

The Ninth of June

"The mountain speaks... The mountain speaks in a strange language, incomprehensible, terrible, never heard before."

He heard it in his ears.

His whole body trembled with fear.

He could not sleep. With neither joy nor sorrow, he decisively and quietly turned his back on the world that had abandoned him. He resolutely welcomed his fate. The light of dawn, pale and desolate, taunted him. As the moonlight dissolved into the cruel light of day, he felt only dread. He had long ago abandoned any hope for peace. Surely death would give him peace. If nothing else, his suffering would cease.

The moon shone in the cold blue sky like a thin blade. Such an hour could hardly be described as morning, and yet it was so. He slept alone. In his torment, he asked himself if such a feeling was a sufficient reason to end his life. But his life was his own, he reasoned, and he was the master of his own fate. He saw no reason to justify his death. "Is man master or slave of his destiny?" he asked himself. He was not a slave, and he was beholden to no one among the living.

For years, such relentless nights had tormented him. Of course, such anguish had been the inspiration for much of his art, although he hesitated to use the word. Inspiration was a fickle thing, a savage mistress. She, too, had long ago abandoned him. In the dim light of the encroaching dawn, he heard the trilling of birds. This, too, was a source of pain.

Life had long ago ceased to bring him anything resembling pleasure. In that sense, he had no reason to live, or, more precisely, he had nothing that was worth remaining alive for. He could find nothing that was worth the pain of existence. Each night, alone, he begged for death. If there was anything merciful in this godforsaken universe, he would have died years ago. He would have been relieved of this torment that left him breathless at the cruel break of day. And yet there was no mercy to be found for this poor soul, forsaken by man and by his art. His own hand would prove to be his salvation.

He longed to hurl himself at the feet of God, to prostrate himself, to beg forgiveness for this act of self-deliverance. If only he could have thrown his weary arms around God's neck, weeping and begging for mercy, through his tears crying out that he had seen enough, that this life was too much for him to endure. Surely, no merciful god would condemn him. This was a mercy killing. He had waited as long as he could, enduring his torment with a gentle and melancholy gaze befitting a poet.

His death had been planned meticulously, with the utmost care. Such was his nature and his temperament. Alongside Akiko, he would go to his death at the height of love.

But in the morning, he was alone, as he had been for seven years. In the early embrace of dawn, a desolate room stood in the solemn stillness, its barren walls echoing a haunting emptiness. Rays of pale light seeped through the thin curtains, casting a feeble glow upon the neglected space, revealing the remnants of lost memories. The sun had risen on the final day of his life.

He had consulted with Mr. A-- on matters regarding his suicide, but he did not let slip a word to anyone related to him by blood. Better than anyone, Mr. A-- recognized the heart of a man who had to the end of his life with all his might and risked himself to become a martyr for art. For both men, existence for its own saké was not an unmitigated good, and death is the absolute truth that lent strength to those who remained alive despite their prayers otherwise. Of course, he could look at the end of his life with the same solemnity with which he looked at the end of this world.

It was the younger man, Mr. A--, who told him, "I have endured as much as I could." The young writer understood. As such, he trusted Mr. A-- to ensure his body would remain undiscovered in one of the family villas in Karuizawa for as long as possible.

The air hung heavy with silence, broken only by the soft sighs of melancholy that seemed to emanate from every crack and crevice of his home. The room, once filled with life and purpose, now bore the weight of neglect and abandonment. He imagined the room as it would appear after his voluntary death. Layers of dust would settle upon forgotten furniture, clinging to their worn surfaces like a shroud.

The morning light, as it would filter through the decaying veil of curtains, would paint a subdued tableau upon the room's faded wallpaper. Who would remember his voice? Once vibrant and full of color, it would show the marks of time and neglect, a testament to the passage of days left unattended. The hues, once vibrant and full of life, would have faded to a muted palette of melancholic tones, mirroring the desolation within. A forgotten table, adorned with an empty vase, would beg for the touch of fresh flowers to bring life to its desolate existence. The room would reveal the scars of a life lived, but now forsaken.

A solitary beam of light would pierce through the gloom, illuminating a solitary photograph on the cracked and peeling wall. He and his wife had been a beautiful couple, in every sense of the word. Seven years had passed since her death at the height of youth. The image, once a testament to love and happiness, now carried a bittersweet nostalgia, a reminder of what once was. It captured a moment frozen in time, a fragment of joy that presently seemed distant and unattainable.

The date was June 9, 1923. In this desolate room early in the dawn, a palpable sense of longing pervaded the air. The very essence of the room seemed to ache with the weight of solitude. He had discovered how powerful it was to be willing to die. He learned the nobility and severity of the conviction that could be a blessing to let others die.

As the dawn continued its gentle ascent, casting its subdued light upon the nameless desolation, the room remained suspended in a timeless limbo. It existed as a somber reminder of the fragility of existence, of the transience of joy, and of the echoes of lives once lived, lives that had been ruthlessly interrupted. And as the world awakened outside its walls, the desolate room would silently bear witness to the quiet tragedies that unfolded within its silent confines, waiting for the touch of renewal to breathe life into its forsaken corners once more.

Although for two years his artistic expression had been blocked by some unknown and inexpressible force, he wrote multiple death poems.

"The joy of the thought that one's life will last for many years is not yet seen,

Like a person who practices Zen, one looks away from the world and quietly peers at the gate of love,

A single cicada has left the tree and fallen to the ground, the windless autumn is silent."

He had no intention of being found until the leaves of summer had begun to ripen into the decadent hues of autumn. He was conscious, too, of the fact that the handwriting on these poems would most likely be the only way his body would be identified.

"Until this moment, I never thought that death was so powerless against love."

He imagined a funeral hall, with incense burning beside his photograph, surrounded by a wreath of white flowers. Imagining his orphaned sons, he could not hold back his tears. He could feel at once the sadness and horror of life, the urgency and seriousness that lay at the bottom of the ordinary. Yet in his nature, he was martyred and idealistic, almost stoic in his character.

He was a man who, with his academic knowledge and traditional selfless train of thought, organized what he felt in his heart first with the remarkable power of his mind. What he understood and intuitively perceived through human feelings, he turned into literature with his idealistic knowledge. He was first and foremost a man of feeling, and he had the delicacy of feeling itself and the acquired quality of not handling it roughly. His creative process had led him to self-destruction in vain.

He could see this point from certain similarities in his and Akiko's character. She was an editor for Fujin Kōron, a willful and intelligent woman. Her feelings were simpler than his, but at the same time they had an intensity that was not uncontrolled by the blind forces of life. Therefore, instead of being more hateful than him at times, her strength, when it was revealed, was the foothold from which he could painstakingly know where the heavenly floor ended.

His trip to America, nearly twenty years ago, was the cause of much of his anguish. Of course, it had been the inspiration for 'Labyrinth,' but he had gained nothing from that

fateful trip abroad beyond his disillusionment. Were he to sin even once, he was told, he would fall into hell. He had returned to Japan a nihilist, a pistol in his steamer trunk. Several times, he had considered using it, despondent.

"Both my head and heart are putrified. I would be of no use if I were to go out into the world. The optimistic views of Christianity can no longer induce me to continue living in this country. If I know for certain that I am merely a man who eats and lives, a shotgun blast will settle the matter."

He knew neither life nor death, but there was one thing of which he could be certain. He could not help but love. When he cursed his life and longed for death, something still remained in his mind and forced him to persist in living despite the strength of his own will to death. This force was one of warmth, of gentleness, and it captivated him with its irresistible power. When he despaired over his destiny, he could hear the cries of an abandoned child. When he was despondent, his loneliness revealed to him the tears of a helpless virgin separated from a lover. When he deplored his lack of talent, he glimpsed a pitiable young man utterly deprived of the opportunity to learn. When he saw that he was misunderstood, this taught him not to deliberately misunderstand others. When he was driven by ambition, the wind whispered to him to remain quiet as a fool and continue to study. When he became egoistical, the word that came to him brash as thunder was none other than "Sacrifice!"

Yes, he knew very well what this force was. Inevitably, it was love. Love was not something that he created, rather, it was love that created him. Even death was powerless in the face of love. How often he had thought of death, only to be stopped by love.

"Oh, how long have I resisted you, love? And yet by doing so, I've never gained any victory over you. So now I will entrust myself to you. Oh, cruel love, deprive me of anything you wish. Honor? Yes. Riches? Yes. Solace? Sympathy? Yes. Joy of youth? Yes. Deprive me of anything. I am proud, but I am powerless before you. You, my master! You, my tyrant!"

This life - this one life - was the only life that he had left to live, and he could not help but fear for his shifting self as he was pulled along by his own ambitions. He was afraid that he would become a plaything of some rootless fantasy and his integrity would disintegrate. Wasn't his ambition, so to speak, a desperate measure that he had devised, without realizing it, to escape the weariness that came from a lack of fulfillment in his life? There were plenty of men who put up such ambitions on their foreheads, unconcerned. But it was not uncommon for him to be troubled by this faint reflection.

He recalled that autumn of 1906 when he had departed New York for Naples, financially and spiritually impoverished. Such a departure was welcome. He was a different man when he reached his brother on the temperate Italian seaside, and his soul was only vaguely revived by the azure waters. They spent much of their time in Rome, painting and visiting museums and cathedrals. But his torment did not cease. He returned to

Japan, where he married Yasuko and became the father of three sons. He lamented that, in spite of his thorough efforts to be independent in thought and in action, he remained a slave to convention. He agonized, too, over his love for the common man and the circumstances of his noble birth. Such a chasm would never be reconciled.

After 'A Certain Woman,' which he completed in 1917, he realized that his work had begun to reach an impasse. He described this as artistic death. When he read his later works, he found them to be too rhetorical, lacking his own fullness of spirit and the vivacity of human nature. In his eyes, such works were too nervous, too fastidious, as if they were forever submerged in the sentimentality of youth. This same failure, he had observed in the novel 'Constellation. He had deliberately left the work unfinished, perhaps out of a pernicious spite for his own nature. The novel was too broad, he felt. It failed to grasp life, its point of view wavered, and, moreover, his heart was too weak as a writer. Such was his criticism of himself. He could not surpass this artistic death, and so physical death was his only means of release.

At times, he could not deny that he felt something close to contempt for some aspects of his own spirit, due to a lack of substance. It was a deformation of love, as it were. But in this dark mood his only hope for survival was love.

"Why can't you press forward, undaunted, when you can see something more wonderful ahead?"

He was forty-four years old, a terribly unlucky age. While he had been yearning for deep rest and solace from the mental strain and fatigue that had been a source of agony since his youth, had such a passive love worked on him with such positive force? Knowing the depth of this tension between his life and the vicissitudes his art, he could feel the force of a great undertow.

The agonies of his middle age were similar to those of his youth. Initially, he did not know what fate awaited him. He had come to feel that it would be best if he loved a woman even at the risk of his own life and died in ardent joy. He was entirely aware that that his mind had started to become disordered, and when he thought that his work, even if he were to miraculously complete it, was such that it would survive merely as a dead classic of a past age, he could not help but that his future was nothing if not dismal. It seemed to him that he had become able, at an age when passions arose from somewhere deep within him, to see the world with clear and unclouded eyes. Still, he found that what he had been watching with childlike joy had unexpectedly begun to seem dubious. Those doubts would not desert him until he reached some firmer bedrock by delving more deeply into his anguish. Quite likely, some new unrest, similar to the agonizing doubt he had suffered before he had realized his undivided life, was returning to him. But he had no intention of evading it. He could not sever his relationship with Akiko, her husband be damned.

"In love, depending on the person, there are those who can sense only the bright side of life from the outside, those who can sense only the negative, those who see the negative first and then recognize a strange light through it, and so on..."

His love life had been an unhappy one from the very beginning. But from that misfortune, he came to see the light of day through the joy of seeking to be devoted to life. This love affair with Akiko had been a turning point in his life, and if his misfortunes were even greater than before, he could not help but admit that he felt light through what the common man called the greatest misfortune, death.

His death, he knew, would be the result of a struggle between reason and instinct, a convergence of the currents of the dissipation of internal forces. The most important and gripping thing for him was that he was a very serious and dedicated man, and he held on until the end.

"This will probably be the last love in my life," he had written to Akiko. "If love were to appear in my life again, it would be a firm union of love and death."

Akiko's passionate response to his love overwhelmed him.

These words were a tragic expression of his feelings. He was struck with a feeling of nostalgia, with a kind of sentimentality, for the feeling of having endured as long as he could and having given up everything, along with the recognition that he truly had endured as long as he could.

The sight of the lightning streaming from one corner of the sky to another, breaking through the black clouds, also reminded him of the power and sharpness of the rush of instinct.

He had not forgotten that he had to fight against nature, as well. But he thought of man and nature as separate. He did not think that to be isolated from the understanding of man was also to be separated from nature. Until that moment, he thought that what he had lost from man, nature would be able to make up for.

He stood there and looked around, but there was not a soul in sight.

At the height of summer, Karuizawa was glorious. A winding path, lined with vibrant flora and towering trees, led to the entrance of the villa. It was here that he secured the noose firmly around his neck.

"Let what crumbles crumble as it will. And what will remain after that? If something does remain, then I will have become a superior man to what I have been."

He loved nature more than ever - the evergreen trees with brightly shining leaves standing in the sun, the lush pines, the copses of broad-leaved trees with greyish-white skin exposed to the wind... Of course, he especially loved the the white birches, with their fragile branches the color of rice paper. He could not help but smile wistfully. He gazed upon the pale green bamboo, blossoming once before dying, and the flowering grasses that undulated so softly in the wind that swept down from the mountains of Nagano. Wild grasses, waterside grasses, sea grass, the mountains, the valleys, hills, swamps, rivers, fields, ditches, some paths, along the banks of fields, on footpaths, on roads, on slopes...

All of the trees and grasses rejoiced in the wind, from poisonous grasses that grew lush and richly green in the shadows of trees, the spacious villa, and the mountains, that shone green, and that converged on their dark leaves. The crisp evening breeze, the wind that carried with it the sunlight and its sweetness, the faint and whispering twilight stream, the dusky stream, and the scent of the soft wind. They were touched by the wind, blown by the wind, and gracefully shone and drifted in the sun.

But also trees and grass, as far as he know, their secret joy began in their communal life, when they touched one another leaf after leaf, stem after stem, and silently embraced each other. If there was space left between him and them, there was the medium of butterflies and bees, who exchanged their affections in the sunlight. However, even among them, there was none that rejoiced in the wind so much as the bamboo, which made use of the wind to save itself.

In the hour of the sun's loneliness, in the evening of the moonlight's lightest trembling, they were always awakened by the wind. The words of the leaves were purer than human words, but they also contained and expressed a deep heart. His own heart, weary from the relentless pursuit of meaning, finally found its release. The world, unaware of the profound loss it had just suffered, continued to turn, ignorant of the void left in the wake of his departure.

He was a child of the daylight in pale green robes, hiding in the dim and otherworldly light of green bamboo trunks.

He was a child of the night who wandered into the thicket of flowering bamboo and put his blue lips to each of the blossoms.

All that was left was the wind in the pines.

He rejoiced in the wind.