

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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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: Ningen Isu (人間椅子)

Author: Edogawa Rampo (江戸川乱歩)

Source: Aozora Bunko (青空文庫)

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

Original Japanese text available at:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/001779/card56648.html>

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Edogawa Rampo, *The Human Chair [Ningen Isu]* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the Japanese by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Yoshiko was a young and beautiful writer. Every morning, she stood at the door of her house and watched her husband leave for work. He was an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and he always left at the same time. When he was gone, the house became quiet. Only then did Yoshiko feel that the day truly began for her.

It was already past ten when she returned to her own life. She walked slowly to the Western-style part of the house and entered a study that she shared with her husband. This room was her world. There, she sat at her desk and worked on her writing. At that time, she was preparing a long story for a special summer issue of a magazine.

Yoshiko was known as a talented woman writer. People spoke of her beauty as well as her skill. Her name had become famous, almost more famous than her husband's. Because of this, letters came to her every day. Many of them were from people she did not know. They wrote to praise her stories, to thank her, or sometimes to ask for advice.

That morning, as usual, she sat at her desk before beginning her work. She took a small pile of letters and began to read them one by one. It was her habit to read every letter, no matter how simple or dull it might be. She felt that it was kind to do so.

Most of the letters were not interesting. They used the same words again and again. Still, Yoshiko read them carefully. She opened two envelopes and read a postcard. After that, only one item remained.

It was a thick envelope. It felt heavier than the others, as if it contained many pages. Yoshiko had not received any notice about it. But this was not unusual. Sometimes people sent long manuscripts without warning. These were often boring, but Yoshiko usually looked at them at least for a moment.

She picked up the envelope and opened it. Inside, she found a bundle of papers. It looked like a manuscript. However, when she glanced at the first page, she noticed something strange. There was no title. There was no name.

Instead, the text began suddenly with a single word.

“Madam.”

Yoshiko tilted her head slightly. “Is this a letter?” she thought. It did not look like an ordinary manuscript. Curious, she began to read.

At first, she only let her eyes move over a few lines. But soon, something about the words made her pause. There was a strange feeling in them. It was not clear, but it was enough to make her uneasy.

A quiet fear, like a cold shadow, began to grow inside her.

Still, Yoshiko had a strong sense of curiosity. Once she started reading, she could not easily stop. The strange feeling pulled her forward. Her eyes moved faster and faster across the page.

The letter continued in a polite but unusual tone.

“Madam, please forgive me for sending you such a rude letter, even though you do not know me at all.”

Yoshiko frowned slightly. The words were very formal, yet there was something strange behind them.

“I am about to confess a most unusual crime. It is something so strange that you may be greatly surprised.”

A crime.

Yoshiko’s fingers tightened around the paper.

The writer continued.

“For several months, I have hidden myself completely from the world of men. I have lived a life like a devil. No one knows what I have done. If nothing had changed, I might have remained hidden forever.”

Yoshiko felt a chill. She did not understand what the man meant, but she could feel that the story was not normal.

“But recently, something changed in my heart. I can no longer keep this secret. I must confess everything. Please read this letter to the end. Then you will

understand why I must tell you all this, and why I have chosen you.”

Yoshiko swallowed quietly.

Why me?

She looked at the paper again. The handwriting was neat, but it carried a strange pressure, as if the writer’s thoughts were pushing hard against each word.

“I do not know where to begin,” the letter went on. “What I must tell you is so strange that it feels almost shameful to write it in the form of a letter. Still, I will begin from the start.”

Yoshiko leaned a little closer to the desk. The room around her seemed to grow quiet and distant.

“I was born with a very ugly face.”

The sentence was simple, but it carried a heavy weight.

“Please remember this clearly. If you ever agree to meet me, I do not wish to shock you. My face has become even worse after my long and unhealthy life.”

Yoshiko’s breath grew slow and shallow. She did not know why, but the words made her feel uncomfortable.

“This is my fate,” the letter said. “Though I am ugly, my heart burns with strong desire. I dream of beauty, of rich and wonderful things. I imagine a world far beyond my true life.”

Yoshiko could almost see the man as he described himself. A lonely figure, filled with dreams he could never reach.

“I am only a poor craftsman,” he continued. “I make chairs for a living. I am nothing more.”

A chair maker.

The image was simple, but Yoshiko felt that it was important. She read on.

“I create chairs with great care. Each one must satisfy the customer. When I finish a chair, I sit on it myself. I test how it feels. In those moments, I imagine a different life.”

The man described rich rooms, soft carpets, shining lights, and beautiful people. He imagined that his chairs were placed in such places. He imagined himself as someone important, sitting in those rooms, with a lovely woman beside him.

Yoshiko felt a strange mix of pity and unease.

“These are only dreams,” the letter said. “In reality, I return to my poor life. I hear the noise of the streets. I see my own ugly face. And I feel empty again.”

The words became darker.

“I began to think that my life was worthless. I even thought of death. But then, another idea came to me. A terrible idea.”

Yoshiko’s eyes stopped for a moment.

A terrible idea.

She felt her heart beat a little faster.

The quiet study, which had always been a safe and familiar place, now felt slightly different. The chair she sat on, the desk before her, the walls around her—all seemed to hold a faint and hidden tension.

Still, she could not stop reading.

She lowered her eyes again to the page.

The letter was only beginning.

Part 2

“The idea came to me suddenly,” the man wrote. “At first, it was only a small wish. I did not want to part from a chair that I had made with great care. I wished that I could stay with it, even after it left my hands.”

Yoshiko leaned back slightly, but her eyes did not leave the page.

“But this simple wish slowly changed into something far more terrible. It joined with the dark thoughts that had been growing in my mind. And then, I decided to act.”

The words were calm, but the meaning behind them was not.

“At that time, I had been given an important task. I was asked to make a large armchair. It was not an ordinary piece. It was to be sent to a hotel run by foreigners. Usually, such chairs were brought from abroad, but this time, they wished to show that Japanese craftsmen could create something just as fine.”

Yoshiko could almost see the workshop in her mind: wood, tools, and a man

working with silent focus.

“I gave all my strength to this work. I forgot sleep and food. I poured my heart into it. And when it was finished, I felt a satisfaction that I had never known before.”

The man described the chair in great detail. It was large and soft. The leather was smooth. The back supported the body gently. The arms were round and firm. Everything was made with perfect balance.

“When I sat in it,” he wrote, “I felt as if I were no longer a poor craftsman. For a moment, I became the master of a fine room. I could almost see the rich house, the paintings on the walls, the bright lights above, and the flowers on the table.”

Yoshiko read slowly now. The man’s imagination was vivid, almost too vivid.

“Then,” he continued, “as I sat there, my thoughts grew strange. They became stronger and brighter, like colors in a dream. I began to feel afraid of my own mind.”

Yoshiko’s fingers tightened again.

“And then, the idea appeared.”

The next lines seemed to grow darker.

“Why not go with the chair?”

Yoshiko’s breath caught.

“If I could not live in such a beautiful world, then I would hide myself inside the chair and follow it. I would enter that world in secret.”

She stared at the page.

Hide... inside the chair?

“At first, the thought seemed foolish,” the letter said. “But the more I considered it, the more it called to me. It was like a whisper from a demon.”

Yoshiko felt a cold sensation along her back.

“I chose one of the chairs—the best one. I broke it apart and began to rebuild it. I changed its structure so that a man could hide inside it.”

The man explained his work with careful detail.

The chair was large. Its seat was close to the floor. The back and arms were thick. Inside, there was a hollow space.

“I adjusted the frame and the springs. I created enough room for my body. I made small openings in the leather so that I could breathe and hear sounds from outside. I even prepared a small shelf inside, where I placed food and water.”

Yoshiko’s face grew pale.

“I thought of everything,” the man wrote. “I made it possible to remain inside for several days without trouble. The chair became a small room, made only for me.”

Yoshiko felt as if the walls of her study were closing in.

“When it was ready, I removed my clothes and entered the chair. I closed the hidden door beneath me.”

She stopped reading for a moment.

The image was too strong.

A man, hiding inside a chair.

She swallowed and forced herself to continue.

“It was dark. It was narrow. I felt as if I had entered a grave. In that moment, I disappeared from the human world.”

Yoshiko shivered slightly.

“Soon after, workers came to take the chairs away. I could hear their voices. When they lifted the chair, one of them said it was very heavy. I was afraid, but they did not discover me.”

Yoshiko imagined the scene: men lifting the chair, unaware of the living body inside.

“The chair was placed on a cart,” the letter continued. “The movement was rough. I could feel every shake in my body. But I remained silent.”

The man described the long journey.

“By the afternoon, the chair was placed in a room at the hotel. It was not a private room, but a place where many people came and went. They read newspapers, talked, and smoked.”

Yoshiko read the next lines with growing fear.

“You may already understand my purpose,” the man wrote. “At first, I planned to leave the chair when no one was around and steal things from the hotel. No one

would ever suspect that a man was hiding inside a chair.”

Yoshiko closed her eyes for a moment.

A thief inside a chair.

The idea was both absurd and terrifying.

“I would move like a shadow,” the letter said. “I would go from room to room. When people began to search, I would return to my hiding place and watch them in silence.”

The man compared himself to a small creature that hides in a shell, coming out only when it is safe.

Yoshiko slowly opened her eyes again.

“And my plan succeeded,” he wrote. “Because it was so strange, no one imagined it. Within three days, I had already stolen many things.”

Yoshiko’s expression grew tense.

“The feeling of danger was exciting,” the man continued. “To steal, to succeed, and to watch people search for me—it was a strange and powerful pleasure.”

Yoshiko felt uneasy, but she read on.

“However,” the letter said, “this was not the true purpose of my story.”

She leaned forward slightly.

“What I discovered inside that chair was something far more important. Something far more terrible.”

Yoshiko’s heart began to beat faster again.

The letter paused there, as if preparing to reveal something deeper.

Yoshiko held the paper tightly.

She knew that what came next would be even more disturbing.

But she could not stop.

Part 3

“I must now return to the moment when the chair was first placed in the hotel room,” the man wrote. “It was quiet at first. After the workers left, I heard nothing. I did not dare to move. I listened carefully, using all my senses.”

Yoshiko leaned closer, her eyes fixed on the page.

“After some time, I heard footsteps. They came slowly along the corridor. Then the sound grew soft as the person stepped onto the carpet. The door opened. Someone entered the room.”

Yoshiko felt a tightness in her chest.

“Before I could think, a large body fell heavily onto the chair—onto me. I felt it clearly. Through a thin layer of leather, I felt the weight of a man.”

Yoshiko’s fingers trembled.

“His body pressed against mine. His back rested against my chest. His hands lay over my own. The warmth of his body came through the leather. I could even smell the smoke from his cigar.”

Yoshiko swallowed. The image was too vivid.

“Madam,” the man wrote, “imagine, if you can, what I felt at that moment. I was in complete darkness. I could not move. A living person sat upon me, without knowing that I was there.”

Yoshiko’s breath became shallow.

“I was afraid—more afraid than I had ever been. I held my body as still as possible. Cold sweat ran down my skin. I could not think. I could only endure.”

Yoshiko read slowly, almost unwillingly.

“That man was only the beginning. On that same day, many people came and sat on the chair. One after another, they used it. None of them knew that I was inside. None of them imagined that the soft seat beneath them was a living human body.”

Yoshiko closed her eyes for a brief moment, but then opened them again.

“The world inside the chair is dark and narrow,” the man continued. “But it is also filled with strange sensations. In that place, people are no longer seen with the eyes. They are known only through touch, sound, and smell.”

Yoshiko felt a deep unease.

“Each person has a different form. Some are heavy and soft. Others are thin and hard. I can feel the shape of their bodies—the curve of their backs, the width of their shoulders, the strength or weakness of their limbs.”

The description became more detailed.

“Even without seeing their faces, I can tell them apart. Their bodies speak to me. In this dark world, touch becomes the only truth.”

Yoshiko’s lips tightened.

“This is also true of women,” the man wrote. “In the world outside, people judge beauty by the face. But inside the chair, such things do not matter. There is only the body, the voice, and the scent.”

Yoshiko hesitated for a moment.

Still, she continued.

“Madam, please forgive me if my words are too direct,” he added. “But I must tell you the truth. One day, a woman came and sat on the chair.”

Yoshiko’s heart beat faster.

“She was the first woman to sit upon me. From her voice, I believed that she was young. She entered the room with light steps, almost dancing. She seemed happy.”

Yoshiko could almost hear the soft sound of her steps.

“Then, suddenly, she threw her body onto the chair. She laughed loudly. She moved her arms and legs, as if she were playing.”

Yoshiko felt a strange tension inside her.

“For a long time—perhaps half an hour—she remained there. She sang quietly to herself. She moved her body again and again. Her weight shifted. Her warmth reached me through the leather.”

Yoshiko held the paper tightly.

“This was something I had never experienced before. I had always feared women. I could not even look at them directly. And yet, here I was, so close to one, separated only by a thin layer.”

Yoshiko’s face grew pale.

“She did not know I was there. She trusted the chair completely. She gave her whole body to it, without fear.”

The man’s words became more intense.

“In that moment, I realized something terrible. I could move slightly. I could

press back. I could even imagine holding her.”

Yoshiko felt a chill run through her.

“From that day on, everything changed. I no longer cared about stealing. That was nothing compared to this new experience.”

Yoshiko lowered her head slightly, but her eyes continued to move across the page.

“The world inside the chair became my true home. It was dark, narrow, and painful—but it allowed me to be close to people in a way that was impossible in the outside world.”

Yoshiko’s breath grew uneven.

“In the bright world, I am ugly. I am weak. I am nothing. But inside the chair, I can be near beauty. I can hear voices. I can feel warmth.”

The man’s tone became almost calm again.

“This is a strange kind of love. It uses only touch, sound, and scent. It does not belong to the world of light. It is something closer to the world of demons.”

Yoshiko felt as if she could no longer escape the letter.

“And yet,” the man continued, “I could not leave it. No matter how painful it became, I stayed. I chose this life.”

Yoshiko’s hand trembled slightly.

“Night after night, I left the chair to move through the hotel. I was careful. I made no sound. No one saw me.”

The man described how he lived in secret for months.

“My body grew weak. My legs could barely move. But I did not care. I remained inside the chair, day after day.”

Yoshiko read the next lines slowly.

“Many women came and sat on the chair. Each one was different. Some were soft and gentle. Others were strong and firm. Each body had its own shape, its own feeling.”

Yoshiko felt a deep discomfort.

“I remember them not by their faces, but by their forms. Their bodies remain in my memory.”

The man paused for a moment in his writing.

“But there were also other experiences,” he added.

Yoshiko’s eyes moved to the next line.

She knew the story was not over.

It was only growing darker.

Part 4

“There were other experiences,” the man continued. “Some of them were strange. Some were almost frightening. And some filled me with a kind of excitement that I cannot fully describe.”

Yoshiko read on, her face pale and tense.

“One day, a very important man came and sat on the chair. I later learned, from the talk of the servants, that he was an ambassador from a powerful country. He was also known as a great poet.”

Yoshiko imagined a large man, dressed well, moving with confidence.

“His body was strong and heavy. When he sat, I could feel the full weight of him. He spoke with others in a language I did not understand. His voice rose and fell as he talked, and each movement of his body reached me through the chair.”

Yoshiko followed each word carefully.

“In that moment, I felt something strange. I, a poor and ugly craftsman, was supporting the body of a man known across the world. No one knew. No one could imagine it. And yet, it was true.”

Yoshiko’s fingers tightened.

“Then, a thought came to me. It was a terrible thought.”

She stopped breathing for a second.

“What if I had a knife?” the man wrote. “What if I pushed it through the leather and into his heart?”

Yoshiko’s eyes widened.

“With one small act, I could change the world. There would be great confusion. Nations might be shaken. Newspapers would shout. People would speak of the

event for years.”

Yoshiko felt cold.

“And all of it would begin with me—hidden in a chair, unseen by anyone.”

She closed her eyes for a moment, then forced herself to continue.

“I did not act,” the man wrote. “But the thought itself gave me a strange sense of power.”

Yoshiko let out a quiet breath.

“Another time, a famous dancer came to the hotel. She was known across many countries. By chance, she sat on my chair.”

Yoshiko’s expression changed slightly.

“Her body was different from all the others I had felt. It was balanced, strong, and beautiful. Every movement had grace. When she sat, I felt not desire, but something like respect.”

Yoshiko read more slowly now.

“In that moment, I did not think of anything dark. I felt as if I were touching a work of art. I could only admire her.”

The man paused again.

“There were many other experiences,” he wrote. “Some were curious. Some were unpleasant. But I will not describe them all. They are not the main purpose of this letter.”

Yoshiko felt a small sense of relief, but it did not last.

“After several months, a change came,” the man continued. “The foreign owner of the hotel returned to his country. The business was sold to a Japanese company.”

Yoshiko’s eyes moved quickly.

“The new owners changed everything. They no longer wished to run a luxurious hotel. They wanted a more ordinary place. Many of the old pieces of furniture were no longer needed.”

Yoshiko felt a growing tension.

“My chair was among those items. It was sent to a furniture dealer and placed for sale.”

She held her breath.

“When I learned this, I felt great disappointment. For a moment, I thought of leaving the chair and returning to the world.”

Yoshiko lowered her gaze slightly.

“I had already stolen enough money to live a better life. I could have begun again.”

The man’s words grew slower.

“But then, I thought again. Perhaps this change was not only a loss. Perhaps it was also a chance.”

Yoshiko looked back at the page.

“In the hotel, all the women I had encountered were foreigners. No matter how beautiful they were, I always felt a distance. Something was missing.”

Yoshiko felt her chest tighten.

“I began to think that I could never feel true love unless the woman was from my own country.”

She stared at the next line.

“If the chair were bought by a Japanese person... if it were placed in a Japanese home... then perhaps...”

Yoshiko’s fingers trembled.

“Perhaps I would meet someone different.”

The meaning was clear.

Yoshiko felt a strong unease, but she could not stop reading.

“So I decided to remain inside the chair. I would follow it, wherever it went.”

Yoshiko’s breathing grew slower, heavier.

“For several days, I remained in the dealer’s shop. It was a difficult time. I could not move freely. I had to endure the discomfort in silence.”

She imagined the man trapped in the chair, waiting.

“Then, at last, a buyer appeared. The chair was sold quickly. It was still beautiful, even after some time.”

Yoshiko leaned forward.

“The buyer was a government official who lived in a large city not far from Y.”

Yoshiko froze.

A government official.

Her heart began to beat faster.

“The journey to his house was painful. The chair was carried on a truck, and the movement was very rough. I thought I might die inside it.”

Yoshiko’s eyes did not move from the page.

“But I endured it. Because I felt hope.”

Her breath caught.

“The man who bought the chair was Japanese.”

Yoshiko’s hand trembled.

“When we arrived, the chair was placed in a large Western-style study. It was a fine room. But more important than that...”

Yoshiko leaned closer, almost unable to breathe.

“That room was not used by the master of the house.”

A pause.

“It was used by his wife.”

Yoshiko’s eyes widened.

“She was young. She was beautiful.”

Yoshiko felt a cold wave pass through her body.

The words on the page seemed to grow heavier.

“From that day on,” the man wrote, “I lived with her.”

Yoshiko could not move.

She knew what was coming next.

But she could not stop reading.

Part 5

“From that day on, I lived with her,” the man wrote. “For nearly a month, I was always near her. Except for the hours when she ate or slept, she spent most of her time in that study.”

Yoshiko felt her breath grow cold.

“She was working on a piece of writing,” he continued. “She remained in the

room for long hours, sitting on the chair—on me.”

Yoshiko’s fingers shook slightly.

“I must tell you, Madam, that she was the first Japanese woman I had ever known in this way. And not only that—she possessed a truly beautiful body.”

Yoshiko could not look away from the page.

“This was different from anything I had felt before. In the hotel, there had been many women, but none of those experiences could be called love. They were only strange sensations. But with her...”

The words slowed.

“With her, I felt something deeper.”

Yoshiko swallowed.

“I loved her.”

Her heart beat hard.

“This love was not satisfied by secret touch alone. I began to wish for more. I wanted her to know that I was there.”

Yoshiko felt a sudden chill.

“But I could not reveal myself openly. If she discovered me, she would be terrified. She would call for help. I would be caught and punished.”

Yoshiko lowered her eyes for a moment, then raised them again.

“So I searched for another way. I wanted her to feel me, without knowing the truth. I wanted her to think that the chair itself had life.”

Yoshiko’s hand tightened on the paper.

“She was an artist. I believed that she might sense something that others could not.”

Yoshiko’s breathing grew uneven.

“So I began to act.”

The next lines were written with careful detail.

“When she sat down, I made the chair feel softer, more gentle. I supported her body as smoothly as I could. When she grew tired, I moved my knees slightly, so that her position would change and become more comfortable.”

Yoshiko felt as if the air around her had grown heavy.

“When she became sleepy, I moved very slowly, almost like a cradle. I rocked her, so gently that she could not notice clearly.”

Yoshiko’s face grew pale.

“I did all this with great care. I did not wish to frighten her. I only wished to give her comfort.”

Yoshiko could hardly breathe.

“Perhaps it was my imagination,” the man wrote, “but I began to feel that she loved the chair. When she sat on it, she seemed relaxed. Her body softened. She moved with ease.”

Yoshiko’s eyes trembled as they followed the words.

“Sometimes, she leaned back as if she were in the arms of someone she trusted. Sometimes, she rested as if she were held by something gentle and warm.”

Yoshiko felt a deep sense of horror.

“Each day, my feelings grew stronger. My desire burned more fiercely. At last, I could not endure it any longer.”

Yoshiko’s heart pounded.

“I wished to see her face. Just once. I wished to speak to her. Just a few words. After that, I would accept death.”

Yoshiko froze.

“Madam,” the letter continued, “you have surely understood by now.”

Yoshiko’s fingers trembled violently.

“The woman I speak of...”

She stared at the next line.

“...is you.”

Yoshiko gasped softly.

The room seemed to spin around her.

“Since the day your husband purchased the chair, I have devoted my love to you. I am the miserable man who has been beneath you, unseen, all this time.”

Yoshiko could no longer feel her hands.

“I beg you,” the man wrote. “Just once, please meet me. Speak to me. Give me a single word of kindness.”

Yoshiko's vision blurred.

"I ask for nothing more. I know that I am ugly. I know that I am unworthy. I do not hope for anything beyond that one moment."

Yoshiko's breath came in short bursts.

"Last night, I left the house to write this letter. I could not ask you in person. I did not have the courage."

Yoshiko slowly raised her head.

"At this very moment, as you read these words, I am somewhere near your house. I am waiting. I am filled with fear."

Yoshiko's body grew cold.

"If you are willing to grant my wish," the letter continued, "please place your handkerchief on the flower pot by the window of your study."

Yoshiko stared at the page.

"That will be the sign. Then I will come to your door as an ordinary visitor."

Yoshiko could not move.

The letter ended with a long and desperate prayer.

Her hands slowly fell to her lap.

For a moment, she could not think.

The words echoed in her mind.

Beneath you... all this time...

Yoshiko suddenly stood up.

A sharp, cold fear ran through her body.

She turned quickly and left the study. She could not remain there. The chair was still inside that room.

The chair.

Yoshiko felt as if it were watching her.

She walked quickly into the Japanese-style living room and sat down at a low table.

Her breathing was uneven.

She looked at the rest of the letter.

For a moment, she thought of tearing it apart.

But she could not.
Her hands moved again.
She began to read the final part.

Part 6

Yoshiko read the final lines of the letter with trembling hands. Her fear was no longer vague. It had become clear, sharp, and real.

“What a terrible thing...” she whispered.

The meaning of the letter was simple and horrifying. The chair she had used every day—the soft, comfortable chair in her study—had hidden a man inside it.

Yoshiko felt a sudden chill, as if cold water had been poured over her back. Her whole body shook. Even after she lowered the paper, the feeling did not go away.

She sat still for a long time, unable to think clearly.

“What should I do?” she asked herself.

Her mind was in confusion. She tried to consider her choices, but each one filled her with fear.

Should she return to the study and examine the chair?

No.

The thought alone was unbearable. Even if the man was no longer there, the inside of the chair must still be filled with traces of him—his food, his tools, the marks of his strange life.

Yoshiko pressed her hands together.

“I cannot...” she whispered.

Her imagination was too strong. The image of the man hidden beneath her, day after day, was too terrible to accept.

At that moment, a voice came from behind her.

“Madam, a letter for you.”

Yoshiko turned quickly.

A maid stood there, holding an envelope. It had just arrived.

Yoshiko reached out without thinking and took it.

Her fingers moved to open it—but then she stopped.

Something caught her attention.

She looked at the writing on the envelope.

In the next instant, she dropped it.

The handwriting.

It was exactly the same as the first letter.

Yoshiko stared at the fallen envelope, unable to move. Her heart beat loudly in her ears.

Slowly, after a long moment, she bent down and picked it up again.

“Should I read it?” she thought.

She hesitated.

Every part of her wished to throw it away without opening it. But another part—strong and stubborn—forced her to continue.

At last, she tore it open.

Her hands shook as she took out the paper inside.

This letter was short.

Yoshiko read it quickly, almost holding her breath.

“Please forgive me for sending you another letter without warning. I am a great admirer of your work. I have sent you a manuscript. I would be grateful if you would read it and give me your opinion.”

Yoshiko blinked.

The tone was polite and ordinary. It was nothing like the terrible confession she had just read.

She continued.

“I sent the manuscript before writing this letter, so you may have already received it. I hope that it has left some impression on you.”

Yoshiko’s eyes moved faster.

“I did not include a title in the manuscript on purpose. But I would like to call it ‘The Human Chair.’”

Yoshiko froze.

The Human Chair.

The words echoed in her mind.

The letter ended simply, with a short greeting.

Yoshiko lowered the paper slowly.

For a long time, she sat in silence.

The room was quiet again, just as it had been that morning. But everything felt different now.

The fear that had filled her body began to change. It did not disappear, but it became something else—something uncertain.

She thought carefully. The first letter. The strange confession. The second letter. The mention of a manuscript.

Yoshiko's breathing slowly returned to normal.

"Was it... a story?" she whispered.

She remembered the thick envelope she had opened earlier. The pages without a title. The words that began with "Madam."

A manuscript. Not a confession. Yoshiko looked down at the papers in her hands.

Her fear had been real. Her reaction had been natural. But now, another possibility appeared before her.

The entire story—every strange and terrible detail—might have been written only to disturb her. To surprise her. To impress her. Yoshiko let out a long breath. Her body relaxed slightly.

"How foolish I was..." she said quietly.

And yet, she could not laugh. The story had been too real. Too detailed. Too close.

She glanced, for a moment, in the direction of the study. The chair was still there. Silent. Motionless. Just a chair. Yoshiko looked away quickly.

Even now, she could not completely forget the feeling. She placed both letters on the table. The room was calm again. But somewhere, deep in her mind, a small doubt remained.

What if...

Yoshiko shook her head. No. It was only a story. Only a story.

She repeated the words to herself, as if to make them true. Outside, the day continued as usual. But Yoshiko knew that she would never look at that chair in the same way again.