

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet Study Guide

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet by Jamie Ford

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Plot Summary

The following version of the novel was used to create this study guide: Ford, Jamie. *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*. Ballantine Books, January 27, 2009. Kindle.

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet by Jamie Ford tells the story of lost love and the power of prejudice. The novel follows Henry Lee, an American citizen of Chinese ancestry. While growing up in Seattle, Washington, Henry struggles to understand the bad treatment during WWII of American citizens who are Japanese. Henry's father demands that Henry not go near the areas of Seattle known as Chinatown or Japantown. His father's demands only worsen Henry's struggles. However, his father's orders do not keep Henry from befriending Keiko, a Japanese girl who attends the same school as Henry. Years later, after Henry and Keiko are separated by time and circumstances, Henry begins to think about her again. Eventually, they are reunited.

The United States government sent the Japanese to concentration camps during WWII. Before the Japanese left Seattle, they stored their belongings in the Panama Hotel. When the new owner of the hotel announced that she had found these belongings still in that basement, Henry was surprised to recognize a parasol among the things that had been brought upstairs. Henry believed it had belonged to Keiko, the Japanese girl with whom Henry had fallen in love during the war years. His father had interfered with the mail system so that Keiko and Henry did not receive the letters they mailed to one another.

Recently widowed, Henry thinks about his relationship with Keiko and wonders if there could be anything left for them. Among the things Henry finds in the basement while looking for memories of his lost friend is a broken copy of the Oscar Holden record "The Alley Cat Strut." Oscar Holden was a famous jazz musician who had once dedicated a version of that song to Henry and Keiko when they went to hear Henry's friend, Sheldon, play in a jazz club with Oscar Holden.

Henry takes the record to Sheldon, who is near death in a nursing home. Sheldon, who understood how special that song was to both Henry and Keiko, tells Henry to "fix it" (271). At first, Henry believes that Sheldon is talking about the record, but he later learns that Sheldon wants Henry to try to fix the broken relationship between himself and Keiko.

Henry's son Marty and Marty's future wife help Henry find Keiko. She is now a widow in New York City. Keiko welcomes a visit from Henry. As the story closes, Keiko tells Henry that they should think of the good times in their relationship, not the times that were taken from them.



The Panama Hotel (1986) - Keiko (1942)

Summary

In the chapter "The Panama Hotel (1986)," Henry Lee watched as a crowd gathered at the Panama Hotel. The hotel was a symbol of the line between Chinatown and Nihonmachi, Japantown in Seattle. He had met the love of his life there more than forty years ago. Now Henry was widowed, his wife had just died following a long battle with cancer. He and his son were still at odds because Marty thought his mother should have been taken care of in a nursing home while Henry's Chinese upbringing taught him loved ones should be taken care of by family members at home.

Inside the lobby of the hotel, which had been boarded up since 1950, the new owner told those gathered that something had been found in the basement. She opened a Japanese parasol and said it was among the possessions of 37 Japanese families discovered there. It was assumed those families had been persecuted during World War II and had hidden their belongings there when they were sent to internment camps, but they had never returned to reclaim them.

In "Marty Lee (1986)," even though they had not talked much since the funeral, Henry's son, Marty, visited him that night. Marty handed his father a lucky money envelope, telling him that it was a token of his appreciation for his father helping to pay for his college. Inside were Marty's grades. With a 4.0 grade point average, Marty would graduate with highest honors. Henry was proud of his son but when he thought about his own school years he remembered how rejected he had always felt by his peers.

In "I Am Chinese (1942)," Henry and his parents stopped talking because they ordered him to speak to them only in English. They wanted him to get better at speaking English but the demand was an obstacle to their relationship because his parents could barely speak or understand English. Henry was confused because his father wanted him to speak only English, yet Henry's father made him wear a button that stated "I Am Chinese" to school.

Henry was attending Rainier Elementary on scholarship. Rainier was a prestigious, Caucasian school. On the way to school each morning, he stopped to visit Sheldon, a black sax player to whom he gave his lunch to keep the boys at school from beating him up for it. To earn his scholarship, Henry worked in the school's cafeteria with the lunch lady, Ms. Beatty.

In "Flag Duty (1942)," when Henry went to school the following day, he saw that Chaz Preston and Denny Brown were on flag duty. Chaz commented when Henry did not salute the flag as he walked past the flagpole. He jeered at Henry, saying that he had forgotten that the Japanese did not salute the American flag.



In “Keiko (1942),” Ms. Beatty introduced Henry to Keiko, a new scholarship student who would be working in the cafeteria. When Henry began talking to Keiko, he realized she was Japanese. He had never had any Japanese friends before because his father would not allow it. His father was a Chinese nationalist who remembered the way the Japanese had attacked China. Despite his father’s prejudice, Henry smiled at Keiko throughout their work of serving lunch and cleaning up afterward.

Analysis

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet is based on historical facts. The story covers two different periods in Henry Lee’s life. The period is the one that he refers to as the war years. It was during this time that Henry lived in Seattle’s Chinatown, just blocks away from Japantown. More than forty years later Henry lives in the same neighborhood. He has just buried his wife, Ethel, who died of cancer. Six months after the funeral, Henry visits the Panama Hotel where many items belonging to the Japanese imprisoned during World War II have been found by the hotel’s new owner. Henry recognizes a parasol that is brought from the basement. The parasol symbolizes Keiko, the Japanese girl who was Henry’s friend and classmate during the war.

In this section, Henry’s son Marty places his grade sheet in a lucky money envelope. His grades, which reflect a 4.0 grade point average, guarantee that Marty will graduate with highest honors. It is significant that Marty chooses to put the grades in a lucky money envelope because they prove that Marty has used the money that his parents invested in his college education wisely.

Another significant object mentioned in this section of the novel is the button stating “I Am Chinese” that Henry’s father makes him wear. This button is intended to keep people from mistaking Henry for being of Japanese descent. It is a symbol of prejudice and a symbol of safety. The button is significant because the story is set in 1942.

The Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into the war. Note Sheldon’s comment to Henry: “That’s a darn good idea, what with Pearl Harbor and all” (14). Sheldon thinks of Henry’s safety. Even though the Japanese in America have done nothing wrong, they are being — because of the attack on the country. Sheldon notes that the button will keep people from mistaking Henry for one of the Japanese. For Henry’s father this outward statement that Henry is not Japanese is a matter of pride. Even though he no longer lives in China, Henry’s father holds a grudge against the Japanese for the things they did and are still doing to China in the war.

The Panama Hotel is an important object in the novel because of its historical value and for what it means to Henry. The author includes information about the Panama Hotel and the Japanese belongings found there by the new owner. The information is based on historical fact. The Panama Hotel is a real hotel in Seattle, Washington. Japanese families stored their belongings in the basement of the hotel where those belongings were located when it was purchased decades after the war was over. The hotel is significant to Henry because it is a symbol of many important landmarks in his life. It



was considered a good place to meet. In fact, Henry indicates it is where he met the love of his life. Before World War II, when the Japanese were sent to interment camps, the hotel marked the point at which Chinatown turned into Japantown.

This novel is a coming of age story for Henry. A big step in his coming of age comes when he is forced to stop speaking English in his home. Even though his parents had not talked to him much before this new rule, they communicated even less afterward because Henry's father spoke little English. Henry's mother spoke even less. This language barrier prevents Henry from communicating with his parents and understanding their reasons for doing what they are doing.

Prejudice and racism are addressed from several different viewpoints. Henry and Keiko were born in America; therefore, they are Americans. Because they are clearly the children of immigrants and do not look like typical Americans, the other children at school torment them. Henry's father is proud that his son has been accepted on scholarship to an elite American school. However, Henry is ignored by his teachers and taunted by other students. He must come up with clever ways to avoid bullies. Prejudice against the Chinese and Japanese is not the only racial injustice discussed in this novel. Racial injustice toward black Americans is also a significant topic. For instance the narrator says of Sheldon, the black saxophone player: "He was a polished jazz player, whose poverty had less to do with his musical ability and more to do with his color" (13).

Henry comes from a Chinese family that reveres family. As such, he has been taught to care for his own family members. To him, it is unacceptable to even consider putting his ailing wife in a nursing home. His resolve causes friction between Henry and Marty, his son. Marty thinks it would be best for his mother to be in a home. Henry is offended by his son's willingness to disagree with him because it does not fit in with the reverence that Chinese children are taught to have for their parents.

Notice the tone of longing and loss that the author develops in this opening series of chapters. "Precious things just seemed to go away, never to be had again" (6) is a sentence that indicates loss and sorrow. The narrator describes the things brought up from the basement of the Panama Hotel as being things that were "saved for a happier time that never came" (6-7). This description indicates the disappointments and unexpected circumstances that life can bring. This longing for happiness from a time past is described in the phrase: "he wondered if his own broken heart might be found in there, hidden among the unclaimed possessions of another time" (7).

Notice also the way the author gives each of the characters an individual dialect and way of speaking. Henry's father, for instance, is described as speaking in "Chinglish" (12) a combination of Chinese and broken English when he talks to Henry. Sheldon, Henry's friend who is black, refers to Henry as a "sir" (14) even though he is twice as old as Henry. His "Thank you, sir, you have a fine day now" (14) is a phrase that will be repeated often throughout the book.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss racism as it has been presented so far in this novel.

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Henry's relationship with his father and Henry's relationship with his son.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of the Panama Hotel and the artifacts found inside.

Vocabulary

transfixed, filial, longevity, actuarial, perpetually, annoyance, cynical, embossed, prosperity, prosperity, provisional, benevolent, transaction, coalesce, heckling, doff, taunting, desecrated, menace, mottled, hordes, recoiling, putrid, taunted



The Walk Home (1942) - Dim Sum (1986)

Summary

In "The Walk Home (1942)," Henry and Keiko are attending school on scholarships. To keep the scholarships, they must do work during lunch time and after school. When they stayed after school to work, the other students were generally gone by the time they left. One day Chaz was waiting for Henry and Keiko by the front entrance. Henry tried to ignore him, intent on getting Keiko past him without her getting hurt. Chaz grabbed Henry by the jacket in a threatening manner. Mrs. Beatty saw the bullying and put an end to it. Chaz ripped the "I Am Chinese" button off Henry's shirt and left, pinning it to his own shirt.

Keiko tried to hold Henry's hand on the way home, but Henry would not let her. They discovered they had been born at the same hospital. Since she was born in America, Keiko said she was American first, then Japanese. She told Henry that her parents had taught her to describe herself that way because the Japanese tried to be good citizens of the country they considered their home, but the Americans were disrespectful to them.

In "Nihonmachi (1942)," Henry enjoyed Saturdays because he could go and hear Sheldon play. When Henry arrived at the street corner where Sheldon played, there was a decent crowd of about twenty people listening the Sheldon's jazz. During his break, Sheldon told Henry he had joined a music union and had finally begun getting some calls. In fact, he was going to be playing at the Black Elks Club that night. Henry was excited because he knew that Sheldon would be playing with the legendary Oscar Holden, a musician that Sheldon held in revere. Sheldon asked Henry about Keiko, the girl with whom Henry had been walking home. Henry explained his father would be angry with him if they found out he had a friend, much less a girlfriend, who was Japanese. Sheldon teaches Henry a Japanese phrase to say to Keiko. In English, the phrase translated to "How are you today, beautiful" (28). Following Sheldon's instructions, Henry walked to Nihonmachi, Japantown, to see if he could find Keiko.

Even though Japantown was about four times bigger than Chinatown, Henry noticed there were a good deal of businesses closing. He suspected it was because of the boycott of the Japanese society called for by the Chong Wa Benevolent Association after the Japanese invaded the Chinese city of Manchuria back in 1931. The recent attack on Pearl Harbor made things worse. Henry stopped in shock when he saw a photograph of Keiko in the window of a photography studio. She was holding a parasol with koi on it. The photographer told him she was the daughter of the Okabe family. He suggested that Henry look for Keiko at Kobe Park.

Once he reached the park, Henry was caught up in the music and dancing being performed there. He heard his name being called and saw Keiko. He repeated the Japanese phrase to her but Keiko laughed because she did not know Japanese. She



told him that the Japanese school did not even teach it any more. Henry lied and told Keiko that he had been asking her what time it was. He changed the subject and asked about the book in which she was sketching. Henry was surprised to see a drawing of himself in the book.

In “Bud’s Jazz Records (1986),” Henry visited this music store Bud’s Jazz Records hoping to soothe himself. He looked for a record by Oscar Holden, although the story went there had been 300 copies of a master-session recorded in the thirties, it was rumored that no more of these records survived. Bud admits to Henry that he knew what Henry was looking for and that he had given up on finding a copy of the record a long time ago.

In “Dim Sum (1986),” during dinner later that day, Marty asked his father if something was bothering him. He showed Marty a record he had purchased to prove he had been getting out. Henry also mentioned he might see if the new owner of the Panama Hotel would let him look through some of the Japanese belongings discovered in the basement there. Marty suggested his father was perhaps looking for a “long-lost jazz record” (39). Near the end of their meal, Henry hummed the melody of a song he had heard long ago. He did not remember the words, but had not forgotten the melody.

Analysis

Henry continues to refer to his father’s extreme prejudice toward the Japanese. He tells Sheldon that his father would kill him if he knew that he had a friend who was Japanese, much less a girlfriend. When Henry goes into Japantown looking for Keiko, it is the first time he has been in Japantown because his father forbids him to go there. Henry mentions that his father would not even eat at a restaurant when he learned that business had been built by a Japanese man.

It appears that the heart of Henry’s father is still firmly set in China. He has never truly come to consider himself an American. He is angry because the Japanese have attacked China. Henry’s father takes his anger out on the Japanese living in America even though those people have nothing to do with the attacks on China. As Keiko tells Henry, she considers herself an America first. She was born there and her parents were born there. She does not even speak Japanese. Because the people from their native country have declared war on China, and America, many people have chosen to boycott Japanese businesses, causing financial difficulties for people who came to America hoping for more opportunities.

“I am Chinese. I am Lebanese. I am Pekinese. I am the ever-loving bees’ knees” (28) Sheldon tells Henry when he shows him his “I Am Chinese” button as a way to explain why his father does not want him to be friends with Keiko. The words seem to indicate that nationality or race should not matter as much as some people believe it does. Instead of agreeing with Henry’s father, Sheldon encourages Henry to go and try to find Keiko.



Despite Sheldon's encouragement, Henry is still influenced by his father's beliefs about the Chinese. However, he enjoys Keiko's company at school. When they walk home from school together after their run-in with Chaz, Keiko tries to hold Henry's hand. Henry will not allow her to do so. He is afraid someone might see them and report back to his father. Without thinking, Henry also says some hateful things to Keiko in response to some of her comments. For instance, he tells her that he is having to go to Rainier because of the Japanese. Because of the fighting, his father does not want to send Henry back to China to finish his schooling so he had chosen to send him to Rainier. The way that Henry states why he is at Rainier is very hateful. "Because of people like you" (24) he tells Keiko. His statement hurts Keiko, shown by her action of taking her hair out of the ribbon pulling it back from her face and letting it cover her face and eyes.

Henry's coming of age in this section deals with his encounter with Chaz, the school bully. Henry shows his coming maturity with his concern for Keiko. He wants to make sure that Chaz does not hurt her. He is not yet ready to stand up to Chaz. He tries to get them both past Chaz by ignoring him, but the bully puts hands on Henry's jacket and tries to taunt him into a fight. It is noted that Chaz was older than the other sixth graders because he had failed two grades. He was also bigger: "Henry became all too aware that his nemesis was a whole foot taller than either one of them" (22). Luckily, Mrs. Beatty runs Chaz off before he can do anything to hurt Henry or Keiko.

There are two significant symbols mentioned in this section. The first is the parasol with the koi painted on it. It appears that Henry was so moved by the discovery of the parasol because it had, perhaps, belonged to Keiko. While he is walking through Japantown, he sees a picture of Keiko displayed in the window of a photographer. In this picture, Keiko is holding a parasol that is similar to the one found in the basement of the Panama Hotel.

The second significant object is the record produced by Oscar Holden. It is rumored that this little known jazz artist produced three hundred copies of a vinyl record. Of these three hundred, it is believed that there are no copies that still exist. Henry's son suggests that he will be looking for a copy of that Oscar Holden record when he asks permission to look through the things in the basement of the Panama Hotel. Henry does not give any specifics, but the reader knows that Oscar Holder was a favorite musician of both Henry and Sheldon when Henry was a boy. Henry was as excited as Sheldon when he learned that his friend had an opportunity to play with Oscar Holden.

Discussion Question 1

How does Sheldon indicate to Henry that he should be friends with Keiko regardless of the opinion of his prejudiced father?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Keiko's statement to Henry that she is an American first and Japanese second.



Discussion Question 3

How does Henry hurt Keiko's feelings when he tries to answer her questions about why he has been sent to Rainier instead of the Chinese school? Is he intending to hurt her feelings? Explain your reasoning.

Vocabulary

nemesis, nonchalance, belied, sabbatical, imminent, amiably, apocryphal, sommelier, glutinous



Lake View (1986) - Jamaican Ginger (1942)

Summary

In "Lake View (1986)," after dinner with Marty, Henry visited Ethel's grave. He removed a white envelope from his pocket. It had been given to him at the funeral home. The envelope contained a piece of candy and a quarter, a Chinese tradition. Even though they were supposed to use their quarters to buy more candy on the way home from the funeral, Henry had insisted they skip the tradition. He just wanted to go home. He kept the quarter as a symbol of Ethel. He tells Ethel that he has some things he has to do. Placing the quarter on the headstone, he wishes Ethel happiness without him.

In "Speak Your American (1942)," Henry's father noticed that he seemed happier about going to school. Henry had neither told his parents about the bullying he faced or the fact that he was working with a Japanese girl.

On the way home, Henry learned from Keiko that she learned to draw from her mother. She hoped to go to the Cornish Institute, but Henry warned her that she would not be accepted because she was Japanese, no Japanese student had ever been accepted there. Keiko said she wanted to go there and be the first Japanese student to attend.

When they reached the corner where Sheldon usually played, he was not there. Henry wondered if he had gotten a full-time job with Oscar Holden. When Henry asked Keiko how late her parents let her stay out at night she immediately knew what he was thinking. They agreed to meet each other in front of the Black Elks Club at 6 p.m.

In "Jamaican Ginger (1942)," because they were too young to get into the club, Henry and Keiko sat on milk crates behind the club so they could listen to the music coming from inside. An old black man came outside and asked what they were doing there. They said they were friends of Sheldon and wanted to hear him and Oscar Holden play. He told them he would let them inside to listen as long as they did not tell anyone and if they would go to a drugstore to pick up bottles of Jamaican Ginger, an ingredient used to make bathtub gin.

When they returned to the club, Henry knew the people were there for more than the bad liquor. They were there for the music. When Henry and Keiko saw the old man they had spoken to outside walk to the piano and sit down, they realized they had been talking to Oscar Holden. He played a song for Henry and Keiko, whom he called his two new friends. The song was called Alley Cats.

Henry and Keiko were both entranced by the music. Keiko said it was the kind of music to which her parents listened. Henry noticed the crowd was made up of mostly black people, along with a few Japanese couples. Keiko recognized some of the Japanese



people. When the band took a break, Henry and Keiko knew it was time to go. Sheldon walked over to them and Henry introduced him to Keiko.

The two were headed out the back door when they were met there by two white men in black suits, federal agents. Henry was afraid the club was being busted for bootlegging whiskey. The kitchen staff must have believed so as well because the workers were dumping out bottles of ingredients. Oscar Holden tried to keep the people calm but the FBI agents hollered at him. Keiko stared at one of the people she knew, Mr. Toyama, who had been pushed to the floor. All six of the Japanese people who had been in the club were handcuffed and taken away.

When the FBI men began questioning Henry and Keiko, Oscar told him to leave them alone. Keiko asked one of the men why they were taking the Japanese away. The man told her it was because they were collaborators, suspected to have been scouting the workings of the Hawaiian base that had been bombed. Henry pulled Keiko toward the door before the men could realize she was Japanese and that she knew some of the Japanese people.

They watched for a while as officers made the people who had come to the club go home. Keiko finally said she could not watch any longer. At the end of the evening, Keiko asked Henry if he was Chinese. She seemed disappointed as she told him to “Be who you are” (60). Then, she told him that she was American.

Analysis

Most significant in this section of the novel is the raid on the black night club where Sheldon and Oscar Holden were playing. The people working there, as well as Keiko and Henry, thought the raid was because of the illegal liquor. The raid was actually being carried out to arrest Japanese people who the FBI believed were spying on America. Among the people arrested is one of the men who taught Keiko when she still attended the Japanese school. Because he is wearing his “I Am Chinese” button, the feds pass both children off as Chinese but after they two are released from the club, Keiko scolds Henry. She tells him that he can be what he feels like he has to be, but that for her, she is American. Her statement indicates that because they are American citizens they should not have to explain or apologize for their heritage. They should expect to be treated with respect regardless of what they look like.

This sentiment is echoed in Oscar’s words to the FBI when they began rounding up and arresting the Japanese people attending the concert. During the raid “Oscar slipped past Sheldon and barged through the remaining crowd, heading for the agents nearest Henry. ‘I didn’t leave the South to come all the way up here and see people treated like that!’” (58-59). Oscar refers to the way people in the Southern American states still showed racial prejudice towards black people even though the blacks had been freed from slavery years before Holden was born. He compares the way the blacks were treated unfairly just because of the color of their skin to the way the Japanese are being treated based on their nationality.



Even though Oscar had come north hoping for better treatment, it seems there is prejudice in Seattle against the blacks. While white music clubs are allowed to legally serve liquor, black jazz clubs are prohibited from selling alcohol. Oscar tells the children when he sends them to a drug store for Jamaican Ginger, “they don’t let us have a liquor license in the colored clubs, so we do what they did a few years back, during the Prohibition. We make it and shake it, baby.” Despite the bad liquor sold in the club, Henry notices that the place is packed when they take their seats to listen. “They were here to partake of something lush, intoxicating, and almost forbidden — they were here for the music” (53). The author describes the music that Oscar Holden and his band produced as being like alcohol in that it was “lush, intoxicating, and almost forbidden” (53). This description also shows how important music was to people in that day. Henry described to club as being a place they could get away from the worries of the war and differences in races. The raid on the club, however, shows that not even that place of music and peace was free from the dangers of racial prejudice.

The reader learns how it was Oscar Holden himself who allowed them into the club and then played a special version of one of his songs for them. Thus, it is easy to understand why Henry wants to find a copy of that musician’s record if one still exists. Both Henry’s son and the man who runs the record store are aware of Henry’s fascination with finding this record. Henry, however, has yet to tell his son the specifics of why the record is important to him. Perhaps it is at this point that it should be noted that Oscar Holden was a real life jazz musician who lived in Seattle during this time period.

Henry’s visit to Ethel’s grave and his words to her are significant in this section. Henry tells Ethel that he is saying goodbye to her and that he has something he must do. A significant symbol is the quarter that he places on her tombstone. This quarter, along with a piece of candy, had been placed in envelopes at the funeral home and handed out to mourners as they left the funeral home. It was a Chinese tradition so that those attending the funeral would taste the sweet in life and not the bitter as they left the funeral. The quarter, a symbol of continuing happiness, was supposed to be used to buy more candy on the way home. Even though they usually argued about Chinese tradition, Henry had been surprised that his son had “ironically argued that they honor this tradition, but Henry refused” (42). Instead of spending his quarter, he wanted to keep it as a sign of Ethel. He had hung onto her symbolically for six months since her death. When he places the quarter on the tombstone, Henry lets her go. He thinks to himself: “This was our promise of happiness, Henry thought. It’s all I have left to give. This is so you can be happy without me. He stood back, hands at his sides, and took three deep bows out of respect” (43). Henry does not want to sully his wife’s memory or in any way belittle his love for her, but it is clear he wants to investigate the possibility that Keiko might still be living.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the raid on the club. Do you think Keiko would have been in danger if the FBI had known she was Japanese by birth? Explain your reasoning.



Discussion Question 2

Why does the author use reminders of slavery in the South to illustrate what is being done to the Japanese? In what ways is America notorious for mistreating people who look different?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the importance of the Oscar Holden record both to Henry as a child and Henry as a man.

Vocabulary

imploring, prestigious, emanated, pungent, vicariously, speakeasy, imploring, proprietor



I Am Japanese (1986) - Marty's Girl (1986)

Summary

In "I Am Japanese (1986)," Henry left the cemetery and rode the bus to the Panama Hotel. He spoke to the new owner of the hotel and explained that he was looking for something he thought might be in the basement. The owner mistook him as being Japanese and he did not correct her. Henry was surprised there were only three names on the list she gave him to sign. He had thought more people would have come to retrieve their family's belongings. The owner agreed but indicated people had probably either moved on or died. Henry signed his name as Okabe.

In "The Basement (1986)," despite the amount of boxes and things crowding the basement, Henry was determined to find the belongings of Keiko and her family. He had a feeling that it was not just coincidence that a parasol like the one he had seen her holding in a portrait had been found there. As he began looking through a stack of photo albums, some with photos missing, he noticed that the albums still smelled like smoke.

In "Executive Orders (1942)," the morning after the arrests at the Black Elks Club, Henry's father was pleased when he read the reports of the arrests in the paper. He also explained to Henry that the president had signed an executive order making parts of Washington State, Oregon and California military areas. The order would allow the Secretary of War to make anyone he wished, like the Japanese, move out of that area. When his father mentioned the Japanese, Henry worried what might happen to Keiko's family. At school, Keiko was not there. Henry left in the middle of his lunch shift and headed toward Japantown. He noticed plumes of smoke in the sky from that area.

In "Fires (1942)," Henry passed the photography studio where he had seen Keiko's picture on Saturday. The owner was standing on a milk crate, taking pictures. Henry saw that he was photographing barrels and garbage cans that had been set on fire. Into these cans the Japanese were throwing anything that connected them with Japan. They were so afraid of being connected with the country of their ancestors that they were burning anything that might connect them with the war including old photos, letters and artwork.

In "Old News (1986)," Henry found a copy of the final Hokubei Jiji — The North American Times printed in Japantown before the interment before the owner of the hotel told him they were closing for the day. Ms. Pettison told Henry that he could come back the following week to look some more.

In "Marty's Girl (1986)," the following day, Henry was surprised to see Marty waiting for him outside the apartment when he arrived home from spending his day in China town. He was worried at first that Marty wanted to have an argument about the way Henry had



chosen to care for Ethel, and then he was worried that something was wrong with Marty. Henry was relieved when Marty said he was engaged. He immediately asked if she was pregnant. When Marty said she was not, Henry asked why his son was talking to him outside. Marty explained the girl was inside and he wanted Henry to meet her. He was in the process of explaining how Henry has always talked to him about finding a Chinese girl to settle down with when the girl popped her head outside. She was American. As she hugged Henry tightly, Henry gave his son a thumbs up.

Analysis

Significant in this section is Henry's ability to move away from his parents' example of being prejudiced. Marty describes their parents with the words, "they weren't just Chinese, they were super-Chinese" (81). First, when Ms. Pettison assumes that Henry had Japanese relatives, Henry does not correct her. He thinks to himself that if it meant being able to look through the things stored down in the basement he would admit to being "a blue-blooded half-Martian Canadian immigrant" (64). Even as he is claiming to be Japanese and signing Keiko's last name to the sign in sheet, Henry is remembering the "I Am Chinese" button that his father always made him wear.

Also illustrating that Henry is not as closed minded as his father, Henry accepts the young American woman, Samantha, to whom his son is engaged. Henry had sensed his son was ill at ease for some reason but never guessed that he though Marty believed he was a strict about staying within their nationality as his father had been. He realizes that Marty knew nothing about Keiko and his friendship with her. If he had, Marty might have understood how open minded his father actually was. Just like Marty struggled with the right time to tell his father he was dating an American girl, Henry struggled with finding the right time to tell his son he'd had a friendship with a Japanese girl and that he wanted to try to find her family's belongings in the basement of the Panama Hotel. This idea of proper timing is a Chinese tradition that Henry does carry on from his parents. It is noted "For one growing up Chinese, decorum and timing were everything" (61). Henry did not want to anger his son by telling him about Keiko too soon. Neither did he want to waste any more time before trying to locate her.

Neither the new owner of the Panama Hotel nor Henry can understand why the Japanese people who put their belongings in the hotel for safekeeping while they were in the internment camps never came back for them. They are particularly puzzled that few families have come to look at the belongings even after it was announced forty years later that so much stuff was still stored in the Panama Hotel. Ms. Pettison, the new owner of the hotel reasoned to Henry that some people had not wanted to look back at what their past lives had been like, they just wanted to move on with their lives after they were released from the camps. Many had probably heard that their homes, as they knew them, no longer existed. Some had died. Henry, however, considered the years that he had spent trying not to look back at the past because he had dedicated his life to Ethel and Marty. "But his sweet Ethel was gone now, and with it his responsibility to her" (64) Marty thinks as he realizes he had finally reached a point in his life where he is free to move on and explore the past.



Notice the author continues to us variety of literary techniques to enliven his writing. For instance, Marty describes his grandparents in a very humorous, if not slightly irreverent way. In his description of his grandparents as being ultra-Chinese, he says: “they weren’t just Chinese, they were super-Chinese, if you know what I mean. They were like ice cubes in America’s melting pot...” (81). This simile, comparison using the word like, indicates how determined Marty’s grandparents were not to allow themselves to be incorporated into American culture. The author also continues to use phrases and sentences that are nostalgic and that promise a better future. For instance, after Henry finishes working in the basement of the Panama Hotel and sees the beautiful sunset, “It reminded him that time was short, but that beautiful endings could still be found at the end of cold, dreary days” (77). This quote foreshadows the idea that Henry’s search will not be in vain and that his story will have a “beautiful ending” (77).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the changes in the relationship between Henry and Marty since the beginning of the novel. How does their relationship improve as the two get to know one another better?

Discussion Question 2

What does the Panama Hotel represent to Henry? What was its significance when he was young? What does it mean to him as a grown man?

Discussion Question 3

How would the Japanese peoples’ act of burning their personal possessions that connected them to Japan keep them from being arrested?

Vocabulary

retrospect, exclude, truant, tangible, internment, lucid, stoically

Ume (1986) - Downhill (1942)

Summary

In “Ume (1986),” while Henry pruned his ume tree, he talked to Samantha and Marty about its significance. It had been his father’s favorite tree and flower because it was a symbol of the Chinese revolutionists. When Samantha began talking about jazz music, particularly Oscar Holden, Henry told his son that he had done well. As he thought about the work that he had to do in the Panama Hotel, Henry decided it was time to begin telling his son the truth. He explained the ume tree had not come from his father’s, but instead from one in Kobe Park, planted the year that Marty was born. When they said they had no plans for the next Thursday, Henry asked them to meet him in the tearoom at the Panama Hotel.

In “Home Fires (1942),” Henry arrived home early. He was upset and hoping to talk to his parents but learned Chaz and his father were in the living room. Mr. Preston and Henry’s father needed his help in arranging a business deal since Mr. Preston did not understand Cantonese and Henry’s father did not understand English. When Henry learned Mr. Preston wanted to buy Japanese property and that he needed the support of the Chinese community to do so, Henry deliberately translated the conversation incorrectly which caused the deal to fall apart. Afterward, Henry felt relieved but guilty at the same time because he had deliberately lied and disobeyed his father.

In “Hello, Hello (1942),” Henry was awakened by the ringing of the telephone. His mother answered it and told Henry it was for him. It was Keiko, asking for help. She wanted him to meet her at Kobe Park in an hour.

When they met at the park, Keiko said her parents would not let her go to school because her parents did not want them to get separated in case something were to happen. The FBI had come and taken their radio and cameras but then left. Henry admitted to her that he left school to look for her. Getting nervous he added he did not want her getting behind in class. Despite his rambling, Keiko told Henry that she needed a big favor. She had a small wagon filled with photo albums that her mother had not been able to bring herself to burn. Keiko could not do it either and wanted Henry to hide them somewhere. He told her that he could keep them under his dresser.

As Henry headed home in the section “Downhill (1942)” he planned out how he would get the photos upstairs and hidden under his dresser while his parents were still asleep. He stuck to back streets and was surprised when he came upon a boy who appeared to be wiping down a picture of a flag displayed on the window of the Janagi Grocery. Henry at first thought the boy was protecting his parents’ property. Then, he realized that the boy was Denny Brown. He was painting the words “Go home Japs” (98) on the window. Chaz and Carl Parks walked up behind Henry, saying they knew he had been Japanese all along.



They noticed his wagon and Henry remembered his promise to Keiko that he would protect her family's things. He pushed the wagon from the back up the crest of the hill and then down the slope on South King. The boys followed Henry. He jumped onto the wagon as it hurtled down the hill. People jumped out of his way as he headed down the sidewalk. Behind him, Denny fell face first into the pavement. Meanwhile Henry lost control of the wagon and collided with a police car. He was scrambling to pick up the spilled photos as the police officer got out of his car to see what was happening. The officer seemed annoyed by Henry, but he did not seem to think any of the photos required any special interest even though they were of people in Japanese dress.

Analysis

In this section, Henry chooses to stand up for his Japanese friend, and the Japanese people in general, even though it goes against his father's desires and beliefs. Learning that Chaz's father plans to buy Japanese property out from under those running for their lives and make a profit on it, Henry knows exactly what he is doing when he incorrectly translates the conversation between his father and the businessman. Despite the anger that it might cause his father, Henry believes it is the right thing to do to stand up for the Japanese. Henry again goes against his father by promising Keiko that he will protect her family's belongings in their house.

Henry also shows evidence of his coming of age when he takes his responsibilities of caring for Keiko's possessions so seriously. On his way home he is threatened by three bullies from school. Because he knows he is not big enough to out fight them, Henry chooses to outsmart them. He uses the wagon as a vehicle, allowing him to outpace his enemies.

Notice also how deeply Henry feels the injustice toward the Japanese. He seems to be able to understand his father's dislike for the people because of the war between Japan and China but cannot understand why an American boy would be so angry at other American citizens.

Because Marty does not know his father well, he does not fully understand how different his father is from his ultra-Chinese grandfather. It is when Henry is talking with Marty and Henry about the ume tree in his backyard that he realizes that Marty still believes he has always been loyal to the Chinese despite being born in America. A quote describing how Marty must feel about his father incorporates a mix of an American saying with the fruit of the ume tree. "In Marty's eyes, the plum hadn't fallen far from the tree; if anything, it was clinging stubbornly to the branches" (84). In fact, what Marty believes about the tree is actually incorrect. He believes the tree was grafted from a branch of his grandfather's tree. In reality, the tree in their backyard was grafted from a tree in Kobe Park. Henry planted it the night that Marty was born.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss Henry's decision to go against his father's Chinese loyalty both in his translation between his father and Mr. Preston and in his decision to protect the belongings of Keiko's family.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the meaning of the ume tree in this section of the novel. Why does it mean different things to Henry, to Marty and to Henry's father?

Discussion Question 3

Research this time period and the rules against helping the Japanese. What might happen to Henry's family if it were discovered that Henry had hidden Keiko's things in his house?

Vocabulary

auger, bilingual, blatantly, prudent, sabotage, converged, projectile, torpedoed



Tea (1986) - Parents (1942)

Summary

In "Tea (1986)," Henry explained to Marty and Samantha some of the background that had made his father hate the Japanese so much. There was a time when the immigration from China was limited but as many people who wished could come from Japan to provide the cheap laborers needed. He added that even though his father had forbidden him to visit Japantown when he was a child, it had changed so much during the war, after the Japanese were forced out, that he had no desire to go there after he was no longer a minor. He explained it was too painful for him to visit there. Marty seemed shocked to learn that even though Henry's father had forbidden him to visit Japantown, Henry had done so anyway. To Marty's question why Henry invited them there for tea, Henry told them he needed help in the basement.

When he stepped into the lobby of the Panama Hotel, Henry noticed since the place had been cleaned and sandblasted it looked like the place he remembered from his childhood. In the basement, Henry describes the things stored there as being "sort of a time capsule from before you were born" (107), the things left by the Japanese sent to internment camps during World War II. He told them that he needed their help in looking for something. Marty guessed it was a copy of the Oscar Holden record, the one no one even knew existed. Henry broke in by telling his son that he knew it existed because he had bought a copy of it but that it would not play on his parents' record player. He had given the record away. If they helped him find it, Henry promised to tell them more.

In "Records (1942)," Keiko laughed when she heard the story of Henry's trip home with her parents' things. She told him she had a surprise for him for taking her to the Black Elks Club. After school, Keiko took Henry to Rhodes Department Store. In the record section, Keiko made Henry close his eyes. He was allowed to open them after Keiko pulled from the rack a copy of a vinyl record. It was a recording of Oscar Holden and the Midnight Blue, The Alley Cat Strut. Keiko said she was buying it for him but Henry said it was for both of them. Because he knew his parents' Victrola would not play the record, Keiko said he could come to her house to listen to it. At the checkout counter, both Keiko and Henry were outraged when the store clerk ignored them. When Keiko confronted her the woman refused to sell the record to her because she was Japanese. Henry finally showed her his "I Am Chinese" button and insisted on buying the record.

On their way home, Henry and Keiko noticed an unusually large number of soldiers in Japantown. Henry at first thought it was a parade. As he watched the rows of Japanese people with suitcases getting off the Bainbridge Island ferry, he realized that the island must have been declared a military zone and was being evacuated. He pulled Keiko away from what was happening, telling her that they did not need to be there. As they walked away, Henry thought that nothing like that could happen in Seattle because there were too many Japanese.



As they walked, Henry and Keiko met Sheldon watching what was happening. He criticized the government for telling the people the evacuation was for their own good. When Keiko asked, he told her that he did not know where they were being taken. Sheldon told them both they needed to get home so their parents would not worry.

In "Parents (1942)," a month after Bainbridge Island was evacuated Henry had an invitation to eat lunch with Keiko and her parents. Henry and Keiko planned to meet in front of the Panama Hotel. They meet her parents, who were shopping in the marketplace, at a Japanese noodle restaurant. Keiko's parents thanked Henry for walking her home each day. They asked about his "I Am Chinese" button and told him that he should not be ashamed of who he was. They explained how they told Keiko to be who she was and they believed people would eventually begin to respect her as an American.

Just after Keiko's parents had invited Henry and his parents to attend an Oscar Holden concert on Jackson Street, the dishes on the table rattled as an army truck stopped in front of the restaurant. American soldiers began nailing up flyers and handing these same flyers out of people standing on the street. The flyer gave instructions to all people of Japanese ancestry to prepare for an evacuation. They were allowed to take with them only what they could carry. Keiko's mother began crying.

Analysis

After Henry and Keiko have watched the Japanese who lived on Bainbridge Island evacuated from their homes, it is devastating to them both when soldiers distribute flyers advising the Japanese in Seattle that they too need to prepare to evacuate. Even after they had seen the reality of the Japanese being forced from Bainbridge Island, Henry could not bring himself to accept the same thing could happen in Seattle. He thought there were too many Japanese in Seattle to be rounded up and moved. There are two places in this series of chapters when Henry thinks to himself that it is simply impossible to put all of the Japanese in Seattle in internment camps. In this section of the novel the proclamation that Henry and Keiko see being handed out to the Americans of Japanese descent is significant because it symbolizes the reality that the American government plans to put these citizens in internment camps simply because of their nationality.

In this section of the novel, the recording of the song *The Alley Cat Strut* by Oscar Holden is introduced. Despite the rumor that this record was not really made Keiko and Henry's purchase of the record proves that it did exist at one time. Since the two children agreed to keep the record at Keiko's house because she was the only one with a record player that would play the album, it is possible that the record will be found among the things in the basement of the Panama Hotel if the things belonging to Keiko's family are actually there. "This is our song, the one he played for us!" (113) Keiko tells Henry when she shows him the album.



Even the purchase of this special record is tinged with hate because the cashier in the store from which Henry and Keiko tried to buy the album refused to wait on Keiko. “I was born here. I don’t even speak Japanese. Still, all these people, everywhere I go ... they hate me” (114-115) Keiko tells Henry after they leave the store. She does not understand why people, particularly adults, treat her the way they do. Keiko understands the treatment she gets at school, but believes that adults should act in a more mature way. Henry understands and realizes that some adults, particularly his parents, could be worse than children in the prejudice.

Henry continues to surprise his son with the things that he tells him about his experience in Japantown. Marty had understood that Henry had never gone into Japantown while the Japanese were still there. He asks his father if he had visited Japantown when he came of age. Henry explains his reasoning for not going into Japantown after he came of age in this analogy: “It was like wanting to go into a certain bar to have a drink, but by the time you turn twenty-one, the bar has turned into a flower shop. It just wasn’t the same” (105). Henry explains to Marty it was also too upsetting to visit Japantown with all the changes that had taken place there.

When Henry first goes into the lobby of the Panama Hotel after it has been cleaned and sandblasted, he is able to see in what has been revealed the hotel he remembered from his childhood. “The hotel was the same all over again, as if nothing had changed. Maybe he hadn’t changed that much either” (106). This feeling that Henry gets inside the hotel is a feeling of hope, a promise that perhaps he can go back to the past and live in another time, just like the hotel appears to have done.

In this section, music is portrayed as a force that can bring people together regardless of race, nationality or creed. Keiko’s parents show their belief in this strength of music when they invite Henry and his family to a free concert. Henry draws the Oscar Holden record into this argument when he says that the record and the song on it is a symbol of the ability of people to be drawn together by music. It reminds Henry of the Black Elks Club and he calls it “a reminder of a place where people didn’t seem to care what you looked like, where you were born, or where your family was from. When the music played, it didn’t seem to make one lick of difference if your last name was Abernathy or Anjou, Kung or Kobayashi” (115).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the difference between the way Keiko’s parents encourage her to be who she is and how Henry’s parents encourage him to be who he is.

Discussion Question 2

How does it change the tone of the novel when the reader learns that a copy of Oscar Holden’s album does exist and that Keiko and Henry bought and owned a copy of this album?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Marty's surprise when he learns how familiar his father was with Japantown, even though his grandfather had forbidden his father from going there.

Vocabulary

verboden, stagnant, vehemently, enmity, dregs, conscript, resigned, livid, conscientious, cadence



Better Them Than Us (1942) - Uwajimaya (1986)

Summary

In “Better Them Than Us (1942),” when Henry showed his father the proclamation, his father said only to Henry that it was “better them than us” (125). His mother asked him why it mattered. He told his parents in English that it mattered because Keiko was Japanese. In his room, Henry went out on the fire escape where he watched as a car pulled up to a restaurant next door. A Japanese couple got out of the car and were helped by a group of Chinese to put their belongings inside the restaurant. The couple left, headed toward the train station, with only four suitcases.

His mother came into his room bringing him cookies and asking if he needed to talk. Henry asked his mother why his father would not talk to him. She explained how his father had lived in China during the time of the war with Japanese. He had seen his own family members killed when the Japanese invaded China and killed women, children and the elderly. His mother tried to explain how much trouble they would be in if they were to help the Japanese. She asked if Henry’s friend is Japanese. When Henry told her that Keiko was his best friend, his mother sighed deeply as if she was resigned.

Henry’s father refused to talk about what was happening in Japantown. Henry’s mother had argued with his father about Keiko, something she rarely did, but she had decided his mind would not be changed and it was time to move on. Henry tried to call Keiko on Sunday but the operator told him she thought the phone had been disconnected. On Monday, Keiko was not at school.

On Tuesday, Henry went to the train station. The proclamation had ordered all of the Japanese to be there by 9 a.m. Henry scanned the crowd for Keiko and her family. He climbed on top of a mailbox and yelled out Keiko’s name. He finally spotted Keiko in the crowd because he recognized the hat Mr. Okabe wore. They did not notice him but unfortunately, Chaz was there and he did notice Henry. Chaz was wearing the “I Am Chinese” button and was laughing at the crowd.

When Chaz made a comment about having to look after the things the Japanese people left, Henry punched him. As Chaz pushed Henry to the ground and beat him, Henry grabbed the “I Am Chinese” button on Chaz’s shirt. Henry tried to turn over but saw Chaz being lifted up by Sheldon. Chaz was embarrassed when the black man came to Henry rescue. Henry found no lasting injuries from the fight. He had Chaz’s “I Am Chinese” button in his hand.

Henry ran in search of Keiko and her family. He hoped to give her the button and thought he could keep her at his house. He continued to believe his father would come to his senses about the Japanese when he saw what was happening to them even



though he was so closed-minded. Henry spotted another hat that looked like the one Keiko's father wore and headed after it. When he reached that man, however, it was not Mr. Okabe. Henry had just about given up when a voice behind him called his name. It was Keiko and her family. He told the family that they could wear his buttons and walk away, stay in Seattle. Mr. Okabe smiled because he said Henry had given him hope. He said as much as he appreciated Henry's offer, he wanted his family to stay together. Before they walked away, Henry learned that the family would be sent to Camp Harmony.

In "Empty Streets (1942)," Henry wandered away from the crowd to the edge of Japantown. He found Sheldon, who expressed sympathy. He tried to comfort Henry by telling him that when the war was over, Keiko and her family would come back. Because Henry told Sheldon that was not going to school and did not want to go home yet, Sheldon told Henry to come with him. They walked through the empty streets of Japantown to Kobe Park. When they reached that section of town, Sheldon took out his sax and began to play. "He played for no one, but at the same time Henry realized he was playing for everyone" (139).

In "Sketchbook (1986)," Marty and Samantha were not as much help as Henry hoped they would be. They took too much time examining each object and calling him over to look. When Marty said he found a box full of sketchbooks, Henry paid attention. When Henry saw the black books with sketches of Japantown and Chinatown inside, he asked Marty from which pile those books had come. Marty called his father as he looked from the book to his father and back. He pointed to one sketch in particular, labeled "Henry" and asked if it was his father. Henry nodded. At the same time, Samantha pulled out a record sleeve. When Henry pulled the record out, however, it was broken in half. It was the copy of Oscar Holden and the Midnight Blue's song *The Alley Cat Strut*.

In "Uwajimaya (1986)," as Samantha shopped for groceries, Marty asked his father about the sketchbooks they had located. Henry had gotten approval to take the sketchbooks with him and had slipped the record inside the box when they left. Marty insinuated his father's Japanese friend had been a male but Henry informed him that Keiko was a girl. Henry said that Ethel had not known about Keiko, that once he married Ethel, he had moved forward and not looked back. He explained to Marty that he had first wanted to find the record as "a dying wish for a long-lost brother" (146). While his desire had begun with finding the record, he had also uncovered memories of Keiko during his search.

Analysis

Henry continues to get mixed messages from his father and the community in general about his status as an American citizen. Although Keiko and her family have been in the United States longer than Henry and his family, they are still rounded up by other American citizens, and taken to internment camps. Henry does not understand how American citizens can treat each other this way. When he goes home, hoping his parents will help him understand, he is even more angry and confused when his father



tells him it is better that it is the Japanese who are being rounded up instead of the Chinese. Henry watches some Chinese people near his apartment help their Japanese friends store their things, proof that not everyone is as prejudiced toward the Japanese as his father is.

Henry's mother tries to help him understand why his father hates the Japanese so much. She describes the war he saw in China where the Japanese killed not just soldiers but also women, children, the elderly and the ill. Regardless of what his father saw in China, Henry believes that he should not lump the Japanese who have been living in America since before that war in the with those who responsible for attacking the Chinese.

Notice the use of music in this section of the novel. After the Japanese have been cleared out of their neighborhood, Sheldon and Henry walk back to that section of town. Sheldon plays his sax even though the streets are deserted. When Henry asks him what they are doing, Sheldon says "We're living" (136). His music represents at first the sadness Sheldon feels as a result of the empty streets. When he moves on to a more upbeat tune, it indicates Sheldon's hope that the war will not last forever and the Japanese will return.

Significant in this section is that Marty and Samantha help Henry find not only the record for which Henry was looking, they also locate some of Keiko's sketchbooks. Marty finds drawings of a boy he thinks looks like his father, and then gets proof it is his father when he sees that one of the sketches is labeled with the name "Henry." These sketches make it easier for Henry to talk to his son about the Japanese girl he once loved.

The record is significant in this section. Henry had apparently known all along that the record did exist. There were many who believed it was only a rumor that Oscar Holden had ever recorded this album. When Samantha pulls the record sleeve out of a box of things, it is proof the record was made. The fact the record was broken can be seen as a symbol of whatever happened between Keiko and Henry to separate them. While some people would think finding the record and having it be broken would be a let down to Henry. He seems to be pleased just to have the record in his possession regardless of its condition. When Marty asks his father why he wanted to find the record so badly Henry tells him "I wanted it for someone. Sort of a dying wish for a long-lost brother" (146). Since Henry had no brothers, the reader might suspect that it was Sheldon, who sometimes referred to himself as Henry's brother, for whom Henry wanted to find the record.

Finally, it is the "I Am Chinese" button that Chaz stole from Henry that given Henry the courage he needs to stand up to the boy who has always bullied him. Knowing it is the button he wears that keeps people from thinking his is Chinese, he thinks that he could get this button that Chaz took from him and give it to Keiko. He believes no one would think anything about him leaving with Keiko is she was wearing that button.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss Sheldon's decision to play music in the empty streets of Japantown. Why does he play? What does his playing represent?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mr. Okabe mean when he tells Henry that he gave him hope when he offered to get them all "I Am Chinese" buttons and keep them from going to the internment camps? What sort of hope does he give Mr. Okabe?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the importance of the things that Henry, Samantha, and Marty find in the basement of the Panama Hotel. How does the sketchbook make it easier for Henry to talk to Marty about Keiko? Why is it significant that the record is broken when it is found?

Vocabulary

infuriated, reverie, demeanor, famished, declarative, honorific, insinuated



Camp Harmony (1942) - Visiting Hours (1942)

Summary

In the section “Camp Harmony (1942),” Henry skipped school on Wednesday, pretending he was sick, but knew he had to return eventually. On Thursday when he returned to school, Ms. Beatty surprised him by serving Japanese food for lunch. None of the students appeared to know it was Japanese but Henry picked up on the message she was sending. When Chaz went through the line he had a hurtful comment about Keiko, indicating he was happy she was gone. Henry was just about to hit him with a spoonful of food when Ms. Beatty stopped him. She told Chaz to leave, that there was not enough food for him. Henry described the look on Ms. Beatty’s face as her “war face” (149). Ms. Beatty asked Henry if he wanted to make some extra money by helping her set up a mess hall Saturday at the interment camp. When he learned they would be working at Camp Harmony, he agreed readily.

During the ride to Camp Harmony Henry learned that Ms. Beatty’s father had been in the Merchant Marines. He worked as head cook and Ms. Beatty would help him out when that ship was in port. The last Ms. Beatty knew of her father he was in a prisoner of war camp after having been captured by the Germans. She said she had not heard from him in a year.

When they arrived at the camp, Henry was surprised to see what looked like rows of chicken coops with people living inside. There were guard towers and barbed wire fences with soldiers carrying machine guns on patrol. He stepped out of the truck into ankle deep mud. Ms. Beatty and the other workers unloaded the Japanese cooking staples she had brought from the back of her truck. Henry did not see Keiko or the Okabes in the first area in which they served, but learned there were two more areas in the camp they would visit the following Saturday.

In the section “Visiting Hours (1942),” as Henry served food, he asked the Japanese if anyone knew the Okabes. When a man came through the line asking why he was looking for the Okabes, Henry recognized the man as Keiko’s father. When Mr. Okabe recognized Henry, his face lit up. He joked about wishing his vacation was someplace sunny. Mr. Okabe told Henry that Keiko missed him. He gave Henry directions to the visitors station and said he would have Keiko meet him there.

Face to face with Keiko, she tells Henry that she dreamed of him, dreamed they were dancing together to the Oscar Holden song. She requests that he bring her family some supplies; paper and envelopes as well as fabric for curtains to keep the spotlights from waking them at night. She also asks that he come back to visit her the following week. The soldiers are allowing them to have a record concert and she wants to listen to it



with him. He asked about the copy of the Oscar Holden record and learned that it was probably stored in the basement of the Panama Hotel.

Analysis

Significant in this section are the conditions of the Japanese internment camps as Henry has described them. Although the government has said the Japanese were sent to these camps to protect them, Henry notices the camps look a good deal like prisons. They are surrounded by barbed wire fences and have armed soldiers on patrol. The families are housed in what he describes as chicken coops.

Also significant is that Ms. Beatty, who has seemed an indifferent character in the past, begins to look out for Henry. She is the one who invites him along to help her out with the mess halls at the interment camps. Whether she asked him because she knew he was a good worker or if she had an ulterior motive to give Henry a chance to meet up with Keiko is never made clear.

The day that Henry finally returned to school after the Japanese were forced to leave, Henry noticed the irony behind Ms. Beatty's decision to serve Japanese food. It is also Ms. Beatty who keeps Henry from getting into trouble because of Chaz's hateful comments about Keiko. She stops Henry from launching a spoonful of food at the bully, but also gives Chaz what he has coming. She makes him leave with no food.

It turns out that Ms. Beatty knows the pain wars can cause as well as the hurt caused from being separated from a loved one. Her father is being held in a prisoner of war camp. For this reason, Ms. Beatty understands Henry's sadness because his best friend has been taken away from him for no good reason. She describes to Henry how she helped her father out on the Merchant Marine ship where he was stationed when it was in port. It was from this experience that she learned about menus, ordering food and portion control.

Notice the literary techniques that the author uses in this section, particularly when describing Ms. Beatty. For instance, after Ms. Beatty sends Chaz away from the lunch line with no food he is described as looking "like a puppy that had been caught making a mess and had just had his nose rubbed in it" (149). A few minutes later, when Ms. Beatty asked if Henry wanted to help out at the internment camp he says yes partially because he was "scared of the tanklike woman who had just left tread marks on the seat of Chaz's dungarees" (150). This particular type of description is a metaphor because Henry describes Ms. Beatty as being a tank. The previous description where Chaz is said to be "like a puppy" (149) is a simile because it uses the word "like."

The Oscar Holden record is discussed again in this section of the novel. When Keiko and Henry meet at the visitors center, Henry gets the idea to bring that record for the camp's record concert. Even when Keiko mentions that she thinks the record is stored with their things in the basement of the Panama Hotel, she tells Henry there is so much stuff down there that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find the record. It is at this



point that the reader understands why Henry was so determined to look through the things in the basement. He had a good deal more knowledge about the location of Keiko's things than he let on.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss how Ms. Beatty's personality is developed in this section of the novel.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the impact of Henry's visit on Keiko and her father. How did the attitudes of the other Japanese toward Henry change when they learned he was a friend? Why is this significant?

Discussion Question 3

What is the tone of the novel at this point? Does the author seem judgmental about the things that are happening to the Japanese or does he present them in a way that is factual? Use examples from the novel to defend your answer.

Vocabulary

ruse, accomplice, procurement, condiments, latrine, sundries, quadrant, collegiate, meager, confidant, ambivalence



Home Again (1942) - Sheldon's Record (1942)

Summary

In the section "Home Again (1942)," Henry's father was studying a map of China when Henry first saw him the following morning. He said that the Americans had given the Chinese supplies and planes to fight against the Japanese. Because Hong Kong was secure, it meant that Henry could go to school in Canton, a common practice even for Chinese born in America. Henry did not want to go to school in China because he knew he would be tormented for not being Chinese enough, just like he was not American enough in America.

On his way to buy supplies for his mother, Henry decided to get Keiko art supplies as a gift for her birthday. He walked past the Panama Hotel to see if there was any way into the building to get the record that Keiko said might be stored there. In the alleyway he discovered Chaz, along with a group of boys trying to get into the building as well. They were throwing rocks and breaking windows, even destroying possessions that had been left on the street. Before he had a chance to get away, Chaz saw Henry. Henry grabbed a broom handle and threatened the boys with it. He noticed the boys stopped getting closer to him. He told them to go home. Some of the boys dropped the things they were holding. Chaz looked scared.

Henry thought he had scared the boys off on his own strength until he turned and noticed the two military police officers behind him. They told him only to go home. When Henry looked back he saw that other police officers were questioning Chaz and the other boys. The officer did not seem to believe what Chaz was telling him.

In the section "Dinner (1986)," Henry was impressed by the Japanese cuisine his future daughter in law cooked. She had even made dragon's beard candy, a delicacy that took years to learn to make. Samantha indicated she enjoyed a challenge, sort of like trying to find Henry's childhood sweetheart. She asked Henry if he had ever wondered if Keiko was still alive and if he had considered trying to meet her. Marty suggested that even if Keiko was married, she would probably appreciate getting her sketchbooks back. Henry mentioned that people from that time period had moved on but at the same time he thought to himself that he had doubted he would find the record in the basement but he had done so. He wondered what else he might find if he were to look hard enough.

In the section "Steps (1986)," while Samantha napped in the living room, Henry and Marty sat on the front steps and talked. Marty asked his father if he had kept his mother at home during her sickness in order to spite him. Henry asked Marty what he thought and Marty said he had felt like that at first. He had come to realize that she needed to be in a place that felt like home to her. Henry told Marty that his father had stopped



talking to him because of his friendship with Keiko. He was not sure how much Ethel knew about Keiko because they never really talked about old loves.

In the section “Sheldon’s Record (1942),” Henry visited Sheldon where he was entertaining on the streets. In addition to his sax case, he had a copy of Oscar Holden’s record on display. Henry told Sheldon he had been busy because he had been helping out at Camp Harmony. Sheldon picked on Henry when Henry asked for his record, the only copy of the record that Sheldon owned. When he told Sheldon it was for Keiko, Sheldon allowed him to have it, saying Henry had gotten him in the heart with his sweet request. Sheldon told Henry to go and see to it that his record was played in the Japanese camp.

Henry was in high spirits when he returned home that day. He had all of the things for which Keiko had asked, including the record. When he walked into his apartment, he stopped in his tracks when he saw that his parents were looking at the photo albums he had agreed to keep for Keiko. His mother was disgusted while his father was furious. He told Henry that Keiko was one of those who had killed people from China. Even though Henry argued that Keiko was American, his father was still furious. He said they could be jailed if the photos were found in their house.

His father opened the window and threw the photos out into the street. Henry put on his jacket to go outside. He informed his father that he was not going to leave her photos out in the street. He felt as if he were leaving his boyhood behind. His father warned him that if he were to walk out the door, he would no longer be considered part of their family. Henry informed his father he was what his father had made him.

Analysis

Henry’s willingness to stand up for what he believes in even though it goes against his father’s wishes is a big step in Henry’s coming of age. Note that Henry is not being disagreeable based on a childish or selfish decision. He realizes that his father is living in the past in regard to his relationship with the Japanese. Although there are some Japanese who are hurting the Chinese, the Japanese in America are not responsible for that war or its outcome. Henry’s father is unable to separate the two. He lumps all Japanese into one category, those who have hurt his people. Even when Henry tells his father that Keiko and her family have been in America longer than their family has been, his father still cannot differentiate. Because Keiko’s family has been in America for so long, there is no way she, or her direct ancestors had anything to do with any cruelty to the Chinese people.

When Marty asked his father what Henry’s father had thought of Keiko, Henry tells his son that his father had stopped talking to him when he found out about Henry’s determination to protect Keiko and her belongings. For all intents and purposes, it appears that Henry’s father disowned him because of his friendship with Keiko.



Meanwhile, Chaz's hate toward the Japanese people seems to have finally caught up with him. He and some of his friends are discovered looting some belongings left near the Panama Hotel. Henry was with them but the officers apparently heard the discussion that happened before Chaz and the others ran away. They were probably aware that the bigger boys were threatening Henry, who was not there to destroy any property. Henry, and the reader as well, wonders what will happen to Chaz since he got caught looting Japanese property.

A second copy of Oscar Holden's record comes into play in this section of the novel. In order to surprise Keiko for her birthday, Henry begs Sheldon to let him borrow his copy of the record as a surprise for Keiko. Sheldon makes fun of Henry for his obvious crush on Keiko but Henry does not seem to notice the black man's wit because Henry is so focused on his goal. Sheldon jokes with Henry telling him; "It'd be the first time I ever played in a white establishment — even if it's for a bunch of Japanese folks, bit of a captive audience" (181). Sheldon both plays on the idea that the white people do not like his jazz music and that because he is a black musician, he would not be accepted in a white club. He also points out that the Japanese will be forced to listen to his music if it is played in the interment camp because they are not allowed to leave, thus to reference to them being a "captive audience" (181) where captive can mean both one who is enthralled and one who is a prisoner.

Also in this section, Keiko is compared to the Oscar Holden record that Henry, Marty and Samantha found in the basement of the Panama Hotel. This is the first mention any of the characters have made to trying to find Keiko. It is indicated that even though the record was difficult to find, and no one was even sure it was in the basement, Henry had located it with the help of friends. Henry does not readily admit it to his son and future daughter-in-law but he does wonder if he would have similar luck at finding Keiko if he were to put his mind to it. As he thinks to himself: "But still, no one had thought the record still existed, and it was found. Who knew what else he might find if he looked hard enough?" (175).

Along with the scene in which Sheldon picks at Henry because of his love for Keiko, the author scatters humorous references through out the novel. In this section he describes the Chinese heutig jou that Henry drinks with Samantha and Marty to celebrate having found the record. The reader understands how strong this liquor is in the way the author describes it as a "clear, innocent-looking liquid that could just as easily be used to strip the grease from used car parts" (172).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Henry's words to his father: "I am what you made me, Father." (185) before he leaves his apartment to pick up the photos his father threw into the street. How do you think Henry intended for this statement to be interpreted?



Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast the direction in which Henry's relationship with his son is headed as the novel progresses and the direction in which Henry's relationship with his father is headed as he learns more about Henry's friendship with Keiko.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the scene in the alleyway between Henry and Chaz. How is this scene significant in their relationship to each other? How is it significant to Chaz in particular?

Vocabulary

lamenting, envisioned, bilingual, piqued, pilfered, affinity, ravaged, dredging, genial, succumbed, homing, intrigue, gibe, dour, oblivious



Camp Anyway (1942) - Stranger (1942)

Summary

In the section "Camp Anyway (1942)," Henry's parents did not speak to him when he spoke to them in English or pleaded with them in Chinese. His mother did his laundry and packed his lunches but was not allowed by Henry's father to serve Henry meals with the family.

Because the art supplies and record were gifts for Keiko's birthday Henry had wrapped them with paper and bows. Ms. Beatty said he would never be allowed to bring them into the camp like that because the soldiers had to search everything. In order to let Henry keep the presents wrapped, she hid them in a sack of rice she had in the back of the truck.

Henry sees Mrs. Okabe in the lunch line she mentions that they will be moving to another camp in a few months. When she asked about their home neighborhood, Henry could not bear to tell her the truth. Instead he told her everything was okay. When Keiko came through the line Henry promised to meet her at the visitors center after dinner.

Rain clouds were moving in when Henry saw Keiko at the visitor center. She said the soldiers had canceled their record party. Henry handed Keiko her first gift and she was delighted with the art supplies, as well as the inscription he had written inside the book telling her that she was "the sweetest, most beautiful American girl I've ever known" (193). When Keiko asks, Henry tells her that his father has disowned him even though he and Keiko are the same people.

Henry gave Keiko her second gift and explained how Sheldon had let him have his copy of the record since Henry could not get into the Panama Hotel. Keiko said she would play it even though the concert had been cancelled. She told Henry the camp had been terrible with no music, and that she would play the record every day. When the rain started falling the soldiers said visiting hours were over. Henry urged Keiko to get back to shelter, not wanting her to get sick in the rain. While Henry was walking back to Ms. Beatty's truck, he heard the sound of Keiko playing the record that Henry had given her. She turned the volume up so loud a guard hollered for the noise to be turned off as he went looking for the source of the music.

In the section "Moving (1942)," Henry learned from one of Keiko's letters that she and her family would be moving to an internment camp further inland. He had been afraid at first that his father would arrange to confiscate Keiko's letters, but his mother had separated them out and put them under his pillow.

During his last trip to Camp Harmony, Henry decided to go into the camp and visit Keiko with no fence separating them. He located the stall that belonged to Keiko and her family because a banner stating "Welcome to the Panama Hotel" was strung over the



opening. When they began talking, Henry apologized because of the way he had treated Keiko the first day they met. He said he had been afraid of her and afraid of liking her because of the way his father felt about the Japanese. He tried to tell Keiko how much he liked her. He wanted to kiss her, but in the same line, he felt like he needed to let her go and get on with her own life.

In the section “Stranger (1942),” when Henry arrived home, Dr. Luke had been called there because Henry’s father had a stroke. The doctor told Henry the stroke had been very bad and he could barely talk. Even though Henry felt guilty that perhaps he had brought on his father’s sickness, his mother told him that it was not his fault. When Henry gave his father a formal apology, however, his father told him that he was a stranger to him.

Analysis

Henry’s relationship with his father continues to deteriorate in this section of the novel. In the previous section when Henry went out and gathered up the photos of Keiko and her family that his father had thrown into the street, Henry’s father told him that if he walked out their door he would be disowned. Henry’s father has followed through with that promise with the exception of kicking Henry out into the street. His mother washes his clothes, sorts the mail and puts letters from Henry to Keiko under his pillow, and sometimes leaves special treats for him in his room but other than those things, she has no contact with him. Even at the point where Henry’s father has suffered a debilitating stroke and Henry apologizes to him in the formal Chinese tradition, his father uses what little strength he has to tell Henry that he is a stranger to him.

Notice in this section Henry’s inability to even thank his mother for the support that she continues to show to him. He wants to thank her but knows that by thanking her, he will be implying that he is aware she is going against the wishes of her husband. It appears that in the world of the Chinese, it is considered best not to acknowledge a kindness done in this manner.

A significant symbol mentioned in this section of the novel is the Panama Hotel. Keiko and her family use this landmark to identify their temporary home at the internment camp. The choice is significant because the Panama Hotel was once a temporary home for immigrants to America. They stayed there while they got jobs and waited on the better life they hoped they and their families would have in America. Similarly, Keiko and her family hope that their stay in the internment camp will be only temporary. Once they are released, they hope that they will be able to return to the lives of freedom they were promised in America.

Music is used in this section not only as a way to bring people together but also as a way to lift spirits. It is the record of the Oscar Holden song that seems to please Keiko the most of all the things that Henry has brought her for her birthday. “You couldn’t possibly know how happy I am to have this” (194) Keiko tells Henry. She says the prisoners have had no music. Even this one record is a welcome treat. Keiko had been



excited because some prisoners had traded with the soldiers in exchange for a record player and permission to have a record concert. This musical event was planned as the first social for the camp and a way to bring the people together. Keiko is disappointed when the concert is cancelled but still somehow manages to play the recording of Alley Cat Strut loud enough that Henry can hear it outside the building in which Keiko and her family live. “It shouted at the night. Louder than the storm” (195), Henry says of the music. This quote not only personifies the music, giving it the ability to shout, but also indicates that the music has the ability to overcome and drown out even the most distressing and depressing circumstances.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Henry’s reaction to the news that Keiko and her family will be moving to a different interment camp. What does this mean for them?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the role of Henry’s mother as a go-between for her husband and son. How does she show Henry that she still loves him and accepts him without angering his father?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Henry’s father says that Henry is a stranger to him despite the fact he is suffering from a debilitating stroke and that Henry has formally apologized. Why does he refuse to accept Henry’s apology?

Vocabulary

impervious, subvert, furloughs, impending, imperceptible



Thirteen (1942) - Waiting (1942)

Summary

In "Thirteen (1942)," Henry turned thirteen, the age at which Chinese boys were considered to become men. Even though Keiko had moved to Minidoka, the new camp, more than a month prior, Henry had still not received any letters from her. He was still attending school at Rainier and still working in the lunchroom. Chaz, the bully, had been kicked out of Rainier after the looting episode. Henry still saw Chaz around town but was not afraid of him any more.

More and more, Henry regretted the formal way he had said goodbye to Keiko. He wished that he had let her know how much she meant to him. As he walked home thinking of Keiko, he heard the sound of Sheldon's sax. He was still playing in small clubs but not with Oscar Holden because Oscar Holden was on a police watch list for speaking out against the way the Japanese had been treated.

When Sheldon saw Henry's dejected look and learned how Henry believed he had been too firm in the way he said goodbye, Sheldon suggested that they take a bus to the new camp and visit with Keiko. When Henry says he cannot because of the effect it might have on his father, Sheldon tells Henry what has happened to his father is not his fault. Henry convinces himself that he cannot go to the new camp but changes his mind when he arrives home and was given a birthday card from his mother that he had gotten in the mail. In her letter, Keiko told Henry that she missed him. She added she would not bother him because she did not want to cause any more problems in his family. After reading the letter, Henry packed a suitcase and told his mother he was going to the bus station and that he would be gone a few days.

On the bus on the way to the camp, Sheldon voices his concerns that they will not be able to find the camp. Henry tells him that with nine thousand people living there, finding the camp should be no problem, especially if it was like Camp Harmony. Sheldon had been irritated when the bus driver had directed him and Henry to sit in the back of the bus when they first boarded. Henry did not understand Sheldon's anger. Henry worries that they will not be able to find any place to stay once they are closer to the internment camp. He remembered stories he had heard of Japanese trying to move further inland to escape being put in camps who were unable to make the trip because people who owned gas stations refused to even sell them gas.

When the bus stopped for lunch in Walla Walla, both Henry and Sheldon were nervous because that town was inhabited with all whites. Even though the people noticed Henry and Sheldon, no one was unfriendly to them. Regardless Sheldon warned Henry not to make eye contact with anyone. As they began to walk through town, Sheldon decided the people might not be as bad as he thought. He noticed there were not "whites only" signs on any businesses and that the people actually waved and spoke when they saw them.



At the stop closest to the camp, a truck took Henry and Sheldon the remaining 18 miles. Henry and Sheldon registered as visitors and a note was taken to the area of the camp where Keiko lived to inform her that she had a visitor. The woman who checked Henry and Sheldon in said it could take a day for Keiko to respond to the request.

Henry and Sheldon waited six hours. It began to rain just as visiting hours were over so the two prepared to board a bus back to town. Henry imagined that he could hear Keiko calling his name like she had from the first days they met. Then, he realized he was hearing her calling his name. They ran to each other at the fence and Keiko wrapped her arms around him, asking him what he was doing there. He told her that he was sorry for not having said goodbye to her the way he should have done as he gave her his first kiss.

In "Sheldon Thomas (1986)," it was raining again when Henry visited Sheldon at Hearthstone Inn, the nursing home in which Sheldon lived. At Sheldon's room, a nurse asked Henry if he was a family member or friend. Henry was delighted by her question because he was obviously no relation to Sheldon. She said they were about to wake Sheldon to give him his medicine so it was a good time for a visit.

When Sheldon woke, he asked if it was Sunday, the day Henry usually visited. Henry said it was not, that he had come early because he had a surprise for him. He told Sheldon that he had found the record but it would need some restoration before it would play. Sheldon put the record on his chest and appeared to be hearing the song play in his mind.

In "Waiting (1942)," Henry wakes in the small area assigned to Keiko and her family in the new camp. He was surprised how easy it had been for him to sneak into the camp. Henry was surprised that Keiko's parents had allowed him to stay the night with them. The two promised to wait for each other.

During breakfast conversation Henry learned that there were already four thousand people in the internment camp and that six thousand more expected to join them. Henry suggested to the Okabes that with that many people, it seemed they could overpower the soldiers making them stay in the camp. Mr. Okabe told Henry they stayed because the Japanese were still loyal to America and planned to show their loyalty by their obedience. He added that the men over the age of seventeen would be asked to sign a vow of loyalty to America so that they could be drafted for the army. Mr. Okabe indicated he had already volunteered to fight in the war. Since many of the Japanese who had volunteered to fight after Pearl Harbor had been turned down, he explained it was an honor to be allowed to fight.

Before he left, Henry asked permission to court Keiko. He felt strange about the circumstances since the Chinese traditionally went through a match maker. Mr. Okabe said that Henry had his full permission because he had been so honorable in the way he acted toward Keiko and the kindness he had shown the family as a whole.



Analysis

Even though Henry is caught between his father's desires for him and his fear that he has caused his father's medical condition, Henry still chooses to visit Keiko when he has the opportunity. He is afraid that he was too abrupt and formal in the way he said goodbye to her at Camp Harmony. The birthday letter that Keiko sends him is the determining factor in his decision to go and visit her. She indicates that she thinks it might be better for him if they were no longer friends. The letter serves as proof to Henry that he left her with the feeling that he was letting her go and giving up on their friendship.

Sheldon is Henry's partner in crime by encouraging him to go and visit Keiko. When Henry tells Sheldon he cannot go all the way to the camp by himself, Sheldon uses the beliefs of Henry's own father against him. "Why, you're thirteen now, ain't you? You're a man in your daddy's eyes. You can make a man's decision and do what you gotta do. That's what I'd do" (211) Sheldon tells Henry when he argues that going to the internment camp to visit Keiko is the right thing to do.

Using Sheldon's experience with racial bias, the author points out how Henry has never experienced prejudice on the level that Sheldon has. For instance, Henry does not realize why it upsets Sheldon so badly when the driver of the bus indicates they are to sit in the back of the bus. Sheldon remembers the time when blacks were not allowed to sit anywhere but the back of the bus. He, like Oscar Holden, had moved north from the South because he was tired of the way the blacks were treated there.

In the town of Walla Walla, Sheldon is suspicious of the people and expects them to treat him differently because he is black. He warns Henry that they need to keep their heads down and not speak to anyone. At the restaurant where they decide to eat he even suggests they go to the back door of the restaurant to order their food, something Sheldon had gotten used to doing in his lifetime. A white man, however, meets them and invites them in the front. Sheldon is surprised when the people inside do not avoid him and some of them even smile and wave.

The American Japanese suffer a different form of prejudice. Even though they are legal Americans, many of them were turned down when they tried to enlist in the army to fight with the allies. Now that they are in internment camps, the men are being forced to sign an oath of loyalty, proof that they intended no harm to America, even though they have already pledged their loyalty to America by moving there and becoming United States citizens. Once they have pledged their loyalty, these Japanese will be allowed to fight for America. Mr. Okabe explains to Henry that it is ironic that the only way they can prove to the Americans that they are loyal is to die in battle for that country and many of the American Japanese are willing to do so regardless of the way they have been treated.



Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast prejudice toward the blacks and prejudice toward the Japanese.

Discussion Question 2

What is significant about Henry's decision to go and see Keiko regardless of the way his father feels? Why does he disobey his father's wishes? How does he realize that obedience should not be blind? Connect this with the way the Japanese are obedient even though they do not agree with what is being asked of them?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and Contrast Camp Harmony and Camp Minidoka.

Vocabulary

grousing, scrutinized, arid, benign, ironically, proximity, pate, profound, sentiment, blanched, betrothed



Farewell (1942) - Meeting at the Panama (1945)

Summary

In the section “Farewell (1942),” when Henry left the internment camp, Keiko asked him to write to her and not to worry. Despite the atmosphere with the barbed wire and guard towers, Henry smiled because he realized that he loved Keiko.

In the section “Angry Home (1942),” Henry arrived at home to discover a black suit laid out on his bed. At first he was afraid his father had died, but then he noticed the cruise ship tickets for passage to China in the pocket. His mother spoke to him from the doorway telling him that the tickets were from her and his father. Because Japan was losing the war, it was safe for him to go to Canton and finish his schooling. Instead of seeing the trip to China as an opportunity, Henry believed his father was trying to keep Henry away from Keiko.

Henry’s mother told Henry that his father had arranged the trip because he wanted Henry to understand his home country and what had made his father the way he was. She told him that he needed to go out of respect for his father, in a voice that was more forceful than he had ever heard. She blamed Henry for bringing on his father’s condition by siding with the Japanese, who were their enemy. Henry compromised by saying he would go to China, but would go when he was ready to do so.

In the section “Letters (1943),” when Henry wrote to Keiko about the trip to China that his father had planned for him, Keiko indicated that he should go. Since they had no choice but to be apart, she thought it would be a good use of his time. Regardless, Henry stuck with his refusal to go.

Because he received letters from Keiko only sporadically when he wrote to her every week, Henry began sending his letters overland carriage even though it was more expensive. When weeks went by since he had gotten a letter from Keiko, even the clerk at the post office looked disappointed when she had to tell him that she had no mail for him. When he finally did get a letter, Henry expected to be brushed off, but instead the letter was about camp activities. He noticed that Keiko did not write anything about the letters she got from him and that she seemed not to be responding to any letter from him in particular.

In the section “Years (1945),” now fifteen, Henry ran into Chaz. When Chaz made a comment about Keiko, Henry surprised Chaz by grabbing him by the arm. Chaz shrugged him off and walked away after he said that his father was buying up all of Japantown and there would be nothing left when the Japanese returned.



At home, Henry was regarded as the man of the house since he was working and helping to pay the bills. His father had another stroke and could barely whisper but he still kept up with the news about the war. Henry often talked to his father but his father would not even look at him during those one-sided conversations. Henry once mentioned the Panama Hotel and by the look on his father's face, he could tell that a deal was in the works to sell it. Henry had hoped that the hotel would not be sold so that there would be something that Keiko would remember about that area when she returned.

In the section "Meeting at the Panama (1945)," Henry told his father that he would go to China on the condition that his father would not allow the Panama Hotel to be sold. His father managed to thank Henry for agreeing to accept the gift, and then asked why he had changed his mind. He told his father he was not going to China for him, but instead for Keiko.

The following day, Henry mailed a letter to Keiko. He decided it would be the last one he would send to her since it had been six months since he had gotten a letter from her. He knew that many of those interned at the camp where Keiko and her family were staying had already been allowed to go home. In his letter he told her that he would be leaving for China and that he wished her a happy life. If she wished, he wanted to have a final meeting with her on the steps of the Panama Hotel.

As Henry sat on the steps of the Panama on the appointed day and waited for Keiko, he allowed himself to miss her. He had decided to make this last attempt to make contact with Keiko, so that when he did leave, he would know he had done all he could to keep them together. A glance at his father's pocket watch, along with the whistle from the Boeing plant told him it was noon, the time by which Keiko should have been there. Just as he was starting to leave, he heard a woman walking toward him. The woman stopped in front of him and for a moment, he could not bring himself to look at her. In the glare of the sun, he thought it was Keiko but once the woman stepped out of the glare, he saw that it was the girl from the post office. She had Henry's last letter with her. It was marked "return to sender." Henry noticed the letter was open. The clerk admitted to opening it. She had brought it to him because she hated the idea of him sitting there waiting for someone who would never come. She gave him a bundle of starfire lilies because she had noticed he bought them regularly, she thought someone should give him some for a change. When he asked her name, Henry learned she was Ethel Chen.

Analysis

It is explained in this section of the novel how Keiko and Henry's relationship came apart and how Henry and Ethel became acquainted. It appears that the mail between Keiko and Henry was suspiciously slow. Henry got letters from Keiko only sporadically and was never sure from Keiko's letters if she had received his letters or not. He went so far as mailing his letters overland carriage, believing they would get to Keiko more quickly but this change still did not seem to make a difference in their communication.



Because he has gotten so few letters from Keiko, he decides that she has gotten distracted by another man at the camp where she was staying and was no longer interested in him. Believing that she will get the letter, Henry writes to arrange a meeting at the Panama Hotel. Since many of the Japanese citizens who were being held in the internment camps have been set free, he thinks the letter will get to Keiko in time for her to either meet with him as arranged or let him know she cannot be there. Because Henry's letter was returned and stamped "return to sender" the clerk at the post office opened it. Instead of Keiko, she was the one who met Henry on the steps of the Panama Hotel.

Significant in this section is the reference to the Panama Hotel. It is important enough to Henry that Keiko have some landmark left in Seattle when she returns that he agrees to go to China if his father will agree not to allow that hotel to be sold. Remember in the chapter "The Panama Hotel" Henry refers to this hotel as being the place "where he'd once met the love of his life" (3). The reader now knows Henry was referencing his meeting with Ethel the day he had arranged to meet Keiko.

Also, in this section, Henry is finally given the opportunity to go to finish his schooling in China, an opportunity his parents had always promised him. Henry had been undecided if he really wanted to go to China or not but with his father's timing, Henry feels as if the trip is being given as a punishment. He believes it is his father's clever way to put distance between Henry and Keiko. Even when Keiko writes a letter to Henry, which he mysteriously gets, telling him that he should go to China, Henry refuses to give in to his parents wishes. Even when his mother accused him of making his father sick because of the way he had sided with the people his father considered the enemy, Henry did not relent. "I will decide. I'm the same age Father was when he left, when he made his own choices" (239-240) he tells his mother.

Notice the literary devices employed in this section of the novel. A pause in conversation between Henry and his father is described as being "A period on the end of the sentence of their whole fractured father-son relationship" (250). Since the pause is described not as being like a period but instead as being a period, this type of comparison is a metaphor. Personification is later used in the phrase "As the words punched the air..." (250) giving the impression that even words can be violent. In another quote, Henry tries to ensure for himself that the Panama Hotel and the memories that it hold for him will remain. Henry thinks to himself of this building that "After the bittersweet memories of him and Keiko were long since paved over, he'd have one reminder left. A placeholder that would be there for him sometime in the future" (252). Henry does not realize at that point that he will visit the Panama Hotel in years to come with the intention of looking for Keiko.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Henry is right in his suspicion that his father has arranged for him to go to China only because he wants to get Henry away from Keiko? Justify your answer.



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of the Panama Hotel both in Henry's relationship with Ethel and his relationship with Keiko.

Discussion Question 3

Consider the way Henry and Keiko leave each other when Henry sneaks out of the internment camp. Based on this farewell, how unusual is it that Keiko does not write to Henry more often than she does? Explain your reasoning.

Vocabulary

vouch, artisan, familial, dialect, mulled, stringent, notoriously, insolvent, reminisce, correspondence, missives, implored, bigoted, abundant, reverently, vantage, bulwark



V-J Day (1945) - Hearthstone (1986)

Summary

In the section "V-J Day (1945)," even though Henry was dating Ethel and was dedicated to her, he still missed Keiko and wished she would come and explain why she had disappeared. One day Henry talked to Sheldon about the change in his (Henry's) father since he had begun dating Ethel. Henry did not know what to think about the change, so he just let Ethel talk to him.

About that time, Ethel ran up to Henry and Sheldon. In the distance there was the sound of bells ringing and horns blowing. The people were celebrating in the streets because Japan had surrendered. Sheldon put his sax together and started playing. In his enthusiasm, Henry asked Ethel to marry him. He was surprised at himself the minute his words were out of his mouth. Ethel climbed onto a police car to announce to the crowd that she was getting married.

After the officer helped Ethel down from the car, Henry started noticing the Japanese people in the crowds that had gathered. For a moment he thought he saw Keiko with her beautiful brown eyes but when he looked closer, she was gone. Henry thought to himself that Keiko could not have been back in Seattle because she would have written to him.

As Ethel and Henry walked together back to the apartment he shared with his parents, Henry heard his mother shouting for him. His father had another stroke and was dying. At his bedside, Henry told his father that he was going to marry Ethel. His father replied only "I did it for you" (263) and Henry knew he was talking about interfering with his letters to Keiko. Henry's father was the reason they had not gotten the letters they sent to one another. Henry wanted to be angry with his father but could not make himself be angry.

Believing that Keiko and her family would go to the Panama Hotel to get their things, Henry ran out of the apartment to the hotel. There was a lone worker replacing boards on the hotel. Even though he wanted to find Keiko and tell her that everything he had done could be undone he knew he could not break Ethel's heart. Ethel was standing in front of Henry when he looked up. When they walked home together, Henry knew he had a good deal to do to keep him busy. He planned, as he always did, to find the sweetness in his bitter situation.

In the section "Broken Records (1986)," Henry visited Marty in his dorm after he had not heard from him for a week. Marty asked him if he was interested in finding Keiko. Henry indicated that he believed he had blown his chance to have a relationship with Keiko. Marty argued that was not fair because Keiko had been taken from him. Henry suggested his relationship with Keiko was like the broken record they had found, it could not be fixed.



In the section “Hearthstone (1986),” Henry had hurried over when he had gotten a call informing him that Sheldon had gotten worse. The nurse said Sheldon’s wife had gone to collect family because it was getting close to Sheldon’s time. He noticed the broken record still laying on Sheldon’s table. When Sheldon woke, he asked Henry to “fix it” (217). Henry assumed he was talking about the record but questioned him again when Sheldon next struggled to awareness. Sheldon said he did want Henry to fix it but that he was not talking about the record. He told Henry that they both knew why Henry was looking for the record and that Henry needed to fix that.

Analysis

After Henry proposes to Ethel, he thinks for a moment that he sees Keiko in the crowd. He does not believe it is really Keiko. This is apparent when he says the following: “It couldn’t have been Keiko. She’d have written” (261). These last words of this quote are italicized for emphasis. When Henry returns home that day to find his father dying. His father wants to clear his conscious before dying. He tells Henry the truth about interfering with the letters between Henry and Keiko. His father’s confession leads Henry to believe that Keiko might have written and the letter might just not have gotten delivered because of his father’s interference.

There are a pair of climaxes that are reached in this section of the novel. The first is from Henry’s earlier years when he learns that his father had interfered in the mail service keeping Henry from getting Keiko’s letters. Henry’s father’s act of clearing his conscious comes in perfect timing with Henry’s spur of the moment decision to ask Ethel to marry him. He is stuck between the realization that perhaps Keiko does still love him and the knowledge that he does not want to hurt Ethel. Notice the reference to the bitter and the sweet as Henry thinks to himself: “He’d do what he always did, find the sweet among the bitter” (265).

The second climax comes when Sheldon orders Henry to fix what is broken. At first Henry believes that his old friend is talking about the Oscar Holden record, that he wants the record fixed. When Sheldon is alert enough to explain to Henry what he really means, Henry realizes that Sheldon wants him to fix his relationship with Keiko. Remember that Sheldon was always a source of encouragement when it came to Henry’s friendship with Keiko. Even in his age, Sheldon encourages his old friend to get in touch with Keiko and see if she has thought about him through the years like he has thought about her.

Discussion Question 1

In this section of the novel, what does the Oscar Holden record symbolize?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the reason why the author stressed that Henry believed Keiko would have written if she were coming back to Seattle. Why is this significant? What is the author trying to tell the reader?

Discussion Question 3

Would it have been better if Henry had never learned his father had interfered with the letters? If so, do you think Henry would still have tried to track down Keiko after Ethel died? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

imminent, obfuscated, resignation, palpable, placid, ambled, mollified, lucid



Tickets (1986) - New York (1986)

Summary

In the section "Tickets (1986)," when Henry took the broken record to Bud's Jazz Records, Bud told Henry there was no way to fix the record or even pull the song off and make a digital copy of it. Henry had thought from the beginning that the record, like some other things, just could not be fixed.

At home, Henry was surprised to see his best suit laid out on the bed. In the breast pocket of the coat was a ticket to New York City. Marty walked into the room behind his father. He told his father he was proud of the way he had taken care of his mother and that he wanted to do something in return. He had found Keiko and was sending his father to visit her. Unlike the last time someone had bought a ticket for Henry and he refused to go, this time Henry refused to stay.

In the section "Sheldon's Song (1986)," Henry decided to wait until Sheldon's time had come to visit Keiko. Sheldon's wife told him there was not much time left. She asked if the music was his doing. Henry started to apologize because he had taken the record but then realized he was listening to Alley Cat Strut playing.

Samantha said that Keiko had sent the record when she found out Sheldon was so close to his death. Samantha also gave Henry a note that Keiko had sent for him. In the letter, Keiko asked him to think of the good in their relationship, not the time they had spent apart from each other. Henry took Samantha's hands, telling her that she was wonderful. Sheldon opened his eyes and looked at Henry, congratulating him for having fixed it. Henry thought to himself that soon he would be fixing everything. When Sheldon took his last breath, Henry whispered to him the words he had heard Sheldon say so often "Thank you, sir, and you have a fine day" (281).

In the section "New York (1986)," Henry paused at the door of Kay Hatsune, whom Henry knew had been a widow for three years, before knocking. Henry recognized Keiko by her hopeful brown eyes, even though it took her a minute to recognize him. She admitted that she had almost given up on him. The inside of her apartment was decorated with watercolor and oil paintings of cherry blossoms and ume trees, along with barbed wire fences and prairie.

Keiko went for tea while Henry looked at the photographs. There was one of her father in an army uniform. There was also a sketch of them the day he had spent at Minidoka. Henry wandered over to the stereo where he put on the Oscar Holden record. As Keiko stood looking at Henry, Keiko began the phrase that Sheldon had taught Henry to say in Japanese "How are you today, beautiful" (28) and Henry finished it.



Analysis

The past comes back to Henry as he hears The Alley Cat Strut playing in Sheldon's room in the nursing home. Sheldon tells Henry that he fixed it, perhaps not comprehending completely that Keiko had sent the record. Because he has learned from his son that they had found Keiko and planned a visit, Henry believes that everything in his life will soon be fixed. Remember, however, that this was not always what Henry believed. When he got the bad news from Bud at the record store that the record could not be fixed, he thought perhaps that his relationship with Keiko could not be fixed either.

When Henry returns to his house from his disappointing visit to Bud's Jazz Records in his attempt to get the record fixed, he discovers a suit laid out on his bed just like it had been when he returned to his childhood home after visiting Keiko in Camp Minidoka. His son, Marty, walks up behind him, just like his mother did on that day long ago. Instead of trying to separate Henry from Keiko, Marty tells his father that he and Samantha have arranged a visit with Keiko.

The novel ends in a positive tone as Henry and Keiko listen to their song playing in the background at Keiko's apartment. They remember the phrase in Japanese that Sheldon taught Henry to say to Keiko. Keiko begins this phrase while Henry repeats it. It is symbolic of the way they were, perhaps, never apart in their hearts even though Henry's father tried so hard to keep them from loving each other. Perhaps, even with the time and distance that had separated them, Keiko and Henry can finally have the relationship they both desire and deserve.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the two instances of Henry finding a suit laid out across the bed.

Discussion Question 2

What do you think Sheldon is talking about when he congratulates Henry for having fixed it? Do you think he is talking about the record, or his relationship with Keiko? Give reasons to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the importance of the Japanese phrase that Keiko and Henry recite at the end of the novel. What is the tone as the book ends?

Vocabulary

precariously, embedded, nuance, impetuous, impeccable



Characters

Henry Lee

The novel focuses on Henry Lee. At the story opens, Henry is in his early teens. He is growing up as an American citizen of Chinese descent in Seattle during World War II. Henry again appears in the novel forty years later after the death of his wife. At this point, he begins to recall his teen years.

During Henry's childhood, Henry's father is dedicated to teaching his son about his Chinese heritage, but he still wants his son to have the best opportunities in America. Instead of letting Henry attend the Chinese school where Henry feels more comfortable, Henry's father arranges for him to get a scholarship to attend Rainier School, a prestigious all-white school. At the school, Henry is made fun of on a daily basis because he is Chinese. It is while Henry is attending Rainier that he meets Keiko, a Japanese student who is also attending that school on scholarship.

At home, Henry and his parents drift apart because his father orders him to speak only in English. Henry knows that it will cause a problem because his parents speak only broken English and Cantonese. Even though Henry and his father have different feelings about the members of the large Japanese community who live near them, Henry is not able to communicate with his father and discuss their differences because they cannot converse in their different languages.

Meanwhile, Henry becomes increasingly dedicated to Keiko. However, his father hates the Japanese and orders Henry to have nothing to do with Keiko. Henry sneaks off to help in the mess hall at the internment camp where Keiko and her family live so that he can see her. He also agrees to keep family photographs that neither Keiko's parents nor Keiko could bear to burn. Henry's father finds the photographs and throws them out the window. He tells Henry that if he goes outside to pick up the photos, he will disown him. Henry chooses to keep his promise to Keiko and gathers up the photos despite his father's threat. He cannot understand why his father is so angry with the Japanese, especially those who have lived in America for generations. They had nothing to do with the wars and fighting that have affected his father so strongly.

As an older man, Henry believes that he blew his chance to have a relationship with a Japanese girl, Keiko, whom he met at his school. Even though the two promised to wait for each other while Keiko and her family were imprisoned in an internment camp, Henry proposed to another girl in her absence. Because he had gotten so few letters from Keiko and none that expressed her love for him, Henry believed that she had moved on with her life despite their promise to each other. It is only after Henry proposes marriage to Ethel that he learns that his father arranged for the letters that Henry and Keiko sent to one another not to reach their intended destinations.



Henry began to think of his friendship with Keiko once again when the new owner of the Panama Hotel announced that the belongings of many Japanese families who had been forced to stay in internment camps were still stored in the hotel's basement. When some of these items were brought up to the main level of the hotel, Henry saw a parasol he believed had once belonged to Keiko. Later Henry, with the help of his son and daughter-in-law, finds not only a copy of the Oscar Holden record that Keiko had bought for Henry, but also Keiko's sketchbooks with some drawings of Henry inside. Marty and Samantha encourage Henry to visit Keiko and try to reunite with her.

Henry's Father

Henry's father is ultra Chinese. Even though Henry was born in America, his father insists that he wear a button saying that he is Chinese so he will not be mistaken for a person of Japanese descent. Even though Henry's father speaks only broken English, which Henry describes as "Chinglish" (12) he insists that Henry speak only in English at their house. This rule severely inhibits their already meager conversation.

Henry's father hates the Japanese not only because of the way they have attacked China killing the elderly and the sick but also because of the way they were allowed into America and given jobs when Chinese immigration was halted. Because he was so devoted to the Chinese, Henry's father was a revered member of the Bing Kung Benevolent Association and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. He sent money to China to help fight against the Japanese.

Henry's father appears to be proud of his son. He often mentions that Henry is on scholarship at Rainier school, a prep school at which Henry is the only Asian student.

When Henry's father learns that Henry has a Japanese friend he is angry with him. When he learns that Henry is hiding that friend's personal possessions in their house, Henry's father disowns him. He does his best to sabotage Henry and Keiko's relationship, even interfering with the mail so that the majority of the letters the two write to each other never reach their destination.

It is when Henry's father is on his death bed that he admits to Henry that he "did it for you" (263). Henry realizes from these words that his father is attempting to clear his conscience about interfering with the letters before he dies.

Sheldon Thomas

Sheldon Thomas is the black jazz saxophone player who is a mentor and big brother figure to Henry.

His role in the novel is to present the injustice of prejudice from the point of view of a black person. Sheldon is not allowed to play in white clubs because he is black. It is for this reason that Sheldon has trouble getting a start in his career, even though he is highly talented.



Sheldon also encourages Henry to follow his heart instead of his father's rules when it comes to his friendship with Keiko. When Sheldon notices that Henry is not happy with the way he left his relationship with Keiko when they said goodbye at Camp Harmony, Sheldon encourages Henry to travel to the new internment camp to say goodbye the right way.

Sheldon even makes sacrifices for the two young lovers by letting Henry take his only copy of the record *The Alley Cat Strut* that he recorded with Oscar Holden as a birthday gift for Keiko. Henry is unable to get to the record that Keiko bought for them because it is stored in the basement of the Panama Hotel.

Sheldon and Henry remain friends their entire lives. After Henry locates the broken copy of the Oscar Holden record in the basement of the Panama Hotel, Sheldon tells him to fix it. Henry at first mistakes that Henry is referring to the record but Sheldon explains he is not talking about the record, but his relationship with Keiko. Sheldon tells Henry that he knows it is because of Keiko and his memories of her that he wanted to find the record so badly.

Ms. Beatty

Ms. Beatty is the lunch lady at Rainier Elementary School. She oversees Henry and Keiko's work in the cafeteria. Although she is described as being distant and not particularly friendly to anyone, she takes a special liking to Henry and Keiko.

It may be because the two are such good workers for her that Ms. Beatty keeps an eye on them but she seems to turn up just when the two need someone to stand up in their defense. For instance, Ms. Beatty calls off Chaz when he tries to pick a fight with Henry after school one day. Ms. Beatty is also the one who stops Henry from retaliating against Chaz when he makes fun of Keiko after she was sent to the internment camp. Ms. Beatty also gives Chaz what he has coming to him because she runs him off from the lunch line without allowing him to have anything to eat.

When Ms. Beatty is hired to help set up the mess hall at the internment camp where Keiko is being held, she invites Henry to go along and help out. She helps him sneak in wrapped gifts for Keiko on her birthday.

Even though Ms. Beatty is described as a rough, man-like woman who has little to say, it appears that she does have a soft heart. On the way to the internment camp one day, Henry learns that Ms. Beatty's father is being held in a prisoner of war camp. Ms. Beatty and her father had a special relationship. Her father was a Merchant Marine and often took his daughter to work with him in the mess hall of the ship on which he was serving. It is perhaps this sadness in Ms. Beatty's life that helps her understand Henry's pain when Keiko is put in an internment camp.



Keiko Okabe aka Kay Hatsune

Keiko Okabe is a Japanese girl who attends Rainier School, the same school that Henry attends. They are both scholarship students. For this reason they work together in the cafeteria. Because they are both ostracized by the other students, the two become friends.

Keiko is a second generation American citizen. Her parents have instilled in her the belief that she is American first and Japanese second. For this reason, Keiko is critical of Henry and the pressure that his father puts on him to be Chinese instead of stressing the unification of their American citizenship.

It is Keiko who finds the copy of Oscar Holden's record in a department store and tries to buy it for Henry. When the store clerk refuses to wait on her, Keiko is upset because she thinks adults should treat people more fairly.

During one of Henry's visits to the internment camp where Keiko lived, Keiko and Henry promised to wait for each other. After the war is over, Keiko returns home to discover that Henry is engaged to a Chinese woman. Apparently, Keiko moves on with her life.

Samantha and Marty connect with Keiko after Ethel's death. They tell Keiko about Sheldon's impending death and the way Henry's father meddled in the relationship between Keiko and Henry. Keiko agrees to meet with Henry. She also sends her copy of the "Alley Cat Strut," the one that originally belonged to Sheldon, so that Sheldon can hear it before his death.

When Keiko and Henry reunite, Keiko encourages him not to think about the time they lost. Instead, he should think about the good times they did have.

Marty Lee

Marty Lee is the son of Henry and Ethel Lee. He is a university student who is preparing to graduate with highest honors. Like Henry's relationship with his own father (Marty's grandfather), Marty and Henry rarely spoke to one another. Their contact with each other mostly came through their mother.

Marty assumed his father was ultra Chinese, like Henry's father. When Marty and Henry begin developing a relationship without Ethel as an intermediary, Marty learns that his father is completely different from his grandfather.

Henry had thought that his son did not approve of the way he had taken care of his mother during her sickness. Instead, he learns that Marty did not agree at the time that Ethel should be at home. He wanted her in a nursing home. After Marty got to know his father, he better understood why he wanted to keep his wife at home to take care of her.



Marty is the one who finds Keiko and arranges for Henry to go and visit her in New York City.

Ethel Chen Lee

Ethel Chen Lee is Henry's wife. Henry meets her at the post office when he mails his letters to Keiko and asks for any letters she has sent him.

Henry does not notice Ethel until she meets him at the Panama Hotel, the place where he had asked Keiko to meet him. Ethel comes to the hotel because Henry's letter to Keiko had been returned unopened. Ethel opened it because she was curious about the letters. She did not want Henry to be hurt when Keiko did not meet him.

Henry learns that his father arranged for Henry and Keiko not to receive the letters that they exchanged. However, he does not believe that Ethel had anything to do with this deception, even though she worked at the post office.

Henry proposed to Ethel on VJ Day. They had one son, Marty. She died of cancer six months before the novel's time period.

Oscar Holden

Oscar Holden is a jazz musician with whom Sheldon gets several gigs after Sheldon joins a union for black jazz musicians. It is because of his association with Oscar Holden that Sheldon is able to break into the business and eventually get his own recording contract.

When Keiko and Henry go to the Black Elks Club to hear Sheldon play with Oscar Holden, they are surprised when Oscar Holden meets them outside the club and offers to let them hear the concert if they will pick up Jamaican Ginger for him so that they can make bootlegged liquor for the club. In his appreciation, Oscar Holden plays a version of his song, "Alley Cat Strut," which he dedicates to Keiko and Henry.

After the Japanese were forced to leave Japantown in Seattle, Oscar Holden spoke out against the way they were being treated. For this reason, he was put on a watch list and had trouble getting paying jobs.

Samantha

Samantha is Marty's fiancé. At first, Marty is afraid to introduce Samantha to his father because she is American. Henry quickly takes a liking to Samantha because she is not only familiar with jazz music but also because she can cook Chinese food as well as he can.



Samantha helps Henry and Marty look for the Oscar Holden record in the basement of the Panama Hotel. Samantha is the one who actually locates the record. When she learns about Keiko, Samantha suggests that Henry try to find her. Later, Samantha gets in touch with Keiko and arranges a meeting between Keiko and Henry. It is Samantha who tells Keiko that Sheldon is dying and wants to hear the Oscar Holden record. The two make arrangements to get the record to Seattle so Sheldon can hear it before his death.

Chaz Preston

Chaz Preston is one of the main students at Rainier who bullies Henry and Keiko. Henry is afraid of the bigger boy when he is in the sixth grade, but he comes to realize that Chaz is pathetic and not as big a threat as he had once seemed. After Chaz is caught looting in Japantown, he is kicked out of Rainier.

Chaz is the antagonist in the novel. He takes after his father in that he likes to take advantage of people who are in unfortunate circumstances or are in a position where they cannot fight back. As he gets older and grows more confident, Henry realizes that bullies like Chaz are often not as powerful as they perceive themselves to be.

Charles Preston

Charles Preston is Chaz's father. He comes to visit Henry's father because he wants to develop land in Japantown. To develop the land, he needs the support of the Chinese Benevolent Association. Because Henry knows Mr. Preston is taking advantage of the way the Japanese are being removed from their homes and businesses, Henry incorrectly translates the conversation between Mr. Preston and his father. For this reason, the business deals between the two fall apart.

Mr. and Mrs. Okabe

Mr. and Mrs. Okabe are Keiko's parents. They are impressed by Henry's friendship with Keiko, even though so many people are prejudiced toward the Japanese. Henry's offer to get Keiko's entire family buttons stating that they are Chinese so that they do not have to go to the internment camps gives Mr. Okabe hope in humanity.

Later, when Henry travels to the internment camp Minidoka to visit Keiko, Mr. and Mrs. Okabe readily give him permission to court Keiko.

The Photographer

The photographer at the Ochi Photography Studio is the one who had taken Keiko's picture with the parasol similar to the one found later in the basement of the Panama



Hotel. This photographer points Henry in the direction of Kobe Park in his hunt to find Keiko.

Later, Henry meets this unnamed photographer again while he is taking pictures of the Japanese people burning their personal belongings that might connect them with Japan.

Palmyra Pettison

Palmyra Pettison is the new owner of the Panama Hotel. She is the one who discovers the belongings of the thirty-seven Japanese families from the World War II era that are stored in the basement of the hotel. She allows Henry to look through the belongings.

Henry respects Ms. Pettison because she plans to restore the hotel as in was in its heyday instead of trying to renovate it into something more modern.

Henry's Mother

Even though she speaks very little English, Henry's mother seems to understand what Henry is doing when he says inappropriate things in English. She tries to be a more accepting parent than Henry's father but tries to stay within the bounds of his rules. She makes sure that Henry gets the letters that Keiko sends to their house, but she is upset when the Japanese photo albums are found in Henry's room.

Mr. Toyama

Mr. Toyama was Keiko's English composition teacher at the Japanese school.

When the FBI raids the Black Elks Club, Mr. Toyama is among the Japanese who are arrested as a conspirator against the American government.

Denny Brown

Denny Brown is one of Chaz's friends. Henry finds Denny painting graffiti in Japantown days before the Japanese are forced to leave. Denny is the bully who falls face first as he tries to chase after Denny and the wagon.

Dr. Luke

Dr. Luke is one of the few Chinese doctors remaining who is still willing to see patients in their homes. It is Dr. Luke who is called to take care of Henry's father when he has strokes.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Panama Hotel

More than anything else, the Panama Hotel is a symbol of the place that Japantown was before the Japanese were evacuated. The hotel was designed and built by a Japanese architect. For this reason, it was a place that Henry's father forbade him to go. The hotel also worked as a go-between both in time and place. The hotel is described as "a place between worlds when he was a child, a place between times now that he was a grown man" (62). When Henry was a child, the hotel was a place between Japantown and Chinatown. In time, the hotel has remained the same from the time he was a child. Even though it has been purchased, the owner strives to keep the hotel true to its history. When he steps back into the renovated lobby as an adult, he feels as if he has physically stepped back in time.

A Japanese Parasol

The Japanese parasol is a symbol of Keiko. Henry automatically thinks of Keiko when the new owner of the Panama Hotel brings up this parasol and opens it for those gathered to admire. Seeing the parasol sparks Henry's curiosity about what else he might find in the basement. Henry recognized the parasol because he had seen it in a portrait of Keiko during one of his trips to Japantown as a child.

A Lucky Money Envelope

This lucky money envelope and its contents represent Marty's desire to make his father proud of him. Marty gives his father his final grade sheet from the university in this lucky envelope and tells him at the same time that he believes he has made good use of his father's money because he will be graduating with highest honors.

"I Am Chinese" Button

This "I Am Chinese" button that Henry's father makes him wear represents his father's pride in being Chinese and the unrest between the Chinese and Japanese in Henry's family's part of town. Henry's father wants to make sure that no one mistakes Henry for a person of Japanese descent. At Henry's school, it does not matter that Henry wears the button because students still accuse him of being Japanese and make fun of him because he is of Asian descent. It is Keiko who tells Henry that he can be Chinese if he wants, but she chooses to refer to herself as an American.



A Piece of Candy

Pieces of candy are given out at a funeral and symbolize the desire that those attending the funeral leave tasting sweetness and not bitterness.

A Quarter

To Henry a quarter represents Ethel and her memory. He believes it is all that he has left of her. At Chinese funerals these coins are traditionally put in the envelope with a piece of candy. Mourners are supposed to use the quarter to buy more candy on the way home. However, in Henry's case, he refuses to follow this tradition even though his son tries to get him to do so.

Jamaican Ginger

Jamaican Ginger is a symbol of the bootlegging business. It is this ingredient that Keiko and Henry are sent out to buy the night that Sheldon plays at the Black Elks Club with Oscar Holden so that they can listen to the music.

Ume Tree

The ume tree is a symbol of perseverance in the place of adversity. Henry grafts a branch from one of these Chinese trees that grew in Kobe Park in Japantown the night that Marty was born. To Henry, it is a symbol of his dedication to his wife and son even though he is not living the life he had intended to live.

A Sketch of Henry

A sketch of Henry that Marty and Samantha find in Keiko's sketchbook is proof to them that Henry did have a Japanese friend despite his father's hatred of the Japanese. It sparks Henry's conversation with Marty about Keiko.

Two Recordings of Oscar Holden and the Midnight Blue, The Alley Cat Strut

These records symbolize many different things during the course of the novel but they mostly represent Henry and Keiko's relationship. Oscar Holden plays a special version of this song for Henry and Keiko the night he meets them in the alley outside the Black Elks Club. For this reason, the two refer to "Alley Cat Strut" as their song.

Keiko finds the first album as a surprise for Henry. They agree she should keep the record since because she is the only one with a record player that will play it. When she



and her family are sent to the internment camp, the record goes with her other belongings to the basement of the Panama Hotel. The second copy of the record comes into play when Henry talks Sheldon into letting him take Sheldon's copy to Keiko in the internment camp so she can play it during the record concert.

When Henry finds the copy of the record in the Panama Hotel, he wonders what else he might be able to find, like his old relationship with Keiko. Because the record is broken and cannot be repaired, Henry takes it as a sign that his relationship with Keiko may not be able to be repaired either. In the last days of his life, Sheldon orders Henry to "fix it" (271). Henry believes that Sheldon is talking about the record, but Sheldon says he is talking about Henry's relationship with Keiko.



Settings

Seattle, Washington

Seattle, Washington, is the setting for most of the novel's action. Both Chinatown and Japantown from Henry's childhood are located in Seattle. As an adult, Henry still lives in Seattle.

The Panama Hotel

The Panama Hotel is the place where items belonging to Japanese families who were sent to interment camps during World War II were stored. Henry is at the hotel when the first items are brought up from the basement. He believes he sees among the things a parasol that once belonged to Keiko. Henry later returns to the hotel where he, his son and his son's girlfriend find a copy of Oscar Holden's record. Unfortunately, this record is broken. It was on the steps of the Panama Hotel where Henry met Ethel, the woman who became his wife, while he was waiting for Keiko to meet him.

Lake View Cemetery

Lake View Cemetery is the cemetery in which Henry's wife, Ethel, as well as his parents, are buried.

Rainier Elementary School

Rainier Elementary School is the school that Henry and Keiko attend on scholarship. Henry and Keiko are the only immigrant students in the all-white school. It is while they are working in the cafeteria of the school that Henry and Keiko meet each other and become friends.

Bud's Jazz Records

Bud's Jazz Records is the name of the store that Henry visited to look for a copy of Oscar Holden's recording. Henry later returned to this store with the broken copy of Oscar Holden's record that he located in the basement of the Panama Hotel. He hoped that Bud could fix the record.

Black Elks Club

Keiko and Henry are let into the Black Elks Club to listen to Oscar Holden and Sheldon play together after they procure bottles of Jamaican Ginger. It is while they are at the



club that the FBI busts in and arrests all of the Japanese people they because they are suspected of spying on the Americans and sending information back to the military in Japan.

Kobe Park

Kobe Park is the place where Henry locates Keiko the first time he visits Japantown. It is also the place where Keiko arranges to meet Henry the night she asks him to keep her family's photographs so they will not have to be burnt. Later, Henry grafts a branch from a ume tree in Kobe Park to plant in his backyard.

Camp Harmony

Camp Harmony is the name of the first internment camp where Keiko and her parents are sent. Mrs. Beatty helps Henry keep in touch with Keiko by taking him with her as his cooking assistant when she helps out at the camp.

Hearthstone Inn

The Hearthstone Inn is the name of the nursing home where Sheldon lives. Henry visits Sheldon at this nursing home several times during the course of the novel.

New York City

New York City is the city in which Marty locates Keiko. He arranges for his father to travel there to meet his lost love.



Themes and Motifs

Henry's Coming of Age

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet is a coming of age story. Henry's early years deal with his coming of age in a home where he is expected to follow the demands of his biased father. Henry cannot believe his father's claims that all Japanese are bad. As a result, he is unable to follow the rules his father lays out for him. He becomes friends with a Japanese girl named Keiko. Eventually, Henry's father uses desperate measures to try to keep his son away from the Japanese girl whom he loves, but he loses his son's respect in the process.

Because Henry's father grew up in China and remembered how the Japanese attacked that country, he was biased against all Japanese. He was biased against those who had no part in what was done to China. Though Henry is an American citizen, his father orders him to wear a button stating the he is Chinese. This makes no sense to Henry.

Henry is also forbidden to go into the parts of Seattle known as Japantown. Henry remembers his father being so prejudiced against the Japanese that he had left a restaurant before the food was served after finding out the the restaurant had been built by the Japanese.

It is against this background that Henry befriends Keiko. She and her parents have lived in America all of their lives. Henry realizes through their relationship that Keiko's parents are more loving and accepting of different people than his own parents. In their minds, they are American citizens first, even though they are of Japanese descent. They believe their fellow Americans will eventually come to respect them if they do what is right.

The first major conflict between Henry and his father comes just before Henry turned thirteen. The Japanese people were being asked to burn anything that connected them to Japan. However, neither Keiko's parents nor she were able to bring themselves to burn their family photos, many of them showing members of the family in traditional Japanese dress. Henry agreed to keep the photos for her in his house. His father found the photos and threw them out into the street. He told Henry that if Henry went out to retrieve the photos, he would disown him. Believing he had reached the point where he had to defend what he thought was right, Henry went after the photos.

From that point forward, Henry tried to show respect for his father even though he could not find it in him to obey his father's request to stay away from Keiko. For Henry, learning that he does not have to blindly obey his father is a major step in his coming of age. Henry realizes his father's blind hate of all Japanese is not right. Because he knows it is not right, he refuses to follow his father's demands not to help Keiko and her family or spend time with them.



One significant step in his journey toward manhood comes when Henry intentionally lies to his father in an attempt to keep the Japanese people from being mistreated. Henry's father has a business meeting with Mr. Preston who hopes to buy up the buildings being abandoned by the Japanese as investment opportunities. He wants the support of Henry's father but Henry mistranslates the conversation between the two so that the business deal falls through.

In China, a boy is said to become a man when he reaches his thirteenth birthday, it appears that Henry takes his final step into manhood when he realizes how his father sabotaged his relationship with Keiko. Henry had already known that his father did not approve of the friendship with the Japanese girl. His father had even arranged for Henry to go to China to keep him away from Keiko. However, Henry does not fully understand to what lengths his father will go to keep him and Keiko apart. It is on his deathbed that Henry's father tells his son that he interfered with the mail and kept Henry and Keiko from getting the letters they sent to each other. He does not regret his decision, but he wants to clear his conscience. Henry shows his maturity by not getting angry with his dying father and by remaining true to the promises he had made to Ethel, his wife.

Music as a Powerful Form of Communication

The author of *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* explores how music is a powerful form of communication. Whether it is heard on the sidewalk, in a black jazz club, or in the room of a dying man, music has the power to communicate emotion. It connects the people who listen to it. The particular song in this novel is the one played by Oscar Holden for Henry and Keiko, "The Alley Cat Strut." The song holds special memories for Henry and Keiko, as well as Sheldon who was a musician playing in the band on that record.

Even before Sheldon had made it as a big time jazz player, he enjoyed a good bit of recognition as a sidewalk performer. Henry notes that the people who gathered to listen to his friend play were always happy: "swaying and smiling while his friend played some smooth jazz number" (27). After Sheldon and Henry watch the Japanese people evacuated from their neighborhood in Seattle, Sheldon once again takes to the streets with his music. He and Henry walk to the heart of the deserted Japantown where Sheldon begins to play. At first, his song is mournful for the people who have been forced to leave their homes but then turns more joyful and upbeat, a sign that things will change and the war cannot last forever.

Keiko and Henry's first unofficial date takes place in the Black Elks Club where they go to hear Sheldon play with Oscar Holden. Not only are they surprised when the older black man dedicates a song to them but Henry is also surprised by the way the people in the club appear to be united by the music despite their race, nation of origin or skin color. He describes the club as "a place hidden from the troubles of the world. Maybe that was why they all came here. To escape..." (55). Henry describes the music as a way to escape from the reality of the world at war.



As an adult, Henry wants to find the recording of "The Alley Cat Strut" for himself and for Sheldon. Sheldon wants the opportunity to hear it one more time before he dies, and Henry wants to be able to bring to mind the memories of Keiko that he associates with that record. The record allows Sheldon to have peace as he dies. Samantha says to Henry "You should have seen him smile when we put it on and played it the first time. Like he'd been wanting to hear this, needing to hear this, all these years" (279). Similarly, when Henry plays the copy of the record in Keiko's apartment, they smile at one another just like they did as young teens, separated by the fence at the internment camp. It is indicated the relationship will continue just like no time has passed.

Prejudice

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet shares how prejudice touches the lives of those who are perceived as different. After Henry is transferred from the Chinese school in his area to the all-white Rainier school, he is not treated well either by the Chinese boys who had once been his friends or the students at Rainier. When he passed the students with whom he had once attended school, they would call him a "white devil" (13), the same thing they called Caucasian students. At Rainier, the students accused him of being Japanese, a taunt they thought was fitting since so many of them heard their parents talk about how the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Even as he served lunch, an activity required because he was attending the school on scholarship, the students would jeer at him and make faces.

It is when Keiko tries to buy the Oscar Holden record that she is most angered by the prejudiced behavior of the adult store clerk. She tells Henry she expected the taunting from children but thought that adults would be more mature in their actions. "I was born here. I don't even speak Japanese. Still, all these people, everywhere I go ... they hate me" (114-115) Keiko shares with Henry. Keiko and her family, along with the other Japanese, again feel the hate of the Americans when they are forced to leave their homes and move to internment camps. Just because some of them once lived in Japan, or had relatives or ancestors who lived in Japan, it is feared they will jeopardize the safety of America. It is because the Japanese people are loyal to America, that they do what is asked of them.

Because they are black, both Sheldon and Oscar Holden have faced racial prejudice their entire lives. Even though Sheldon is much younger than Oscar, they both moved from the homes in the deep South to escape the way blacks were treated there. Because they remember what that treatment felt like, both Sheldon and Oscar are outraged by the way the Japanese people are being treated. When the FBI raids his club, Oscar tells them "I didn't leave the South to come all the way up here and see people treated like that!" (59). Ironic is that even while Oscar stands up for the rights of the Japanese, he and other blacks are still fighting for their own rights. Because the Black Elks Club is a black club, it is illegal for alcohol to be served there. At that period in time, even in Seattle, black musicians were not allowed to play in white clubs.



Effects of World War II on America

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet addresses the effects of World War II on America. When America was brought into World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, America's citizens followed a new set of rules. The rules included blackouts, rationing, and evacuation. The rules, which were put in place by the country's leaders to keep the people safe, affected everyday life in America. Some of the steps taken, like blackout orders, probably had real life saving consequences. However, other rules, such as the evacuation of the Japanese, probably did not help the war effort. In fact, the internment of the Japanese might have been a hindrance since many Japanese men wanted to sign up to fight for America. They were not allowed to do so.

Because it was the Japanese army that attacked Pearl Harbor, it was believed that the people of Japanese ancestry, even if they were American citizens, should be rounded up to keep the country safe. Those who were only sent to internment camps actually got off easily because some Japanese were arrested on charges of war crimes and treason. Many Japanese families destroyed all evidence — including traditional clothing, photographs, and letters from family — that they had any connection with Japan. They did this to avoid being arrested.

One aspect of life during the war that Henry mentions often were the blackout rules. Windows were to be covered so that no light could be seen shining outside. Outside lights were turned out and people driving cars at night had to keep their headlights covered or turned out. It was believed that the Japanese bombers would be able to recognize and target large American cities by the amount of light they could see from the sky. Although it was believed these blackout rules kept the people of America safe, Henry notes at one point that it was dangerous to walk around town after dark because people sometimes got hit by cars because of the required darkness.

Also because of the war, a variety of staples like sugar, shoe leather, gasoline, and many food items were rationed. The people did the best they could to make do while the items were being rationed. The blacks, for instance, used Jamaican Ginger to make bootlegged liquor because alcohol was being rationed. Many families grew small gardens, known as Victory Gardens, to help fill the gaps because of shortages in produce.

Overcoming Prejudice in Relationships

The novel examines how relationships can overcome prejudice. While there are several references to people who are prejudiced against others, there are also many relationships in the story that demonstrate how people can like each other despite their differences. The relationship between Keiko and Henry, the relationship between Samantha and Marty, and the friendship between Sheldon and Henry show that people can like, even love, someone with a different background or ethnicity. Henry, for example, is surprised how well Samantha and Marty fit together despite the differences in their ancestry. Even while Henry approves of the relationship between his son and



fiancé, he worries that his son will not accept the fact that his father once dated a girl of Japanese ancestry. Sheldon and Henry's friendship, a black man and Chinese boy, illustrates the idea that people of different ages as well as of different races, can be friends.

Because his grandfather was so strictly Chinese, Marty worries that his father follows the same strict beliefs that people of Chinese descent should marry only Chinese. For this reason he is anxious when he tells his father that he is engaged to an American girl. When Henry meets Samantha, he loves her because she is loving and caring. She puts care into learning how to make traditional Chinese food for her future father-in-law. Samantha even gets in touch with Keiko and requests the copy of the recording of "The Alley Cat Strut." She makes the request so Sheldon, a man she barely knows, can hear the song before he dies. It is not Samantha's nationality that Henry sees; it is her kindness.

Similarly, Henry does not see in Keiko her Japanese ancestry. He sees her kindness and her hope for the future.

Even though Henry and Keiko are dedicated to one another, Henry's father manages to come between the two. Regardless of his interference, Henry does not forget Keiko. After Henry's wife dies of cancer, his son helps find Henry find Keiko. Henry and Keiko are reunited after all those years since they were teens.

Sheldon's friendship with Henry is another example of a relationship that manages to thrive despite the racial and age differences between the two. When Keiko first meets Sheldon, Sheldon jokes with her that he and Henry are actually brothers and that people get the two mixed up. "That's the only reason he wears that button, so they don't confuse the two of us" (56) he tells Keiko of the "I Am Chinese" button that Sheldon wears. Later, when Henry visits Sheldon in the nursing home, he is pleasantly surprised when the nurse asks him if he is related to Sheldon. "The question hung there like a beautiful chord, ringing in the air. Henry was Chinese, Sheldon obviously wasn't" (224). Henry is touched by the nurse's suggestion that he and Sheldon might be related even though they obviously looked nothing like each other. Her question is beautiful to Henry because it is accepting and understanding, that love and relationships can cross the bounds of color and race.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the point of view of a third person narrator. The narration focuses on Henry Lee, both as a young teen and later as a new widower who tries to reunite with the love of his youth.

Since this is a story about Henry's coming of age and his realization that he has different goals for his life than his father has lined out for him, it is important for the narrator to focus on Henry. If there was not this direct focus, the reader would not be able to follow as clearly the changes in Henry as he befriends Keiko and her parents and realizes they are not the threat that his father believes they are.

Although a first person point of view might have worked, it could have put the reader in a position that was too close to Henry's thoughts and desires. This third person point of view allows the reader to focus on Henry without that character overtaking the book. The third person point of view allows the reader to still understand some background coming from Sheldon, like Sheldon's frustration on the bus when the bus driver told them to sit in the back, and other characters that Henry would not be able to describe if the book were written in the first person point of view.

Language and Meaning

Language is significant in the novel because most of the central characters are people whose families have immigrated only recently from other countries. For this reason, language can be a barrier, particularly between Henry and his parents because they ask him to speak only in English, yet they are not fluent in that language. Henry describes the way his father speaks as being in "Chinglish" (12), a combination of Chinese and English. "No more. Only speak you American" (12) Henry's father says to him when Henry asks his father, in Cantonese, for an explanation.

Henry's mother's English is even more halting than her husband's. "Come, you come," (86) she says to her son to direct him to the living room where his father and Mr. Preston are waiting for him to translate their business conversation. Even though Henry's mother does not speak good English she seems to have a second sense about what Henry is saying in English and when he is saying something inappropriate. For instance, when Henry makes a nonsense statement one morning about opening an umbrella in his pants, "his mother looked on, seemingly knowing what he was up to, even if she didn't understand the words" (16).



Structure

The story moves back and forth between the years of 1942-1945 and 1986. Each chapter is labeled to indicate in which year it is set so the reader does not get confused about the time period. The sections from 1942-1945 are Henry's memories of his childhood and his father's loyalty to the Chinese as he grew up in the World War II era. Henry also details his friendship with Keiko, a Japanese girl of whom his father did not approve. The sections from 1986 outline Henry's relationship with his own son and the changes in that relationship as Marty realizes that his father is a very different man from his grandfather. When Marty understands how much Keiko meant to his father, he helps his father locate his lost love.

About three-fourths of the novel is exposition. Then, as the action rises, the reader learns about the conflict between Henry and his father as well as Henry's devotion to Keiko despite his father's threat to disown him. The climax of the novel comes in the chapter "V-J Day (1945)" when Henry gives up on Keiko and asks Ethel to marry him in the excitement of the day. It is on this same day that Henry learns it was his father who kept him from getting the letters that Keiko wrote to him and the ones that he sent to her.

The falling action comes as Marty and Samantha tell Henry that they have contacted Keiko and that she has sent her copy of "The Alley Cat Strut" for Sheldon. The denouement comes when Henry finally arrives at Keiko's apartment and puts that record on her stereo. She tells him she believes they should concentrate on the good times in their relationship, instead of looking at the things that did not work out the way they hoped. Perhaps, her comment is a sign that she, too, wants to see if she and Henry could spend what they have left of their lives together.



Quotes

Two outposts of an old-world conflict — where Chinese and Japanese immigrants rarely spoke to one another, while their American-born children often played kick the can in the streets together.”

-- Narrator (The Panama Hotel (1986))

Importance: The Panama Hotel is a symbol of the division of Japantown and Chinatown because it sits on the dividing line between these two places. Though the immigrants from these two different countries held grudges against one another, the first born generations of these immigrants had let go of their parents’ prejudices. As young children, they played together.

The new hotel owner explained that in the basement she had discovered the belongings of thirty-seven Japanese families who she presumed had been persecuted and taken away. Their belongings had been hidden and never recovered — a time capsule from the war years.”

-- Narrator (The Panama Hotel (1986))

Importance: Henry is caught up in the excitement brought about by the announcement made at the Panama Hotel that belongings of Japanese people put in interment camps during World War II. Henry is personally drawn to the hotel and the things found there when he sees a parasol that he believes looks like one once owned by Keiko.

Nice button, young man,’ said Sheldon, as he was setting out his case for his morning performances. ‘That’s a darn good idea, what with Pearl Harbor and all.’”

-- Sheldon (I Am Chinese (1942))

Importance: Sheldon comments on the button that Henry’s parents make him wear to school. He thinks the button is a good idea because it will keep people who want to hurt the Japanese from mistaking Henry as a member of the Japanese community. Henry is ashamed of the button. He knows his father makes him wear it because he does not want Henry mistaken as being Japanese. Henry’s father hates the Japanese.

Apparently business had been bad, even before Pearl Harbor — going all the way back to when the Japanese invaded Manchuria, in 1931. Henry remembered the year only because his father mentioned the war in China so often. According to the news article, the Chong Wa Benevolent Association had called for a boycott of the entire Japanese community.”

-- Narrator (Nihonmachi (1942))

Importance: As Henry searches for Keiko in Japantown during his first visit there, he notices how many businesses are closing or are offering sales to increase business. Because his father is so anti-Japanese, Henry remembers his father having talked about the Chinese boycott of the American-Japanese after Manchuria was invaded by the Japanese army nearly 10 years prior. Because of that, Japanese business had



struggled. The attack on Pearl Harbor has made things even more difficult for the Japanese business owners.

That's fine. Be who you are,' she said, turning away, a look of disappointment in her eyes. 'But I'm an American.'"
-- Keiko (Jamaican Ginger)

Importance: Keiko's statement to Henry boils down the problem that they both face because of their Asian appearance. Regardless of their ancestry, both are American citizens. American citizens should not have to apologize for their nationality or explain themselves in order to be respected. They should be respected on the basis of their citizenship, regardless of their appearance.

If that's what it takes to get in the basement, I'll be Japanese. I'll be a blue-blooded half-Martian Canadian immigrant if that's what it takes, he thought."
-- Narrator (I Am Japanese (1986))

Importance: Henry realizes how much it would upset his father if he described himself as Japanese for any reason. Considering how important Henry believes it is to look for Keiko's things in the basement of the Panama Hotel, he tells himself he would not only pretend to be Japanese, but any nationality, real or imagined, in order to get permission to explore the basement.

People are getting rid of anything that might connect them to the war with Japan. Letters from Nippon. Clothing. It all must go. Too dangerous to keep. Even old photos. People are burning photos of their parents, of their families."
-- Photographer (Fires (1942))

Importance: Henry joins the Japanese photographer in watching the Japanese people burn personal items because they wanted so badly for the American people to accept them and not accuse them of conspiring with the Japanese who were attacking the Americans.

After a lifetime of nods, frowns, and stoic smiles, they were both fluent in emotional shorthand."
-- Narrator (Ume (1986))

Importance: Because Marty and his father had spoken to each other for so long only in motions and facial expressions, they are still able to communicate in this sort of emotional shorthand when they need to do so. This is particularly important when Henry expresses his approval of Samantha to his son without Henry having to say a word.

For the first time Henry realized where he was, standing on one side of an unseen line between himself and his father, and everything else he'd known. He couldn't recall when he'd crossed it and couldn't see an easy way back."
-- Narrator (Home Fires (1942))



Importance: It is as Henry prepares to translate the conversation between his father and Mr. Preston that he realizes that he is on a different side of the battle than his father. Henry is aware that both men want to take advantage of the Japanese and the unfortunate position in which they have been placed. He does not know how he can help in the conversation between Mr. Preston and his father without going against his own beliefs.

Spies and traitors came in all shapes and sizes, Henry prayed, but not as sixth graders out too late with a wagonload of photographs.”

-- Narrator (Downhill (1942))

Importance: As Henry heads to his house with Keiko’s photos, he hopes that he will not be stopped by police or a soldier and accused of being a traitor because he has the pictures in his possession. He hopes that because he is only a young boy, and a Chinese boy at that, no one will bother him.

Henry wondered how many immigrants had rested their weary heads at the Panama Hotel, dreaming of a new life that began the day they stepped off the steamship from Canton or Okinawa, counting the days until they could send for their families. Days that usually turned to years.”

-- Narrator (Parents (1942))

Importance: Henry’s insinuation is that the life of an immigrant to America is not always what it was described as. Although America is billed as a land of opportunity, people who came to the country often did not make their fortune as quickly as they believed they would, if at all.

Where your father comes from, it was nothing but war. War with Japan. They invaded northern China, killing many, many people. Not soldiers but women and children, the old and the sick.”

-- Henry’s Mother (Better Them Than Us (1942))

Importance: After Henry comes home upset because the Japanese are being sent to internment camps his father tells him that it is better Japanese are evacuated than the Chinese. Henry’s mother tries to explain to Henry why his father dislikes the Japanese so much.

You just gave me hope, Henry.’ Mr. Okabe shook Henry’s small hand and looked him in the eye. ‘And sometimes hope is enough to get you through anything.’”

-- Mr. Okabe (Better Them Than Us (1942))

Importance: When Henry offers to get “I Am Chinese” buttons for the entire Okabe family so they can claim to be a different nationality and escape internment in the camps, Mr. Okabe is touched by Henry’s concern. While other people are shouting insults at the Japanese or doing nothing, Henry is willing to do what he can to keep his friends safe.



Like so many things Henry had wanted in life — like his father, his marriage, his life — it had arrived a little damaged. Imperfect. But he didn't care, this was all he'd wanted.”

-- Narrator (Sketchbook (1986))

Importance: Even though the Oscar Holden record is broken when Henry finds it, he is happy that he did find it. He compares this broken record to other parts of his life, including his relationship with his father and his life in itself, that were different from what he had imagined them being.

If Henry's fellow grade-schoolers knew that the main course at lunch was Japanese food, they didn't notice and didn't seem to mind. But the irony hit Henry like a hammer. He smiled, realizing there was more to Mrs. Beatty than met the eye.”

-- Narrator (Camp Harmony (1942))

Importance: When school resumed after the Japanese were evacuated, Ms. Beatty serves Japanese food for lunch. Most of the students do not even realize what they are eating. Henry recognizes it and realizes the statement that Ms. Beatty is trying to make. It is at this point that he begins to believe that he perhaps misjudged the woman for whom he has worked.

It'd be the first time I ever played in a white establishment — even if it's for a bunch of Japanese folks, bit of a captive audience.”

-- Sheldon (Sheldon's Record (1942))

Importance: When Henry asks Sheldon for his copy of the record The Alley Cat Strut so that Keiko can play it at the record concert at the internment camp Sheldon tries to joke with Henry. Because Henry is so intent on surprising Keiko he does not even notice his friend's joke.

He'd be thirteen in a few months; maybe this was what it meant to stop being a boy and start being something else, Henry thought as he put his coat back on and headed for the door.”

-- Narrator (Sheldon's Record (1942))

Importance: Henry's act of going out and retrieving Keiko's pictures from the street is a turning point in his relationship with his father. Because he is nearly thirteen, Henry thinks that he has reached the point where it is time for him to stand up for the things in which he believes. His father, however, expects Henry to obey him, especially when it concerns the Japanese. Because of their different ideas, Henry's father tells him that if he goes to get Keiko's pictures, he will disown him. Henry gathers the pictures despite his father's threat.

The price you pay for speaking your mind — you lose the ability to have your singing voice heard. A tragedy, Henry thought. No, more than a tragedy, it was a crime, having that ability stolen from him.”

-- Narrator (Thirteen (1942))



Importance: Henry laments the fact that Oscar Holden had to stop playing in public because he has spoken out against the way the Japanese Americans were being treated. That jazz musician had been put on a police watch list for his willingness to stand up for the rights of others. Notice that Henry believed it was a crime that Oscar Holden had been punished in that way for speaking his mind.

Your daddy having himself a heart fit, that ain't your fault either. He's been fighting the war in his head, in his heart, ever since he was your age back in China."
-- Sheldon (Thirteen (1942))

Importance: Even though Sheldon does not know Henry's father personally, he understands that the man has put stress on himself, causing his stroke, than his son has done by disobeying. He tells Henry that his father's sickness is not his fault because his father has been tied up with the war between the Chinese and the Japanese since he was a boy.

Loyalty. We're still loyal to the United States of America. Why? Because we too are Americans. We don't agree, but we will show our loyalty by our obedience. Do you understand, Henry?"
-- Mr. Okabe (Waiting (1942))

Importance: Even though Henry asked with all the Japanese people assigned to the internment camp why they did not overthrow the soldiers and escape. Mr. Okabe explained to Henry that they stayed not because they felt they had no other choice, but because they were trying to prove their loyalty to America by being obedient.

He didn't really think she'd show up. But he had to try, to make one last noble gesture, so when he boarded that ship, he could leave knowing he'd given it his all."
-- Narrator (Meeting at the Panama (1945))

Importance: Henry writes Keiko a final letter asking her to meet him on the steps of the Panama Hotel. He believes by doing so he could rid his conscious of guilt that he had not tried hard enough to keep their relationship alive.

You used your position with the benevolent associations and fixed it so that my letters never made it to Keiko. So that hers never got delivered. That was your doing somehow, wasn't it?"
-- Henry (V-J Day (1945))

Importance: Henry learns from his dying father that he had arranged for Henry not to get the letters that Keiko had written to him and for Henry's letters not to get delivered to Keiko. This means that Keiko had perhaps not forgotten about Henry as he had assumed because he got so few letters from her.

We both' — Sheldon paused, then caught his breath again — 'know why you were always looking for that old record. Always known.' His breathing slowed. 'Fix it,' Sheldon managed to say one last time, before drifting off to sleep, his words disappearing into



the soft hissing of the oxygen.”
-- Sheldon (Hearthstone (1986))

Importance: Even as Sheldon is dying, he pushes Henry to fix his relationship with Keiko. At first, Henry thought that Sheldon was referring to the broken record, but Sheldon made it clear that he knew why Henry was so intent on finding the record. The record reminded Henry of what he had lost when he lost Keiko.