

## LAST DAY

Some of us left weeping. And some of us left singing. One of us left with her hand held over her mouth and hysterically laughing. A few of us left drunk. Others of us left quietly, with our heads bowed, embarrassed and ashamed. There was an old man from Gilroy who left on a stretcher. There was another old man—Natsuko’s husband, a retired barber in Florin—who left on crutches with an American Legion cap pulled down low over his head. “Nobody win war. Everybody lose,” he said. Most of us left speaking only English, so as not to anger the crowds that had gathered to watch us go. Many of us had lost everything and left saying nothing at all. All of us left wearing white numbered identification tags tied to our collars and lapels. There was a newborn baby from San Leandro who left sleepily, with her eyes half closed, in a swaying wicker basket. Her mother—Shizuma’s eldest daughter, Naomi—left anxiously but stylishly in a gray wool skirt and black alligator pumps. “Do you think they’ll have milk there?” she kept asking. There was a boy in short pants from Oxnard who left wondering whether or not they’d have swings. Some of us left wearing our very best clothes. Others of us left wearing the only clothes we had. One woman left in fox furs. *The Lettuce King’s* wife, people whispered. One man left barefoot but freshly shaven, with all of his belongings neatly wrapped up in a square of white cloth: a Buddhist rosary, a clean shirt, a lucky pair of dice, a new pair of socks, to be worn in better times. One man from Santa Barbara left carrying a brown leather suitcase covered with faded stickers that said *Paris* and *London* and *Hotel Metropole, Bayreuth*. His wife left three steps behind him carrying a wooden washboard and a book of etiquette she had checked out from the library by Emily Post. “It’s not due until next week,” she said. There were families from Oakland who left carrying sturdy canvas seabags they had bought the day before at Montgomery Ward. There were families from Fresno who left carrying bulging cardboard boxes.

*The Buddha in the Attic*, Julie Otsuka