

09PH
H 3236
1



Flight

Janet Gail Harrow

Submitted as Part of the Requirement
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Discipline of English
School of Humanities
The University of Adelaide

November 2005

Synopsis

Flight reveals the ghosts left behind in the lives of seemingly disconnected people after the 'dawning' of the nuclear age. In 1975, Darcy Rain returns to New Mexico because her father is ill. While she waits for her father to die, she finds herself attempting to reconstruct the disintegration of her family by writing a series of letters that will probably never be sent. Through telling her parents' unreliable story, she re-visits the secrets that threatened to destroy her family after World War II.

The story begins in 1944 near Alamogordo, New Mexico where the first atomic bomb was tested. The government's confiscation of local ranch land sends Ida Drea's family into crisis and she runs away from her oppressive father, her sick mother, and a repeated nightmare that she doesn't understand. On the road, she meets Johnny Rain, a young man on his way to military training. As they travel through the deserts and mountains of New Mexico, they tell their stories and begin an uncertain journey together that will connect them for the rest of their lives.

The novel follows them together and apart during the last years of the war. When Johnny witnesses and contributes to the destruction of Japan from the tail end of an airplane, he begins his own private battle of guilt and shame. In the bomb-devastated ruins of Tokyo, he finds refuge in a Japanese woman who has fled Nagasaki. Ida, torn between obligations to her family and the possibility of a different future, witnesses and bears the physical burden of the testing of the first atomic bomb. She seeks refuge with Johnny's family.

When they reunite at the end of the war, both Johnny and Ida are changed, each with secrets they'd rather keep hidden. As America turns toward the outwardly cheerful

1950s, they find themselves in a hastily constructed marriage that begins to collapse when their pasts explode into the present like small silent bombs.

Note: I have used American spelling and punctuation in this novel due to its setting and for the purpose of possible publication in the United States. A selected list of works consulted is included with the critical essay that accompanies this thesis.