

*This PDF is a simplified English version of the source text below. It has been translated from Japanese by ChatGPT for intermediate English learners.

Source text:

Dazai Osamu, *Ningen Shikkaku* (No Longer Human)

Available at Aozora Bunko:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000035/card301.html>

Dazai Osamu, *No Longer Human* (Simplified Edition, Translated by ChatGPT)

Part 1

I saw three pictures of a man. I do not know his real name. Even now, I feel strange when I think about his face. The first picture showed him as a child. He stood in front of a garden wall. His hair was cut short, and he wore a light shirt. At first, I thought he looked like any other boy. But when I looked longer, I felt uneasy. His smile did not feel warm. It looked forced, like a mask placed on a small face. His eyes did not smile at all. They seemed to look somewhere far away, not at the person taking the picture.

The second picture showed him as a young man. He sat on a chair in Western clothes. The room looked simple, and light came from a window on one side. His body leaned forward a little, as if he wished to stand up but could not. Again, he smiled, but this smile felt even more painful than the first one. It was too careful, too polite. I felt that he feared something, though nothing dangerous could be seen in the picture. His eyes looked tired, as if he had already lived too long.

The third picture was the hardest to see. The man was older, but not old in years. His face looked thin and weak. His hair was not neat, and his clothes seemed heavy on him. He did not smile this time. His mouth stayed half open, and his eyes looked empty. I felt fear when I saw this picture. It did not look like the face of a living man. It looked like someone who had lost his place among people.

I later heard that the man in the pictures was called Yozo. The name stayed in my mind. After some time, I received several notebooks said to be written by him.

When I opened them, I felt a cold feeling in my chest. The writing was simple, but full of pain. These pages told the story of how he believed he had lost the right to be called human.

What follows are his own words.

Part 2

I have always been afraid of people. Since I was very small, I could not understand how human beings lived with such ease. Everyone around me laughed, spoke loudly, and showed anger or joy without fear. I watched them carefully, but their feelings were like a language I could not learn. Because I did not understand them, I feared them.

I was born into a large family in the countryside. My father was an important man who often traveled for work. Many visitors came to our house. Servants moved quietly through long halls. My brothers and sisters spoke freely, but I stayed silent most of the time. I felt like a guest inside my own home.

When adults spoke to me, I did not know how to answer. I worried that my true thoughts would make them angry or confused. So I learned another way to live. I decided to become funny. If people laughed, they would not look too closely at me. If they laughed, they would not notice my fear.

I made strange faces. I told small jokes. I fell on purpose or said foolish things at the right moment. Everyone laughed and called me a cheerful child. They said I was bright and easy to love. Each time they laughed, I felt safe for a short while. Yet inside, I felt more alone than before. My laughter was not real, but no one noticed.

At night, I often lay awake and thought about death. I did not wish to die, but I could not understand why people wished to live. The world felt heavy and unclear. I believed that everyone else knew some secret rule about life, and I alone had failed to learn it.

My father frightened me the most. He was not cruel, but his presence filled the house like a strong wind. When he returned home, everyone became careful. One

evening, before he left again for a trip, he asked each child what gift we wanted. My brothers answered quickly. My sisters spoke with smiles. When my turn came, I could not speak. My mind went empty. I did not know what a child should want.

My father looked at me with surprise. The room grew quiet. I felt cold fear rise through my body. At last, I said the first thing that entered my mind: "A lion mask." I had once seen such a mask used in a festival dance. My father laughed loudly and agreed. Everyone seemed pleased, and the danger passed. Yet I felt deep shame. Even my wishes were false.

When the lion mask arrived, I was afraid to touch it. Its wide mouth and sharp teeth looked too real. Still, I wore it and danced to make my family laugh. They clapped and praised me. Inside the mask, hidden from their eyes, I felt relief. Only when my face was covered could I breathe freely.

As I grew older, my role as the funny one became stronger. Teachers liked me because I caused no trouble. Classmates gathered around me because I made them laugh. No one guessed that I watched every movement carefully, always afraid of making a mistake. I studied people the way one studies a difficult subject, trying to copy their behavior.

One day, a servant woman who worked in our house called me into a storage room. I did not understand her intention. Her smile felt strange, and her hands held my shoulders too tightly. I froze, unable to move or speak. Fear filled me, but I could not resist. Afterward, I felt dirty and confused. I did not blame her, yet I began to believe that my life would always move in ways I could not control.

From that time, my fear of humans grew deeper. I learned that even kindness could hide danger. I laughed more than ever, using jokes like a shield. People said I was happy, but my heart felt empty.

In school, I discovered drawing. When I held a pen, my fear became smaller. I drew strange faces and funny scenes. Others praised my talent, and for the first time I felt a small sense of worth. Yet even this joy carried worry. I feared that if people looked too closely, they would see that my drawings were only another mask.

I often wondered what it meant to live honestly. Adults spoke of truth and effort,

but their actions seemed full of hidden thoughts. I could not understand how they accepted such confusion. I believed that I alone saw the world as uncertain, and that belief made me feel separated from everyone.

Still, I continued my performance. Each laugh I created built a wall between myself and others. Behind that wall, I waited quietly, hoping someone might notice the real me. No one did. And so I began to think that perhaps there was no real self inside at all, only the clown I had created to survive.

These are the earliest memories I can clearly recall. Even now, when I look back, I feel the same fear that followed me through childhood. I learned to smile before I learned to speak honestly. That smile would guide my life toward places I could not yet imagine.

Part 3

When I entered middle school, my fear of people did not grow smaller. Instead, it became sharper, like a thin needle always pressing against my chest. The school building was large, and the voices of boys filled the halls from morning until evening. They shouted, argued, laughed, and fought without hesitation. I watched them carefully, trying to learn the correct way to exist among them.

My role as a clown continued. I made funny drawings during class and passed them around. The boys laughed loudly, and teachers often forgave my poor attention because they believed I had a cheerful nature. I understood that laughter protected me. If people laughed, they would not ask serious questions. They would not look into my heart.

Yet every joke cost me strength. After school, when I walked home alone, my face felt heavy, as if the smile remained stuck there even when no one watched. I sometimes touched my cheeks to make sure they were still my own.

Around this time, I met a boy named Takeichi. He sat near me in class and did not laugh as loudly as the others. One afternoon, he watched me draw a comic picture and said quietly, "You do not really feel happy when you make these faces."

His words shocked me. I felt as if someone had suddenly opened a door I had

tried to keep locked forever. I laughed quickly and denied it, but he only nodded. “You draw serious pictures when no one looks,” he added.

I became afraid of him, yet also curious. No one had ever noticed my secret before. After that day, I allowed him to see some of my real drawings. They were darker, filled with thin lines and silent faces. Takeichi studied them carefully and said they were honest. I did not fully understand what he meant, but his calm voice made me feel strangely relieved.

For the first time, I wondered if someone might see me without laughter. Still, I could not stop acting. The habit had become my only way to live. Even with Takeichi, I often returned to jokes when silence grew too deep.

At home, my family expected me to succeed in school and later serve society as my father did. Letters from my father spoke about duty and effort. Each word felt heavy. I did not know what kind of future awaited me, only that I feared it.

During these years, I also began to feel strong shame about my own body. I avoided looking at myself in mirrors. My movements felt unnatural, as if I were pretending to be human rather than truly being one. When classmates spoke easily about dreams or love, I listened without understanding. Their confidence seemed unreal.

One evening, while returning from school, I passed a group of boys teasing a stray dog. They laughed as the animal tried to escape. I wanted to stop them, but my feet would not move. I laughed weakly along with them instead. Later, I felt deep disgust toward myself. I realized that my fear of people was stronger than my sense of right and wrong.

This realization stayed with me for many nights. I began to believe that I lacked something essential. Other people felt anger or courage naturally, but I could only adjust myself to match the crowd. I felt hollow, like an empty container shaped by others.

Around this time, books entered my life. I read stories secretly at night. In books, people spoke openly about suffering and loneliness. Their words felt closer to my own thoughts than anything I heard in daily life. Yet even these stories frightened me, because they showed emotions I could not express aloud.

My drawings changed as well. Teachers praised my skill and encouraged me to continue. Some classmates asked me to draw portraits of them. I agreed, smiling as always, but inside I feared their faces. Looking closely at another person felt dangerous, as if I might discover truths I was not ready to face.

Takeichi once said to me, “You should become an artist.” The idea shocked me. An artist seemed like someone allowed to live outside normal rules. For a moment, I imagined a life where I would not need to pretend constantly. But soon fear returned. Such freedom felt impossible for someone like me.

As graduation approached, adults began asking about my future. Their questions sounded simple, yet each one filled me with panic. I answered vaguely, copying what others said. Inside, I felt as though I stood at the edge of a wide dark space.

During our final school trip, classmates gathered at night to talk and laugh. Someone asked me to perform one of my usual comic acts. I obeyed immediately. The room filled with laughter, louder than ever before. They clapped my back and called me wonderful. At that moment, I felt completely separated from them. Their happiness seemed real, while mine existed only as performance.

Later, when everyone slept, I stayed awake alone. Moonlight entered through the window and fell across the floor. I wondered whether anyone truly knew another person. Perhaps all humans wore masks, and mine was simply easier to see.

Soon after, I left home to continue my studies in the city. My family believed this would be the beginning of a bright future. Servants prepared my luggage, and my mother spoke kindly, though she seemed distant. My father was away and sent only a short message of encouragement.

As the train moved away from the countryside, I watched the fields disappear. I felt neither sadness nor excitement, only uncertainty. I told myself that in the city I might become a new person. Perhaps I could learn how to live correctly among humans.

Yet deep inside, I carried the same fear. I knew that wherever people existed, my struggle would follow. Still, I smiled at fellow passengers and made small

jokes when spoken to. The clown traveled with me, faithful and unavoidable.

This was how my youth ended and my new life began, not with hope, but with quiet anxiety hidden behind laughter.

Part 4

Life in the city began with noise. Cars moved without rest, people hurried along the streets, and bright signs shone even at night. At first, I felt lost among so many strangers. Yet this confusion also brought a strange comfort. In the countryside, everyone knew my family. Here, no one knew me at all. I believed I might disappear into the crowd and begin again.

I entered a higher school as my family wished. Classes were difficult, but my real problem was not study. It was people. Students spoke openly about politics, art, and the future. Their confidence amazed me. They argued strongly, laughed loudly, and showed anger without fear. I listened quietly, pretending understanding while feeling empty.

My clown behavior soon returned. During breaks, I made comic drawings and silly remarks. Classmates welcomed me easily. They invited me to cafés and small gatherings. I accepted every invitation, afraid that refusal might reveal my true self. Each evening, I returned to my room exhausted, as if I had acted on a stage all day.

Around this time, I met a senior student named Horiki. He was lively and careless, always searching for pleasure. He laughed easily and treated life as a game. Unlike others, he did not expect seriousness from me. He enjoyed my jokes without asking deeper questions, and this made me feel safe near him.

One night, Horiki took me to a small bar. Smoke filled the air, and soft music played in the background. Men and women spoke closely, their voices low and relaxed. I had never entered such a place before. My heart beat quickly, but I followed him, smiling as always.

He ordered drinks for us. I hesitated at first, but he encouraged me. The alcohol burned my throat, then spread warmth through my body. For the first time, the

tight fear inside me loosened slightly. Words came more easily. I laughed without planning it. The world seemed softer, less sharp.

That night changed something in me. Alcohol became a tool, another mask that helped me face people. When I drank, my fear grew distant. I could speak freely, joke naturally, and forget my constant worry. Others praised my cheerful spirit, not knowing that the drink created it.

Horiki introduced me to many places like that bar. We stayed out late, moving from one room to another filled with laughter and smoke. I felt both excitement and deep tiredness. During the day, I struggled to attend classes. Study lost its meaning. Nights became more important than mornings.

One evening, Horiki showed me magazines filled with strange drawings and stories meant only for adults. I pretended interest, though I felt confusion and shame. He laughed at my discomfort and called me innocent. Wanting to please him, I forced myself to laugh as well.

Through Horiki, I met a woman who worked at a café. Her name was Tsuneko. She spoke softly and often looked down when talking. There was sadness in her eyes that reminded me of my own feelings. Unlike others, she did not laugh loudly at my jokes. Instead, she listened quietly.

We began meeting alone. With her, silence felt less frightening. We walked along rivers at night, speaking about small things. She told me about her difficult life and loneliness. I did not know how to comfort her, yet I felt close to her pain. For the first time, I sensed that another person might share my isolation.

Still, I could not speak honestly about myself. Even with Tsuneko, I hid behind gentle humor. I feared that if she saw my emptiness clearly, she would leave.

My money from home slowly disappeared. I spent it carelessly on drinks and entertainment, trying to keep the warm feeling that alcohol gave me. Letters from my family asked about my studies, but I delayed answering. Shame grew inside me, yet I lacked strength to change.

One rainy evening, Tsuneko and I sat together in a small room near the harbor. The sound of water filled the silence. She spoke about feeling tired of life. Her voice was calm, almost peaceful. Listening to her, I felt a strange agreement rise

within me. Life seemed heavy for both of us.

Without clear thought, we decided to travel to the sea. The decision felt unreal, like part of a dream. I did not fully understand what we planned, yet I followed her quietly. My mind moved slowly, wrapped in sadness and alcohol.

At the shore, the night air was cold. Waves struck the rocks again and again. Tsuneko held my hand tightly. I remember thinking that the sound of the sea was kind because it covered human voices. For a moment, I felt free from fear.

We walked into the water together.

What happened next remains unclear in my memory. I recall cold darkness and the heavy weight of water. Then nothing.

When I opened my eyes again, I lay in a room surrounded by strangers. I learned that I had survived. Tsuneko had not. The words reached me slowly, as if spoken from far away. People looked at me with pity and suspicion. Questions filled the air, but I could not answer them properly.

Shame and guilt pressed down on me. I believed I had failed even in death. Newspapers wrote about the incident, and my family soon learned the truth. Their disappointment felt stronger than anger. I wished I could disappear completely.

After leaving the hospital, I wandered through the city without direction. The world looked unchanged, yet I felt separated from it more than ever. People passed by, unaware of the weight I carried. I smiled automatically when spoken to, but inside I felt hollow.

This event marked the end of one part of my life. I had crossed a line I could never erase. From then on, I began to believe firmly that I was no longer qualified to live as a normal human being.

Part 5

After the incident at the sea, I could not return to school. The idea of sitting in a classroom again felt impossible. Faces of students and teachers appeared in my mind like shadows ready to judge me. Instead, I moved between cheap rooms and small cafés, trying to avoid places where I might be recognized.

My family sent letters filled with concern and quiet disappointment. They asked me to return home and recover. I could not face them. The thought of standing before my father filled me with unbearable fear. I answered only rarely, writing short messages that hid the truth.

Horiki remained beside me during this time. He treated the event lightly, as if it were only another strange story from city life. His careless attitude relieved me at first. Around him, I did not need to explain my feelings. We continued to drink together, moving from bar to bar late into the night.

Alcohol soon became necessary. Without it, my body felt cold and tense. With it, I could laugh again. People said I was lively and charming. They did not see how desperately I depended on that false warmth.

Through Horiki, I began drawing comic pictures for small magazines. The editors liked my work because it made readers laugh easily. I drew foolish characters and humorous scenes. The more painful my inner life became, the brighter my drawings appeared. Readers believed I possessed a joyful spirit. Their praise felt distant, as if meant for someone else.

One day, Horiki introduced me to a woman named Shizuko. She lived alone with her young daughter in a quiet neighborhood. Her home felt calm compared with the noisy bars I knew. The rooms were small but clean, and sunlight entered gently through the windows.

Shizuko welcomed me kindly. She did not laugh loudly or ask many questions. Instead, she treated me with simple warmth, offering tea and speaking in a soft voice. Her daughter watched me with curious eyes. At first, I felt uncomfortable in such peaceful surroundings. I feared that my presence might disturb their quiet life.

Yet I continued visiting. The child laughed at my drawings, and I performed small tricks to amuse her. Watching her honest joy gave me a feeling I could not name. It was not the sharp laughter of adults but something pure and direct. For brief moments, I forgot my fear.

Gradually, I began staying longer at their home. Shizuko allowed it without complaint. She seemed lonely, and perhaps my presence eased her days. I helped

with small tasks and drew pictures while the child played nearby. Compared with my former life, these days felt gentle and slow.

I wondered if I could live like this permanently. The thought frightened me because happiness always seemed temporary. Still, I allowed myself to imagine a quiet future.

During this period, I drank less. The peaceful rhythm of the house made alcohol seem unnecessary. My sleep improved, and mornings no longer felt unbearable. For the first time, I experienced something close to stability.

However, my fear of people never disappeared completely. When visitors came, I grew nervous and spoke too much, hiding anxiety behind jokes. After they left, exhaustion returned. I realized that even in safety, I remained unable to live naturally.

One afternoon, while Shizuko was away, I discovered money hidden inside a drawer. I do not fully understand why I took it. Perhaps old habits guided me. Perhaps fear of losing comfort pushed me toward self-destruction. The moment I held the money, shame filled me, yet I could not stop myself.

Soon afterward, guilt became unbearable. I avoided Shizuko's eyes and drank again to escape my thoughts. Alcohol quickly regained control over me. The peaceful days faded, replaced by late nights and careless behavior.

Horiki noticed my return to drinking and encouraged it. Together we visited unfamiliar districts filled with bright lights and restless crowds. I laughed loudly, but inside I felt the loss of something fragile and precious.

Eventually, Shizuko discovered the missing money. She did not accuse me directly, but sadness appeared in her expression. That quiet sadness hurt more than anger would have. Unable to endure it, I left her home without explanation. I told myself it was better for her and the child if I disappeared.

After leaving, I felt more alone than ever before. The city seemed colder, its streets endless. I wandered without purpose, carrying regret that could not be repaired. My drawings continued to appear in magazines, yet I felt no connection to them. The cheerful characters I created mocked my true state.

During this time, I began using stronger substances offered by acquaintances in

drinking houses. They promised relief from anxiety and sleep without dreams. At first, I resisted, but curiosity and despair weakened my resolve. The effects were powerful. My thoughts slowed, and reality became distant.

Dependence formed quickly. Without these substances, my body shook and my mind filled with dark thoughts. I understood that I was falling deeper into ruin, yet part of me accepted it calmly. Destruction felt easier than effort.

Occasionally, I remembered the quiet house where Shizuko and her daughter lived. The memory appeared like soft light in darkness. I wondered whether I might have lived differently if I had been stronger. Such thoughts lasted only briefly before fading under alcohol and sleep.

My family finally intervened after hearing rumors about my condition. A relative came to the city and arranged for me to rest in a rural area. I agreed without resistance. I felt too tired to oppose anything.

As I left the city again, I sensed that another stage of my life had ended. Each attempt to live normally had failed. I began to believe firmly that happiness was something I could only approach briefly before destroying it myself.

The train carried me away from familiar streets. Outside the window, fields stretched quietly under the sky. I watched them without emotion, feeling neither hope nor despair, only a dull acceptance of whatever would come next.

Part 6

The place where my family sent me was quiet and far from the city. A relative owned a house near the mountains, surrounded by fields and narrow paths. The air felt clean, and the sounds of traffic were replaced by wind and insects. At first, the silence made me uneasy. Without noise or crowds, I could not hide from my own thoughts.

The people in the house treated me gently. They spoke little about my past and encouraged me to rest. Each morning, I woke early and walked outside. The sky appeared wide and calm. Farmers worked slowly in the distance. Their movements seemed natural and steady, unlike my restless life in the city.

For several days, I avoided alcohol. My body felt weak, and sleep came in broken pieces. Dreams returned, filled with faces from my past. I often woke with fear, unsure where I was. Yet the quiet surroundings gradually softened my anxiety.

A doctor visited occasionally to check my condition. He spoke kindly and advised simple routines: regular meals, walks, and drawing. I followed his instructions without resistance. Drawing again felt different here. Without the need to entertain others, my hand moved slowly, creating simple images of trees, houses, and empty roads.

During this period, I thought often about what it meant to live honestly. I realized that I had spent my entire life reacting to others, never deciding anything for myself. Even my laughter had been chosen out of fear. This understanding did not bring relief, but it allowed me to observe my past more clearly.

Letters from my family arrived more frequently. Their tone softened, expressing hope that I would recover and return to a normal path. I felt grateful yet distant. The idea of becoming a respectable person still seemed unreal to me.

One afternoon, a woman named Yoshiko visited the house. She was a friend of my relatives and worked nearby. She spoke openly and smiled easily, but her manner carried a gentle innocence rather than loud confidence. When she laughed, it felt natural, without effort.

Unlike others, Yoshiko did not react strongly to my silence. She talked about ordinary things—the weather, small events in town, and her daily work. Listening to her calm voice brought me unexpected comfort. I did not feel pressure to perform.

Over time, she visited often. We walked together along quiet paths. Sometimes we spoke; sometimes we remained silent. I noticed that her presence reduced my fear. She trusted people easily and seemed unable to imagine cruelty. Her simple kindness felt almost unreal to me.

Gradually, I began to believe that I might live peacefully beside someone like her. The thought frightened me because hope always carried risk. Still, I allowed myself to stay close to her warmth.

Eventually, we married quietly with family approval. The ceremony was small

and simple. I felt detached, as if watching another person's life, yet also strangely calm. Yoshiko accepted me without asking about my past in detail. Her trust felt both comforting and painful, because I knew how fragile I truly was.

Our life together began gently. We lived in a modest home and followed regular routines. Yoshiko managed daily tasks with cheerful energy. I continued drawing and tried to work steadily. For a time, I drank very little. The peaceful rhythm gave me the illusion that I had escaped my former self.

Yoshiko believed in people completely. She trusted strangers, welcomed visitors warmly, and never suspected harm. I admired this quality but also feared it. To me, the world had always been dangerous. Watching her move through life without fear made me anxious for her safety.

One evening, while I was away, an acquaintance visited our home. He was someone I knew slightly from the city. When I returned, I sensed a change in Yoshiko's expression. She tried to behave normally, but her smile looked uncertain. Slowly, I understood that something painful had occurred during my absence.

She spoke hesitantly, explaining that the man had behaved improperly. Her words were simple, without anger or blame. She seemed more confused than hurt, unable to understand why someone would act that way. Listening to her, I felt intense shock and rage, emotions I had rarely experienced before.

Yet alongside anger came another feeling—despair. Yoshiko's innocence, which I had admired, now appeared fragile and easily broken. I blamed myself for leaving her unprotected. At the same time, I felt powerless to repair what had happened.

After that day, my stability collapsed. Alcohol returned quickly, stronger than before. I drank to escape images in my mind and the guilt that followed me constantly. Yoshiko tried to help, speaking gently and encouraging rest, but her kindness only deepened my shame.

I began staying out late again, visiting old drinking places. Friends from the past welcomed me, unaware of the struggle inside me. Nights blurred together. Mornings brought regret and physical pain. My work suffered, and drawings lost

their energy.

Yoshiko continued trusting me despite everything. Her patience felt unbearable. I believed she deserved a better life than the one I offered. Instead of motivating change, this belief pushed me further into self-destruction.

Eventually, my drinking led to serious illness. My body weakened, and I could not stand steadily. Family members intervened once more, arranging medical care. I agreed passively, feeling that events moved without my control.

As I entered treatment, I sensed that another stage of my life was ending. Each attempt at happiness had slipped away through my own weakness. I began to accept the idea that I existed outside ordinary human life, observing it from a distance but never fully joining it.

Even so, a small part of me still remembered the quiet walks with Yoshiko and the peaceful mornings in the countryside. Those memories remained faint lights within my growing darkness, reminding me that for a short time, I had almost believed in the possibility of living as a human being.

Part 7

The place where I was taken this time was not a quiet home but a hospital. The building stood behind a high fence, and its windows were covered with metal bars. When I first saw it, I felt no surprise. Somewhere inside, I had expected my life to arrive at such a place.

Nurses guided me through long white halls that smelled of medicine. Their voices were calm and professional. They asked simple questions about my health and habits. I answered honestly because hiding the truth no longer seemed useful. My body felt weak, and my thoughts moved slowly, as if covered by fog.

The doctors spoke among themselves about rest and treatment. I heard words about alcohol dependence and nervous exhaustion. Their explanations sounded distant, like conversations about another person. I accepted everything quietly. Resistance required strength I no longer possessed.

Days inside the hospital followed strict rules. We woke early, ate meals at fixed

times, and spent long hours resting. Some patients spoke loudly or laughed without reason. Others sat silently, staring at nothing. Watching them, I felt neither fear nor superiority. I simply felt that I belonged among them.

At first, my body struggled without alcohol. My hands shook, and sleep refused to come. Nights stretched endlessly. I listened to footsteps in the halls and the quiet breathing of other patients. Memories returned one by one—faces from childhood, laughter in classrooms, the sound of the sea. Each memory carried regret.

Gradually, the physical pain lessened. My thoughts became clearer, though clarity brought new discomfort. Without the fog of drink, I could see my life plainly. I understood how often I had escaped responsibility by pretending weakness. This realization did not make me stronger; it only deepened my sadness.

Occasionally, visitors came. Family members spoke gently, encouraging recovery. Yoshiko visited as well. She smiled softly and spoke as if nothing had changed. Her kindness filled me with both gratitude and despair. I believed I had destroyed her happiness, yet she continued to trust me.

During one visit, she brought small drawing materials. “You may feel better if you draw,” she said. Her voice carried simple hope. I accepted the gift and began sketching again. My drawings now appeared quiet and empty—simple rooms, chairs, and windows with no people inside. Nurses sometimes praised them, but their words meant little to me.

Conversations with doctors focused on returning to normal society. They spoke about work, family responsibility, and healthy habits. I listened politely, yet I could not imagine such a future. The idea of living confidently among people still felt impossible.

One afternoon, I sat in the hospital garden. The sky was clear, and sunlight touched the ground gently. A patient nearby laughed suddenly, then began to cry. No one reacted strongly; such behavior was common here. Watching him, I realized how thin the line was between ordinary life and madness. Perhaps that line had never truly existed.

I began writing during this period. At first, I wrote only short notes about daily

events. Slowly, these notes turned into longer reflections about my past. Writing allowed me to observe myself from a distance. For the first time, I described my fear openly without hiding behind humor.

I wrote about childhood laughter, about Takeichi's words, about Tsuneko and the sea, about Shizuko's quiet home, and about Yoshiko's innocent trust. Each memory appeared clearer on paper than in my mind. Writing did not heal me, but it gave shape to confusion.

The doctors encouraged this activity, believing it helped recovery. I continued filling notebook after notebook. Sometimes I felt relief after writing; other times I felt empty. Still, I could not stop. These pages became the only honest conversation I had ever held.

Months passed. My physical condition improved, and the staff spoke about discharge. Instead of relief, I felt anxiety. Outside the hospital waited the same human world that had always frightened me. Inside these walls, expectations were simple. Outside, masks would again be required.

Eventually, arrangements were made for me to live under family supervision in the countryside. The decision felt final, like the closing of a long chapter. Nurses wished me well, and doctors reminded me to avoid alcohol. I thanked them politely, though I doubted my own strength.

On the day of departure, Yoshiko came to accompany me. She held my belongings and spoke cheerfully about beginning again. Her faith in the future seemed unbroken. I walked beside her quietly, unsure whether I deserved such kindness.

As we left the hospital grounds, I turned once to look back at the building. Instead of fear, I felt a strange calm. That place had shown me my true condition without disguise. I realized that my struggle was not against society alone but against my own inability to trust life.

Returning to the countryside felt different from before. I no longer expected transformation. I simply followed the path prepared for me. Days passed slowly, filled with routine and silence. I wrote frequently, describing thoughts that came and went like passing clouds.

During this time, I began to accept an idea that once terrified me: perhaps I was not suited for ordinary human happiness. This acceptance did not feel tragic or dramatic. It felt quiet, almost peaceful. Expectations faded, and with them, a portion of my fear.

Still, memories remained. Sometimes I recalled childhood laughter or the warmth of evenings with friends. These memories did not hurt as sharply as before. They appeared distant, like scenes from another person's life.

I continued writing, believing that these notebooks might one day explain who I had been. Whether anyone would read them did not matter. Writing itself became my final attempt to understand the meaning of my existence.

Thus, my days moved forward calmly, without strong hope or deep despair. I lived, observed, and recorded. And slowly, I came to believe that my story was not one of sudden tragedy but of gradual separation from the world of ordinary human beings.

Part 8

Life in the countryside continued quietly after my return from the hospital. Each morning began in the same way. I woke early, washed my face, and sat near the window to watch the light move across the fields. The steady rhythm of nature felt distant from human worries. Days passed without strong emotion, neither happy nor painful.

Yoshiko cared for the house with gentle energy. She spoke to neighbors easily and smiled at everyone she met. Watching her, I often felt as if she belonged to a different world—a world where trust came naturally and fear had little power. I admired her strength but also felt ashamed beside it.

I tried to work again by drawing illustrations for magazines. Editors still accepted my work, though my style had changed. The jokes appeared softer, less lively. Readers might not have noticed, but I understood that the laughter inside my drawings no longer came from effort to entertain. It came from habit alone.

Alcohol remained a danger. At first, I avoided it carefully, remembering the

hospital and the promises I had made. Yet memories of past comfort returned whenever anxiety grew strong. Sometimes I walked past small shops where bottles stood behind glass. I slowed my steps, arguing silently with myself before continuing forward.

Yoshiko trusted me completely. She never checked my actions or questioned my movements. Her faith should have encouraged me, but instead it created pressure. I feared disappointing her again. This fear often turned into quiet despair.

One evening, an old acquaintance visited unexpectedly. He brought stories of the city and offered drinks as a friendly gesture. I hesitated only briefly before accepting. The familiar warmth spread through my body, awakening memories of easier laughter. For a moment, I felt alive again.

That single evening led to another, then another. Soon I began drinking secretly. I hid bottles and lied about my condition. Each lie increased my shame, yet stopping felt impossible. The old cycle returned quickly, stronger than before.

My health weakened again. Sleep became irregular, and my hands trembled slightly. Yoshiko noticed but spoke gently, hoping kindness would help me recover. Her patience felt endless. I often wished she would become angry, because anger might have been easier to face than quiet concern.

During this period, writing became more intense. I filled pages rapidly, describing memories with painful clarity. I wrote about fear of people, about laughter used as defense, and about my belief that I had never truly belonged among humans. The notebooks grew thicker, forming a record of thoughts I had never spoken aloud.

Sometimes, after writing for hours, I felt sudden exhaustion and lay down without removing my clothes. Dreams came filled with mixed images—childhood gardens, city lights, hospital halls, and endless water. I often woke unsure which memories were real and which belonged only to dreams.

My family visited occasionally. They spoke about practical matters and encouraged stability. Their kindness felt formal, as if they no longer expected full recovery but hoped for peaceful survival. I sensed their quiet resignation and felt strangely relieved. Expectations had finally grown smaller.

One afternoon, while walking alone, I watched children playing near a field. Their laughter sounded natural and free. I realized that I had once imitated such laughter without understanding it. Instead of sadness, I felt gentle acceptance. Perhaps my life had followed a different path from the beginning.

I began to see myself not as a tragic figure but as someone simply unsuited to ordinary life. This thought removed some of my fear. If I could not become like others, then constant struggle might no longer be necessary.

Still, moments of regret appeared unexpectedly. When Yoshiko smiled or spoke about future plans, I felt pain knowing I could not share her hope fully. I worried that my presence limited her happiness. Yet she never expressed complaint.

My writing eventually turned toward conclusion. I sensed that my story approached its natural end, not through dramatic events but through understanding. I reviewed earlier pages and noticed how often I had tried to explain myself through humor or excuse. Now I wrote more directly, accepting responsibility for my actions without defense.

I described my belief that fear had guided every choice I made. Fear of rejection, fear of judgment, fear of being seen honestly. To escape that fear, I had worn masks—laughter, alcohol, dependence on others. Each mask protected me briefly but separated me further from real connection.

As these thoughts settled, my emotions became calmer. I no longer searched for meaning or redemption. Instead, I focused on recording events exactly as I remembered them. Writing felt like placing stones one by one to mark the path of my life.

One evening, after finishing several pages, I sat quietly beside Yoshiko while she prepared tea. The room felt warm and peaceful. I realized that despite everything, moments of kindness had existed throughout my life. They had not saved me, but they had allowed me to continue living.

I felt gratitude toward those moments—toward Takeichi's understanding, Tsuneko's shared loneliness, Shizuko's gentle home, and Yoshiko's enduring trust. Remembering them softened the harsh judgment I once held against myself.

My notebooks neared completion. I sensed that once they were finished, I

would have nothing more to explain. The act of writing itself felt like farewell—not to life entirely, but to the struggle to define myself.

As I prepared the final pages, I understood that my story was not meant to justify my existence. It was only a record of one person who could not learn the simple art of being human among humans.

With that understanding, I continued writing, slowly approaching the end of my account.

Part 9

I now write these final pages with a calm mind. The act of writing has changed me slightly. Not in the sense of becoming stronger or happier, but in learning to observe myself without panic. My memories no longer rush forward with sharp pain. They arrive quietly, like distant sounds carried by wind.

When I look back on my childhood, I see a boy trying desperately to avoid fear. I do not hate that child anymore. He did what he believed necessary to survive. His laughter was not deception alone; it was also a form of protection. Understanding this allows me to forgive him a little.

I once believed that I alone failed to understand humanity. Now I wonder whether many people feel similar confusion but hide it better. Perhaps everyone carries private fear. The difference is that others learn to continue living despite it, while I allowed fear to guide every decision.

Yoshiko continues to live beside me with gentle patience. She speaks of ordinary matters each day—meals, weather, neighbors, small events that shape daily life. Listening to her, I sometimes feel peaceful. At other times, I feel like a visitor observing a world that belongs to someone else.

My health remains uncertain. Some days I feel clear and steady; other days weakness returns suddenly. Doctors advise rest and moderation. I follow their guidance as best I can, though I no longer expect complete recovery. Acceptance has replaced struggle.

Recently, I reread my notebooks from the beginning. The early pages felt

written by another person. The voice there trembles with fear and confusion. As the story continues, I see moments where hope appeared briefly before fading again. Reading these pages made me realize how long I have searched for a place where I could exist without pretending.

I do not know whether such a place truly exists. Yet writing has given me a small sense of completion. By placing my memories into words, I have created distance between myself and them. They no longer move freely inside my mind; they remain quietly on paper.

Sometimes I imagine a reader opening these notebooks in the future. Perhaps that person will feel pity or confusion. Perhaps they will judge me harshly. None of these reactions matter greatly now. My purpose has been only to speak honestly at last.

I think often about the idea of being human. For many years, I believed I had lost the right to call myself one. Now I am less certain. Maybe humanity does not require strength or success. Maybe it exists even within weakness and failure. If so, then my life, with all its mistakes, may still belong within the human world.

This thought does not bring joy, but it brings quiet relief.

Outside the window, seasons continue to change. Spring arrives slowly, covering fields with soft color. Children's voices carry through the air. Life moves forward without asking whether I understand it. Watching this steady movement, I feel neither envy nor anger.

I have stopped searching for dramatic meaning. Instead, I notice small details—the sound of rain against the roof, the warmth of tea in my hands, the simple presence of another person nearby. These moments feel real in a way that laughter once pretended to be.

Occasionally, regret returns. I remember those I hurt through weakness or selfishness. I know apologies cannot repair everything. Still, I hold gratitude for the kindness I received despite my failures. Without such kindness, I might not have survived long enough to write these words.

As I approach the end of this account, I feel no desire to add explanations or excuses. My life has unfolded exactly as written here. Each event followed the

previous one naturally, shaped by fear, chance, and my own decisions.

The clown I created in childhood still exists within me, but he is quieter now. I no longer rely on him constantly. Silence has become easier to accept. When conversation ends, I do not rush to fill it with jokes. I simply remain present.

I do not know what future awaits me. Perhaps calm days will continue; perhaps new difficulties will appear. For the first time, uncertainty does not terrify me completely. I accept that life may remain unclear until its end.

These notebooks represent my attempt to understand myself and to leave an honest record behind. Whether they succeed is not for me to decide. My task has been only to write.

Now, as I place my pen down, I feel a quiet stillness. The story I have carried for so long has reached its natural conclusion. There is nothing more to add.

This is the end of my confession.

Part 10

I finished reading Yozo's notebooks late at night. When I closed the final page, I remained seated for a long time without moving. Outside, the street had grown quiet, and only distant footsteps could be heard. The room felt heavier than before, as if the air itself carried the weight of his words.

The handwriting throughout the notebooks was careful but uneven. In earlier pages, the lines moved quickly, sometimes crowded together. In later sections, the writing became slower and more controlled. It seemed as though Yozo had gradually learned to face his memories without rushing away from them.

I first met Yozo several years before receiving these notebooks. At that time, he already appeared fragile, though he tried to hide it behind polite smiles. Many people described him as gentle and amusing. Few noticed the deep uncertainty in his eyes. After reading his account, I understood that what appeared to others as kindness was often fear.

The woman who gave me the notebooks spoke about him quietly. She said that after writing them, Yozo lived calmly for a period of time in the countryside. He

avoided crowds and rarely traveled. Those who met him during those years remembered him as quiet and harmless, someone who caused no trouble.

She also told me that he no longer drank as heavily as before. His health remained weak, but his behavior grew steady. He spent long hours writing or drawing alone. Sometimes he helped with small tasks around the house. His life, she said, became simple and limited.

Listening to her, I wondered whether Yozo had finally found a form of peace. Not happiness in the usual sense, but a state where fear no longer ruled every moment. The notebooks suggested such a possibility, though they never claimed complete recovery.

The three photographs I had seen earlier returned to my mind. The child with the forced smile, the young man leaning forward uncertainly, and the exhausted figure whose eyes seemed empty. After reading his words, those images changed meaning. They no longer appeared strange or frightening. Instead, they felt deeply human.

I realized that Yozo had spent his entire life believing himself separated from humanity, yet his suffering resembled struggles shared by many people. His fear, his longing for acceptance, and his repeated failures were not signs of inhumanity but expressions of painful sensitivity.

The woman who entrusted me with the notebooks said one final thing before leaving. She smiled gently and said, "He was always kind." Her words remained with me long afterward. Kindness was not a quality Yozo often granted himself, yet others remembered it clearly.

As dawn approached, light entered the room slowly. I placed the notebooks together and tied them carefully with string. I felt responsibility toward the story they contained. These pages were not written for fame or sympathy. They were simply an honest record of one person's struggle to live among others.

I do not know how readers will judge Yozo. Some may see weakness. Others may feel compassion. Perhaps many will feel both at once. What remains certain is that he tried, in his own way, to understand life and his place within it.

The world outside continued as always. People hurried to work, spoke with

friends, and laughed without knowing his story. Yet after reading his words, I found myself looking more carefully at faces around me, wondering what hidden fears might exist behind ordinary expressions.

Yozo once wrote that he believed he had lost the right to be human. After finishing his notebooks, I cannot agree with that judgment. His confusion, pain, and desire for connection reveal a deeply human heart, even if he himself could never fully accept it.

I placed the photographs beside the notebooks and looked at them one last time. The expressions no longer seemed empty. Instead, they appeared fragile, searching, and quietly sincere.

With that thought, I closed the box containing his writings.