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Source text:

Natsume Sōseki, *Kokoro*

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<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000148/card773.html>

Natsume Sōseki, *Kokoro* (Simplified Edition, Translated by ChatGPT)

Part 1

I always called him Sensei. Even now, when I write about him, I do not use his real name. It is not because I want to hide it from people. It is simply because calling him Sensei feels natural to me. Whenever I remember him, that word comes to my mind first. Even when I take up my pen, I feel the same. Using only an initial would feel cold and strange, and I cannot do it.

I first met Sensei in Kamakura. At that time I was still a young student. A friend of mine had gone there for sea bathing during the summer break and sent me a card asking me to come. I had little money, so I spent two or three days trying to gather enough before I could leave Tokyo. When I finally arrived, however, things changed quickly. Within three days my friend received a telegram from home telling him to return at once because his mother was ill.

My friend did not believe the message. His parents had long wanted him to marry someone he did not like, and he suspected the illness was only an excuse to force him home. Still, if his mother truly was sick, he could not ignore it. After much worry he decided to go back. Thus I was left alone in Kamakura almost as soon as I arrived.

There were still many days before school began again, and I did not know whether to stay or return to Tokyo. In the end I chose to remain at the same inn. My friend was the son of a rich family, but our way of living was not very different, so I felt no need to move somewhere better. The inn stood in a quiet and somewhat

lonely area. To reach places with modern amusements, such as billiards or ice cream shops, one had to cross a long road. Even by carriage it cost money to go there. Yet many private villas stood nearby, and the sea was very close, which made it perfect for bathing.

Every day I went to the beach. Passing between old houses with thatched roofs, I came down to the shore and found crowds of visitors resting on the sand. At times the sea itself looked black with heads, like a public bath full of people. Though I knew no one there, I felt happy lying on the sand or letting the waves strike my knees while I moved about among the others.

It was in this busy place that I first noticed Sensei. There were two small beach huts on the shore, and by chance I began using one of them regularly. People who did not own private changing rooms used these huts to rest, drink tea, wash their clothes, and leave their belongings. Since I had nothing valuable but still feared theft, I always left my things there before entering the sea.

One day, when I came out of the water and returned to the hut, I saw a man preparing to go in. Between us many heads moved and blocked my view, yet I noticed him at once because he was with a foreigner. The foreigner's very white skin drew my eyes. He wore a simple Japanese robe, which he soon threw aside before standing with only a small bathing cloth. I had watched foreigners bathe before and had never seen one dressed so lightly among others. Because of this, I kept looking at him with curiosity.

After a moment the foreigner spoke to the Japanese man beside him. The man picked up a towel, wrapped it around his head, and walked toward the sea. That man was Sensei. I watched the two figures step into the water and swim far beyond the noisy crowd near the shore. Their heads grew small as they moved out toward the open sea, then they returned straight back. Without washing at the well, they dried themselves quickly, dressed, and left at once.

After they were gone, I sat smoking and thinking about the man I had seen. His face seemed familiar, yet I could not remember where I had met him. At that time I was not troubled by any serious worry, but I felt a dull boredom. The next day I returned to the hut at the same hour, hoping to see him again.

This time the foreigner did not come. Sensei arrived alone, wearing a straw hat. He placed his glasses down, wrapped his towel around his head, and walked quietly toward the sea. As he swam away through the crowd, I suddenly felt the wish to follow him. I chased after him through the water, but he turned in a curved path and reached the shore from another direction before I could catch up. When I returned to the hut, he had already dressed and left.

I saw him again the next day, and again the day after that. Yet we did not speak. His manner seemed distant and unsociable. He came at a fixed time, entered the sea, and departed without paying attention to anyone around him. The foreigner never appeared again. Sensei was always alone.

One day, as Sensei tried to put on his robe, sand fell onto it. While shaking it clean, his glasses slipped through the gap in the wooden floor and fell below. He began searching anxiously. I quickly bent down, reached under the bench, and found them. When I handed them to him, he thanked me. That was the first word he spoke to me.

The next day I followed him into the sea again. We swam in the same direction until we were far from others. The wide blue water stretched around us, shining under the strong sun. Filled with freedom, I moved my arms and legs with joy. Sensei suddenly stopped swimming and lay floating on his back. I copied him. The sky above was bright and painful to the eyes.

“This feels good,” I called out loudly.

After a while Sensei rose and said calmly, “Shall we go back?”

I wanted to remain longer, but I answered at once, “Yes, let us return.” We swam back together. From that day our acquaintance began, though I still did not know where he lived.

Two or three days later he suddenly asked me at the hut, “Will you stay here much longer?”

I had no clear plan and replied, “I am not sure.” Seeing his slight smile, I felt embarrassed and asked in return, “And you, Sensei?” That was the first time I called him by that name.

That evening I visited his lodging. It was not a normal inn but a quiet house

within the grounds of a temple. The people living there were not his family. When I called him Sensei again, he smiled faintly. I explained it was simply my habit when speaking to someone older. I also asked about the foreigner. Sensei spoke a little about the man and said it was strange that he had become friendly with a foreigner even though he did not often associate with Japanese people either.

At last I told him that his face seemed familiar to me, though I could not remember where we had met. I secretly hoped he might say he felt the same. Instead, after thinking for a moment, he replied, "I do not recall your face. You must be mistaken." His answer left me with a small feeling of disappointment.

At the end of the month I returned to Tokyo. Sensei had already left Kamakura earlier. When we parted, I asked if I might visit him sometimes. He answered simply, "Yes, come." I had expected warmer words and felt slightly hurt by his brief reply, yet my interest in him only grew stronger.

Part 2

When I returned to Tokyo, I fully intended to visit Sensei soon. There were still two weeks before classes began, and I thought I would go during that time. Yet after a few days the mood I had felt in Kamakura slowly faded. The busy air of the city filled my mind again. Seeing students on the streets awakened thoughts of the new school term, and little by little Sensei slipped from my thoughts.

About a month after classes began, however, I felt a strange emptiness. I walked through the streets without clear purpose and looked around my room as if something were missing. Then Sensei's face rose again in my memory. I suddenly wanted to see him.

The first time I visited his house, he was out. I returned the next Sunday on a bright and pleasant day, but again he was absent. In Kamakura he had told me he usually stayed at home and disliked going out, so I felt an unreasonable dissatisfaction. I hesitated at the entrance instead of leaving at once. The maid recognized me and went inside. Soon a woman appeared in her place. She was beautiful and gentle in manner. This was Sensei's wife.

She politely told me where Sensei had gone. Once each month, she explained, he visited a grave in the cemetery at Zoshigaya to place flowers there. “He left only ten minutes ago,” she added kindly. I thanked her and stepped outside. After walking a short distance toward the busy street, curiosity led me to turn back and head toward the cemetery myself.

I entered through a path beside a small field and walked along a wide road lined with maple trees. Near a tea shop at the far end, a man suddenly came out. As I drew closer and saw the light shining on his glasses, I called loudly, “Sensei!”

He stopped at once and stared at me.

“How... how did you...?” he repeated twice. His voice sounded strange in the quiet afternoon. I felt unable to answer.

“Did you follow me? Why...?” he asked again, though his tone remained calm.

I explained how I had visited his house and learned where he had gone. He listened carefully.

“Did my wife tell you whose grave I visit?” he asked.

“No, she said nothing.”

“Of course not,” he murmured. “There was no reason for her to tell you.”

We walked together through the graves. Some stones bore foreign names, others Buddhist words. I pointed at several with curiosity, asking how to read them. Sensei answered briefly but without interest. At last he said quietly, “You have not yet thought seriously about death.” I fell silent, and he spoke no more on the subject.

Beneath a large ginkgo tree he looked upward and said, “In a little while this tree will be beautiful. When the leaves turn yellow, the ground here becomes gold.” He passed under that tree every month, he told me.

We soon reached the road. With no destination of my own, I simply walked beside him. He spoke little, yet I did not feel uncomfortable.

“Are you going straight home?” I asked.

“Yes. I have nowhere else to go.”

After walking some distance in silence, I asked whose grave he visited.

“It is not a family grave,” he said.

“Then whose is it?”

He did not answer. I stopped asking. After another block he suddenly spoke again.

“It belongs to a friend.”

“You visit your friend’s grave every month?”

“Yes.”

He said nothing more that day.

After this meeting I began visiting him often. Each time he was at home. As my visits increased, my attachment to him deepened. Yet his manner toward me hardly changed. He remained calm and quiet, sometimes so quiet that it felt lonely. There was something distant about him, and yet that very distance drew me closer.

At times a faint shadow passed across his face, like the shadow of a bird moving across a window. I first noticed it when I called to him in the cemetery. I forgot it soon after, but later I remembered it again on a late autumn evening.

Thinking of the ginkgo tree he had mentioned, I realized the day of his monthly visit was approaching. My classes ended early that day, so I said to him, “Sensei, may I go with you next time you visit the grave? I would like to walk there together.”

“I go there to visit a grave, not for a walk,” he replied.

“Still, we could walk as well.”

He gave no answer. After a pause he said firmly, “Mine is a true grave visit.”

I thought he was making a childish excuse because he did not want my company, but I persisted. “Then I will also visit the grave,” I said. “Please allow me to come.”

His brows darkened slightly. A strange light appeared in his eyes, not anger exactly, but something like fear or unease. It reminded me of the moment in the cemetery when I first called his name.

“I cannot go there with others,” he said quietly. “There is a reason I cannot tell you. I have never even taken my wife there.”

I found this mysterious but did not question him further. At that time I had no wish to study him like an object. I simply accepted things as they were, and perhaps because of that our friendship grew warm and natural.

I visited his house two or three times each month. One day he suddenly asked, “Why do you come so often to see a man like me?”

“There is no special reason,” I replied. “Am I troubling you?”

“No,” he said. “I am a lonely man. I am glad when you come. That is why I asked.”

Then he looked at me and asked my age, though the question seemed unrelated. I did not press him for explanation and soon left.

Only four days later I visited again. As soon as he appeared, he laughed lightly. “You have come again,” he said.

“Yes, I have,” I answered, laughing as well. From another person such words might have annoyed me, but from him they felt pleasant.

That evening he repeated, “I am a lonely man. Perhaps you are lonely too. I am old enough to remain still, but you are young. You want to move, to throw yourself against something.”

“I am not lonely,” I insisted.

“Young people are the most lonely,” he said gently. “Why else would you come here so often?”

He smiled sadly. “Even after meeting me, you probably still feel something missing. I do not have the power to remove that feeling. One day you will turn elsewhere. Your feet will no longer come to this house.”

He spoke with quiet certainty, yet his prediction did not come true. I continued to visit him just as before.

Part 3

Fortunately, Sensei’s prediction did not come true. At that time I lacked experience and did not fully understand the meaning hidden in his words. I continued visiting him just as often as before. Before long I began eating meals at his table, and naturally I also came to speak more with his wife.

I was not cold toward women, yet my life until then had given me little chance to know them closely. My interest usually turned toward unknown women I

passed on the street rather than toward those I actually spoke with. When I first met Sensei's wife at the entrance, I thought her beautiful, and that impression never changed. Still, beyond that I felt nothing special. I always saw her as part of Sensei himself, almost like something belonging to him rather than a separate person. She, in turn, treated me kindly as a young student who visited her husband.

One evening Sensei offered me sake. His wife sat beside us and poured drinks. Sensei appeared more cheerful than usual. After emptying his cup, he held it out to her and said, "You should drink too."

"I do not usually drink," she replied, hesitating, yet she accepted the cup. She filled it halfway and raised it carefully to her lips.

"How rare," she said with a small smile. "You almost never ask me to drink."

"You do not like it," Sensei answered. "But sometimes it feels good."

"It never feels good to me," she said. "But you look very happy when you drink a little."

"Only sometimes," he replied. "Not always."

"How about tonight?"

"Tonight feels pleasant."

"Then you should drink a little every evening," she said lightly. "You would feel less lonely."

Sensei shook his head. "That is not possible."

Their house contained only the two of them and a maid. Each time I visited, it was quiet. Loud laughter was never heard there. Sometimes it felt as though only Sensei and I existed inside the house.

"It would be nice if we had a child," his wife said one day, turning toward me.

"Yes," I answered politely, though I felt no real sympathy. At that age I thought children only noisy and troublesome.

"Shall we adopt one?" Sensei said.

"An adopted child is not the same," she replied softly.

"We will never have one," Sensei said suddenly.

"Why not?" I asked without thinking.

He laughed loudly and answered, "It is heaven's punishment."

I did not understand what he meant.

As far as I could see, Sensei and his wife were a happy couple. Having never lived within a family myself, I could not judge deeply, yet their behavior toward each other seemed gentle. When Sensei wished to call her, he turned toward the sliding door and said kindly, “Shizu.” Her name sounded soft when he spoke it, and she always answered at once. They sometimes attended concerts or plays together and even took short trips. I still kept postcards they had sent from Hakone and Nikko.

Only once did I witness something different. One day I came to visit and heard raised voices from inside before I entered. The house was small, and from the entrance I could tell they were arguing. Sensei’s voice rose sharply, while the other voice sounded lower and seemed to belong to his wife. She may even have been crying. Unsure what to do, I turned back and returned to my lodging without knocking.

A strange uneasiness stayed with me. I tried to read but could not concentrate. About an hour later Sensei appeared below my window and called my name. Surprised, I opened it. He invited me to walk with him. I went out still wearing the clothes I had not yet changed.

That evening we drank beer together. Sensei could not drink much. After a certain amount he could not force himself to continue.

“It is no good tonight,” he said with a faint smile.

“You cannot feel cheerful?” I asked.

The earlier argument remained in my mind like a bone caught in my throat. I wondered whether to ask about it but hesitated.

“You seem strange tonight,” Sensei said suddenly. “In truth, I also feel strange. Can you tell?”

I could not answer.

“I argued with my wife earlier,” he continued. “It made my nerves restless.”

“Why...?” I began, unable to finish the question.

“She misunderstands me,” he said. “No matter how I explain, she will not accept it. I lost my temper.”

“What does she misunderstand?”

He did not reply directly. Instead he said quietly, “If I were the man she imagines, I would not suffer as I do.”

I could not imagine the suffering he spoke of.

We walked in silence for a long time afterward. Then he said suddenly, “I behaved badly. I left in anger, and she must be worried. Women are pitiful creatures. My wife has no one in the world to rely on except me.”

After a pause he added, “Yet the husband appears strong. That is almost funny. Tell me, how do I appear to you? Strong or weak?”

“Somewhere in between,” I answered honestly.

He seemed surprised and fell silent again.

When we reached the corner near my lodging, I offered to walk him home, but he stopped me with a gesture. “It is late. Go back. I must return quickly—for my wife’s sake.”

Those final words warmed my heart, and I slept peacefully that night. Later I learned their quarrel had not been serious and rarely happened. Once Sensei even told me, “I know only one woman in this world—my wife. To her, I am also the only man. We should be the happiest pair alive.”

Yet he spoke those words in a heavy tone, adding, “We should be,” rather than “We are.” That difference troubled me, though I soon forgot it.

One day I visited while Sensei was out seeing a friend off at the station. He had told me to wait, so I sat and talked with his wife alone. By then I was already a university student and felt more grown than before. We spoke freely about many small matters, most of which I no longer remember.

At last our talk turned naturally to Sensei himself.

“Why does Sensei stay at home studying instead of working in society?” I asked.

“He cannot,” she answered gently. “He dislikes such things.”

“Does he think them meaningless?”

“I do not know,” she said. “He probably wishes to do something, yet he cannot. That is why I feel sorry for him.”

“But he seems healthy.”

“Yes, perfectly healthy,” she said. “That is why it troubles me. If I understood the reason, I would not worry so much.”

Her voice held deep sympathy. After a moment she added quietly, “He was not like this when he was young. He changed completely.”

“You knew him when he was young?” I asked.

She suddenly blushed and lowered her eyes.

Part 4

Sensei’s wife was born in Tokyo. I already knew this from both of them. Once she joked that she was “half and half,” because her father came from a distant province while her mother had been born in Edo when the city still carried that old name. Sensei, however, came from a completely different region. Therefore, if she had known him during his student days, it could not have been through family ties. Yet after blushing, she seemed unwilling to explain further, and I did not press her.

From the time I met Sensei until his death, I spoke with him about many matters of thought and feeling. Still, I learned almost nothing about the time when he and his wife married. At times I believed he avoided such talk out of modesty before a younger man. At other times I suspected both husband and wife belonged to an older generation that felt ashamed to speak openly about love. In either case, I imagined that some bright romance lay hidden behind their marriage.

My guess was partly right, though I understood only half the truth. Behind their love stood a dark tragedy, one that even his wife never knew. Sensei hid it from her until the end of his life. Rather than destroy her happiness, he chose to destroy himself. At that time, however, I knew nothing of this and continued living beside them in ignorance.

One memory from those days remains clear. During the season of blossoms, Sensei and I went together to Ueno Park. Many people gathered under the flowers, smiling and talking. Among them we noticed a young man and woman walking closely together. They looked newly married, and many passersby watched them

with interest.

“They seem like a new couple,” Sensei said.

“They look very happy,” I replied.

Sensei did not smile. Instead he turned his gaze away and walked in another direction. After a while he suddenly asked, “Have you ever been in love?”

I answered no.

“Do you not wish to fall in love?”

I hesitated.

“Surely you do,” he continued.

“Yes,” I admitted.

“When you looked at that couple,” he said, “you spoke lightly. In your voice there was dissatisfaction, the feeling of wanting love but not yet having it.”

“Did it sound that way?” I asked.

“Yes. A person who knows the joy of love speaks more warmly. But listen carefully—love is a sin. Do you understand?”

His words shocked me so deeply that I could not reply. We walked among the crowd until we reached a quiet wooded area where flowers and people disappeared behind us.

“Is love truly a sin?” I asked at last.

“Yes,” he said firmly. “You will understand someday. Your heart already moves because of love, even if you do not see it.”

I examined my feelings but found nothing clear within myself. “There is no one in my heart,” I said honestly.

“Because there is no object, your heart moves restlessly,” he answered. “If you had one, you might feel calm.”

“I do not feel so restless.”

“Then why did you come to me?” he asked gently. “You moved toward me because something was lacking.”

“That is different from love,” I said.

“It is the first step toward it,” he replied. “Before embracing a woman, you came toward me, another man. Yet I cannot give you what you seek. There are

reasons why I cannot satisfy you.”

His tone became heavy, and I felt uneasy. I did not know what answer to give, so we walked in silence until we left the park.

After that day, the word “sin” remained in my mind whenever I thought of love. Still, I did not fully understand what Sensei meant. My youth allowed me to forget difficult ideas quickly, and daily life soon carried me forward again.

I continued visiting his house regularly. Sometimes I arrived to find him reading quietly; at other times he sat without a book, lost in thought. The room was always calm, almost too calm. Even when we spoke, our voices seemed to sink into the still air.

Gradually I noticed that Sensei avoided speaking of the future. When I talked about plans after graduation or about ambitions, he listened but rarely expressed opinions. Once I asked directly, “Did you never wish to become famous or respected?”

He smiled faintly. “Such things belong to others.”

“But you studied at the university,” I said. “It feels wasteful for someone like you to remain unknown.”

“I have no right to stand before society,” he answered quietly.

His words sounded more serious than modest. I felt there was something hidden behind them but did not know how to reach it.

My visits became part of my routine. Sometimes I arrived without any special reason. Sensei would welcome me calmly, and we would speak about books, people, or small events. At other times we sat almost without talking. Strangely, those silent moments did not trouble me.

One evening, while we were drinking tea, Sensei suddenly said, “You trust people easily.”

“Do I?” I asked.

“Yes. That is why you can sit quietly beside another person. But the world will teach you caution.”

“Have you lost trust yourself?” I asked.

He looked at me for a long moment before answering. “Perhaps I lost it long

ago.”

His eyes then moved toward the garden, and the conversation ended there.

As seasons passed, my attachment to him deepened without my noticing. I began to feel that visiting his house was as natural as returning to my own room. Yet at the same time, a faint mystery always surrounded him, like a shadow that never fully disappeared.

I did not yet know that this shadow came from the past he carried within himself, a past that would one day change my own life as well.

Part 5

After that conversation in Ueno, the idea that love might be a sin remained somewhere in my mind, though I could not clearly explain it. I continued my ordinary student life, attending lectures during the day and visiting Sensei whenever time allowed. My attachment to him grew naturally, without effort, like a habit that slowly becomes part of one’s breathing.

Sensei’s house always felt quiet. Even when I entered suddenly, nothing seemed disturbed. The sound of my footsteps in the hall often appeared louder than any other noise within the house. His wife greeted me kindly each time, and before long I could speak with her freely without feeling shy.

One afternoon, while Sensei was away, I sat talking with her again. Our conversation moved from daily matters to Sensei himself. By then I had begun to wonder more deeply about the reason he avoided work and public life.

“Sensei studied so much,” I said. “It feels strange that he does nothing outside.”

She sighed softly. “He wishes to do something. I am sure of that. But something inside him stops him.”

“Does he ever speak of it to you?”

“No,” she answered. “He never explains. That is why I feel sorry for him.”

Her voice held neither complaint nor anger, only concern. I realized then how deeply she cared for her husband, though she did not fully understand him.

“He changed after his student days,” she continued. “Before that he was lively

and hopeful. People liked him very much.”

“What caused the change?” I asked carefully.

She shook her head. “I do not know. Sometimes I think he carries pain he cannot share.”

At that moment footsteps sounded outside, and Sensei returned. Our talk ended at once. He greeted me calmly, as if nothing unusual had happened, and the three of us drank tea together. I noticed no difference in his expression, yet I felt as though I had touched the edge of a hidden truth.

During these visits I learned more about their daily life. They lived simply and spent little money. Sensei read often but did not write for publication. Occasionally letters arrived from old classmates, and he answered them briefly. When I asked about those friends, he spoke without enthusiasm, sometimes even with quiet criticism.

“They work hard to gain honor,” he once said. “But honor is not always worth gaining.”

I argued that society needed capable people. He listened but only smiled faintly. I sensed that his judgment came from personal experience rather than mere opinion.

One evening he invited me to stay for dinner again. After the meal we sat together while his wife prepared tea. The room grew dim as the sun set. Sensei suddenly asked, “Do you believe people can truly understand one another?”

“If they speak honestly,” I replied.

“Even then,” he said slowly, “there remain parts that cannot be shared.”

His wife returned at that moment, and he fell silent. Watching them together, I felt both warmth and distance between them. They treated each other gently, yet something invisible seemed to stand between their hearts.

As months passed, I noticed that Sensei sometimes fell into deep thought without warning. His expression would darken briefly, then return to normal as if nothing had happened. Whenever I tried to ask what troubled him, he changed the subject.

One night, while walking together after dinner, I gathered courage to speak

more directly.

“Sensei,” I said, “you once told me love is a sin. Do you still believe that?”

He walked several steps before answering. “Yes.”

“Even between husband and wife?”

He stopped and looked at me carefully. “Especially there.”

I felt confused. “But you and your wife seem happy.”

“We appear so,” he said quietly. “Appearance and truth are not always the same.”

His words disturbed me, yet I sensed he would say no more. We continued walking in silence until we reached my lodging.

That night I lay awake for a long time. Until then I had believed happiness was simple: affection, trust, and peaceful living together. Yet Sensei’s tone suggested another reality hidden beneath such appearances.

Despite these doubts, my affection for him did not weaken. If anything, the mystery surrounding him drew me closer. I felt that someday he might reveal his true thoughts, and I wished to be near when that moment came.

Soon afterward the season changed. Cool winds replaced the warmth of early autumn, and the city grew quieter. My studies demanded more attention, yet I still found time to visit Sensei regularly. Each visit felt both familiar and slightly tense, as though I stood near a door that had not yet opened.

One evening I arrived to find Sensei unusually cheerful. He spoke more freely than usual and even laughed several times. His wife looked pleased by this change, and the atmosphere of the house felt lighter.

“You see,” she said to me with a smile, “he is happier when you come.”

Sensei shook his head gently. “Do not blame our guest for my moods.”

Still, I sensed that my presence gave him some comfort. The thought made me proud, though I could not explain why.

Later, after his wife left the room, Sensei said quietly, “Human bonds are strange. Sometimes we grow close without knowing the reason.”

“That is true,” I answered.

“But closeness can also bring suffering,” he added. “Remember that.”

His voice carried a seriousness that prevented further questions. I felt again that

unseen shadow moving between us.

At that time I believed our relationship would continue unchanged. I did not yet realize that events beyond my understanding were slowly approaching, and that the calm days I spent visiting Sensei would one day become memories filled with meaning I could not yet grasp.

Part 6

Winter approached, and the air grew cold. My visits to Sensei continued, though sometimes several days passed without meeting him because of my studies. Whenever I returned after an absence, he greeted me in the same calm manner, as if time had not moved at all. His wife also welcomed me warmly, and the quiet life of their home soon restored my peace of mind after the noise of the city.

Around this period I began to notice more clearly how little Sensei spoke about his past. When conversations turned toward earlier years, he either answered briefly or guided the talk elsewhere. At first I accepted this without thought, but gradually my curiosity increased. I felt there must be some important event hidden behind his silence.

One evening, while we were alone, I asked, "Sensei, were you always living in Tokyo after university?"

He paused before replying. "No. I lived elsewhere for a time."

"Was that when you married?"

He looked at me quietly. "Yes."

I waited for him to continue, but he did not. The conversation ended there, leaving me both dissatisfied and strangely respectful of his reserve.

My own life, meanwhile, followed the ordinary path of a student. I attended lectures, prepared for examinations, and spent evenings reading. Yet even during busy days I often thought of Sensei. His words about loneliness and love returned to me again and again, though I still could not fully understand them.

One afternoon I arrived at his house earlier than usual. Sensei was reading by the window. Outside, pale winter sunlight touched the garden stones.

“You came early today,” he said.

“My class ended sooner,” I answered.

He closed his book and asked suddenly, “Do you trust me?”

The question surprised me. “Of course I do.”

“Why?” he asked.

I hesitated. “Because you have never deceived me.”

He smiled faintly. “You are fortunate to believe that.”

“Is it not true?” I asked.

He did not answer directly. Instead he said, “Trust is simple when one knows little. It becomes difficult when knowledge grows.”

His words puzzled me, yet I felt they contained personal meaning. I wondered whether he doubted himself rather than others.

That evening his wife joined us, and the mood lightened. She spoke about small household matters and asked about my studies. Watching them together, I again felt that they formed a gentle and harmonious pair. Still, I remembered his earlier remark that appearance and truth were not always the same, and the thought disturbed me.

During dinner she mentioned a neighbor who had recently married. “They look very happy,” she said.

Sensei listened silently before replying, “Happiness often appears strongest at the beginning.”

“You speak as though it must fade,” she said with a slight laugh.

“Everything changes,” he answered calmly.

She looked at him for a moment, then turned the conversation elsewhere. I sensed an invisible tension passing between them, though neither showed open discomfort.

After the meal we drank tea. Sensei asked about my future plans after graduation. I spoke eagerly of possible work and hopes for independence. He listened attentively but without enthusiasm.

“You should live fully while you are young,” he said at last. “Do not become like me.”

“Why say that?” I asked. “Your life seems peaceful.”

“Peace and emptiness resemble each other from a distance,” he replied.

His words left me uncertain whether he spoke in regret or simple observation.

As weeks passed, I became more aware of the deep sadness hidden beneath his calm surface. Sometimes, when conversation paused, he stared into space with an expression so lonely that I felt almost afraid to speak. At such moments I sensed that he carried memories heavier than I could imagine.

One snowy evening I arrived to find him alone. His wife had gone to visit a relative. The house felt even quieter than usual. We sat facing each other while snow fell outside.

“You come often,” he said softly. “Do you never grow tired of me?”

“No,” I answered honestly.

“That may change someday,” he said. “People grow and move away from what once seemed important.”

“I do not think so,” I replied.

He smiled gently. “Youth always believes in permanence.”

We spoke little after that. The silence between us felt deep but not uncomfortable. Listening to the faint sound of falling snow, I felt a strange closeness to him, as if we shared something beyond words.

When his wife returned later that evening, warmth seemed to reenter the house. She brushed snow from her sleeves and laughed lightly at the cold. Watching her, I understood how much brightness she brought into Sensei’s life. Without her presence, the house felt almost too still.

As I prepared to leave, Sensei walked with me to the entrance. “Take care on the road,” he said.

“I will,” I replied.

He hesitated, then added, “You are still at the beginning of life. Remember that.”

I nodded, though I did not know why he spoke with such seriousness.

Walking back through the cold streets, I felt both comforted and uneasy. My friendship with Sensei had become one of the most important parts of my life, yet I sensed that behind his kindness lay a story I had not yet heard—a story that

would one day change my understanding of him completely.

Part 7

Spring returned slowly, and with it came a lighter feeling in the city. Students spoke eagerly about examinations and future plans, while shops displayed new goods in their windows. My own days became busy, yet I continued to visit Sensei whenever I could. By now my presence in his house felt entirely natural, almost like that of a family member.

During this season I began preparing seriously for graduation. Whenever I spoke of my future, Sensei listened with attention but rarely gave advice. Instead he asked questions that made me examine my own thoughts more deeply.

“Why do you wish to work?” he asked one day.

“To live independently,” I answered. “And to become useful.”

“Useful to whom?” he continued.

I struggled to reply clearly. His questions often turned simple ideas into difficult problems. At last I said, “Useful to society, I suppose.”

He nodded slightly but did not appear satisfied. “Society,” he repeated quietly, as if the word itself carried doubt.

His wife, who was sewing nearby, looked up and smiled. “You always make young people think too seriously,” she said. “Let him enjoy his hopes.”

Sensei smiled faintly but said nothing more. Watching them, I felt again that strange mixture of harmony and distance between husband and wife.

Around this time I also noticed that Sensei’s mood changed more often. Some days he spoke freely and even joked. On others he seemed withdrawn, answering only briefly. These changes puzzled me, yet I did not dare question them directly.

One afternoon we walked together through the streets. Children played nearby, and their laughter filled the air. Sensei watched them silently.

“Children live without memory,” he said at last. “That is why they appear happy.”

“Is memory always painful?” I asked.

“Not always,” he replied. “But once a person learns certain truths, forgetting becomes impossible.”

His words sounded heavy, yet his expression remained calm. I felt again that he was speaking from personal experience rather than philosophy.

As we continued walking, he suddenly asked, “Do you believe people can change completely?”

“Yes,” I said after thinking. “Experience changes everyone.”

“Even one event may be enough,” he murmured.

I wanted to ask what event he meant, but his tone discouraged further questions. We walked on without speaking.

Soon afterward my examinations approached, and I visited less frequently for a short time. When I finally returned after several days, Sensei greeted me with unusual warmth.

“You have been busy,” he said.

“Yes, preparing for exams.”

“That is good,” he replied. “Work hard while you still can.”

His words sounded almost like advice from someone watching life from a distance. I suddenly realized that he rarely spoke about his own future. He seemed to live only in the present, as if tomorrow held little meaning for him.

During dinner that evening his wife asked about my family. I spoke of my parents in the countryside and their hopes for me. Sensei listened quietly.

“Parents place many expectations on their children,” he said after a while. “Sometimes those expectations become burdens.”

“But they come from love,” I said.

“Yes,” he agreed softly. “From love.”

Something in his voice suggested regret. I wondered whether he thought of his own parents, yet he did not explain further.

After the meal we sat together drinking tea. The evening light faded, and shadows filled the room. Sensei suddenly turned to me.

“If one day you learn something painful about a person you trust,” he asked, “would you still continue to trust him?”

The question surprised me. "If I understood the reason, perhaps yes."

"Understanding is difficult," he said. "People judge quickly."

I felt uneasy but answered honestly. "I would try to understand."

He looked at me carefully, as if measuring my words. Then he nodded slowly. "You are kind," he said. "I hope you remain so."

His wife, unaware of the seriousness of our talk, began speaking about ordinary matters again, and the tension faded. Yet his question stayed with me long after I returned home.

As graduation drew nearer, I sensed that my relationship with Sensei was also approaching some turning point. Though nothing outward changed, an invisible weight seemed to grow between us. I often felt he wished to say something but held himself back.

One evening, as I prepared to leave, he walked with me to the gate and said quietly, "When your studies end, your life will truly begin."

"And yours?" I asked lightly.

He gave a faint smile. "Mine has already passed its beginning."

His answer left me strangely sad. Walking away, I looked back once and saw him still standing at the gate, watching silently until I turned the corner.

At that time I did not know why his figure appeared so lonely against the fading light. I believed our meetings would continue just as before. Yet unseen forces were already moving toward us, and the peaceful days I enjoyed were slowly leading to a future neither of us could avoid.

Part 8

My examinations ended at last, and with their completion I felt both relief and uncertainty. For several days I rested, enjoying freedom after long study. Naturally my thoughts returned again to Sensei, and I soon visited his house to tell him the results.

He received me calmly, as always, yet I sensed genuine pleasure in his eyes when I told him I had passed.

“You have done well,” he said. “Now a new stage begins.”

His wife congratulated me warmly and prepared tea at once. The atmosphere of the house felt unusually bright that day, perhaps because my own mood was light. We spoke of future plans, and she asked whether I would remain in Tokyo or return home.

“I must visit my parents first,” I answered. “They will expect it.”

Sensei nodded. “Yes, you should go. Parents grow old while we are away.”

His words sounded simple, yet they carried a tone that made me look at him closely. For a moment his expression seemed distant, as if he were remembering something far beyond the present.

During that visit he asked many questions about my family, more than usual. I described my father’s strict character and my mother’s kindness. Sensei listened without interruption.

“You are fortunate,” he said quietly. “Do not forget that.”

I promised I would write to him while away. He agreed but did not show strong feeling. Still, when I rose to leave, he walked with me farther than usual, all the way to the street corner.

“Take care of your health,” he said. “Travel safely.”

His voice sounded almost serious enough to trouble me, though I could not explain why.

Soon afterward I returned to my hometown. The countryside felt peaceful after the noise of Tokyo. My parents welcomed me warmly, and neighbors came to ask about university life. For a time I forgot the quiet tension that often surrounded Sensei.

Yet even there, memories of him returned unexpectedly. When conversations ended and evening grew silent, I found myself thinking of his lonely expression or recalling his words about love and trust. I wrote him a letter describing my journey and daily life, and before long his reply arrived.

His letter was brief but kind. He asked about my health and studies and mentioned nothing of himself except that he and his wife were well. The simplicity of the message matched his manner of speaking, yet I felt slightly

disappointed by its restraint.

Days passed peacefully until my father suddenly fell ill. At first we believed it a minor sickness, but his condition worsened. Doctors visited frequently, and the house grew tense. I remained at home to help my mother, writing to Sensei again to explain why I could not return to Tokyo soon.

While caring for my father, I began to understand something of the responsibility Sensei had mentioned when speaking about parents. Watching my mother worry beside the sickbed, I felt a new seriousness entering my life.

During this period another letter arrived from Sensei. Its tone differed slightly from before. He asked carefully about my father's illness and expressed concern in warmer words than usual. Reading it, I felt comforted, as though he stood quietly beside me even from afar.

My father's condition improved for a short time, then worsened again. The uncertainty exhausted us all. Nights passed with little sleep, and my thoughts turned inward. I began to reflect on my own future and on the meaning of the relationships that shaped my life.

One evening, after my father finally fell asleep, I sat alone outside the house. The sky was dark and silent. For the first time I felt deeply the loneliness Sensei often spoke about. Though surrounded by family, I sensed how fragile human connections could be.

At that moment I understood a little why Sensei valued companionship yet feared closeness. Loss seemed always possible.

A few days later another letter arrived from him, longer than usual. He wrote that he hoped my father would recover and that difficult times often revealed truths hidden during peaceful days. His words felt serious, almost urgent, though he still revealed nothing about himself.

Reading the letter, I felt a strong desire to return to Tokyo and see him again. Yet my father's illness kept me at home.

As weeks passed, I realized that my life was changing. The carefree feelings of youth began to fade, replaced by awareness of responsibility and uncertainty. In this new state of mind, my memories of Sensei gained deeper meaning. His

sadness no longer appeared mysterious alone; it seemed connected to experiences I was slowly beginning to understand.

Still, I did not know that events were already unfolding in Tokyo that would soon alter everything between us. At that time I believed I would simply return after my father recovered and resume my visits as before. I could not imagine how greatly our relationship was about to change.

Part 9

My father's illness continued longer than we expected. Some days he seemed better and spoke almost as before, but the improvement never lasted. Each small sign of recovery gave us hope, only to be followed by renewed worry. My mother moved constantly between hope and fear, and I remained beside them, feeling that my own life had paused.

During this time I received several letters from Sensei. Each one asked carefully about my father's condition and urged me not to neglect my own health. His concern felt sincere, yet his words remained restrained, as though something prevented him from writing freely. I answered faithfully, describing our daily situation and promising to return to Tokyo as soon as possible.

One evening, after a particularly difficult day, a telegram arrived from Sensei. Its sudden appearance startled me. The message was short but urgent, asking me to come back to Tokyo at once if possible. I read it several times, unable to understand the reason. Nothing in his earlier letters had suggested such urgency.

I showed the telegram to my mother. She looked troubled but said gently, "Your friend must have an important matter. Still, your father is not yet well."

I stood between duty and confusion. My father's illness held me firmly at home, yet Sensei's request disturbed my thoughts deeply. That night I slept little, wondering what could have caused him to send such a message.

The next morning my father's condition appeared slightly improved. He spoke more clearly and even asked about my future plans. Seeing him calmer, my mother urged me to wait a few more days before deciding. I agreed, though uneasiness

remained within me.

Soon afterward a long letter arrived from Sensei. The handwriting seemed hurried, unlike his usual careful style. He wrote that important events had occurred and that he wished to speak with me directly. He added that if I could not come immediately, I should at least read his letter carefully when it reached me, for it contained matters concerning his entire life.

As I read these words, a cold feeling passed through me. I sensed that something serious had happened, something connected to the hidden sorrow I had long suspected in him.

The letter continued at great length. He began by explaining that he trusted me more than anyone else and wished to leave behind a true account of his past. He wrote that he had long carried guilt and loneliness and that the time had come when he could no longer remain silent.

Reading this introduction alone filled me with anxiety. I paused several times, unable to continue at once. Outside, ordinary village sounds continued, yet I felt separated from them, drawn instead toward the distant world where Sensei lived.

Before beginning the main story, he asked forgiveness for the burden he was placing upon me. He wrote that youth must one day face reality and that perhaps my friendship with him had prepared me to understand what he would reveal.

At this point I stopped reading and looked toward my father's room. The contrast between the quiet sickbed nearby and the heavy confession unfolding in my hands made my heart beat faster. I realized that my life stood between two worlds: the family that had raised me and the mysterious friend who now entrusted me with his deepest truth.

Gathering my courage, I returned to the letter and began reading again. Sensei described his own youth, his student days, and the events that shaped his character. His tone differed greatly from the calm speech I knew. It carried regret, self-judgment, and a deep sadness that seemed almost unbearable.

As I read, I understood that the peaceful figure I had known concealed a past filled with struggle and pain. The loneliness he often spoke of was not a simple feeling but the result of actions and choices that had marked his entire life.

Though I wished to continue reading without pause, my father called for me, and I had to set the letter aside. Yet even while caring for him, my thoughts remained fixed on Sensei's words waiting unfinished.

That night, after the house grew quiet, I returned to the letter once more. I sensed that everything I believed about Sensei—and perhaps about human life itself—was about to change.

I did not yet know how deeply his confession would affect me, nor that it would soon become the final message he would ever send.

Part 10

When the house finally grew quiet that night, I returned to Sensei's letter with a feeling close to fear. The lamp beside me burned steadily, and outside the countryside lay silent. Holding the pages in my hands, I felt as though Sensei himself were speaking directly to me from far away.

He began his story by describing his youth. He wrote that he had lost both parents while still young and had been left with a considerable inheritance. Because he had no close family able to guide him, he depended on relatives to manage his affairs. At that time he trusted people easily and believed kindness existed naturally in the world.

After entering school in Tokyo, he lived with an uncle who handled his money. Sensei studied seriously and spent his days quietly, believing that his relatives cared for him honestly. Yet gradually he noticed small changes. His allowance became irregular, and explanations about his property grew unclear. At first he blamed misunderstanding, but suspicion slowly entered his mind.

Eventually he discovered the truth. His uncle had secretly used much of his inheritance for personal purposes. The betrayal struck him deeply. Until then he had believed in human goodness without doubt, and the realization that someone close could deceive him destroyed that belief.

In the letter he wrote, "From that moment, trust left my heart. I learned that affection and greed can exist together in one person." These words felt heavy as I

read them. I remembered his earlier remarks about trust becoming difficult once knowledge increased, and now their meaning became clearer.

After this discovery he separated himself from his relatives and began living alone. Though still young, he felt older than others around him. He avoided forming close friendships and devoted himself to study, yet loneliness followed him constantly.

During this period he met a fellow student whom he called K. Sensei described K as serious, intelligent, and deeply devoted to moral ideals. K had grown up under strict religious teaching and lived with strong discipline. The two young men became close companions because each felt isolated from ordinary society.

Sensei admired K's strength of character. He wrote that K possessed a firm purpose in life, while he himself drifted without direction after losing faith in others. Living together, they shared long conversations about belief, duty, and the meaning of existence. For a time Sensei felt comforted, thinking he had finally found a person he could trust completely.

Yet beneath this friendship lay differences. K pursued spiritual perfection and rejected worldly desire, while Sensei remained uncertain, pulled between ideals and ordinary human feelings. Their discussions often turned serious, sometimes painful, as each struggled with questions neither could fully answer.

Eventually they moved into a new lodging house run by a widow and her daughter. Sensei described the daughter as gentle and quiet. Living under the same roof, he gradually developed affection for her, though at first he did not recognize his feelings clearly.

Reading this part of the letter, I felt my heart tighten. I realized that Sensei was now approaching the source of the sorrow that had shaped his life. His writing became slower and more emotional, as though each sentence required effort.

He confessed that during those days he experienced happiness for the first time since his betrayal by relatives. The peaceful household and the presence of the young woman softened his loneliness. Yet at the same time he feared attachment, remembering how trust had once brought him pain.

Meanwhile K also lived in the same house, sharing meals and daily life with

them. Sensei gradually sensed that K, despite his strict ideals, was also changing. The calm balance between friendship and hidden emotion began to weaken, though neither spoke openly of it.

At this point Sensei paused in the letter to explain why he was telling me these things. He wrote that understanding his later actions required knowing how deeply he had once trusted K and how strongly he feared betrayal after his earlier experience.

As I read, I felt increasing tension. The peaceful friendship he described seemed fragile, like something already moving toward tragedy.

He ended this portion of the letter by writing, "It was during that time that I first learned how love can become a sin." The sentence stood alone at the bottom of the page, and I understood that the meaning of his earlier words in Ueno was finally beginning to reveal itself.

I set the letter down for a moment, unable to continue immediately. The quiet night around me felt heavier than before. I sensed that what followed would lead directly to the secret that had governed Sensei's entire life.

Part 11

After resting for a short time, I continued reading Sensei's letter. His writing grew more serious as he described his life with K in the widow's house. At first their days passed peacefully. They studied together, shared simple meals, and spoke late into the night about philosophy and faith. Sensei believed that, at last, he had found a friendship free from selfishness.

Yet slowly a change occurred. Living close to the widow's daughter, Sensei felt his affection deepen. Her quiet kindness eased the loneliness that had followed him since childhood. She treated both young men with equal politeness, and nothing in her manner suggested preference. Still, Sensei's heart began to move toward her in ways he could not ignore.

At the same time he noticed a subtle change in K. Though K continued speaking about discipline and the rejection of worldly desire, his behavior grew restless. He

became silent during meals and often left the house alone. Sensei sensed that K struggled with feelings he could not easily accept.

One evening, during a long conversation, K confessed that his spiritual training had reached a crisis. He spoke of weakness and inner conflict, though he did not clearly explain its cause. Sensei listened carefully but did not yet understand the true reason for K's suffering.

Gradually the truth became clear. K, who had always rejected ordinary emotion, had also fallen in love with the widow's daughter. The realization shocked Sensei. Until then he had believed his feelings were private, yet now he understood that his closest friend shared the same secret.

In his letter Sensei wrote that from that moment his heart divided against itself. He felt sympathy for K, whose struggle seemed painful and sincere. At the same time jealousy entered his mind. For the first time since childhood he feared losing something precious to another person.

He described sleepless nights filled with doubt. Should he confess his own feelings honestly to K? Should he step aside and allow his friend happiness? Or should he act first to secure his own future? These questions tormented him, and the trust he once felt toward others began to weaken again.

One day K spoke openly. With great effort he admitted that he loved the young woman but believed such feeling to be a weakness that betrayed his ideals. He said he intended to overcome it through stronger discipline. Listening to him, Sensei felt both relief and fear. Relief because K seemed unwilling to pursue marriage, and fear because such determination might not last.

Sensei confessed in the letter that at this moment he acted selfishly. Instead of revealing his own feelings, he remained silent. He encouraged K to remain strong and to conquer his emotions, even while secretly hoping K would abandon his love.

After this conversation Sensei's anxiety increased. He watched K closely, searching for signs of change. Every word and gesture seemed filled with hidden meaning. Their friendship, once natural, became strained by unspoken rivalry.

Unable to endure uncertainty, Sensei finally made a decision. Without

informing K, he approached the widow privately and asked permission to marry her daughter. The widow accepted his proposal warmly. She had long trusted him and believed him a suitable husband.

Writing this part, Sensei admitted that he acted in haste, driven by fear that K might confess his own feelings first. Even while arranging the marriage, he felt guilty toward his friend. Yet he convinced himself that securing happiness quickly was necessary for survival.

After the agreement was made, he returned home and faced K as usual. He did not immediately reveal what he had done. Days passed while he searched for courage to speak. During this time K seemed increasingly troubled, though he said little.

At last Sensei told him of the engagement. He described the moment in painful detail. K listened silently, showing almost no reaction. He congratulated Sensei calmly and spoke as though nothing important had happened. Yet behind that calmness Sensei sensed something breaking.

That night K behaved normally, even speaking more gently than usual. Sensei felt uneasy but tried to believe everything would soon return to peace. He told himself that honesty had finally restored balance between them.

The next morning, however, tragedy arrived. K was found dead in his room, having taken his own life.

Reading these words, my hands trembled. The quiet figure I knew as Sensei suddenly stood before me in a new light. The loneliness and guilt I had long sensed now appeared connected to this terrible event.

Sensei wrote that beside K's body lay a letter explaining his despair. K blamed himself for weakness and failure to live according to his ideals. He did not accuse Sensei directly, yet Sensei felt responsible. He believed that by hiding his intentions and acting secretly, he had betrayed the one person who trusted him completely.

"From that day," Sensei wrote, "I became a man who carries death within his heart."

I paused again, overwhelmed by the weight of his confession. The meaning of

his earlier words—about trust, loneliness, and love as sin—now stood painfully clear.

Part 12

With trembling hands I continued reading. Sensei's letter described the days following K's death in slow and painful detail. The house, once peaceful, became filled with shock and confusion. The widow wept constantly, unable to understand why such a serious and gentle young man had chosen death. Sensei alone knew how closely the tragedy touched him, yet he hid his feelings behind calm behavior.

He helped arrange the funeral and managed practical matters, acting as though he were only a grieving friend. Inside, however, guilt consumed him. He believed that his secret decision to marry had driven K into despair. Although K's letter blamed only himself, Sensei could not escape the thought that he had betrayed his friend's trust.

After the funeral, silence settled over the house. The widow and her daughter relied increasingly on Sensei for support, and the marriage proceeded as planned. Outwardly life returned to order, yet Sensei felt unworthy of happiness. Standing beside the woman he loved, he remembered constantly the friend who had died.

In the letter he wrote, "I married with the feeling that I had stepped over a grave." These words struck me deeply. The happiness he gained could never be separated from the loss he carried.

At first he believed time might lessen his guilt. He tried to live kindly toward his wife and devoted himself to creating a peaceful home. She trusted him completely and loved him sincerely. Yet instead of bringing comfort, her affection increased his suffering. Every sign of her happiness reminded him of the cost at which it had been obtained.

He confessed that he never revealed the truth to her. He feared that telling her would destroy her peace and make K's death meaningless. Thus he chose silence, carrying the burden alone.

Years passed, but the memory of K did not fade. Sensei began visiting his grave

regularly, feeling that only there could he face his own conscience honestly. Each visit renewed both sorrow and responsibility. He believed himself bound to the dead friend more strongly than to the living world.

Gradually he withdrew from society. Though educated and capable, he lost all desire for public success. Praise or recognition seemed empty to him. He felt that a man who had betrayed trust possessed no right to stand proudly before others.

This explained what I had long wondered: why he avoided work, why he spoke of himself as unworthy, and why loneliness surrounded him even within marriage.

Sensei wrote that his wife noticed his change but never understood its cause. She believed only that he suffered from some unknown sadness. Her kindness toward him never weakened, and this kindness deepened his remorse further.

“She lives beside a man she does not truly know,” he wrote. “Yet I lack the courage to reveal myself.”

Reading these lines, I remembered her gentle smile and felt a sharp sorrow for both of them.

Sensei continued by explaining that he often considered confessing everything, yet each time he imagined the pain it would bring her, he remained silent. Instead he accepted loneliness as punishment. The monthly visits to K’s grave became a ritual through which he maintained connection with the past he could neither escape nor forgive.

He then turned to speak of me. He wrote that when we met in Kamakura, my youth and openness reminded him of the person he once had been before betrayal and guilt changed him. At first he avoided closeness, fearing that friendship would again lead to harm. Yet gradually he felt comfort in my company.

“You approached me without suspicion,” he wrote. “Your trust both relieved and frightened me.” He feared repeating past mistakes, yet he also wished to guide me away from the errors he believed had ruined his own life.

This, he explained, was why he spoke often of loneliness and warned me about love. He hoped I would understand human weakness before suffering its consequences.

As I read, memories of our conversations returned with new meaning. His

strange seriousness, his sudden silences, and his refusal to visit the grave with others all became clear.

Near the end of this section he wrote that recent events in the nation had forced him to reflect deeply on life and death. The passing of an important public figure had awakened thoughts of loyalty and responsibility within him. He felt that the time had come to face his own past fully.

The tone of the letter grew heavier, almost final. I sensed that he was preparing to speak of a decision already made.

My heart beat quickly as I turned to the next page, afraid of what I might read yet unable to stop.

Part 13

The next part of Sensei's letter began with a calmness that frightened me more than any strong emotion. His writing became clear and steady, as though he had already reached a final conclusion. He explained that recent events in the country had deeply affected him. The death of a great national leader had caused many people to reflect on loyalty and the meaning of life. For Sensei, however, it awakened a personal decision long forming within his heart.

He wrote that since K's death he had lived as a man already separated from ordinary life. Though he continued breathing and speaking, he felt spiritually bound to the past. Years of quiet living with his wife had not erased this feeling. Instead, time had only confirmed his belief that he carried an unpayable debt.

"I have lived many years after K," he wrote, "yet each year has felt borrowed." He believed that continuing to live without facing his guilt honestly was itself a form of dishonesty. The peaceful routine of daily life could no longer protect him from this thought.

Sensei then turned again to me. He said that meeting me had delayed his final decision because my presence allowed him to feel human warmth once more. Through our conversations he experienced moments of peace he believed lost forever. Yet at the same time, my youth reminded him constantly of the person he

had once betrayed.

He feared that remaining alive while carrying his secret might someday harm me as well. Therefore he decided to reveal everything before taking the last step of his life. He hoped that by entrusting his story to me, someone young and still searching for truth, his experiences might gain meaning beyond personal suffering.

Reading these words, I began to understand what he intended, and a cold fear spread through my body.

Sensei continued by describing his wife. He wrote of her kindness, patience, and loyalty throughout their marriage. She had given him trust without question and shared his quiet life without complaint. Because of this, he felt even more unworthy.

“She believes she lives with a good man,” he wrote. “I cannot allow her to learn that her happiness was built upon another’s death.” For this reason he chose not to reveal the truth to her. He believed that protecting her innocence was the final duty remaining to him.

He explained that after his death she would receive his property and live securely. He asked me, if possible, to offer her support through friendship and respect, though he did not demand it. His tone remained gentle, never commanding, even while discussing such grave matters.

Then he returned to the idea he had once spoken aloud to me: that love could be a sin. He clarified that love itself was not evil, but selfish desire hidden beneath love could destroy both self and others. In choosing his own happiness without honesty toward K, he believed he had allowed love to become sin.

“Human hearts are weak,” he wrote. “I was neither strong enough to sacrifice nor honest enough to confess.” These words seemed to carry the weight of his entire life.

As the letter neared its end, his sentences grew shorter. He thanked me for my friendship and for listening to him without judgment during the years we spent together. He wrote that my visits had given him moments of peace he never expected to know again.

Finally he explained that by the time I finished reading the letter, he would

likely already be dead. He did not describe the method directly, but the meaning was unmistakable. He wished his death to serve as both confession and atonement, a way to reunite himself spiritually with the friend whose trust he believed he had betrayed.

The final lines were addressed to me personally:

“Live honestly. Do not repeat my mistake. Trust others, but do not deceive yourself. If my life holds any lesson, let it be this.”

The letter ended there.

For a long time I could not move. The quiet room around me seemed unreal. The man I had known as calm and distant had revealed a life filled with guilt, love, betrayal, and endless remorse. His loneliness, once mysterious, now appeared painfully clear.

Holding the final page, I felt that the bond between us had changed forever. Though separated by distance, his voice remained alive in my mind, asking silently what meaning I would draw from the story he had entrusted to me.

Outside, the night remained still, unaware that somewhere far away the life of the man I called Sensei had already reached its end.

Part 14

After finishing the letter, I sat motionless for a long time. The lamp burned low, and the silence of the night pressed heavily around me. Sensei’s final words repeated again and again in my mind. I felt as though the distance between my quiet hometown and Tokyo had suddenly become unbearable.

At last I rose and went to my father’s room. He slept weakly, his breathing slow but steady. Watching him, I felt torn between two duties. One bound me to my family, whose need was immediate and visible. The other pulled me toward the friend who had entrusted me with his final confession.

I returned to my room and read the letter once more from beginning to end. Each passage now carried deeper meaning. The calm man I had admired appeared before me not as a figure of mystery but as someone painfully human, struggling

under the weight of his own choices.

Morning came without rest. I told my mother that I must return to Tokyo at once. She saw from my face that something serious had happened and did not question me long. My father, though still weak, encouraged me to go, saying that a young man must answer urgent calls without delay.

With a heavy heart I prepared for departure. The journey felt endless. As the train moved toward the city, I watched the passing landscape without truly seeing it. My thoughts remained fixed on Sensei's final pages. I wondered whether I might somehow arrive in time, though reason told me it was already too late.

When I reached Tokyo, the familiar streets appeared strangely distant. Everything looked unchanged, yet I felt separated from ordinary life. I hurried directly toward Sensei's house, my heart beating painfully with each step.

The gate stood closed as always. For a moment I hesitated, afraid of what waited inside. Then I entered.

The house felt unusually quiet. The maid recognized me and looked startled. Without speaking clearly, she led me inside. I soon learned that Sensei had died shortly after sending the letter. The official explanation spoke of sudden illness, but I understood the truth immediately.

His wife received me calmly, though deep sorrow showed in her face. She seemed exhausted rather than shocked, as if grief had already settled into her heart. She told me that Sensei had behaved gently in his final days and had spoken little of anything unusual.

Listening to her, I felt the terrible weight of the secret he had left behind. She knew nothing of the confession I carried. To her, he remained the quiet husband who had shared her life faithfully.

I offered what comfort I could, though my own emotions remained confused. Standing within the familiar room where we had once talked so easily, I felt his absence more strongly than I had expected. Every object seemed to hold memory: the place where he read, the seat where we drank tea, the calm light falling through the window.

Later I visited the cemetery at Zoshigaya alone. Beneath the large ginkgo tree

I remembered his words about golden leaves covering the ground. Now the place felt solemn and still. Nearby lay the grave of K, the friend whose death had shaped Sensei's life, and not far away the newly prepared grave that would soon hold Sensei himself.

Standing there, I understood why he had returned month after month. The cemetery connected past and present, guilt and memory, life and death. I bowed silently, feeling both grief and responsibility.

In the days that followed, I helped with small matters at the house whenever possible. Sensei's wife treated me kindly, grateful for companionship during mourning. Yet each time I spoke with her, I felt the hidden letter within me like a weight I could never share.

Eventually I returned to my own lodging. Life around me resumed its ordinary movement, but I no longer felt the same person who had first met Sensei at the seaside. His story had changed my understanding of trust, love, and human weakness.

I often recalled his final request: to live honestly and not repeat his mistake. Though I could not fully grasp all its meaning, I felt certain that the responsibility now belonged to me.

The man I had called Sensei was gone, yet his voice remained alive within my memory. Through his life and death, he had left me a question rather than an answer—a question about how one should live while carrying both love and guilt within the human heart.

And so my story of Sensei, which began with a chance meeting at the crowded shore of Kamakura, reached its end with quiet reflection beside his grave.