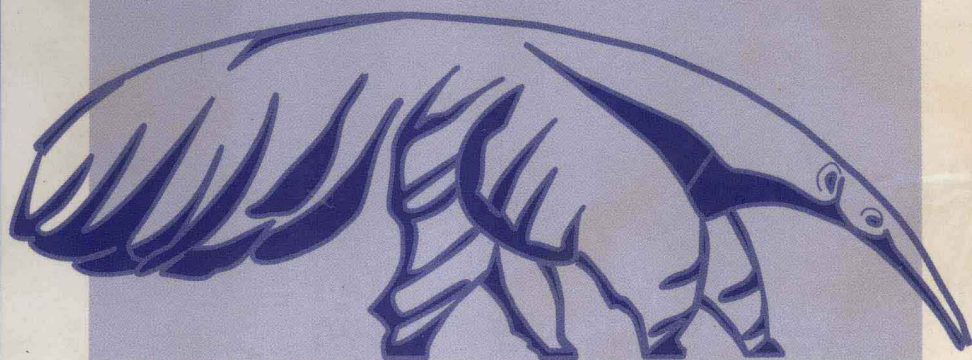


THE ANTEATER READER



THE ANTEATER READER

FIFTH EDITION

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Adrienne Jones

PAUL AND MICHIKO SAY GOODBYE

Adrienne Jones (1915-2000) was the author of sixteen novels, mostly written for a young adult audience. She won numerous prizes from the Southern California Council of Literature, most notably the Body of Works award in 1984. In 1969, 1972, and 1973, she received the UC Irvine award for Best Children's Book. The PEN International USA West society recognized her for Best Young Adult Novel 1987. She was also the first woman to make the ascent to the top of Mount Whitney and descend in one climb. "Paul and Machiko Say Goodbye" is an excerpt from a novel which was in progress at the time of the author's death.

Mama-San had packed the things she needed in an ancient suitcase. Because there had been an effort to take too much, one hinge was broken, so a cord was wrapped several times around and tied with a series of hard knots.

"Everything I must leave." The words were only a breath in the silence of the half-empty house.

The despair in the woman's eyes made me look away. *Alison, you coward*, I told myself, but still I could not bear to see her sorrow. It would sit, now, a carrion crow on the rail of the Katchimuras' disaster, filling all their days and nights with its dark cries.

"We'll come back, Mama-San, after the war's over." Michiko's voice was tight with unshed tears. She took her mother's arm.

"Not this one. Too old, too old. All things gone...."

"Paul will look after our things here," Michiko said. Her voice did break, finally, on Paul's name.

"Paul good boy. But everything gone, gone...."

When I at last looked at the two, I saw the gaze of Mrs. Katichimura trail hopelessly around the neat room. Presently the old woman picked up a small fragile porcelain vase. Her concentration settled on the tranquil spray of willow etched across the round, smooth surface. She straightened a little.

"This I not leave." Her words steadied and I saw a flicker of defiance in the dark eyes.

It was still there when the sound came of someone hurrying across the front porch. A second later Paul was edging in at the door.

"I've come to help." The cheerfulness in his voice was unnatural. "This crazy thing won't last. I'll keep an eye on the house. I don't want any of you to worry. Where's your dad, Michiko?" And he was set to rattle on, to fill the silence with his talk, to crowd out the disaster of this day, disaster that had struck

down not only the Katchimuras but all the other thousands of West Coast Japanese.

The flow of chatter proved more awkward than the silence would have been. Suddenly aware of this, Paul left his last question hanging.

After a moment he said softly, "Is there anything at all I can do to help?"

Michiko managed a smile. "Yes. Please do keep an eye on the house so it will be here for us after all of this is over."

"Of course. Yes." Paul nodded, but this time he didn't voice his view of the future, he said nothing to sustain hope. Instead he asked again, "Where is your dad?"

Now Michiko touched his arm. Then her palm rested against the stiffness of his jaw. I could see the delicate tips of her fingers where they curled softly over the sharp angle of bone below his ear.

"Papa-San has gone to sell the truck."

"I thought he did that last week."

"He tried. A man offered to buy it a week ago. Right after the evacuation order."

"Well?"

"He only wanted to pay two hundred dollars."

"But it's worth at least a couple of thousand!"

The honest outrage in Paul's voice was better than the false cheer had been. *Bless the anesthesia of anger.* I relaxed. But I knew Paul's anger would fade. Would he let himself slip back into his usual detachment? Maybe he'd close out the tragedy of this day. Maybe he would even close out Michiko and the Katchimuras. I wondered if he would give me one of his direct cool looks and smile that fine smile of old. For an instant I remembered how that smile had once quickened my heart

One of those years before, Michiko and Paul began to spend much time together. He seemed to keep only a detached friendship for Lena, Vanessa, and even me. All of his warmth went to Michiko. Paul's mother disliked this Asian friendship, tried to block it in every way, enlisted her husband in this effort. Though Paul didn't talk about it, I knew the breach in the Anders' family had widened with time.

Now Mrs. Katchimura settled next to her luggage, cradled the vase in her hands, sank into the blankness of waiting. At last when Mr. Katchimura returned, he said nothing about the truck. In his hand he clutched a few bills, and only shook his head when any question was asked. Otherwise he stood silently in the middle of the room, his eyes fixed on some point beyond the confines of the walls.

He seemed unaware that anything needed to be carried when Michiko sighed and said, "We'd better be on our way."

Mrs. Katchimura held her willow-spray vase and a string bag. Paul, Michiko and I managed the rest. It was difficult to crowd five people and the baggage into Paul's car.

At the assembly point my heart felt as though it had died. *I'll lose my breakfast right here in front of everybody.*

A contingent of U.S. soldiers had pushed the Japanese into a rough semblance of a column three or four abreast, where they stood patiently, unresisting, and for the most part with expressionless faces.

The idle crowd of spectators said little. They stood perhaps twenty-five feet away from the silent, waiting column. The soldiers stopped anyone who attempted to draw closer to the internees. When Paul, who had been carrying the suitcases, tried to stand in line beside Mama-San and Michiko, a soldier came up and said, "You can't stand here, mister. Only Japs here."

Paul started to say something. Michiko put her hand on his arm and said softly, "No, Paul."

He looked at her and his beautiful face seemed to break apart. There with everyone watching he kissed Michiko. She did not pull away.

"Jap lover!" someone shouted. It was repeated somewhere down the line. Paul and Michiko seemed not to hear. I felt sicker with my disgust for the crowd.

"We won't be safe until they shoot all them dirty yellow bastards," a red-faced little man said, his voice loud with his own importance.

"You said it," his friend agreed. This one was tall, and stoop shouldered, sour faced. "Only good Jap is a dead one." He looked pleased as though the phrase were original with him.

At least most of the people who had come down to see the show ignored the few who were abusive, the way a drunk is ignored at a polite party. A few turned and walked away. But I hated them all. Why didn't they say something about justice and fairness? Even something about humanity. But I said nothing either and hated myself too.

The soldier touched Paul's arm. "Okay fella, move back now. We don't want any trouble from the crowd. This kind of thing," he nodded at Michiko and at Paul, who still stood touching each other, "could turn 'em ugly."

Paul backed away, leaving the heavy suitcases there.

Michiko tried to say something but no words came. She did give him a wan smile, then suddenly turned her back to us.

We stood back with the crowd, and the soldiers now walked a patrol, keeping all of us a good thirty feet from the line.

A man sneaked past the soldiers and rushed to Mama-San.

"Give ya fifty cents for the vase," he said quickly.

Mama-San did not even turn to look at him. She held the vase in her two hands. I could see the curve of her weathered fingers around the pale surface.

"Don't you hear, old lady," the man talked rapidly, trying to close the deal before the soldier reached him.

"Get back," the soldier was saying.

"Fifty cents, old lady, fifty cents. What good'll the vase do you where you're goin'?"

Mama-San looked straight ahead. She held her back almost straight.

The soldier was there. "Okay, buddy," he took the man's arm. Angrily, the man jerked away. It was only accident that his elbow hit Mama-San's hands. I could scarcely hear the light tinkle as the vase shattered on the pavement. The man was hustled out of the way by the soldier. There was some sort of shouted order down the way, and the patient Japanese moved forward. Single men and women, old people, families with babies and children of all ages, pregnant women.

Michiko picked up both suitcases. She did not look at us. Mama-San stood staring at the ground and the small shards of shining white that lay about her feet.

Michiko, bent beneath the weight of the suitcases, came back and said something. Then they moved off together.

Mama-San's back was humped, like an old, old woman's, and every long hour, week, month, year of tending and picking tomatoes showed. All the effort of the long years she and Papa-San had spent in toil on their well-loved land sat on the hump of her back.

I wanted to scream and cry, but I stood silently swallowing down the sickness.

Michiko and Mama-San moved quietly with the line, Michiko almost as bent as her mother by the dreadful suitcases.

ONLY WHAT YOU CAN CARRY, the evacuation order had read.

The last glimpse I had of them was Mama-San's little feet in their white, white socks moving steadily along. Paul and I stood there for a long time.

The crowd mostly drifted away. A soldier came walking along the street where the Japanese had been standing. I heard the brittle crackling as he trod on the shards of the vase.

I got as far as the billboard in the vacant lot and lost my breakfast. Paul came finally and took my arm. Neither of us said anything as we walked in the watery sunshine of the September afternoon, walked back up the long hill to the car.

There he turned to me. "Michiko and I were married three weeks ago. My mother put me out of the house, said not to come back until I'd had the marriage annulled. Annulled. Michiko and I love each other too much for that. I could have gone with her today, but I'm staying to keep the house safe for the three Kachimuras and myself. I've already erased the Anders family from my mind."

The old detachment had returned, and he smiled the lovely smile that used to haunt my heart.