PART II

VISION
At noon on August 15, 1945 we were made to stand at attention in the space in front of the barracks to listen to a radio broadcast that they said was the Emperor himself, but which for the most part was so drowned out by static that we couldn’t hear a word; and then afterwards the young lieutenant ran up, ascended the platform without ceremony and said:

“Did you hear it? Did you get it? Japan has accepted the Potsdam Declaration, and surrendered. But that’s a political matter. We soldiers will continue to resist to the end, and finally we will all without exception kill ourselves, thereby expressing our apologies to the Emperor. I have already decided to do this; the rest of you must also so resolve. You understand? All right. Fall out.”

So saying, he came down from the platform and took off his glasses, and as he walked away the tears fell. I suppose that is the feeling meant by solemnity. As I stood there, stock still, the surroundings grew dark and hazy, from nowhere a cold wind blew, and my body felt as if it were about to sink to the depths of the earth of its own accord.

I thought I would do my best to die. Dying is real, I thought. The forest in front of me was unpleasantly silent, and looked jet black; from one edge of it a group of small birds flew off without a sound, like a handful of black sesame seeds thrown into the sky.

It was at that moment. From the barracks behind me I could hear faintly the sound of someone hammering a nail, toka-ton-ton. The instant I heard that—I suppose it was the feeling they mean when they say the scales fell from one’s eyes—pathos and solemnity both disappeared and I was stunned, as if a curse had been lifted, and with a feeling of total blankness I looked around at the sandy plain at noon-time in summer and had no strong emotion of any kind whatsoever.

So then I stuffed a lot of things in my rucksack, and wandered off toward home.

To an odd degree, that faint faraway sound of the hammer stripped completely from me the specter of militarism, and it seems absolutely impossible that I should ever again be intoxicated by the nightmares of either pathos or solemnity, but, as if that small sound had pierced the bull’s-eye of my brain, from that moment I have become a truly strange, loathsome, almost epileptic sort of man.

By which I do not mean that I have fierce paroxysms. It is just the opposite. When I feel deep emotion about something, when I begin