

On The Shores of Memory

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"Despair isn't found in the future; it's simply the sum of our respective pasts placed before us -- a wall of yesterdays, as it were, stacked up high. In the face of such a daunting sight we lose our nerve. But in reality the past is the past; it is done and over with, and the future is like the clear sky that spreads forever on the other side of the window, without a single obstacle in sight obstructing the road ahead. But we, fearing the past nonetheless, and the phantoms the past gives rise to, avert our eyes from the future, which is an uncertainty, or, in other words, a field of infinite possibilities. That's despair, in its true essence, in its unmasked truth; nothing more, nothing less."

(An excerpt from the notes left behind by my older brother, Jin Tezuka)

Part One

I

My older brother was able to walk straight with his eyes closed.

"Now listen to me Junichi, the first thing you need to do is hammer into your head the sight of all this scenery spread before you. If you do that, even if you're blindfolded, you'll still be able to walk several hundred steps down the middle of any road. There's nothing to be afraid of. Here, look. You can walk effortlessly like this as many times as you like. See? How's that, Junichi? It's just as I, your older brother, keep telling you, right? It all comes down to concentration; that's all there is to it in the end really."

I can see memories and those memories are, in fact, reality -- my older brother used to brag ever since we were kids.

Now that I think about it, though, it was all probably nothing more than his audacity shining through, his peculiar and tremendous faith in himself, or, to put it differently, the product, simply, of his mindless recklessness.

It wasn't that my older brother was adept at walking with his eyes closed; it was rather that, even if he couldn't see the steps he was taking -- and thereby risk tripping somewhere and falling -- he was just numb to the fear of any such thing happening to him.

Now that I recall, I must say I never knew a fiercer critic on the contradictory nature of human beings than my older brother. My brother's off the wall, biting and virulent hypercriticality was never grounded in any set of principles or reasons, but stemmed, instead, from a sort of absurd courage -- a desperate foolhardiness, I feel.

For example, he used to severely criticize countless game-console makers and software houses of Japan as the main culprits behind destroying imagination and creativity in children. In addition he used to get terribly upset at celebrities appearing on television commercials recommending, with a smile on their face, products they'd never use themselves; a beautiful actress giving the impression of how regularly she used ordinary, mass-market cosmetics, a teetotaling actor in casual clothes drinking sake with great relish, an idol who has never ingested a laxative in her life eagerly recommending the stuff -- apparently, my brother couldn't stand such falsehoods.

Much time had passed since he had laid down his pen by the time the Prime Minister, a man who repeatedly made official visits to Yasukuni Shrine to honor the war dead under the pretext of fulfilling his political campaign promise, had sided with the recommendations of an advisory body's report that favored the passing of the Imperial Household Act reform bill that promised to pave the way to maternal-line succession, or,

in other words, to the birth of a matrilineal sovereign -- an empress. Nonetheless, my brother suddenly published in a certain monthly, to the public's surprise, an editorial that lashed out abusively at the infidelity the Prime Minister had demonstrated with his pro-matrilineal stance; the Prime Minister, my brother had raged, had, in effect, neglected the "underlying principle of national polity," and was therefore "immoral" and even guilty of "treason."

On my return flight, with my older brother's ashes on my knees, I kept pondering the reason behind his death. I say reason but of course I couldn't come up with anything specific. After all, he and I had been incommunicado for over a decade -- neither him nor I had sent a letter or placed even a single telephone call.

Still, I felt as though I grasped, albeit vaguely, why my older brother had to die.

I think worries had gradually accumulated so much inside him that they had ultimately driven him into a corner -- worries that were grandiose and meaningless, yet to my older brother, too urgent and serious to neglect -- like his apprehension over how the rise in absurd, juvenile crimes was being caused, without a doubt in his mind, by those matter-of-fact, unidealistic games, by the kids immersing themselves into them,

putting the future of the nation at risk someday of devastation and ruin, just for the sake of their amusement.

As a person my brother was, as his acquaintances and he himself would admit, terribly intelligent and sharp witted. But, on the other hand, he couldn't relate, nor make sense of, the swirl of everyday life, all the motley details of the conventions of this world; that is to say, my brother was for some reason incapable of attaining a proper grasp, at any age, of the tacit rules and trivialities of human society. I suppose such a trait is quite common among so-called geniuses.

God gifts the spirit of reckless valor to the geniuses, for confronting questions that remain unanswered for all eternity.

My older brother wrote that somewhere, as I recall.

I have always maintained, based on observing him since my childhood days, the belief that the reason we fail to understand what goes on inside the mind of geniuses is because they're preoccupied with nothing but thoughts and ideas which humanity, as a whole, has no need of contemplating.

In a manner of speaking, geniuses are like scientists who, to consume metal as food, keep desperately devising ways to eat nails and bicycles.

