

SON KEN

The beginning of the collapse

Episode One: The Beginning of the Road

.The morning was weaving its first threads over Japan

The sun had not yet fully risen, but its golden light began to flow quietly over the rooftops, as .if waking the country from its slumber without disturbing it

The camera extended over the sea, where its calm waves embraced the shore in a steady .rhythm

...Then it rose little by little

.to reveal the green-clad mountains, and the white mist that coiled around their peaks

.The scene shifted to the quiet villages

Rice fields stretching to the horizon, and farmers bending over the land they had inherited .from their fathers and grandfathers

...Then

.to another city

A train cutting its way at tremendous speed, while images of glass buildings reflected on its .windows

...Then

.the ancient temples

.Soaring red pillars

.Bells swaying with the breeze

.Monks walking with quiet steps over the wooden pathways

...Then

.the streets of Tokyo

.Cars

.Traffic lights

.Students in their school uniforms

.Street vendors

.And children running after the park pigeons

...Japan seemed

.alive

.peaceful

.balanced

.As if time had decided to grant it complete peace

...In the midst of this calm

.the voice of an elderly man rose, deep and clear, as if addressing the entire country

"...Martial arts"

.Silence fell for a moment

"...are not a means to harm others"

.The scene moved over an ancient castle

"...nor a path to fame"

.Then to a fighter bowing respectfully to his opponent

".they are a language that the body understands when words fail"

.The voice grew louder

"...And that is why"

"...the bearer of a combat license was not merely a strong person"

".but a person who carried responsibility"

.The voice suddenly cut off

...In its place came another voice

.sharp

.clear

.repeating names

"!Ito Riko"

"!Present"

"!Daichi Kurogane"

"!Present"

"!Sora Kanzaki"

"!Present"

.The calls accelerated

...And with the last name

.the camera finally settled

.Tokyo

.The World Martial Arts Bureau

In the wide training grounds, six young men stood in white training clothes, aligned in a .straight line

...Their faces bore different features

.but one thing united them all

.Seven years of exhaustion

.And seven years of training

.And seven years of waiting for this moment

The World Martial Arts Bureau

The building stood tall in the heart of Tokyo, surrounded by wide grounds and carefully .tended gardens

Its white stone facade rose as if telling a long history of discipline and honour, while a massive emblem was precisely engraved on its central wall.

The World Martial Arts Bureau.

It was not just a government building.

But the place from which generations emerged, carrying the responsibility of self-defence, protecting others, and passing on the legacy of martial arts to those after them.

On this day...

the place was different.

The stands were filled with spectators.

Families of the graduates.

Journalists.

Institute trainers.

And people who came only to witness the graduation day of a new batch of licence holders.

In the centre of the circular arena...

stood five elderly men, wearing formal black attire with the Bureau's emblem at its centre.

Their authority did not come from their positions.

But from the years that had left their marks on their faces.

White hair.

And calm gazes.

Each one of them had once been a fighter carrying the same licence that the graduates would carry today.

Silence fell.

The eldest among them took one step forward.

He raised his gaze toward the stands.

Then he said in a calm voice, but one that reached every corner of the place.

"...Martial arts"

.he paused for a moment

".are not a sport"

".nor a means to prove superiority"

".but a responsibility"

.Moments of silence passed before he continued

".A person's ability to defend themselves is a right"

"...But their ability to protect others"

".is an honour"

.The judges exchanged silent glances

.Then the man continued

".And for this reason, the World Martial Arts Bureau established the licensing system"

.A large screen appeared behind him bearing the Bureau's emblem

".Beginner Level"

.Applause began to echo in the stands

".granted to its holder the right to defend themselves against one person"

.The screen shifted to the next rank

".Platinum Level"

Its holder is permitted to defend themselves against three people... and in exceptional"
".circumstances, four

.Then the third rank appeared

.Some of the graduates standing in the arena smiled

.They knew well what was coming

.The judge smiled as well

".Advanced Level"

.A light hush fell

Its holder is permitted to defend themselves against seven people... and in exceptional"
".circumstances, eight

:Then he added

and they have the right to open a private school to teach martial arts, and to work as a"
".certified instructor

.A new wave of applause rose

...As for the graduates

.their eyes were fixed on the old man

.Waiting for the moment they had struggled seven years to reach

...The judge smiled a small smile

.then lowered his gaze toward the papers in his hands

:And said calmly

"...And now"

".let us begin the announcement of the results"

.The judge gently closed the file in his hands

.Then he opened another, thicker file

.He raised his head toward the audience

.He smiled a calm smile

:And said

"...Let us begin"

.He paused for a second

".by announcing the names of those who passed..."

.Calm prevailed

.And only the sound of the breeze that passed over the arena could be heard

.The judge lowered his gaze to the first paper

.Then he pronounced the first name

".Daichi Kurogane"

...From among the rows of graduates

.a tall young man stepped forward with steady steps

.He stood before the judge

.He bowed respectfully

.The judge stepped forward, and handed him the metal card, then the certificate

:He shook his hand, saying

".Congratulations"

:Daichi replied firmly

".Thank you"

.He turned

.And raised the card for a moment

.Applause erupted in the stands

.The second name

".Riko Hayashi"

.The scene repeated

...Then

".Sora Kanzaki"

...Then

".Haruto Ishida"

...And finally

".Ren Fujimoto"

...Five names

...five graduates

.five fighters who had obtained the Advanced Licence

.The sounds of applause and congratulations rose

...And in the last row of graduates

...there was only one young man

.whose name had not yet been called

.His friends looked at him

:One of them smiled and said in a faint voice

"...As expected"

.Another smiled as he crossed his arms

".It seems they deliberately left him for the end"

.Calm returned

.The judge lowered his head

.He took the next paper

...But

.his hand stopped

.His eyes froze on the last line

.A second passed

.Then another second

.He frowned

.He raised the paper slightly

.Then lowered it

.He slowly removed his glasses

.He took out a white handkerchief from his pocket

.He carefully wiped the lenses

.And put them back on

.He looked again

...Then

.he smiled

.A small smile

.It turned into a faint laugh

...Then

.a clearer laugh

.The other four judges looked at him in astonishment

:One of them said in a low voice

"?Is there a mistake"

.He slowly shook his head

:Then he said, still looking at the paper

"...No"

".there is no mistake"

.He gently closed the file

.Then he raised his head to the stands

.And took a deep breath

.The smile was still on his face

:He said

"...Amazing"

.He laughed again

"...I did not think"

".that I would witness this day before I retired..."

.Whispers began to spread among the audience

"?What is happening"

"?Did someone fail"

"?Is there a problem"

.The judge raised his hand

.And silence returned

:Then he said in a strong voice

"...Ladies and gentlemen"

"...many years ago"

"...there was a title"

.he paused

".that was only granted in extremely rare cases..."

.Curiosity began to fill the stands

:And he continued

"...A title"

".that disappeared over time..."

.Silence fell

.Even the wind seemed to have stopped

...Then

.he said the word

".The Rare Level"

...In an instant

.the stands erupted in uproar

.Some attendees stood from their places

.Others exchanged glances in astonishment

:While one of the graduates shouted

"!Impossible"

:And another raised his voice

"!?Does that title still exist"

.The judge smiled

.And raised his hand again

.Calm gradually returned

:Then he said

"...The Rare Level"

".permits its holder to defend themselves against fifteen people..."

.Silence fell

...This time

.no one clapped

.No one spoke

.Even some journalists lowered their pens without realising

...Then the whispers began

"?Fifteen"

".That's illogical"

"...It can't be"

"?Is this even human"

...And at that moment

.the judge looked at the last paper

.Then he pronounced the name

.In a clear voice

".Son... Kin"

.Silence fell once more

...And from among the rows of graduates

.a young man began walking forward

.Calmly

.Without haste

.His steps were steady

.His shoulders straight

.He wore black athletic trousers

.And a simple white shirt

.His body was athletically proportioned

...He did not appear the largest

.but he seemed like a rock polished by years

:One of the students whispered

"?Isn't that... Asmar"

.Another smiled

"...Yes"

".no one calls him by his real name"

.His steps stopped before the judge

.He bowed respectfully

.The old man smiled

.And handed him the card first

.Then the certificate

:And said in a voice that everyone heard

"...From this day forward"

"Son... Kin"

".is granted the title..."

.He raised the card before the audience

.And the word engraved on it was clear

.Kentru

...Silence fell

.for only one second

.Then the place echoed with the voices of five people who knew him more than anyone

"!Asmar"

"!!Asmar"

"!!!Asmar"

.Their laughter and applause rose

...While Asmar merely smiled calmly

.then bowed to the judge once more in respect

.Without saying a single word

.Seven years... ended today

.Applause echoed throughout the arena

.Many of those present stood in respect for the graduates

While the photographers' lenses began capturing successive images of the graduation .moment

.The judge returned the file to its place

.Then he stepped forward

:And said with a calm smile

".I congratulate you all"

"...Today"

".your training does not end"

".it begins"

.He looked at the licence cards the graduates held

:Then he continued

"...The card in your hands"

".does not grant you power"

".but grants you the responsibility to use what you have learned"

.Silence fell

.Then the five judges bowed together in respect to the graduates

.Something no one had expected

.Some attendees' eyes widened

:One of the fathers whispered

"?They are... bowing to them"

.An elderly man sitting beside him smiled

:And said

"...No"

".they are bowing to the responsibility that has now fallen upon their shoulders"

.The graduates began to bow in turn

.And applause mixed with smiles

:And the official announcer declared

".The graduation ceremony has ended"

...In an instant

.the quiet arena turned into a sea of sounds

.Fathers embracing their sons

.Friends taking pictures

.Journalists conducting interviews

.And children imitating combat moves with enthusiasm

...As for Asmar

...the moment he stepped a few paces away from the podium

.he felt a strong slap on his shoulder

.He turned

.To find Daichi laughing loudly

"!There you are, famous one"

...And before he could reply

.the others surrounded him

:Ren said, pointing at the card

"!Let me see it"

.He quickly pulled it out

.Then raised it high

"!Everyone"

"!We have an important person now"

.Everyone laughed

.Haruto jumped trying to snatch the card

.But Ren raised it higher

"!Forbidden"

"!This is a museum piece"

.Everyone burst out laughing

...Even Asmar

.finally smiled

.A simple smile

.But a genuine one

.Sora approached and patted his shoulder

:And said

"...Honestly"

".I knew you would get something different"

.Asmar raised his eyebrows

"?And why"

.Sora smiled

".Because the trainers were always watching you more than us"

.Daichi laughed

"!Rather, because you used to wake us before dawn every day for training"

:Haruto quickly replied

"...No"

"...he used to pull our blankets and say"

:Then he changed his voice, imitating Asmar

".Get up... sleep does not win championships"

.Everyone burst out laughing

.Even passersby turned to look at them

.Asmar shook his head in surrender

:And said with a smile

".I did that because you were always late"

:Ren immediately replied

".And we hated you for it"

...He paused for a second

.then smiled

".but we will miss it..."

.A brief silence fell

...For the first time

...the six realised

.that seven years had ended

.They would not gather every morning

.They would not hear the trainer's whistle

.And they would not share the daily hardship of training

:Daichi said as he slowly exhaled

"...Strange"

"...I was counting the days until graduation"

.He looked at the distant Bureau gate

:Then he continued with a sad smile

".and now I do not want to leave..."

.Asmar smiled as he looked at the building

:And said quietly

"...Every road ends"

".so that another road may begin"

.Silence fell again

...But this time

.it was a comfortable silence

...Broken by Haruto's stomach

.with a loud sound

.Everyone looked at him

.Then they burst out laughing

.He scratched the back of his head in embarrassment

:And said

"...Alright"

"...philosophy is beautiful"

".but I'm hungry..."

:Daichi laughed and said

"...Then"

".let's celebrate"

.Ren raised his fist in the air

"!The last celebration before we become responsible men"

.Everyone looked at Asmar

.He smiled

:And said

".Let's go"

...The six left the arena

.and the sound of their laughter was louder than the city's noise

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.The evening lights began to cover the streets of Tokyo

The pavements were crowded with passersby, while the illuminated signs began to glow one .after another

.The group stopped in front of a small tavern located in one of the quiet alleys

Its old wooden facade bore the marks of time, while two Japanese lanterns hung above the .door, emitting a warm light

.Daichi smiled as he forcefully opened the door

"...Today"

"!I'm paying..."

.Ren laughed as he patted his shoulder

".You mean your father is paying"

.Everyone burst out laughing

:Daichi replied, feigning anger

"...Even if that is true"

"!don't ruin the moment..."

.The six entered inside

.They were greeted by the tavern owner with a wide smile

.He was a man in his early fifties

...As soon as he saw the graduation attire

.he clapped his hands

"!Congratulations, young men"

.They all bowed in respect

.The man led them to a large wooden table in the corner

...And the moment they sat down

.everyone began speaking at the same time

.As if seven years of memories had decided to pour out all at once

:Haruto said, pointing at Asmar

".Let's start with the most important question"

.Everyone looked at him

.He smiled slyly

"?Will you drink today"

.Asmar looked at the cups the waiter had placed on the table

.Then he shook his head with a smile

".You know my answer"

.Ren grumbled

"!Just once"

.Asmar replied calmly

"...I told you from the first year"

".I don't like alcohol"

.Daichi sighed

".I knew it"

...He took one of the cups

.and moved it away from Asmar

.Then he raised his hand toward the waiter

"...Please"

".a glass of orange juice for this man"

.Everyone looked at him in astonishment

.He smiled

"...After seven years"

"?do you still think I don't know him..."

.The juice arrived moments later

.Asmar took the glass

.He looked at his friends

.Then he said with a calm smile

".Thank you"

.Everyone raised their glasses

.Daichi said loudly

"...To seven years"

.Ren said

".we will never forget..."

.And Sora added

".And to the days ahead"

...As for Asmar

.he only said

".And to every one of you staying well"

.The glasses clinked together

.And the table filled with laughter

.The hours passed quickly

.The plates began to empty

.And the stories became stranger

:Haruto said, laughing

"?Do you remember the first day of training"

.Everyone looked at Ren

...Immediately

.they burst out laughing

.Ren raised his hands in surrender

"...Alright... alright"

"...yes"

".I'm the only one who lost consciousness after ten minutes"

.Daichi laughed until tears came to his eyes

"...And when he woke up"

"!he asked the trainer if training had started..."

.Everyone burst out laughing again

...As for Asmar

.he laughed this time audibly

.Everyone stopped for a moment

.They looked at him in surprise

.Sora said with a smile

"...It's good"

".to see you laugh like this..."

.Asmar shook his head shyly

".You are the reason"

...After another hour

.Daichi had his arm around Ren's shoulder, singing in a voice that was not singing at all

While Haruto was trying to convince the tavern owner that he could stand on a chair with one .leg

.The tavern owner shouted from afar

"!Don't you dare"

...But

...after only one second

.Haruto fell to the ground

.Silence fell

:Then he raised his hand from the ground and said

"...I'm fine"

".the ground attacked me..."

.No one could contain themselves

.Even the tavern owner burst out laughing

...As for Asmar

.he was holding his juice glass

.Looking at his friends

.And smiling in silence

...Inside him

...he knew

...that this night

.would never repeat

.The six left the tavern after midnight

.The cold air greeted them quietly

.Ren and Daichi were supporting Haruto, who could no longer walk straight

.Daichi said, laughing

"...Tomorrow"

".he won't remember anything..."

.Haruto immediately replied

"...I will remember"

.then he paused

".probably..."

.Everyone laughed

.They stopped at a crossroads

.Each shook hands with the other

.And exchanged embraces

.Sora said, looking at Asmar

".Don't disappear for too long"

.Asmar smiled

".You too"

.Each went their separate way

.And Asmar remained alone in the street

.He raised his hands behind his head

.And looked at the sky

:Then he said to himself with a calm smile

"...Ah"

"...It's been a long time"

".since I visited the old neighbourhood..."

...He turned

.and walked quietly

.While the lights of Tokyo stretched before him

.Night had begun to spread its cloak over the city

The heat of the day had disappeared, replaced by a gentle breeze caressing the trees lining .both sides of the road

.Asmar walked with quiet steps

...The further he moved from central Tokyo

.the lighter the traffic noise became

.And the towering buildings disappeared

.Replaced by medium-sized houses, standing side by side in peace

.He stopped in front of a small sign bearing the neighbourhood's name

...He smiled

:and said in a faint voice

"...Nothing has changed"

.then he entered

.The neighbourhood was pulsating with life

.Two children running after a rubber ball

.An elderly man watering his plants in front of his house

.A woman hanging clothes while calling her children to come inside

...And at the corner

.stood a small shop, its front filled with boxes of fruit and vegetables

...And the moment Asmar approached

.a familiar voice called out

"!?Huh"

.The shopkeeper raised his head

.His eyes widened

.Then he rushed out

"!Asmar"

.He did not give him a chance to reply

.He embraced him firmly

.And gave his back a light pat

"!?Where have you been, young man"

.Asmar laughed

".Study does not spare anyone"

.The man shook his head sarcastically

"!Seven years and you still say study"

.Asmar replied with a smile

".But I came back"

.The man smiled

.And pointed to a box of apples

".Take"

.Asmar waved his hand

".I'll pay"

.The man frowned

"?Have you become a stranger to us"

.Asmar laughed

".Then... just one"

.The man handed him a large red apple

".This is a graduation gift"

.Asmar bowed respectfully

".Thank you"

...Before he could continue on his way

.a small child jumped in front of him

"!Asmar"

.He stopped

.He looked at him

.Then he smiled

"!Yuta"

.The child said excitedly

"!Look"

.He pulled a small paper plane from his pocket

"!I made it myself"

.Asmar took it in his hands

.He examined it carefully

.Then he said with genuine admiration

".Excellent work"

.The child's chest swelled with pride

"?Really"

.Asmar nodded

"...But"

.he pointed to one of the wings

"...if you made it a little longer"

".it would fly further..."

.The child's eyes widened in surprise

"!?Really"

.Asmar smiled

".Try it"

.The child ran toward his house, shouting

"!Mom"

"!Asmar said my plane is great"

.Asmar laughed softly

.He continued walking

...Every few metres

.he would stop to greet someone

.The baker

.The bicycle shop owner

.The elderly woman who always sat in front of her house

.They all knew him

...And they all called him

".Asmar"

.He approached a small park

.He sat on one of the wooden benches

.He took a deep breath

.And closed his eyes for a moment

.The sounds of children filled the place

.Their laughter

.Their running

.And their innocent screams

.He opened his eyes

.And watched them in silence

.Then he smiled

:And said to himself

"...This is why"

".I want to become a teacher..."

"...Not just to explain mathematics"

"...but to raise a generation"

".that knows when to use its power..."

.The bell of the nearby temple rang

.Asmar raised his head

.He looked at his watch

"...It's late"

.He rose from the bench

.And turned his back to the park

...But before he walked away

.he stopped

.He turned one last time

.He looked at the whole neighbourhood

.At the children

.At the shops

.At the houses

.At the faces he had known since childhood

.He smiled

.Then he continued on his way

.Asmar left the old neighbourhood

.The streets were quieter than before

.He walked slowly, his hands in his trouser pockets, while contemplating the city lights

.He sighed with a smile

"...The neighbourhood hasn't changed"

.Then he looked at his watch

".It seems I must go back"

.He turned toward the bus stop

...But

...before he reached it

.his attention was caught by the sound of crying

.It was not loud

...But muffled crying

.its owner trying to hide it

.He stopped

.He turned toward the source of the sound

...On a nearby concrete bench

.a woman sat holding a child of about ten years old

.His head was resting on her shoulder

.His eyes half-closed

.He was breathing with difficulty

.Beside her stood a man in his mid-forties

.His clothes were simple

.And his shoes bore the marks of long travel

...He was looking around helplessly

.as if searching for a solution he could not find

.Asmar approached with quiet steps

:And said respectfully

"?Is everything alright"

.The man quickly raised his head

.Confusion appeared on his face before he answered

"...My son"

.he looked at the child

".has been ill for months..."

.He lowered his gaze to the ground

"...We came from the countryside"

".they said the capital's hospitals are better"

.The child suddenly coughed

.The mother quickly wiped the sweat from his forehead

:Asmar asked quietly

"?Have you been to a hospital"

.The man shook his head

"...They said we need to go to a private hospital first"

.he hesitated slightly

".but we don't have enough money..."

.Silence fell for a moment

.Asmar looked at the child

.Then at the mother

.Then back at the father

:And said simply

".Come with me"

.The father raised his head in astonishment

"?What"

.Asmar smiled

".I won't leave a sick child sitting here"

.The mother quickly wiped her tears

.While the father kept looking at him in disbelief

:He said in a hoarse voice

"...But"

.Asmar gently cut him off

".We can discuss anything after he sees a doctor"

.He bent down in front of the child

:And said with a smile

"?Will you allow me"

.The child opened his eyes with difficulty

.And looked at him

.Then he nodded lightly

.Asmar carefully lifted him in his arms

...The child was light

.in a way that worried Asmar

.But his features remained calm

.He turned toward the parents

:And said

".Let's go"

.The four began walking together

.On their way to the hospital

.The camera slowly pulled back

...Until they became just four people

...walking through a crowded city

…To be continued

Episode Two: The Road to Life

.Raindrops were falling lightly over the streets of Tokyo

Son Kin carried the child steadily in his arms, while the mother walked beside him, trying to shield her son from the rain with her hands. As for the father, he was walking ahead of them, .then turning back every moment with worry

.The father finally broke the silence

"?Where are we going, young man"

:Son Kin replied as he continued walking

".To the nearest hospital"

.The father looked around

"?And is there one nearby"

.Son Kin smiled a calm smile

".Yes... there is a government hospital just minutes away"

.The father sighed, as if a light burden had been lifted from his chest

"...Ah"

.The rain intensified

.Son Kin's clothes were completely soaked, but his grip on the child did not waver

.The child's breaths were weak, almost inaudible

.Son Kin looked at him for a moment, then quickened his pace slightly

".Hold on... we're almost there"

...After minutes

.The hospital lights appeared through the rain

A large building surrounded by ambulances, while the emergency door kept opening and closing.

...And the moment Son Kin entered

one of the nurses noticed him.

"!Emergency case"

Two other nurses ran over, and a nurse brought a stretcher.

One of them quickly asked:

"?What happened to him"

Son Kin gently placed the child on the stretcher.

".I don't know... but he's sick, and his condition is getting worse"

They asked no further questions.

They quickly pushed the stretcher inside.

The father and mother followed with tense steps.

...But

...the moment they reached the reception desk

the stretcher stopped.

The receptionist looked at the screen before him.

Then he said coldly:

".Patient details"

The father began answering.

...Name

...age

...place of residence

The receptionist noted everything down.

Then he closed the register.

:And said

".Initial examination fee"

...At that moment

.Son Kin looked at his wet clothes

:And said to the father

".I'll go dry my clothes a little... I'll be back in a few minutes"

.The father nodded gratefully

.And Son Kin left toward the restroom

.The father took out his old wallet

.He opened it slowly

...Inside it

.there were only a few banknotes

.He placed them before the receptionist

.The man's expression changed

.He counted the money once

.Then again

.He raised his head

".This is not enough"

.The father smiled apologetically

"...I know"

".but I will gather the rest within days"

.The receptionist returned the money to him

".That is not possible"

.The mother intervened in a trembling voice

"...Please"

".start the treatment... and we will pay everything"

.The receptionist shook his head

".These are the rules"

.Silence fell

:Then the father said in a faint voice

"...My son"

".he may not be able to wait"

.The receptionist sighed

.Then he pointed to the door

"...If you cannot pay"

".we cannot admit the case..."

.The mother's eyes widened

...As for the father

.he remained standing in his place for seconds

.As if he had not processed what he heard

...Then

.he slowly bowed

"...Please"

".save my son"

.No one replied

.The staff kept looking at him with cold silence

.The father closed his eyes

.He stood up

...And reached out his hands toward his son

.to carry him again

.The father stood in silence

.His hands trembling as he returned the few banknotes to his wallet

...He closed it slowly

.as if it had become too heavy to carry

.He approached his son's bed

.He looked at his pale face

.Then he smiled a broken smile

"...Come on, my son"

".we'll find another place"

.The mother approached, holding back her tears

.She helped him carry the child

...And before they left

.one of the nurses paused for a moment

.She seemed to want to say something

.But the receptionist looked at her

.So she only lowered her head

.The family left through the hospital door

.And the glass door closed behind them

.Silence fell for seconds

:Then one of the staff said while arranging papers

".Today, this is the third patient"

:Another replied with a sigh

"...If we let everyone who can't pay in"

".we wouldn't have a hospital left..."

.Another nurse laughed shortly

".Then they'd say we don't respect the system"

:The first staff member said while shrugging

".This isn't a charity"

.A brief silence fell

...Then everyone returned to their work

.as if nothing had happened

...On the other side

.Son Kin opened the restroom door

.His clothes were still damp

.He looked at himself in the mirror

.Then he sighed with a smile

".It seems the rain won this round"

.He took a paper towel

.He dried his hair a little

.Then he came out

...As he approached the reception

.he stopped

.He looked around

.He did not find the family

.Nor the child

.He frowned

"...Strange"

.He stepped toward the receptionist

"?Where is the family that was here a moment ago"

:She replied without raising her head

".They left"

.He froze in place

"?They left"

"?Why"

.She did not answer

...And at that moment

:he heard one of the staff saying to his colleague

"...If they don't have the money"

".let them go somewhere else..."

.Silence fell

.Son Kin's expression changed

.He slowly turned

.He looked at the staff

.He did not say a word

...Then he suddenly turned

.and ran toward the door

.He rushed outside

.The rain greeted him again

...But this time

.he did not feel it

.His eyes were searching in every direction

.Between the cars

.At the bus stop

.And on the pavements

"?...Where did they go"

.He ran several metres

...Then

.he spotted the father

.He was carrying his son with difficulty

.The mother stood beside him

.While the bus had just arrived

.Son Kin raised his hand

:And shouted at the top of his voice

"!Sir"

.The father turned

.His eyes widened

...As for the bus

.it closed its doors

.And slowly moved away

.Son Kin ran until he reached them

.He was catching his breath

:But the first thing he said was

"?Why did you leave"

.The father looked at him in silence

.Then he smiled a tired smile

:And said

"...Don't worry, young man"

".we'll look for another hospital"

.Son Kin kept looking at him

.Then at the child

.Then at the mother

...And he understood

...that the truth

.had not been fully told to him

".Don't go"

.The father was still looking at the bus that had driven away

...As for Son Kin

.his eyes were fixed on the child's face

.His breathing had grown weaker than before

.He raised his gaze toward the father

:And said calmly

".Come with me"

.The father looked at him in astonishment

"?Where"

.Son Kin pointed to the benches in front of the hospital

".Let's sit for a minute"

.The four sat under a small shelter

.The sound of rain hitting its metal roof with a steady rhythm

.Silence fell

.Son Kin broke the silence first

"?Why didn't you take him to the doctor"

.The father smiled a tired smile

".We don't have enough money"

...He said it simply

.without complaint

.And without anger

.He continued speaking while looking at his son

"...It's alright"

".we'll find another place"

.Then he turned to Son Kin

.And bowed to him slightly

"...But"

".thank you"

".It's enough that you carried my son all this way"

"...Having young people like you"

.he smiled a small smile

".makes me feel there is still goodness in this world..."

.Silence fell

.Son Kin did not reply

.He kept looking at the child

.Then at the hospital door

.Then back at the father

.His expression changed

.He stood up

...And said in a calm voice

.but a decisive one

".You are not going anywhere"

.The father raised his head

"?What"

.Son Kin approached the child

.And lifted him again in his arms

.Then he turned toward the hospital

:And said

".Come with me"

.He forcefully opened the glass door

.All eyes turned toward him

.One of the nurses instinctively ran over

...But

...as soon as he saw the child

...and saw the same family

.his steps slowed

.Son Kin approached him

:And said in a firm tone

".Bring a stretcher"

.The nurse looked at the receptionist

.As if waiting for his approval

...At that moment

.Son Kin's voice rose for the first time

"...I said"

".bring a stretcher"

.Silence fell

.It was not angry shouting

...But a voice

.that brooked no argument

.The nurse hesitated

.Then he ran quickly

...Within seconds

.the stretcher arrived

.The child was placed on it

.And the nurses rushed him inside

...As for Son Kin

.he headed directly to the reception desk

.He stood before the receptionist

.She looked at him

.Then she lowered her head

:He said calmly

"?How much is the examination fee"

.She told him the amount

.He took out his wallet

.He counted the banknotes

.He placed the full amount on the table

.Then he added another amount

.The receptionist raised her head in astonishment

:He said

"...And this"

".for treatment and medication costs"

.She did not utter a word

...As for the father

.he remained standing in his place

.His eyes wide with shock

.The mother placed her hand over her mouth

.She could not hide her tears

.Son Kin raised his gaze toward the staff

:And said very calmly

"...A moment ago"

".I heard what was said here"

.Silence fell

.No one dared to look into his eyes

:He continued

"...This place"

.he looked around

".was made to save people..."

.Then he looked directly at the receptionist

".Take good care of him"

.He paused for a moment

...Then he continued in a low tone

.but one that carried more weight than shouting

".I hope I do not have to repeat my request"

.A heavy silence fell

.Then the receptionist bowed slightly

".We will"

...At that moment

.an emergency doctor came out of the corridor

.He quickly looked at the file

:Then he said to the nurses

".Take him to the emergency room"

.And the stretcher disappeared behind the white doors

...The four remained

.looking at them in silence

.The emergency room doors closed

.And the family stood before them

...Nothing could be heard now but the sound of rain outside

.and a large clock hanging on the wall

...Its second hand moved slowly

.as if deliberately prolonging the wait

.Son Kin sat on one of the benches

.And gestured to the father and mother

".Sit down"

.The father hesitated for a moment

.Then he sat beside him

...As for the mother

.she remained standing

.Her eyes fixed on the emergency room door

.Several minutes passed

.No one spoke

.Until the father broke the silence

"...Young man"

.Son Kin turned to him

:The man said in a low voice

".I don't know how to repay you for this kindness"

.Son Kin smiled a simple smile

".There is no kindness"

.The father shook his head

".There is"

".You don't know us"

".And you didn't have to do all this"

.Son Kin looked at the ground for a moment

:Then he said

"...If I were in your place"

.he raised his eyes to him

".I would have wished for someone to help me..."

.Silence fell

.The father lowered his head

...Then

.he suddenly stood up

.And walked toward Son Kin

...And before the latter could realise what he intended to do

.the father knelt on his knees

".Thank you"

.Son Kin's eyes widened

.He quickly stood up

.And gently grabbed the man by his shoulders

.And lifted him up

"...No"

.he said calmly

.then smiled

".do not bow to me"

".I only did what any human being should do"

.The father looked at him for a long while

...Then he lowered his head again

.but this time while standing

.The mother finally sat down

.She was silently wiping her tears

:She said in a faint voice

"...Since we arrived in Tokyo"

".no one has looked at us the way you did"

.Son Kin found no answer

.He only smiled faintly

...And suddenly

.the emergency room door opened

.The doctor came out

.He removed the surgical mask from his face

.He stepped toward the family

.Everyone stood at once

:The doctor said

".We have conducted the initial examinations"

.He looked at the child through the glass

:Then he continued

"...His condition is complex"

".but he is still alive"

.The mother sighed with relief

.While the father closed his eyes for a moment, as if thanking the heavens

:The doctor continued

".We will need to transfer him for more detailed examinations and treatment"

".And we will keep him under observation"

.The father quickly nodded

".Do whatever is necessary"

:The doctor replied

".We will"

.Then he returned inside

.The father looked at Son Kin

.He smiled

...But this time

.it was a smile full of hope

...As for Son Kin

.he looked at his watch

.He froze for a second

.Eleven fifty-five at night

.His eyes widened slightly

:And he said to himself

"...I'm late"

.He stood quietly

.And turned to the family

.I think your daughter..." then he smiled and quickly corrected himself"

".I mean... your son is in safe hands now"

.The father smiled

".Thanks to you"

.Son Kin shook his head

".Thanks to the doctors"

.Then he bowed to them in respect

".I hope he recovers soon"

.He turned

.And walked toward the hospital door

...And the moment he opened the door

.the cold night air greeted him

.He looked at the sky

.The rain had stopped

.He sighed

:Then he said while looking at his watch again

"...What a time"

".I need to get home quickly"

.And he hurried out of the hospital

.Son Kin's footsteps echoed on the wet pavements

.The night had passed midnight

.He took his hand out of his pocket

.He looked at the watch again

.Eleven fifty-eight

.He smiled shyly

"...Mom is going to kill me"

.He quickened his pace

.He reached the main street

...But

.there was no sign of buses

.He looked right

.Then left

"...Gone"

.He sighed

...And at that moment

.a taxi passed by

.He quickly raised his hand

"!Please"

.The driver pressed the brakes

.And the car stopped beside him

.He opened the back door

.And got in, catching his breath

.The driver smiled through the rear-view mirror

"?Long night"

.Son Kin smiled

".Very long"

"?Where to"

.He gave the home address

.The driver nodded

.And the car moved off

.The streets of Tokyo were quieter now

.The shops had closed their doors

.And the passersby had become few

.Son Kin sat looking out of the car window

.The city lights reflected on the glass

.And he replayed the day's events in his mind

.The graduation

.His friends

.The celebration

.The child

.The hospital

.He sighed

.Then he smiled a small smile

".A day... to remember"

.The car stopped in front of a medium-rise residential building

.Son Kin took out his fare

.He handed it to the driver

.He bowed respectfully

".Thank you"

:The driver replied with a smile

".Get home safely"

.He closed the door

.And ran toward the building entrance

.He entered the lobby

.Then he began climbing the stairs quickly

...On the second floor

.one of the doors opened

.An elderly man came out carrying a rubbish bag

...As soon as he saw Son Kin

.he smiled

"?Is that you, Kin"

.Son Kin stopped

.And bowed respectfully

".Good evening, Uncle Yamada"

.The man laughed

"?What evening"

".It's already late into the night"

.Son Kin smiled shyly

".I got a little busy"

.The man's wife came out of the apartment

"!Kin"

".It's been a long time"

.He bowed again

"?How are you both"

:She said with a smile

".We're fine"

.Then she looked at his clothes

"!But you're completely soaked"

.He looked at his shirt

.And laughed

".The rain beat me to it"

.The man said while patting his shoulder

".Your parents have been waiting for you for hours"

.Son Kin's eyes widened

".Then I'll head up quickly"

.The woman waved at him

".Don't forget to visit us when you settle in"

.He smiled

".I promise"

.He continued climbing

.He reached the fourth floor

.He stopped in front of the door

.He took a deep breath

.Then he pressed the doorbell

.The bell rang inside

.He waited

.He heard slow footsteps approaching

...Then

.the door opened

.A woman in her mid-fifties stood there

.She looked at him

.And narrowed her eyes

:And said in astonishment

"?Yes"

.Son Kin held back his laughter

.And did not speak

.She looked at him again

:Then she muttered

"...Wait"

.She went back inside

...And after seconds

.she returned wearing her glasses

.She raised her head

.She stared at his face

.Her eyes widened

.She placed her hand over her mouth

"?...Kin"

.This time, he could not stop his smile

".I'm home, Mom"

.Her eyes filled with tears

.Then she rushed toward him

.And embraced him tightly

.Son Kin closed his eyes

.And returned the embrace quietly

:And said with a laugh

".I missed you"

.She pulled back slightly

.And gave his shoulder a light slap

"...You fool"

"?is this how a son visits his mother after two years"

.Son Kin laughed

"...I know"

".and I deserve the scolding"

.She smiled despite her tears

.Then she took his hand

"...Come in"

".you're very late"

...The moment Son Kin closed the door behind him

.a man's voice echoed from inside the house

"?Haruko"

"?Who is it at this hour"

:The mother answered while quickly wiping her tears

".Come and see for yourself"

.A brief silence fell

.Then heavy footsteps were heard approaching

...And suddenly

.a man in his sixties appeared

He was carrying a hunting rifle on his shoulder, and it seemed he had come out with it in a .hurry after hearing the door

.He looked at Son Kin for a second

.He frowned

:Then he said seriously

"?Who are you"

.Son Kin could not contain himself

.And burst out laughing

.The man slowly lowered the rifle

.He stared at the young man's face again

.Then his eyes widened

"?...Kin"

.Son Kin smiled

".I'm back, Dad"

...In an instant

.the serious expression disappeared

.And the man smiled broadly

.He put the rifle aside

.Then he stepped forward quickly

.And embraced his son tightly

.He patted his back more than once

:And said while laughing

"!You finally remembered you have a home"

.Son Kin laughed

".I was busy with studying"

.The father pulled back slightly

.And looked him up and down

".You've lost weight"

:Son Kin immediately replied

".You're the one who's grown older"

.The father looked at his wife

.And pointed at his son

"?Did you hear that"

"!He came back to insult his father"

.The mother burst out laughing

...As for Son Kin

.he raised his hands in surrender

".Alright... I'm the one in the wrong"

.The three laughed

.And the house was filled with life once more

.They sat in the living room

.It was just as he had left it years ago

.Family photos hung on the wall

.An old wooden clock ticking quietly

.And a small potted plant by the window

:The father said while pouring tea

"...So"

".tell us"

.Son Kin smiled

.And took a deep breath

.Then he began to speak

...The conversation moved between quick scenes

.about the years of training

.About their teacher

.About the World Martial Arts Bureau test

.About his five friends

...Then

.about the celebration they held

The father laughed when he described one of his friends trying to walk straight after drinking .too much

:And said sarcastically

".And lucky for them you don't drink"

.Son Kin smiled

"...If I had drunk with them"

".I wouldn't have found anyone to take them home"

.Everyone laughed

.Son Kin asked his father about his work

...His father replied

Excellent.. and without your ideas, the name (Son Takamori) wouldn't have reached this .fame

.Son smiled

.The mother suddenly stood up

".Wait here"

.She disappeared into the kitchen

...And after minutes

.she returned carrying a large tray

.She placed it on the table

.Steam rose from it

:She said proudly

"...Sushi"

.then she placed the second dish

".and curry..."

.Son Kin looked at the food

.Then at his mother

.And his smile widened

".No one makes them like you"

:She said, raising an eyebrow

"?Even Tokyo restaurants"

.He shook his head confidently

".Especially Tokyo restaurants"

.The father laughed

".Then let's eat before it gets cold"

.Son Kin pressed his palms together

:And said with a wide smile

"...Today"

".I'm going to eat until I burst"

.His parents burst out laughing

...And the three began to eat dinner

...as if time

.had never passed

.Dinner ended

.Son Kin helped his mother carry the dishes to the kitchen

:She said while trying to push him away

".Leave it to me"

.He smiled

"...I've been gone for two years"

".at least let me help for five minutes"

.The mother laughed

.And left him some dishes

...As for the father

he sat in the living room reading the evening newspaper, while the sound of the old radio played in the background, broadcasting a quiet nightly bulletin, carrying no news worth .noting

...After minutes

.Son Kin came out of the kitchen

.He bowed to his parents

".Goodnight"

.The father smiled

".Sleep well"

:And the mother added

".And don't forget you have an interview in the morning"

.He raised his hand with a smile

".I won't forget"

.He headed toward the end of the hallway

.He stopped in front of his room door

.He hesitated for a moment

...Then he grabbed the handle

.and opened it slowly

.He entered

.And remained standing

...The room

.exactly as he had left it

.The bed in its place

.The small wooden desk

.The shelves filled with books

.And old pictures hanging on the wall

.He approached the desk

.He ran his fingers over its surface

.Then he opened one of the drawers

.He found old notebooks

.And pens he had kept since his school days

.He smiled without realising

"...Even this"

".is still here"

.He gently closed the drawer

.Then he sat on the edge of the bed

.He looked around again

:And said in a low voice

".I missed you"

.He lay on his back

.And placed his hands behind his head

.Silence fell

.He could hear from afar his parents talking in the living room

.He smiled

.And closed his eyes

...But

...after a few seconds

.he suddenly opened them

.He sat up

"!The interview"

.He looked at the small clock by the bed

.He sighed with relief

".I still have enough time to sleep"

.He stood up

.He took out a blue folder from his bag

.He opened it

.He quickly reviewed the papers

.His certificate

.Graduation documents

.And application papers for a university teaching position

.He arranged them carefully

.Then placed them on the desk

.He turned off the lamp

.And returned to the bed

.He closed his eyes again

...This time

.sleep quickly overcame him

.And calm descended over the entire house

Episode Three: Bus to the Future

.Morning sunlight crept through the curtains of Son Kin's room

.He slowly opened his eyes

...He kept looking at the ceiling for a few seconds

.then he smiled

"...Today"

".is the job interview day"

.He got up from his bed energetically

.He made his bed as he always did

.Then he dressed carefully

.A white shirt

.Simple black trousers

.And clean leather shoes

...As for his sunglasses

.he left them in his pocket, as they were more travel companions than decoration

---

.He came out of his room

.He found his mother had already beaten everyone to the kitchen

.She turned to him with a smile

".Good morning"

:He replied with a smile

".Good morning, Mom"

.She placed a simple breakfast before him

.Rice, a piece of grilled fish, and miso soup

.He sat eating quickly

.His father entered moments later, adjusting his shirt collar

"?So... the first day"

.Son Kin nodded

".I hope it's a good start"

.His father smiled

".It will be"

:Then he added while drinking tea

"...But don't be afraid of the students"

".just be afraid of the correction papers"

.The mother laughed

...As for Son Kin

.he shook his head with a laugh

".I'll remember that advice"

.He stood after finishing his breakfast

.He bowed respectfully to his parents

".I'm going"

:His mother said while adjusting his shirt collar as she had done since he was young

".Take care of yourself"

:He replied with a calm smile

".Always"

.He left the apartment

.And gently closed the door

...Outside

.the city was beginning to wake up

.Shops opening their doors

.Students heading to their schools

.Workers walking quickly toward their jobs

.He reached the bus stop

.He stood waiting quietly

...And after minutes

.the bus stopped in front of him

.He boarded it

.And greeted the driver

.Then he sat by the window

.The bus set off, cutting through the streets of Tokyo

.Son Kin took out his appointment file

.He reviewed it one last time

.Then he put it back in his bag

.He raised his gaze to the window

...He was contemplating the city in silence

.until a loud voice from the middle of the bus broke the quiet

"!?How many times have I told you not to do that"

.Some passengers raised their heads

...But they quickly returned to their places

.as if they were used to ignoring other people's problems

...As for Son Kin

.he only looked for a moment

.Then he returned his gaze to the window

...He always preferred not to interfere

.as long as the matter did not require it

...But

.the shouting continued

.And the young man's tone became harsher

...While the girl was trying to explain something

.without him giving her a chance to finish a single sentence

.Son Kin took a calm breath

.And closed the file

.Then he raised his gaze again toward the source of the noise

---

.The young man's voice rose again inside the bus

"!?How many times have I told you not to do that"

.The girl tried to respond

"...Listen to me first"

.But the young man cut her off

"!I don't want to hear anything"

.Tension prevailed inside the bus

.Some passengers lowered their heads

...And some looked out the window

.as if the matter did not concern them

...As for Son Kin

.he quietly closed the file

.And placed it inside his bag

.Then he stood up

.He stepped forward until he stood between the young man and the girl

.He smiled a calm smile

:And said

"...My friend"

".a man should not raise his hand to a woman"

.The young man looked at him angrily

"?And who are you"

.Son Kin replied calmly

".Just a passenger"

:Then he added

"...If you two have a problem"

".then talk calmly"

.The young man did not give him time

.He pushed him with both hands

"!Don't interfere in what doesn't concern you"

.Son Kin stepped back only half a step

.Then he regained his balance

.His expression did not change

.And his smile did not disappear

:He said calmly

".Calm down"

.The young man shouted

"!I said get away"

.And he lunged with a straight punch toward Son Kin's face

.Son Kin tilted his head slightly

.The punch passed beside his cheek

.Without him retaliating

.The young man followed it with a kick

.Son Kin stepped back a small step

.So it did not hit him

.The young man's anger increased

.He spun his body

.And struck with his elbow

.Then followed it with a strong side punch

...But

...every strike

.passed through the air

.Son Kin's movements were very small

.So much so that some passengers did not realise how he dodged them

.Son Kin looked at him

:And said for the second time

".Calm down"

...But the young man

.had completely lost his composure

.He suddenly turned

.And raised his hand toward the girl

"...And you"

.he did not finish

...In one moment

.Son Kin moved

.He grabbed the young man's wrist

.And gently wrapped his fingers around his palm joint

.With only two fingers

.He applied slight pressure

.The young man's eyes widened

...Then

.his knees began to lower automatically

.Until he sat on the bus floor, screaming in pain

"!Ahhh"

.Silence fell

.All the passengers looked at the scene in astonishment

...As for the girl

.she remained looking at Son Kin in disbelief

.Son Kin did not increase the pressure

:Rather, he said calmly

"...If you calm down"

".I'll let go of your hand"

.But the young man tried to resist

.So Son Kin increased the pressure slightly

.The young man screamed loudly

"!Alright! Alright"

"!I won't touch her"

.Son Kin waited a moment

.Then he released his grip

.The young man stood up, holding his painful wrist

...At that moment

.the bus stopped at one of the stations

.The young man looked at Son Kin

.Then at the passengers who were staring at him

.He bit his lip

.And quickly got off the bus

...And the moment the doors closed

.the bus resumed its journey

.A brief silence fell

.Then the girl bowed slightly

:And said shyly

".Thank you"

.Son Kin smiled

:And replied simply

".No need to thank me"

.Then he returned to his seat

...And took out his file again

.as if nothing had happened

...After about half an hour

.the bus stopped in the heart of Tokyo

.Son Kin got off

.He stood for a moment

.He took a deep breath

.Then he exhaled slowly

.And looked at the building before him

.He smiled faintly

"...Alright"

".let's begin"

.He began walking with steady steps

.Until he reached the gate of a large university consisting of seven floors

.Students were entering and exiting in every direction

.And the sounds of conversations filled the place

.He approached the security office

.He took out his file

:And said respectfully

".Good morning"

".I am Son Kin"

".I have an appointment for an interview for a teaching position"

.The guard checked the appointment schedule

.Then he smiled

".Welcome"

.He handed Son Kin a visitor's card

:And said

".Seventh floor"

".Administration office"

.Son Kin bowed respectfully

".Thank you"

.He entered the building

.He took the elevator

...While ascending

.he looked at his reflection on the metal door

.He adjusted his shirt collar slightly

.And took a calm breath

.Then the elevator stopped

.Seventh floor

.He got out

.And walked through a long corridor

.Until he stopped in front of a large wooden door

:Written on it

.General Administration

.He knocked gently

".Come in"

.The voice came from inside

.He opened the door

.And entered

.The office was spacious

.In the middle was a meeting table

.Around it sat the university director

.The general supervisor

.And three professors

.Son Kin closed the door behind him

.Then he bowed respectfully

".Honoured to meet you"

.The director welcomed him

.And pointed to the opposite seat

".Please, have a seat"

.Son Kin sat quietly

.The director opened the file before him

:Then he said

"...So"

".introduce yourself"

.Son Kin replied with calm confidence

".My name is Son Kin"

".A graduate of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering"

".And I wish to work as a teacher for mathematics and engineering"

.The director clasped his hands

.Then he smiled

".We have a question"

"?Why did you choose our university specifically"

.Silence fell for a moment

:Then Son Kin replied

"...Because it does not only care about students' results"

".but about how they are taught"

.Some professors looked at each other

:And he continued

".I read about the university's activities"

".And about its scientific and cultural clubs"

".And I felt it is an environment that encourages students to think, not just memorise"

.The general supervisor nodded in admiration

.While one of the professors noted a small observation

:Another professor said

"...So"

"?how do you see the role of a teacher"

.Son Kin smiled

:And said

".A teacher does not fill minds with information"

".but teaches their owners how to use it"

.Silence fell

.Then a satisfied smile appeared on the director's face

:The director said

"?Did you bring your documents"

".Yes"

.Son Kin opened the file

.And took out the papers one by one

.The university certificate

.Training certificates

.Identity documents

...And while taking out the last paper

.a small card slipped from among the papers

.And fell to the ground

.Son Kin did not notice

...But

.one of the professors' eyes fell on it

.He frowned

.Then he bent down and picked it up

.He read what was on it

...And suddenly

.his eyes widened

.He looked at the card

.Then at Son Kin

.Then back at the card again

:He said in astonishment

".Wait..."

.The director turned to him

"?What is it"

.The professor slowly raised the card

:And said

"...This card"

.Silence fell inside the room

:And he added while still looking at Son Kin

"...Are you"

"?Kentru..."

.The professor remained holding the card

.He looked at it again

.Then at Son Kin

:And said quietly this time

"?Are you Kentru..."

.Son Kin raised his head

.He looked at the fallen card

.Then he smiled faintly

".Yes"

.Silence fell for moments

.The university director took the card from the professor

.He read it himself

.Then he returned it to Son Kin

:And said with a calm smile

".I did not expect the holder of this rank to be this young"

:Son Kin replied as he returned the card to his file

".The rank is a responsibility... not something to boast about"

.The professors exchanged glances

:One of them said

".So... everything we heard in the results announcement was true"

.Son Kin smiled with slight shyness

".I don't like talking about it much"

.The director laughed lightly

".And that is another reason for me to respect you"

.He closed the file before him

.Then he clasped his hands over the table

:And said

"...Honestly"

".we were already convinced of you even before the card fell"

:Then he added

"...As for now"

".it has been confirmed to us that we have chosen the right person"

.He rose from his seat

.And extended his hand toward Son Kin

".Welcome as a professor at our university"

.Son Kin stood

.And shook his hand with full respect

".Thank you"

:The general supervisor said

".You will start your work from tomorrow"

.Then he handed him a neat file

".Here is the lecture schedule"

".and the room numbers"

".and the names of the subjects you will teach"

.Son Kin took the file with both hands

.And bowed

".I will do my best"

.He left the administration office

.And quietly closed the door behind him

.He stood in the corridor

.He opened the file

.He looked at the first page

.Then he smiled to himself

"...So"

".I've really become a professor"

.He closed the file

.And walked through the long corridor

.While sunlight streamed through the large windows, casting his shadow on the floor

---

.The next morning arrived

.The university corridors were bustling with students

.Laughter

.Conversations

.And the sounds of footsteps that barely stopped

.Son Kin was walking through the corridor, carrying his lecture file

:He stopped in front of a door with a sign

Room 12

.He looked at the schedule one last time

.Then he opened the door

.Inside the room were about fifty male and female students

...And the moment he entered

.the voices quietened little by little

.Eyes turned toward him

.Faint whispers began to spread among the seats

"?Is this the new professor"

".He looks young"

".I thought he was a student"

...And in the back seats

:one of the female students whispered to her friend, trying not to be heard

"...Honestly"

".handsome"

.The other stifled her laugh

:And said

"?Look at his build... is he an athlete"

...On the other side

.some students were watching him in silence

.As if trying to figure out what kind of professor he would be

---

.Son Kin reached the podium

.He placed his file on the table

.Then he picked up a piece of chalk

:And wrote in clear handwriting on the board

Son Kin

.He turned toward the students

:And said calmly

".Good morning, everyone"

.The students returned the greeting

.He smiled a simple smile

".I am Son Kin"

".And I will teach you mathematics and engineering this semester"

.He paused for a moment

:Then he added

".I don't care if you memorise the laws"

".What matters to me is that you understand why they were made"

.Complete quiet prevailed in the room

...Even the students who had been busy talking

.raised their eyes to him

.He opened the first page of his notes

.And drew a simple geometric shape on the board

:Then he said

"...Let's start with a small foundation"

".every great building begins with a single line"

.And Son Kin's first lecture began

...While in the third row near the window

.a female student was following the explanation very quietly

.Without saying a word

.The first lecture ended

.The students began leaving the room, talking among themselves

.Some discussing the lesson

.And some talking about the new professor

...As for Son Kin

.he quietly gathered his papers

.And closed his file

.Then he left the room

.The midday break had begun

.He went out to the wide courtyard in the centre of the university

.Trees surrounded the place

.And wooden benches were spread under their shade

.He sat on one of them

.And took out a lunchbox his mother had prepared for him that morning

.He smiled as he opened it

"...As expected"

.He began eating his meal calmly

.His eyes wandered around the courtyard

.Students laughing

.A group playing sports

.And another discussing a study project

.He smiled to himself

".A lively place"

...At that moment

.a girl stopped in front of him

.She straightened her posture slightly

:Then she said politely

"...Excuse me"

.Son Kin raised his gaze to her

"?Yes"

:She said

"?You're Professor Son... aren't you"

.He nodded

".Yes"

...And before he could say anything else

.she suddenly reached her hand toward his face

...But

...at that same moment

.Son Kin raised his left hand

.And gently caught her wrist

.While the chopsticks remained in his right hand

.He looked at her with calm surprise

:And said

"?What is it"

.The girl's eyes widened

.She quickly pulled her hand back

.Then she bowed shyly

"!I'm sorry"

".I didn't mean to be rude"

.Son Kin smiled and relaxed his hand

".It's fine"

.She took a deep breath

:Then she said with a shy smile

"...I just"

".wanted to make sure"

.He raised his eyebrows slightly

"?Of what"

:She said

"...Are you really"

"...Son Kin"

"?known as Kentru"

.A brief silence fell

:Then he replied with a simple smile

".It seems news travels fast"

.She laughed lightly

:And said

".I heard some professors talking about you"

.He shook his head with a smile

.Then he returned to his food

:And said calmly

".So... you've made sure"

.She smiled

".Yes"

.The girl remained standing before Son Kin for moments

...She wanted to say something

.then she hesitated

.Son Kin noticed that

:So he said calmly

"?Is there something else"

.She caught herself

".Ah... yes"

.She sat on the opposite bench after he gestured for her to do so respectfully

".I'm sorry if I bothered you"

.He shook his head

".No problem"

.A brief silence fell

:Then she said

"...Actually"

".I'm also interested in martial arts"

.Son Kin looked at her with interest

"?Really"

.She smiled

".But I don't practise it"

.He was slightly surprised

"?Then how are you interested in it"

:She replied

".I enjoy watching it"

:Then she added

".But my main hobby is archery"

.Son Kin paused slightly

"?Archery"

.She nodded

".Yes"

"...I use firearms"

".and I also train with the traditional bow"

.A small smile appeared on his face

".That's not a common interest"

.She laughed

".I know"

".Many people are surprised when they hear that"

.Son Kin looked at the courtyard

:Then he said

".But everyone has something that draws them"

".What matters is that they know why they love it"

.She looked at him for a moment

.Then she smiled

".You're different from what I expected"

.He raised his gaze to her

"?What did you expect"

:She said quickly

"...Nothing"

.then she laughed shyly

"...I just thought someone who holds this rank would be more"

.she paused

"?Arrogant"

.Son Kin completed the sentence with a smile

.Her face flushed slightly

".Yes"

.He laughed quietly

".Ability does not mean a person is better than others"

".It only means they have a greater responsibility"

.The girl fell silent for a moment

.As if she had memorised that sentence in her memory

:Then she said

"...I"

"...my name is"

...And before she could finish

.the bell for the end of the break rang

.Son Kin looked at his watch

".It seems time is up"

.She quickly stood up

".Right"

.She bowed to him slightly

".Thank you for your time, Professor"

:He replied

".You're welcome"

.She walked away among the students

...As for Son Kin

.he looked at her for a moment

.Then he returned to his food

.As if this meeting was just a passing conversation

"After the lecture

.The first day passed quietly

.Son Kin finished his lectures

.He answered students' questions

.And listened to their feedback

.He was not the type to stand far from his students

Rather, he would walk among them, ask them about their way of thinking, and try to identify .their weaknesses

...For him

.education was not just writing equations on the board

.But understanding the person before him

.After his last lecture ended

.He left the room carrying his files

...In the corridor

.he passed by some students who bowed to him respectfully

.He returned the greeting with a smile

.He continued on his way until he left the university building

.The sun had begun to tilt toward sunset

.He stood for a moment at the gate

.He looked at the university building behind him

.Then he smiled

".It seems the start was good"

...Inside the hospital

.the corridor was heavy with silence

.The mother sat on one of the benches

.Her hands clasped tightly together

.Her eyes fixed on the emergency room door

...Beside her

.the father stood silently

.Trying to appear steady

.But his trembling hands gave him away

...Minutes passed

.then more minutes

.Until the door opened

.The doctor came out

.Exhaustion was clear on his face

.He slowly lowered his mask

.He looked at the parents

.He was silent for a moment

:Then he said

"...I'm sorry"

.The place froze

.The mother could not reply

...As for the doctor

.he only lowered his head

.Then he walked away

...In the next moment

.the mother's strength broke

.She placed her hand over her mouth

.And her tears began to fall

"...No"

"...No"

.The father quickly held her

.Tried to steady her

.But his voice came out weak

:She said through tears

"...If only we"

"...if only we had come a little earlier"

.The father lowered his head

:And said in a broken voice

"...If only I had enough money"

.Silence fell

.One day earlier

.Inside the examination room

.The doctor was looking at the medical reports

.Worry was clear on his face

:He said

"...Your son"

".is suffering from several illnesses"

.The mother stopped breathing for a moment

:The doctor continued

".His condition is very weak"

".I cannot promise you anything"

.The father looked at him

"?But you will treat him... right"

.The doctor fell silent

:Then he said

".We will do what we can"

.Back to the present

.Inside the doctors' office

.The doctor sat at his desk

.He placed his hand on his head

.He was looking at the ground

:And said in a low voice

"...Oh my"

"...it didn't work"

.Several days earlier

.Inside a private room

.A number of doctors stood around the boy's bed

.Signs of confusion appeared on their faces

:One of them said

".His pulse is very weak"

".for a long time"

:And another said

".But his heart is still working"

.The supervising doctor approached

.He looked at the screen

:Then he said

".This is impossible"

".A person cannot remain in this state"

.Silence fell

:Then he continued

".There is something happening inside his body"

.He looked at the others

".We need to find out the cause"

.In another room

.The boy was lying down

.With machines surrounding him

.The chief doctor stood beside him

:He said

".Give me the scissors"

.He approached

...The procedure began

...but in an uncalculated moment

.the error occurred

.The doctor's expression changed

.The movement stopped

.The machines began to emit accelerating sounds

...Then

.a long line

.Silence

.Back to the present

.Some nurses came out of the emergency room

.The bed was covered

.The mother quickly approached

"!My son"

.She tried to hold him

.But the nurses stopped her

"...Please"

".let us do our work"

.The father clung to the bed

...But after moments

.the bed moved away down the long corridor

.Toward another place

.Toward the morgue

.The family stopped outside the hospital

.No one spoke

.The mother looked at the building

...The place she had entered carrying hope

.and was leaving carrying emptiness

.The father took her hand

.Then the two began walking away

.Under the quiet street lights

.He returned home

.He opened the door

.He found his parents in the living room

:His mother said as soon as she saw him

"?How was your day"

.He took off his shoes and entered

".Better than I expected"

.He sat with them

.He began telling them about the students

.About the room

.About the strange questions some of them asked

.And about the differences in their personalities

.The father listened with interest

:Then he said

".I knew you would succeed"

.Son Kin smiled

:As for his mother, she said

"?Did you eat the food I gave you"

.He pretended to think

.Her expression changed

"...Kin"

.He quickly laughed

".Yes, yes"

".I finished it all"

.She sighed with relief

.The evening passed quietly

.Son Kin entered his room

.He arranged the next day's papers

.And placed them on the desk

.Then he sat for a moment looking out the window

...Tokyo at night

.the lights

.the cars

.the distant sounds

.Everything seemed normal

.He closed the curtain

.And went to his bed

...And before he closed his eyes

.he remembered something

.The family he had met at the hospital

.The sick child

:And the father who had told him

".This world is still good as long as there are young people like you"

.He opened his eyes slightly

:And said

"...I hope he's doing well"

.Then he turned off the lamp

…To be continued

Episode Four: The Title That Only One Carries

.Several days had passed since Son Kin started working at the university

.His face had become familiar to the students

...He was no longer that new professor everyone talked about

.but had become part of their daily school life

...During the midday break

.the university courtyard was bustling with students

...Under the shade of a large tree

.Son Kin sat on his usual bench

.Around him was a group of male and female students

.This time, the talk was not about mathematics

.Nor about engineering

.But about life

:One of the students said with a laugh

"...Professor"

"?were you serious when you said you don't drink alcohol, even at your graduation party"

.Some students laughed

.Son Kin smiled and shook his head

".Yes"

".I never felt I needed it to be happy"

:Another student replied

".Your friends definitely didn't leave you alone"

.Son Kin laughed

"...Indeed"

".they tried many times"

".And in the end, I celebrated with them over orange juice"

.Everyone burst out laughing

.One of the female students raised her hand slightly

:And said with a smile

"...Professor"

"?do you have a nickname"

.He looked at her with slight surprise

"?A nickname"

.She nodded

"...I mean"

".like the name your friends call you"

".or a distinctive name you became known by"

.He thought for a moment

.Then a calm smile appeared on his face

".I have more than one nickname"

"...But the most commonly used one"

".(is (Asmar"

.Some students were surprised

.One of them looked at his face

:Then he said with a laugh

"!But your skin isn't dark"

.Son Kin laughed

".It was when I was young"

".I lived with my parents in Australia for several years"

"...And when we returned to Japan"

".my friends gave me this nickname"

"...And since that day"

".they haven't stopped calling me by it"

.Everyone smiled

:Another female student asked

"?And how was life after graduation"

.A brief silence fell

.Then Son Kin looked at the sky

.As if recalling long years

:And said calmly

"...Beautiful"

".because I didn't live it alone"

"...I had five friends"

".we grew up together"

".and trained together"

".and spent seven full years inside the training institute"

.A sincere smile appeared on his face

".I don't think I would have reached where I am without them"

:One of the female students asked in surprise

"?Training institute"

:He replied

".An institute affiliated with the World Martial Arts Bureau"

".on the outskirts of Tokyo"

".we entered it on the same day"

".and graduated on the same day"

...And before he could finish

.one of the students interrupted him, his eyes wide

"...Wait"

"...do you mean"

.Then he mentioned his friends' names one by one

.Silence fell for seconds

.Son Kin looked at him with a smile

".Yes"

".those are them"

.The student slapped his hands together

"!Impossible"

"!Those are the holders of the Advanced Rank whose graduation was announced this year"

.The students began exchanging glances

:And one of the female students said

"?So... you know them personally"

.Son Kin laughed

".Not just know them"

".they are my closest friends"

...At that moment

:one of the heroine's friends said excitedly

"!Professor"

"!We should meet them someday"

.The other two quickly agreed

.Even the heroine only smiled quietly as she listened

.Son Kin smiled

:And said

"...If the opportunity arises"

".I'll try to bring you together with them"

.A quiet moment prevailed

:Then one of the students said with a sly smile

"...Professor"

".I think you're hiding something from us"

.Son Kin raised his eyebrows

"?Really"

"?And what am I hiding"

.The student laughed

".Don't pretend"

".Tell them"

.Some students began looking at him in surprise

:While others whispered

"?What is he talking about"

...And here

.one of the students suddenly raised his head

.As if he remembered something that had been dormant in his memory

:And said slowly

"...Son... Kin"

"...wait"

"...I've heard this name before"

.Silence fell among the students

.Everyone was looking at that student who seemed to be trying to remember something old

.He placed his hand on his chin

.Then his eyes suddenly widened

:And he said

"!I remember"

.The group turned to him

:He said excitedly

"...A few days ago"

".I was watching TV"

".There was a broadcast of the World Martial Arts Bureau results announcement ceremony"

.Some students began trying to remember

:And he continued

"...The camera didn't show his face clearly"

"...but"

.he looked directly at Son Kin

"...the name"

".was Son Kin"

"...and the holder of the Rare Rank"

.Silence fell

:Then he said in a voice that was almost unbelievable

".Kentru..."

.The students exchanged glances

:One of them said

"...Impossible"

:And a female student said

"?Our professor"

.Everyone looked at Son Kin

.He was still sitting quietly

.Sipping a little from his tea cup

.Then he smiled

:And said

".It seems you've discovered it"

.The place exploded with questions

"?Is this true"

"?Did you really get the Rare Rank"

"?Can you really face fifteen people"

"?How did you achieve it"

.Son Kin smiled

.And raised his hand slightly

.So calm returned

:He said

"...The rank"

".is not proof that its holder is invincible"

.The students looked at him with interest

:And he continued

"...It only means"

".that whoever holds it passed a harder test"

".and that their responsibility has become greater"

.Silence fell

:Then one of the students said with a smile

".But this makes us feel safe"

.Son Kin laughed lightly

".I hope you never need me to defend you"

.Everyone laughed

...At the edge of the circle

.the girl was watching the conversation in silence

.A small smile appeared on her face

.She didn't say anything

:But she thought to herself

"...Even after all this"

".he still acts like an ordinary person"

.The bell for the end of the break rang

.The students stood one by one

.And the group began to disperse

:One of them said as he walked away

".I think the university has gained a professor it won't forget"

.Son Kin smiled

.And carried his file

.And walked quietly toward the lecture building

.While the students' words echoed behind him

...At the same time

.inside one of the hospital offices

.A heavy silence prevailed

.The chief doctor sat at the head of the table

.Around him were a number of doctors who had participated in treating the child

.No one spoke

.Medical files were scattered before them

.And cold coffee cups were still in their places

.One of the doctors broke the silence

".We need to decide what to write in the report"

:Another replied while passing his hand over his forehead

"...If it turns out that the death was due to an error during the procedure"

".it won't stop at our dismissal"

:A third doctor said

".And the case might go to court"

.Silence fell again

.The chief doctor was still looking at the table

.Distracted

.As if he hadn't heard anything

:One of them said

"...Doctor"

"?what do you think"

.He didn't reply

.He remained silent

.Then he slowly raised his head

:And said in a low voice

"...Before we decide anything"

".we must verify all the details"

.The doctors looked at him

:And he added

".No report will be issued now"

".and no one speaks about what happened outside this room"

.Everyone nodded in silence

.The chief doctor closed the file before him

.And rose from his seat

".The meeting is over"

.The doctors began leaving the room one by one

...As for him

.he remained standing in his place

.Looking at the door after it closed

.Then he sighed deeply

...In the hospital corridors

.patients and visitors were moving normally

.Nurses pushing beds

.Doctors reviewing files

.Phones ringing

.Everything seemed normal

.The corridors were ordinary

.Even the busy departments

.And the lighting became dimmer

.And the sounds quieter

.Then to the back corridor

...Leading to

.operating rooms

.emergency rooms

.and the morgue

.In front of a cold metal door

:Written on it

.Morgue

.The door opened slowly

.Metal beds were lined up inside the room

.Some empty

.Some covered with white sheets

.A heavy silence prevailed

...A bed

...then another

...then a third

.There was a small bed

...Under the sheet

.lay the child

.Silence

.No sound

.No movement

.A second passed

.Then another second

...Suddenly

.the fingers of his hand twitched

.A very slight twitch

.As if it had never happened

...Then

.his chest rose

.And fell

.Very slowly

...The next day

.the morning sun shone on the hospital

.Movement began to stir in the corridors

.Doctors heading to their departments

.Nurses exchanging files

.And the sound of medicine carts passing between rooms

.Everything was going like any other day

...In the basement

.one of the workers opened the morgue door

.He entered carrying a cup of coffee and a death register book

.He placed the cup on his desk

.He sat down

.He opened the register

.Then he began reviewing the names one by one

.He didn't raise his head

.And didn't look at the metal beds lined up behind him

.Complete silence prevailed in the place

.Only the sound of the pen rubbing against the paper could be heard

...And after moments

...one of the child's toes bent

.a very slight bend

.Then returned to its place

.No one noticed

.And the worker continued writing the records

...Inside the university

.Son Kin stood before the board

.He finished drawing one of the geometric shapes

.Then he turned to the students

"...If we change the projection angle"

"?how will this perspective change"

.Hands began to rise

.And the room turned into a quiet discussion

...And suddenly

.his phone rang

.He paused for a moment

.He took it out of his pocket

.He looked at the screen

.A small smile appeared on his face

.He pressed the decline button

.And put the phone back in his pocket

:And said with an apologetic smile

"?Where were we"

.And returned to the explanation as if nothing had happened

...After the lecture ended

.he left the room

...And while walking through the corridor

.he took out his phone

.He looked at the name again

"...Yuta"

.He smiled

.And pressed the call button

.Only seconds passed before the child's excited voice came through

"!..Kin"

.Son Kin laughed

".I knew you were going to scold me"

:Yuta quickly replied

"!You haven't visited us in a while"

".You said you'd come"

:Son Kin replied with a light laugh

".You're right"

".starting work at the university took all my time"

:Yuta said excitedly

"!Then come today"

.Son Kin looked at his watch

.Then at his daily schedule

.And smiled

".Alright"

".I only have one lecture today"

".and I've finished it"

".I'll be with you shortly"

.The child's joyful voice came from the other end

"!?Really"

"!I'll be waiting for you"

.The call ended

.Son Kin smiled as he put the phone back in his pocket

:And said in a faint voice

".It seems I really have been late for them"

...After about an hour

.the bus left the crowded streets of Tokyo

.And headed west

.Until it reached one of the quiet neighbourhoods in Hachioji City

.The neighbourhood was far from the noise of the capital's centre

.Close houses

.Small shops whose owners knew each other

.And children running through the narrow alleys

...The moment Son Kin got off the bus

.he felt as if he had returned to a place he had never left

...He had barely taken a few steps

.when he heard a voice he knew well

"!..Kin"

.He turned

.And saw Yuta running toward him at full speed

.He stopped in front of him, panting

.Then he smiled a wide smile

".I knew you'd come"

.Son Kin patted his head

"?And did you doubt that"

.Yuta shook his head in denial

.Then a brief silence fell

.As if the child was gathering his courage

.He raised his head

.And looked directly at Son Kin

:And said with confidence mixed with innocence

"...I want you"

".to become my teacher"

.Silence fell

.Son Kin looked at him

...Then his calm smile appeared on his face

.without him saying a word

…To be continued

Episode Five: The First Pulse

.Night had fallen over Japan

.The streets gradually quietened

.Most shops had closed

And the noise of the day had disappeared, leaving only the lights of streetlamps reflecting on .the wet pavements

---

...In the basement of a government hospital

.a heavy metal door slowly opened

The morgue worker entered, carrying a cup of coffee in his right hand and a death register .book in his left

.He yawned lazily

.Then he closed the door behind him

.Silence fell

.The place was unusually cold

.Rows of metal drawers

.Beds covered with white sheets

.And the smell of disinfectants never left the place

.He placed the coffee cup on his desk

.He opened the register

Then he began calling out numbers in a low voice, comparing them with the tags on the .beds

.Everything was going according to the routine he had followed for years

---

...After minutes

.he paused briefly

.He raised the coffee cup

.And took a quiet sip

...Tap

.A faint sound came from behind him

.He slowly lowered the cup

.He turned

.He saw nothing

.He kept staring at the beds for moments

.Then he shrugged with a smile to himself

".It seems exhaustion is starting to mess with me"

.He returned to his desk

.And turned another page of the register

...Tap

.The sound came again, this time faster

.He turned quickly

.His gaze fell on one of the beds

...It seemed to him

.as if the sheet had moved slightly

.He stepped closer

.He kept watching the bed for a long time

.Nothing happened

.He rubbed his eyes

.And exhaled quietly

".I need to sleep"

.He returned to his desk again

...Without knowing

...that the child who had been lying under the sheet

.had slowly sat up

.Without making any sound

.Seconds passed

.Then a full minute

.The worker did not notice

.He finished the last line in the register

.He closed it

.And picked up the coffee cup

:And said to himself

".Alright... I'm done"

...He raised his head

.to freeze in place

...The child

.was standing before him

.Only one step away

.Not moving

.Not blinking

...His eyes

.completely black

.Surrounded by dark cracks that had quietly spread across the sides of his face

...As for his nails

.they seemed slightly longer than a normal child's

.The worker's eyes widened

.His hand trembled

.The coffee cup fell to the ground

.Then the register followed

.His breathing quickened

...He opened his mouth to scream

.but the shock trapped his voice

.The child took a slow step

.Then another

.His body tilted in an unstable way

.As if his balance had not yet been fully restored

.He stopped directly before the worker

.He tilted his head slightly

.Then he began to slowly sniff his scent

...Once

.then again

.The worker stepped back in terror

.Then another step

.Until he hit one of the metal drawers behind him

.He lost his balance

.And fell to the ground

...In the next moment

.the child leaped onto him with unexpected speed

.He pinned one of his hands on the worker's head

...And kept moving closer to his face

.sniffing his breath

.The worker trembled violently

.His voice finally came out

...A short scream

.that turned into a terrifying shriek

...But

.the thick walls of the morgue swallowed everything

.No one heard him

...And suddenly

.the child lunged at his neck

.The sound of tearing flesh rose

...And the place filled with muffled screams

...then gradually faded

...little

...by little

.Moments passed

.Then a heavy silence fell

.The child stood up slowly

.He turned right

.Then left

...As if searching for something else

.then he headed toward the morgue door

...A few hours passed

.the night had grown quieter

The forest stretched under thick darkness, broken only by moonlight filtering through the .branches

.The wind gently rustled the leaves

.And the sounds of night insects rose from time to time

...On one of the dirt paths inside Okutama Forest

.the child appeared

.He was walking with unsteady steps

.Sometimes leaning to the right

.Sometimes to the left

.As if his body was not yet used to movement

...Suddenly

.he tripped over a tree root

.And fell to the ground

.He remained still for several seconds

.Not moving

.Not making a sound

...Then

.his fingers began to clench slowly

.He raised his head

.And leaned on his arms

.And stood up with a strange, unbalanced movement

.He stood in place

.He raised his head toward the air

...And sniffed slowly

...once

.then again

.A hoarse, low sound came from his throat, unlike the voice of a child or an animal

...Then

.he broke into a run between the trees

...Not far away

.a small fire was burning

.A young man and woman sat beside it

.Chatting in the quiet of the forest

.The young man smiled as he looked at her

:And the girl said with a laugh

".I told you camping here was a good idea"

.He smiled at her

.And reached out to brush a strand of hair from her face

...He leaned closer to her

...And suddenly

.the bushes behind him rustled

.He turned halfway

...But

...before he could see anything

.a small shadow rushed out from between the trees

.And collided with him violently

.The two fell to the ground

.The girl screamed and scrambled back in terror

.The young man tried to push the attacker away

...It was small

.but it moved in a terrifying way

.The young man punched it

.Then kicked it with all his strength

.The small body flew several metres, hitting the ground and rolling among the leaves

.The young man breathed quickly

.And stood up, panting

...He raised his gaze

.and saw the attacker clearly for the first time

.A child

...But

.with completely black eyes

.And dark cracks spreading around them

.The young man stepped back unconsciously

:And muttered

"?What... is this"

.The child sat on the ground in silence

.Then slowly turned his head toward him

.The young man turned, grabbing the girl's hand

"!Run"

...But

...before they could move away

.the child lunged again

...This time

.he did not try to bite directly

.He ran his long nails along the back of the young man's leg

.They tore through the skin

.The young man screamed and fell to one knee

...And at that same moment

.the child pounced on him

.He began scratching him

.Trying to reach his neck

.The young man resisted with everything he had

.Pushing him

.Striking him

.But the child did not stop

.The girl screamed

.She picked up a thick branch from the ground

.And ran toward them

.Then she struck the child with all her strength

.His body hit the ground

.And rolled several times among the stones and leaves

.She rushed to the young man

.Tried to lift him

.But his body was heavier than she expected

"!Come on... get up"

.She tried again

...Once

...then again

...And suddenly

.the child emerged from the darkness behind her

.And pounced on her

.He sank his teeth into her arm

.Tore out a piece of flesh

.Blood gushed

.Her scream echoed through the forest

.The young man tried to get up to save her

...But the child left the girl at that very moment

.and lunged at the young man's neck

...Before he could finish him

.lights from flashlights appeared in the distance

.And men's voices rose

"!There's someone"

"!I heard screaming from this direction"

.The child raised his head

.He fixed his gaze on the lights

...Then

.he turned

.And vanished between the trees

.The men arrived moments later

.They froze in their places

...The young man and girl

.drenched in blood

.One of them quickly approached

"!They're still breathing"

:Another shouted

"!Get the car"

.They quickly carried them

...And the car sped out of the forest

...while the small fire

.continued to burn alone in silence

.The car raced at full speed through the night road

.Its headlights cut through the darkness

...In the back seat

.the young man and girl lay

.Their clothes stained with blood

.Their breaths ragged

.One of the men pressed a cloth to the young man's neck, trying to stop the bleeding

.While another held the girl's injured arm

:The driver said while looking at the road

".Hold on... we're almost there"

...After minutes

.the lights of a small hospital on the outskirts of Tokyo appeared

.The car stopped abruptly at the entrance

.The men quickly opened the doors

:And one of them shouted

"!Help"

"!We have two injured"

.Two nurses rushed out, followed by the on-call doctor

.The doctor looked at the injuries

:Then he said quickly

"!Bring two beds"

.The nurses rushed inside

.And returned moments later

.They placed the injured on the beds

.And took them straight to the emergency room

.The doors closed behind them

.And the men remained outside

.Each one trying to process what they had seen

.Silence fell for moments

:Then one of them said

"?What attacked them"

:Another replied while shaking his head

"...I don't know"

".but I've never seen anything like this in my life"

.A third man looked at the traces of blood on his hands

:And said quietly

".The strange thing... is not the amount of blood"

.They turned to him

".but the injuries"

:One of them asked him

"?What about them"

:He said while recalling the scene

"...There are long scratches"

"...and bites"

".but they are not like human bites"

.He paused for a moment

:Then he said hesitantly

"...Could it be"

"?an Inugami..."

.Everyone looked at him

.Then one of them burst out laughing

"?Have you lost your mind"

:And another added with a smile

"?You believe in myths too"

.The man smiled shyly

"...Maybe"

".but I couldn't find an explanation"

.One of them patted his shoulder

".Let the police investigate"

"...as for us"

".let's go home"

.Everyone nodded in agreement

.They got into their cars

...And left the place

...without any of them realising

...that the catastrophe they had brought with their own hands to the hospital

.had already entered through its doors

...Inside

.the emergency room doors closed

.And the doctors began their work quickly

...While the sound of the heart monitor rose

.filling the room with a steady rhythm

...No one knew

...that that night

.would not end as it began

...Morning came

light was filtering through the trees, while the remains of the fire in the forest bore witness to .what had happened during the night

...But far from that place

.life continued as normal

.Cars moving

.Shops opening their doors

.And people heading to their work

.No one knew that something new had appeared among them

...On a road near western Tokyo

.a man was walking alone

.Carrying a small bag in his hand

.Stopping occasionally to check his route

.Then continuing on his way

.He suddenly stopped

.Because something rushed toward him from the side of the road

.He did not understand what happened until he fell to the ground

.The child was before him

.His black eyes fixed on him

.He pounced on him

.The man tried to push him away, but could not

:He screamed

"!Get away from me"

.He tried to get up

.But the child brought him down again

...And a few metres away

.another man was passing by on the road

.He heard the scream

.He turned

.He saw the scene

...He hesitated for a moment

.then rushed to help

.He grabbed a metal pipe lying near the road

"!Get away from him"

.He raised the pipe

.The child rushed toward him

.The man quickly raised the pipe and struck him with all his strength

.One blow

.The pipe hit the child's head

.He fell to the ground

.He remained still

.The man sat on the ground, panting

.He looked at his arm

.It was injured and bleeding

.He tore a piece of his clothing and tied it around the wound

.Then he raised his eyes toward the child

.He did not move

.He approached cautiously

"?Is he... dead"

.No one answered

.The child remained lying motionless

.Moments passed

...Then

.the child's fingers moved

.He sat up slowly

.His expression changed

.He moved his head to the right

.Then to the left

.He stopped

.He repeated the movement again

.As if trying to understand the space around him

.The man stepped back slightly

.He raised the pipe again

".Don't come closer"

.The child raised his head

.He fixed his eyes on him

.But he did not attack

.He remained standing

.Watching him

.The man clenched his fist

"?What are you waiting for"

.He suddenly lunged toward him

.He raised the pipe with all his strength

...But

...at the moment the pipe came down

.the child lowered slightly

.And moved to the side

.The strike passed beside him

.The man froze

.His eyes widened

"?...What"

.The child gave him no more time

.He pounced on him

.The man fell to the ground

.He screamed

.And tried to push him away

.But the child had already reached him

...And after moments

.silence fell again

...Nothing remained in the place but the metal pipe on the ground

.and the two bodies

...As for the child

.he had disappeared into the streets of western Tokyo

.No one knew where he had gone
