

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

Masaru Uchida, Gifu University

Publication webpage:

[https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated\\_graded\\_readers.html](https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated_graded_readers.html)

Publication date: March 18, 2026

### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice. The text was translated from Japanese into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

The adaptation aims to improve readability while preserving the narrative content and spirit of the original work.

### **Source Text**

Original work: Gan (雁)

Author: Mori Ōgai (森鷗外)

Source: Aozora Bunko (青空文庫)

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/>

Original Japanese text available at:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000129/card45224.html>

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Mori Ōgai, *The Wild Geese [Gan]* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the Japanese by ChatGPT)

## Part 1

It is an old story. I remember clearly that it happened in the year 1880. You may ask why I remember the exact year so well. The reason is simple. At that time, I lived in a boarding house called Kamijo, which stood just across from the main gate of the medical school of Tokyo University. In that house, I had a room next to the young man who became the center of this story. Later, in the following year, the house burned down, and I was one of the people who lost everything in that fire. Because the fire happened the year after this story, I cannot forget when it took place.

Most of the people who lived in Kamijo were medical students. A few were patients who came to the university hospital. In such boarding houses, there is usually one person who stands out. He has money, he speaks easily, and he knows how to behave. When he passes the landlady, he always greets her. Sometimes he even sits and talks with her, as if he were part of the family. He may order food and drink, and it looks as if he is troublesome, but in truth he brings profit to the house. Because of this, he is respected. Other students follow him, and he gains influence without trying. This is the usual case.

However, the man who lived next to me was different. His name was Okada. He was one year younger than I was, and he was already close to graduation. “You must know what kind of man he was,” someone might say. If I had to begin, I would start with his appearance. “He is very handsome,” I would answer at once. But I do not mean a weak or pale beauty. His face had color, and his body was strong. I had almost never seen such a face before.

One day, long after that time, I met a writer named Kawakami Bizan in his youth. Looking at him, I thought, “Ah, he is a little like Okada.” But even then, Okada had a better body. He had been a rowing athlete, and his strength was clear to anyone who saw him. “A face like that must make life easy,” someone might

say. Yet appearance alone is not enough to gain respect in a boarding house.

“Then what about his character?” you may ask. I can answer that without hesitation. Okada lived a well-balanced life. He was not the kind of student who studied day and night to win the highest place. But he always did what was necessary. He never fell behind. At the same time, he knew how to enjoy himself. After dinner, he always went out for a walk. Before ten o’clock, he always returned. On Sundays, he went rowing or took long walks outside the city. His life moved like a clock.

“Is he always like that?” I once asked another student. The student laughed and said, “Yes, always. If you lose track of time, just look at Okada.” In fact, even the clock in the house was sometimes corrected by his watch. Because of this, everyone trusted him. The landlady often said, “Look at Okada. That is how a student should be.” When she said this, some students would smile and answer, “We cannot all be like him.” In this way, without trying, Okada became the model student of the house.

At first, I did not speak to him much. I was not a sociable person. Even if I met someone every day, I would not greet him unless I had a reason. I rarely even removed my hat to the other students in the house. So it was natural that I and Okada, though we lived side by side, did not become friends at once. Still, we saw each other often, and I began to notice him more and more.

Our connection began in a simple way. Both of us liked old books. I often walked through the streets of Hongo, Shitaya, and Kanda, stopping whenever I saw a secondhand bookstore. One day, I found Okada standing in front of such a shop. He turned, saw me, and said with a small smile, “You come here often, don’t you?” I answered, “Yes. And you too, it seems.” He laughed softly and said, “Then we must have the same habit.”

From that day, we began to speak more freely. When we met in front of a bookstore, we would stop and talk. “Have you found anything interesting?” he would ask. “Not today,” I would answer. “But I am still looking.” Sometimes he would show me a book and say, “This one looks promising.” In this way, our conversations grew, and before long we began to visit each other’s rooms. What

had been only a wall between us slowly disappeared.

Looking back now, I think that this quiet beginning was the first step toward everything that followed. At that time, however, I did not think much about it. I only felt that I had found a pleasant companion. If someone had told me then, “This man will become part of a strange and sad story,” I would have laughed and said, “That is impossible.” But life often begins quietly, without any sign of what is to come.

## Part 2

Okada’s daily life was so regular that one could almost predict each hour without looking at a clock. “You will go out now, won’t you?” I once said to him after supper. He nodded and answered, “Yes, I always take a walk at this time. It clears the mind.” Then he put on his coat and left the house with calm steps. Watching him, I sometimes wondered whether such order was natural to him or something he had trained himself to follow.

His route was almost always the same. He would go down the quiet slope of Muenzaka, where few people passed in the evening. Then he would walk along the northern edge of Shinobazu Pond, whose dark water lay still like ink. From there, he would wander up toward Ueno. “Do you never grow tired of the same path?” I asked him one day. He smiled and replied, “No. A path becomes more interesting the more you know it.”

After leaving the hill, he would pass through the lively streets of Hirokoji and Nakamachi. There were shops full of light and noise, and people moved about with energy. Yet Okada did not stay long in such places. “It is too crowded here,” he would say. “I prefer quieter streets.” Then he would turn toward Yushima Shrine, pass through its grounds, and return by a narrow road. In this way, his walk formed a circle that brought him back home before ten o’clock.

Sometimes, however, he chose a different way. “Today I will go through the university,” he once told me. “The main gate will be closed, but I can pass through the side entrance.” He explained this as if it were a small adventure. “From there,”

he added, "I will go toward the Kanda area and then return." Even when he changed his route, there was always a kind of order in his movement.

During these walks, he did very little that could be called unusual. He did not meet friends, nor did he visit tea houses. "What do you do while you walk?" I asked him. He thought for a moment and said, "I look, and sometimes I think. That is enough." The only place where he often stopped was in front of secondhand bookstores. He would stand quietly, looking at the books, and sometimes step inside.

In those days, such shops were common in several streets. "There used to be more of them," I said once. Okada nodded and replied, "Yes, but some have already disappeared." He seemed to remember each shop as if it were a person. "This one is good," he would say. "The owner understands books." Then he would add, "But that one—no, I never find anything there." His tone was always calm, but there was a clear difference in his judgment.

His interest in books was not that of a scholar who reads everything deeply. "I read what interests me," he once explained. "No more, no less." At that time, modern literature was still developing, and the works available were limited. We read old Chinese-style poems and essays, and sometimes translations of foreign stories. "This is curious," I said once, holding a translated novel. Okada looked at it and answered, "Yes, but it feels distant. Still, it is worth reading."

Because of this shared interest, our conversations grew longer. Sometimes we stood in front of a shop and spoke for many minutes. "If you had more time, would you read more seriously?" I asked him. He shook his head and said, "No. I think this is enough. Life should not be only study." Then he added with a faint smile, "You agree, don't you?" I answered, "Yes, I do."

Little by little, I began to feel that I understood him. He was not a man of strong passions. He did not chase after anything with great desire. Instead, he kept a steady balance in all things. "Too much of anything is not good," he once said. "Even ambition must have limits." At the time, I thought this was a wise way to live.

And yet, there was something in him that I could not fully grasp. Sometimes,

when he stood silently in front of a shop or looked into the distance during a walk, his expression changed. “What are you thinking about?” I asked him once. He hesitated for a moment, then answered, “Nothing in particular.” But I felt that this was not entirely true.

Looking back now, I believe that even then, something was beginning to move within him, though neither he nor I could clearly see it. His life appeared calm and orderly, but beneath that surface, there was space for something unexpected to enter. At the time, however, I did not imagine that such a change would come from a place as quiet as Muenzaka, or from a person as silent as the one he would soon meet.

### Part 3

It was early autumn when the change began. The air had become cooler, and fewer people came out in the evening. On such a night, Okada left the house after supper, as he always did. “I will take my usual walk,” he said. I answered lightly, “Then I will see you before ten.” He nodded and went out, his steps as steady as ever.

He passed through the university grounds and came down toward Muenzaka. The slope was quiet, and the houses on both sides stood in silence. On one side rose an old stone wall, covered with moss and small plants. On the other side were narrow houses, most of them simple and poor. “It is always quiet here,” he had once said to me. “Too quiet for most people, perhaps.”

That evening, as he began to descend the slope, he noticed a woman walking ahead of him. She seemed to be returning from a public bath. In her hand she carried a small basket filled with a towel and other things. “It is unusual to see someone at this hour,” he thought. Still, he paid little attention at first and continued walking.

The woman reached a small house and stopped in front of its lattice door. Just as she was about to open it, she heard the sound of Okada’s footsteps behind her. She paused, her hand still on the door, and turned around. Their eyes met for a

brief moment. “Ah,” Okada thought, “she has noticed me.” He felt no strong emotion, only a slight awareness of her presence.

She wore a simple dark garment, and her figure was slender. Her hair was neatly arranged, and her face was long and pale. There was something quiet about her expression, almost sad, though not clearly so. Okada looked at her for a second, then passed by without stopping. By the time he reached the bottom of the slope, he had already forgotten her.

“Did anything interesting happen on your walk?” I asked him later that night. He shook his head and replied, “No, nothing at all.” His answer was simple, and he seemed to believe it. At that moment, the woman had left no clear mark in his mind.

However, two days later, he again chose the same route. As he approached the house where he had seen the woman, something came back to him. “There was someone here,” he thought suddenly. He slowed his steps and glanced toward the house. “I wonder if she is there again,” he said to himself.

The window beside the door was slightly open. Inside, he could see a potted plant placed near the edge. The room behind it was dim, and nothing moved. “Perhaps I imagined it,” he thought. Still, he did not look away at once. Because of this small delay, he arrived directly in front of the house more slowly than usual.

At that moment, something unexpected happened. From the dark background inside the room, a white face appeared. It was the same woman. She was looking out through the window, and as their eyes met, she gave a faint smile. “She is looking at me,” Okada thought, surprised. He did not know how to respond, and so he simply continued walking.

That night, when he returned, he seemed slightly different. “You are late today,” I said. He answered, “Only a little.” Then he added, after a pause, “There is a house on Muenzaka. I had not noticed it before.” I asked, “What kind of house?” He replied, “A quiet one. Very quiet.”

From that day on, whenever he passed that place, he could not help but look toward the window. Sometimes the woman was there, sometimes not. “Do you think she is waiting?” he asked me once, half in jest. I answered, “How should I

know?” He smiled and said, “Yes, of course.”

Yet, even as he spoke lightly, the question remained in his mind. Each time he saw her, the image stayed a little longer than before. What had been a moment soon became a habit, and what had been a habit slowly began to take on meaning. Without realizing it, Okada had begun to expect that face at the window, and his quiet walk along Muenzaka was no longer the same as it had been before.

#### Part 4

After that, it became almost certain that Okada would see her whenever he passed the house. “She is there again,” he would think, even before he reached the window. And indeed, more often than not, her face would appear from within the dim room. She did not speak, and neither did he. They only looked at each other for a brief moment as he walked by.

At first, he tried not to give it much importance. “It is nothing,” he told himself. “She only happens to be near the window.” Yet this explanation did not fully satisfy him. One evening, he said to me, “Do you think it is possible that someone would stand at a window every day for no reason?” I answered, “Perhaps she simply likes the air.” He smiled slightly and said, “Yes, perhaps.”

Still, the thought did not leave him. As he walked, he began to wonder, “Was she there before, and I did not notice? Or has she only recently begun to appear?” He tried to remember the past, but no clear answer came. “I cannot recall seeing her earlier,” he said quietly one night. “Then maybe she was not there,” I replied. He shook his head. “Or maybe I simply did not see.”

The house itself had always been quiet. Next to it was a busier home where women worked at sewing, their voices often heard through the open windows. Compared to that place, this house seemed even more silent. “It is strange,” Okada said. “Such a quiet house, and yet someone is always at the window.” I answered, “That makes it less quiet, does it not?” He laughed softly. “Yes, I suppose it does.”

As days passed, the small exchange of glances became something expected. “If she is not there today, I feel something is missing,” he admitted once. I looked at

him and said, "Then you are already accustomed to it." He did not deny it. Instead, he said, "It is only a habit. Nothing more." Yet his voice was not entirely certain.

About two weeks after their first meeting, something changed. As he approached the house one evening, he saw her at the window as usual. Without thinking, he removed his hat and bowed slightly. "Why did I do that?" he later asked himself. The action had been so natural that he could not explain it.

The woman seemed surprised. Her pale face suddenly became red, and her quiet smile turned into something brighter. She did not move away. Instead, she looked at him more directly than before. "She understood," Okada thought. He felt a faint warmth in his chest, though he could not say what it meant.

That night, he told me what had happened. "I greeted her," he said. I looked at him with interest. "And what did she do?" He answered, "She smiled." After a short silence, I asked, "Will you greet her again?" He replied, "Yes, I think I will." Then he added, almost to himself, "It would be strange not to."

From that day on, the greeting became a rule. Each time he passed, he would remove his hat, and she would respond with a slight smile. No words were exchanged, yet something like an understanding grew between them. "It is curious," he said once. "We do not speak, and yet it feels as if we have spoken."

I asked him, "Do you wish to know who she is?" He paused and then answered, "I have thought about it." "And?" I said. He shook his head. "No. I do not think I will ask." "Why not?" I pressed. He replied quietly, "It may change things."

There was a kind of balance in this silent exchange, and he seemed unwilling to disturb it. "If I learn too much," he said, "it may no longer be what it is now." I understood his feeling, though I could not fully explain it. It was as if the unknown itself had value, and to remove it would be to lose something.

In this way, what had begun as a chance meeting became a fixed part of his daily life. The walk, the slope, the house, and the woman at the window—all these formed a small world that belonged only to him. And though nothing more had happened, that small world had already begun to take a quiet hold over his thoughts.

## Part 5

Although this silent exchange continued day after day, Okada made no effort to learn anything more about the woman. “You could at least read the name on the door,” I once suggested. He answered at once, “Yes, I could.” But then he added, “When she is there, I feel it would be rude to look. And when she is not, I do not wish to stand there alone.” His reasoning was simple, yet it showed a certain hesitation.

“Then you do not even know her name?” I asked. He smiled faintly and said, “No, I do not.” I laughed and replied, “That is a strange kind of acquaintance.” He answered, “Perhaps. But it is enough.” There was no impatience in his voice. Rather, he seemed content with the distance that remained between them.

Still, he had formed some idea about her situation. “She is probably not living freely,” he said one evening. “What do you mean?” I asked. He paused before answering, as if choosing his words. “A woman like that, in such a house—she is likely kept by someone.” I looked at him and said, “And that does not trouble you?” He shook his head slightly. “No. It is simply how things are.”

His attitude surprised me. “You speak as if it has nothing to do with you,” I said. He replied calmly, “It does not. I only pass by.” Yet after a moment, he added, “Still, I do not wish to think badly of her.” This was not a strong feeling, but it was clear that he had already given her a place in his thoughts.

In truth, Okada had a particular way of thinking about women. “A woman should remain beautiful,” he once said. “No matter her situation.” I asked, “Is that possible?” He answered, “I believe so.” Then he explained, “Even if her life is difficult, she should preserve what is gentle and pleasing. That is what gives her value.”

I could not fully agree, but I listened. “Where did you learn such an idea?” I asked. He smiled and said, “From books, perhaps.” He often read old stories about women who remained graceful even in sorrow. “There is something moving in such figures,” he added. “They seem to stand apart from ordinary life.”

It seemed to me that he was beginning to see the woman at the window in this

way. “You imagine too much,” I said once. He replied, “Perhaps. But it does no harm.” His tone was light, yet I felt that his imagination was growing stronger with each passing day.

Meanwhile, he continued his walks as before. He did not change his route, nor did he try to approach the house more closely. “I will not go beyond this,” he said. I asked, “Why not?” He answered, “Because it is not necessary.” Then he added, “If something is complete as it is, it should remain so.”

And yet, even as he spoke these words, there were moments when he seemed uncertain. “Do you think she notices me?” he asked one night. I replied, “Of course she does. You greet her every day.” He nodded slowly and said, “Yes. That is true.” But his expression suggested that this simple fact had begun to carry more weight than before.

The small world he had formed around that house and that window continued to deepen. Each glance, each slight smile, added something that could not easily be explained. Though no words were spoken, the silence between them was no longer empty. It held a quiet meaning, one that Okada felt but could not clearly name.

Looking back now, I believe that this was the moment when his calm and balanced life first began to shift. It was not a sudden change, nor was it visible to others. But within him, something had taken root. And like many such things, it began not with action, but with a feeling that slowly grew in silence.

## Part 6

While Okada’s thoughts were quietly changing, the story of the woman had already moved through many turns before he ever saw her. At that time, I did not know these things. I learned them later, piece by piece, from people who had heard them from others. “You should know how she came to live there,” an acquaintance once told me. “Otherwise, you will not understand the whole matter.” What I tell now is based on such accounts.

The woman’s name was Otama. She had once lived with her father in a poor

neighborhood. Her father made small figures from sugar and sold them in the streets. "We have little," he would say, "but we have enough to live." Otama, who had lost her mother early, stayed close to him and helped in small ways. "Father, I will work harder," she often said. He would smile and answer, "No, you must not trouble yourself too much."

Their life was simple, but not unhappy. Otama was known as a gentle and quiet girl. "She is a good child," neighbors would say. "Too good for such a hard life." Her father heard such words and felt both pride and worry. "What will become of her?" he would think when he was alone. Yet he could not find a clear answer.

It was during this time that a man came into their lives. He was a policeman. He began to visit the house and spoke kindly to both father and daughter. "You must not be afraid," he said. "I will take care of things." The father, who had little experience with such matters, trusted him. "He seems an honest man," he told Otama. She said nothing, but she listened.

Before long, the man became part of the household. "It is better this way," he explained. "You will be safer." The father, uncertain but hopeful, agreed. "If it brings peace, then it is good," he said. Otama accepted the change quietly. "If this is what Father wishes," she thought, "then I will obey."

For a short time, things appeared calm. But the truth was different. The policeman already had a family elsewhere. One day, without warning, his wife and children came to the house. There was a loud argument. "You have deceived us," the wife cried. The father stood helpless, not knowing what to say. Otama listened in silence, her face pale.

After the visitors left, the house fell into confusion. "What have I done?" the father said again and again. Otama tried to calm him. "It is not your fault," she said. But her own heart was troubled. "What should I do now?" she asked herself. For the first time, she felt that her life had been pushed into a direction she had not chosen.

Soon after, the policeman left them. The small peace they had known disappeared. The neighbors began to talk. "It was bound to happen," some said. Others spoke with pity. The father, ashamed and confused, could not remain where

he was. "We must go somewhere else," he told Otama. She nodded and answered, "Yes, wherever you think best."

They moved to another place, but their situation did not improve. Money was scarce, and the father's work brought little profit. "I cannot go on like this," he said one evening. Otama replied gently, "We will manage somehow." Yet both of them knew that their future was uncertain.

It was at this time that a new proposal reached them. A woman came to speak with the father. "There is a man who is willing to support your daughter," she said. The father frowned and asked, "What do you mean?" She answered, "He will provide for her. You will not have to worry about money." The meaning of her words was clear, though she did not say it directly.

The father hesitated. "I do not wish for such a thing," he said. The woman replied, "Then what choice do you have?" Otama listened from the side. After a long silence, she spoke quietly. "If it helps you, Father, I will accept." He looked at her in shock. "No," he said, "I cannot allow it." But she repeated, "Please. It is better this way."

In the end, the father gave in. "Only because you say so," he told her. Otama bowed her head and said nothing more. Thus, without any loud decision, her life was once again turned by forces she could not resist. And it was this path that would lead her, step by step, to the quiet house on Muenzaka, where Okada would one day pass and see her at the window.

## Part 7

The man who agreed to support Otama was named Suezo. He had not always been a man of means. "In the old days, I had nothing," he would say with a certain pride. He had once worked as a servant in a student lodging, running errands for small pay. "Two sen for a task," he would explain. "That was how it began." Yet even then, he was not like the others.

"You are careful with money," someone had once told him. Suezo answered, "If you are not careful, you will have nothing." While other servants spent what

little they had, he saved and lent money in small amounts. “I will pay you back soon,” a student would say. Suezo would nod and reply, “Of course. But do not forget.” In time, these small loans grew larger.

“Five yen... ten yen...” he would say, writing things down carefully. Before long, he had become a lender, and then something more. “You have done well,” people began to say. Suezo would smile slightly and answer, “I have only used my head.” By the time the school moved to a new location, he was no longer a servant but a man with some wealth.

He had a wife and children, but his home life did not satisfy him. “This is not enough,” he often thought. His wife was plain and spoke too much. “Why must you complain so?” he would say. She would answer, “Because you are never satisfied.” Their voices would rise, and then fall again into silence.

As his money increased, so did his desires. “There must be something better,” he told himself. It was then that he remembered a girl he had once seen long ago. “What was her name?” he asked himself. “Ah—Otama.” The image of her returned to him: a young girl, quiet and gentle. “She must be grown now,” he thought. “What kind of woman has she become?”

Once this thought took hold, he could not forget it. “I will find her,” he decided. Using his connections, he made inquiries. “There was a man who sold sweets,” he said to one person. “He had a daughter.” The person replied, “Yes, I think I know who you mean.” Step by step, Suezo followed these small traces until he discovered where Otama and her father were living.

“So, you have found them,” said the woman who helped him. Suezo nodded. “Yes. And now I will make an offer.” The woman looked at him and asked, “Are you certain?” He replied, “Of course. I do not act without thinking.” Yet there was more than calculation in his mind. There was also desire.

He did not go to them directly. Instead, he sent the woman to speak on his behalf. “Tell them,” he said, “that I am a respectable man. I will provide everything that is needed.” The woman nodded and answered, “I understand.” Then she added, “But they may hesitate.” Suezo smiled thinly. “Then persuade them.”

When the proposal was presented, Otama’s father resisted at first. “I cannot

allow my daughter to live in such a way,” he said firmly. The woman replied, “You speak of honor, but what of her future?” He fell silent. “There are no easy choices,” she continued. “You must think of what is possible.”

Otama listened quietly, just as before. When her father turned to her and said, “What do you think?” she answered, “If it eases your burden, I will accept.” He shook his head in distress. “You should not have to say such things.” But she replied gently, “It is already decided, is it not?”

In the end, Suezo’s plan succeeded. “Everything is arranged,” the woman told him. He asked, “They have agreed?” She nodded. “Yes.” For a moment, he said nothing. Then he smiled and said, “Good. Then we will proceed.” His voice was calm, but there was satisfaction in it.

From that point on, he began to prepare carefully. “The house must be suitable,” he said. “The surroundings must be quiet.” He wanted everything to match his idea of comfort and control. In his mind, Otama was no longer simply a person. She had become something to be placed, arranged, and possessed.

And so, while Okada continued his peaceful walks and silent greetings, another story moved forward at the same time. Without knowing it, he was already connected to it. The quiet house on Muenzaka, the woman at the window, and the man who had chosen her—all these threads were coming together, though none of them yet understood what that meeting would mean.

## Part 8

Once Suezo had secured their agreement, he turned at once to practical matters. “A house must be chosen,” he said. “It must be quiet, and it must not attract attention.” He went out himself to look at several places. “This one is too open,” he muttered at one house. “People would see too much.” At another, he said, “Too old. It will not do.” He was careful, not only with money, but with appearance.

At last, he found two places that pleased him. One stood near the edge of the pond, where the view was wide and clear. “It is a fine place,” he said. But then he added, “Too visible.” He imagined passersby looking in and shook his head. “No,

this will not do.” The second house stood on Muenzaka. It was smaller, quieter, and set slightly back from the road. “Yes,” he said, “this is better.”

The house had a simple entrance with a clean stone step. A narrow space lay between the house and the fence, where a few small trees grew. “It is modest,” Suezo said, “but it has a certain charm.” He walked through the rooms, touching the walls and looking at the windows. “This will be enough,” he decided. “No one will notice too much here.”

That night, lying awake beside his sleeping wife, he thought again about his choice. “Muenzaka is quiet,” he told himself. “Few people pass. It is safer.” He glanced at his wife, who was snoring softly. “This is not the life I want,” he thought. Then, with a faint smile, he added, “Soon, things will be different.”

Meanwhile, preparations were also being made for the first meeting. “It must be done properly,” Suezo said. He chose a well-known restaurant in Ueno. “A respectable place,” he explained. The woman who had arranged the matter nodded. “Yes, that will give a good impression.” He added, “And their clothing must be suitable. I will not have them appear poorly.”

Instead of giving money directly, Suezo took charge of the clothing himself. “I know what is best,” he said. He went to a shop where he often ordered his own garments. “Prepare something appropriate for a young woman,” he told the tailor. “And also for an older man.” The tailor asked, “What kind of style do you prefer?” Suezo replied, “Simple, but not cheap.”

When the clothes were delivered, Otama and her father received them with surprise. “He has thought of everything,” the father said. Otama looked at the garments and said softly, “Yes.” In their minds, this attention seemed like kindness. “He must be a considerate man,” the father added. Otama did not answer, but she felt a small sense of relief.

On the day of the meeting, they prepared carefully. “Stand straight,” the father said. “Do not speak unless necessary.” Otama nodded. “Yes, Father.” She dressed without ornament, her face almost without makeup. “It is better to be natural,” she thought. There was no excitement in her heart, only a quiet acceptance.

At the same time, Suezo was already seated in a small room at the restaurant.

He looked around with sharp eyes. “This will do,” he said to himself. A servant came and asked, “Shall I bring anything?” He answered, “Not yet. I am waiting.” Then he leaned back and began to imagine the moment to come.

“What will she be like now?” he thought. The image of the young girl he once remembered returned to him. “She must have grown into a fine woman,” he said softly. At the same time, he considered how the meeting should proceed. “The father may be troublesome,” he thought. “I must deal with him quickly.”

As he sat there, smoke rising slowly from his pipe, his thoughts moved between desire and calculation. “This is the beginning,” he told himself. “Everything must go smoothly.” Outside, the sounds of the street continued as usual, but inside that quiet room, something was about to take shape—a meeting that would decide the future of all involved, though none of them could yet see its full meaning.

## Part 9

Before long, footsteps were heard in the corridor, and a maid’s voice said, “Your guests have arrived.” Suezo rose at once. “Bring them in,” he answered. He stepped out into the corridor and saw the old man standing uncertainly, with Otama just behind him. “Please, this way,” Suezo said, bowing slightly. “You must not hesitate.”

The father bent his back and replied, “Thank you, sir.” Otama stood quietly, looking around with calm eyes. Suezo glanced at her and felt a strong satisfaction. “So this is how she has become,” he thought. Aloud, he said, “Please come inside. There is no need for formality.” Then he guided them into the room.

Once they were seated, there was a short silence. The father remained stiff, unsure of how to begin. Suezo spoke first. “You must be tired from the journey,” he said. The father answered, “Not at all. It is our honor to be here.” Otama lowered her eyes and said nothing.

A maid entered and asked, “Shall I bring the food?” Suezo replied, “Yes, bring it now.” Then he turned to the father and said, “Let us have some sake first.” The father hesitated. “If you permit,” he said. Suezo poured a cup and offered it.

“Please,” he said. The father accepted it with both hands.

“You have had a difficult time,” Suezo continued. The father sighed and answered, “Yes, things have not gone well.” Suezo nodded as if in sympathy. “Life is not easy,” he said. “But we must make the best of it.” The father looked at him and said, “I am grateful for your kindness.”

As they spoke, Otama listened quietly. When Suezo glanced at her, she lifted her face slightly. Their eyes met for a moment. “She is even more beautiful than I expected,” he thought. Aloud, he said gently, “You must not feel uneasy here.” Otama answered in a soft voice, “Thank you, sir.”

The food was brought in, and the atmosphere slowly changed. The father began to speak more freely. “My daughter has always been obedient,” he said. Suezo replied, “That is clear to me.” He turned to Otama and added, “You will not find things difficult.” She bowed her head and said, “I will do my best.”

At first, Suezo had wished to end the meeting quickly and dismiss the father. “If he leaves early, it will be easier,” he had thought. But as the conversation continued, he found himself speaking more calmly than expected. “There is no need to hurry,” he said to himself. The father, too, seemed less anxious, and the three of them sat together as if they were already familiar.

“Please, eat more,” Suezo said, placing food before them. The father replied, “You are too generous.” Otama, still quiet, poured sake when asked and smiled faintly. Her movements were gentle, and there was no sign of complaint. Watching her, Suezo felt a different kind of pleasure from what he had imagined.

“You are very kind,” the father said again. Suezo answered, “It is nothing. We must help each other.” His words sounded sincere, and even he felt a certain warmth as he spoke. For a moment, the situation resembled that of an ordinary family gathering, rather than a formal arrangement.

Yet beneath this calm surface, each person held different thoughts. The father felt relief mixed with unease. Otama felt resignation, but also a quiet sense of safety. Suezo felt both control and satisfaction. None of them spoke of these feelings, but they were present in the silence between their words.

By the time the meal was well underway, the tension of the first meeting had

softened. "Everything has gone well," Suezo thought. "Better than I expected." He looked at Otama once more and said, "From now on, there is no need for worry." She answered simply, "Yes." And with that, the path ahead, though still unclear, had already been decided.

## Part 10

After that evening, Otama was brought to the house on Muenzaka. The move was quiet and without ceremony. "It is better this way," Suezo said. "There is no need for attention." The father accompanied her, carrying a few belongings. "Take care of yourself," he said again and again. Otama answered each time, "Yes, Father," though her voice grew softer with each repetition.

When they arrived, Suezo showed them the rooms. "This will be your place," he said to Otama. She looked around and nodded. "It is very clean," she said. Suezo smiled slightly. "I have chosen it carefully." The father walked slowly through the house, touching the walls as if to test their reality. "It is more than we expected," he said.

At the door, when it was time to leave, the father hesitated. "If there is anything you need..." he began. Otama interrupted gently, "I will be fine." He looked at her, unable to speak for a moment. Then he said, "Yes. You are strong." Suezo stood beside them and said, "You may visit when you wish." The father bowed deeply and left.

From that day, Otama lived alone in the quiet house. Suezo came and went according to his own schedule. "I will not always be here," he told her. "But you will lack nothing." She answered, "I understand." When he was present, he spoke kindly enough. When he was absent, the house returned to silence.

Her days soon took on a simple pattern. In the morning, she cleaned the rooms. In the afternoon, she sat by the window or arranged small things in the house. "There is little to do," she thought. Sometimes she spoke aloud, as if to fill the emptiness. "It is quiet," she would say, and then fall silent again.

The window became her place. From there, she could see the slope of

Muenzaka and the people who passed. At first, she only watched without thought. “They are going somewhere,” she would think. “They have their own lives.” The sight did not bring her joy, but it kept her from feeling completely alone.

In time, she began to recognize certain figures. “That man passes every evening,” she noticed one day. It was Okada. At first, he was only one among many. But gradually, she came to expect his appearance. “He will come soon,” she would think as the light began to fade.

The first time their eyes met, she had felt only surprise. “Who is he?” she wondered. But as he continued to pass each day, her feeling changed. “He looks at me,” she thought. There was no fear in this thought, only a quiet awareness.

When he removed his hat and bowed, she was taken aback. “He greets me,” she said softly. Without thinking, she smiled in return. After that, she waited for that small moment each day. “Will he come today?” she would ask herself. When he did, she felt a slight warmth. When he did not, the house seemed even more empty.

One evening, Suezon noticed her standing by the window. “Do you enjoy the view?” he asked. She turned and answered, “It is pleasant.” He looked outside and said, “There is not much to see.” She replied, “Even so, it passes the time.” He nodded and said no more, but he did not fully understand her reason.

The quiet exchange between Otama and Okada continued without words. Each day added a small layer to it, though neither of them could say what it meant. For Otama, it was a break in the stillness of her life. For Okada, it was something that slowly drew his thoughts back to the same place again and again.

And so, within the narrow space of that silent street, two lives moved side by side without touching. The house, the window, and the slope remained unchanged, but the feelings that gathered there grew little by little, unnoticed by others, yet impossible to deny for those who felt them.

## Part 11

As autumn deepened, the air grew cooler, and the evenings became darker

earlier. Still, Okada did not change his habit. “Even if it is cold, I will go out,” he said. I answered, “You are very faithful to your routine.” He smiled and replied, “If I break it once, it becomes easy to break it again.” Yet I felt that something more than habit now drew him to that walk.

“You will pass Muenzaka again?” I asked one evening. He nodded. “Yes,” he said simply. Then, after a pause, he added, “It is part of the way.” I looked at him and said, “Only part?” He did not answer at once. Finally, he said, “It is enough that it is there.”

When he reached the house, he saw her at the window as usual. He removed his hat, and she smiled in return. This moment had become so natural that neither of them seemed surprised anymore. “Good evening,” he said once, almost without thinking. She hesitated, then answered softly, “Good evening.” It was the first time their voices had crossed the space between them.

That night, he spoke of it to me. “She answered me,” he said. I asked, “And how did it feel?” He thought for a moment and replied, “Strange. As if something had changed, though nothing has changed.” I said, “Perhaps it has begun.” He shook his head. “No, I do not think so.”

Yet after that, their brief exchange of words continued. “Good evening,” he would say. “Good evening,” she would answer. The words were simple, but they carried a quiet weight. Each time, there was a slight pause, as if both were aware that they had stepped beyond silence.

One evening, as he passed, she spoke first. “You walk here every day,” she said. Okada stopped for a moment and replied, “Yes, I do.” She added, “It must be pleasant.” He answered, “It is.” Then, after a short silence, he said, “And you—do you often sit here?” She nodded. “Yes. It is quiet.”

After this, he continued walking, but his steps were slower than usual. “She spoke to me,” he thought. The words themselves were simple, yet they remained in his mind. “It is quiet,” he repeated to himself, as if trying to understand what she had meant.

When he returned home, I saw that he was thoughtful. “You are not as calm as before,” I said. He smiled faintly. “Am I not?” Then he added, “It is nothing. Only

a small change.” I replied, “Small changes often lead to larger ones.” He shook his head again. “Not always.”

Meanwhile, Otama also felt the difference. “He spoke to me,” she said softly after he had gone. She placed her hand on the window frame and looked out into the fading light. “It is only a greeting,” she told herself. Yet she remained there longer than usual, as if waiting for something more that did not come.

The next day, she found herself thinking of the evening before. “What should I say if he speaks again?” she wondered. Then she smiled slightly and said, “It does not matter.” But when the time came, she was once again at the window, waiting without admitting it to herself.

Suezo, however, remained unaware of these small changes. When he visited, he spoke of ordinary things. “Is everything in order?” he would ask. Otama answered, “Yes.” He would nod and say, “Good. That is all I ask.” He did not look closely enough to notice the quiet movement of her thoughts.

In this way, the distance between Okada and Otama grew both smaller and more uncertain. They had moved beyond silence, yet they had not truly come closer. Each word opened a possibility, but also revealed a boundary. And within that narrow space between what could be said and what could not, their feelings continued to take shape.

## Part 12

As the days went on, their short conversations remained simple, yet they became more frequent. “It is colder today,” Okada said one evening as he paused by the window. Otama answered, “Yes, the wind has changed.” He nodded and added, “Winter will come soon.” She replied, “It always does.” Their words were ordinary, yet both felt that something unspoken lay behind them.

One night, Okada stopped a little longer than before. “Do you not grow tired of sitting here?” he asked. Otama thought for a moment and said, “Sometimes. But there is nowhere else for me to go.” He looked at her more closely and said, “You do not go out?” She shook her head. “No. It is not my place to do so.”

He felt a slight discomfort at her answer. "Then it must be lonely," he said. Otama smiled faintly. "At first, yes," she replied. "But one becomes used to it." Okada hesitated, then said, "That is not always a good thing." She looked at him and answered quietly, "Perhaps not."

After this, he continued his walk, but his thoughts did not move away from her. "She has no freedom," he said to himself. "And yet she speaks as if it does not trouble her." He could not decide whether to admire her calmness or to feel uneasy about it. "It is not my concern," he reminded himself, but the thought did not leave him.

When he returned home, I noticed his silence. "You are thinking again," I said. He answered, "Yes, a little." I asked, "About the woman?" He did not deny it. "She said she cannot go out," he explained. I replied, "That is not unusual." He said, "No, but it sounded as if she had accepted it completely."

"And you do not like that?" I asked. He considered this and said, "I do not know. It feels... too quiet." I smiled and said, "You prefer your own quiet, but not hers?" He looked at me and answered, "Perhaps they are not the same." I could not argue with that.

Meanwhile, Otama also began to think more deeply about their meetings. "He always listens carefully," she said to herself. "He does not speak like others." She remembered how Suezo spoke—direct, practical, without hesitation. "They are different," she thought. "Very different."

One evening, as Okada passed, she said, "You always return at the same time." He replied, "Yes. It has become a habit." She asked, "Do you never wish to change it?" He smiled slightly and said, "Sometimes. But I do not." She looked at him and said, "Then you are strong." He answered, "No. Only consistent."

After he left, she remained by the window, thinking. "Consistent," she repeated softly. The word stayed with her. "I am not like that," she thought. "My life changes without my choosing." Yet she did not feel bitterness. Instead, she felt a quiet curiosity about the difference between them.

Suezo visited less often during this time. "I have business," he would say. When he did come, he noticed little change. "You are well?" he asked. Otama answered,

“Yes.” He looked around and said, “Everything is in order.” Then he added, “That is good.” He did not ask more, and she did not offer more.

Thus, the two worlds continued side by side: the controlled, practical world of Suezou, and the quiet, uncertain space that had formed between Okada and Otama. Neither world touched the other directly, yet both existed within the same small house, the same narrow street, and the same passing of days.

And with each evening, as the light faded and footsteps approached, that small space between them grew more filled with meaning. It was still fragile, still undefined, but it had begun to shape their thoughts in ways they could no longer ignore, even if they chose not to act upon them.

### Part 13

One evening, the sky was already dark when Okada came down Muenzaka. A cold wind moved along the slope, and there were fewer people than usual. “It is quiet tonight,” he said as he approached the house. Otama was at the window, her figure faint in the dim light. “Yes,” she answered, “very quiet.”

He stopped for a moment longer than before. “Do you not feel afraid here at night?” he asked. Otama shook her head. “No,” she said. “There is nothing to fear.” Then she added, after a short pause, “What is frightening is not outside.” Okada looked at her, surprised. “Then where is it?” he asked. She replied softly, “Inside, perhaps.”

Her words remained in his mind as he stood there. “Inside...” he repeated. For a moment, he felt that he understood her, though he could not explain how. “If that is so,” he said, “then it cannot be easily escaped.” Otama smiled faintly. “No,” she said, “it cannot.”

A silence followed, deeper than before. The wind moved the leaves slightly, and the sound seemed louder than usual. Okada felt that he should say something more, but the words did not come. “I should go,” he said at last. Otama nodded. “Yes,” she answered.

As he turned to leave, she spoke again. “Will you come tomorrow?” she asked.

The question was simple, yet it carried a weight that neither of them had expected. Okada stopped and looked back. “Yes,” he said, “I think I will.” She lowered her eyes and said, “Then I will be here.”

He walked away slowly, his thoughts unsettled. “She asked me to return,” he said to himself. Until now, everything had seemed accidental, almost without intention. But this was different. “It is no longer only a habit,” he thought. Yet even as he realized this, he did not decide to change anything.

When he returned home, I noticed his expression at once. “Something has happened,” I said. He answered, “Perhaps.” I asked, “Did she speak to you again?” He replied, “Yes.” After a moment, he added, “She asked if I would come tomorrow.”

I looked at him carefully. “And what did you say?” He answered, “I said that I would.” I paused, then said, “Then you have made a promise.” He shook his head. “It is not a promise,” he said. “It is only... a reply.” I smiled slightly. “Call it what you like.”

He sat in silence for a while. “Do you think I should go?” he asked suddenly. I answered, “You always go.” He said, “That is not what I mean.” I considered this and replied, “If you are asking whether you should stop, then you already know that you will not.”

He did not answer. Instead, he looked down and said quietly, “It would be easy to stop.” I replied, “Yes, very easy.” Then I added, “And yet you will not do it.” He gave a faint smile. “No,” he said. “I suppose I will not.”

That night, both he and Otama lay awake longer than usual. She thought, “He will come tomorrow.” He thought, “I will go tomorrow.” Neither of them imagined what might follow, nor did they try to. The moment itself was enough, and they remained within it, without moving forward.

Yet it was clear that something had reached its limit. The quiet balance they had kept could not remain unchanged forever. Whether it would deepen or break, neither of them knew. But in that stillness before change, both felt a kind of tension that had not existed before, as if they stood at the edge of something they could not yet see.

## Part 14

The next evening came, and Okada went out as he had said. "I will take my walk," he told me. I looked at him and asked, "As usual?" He answered, "Yes, as usual." But there was a slight hesitation in his voice. I said nothing more, and he left the house.

When he reached Muenzaka, he felt at once that something was different. The slope was quiet, as always, but the house seemed darker than before. "Perhaps I am early," he thought. He walked more slowly, his eyes fixed on the window.

But when he came close, he saw that the window was closed. There was no light, no movement, no sign of her presence. "She is not there," he said to himself. He stood for a moment, uncertain. Then he said softly, as if she might hear him, "Good evening." No answer came.

He remained there a few seconds longer, then turned away. "It is nothing," he thought. "She may simply be inside." Yet as he continued walking, the emptiness of that dark window followed him. "She said she would be there," he remembered. Then he added, "But there was no promise."

The next day, he passed again. The window was still closed. "Perhaps she is ill," he thought. On the third day, nothing had changed. The house stood silent, as if it had always been so. "It is over," he said quietly, though he could not say what "it" had been.

When he returned home, I asked, "Have you seen her?" He shook his head. "No." I said, "Perhaps she has gone away." He replied, "Perhaps." After a pause, he added, "It does not matter." But his voice was not entirely steady.

Days passed, and the window remained closed. At last, even Okada stopped looking so carefully as he walked by. "There is nothing there," he told himself. His steps returned to their former rhythm, and his life seemed to fall back into its old order.

Yet something had changed, though it was not visible from the outside. One evening, I said to him, "You no longer speak of that house." He answered, "There

is nothing to say.” I asked, “Have you forgotten?” He replied, “No. But there is no reason to remember.”

I looked at him and said, “You are the same as before.” He smiled faintly. “Yes,” he said. “The same as before.” But after a moment, he added, “Perhaps not entirely.” Then he fell silent.

As for Otama, I learned later that she had left that house. “She was taken elsewhere,” someone told me. “The arrangement changed.” There were no details, only this simple explanation. Her life, like before, had moved in a direction she did not choose.

“Did she think of him?” I once wondered. There was no way to know. Perhaps she remembered the quiet greetings, the small words spoken at the window. Or perhaps those moments disappeared into the many changes of her life. No one could say.

Looking back now, I sometimes think that nothing truly happened between them. They spoke only a few words, and they never met face to face. And yet, for a short time, they shared something that cannot be easily named. It appeared quietly and disappeared in the same way.

“It was a small thing,” I might say. And yet, when I remember it, I feel that it was not so small. In that narrow space between silence and speech, between distance and nearness, something existed—only for a moment, and then no more.

Such was the story. It began without intention and ended without conclusion. And perhaps, for that very reason, it has remained in my memory longer than many things that seemed more important at the time.