

Terror

Tanizaki Jun'ichiro

MY OBSESSION WITH the disease started around the beginning of June when I was staying in Kiyamachi. I would go out drinking and stay out late every evening. I recall being stricken by this sickness more than once while living in Tokyo. To recover, I would quit drinking, get cold-wet-towel massages, and drink memory-erasing tonics. After coming to Kyoto, I fell back into my chaotic life and reverted to my reckless ways.

My friend N-san said my illness, thinking about it now, my strange, unpleasant, and foolish illness, was probably a type of the neurosis known as *Eisenbahnkrankheit* (Railway Disease). Although it's called Railway Disease, an obsessive guy like me experiences feelings of distress and terror completely different from the drunkenness or the dizziness often experienced in boats and cars by women throughout the world.

When a train whistle blew whether I've boarded or not, or when the wheels jerked into motion or even when they remained motionless, the pulsations in the blood vessels spread throughout my body suddenly rush to the crown of my head, not unlike the stimulation from a strong shot of alcohol, and a cold sweat poured from my skin as my arms and legs trembled in a way that resembled an attack of shivering chills.

Whenever I received any sort of emergency treatment in my youth, all the blood in my body would pass through my neck to the narrow, hard, round part to fill my brain. Somehow my skull managed not to burst like a balloon forced to hold too much air.

In any event, trains run at full speed with complete serenity and remarkable energy. The life of any one person is said to matter little. Therefore, soot and smoke exploded from a chimney like a volcano. A rumbling and a cruel, fearless groan swelled. The train traveled without a moment's delay, moving through pitch-black tunnels, passing over very long, treacherous iron bridges, crossing over rivers, traversing fields, and veering around forests.

My fellow passengers possessed a relaxed air. They read newspapers, smoked cigarettes, and napped, or, to my astonishment, gazed at the scene dizzily unfolding outside.

"Somebody please help me! My head is filling with blood and I think I'm dying," burst this shout from my heart as my face paled and my breathing raced as if I were in my last moments. I ran to the lavatory to splash cold water on my face. I clung to the window frame and stomped my feet and raved frantically.

My mind was possessed by the need for a quick escape from the train. Not realizing that my clenched fists were bleeding, I banged on the panel boards of the cabin and carried on like a criminal tossed into a jail cell.

In the end, as if in a dream, I was poised to grab hold of the emergency alarm, fling open the door while the train was still in motion and leap out. But I held on until

the next stop, then my pathetic, miserable figure wobbled from the platform to the ticket gate. Strangely, my heart palpitations quieted the moment I got off the train, and the shadows of anxiety fell away layer by layer.