Chapter 4: NOTHING TO EAT

Tuesday, November 30, 1943
Morning: hot cake, coffee
Lunch: rice, salt, tea
Dinner: rice, mackerel, tea

The army searched the whole camp this past day, even inspecting the ceilings with flashlights, but their main goal failed, and only one Negotiating Committee member was arrested. In the process, they confiscated rice, canned foods, and radios. The army photographed the heap of rice and canned foods. I guess they are going to use the photos for propaganda purposes to prove that there is plenty of food, although the Japanese are complaining about not having enough food.

Almost all of the food was purchased (at the canteen or ordered from outside). The WRA-supplied goods amounted to very little. I heard they began returning the foodstuffs, but they’re very upset.

The foodstuffs marked WRA were dated before segregation. It is clear the original Tuleans did not trust the WRA, so they had hoarded the food before the segregation process began. The authorities had repeatedly warned the sergeants but nothing had ever been resolved. The sergeants always fell back on their callous ways.

The amount of food is getting less, and the quality, getting poorer. This afternoon we ate a portion of rice too small to even feed a cat. Someone finally spoke up and said, “We need to bring our complaints to the authorities and negotiate better treatment.”

We, especially, pray for better treatment of all 15,000 residents in camp, but we cannot tell what affect we have due to the arrogance or ignorance from the people we deal with. In addition, they are overly strict and uncooperative. We are concerned that whenever we negotiate with such people and they refuse to listen to our concerns, the result also affects the fate of the 15,000 others.

It is logical and realistic to assume our complaints are valid, but they dismiss any complaints by routinely ignoring them. We must prepare sufficiently to negotiate with such people. Since there is no chance of the Spanish consul visiting, the only alternative is to, continuously, try and try to open their eyes. Even if this isn’t successful, we must not forget we are Japanese. It is up to us to negotiate. We must be patient in order to make the negotiations a success.

I talked about the Japanese in America with young Hirata. It was a very pleasant conversation. We shared the same opinions.

We came to a dead end when we talked to a lieutenant in charge of food supply about the poor food situation.
He replied, “I am just carrying out orders from above.”

Us: “If that is the case, let us make an appointment to meet with the commander.”

Lieutenant: “You don’t have to see the commander. I represent the commander.” (Not a good opinion here.)

What an illogical argument. The answer is stupefying. He is a fox, parading with the lion (army). He told us, “My order is the same as that coming from the commanders,” and then, added, “No one can order the army around. The army is the one who gives orders.”

Smoke fills the room. Much talking on erotic topics. I can’t help feeling sadness and anger. Gambling with hanafuda (Japanese playing cards, literally translates as ‘flower cards.’). We waste our days talking about stupid topics. We are gentlemen, so we shouldn’t do anything wrong to disgrace Japan. This is a great opportunity to practice moral training, but we are wasting our time. (mottainai - what a waste)

Yuriko sent a letter Friday, and I received it today (Tuesday):

“If you want clothes I’ll send it, but please tell me if you received the ones I sent before or not. Masako’s cod liver oil supply is out so I will purchase some at the canteen. Seems like this is the longest Thanksgiving Day I ever spent. Sayuri says:

‘I bet Daddy had a turkey dinner, because he lives with the soldiers.’ I am going to school every day and Sayuri too. I take Sayuri and Masako to the library. While I attend classes, Sayuri plays with Masako. I’m trying to make dolls and toys for children. I’m trying to make them as happy as they would be on a usual Christmas. Our neighbors’ kids want snowshoes. Should I buy it for him? I can’t decide. We can ask Grandmother to send shoe stamps to us.”

**Wednesday, December 1, 1943**

Morning: toast, coffee, cooking cheese
Noon: macaroni, two pieces of bread, tea, beets marinated in vinegar
Dinner: rice, scrambled eggs, tea

Nothing to eat. We somehow managed to make breakfast. We waited for the food supply this morning, but the truck didn’t come. Since no food supply came, we cooked macaroni with a bit of cheese, which we could barely see. We only had two tablespoons each. The bread is limited to two pieces each. I could take the bad taste, but I can’t stand the small amount. It feels like we hadn’t eaten anything. How I feel for the youths. I hear comments such as, “Let’s sleep,” or “Don’t move around or you’ll get hungry.” What is going on?

We cannot do anything about this, but if this situation continues, I’m concerned for the youths. While we live like this, there are others who are trying to negotiate with the authorities. We must strengthen our resolve.
A sergeant stepped in around 3 o’clock with sardines but they were spoiled. He said he would bring some fresh ones but never did. We prepared two teaspoons of scrambled eggs per person. The arrival of 100 pounds of rice surprised us but how long will that last? It was not enough. We put *shoyu* (*soy sauce*) on the rice and ate it.

The reason the 100 pounds of rice was not enough (for dinner) was because at the noon meal, there was hardly anything to eat. The delivery of the rice came very late, plus, there aren’t sufficient pans to cook with. (We asked several times for more pans but our requests have been ignored.) A combination of these factors delayed dinner.

The food is not enough for me but the problem is worse for the still-growing young men. They are starving. We negotiated with the lieutenant in charge of food supplies. He told us, “Don’t worry. We won’t starve you to death. From tomorrow, the treatment will be better.” I wonder what the plan is for tomorrow.

The latrine is always occupied. There are eight seats for 200 men. Everyone is constipated and takes a long time.

The problem that had been going on for a week was resolved this morning. The four Negotiating Committee members voluntarily appeared this morning. They asked to be sequestered for one day, and then, today, agreed to be questioned by the FBI. We feel a speedy resolution to this situation can now be made after this development. (Come or not, there were two ways of thinking, but when we think about the big picture, there was no other way.)

Beyond the fence, we saw a few Japanese, who appeared to be going to work. These Japanese were guarded by soldiers, so some think they were crossing the line and breaking the strike.

I walked around the stockade looking for an arrowhead but I couldn’t find any. When I got too close to the fence, the guard complained. It looks like they are scared of us, even if we are fenced in.

Today, a man was released because they discovered they had made a mistake and gotten the wrong person.

Total: 198

There was a clamp down in the stockade barrack, housing single men. The army escorted them back to retrieve their belongings, but the army announced that next time, the men will not be allowed to return to get their possessions. Something like this unusual.

From Yuriko, I received a shirt.

From Sayuri, a letter:
“Dear Daddy,  
Masako says she wants a big dolly. I want cute dolly and most of all I want you.

Daddy, I am studying hard every day and help my mother clean house and watch Masako every day. I went to library to get book to read so I can study. Tell me what you are doing everyday daddy.

Your little girl,  
Sayuri”

Yuriko wrote:  

“I am sending 1 shirt. Today is a nice day, which is rare so I went to the canteen. I bought dishes, spoons, needles, and paint because Mr. Hayashi said he’s going to make a bed for the dolls so I’m going to paint it.

I gave Sayuri 15 cents to spend at the canteen today. She bought 10 cents worth of this paper herself and bought ice cream for Masako! I was surprised that Masako ate so much imogayu (rice and sweet potato porridge). It was very good. When we went to the mess, Masako didn’t eat because she doesn’t like beans. So it was very good she ate. The kitchen doesn’t give us butter — it’s only cooking purposes; so every day we go to the mess to eat. Masako plays with ice every day. I realized I used to play with ice when I was small so I don’t scold her.”

Sayuri and Masako Inouye  

* * *

Dear Children,  

I am awfully glad to hear from you. Isn’t it good to write a letter once in a while? Good thing to hear is you are studying hard and help clean house every day. Moreover, I sure could know that you are getting better in writing and spelling English.

I will not forget to ask Santa Claus to carry my gift to you. For this, you must be nice and be very good to your mother. When you please your mother, you please me. Things you like to buy from canteen, such as snowshoes or anything, you go and buy them with mother. I heard that you bought papers for ten cents instead of ice cream and gave an ice cream to Masako. Well, that is what I like to hear. You’ve done fine deed. Someday, you will be a great one by doing things like that.

Well, children, you asked me what I am doing. I liked to tell you this before, but I forget it. I am running and trying something on my business.
But you cannot understand about men’s job, can you, dear? You could listen to my story as soon as I get home. Write you soon. Be very, very nice.

Separate letter to Yuriko from Tatsuo:

Send me “Saikontan.” It’s about Chinese Philosophy. You have made a mistake twice. It is not the book I was reading the night I was arrested. Don’t forget to give Masako the cod liver oil. Don’t forget to make Sayuri do homework. Don’t send anything unless I ask. Give my thanks to Mr. Hayashi. Whenever you need money, look in the medicine chest for my money and spend it. Make sure the children have enough food. If there isn’t enough, go to the canteen.

Anyway, have no worry about me. You know what sort of man I am: ha ha! Do not forget to keep the promise I made with children.

Thursday, December 2, 1943
Morning: pancake, coffee
Lunch: rice, scrambled eggs (one tablespoon), tea
Dinner: rice, macaroni (mixed with carrots), beets (without vinegar), tea

The food tastes so awful and is indescribable. When you see this menu, perhaps, it doesn’t look so bad but there are no condiments to give the food any taste. The macaroni dish is simply macaroni and salt. Scrambled eggs sound good but they aren’t. The food portions are minuscule. We finally had to resort to eating only rice with a bit of salt sprinkled on it.

They brought in sardines before noon. We looked at the sardines, and they were the same ones from the day before. However, the examiner claimed those sardines were not rotten, saying, “This is good enough to eat.”

We responded: “We have eaten fish for many years, and we know if it is good or bad, better than you would. However, if the army says it is all right, then, it is all right. But we don’t want to get sick, so we won’t eat it.”

I don’t know how long we can control the youths, who complain about the disgusting food we eat, day after day. We feel the same way, but if we reveal our feelings to the army, there is the possibility that it will affect the other 15,000 in camp so we endure. We are dealing with that kind of opponent.

They told us to take the garbage out to the other side of the gate. Until now, they drove up in a truck and picked up the garbage within the fence, near the kitchen. Then, they took the garbage out themselves, but since the garbage can is so big and heavy, it is difficult to carry. Those who had to carry out this task complained and refused to continue doing this. I can understand why. Sergeant Sam brought a corporal into the stockade concerning this matter. He said, “Why don’t you guys do it? We want to
cooperate with you and are trying to do our best. You are refusing to do such a small thing. By refusing to help us, you are hurting no one but yourself. This refusal is punishable by army standards. We can put you on just bread and water.”

The man said the word, “cooperate,” but the bad food given to us every day cannot be considered cooperative. What is the matter with him? We are forced to cooperate with them but they, in turn, ignore our requests.

I hope the army will adopt a humanitarian viewpoint. How could they say they would put us on bread and water? If we submit to this army pressure tactic, we will fall into a trap. We must be aware of this.

Eight people were released. Whether they had been victims of mistaken identity or for some other reason, we don’t know. One of them came from my same block so I asked him to update Yuriko about the stockade situation and to tell her not to worry about me. From the windows, those of us who were left behind, watched with envy. What has become of us that we envy life in camp?

Once, the lieutenant in charge of the stockade told us, “I am the officer in charge of the prison.” I’m just wondering, am I a prisoner? Already three weeks have passed without a court hearing or sentence. It is very clear that they intend to break us. As long as we understand this, the only way to counter their attempt is by ignoring the pain and act as if we don’t care which way the wind blows.

Rain. Roll call.

Three low ranking soldiers tried to take a head count of us, over and over again, but were unable to. How strange that they could not figure out how many of us are imprisoned. It must be difficult for them to count to fifty.

Now that we are 200, it must be impossible for them to count that high. This is comical. It takes them a long time, so I feel sorry for them.

Four negotiating members are now in the old stockade. Although we cannot see them, we wave towards their direction. They have endured the struggle thus far but must continue to struggle. When will they be rewarded for their efforts? This is nothing compared to soldiers fighting on the front lines, but we, also, cannot give in, if we want to call ourselves men.

I know Yuriko and the children are lonesome without me. My heart is aching. On the other hand, when I think about justice, humanity, a stable life for the Japanese, and Japanese honor, then courage fills my heart and my fighting spirit is renewed.

Total number now is 190.
The original order for rice use to be one-and-a-half sacks of rice, but due to the protest concerning the garbage can, it was reduced to one sack, so in addition to the fact that there is so little rice, there is also no side dish. What are we supposed to eat? I feel the time is coming.

**Friday, December 3, 1943**

Morning: coffee, mush, 2 pieces of bread
Lunch: 2 bread, tea, salty meat with beans
Dinner: 1 squid, rice, tea, beets

The food shortage is becoming increasingly serious. My feelings intensified after I worked as a waiter today. Somehow we got through serving breakfast. During lunch, we were limited. Two pieces of bread each. I know the young can’t stand it, and I feel frustrated and angry over being powerless to do anything about it.

Some boys know there isn’t enough food but they grab more than their share. I feel angry and sad towards them. I want to serve enough to them but it is obvious there isn’t enough so I can’t. Who is responsible for this situation? In any case, even if we know, the impossible is still impossible. The only thing to do is to be patient. We cooked all the leftover rice but still it wasn’t enough for dinner. I feel so terrible that I have to refuse the young boys a second bowl of rice. They complain that it is not enough. This irritates me but…

Beets are just beets, no more than that. It tastes awful without rice. Some quietly eat the beets. In ordinary circumstance, one might eat one or two beets with vinegar or not eat them at all.

We cannot make even okazu (side dishes, usually eaten with rice) with just one squid for each man.

We feel this way: “Busshi wa kuwanedo takayoji (The samurai, who has not eaten, uses a toothpick to pretend to be full). Therefore, I can survive on water alone. But the young boys are hungry because they are still growing, and their only enjoyment in the stockade is to look forward to the three meals. This is what life in the stockade is like.

When a blind man is in danger or threatened, he lashes out at anything and in the process, may strike an innocent bystander by mistake. In a similar way, the WRA has selected these youths as scapegoats. The government has labeled these youths, who have no idea why they were arrested, as good-for-nothing gangsters (gorotsuki). How sad. What a laughing matter… They talk about humanity and justice but when one views this situation, their work is ridiculously absurd.

I read “The African Explorer.” Yuriko sent me “Saikontan.” Reading such a book makes life in the stockade more meaningful. I was shocked to read an article from the camp newspaper about us in the stockade. It was incorrect and exaggerated. They’re tightening their own noose, and it is getting tighter and tighter. Look at this shameful, scandalous
conducted. They try to cover up their mistakes by committing further injustice and are sinking deeper into the pit. They do not know what to do, since it is all absurd. All we can do is laugh.

I received a letter from Mr. Nakaji:

“If you want a book, I’ll send it. Anything you want me to do, etc. I visited your house and Yuriko was so calm and worthy of admiration. Sayuri seems to be lonesome. Although I have not written a word to you since you were taken from the camp, I have always been thinking about you, your health, comfort and well-being. On two occasions I called on your family and was happy to learn from Mrs. Inouye that you were in good health and cheer, also I could not help but admire how Mrs. Inouye was taking her best to reserve a bit of cheer no matter how lonesome she may be at heart. Mr. Inouye, if there is anything I can do for you I wish you would let me know. Please take care of yourself Inouye-san and as for your family, there really isn’t anything to worry about. Sayuri seems to miss you a whole lot.

K. Nakaji

Saturday, December 4, 1943
Morning: 2 biscuits, coffee
Noon: rice, 1 piece of bread, nimono (carrots, potato, meat)
Dinner: rice, stew (potato, carrot, meat), beets, tea

Three weeks in jail

Last night, two newcomers were brought in for violating the curfew (curfew at 7 o’clock). They were five minutes late when they arrived home.

From yesterday, we are allowed to move around within the block until 10-11 o’clock at night. Today, seven people were brought in.

Total: 185.

Breakfast was okay, but lunch was so bare that it was depressing. The best thing to do was not to expend too much energy moving around and to sleep. The additional one piece of bread didn’t help much. For dinner, we had enough rice but there was only three spoonful of stew each, so we put that on our rice with salt.

Rain. By evening, it turned to snow. The guards were on duty in the snow, getting wet. Every day, a few men are released. How long are they going to keep these people, who have no idea why they had been arrested, in the stockade?

I guess Sayuri and Masako must be happy to see the snow. I am getting used to this kind of life. I hope the children have settled into this arrangement, as well.
Indian Castle Mountain is near the stockade. They built a guard tower on it, which is now covered with snow. The guards can keep an eye on a wide area with their binoculars. This seems a grim reality.

**Sunday, December 5, 1943**

Morning: hotcakes (limited to 2), coffee  
Lunch: rice, 2 *ika* (squid), tea, beets  
Evening: rice with just carrots and a little lard, salt, beets, tea

It is common sense that a fireman would put out a fire. Also, it is customary for the police to apprehend the firebug. But it is unprecedented for the arsonist, who starts the fire, to put out the fire and then seek out the culprit who started the fire. This is the situation we are in.

In order to explain the concept of humanity and justice to an animal, I must be very patient. But from the stockade, even if we try to explain this principle, it would be like pouring water on dry soil, while we stand on our heads. They openly express the attitude of: “You should be thankful that you’re still alive.”

If there was a reason for my confinement, I could accept my detainment. But without any cause, they’re calling us “firebugs,” running around madly to dig up evidence. This is too much. No, this is more than too much.

Today, the food supply came at 3:30 p.m. (Usually, it arrives just before dinner.) The dining hours are designated as 7 a.m., noon, and 5 p.m., but since there aren’t enough pans, we must cook all day in order to have enough food prepared by serving time. It causes us a lot of problems when the food supply comes in late. Today, we cooked continuously and were able to serve until 7:30 p.m. Although we are not ravenous youths, our stomach still grumbles from hunger. We have been negotiating with a lieutenant-in-charge for the past few days, but he insists there is adequate food by saying, “The rice ration is under my authority. There’s more than twenty-five pounds for 100 people, so 200 pounds should be more than sufficient.”

We replied that most of the young people here have big appetites. We have some side dishes but it amounts to almost nothing. How can we fill our stomachs? They tell us that they are supplied a certain amount of food for every person in camp. If these portions are the same for those in camp, then, life in camp must be miserable.

The *OPA* (*Office of Price Administration, was a now defunct federal agency, which, among its duties had the power to ration scarce supplies such as certain foods, tires, automobiles, etc. OPA points, in the form of red or blue tokens, were given out to make change for ration coupons.*) regulates what a person should consume per day. The OPA standard says that the minimum a person should consume per day is sixteen points. The lieutenant-in-charge answered, “I don’t know about such regulations.” After we repeatedly raised the issue that there should be 150 pounds of rice per day, he promised we would receive 100 pounds this day and 200 pounds the next day, to make 150 pounds
per day. We felt this would, at least, make us feel full, but we never saw him for the next six days, and the food supply got worse. We talked to the sergeant and the corporal about this matter, but they claimed they knew nothing about this and that they would talk to the lieutenant.

It is very clear that they cannot find any criminals among us, so they are using pressure tactic to force us to resort to violence, thereby, confirming their preconceived notions that we are violent and worthy of mistreatment. The youths do not realize this. Their agitation over their unlawful arrests and lack of food is gaining momentum, and although the elders should be calming this situation, they are, instead, adding fuel to the fire. (If we react violently to this situation, it might affect the fate of the 15,000 in camp, in the long run.) (Who will win this struggle? The one, who is most patient? If we act impulsively, we will surely fall into the trap.) We are fighting on behalf of the 15,000 fellow Japanese against a people who ignore such concepts as humanity, justice, international law….We must restrain ourselves for our own honor and the honor of the Japanese people and for self-respect, since we clearly see through what the authorities are up to.

It is guaranteed that if there is any violence, things will get worse. We cannot involve or implicate others into this situation. My duty is to make sure things remain calm. When I was young, I never thought about pacifying a situation, but now, the roles are reversed. Thinking about those days makes me emotional. Now, I am the one trying to calm the youths down.

We formed a committee of three. We explained the situation to the others in the four barrack buildings, and as expected, since they are Japanese, they quickly understood what we were saying. (I think there is an effort to prevent the Spanish consul general from visiting, but I believe the Spanish embassy and U.S. officials in Washington, D.C., are negotiating.)

The bozu (shaved) haircut is in fashion. It is severely cold. Yesterday’s snow hasn’t melted in today’s sun. Roll call. The sergeant attempted to take a count over and over but finally gave up, saying, “What is the number present?” During the lengthy roll call, the cold grips us. The guards try to keep a fire going, day and night.

The camp sent us a Japanese newspaper. We circulated it. During the first few days, we also received candy, cakes, and fruits from camp, but now, the army strictly prohibits this. We are, now, subjected to cheap food. The authorities continue to blatantly pressure us.