

No Longer Human: Third Notebook (Part 1)

"The fear of human beings continued to rise... but my acting talents had unquestionably matured."

After his childhood of self-imposed isolation, Yozo is able to use his 'clown persona' to manage his anxiety about other people and successfully complete high school. He has grown into a handsome young man and perfected his clownish disguise – yet one day an unintelligent classmate called Takeichi unexpectedly sees through his act. Fearing Takeichi will expose him as a fraud, Yozo cultivates a relationship with him. One day, Takeichi shows him a Van Gogh painting which inspires Yozo to make his own artwork.

In college, Yozo becomes friends with a young wastrel called Horiki who introduces him to drink and bar crawling for women. Through Horiki, Yozo meets Tsuneko, a hostess at a bar. They form a bond and have a short relationship, soon agreeing a suicide pact. Tsuneko drowns but Yozo survives. He is disgraced by this incident; his family estranges him and he is expelled from university. He has no choice but to live with Flatfish, one of his father's political fixers.

Knowledge Check

Try to answer these questions from memory:

1. In his silly story about school, Yozo calls his geography teacher the...

- (a) Hippo
- (b) Lion
- (c) Elephant
- (d) Walrus

2. What does Yozo say will restore a woman's spirit?

- (a) Give her something sweet
- (b) Tell her funny stories
- (c) Offer her a kiss
- (d) Draw her a comic

3. What was the first prediction Takeichi makes about Yozo?

- (a) That he'll always be a liar
- (b) That he'll be a great painter
- (c) Women will fall for him
- (d) He'll make lots of money

4. From where did Horiki graduate?

- (a) Waseda University
- (b) University of Tokyo
- (c) A private art school
- (d) He didn't graduate

5. When Yozo wears glasses, who do the sisters say he looks like?

- (a) Harold Lloyd
- (b) Soseki
- (c) Takuya Kimura
- (d) Kento Yamazaki

6. What is a synonym of 'consternation'?

- (a) Surprise
- (b) Satisfaction
- (c) Settlement
- (d) Stubbornness

7. Who does Yozo show his best drawings to?

- (a) Horiki
- (b) Takeichi
- (c) The sisters
- (d) Soseki

8. Who is known as the 'lady-killer'?

- (a) Tsuneko
- (b) Yozo
- (c) Horiki
- (d) Yuan

9. When does Yozo say his 'wound of a guilty conscience' appeared?

- (a) When he was an infant
- (b) As a child
- (c) In his adolescence
- (d) He doesn't believe he has one

10. What word does Tsuneko pronounce as they fell into sleep?

- (a) Happiness
- (b) Shame
- (c) Death
- (d) Muffins

Understanding and Interpretation

1. Who is Flatfish? What is his role in the story? What does Yozo think of him?
2. What does Yozo 'learn' by visiting Horiki and sharing a meal prepared by Horiki's mother?
3. Who is Shizuko? How does she become significant to Yozo? How does she compare to other women in the story? Is she similar or different? Is a pattern emerging?
4. How do Yozo's ideas about Society develop in this notebook? What are the implications of his new understanding?
5. Who is Yoshiko? Why is his decision to marry her significant for Yozo?

Important Theme: *Self Esteem and Stigma*

“Why, I wonder, couldn’t he have mentioned the simple fact that the money would be forthcoming from home? I was left in a fog.”



Through Yozo’s struggles with his mental health and self esteem, Dezai explores the stigma that is often attached to issues such as depression, loneliness, anxiety, feelings of alienation, and suicide. While not everybody Yozo encounters is always unsympathetic, at certain times in his life people fail to support him by showing genuine sympathy or understanding. And even his friends and intimate others sometimes seem to look down on him for his inability to act like everyone else and might say or do something thoughtless when a kind word might be all Yozo needs.

The tendency to stigmatise and criticise is most apparent in the aftermath of Yozo’s failed suicide attempt. He’s taken from hospital to jail and charged with being ‘an accomplice’, effectively penalising him for struggling with depression and low self esteem. Furthermore, he is expelled from his university and his own father cuts him off, appointing an intermediary (Flatfish) to communicate in his stead. Perhaps it’s not surprising that Yozo continually retreats into alcoholism, since society repeatedly fails him, looks down on him, and even punishes him when he’s at his lowest moments. It’s hard not to conclude that Japanese society in the 1930s exacerbated rather than alleviated the unhappiness of people like Yozo by attaching stigma to issues of mental health instead of offering any kind of meaningful support.

Activity

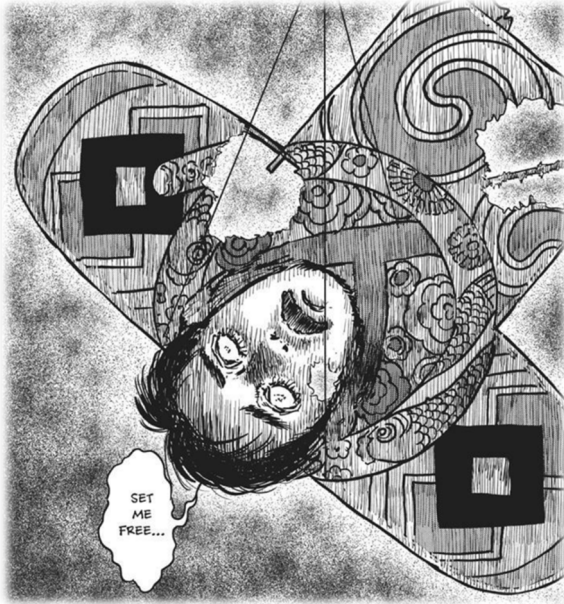
Complete the following table with specific examples of things people say and do to Yozo that may exacerbate his low self-esteem issues or stigmatize his struggles with mental health:

Character	Yozo’s vulnerability / vulnerable situation	Stigmatizing comment or action
Yozo’s father	Yozo has anxiety about disappointing his father Relies on his father’s financial support	His father expresses anger and disappointment when Yozo asks for a book as a gift (First Notebook). Later, his father cuts him off when Yozo is at his lowest point following his suicide attempt.

Character	Yozo's vulnerability / vulnerable situation	Stigmatizing / critical comment or action
Horiki		
Tsuneko		
Flatfish		
Shizuko		
Yoshiko		

Important Symbolism: *The Kite*

"It haunted me even in my dreams."



While Yozo is living with Shizuko and Shigeko he notices a kite that has gotten tangled in the wires outside the window. The kite keeps catching his eye, which draws attention to its symbolism. The forlorn and ragged kite resonates with Yozo and seems to mirror how he feels about his own life. Caught up in circumstances that are bigger than himself, tangled and trapped, and in a condition that leaves much to be desired...

Yet, like the kite, Yozo hangs on. True, he's just survived a suicide attempt, but the fact that he was unable to succeed seems to point to the idea that something is keeping him alive. The kite points to two possibilities: first, he doesn't want

to live but he's trapped, a prisoner of circumstance. Second, no matter how bad his situation gets, the simple human will to survive keeps Yozo tied to life. Perhaps he's not as 'disqualified from being human' as he thinks?

Discussion Point: *fate vs free will*

What do you think is the symbolism of the kite? Does it indicate the presence or absence of Yozo's free will? What other parts of the novel can you use to debate this topic? Note your ideas and findings here, then share your viewpoint with a classmate and see what others think:

Fate	Free Will