

felt these things which he could not say, Ichiro felt them too and understood. So, when Taro stalked into the bedroom and banged the drawers and packed a small bag, he felt the heaviness lifting from his own shoulders. He did not even turn to look when Taro swept past him on the way out, for he saw in the fearful eyes of the father the departure of the son who was not a son but a stranger and, perhaps more rightly, an enemy leaving to join his friends. Then the bell tinkled to signal the opening of the door and it tinkled again as the door closed and shut them off from the world that Taro had entered.

The mother uttered a single, muffled cry which was the forgotten spark in a dark and vicious canyon and, the spark having escaped, there was only darkness, but a darkness which was now darker still, and the meaning of her life became a little bit meaningless.

Ichiro looked at his father, who did not look as would a father who had just lost a son, but as a man afraid. His face paled perceptibly as the mother came into the kitchen.

"Mama," said the father, and he might have been a boy the way he said it.

"We don't have enough nickels," she said, trying to sound the way she would have sounded if Taro had never been born, but it was not the same and Ichiro felt it.

"Ya, I get," the father almost shouted as he jumped up. "The bank will still be open." He threw on his overcoat and hastily departed.

Ichiro started to pick the cards off the floor and felt his mother's eyes on him. He took his time purposely, not wanting to look at her, for the strength that was the strength of Japan had failed and he had caught the realization of it in the cry and in the words which she had spoken. As if suddenly sensing what was in his mind, she quickly turned and left him alone.

THERE ARE STORES on King Street, which is one block to the south of Jackson Street. Over the stores are hotels housed in ugly structures of brick more black than red with age and neglect. The stores are cafés and open-faced groceries and taverns and dry-goods shops, and then there are the stores with plate-glass windows painted green or covered with sun-faded drapes. Some bear names of exporting firms, others of laundries with a few bundles on dusty shelves. A few come closer to the truth by calling themselves society or club headquarters. The names of these latter are simple and unimaginative, for gambling against the house, whether it be with cards or dice or beans or dominoes, requires only a stout heart and a hunger for the impossible. And there are many of these, for this is Chinatown and, when the town is wide open, one simply walks into Wing's Hand Laundry, or Trans-Asia Exporting, Inc., or Canton Recreation Society with the stout heart and the hunger and there is not even a guard at the massive inner door with the small square of one-way glass.

Inside the second door are the tables and the stacks of silver dollars and the Chinese and Japanese and Filipinos and a few stray whites, and no one is smiling or laughing, for one does not do those things when the twenty has dwindled to a five or the twenty is up to a hundred and the hunger has been whetted into a mild frenzy by greed. The dealer behind the blackjack table is a sickly, handsome Chinese, a pokerfaced dignitary

of the house, whose soft, nimble fingers automatically remove bunches of five and ten and fifteen from the silver stacks. He is master for the moment over the kingdom of green felt, but he neither jokes with the winners nor sympathizes with the losers, for when the day is over and the money for the day's labors is in his pocket he will set aside a dollar for his hotel room and give the rest back to the house because his is the hunger no longer accompanied by a stout heart, a sickness which drives him relentlessly toward the big kill which, when attained, drives him to the next bigger one and so on and on and on until he is again behind the table working toward his day's wages from which he will set aside a dollar for the hotel room and give the rest back to the house.

The dealer flipped up Kenji's cards and matched five dollars against the five that was bet, for the house had eighteen and the young Japanese with the cane held two face cards.

Ichiro watched Kenji ride the ten and hit twenty, then forty before he pulled it in and sat out several hands. Over at the dice table were half a dozen young Japanese who could not have been any older than Taro. A few were betting dimes and quarters, feeling their luck with the miserliness of the beginner who does not yet fully understand the game or the strained impulses within his young body. And there was one who held a fistful of bills and played with an intensity that was fearful to watch.

"Here," said Kenji to Ichiro, "play." He shoved a stack of ten silver dollars over to his friend.

"No," he said, wanting to play very much.

Kenji did not urge him. He played five as usual and again ran it up to forty. "For a change, I'm going to quit while I'm ahead." He traded the silver for four twenties, a ten, and a five.

They walked from game to game, watching the players for a little while.

"I feel like drinking it up," said Kenji, looking at Ichiro.

"Fine," said Ichiro, wanting to say that he did not want to go anyplace where too many would know him and of him, for he was afraid.

They walked down the ugly street with the ugly buildings among the ugly people which was a part of America and, at the same time, would never be wholly America. The night was cool and dark.

Halfway down an alley, among the forlorn stairways and innumerable trash cans, was the entrance to the Club Oriental. It was a bottle club, supposedly for members only, but its membership consisted of an ever growing clientele. Under the guise of a private, licensed club, it opened its door to almost everyone and rang up hefty profits nightly.

Up the corridor flanked on both sides by walls of glass brick, they approached the polished mahogany door. Kenji poked the buzzer and, momentarily, the electric catch buzzed in return. They stepped from the filthy alley and the cool night into the Club Oriental with its soft, dim lights, its long, curving bar, its deep carpets, its intimate tables, and its small dance floor.

There were a few people at the bar, a few more at the tables, and one couple on the dance floor, sliding around effortlessly to the Ralph Flanagan tune which was one of a hundred records offered by the massive, colorful juke box.

It wasn't until they had seated themselves at the bar and finished half their first bourbons on ice that their eyes became sufficiently accustomed to the darkness to enable them to distinguish the faces scattered around the club.

"I like it here," said Kenji contentedly.

"Yeah, I see what you mean."

Kenji sipped his drink appreciatively, knowing that the night was long and that there would be other days in spite of the hurting of his leg. "If I didn't have to sleep or eat, I'd stay right here. I'd work up to a nice, lazy feeling and keep it there by hoisting my arm every once in a while. That would be nice."

"Yeah, it would."

"For me, yes, but not for you."

"Oh?"

"I've been thinking about the things we said this afternoon."

"Have you?"

"Yes, and so have you." He looked at Ichiro with his face already flushed from the liquor.

"Sure," said Ichiro. "Seems like that's all I've been doing since the day I was born."

"Don't blame yourself."

"Then who's to blame?"

"Doesn't matter. Blame the world, the Japs, the Germans. But not yourself. You're killing yourself."

"Maybe I ought to."

"Now, you're talking like me." Kenji smiled and beckoned the bartender for refills.

"There used to be times, before the war," said Ichiro, "when I thought I had troubles. I remember the first time I laid a girl. She was a redhead in my history class. Knew her way around. I guess, actually, she laid me. I was scared, but I was more scared after it was done. Worried about it for weeks. I thought I really had troubles then."

"Sounds more like a good deal."

"Could have been. I think about that now and I feel good about it. If I had to do it over—" Leaving the rest unsaid, he played with the glass in his hands.

"I feel for you," said Kenji.

"I suppose that means you've decided not to change places with me."

"If it were possible to, no."

"If it were, 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."

"I wish I could do something."

"You can't."

"But I wish I could."

"Nobody can."

"I want to anyway."

"Don't try."

"If you say so."

"I do."

So they sat silently through the next drink, one already dead but still alive and contemplating 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.

The crowd was beginning to thicken now. The door seemed continually to be buzzing and, from their stools at the bar, they watched the laughing faces of the newcomers, who quickly settled down at the tables with a thirst for the drinks which would give them the relaxation and peace they sought.

A swarthy Japanese, dressed in a pale-blue suit that

failed to conceal his short legs and awkward body, came in with a good-looking white girl. He spoke loudly and roughly, creating the commotion he intended so that, for a moment, all eyes were upon the couple. Seeing Kenji, he boomed out jovially: "For crissake, if it ain't Peg-leg. It's sure been a helluva long time since I seen you." He left the girl standing at the door and advanced upon Kenji with arms outstretched.

"Cut it out, Bull," said Kenji quietly. "I saw you last night."

Bull wedged himself between the stools with his back to Ichiro. "How'm I doin'?" he whispered slyly.

"She's all right," said Kenji examining the girl.

"C'mon, sit with us. I'll fix you up." Bull gave Kenji a hearty slap.

"I'm with a friend," said Kenji.

Bull turned around and looked at Ichiro with a meanness which was made darker by the heavy cheekbones and the rough stubble which defied a razor. He wiggled out into the open with exaggerated motions and began to brush himself furiously, "Goddammit," he said aloud, "brand-new suit. Damn near got it all cruddy."

There was a ripple of laughter and Ichiro turned and looked at the crowd without wanting to. Someone said something about "No-no boys don't look so good without the striped uniform" and that got a loud, boisterous laugh from the corner where a group of young Japanese who were too young to drink sat drinking. He scanned their faces quickly and saw, among them, the unsmiling, sick-looking face of Taro.

"Go on, Bull, your girl friend's waiting," said Kenji quietly.

"What's with you, nuts or somp'n?" said Bull wickedly.

"Go on."

Bull regarded the lean, solemn face stubbornly but only for a moment. "Sure, sure," he said lightly, "a friend of yours . . ." He paused and cast the meanness at Ichiro once more and added: ". . . is a friend of yours." Grinning at the crowd as though he were a performer who had just done his bit, he returned to his girl, who had been primping ostentatiously all the while.

Ichiro leaned over the bar, the fury inside of him seething uncontrollably, and shame, conceived of a great goodness momentarily corrupted by bitterness and the things he did not understand, deprived him of the strength to release the turbulence.

"Want to go?"

"No," he muttered savagely before he could stop himself.

"Bull didn't mean it. He might be a brute, but he's all right."

"He meant it. They all mean it. I can see it in their faces."

"You see too much."

"I feel it."

"Then you feel too much."

As if hoping to find escape in the whisky, he downed it quickly and motioned to the bartender to fill it. When the smiling Chinese behind the bar tipped the bottle over the glass, he held it down until the liquor spilled over the lip.

"Leave it, Al," said Kenji to the Chinese.

Al nodded his head and left the bottle in front of Ichiro.

They drank in silence, Kenji taking his leisurely and Ichiro gulping his purposefully.

"Take it slow," warned Kenji in a voice which was softer than usual because the whisky made him that way.

"Doesn't help," grumbled Ichiro thickly, "not a goddamned bit it doesn't help." He swung around on his stool and surveyed the crowd, which had long since forgotten about him. He noticed hazily that Taro and his friends were gone. "Son-of-bitches. That's what they are, all of them. Dirty, no-good son-of-bitches."

"I agree," said Kenji peacefully.

"You too."

Kenji nodded his head, "Sure, I'm a member too. World's full of us."

"I mean it. Everybody except me. Me, I'm not even a son of a bitch. I'm nobody, nothing. Just plain nothing."

"Let's get some air."

"No, no. After a while. Right now, I'm going to get stinko."

"You're drunk now."

"Hell, I'm just starting. I want to get so drunk I'll feel like a son of a bitch too." He lifted the glass to his mouth and emptied it, almost toppling off the stool.

Kenji grabbed his arm and straightened him out.

"Thanks. Thanks, Ken. You're okay and you've done plenty for me. Now, it's my turn. I'm going to do something for you."

"What's that?"

"You go over there and sit with your friend, the monkey in the blue suit, and I'll go out the door and I'll forget I ever saw you. Fair enough, huh? Best thing I can do for you. Forget you, that's what."

"That's no good."

"It is. It is. You go get fixed up with that blond. Take her away from that monkey and I'll walk out the door and keep right on going all the way down Jackson Street and into the drink. I got no right to let you be my friend. I don't want you for a friend, friend. Please, huh?"

"We're going for a ride, remember?"

"Nope, you go, with blondie. That's for you. I don't want to go anyplace with you no more."

They stared at each other, Kenji smiling patiently at his friend, who spoke with drunken earnestness.

Someone said "Hey" softly and they both turned. It was Taro.

"Hay is for horses," he blurted out stiffly at his brother. "Don't you even know your own brother's own name? I'm I-chi-ro, remember?"

"I wanta talk to you."

"Talk then."

"C'mon outside."

"I like it here."

Taro fidgeted uncertainly and looked hostilely at Kenji.

"I have to hit the John anyway," said Kenji obligingly.

"No, stay. Piss on the floor. This ought to be good. He's finally got something to say to me and I want you to hear it. Well? What is it?" he demanded impatiently.

"If you'll come outside, I'll tell you."

Ichiro threw up his arms in disgust. "Come back when you feel like talking in here." He turned around to get his drink and did not see the two young Japanese step inside the doorway and look questioningly at Taro. Taro waved them away with a furtive motion of his hand, which Kenji noticed. The two youths hurried back out.

"You gonna come out?" asked Taro.

"Your brother is busy. Come back later," said Kenji.

"For crissake. Okay, okay, so I'll go." Ichiro tumbled off the stool.

"I'm coming too." Kenji reached for his cane.

Ichiro held back his friend's arm. "Nope. This is a family powwow. You keep my glass warm and I'll be right back. Right back."

"Watch yourself," cautioned Kenji.

"I'm not that drunk," laughed Ichiro. He lumbered after Taro, the weight of his body urging his legs unsteadily forward in quick, clumsy spurts.

Taro walked rapidly, turning down the alley away from King Street. Some thirty yards from the club entrance he angled off through a vacant lot which was gloomily illuminated by a distant street light.

Resolutely, Ichiro followed, his breath coming hard and the hot smell of the whisky swirling through his nostrils nauseatingly. He started across the lot and spied Taro far ahead. "Where in the hell you going? I'm tired." He stopped and fought for breath.

His brother had stopped too and faced him silently from the shadow of an old garage. Ichiro had to squint his eyes to barely see him.

There were sounds of feet shuffling in the gravelly earth. The sounds advanced from all sides. The darkness of the night and his own drunkenness made it difficult for him to realize immediately what was happening. Two youths stepped between him and Taro.

"That's a Jap, fellas," sneered one of them bravely.

A voice concurred from behind: "Yeah, this one's got a big, fat ass, fatter than its head."

"It's got legs," came a voice from the side, "and arms too. Just like us."

"Does it talk?"

"Talks Jap, I bet."

"Say something," egged the first youth. "Say no-no in Jap. You oughta be good at that."

"Yeah, I wanta hear."

"Me too. Say no-no."

Ichiro wove unsteadily, the humiliation and anger intensified by the dulling effect of the liquor into a heavy, brooding madness. He strove to keep his brother in sight, catching an occasional glimpse of the now fear-

stricken face.

"It doesn't look very happy," said a voice, shaky but inspired by the knowledge of being on the stronger side.

"That's 'cause it's homesick."

"It's got a home?"

"Sure, on the other side of the pond."

"Comes from Japan, doesn't it?"

"Made in Japan. Says so right here."

A brutal kick on his behind sent Ichiro stumbling forward. His anger frothing over, he picked up momentum and lunged at the dim shape that was his brother. He swung his arms wildly at the two youths who stood between them. One of them threw himself athwart his legs and Ichiro sprawled heavily to the ground. He shook his head wearily and struggled to his knees.

"Pretty game," said one of the tormentors calmly.

"Wants to fight," said another.

"Just like a dog."

"Dogs don't wear pants."

"Right. We can't let it run around with pants on."

"No. People will think it's human."

Before he could struggle to his feet, his arms were pulled painfully behind him. Furiously, he attempted to kick himself loose. Immediately arms were clawing at his trouser legs and it was only a matter of moments before he was stretched out helplessly.

There was a sharp snap and a slender youth bent over him with a wide grin and started to slip the knife blade under the leather belt.

"That's enough. Let him go." Kenji limped across the lot and advanced upon the group. He poked his cane at one of the youths who hovered over Ichiro. Slowly, they backed away from their prey. Only the youth who held the knife did not move.

"You heard," said Kenji to him.

"Keep out of this. It's none of your business."

"It's certainly none of yours." The cane swished and smacked loudly against the wrist of the knife wielder.

Dropping the knife with a yelp of pain, the youth backed off, swearing menacingly at Kenji.

"Let's get out of here," said one of them urgently.

"Yeah, I heard about this guy. Kill-crazy, that's what. Even his buddies were afraid of him."

"Just like a madman. Couldn't kill enough krauts."

"I'm gonna beat it."

"Aw, he's just another Jap." The slender youth stooped over to retrieve his knife, mumbling "Jap-lover."

Kenji raised his cane and aimed a stiff blow at the youth's back.

"Ahh!" The youth fell across Ichiro, then picked himself up hastily and dashed into the shadows. The others followed in a mad rush.

"Your brother has nice friends," said Kenji, helping Ichiro to get up.

"No-good rotten bastard." Ichiro brushed himself with heavy, limp arms.

"Want to drink some more?"

They walked silently to the car and, a short while later, were driving swiftly along the highway leading southward out of the city. With both windows rolled down, the dulling effects of the whisky soon wore off.

Ichiro rested his head on the door, exposing his face to the stream of cold air. Hazily, he thought disgustedly of the recent happenings, of Bull and of Taro and his gang of weak hoodlums. He could understand Bull's subjecting him to the indignity in the Club Oriental. Bull's mind was about as thick and unpliable as a brick and the meanness which had prompted him to make a spectacle of him was less to blame than the dull, beastly desire to feel the approval of the crowd, which had laughed with him for a moment instead of at him. The

blond was a compensation for his lack of acceptance also. Somehow, he had managed to date her but, before the night was done, Bull would be looking stubbornly for her while someone else took her to bed. He could forgive Bull, but not Taro, who had baited him into the lot and was too cowardly to join in the game which he had made possible and too cowardly to come to his defense when the horror of what he had done dawned too late.

Taro, my brother who is not my brother, you are no better than I. You are only more fortunate that the war years found you too young to carry a gun. You are fortunate like the thousands of others who, for various reasons of age and poor health and money and influence, did not happen to be called to serve in the army, for their answers might have been the same as mine. And you are fortunate because the weakness which was mine made the same weakness in you the strength to turn your back on Ma and Pa and makes it so frighteningly urgent for you to get into uniform to prove that you are not a part of me. I was born not soon enough or not late enough and for that I have been punished. It is not just, but it is true. I am not one of those who wait for the ship from Japan with baggage ready, yet the hundreds who do are freer and happier and fuller than I. I am not to blame but you blame me and for that I hate you and I will hate you more when you go into the army and come out and walk the streets of America as if you owned them always and forever.

I have made a mistake and I know it with all the anguish in my soul. I have suffered for it and will suffer still more. Is it not just then that, for my suffering and repentance, I be given another chance? One steals and goes to prison and comes out a free man with his debt paid. Such a one can start over. He can tell himself that the mistake which he has made has been made right

with the world. He can, without much difficulty, even convince himself that his wrong has been righted and that, with lesson learned, he can find acceptance among those of his kind. I, too, have made a mistake and I, too, have served time, two years all told, and I have been granted a full pardon. Why is it then that I am unable to convince myself that I am no different from any other American? Why is it that, in my freedom, I feel more imprisoned in the wrongness of myself and the thing I did than when I was in prison? Am I really never to know again what it is to be American? If there should be an answer, what is it? What penalty is it that I must pay to justify my living as I so fervently desire to?

There is, I am afraid, no answer. There is no retribution for one who is guilty of treason, and that is what I am guilty of. The fortunate get shot. I must live my punishment.

Overcome by the sense of futility which came back to him again and again, he moaned helplessly.

Kenji pointed the Oldsmobile down the broad stretch of concrete at an unwavering fifty-five. "Head starting to hurt?"

"Yeah."

"We can stop for a drink."

"No. That wouldn't help."

They sped past a drive-in movie, catching a glimpse of the silent drama on the part of the screen which was unobscured by the fence.

"Speed make you nervous?"

"No."

The Oldsmobile lunged up to seventy, then struggled more slowly to seventy-five and, soon, they were hurtling along at eighty. They rolled up the windows to stop the wicked rush of air.

"Where we headed?" asked Ichiro.

Kenji drove calmly, not tensing up the way some

fellows do when they drive beyond their usual speeds, but he kept his eyes on the road. "I want you to meet a friend," he answered.

"Do we have to? Tonight, I mean."

"What's a better time?"

"I'm not exactly sober," said Ichiro, and he fought off a shudder. He wished he had a drink.

"She won't mind."

"She?"

"She."

He could have asked who she was, what she did, why he had to meet her tonight, and so on, but he'd find out soon enough. He leaned his head back against the seat and closed his eyes. He was sound asleep by the time they drove up to the small farmhouse situated in the middle of forty acres, partly wooded but mostly cleared.

Letting the motor idle, Kenji turned the car heater on low and walked the narrow curve of concrete leading to the front door. He brushed his hand alongside the door and found the button. The faint, muffled notes of the chime were barely audible. The pale, brownish glow visible through the window of the living room flicked twice into a warm brightness and, immediately after, the porch light snapped on.

Emi was several inches taller than Kenji. She was slender, with heavy breasts, had rich, black hair which fell on her shoulders and covered her neck, and her long legs were strong and shapely like a white woman's. She smiled and looked beyond him into the darkness.

"You left the car running." She questioned him with her round, dark eyes.

"A friend," he said, "sleeping it off."

"Oh." Leaving the porch light on, she followed Kenji into the living room. An old Zenith console, its round face with the zigzag needle glowing, hummed monotonously. She turned it off, saying: "Station just went

off."

Slouching comfortably in an overstuffed chair beneath the lamp, Kenji grabbed a picture frame from the end-table and examined the several snapshots preserved under glass. There was one of a muscular-looking young Japanese sitting on a tractor. He looked from it to the fireplace mantel, where a large color portrait of the same fellow in uniform stood among an assortment of animals of glass and china. The other snapshots were of an elderly couple, pictures taken by a happy daughter on sunny days, with the mother and father posing stiffly as they would in a photographer's studio.

He set the frame back on the table asking: "Heard from anyone?"

"Dad wrote," she said.

"How is he?"

"Sick. Sick of Japan and Japanese and rotten food and sicker still of having to stay there."

"What can he do?"

"Nothing."

"No hope of getting back here?"

"No." She kicked her shoes off and rested her chin on her knees, not bothering to pull the skirt down over her legs.

Kenji stared at the legs and beyond, seeing but unresponsive. "Nothing from Ralph?"

Emi glanced briefly at the picture on the mantel. "No," she said, "Ralph is not the writing kind." It was said bravely, but her lips quivered.

He looked at her with a touch of sadness in his tired face. She met his gaze with the sadness all in her eyes, the deep, misty-looking eyes in the finely molded, lovely face.

"Still love him?"

"What's that?"

"You know what."

Dropping her feet to the rug, she squirmed uneasily for a moment. "Do I?" she said almost shrilly.

"That's what I'm asking."

"I think so. No, perhaps I should say I thought I did. Then again, there are times when I'm quite sure I do. Does it make sense to you, Ken?"

"Sounds mixed up."

"Yes."

From the end-table, Kenji helped himself to a cigarette. "If I were you and my husband signed up for another hitch in Germany without even coming home or asking me to go over and be with him, I'd stop loving him. I'd divorce him."

"That makes the twenty-ninth time you've said that and it's still none of your business."

"I didn't say it was."

She stood up abruptly, snatched the cigarette out of his hand, and turned her back on him, saying sharply: "Then stop saying it."

He reached out and squeezed her elbow tenderly.

Slowly, reluctantly she looked at him. "I'm sorry," she said.

She smiled, gazing fondly at him for a moment. "Coffee?" she asked sweetly.

"Sure. Make enough for the friend."

As soon as Emi had gone to the kitchen, Kenji decided to awaken Ichiro. Just as he was about to rise, Ichiro came into the house.

"Snap the light off," shouted Kenji.

Ichiro looked stupidly at him.

"The porch light. Switch is on the wall."

Looking around uncertainly, Ichiro located the switch and did as he was told. He examined the house, the pictures, the radio, the books, the lamps, the curtains, and the old upright near the fireplace but not flat

against the wall. It was, rather, almost perpendicular to the wall so that the heavy, unpainted casing was in plain view. He caught Kenji's eye and tossed the car keys to him. Touching the piano keys hesitantly, he punched out several notes, then tried a series of chords with both hands.

"Sounds good. Play something," said Kenji.

Sliding onto the bench, Ichiro executed several runs before starting into a simple but smooth rendition of "Sentimental Journey." It sounded good, almost professional in spite of the monotony of the chording, and Kenji listened appreciatively.

Hearing the playing, Emi came out of the kitchen. As she turned toward the piano, the look of inquiry on her face suddenly changed to wide-eyed surprise. It wasn't horror exactly, but there might have been a trace of it. She let out a sharp utterance.

Ichiro stopped and twisted about until he was facing her.

"Forgive me. You looked—you reminded me of someone, sitting there like that." She turned toward Kenji.

"Hadn't thought about it," he said, "but, I guess you're right. Ichiro is big and husky like Ralph. Emi, that's Ichiro. Ichiro, Emi."

Getting up from the bench self-consciously, Ichiro nodded to her.

"How are you at 'Chopsticks'?" she asked, recovered from her initial shock.

"So-so," he replied.

Emi pulled him back onto the bench and sat beside him. They fumbled the beginning several times, laughing at their own ineptitude and quickly losing the sense of strangeness in their mutual endeavor. Finally, getting off to an even start, they played loudly and not always together to the finish.

"You play much better than I do," she commented gaily.

"I try," he said modestly.

They walked together to the sofa and sat down facing Kenji.

"Never knew you could play at all," said Kenji.

"I learned from an old German named Burk," replied Ichiro. "He was a good guy, a real musician. Played one time with some symphony outfit—San Francisco, I think it was. He was fifty years old and looked sixty-five with flabby creases on his face and his shoulders stooped over. His hands were big, with thick, stubby fingers more like a bricklayer's than a pianist's. He made music with those ugly hands and he also used them to choke his wife to death. He taught me while I was in prison."

"Prison," echoed Emi. "You were in prison?"

"Yeah, I guess Ken doesn't talk enough. I was in for not wanting to go in the army."

"I'm sorry, frightfully sorry," she said sincerely.

"So am I."

She studied him quizzically, then rose to get the coffee.

"Where are we?" he asked Kenji.

"You've sobered up," he replied.

"Thanks for keeping me warm."

"Didn't want you to catch cold."

"Drunks don't catch cold."

"You're out of practice. You weren't really drunk."

"I was."

"Okay. You were."

"Where are we?" he repeated.

"Out in the country. Away from it all. You'll see what it's like in the morning."

Ichiro jerked his head up and waited for an explanation.

"We can sleep here. Emi doesn't mind." Kenji reached out and pulled the coffee table in front of them as Emi returned from the kitchen.

The coffee was black and hot. Emi sat beside Ichiro, looking at him with wondering eyes. It was as if she yearned to reach out and touch him. Ichiro felt uncomfortable, yet drawn to her, for she was young and lovely and attractive.

Kenji sat smiling, so much so that Ichiro commented upon it.

"Just feeling good and satisfied," said Kenji, leaning back and lifting the stiff limb with both hands onto the coffee table.

They sipped their coffee, saying little and occasionally looking at one another. Kenji kept grinning, apparently with meaning to Emi, for she began to fidget nervously. Suddenly, she stood up and said not unpleasantly that she was going to bed.

"I'll sack down on the sofa out here," said Kenji, watching Emi intently.

Her face flushed. She started to say something, then merely nodded her head and, without looking at Ichiro, left them.

"What goes on?" inquired Ichiro.

"I didn't notice anything. Why do you ask?"

"I must be getting sleepy. Forget it." He stood up and studied the sofa. "We might as well fix up the bed. How does this thing work?"

"It doesn't."

"Aren't we sleeping here?"

"I am."

"And me?"

"In the bedroom, of course."

"Which one?"

Kenji said steadily, "There's only one—that is, only one with a bed in it."

Appalled by the realization of the fantastic situation, Ichiro sank down upon the sofa. "Where," he said pointedly, "does she sleep?"

"In the bedroom."

"What the hell is this?" he boomed out indignantly.

"She likes you."

"Sure, that's great. I like her too, but this is crazy. I hardly know her."

"Does it make a difference?"

"Yes, it does."

"She needs you," said Kenji. "No, I should say she needs someone. Just like you need someone. Just like I need someone sometimes. I won't apologize for her because then I'd have to apologize for myself. She waited four years for Ralph to come back. We were in the same outfit. Ralph signed up for another hitch. Don't ask me why. He did. He asked me to look her up and tell her he wasn't coming back for a while. No explanations. Just tell her he wasn't coming back just yet. Would you wait?"

"No."

"I'm only half a man, Ichiro, and when my leg starts aching, even that half is no good."

The hot color rose to his face as he lashed out at Kenji angrily: "So you're sending in a substitute, is that it?"

Kenji sighed. "The conversation is getting vulgar, but the facts aren't vulgar because I don't feel that they are wrong or loose or dirty or vulgar. You can sleep on the floor or take the car and go back to town." He threw the keys on the sofa beside Ichiro.

Ichiro sat and fumed, struggling to do the right thing and not knowing what it was. If Kenji had said another word or allowed even a tiny smile to rise to his lips, he would have snatched the keys and rushed out.

His face an unchanging mask of serious patience, Kenji sat quietly.

"I'll see you in the morning," said Ichiro placidly.

Kenji grasped the leg and lowered it from the table, wincing as he did so. With his cane, he pointed beyond the kitchen.

Walking up to the partly open door, Ichiro paused and glanced back at Kenji. Slowly, he pushed it open and shut it silently behind him. There were two windows in the back, shining dimly against the darkness of the unlighted room. As his eyes became accustomed to the dark, he was able to make out the shape of the bed and the slender hump that was Emi. Moving cautiously forward, he glimpsed the fine trail of chain hanging from the ceiling. He raised his arm toward it gropingly.

"Don't," she whispered.

He untied his shoes by kneeling down and then let his shirt and trousers drop to the floor. Debating whether or not to strip all the way down, he pondered the matter for a long while. Then, like a swimmer plunging decisively into the cold water, he removed his underclothes and crawled into the bed.

His body taut and uncomfortable, he lay stiffly and stared at the ceiling. He fought for something to say, some remark to start bridging the gap of starched sheet that stretched between them. He listened to her soft, even breathing and tried to control the heaving of his own breast. At length, she stirred and her hand found his under the covers. It was warm and friendly and relaxing.

"This house," he said.

"Yes?"

"You live here all alone?"

"Very much so."

"No brothers or sisters."

"No. No brothers or sisters."

"Folks. How about them?"

"Mother died in thirty-nine."

"That's tough."

"It was just as well," she said. "The war would have made her suffer and she didn't have that. She had a wonderful funeral. It seemed as if everyone in the valley came with little white envelopes bearing quarters and dollars and some with even five and ten dollars and a few with much, much more. Paid for the funeral, they did. If father were here, he'd still be talking about it. It made him proud to tell people how he actually made money on the funeral. He didn't really mean it that way, of course. It was just his way of saying that he had a lot of good friends."

He lay there thinking about his own mother, thinking what might have been if she had died mercifully before Pearl Harbor also.

"Dad is in Japan," she continued. "He asked to be repatriated and he's been there five months."

"My ma thinks Japan won the war," he said.

"So did Dad. But he doesn't any more. He wants to come back."

"What makes them that way?"

"I don't know. It's like a sickness."

He turned to face her, his leg touching hers. "I want to know," he said loudly and distinctly. "I've ruined my life and I want to know what it is that made me do it. I'm not sick like them. I'm not crazy like Ma is or your father was. But I must have been."

"It's because we're American and because 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."

"So?"

"I don't know," she answered, "I don't know."

"I've got to know," he sobbed out, holding desper-

ately to her hand with both of his.

Emi reached out her free hand and drew his face against her naked breast. Lost and bewildered like a child frightened, he sobbed quietly.

It was hardly seven o'clock when Ichiro stirred wearily and dug his chin deeper into the covers to ward off the sharp coolness of the morning country air. He rolled half a turn, expecting to encounter the soft warmth of the girl who was a woman and could not wait for her husband but waited, and she was not there. He lay there for a moment, wanting to sleep some more and finding it difficult because Emi was gone. Slowly, he eased out from under the covers and sat shivering on the edge of the bed.

On a chair near the bed were neatly laid out a fresh shirt, a clean pair of slacks, even underwear and socks. His own clothes were not in sight. He dressed hurriedly, his body tingling from the brisk, unheated air and his head heavy and dull.

In the kitchen he let the cold water run over his head and neck, shocking himself into a wide-eyed yet somewhat drowsy state of wakefulness. The table bore signs of someone's having breakfasted. There was a cup with a film of coffee in the bottom and a small plate with toast crumbs and a butter-stained knife. When he put his hand to the coffeepot, it was still warm. He poured a cupful and drank it down.

Kenji was still sleeping soundly and, while he stood over his friend, wondering whether or not to awaken him, he heard the water spraying in the yard. He walked softly to the door and stepped outside.

It was a glorious morning. The sun, barely starting to peek over the eastern rim, was forcing its crown of vivid yellows and oranges and reds against the great expanse of hazy blue. The utter stillness of the countryside

seemed even more still against the occasional distant crowing of a rooster and the chirping of the birds.

Through the misty, swirling pattern from the revolving sprinkler on the neat, green lawn he saw Emi kneeling over the flower bed.

"Morning," he said and, when she didn't respond, he said more loudly: "Hey."

She turned and, smiling, waved. Taking time to pull a few more weeds, she rose finally and made her way around the flying water. She wore a pair of man's overall pants, encircled with dampness at the knees, and a heavy athletic sweater with two gold stripes on the arm and an over-sized F on the front. It hung on her like an old potato sack, limp and faded from repeated use. She paused a short distance in front of him and examined him skeptically.

"Pants are a little snug around the waist, but they fit good," he said.

"I thought they would. You're about the same size as him."

Watching her standing there, he felt the need to say something about the previous night. "I want you to know—" he started hesitantly.

The color rose faintly to her cheeks. "You mustn't," she said quickly. "Talking will make it sound bad and unclean and it was not so."

He fidgeted uneasily, then saw the truth in her words. "No, it wasn't."

"There's a jacket in the hall closet," she said as she bent down to grab the hose and pull the sprinkler closer to the concrete walk.

It wasn't any longer than a minute or so before he had come back out with the snug-fitting leather jacket. Emi was sitting on the bottom step and he dropped down beside her. She sat with her wrists on her knees, her soiled hands carefully arched away from the soiled

overalls as if she were wearing a clean skirt.

"There's someone out there," he said, peering into the distance across the level field and catching the movement of a tiny, dark shape stooped over in earnest industry.

"That's Mr. Maeno," she replied. "He leases my land."

"Looks like he's all alone."

"Oh, no. There's Mrs. Maeno, of course, and they have two young daughters who help after school and they hire help when necessary."

"And work from daylight till sundown, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. I can tell he's that kind of a man without ever having met him but by just watching him from here."

"Is that bad?"

"Bad?" He thought about it for a while before answering. "It's good. I used to think farmers were crazy working the way they do. I don't any more. I envy him."

"Why?"

"Because he's got a purpose in life. He's got something to do. He's got a goal of some kind and it gives meaning to his life and he's probably pretty satisfied."

"And me?"

He turned and looked at her. She was smiling, half seriously, half teasingly.

"I envy you too," he said without hesitation.

"And Ken? Poor Ken."

"Him also."

"You're bitter and you've no right to be." She brushed her palm against her eye irritably.

He stood up, digging his fists angrily into his pockets because she was nice and he had no right to make her partner to his gloom. "What kind of flowers did you plant?" he said cheerfully.

"Sit down, Ichiro."

Obedying her, he said: "I want to talk about something else."

"I don't. I want to talk about you, about how you feel and why you feel as you do."

"It's a lousy way to spend a fine morning," he protested.

She put a hand on his arm until he turned and looked at her. "I think I know how you feel."

He shook his head. "You can't. No one can."

"I thought about it while you were sleeping. I put myself in your place and I know how you feel. It's a very hopeless sort of feeling."

There was nothing he could say to that and he didn't.

"A hopeless feeling, however, doesn't mean that there is no hope."

"Are you saying there is?"

"There must be." She rubbed her hands together, flaking the dry dirt onto the walk.

"Thanks for trying," he said, "thanks for trying to help."

Emi faced him with a look of surprise and hurt anger: "Do you really think it's so hopeless? What do you propose to do during the rest of your life? Drown yourself in your selfish bitterness?"

Ichiro opened his mouth to mollify her.

"Are you blind?" she continued without waiting for an answer. "Deaf? Dumb? Helpless? You're young, healthy, and supposedly intelligent. Then *be* intelligent. Admit your mistake and do something about it."

"What?"

"Anything. It doesn't matter what you do. This is a big country with a big heart. There's room here for all kinds of people. Maybe what you've done doesn't make you one of the better ones but you're not among the worst either."

"If I were Ralph, if Ralph had done what I did, would you still feel the same way?"

"Yes, I would."

"Ralph's a lucky guy," he said.

"And you are too. In any other country they would have shot you for what you did. But this country is different. They made a mistake when they doubted you. They made a mistake when they made you do what you did and they admit it by letting you run around loose. Try, if you can, to be equally big and forgive them and be grateful to them and prove to them that you can be an American worthy of the frailties of the country as well as its strengths."

"The way you say that, it seems to make sense, but I don't know."

"You do know," she said quickly, for she was spurred by the effect her words were having on him. "It's hard to talk like this without sounding pompous and empty, but I can remember how full I used to get with pride and patriotism when we sang 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and pledged allegiance to the flag at school assemblies, and that's the feeling you've got to have."

"It was different then."

"Only because you think so. Next time you're alone, pretend you're back in school. Make believe you're singing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and see the color guard march out on the stage and say the pledge of allegiance with all the other boys and girls. You'll get that feeling flooding into your chest and making you want to shout with glory. It might even make you feel like crying. That's how you've got to feel, so big that the bigness seems to want to bust out, and then you'll understand why it is that your mistake was no bigger than the mistake your country made."

Ichiro pushed himself off the step and walked slowly

to the end of the yard. Turning, he looked at Emi, who stared back at him with an intentness which made him uncomfortable. Keeping his eyes on her, he made his way back until he was looking down upon her.

"It's nice out here," he said, "nice house, nice yard, nice you. No cars whizzing by, no people making noise. It's quiet and peaceful and clean and fresh and nice. It feels good just being here and even what you've just been saying sounds all right. But I don't live here. I don't belong here. It's not the same out there." He motioned toward the highway and beyond, where the city lay.

For a moment she looked as if she might scream to relieve herself of the agony in her soul for him. Fighting to regain her composure, she beckoned him to sit down.

He did so wearily, not wanting to pursue the subject but sensing that she was not yet ready to abandon it.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Twenty-five," he answered, skeptical.

"I'm twenty-seven. So is Ralph, and Mike is fifty."

"Mike?"

"Yes, Mike, a good American name for a good American—at least, he was. Mike is Ralph's brother."

"I see."

"No, you don't. Not yet, anyway. I want to tell you about him."

"Sure."

"Do you want to go to Japan and live there?"

He furrowed his brow, not understanding. "You were going to tell me about Mike."

"I am," she said impatiently. "Do you?"

"No, of course not."

"Mike did."

"He did?"

"Yes, not because he wanted to, but because he had to."

"I still don't get it."

"You will. I'll start from the beginning."

"Fine."

As if preparing the story in her mind, she gazed silently over the fields before she began. "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."

"He's got more right than I have."

She swung around to face him, her eyes wide with

anger. "You don't understand. Mike doesn't have any more right than you have to be here. He has no right at all any more. It was as if he joined the enemy by antagonizing the people against the government, and you certainly never did that. All you did was to refuse to go in the army and you did so for a reason no worse than that held by a conscientious objector who wasn't a conscientious objector."

"I don't follow you."

"No?" She looked at him pleadingly, her mouth quivering uncontrollably. "I want so much to help," she cried softly, "but nothing seems to make any sense."

He 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?"

"He'll come back. Takes time to work these things out."

"I'm sorry," she said, wiping her eyes on the sleeve of the sweater.

"So am I. Hungry too."

They rose together and entered the house.

Inside, they found Kenji getting breakfast ready. He looked up from the frying eggs and bacon and grinned sheepishly. His face was drawn and pale. The cane was hooked to his belt, for he held the spatula in one hand and a water glass half full of whisky in the other.

"We were talking outside," said Ichiro.

"Yeah, nice morning. You should have stayed out a while longer. Breakfast isn't quite ready."

Emi washed her hands and took over at the stove. Sadly, she watched as Kenji limped carefully to the

table. "How did you sleep?"

"Not very well." He sipped the whisky appreciatively.

"It—it—" She bit her lips for control and managed to utter: "Did it—does it . . .?"

"It does, Emi."

"Oh." She flipped the eggs over unthinkingly. "I—I hope you weren't expecting sunny side up."

Shrugging his shoulders, Ichiro said assuringly: "Makes no difference to me."

Moving about quietly as if fearing to jar the floor, Emi fixed the plates and set them on the table. Ichiro poured the coffee and loaded the toaster.

Kenji leaned back in his chair and gazed through the window above the sink. "Swell day for a picnic," he said. "How about it, Emi? Pack a lunch."

Ichiro retrieved the toast, saying: "Sounds good to me."

"Go home and see your father and your brothers and sisters," she answered. "They'll want to see you before you go. We can have our picnic after you come back. Please."

"I suppose you're right. You always are." He turned to Ichiro: "Feel like going to Portland tomorrow?"

"What's there?"

Emi's fork clattered against the plate. "The VA hospital," she said curtly.

"Sure," he said, looking at Emi, who was avoiding his eyes, "I'd be happy to."

While Ichiro ate and Kenji drank, Emi got up and left them. She returned a few minutes later, shed of the baggy work clothes and wearing a trim, blue-Shantung dress and high heels. He eyed her approvingly, but Kenji seemed to take no notice until it was time for them to leave.

At the door Kenji said fondly to her: "Thanks for not

choosing black. You look wonderful."

"I'll wait for you," she said softly, fighting to hold back the tears. She slipped out of her shoes and, when Kenji kissed her lightly on the cheek, grasped him about the neck and put her lips to his.

As he backed the car down the driveway to the road, Ichiro saw her standing very still on the porch, neither waving nor shouting. He had a feeling that she was crying.

AN HOUR LATER Ichiro was at home with a promise from Kenji to pick him up early the next morning. As he walked into the store, his mother looked up from a sheaf of bills and receipts. If there was any indication of relief, he didn't notice it.

"Where have you been?" she said accusingly.

"Out." On the way home he had felt a twinge of guilt for having spent the night away without telling his folks, but whatever regrets he might have had were quickly dispelled by the tone of her voice.

"Where have you been?" she repeated harshly.

"With Kenji, Kanno-san's boy." He approached the counter and faced her. "You know him."

"Ahh," she said shrilly and distastefully, "that one who lost a leg. How can you be friends with such a one? He is no good."

He gripped the counter for fear of having his hands free. "Why?" he rasped.

His discomfort seemed strangely to please her. She raised her chin perceptibly and answered: "He is not Japanese. He fought against us. He brought shame to his father and grief to himself. It is unfortunate he was not killed."

"What's so good about being Japanese?" He felt the pressure of the wood against his nails.

She seemed not to hear him. Quite calmly, she continued, talking in the tone of mother to son: "You can be a good boy, a fine son. For my sake and yours do not see him again. It is just as well."

Pushing himself away from the counter, he let his arms drop to his sides. "I'm going to Portland with him tomorrow."

Her face, which had dropped to regard a column of figures on an invoice from the wholesale grocer, jerked up. For a moment, it glared at him, the twisted mouth contorting the slender, austere face into a hard mass of dark hatred. "Do as you will," she cried out. Then the tension drained just as quickly from her face and she was putting her mind to the figures once more.

Through his anger crept up a sudden feeling of remorse and pity. It was an uneasy, guilty sort of sensation which made him want almost to take her into his arms and comfort her, for he saw that the sickness of the soul that was Japanese once and forever was beginning to destroy her mind. Right or wrong, she, in her way, had tried harder than most mothers to be a good mother to him. Did it matter so much that events had ruined the plans which she cherished and turned the once very possible dreams into a madness which was madness only in view of the changed status of the Japanese in America? Was it she who was wrong and crazy not to have found in herself the capacity to accept a country which repeatedly refused to accept her or her sons unquestioningly, or was it the others who were being deluded, the ones, like Kenji, who believed and fought and even gave their lives to protect this country where they could still not rate as first-class citizens because of the unseen walls?

How is one to talk to a woman, a mother who is also a stranger because the son does not know who or what she is? Tell me, Mother, who are you? What is it to be a Japanese? There must have been a time when you were a little girl. You never told me about those things. Tell me now so that I can begin to understand. Tell me about the house in which you lived and of your father

and mother, who were my grandparents, whom I have never seen or known because I do not remember your ever speaking of them except to say that they died a long time ago. Tell me everything and just a little bit and a little bit more until their lives and yours and mine are fitted together, for they surely must be. There is time now while there are no customers and you and I are all alone. Begin from the beginning when your hair was straight and black and everyone was Japanese because that was where you were born and America was not yet a country beyond the ocean where fortunes were to be made or an enemy to hate. Quick, now, quick, Mother, what was the name of your favorite school teacher?

While he wrestled with the words which cried to be spoken, the mother glanced up and looked surprised as if to say: Oh, I thought you had gone. She riffled through the papers and dug out an envelope arrayed with an assortment of expensive-looking stamps. It was similar to the other ones from Japan which he had seen in his father's hands two nights previously.

"For Papa," she sneered, flipping it across the counter at him.

He snatched it as it was about to slide over the edge. If he had been about to say something, the moment was gone. Wretchedly, he turned and stumbled into the kitchen.

The father turned from the cutting board, where he was chopping up a head of cabbage for pickling. Around his waist was a bright plastic apron and his wide, stubby, stockinged feet were crammed into a pair of shapeless reed slippers.

"Ichiro, my son," he chuckled, "you are home." He gazed fondly at him and added: "Had a nice time, yes?"

He looked up at his father, not immediately under-

standing what the old man meant. "Sure," he said, interpreting the sly, friendly smile, "not enough to make up for two years, but I had a big time."

"Ya," the father said gleefully and brought his hands together as might a child in a brief moment of ecstasy, "I was young once too. I know. I know." He picked up the broad, steel blade and sank it energetically into the cabbage.

Whatever the old man thought he knew was probably wilder and lewder and more reckless than the comparatively gentle night that he had spent with Emi. It bothered him to have his father thinking that he had spent the night carousing when such was not the case. He could imagine what it must have been like for the young Japanese new to America and slaving at a killing job on the railroad in Montana under the scorching sun and in the choking dust. Once a month, or even less, the gang of immigrants would manage to make it to town for a weekend. There would be gambling and brawling and hard drinking and sleeping with bought women, and then the money would be gone. Monday would find them swinging their sledge hammers and straining mercilessly against the bars to straighten the hot, gleaming strips of railing while the foul smell of cheap liquor oozed out of their listless bodies. Occasionally, one of them would groan aloud with guilty resolve that he would henceforth stay in camp and save his money and hoard and cherish it into a respectable sum, for was that not what he had come to America for? And there would be murmurs of approbation from those who harbored the same thoughts and were thinking what foolishness it is to work like an animal and have nothing but a sick faintness in the head to show for it. If it is not work and save and go back to Japan a rich man, which is why one comes to America, it is better never to have left Japan. The will is there and, in this moment

when the shame and futility is greatest, the vow is renewed once and for always. No more gambling. No more drinking. No more whoring. And the ones who had long since stopped repeating the vow snickered and guffawed and rested their bodies by only seeming to heave when the gang boss commanded but by not really heaving at all so that the younger ones had to exert themselves just that much more and thereby became more fervent in their resolution to walk a straight path.

"I got pretty drunk," he said vaguely.

"Ya, I drink pretty good too." He bent over the cabbage, mumbling: "Pretty good—pretty good."

Ichiro laid the letter on the table and pressed it flat with his hands. "Another letter, Pa. Just came."

Laying down the knife and wiping his hands on a dish towel, the old man sat at the table and took the letter. Holding it at arm's length, he examined the envelope curiously. "So much money to send such a tiny piece of paper. Still, they write. For Mama, this one. From her sister. They would die with happiness if they saw our little store so full of cans and bottles and boxes of things to eat."

He inserted a pudgy finger under the flap and ran it through from end to end. The thin sheets of rice paper crackled softly as he removed them. He read the letter slowly and deliberately, his eyes barely moving and his mouth silently forming words. After he had finished, he sat staring at the last page for a long time without moving, looking extremely thoughtful. Slowly, he shook his head several times.

"Mama!" he shouted suddenly in a loud voice.

The mother stuck her head through the curtain, looking unhappy about being disturbed.

"Sit down, Mama."

"Who will watch the store?"

"Please. I say sit down."

She did so but not without making it obvious that she disapproved. "What is it?"

The old man shoved the letter before her. "It is from your sister for you. Read."

"I do not have to read it," she said flippantly. "Is this why you ask me to leave the store unattended and sit in the kitchen?" She started to rise.

"No," he said and pushed her roughly back into the chair. "Then I will read."

She glared stubbornly at him, but was momentarily too surprised to defy him.

Ichiro was watching his father, who continued to speak: "It is from your sister who calls you Kin-chan. She has not written before."

"Kin-chan?" voiced the mother stupidly, hardly believing the sound of her own diminutive, which she had almost forgotten.

"Many, many pardons, dear Kin-chan," the father read, "for not having written to you long before this, but I have found it difficult to write of unpleasant things and all has been unpleasant since the disastrous outcome of the war which proved too vast an undertaking even for Japan. You were always such a proud one that I am sure you have suffered more than we who still live at home. I, too, have tried to be proud but it is not an easy thing to do when one's children are always cold and hungry. Perhaps it is punishment for the war. How much better things might have been had there been no war. For myself, I ask nothing, but for the children, if it is possible, a little sugar, perhaps, or the meat which you have in cans or the white powder which can be made into milk with water. And, while I know that I am already asking too much, it would be such a comfort to me and a joy to the children if you could somehow manage to include a few pieces of candy. It has been so long since they have had any. I am begging and feel no

shame, for that is the way things are. And I am writing after many long years and immediately asking you to give assistance, which is something that one should not do in a letter until all the niceties have been covered, but, again, that is the way things are. Forgive me, Kin-chan, but the suffering of my children is the reason I must write in this shameless manner. Please, if you can, and I know not that you can, for there have been no answers to the many letters which brother and uncle and cousin have written, but, if you can, just a little will be of such great comfort to us—"

"Not true. I won't listen." She did not, however, move. Nervously, she rubbed her palms against her lap.

"One more place I will read," said the father and, casting aside the first sheet, searched along the second until he found the place he wanted. "Here she writes: 'Remember the river and the secret it holds? You almost drowned that day for the water was deeper and swifter than it looked because of the heavy rains. We were frightened, weren't we? Still, they were wonderful, happy times and, children that we were, we vowed never to tell anyone how close to dying you came. Had it not been for the log on the bank, I could only have watched you being swallowed up by the river. It is still your secret and mine for I have never told anyone about it. It no longer seems important, but I do think about such things if only to tell myself that there were other and better times.'"

He laid the sheets on the table and looked firmly at his wife as he had not done for a long, long time. Then, as if sensing the enormity of the thing he had been trying to prove, his mouth trembled weakly and he retreated timidly to the cabbage, which he began industriously to stuff into a stone tub partly filled with salt water. On the cabbage he placed a board, and on

the board, a large, heavy stone weight. Not until then did he fearfully cock his head and look askance at the woman who was his wife and the mother of his sons.

She sat stonily with hands in lap, her mouth slightly ajar in the dumb confusion that raged through her mind fighting off the truth which threatened no longer to be untrue. Taking the letter in her hands finally, she perused it with sad eyes which still occasionally sparked with suspicious contempt.

Ichiro watched wordlessly, having understood enough of the letter to realize what was taking place. The passive reaction of his mother surprised him, even caused him to worry uncomfortably.

"Oh, they are so clever," she suddenly said very clearly in a voice slightly nasal, "even to the secret which I had long forgotten. How they must have tortured her to make her reveal it. Poor, poor sister." With letter in hand, she rose and disappeared into the bedroom.

The father glanced nervously at Ichiro and shoved the cabbage-filled stone tub under the sink. "It is happening, ya? She is beginning to see how things are?"

"I don't know, Pa. I think so."

"What is it you think?"

"She didn't look too happy. Maybe it means she's not so sure any more about Japan winning the war."

Muttering under his breath, the father hastened to get the bottle from the cupboard and tilted it hungrily to his mouth. Taking more than he had intended, he gagged noisily and stamped his foot on the floor until the agony passed. Tears streaming down his beet-red face, he stumbled to the table and flopped down hard on the chair. "Aagh," he grunted hoarsely, "good stuff, good stuff."

Ichiro fetched a glass of water, which the old man

downed promptly. He nodded gratefully to his son. When his discomfort had passed, he uttered with obvious embarrassment: "I do not mean to hurt her, Ichiro. I do not mean to do any wrong. It is not right for her to go on hugging like a crazy woman to her dreams of madness when they are not so, is it? Is it, Ichiro?"

"No, it's not right."

"I am not wrong, no?"

"No, you're not wrong. She should know."

"Ya," he said, greatly relieved, "I do only what is right. A woman does not have the strength of a man, so it is I who must make her see the truth. She will be all right."

When Ichiro did not answer, the old man, looking concerned again, repeated: "She will be all right, ya, Ichiro?"

"Sure, Pa, sure. Give her time."

"Ya, time. We have plenty time. She will be all right, but look anyway."

"What?"

"Look. Look in the bedroom. See that she is all right now."

His disgust mounting rapidly, Ichiro peeked into the bedroom doorway. In the semi-darkness of the room, the mother sat on the edge of the bed, staring blankly at the sheets of paper in her hand. Her expression was neither that of sadness nor anger. It was a look which meant nothing, for the meaning was gone.

"How is it?" asked the father anxiously. "What is she doing, Ichiro?"

"Sitting," he replied.

"Only sitting?"

"Maybe thinking too. How should I know?"

"I make lunch. After she eat, she be fine. You watch the store, ya?"

"Sure." Ichiro settled himself on a stool behind the

cash register and lighted a cigarette. He thought of the trip to Portland the following day and wished that he were already on his way. Then it occurred to him that he might look for work down there without returning home.

I haven't got a home, he said to himself, smiling ironically. Why should I come back? Too many people know me here. Best I can do around Seattle is knock my head against the wall. The sensible thing to do would be to find work in Portland, mind my own business, keep away from the Japs, and there's no reason why things couldn't work out. It's the only chance I've got. I've got to start clean. I've got to get away from Pa and Ma and forget the past. To forget completely would be impossible, but I don't have to stay here where I'll be reminded of it every moment of the day. I don't owe them a thing. They loused up my life for me and loused up their own in the process. Why can't they be like other people, other Japs, and take things as they are? . . . They? Ma's the one. Pa, he's just around. Still, his weakness is just as bad as Ma's strength. He might have prevented all this. He saw what was going on. He could have taken her in hand and straightened her out long ago. Or could he? No, I guess not. Pa's okay, what there is of him, but he missed out someplace. He should have been a woman. He should have been Ma and Ma should have been Pa. Things would have worked out differently then. How, I don't know. I just know they would have.

I won't be running away. I'll be getting away from them and here, but I won't really be running away because the thing that's inside of me is going along and always will be where it is. It's just that I've got to do things right and, in order for things to be right, I've got to be in a new place with new people. I'll talk to Pa about it. Somebody ought to know and I certainly can't

tell Ma. She wouldn't understand. She never has and never will. Pa won't really understand either, but he'll agree. Maybe it'll make him happy. He should have been a woman, dammit. Poor Ma. Wonder what kind of hell she's going through now.

The door latch clicked, the bell tinkled, and a small boy walked in. He gaped at Ichiro with the doorknob still in his hand and said: "Who are you?"

"I work here," he said.

"Oh." The boy closed the door and proceeded to the bread rack, where he methodically squeezed each loaf of bread. "Day-old stuff," he grimaced and reluctantly selected a small loaf. He placed it on the counter and examined the coins in his hand. "Gimme two black-whips too," he said.

"Black-whips? What are they?"

"If you work here, how come you don't know? I know more'n you."

"Yeah, you're smart. What are black-whips?"

"Lik-rish. Them over there." He pointed behind Ichiro at the assortment of candy, indicating the long strips of red and black licorice. "I want the black ones."

Without further comment, Ichiro took two strips from the box and handed them to the boy, who put his coins on the counter and departed after again eyeing him skeptically.

He was telling himself that he'd better pack his suitcase, when his father called to say that lunch was ready.

Somehow, he knew that his mother wouldn't be in the kitchen, and she wasn't. After they had been eating for a while, the father got up and looked into the bedroom. "Mama," he said, trying to sound cheerful, "Mama, come and eat. I made fresh rice and it is good and hot. You must eat, Mama."

Rocking hesitantly from one slippers foot to the

other, he suddenly made as if to go in but quickly stepped back and continued to watch, the sad concern making the puffiness of his cheeks droop. "Mama," he said more quietly and hopelessly, "one has to eat. It gives strength."

And still he stood and watched, knowing that no amount of urging would move the beaten lump on the edge of the bed and vainly searching for the words to bring her alive. He brushed an arm to his eye and pressed his lips into a near pout. "The letter," he continued, "the letter, Mama. It could be nothing." Hope and encouragement caused his voice to rise in volume: "Your own sister would never write such a letter. You have said so yourself. It is not to be believed. Eat now and forget this foolishness."

Enraged by his father's retreat, Ichiro swore at him: "Goddammit, Pa, leave her alone. Feed your own stupid mouth."

"Ya, ya," he mumbled and returned to the table. He picked distractedly at the food, jabbing the faded chopsticks repeatedly into the plate only to pinch a tiny bit of food, which he placed unappetizingly on his tongue.

"I'm sorry, Pa."

"Ya, but you are right. I do not know what I am doing."

"She'll work it out okay."

"What is she thinking? She is like a baby dog who has lost its mother."

"It'll be all right, Pa," he said impatiently. "It isn't anything she won't live through."

The father weighed his words carefully before answering: "You can say that, but, when I see her sitting and not moving but only sitting like that, I am afraid."

"Can it, Pa," he lashed out angrily. "Nothing's going to happen. Things like this take lots of time. Look at me. Two years, Pa, two years I've thought about it

and I'm not through yet. Maybe I'll spend the rest of my life thinking about it."

The old man looked at him, not understanding how it was that his problem could be compared to the mother's. "You are young," he said. "Old minds are not so easily changed. Besides, if it was wrong that you went to prison, it is over, all done. With Mama, it is deeper, much harder."

Hardly believing what his father had said, Ichiro reared back in his chair, then leaned far forward, at the same time bringing his fists down on the table so viciously that the dishes bounced crazily. "You really think that?"

"What is that?"

"About me. About what I've done. I've ruined my life for you, for Ma, for Japan. Can't you see that?"

"You are young, Ichiro. It does not matter so much. I understand, but it is not the same."

"You don't understand."

"Ya, I do. I was young once."

"You're a Jap. How can you understand? No. I'm wrong. You're nothing. You don't understand a damn thing. You don't understand about me and about Ma and you'll never know why it is that Taro had to go in the army. Goddamn fool, that's what you are, Pa, a goddamn fool."

The color crept into the father's face. For a moment it looked as if he would fight back. Lips compressed and breathing hastened, he glared at his son who called him a fool.

Ichiro waited and, in the tense moment, almost found himself hoping that the father would strike back with fists or words or both.

The anger drained away with the color as quickly as it had appeared. "Poor Mama," he mumbled, "poor Mama," and he had to slap his hand to his mouth for he

was that close to crying out.

At the tinkle of the doorbell, the father hastily dabbed his eyes with a dishcloth and rose heavily from his chair.

"I'll go," said Ichiro to the man who was neither husband nor father nor Japanese nor American but a diluted mixture of all, and he went to wait on the customer.

HOME FOR KENJI was an old frame, two-story, seven-room house which the family rented for fifty dollars a month from a Japanese owner who had resettled in Chicago after the war and would probably never return to Seattle. It sat on the top of a steep, unpaved hill and commanded an uninspiring view of clean, gray concrete that was six lanes wide and an assortment of boxy, flat store buildings and spacious super gas-stations.

Kenji eased the car over into the left-turn lane and followed the blinking green arrow toward the hill. At its foot, he braked the car almost to a full stop before carefully starting up, for the sharp angle of the hill and the loose dirt necessitated skill and caution.

As he labored to the top, he saw his father sitting on the porch reading a newspaper. Before he could depress the horn ring, the man looked up and waved casually. He waved back and steered the Oldsmobile into the driveway.

When he walked around the side of the house and came up front, the father said "Hello, Ken" as matter-of-factly as if he had seen his son a few hours previously, and returned his attention to the newspaper to finish the article he had been reading.

"Who's home, Pop?" he asked, holding out the bag.

"Nobody," said the father, taking the present and looking into the bag. It held two fifths of good blended whisky. He was a big man, almost six feet tall and strong. As a painter and paper hanger he had no equal,

but he found it sufficient to work only a few days a week and held himself to it, for his children were all grown and he no longer saw the need to drive himself. He smiled warmly and gratefully: "Thank you."

"Sure, Pop. One of these days, I'll bring home a case."

"Last me two days. Better bring a truckful," he said, feigning seriousness.

They laughed together comfortably, 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. They walked into the house, the father making the son precede him.

In the dining room the father deposited the two new bottles with a dozen others in the china cabinet. "I'm fixed for a long time," he said. "That's a good feeling."

"You're really getting stocked up," said Kenji.

"The trust and faith and love of my children," he said proudly. "You know I don't need clothes or shaving lotion in fancy jars or suitcases or pajamas, but whisky I can use. I'm happy."

"Are you, Pop?"

The father sat down opposite his son at the polished mahogany table and took in at a glance the new rugs and furniture and lamps and the big television set with the radio and phonograph all built into one impressive, blond console. "All I did was feed you and clothe you and spank you once in a while. All of a sudden, you're all grown up. The government gives you money, Hisa and Toyo are married to fine boys, Hana and Tom have splendid jobs, and Eddie is in college and making more money in a part-time job than I did for all of us when your mother died. No longer do I have to work all the time, but only two or three days a week and I have more money than I can spend. Yes, Ken, I am happy and I wish your mother were here to see all this."

"I'm happy too, Pop." He shifted his legs to make himself comfortable and winced unwillingly.

Noticing, the father screwed his face as if the pain were in himself, for it was. Before the pain turned to sorrow, before the suffering for his son made his lips quiver as he held back the tears, he hastened into the kitchen and came back with two jigger-glasses.

"I am anxious to sample your present," he said jovially, but his movements were hurried as he got the bottle from the cabinet and fumbled impatiently with the seal.

Kenji downed his thankfully and watched his father take the other glass and sniff the whisky appreciatively before sipping it leisurely. He lifted the bottle toward his son.

"No more, Pop," refused Kenji. "That did it fine."

The father capped the bottle and put it back. He closed the cabinet door and let his hand linger on the knob as if ashamed of himself for having tried to be cheerful when he knew that the pain was again in his son and the thought of death hovered over them.

"Pop."

"Yes?" He turned slowly to face his son.

"Come on. Sit down. It'll be all right."

Sitting down, the father shook his head, saying: "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."

"That is what I think nevertheless. I am to blame."

"It'll be okay, Pop. Maybe they won't even operate."

"When do you go?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"I will go with you."

"No." He looked straight at this 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 it in their speech and joys and sorrows and hopes and 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? He had not begged or borrowed or gone to the city for welfare assistance. There had been times of hunger and despair and seeming hopelessness, but it did not mean something now that he could look around and feel the love of the men and women who were once only children?

And there was the one who sat before him, the one who had come to him and said calmly that he was going into the army. It could not be said then that it mattered not that he was a Japanese son of Japanese parents. 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 anywhere 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.

And he remembered that a week after Kenji had gone to a camp in Mississippi, the neighbor's son, an American soldier since before Pearl Harbor, had come to see his family which was in a camp enclosed by wire fencing and had guards who were American soldiers like himself. And he had been present when the soldier bitterly spoke of how all he did was dump garbage and wash dishes and take care of the latrines. And the soldier swore and ranted and could hardly make himself speak of the time when the president named Roosevelt had come to the camp in Kansas and all the American soldiers in the camp who were Japanese had been herded into a warehouse and guarded by other American soldiers with machine guns until the president named Roosevelt had departed. And he had gone to his own cubicle with the seven steel cots and the pot-bellied stove and the canvas picnic-chairs from Sears Roebuck and cried for Kenji, who was now a soldier and would not merely turn bitter and swear if the army let him do only such things as the soldier had spoken of, but would be driven to protest more violently because

he was the quiet one with the deep feelings whose anger was a terrible thing. But, with training over, Kenji had written that he was going to Europe, and the next letter was from Italy, where the Americans were fighting the Germans, and he found relief in the knowledge, partly because Kenji was fighting and he knew that was what his son wished and partly because the enemy was German and not Japanese.

He thought he remembered that he had not wanted Kenji to go into the army. But when he was asked, he had said yes. And so this son had come back after long months in a hospital with one good leg and another that was only a stick where the other good one had been. Had he done right? Should he not have forbidden him? Should he not have explained how it was not sensible for Japanese to fight a war against Japanese? If what he had done was wrong, how was it so and why?

"Would you," he said to his son, "have stayed out of the army if I had forbidden it?"

Kenji did not answer immediately, for the question came as a surprise to disturb the long, thought-filled silence. "I don't think so, Pop," he started out hesitantly. He paused, delving into his mind for an explanation, then said with great finality: "No, I would have gone anyway."

"Of course," said the father, finding some assurance in the answer.

Kenji pushed himself to a standing position and spoke gently: "You're not to blame, Pop. Every time we get to talking like this, I know you're blaming yourself. Don't do it. Nobody's to blame, nobody."

"To lose a leg is not the worst thing, but, to lose a part of it and then a little more and a little more again until . . . Well, I don't understand. You don't deserve it." He shrugged his shoulders wearily against the weight of his terrible anguish.

"I'm going up to take a nap." He walked a few steps and turned back to his father. "I'll go upstairs and lie down on the bed and I won't sleep right away because the leg will hurt a little and I'll be thinking. And I'll think that if things had been different, if you had been different, it might have been that I would also not have been the same and maybe you would have kept me from going into the war and I would have stayed out and had both my legs. But, you know, every time I think about it that way, I also have to think that, had such been the case, you and I would probably not be sitting down and having a drink together and talking or not talking as we wished. If my leg hurts, so what? We're buddies, aren't we? That counts. I don't worry about anything else."

Up in his room, he stretched out on his back on the bed and thought about what he had said to his father. It made a lot of sense. If, in the course of things, the pattern called for a stump of a leg that wouldn't stay healed, he wasn't going to decry the fact, for that would mean another pattern with attendant changes which might not be as perfectly desirable as the one he cherished. Things are as they should be, he assured himself, and, feeling greatly at peace, sleep came with surprising ease.

After Kenji had left him, the father walked down the hill to the neighborhood Safeway and bought a large roasting chicken. It was a fat bird with bulging drumsticks and, as he headed back to the house with both arms supporting the ingredients of an ample family feast, he thought of the lean years and the six small ones and the pinched, hungry faces that had been taught not to ask for more but could not be taught how not to look hungry when they were in fact quite hungry. And it was during those years that it seemed as if they would never have enough.

But such a time had come. It had come with the war and the growing of the children and it had come with the return of the thoughtful son whose terrible wound paid no heed to the cessation of hostilities. Yet, the son had said he was happy and the father was happy also for, while one might grieve for the limb that was lost and the pain that endured, he chose to feel gratitude for the fact that the son had come back alive even if only for a brief while.

And he remembered what the young sociologist had said in halting, pained Japanese at one of the family-relations meetings he had attended while interned in the relocation center because it was someplace to go. The instructor was a recent college graduate who had later left the camp to do graduate work at a famous Eastern school. He, short fellow that he was, had stood on an orange crate so that he might be better heard and seen by the sea of elderly men and women who had been attracted to the mess hall because they too had nothing else to do and nowhere else to go. There had been many meetings, although it had early become evident that lecturer and audience were poles apart, and if anything had been accomplished it was that the meetings helped to pass the time, and so the instructor continued to blast away at the unyielding wall of indifference and the old people came to pass an hour or two. But 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. I will tell you what it is like to be an American boy or girl. I will tell you what the relationship between parents and children is in an American family. As I speak, compare what I say with your own families." And so he had spoken and the old people had listened and, when the meeting was over, they got up and scattered over the camp toward their assigned cubicles. Some said they would attend no more lectures; others heaped hateful abuse upon the young fool who dared to have spoken with such disrespect; and then there was the elderly couple, the woman silently following the man, who stopped at another mess hall, where a dance was in progress, and peered into the dimly lit room and watched the young boys and girls gliding effortlessly around to the blaring music from a phonograph. Always before, they had found something to say about the decadent ways of an amoral nation, but, on this evening, they watched longer than usual and searched longingly to recognize their own daughter, whom they knew to be at the dance but who was only an unrecognizable shadow among the

other shadows

Halting for a moment to shift the bag, Kenji's father started up the hill with a smile on his lips. He was glad that the market had had such a fine roasting chicken. There was nothing as satisfying as sitting at a well-laden table with one's family whether the occasion was a holiday or a birthday or a home-coming of some member or, yes, even if it meant someone was going away.

Please come back, Ken, he said to himself, please come back and I will have for you the biggest, fattest chicken that ever graced a table, American or otherwise.

Hanako, who was chubby and pleasant and kept books for three doctors and a dentist in a downtown office, came home before Tom, who was big and husky like his father and had gone straight from high school into a drafting job at an aircraft plant. She had seen the car in the driveway and smelled the chicken in the oven and, smiling sympathetically with the father, put a clean cloth on the table and took out the little chest of Wm. & Rogers Silverplate.

While she was making the salad, Tom came home bearing a bakery pie in a flat, white box. "Hello, Pop, Sis," he said, putting the box on the table. "Where's Ken?"

"Taking a nap," said Hanako.

"Dinner about ready?" He sniffed appreciatively and rubbed his stomach in approval.

"Just about," smiled his sister.

"Psychic, that's what I am."

"What?"

"I say I'm psychic. I brought home a lemon meringue. Chicken and lemon meringue. Boy! Don't you think so?"

"What's that?"

"About my being psychic."

"You're always bringing home lemon meringue. Coincidence, that's all."

"How soon do we eat?"

"I just got through telling you—in a little while," she replied a bit impatiently.

"Good. I'm starved. I'll wash up and rouse the boy." He started to head for the stairs but turned back thoughtfully. "What's the occasion?" he asked.

"Ken has to go to the hospital again," said the father kindly. "Wash yourself at the sink and let him sleep a while longer. We will eat when he wakes up."

"Sure," said Tom, now sharing the unspoken sadness and terror which abided in the hearts of his father and sister. He went to the sink and, clearing it carefully of the pots and dishes, washed himself as quietly as possible.

It was a whole hour before Kenji came thumping down the stairs. It was the right leg, the good one, that made the thumps which followed the empty pauses when the false leg was gently lowered a step. When he saw the family sitting lazily around the table, he knew that they had waited for him.

"You shouldn't have waited," he said, a little embarrassed. "I slept longer than I intended."

"We're waiting for the chicken," lied the father. "Takes time to roast a big one."

Hanako agreed too hastily: "Oh, yes, I've never known a chicken to take so long. Ought to be just about ready now." She trotted into the kitchen and, a moment later, shouted back: "It's ready. Mmmm, can you smell it?"

"That's all I've been doing," Tom said with a famished grin. "Let's get it out here."

"Sorry I made you wait," smiled Kenji at his brother. Tom, regretting his impatience, shook his head vig-

orously. "No, it's the bird, like Pop said. You know how he is. Always gets 'em big and tough. This one's made of cast iron." He followed Hanako to help bring the food from the kitchen.

No one said much during the first part of the dinner. Tom ate ravenously. Hanako seemed about to say something several times but couldn't bring herself to speak. The father kept looking at Kenji without having to say what it was that he felt for his son. Surprisingly, it was Tom who broached the subject which was on all their minds.

"What the hell's the matter with those damn doctors?" He slammed his fork angrily against the table.

"Tom, please," said Hanako, looking deeply concerned.

"No, no, no," he said, gesturing freely with his hands, "I won't please shut up. If they can't fix you up, why don't they get somebody who can? They're killing you. What do they do when you go down there? Give you aspirins?" Slumped in his chair, he glared furiously at the table.

The father grasped Tom's arm firmly. "If you can't talk sense, don't."

"It's okay, Tom. This'll be a short trip. I think it's just that the brace doesn't fit right."

"You mean that?" He looked hopefully at Kenji.

"Sure. That's probably what it is. I'll only be gone a few days. Doesn't really hurt so much, but I don't want to take any chances."

"Gee, I hope you're right."

"I ought to know. A few more trips and they'll make me head surgeon down there."

"Yeah," Tom smiled, not because of the joke, but because he was grateful for having a brother like Kenji.

"Eat," reminded the father, "baseball on television tonight, you know."

"I'll get the pie," Hanako said and hastened to the kitchen.

"Lemon meringue," said Tom hungrily, as he proceeded to clean up his plate.

The game was in its second inning when they turned the set on, and they had hardly gotten settled down when Hisa and Toyo came with their husbands and children.

Tom grumbled good naturedly and, giving the newcomers a hasty nod, pulled up closer to the set, preparing to watch the game under what would obviously be difficult conditions.

Hats and coats were shed and piled in the corner and everyone talked loudly and excitedly, as if they had not seen each other for a long time. Chairs were brought in from the dining room and, suddenly, the place was full and noisy and crowded and comfortable.

The father gave up trying to follow the game and bounced a year-old granddaughter on his knee while two young grandsons fought to conquer the other knee. The remaining three grandchildren were all girls, older, more well-behaved, and they huddled on the floor around Tom to watch the baseball game.

Hisa's husband sat beside Kenji and engaged him in conversation, mostly about fishing and about how he'd like to win a car in the Salmon Derby because his was getting old and a coupe wasn't too practical for a big family. He had the four girls and probably wouldn't stop until he hit a boy and things weren't so bad, but he couldn't see his way to acquiring a near-new used car for a while. And then he got up and went to tell the same thing to his father-in-law, who was something of a fisherman himself. No sooner had he moved across the room than Toyo's husband, who was soft-spoken and mild but had been a captain in the army and sold enough insurance to keep two cars in the double garage

behind a large brick house in a pretty good neighborhood, slid into the empty space beside Kenji and asked him how he'd been and so on and talked about a lot of other things when he really wanted to talk to Kenji about the leg and didn't know how.

Then came the first lull when talk died down and the younger children were showing signs of drowsiness and everyone smiled thoughtfully and contentedly at one another. Hanako suggested refreshments, and when the coffee and milk and pop and cookies and ice cream were distributed, everyone got his second wind and immediately discovered a number of things which they had forgotten to discuss.

Kenji, for the moment alone, looked at all of them and said to himself: Now's as good a time as any to go. I won't wait until tomorrow. In another thirty minutes Hana and Toyo and the kids and their fathers will start stretching and heading for their hats and coats. Then someone will say "Well, Ken" in a kind of hesitant way and, immediately, they will all be struggling for something to say about my going to Portland because Hana called them and told them to come over because I'm going down there again and that's why they'll have to say something about it. If I had said to Pop that I was going the day after tomorrow, we would have had a big feast with everyone here for it tomorrow night. I don't want that. There's no need for it. I don't want Toyo to cry and Hana to dab at her eyes and I don't want everyone standing around trying to say goodbye and not being able to make themselves leave because maybe they won't see me again.

He started to get up and saw Hanako looking at him. "I'm just going to get a drink," he said.

"Stay, I'll get it," she replied.

"No. It'll give me a chance to stretch." He caught his father's eye and held it for a moment.

Without getting his drink, he slipped quietly out to the back porch and stood and waited and listened to the voices inside.

He heard Hisa's husband yell something to one of his girls and, the next minute, everyone was laughing amusedly. While he was wondering what cute deviltry the guilty one had done, his father came through the kitchen and out to stand beside him.

"You are going."

Kenji looked up and saw the big shoulders sagging wearily. "I got a good rest, Pop. This way, I'll be there in the morning and it's easier driving at night. Not so many cars, you know."

"It's pretty bad this time, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said truthfully, because he could not lie to his father, "it's not like before, Pop. It's different this time. The pain is heavier, deeper. Not sharp and raw like the other times. I don't know why. I'm scared."

"If . . . if . . ." Throwing his arm around his son's neck impulsively, the father hugged him close. "You call me every day. Every day, you understand?"

"Sure, Pop. Explain to everyone, will you?" He pulled himself free and looked at his father nodding, unable to speak.

Pausing halfway down the stairs, he listened once more for the voices in the house.

Hoarsely, in choked syllables, his father spoke to him: "Every day, Ken, don't forget. I will be home."

"Bye, Pop." Feeling his way along the dark drive with his cane, he limped to the car. Behind the wheel; he had to sit and wait until the heaviness had lifted from his chest and relieved the mistiness of his eyes. He started the motor and turned on the headlights and their brilliant glare caught fully the father standing ahead. Urged by an overwhelming desire to rush back to him and be with him for a few minutes longer,

Kenji's hand fumbled for the door handle. At that moment, the father raised his arm once slowly in farewell. Quickly, he pulled back out of the driveway and was soon out of sight of father and home and family.

He fully intended to drive directly to the grocery store to get Ichiro, but found himself drawn to the Club Oriental. Parking in the vacant lot where only the previous night Ichiro had experienced his humiliation, he limped through the dark alley to the club.

It was only a little after ten, but the bar and tables were crowded. Ignoring several invitations to sit at tables of acquaintances, he threaded his way to the end of the bar and had only to wait a moment before Al saw him and brought the usual bourbon and water.

Not until he was on his third leisurely drink did he manage to secure a stool. It was between strangers, and for that he was grateful. He didn't want to talk or be talked to. Through the vast mirror ahead, he studied the faces alongside and behind him. By craning a bit, he could even catch an occasional glimpse of couples on the dance floor.

It's a nice place, he thought. When a fellow goes away, he likes to take something along to remember and this is what I'm taking. It's not like having a million bucks and sitting in the Waldorf with a long-stemmed beauty, but I'm a small guy with small wants and this is my Waldorf. Here, as long as I've got the price of a drink, I can sit all night and be among friends. I can relax and drink and feel sad or happy or high and nobody much gives a damn, since they feel the same way. It's a good feeling, a fine feeling.

He followed Al around with his eyes until the bartender looked back at him and returned the smile.

The help knows me and likes me.

Swinging around on the stool, he surveyed the crowd and acknowledged a number of greetings and nods.

I've got a lot of friends here and they know and like me.

Jim Eng, the slender, dapper Chinese who ran the place, came out of the office with a bagful of change and brought it behind the bar to check the register. As he did so, he grinned at Kenji and inquired about his leg.

Even the management's on my side. It's like a home away from home only more precious because one expects home to be like that. Not many places a Jap can go to and feel so completely at ease. It must be nice to be white and American and to be able to feel like this no matter where one goes to, but I won't cry about that. There's been a war and, suddenly, things are better for the Japs and the Chinks and—

There was a commotion at the entrance and Jim Eng slammed the cash drawer shut and raced toward the loud voices. He spoke briefly to someone in the office, probably to find out the cause of the disturbance, and then stepped outside. As he did so, Kenji caught sight of three youths, a Japanese and two Negroes.

After what sounded like considerable loud and excited shouting, Jim Eng stormed back in and resumed his task at the register though with hands shaking.

When he had calmed down a little, someone inquired: "What's the trouble?"

"No trouble," he said in a high-pitched voice which he was endeavoring to keep steady. "That crazy Jap boy Floyd tried to get in with two niggers. That's the second time he tried that. What's the matter with him?"

A Japanese beside Kenji shouted out sneeringly: "Them ignorant cotton pickers make me sick. You let one in and before you know it, the place will be black as

night."

"Sure," said Jim Eng, "sure. I got no use for them. Nothing but trouble they make and I run a clean place."

"Hail Columbia," said a small, drunken voice.

"Oh, you Japs and Chinks, I love you all," rasped out a brash redhead who looked as if she had come directly from one of the burlesque houses without changing her make-up. She struggled to her feet, obviously intending to launch into further oratory.

Her escort, a pale, lanky Japanese screamed "Shut up!" and, at the same time, pulled viciously at her arm, causing her to tumble comically into the chair.

Everyone laughed, or so it seemed, and quiet and decency and cleanliness and honesty returned to the Club Oriental.

Leaving his drink unfinished, Kenji left the club without returning any of the farewells which were directed at him.

He drove aimlessly, torturing himself repeatedly with the question which plagued his mind and confused it to the point of madness. Was there no answer to the bigotry and meanness and smallness and ugliness of people? One hears the voice of the Negro or Japanese or Chinese or Jew, a clear and bell-like intonation of the common struggle for recognition as a complete human being and there is a sense of unity and purpose which inspires one to hope and optimism. One encounters obstacles, but the wedge of the persecuted is not without patience and intelligence and humility, and the opposition weakens and wavers and disperses. And the one who is the Negro or Japanese or Chinese or Jew is further fortified and gladdened with the knowledge that the democracy is a democracy in fact for all of them. One has hope, for he has reason to hope, and the quest for completeness seems to be a thing near at hand, and then . . .

the woman with the dark hair and large nose who has barely learned to speak English makes a big show of vacating her bus seat when a Negro occupies the other half. She stamps indignantly down the aisle, hastening away from the contamination which is only in her contaminated mind. The Negro stares silently out of the window, a proud calmness on his face, which hides the boiling fury that is capable of murder.

and then . . .

a sweet-looking Chinese girl is at a high-school prom with a white boy. She has risen in the world, or so she thinks, for it is evident in her expression and manner. She does not entirely ignore the other Chinese and Japanese at the dance, which would at least be honest, but worse, she flaunts her newly found status in their faces with haughty smiles and overly polite phrases.

and then . . .

there is the small Italian restaurant underneath a pool parlor, where the spaghetti and chicken is hard to beat. The Japanese, who feels he is better than the Chinese because his parents made him so, comes into the restaurant with a Jewish companion, who is a good Jew and young and American and not like the kike bastards from the countries from which they've been kicked out, and waits patiently for the waiter. None of the waiters come, although the place is quite empty and two of them are talking not ten feet away. All his efforts to attract them failing, he stalks toward them. The two, who are supposed to wait on the tables but do not, scurry into the kitchen. In a moment they return with the cook, who is also the owner, and he tells the Japanese that the place is not for Japs and to get out and go back to Tokyo.

and then . . .

the Negro who was always being mistaken for a white man becomes a white man and he becomes hated by the

Negroes with whom he once hated on the same side. And the young Japanese hates the not-so-young Japanese who is more Japanese than himself, and the not-so-young, in turn, hates the old Japanese who is all Japanese and, therefore, even more Japanese than he . . .

And Kenji thought about these things and tried to organize them in his mind so that the pattern could be seen and studied and the answers deduced therefrom. And there was no answer because there was no pattern and all he could feel was that the world was full of hatred. And he drove on and on and it was almost two o'clock when he parked in front of the grocery store.

The street was quiet, deathly so after he had cut the ignition. Down a block or so, he saw the floodlighted sign painted on the side of a large brick building. It said: "444 Rooms. Clean. Running Water. Reasonable Rates." He had been in there once a long time ago and he knew that it was just a big flophouse full of drunks and vagrant souls. Only a few tiny squares of yellowish light punctuated the softly shimmering rows of window-panes. Still, the grocery store was brightly lit.

Wondering why, he slid out of the car and peered through the upper half of the door, which was of glass. He was immediately impressed with the neatness of the shelves and the cleanness of the paint on the walls and woodwork. Inevitably, he saw Ichiro's mother and it gave him an odd sensation as he watched her methodically empty a case of evaporated milk and line the cans with painful precision on the shelf. He tried the door and found it locked and decided not to disturb her until she finished the case. It was a long wait, for she grasped only a single can with both hands each time she stooped to reach into the box. Finally, she finished and stood as if examining her handiwork.

Kenji rapped briskly on the door but she took no

notice. Instead, she reached out suddenly with her arms and swept the cans to the floor. Then she just stood with arms hanging limply at her sides, a small girl of a woman who might have been pouting from the way her head drooped and her back humped.

So intent was he upon watching her that he jumped when the door opened. It was Ichiro, dressed only in a pair of slacks.

"You're early," he said, blinking his eyes sleepily.

"Yes. Is it okay?"

"Sure. Be ready in a minute. Can't get any sleep anyway." He shut the door without asking Kenji inside and disappeared into the back.

Looking back to where the woman had been, he was astonished not to see her. He searched about and eventually spied her on hands and knees retrieving a can which had rolled under one of the display islands. He followed her as she crawled around in pursuit of more cans, which she was now packing back into the case. Ichiro came out with a suitcase and went directly to the car.

Kenji looked once more before driving off and noticed that she, having gathered all the cans, was once more lining them on the same shelf.

"We'll make good time driving at night. Won't be so many cars on the road." Out of the corner of his eye he watched Ichiro light a cigarette.

"Snapped," he said harshly.

"What?"

"Snapped. Flipped. Messed up her gears." Drawing deeply on the cigarette, he exhaled a stream of smoke noisily. He twisted about on the seat as if in great anguish.

"Is it all right for you to be going?"

"Sure, sure, nothing I can do. It's been coming for a long time."

"You knew?"

Ichiro rolled down the window and flung the lighted butt into the wind. As it whisked back, spraying specks of red into the dark, he craned his neck to watch it until it disappeared from sight. "Something had to happen," he said, cranking the window shut. "Still, I guess you could say she's been crazy a long time."

"How long?"

"I don't know. Maybe ever since the day she was born." He turned abruptly to face Kenji and said appealingly: "Tell me, what's your father like?"

"My dad is one swell guy. We get along."

"Why?"

"I don't know why. We just do."

Ichiro laughed.

"What's funny?"

"Things, everything's funny because nothing makes sense. There was an Italian fellow in prison I used to talk to. Sometimes I'd confide in him because he once wanted to be a priest and so he was the kind of guy you could talk to. He got sent up for taking money from old ladies. You can see what I mean. I used to tell him about how tough it was for kids of immigrants because parents and kids were so different and they never really got to know each other. He knew what I meant because his folks were born in Italy and raised there. And he used to tell me not to worry because there would come a time when I'd feel as if I really knew my folks. He said the time would come when I grew up. Just how or when was hard to say because it's different with everyone. With him, it was when he was thirty-five and went home on parole after four years in prison. Then it happened. He sat at the kitchen table like he'd been doing all his life and he looked at his mother and then at his father and he no longer had the urge to eat and run. He wanted to talk to them and they talked all through

that night and he was so happy he cried."

Slowing down a little, Kenji pointed through the windshield. "That road goes to Emi's place. Go see her when you get a chance."

Ichiro didn't answer, but he seemed to be studying the landmarks. "It won't ever happen to me," he said.

"What won't happen?"

"The thing that happened to the Italian."

"You never can tell."

"She's really crazy now. You saw her with those milk cans. Ever since eight o'clock tonight. Puts them on the shelf, knocks them down, and puts them back up again. What's she trying to prove?"

"Aren't you worried?"

"No. I've been more worried about you."

After that, they didn't talk very much. Some eighty miles out of Seattle, they stopped for coffee and sandwiches at the roadside café and then Ichiro took over the wheel. There were few cars on the road and he drove swiftly, not bothering to slow down from sixty-five or seventy to twenty-five or thirty as specified on the signs leading into small towns where nothing was open or no one was up at about five o'clock in the morning. As the needle of the speedometer hovered just under seventy for almost an hour without any letdown except for forced caution at curves, monotony slowly set in and it began to feel as if all that separated them from Portland was an interminable stretch of asphalt and concrete cutting through the darkness. Occasionally, Ichiro would feel his foot easing down even harder on the accelerator pedal, but he restrained himself from tempting danger. Rounding a curve and shooting down a long hill, he saw a bunch of houses sitting darkly and quietly at the bottom in the filmy haze of earliest morning. The trees and foliage along

the highway thinned out visibly as the car sped closer to the village and, as always, the signs began to appear. "Approaching Midvale, Lower Speed to 40. Speed Laws Strictly Enforced." "You Are Now Entering Midvale. Population 367." "20 MPH. Street Patrolled." He had almost traversed the eight or ten blocks which comprised the village and was looking for the sign which would tell him that he was leaving Midvale and thank you for observing the law and come back again, when he became aware of the siren building up to an awful scream in the night.

"Damn," he uttered, "lousy bastards."

"Slow down," said Kenji, suddenly coming alive. He moved to the middle of the seat. "When he pulls up ahead, switch places."

The plain, black Ford sedan with the blinking red light on its roof passed and cut in ahead of them. Just before they came to a halt, Ichiro rose and let Kenji slide in behind him.

They saw the big, uniformed cop get out of the Ford and lumber toward them. Pointing a long flashlight into the car, he played it mercilessly on their faces. "Going pretty fast," he said.

They didn't answer, knowing that whatever they said would be wrongly construed.

"What were you doing?" the cop demanded.

"Forty-five, maybe fifty," said Kenji, blinking into the light.

"Seventy," said the cop. "You were doing seventy." He walked around the car and got in beside Ichiro. "Drive back through town."

Kenji made a U-turn and drove slowly to the sign which said "20 MPH. Street Patrolled."

"You Japs can read, can't you?"

"Sure," said Kenji.

"Read what it says there," he ordered as he shined

his light on the sign.

"Twenty M-P-H. Street Patrolled," read Kenji in a flat, low voice.

Then they drove back to where the Ford was parked.

Even sitting down, the cop towered over them, his broad, heavy features set into an uncompromising grimace. "Well?" he said.

"We're guilty. Put us in jail," answered Kenji. "We're in no hurry."

The cop laughed. "Funny. You got a sense of humor." He reared back and, when he settled down, his manner was obviously more friendly. "Tell you what. Next court won't be until the day after tomorrow. Now, you don't want to come all the way back here and get fined fifty bucks. That's what it's going to be, you know. You haven't got a chance."

"No, I guess we haven't." Kenji was not going to accept the cordiality of the cop.

"You might just happen to go over to my car and accidentally drop ten bucks on the seat. Simple?"

"We haven't got ten bucks between us."

"Five? I'm not hard to please." He was grinning openly now.

"Give me the ticket. I'll show up for court." There was no mistaking the enmity in his voice.

"All right, smart guy, let's have your license." The cop pulled out his pad furiously and began scribbling out a ticket.

Hurtling over the road again, with Kenji driving intently as if trying to flee as quickly as possible from the infuriating incident, Ichiro picked up the ticket and studied it under the illumination from the dash. "Son of a bitch," he groaned, "he's got us down for eighty, drunk driving, and attempting to bribe."

Before he could say more of what was seething through his mind, Kenji grabbed the piece of paper out

of his hand and, crumpling it hatefully, flung it out of the window.

Not until they got into Portland two hours later and were having breakfast did they feel the necessity to talk. Ichiro was watching an individual in overalls, with a lunch box under one arm, pounding determinedly on a pinball machine.

"What will you do?" he asked Ichiro.

Waiting until the waitress had set their plates down, Ichiro replied: "I'm not sure. I'll be all right."

"When you get ready to go, take the car."

Sensing something in the way Kenji had spoken, Ichiro looked up uncomfortably. "I'll wait for you. I might even look for a job down here."

"Fine. You ought to do something."

"When will you know about the leg?"

"A day or two."

"What do you think?"

"I'm worried. I get a feeling that this is it."

Shocked for a moment by the implication of his friend's words, Ichiro fiddled uneasily with his fork. When he spoke it was with too much eagerness. "That's no way to talk," he said confidently, but feeling inside his own terror. "They'll fix you up. I know they will. Hell, in a few days, we'll go back to Seattle together."

"Just before I left last night, I told my pop about it. I told him it was different this time. I told him I was scared. I've never lied to him."

"But you can be wrong. You've got to be wrong. A fellow just doesn't say this is it, I'm going to die. Things never turn out the way you think. You're going to be okay."

"Sure, maybe I will. Maybe I am wrong," he said, but, in the way he said it, he might just as well have said this is one time when I know that, no matter how

much I wish I were wrong, I don't think I am.

The waitress came back with a silex pot and poured coffee into their cups. The overalled man at the pinball machine sighted his bus coming down the street and, shooting three balls in quick succession, dashed out of the café.

Ichiro buttered a half-slice of toast and chewed off a piece almost reluctantly. When they had finished he picked up the bill for a dollar-eighty and noticed that Kenji left a half dollar on the table.

Driving through town to the hospital, they ran into the morning traffic and it was nearly nine o'clock or almost an hour after leaving the café when they reached their destination. It was a big, new hospital with plenty of glass and neat, green lawns on all sides.

They walked up the steps together and halted in front of the doorway. Kenji was smiling.

Ichiro gazed at him wonderingly. "You seem to be all right."

"I was thinking about that cop. I bet he can't wait to see me in court and get the book thrown at me. He'll have to come a long ways to catch up with this Jap." He stuck out his hand stiffly.

Grabbing it but not shaking, Ichiro managed with some distinctness: "I'll be in to see you."

"Don't wait too long." Avoiding the revolving door, he stepped to the side and entered the hospital through a swinging glass door.

ALONE AND FEELING very much his aloneness, Ichiro drove the Oldsmobile back into the city proper and found a room in a small, clean hotel where the rates seemed reasonable. Having picked up a newspaper in the lobby, he turned to the classified section and studied the job ads. Most of them were for skilled or technical help, and only after considerable searching was he finally able to encircle with pencil three jobs which he felt he might be able to investigate with some degree of hope. Putting the paper aside, he washed, shaved, and put on a clean shirt.

I mustn't hesitate, he told himself. If I don't start right now and make myself look for work, I'll lose my nerve. There's no one to help me or give me courage now. All I know is that I've just got to find work.

With the folded paper under his arm, he walked the six blocks to the hotel which was advertising for porters. It was a big hotel with a fancy marquee that extended out to the street and, as he walked past it, he noticed a doorman stationed at the entrance. He went down to the end of the block and approached the hotel once more. He paused to light a cigarette. Then, when he saw the doorman watching, he started toward him.

"If it's a job you want, son, take the employee's entrance in the alley," said the doorman before he could speak.

He muttered his thanks a bit unsteadily and proceeded around and through the alley. There was a sign over the door for which he was looking, and he went

through it and followed other signs down the corridor to the employment office. Inside, two men and a woman, obviously other job seekers, sat at a long table filling out forms. A white-haired man in a dark suit, sitting behind a desk, looked at him and pointed to the wall. On it was another sign, a large one, instructing applicants to fill out one of the forms stacked on the long table, with pen and ink. He sat opposite the woman and studied the questions on the form. With some relief, he noted that there was nothing on the front that he couldn't adequately answer. As he turned it over, he saw the questions he couldn't answer. How was he to account for the past two years of the five for which they wanted such information as name of employer and work experience? What was he to put down as an alternative for military duty? There was no lie big enough to cover the enormity of his mistake. He put the form back on the stack and left without satisfying the questioning look on the face of the white-haired, dark-suited employment manager, because there really was nothing to be said.

Over a cup of coffee at a lunch counter, he examined the other two ads which he had selected for investigation. One was for a draftsman in a small, growing engineering office and the other for a helper in a bakery, the name of which he recognized as being among the larger ones. He figured that the bakery would give him a form to fill out just as the hotel had. As for the engineering office, if it wasn't a form, there would be questions. No matter how much or how long he thought about it, it seemed hopeless. Still, he could not stop. He had to keep searching until he found work. Somewhere, there was someone who would hire him without probing too deeply into his past. Wherever that someone was, it was essential that he find him.

Before further thought could reduce his determina-

tion to bitterness or despair or cowardice or utter discouragement, he boarded a trolley for fear that, if he took the time to walk back to the car, he would find a reason to postpone his efforts. The trolley, a trackless affair which drew its motive power from overhead wires, surged smoothly through the late morning traffic with its handful of riders.

It was a short ride to the new, brick structure which had recently been constructed in an area, once residential, but now giving way to the demands of a growing city. Low, flat, modern clinics and store buildings intermingled with rambling, ugly apartment houses of wood and dirt-ridden brick.

Striding up a path which curved between newly installed landscaping, Ichiro entered the offices of Carrick and Sons. A middle-aged woman was beating furiously upon a typewriter.

He waited until she finished the page and flipped it out expertly. "Mam, I . . ."

"Yes?" She looked up, meanwhile working a new sheet into the machine.

"I'm looking for a job. The one in the paper. I came about the ad."

"Oh, of course." Making final adjustments, she typed a couple of lines before she rose and peeked into an inner office. "Mr. Carrick seems to be out just now. He'll be back shortly. Sit down." That said, she resumed her typing.

He spotted some magazines on a table and started to leaf through a not-too-old issue of *Look*. He saw the pictures and read the words and turned the pages methodically without digesting any of it.

A muffled pounding resounded distantly through the building and he glanced at the woman, who met his gaze and smiled sheepishly. He returned to the flipping of the pages, wondering why she had smiled in that

funny way, and she bent her head over the typewriter as soon as the pounding stopped and went back to work.

When the pounding noise came again, she muttered impatiently under her breath and went out of the room.

She was gone several minutes, long enough for him to get through the magazine. He was hunting through the pile of magazines in search of another when she stuck her head into the room and beckoned him to follow.

There was a big office beyond the door with a pile of rolled-up blueprints on a corner table and big photographs of buildings on the walls. They went through that and farther into the back, past a small kitchen and a utility room and, finally, came to stop by a stairway leading down into the basement.

"I told Mr. Carrick you were here. He's down there," the woman said, slightly exasperated.

As he started down, the same pounding began, only it was clearer now and he thought it sounded like a hammer being struck against a metal object of some kind. The object turned out to be what looked like a small hand-tractor with a dozer blade in front, and a small man with unkempt gray hair was whacking away at it with a claw hammer.

"Mr. Carrick?" It was no use. There was too much noise, so he waited until the man threw the hammer down in disgust and straightened up with a groan.

"Cockeyed," the man said, rubbing both his hands vigorously over the top of his buttocks. "I guess I'll have to take her apart and do it over right." He smiled graciously. "Doesn't pay to be impatient, but seems I'll never learn. That there blade isn't quite level and I thought I could force her. I learned. Yup, I sure did. How does she look to you?"

"What is it?"

Mr. Carrick laughed, naturally and loudly, his small, round stomach shaking convulsively. "I'm Carrick and you're . . .?" He extended a soiled hand.

"Yamada, sir. Ichiro Yamada."

"Know anything about snowplows?"

"No, sir."

"Name's Yamada, is it?" The man pronounced the name easily.

"Yes, sir."

"*Nihongo wakarimasu ka?*"

"Not too well."

"How did I say that?"

"You're pretty good. You speak Japanese?"

"No. I used to have some very good Japanese friends. They taught me a little. You know the Tanakas?"

He shook his head. "Probably not the ones you mean. It's a pretty common name."

"They used to rent from me. Fine people. Best tenants I ever had. Shame about the evacuation. You too, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"The Tanakas didn't come back. Settled out East someplace. Well, can't say as I blame them. What brought you back?"

"Folks came back."

"Of course. Portland's changed, hasn't it?"

"I'm from Seattle."

"That so?" He leaned over the snowplow and tinkered with the bolts holding the blade in place.

Thinking that spring was not far away, Ichiro ventured to ask: "Does it snow that much down here?"

"How much is that?"

"Enough for a plow."

"No, it doesn't. I just felt I wanted to make one."

"Oh."

Adjusting a crescent wrench to fit the bolts, he grunted them loose and kicked the blade off. "Let's have some coffee." He rinsed off his hands at the sink and led the way up the stairs to the kitchen, where he added water to an old pot of coffee and turned on the burner.

"The Tanakas were fine people," he said, sitting down on a stool. In spite of his protruding belly and gray hair, he seemed a strong and energetic man. As he talked, his face had a way of displaying great feeling and exuberance. "The government made a big mistake when they shoved you people around. There was no reason for it. A big black mark in the annals of American history. I mean that. I've always been a big-mouthed, loud-talking, back-slapping American but, when that happened, I lost a little of my wind. I don't feel as proud as I used to, but, if the mistake has been made, maybe we've learned something from it. Let's hope so. We can still be the best damn nation in the world. I'm sorry things worked out the way they did."

It was an apology, a sincere apology from a man who had money and position and respectability, made to the Japanese who had been wronged. But it was not an apology to Ichiro and he did not know how to answer this man who might have been a friend and employer, a man who made a snowplow in a place where one had no need for a snowplow because he simply wanted one.

Mr. Carrick set cups on the table and poured the coffee, which was hot but weak. "When do you want to start?" he asked.

The question caught him unprepared. Was that all there was to it? Were there to be no questions? No inquiry about qualifications or salary or experience? He fumbled with his cup and spilled some coffee on the table.

"It pays two-sixty a month. Three hundred after a

year."

"I've had two years of college engineering," he said, trying frantically to adjust himself to the unexpected turn of events.

"Of course. The ad was clear enough. You wouldn't have followed it up unless you thought you could qualify and, if you did, we'll soon find out. Don't worry. You'll work out. I got a feeling." He pursed his lips gingerly and sipped his coffee.

All he had to say was "I'll take it," and the matter would be settled. It was a stroke of good fortune such as he would never have expected. The pay was good, the employer was surely not to be equaled, and the work would be exactly what he wanted.

He looked at Mr. Carrick and said: "I'd like to think about it."

Was it disbelief or surprise that clouded the face of the man who, in his heartfelt desire to atone for the error of a big country which hadn't been quite big enough, had matter-of-factly said two-sixty a month and three hundred after a year when two hundred a month was what he had in mind when he composed the ad since a lot of draftsmen were getting less but because the one who came for the job was a Japanese and it made a difference to him? "Certainly, Ichiro. Take all the time you need."

And when he said that, Ichiro knew that the job did not belong to him, but to another Japanese who was equally as American as this man who was attempting in a small way to rectify the wrong he felt to be his own because he was a part of the country which, somehow, had erred in a moment of panic.

"I'm not a veteran," he said.

Mr. Carrick creased his brow, not understanding what he meant.

"Thanks for the coffee. I'm sorry I bothered you."

He pushed himself back off the stool.

"Wait." His face thoughtfully grave, Mr. Carrick absently drew a clean handkerchief from his trousers pocket and ran it over the coffee which Ichiro had spilled. He straightened up quickly, saying simultaneously: "It's something I've said. God knows I wouldn't intentionally do anything to hurt you or anyone. I'm sorry. Can we try again, please?"

"You've no apology to make, sir. You've been very good. I want the job. The pay is tops. I might say I need the job, but it's not for me. You see, I'm not a veteran."

"Hell, son. What's that got to do with it? Did I ask you? Why do you keep saying that?"

How was he to explain? Surely he couldn't leave now without some sort of explanation. The man had it coming to him if anyone ever did. He was, above all, an honest and sincere man and he deserved an honest reply.

"Mr. Carrick, I'm not a veteran because I spent two years in jail for refusing the draft."

The man did not react with surprise or anger or incredulity. His shoulders sagged a bit and he suddenly seemed a very old man whose life's dream had been to own a snowplow and, when he had finally secured one, it was out of kilter. "I am sorry, Ichiro," he said, "sorry for you and for the causes behind the reasons which made you do what you did. It wasn't your fault, really. You know that, don't you?"

"I don't know, sir. I just don't know. I just know I did it."

"You mustn't blame yourself."

"I haven't much choice. Sometimes I think my mother is to blame. Sometimes I think it's bigger than her, more than her refusal to understand that I'm not like her. It didn't make sense. Not at all. First they jerked us off the Coast and put us in camps to prove to

us that we weren't American enough to be trusted. Then they wanted to draft us into the army. I was bitter—mad and bitter. Still, a lot of them went in, and I didn't. You figure it out. Thanks again, sir."

He was in the front room and almost past the woman when Mr. Carrick caught up with him.

"Miss Henry," he said to the woman at the typewriter, and there was something about his manner that was calm and reassuring, "this is Mr. Yamada. He's considering the drafting job."

She nodded, smiling pleasantly. "You'll like it here," she said. "It's crazy, but you'll like it."

He walked with Ichiro to the door and drew it open. "Let me know when you decide."

They shook hands and Ichiro took the bus back to the hotel. He had every reason to be enormously elated and, yet, his thoughts were solemn to the point of brooding. Then, 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. And in this moment when he thought of Mr. Carrick, the engineer with a yen for a snowplow that would probably never get used, and of what he had said, and, still more, of what he offered to do, he glimpsed the real nature of the country against which he had almost fully turned his back, and saw that

its mistake was no less unforgivable than his own.

He blew a stream of smoke into the shaft of sunlight that slanted through the window and watched it lazily curl upward along the brightened path. Stepping to the window, he looked down for a moment upon a parking lot with its multi-colored rows of automobile hoods and tops. And beyond was the city, streets and buildings and vehicles and people for as far as the eye could reach.

Then he drew the shade and found himself alone in the darkness, feeling very tired and sleepy because he had been a long time without rest. It was all he could do to remove his clothes before he fell on the bed and let himself succumb to the weariness which was making him dizzy and clumsy.

He slept soundly, hardly stirring until he awoke in the quiet which was the quiet of the night, disturbed only by the infrequent hum of an automobile in the streets below. As the drowsiness faded reluctantly, he waited for the sense of calm elation which he rather expected. It did not come. He found that his thoughts were of his family. They were not to be ignored, to be cast out of mind and life and rendered eternally nothing. It was well that Kenji wished him to take the Oldsmobile back to Seattle. A man does not start totally anew because he is already old by virtue of having lived and laughed and cried for twenty or thirty or fifty years and there is no way to destroy them without destroying life itself. That he understood. He also understood that the past had been shared with a mother and 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 of 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. Mr. Carrick had shown him that there was a chance and, for that, he would be ever grateful.

Crawling out of the bed, he switched on the light and started to search through the drawers of the dresser. In the third one he found a Gideon Bible, a drinking glass in a cellophane bag, and two picture postcards. Lacking a desk, he stood at the dresser and penned a few lines to Mr. Carrick informing him that, grateful as he was, he found it necessary to turn down the job. He paused with pen in hand, wanting to add words which would adequately express the warmth and depth of gratitude he felt. What could he say to this man whom he had met but once and probably would never see again? What words would transmit the bigness of his feelings to match the bigness of the heart of this American who, in the manner of his living, was continually nursing and worrying the infant America into the greatness of its inheritance? Knowing, finally, that the unsaid would be understood, he merely affixed his signature to the postcard and dressed so that he could go out to mail it and get something to eat.

Outside, he walked along the almost deserted streets. It was only a little after ten o'clock but there were few pedestrians and traffic was extremely light. He came to a corner with a mailbox and paused to drop the card. Lifting his eyes upward along the lamppost, he saw that he was on Burnside Street. In a small way, Burnside was to Portland what Jackson Street was to Seattle or, at least, he remembered that it used to be so before the war when the Japanese did little traveling and Portland seemed a long way off instead of just two hundred miles and the fellows who had been to Portland used to rave about the waitresses they had in the café on Burnside. He could almost hear them: "Burnside Café. Remember that. Boy, what sweet babes! Nothing like them in

Seattle. Sharp. Sharp. Sharp."

He ambled up the walk past a tavern, a drugstore, a café, a vacant store space, a cigar stand, a laundromat, a secondhand store, another tavern, and there it was. Just as they said it would be, Burnside Café in huge, shameless letters plastered across two big windows with the door in between.

A young fellow in a white apron with one leg propped up on the inside ledge smoked his cigarette and looked out on the world, waiting for business to walk in. When he saw Ichiro, his eyes widened perceptibly. He followed the stranger through the door and said familiarly: "Hi."

Ichiro nodded and walked to the rear end of the counter where a middle-aged woman was standing on a milk box and pouring hot water into the top of a large coffee urn.

The young fellow pursued him from the other side of the counter and greeted him with a too-friendly grin: "Hungry, I bet." He plucked a menu wedged between the napkin holder and sugar dispenser and held it forth.

"Ham and eggs. Coffee now," he said, ignoring the menu.

"Turn the eggs over?"

"No."

"Ma, ham and eggs sunny side up." He got the coffee himself and set it in front of Ichiro. He didn't go away.

Thick as flies, thought Ichiro to himself with disgust. A Jap can spot another Jap a mile away. Pouring the sugar, he solemnly regarded the still-grinning face of the waiter and saw the clean white shirt with the collar open and the bronze discharge pin obtrusively displayed where the ribbons might have been if the fellow had been wearing a uniform.

"You're Japanese, huh? Where you from?"

He could have said yes and they would have been friends. The Chinese were like that too, only more so. He had heard how a Chinese from China by the name of Eng could go to Jacksonville, Florida, or any other place, and look up another Chinese family by the same name of Eng and be taken in like one of the family with no questions asked. There was nothing wrong with it. On the contrary, it was a fine thing in some ways. Still, how much finer it would be if Smith would do the same for Eng and Sato would do the same for Wotynski and Laverghetti would do likewise for whoever happened by. Eng for Eng, Jap for Jap, Pole for Pole, and like for like meant classes and distinctions and hatred and prejudice and wars and misery, and that wasn't what Mr. Carrick would want at all, and he was on the right track.

"I've got two Purple Hearts and five Battle Stars," Ichiro said. "What does that make me?"

The young Japanese with the clean white shirt and the ruptured duck to prove he wasn't Japanese flinched, then flushed and stammered: "Yeah—you know what I meant—that is, I didn't mean what you think. Hell, I'm a vet, too . . ."

"I'm glad you told me."

"Jeezuz, all I said was are you Japanese. Is that wrong?"

"Does it matter?"

"No, of course not."

"Why'd you ask?"

"Just to be asking. Make conversation and so on. You know."

"I don't. My name happens to be Wong. I'm Chinese."

Frustrated and panicky, the waiter leaned forward earnestly and blurted out: "Good. It makes no difference to me what you are. I like Chinese."

"Any reason why you shouldn't?"

"I didn't say that. I didn't mean that. I was just trying to . . ." He did a harried right face and fled back toward the window grumbling: "Crissake, crissake. . ."

A moment later, the woman emerged from the kitchen with his plate and inquired in Japanese if he would like some toast and jam. She did it very naturally, seeing that he was obviously Japanese and gracefully using the tongue which came more easily to her lips.

He said that would be fine and noticed that the son was glaring out of the window at a world which probably seemed less friendly and more complicated than it had been a few minutes previously. The woman brought the toast and jam and left him alone, and he cleaned the plate swiftly. He would have liked another cup of coffee but the greater need was to get out and away from the place and the young Japanese who had to wear a discharge button on his shirt to prove to everyone who came in that he was a top-flight American. Having the proper change in his pocket, he laid it and the slip on the little rubber mat by the cash register and hurried out without seeing the relief-mixed-with-shame look on the waiter's face.

From the café he walked the few steps to the tavern next door and ordered a double shot of whisky with a beer chaser. He downed both, standing up, by the time the bartender came back with his change, and then he was out on the street once more. On top of the ham and eggs and toast with jam, the liquor didn't hit him hard, but he felt woozy by the time he got back to the hotel. He had to wait in the elevator for a while because the old fellow who ran it also watched the desk and was presently on the telephone.

On the way up, the old man regarded his slightly flushed face and smiled knowingly. "Want a girl?" he asked.

"I want six," he said, hating the man.

"All at one time?" the old man questioned unbelievably.

"The sixth floor, pop." The hotness in his face was hotter still with the anger inside of him.

"Sure," he said, bringing the elevator to an abrupt halt, "that's good. I thought you meant you wanted six of them. That is good."

The old man was chuckling as Ichiro stepped out of the elevator and headed toward his room.

"Filthy-minded old bastard," he muttered viciously under his breath. No wonder the world's such a rotten place, rotten and filthy and cheap and smelly. Where is that place 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? And what about the poor niggers on Jackson Street who can't find anything better to do than spit on the sidewalk and show me the way to Tokyo? They're on the outside looking in, just like that kid and just like me and just like everybody else I've ever seen or known. 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. That makes sense. I've got the answer all figured out, simple and neat and sensible.

And then he thought about Kenji in the hospital and of Emi in bed with a stranger who reminded her of her husband and of his mother waiting for the ship from Japan, and there was no more answer. If he were in the tavern, he would drink another double with a beer for a chaser and another and still another but he wasn't in the tavern because he didn't have the courage to step out of his room and be seen by people who would know him for what he was. There was nothing for him to do but roll over and try to sleep. Somewhere, sometime, he had even forgotten how to cry.

In the morning he checked out of the hotel and drove to the hospital. Visiting hours were plainly indicated on a sign at the entrance as being in the afternoons and evenings. Feeling he had nothing to lose by trying, he walked in and stood by the registration desk until the girl working the switchboard got a chance to help him.

"What can I do for you?" she asked sweetly enough and then, prodded into action by the buzzing of the board, pulled and inserted a number of brass plugs which were attached to extendible wire cords. Tiny lights bristled actively as if to give evidence to the urgency of the calls being carried by the board.

"I've got a friend here. I'd like to find out what room he's in."

"Sure. His name?"

"Kanno."

"Kanno what?"

"Kenji. Kanno is the last name."

"How do you spell it?" She consulted the K's on the cardex.

"K-A-N—"

"Never mind. I've got it." Looking up, she continued: "He's in four-ten but you'll have to come back this afternoon. Visiting hours are posted at the entrance. Sorry."

"I'm on my way out of town. I won't be here this afternoon."

"Hospital rules, sir."

"Sure," he said, noticing the stairway off toward the right, "I understand."

The board buzzed busily and the operator turned her attention to the plugs and cords once more. Ichiro walked to the stairs and started up. Between the second and third floors he encountered two nurses coming down. When they saw him they cut short their chattering and one of them seemed on the point of questioning him. Quickening his pace, he rushed past them purposefully and was relieved when he heard them resume their talking.

Up on the fourth floor, no one bothered him as he set out to locate Kenji's room. Four-ten wasn't far from the stairway. A screen was placed inside the doorway so that he couldn't look directly in. He went around it and saw the slight figure of his friend up on the high bed with the handle of the crank poking out at the foot.

"Ken," he said in almost a whisper though he hadn't deliberately intended to speak so.

"Ichiro?" His head lay on the pillow with its top toward the door and Ichiro noted with a vague sense of alarm that his hair was beginning to thin.

He waited for Kenji to face him and was disappointed when he did not move. "How's it been with you?"

"Fine. Sit down." He kept looking toward the window.

Ichiro walked past the bed, noticing where the sheet fell over the stump beneath. It seemed to be frighteningly close to the torso. His own legs felt stiff and awkward as he approached the chair and settled into it.

Kenji was looking at him, a smile, weak yet warm, on his mouth.

"How's it going?" he asked, and he hardly heard his own voice, for Kenji had aged a lifetime during the two days they had been apart. Exactly what it was he couldn't say, but it was all there, the fear, the pain, the madness, and the exhaustion of mind and body.

"About as I expected, Ichiro. I should have been a doctor."

Kenji had said he was going to die.

"You could be wrong. Have they said so?"

"Not in so many words, but they know it and I know it and they know that I do."

"Why don't they do something?"

"Nothing to be done."

"I shouldn't be here," he said, not knowing why except that it suddenly seemed important to explain.

"They told me to come back this afternoon but I came up anyway. Maybe I shouldn't have. Maybe you're supposed to rest."

"Hell with them," said Kenji. "You're here, stay."

It was quiet in the the hospital. He'd heard someplace a long time ago that visitors were not allowed in the morning in hospitals because that's when all the cleaning and changing of beds and mopping of floors were done. There wasn't a sound to be heard. "Quiet here," he said.

"Good for thinking," said Kenji.

"Sure, I guess it is." He wished Kenji would move, roll his head a little or wiggle his arm, but he lay there

just as he was.

"Go back to Seattle."

"What?"

"Go back. Later on you might want to come to Portland to stay, but go back for now. It'll turn out for the best in the long run. The kind of trouble you've got, you can't run from it. Stick it through. Let them call you names. They don't mean it. What I mean is, they don't know what they're doing. The way I see it, they pick on you because they're vulnerable. They think just because they went and packed a rifle they're different but they aren't and they know it. They're still Japs. You weren't here when they first started to move back to the Coast. There was a great deal of opposition—name-calling, busted windows, dirty words painted on houses. People haven't changed a helluva lot. The guys who make it tough on you probably do so out of a misbegotten idea that maybe you're to blame because the good that they thought they were doing by getting killed and shot up doesn't amount to a pot of beans. They just need a little time to get cut down to their own size. Then they'll be the same as you, a bunch of Japs."

He paused for a long time, just looking and smiling at Ichiro, his face wan and tired. "There were a lot of them pouring into Seattle about the time I got back there. It made me sick. I'd heard about some of them scattering out all over the country. I read about a girl who's doing pretty good in the fashion business in New York and a guy that's principal of a school in Arkansas, and a lot of others in different places making out pretty good. I got to thinking that the Japs were wising up, that they had learned that living in big bunches and talking Jap and feeling Jap and doing Jap was just inviting trouble. But my dad came back. There was really no reason why he should have. I asked him about it once and he gave me some kind of an answer.

Whatever it was, a lot of others did the same thing. I hear there's almost as many in Seattle now as there were before the war. It's a shame, a dirty rotten shame. Pretty soon it'll be just like it was before the war. A bunch of Japs with a fence around them, not the kind you can see, but it'll hurt them just as much. They bitched and hollered when the government put them in camps and put real fences around them, but now they're doing the same damn thing to themselves. They screamed because the government said they were Japs and, when they finally got out, they couldn't wait to rush together and prove that they were."

"They're not alone, Ken. The Jews, the Italians, the Poles, the Armenians, they've all got their communities."

"Sure, but that doesn't make it right. It's wrong. I don't blame the old ones so much. They don't know any better. They don't want any better. It's me I'm talking about and all the rest of the young ones who know and want better."

"You just got through telling me to go back to Seattle."

"I still say it. Go back and stay there until they have enough sense to leave you alone. Then get out. It may take a year or two or even five, but the time will come when they'll be feeling too sorry for themselves to pick on you. After that, head out. Go someplace where there isn't another Jap within a thousand miles. Marry a white girl or a Negro or an Italian or even a Chinese. Anything but a Japanese. After a few generations of that, you've got the thing beat. Am I making sense?"

"It's a fine dream, but you're not the first."

"No," he uttered and it seemed as if he might cry, "it's just a dream, a big balloon. I wonder if there's a Jackson Street wherever it is I'm going to. That would make dying tough."

Ichiro stood and, walking to his friend, placed his hand on the little shoulder and held it firmly.

"I'm going to write to Ralph," said Kenji.

"Ralph?"

"Emi's husband. I'm going to write him about how you and Emi are hitting it off."

"Why? It's not true." He felt the heat of indignation warm around his collar.

"No, it isn't true, but what they're doing to each other is not right. They should be together or split up. If I tell him about you and how you're hot for her, it might make him mad enough to come back."

Understanding what Kenji meant, Ichiro worked up a smile. "Seems like I'm not so useless after all."

"Tell her I've been thinking about her."

"Sure."

"And I'm thinking about you. All the time."

"Sure."

"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. He wasn't the only German I killed, but I remember 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. The living have it tough. It's like a coat rack without pegs, only you think

there are. Hang it up, drop, pick it up, hang it again, drop again . . . Tell my dad I'll miss him like mad."

"I will."

"Crazy talk?"

"No, it makes a lot of sense."

"Goodbye, Ichiro."

His hand slipped off his friend's shoulder and brushed along the white sheet and dropped to his side. The things he wanted to say would not be said. He said "Bye" and no sound came out because the word got caught far down inside his throat and he felt his mouth open and shut against the empty silence. At the door he turned and looked back and, as Kenji had still not moved, he saw again the spot on the head where the hair was thinning out so that the sickly white of the scalp filtered between the strands of black. A few more years and he'll be bald, he thought, and then he started to smile inwardly because there wouldn't be a few more years and as quickly the smile vanished because the towering, choking grief was suddenly upon him.

It was almost seven hours later when Ichiro, nearing the outskirts of Seattle, turned off the highway and drove to Emi's house.

He pressed the doorbell and waited and pressed it again. When no one appeared, he pounded on the door. Thinking, hoping that she must be nearby, he walked around to the back. With a sense of relief, he noted that the shed which served as a garage housed a pre-war Ford that looked fairly new. It probably meant that she hadn't driven to town. He tried the back door without any luck and made his way around to the front once more.

Tired and hungry, he sat on the step and lit a cigarette. It was then that he saw her, walking toward the house from out in the fields about where the man

had been stooped over his labors a few mornings previously. Looking carefully, he saw that he was still there, still stooped over, still working.

Emi covered the ground with long, sure strides. Occasionally she broke into a run, picking her way agilely over the loose dirt and leaping over mounds and the carefully tended rows of vegetables. He stood and waved and got no response, so he waited until she was closer before he raised his arm again. Still she did not wave back. Seeming deliberately to avoid looking at him, she approached the gate. Once there, she jerked her head up, her face alive and expectantly tense.

"Hello, Emi."

"I saw the Oldsmobile. I thought . . ." She didn't hide her disappointment.

He felt embarrassed and unwanted. "I'm sorry," he said quietly.

She grasped the gate, which he had left open, and slammed it fiercely. With chin lowered, she pouted, her face swollen and defiant. Then she came up the walk, moving her legs reluctantly, and dropped on the step.

Unnerved by her reaction, Ichiro fidgeted uneasily, thinking of something to say. At length, he too sat down beside her and remained silent. Without looking at her, he could sense that she was struggling to keep the tears from starting. There was a streak of brown dirt clinging across the toe of her shoe and he restrained the urge to brush it off.

"It's just that I wanted so much for him to come back." She started speaking, almost in a whisper. "It somehow seemed more important for him to come back this time than the other times he went down there. He's not coming back, is he?"

"No, I think not. He told me to tell you that he's thinking about you."

"I'm sorry," she blurted out.

"Sorry?"

"I'm sorry I made you feel bad just now."

"You didn't."

"I did and I'm sorry."

"Sure."

"I'll make you something to eat," she said and before he could refuse, rose and went into the house.

In the kitchen, he watched as she moved from the refrigerator to the sink to the stove, fussing longer than necessary with each little thing that had to be done.

He got the dishes and utensils from the cupboard and set them on the table. "Were you in love with him?" he asked.

She turned and, apparently neither startled nor hurt, softly smiled. "In a way. Not the way I love Ralph. Not the way I might love you, but I loved him—no, he's not gone yet—I love him too much but not enough."

"Any other time I might not understand the way you put that, but I do."

"It doesn't matter. I'm glad if you do, but it really doesn't matter. Love is not something you save and hoard. You're born with it and you spend it when you have to and there's always more because you're a woman and there's always suffering and pain and gentleness and sadness to make it grow."

"He said he was thinking about you."

"You already said that. Besides, it doesn't need to be said." She put the meat and potatoes in his plate and urged him to eat. For herself she poured a cup of coffee and stirred it absent-mindedly without adding cream or sugar.

Hungry as he had thought himself to be, he found himself chewing lengthily on each little mouthful.

"And you?"

He looked at her, not quite understanding the intention of her words.

"What will you do now?"

"I haven't decided," he said honestly. "Strangely enough, I had a wonderful job offer in Portland, but I turned it down."

"Tell me about it."

He did so, dwelling at great length on his admiration for Mr. Carrick and the reasons for his final decision to refuse the job. Somehow, he had expected her to be impatient with what he had done, but when he finished she merely said: "It's good."

"That I turned down the job?"

"No, it's good that you found out things aren't as hopeless as you thought."

"Just like you said."

"I did say that, didn't I?" She looked pleased. "This Mr. Carrick you speak of sounds like the kind of American that Americans always profess themselves to be."

"One in a million," he added.

"Less than that," she said quickly. "If a lot more people were like him, there wouldn't have been an evacuation."

"No, and one might even go farther and say there might not have been a war."

"And no problems for you and me and everybody else."

"Nothing for God to do either," he said, without knowing why and, as soon as he had, he knew that they had just been talking. What it amounted to was that there was a Mr. Carrick in Portland, which did not necessarily mean that there were others like him. The world was pretty much the same except, perhaps, that Emi and he were both sadder.

"Mr. Maeno will give you work, if you wish. I was speaking to him about you just before you came."

Rising, he went to the stove to get the coffeepot and

did not answer until he sat down again. "That would be nice, but I can't. Thanks, anyway."

"Why?"

"It won't do any good. It'll be like hiding. He's Japanese. Probably admires me for what I did, I suppose. Maybe it doesn't make any difference to him what I've done, but it does to me."

"What will you do then?"

"Find a girl that's not Japanese that'll marry me." Seeing the incredulous look in her face, he rapidly explained what Kenji had said to him.

"He didn't really mean it," she replied. "He only meant that things ought to be that way, but I think he knew he was only dreaming."

"He did. It's probably what makes him so unhappy and kind of brooding underneath."

"Is he really going to die?" She looked at him pleadingly, as if beseeching him to say that it was not true.

All he could do was nod his head.

Emi pushed her cup away abruptly, splashing some of the coffee onto the table. Then she cupped her face with her hands and began to sob, scarcely making a sound.

"I have to go now," he said. "I may not come to see you again and, then, I might. I like you a lot already and, in time, I'll surely love you very deeply. That mustn't happen because Ralph will probably come back."

"He won't," she cried, without taking her hands away.

"I think he will. Ken said he was writing to Ralph. He's got something in mind that'll jolt him hard enough to make him see what he's doing. He'll come back. Soon."

He stood beside her a moment, wanting to comfort

her. Slowly, he raised his arms, only to let them drop without touching her. Quickly he brushed his lips against her head and ran out of the house.