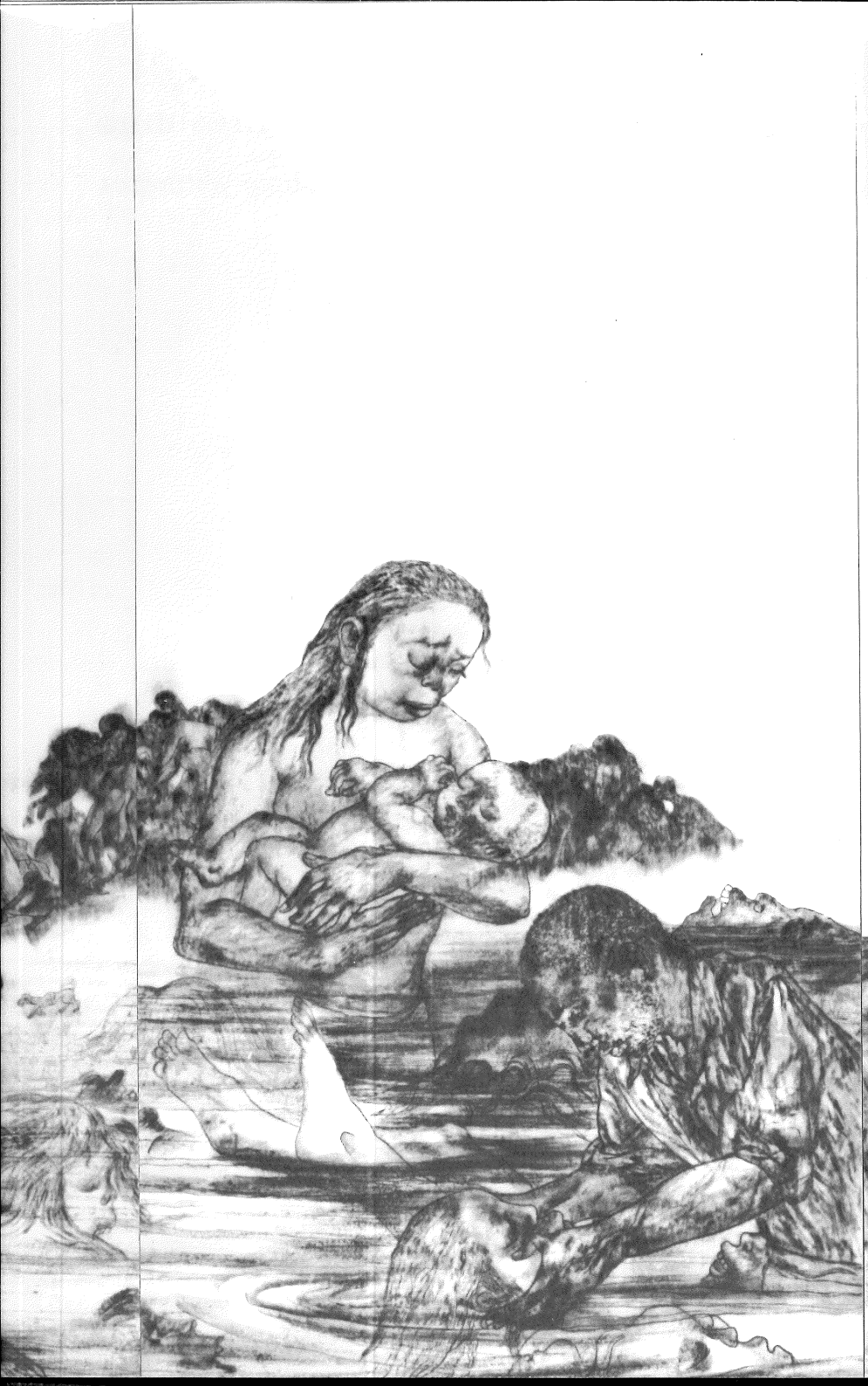
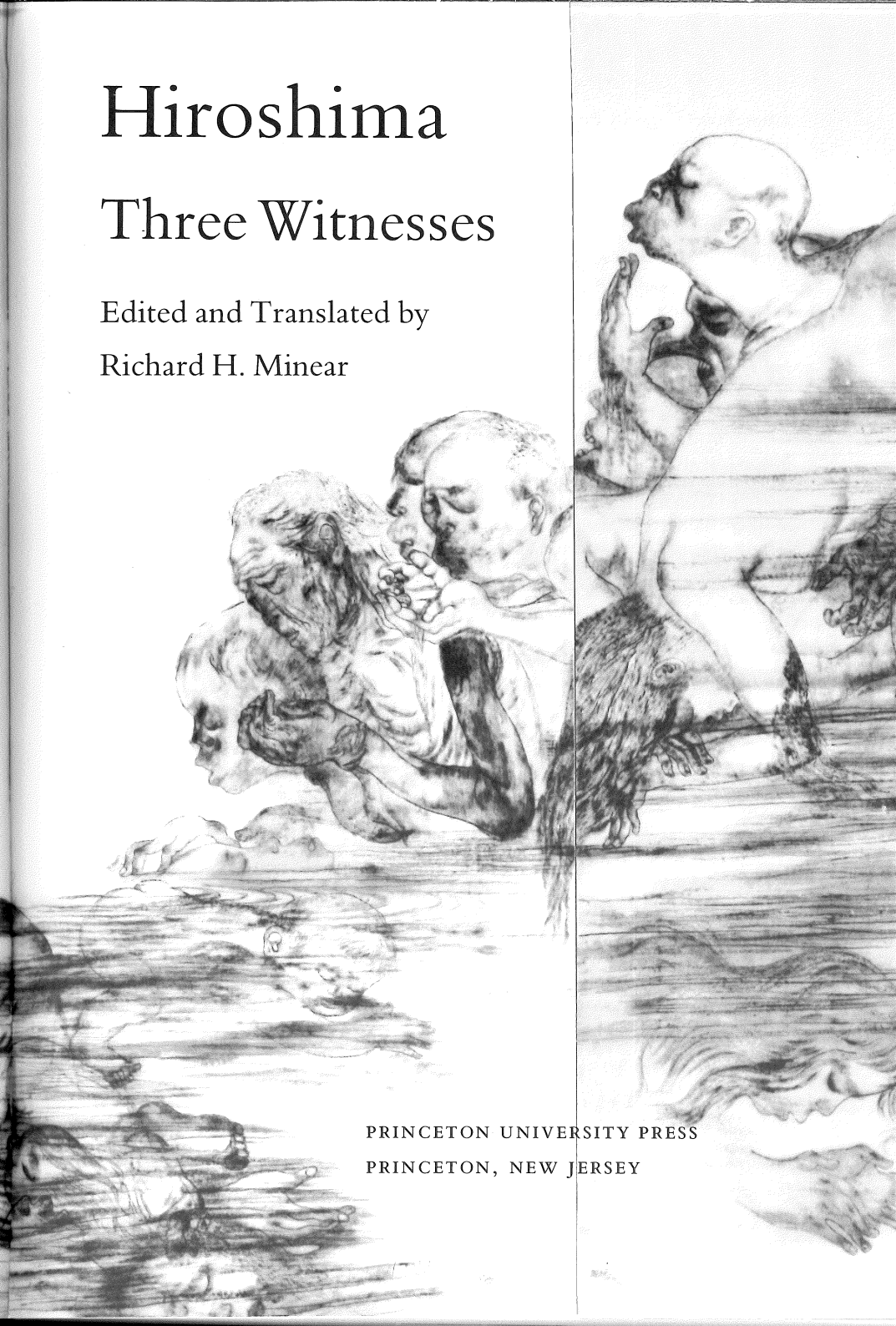


Hiroshima

Three Witnesses

Edited and Translated by

Richard H. Minear



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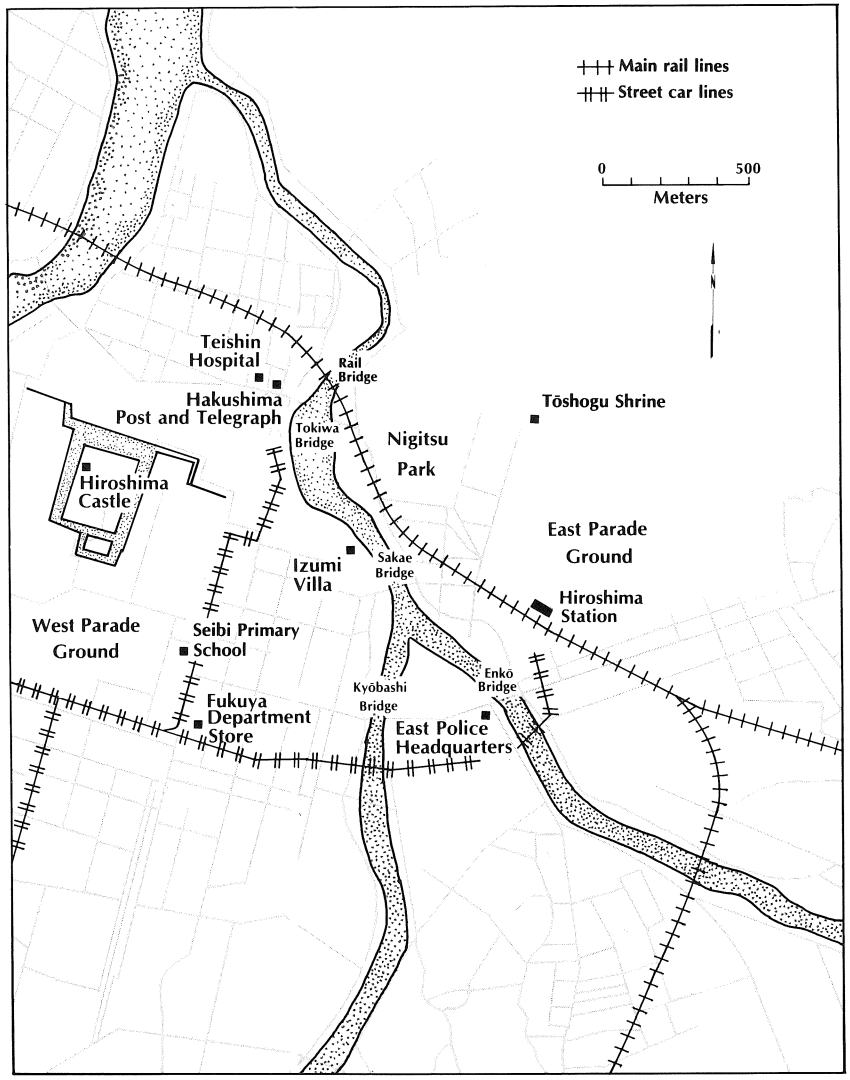
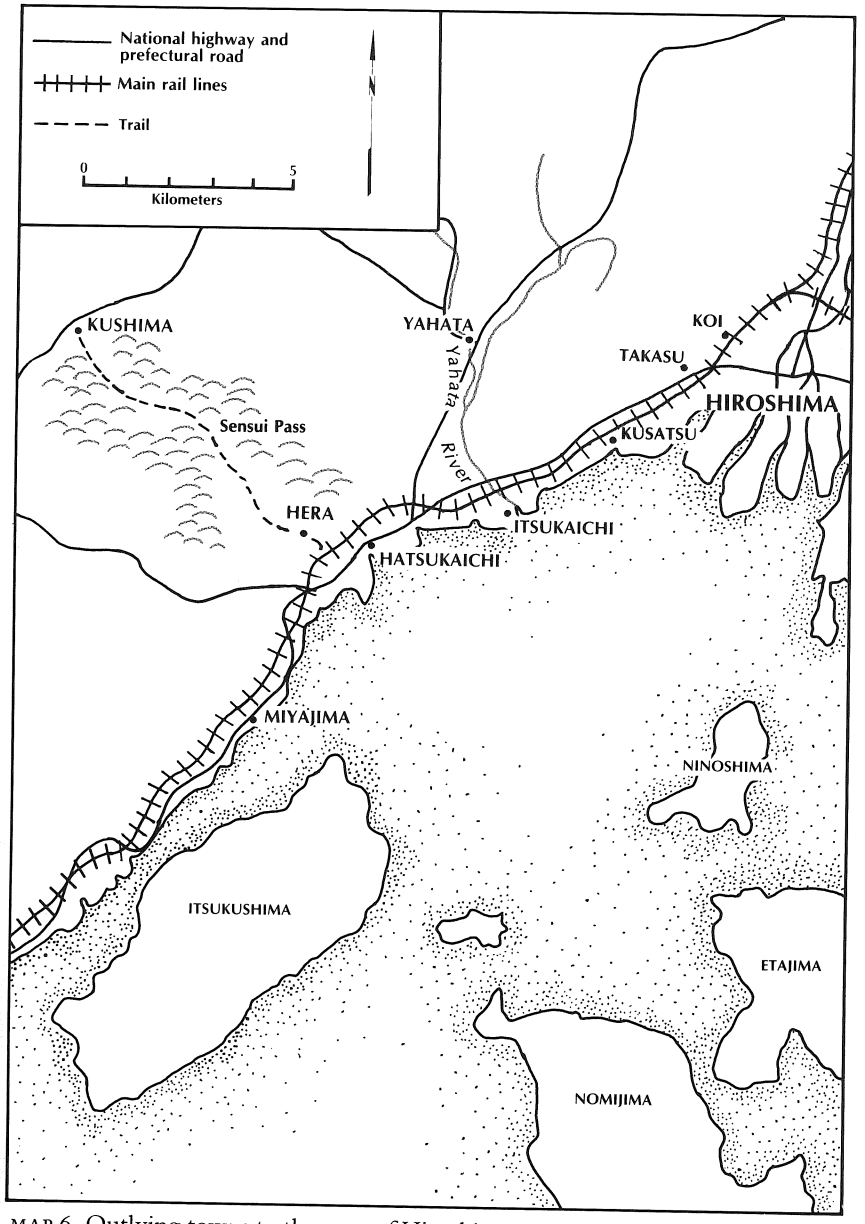


MAP 5. Northeast Hiroshima (detail)



MAP 6. Outlying towns to the west of Hiroshima

O loved ones, may you romp and play
like the roe, the fawn,
deep in fragrant mountains.

Summer Flowers

WHEN I WENT OUT and bought flowers, it was with the intention of visiting my wife's grave. In my pocket was a bundle of incense sticks I had taken from the *butsudan*. August 15 would be the first *bon* since my wife's death; but I doubted that this hometown of mine would survive that long unscathed. It happened that the day was a no-electricity day; early that morning I saw no other men walking along carrying flowers. I do not know the proper name of the flowers; but with their small yellow petals, they had a nice country flavor about them, very summer-flower-like.

I splashed water on the gravestone standing exposed to the hot sun, divided the flowers into two bunches, and stuck them in the flower holders on either side. Once I had done so, the grave seemed somehow cleansed and purified, and for a moment I gazed at flowers and gravestone. Beneath this stone lay buried not only my wife's ashes, but also Father's and Mother's. After setting a match to the incense I had brought and bowing in silent respect, I took a drink of water at the well nearby. Then I walked home the roundabout way, via Nigitsu Park; that day and the next, the smell of incense clung to my pocket. It was on the third day that the atomic bomb fell.

I OWE MY LIFE to the fact that I was in the privy. The morning of August 6 I got out of bed at about eight o'clock. The air raid warning had sounded twice the previous night, but there had been no air raid; so before daybreak I had taken off all my clothes, changed for the first time in a while into sleepwear of *yukata* and shorts, and gone to sleep. When I got out of bed, I had on only the shorts. Catching sight of me, Sister complained about my having stayed in bed so long; without a word I went into the privy.

How many seconds later it happened I can't say, but all of a sudden there was a blow to my head, and everything went dark. I cried out instinctively and stood up, hand to my head. Things crashed as in a storm, and it was pitch dark; I didn't know what was going on. Grasping the handle and opening the door, I came out onto the ve-

randa. Until that point, I was in agony: amid the hail of sound I had heard my own cry distinctly, but I couldn't see a thing. However, once out on the veranda I quickly saw, materializing in the thin light, a scene of destruction; my feelings too came into focus.

It was like something in the most horrible dream. Right from the start, when I received the blow to my head and things went black, I knew I wasn't dead. Then, thinking what an enormous inconvenience this all was, I tried to work myself up to anger. My cry sounded in my ear like someone else's voice. But as the situation around me, though still hazy, began to resolve itself, I soon felt as if I were standing on a stage that had been set for a tragedy. I had surely seen spectacles like this at the movies. Beyond the dense cloud of dust, there appeared patches of blue, and then the patches grew in number. Light came streaming in where walls had collapsed and from other unlikely directions. As I took a few tentative steps on the floorboards, from which the *tatami* had been sent flying, Sister flew toward me from across the way. "Not hurt? Not hurt? You're all right?" she cried. Then: "Your eye is bleeding; go wash it off right away," and she told me the water was running in the kitchen sink.

Realizing that I was utterly naked, I said, looking back at Sister, "Isn't there something for me to put on?" She produced some underpants from a closet that had survived the destruction. At that point someone rushed in making strange gestures. Face bloody and wearing only a shirt, he was one of the factory workers. He saw me, said over his shoulder, "You're lucky you weren't hurt," and went off busily, muttering, "Phone, phone, I must phone."

Cracks had opened everywhere; screens and *tatami* were scattered all about; bare joists and doorsills were plainly in sight; for some time a strange silence continued. The house seemed on its last legs. As I learned later, most houses in this area collapsed flat; but our second story did not fall, and the floor held firm. Probably because it was so solidly built. My father, a cautious person, had built it forty years ago.

Trampling on the jumble of *tatami* and sliding screens, I looked for something to put on. Right off I found a jacket; but as I was searching here and there for pants, my busy eye was caught by stuff lying scattered, in a mess. The book I had been reading, half-finished

last night, lay on the floor, pages curled up. Fallen from the lintel, a picture frame covered my bed, ominously. My canteen emerged out of the blue, and then I found my cap. My pants did not turn up, so I looked for something to put on my feet.

At that point K. from the office appeared on the veranda of the drawing room. On seeing me, he called in a pathetic voice, "Help! I'm hurt," and slumped to the floor. Blood was oozing from his forehead; tears glistened in his eyes.

I asked him, "Where are you hurt?" He replied, "My knee," pressing it and contorting his pale, wrinkled face. I gave him a piece of cloth that was there and pulled on two pairs of socks, one over the other.

"Look—smoke! Let's get out of here! Take me with you!" K. urged me repeatedly. Though a good deal older than I, K. was normally far more energetic; but even he was a little lost.

Surveying the scene from the veranda, I saw an expanse of rubble, the ruins of collapsed houses; except for the reinforced concrete building still standing in the middle distance, there wasn't even anything by which to get my bearings. The large maple next to the earthen wall—now toppled—of the garden had had its trunk snapped off halfway up, and the upper half of the tree had been thrown atop the outdoor washstand. Stooping over the air raid shelter, K. said, irrationally, "Shall we stick it out here? We've got water . . ."

"No," I said, "let's head for the river," and with a look of incomprehension, he cried, "River? Which way to the river, I wonder?"

As a matter of fact, even if we wished to flee, we still hadn't made any preparations for doing so. Pulling some pajamas out of a closet, I handed them to him and also tore down the veranda's blackout curtains. I picked up some cushions, too. When I turned over the *tatami* scattered on the veranda, my emergency kit came to light. Relieved, I slung it over my shoulder. Small red flames began to appear from the storehouse of the medicine factory next door. It was time to get out. The last to leave, I climbed over the wall alongside the maple tree, snapped off and broken.

That large maple had stood forever in the corner of the garden; when I was young, it had figured in my daydreams. After having been

away a long time, I had returned this spring to live in my old home; I had thought it odd, since returning, that the tree no longer held its old charm. Strangely, this whole city seemed to have lost its gentle naturalness, to have become a collection of cold inorganic matter. Each time I entered the room that looked out onto the garden, there had come floating into my mind, unbidden, the words, "The Fall of the House of Usher."

CLAMBERING over the ruins of the house and around what was in our way, K. and I proceeded at first quite slowly. Soon our feet came to level ground, so we knew that we had come out onto the road. Then we hurried briskly down the center of the road. From the other side of a flattened building came a voice crying, "Mister, please!" We turned, and a girl whose face was bloody came walking toward us; she was crying. Looking absolutely horror-stricken, she followed us for all she was worth, calling, "Help!" We went on a while and met an old woman standing squarely in our way in the road, weeping like a child: "The house is burning! The house is burning!" Smoke was rising here and there among the ruins, but suddenly we came to a place where tongues of flame licked at us fiercely. Running, we got past that spot, and the road became level again; we had come to the foot of Sakae Bridge. Here refugees had gathered in droves. Someone on top of the bridge was being a hero: "Those of you who are up to it—form a bucket brigade!" I took the road in the direction of the bamboo grove at the Izumi Villa and at this point became separated from K.

The bamboo grove had been blown flat, but the press of people fleeing had opened a path. I looked up at the trees; most of them, too, had been snapped off partway up. This historic garden flanking the river: it too was now covered with wounds. Suddenly I noticed the face of a middle-aged woman who was squatting next to the shrubs, her fleshy body slumped over. Wholly devoid of life, her face seemed even as I watched to become infected with something. This was my first encounter with such a face. But thereafter I was to see countless faces more grotesque still.

Where the grove joined the riverbank, I came upon a bunch of schoolgirls. They had fled here from the factory, all lightly injured;

they still trembled from the vividness of the event that had only just taken place before their very eyes, yet they chattered all the more spiritedly. At that point my eldest brother turned up. Wearing only a shirt and carrying a beer bottle in one hand, he seemed at first glance uninjured. On the opposite bank, too, as far as the eye could see, buildings had collapsed, and only telephone poles still stood; the fire was already spreading. When I sat down on the narrow path on the riverbank, I felt, despite everything, that I was now safe. What had hung over our heads for so long, what in time surely had to come, had come. There was nothing left to fear; I myself had survived. Before, I had given myself an even chance of dying; now, the fact that I was alive took my breath away.

I thought to myself: I must set these things down in writing. However, at that time I still had virtually no idea of the true state of things brought about by this air raid.

THE FIRE on the opposite bank had grown in force. The heat was being reflected all the way over to our side, so we repeatedly soaked the cushions in the river, which was at high tide, and covered our heads with them. Meanwhile, someone shouted, "Air raid!" A voice said, "Those wearing white hide under the trees," and people responded by crawling, all of them, into the center of the bamboo grove. On the other side of the grove, too, with the sun pouring down, it looked as if a fire was burning. With bated breath I waited for a while, but it didn't appear that an air raid was coming; so I came out again on the river side of the grove. The fire on the opposite bank had not lessened in force. A hot wind blew over our heads, and, fanned across toward us, black smoke came as far as mid-river. Suddenly the sky overhead seemed to have turned black, and large drops of rain came pouring down, a torrent. The rain dampened the fire a bit in our vicinity, but in a while the sky turned cloudless again. The fire on the opposite bank burned on. Now, on this bank, I saw my eldest brother, Sister, and two or three acquaintances from the neighborhood; we all drew together, and each of us gave his account of the morning's events.

When the bomb fell, my brother was at the table in the office. A brilliant light flashed through the garden, and immediately thereafter

he was sent flying six feet or so; trapped under the building, he struggled for a while. Noticing a gap at last and crawling out, he became aware that over at the factory the schoolgirls were screaming for help. He struggled mightily to get them out. Sister was at the entryway when she saw a brilliant flash and quickly took cover under the stairs, so she was not injured badly. Each of us had been convinced at first that only his own house had been bombed; when we did go outside, we were flabbergasted to see that the same thing had happened everywhere. We were also amazed that while everything aboveground had collapsed, there were no holes that looked like bomb craters. Sister said it had happened soon after the lifting of the preliminary alert. There had been a brilliant flash and a soft hissing, like the sound of magnesium burning, and instantaneously everything had turned upside down . . . just like black magic, she said, trembling.

As the fire on the other bank began to die down, a voice said the trees in this garden had caught fire. A faint smoke began to be visible high in the sky over the bamboo grove behind us. The water in the river was still at full tide and gave no indication of falling. I walked along the stone wall and climbed down to the water's edge. Just at my feet, a large wooden crate came floating past, and onions that had spilled out of the crate were bobbing about. I pulled the box over, grabbed onion after onion out of it, and handed them to people on the bank. On the railway bridge upstream a freight train had derailed, and this box, thrown out, had floated down. While hauling in onions, I heard a voice crying, "Help!" A young girl was floating past in the middle of the river holding on to a piece of wood, her head sometimes above the water, sometimes under it. I picked out a big log and swam out, pushing it ahead of me. I hadn't swum in a long time, but I was able, more easily than I would have thought, to rescue her.

The fire on the opposite bank had slackened for a while but suddenly started raging again. This time dark smoke appeared in the midst of the red flames, and the black mass spread savagely; even as we watched, the temperature of the flames seemed to rise. But even that eerie blaze too gradually burned itself out; when it did, only empty shells of buildings remained to be seen. It was then that I noticed, in the sky downstream above the middle of the river, an absolutely translucent layer of air trembling and moving toward us. A tornado, I thought; at that very moment violent winds were already blowing overhead. The trees and plants all around me trembled; suddenly, I saw many trees above my head sucked up by the wind, just like that, and carried off into the sky. Dancing crazily in the air, the trees fell into the midst of the maelstrom with the force of arrows. I don't remember clearly what color the surrounding air was. But I think we must have been enveloped in the dreadfully gloomy faint green light of the medieval paintings of Buddhist hell.

Once this twister had passed, a kind of twilight obtained, and my second brother, who hadn't appeared until then, unexpectedly came to where we were. His face was streaked with gray; the back of his shirt was torn, too. The marks on his skin looked as if he had gotten sunburned at the beach; later, they developed into real burns that suppurated and required several months of treatment. But at the moment he was still pretty fit. He said he had just returned home on an errand when he spotted a small airplane high in the sky and then saw three strange flashes. He was thrown a good six feet. He rescued his wife and the maid, both of whom had been pinned under and were struggling; he entrusted the two children to the maid and sent them fleeing ahead of him; then he rescued the old man next door, which took longer than he expected.

My sister-in-law was very worried about the children from whom she had become separated, but then the maid called from the other bank. Her arms hurt, she said, and she was no longer able to carry the children; please come quickly.

The trees of the Izumi Villa were burning, a few at a time. We would be in trouble if the fire burned its way here after dark; we wanted to cross to the opposite shore while it was still light. But there was no boat to be seen. My eldest brother and his family decided to cross to the other shore via the bridge; still searching for a boat, my second brother and I went up the river. As we proceeded up the narrow stone path running along the river, I saw for the first time a group of people defying description. The rays of sunlight, already slanting, cast a wan light on the surrounding scene; there were people both on top of the bank and below it, and their shadows fell on the water.

What kind of people? . . . Their faces were so swollen and crumpled that it was impossible to tell which were men and which women; their eyes were narrowed to slits; their lips were festering horribly. Baring their hideously painful arms and legs, they lay on their sides, more dead than alive. As we passed in front of them, these monstrous people called to us in thin soft voices. "Please give me a little water to drink!" or "Please help me!"—every last one appealed to us.

I was stopped by someone calling "Mister!" in a sharp, pitiful voice. In the river just there I saw the naked corpse of a boy, entirely submerged; and on the stone steps less than a yard away crouched two women. Their faces were swollen to about half again normal size, deformed and ugly, leaving only their burned and tangled hair as a sign that they were women. At first sight, rather than pity, I felt my hair stand on end. When these women saw that I had stopped, they pleaded with me: "That blanket over there by the trees is ours; won't you please bring it here?"

Over there by the trees there was indeed something that looked like a blanket. But on top of it lay a badly injured person on the point of death, and there was nothing I could do.

We found a small raft, so we untied the rope and rowed toward the other bank. By the time the raft landed on the sandy beach on the other bank, night had already fallen; but here too, it seemed, many injured were waiting. One soldier who had been crouching at the river's edge pleaded, "Give me some hot water to drink!" so I made him lean on my shoulder as we walked on. In pain, he tottered forward over the sand, and then he muttered as if in utter despair, "I'd be better off dead." I agreed sadly but said nothing. It was as if unbearable resentment against this absurdity bound us together; we needed no words. Partway there I had him wait, and looked up from the base of the stone wall to the emergency stand with its supply of hot water; it had been set up on top of the embankment. At the place on the stand from which steam rose, a large head, burned black, was grasping a teabowl and slowly drinking hot water. The huge grotesque face seemed to me made entirely of black beans. What is more, the hair on its head had been cut off in a straight line just at the ear. (Later, as I saw people with burns, hair cut off in a straight line, I came to realize

that their hair had been burned off right up to the line of their caps.) I got a bowl of water and carried it back to where I had left the soldier. In the river a single soldier, seriously injured, was squatting, drinking his fill of river water.

In the dusk the sky above the Izumi Villa and the fire in our immediate vicinity loomed brilliantly; on the sandy shore some people were even burning bits of wood to cook supper. A woman had been stretched out right beside me for some time, face swollen like a spongy balloon; from her voice pleading for water I recognized her for the first time as the maid from my second brother's house. Carrying the baby, she had been about to set out from the kitchen when the flash caught her, burning her face, chest, and hands. Then, taking with her the eldest daughter and the baby, she had fled just ahead of my brother and his wife; but at the bridge she had become separated from the girl and had reached the riverbank here carrying only the baby. The hand that had been injured when she first tried to shield her face from the flash, she complained, that hand still hurt as badly now as if it were being wrenched off.

The tide was now rising, so we left the riverbed and moved toward the embankment. Night had fallen; crazed voices echoed from this side and that, crying, "Water! Water!" The clamor of those still left behind on the riverbed gradually grew more insistent. On top of the embankment a breeze stirred, and it was a little chilly for sleeping. Immediately across the way was Nigitsu Park; it too was now enclosed in darkness, only the faint outlines of broken tree trunks visible. My brother and his family were lying in a hollow in the ground; I found another hollowed out place and crawled into it. Lying right next to me were three or four injured schoolgirls.

Someone was worried and said, "The trees across the way have caught fire; wouldn't we be better off fleeing?" I emerged from my hollow and looked across. The flames were flashing in the trees two or three hundred yards away, but they didn't seem about to come toward us.

"Is the fire burning our way?" an injured young girl asked me, trembling.

"No," I told her, "we're okay," and she had another question: "What time is it now—not twelve yet?"

The preliminary alert sounded. Somewhere there must have been an undamaged siren, for one reverberated faintly. Downstream there was a glow, vast and hazy: the fire in the city must still be going strong.

The schoolgirls sighed: "Ah, if only morning would come!"

In soft, gentle voices they sang in chorus, "Father! Mother!"

"Is the fire burning our way?" the injured young girl asked me again.

At the riverbed could be heard the dying gasps of someone apparently quite young and strong. Echoing on all sides, his voice carried everywhere. "Water, water, water, please! . . . Oh! . . . Mother! . . . Sister! . . . Mit-chan!": the words poured out as if he were being torn body and soul; interspersed between the words, forced out of him by the pain, were faint groans of "Ooh, ooh!" —Once when I was a child I walked along this embankment to fish from this riverbank. The memory of that entire hot day still remains strangely vivid. On the sand is a large billboard for Lion toothpaste; from time to time, off in the direction of the railway bridge, I hear the roar of trains crossing. It is a scene peaceful as in a dream . . .

WHEN DAWN CAME, last night's voice was stilled. Its bloodcurdling death cry seemed to linger in my ear; yet the light was full, and a morning breeze was blowing. My eldest brother and Sister went around to the charred ruins of our house, and since people said there was an aid station in the East Parade Ground, my second brother and his family set off for there. I too was about to head for the East Parade Ground when the soldier next to me asked to go along. This hefty soldier must have been pretty badly injured; leaning on my shoulder, he went forward on his own legs one hesitant step at a time, just as if carrying something fragile. What is more, ours was a terrible, ominous path: fragments and splinters and corpses, still smoldering. When we got to Tokiwa Bridge, he was tired out and told me to leave him because he couldn't take another step. So I left him there and proceeded alone in the direction of Nigitsu Park. In some places

houses were still there, as they had collapsed, spared by the flames; but the brilliant flash seemed to have left the marks of its claws everywhere. In an open space people had gathered. Water was trickling from a pipe. It was then word reached me that my niece was being cared for at the Tōshōgu disaster station.

I hurried to the precincts of Tōshōgu Shrine. Just as I got there, my niece came face to face with her mother again. Yesterday she had become separated from the maid at the bridge, then afterward had fled in the company of people from somewhere else; when she saw her mother, she burst out crying, as if suddenly she could stand it no longer. Her neck, black from burns, looked painful.

The aid station had been set up at the base of the Tōshōgu *torii*. A police officer asked for home addresses, ages, and so on. But even after the injured were given the slips of paper on which he had written down that information, they had to wait another hour and a half or so in a long line under the hot sun. Still, if you were injured and able to join this line, you were probably among the fortunate. Even now, there was a voice crying frantically, "Soldier! Soldier! Help! Soldier!" It was a girl with burns; she had collapsed at the side of the road and was rolling about. And a man wearing the uniform of the guards had lain down, his head, swollen with burns, atop a stone; just then he opened his pitch-black mouth, pleading brokenly in a weak voice: "Please help me, someone! Oh! Nurse! Doctor!" But no one paid him any attention. Police officers, doctors, nurses: all had come from other cities to help out, and there weren't enough of them.

Accompanying the maid from my second brother's house, I joined the line; by now she was swollen badly and could hardly stay on her feet. Presently her turn came, and she was treated; then we had to make a place where we could rest. Every spot within the shrine precincts was taken up by badly injured people lying about; we saw no tents, no shade. So for a roof we leaned some thin boards against the stone wall and crawled underneath. In this cramped space the six of us spent more than twenty-four hours.

Right beside us, too, a similar shelter had been fashioned, and a fellow was in constant motion atop its mats; he called over to me. He had neither shirt nor undershirt; only one leg of his long pants was

left, and that reduced to a piece about his waist; he had burns on both hands, both feet, and face. He said he had been on the seventh floor of the Chūgoku Building when the bomb fell; he must have had enormous willpower, for despite his severe injuries he had made it this far—pleading with some people to help him, ordering others. Then a young man came wandering over, whole body bloody and wearing the armband of a headquarters cadet. Seeing him, the man next to us reared up and almost roared, from his high horse: "Hey! Hey! Get away! My body's a mess; touch me and you'll get yours! There's plenty of room, so why pick this tiny spot? Quick, take off!" Looking dazed, the bloody young man stood up.

Perhaps ten feet from our shelter there was a cherry tree with only a few leaves, and two schoolgirls had lain down under it. Faces burned black and thin backs exposed to the hot sun, they both groaned for water. Students from the girls' vocational school, they had come to this area to dig potatoes and here had met disaster. Then another woman came, face bloated, wearing cotton work trousers; setting her handbag down, she stretched her legs out, exhausted . . . The sun was already beginning to set. Another night here? I was singularly forlorn at the thought.

BEGINNING just before dawn we heard voices here and there reciting the *nembutsu* over and over. People were dying one after the other. When the morning sun rose high in the sky, the students from the girls' vocational school both breathed their last, too. Having checked their corpses, which lay face down in the ditch, a police officer approached the woman clad in cotton work clothes. She too had collapsed and seemed now to be dead. When the police officer checked her handbag, he found a bank book and a war-bond book. So she had been on a trip when disaster struck.

At about noon, the air raid warning sounded, and we could hear planes. We had become quite inured to the sorrow and grotesque ugliness on all sides; even so, our exhaustion and hunger gradually became severe. Both the eldest son and the youngest son of my second brother had been going to school in the city, so we still didn't know what had happened to them. People died one after the other, and the

corpses simply lay there. With a sense that no help was coming, people walked about restlessly. Yet now, from over toward the parade ground, a bugle sounded, loud and clear.

Suffering from burns, the nieces cried bitterly, and the maid pleaded frequently for water. Just when we had had about all we could endure of their complaints, my eldest brother returned. Yesterday he had gone off in the direction of Hatsukaichi, to which his wife had been evacuated; today he had come back with a horse-drawn goods cart he had arranged to hire in the village of Yahata. So we climbed onto the cart and left.

LOADED with my brother's household and Sister and me, the cart left Tōshōgu and went in the direction of Nigitsu. It happened as the cart set off from Hakushima toward the entrance of the Izumi Villa. In an open area over toward the West Parade Ground my brother happened to spot a corpse clothed in familiar yellow shorts. He got off the cart and went over. My sister-in-law and then I also left the cart and converged on the spot. In addition to the familiar shorts, the corpse wore an unmistakable belt. The body was that of my nephew Fumihiko. He had no jacket; there was a fist-sized swelling on his chest, and fluid was flowing from it. His face had turned pitch-black, and in it a white tooth or two could barely be seen. Though his arms were flung out, the fingers of both hands were tightly clenched, the nails biting into the palms. Next to him was the corpse of a junior high school student and farther off, the corpse of a young girl, both rigid just as they had died. My second brother pulled off Fumihiko's fingernails, took his belt too as a memento, attached a name tag, and left. It was an encounter beyond tears.

THE WAGON then went toward Kokutaiji and, crossing Sumiyoshi Bridge, toward Koi, so I was able to get a look at virtually all the ruins. In the expanse of silvery emptiness stretching out under the glaring hot sun, there were roads, there were rivers, there were bridges. And corpses, flesh swollen and raw, lay here and there. This was without doubt a new hell, brought to pass by precision craftsmanship. Here everything human had been obliterated—for example,

the expressions on the faces of the corpses had been replaced by something model-like, automaton-like. The limbs had a sort of bewitching rhythm, as if rigor mortis had frozen them even as they thrashed about in agony. With the electric wires, jumbled and fallen, and the countless splinters and fragments, one sensed a spastic design amid the nothingness. But seeing the streetcars, overturned and burned apparently in an instant, and the horses with enormous swollen bellies lying on their sides, one might have thought one was in the world of surrealistic paintings. Even the tall camphor trees of Kokutaiji had been torn up, roots and all; the gravestones too had been scattered. The Asano Library, of which only the outer shell remained, had become a morgue. The road still gave off smoke here and there and was filled with the stench of death. Each time we crossed a river, we marveled that the bridge hadn't fallen. Somehow I can capture my impressions of this area better in capital letters. So here I set down the following stanza:

BROKEN PIECES, GLITTERING,
AND GRAY-WHITE CINDERS,
A VAST PANORAMA—
THE STRANGE RHYTHM OF HUMAN CORPSES BURNED RED.
WAS ALL THIS REAL? COULD IT BE REAL?
THE UNIVERSE HENCEFORTH, STRIPPED IN A FLASH OF EVERYTHING.
THE WHEELS OF OVERTURNED STREETCARS,
THE BELLIES OF THE HORSES, DISTENDED,
THE SMELL OF ELECTRIC WIRES, SMOLDERING AND SIZZLING

The wagon proceeded along the road through the endless destruction. Even when we got to the suburbs, there were rows of collapsed houses; when we passed Kusatsu, things finally were green, liberated from the color of calamity. The sight of a swarm of dragonflies flying lightly and swiftly above green fields engraved itself on my eyes. Then came the long and monotonous road to Yahata. By the time we got to Yahata, night had already fallen. Next day began our wretched life in that place. The injured made little progress toward recovery, and even those who had been healthy gradually grew weak from lack of adequate food. The arm burns of the maid suppurated horribly, flies swarmed, and finally her arms became infested

with maggots. No matter how we treated them, the maggots came back, again and again. After more than a month, she died.

ON THE FOURTH or fifth day after we came here, my middle school nephew turned up; he had been among the missing. On the morning of the sixth, he had gone to school in order to help clear firebreaks; the flash came just as he was in the classroom. Instantly he had thrown himself under a desk, and then the ceiling had collapsed, burying him; but he had found a hole and crawled out. Not more than four or five of the schoolchildren were able to crawl out and flee; the others had all been killed in the initial blast. With four or five others, he had fled to Hijiyama, vomiting up white fluid on the way. Then he had gone by train to the home of a friend who had fled with him, and they had taken him in. However, a week or so after he came home to us here, he too saw his hair fall out, and within a few days he became completely bald. At that time many of the victims of the bomb subscribed to the theory that if your hair fell out and your nose started to bleed, you were done for. On the twelfth or thirteenth day after his hair fell out, my nephew finally began having nosebleeds. That night the doctor declared him to be in critical condition. However, he did hold his own, his condition still critical.

ON HIS WAY by train, for the first time, to a factory evacuated into the countryside, N. felt the bomb's shock at the precise moment the train entered a tunnel. On emerging from the tunnel, he looked toward Hiroshima and saw three parachutes floating gently down. Then the train arrived at the next station, and he was astonished that the station's windows were badly splintered. By the time he got to his destination, detailed reports had already come in. Turning around on the spot, he boarded a train bound for Hiroshima. The trains he passed that came from Hiroshima were all filled with grotesquely injured people. He waited impatiently for the fire in the city to die out, then walked along at a rapid pace on asphalt that was still hot. He went first to the girls' school where his wife taught. In the ashes of the classroom, he found the bones of schoolchildren; in the ashes of the principal's office, he found a skeleton that appeared to be the principal's.

But he found no skeleton that could have been his wife's. In great haste he went in the direction of their house. That was near Ujina, where houses had merely been knocked flat; they had been spared the fire. But he found no trace of his wife there either. So now, one by one, he checked the corpses lying on the road between his house and the school. Because most of the corpses were lying face down, he had to pull them into a sitting position in order to examine the faces; every last face was grossly disfigured, but none belonged to his wife. In the end, he went looking almost mindlessly, even in places in the opposite direction. In a cistern there were ten or more corpses piled one atop the other. On a ladder leaning on the riverbank, there were three corpses; rigor mortis had frozen them with their hands on the ladder. In a line waiting for the bus, corpses were standing just as they had been; they had died with their fingernails sticking into the shoulder of the person ahead of them in line. He also saw a large group of corpses—an entire unit of the labor corps mobilized from the countryside to clear firebreaks had been annihilated. Those scenes still did not equal the West Parade Ground. That was a mountain of dead soldiers. Yet nowhere did he find his wife's corpse.

Visiting in turn every aid station, N. examined the faces of the severely injured. Each face was the very picture of suffering, but none belonged to his wife. Then, having spent three days and three nights examining corpses and burn victims to the point of utter revulsion, N. started all over again, going once more to the charred ruins of the girls' school at which his wife had taught.

From the Ruins

WHEN WE FIRST moved to the village of Yahata, I still had lots of energy; I loaded the injured onto the cart and went with them to the hospital, walked here and there to pick up what was being handed out, and kept in touch with Jun'ichi in Hatsukaichi. The house was the outbuilding to a farmhouse in Yahata; Seiji had rented it. From our initial place of refuge Yasuko and I ended up moving in with his family. The flies from the cowbarn came swarming boldly into the rooms. They stuck tight to the burned neck of my young niece and did not budge. Throwing down her chopsticks, she screamed frantically. To ward them off, we spread mosquito netting even during the day. Face and back burned, Seiji was stretched out inside the netting, a gloomy expression on his face. The main house was separated from us by a garden, and on the veranda we could see a man with cruelly swollen face—we had already seen so many such faces that we had grown weary of them; in the back, a bed had been laid out for someone apparently even more seriously injured. In the evening we heard a weird delirious voice from over there. He'll die any time now, I thought. Soon thereafter we heard a voice already intoning the *nembutsu*. It was the husband of the family's eldest daughter who had died; he had been in Hiroshima when the bomb fell, then walked all the way back. After taking to bed, they say, he scratched involuntarily at his burns and in short order developed fever on the brain.

No matter when we went, the clinic was crowded with the injured. It took a whole hour to treat a middle-aged woman, carried in by three others—her entire body lacerated by splinters of glass; so we had to wait until afternoon. Some of the people we met no matter when we went: the injured old man brought by handcart, the junior high school student with burns on face and hands—he had been at the East Parade Ground when the bomb fell—and others. When they changed my young niece's bandages, she screamed as if possessed: "Ouch! Ouch! Give me some candy!" With a bittersweet smile, the doctor said, "You say, 'Give me some candy!' but I haven't got any."

The room adjoining the examination room was full, too—appar-