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**The Moment  
When the Familiar  
Becomes Unfamiliar**

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# **The Moment When the Familiar Becomes Unfamiliar**

People like to define things. They want to know the world they live in. This desire stems from a fundamental human instinct and the wish to avoid danger in their environment. Here, the word “danger” doesn’t necessarily mean accidents or violence. Instead, it is more apt to say it refers to the unknown. As such, people are wary of ambiguity. Only those who are trained can suppress and endure their instincts.

What should I do if the definitions and norms I knew, the things I thought I understood, become useless? How can I reconnect myself with the world, as if floating in the air without gravity, separated from the world I knew? Through this writing, I want to answer these questions.



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## CHAPTER I

# The Trap of Rest

Here is someone who is caught in seemingly endless rest. He spends his time almost motionlessly on the space called the bed. To him, everything about eating, dressing, and sleeping feels excessive. He seems to have no hope of finding or achieving something outside. He avoided the outside world to a place where he could be physically safe, but even there, he is not completely secure. Vague fears about the future and what he once called his dreams torment him. I hope he can go out again and realize himself.

Here lies a person who is neither a child nor an adult, on a mattress covered with a yellow sheet that won't disappear no matter how much he washes it. He lies there, having faced the same questions countless times in his short life, lost the will to fight. He has lost his sense of self and is merely an organic object with a soft pedestal. This object denies both purpose and means. Therefore, it was an ambiguous organic mass, difficult to call a work of art. The only thing on Earth with such characteristics might be a 'rock.' But this object, unlike a rock, had to inevitably communicate with the outside to solve problems like food, clothing, and shelter. He had a 25-square-meter studio, but except for brief uses of the bathroom and kitchen necessary for survival, he spent days only on a mattress 140 cm wide and 190 cm long. There, what concerned him was an 8 cm wide and 15 cm long rectangular smartphone. He watched as much as possible with the least energy consumption. He saw people enjoying, trying to be funny, suffering, getting angry, eating, having sex, making friends, and more. In fact, it didn't matter what was on the small screen. What he wanted from the box was to trick himself into not recognizing his existence and fall asleep. He considered the gap between morning and night as pain. During that time, he stayed in a state of neither living, dying, nor sleeping. He couldn't choose anything. He would endure until his fridge was empty, then go to the market in front of his studio for another repetitive act. Although a short

walk, he cherished this moment. The air of different temperatures from inside stimulated his lungs refreshingly and tickled his brain. His skin rejoiced at feeling cold, hard metals like door handles and elevator buttons, different from the blanket he felt tired of. Thanks to the trivial but inevitable purpose of food, he felt momentarily connected to the people outside and wanted to go out more. He added a stimulating snack like ice cream to his basket, cheering for being outside to enjoy their civilization more in his cave. Of course, the next day he would regret realizing that this snack exceeded his daily energy consumption. He also distrusted the food he ate. He knew well that any unused calories would only become poison. He learned from a documentary on the small screen he was engrossed in that even healthy things could become poison and vice versa. Ironically, he was getting a lot of information without productivity, which could also become poison if it overflowed. If one's head is empty like a rock, one can forget oneself, but if there is too much information, one can clearly see one's situation. He was too smart and thoughtful compared to his unproductive acts, so he couldn't be as comfortable as a rock. He knew why he was lying down and how such behavior would harm his future self. Even when he tried to forget himself in his space separated from the world, time outside was flowing, and the obligations he had in the society outside would overwhelm him all at once, making his external life more difficult and further keeping him from getting



off the bed. To avoid this disaster, he had to go out and do his daily tasks one by one. But it was very difficult for him to leave his bed, and he had to fall asleep with guilt and fear of growing tasks after failing to escape. To him, home was not a place of rest but a refuge where he couldn't adapt to the outside, a space of illusion replacing what he couldn't achieve outside with something virtual. Realizing this, his home was the most comfortable place giving him pain like a torture chamber.

He woke up at 10 a.m. Although the alarm was set for 8 a.m., his skillful reflexes turned it off in his sleep without disturbing his rest. His relatively unused right eye remained shut, and his blood didn't flow fast enough to get him up. As usual, he felt like he was half-submerged in water. He didn't rush himself at what might be a late morning for others. To wake his still drowsy mind completely, he accessed YouTube on his phone, pouring various videos into his brain to wait for stimulation. After a few minutes, both eyes recovered from sleep, and he thought, 'Can I get up today?' 'If I don't get up by 11, I must wait for the next day on this bed.' 'Noon feels too late for anything, and after 1 p.m., my will fades, accepting this cozy space again.' 'I just want to avoid spending the day here.' He barely got up with a determination that might break anytime. His body, suddenly burdened with forgotten gravity, wanted to return to its place. He stood

up but felt overwhelmed, not knowing what to do. Naturally, everything has a certain rhythm and continuity. A rotating wheel continues to spin even without the driving force due to its previous action. Similarly, running is easier for a moving person with some momentum than stopping and starting again. But his rhythm and continuity had not just paused but collapsed, requiring much time to find an active rhythm and continuity again. He recalled a story about sharks. Sharks, the predators of the sea, had fins allowing fast and continuous swimming. However, due to their gill structure, if they didn't create water flow by moving forward, they couldn't breathe. He felt like a shark at the moment. No, since he wasn't a predator, maybe he was a tuna with similar gills. He saw himself as a can of tuna he ate with bread in the morning, struggling to regain a lost flow, feeling his achievement-oriented nature through his imagination. The evidence was his falling into depression leading to death if he didn't engage in productive activities continuously. He just couldn't be something. He had to be someone doing something valuable. But such ambitions and achievement-oriented nature were not drives towards success but parasites consuming him. This trait had once brought him progress and success, but now, in a state of achieving nothing, it was clear if he didn't meet this parasite's demands, he would be completely consumed. Eating the last bread piece with tuna oil, he resolved to act for achievement after this meal. Satisfied with his

self-motivation, he got up from the table but soon found himself back on the bed, making his previous resolution meaningless. During the meal, his brain briefly pondered reality, but once the reason for getting up was fulfilled, his prefrontal cortex's alertness was forgotten, and he lay down again. His full stomach after the meal was satisfied, and his whole body hinted it would be nice to be comfortable, whispering to his back and limbs, which easily succumbed to a slight temptation and brain's agitation, repressing him back on the bed. Thus, he felt ashamed of himself. "I want to die," he muttered to himself. He barely separated himself from the bed for the excuse of eating, but that effort was in vain, and he had to wait for the next meal to get up again. The continuity of stillness cleverly corroded his attempts to move. His mind was not free from this corrosion. He feared becoming a grotesque insect like in Franz Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' if he continued living like this. Fortunately, unlike that poor man, his big box was entirely his. No one dared to witness his 'silent, slow self-harm left to time.' He painfully realized that time, being something consumed by people, could harm oneself depending on how it was used, like a tool. Day by day, it became harder for him to leave the bed, and that direction never led to a good end. Gradually, the bed held him like a sticky trap with a sweet scent designed to catch insects.

On this day, too, he lay on the bed like another object. His eyes were open but not awake, neither asleep. Just as he thought he might merge with the bed and become inanimate today, suddenly, the whole room began to shake. At first, the cup on the desk wobbled, then the shelf beside the bed rattled, ready to spill everything onto him. His body, despite always lying down, quickly got up in disbelief. Without time to grab anything, he opened the door and ran out. As he left the room, he heard a loud, crashing noise behind him. It was definitely the sound of all his room's items losing balance and falling. He successfully escaped outside with other panicking people. He practically leaped down the stairs. Fortunately, his room was on the second floor, so it didn't take long to get outside. Looking at his room's window, he saw it collapse with a bigger crash. He felt relieved not to be trapped inside the desk. If he had chosen to stay, death would have surely approached him. The earthquake ended soon after, toppling trash cans and slightly shaking street signs, scaring people. People still feared but had the time to check their surroundings and themselves. Since the earthquake occurred at 5 a.m., few were properly dressed. Most were in their underwear. Some brave ones had half-hung T-shirts or gowns on their shoulders and necks. Our protagonist felt embarrassed about being more poorly dressed than others. But soon, he witnessed a more serious situation. Some rooms had collapsed due to the earthquake, and they were his



house, the neighboring house, and the house above his. Firefighters arrived shortly after to inspect the building's safety, concluding that the pillars of the collapsed rooms were unstable. They announced that everyone else could return to their rooms except the three unlucky ones. Only three rooms were neatly destroyed, and the others were okay for daily life. He didn't know what to do. Should he sue the building constructor? Where should he live in the meantime? What about the other two? As he hesitated in his underwear, a Chinese man angrily complained about suing the builder and took it out on a passing pigeon. He introduced himself to others as Wei. Wei lived on the third floor. He was an honor student who had never missed a day of school. His daily routine was to study at school, come home, and prepare for the next day's study, without any change. But after the earthquake, he couldn't go to school for the first time. He resented the natural disaster that occurred at 5 a.m. deeply. It felt like his entire way of life was taken away. Instead of being grateful for surviving, the future difficulties seemed greater. He felt his life pattern would turn him into a failure due to this unexpected event. He became restless, searching for someone to blame, contacting the landlord and unknown others. "Why was the house built like this?" "... "We could have died!" "... "What do you expect me to do now?" As others eavesdropped on his call, they introduced themselves to each other. "My name is Amelia. What's yours?" "I'm Ungbin." Yes, 'Ungbin,' the person who

almost became an object merging with the bed. Amelia introduced herself as coming from Scotland. Ungbin, in response, introduced himself as being from Korea. After the simple introductions, they felt ashamed. As time passed, people returned to their rooms, leaving the three with destroyed rooms barely covered with some fabric on the street. Wei disappeared somewhere as the naked people around vanished, finding it awkward to stand on the street. He would spend a lot of time dealing with his incident caused by the earthquake. Probably, he would try to regain himself after the earthquake. On the other hand, the disaster had the opposite effect on Ungbin. “Ungbin, what will you do now?” Amelia asked Ungbin. “I don’t know. I might be confused by the shock, but I actually feel energized. I feel somewhat relieved.” He was surprised by his unconsciousness. If he truly wanted to become inanimate, he could have accepted the ceiling falling on his head. He felt like he discovered another being within his body. His dormant instincts moved him, and he rejected the death he had once praised when it showed him mercy. While his consciousness was indecisively weighing between life and death, his unconsciousness already knew the answer. He felt free from the bed and his room. The physical erasure of his space allowed him to escape from it psychologically. He became grateful for the earthquake. Amelia found his reaction very intriguing. Usually, people viewed earthquakes like Wei, focusing on their negative impact on life. “You two, come here

quickly!” A man in a suit gathered the disaster survivors left on the street. He offered them a temporary empty room. He seemed to be one of the people Wei contacted by phone. Thanks to this, Ungbin and Amelia didn’t have to worry about being homeless. The neighbors also donated clothes. They quickly returned to civilization with people’s attention. Ungbin and Amelia quickly became close, sharing the same disaster and space. Of course, sharing the same space required them to discuss, agree, and understand each other. But these were novel experiences for Ungbin. When alone at home, he didn’t need to recognize himself. Without thinking about it, he could stay in his room. But with someone else, he felt his existence emphasized. He noticed the boundaries and differences between them. Differences in gender, appearance, behavior, habits, and thoughts became visible. He liked these differences. Thanks to her presence, he felt his own existence solidified. She had orange hair, playful freckles on her nose, moved agilely, and her shoulders were always confidently broad. Ungbin became grateful for the earthquake again. Thanks to the earthquake, he befriended a beautiful woman he wouldn’t have spoken to normally and could share a space with her. Though he gained a lot due to the earthquake, he also had to strive due to being thrown into the world. He needed jokes to converse, cared about his appearance, ate more cleanly and quietly, and cleaned up his mess. He surely tried

to behave like a person. This effort made him look like those walking outside.

Amelia found him to be a peculiar person. When she first met him, he treated her as if encountering a person for the first time. His gratitude for the earthquake rather than fear and worry left a deep impression on her. She also lost her room, but talking with him, her fear of the future strangely disappeared. Talking almost naked, she felt they had shown each other their true selves, feeling comfortable with him. The clothes she wore or the books, computers, and daily necessities she had at home might have helped her become who she was trying to be. But losing those and being left naked, with other illusions gone and primitive forms facing each other, she could savor a bit of freedom. The surrounding people whose homes weren't destroyed had a chance for a similar experience, but they chose to return to their routine, making it her unique experience. If she had talked to Wei instead of Ungbin, her disaster might have been like Wei's, a collapse of her efforts. But Ungbin viewed the earthquake as a settlement of the past. Thanks to him, she could value her small feelings instead of dismissing them as ridiculous. She had successfully used her major studied at university to get a job. But she couldn't find satisfaction in her work. Still, she had to stay at her job, unwilling to waste the time invested in getting it.

To maintain what she had built so far, she kept making safe choices despite dissatisfaction, preferring safety over new decisions. While living a boring, unsatisfying life, the earthquake destroyed her home, freeing her from the binds. She found her new roommate, Ungbin, amusing.

Meanwhile, the government provided disaster relief funds to Amelia and Ungbin, and the construction company paid a significant settlement. They sat across the new living room's table, pondering how to utilize their new start together. The near-death experience made them bold. Like some people, they decided to travel the world, start a new business, or study what they always wanted, regardless of who they were before. Such conversations made them happy for days. They felt like they were truly living life more than ever. One day, he met Wei on the street. Wei looked very upset, unlike Ungbin. "Hello, Mr. Wei. How have you been?" Ungbin asked. He wanted to express his gratitude for the unexpected benefit from Wei's complaints. Wei, initially wary of the stranger approaching, recognized Ungbin and replied. "Not well at all. I will definitely take revenge on those who destroyed my room. They ruined my life! I lost all my research that I had been working on for so long. If it weren't for the damn earthquake!" "Mr. Wei, I'm really sorry to hear that." "I need to get my research back. It's the reason I've been living, and without it, I can't live." "Aren't

you upset too? That you have to go through the trouble of getting back what you lost because of the earthquake! Now, I don't even know why I'm living." He almost yelled, pouring out his hardships. Ungbin, sympathizing with his feelings, made a hasty escape. He saw his former self in Wei's suffering. 'Why do I live?' That question had also made him lie in bed, losing his will. Meeting Wei made him slightly uneasy. Although he had changed, it seemed he left the bed not by choice but due to an unexpected event. Eventually, he went to find his old room. The corridor where his room was located looked tidy on the surface. Passing a few doors, he found the spot where his room used to be. The door was torn off, revealing the inside. Cold air flowed in through the broken walls and windows. His room looked strangely out of place in the seemingly ordinary corridor. Long strips of tape were the only thing blocking access and attention. He looked around, tore off the tape, and entered. Broken debris and damaged odds and ends were scattered everywhere. He searched for his belongings. They were all minimal items necessary for survival. Cups, forks, plates, a microwave, a fridge, clothes, a toothbrush, and soap were found, but all were broken and unusable. He wondered what they would become if they couldn't function. They seemed to resemble his former self. He recalled the place where he always lay and found the spot where the concrete ceiling had fallen. His bed was completely covered with the cold debris of the building. He thought about why he



returned here. Was it to prevent losing again because his current situation was too good? Was it to avoid another trap experience? He needed to confirm if his former self was dead there. He needed certainty that the experience wouldn't return to fully enjoy his happiness. Was the bed under the massive rubble also broken like the items he found? "The bed must be smashed down there." He felt relieved by the sight before him. He left after a short tribute, as if burying his past self there.

Even now, he can't give a clear answer. He might just be fooling himself into thinking he knows the answer. Perhaps he could be trapped in the bed again. But if he took the question 'why do I live?' as a signal to find a new self instead of losing his will, he might not succumb to the question. If he clung to things no longer valid like Wei and his past, he could become like them.





## CHAPTER I

# The Obsession of the Defeated Thorn

The defense mechanism that fails to protect itself from external stimuli strives to return to its original self. However, effort sometimes turns into obsession. Obsession breeds repetition, turning the doer into a machine. Those caught in this loop spend a long time in the prison they created with their monster. Facing this virtual entity, he gradually loses himself. To escape this situation, he must acknowledge and forgive his failure.

He gradually shrank to the point where others wouldn't notice. If someone who knew him saw him months later, they would notice the change. Unfortunately, he saw himself daily, making it hard to recognize his gradual change. One day, as if waking from sleep, he would notice the change. He sat still without moving. His eyes saw nothing, ears heard nothing, nose breathed without caring about the surrounding air. His mouth naturally didn't move as no one was beside him. He sometimes drew, but his movements were mechanical. If asked about the drawing, he would say it was a necessity to release the recurring thoughts in his head, not a willful desire. It was more like an unavoidable leak. His skin seemed merely the exterior of a building, and he felt like he existed somewhere inside that building. Nestled somewhere in his mind, he stared into space through his eyes. When I asked in passing, he said he was preparing. Through that conversation, I realized he was being chased by something. But what was he being chased by? He said he could never return to his original self after a single incident. He seemed to have retreated inside his body, avoiding contact with the outside after an incident forgotten by colleagues as mere gossip. Like a cocoon, he didn't move. No one knew what he would become when the hibernation ended. One day, he disappeared from his place. The cold winter air might have wiped out any trace of his warmth from his desk and chair. Fortunately, a notebook replaced his absence at the center of his desk.

I couldn't help but be drawn to it. I felt like his candle was flickering out. Reluctantly, I admitted that watching his slight tremor become a fragile change had become one of my small guilty pleasures. I was curious about what the flame had left behind. What would be in it? For a biological observer, the content of the notebook would surely be a blessing. If they discovered a tool to converse or eavesdrop on their subject, they would offer their entire fortune. I hurriedly looked around, fearing someone might take it, and put it in my jacket to take it home. Would I find answers to my questions about him in it? Or would I become more confused? Or worse, would I be cursed like him? I carefully brought the notebook home and opened it as if possessed. The following content is transcribed from his diary. There are no exact dates, so I couldn't tell when it was written. However, the separation of paragraphs suggests different days.



*One single hour of one day made me hate him. He was so different from me, so incomprehensible that I couldn't believe how he had lived so far. It annoyed me that we shared the same air in the same place for years. I had to stay with him at work. I thought about moving to another department, but it hurt my pride to think I had to leave because of him. Hating him made me feel everything he did with my eyes, ears, nose, and hands. Everything he did, said, ate, and any unfair act became unpleasant and incomprehensible. It was fascinating to discover that I could reject someone so strongly.*

*I often remember the days we fought. He was furious that day. He was busy justifying his anger afterward. He cited stories of people unrelated to him, starting from who knows when, to justify himself. He didn't seem to care if his words made sense. I was dumbfounded rather than understanding him. They say fights help you quickly grasp the true nature of your opponent and understand them better. But this fight made him more incomprehensible and an unpredictable element of anxiety.*

*Weeks passed, and my hatred grew into fear. It became much bigger and rougher than its original form, looking overwhelming to handle. It was always with me, at work and at home, and even existed in my head. After a while, everything related to it. My actions at work became constrained. My steps were either slow and cautious or hurried to avoid it. My body faced*

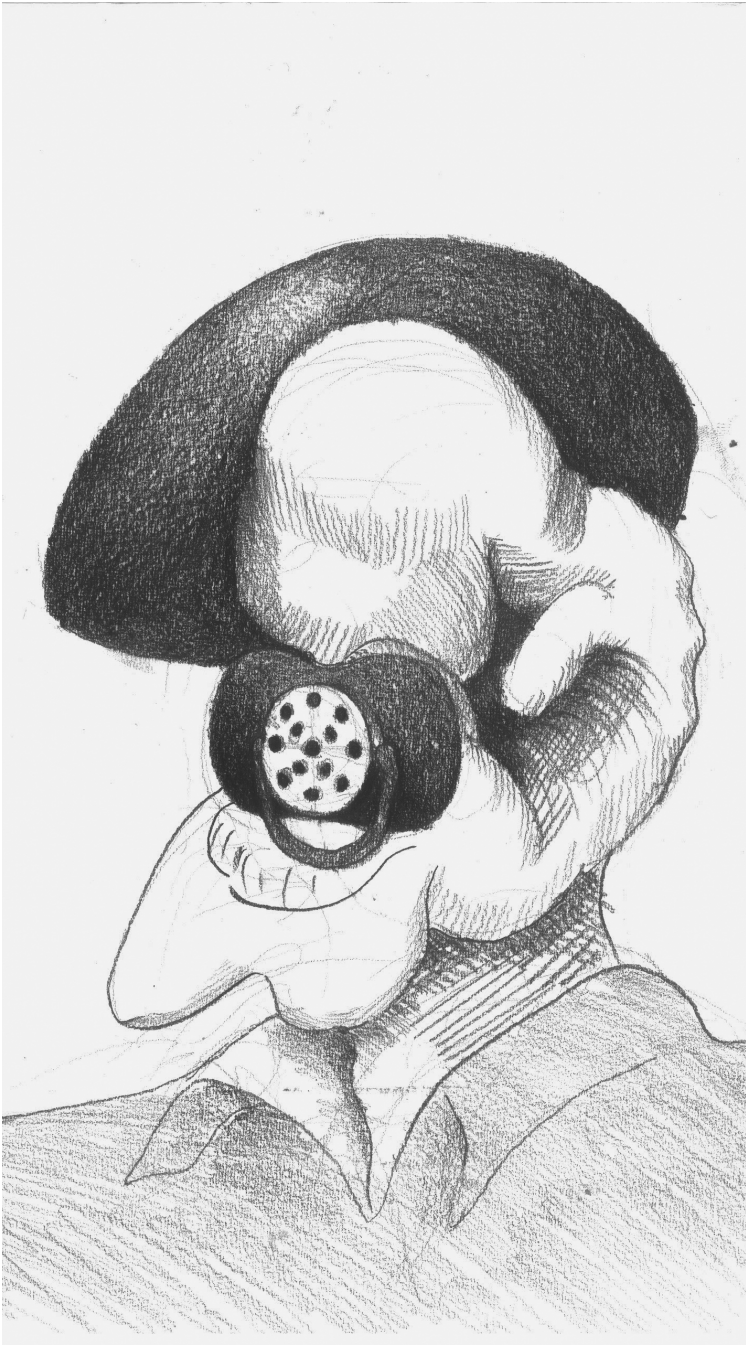
*the wall and corners to avoid sitting opposite it. My eyes and ears saw and heard nothing. My fingers refused to stretch out and wanted to retract into my body. My body hair stood on end at external contact but was too weak to fight. Sometimes, I found similarities or points of convergence with it, making me retch reflexively. Even without expelling anything tangible, the act felt necessary, like a ritual to expect something to come out of my body. I knew too well what this moment meant. I was becoming more like the object of my fear, losing myself. Losing everything I had built, my abilities, and my character, becoming similar to what I feared, was painful. I was being consumed by the monster I created. I lost the capacity to care for others, began to criticize them, my positive thoughts turned negative, my imagination dried up, and I lost interest in anything not essential for survival. My eyes no longer saw life but death.*

*I kept thinking about what I had lost. They had no form. They were more important than my hands, feet, eyes, mouth, stomach, and liver. Their value was intangible but as essential as my spine and heart. They were the foundation allowing me to exist and move in the world. Now they were expelled from my spine to my anus, from my heart to my mouth. Surely, there must be words for them: joy and anticipation of the world, curiosity, imagination, passion. But their absence made the space colder and emptier, revealing that something greater, beyond words, had vanished. Some might think their absence*

*isn't a significant loss, but this experience taught me they were the flame of my soul and sovereignty. What connects your 33 vertebrae into a single vertical line? What prevents the warmth from your heart from escaping, allowing you to look at others with warmth? Now, obsession and craving sprouted in my empty space. I became a phantom seeking to reclaim lost purity, a Don Quixote fighting an invisible monster.*

*Today, too, I tried to hide my existence as much as possible to protect myself from unexpected threats. My skin couldn't recognize touch, my mouth stayed shut unless necessary, my eyes gave up seeing, my ears refused to hear, my nose held its breath to avoid making a sound, and my limbs moved more by instinct than will, cooperating for survival without conscious effort. Despite being outside, all my senses were cut off, drawn inward, crushing my soul under pressure. I needed an outlet for the internal pressure. I began to draw with paper and pencil nearby, expressing emotions too difficult to articulate. Unlike the lively, curious drawings of childhood, my drawings were sudden eruptions of pressure. Still, drawing kept me from being destroyed by pressure, maintaining a suppressed state.*





*Finally, I seemed invisible to anyone. The bright daylight, the cat sprawled carelessly on the street soaking it up, the nameless charming woman ahead of her shadow, the relaxed security guard exchanging brief greetings during my commute, and my coworkers joking around—all felt alien. I was fighting the most secretive, quiet war beside them, a war without a place for me in their peaceful, mundane lives. Sharing physical space but with such different occurrences made my suffering more acute, knowing it wouldn't be understood. In a localized war, peers and the environment understand your pain, but my solitary, silent battle expected no empathy. The ease of invisibility meant no one cared if I worked or not. Even the plump supervisor, sharp when scolding subordinates, no longer visited my desk. I neither helped nor meddled in others' matters, making my existence more forgettable but keeping my workload manageable. Comfort mixed with bitterness, soon overwhelmed by comfort, numbing my emotions. With my actions affecting reality dwindling, my name and place at work faded. This subtle liberation gave me an unconscious sense of release. Today, heading to the storage for more paper, I walked the dark, narrow corridor. Midway, the storeroom door opened, and the source of my internal monster appeared suddenly. I was so shocked that every hair stood on end, looking for a mouse hole to escape. If there had been one, I'd have squeezed my body into it, or hoped for a divine miracle to turn me into a small, quick cockroach. Realizing the impossibility, I prepared to retreat, but he was already close, and I pressed against the wall, praying he'd pass by. He did, not even noticing*

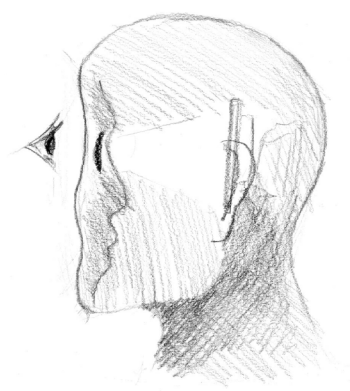
*me. Usually, we notice small bugs on walls, reacting to kill or be horrified, but he didn't see me. My muscles and organs, clutching air too tightly, finally exhaled. His ignorance freed me from fearing him. He couldn't see me anymore.*

This is the part I read on the day I stole his notebook, after returning home from work, my guilt turning into a twisted sense of satisfaction as I justified my boldness. Earlier, I had asserted that he wasn't aware of his own changes. However, I never imagined he would record his state in such meticulous detail. Embarrassingly, at the time, instead of worrying about him or investigating who had driven him to this point, I was more astonished at how he could experience so much while remaining as still as a rock. The thought of him suppressing his presence, shrinking, and being crushed until he became invisible sent chills down my spine. After reading the last part that day, I nervously looked around. What if he had discovered my theft, followed me home, and was now reading the diary with me on my bed? Hastily, I grabbed the baseball bat from the corner of my closet and swung it around, poking at various spots: the bed, the desk, beside the bookshelf, atop the trash can in the corner, even in front of the sexy star poster from the 90s. I threatened the air with my bat, but no "ouch" sound was heard. Just in case, I thought about any spaces I had yet to check and proceeded to lock the door and windows. "Yes, let's

draw the curtains too; he could be watching me from outside,” I said loudly, pretending I knew all his moves, as I briskly and confidently closed the curtains. That night, I wondered whether I should read the diary again. The vague fear that I might disappear like him or that he might harm me the next day lingered. It reminded me of childhood days when I was tormented by the monster under my bed or in the closet. Back then, I could just rush to my parents’ room next door and squeeze between my two strong allies if I felt such foreboding. But now, I no longer lived with them, and I was too big to fit between them. Surely, if I tried that now, my dependable allies would send me to a psychiatric ward. So, I checked all the locked spaces, hugged the baseball bat like a lover, left all the lights on in the bedroom, and fell asleep. Of course, I locked the eerie, chilling diary in the desk drawer and felt proud of not losing the drawer key.

For a while, I couldn’t open that drawer. I was too busy worrying if someone was following me, or if I would start seeing monsters or become invisible like him. I avoided actions that might accelerate that transformation. The stationery and knick-knacks inside the drawer were also inadvertently sealed away, so I had to buy new ones from a nearby store. Damn, I couldn’t even feel comfortable at work. I had no idea what had happened to him. I strained my eyes, hoping to see him faintly, but he wasn’t visible,

so I mimicked his cautious steps and movements at work (fearing a sudden attack from behind would stop my heart). My behavior must have seemed very interesting to my coworkers. I startled easily whenever they spoke to me. Fortunately, it seemed I was still visible to them. I couldn't continue living like this. Work was unproductive due to constantly looking around, and I had to take excessively long detours to avoid passing his old spot. My actions in the break room became gossip material, leading to absurd speculations. I had to read the notebook to the end to find out what happened to him or where he might be now. As soon as work ended, I rushed home, ignoring anyone who might have tried to stop me. I swung my fists in the air upon entering to confirm I was alone, then went into my bedroom. I locked the windows and door, hesitated for a moment, and then opened the desk drawer. Thankfully, the notebook was still there, waiting quietly. Unlike my previous curiosity-driven perusal, this time I opened it with a solemn resolve. The following content is transcribed from the notebook.



*As time passed, I no longer cared about the person who created the monster. The monster had grown so large it was vastly different from him. Its head touched the ceiling, hair spread all over the room, with vivid and pitch-black colors—this creature could not be him. I had nurtured the seed he planted, suffering more than he intended. For a while, the monster was more threatening than he was, as it fed on my regrets and frustrations. It scolded me for the wasted time spent thinking about him, showing me a list of things I could have done, thus chastising me. The endless possibilities of what could have been, which might have existed, also pained me. The monster distanced me further from reality. I became fainter.*

*Is this freedom or a curse? Should I be happy or sad? I became invisible to people. So, am I alive? Doesn't someone need to acknowledge my existence for it to matter? Even the things I knew required agreement and recognition to hold meaning. Things unrelated to my survival turned into illusions. Trust in what once seemed obvious disappeared. The monster no longer attacked me but instilled doubt in everything I saw and heard. 'Country A attacked Country B,' 'Country B attacked first,' 'Person X embezzled,' 'No, Person Y committed a bigger crime,' 'People have the freedom to do Y,' 'No, that would ruin everything,' 'We must live harmoniously,' etc. I realized there were always opposing or different opinions. In between, I no longer knew what to believe. What is truth and what is a lie? Although he was the opposite of me, he too existed in the same*

*space. Is there anyone who can tell us what justice is in the space we occupy? The doubt sown by the monster also appeared in the mirror I looked at. I even felt faint to myself. My reflection in the mirror looked like smoke trapped in a soap bubble, ready to disappear at any moment. The sensation in my hands and feet had long gone. Fearful of accidentally bumping into someone or getting pricked by sharp corners, I moved very cautiously around my house and office. It's truly ironic. Today's world is busy defining and categorizing themselves, finding groups they fit into, based on who they are or whom they are sexually attracted to, but I struggle to recall who I am. I envy their ability to declare who they are. Or maybe they too, like me, feared disappearing from the world and defined and categorized themselves to clarify their forms. Perhaps they too experienced faintness like me?*

*The fight with him pushed me out into the world. The current world is a chaotic space where various definitions compete for dominance. In the face of this, what I had built, learned, and believed in became useless. I only struggled, hoping to return to the world I knew. My instinct to return turned into an obsession that attacked me. This must be the monster lingering around me. I went to work to remind myself of my existence, but it only certified that I was an alien object in the outside world. I will now disappear completely. The monster can no longer touch me. Like ancient humans naming the unknown to give it form, I will enter my new land and do as they did.*



The notebook ended here. I don't know where he went. But he's definitely not in my room or workplace. It seems he left to create his world. I believed he wouldn't bother me anymore. Though the idea of him becoming invisible to people and moving to another realm seemed unbelievable, the relief from not fearing him anymore provided a vague basis for believing he went to another world. My selfish curiosity drove me to steal and read his notebook. I guess leaving it at work, not taking it to his home or new place, was his way of seeking some understanding and empathy for his perspective.



