

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

Masaru Uchida, Gifu University

Publication webpage:

[https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated\\_graded\\_readers.html](https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated_graded_readers.html)

Publication date: March 19, 2026

### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice. The text was translated from Japanese into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

The adaptation aims to improve readability while preserving the narrative content and spirit of the original work.

### **Source Text**

Original work: Natsu no Hana (夏の花)

Author: Hara Tamiki (原民喜)

Source: Aozora Bunko (青空文庫)

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/>

Original Japanese text available at:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000293/card4680.html>

The original work is in the public domain in Japan.

### **Copyright and Use**

This simplified English edition is an educational adaptation intended for non-commercial use only.

The source text is provided by Aozora Bunko, a digital library that makes Japanese public domain literature freely available.

For information about Aozora Bunko and its usage policies, see:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/guide/kihon.html>

This edition is an AI-assisted translation and simplification prepared for educational purposes.

### **Disclaimer**

This edition is an independent educational adaptation and is not affiliated with or endorsed by Aozora Bunko.

Hara Tamiki, *Summer Flower [Natsu no Hana]* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the Japanese by ChatGPT)

## Part 1

I went out into the street to buy flowers. I wanted to visit my wife's grave. In my pocket, I carried a small bundle of incense that I had taken from the family altar. It was August fifteenth, and for my wife it would be her first Bon after her death. I did not know if this town would still be safe by then. That morning there was no electricity, and the streets felt quiet in a strange way. I walked slowly, holding the flowers in my hand. They were small and yellow, simple flowers that seemed to belong to summer.

When I reached the grave, the stone was already hot from the strong sun. I poured water over it, and a thin white steam rose into the air. Then I divided the flowers into two and placed them on both sides. The front of the grave looked calmer at once. Under this stone lay not only my wife, but also the bones of my parents. I lit the incense and bowed my head. For a short time, I stood without moving. Then I went to the well nearby and drank some water before returning home.

On the morning of August sixth, I woke at about eight o'clock. During the night there had been two air raid warnings, but nothing had happened. Before dawn, I had taken off all my clothes and changed into sleepwear. It had been a long time since I had slept like that. When I rose, I was wearing only my underwear. My younger sister complained that I had slept too long, but I did not answer. I went quietly into the toilet.

I was in the toilet, and that is why I lived.

I do not know how many seconds passed. Suddenly, something struck above my head. At once, everything went dark. I cried out and grabbed my head as I stood up. There was a loud crashing sound, like something breaking in a storm. I could not see anything. I reached out with my hands and felt for the door. When I pushed it open, I stepped onto the veranda.

At first, I could hear only my own voice shouting in the darkness. I felt as if my eyes had stopped working. I stood there in fear, unable to understand what had happened. But after a short time, a faint light began to return. In that dim light, I saw that the house had been broken apart. The air was filled with dust. Pieces of wood, paper, and tiles lay scattered all around me.

It felt like a terrible dream. When I was first struck and lost my sight, I knew that I had not fallen. That made me feel a strange anger. I thought, this is a troublesome thing. My voice sounded far away, as if it did not belong to me. Then, as my sight slowly came back, I saw the scene more clearly. It was like something from a film. Dust rose like smoke, and through it I could see pieces of blue sky. Walls had fallen, and light came in from places where it had never entered before.

I stepped carefully over the broken floor. From the other side, my sister came running toward me. "You are alive! You are alive!" she cried. Then she looked closely at my face. "There is blood near your eye. Wash it quickly," she said, and told me that water was still running in the kitchen. Only then did I notice that I was almost naked.

"Find me something to wear," I said. She ran to the broken closet and pulled out a pair of trousers. At that moment, a man came in, moving in a strange way. His face was covered with blood, and he wore only a shirt. He worked at the factory nearby. When he saw me, he said, "You are safe. That is good." Then he murmured, "The telephone... the telephone..." and went away again.

Everywhere in the house, there were gaps. Doors and floor mats lay in disorder. Only the pillars and frames still stood. For a while, everything was silent. It seemed that this was the last shape of the house. Later, I learned that most houses in this area had fallen completely. But ours had not collapsed entirely. Even the second floor remained. It must have been built strongly by my father many years before.

I began to look for clothes among the broken things. I found a jacket, but I could not find my trousers. As I searched, my eyes caught small things that had fallen out of place. A book I had been reading the night before lay open on the floor. A picture frame had slipped and leaned against the alcove. I found a water

bottle and a hat. Still, I could not find what I needed.

At that moment, a man named K appeared on the veranda. He worked in the office. When he saw me, he said in a weak voice, “Ah, I am hurt. Help me.” Then he sat down where he stood. Blood flowed a little from his forehead, and his eyes were filled with tears. I asked where he was hurt, and he said it was his knee, holding it as if it caused him great pain.

I gave him a piece of cloth and told him to bind it. Then I put on two pairs of socks. K began to hurry me. “Smoke is coming. We must run. Take me with you,” he said again and again. He was older than I was and usually stronger, but now he seemed confused and afraid. I stepped out onto the veranda and looked around.

All around us, houses had collapsed into piles. Only a few buildings still stood in the distance. In the garden, the wall had fallen, and a large maple tree had broken in the middle. Its top lay across a stone basin. K bent down near the air-raid shelter and said in a strange voice, “Shall we stay here? There is water.” But I said, “No, let us go to the river.”

“The river? Which way is the river?” he asked, as if he had forgotten. We were not ready yet. I went back to the closet and took out clothes for him. I tore a curtain from the veranda and picked up a cushion. Then I lifted a floor mat and found a small bag prepared for escape. I felt relief and put it over my shoulder.

From the warehouse of the factory next door, I could now see a small red flame. It was time to leave. I stepped over the broken maple tree and went out. That tree had stood in the corner of the garden for many years. When I was a child, I had often looked at it. But now it lay broken, like everything else around us.

As I stepped into the street, I felt that the world had changed into something I did not know.

## Part 2

K and I climbed over the broken remains of houses. At first, we moved slowly, pushing aside wood and tiles with our hands and feet. The ground was uneven, and we had to watch each step with care. After a while, the surface became flatter,

and we found ourselves on a road. There we could walk a little faster, and we moved forward together, almost in the middle of the street.

From behind a fallen wall, a voice suddenly called out, "Uncle!" I turned and saw a woman with blood all over her face. She came toward us, crying, and said, "Help me." She followed us closely. A little further on, an old woman stood in the road, crying like a child, "My house is burning, my house is burning." Smoke rose from many places among the ruins, and in some places flames had already begun to grow. We passed those places quickly, trying not to look too closely.

Before long, we reached the foot of a bridge. Many people had gathered there. Some shouted, "Those who can move, bring water!" A man stood on the bridge and tried to give orders, but most people did not listen. They stood in confusion, or moved without knowing where to go. I chose a path toward a grove nearby and went in that direction. Somewhere along the way, I lost sight of K.

The grove had once been a bamboo garden, but now the bamboo lay broken and scattered. Many people had run through it, and a narrow path had formed. The trees above were torn in strange ways, and light came through from places where it should not have. Near a bush, I saw a large woman lying on the ground. Her body was strong, but her face had lost all life. It looked empty, as if something had already left it.

When I came out to the riverbank, I met a group of young students who had run from their factory. Most of them had only small injuries, and they spoke quickly to each other, still shaken by what had happened. At that moment, my older brother appeared. He wore only a shirt and held a bottle in his hand, but he seemed unhurt. Across the river, all the buildings had fallen. Only a few poles remained, and fires had already begun to spread.

I sat down on a narrow path along the river. For the first time, I felt a strange sense of relief. Something that had been feared for a long time had finally come. I realized that I was still alive. I had often thought that I might not survive such a thing, but now I felt clearly that I had lived. The thought came to me that I must remember this moment.

The fire on the opposite bank grew stronger. The heat reached us across the

water. We soaked cushions in the river and placed them over our heads. After a while, someone shouted, "Air raid!" Another voice said, "Those in white clothes, hide under the trees." People moved quickly into the bushes. The sun shone brightly above us, and beyond the grove more fires seemed to be burning.

We stayed quiet for some time, holding our breath. When nothing more happened, we came back toward the river again. The fire across the water had not weakened. Hot wind passed over our heads, and black smoke spread across the sky. Then the sky suddenly grew dark, and large drops of rain began to fall. The rain cooled the heat for a short time, but soon it stopped, and the bright sun returned.

Around me, I could see my brother, my sister, and a few familiar faces. We spoke about what had happened that morning. My brother said that he had been at his desk when he saw a flash in the garden. At once, he had been thrown across the room and trapped under the building. After struggling, he found a small space and escaped.

My sister said that she had been at the entrance when she saw the flash. She quickly hid under the stairs and was not badly hurt. All of us had first thought that only our own house had been attacked. But when we went outside, we saw that everything had been destroyed in the same way. There were no holes in the ground like from bombs. It made no sense to us.

As we spoke, someone said that the trees behind us had begun to burn. Thin smoke rose into the sky. The river was still full, and the water did not go down. I climbed down along the stone edge to the water. Near my feet, a wooden box floated by. Inside were onions. I pulled it closer and began to take them out and pass them to others.

While I was doing this, I heard a voice cry out, "Help me!" A young girl was floating in the river, holding on to a piece of wood. I chose a larger piece and pushed it ahead of me as I swam. I had not swum for a long time, but I reached her and brought her safely to the shore.

For a while, the fire across the river seemed to calm. But then it rose again with great force. Thick smoke appeared among the flames, and the fire spread quickly.

It burned everything it could reach, leaving behind only empty ruins.

### Part 3

As the fire grew stronger, a strange movement appeared in the sky downstream. A clear layer of air seemed to come toward us, shaking as it moved. At first, I thought it might be a whirlwind. Before I could understand it, a strong wind passed over our heads. The trees around us shook violently. Some were torn from the ground and lifted into the air. They flew like arrows and fell somewhere far away. The scene was so sudden that I could not fully take it in.

After the wind passed, the sky began to change color. It slowly took on the dim tone of evening. At that moment, my second brother appeared. His face was marked with dark burns, and his shirt was torn. He looked strong, but there was something strained in his expression. He told us that he had seen a small airplane above the city. Then he had seen three strange lights. After that, he had been thrown to the ground and trapped under the house.

He had managed to save his wife and a servant. The children had been sent away first. After that, he had tried to help an old man nearby. As he spoke, someone on the opposite bank called out. It was the servant, holding a child in her arms. She said she could not carry the child any longer and asked for help.

The trees around us were still burning little by little. We knew that if the fire reached us during the night, it would be dangerous. So we decided to cross to the other side of the river while there was still some light. There was no boat near us, and we had to find a way across.

My older brother chose to go around by the bridge with the others. My second brother and I moved upstream, looking for something that could carry us. We walked along a narrow path by the water. As we moved forward, I began to see many people lying along the bank.

The sun was already low, and the light had grown pale. On the ground and near the water, people lay in large numbers. Their shadows stretched into the river. At first, I could not tell if they were men or women. Their faces were swollen, and

their eyes had become thin lines. Their lips were torn, and parts of their bodies were bare, showing burned skin.

As we passed them, they spoke in weak voices. "Please give me water," one said. "Help me," said another. Almost every person had something to ask. Their voices were soft but full of pain. It was not possible to stop for all of them, yet it was hard to keep walking.

Suddenly, I heard a voice call out, "Uncle!" I turned and saw a boy's body in the water, his head under the surface. Not far from him, two women crouched on the stone steps. Their faces were swollen to twice their normal size. Their hair was burned and tangled. Their faces had changed so much that I felt fear before I felt pity.

When they saw that I had stopped, one of them spoke. "That bedding by the tree is mine. Please bring it here," she said. I looked and saw something like bedding near a tree. But on it lay another person who no longer moved. I could not move it, and I could not answer in a way that would help them.

At last, we found a small raft tied near the shore. We untied it and pushed it into the water. Slowly, we crossed to the other side. By the time we reached the sandbank, the light had grown dim. Even there, many wounded people had gathered, and the air was filled with the smell of smoke and heat.

A soldier sat near the water. When he saw me, he said, "Please give me some hot water." I helped him stand and supported him as we walked across the sand. His steps were unsteady, and he seemed ready to fall. After a while, he spoke again. "It would be better to die," he said in a low voice. I could not answer him.

I left him for a moment and climbed up to a place where water was being heated. From below, I saw a man holding a bowl and drinking. His face was burned dark, and his hair had been burned away in a straight line. When I returned with the bowl, I saw another soldier in the river, bending forward and drinking again and again, as if he could not stop.

As the darkness deepened, the fires around us became more visible. Some people gathered wood and made small fires to cook what they could. Near me lay a woman with a swollen face. When she spoke, I realized that she was the servant

from my brother's house. She told me how she had been burned while holding a child and how she had become separated from the others.

The tide began to rise, and we had to leave the sandbank. We moved up to the embankment. Night had fully fallen, and the darkness was deep. From all around us, voices called out for water. The sounds grew stronger, and it felt as if the night itself was filled with suffering.

#### Part 4

We lay down on the embankment as the night deepened. My brothers found a hollow in the ground and rested there, and I lay down a short distance away. Close to me, several young girls lay side by side. They were students, injured and weak, their bodies barely moving. The darkness covered everything, and only the glow of distant fires showed where the city still burned.

"The trees over there are burning. Should we run?" one of the girls asked in a thin voice. I stood up and looked in the direction she pointed. Flames flickered among the trees at some distance, but they did not seem to be coming closer. "It is all right," I said, though I was not certain. The girl seemed to accept my words, and she lay still again.

"What time is it now?" another girl asked. "Is it not yet midnight?" Her voice trembled, and it was clear that she was afraid. Soon after, we heard the faint sound of a siren far away. Somewhere, another warning was being given. The sound rose and fell, then faded again into the night.

"I wish morning would come soon," one of the girls said. Then, in low voices, they began to call for their parents. "Mother... Father..." they said, again and again. The words came slowly, like something carried on the wind. One of them turned to me and asked, "The fire will not come here, will it?" I told her it would not, though I could not be sure.

From the riverbank below came a sharp cry. A young man, still strong enough to move, shouted again and again, "Water, water, please give me water." His voice echoed in all directions. Then he began to call for his mother, his sister, and

someone by name. His voice rose higher, full of pain, then slowly weakened. At last, it became only a faint sound.

I lay still and listened. The voices around me rose and fell, some near, some far away. Some called for water, others for help, and others spoke words that could not be understood. It seemed that the night itself had become filled with voices that would not stop.

Long ago, I had come to this river as a child to catch fish. I remembered the bright day, the wide sand, and the sound of trains passing over the bridge. Everything had been quiet and clear then. That memory came back to me now, but it felt far away, as if it belonged to another world.

The ground beneath me was hard, and the air carried the smell of smoke. I could not sleep. Even when I closed my eyes, the voices did not stop. They moved through the darkness, rising and falling, as if they would continue without end.

At some point, the voices began to grow fewer. One by one, they faded. The night grew quieter, though it was not a peaceful silence. It was the kind of quiet that comes after something has ended, leaving only what remains behind.

When morning came, a pale light spread over the river. The shapes of people lying around us became clear again. Those who had called out in the night now lay still. The ground seemed even more crowded than before. The day began, but nothing had improved.

## Part 5

My older brother and my sister decided to return toward our house. My second brother and the others planned to go to a place where the injured were being treated. I chose to go with them. As I prepared to leave, a soldier who had been lying nearby asked me to walk with him. He leaned heavily on my shoulder, and I supported him as we began to move.

We walked slowly along a path filled with broken pieces and bodies. The ground still held heat, and in some places thin smoke rose from what had burned. The soldier's steps were weak, and he struggled to move forward. Each step

seemed to take great effort, and his weight pressed heavily against me.

When we reached a bridge, he stopped. He said that he could go no further and asked me to leave him there. I hesitated, but there was nothing I could do. I lowered him gently and left him behind. Then I continued on alone, moving toward the park.

As I went forward, I saw houses that had partly remained standing, though they were broken and damaged. Everywhere there were signs of the great flash. In an open space, people had gathered around a small flow of water. They bent down to drink or tried to fill whatever they could carry.

It was there that I heard that my niece had been taken to a safe place. I hurried toward the shrine where she was said to be. When I arrived, I saw her meeting her mother. She had been separated the day before and had followed strangers to survive. When she saw her mother, she began to cry at once. Her neck was burned and dark, and it looked painful.

Near the shrine, a place had been set up to treat the injured. A policeman wrote down names and ages before people could receive care. Even after that, they had to wait in a long line under the hot sun. Many of those who could stand in line were still better off than those who lay by the roadside, unable to move.

From one side, I heard a young girl crying, "Soldier, please help me." She lay on the ground, turning in pain. Not far away, a man in uniform lay with his swollen head on a stone, calling weakly for help. But no one could stop for them. There were too few people to help so many.

I stood in line with the servant, supporting her as she grew weaker. Her body had swollen, and she often tried to sit down on the ground. At last, her turn came, and she received some treatment. After that, we had to find a place where we could rest.

There was no proper shelter. We placed thin boards against a stone wall to make a small cover. Under it, we gathered together. It was narrow and crowded, but there was no other choice. There we lay down, trying to rest in the heat.

Next to us, a man with severe burns spoke loudly and gave orders to others. Even in that condition, he tried to control those around him. Another young man,

covered in blood, came near, but the burned man shouted at him to stay away, saying that even a small touch would cause him pain.

Under a nearby tree, two schoolgirls lay on the ground. Their faces were dark with burns, and they asked again and again for water. They had been working outside when the disaster struck. Their voices were weak, but they did not stop asking.

As evening came, the light began to fade. I felt a deep sadness as I understood that we would spend another night in this place. The air grew heavy again, and the sounds of suffering began to rise once more. It seemed that there would be no end.

## Part 6

During the night, the sounds rose again, though they were not as strong as before. People called for water in low voices, and some spoke as if they were talking in a dream. The darkness covered everything, and it was hard to see the faces around us. Still, we could feel that many were lying close, breathing weakly.

Before dawn, the voices began to grow fewer. One by one, they faded, and a quiet settled over the place. When the light of morning came, it showed what had happened during the night. Many who had been alive the evening before now lay still. Their bodies had not moved, but something in them had already gone.

A policeman walked among the bodies and checked them one by one. When he found someone who no longer breathed, he moved on without stopping. Near us, a woman who had been sitting with her bag lay on her side. She had been alive the day before, but now she did not move. The policeman opened her bag and looked inside. There were papers and money, showing that she had been traveling. It seemed that she had come from far away and had been caught here by chance.

By midday, another warning sounded. We could hear the low noise of planes in the distance. Even though we had grown used to what we saw, our bodies were becoming weaker. The heat pressed down on us, and time seemed to move slowly. Hunger and tiredness made it hard to think.

My brother's two sons had been at school in the city, and we still did not know what had happened to them. Around us, people continued to die. Their bodies were left where they lay, and no one had the strength to move them. People walked here and there without clear purpose, their faces empty.

From somewhere nearby, the sound of a bugle rose into the air. It was clear and strong, as if it belonged to another place. The sound passed over us and then faded. It felt strange to hear something so ordered in the middle of such disorder.

The servant beside us asked again and again for water. Her face and hands had swollen, and her voice had grown thin. We gave her what little we could, but it did not ease her pain. The children nearby cried softly, and their voices seemed to mix with the sounds around us.

In the afternoon, my older brother returned. He had gone to a town outside the city and had brought back a horse cart. With that cart, we could leave this place. We prepared to go at once, placing the injured carefully onto it.

My brother's family climbed onto the cart, along with my sister and myself. The cart began to move slowly from the shrine toward the road. As we left, I looked back once. The place where we had stayed was still filled with people, some moving, many not. The sounds remained behind us.

The cart moved through the broken city. Under the strong sun, everything looked pale. The roads and rivers remained, but almost everything else had been destroyed. The light was too bright, and it made the scene feel unreal.

## Part 7

As we passed an open ground, my second brother suddenly told the driver to stop. He had seen something on the ground. We stepped down and went closer. There lay a body wearing yellow shorts. The body was my nephew Fumihiko.

His body lay on its back. His face was turned slightly to one side, and his eyes were half open. The skin of his face had swollen and darkened, and it was hard to see his old features. His lips were dry and pulled tight. One arm lay stretched out beside him, and the other was bent under his body.

His clothes were torn, and parts of his skin were burned. The yellow shorts made it possible to know who he was. Without them, it would have been difficult to recognize him at all. We stood in silence, looking down at him.

My second brother bent down slowly and looked closely at his face. He did not speak at once. Then he said in a low voice that this was his son. His words were quiet, but they carried a deep weight. No one around us moved.

We could not stay there long. The cart had to move on, and there was nothing we could do for him. We stepped back and returned to the cart. As we moved away, I turned once more and looked at the place where he lay. The shape of his body remained clear in my mind.

The cart moved on again. It passed through streets that had once been full of life. Now only the lines of the roads and the shapes of the rivers remained. Everywhere, bodies lay scattered. Many were swollen and burned, their forms no longer clear.

Burned streetcars lay overturned, and wires hung down across the road. In some places, poles stood alone without anything around them. A horse lay on its side, its body swollen and still. The air carried a strong smell that did not leave us as we moved forward.

We passed a large tree that had been pulled out of the ground. Nearby, broken stones lay scattered where graves had once stood. A building that remained upright had become a place where bodies were gathered. Smoke rose from many places, and the sky above seemed dull and heavy.

Each time we crossed a river, I was surprised that the bridges were still standing. The water flowed quietly below, unchanged, as if it did not know what had happened around it. The contrast between the calm water and the ruined land felt strange.

As we moved further away, the land slowly began to change. Some houses still stood, though many were damaged. Then, after a while, the fields appeared. Green rice fields spread out under the sky, and dragonflies moved above them. The air felt softer, and the smell changed.

It was as if we had stepped out of one world and into another. Behind us lay the

broken city, and before us lay a quiet countryside. But the memory of what we had seen did not leave us. It stayed with us, heavy and clear.

By the time we reached the village, the sun had already set. The road grew dark, and we were led to a place where we could stay. There, we began a new life, though it did not feel like a beginning. It was only a continuation of what had already happened.

The injured did not grow better. Even those who had seemed unhurt began to lose strength. Food was scarce, and we could not eat enough. Each day passed slowly, and it was hard to see any change.

The servant's arm grew worse. The burned skin became dark and soft, and flies gathered around it. No matter how we tried to clean it, they returned again and again. After some days, small white worms appeared. We removed them, but they came back. She tried to bear the pain, but it was too much.

About a month later, she died. It happened quietly, without any clear moment. She had been speaking a little, and then she was no longer able to speak. We stayed near her, but there was nothing we could do.

Some days after we came to the village, one of my nephews returned. He had been missing since that morning. When he arrived, he told us what had happened to him. His voice was weak, but he spoke clearly.

"When the light came, I was in the classroom," he said. "I saw it, and I hid under my desk. Then the ceiling fell. I was buried, but I found a small space and crawled out. Only a few of us escaped. Many did not." He stopped for a moment, then continued, "I ran toward the hills. On the way, I became sick and vomited. After that, I rested with a friend. Then I came back."

## Part 8

At first, he seemed strong enough. He could sit up and speak, though he tired easily. We thought that he might recover if he rested. But after a few days, his condition began to change. One morning, when he touched his head, his hair came away in his hand. It did not fall little by little. It came off all at once. Within two

days, he had lost it all, and his head became bare.

His face also began to change. It grew pale, and his eyes seemed to sink deeper. He spoke less and lay still for long hours. People in the village had begun to say that when this happened, the person would not live long. We heard these words, but we could not accept them fully.

After some days more, his nose began to bleed. The blood flowed slowly but did not stop easily. We tried to clean it and keep him comfortable, but there was little we could do. The doctor said that he might not live through the night. We stayed near him, watching his breathing, waiting.

But he did not die that night. He remained alive, though very weak, and passed from one day to the next. Each day felt uncertain. At times, he opened his eyes and looked at us, but it was not clear what he saw. His voice had grown faint, and when he spoke, we had to lean close to hear him.

Around us, others also began to show signs of illness. People who had seemed unhurt now grew weak. Some lost their hair, and others began to bleed. The body no longer followed its old rules. Illness came without warning and did not leave.

Food was still scarce. We ate what we could find, but it was not enough. Even those who were healthy became thin. The injured had no strength to recover. The days passed without change, and time seemed to stretch.

At night, I lay awake and listened to the quiet. When I closed my eyes, I saw again the river and the fire. I heard the voices calling for water. They did not fade. They remained clear, as if they were still near.

Sometimes, we spoke of what had happened in the city. Each person had a different story, but all were filled with loss. Some spoke of a great light. Others spoke of a wind that had thrown them down. No one could explain it clearly. It was something beyond what we had known.

The village remained quiet, and life there continued in its own way. The fields were green, and insects moved through the air. From a distance, nothing seemed to have changed. But for us, everything had been broken, and nothing returned to its former shape.

I began to feel that what had happened must be written down. It was not

something that should be lost. Yet I did not know how to begin. The memory was too large, and it did not stay still in my mind.

## Part 9

As the days passed, my nephew grew weaker. His breathing became uneven, and at times it stopped for a moment before starting again. We stayed near him, watching closely. His body felt hot, and his strength did not return. We could do little but wait.

One night, his nose began to bleed again. The blood came slowly but would not stop. We tried to clean it, but it returned again and again. He opened his eyes once and looked at us, but there was no strength in his gaze. Then he closed them.

By morning, his breathing had grown very faint. We sat in silence, listening. At last, it stopped. It was so quiet that we almost did not notice it at first. Then we understood. He had died.

We did not cry loudly. It felt as if we had no strength left. We sat beside him, looking at his still face. The pain that had been there before had gone. That was the only comfort we could find.

After that, we prepared his body as best we could. There were no proper tools, and everything had to be done in a simple way. The villagers helped us, and together we carried him to a place where he could rest. It was a quiet act, without ceremony.

Around us, others also died. The illness did not stop with one person. It moved from one to another. People who had seemed safe became sick, and some died in the same quiet way. There was no clear rule to it.

The days after his death felt empty. We continued our daily work, but something inside us had grown still. The loss did not come all at once. It remained with us, steady and silent.

At times, I walked alone for a short distance. I looked at the fields and the sky. Everything seemed calm, but I could not feel that calm within myself. The memory of the city remained, and it did not leave.

I thought often of the river, of the people who had called out for water, and of those who had lain still by morning. Their voices seemed to follow me, even into this quiet place.

The thought returned again that I must write. If I did not, something would be lost. Yet when I tried, the words did not come easily. They felt too small for what had happened.

## Part 10

It was around that time that I heard the story of a man named N. He had been on a train on the morning of that day. As the train entered a tunnel, there was a sudden shock. The cars shook, and for a moment everything seemed to stop. When the train came out of the tunnel again, he looked toward the city.

In the sky, he saw several objects falling slowly. They moved down through the air in a strange and quiet way. He did not understand what they were. At the next station, he saw that many windows were broken, and people were speaking in low voices. By the time he reached his stop, he had already heard that something terrible had happened in the city.

Without resting, he turned back at once. He boarded another train and went toward the city again. The trains he passed were filled with injured people. Some lay on the seats, others on the floor. Many did not move. The air inside the cars felt heavy, and no one spoke clearly.

When he reached the city, the fires had not yet gone out. Smoke still rose into the sky, and the ground was hot. He walked quickly, moving from one place to another. The roads were hard to follow, and many landmarks had disappeared.

The first place he went was the school where his wife worked. It had once been full of life, but now it was broken. He stepped over the remains of walls and entered what had been a classroom. There, he saw bones lying among the broken desks.

He stopped for a moment and looked at them. Then he began to search. He looked at each one carefully, hoping and fearing at the same time. But he did not

find his wife there. After some time, he left the school and went toward his home.

His house stood in another part of the city. It had collapsed, but it had not burned. He searched inside and around it, calling her name. There was no answer. She was not there.

Then he began to search along the roads between the school and his home. Many bodies lay where they had fallen. Some lay face down, others on their backs. He turned them over one by one and looked at their faces.

The faces had changed. The skin was burned, and their shapes were not clear. It was hard to tell who they had been. But he continued to look at each one, moving from one body to the next.

He went further, to places where people had gathered to escape. In one place, he found a water tank filled with bodies. They lay together, one over another. Near a river, he saw a ladder leading down to the water. Three bodies hung from it, their hands still holding the steps.

He moved on again, searching without rest. He went to open spaces, to shelters, and to buildings that still stood. Inside them, rows of people lay on the ground. Some still breathed, and others did not. He bent over each face and looked closely. None of them was his wife.

## Part 11

He did not stop. He moved from one place to another, following any path that his wife might have taken. The streets were hard to follow, and many places no longer had clear shapes. Still, he walked on, looking at each body that lay along the way.

In some places, the bodies lay in long lines, as if they had been waiting for something. In others, they were gathered in groups, as if they had tried to stay together at the end. He bent down again and again, turning faces toward him, searching for something he could recognize.

At times, he thought he saw her. A shape, a piece of clothing, or the line of a face would make him stop. But when he looked more closely, it was always

someone else. The skin had changed too much. The marks of the fire had made all faces uncertain.

He went to places where the injured had been taken. He entered buildings that still stood and walked through the rooms. People lay side by side on the floor. Some were still alive, breathing weakly. Others had already died. He looked at each one, but he did not find her.

In one place, he saw a group of people standing close together, holding on to each other. They had died in that position, as if they had been waiting or moving together. He looked at their faces, one by one, but none of them was his wife.

He went to the river again. Along the bank, many bodies lay in the same place where they had fallen. Some had reached the water and stopped there. Others had fallen on the steps leading down. He walked slowly along the edge, looking at each one.

The smell in the air was strong, and the ground was still warm. Smoke rose in thin lines from places that had burned. He moved through it without stopping. His steps did not slow, even when the way became hard.

He searched for three days and three nights. He did not rest, and he did not sleep. He moved as if something pushed him forward. The thought of finding her did not leave him.

At last, he returned again to the school where he had begun. The place was quiet now. The smoke had grown thin, and the air felt still. He stood among the remains and looked once more at the ground.

He searched again, slowly and carefully, looking at each place where something remained. But even then, he did not find her.

## Part 12

He stood there for a while, without moving. The place had become quiet, and there was nothing more to hear. The smoke that had once filled the air had thinned, and the light fell evenly over the broken ground. He looked again at what remained, as if something might still appear.

Then he turned and walked away from the school. There were still many places he had not seen. He went back to the roads and began to search again. The ground was uneven, and in some places it was hard to pass, but he continued without stopping.

He moved toward the areas where people had gathered to escape. There, the bodies lay close together. Some had fallen as they ran, others had stopped where they stood. He bent down again and again, turning faces toward him, looking for any sign.

At times, he stopped and looked at the same place for a long moment, as if he could not be sure of what he saw. Then he moved on again. His steps did not change, and his pace did not slow.

He entered buildings that still stood and walked through their rooms. Inside, the air was heavy, and the light was dim. People lay in rows, some breathing, others still. He moved among them, looking at each face in silence.

He went again to the river. The water flowed as before, but the banks were filled with bodies. Some lay half in the water, and others had fallen on the steps. He walked along the edge and looked at each one, moving slowly.

There were places where the ground had been cleared, and bodies had been gathered together. He looked there as well, though he had already passed many of them before. Still, he did not stop searching.

The day passed, and the light began to change. The sky grew dim, and the shapes around him became less clear. He continued to move, though it was harder to see.

He had not found her.

And still he went on.