

For complete reader reviews visit the reviews page at NanaMizushima.com

“Her story has resonances with our daily media accounts of the displacement, wounding, killing, and rape of women and children in violence around the world...

Mizushima is to be commended for providing Western readers with this chilling account of some wrenching human aspects of the end of World War II.”

– *Professor Emeritus Joyce Lebra, first woman Ph.D. in Japanese History in the U.S. (granted by Harvard/Radcliffe)*

“*Tei* reminds us of what the Syrian and other refugees must be experiencing today in similar circumstances. It is a story without any boundaries for all time.”

– *Caroline Matano Yang, Former Executive Director Japan-US Educational Commission (Fulbright Program)*

“*Tei’s* story is impossible to forget, a bone-achingly sharp and beautiful reminder of my privilege.”

– *Ansley Clark, poet*

“The story of *Tei Fujiwara* is amazing. I found myself in equal parts, amazed, humbled, and terrified if I could ever live that standard of relentlessness and courage.”

– *Chuck Nemer, voracious reader in Wisconsin*

For more information, visit:
NanaMizushima.com

Tei

A MEMOIR OF THE END OF WAR
AND BEGINNING OF PEACE

By Tei Fujiwara

Translated from the Japanese
by Nana V. Mizushima

TONNBO BOOKS

Copyright © 2014 Tonbo Books

All rights reserved.

This is an authorized translation of a memoir originally published in Japan in 1949 as *Nagareru Hoshi Wa Ikiteiru*.

This is a work of nonfiction. The names and Japanese terms used in this translation are based on the original names and terms used in the Japanese book.

CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| The Story of Her Story | II |
| Historical Background | VI |
| Translation Notes | X |
| Map | XVI |

PART I THE HILL OF TEARS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Four Kilometers to the Train Station | 3 |
| The Separation | 9 |
| The Open Freight Car | 15 |
| The Day the War Ended | 22 |
| Meeting My Husband Again | 28 |
| Shall We Go South? | 31 |
| A New Worry | 36 |
| Corn Husks | 40 |
| Where is My Husband Going? | 44 |
| The Hill of Tears | 50 |
| Making Ourselves Invisible | 55 |
| Diamond Dust | 58 |
| The Child Who Doesn't Cry | 62 |
| Shooting Stars Are Alive | 65 |
| I Love You Right Now | 69 |
| A Sundial of Ice | 73 |
| The Sound of Breaking Ice | 75 |
| Smoke from the <i>Ondoru</i> | 79 |
| Cause of Death | 83 |

PART II
THE TOWN WITH A CHURCH

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Below the Hill | 95 |
| The Men from the Graveyard | 100 |
| A Potato with Teeth Marks | 108 |
| A Marriage Proposal | 112 |
| The White Cross | 116 |
| The Element of Love | 126 |
| Fighting the Spring Wind | 132 |
| Teacher of Soap Sales | 136 |
| The Couple Who Lived on Bickering | 140 |
| I'm Just a Beggar | 147 |
| Trembling Hands and Lips | 153 |
| A Mad Woman | 156 |
| The Molested Doll | 161 |
| Black Gloves for Gennadi | 167 |
| Food Shop Assistant | 170 |
| Two Lives Versus One Life | 174 |
| The <i>Hikiage</i> Plan | 177 |
| How I Made Three Hundred Yen | 182 |
| Our <i>Dan</i> Divides | 186 |

PART III
THE VOICE OF BEELZEBUB

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| The Content of the Letters | 195 |
| Struggle in the Red Mud | 199 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Before Freezing to Death | 206 |
| The Bald Head of Kappa Man | 211 |
| Two Thousand Yen Promissory Note | 215 |
| We Reach Shihenri | 221 |
| Rest in the Grass | 224 |
| The Agony of Crossing the River | 229 |
| A Dead Old Woman | 234 |
| Through the 38th Parallel | 239 |
| Rescued by Americans | 246 |
| Pebbles of Bitterness | 248 |
| The Lawyer who Pretended to be Mad | 252 |
| We Reach Giseifu | 255 |
| A Can of Corned Beef | 258 |
| Social Decency on the Train | 261 |
| Hundred Yen Magic Trick | 264 |
| At Fusan | 267 |
| Fat Fujiwara and Thin Fujiwara | 270 |
| Woman with Children | 276 |
| Beelzebub's Invitation | 286 |
| The Four Thousand Yen Carrier | 290 |
| Landing Day | 295 |
| The Second Day after Landing | 298 |
| From Hakata to Suwa | 303 |
| Finally, My Parents Embrace Me | 308 |
| | |
| Author's Notes from 1976 and 1984 | 313 |
| About the Author | 319 |
| | |
| Glossary of Names, Places, and Terms | 320 |

The Story of Her Story

Boulder, Colorado

April 2014

More than sixty years ago, Tei Fujiwara wrote a memoir about her harrowing journey home with her three young children. But the *story of her story* is what every reader needs to know.

Tei's memoir begins in August 1945 in Manchuria. At that time, Tei and her family fled from the invading Soviets who declared war on Japan a few days after the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. After reaching her home in Japan, Tei wrote what she thought would be a last testament to her young children, who wouldn't remember their journey and who might be comforted by their mother's words as they faced an unknown future in post-war Japan.

But several miracles took place after she wrote the memoir. Tei survived and her memoir, originally published in Showa Era 24 [1949] became a best seller titled *Nagareru Hoshiwa Ikiteiru* (Shooting Stars are Alive). Over the following decades, millions of Japanese became familiar with her story through forty-six print runs, the movie version, and a television drama. Empress Michiko, wife of the current emperor, urged her people to read Tei's story.

Why should Westerners read this translation of her story? Tei wrote about men, women and children caught in the middle of the world's most devastating war and how they coped. The suffering, endurance, and struggles she described reminded the defeated Japanese of their strength, their spirit, and hope in the future. Her sense of humor, compassion and love helped defuse anger and

despair. She brought back a basic sense of trust towards former enemies, but also a honest new look at her own countrymen.

In many ways, Tei was a typical Japanese housewife, but she was also extraordinary. The memoir begins with a well-educated but sheltered young wife of a civilian scientist, who is a mother of three young children. Her keen insights in 1945-46—on the Koreans, fellow Japanese men, women and children, as well as the Russian soldiers and the American GIs—give us rare glimpses into a part of the world few Americans know.

Why did I translate Tei's memoir? My initial reason for translating her book was personal. My parents both grew up and lived in Tokyo during the war. My father was 22 years old and my mother was 13 when the war finally ended after four long years. WWII devastated the lives of millions of Japanese civilians living in Japan as well as in Manchuria and other parts of Asia. Tei's story resonates deeply with my parents' generation.

Her memoir and family also influenced my family in unexpected ways. Tei's younger son, Masahiko, became a mathematician, and came to the University of Colorado as a Visiting Scholar, where my father taught in the physics faculty. My parents enjoyed taking care of any visiting Japanese, and often invited them over to our house to stave off homesickness. I met Masahiko at one of the social gatherings at our home. I was 13 at the time but vividly remember meeting the young professor.

Over the next years, my family visited Tokyo several times. I heard first-hand, stories of how people survived and struggled after the war. The stories of the Fujiwara family as well as those of my own family encouraged me to study in Japan, obtain a Masters degree in International Affairs from Columbia University, and

work in international educational exchange over the next several years. This included several years as the Educational Information Officer at the offices of the Fulbright Program (Japan-U.S. Educational Commission) in Tokyo, and as the Japan Correspondent for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* newspaper.

The impact of Tei's story on her own family life is also fascinating. After her memoir became a best-seller, Tei found herself in the public spotlight and dealing with the complexity of life after the war. At the end of this book, I included the afterwords she wrote in two of her later editions of her memoir.

Her husband, a former meteorologist, became an award-winning historical novelist himself, under the pen name, Jiro Nitta. Her children also wrote essays and books. In 2005, Tei's son Masahiko Fujiwara wrote a book, *The Dignity of a Nation*, which has sold more than 2 million copies.

For Tei, this memoir was the achievement of a lifetime. She wrote it because she thought she might not live long enough to pass her story on to her children. In an interesting twist of fate, she has lived longer than most of us ever will. As of this writing, she is alive and well, ninety-six years old and living quietly in a senior home in Tokyo. Although Alzheimer's has taken its toll and she no longer speaks or writes publicly, she still shares weekly meals with her three adult children, and her grandsons.

I feel fortunate to have had the privilege of translating her memoir while she is still alive. Her words are still as fresh as when she wrote them over sixty years ago. Tei's story has also helped me in my own life as a mother of three children. By coincidence, I also have two boys and the youngest, a girl, about the same spacing in age as Tei's three children.

When I first read her memoir, I was a full-time mother of

three young children, adjusting to life in Colorado after living in Tokyo for two years, and in Jakarta for a year. Although I faced completely different challenges – divorce, financial hardship and starting over – her words encouraged me, inspired me, and gave me perspective.

My mother helped translate this memoir, by reading out loud passages from the book, and explaining what life was like in 1945 Japan. We spent many afternoons reading and discussing Tei's stories, and we worked together to create the glossary in the back of this book. My mother and many of her Japanese friends say they have read and reread this book. When she introduced this book to me in the midst of all the turmoil in my life, I knew this was more than a casual book recommendation. The emotional impact of this memoir hasn't diminished, even after sixty years. Often, during our afternoon talks – my mother would stop in the middle of a chapter she was reading to me – because she couldn't continue. Her voice would break, quaver and die off to a whisper as her eyes filled with tears. Memories of the end of war and the beginning of peace are still very much alive.

Nana V. Mizushima
NanaMizushima.com

Historical Background

Since I am not a historian, I will present only basic information and anecdotes from my own family who immigrated from Japan after the war ended. I hope these snippets will help the reader better understand the background for this memoir. Tei and her family traveled through Manchuria and Korea, both former colonies of the Empire of Japan which existed from 1868 to 1947. For more detailed information, please see the list of Resources, the Glossary, and East Asian experts in your area.

My great-grandfather, Masamichi Mizushima, served as a general in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) which gave the victorious Japanese significant influence over Manchuria and Korea. The Japanese military at the time was instrumental in expanding the Japanese Empire which extended over Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan and other parts of Asia. But like many members of the former samurai class, he grew disenchanted with the military, and encouraged his son, (my grandfather), Seizo Mizushima, to study and begin a career outside the military. Education, not family background was the key to success in the new Japan. My grandfather Seizo was the first civilian in his family, and he built a successful dental practice in Tokyo during the prosperous, liberal *Taisho Era* (1912-26).

Several members of my family went to the United States to study and seek their fortune during that time. Well-educated young men like Tei's husband and Seizo's son (my father), were also eager to learn from the West. My father's uncle, a medical

doctor, followed in the footsteps of other Japanese scientists who went to the United States, but a tragic car accident killed the ambitious doctor and his wife in Stockton, California. My relatives were dismayed to hear how poorly the Japanese and the Japanese-Americans were treated in the U.S. at that time.

The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 killed over 140,000 people in the Tokyo-Yokohama region, set back the economy, and increased social instability. My family survived the earthquake but remembered the anti-Korean sentiments—thousands of Koreans living in Tokyo were killed by panic-stricken Japanese who believed the Koreans had poisoned the drinking water. Conservative military leaders fanned such xenophobic feelings toward foreigners and the West, and they began silencing the liberals, imposing more restrictions and military control.

As my grandfather Seizo saw the growing militarism in Tokyo (In 1932 young fanatic military officers assassinated the Prime Minister), he was probably relieved when his sons took academic paths away from military school. The *Kenpeitai* (secret military police) forbade political meetings, censored student meetings, confiscated foreign books, and tortured dissenters, including my father's friend who never recovered. The *Kenpeitai* were known to be brutal, particularly in Korea.

By the time Tei's husband moved to Shinkyō City, Manchuria in 1943, the Japanese army had been at war with China for three years. Manchuria was an important source of raw materials for Japan, a resource-poor island nation. Although my father and many others in the educated community knew the U.S. would defeat Japan, the militarists, particularly the army, pushed for war, especially when the U.S. threatened Japan's oil supplies.

My father escaped widespread military conscription because

he could do scientific research—such as on alternative fuels. Tei's husband was also one of the educated who was not drafted. Tei and her husband were part of a thriving economy in Manchuria. Over 850,000 Japanese lived in Korea and more than 2 million in China. In Shinkyō, where Tei and her family lived, the Japanese made up almost a quarter of the population. Modern factories, and institutions such as the Meteorological Institute where Tei's husband worked were well established.

Tei begins her story in August 9, 1945 as they fled from the invading Soviets who declared war on Japan right after the U.S. dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima. The Japanese military abandoned the civilians, leaving them completely vulnerable. More than 11,000 Japanese settlers died as they fled, about a third by committing suicide.

Hundreds of thousands of Japanese men were captured, including Tei's husband, and were sent to the Soviet forced labor camps, the infamous *gulag*. After the end of the war, the *hikiage* began, the massive reverse migration of millions of Japanese soldiers, civilians, women, and children back to Japan.

Most of Tei's memoir takes place in what is now North Korea. Long before the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese merchants settled throughout Korea, seeking economic opportunity. Westerners were also in evidence on the peninsula. Tei saw a church and a hospital left behind by Protestant and Methodist missionaries who arrived in Korea from the United States and Canada beginning in the 1880's. By the time Tei arrived, these missionaries were gone, replaced by the Japanese military. Tei's group stays in the house next to a shinto shrine which was burned down, most likely by locals who resented the Japanese and their regulations: the abolishment of the Korean language in public schools and public

functions, the pressure for Koreans to adopt Japanese names, use Japanese language, and bow to Japanese shinto shrines.

When Tei finally reached the shores of Japan in 1946, the situation was not much better – food shortages and the spread of the black market. My relatives experienced malnutrition and vividly remember the U.S. emergency food packets which saved many lives. It was no wonder that Tei thought her memoir might be her last testament. Her world in 1946 looked bleak and uncertain.

Tei's memoir is about a year that was the confluence of tremendous change – the end of the most devastating war the world had experienced, and the beginning of tremendous social change for Japan and the rest of the world.

For her personally, her memoir documents the end of her innocence. Just as Pandora found when she opened the box, Tei found hunger, pain, suffering, cruelty and all the evils man could inflict on man. But also like Pandora, Tei finds one last spirit still remaining in the box – hope.

Nana V. Mizushima

March 2014

Translation Notes

I am not a professional translator or an academic, so the reader may wonder how I came to translate this work. First, my language background in a nutshell: My parents both immigrated from Japan as adults. I was born in the United States, but spoke Japanese at home and attended school in Japan several times for stays ranging from half a year to a year (*yochien*, middle school, and college). I vividly remember learning English when I began kindergarten in Boulder, Colorado. I lived in Japan for a total of about ten years, spread out over several visits.

I enjoyed reading many Japanese-to-English translated works through my middle school and high school years, but found many of them to be difficult to read. I have consciously tried to avoid the stiff style I encountered in some of those translations. Once I reached college age, I did not major in Japanese but I did study Japanese at the University of Colorado, and in the Master's program in International Affairs at Columbia University. (My major was economics as an undergraduate, and international affairs, with a focus on modern Japan, at Columbia University.)

Much of the Japanese I learned was through living and working in Japan. Besides attending Japanese schools, I worked for a large Japanese steel company (*Nippon Kokan*) for two years, the Japan-US Educational Commission for four years,

the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for a year, and was the busy mother of three children who attended local Japanese schools for two years. Many of my relatives and friends are Japanese.

I do have professional experience as a Japanese-English interpreter (translating the *spoken* language) with two companies here in Colorado. I was an interpreter for a Japanese heart transplant patient in Denver, other Japanese medical clients, and an American engineering company with Japanese clients. I find translating written work more difficult because I am limited to written characters. Fortunately, I can ask family and friends to clarify the Japanese vocabulary. Now, I mainly communicate in Japanese with my parents.

I don't have the linguistics background to explain the intricacies of my translation process. My goals are to be accurate and translate the emotional intent of each sentence. In any case, I hope that most readers are going to be more interested in the story rather than my translation process. I am going to cheat here and quote a professional translator, Professor Jay Rubin, who translates Haruki Murakami's works and is much better than I am at articulating the translation challenges.

The Japanese language is *so* different from English ...that true literal translation is impossible, and the translator's subjective processing is inevitably going to play a large part.

I try to write in a natural style which is enjoyable to read. I believe the translation should be invisible, just as the camera is invisible in a good movie. But the reader should be aware that this is *my interpretation* of Tei Fujiwara's story, not a literal translation. What is the difference, you ask? I will give you a specific example

from Jay Rubin's work mentioned in his book *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* (ISBN 1 86046 952 3 (tpb)). A paragraph from the Professor Rubin's translation of Haruki Murakami's "The Girl from Ipanema":

When I think of my high school's corridor, I think of combination salad: lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, green peppers, asparagus, onion rings, and pink Thousand Island dressing. Not that there was a salad shop at the end of the corridor. No, there was just a door, and beyond the door a drab 25-meter pool.

Professor Rubin notes that a literal translation of the same paragraph would actually look like this (foreign non-Japanese words are italicized):

High school's corridor say-if, I *combination salad* think-of. *Lettuce* and *tomato* and cucumber and green pepper and *asparagus*, ring-cut bulb onion, and pink-color's *Thousand island dressing*. No argument high school corridor's hit-end in *salad* speciality shop exists meaning is-not. High school corridor's hit-end in, *door* existing, *door's* outside in, too-much flash-do-not *25-meter pool* exists only is.

The differences in grammar between Japanese and English make translation between these two languages challenging. Professor Rubin's example is from a Japanese book which is widely regarded as more American in style than most Japanese books. So the reader can imagine Tei Fujiwara's book, written in the 1940's, is going to be even more difficult. Here are a few notes for this translation:

- Please see the **Glossary** at the end of the book to see the

original kanji (used by Tei Fujiwara) of names of people and places. If I had a choice, I used the simpler pronunciation of a name.

- I purposefully left out Tei's husband's first name since she only refers to him as "my husband."
- I used Western ages for people (a person becomes one year old after a year has passed from the date of birth.)
- I inserted pronouns and gender and titles to clarify the identity of the speakers. And used Mrs., Mr. and *Dancho* as the form of address instead of the gender neutral *-san*. I used *-chan* as the Japanese do, when addressing children.
- *Okusan* (literal meaning Madam) is the form of address commonly used when talking to Mrs. Fujiwara and other married women.
- I used the original map from Tei's memoir with the Kanji characters. These are the 1940's Japanese names of the cities and towns. I added a larger map for readers unfamiliar with the region.
- I added a few details to clarify the context of the story and the identities of the people, but did not change any of the events of Tei's story.
- The Glossary in the back provides additional information.

Acknowledgements:

This translation would have been impossible to produce without the help and support of many people. I wish to thank Tei Fujiwara's family for giving me permission to translate her work. I am especially grateful to my mother, Yoneko Mizushima, who introduced this book to me, encouraged me to translate it, and provided essential help over many months. My father, Masataka Mizushima, was able to explain many of the details and vocabulary of that time period. Becky Tarr was a patient and wonderful reader of my earlier drafts, as well as a good writing buddy. Members of the Tuesday Fiction Writers group were gracious enough to look at the earlier drafts of this non-fiction work, and gently critique my writing and story-telling style. John Shors, historical fiction writer of novels such as *Beneath a Marble Sky*, gave me the go-ahead when I needed that initial encouragement, and provided many helpful comments on the earlier draft. Ansley Clark, creative writing instructor at the University of Colorado, gave me useful comments and advice. Aaron Klass was also very kind to read through the earlier draft and give me comments. I am especially indebted to my husband, Robert Forshay, for his willingness to listen to me read the book out loud and provide valuable comments.

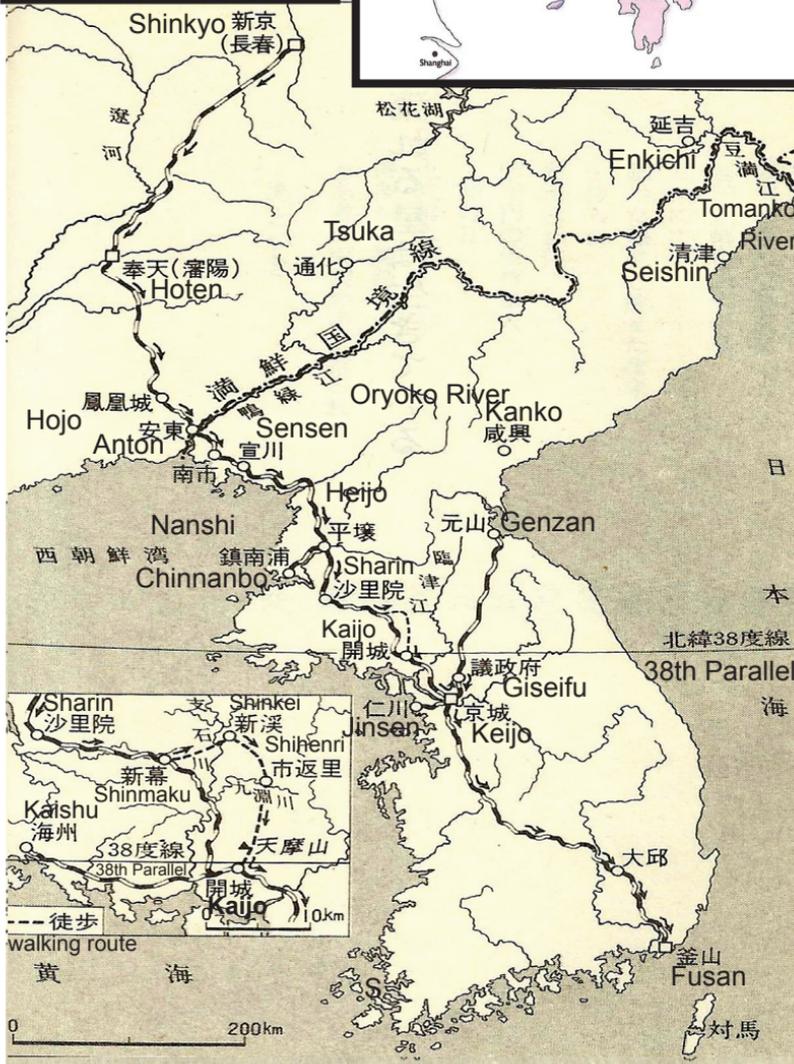
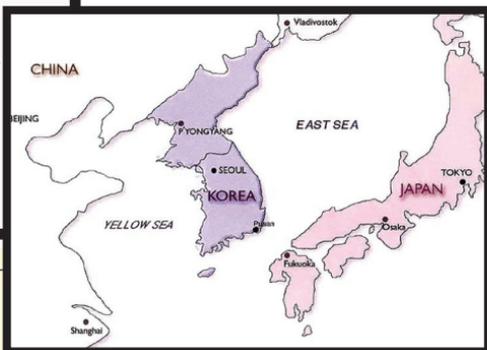
I hope readers will contact me if any errors are found or any additional information is available. I thank you for having the patience and interest in reading this translation. Most of all, I hope readers will forget that this book is a translation.

Nana V. Mizushima

NanaMizushima@gmail.com

Map
(from Tei's memoir.
Circa 1945)

My Journey
(From Shinkyo to Fusan)



PART I

THE HILL OF TEARS

CHAPTER ONE

Four Kilometers to the Train Station

Shinkyō City, Manchuria

August 9, 1945, around 10:30 p.m.

I heard a loud knocking at the front door. The children were asleep. My husband and I were talking about getting to bed soon because we had stayed up late the night before.

“Mr. Fujiwara! Mr. Fujiwara! We’re from the meteorological station!” a young man shouted from outside.

My husband and I opened the front door to find two young uniformed men holding rifles.

“Sir? Are you Mr. Fujiwara? Please come immediately to the office,” said one of them.

My husband asked, “What is going on?”

“Sir, we don’t know the reason but everyone is being called to an emergency meeting. Please cooperate and come right away!” The two rushed off to the next house to continue their mission.

When I closed the door, I felt light-headed. My intuition told me that I shouldn’t let my husband go into the pitch-dark night by

himself. "Are you sure you want to go out alone?" I asked.

Right after I said that, I peered into my husband's eyes to try to extract what vital knowledge he had. I was sure that there was something he didn't tell me, something he hid about what was going on with the war. The last two or three days, uneasiness clouded his eyes.

"Don't worry. I want you to wait for me," he said. Then he sighed. "It looks like the day has finally come," he added and he opened the door again. "Here. Listen...it definitely isn't the same old Shinkyo City we know."

I turned my attention to the night and listened carefully. In the distance I heard cars running, people's nervous voices, and other restless noises. A big change was about to happen. It was like an omen, vibrating all around us in the dark night air where the new moon shed no light. "Has the day finally arrived? Is this it?" I asked. I sat down in the dark, narrow hallway as all of the strength drained from my body. I clung to the bottom of my husband's jacket and trembled.

"*Baka!* You fool," he scolded me. "What are you doing? Hurry; you've got to get everything ready so that we can leave this place right away."

"Leave here? Leave our home – to go where?" I asked.

"I don't know myself. I don't even know yet if we're really leaving or not – but we've got to prepare ourselves; we've got to be ready."

He hurriedly wrapped his uniform leggings around his trousers and rushed out. The meteorological station where my husband worked was in the suburbs south of Shinkyo, in a place called Nanrei. From here, it was going to take at least thirty minutes for him to get there by foot. Even if he turned right

around, it would about an hour before he got back home.

I went upstairs and tried to decide what to do. From the second-floor window, I saw confirmation of my fears. Even though there was an official blackout order, scarlet points of light flickered between the window shades of the neighbors' houses.

Tonight, it wasn't just my home. Everywhere, in every home, terrible thoughts ran through people's minds. Turmoil and fear spread, like a plague. The shadows in the windows moved about hastily, as if they were in a panic. "I've got to do something," I told myself and opened up our emergency suitcase.

Inside, our winter clothes—children's and adults' were neatly packed. What about emergency food? Some packages—sugar, hard biscuits, and canned goods were already packed inside. If we have to leave Shinkyo tonight and go who knows how far—other than these things—what in the world should we take? As I thought about this, my heart pounded faster and faster, and soon any semblance of rational thought fled my mind. I couldn't think.

Under the mosquito netting hung in the center of the eight-*tatami*-mat room, I saw the faces of my children, all sleeping together on one bed—limbs and bodies intertwined as if they were one creature. How could we possibly leave this house and get very far with these children? My two boys—Masahiro was five years old and Masahiko was only two. My baby girl, Sakiko, was a newborn who had just turned one month old. As I nervously packed and unpacked things in and out of the backpack and suitcase, I was overcome with dread, and my eyes welled up.

"I'm not strong enough for this. There was nothing I could do by myself," I thought. A woman alone with her children. All I could do was wait for my husband to come back. As I sat quietly,

various sounds outside seemed to press in on my home from far away. Looking out again from the window, I saw the unfamiliar sight of the headlights of many trucks reflecting off the white walls of our housing compound along the Daido Daigai Road.

My husband came home. His pale face was so tense that he seemed like a different man from the one who usually stood before me. "We've got to get to the Shinkyō Station by 1:30 this morning," he said.

"What!" I cried. "Shinkyō Station?"

"We've got to evacuate by train," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

He explained the situation quickly in terse sentences. The military families of the Kanto Army were already moving. The authorities had issued an order; families of the civil servants must do the same. There was the real possibility that Shinkyō City would be engulfed in the turmoil of this war. I thought, "Did that mean the Soviets were invading the city?" Any Japanese who remained would be risking his life. We had to leave right away. Other families besides those of the meteorological station were also preparing to leave. We needed to evacuate immediately.

He said, "We've been assigned to a train. In just thirty minutes...we're supposed to leave. Hurry!" My husband instructed me as if he were ordering the troops,

"Of course, you're coming too, aren't you?" I asked. There wasn't time to argue with him any more than this. I felt that as long as we were all together we would somehow survive. I looked at his face.

"I will take you as far as the train station but I've got to stay here," he said.

"What! You're leaving me?" I was shocked. With fear and

anger rising in me—like a woman who had lost her mind—I hurled harsh words at him. As I screamed, I barely heard him say, “I still have work to do...” and something about “...as a man in my position, I can’t leave without first finishing what needs to be done...” But he was overwhelmed by my anguish and stopped talking. He looked into my eyes. As I noticed my silent husband gazing at me, I realized that there was nothing I could say to change his mind. I stopped.

He put his hand on my shoulder as I crumpled in tears.

“Now hurry. Think about the children,” he said.

With those words, I regained my composure. I’m a mother...a mother who has to save her children by running away. I became resolute. There was no room for crying now.

Once more, from the beginning, I organized our belongings. But with three children, how much could I carry? With just the essential things—the children’s winter clothes—the bags were full. I put two-year-old Masahiko piggy-back in a sling across my back while my husband tied Sakiko, papoose-style, on top of his backpack. In both hands he carried the other bags. Masahiro was just old enough to walk, carrying his own small bag. That was how we decided to get to Shinkyō Station.

As we opened the door, the cold night air blasted our faces and took my breath away. We had the children wear as much as they could. Since I was also dressed with layers of winter clothes, the dry cold wind blowing in from the Manchurian plains felt just right. From the many vegetable plants I had in our yard, I picked a couple of tomatoes and put them in my bag. My husband kept saying, “Hurry, hurry,” while I thought about how I wanted to properly pay my farewell respects to the neighbors, Mrs. Maeda and Mrs. Sato. But tonight, the six houses in our compound were

dark and empty. Where did they go? I said good-bye to them silently as we walked out toward the Daido Daigai Road. As I looked back once more at our home of two years, I saw only a dark square shadow, and it looked like a pile of dirt.

Shinkyō Station was four kilometers away, straight on the Daido Daigai Road. But before we had even walked one kilometer, I was exhausted. My poor body had given birth to Sakiko just a month earlier, and I was in no condition to carry a toddler like Masahiko. I tried to catch my breath around Daido Park, but was overcome by a sadness that I have never felt before in my life. In front of us passed a truck heavily loaded with the military families and their luggage. There were parents like us who were fleeing, holding onto the hands of their small children. How could it be that just two hours earlier, my family had been living here in such peace? My husband and I had often admired the vast Manchurian night sky. Why do we now look at that same starry sight with such fear? What could a woman with children do? We passed the thickets of the park and, almost horizontally in front of us, a large shooting star flew across the sky.

I felt as if an icy blade were plunged into my chest—hopelessness bled into my body. I said, “Let’s go home. If I am going to die anyway, I’d like to die at home.”

My husband said nothing and kept marching. He took out his pocket watch and tried to look at it in the light of the stars. I knew he wanted me to keep walking. There were still three kilometers to go. I thought if I kept walking like this I would collapse, a body already weak from loss of blood.

“Please. Please...let’s go home,” I pleaded one more time. But I knew that I was making an impossible request.

CHAPTER TWO

The Separation

Shinkyō Station was a mass of people stumbling in the dark. There were supposed to be about fifty in our assigned group, the *dan*. It was a minor miracle that my husband and I found them, huddled in front of the government travel office in front of the train station.

“Good. We made it,” he said.

But I didn’t see anyone’s face that I recognized. I collapsed, so thoroughly exhausted that I couldn’t do anything. The families of the Kanto Army formed nervous lines around us that steadily snaked into the train station. We were told that our group’s departure would not be until seven that morning, long after these military families left on the first trains. I spread out a single blanket on the bare dirt ground, and together with the children, curled up into a circle to sleep. The only comfort I had was the knowledge that my husband was near us until we had to leave.

An uneasiness, the unfamiliar sensation of being surrounded

by so many people, grew like a web in my brain. In my sleep, I must have breathed in the soot-filled air. A fit of coughing woke me from the desperately needed rest. It was dawn. Now we were surrounded by a crowd that had grown through the night; how did we sleep without being trampled? My husband was nowhere to be seen. As I looked for him I was relieved to see faces I knew right in front of us – Mr. Daichi and his family! Their kind, friendly faces lined up near us was reassuring. Between Mr. and Mrs. Daichi sat their teenage daughter, Seiko who hid her pretty face in her father's shoulder. Mrs. Daichi held their baby. It turned out that my husband had gone to the office to get more instructions.

The chief of our General Affairs Section, Mr. Shibata, was busy trying to organize our group. "Is Mr. Fujiwara back yet?" Mr. Shibata waited anxiously for my husband's return. By the time my husband came back, it was already past seven. Now we were told that our train would depart at nine.

"What did the director say?" Mr. Shibata impatiently asked.

My husband said, "He told us to make our own decisions on how to select the men."

The two of them moved away from me and began discussing matters in lowered voices so that I couldn't hear. But I knew they were deciding which men would accompany us on the train. By us, I mean the women and children. Four men were selected. The families of the lucky four joyfully crowded around their own husband or father.

"Who should we choose as *dancho*, to head the *dan*?" Mr. Shibata looked at my husband's face.

"Mr. Tono would be good," I distantly heard my husband say.

Mr. Shibata hesitated, then said, "Hey, Mr. Fujiwara. Why

don't you go on with this group? You've got three young children... I can explain everything personally to the director later. Even if you stayed behind with us, it's just a matter of two or three days anyway."

My husband didn't answer. I stood up unsteadily and went closer to him. "Dear...please come with us," I said.

My husband looked at me accusingly, as if to blame me for embarrassing him. "I will not go," he said very clearly to Mr. Shibata. Then he shouted so that everyone could hear, "Mr. Tono. Mr. Tono, you've been selected to head this *dan*."

I couldn't believe it. I witnessed my husband sacrifice his own family. For what? For the sake of appearance, for the sake of honor. He did what he was expected to do in his position, I suppose. Back then, all I could do was cry like an ordinary, helpless housewife. Tears poured down my face.

Night gave way to morning, and Shinkyo Station became clear in the light. The station was much more crowded than it was when we arrived in the middle of the night. Lines and lines of people formed, most of them women and children. Japanese soldiers ordered everyone about with hoarse shouts and barks. My husband brought a bundle wrapped in our large *furoshiki* cloth, the cloth I used to wrap my packages. He must have picked it up from our house on his way from the office.

"You might end up throwing this away but if this bundle stays at the house, it won't do any good there either," he said.

It was mostly clothes. In my husband's other hand hung a basket full of my freshly picked tomatoes. Seeing my fresh vegetables made me happier. As the children and I ate the sweet, juicy tomatoes, I watched my husband's eyes—red, bloodshot eyes that hadn't had any sleep at all. There was one hour left

before our train was supposed to depart. It was a terrifying sixty minutes.

The motorcycle sidecar that was supposed to fetch Mrs. Tono, our *dancho's* wife, came back loaded with baggage belonging to someone, I don't know who. But Mrs. Tono was not aboard.

Mr. Shibata shouted something at Mr. Daichi. People argued, discussed, bickered. I listened distractedly, no longer capable of caring. At eight o'clock we were allowed onto the train platform. Then we were assigned to an open freight train car with the number thirty-five painted on in black and white. It wasn't a passenger car, just a freight car used to transport logs or rocks with no roof overhead, no seats.

My husband dragged us onto the car, with our children and our bags. But by the time we got on the freight car, the 'good seats' on the car floor were already taken by the nimble people. We were left with the worst spots, in the front—right where the train's steam engine would shower us with smoke and coal dust.

Mr. Shibata then called out, "All right, men, we've got to get back to the office!" They were leaving us.

My husband loved two-year-old Masahiko with a special tenderness. He was a lively little boy who looked just like his father. My husband picked him up and put his face close to his son's. He spoke using his usual paternal tone. "Masahiko-chan, remember your Daddy's face, all right? Don't forget me, all right? Do as Mommy tells you. Okay? Listen to her; listen to her well. All right?" He nuzzled Masahiko's frightened face and set him down beside me.

Then he turned to our eldest son, Masahiro, who stood in a daze. My husband knelt down, faced him, and placed his hand on his small shoulder. "Masahiro, how old are you?"

“Five,” he said in a small voice.

“That’s right; you’re five years old. So you’re old enough to understand what Daddy has to say. Listen to me carefully, Masahiro. You are going on this train with Mommy, your little brother, and the baby to a place that is far away. Daddy has to stay behind in Shinkyō. I am not going with you, so you need to do as Mommy says and be a good boy.”

Masahiro obediently said, “Yes, Daddy:”

My husband then turned to look at me and simply said, “*Dewa tanomu yo*—I leave this matter in your hands,” just the way he asked me when he needed me to do an ordinary task, and then he stood up. It was a man’s job to be strong, not sentimental.

This might be the last time I would see my husband. The last time I would see him alive. I couldn’t possibly utter the word ‘good-bye’—not like this. I stood up and said gently into his ear, “Please stay alive, dear. Stay alive. Do whatever you have to do, just please stay alive.” I whispered this over and over into his ear.

Without saying a word, he took out his watch from the pocket of his tailored government jacket and gave it to me. It was his precious Longines pocket watch.

“*Kodomotachi wo tanomu yo*,” he said, asking me formally to take on the responsibility for the lives of our three children, a terrible burden to place in my hands, and then he turned his back to us—to get ready to jump off the train car. Just then, a small towel tucked into his waist brushed against his hand. He stopped, came back to us, took the towel out, and put it around Masahiko-chan’s head and face.

“Don’t let him get sunburnt. He’ll get too hot.” He said this without losing control over his emotions. A father worried over

his son. Then without hesitation, he took a big leap off the freight car and lightly landed on the station platform. He ran to catch up with the other men.

Long after I lost sight of him in the crowd, I kept looking and looking, hoping that he would reappear. The cold Manchurian wind penetrated me, and sliced my heart.

CHAPTER THREE

The Open Freight Car

When I leaned against the outer railing of the train car and held completely still, loneliness pushed up against me, then engulfed me like a huge, dark ocean wave. I had just lost that one person I could lean on, my husband. Now how was I going to survive? As I thought about this, I couldn't stay still any longer. I looked around me.

Dancho Tono waited to see if his wife would make it in time. He stood up and looked anxiously into the frightened crowd on the train platform. She was nowhere to be seen. At ten, the train started moving. I was relieved. At least, something was happening. I thought, "That's good, the train will keep moving, keep going all the way to my homeland, Japan..." Japan? How silly I was! How childish. As the train started moving everyone turned back toward the station and started waving their hands. I knew that my husband was gone. He wouldn't be standing on the platform anymore. But along with everyone else, I started

waving a handkerchief at the crowd remaining on the platform. A throng of faces—all turned toward us but not a single familiar person—no friends or anyone I recognized.

Somebody cried out, “*Shinkyō sayonara*, Good-bye, Shinkyō!” I wondered what the person who shouted that was feeling. I felt empty, devoid of emotions.

My children. As the train moved forward I thought, how can I keep the smoke, the flying soot and cinders from smothering them? Both of the boys, Masahiro and Masahiko, were exhausted. Unlike their usual selves, the two boys just sat there silently, in a daze. Baby Sakiko slept, her tiny face nestled in the sling against my body. How could I protect her against the coal dust? I tried to take Masahiko’s hand towel to cover her face. He suddenly broke out of his trance and pulled back with unexpected strength on the towel. He cried, “No, don’t!” He cried out so piteously that I let the towel go. Masahiko blinked his round eyes, fighting back his tears, and held on tight to the towel that his father had draped around his head.

“Poor child. Let him hold onto that small token of his father’s love a little longer,” I thought. So I opened the rucksack and found a dry cotton diaper that I pulled out and placed over the baby’s face. Without warning, my tears came. I turned my face toward the wooden wall of the train to hide. I cried and cried. I was not alone in my grief. A number of the wives wailed and joined me in sorrowful chorus.

I closed my eyes. In my mind, I took myself back to the life we had before last night. Our cozy brick house—the home we enjoyed until only yesterday. From the second floor I looked out to the yard where I had planted vegetables; the sight calmed and soothed me. The rocking and swaying of the train receded into a

faint backdrop. This train was just a dream. I wanted to wake up from this nightmare. Oh, don't forget! There was a little red kimono I made for Sakiko up on the top shelf of the closet. I wanted to try it on Sakiko once. My precious baby daughter was sleeping peacefully under the south window. How strong was that sensation that Sakiko was still sleeping upstairs...

Suddenly I was jolted out of my vision. Sakiko hadn't been fed since yesterday. My breast milk had stopped since last night, since the nightmare began. "My baby will surely die," I thought, "if I can't feed her." My tears started again.

Dancho Tono stood up and announced, "Attention, everyone, please." His voice pierced my aching head. He spoke formally and introduced himself as *dancho*—our formal group leader, "Let's call our group the Meteorological Station *dan*. As your *dancho*, I will be honored to accompany you all." He bowed formally to us.

The wind chopped up *Dancho* Tono's voice. I strained to hear his words "...rules for our group...must stay together...take care of those with many children...do not not wander off on your own, check with me before leaving the group..." *Dancho* Tono's thick eyebrows twitched with concentration as he gave his directives.

As the morning turned into midday, August reared its ugly head. Beneath the burning hot sun, people began to dry up and—just like vegetables, they sought shade and water.

The children began to incessantly demand water from me. From time to time the train stopped at a small station and, with Sakiko in my sling and a canteen in my hand, I got off the train to try to get water, but always, strong men and women pushed in front of me.

Miserably, I returned to the train empty-handed. But even

more troubling was washing the baby's soiled diapers. If it looked like the train would stop for a while, I tried to rinse out the diapers at the station's water pump. But as I stood in line, with my baby and the diapers, men shouted at me, "Don't do anything dirty near the pump!" as they carried buckets of water back to the train. Finally I found a small fetid, foul-smelling pool near the station and hurriedly tried to clean the diapers in the blue-black muddy water.

When I got back to the train, my two thirsty boys cried, "Mommy, did you get water?" I didn't know what to say to them.

"I'm so sorry. I couldn't get any." Saying this, I sat back in my seat, and looked reproachfully at the hot sky with a sigh.

Suddenly, I noticed a young couple, seated a few rows in front of us. They poured water out of a full jug into a pan. The splash of water sounded heavenly. The young man grunted with effort as he lifted the heavy pan. "He'll share that water with us," I thought hopefully. But then he put the pan in front of a round-faced woman sitting next to them.

"I've never washed my face in a cooking pan," the round-faced woman joked to the young man as she put both hands into the pan and began splashing water onto her face. Then without any hesitation, they threw the water off the side of the train.

When the train stopped at a larger station, a group of the Japanese Wives Association brought in dozens of *onigiri* (seasoned rice rolled into serving-size balls). They also gave us stewed acorn squash. The children were delighted and ate with gusto. But I was so terrified they would ask me for water afterwards that I had no appetite at all. I just thought, "Were these women feeding the refugees on each train—every train as it came through from where we came? Why don't they save themselves while they

could?" No one knew anymore what would happen to us or Japan.

As we left Hoten, the sun was in the west. And for the first time that day, I saw the shadow of our train on the side of the tracks. Then I remembered. Hoten was the train station where we first arrived here, in April of 1943. My husband was transferred here from Japan. We had come from so far away, but I remembered Hoten as a much more beautiful and quiet train station back then. At that time, Masahiro was our only child. Now I thought, "Here I am again. At this station. An exhausted mother with three children riding on a open freight car – where are we going this time?"

We were all afraid. Where are we going? Where could we escape? Rumors spread among the panicked passengers. We would go east to Tsuka—but that turned out to be untrue. Would we go straight south from Sokato, or would we double back then go south? Would we go west to Tairen or go towards Korea? The train had come to a point where someone would have to make a decision. I was too tired to care which way we went. I leaned my back against the wall and closed my eyes. Then someone said it was decided. We would go south to Anton and then on to Korea.

"Oh, what a beautiful sunset," said a woman who was standing near me. I raised up my head. The huge sky was filled with spectacular shades of red and orange and purple. Our first night arrived. I gathered the children as close to me as I could, and tried to go to sleep. We were alone. Countless stars began to emerge in the darkening sky, and they remained fixed in their places, unlike us. How small I felt beneath that massive dome.

When I woke up, the train had stopped, and dawn was on the horizon. We were at a station called Renzankan. As far as I

could see, green fields of maize lay under a thick layer of mist, flat as a blanket on top. The train started moving again as the sun rose. It would be another hot day like yesterday. But compared to the day before, I had a little more energy. If my children and I were to survive, I knew I had to change. I wasn't afraid to be more pushy anymore. I got better at haggling and managed to get water, some melons, and tomatoes. I nursed Sakiko. At Ryukaga there was rain which drenched our clothes. I busily wrung out the sopping wet things, laid them out to dry around us, and somehow, somehow the four of us got through another day. By the time the clouds clustered on the horizon and turned purple, our train neared the border.

The men gathered together in the middle of the car and began discussing something. They appeared to have made a decision. *Dancho* Tono turned to everyone and said, "Soon the train will pass through Hojo. We've thought of a way to send a message back to Shinkyo. The Hojo Meteorological Station is located right next to the railroad—so when our train goes by, let's all raise our voices to let them know we've gotten on the train. Then they can send a telegram back to Shinkyo for us—to let them know we've made it this far."

I suddenly stood up with renewed energy like a rescued woman. My husband must be still in Shinkyo, so worried about us. This was the one line of communication I had left with him. I grabbed one of the drying white diapers to wave, and stood with everyone on the side of the train car.

Soon we saw the red building of the meteorological station. The familiar weather monitoring devices on the rooftop. But our train was moving so fast. We would pass this little station too quickly. The steam from our train glittered in the setting sun and

looked beautiful.

When our train was less than fifty meters from the weather station building, we all faced the building and yelled as loudly as we could. “*Oooi, Kanshoo-jo, oooi, kansho-jo!* Hey - Weather Station, Weather Station!” we called out to the people in the building. But no one came out of the building. We couldn’t tell if anyone was there or not. Just as we gave up, I saw the four metal cups of the *Robinson* anemometer gaily spin round and round, as if to mock me. I was so angry. What’s the use?

As I sat down, full of disappointment, another night arrived. We didn’t know where we were going. We were frightened people with only uncertainty ahead. Then the train started making a loud “goro-goro” sound, the sound of metal wheels going across the long steel bridge which spanned the Ooryoko River. We entered northern Korea.

The people in the train started talking excitedly, “We’ll stop soon and reach our final destination.” But there was no sign that was happening. The train kept going on and on.

Just as I had done the night before, I sat up, lost in my world without time or place, and not sure if I was asleep or awake, when the train stopped at a station, one that was larger than most. The sign said “Nanshi.” While the train stopped, the men representing every *dan* jumped down from each car, and joined together to talk. We were then told for the first time that the final destination would be—Sensen. We wondered, “Sensen, Sensen, what sort of a town is Sensen?” What would be waiting for us there? We started to get ready to get off the train. All I could think about was how I desperately wanted to sleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Day the War Ended

I woke up early and found myself lying on the cold floorboards of a cement building, on the edge of town where we arrived the night before. I lifted my head, so as not to wake the children, and tried to see where we were. Everyone was fast asleep—dressed as they were when we all collapsed upon arrival. The morning sun shone on the children and intensified their ghastly faces, white with fatigue beneath ugly streaks of coal dust.

Sensen Agricultural School took us in to join about three hundred Japanese refugees already here—mostly women and children. As the sleep slowly dissolved from my eyes, my first thought was, “I must wash Sakiko’s diapers.”

I slowly rose from beneath the single blanket that covered us, unwrapping my arms from around my three children, who remained asleep. I crept outside and after going up a little ways on a dew-covered farm road, I found a clear small stream and followed it up into the middle of the woods where a beautiful western-style red brick-building stood. When I went past the

front of the building, a lovely view suddenly appeared.

It was a pretty town. More sturdy western-style buildings, perhaps a school or a library stood next to what looked like a church tower. Below that, several neat dwellings lined up, all of them still dark in the thin morning light. Mountains embraced this valley while a river ran through the middle of a town laid out in a square. A single lonely train track crossed the river, then wound around and disappeared into the mountains.

Behind our refuge, this school where we slept, the men were building a simple kitchen. They had set up a cook stove, a place to put the pots, and a communal serving area. Later that day they prepared a mixture of half soybeans with half white rice and made *onigiri* to distribute twice a day. But the soybeans must have gone bad. After eating, almost all the children got upset stomachs, and most of the adults ended up with a most unpleasant diarrhea.

A cow looked up at me in curiosity. Thank goodness, there was a cow at the agricultural school. Those of us nursing babies each received a small portion of her milk. We mothers were helped a great deal by this cow, but there were so many of us that the milk was not nearly enough. Those whose breasts stopped making milk became desperate as their babies became weaker and weaker.

Once we settled in, I dragged myself several times a day to the river to do the laundry. Sometimes I heard planes flying overhead and each time, I followed the contrails and wondered, "What will happen to us?"

On August 14th, around noon, a single plane began circling high in the sky. "There must be some good news," we fervently hoped, and rushed outside to wave at the plane. As if to answer our signal, the plane scattered handbills. But they only contained

a message from a senior officer of the Japanese Kanto Army asking, "Where are our families?" They only care about their own.

August 15th was a clear day. I was carrying Masahiko on my back, sitting under the poplar trees when—suddenly—bells started pealing. I could hear the footsteps of the agricultural school students as they gathered in their school yard. There must have been four or five hundred of them. A bald man we recognized as the headmaster stepped up to the speaker's platform. I watched and waited for something to begin.

Then the headmaster waved his right arm at me, as if to tell me to go inside the school building. I looked around to see who he had waved at. There was no one behind me. He waved his hand again in big movements. I gave up on my day's excursion and began slowly climbing up the hill back to our building.

Then suddenly, like a wave coming towards me, I heard strange sounds. I turned around and those sounds quickly became cries and moans. A male student with a white shirt and crewcut cried so sharply that icy shivers went up my spine. Without any further thought, I hurried back to our schoolroom. Something must have happened.

That was when I first heard the news. "The war is over," announced *Dancho* Tono, his face pale and drained. As I watched his tears drop one by one to the ground, our nerves stretched to the breaking point. One woman burst into hysterical wails. Her cries sparked all of us. So many times, I wept since leaving Shinkyō. As I began to cry this time, I thought, "Where is my husband? Where is he hearing this news?"

Another fear quickly grew amongst us. "Would we all die now? What is going to happen to us?" Japan was defeated. Our

world was coming to an end and something catastrophic would happen very soon. The evening of the fifteenth we prepared to flee as quickly as possible. Terrors of the worst kind filled our imagination. I sat with Sakiko strapped onto my back. If we had to run then I'd throw away everything I had in my pitiable rucksack. I took out the Longine watch my husband gave me and looked at it in the moonlight—it was past midnight. I had Masahiro and Masahiko go to sleep with their white cotton shoes on, ready to run at a moment's notice. I watched their restless legs tangle together, then untangle as they slept.

The wait for morning was exhausting. I was stiff from sitting up for so long with the baby on my back. When dawn finally arrived, we were so frightened, our own shadows spooked us. But nothing happened. While the boys slept, I got up. Severe diarrhea sapped me of any strength I had left. But I continued, dragging myself up through a thick fog to wash the diapers.

Outside the school, crowds of Koreans passed by, they waved flags, and there was a festive mood flowing about the town. They were celebrating the end of Japanese rule. We felt nervous and uneasy for the rest of the day, especially when all the *danchō* ordered us to stay inside. The children and I huddled quietly in the classroom.

As the hours ticked by, we grew hungry. A few bold women from our group ventured out to climb the hill beyond our building where cornfields and apple orchards lay. They managed to get food from nearby people. But I was so afraid, too afraid to do as they did, so I watched them with envy as they came and went. I had money, but since I couldn't go out, I tried to satisfy the children's hunger by feeding them strings of lies.

When I separated from my husband, I had a three thousand

yen certificate from the Bank of Manchuria and my post office savings book. But in this town, the Manchurian money was useless. I had managed to get to the post office once to get Korean bank certificates. Using them, I bought a few vegetables from the town market. But living in a group like this, there was little tolerance for individuals. When I approached our common cooking area to try to cook our own food, the men yelled at me and drove me off. I had no choice but to give up.

All four of us had diarrhea. Masahiro, my oldest, and I had it the worst. I knew we needed to eat *okayu*—rice gruel—but we didn't have any. From the window I saw the Japanese Kanto Army families, their strong men, stripped to the waist, mixing big pots filled with *okayu* and good-smelling soup. The military families had a lot of supplies and we saw their storage containers filled with canned food, sugar, and various other items.

I envied them as they ate and enjoyed their food. It became obvious that those of us in the Meteorological Station *dan* were the poorest of the Japanese refugees here at the school. Why had our group not saved as many supplies? Why were we so poorly treated? I wondered. My husband was one of those who were treated as second-class citizens by the Japanese military authorities.

My life was soon reduced to walking a small triangle—from the corner of our room to the toilet, and then from the toilet to the small stream at the top of the hill where I washed the diapers, and then back to our corner. Back and forth. Back and forth. My diarrhea worsened. Then as Masahiro's fever rose, he could no longer walk. I put him on my back and carried him along that triangle over and over.

In the toilet, I tried to check to see if there was blood in our

stool, but the others waiting in line behind us complained for us to hurry, so I rushed out with Masahiro's feverish, limp body in my arms. When we returned to our 'home,' I found Masahiko and Sakiko bawling, and the neighbors glared at me. Their eyes burned white-hot with hate as they wallowed in their own misery. I stopped talking to anyone the whole day. I scolded the children to be quiet and swallowed the bitter phlegm in my throat. As diarrhea tortured my body, walls of agony closed in on me, and the fever burned away everything in my mind. Everything except the desire to go home. The desire to go home and thoughts of my husband.

CHAPTER FIVE

Meeting My Husband Again

It was very late at night on August 15th, when there was a sudden commotion at the front gates of the school. I had already put Masahiko and Sakiko to bed, and was still up mending the split seams on their clothes when I heard loud voices. I put my sewing down and crept down towards the front door to see what was going on.

“They’re from the meteorological station,” one of the women said as they stood in the hallway. I gasped and hurried into the entryway. Beneath a dim light, I saw several men. Among them, I immediately recognized Mr. Narita, a meteorologist from my husband’s office. I ran about looking, “Where is my husband?” But I didn’t see him. I sank with bitter disappointment against the metal bannister. As if I had lost any will to live, I just stared at the faces of the men from our meteorological station as they lowered their rucksacks to let people see what they brought. Then suddenly, Masahiro, my eldest, said in a strange voice, “There’s Daddy!”

I jerked awake and looked where Masahiro was pointing. My husband was separate from the other men—he kneeled at a table—surrounded by a crowd, and was writing something. When he finished writing, he talked with the *Hoantai*, the Korean police who had brought our men. I grabbed Masahiro and crumpled to the ground in tears.

There were eight men who returned to us that night. With these men, now there were eleven families restored, made whole again. But six men did not return—their families sat desolate as the rest of us rejoiced. I touched my husband's rucksack and asked if I could take it. He shrugged as if he didn't care. "Go ahead," he said. There was a mountain of things for us to talk about, but when we took his bag to our 'home' in the classroom, he gently touched the cheeks of our sleeping children, Masahiko and Sakiko. Then he laughed, and took out a wrapped present for Masahiro. He started to go talk with *Dancho* Tono, to catch up, and I stopped him to say, "Be sure to thank *Dancho* Tono. He's been a good leader despite his missing wife.

He nodded his head, again surveyed my 'home,' our family's sleeping area on the school room floor, and strode over to *Dancho* Tono and they talked quietly for some time.

I was delighted as I went through my husband's bag. He brought a new blanket for us! And his winter underwear. I was so happy with the thought that we would sleep under a warm blanket that night. Happy families here and there laughed and talked late into the night. But I noticed the six families left out of the happy reunions. They sat apart from us—dejected and silent. I waited for my husband to come sit by my side. I was so happy and relieved, and repeated to myself, "My husband is back." I wanted to chatter about everything—all my complaints, my worries.

Although I knew I would sound silly, I didn't care anymore. "I can talk with him." I pulled out the Longines watch I kept in my clothes to show him.

"See. I still have it," I proudly said. The pocket watch swung on a heavy black silk rope. He took the watch and put it up against his ear to listen, to drink in its nostalgic ticking. When I tried to untie the watch to give it back to him, he refused. But that watch didn't mean anything to me now that I had my husband's breathing to replace its sound. The hands of the Longines pointed to two a.m.

I think my husband hadn't expected to ever see us again. In his bag, there were no clothes for the children or me, but I found a small square package wrapped in cloth. Out of the cloth, photos fell out. He had taken them out of our photo albums. Photos from our wedding, photos of the children, about ten photos in all, carefully tucked away.

That night, as soon as he curled his body around the children, he fell asleep. Grateful for the warm blanket that he had brought, I silently thanked the universe before I lay myself down on the other side of the children. His sunburnt face glowed in the moonlight shining through the window. After I gently lifted my side of the blanket to slip in next to the children, I fell into a deep sleep, so deep it felt like several nights rolled into one.

CHAPTER SIX

Shall We Go South?

I couldn't rouse myself out of bed the next morning, maybe because I was too drunk with happiness—my husband was back. I didn't want to get up. I wanted to let him take care of me again—to *amaeru*—that delicious feeling of losing myself in him. I was so happy that I could relax, even a little. But two days after he arrived, there was a change in our group. *Dancho* Tono learned his missing wife was in Chinnanbo, a town further south, and he decided to leave our group to go find her.

Who is going to be our next *dancho*? This was wartime and we couldn't depend on the usual procedures we followed for this sort of thing. They would probably select someone based on a his former job. Out of the eleven men, the ones most likely to be chosen were Mr. Narita and my husband. In addition to these two, there was Mr. Oe who was ten years older and used to be a manager. So there were three candidates. Watching the eleven men seated in a circle in the middle of the room, intently talking, it looked like the *dancho* job was going to be handed to my husband,

but I prayed that he would turn the job down.

Mr. Narita was a weak, scholarly man and I dismissed him, thinking, "He's not much use in this situation." Next they talked about my husband. I was worried sick that he would end up with the job because I knew my children and I would end up secondary to any *dancho* responsibilities. They kept talking through the morning but still hadn't made a decision yet. When my husband came back to talk with me during their break, I told him to not accept this job, "Never!" He didn't say anything but just nodded.

In the afternoon, it was decided. The new *dancho* would be Mr. Oe, who was older and known for being a tough boss. Next in line—*fuku dancho*, the assistant head, would be my husband. I was uneasy but grateful that he wasn't picked to be the *dancho*. *Dancho* Oe and *fuku-dancho*, my husband, they were announced to the other Japanese.

Everyday at one p.m. representatives from all the refugee *dan* met at an elementary school in the center of town. When *Dancho* Oe and my husband, the *fuku-dancho*, got back from these meetings, we gathered round to hear the latest news. But who knew if the information was really reliable or not. I thought a lot of it was gossip, or just more propaganda from the government. I waited anxiously for my husband to get back because he sometimes managed to pick up some apples or Korean rice cakes on the way back.

The information from these meetings made everyone uneasy. There was always talk of something terrible about to happen to the Japanese—the hated former colonizers of Korea. More and more Japanese fled south when the trains began to run as they did before. I thought we should take the chance, too, and go to Jinsen in southern Korea, rather than stay here

northern Korea with people I didn't know. The former head of the meteorological station, Mr. Wadachi, his wife and others would be down south.

I had the feeling that if we could somehow get to Jinsen, we could escape this terrible situation. "Now. Now, we should go south," I urged my husband. When he was extremely worried, a deep wrinkle would appear between his thick eyebrows. He said, "But what about the other families who get left behind?"

"But in this situation, we don't have the luxury of thinking about other families," I said.

"That's just your selfish logic," he shot back. "It's true that if we go south, we would be saved. At Jinsen, there's not just Mr. Wadachi, there are a lot of people I know from the Korean meteorological station. That's true that we would be better off than we are now. But, who's going to help these other families get home?"

"What are you saying? There's a great *danchō* here, and there are a lot of other men who could do the job," I said.

"You don't understand," he said. My husband became very serious.

Did he intend to endanger the lives of all five members of our family and have us stay in this dangerous place? All because of his sense of responsibility, his devotion to other Japanese refugees, and his willingness to meddle in their problems?

I said, "Times have changed. The meteorological station is gone. And you are not a manager of anything now. You have no department. If there's any connection, it's just the people who were civil servants, and they look to you as a mentor. Why should your freedom be held hostage by forty-nine strangers? How is that a reason for staying behind?"

I ignored Mr. and Mrs. Mizushima who sat next us. Mr. Mizushima wiped his glasses, but he was obviously listening in on our fight. I pressed my husband even harder. But he dug in his heels, and ignored my pleas. "My boss, Mr. Taya, asked me to look after these people. If I go now, this *dan* will become a mess," he said.

My husband's idiocy, as he went on and on about his duty and his obligations finally got to me. I shouted, "You're just thinking about yourself. You have a twisted, one-sided prejudice against your own family. Stupid ideas about your own superior character and sense of justice are all you care about!"

"What? Superior character?" he angrily sputtered.

I shot back, "That's right. I don't know what Mr. Taya said to you but you've gotten so full of yourself, you think you are the only honorable person here. I'm sick of your thinking. Do whatever the hell you want," and I turned away from him.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Mrs. Mizushima cover her mouth. She trembled and clung to her husband as I spit out my words. My husband didn't try to argue. He finished his dinner quickly and gazed at the group as everyone got ready for bed. His eyes focused on two or three families in particular, those with children. The Mizushima's leaned their heads close together, to gossip about our fight, no doubt. From time to time, they glanced back at us. My husband finally noticed them.

"I'll think about it tonight," he said.

After that he didn't say a single word.

When he ended his silence the next day, he began talking with *Dancho Oe* about going south. They decided that those who wanted to go south should be allowed to do so. He said, "Let's ask everyone what they want to do." At the next group meeting,

the idea of going south was brought up. Many were pessimistic. They said, "The more we move, the more dangerous it will be. If we just stay where we are for another month, we can go back to Japan with those from the north." There were many who believed this nonsense.

We devoted the day to deciding what the *dan* should do but the discussions just went around in circles, with no end in sight when we went to sleep that night. The next day, the *dan* still couldn't reach an agreement and I grew irritated with all the waffling. The morning of the third day, my husband made an announcement to everyone. "Not as your *fuku-dancho*, but as an individual and a family man, I've decided to go south. If anyone else wants to come with us—we leave tonight." After saying that, we began preparations to leave. Then the people who were so opposed to him suddenly changed their minds and began preparations themselves. Soon everyone joined in the preparations.

Mr. Kimoto and another man ran to the train station to check on the departure times. One man told us a train would leave at 6 p.m. that day. But as we hurriedly packed, Mr. Kimoto came running back from the train station and said, "Mr. Fujiwara, it's no good. Starting today, the trains are not allowed further than Heijyo, in northern Korea, which is only a little ways south of us."

I felt that whatever we decided to do was going to determine our fates. (I think this was August twenty-fourth.) They said the 38th Parallel was closed and trains would no longer be allowed through. We stopped packing and were stunned into silence. My husband remained quiet and gazed out toward the eastern sky for a long time.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A New Worry

When it looked like we couldn't get through to southern Korea on the train, there was talk of going back north. Some, like the Manchurian Railroad people, tough Japanese engineers who lived in Manchuria for many years, thought that once the Soviets finished their rampage, the situation would be better up north than it was down here in northern Korea, surrounded by angry locals. Many of these people did go back but there were a few of us who still thought it would be better to somehow get through the 38th Parallel before they closed it down completely.

As it became clear we had to move somewhere, I cut up our blanket and made coats for Masahiro and Masahiko. The uncertain days passed into September. Our *dan* was ordered to leave the Agricultural School and move into an empty house on top of the hill outside town. We stuffed the bags of forty-nine people onto two ox-carts we borrowed from the school. We avoided the middle of town where we might run into Koreans eager for revenge, and instead walked around the village to the

hill. But it was soon obvious that we wouldn't be able to get the two ox-carts up the hill.

We collected our bags off the carts and carried them up. The house at the top had a small wooden sign, "Sensen *samusho*," a reminder of its past life as a Japanese *shinto* shrine, one of many built by the occupying Japanese government. The shrine itself had been burnt down recently, perhaps by an angry mob celebrating the end of the Japanese occupation. But the residential building next door had miraculously escaped the fire. This house had Japanese *tatami*, rice straw mats laid inside. How nostalgic! There was nothing else inside. The thought of sleeping on comfortable *tatami* mats made us feel safer. Beyond the remains of the *shinto* shrine, a mountain range rose into view.

In terms of size, the house contained an eight *tatami* mat size room, two six mat rooms, and two small four-and-a-half mat size rooms. Our group divided up into these five rooms. There was a kitchen and two toilets. Although the pump didn't flow very well because we were at the top of a hill, if we left a bucket under the pump for the night, by morning there was a good amount of water in the bucket.

At night we saw the lights of the town below. Sometimes we even heard sounds from the town. But besides that, we had an interesting view. We saw below us everyday, open train cars going south overloaded with people. Mostly Koreans passengers, but we still wondered, "When can we go home to Japan?" As we obsessively wondered what to do, whenever we saw anyone on the trains who looked Japanese—we asked ourselves, "Has the *hikiage* repatriation started?"

After seeing some Japanese on the trains, my husband went to see if he could verify who and from where these Japanese

might be. We felt better sleeping on *tatami* mats, outside of town and although we were a group of forty-nine strangers, it was refreshing to hear the sound of laughter from time to time.

We were fortunate to find a large number of *futon* quilts left behind by other Japanese who had already left. Many of these *futon* were wet and half rotted but when we dried them out, some of them could be restored back to decent shape. I took two of the quilts and used them for our bed. Around our house on the hill, wild white chrysanthemums blossomed with a few yellow ones scattered amongst them.

Our children regained their strength. Avoiding the main roads, the men went to town everyday to buy food. They bought back something that looked like *hoshi-zakana* dried fish and some *hango*, small metal pots for cooking. We cooked vegetables and fish. We bought and baked sweet potatoes, roasted corn and ate. My breasts swelled and I nursed Sakiko once again. We even talked about daily life, mundane things like, "Three ears of corn for one yen. That's cheap...or that's too expensive." Using wood we picked up on the mountain, we cooked the food and felt good.

We were seventeen families, almost fifty people all together, in the five rooms. Living so close together, we had a new worry. Where to keep our money? We decided to hide our money tucked in empty cans—near the roots of trees, under rocks. Each family hid their money, not only from outsiders, but also from the other members of the *dan*. There had already been several thefts. My husband and I decided to divide our money into three parts, and to hide it outside and inside.

Everyone had to contribute to a pool of money to cover group expenses. It was frightening to think what would happen

if someone inevitably ran out of money, and could no longer contribute their share. I wondered, "Would the rest of the *dan* look after the impoverished members?" I tried not to think of that. For now, we depended on the money from Manchuria. Later, we might go our separate ways but for now, we had to live together.

Once every ten days, we withdrew our Manchurian money and exchanged it for Korean bank certificates. One hundred yen became fifty yen. Japanese money was no longer accepted and we were running out of funds. The men went out to work everyday, doing anything to earn a little money. My husband got up early and come back late, exhausted after a full day of manual labor, but all I could offer him at the end of the day was one ear of corn or maybe an apple.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Corn Husks

That day my husband was working at a mountain three *ri* away (about seven miles). We women had finished washing clothes at the river at the bottom of the hill, and were on our way back when I saw a group of Korean men digging about. They were close to the spot where I buried some of our money. From the window at our sleeping area, our money was hidden beside a far rock, next to the third deciduous tree. But now a man in a hunting cap came up the hill, and as he dug here and there with a small shovel, he approached that tree.

Mrs. Daichi who was standing nearby said to me, "*Okusan* (Ma'am), he's about to dig up your money!"

I shushed her to be quiet and held my breath. That man dug around the roots of a tree below my tree. He stepped closer to my 'safe'. I couldn't help myself and let out a small cry, "Ahh." He stopped, rested his arm on his shovel, and looked up at us. At the same time, there was a loud noise from nearby, and a large rock came rolling down. Underneath that rock, a small can appeared.

“Oh, no. Someone’s money’s been discovered,” we all knew. The man with the hunting cap shifted his body and turned around to look. Maybe he thought that newly discovered place was more promising. In any case, he rushed over to that area, away from my ‘safe’. Several men focused their attention on that rock and began digging around its former resting place. They were obviously thieves but there was nothing we could do about it. We were just refugees, and could only helplessly watch.

Then a whistling sound drifted up from below. Somebody from the *Hoantai*, the local Korean police, came up the hill on a horse. Thank goodness. The thieves quickly disappeared. But Mrs. Sakiyama’s money was gone. In our group, she was probably the worst off or close to it. Her husband never returned, she was pregnant, and she had two young boys to care for. Of course, I hoped that wasn’t all of her money. I assumed she did what we all did. Divide the money into at least three parts before hiding it. Mrs. Sakiyama was usually morose but it was still terrible to see how she tried to hide her anguish. She refused to be comforted as she stood alone in her pain. I was relieved my money was still safe. I glanced at Mrs. Daichi and thought, “Wait a minute! How did she know my money was hidden there?”

I asked her, “Mrs. Daichi, how did you know my money was there?”

She smiled and said, “Oh, I’m not the only one. Everyone knows.”

The morning my husband and I hid our money, the fog was thick. We did it at mealtime when everyone was eating, I went to my room and was the lookout while my husband went to bury the money. I didn’t notice anyone outside of the house. “How did everyone know where our money was?” Now I was frightened.

I quickly ran to the bushes, dug up the spot, and checked our 'safe.' Although it stunk of dirt, none of the money was missing. It was wrapped in paper and tucked inside the bottom of the *hango*. I had carried it with my husband's meal sitting on top and felt safe.

I sat staring at the *hango*, until my husband got home that night. Hiding the money in the house was dangerous. But hiding the money outside was dangerous, too. What could I do? Sewing a hundred yen bill in the seam of our clothes, in the collars, or inside the *obi* waist band, was too obvious – everyone knew about those hiding places. My husband and I continued to think about this problem everyday. He was so deep in thought that he no longer chatted with me.

One morning, during breakfast, he stopped eating. He was looking something outside through the window.

I said, "What are you looking at?"

There was only a corn husk someone had thrown away. When he was about to leave to work, he said to me in a low voice, "I figured out a way. I want you to collect as many corn husks as you can, and dry them."

"What are you going to do?" I said.

"I'm going to make *zori* sandals tonight," he said.

He must have some plan, I thought and did as he asked. I collected and dried corn husks all day. From that night, he started making *zori* sandals. He learned how to make them from Mr. Nagasu, a large, older man who came from a farming family.

Mr. Nagasu was curious. "Mr. Fujiwara, why use corn husks to make *zori*?" Traditionally, they were made of rice stalks.

"I did some research on this," my husband said. "Corn husks contain oil and on top of that, they have very strong fibers. They

make stronger *zori* than rice stalks. And did you know that even if they get wet, they won't get soaked?" Saying such nonsense, my husband managed to deflect Mr. Nagasu's suspicions. My husband's first attempts were odd shaped *zori*, and Mr. and Mrs. Nagasu laughed at him because they looked so strange, but he didn't seem to mind. It was late when he got to the third pair, working all alone. Each man took a turn as night watch. That night, my husband took the first night shift and worked on his *zori* sandals. He made four pairs with the corn husks. He hid hundred yen and ten yen notes, folded into tiny strips inside the corn husks – altogether about a thousand yen for emergencies. I was impressed at his cleverness. "Not bad," I said to myself.

As he instructed me, I wore those *zori*, got them dirty and kept them along with the children's shoes, next to our rucksack.

And there was also my husband's precious Longines watch. We hid that, too. This was another good idea. I carved a hole in a large bar of laundry soap, then wrapped the watch in paraffin wax and placed it inside the hole. From another bar of soap, I carved out a chunk of soap to seal the hole. After carefully filling in the cracks with soap flakes, I warmed the soap bar. As far as anyone could tell, we had an ordinary bar of laundry soap – with a watch inside! I even dipped it in water and used it a few times to show everyone it was just soap. The corners were all rounded and smooth and I kept it inside a can. In these clever ways, we kept our valuables safe.

After we put these 'safes' together, I was relieved. No one seemed to notice what we did.

CHAPTER NINE

Where is My Husband Going?

In the yard there was a single small maple tree. This tree was in the shape of a sideways letter V and from the top, three branches sprouted from the same place. It was October when these maple leaves turned. We had to wear socks to bed, otherwise our cold feet woke us in the middle of the night, but the afternoons were still warm.

As I hung diapers to dry on the tree, I heard something. When I looked up, an airplane, one with markings that I had never seen before, flew north. A Korean man asked quietly, “Is Mr. Daichi here?”

I turned around to see the train station master standing there, half-smiling. Most of us didn’t know what was happening in the war but Mr. Daichi found a source. On his daily walks, he became friends with this Korean station master. I wasn’t surprised. Mr. Daichi was good with people—making anyone feel at ease. Every evening, he snuck down the hill and listened to the station master’s radio and heard all sorts of news. This is where we heard:

the *hikiage*, the repatriation would begin in November.

I showed the station master up the hill to Mr. Daichi and, felt anxious—is there something new going on? By coincidence, I heard the same news about the November *hikiage* through my husband’s distant relatives, an elderly couple who lived nearby, called Old Man Gomi and his wife. He used to be an elementary school teacher in northern Korea. They lived in a small place and started quietly bringing us things (mostly old magazines, paper and other useful things).

Around October 20th, Old Man Gomi came around and told us he heard through another Japanese group that the *hikiage* would be in November. “If it’s possible, I wanted to ask if we could be included, to go home,” he said. My husband tried to find out where that rumor came from but Old Man Gomi didn’t know. Maybe it started with the station master’s information? Old Man Gomi laughed and went back down the hill.

Around October 25th, there was more activity in the town and more trains started coming and going. Our hearts beat with excitement—maybe we could go home to Japan! When the men returned that night, sounds of laughter filled with hope floated through every room. The next day, we started preparing candy and other portable food. But, other than trains passing through the station, three or more times a day, nothing happened.

A gentle knock on the front door woke us from a deep sleep on the morning of October 28th. It was Mr. Daichi’s friend, the station master again, but this time he asked for *Dancho* Oe and my husband to come outside together with Mr. Daichi. I felt uneasy. In every room, everyone woke up and we all quietly waited for the three men to return.

When they came back, I saw their faces were ashen, like those

of the dead. I wondered, "What happened?" but our three men only said, "Hurry. Make breakfast," and went into the small room to discuss something in private. When my husband came out to get a piece of paper, I asked him, "What's going on?"

"I'll make an announcement soon—just get things ready," he said and rushed back to *Dancho* Oe and Mr. Daichi.

"Get ready for what?" I called out, but he didn't answer me.

When I went outside, an early-morning fog completely covered the town. It was eerie to hear all sorts of sounds—children crying, things being moved—through the thick grey mist. Then from the school below us, I heard the shouting of men. All I could do was pace back and forth. "Get ready? How?" I thought, but I did as he asked and repacked all of our things.

Sounds of a horse climbing our hill were followed by the appearance of a man from the *Hoantai* Korean Police. He asked for our *dancho* to come right away. I couldn't see where *Dancho* Oe and my husband went. Worried, I went out to wait. Out of the thick fog, my husband came back holding one of our 'safes', the tin can with emergency money. He hurriedly pulled out the money that was in the can.

"All Japanese men between the ages of eighteen and forty are to go to Heijo by train," he said. "I've got some money for myself. I'm giving the rest to you."

"What are you going to do at Heijo?" I asked.

"I don't know. We might be sent to Siberia," he said.

"Siberia?" I didn't know what to say. The world was ending. Clutching the money wrapped in paper my husband gave me, I sank to the ground.

"Please hurry. Get my things ready. I don't need money. Just the essentials," he said nervously.

He had to get back to his duties for the group, taking care of the bookkeeping, and giving final instructions to those staying behind. *Dancho* Oe came back. "Within thirty minutes, all men between eighteen and forty years of age are to report to the front of the school below us," he said. "Get ready right away." A black cloud descended on everyone—except for Mrs. Nagasu whose face lit up when they announced "men up to the age of forty." Her husband was forty-three. I hated the smirk on her face.

After they had their meeting, my husband came back. "This might be it. I may be leaving you for good," he said as he put on the black suit I had repaired. We sat down to eat but couldn't swallow the food. I stuffed the leftovers into a *bento* box for him. Looking through the clothes I packed in his rucksack, he said, "I don't need this...or this," and pulled out the winter clothes. I knew he was thinking of us. The *Hoantai* police came up to get our men.

"Hurry," they said while avoiding our eyes.

When I tried to get him to take the blanket, my husband fought back fiercely. "I'll manage," he said. I pleaded with him, crying. Finally, I got him to take five hundred yen.

The final moment came and we looked at our baby, Sakiko still fast asleep on our blanket. Gently touching her cheek, he said, "She's sleeping so well. She looks just like Masahiro when he was a baby." Then he turned around and gazed at our eldest son who was standing beside me. Masahiro was doing his best to be brave. "This time, Daddy might not come back. Listen to Mommy, all right? All, right?" my husband said. Masahiro nodded and put his hand on my shoulder.

Masahiko was on my lap, his face nestled against my breast. He was only a two-year-old, still in need of mothering. At this

tender age, he had been forced to deal with the arrival of his baby sister, and the war. Masahiko was so thin, his eyes seemed even bigger. He was my husband's favorite and while I was busy with the other children, he took care of our middle child. One of their favorite activities was their walk to the bathroom every night. "Masahiko-chan, I want you to listen to Mommy, all right?" my husband said, but our son wouldn't let go of my blouse. Instead, he stared at his father with huge terrible eyes.

My husband then turned to me. "Go home to Japan. Take care of the children." There was so much to say but I couldn't speak. As tears trickled down my face, I finally said, "Take care. All right?...Don't get sick. All right?...Be sure to come back to us. All right?..."

Of our eleven men, those over forty years of age were: Mr. Narita, Mr. Daichi, Mr. Nagasu, and *Dancho* Oe. They would be allowed to stay with us. My husband and the six other men who were to be taken away from us gathered in front of our house. Facing us, one of them said, "Everyone...please be kind to each other. Take care of each other."

After each man spoke, my husband came over one more time as I held Masahiko. He gently touched his son's face. He used a favorite nickname and said, "Masa-chan, *sayonara*." My little boy, who until now had been silent, suddenly started screaming. I wanted to scream even louder than him.

The fog began to lift. An open freight car was taking our men, and we stood on the hill to see them off. The train started moving slowly. Mr. Mizushima's glasses glinted in the sun. I spotted my husband's black suit right away. He waved his handkerchief and I waved a hand towel back. He waved his handkerchief in a circle. I waved my hand towel in a circle. We said good-bye. The train

picked up speed and then passed behind a hill. October 28th was one of the saddest days of my life.

CHAPTER TEN

The Hill of Tears

The autumn sun rose high as we stayed on the hill, silently crouched, even after we could no longer see the vapors left behind the steam engine of the train. The crowd at the train station disappeared, and everything had settled into a frightening lull. We wept silently as we faced the distant mountains. One by one, the women whose husbands had left, went alone to a rock or a grassy spot to grieve in private.

"Mrs. Fujiwara." When I turned around, I found *Dancho* Oe standing. As the head of our group, he had accompanied the men to the train platform.

"I was asked by your husband to return this to you." In his hand, *Dancho* Oe was holding a blanket and woolen underpants.

"Why?" I said as my eyes filled with tears.

"He was worried about you. He thought you would have a hard time," he said. "He also told me to give you this money." There was three hundred yen in his hand.

"What an idiot!" I scolded my husband silently. Going to

the *gulag* in Siberia, why did he give me back his most precious things? It's like some sort of love suicide. Maybe he thought if he left these things for the children, I'd be satisfied. But now every day, every night when I saw this blanket, I would be reminded of him. I was so angry at him for leaving me, I forgot to thank *Dancho Oe*—he stood there, waiting.

Finally, he said, "Mrs. Fujiwara, you might not know about it...a while ago, at the marketplace on the way back from a meeting, I lent your husband forty yen..."

"What...what about forty yen?" I mumbled. A look of annoyance flitted across his face.

"I lent him forty yen," he said.

"I don't give a damn about forty yen," I thought. I couldn't stand to look at his face as he tried to collect on a loan—to bring this nasty business up when my heart was breaking. I paid him the forty yen. The thought suddenly surged through me, "From today...I've got to be strong."

Near our *shinto* shrine house on the hill, the other women stood in a circle and looked towards me. They were the women who had always been alone, their husbands missing since we left Manchuria. From the hill, they looked down at the seven women who just lost their husbands, and whispered amongst themselves. I looked at them, then they averted their eyes, as if they had been saying something bad.

One of them, Mrs. Nagoshi, said to me, "*Okusan* (Ma'am), it's going to be hard for you now." She had one nursing baby and was the youngest wife in our group. Was she trying to be polite, or comfort me, or provoke me? I didn't know. I've got to be strong. I looked at the faces of my children. Masahiro, still stunned, came near me, and from time to time looked up at me,

trying to understand what had happened. Masahiko-chan was angry – the pain of separating from his father overwhelmed him. I worried about Sakiko and went back to my room, the boys following close behind. It was unusual to find no one else in the room. She was asleep.

I picked her up and said, “Sakiko. Daddy is gone. Sakiko, he’s gone.” I rubbed up against her sleeping face and sobbed. I felt so miserable, but my three children understood me best. Masahiro, with his eyes full of tears, stared at me. For three days, I was in a daze. A voice, somewhere inside me said, “You’ve got to get a hold of yourself,” but I could do nothing. Wherever I was, I was in tears, and consumed by heartache.

The four men left behind went back and forth to the main office of the Japanese Association. They talked importantly amongst themselves. Mr. Narita, who until now had been ignored, became one of the inner circle of men. When they announced that the age limit was forty, Mr. Nagasu was exuberant, and for two or three days, he worked energetically, and annoyed me by saying, “*Okusan*, it’s no use crying. You must get to work.” He bossed the women around and stuck his nose in the cooking pot, commenting on the food. Then on the night of the third day, he suddenly became quiet and his head drooped. I thought he was sick and asked Mrs. Daichi about him.

She said with a worried look, “It turns out that all of the men are doomed. Unless a man is really sick, everyone of them – up to age forty-five is going to be sent away.”

“Is that true?”

“I think so. I don’t know what to do.” Her husband, Mr. Daichi would be sent away and their daughter, Seiko-chan, would be devastated. I don’t know where that rumor came from but the

remaining four men suddenly lost their spirit and began packing up their things. Four days after my husband left, I finally came back to my senses. There was no time to grieve, I knew I had to think about the future.

The morning of the fifth day after our seven men were taken away, the same station master knocked on our door, just as he had done before, to bring bad news. He announced that the remaining four men would be shipped away. The next morning at 8 a.m. the remaining men up to the age of forty-five gathered together at the school. Former *Dancho* Oe; Mr. Nagasu, no longer proud; and poor Mr. Daichi, held his daughter, Seiko-chan's hand. Mr. Narita, a weak man who was often feverish, couldn't move with the other men. Thankfully, because of his illness, the authorities let him stay.

I went through a repetition of the same horrible events of five days earlier, but this time I was the witness. *Dancho* Oe handed over the *dancho* responsibilities to Mr. Narita, then he talked in private with his older sister, Old Woman Oe. After three months as our leader, *Dancho* Oe was feared more than respected by us. Now he bowed his head, like a beggar monk, before us women and spoke. "Thank you all for everything. I ask you to take care of my sister," he said humbly.

I bowed my head to the man who at one time, forced my husband to apologize for some silly offense, with both hands on the floor. I hated him before for that, but now I felt nothing. Seiko-chan cried out in anguish, "Papa. Papa," as she clung to her father. The fourteen-year old girl couldn't be stopped by her mother and she held onto Mr. Daichi, crossing the hill with him. All of us were in tears watching them.

"Take care of yourself. Don't do anything rash," Mr. Nagasu

said to his wife and five-year old daughter, Hisako, as he kept turning his shoulders around, over and over, to see them as he walked down to the station. This once proud man was crying, and I felt guilty for my earlier feelings about him.

Dancho Narita, with his fever, struggled to keep his reddened face up and stand on the hill. We watched the train go past the hill again. This time, there were much fewer men on the train.

From our vantage point on the hill we heard Mr. Nagasu calling his daughter. His voice was cut by the wind, "Hisako... oh, Hisako...oh." His dark face strained to see his only daughter, and that voice...by the time the vapors floating horizontally from the steam engine faded, the train was on the other side of the mountain and his cries were gone.

I took tally of my group. Now we had:

Males: only *Dancho* Narita.

Females (Married women): sixteen.

Young single women: (Mrs. Kurashige's young sister, Kuniko), one.

Unmarried older woman: (Mr. Oe's older sister), one.

Children: twenty.

Total: thirty-nine people.

Under the leadership of our sick *Dancho* Narita, our small group of thirty-nine women and children would have to go forward beginning tonight, together with new tears.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Making Ourselves Invisible

The locals called us *Nihonjin*, (Japanese) and none of us were upset because that was obvious. But if any of us called them *Chosenjin*, (Koreans) they got very angry. (It was the pent-up rage from many years of Japanese military rule.) In order not to provoke them, we decided to call them, “the people of here.” But if we weren’t careful, the words still slipped out of our mouths—*Chosenjin*.

The north wind that started blowing during the night kept gusting with the arrival of morning. We huddled in the corners of the rooms with rounded backs when the west-facing window shattered with a loud crash. We looked at each other. Another window broke.

A young Korean yelled something. When we peeped outside, we saw five or six kids, maybe fourteen or fifteen-year olds. They held rocks in both hands, and threw them at our windows. I rushed over to get Sakiko—any of these windows might be next.

Dancho Narita got up unsteadily and closed the northern win-

dow shutters quietly. Then all of us women and children hid in the darkened room. My children said nothing as they held onto me, letting their noses drip. If we could reach the *Hoantai*, the Korean police, maybe they would help us. But who was going to go from our house, down the hill to let them know? No one had the courage. If we went outside, were we going to be beaten? Maybe some thugs would kill us or worse...we were terrified. Even Dancho Narita trembled.

Through the cracks in the window shutter, we saw a white neck scarf of one of the boys. I tried to comfort Dancho Narita by saying, "*Dancho* Narita, maybe we could fix the broken window with a piece of paper."

He just said, "Those stupid kids."

After a while, we heard footsteps run over to our kitchen. Bang. Crash. There was the sound of metal banging into something. A boy said in Korean, "Hey, there's a *hango*." After some rustling, there was no noise. In a rush, we ran over to the kitchen.

Five of the *hango* that we had kept were taken. There was only one left. "If we don't have our *hango*, how are we going to cook?" Tears streamed down Mrs. Daichi's thin face. "And I had stuffed mine full of potatoes...for our dinner."

Seiko-chan pulled Mrs. Daichi's sleeve, "It's no use crying, Mama." And she went back into our room.

There were days when shifty-eyed Korean men hung around near the house. And days when boys drew nasty graffiti on our house. Some men came, saying they had messages from our men in Heijo. They banged on our door, claimed they had business with our men, and looked at us with suspicious eyes. The Koreans who were sympathetic no longer came near. If we passed each other on the street, they slipped the children an apple or a piece

of candy. Most of those people were elderly. The young Koreans tried to not look at us as they passed by.

We didn't know what would happen if we ran across the Koreans who really hated us. They could do anything and we wouldn't be able to defend ourselves. We were terrified whenever we had to go outside, and shrank into ourselves in an effort to make ourselves invisible. The children learned this, too, and when they saw any townspeople, they covered their frightened faces and hid behind us.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Diamond Dust

November arrived, and there were nights where a cold north-west wind blew so hard it rattled the windows, and kept me half-awake until morning. Once there was enough light, we looked for branches the wind had torn off the trees—sometimes I found enough for an arm load. Later in the day, when the sun had warmed the ground, we went down in the hill to town. On the west side of the dirt road, apple stands started appearing.

These apple stands soon formed two red parallel lines all the way down to the train station entrance. From the mountains in every direction, hand-carts full of dried grass began to creep along the roads, dropping their loads into small haystacks here and there. Ox carts would then collect these haystacks into huge loads, and one by one, they lumbered between the lines of apple stands into the town center.

I guessed the dried grass was for the town's *ondoru*, Korean floor heaters. In the morning, smoke climbed from the many *ondoru* and made thin white layers in the air. Our lonely house at the

top of the hill, where the men were gone, also let sad, bitter smoke out from the *ondoru* twice a day. Winter was coming.

Just after the middle of November, early in the morning, someone came knocking at our door. This felt ominous so early in the day. As we all got up, *Dancho* Narita brought in a Korean boy who was breathing hard and sweating. He had brought messages from the town of Anton, just north of us on the border with China. Mrs. Tomimoto, Mrs. Yamada, and Mrs. Sueyoshi got letters and money and they beamed with happiness as they read letters from their husbands. The messenger boy said, "Hurry. Hurry," while the three women wrote letters for him to take back to Anton. The boy looked worried, and kept looking out the door.

As soon as the letters were done, he grabbed them, and ran down the hill as if flying on the wind. After two or three such letter exchanges with Anton, four women with their children, ten people altogether, decided to leave us and go north to Anton to join their men there. A fine powder snow fell that day, and we saw them off. We called out, "*Sayonara*. Take care of yourselves," as the women and children disappeared into the snow.

Our group was now reduced to twenty-nine people. Once December came, the authorities decided that we would be rationed two Japanese *go* (about a cup and a half) of rice a day for each person. I was so happy at first. This rice would help us survive the winter. But then our *dan* decided to re-distribute this rice amongst us. For children under five, the ration was cut to half that of the others, in other words, just one *go* a day. The extra rice was saved to distribute to the women who worked for pay. With this new distribution system, the ones who suffered the most were the women with young children and babies: me - I lost two *go*, Mrs. Honda lost two *go*, Mrs. Sakiyama also lost two *go*, and Mrs. Daichi lost

one go. We mothers with little children were the most desperate of the refugees. In this life, we endured and suffered the most. I wondered if this was my fate, determined from my date of birth. What is going to happen to my three, pale-faced sickly children?

Once the snow started, tiny ice crystals blew incessantly around in air. I'd seen this snow often in Manchuria where the temperature often dropped below freezing. The air was dry and the skies were clear. The snow particles stayed suspended and sparkled in the sun. It was breathtakingly beautiful. I had heard my husband describe such snow as "*saihyo*." But he also used another name in English, "diamond dust." That English name was so wonderful, I never forgot it. *Diamond dust*. There were times the snow really looked like that.

In my hometown Nagano, where winters were cold, there is a phrase we used—"ice drying". This refers to when the laundry is hung out to dry in the winter. It quickly froze stiff, but before you knew it, the clothes would be dry. In order to dry Sakiko's diapers, I hung them facing the sun. The wind pierced the red cracks in my hand like needles as I hung the wet cloths every day.

Now it was so cold the snow did not melt. When I walked on the icy road, my head would ache, throbbing with each step on the hard ground. Somehow my hunger made the frozen ground feel even harder.

Our toilet froze. The daily waste, instead of flowing down as usual into the pit, now froze in place, growing taller and taller. We shoved the waste down after we used the toilet each time, but finally, this grotesque 'tower' of feces and urine would not let loose, even if we hit it with all our strength. So we made a special toilet. We placed a large wooden bucket upside down and left boards on top beside the crude toilet opening to step on.

That way, we could move the toilet away from the icy mountains of waste.

But every morning, we took turns cleaning this nasty, frozen mess up. It was the most unpleasant chore we all shared. And those of us with small children bore the brunt of everyone's frustrations. Mrs. Nagasu, with her one five-year-old daughter, and enough money to pay for heating fuel, complained the most. Small children inevitably made the biggest messes so she haughtily said, "We need to have those with small children do more of the toilet clean-up."