

Unforgettable'

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There are two reasons why a person faces the sea.
One, to enjoy a slice of shine in the sea like children bubbling over in the beach.
The other, to brush the dust of memory like an old man who misses old days, staring at the shine quietly.
Those lead to only one meaning though they do not seem to overlap. It's a rebirth.
I face myself to change tomorrow, a vague day into something certain.
That is the meaning of a rebirth.

I had a very sweet girlfriend when I was 18.
After she left, I knew the meaning of gentleness for the first time and also a true pain of loss. After she left, how many times did I depend too much on her, doubt her, envy her and keep on telling lies until I realized it is love?
I wonder whether a nobody like me could have given something to her who was struggling in the daily life in those days. Giving something is arrogant conceit. It is nothing but self-satisfaction.

I had been thinking about such a thing.
However, I guess what she saw in me was because I had nothing. That's why she tried to see something in me. Perhaps she found a slight possibility in me, a guy filled with ambiguous, unstable tomorrow. But I wasted days depending too much on her gentleness.
Now I finally can convey how I felt in those days when we met.

Lukewarm wind licked the cheek. The wind went down once and quietly swelled the bottom of a curtain. Then it passed Key sprawling, grazing his cheek and slid down over a stain standing out on the wall by a closet.
The tip of Kaori's nails which looks like floating through a sheet turned like being pushed slightly with the wind.
The edge of her pedicure shone thinly in the room having an ambiguous frame with a glimmer which is not continuous shining weakly. It was calm light.

"What time is it?"
"Well, maybe five or so..."

Kei left the sofa when he answered Kaori so, came near the window, and pulled the curtains back slowly. A blue silence has extended to the outside. The sky in Shinjuku where the night is dragged is still covered with dark and dull blue, and has sunk deeply. The entire town is covered with a thin veil of silence and full energies are inhaled completely. Glossy heat at night that would be a minute ago was not found anywhere.

Kaori hauled the edge of the blanket in to the mouth impatiently and watched Kei's back, twisting the half of her body. The hoarse voice showing her tiredness has been heard from Kei's back.
"Such a short time! One week!"
She stretched out her arm to the table by the side to pick up her cellular phone and pulled it to the blanket. The faint light has loomed up roundly in the back.
"As I told you. No mail from Mr.Ohsawa. "
She told it in the muffled voice and pulled the blanket back. She dimly looked at the other side of the window for a while, and took her deep sigh. The sigh sank in the light shadow on a twisted sheet.

Kaori got her feet down from the bed, and came on tiptoe near Kei by the window while keeping an eye on not to step on the record on the floor.
The record jackets that Kaori spread has extended to all over the floor of Kei's room which has ten meters on all sides. Kaori stepped aside Kei's side in a way of leaping aside them.
In Kei's room, about ten scrapped business cars were left when the room was a warehouse before. But all were taken away by his father through the due procedure within last year.

Kaori put her chin on Kei's shoulder and combed up the ruffled hair by the tip of a finger repeatedly. After that, his shoulders were wrapped by her arms which were slowly turned to his nape. The soft warmth has spread over Kei's back. Kaori's shallow sigh was often passed in his ear and it slipped down passing Kei's chest.

Kaori touched Kei's shoulder in her lips, and loosened the arms slowly. After that she came near the table on the window side, and fell on her knees. She shut the eyelids to "babys-breath" in a plastic bottle and felt the fragrance.

Kaori's profile was inhaled into the white, soft light from the window and melted each other on the wall. Her white skin and a small white petal were encompassed with the streamed white silence and recalled Kei's memory quietly. Her profile overlapped with his deceased mother's one which he saw when he was very little.

Kaori slowly left the table and walked on the tiptoe toward the bathroom. A floor board often grated high and it made a pale shade in her back even whiter.

Kei lightly rubbed his eyelid leaning over the crosspiece in the window. The View still swayed. Daytime and night was completely reversed in one week he spent with Kaori. A sense of time was out of step.

Daytime was skillfully replaced with night only by shutting and opening just one thick curtain. Two people looked for the depth of night in the daytime and the moonlight in the middle of night. Kei definitely thought that he knew not only Kaori's appearances but also her inner part to some extent in complicated seven days in such a way.

The corner of the room echoed with the sound of the shower. It was heard sparsely like drizzle, and fell again on the floor echoing toward the ceiling. Then it scattered to pieces, and disappeared. A lump of heat which has lurked in Kei's heart has weakened gradually while hearing that kind of reflected sound so many times. It obscured Kei's view further.

Kei looked at the outside of the window again. The fragment of the cloud dyed silver hung over a valley of two buildings that looked small on the edge of the town. The day dawned bright. The bustle of the night sky in Tokyo settled at a breath toward the night in Shinjuku. The contemptuous light and shade and the vague color was swept away by daybreak.

Kei cast his eyes down to cluttered jackets. Most of the records pulled out from the record rack and displayed by Kaori were Blue Note, and all were beautiful designs. On each piece of jackets, there was a sketch which Kei drew with a pencil.

As soon as a gentle wind came unexpectedly, the sketches made a dry sound all at once, and scattered widely. Several sketches were swept away by the wind growing stronger. They were brought to the corner of the room, and fell along the wall.

"Looks like body shampoo ran out."

Key took a new bottle out of the lower space under the sink. Kaori crooked her arm and received it on the palm. Kaori had impish laughter in a moment and pulled Kei close to her, grasping him by the neck. Kei's T-shirt got wet at once. The shower beat from the hair to the knees. Kaori turned the arm to Kei's shoulder, let the forehead come close to him, and smiled. She slowly bent the knees and sat down on an uncovered concrete surface, while holding him firmly,

Kei got a cold feel on the thigh. Kaori's small palm was slowly passed over Kei's chest many times. Kori wreathed her arms around Kei's neck. Then she smiled and said, "I'm sorry I told a lie...."

Kei shook the neck lightly in Kaori's arms and slid the waist along the flow of the water sucked into the drain ditch. After that, he quietly brought the cheek around Kaori's breasts. Soft warmth soaked

into the cheek. He shut the eyes and heard Kaori's small laughter, straining his ears. Kaori's feeble laughter quietly creeps up from a dark night of pouring rain. Kei thinly opened the eyelid, and shut at once. He breathed in quietly a sweet, nostalgic smell around Kaori's soft breasts so as not to be noticed by Kaori. The smell gently overlapped with mother's nostalgic smile.

"You are trembling."

The more Kei inhaled a calm smell from Kaori's skin, the more Kei's whole body trembled little by little. Touching the fragment of the relief made the outline of mother in Kei's memory much clearer. Kei was crying unnoticed when mother's smile lurked for a long time revived slowly in his mind. Kei's tears went along the corners of his eyes in a line. Kaori dropped the word quietly while wiping it with the tips of her right fingers.

"It is all right."

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On the other sides of Kei's widely open eyes, there was Kaori's smile. It was a calm, warm smile like wrapping slowly sweeping the inside of Kei's heart away. Kei got his hands down on the concrete floor being hold by her. Then he quietly stared at Kaori's smile fighting against the cold feeling from the tips of fingers. The stripe of a blue, white light from the window falls gradually, and it stays on Kaori's cheek.

The pale light made the thin mist and it seemed to draw him in to the far place somewhere that Kei did not know, and Kei opened his eyes. He wiped the stream of tears down the corner of his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Any girl who slept with me said that I was a kind of weird guy because I was always trembling. I thought it was natural. But Kaori ..."

Kei crouched down trembling in her breasts. Kaori smoothed down his hair in silence. The mother's soft memory overlapped with the soft touch of her fingers, and his heart was wrung almost torn off.

"Recently I found that I tremble when I draw, too. Feel like tremble feebly inside of the finger, not the tip of the finger. You know the story that Van Gogh cut off his ear?"

Kaori dropped the glance to Kei after she looked up at the ceiling a minute.

"Yeah, I know. It's famous. I've read about the story when I was a student. So it might be ambiguous, but the critic says that he just wanted to cut off the sound of the external world. He seems to have been mentally unstable, too."

Kei's eyelid trembled a little hearing Kaori's vague words.

"Maybe it might be right. But I think that there were surely other reasons. Kaori mysteriously looked into Kei's eyes.

"Gogh found another character in himself. Another consciousness dimly comes up to the surface when he drowse looking at the object quietly with the calm eyes. But an accurate sense of distance is necessary between himself in the consciousness and himself in the reality. The sense of distance should be moderate, not too far and not too close."

Kei drew in his chin once, stopped talking a minute and continued again.

"Gogh noticed the sense. That's why he wanted kind of pain to keep the consciousness back to the reality, that is, to keep the sense of the distance somehow."

The sound of the shower became distant from Kaori's ear a moment. Kaori smiled to distract Kei's attention.

"I can't understand that kind of sense. You always have such a sense, Kei?"

Kei turned away his eyes from Kaori and nodded. White paint spills over the bare concrete. This place was the one he gave up painting.

"Kaori... "

What?"

"Do you believe what I told you?"

Kaori's arms interrupted Kei's voice which sounded gloomy. Her arms slid down and drew Kei's shoulder quietly.

When Kaori's soft breast touched Kei's cheek again, Kaori nodded small, and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

It was a night seven days ago. Kaori and Kei arranged to meet at the bar where they can look down at the intersection in Shibuya. The bar was on the eighth floor. The wall itself was round and glass-lined and flashes of neon lamps in the town got entangled incessantly over

the floor in the dim inside of the bar. Kei showed up in the bar being 30 minutes behind time on purpose. The bar was crowded with people because it was Friday night.

Kaori was sitting in a stool at the counter by the window, seeing the outside dimly. She slowly stood up when she noticed a sign of Kei who stood next to Kaori. It was a smooth, faultless motion, kind of getting used to the bar.

"Mr. Kitami?"

Kei forgot to greet and was looking up at Kaori's eyes. Her eyes were several centimeters up from Kei's ones. Kei did not notice it in her photograph on SNS, which was taken with her friends in the event site. The stripe of light that stacked to her stockings falls smoothly from the inside of her tightened skirt, and was collected beautifully on the tip of pointed heels. The heels shone momentarily in the coming neon light. A sweet smell has fallen under Kei's nose.

"I am taller. I should have worn pumps?"

Kaori raised the heel lightly and looked down the feet. Then she smiled ducking her head. A calm smile swayed in the clear black pupil of her slit eyes. When a waiter came, Kaori got the heels down and looked into the eyes of Kei who was standing vacantly. Silver earrings gleamed in the view of Kei who hung his head.

"The same one, please. He is under age." Kaori said so with a smile.

Gross shone smoothly with the smile that floated on the mouth. The soft warmth of Kaori's body appeared and disappeared in the other side of her cold feeling, and it was comfortable for Kei.

The bartender left a light smile and moved to a man and a woman who sat next to them.

Kei sat on a stool sticking his hand into his pocket of 501 jeans and asked Kaori without hesitation, looking down at the silent night view of Shibuya.

"Why you wanted to meet me?"

"Why did you come here?" Kaori said taking out her cellular phone of her handbag on the counter.

Kei kept silent to her cool tone. Then he looked around. At an oval table behind him, men wearing suits and women who seemed to have finished their works were chatting loudly. It was the laughter which suits Friday night and a nuisance for Kei today.

"I was just interested in you, I mean if you are really the one as shown in the photo."

"You mean if I am pretty or not? Well, I also came here to confirm that you are actually a cool guy."

"You look down on me?"

"It is you who look down on."

Kaori looked at her open cellular phone for a while and looked at Kei. Her cool gaze was like controlling Kei's answer, not like conceit or sarcasm.

"You wanted to meet me because I am pretty. That's the same reason as other guys who left messages on my page. I didn't want to meet you if you have just the only reason."

Kaori reached out the tips of fingers for a glass and drew it slowly. When the glass was shifted, a blue line of neon intersected diagonally at a rim of the glass. A light circle in clear blue extended to the table.

“When I wrote I wanted to know more music that exists in his background, you only taught me seriously and politely. I saw your photo on your page linked and thought that you

“So, are you really going to meet him?”

When Kei interrupted in a low voice, Kaori slowly drew the jaw and smiled. The chill of air-conditioning duct got down on Kei’s flushed chest and his T-shirt swelled in it. The smell of the sweat stank.

Kaori closed her eyes and tried to push her waist back slowly. The slit of her tight skirt swelled, and it distorted smoothly. The breast of her blouse shook faintly and a white line of her lingerie shone lightly through the transparent material.

“I’ve not received his mail on my cellular phone yet. There is not a reply though I sent just a little a few days ago thinking that I will be asked about it for sure. But I think that he received it because it didn’t return to me by an error. Perhaps you will believe me if you read his mail. He said that his office is at Omotesando and he always beats a keyboard at a cafe of coffee specialty on the first floor.”

Kaori Uemura has mentioned how it came about in exchanging several e-mails with Kei. After she graduated from the department of literature of the university which is famous for the English language and literature course in Chiyoda Ward, she chose a temporary job, not a permanent job on purpose. When Kei asked the reason, she said that it is not likely that she could meet her longing artist if she becomes stable after finding a permanent job and live a stereotyped life. Her smiling face told me what she wanted to say. In addition, her face proudly told that a qualification for a secretary is also the first class. It seems to be useful for some other work in order to be employed in a big event.

Kaori had believed that she surely could get connections some time and meet the artist whom she had been yearning for a long time as long as she manages a showy, big event as a staff in such an industry. She met a man editor at an event of a major publisher which will be under the umbrella of the TV station which looks toward the port. He didn’t have personal acquaintances with the artist, but he introduced a producer of a radio program which treated the artist.

But the time when Kaori met the producer was three months ago, and there was not a chance to meet with him at all afterwards. Moreover, she has heard nothing from him since, either.

Kei received a glass directly from a bartender and took a sip. It was a sweet, transparent cocktail and soaked into his flushing body.

"You like drawing?"

The photo of Kei registered in SNS is the one Yurika took. They spent together last summer. Kei missed the last train and compelled to sit on the stairs at the station because Naoya had a spree at the club in a backstreet of Aoyama.

The photo caught Kei's pose in a moment. It showed that he took a palm-sized sketchbook out of a back pocket of 501 jeans, and tried to draw a plastic bottle with a label peeled off, which rolled to him. Kei registered in SNS with an introduction from Naoya Osugi.

Naoya was a best friend from his childhood. On that day he turned back to deliver CDR which he forgot to pass it to Yurika. At the moment Naoya opened the door of the club, two people were kissing in a casual manner. Yurika's eyes which turned on Kei looked cool though Naoya was in a fluster. Kei also closed the door keeping cool. Yurika was a first girlfriend for Naoya and also a woman for him. Although Naoya talked with his best friend, Kei over Yurika, it was Kei to rob her first.

Kei did not understand why Yurika took a photo of Kei's profile and sent it with a silent mail on purpose one week later. It was the last time Yurika contacted Kei and Kei had not seen Naoya. Kei did not know the reason why Yurika followed Kei and came to the station where the last train had left, leaving Naoya at the club.

Kei's eyes finally rested on Kaori as red neon ran on his forehead. Kei was dead drunk and abstracted for a while, looking down at the lights and the crowd of the town that came and went in silent. His glance was too uncertain to trace slowly tracks of stains on the old wall, not turned on Kaori.

Kaori was staring at Kei with steady eyes. The look was like probing into Kei's absent-mind to find out what he was thinking. A long silence which did not seem to melt for a long time continued for a while. Kaori looked away from Kei and took a sip of cocktail. Then Kaori said with a steady smile.

"Well, I feel like I've been alone here."

"I'm sorry...."

"I thought you are such a boy."

"Such a boy? Might be right. I'm six years younger than you."

Kaori said once again with a smile, collecting herself.

"Do you like drawing?"

"How about you? You smile naturally at a guy pointing his camera at you?"

Kaori stopped smiling and bit her lower lip. She gave a sulky face and her cheeks stiffened. After taking a big deep breath, she looked at the intricate illumination again. Any color shone clearly over the white, clear, softly- swollen cheeks.

"I ...wanted to know music more."

"That's all." she added, and took a black hemp jacket on the back of a chair. After she suddenly stood up, a series of the high sound of high heels was heard twice in Kei's ears.

Kaori passed through at a quick pace between crowded tables. A couple at a table near the exit looked back to see how things go when Kaori was paying the bill. Kei ran after Kaori ignoring their eyes.

The lukewarm chill hung in the air at the narrow landing of the building. Kaori was looking up a lamp of a descending elevator silently, with only her eyes turned up. Kei blocked Kaori's way in a fluster.

"Sorry, I apologize. Today is the first time I met you...."

"You don't to have to."

"Oh, I almost forgot" Kaori said, and opened her handbag. Several paperbacks without the book jackets and a white vanity bag were casually thrown

in it.

"This is for you."

It was "The Stranger" by Camus. The color of the cover has faded out to yellow. It was a book Kei had finished reading it at 15 during the summer vacation. Kei received it behind him and stuck it into a pocket of 501 jeans. Then he got aggressive, stepping back to avoid a door which was open.

"Hey, I am not Meursault."

"Oh, you know him? As I thought, you are a good reader. A painter knows everything?"

Kaori said so without giving eyes to Kei and looked at the lights through the window. He always felt that the lights in Shibuya is somewhat different from Shinjyuku, perhaps a kind of different colors are mixed with the lights in Shibuya. After Kei looked at Kaori's suit appearance again, he cast his eyes down to the 501 jeans and the dirty Converse sneakers. Obviously there was no point of contact between Kaori and Kei. It is very hard to find things in common. I am totally different creature, different from those who enjoy drinking at a cozy bar. Kei heaved a deep sigh to himself and looked at Kaori who fell silent.

Kaori's forelock swayed feebly while going down stairs. Her precocious look or manner that existed a little while ago had disappeared completely. Kei stared her in the profile. The surface of black pupil swells with the thin transparent film, and the lights of the town, which were inhaled, wavers dimly in the back of her eyes. Kei's back was stuck out hard. Kei tried to touch the tip of her finger which turned white gripping the handrail hard. But he suddenly stopped it. Kaori's lip was thinly open.

"You don't understand anything ... But you are saucy as if you know everything ... you made me wait for 30 minutes and ... You don't think about how I felt when I came here, not even trying to think ... Get me irritated ...Really disgusting!"

Kaori's lip trembled feebly. She turned round slowly and hold Kei's chin up. The line of shredded tears thinly extended over Kaori's cheeks. The lights of Shibuya break lengthwise and flow over her shaking hair. Kaori's muffled breath fell over Kei's eyelid and stayed in his chest through her lips, and a silence followed.

Her tears looked so sweet. The lines of lights fly up, overlapping each other and fluttering over her

trembling hair.

Kaori slowly kept Kei's shoulder from her and wiped tears with the back of her hand. She looked like an innocent girl who has no cares.

"I just wanted to meet you. To know more about you."

"Why so much?"

"Why? You need such a reason?"

Kaori said after she breathed hard and took heart.

"Well, maybe, a guy of your age could not understand words. Let me take to your room."

Kei's room was on a small hill where you could look down over Shinjyuku. A signboard of the food company was still put inclined on the entrance of Kei's room which had remodeled an old warehouse, and the iron plate was rust-colored in parts.

Kei repainted the building all white with his father's mediation. The building had been used as the warehouse of a family restaurant, the subsidiary of the company his father was working for. Therefore, it was almost like a shelf, not the kitchen and there were just one naked gas stove, a small kettle, and a cheap frying-pan made in France. There was no bathtub in a shower room, and a simple washroom and a lavatory were installed.

Kaori came to the room dubiously seeing the building, and kissed Kei lightly when the door closed. After that, she stepped and entered the back of the room at once. Kaori told Kei to turn on the light, laughing in the high voice as an old board creaked.

The room with the full light echoed with Kaori's alluring voice. As it was a warehouse, the ceiling is far higher and wider than that in a standard apartment. In the left side of the room, there is a white bed which Kei painted and a wooden white desk picked up at the garbage space. All these looked small in the spacious room. The full wall on the right side was buried to a ceiling with record racks. The wall of several thousand records looked down at Kaori.

Kaori approached slowly and traced it putting up her index finger. Every time they walked, the flooring creaked and made a small sound.

"How many you've got?"

"Don't know."

Kei went to the kitchen at the corner of the room through the living room, and poured water into a kettle and put it on the stove.

"Can I pull out one piece?"

"Be sure to give it back."

It was "Blue" by Joni Mitchell that Kaori pulled out. It is an album Kei hated. Kaori turned the jacket over, and ran her eyes over English letters on it for a while. Then she pulled out the record from the back. Kei's sketch made a light sound at the same time and fell down. It was a small scrap of a memo pad covered with dust for a long time on his father's desk.

"Your sketch?"

Kei nodded pouring the hot water into a cup. Kaori took a sip of coffee passed by Kei and put the cup on a small table at the center. Then she came near to the record rack again and pulled out politely one by one, and displayed every piece on the floor.

Kaori asked Kei arranging them.

"There are sketches in these?"

"Maybe."

"All of them?"

Kaori stopped arranging them and turned around to Kei. Kei nodded, putting his mouth to the lip of the cup.

"Can I look at the sketches?"

"If I say "No", you would stop?"

Kaori put her heels at the wall and said, dropping her shoulders. Her small feet which are contrary to her height looked sweet to Kei.

"Why do you always fly at me?"

"Be sure to get them back."

Kaori politely pulled out the sketches from the records laid out in the endmost line at the window, pointing the lips, and put them on the jackets. Kaori returned to the center of the room, repeating the action, and looked at the spread sketches slowly.

The sketches were copies of the jackets. Some of them were on scraps of a notebook, the back of a leaflet, and the one drawn on a scrap of a direct mail that came to his parents' place. Though the qualities, the color, the size of paper varied, they were well-balanced with his light touch of pencil. When viewed from a distance, they looked a huge work which could be displayed casually at the entrance of a gallery where young people often

visit.

Kaori undid the knees she hold on the floor, and leaked the voice of admiration. She took a cup in both hands.

“Wow! That’s great! But, it seems to go beyond just a copy of the jacket.”

“Actually a music jacket is made by a designer. That means artist's intention does not exist. So, if I revise the album as the record jacket, I would draw in that way. I just wanted to show how I draw.

Lights go through a window pane and shone on the room. John Lennon is facing the piano in a poster with a paper tape peeled off. Kei was enchanted by his singing posture in a monochrome.

Kei was gazing the poster for a while, and his knee suddenly got warm. He felt Kaori's right hand. She dropped words, looking at the spread jackets dimly without seeing Kei.

“But.....Why?”

Kei watched Kaori whose voice sounded heavy. A light shadow fell on her cheek.

"All pictures of women in the jackets are their profiles.”

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Kei twisted half the body from the bed, and stretched the arm to the foot of the table. Joints of the body were heavy. He pulled out his cellular phone from the back of 501 jeans rolled down the floor untidily, and turned on the power. Then he kept half an eye on the time and the date. After that, he called up the calendar to confirm the colored days. It's certain that he has spent with Kaori whole week.

Kei opened e-mail. Among advertisements of goods and spam subjects, there were some mails in different colors, which seemed to be sent from Rika, a friend at a prep school. Kei was lost in thought for a while, wondering when Rika had stolen his address from Kei's cellular phone. But he did not recall anything as a point of contact with Rika, except for school hours when he was asleep.

《You've been absent for five days. A cold? Or a girl?》

Kei looked at the ceiling for a while after shaking the head from side to side lightly, and then massaged the corners of the eyes with the tip of a finger. Kei felt listless, heavy and a kind of feverish around temples. Kei did not answer her mail and deleted all the mails at once after checking them. Then he threw the phone away to a blanket at his feet.

Heat hung in the air on the road. Kei fixed his eyes on range of buildings beyond a billboard which shows a word "loan" in red. As for a group of low buildings at the east exit in Shinjuku, the outline was always vague. Kei thought that low buildings standing in an orderly line at the east exit always looked fumigated, compared with those at the west exit towering strongly to the clear blue sky. It did not come from heat haze at midsummer. The breath exhaled from people passing by, gets tangled slowly and rubs each other, becomes invisible dirt from the hands and makes a drift all over the place

Kei felt that he was inhaling the powdered heat parched by asphalt every time he walked. Kei felt a shiver go down his spine, thinking that he also will become a part of their lump some day in spending days repeatedly.

Kei unconsciously hid the breath. He shut the mouth tight like putting the flushing body under water. Then he found his way out of some horns disregarding a signal. At the moment he got to a median, his cellular phone vibrated in the back pocket of 501. He looked at the unregistered numbers for a while without opening the phone. The letter "M" on the monitor is blinking. Kei opened it in silence.

"Watch out! Let's go across a crosswalk by following rules."

It was Rika's voice. Kei got sick of her innocent voice. The heat over the asphalt suddenly increased. Rika jumping up and waving hands, behind the crowd flowing without a break in his back, caught Kei's eye when Kei looked about him.

Kei said to Rika who looked high-spirited on the display.

"When did you steal my number?"

"You know, you are always sleeping."

Kei was disgusted at her and said like spitting it out.

"Delete it without fail."

Kei talked to Rika on the phone. Then the figure, "3" began to light on the display of the phone. Rika said in fluster, "Key, I'll introduce my friend. She is cute. I'll connect her with us. Hold on!"

Kei talked to Rika's smiling face on the display while crossing the road diagonally.

"It's none of your business!"

Kei shut the phone. From the bustle at the back, Rika's voice gradually became loud to stop Kei and approached.

Rika has been following Kei about since the class in April started. A prep school was almost near a boys' school, and girls in such an atmosphere were like precious ceramics. Some boys seemed to make advances to an active, cheerful girl, Rika, but she was not interested in them and kept sitting next to Kei single mindedly. There was a reason for that, but actually it meant nothing to Kei.

It was the time when he was not able to become familiar with a new classroom yet, and sat on the window seat for the time being. Most of the seats in the classroom were already occupied. Rika entered the classroom late and happened to seat next to Kei.

Rika looked into Kei's sketch selfishly by way of a greeting. The back of a pigeon raising its head outside of the window was drawn on the sketch. Rika asked Kei who she had met the first time to draw her without the slightest hesitation. Somehow Kei made his automatic pencil run because her attitude was too natural and uncontrived. Rika lost the word for a while looking at the picture finished up within a minute.

Then she dropped a word.

"It's me? So beautiful...."

Rika deliberately patted the line of a finished picture by the tip of a finger. The glance that she had dropped had the warmth of a little girl. But at the next moment Kei was disgusted at her words.

"Won't you draw much better? Give color to it."

Kei never accept any invitation from Rika since then. Rika kept talking about a new club opened near the intersection at Roppongi or a live house opened today and a nameless band that will become a hit in the future performs or there is a wonderful, popular bar which opened recently at a building constructed in Nishi-Azabu recently. Rika kept asking Kei to go to such places at night, but she was actually a coward. Kei spent every weekends coming to Tokyo with Naoya in their high-school days and made whoopee until next morning. Even if Kei spent happy time as a diversion of youth, he was seized with a wave of weariness doubly next morning. Kei was already worn out by it and also feared being overawed. Kei hated being confused by a pleasure of one night.

After a good sleep at the first lecture, Kei stepped over a desk and left the classroom. On the way, from the back he heard Rika's voice to stop him, but he went out of the preschool disregarding it.

Father's back figure crossed Kei's mind when he saw a businessman wiping sweat of his brow in the intersection distorted by heat.

It was a day of April when he was 15 years old. A gentle wind was blowing. Kei was called to an old coffee shop which was just next to the head office of the company in Otemachi where his father was working for.

"These are for you."

Father said so in a few words and gave one credit card and a brand-new cellular phone on a dirty table with a circle of coffee stain. Kei took them a little later after father left. A cold feel

was transmitted to the tip of his finger. A smell of rust hung in the air from the inside of the portable, precise equipment which had no flaw. Kei inhaled the smell deeply and grasped it.

Kei took out iPod from the pocket and screwed the headphone into the ear while being hit around the waist by the hot wind that had fallen vertically along the wall of the building. The familiar bustle of town faded away at the moment when the back of the eardrum trembled, and the scenery changed.

The undulation of “Killer cars” quickens Kei's steps and the chain of the heat surrounded around the ankle is slowly undone. The sluggish voice of Thom Yorke rippled widely the stagnant crowd coming and going. The ripple becomes smaller and smaller to the breath of Kei running with short steps, focuses toward one point, becomes a line from small spots and hurts the scenery he passed. The scenery is like the thin glass scraped with a small pebble repeatedly. The color of the town faded out as Kei quickens his steps and gets out of breath.

The feel in the way of giving way to the monochrome was comfortable to Kei. Kei had touched music in this way for a long time. Erasing the meaning of his presence and merging him into the flowing scenery. This way eased his gloomy feeling to some extent, too. Kei felt at ease unnoticed by walking thus restlessly in the town, being unconscious of himself at present and himself hereafter. But another thought crossed his mind on the other hand. By any chance I might value this scenery filled with boredom. Everyone belongs to one of these sceneries and never run away even if he wants to get away from tedious days. Though he understands this, he values every days. In the corner of mind he still might have an instinctive hold on leaving him quietly somewhere in the dull scenery. He might expect a little somewhere in the familiar scenery and want to belong to it like choosing the way to a halfway preschool with no definite object to go.

But the lines of the window stuck on a building certainly goes straight, crosses each other all over the town, runs after the crowd of the flowing people endlessly and surrounds it. A stable standard of the society is shown in the bunch of the transparent lines. An enclosure of definite ideal standard that looks justice. If you are not tightened by the collar of the ideal hung mutually and spend disregarding the standard shown each other, the lines coils around the foot, and hangs you at once. He felt he would get stiff in a moment and be set straight until his breath stops if he was seized with only one thing.

Rika's white T-shirt blocked and stopped just in front of Kei who was walking looking down. Kei looked up and saw Rika's white teeth shining on her suntanned face.

"Where are you going?"

"None of your business."

"Secondhand record shop or bookstore again?"

Kei sighed heavily to the word. He turned around to Rika whose eyes were sparkling and said to her. Her T-shirt was dazzlingly white.

"Don't follow me."

"Why do you always look for secondhand goods?"

"They don't have lousy noise like you."

Rika didn't mind Kei's tone at all and said,

“How did you get to know her? The reason why you took five days off school was her, not a cold, right? I saw you two. Just the time when you were getting on a taxi at the intersection in Shibuya last Friday night. You know, that place stands out. Kei, you made love with her that day? I doubt her. She looks so smart.”

In a hurried crowd, Rika shouted cheerfully to Kei's back. Kei thought of Kaori while walking because Rika just his age mentioned Kaori. Kei did not feel the difference of six years at all through the talk with Kaori. Besides there was little difference between Kei and Kaori as for an understanding of music, a view about pictures and favorite books they had read.

But it is Kei's view and not necessarily Kaori's view. By any chance, Kaori might think that Kei is just a boy younger, innocent and sulky like Rika mentions. Actually they made a fuss at a first meeting.

Kei had hesitation about chic fashion that looks like a grown-up, still he didn't hate it. But it is only Kei's impression. Kaori might hate his 501 jeans. It is quite out of the question to put on Converse sneakers with torn laces. Just spending one week together might be a little staying out late at night and be no sense for a woman like Kaori.

Kei stopped and opened the cellular phone. What would Kaori say if I conveyed my feeling to Kaori?

A series of shrill horns rebounded to the wall of the building.

Kei vertically looked up at the building in the back turning around. A series of windows of sheer buildings were blurred right and left momentarily, and the stagnant clouds were flowing low at an end. Right under the Kei's view, there was Rika, keeping some distance from Kei. Kei slowly went through the crowd and said to Rika keeping silent, with her head down,

“How about tea? I'll treat you”

Rika's eyes shone dazzlingly. She was suddenly in a gay mood, changing her expression totally and put her arm around Kei's back. Kei brushed it away in silent

Kei knew Rika's father. It is because he found the name of Sanjo on the corner the front page of a financial paper lined up at a bookstore where he had stopped at several weeks ago. It was a small company dealing with import materials, started from a small store in Itabashi, and Rika's father, the second generation of the store, developed it to the whole country little by little and finally made it to be listed.

Kei was able to imagine a big existence of Rika's father to some extent from her cheerful attitude, frank way of speaking and careless attitude about trifling matters though her father's photograph did not appear in the paper.

"Now I got. You were really rich."

Rika nodded holding a straw in her mouth. It was an agreeable, obedient reaction. The light reflected from the opposite building is diffused through the glass and makes a circle of light on her head. Kei talked unusually, being fed up with the oily smell of fast food a little.

"I thought it was strange because you've got Chanel sports bag.

"Why?"

“If a lot of money was paid for such a bag, a leather bag would usually be chosen?

Like others do, ah? ”

Rika kept silent for a while pop-eyed. And she said with only her eyes turned up, raising the

chin slowly from a paper cup of cola,

“Kei, you are really interesting. You know, anybody usually doesn’t mind such a matter.”

“You are wrong. You don’t mind it because you are rich”

Rika leaned toward Kei over the table, impressed with him more and more though he thought she would show a bitter face, offended with him.

”C’mon, this is our much-awaited first date. Let’s have a nice drink.”

“No, it’s not a date.”

"Stop talking about my father! By the way, what does your father do?"

Kei looked down the street through the glass. The crowd was moving silently in the sweltering heat. It seemed to Kei that the bustle through the glass looked coagulated like a plastic board.

"An office worker?"

Kei shook his head.

Rika turned her eyes round mysteriously, and picked up all occupational categories seen on the street.

Businessman, garbage man, taxi driver, home delivery service man, storekeeper of bookstore and hooligan distributing tissue.... Kei nodded none of them.

Rika got irritated and pout her lips.

"So which one?"

Kei said to Rika, leaving the seat with a cup finished off.

"What does it matter?"

Rika looked up at Kei’s profile for a while. She was absent-minded. Her clam eyes looked like Kaori’s somewhere and replaced precocious ones. Girls might have such a moment ...

Kei sometimes thought about it, but it disappeared at once. Rika joked in a usual way.

“Kei, why do you act like a bad guy so much? Well, you look cute, I mean, not cool.

Kei stood up disregarding Rika’s words completely. While pushing the heavy door of the shop, Kei looked back on his father’s cold profile at looking down at little Kei at his mother’s funeral, together with the image of anemic businessmen coming and going at Shinjuku restlessly. His father looked absent-minded somewhere as if the funeral had nothing to do with him.

Kei stopped feeling the stuffy heat, and looked back on Rika waving nonchalantly. Then he went back and sat next to Rika again.

Kei took Mac book sleeping out of a drawer of the desk and called it with Enter key. Opening the application program of the radio station with the right hand, Key shut the drawer with the other hand. In the moment it was shut, the thin cover of the book “The stranger” given by Kaori was caught in the drawer and broke short.

There are 30,000 of those who come in the event place on Sunday, and Kaori who was completely late for Kei's room looked discouraged a little as she noticed that the program was already in the last stage. She lost her strength from the fork that pokes salad somehow. Kaori smiled keeping up appearance, remarking “You are a good cook of potato soup.” Kei opened the lid of volvic wrenching and took a sip. It was too chilled to vibrate the core of the head.

《This program has always been broadcast videotape recording and it is called program auto which is equal to an automatic pilot of an airplane. In fact, Sixty minutes of today's program was all sent by hand power. In a word, it is live. There is a reason for it. Today I've got a message from my friend who is always in charge of this program. The message is for a girl. But I must say she is a fan of me. She is here because I'm here....Well it's quite complex. Anyway, listen to this. I hope she is listening now.》

The artist, MC of the program talked in joke a little, but the tone sounded somewhat provocative. After that, the sound of touching keyboards several times was faintly heard from the speaker. The sound of rubbing papers each other sometimes appeared in a higher place.

Kei felt for the switch of Mac on the table with his fingers and pushed it up, feeling Kaori's glance. Kaori's spoon stopped in air, and her glance flowed slowly after a while. Kaori was quietly watching the top and bottom of the sound wave which was produced by the application.

《I met you three times. At the first time, you told me with sparkling eyes that your dream is to meet the artist openly. But it was a boring publishing memorial party and it seemed to me that your voice sounded dark somewhat though your expression was bright. I wondered why this girl was quiet talking about her dream. There was a shadow in your words although eyes were sparkling. I was very anxious about that. Therefore I wanted to meet you again. At that time, I could not leave my office. So I asked you to come to Omotesando. I feel sorry for that.... 》

The air of the room waved faintly. Kei turned his eyes away from Kaori's profile. The pale light of the moon falls giving out clear light on the floor at the window. The light was so tranquil and beautiful as if it would never end and stay there.

《At the second time we met, I was really tired because I had not slept for two days or so. Then I just wanted to meet you. But you were talking feverishly about a guy six years younger than you. You said that the guy looked kind of crooked, but he was actually very obedient and gentle....But sometimes you found the cool part in him. It was a feeling like shutting himself, not you and throwing off him ... It is just like me at the time...You smiled saying that. Your eyes were very calm and clear when you were talking about him.》

Kaori left the table and sat on the floor. Kei stole a glance at a profile of Kaori who was sitting down holding the knees. The glance stuck to one point of the floor. Kaori's cheek was

thinly wet in the bluish white light. Kei could not feeling that there is something he had not known yet in Kaori, seeing the transparent, wet film that had extended on her cheek. Kei wanted to learn the meaning of tears. One water drop stuck on a “volvic” bottle slipped down slowly and diagonally.

I still doubted that you might be just an annoying fan who wanted to meet the artist. I thought the time when I introduce her to the artist would be the end for us. When I met you third time, I told you seriously. We met thus because there are personal connections. Certainly personal connections are very important to work in this world. But as a result of connections being forwarded, not only trashy programs had increased but also instant artists had appeared.

Essential parts of musicians were left and how will musicians be promoted? Artists used to gather to a man of talent. A talent brought personal connections. But today personal connections are first. Many requests for introducing a new face in my program come. Not only the request comes but also they present their bodies. Men and women alike. And they left at the same speed as they came. I did not want to be concerned and even swallowed. Therefore, I had to ascertain various things. And I had a doubt about you. I am really sorry » .

Kei’s cellular phone on the bed vibrated. It was Rika.

《Do you hear me? 》

Kei did not answer, sat on the bed, and watched Kaori's back. Kaori who is taller than Kei trembles like a little girl. Any woman might return to a girl at a time like this. Kei looked at the display of the phone lying down on the bed.

Ryo Osawa added the word, “And.....” hesitating in a moment.

《I have a wife. And I love her. My kid has just reached his third birthday quite recently. Of course I love him. But while living in a busy life, what I had in my mind was your smile you showed me every time we met. It was a soft, innocent smile. I noticed I smile naturally when you crossed my mind. I want to meet you. I sincerely think so. But I would not love you like I love my family. Sill I want to meet you... You told you will go to his outdoor live. I will be waiting for you at the back door. 》

Kei looked away from the display. He jumped out of bed and took a sip of “volvic” on the table. Then he asked behind Kaori, "You want some?"

Kaori shook her head looking down.

It seemed her swaying hair has made a small sound. From the outside of the window, a cheerful voice of man and woman who had got drunk rolled into the corner of a room, mixed with a hackneyed commercial of whisky. .

"So what will you do?"

Kaori shook her head right and left like saying that she had no idea and fell silent again. A soft night breeze came unexpectedly from the window that opened a little and shakes the hem of the curtain.

Kaori took her cellular phone from the bag on the floor and stared at it. Dim light stayed in Kaori's eyes. It flutters so feebly as if it would go out being blown.

Kaori faintly vibrated the throat a minute, and said.

“Well.....anyway I call him.”

"You had better not"

“Why?”

“Did you hear what he said?”

Kaori's eyelid swelled in red.

Kei sat down at the table and poked a salad as if nothing particular happened. He felt that the weight of the fork has increased.

"He said he will be waiting for you, right?"

Kei continued to talk to Kaori who had been unconscious.

"Seems to me he would not answer your call or mail.... Perhaps he is supposed to meet you and then talk. If he wants an answer from you at once, he would have already sent you mail or the phone would have rung first."

Kei couldn't believe his talkativeness. Kei was talking as if it was not his business, though Kaori, Kei's senior, was frightened like a little girl.

Kei thought that he did not get involved in Kaori who should be an important person for him. And he left the chair, saying "So....."

"What did you tell him about me?"

Kaori's glance cut the sky in a moment and fell on the floor. Then she fell silent for a while. She opened the mouth slowly, and her eyes were turned on the outside of the window. The clouds that soaked up neon light in Shinjuku were stagnant low.

"Nothing..."

"You told that I am a gentle boy faking a twisted personality."

“It's just a figure of speech.”

“What I want to say is not that. I didn't write anything twisted in the mails to you. Well. I actually wrote about musicians in detail, so I might be kind. But the day I was twisted and had a dispute with you is only one night at Shibuya. And it was almost one week ago, right?”

The cellular phone vibrated in Kei's palm. It was a mail from Rika.

《Listening ? 》

After a while,

《I wonder what he is thinking. 》

Kei watched a profile of Kaori who was biting her lower lip, stealing a glance at the display so that Kaori would not notice it. Kaori stood up taking a handbag on the floor suddenly.

Kaori's eyes looked wet through her flowing hair.

Kei slowly started to talk after a moment of silence.

"I wonder I've been thinking too much...."

"Thinking what?"

“Kaori, isn't it strange? Did you see him recently?”

Kaori thought for a while. Then she gave words toward Kei's head, holding the jacket on the chair.

“Just once I've met him... I wonder why Osawa-san is telling such a lie".

Kei was sunk in thought while watching the light over the table, turning his eyes away from Kaori. It's sure that Kei has spent with Kaori for seven nights. On one of those days he returned to Kaori's room in Setagaya to take some documents for the event and underwear for a few days. But Kei completely forgot about what day of the week it happened. It was the

same as other two days. Kaori talked that she was supposed to have a drink with her friend, Saki, at the bar where she arranged to meet Kei in Shibuya. It was the second time Kei doubted.

But it was past 11 o' clock when Kaori returned to Kei's room that night. Kei doubted that Kaori spent the third night with Osawa. That day a guy of a publisher who introduced Osawa to Kaori asked her to come to a party by all means. Kaori participated in it reluctantly, taking care not to reject it rashly. But it is possible for them to meet in the daytime if they wish to meet, not only three nights.

Kei forcibly turned away the doubts which came to mind and disappeared repeatedly. It seemed to be meaningless even if he questions her closely now. Before that, Kei felt that Osawa's words made the meaning of Kaori's existence clear. Kei threw a closer, strange question at Kaori, driving away thoughts which tangled again.

"I guess his wife is listening to this program too."

"You don't know, Kei?" Kaori said, trying to put on her jacket.

Kei listened to Kaori's cool voice.

"Writer's wife doesn't read her husband's book."

"Producers really like showy directions."

Rika had a seat next to Ken. Then she took a laptop out of her bag, opened and handed it before Kei. Some circles of lights had fallen through the window of a fast-food shop, with lots of fingerprints stains, overlapped each other and wrapped roundly the Enter key Rika tapped

There were various comments regarding the affair of last night. Kei accessed the browser address shown. It was from FM station he was working for.

"Some of the comments are really disgusting. Besides the minority opinions are outstanding. How vexing!"

Kei's eyes have already followed them. Most of them were negative ones like a private use of public radio wave (This opinion is too ordinary.) or narcissism which exists in any time. But some favorable opinions also caught his eye like "This artist does it coolly. That's why I like him."

Kei put his coffee cup back to him and asked Rika who blew up a small bag of straw into a ceiling.

"Who is in the spotlight?"

Rika put her finger on the display and slid it smoothly, holding a straw in her mouth. It was a little below the center.

《I don't mind how hard I will be blamed. I just want to have such a hard time.》

"That's her, isn't it?"

"No way. Kaori has been busy for the event."

Rika kept silent all of a sudden. After a while she said, rocking a glass of Coke to make ice sound,

"She is Kaori.....I see, and a receptionist, now I've got...."

Kei clack his tongue in his mind. He tried to be vague about such personal backgrounds of Kaori when he consulted with Rika.

Kei supposed that Rika would get disappointed knowing about Kaori. But she looked very cool, more cheerful than a little while ago, then said,

“Why don’t you put an end? She is not a good match. I mean, unbalance...and she is older than you, right? Much older...”

Kei was thinking of last night, ignoring Rika’s words. Rika was shaking her head, getting into the rhythm of flashy 60’s that flows down from a ceiling speaker over the long and narrow counter. Kei talked to Rika.

“It would be filled with a lot of people in an instant if he talks about such a matter at a radio station, I guess. I mean “the back door”.”

“Right, many people will come. There would not be confusion, though. But I guess few people know him. Except Kaori.”

Someone passed behind Kei and the hot wind came from an open door at exit. Kei got out in a flurry, feeling a faint scent of Kaori in the heat that cut the chill.

There was a hustle and bustle of Shinjuku that had been unchanged.

Rika said, “What’s the matter?” and tried to chase Kei. But Kei ignored her and came backed to the store in a hurry and looked over the inside of the store. In the long, narrow store, there were some round tables and circling around them, a group of collage students who seem to have a meeting. A woman in a suit like Kaori or a man looks like an office worker with a tie was not found.

Kei told Rika that nothing mattered. Rika was shoveling French fries into her mouth without a break. Then Kei’s cellular phone vibrated. Kei took it behind him. “Kaori” in alphabet appeared in the display.

“Won’t you come to the hall?”

Rika was about to utter from a mouth filled with potatoes and Kei hastily covered his right hand to her mouth. Rika’s soft lips tickled Kei’s palm.

“OK! Where should I go?”

“At the bottom of steps to TV station, not the front door of the event hall. I will be right there, perhaps a little past nine.”

In the middle of the conversation, the cellular phone vibrated again and Kei looked at the display. It indicated “3” that showed a three-way call. Kei pushed the button silently to block it, being aware that it was a call from his father.

Kei listened to Kaori through the cellular phone, being swayed by the chill from an air-duct. It sounded the sordid bustle of a city like Shinjuku, but there would be little differences in the bustle of Tokyo. Kei answered, “OK.” and continued to talk.

“Where are you now?”

“I’m taking a break.”

Kaori said to Kei being relieved. Kaori’s voice sounded a little heavy in the bustle.

“I’m waiting.”

The harbor at night was seen from steps of a building facing to the port. The lights of town sway on the water like a transparent lake and reflect on the darkness silently. A line of lights sent out from the window of a building across the river absorbs the outline and reaches the dark waves. In the white belt of lights that extended horizontally, particles of lights crystallized twinkling. The scene of light particles breathing sparsely, smashed by the deep stillness of night, was more beautiful than Kei pictured.

“Waited long?”

Kaori’s clothes were always simple, though she was involved with big events organized by TV station. “Simple” does not mean “shabby”. It seemed to me that she has some suits in a same style and wears rotating them. In Kei’s room, there were some similar thin white blouses, black stockings, glossy patent leather high heels and also leather black high heels that were put in each shoe case. Kaori leaped up her eyes and mumbled that she could spend with Kei for a week, while putting all of them in a closet in the corner of the room. Kei has seldom seen bland clothes that other girls of her age have. Things Kei noticed were only Danna Karan hemp jacket and Prada leather heels. Those were not that expensive, thinking of her income. Kei thought that they were rather cheap.

Therefore Kei thought that Kaori’s figure of walking seemed vivacious and more beautiful than other girls, perhaps, thanks to her silhouette. Kei has asked Kaori about it. Kaori smiled softly, put her hand on the cheek of Kei lying next to her and said modestly, “Thank you.”

When Kei and Kaori met in Sibuya, office workers behind Kaori rested their gaze on her at the counter as if they drank too much. A sharp chin, moderately stretched shoulders that look healthy, the swell of breasts that make a deep shadow on a blouse, a tight skirt that stuck to the hourglass waist, all of them to toes wrapped with thin, black stockings, elegantly stayed in heels.....

Those made Kei feel superior somewhat, but anxiety was much larger than that. Since her decent messages in e-mails were unsuitable for him, Kei could not remove his unsteady mind until the first night with Kaori. Kei understood that Osawa was attracted to a girl like Kaori. If Kei asked her about love for a guy with a wife and child, how would Kaori deny it? But Kei was irritated with himself since he could ask her about that. It’s frustrating and bitter sweet feelings well up in him as he bites his back tooth. Kaori’s smile before Kei was tenderer, Kei seemed to have shut his mouth harder.

Kaori sat down before Kei who rested himself at stairs, then smiled, pushing back her tips of hair, tousled by a night breeze, with her right hand.

“Not that long. I was just strolling.”

Kei said standing up. Then Kaori handed over a paper bag before Kei.

“Let’s have sandwiches, looking at night view. I made at a back room.”

Kaori ran out to the spreading night view, taking Kei’s hand abruptly, saying,

”Come along on!”

Kaori removed wrapping carefully and handed it to Kei at the bench where the sound of the waves were heard right there. The distorted white moon fell on the other side of a steel fence along the sidewalk.

Kei took off the lid of coffee cup and handed it to Kaori. Kaori said, making her black eyes bulged with pleasant surprise,” Thank you.” Kaori’s murmur sounded like being melted into the faint smell of tide. It overlapped her clear eyes and filled Kei’s heart. For a second, a flash across the river twinkled in the darkness and the sound of dark waves died away. Then Kaori nodded silently.

“I wanted to eat in this way some day. I used to pass here. It was just dull.”

Kei had a bite of sandwiches, keeping silence. A taste of sweet-and –sour tomatoes spread to the mouth from a half- slice of bread.

“Excuse me for interrupting you at table.”

Abruptly Saki appeared from a bush on the right hand, nodded and smiled. Then she took a step back and gazed at Kei slowly from his feet to tips of his hair. The gaze was not like the vulgar one for sizing up guys. It's more serious and just like an extension of work. Saki sat down next to Kaori who was having coffee, holding her bag under her arm, then looked down Kei with a stoop and said cheerfully. For a second the scent of strong perfume brushed against Kei. Kei forgot No., but might be the same Channel as Yurika.

“Is he that guy?”

Kaori nodded back a little sipping coffee. Then Saki said standing before Kei, swinging her golden pierced earrings that are as small as her small eyes. She resembles Kaori in appearance and her voice was rich and beautiful.

“Nice to meet you.”

Saki continued to say that Kei was just the same as the photo on SNS and gazed at Kei in the same way as a little while ago.

“Converse dead stock, old 501 and maybe Hanes T-shirt red label? ...judging from the shabby neckline.”

Suddenly Kei stooped the hand holding a sandwich.

“Seems to me they are not Kaori's taste.”

Saki fingered her loose wavy hair and gave a light smile. Kei answered to it in amusement because Saki's words was not a sarcasm,

“Hermes Jane Birkin and patent mules. Also Hermes. How many guys are involved with them?”

“The same as Kaori.”

Kei smiled nodding. Then Saki laughed and tapped the knees of Kaori who also laughed. And Saki added that she understood why Rika was attracted to Kei.

“See you tomorrow!”

Kaori said to Kei after Saki was lost in their views. Kei was still laughing.

“Kei, I'm sure Saki's things are presents from a man, but her father bought her all of them.”

Kei tried to say that there is no difference, but stopped it. Because Ken was in similar circumstances. There is Nokia cellular phone in his back pocket on the right and a gold credit card in a wallet. Both of them are not Kei's.

“You intended this meeting, right?”

“If I told you it in advance, would you come here?”

Kaori leaned against a steel fence, standing up with a smile, and then said in a quiet voice. Her voice was much smaller than a bustle in a distance.

“Saki will get married after this event. She will go to Italy.”

The sea smell has a light sweetness. A scrap of leaflet torn off was flied by the wind and went through the darkness at Kei's feet.

“We worked together at the reception of an advertising agency before this event started. Saki went round with a married man there. It already ended up, though. But she was tough. At the same time, she was going round with an Italian guy just on the same floor. Can you believe that?”

“Did she tell you about that?”

Kei asked, leaning to Kaori quietly. Kaori nodded to the spreading light of night view.

“I went to have a drink with the Italian guy a couple of times, you see, the bar at Shibuya where we met....but Saki never mentioned about that...”

“You are her friend.....then what did you think?”

Kaori said after thinking for a minute. The light in circle of Ferris wheel, glowing bluely in

the night sky, looked waning a little.

"I thought she could not talk to me that's because I am her best friend. Maybe it was a very important matter for her...Now I think."

"Maybe the Italian guy may know it. But he tried to keep silence. I think he really loved her."

"I wonder if Saki noticed it."

"I'm not sure....If she got married realizing that, she would get along well."

"I think so. I do hope so, too."

Kaori took aside the tip of her hair over a lip gloss. Then she looked back slowly with a smile. Kei thought Kaori was beautiful this moment. Then suddenly Yurika flitted through his mind and Rika's happy face, full of potatoes in her mouth, and Osawa came across his mind. Kei took away those images with Kaori's calm eyes falling on the dark waves.

"I think that an answer to love affair is already fixed before you talk about it with someone this way and that."

Kei tried to ask about a love with him, but stopped. He clammed up because he thought it is too childish.

"Let's walk a minute, shall we?"

Kaori started to walk to the sidewalk along the line of port which was lower one step, taking Kei's hands. The tip of her fingers was cold although it was summer. The cold feel came down from the tips of her fingers clasped and cooled down his burning heart quietly.

At the moment Kaori threw a pebble she picked up to the dark waves, Kei looked back. Behind them, particles of white lights in an arch are seen. Under the particles, endless red tails of lights flow drawing lines gently. It was a soundless, still sight.

"Say, why is a city flooded with light? What do you think?"

Kei shook his head. It was a blunt, indifferent gesture.

"Noticed recently... "

A shadow remained in the ends of her words. Kaori stopped her steps again and leaned against the steel fence. Then she thinly opened the lips, casting her clear eyes in the far distance.

"Maybe, a place where light and shade is clarified..."

Kei did not answer it. Because it was a cliché.

Kei took a sip of already lukewarm coffee and watched her profile quietly. The overlapping night view was blurred dancing in the back of her soft eyes.

"So..."

"So what?"

"Various things might be necessary to shine."

Kaori smiled at Kei softly, walked in silence for a while and tuned to the left at the end. The bustle and the lights behind him suddenly faded and the wind got cold. Kei squinted his eyes. The horizon at the end of the deep darkness divided into the upper part and the lower part in two colors and drew a thin line dimly.

Kaori sat on the handrail and turned her back on the waves. Then she put her arm behind the neck and untied the hair weaved. The hair streamed to the night sky like loosing the strain of the day. At the tip of the hair, little stars were twinkling quietly. The half moon on the sky drawn into Kaori's eyes was reflected overlapping in her wet eyes.

Kaori put her right hand on the cheek to hold the streaming hair.

“What can I do in such a time?”

“What do you mean?”

Kaori turned her eyes to the waves a minute and smiled again.

“I wanted to come here with you. I just wanted to see the night view together...”

A sweet smell mixed lightly with a scent of tide passed Kei’s heart. It’s a good old smell mixed with a sweat and also kind of smell which melts the surface of Kei’s frozen memories slowly.

Kaori approached a step and dropped the knee lightly to close her forehead to Kei’s.

Her chest shines dimly as if it absorbed the stillness of the moon floating quietly in the darkness. It seemed to Kei that one more button of her blouse was undone than usual.

Kaori noticed Kei’s glance and looked at him again, giggling. Once nodded, then she shot him a serious look. Kei looked around quietly. The bustle has gone far away. Kei thought that various hours would go away when they spend together.

Kei’s fingertip reached Kaori and touched her cheek. He slowly spread the hands to wrap her cheeks. Kei felt Kaori’s warmth through her cheek that got cold with the wind. Kaori’s closed eyelids appeared to waver.

Kei reached up a little and kissed her. A sweet sigh escaped her lips that opened thinly. Then it was absorbed in the coming night air and faded.

PAGE

PAGE 1

Kaori's room in Setagaya overlooked the slow orange light of cars which was strung and stretched west curving on the highway.

Kei shut the curtain and looked around Kaori's room slowly. It looked a little like Kei's white room a little. Simple and bare for a girl. Books were stuffed haphazardly in a steel shelf with many tiers all over the wall, though records were stuffed in a record holder in Kei's room.

"You've been a literary girl?"

Kaori smiled at Ken in the back of mirror on the table, combing her wet hair. Kei remembered that a few pocketbooks were thrown in a bag with "Camus", given by Kaori as they met first.

A book Kei took was a maiden work of "Haruki Murakami". It was the book Kei read next to "Camus" in his father's study as he was 15. As far as Kei remembered, he was not moved at all.

"I've already read this one. Next to Camus."

"So, what's your impression?"

Kaori gazed at Kei, wrapping a towel that bared her breast almost. Kei searched his memory, turning the pages, but he could not find anything new. Kaori's eyes showed a mischievous look like a little girl enjoying a riddle.

"Well, I guess it's boring because I had no impression."

Kaori smiled at Kei's profile in the mirror that showed his negative answer.

"Most people say like you mentioned. But I don't think so."

"It's a poor writing. I think so, even now I'm going over it."

Kei glanced through the book, single-handed. Most pages turned were blank. Some of them were illustrated. Kei inclined his head, looking at them. The number of letters is remarkably small, compared with that of "Camus" and it lacks passion.

Kaori gazed at Kei seriously. The white face of Kaori sitting down on the floor looked as if it was floating in the darkness colored orange by the lights through the curtain. Kaori did not seem to turn the lights at all after they entered the room. Then Kei asked Kaori about it. Kaori told that she prefers to be vague, at least, in the room. Then Kaori put her arms around Kei. Faint, white lights through the window was swaying as if was trembling in the eyes of Kaori getting closer to Kei.

Kaori took the brush, withdrew her gaze, and combed hair slowly, drooping. A grave voice was heard from Kaori's slender back.

"Draw an outline, hide the essence. A person tries to seek it more. Fix a will, trying to make up for it with mind and imagination."

Kei sat down on the bed and thought over her words in his mind. It was a rigid word and unlike her. The silence in the room got heavier by degrees, and Kei began to speak.

“If it was something you don’t know, you could do well without knowing it...”

Kaori put the brush on the table, nodding her head lightly, and said, “At least”.

“A person who noticed must face it...”

“And a person who was informed, too.”

Kaori stood up by the table and sat down next to Kei. She added words as if she soothes him, and rested her gaze on the dark corner of the room. It was an absent, gloomy look.

"My town becomes pure-white in winter. Even the edge of a straight road was pure-white ... If white clouds were floating all over the sky, the horizon could not be visible ... I had a pain in the cheek with a frozen air...

You know? You ever heard the story a fairy lives in a deep forest?

The fairy is not one and many live together ... It is a place where such an allegory sounds realSo the place like your town is still too urban... I wanted to leave such a place ...

I wanted to come to this town to become a friend of the musician whom I had been admiring for a long time. I thought a lot about what was necessary for that...first, going on to university to get smart... After that, brushing up myself to be sophisticated ... not only a dress and make-up but also how to walk and how to smile ...learning everything from ladies on TV whom you thought beautiful. Then the most necessary thing is ..."

Kaori told Kei this and shut her mouth. Her glance shifted to from the floor and she softly muttered to Kei in the bedside.

"To know music a lot."

Kei lay on the bed and gazed at Kaori, then looked at orange lights out of the window with an up glance. Kei just tried to lay back to front, but brightness of the lights didn’t change.

"Have you ever regretted coming to this town?"

A little smile extended to her mouth. Then she said in a soft voice.

The tone was much softer than a while ago and very familiar to him.

"No regret ... I'm very happy, really enjoying even this moment.

Do you regret?"

Kei dropped the glance to the wall after shaking his head. An oval, black stain came to the surface on the wall, and the soft light fell into the edge. The stain and the lights melted each other well and looked beautiful like a picture.

Kaori’s calm voice sounded in Kei’s ears.

"You must not regret...It will hurt someone someday."

Kei took the sheet from his face, came close to the window and brushed away the curtain. Strong, orange color flooded Kei’s eyes.

“Are you taking lessons?”

Big concrete posts sustaining a highway looked hard and stout. When Kei peered into it, he found the vertical, slight cracks ran making shadows from the ground to the highway. Kei’s eyes followed it rather tensely over and over.

“Is that girl your classmate?”

Though the highway was illuminated by shinny orange lights, obscure lights

scattered below, along a narrow alley. Those were very few, almost countable. Kei felt nostalgic for the round, silver lights because the same lights existed in his hometown.

“I just worried about you, so I was late for work today. Then I saw you two. At fast-food shop on the street, in the back of the avenue. You might say it’s not my business, so I decided to keep it to myself....

501 jeans casted off made a hard sound. His cellular phone received an e-mail. “Isn’t it from her?”

Kei kept silent, sat down at the place, leaning on the wall. The chill ran down the ceiling, slid on a pane, and deprived the heat filled with Kei’s sole. Kei looked at the mirror on the table. Kaori’s slender legs crossed were diagonally in the edge of the mirror.

“Annoying girl, indeed! Totally different from you. Disgusting, her existence itself.”

Kaori gave a sigh to Kei’s words, and lay on the bed, turning her back on him. She pulled the blanket over herself, and drew it to her chin. Her slender back silhouetted in white. It shone quietly and softly, and made deep shades, timing to Kaori’s breath.

“If you think she is annoying, why not reject her e-mail?”

Then Kaori uttered a small voice like the breathing, to the wall. I’m going to the live concert.....

Kei resigned himself to the monotonous sway of the train running around the city.

Going to the live concert.... Kaori’s words were repeated in Kei’s heart over and over. In the train of after 3 P.M., an old man sat stooping down in a priority seat. The others were just a few students standing in the window, chatting, who seemed to have skipped a class.

When Kei woke up, he found two slices of medium brown toast and sunny-side up eggs turn-overed on plain, white plates. And Kaori’s note was left beside the plate. On the note, a brand-new key was set diagonally like closing her neat note.

Kei sat up on the bed and gazed at Kaori’s note, taking a fork which was set on the plate.

A glass of coffee is in the refrigerator. Don’t wash the dishes. Just leave in the sink. The key is a duplicate one. You may take it or I don’t mind if you throw it away.

I’ll enjoy the live concert.

Kaori

Kei’s eyes fell on the train window again. Beyond a row of low, competing houses, the heavy, thick clouds extended far to the south, rolling strange ripples.

Kei took the neck of a T-shirt and drew it to his nose. The soft smell of detergent was comfortable to him. It was a nostalgic, dry smell that he had a long time ago.

The T-shirt was folded properly in the corner of the table.

Every time Kei touched Kaori, a good old memory rushed into his mind. It softly wrapped Kei's heart, but he was not interested in Kaori's background any more. He seemed to, rather, keep off the topic. But if Kaori wants to talk about her family, she might have talked it more to Kei within last night, no, previously. While Kei took refuge in Kaori who kept quiet about herself, he seemed to be irritated by her distant attitude.

.....If I snoop into Kaori's complicated past, how would she feel about it? Perhaps I might lack capacity for accepting it. Kaori might be reluctant to confide because I'm simply younger than her.....

While Kei was thinking to himself, a small impatience gradually rose within him. Kei was getting impatient at himself who was feverish coldly.

.....Kaori will meet Osawa without hesitation.....

Kei came back to the room, and threw the key to the table by the window. The keys rubbing each other made a high sound to the ceiling for a second, and then stillness fell again. He tried to take Mac book out of the drawer of desk, but stopped his hand and looked at the table. He slowly came close and gazed at the table shadowed by cloudy weather. A bunch of **Babies' Breath** in an empty PET bottle withered up and lost colors. The **Babies' Breath** was the one Kaori bought at a riverside, small florist's which an old lady runs, where she just dropped in on the way back from the supermarket, the next day after Kaori's first stay at Kei's room.

Kei looked away from it and opened the window.

The dusky clouds hung low over the window kept open. A hint of moisture in the air gave a sign of the rain.

Kei hold the bunch of **Babies' Breath** tight, that stuck into the lip of the PET bottle, and pulled them out. He tried to throw them away to the cloudy sky and stopped it. He gazed at the faded colors in his hand for a while, and then flung them on the floor good and hard.

Kei took the cellular phone out of 501 jeans in a fluster. The call sound from Kaori rung about 10 times and was transferred to answer-phone. Kei clucked his tongue and took the key on the table again. He closed the door, murmured "Kaori" in his mind, running to the station. While running, Kei remembered Kaori's profile at she smiled trying to smell the little **Babies' Breath**. Kei ran on the riverside road that looked like sinking under the shadowy sky, to the station, breathing hard and constricting his chest. Whenever he ran, his legs stiffened and got heavy. He choked as if wet cotton was stuffed into his mouth, and the harder he breathed, the more vividly Kaori's voice or eyes came back. That made Kei's legs move more than ever.

Kei went through a ticket gate in the evening rush.

The concert hall was in Hibiya. Kei felt regret for having taken this line, swaying his body in the subway he was not used to. The line was different from the route to Aoyama where Kei used to play at night, and it was kind of the line

close to business district.

The heavy, sullen sway of the subway rocked Kei. He was irritated with the smell of sweat filled with the train and the strong smell of naphthalene drifting from somewhere. Kei managed to take the cellular phone, being nervous of surroundings, swaying in the tube of dark subway. He found an eclectic bulletin board indicating the lines and the names of stations over crushing people. Then the door opened when Kei tried to check the sign of exit at the arrival station on the mobile site.

Kay went out of the train and flowed to the left along the crowd. While looking at the guide sign jutting from the ceiling and the cellular phone turn about, he looked for a clock. The clock on the ceiling said 5:30. The concert was supposed to open at 6:30. What time did Kaori leave her room? She might have already met Osawa.....

Kei got moving forward wiping the sweat off from his forehead. Kei noticed that he was weeping while getting out of breath and choking. The tears on the cheeks showed both regrets for having done an irrevocable thing and impatience with himself who could not take a step forward. And soon the same regret gushed and fell upon him.

Why didn't I stop Kaori? That's because it was her dream she had been chasing. Isn't it possible for a guy, her junior by six years who appeared suddenly, to make her give up such a dream? Kaori had endured alone in this city to become a friend of an artist. Kaori has the right to meet Osawa. Osawa himself dared to accept her offer. How could I stop her? Is there any reason to stop her? Because Kaori loves me? So I could stop her? No. I should make her dreams come true if I want to tell her clearly that I love her. I want to laugh with Kaori. What I want to hope is just see Kaori lagging tomorrow too. But He can't get the bliss without the existence of Oshawa. Oshawa's resolution is firm. Perhaps He would be waiting for her with preparation like what Kei had in his mind, perhaps more than that.
But the reason why I was running was just to stop Kaori.

A sweaty, sticky smell of people assailed his nostrils. In the hands of office workers passing hurriedly, there were wet umbrellas. The rain was falling on the ground. At the moment Kei went through the ticket gate and jumped out of the stairs of subway vigorously, water splattered under his shoes.

Kei looked for the crossroads being beaten by a drizzle. There should have been the sign of the hall. Kei took out the cellular phone and checked the time, heading for the crossroads that was nearest to him. It was 5:40P.M. At the moment He called Kaori while running, he lost his footing on the wet pavement. His view reversed diagonally, and rays flowed in one color and scattered.

An obtuse pain hollowed Kei's left shoulder heavily and heated. He stuck his shoulder under the shutter of bank closed hard, and the shrill sound scattered around. A crowd of office workers who stopped at a red light turned around all

at once, and glanced at Kei who crouched down in the corner of shutter that got dusty by exhaust gas. Their eyes looked cold. When the look of contempt like looking far away through Kei mingled with a sharp pain in Kei's heart, he was reminded of his father's eyes on that day.

The place where his mother died was crossroads.

Although Kei was still three years old when his mother died, he noticed that she fell down owing to him.

It was the day when a new supermarket opened in the place; about five minutes walk from Kei's house, on the avenue toward the station. At the entrance that was crowded with people, balloons were given out, and one of them flew over Kei who was pulled by his mother across the street.

Kei shook off mother's hand. At the moment he tried to reach the twisted, white string, sullen sound vibrated about. He couldn't hear even the horn. At the same time Kei's view turned to one color crossing the sky, he was hugged tightly in mother's breast. Mother's right eyes hit on asphalt swelled up oddly and distorted. Mother lay opening her eyes wide and thin streaks of tears fell down. But Kei smiled at mother innocently for a while because mother's mouth smiled feebly. Streaks of tears got thick gradually, and dark blood oozed thickly making circles on the road. Kei finally realized it, looking at mother's mouth that got dry whitely. Surrounding sounds swelled slowly in the ears of little Kei. Kei sank his cheek in the breast of mother who lay silently, and kept the posture all the time until her body got cold.

After a while, Kei opened his eyes hearing father's shouts. Father was out of his mind crying to the crowd on the road. He noticed Kei hugged in mother's breast as he heard a siren in the distance. For the moment, he breathed a sigh of light relief, but he gazed at it in Kei's hand. Glassy, stiff white eyes came to father's eyes.

Kei opened his eyes squatting down at the shutter. He became conscious soon. He gazed at the light on the cellular phone in his hand for a while, and then looked about him. Kei began to run for the hall as he found a sign on the signal at the intersection. He ignored the red signal and crossed four lanes. Kei running through was profiled against the car horns and the lights which hustled him. Kei strained to hear them, standing on the sidewalk. The leaves of trees that spread out on the right trembled faintly with the heavy horn of bus

Kei began to run for the direction of sound on the straight. He ran brushing off the spray of illuminated fountain, kicking shiny raindrops that spread out on the lawn. On the way, he slipped and fell down on the ground headfirst as he tried to jump over the fence. He drew up his knees taking the obtuse pain away slowly from the wet soil and stood up. While he desperately tried to dust cakes of mud from T-shirt and 501 jeans again and again, a lump of tears welled up in his eyes from the bottom of his heart. Kei wiped tears with the back of his mud-covered hand. Kei began to run again washing away the tears with some sand and the sweat, looking up the night sky, and took out the cellular phone behind him. He pushed the name, "Kaori" on a record getting his breath. The

front entrance gradually approached him while a calling tone rang once and twice.

Many colorful umbrellas pressing each other already moved slowly to the hall. Kei ran to the back door looking in each umbrella. He finally reached the back door where a few guards stood as the calling tone changed into an answer-phone. Kei gazed at some umbrellas along the concrete wall, but he didn't see a girl like Kaori. Kei vaguely looked in each umbrella coming and going, breathing slowly. But there was no figure of Kaori. Then he slowly headed for the front entrance, looking in each umbrella backward this time.

At the moment Kei got tangled up and his gaze flowed to the left, he saw Kaori's profile passing. He choked and tears stopped. Streaks of shiny rain struck through the darkness diagonally and fell down. A tremble of Kei's mind sank with the rain. His legs stuck to the wet road and got stiff. A fragment of passion that swelled in his heart looked like melting and being taken away with the rain running down his cheeks and tear drops.

With a small umbrella, Kaori's figure slowly passed and became small in the distance. She was all smiles, but the smile was unfamiliar to Kei. Is the guy holding the umbrella and turning his back Osawa? Kei didn't see the guy's face any more. He didn't have much pep left for chasing them and just kept standing. Once Kei stopped, he didn't have the courage to look at her, even, from behind.

Kei sat down on a low, steel fence aside. Kei just fixed his eyes right on the shade of thick forest.

The cellular phone vibrated, and Kei hastily took it out of the back pocket. Rika's phone number blinked in red. Kei gazed at it for a while, grasping it in his hands.

Kei saw black high heels over the cellular phone. He was in a panic. "Kaori?" He tried to call her name and raised his face. But the word disappeared as it was.

"Why don't you answer it?"

The girl standing there was Rika. Rika managed to make a smile, but looked down at Kei with her show of give up, keeping her mouth shut tight. Her hand holding the umbrella trembled feebly.

"I've been watching Kaori-san."

Rika slowly muttered, resting her gaze on Kaori and the guy who had left. Then she added words.

"You know? They were making it at the front entrance, not the back door.

Raindrops tapping Kei's forehead flew to the mouth. The breath he inhaled had a faint, dry smell of rain. Kei couldn't understand what Rika said. He breathed hard, and then looked down at his foot. Not only Converse but 501 jeans and T-shirt were all dyed in a muddy color.

"I got the party place for ending the work off. I 'm not sure if they will come or not..."

"How did you get it?"

Rika shifted her umbrella to the other hand and took out the cellular phone of

the handbag in her arm. Rika copied from the shape and the color of Kaori's black bag and even the mood of cool suit she was dressed in

"I told my e-mail address and mobile phone number to the stuff."

Kei looked up at the rain clouds through Rika and nodded bending his head. It was vintage Rika. He was just unwilling to chase Kaori from now.

"I told him my real number. Because I imagined he would possibly confirm the number, and sure enough he called the number before me... I don't mind if the number will be changed. I could get another one."

Rika said so and smiled. She looked a bit more cheerful than a while ago. Then Kei was silent for a minute, and cast a question which sprang up in his mind suddenly.

"But why are you here?"

Rika gazed at Kei.

"Because I love you..."

Rika sat next to Kei and said so, making him come under her umbrella. Then she opened the bag again and took out a handkerchief and put it on Kei's forehead. The warmth of Rika's palm softly spread out.

"The guy talked that much. A girl generally would go to see him, I guess..."

Kei gazed at the colors of umbrellas coming and going over Rika and the bustle. The soft colors of umbrellas looked beautiful in the silver lights of scattered searchlights. Perhaps the hall would be just in sight.

"Are you gonna see the concert?"

Kei shook his head and laughed.

"I don't have the ticket."

"You didn't get it? Such a hick!"

Rika's profile looked more adult than usual when she said so with a calm smile. It seemed that she selected not only her dress but also her makeup for the party. But Kei thought that something lurked quietly in Rika suddenly sprout.

Rika looked around her and said,

"Well, most girls look like her. That was good I dressed formally."

When Kei took Rika's umbrella, Rika stood up and kicked a puddle under her feet lightly with her heel. The splash swirled in the air changing into raindrops again, and faded away shining over the darkness of forest

Kei looked up at Rika and said,

"So...What were you going to do if you didn't see me?"

Rika pursed her lips and became very quiet. She bent her head for a while and answered slowly.

"...I would have said nothing and left ..."

Kei stood up and take Rika under his umbrella.

She stood under the shade of his umbrella and rested her gaze on Kei straight.

"...But I was sure that I could see you..."

Kei kept silent. He felt out Rika's look and heart to say something, but he could not find anything like that. No, if he said something, she would have disappeared. Kei broke silence and said,

“You wanna see the concert? I’ll get the tickets from ticket tout. We might see her inside.”

Rika shook her head immediately.

“Impossible. It’s not sure that they are on the stage or seats. They might stay at the dressing room all the time, moving nowhere. If my guess is right, they would be at the party from the first. I’m sure they will come. So if we see the concert, we would be late for the party...Don’t you know, Kei? Everyone will go first before they make the audience get out of the hall.”

Kei was impressed by her strong tone that was unlike her and kept silent again. He looked around him for a minute and added word.

“You had not better go...”

Rika’s eyes suddenly got cloudy. She took a step close to Kei and said.

“Take me with you...I just came here for that...”

The name of a hotel Rika got from a guard was one of hotels at the west exit of Shinjuku. It did not belong to first-class hotels among several hotels standing there. But it is relatively reasonable to stay although it stands in the area called a first class place in Tokyo and also has a high popularity among young people because the beautiful night view of Shinjuku can be enjoyed

Rika’s hand pulling Kei’s arm stopped when they got out of the subway at Shinjuku. She stopped, fixed on the valley of buildings in the light rain, and got close to a pane of first-food shop on the left. Rika’s fingertips Kei holding were chilled to the bone, but her profile watching the inside of the shop had a look like a little girl who looks at a doll in the window that she can’t get, in silence for a long time,

“I’m starving.”

Rika said with a smile and tapped Kei on the shoulder, saying that she could not work hard if she was hungry, in a cheerful voice

Rika rested her chin on her hand and looked at Kei quietly, who kept on eating French fries more than Rika. Kei noticed it and pushed pack a leaf of lettuce hanging out in the back of a hamburger.

“What?”

“Nothing”

“It will be the time the concert is over soon.”

Kei cleared the messy table hastily. He stopped, and said to Rika who still sat there forgetting herself.

“...You don’t have to...”

“No, I just.....”

Rika cast up her eyes that fell on the table to Kei slowly. Her wet eyes looked like wrapping something up, and Kei looked away from them in his haste. Rika bang the table with her both hands.

“Let’s go.”

Any hotel lobbies are dirty in yellow. Under the white lights, everything gets back to primary colors and people look them right. The dirty yellowish lights at the hotel ; not only heavy lights falling down from the chandelier but also streaks of sharp lights from the ceiling lights and the wall, crossed like creeping and crystallized right under the chandelier in the center. Kei thought that the luscious lights trying to catch attention of guests who set foot in the lobby looked yellow lights that directed commonplace dishes. It seemed to Kei that the elegant sparkle of marble laid on the whole floor and the whole wall was sleazy like cheap plastics.

When they were about to enter, a door man shot a persistent look to Kei, from his muddy toes to his wet hair. Kei was disturbed by the gaze for a moment because he thought they might be kicked out of the hotel. But the doorman seemed to have hesitated as he looked at Rika in a suit style, walking before Kei

Rika ran up the low steps in marble with a snappy pace and pushed the button at the elevator in the front. The party was supposed to be held on the 45th floor, the top floor.

Kei looked back without intention. When he looked at the sparkle of the chandelier hanging heavily in the stairwell around 5th floor, the top floor, he felt down and drooped. His contempt for marble that he felt at first suddenly went away. He was overwhelmed with the beauty he looked it over again. Kei whispered in Rika's ear in a thin voice.

"As soon as we get off the elevator, a staff presses us. He asks us if we have a pass." Rika sighed a little looking at Kei's posture reflecting in gold on the door and said in shock.

"Kei, you are a fool, indeed! Don't you think we should use emergency stairs after we get off on 44th floor? What would happen if we appear directly? Maybe the staff is just one. As I said before, a party for ending the work would start immediately after the concert. I mean before they pitch the audience out."

"You really like music? You don't know kind of inside story at all." Rika added her words, looking up at the number of the floor indicated in the elevator. Kei asked as if he relieved anxiety.

"Why are you so sure that the staff is one?"

"Because it's a fair distance from Hibiya to Shinjuku. I think the security would get easier if they go further. Well, it's just my scent. And he is not an idol. I guess no fans chase him."

They got to the 44th floor, and went to a sign of emergency stairs just on the right. Rika opened the heavy fire door with her shoulder and ran up the stairs on the left. Kei looked at downstairs, leaning against the rails. Kei shrank from the height and looked at the blurred streaks of lights through the stairs cutting the darkness that was thinning down intermittently.

"Kei!"

Rika raised her voice with a frown, looking at Kei.

Rika opened the door on the 45th floor with her elbow slowly and made a faint smile at Kei looking into the lobby. Then she put up her index finger. The staff was one.

The same lights extended to the similar marble also, from the chandelier which is smaller in radius, about two rounds, than that on the lobby.

The male staff over the rails which surrounded the escalator took a handkerchief out

of his jacket and wiped his forehead. Then he apologized to the transceiver in his hand bowing down and disappeared into the hall in a hurry.

Rika started to run when she clasped Kei by the arm hard. Once they went to the window, and then veered to the hall on the left slowly along the glass wall. Rika showed her subtle conduct on the floor where she found no one as if she just went out of the hall for a short rest. Kei withheld his laughter looking at Rika's manner like a mouse. But he was impressed by her prompt action that he lacked. Rika opened the door of the hall a little, made Kei enter and glided into the hall.

The hall was lighter than Kei thought and there were few people. An elderly man in a suit who looked like a superior was giving some greetings heartily at the podium. Kei slowly looked around. The hall was not so dark as the night spot Kei used to visit, but it was dim as the lighting was set weak. Kei imagined that the sound of music was vibrating the floor harder.

The sparkle of chandelier on the low ceiling Kei looked up was too clear. Kei was disturbed. Most women wore chic dresses and most men were in suits although some guys were in casual jeans like Kei. It was totally the opposite of the party that Kei and Rika imagined.

"This is not a place for us."

Rika's voice sounded less nervous than Kei's voice. Rika may have been brought to such parties by her father and accustomed to this kind of atmosphere. At least, Rika seemed to be more experienced than Kei.

Rika took some cookies and a piece of short cake cut off from a whole which were set on the side of the table covered with a white race, and then took Kei's hand and stood by the window. A quiet night view of the west exit of Shinjuku unfolded on the glass. For a moment Kei looked at the glaring neon lamps of the east exit which got entangled in the place farer and lower than that of the west exit, and then looked back to Rika.

"I guess... maybe they might find us and come here.... Not so many people here." Before Rika finished her words, Kei heard Kaori's voice over his shoulder. It was a low voice like spying and kind of fearful.

"Kei?"

"Nice to meet you."

Rika nodded and reacted in a funny manner. Kaori realized that the girl was Rika, and said to her, "Good evening" in a descent voice like an extension of business.

"...What happened?"

"Can I talk outside?"

“OK, but...”

Kaori said that and looked at Rika. Rika put a plate in her hand on the edge of the table, and then took Kei’s hand and opened the door. The security guard was watching his cellular phone without looking at the vacant escalator going up and down. Rika turned back to Kaori and said, “Kei came here to end up with you. Tonight is the last time. He said that he won’t meet you anymore. Right, Kei?”

Kei bent his head. A dull gray of marble sent out the dim light. Kaori slowly stood face to face with Kei and turned her sparkling eyes. The back of her eyes was full of a strong light Kei didn’t know. Then Kaori began to talk quietly.

“Finally I met him...”

Kaori held out her arm and grasped Kei’s palm. Kaori’s soft warmth looked like warming him, grazing from Kei’s cold body to his heart. Kaori’s delight gushed out of the heat directly.

“Congratulations! Let’s go back, Kei.”

Kei shook off Rika’s hand. Kaori was absent-minded as much as Rika. At the moment Kei tried to say that that was good, a voice was heard from the back. The bustle which spread over the door spilled, and Osawa’s cool, low voice fell to their feet.

“I thought you were gone...”

Kei did not look back. He just gazed at Kaori’s eyes without movement. Her eyes were soft and there was a light smile on her lips. Rika boldly said.

“We are just on the way back.”

Kei shook off Rika’s hand on his arm again. Three people threw glances at the situation. For a while, the silence fell on the floor.

Kei slowly turned on Osawa. A deep blue lens caught the reflection of Kei. At the moment Osawa ran his fingers lightly through a fringe of hair on his forehead, his eyes barely appeared. The eyes were calm and something cool which had lost emotion. For a second, there was something dark and excited about Kei’s voice as he was upset at Osawa’s monotonous voice.

“Why did you act like that?....”

Kaori grasped Kei’s hands hard. She stood between two, and then shook her head. She kept her mouth shut tight to advise Kei not to ask him.

“You are Kei Kitami?”

Osawa talked in a low voice after he leaned slowly against the glass wall.

“Yes. He is Kitami, my boyfriend. Let’s go back, Kei.”

Rika said that, and took off Kaori’s hand on Kei’s hands. A short, high sound echoed to the ceiling. A security guard shot them a look. As the guard slowly approached, Osawa thrust out his left hand lightly and said to hold the guard

“My friends.”

“No kidding!”

Rika’s shrill voice crossed space. The guard who reversed his steps once approached again. Osawa hold the guard in the same way.

Kei approached Osawa, looking away from Kaori. Kei noticed his knees trembling, approaching Osawa

“Why on the radio.....?”

“She asked me the same question a little while ago. So I’ll tell the same thing as it

is.”

Osawa seemed to be not interested in three, turning his back and looked down to the outside from the window. Particles of lights dotted in white below. The narrow, vertical shadows of railroad broke the lights in Shinjuku into two parts
The white lights of the west exit seen below and the colored illumination of town extending to the other side. Both were beautiful. But it seemed to Kei that the two beauties never mix together.

Kei looked at Osawa’s back. When Osawa spread his arms wide, the arms and the back of his white shirt looked clear against the dark window. The lizard leather shoes shone matching the outworn, wrinkled black pants. There was something confident, invisible about Osawa’s widely-spread arms, which Kei would never get. Osawa talked gently.

“It’s jealousy. My own jealousy for you. That’s it....”

“.....jealousy?”

“I’ve heard about you from her. She was quite familiar with music, so I asked why. I’ve seen girls who knew names of studio musicians in New York, but I’ve never seen a girl who told names of studios as well....”

Kei looked backed to Kaori. She was stared at Kei with eyes which were clearer than a little girl’s. Kaori’s early childhood which Kei had no recollection flittered through his mind. There was a sweet landscape of snowfield. Kaori with red cheeks appeared through the white of new snow that breathed stillness and the clouds in gray. Rika’s voice drowned out their words as if she sensed that Kei was deeply distressed to Kaori’s look.

“That makes sense. You planned to catch her attention, inflaming jealousy and making her mix up in that way. It’s really easy to understand.”

Osawa who understood situations of three people said, with a calm expression, like talking to himself to Rika’s defiant attitude.

“I don’t want you to comment from your point of view.”

Rika’s fingertips holding her bag in the chest hardened suddenly and whitened.

Osawa rubbed the corner of the eyes lightly with both hands, and then cast Kei a glance and continued to talk.

“You talk her about many things and look forward to her answer.....then she will hug you.”

Kei looked away from Osawa’s profile. Then he looked back to Kaori slowly. It seemed to Kei that her white cheeks were dyed in red lightly. Rika kept her mouth shut tight and tears ran down her cheeks.

“Perhaps you don’t know about what she told me a little while ago.”

“Stop it! Please!”

Kaori's body froze. Her heel tapped the marble floor and made a light sound. Kaori took a step forward and implored in a feeble voice as if she threw herself on him. It was first time Kei looked at Kaori's face distorted by dismay.

“No. It's for his sake. I had better say that.”

“《I've involved him in trouble. Could you hire him if he failed to go on to college?》”

Kei forgot himself and looked at Kaori. Her hair drooped over the face and her chin trembling feebly peeped. Rika took out a handkerchief and wiped her cheeks, staring at Osawa. Kei heard Rika's stuffy small voice behind.

“Kei, let's get back. It's all right. We managed to come here. Actually I don't know well, but we did it anyway. We did our best. Let's have a drink somewhere and go back.”

Kei moved Rika aside and said to Osawa. It was his desperate question.

“You have a wife and a child; still, you need Kaori?”

Osawa made a faint smile through sunglasses and rested his gaze on the door of the hall which opened. The cheerful laughter rippled suddenly. On the end of laughter, the artist who Kaori had been longing for beckoned Osawa nearer smiling at girls surrounding the artist. Kei's legs stiffened with the tremor for a minute; on the other hand, Osawa waved back with a gentle smile and told that he would be right back. Then the artist seemed to feel an awkward silence inside. He looked over Kei and the other slowly and closed the door soundlessly. Osawa turned his back on Kei, and then his eyes fell on the night view again. Osawa's eyes looked more glacial through the lenses.

“I think I told you I need her. It was a long time ago.”

“Don't worry about her. I will see her home. I never intend to touch her hand. So take it easy.” Osawa left the message to Kei, not looking at him. Then Osawa passed by Kaori standing and disappeared over the door. A dry sound of Osawa's shoes remained long in Kei's ears.

“Kei, I've not changed my mind at all. Really....”

The words Kaori uttered spread over the wet marble with a thin light. The cold floor echoed the small murmur quietly. Kaori looked smaller than usual for Kei. Kaori's cheeks trembled feebly, got wet in white and shone clearly. Kei wiped away the tearful eyes and the sweat as well with the back of his hand, thinking that her words are maybe right. The hesitant, hollow feeling welled up in him and he couldn't control them. Osawa's existence exactly overwhelmed Kei

Kei stared at Kaori's wet eyes and said, dusting mud on T-shirt that was dry.

“If you think so, why not told that before he left?”

Kei took the hand of Rika who kept silent, walked to the elevator and got down, hearing a sob of Kaori who couldn't repress herself

“Rika, can you go right back?”

Kei said to Rika in a small voice like being drowned out over splash raised by a taxi. The twinkle of street lamps wet the sidewalk in silver straight. The tremble of Rika who nodded communicated itself to Kei’s palm. Rika was still crying. Rika breathed harder after she heard Kei’s gentle voice.

“Kei, what will you do?”

“I want to be alone.”

Rika looked up with an anxious look. Her eyes colored with cold silver were full of the warmth. Rika nodded lightly again trembling as if she persuaded herself. Kei tried to nestle her shoulders for a moment.

Kei stopped when he saw a range of lights under the railroad bridge and said. Rika also stopped next to Kei and gazed at him.

Kei bashfully patted the skirt of dry 501 jeans dyed all in brown. Then he said to Rika again,

“Rika”

Kei once bent his head and smiled, lifting his head.

“Thank you.”

Rika shut her mouth hard, shook her head in disapproval again and again and went to the station at a quick pace.

Kei saw Rika off firmly, turning him back on roadside trees. On the way, her figure became smaller and smaller, looking back again and again. She gazed at him who would look small as well, keeping sight of him constantly.

Perhaps you can’t understand now...

Kei wiped off the rain gathered on the bench with both hands and sat down. Soon his 501 jeans absorbed the rain and his underwear got damp

It still sprinkled over the circle of light when Kei looked up a mercury lamp. Small raindrops danced with a gentle wind, came down suddenly and disappeared in the dark.

Kei lay down on the bench and closed the eyes. Kaori’s smile blurred and swayed. Kei opened the eyes and gazed at the dark night sky.

The park was surrounded with three buildings. Lights still scattered like dots on each wall of the sheer buildings. While Ken gazed at the lights, he was under a deep illusion that the lights flew down to him and were absorbed into the bottom of dark, damp ground. Kei removed the shiver of legs which cowered for a second and got up. Then he repeated Osawa’s words again.

“Perhaps you can’t understand now...”

A big moth was lying at his feet, just on the right foot of Kei who bent his head. It spread the wings on the dark ground like a white paint spilt. It was rather smaller

than Kei's shoes. When Kei peered into the moth, he found that the right edges of both wings were missing like being chipped off by the asphalt. The white bulged abdomen got several brown lines in ellipse. It was bulging much bigger than a normal bud.

Kei touched it on tiptoe under his breath. The wings wavered as if a big sailboat leaned. The right feeler also broke halfway and turned to the outside.

Kei gave a sigh, waved his right hand and knelt down slowly. Kei's fingertips shove off the black, damp ground softly. He drew the broken feelers on tiptoe, emphasizing the lines of broken wings a bit and traced the outline of wings and body carefully like giving dark shades.

The result did not satisfy Kei. Kei bit his lips and drew it many times, deleting it and drawing it repeatedly, with five fingers, not only with the forefinger. But each result did not reach what Kei had in his mind.

Kei gave up, lay down on the bench again and closed the eyes hard. A glow of the heart was absorbed into fine raindrops falling down and faded away to the night sky quietly.

Kei awoke with the heat of morning light. When Kei squint his eyes, a black shadow was waving in the back of clear blue sky above his view. Kei jumped out in his haste. The man took a step back and said, "You drew this?" pointing the ground and making the stubble of his chin wave. Several plastic bags of supermarket were hanging from his fingertips of both hands and the bags made a light sound as often as he moved. The surface of the wet bags shone sharply. Kei answered with a nod squinting at it.

"Straight lines are not bad, but curves are loose."

"Awful! Just an amateur painting." the man spat out on the ground and reversed his steps slowly before the elevated railroad. The long dark shadow got longer and covered Kei's feet.

"Excuse me!"

"What?"

"Thanks!"

Kei said that ironically, but it was his real feelings. The man began to walk swaying right and left widely, and then stopped suddenly to look back. The man fixed his eyes on Kei. Kei looked after with a smile, shading his eyes from the light. The man began to walk again, turned to the right and disappeared.

Kei looked at the moth he drew for a while. Then, he came to himself and looked around. Beside the bench there was not the white moth that stayed last evening. Kei stood up and looked about for the moth, but there was not even a sign that looked alike.

Kei didn't go back to his room and stayed at the business hotel where was closest to the prep school, using the credit card given by his father.

The voice from Kaori recorded in the cellular phone and some mails as well. Kei deleted all of them without opening them. While staying at the hotel, he dropped at his room once and found Kaori's words on a scrap of a schedule book in a mail box. "Call me. I want to see you." The message was written in neat letters. Kei thought that he should meet Rika, not Kaori, so he went to the cram school several times. But Kei did not see Rika since that day, and had no reply from Rika though he contacted her many times.

After an interval of four days, Kei went back to his room and took a hot shower raising the heat of the water. Drips hit the eyelid and a soft heat soaked. It was three days after the day Kaori stayed at his room. Kei was dragged out to a nearby supermarket by Kaori for buying groceries for four days. Kaori picked up fresh colorful vegetables arranged in the chill like adding colors to the beige basket with care.

Most of the vegetables Kaori took were near to primary colors. Red, green and purple vegetables made Kei image a painting in his memory. Kei vaguely had an image of a painting in his memory looking at red, green, purple vegetables. But Kei hardly remembered even the names of those he had in his mind. The names Kei told were just Gogh and Picasso who everybody knew. Kei told Kaori about that and Kaori smiled gently and said that their paintings were that level for him.

The home-made dish Kaori cooked impressed Kei who didn't remember mother's dish. Kei imagined that Kaori eats out almost every day. But Kaori told with a shy smile that cooking on her own would be useful for her work that needs mainly entertaining the staff who employed her and the guests to the hall and the rough skin would disturb her job.

On the way to Kei's room at the shed on a path by the river running along the foot of the hill, Kaori stopped suddenly on the bridge. She gazed at the thin sun setting over the river and swaying, over the parapet. Kei held the paper bag over slowly in her arms.

The surface of a river was glaring with the strong afternoon sun. It looked intense to Kei's eyes. Kaori's cheeks looked sweaty a bit because the light heat from there seemed to be conveyed to Kaori who gazed at it. Behind them the kids on their ways from school passed romping and Kaori opened the mouth thinly like replying to the kids

....There is various bustles in the city and the bustles pass by. If Kei wants to stop the bustles from passing by and keep them in his mind, it would not be hard. He could wrap laugh and sadness one by one with care and pack them quietly into a paper bag like the one you've got now.

But Kei might throw them out someday when he cannot hold the bag. It is not wrong at all. It's no big problem about which one is right and wise, throw them out when you are walking or throw them out after you stopped? The question is that you have to make a choice someday And you must notice it someday...

The hours move on at each person's pace. The speed of spending a day depends on each person. It looks alike understanding of study, efficiency of work and how to spend Sunday morning. It varies with each person...

So you must catch a moment of choice someday....I 'm sure you can do well if you notice it before you are forced to do it

Kei turned on the tap, dropped to his knees and fell down on the spot. The dry sound of falling drips flitted through his ears. Kei squeezed his both hands and held the breath for a while, and then stifled his voice dropped from the heart clenching his back teeth. Kei was crying stiffening the whole body.

A red Japanese car for a family use that was released a few years ago and didn't match the alley of Setagaya sent out a dull light under the cool light of street lamps. The corner of rear window cracked a little diagonally and a scratch stood out on the handle. I'm not sure that the window of the back seat is broken, but it was pulled down halfway and left open. Kei could see Kaori's room on the 6th floor diagonally to the right over the roof. The light was not on in her room yet.

It was past 10:00 P.M. when Kei arrived there. There was almost no sign of life about. Kei gazed at the lights on the main street at the end of the shadow that extended straight. An electric sign of a small French restaurant that looked like a personal shop sent out a gentle, soft blue light. Kei remembered Kaori's words stepping back. In past days, when Kei left Kaori's room, she asked him to go to the restaurant together next time because it was good.

Kei opened his cellular phone sitting on the stairs in the center of Kaori's apartment. A soft light wrapped Kei's sweaty forehead.

Kei opened the inbox and found a mail from Rika. The subject was blank.

《Can I see you somewhere? I have something to talk to you.》

Kei tapped the keys in a hurry.

《You know, I mailed to you many times. I've been worrying about you. Can I talk to you? Right now. 》

There was a reply, 《Sure.》 a while after Kei sent his mail. Kei called Rika's phone number right away.

“Are you all right? You've been absent from classes. I asked the fussy secretary of the prep school and she replied shortly, 《You were absent longer than her.》 You are different from me, right?”

Rika smiled a little and said. It was the familiar, cheerful voice.

“Don't worry. I just wanted to think about many things by myself....For a while, I was hanging out many places for a change.”

“If you say so, that's OK....What's that you want to talk to me?”

“Kei, can I see you? How about now?”

For a moment Kei hesitated at her invitation that sounded formal unusually, but answered.

“Sure. But Rika, I was at Kaori's apartment now.”

There was a long silence. Kei added words like patching things up.

“Rika, perhaps you are correct. Kaori and I don't go well after all. We must be not well-matched. Well, our ages must be concerned, but Kaori is sound on her goal, and it has finally come true. So she won't need me anymore. I don't have a goal like that Kaori has....Thank you for the other day. You accompanied me a whole day doing a rash act. “

“...Kei”

“What?”

“I want to see you right now.”

“Where can I meet you?”

“Come to my room...I'll send you my address by mail. You've got GPS, right?”

I will be waiting...

After a while, a small figure suddenly appeared over the darkness of a long street, swayed and stopped. The sound of heels vibrated quietly. Kei thought the figure may be Kaori.

“Kei?”

At the moment Kaori asked so doubtfully, the back seat door of a red car opened. Legs got out of it and Osawa's long hair swayed. A figure of Kaori in a distance trembled a little. Osawa fixed his eyes on Kei.

In a moment Osawa noticed Kei's glance fallen on the car, heaved a deep sigh and said.

“What's the matter? Did you think I drive around a red BMW? I am different from other lots. A fool tends to make a gorgeous fence.”

Faint lassitude was shown in Kei's eyes. It was far from his anger. It was, rather, something that he couldn't afford.

The figure of Kaori stiffened. She appeared to be astonished at a sign of two people. Kaori's voice with a gasp fell from the end of the darkness.

“Why?”

The two shadows stared each other side by side. Kei rubbed his eyes. The shadow was a blur in the heat and swayed.

“I got here guided by GPS. Because I’ve got a thing I must talk today...”

The line of shadow behind Kaori tightened for a second. Then Kaori relaxed and asked gently,

“How about your work?”

Osawa took a square shadow out of the back seat, saying that it is a convenient age. Perhaps it is a notebook PC. A small lamp blinked like taking a deep breath at the edge of the square shadow.

The shadow of Osawa turned back to Kei slowly. He took a step forward and asked Kei. Two shadows of buildings overlapped sharply over Osawa’s head.

“How are you getting along?”

Kei froze, then kept silent and bit his lips. The sweat on his forehead glistened with the dim light of the street lamps.

“He said he came here to say good-bye to you.”

The figure of Kaori suddenly became small. Kei gasped at her appearance. The stringy spit adhered to the tip of his tongue.

“Perhaps you couldn’t believe that. Look at his cellular phone. A record of mail and call is left. I just happened to hear it. I didn’t intend to hear it, though. You know, it’s hot and humid.”

Osawa looked backed to the open window of the car and said. Kei once swallowed the spit and opened his mouth. The lower lip was dry and rough.

“I don’t want you to say.....I hate you. I really hate a guy like you.”

“Why do you hate me? Because I work with famous artists and try to get at her, taking advantage of that?”

Kei bent his head. He kept silent and gazed at a shadow of himself at his feet for a while. It was a short, light shadow because he was just below the street lamp. The only answer to Osawa’s words that Kei found was just “Right”, besides, he bent his head again brooding on what kind of words he should add after the answer.

“There is a difference between you and me at present. It is a decisive difference. You might think that I am dangling round Kaori urgently. But it may not be right. Kaori has seen me before she saw you, besides, Kaori called me.”

The silhouette of Kaori swayed widely for a moment. From the back a scared voice sounded like vanishing over.

“Kei, I met him just once.... For a week we stayed together I’ve never met Osawa.”

“Actually what do you think of what she said?”

Osawa’s shoulder touched the circle of a white light falling from the street lamp. The left shoulder of his white wrinkled shirt shed a pale light. Osawa once looked down and said gently. His eyes were clear as if he was looking away beyond Kei’s figure.

“What was her dream? It’s to become a friend of an artist. For the only dream, she

came to today rejecting the absolute stability of a job which ordinary girls want without hesitation. Besides, she is 24 years old. Perhaps it's the peak age for a girl, and getting married at 24 is not funny. She spends such valuable time on a halfway guy like you. Perhaps she met you because she just wanted to know music simply. Actually it's right. And what she said that something brilliant you've got might be a kind of compassion. It's sympathy. An indifferent thing. If you've got a talent, you might have showed your genius already, right? The picture you drew might be recognized by nobody. If you should succeed in it, the fame might be temporary. There are many possibilities in ambiguous future, but there is also anxiety. Don't you think so?"

Osawa stopped to talk once, and continued.

"I worked out beside you."

Osawa was in a circle of light. His long hair swayed a little on the shoulder. Osawa who ran his fingers through his hair took a step back and leaned against the bonnet. Osawa's monotonous voice passed through the darkness between the two, and sneaked into Kei's ears heavily.

"Kaori's story doesn't completely agree with what I said. You know? Do you think Kaori can tell you the truth? Do you think she can tell you everything under this situation? Do you think it's her kindness to talk to you now? Kaori is not such a girl. She would talk to you later. You should know best that she is such a girl. But I never deny her story for the contradiction. That's because Kaori was considerate of you to talk so. It's not a lie because it could be a truth for you."

"Osawa-san, you are too cruel."

Kaori sobbed and said. Her shadow was shaking getting darker.

"Cruel, ah...I think I have a deep feeling for others."

"He is still 18 years old. He lost her mother when he was a kid."

"And he draws only a profile of a woman.....A cool artist. It's a kind of sympathy that is in fashion these days?"

Osawa's voice did not sound sarcastic. Kei could have replaced humiliation with anger and felt much easier if Osawa made fun of him.

Kaori's shadow got smaller slowly and sank down at the spot. She said in a small, low voice like saying to herself with a tremble.

"No, absolutely no, Kei...I like you....I really like you...."

"I came here because I had business with Kaori."

Osawa sat slowly close to the shadow that sank down and dropped to his knees. He touched Kaori's chin and raised it silently in the shadow silhouetted. Then, he gave her a kiss slantingly.

Kei remained standing, being staggered by the shadows overlapped. He thought that the moment will be the sequence of one moment that never ends. The shadows are, rather, something that should be there in that way.

Kei cowered and his legs trembled.

At the moment two shadows was apart, Kei started back. After his heavy, stiff legs came off the darkness of the road at last, the tremble increased all over.

Kaori's cry calling after Kei echoed splitting the darkness of the street over and over against the back of Kei who dashed.

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It was a little past twelve when Kei arrived at Rika's apartment in Meguro. Signs of life faded completely though the light was still left in the street. Kei who rushed up the stairs of the subway at a stretch put the cellular phone into the pocket and regained his breath leaning against the door of her room on the 2nd floor, and then pushed the intercom after repeating deep breathing a few times.

"You are late...."

Rika's hair was wet. She shot Kei a look like feeling out on Kei's mind. For a while, Kei leaned against the door, exhaled the rest of the breath to the darkness downstairs trying to make Rika unconscious.

"Anything?"

"Nothing..."

Kei gazed at Rika. He smelled the rinse in the chill. A meaningless list of English letters on T-shirt bulged softly and made a dim shade with the light from the kitchen.

Rika wiped the sweat on Kei's forehead with her hand. She went up to him, stared fixedly at his eyes and said uneasily.

"What's wrong with you?"

Kei went to her back without answering it and took a breath of a sweet smell of her wet hair. The distorted pain throbbing in his chest faded away a little. Then he slowly held her shoulders in his arms. Her body was all cold due to the air-conditioner.

"I don't mind..."

Kei tried to reach his right hand toward around her lower part. Her warmth softly waved on his palm. Then Kei wanted the warmth again. Her breasts did not refuse his fingers. Kei forgot himself in her sweet, soft warmth. Kei noticed her shoulders tremble at the moment he touched the top of her breasts. The shiver slowly descended from the shoulders to the waist and then the knees. Rika threw out the word at a white wall which is ahead of her downcast eyes.

"I don't care substitute for Kaori...."

Rika turned around and tears overflowed in her eyes. It went along over and over again in the cheek slightly dyed in red and dispersed from the tip of the trembling chin. The tears split many times along the lines of tears drawn once and the teardrops absorbed tranquility around shining on the cold floor.

"I'll hold you if you feel hard and sad... like Kaori does."

Rika drew Kei's back that sank down to her breast quietly. She wiped her tears with her palm and whispered in his ear.

"Kei, we can go to college together and enjoy the so-called campus life. Isn't that great? Parties with the club members every week. How about living together after graduation? I don't say "marriage". I won't rush you. If we live together, I can go to bakery with you every Sunday morning. Breads are hot straight from the oven! Must be nice. I'm sure you will be gentle."

Kei looked up hearing her voice. Rika slowly lipped Kei's cheek and kissed.

Rika was waiting for Kei against the soft morning sun. She took a hamburger out of a paper bag that Kei bought at a fast-food shop in the station, and then smiled with pure eyes saying, "Thank you."

They went to Kei's room biting a hamburger. On the way, Rika tried to talk to Kei gazing at his profile a couple of times, but withdrew her eyes immediately and kept on eating in silence.

Kei also tried to talk to Rika something and searched words, but found nothing new. He just said, "This is good", setting Rika's untidy hair on her ear. For a second, Rika stopped, gazed at Kei and opened her mouth thinly. But she began to walk in silence again. Perhaps she didn't find right words.

When a shed with Ken's room appeared on the right after going up a gentle slope, Kei stopped holding Rika's shoulder. There were two shadows of squatting figures with legs stretched in the shade of the entrance against the morning sun.

Rika's eyes fell on them, following Kei's eyes. Rika lost her words for a while because she noticed who they were. She gasped biting her lips and cried lowering her sobs. Then, she whispered in Kei's ear standing on tiptoe.

"Kei, don't go.....Please....Let's go back"

Kei gazed at Rika firmly.

"I'll be right back."

Rika shook her head desperately stifling a sob.

"No, never....Kei, don't go....."

Kaori's ankles moved slightly when a light sound of bicycle which slid down from the top of the slope. Once it disappeared in the shade of the shed and Kaori's shadow appeared in the morning sun.

"Kei?"

At the moment Kei tried to call her name, Rika dropped her voice. It was a small voice, but carried well to Kaori.

"That's not fair ...Really sly... Something wrong with you... Kaori-san has a boyfriend, right? Why do you run after her? ... All is over between two of you...Already over..."

On the concrete road, a belt of light that came through leaves of roadside tree became complicated making mesh. In the transparent light, dry pebbles were scattered sparsely.

Kaori approached slowly and said to Rika. Kaori's shadow became bigger and her hair swayed from side to side on her shoulder.

"Whether it has ended or not...I don't think it's your business."

"Stop it!"

Kei suddenly spoke in a rough voice. Kaori glared at Kei. There was a flow of tears from her piercing eyes like Rika.

"She was great? Much fresher than me, right?"

She began to run leaving the words. The sound of the heel reflected on the road. The squeaking sounds rocked Key. Kei ran out and Rika's voice scattered widely over his back.

"Not fair! Kaori-san just pretends to be adult! She is just a wheedling girl. Don't go!"

For a second Kei stopped to look back to Rika who fell down to the spot, but ran after Kaori soon.

Kaori shook away Kei's hands forcefully when he caught her by the shoulder before the station. Commuting businessmen and students turned around to see the events. Kaori leaned herself against the show window turning her back to Kei. And she concealed her eyes with the back of a small right hand. Her lips moved lifelessly feeling indication that Kei stood slowly sideward.

"It's all right. ... You do as you like. You are always running away ... You would depend on anyone who can accept you ... You would kiss anyone, even make love."

Her knees trembled faintly. Kei kept silent looking at it. The bustle flowing toward the station became remote.

"Kaori, I didn't sleep with Rika."

"Do you want me to believe it?"

Kaori smiled faintly.

"How about you, Kaori? Actually you slept with him, right?"

"Never."

"Me, neither. Do you want me to believe it?"

"Why does a man dwell on it?"... You are the same as other guys..."

Kaori squeezed the word firmly from her thin body. Then, she added a few words.

"But, maybe...yeah, maybe... I love Osawa-san."

Kei lost his strength from his whole body as if various things were spilling from the tip of

fingers that trembled faintly.

Kei finally opened his mouth after a while.

“Why do you want to hold back Osawa desperately? I don’t need the existence of “Osawa”.”

“Kei, why don’t you understand me?...I want you to struggle your way upward...I just want you to do it...”

Kaori’s shoulders trembled feebly. A line of light reflected by a pane came on Kaori’s wet cheeks.

“You don’t understand it. You don’t know the machinery of society yet. How many sacrifices I made to meet Osawa-san...”

Kei nodded. Kaori might be right. Kei muttered in his mind, but what he uttered was totally different.

“That guy knows everything about me. Why did you talk to him?”

“Don’t you understand that I wanted you to be connected with him? To make Osawa-san know about you, everything is necessary.”

Kei asked all question left.

“You could have left him any moment at that time..... But you didn’t intend to leave him...”

“I couldn’t move because I lost the strength....that’s all....”

The noise of train was swollen gradually. The heavy sound passed over the thick crowd many times and swept away the silence between two. There was a long silence for a while.

Kaori looked up the sun above the bridge as if she averted her glance from Kei. Her red eyelids showed how many hours she had waited for Kei. Then Kaori slowly fixed her eyes on Kei’s eyes and stared. Kei thought that Kaori looked another person.

“But I can do anything for my beloved person.....I’m sure.”

Kaori said it to Kei and began to walk slowly to the stairs at the station flooded with people.

Kei saw Kaori off and looked fixedly at her who was slowly swallowed up by the quiet crowd with slight expectations that she might look back.

Kei went back to the slope rapidly, but found Rika nowhere. He called her cellular phone hastily and sent a mail, too. But no reply returned.

Kei thought it is no wonder. As soon as he opened the door of his room, he felt the fatigue from last night at once.

Kei spread himself on the bed and looked at a record rack. He recalled Kaori who was excited when she came to the room. He sat up and erased it with the strong sunshine through the curtain. Then, he rested his gaze on the floor. Baby's-breath was utterly yellow and dried. White petals fell from the bunch and smashed into tiny pieces.

Kei slowly got up and threw them into the sink, and lay down on the bed again.

Kei fell asleep without notice.

Kei woke up in the strong sunshine of the afternoon. He took a quick shower, got dressed and went to Rika’s apartment.

He pushed the intercom on the door of Rika’s room and knocked the door a couple of times, but the no sign of life returned. At the moment he turned back and looked up the sky with no clouds, his cellular phone rang. It was Rika. Kei leaned against the rails of the corridor and opened it hastily.

Kei wondered about Rika’s voice from the cellular phone. It was low, heavy and cool.

“Kei, we made a detour too much.”

At the same time, number 3 appeared and a conference call flashed on the upper right of the display and Rika's eyes were imaged on the monitor. Kei lost his words looking at Rika's cold eyes which were more transparent than the clear blue sky in the background. Rika's smile which should have been on her face this morning died and a cold smile appeared on her lips instead.

"I'll tell you where I am now.....to two of you, OK?"

Kei's mouth froze with Rika's words. Then Kei gazed at the display rotating slowly over there. At the same time, Kei doubted the third number shown on the corner.

"Rika, Is another one Kaori? Joking? You can't know Kaori's phone number."

Kei said to Rika in a light voice as if he laughed it away somewhat, but the name shown on the monitor was actually her name. Rika didn't look away and smiled at Kei who gave a bitter smile.

"I backed up whole when I copied your mail address and phone number. To my notebook PC."

Kei's eyes fell on outside the passage. On the right, a series of countless roofs of apparently used cars which was out of sight at night, were stuffed uncomfortably to the other side of the avenue which looked narrow. A sheaf of dazzling heat which bounced on the hood made Kei's pupils contract. Kei withdrew his gaze from the sultry reflected heat at last and ran down the stairs in a hurry. The sweaty palm which grasped the rails was caked with reddish brown rust and the rust didn't come off even though he tried to dust it off.

When Kei turned left at the alley, buildings competing with each other came into Kei's view. Kei ran to the entrance to the subway at the intersection.

"I'm here, Yoga, a quiet area. Kaori-san, can you hear me? Are you with Osawa-san, right?"

The noise of the sudden brake on the street died away in the distance. The cellular phone he held looked like a hard, chilled ice. Kei strained to hear Rika's excited voice, losing his breath in silence

"Kei, do you know where they are now? You don't know..., in Kaori-san's room.

But I guess you don't admit this even if I say so. You are submissive to Kaori-san, though. I've looked up Kaori-san's act and how Osawa-san's wife spent the time. Well, let's bring this to an end. All is over..."

The end of central reservation looked warped with afternoon heat. The heat haze shimmered and flapped the circumference widely.

"Rika, calm down. You just hurt yourself. Kaori, can you hear me? Are you really on line? Answer me."

"Kei, Kaori-san never answers you. You are too easy, Kei. A person who expects me most is Kaori-san. Kaori-san was waiting for this moment. Is that right? Kaori-san."

Rika was right. If Kaori is concerned about Osawa, Kaori should want to know about Osawa right now, here. Kei forgot himself running to the stairs of subway breathlessly. Once Kei looked away from the display and looked around

The town was dancing with busy signals in the heat of midsummer. As Kei's legs got gradually heavy, the outline of scenery became loose and motionless. Various things around Kei looked bare and floating in the space. Kei stopped and went into the narrow alley.

Kei looked down at the image again with Rika's voice, leaning against the wall of building.

"I got to the middle of condominium. Whose kid is that playing there now?"

The front of slide appeared the moment that the hard, clear blue sky flew in a line with one color. The moment Kei looked away from the silver setting sun with a strong brightness closing down straight. The small head appeared over the light. It went up the stairs shaking right and left. Kei thought it was a boy because it romped about holding the fence on the top

of the stairs.

The boy slid down splitting the sunlight and then, the back of a woman appeared suddenly. The tip of hair which grew to the back glowed on her white T-shirt and swayed. She looked like Osawa's wife

"This is live. Listen carefully...."

The darkness fell with the dull sound of unzipping Rika's bag. The soft light sometimes got in through the opening of her bag and the image altered into blue.

"Are you Ryou Osawa's wife?"

There seems to be no response. It made Kei's imagination swell more. If Kaori heard this, she would feel in the same way. If Rika's guess was right, Osawa who was supposed to be there together should feel so.

After a short silence, she said in a transparent voice, "Yes...." She looked like asking mysteriously.

"I'm a girl friend of a guy, Kei Kitami. He was deceived by a girl, Kaori Uemura and doesn't face the reality."

"I don't understand it." The calm voice came to his ears. Then, Rika's slow voice sounded.

"I mean, a girl, Kaori Uemura is a hindrance to me because she has been going out with my boyfriend and your husband."

"What?"

"Your husband has been dating with Kaori Uemura. Well, I could say Kaori has been dating with your husband. Anyway, it doesn't matter which is which."

There was a long silence. Sometimes children's yell floated over the darkness and died away in the distance.

Kei looked up into space vertically along the wall of a building. The snow-white cloud swam low on the tip of his eyes and drifted far.

Osawa's wife finally opened her mouth. Her voice was much calmer than Kei thought regardless of the fantastic appearance of Rika.

"Well, I vaguely noticed ..."

"So, why do you ask him? My boyfriend loves the girl. They should have broken up, but he was still chasing her. He can't put his feelings in order."

Kei didn't hear Rika's answer. Perhaps Rika nodded. Kei wiped the sweat on his eyelids and strained his ears. Kei peered into the image which made a light shade, but there was still the darkness. In the deep darkness, the chain of swing squeaked high.

"I don't doubt you, but I've experienced this kind of harassment so far. Suppose your story is right and I can ask him to reform him, I could feel easy..."

"I didn't come here all the way to tell a lie. Everything is true."

"Yeah, I know."

Silence fell again. The yell of children came back and sounded big, but cracked and went away. Kei lowered his breath under the heat got in.

"I was one year older than him. When he joined the same company where I worked for now, I thought I don't have to be there. I've worked frantically until then. There were many trashy programs and stupid guys besides. I thought I don't want to be outdone by anyone. But I was outdone by him from the first. Though connection is necessary in this world, he refused most of them and attracted the artists one after another, composing his inner elements concretely to appeal the artists who he regards. On the other hand, I was pregnant....but had an abortion. I felt that he doesn't need a child at present and we could not get along if a baby is born...."

Rika said raising her voice.

"I'm not interested in your husband's success story and I have nothing to do with a sad story"

all the more. I want to stop everything.”

“Yea, I know....Sorry...”

Kei stared upon the image. A long silence continued and there seemed to have been a pause in the call. The darkness took on a dash of blue again and a calm voice of Osawa’s wife rose. Her next words aroused Kei’s interest, too.

“But the girl likes him, right? There are not such cool guys in the world now. They desperately brush only the appearance. There are many guys who are off the point. The girl, maybe, had the same feeling as me. Think about it well...The girl dared to choose the married man, my husband, right? Of course, I’m not happy hearing he is loved by the girl. I’m disturbed, too....because I was suddenly informed by you.”

“Don’t you want them to break up?”

“How?”

“...don’t know”

“She will give up with your act like this?”

Rika kept silent. The cellular phone made noise in her bag.

“You are a very obedient, brave girl. You wavered much before you came here, right?”

Kei saw a light came from the darkness in her bag. For a while, the silence went on, and then Rika’s feeble sob followed. Kei held his cellular phone tight, visualizing the trembling image of Rika.

“If you have courage to come here, you should be a more wonderful girl. Don’t you think so? Maybe you could be a strong, smart, beautiful lady. I feel so....

I don’t want you to spend your time on this kind of matter now...”

Rika’s sob cracked. She cried. Kei held his breath and closed his eyes looking up into space. Kei kept his mouth shut tight. Various expressions of Rika silhouetted in his eyes and flitted through.

“I think it’s very hard to change a person’s feeling. So we had better leave it in peace for a while? OK?”

The voice of Osawa’s wife got larger and Rika’s bag shook again. Maybe Osawa’s wife approached Rika. A dash of deep blue increased in the image and Kei heard Rika’s shaking cry quietly from the image. Kei thought that Rika’s tears flew more as the image swayed delicately.

“Let’s go home, Taichi.”

Kei heard dry footsteps on the ground, and the sound gradually became larger. Kei strained to hear the sound. Then he heard a sweet voice of the boy.

“That girl was bullied by mom?”

A laugh that sounded like lulling him dropped.

“She accidentally fell over something. She can stand by herself, so let’s go home, OK? You wanna eat cookies?”

“Yeah! “ Kei heard a lively voice and her voice of collecting herself together, and the voice sounded large. Kei also heard a mumble in the voice of Osawa’s wife that died away in the distance.

“I’m indifferent to my makeup, maybe...”

Kei heard Rika’s sob that got larger from the back of image waving faintly. He said gazing at a short shadow at his feet.

“Rika, I’ll go there. Don’t go away. I’ll be right there.”

“Yeah....I’m OK....No problem, really...Thank you....Kei...”

Kei kept silent for a while hearing Rika’s words discharged barely. Then “3” on the display disappeared like being swallowed up. A normal call of two persons returned. Kei didn’t know whether it is Rika or Kaori.

“Kaori, can you hear me? Is that you?”

Kei asked so, going down the stairs to a subway, but the darkness of image kept quiet and

just increased. After a while, there was a pause in the call.

Kaori is with Osawa now as Rika said? Kei didn't think that Rika's action was a fake. No, he should trust her action. In fact, Kei heard a reply from Osawa's wife and a voice of a little child, so Kei should have believed Rika's words. Kei tried to recall and arrange Rika's words passing through a ticket gate of subway, but he had to accept the reality presented by Rika as far as she chased two persons. But Kaori's behavior and her warmth still flitted through his mind and never went away.

Kei idly looked at the light of express train leaving, leaning against a post at the subway platform.

It was Thursday, four days later from a day Kei located Osawa. Kei met Osawa at a coffee shop on the first floor of a building at Omotesando. It was already past 2:00 at midnight. Kei hesitated to contact Kaori and brooded over words to Rika, who had been absent from the prep school, for a few days. But Kei thought that he should meet Osawa directly and wants to meet him some day. Kei felt out words that Kaori left and found the way from that.

Omotesando was almost deserted at night, different from Shinjuku. But as it was just next to Aoyama, a few foreign girls who looked like models passed on bare foot, swinging golden hair widely and scattering merry voice.

On the counter of the shop a guy who looked like a clerk in a boutique was mortally drunk and lay on his face taking off his glasses on the side of an ashtray. In the back, a waiter with a thick beard turned a record.

It was Bill Evans who refused to be hospitalized and died at live at the Keystone Korner. There was always a kind of impatience in his tune. Perhaps that's because he was told that he could not live long. Kei did not like him.

Osawa noticed Kei who was looking out of the window idly at the inmost table, and then sat at the same table. Kei had a moment of confusion because his behavior was too natural, but strangely he didn't feel tension which he had felt from Osawa before. Kei was never affected by Osawa's action of opening his notebook nor his cool eyes through deep blue lenses.

"I thought you will come here someday. What do you want?"

Osawa laid his hand on the rim of sunglasses. Then he looked down at Kei's empty cup and said. Ice in a glass of iced coffee melted all and stagnated.

A waiter came and Osawa said, "Regular." And he cast Kei a glance.

"Coffee, hot"

Osawa laughed a little and said.

"There are more than 50 kinds of coffee beans here. If combinations of blends are added, there would be over 1000. Would you like the same blend as mine?"

Kei kept silent and blushed. Kei trusted Osawa a little because Osawa's voice sounded calm like relieving the tension Kei felt. It was one side of Osawa which Kei had not felt. Kei was puzzled about that.

Osawa told Kei resting his gaze on the display opened.

"You might hear a little from Kaori, but I will tell you about me. Perhaps we could come to an arrangement with my story and it is also for your own sake."

Osawa's clear eyes fell on Kei for a second. Kei was confused at Osawa's calm look with large pupils and looked away from him. One taxi passed through a red signal that had just changed, and then disappeared on the other side of the crossing.

"I graduated from K University. It is no too much to say that's one of top 3 in Japan, it depends on college, though. But even in such a university, everyone searched desperately for a company at job hunting. People who entered a university from outside like me and

easygoing people who went on with his or her father's occupation data scrutinized from early childhood are totally different. People from inside spent day and night in parties as usual because they had certain connections, but other people spent the desperate time.

Osawa stopped tapping keys and looked out of the window. The eyes looked like recalling his memory. A waiter gave a cup with a saucer to each of two and left.

"I thought at that time. Everything was settled from the beginning. So I found employment at the small production company of my own free will. And now I'm here like this."

Kei took a sip of coffee. He took a peep into the cup of bitter coffee. Osawa's forelock reflected on the bottom of the cup swayed and blurred.

"Do you respect my work some? Without thinking of Kaori."

Osawa fixed his eyes on Kei with a low voice. Kei did not answer it, but his eyes fell on the floor for a second. Osawa seemed to have understood looking at Key's look.

"Look out of the window."

Office workers who are seldom seen in Aoyama caught Key's eyes. They seemed to have tried to call a taxi and stood on the road shoulder staggering and pulling each other's tie

"They are shit. They deceive themselves to varnish the reality that confronted them, using drinks, appearance and various things. Not others, you know, themselves."

Kei felt that Osawa's voice shook with anger. Kei cast Osawa a glance quietly. Kei was deeply distressed to see Osawa's eyes fallen on outside. His eyes did not show anger, even not pity with kind of contempt. They were just clear pupils like those of boys. Kei peeped Osawa's look from his long forelock. His eyes looked as if he will never be an adult who shattered his dream that he had in his childhood.

Osawa sipped a cup of coffee and said.

"And to me you just look like them. Perhaps Kaori who has seen you has the same feeling as mine. That's why she worries about you. She hopes you will not be one of them."

Kei searched his memory for some of her words. There were some he could recall clearly, but some words had already become vague and were going out of his memory. A kind of sound was lost in the image of Kaori who came across Key's mind.

Osawa shifted his eyes to the display again. And then the quiet, intermittent noise of touching the keys correctly sounded delicately like raindrops and fell on the corner of the table.

"My father was just an officer of a town hall. I went to the hall with my friend to see how he works. At the counter, my father was contending with an old man, who was so called "a claimer" today. I still remember that my father constantly tapped the counter with his fingertips, irritated by a stream of abuse.

The busy movement of his fingers irritated even me. My father was irritated because he could not answer well. He reacted endlessly to the problem, which didn't seem to be agreed, at the window and there was no air of showing to the claimer to another room. I couldn't understand what they were arguing, but a trifling matter, I guess. I thought that not only my farther but also the claimer was stupid. Their talk was a kind of faultfinding each other. It was like going on adding 0 to 0 without end. It never totals to 1. Nothing is born by just knocking each other. There was no positive passion for opening up something.

I was disillusioned with my father's service. He hoped to make me an officer and live in security, but it was obvious that I would not obey him as I was still young. In fact, it seemed to me that my father's consideration was just trying to secure his life exactly. "Get out of here!" my father bawled at me for falling short of his expectations. So I left my house. When I was in my third year of high school, I came to Tokyo with a little money from my mother. And my father died of heart attack. It was just a year before drawing his pension."

Osawa's mouth was closed lightly and his eyes flashed. It was the cool gaze that Kei had seen before. Osawa looked out of the window. In the back of the eyes, a red neon lamp on the street sparkled for a moment. He blinked the eyelids lightly and looked at the display again. "I had a favorite music program which I had loved since a pupil. I had been tied up listening to music through a radio. I still remember a radio program that I listened to those days, and the boss at that time and I work together now. He was, so to speak, my father. He closely cautioned me about that on-air. It is society. I was called by the board and roared repeatedly, but all of them were a matter of principle. On the night when we apologized in public, we went to Roppongi right away to drink. What I did was just a new topic for them. It will be forgotten in three days. Actually that was right. Nobody talks about that now. In fact, the artists who I took charge of laughed and said, "That was really exciting."

The stiff mood broadened into Osawa's laughter. Kei was amused, too. Kei thought that he would have been delighted if he was on that occasion. But Osawa drowned out his smile immediately and said. It was a strong tone like demanding himself. "And a total of listeners for my program never drop to "0". If a number close to "0" was left, the listeners were actual listeners. We make programs and broadcast for them." Osawa's eyes fell on the display again. A meaningless list of English letters appeared on the display was reflected clearly in the sunglasses. Kei sat down again and asked a question prepared. Kei noticed that his voice was trembling. "What about your wife and child?" "Why do you stick at that? If I were a normal office worker, this will end to a normal, trashy story. But I'm different. I am in the business with artists who steered music scenes in Japan. Their sense was totally different from general sense. That's why I was attracted, and I must keep on supporting it. Do you understand what I want to say?"

Osawa's right forefinger pushed up the sunglasses on his nose. In the back of glasses, the cold light sparkled again. "I need the existence of Kaori for my business." Osawa said quietly like adding words. "Why on earth does my home have to do with you? It's only Kaori's business, right?" "Did you hear that call, didn't you?" Osawa drew his chin in silence. Kei's tense feeling changed to a sigh in a matter of seconds. Kei murmured "Kaori" in his mind, thinking of Rika's right sense.

Kei swallowed lightly. And moreover, he asked Osawa. Kei's voice cracked a little. "Your wife had an abortion for you, thinking of you...." "That's what she decided." The sound of tapping the keys stopped. And Osawa stared at Kei sharply and said. The silence in the shop closed in over the table like being condensed. "That's why I'm here." Osawa rested his chin on his hand shifting his eyes to the display and kept on talking. "Others might think it's a showy work, but just a fifteen minutes program. Even if other two programs are added, the total per a week will be less than 10 hours. People who don't listen to the program are much more than people who listen to it. When I chose this field, I lost control of a future meaning of myself as I knew various realities. You have your father, right?" Osawa's eyes became gentle again and sounded Kei out. Kei looked for the answer for a while with Osawa's gentle eyes and immediately remembered Kaori. For Kei, first, he should talk about Kaori now.

Kei took a cup, looking away from Osawa. Coffee became lukewarm and stronger. "What for is Kaori here?" "Kaori? What for? Did you hear the story?"

Osawa's voice rose. Kei took the cup to his mouth again.

"Kaori is not particularly here for me. She is with me for herself. She hopes to stay with me because she can get something from me. And I want her to stay beside me. That's all."

Osawa rolled lightly up his sleeves of a white shirt and drank coffee. He cast outside a glance and said quietly. The rough tone faded away.

"In future, major FM will be driven away more by radio on the Net. If my ability dies someday, I will be deserted by various things, not only Kaori. And I might lose everything I treasured. But I don't hope to live life being afraid of losing something."

Kei bit the lower lip. He bent his head and gazed at his 501 jeans. A fair skin looked pale from the lap fallen out. Kei felt that the skin got still whiter with Osawa's words.

"What do you want to do with Kaori? You still want her to stay beside you?"

Osawa told gently and Kei shut the mouth tight. Osawa's voice gradually got thinner, and swelled with tenderness, too.

"Have you thought like this? Just imagine you are so worthwhile that I am jealous of and I have such status and talent. Why didn't Kaori leave you soon? Why didn't Kaori try to leave you? I was jealous of you...."

Kei tolerated Osawa's words biting his back teeth. His shoulder stiffened, and he was ashamed of himself with annoyance because on one hand he regretted coming here somewhat; on the other hand, he got a feeling of contentment somewhere. A lump in his throat was just one thing. Kei wanted to meet Kaori.

"Do you have something to ask me?"

Kei shook his head bending his head.

"I have something to ask you. No. I beg you a favor. I'm not talking about you.

A girl who was with you."

Osawa said so and gave a deep sigh. Kei looked up at Osawa. Osawa was looking at cold street lamps in Omotesando where stillness had fallen.

"Perhaps you love Kaori, but you must not forget that girl. And I want you to apologize to her. On that day I've gone a little too far. I should not ask you this, but we will not meet again...."

Kei stood up to search his pocket. When the coins tinkled, Osawa who rested his gaze on the other side of the window murmured, "No.", and said, "You have money for a taxi?"

Kei ignored the word and took a step forward, but stopped just next to Osawa. Kei's eyes fell on Osawa's profile. With sharp eyes Osawa searched something shimmering in the display like searching something that was still a long way off a shape. Kei glanced at a waiter in the back of the counter and started to walk to the exit.

Kei opened the door and breathed deeply in the uncomfortably warm night air. The dry scent of a shower beating the heated asphalt floated over the river of light that was formed on the road.

Kei threw a few of T-shirts and underwear into a bag and left the room.

The subway at past five was flooded with people like rush hour in the morning and people crushed. Their shoulders touched each other every time they swayed from side to side along the tube of subway and the odor of sweat oozed in the chill also swayed.

Kei thought that he will meet Kaori once more before he goes back to his parents' home. He felt that the day when he saw the port by night with Kaori was a long time ago. The night view Kei had seen once did not move him deeply like his first view.

The view before his eyes was just a fiction of artificial light sending out with someone's

intention. It was too factitious to color artificially for the best possible look. The color scheme was so commonplace and false, so Kei thought that it was too empty to crash soon. The temporary beauty with direction was an eyesore for Ken. It must be a symbol of someone's silly greed.....

Kei went to the exit for staff in the back of the event hall. He decided to go back at once if he waits for Kaori for one hour, but can't see her and one hour passes. He sat down at the bench. Sometimes a security guard stared at Kei, but he spent time making a pretense to gaze the night view

After a while, Kaori appeared with Saki, among a group of girls. They smile peacefully each other and go to the platform of subway where Kei came out of.

Kaori stopped to open her handbag. Then she took a cellular phone and gazed at it for a while. And Kaori slowly reversed her steps with saying good-bye, maybe. Turning round, Kaori busily tapped keys on the cellular phone and quickly closed it. Kei saw how they are going being couched in the shade of ever green grown over.

Kei left the spot before Kaori's figure became small and disappeared into the lights on the street. Kei didn't look back to Kaori any more. Kei's bag on his back appeared to get heavier.

The cellular phone in his 501 jeans did not vibrate though two minutes passed.

Kei sneaked the duplicate key of Volvo from the drawer of father's desk and inserted the key in the dusty car. The car ran to the sea.

Occasionally, the deserted town passed, but others he found were just the dull pastoral landscape and the blaze of the afternoon light sending out the dry heat. Kei did not hate such a town and landscape, but did not want to gaze at them by preference.

On the way, the steel tower under construction was exposed to the dry light from the west in the end of the extensive country. It soared in the glaring light silently.

On 8th of January, the beach was almost deserted and the cold wind just ran through Kei's feet. When the top of waves broke and came down to his feet, he bent down to scoop up them with his hands. The gray shingle that crumbled to pieces was left in his palms. The wet palm that was numb with the north wind shone coldly in the sunlight pouring. Kei scooped up the wet shingle repeatedly, took a few steps back and sat down on the dry sand. Just beside him, the broken bottle of Coke stuck slantingly like inclining the head.

Kei felt that the sound of waves that surged and returned sounded bigger than that in summer. It was such a low, heavy wave that the freezing wind from the far north got in the swell of the sea, washed away slowly dredging up the bottom of the dark sea and blew up to the sea that stagnated again

But Kei was calm. It was totally different from that in summer. Kei was relieved to feel that time surely passes.

Kei didn't hear from Kaori even after the New Year started. Kei thought that even Kei had seen Kaori, he would repeat the same thing if he had no intent to contact her somehow. But there was a call from Rika only once.

It was the morning of January, 3, but almost the sequel to last evening. Kei received a call from Naoya after a long time. Kei was asked to have a drink at the bar opened by a boyfriend of Yurika's friend in Chiba. Kei went there hesitating somewhat because he felt awkward with his father who had retired.

At the counter of the poky bar on third floor of the building, they drank to a new year with beer.

Naoya and Yurika deliberately concentrated on talking about an unfashionable second hand clothing store which opened recently in the local area, trying to avoid the past time. But Yurika sobered up and said in a cool tone when Naoya stood up to go to the rest room.

"We gonna take it easy because we don't think of going to college, but what are you gonna do?"

Then she looked at the bank of noisy figures shaking and overlapping in the dark at the back and said, "You know, most of guys here are college students. They are enjoying..."

Yurika said so and Kei noticed that she looked away from the figures. Her eyes were just the same as the ones at the moment she let go her lips from Naoya behind the door.

When Naoya came back, Kei collected himself and smiled at them. He said that he will go for a blow and stood up for the lamp of emergency stairs which was lighted in the corner of the shop. He opened the door and sat down in the corner of the landing. When his hot cheeks were exposed to the freezing wind, his cellular phone vibrated.

There was a phone number unregistered, but Kei had slight expectation and opened the cellular phone without hesitation. He heard Rika's depressed voice like she was sounding out.

"How are you?"

"That's what I want to say. How are you doing?"

Kei also answered in a lukewarm voice as same as Rika's. A long silence continued. Kei thought of many words to express thanks and an apology for Rika, but none of them sounded senseless even if uttered. He sympathized with Rika's silence over the phone. Rika said after a deep sigh.

"A Happy New Year!"

"My best regards to you!"

"Hey, stop it."

Suddenly Rika's voice sounded watery. It was a muffled voice.

"I don't like you, Kei. I hate you. You are indecisive, though there is something defiant about you. But when it comes to the point, you are not reliable all the time... I like a masculine guy. A guy who is frank, simple and no satirical...A strong, tough guy who is brown from the sun...I don't like you, hate you...really don't like you..."

The phone made noise. Kei stood up and went up to the landing to get a cell phone signal. The wall of the next, sheer building was dusty in gray across from him. Kei sat on the rails, slowly moved and stretched his hand to touch the dirty wall. Kei's fingertips swung and floated within his reach to the wall. Meanwhile Osawa's message to Rika flitted through his mind. But Kei thought that nothing will improve if he tells the message to her now. He thought that it rather will bring confusion up again.

Kei shut his mouth to Rika's silence and then answered. A flash sparkled from somewhere and Kei said quietly in the silence.

"Sorry, I'm so sorry..."

Rika managed to control her sob with Kei's soothing words and finally said.

"Someday I will be more beautiful than Kaori and make you regret....I won't look back at you if I pass you in the town.... If I pass you and look at you through sunglasses in a convertible, you will vanish away like a wind in an instant....When you notice me, you will regret because I'm such a beautiful girl. You will think that you should have hugged me. I'm sure to make you regret....."

Kei repeated "I'm sorry." Then Rika shouted at him.

"OK. You can live like that, apologizing easily. You may take it easy. You are dishonest....too dishonest..."

Kei kept silent and strained his ears for the phone. Rika often sniffed and murmured.

'Good bye...Kei'

Kei closed his eyes and looked up at the sky. The freezing wind passed through Kei's throat and a lump of heat which fell down vertically dissolved into his eyelid. The north wind which never stopped and the heat of the sun that looked to stay there forever overhead ...Kei's shoulders stiffened up. Time stopped like sticking there. Kei slowly opened his eyes, pulling up the blurred, red eyelid. The white light in the blue sky swirled widely in the pupils and was scattered.

Kei gave a deep sigh and knelt down on the sands. A slight heat gathered in the bosom of the sand came through 501 jeans. He leaned his hands and gazed at the sand that turned bright for a while. The inside of fingertips trembled feebly. Then he made his forefinger put up and slide it slowly.

Brown quicksand ran like dragging Kei's shin when he drew huddling himself. It goes away thinly like weaving silk, dyeing the dazzling white beach amber.

Kei drew for a while. Then he ducked his head when the freezing wind blew hard and gave a deep sigh. The sigh was crushed in an instant and inhaled behind the sun.

Kei gazed at the lightness of the waves and knelt down facing to the sun again. He fixed on the seawall far, dusting grains of shingle. Two small figures were romping with the waves. Kei took a deep breath.

He opened his eyes wide at the whiteness of sand. He controlled his anger with pathos against Osawa, removed Rika's sob thinking of Kaori's sweet warmth and a soft smile.

The tremble on the fingertips vanished and Kei heard little sound. He put up his forefinger feeling the faint heat in the closed eyelids and drew a line blowing lightly. It took one minute or less to draw it, but Kei gazed at it. The outline was so simple that he couldn't believe it was his work. Kei shifted a little. He dispelled the existence of Rika and his father and kept on drawing. In a short time, Kei was drawing the same line. The line was so delicate and so beautiful as to fascinate Kei irresistibly, just a drawing of outline, though.

Kei moved back. In a moment when he put his finger to try to draw again, he had a stabbing pain in his forefinger. He saw a fragment of glass bottles being washed away by quicksand, sending out sharp light over the sand. Kei looked back at the first drawing, putting his red, oozing finger in the mouth. For a second there was just Kaori's calm face merging into the wall with white light. She was closing her small nose to little baby's breath. It sprung a bit from her profile and kept its eyes front.

Kei laid his body chilled to the bone. He lifted his cold forehead and lay on his back.

Circles of light which looked clear like early summer poured in folds to the spreading view before Kei.

Kei drew in that way alone, but he didn't notice that the drawing turned out good because he was

alone.

He lay down on the bed without taking a shower, straining his ears for a sound that his father made downstairs.

Outside the window, the cold moon shed a pale light blurring the outline. It was such a quiet night with a shroud of deep darkness.

The cellular phone vibrated and he reached his hand for it. There was a sign of a call from a public phone. Kei sat on the bed and opened the cellular phone in two with his thumb.

“Are you well?”

It was Kaori.

For a second he strangely got nervous at her feeble voice and his heart leaped up. The window frame throws a square of light shadow at his feet.

“...What’s the matter?”

“Nothing particular.”

“Are you okay?”

The silence fell down. It was hard for Kei to imagine that Kaori was holding the receiver. Kei kept silence and Kaori said quietly.

“I am in your town now.”

Kei thought it strange than surprising. How come she got to know my parents’ home? I’ve never talked about it, not even remembered dropping her that kind of thing. For a second, perhaps, Kaori moved. Her voice sounded remote a little and she said quietly.

“Looks like an unmanned station. ...Your town is here, right?”

“How did you know this place? Rika, again?”

“No.” she said and kept silence. Then Kaori took heart somewhat and opened her mouth.

“I found a direct mail for you father in your sketch put into an album. I wrote down it secretly...I’m very sorry for my rudeness....”

It was a tearful voice. Tears Kaori shed always showed her positive strength, but Kaori, Kei used to know, didn’t come across his mind because the voice heard was feeble and shaking. Kaori’s behavior which slept in Kei’s remembrance awoke quietly and wavered softly.

“Can I stay just one night?”

Kei put on a windbreaker on the chair holding his cellular phone with the other hand.

“Are you calling at a telephone booth in front of the station?”

Kaori said in a small voice, “Yeah.” With the cellular phone in his hand, he visualized the figure of Kaori who nodded shaking and ran down the stairs two at a time.

“I’ll be right there...”

Kaori stood by the telephone booth and idly looked at thin lights falling from the roof of the desolate, solitary station. The figure of Kaori threw a shadow against the strong light of the telephone booth.

And it took a while for Kei to notice it was the shadow of Kaori. The shadow became much smaller with the same height as she was. The shade told that she considerably lost weight.

Kaori noticed the shadow of Kei who stopped. Kei heard a familiar voice of Kaori behind the thin shadow, keeping a distance.

“Kei?”

When the shadow of Kaori who asked and stepped forward slowly waved, Kei was dismayed. At the moment when Kaori came in a circle of street lamp, Kei gasped.

The appearance of Kaori was far from her image in Kei’s memory. Her soft, round cheeks sank in and threw a shadow like being hollowed deeply. Her roundish eyes sank in and darkened.

Kei was choked and paralyzed. Then Kaori slowly approached Kei. She whispered, “I’m sorry.” looking Kei in the eye. After the silence, there was a flow of tears on her cheeks again. Then Kaori threw herself into Kei’s chest like being pushed by something.

“I was exhausted...”

Kaori really looked exhausted and dropped the knee, shaking in Kei’s chest. Kei hugged Kaori’s shoulders silently. He hugged stronger than ever to call up Kaori’s smile in his memory. While Kei was hugging Kaori’s back which got small and looked fragile, he was crying. He was just crying, keeping silent and shaking.

Kei was hugging Kaori whom he had long wished to see, but he realized that Kaori was not herself as she was. Tears fell fast. Kei said keeping back a sad feeling welled up from his heart unconsciously.

“What happened to you?”

“I’ve gone to bits.”

For five minutes or so while getting to Kei’s room, Kaori walked with Kei, talking vaguely about what happened for these months.

Saki’s gone to Milan and she has lost her best friend whom she can talk without constraint. Rika thought of getting in touch with Kei many times, but she hesitated. She made friends with musicians, and what’s more, she had a chance to go in a studio on recording or on the air. At the weekend, she went drinking with them as well....

Osawa’s existence was seen off and on like waving in all factors of Kaori’s talk, but he didn’t mention it.

While Kaori was talking, her voice sometimes sounded cheerful, but mostly she suddenly stopped like a little girl who didn’t want to go to school and burst into tears.

Kei opened the front door and felt a sign of his father sleeping through the wall. Then he showed

Kaori to his room on the 2nd floor. As soon as Kaori got to the dark, gloomy room, she murmured.

“Let me sleep.....I want to sleep soundly.....”

Kaori didn’t settle her eyes on Kei’s house and room. She threw her white jacket and bag on the floor and lay on Kei’s bed at the window right away.

Kei leaned his elbow and nestled to Kaori’s profile on a pillow. Her sweet smell as they met first faded away and her dull cheeks suggested just the dead strain. Kei often ran his fingers through his loose hair. Kaori said in a thin voice closing her eyes.

“Sorry....Kei... I slept with him...Once we made love, various things broke down...”

A sharp pain stabbed at his chest. The heavy, sharp pain was stabbed hard and didn’t seem to pass away. Kei closed his eyes and heard silently. He ran his fingers through Kaori’s hair and patted it again and again. Kei couldn’t find anything to do besides doing so. He was irritated at himself because that was an only thing he can do. He clenched his back teeth. Kei shed tears quietly not to awake Kaori who kept closing her eyes. He controlled his sob welling up without end and cried patting her hair over and over.

Meanwhile Kaori’s soft breathing escaped and Kei also went to sleep without notice.

Kei woke up to Kaori’s call. He woke to find that Kaori wore full makeup and stood at Kei’s bedside with a look of smile. A deep, blue shadow fell on her hollow, sunken cheeks. But it warmed Kei’s heart to think Kaori was beside him. Kei lifted himself and said to the window with a pale light.

“What time is it?”

“Maybe, around five...”

It was Kaori’s clear-cut tone which sounded familiar to Kei at they met first. The existence of Kaori was slightly becoming clearer than last evening.

“Kei, I’ve got to take the first train....”

“Are you leaving?”

“I’m going to Milan...”

Kaori said so to Kei who looked sleepy rubbing his eyes and she smiled.

When Kei got down the stairs, he found his father was having a breakfast at the living room. He stopped for a moment and passed by the table easily pulling Kaori. At the moment they passed by, Kaori bent and greeted his father like a clear-cut address for an extension of event, saying "I'm sorry for visiting suddenly at night." Kei pushed Kaori's back to the front door hard and closed the door of the living room, but Kaori still repeated "Thank you." Kei drove Kaori out of the front door first and bent to lace up his Converse. Kei heard his father's voice from behind the back.

"Is she leaving?"

Kei kept silence. The shoelace was not tightened. It irritated him. Kei didn't answer. Kei's father said to Kei like talking to himself. I supposed that he talked in a clear voice as he asks the mirror of himself as usual

"I must apologize to you...maybe I blamed you indirectly. No, I think I blamed you somewhere in my mind. I thought your mother died because you rushed out...I've thought about it since you left home...I've been wrong...I'm sorry...."

Kei's fingers stopped. The noise of TV made the quiet all around get deeper. For a while, Kei strained to hear it and took a deep breath. Then he said thinking of Kaori who was waiting for him opposite the front door.

"I will see her off, father."

Kei heard the dry sound of turning over the pages of the newspaper and closed the front door.

"What's the matter?"

Kei said, "Nothing." But Kaori utterly cared about it. She was depressed and bent her head saying, "Maybe things were not good." Kei tapped her back.

"You might be late for the train."

On the unmanned platform without the roof, one black figure reached Kei's feet from far. There was just a cold air of winter and the stillness that looked to stay there long. The sun was still low, but it sent out the strong light like going through the stillness all around. Every one of them stuck to Kei's shaking legs and shoulders. Kei said to Rika like casting aside them. She was standing shrugging her shoulders with the cold.

"Are you going to Milan?"

Kaori nodded lightly.

"I will stay at Saki's."

Kei nodded silently and said to Kaori.

"When are you going back?"

Kaori said that she doesn't know and bent her head. A white sigh made a small cloud.

"Can I see you again?"

Kaori lifted her face and looked at Kei. Her clean eyes were those of Kaori as she was. Kaori looked away from him and said after hesitating a bit.

"I won't see you any more..."

"Why?"

Shakes at Kei's feet increased. The chill inhaled filled his chest and gathered. Kaori kept silence for a while looking at Kei's looks. Then she pulled his arm out of the pocket and touched the palm. The soft, familiar touch of Kaori recalled Kei's memory.

"He..." Kaori said and collected herself at once.

"I wanted to learn many things from Osawa-san, so we were not friends any more..."

Kaori said so and added words.

"I'm sorry..."

"I understand it. I vaguely know it....But can we start over again?"

Kaori smiled and looked up at the sky, and then she bent her head at once and shook her head.

"Impossible. Kei will blame me someday. I will blame you who blame me. I'm sure we get confused and untangle it...we repeat that all the way."

"But..." Kaori said and drooped her head.

"But I wanted to see you like this. Even if we have an argument and a bitter quarrel, I wanted to see

you...but it was really good to see you without such a situation...”

...I blame Kaori? Why could I blame her, looking at her haggard, thin appearance? Of course I had anger for Osawa, too....It's not jealousy.....

It's a hesitant feeling that transcend the anger for him....But if I shake my fist at him, Kaori as she was will be back as she was? Even Kaori would not hope like that...

Rip current welled up filled Kei's heart and his shake increased

“Remember? I asked why you accessed SNS one day....”

Kaori gently touched a profile of Kei who bent his head trembling, and she nodded.

“...I was sad. I thought someone might understand me. Yeah, I thought so. I am such a guy. I couldn't be a strong guy like Osawa. I 'm sure I can't....”

Kaori silently hugged Kei who was crying as he trembled clenching his teeth. Kei's tremble never stopped in Kaori's soft warmth. Harder Kei tried to withhold the small tremble that sprang up in his mind, more the lines of tears increased. Kaori silently whispered in Kei's ear. He was still trembling. “But the strong guy, Osawa-san also needed me as well as Kei...Kei, nobody is so strong.....”

The figure which grew to his feet suddenly disappeared and the cold sunlight came in. Kei couldn't repress and murmured again and again in Kaori's breast

“I don't ask you to come back soon....I'm waiting, waiting long. So I want you to stay beside me all the time...maybe, I can't live alone.....”

Kaori released Kei of her breast and said staring into Kei's downcast face.

“Kei, listen to me carefully....You've got a talent others don't have. I can't say well what it is....But I've felt so since we met... Everyone wants it, but no one gets it, something a little bit....Kei, you do have it. I think so. Don't lose the rare, precious gift.”

“Kaori, you always talk about it, but I don't have such a thing. You overestimate me. What Osawa said before was just right. I don't have such a precious talent.”

Kei was crying dropping to his knees. Kaori also sat down and patted Kei's hair. Kaori said like chiding Kei who was sobbing.

“Even now I still think that you've got it. That's why I'm here now like this. I came here because I wanted to see you once again....But if I wish you to treasure the gift you've got, I think I must go away from you...”

“Do you understand?” Kei was crying with Kaori's gentle words like a kid.

I want Kaori to stay beside me long like now....His heart filled with such a thought.

“Kaori, we can start over again. I don't mind if we quarrel many times. I want to live with you like everybody does. Dinner with you, a normal life....Perhaps I just envy college students or businessmen. I think that I want to have fun with them and spend like they do. I bluffed looking askance at many things. I want to have a normal life with you....That' it. I don't want anything else...”

“Kei, remember? I told you. A man who realized must go for it....”

The train rails were shaking feebly. It was the time the train arrives. Kei noticed it and looked up at Kaori. She was looking at the end of the railroad in the morning sun.

Kaori bent down and hugged Kei once again. Then she kissed his bright cheek with the morning sun. And the warmth of the touch drew Kei's tears. Kaori said that the train was approaching with the noise getting bigger.

“Kei, stand up.”

Kaori slowly pulled up Kei's shoulders and murmured to the town of white quietness.

“Look! Everyone is still sleeping.....”

Kei looked up at Kaori's profile, and the moment he tried to rest his gaze on the town, the strong wind swept away the scene. The scene was closed and blue of the train flew. It gradually sounded heavier and slowly shook the surroundings. Then it stopped and the door opened.

“Kei, I'm going.”

The gentle morning sun fell on Kaori's mouth and shone.

Kaori.... Thank you...

He just wanted to tell her this word, but his heart was too full to talk....

Kei was just standing there looking at Kaori's smile. She was waving lightly through the dim glass, leaning against the door.

The train left. Kei stood there until the train became small and was lost to his view.

Kei thought that he spent much time to get to his house and open the front door. There was not a shift in a sense of distance, but the time veered back and forth.

When Kei laid his hand on the front door, his fingertips suddenly stopped. In a crack in the aluminum door, he found a small paper stuck. The moment Kei slowly pulled it out, he started to run for the way back. While Kei was running to the station again, he gazed at it. It was Osawa's card.

Walking diagonally across the empty T- crossing, Kei peered into three ways. Osawa's red car Kei has seen before was not found. Kei stopped when he ran up the gradual slope and saw the fence at the station over there. Then he flung Osawa's card on the road. The whiteness of the card stood out in the cold, dull color. In the white breath Kei expired, he thought that Osawa's card has stuck to that place long time

Kei slowly picked it up and turned it gasping many times. On the reverse of the card, English sentence translated from Japanese and 11 figures of a cellular phone which looked Osawa's were written down like flowing busily.

Kei twisted it in the back of the pocket reversing his steps and crushed it in his hand hard.

On the evening of the day, Kei cleared up his room briefly and left home. Kei heard his father's voice when he was lacing up the shoestring at the front door as he did in the morning. It was a gentle voice as if he saw through the whole time Kei didn't see.

"Come back anytime... Your house is here."

Kei didn't answer. He closed the door looking up at the red sky. Across the dead branches of roadside trees, the shade of the clouds streaming to the west in a gentle arc was swallowed up in the dark evening sun.

In the train which was crossing the river just at the border, Kei repeatedly recalled Kaori's word she left when she suddenly stopped on the way to the station. It was Osawa's word. Over the river Kei looked out of the train window, the lonesome lights were sending out in places and swaying faintly. Kaori said in a gentle voice which sounded like feeling out her memory in the middle of the upward slope, looking at the end of the light shadow which threw at her feet. Kei felt that Kaori was questioning him.

"Kei, Picasso didn't draw his son with cubism as usual. That's what he said...."

In Kei's view, the dazzling light of Tokyo spread out and looked blurred.

The moment Kei opened the door of the silent room, he smelled something dry. As the room was not exposed to people's breath a long time, Kei felt that the air of the room contained a flake of dust laid thick and the slight, sweet smell of Kaori. Besides the dark, silent room seemed to increase shades of blue and keep silence.

Kei opened the curtain and flung the window open. The wooden bolt grated a little and made a light sound. In the corner of the night sky unfolded before his eyes, a half moon like clear plastic was riding quietly.

In the bottom of the darkness, the oval light sending out a pale light swelled like swallowing the bustle of the town.

Kei took MacBook out of the drawer of the desk. When he tried to open app for radio, he saw a scrap of plain paper. It was sticking out like spilling out of the back of the book cover, Camus given from Kaori.

Kei took it. Then he removed the dusty, silver clip and opened it quietly. The dry sound of paper spread to the corner of the room and echoed faintly. In the scrap folded neatly into four pieces, soft, small letters which was particular to Kaori lined

I've just read your mail.

And thank you for your comment on SNS.

You wrote about studio musicians in N.Y. who were in good contact with him. It was quite plain and written in detail. I read that part over and over again.

I really appreciate it. I want to know more about it.

Is the photo on SNS a station at night?

You like drawing?

I wonder why you were drawing at night....

I think the eyes on your profile fell on the edge of the sketchbook.

I feel you were gazing at the tip.

I can't convey well in a letter....

I fell in love with you.

I'm six years older than you, though...

Might be an act unbecoming to my age. I'm ashamed a little bit.

It's first time I was attracted like this way, through e-mail, actually there was also a photo, though.

But I'm sure we won't go well.

I'm sure that I will be taken with a man with romantic gray hair, though I went out with you, and you will go with a young, obedient girl, though you went out with me.

But I think it's OK.

Now I've just read your mail, and I think I want to see you. You also think the same thing....

So I think it's all right.

I'm sure that you will be a nice guy.

But you must get over various things.

Now I'm looking at your photo and one expression came into my mind.

Ecstasy and anxiety of those who were chosen....

I chose you.

Besides, I believe you whom I've never seen.

Most guys use common words, *I love you*.

I like ordinary words, *I believe you* more than familiar words, *I love you*.

And I'm sure that you will appreciate the words someday.

You might encounter many difficulties, but please believe me who believed you.

Don't forget me as a first(?) person who believed you.....

I'm looking forward to seeing you tomorrow....

Kaori

Kei looked away from the scrap, and looked at it again. He closed it, lay on the bed and opened it again after looking into space for a while. Then he read it from the first line again.

The chill that got in pierced Kei's cheeks and tiptoe.
Over the words Kei went on reading, a scent of Kaori was borne.

Fin