No Longer Human

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF OSAMU DAZAI

The famous Japanese author known by the penname Osamu Dazai was born with the name Shūji Tsushima in 1909. He belonged to a large family that was wealthy and influential, having found success in moneylending. As one of the richest landowners in the Aomori Prefecture, Dazai's father became a politician in Japan's House of Peers, which ultimately meant he was absent for most of Dazai's childhood—he died of lung cancer shortly before Dazai entered high school in 1923. Dazai eventually went on to study literature at Hirosaki University, where he edited and wrote for several student publications. However, he soon lost all interest in school when one of his favorite writers, Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, died by suicide in 1927. Dazai started spending his money on alcohol and sex workers, and—two years later—he tried to take his own life. He survived and was ultimately able to graduate the following year. He then went to Tokyo Imperial University to study French literature, but he was expelled for not going to class. Shortly thereafter, he tried again to die by suicide, this time attempting to drown alongside a woman he'd met at a bar. The woman died, but Dazai was rescued by a passing boat. Because his powerful family intervened on his behalf, he narrowly avoided legal repercussions for the woman's death. In the ensuing years, Dazai wrote and published a number of short stories, experimenting with his characteristically autobiographical style. He tried to die by suicide again in the 1930s but survived once more. He became addicted to painkillers after a bout with appendicitis and, to overcome his addiction, was eventually taken to a psychiatric ward—an experience he writes about in one of his best-known novels, *No Longer Human*. Despite his tumultuous personal life and crushing struggle with depression, Dazai wrote many novels in the 1930s and 1940s, including what is perhaps his most famous book, *The Setting Sun*, in 1947. He died in a double suicide in 1948, drowning himself alongside his mistress, Tomie Yamazaki.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Because *No Longer Human* is a highly autobiographical and confessional novel, it can feel somewhat timeless. However, it takes place in the 1930s, which was a very specific time in Japanese society. Although Yozo's struggles with depression and social isolation are certainly applicable to many different time periods, then, it's also the case that his individualistic existence is somewhat at odds with the collective, nationalist mentality prominent in Japan at the time. As a reaction to both diplomatic and financial instability during the Great Depression (which began two years earlier in Japan than it did in the United States), patriotism and a sense of loyalty to Japan became quite common—meaning, of course, that Yozo's feeling of alienation amongst his fellow Japanese citizens would have gone against societal norms. What's more, Yozo ends up participating in the Japanese Communist Party, which was officially outlawed in 1925. Anyone found to be in league with the Communist Party was subject to arrest and imprisonment until they converted to embrace a more nationalist agenda. Of course, Yozo himself doesn't seem to actually *care* about communism, but the fact that he's involved with the Communist Party in any capacity only emphasizes the extent to which he's at odds with mainstream, 1930s Japanese society.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

It's worth considering *No Longer Human* alongside Osamu Dazai's other well-known novel, *The Setting Sun*, which was published in 1947—just one year before *No Longer Human*. Whereas *No Longer Human* is set before Japan's involvement in World War II, *The Setting Sun* deals with the immediate aftermath of the war. Both novels, however, take stock of Japanese society and feature protagonists from well-to-do families. Because *No Longer Human* is largely autobiographical, though, it qualifies as an I-Novel, which refers to a type of Japanese confessional literature that was popular in the late 1800s and the first half of the 20th century. I-Novels like Tōson Shimazaki's *The Broken Commandment* and Katai Tayama's *Futon* unflinchingly present the author's emotions and experiences, even though they're presented as fiction—something that is certainly the case in *No Longer Human*, which so closely mirrors the events of Osamu Dazai's actual life. Lastly, it's noteworthy that Dazai's daughter Satoko Tsushima—who was born a year before he died—went on to become one of Japan's most famous authors under the penname Yūko Tsushima.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** No Longer Human
- **When Published:** 1948
- **Literary Period:** Modern/Shōwa Era
- **Genre:** Autobiographical Novel, Japanese I-Novel
- **Setting:** Tokyo in the 1930s
- **Climax:** Each of Yozo's several suicide attempts function as narrative climaxes.
- **Antagonist:** Social isolation and depression
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Adaptations. *No Longer Human* has been adapted many different times—and into many different mediums, including a graphic novel, a film, and a collection of anime episodes.

Bungo Stray Dogs. Osamu Dazai served as the inspiration for a character of the same name in the popular manga series *Bungo Stray Dogs*. The character's superpower—called "No Longer Human"—enables him to extinguish any supernatural ability simply through the use of touch.

PLOT SUMMARY

An unnamed speaker describes pictures of a man later revealed to be Yozo. There are three pictures of him: one as a child, one when he's slightly older, and one as an adult. The unnamed speaker finds each picture grotesque, saying he can hardly recognize Yozo as a human, even though he knows most people would find Yozo good-looking. But, the speaker says, there's something deeply disturbing about Yozo, especially in the final picture, in which he stands in a run-down room while staring at the camera with a blank expression.

The novel then presents Yozo's personal notebooks. He begins by describing his childhood, explaining that certain things about society and humanity never made much sense to him. He has never seen the point of eating big meals, for instance, but he always eats large amounts to please other people. As a young boy, he feels depressed by what he sees as "human dullness," which is something he picks up on when he thinks about the logical, unaesthetic way people move through life. At one point, several members of his family's waitstaff sexually abuse him, and he feels unable to tell anyone about it. The experience makes him feel "corrupted."

Yozo feels unable or unwilling to let his "true nature" show, so he develops a technique of performing for the people in his life. He thinks of himself as a clown who's willing to do anything to get others to laugh, and he becomes quite good at endearing himself to people. One day, though, he purposefully falls down at school, and while everyone is laughing, a quiet boy named Takeichi comes up behind him and whispers, "You did it on purpose." Yozo is horrified to learn that Takeichi—whom he thought was unintelligent—can see right through his entire act. He decides to get as close as possible to Takeichi, hoping this will allow him to keep an eye on him. After some false starts, he manages to bring Takeichi back to his house during a rainstorm, and he gently dries his new friend, prompting Takeichi to say that women will surely go crazy for him later in life—a comment that ends up being true, though it unsettles Yozo.

One day, Takeichi shows Yozo a famous **painting**. Yozo recognizes it as Van Gogh's self-portrait, but Takeichi says it's a painting of a ghost. The comment astounds Yozo, prompting him to reconsider the way he looks at art. Many paintings, he realizes, aren't beautiful portraits meant to be passively admired—they're visceral depictions of life's horror. He decides to become an artist himself and starts creating disturbing paintings that convey his "true nature," which he otherwise keeps hidden. He only shows the paintings to Takeichi.

Years later, Yozo goes to college in Tokyo and studies art while living in a townhouse that his father owns. His father is a politician, so he uses the townhouse when he's in Tokyo for legislative sessions. For the most part, Yozo hardly sees his father, instead spending his time with a classmate named Horiki, who shows him how to lead the rough-and-tumble life of a young artist. He introduces Yozo to drinking, smoking, and sleeping with sex workers. Despite their new friendship, though, Yozo doesn't actually like Horiki, even if he appreciates having a drinking companion. Horiki also brings him to a Communist Party meeting. Although Yozo finds the people there ridiculous for thinking their Marxist beliefs actually matter, he pretends to feel the same way and eventually becomes widely popular amongst his new "comrades."

Yozo spends all of his time drinking, smoking, and running errands for the Communist Party. He hardly attends class. Soon, though, his father decides to sell the townhouse. Until this point, Yozo has been living on a small monthly allowance, but he tends to use that up within the first few days of every month. He usually manages to buy what he needs by putting things on his father's tab at the local stores, but that's no longer possible. He suddenly feels what it's like to experience poverty, but this doesn't keep him from drinking. He becomes deeply depressed. He still fears other human beings, and all he ever wants to do is get so drunk that he can't feel anything. One night, Yozo goes to a bar and bluntly tells the bartender that he doesn't have much money. But she doesn't mind—she lets him drink on the house, joining him in his glum mood. Her name is Tsuneko, and she brings him back to her apartment later that night.

Tsuneko talks to Yozo all night about how unhappy she is. Listening to her makes him feel better, as if they're connected through their suffering. The next time they spend the night together, Tsuneko says she can't stand the idea of continuing to live, so they decide to die together by suicide. They throw themselves into the ocean, but Yozo survives. Tsuneko dies.

Yozo is taken to the hospital. Upon waking up, he's arrested and charged with being an "accomplice to a suicide." He spends the night in jail, but because he's still recovering from the incident and has a nasty cough, the authorities aren't as harsh on him as they could be. He's released the next day and put under the supervision of an old family friend known as Flatfish. Yozo's father, refuses to speak to Yozo, though his older brothers send Flatfish money. Yozo has also been expelled from the university, so he spends his days doing very little at Flatfish's house. One evening, Flatfish calls him to dinner and asks what he wants to

do with his life. He tells Yozo that he'll be happy to help him, as long as Yozo comes up with some sort of plan. Yozo can tell that Flatfish wants to hear him say something very specific, but he can't fathom what this might be. Flatfish gets angry that Yozo's life has no direction, prompting Yozo to finally say he wants to be a painter—something that makes Flatfish laugh.

The next morning, Yozo runs away from Flatfish's house. He leaves a note with Horiki's address on it, but he doesn't intend to go to Horiki's house. And yet, once he's out wandering the streets, he realizes he has nowhere else to go, so he actually *does* go to Horiki's. Like everyone else, Horiki has heard about what happened with Tsuneko, so he greets Yozo coldly. He clearly doesn't want him there, but he still lets him in. Eventually, a woman named Shizuko stops by to collect an illustration that Horiki has made for a magazine she works for. Yozo ends up going home with her, and she seems happy to care for him, as if she's attracted to his sadness.

Yozo lives at Shizuko's house, along with her daughter, Shigeko. Shizuko's husband died several years ago, and now she's content to provide for Yozo. But Yozo soon grows restless, so he starts doing illustrations and cartoons for the magazine Shizuko works for, using the money to buy alcohol and cigarettes. He descends even deeper into depression, at which point Shizuko meets with Horiki and Flatfish. As a group, they decide that Yozo should marry Shizuko and have no more contact with his family. However, when Shigeko makes a comment about wanting her "real" father back, Yozo decides to leave.

Yozo goes to a bar in the Kyobashi neighborhood, and the bartender lets him drink for free and stay in an upstairs apartment. During this period, he continues to drink heavily until he meets a 17-year-old woman named Yoshiko. One night, Yozo is drunk and starts thinking about how Yoshiko must be a virgin, and he suggests that they get married—wanting, it seems, to experience what it's like to have sex with a virgin. Yoshiko agrees to marry Yozo on the condition that he stop drinking. Yozo accepts Yoshiko's condition but breaks his promise the following day. Nonetheless, Yoshiko is extremely trusting, so she doesn't believe he would break his promise. They end up having sex and, shortly thereafter, marrying.

Yozo and Yoshiko move into a new apartment. For a while, life is good. Yozo stops drinking and begins to wonder if he might have a chance at happiness. But then Horiki reappears in his life. Yozo starts drinking again. One night, Yozo and Horiki hang out on the roof of Yozo's apartment. They're extremely drunk. At one point, Horiki goes downstairs to get some food, but he quickly returns and orders Yozo to come see what's happening. When Yozo follows, he sees a man raping Yoshiko in an adjacent room. He's horrified by what he sees, but he doesn't interfere. Later, Yoshiko says the man assured her nothing would happen, and Yozo thinks about how Yoshiko is too trusting.

Yozo starts drinking even more. Upon coming home drunk one night, he finds a box of sleeping pills and takes them all, hoping they'll kill him. He wakes up three days later, at which point Flatfish gives him some money to go recover at some hot springs. Yozo goes, but he spends the entire trip drinking. By the time he returns to Tokyo, he's in a worse condition than before, frequently coughing blood and stumbling home drunk. He goes to a pharmacy to get medicine for his condition, and he instantly feels a strange connection with the elderly pharmacist. He can tell she's another unhappy soul, and she seems to recognize the same thing in him. She tells him to stop drinking, giving him morphine instead. It isn't long before Yozo is fully addicted to the morphine and constantly hectoring the pharmacist for higher doses. He starts having an affair with her to get more of the drug.

Once again, Yozo decides to kill himself. Before he can do so, though, Horiki and Flatfish take him to a psychiatric ward, where he feels like a "reject" and thinks he has been "disqualified as a human being." Upon his release, one of his brothers sends him to the countryside, where he lives with an older maid who watches over him. His notebooks end with him saying that he has been in the countryside for three years and that, even though he's only 27, he now looks like a much older man.

The novel's final section returns to the unnamed speaker, who explains that the bartender from Kyobashi gave him Yozo's notebooks, which Yozo seems to have sent her 10 years ago. The speaker came across the bartender while traveling in the country, and she thought he might be able to turn the notebooks into a novel. Instead, the speaker has decided to simply present the notebooks as they are, without changing anything.

CHARACTERS

Yozo – The protagonist of *No Longer Human*, Yozo is a depressed Japanese man who feels alienated from everyone around him. He has an almost inexplicable fear of humans, finding it hard to understand why people behave the way they do. This fear and sense of alienation seems to predate his own sexual abuse at the hands of his family's waitstaff, but the incident certainly exacerbates his fraught view of humanity. As a defense mechanism, he learns to deceive people by acting gregarious and funny. In reality, he feels that his "clowning" around has nothing to do with his "true nature," which he keeps hidden. He eventually realizes that he can express some of his inner turmoil through **painting**, but he mostly keeps his artwork hidden, as well. As a young man, he meets a fellow art student named Horiki, who introduces him to alcohol, which ultimately becomes one of Yozo's ways of escaping reality. He also throws himself into messy romantic relationships to try to feel better about the world, but this has disastrous results—as made evident by the fact that he and his lover Tsuneko try to

die together by suicide. Tsuneko dies, but Yozo survives and spends the rest of his life seeking refuge from his horror of the world in tumultuous relationships, drugs, and alcohol. By the end of the novel, Yozo has tried to kill himself multiple times and has been forced to live under a maid's watch in the countryside, where he wastes away as life passes him by.

The Unnamed Speaker – The unnamed speaker narrates the prologue and epilogue of *No Longer Human*, explaining that he never met Yozo—or, in his words, "the madman who wrote these notebooks." Nonetheless, the speaker used to frequent the bar in Kyobashi that Yozo himself used to visit, which is why he knows the bartender from Kyobashi, who used to serve Yozo. When the speaker visits the countryside to see a friend and buy some seafood, he goes into a café and recognizes the bartender from Kyobashi. They talk about old times, at which point the bartender asks if the speaker ever knew Yozo. Even though he didn't, the bartender still gives him Yozo's notebooks, saying he might be able to use them for a novel—a suggestion implying that the speaker is a writer. That night, the speaker stays up reading the notebooks. Although he seems repulsed by Yozo as a person, he can't help but acknowledge how interesting the writing is, so he decides to publish the notebooks without changing them.

Takeichi – Takeichi is one of Yozo's peers in high school. Yozo initially thinks Takeichi is simple-minded and unobservant, so he's shocked when Takeichi is the only person who recognizes that Yozo is constantly pretending to be someone he's not. This happens one day at school, when Yozo purposefully falls over—everyone laughs, but Takeichi comes up behind him and says, "You did it on purpose." From that point on, Yozo is determined to keep tabs on Takeichi, terrified that the strange boy will tell everyone that he's a faker. To Yozo's surprise, spending time with Takeichi helps open his eyes to what true art can be, since Takeichi inadvertently shows him that good artists don't try to make beautiful, pleasant **paintings**. Rather, they try to depict the world as it really is, meaning that they unflinchingly paint the horror and depravity that Yozo himself sees everywhere around him. Having realized this, Yozo decides to become a painter. In this way, Takeichi helps Yozo find a way to express his "true nature," which he otherwise keeps hidden.

Yoshiko –Yoshiko is 17 years old when she meets Yozo. She works across the street from the bar he frequents in Kyobashi, and she often tells him that he needs to drink less. One night, he drunkenly suggests that they should get married, mainly because he has been thinking about how she's a virgin and how he'd like to sleep with her. She agrees to marry him if he stops drinking. Although Yozo accepts this condition, he gets drunk the very next day. However, Yoshiko is too trusting to believe that Yozo would break his promise, so they have sex and then get married. Yozo later worries that Yoshiko is *too* trusting, ultimately associating her tendency to unquestioningly trust others with the fact that she ends up getting raped—something that happens while Yozo himself watches and does nothing. Yozo falls into an even deeper depression after Yoshiko's rape, eventually trying once again to die by suicide. Yoshiko tragically blames herself for this, thinking that Yozo wants to die because he feels guilty for not protecting her.

Yozo's Father – Yozo's father is a Japanese politician who lives with his family in the countryside but spends several weeks each month in a townhouse in Tokyo. The novel implies that he's a fairly strict and unforgiving man, which is why he cuts ties with Yozo after Yozo tries to die by suicide—something that leads to a scandal and draws negative attention to his father's political career. Even though Yozo's father doesn't communicate with him after he tries to die by suicide, Yozo's brothers continue to send Yozo small amounts of money. Yozo never sees his father again, ultimately learning of his death after being released from a psychiatric ward.

Horiki – Horiki is one of Yozo's college peers in Tokyo. Horiki is a somewhat self-satisfied painter who considers himself something of a rebel. He takes Yozo under his wing and introduces him to drinking, smoking, and sleeping with sex workers. He often seems to have ulterior motives when it comes to his friendship with Yozo, since he always wants to borrow money. But Yozo doesn't mind, instead embracing Horiki's chaotic lifestyle. Later, Horiki treats Yozo rather coldly, not wanting to associate with him after he tries to die by suicide. But Horiki eventually gets over this and starts spending time with Yozo, ultimately drawing him back into a life of excessive drinking. Just when it seems that Horiki truly doesn't care about Yozo, though, he and Flatfish appear and take him to a psychiatric ward, and Yozo senses that Horiki does this out of a genuine desire to help him.

Tsuneko – Tsuneko is a bartender who serves Yozo one night when he doesn't have enough money to pay for his drinks. A sad soul, she takes pity on Yozo and spends the entire evening with him, eventually inviting him back to her apartment, where they sleep together and talk about how unhappy they are. Tsuneko's husband is in jail, but she commits herself to her new relationship with Yozo—a relationship that accelerates quite quickly. The next time they see each other, they spend the night together and again talk about how unhappy they are, and Tsuneko eventually says she can't bear to go on living. Together, they decide to die by suicide. When they throw themselves into the ocean, though, Tsuneko is the only one to die. Yozo is saved and thus must face the scandal surrounding the role he played in Tsuneko's suicide. In retrospect, Yozo thinks Tsuneko might be the only woman he ever truly loved.

Flatfish – Flatfish is an old acquaintance of Yozo's father. When Yozo is arrested for being an "accomplice to a suicide," the authorities require him to arrange for somebody to pick him up and watch over him. He calls Flatfish, who agrees to take him in. Flatfish thus steps in to fill the void left by Yozo's father, who

stops speaking to Yozo after his failed suicide. A kind and practical man, Flatfish lets Yozo live in his house, but he eventually tries to urge Yozo to do something with his life. He's willing to pay for Yozo to return to college, but he'll only do so if Yozo expresses a desire to get his life back on track. Yozo, however, is unable to articulate what he wants in life and, instead of accepting Flatfish's help, ends up running away. Later, Flatfish teams up with Horiki and takes Yozo to a psychiatric ward.

Shizuko – Shizuko is a woman who has a relationship with Yozo after he runs away from Flatfish's house. Her husband died several years ago, and she works for a magazine that occasionally publishes Horiki's illustrations, which is how Yozo first meets her. Enticed by how sad Yozo seems, she readily takes him in and provides for him, apparently finding his melancholy attitude somehow attractive. Shizuko decides—along with Horiki and Flatfish—that Yozo should officially cut ties with his family and marry her. Before this can happen, though, Yozo overhears Shigeko (Shizuko's daughter) say that she wants her "real" father back. He realizes that Shizuko and Shigeko would be better off without him, so he runs away.

Shigeko –Shigeko is Shizuko's daughter. She takes a liking to Yozo when he lives with her and her mother, but she unintentionally wounds him by talking one day about her late father, saying that she wishes she could have her "real" father back. Shortly thereafter, Yozo decides that Shigeko and Shizuko would be better off without him, so he runs away.

The Bartender from Kyobashi –Yozo endears himself to the bartender from Kyobashi by telling her one night that he left Shizuko for her. In response, the kind bartender lets him live in an apartment above the bar. Although he later moves out of this apartment when he gets married to Yoshiko, the bartender from Kyobashi still seems to play an important role in his life, perhaps because she feels that she has a connection to him. Years later, it's she who receives Yozo's notebooks in the mail—an indication that Yozo felt connected to her, too. She ends up giving the notebooks to the unnamed speaker.

The Pharmacist –The pharmacist is an elderly woman who gives Yozo morphine. Yozo first meets her after trying to die by suicide for the second time in his life. In the aftermath of this failed suicide, he is in extremely poor health, so he goes to the pharmacy and instantly senses a connection between himself and the pharmacist, recognizing that the pharmacist is, like him, deeply unhappy. The pharmacist sees this, too, and it brings tears to her eyes. Later, she tells Yozo that he must stop drinking, and she gives him morphine to make it easier to give up alcohol. It isn't long before he's fully addicted to morphine and coming back to the pharmacy at all hours of the night, begging the pharmacist for more morphine. He even starts an affair with the pharmacist, who continues to give him drugs even though she knows it's not a good idea.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND ALIENATION

No Longer Human explores what it's like to feel completely detached and alienated from society. Yozo, the novel's protagonist, feels fundamentally at odds with everyone around him, finding everything about humanity unnatural and impossible to comprehend. In other words, nothing about human behavior or society feels intuitive to him, and his only way of getting through life is by mimicking the social conduct he thinks other people view as acceptable. And yet, by constantly performing in this way, he ultimately alienates himself all the more, effectively hiding what he calls his "true nature" and thus guaranteeing that nobody will ever be able to genuinely connect with him. In this way, the novel spotlights how hard it can be for people who already feel alienated from society to meaningfully assimilate into a broader community, since their sense of alienation often drives them to behave in ways that only exacerbate their sense of isolation.

However, *No Longer Human* doesn't necessarily make a specific argument about social isolation or antisocial behavior. Rather, the novel simply follows Yozo's alienation, functioning as a snapshot or document of a lonely man. This snapshot doesn't clarify why, exactly, Yozo initially feels alienated from humanity. Of course, he *does* have the tragic misfortune of being sexually abused by his family's waitstaff as a child, and this experience undoubtedly plays into his "fear" of humans and his hesitancy to connect with others. However, it's difficult to argue that this traumatic experience is the singular *origin* of his feelings of isolation, since his misgivings and sense of estrangement begin before his abuse. In turn, the novel perhaps suggests that some people are simply prone to feeling excluded from society—and, to that end, that such feelings often become more pronounced over time, as Yozo comes to feel by the end of the novel that he's so cut off from humanity and society that he's "disqualified as a human being." Feelings of alienation, then, are capable of building on themselves, making it that much harder for people like Yozo to forge connections and find a sense of belonging in society.

COMPASSION AND MUTUAL SUFFERING

Although *No Longer Human* primarily focuses on social isolation, the novel also considers the kinds of connection that are still available to people who feel alienated and alone. Yozo, for instance, is so estranged

from everyone around him that he legitimately *fears* other human beings—and yet, he still experiences moments of connection throughout the novel. In general, the most meaningful relationships he forms are built on a sense of mutual suffering. For example, he falls in love with a young woman named Tsuneko, and their bond is primarily rooted in their shared sense of despair. After spending a night listening to Tsuneko talk about how sad she is, Yozo experiences a "feeling of comradeship for [a] fellow-sufferer," ultimately suggesting that he *is* capable of sharing a bond with another person—it's just that this bond is predicated on mutual feelings of sorrow. After all, meeting somebody like Tsuneko is arguably the only way for Yozo to feel less alone and alienated from the rest of society, since he finally feels as if someone shares his turbulent emotions. In a way, then, finding a "fellow-sufferer" is like finding compassion: Yozo and Tsuneko can commiserate with each other and thus ease the emotional burden of feeling alone in the world.

Similarly, Yozo later feels connected to an elderly pharmacist because he can instantly tell she's unhappy. "Unhappy people are sensitive to the unhappiness of others," he thinks, confirming that he experiences compassion and empathy when he meets people who seem as depressed as him. This, however, is not to say that Yozo's relationships with other unhappy people *improve* his outlook on life—in fact, both his relationship with Tsuneko and his acquaintance with the pharmacist lead to disastrous results. Nonetheless, the mere fact that he connects with them at all suggests that it's possible for even the most lonely, alienated people to find camaraderie, even if that camaraderie is based in mutual suffering.

DEPRESSION, MENTAL HEALTH, AND STIGMATIZATION

No Longer Human examines societal perceptions surrounding depression and the unfortunate stigma that is often attached to mental health struggles. Almost everyone in Yozo's life fails to show genuine sympathy about his depression. And though he *does* have people who technically support him in times of hardship, they still seem to look down on him for his apparent inability to live like everyone else. When he and Tsuneko both decide to die by suicide, Yozo survives and ends up facing the harsh stigmatization surrounding suicide. In fact, he's even taken straight from the hospital to jail and charged with being an "accomplice to a suicide"—something that certainly doesn't help with his feelings of depression and alienation, since this kind of treatment directly ostracizes and penalizes him for his mental health struggles. What's more, his father effectively disowns him, refusing to see or communicate with him. It's clear, then, that the people around Yozo interpret his depression not as something he needs help dealing with, but as a form of purposeful antisocial behavior that ought to be punished. It's therefore not particularly surprising that Yozo has such a hard time investing himself in the surrounding society, since this society has shown him such outward hostility during his most vulnerable and painful moments. *No Longer Human* thus unveils the ways in which the stigma surrounding mental health issues in 1930s Japanese society actually ran the risk of *exacerbating* the way people like Yozo deal with and process their own unhappiness.

SELF-EXPRESSION, PRIVACY, AND ART

In many ways, *No Longer Human* is a testament to the human tendency to naturally gravitate toward self-expression. Even though Yozo goes to great lengths in his everyday life to conceal his inner thoughts and feelings, he's still drawn to certain modes of self-expression that allow him to represent his "true nature." When he's an adolescent, for instance, he discovers that **painting** can be an outlet of sorts, since the artform provides him with a way to recreate his general worldview. He has always been good at drawing cartoons, but he spends most of his childhood doing so simply as a way of pleasing his peers, catering to their preferences as a way of masking what he sees as his authentic self. When his classmate Takeichi mistakenly suggests that a self-portrait by Van Gogh is actually a painting of a ghost, though, Yozo is astounded—the comment helps him realize that art doesn't always have to be straightforward, beautiful, or entertaining; it can also be frightening, heavy, and expressive. With this in mind, he begins creating disturbing paintings that reveal "the true self [he has] so desperately hidden." In this way, art becomes the only way that Yozo feels comfortable expressing himself (though he only shows the paintings to Takeichi). More importantly, though, his interest in art shows that he yearns for some kind of outlet, despite the fact that he otherwise works so hard to hide his internal emotional landscape.

In addition, the format of *No Longer Human* plays into the idea that Yozo longs for self-expression even if he also abhors the idea of actually revealing anything about himself to others. After all, the majority of the novel itself is made up of Yozo's (fictional) notebooks, in which he has spent pages upon pages trying to precisely articulate his thoughts and feelings. The fact that he has put so much effort into expressing himself suggests that even the most guarded, private people often experience the urge to explore certain parts of themselves through art. And though his notebook entries are presumably intended to be private documents of his life, he ends up sending them to an old bartender he used to know, indicating that he has finally decided to open up to the world after decades of stifling privacy.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PAINTING

Yozo's interest in art—and specifically painting—symbolizes his desire to somehow express his feelings of horror and revulsion in response to everyday life. When Takeichi comes over one day and insists that Van Gogh's famous self-portrait is actually a portrait of a ghost, Yozo suddenly realizes that art doesn't always have to depict beautiful, pleasant things. To the contrary, art can be challenging and disturbing, and Yozo takes comfort in the idea that many of history's most successful painters must have seen the world as a wretched place and then decided to depict that wretchedness in their art. This, he comes to believe, is a way for people to face depravity head-on instead of constantly running from it, which is what he has been doing by "clowning" around and trying to act like a silly, jovial person. He thus decides to stop drawing meaningless cartoons and start painting unsettling portraits, and though he only shows his work to Takeichi, the paintings come to represent his gravitation toward self-expression, ultimately suggesting that even the most private people find themselves drawn to anything that helps them make sense of their worldview.

PILLOWCASES

Yozo's disappointment when he learns that pillowcases aren't purely ornamental symbolizes his disgust at the mundanity of everyday life. When he's a young boy, he thinks that pillowcases are simply decorative, but he soon learns that they serve an actual purpose: namely, to provide a washable surface for people to put their heads on without dirtying the pillow itself. As soon as he learns this, he feels depressed and overwhelmed by what he thinks of as "human dullness." Everyday life is full of customs that feel unspeakably boring and pointless to him. This, of course, is an early manifestation of his long struggle with depression, which often makes it hard for people to invest themselves in the things happening around them. For Yozo, the surrounding world is nothing but a bleak, unexciting place, and his disappointment regarding pillowcases is a good indication of just how easily small, seemingly unimportant details can upset him. And yet, at the same time, his desire for pillowcases to be aesthetically pleasing also hints at a certain desire for beauty and pleasure, thus implying that, though he finds everyday life dull and depressing, he's still interested enough in life itself to yearn for decoration and artfulness.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the New Directions edition of *No Longer Human* published in 1973.

Prologue Quotes

❝ The head is shown quite large, and you can examine the features in detail: the forehead is average, the wrinkles on the forehead average, the eyebrows also average, the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the chin…the face is not merely devoid of expression, it fails even to leave a memory. It has no individuality. I have only to shut my eyes after looking at it to forget the face.

Related Characters: The Unnamed Speaker (speaker), Yozo

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In the prologue of *No Longer Human*, an unnamed narrator describes three pictures of Yozo. The first is of Yozo as a child, the second is from when he's a young adult, and the third is when he's in his 20s. All three pictures deeply unsettle the unnamed narrator, though it's not immediately apparent why this is the case. At the same time, though, the narrator's description of Yozo *does* make him seem somewhat unhuman. Here, for example, the narrator describes the picture of Yozo as an adult, saying that his "head is shown quite large," almost as if his physical proportions are slightly askew. This, in turn, hints at the narrator's sense of disgust and curiosity when it comes to Yozo, as he looks at him as if he's a completely unrecognizable being. And yet, the narrator goes on to describe a very normal-looking person, using the word "average" three times in reference to Yozo's facial features. It's clear, then, that what unsettles the narrator about Yozo *isn't*, in fact, some physical attribute. Rather, it's the blank expression on his face, which perhaps gestures toward his inability to fit in—unable to manipulate his face in a way that might appeal to others, he comes off as strange and somehow unhuman.

The First Notebook Quotes

❝ Mine has been a life of much shame.

I can't even guess myself what it must be to live the life of a human being.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

These are the first lines of Yozo's personal notebooks, which make up the majority of *No Longer Human*. By immediately announcing that his life has been full of shame, he foregrounds the entire novel with a sense of remorse while also framing himself as a somewhat complicated and unlikable person. Of course, this is mainly his own assessment—as will later become evident, he is, in many ways, his own worst critic, seeing himself as detestable and deserving of guilt. Nonetheless, this blunt pronouncement at the beginning of his notebooks highlights just how self-critical he is. What's more, he goes on to say that he has no idea "what it must be to live the life of a human being," thus hinting at a possible connection between the dim view he takes of himself and his inability to fit in to the rest of society—he is, it seems, so hard on himself that he feels excluded from everyday human life, as if he doesn't deserve to be part of society in general. Although these ideas are somewhat strange and dramatic at the beginning of the novel, readers will soon see that Yozo's pessimistic outlook is something that defines his entire worldview and sense of self.

> How often as I lay there I used to think what uninspired decorations sheets and pillow cases make. It wasn't until I was about twenty that I realized that they actually served a practical purpose, and this revelation of human dullness stirred dark depression in me.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Narrating the events of his childhood, Yozo sheds some light on the somewhat strange, uncommon way that he moves through life. Although most people intuitively understand that pillowcases serve a "practical purpose" (to allow people to lay their head on a washable surface while using a pillow), Yozo doesn't quite grasp this as a child. Instead, he thinks they are "decorations," and though he doesn't necessarily think they look all that good, he's even more disappointed to learn that they exist for nonaesthetic reasons. The fact that this realization overwhelms him with a depressing sense of "human dullness" is a good indicator that he dislikes the ordered, logical way of the world—for Yozo, human life is oppressively boring and stifling with its arbitrary rules and customs. He perhaps finds such customs upsetting because he has trouble understanding them in the first place. He feels like an outsider when it comes to the surrounding society, so there's a certain sense of unfamiliarity when it comes to the codes and traditions everyone else intuitively follows.

> "How about you, Yozo?" he asked, but I could only stammer uncertainly.

Whenever I was asked what I wanted my first impulse was to answer "Nothing." The thought went through my mind that it didn't make any difference, that nothing was going to make me happy.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Yozo's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Before Yozo's father goes away on a business trip, he asks each of his children what they'd like him to bring back as a gift. All of Yozo's siblings quickly make their requests, but Yozo has no idea what to say—he doesn't want anything. Nothing, he thinks, is going to make him happy. Even at a young age, then, it's clear that he has a pessimistic worldview that makes it quite hard for him to get excited about anything. Most children love the idea of receiving a gift, but Yozo seems all too aware of his own prevailing sense of perpetual dissatisfaction, and he knows that nothing his father could get him would ever bring him contentment. This attitude, in turn, suggests that Yozo is already disengaged from life; he has, in many ways, already given up the idea of finding happiness, and his overall lack of desire foreshadows his eventual disinterest in life altogether.

My true nature, however, was one diametrically opposed to the role of a mischievous imp. Already by that time I had been taught a lamentable thing by the maids and menservants; I was being corrupted. I now think that to perpetrate such a thing on a small child is the ugliest, vilest, cruelest crime a human being can commit. But I endured it. I even felt as if it enabled me to see one more particular aspect of human beings. I smiled in my weakness.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

As a young boy, Yozo learns to perform for the people in his life, essentially becoming an actor in order to please others and endear himself to them. He does this both at school and at home, referring to his behavior as "clowning." And yet, his "true nature" has nothing to do with the merry, "mischievous" behavior that comes along with the art of "clowning." To the contrary, he has a very dark view of himself and of the world, and his gregarious outward appearance is in direct opposition to his actual sensibility.

Throughout the novel, it can sometimes seem hard to understand why, exactly, Yozo has such a cynical, depressed view of the world and, to that end, why he feels compelled to please others no matter the cost. In this passage, though, he reveals that members of his family's waitstaff sexually abused him, noting that this is "the ugliest, vilest, cruelest crime" to which somebody could possibly subject a child. It's possible, then, that part of his intense need to please others is directly tied to his history with abuse, as this kind of behavior can be a defense mechanism. And yet, it's also the case that Yozo's feelings predated this experience, so although it's possible that his abuse exacerbated his fear of other humans, it's hard to say that it's solely responsible for his entire outlook.

The Second Notebook Quotes

I got to my feet with a rueful smile and was brushing the sand from my pants when Takeichi, who had crept up from somewhere behind, poked me in the back. He murmured, "You did it on purpose."

I trembled all over. I might have guessed that someone would detect that I had deliberately missed the bar, but that Takeichi should have been the one came as a bolt from the blue. I felt as if I had seen the world before me burst in an instant into the raging flames of hell. It was all I could do to suppress a wild shriek of terror.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Takeichi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Yozo has already said that he has developed a habit of "clowning" in front of other people—that is, he has learned to endear himself to people by deliberately making himself look silly or goofy, thus winning others over by getting them to laugh at him. He has become quite adept at deceiving everyone around him and getting them to see him as a fun, jovial young boy. In reality, though, his true identity is nothing like the outward façade he has constructed, and this is exactly what he wants, since hiding his "true nature" (as he says elsewhere) ultimately keeps everyone around him at an arm's length.

For this reason, he's shocked when his classmate Takeichi—whom he thought was unobservant—manages to see through his entire act one day. Takeichi is the only one capable of recognizing that Yozo has intentionally fallen down in order to make everyone around him laugh. It makes sense that this greatly unsettles Yozo, since it suggests that he hasn't protected himself from the scrutiny of others quite as well as he previously thought. At the same time, though, this moment is almost humorous, since Yozo says that Takeichi's words make him feel like *the entire world has burst into flames*—an extremely melodramatic way to feel. Nonetheless, that Yozo feels so profoundly terrified by Takeichi's ability to see his true intentions shows just how desperately he wants to isolate his "true nature" from everyone around him.

> There are some people whose dread of human beings is so morbid that they reach a point where they yearn to see with their own eyes monsters of ever more horrible shapes. And the more nervous they are—the quicker to take fright—the more violent they pray that every storm will be…Painters who have had this mentality, after repeated wounds and intimidations at the hands of the apparitions called human beings, have often come to believe in phantasms—they plainly saw monsters in broad daylight, in the midst of nature. And they did not fob people off with clowning; they did their best to depict these monsters just as they had appeared.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Takeichi

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

When Takeichi comes over one day, he shows Yozo a painting. He says that it's a painting of a ghost, but Yozo recognizes it as Van Gogh's famous self-portrait, which means that Takeichi is—technically—wrong. The painting isn't of a ghost, it's of the painter himself. And yet, Yozo is profoundly moved by what Takeichi has just said, since he likes the idea that art doesn't just depict life as it is. In this moment, he realizes that painters can take certain artistic liberties and that these liberties can help them express the "morbid" "dread" of living amongst other people. In response to Takeichi's silly assertion, Yozo begins to feel a certain kinship with people like Van Gogh, ultimately recognizing masterful painters as people who—like Yozo himself—moved through the world with a fear of humans. This fear, he thinks, starts to change how people view the world, making it so that they see "monsters" everywhere they look. Yozo, for his part, has dealt with this fear by trying to ignore it, using his "clowning" around as a way of masking his horror of the surrounding world. However, he now thinks that painters like Van Gogh have refused to turn their backs like he has. Instead, these painters have used art to depict the world as they truly experience it. In turn, Takeichi unknowingly helps Yozo find an outlet in painting, which becomes a way for him to honestly grapple with and express his dark feelings instead of constantly hiding them away.

> The pictures I drew were so heart-rending as to stupefy even myself. Here was the true self I had so desperately hidden. I had smiled cheerfully; I had made others laugh; but this was the harrowing reality. I secretly affirmed this self, was sure that there was no escape from it, but naturally I did not show my pictures to anyone except Takeichi.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Takeichi

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

After Takeichi suggests that Van Gogh's famous self-portrait is actually a painting of a ghost, Yozo's entire conception of art changes. He has always been quite adept at drawing, but until this point, he has only ever drawn cartoons intended to please his peers. Now, though, he starts painting things that are so wretched and "heart-rending" that even *he* finds them troubling and almost unfathomable. And yet, he feels as if these paintings are the first genuine representation of "the true self" he has "so desperately hidden" for his entire life. In other words, painting becomes his only means of legitimate self-expression. Although he has spent years "cheerfully" entertaining others, the truth is that this has always been nothing more than a social mask and a way of keeping others at arm's length. Through painting, then, he manages to explore his actual worldview. And yet, this is still a very limited form of self-expression, since he only shows his paintings to Takeichi, thus ensuring—once again—that nobody else will ever be able to fully understand him.

> I soon came to understand that drink, tobacco, and prostitutes were all excellent means of dissipating (even for a few moments) my dread of human beings. I came even to feel that if I had to sell every last possession to obtain these means of escape, it would be well worth it.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Horiki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

After Horiki introduces Yozo to alcohol, smoking, and sex workers, Yozo feels as if his life has changed. Of course, it's

quite unlikely that these new interests will bring Yozo any sort of lasting happiness, but they *do* give him an immediate sense of satisfaction—and considering that Yozo is somebody who rarely feels even the most fleeting joy or pleasure, it's no wonder that he quickly gravitates toward these things, since they at least give him a brief escape from his otherwise bleak outlook on life. Unsurprisingly, though, he becomes so reliant on these brief, transient pleasures that they seem to take over his life. Because drinking or sleeping with sex workers make him feel like his "dread of human beings" is "dissipating," he's willing to do almost anything to continue indulging. And though this isn't necessarily a problem at this point in his life, it will become a source of tension when he later runs out of money and has no way of seeking out the only things that relieve him of his constant terror of the world.

❝ Irrationality. I found the thought faintly pleasurable. Or rather, I felt at ease with it. What frightened me was the logic of the world; in it lay the foretaste of something incalculably powerful. Its mechanism was incomprehensible, and I could not possibly remain closeted in that windowless, bone-chilling room. Though outside lay the sea of irrationality, it was far more agreeable to swim in its waters until presently I drowned.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Horiki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Horiki first takes Yozo under his wing, he brings him to a meeting of the Communist Party—presumably, Yozo thinks, to impress him, since Horiki loves the idea of seeming subversive. But he doesn't succeed in impressing Yozo, who finds the Communist Party ridiculous. And yet, this isn't necessarily a bad thing, at least not in Yozo's mind. He actually *likes* what he sees as the "irrationality" of the Party's idealism. He doesn't really care about the Party's political agenda, but he appreciates the fact that the communists around him are striving to fundamentally change society, which Yozo finds oppressively full of "logic." This idea goes back to the disdain he felt for practical things like pillowcases when he was a child. When he was young, he thought pillowcases were purely ornamental, but then he realized that they mainly exist to serve a very specific and mundane function, and this deeply depressed him, overwhelming him with a terrible sense of "human dullness." The same is true, it seems, of society as a whole: Yozo finds its rules and customs oppressively "dull[]," perhaps because he has never been able to understand those customs or feel part of society in the first place. Now, then, he delights in the Communist Party's desire to rail against the status quo, and though he doesn't necessarily care about *how* the Party does this, he appreciates the general idea of departing from conformist societal norms.

❝ I drank the liquor. She did not intimidate me, and I felt no obligation to perform my clownish antics for her. I drank in silence, not bothering to hide the taciturnity and gloominess which were my true nature.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Tsuneko, Yozo's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Not long after his father sells the family's townhouse in Tokyo, Yozo realizes that he doesn't have quite enough money to continue his lifestyle of heavy drinking. And yet, drinking is essentially the only thing he enjoys in life, so he certainly doesn't want to stop. He therefore goes to a bar anyway and tells the bartender that he doesn't have much money. To his surprise, she takes pity on him and gives him as much liquor as he wants. This is the first scene in which Tsuneko—with whom Yozo later tries to die by suicide—appears, and it's noteworthy that Yozo immediately feels at ease with her. He doesn't feel as if he needs to "perform [his] clownish antics for her," which is actually quite significant, since he always feels compelled to "perform" for people as a way of both endearing himself to them *and* making sure they don't get too close to him. In a way, then, Yozo's eventual intimacy with Tsuneko is directly linked to his uncharacteristic willingness to let his guard down around her, ultimately letting her see his "true nature" instead of constantly hiding behind artificially cheery behavior.

> It was entirely different from the feeling of being able to sleep soundly which I had experienced in the arms of those idiot-prostitutes (for one thing, the prostitutes were cheerful); the night I spent with that criminal's wife was for me a night of liberation and happiness. (The use of so bold a word, affirmatively, without hesitation, will not, I imagine, recur in these notebooks.)

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Tsuneko

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Yozo compares his first night with Tsuneko to sleeping with the sex workers he has often visited in the past. The comparison he makes is quite condescending and sexist, as he presents the sex workers as inherently unintelligent and incapable of true emotion. In reality, though, the main difference between his relationship with Tsuneko and his experiences with sex workers lies in the fact that his interactions with sex workers are purely transactional, whereas his time with Tsuneko is based on a mutual feeling of sorrow. Indeed, the main reason he feels so at ease with Tsuneko has to do with their shared sense of suffering, meaning that their bond is highly mutual—something that is quite rare in Yozo's life. After all, Yozo usually wants to keep people at a safe distance from himself, so he puts on a social mask to ensure that nobody can get too close. As a result, his relationships are usually founded on his eagerness to please the other person. Now, though, he seems to have let his guard down and, in doing so, feels like he has finally gotten a taste of "liberation and happiness"—though, as he acknowledges, this won't last very long.

> It was because I felt sorry for Tsuneko, sorry that she should be obliged to accept Horiki's savage kisses while I watched. Once she had been defiled by Horiki she would no doubt have to leave me. But my ardor was not positive enough for me to stop Tsuneko. I experienced an instant of shock at her unhappiness; I thought, "It's all over now." Then, the next moment, I meekly, helplessly resigned myself. I looked from Horiki to Tsuneko. I grinned.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Tsuneko, Horiki

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

After spending his first night with Tsuneko, Yozo doesn't see her for a little while. It isn't until he and Horiki are out drinking and run out of money one night that Yozo decides to go back to the bar where Tsuneko works, assuring Horiki that they'll be able to drink for free (though he doesn't specify why, exactly, this is the case). Excited, Horiki announces before they arrive that he's going to kiss whoever ends up serving him. Then, when they get there, Yozo is thrown off by the fact that Tsuneko sits down next to Horiki. He instantly realizes that Horiki is going to kiss Tsuneko, and he starts to feel sorry for her.

In and of itself, the fact that he feels sorry for her is quite significant, since he's generally pretty unconcerned with how other people feel—he's usually so focused on his own fears and anxieties that he fails to really consider what other people must be experiencing. And yet, his consideration for Tsuneko's feelings isn't *completely* selfless, since he assumes that Tsuneko will feel she has to break things off with him if Horiki kisses her. In turn, this moment suggests that Yozo is capable of empathizing with others *but also* that this capability is somewhat limited and still, in the end, tied to his own emotional baggage.

> Yes, just as Horiki had said, she really was a tired, poverty-stricken woman and nothing more. But this thought itself was accompanied by a welling-up of a feeling of comradeship for this fellow-sufferer from poverty. (The clash between rich and poor is a hackneyed enough subject, but I am now convinced that it really is one of the eternal themes of drama.) I felt pity for Tsuneko; for the first time in my life I was conscious of a positive (if feeble) movement of love in my heart. I vomited. I passed out. This was also the first time I had ever drunk so much as to lose consciousness.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Tsuneko, Horiki

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 85-86

Explanation and Analysis

As Yozo tensely waits for Horiki to kiss Tsuneko (as he previously said he would), Horiki announces that he would never kiss anyone who looks as poor and unappealing as Tsuneko. This is obviously a very cruel thing to say, but one

might think it would relieve Yozo—after all, he didn't want Horiki to kiss Tsuneko in the first place, so at least he won't have to watch that happen. However, Yozo actually takes Horiki's words to heart, suddenly questioning his *own* involvement with Tsuneko and viewing her as a "tired, poverty-stricken woman and nothing more." This sentiment suggests that he doesn't feel as fondly for her as it seemed, but this isn't necessarily the case. In fact, Yozo's affinity for Tsuneko ends up growing even stronger after he starts to see her in this negative light. By viewing her so harshly, Yozo is able to feel a certain kinship with Tsuneko. His own self-esteem is extraordinarily low, so when Horiki savagely insults her, Yozo feels even more connected to her than he did before, now seeing her as a "fellow-sufferer." The only way he can truly bond with somebody, then, is by feeling a sense of mutual sorrow.

> She lay down beside me. Towards dawn she pronounced for the first time the word "death." She too seemed to be weary beyond endurance of the task of being a human being; and when I reflected on my dread of the world and its bothersomeness, on money, the movement, women, my studies, it seemed impossible that I could go on living. I consented easily to her proposal.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Tsuneko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

The second time Tsuneko and Yozo spend the night together, they once again stay up late talking about their many sorrows. This time, though, they specifically focus on how difficult life feels, highlighting the idea that having to go through the everyday motions of being alive takes an unbelievable amount of "endurance." This idea provides some insight into the nature of Yozo's depression, as it implies that everyday tasks that many people find simple and easy are actually overwhelmingly difficult for Yozo, who feels as if daily life itself is like a long, grueling marathon. It's not that there's necessarily something *specific* that constantly bothers him—it's that *everything* feels impossibly difficult. For this reason, he finds great comfort in his new relationship with Tsuneko, since at least hearing about her similar experiences makes him feel less alone with what he experiences as the heavy burden of living. At the same time, though, while their mutual suffering might provide them with a sense of relief, it also seems to make things worse, as they effectively urge each other toward suicide.

> The next instant he asked with his quiet smile, "Was that real?"

Even now the recollection makes me feel so embarrassed I can't sit still. It was worse, I am sure, even than when in high school I was plummeted into hell by that stupid Takeichi tapping me on the back and saying, "You did it on purpose." Those were the two great disasters in a lifetime of acting. Sometimes I have even thought that I should have preferred to be sentenced to ten years imprisonment rather than meet with such gentle contempt from the district attorney.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Takeichi, Tsuneko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

After Tsuneko dies in her and Yozo's mutual suicide attempt, Yozo is brought to the hospital. As soon as he recovers, though, he's arrested and put in jail, eventually having to meet with the district attorney. During this meeting, he plays up the cough he has developed, since doing so won him some sympathy when he was talking to the police chief earlier in the day. Now, though, the district attorney manages to see through his act, and Yozo is immediately transported back to the day Takeichi called him out for purposefully falling in order to make their other classmates laugh. Yozo finds such interactions horrifying because they suggest that he isn't as good at hiding his true nature as he'd like to think. He has spent years working on his skills of deception, so when the district attorney instantly realizes that he's playing up his cough, Yozo is forced to acknowledge that it's not always possible to isolate oneself from others through careful deception—sometimes, it seems, people manage to see through even the most skillfully constructed facades.

The Third Notebook: Part One Quotes

Why, I wonder, couldn't he have mentioned the simple fact that the money would be forthcoming from home? That one fact would probably have settled my feelings, but I was left in a fog.

"How about it? Have you anything which might be described as aspirations for the future? I suppose one can't expect people one helps to understand how difficult it is to help another person."

Related Characters: Yozo, Flatfish (speaker), Tsuneko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

After Yozo is released from jail in the aftermath of his and Tsuneko's mutual suicide attempt (which, of course, he survived), he goes to live with an old family friend named Flatfish. One night, Flatfish invites him down to dinner and asks how he might be able to help Yozo, saying that Yozo shouldn't worry about money. What Flatfish wants, Yozo later realizes, is to hear Yozo say that he has plans to go back to school. And yet, Flatfish doesn't straightforwardly set forth what he has in mind. In reality, the money Flatfish has for Yozo is actually from Yozo's family. Because Flatfish isn't forthcoming about this, though, it makes it difficult for Yozo to answer his questions. This moment provides some good insight into Yozo's constant efforts to please others—in this conversation, he has no idea what Flatfish is driving at, so he's unable to appease him by telling him what he wants to hear. Once again, then, Yozo is forced to recognize the limits of his own ability to endear himself to others through strategic deceptions.

Just outside the apartment window was a kite caught in the telegraph wires; blown about and ripped by the dusty spring wind, it nevertheless clung tenaciously to the wires, as if in affirmation of something. Every time I looked at the kite I had to smile with embarrassment and blush. It haunted me even in dreams.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Shizuko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

When Yozo goes to live with Shizuko and her young daughter, he notices a ripped kite that has gotten tangled in the telegraph wires outside the window. The fact that this catches his eye is noteworthy, since the kite itself seems to resonate with how Yozo feels about his own life—it's clear that he compares himself to the kite, seeing himself as someone who has been caught up in life and is in a very sorry state. And yet, like the kite, he "nevertheless cl[i]ng[s] tenaciously" to life. Of course, he has already tried to kill himself, but he was unable to succeed. In this moment, then, he seems to wonder about what must be keeping him tied to life. It's not necessarily that he *wants* to be alive, but that he's caught up in life and unable to do anything other than simply continue to exist, which is why the sight of the kite "haunt[s]" him and makes him feel embarrassed.

(They were happy, the two of them. I'd been a fool to come between them. I might destroy them. I might destroy them both if I were not careful. A humble happiness. A good mother and child. […]

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Shizuko, Shigeko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

After living with Shizuko and her daughter, Shigeko, for a little while, Yozo overhears them talking one day and realizes that he's nothing but a burden on their small family. Until this point, he hasn't really stopped to think about the influence he has on them, but he now starts to feel that his heavy drinking and depressive behavior will only negatively impact their lives. It makes sense, then, that this realization comes after he thinks about how happy they are. He, of course, knows that he's not happy at all and perhaps suspects that he's not even *capable* of feeling genuine happiness. In turn, he feels out of place living with them, worrying that he might "come between them" and possibly even "destroy them both." In a way, this is one of the more selfless thought processes Yozo has throughout the novel, since his empathy for Shizuko and Shigeko isn't directly tied to his own wellbeing—to the contrary, he decides to leave in order to *save* them, though it's also possible that this is just an excuse for him to leave behind the stability of domestic life in order to embrace a rougher existence.

The Third Notebook: Part Two Quotes

> The voice of a resistance weak but desperate spoke from somewhere in my heart. It said that I had not caused anyone to die, that I had not lifted money from anyone—but once again the ingrained habit of considering myself evil took command.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Horiki, Tsuneko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

One night, Horiki comes over and drinks heavily with Yozo. As they get progressively drunker, they start talking about crime, wondering what the antonym (the opposite) of the word would be. This strange topic inspires Horiki to make several mean-spirited comments about Yozo's past experience with the law enforcement system—an experience, of course, that came about in the aftermath of his mutual suicide attempt with Tsuneko. At one point, Horiki suggests that Yozo is responsible for Tsuneko's death, and though Yozo wants to say that he has "not caused anyone to die" or even broken any other petty crimes, he remains silent. It's worth noting, however, that there *is* a "voice of resistance" that sounds within him, urging him to stand up for himself. This is somewhat surprising, since he never seems willing to advocate for himself. And yet, he easily overrides this impulse to stand up for himself, since he's so used to seeing himself as "evil." In other words, his extremely low opinion of himself keeps him from defending himself against Horiki's unkind and unfair remarks.

> She stood ramrod stiff. But in her wide-open eyes there was no trace of alarm or dislike; her look spoke of longing, almost of the seeking for salvation. I thought, "She must be unhappy too. Unhappy people are sensitive to the unhappiness of others." Not until then did I happen to notice that she stood with difficulty, supporting herself on crutches. I suppressed a desire to run up beside her, but I could not take my eyes from her face. I felt tears starting, and saw then the tears brimming from her big eyes.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), The Pharmacist

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

After Yozo tries for the second time in his life to die by suicide, he's sent to convalesce at a nearby hot spring. However, the vacation doesn't do him any good, and he soon returns to Tokyo feeling just as wretched and unhealthy as before (if not *more* so). While wandering the streets drunk one night, he collapses into a snowbank and coughs blood, at which point he decides to go to a local pharmacy. It's late, but the pharmacist is still there, and she stares out at Yozo's miserable appearance for a long time. In this passage, Yozo describes the eye contact they make in this moment, in which he feels a strong unspoken connection with the older woman. The fact that he can instantly recognize that she's "seeking for salvation" and is "unhappy" once again suggests that he only ever feels at ease with other people who are suffering. In fact, he explicitly acknowledges this when he says, "Unhappy people are sensitive to the unhappiness of others." The tenderness of this wordless interaction emphasizes just how much of a relief it feels for Yozo to connect with another person, which happens so rarely because he's generally so unwilling to let people in. When the pharmacist looks at him, though, there's nothing he can do to disguise his misery from her, since she feels the same agonizing burden of sorrow.

> Horiki sat in front of me and said, with a gentle smile, the like of which I had never before seen on his face, "I hear you've coughed blood." I felt so grateful, so happy for that gentle smile that I averted my face and wept. I was completely shattered and smothered by that one gentle smile.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Horiki, Flatfish, Yoshiko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of the novel, Yozo is once again in a very bad way. He has gone from heavy drinking to an intense morphine addiction, and his relationship with Yoshiko isn't going well. Unsure of what else to do, he decides once more to die by suicide, but Horiki and Flatfish show up on the day he plans to kill himself, and they take him to a psychiatric ward. As they travel with him to the ward, Horiki smiles at him and expresses concern about the fact that Yozo has coughed blood. Suddenly, Yozo feels deeply "grateful" for

Horiki, feeling as if his friend's smile is extremely moving. This is perhaps the first time in his entire life that Yozo seems to have been moved by someone else's compassion for him. He's normally only able to connect with people if they're suffering like he is. In this moment, though, Horiki simply shows Yozo that he cares about him as a person, and this manages to break through all of Yozo's insecurities.

What's somewhat shocking about this idea is its implication that Yozo desperately cares about his relationships with others. He's afraid of human beings, but that doesn't mean he hates them—to the contrary, he's so invested in getting along with other people that the mere idea of accidentally turning someone against him feels like one of the most horrifying things that could possibly happen to him.

> This was a really rare event. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that it was the one and only time in my life that I refused something offered to me. My unhappiness was the unhappiness of a person who could not say no. I had been intimidated by the fear that if I declined something offered me, a yawning crevice would open between the other person's heart and myself which could never be mended through all eternity.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker), Yoshiko , Horiki, Flatfish

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

When Horiki and Flatfish take Yozo to the psychiatric ward, Yoshiko tries to bring him one last dose of morphine, thinking it's medicine that he genuinely needs for his health. But Yozo doesn't take the drugs from her. This, he notes, is the first time in his entire life that he "refuse[s] something offered to" him. This detail leads to an important revelation, which is that his unhappiness largely stems from his inability to say no to other people. This could, of course, be the result of his traumatic experience with the members of his family's waitstaff who sexually abused him as a child—after all, trying to fend off an abuser can have dangerous consequences. Yozo also has a broader, more existential reason for always trying to please people: he's afraid that saying no to others will turn them against him (which, indeed, could also be tied to his history of sexual abuse).

> Even if released, I would be forever branded on the forehead with the word "madman," or perhaps, "reject."
>
> Disqualified as a human being.
>
> I had now ceased utterly to be a human being.

Related Characters: Yozo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

Once Yozo is put in the psychiatric ward, he feels as if he has been "branded" as a "madman" or "reject." Needless to say, he has pretty much *always* felt this way about himself, but now his circumstances seem—in his own mind, at least—to have confirmed his status as an outsider who is essentially unfit for normal human life. He has spent his entire life trying to figure how, exactly, to navigate the rules and customs of society, all while hoping to protect himself from other people. This has largely meant putting on a social mask and tricking people into thinking he's a jovial, easygoing person. All the while, though, he has felt utterly isolated from everyone around him, largely because engaging in this kind of deception means hiding his true self from others. Now, then, he has been put in a psychiatric ward, a place designed to help people who find everyday life too difficult to manage on their own. As a result, he feels "disqualified as a human being" (which is the direct translation of the novel's original Japanese title), confirming his long-held belief that he's irreversibly alienated from the rest of society.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

An unnamed speaker describes three pictures of someone he simply refers to as "the man." The first picture is from the man's childhood, and though many people might think he looks extraordinarily cute, the speaker insists that the boy in the picture is "ugly." The speaker is certain that if people studied the picture closely, they'd soon realize that the smiling boy in it isn't actually smiling at all. His fists are balled tightly, and there's something deeply unnatural about his facial expression, even if it seems happy and cute at first.

Although it's not yet clear who the unnamed speaker is describing (or, for that matter, who the unnamed speaker is*), it's reasonable to assume that the person in the three pictures is a central figure of* No Longer Human. *The fact that this person is presented in such disconcerting terms sets the stage for the novel's exploration of what it means to be human. There's an unsettling hint in the opening of the novel that simply existing as a human being doesn't necessarily mean people are entitled to a sense of humanity or personhood. Rather, the subject of the pictures is somehow different from the average person, as if something about his nature has cut him off from humanity and turned him into something else entirely.*

The second picture is from when the man was either a high school or college student. Again, his face makes him look like he's a "living human being," but the speaker insists that his supposedly smiling face is actually lacking in "substance" and the "solidity of human life." There's an emptiness to the face, and though the young man in the picture is objectively handsome, the speaker can't even find the slightest sense of humanity in him.

The prologue of No Longer Human *taps into the fact that it's possible for some people to move through life wearing a mask of sorts—a mask that hides their true nature. The subject of these pictures, it seems, is nothing like the person he appears to be. Although he might seem handsome and vivacious, for instance, the unnamed speaker insists that he's hardly even a human being, ultimately suggesting that there's something deeply unrelatable about his fundamental nature.*

The third picture is the worst of all. It's of the man as an adult. He's in a dirty room, and this time he has no expression on his face at all—it's so blank, in fact, that it would be impossible to remember the image of his face even a mere moment after looking at the picture. There is nothing unique or individual about the expression. The entire thought of the picture creeps the speaker out, making him feel extremely uncomfortable, but he can't say exactly why—there's just something indescribable and unknowable that makes looking at it a very unpleasant experience. Never before has the speaker seen a more unsettling, unfamiliar look on a human being.

It's worth noting that the prologue of No Longer Human *is somewhat ambiguous. It's not clear why, exactly, the unnamed speaker is so repulsed by the person in the pictures, nor is it all that apparent why he sees him as somehow unhuman. And yet, the mere fact that he feels this way hints at the kind of isolation and alienation the novel will go on to explore in greater detail. In other words, it's difficult for the speaker to put his finger on why he's so unsettled by the person in the pictures, but the mere fact that he feels so disturbed invites readers to consider the ways in which people ostracize those who seem different.*

THE FIRST NOTEBOOK

A new narrative voice declares that he has lived a shameful life. He doesn't even know, he claims, what it's like to be human. Ordinary things seem foreign and strange to him. When he was a child, for example, it took him a long time to grasp the purpose of a small bridge connecting one train platform to another—he thought the bridge was simply there for people to climb, and he found this very "elegant" in and of itself. He lost interest in it when he realized what it was really for. Similarly, he used to think **pillowcases** were purely decorative, but when he realized they have an actual *purpose*, he felt deeply depressed by what he saw as "human dullness."

It's reasonable to conclude that the new narrative voice belongs to the man in the pictures, whom the unnamed speaker described in the prologue. This section, it seems, is drawn from the personal notebooks of the person from the photographs. The unnamed speaker found this person unsettling and somehow unhuman, but now it becomes clear that the subject himself *feels somewhat estranged from human life—he doesn't understand the things that make people tick, and when he does grasp common aspects of human nature, he finds it all so "dull[]" that it depresses him. There is, then, something to the speaker's idea that this person is fundamentally at odds with the rest of humanity.*

The writer of this notebook is named Yozo. He continues to write about how he has never understood human feelings. As a child, for instance, he was never hungry—he ate, but only because he understood that this was something he was supposed to do. In fact, he always stuffed himself to make his parents happy when he came home from school, doing whatever he could to please them. But he never felt a physical need to eat. He has also never understood human happiness, which he himself has never experienced. It's mystifying to him that other people manage to find pleasure in life and take interest in mundane things. Yozo, for his part, has felt burdened and tormented by the mere fact of his own existence since he was a young boy, and this makes it impossible for him to appreciate life in any way whatsoever.

From the very beginning of his life, it seems, Yozo has been unhappy. Yozo himself doesn't necessarily clarify why this is the case, nor does the novel as a whole—but that's not the point of No Longer Human, *which doesn't purport to explain anything about depression or alienation. Rather, the novel simply puts these things on display by sweeping readers up in Yozo's feelings of despair and isolation.*

Yozo continues to write about his childhood. Because he's unable to feel the same things as other people, he invents a way of tricking others into thinking he's just like everyone else. He starts "clowning," or figuring out how to make people laugh and give them joy. He himself derives no happiness from this behavior, but he becomes remarkably good at getting others to laugh at him. The idea of people criticizing him in any way horrifies Yozo—in fact, humans *in general* horrify him, which is why he decides to do whatever he can to make them laugh. If they laugh at him, he figures, then they might pose less of a threat.

Even though Yozo feels isolated and as if he couldn't possibly understand the people around him, he seems to have a knack for endearing himself to others. In a way, though, his expertise when it comes to "clowning" only makes it harder for him to relate to others, since behaving in this way requires him to actively hide who he really is, thus ensuring that nobody will ever get close to him—and, in turn, that he'll never genuinely feel part of the surrounding society.

Yozo's "clowning" isn't just something he does at school or in public. He also does it at home, thereby deceiving his family members into thinking he's a lighthearted, funny boy. Once, though, when his father is about to leave on a business trip, Yozo finds it difficult to please him. His father gathers Yozo and his siblings and asks them each what they want him to bring back as a present, writing their answers in a notebook. When it's his turn, Yozo can't think of anything—there's nothing he could possibly want. His father suggests a lion's mask, but Yozo still can't respond, and it becomes clear that this annoys his father.

Part of what Yozo has trouble with is the idea of having to live up to certain expectations, even if those expectations are relatively small or insignificant. For instance, his father expects him to want some sort of gift. Yozo, however, clearly doesn't want anything and is overwhelmed by his father's assumption that he would. Because he always tries to please people, though, he doesn't know what to say. His defense mechanism—which helps him maintain a sense of emotional distance from those around him—thus puts him in a difficult position, as he isn't sure what to tell his father to make him happy.

Yozo's brother interjects on Yozo's behalf, telling his father that he should get him a book. His father seems disappointed and angry. Later that night, Yozo realizes that he should have just said he wanted the lion mask—his father clearly wanted to give it to him. He thus sneaks downstairs, finds his father's notebook, and writes "LION MASK" in it. When his father returns from the trip, Yozo hears him talking to his mother, happily telling her how surprised he was to find "LION MASK" written in his notebook. In a satisfied tone, he says that young Yozo must have wanted the lion mask so badly that he was too shy to say anything.

Although he doesn't think of it in the moment, Yozo manages to please his father in the end by making him think that he desperately wanted the lion's mask. In a way, then, the lion's mask itself comes to represent the great lengths Yozo will go to in order to satisfy others—a tendency that stems from his general discomfort around other people.

In school, Yozo is extremely successful at getting his classmates to laugh. He can even get his teachers to crack a smile, even when he's misbehaving. He often draws funny cartoons, which greatly please his peers. For homework assignments, he writes outlandish stories that, although they don't align with what he's *supposed* to write about, ultimately succeed in making his teacher chuckle.

Nobody in Yozo's life would know how detached and alienated he feels from the surrounding society. Because he's so successful at pleasing others and acting happy, though, he ultimately isolates himself all the more, making it impossible for anyone to authentically connect with him.

Of course, Yozo's "clowning" doesn't reflect how he feels internally. He's like an actor who's constantly performing, even for his family and their many servants. He thus feels like his "true nature" is at odds with his jovial outward demeanor, especially after the family's servants begin to sexually abuse him. This makes him feel as if he has been "corrupted." To do this to a child, he writes in his notebook, is the most horrific and vile thing a person can do. At the time, though, he doesn't say anything, instead "endur[ing]" the abuse and allowing it to inform his overall conception of humanity.

It's noteworthy that Yozo's sense of alienation and despair comes before *he's sexually abused by his family's waitstaff. Of course, this traumatic experience undoubtedly exacerbates his feelings of isolation and fear, but it's not the* cause *of these feelings—an important detail, as the novel presents Yozo's sorrow and loneliness as things that are seemingly inherent to who he is as a person; that is, his depression and sense of isolation don't come from a single experience—they're more ambiguous and thus harder to address.*

Yozo feels alienated from his own parents, so he doesn't think to tell them about what the servants have been doing to him. And because he feels like he doesn't understand other humans, the idea of telling someone about being sexually abused seems impossible, since he has no idea how they would react. In the ensuing years, he notices that women tend to seek him out, and he posits that this is because they see him as "a man who [can] keep a love secret."

Tragically, Yozo's isolation from everyone around him makes it feel impossible for him to open up to his family members about his experience with sexual abuse. Even as a young child, then, he feels utterly alone, and this traumatic experience clearly makes him feel even more alienated from his surroundings.

THE SECOND NOTEBOOK

Yozo attends high school on the coast while living with a relative. He likes being away from his immediate family, since it's easier to carry out his "clowning" around people who don't know him very well. In this new environment, he manages to win over his peers and teachers by making them laugh. One day, though, he finds himself deeply unsettled by an unsuspecting boy named Takeichi. It's during a physical training exercise at school. Yozo purposefully fails a physical challenge in a humorous, slapstick way that makes everyone laugh. But then Takeichi, whom Yozo sees as an unintelligent onlooker, taps him on the shoulder and says, "You did it on purpose."

Yozo has become accustomed to fooling everyone in his life—even his family members, though he suggests that it's easier to get away with his identity performance when he's not around people who have known him for his entire life. It is perhaps because he feels so confident in his ability to hide his true nature, then, that he is so shocked when Takeichi manages to see through his façade of gregarious silliness. In this moment, Yozo suddenly faces somebody who seems to see him on a deeper, more fundamental level than he's used to.

Yozo is horrified by Takeichi's words, which make him feel suddenly as if his entire world has gone up in flames. In the coming days, he feels certain that Takeichi can see right through him, even as Yozo fools everyone else into laughing at his antics. Fearing that Takeichi will tell everyone that he's a fraud, Yozo resolves to endear himself to him by becoming his close friend, but this is more difficult than he would have thought. He wants to keep a constant watch over Takeichi to make sure he doesn't say anything, determined to convince him that he's not, in fact, pretending to be a clown. If this doesn't work, he realizes, he will have no other choice but to pray for Takeichi's death—but he wouldn't kill him, since he has never wanted to murder anyone.

It's clear that Yozo abhors the idea of anyone managing to understand him on a fundamental level. He wants to keep the world at a distance, ultimately insulating himself from everyone around him. To realize that Takeichi sees through his guise, then, is to realize that he's not as protected from his surroundings as he once thought.

Finally, after multiple attempts to befriend Takeichi, Yozo succeeds by ushering him to his house after school. It's raining heavily, so it's easy for him to sweep Takeichi up with the suggestion that they take shelter in his house. In Yozo's room, Takeichi complains that his ears hurt, so Yozo gently examines them. He sees that there's pus oozing from Takeichi's ears, so he carefully wipes it away while soothingly apologizing for taking Takeichi into the rain. He speaks in a voice that he normally associates with women, trying hard to act like a caretaker. Eventually, Takeichi appreciatively comments that many women will surely "fall" for Yozo.

At this point in the novel, it's still unclear what kind of person Yozo is, so it's hard to tell what his intentions are with Takeichi. It's possible, of course, that he wants to harm or scare the young boy as a way of pushing him away. In this moment, though, it seems unlikely that this is Yozo's plan. In fact, Yozo acts quite tenderly toward Takeichi, behaving in an intimate way that's somewhat surprising for someone so uncomfortable with the idea of connecting with others.

Yozo feels somewhat unsettled by Takeichi's comment about women falling for him. In retrospect, he now sees that Takeichi's words were oddly prophetic. Throughout his life, attention from women has made him uncomfortable, partially because he finds women even harder to understand than men. And yet, women tend to be drawn to Yozo. While living in his relative's house in high school, for instance, his two female cousins (who live there too) frequently pay him visits in his room, and though he never wants to talk to them, he never protests—to the contrary, he does whatever he can to make them laugh and engage them in conversation.

Despite his extreme discomfort around others, Yozo goes to great lengths to please people. This, however, doesn't mean that he actively wants attention—to the contrary, he finds the mere suggestion that women will "fall" for him very disturbing, since this suggests that he's doomed to constantly evade people by placating them, hoping all the while that doing so will keep them at an emotional remove.

One day, Takeichi comes over to Yozo's house and shows him a reproduction print of a **painting** that Yozo recognizes as Van Gogh's self-portrait. Takeichi, however, says that the painting is of a ghost. Yozo is astonished and deeply moved by this strange comment. He starts to think about how some people view the world with a horrified gaze, seeing human beings as terrifying "monsters." One way of dealing with this is by constantly "clowning" around in an attempt to fit in with these "monsters." This, of course, is what Yozo has been doing, but he now realizes that some people, like many of the world's most famous painters, have responded to the horror and strangeness of humanity not by cowering from it, but by unflinchingly depicting it in art. He decides right then and there that he will become a painter.

Takeichi's comment about Van Gogh's self-portrait is strange, suggesting that he has an odd way of viewing the world. This viewpoint, however, deeply resonates with Yozo, who suddenly feels as if he has found an outlet for the horror and fear he feels in response to the surrounding world. Rather than hiding his true nature, he realizes, he can depict his most troubled feelings through art. Simply put, he has finally found a mode of self-expression that seems safe.

Yozo has always drawn cartoons, but now he decides to bravely paint the grotesque side of humanity that he sees on a daily basis. The **paintings** he makes are—to his estimation—horrifying, but they accurately represent his truest self. He only shows them to Takeichi. If he showed them to other people, they might fail to recognize in the paintings Yozo's true nature, and this would be mortifying.

Although Yozo has found an outlet that allows him to actually express the way he feels, he's still quite guarded about sharing this part of himself with anyone else. It's clear, then, that he still wants to remain isolated from the surrounding world, only feeling comfortable depicting his true nature in a private setting.

Takeichi, for his part, thinks Yozo will become a great **painter**. Upon finishing high school, Yozo wants to attend art school, but his father sends him to a traditional college in Tokyo instead. At first, he lives in the dorms. But Yozo hates being surrounded by his peers, so he moves into a nearby townhouse that his father uses when he comes to Tokyo for work. His father is a government representative, so he has to come fairly often, though only when the legislative body is in session.

It's unsurprising that Yozo doesn't like being around his college peers—he is, after all, deeply uncomfortable around other people. Plus, he's accustomed to "clowning" around in order to hide his true nature, which means he would have to constantly perform if he were living in dorm rooms, where he'd be constantly surrounded by others. It makes sense, then, that he'd prefer to retreat to his father's townhouse.

Eventually, a fellow art student named Horiki introduces himself to Yozo. Horiki likes to think of himself as something of a rebel, and he insists on taking Yozo out drinking. Yozo is skeptical of him, but he deeply enjoys getting drunk for the first time, so the two young men start spending more time together. Yozo still dislikes Horiki, who constantly borrows money from him, but he figures that he's better than the average person—plus, he helps Yozo make his way through life in Tokyo, which has, until now, frightened him.

Yozo doesn't have many friends. In fact, until this point in the novel, Takeichi is the only person he seems to have spent any social time with, and that was only because he wanted to keep tabs on Takeichi to make sure he didn't tell everyone else that Yozo purposefully acts like a "clown" to please them. It's therefore arguable that Horiki is Yozo's first actual friend. And yet, it's clear that Yozo doesn't actually like him, once again proving himself incapable of forging a genuine connection with another human.

Another reason Yozo comes to like Horiki is that the belligerent young man doesn't seem to care what other people have to say, making it easy for Yozo to sit back in silence as Horiki rambles on. As they spend more and more time together, Yozo develops certain habits. He starts to like drinking, smoking, and sleeping with sex workers—activities that give him a certain feeling of "escape." He views the sex workers he sleeps with rather scornfully, having trouble thinking of them as human beings. And yet, he feels completely at peace when he's sleeping in their arms, safe from his many fears. He even starts to feel like he and the sex workers are "kindred" souls. When Horiki points out that women tend to like Yozo, though, the comment disgusts him so much that he loses interest in visiting sex workers.

Any sense of emotional connection Yozo might feel with Horiki is solely based on the fact that he doesn't feel threatened by his new friend. Because Horiki is content to ramble on, Yozo doesn't have to spend all of his time "clowning" around in front of him—he can just brood in silence. In this way, his relationship with Horiki is rather transactional: Horiki gives him a relatively safe social environment in which he can more or less be himself, and, in return, Yozo lets Horiki dominate the conversation. Yozo's relationships with the various sex workers he visits are transactional in a much more straightforward way, and the fact that he has trouble viewing them as fully human only underscores his inability to relate to others on a personal level. Furthermore, his disdain for the sex workers hints at the ways in which his own problems cause him to treat others unkindly.

Horiki takes Yozo to a meeting of the Communist Party. Yozo thinks everyone at the meeting is ridiculous and self-important, but he also enjoys watching the members of the Party speak with such absurd seriousness. He finds this entertaining, mostly because he can't imagine how they could possibly think the things they're discussing are such dire matters. He starts attending the meetings regularly. To dissolve some of the tension in the room, he acts like the same sort of "clown" he used to be in school, and this makes him very popular.

It's almost as if Yozo can't help but endear himself to people, even when he doesn't respect them. He clearly doesn't feel all that fond of the people in the Communist Party, but he still "clowns" for them as a way of currying favor within the Party. In a way, then, his deceptive way of socializing is something of a compulsion—something he has *to do. And, of course, this makes it that much harder for him to ever form actual connections with others, since he's constantly hiding his true nature.*

Yozo eventually realizes that he likes the Communist Party so much because he enjoys the "irrationality" of its members. In contrast, he hates the rest of society's orderly commitment to logic. Of course, Yozo is only tricking his comrades in the Communist Party into thinking he actually believes the same things they do, but he likes doing this because it helps him feel a little less isolated in society, in which he otherwise feels like an outcast. He doesn't care about communism, but he *does* like the feeling of participating in a secret, subversive movement. He thus doesn't hesitate to carry out secret jobs for the Communist Party, and though he knows that some of these jobs could get him arrested, he doesn't mind, since the idea of spending his life in prison doesn't seem so bad.

Yozo has always been disdainful of anything that is too mundane or overtly logical. When he was a young boy, for instance, he felt depressed at the sense of "human dullness" that came over him when he realized pillowcases serve an actual purpose—he originally thought they were ornamental objects that existed for purely aesthetic reasons. His interest in the Communist Party is thus tied to his aversion to things that are too rational and orderly. Because he thinks the Communist Party is ridiculous and irrational, its lofty ideas appeal to him, as they go against what he sees as the depressingly ordinary, humdrum rules that govern everyday life.

Yozo's father decides to sell the house in Tokyo, since his political term is about to end. As a result of no longer living with his father, Yozo realizes that he won't have much money at his disposal. His father has always given him a monthly allowance, but he tends to spend that on alcohol and cigarettes within a couple days. When his father still lived in the city, Yozo could just put anything he wanted to buy on his father's account at the local shops. Now, though, he can't do that. Upon moving to his own place, he burns through his monthly allowance and then feels terrified by his lack of funds. He starts selling things at pawnshops, but he still never seems to have enough money.

At this point in the novel, Yozo begins to develop certain habits that intrude on his ability to coast through life. He has never had to worry about finances before—now, though, he not only has access to less money, but he has also started to lead a lifestyle of heavy drinking and smoking, meaning that he needs a way to fund his habits. Needless to say, this pronounced need for money will only complicate his depressive feelings, compounding his general sense of not being able to move effortlessly through life like everyone else seems to do.

During this period, Yozo spends the vast majority of his time either meeting with the Communist Party or drinking with Horiki. His schoolwork and **painting** suffer, but he doesn't care—and then, he says, he becomes embroiled in a "love suicide" with a married woman. He hasn't been to class for a long time, and when his family finds out, they reprimand him in a strongly worded letter. Still, Yozo doesn't concentrate on his studies. But his work with the Communist Party no longer amuses him. All he wants to do these days is drink until he's completely numb to the world, but he doesn't even have enough money to do this. Wanting to "escape" from everything, then, he decides to kill himself.

Yozo's alienation and depression intensify in this period, as he seemingly transitions from an unhappy childhood to an even unhappier adulthood. Previously, his feelings of isolation were pronounced, but he was still quite young and could depend on others to support him. Now, though, he has to worry about money and keeping up with his schoolwork, all while leading an unmoored and joyless life. With nothing to keep him invested in his own life, then, he gravitates toward suicide.

Feeling depressed and overwhelmed by life, Yozo finds relief at a large café, where he tries to blend into the crowd—he hopes to completely lose himself in the chaos of the scene. But he doesn't have much money to spend. As soon as he sits down, he tells the waitress how little money he has, but she tells him not to worry, pouring him liquor and making him feel like he doesn't have to think about money. For some reason, he doesn't feel obligated to perform in front of her the way he usually does in public.

Yozo seems to find some kind of unspoken connection in the bar he visits, as the waitress puts him at ease for some reason. The fact that she simply tells him not to worry suggests that she instantly senses his somber attitude, recognizing—perhaps—that he's somebody who carries around a heavy burden. And by recognizing this, she seems to dispel some of his anxiety, ultimately putting him at ease and giving him permission to be himself, which essentially means sulking in silence and brooding over his drinks.

In retrospect, Yozo can't even remember the name of the waitress, even though they tried to kill themselves together. This sort of forgetfulness isn't unusual for him. He does, however, remember the poor quality of the sushi he was eating while waiting for her to get off her shift. He thinks her name was Tsuneko, and he remembers lying in her rented apartment and drinking tea while she tells him about her husband, who's in jail for conning someone.

Even though Yozo seems to have made a connection with the waitress, the fact that he can't quite recall her name undercuts the idea that he has finally embraced the idea of having a close relationship with another human. He is, it seems, too caught up in his own difficulties to be fully present in his relationships, once again isolating himself from the people around him.

As Yozo lies in her apartment, Tsuneko goes on at length about her life and her many problems. He's hardly listening, but he comes to attention when she says that she's desperately unhappy. Suddenly, he feels at peace as he lies next to her, no longer experiencing a perpetual state of fear and discomfort. He even feels a sense of freedom and happiness (though he notes that this is most likely the only time that the word "happiness" will appear in his notebooks). When he wakes in the morning, though, the feeling is gone, and he once again feels like a "shallow poseur of a clown."

Yozo's happiness is noteworthy, since—as he himself is eager to point out—he's pretty much never *happy. And yet, the reason he's happy in the first place is because he has found somebody who is equally as miserable as he is, meaning that his brief sense of satisfaction ultimately comes from a place of deep sorrow. And yet, the fact remains that he has managed to make a genuine connection with another human being, and this has somewhat alleviated his feelings of wretchedness.*

In the coming days, Yozo feels uncomfortable about the fact that Tsuneko paid for him to drink at the café. He worries that she is like the other women who have expressed interest in him and that he will feel overwhelmed by her affection. Thinking this way, he regrets letting his guard down and becoming intimate with her. One night, though, he and Horiki are out drinking and run out of money. Because Horiki wants to keep drinking, Yozo takes him to the café where Tsuneko works, since he knows she'll give them free drinks.

Although Yozo experienced a fleeting sense of happiness while lying with Tsuneko and hearing about her problems, it's clear that he's not used to this feeling of connection. Unsurprisingly, then, he begins to doubt the strength of their bond, feeling wary of her in the same way that he always seems to feel wary of the women in his life. No matter what happens, it seems, he can't let himself get close to another human.

On the way to the café, Horiki talks about how he's going to kiss whoever serves them, saying that he's "starved for a woman." When they arrive, a waitress Yozo doesn't know sits next to him while Tsuneko sits next to Horiki. For a moment, Yozo is struck by the uncomfortable fact that he's going to have to watch Horiki kiss Tsuneko, though it's not that he's afraid of losing her—he doesn't feel possessive—it's because he feels sorry for Tsuneko. He knows she'll have to let Horiki kiss her while he (Yozo) watches. And this, he assumes, will make her think she has to cut things off with Yozo.

The fact that Yozo feels bad for Tsuneko indicates that he does, on some level, feel a sense of connection with her. Generally speaking, he doesn't seem to care what happens to other people. In this situation, though, he does *care, and this ultimately calls attention to how different his relationship with Tsuneko is compared to all of the other relationships in his life.*

Yozo braces, waiting for Horiki to kiss Tsuneko. But then Horiki says he would never kiss someone who looks so "poverty-stricken." Hearing this, Yozo has the overwhelming urge to drown himself in liquor, so he tells Tsuneko to fetch some. He's embarrassed that even a drunk, ridiculous man like Horiki wouldn't kiss Tsuneko. He looks at Tsuneko and realizes that Horiki has a point: she looks extremely impoverished and sad. But this just makes Yozo feel for her all the more, as if she's a kindred soul. For the first time in his entire life, he feels as if he's in love. He reacts to this feeling by throwing up and passing out.

It's worth noting that Yozo's sudden love for Tsuneko is directly tied to the fact that Horiki insults her. It's almost as if Yozo needs to watch Tsuneko's debasement in order to fully feel for her, since this allows him to feel a sense of kinship with her—after all, he himself feels wretched, so recognizing this same quality in somebody else is a profound experience. Their bond is therefore built on a sense of mutual suffering.

When Yozo wakes up, he's in Tsuneko's apartment. She lies down next to him and talks about how unhappy she is. He resonates with her feeling of being too tired to go on in life. He himself feels like he couldn't possibly continue to live, so he quickly agrees when she suggests that they both should kill themselves.

Again, it's evident that Yozo and Tsuneko's connection is based on their shared sense of suffering. Although this provides Yozo with an outlet, then, it also poses a certain danger, as made clear by the fact that they decide to die together by suicide.

That day, Yozo and Tsuneko wander the city. Although he has agreed to die alongside Tsuneko, Yozo hasn't fully grasped the idea that his life will soon be over. But when he goes to pay for a glass of milk and realizes he only has three coins, he's struck by the horror of his life. He also thinks about how his only other possessions are the coat and kimono that he's currently wearing, and it's at this point that he understands that he really *can't* continue to live—he must, he thinks, die. That night, he and Tsuneko throw themselves into the sea. Yozo survives, but Tsuneko does not.

At first, Yozo finds the idea of dying by suicide abstract and hard to grasp, perhaps because he has been struggling with depression and feelings of alienation for his entire life, so it's hard to conceive of bringing all this suffering to an end. The fact that the reality of his plan finally strikes him when he goes to pay for a glass of milk ultimately aligns with the way that mundane aspects of everyday life depress him. He thinks he's never going to experience such a thing again, but he's ultimately wrong, since he ends up surviving. The fact that Tsuneko doesn't *survive, though, suggests that Yozo will be in an even worse position than he was before trying to die by suicide, since he will perhaps feel guilty that Tsuneko died and he didn't.*

The news of Yozo's failed suicide sweeps through Japan, since his father is a prominent politician. He's taken to a hospital, where a relative visits him and tells him that his father and the rest of his immediate family are so angry that they might disown him. But Yozo doesn't care—he's too busy mourning the loss of Tsuneko, realizing that she's the only person he has ever loved.

Tsuneko's death undoubtedly makes it much harder for Yozo to heal after trying to die by suicide. Not only does he now face the difficult prospect of moving on with his life after having tried to kill himself, but he also has to carry the traumatic weight of having lost a loved one.

After his stint in the hospital, Yozo is charged with having been an "accomplice to a suicide." He's taken to the police station, but because his lungs are still affected by his efforts to kill himself, they don't put him in a cell with other criminals. In the middle of the night, an old guard brings him out of the cell and tries to interrogate him, but Yozo quickly recognizes that the man has no true power—he's clearly bored and trying to pass the time. Yozo thus decides to play along, giving a detailed but inaccurate confession about what happened. This, he sees, greatly satisfies the guard.

Even in dire circumstances, Yozo performs for the sake of other people, this time going out of his way to make up a juicy story to please the guard working the nightshift. Not only does this underscore the lengths he'll go to in order to satisfy others, but it also highlights just how little he cares about what happens to him—after all, it's possible that the guard could take him seriously and then have him prosecuted because of this false confession.

The next day, Yozo meets with the police chief, who's a lot less intense than the guard was. He comments on how handsome Yozo is and then tells him that the district attorney will decide whether or not to press charges. In the meantime, he tells him to take good care of his health, since Yozo has a bad cough. At one point, Yozo coughs into a handkerchief that is already stained by blood from a pimple. The chief thinks he's coughing blood, and Yozo leans into this assumption, letting the chief think he's in worse shape than he really is.

Yozo's tendency to perform for others now plays to his benefit, as he effortlessly capitalizes on the chief's mistaken assumption that he's coughing blood—for once, then, his history of "clowning" and deceiving people actually comes in handy in a more practical way.

The police chief tells Yozo to contact somebody who can act as a "guarantor," so Yozo reaches out to a man from his hometown—a man he and his father used to call Flatfish. Flatfish agrees to meet him in the nearby city of Yokohama, where the district attorney examines him. Yozo underestimates the district attorney, thinking that he's a straightforward, simple man. He thus plays up his cough in the same way that he emphasized it in front of the police chief, but the district attorney catches him off guard by smiling and asking, "Was that real?" Suddenly, Yozo is transported back to the day Takeichi accused him of falling on purpose at school.

There are very few instances in which Yozo's performative deceptions fail. The first time this happened was when Takeichi called him out for pretending to fall at school. And now, years later, Yozo is reminded of this incident when the district attorney recognizes that he's pretending to cough. Because Yozo is so hesitant to let people see his true nature, he finds this kind of interaction deeply unsettling, as it suggests that he's not as impenetrable and deceptive as he'd like to think.

Yozo feels as if he'd rather spend 10 years in prison than have to endure the kind of interaction he just had with the district attorney. Still, the district attorney drops the charges, but it doesn't bring Yozo any happiness.

It's almost as if Yozo is more unsettled by his interaction with the district attorney than he is by the aftermath of his failed suicide. This, in turn, illustrates just how horrified he is by the idea of somebody seeing through him and thus getting close to his true nature, which he tries so hard to keep hidden.

THE THIRD NOTEBOOK: PART ONE

Yozo is expelled from college because of his involvement in Tsuneko's suicide. He spends his days at Flatfish's house, and though his family doesn't contact him, it becomes clear to him that his brothers periodically send small amounts of money to Flatfish. Flatfish also forbids Yozo from leaving the house—he's afraid, Yozo can tell, that he'll try to kill himself again. Yozo, however, feels far too exhausted to do such a thing. Still, he yearns for alcohol and cigarettes, which are more or less the only things in life that he misses.

After trying to die by suicide, Yozo ends up leading a life of isolation—something he's actually rather used to, considering that he has always felt isolated and alienated from society. The only difference now, though, is that he's literally kept from most aspects of life, whereas his previous isolation was more self-imposed.

One night, Flatfish invites Yozo downstairs to have dinner with him and his son. It's a nice meal, which surprises Yozo. But then Flatfish starts asking him about his future—what does he want out of life? What is his plan? Flatfish says he's more than willing to help Yozo get started on a productive path, if only Yozo will tell him what he wants to do. Yozo, however, feels unable to answer. He has no idea what he wants to do, nor can he discern what Flatfish wants for him. He wishes Flatfish would simply tell him to do something like enter school in the spring term (he notes, in retrospect, that this is exactly what Flatfish wanted). As it stands, he's unable to say anything, which only angers Flatfish.

It's somewhat ironic that Yozo can't think of what to say when Flatfish asks him what he wants to do with his life—after all, Yozo wants to please Flatfish by saying whatever would please him, and this (pleasing people) is normally something he's quite good at. And yet, he can't fathom what Flatfish could possibly want for him, perhaps because he himself has no idea what would make sense for him to do with his life. He is, in other words, at loose ends and doesn't know where to look for guidance.

Eventually, Yozo says that he'd like to work as a **painter**. Flatfish can't believe his ears. He laughs and looks at Yozo scornfully, and his look tells Yozo everything he needs to know about the worst, lowest aspects of adult life. The next day, Yozo runs away from Flatfish's house—not because he's embarrassed by his conversation with Flatfish, but because he doesn't want to burden him any longer. He leaves a note saying that he's simply going to Horiki's house and that Flatfish doesn't need to worry.

When Yozo finally opens up and honestly tells Flatfish what he'd like to do with his life, Flatfish responds quite unkindly. The one time Yozo manages to speak truthfully about himself, then, he's met with mockery that unfortunately reinforces his sense that it's unwise to open up to other people.

Yozo doesn't actually intend to go to Horiki's house. And yet, once he's wandering through the city, he can think of nowhere else to go. He therefore ends up going to Horiki's house, where Horiki greets him with apathy and disdain. While he's there, a woman comes to visit Horiki. She works for a magazine that commissioned an illustration from Horiki, who wants to get rid of Yozo so he can focus on his conversation with her. At one point, a telegram arrives from Flatfish, causing Horiki to angrily ask what Yozo has dragged him into. He orders him to return to Flatfish immediately, not wanting to be associated with any kind of scandal.

Horiki's unkindness is a good illustration of the stigma attached to suicide in Japanese society during this time period (the 1930s). Because everyone has read about how Yozo tried to die by suicide alongside Tsuneko, nobody wants to associate with him—including Horiki. In turn, the extent to which Yozo is now truly on his own becomes quite clear, as even Horiki—who isn't even a very respectable person to begin with—has become hesitant to spend time with him.

The woman from the magazine offers to take Yozo home. Her name is Shizuko, and she lives alone with her five-year-old daughter, Shigeko. Her husband died a few years ago. She likes the sadness coming from Yozo, praising him for being sensitive. From that day on, he lives with Shizuko and her daughter, leading the life of a "kept man." At first, he doesn't do much, other than spend time with Shigeko and gaze out the window at a ripped kite that has gotten tangled in some telephone wires. The kite makes him smile as he watches it blow in the wind without actually going anywhere.

It's clear that Yozo sees himself in the ripped kite, which symbolizes his apparent inability to move through life as easily as everyone else—in the same way that the kite has been torn and is caught on the telephone wires, Yozo has been trapped by his own feelings of depression and alienation. He can't, like some people, simply breeze through life, so the sight of the torn and tangled kite resonates with him. This mentality seems to appeal to Shizuko, suggesting that she likes the idea that she might be able to help Yozo in some way. Of course, it seems unlikely that her kindness will do much to make him happy, but at least he has somewhere to stay and somebody to support him.

Yozo starts drawing cartoons for Shizuko's magazine. It's not a good magazine, but they pay him for the cartoons. Meanwhile, Shizuko loves living with Yozo, saying that the sadder he seems, the more women gravitate toward him. He accepts these compliments, but he's depressed about his current situation. He decides he wants to run away from her, but he realizes that he depends on her too much to do so.

There's a strange irony at play in Yozo's life: the more miserable and reclusive he feels, the more people seem to gravitate toward him. And yet, being around people is something that clearly puts him on edge, since he literally fears human beings and doesn't want to get close to anyone. This, in turn, isolates him, which makes him even more depressed, but his depression only intensifies Shizuko's feelings for him. He is, then, caught in a vicious cycle of simultaneous affection and alienation.

Yozo becomes so depressed that Shizuko organizes a meeting with him, Flatfish, and Horiki. They all decide that Yozo should no longer be in touch with his family and that he should marry Shizuko. In the meantime, his cartoons become very popular, giving him enough money to buy alcohol and cigarettes. He develops what he thinks is a relatively close relationship with little Shigeko, but one day she emotionally eviscerates him by casually saying that what she wants more than anything is to have her "real" father back. Yozo realizes that he once again let his guard down only to be wounded by an unexpected comment.

Throughout the novel, it's not always all that clear why Yozo fears other human beings. Of course, his discomfort around other people might be related to the fact that his family's waitstaff sexually abused him as a child, but his feelings ultimately predated this incident, so it's not solely to blame. In this moment, though, it's possible to recognize a source of his uneasiness: namely, the fact that getting close to others sometimes means making oneself vulnerable. Because he feels connected to Shigeko, she's all the more capable of emotionally wounding him, thus justifying his fears about getting close to people.

These days, Horiki has started speaking to Yozo in an incredibly condescending manner. This is because he participated in the meeting about Yozo's future, so now he sees himself as something of an authority figure in his relationship to Yozo. He tells him how to behave, talking about what's acceptable in society. This comment makes Yozo think about the general idea of society—what, exactly, *is* society? He figures that it must be the "plural of human beings." He has spent his entire life thinking about what society does and does not approve of, and now he begins to see society as more than the "plural of human beings." Society, he thinks, is an individual.

It's unsurprising that Yozo has a strange conception of society. Most people, of course, don't think quite so hard about the exact meaning of the word "society," instead seeing it as a simple term that refers to a broader cultural collective. Yozo, on the other hand, feels uncomfortable around other humans, so any idea that pertains directly to a large group of people is automatically threatening and off-putting. With this in mind, his decision to start thinking of society as an individual is a possible attempt to feel less threatened by the idea of a vast collective—in other words, viewing society as an individual makes it seem less powerful and imposing, at least in Yozo's mind.

As soon as Yozo starts thinking of society as an individual, he feels less shy and apprehensive than normal. He's more capable of doing what he wants. But that doesn't mean he finds happiness. To the contrary, he spends his days in a state of deep depression, drawing cartoons for the many magazines that now pay for his silly, pointless drawings. In the evenings, he goes out and gets as drunk as possible, coming home late and speaking rudely to Shizuko, though she never takes the bait. She remains calm and levelheaded, refusing to let his antics upset her. Realizing that Shizuko and Shigeko will be better off without him, Yozo leaves for good.

Yozo's mistreatment of Shizuko suggests that he feels uncomfortable in their relationship. He seems to want to push her away, but he's unable to do so. This makes sense, considering that she has always been attracted to him because of his sadness and general misfortune. The more he descends into drinking and disrespectful behavior, then, the stronger she feels for him, since he's just sliding into an increasingly troubled lifestyle. Unable to push her away, then, he decides to leave.

After leaving Shizuko, Yozo goes to a bar in the Kyobashi neighborhood, where he tells the bartender who manages the bar that he left Shizuko for her. This is all he needs to say for her to let him drink at the bar and sleep in the upstairs apartment. A year goes by. Yozo is still frightened of human beings and drinks heavily, all the while drawing cartoons for a number of magazines, some of which are pornographic. At one point, though, a young woman tries to get him to stop drinking. Her name is Yoshiko, and she's 17. She works in a tobacco store across the street from the bar.

Not much has changed for Yozo in the last year. He still leads a lonely, alienated life and is supported by a woman who pities him—the only difference, it seems, is that this woman is now the bartender from Kyobashi instead of Shizuko. Yozo has thus drifted from one person to the next, and though he manages to gain the affection of seemingly any woman he associates with, no amount of attention makes him happy or helps him feel at ease around others.

When Yoshiko tells Yozo to stop drinking, he doesn't understand why he should do such a thing. But he also declares that he wants to kiss her, and she doesn't object. Shortly thereafter, he falls into a manhole while walking home drunk one night. Yoshiko helps pull him out and mends his wounds, again saying that he drinks too much. He then declares that, starting tomorrow, he won't drink any alcohol—if, that is, Yoshiko agrees to marry him. He means it as a joke, but she agrees, so they plan to marry (as long as Yozo stops drinking).

Based on Yozo's past romantic relationships, it's very unlikely that things will end well between him and Yoshiko. What's interesting, though, is that he gravitates toward this relationship in the first place. For somebody who claims to fear others, Yozo actually finds his way into relationship after relationship—evidence, perhaps, of his self-destructive behavior, as well as of how hard it is for him to avoid the attention of others.

The next day, Yozo gets drunk. He tries to tell Yoshiko that their arrangement has to be called off, since he's drunk, but she doesn't believe him. She knows, she says, that he wouldn't break his promise like that. He insists that he's drunk and that he doesn't deserve to kiss her, but she refuses to believe him. Suddenly, the fact that Yoshiko is a virgin overpowers Yozo, and he decides then and there that he really *will* marry her, since he has never slept with a virgin before and wants to know what it's like. That night, they have sex. They get married shortly thereafter. Yozo doesn't end up experiencing much joy from having sex with Yoshiko, but he notes that the decision to marry eventually brings him great suffering. He realizes that sorrow doesn't just go away after a spur-of-the-moment decision.

By freely admitting that he broke his promise, Yozo intentionally tries to get out of marrying Yoshiko. To a certain extent, it's arguable that he does this because he recognizes, on some level, that marrying Yoshiko won't fix his problems and will instead lead to grave consequences. But Yoshiko apparently thinks he's more trustworthy than he actually is, so he finds himself unable to back out of their agreement—yet another sign that, no matter what he does, people naturally gravitate toward him even though this is the exact opposite of what he wants (though he does, of course, convince himself in this moment that he wants to marry Yoshiko, but that's only because he's lustfully curious about the idea of sleeping with a virgin).

THE THIRD NOTEBOOK: PART TWO

Yozo and Yoshiko move into an apartment together, and Yozo stops drinking. He enjoys spending time with his new bride, and he even begins to hope that he'll find happiness and learn how to lead a normal life. But then Horiki reappears in his life. He says—in front of Yoshiko—that Shizuko has asked him to tell Yozo to come visit her. Yozo suddenly feels deeply ashamed about his past and how he abandoned Shizuko. Distressed, he suggests that he and Horiki should go out for a drink. From this point on, he and Horiki periodically go to the bar in Kyobashi, get drunk, and then visit Shizuko, sometimes even spending the night at her apartment.

Just when it seems that Yozo might actually manage to find some sort of contentment in life, Horiki causes him to rehash his troubling past and start drinking again. This effectively shatters the domestic happiness that Yozo has secured with Yoshiko, and though it's certainly the case that Horiki is a bad influence, the fact that Yozo backslides so easily highlights the fragility of his brief sense of happiness—his marriage to Yoshiko is clearly a temporary solution to his longstanding struggle with depression, and it takes very little to plunge him back into a life of squalor and despair.

One night, Horiki comes over and asks to borrow some money. Yozo sends Yoshiko to the pawnshop to pawn some of her clothes, and then he tells her to use a portion of the money to buy gin, which he and Horiki spend the evening drinking while lounging on the roof. As they get progressively drunker, they talk about crime, and Horiki makes offensive comments about how, unlike Yozo, he has never been arrested and imprisoned. Nor, he says, does he want women to die. Yozo recognizes this as a rude comment about what happened between him and Tsuneko. He feels an impulse to defend himself by saying that he didn't *want* Tsuneko to die, but he doesn't say anything because he's so accustomed to seeing himself as "evil."

Horiki's comments underscore just how little he truly cares about Yozo. He not only brings up Yozo's painful past, but deliberately casts his friend as cold and mean-spirited, as if he wants to legitimately hurt Yozo's feelings. Yozo, however, won't give him a reaction, since Horiki couldn't possibly say anything about Yozo that would be worse than what Yozo already thinks about himself.

At one point, Horiki drunkenly announces that he's starving, so he gets up and descends from the roof, going downstairs to look for food. He quickly returns, though, and Yozo can see by his face that something strange is happening downstairs. Horiki tells him to come take a look. Yozo follows him and then sees a man raping Yoshiko in an adjacent room. Yozo is deeply troubled by this, but he doesn't do anything to help Yoshiko. Instead, he tries to tell himself that this sort of thing is simply "another aspect of the behavior of human beings." Horiki, for his part, announces that he's leaving, at which point Yozo retreats and continues to drink gin and cry until Yoshiko appears and offers him some food, explaining that the man who raped her had promised he wouldn't do anything.

This is a very strange and troubling section of No Longer Human. *Yozo's inability or unwillingness to intervene and protect Yoshiko is hard to account for, though it's a good illustration of how his own struggle with feelings of depression and isolation ultimately impact the way he treats others. In this moment, he's so focused on his own feelings—and his discomfort with humanity in general—that he fails to rescue his wife from a horrific, traumatic experience.*

Yozo tells Yoshiko not to talk about getting raped. Before he left, Horiki told Yozo to "forgive" her, but now he feels as if he neither forgives Yoshiko nor holds the rape against her. What mostly bothers him isn't necessarily that she herself was violated, but that she was taken advantage of because she tends to trust people. In the coming days and weeks, Yoshiko becomes jumpy and nervous around Yozo, constantly worrying about how he feels. In response, he plunges into his drinking habit.

Yozo responds to Yoshiko's rape in a very selfish way, basically making the entire ordeal about his own emotions instead of recognizing the trauma she has been through and trying to do something to help her manage it. Once again, then, it becomes clear that the intensity of his own feelings ultimately gets in the way of his ability to show kindness and compassion to others.

One night, Yozo comes home excruciatingly drunk. Wanting some sugared water before bed, he ends up finding a box of sleeping pills. He takes all of them and then goes to bed. He doesn't regain consciousness for three days. The doctor treating him rules the incident an accident, so the police don't descend on Yozo when he wakes up. Yozo's first words upon waking up are, "I'm going home," though he doesn't know what this means and doesn't remember saying it later on.

This is Yozo's second attempt to die by suicide. It's evident that not much has changed in his life between the first time he tried to die and now—in fact, it's arguable that he's in an even worse position than before, since his first suicide attempt saddled him with the grief of Tsuneko's death, thus adding to his already bleak outlook.

Flatfish is there when Yozo regains consciousness. He's talking to the bartender in charge of the bar in Kyobashi, remarking that the last time Yozo tried to take his own life was also near the end of the year. Addressing the woman from the bar, Yozo asks to be taken away from Yoshiko. Then, without understanding what he means, he says that he's going to a place where there aren't women.

It's somewhat unclear why, exactly, the bartender from Kyobashi is at Yozo's bedside. The only logical explanation is that she feels close to Yozo and is yet another woman who has taken pity on him—she did, after all, let him stay in the room above the bar in Kyobashi for an entire year before he married Yoshiko. Again, then, Yozo manages to surround himself with sympathetic women even though he doesn't actually want to grow close to people.

In the aftermath of Yozo's incident with the sleeping pills, Yoshiko thinks he tried to kill himself because he blames himself for her rape. Flatfish, for his part, gives Yozo some money, acting as if it's a gift from him even though Yozo knows it's really from his own brothers. Still, Yozo accepts the money and uses it to go on a solo trip to some hot springs, but the trip doesn't do him any good—he spends the whole time drinking indoors, thinking about Yoshiko, and feeling miserable. He returns to Tokyo feeling even worse than before.

Even with the resources from his brothers and a number of people giving him emotional support, Yozo is miserable. This, in turn, provides insight into the nature of his struggle with depression—it's not that he's unhappy because of some specific grievance, it's simply that life itself feels unbearable to him, and there's very little anyone can do to change this unfortunate fact.

Drunkenly wandering the streets one night, Yozo throws up blood and falls into a snowbank. Pulling himself up, he decides to go to the pharmacy to get some medicine. It's late, but the woman who runs the pharmacy is still there. When she sets eyes on Yozo, they both immediately seem to recognize each other's suffering. They both start crying, at which point Yozo backs away and returns to his apartment. The next night, he returns to the pharmacy and tells the pharmacist about his condition. She tells him to stop drinking—her husband, she says, took years off his life by drinking. Yozo says he feels too unsettled when he's not drunk, so she gives him some medicine to help, making him promise not to touch alcohol.

Yet again, Yozo manages to make a fast connection with a woman, despite the fact that he isn't looking *for connections. At the same time, the unspoken bond between him and the pharmacist seems perhaps a bit deeper—and more fraught—than his bond with somebody like Yoshiko or Shizuko. In fact, this emotional attachment is similar to the one Yozo had with Tsuneko, since it's clearly based on a sense of mutual suffering. In and of itself, the fact that they connect to each other because of their sorrow suggests that their relationship will be tumultuous and dangerous, as was the case with Yozo and Tsuneko.*

The medicine that the pharmacist gives Yozo is morphine. She tells him it's no worse than alcohol, and at first, he thinks this is true. He's astonished by how the morphine makes him feel optimistic and unworried. All of his anxieties seem to melt away, and he frequently experiences a state of elation. But it isn't long before he's taking multiple injections of morphine each day. He soon runs out of his supply and has to return to the pharmacy, and though the pharmacist is hesitant to give him more, he convinces her. This pattern repeats, and he even begins an affair with the elderly pharmacist as a means of convincing her to continue supplying him with the drug.

Yozo's use of morphine only provides him with a temporary sense of relief. The drug gives him a sense of elation at first, but nothing has actually changed about his life, so it's unsurprising that he soon feels just as miserable as he did when he was still drinking. In fact, it's arguable that his morphine use makes everything worse, *since he has essentially just taken on a new dependency—and one that is difficult and even dangerous to give up, at that. What's more, living with this addiction further isolates him from the people around him, since he has to struggle with his cravings for morphine on his own. And though he starts a romantic affair with the pharmacist, he only does this as a way of getting more drugs, so it certainly doesn't make him happy.*

Yozo is already fully addicted to morphine by the time he realizes it's no better than alcohol. He wants to die, but still he keeps going back to the pharmacy for morphine, thus racking up a huge debt. He decides to write to his father and beg for help—and if he doesn't receive this help, he'll kill himself. His father never writes back. On the day that Yozo plans to kill himself, though, Horiki and Flatfish show up and take him to a psychiatric ward. Yoshiko comes with them, and just before leaving Yozo at the ward, she tries to slip him some morphine, thinking he'll need it. However, he doesn't take it.

Neither Horiki nor Flatfish seem like the kindest, most empathetic people. And yet, they do *show up for Yozo when he's in dire need of some kind of support. Of course, taking him to a psychiatric ward isn't necessarily something he* wants, *but there's no denying the fact that their decision to do this ultimately prevents him from trying once again to die by suicide. Yoshiko, for her part, also seems eager to help Yozo—the problem, though, is that she naively believes that he has been taking morphine for health reasons. Her final effort to help him is thus misguided.*

In the psychiatric ward, Yozo realizes that his premonition has come true: he's now in a place where there aren't any women. He also realizes that, even when he gets out of the ward, society will always see him as a "reject." He has been, he thinks, "disqualified as a human being."

The phrase "disqualified as a human being" is the literal translation of No Longer Human*'s Japanese title. Now that Yozo has been removed from society, his sense of isolation is all the more pronounced, since his presence in the psychiatric ward feels to him like a very clear indication that he doesn't fit in anywhere else. He is, he thinks, unfit for everyday life, and his stay in the psychiatric ward only reaffirms this idea.*

After spending three months in the psychiatric ward, Yozo is released. His older brother and Flatfish come to pick him up, and his brother tells him that their father has died. The family, his brother says, will now support him financially without asking any questions about his past—if, that is, he agrees to leave Tokyo. They want him to recuperate in the countryside. Devastated by the news of his father's death, Yozo agrees to leave Tokyo. His brother installs him in a house near a coastal hot spring.

Yozo hasn't spoken to his father since before he tried to die by suicide alongside Tsuneko. That the news of the old man's death devastates him, though, suggests that he still felt a connection with—or a tenderness toward—his father. Unfortunately for him, though, the societal stigma surrounding suicide drove him and his father apart, making it impossible for Yozo to ever develop a closer relationship with him, since the old man essentially disowned him for trying to take his own life.

It has now been three years since Yozo first went to the countryside. He still sometimes coughs blood, and the old servant his brother hired occasionally torments him in strange ways. For instance, he recently sent her to get some sleeping pills, but she brought back laxatives instead. He took ten of the pills and then stayed up all night with a cramping stomach. In the long run, though, he is neither unhappy nor happy. Life simply passes him by. He's almost 27, but his hair is already graying, and most people would think he's older than 40.

Yozo's notebooks end without any sense of resolution. His suffering will simply go on, and he will continue to struggle with depression, as evidenced by the fact that he tried to take ten sleeping pills, ultimately suggesting that he once again wanted to die by suicide. Seemingly unable to die, though, he appears doomed to lead an extremely isolated existence in which he will surely continue to struggle with the same emotional challenges that have plagued him since childhood.

EPILOGUE

The voice of the unnamed speaker returns, saying that he never met "the madman who wrote these notebooks"—that is, he never met Yozo. He did, however, know the bartender who ran the bar in Kyobashi, whom Yozo has written about. The speaker visited her bar in 1935, roughly five years after most of the events Yozo writes about in his notebooks. Now, though, the speaker has come to the countryside to visit a friend and to get some seafood to bring back to his family. At one point, he wanders into a café and recognizes the woman working there as the same woman who ran the bar in Kyobashi. They strike up a conversation, and she asks if he ever knew Yozo.

The Epilogue helps readers make sense of the structure of No Longer Human. *The unnamed speaker, it seems, has somehow come into possession of Yozo's notebooks and has assembled them into a book. The speaker now begins to explain how this came to pass, and—in doing so—refers to Yozo as a "madman." Of course, the speaker himself is fictional, but his assessment of Yozo ultimately emphasizes the novel's suggestion that the majority of society tends to judge people like Yozo rather harshly, viewing them with a certain lack of empathy and compassion.*

The unnamed speaker tells the bartender from Kyobashi that he never knew Yozo, but she still gives him three of his notebooks, suggesting that perhaps they might give him good material for a novel. The speaker is about to hand them back, but the three pictures of Yozo (included with the notebooks) capture his interest. That night, he gets drunk with his friend and decides to spend the night. Instead of sleeping, though, he stays up and reads all of Yozo's notebooks.

The implication is that the unnamed speaker is a writer, since there's no other conceivable reason that the bartender from Kyobashi would suggest that Yozo's notebooks might make good material for a novel. In a way, then, there's a voyeuristic aspect at play, as both the bartender and the unnamed speaker come to view Yozo's emotional troubles with intrigue.

The unnamed speaker decides to get the notebooks published without alteration. The next day, he returns to the café and asks the bartender from Kyobashi about them. She says she received them in the mail a decade ago. She thinks Yozo sent them, but he didn't include a return address. When the speaker asks if she cried upon reading them, she says she didn't—she simply says the notebooks made her think about how, "when human beings get that way, they're no good for anything." Still, she remembers Yozo fondly, insisting that, despite everything, he was "a good boy, an angel."

The bartender's comments about Yozo underscore the societal stigma surrounding depression, as the bartender considers people with severe depression as essentially useless. At the same time, though, she seems to have been quite fond of him, and her final assertion that he was "an angel" illustrates the strange effect he had on people (and especially women), somehow managing to win their affection without even trying to secure it—or, perhaps more importantly, without wanting it in the first place.

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