has been relatively easy for him since he got out. He has always been a painter, but he feels that he "died in prison," and was reborn caring only about painting. What ruined Ichiro's life saved and rejuvenated his own. Now, he feels happy and fulfilled. He paints for pay during the day, and for himself at night.

Gary is the novel's first well-adjusted no-no boy. Freddie feels that his life has been ruined by his imprisonment, and continues to actively ruin it. Ichiro is doing his best to secure a future for himself, but is still consumed by shame and embarrassment. Gary, however, feels like his life has been actively improved by his rejection of the draft. He thus provides inspiration for Ichiro, and proof that his past decision doesn't mean he has no future prospects.

His break over, Gary gets up to paint again. He tells Ichiro that he thinks they would work together well. Ichiro has decided to pass on the job opportunity, but thanks his friend. Before he leaves, he asks Gary about what happened at the foundry.

Although Ichiro is unsure what other job prospects are available to him, he is becoming increasingly confident that he can find meaningful or interesting work despite his past.

Gary explains that the job was good, and paid well, and he even made a friend, a black man named Birdie. However, when the Japanese veterans and white workers in the shop found out he was a no-no boy, they began to ignore and exclude him. Gary didn't mind this, but Birdie would often defend him, although he asked his friend not to. Gary wasn't concerned for his own safety, and was worried that if he found a new job he would face similar harassment. However, the men at work eventually went after Birdie, loosening the wheel on his car, which led to a devastating car accident. Although Birdie was unhurt, Gary knew he had to leave.

Gary faced discrimination from other Japanese people because they saw him as undermining their status as Americans. Birdie, also an outsider because of the anti-black racism he likely faced in his daily life, felt solidarity with Gary, which is likely why he tried to defend him. This is one of the novel's few instances of intersectionality (empathy for people who have a similar, if not identical struggle that is connected to one's own by complex systems of power and oppression).

Gary explains that he thinks this is a difficult, emotional time for people of Japanese ancestry in America. However, he believes that eventually the Japanese people who have treated him so poorly will in turn be discriminated against by white Americans, and then, maybe, they'll forgot to discriminate against others who are also Japanese. Now, these Japanese veterans are doing their best to prove they are real Americans, and no-no boys like Gary and Ichiro seem to be undermining their claim.

Gary recognizes that as no-no boys, he and Ichiro complicate the claim many Japanese veterans have made that they, and other people with Japanese ancestry, can be fully committed to America. Because these veterans recognize mainstream dislike of no-no boys could easily be extrapolated to a dislike of all Japanese-Americans, these veterans seek to prove their American-ness by discriminating against the no-no boys as well. However, Ichiro predicts that soon all Japanese-Americans will experience the same kind of prejudice again, and will be brought together by this marginalization.

Ichiro says goodbye to Gary and leaves the Christian Rehabilitation Center. He takes a bus back into town. He thinks back to a church in Idaho that he visited with his friend Tommy, a Japanese man in the same internment camp. The two were rejected from one church by a white man who told them "One Jap is too many…don't come back." They found another, more accepting church a few weeks later.

This memory from Ichiro's past reminds the reader that the discrimination he has been facing in recent weeks is in no way a recent development. It also illustrates the hypocrisy of so many Americans. Even those who practice religions ostensibly based on love and acceptance can easily practice hatred and bigotry.

Ichiro liked this new church, until one Sunday he noticed an old black man standing in the back, who was ignored by the primarily white congregation, and then denied seating. After this, Ichiro refused to return to the church, although Tommy argued that because "they like us" and "treat us fine," he and Ichiro should put their heads down and be grateful for their inclusion.

Unlike Tommy, who was happy to turn a blind eye to prejudice that did not directly affect him, Ichiro recognized that the treatment of this black man was similar to his and Tommy's own rejection at the first church. Understanding how much this prejudice hurts, Ichiro was unwilling to sit by and condone it with silence.

Ichiro thinks that the world is like a "shiny apple with streaks of rotten brown in it." He sees that he is still young, and wiser than he used to be. He can see that "After rain, the sunshine" might appear. Although it will not be easy for him to start his new life, it can be done.

Increasingly, Ichiro is recognizing that there is potential in his future for personal and professional happiness. Although the world and America are not as perfect as he had once believed, neither are they as evil as he had recently suspected.

CHAPTER 11

Ichiro is lying in bed when he gets a phone call from Freddie. Freddie says he wants to go out and do something fun. Ichiro is hesitant, but Freddie convinces him to "get out and live" a little. Mr. Yamada insists that Ichiro take a little spending money. They discuss the future briefly, and Ichiro proposes returning to school and helping his father out at the store.

At the novel's opening, Ichiro was uninterested in returning to school and uninterested in staying in Seattle, partially because he believed that his rejection of the draft precluded him from resuming his life. Now, however, Ichiro has realized that his relationship with his father and his future are both salvageable after all.

Mr. Yamada tells Ichiro that Mrs. Yamada would have liked Ichiro returning to school and working with his father, and Ichiro feels a twinge of resentment. But he catches himself—now that she is dead, he doesn't have to "fight her or hate her any more."

Ichiro has begun to work through his fraught relationship with his mother. He understands just because she would have wanted something doesn't mean that it is antithetical to his own happiness.

Ichiro meets Freddie in a shoeshine parlor. Freddie tries to get the man shining his shoes, Rabbit, to set him up with a prostitute, but Rabbit says none are available tonight. Freddie then takes Ichiro to a pool hall, where the two men are denied a table at the front of the establishment, and are forced to play in back. Freddie seems to concede, but after they've begun playing he breaks the pool cue, and then begins throwing pool balls at the proprietor as he chases the two men out onto the street.

Freddie is living recklessly. Unlike Gary, who was introduced in the previous chapter and has found his life set on a happy track since his release from prison, Freddie has gone off the rails. As Ichiro observed in Chapter 9, Freddie must live a dangerous, fast-paced life to keep himself from thinking about his despair and the hopelessness of his situation.

Ichiro pities Freddie, who he sees has been unable to reintegrate into society. Ichiro, meanwhile, feels like he might be able to have a happy future, thanks to the help of Emi, Mr. Carrick, Kenji, and even his parents, Mr. Yamada and Mrs. Yamada. Ichiro asks his friend if anything is wrong, but Freddie claims he is "just livin'."

Ichiro could have ended up like Freddie, but luckily met a series of people who inspired him, supported him, and showed him that he had not ruined his life and there was still a future left to live for. Freddie, meanwhile, is lonely and estranged from his family, with few friends to support, encourage, or stabilize him.

Ichiro is not having fun with Freddie, but he doesn't want to leave him alone. He suggests going back home to have a drink, but Freddie shoots down the idea. Freddie wants to go to the Club Oriental, even though that is where he got in a fight with Eto just a few days before. Freddie argues that he should be allowed to go wherever he wants, and drives Ichiro to the bar.

Freddie continues to live life on the edge. Although he knows Club Oriental is unsafe for him, he perhaps hopes to get into a fight, as that would provide variety and stimulation in his otherwise empty life, and indulge his self-destructive tendencies even further.

Freddie parks illegally, disregarding Ichiro's warning that he'll get a ticket. They go inside and get drinks. Ichiro toasts to Kenji, but before they can clink glasses Bull appears from a corner of the bar and attacks Freddie. The bar's owner, Jim Eng, insists they go outside to fight, and Bull drags Freddie out into the street.

Although Bull is also Japanese, he hates Freddie because, as a no-no boy, Freddie seems to undermine Bull's claim to an American identity. Freddie knew the risks of going to Club Oriental, and likely went because he suspected his presence would lead to some excitement. Alternately, perhaps Freddie knows he is in danger, but is so unhappy with his life that he doesn't mind putting it at risk.

Although Ichiro does not want to fight, he feels obligated to defend his friend. He follows Bull and Freddie into the alley, where he grabs onto Bull's arm and tells him that he and Freddie will leave he if he will just let them go. Bull tells Ichiro he didn't fight the war for people like him and Freddie.

Although the fight is not his, Ichiro remains loyal to his friend. Bull's comment clarifies that some of his resentment towards Ichiro and Freddie comes from a sense that he fought for a certain idea of America—one that didn't include men like Ichiro and Freddie.

Freddie attacks Bull. Ichiro tries to intervene and get Bull to stop fighting, but he won't, so Ichiro punches Bull in the face, breaking his nose. A crowd has come outside and pulled the men apart. Ichiro is happy it is over, but Freddie remains combative, kicking Bull in the stomach before running to his car. Bull chases after him, and Freddie hits him in the head with a wrench before driving off.

Freddie is burning bridges left and right. He fights as though he has nothing to live for, no real future to protect. Bull, meanwhile, feels personally offended by Freddie's rejection of the draft, and wants to demonstrate this offense through violence.

A moment later, there is the sound of a crash—Freddie clipped the front of another car, which sent his into the air, flipping over and colliding against a wall, killing him instantly.

Freddie's death is almost inevitable—he has been living his life as though he has no future, and now he cannot have one.

Ichiro stands for a moment. He feels "utterly exhausted," but knows that Freddie "would have to fight no longer." Bull asks for a drink, and Ichiro gets a bottle from inside. Ichiro tells Bull that Freddie has died. Bull says he hopes Freddie goes to hell. But then his hardened exterior begins to break down, and Bull starts to cry, overcome by loneliness. Ichiro comforts him before walking towards the car crash.

Ichiro sees that Freddie believed he had no future, and by ending his life will no longer experience the shame or anxiety that came from his status as a no-no boy. However, although Ichiro carries with him the same shame, he has the support system in place and the desire to live that will allow him to work towards building a future for himself.

Ichiro thinks about Kenji, Freddie, Mr. Carrick, Emi, and Birdie. In the crowd drawn out of the nightclub by the car crash Ichiro sees "a tiny bit of America," and feels "a glimmer of hope."

Ichiro began the novel feeling alone and helpless, but he has realized that there are people out there who care about him, and many strangers who will be willing to help him move forward. America is fragmented, but he also sees that people can be brought together, and the hope for a diverse, racially-inclusive future is not gone.

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