

My Sister Tsuru

On August 9, Tsuru was working from early morning at the Ohashi Works of Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Company. At 11:02 there was a blinding flash; she fainted. When she regained consciousness the air was full of noise and the voices of her friends calling "Tsuru, let's run!" But try as she may she couldn't move; she was caught under a heavy beam. From the wounds in her forehead, caused by flying glass, blood was streaming down to mingle with the blood from her other wounds which was oozing through her tattered dress.

Her friends pulled her out from under the beam but she could not stand; her hips were too badly crushed. So she urged her friends to look out for themselves and leave her there. They refused, and though they themselves were injured they took turns carrying her as far as the banks of the Urakami River. By that time they could carry her no further, and with tears in their eyes they reluctantly left her there on the river bank.

She lay there certain that she would die soon. As she looked around she could see flames coming closer and closer. She was almost in despair when, at risk to himself, a man stopped and brought her to the station at Isahaya where they parted without her coming to know his name. She had asked him along the way, but he had remained silent; he spoke only once and then just to tell her to get well soon; his name didn't matter.

At Isahaya Station a large group of women from various volunteer associations had gathered to help. Among them was a woman who had a daughter at Junshin High School. Finding that Tsuru was a schoolmate of her daughter, she carried her to the naval hospital where eight other Junshin girls had already been admitted.

By August 11 she had made such good progress that my father went and brought her home. She thanked all the nurses and the doctor, and had a bright smile on her face as she left. On the way home she urged my father to stop at Junshin so that she might see the principal. He told her that she would have plenty of time for that later. First, she was going straight home. She was never to make that visit.

Once home, seeing mother and the rest of us, her brothers and sisters, she was very happy and relaxed as she walked in and around the house. All its sights

and sounds seemed to have special meaning for her. She talked of how she missed home and busied herself with many things around the house, sampling the joys of everything, be it work or food, enjoying it to the full.

We all felt that she was getting better though her appetite was small. Then one day she stayed in bed with a fever which constant nursing could do nothing to ease. By August 26 she became seriously ill. She also began asking to see two of our sisters who were living away from home. We reassured her they would be arriving soon but in fact she got worse. Her hair started to fall out, her gums to bleed and she had constant attacks of diarrhea.

When I went to see after her needs one day she told me that two of her friends, Sister Ayako and Kashiya-san had died. Also she spoke to her father of her own health, thanking him for sending her to a good school like Junshin. God was inviting her to heaven. None of her brothers had gone to the front but she hoped her own work as a mobilized student would be for the good of all. Then fatigue came over her and she asked my father to inform the principal that she had done her best. As she tried to continue talking she slurred her words and we couldn't understand her. She tried writing but it came out as a scribble which we could not read.

On August 30 she began vomiting blood and the last of her hair fell out. She couldn't eat anything. Though in great pain she was cheerful with all who came to see her, and always thanked them for their consideration, though once more her words were hard to understand. The following day her vomit just lay gurgling in her throat. She didn't try to speak that day.

The morning of September 1, Tsuru was in a comatose state, as if waiting for the other two sisters to arrive, for they had been delayed by the shortage of ships. That afternoon at four, as I told her that the ship they were on had docked at Ohato, she weakly grasped my hand for the last time and soon fell into everlasting sleep.

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