

“ I am ready now.”

It was late in the evening of August 15 when my Aunt Kishi came rushing in, and with tears in her eyes told me “ Shinobu has come home, but she won't speak. Come, see if she will speak to you.”

Her father had brought her home that day. By the time I got to the house it was already packed with on-lookers and well-wishers, so that I had difficulty getting through the crowd, only to look upon Shinobu who was but a shadow of her former self. Her head, the hair disheveled, drooped down, and her hands lay forlornly on her knees. Her face was smeared with blood and her working smock stiff from the blood that had now congealed on it. The only image that came into my mind was that of Jesus when He was brought before Pilate.

Burying my head in her lap, all I could say was “Shichan, Shichan”. She responded crying “Miechan, it's you. I didn't think I'd see you again.” Tightly clasping my hands she sobbed on for some time before calming down, and then we began the task of removing her blood stained clothes, washing her, and dressing her in fresh clothes. This was made difficult because in many places her clothes were stuck together and adhering to her skin. Trying not to cause her too much pain we changed her and got her settled.

On August 16, even though the war had ended, the coming of enemy planes saw us scatter to the shelters. I ran, carrying my mother on my back, and found that Shinobu had already been carried in ahead of us. She now sat in a corner eating a pear from a tree in the house garden. She looked pale and fragile, but her spirits were high. “With this and all the care you are giving me I will soon be well. Then together Miechan, we can go and help the Sisters rebuild and reopen the school.” That was always her most earnest wish.

Gradually her wounds began to heal as we continued to clean them and to remove broken pieces of glass from them. She got as far as being able to do a few little things for herself, and this meant a lot to her. Then one day as I was going out for some water she asked me to come to see her. I first got water for my mother and then went to her. Sitting with her she told me of that day, and of what had happened before she'd come home.

“The all clear had sounded and then the Bomb exploded. I had just turned to my companion, Imamura-san, and said, 'Let's go to lunch.' I could hear the whir

of plane engines. There was a flash and I fainted. When I came to, all around me was in ruins. Unconscious of my wounds I began to head for the shelter. Somehow I got across the Urakami River and into the shelter. There I met Matsumoto-san who was a senior and wanted to enter the convent. First we rejoiced at being alive, and then noticing the blood and our wounds, leaned against each other and fell asleep.

Early next morning August 10, I awoke to the sounds of voices nearby. I began trying to walk to Junshin and to the shelter there. I felt dizzy and fainted. I awoke to find myself half submerged in the river. Around me both in the river and on its banks lay many dead. On one side, still standing as if drinking from the river, stood a dead horse. Full of dismay and horror, trying to get away from this horrible scene, I ran, but I soon got lost and fainted. This time I awoke as a man was about to put me with the rest of the dead bodies he was collecting into a cart. Finally with one last effort I made it to Junshin. There I saw the principal who lay ill from her wounds.

After they had cleaned me up and changed my clothes I was moved to the aid station at Akunuura though I hardly remember being moved. At the aid station, we were all packed into one room. People were dying all around. As one arrived another would die. Some were not five minutes in the aid station before they passed on, to be stacked to one side to await the uncertain time of cremation; there was no one free for that work. The bodies were left uncovered and so were quickly infested with flies and maggots.

Some suffered greatly in their last agony. Some groaned while others became hysterical. The air was filled with a horrible stench as people, unable to move, answered the call of nature where they lay. It was like hell on earth. I felt certain that the only course was to place one's trust in God.

Many Junshin girls were brought there, soon to pass on to heaven. I was helpless, save to mourn their passing. Some smiled peacefully in death, while others, whom I joined in their singing, sang hymns as they passed away. I was continuously praying for the repose of a succession of souls. I could but reflect that death comes to all in time, and then how simply man goes on his way.

Slowly the room emptied and I felt certain that it would be my turn when suddenly I could hear 'Shinobu. . . where is she?' I turned, half thinking it was a dream, to see my uncle Hatsutarō. I was delighted to see him. The doctor

had told him that with more medication I could go home, and so he urged him to do that immediately. As the doctor began to change the bandages I saw that there were maggots in my wounds, too; a chill crept over me.”

The evening after Shinobu told me her story she became feverish and found it hard to talk. For the next three days her temperature did not go down. Blood clots and bruise-like marks began to appear, slowly spreading all over her body. She began to have convulsions which would twist her body into horrible shapes, then she would settle and rest calmly in her bed.

She was now conscious that her own death was near, for she said to me “Miechan, my time has come. I’d like to go back to work and to school, but. . . I won’t miss life, for my death will bring me to heaven.” Then she asked, “Can you get Father to bring me Holy Communion, and anoint me with the Oils of Extreme Unction? I’m ready now.”

The parish priest was out but Father Pumagai came from Shimokanzaki, and as she lay there, now peaceful, he anointed her. She then began to say the rosary, making her way slowly but faintly, before she had another convulsion. We had to put cotton wool in her mouth to stop her from biting her tongue. As the convulsion reached its peak, her heart beat rapidly and excitedly. Finally she relaxed.

She apologized for having given us so much trouble but explained that she would not survive to receive the Eucharist on the morrow. With that she was gripped with another convulsion that left her twisted painfully and unable to settle comfortably in the bed. I straightened her out once more. However, no sooner had I done this than she had another and more violent convulsion that left her bathed in perspiration. She apologized once more and asked her father for forgiveness. Her heart was now beating rapidly and we made her as comfortable as we could. I helped her to join her hands; she nodded, smiled, and died. It was September 7, just before midnight when she passed away. It was just as she said: when the time comes, a person passes on quite simply.

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A friend