Chapter 15: CAMP RESIDENTS TAKE A VOTE

Monday, January 10, 1944
Breakfast: biscuits, mashed potatoes, black coffee
Lunch: rice, king fish, tea
Dinner: rice, macaroni, soup

I slept well last night and woke up at ten. Yesterday, I had taken a nap after lunch and
 dinner for an hour, so I didn’t get to bed until midnight. I don’t feel any different but I
think that I was very tired physically. The night before last, I was startled awake when
someone had dropped garlic into my mouth. I felt something hot in my mouth and woke
up in a panic. Everyone was trying to stifle a laugh and attempting to wear poker faces
while they pretended to play shogi or go.

The snow that had fallen a few days ago hasn’t melted yet. It’s been about two months
since I arrived here. Our current room is close to the bathroom and shower. It is small so
it gets warm quickly. I don’t want to switch rooms. I don’t want to have to walk through
the snow at night to get to the bathroom.

As of tonight, I don’t know if it’s an interrogation session or judgment day or what else
but each person is being summoned (in no particular order). No doubt, the situation in
camp has changed. The day we will be released appears to be soon. I think that we have
reached a point where the issue has to be resolved internally, as well as, externally. I
heard that the hospital is now giving better treatment to the patients and that the food is
improving. We may be rewarded for our personal hardships soon.

Thus far, the two months of imprisonment — although I cannot predict how much longer
this imprisonment will last — has been a good time to physically and mentally discipline
myself. Here, I was directly confronted with the human weakness of relying on material
goods that we should not be dependent upon and witnessing the miserable behavior of
those who would sell out for a piece of bread. I felt an urgency to strengthen my mental
discipline.

I got a letter from Yuriko which had been sent on January 3:

Everybody is well. The children are running around in the snow.
Let them play outside since it is New Year’s Day. It certainly feels good to see the
children happy again. They are so much into playing.

But I have been worrying about you because you haven’t written for several
weeks. I have been writing a letter every day. Are you ill or something? Have you
received a pipe that Mr. Hayashi made for you? He went to buy a chicken for the
New Year and waited two hours to get it. So delighted, they ate it all. They were
even sucking on the last bone. I felt lonesome without you here to enjoy it with us.
Masako keeps calling for daddy every day and every night before she goes to
sleep. She says when daddy comes home I am going to sleep with him. I think she
dreams of you almost all of the time because she gets up in the morning and says I saw daddy with a soldier. She thinks it is real. Mr. Miyamoto sent some cookies and candies for Sayuri. We got presents from Mr. Kobayashi of Poston.

Masako likes Mr. Hayashi and plays with him every day. He is very nice to us. He tries to be very helpful. Masako likes him very much. She goes on his lap and plays with him.

It’s getting cold.

If you need anything, tell me. I will send it soon. The daughter of the family next to us always runs some errands for me. And so on

Love, Yuriko

Tuesday, January 11, 1944
Breakfast: pancakes, black coffee
Lunch: rice, nimono (carrots, cabbage) tea
Dinner: zousui (a little corned beef, carrots, lard), pudding, tea

Every day, they return a few cigarettes to us from the personal possessions they had confiscated. The cigarettes are taken out of the boxes, so we cannot figure out to whom they had belonged to, and even if we could figure it out, the original owner would hesitate to smoke the few cigarettes all by himself. This is an ingenious but spiteful way to operate. We would not act in this way if we were in their position. I understand they cannot return everyone’s property at once but...

The menu listed oranges or apples, but I was surprised to discover that they had been personal Christmas gifts from the Japanese. Their names had been written beautifully on the boxes. What nerve to list those items on the menu when they had been presents.

A day’s ration of rice for 217 people is a hundred pounds (pancake or bread for breakfast). It is nice that we have a side dish, but it is only a very small amount.

When someone asked for an increase in the amount of rice we received (because there are a lot of growing, young men), he was told that the amount of rice could be increased but this would mean the portion of vegetables would be reduced. What are we going to eat if what we are given now is decreased? We can endure lower quality food since it will still be edible but how can we deal with less food?

One person was brought in. They held a hearing with him from eight to eleven o’clock last night. (Why was it done at night?) Today’s hearing was suspended because the army had to be dispatched.

Five people were brought in, and then, five more were brought in at six o’clock.
Last week, a notice had been issued in camp, ordering everyone to return to work. (This notice had been written in pen and pencil by an anonymous source.) Initially, many of the camp residents had been inclined to return to work, but now, everyone was hesitant.

Tonight, the status quo was maintained. The army had ordered each block to hold a meeting. All males and females over the age of eighteen had been commanded, at the point of bayonets, to participate in an open vote. (I heard they are investigating those who were absent.) I was told the army is pressuring them to return to work and that the army had ordered the block managers to make an announcement that this was a military order. No questions were allowed.

If the residents had been forced to vote under these circumstances, very few would actually return to work. Why do they keep instituting one ridiculous thing after another? The more they try to force things on the residents, the worse the situation will get. This is so ridiculous, that it’s almost entertaining.

Words fail me when I try to describe the suffering that the Japanese are going through, in having to deal with these kinds of people.

Some of the inmates have forgotten the pride of being Japanese and instead, rush for immediate gain (in the guise of honor). The gangster group protects them, and in turn, the army protects these thugs with their bayonets. This is the reason these bullies are roaming around camp, unrestrained.

These people, who hide behind the protection of bayonets carried by enemy soldiers of the U.S. army, bring disgrace to the Japanese. It is useless to shed any tears of blood or to cry out in misery.

People are being brought in, one after another. I lost count at this point.

I heard that the army had decided to imprison the supporters of the strike before tonight’s meeting. I do not know whether this is true or not. I also heard Washington had ordered the army to withdraw by the 15th and that a first lieutenant was coming to take over for the lieutenant colonel.

A group held a secret meeting with the army a few days ago.

I heard our hunger strike had made the headlines of The Examiner. I was told the article quoted one person as saying that one of the reasons the authorities are insisting on the camp residents to return to work was because the strike reduced everyone’s wages, which in turn, resulted in less available cash for gambling and affected the sales at the canteen. I think this person touched on some pertinent points.

One man was brought in around eight o’clock. The soldiers — four soldiers were placed in each hall — had arrested him only because he had asked at one of the meetings why it was necessary to break the status quo* (*The status quo refers to the continuation of the
strike in camp). Before the meetings, a notice had been passed out, stating that anyone who asked questions or expressed radical thoughts would be arrested. Not much can be said about the absurd conduct of the authorities, but who are these Japanese, who cooperated with them and led the camp into this situation?

These egoists, who carry no national pride, have misjudged the situation and led things to what it is today. On a larger scale, these men are causing problems for the Japanese government by forcing them to consider our issues while they are waging a war. On a smaller scale, they are negatively affecting the lives of 16,000 Japanese in camp. They deserve to die ten thousand deaths.

**Wednesday, January 12, 1944**

Breakfast: coffee, toast, mashed potatoes  
Lunch: rice, kingfish, tea, cabbage salad  
Dinner, *nimono* (udon, carrots), a little Jell-O

Everyone is complaining and moaning about the shortage of cigarettes. Every day, we are given five cigarettes per person. These cigarettes are the ones they had confiscated from us. When we asked the officer to return all of the cigarettes at one time, rather than a few at a time, the officer bluntly said, “I am just carrying out orders. It is none of my business.”

I was told that the last vote in camp had been done by secret ballot. Then, I heard a shout from the hospital that the measure to continue the strike had won in the ballot.

There was a fire in the garage, which is located just outside the fence. The fire was not big. It had just burned a small portion of the garage, but the soldiers were in a frenzy. The commanding lieutenant colonel went up on the roof to give orders. Some soldiers went to work to put out the fire, while others just stared in confusion. I don’t want to be judgmental but reacting like that to such a small fire is pathetic.

I saw Mr. Nakagawa, whom I had first met at Central Junior High School. He told me that the stocks for gambling and brewing alcohol are being sold in camp. This has a lot to do with the mess we are in. Some stayed to reap the profits from gambling, while others chose material gain over joining our cause for justice. They do not consider the shame they are bringing upon Japanese honor.

Bob Hayashida apparently was summoned by (Tule Lake Project Director Raymond) Best on November 4th. Kenji Yamane had pulled up to him in a postal vehicle and driven away. They tried to bribe him with candy to testify that he had nothing to do with the incident. But Bob had answered, “Goddam, son of a…”

The situation seems to be changing every moment. Those, who had taken extremist views based on wrong information, are now finding it impossible to retract from their initial positions without looking ridiculous. But more importantly, who had fed them the wrong information in the first place?