



## The Inner Me

Today's story is about an episode that happened on March 11, or as it is becoming known, '3-11'. But no, it's not about the earthquake that took place that afternoon here in Japan, it's about something that happened shortly before it.

I was down in Tokyo that day, with a whole list of 'things to do'. I had four items to check off, which is actually a lot for a single trip to town. Tokyo is a pretty big place, and unless your destinations are all in the same general area, the travel from one stop to the next usually eats up just too much time. But I had left home very early, had been very lucky with train timing, and had managed to get the first two visits taken care of before lunch. And in fact, I had now arrived at Shimokitazawa Station, the destination for my third visit, nearly an hour in advance of the previously arranged time for the appointment.

So I had a light lunch in a café, and then began to saunter around the shopping district near the station, just window shopping and killing time. At one place I saw some interesting posters in a window, and stopped to look into the shop. A row of couches was against one wall, on which a couple of people sat. In the middle of the room, facing the couches, were three people sitting on chairs, each with a kind of wooden 'table' on their lap, kind of like a TV dinner tray. On these trays were pads of paper, and by now you can guess what this place was. Yes, the couch people were 'sitting' for quick-sketch artists; this was a caricature shop - your portrait while you wait!

Well, I had a half-hour to kill, and the price (shown on their posters) was reasonable, so I went in and took my place in front of the third artist - the one with no customer. We chatted for a minute about the job, and he got to work, studying me intently for a short time, then beginning to sketch on his pad.

It seemed that the 'rules' for sitters weren't so strict, and we could relax and talk among ourselves while the work proceeded. I learned that I was the first foreigner to patronize the shop, and when I asked my artist if this made his work more difficult, he instantly rejected the idea. My face was so 'different' from his typical customer that he had no problem at all finding good ideas.

A minute later, the artist doing the customer on my left came to the end of her job, presented him with his portrait (with which he was very pleased) and then came over to see how our job was progressing. The moment she saw the partially completed sketch (which of course I couldn't see from where I sat) she burst out laughing. I was a tad nonplussed, but she quickly reassured me; she thought it was very well done. It was just that the portrait was ... interesting.

A few minutes later when he was done (and he was indeed incredibly fast), he took his phone from his pocket, quickly took a snapshot of the picture, and then one of me (after asking permission). "This is for training," he explained, telling me that this shop was actually a kind of 'front' for an art school where you could take lessons in this sort of work.

Anyway, it was now time for me to be presented with the image, and he confidently passed it over. Something I have read about portrait painters is that their work involves a kind of paradox: they have to work to

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two sometimes incompatible ideals. They have to show the true character of their client, and ... they have to keep their client happy!

In my case, did he succeed in both? Honestly speaking, I myself can't answer that. I had a definite 'start' when I saw the image - it was so intense! - but everybody who has seen it since then tells me clearly that "Yes, of course it looks like you; he did a good job!", so I suppose I have to be 'pleased' with it.

As for the 'true character' aspect though; good grief, am I *that* evil deep inside?!



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