Yume Nikki

I Am Not in Your Dream



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You are dreaming again.


Part One:
You

Chapter 1 / Little Room

You stand in a small room.

A lonely, dimly lit room, without even the slightest hint of sound.....

You stand stock-still in a daze, as if you haven’t yet grasped the fact that you can move.

Those childish braids in your hair.

Your clothes, the raw color of exposed entrails.

Your head hangs low, keeping your expression out of view.

You begin to move, trembling, starting from the tips of your fingers, turning around slowly.

Then, with the tiniest movement, you awkwardly step forward. You gaze about at your surroundings. Taking everything in like a newborn baby.

Eventually, you make your first bold move and hesitantly begin to explore the room in which you stand.

You approach each item you lay eyes on, touching it and bringing your face close, as if to discover its scent and flavor.

It’s like you’re anticipating the start of a delightful and fascinating new adventure.

You seem convinced that there should be some sort of reaction to your movements.

But no matter how much you move and walk about, it has no effect on your surroundings — not one thing changes. It’s almost as if you aren’t even alive.

It’s just like you’re dreaming, isn’t it?

Isn’t it so empty?

As if to express those thoughts, you stubbornly continue to walk along. Walk, walk.....

Walking about the little room, as if you've been possessed by a malevolent spirit.

At some point, you find a sliding glass door that connects the room's interior to the outside. After ruefully looking back at the room several times, you head for that door.

You pass through the glass door, which slides open with no resistance, and step outside.

However—

Even out there, there is only emptiness.

It is a cramped veranda attached to the little room.

There are no houseplants, or even a little bird stopping to rest its wings. It is barren, as if everything has gone extinct.

As if the previous owner took what they could and fled, only such necessities as an external air conditioning unit, drainage pipes, and a barren planter were left behind.

You approach the handrail and glance back at the little room you were in until a short time ago.

Somehow, it seems like a narrow apartment building or condo. You cannot tell how tall the building is, and you can't see any neighboring buildings — or maybe there is just nothing nearby.

There are only the thick, sordid clouds and the moonlight shining dimly through them.

You seem to realize that this isn't the outside. The outside is supposed to be a world overflowing with positivity, with feelings such as freedom and joy. However, this veranda is like the visualization of a depressed heart, the clouds and the handrails and this mysterious feeling of being cooped up serve to disconnect one from everything else — to cut off the outside world, to close it off. You return to the room, seemingly to escape that suffocating feeling.

Perplexed, you gaze about the room with disinterest — looking around at all the objects that may or may not hold meaning, with heavy-lidded eyes that

make you seem half-asleep.

The rug bears an unsettling and graphic pattern that looks as if human flesh has been peeled away and lined up like the pieces of a puzzle. You stare down at the face sneering up at you, as if it belonged to another person, standing out against the carpet's backdrop — as if to say to it that you'd like to talk.

But of course, there is no reaction.

The room overflows with emptiness.

There is an extremely old CRT TV. There's also a game console, one capable of handling only the simplest of games, not enough to satisfy your boredom. It's unlikely any guests would ever come, so the cushions on your floor are strewn about haphazardly. Books are situated on a bookshelf at about your height, as if they might have been put there by you — but the dust is so thick that you can't clearly make out the titles.

A diary lies abandoned on a desk, the nondescript type of desk you might see in an interview room.

An extremely charming and soft-looking bed stands in the room.

As you totter toward the bed, you discover the room's interior door. But your movement becomes uncertain. It's as if you're afraid of something. With a great deal of difficulty, you approach the door and touch it. At that moment, you hang your head as if trying to stave off nausea, and shake it weakly.

You cannot go outside — or perhaps, you don't want to.

You head for the bed right away, as if to escape. Escape the unending boredom of this room and isolate yourself in the world of dreams. You crawl wearily into the bed, still in the same clothes, and pull the comforter snugly up around your head.

It's like you're hiding your eyes from anything and everything.

After only three seconds, you slip into your dreams.

Chapter 2 / Through the Door

You are dreaming.

At least, you should be, yet the scenery has not changed.

It's as if the hands of time have been wound back. Here you are — once again standing in a little room.

You seem lost, moving listlessly from left to right, forward and backward. Looking disappointed, you then stand completely still and stare— Your body has gone completely rigid, as if you might have realized how *off* everything is.

There are several changes, as if this were a "Spot the Difference" puzzle.

The cushions are askew. The game console has completely vanished, as if there's no longer a need to kill your boredom. A gentle light flows in from the veranda through the sliding glass doors. It's no longer closed off, no longer empty — now it is a place of freedom.

The greatest change is the sound.

The sounds that humans are either unaware of or learn to ignore: those of the pulse, breathing, the inner workings of organs and muscle, the creaking of joints and bones — those sounds have suddenly become audible.

It feels as if, by falling asleep, you have finally begun to live.

This is supposed to be a dream, yet it feels like anything but.

Like you were dreaming up until a short time ago, and now you've finally awakened...

The line between dreams and reality has become blurred.....

You slip over to the interior door, as if expecting something. Your movements are so precise, like you've already confirmed something.

Gently, your fingertips drift up to the doorknob.

Suddenly, the screen on the CRT TV flickers to life. On the screen, an eerie

geometric pattern, taking the shape of a sneering eye, blinks. It fixes its gaze upon you, unrelenting.

However, you don’t seem to notice. As if to show how desperately you want to flee this suffocating little room, you lean against the door with all your might and push it open.

The door opens with a creak that is more akin to a deep snore, and you abruptly tumble through.

And, as if temporarily paralyzed, you freeze in place.

Once through the door, an incomprehensible scene unfolds before you.

There is nothing but an expansive darkness. Beneath your feet float several things that look like they could be either gods or devils, and yet they make no attempt to interact with you, as if they have no interest in you, content merely to flash their wide, detestable grins.

You take a step forward, ill at ease and well aware of the presence of those things.

Glancing around, you see several doors. The doors are not being illuminated by anything, and yet they stand out against the deep darkness, as if floating there.

One, two, three..... not counting the door you initially opened, there seem to be a total of twelve doors.



Positioned like the numbers on a clock face, the doors are evenly spaced and form a circle.

None of the doors look like ones anyone would want to touch, nor do they look like the kinds used in everyday life. They have creepy designs on them and look as if one would need a great deal of courage to open them.

At the very least, the doors don't look like the type that would yield heart-pounding adventures, romance, or illuminating discoveries.

They're more like scabs, where opening them could lead to a spattering of blood.

There is a door that looks like the interwoven legs of a spider. A door covered in blood, as if someone with gaping wounds on their hands tried in desperation to get it open. A door that looks like it has sprouted a pair of teary eyes. A door with a light so garish that it induces headaches, blinking on and off like the neon lights of a dangerous shopping street.

One by one, you approach each door and take a good look at it.

Even though these doors are very much tangible, you only look at them, apparently reluctant to touch them.

You appear to be deliberating on which door you should open, as several thoughts fall into place.

For example, since the doors are arranged like the numbers on a clock face, should you open them starting with the door in the one o'clock spot and go clockwise from there? But perhaps "something" here wants you to open the most outstanding door first. On the other hand, there's no guarantee that opening the most boring-looking door won't yield the most horrific outcome.....

However, you finally give up on thinking it over.

There's no rhyme or reason. Nor does there appear to be a right answer. At least, no one will guide you to the right answer.

In which case, thinking is futile.

Though no one is there to hasten you, it seems as if your distaste for the sneering forms in the dimly lit room is so great — you obey the common

wisdom that doors are a thing you open and go for the door nearest you, placing a hand gently on the handle.

It opens.

You step inside.

Chapter 3 / Red Umbrella

You stand, bathed in dim light.

Behind you — the door through which you passed floats unnaturally. Aside from yourself and the door, everything is concealed in pitch-black darkness.

Like the middle of the night, immediately after a rainstorm.

Drenched in loneliness and silence.

It's like the trek between such lively places as cram school, school, or work and the home where you can relax and be at peace. It's that kind of nauseating scene that seems to be a manifestation of that mild anxiety that exists in the cracks between happiness, between peace.

You seem a bit perplexed.

The door seems to be your only reassurance as you wander around it like you've been tethered to it by a rope. As if there to remind you that you could go back at any time. Out of caution, or out of cowardice.

However, this place yields nothing of importance. The scenery is unchanging and boundless, and save for you, nothing here moves.

Whether it's because you feel at ease or because you want some sort of change, you start walking.

With no other landmark to help establish a sense of direction in the depths of this darkness, you use the door as your only cardinal point and begin to walk away from it in a straight line.

Your braids sway back and forth.

There are occasional puddles beneath your feet. It really does seem like rain has just fallen. Your pale legs become sullied with splashes of the mud you've been carelessly walking through.

The puddles seem pregnant with meaning — as if they could tell your fortune.

Clear water could mean a great success or good fortune.

Dirty water could predict being involved in unforeseen trouble or fatigue.

Anyone breaching the surface of these puddles would feel uneasy. The water is muddied, full of mysterious bacteria, maggots, and exhaust..... The interiors of your shoes have also become soaked. Those are omens of hardship. At least if the water were clear, you might also feel like your heart could be cleansed.

The puddles, apparently unable to determine to your fate, sully and then clear, changing the water's surface at a dizzying rate. In the surface disturbed by the tiny ripples, you see the same thick clouds that you saw from the veranda of that tiny room, along with the moon, once again shining through the clouds as if laughing at you.

Paying it no mind, you step through the puddle. Just as you pass, your entire form is reflected on the water's surface. As your foot lands, it sends out a wave of ripples, twisting your reflection into something abnormal. Even after you've passed, the image remains, distorting even further.

Your image, reflected in the puddle, undergoes a metamorphosis, pliable like clay, into a well-dressed man and woman. Neither of them look at you as you pass, instead glaring at one another, wrapped up in their own heated argument.

The warped version of you — the man and woman who look a lot like you — scowl, spit, and yell at one another.

You don't notice any of this.

You can't see it. You don't feel it. You aren't aware of it.

Well, you might be unaware of it, but—

Somehow, they seem to have the closeness of a married couple, but it's because of that closeness that the man and woman's argument continues on, unrelenting. As each ripple expands outward, it distorts the two further. Their arms and legs stretch and twist unnaturally as their faces lose their shape, like monsters.

As if trying to ignore the sight, you move farther and farther away.

The water's surface is like a mirror, reflecting back all things.

However, the other side of the mirror is another world altogether. You simply pass on by, without closing your eyes or plugging your ears, your face feigning ignorance.

When is it exactly that humans look into mirrors? When they're attending to their hair, applying makeup, putting cream on a pimple on their cheek..... It is for when one wants an objective point of view, in order to straighten oneself up to more closely match how they perceive themselves to be. To face oneself as one is.

Sometimes it's for reflecting, sometimes it's for gaining courage, and sometimes it's just for calming oneself down.

However, the chance to see oneself from the outside, to correct oneself — it's something humans are afforded few opportunities to do.

You are not one to take that opportunity.

Pretending not to see yourself, you walk along swiftly, until your foot suddenly catches on something.

You start to stumble forward, but perplexed, you brush aside your bangs and gaze down at your feet.

A tiny umbrella is lying on the ground.

The vivid, crimson umbrella stands out amidst the unchanging scenery. Without a moment's hesitation, you pick up the umbrella and open it all the way.

When is it that one would use an umbrella? Mainly when rain falls. As if cause and effect, before and after, switched places — like in *Through the Looking-Glass* — it suddenly begins to rain.

Raindrops pound the umbrella with a thunderous rhythm.

You pull the red umbrella close to yourself, taking care not to get wet.

The rain is like tears, but it is a symbol of blessing. Tears have a positive function — they are like a sponge that soaks up sadness before they are expelled from the body. They brighten the path before you.

The puddles are blurred by the massive downpour of rain, the water level

rising and then overflowing, like clusters of anxiety, and within them, the arguing man and woman disappear without explanation.

As if your worries have been laid to rest, you begin walking along once again, with no set destination.

Perhaps it’s that you’re ignoring your troubles, or possibly that you’re letting the umbrella catch them instead.

Cheerfully.

Chapter 4 / Unforking Road

You continue walking along like that.

As if you're a small child again, being led by the hand through the rain by a parent who has come to pick you up from school. Somehow enjoying yourself. Happily.

For you, the rain doesn't seem to be that unpleasant.

Yet, there is no parent at your side, nor is there anyone at all. All alone, you walk along. The ceaseless rain seems to penetrate the otherwise empty darkness.

Within the puddle, swollen by the rain, the dim outlines of the man and woman having the argument fade and melt away until their forms are unrecognizable, yet still they spew hatred.

Yet you still maintain the rhythmic sound of catching the rain with the umbrella. Naturally, the hateful words of the man and woman never reached you. They've been erased by the sound of the rain, leaving your surroundings awfully quiet.

Leisurely, you walk along.

Before long, you spot something up ahead resembling a stairway.

It has a surprisingly narrow entrance that is sprouting unnaturally out of the ground. A stairway extends down from there, though you cannot tell where it leads. You head straight for it, perhaps because you are sick of wandering along with no destination, or maybe you're anticipating something within.

You close the umbrella, causing falling droplets of water to drum with a "tap, tap" on your rear end. You step toward the stairway as if you're being sucked into it.

Your soaked braids sway as you descend down the wet and slippery steps. It is dark and you can see nothing. You have no idea what is waiting at the bottom

of the stairs.

Moving forward with only the slightest hint of light to guide you, you finally reach the end.

What awaits you is a dense forest — a sea of trees.

What should have led you underground has instead led you outside. It's baffling, but you don't seem too concerned about it. You gaze around you with curiosity.

The trees stretch on interminably. Your view is essentially blocked, obstructed by all of the trees. The trees, oddly lacking in vitality, envelope you, hiding you away. At some point in the dense sea of trees, having let go of your umbrella, you find yourself standing next to something completely unnatural.

It is a vending machine — a complete mismatch to the suffocating wilderness.

Like a moth drawn to a flame, you approach the vending machine. An exceedingly ordinary, brand-new vending machine. As if enchanted by the soft drinks, teas, coffees, and so on offered within, you press your face against the machine and stare like a kid coveting a clarinet.

You feel around inside your breast pocket, looking for some change.

However, you shake your head and mutter something quietly, likely not having found any.

A delicious beverage with which to quench your thirst might be the perfect symbol of a fabulous meeting with someone new, or perhaps some fantastic accomplishment. As you cannot get one, you choose none of the drinks — even if you wanted one bad enough to sprout an arm from your throat — nothing will come of it. It would only be a temporary solution anyway.

You ruefully lift your hand up to the vending machine, then carelessly begin to walk back into the sea of trees, as if having given up. Your surroundings don't appear to be suitable for taking a walk in, and yet mysteriously, the grass at your feet has been maintained with the care of a lawn, leaving not even the slightest obstacle.

You finally glimpse some spaces between the trees, and so you slide your

petite frame through those spaces.

On the other side of those spaces is a straight road.

A road paved in asphalt. However, there are cracks in the road, weeds poking their heads through the cracks, as if it isn't being maintained. With no cars passing over it, it reminds you of the skeletal remains of some enormous creature. You step onto the road, then take a look around.

It is a straight road, stretching on and on, as if slicing through the dense forest. It stretches on endlessly, obscuring the other end of the road and leaving you without a clue as to where it leads. Yet you press onward, as if to assert that a road is the sort of thing one should walk on.

The sound of your shoes on the pavement echoes.

The road is long and endless; it is similar to a highway built for cars to drive on.

Traversing it on foot is extremely difficult.

You continue walking on and on and on..... You become bored, you become tired, and even so, in the end, you haven't arrived at any sort of destination. You are trapped in this straight road.

That's when you suddenly realize.

Something strange is standing right in the center of this unending highway.

It's rather unobtrusive, so unassuming and vague that you almost pass by it without noticing.

Staring at the intermittent white line etched into the road has a hypnotic effect, which is often the cause of people falling asleep at the wheel. In the same way, you walk along the unending road and slowly begin to space out, losing your sense of vigilance.

However, once you become aware of it, you can no longer ignore this sinister thing.

No matter how you look at it, you have no idea what it is, this baffling form. For a split second, it looks like a human. It is as if someone the same height as you were hidden beneath a raincoat. You happily head straight for it, likely

pleased to encounter another person for the first time, then freeze up in shock.

That is no human. If one had to pick something, it looks closest to a jellyfish.

A jellyfish the same size as a human.....

It is a disgusting thing, like its blood-drenched organs have been yanked out and it has been restructured into the shape of a human. Or perhaps like a human who has been turned inside out, their organs now on the outside — or like their organs have shot through their flesh and were left exposed, that might be closer to how it looks.

Large intestine, small intestine, and other nondescript organs drip with blood from something unknown, like a pitiful creature in the middle of an autopsy left undone. It stands stock still, giving no hint of a reaction.

Terrified, you hurry away from it.

Returning straight down the path you came from, you look back only once.

As if predicting your fate and the end of that straight path, a bell rings out from that object that looks like a slaughtered corpse, just once — the kind of bell that signals fate, like the kind rung to remember the dead during a funeral. As if in mourning. As if out of sympathy.

You plug your ears and run away.

Chapter 5 / Stoplight

You are dreaming.

A never-ending nightmare.

Running from that creepy thing that looked like smashed-up organs, you go back down the path you came from. At least doing so lets you return to the familiar scenery that you have passed so many times. You can feel at ease.

At least, you should be able to.

Before you realize it, you find yourself walking in an unfamiliar setting.

But you went back down that straight path, that unforking road. The scenery shouldn’t have changed.

The road beneath your feet remains the same, but the sea of trees sprouting out of the ground is disappearing. Raindrops bore their way into the impenetrable darkness.

You gaze around quizzically as strange objects hover above your head.

They look like giant crosses.

Like symbols of sin...

However, at the same time, crosses can be symbols of atonement and redemption. Have faith in them, and you shall be saved. That’s why going back down that road was the right choice. Surely, getting away from that disgusting thing that looked like organs was the right decision.

Your steps become more rhythmic, as if you are reassuring yourself of this. But it’s strange — for objects that are said to bring salvation, those crosses are awfully unsettling.

The putrid smell of a rotting corpse hovers around you, as if it has pierced through a grave...

The number of crosses steadily increases and yet, none of them approach

you. Nor do they show any sign of extending a helping hand. Eyeballs sprout from the crosses, and they fix hard gazes upon you.

All they do is watch you.

You quicken your pace and move forward, as if those stares have filled you with an indescribable feeling of nervousness and you are trying to shake it off.

The crosses gradually increase. The heaviness of their stares also increases.

Those crosses, on closer inspection, look like sensual, exposed organs... in other words, like genitalia. Though they are supposed to be a symbol of salvation, they have an unpleasantness to them, so you will not seek their aid.

The road continues on and on, and the crosses, with their stares fixed upon you, continue to multiply.

Like Jesus Christ taking that heartbreaking walk up to that hill at Golgotha, no one will save you as you trudge along. They choose instead to scorn you, to talk about you behind your back, their stares fixed on you — the whole time.

There is no way you can continue to endure this.

After walking for some time, you suddenly stop where you are, then turn and start back the way you came.

Coming and going to and fro like you are, you’re the perfect embodiment of a lost child.

You head back toward those gazes, their eyes pregnant with malice and disdain, but you ignore them, lowering your head as you walk on. Finally, at a break in the road, the dense forest once again begins to stretch into your line of sight.

Such seas of trees are known for being places where people commit suicide. They should be melting pots of life, as they provide a home to a variety of trees, insects, wild animals, and birds — yet, for some reason, they cannot seem to rid themselves of the stench of death.

Untamed nature, not shielded by the armor of reason, of civilization, of the urban life, can easily snatch away the life of a feeble human.

If you die out here, you’ll be broken down by the greater swell of life forms —

your flesh and bones and everything else will be greedily devoured and consumed, leaving nothing.

Or perhaps you're like those who come to this forest seeking death, wandering about with heavy breaths and a mind locked on bitterness. The forest becomes thicker and thicker, while the road becomes more narrow and difficult to travel. Every now and then on this highway, there are stoplights emitting yellow and red lights that alternately indicate "stop" and "caution."

You open the red umbrella and hold it close, as if to shield your eyes.

With the unending rain blocked out, you take a deep breath, as if you finally feel a bit of relief.

And then, you suddenly notice.

Something is lying on the ground right in front of you.

It looks like a corpse.

The corpse is lying face-up in a sea of blood. It is crushed flat, as if it has been run over. If parts like the arms, legs, and head weren't just barely spared, one wouldn't be able to tell that this was a human corpse — they would only be able to see it as a pulpy mess.

The body has already begun to putrefy, the flesh now a venomous green. Maggots that have eaten their way through the flesh poke their heads out of this corpse, apparently that of an adult male, which they have left full of holes.

With the rain mixed in, the decomposing corpse has become viscous, the remaining bits of ashen hair and clothing fluttering about listlessly.

It looks like a frog hit by a car. That sight is often the first graphic view of death that children living in rural areas experience. The placement of a frog's limbs is much like a human's, and the arrangement of its organs also very similar. That's why they're used for dissection — it makes death so relatable.

As if washed away by the rain, the smell of decomposition seems to be gone.

Expressionless, you rest the umbrella against your shoulder and squat down beside the corpse.

With your head lowered, some impulse compels you to rapidly open and close

your mouth, as if you're making an appeal.

Desperately.

Like you're fighting back a severe headache. Or perhaps, like you're trying to repent.

In reality, there's no way you will ever see a deceased person or their corpse again. Either because you would avoid them or because chance encounters with the dead are practically impossible. So, the fact that they're appearing in your dreams must indicate that you're seized with guilt or regret over something in your past.

You are bound by something.

On the other hand, the sight of a corpse makes one fact bitingly clear — that all humans will inevitably die. Life will someday end in death. There is a bad ending waiting for you, no matter what.

You are face-to-face with an ominous sign of the future.

However, as one might expect — there is no reaction from the corpse.

The only sound is that of your own heavy breathing.

You are hiding something, something you want to get out, and yet it's tucked away deep inside you — in the furthest recesses of your heart.

You grit your teeth, as if you're about to say something.

However, you seem to stop yourself.

The stoplight hanging over your head begins swaying rapidly in the wind, likely due to years of decay, and abruptly falls. It heads straight for you.

It's so sudden that it leaves you unable to react, you just hear the strange sound and look straight upward...

Almost comically, the stoplight hits you right on your head.

With its remaining power supply, the stoplight blinks repeatedly between "stop" and "go."

Chapter 6 / Red String

A-Are you all right...?

That stoplight fell from a considerable height and hit you right on the head. Normally it would have killed you.

However, this is a dream. Because it’s a dream, you’re fine. No problem.

You pull yourself together, as if to demonstrate those thoughts. What fell on you was a stoplight intended for pedestrians. A typical stoplight, with the green and red signals indicating “go” and “stop,” stacked vertically.

At the moment that stoplight hit you, it expanded in a bizarre way — almost completely concealing your body. Like a costume.

Your legs protrude from the base. You wobble along in this bizarre new form — looking like a stoplight that has sprouted a pair of legs.

You begin playing with the signals, switching from “go” to “stop,” perhaps trying to see how it works, and you seem to be enjoying yourself. You’re like a small child playing with a new toy.

There’s no way you can see in front of you, and yet you distance yourself from the run-over corpse without losing your way, lighting up “go” and “stop” with rhythmic clicks all the way. You’re like a baby, unable to express anything other than “yes” or “no.” It makes you seem so innocent.

With that stoplight covering your entire body, you stroll along.

Perhaps it’s because you can’t see, but you’ve stumbled down a side road that you passed by earlier. But the fact that you can’t see is likely the only reason that you aren’t afraid. Your steps carry with them a courage that suggest this is the case.

But it is dangerous.

Right in front of you, right in the path you’re heading down, is a manhole.

A wide open shaft.

This is not good. If you keep going this way, you will fall. Yet you can't see it, have no sense of the impending danger, and there is no benevolent force there to warn you.

However, something does entangle itself in your feet as you're toddling along — something that's bright red and looks something like a snake. That something, that looks like a string, is sprouting out of the manhole like a plant. It moves in an uncanny, but living way, wrapping itself around your legs, knocking you off-balance and causing you to fall.

You topple forward, head over heels — right into the manhole.

Downward. Farther in. Deeper into the hole.

After a complete free-fall, you abruptly land on your backside.

Luckily, it doesn't seem to have been that deep of a hole. It doesn't feel any worse than having fallen off a jungle gym. Fissures run along the surface of the stoplight, which has likely absorbed most of the impact of the fall. Your shocked face pokes through those cracks.

The stoplight must have taken most of the shock of that fall, leaving you unharmed. You stand up right away, as if in no pain whatsoever.

Staring at the stoplight, now cracked into pieces, you sweep the dirt off of your skirt with the palm of your hand. When you look away, the fragments disappear, as if in a dream (metaphorically speaking).

You then lift your face—

You are dumbfounded by what you see.

A giant face is staring down at you. It has an unsettling form to it, reminiscent of an octopus, so much so that it makes you imagine a fishy smell. This face is a vivid red, the same blood-red color as the string that wrapped itself around your legs earlier. Like a giant man stained in blood.

With that creepy red string still hanging in the air, the face stares at you with a vulgar look in its eyes.

With your skirt somewhat disheveled, your rear end is on full display, as are the contours of your breasts — aware of that stare, you shield your body with

both hands in an attempt to hide yourself. However, that red string wriggles in the air around you, like lust itself.

The palm of a large red hand inches ever closer. It seems intent on gradually making off with you. You vigorously shake your head in disgust and run away. However, like the inescapable nature of fate itself, no matter how far you run, the red string creeps its way into your line of sight.

At a bit of a loss, you grab onto a bundle of thread. Then, twisting your body uncomfortably around it, you begin to climb. It's a compulsion — you're being forced to do something unseemly. That's what it looks like — as you seem to hate it so much, you can't stand it, yet it's like you have no choice but to hang on.

You continue to slink your way up that red string.

The red string wraps itself lasciviously around your bust, your ankles, the nape of your neck.

There seems to be a hole at the very top that leads somewhere. It's like the slightest ray of hope; an exit from this hellish scenery. Latching onto that ray of hope, you accept this hardship, clinging to the blood-red string as you make your way to the top.

Like a sinner wriggling his way out of hell on a spider's thread.

However, what exactly was the sin that you committed?

Courage wells up from within you as you head desperately for the light with a vitality that seems to scream, "I want to live, I want to be happy."

That vigor has a divinity to it, the sole proof that you have not yet given up.

Your breathing is ragged and, with the slender arms of a girl, you reach the top, looking more like you were playing at rock climbing than actually doing it.

You poke your face through the hole, then use both arms to pull yourself up and through.

You hold your hands at your chest for a bit, then begin to vomit, as if you've eaten something disgusting.

The scenery surrounding you has once again undergone a transformation.

The dense forest and highway from earlier had a realness to them, like they actually could have existed in reality. But this place is different. You've arrived at a place with a bizarre topography, almost like you've traveled to another dimension.

This space appears as if it were created by a child who had been handed a clean white piece of paper and allowed to scribble all over it to his heart's content — like it had been created with an untainted instinct. A boundless expanse, mostly white as snow — and standing on it, several unidentifiable structures that look like they had been sketched in here and there with messy lines.

One of those structures looks like the head of an adult male.

It could be the surface or exterior of that space from earlier, the one swirling with those red strings — as that head gazes at you with the same sense of desire. With bloodshot eyes. The rain is still falling and, seemingly using that as your excuse, you open your umbrella to shield your body.

To conceal everything that you are.

At least, you seem to be hiding yourself from someone else's gaze.

With the umbrella still open, you circle around the back of the head, as if in an attempt to avoid its gaze — and there, you find something that looks like an entrance and hesitantly step inside. It seems that you don't want to be out here anymore. The idea of slipping inside the man's head gives you a bad feeling, but you can't find anything else that resembles an entrance or exit. There is nowhere else.

Gripping the umbrella tight, you force yourself to go inside.

Chapter 7 / Diary

The scenery undergoes a dizzying change.

You've dived even deeper into the dream.

You're walking on top of the clouds. Just like in a fairytale.

Shrouded in darkness, you move along a corridor of clouds stretching across the sky. It's a soaring feeling of euphoria — like you're climbing into the heavens themselves. Though climbing to the heavens inevitably is an image associated with death.

You seem like you're having a great deal of fun, but with some sense of unease, you take a good look at your feet and realize that the clouds mysteriously resemble stiff black charcoal. Whether you meant to or not, it appears you've been pushed up to a rather high altitude.

It's like you're being pushed along by someone who isn't very considerate, telling you what a blessing this is. As if they're coercing you to smile. Something envelops you that gives you a great sense of discomfort.

There's something looking down on you, it's definitely something enormous. Something awful that feels as if it's dripping with a man's desire.

You're like the doll inside of a toy box when a small boy is looking down at you, reaching for you, a boy who likes you and is going to play with you until you fall apart.

You merely walk on in an attempt to escape.

Your vision then becomes clear.

You freeze in place amidst the deep darkness.

There is a large monster.

A beast, terrifying even on first sight.

It is a muscular creature, its inherently violent nature highlighted by the glint

in its eyes, its veins visible to the naked eye, its sharp claws and fangs — this monster gnashes its teeth with a feeling of inescapable rage and malevolence.

It's like the embodiment of rage and frustration, like a man whose own desires cannot be satisfied, so he finds fault with everyone else. This beast, symbolizing such a person, glares at you and snarls as if he's on the verge of swooping down at you. The sound of those carnivorous teeth sends a torturous echo through your ears.

Grind, grind, grind, grind, on and on without end.

You quickly plug your ears in disgust and take a step back.

At that moment, you realize.

You're actually the one gnashing your teeth. This irritation, this anger, this bundling of stress — even this monster — they're all you. The most atrocious parts of you that you couldn't let out, the deepest-held resentments, are now making themselves heard, like a bomb on the verge of detonation.

This monster, no, all of this disturbing scenery — it's all just your dream. You are the one who gave birth to all of these sinister things. All of these unsightly and repulsive things are crawling around inside of you; you're just walking through all of that.

You begin to shiver, as if you've just now become aware of all of this. Grabbing your head in horror, you continue to gnash your teeth and lower your head, as if to say you don't want to experience such a horrible dream anymore.

The tips of your fingers brush your cheeks, as if trying to check something.

Then, they pinch.

As if to say, "If this is a dream, please wake me up."

.....

And then, you wake up in your bed.

You throw off the comforter you had pulled up to your head and take a deep breath, as if having just resurfaced from a deep dive. Both your head and chest are drenched with sweat. You touch your cheeks and force yourself to stop gnashing your teeth like you had been doing until that point.

Your rugged breathing continues for a time.

It really was a dream — you nod over and over again, as if to say, “Of course it was.”

Then, without even sitting up, you lazily stretch out your hand, grab a diary off your desk, and pull it to you. You scrawl out letters in it with shaky hands.

It’s compulsory, as if some unseen force is making you do it.

Dreams show us our unconscious thoughts. The unconscious is hidden, locked away within the deepest parts of the heart while we are conscious. That’s why we so readily forget our dreams. Like water overflowing from our palms.

You clumsily inscribe the words, as if trying to forcibly tie those dreams down.

Locking down the red umbrella, the stoplight, and everything else in words.

Your face once again lands upon the pillow, either because you’ve run out of stamina or because you’ve simply surrendered yourself to sleep.

The diary slides out of your hand—

You drift off into another dream.



Chapter 8 / Blizzard

You are dreaming once again.

Once again, the darkness beyond that door in your little room stretches before you. Within that darkness stand all of those doors that connect you to mysterious spaces — whenever you dream, this is inevitably the first place you come to.

Perhaps you've gotten used to this place, as you don't hesitate for even a second, instead boldly moving forward, stealthily opening one of the doors and peeking inside. If, while doing so, you get even the slightest hint of a frightening air about it, you quickly withdraw, then repeat this strange ritual.

You continue on this little pleasure stroll for some time until, finally, the contents of one particular door catch your interest.

It really isn't in any particularly notable location, and the door has an utterly drab color scheme.

There isn't the slightest hint of harshness. Instead, the door has a rather fairytale-esque quality to it, so you stare at it with deep curiosity, then gently push it open and step inside.

What awaits you therein is a snow blizzard.

It's another expansive space — a silvery snowscape without a blemish to it, everything completely covered in snow.

Unlike the places inside the other doors, which are somewhat gloomy and reek of blood, this place is peaceful and joyful, overflowing with light reflecting off the snow.

You seem relieved by the sight and begin walking through the snow.

It's a beautiful snow field, untainted by anyone else's footsteps.

You walk about the wind-blown ruts made in the snow.

You open the red umbrella, which you seem to have taken a liking to, blocking

out the onslaught of snow as you walk along. Your footsteps are light, meaning it might not be as cold as one would expect. Perhaps it's because it's a dream, so you just can't feel hot and cold. The unexplained warmth you've experienced is likely something of your own creation.

You hop through the snow like a mountain hare.

Every now and then, you squat down, make a snowball, and throw it for no reason. You lose your balance and fall on your backside, getting covered in snow, but you seem to be enjoying yourself. The impact causes snow to fall from the branches on one of the trees, covering you in so much snow that you look like a snowman.

However, you continue carrying on like a little kid.

Reminiscent of a dog happily frolicking through the yard, something about snow seems to fill you with cheer. There's a moderate sense of unreality, like everything ugly and dirty has been covered up... It's the greatest of playthings, raining down from the heavens.

However, snow isn't merely gentle fun. According to Dante's *The Divine Comedy,* in the very depths of Hell, there exists the frozen circle of Cocytus: the furthest depths of despair.

The snow and the cold can snatch away body heat, steal life, and kill plants. Winter is like death, or rather, like sleep.

That's why you shouldn't set foot here — you should leave it a clear snowscape, untainted by footsteps and left only in the world of your memories.

The thick snow must surely be covering things you don't wish to see.

You're losing body heat, you're going to be eaten away and frozen solid, all without you realizing it.

Or at least that should be the case, and yet you're playing around like you've become a small child once more. Your footsteps still somehow manage to be light, even in this potentially disastrous blizzard.

Finally, amidst the fuzzy scenery, you happen upon something mysterious.

It's like a cave made out of snow — what one might call a snow hut.

There are several of them, as far as your eyes can see, all grouped densely together.

The human mind remembers much more than most people are aware of. Those things are packed away in tiny boxes and stored in the deepest depths of the heart. They are wrapped up with lovely paper, with handling warnings inscribed on them, but can be opened at will anytime.

Those huts are positioned here and there, the crystallization of those thoughts, those precious memories that have been stored away. All of them look warm — and though they are small, they look like treasure chests. You set foot in one of the snow huts in order to shield yourself from the blizzard.

You put your umbrella down, relieved.

Like the “Little Match Girl,” you curiously gaze about the hut, relaxing as happy memories begin to drift up all around you. Of course, you don’t seem to notice.

A younger version of you, losing yourself in playing with someone else. Getting tangled up in each other and falling over, playing around, and hopping all over like animal cubs. Playing house. Hide-and-go-seek. The swing set and slide — light flows all around you and lovely flowers blossom to life.

Such a sincere smile. The warmth of holding hands. That feeling of safety embraces you.

But those are just traces of a long-forgotten past.

Like the snow that has collected in your palm, they melt through your own warmth, evaporating into thin air.

You head for the next snow hut, as if you’ve gone cold and are in search of a new source of warmth. You repeat this process over and over, vicariously experiencing sweet and nostalgic days.

You enter another snow hut with no hesitance, but then freeze solid in place.

There is a lone girl.

It’s so rare in your dreams to see someone else with the form of a completely normal human being. Whenever other people show up in your dreams, they’re

often simply replays of past memories, or sometimes metaphors for something else. So which is it this time?

The girl is slumped forward with her knees pulled up to her chest, somehow fast asleep. She doesn't react, let alone move even an inch when you approach her. She's completely embedded within you. Perfectly and carefully preserved, just like a jewel.

This girl looks a lot like you. However, she's pretty young. She's like you, when you were a little girl. Your pure-hearted, innocent self, the self that would roll around and play in the snow, seems to be sleeping here.

You've tucked away your happy childhood for safe-keeping.

You've put it to sleep and sealed it away.

You gently approach the girl curled up on the ground, like someone naturally lured by the warmth of a fireplace or woodstove on a cold night.

Don't do it.

You mustn't awaken the sleeping child.

If you wake her, then you'll have to come face-to-face with reality. You'll have to go back to living. All of those painful things, all of that suffering, that sadness, your body, slashed and bloodied. If you stay asleep, you can keep enjoying yourself, keep being a kid — living that way is much better.

Your hand softly brushes the sleeping girl's shoulder.

All of a sudden, you spin around, as if having sensed someone nearby.

Something is standing in the doorway, their form outlined with the backdrop of the blizzard.

It's a little girl — so small that you could carry her in your arms.

She appears in a white kimono, the type people are buried in. Her mysterious blue hair serves as proof that she isn't human. She looks a lot like the type of doll a child would use for playing house.

Tilting your head, you approach her.

You reach out your hand in an attempt to grab the unrealistic, fairy-like

creature.

However, the blue-haired doll slips out of your grasp and runs away. It puts distance between you, as if afraid. You chase after it.

Back out in the blizzard, you scoop up the doll that can't move as quickly as you can and embrace it, pressing it into your chest.

The doll does not try to resist, instead becoming docile.

A small child will refuse to part with a blanket or a doll that bears their own scent. Even after one becomes an adult, though they might pack the object away in a storage room, they cannot bear to throw it away. If the precious blanket or doll is thrown away by a heartless parent, it can bring a great deal of sadness to the child.

It's like the doll is a crystallization of your joyous childhood memories or the pure feelings of love you felt for a friend. And so, you hold it close.

Having chased the doll through the snow, you're now so far away from the snow hut that you can't see it anymore. With each breath you exhale a burst of white, standing stock-still with a pained expression.

The doll in your hands is slowly falling apart. Like a yuki-onna, a snow woman, melting away after being thoroughly loved. The doll melts like snow into water, against your flesh which is warm from running around, but it calms you. It makes you feel at ease.

However, even though the doll vanished, you find yourself full of energy, as if the doll left you with something, something precious — like courage.

You delicately cradle the lingering traces of your little friend.

Chapter 9 / Bed

You stay like that for a time, unmoving.

You're like a small child, cradling the little doll — or what remains of her — standing still amidst the snowscape.

Your skirt becomes damp from all the snow it's absorbed.

You remain in that position, the snow continuing to fall on you, looking like it could bury you.

Finally, you notice it.

There's a snow hut in the edge of your line of sight. As if seeking its warmth — or perhaps invited by it, you approach the hut.

However, there's something you haven't picked up on.

The snow huts earlier were huddled together, like a flock of birds in a particularly cold area leaning on each other for warmth.

However, this snow hut is by itself, as if discriminated against by the others, ostracized.

If the snow huts are the manifestation of fun childhood memories — then this one, so far apart from all the others, is likely something you don't want to remember, right?

Though it's been driven into a corner here, there are no features to distinguish it from the other huts, and so you approach without the slightest sign of caution. Without any hint of the sadness or pain that could await you there.

Your steps suddenly come to a halt.

Something pokes its head out from the snow hut you're heading toward.

As soon as you see it, it fills you with a sense of disgust.

It is a bizarre creature, a complete mismatch to the lovely and bright field of

snow. Something unpleasant and ugly...

You recoil and back away. Right before your eyes, this strange thing steps out from the snow hut with a swagger as if it owns the place, stomping through the pretty snowscape and dirtying it with shoe prints.

It looks somewhat like a woman.

An elegant woman, or at least one with a proper upbringing.

With a somewhat gaudy outfit and nicely coiffed hair. Giving the impression of refinery...

But the face is different.

It has huge eyes, opened wide, but with tiny pupils, just like those of a wild, carnivorous bird. A tapered nose, like that of a witch. On closer inspection, its hair and clothing look threatening, venomous, like a beehive or the angled legs of a spider.

You mustn’t get close.

It’s dangerous, poisonous. That’s the feeling she gives off, this sinister woman.



She looks like a tall and gangly adult.

That woman, however, walks along willfully, not the least bit interested in you as you stare and then step back. It's almost like she cannot see you. This woman roams here and there, without the least bit of consideration for you, as if she's on a completely different plane of existence.

Your reaction is so dramatic. You tilt your face upward, clearly afraid of the woman, who is right next to you now. And then, you delve back into the snow. Your movements are dripping with certainty. Ignoring the fact that your fingertips have turned blue from frostbite, you continue working.

Finally, from within the snow, out pops a familiar stoplight.

That item that, out on that highway, crashed on top of you and became one with you.

Why is something like that buried here? How did you know that if you dug in this spot, the stoplight would be here? It's baffling, but you don't seem surprised at all, as if it makes complete sense to you.

You grab the stoplight with shaking hands and place the hole in its base over your head.

Like a costume. You put it on like you're used to it, with the familiarity of putting on a uniform.

You then make the stoplight light up red, and suddenly, you faintly assert to the tall woman walking next to you, "Stop."

On seeing this, the woman freezes in place, almost comically.

Rather than merely standing still, she is completely petrified.

Her leg gently lifted, in the midst of taking her next step, has stopped moving. Even her fingers and hair have stiffened.

Your entire body, still clad in the stoplight, gives off a strong sense of resistance.

Stop. Don't move. Stay away. NO. I deny you. I don't like you—

After displaying the red light, as if it were those feelings made manifest, you

turn away quickly, the stoplight still covering your entire body, and take off. Still unable to see in front of you, your feet get tripped up on the cumbersome snow, and you clumsily topple over.

The moment you topple over, the stoplight cracks open and your body falls out.

Now that the stoplight has broken, the tall woman starts moving again.

You scamper away. Frantically and without looking back.

After some time, something unnatural appears before you.

All of a sudden, out in the middle of the blizzard.

It's something that shouldn't be standing out in the middle of the snow — a bed. A completely normal, everyday bed. Not a bit of snow has stuck to the top of it. It looks so warm — and without missing a beat, you leap right into it, bringing the comforter up to your head.

You curl into a ball, trembling.

Like you might do after seeing a scary movie.

Or like a child who has been scolded by their parents, left their toys on the ground, and reluctantly climbed into bed.

Like a child forcibly lulled to sleep, you close your weary eyes and curl up in the bed. Even in your dreams, you sleep. You hide yourself inside that bed within your dream. Like you're sinking deeper in, further in, to the depths of the ocean.

Nearby — next to the bed, the tall woman is walking about. Like a neurotic parent making sure that her boisterous child has actually gone to sleep. Her two fiendish eyes move about in frantic circles. She peeks into the bed, and her manner suggests that if you appear to be the slightest bit awake, she'll shower you with her inescapable wrath.

She walks about nearby the whole time, never going away.

Sleep is escape. It's what one does to escape a terrible reality. But it isn't a solution. When you wake up, you'll have to face the people in your disagreeable family, school, or work situation again. No matter how deeply you sleep, reality

is always standing right next to you.

There is nothing that can be solved merely by going to sleep.

The woman is pacing listlessly nearby, as if annoyed.

Without the slightest hint of love or concern, she watches you relentlessly, in order to make sure that you're staying in your bed like you should.

She's moving like she's ready to snap at the slightest thing that might displease her — like smashing a cockroach that dared to appear, or ripping out a strand of hair that had a split end.

You desperately try to evade the horrid presence that seems to encircle the tall woman. However, merely hiding has no effect whatsoever. You search the bed, trying to keep the tall woman from noticing, to see if there's anything that can be of use to you.

And then, you find something.

You thought it had disappeared a while ago — that tiny, blue-haired doll. Like a little child unable to sleep, you cradle it close to you. The doll, being pressed against your chest, gives an almost unnoticeable smile and changes form.

It's hard to see beneath the covers, like the inside of a comforter any child might sparsely illuminate with a flashlight, making it their own little kingdom. With the smallest bit of light coming in, you realize that the doll has transformed itself into clothing.

Inevitably, girls forget about their dolls and instead get nice clothes for themselves to wear. They become fashionable, dress up, put on makeup... In that way, they themselves become the dolls.

In this way, young girls become adults. Confining their feelings and wishes to the world of their dreams.

You get changed under the covers. Squirming, like someone using this method to change into their school uniform on a cold morning. Preparing themselves to face reality from within the warm bed that still contains the remnants of their dreams.

Somehow having finished changing, you wriggle out of the bed.

You look just like the doll. A white kimono like that which the dead are buried in. Even your hair is like hers, now faintly dyed blue. Almost like a copy. Like how women seek to dress like a doll they cherished in their childhood.

The tall woman looks at you just once.

However, adults cannot see the value of dolls. She turns away in disinterest and walks off.

You let out a sigh of relief — and head for the snow hut you couldn't get into before. You seem relentlessly curious about it. After making sure that the tall woman has gone far away, you step inside.

It's clearly different from the other huts.

There's a small spring in the floor. It's a small pool of water, no bigger than the basin one might use to wash one's face each morning after waking up. It's viscous and has a strange color to it, like face lotion or eyewash.

People wash their faces in order to bring themselves back to reality. A girl learns to apply makeup and becomes an adult.

You gently touch the pond, which seems to be some sort of juncture.

The tall woman's sneer echoes through the void, as if she's making a fool of you.

Chapter 10 / Who Are You?

You are washing your face.

All of a sudden, the scenery around you undergoes a shift.

It's a place full of water, as if all of the snow that surrounded you until a moment ago suddenly melted. You are standing in cold water, submerged up to your ankles. A pond, like the splash ponds small children play happily in, stretches endlessly around you.

You look confused, but still plod along happily. Even though it seems difficult for you to walk about, you kick up sprays of water, like you're dancing.

Water is life itself. The body of any living person contains an abundance of water. Water is a necessity for life; that's why everyone has an instinctive fondness for it.

Anyone sliding in up to their shoulders in the ample hot water of a bath would feel at ease. They would be able to relax.

Your expression melts into a broad smile, as if you've become relaxed.

The water all around you is completely translucent — you can see all the way to the bottom. It's like the shoals on a beach in a southern country, the pretty, jewel-like sand stretching beneath your feet. They draw unique patterns at your feet, like a magnified image of human flesh.

That unblemished moisture seems to embody the very feeling of getting sweaty from playing with a friend, in those youthful days when one's skin is still moist.

A droplet splashes your cheek, and you wipe it away with the palm of your hand.

A gentle light illuminates you, reflecting off the water's surface. You are no longer wearing the burial kimono you had been wearing only a short time ago, but are now back in your regular attire. Your hair, which had been undone, is

now neatly braided once more and bounces happily as you walk.

You walk through a fantastical scenery. It's like a fairytale, or the world as seen through the eyes of a happy child.

The water level is low, the water itself clean. It's as if it's cleansing your heart as well.

All around you are brittle-looking rock walls that look like they are made out of sugar. A pure-white foundation. You look for a spot low enough for you to climb up onto, and you wriggle your way up, shaking your head to free lingering droplets of water.

You wring out your braids.

Brushing back the bangs framing your face, you gaze about your surroundings.

This rocky surface has a complex structure. Almost like a labyrinth. It's such a complicated terrain, thinking about walking through it seems so tedious.

It's like learning. Studying. Human relationships. Helping your parents. A small cold.

All you want to do is keep playing, but so many things tie you down, bind you, inconvenience you.

As you stare blankly at the obstinate structure of the rock wall, at a loss, something tiny hovers next to you. A string. No, a balloon. A string is dangling from a primary-colored balloon that might have been well-loved by a child.

You grab the string, as any child might have done.

In that instant, your feet are lifted gently off the ground.

Your entire body is floating, completely ignoring the laws of physics. You seem a bit confused, but the balloon continues pulling you higher and higher. You're being given an escape from that troublesome, almost grotesque maze-like structure. You're being carried away.

As the balloon sways uncertainly, you float higher and higher. Blown about by the wind, it feels weak, but it supports you as long as you don't let go. It's not strong enough to say it's protecting you, not proactive enough to say it's taking

you under its wing.

But in some way, it's like friendship.

It's something you can count on, something that has offered you the tiniest bit of relief from your painful lost way.

The balloon deflates, seemingly losing the gas with which it had been inflated. However, as it does, a new balloon appears nearby.

You switch from one balloon to the next. It's like changing friends as the years go by. Like when your friendship is used up, your affection withered, you part ways with the balloon.

But whenever you reach out a hand, a new balloon will be there.

You cling to it with all your might.

The higher up you go, the colder the air gets. Your breath freezes, turning white. You wheeze, struggling to breathe. The last balloon is fleeting, so tiny it could fit in the palm of your hand, and stalls out, losing its buoyancy.

You begin to wiggle your arms and legs in a panic. You're so high up that you can't even see the ground anymore. If you fall, you won't escape unharmed, even in a dream. You look desperately around you, like a lonely girl seeking someone to love her.

And then you realize. Right next to you is a tiny floating island. In reality, it should be inaccessible to you. It's at the same height of that troublesome white rock wall. But there's an open space, and in that space are several objects that look like tents.

You gather your courage, let go of the balloon, and jump down.

Falling from such a great height, you are unable to make a graceful landing, and end up landing on your backside.

It seems like it doesn't hurt due to this being a dream, as you merely shake your head to shake off the shock, then slowly get to your feet. You're up so high, the air is thin and very cold. Yet, you've actually managed to make it here.

You wring out your wet clothes and fix your hair, as if you're suddenly aware of your appearance and about to enter a solemn religious institution, such as a

temple.

You then lift your eyes to find a giant tent.

You gulp back the saliva in your throat.

The tent is cute and flashy. It's dazzling, like a child used only their favorite colored crayons on it. It's practically glistening, like something a precocious little girl might do to show off... You hesitantly approach it.

It looks warm, like the snow huts — but far more extravagant. It gives off a happy vibe, and it seems like something its owner would be proud of, like if they happened to see someone else, they would want to boast about it. You approach with an air of guilt, like the uninvited visitor you are.

And so you quickly take a peek inside the tent.

Then step completely inside.

Inside is even more adorable than one might imagine from the outside. It's the type of place where a fairytale princess might live, the type of place that could make one happy just by being there. A room full of treasures for a child who has been raised in a loving home.

It's clearly completely different in tone from the rest of the dream that you've been walking through — like it's the precious internal part of some unseen person, and you've inadvertently happened upon it. That's why you seem so uncomfortable. However, you step forward into the magnificent place with hope in the positivity and love that it overflows with — the positivity and love that you yourself lack.

An expensive-looking carpet stretches across the floor. Delightful paintings of landscapes adorn the walls. There is a soft and fluffy-looking bed. Books that seem like they might depict fanciful adventures or stunning romances are neatly arranged on the desk and the bookshelf. It's a harmonious and intimate place, the type that could make your heart dance.

You seem entranced for a time, gazing about the room, and then— Finally, you realize it.

Something has been standing in front of you the whole time without you

noticing.

In this little room, with nowhere to run or hide.

That person just accepts it, and—

“Sorry about the mess,” I say, as if talking to a friend who has suddenly dropped by.

As I do, I play with the tuft of hair dangling over my shoulder.

“Uhhm, is there something you need from me?”

In the end, that’s all I can think of to say.

You stand there for a while, without reacting.

However, a muffled sound comes from your mouth, a voice that isn’t really a voice.

Maybe this is your way of asking me:

Who are you?


Part Two:
Me

Chapter 11 / Onlooker

I am watching you.

You stand frozen, somewhat dumbfounded, in the middle of my adorably decorated room.

“Uhhm—”

I put my hand on my chest and steady my breathing.

I tell myself to calm down.

I should have been able to predict that this would happen.

That’s because you and I — we’re having the same dream.

Of course it would be possible that someday, you might find your way here. After all, I’ve thought about what it would be like to come face-to-face with you like this, how I should behave — I’ve even practiced it.

But, it’s like unexpectedly happening upon a celebrity in town.

I feel so flustered.

“W-Welcome. No, that’s not it, this isn’t a store or anything that formal — uhm.”

Not sure of what to say, I stand here, flustered as you stare at me.

No one acts the way they think they would within their dreams.

“It must have been cold out there. Well, my place isn’t very exciting, but feel free to rest here.” I motion toward a cushion over in the corner of the room.

You show not even a hint of a reaction. I start to feel uneasy once again.

I have no clue what you’re thinking — with no hint as to what’s going on inside your head, you wander over expressionlessly to the bookshelf on my wall and begin to investigate.

It doesn’t feel very good to have someone just walk up and start touching

things in one's room. It feels like a breach of manners — but I guess that's what one might do in the relaxed environment of a friend's room. At least, after seeing the friendly expression on your face, that's the impression I get.

"I don't really have any books that are that interesting. The ones over there are—" I cut in behind you, peering over your shoulder. All of the spines look the same.

Next to the bookshelf, a picture of a large creature, like an elephant or a whale, done in a cute style of painting, is placed in a frame upon the wall.

It gives off a sense of security, like having a mighty ally.

That's right, I want to be someone who gives you a sense of security, who gives you a place where you can rest.

Just walking and walking must tire you out. There's no way you've had a chance to recover.

That's exactly why.

"You understand right? All of these — they're your dream diary. Your 'yume nikki.'"

For some reason, you just keep meandering about in front of the bookshelf, so I take out one of the books and open it.

What's written within are several words heavy with meaning.

Red umbrella. Stoplight. You must remember having actually written these words.

However, several other words are there, written with distorted letters, as if done in the depths of darkness.

Frog. Witch. Lamp. And so on, that you can generally grasp the meaning of. However, there seem to be some unpleasant or frightful words mixed in as well — like knife. Severed head. Medamaude — eyeball hand.

"It seems that you've recorded some important words here that have left an impression upon you. Dreams can show us the depths of our unconscious mind, though we quickly forget them. Within them are the things so thoroughly attached to your heart that they cling to it like an image burnt onto a computer

screen. So that's why you've written them down so frantically."

I open the book and hold it out in front of you.

I clear my throat and continue.

"I've been thinking about a lot of things. Well, we have time — I'm not doing anything, and I wanna find out how I ended up lost in this nightmare. I want to escape if at all possible — it's the same for you, right?"

I take out another book.

It's a technical book, but it is filled with a lot of blank space. There are empty spaces here and there, as if to reflect the information we don't know. It's like it only contains the bits we can remember of books we read a long time ago. So we have no way of knowing whether what's written in that book is right or wrong, a misconstruction, or a fabrication of our own making.

I indicate both the book and dream diary as I speak.

"For example, you had that stoplight. That straight path in the dense forest, the corpse, that monster that was farther in — I think that those are symbols that in Freudian psychology would be used in dream interpretations," I state proudly, like a small child sharing a piece of learned knowledge.

I put a heavy amount of zeal into what I say.

"Freud, the so-called father of psychology and the one responsible for establishing a system of analysis for it, said that dreams are the product of the repressed unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is a collection of all the things we seal away in the depths of our hearts as we live our lives — things like repressed stress, desire, and conflict. Like what's left after the contents of a pot are boiled down."

That monster at the end of that straight path.

It's like a wild beast kept within your heart, sealed with pockets of hatred, desire, and malice, things you don't need in your waking life, but can't help feeling.

So when you dream, you have to confront the beast within — your unconscious mind.

And so you run away from it by waking up. Looking away. But that's just fine. And those who confront the monster and aren't armed with psychological knowledge are chewed up and swallowed by the monster.

"So what we call logic is just suppressing instinct. Mental illness or other such illnesses are from when the monster cannot be suppressed and those things rise to the surface — the hero known as reason is defeated, and the monster breaks through the walls of the fortress of your heart. That's Freud's explanation, at least. That's one facet of the truth, but at least it's easy enough to understand."

Dreams = the monster = repressed instincts and desire. And so we humans must use the blades, armor, and chains known as reason to fight and hold back the monster to get through our lives.

Though, this is a rather violent way of thinking about it. This complicated, dualistic battle between reason and instinct exposes our heart and gives birth to a great deal of discord.

Freud basically named this repressed beast "lust." All of what appears in dreams are symbols of the phallus or sexual intercourse. They're rather coercive and extremely vulgar. There's a lot that is explained with this, but that shouldn't be all there is to it.

Because monsters aren't the only things that appear in our dreams.

Moreover, if we accept Freud's system, then people who have a mental illness would be labeled "weak," "pathetic," or "losers." And his suggested solutions were overly simplistic, comic hero-esque advice like "do your best" and "you need to get stronger."

No one can get strong like that. Doing your best isn't enough — there are some monsters you cannot defeat, no matter what. However, in Freud's philosophy, making that assertion would only result in one being labeled as a "weakling."

Chapter 12 / Jung

I continue talking.

“For me, I prefer the explanations of Jung, who had apprenticed under Freud, but split from him after a difference of opinion.”

In contrast to my enthusiasm, you merely gaze out the window at the shimmering of the starry sky, so I cannot tell whether or not you are listening.

Bright stars that denote good fortune, and dim stars that denote misfortune.

You sway between them.

“With Jung’s theory, it’s like the human heart is made up of contrasts.”

It’s not that I’m particularly well-versed in psychology, but I’ve been desperately researching.

For your sake.

“Let’s say that there’s someone who is completely peaceful, who would never engage in violence. That primary self is a peaceful one, and thus the surface personality, the one typically seen by the world at large. But the truth is, that person has a violent personality, one that is cruel and extreme, within themselves. The two contrasting tendencies are like surface and beneath, reality and dream, as if one is a warped reflection of the other.”

In other words, both tendencies exist, but in contrast.

Jung establishes them as the first and second self.

This isn’t the story of someone with Multiple Personality Disorder or anything.

The story of the life of Billy Milligan is interesting, but very exaggerated, leading people to embrace a narrow idea of what the word “personality” means.

No matter who they are, everyone possesses two contrasting selves — divided into the surface and the hidden.

“Typically, people live their lives as the surface, or primary, self. However, there are times when the second personality comes to the surface. Like when you’re dreaming. Or when you’re angry or crying and can’t regulate your emotions. Or when you’re with close relatives and let your guard down—”

In those cases, we say the individual is “like a different person.” A person who is always serene and kind can suddenly change into someone who is mad with rage. That is, when the second personality presents itself, the person themself changes — as if a switch has been flipped and they’ve swapped out, basically. That’s why it is fairly accurate to say they’re like a different person.

Switching between the surface and internal, it seems like an opposite disposition is being displayed.

The story of a husband who appears fair and upright to total strangers, while being violent, heavy-drinking, and domineering in front of his wife, is a commonly heard one. On the other hand, there are also those stories of interesting people online who act so lively and gregarious, but in real life, they’re plain and subdued — in other words, keyboard warriors. The personalities change between home and the outside world, or between the internet and the real world.

There’s the self you use in public, then the other self, the one that’s expressed in your home where you can relax, or when you retreat behind a computer screen. That’s how things are, according to Jung’s explanation.

However, that isn’t an illness or anything.

Everyone possesses these conflicting primary and secondary selves. If there’s an action, then there must be a reaction, that’s an essential law of physics — that’s why, though Jung’s way of thinking was vague, the study of the human heart and mind was made a scholarly distinction and entered into the body of science.

He discovered a formula for the basic principles of the mind.

“Usually, these two selves exist in a state of balance. That’s a natural, peaceful state. If that balance is lost, then that’s when it seems like that person has changed. It’s like when a boat loses balance and capsizes, and what’s below flips up to the surface.”

But, that isn't a weakness of the heart or a mental illness. It's something that could happen in anyone's mind. All humans possess the full spectrum of emotions. The heart doesn't remain the same all of the time; instead, we spend each day with the mind in flux, trying to regulate that balance. This goes on and on, like a game of Reversi with the heart.

If the balance is abruptly thrown off, then the hidden self emerges.

The problem is when someone gets flipped over and can't get themselves back to normal. Often, living out your daily life with that shadow self can be a problem. Hot-tempered. Inhumane behavior. The inability to communicate. Being vulgar and irritable. And so on and so forth.

If it's always expressed, it could lead to problems in your social life.

In instances where people notice something is off about you, if you quickly receive treatment, you can return to normal. All you have to do is overturn the reversed personalities once more.

On the other hand, you could stay as you are and adapt to life like that. Hidden personas can be more loveable and agreeable, easier to get along with. But to the people around you, if you change your personality, it may seem like you're not the same person anymore. It may seem like you're a different person, just wearing the same face.

At any rate, calling it an illness or a weakness of the heart is a misunderstanding — in the case of mild symptoms, it's something that can happen to anyone in their daily life. The mind's balance is thrown off, the personalities are switched. If that happens, then it can cause trouble for the people around us.

All we need to do is maintain the balance of our selves and pay attention whenever that balance is overturned. If one cannot get back to normal on their own, then they should seek help from the people close to them or a doctor.

Nevertheless, the surface and underneath are both you, and it's difficult for you yourself to judge whether or not you're balanced. The mind isn't something visible, and unlike skin disease or tooth decay, there are no subjective symptoms, and it's hard for a person to be aware of any changes or pain. It's hard to examine.

If you can't see it, then an exam can't detect it. You can't take care of your own well-being that way.

Even if something is wrong with you, you might not know it.

"But there are opportunities to catch a glimpse of our hidden selves. Those are — in our dreams."

I lean forward in excitement, having hit the main point.

But you just stand there, spacing out.

"Human minds have been broadly stratified into the 'conscious' and 'unconscious' minds. The prominent self is the conscious. Connected to reality, on the surface. However, the 'unconscious mind' sprawls throughout the inner parts of your mind — that's where the secondary self walks about. Therein lie the symbols of memories of the past, records of things one has seen or heard. The ability to see chinks in the unconscious mind is what we call a dream."

You are dreaming right now.

This place is inside your unconscious mind.

"The conscious mind can't keep going on endlessly. It needs a break too. That's why each day, humans sleep in order to let their minds and bodies rest. As we dream, the conscious and unconscious minds trade places. So then, the unconscious mind, which is usually in the background, gets to take center stage and play. It gets to explore. The story of what your unconscious mind does in that space of time when your conscious mind is resting — that's what dreams are."

That's what we're experiencing right now.

Within the world of dreams, your memories and emotions become symbols and are scattered about. Among them are special symbols, ones that have left a particularly strong impression on you. The red umbrella, the stoplight — and a variety of other things are strong symbols that can have a mild impact upon your unconscious mind.

Within your dreams, they can effect changes in your unconscious mind.

Because of that, I call them 'Effects.'

You need to pick up the symbols scattered throughout your unconscious mind, decipher them, and set things in order. That's what all humans try to do each night when they go to sleep.

You have a mutual agreement with your heart — that you can play within your unconscious mind to your heart's content—

But you will have to return to reality.

Understand your mind and put it in order, and once you're satisfied, awaken from your dream.

If you don't, you won't—

You won't be able to save your consciousness. You won't be able to walk around reality ever again.

You can't just lock yourself up in your dreams, in your unconscious mind, forever.

Because it's your conscious mind that's connected to the world outside. You have to awaken it and then face reality. That's what it means to live, and I want you to live.

For example, even if your reality is exceedingly harsh. It's impossible to sail the vast seas of reality with a vessel that's lost its balance and flipped over.

Even though I'm desperately trying to tell you, to warn you—

You just keep staring at me.

Chapter 13 / The Unconscious Mind

You are looking at me.

Of course I'm puzzled, as you haven't said a thing this whole time.

"Wh-What's up? Is there something you don't understand?"

I'm already baffled, then you suddenly open your umbrella in front of me, as if to block my view.

"Hwha?" I topple back in surprise at your sudden action.

At that same moment, even though we're inside — it starts to rain. It's a baffling phenomenon, but as we are in a dream, something like this shouldn't be too much of a shock. The raindrops hit my cheeks and begin to soak the book I'm holding open, so I close it in a panic.

I look up at you.

"You open an umbrella because rain is falling. That's reality. That's the world of the conscious mind. But here, rain falls after you open your umbrella. It's reversed. *Through the Looking-Glass,* that story by Lewis Carroll that was like a love letter to the young girl Alice — does hold some important hints. The story of Alice is the story of a dream."

Reason is topsy-turvy. Cause and effect are swapped.

Because this is a dream.

So that type of logic is fitting here. *Through the Looking-Glass* is correct in a Jungian psychology sense.

"Urk." I suddenly stop moving about.

I let out a strange sound and stiffen.

When I look at you, I notice that your body is almost completely covered by the stoplight. The rain continues unrelentingly during that time, soaking the whole room. The weight of the raindrops causes the frames holding the

paintings to fall down, and the bed gets completely soaked. Several puddles appear on the floor.

You mischievously flicker the stoplight between “go” and “stop.”

Every time you do, I go from being able to move to not being able to move — I can’t settle down. Even so, with subsequent starts and stops, I intermittently speak to you.

“L-Listen. Effects can impact dreams. Though they can only cause mild interference. I wonder what that stoplight might be a symbol of. Anyone born in modern times is taught in childhood that red means ‘stop’ and green means ‘go.’ They indicate your negative and positive feelings — and societal common knowledge, right?”

As I’m speaking, you change into a white burial kimono. I decide to refer to that as the “yuki-onna.” A symbolic Effect you obtained a short time ago.

As I watch, snow begins to fall within the room. The puddles that formed earlier freeze, and snow begins to pile and cover the desk and bookshelf. You’re just doing whatever you please — and hey, are you even listening to me? I shiver in the cold and snort back some snot.

Forcibly lifting the soles of my shoes from the floor, I approach you as you stand there, touching my bed for some reason. Hey, have you been ignoring me this whole time?

“Beds are places full of significance. But this is my bed, so you can’t use it. It seems like you’re missing that bit of common sense about not getting into someone else’s bed — maybe. But that’s in the real world — the world of the conscious mind.”

I spit out flakes of snow, amidst this snowstorm that’s so furious one could catch a cold, and struggle to speak.

“But having a dream within a dream is incredibly important. Uhmm, the book should be around here — oh, come on, cut it out with this snow!”

I try to open a book to get the answer, but even more snow falls and gets in the way.

With no other choice, I give up and try to explain as much as I can with what I remember.

“That’s why, if you find a bed within your dreams — I think it’s okay to try and sleep in it. Having another dream within a dream. In that way, you might be able to go even deeper into the dream. You might even slip from your ‘individual consciousness’ to an even deeper ‘collective unconsciousness.’”

I call out to you even as you stand mute with your back to me.

“The ‘collective unconsciousness’ is one shared by all humankind. Humans see the world with two eyes and experience it with pairs of arms and legs. There exists at least a basic consciousness that we all experience, as creatures who have those things in common.”

Myths and legends are our oldest stories.

There are a surprising number of common symbols that appear throughout myths and legends among different cultures around the world. They are all born from the collective unconsciousness so that we can understand myths and legends from other cultures.

The giant, which often appears in myths and legends, might scare someone as a child, but as an adult, it is a symbol of the dominance that they have come to fear in reality. The legend of the mighty flood destroying the world might be childbirth — you’re shuffled out of the gentle womb and into harsh reality before you can even walk — it’s a symbol of one world being destroyed to create another. Gods are symbols of respect for nature and for fear of natural disasters.

And through all tales, humans feel anger, sadness, and joy, fall in love and experience hate, live and die.

Anyone anywhere can sympathize with these motifs — they bear universal truths.

They’re tales that spring forth from the “collective unconsciousness” that we all embrace.

“And just like that, you can discover numerous patterns throughout myths and fairytales all over the world. Being anxious about the dark, being afraid of a

monster — or an invading enemy. Being loved by one's parents, loving someone of the opposite sex to make a baby, those various types of biological instincts — those are part of the 'collective unconsciousness.'"

I approach you as you stand next to my bed.

My completely soaked and frozen bed is in a totally miserable state.

Are you uncomfortable with a brush with the "collective unconsciousness" — the truth?

"If you have the chance, try to experience a dream within a dream. The 'collective unconsciousness' is the mind's greatest principle, one that can exert a great deal of influence over the heart. All of the myths about believing in a deity in order to receive salvation are the same. At some point, you need to dive into the 'collective unconsciousness' and re-evaluate yourself from there."

No matter how much I talk, you show no signs of reacting.

"Come on, please listen to me. You need to come face-to-face with your own mind."

I feel impatient and hang my head — with a groan.

"I want to save you. I want to release you from this nightmare."

These are my true thoughts, my honest feelings.

As usual, you give me no reply.

It all feels futile.

"Hey, why are you ignoring me? I'm saying all of this for your benefit, you know!"

I shake, not just because of the cold, but because no matter how much I call out to you, I can't get you to turn around — so I reach for your shoulder.

I want you to face me.

"H-Huh...?" I cannot touch you.

It's like there's an invisible film between you and I — my fingertips cannot reach you. Your body heat is so far away. It's as if you and I are in separate dimensions and cannot interact with one another. So then why in the world am

I even in your dream? You slip past me with ease — wandering about the room. It's as if you can't even see me. On the other hand, it also feels like you've lost interest in me. It feels uncomfortable, like I've become a ghost or something. A ghost — that became a human a long time ago.

You suddenly notice it and look up.

In front of your eyes, set right around the entrance, is a light switch.

You reach for it, just like a child trying to kill their boredom.

A burst of terror clamps down around my heart.

No, you can't do that. Don't touch it.

"Hey, stop," I beg you in a hoarse voice. "Please, stop."

You flick the switch with a click, so I guess you really are ignoring me.

That, or you aren't even aware of me in the first place.

The light in the room goes out.

The room becomes pitch-black.

As if trying to block your view, to pretend you cannot see — as if rejecting everything, you fill the dream with darkness.

Chapter 14 / Frog

I remember it now.

A dream of yours.

“Hey.” I call out to you over and over, coming up behind you. “I said hey.”

Memories from the past whirl about me like a revolving lantern. This dream, this time we’ve spent together, feels like a second stretched into an eternity.

I don’t know how long ago it was, but I was barely there, so it seems like it must have been well in the past. However, like a dream of wealth and fortune, even though it can feel like you’ve lived a lifetime, it can all take place in the blink of an eye.

So it could have been several seconds ago, or several millennia ago.

At any rate, here inside this nightmare, I met you.

No, I found you.

I didn’t even have an outline yet, I was just a point of view, flimsy, like an invisible person. I was unable to perceive even my own fingertips. I was like a spirit, following you from behind.

I was only able to realize my shape here in this rainbow-colored tent, which you reached after a long period of wandering. The moment you pinch your cheeks and wake up, I am forced back into this tent.

Only while you’re awake can I relax in that cute, put-together little room. I have no idea why things are this way.

I have no clue who you are, what I am, or anything about this dream.

What I can’t understand makes it hard to feel at ease. That’s why when you’re walking around the world of your dreams, I’m following close behind you, observing. I want to believe that there’s some key to satisfying the ceaseless wandering in this unending dream.

That’s why I worked so hard to find you and get involved.

“Wait up a second, hey—”

I was lucky to find you that day you strode about, your braids swaying.

Dreams are expansive, complicated and mysterious, so there weren’t many chances for me to come across you. With years of experience, I learned the peculiar sound your shoes make, and after a great deal of hardship, I found you.

I merely observed you at first, just watching the whole time. Finally, I couldn’t hold back any longer, so I gradually drew closer to you. I called out to you, reached out my hand. However, you didn’t notice me, you just kept walking as you always do.

I wasn’t satisfied with that.

I continued my relentless pursuit of you, like a small child seeking its mother.

“Hey, don’t just walk away.”

Your movements aren’t particularly fast, but you move in a way that’s hard to predict, so finding you was a challenge. Following you is tough. Unlike you, who don’t seem to tire from walking on and on, my breath frequently runs ragged.

Getting tired in a dream. Talking about breathing in and out is also weird.

Discussions of such biological functions are irrelevant to me.

Perhaps if I’m stabbed with a knife, I’ll bleed and die.

You’re walking through a thick forest. A fairytale-esque forest, like the one Hansel and Gretel get lost in. A large amount of enormous trees stand before you, and weeds grow, thick and unchecked. This is absolutely no place for a walk, and yet you strut about confidently, without fear of getting lost.

I trip over the roots of a tree, shake at the cries of birds or wild animals throughout the forest, and balk at the all-consuming darkness created by the treetops.

The throng of trees is rather like a crowd of people. Like the crowds of people strutting aimlessly in front of the train station, or inside the train, or in line at a shop..... In the middle of those crowds, you are lonely. You move forward,

cutting through at a fast pace.

Within the woods, there are occasionally things like spirits. They're pink and green, like some kind of gross, sticky treat from a foreign country. They creep through the forest, either wearing broad grins, expressions of sadness, or expressions of maddening anger.

Though they pose no harm, they lurk about the forest like wild beasts, and once you approach them, they cling to you.

They seem to cling to you with a stickiness, never letting you go.

Like gum somebody spit out on the side of the road.

It doesn't seem very pleasant to you, as you quicken your pace even further.

If I coiled my way around you like that, I wonder if I would also become a spirit that merely followed you from behind. I can't do anything to impact you. All I can do is watch. Worse than those apathetic trees are those clingy, unpleasant interlopers...

Memories involving other people leave scratches on the heart. By merely interacting with others, they leave depressions on our heart, transforming it. Insofar as humans are creatures that learn, even negative memories are precious learning experiences. Unpleasant memories are stored for later reflection, such as "this was a failed attempt" or "let's try to make sure things don't end up like this again."

They're put on display within your unconsciousness, without being forgotten.

No matter how terrible something is or how badly people want to forget it, the mind will not erase the memory. The heart cannot be seen with the eye nor touched by the hand. So the heart always has blemishes left on it that cannot be cleansed.

What sort of blemish am I?

"Hey, who are you? What am I? Where is this?" I ask you over and over again, thinking you know something.

I'm so anxious.

Not knowing what exactly I am instills a fear in me that makes it hard to stay

sane. There's no place for me to rest, like a little boat in a storm.

I'm amassing plenty of ideas, but I have no clue which one is correct. I'm sure what I really want is for someone to say, "Yes, yes, that's it."

I want it to be you, without a doubt, for you are special within this dream world. Everything else here seems to move on autopilot, and there are many strange beings that I'm hesitant to even engage with in the first place. But little by little, as you come and go throughout these worlds, you change.

You are special, you are alive, or at least you seem to be. I believe that, and so I'm trying to help you.

"Are you listening to me?"

I have no idea whether you have a purpose or not — every time you look like you're going to move on, you pace back and forth in the same spot. You're almost like a sleepwalker.

No matter where you go in the forest, the scenery never changes, but you just walk on, never tiring of it. This doesn't seem like the type of laid-back place one would visit to go forest bathing, so you must just be going for a walk.

This boring period of time seems to last forever.

You suddenly stand completely still.

As if you've made a discovery.

There's something hopping up and down right in front of you.

It's a frog. Its form seems to shine brightly against the gloomy forest scenery. Like a jewel. A stout frog with a heavy sense of presence. It's mysterious in the most pleasant way, like the vivacity of life itself.

In general, frogs denote the highest degree of good fortune in dreams. They are positive symbols of hope.

It seems things are finally heading in a good direction. It might be my imagination, but that's how it seems.

Probably sick of wandering around the endless forest, you quickly head toward the frog. From where I'm standing, I can only see your back, but I think

there's likely a gleam in your eyes. You act that way toward the frog, and yet you don't even notice me — it makes me feel a bit jealous.

You reach for the frog with both hands as it takes giant leaps, giving off a strong sense of presence amidst the dark woods. The frog barely resists, allowing you to take it. You snatch the frog's forelegs somewhat violently, then stare at it as it dangles in front of you.

You tilt your head.

You're standing completely still, so I follow you, crouch down behind you, and steady my breathing. And then, I watch attentively, but with caution. Something amazing might be about to happen.

However, no matter how long we wait, no surprise happens.

You toss away the frog in disappointment. You're way too quick to lose interest. Are you a child? The frog smacks me in the face — it seems almost like you wanted to be scolded.

With the frog stuck to my face, I fall on my backside.

I peel off the annoying amphibian and hold him like a stuffed animal.

I call out to you.

"You know, I think this frog definitely has some sort of significance — why not investigate it a little further?"

The frog is acting so docile in the palm of my hand.

Like some wise man, it stands completely still, without inflating its chin or making a sound.

"It could be that this frog is some sort of key to solving the mystery of this dream—" I assert with all my might, but you steadily move on ahead.

Frustrated, I pull myself up and chase after you in small sprints. A vicious feeling starts to well up inside of me. I'm trying so hard, after all. You don't seem to care.

I can't take it.

You and I should be shouldering the same burdens. We should be working

together.

I bring my face close to the frog's rear end.

And then, I bring my lips close — and blow with all my might.

Like the cruel game that children in the country play, trying to make the frog explode.

Like a manifestation of happiness itself, the frog disappears, and you realize it. That you threw away something so important to you.

The frog expands. It becomes bigger and rounder, like a balloon. Almost unnaturally so. At that moment, the frog's skin can endure no more and bursts open.

There is no splattering of blood and entrails. Instead, it's more like someone popped their bubblegum.

"W-Well? What do you think?"

I don't even know what I mean by that.

Maybe I too have become tired from walking on endlessly and have gone a little crazy.

And then I realize. The skin of the burst frog clings to your face. You stand completely still, dumbfounded.

"Ahh— I-I'm sorry. Are you all right?"

It's as if we were students playing around in a classroom and end up breaking a glass. And then I shake and go pale, as if I've just realized my friend is bleeding because of it.

What in the world am I doing? This is so ridiculous. I reflect back on this, as if perhaps there's some deeper meaning, but more importantly—

The skin of the frog slowly overtakes your entire face. It's moving on its own, transforming you. On touching you, it goes from a sign of good fortune to something bad.

It looks like a frog mask. It's as if your head has been transformed into a frog's face — even the way your eyes bulge is so realistic. You touch your face and

feel the sticky sensation, but it doesn't seem like it will come off.

Having become a creepy frog-person, you look in my direction.

Maybe you're finally aware of me.

You're like a child who misbehaves in order to get a parent's attention, and I gladly oblige. You wanted to be scolded, at least. You wanted the reaction of "You're a bad girl, you're terrible."

That's what I hope for, but since I'm invisible, there's no way you can see me. So I pretend to fix my hair.

I turn and face you bashfully.

"I'm sorry. But you've been ignoring me this whole time—" I say, as if making an excuse.

You respond with: "Ribbit, ribbit."

"Hmm?"

You open your mouth wide and stick out your long, thin tongue. It isn't just that you're wearing a mask — your insides have changed as well. You then place your hands on the ground and hop off into the thick patches of trees with a "boing, boing."

"Hey, where are you going?!"

You leap away energetically, your croaking of "ribbit, ribbit" echoing into the forest.

"Wait up~!"

With no other option, I chase after you.

I really have no idea what's going on anymore.

But it does feel like something has changed, just a bit.

Chapter 15 / Neon

I lose sight of you for a bit.

Just when it seems I've found you, you're hopping around in another strange place.

It looks like a town at night.

The place is basically pitch-black, with giant, all-black structures here and there. They look like buildings with all the lights off, steeped in the dark of night. Having become more frog-like somehow, you roam about these alleyways the dark buildings create.

You're like a delinquent girl donning some disguise in order to enjoy the nightlife in this maze of buildings.

The frog skin still covers your face, and it stays on no matter how many doors you pass through or what kind of place you end up in. It's a unique transformation. While I didn't initially have a name for it, the thing I've decided to call "the Frog" must be an Effect.

Which is why I'm glad you've kept it on your face without tossing it out.

"Mm-hmm," I say to myself, asserting that I've done a good thing, and follow you as you bounce along, having cast aside all sense of human logic. Your movements have become rather nimble, so I almost lose sight of you several times.

Finally, we end up in some bizarre place, likely lost.

With so many buildings squished together and my vision inhibited by the darkness, I bump my head. This place is restrictive. I can't move around like I should be able to. I'm trapped. It's like the limits one sets for themselves — it's apathy, resignation.

I'm not one to give up though, so I pull myself together and begin trying to climb the building. With no clear place to start, I reach my hand up the smooth

wall, but then slide back down onto my butt. What am I doing?

As I scramble about, you skillfully slip through a crack in the wall and go even farther away. I cannot lose sight of you again, so I give chase.

The buildings here overflow with rainbow light, one that does seem like the neon seen in cities at night. It's like a Christmas tree, all decorated and lit up. But it's kind of garish, hurting my eyes and making me uneasy.

You remind me of someone slipping out of their boring home to experience the nightlife for the first time. However, there's no place out there where you can relax or feel at ease. None of these buildings will take you in. They merely emit their harsh glow.

The sound of each of your footsteps echoes on and on. There are the sorts of sounds here that cause people to tremble, like rushing cars, the wails of sirens, and the din that eeks out of arcades and pachinko parlors. There are even sounds that seem like angry shouting and people sobbing.

This is the type of place where one cannot relax, where it seems that stress just continues to build.

I walk carefully through the glistening sea of neon.

"Wuhuh?!"

At least, I do, until I slam into something and topple back.

Whatever it is seems to have appeared suddenly in front of me.

"Wh-What is this?"

It's a huge billboard with a neon glow of its own. It looks like a giant, harsh-looking man. He has arms, legs, and a face, and all of his features are overbearing. And yet, a broad smile stretches across his face, like someone who is obtrusively drunk.

He's just standing there, his light flickering, enshrined like a statue of the guardian deity Niou.

"Ah, it's just a decoration—"

He gives no sign of movement, merely looking like the billboard for some

mysterious shop. I may be invisible, but the spot where I bumped into him really hurts.

Using the billboard for support as I get back on my feet, I once again let out a “Kyaa!”

At some point, something strange has begun wriggling around me.

“Wh-What?”

On closer inspection, there are tons of somethings. Swarms of them. Even though they give off vivid colored light, they appear to be some sort of living creatures. These tiny creatures move about in a strange, disorderly fashion — a lot like me.

All of them emit a neon light, but they each look different from each other. There are little winding tentacle-like things, arrow-like things like you would see on a banner, ghost-like things with small-but-wide eyes that are the only parts of them illuminated — the ones that stand out are what look like water fleas or parameciums, like microbes that wouldn’t normally be visible to the naked eye, but are almost comically inflated here.

It’s like the body itself is transparent and revealing the inner parts, making the capillaries and the entrails visible. It’s hideous, causing me to avert my eyes.

Though we’re often not conscious of it, microbes and bacteria exist all around us — even within us. And yet we unwittingly come into contact with them — somehow, these seem to be like that.

They’re normally something we aren’t aware of, but they definitely exist.

No matter how much of a plain, honest life one might live, if they step into a busy shopping area, they’ll notice people like fashionable girls and delinquents. These people seem like the denizens of another world. Even though they may live in the same area, be around the same age, one might never go near them, let alone speak to them—

You’re completely different from those throngs and crowds, like someone just going out to explore the nightlife. You neither brush against them nor look them in the eyes. However, as if you prefer this to being alone, you dive into the crowd of flashy, dangerous types.

I try to follow you, but the mysterious creatures emitting the fluorescent lights get in my way, and try as I might to move, I can't. It's extremely hard to breathe here. Amid the din, they seem to be having a great deal of fun — it's a parade for strange creatures. It's Carnival.

If you were to join them, I'm sure you would be able to savor the invigoration. For someone like me, who doesn't fit in, it just feels uncomfortable. It makes me uneasy. If I were to join in such a riotous celebration, I'm sure I would lose my way.

If I became a part of the pandemonium, I might never be able to go back to being a normal human.

It's like being invited out by a bad friend who knocks your life off course.

However, you walk through the bevy of glowing things, unconcerned.

"Wait, wait up—"

I chase after you in desperation. Like a mother worried over her delinquent daughter.

I can't get close to you in a place like this. No matter how much fun you're having, there's an air of destructiveness about this situation.

"Nmph?!"

I try to chase after you in a panic, but my nose butts up against whatever this short and stout thing is before me. I topple backward, unable to take it. These strange creatures cannot see me, are unaware of me, or they have no interest in me, moving along and doing as they like.

It's a disadvantage that I can only worry about. If I try to go near them, I lose my balance all over again.

I ignore the strange creatures, pushing through them and passing beneath the inseam of the billboard that looks like a giant man, making my way over to you.

Once I've put a little distance between myself and that din, I breathe a heavy sigh of relief.

If this is a dream, it should be quieter than this.

The din is so painfully loud, it's excruciating.

I pat my chest and lift my face—

Then I see it.

"Huh? What are you doing?"

You're sitting down right in front of me. Your clothes look like those of a little girl, which makes the frog mask look even more bizarre. It's like someone wearing makeup unsuited to them. And you're shoving something into that giant frog mouth of yours. Like a predator devouring its prey.

It looks like a glowing bird.

Birds are generally a symbol of stress. You gulp it down intently. It looks like someone shoving a coin into a coin purse. You're ingesting something just as bad as alcohol or cigarettes.

"Don't eat it! Don't eat something like that!" I shout and rush toward you.

It doesn't look like something that would be good for you to put into your body. It will definitely make you ill. However, if you don't eat something, you'll die. So you swallow the bird whole, as if you can't help but do so.

You're like a starving child that wasn't allowed to eat dinner.

What is it that you're starving for?

Flapping its wings in a panic, the bird with the glowing neon light disappears from view.

Flustered, I shout at you.

"A-Are you okay?! Let me see it! Spit it out!" I scold you like you're a baby, trying to get you to do as I say.

I grab your face and shake it about in an effort to make you spit up the glowing bird from earlier. Surprisingly, I can touch you. Maybe I can only interact with the frog mask covering your face.

You don't seem very perturbed as the frog skin comes peeling off—

Your face is revealed, dripping with sweat or some other mysterious liquid. It's your usual face, your eyes closed as if you're sleeping — I feel relieved. I'm

not sure what I would have done if you had undergone some sort of transformation inside that mask.

However, you suddenly grab your stomach and moan.

“Wh-What’s wrong? Are you all right? It’s because you’re eating strange things!” I peer at you, concerned.

All of a sudden, you begin to glow. I have no idea what’s going on. A neon light is emitted from every pore in your body. Like one of those strange creatures who wriggle about this world. You’re trying to become part of this night town by ingesting something forbidden.

Your entire body glistens with rainbow colors, from the ends of your hair to every inch of your skin.

With makeup and fashionable clothing, you transform from a rustic girl into some unfamiliar creature. That’s how it seems. And that gives me an extremely awful feeling.

“Spit it up! You don’t need something like that!” I desperately insist in a shrill voice.

I want you to live, pure as you are, unsullied and untainted. I don’t want you to become something unfamiliar to me. But to live is to become sullied. Knowledge and experience cling to you like filth, covering you.

You can’t stay a pure baby forever.

That is terrifying.

Your form might change, illuminate, and even though you’ll always be you... I don’t like it. It’s so frightening, I can’t take it.

However, still illuminated, you pass by me.

You’re like a fairy. Or rather, like a changeling child that has been replaced.

I run after you, as if you might be stolen away.

Wait.

Don’t leave me behind.

Don’t leave me alone.

Chapter 16 / Sleepwalking

You have been dreaming.

This whole time, never tiring of it.

With no destination, you traverse numerous places. Like the electric signals that zip about the brain, you're having a dialogue with yourself, increasing your capacity for introspection.

You wander aimlessly about this unsettling, unending dream.

One of the worlds you wander through is a grotesque one, one where eyeballs and bloody arms sprout out at random. One world looks like someone splattered paint everywhere. Without a bird's-eye view from a far-off point, one wouldn't be able to tell what is drawn on these huge pieces of graffiti.

Dangerous-looking primitive folk, seemingly ready to take up their shields and spears, simply stand around in the darkness with vacant expressions. There is a fishing pond with strange fish and wriggling creatures that cry out when touched. And a stairway that extends so high up, it seems as if it might reach the heavens.

There are ancient plants standing throughout the furthest reaches of a wasteland, a wasteland that looks like a TV that has been knocked over and broken. For some reason, that birdlike woman with the goggling eyes is having a picnic therein.

You seem to have gradually gotten used to this, encountering all of these strange things, taking in their influence, but essentially, you just continue to walk about aimlessly. You move along at an other-worldly pace, as if the eerie scenery horrifies you.

Gradually getting braver, you approach anything, no matter how grotesque, without hesitation, discovering new entrances and exits and diving deeper, further in. Even to the ugliest parts, the parts that make you want to shield your mind's eye.

Finally, you tire of it. It’s become work for you. You seem to be losing interest in it all. Like a zombie. In other words, it’s like you aren’t even living, like you’re just dreaming the whole time, like you’re in a state of near death.

As if you hate the idea, you collect all of the things you have discovered within your dreams that have left an impression upon you. These items that drip with significance, which I call Effects, are reliably preserved within you, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle coming together to make up who you are.

Among those Effects are those which, on occasion, can impact your surroundings. As you use them, you can set foot into increasingly extraordinary areas.

Each Effect brings with it its own heaviness, and some bring a sense of pain — as you acquire each one, you seem to become more and more exhausted. Becoming fulfilled, growing, but getting more and more tired. It’s almost like becoming an adult.

You continue gathering a variety of Effects.

Like a bicycle, for example. That little vehicle, left in the corner of a fantastical world, moves you farther and faster than ever before. Chasing you as you zip about with such zeal, your braids flying in the wind, is something that brings me a great deal of hardship.

Or like the knife. It seems to be the only weapon that you possess. With it, you walk here and there, stabbing some of the bizarre beings and destroying others. Like the legs that look like they were being grown in some vessel, or the thing overflowing with blood, or the woman that looks like she melted in the hot springs, or the thing that looks like a toy soldier. It is scary for me when you are waving the knife about, and I stay away from you for fear of being stabbed.



However, Effects with such a profound effect on your surroundings are rare.

In general, the Effects have no use. It's not like they have a profound impact on the nature of the dreams, nor are there any that can cause any sort of dramatic change. They only seem to go as far as getting you to some places you might not have been able to reach before. They're like glasses or backscratchers — things that would be convenient to have, but not the sort of things worth risking one's life over.

However, there's nothing else here that you have to do. The Effects should have some sort of significance, or at the very least, should yield something, and not something bad. Believing this to be the case, I help you from the shadows.

For example, there is this object that I can only describe as a cat-shaped coin, rotating at high speed. Its movements are so quick that it seems incredibly difficult for you to catch, so, slipping next to you and the bicycle, I try to help you by impeding the coin's movements — or at least, that is my intention.

At one point, I get tangled up in the fishing line of an oddly lanky man while we are going for one of the Effects that had sunk to the bottom of the pond.

There is also an Effect hidden in a corner of a messy reference room. I try to use a ghost's movements to make the Effect easier for you to spot. I am overtaken and almost eaten by that monster, but I panic and run away.

In this way, through my and your hard efforts(?), you explore every corner of the dream, acquiring every type of Effect — leaving almost nothing else to do. Perhaps it's because you've finished collecting them all, but you don't feel any sense of accomplishment or progress.

As if you're undergoing full-fledged brain death, you wander around idly with nothing else to do.

I grow bored of all this repetition. With no other option, I pursue you less and less, instead choosing to spend my time researching and coming up with deductions.

Back in the one place where I can truly be myself — the little hut amidst the snowscape, I open the dream diary and scribble things here and there. One by one, I record the Effects you've obtained. Frog. Neon. Demon. Midget towel.

Buyo-Buyo.

I roll up my sleeves, as if I'm about to dispel any doubts of the value of those symbols, even if their meaning is not yet understood. I am sure that they hold significance for you. They're the keys to breaking through these impenetrable circumstances, and believing otherwise feels like it would cause me to lose something important.

I've been thinking over a lot of things. What in the world is this dream? I understand that it is in fact a dream. That's because when you go to bed and fall asleep, it is your dreams that rise to the surface. Outside of those times, I cannot leave this little room.

And then, who are you? Why are you having a dream like this? And why am I inside of your dream? What in the world am I? Why am I so interested in you? And why in the world don't you have even the slightest interest in me? No matter how much I think about it, I can't find an answer, as deduction and inquiry give way to the realm of philosophy.

I want someone more clever than I to explain it in great detail.

However, no such generous development occurs, and so all I can do is follow you, observing your movements and coming up with even more conjecture about the nature of things. It's very much like excavating ruins. I painstakingly brush away the filth from the geographical formation that is you, inspecting that which I find.

No one will give me the right answer. Or at the very least, no one will affirm what the right answer is. All I can do is gather a variety of data, compare it, and consider whether is or isn't right.

While you're awake — in other words, while you're in that little room, I cannot interact with you. However, I can watch you. I can watch you from the other side of that TV in your room.

I can't touch you. You're so far away during those times, as if you're on the other side of a mirror.

You're only awake for a very small period of time. You're like a baby; all you do is sleep. On the nights you can't sleep, you lie awake drowsily in your bed for

short bursts of time. Your room always looks so simplistic — there doesn't seem to be anything important therein.

While you are awake, you often head for your desk and write in your diary. What you write is eerily similar to what I summarized. Almost completely the same, down to the words... Flute. Bicycle. Blonde Hair. Triangle Kerchief.

I am having your dream. I am next to you. That's why the things we saw and heard were almost the same, and the impressions left upon us seem to line up. That's why it makes sense that what we both write is so similar.

I feel as if I'm beginning to lose any sort of distinction between you and I.

That line is becoming ambiguous. I think too much about you, and so I become closer to being you. The delineation between us is becoming unreliable and falling apart.

Me. You. Me. You.

It feels as if I'm going to be swallowed up by your dream. Like one droplet dangling above the sea.

Amidst these strange feelings, I remember comfort — and so, I pursue you. Reaching out for you, or rather, voluntarily trying to interact with you.

I want to be with you.

You continue collecting the Effects. They are items that are important to your mind and heart... or at least, they should be. You seem so satisfied upon attaining them.

Like Billy Milligan, who had 24 distinct personalities that later integrated into one perfect self. Perhaps, with a perfectly intact mind and the willful purity of a saint, your consciousness and unconscious mind — in other words, the wisdom of the anima and the reason of the animus — can integrate, bringing you closer to the realm of the divine.

If that is your ultimate goal, then I want to help you. I want you to become stronger. I want to prevent you from cracking into pieces like Humpty Dumpty. To have a strong heart, an unscathed one that will not be lost no matter what.

Even if I'm not an Effect — even if I'm a meaningless, worthless being who

won’t leave any sort of impression on you.

Even if my place isn’t in the completed version of your heart, it’s all right.

Chapter 17 / The Sewer

I continue following you.

Even I don’t really understand why. It’s just that I can’t stand merely watching you any longer. To me, you are special. Call it instinct, desire, whatever you want. I prioritize following you, like the need for water or food or the need to go to bed at night.

Amidst all of this uncertainty, you are the one constant I can rely on.

My everything.

You are still dreaming.

Amidst all of the doors standing in the darkness where you always arrive first, you reach for a new door this time and open it. Inside the door is the most ambiguous sight yet.

Amidst the endlessly expansive space, several walls tower over you. Huge walls, infinitely taller than your petite frame. Almost all of them have an oblong shape to them, and walking around them takes a considerable amount of time. There’s nothing else there.....

It’s something of a mystical sight.

Like asteroids floating throughout the cold void of space, they’re placed at random. You walk through the cracks in those walls. The walls obstruct my view, causing me to occasionally lose sight of you. However, I don’t panic.

This dream seems like it will go on forever. Even if I lose sight of you, I will meet up with you again. There’s a sense of relief— no, a negligence to that though. You will not disappear. You will not come to harm.

That is pride. I’m under the impression that no matter how many times we fail, we can just do it over again. It’s just a dream; it’s not like we can’t take things back — it goes on and on, tomorrow and the next day and the day after that. Even if I lose sight of you at one point, I have no doubt that I’ll meet up

with you again soon.

I run my fingertips gently along the walls standing before me. I can feel a pulse, like that of a living creature. The rhythm of a beating heart and the flow of blood through a brain. Working in tandem, they lead to the ebb and flow of thought. Thickening and thinning, sometimes even breaking off.

Thoughts don't go on without interruption... Perhaps this wall is a symbol of that. These are the kind of meaningful and meaningless thoughts that come to mind.

Trying to find some sort of meaning, I make conjecture after conjecture. But, who knows how much value there is in that. I begin to feel a sense of futility. No matter how much I mull it all over, it's pointless.

My thoughts are veering off on a side street out of boredom. Numerous meaningful patterns are drawn upon the walls, rather like stamps. Stamps lead to the creation of many memories. They might be a memory of yours, or perhaps some portrait you've committed to memory.

Yes, I feel like I remember seeing a wall like this somewhere. That's right, it was in that movie — *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It looks just like that mysterious rectangle, the one referred to as a monolith, that black wall that granted knowledge to the primitive people who were indistinguishable from apes.

It is something granted by the will of the universe. The evolution of humans from apes. The solid and beautiful manifestation of intelligence itself.

Speaking of movies, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* includes a magnificent parody of that, where the monolith is replaced with a chocolate bar, which is subsequently eaten. The source of intelligence, granted by the will of the universe, being turned into chocolate and eaten has a great deal of significance—

"H-Huh?"

I come back to my senses and realize you are nowhere to be found.

I've completely lost sight of you.

While I've spent all this time spacing out, thinking about pointless things,

you've walked on. I scold myself for being an idiot and begin looking around in a panic. I sprint along the outer edge of the wall and peer through to the other side. But, you're nowhere to be found.

I begin to feel a strong sense of terror.

Like all of the blood in my body has gone cold.

Not having you here is so difficult to bear. As if all the food and water has disappeared from this world. It makes me anxious, I hate it, and I'm terrified.

"Where? Where did you go?" As I call out, I rush about in a panic.

And then, I notice it.

Beneath my feet is a little manhole. A completely normal shaft, unsuited to this more mystical scenery. A point that connects the pristine, manicured surface to the dirty sewers. The lid is open, and so I peer inside. Perhaps you've fallen down here.

The hole, by some meanings, is a bad omen, like a trap or some other expression that carries such a disquieting nuance to it. If you don't pay attention, you could lose your footing and fall.

Fall into misfortune and danger.

I was careless, spacey, and I lost sight of you.

And so maybe I missed you falling into the hole.

"Uu, ahh!" I kneel next to the manhole, crying out in a voice that isn't really a voice.

I peer inside, but I cannot see through the darkness all the way to the bottom. Not here, not here.

You're not here. You've fallen down the hole. I feel uncomfortable, almost nauseous, as if I've run my bare hands through entrails.

Without a moment's hesitation, I leap into the hole.

It's a deep, deep hole. I dive deeper and deeper, my body tumbling over numerous times, painfully knocking my head along the sides as I go.

Finally my body slams hard into the ground at the very bottom.

I fell and crash-landed.

My body hits the ground, making the creaking sound of cracked bones.

My body writhes at the impact, and I let out a moan.

“U-Ungh, ahh.....”

Falling from such a considerable height dealt a mighty blow to my body. If this were reality, I would probably be dead.

While I wouldn’t disagree with the notion that one can’t feel real pain in a dream, this is not exactly correct. There are dreams where you can feel pain, where you can feel hot and cold. For example, in dreams that take place in ice floes or amidst seas of flames. Dreams where you’re being stabbed all over with sharp objects. In these situations, it should hurt: if the mind can imagine it, then you can feel pain. Through that misunderstanding, the body senses pain.

But that’s just my impression. If you’re just watching a dream, then it’s like a movie. There shouldn’t be any damage to your body. So I keep reassuring myself..... it doesn’t hurt, it doesn’t hurt, it doesn’t hurt. I surrender the delusion that it should hurt.

“U-Uhh.”

I experience some discomfort, but it’s preferable to pain.

I lift my face and stagger to my feet. And then, I glance around me. It’s dim, as if illuminated only by the faint light of a broken fluorescent lamp.

It looks like a sewer. Having fallen into a manhole, this is probably the preferable place to land. The surface was unbelievably vivid with a mystic atmosphere. In contrast, the deep, wide gutter next to me has a mysterious, syrupy brown liquid seeping through it like mud.

Put simply, it seems to be related to the body. No matter how hard you try to harbor reason and pure thoughts in your heart and mind, your body metabolizes it. Sweat and filth both out. One discharges feces and soils themselves. That muddied filth, that disgusting, corporeal curse, swells about.

Humans cannot become gods. They cannot become an intangible concept. You cannot separate yourself from such filthy things. We get dirty, decay, get

old, and someday, we die.

It feels as if this truth is being thrust upon me.

“Uugh—”

Like a living corpse, I walk about wheezing.

I hear footsteps from within the darkness, on the other side of this extensive, slender pathway that follows the sewer.

Maybe it’s your footsteps.

That sound slowly gets farther away, but I want to draw it closer to me — I want to reach you. And so, in this sewer that smells fishy, like a cesspool, I creep along.

Chapter 18 / A Picture in Words

The sewers go on and on.

Every once in a while, white creatures lift their snake-like necks out of the repulsively viscous sewage and stare at me. They make me uneasy, these snake-like things that look like solidified smoke. They move eerily like living beings, causing the splishing sound of water to echo.

I don't want to see such unsettling, slippery things, even in my dreams. They have such a fishy stench, causing a feeling of visceral unpleasantness to rise from my gut. I'd be just fine if all things with that kind of flesh and texture just disappeared.

I do my best to walk by without looking at those white things. Parallel to the flow of water in the sewer, directly next to it. Even though I don't want to see it, something corporeal is always following.

Hair and nails grow. Fecal matter is discharged after one has a bowel movement. It's nasty.

Finally, my field of view is clear. I seem to be outside. Several enormous buildings tower over me, directly next to the narrow pathway. That's why it still feels just as claustrophobic here.

Even if one doesn't want it to, the body continues to grow. Troublesome flesh clinging to you as you avert your eyes. One's weight increases, even if you don't want it to.

The buildings look like they could be hospitals, or perhaps school buildings. White and unblemished, dull and cold.

We may empathize with the physical aspects of ourselves, but we cannot run from these social things either. Rules. Common sense. Tradition. Human relations..... Those symbolic buildings cause a feeling of entrapment in me, like someone is pressing lead down upon my chest. I don't want to look at them.

Human history goes back eight million years. During that time, cracks have

emerged in these giant buildings we call common sense. They've deteriorated, and graffiti has been slapped onto them like meat on a cutting board.

They've been sullied.

Must I hold my breath and keep living, with all this stuff shoved into my head?

I rush along, as if I can escape everything.

On and on.

Finally, I arrive at a dead end.

At some point, I end up back inside, the layout transposed like a concave grotto — or the dried-up eye socket of a corpse.

It looks like a naturally constructed cavern, yet unnaturally, there are waste receptacles here and there. Trash cans. There are several of these pointless waste receptacles covered with damp cloth, like the type of bins used to preserve corpses.

What stands out even more are the washbasins. For some reason there are several of them, with rusted faucets that draw attention to them. I look at one every day when I go to wash my face. It's so commonplace that the image sticks in my mind. Sullied by hair and dirt, it's where I flush away the filth from within.....

Things like hatred, anger, and resentment born from one's heart but left unresolved are stored here. That's how it feels. That's why, as if smelling something stinky, I avert my eyes.

Cleaning the bathroom would be a punishment for anyone. No one wants to see something like that, let alone clean it. Anyone would rather push the chore onto someone else.

Sewage flows out into some place like a reservoir.

That place fills with filthy, muddy sewage water.

It gets so full and swollen that it seems like it might overflow, and beneath the water's surface something wriggles around. Something is attempting to be born from within the filth, surely something accursed.

Standing next to that reservoir is you.

It's a dead end, with no further side roads.

You jump to your feet, as if being given a new path.

I've caught up with you. Relieved, I rush over to your side.

But suddenly, my steps come to a complete halt.

Something's moving around next to you. It looks like a human soul. Pure white, floating about in the air, like something not of this world. It rotates about as if coiled around you, swimming within the air as if pulled by its white tail.

I begin to feel something indescribably unpleasant.

I want you to stay unaware of it. I don't want you to follow it around.

I shout at the white thing gamboling about next to you.

"Stop! Stay away from her!"

As I speak, I trip over a toppled trash can, but still I desperately rush to your side.

"No, you can't go!" I call out in a shrill voice, but at least it seems to have reached you, as you turn around.

I suck in my breath.

You've become a nopperabou — a faceless ghost. No eyes, no nose, no mouth. Like they all fell off somewhere.

I hold my head in my hands. What was your face like before? I think I must know. What kind of face did you — who were you again? I falter, falling back on my rear and trembling.

During that time, you pass by me, completely ignoring me.

I reach out my hand in a panic, but the white thing passes in front of me and, unable to stand the nausea any longer, I start coughing.

I lift my face after vomiting to see that you're already making your way down the path. There's an open hole along the way, and you squeeze your whole body into it.

“W-Wait!” I muster my willpower and stand up. My body feels heavy, like it’s being permeated by carbon monoxide or poison gas. Moving causes a horrific pain throughout my entire body, making it feel as if it is being ripped apart.

Sometime after you go down the hole, I slide my body into it. Tumbling down, it feels as if I’m going to land face-up. I cover my nose and mouth with my hand and lift my face.

Tears well up in my eyes.

You walk briskly along. There’s no way I can catch up to you.

I hate that. I don’t want you to be far away from me. I want to be with you. I want to call you over, like in a game of Red Rover.

I want to feel your warmth, to confirm your existence with the palm of my hand.

And yet, I have no idea why you’re going so far away.

I want to ask someone for advice, but all that whirls about me here is sewer water.

The sewage goes on and on, like necrotic fluid flowing through the veins of a corpse. It stretches on and on, like the accumulated pus of a long life. As if to cover up the gutters, a strange curvature decorated with framed paintings has been carved into the wall.

It’s a bit like a museum.

But to describe it artistically, it is in poor taste.

The pictures are drawn with messy, squiggly lines, like they were done by a child who was left to create them based on their own imagination. One portrait where the head and hands are oddly highlighted is clearly an illustration of a monster with no hint of amicability.....

In psychology, miniature gardens, paintings, or writing can serve as a form of therapy or help diagnose and treat the mind. However, these paintings have nothing about them that pulls me in. I have no idea what they’re trying to express. They’re merely unpleasant.

It’s likely that if an infant, scrunching up its face and about to burst into tears,

had the ability to grip a paintbrush and could paint, the result might look like that.

It feels like confusion and anxiety alone were pressed into the frame and put on display.

It's too full of metaphors, and so I overthink it with a great deal of difficulty, causing me to lose sight of what is what. It's like being ridiculed for oddities or delusions, kind of like in a comedy movie. A movie. Speaking of which, I wonder where I ever saw *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*.

I'm... I'm...?

While I've been mulling things over, I've finally come upon the end of the sewer.

Pitch-black darkness.

No, right in front of me is a giant face. A bright-red face with the mouth chomping up and down like it's chewing gum. Its uneven hair sways about in a creepy manner. It wears a vulgar grin..... I feel like I know this face. It's symbolically exaggerated, but I'm sure I've seen it somewhere before.

Flustered by deja vu, I suddenly realize. You're walking forward. You're approaching the giant face, gently reaching out your hand— All of a sudden, you're eaten by that face.

You're sucked up by that mouth that was open so wide.

I am horrified.

"No—" I rush over in a panic and pound on the large face over and over again.

Without realizing it, my lips begin stringing words together.

"Open up. Open your mouth. If you don't open it, you won't be able to breathe, you'll die—"

Open it. Open up. Come on.

I scream over and over again, using my whole body to ram into the giant face. I tear at it. I muster up all of my strength and try to force open the giant mouth.

I plant myself firmly and push open the stubbornly shut teeth with my hands, spit soaking my cheeks and a fowl stench causing me to screw up my face.

Somehow, I move with disgust and slip farther in, past the tongue.

I step onto the fleshy interior, looking for you.

“Where are you?! Where have you gone?!” I scream, but there is no response.

At that moment, the tongue easily wraps around me and pulls me in, down farther to the inner part of the throat. Unable to resist, I flail and squirm in futility as I fall into the dark esophagus.

Down another hole. Farther and farther in.

Ground suddenly appears once more, and my entire body is slapped down upon it. This time, the ground is soft and lacks any of the impact I felt earlier. But still, it’s an awful feeling. It’s like I’m standing on top of organs. I might be inside that face’s body — inside of its stomach.

I look around me, searching for you.

“Where.....?”

It’s almost complete darkness. However, there is something here and there that glows. There are some designs drawn in unseemly colors — they seem like someone’s x-ray. It’s vague though, and no one besides a specialist would be able to understand it.

“Where are you...?”

I walk along, almost on the verge of tears.

Finally, in this unending darkness — I discover an exit standing all alone. It looks like the baggage check gate at an airport. As long as you are not deemed to be a problem, you can pass through and go into another world.

Unable to find anything else of significance, I stealthily approach it.

I place my hand on the stiff gate and timidly peer inside.

Someone is standing there.

At first, they look like a normal human. No, something is off.

I hold my breath. A hat and scarf are floating there. A hat, a scarf, and that's all.

It looks like an invisible person. The hat is definitely being worn by someone, as it traces the silhouette of a head. The scarf is wrapped around something, as if to assert the existence of a neck.

However, the body that they're on is invisible. I can't make it out.

This invisible person(?) walks about leisurely.

Invisible. I'm invisible too... At the very least, it seems like you can't see me. In other words, the invisible person who is wearing this hat is likely similar to me.

Perhaps I've found a companion.

Perhaps I'm not truly alone—

Chapter 19 / Death by Falling

“You’re wrong.”

A voice.

The kind of voice that gives you an uncomfortable feeling, like hearing a recording of your own voice for the first time. It’s similar, but so distant.

I put my fingers to my lips, wondering if I was the one who said it, but it couldn’t have been me.

So then, whose voice was it? I fix my eyes upon the invisible person — the only one who could have said it.

Saying “fix my eyes upon” might be a bit strange, since this person is invisible, but the hat and scarf help to paint an outline. I can hear their footsteps and sense their presence, so I know more or less that someone is there.

“We’re both invisible, but you and I are not the same. We’re essentially the same, but the difference between us is that you don’t know me, therefore you cannot see me. One can only imagine that which they don’t know, but it’s like a faceless ghost, with that which is missing being unknown, unseeable, and incomprehensible...♪”

The invisible person spins around and around to a beat as if they’re singing.

That’s right, I can guess. As the scarf spins round and round, I can basically imagine their presence.

This person and I are both invisible, but we do have corporeal bodies. It’s just that no one can see them. We have diaphragms, vocal cords, and lungs, so we have voices. We can even talk. That person said, “You’re wrong,” but in the end, we are the same.

“Hmhee.” They let out a strange and hearty laugh, and it sounds like their hands are clapping.

Since they’re invisible, I really can’t see them.

They seem friendly, but I wonder. If they were to frown or sneer, I wouldn't be able to tell because they're invisible.

I don't know them, can't see them, so I can't tell, thus all I can do is imagine.

"Thank you." This invisible person, which I can infer from her voice to be a girl, gives an endearing bow of her head. At least, that's what I'm made to think as the hat dips for a moment.

"Thanks for the hat and scarf. They're so warm. They keep me nice and toasty. So I don't catch cold nor do I freeze. You're so very kind. ♪"

The fringes of the scarf dance about, and I visualize a happy child. What is it with this invisible girl? What kind of metaphor is she? She's so talkative, but her words make absolutely no sense.

Why would she thank me?

Having these one-sided words thrown at me makes me uneasy, so I reach out my hand. But the invisible girl lets out a "kya!" and jumps back.

As I get closer I can now see — she's not invisible. It's like she's been blacked out. There's no other way I can describe it — her face, palms, even her fingertips are all black. It's not so much that her skin is black, it's more like someone took a pair of scissors and cut out the shape of a human from the night sky.

And since she's black, it's like she melts into the surrounding darkness and can't be seen.

It's like she's the aggregated nothingness of darkness—

It looks somehow like she is bowing in apology.

"But, I'm sorry..... I couldn't get bigger. I no longer needed the hat and scarf. Even though they were chosen just for me with such love and care. That's why you don't know it. You don't know my face."

The same words are repeated over and over again.

As if they are a form of hypnosis. Or rather, an echo.

Like she's trying to reassure someone.

“And then you carry the hat and scarf around, as if in regret. You treasure them so much that you couldn’t cast them aside. Even though it is meaningless. No matter how cute the hat is, if you don’t need something, it’s like tossing pearls before swine — it’s useless.”

“What are you going on about? What ARE you?” I become anxious and call out.

I guess you could say this is the first person I can actually talk back to. So I call out desperately. I want to communicate. I can’t stand squatting on my own and mumbling to myself any longer.

I’m tired of just wandering around.

Scraping about and exhausting my energy.

“Hey, if you know something, tell me!” I demand, trying to make my voice harsh, but the girl just continues trolling about.

“I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know anything—”

Over and over again. It doesn’t feel at all like I’m having a conversation with another human.

It’s like having a conversation with yourself while praying in church. Or else it’s like mumbling to yourself in your room, only for the words to echo off into the void.



There’s no response. I get impatient and press the girl.

However, she gently moves about, and I cannot touch her.

“‘If you know something’? I don’t know anything, and that’s that — you’re the one who knows something, right? You should be the one who knows about all of this, so why are you acting like you don’t?”

I know something? What is it I know? I become uneasy. But then, like a child trying to get the attention of their parents who are worried over finances or work, the girl suddenly pulls my arm.

It’s faint, the feeling of her fingertips. Her face, dyed in black, might be close to mine, as I can feel her breath. However, no matter how close she gets to me, I cannot see her face.

I don’t know her. Is it because I don’t know her face?

“Hey, when I was trying to express my gratitude earlier, when I said thank you. Well, it’s because you tried to give me that cute hat and scarf. I was so happy. I felt I should be happy. So, thank you.”

The girl speaks with a lisp.

“It’s not just the hat and scarf; you tried to give me several things — delicious food, a warm bed, hugs and kisses. You tried to gift me so many things. You were planning to take my hand and take me to so many places.”

The girl whispers as she pulls me along.

At that moment, the scenery changes.

I’m surprised and stagger. I’m standing somewhere fairly high up. There are blocks, much like children’s toys. And I’m up at the very top. Several of these connected, three-dimensional forms are standing there. They are like stacked toy blocks, but ones of an uncanny size.

If I get careless, lose my footing and fall, I could be crushed flat. Whenever a wind blows through, it knocks me off-balance.

That girl deftly supports me.

It’s a gentle touch. At least this girl is trying to show me some kindness —

saying nothing but friendly things like “thank you” to me.

I let my guard down a bit, but without being able to comprehend anything, I remain in a daze.

There are several of these three-dimensional objects, making the scene look like the inside of a toy box. I’ve seen it somewhere before. It’s a place easily accessible from one of those doors. However, the three-dimensional structures there are far too tall and cannot be climbed.

We are up so high, and the girl dyed black keeps me one pace behind her.

Somehow, she can pass through a variety of different worlds.

So it seems, yet we aren’t moving — at least I don’t think we are. I think that this girl might exist anywhere and everywhere. At the heart of this dream, connected to a variety of points. She is there, amidst all of those memories, all of that knowledge.

Omnipresent — everywhere at once.

This girl takes up even more space than anything else in this world of dreams.

At least, that’s what I’m made to think.

“You wanted to visit so many places with me. To go on adventures, holding hands, walking along. But you couldn’t. And because you couldn’t, you have regrets. It was so painful, you couldn’t accept it. Not one of your dreams has come true, so those unfulfilled dreams rot within your heart and mind, distorting and piling up.”

She’s trying to tell me something.

But the words aren’t enough, they’re vague, and they baffle me further.

“You know nothing. It’s all fantasy, restricted to your dreams.”

Still holding my hand, she walks along as if dancing.

Now that our surroundings are no longer pitch-black, I can clearly see her outline. She really does look like a human being that has been dyed black. Her features are vague — the faint form of a girl. Only the hat and scarf are clearly visible.

That’s all that I know.

Is that why those are the only parts that I can see?

“Not knowing makes us uneasy. So everyone reads books and comics. We do research on the net. Watch movies. Listen to the wisest people. Having these kinds of experiences, it’s like we’ve entered some kind of tale, taken a journey, like we can have our own delusions. Your feelings, your heart and dreams, can freely lift you to so many different places. But, if you don’t see it with your own eyes, or feel something with your own hands, then knowledge is just knowledge — it’s just words on a page, splotches of ink, pure imagination. ♪”

The girl pats my head.

Like she’s babying me.

Like I’m a child who has just told her parents about something she discovered on her own.

“No matter how many video game dungeons you take on, items you gather, demons you defeat, or worlds you save — no matter how grand an adventure you have, you won’t advance one step in reality. You still know nothing. Knowing nothing, you merely expand your imagination.”

The scenery changes once more.

Just like the girl was saying, it’s as if we’ve entered the world of some game.

It’s flat, like a game from long ago. On closer inspection, somehow even the girl’s scarf has adjusted to this world’s style, looking like some sort of pixel image. The same touch has been applied to the blocks and rocks, making everything look like ancient ruins.

All of it’s so flat. So shallow and dull. Here and there, things that look like primitive men walk about, but they show no signs of being concerned with us. So even if we defeated these primitive men like in a game, for example, nothing would come of it. No matter how much money you accumulate in a game, how many achievements you unlock, it has absolutely no impact on reality.

The brain reacts to light, color, and sound, creating a feeling of pleasure. That’s the only benefit to games... The primitive reaction, the stimulus,

temporarily grants enjoyment. However, it's just a sensation. It might make you feel good, but that's all.

Just like animals. We're just reacting to stimulus.

It won't build your muscles in the least, or help you grow, nor will it yield any experience.

This game-like world seems to assert that.

"Just because you have knowledge doesn't mean you have meaning. So, even if you can imagine something, that doesn't give it meaning. You couldn't go anywhere. You wanted to take me to all of these places — but in the end, we couldn't go anywhere. That's why you don't know anything. You couldn't see anything. You couldn't accumulate anything, couldn't grow, just remained empty. ♪"

The girl pulls my hand again and at the same time, the scenery changes once more.

This time, it feels like we've entered a comic book world.

It's a pure-white world. And yet, it's not a snowscape. It's as if the color has been drained from everything, and the buildings and nature are simplistic, like everything's been drawn with rough lines. A simple world, constructed only of white and black..... Every now and then, the sound of a page being turned reverberates.

Like someone is fervently reading a fascinating comic.

Absorbed in the world of a comic book, they forget themselves for just a moment. If one were to look at such a situation objectively, it might look like this.

These somewhat comical things, with parts of their bodies exaggerated, play about here and there. They're abstract, like caricatures, and show no signs of interacting with me.

Movies and comics and games are not an extension of reality. We can't interact with them — they exist far away from us. The cast of characters in a story won't be your friends. They don't exist. They're blotches of ink. Your

feelings won’t reach them, you can’t interfere, and there’s no love there.

Even so. No matter how much we play here, it’s all pointless.

You are here. You’re sitting in a corner in this place that looks like a comic drawn in black and white. Only you float above the scenery in full color. No matter how many comic books you might read, it’s not as if you could ever enter the world of comics.

You really seem like you don’t belong here.

Right next to you is a monochrome girl that looks like she is part of a comic. Her hair is parted, tied to the right and left, and she has a simple form that looks as if the artist hadn’t yet finished inking her. She has very simple eyes, nose, and mouth.

You’re hand-in-hand with a monochromatic girl and seem to be playing. Like you’re friends. However, this girl is a drawing, she’s no more than a daydream. Nothing will come of befriending her. It might bring your heart comfort for a brief time, but— It’s no different than talking to yourself. It’s just like dreaming.

It won’t be of any use to you.

For some reason, I begin to feel disgust well up inside me.

“But this is also something you wanted. In dreams, your desires will occasionally appear in a symbolic form. You wanted to read comics and picture books aloud to me. You might have wanted to play with me in the world of daydreams, but that was impossible—”

The scenery shifts once more. Over and over again. Chasing you through the dream world, I have also visited several different places. But there are still some places I haven’t seen. But that feeling of excitement like we’re on an adventure or a journey doesn’t feel real.

“They’re all dreams you’ve imagined, where all you can do is stand and stare at their brilliance. Jung referred to these as daydreams and regarded them highly. An opportunity of only several seconds in which we can connect to the unconscious while still awake. Like dreams, they are also filled with major hints.”

It seems like she’s just spouting knowledge.

The girl’s pronunciation is strange.

“By the way, where did you learn the name ‘Jung’?”

Her laugh rings out as the world changes over and over again.

With just one step, the world undergoes a major shift.

I begin to feel awful, as if I have motion sickness, and I attempt to crouch down. But the girl won’t let go of my hand. She tugs my hand, repeating over and over again.

The same words. It’s more like I’m being attacked, like they’re being thrust at me.

Over and over and over and over again.

“But, you can’t go anywhere. You couldn’t go. You just imagined it, knew of it. Not moving a step forward, just dreaming. You wanted to go to so many different places, but you couldn’t go anywhere— Hey, why are you pretending like you don’t know?”

Sadness and anger are mixed into the girl’s voice.

Suddenly, the gentle touch of the girl’s hand disappears.

“As long as you pretend not to know, it doesn’t matter how far you walk. It’s all futile. If you aren’t walking in reality, then you haven’t taken a single step forward. No matter how far you go, no matter where you search, you’ll never find what you’re looking for. The distance will never close. You’ll be as far away as you’ve ever been. How sad it is. That — you — will — nev — er — catch — up — to — the — Red — Queen.”

My back is shoved.

When I realize it, I’m still on top of that tall building.

I’ve been pushed from a height so great, I can’t see the ground. I start to drop. I panic and flail about, but with nothing to grab onto, it feels as if I’m being pulled toward the ground.

I begin to fall.

I don’t want to fall.

“How pitiful. So pitiful—”

The girl with the hat and scarf is getting farther away.

That dyed girl seems so impatient.

“How very pitiful—”

Giving voice to that strange designation, I can only watch.

The ground draws nearer.

Immediately, the impact shoots through me.

My body makes a crunching sound.

I’m scattered about in pieces, my flesh, blood, and bones spilled about.

My vision is dyed in deep red.



Chapter 20 / Don’t Look at Me

“You’re dreaming.”

I hear a voice.

My vision is still dyed a deep red. No, even with my eyes closed, I can tell a light is shining down from above. Viewing it through the capillaries behind my eyelids, it all seems to be dyed red. That crimson seems to wriggle about like a face, smiling broadly, with the grandeur of a king.....

I can hear sounds. My eyes are closed, but I can see.

However, my body won’t move. My fingers won’t even twitch.

It’s like I have sleep paralysis.

Or like every muscle in my body has been yanked out. Or like my brain alone has been transplanted into someone else’s body. Like I am no longer myself, like I can no longer move of my own volition.

Sleep paralysis is where only your brain is awake..... Or rather, where your consciousness alone is awake. Your body is still resting and will not move.

As you sleep, the parts of you that are still active continue to work, unchanged. Like your heartbeat, or your breathing..... All that I can hear are the sounds of my own heart and breathing.

It feels as if my consciousness is waking up. Maybe I’ve finally awakened. But this is the first time I’ve ever woken up like this. That’s why I’m so perplexed.

Half-asleep, my memories are all fuzzy, and I can’t think straight.

I’m pretty sure that I was pushed from atop those stacked blocks by that girl with the hat and scarf. Then I smacked into the ground and was crushed.

No, back in that rainbow-colored tent — in that cute little room, you turned off that light switch. And then I got the feeling that you were about to turn it on again.

The order of events gets all mixed up, and I have no idea what's going on.

The passage of time within our dreams is different from the passage of time in reality, and there's no sense of logic as the locations change. Like a book full of missing pages. All of those branching points, the four-point plot structure, the flow of all those stories, exist within me at once — and yet, my awakening cuts them all off.

My body is incredibly heavy.

The ringing in my ears echoes with a hum, hum.

All of the stimuli is excruciating and painful, like a hell built to torment me.

If only I were awake. If only this were reality.

Why is this such an unpleasant world?

"Such a strange thing."

A voice echoes.

"Sleeping, dreaming, is an escape. In order to escape a detestable reality... All I can think is that reality doesn't have to be that awful, does it? No, I don't think it's anything that romantic — it's just a physiological mechanism. There's no mysticism to it. Science won't allow it. Someone like Jung, who was occupied with the occult, probably feels differently though."

Jung. Jung. Jung.

That's all it is — hard on my ears, and I'm growing tired of it.

"Sleep only had a mystique about it during the age of magic and alchemy. Scientifically, it's merely a physiological reaction. Back in the days of Aristotle, it was believed that sleep was caused by a release of vapors from the lungs."

Since my eyes aren't open, I don't know who it is.

But someone speaks with expertise at my bedside.

"As time marches on, science has begun to unravel the mysteries of what happens during sleep. Some sort of material activates a function in the brain, leading to sleep. Leucomaine, cytokine — through a variety of these scientific explanations, the mysticism of sleep, of dreams, is ripped away. From the god

of sleep, Hypnos, to the chemical substance Hypnotoxin, sleep has come to ruin."

It is a tedious story.

And so, I become sleepy.

I've slept so much, I've long since tired of it.

"We've finally pinpointed the substances in the brain that cause humans to sleep. It also has to do with a slight drop in body temperature. It's something we can describe with chemical formulas, something extremely logical. Of course, what's making you tired right now — that is, boredom, is also an important component of sleep."

I feel shocked.

The owner of this voice knows that I am awake.

"Your heart rate has gone up. It's reacted to stimuli, and now you're no longer sleepy. If you wake up to a life where simple functions can be handled without focus, a life with no change or stimulus, then you invite sleep. It's so that the brain can judge whether or not there will be problems if it takes a rest. The brain goes all in on its consumption of calories, and so if it can rest, it will. Such a lazy thing."

I can offer nothing but small noises to show I am listening.

Even now, my body is still asleep.

"It's a function of being a living creature or a beast. But for creatures like humans, who have gained such a high social standing, it has become a troublesome function. That's what sleep is. When you're sleepy, you lose focus. Falling asleep at the wheel after becoming tired of the tedium of driving, only awakening on some stimulus, like finding a side street or looking away. You can't string words together well when you're tired, can't write a thesis or use your knowledge to its utmost. You become incapable of flexible thought, acting only on emotion."

It seems like the owner of the voice doesn't care much for sleep.

There's something venomous mixed in this person's intonation.

“Sleeping and dreaming are unnecessary functions. They’re bulky refuse that humanity has discarded along the path of evolution from beasts. When humans allow themselves to be ruled by sleep, by the unconscious, they take a step backwards, to beasts. No, humans are more like mechanical automatons, merely reacting to their fate and their circumstances. Machines repeat the same actions over and over. Just working, unimpressively, without spontaneity.”

That voice now bears only hatred.

“Sleep is inhuman, lacking intelligence, the enemy of civilization.”

Like a dictator, the voice declares that we must conquer sleep and our dreams.

The loud voice at my bedside is so disquieting, I try to open my eyes.

I at least want to see the face of the voice’s owner. It’s frustrating to have words dropped on me like bombs in a raid. I at least want to respond, to ask about the parts I don’t understand. The person seems rather well-informed, so I want to ask: who am I? Why do I keep having these ceaseless nightmares? What in the world was that dream? I struggle to open my eyes, like a baby.

“Eek!”

And then, I am shocked.

A barely comprehensible scream leaks out of my throat.

Like waking up early in the morning after a long sleep, my eyes are bleary and I can’t seem to focus. That might be why, but I see something totally abnormal. Right in front of me is a giant face. Someone’s face, peering at me.

No, it’s something that looks like a face. That outline seems like it was melted at a high temperature, leaving it pulpy, swirling about strangely. Like everything around me, it’s a sloppy mess. The ringing in my ears gets worse as a hysteric shriek vibrates my ears.

I sort of understand. The one looking at me is rather masculine. I think I might have heard someone refer to him as “Sensei.” Perhaps he is a doctor. Amidst a background that looks as if it were drawn with disorderly strokes, I get a general

sense of the objects around me: an old TV, shelved books, and what I'm lying in seems to be a bed.

Maybe this is a hospital room. It's extremely plain and sterile, with a sanitized smell. The lighting is so extreme and blindingly bright. It overflows with a brightness that is almost painful, the stimuli from it overpowering.

Is this a hospital? Or perhaps a nursing facility? I'm not sure, and that makes it scary. I tremble within this fuzzy, incomprehensible world. I panic and flail about, as if trying to get away from something scary. The scream that escapes from the depths of my throat mixes with the ringing in my ears, creating a dissonant sound.

"Calm down, please, calm down—"

A voice calls out and someone grabs my shoulders.

I resist desperately.

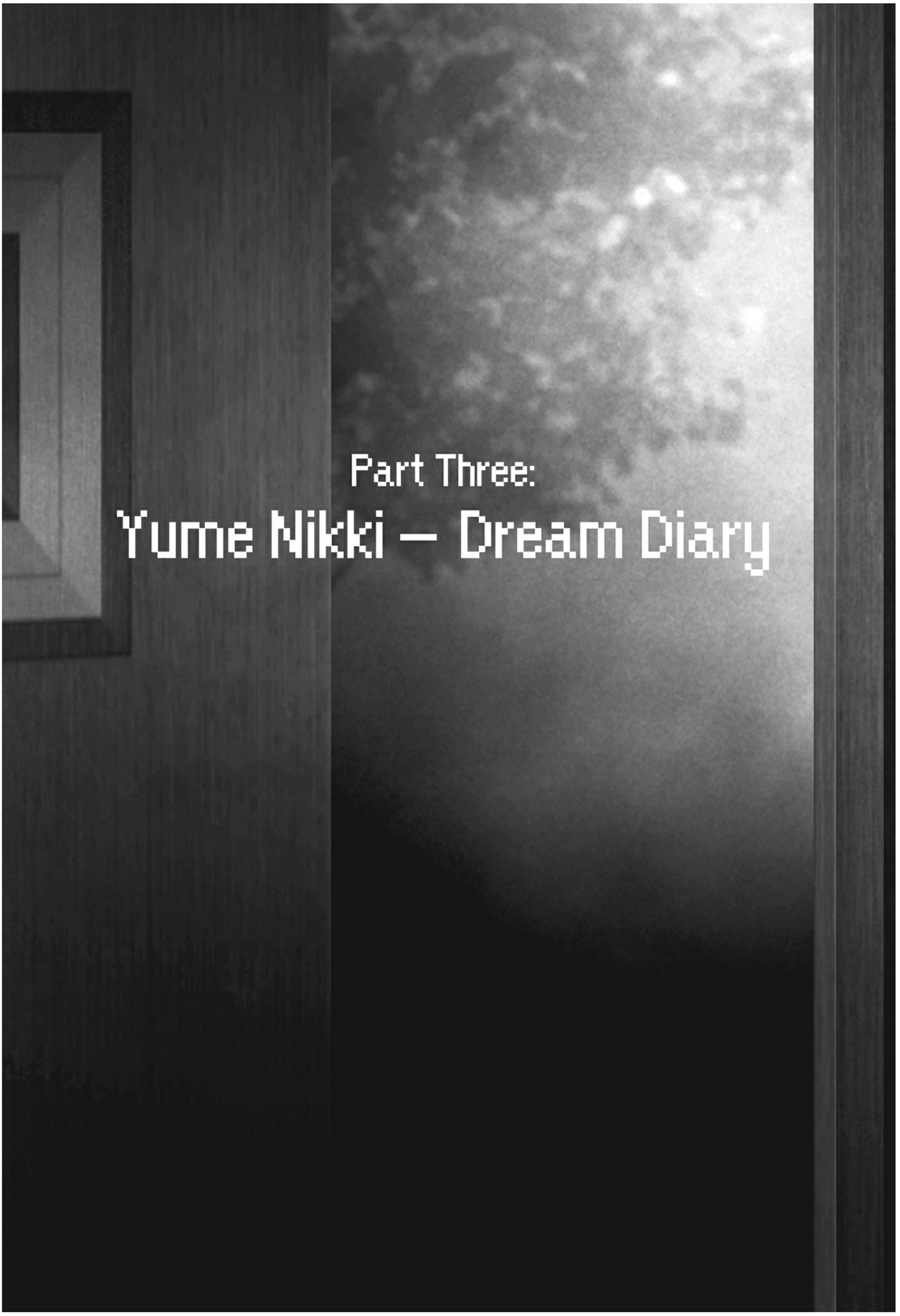
The nearby face that looks like a doctor gazes at me as they would a monster. I can't stand that stare. Don't look. Don't look at me. Don't look at me with those eyes— I want to look away. I want to escape. However, if this is reality, there is nowhere for me to run. I have no choice but to live here. No. In this case, it really would be better if this were a dream. Because I cannot run if this isn't a dream.

My head is terribly heavy, and while I try my best to sit up, I can't and fall back.

I hit the back of my head hard.

The flow of blood stops for a bit.

My brain relinquishes its hold on consciousness.


Part Three:
Yume Nikki – Dream Diary

Chapter 21 / Kamishibai

Someone shakes me awake.

It's like one of those mornings where I might be late for work or school.

In the beginning, it's a gentle shake, but it finally escalates to a violent grip on my shoulders, wobbling me to and fro, here and there.

No. I don't want to wake up. Reality is inevitably harsh. I don't want to open my eyes if it means I have to once again behold such repulsive things.

I stubbornly ignore and reject it, turning over to go back to sleep.

I still want to have these gentle dreams.

However, at that moment, something heavy lands on my chest with a thud.

I expel a burst of air with a "Ngph?!" and cough.

Someone's jumped on top of me.

They continue to do so as they smack my cheeks, pull on my hair, getting on my nerves and forcing me to open my eyes into little slits.

"Eek?!"

My eyes pop open in shock.

Someone's face is right in front of mine.

It's not merely that if I reach out my hands, I'll touch them — but that if I even stuck on my tongue, I would touch them — that close of a distance. Too close. My entire field of view is covered by that person's face.

"Wh-What?" I shrink back, recoiling from this person who is close enough to kiss me.

They knit their eyebrows together in apology. As if they had awakened me with a fairytale kiss.

They then stroke my cheeks.

Lovingly.

Their palms are cold — spine-tinglingly so.

It feels as if I'm being stroked by a ghost.

Those fingertips don't feel like those of a living person. They're smooth and dry, like paper, mysterious in their origin.

I rub my sleepy eyes and watch this "someone" right in front of me.

She is a woman whose features are so well put together, it would be safe to call her a girl. Maybe only a few years older than you or I..... However, she seems mysteriously calm, giving the impression of maturity and adulthood.

Oddly enough, it's like the color has worn off of her. Like a black and white film from the Showa era. Her skin, her clothes, everything is in black and white. However, it suits her. She looks like she was drawn by someone, but has the depth and presence of a real person, staring at me with a gentle grin.

"Uh-m—"

I feel like I've seen this person somewhere.

She looks a lot like the girl I saw you playing with earlier (if earlier is even a fitting phrase, since I can't seem to get the hang of the order of events in the dream world). That monochrome girl gamboling about with you in that black-and-white world— No, it might be a different person. She has the same air about her, but the hair and build are different.

Observing her up close, she oddly leaves no impression, having a peculiar dullness about her. Pretty, but with dull characteristics. Just as the most beautiful girl in the world would inevitably be "plain," her face is merely pretty, with no outstanding features.

In art terminology, it's like she was drawn simplistically, like the very concept of a beautiful girl itself.

I'm looking at her as close as I possibly can, but even this close up, I can see no pimples or moles, not a hint of moisture in her eyes or pores on her skin, not one of these physiological things.

She is right in front of me, but it's like looking at someone from far away.

The front bangs are cut straight and even, but the back hair hangs uneven (this was supposedly a hairstyle back in the day), each strand at a visible distance, and straight black like an image colored in a PC illustration program.

Her eyes, like narrow slits, vacant, creased as if she is smiling, like cracks in her face.

A woman with no sense of reality, as if she really were drawn— When I blink, her smile broadens, and she sits up.

Now that she's pulled her face away, I can finally see my surroundings.

It's that black-and-white world, the one I saw between gaps in those giant structures.

It looks like a comic pencil sketch. Or like printed text in a picture-less book.

Yes, somehow it really does feel like I'm reading a comic book.

After all, here and there are borders resembling comic panels. Lines like those that represent division in the world of comics. They've become three-dimensional and surround us. Something like grass grows thickly beneath me, but it's simplified, like a repetitive "www."

There are fires burning here and there, but they're harmless, not the least bit hot. I notice a severed head floating in the sky, but it doesn't seem very graphic, as if one could skim right over it. No matter what kind of tragedy or degree of ruin occurs in a comic book or a novel, it has no effect on reality... or so it seems.

Cactuses grow unnaturally here and there, like our hands as we separate from awareness while reading. Like fingers used to support a book.

Every now and then, splotches of vivid red jump out, like droplets of blood from a nosebleed falling onto the page.

What is with this world? I wonder what sort of metaphor it bears.

Generally speaking, it's like a dream without the color, like someone forgot to add it.

The dream world was colorful, but then it became sepia-toned, then black and white, then invisible, then it disappeared. Like a memory from long ago, an

insufficient dream with memories omitted because they failed to leave an impression.

I wonder what it is I've forgotten.

"Hya?"

All of a sudden, the monochrome girl looking at me reaches out a hand toward me.

For some reason, I feel like I'm about to be hit, so I cover my face.

When I give her a bashful look, I notice she's reaching for my stomach. I finally realize it — someone else is sitting on top of me.

I can feel the heaviness.

With a great deal of hardship, I turn my face in that direction, shocked.

There, right before me, is the girl I saw you playing with earlier(?).

This one appears younger than me. She's still a small child.

With her as well, from the top of her head to her fingertips, even the clothes covering her body, are all black and white. Her hair is parted in the middle and tied on each side, bouncing about like animal tails. Or rather like wings, like an angel's wings.

She has extremely simple eyes, like a stuffed animal's.

I can't feel this girl's body heat either.

That point is a bit weird (she doesn't seem to be of this world!), but she's very peaceful and doesn't seem to mean me any harm.

The monochrome girl, like so many characters in comics and cartoons before her, has jumped on top of me in an attempt to wake me up. The one shaking me earlier must have been this girl— Even though I've long since woken up (or at least opened my eyes), the girl just keeps shaking me and saying, "Wake up, wake up," gleefully.

The older girl pats the younger girl's head, as if chiding her.

The girl smiles innocently and jumps up, hugging the older girl around the waist with all her might.

The two of them stare in my direction.



“Uhhm—”

I look disappointed at the pair, who share such a similar aura about them that they could be sisters. I can’t relax with characters from a comic staring at me like this. These moving pictures are just strange.

In any case, I can’t properly grasp the current situation.

My body can barely move. After falling from so high (like atop those blocks), or rather, being pushed from that height, it seems I did hit the ground. It feels like my body was crushed, but I’m invisible, so there’s no way to get a good look.

My bones are crushed, my flesh smashed; under normal circumstances, I would be dead.

The blood that flows and drips from my body hasn’t dried yet. It’s still sticky.

I look straight above me, but those colorful structures have disappeared, and all I can see is a bright white sky. That girl with the hat and scarf seems to traverse a variety of worlds, so maybe she lost interest in me and left.

Why on earth did she push me?

Giving someone’s back a push can have positive meanings, like cheering them on, giving them courage. But this action seemed more like someone got angry, lost their temper.

Maybe she did it because I wouldn’t move forward, so she got frustrated and pushed me in the right direction.

Then I fell, crashed into the ground, and was found by the two black-and-white girls who might be sisters. Who subsequently woke me up.

These monochrome sisters(?) are so mysterious, but if they had no interest in me, they could just as well ignore me — if they had bad intentions, they could have done what they wanted with me while I was unconscious.

But maybe the fact that they woke me up means I can see them as friendly.

At the very least, they’ve interacted with me, like that girl with the hat and scarf. They’ve gotten involved with me. Someone like me, who has been

ignored, should be happy to know that they exist.

We can talk to each other, touch each other, and that alone makes these two seem very important.

I cannot let them get away.

“Uhm—” I call out to them, coughing up the blood pooling in my mouth. “You two are...?”

However, the two girls exchange glances and tilt their heads, as if they cannot speak. They have a human appearance, but act more like animals.

Seeming to come to some sort of understanding, the smaller one gives a “teehee” and puffs out her chest, taking both of my hands. And then, she pulls me up with all her might.

Blood flows from my body, spilling onto the ground.

Whether they can see someone invisible like me or not, the girl happily takes my hand, like she’s embracing it. The bigger girl keeps patting the head of the little one, as if to say well done, to tell her she’s a good girl.

With their faces close and their attention fixed on each other, they are truly like intimate family members.

“Uhm.”

Guided by them, I take their hands, light-headed.

“That girl — the one with the braids? Where is she? Do you know?”

Of course, I’m definitely curious.

The monochrome pair say nothing in response, merely pulling me along.

It’s like they’re saying, “Come with us and you’ll find out.”

It’s like someone has yanked the comic book from my hands, pulled me out of that black-and-white world, and forced me to walk forward.

Chapter 22 / Written in Blood

I've collapsed.

The monochrome girls pull me hard, but I don't have the stamina to run. I get the feeling that something horrible is happening all throughout my body. Like bones are breaking, like skin is tearing, like blood is overflowing...

Of course, I'm invisible — I can't conceive my own form, so I can only imagine. I guess I must be squashed flat like a frog hit by a car.

I don't get the logic behind it, but the blood that drips from my body becomes visible the second it touches the floor. Of course, I'm probably the only one who can see that blood.

I don't know how many liters of blood are actually in the human body, but I feel like I've long exceeded that amount. It's sprayed all over the place, like splatters from a hose in an old horror movie.

"Huff, uungh—"

I can no longer walk, and I collapse on the spot.

I feel dizzy and topple forward. I'm lying facedown, sinking into that sea of blood.

The monochrome sisters(?) who were pulling me seem to be concerned about me. But my vision has become so obstructed, I can't see very well.

I'm like an ice cream cone that's been dropped on the ground, I surmise vacantly.

What was that scenery I saw earlier — that hospital-like place, and someone who was like a doctor, lecturing me. It was like torture, as they droned on and on about stuff I didn't know about.....

It was more vague than a dream, but the scenery was oddly realistic, and I still can't process it. It's the first time I've seen something like that. Somehow it didn't fit with the other dreams — such strange content, like reading the pages

of a novel out of order.

I only saw that place for a short period of time. I'm completely exhausted. My head's heavy, like I've just gulped down some sleeping pills. I can't think clearly. It's awful, like an iron kettle boiling in Hell.

In dreams, we process what we've seen in reality. It helps us recover from our exhaustion. If that hospital came from reality, then reality really is awful. But no matter how much I dream, this extraordinary weight never sorts itself out, and I never get better.

The atmosphere here is like that of a strange planet. I cannot breathe. I feel like I will suffocate.

"Ungh..."

As I gasp for breath, I suddenly realize.

Vivid-red blood flows from my body... Something is being drawn along the floor, using my blood as paint. It's a number.

4

Four can be a very sacred number in dreams, and is highly regarded.

If it were a shape, it would be a circle or a square, a symbol of stability. Circles are used in mandalas and squares in national flags; they're symbols that put humans at ease.

It's balanced, harmonious, and orderly, the perfect dream — the ultimate goal of humanity, referred to as individuation by Jung. Three makes people uneasy, and five is too unbalanced, making four the most reassuring number. That's why so many things we use in our daily lives, like books and cigarette boxes, are a quadrilateral shape. Four can make people feel at ease.

In any case, four is the first number written.

Since four is being written in blood, it also has that sinister association with death, as both are pronounced "shi" in Japanese.

The numbers gradually increase.

4. 36. 84141089..... 88888..... 01010101.....

It looks as if someone has run their fingertips through the blood, painting the floor with it.

But I cannot see who that someone is. I can't even fathom what would be writing numbers in blood.

It's a strange phenomenon, like a poltergeist. I lift my head anxiously.

All of a sudden, the scenery around me changes.

Though at this point, I'm not particularly surprised.

I've seen a variety of different scenes while pursuing you. Walking through all of these bizarre dream worlds, nothing surprises me anymore. It takes a great deal of energy to move forward even one step in real life. Within one's dream, one's mind, one can move instantly from India to outer space to a different dimension. You can take a trip around the world in the blink of an eye, without such tedious procedures as acquiring passports or immigration inspections.

I observe my surroundings as I let such thoughts drift through my mind.

It's a familiar scene. It's someplace we passed through several times when I was following you. An area that can readily be reached from one of those doors that stand in that area you first arrive at when you are dreaming. Maybe it's the surface of that dream — the outermost area.

It's a scene that looks like it could take place in the near future. It looks like a floor that has been vigorously scrubbed until it shines, without one speck of dust on it. The floor is oddly translucent, and the scene goes on and on, like mirrors facing one another. It feels like I'm in one corner of this giant circuit of a world.

Each of us is just a tiny part of society — of the world. Earth aside, it's the type of place that makes you realize how diminutive you are in the grand scale of the universe.

A wall stands perpendicular to where I lie prone on the floor, and that wall is filled with circuits. They're exposed circuits, like those that make up the inside of a computer. The patterns look like pictures of groups of men, arms around each other, smiling. If you made society or the cycle of human relationships extremely simple, this might be what it would look like.

If one were not accustomed to the cycle of society, they might be alone in a corner of the world, sad. Circuits and cycles never rest, just running on and on.

Even if I sleep, the world moves on the whole time.

Dreams, like machines or circuits, are a barometer to measure how happy or unhappy someone is with their life. If things are going well, the machine works without a hitch. If they aren't, then it breaks or shuts down somewhere. In this situation, if blood were to drip into the machinery, then it would stop working, wouldn't it?

The heart and mind would break down, wouldn't they?

As I'm thinking of such things, the oozing, bloody characters begin to change. The numbers transform into something like machine language, then finally phonetic characters, and even kanji begin to appear. In the end, an illustration appears.

The image drawn in blood somehow looks like the two monochrome girls I encountered earlier.

It's so poorly done and hard to make out, but I can grasp their features. It's like a child's doodle. The illustration depicts the older sister with the long hair and the younger sister with the tied-back hair.

I wonder if these two are the ones who drew this image and wrote the numbers. When the world changes, we all become invisible. We become distant, unable to perceive. It seems I cannot have a form outside of that rainbow tent.

And outside of that comic-like world, I cannot see the two of them.

However, when you remember the words of comics or novels in the real world, then they too can have an effect on this world... That's the conclusion I've come to.

As I'm watching, a speech bubble inflates next to the image.

It really is a comic. There are now bits of dialogue accompanying the illustration.

"Patience is poison to the body."

“And to the heart!”

A bubble also pops up with a “ping” next to the littler girl. The letters are messy, like maybe she wrote her lines herself. On the other hand, the neat letters in the bubble by the older girl are erased, and written anew.

“If you suppress your stress, it will leak out.”

Those two girls, who seem to be sisters, appear to be talking to each other.

“Suppression, endurance, restraint... all of those things create a burden on the heart and mind, pressing down on them. The way your head leaves an indentation on your pillow, or a heavy bookshelf leaves one on the floor. Any human under a great deal of pressure will break, their skin torn, their body crushed.”

“Just like you are right now!”

“If the surface, the consciousness, the skin cracks, the unconscious is revealed and spurts out. Like when one suddenly breaks down or cries, that sort of thing. The cause is the stress that the distortion is rooted in. That’s because the unconscious generally is the opposite disposition of consciousness. So if you let that out, everyone around you will be surprised.”

“Like how when a child commits a crime, everyone says, ‘But he was such a good kid!’”

“Stress warps the heart and mind, causing them to fall apart. Destroying them — this was a point that Freud and Jung actually agreed on for once.”

“It’s something obvious, something everyone can agree on!”

“As the pressure increases, it presses hard upon the heart, constricting it. Once a hole opens, the unconscious comes flowing out.”

“When you pull the tab on carbonated juice can that you’ve shaken up, it instantly spews everywhere.”

“The carbonic acid vaporizes and it becomes carbon dioxide. When you give an out to something compressed into a can, it gushes out instantly.”

“I love juice!”

“In order to prevent it from ending up like that, you must reduce the stress — the pressure — or else you’ll end up periodically letting off steam.”

“If you don’t, you’ll be crushed! Crushed!”

The illustration of the smaller girl on the ground, in accordance with her words, becomes crushed flat. It’s unsettling. Cracks run along the center of their bodies, flow from their eyes and vomit from their mouths, arms and legs sprouting endlessly from their bodies.

It’s a cute illustration, but it’s unnatural and makes me feel weird.



Sinister things continue to be written in that red, that vivid color that means “stop!” on a stoplight.

“What are you guys.....?”

As I watch the erased letters in blood be written over, I somehow sit up.

I can tell that the blood flowing from my body is soaking my clothes. I’m invisible, so I can’t see it, but it makes me feel uneasy. The circuits around me keep moving, letting out an irritating, ear-ringing sound. It’s like snoring or teeth-grinding that interrupts restful sleep.

No matter what kind of mechanical engineer or programmer one is, in the end, they are entranced by and pursue that grotesque, complex machine known as the human. Using the machine created by God as an example. And there, in the corner of that machine, I continue thinking with my tiny brain.

“Why do you concern yourselves with me? This dream belongs to that girl, doesn’t it?”

That girl. The girl with braids, the one I kept chasing.....

That girl — you — where are you?

“I am a character in those dreams. Like you two, I’m just a symbol. Isn’t that right? That girl is at the center of these dreams, and only she can impact them or cause change. She’s the protagonist of these dreams. Hey, I’m right, aren’t I?”

“Is that the truth?”

“It might be?”

A question mark — “?” — is drawn right on top of the illustration.

“We aren’t gods either. It’s not like we know everything.”

“There are plenty of times when knowledge gleaned from comics isn’t useful in real life.”

“Who is the subject of these dreams? Whose dreams are they? These are very difficult questions — in *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice and the Red Queen are both dreaming. In that situation, who is the subject of the dreams?”

“The Jabberwocky is coming! The Jabberwocky!”

“Within dreams, everyone is connected by a shared unconscious — the collective unconscious. You could say that, even though they’re different on the surface, everyone is having the same dream. In that case, who is the subject of the dream? In an online game or social game, who is the protagonist?”

“It’s so hard to tell!”

“The heart can neither be seen by the eyes nor touched by the hands. You cannot look into other people’s hearts. So can you clearly articulate why it is that you’re inside of someone else’s dream? Even in a net game, the distinction between program-automated NPCs and player characters is difficult. You’re the only one who understands what is in control of you. You cannot make affirmations about others. And yet, here you are, talking as if you yourself are a cast member of the game, asserting that someone else is the protagonist!”

“It’s so strange? Isn’t it~?”

What does that mean?

I feel a terrible anxiety, like I’ve lost my footing.

This is your dream. That girl’s dream. I’m just something that is pursuing you, the protagonist of this dream. But how have I confirmed this? Have I never questioned how it is that I know this?

I become dizzy.

Like a detached observer being suddenly knocked onto a stage.

That’s how it feels. I suddenly shrink back from all of the attention, like a stupid performer who has forgotten their part.

I shake my head. It’s still too soon to take what they say to heart.

Dreams are full of valuable hints and truths, but it’s hard to suss out those truths, and much of it is useless junk.

Tweedledee and Tweedledum merely continue spouting out nonsense. The realm of the unconscious is a mix of the good and the bad, and I’m the one who has to find the true, right answers for myself.

Having decided that, I have to tell myself to calm down to keep the anxiety at bay.

The words written in blood go on and on.

“Consciousness and unconsciousness are two sides of the same whole. Everyone has those two layers of self. The surface and hidden selves are separate people. That’s why it’s possible that you might think of one as someone else. Even though you have things in common, things that connect you, you’re still different people.”

“Different people, different people~ ♪”

Something passes through the letters that seems to mock me.

It’s a strange, disc-shaped creature that seems to have human-like legs. They have to notice it, even just a little. It tramples and passes through the words written in blood, busily running about. It quickly puts distance between us.

“One can understand themselves. But not the unconscious, because that is someone else. Is there any logical explanation for those creatures just now? Can you comprehend them as clearly as you do yourself? Is that what that girl is to you — another person connected to you, like a twin?”

“So which one is hidden, and which is on the surface?”

“They’re another person, but they’re you. Surface and hidden are both different sides of the same coin, so you can’t avoid them. They cannot be separated, no matter how much you wish they could. You’re curious about this. That’s why you pursue that girl endlessly, right?”

“I have no clue what you’re saying—” I groan and glare at the letters.

I’m convinced, somewhere deep down. But I don’t want to face that fact.

However, the pair is not going to forgive my lack of self-reliance.

“What you don’t understand, you hide away. You restrain it, seal it away. But that becomes stress, and your heart warps as a result. At this rate, you will rupture.”

At some point, a door appears in front of me.

And then, it opens wide.

I am flung through that door.

I hit my nose hard and let out a moan.

I lift my head, astonished.

It's a narrow room. Like that little room, that tent where I can be my true self. This place is full of a large number of creatures.

They are the same as the creature that passed through earlier, the one that looked like a disc that had sprouted legs. They cluster together like insects, packing in so close that it resembles a crowded train car.

It gets so cramped with their shoulders all jostling together, there isn't even a crevice to move in.

Like creatures that belong in a colder country.

I begin to shake at the prospect of them stepping on me.

No. I'm scared. I can't breathe.....

"It's hard to breathe because you are enduring it."

"If you stop breathing, you'll die!"

The blood that dripped out of me pools next to the door, and with it, letters are written.

However, I have no time to read. One by one, the disc-like creatures step on top of me, inhibiting me. This room is packed so full right now that there's not even a corner for one ant to fit into. I'm trampled numerous times, as if I'm being attacked, lashed at.

Like a child with a strict upbringing is lashing out at me.

I have no energy with which to resist, so I have no choice but to endure it.

"Hey, why do you hide that away inside a treasure box? Even though it's something silly that will never satisfy you?"

I can see part of the floor. There is the humorous face of a man.

I really am hiding something silly.

Things that seem to be meaningful or to have a lot of value, but in reality are nothing... I might be hiding some of those within as well.

No, I've probably completely covered them up.

"What if the things you've covered or endured take on a warped form, becoming toxins or monsters?"

"If you leave it there the whole time without eating it, then it'll go bad even if you put it in the fridge!"

"Wh-What should I..." I ask for help, only seeking to escape this torture. "What should I do?"

I get frustrated about having all these things thrust at me in a condescending manner. I feel like I'm being scolded or blamed for some reason. However, I don't know why. I don't get it at all.

I want them to forgive me.

"Eat it before it goes bad."

"Put it in your belly and digest it!"

"The heart cannot be seen with the eyes, and if it's wounded, you won't know. First you must accept something, even if you can't swallow it. For example, there are people who firmly believe in the existence of extraterrestrials. For that person, aliens are real. If you listen to that person's thoughts while accepting the premise that aliens could exist... if you consider the possibility, imagine it, and seek the cause of that belief, then you can understand the belief and finally begin to deal with it."

"You can't just keep putting it in your stomach! You have to digest it!"

"Or otherwise throw it up!"

"It'll rot in your stomach!"

"With the thoughts that you cannot see, first try swallowing them. Whether or not you can swallow them, your body knows the heart. If it can properly be digested, can it become nutrition? If you cannot do it by yourself, then leave it to a specialist! They might be able to set things right for you."

“Cooking is love!”

The things enumerated by the text are disturbing, and so I run out of the cramped room.

It’s like I’ve just finished reading a difficult technical book.

I can’t take any more. If it’s going to be this hard, I’m better off not knowing.

The trail of blood follows along as I try to get away from the sight.

“Are you going to run away again?”

“But we’re connected, so there is no escape!”

I avert my eyes from the text.

I crawl along like a newborn baby.

I want to see you.

I want to see your face.

Without you here, who knows what will become of me—

Chapter 23 / A Picture of Hell

Perhaps I've died.

That's what I think for some reason.

My consciousness has completely been cut off. Like the type of non-REM sleep where you don't dream. My ego has completely disappeared. I'd be fine if that's how things ended, with mere pain. I can't take any more of this nightmare where I keep having to fight the urge to vomit.

"U-Ugh....."

However, my ego has been restored.

I wake up. Though talking about waking up from a dream is strange for me.

In Jungian psychology, the ego and the self are clearly separated. The self includes that universal unconsciousness and all that one is. The ego is only one part of your mind, that actualized, self-aware part.

For the time that we're awake in reality, that's our surface consciousness. While we're asleep, that's our hidden unconsciousness. It's the ego that takes action. The ego's goal is to grasp all that there is to the self and take control of it. The conscious and unconscious, all of it lumped together, comprehending all of it and drawing it closer to yourself.

Perhaps collecting those things I've called Effects, things that seem to have a grand significance within the dreams, has a significance unto itself.

Your heart embraces all of these things, completed. Perhaps in order to grant you equilibrium.

But what does it meant to gather all of the Effects and become complete? Somehow I get the feeling that I've made a fundamental miscalculation. For you, gathering Effects is surely a way to unify yourself, to gather your mind together and take control, or at least that might be the result. But there's still something else.....

“Where am I?”

I’ve been so caught up thinking about you that I’ve become careless.

I take an overdue look around me. Like investigating a part of yourself that you normally pay no mind to, unaware of it.

There’s a sensation like my body is falling apart. My blood, flesh, and bones, likely a pulpy mess. I’m pulverized, though I can’t see it — it’s likely the type of horrible scene no one would want to see anyway.

Blood still trickles out.

But I am in a world of such deep crimson, so it doesn’t bother me.

“What is this place.....?”

I stand in that dark-red, long, and narrow hallway. It’s like being inside of a blood vessel. Even as we dream, our bodies are still moving. Our pulses still pound. Like being inside a biological function itself, like being inside the conducting wire of a circuit.

The floor, walls, and ceiling are all blood-red. It’s extremely narrow. I can barely move my body.

It’s so cramped, and on top of that, sweltering, like a boiling kettle pot.

It’s like Hell.

I really must be dead — and now I’ve fallen into Hell, likely being judged for some sin.

But, what exactly is the sin that I have committed?

“.....”

I shake my head.

This is also a dream.

I’ve traveled through so many hellish scenes before now. I seem to have fallen into this place while distracted, so it must be connected to another area. Perhaps it’s part of that collective unconscious, that living creation embraced by all humankind.

No matter which country, each land has a myth depicting a Hell-like place.

It is a nightmare shared by all humankind.

“Huff, ungh...” Breathing heavily, I run my hand along the wall, returning to some sense of serenity.

I think back.

I had been dragged along and tossed into that mysterious room by those monochromatic sisters, then completely trampled, causing me to lose consciousness. In an attempt to avoid the tortures of Hell, I parted with my ego. That’s true torture.

If it’s too painful, humans will cast off even the most basic forms of reason and become like beasts. Having lost all reason and discretion, they’ll respond to anything you tell them. They’ll believe even the most ridiculous ideas.

That’s my current state.

That’s why the words of those monochromatic girls cling to my head still.

Even though it was all likely rubbish.

There is no meaning in dreams.

Nevertheless, the scenery changes once again. Fortunately, it doesn’t seem like those monochromatic girls have followed me here. Beasts can neither read comics nor understand text. Such good times are over.

This is a biological area, just pulsating, living.

I stand in that blood-drenched passageway and ponder.

I don’t want to keep experiencing this nightmare forever.

In order to reach a compromise with my ego, I need to understand more.

There are plenty of hints. There are plenty of things within the dreams that seem to be symbolic. I consider them, investigate them, and come up with a deduction, finally achieving a breakthrough in my current situation.

However, interpreting dreams is hard, even for a specialist.

For example, when a dog appears in a dream.

Dogs are generally bad signs.

In real life, dogs are relatively dangerous beings. They bark. They're dirty. And they may even bite you.

That's just the general viewpoint though.

But if you're the type of person who loves dogs like a family member, then a dog will certainly be a happy symbol for you. On the other hand, for someone who was bitten by a dog and almost died, a dog would be a brutal, repulsive sign of unease and disaster. It might also change based on the dog breed, or how exactly the dog is involved in the dream. Like whether you're playing with the dog, or being chased by it, or have even become a dog— The mind cannot be seen. It has no mass. One cannot investigate it with a microscope.

So it can't be explained by common viewpoints. It cannot be explained by scientific formula. Numerical formulas are completely inapplicable.

It's about what kind of life that person has led. What they've experienced, who they've met, what kind of books and comics they've read. What their cultural sphere of influence is, what their religious beliefs are, what their parents are like, who they've loved.

Even if you have a complete understanding of that person, it may not be enough. There might be memories that person isn't even aware of that are influencing them, thus dream interpretation can be very hard. An examination or treatment of the mind can fail due to misdiagnosis. It's impossible to resolve the problem through medication or surgery.

There is no option other than to go through a rigorous cycle of conjecture, treatment, adjustment, and repeat.

That's what I am supposed to do though. There are numerous symbols. Luckily, I am able to see them. Numerous symbols are scattered about these dreams.

Organizing them, assessing their nature.

The Effects are a good starting place. They are things that have left a major impression within the mind, symbols that can have a major impact on their surroundings. They're like keys to explain the heart, and analyzing each one is

like visualizing the full picture of a jigsaw puzzle from what is drawn on each piece.

Lamp. Cat. Knife. The Fat. Long hair.

Piling on a variety of interpretations, trying to understand.

What envelopes your dreams is a sense of isolation, of alienation, an image of death. From there, expressed in simple tales, is something resembling depression. In reality, you're a girl with no place to belong. Unloved by your parents, not fitting in at places like school, you avoid reality and escape into your dreams...

Scolded by your parents, bullied by classmates, backed into a corner.

You sob in pain, locking yourself away in that little room in an attempt to avoid everything. Only during those times where you dream in your bed can you forget about your painful reality.

It's easy to imagine. After all, dreams are a mirror that reflects the heart and mind. These dreams do not contain happy things or things so fun that they make your heart dance, but rather they drip with decay. Your mind and heart are ill. They're exhausted, warped, and stagnant.

However, I have no positive proof. There's no guarantee that my conjecture is correct.

I get the feeling that I'm overlooking something fundamental.

After all, if this were a dream to help you escape reality, then it should be more fascinating to you, it should heal you, should be a dream full of joy that stimulates you and allows you to lose yourself. But this place isn't that. There's no salvation or endpoint, it's merely tedious and uncomfortable.

And then, that's right. There's me. That thought doesn't include me. Those monochromatic, sister-like girls and that girl with the hat and scarf all spoke to me, not you. Why me? What am I? I'm supposed to be an Effect, something just picked up along the way — something unimportant, so what significance do I have?

"I don't get it," I groan, but I am given no time to think.

I hear footsteps.

They reverberate with loudly through the cramped, blood-colored passage.

It's that particular sound of shoes — so familiar that it makes me feel some sense of nostalgia.

It's you, walking along.

You're somewhere in this long, narrow, and maze-like passage, perhaps close by.

While I've been tearing myself apart, drowning in useless thought, you've been wandering about at your own pace.

It's like a dolphin's brain — half of the brain is just waking up while the other half has been up and moving the whole time — so while "I" have been standing in place, "you" have likely been on the move.

Consciousness and unconsciousness switch out, as we live in a constant exchange of the two. You and I have that sort of relationship. You and I are separate people, so even as I go one way or the other, you move along on your own. It's rare for the conscious and unconscious to face each other. That might be why you cannot see me. And it might be why I cannot catch you.

It seems like what the monochromatic girls were talking about hints at that.....

Agh, I'm thinking too much and losing my ability to make sense of anything.

At any rate, I want to find you.

I want to see you.

Like the heads or tails of a coin, we may never be able to meet face-to-face, and that might be fine. I want to be with you, and yet the fact that you get farther away is so unnatural. The back cannot cling to the abdomen, so as the two get farther apart, they're torn to pieces, and the person dies.

I begin walking, following the sound of your footsteps.

The sound seems to suggest that you've hit several dead ends.

Each time you do, I change direction, fretting. Humans cannot think about

that which they do not know. I have no choice but to walk along this lengthy road known as knowledge. Fumbling. Digging my way through with a pickaxe of books or other peoples' words.

Finally, at the end of the passage, I find you.

You're moving along at an unchanging pace.

Those swaying braids.

I let out a sigh of relief, feeling like I might sink to the ground.

There you are.

You're right here.

I am euphoric at that fact alone.

But right at the moment that I'm about to breathe another sigh of relief, a shudder runs through my entire body.

There's something moving right next to you.

It's a woman, one I've seen several times throughout the dreams. An incredibly slender woman. With almost venomous, vivid-colored skin. A tapered nose, like a witch's. And those huge, goggling eyes.....

That woman gives me a bad feeling, but she's always been harmless. She just wanders aimlessly about. However, it's different this time. Those eyes are tinged a threatening purple color, and they leap to and fro at a dizzying pace. Her movements are also more suspicious than usual, as she flails and kicks her arms and legs about like she's struggling.

It's like she's lost her sanity.

She's like malice itself.

You're completely unaware of the woman walking right behind you.

She's closing in on you, like she might do something awful, incite some violence.

I won't let her.

The thought seizes my mind.

I won’t let anyone harm you. I won’t let anyone steal you away.

Not even God himself.

I run desperately along, dripping blood, my body in shambles.

I reach out my hand, reaching the body of the woman with the wide, bloodshot eyes and clamping down.

You turn around, like you noticed the sound.

And then, you take a step back. You’re so slow. I cry out to you.

“Run!”

Though my voice is unlikely to reach you.

Because you likely can’t see me.

“Survive—”

These are my true, raw feelings.

I want to do something for you. I wanted to give you everything that was within my power. However, I can’t. I regret it. I want to atone for my sins. I would be fine with sacrificing myself for you, without any reward.

Even if that meant that I would lose my place within your dream.

No matter what I do within your dreams, it has no meaning.

It probably has no effect on reality.

And then, I—

In that instant, the woman with the purple eyes grabs me by the neck in aggravation. She begins to strangle me. Her lips emit a shrill sound. She’s so close with those ominous eyes of hers. I spit at her and let out a cry, and she tightens her hold. She pushes me up against the wall, and I struggle frantically.

Strangulation is not a matter of one dying because they stop breathing. With the neck constricted, the blood flow stops, which means that it can’t reach the brain. Without any oxygen, from whatever the cause, the brain cannot do its job. You lose the ability to dream.

My vision begins to fade. The dream collapses in on itself, the area within my

grasp disappears.

You run ahead without looking back.

I feel like I finally remember what those swaying braids are a symbol of.

Chapter 24 / Revolving Lantern

I think I might be dreaming.

I'm being strangled by this woman with the goggling purple eyes, my consciousness on the verge of leaving me, when I see, for a brief second, something that looks like a revolving lantern.

My sense of self becomes vague, and it's as if I'm behind you, chasing after you, even though you should have already run off.

The boundary between you and I is becoming vague.

Is this your dream? Is it mine? Who is it that's having this dream? You've reached a grim-looking gate at the end of this hellish passage. A coffin-like gate, painted black. It's like the gates of Hell, and if this were Dante's work, scrawled into it would be the words, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

You're heading into a place from which you cannot return, making an irreversible choice.

I reach out, but no matter how much I want to stop you, this woman who is malice itself holds me back, and I can't move. Reaching out my hand is meaningless, it won't get to you.

As you leave, all I can do is watch you go.

With your usual lack of caution, you pass through the gate and walk inside.

You're like a baby, lacking the knowledge to protect yourself.

You walk along.

There are tons of street lights there amidst the darkness.

Some of the lamps are lit, while others are out. They're like the fixated eyes of others, turning their gaze on you with great interest. The streetlights are lit, like shining eyes. However, the number of lights gradually decreases, and so too does the amount of illumination.

You are alone in that darkness.

However, next to you, a light appears. A mysterious lamp, bounding around on its own. That lantern alone is looking at you. Like it's shielding you with its warm light.

You pick it up happily, and it illuminates your path as you hold it high.

That's the only thing you have to rely on, to cling to.

You walk along.

Once again, you become lost in that sea of trees that reeks of death. You press on through the trees, all of them standing together without distinction, like they symbolize other people. Eyeballs sprout amid the thicket of trees and rudely stare at you.

Like you're curious, or vulgar.

You only illuminate the area around you as you walk along.

It's the type of deep darkness that, if it were not illuminated by streetlights, you wouldn't be able to see your feet.

The eyeballs steadily increase, peering at you. Though you didn't seem to notice before, it's as if you've suddenly become aware, and you lower your head in embarrassment.

It's like a funeral. People who might have ignored you during life now shower you in attention at your funeral.

That is the heart of the matter. There are people even shedding tears, though it's far too late.

How terribly selfish.

Within that forest, there's also that jellyfish-like thing that looks like gathered organs and makes a disquieting sound like the bells rung at funeral memorial addresses. Thus the forest seems even more like a funeral service.

It overflows with an aura of death, and of mourning.

There is finally a break in the trees, and there is an old train right before you. It's old-fashioned, rusted, and broken — no matter how you look at it, it's a

decommissioned vehicle long past its service life. It doesn't lead anywhere, the line it runs on broken up. It just sits there, abandoned, on display.

Within dreams, vehicles are a symbol of being carried off to another world.

You might be planning to take that ride somewhere.

Those troublesome stares that had been there until now have all disappeared. There's no one to accompany you, as you're headed somewhere no one wants to go.

You open the door of the train all by yourself and climb inside.

The moment you get on, the train begins to move. A loud clatter resonates, click-a-clack. The vibrations cause your braids to flutter. Where is it you are headed?

There is passenger seating inside the train, and those seats are occupied by beings that seem like passengers.

Like the girl with the hat and scarf, they're painted black — like children that died before God could decide upon a face for them. Next to them sit creatures sprouting legs and eyes, as if they have birth defects.

They all seem innocent somehow, their legs kicking about here and there.

They seem like children.

You sit quietly in a space between those odd children.

The train just seems to go on and on endlessly, so you get out of your seat, seemingly bored. You open the door manually and head outside.

The black things that seem like passengers wave their hands, and the ones that look like children smile.

You walk for a bit, finally reaching a river.

It's a broad river, with a bottom so far down, you can't see it. It seems like it would drain away your will to swim across, in both its gloomy hue and its seemingly freezing temperature.

The boundary between the transient and the eternal, like the Sanzu River of the Buddhist afterlife.

A vast bridge stretches across the river, and you walk over it.

Standing around you are people in white clothing like that of the dead, looking a lot like ghosts. They're like ghosts that have died and not completely crossed over, milling around the Sanzu River.

You walk on, unconcerned.

You cross the bridge over the river.

No.

Come back.

You can't go over there.

I want to shout out to you, but I can do nothing.

The river is wide, the bridge is long, just stretching on and on. Within the river, coral and the remains of fish are visible. It's like a giant town was flooded out. Like a world that has already ended. A world that was destroyed by something and brought to an end.

Upon death, the world built around "me" would come to an end.

The world would close out there.

It would be destroyed.

You finally reach the opposite side.

A dead tree stands there, all alone.

Humans grow a tree within their minds. A tree known as the self. It's a tree that is nourished through wisdom and experience, emotion and love. Each person has their own variety and type of tree. What kind of flowers will it grow? What kind of fruit will it bear? Who will it fascinate, what will it yield, how will it keep the pests away? What kind of poison will it possess? How tall will it grow?

However, the tree there is dead.

An exhausted heart, bent halfway.

Yet you touch it.

You try to huddle close to it.

However, next to the dead tree is a symbol of evil — a dragon. Its uncannily large face sticks out of a small puddle. It breathes flames, setting you and the dead tree ablaze. You both burn.

Like at a witch trial.

Like “Joan of Arc at the Stake.”

She should have been the one to save the world, and yet she was judged and burned as a witch.

She disappeared, like someone turned to ashes at a crematorium.

And then I finally remember that you are dead.

Chapter 25 / Interpreting Dreams

I am dreaming.

“Yes, a dream. It’s all a dream..... Dreams are the realm of the unconscious, of the other self you possess — a rare glimpse at the world inside. Within dreams, your unconscious mind is expressed, and those dreams contain many things about yourself that you aren’t cognizant of. In order to treat the illness of your mind, no, in order to diagnose that unseeable, untouchable mind, there are things we need.”

Something right in front of me is talking about difficult things.

The only judgment I can possibly make is that it might be a male — it has a blurry form, dripping in white. The face is very close to me, and the only assessment I can make is that it’s melted into the white lab coat at the corners of my vision.

It seems that somehow, I’ve woken up again.

This is reality. At the very least, it’s an area that would lead me to believe as much.

It’s like that scenery I saw for a bit after I awoke from that girl with the hat and scarf thrusting me down..... I’ve returned once again to that suffocating place. I was being strangled by that woman with the goggling eyes back in the dream, my consciousness slipping...

Before I realized it, I was met with this sordid face.

I think within the dream... I had been strangled. Death in dreams is more akin to brain death in movies, or what is called a vegetative state. If the mind, or consciousness, were killed, the body would become husk. If the soul were lost, the body would be left behind like refuse.

However, in actuality, dreams about death and being killed are quite common. It would be a big problem if they resulted in brain death, but that’s not the case. Death as it occurs in dreams is like a simple deus ex machina to

end the performance of the dream and allow you to begin life anew, so it's a positive and proactive symbol.

Dreams and the unconscious are the underside of the dualistic personality. They're like another person. Like Jekyll and Hyde. Even if you die in a dream, it has no effect on reality. Rather, it's like the feeling of release that comes from letting stored-up pus out of your body.

There are some cases where it can even get rid of anxiety and fear that encircle the heart.

Be that as it may, dying is not a pleasant thing. That hidden personality is still part of you. Actually experiencing death is a terrible burden. The way I died was miserable and cruel. For some time after, you can't believe that you're alive, your pulse thunders and you break into a cold sweat, unable to calm down.

In any case, death in my dream afforded me the opportunity to wake up.

It's a Game Over. Until the moment when power is returned to the dream world, I have no choice but to reside in reality.

I feel so down. The stimuli in reality are too great for me. The heaviness and resonance of the air, the rustling of clothes, other people's voices.....

Even the pressure of the air against my skin is painful.

My body is heavy, and it's hard to breathe. I'm like a fish dumped on land.

If it's going to be this depressing, then dreams would be infinitely better.

"Dreams are the most vital tool for curing an illness of the mind. We reach a consensus after analyzing the contents and events of a dream and decide on a diagnosis. That's a quick starting point. Anyway, it's difficult to explain the content of your dreams to someone else. So it's hard to treat an illness of the mind."

Even as I'm groaning, the blurred doctor is talking nearby.

About something I don't understand at all.

"Often, stories of other people's dreams are boring. No matter how exciting the dream might be, it's unintelligible to the listener. Like words in a foreign language. It's easy to understand how talking about weather and baseball is

infinitely more interesting, because you can understand the rules and join in."

The doctor-like man seems to be putting on airs, like he knows everything.

It's like he's monologuing, and I have no energy to do anything but interject to show that I'm listening.

"Telling someone else about your dreams is a monumental task. Dreams are the unconscious, the underside of your personality, the contents of someone else's mind. The heads and tails of a coin. They're connected, and yet you can't understand another person's mind. Twins who are raised together or a close married couple would be better, but still no one could truly judge whether what the person said was true or not."

It's a one-sided conversation. I'm not ready to take in someone else's words. The words reach my ears and are sent back out without processing. Still dazed from sleep, I can't comprehend anything.

"It's a bit like reading a friend's novel. There are literature classes about addressing the feelings of the author in a particular work. Anyone would have doubts about the significance of such classes. Someone more sarcastic would think: 'Like I could know how the author felt. They probably wrote it to meet their deadline and get their royalties.' But that's wrong, the novel is a piece of the author's soul. But the class is training one to read, understand, and make a guess."

What is he talking about?

I don't get what he means at all.

"How do you go about getting a good grade in such a class? I have an acquaintance who is a novelist, and he reads with abandon. He writes manuscripts like a fool. When he was in school, he got top grades in that class without even studying."

The doctor-like man talks on happily.

His manner of speaking is very indirect.

I think this, but my grade in such a class probably wouldn't be very good.

"Having encountered so many books, and being so used to writing them, one

somehow comes to understand them. To understand the feelings of an author. One comes to sympathize with the pieces of the author's heart. In psychology, there's a therapy referred to as modeling, where we simulate a set of circumstances."

That's right, I am receiving treatment.

My mind is ill.

While I'm dreaming, my hidden self, that someone else, rises to the surface. But when I'm awake, I return to myself. I get myself back. Coincidentally, when I dream, so many distant matters — memories, emotions, knowledge — are all revived.

I finally begin remembering minute details about realistic matters, like how I got here, where I am.

The baton I handed off to my unconsciousness in my dreams has been returned to me. Now it's my turn to run with it. It seems I've rested a bit too long, as I can't move like I should be able to.

I'm still sleepy, so nothing is clear yet; everything is still so vague.

My mind is ill, so I'm receiving treatment.

Because it was necessary for this process, I've read numerous books about psychology, written as much about my dreams as possible, and talked to doctors about it like this.

My mind is being predominantly treated through dialogue, modeling, and dream interpretation.

What I'm doing right now is having a dialogue.

Through discussions with the doctor, I reveal my heart and mind. By communicating with another, I bring my heart front and center. Through my reactions and the contents of my story — in other words, my testimony — I can venture a guess at something vague, like dreams are the mind itself. It's like preparing a montage from witness testimony.

However, it's a task that requires a great deal of patience. We can't even grasp our own minds. Understanding someone else's unconscious is even

harder. Even in testimonies from a close wife or siblings, there will be inconsistencies or things missing.

Depending on how reliable you find the doctor in question, there are also many cases of stories being completely fabricated. In order to protect that hidden self, that precious other person that you're connected to. It could simply be that type of personality, one with an ill temperament. A testimony grounded in lies or misunderstandings is always a possibility.

That's why, over and over again, we have dialogue. He asks the same questions over and over, like a detective.

Or, we could try another approach.

"Modeling is creating something. Like a novel or a picture. Things with a great deal of usefulness, like miniature sand garden therapy. What you're doing right now."

I'm in a small room, like a hospital room.

Sitting up in bed, I hold the large box set on my lap with both hands.

There are lots of things lined up in that box. Haphazardly. What's left in the box and how it's arranged can be used to guess the state of the mind..... That seems to be how miniature sand garden therapy works. If it were just selecting and placing objects, even a small child could do it. It's a simple form of creation, one that doesn't require the knowledge or skill of literature or oil painting.

That's why it can be an effective form of therapy for anyone — and an effective form of diagnosis.

Normally when you're being examined by a doctor, you're hooked up to some machine or the doctor interviews you face-to-face. The doctor sits right next to me, and my posture in the bed is a relaxed one. But the atmosphere doesn't feel like one of healing.

It's more one of relaxation. If one thinks they're receiving treatment, they get nervous and close off their mind and heart, becoming rigid in expression and concealing their true thoughts and feelings. Thus it becomes incredibly difficult to get them to remove the mask and probe the depths of their heart.

Having me remain in bed means they're trying to keep me as close to sleep as possible.

They're trying to get closer to the depths of my mind, my unconscious mind.

A small girl doll is placed at the center of my miniature garden.

I take the doll in my hands, aimlessly moving her about the miniature garden. I can't decide where to put her. A cute doll with braids...

It's not something commonly used in miniature sand garden therapy, but rather something that I treasured in my childhood.

Though I can't remember it well.

I'm still so drowsy, it still feels like someone else's memories.

"That's right, that's it."

The doctor's interjection is mostly a nuisance, and I furrow my brows.

I place the doll in the center of the miniature garden and arrange several things around it. One by one, fitting them together. Things like a frog or a midget, things I referred to as Effects in the dream, all seem to fit together.

This seems the most natural.

Once I have them more or less in place, I ask the doctor, "What condition do you think this suggests?"

I want the right answer, one that makes me feel better.

The doctor gives a vague answer, like "I'm not sure," and urges me to continue.

I'm flustered. It's like I don't want anyone else to see, don't want to let anyone else know about those Effects that were so important to you — I want to wrap them up tight with a ribbon. I carefully cover them up. Like a cocoon. Like an egg. I cram them together, like the wife of President Kennedy gathering his grey matter after the back of his head was shot out by an assassin's bullet.

"What... are you doing with that?" This time, the doctor asks me. Even though he hasn't answered my question yet.

Unsatisfied, I remain silent.

Concealing things that were precious to you, making them into an egg, seems natural to me.

Those precious things, the Effects, match with the number of eggs that surround you.

Right.

It appears to be fitting.

“What a colorful egg. It’s pretty, almost divine. Like an Easter Egg. Easter — a festival of revival. Hmm, hmm.....” The doctor stares at me with a satisfied expression.

Then he continues speaking, unperturbed.

“I’ve been listening intently to your story up to now. It’s actually very interesting.”

In the doctor’s hands lies the open diary.

A record of the dream.

The contents are just a series of words, an incomprehensible mess that’s out of order. A diary where the things that left an impression are recorded. There’s no finesse to it, it probably won’t entertain anyone. After all, I’m not a novelist.

“There’s no need to put on the airs of an author. It’s most important to paint the scenes as you saw them. That’s why we call it a picture in words. If we’re talking about images, then it’s a rough sketch, or even just a sketch. What’s most important is the accuracy and amount. We quickly forget our dreams, so properly getting them down on paper can be quite difficult. There’s no need for finesse. I just want to be able to understand what you saw and how you felt.”

“My dreams, my heart and mind—” Again, I ask, “What will that explain?”

“I’d rather hear your opinion on that subject than mine — it’s vital.”

“.....”

On hearing that, I begrudgingly begin to think.

I remember.

Everything I saw, heard, and felt in the dream.

“I...”

The dream is so far away, and remembering it here in reality is hard.

Even so, I desperately try to scrutinize it.

“In my dreams, I’m always chasing a lone girl who’s just walking around. That girl seems to be collecting something. No, it’s more like she has nothing else to do. She’s picking up these special things, things that left an impression, throughout her mind.”

I named these “Effects.”

The dream didn’t seem to have any other obvious goal besides collecting them.

Just walking around.

That’s all you did the whole time, occasionally stopping to gather Effects.

“For the mind, that’s the most important thing. I think it’s a very significant activity. I was trying to collect the pieces of my mind, trying to put them together like a jigsaw puzzle. Trying to create the completed version. That’s what I think. Collecting the shattered pieces of my heart, returning myself, that seems to be the goal—”

I can’t really put it into words. So much so that it makes me impatient.

I cannot understand your feelings.

“I want to be treated, want my illness to be cured, I think those are the feelings I’m trying to express. It’s painful, so I don’t want to stay ill. I want to return to health, to well-being. That’s why I gather the things missing, the things scattered about—”

“That might be true.”

The doctor will not reach a conclusion.

He’s cautious. With an illness of the mind, one cannot just prescribe certain medicines or certain surgery for certain symptoms. There’s no established medical or symptomatic treatment. The shape and components of each person’s mind are different. One must thoroughly search for and find the illness

in the mind's inner workings.

"It would be nice if that were the case. If this were the expression of such proactive feelings as a desire to get back on your feet and get better. That's what you need most when treating the mind, after all."

He's using the sort of cheerful tone he might use to praise a student who gave the right answer.

The doctor continues.

"The mind doesn't have a pulse. There's no place to insert a scalpel. I'm powerless, so you're the one who must act. There's nothing so powerful as yourself when you're trying to return your mind to its rightful state."

That reaction makes me rather uneasy.

The answers I give the doctor before me are those like an honors student would submit. It's not something menial like just observing the expression on your conversation partner's face.

It just seems like, in order to end the discussion as soon as possible, I keep giving him the answers I think he wants to hear.

I think I really do want to return my mind to its holistic state.

Those may likely be my true feelings.

I wonder if perhaps I've left something big, something important, sealed away.

"I want you to open your heart," the doctor mutters, as if he's seen through me.

He pats my head pitifully, as if there's no other choice, like he's tapping the hard shell covering my heart. That's the way it feels. I'm not exposing my heart again.

"You know, I'm not your enemy. I don't want to hurt you, I want to heal you. That's why I want you to let me in. I want you to let me at least get close enough to touch, to use the stethoscope. If you don't, I won't know anything and can't help you."

“I’ve shown you already.” I spit out those words.

It isn’t like me to get so irritated.

“You’ve let me see through the myriad diary entries you’ve written. Through all of these methods, I can see into your heart. You’re opening up and putting it on display.”

Modeling. Discussion. Dream interpretation.

In other words, he’s trying the symptomatic approach.

I wonder what that entails, other than my expressing a desire to be cured.

“So will you?” As if taking a step forward, the doctor asks in a quieter tone, “Will you really let me see *everything*?”

It’s not so much an attack as it is tinged with sadness.

“You’re still hiding something important. Protecting it, covering it up. It’s like you’re shielding an open wound with the palm of your hand. I know it must hurt. But you have to let me see it. If you don’t let me near the wound, I can’t treat it,” the doctor says gently, but also firmly.

The doctor is drawing closer to my heart and mind. It’s like he’s reaching for me, but I don’t want him to.

“You gather up the pieces of your mind. That’s something quite amazing. That’s an ideal Jung aimed for. The self is created from the combination of everything, including the conscious and unconscious mind. There’s just one complete version of each of us in this world. Not just the surface ego, but the entire extent of the mind. Jung called this individuation, the end goal of the mind, the ideal it’s trying to achieve.”

I know the terminology for that aspect of psychology.

I read books. To gain knowledge and somehow bring peace to my heart.

I want to run from this pain.

“You continue to wander about the unconscious, the mind, the dream, collecting those vitally significant symbols of the heart. Once you finish collecting them, no matter where you look, there will be no more of what you

call ‘Effects.’”

That’s right.

The exploration of every corner of the mind has ended.

I know where everything is.

I’ve sorted out my mind, grasped it, and done all that I needed to do.

With nothing left to do, I find myself at a loss.

“However, if you had truly achieved your goal — had finished gathering the pieces of your mind, had brought everything together — you should feel relieved. An individuated and complete mind experiences no anxiety, fear, or suffering. However, even now, you’re still afraid of something.”

Those words are enough for me me.

That’s right. When you finish a jigsaw puzzle, finish finding all the pieces and making it into one whole image, that’s all. One should feel at ease, and feel satisfied.

Even so, I am still uneasy.

It still seems like there are things left to do.

“Is this diary truly complete? Is there not more to it?”

The doctor indicates the remaining pages in the diary where I’ve recorded the contents of my dreams.

“What about the doors you haven’t opened, the areas you haven’t passed through?”

I hate being questioned like this, so I look away.

I faintly gaze at the miniature garden sitting on my lap.

The Effects make an egg-shape to conceal the doll that looks like you. They look like the ones that you tossed out. After you went to all the trouble to gather them. As if to say they’re not yours, that you don’t need them.

Gather all of the pieces and complete the heart, unifying it.

Is that not the heart’s final goal?

Why am I rejecting it then?

Don’t I want to get better? Don’t I want to feel at ease?

Was it intentional that I kept missing you the whole time? Was I walking around and around so that I would get tired out?

I’m misremembering something basic.

I am still hiding something.

“Your story is very interesting. There aren’t that many people that could share their dreams in such detail. However, it clearly isn’t enough. There’s something obviously being left out. It’s precisely because certain parts aren’t detailed or clear that they’re painted black,” the doctor says, obviously saddened.

Trying to grasp someone else’s mind must be a difficult job. Their unseeable mind and yours collide, damaging one another and bleeding out. You can’t just insert a scalpel from that safe space or give them medicine. The doctor and patient become one, they sympathize, melt together — they warp, hurt each other, and become exhausted.

That’s why the doctor hopes their patient will rise up again on their own.

That’s the best, clearest way of doing it without anyone being hurt.

“It doesn’t seem like you’re making it up, though it does seem like you’re glossing over the important parts. That’s why it’s a distorted story, like a book where half the pages have been covered in paint. You don’t realize that you’re avoiding the most important truth.”

And then, it’s like I’m being stabbed with a knife.

He asks a pointed question, and it’s like he’s digging a scalpel into me.

“Why do you think □□□ isn’t in your dream?”

I can’t understand that one word.

The mind and heart recognize that word, but avoid it.

If I did accept it, my heart would be crushed. I’d bleed excessively and die of shock.

That’s why the mind shields us: out of self-defense. That word is connected to

something that is taken in, then rejected.

However, the fact that I was hiding this meant it was in my heart.

I couldn't just throw it away.

For me, it is so very important. A vital organ necessary for survival. Something that hurts so much. And that pain bursts out all at once.

I gasp and wheeze.

"Ah, ahh."

I get the feeling that I've remembered everything.

Like it's all clicked together.

The images repeat over and over..... The girl with the hat and scarf. The words of those things resembling the monochromatic girls. Swaying braids. So many Effects. The results they are supposed to have. In all of the dreams I reached while chasing you, I just averted my eyes and accepted them.

Even though I pretended not to see.

I covered the wound with my hand and pretended not to see it. I kept saying there was no wound, so I was fine, over and over to reassure myself.

Blood flows out from my heart, and my heart can no longer hide it.

I hold the miniature garden in my lap with both hands.

I don't want to see it. I don't want to see in my mind. I don't want to accept it. I don't want to comprehend it.

I let out such a loud scream that I can't even believe it.

From the miniature garden, I yank up the doll that looks like you.

Then it hits the floor with a fierce impact.

The old doll breaks into pieces, spilling its cotton everywhere.

Her guts spew out everywhere.

She apparently died from a fall.

"This is the end, the continuation and end of the diary, the conclusion. She

fell, she fell and she died. She went, fell, and *DIEEED*!”

I unleash my raw emotions in a scream.

I let out all of my unconscious thoughts in that shrill scream.

The doctor rises and begins shaking my shoulders. Calling out to me. Oddly alert, like they were on standby, a group of nurses come charging in and hold me down. I hit the back of my head hard, and my mind begins to wander.

I feel like I’m about to lose consciousness.

No. I don’t want to dream anymore. There is no salvation there.

There is nothing but despair.

Because you are not there.

You aren’t anywhere.

No matter how much I walk and wander about, you are not in my dream.

Chapter 26 / Word Association

I am still awake.

I don’t want to dream anymore.

I remember. The dream, the one that was over in an instant, was slathered in blood. It was splattered everywhere. It reeked of that metallic stench. It was awful. You had jumped from that veranda of the tall, tall building. I was powerless to stop you.



You fell, smashing into the ground.

You were crushed, likely dying instantly.

You fell all that way, and died.

I sobbed at your side, your form like that of a frog run over by a car. The whole, entire time..... That is the entirety of the dream. The conclusion. I've been made to watch the same scene over and over. All I see the whole time are your crushed organs, your body lying in a sea of blood.

The memorial bell rings out.

That's the end.

The conclusion of my dream.

I'm at the end of my rope.

Even so, reality just goes on. I have the same dream over and over and wake up in a sweat. And then I begin to sob, back in this suffocating reality. It's been like this for so long. My dreams, my unconscious stops there, ceasing operation. They've died.

However, in reality, I breathe, I metabolize.

I have no choice but to live.

"We're going to perform a type of examination on you. It's what we call a word association test. It's a pretty standard thing in psychology, but you may have heard of it over the course of your lifetime."

I'm exhausted from having that repeated image of death thrust upon me.

The doctor's voice somehow seems far away.

"The things you've kept hidden in your heart have become slightly exposed. Having them becoming exposed is what caused your mind to break. You likely kept those things secret in order to protect your heart and mind. It was self-defense. However, those things were dragged out of you, and you couldn't take it. You became aware of the wound, of the pain, and couldn't maintain your sanity."

It seems as if I've raged, screamed, and caused a fuss many times before.

The bandages and dressings on my fingertips and the exposed parts of my arms grab my attention. I feel disgust with my surroundings, with all of reality. And so I shed my blood.

The doctor before me is also wrapped in bloody bandages as if he had been stabbed with a knife. His form is fuzzy, like his outline was sloppily drawn, and my mind can't really get a firm grasp on it. He has scratches on his face, likely from when I made a fuss.

Over the course of treating the mind, our hearts and minds collide and we both wear each other down.

We both get hurt, both bleed.

"I apologize for being too hasty. Your recovery is most important. Like doing a surgery without a blood transfusion, it's only natural that you would reject it. You protecting your own heart and mind is instinctual. In that way, I was no longer a doctor, but became like an enemy who would do you harm. That's why you felt you were under attack. That mistake was mine. There's no need for you to be concerned," the doctor says courteously, then turns my way once more. "Word association is just a form of medical examination. There's no need to touch you, nor to stress your heart and mind. We're just assessing your current state. It's like taking an X-Ray photo. I want to cure you. I want you to have a peaceful life. That is the heart and mind's ultimate goal. I want to help you to do so. So I want to examine you closely, without harming you, much like peering through a microscope."

I nod slightly.

I'm completely wiped out.

Every time I close my eyes, the image of your crushed form hovers before me. The splattered blood and organs, the depressing image of death, they follow me about. I'm drained, haggard, like I've been possessed by a ghost. I can't seem to muster the will to do anything.

I readily follow the doctor's instructions.

Like a machine.

"Word association, just as the name implies, is where I give you a word, and

then observe whatever you associate with that word, as well as your reaction. It's like a simple survey. It's not very difficult, so there's no need to be guarded," the doctor explains warmly.

He seems almost apologetic. It feels like a waste for him to use up all his sincerity on someone like me. However, that's a doctor's job.

A difficult, cruel, and thankless job.

"So from here on, I will say a total of one hundred words. With each one, I want you to respond with how you felt upon hearing the word, and what it made you think of. From those answers, I will draw out the inner workings of your mind. Even though it might be a roundabout method, it is an effective form of examination that will allow me to grasp the full picture."

My head bobs like a certain type of toy.

I'll do whatever it takes to free myself from this suffering.

If this could spare me from the nightmares.

"This isn't some test for school, so there's no right answer or score to be kept. No one is going to scold you for the answers that you give, nor will your answers preclude you from treatment. On the other hand, if you give an impressive answer like some honors student, I'm not going to praise you, for this isn't some thesis competition. If nothing comes to mind, you are welcome to remain quiet. Having no response is a response in its own right."

It's like the doctor is explaining the rules to some game.

I merely take the information in.

My guard seems to be lowered.

"I will fire these words at you in rapid succession, to deprive you of time to give your responses undue thought. I will judge the state of your mind by taking note of your responses, the speed of your reactions, your expression, and your tone collectively. I want you to let me know if it becomes difficult partway through, though. There's no need to be nervous. There's no failure or success. This should be something that puts you at ease. Now then..."

The doctor speaks calmly as he begins the word association test.

I am unable to sit myself upright.

I don't have the strength to. All I can do is react to stimuli like an animal.

"Now, what if I say the word, 'head'?"

I'm baffled by the word the doctor has used.

Head. He said head. But what appears in my mind is your head — and your swaying braids.

"No need to think it over. I just want you to tell me exactly what comes to mind."

The doctor speaks gently, as if this is the first conversation I've ever had.

"Severed head," he says, his words muffled and unclear.

The image of your head detached from your body appears in my mind.

He just said something very creepy. I can't shake the image of death attached to that phrase. I panic and change the subject.

"I've dyed my hair before. Everyone was doing it, so I decided I would too. Back in those days, when I was younger, playing with my hair was fun. I've dyed my hair blonde, grown it long, even did it in a funny style. Uhm, is it all right to reminisce about past stories like this?"

"How about, 'green'?" The doctor gives no sign of reacting to my response and just tosses the next word my way.

I blush and panic, as if he's seen through something I've said somehow.

However, everything about me, including my attitude, is likely being observed. Feeling such discomfort, I respond.

"Sea of trees."

What comes to mind is that sea of trees I pursued you through. In the end, it too bears an image of death..... It's so dark, I begin to feel depressed. I probably would have preferred "frog" instead. That at least seems happier.

However, I don't have time to think.

Words are steadily thrust at me, and I react to those vague words dripping

with symbolism. This process just repeats over and over.

Gradually it starts to feel like I'm answering on reflex. That's the point, to answer without being conscious of it — in other words, to answer unconsciously.

It's like dreaming.

"What if I say, 'window'?"

"Window...? That girl..... I watch you from the window, for it's the only place I can."

"What about, 'village'?"

"School, maybe. There are all these little groups, tons of faceless people."

"How about, 'cooking'?"

"Knives. But knives are dangerous. They can become lethal weapons."

"And how about, 'travel'?"

"I want to go traveling. There are so many places I wanna go."

"And, 'blue'?"

"Didn't you ask me the same question earlier? You said green, right...? If we're talking about the sea of trees and blue, then it would just be a sea, right?"

"And how about, 'stab'?"

"Didn't you ask me that one already too?"

"How about, 'death'?"

"....."

"And, 'money'?"

"I guess it's something you need, money I mean."

"And, 'bird'?"

"I hate birds..... They scare me. Their screeches, their eyes, all of it."

"How about, 'frog'?"

“There’s a fairytale about a stubborn frog. There are those who think it’s funny to inflate frogs until they explode. But I like them.”

“And, ‘child’?”

“.....”

“‘Marriage’?”

“.....”

“‘Home’?”

“Somewhere to return to. Though no matter how much you clean and decorate it, no one’s coming over to visit.”

“And how about, ‘draw a picture’?”

“I prefer to read rather than draw.”

“How about, ‘family’?”

“.....”

“And, ‘happiness’?”

“I don’t know... I can’t understand it anymore.”

“What about, ‘storks’?”

“I told you, I hate birds!”

“How about, ‘kisses’?”

“They’re gross, I don’t like them. You just keep bringing up things I don’t like!”

“And, ‘door’?”

“What about, ‘alien’?”

Suddenly, I feel uneasy.

The next word keeps coming even though I haven’t responded to the last.

It’s a voice repeating the same rhythm, the words all blurring together.

I am in a trance-like state, but still I can discern one thing.

That word just now was weird. I know about word association, I read a book

about it. But I feel like that wasn’t among the words — and so I lift my head suspiciously.

And then, I see it.

Chapter 27 / Spaceship

I might be dreaming.

This doesn't feel real.

In the blink of an eye, my field of view changes. The scenery is suddenly changing. Shockingly, everything is completely different than it was before.

I'm supposed to be in the middle of a word association test.

I was receiving treatment because my mind was ill. However, as I gradually answered the monotonous questions — that is to say, as I reacted to the words offered at the same rhythm, my unconscious mind got bottle-necked.

Like driving down a highway.

Like repeating a simple procedure.

It's as if I fell into a trance, as if I were hypnotized at some point, and those overflowing dreams covered up reality. Like having a daydream.

Or maybe I fell asleep out of boredom, and ended up dreaming again.

A mysterious person stands before me.

He was supposedly a doctor up to this point. He was supposed to be a doctor, referred to as "Sensei." Like a teacher who would teach and guide me, who might even save me.

"Uhm, Sensei? It's 'Sensei,' right?" I call out to him.

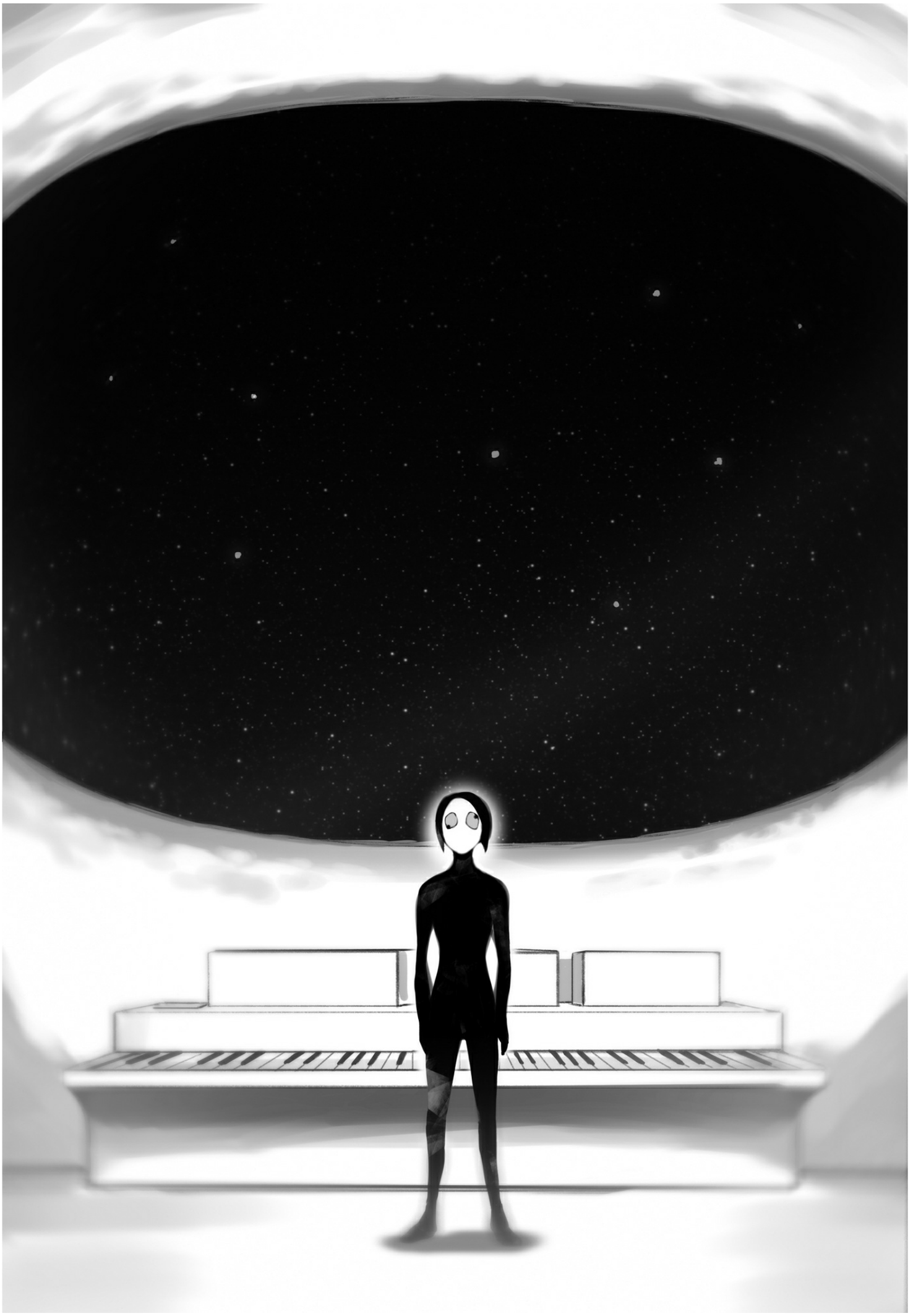
Though he doesn't really seem like an easy conversation partner.

He makes me uneasy.

He looks like a tall and gangly man. He has a similar air to the doctor I had been speaking with up to a short time ago. Even though he wears the same mask, it's like the actor inside is different — like at some vital point, that being has changed, right down to its roots.

He is somehow strange, somewhat mysterious.

Clearly, he’s not exactly human.



He has two eyes. Arms and legs. His outline is that of a human.

His finite facial features are rather vague. His face only has eyes; no mouth, nose, or ears. His eyes are stiff, like the compound eyes of a bug, and I can't tell where he's looking. I'm doubtful that they really even are eyes.

He has something resembling hair, but it's limp, clinging to him like a piece of seaweed. His body is a solid black, with the polish of a mollusk. He's like a living creature, but I feel no affinity for him. He's like a lifeform incomprehensible to us, one that evolved somewhere foreign to us, like the deep sea or outer space.

He's rather like an alien.

That thought likely comes to mind after I realize that I am on a spaceship. My very simple reasoning is that, if this is a spaceship, then he must be an alien.

We're in a small room. It's about the same size as the hospital room I was in just a short time ago.

However, the floors, walls, and ceiling are all smooth and white, like the inside of an egg. It's so sanitized, so robotic. Through what looks like a window, I can see numerous stars. They're clearly different from the stars one might see in the night sky — they're too bright, too close.

It's like we're actually flying through outer space.

I was in the hospital room receiving treatment for an illness of the mind — when suddenly, an alien paid me a visit and seemingly kidnapped me. I wonder if something so absurd is possible.

It's an astounding mystery, for if such a calamity were to occur, it would occur in a dream.

This, too, must be a dream.

Speaking of which, Jung, one of the primary researchers of dreams, also had a keen interest in aliens. He presented several papers into which he had put a great deal of work on the subject. Jung was really interested in the occult, and a third of his writing on that was about alchemy. However it's not like Jung was a swindler like some dubious people claiming to have spiritual powers. Jung tried to illuminate that which was called the occult through his own particular

theories and logic.

Like ghosts. Or psychic powers. Or mythology.

Or like aliens and UFOs.

According to Jung, those are things born of and displayed by the collective unconsciousness shared by all humans. No matter where they live or what culture they belong to, everyone has a vision of gods and ghosts. I wonder why that is. The angle he takes is that the reason myths have so many commonalities is because the source of things like gods and ghosts is that collective unconsciousness shared among all humans.

As for gods or aliens, they are visions born of the overarching anxiety of humankind. They give a clear form to fuzzy things like anxiety, and so humans can experience such things in waking dreams. In that case, it's not necessarily that people saw physical beings, intelligent life that came from outer space, but that they made these "aliens" the symbol of their anxiety. There were a lot of incidences of eyewitness reports of UFO sightings during the World War, as people trembled in anxiety. That's why aliens came in mass quantities.

Gods and devils, fairies and demons, those kinds of fantastical beings — fear, yearning, human pathos, those kind of emotions are a basis for these symbols. It's the same as symbols seen in dreams, but we see them while we are awake. Particularly anxious people, or drowsy people, might have a gap in their unconscious mind and begin to see these things in reality.

In most cases, it's anxiety and fear themselves that make people want to brush off such things. So that's why everyone laughs the person off, saying things like ghosts don't exist. However, anyone and everyone has access to those things within the collective unconsciousness. Face them, overcome them, defeat them, and in this way, conquer them.

These kinds of antagonists manifest as general concepts — things like demons or devils that are the realm of the occult. Jung referred to them as "shadows." We shouldn't ignore them, instead we should choose to defeat and conquer them. Or accept them, integrate them into ourselves. If we don't, the shadow part of our hearts will be treated as if it didn't exist, go missing, be painted over, leaving our hearts and minds incomplete.

If we don’t face them, that is.

So this alien-like thing must be a shadow with some sort of significance to me. Something I’ve sealed away. Something I’m hiding. That part has awakened and is imploring, “Look at me.” Karma is paying me a visit for closing my eyes and pretending not to see.

All the way down into the collective unconscious.

I’ve been lured once again into a dream that should have ended.

No, the scene I saw earlier may not have even been reality to start with. I can’t comprehend it. Having a dream inside a dream, then another dream within that dream — I can’t get a firm sense of where I am within these multilayered dreams. That doctor-like being, the one that seemed to transform into an alien, he’s probably just a character within my dreams. Maybe I’m just monologuing. Like I’m answering my own questions.

I can’t deny the possibility.

There is a sage within my dreams. An intellectual and wise being, like a god. That being guides my lost self. Dialoguing with me, guiding me, and sometimes, exposing me to the truth.

That was something born of the collective unconscious in order to teach and guide me.

That doctor, this alien, they might all be such things.

I am receiving a medical examination from this sage that all humans have in common.

I can’t seem to understand what’s going on anymore.

I don’t get anything.

“.....?”

A sound echoes.

It’s not a sound that shocks or surprises me. On the contrary, it’s a sound that has the capacity to calm. It’s the sound of a piano, a very gentle one.

When I look over, Sensei (as I’ve taken to calling him) is playing a piano with

his slimy hands. This room, which seems to be inside of the spaceship, has a piano hanging on the wall. A grand piano, the unblemished white of ivory.

Sensei, who I can see as nothing more than an alien, is facing the piano, giving a gentle performance. He seems to be sublimely striking the keys of the keyboard, which also look like those that might operate a computer.

The enumeration of simple sounds that are played. All countries have their own myths and music. A comfortable scale for human ears, with a rhythm. That tune, flowing through. It's a melody that stays with you, like an elegant lullaby.

I'm squatting in a corner of the room, almost as if I've collapsed.

A chair appears out of thin air, and I can sit comfortably in it. Right in front of me is a modest table. I take a seat at that table as white as bed sheets, and stop thinking.

My pulse quiets.

Like when one falls asleep.

Ahh, I've gotten so tired, I just want to rest for a bit.

Chapter 28 / To Die

Before I realize it, it seems I've fallen asleep.

Falling asleep while already in a dream sounds so strange, but it's not rare or anything, and I'm pretty used to it by now. What is a dream and what is real has gotten so vague, and it doesn't even really matter anymore. It feels so good, listening to the piano music, that I slowly begin to doze and nod off.

In that time, that teacher-like being notices and picks me up to move me. He takes me into a room connected to the piano room and gently lays me down on a bed that seems to be from the not-too-distant future.

Contrary to its coarse appearance, the bed is surprisingly snug, allowing me to quickly fall into a sound sleep.

In the soft, warm bed, I release my grip on consciousness.

It feels like the doctor pats my head for a bit, then pulls the futon covers over me.

Like he is protecting me. Like a father. Like an archetype or a major component of the heart. Like a revered father. It's a strong element that supports one's heart and mind, guiding and protecting them. I feel at ease and fall asleep.

On the verge of sleep, the conscious and unconscious mind meld together within the self, thinking.

It's not even a matter of thinking, for I understand.

Even as I avert my eyes, I know.

I know the truth, and yet I pretend not to see.

There have been so many hints. So many symbols lying about.

Things remembered. Things brought to the forefront of my mind. Things thrust upon me. All of it, pointing to one truth.

There, in the bed in that spaceship, in that place that is like the deepest depths of my dreams, I come face-to-face with it.

Like a baby chick waiting to awaken from within an egg.

In order to be born, I accept it, like a process in order to keep living. It took such a long time. But perhaps, in reality, it was the briefest of moments. Reach an agreement, face each other, and embrace. That's what I think I'm supposed to do, but I'm tired from all of this running around.

What I've been hiding is a small sorrow.

It's not something that would bring the world to tears or mar the pages of history. It's commonplace misery. Pain and suffering.

Yet for me as an individual, for the world of my dreams, my unconsciousness, it is the ultimate world-crumbling tragedy.

It really is something so trivial.

Human relationships that don't go well. A suffocating society. A bit of discord with one's family. Despair, envy, and resentment toward one's friends. Being unwell to the degree of having a cold. Lamentations over lacking talent or sense. Something of a minor complex.

I feel pain like anyone else does as I continue living my life.

Not enough to wish for death, but it is a genuine pain.

Even so, it feels like I've moved through life weathering a storm.

But something caused everything to fail and fall apart.

Maybe I was blessed with a child. I was pregnant. A new life resided within me. That was you. What I'm referring to as "you" was that child. Those swaying braids were a symbol of the umbilical cord. The fetus always slept, without opening her eyes. That's why your eyes were always closed — at least, that's what I think.

A fetus, inside its mother's stomach, is connected to her, sharing her dream.

Another person, connected.

That's why we both existed in the dream at the same time. Normally, we

would be switching out. As if the baton were passed, surface and hidden, conscious and unconscious, reality and dreams, they're all supposed to switch. I saw you. We exist separately yet had the same dream.

That's the trick.

At the very least, I get the feeling that that line of thinking makes some sort of sense.

But, you've died. You emerged, fell, and died. Maybe I had a miscarriage. I was unable to acknowledge it. Unable to accept it, I averted my eyes, held back those memories and that pain, sealed it away, and got distorted.

I ruptured and broke.

And then I got sick.

You.

You, to whom I never gave a name.

I was supposed to love you. The treasure I found after this painful, suffocating life. I gave you a hat and scarf as a gift. I wanted to walk off somewhere with you, hand-in-hand. I wanted to read picture books aloud to you, the both of us laughing together.

However, I cannot touch you.

Never again, for all eternity.

You emerged, fell, and died.

I can't even see you in my dreams anymore.

That is my conjecture.

My conclusion.

My interpretation.

The symbols scattered throughout the dreams, these things I've called Effects that carry a particular degree of impression, are gathered, making the heart whole. With all of the pieces that went missing filled in, I remember everything. Unable to handle it, my unconscious mind leapt out, was crushed and ruined, then died.

You’ve gone so far away.

Even if I reach out, my hand won’t reach you.

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, and all the kings in the world couldn’t put him together again. Not even God. The dreams fall, fall... slamming into the ground. Cracking into pieces like an egg, ending up all over the place. All that remains in my future is blood scattered about a gloomy darkness.

I wanted to live my life with you.

I was supposed to love you.

All I wanted was for you to come out of my belly, to be born. Once the umbilical cord is severed, we can no longer share our dreams.

Even that would have been fine. I wanted you to live, not in dreams, but in reality.

Even if I wasn’t in your dream, it would be fine.

But the one who disappeared was you.

All that’s left is me, with a giant hole in my belly and my heart.

Chapter 29 / To Live

Suddenly, I feel something very strange.

Before I realize it, I've fallen into a deep sleep. My consciousness is gradually swallowed up by the depths of darkness, my sense of comfort dyed in nothingness. I don't want to think anymore. I don't want to feel anymore. I crave the stillness of death. Even so.

It's like when that kindly doctor slowly lowered the lights, placing me in the dark, into the depths of my consciousness. I sense something, like sensing God. With a sixth sense. No good. At this rate, I won't be able to sleep. Instinct, the collective unconsciousness, cries out.

As if rising from the depths of the ocean, I awaken.

I regain my consciousness. Regain myself.

I react to the stimulus.

There is a sound. It's shrill, like a siren. Like when some abnormal situation has taken place. Is this not the end then? Swallowed up in darkness, returned to nothing, isn't that a fine ending too?

I just want to be left alone. No. I just want to be at peace, to lie in my bed. I don't want to feel anything else. I don't want to think. I don't want to feel any further stimulation.

I've bled dry, cried myself out, worn myself down.

However, a sound with the timbre of a siren or a shrieking alarm clock grows louder, as if trying to prod me along.

Like the blaring of an alarm. The continuation of the sound must mean that there are things still undone. Like it's too early to go to sleep, let consciousness slip away, and stop thinking.

I reluctantly sit up.

I rub my eyes, yawn, and stretch.

I look forward.

At this rate, I can't go to sleep.

I throw off the comforter and get out of bed.

It seems like some major crisis is taking place. In sync with the siren, a bright red light, seemingly to warn of something, is blinking on and off. It's like someone is sounding an evacuation warning. At the very least, something bad is happening.

This is no time to be sleeping.

Like pain itself visualized, that bright red light switches on and off with a brilliant flash. I become anxious and glance about my surroundings. My vision is unclear. The tremors are so great, I cannot stay standing. Whether the spaceship's erratic movement is to blame for my not being able to stand or not, I slip out into the room with the piano.

There, the siren's wail echoes on.

In that tiny room, that alien-like man who seems to be my archetype, or perhaps my shadow, is making a panicked commotion. He's rushing about. Even though an archetype should be a symbol of peace and calm. What is with this pitiful being?

No matter how much wisdom or brute strength he has, it's of no use. I get the feeling that the man is in a situation that nothing can be done about. All he can do is panic.

I'm dumbfounded.

I wonder what's happening.

It's enough of a tremor that it could shatter everything, including the dreams. The spaceship seems to be in the midst of falling. The hull ends up diagonal, then drops with a violent force.

Gravity seizes my body, leaving me unable to stand and causing my body to topple over.

Amidst the major shock, the alien-like Sensei collapses, his entire body hitting the piano.

It makes a sound I can't comprehend.

How useless, my shadow. Shadows have no mass, that's why they pose no actual threat once you turn away. It seems that's the kind of metaphor he embodies. My breathing is disrupted, I can't calm down, all I can do is pull myself together.

There's a huge impact.

A loud sound.

The spaceship must have crash-landed somewhere. I grasp this, as I have something of an overhead view. The spaceship has made a lively impact on a desolate planet. We've smashed into the ground, been crushed, and warped.

The rather firm spaceship was not broken up into pieces on impact though. I float in the air, bouncing between the ceiling and the floor, everything getting all mixed up. It feels like I could puke up all my insides. So much so that I'm surprised I'm not dead.

Finally, the spaceship stops.

The planet's surface has things resembling gravestones sticking out of it.

I can tell from looking out the window.

The spaceship has made an emergency landing on this vast, dead planet. There's nothing moving outside the window, yet the aftershocks from the crash cause us to shake.

I groan as I sit up. My whole body is tossed here and there, my blood flows out, and my bones feel as if they might break. It doesn't hurt, it doesn't hurt, it doesn't hurt... I tell myself over and over like always. I have to endure it.

Though people tell me it's not good to hold it in. You have to face pain and shock, process them, do all that you can to make that happen and be proactive. Maybe that's what we call courage. Such an unbelievable impetus is preparation for battle itself.

I move the alien doubled over in the floor aside with my foot and head for what looks like the spaceship's exit.

That alien and anything mysterious have no practical use. Escaping into

daydreams is futile. My arms and legs feel like they will be torn apart, my eyes squished, if I don't face the world.

There are steps leading outside.

I carefully descend the steps, not wanting to make the slightest mistake.

I leave the spaceship, that place that felt as comforting and safe as an egg.

Outside seems to be a barren wasteland, devoid of hope, just as it appeared from the window of the ship. There's nothing that looks useful, resembles a landmark, nothing. It's almost all desert. There are just rocks scattered everywhere... It's all barren earth.

There's something like a road before me. I follow it. Step by step, I gain courage. I step onto it. I walk along it. The ground is unsteady, it feels like if I get careless, I could fall. There doesn't seem to be a destination as far as the eye can see, and walking on and on with no goal is torturous.

But I have no choice but to proceed down the road.

The spaceship won't move anymore.

So I walk.

Maybe that's what it means to live.

Walking through a wasteland alone, with no guarantees.

It's the same for everyone, and I'm no exception. I've been running away this whole time, but that kind of naïveté is unforgivable now. That's the feeling that I get. I walk along, like a martyr.

A divine music note rings out.

It's not unpleasant.

It's like a neural drug that softens pain and makes one feel better. I take it as encouragement and traverse the never-ending path.

I can't find a nearby road. There are no doors, nor conveniences like teleportation. There's no one to take my hand and guide me either. I just walk on. Alone. On and on ahead.

In order to live.

I breathe, gaze ahead, step forward.

That’s all that I can do.

Until I experience this agony and move on, I won’t know what awaits me. There might be nothing. I might become exhausted, collapse, and let it end there.

The road gradually slopes, finally becoming steep.

No matter how I think about it, according to the laws of gravity, this hill is on an angle that shouldn’t exist and I should be falling backwards. Yet, somehow, I stand firm and walk on. I wipe away the sweat and, wheezing, continue this torturous labor. This labor of walking, of living.

I proceed steadily.

The scenery changes.

I can see the end.

Final Chapter / I Am Not in Your Dream

Finally, I reach the highest part of the hill.

The peak.

When I look behind me, it is a mountain of unbelievable height. It seems I have reached its highest point. There, the ground is a bit cracked. A small hole gapes there, spewing steam that seems to hint at good fortune and to invite sleep.

That hole looks like a crater. It looks like magma, the Earth's lifeforce itself, could come flowing out. On the other hand, it looks like it could lead to a mysterious and wondrous land. That hole really is so small, and save for a miracle, it does not seem like one could get inside. It is a realistic hole, one that won't open, no matter how much magic or mysticism one puts into it.

However, I try to go farther in. There's nowhere else to go, unless I fold myself up and proceed through this hole. If I lop off my appendages and my head, I could make myself smaller. No, concentrate myself. Like a jewel. I try to fold myself up, over and over, but nothing changes.

I try over and over.

Even though I feel like giving up, I muster my courage.

I devote myself to this exhausting effort.

I suddenly fall into the hole.

I can't make a decent landing, and I hit my backside hard. A violent pain causes me to shriek. But, it doesn't hurt, it doesn't. Endure, endure... I grind my teeth and withstand the impact and agony of what it feels like to be crushed.

I stand up.

There is a stairway right before me. It's a rusted, unreliable stairway that looks like it's on the verge of crumbling. It's constructed in a spiral, like DNA, and likely leads deep underground. It stretches farther in, deeper in.

I don’t know where it leads. However, it’s my one and only path. I can no longer turn back. I timidly descend. With each step, the stairs creak, echoing a disquieting sound. Like a dangerous walk across a tightrope.

Finally, the stairway snaps partway down, and I fall once more. This time, it’s not from that great of a height. I soon hit the ground, giving me no time to prepare my body for impact.

I feel like crying.

I sit up, then stand.

I’m in terrible state with my clothes dirtied and torn, but I’ve made it somehow. Maybe it’s the deepest part of the dream. Further, further, and further in still. It’s normally a place where one can’t reach. Surely, within the collective unconscious.

Numerous broken machines are kept here.

They’re huge machines, ones that look like trains. Just as the body is a vehicle for genes, for life. That’s what they appear to symbolize. The trains are completely worn down, with breakdowns and broken parts here and there. They’re vehicles that are broken down and, without serious repairs, will never move again.

They are heavily damaged mechanisms.

But, they’re still here.

I think as I walk along, dizzy, leaning against the machines for support.

They’re broken down. They’ve fallen ill, gotten tired, and seem ready to give up living. This is my heart, my mind, my life, in this very state. I wasn’t that strong of a vessel. I broke down, let off sparks, lived on, dragging along this husk in desperate need of repair.

However—

I think I have made a huge mistake. The vehicle is broken, but it’s still here. The one who decides whether or not it’s truly useless is me.

No, from the beginning, it was me myself.

This is my dream.

My unconscious.

Within my mind and heart.

The girl with the hat and scarf, those monochromatic sisters, that doctor, all of them are denizens of my dreams. My shadow selves. I can't speak about anything I don't know, but that doesn't mean that's all there is to the truth.

I tried to admonish, blame, and abandon my shadows — the antagonizers of my ego. Isn't that evasion? Isn't that running away? I miscarried my precious child, and she was lost. I fell ill. That's what I believed.

What if that weren't true?

What if it were just anxiety, the screams and cries of the shadows, of my unconscious mind? What if truth and reality were different?

What if it had just been a pregnancy riddled with anxiety — anxiety about whether or not I could successfully give birth, about whether I could properly love and care for her? I was afraid of miscarrying and losing my child. No, in that situation, my stomach would just get lighter. I would feel relieved somehow. That's all I thought.

If I had just quit from the start, I would have felt despair, but nothing worse.

In order to protect my heart and mind, I pretended not to see my own child, about to be born.

From the beginning, I resigned myself to your death and just let myself go on thinking that way.

How ridiculous. I am the worst. Of course, this is just my imagination. I no longer know the difference between right and wrong, or where the truth lies.

But, I want to believe it. From the very depths of ruin, it would be infinitely better.

At the same time, what if my imagination is correct— I was so sorry.

In my dreams, that girl has died over and over. You, who flew, fell, and died. I sacrificed you in order to protect my own heart and mind. I distanced myself,

pretended not to see, averted my eyes. I decided that it was preferable for you to die so I didn't have to feel pain. Because you were someone else. Because it didn't have anything to do with me. That's what I had begun to think.

Of course, unconsciously.

But that's too horrible. I regret it.

I'm so sorry I'm weak, and I gave up. I'm sorry. But— But you've been right here.

I look up. There is a large life form. It looks like a monster. A monster writhing and moaning in pain.....

This is the fruit of my distorted heart.

It looks like a fetus. A frail, dainty, and precious life, with no way to protect itself. Sealed away in the depths of the dream, in the deepest part of my mind, is you. I draw close to you. I apologize over and over, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I won't forget again. I won't seal you deep down here, pretending I don't see you. I won't let you feel lonely again. I'll be by your side. I draw the thing that looks like a fetus near. I hold you, feel your body heat.

It's warm.

I feel like I'm getting sleepy.

There are times where dreams have predicted reality.

Those could have been coincidences. Or perhaps it was instinct, peeking out statistically from the collective unconscious. Prophecies. Future predictions... So it could be possible that someday, I may have to see you in that absolute worst state, a future where you fly, fall, and die.

However, I will go to great lengths to make sure that doesn't happen.

I will be brave and draw you close.

I will protect you.

Until you disappear from my dreams, until you come forth from my belly, I will continue to draw you close like this.

I will liberate you, unharmed, so that you are no longer imprisoned in these dreams.

Someday, you and I will no longer be able to share a dream.

I will not be in your dream.

As you will not be in mine.

Because you'll be gone, at least from my dreams, and we'll bid farewell.

But, I will find you in reality.

I will hear your first newborn cries.

You will surely open your eyes and look at me.

And with a broad smile, I will say, "Good morning."

Original Game

Kikiyama — Creator of the free game Yume Nikki*.*

The game, created by Kikiyama, allows the player to walk around the fantastical setting inside someone's dreams. With no story or clear objective, the only thing clearly revealed to the player is the character's name. From that unique world view in the game, the users who have played the game have shared a variety of reactions, and even all these years after release, it continues to charm players.



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