

Chapter Five She'll Never See Her Home Again

Even when evacuation day came, Hana Kimura's eyes were dry.

She would not have confessed to anyone how much easier it was to be stoic when she learned that the Endo family would be going to the same assembly center. And the hurry and rush of getting ready made the young Kimuras forget, most of the time, that this was - for no one knew how long - the last day.

The last night Hana spent with Amy, and the girls talked till the small hours. Kaito stayed with Luke Boyd, and Mrs. Kimura with the Albrights. Then, after early breakfast, the Kimuras met at their deserted house, where the car was packed and waiting in the locked garage.

With the house empty and the yard stripped of its choicest foliage and flowers, it was not so hard to say goodbye to home. Still, Hana did run upstairs for a last look through her bedroom window. The palms and pepper trees seemed woven with girlhood dreams. And she did stand and gaze a moment at the chubby heart and the H.K. on the front walk. The cement of the new sidewalk had happened to be still wet, that day ten years ago when the twelve-year-old Sora had come to their house with his father. He had carved the design deep, smiling at her through his thick lashes. The young Kimuras did not know why he did not come to the house again, nor his father. They did not know why Mr. Endo was always too polite, and Father cool and stiff; nor whether their unfriendliness stemmed from that very day.

The hour of departure had been set for eight-thirty, and Corcoran was just getting to work when the Kimuras reached the town hall, where they had been directed to meet. From farms, market gardens, fruit ranches, all around Corcoran, the Japanese had gathered. A line of cars was drawn up at the curb, all but the Endos' big Buick and the Kimuras' Dodge dingy workaday one. The people who were going in buses sat on their bags and suitcases or drooped patiently above them.

It seemed like some strange going-away party, all blurred and distorted by Hana's excitement. She politely thanked Mrs. Albright and the other church women, who were pouring hot coffee and passing puffy sugared doughnuts; but she hardly knew that she was eating and drinking. Still munching doughnuts, she and Amy drifted over to the Endo car and talked to Aoi, wedged into the back seat between her mother and younger sister, and to Sora, behind the wheel.

"Look, Hana," Amy cried, tugging at her arm, "the gang."

Hana hung back, saying, "You come, too, Aoi and Sora. It's kids from school."

Sora shook his head. "It's your crowd, Hana. And Aoi's in too much of a funk. I can't convince her but what we're going to be dumped in a camp and left to starve."

"Oh, Aoi, for goodness' sake! Well, we'll be seeing you." Hana laughed protestingly, but Aoi's face was as white and frightened as it had been on Pearl Harbor Day.

And then Hana forgot Aoi as the dozen boys and girls swarmed around her, and around Kaito. Becky was there, and among the rest were Peter Lucca and Elsa Schonberg, who didn't have to be pulled up by the roots and dropped on new soil whether or not.

Now it was more than ever like a going-away party, with train-letters, boxes of candy, a basket of goodies, a bouton-mere - with everyone talking at once, with girls laughing artificially and boys pushing one another around.

Then the M.P.'s began to load people onto the buses, and a tight, awkward silence seized the group of schoolmates. The evacuees climbed quietly into the waiting vehicles, some with a heavy weariness, some stolidly, some with determined smiles. There was no outcry until one old woman pushed aside the hands helping her aboard, turned wildly toward Corcoran, and uttered a sobbing, gulping cry.

Hana had a single glimpse of the old face, furrowed as deep as a dried peach, the corded throat working convulsively. Then the two hands, like bundles of sticks, came up to hide the naked grief, and the woman's friends lifted her into the bus.

"She thinks she'll never see her home again. Likely she's been coming here to market since she was young," Amy quavered, the tears running.

"Guess the clock's struck, sis," Kaito said loudly, heartily and the young people moved in a mass toward the bus.

Hands thrust out to shake hers - Amy's wet face against her own - boys slapping Kaito's back till he staggered.

The gang breaking down in the middle of "He's a jolly good fellow." Mrs. Albright starting "God be with you till we meet again." Pitching it, too, high. Reverend Albright pitching it, too, low. The church people joining in, waveringly, voices thick with grief.

Just as the buses rumbled into motion and the song ended, a kindgartener leaned out of the window of a bus and piped to his teacher, "See you in the morning, Miss Adams!" just as he had done every day.

At that, all the determined smiles of church women and schoolgirls melted into weeping, and the boys ran alongside the window to wave to Kaito hiding their emotion with pointless jokes: "Don't take any wooden nickels!" "Write once in a while if you haven't too many dates!"

From the Endo seat Sora looked back and waved. His head was high, and his eyes lost themselves behind his thick lashes. He seemed to signal, "Adventure, Hana! Pioneers, remember!"

The caravan gained speed, and Hana screwed around to watch the throng at the town hall until the turn of a corner hid them from sight. Then, she fixed her gaze on Corcoran till they passed its limits and sped out along the highway. Heading the procession, bringing up the rear, weaving through it, keeping back other traffic, were the dusty jeeps, and the young M.P.'s in them

shouting friendly directions, joking with the evacuee children, grinning or looking sympathetically sober. Hana's heart swelled with gratitude toward them.

"Since we've got to go, I'm sort of glad we're going to Fresno," said Hana, trying to lift Kaito's dejection.

Kaito only growled.

"All these years I've wanted to see the races there," Hana went on, vivaciously, "and never dreamed I'd be living there some day. Swankiest race track ever!"

"Oh, dry up," Kaito begged with brotherly courtesy.

The ride was long. Within five hours the entourage slowed up, and Hana, peering out, could see that the buses were turning in at the Fresno Fairgrounds entrance. Sora grinned back at her, flipping a hand in mock awe at the tall, many-windowed facade, the lofty palms, the fountain. They had arrived.

The Kimuras lugged their bags inside and left them on tables where inspectors were opening the luggage. Behind the Endo family they filed past the doctor at the entrance, showing him their throats and their hands and then pushing on along the graveled walk.

"Barracks 15, Apartments A-2 and A-3, that's where we're assigned," said Sora. "What about you folks?"

"Barracks 15, Apartment B-2," Kaito read from the page of instructions that had just been handed to his mother.

Hana felt herself flushing with pleasure. Sora would be their neighbor, no matter how frosty Mother was looking. Sora would be their neighbor, so it didn't matter much that there were only one or two familiar faces among those peering from stable doors and windows to watch the newcomers.

"And here we are," said Sora, striding ahead to throw open the Kimuras' door. "Welcome home!" "Gosh," said Kaito, momentarily forgetting his gloom, "must have been a prince of a horse to rate this. Reckon it was Whirlaway or Seabiscuit?"

"A horse's stall as big as my kitchen!" cried Mrs. Kimura.

"Doesn't smell like your kitchen," said Hana.

The individual exercise yard had been walled up to make another room; an asphalt floor had been put in; the walls had been whitewashed; but the odor remained.

"Smells?" asked Sora from the half door of the next stall. "I can't smell anything. Too used to it, maybe." Grinning, he gestured toward the small hallway between the stalls. "This was where

they forked in the hay. The former inmates just stuck their heads through these half doors and got their grub. Service, hey!”

“You make me hungry,” Hana said. “And we don’t have long to wait. Look: This sheet says, Breakfast six-thirty, dinner eleven-thirty, supper four-thirty. Good grief!”

Kaito said, “At Alcatraz they wake the prisoners even earlier.”

“Surely they said cots and mattresses would be supplied,” Mother said anxiously, looking around the complete emptiness of the twenty-by-ten feet.

“Yes,” said Hana, “and it isn’t going to be so bad. In New York it’s all the style to turn old barns into swanky houses. We’ll be in fashion. But when will they let us have our bags?” she demanded of Sora, as if he should know everything.

“Want to go see if they’re ready?” he asked.

Sora, Kaito, Aoi, and Hana walked back along the streets of stalls and stood watching the M.P.’s opening bundles and bags.

“Gosh,” said Kaito, “can’t they take our word for it that we haven’t any contraband?”

Without speaking, Sora pointed at the cameras, the radios, the one or two knives the M.P.’s had tossed aside.

“Remember the Ogawas, Kaito,” said Hana, adopting Sora’s easy attitude. “Trouble is, they think we’re all tricky, and we think we’re all woolly white lambs. Really, we’re like any other bunch of folks. Lookit! Another camera!”

When they got back to their quarters with their exonerated luggage, they found that three cots had been delivered to the Kimuras. When Mother and Hana had made them up with white sheets and the army blankets, even those cots gave the stalls a feeling of home.

“Almost dinnertime!” Sora called, just as Hana plumped her pillow into place. “And a fellow told me we’d have a plenty long wait, if we weren’t on time.”

A tremendous bang and clatter put a period to his words. “Gong of the Blue Mess,” he added.

The Kimuras and the Endos were soon part of the queue winding toward the mess-hall door. A kitchen boy whanged his battered dishpan a few more times, flourished his stick, and vanished into the kitchen.

“Cowboy style, I take it,” said Sora.

Inside the hall, the Endos and Kimuras were engulfed in warm, heavy food odors and the din of forks, spoons, tins. Presently, they were balancing heaped plates and hunting a place at the tables. As they came to a vacant place, Mrs. Kimura hesitated outside the long backless bench.

Hana giggled. “Turn sidewise,” she instructed, taking her mother’s dishes. “Put one foot over, like this. Now sit astraddle, so, and lift over your other foot. You don’t have to blush so, Mom. Everybody’s doing it. But it would be easier in slacks.”

The scraping of dishes at the end of the hall drowned conversation, but Hana was too engrossed in the endless file of diners to talk. Young people called to one another as they made their way down the crowded aisles between tables, fathers and mothers kept their children under their wings, older Japanese bowed rhythmically to acquaintances or shuffled along blank-faced and silent. Hana looked more than she ate, but Kaito emptied his plate and stood in line for a second helping, coming home an hour after the others, because it had taken forty-five minutes to get to the serving table again.

The afternoon passed. There were letters to write. There were the first inoculations to take. There was the evening meal at half-past four.

For a while after supper the young people walked to and fro before their stalls. Here, withdrawn from the barbed wire which fenced the camp, and with other people walking, talking, laughing around them, the place did not feel abnormal. The difference showed itself when twilight thickened and the searchlights began to flash. Up and down the streets, across roofs, in and out of windows, played the hard white light. It swept across Hana’s and Aoi’s faces as they loitered before the Kimura door. Aoi ducked her head, shutting her eyes and mewling like a drenched kitten, and even Hana felt as if she were drowning in that bright, relentless flood of light.

“This is like prison,” Hana thought desperately. “Like the searchlights wheeling ceaselessly round Alcatraz.”

Even without the lights, that first night would have been wakeful. The legs of the cots had sunk into the soft asphalt so that the beds tilted and wobbled. It was late before the day’s heavy heat began to lift from the Kimura apartment; and in the row of stalls behind it where windows were fewer, babies whimpered and wailed till midnight. The partitions were thin, and Hana could hear Kiku Endo ask for a drink; could hear his mother say that no one had remembered to bring water from the hydrant several doors away. Twice an hour the neighbor on the Kimuras’ right wakened them with a magnificent sneeze; and from the stall that backed up against theirs came another set of coughs, laughs, squeakings of restless cots.

“My grief!” Hana muttered. “I suppose all those other people can hear us breathing, too. Likely they heard me ask Mom what became of my pj’s.’s.”

From the wall behind a chuckling little-boy voice inquired, “Well, what did become of ’em?”

Hana flounced on her cot, making a face of violent protest, and the little boy snickered. Kaito, from the corner which he had curtained with a sheet, made his voice deep and inquired, “What’s-this-what’s-this, young people?”

Hana dozed at length, rousing with a start whenever a searchlight flashed in the window. Toward

morning her slumber deepened into profound sleep, so that when she wakened she pushed hard against the unfamiliar hammocky sag of her cot, refusing to open her eyes, though daylight shone through her lids.

The noise bewildered her: thudding feet, shrieking beds, slamming doors, crying of children. She could hear the clamor of birds, the rattle of palm leaves. She could smell spicy fragrances. Yes, but battling those aromas was the unmistakable edge of horse odor. And on Hana's nose a fly settled and bit viciously. Her eyes popped open and she stared up into the bare rafters, where more flies buzzed and circled. Her gaze flew to the windows, round the board walls. At a pushed-out knothole she caught the glint - the blue glint - of an eye. Jerking the sheet up to her chin, she called indignantly, "Kaito! Look at that knothole!"

Before Kaito could respond, the eye vanished, to the accompaniment of a loud smack and an aggrieved "Ouch! I only wanted to see what our neighbors looked like."

Hana leaped from bed, snatched an envelope out of her suitcase, licked the flap, and whacked it onto the wall so that it hung over the hole. "My grief!" she protested.

So the first day began.