

The Escape of Three Siblings 三人姉弟で逃げまどう**Takemiya Etsuko 竹宮 悦子****Minami Yaso-cho, Tokushima-shi 徳島市南矢三町**

The air raid sirens went off. It was the early evening. Dad said “You kids and grandma go ahead into the air raid shelter.” Dad thought that nothing out of the ordinary would happen that night. We didn’t know whether anything would happen either because we were already so used to the daily recurring air raid alarms.

Only one month had passed since we moved from Osaka back to my parent’s home town of Tokushima. I can only vaguely remember the way from Itsuki-cho to Tomida Elementary School. It was also common sense to turn off the lights at night in order to not be targeted by enemy planes. So in the darkness we didn’t know the way, the three of us kids just followed grandma hurrying through the streets to the air raid refuge. Inside the refuge it was pitch black and I couldn’t see anything. Without knowing where grandma was we were pushed to the very back. There were also other people from the neighbourhood. We sat on the ground. It was quiet. It was already time for children to sleep and it was dark all around us, so we fell asleep. I was nine and my little brothers were seven and five years old.

“Bombs incoming! Evacuate quickly!”

Although it was yelled loudly, for children who just fell asleep it was impossible to follow. I wonder after how many calls we woke up. After we got up everyone had already escaped from the air-raid shelter, grandma was nowhere to be found. The three of us after being pulled out of the shelter were heading towards our house when an old man blocked the way and said: “You can’t walk here! Go that way”, and pointed his finger. The houses on both sides of every street were already a sea of flames. We had no choice but to obey the man’s command and went that way. One by one we ran by the houses that had turned into fireballs. We took each other’s hands and followed a group of people.

“Sister, we can’t keep running if we don’t put him in the middle.”

Without saying anything I put my five year old brother in the middle. There were already a lot of people in the little river up to their neck inside of the water. It was scary there so we kept running. There were also people running back and forth. When we arrived at a black warehouse a sea of flames was hanging over us. It was in the red light district. Blazing sparks landed on the retracted hood of my brother.

“Hold on, your hood has caught fire!” yelled a lady and extinguished the sparks. Grandma told us that if cotton catches fires it spreads out like a demon. My legs froze from fear. Again we started running for our lives. All of a sudden we realized there was

no one running in front of us anymore.

Surrounded by darkness the pitch black trees blocked the way as if they were monsters or ghosts. I frantically looked around and found a little entrance between the trees.

“I’m scared, sister.”

“What should we do?”

“Let’s go in there.”

Before long the three of us went inside. It was the Myojin Shrine in Tomida.

“Let us pray to be saved.”

We used the water to wash our hands to moisten our hoods.

“What should we do? Should we leave this place?”

Inside the dark and quiet shrine we were struck by a profound feeling of fear and we weren’t able to stay. A real ghost might appear from behind the shrine.

“Let’s go this way!”

It was still dark around. After walking for a bit we reached an embankment. The three of us stood in the middle on top of it. We saw silhouettes of something that looked like humans crawling in the rice paddy in front of us.

“You kids, take cover!” yelled a loud voice of a man from below. As he yelled we

were already jumping down as quickly as we could. In that moment incendiary bombs flew over our heads with a roar.

“Thank god”, said the young couple with a smile. We were too young to know how to thank them. We still don’t know who that couple was. Only after I became an adult did I understand that we are alive thanks to these people. The three of us who had been running all night, found a comfortable spot at the foot of the embankment and fell asleep.

“Sister, aren’t that mum and dad over there?”

My brother shook me and wake me up. I couldn’t help it but the man with the towel wrapped around his head and the woman pushing the baby carriage didn’t look like our parents to me. So I coldheartedly said “You’re wrong.”

“No, it’s them!”

My little brother who firmly insisted that it’s them couldn’t be helped so I just said “Just go and ask, then.” So he went to the couple.

He came panting out of breath running back and shouted: “Sister, I was right!”

So the three of us returned to our parents.

I looked at our mum who broke down in tears, embraced my little brothers with both arms and said: “I’m so glad you survived. I’m so glad you survived.” Dad just stood

still staring at the scene. Who are these people? What are they doing? It seems like I haven't seen these people in a long time. I couldn't believe it. What time is it now?