Kafka on the Shore

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HARUKI MURAKAMI

As a child and teenager, Murakami was interested in Western culture, soaking up the work of writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Charles Dickens, and Franz Kafka. After graduating from Waseda University in 1973, Murakami worked in a record store before opening a small jazz bar with his wife. One day, while attending a baseball game, Murakami was suddenly struck with the conviction that he could become a novelist, and began writing that night. Since then, Murakami has gained international acclaim for his surreal novels and short stories. Most of Murakami's books blend elements of magical realism or absurdity with the mundane, creating fictional worlds that are variously unsettling and humorous. He has said that "writing a novel is like having a dream." His work has been translated into over 50 languages. In 2006, Murakami became the sixth winner of the Franz Kafka Prize, awarded to writers whose works serve as "a testimony about our times."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Kafka on the Shore is one of several recent works by Murakami to address collective trauma in Japanese history. References to the lingering memory of World War II and the subsequent American occupation serve as one of the novel's important recurring motifs. Some characters, like Nakata, are still deeply affected by their wartime experiences. In flashbacks to the war period depicted in letters and army paperwork, Murakami touches on aspects of rural life during the war, including fear of biological or chemical attack and the necessity of foraging for food because of wartime shortages. Although Murakami was born after the close of World War II, as a child Murakami heard stories of wartime from his father, and has said that he sees those memories as an "inheritance." *Kafka on the Shore* also touches on the practice of Shinto, a traditional Japanese religion centered on ritual and connections to the past.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Murakami employs a distinct form of magical realism that blends elements of the Japanese literary tradition with foreign influences. *Kafka on the Shore* is one of many works by Murakami written in the style of the traditional Japanese "I-Novel," which emerged in the early twentieth century. I-Novels typically use a first-person, confessional style, often to take on extremely dark and personal subject matter. At the same time, Murakami has also been criticized within Japan for his unconventional style, which draws inspiration from European writers including Kurt Vonnegut and the Czech novelist Franz Kafka. Like Murakami, much of Kafka's work, such as his short story "The Metamorphosis," blends unsettling fantastical elements with realism to portray isolated characters dealing with the absurdity of modern life. *Kafka on the Shore* has also drawn much comparison to Murakami's other long surrealist works, including *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. *Kafka on the Shore* also draws heavily on the ancient Greek tragic myth of Oedipus, immortalized in dramatic form by Sophocles in his play, *Oedipus Rex*. In the myth, Oedipus receives a prophecy from the oracle at Delphi that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Unwittingly, Oedipus fulfills the prophecy. When he finds out what has happened, Oedipus blinds himself in anguish. The Oedipus myth is often cited as an example of self-fulfilling prophecy, and became associated with Freudian psychology after Freud developed the theory of the "Oedipus complex." Characters in *Kafka on the Shore* discuss the Oedipus myth often because Kafka believes himself to be the subject of an Oedipal prophecy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Kafka on the Shore
- **When Published:** 2002 in Japanese and 2005 in English translation
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Magical realism; fiction
- **Setting:** Tokyo and Takamatsu, Japan
- **Climax:** The door to the other world is closed as Kafka forgives his mother
- **Antagonist:** The Oedipal prophecy
- **Point of View:** First, second, and third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Unanswered Questions: In the three months after *Kafka on the Shore* was published in Japan, Murakami received over 8,000 questions from readers about the book. He responded to over 1,200 of them. As a result of those conversations, Murakami now believes that the best way to understand *Kafka on the Shore* is to read it multiple times.

At Bat: Murakami often tells the story of how he became a novelist. In 1978, at a baseball game in Japan, Murakami watched Dave Hilton, an American player who was playing in Japan, hit a double. At that very moment, Murakami realized that he was destined to become a novelist.

PLOT SUMMARY

Kafka Tamura sits in his father's study. Kafka has decided that he will run away from his home in Tokyo on his fifteenth birthday. Crow (an imagined persona whom Kafka consults for advice when he finds himself in stressful situations) advises Kafka to be tough and strong. Feeling as if he is preparing for a journey that will change him forever, Kafka packs a knife, some money, and a picture of himself and his older sister on the beach from when Kafka was young. Both his older sister and his mother left the family when Kafka was just four, so this is the only memory he has of them. Kafka has spent years building up his physical and mental strength, training to be able to escape his cruel father and survive as a runaway. But he fears that no matter how far he runs, he will never be able to escape a dark omen that follows him everywhere.

With only a backpack of possessions, Kafka gets on a bus bound for Shikoku in Western Japan. At a rest stop on the journey, Kafka meets a girl named Sakura, who is a few years older than him. He is attracted to her, but he worries, as he does with all women Sakura's age, that she could be his long-lost sister. They both agree that chance encounters are important, and possibly even the result of fate. When they arrive in the town of Takamatsu, Sakura gives Kafka her phone number. Kafka, unsure of what to do, visits the Komura Memorial library, where he meets Oshima, a well-dressed young librarian, and Miss Saeki, an extremely elegant, middle-aged woman who runs the library. Kafka is struck by the thought that she could be his mother. Over the next week, Kafka falls into a lonely routine, spending mornings at the gym and afternoons reading in the library. He and Oshima strike up a friendship.

Meanwhile, a series of declassified U.S. Army documents from World War II tell the story of a mysterious incident. Setsuko Okamochi, an elementary school teacher in the countryside, took a group of children to look for mushrooms on a hill. Suddenly, all the children collapsed. The children were unconscious, but their eyes moved back and forth rapidly, almost as if their minds were experiencing something independently of their bodies. Setsuko ran to get help, but a local doctor found himself completely at a loss. Soon, the children began to wake up on their own, apparently fine and without any memory of the incident. All the children woke up except for one: Satoru Nakata, a studious young boy who had been evacuated from Tokyo to the countryside, remained in a coma for weeks. Interviews with doctors and psychologists show that Nakata's case baffled them. Finally, Nakata, too, woke up on his own, but unlike the other children, he had lost his memory entirely. He had even lost the ability to read or write, skills he never regained. Although the official record ends there, many years later, Setsuko wrote in a letter that she believed she was responsible for the incident.

In the present day, Nakata, now an old man, sits in a vacant lot in Tokyo chatting with a black cat. Although he lost his memory and literacy in the childhood incident, Nakata gained the special ability to talk to cats, a skill he now leverages in his part-time job searching for lost house cats. Right now, he's on the hunt for a cat named Goma. A slightly addled cat named Kawamura and a refined Siamese cat named Mimi help Nakata trace Goma to the grassy lot where she was last seen, and Nakata waits there, hoping she will reappear. Other cats warn him that an evil man has been showing up there. Before long, a big, fierce dog shows up at the lot. Nakata follows the dog to the home of Johnnie Walker—a mysterious man who dresses like the logo for Johnnie Walker brand whisky. Johnnie Walker tells Nakata that he can help him find Goma, but only if Nakata will help him, as well—by killing him. Johnnie Walker reveals that he kills cats in order to collect their souls, which he is using to build a mystical flute. Unless Nakata kills Johnnie Walker, he will kill Goma and Mimi. With mounting horror, Nakata watches as Johnnie Walker dismembers three other cats before he can no longer stand it. He stabs Johnnie Walker with a kitchen knife and gathers up Goma and Mimi, whom Johnnie Walker was about to kill. Nakata returns Goma to her family and tries to turn himself in to the police, who think he is crazy. He leaves Tokyo the next day.

Back in Takamatsu, Kafka wakes up outside with blood on his shirt and no memory of the past few hours. Panicked, he calls Sakura and goes to her apartment, where he tells her about his family. He spends the night there, and she makes him orgasm while they talk about his sister. The next day, Kafka heads to the library and tells Oshima that he needs somewhere to stay. Oshima says that he will ask Miss Saeki if Kafka can stay in the library, and, in the meantime, takes him to a remote cabin in the woods. On the drive, Oshima reveals that he suffers from hemophilia and as a result often thinks about his own death, using music as a distraction. Kafka spends the next couple of days venturing into the **labyrinth**-like woods around the cabin, talking with Crow, and making peace with the overwhelming solitude of the forest. On the drive back to the library, Oshima tells Kafka about Miss Saeki's past. Her childhood sweetheart died when they were both very young, and ever since then Miss Saeki has been distant and listless. She refuses to listen to "Kafka on the Shore," a song she wrote for her boyfriend when they were young. The next day, two women visit the library and complain that it is not comfortable for female guests, accusing Oshima of sexism. He reveals that he is a gay, transgender man.

Meanwhile, Nakata hitchhikes west, getting a series of rides on different trucks. Eventually, he meets Hoshino, a young man who cruises through life seeking out only short-term relationships and new Hawaiian shirts every few weeks. Hoshino finds himself drawn to Nakata and takes a few days off work to help him get to Takamatsu—a location Hoshino feels drawn to, though he isn't sure why. Nakata says they must find the "entrance stone," a mysterious white stone with magical

properties that only Nakata knows about. After days searching in library books and tourist sites to no avail, Hoshino is approached by an old man who calls himself (and dresses like) Colonel Sanders. Colonel Sanders takes Hoshino to a Shinto shrine, where he finds the entrance stone. He then lugs the stone back to Nakata. They spend some time trying to determine what to do, and then Nakata says they must flip the stone over in order to open an entrance to another world. With tremendous effort—the stone has become supernaturally heavy—Hoshino does so. Soon, he decides that his relationship with Nakata is more important than returning to work.

At the library, Oshima shows Kafka an article saying that a famous sculptor—Kafka's father—has been stabbed to death. Although he was far away at the time of the murder, Kafka feels he was responsible. He tells Oshima about the omen that drove him away from home: echoing the Oedipal myth, Kafka's father prophesized that Kafka would kill him and sleep with his mother and sister. Over the next few nights, a ghost resembling a teenaged version of Miss Saeki appears in Kafka's room. Intrigued, he listens to the song "Kafka on the Shore" and begins to believe he and Miss Saeki are being drawn together. He also begins to suspect more strongly that Miss Saeki is his mother, although she denies it. Soon, Kafka and the real Miss Saeki begin to have sex. She feels as if she is making up for the time she lost with her boyfriend, while he wants to make up for his damaged childhood.

As the police intensify their search for Kafka's father's killer, Hoshino and Nakata relocate to an apartment provided by Colonel Sanders. They begin driving around the city as they try to determine what to do next. Oshima, also wary of the intensifying search (and the relationship between Kafka and Miss Saeki), brings Kafka back to the cabin. Kafka has a dream about raping Sakura which fills him with guilt. Kafka is intensely lonely and feels trapped by his father's prophecy. Hoping to escape, or face death, he ventures into the dark woods. Eventually, he comes upon two soldiers in World War II uniforms who say they will take Kafka to a mysterious entrance. He follows them to a steep ravine with a collection of small cabins, much like Oshima's cabin, in a clearing at the bottom. The soldiers leave him in one of the houses.

After days of aimless driving, Nakata and Hoshino stumble upon the Komura memorial library, and Nakata feels pulled to go inside. There, he talks with Miss Saeki. They feel an immediate connection. She tells him that she feels trapped within memories of her past, while he says that he feels equally trapped by his lack of memory. Miss Saeki entrusts Nakata with a stack of files in which she has written her life story. At her request, Hoshino and Nakata burn the files without reading them. When Oshima goes to Miss Saeki's office at the end of the day, he finds her face down on her desk, dead. When Hoshino and Nakata return to the apartment, Nakata, too, dies in his sleep, leaving Hoshino to puzzle over what to do with the entrance stone. After a couple of days, a black cat arrives and tells Hoshino that he will need to kill something that will attempt to get through the entrance. Sure enough, a long, pale, snake-like creature emerges from Nakata's dead body and begins to make its way to the stone. Hoshino tries unsuccessfully to kill it and realizes he must close the entrance by flipping the stone over. Once again, it takes nearly all his strength, but he is successful. He is then able to kill the creature. Vowing to hold onto Nakata's memory, Hoshino heads out of the apartment.

In a brief interlude, Crow, in the form of a literal **crow**, circles the forest. He spots a man dressed in a red track suit and black silk hat. The man tells Crow that he makes flutes out of the souls of cats, and he's traveling to where he can make the biggest flute of all. He says that the forest where they are now is like limbo: the man has died and is now a soul in transition. It's impossible for Crow to hurt him, he says, but invites Crow to try. Crow pecks out the man's eyes, but the man just laughs. Crow rips out his tongue, and he continues to laugh, now soundlessly. The wheezing sounds almost like a flute.

In the cabin in the ravine, the young version of Miss Saeki appears to cook Kafka's meals. He is overjoyed to see her, but soon realizes that she has no memories of the past—and that, if he doesn't leave soon, he too will lose his memories. In the afternoon, the middle-aged Miss Saeki arrives and tells Kafka that he must leave the valley. He asks, again, if she's his mother. Miss Saeki responds only that she once abandoned someone she shouldn't have, and asks if Kafka can forgive her. He forgives her, and, in his head, forgives his mother, and feels as if a frozen part of his heart has crumbled. Miss Saeki pricks her arm with a hairpin and lets Kafka drink some of her blood, and then leaves the cabin and stumbles back through the woods to Oshima's cabin. Oshima's brother drives Kafka back to the library, where he tells Oshima he has decided to return to school in Tokyo. They part, promising to meet again someday. On the phone, Kafka also says goodbye to Sakura, fondly calling her his sister. Thinking about all that has happened to him, Kafka gets on the train to return home.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Kafka Tamura – Kafka is one of the two protagonists of the novel, serving as the narrator for half of the chapters in the book. At the opening of the story, Kafka has just turned fifteen and decided to run away from home. Kafka is obsessed by fate, plagued by a fear that he will fulfill a prediction made by his cruel and distant father: that Kafka will kill his father, and have sex with his mother and sister, both of whom left the family when Kafka was a young child. This fear not only sets Kafka on his transformative journey but also makes him worry that every

woman he meets could be his mother or sister. He constantly feels guilt, worrying that his dreams and desires have the power to affect things in real life. Kafka attempts to make himself stronger and smarter by constantly working out and reading, but he worries that he will always be unhappy because of his family. Although Kafka prides himself on his self-sufficiency and independence, he eventually forms close bonds with Oshima, Miss Saeki, and Sakura, and, with their help, begins to make peace with his longing for his absent mother.

Satoru Nakata – Nakata is one of two protagonists of the story, serving as the subject of half of the chapters in the book (although, unlike Kafka's chapters, Nakata's chapters are written in the third person). During World War II, when he was a young boy, Nakata was struck by a mysterious illness that left him in a coma for many weeks. When he awoke, Nakata had lost all of his memories as well as the ability to read. As an adult, Nakata leads a solitary life in Tokyo. Because of the childhood incident, Nakata has lost the ability to understand abstract concepts, and sometimes speaks in the third person, which many people he meets find disconcerting. He supplements his government subsidy with money that he earns using a special power: Nakata can speak to cats, and uses this talent to find missing pets for a small fee. Nakata can't remember what happened to him during the coma, but he has a vague feeling that his mind briefly travelled to another world, a belief that intensifies over the course of the novel. Nakata feels guided by fate to find the mysterious entrance stone—but even he doesn't know what it is.

The Boy Called Crow – When Kafka is scared or at a loss for words, he imagines "the boy called Crow" giving him advice. Crow is an imagined persona, representing a tougher, wiser version of Kafka himself. Kafka notes that the name "Kafka" is an alias he chose for himself in part because it means "**crow**" in Czech. Like literal crows in the book, Crow sometimes appears to offer warnings or watch over Kafka in dangerous situations. Because he is a figment of Kafka's imagination, no one else can see or hear Crow—although Kafka sometimes imagines that Crow takes over and controls what Kafka says or does.

Hoshino – Hoshino is an aimless twentysomething who works as a truck driver largely because he has been fired from every other job he's held. Still, he's content and confident, with a flamboyant penchant for Hawaiian shirts and ponytails. Unlike most people, Hoshino is patient with Nakata, taking the time to get to know him. As Hoshino and Nakata undertake their quest to find the mysterious entrance stone, Hoshino becomes interested in classical music. These new experiences are revelatory for him. Hoshino vows to start a new, more meaningful life after the journey is over. Hoshino's story is an example of the power of music in this novel.

Oshima – Oshima works at the Komura Memorial Library. He is an avid reader and impeccable dresser. Oshima is polite but reserved, only sharing his deeper struggles with those closest to him. Oshima is a transgender man, and sometimes feels alienated or discriminated against because of this. He is also a hemophiliac, and so has to be constantly vigilant to avoid serious injury. For these reasons, he sometimes feels that his body is frustratingly imperfect. He demonstrates the theme of the mind/body split, because he sees his body as an imperfect container for his mind. He often muses on his own death, intentionally driving recklessly to tempt fate. However, he finds solace in classical music, the library, and engaging Kafka in discussions about philosophy and literature.

Miss Saeki – As a middle aged woman, Miss Saeki runs the Komura Memorial Library. The library is a special place for her—it is named after Miss Saeki's first and only love, a young man in the Komura family who died at the age of twenty. Miss Saeki and Komura were childhood sweethearts who believed they were meant to be together. As a teenager, Miss Saeki wrote the song "Kafka on the Shore" to express her love for Komura. Now, the song is a painful reminder of the past. Miss Saeki has never overcome the pain of losing her first love and remains aloof from others. Kafka is captivated by her beauty and intelligence, feeling attracted to her as both a romantic partner and mother figure—an example of the Oedipal theme prevalent in this book.

Sakura – Sakura is a young woman visiting friends in Takamatsu. Sakura and Kafka meet on a long bus ride to Takamatsu. Sakura, who is a few years older than Kafka, is kind and friendly. Kafka finds her extremely attractive—but because of this and her age, he worries that she could be his older sister, and that his attraction fulfils the Oedipal prophecy. Nonetheless, Sakura and Kafka both believe they were destined to meet. Kafka occasionally meets with Sakura during his time in Takamatsu—but more often he is plagued by sexual dreams about her that fill him with confusion and guilt.

The Living Ghost of Miss Saeki – Shortly after Kakfa moves into the library, an apparition begins to appear in his room at night. She appears to be a ghost who resembles Miss Saeki at fifteen years old. Kafka is attracted to her, but she doesn't seem to be able to see or hear him. Because Miss Saeki is still alive, Kafka refers to the mysterious girl as a "living ghost."

Koichi Tamura – Kafka's father is a renowned sculptor, best known for a work called "**The Labyrinth**." Kafka describes him as cruel and violent, though never fully explains what he means or why he feels this way. Importantly, Koichi issues a prediction that Kafka will sleep with his own mother and older sister, who left the family when Kafka was very young. Koichi also predicts that Kafka will kill him. When Koichi is found stabbed to death in his home, police open a murder investigation. Kafka himself feels that he must be responsible, even though he was nowhere near the scene of the crime.

Kafka's Sister – Kafka's older sister disappeared with his mother when Kafka was almost too young to remember. Kafka

knows his sister was adopted, but can no longer remember what she looks like. Because of the prophecy from his father, Kafka is worried that every young woman he meets might be his sister.

Setsuko Okamochi – Setsuko Okamochi teaches elementary school. During the war, children from Tokyo were temporarily relocated into Setsuko's class in the countryside, where it was safer. Nakata was one of those students. Setsuko remains shaken by the accident that rendered Nakata unconscious, known as the "Rice Bowl Hill Incident." She reveals in a letter to Dr. Nakazawa that she feels guilty because she believes that the strange incident was somehow related to a sexual dream she had had the night before.

Doctor Juichi Nakazawa – After the "Rice Bowl Hill Incident," Dr. Nakazawa, a psychiatrist, was called by the Japanese military to examine Nakata and the other children who had fallen unconscious. The accident baffled Nakazawa—he didn't understand what had happened to the children, why all but Nakata swiftly recovered, and why Nakata himself suffered a coma and then amnesia. Nakazawa tells Lt. O'Connor that the memory of the incident feels "like a weight pressing down" on him.

Johnnie Walker – A mysterious and sinister character, Johnnie Walker is named after and dresses like the mascot for Johnnie Walker brand whiskey. He is extremely cruel and violent, especially towards cats. Johnnie Walker believes he must kill cats in order to gather souls so that he can create a mystical flute. Johnnie eventually convinces Nakata to kill him in exchange for Goma's life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Kafka's Mother – When Kafka was young, his mother left the family, taking Kafka's older sister with her. Kafka can no longer remember what she looks like, and is tormented by the thought that every woman he meets could be her.

Oshima's Brother – Oshima's older brother built the remote cabin where Oshima went to meditate as a teenager. He runs a surf shop.

Lieutenant Robert O'Connor – Lieutenant O'Connor is sent by the United States government to conduct interviews as part of an investigation into the mysterious accident that left Nakata unconscious. He asks straightforward questions to Setsuko Okamochi and Doctor Nakazawa.

Major Toyama – An army doctor who examined the children in Setsuko's class after the "Rice Bowl Hill Incident." He died during World War II.

Otsuka – Otsuka is a black cat whom Nakata meets (and names) in Tokyo while he is searching for Goma. Otsuka notices that Nakata's shadow seems to be fainter than most.

Kawamura – Kawamura is one of several cats Nakata encounters as he searches for Goma. However, unlike the other cats he meets, Nakata can barely understand Kawamura when he speaks. Kawamura is eventually killed by Johnnie Walker.

Mimi – Mimi is a Siamese cat. She helps translate between Kawamura and Nakata during the search for Goma.

Goma – Goma is a missing tortoiseshell cat. Nakata is hired by Goma's owners to find her.

Okawa – Okawa is a wary black and white tabby. He warns Nakata that searching for Goma will put him in danger.

Colonel Sanders – Colonel Sanders is a strange if friendly man who resembles and dresses like the mascot for Kentucky Fried Chicken. He aids Nakata and Hoshino by providing them a place to stay in Takamatsu and helping them to find the entrance stone.

Ms. Soga – Ms. Soga is a member of a women's organization that is investigating museums and other public places "from a woman's point of view." Along with her unnamed colleague, Ms. Soga inspects the Komura Memorial Library.

Togeguchi – A truck driver who takes Nakata from Tokyo to a rest stop on the highway to Takamatsu.

Hagita – A truck driver who takes Nakata to Fujigawa.

Dr. Shigenori Tsukayama A doctor who was ordered by the military to assess the children involved in the Rice Bowl Hill Incident.

TERMS

Entrance Stone – A mysterious, supernatural object that becomes the focus of **Hoshino** and **Nakata's** quest. The entrance stone is white, round, and about the size of a vinyl record. It seems to weigh more at some times than others. Most of the time, including when Hoshino first finds the stone, it is hefty but can be lifted without too much effort. At these moments, the stone is simply a stone, and does not possess any supernatural qualities. However, occasionally the stone becomes supernaturally heavy. This happens when the stone is functioning as the "entrance" to the parallel world that **Kafka** visits at the end of the novel. By flipping the stone over, Hoshino is able to open and close the entrance to that other world. Nakata feels drawn by destiny to find the entrance stone, but until he and Hoshino find it, he doesn't actually know what it is or how to use it. Like many things in the novel, the origin and purpose of the stone is never fully explained.

Oedipal Complex – The Oedipal complex is an idea from Freudian psychoanalysis that male children unconsciously desire to kill their fathers and sleep with their mothers. The name "Oedipal complex" is a reference to the myth of Oedipus, immortalized in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. In the story, an oracle issues a prophecy that Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother. Although Oedipus and others take steps to

try to prevent the prophecy from coming true, he ends up fulfilling it unwittingly. In *Kafka on the Shore*, **Kafka** and others, including **Oshima**, draw parallels between Kafka's story and Oedipus's because **Kafka's father** delivered a prophecy that Kafka would kill his father and sleep with his **mother** and **sister**. Kafka is aware of the Oedipal story and haunted by the thought that he, too, will be unable to escape his own prophecy.

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.

THE MIND VS. THE BODY

Kafka on the Shore is often described as a metaphysical novel. It is deeply concerned with the nature of consciousness and the gap between thoughts and actions. This theme is enhanced by the form of the novel itself, which slips between perspectives and tenses, allowing the reader to inhabit the minds of different characters and experience their inner thoughts and dream sequences as well as reality. Through his writing, Murakami envisions the mind itself as inextricably linked to the body, despite the ways in which the body can feel frustratingly limited or disconnected from the mind.

To varying degrees of literality, characters in *Kafka on the Shore* experience their bodies as imperfect containers for their minds or selves. Most characters have a strong sense of their own consciousness as something distinct from, yet trapped in, the body. Ultimately, this awareness makes many of them feel as if they are experiencing the world from within uncomfortable containers. For example, Kafka is extremely focused on developing his physical strength, practicing a strict workout regimen. Working out makes him feel that his mind is at home in his body, even if only temporarily. However, he also believes that his body itself is tainted and evil because it is the product of his parents, who abandoned him in his childhood. As much as he would like to escape from his body and the reminders it carries of his parents, he feels like he is trapped with his past by virtue of being trapped inside his body.

Oshima is a transgender man who sees his gender identity as disconnected from his body (or his biological sex). He also suffers from hemophilia, which means that any accident could be fatal. In these ways, he describes his body as an imperfect vessel for his heart and mind, which has brought him frustration and made him feel isolated. But he has also learned how to be at peace with his limited body, an outlook he attempts to share with Kafka. Nakata experiences a similar disjuncture between mind and body. As a child during World War II, Nakata was involved in a freak accident that put him in a coma-like state for several weeks. He believes that during this time, his mind left his body to wander another world, and returned as a blank slate. Because of this, Nakata no longer feels totally at home in his body. Like many characters in *Kafka on the Shore*, Nakata demonstrates that the body may feel like an uncomfortable home, but ultimately, there is no escape from it. Therefore, characters must learn to be at peace with their bodies despite the body's limitations.

The power of the mind itself to create a physical impact is also a subject of frequent concern in *Kafka on the Shore*. Kafka worries about the extent to which dreams and thoughts can have physical manifestations, or influence real-world events. Murakami demonstrates that subconscious thoughts may make it feel as if the mind is acting independently of the body, but shows that his characters are responsible for their actions whether they understand their motivations or not. Kafka envisions his thoughts as a separate being in the form of the boy called Crow. Crow represents a more confident, knowledgeable version of Kafka, who stands behind him in times of stress, offering advice. Kafka feels as if Crow is stronger than him—but, since Crow is actually a part of Kafka, this cannot be true. At several points during the novel, Kafka worries that actions he carries out in his fantasies and dreams will have real-world consequences. Kafka feels that he has no control over his dreams, but that he is nevertheless responsible for the terrible consequences he believes they will have. He is especially concerned when his dreams concern sex or violence. Frequently, he expresses guilt over the things he imagines because he believes that imagination is as powerful as action. When Kafka's father is murdered, for instance, Kafka tells Oshima, "maybe I murdered him through a dream," because he has thought about killing his father so often. Nakata also feels that he is impelled to violence by a force that both inhabits him and yet is outside of his control. When Nakata murders Johnnie Walker/Mr. Tamura, he feels as if a foreign consciousness has seized control of his body and acted against his will. Still, he sees himself as responsible for the murder and attempts to turn himself in to the police. Nakata, like Kafka, demonstrates that even if he does not understand his motivations, he is still responsible for his actions. Ultimately, the characters acknowledge that it is impossible for the body to act independently of the mind, or vice versa.

In *Kafka on the Shore*, the line between thought and action, mind and body, imagination and reality, is always in question. Characters grapple with the nature of consciousness by thinking about the disconnect between their minds and the world around them. Ultimately, many feel that their minds are powerful forces independent from their physical selves—but in order to lead fulfilling lives, they must each learn and make peace with the fact that the spirit and mind are inextricably

linked to the body.

FATE AND PROPHECY

In the surreal world of *Kafka on the Shore*, characters may have a hard time understanding not only strange phenomena and encounters in the world, but also their own inner experiences and behavior. Some characters, and especially Kafka, feel as if the world and their own futures must be governed by inescapable prophecies. Meanwhile, other characters feel that they are destined to carry out special missions, or fall in love or die at specific moments. The possibility of a destined path might offer solace, but it can also be ominous. Whether or not "fate" truly exists, *belief* in fate drives the characters in *Kafka in the Shore* to behave in such ways that render the question irrelevant, as they ultimately fulfill their own imagined prophecies. Thus, Murakami shows that *belief* in fate is what makes fate real, and prophecies self-fulfilling.

Kafka is driven, to the point of obsession, by a "prophecy" delivered by his father: that Kafka will murder his father, and have sex with his mother and older sister. Kafka is tormented by the prophecy, and believes himself to be fighting or fulfilling it at almost every turn. Kafka's own "prophecy" parallels a famous prophecy from the myth of Oedipus, in which an oracle correctly predicts that Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother. Kafka frequently references the story of Oedipus, turning the myth into a kind of roadmap guiding his own life. When the news comes that Kafka's father has mysteriously been murdered, Kafka strongly feels that he is responsible, even though he has no memory of committing the murder and was hundreds of miles away at the time. Kafka is convinced that the sheer power of his dreams and desires makes him responsible for his father's death. In a further manifestation of the prophecy's power over Kafka's thought, Kafka imagines that Sakura, a girl he met on a train, is his sister, despite little evidence (and the fact that she has a different name from Kafka's sister). As a result, he is confused by their brief sexual encounter and tormented by erotic dreams and the belief that he will rape Sakura. Thus, Kafka's relationship with Sakura is tinged with guilt and anguish because of his intense belief in fate and prophecy. Kafka's second and far more intense relationship in the book is with Miss Saeki, a middle aged woman whom he believes to be his mother—again, despite the fact that he has no real evidence to support this theory. Kafka falls madly in love with Miss Saeki and begins an intense affair with her, casting her as both his lover and his mother. Kafka lets his belief in the Oedipal prophecy guide him into relationships that he believes are wrong, because he feels he has no power to resist.

Apart from Kafka's obsession with his family prophecy, many other characters feel that they are destined to be with certain others. As a result, they ascribe special significance to the strangers they meet, and allow new relationships to totally alter their plans. For example, Kafka assigns deep significance to new friendships, in part because he is searching for his lost family. When he meets Sakura by chance, he becomes convinced that they share a special connection. Much as Kafka casts new acquaintances in the roles of his lost family members, Hoshino is drawn to Nakata because Nakata reminds him of his beloved deceased grandfather. This imaginary relationship is so strong that Hoshino abandons his day-to-day life in order to assist Nakata on his mysterious quest, even as it grows increasingly surreal. Finally, Miss Saeki believes that she and her childhood sweetheart were destined to be together—so much so that she was never able to recover from his premature death. She is drawn to Kafka because he seems to her to be a reincarnation of her boyfriend, and begins a relationship with him because of this. Throughout the novel, characters are drawn into incongruous, sometimes unhealthy, relationships, and onto strange new paths because of their beliefs in fated relationships.

A serious belief in fate can lead characters to think they can predict the future—and, in Murakami's surrealist vision, this is sometimes true. This strengthens the illusion that the world is governed by fate and life's outcomes predetermined. However, reliance on this belief in predetermination also makes characters dangerously oblivious to the unpredictable nature of life, and the possibility of sudden death. Nakata, for instance, begins to predict bizarre weather events, such as storms of fish and leeches falling from the sky, or continuous lightning strikes. When these predictions come true, Nakata gains confidence that his quest will be successful. This firm belief is undercut when Nakata dies suddenly, before the quest can be completed. Nakata's death demonstrates that, even in a world where special powers of prediction exist, it is actually impossible for humans to know the future. Miss Saeki and Oshima both believe that they know exactly when they will die. This belief leads them to live fearlessly during their allotted time and take care of important matters without delay. But more importantly, both characters are reckless and take unnecessary risks because they believe they can know the details of their own deaths. Thus, belief in fate blinds characters not just to the unpredictable nature of life, but also to the possibility of unexpected death.

Because the characters in this novel are obsessed by fate and prediction, they let their beliefs about the future govern their life choices and relationships in aware and unaware ways. This warped sense of reality leads characters to put themselves in dangerous situations or unhappy relationships because they believe they are forced to by a predetermined fate. Murakami shows that reliance on belief in fate prevents people from making rational choices, and in fact can lead them to feel trapped in situations where they actually do have a choice.

THE VIRTUES OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Characters in *Kafka on the Shore* struggle to overcome personal challenges in order to become self-reliant. In addition to experiencing isolation and loss, characters frequently grapple with the question of whether their greatest trials must be faced alone. Murakami demonstrates that the cultivation of personal strength and the ability to be alone is important—but equally important is the capacity to accept the support of others.

As Murakami's characters attempt to rationalize death and loss, they often find themselves feeling extremely lonely. They also find that their most profound emotions and insights are impossible to fully share with others. Yet this state of loneliness can also help characters to better understand themselves. Oshima brings Kafka to a remote cabin, where Kafka experiences true isolation—just as Oshima did when he was a teenager. Here, Kafka wrestles with and overcomes some of his greatest fears, eventually making peace with the fact that his mother and sister are gone. Although Oshima, Oshima's brother, and Kafka have all had similarly transformative experiences in the forest, they acknowledge that such experiences are private and better left undiscussed. Miss Saeki chooses a similarly solitary and private existence because of the loss of her boyfriend. She keeps a careful record of her past, but refuses to share it with anyone—until she meets Nakata, someone who is equally misunderstood and introverted. She asks him to burn the secrets contained in her journals, a request that he implicitly understands and undertakes. In these moments, characters draw strength and insight from periods spent in isolated self-reflection. Their introspection is extremely private—yet they also find a sense of kinship with others who have experienced similar moments of isolation.

Although solitude and self-reliance can be a source of strength, healing, and enlightenment, Murakami shows that accepting the help and love of others is also essential. Both Nakata and Kafka have worked hard to become self-sufficient. Nakata has slowly learned how to survive by himself after losing his memories, leveraging his special talents to make a living. Kafka has strengthened his body and mind in order to strike out on his own as soon as he turns fifteen, escaping the toxic environment of his home. Both characters are rightfully proud of their strength—but living in this way also means that they lack meaningful relationships, and are especially vulnerable in moments of danger. Because he is elderly and disabled, Nakata has difficulty carrying out his mission. It takes the perceptive eye of Hoshino, a fellow loner, to see Nakata's talents and help him to put this knowledge into action. Hoshino and Nakata become friends, and through this friendship they learn to rely on one another. By respecting Nakata's desires and insights as others do not, Hoshino is able to bolster Nakata's sense of self-worth. Meanwhile, Kafka, a runaway, initially prioritizes personal strength and independence over forming friendships. Though he is initially wary of Sakura and Oshima, soon he realizes that he must rely on them if he hopes to survive in the city, which enables him to meaningful friendships with both characters. Later, his intense relationship with Miss Saeki allows him to feel both first love and the sting of loss. Slowly, he begins to form connections that not only help him to thrive and grow, but that eventually help him process his deep sense of loneliness, caused by his mother's abandonment.

In addition to relying on inner strength and the love of friends, characters must also make peace with the loss of loved ones in order to be truly self-sufficient. By the end of the novel, Kafka has shed his identity as a reclusive runaway, having formed deep attachments with those around him. At the pinnacle of this transformation, Kafka confronts the ghost of Miss Saeki. At her command, he accepts that his mother and sister loved him even though they left him behind, and he chooses to forgive them. After this moment of redemption, Kafka is able to leave the haunted woods and face and return to his day-to-day life. In this way, Murakami shoes that attachment to—or resentment of—lost loved ones can stand in the way of personal growth and self-sufficiency. Like Kafka, Miss Saeki is haunted by the loss of a loved one. But unlike Kafka, Miss Saeki is unable to overcome the pain of losing her childhood sweetheart, and feels perpetually incomplete. When her relationship with Kafka fails to fill that void, she realizes that she will never truly be able to overcome her loneliness, and her heart gives out. Thus, Murakami shows that dwelling too strongly on lost loved ones prevents the formation of new, sustaining relationships.

For Murakami, self-sufficiency is a complicated virtue. Although personal strength and independence are worth striving for, paradoxically, it is only possible to achieve self-sufficiency through an acceptance of the support of others, and a recognition of the ways in which others' lives and actions have meaningfully impacted one's own life, for better or worse. Murakami makes a distinction between different kinds of self-sufficiency, showing that commitment to independence must not come at the cost of being open to meaningful relationships with others. True maturity comes from a combination of personal strength and making oneself vulnerable to others.

MUSIC AND INTROSPECTION

Music appears often in *Kafka on the Shore* as a powerful force for triggering introspection. At various moments, Murakami depicts characters who feel profoundly touched by subtle elements of music, from unusual pairings of chords and evocative lyrics to artful handling of imperfections in performance. Characters share music with each other as an act of trust, and struggle to put their intimate feelings about music into words. In this novel, Murakami shows that music has the power to do more than simply inspire emotion—it can also lead to deep self-reflection, and help characters to think about the very nature of life and

death.

Murakami shows that music can preserve and recreate intense emotions from the past. The song "Kafka on the Shore" was written by Miss Saeki in her youth as an embodiment of her young love for her boyfriend. When Kafka listens to the song, he feels as if it reminds him of a forgotten time, and that it speaks directly to him. Although he is much younger than Miss Saeki, he begins to imagine that he could be the boy from her past, as if the song has transported him to that time. The song also reawakens strong emotions in Miss Saeki, who begins an affair with Kafka because she, too, feels transported to the romance of her youth by the reappearance of the song. In a surreal twist, the song also conjures a ghost who resembles a younger version of Miss Saeki. The power of "Kafka on the Shore" (the song) lies in its ability to conjure up memories of a distant relationship. Music has the ability to make listeners identify with and even experience for themselves the emotions of the songwriter.

Throughout the novel, classical music is a motif that is closely associated with self-awareness and reflection. By carefully listening to classical music and considering its complexities and imperfections, characters are able to gain perspective on their own lives and even confront the thought of death without fear. Because Oshima suffers from hemophilia, he often imagines his own death and seems to be at peace with his mortality. For example, he intentionally drives recklessly so that, if he were to get in a car accident, he would die swiftly and painlessly. But Oshima also tempers such thoughts of death with music. As he drives, he plays a Schubert sonata that he finds beautiful precisely because it contains imperfections. As he ponders this paradox, Oshima feels that death simply "isn't an option." Like Oshima, Hoshino is also captivated by a piece of classical music. As he aids Nakata, Hoshino hears a recorded performance of a Beethoven piece for the first time. Although he has never been particularly interested in music before, Hoshino feels moved by the beauty of the music—so much so that he begins to reexamine his life and the choices that have brought him to this moment. His newfound love for music leads him to think critically about his past, and decide that his recklessness in befriending and following Nakata is the beginning of a new and more fulfilling life.

Music in *Kafka on the Shore* serves as a force for altering characters' perspectives. It can be intensely nostalgic, triggering painful memories of the past. Music can also prompt introspection and even self-transformation, pushing listeners to reconsider their own lives in light of the powerful emotions that music can stir. In this way, Murakami champions the virtues of music as a medium that is at once physical and nonphysical and thus transcends the boundaries between body and mind that are so central to the book's thematic landscape.

SYMBOLS

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

THE LABYRINTH

The image of the **labyrinth** in *Kafka on the Shore* is used to represent knowledge-seeking and understanding of the self—an undertaking that poses no small challenge to the characters in the novel. Like the Oedipal myth that is an important part of this book, the concept of the labyrinth extends back to Greek mythology, and can represent both confusion and the eventual attainment of knowledge or self-awareness.

"The Labyrinth" is the name of Kafka's father's most celebrated work of sculpture, which reflects the fact that Kafka finds his own father to be inscrutable and frightening. But there are also less literal labyrinths that play a key role in the story. Oshima explains to Kafka that in ancient Mesopotamian culture, the labyrinth-like intestines of animals and humans would be examined to try to reveal prophecies. He points out that in that way, "the principle for the labyrinth is inside you" (352). This idea is reflected by the fact that Kafka must work through several puzzles and mazes in order to gain a better understanding of himself. Kafka's inner voice, Crow, points out that his strange relationship with Miss Saeki is like a "labyrinth of time" from which Kafka does not want to escape (243). Kafka learns a lot about himself and experiences his first love by venturing into this labyrinth, but he also experiences anguish and loss. It is only by venturing into the maze of trees in the forest, another kind of labyrinth, that Kafka ultimately confronts the mysteries of his past and comes to peace with them. The deeper he ventures into the woods, the more he feels as if he is venturing into his own mind. Although labyrinths in *Kafka on the Shore* pose the threat of becoming lost, venturing into them allows characters to face their fears and gain important self-knowledge. In this way, the labyrinth signifies the difficult but important process of introspection.

CROWS

As Kafka himself points out, the name "Kafka" means **crow** in Czech, which is part of why he chose the name for himself. Crows in *Kafka on the Shore* are harbingers of protection, warning, and advice. More specifically, they signify wisdom that feels as if it is coming from an inner voice or conscience. Thus, they speak to the importance of heeding inner voices and instincts, as well as pausing to take a step back before entering into dangerous territory. Crows appear most prominently in the role of the boy called Crow, a persona that Kafka imagines giving him advice

and encouragement in times of danger. Crows also appear at key moments in the novel when Kafka seems to be entering into physically or emotionally dangerous territory. For example, at each of the moments when Kafka begins his sexual relationship with Miss Saeki, dreams of raping Sakura, and enters into the deepest part of the forest, a crow caws ominously in the distance, as if trying to warn him. Crows are an embodiment of wisdom that Kafka possesses but to which he does not always have full access.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Kafka on the Shore* published in 2006.

The Boy Named Crow Quotes

Sometimes fate is like a sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change directions but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. Something *inside* of you.

Related Characters: The Boy Called Crow (speaker), Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, the boy named Crow counsels Kafka as he prepares to run away from home. Crow, an imagined alter ego who exhibits confidence and wisdom that Kafka wishes he himself possessed, is a coping mechanism Kafka uses to center himself in times of stress. In this role, Crow sometimes offers insights that Kafka is too anxious to notice himself. In this scene, Kafka uses Crow to work through the anxiety he feels about running away from home. Crow imagines that Kafka's emotions are like a turbulent sandstorm following Kafka wherever he goes. This evocative image conveys just how stressed and afraid Kafka is. His own emotions feel like a dangerous force of nature. Furthermore, Crow points out that part of why the "sandstorm" of emotions is so dangerous is that it is within Kafka himself. Therefore, he can't outrun the storm—instead, he has to face it over and over again. Since Kafka is preparing to run away from his home and try to find a better life, the warning that he will not be able to escape his turbulent feelings is ominous.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"'Even chance meetings'... how does the rest of that go?"

"'Are the result of karma.'"

"Right, right," she says. "But what does it mean?"

"That things in life are fated by our previous lives. That even in the smallest events there's no such thing as coincidence."

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura, Sakura (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

On the journey west to Takamatsu, Kafka meets Sakura, an unusual, talkative girl a few years older than him. As they part ways, she expresses the sentiment that chance meetings aren't really chance at all, but have special significance and meaning extending beyond simple coincidence. It is unclear how much Kafka actually agrees, but he extends the statement by saying that such meetings are the result of fate. Like many characters in the novel, Kafka and Sakura share a belief in fate. That shared belief draws them together, which seems to confirm the theory that they are connected by something more powerful than mere coincidence. Because he does not believe in coincidence, Kafka is always looking for meaning or greater significance in his encounters, a mindset that can tend to warp how he perceives others. In this case, Kafka wonders if has some deeper connection to Sakura—be it romantic, familial, or both—because he rejects the idea that their meeting could be the result of chance alone.

"In ancient times, people weren't just male or female, but one of three types: male/male, male/female, or female/female. In other words, each person was made out of the components of two people. Everyone was happy with this arrangement and never really gave it much thought. But then God took a knife and cut everybody in half, right down the middle. So after that the world was divided just into male and female, the upshot being that people spend their time running around trying to locate their missing other half."

Oshima and Kafka have just met for the first time. Oshima engages Kafka in a surprisingly deep conversation about the nature of the soul. Indeed, this quote reveals much about Oshima's worldview, and foreshadows later conversations he will have with Kafka, as their friendship develops, about his own gender identity. Oshima's story helps to explain why many characters in the novel feel as if they are being drawn towards each other by forces outside of their control or knowledge, as well as why characters feel so comfortable with each other so soon after meeting: perhaps they are actually two halves of the same soul, reunited at last. However, another side to that theory is that soulmates are codependent—and, until they meet, are less than complete. One possible danger of a belief in soulmates is that it suggests that someone who has not found their soul mate is less than whole, and therefore cannot possibly have a fulfilling life. Finally, Oshima's story relates to his gender identity, something that he keeps private from Kafka until later. Oshima identifies as a gay transgender man, but because he faces prejudice from others who don't know about his identity or perceive him as female, Oshima often feels conflicted about his gender, making him another example of the ways in which the novel deals with the split between the mind (or the self) and the body.

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura, Oshima (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Chapter 8 Quotes

It might sound strange to put it this way, but it seemed like the real Nakata had gone off somewhere, leaving behind for a time the fleshy container, which in his absence kept all his bodily functions going at the minimum level needed to preserve itself. The term "spirit projection" sprang to mind.

Related Characters: Dr. Shigenori Tsukayama (speaker), Satoru Nakata, Lieutenant Robert O'Connor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Doctor Shigenori Tsukayama, a professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Tokyo Imperial University, is being interviewed by a U.S. Army official for his take on the Rice Bowl Hill incident. Tsukayama's description of Nakata's condition touches on some of the larger themes of the book. Tsukuyama makes it sound as if Nakata's mind was able to roam free of his body, establishing a disconnect between the mind and body that many of the characters in the novel experience—albeit in less literal ways. It seems that Nakata's inner self was actually able to temporarily abandon his body. Tsukuyama's testimony connects this phenomenon with Japanese mythology, a connection that Murakami makes at several points in the novel. As he goes on to explain, the term "spirit projection" hearkens to Japanese folktales in which the soul would leave the body in order to settle a personal score. In other words, it shows that intense personal connections can have lingering effects even after death. That very phenomenon is later explored with the introduction of Miss Saeki's living ghost.

Chapter 12 Quotes

I didn't cry at all. I already knew that somewhere, on some distant battlefield, my husband would lose his life. Ever since the year before, when all those things I just wrote about took place—that erotic dream my period starting ahead of time, hitting Nakata, the children falling into that mysterious coma—I'd accepted my husband's death as inevitable, as something fated to be. So news of his death merely confirmed what I already knew.

Related Characters: Setsuko Okamochi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103-104

Explanation and Analysis

Setsuko writes a letter to a psychology professor, amending her previous statements about the Rice Bowl Hill incident. In fact, Setsuko is wracked with guilt about what happened that day, as well as her failure to tell the whole story afterwards. Setsuko believes that she is somehow responsible for the mysterious coma-like condition that befell the children because of an intense erotic dream she had about her husband the night before. Like many characters in the novel, Setsuko feels responsible for the contents of her dreams. Furthermore, Setsuko connects her

sense of guilt about the erotic dream to her husband's death, as if by having the dream she not only caused the children to fall ill but also fated him to die in the war. Belief in this kind of fate softens the blow of his death in a way, because Setsuko was emotionally and mentally prepared for his death, which she saw as inevitable. At the same time, belief in fate has also made her feel responsible for horrible things that happened during the war which were in fact outside of her control. In this way, belief in fate can be a double-edged sword.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"If I listen to some utterly perfect performance of an utterly perfect piece while I'm driving, I might want to close my eyes and die right then and there. But listening to the D major, I can feel the limits of what humans are capable of—that a certain type of perfection can only be realized through a limitless accumulation of the imperfect. And personally, I find that encouraging."

Related Characters: Oshima (speaker), Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111-112

Explanation and Analysis

As Oshima drives Kafka to the cabin in his speeding green Miata, he tells Kafka that he suffers from hemophilia, a condition which means that most accidents—and certainly any car accident—would be fatal. His condition has prompted him to think more about his own death than the average person might, leading him to feel as if he can control his fate by controlling when he will die (for example, he intentionally drives recklessly so that any accident would kill him instantly, which paradoxically makes him feel more calm on the road). Music is one way that he tempers such thoughts of death. Oshima finds himself becoming extremely immersed in classical music. A well-played piece represents not only a beautiful piece of art in itself, but also reflects well on all of humanity. Oshima is able to draw lessons from classical music and apply them to his own life: while his medical condition may make him "imperfect," such imperfections are what comprise the very fabric of humanity. In this way, Oshima shows that classical music can have both a profound personal effect and that it contains broader truths about humanity.

Chapter 15 Quotes

I'm being tested, I tell myself. Oshima spent a few days alone here, too, when he was about my age. He must have been scared out of his wits, same as me. That's what he meant by *solitude comes in different varieties*. Oshima knows exactly how I feel being here alone at night, because he's gone through the same thing, and felt the same emotions.

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker), Oshima

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

During Kafka's first night in the isolated forest cabin, the darkness and silence feel oppressive. He can't stop thinking about how alone he is, a terrifying sensation. But Kafka soon comes to an important realization about the nature of his solitude: even though he is literally alone, in another way this experience is bringing him closer to Oshima. Murakami demonstrates an interesting contradiction about the nature of loneliness. In a way, the fact that loneliness is a near-universal emotion diminishes its power—since, although he feels a sense of aloneness, Kafka realizes that someone else has experienced this same sense of solitude, which makes it more difficult for him to feel truly alone in his condition. Paradoxically, this moment of solitude is actually one that brings him closer to Oshima.

Chapter 17 Quotes

"Miss Saeki's life basically stopped at age twenty, when her lover died. No, maybe not age twenty, maybe much earlier…I don't know the details, but you need to be aware of this. The hands of the clock buried inside her soul ground to a halt then."

Related Characters: Oshima (speaker), Miss Saeki, Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

As he drives Kafka back from the woods to his new home in the library, Oshima tells Kafka Miss Saeki's tragic story: after finding her soulmate when they were both young teenagers, she lost him just a few short years later in an accidental, senseless killing. Since then, she's been a shadow of her younger self, staying reserved, aloof, and solitary.

Miss Saeki's story demonstrates the dangers of forming such an intense connection with another person, especially at such a young age. Miss Saeki and her boyfriend believed they were meant to be together, as if they were two halves of one whole. As a result, Miss Saeki is completely devastated by their separation, and no longer feels whole afterwards. Because she has been unable to let go of this broken connection from the past, she hasn't been able to move on or form new connections.

Chapter 19 Quotes

"But what disgusts me even more are people who have no imagination. The kind T.S. Eliot calls *hollow men*. People who fill up that lack of imagination with heartless bits of straw, not even aware of what they're doing."

Related Characters: Oshima (speaker), Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

After being accused of sexism by two activists who visit the library, Oshima reveals to them and Kafka that he is a gay transgender man. Afterwards, he and Kafka talk about this revelation and Oshima explains how his identity has affected his worldview. Although he has faced "all kinds of discrimination," what bothers him the most are people who lack empathy. Oshima compares such people to "hollow men," a reference to a T.S. Eliot poem that deals with the failure to translate thought into action. That theme is highly prevalent in Murakami's writing, as well—as much of *Kafka on the Shore* deals with the gulf between desires and actions, dreams and reality, and imagination and responsibility. Oshima is frustrated by this gap, as well as the distance he feels from others who are unable or unwilling to empathize with him.

Chapter 20 Quotes

Experience had taught him it was better not to let on that he didn't know how to read. Because if he did, people stared at him like he was some kind of monster.

Related Characters: Satoru Nakata

Related Themes:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

Fleeing Tokyo after murdering Johnnie Walker, Nakata is forced to confront the limitations of his self-sufficiency and fully realize how difficult it is to navigate the world outside his corner of Tokyo without being able to read. Almost immediately, Nakata begins to learn how to gain the trust of others, and, simultaneously, learns what aspects of himself he should keep more closely guarded. Nakata's journey is a careful balancing act between learning how to be personally resourceful and independent, and learning that it is sometimes necessary to rely on the help of others. The experience is liberating yet also lonely, especially early on, before Nakata has begun to trust others and form friendships. Murakami demonstrates the ways in which personal differences and difficulties can be intensely isolating, yet also drive one to rely on others and form new connections.

Chapter 21 Quotes

"My father told me there was nothing I could to escape this fate. That prophecy is like a timing device buried inside my genes, and nothing can ever change it. *I will kill my father and be with my mother and sister.*"

Related Characters: Kafka's Sister, Kafka's Mother, Koichi Tamura, Oshima

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

After reading of his father's death in the newspaper, Kafka finally voices the prophecy that drove him away from home and continually haunts him. As Kafka and Oshima discuss, the prophecy is an obvious parallel to the Oedipus myth, which centers around a prophecy that Oedipus will kill his father and sleep with his mother. Oshima says that such omens are meant to teach people about irony and the dangers of self-fulfilling prophecy, but Kafka views them quite differently. For Kafka, a strong and literal belief in fate and prophecy mean that he sees his father's omen as a direct, inescapable warning of what will come. Understandably, he is tormented by this thought, and feels as if he is trapped on a path towards this unhappy fate. As a result, he feels that his decisions do not matter. Regardless of whether fate truly exists or not, Kafka behaves as if it does, thereby making fate as good as real. His father's

prophecy has also profoundly affected how he sees his own body. As he describes here, he feels that his physical body itself carries the dangerous omen within it, an evil inherited from his father in his very genes. He has the disturbing sensation that, because of his genetic relationship to his father, he is doomed to fulfill the omen against his own will.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ One by one the words find a home in my heart. It's a weird feeling. Images beyond any meaning arise like cutout figures and stand alone, just like when I'm in the middle of a deep dream.

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker), Miss Saeki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

After returning from the cabin and moving into the library, Kafka begins to feel a strong connection to Miss Saeki. Although he can't fully explain the feeling, he wants to explore it more, so he listens to *Kafka on the Shore*, the song she wrote for her late boyfriend as a college student. The name of the song itself is just one of the many connections Kafka has begun to make between the two of them to bolster his own feeling that they are being somehow pulled together by destiny. The song is also an example of the power of music, a theme Murakami returns to often in the novel. Although the song was written before Kafka was born, and for another boy, its haunting melody and strange lyrics seem to speak to him. The song provides a link to the past, communicating the feelings Miss Saeki had for her boyfriend long ago. It allows Kafka to deeply empathize with Miss Saeki's experience.

❝ *The drowning girl's fingers*

Search for the entrance stone, and more.

Lifting the hem of her azure dress,

She gazes—

at Kafka on the shore.

The lyrics to "Kafka on the Shore" speak deeply to Kafka, serving as one of many pieces of real or imagined evidence convincing him that he is being drawn to Miss Saeki by fate. Indeed, there are many references in the song tying different elements of the book together, adding a note of surrealism and coincidence that helps explain why characters like Kafka might believe so strongly in fate. The most obvious instance of this is the connection to Kafka's name, which seems especially powerful because he chose the name "Kafka" for himself. The reference to the "search for the entrance stone" connects Miss Saeki and Kafka's story to that of Hoshino and Nakata, reinforcing the suspicion of many characters in the book that their lives are on predetermined paths.

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker), Miss Saeki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 252

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ I breathe very quietly, waiting for the dawn. A cloud parts, and moonlight shines down on the trees in the garden. There are just too many coincidences. Everything seems to be speeding up, rushing towards one destination.

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

As the ghost of Miss Saeki starts appearing in Kafka's room, he becomes even more convinced that he is on a path predetermined by destiny. Destiny, he thinks, explains why he felt drawn to the library, why he knew he would be able to find help there, and why he has been so drawn to miss Saeki. It is perhaps not destiny itself, but rather the belief in it, that is driving these events. Kafka was able to make connections with Oshima and find a home at the library because his belief in fate emboldened him to ask Oshima for help and let him into his life, despite his pledge to stay tough and independent. He fell in love with Miss Saeki because

she was around the right age to be his mother, and Kafka's obsession with prophecy dictates that he will fall in love with his mother. There are, indeed, a number of coincidences in Kafka's life—but Murakami asks readers to consider that this may be primarily because he is looking very hard for them.

Chapter 31 Quotes

❝ "I had something too complete, too perfect, once, and afterward all I could do was despise myself. That's the curse I can never escape. So I'm not afraid of death."

Related Characters: Miss Saeki (speaker), Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 295

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Saeki talks to Kafka in her office above the library, cautiously answering his questions about her past life. In this exchange, she references the intense relationship she had with her childhood sweetheart, and the way that his loss still affects her. She is unable to be happy by herself. His loss has also made her feel trapped in her own destiny, much like Kafka. She believes she can "never escape" the unhappiness she brought upon herself by falling so deeply in love. This sensation is extremely disheartening, because she has no hope for the future and does not believe she deserves to be happy. At the same time, belief in such fate means that she is no longer afraid of death. Death feels both inevitable and deserved; in this way, belief in fate removes a sense of joy and purpose from life, replacing it with morose feelings of being trapped.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ "I used to be normal, just like everybody else. But something happened and I ended up like a container with nothing inside."

"Yeah, but if you look at it like that we're all pretty much empty, don't you think?"

Related Characters: Satoru Nakata (speaker), Hoshino

Related Themes:

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

In this conversation between Nakata and Hoshino, Nakata reflects on how his childhood accident changed him. Through his friendship with Hoshino—the first real human interaction he's had in years—and his journey out of Tokyo, Nakata has begun to see the limitations of his own self-sufficiency and the downsides of his solitary lifestyle. It has also brought him awareness of just how different he is from everyone else. Nakata is increasingly aware of the sense that there is a literal gap between his body and mind, a more literal version of a sense of discomfort that many characters in the novel face. His body feels like merely an empty container. This realization is isolating, as Nakata feels as if he is experiencing something no one else can understand. But Hoshino can offer some reassurance. Although Nakata may have experienced something extreme in his childhood accident, the sense of discomfort he carries with him now is actually something that almost everyone faces at one time or another. Sharing feelings that seem to be profoundly isolating can actually help people connect to others who may be going through the same thing.

Chapter 34 Quotes

❝ Listening to Fournier's flowing, dignified cello, Hoshino was drawn back to his childhood. He used to go to the river every day to catch fish. Nothing to worry about back then, he reminisced. Just live each day as it came. As long as I was alive, I was *something*.

Related Characters: Hoshino (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 328

Explanation and Analysis

Hoshino spends a couple of days wandering the city, watching art films and listening to classical music for the first time. Listening to and discussing the music, Hoshino discovers a new and deep interest, which makes him wonder if it might be possible for him to change other parts of his life, as well. Like other characters in the novel, Hoshino begins to use music as a tool for self-reflection. Allowing himself to contemplate music, Hoshino has the mental space to reflect on his past and start questioning his life. For the first time, he begins to think more seriously about his sense of self-worth and his hopes for the future.

Chapter 35 Quotes

"There are a lot of things that aren't your fault. Or mine, either. Not the fault of prophecies, or curses, or DNA, or absurdity. Not the fault of structuralism or the Third Industrial Revolution. We all die and disappear, but that's because the mechanism of the world itself is built on destruction and loss."

Related Characters: Oshima (speaker), Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 336

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Oshima briefly offers an alternative to the fears and insecurities that plague Kafka. Because the book is largely narrated from Kafka's perspective, his belief in prophecy and fears about the evil contained within his DNA come across as legitimate and pressing. But when Oshima offers his counsel, the reader can briefly see how Kafka's logic might be flawed. The claim that prophecies or DNA are responsible for misfortune seems just as implausible as believing that there is some guiding principle of "absurdity" at work, or as blaming personal misfortune on completely unrelated factors like structuralism or the industrial revolution. In this way, Murakami shows the flaws in Kafka's reasoning, and highlights the extent to which his beliefs in fate and evil within his body may be completely irrational.

Chapter 37 Quotes

"I know how you feel," he finally says. "But this is something you have to figure out on your own. Nobody can help you. That's what love's all about, Kafka."

Related Characters: Oshima (speaker), Miss Saeki, Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 351

Explanation and Analysis

As Oshima leaves Kafka in the remote mountain cabin for the second time, Kafka expresses his anguish at being separated from Miss Saeki. Oshima's answer is bittersweet, pointing to the ways in which love is both a source of comfort and a source of loneliness. Oshima says that he knows how Kafka is feeling, yet, almost paradoxically, he also says that Kafka is suffering alone and will have to find his own way through the difficult feelings. While his relationship with miss Saeki has allowed Kafka to experience the joys of true love for the first time, it has also introduced him to the sting of intense loneliness and self-doubt that comes along with such relationships. At the same time, there is some comfort in what Oshima says. Even though Kafka is alone, he is also experiencing emotions shared by everyone who has ever been in love.

Chapter 39 Quotes

What makes sense, what doesn't, it's all mixed up. Above me, a crow gives out a piercing caw that sounds like a warning, it's so jarring. I stop and cautiously survey my surroundings.

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

Despite Oshima's serious warnings, Kafka decides to venture onto the dense woods around the cabin. Grappling with his feelings for Miss Saeki as well as his continuing anxiety about the prophecy delivered by his father, Kafka feels that the only way to vanquish this internal turmoil is to fight his way through the tangles of the forest. However, in his quest to understand or overcome these feelings, Kafka is also intentionally putting himself in harm's way. When a crow gives out a caw of apparent warning, Kafka suddenly becomes aware of this danger. Kafka sees crows as a kind of personal talisman, serving as sources of wisdom and guidance to him as in times of stress. This is exemplified by his imagined alter ego, Crow, who frequently gives him advice or tells him to toughen up. In this scene, Kafka is imagining the dense forest as a stand-in for his own confusing psyche. When a crow, which Kafka has come to visualize as his inner voice of reason, issues a loud sound, Kafka naturally associates it with a warning to turn back.

Chapter 41 Quotes

"You have to overcome the fear and anger inside you," the boy named Crow says. "Let a bright light shine in and melt the coldness in your heart. That's what being tough is all about."

Related Characters: The Boy Called Crow (speaker), Kafka Tamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 387

Explanation and Analysis

As Kafka stumbles deeper into the forest, the boy named Crow—Kafka's imagined inner voice of reason—appears to try to calm him down. He advises Kafka to let go of the mounting fear and anger that are driving him into the woods. Kafka first believed that being tough entailed running away from his family and past. Then, he believed that fulfilling the very prophecy he hated was the only way to break free. But here, Murakami demonstrates that the only way for Kafka to actually overcome the toxic relationships of his past and begin to heal himself is by forgiving his family and trying to move on. In this way, he troubles both Kafka's philosophy towards prophecy and his strategy for being independent. Kafka must let go of his belief in and fear of prophecy in order to finally be free of it. True "toughness" is not about fighting, but coming to terms with those who have inflicted hurt—and then letting that hurt go.

Chapter 42 Quotes

❝ He'd resigned himself to the fact that it was only a matter of time before this day came. But now that it had, and he was alone in this quiet room with a dead Miss Saeki, he was lost. He felt as if his heart had dried up.

Related Characters: Oshima (speaker), Miss Saeki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 395

Explanation and Analysis

Oshima, like Miss Saeki, believes that he can control when he will die, a belief that allows him to live with confidence even as he also thinks more about death than the average person. Like many characters in *Kafka on the Shore*, Oshima uses his belief in fate to avoid the thought that only he is responsible for his own path—or, perhaps even more unsettling, the thought that things happen randomly rather than according to a predetermined pattern or narrative. Miss Saeki's death throws that philosophy into crisis. To his surprise, Oshima finds the fact that he was prepared for Miss Saeki's death doesn't bring much comfort at all, nor is he sure what to do next now that this anticipated moment has passed. Even though he believed that Miss Saeki was destined to die soon, that belief did not shelter him from the wave of emotions he felt after she was gone. Oshima realizes that it is impossible to truly anticipate everything, including the true impact of the loss of a loved one.

Chapter 46 Quotes

❝ "But when I listen to this music it's like Beethoven's right here talking to me, telling me something like, *It's ok, Hoshino, don't worry about it. That's life. I've done some pretty awful things in my life too. Not much you can do about it. Things happen. You just got to hang in there.*"

Related Characters: Hoshino (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 430

Explanation and Analysis

After Nakata's death, Hoshino sits and talks to the entrance stone as he tries to figure out what to do. Telling the stone about his past relationships, all of which ended in failure, Nakata suddenly realizes that his life has been relatively meaningless. Such thoughts occurred to him early in his time with Nakata, as well, but now Hoshino feels like he has tools to deal with such feelings and determine how to move forward. Hoshino turns to music as a source of companionship and guidance. He finds that music is a source of empathy, allowing him to feel connected to the artist in a way that diminishes his sense of personal failure. Hoshino uses music to feel connected to Beethoven across time and space, and then uses that imagined connection to comfort himself and see his shortcomings with some perspective.

Chapter 47 Quotes

❝ Mother, you say. I forgive you. And with those words, audibly, the frozen part of your heart crumbles.

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker), Miss Saeki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 442

Explanation and Analysis

In the climactic scene of the novel, Kafka confronts Miss Saeki in the strange cabin in the valley. Although she still evades his question about whether she really is his mother,

Kafka recognizes that this is an opportunity to once and for all put aside the resentments and sadness that he has carried all his life. Rather than fulfilling the prophecy or running from it, Kafka recognizes that the only way to take back control of his own fate is to decide to forgive. Kafka realizes, too, that the only way to become independent is to let go of the painful loss of his mother. Thus, he decides to let go of her. Murakami demonstrates that it is possible to choose not to continue heeding "fate," and that releasing one's attachment to damaging relationships is the only way to heal. To emphasize the intense emotions of the scene, Murakami casts the reader as Kafka himself by putting the scene in first person. He also accomplishes this through hyperbole, saying that the crumbling of Kafka's heart is "audible."

Chapter 48 Quotes

"I think that whenever something happens in the future I'll always wonder—*What would Mr. Nakata say about this? What would Mr. Nakata do?* I'll always have someone I can turn to. And that's kind of a big deal, if you think about it. It's like part of you will always live inside me.

Related Characters: Hoshino (speaker), Satoru Nakata

Related Themes:

Page Number: 455

Explanation and Analysis

Finally, after making peace with Nakata's death and vanquishing the entrance stone, Hoshino prepares to say goodbye and move on. Hoshino realizes that one way to recover from the loss of Nakata is to think about the parts of him that will live on in Hoshino himself. Hoshino's friendship with Nakata—the first real friendship either of them had ever experienced—profoundly changed him, giving him the opportunity to think critically about his own life and envision what he wants his future to look like. Hoshino realizes that by carrying this new outlook forwards, he can honor Nakata's memory and thereby soften the impact of his death. Hoshino's way of imagining this—as if he will be carrying a piece of Nakata inside himself—also reflects Nakata's ingoing preoccupation with his mind as an independent entity from his body. Hoshino's promise to serve as a container for Nakata's memory seems to reinforce that belief. By the end of his life, Nakata was plagued with the thought that his mind was incomplete or even empty, but Hoshino's pledge to keep Nakata's very essence alive suggests that he believes Nakata's memory is worthy of preservation, despite the flaws Nakata saw in himself.

Chapter 49 Quotes

"It's not something you can get across in words. The real response is something words can't express."

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker), Oshima's Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 459

Explanation and Analysis

Oshima's brother drives Kafka back to the library from his turbulent few days at the cabin. Kafka reveals that he ventured deep into the woods and met the World War II soldiers, and Oshima's brother replies that he once did, as well—but stops Kafka from saying more, insisting that it's best to leave the experience unsaid. Even though Kafka and Oshima's brother have shared a very unique and intense experience, there are limitations to what they can understand about each other—and therefore limitations to what they should even try to discuss. Once again, Murakami explores the paradoxical nature of shared experience and understanding. At the same time that it is possible to recognize when others have gone through something similar, ultimately, one's experiences are one's own and it is impossible to perfectly convey an emotion to another person. Yet that very gulf is a universal experience, and one that can create a shared understanding between people. In this case, Kafka says that he understands Oshima's brother's point of view, and feels comforted by the thought that they have experienced something similar, even if it is impossible to discuss.

"I appreciate it," I say. "But that's just a dream too."

Related Characters: Kafka Tamura (speaker), Sakura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 466

Explanation and Analysis

As Kafka prepares to return to life in Tokyo, he gives Sakura a call to say goodbye. His calm demeanor and statements

during the phone call demonstrate just how much he has been changed and healed by his time in the forest and his decision to forgive his parents. Where just a few days previously he was tormented by guilt because he had dreamed about raping Sakura, now, when she expresses anxiety about having a dream about him, he reassures her that it was only a dream and she does not need to worry. By rejecting his father's power to determine Kafka's fate, Kafka has regained control of his life and no longer fears that dreams will lead him to unintentionally fulfill some kind of prophecy. Free from fear that he is doomed to commit incest, he says goodbye to Sakura as his sister—an idea that no longer holds disgust and fear for him.

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.

THE BOY NAMED CROW

Fifteen-year-old Kafka Tamura, who is preparing to run away from home, sits in his father's study with the boy called Crow. Kafka is nervous; Crow advises him to be tough and strong, and make sure he has taken enough money to survive, at least for a while.

Kafka's decision to run away and the practical planning he has put towards this goal demonstrate that he values the ability to survive on his own. The mysterious character Crow, however, points out Kafka's insecurities and the extent to which he doubts his own abilities.

Crow warns Kafka that he will have to weather a storm—a storm that he will not be able to outrun, because it is within Kafka himself. Kafka predicts that he will run away from home, journey to a distant town, and live in the corner of a small library. Afterwards, he will be a different person.

Kafka believes that he is destined to run away from home, and that he can see everything that will happen in his own future, giving him a grim sense of purpose and destiny. At the same time, he feels as if he is trapped in his body, with carries within it the turmoil and evil he believes he inherited from his parents. Kafka believes that as hard as he tries, he will not be able to alter his own future or escape the turbulent history he carries in his body.

CHAPTER 1

In addition to the money, Kafka takes a cell phone, an old-fashioned lighter, and a small knife from his father's study. He also takes an old photo of himself and his older sister standing on the beach many years ago. The photo fills him with questions—he can't remember the trip to the beach, or his mother or sister.

Kafka's decision to take only what he needs most from his father's study reflects his commitment to making it on his own as a runaway. The photo reminds him of how alone he feels, with no memory of his mother and sister. Kafka has turned his sense of isolation and loneliness in his family into a determination to escape and live on his own.

Hoping not to stand out as a runaway, Kafka strategically packs a small backpack with clothes. He decides to head for someplace warm so that he won't need as many supplies. Kafka has also spent years working out so that he can be physically strong and appear older. He spends most of his time studying and reading alone, avoiding his father and staying isolated from his peers.

Again, the reader is clued into the elaborate, strategic preparations that Kafka has made to ensure his success and self-sufficiency. Kafka's years of physical and mental exercises demonstrate that he hopes to hone his body and mind like tools, despite the sense of turmoil he often feels.

As Kafka washes up and prepares to leave home, his mind returns to a familiar, dark place. Kafka imagines that deep within his body is a pool of dark water, threatening to drown him at any moment. Kafka imagines a dangerous "mechanism" hidden within his DNA, an omen that he cannot escape.

Kafka is obsessed with the idea that, deep within his body, there is some kind of physical manifestation of the evil his father passed on to him. If Kafka isn't careful, he worries, this darkness will overwhelm him.

Kafka decides to head from his home in Tokyo towards Takamtsu, in Shikoku, Western Japan. He leaves the house and boards a bus headed West. Even as he drifts off to sleep on the speeding bus, Kafka can feel the omen following him.

Despite putting physical distance between himself and his father, Kafka feels as if there is a dark omen following him. Kafka's belief in this omen shapes how he perceives everything around him, even when things are going well.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter takes the form of a declassified US Army document from World War II. In 1946, Second Lieutenant Robert O'Connor conducted a series of interviews in Yamanashi Prefecture to investigate the mysterious "Rice Bowl Hill Incident" of 1944. Lt. O'Connor notes that his interview subject, the schoolteacher Setsuko Okamochi, seems intelligent and responsible, but also still traumatized by the incident.

Murakami uses frequent perspective and tense shifts to craft his narrative, heightening the surrealism of the novel. In this flashback, conveyed in the format of an army document, the reader is introduced to a mysterious incident from the past.

In the interview, Setsuko recalls that on the morning of the incident she and her students observed a bright silver flash moving across the sky. They thought it might be a B-29 or some other kind of army plane. O'Connor responds that, according to records, there were no U.S. airplanes in the region at the time. Setsuko also tells Lt. O'Connor that her husband was killed during the war.

The bright flash in the sky is never fully explained, but in retrospect everyone assumes that it was an omen of the coming incident. This demonstrates people's tendency to search for patterns of meaning in random events.

At Lt. O'Connor's request, Setsuko then tells the story of the day of the incident. On the morning of the incident, she led a group of children—five of whom had been evacuated from Tokyo to the school in the countryside—to gather mushrooms on a hill called "Rice Bowl Hill." Other than the brief sight of the airplane, it was a normal, peaceful morning in the woods.

Although Murakami does not explicitly say so, the scenes of food gathering on Rice Bowl Hill are evidence of shortages that affected the countryside during World War II. Beneath this idyllic scene of an outdoor field trip, there are hints of the difficulty of survival during the war, which touched the lives of children as well as adults.

Soon after Setsuko and the children stopped to pick mushrooms, the children began to collapse. They seemed to be unconscious, but their eyes continued to look around, almost as if a part of their minds were still awake even though their bodies remained limp. Feeling terrified and alone, Setsuko ran down the hill to search for help. After a pause, she tells Lt. O'Connor that she didn't notice anything unusual before the children began to collapse.

One of the most striking things about the incident is the fact that the children's minds seem to be acting independently of their bodies. This phenomenon reinforces a larger trend in the book: characters often feel as if their minds are disconnected from their bodies, or as if their consciousness has the ability to roam around influencing events separately from their physical actions and desires.

CHAPTER 3

Kafka awakens as his bus pulls off the highway into a rest area. As he's sipping some tea in the cafeteria rest area, a talkative girl from the bus sits down with him. She asks if she can sit with Kafka on the bus, and he agrees. The girl says that she believes that chance encounters are part of what gives life meaning.

Like many characters in Kafka on the Shore, in this scene, Kafka and Sakura demonstrate their fervent belief in fate and the power of chance encounters. Whether "fate" truly exists or not, the fact that Sakura and Kafka both believe in it draws them to each other and causes them both to ascribe significance to a random event.

Back on the bus, the girl falls asleep leaning on Kafka's shoulder. Glancing at her body, Kafka feels extremely attracted to her—until he suddenly wonders if this girl could be his long-lost older sister. Before he can think much further, he falls asleep.

Ever since Kafka lost his mother and sister when he was a child, every woman he meets seems as if they might be related to him—especially if he is attracted to them physically or emotionally. For Kafka, this is extremely unsettling.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 is another declassified US Army document from the investigation into the Rice Bowl Hill Incident. This time, it is an interview between Lt. O'Connor and Doctor Juichi Nakazawa, who ran a clinic in a town near Rice Bowl Hill. Nakazawa was called to the scene where the children had collapsed, and rushed there immediately. By the time he arrived, the children had already begun to recover. After examining the children, Nakazawa was at a complete loss—he couldn't determine what had happened to the students or how they might be treated.

The fact that the town's medical professionals are helpless to diagnose or treat the strange illness reinforces the idea that it is some kind of supernatural occurrence—or something affecting their minds and not their bodies.

As the children gradually began to return to consciousness on their own, Dr. Nakazawa questioned them and found that they had no memory of the incident. They all seemed to completely recover. However, one boy, an evacuee from Tokyo named Satoru Nakata, remained unconscious. Dr. Nakazawa was warned by the police never to speak of this incident. He tells Lt. O'Connor that it remains a painful memory.

The fact that the children have no memory of the incident is another detail that makes it seem as if they have suffered some kind of supernatural event. The failure of everyone involved with investigating the incident to learn what truly happened also points to a sense of confusion, anguish, and helplessness inspired by the senseless violence of war.

CHAPTER 5

As the bus arrives in Takamatsu, Kafka introduces himself to the girl next to him, who is named Sakura (a different name, he notes, from that of his older sister). She gives him her phone number, and muses again that she believes all meetings are the result of fate.

Kafka believes that he is destined to meet his sister by chance, a feeling so strong that it persists even in the face of contrary evidence—like the fact that Sakura does not resemble his sister in any way. Sakura, too, believes their meeting is the result of a different kind of fate. For her, all chance encounters carry with them a feeling of destiny, which causes her to trust and open up to people she just met.

Feeling free and independent, Kafka checks into a local hotel and heads to the Komura Memorial Library outside of town. There, he meets Oshima, an extremely well-dressed, composed young librarian, who tells him about the library's collection of classics and poetry. Kafka settles in to read. That afternoon, when Oshima realizes that Kafka has struck out on his own, he tells Kafka about the ancient theory that people were once composed of two halves split apart by God, and are therefore destined to spend their lives searching for their missing other halves.

Feeling like he has successfully carried out his escape plan, Kafka's sense of independence and self-sufficiency grows. His unusual conversation with Oshima touches on the subject of independence. Oshima's somewhat bleak outlook suggests that it may not actually be possible to be truly independent. Oshima believes that, according to fate, everyone is incomplete until they meet a soul mate who completes them.

At 2:00 PM, Kafka pauses from his book to take a tour of the library lead by Miss Saeki, an extremely elegant middle-aged woman who runs the library. Kafka is struck by her beauty and wonders if she could be his mother. At the end of the day, Kafka returns to the hotel and feels relieved that he has had a successful first day as a runaway. He falls into a dreamless sleep.

Just like his meeting with Sakura, Kafka's first impression of Miss Saeki is colored by his constant feeling that he is bound to meet his mother at some point. Even random encounters with strangers become imbued with significance and turbulent emotions because of this belief in destiny.

CHAPTER 6

In a vacant lot in Tokyo, an old man strikes up a conversation with a black cat. The cat is initially surprised that that a human can speak to and understand him, but they soon fall into an easy conversation. The old man introduces himself as Nakata and asks if he can call the cat by the name Otsuka, and the cat agrees. Nakata tells Otsuka that ever since an accident when he was young, he hasn't been able to read or write—and although he gained the ability to speak to cats, many people tell him he's dumb. He speaks in a simple, somewhat halting manner, sometimes referring to himself in third person. He also lost all his memories in the accident, and the ability to understand abstract concepts.

Nakata reveals that his childhood accident profoundly altered his mind in ways he's still trying to understand even now. The fact that he can speak to cats suggests that something supernatural happened on Rice Bowl Hill, fitting with Murakami's larger project of using surrealism to emphasize the power of the mind. Nakata's experiences and disabilities have isolated him, leaving him to live a largely solitary existence.

Nakata tells Otsuka that he makes some extra money by searching for lost house cats. Right now, he's on the search for a tortoiseshell cat named Goma. Otsuka, unfortunately, hasn't come across Goma, but he wishes Nakata luck. He also observes that Nakata's shadow seems to be fainter than a normal shadow.

Nakata has learned how to leverage his special abilities to support himself in a world that has been less than kind to him. The significance of his faint shadow is unclear, but suggests that he is somehow fundamentally different from others, perhaps as a result of his accident.

CHAPTER 7

After consulting with Crow about the best course of action, Kafka bluffs his way into extending his student rate at the hotel in Takamatsu without revealing that he's a runaway. He goes to work out at the gym, which helps him to feel more in control, and then heads to the library. Crow reminds him to be "the toughest fifteen-year-old on the planet."

Kafka is on high alert, using both his mental and physical prowess as tools to help him be self-sufficient. Physical exercise helps him feel more in control of his unruly thoughts, as does turning to his guiding voice, Crow, for advice.

Kafka spends another day reading at the Komura library, and reveals to Oshima that he never plans to return to home or school, but he is hesitant to explain why. Oshima is concerned that Kafka will not be able to take proper care of himself, but does not seem as if he will report Kafka to the authorities.

Kafka is reluctant to compromise his independence by telling anyone what he's doing, but he likes Oshima in spite of himself, and breaks his resolve. Oshima's acceptance of the situation is a hint that Kafka may be able to trust more people besides just himself.

For the next week, Kafka falls into a lonely, orderly routine, spending mornings in the gym, afternoons at the library, and evenings alone in his hotel.

Despite connecting with Oshima, Kafka remains introverted and independent so that he does not risk getting caught. For the time being, spending his days alone seems to be the best option.

CHAPTER 8

In this declassified US Army document, Lt. O'Connor interviews Doctor Shigenori Tsukayama, a psychiatry professor. During the war, Dr. Tsukayama was ordered by the military to inspect the children involved in the Rice Bowl Hill Incident. Since other factors like poison gas had been ruled out, Dr. Tsukayama concluded that the children fell unconscious and lost their memories of the incident because of group hypnosis. But Nakata remained unconscious, and it was unclear why. Though his body continued to function normally, Tsukayama said in the interview, it was as if his mind had gone elsewhere to wander, leaving his body behind like "a fleshy container." Tsukayama said it reminded him of Japanese myths of "spirit projection," in which the soul separates from a living body and wanders like a ghost.

To heighten the mystery of what happened to Nakata, and further suggest that the event was both supernatural and psychological, Murakami includes this psychiatrist interview. Even reputable scientists like Tsukayama have apparently connected the incident to a supernatural theory: Nakata's mind actually left his body. This is a literal version of a sensation experienced by many characters—that their "selves" are separate from, and oftentimes at odds with, their physical bodies. The fact that Nakata has literally experienced such a disconnect highlights the intensity of that feeling in other characters.

Despite the best efforts of the doctors, nothing could be done to wake Nakata from his coma until one day, after weeks, he woke up on his own. Physically, Nakata was fine, but his mind had been wiped clean.

Again emphasizing the disconnect between body and mind, Nakata had an experience that altered his mind but left his body intact.

CHAPTER 9

Kafka suddenly wakes up lying on the damp ground beneath a bush on the grounds of a Shinto shrine. In a panic, he realizes he has no memory of the past few hours. The front of his shirt is covered in blood, and it doesn't seem to be his own. In his head, Crow tells Kafka to calm down and plan his next steps. With effort, he calms down and calls Sakura, then takes a cab to her apartment.

When Kafka wakes up in a strange place with no memory of the past few hours, it seems to confirm his fear that there is an unknown, dangerous "mechanism" within him operating outside of his control. Kafka calls on his imagined persona Crow to help him be strong and calm, a coping mechanism he frequently employs. Kafka also recognizes that he can't face this problem alone, and so calls on Sakura, marking the beginning of an evolution of his ideas about self-sufficiency and independence.

Kafka and Sakura discuss the blood on his shirt. Kafka worries that he has committed a horrible crime while unconscious, a crime he will be responsible for even if he can't remember it. But Sakura encourages him not to jump to conclusions. Kafka reluctantly reveals to Sakura that he ran away from home, and she tells him her own story of running away as a teenager. Kafka is comforted, and glad that he has someone he can count on, but he still feels like he can't tell her—or anyone—about the omen that drove him away from home.

Kafka's fear that he may have committed a crime while unconscious is one of the many examples of ways in which he feels his body is disconnected from his mind and acting out his subconscious desires. But Sakura, reasonably, points out that such a division is unlikely.

CHAPTER 10

Nakata is attempting to get information about Goma from a striped brown cat he calls Kawamura, but they are having a difficult time understanding each other. A refined Siamese cat named Mimi joins them and helps translate. In this way, Nakata learns that Goma was spotted in a grassy lot nearby. But, Mimi warns, a strange, dangerous man has been capturing cats from that area, so it may be unsafe.

As Nakata continues to search for Goma, Murakami shows that he has learned to leverage his unique skill of talking to cats to become an efficient investigator. Meanwhile, Mimi's ominous warning foreshadows the danger that lies ahead if Nakata continues to pursue his search.

Undaunted, Nakata settles into a corner of the grassy lot to wait for Goma to reappear. As he waits, Nakata lets his mind wander, feeling as if he is standing on the edge of a great, dark abyss.

Nakata is able to figuratively let his mind drift away from his body, paralleling his childhood accident in which doctors observed that is seemed as if his consciousness had left his body to wander elsewhere.

CHAPTER 11

In Sakura's apartment, Kafka tells Sakura about running away from home and that his mother and sister left the family when he was just four, but decides not to tell her anything about his father. Sakura tells Kafka that the only person he can rely on is himself. Kafka sets up a sleeping bag on the floor for the night.

Even as Kafka opens up to Sakura, he feels like he has to hold information back from her and remain closed off within himself. Her statement that he can only rely on himself seems to confirm that instinct. Even as Kafka begins to connect to a new friend, he can't shake the lonely feeling that he must keep some of his deepest concerns private.

Before long, Sakura tells Kafka he can get into bed with her, but that they can't have sex since she has a boyfriend in Tokyo. Still, she starts to give him a handjob, while asking him questions about his older sister. Kafka asks if he can picture Sakura naked. Sakura thinks it's a silly question, but Kafka believes that imagining is important and that Sakura has a right to know what he's thinking about her.

That Sakura talks to Kafka about his sister during this sexual exchange suggests that, for Kafka, whether or not he likes it, the idea of sleeping with his sister may have become sexualized for him.

The next morning, Kafka wakes to find that Sakura has gone to work, leaving him alone in the apartment. He cleans the apartment and leaves Sakura a note thanking her for the night before. He's not sure what to do next: he doesn't want to return to his hotel in case he committed a crime the night before, and he doesn't know anyone in town. He feels as if he is being pulled by destiny to the Komura Memorial Library, and that everything will work out if he goes there, so he heads towards the library.

Kafka lets his belief in fate and destiny guide him in this moment of uncertainty. His belief in fate can be debilitating because it makes him feel trapped, but in moments like this one his belief in fate, regardless of whether or not it is misguided, helps him to act decisively. Murakami demonstrates that belief in fate is a double-edged sword, providing both a sense of direction and fear of the future.

CHAPTER 12

In a letter dated October 19, 1972, Setsuko Okamochi makes a confession to a psychology professor who participated in the military investigation into the Rice Bowl Hill Incident. Setsuko reveals that she kept certain things hidden during the investigation but now, many years later, they weigh heavily on her mind. Setsuko writes that the night before the incident, she had an incredibly vivid dream about having sex with her husband, who was away at war at the time. Even after waking and heading out on the field trip, Setsuko felt as if she were "still in the middle of that realistic, erotic dream."

Setsuko's letter reveals yet another perspective on the Rice Bowl Hill incident. This letter to a psychologist reveals that, like Kafka, Setsuko believes that her dreams can have an impact on those around her.

Just as Setsuko reached the top of the hill with the children, she realized that her period had started—perhaps, Setsuko writes, because the dream had physically stirred something in her body. Setsuko cleaned herself up in the woods with some towels and returned to supervise the children, feeling guilty for allowing her mind to linger on the erotic dream in front of her students.

In a further demonstration of the power Setsuko believes her dream had, she writes that she believes it altered her physically body, causing her period to start. Setsuko seems to worry that even her most private thoughts can somehow be intuited by others, which is perhaps why she feels guilty for continuing to think about the dream in front of her students.

One of the children, Nakata, approached Setsuko with something in his hands: one of the bloody towels Setsuko had used to clean herself up. Horrified, Setsuko began to slap and yell at Nakata while the other children watched as if frozen in place. When she realized what she was doing, Setsuko began to weep and apologize. But then, the children collapsed. Later, none of them seemed to remember anything about the incident.

The fact that Nakata managed to find one of the bloody towels seems to confirm Setsuko's fear that the thoughts she is trying to keep secret from the children are somehow being detected by them. Both the strange comas and the children's inability to remember the incident later suggest—to Setsuko, at least—that Setsuko's thoughts and actions have had a profound psychological impact on the children. This thought wracks her with guilt.

Setsuko writes that she never found out what happened to Nakata after the incident. Previously, Nakata had been a bright, if quiet, child. Setsuko had hoped to draw him out of his shell. But after the incident, Nakata was hospitalized and that was no longer possible. Setsuko feels to blame. She closes her letter with a note that when her husband died shortly afterwards, she felt no shock at all. Ever since that day in the woods, it felt to Setsuko as if her husband's death was fated to be.

The guilt that continues to haunt Setsuko suggests that she, like Kafka, feels that her thoughts have real consequences. Meanwhile, Setsuko's sense of fate and destiny softens the blow of death, as it does for many other characters in the novel. Setsuko sees her husband's death as an inevitability brought about by her own dangerous thoughts.

CHAPTER 13

At the Komura library, Oshima offers Kafka some lunch and engages him in a conversation about the turn-of-the-century Japanese novelist Natsume Soseki. Crow helps Kafka put his feelings about the writer into words. Oshima says he believes Goethe's sentiment that "everything's a metaphor."

Kafka feels like Crow can articulate ideas that Kafka has a hard time putting into words, but Crow is part of Kafka—a type of coping mechanism that Kafka employs as he gathers his thoughts. Oshima's assertion that everything is a metaphor becomes more relevant as the story unfolds and different characters are revealed to symbolize or "twin" other characters, just as one thing twins another in a metaphor.

Put at ease by the conversation, Kafka reveals that he has nowhere to stay and asks Oshima for help. Surprisingly, Oshima has a solution: if Miss Saeki agrees, Kafka can live in the library. In the meantime, Oshima will take Kafka somewhere he can stay for the night. Kafka is surprised but grateful.

Kafka realizes that, paradoxically, in order to maintain his status as an independent runaway, he must ask for help and advice. The risk pays off, and Kafka learns he can trust Oshima when Oshima offers to help.

When the library closes, Kafka and Oshima get in Oshima's green Mazda Miata and speed off down the highway. Oshima tells Kafka that he has hemophilia, a condition that would make even a slight injury potentially fatal. Normally, he is quite cautious, but he drives at reckless speeds because he would prefer to die instantly in a crash than to slowly bleed to death. Reasonably, Kafka finds this revelation unsettling. But Oshima reassures him that since he isn't planning on dying that evening, getting into a crash simply "isn't an option."

Oshima reveals a frustrating limitation of his body, one that makes him feel as if he is trapped inside his skin. Such a condition is another of the many ways Murakami explores the idea of a sense of self that is at odds with, yet nonetheless tethered to, the physical body. Oshima's belief that he can predict or control the moment of his death leads him to act confidently, even recklessly.

To further this point, Oshima puts Schubert's Sonata in D Major on the CD player. He explains that it is extremely difficult to play the Sonata without errors, while still preserving its feeling, so most performances are slightly imperfect in a way he finds enjoyable. If he were to listen to a perfect piece of music, Oshima says, he would probably close his eyes and die right there. As the Miata speeds down increasingly dangerous mountain roads, Kafka decides not to worry about a fatal crash, because Oshima has made it clear that he has no intention of dying.

Oshima's confidence is contagious, and soon Kafka is calmed because he, too, has the sense that Oshima has complete control over his destiny. That sense is bolstered by Oshima's ideas about music: Oshima reveals that he feels such an intense connection to classical music that to hear the perfect song would be to die. This makes him one of several characters in the novel that has a special relationship to music.

Finally, several hours after they leave the library, Kafka and Oshima arrive at a small log cabin deep in the forest. Oshima tells Kafka that his brother, a surfer in Kochi, built the cabin on mountain land that has been in their family for generations. When Oshima was young, his brother practically forced him to live in isolation in the cabin for stretches at a time; now, Oshima sees that he needed the experience. The cabin is sparse, without electricity or running water. Outside is a dense forest, and Oshima warns Kafka that he will almost certainly get lost if he ventures into the trees.

Nestled deep in the woods, the cabin is the ultimate site of independence and isolation. Oshima hints at some of the strong, contradictory feelings that such an arrangement can excite—both feelings of being trapped alone, and, in retrospect, a sense that the experience of being so isolated helped him to grow.

CHAPTER 14

Nakata stakes out the grassy lot for several days, waiting for some sign of Goma. One day he meets a black and white cat, Okawa, who warns him that Goma is mixed up in some dangerous business that he'd rather not talk about. That evening, a huge, fierce-looking black dog lumbers into the empty lot. He seems to be beckoning Nakata to follow, and he does. The dog leads Nakata to a neighborhood he's never seen before, and into the living room of a large stone house. Seated on a swivel chair inside is a mysterious man in a long red coat, black vest, white trousers, and tall black boots. He takes a sip of whiskey and introduces himself as Johnnie Walker.

As he searches for Goma, Nakata demonstrates the relative contentment of his very solitary existence. Meanwhile, the omen-like warnings of the cats—which seemed as if they must be either untrue or exaggerated from a cat's perspective because of how extreme they were—prove to be true when Nakata is led to the home of a strange man who matches the description provided by the cats.

Johnnie Walker reveals that he has Goma, and that he will give Nakata an opportunity to get her back. But first, he says, they will play a game. Nakata stays silent.

Nakata's ability to continue supporting himself through the unique business he has established hangs in the balance in this surreal encounter.

CHAPTER 15

Telling Kafka that he will return in a couple of days, Oshima drives away in the Miata, leaving Kafka alone in the dark woods. Kafka tries to get to sleep in his sleeping bag, but it is oppressively dark and silent. he can't shake the feeling he's being watched. In his head, Crow mocks him for being afraid of something so harmless as the dark. Kafka reminds himself that Oshima, too, spent time here alone as a teenager, and must have experienced the same solitude and fear. That thought comforts him, and he drifts off to sleep.

In the cabin, Kafka's ability to thrive on his own is put to an extreme test. As Kafka struggles to sleep in the dark, he turns to Crow for help—but, instead of offering counsel, Crow is critical, teasing Kafka for his weakness. Kafka realizes that his shared experience with Oshima can be a source of strength. In this way, Kafka is reminded that relying on others can help him to be stronger, and that even the most seemingly isolating experiences can be a source of connection to others.

After making some breakfast and exploring the stream by the cabin, Kafka settles down with a book about Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi who was responsible for inventing ways to kill Jews during World War II. Previously, the book belonged to Oshima, and Kafka sees that Oshima has scribbled some margin notes: "Our responsibility begins with the power to imagine." Thinking about his blood-stained shirt, the words resonate with Kafka. He worries that he will be held responsible for the contents of his dreams, even if he has no control over them. He also thinks about asking Sakura if he could imagine her naked, and decides again that what he imagines is very important—"for the entire world."

In this scene, Kafka solidifies and brings out into the open a mindset that has driven him throughout the novel. Reinforced by his reading about Eichmann, Kafka believes that people are responsible for not just their actions but also the contents of their thoughts. This is a mindset that puts him constantly on edge, especially because he feels like he has no control over some of his deepest and most subconscious desires.

Despite Oshima's warning, Kafka decides to venture into the woods. Almost immediately, he becomes disoriented and is chilled by the thought that he won't be able to find the cabin again. Carefully, he retraces his steps and finds his way back. He feels awed by the power of the forest, which could swallow him whole. To bring himself back to reality, he listens to Cream and Duke Ellington on his Walkman. After working out and eating dinner, Kafka sits under the stars. Once again, he is awed by the vastness and power of nature—and afraid. Looking at the stars makes him feel watched and helpless, a feeling he worries he will never outrun. He falls asleep wishing Sakura were his real sister.

As Kafka adapts to life in the woods, he confronts the experience of being totally alone in nature. Total isolation gives him the opportunity to start noticing and appreciating nature for the first time, demonstrating one benefit of such isolation. Kafka also learns that music has the power to ground him, providing comfort in times of loneliness. At the same time, total isolation has also left Kafka alone with his insecurities, which only intensify. As he reflects on his journey so far, he is once again struck by the horrible sensation that he is trapped on a predetermined path. Isolation in the forest is both helping him to grow and bringing out some of his worst, most irrational fears.

On the second day, Kafka repeats the same routine, this time venturing slightly deeper into the forest. His feeling of helplessness has melted away, and he makes his way easily back to the cabin. In the afternoon, he washes himself in a rainstorm, which leaves him feeling purified and calm. Yet, in his mind, Crow warns that the calm won't last long. Inevitably, says Crow, Kafka will dream about raping his mother or sister. He worries about the consequences of his dreams and imagination, and thinks that, ultimately, those are things he cannot control. Shortly after, the batteries in Kafka's Walkman die, leaving him in a thick silence.

Over the course of a few days in the woods, Kafka's relationship with isolation has evolved. After just a couple of days, he has begun to see the beauty of nature and appreciate the clarity and calm that being alone has allowed him to experience. At the same time, an inner voice that he can't seem to silence—in the form of Crow—continues to toy with the idea that powerful forces within Kafka's mind will overwhelm him with illicit thoughts and bring more evil into the world.

CHAPTER 16

In Johnnie Walker's house, the big dog leads Nakata to a clean, cold kitchen. Nakata opens a large fridge to find that it's full of frozen, severed cat's heads staring forward expressionlessly. Luckily, Goma is not among them. Back in the study, Johnnie Walker reveals that he kills cats in order to collect their souls, which he is using to make a special flute. That flute will allow him to collect even larger souls, which will allow him to build a larger flute, and so on. Nakata is confused.

This surreal scene emphasizes the absurdity of violence. It also helps the reader to understand Nakata's unique perspective. Nakata is often dismissed as a crazy old man because his ways of speaking and perceiving the world are unusual. The strangeness of the situation demonstrates how difficult it can be for Nakata to navigate a world he himself does not fully understand.

Johnnie Walker reveals that Goma is among the next batch of cats he has captured and plans to kill. He will return her to Nakata if he performs a task in exchange: Nakata must kill Johnnie Walker. Johnnie Walker is tired of living, and taking his own life "isn't an option." Nakata protests that he could never do such a thing. Whistling cheerfully, Johnnie Walker pulls a live but paralyzed gray cat out of a bag and cuts it open with a scalpel. He removes the cat's still-beating heart and pops it in his mouth, then uses a saw to cut off the cat's head. Nakata is frozen, but feels as if something is stirring in his mind.

Johnnie Walker's desire to control his own death is part of a broader trend of characters who believe they can do so. These characters do not fear death because they believe they can choose the moment of their own death, thereby robbing death of some of its power. They believe they can control fate. Like Kafka, Nakata begins to experience his own impulse towards violence and anger as something foreign to himself—suggesting his mind and actions are not entirely within his control.

Johnnie Walker dispatches a second cat in the same manner, still whistling cheerfully. Nakata feels a horrible confusion rising up within him, transforming his being and blurring his vision. Johnnie Walker pulls a third cat from the bag—Kawamura. Before Nakata can act, Johnnie Walker cuts the cat open. Nakata begs Johnnie Walker to stop, but he continues, pulling Mimi out of the bag.

Nakata's sensation of his own anger as a foreign influence intensifies, highlighting the duality of mind and body that runs as a theme throughout the novel.

Nakata warns Johnnie Walker to stop, saying he no longer feels like himself. Feeling as if he has lost control of his body, Nakata picks up a steak knife from the desk in the study and plunges it into Johnnie Walker's stomach, and then his chest. Johnnie laughs and coughs up blood before collapsing on the floor, dead. Nakata scoops up Mimi and Goma, who was in the bag, and tries to leave but can't stand up. He collapses on the sofa and loses consciousness.

Finally, in a climactic moment, Nakata is overwhelmed by desires and impulses which feel external to him. He feels as if forces outside of his control have driven him to violence. Desires he did not know he possessed have broken to the surface and caused him to physically commit violence, calling attention to the ways in which people are often unknown to themselves.

CHAPTER 17

By his third night in the cabin, Kafka feels a sense of peace and awe at nature. In the absence of his Walkman, he has learned to truly hear the beautiful sounds of the forest. As long as he is careful not to venture too far into the silence and darkness of the **labyrinth**-like woods, he is perfectly at peace. On the fourth day, Oshima returns while Kafka is napping, naked, on the porch of the cabin. Kafka tells Oshima he had a wonderful time, omitting his feelings of helplessness and wandering in the woods.

Kafka's time in the cabin has forced him to confront solitude, and now, after several days, he feels at peace with the isolation of the forest (especially if he keeps himself from venturing into the dense, terrifying woods). However, when Oshima returns, Kafka realizes that there are some parts of his experience which are impossible to share even with Oshima.

On the drive back to the city, Oshima observes that Kafka seems to be both seeking something and running away for all he's worth, although Oshima doesn't know from what. He predicts that whatever Kafka seeks will not come in the form he expects. When Kafka responds that that sounds like an ominous prophecy, Oshima tells him the story of Cassandra, an oracle in Greek tragedy who was gifted with foresight but cursed to never be believed. Oshima believes that reality is "the accumulation of ominous prophecies come to life." Then, he tells Kafka that he and Miss Saeki have agreed that he can stay at the library.

In one of the most important conversations in the book, Oshima connects Kafka's experiences to the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus and his self-fulfilling prophecy. Oshima reveals that, like Kafka, he believes in the power of prophecy and omen to shape day-to-day life, even though these concepts are grounded in mythology.

For the rest of the drive, Oshima tells Kafka the story of Miss Saeki's troubled past. As a child, she fell in love with the oldest son of the Komura family. They were inseparable, "like one body and spirit," or like two halves of one whole in the ancient myth Oshima told Kafka earlier. When the young man went to university in distant Tokyo, it felt as if they had been split apart with a knife. They wrote each other every day and stayed faithful to each other.

Miss Saeki and her boyfriend embody the very antithesis of self-sufficiency. They feel as if they are incomplete without each other and are fated to be together—both of which make it extremely difficult for them to be apart.

While her boyfriend was at university, Miss Saeki wrote a hauntingly beautiful song about her love for him. She was invited to Tokyo to record the song, which soon became a hit. The strange thing, says Oshima, is that the song is called "Kafka on the Shore." Just as the song was becoming popular, Miss Saeki's boyfriend was killed accidentally during a student protest. Miss Saeki never sang again and soon disappeared.

As a teenager, Miss Saeki was able to put her turbulent emotions into an extremely powerful song for her boyfriend, demonstrating the ability of music to capture and convey intense feeling. That song became even more meaningful after her boyfriend tragically died. The fact that the song and Kafka share the same unusual name heightens his sense of connection with Miss Saeki, as well as the strange feeling that they are being brought together by a mysterious force like fate or destiny.

Twenty years later, Miss Saeki returned to Takamatsu and took over the Komura Memorial Library, where her boyfriend had lived when they were both teenagers. She keeps others at a distance, speaking only to Oshima with any regularity. She seems to be frozen in time, unable to move past her grief. Now, says Oshima, Kafka will take over the room where Miss Saeki's boyfriend used to live.

Because of their close connection, when Miss Saeki's boyfriend passed away, she was left feeling adrift and helpless. She feels as if she is incomplete without him. It seems like an eerie coincidence—or perhaps something more—that Kafka, who is the same age Miss Saeki's boyfriend was when they met, will now move in to the room where he once lived.

CHAPTER 18

Nakata awakens at night in a clump of weeds in the vacant lot where he had been waiting for Goma. He vividly remembers stabbing Johnnie Walker, but there is no blood on his hands or clothes. However, Mimi and Goma are beside him, which makes him think it wasn't a dream. For some reason, he is no longer able to understand them. Nakata returns Goma to her family.

Not for the first time, Nakata experiences a strange disconnect between his memories and the physical evidence of where he has been, suggesting that the mind and body may not always be entirely bonded to each other.

Feeling that he must confess, Nakata approaches a policeman and tries to tell him what happened. The police officer assumes Nakata is a crazy old man and sends him on his way. As he leaves, Nakata warns that it will rain fish the next day, which the officer also writes off as nonsense. When sardines and mackerel inexplicably fall from the sky the next day, the police officer is shaken. Also the next day, the body of a famous sculptor is found stabbed to death in his home. Shocked, the police officer decides to keep quiet about Nakata's prophecy. By then, Nakata has left town.

Like Kafka, who believes himself to be responsible for the violence he imagines or dreams about, Nakata believes he is responsible for the murder he remembers committing even though it seems like physical evidence of the event has disappeared. When Nakata makes an unlikely prediction about the future, it seems like he might simply be crazy. But the strange prediction comes true, giving Nakata credibility and suggesting that his perception, however surreal, might in fact reflect reality.

CHAPTER 19

Oshima helps Kafka settle into his spartan but comfortable room at the library, and shows him the basic tasks he will be expected to perform around the library. In his room, Kafka notices a small painting of a boy sitting by the beach. He feels drawn to it, and wonders if it depicts Miss Saeki's childhood sweetheart.

Because he places so much significance on chance encounters and has already begun to relate to Miss Saeki, it seems as if Kafka is looking for ways to connect more deeply to her story. He relates to the picture of the boy in the painting because it confirms his hope that there is some special connection between himself and Miss Saeki, drawing them together.

At around 11:30 AM, two serious-looking women enter the library and begin to wander around, taking notes. They tell Oshima that they are representatives from a women's organization, touring public places and cultural sites to assess them for ease of use and fairness of access from a woman's perspective. They take issue with several elements of the library, including the fact that there are shared gender restrooms, and that male authors are arranged before female authors on the bookshelves. Skeptical, Oshima tells them their time could be better used on more pressing issues. One of the women responds that Oshima is a "sexist, patriarchal male." Oshima announces they are wrong, because he is "not a male." Oshima explains that his "body is physically female, but my mind's completely male." He identifies as a gay transgender man. Stunned, the women leave.

Oshima uses this opportunity to reveal an important facet of his identity to Kafka. Oshima explains that his gender identity does not match the gender that he was assigned at birth. For Oshima, this means he feels that there is a disconnect between some aspects of his identity and the body with which he was born. It is frustrating to him when others oversimplify gender issues or fail to take his identity into account.

Kafka, too, is surprised. Oshima explains that he may be a little different, but he's still a regular person. That difference, though can sometimes feel like an abyss—especially when he is faced with discrimination, or the kind of small-mindedness he says the two women displayed. Kafka tells Oshima that he likes him regardless, and Oshima is glad.

Oshima further explains that he sees his body as an imperfect container for his identity or self—but he has nonetheless made peace with the disconnect he feels. Through this personal conversation, Kafka and Oshima become closer.

CHAPTER 20

Hitchhiking in an eighteen-wheeler truck, Nakata arrives at a rest area in Fujigawa, west of Tokyo. It's been a long day: because he can't read, Nakata found it impossible to navigate the series of trains and buses he would have needed to catch to make it to the highway on his own. Eventually, he asked for help from two friendly office workers, who helped him get a ride with a truck driver named Togeguchi. From there, a second truck driver, Hagita, took Nakata the rest of the way to Fujigawa.

As Nakata makes his way out of Tokyo, he begins to push at the limits of his independence and self-sufficiency. He has made a life for himself in Tokyo, but as he makes his way out of the city he realizes that he will need to rely on others to help him overcome basic challenges. Luckily, Nakata learns from reaching out and asking for help that there are plenty of helpful strangers willing to assist him—and knowing how to get help is its own kind of self-sufficient skill.

At the rest stop, Nakata can't find anyone who will take him further west. He sees a group of tattooed men beating and kicking another man on the ground in the parking lot. Nakata tells the men to stop, but they ignore him. Once again, he feels something foreign welling up inside him, as he did when Johnnie Walker was killing the cats. Looking to the sky, Nakata calmly opens his umbrella. As if on his command, leeches begin to rain from the sky, and the young men flee.

Once again, Murakami shows that Nakata seems to have the ability to predict or even precipitate strange events (like leeches falling from the sky). This, it seems, is connected to the resurgence of the feeling that something foreign is welling up inside him—perhaps the impulse to act violently, or to protect others from violence.

Shortly afterwards, Nakata finds a truck driver who will take him to Kobe. He is a twenty-something man with a distinctive style: a ponytail, earring, and flamboyant Hawaiian shirt. He says Nakata reminds him of his grandfather, which is why he agrees to help him.

Like Sakura and Kafka, the truck driver places significance on this chance encounter with Nakata, in part because Nakata reminds him of a family member with whom he shared a special connection.

CHAPTER 21

Oshima gives Kafka a newspaper article titled, "SCULPTOR KOICHI TAMURA STABBED TO DEATH." The article reports that Koichi, a famous sculptor known for his work "**Labyrinth**" was found naked in a pool of blood in his home. Police are treating the case as a vendetta killing, and are on the search for Koichi's fifteen-year-old son, who has been missing for some days. Sickened, Kafka stops reading about his father. Kafka says he didn't commit the murder, and Oshima believes him, because Kafka was in the library the day of the crime and wouldn't have had time to make the journey to Tokyo and back. Privately, Kafka realizes that the murder happened on the same night he woke up covered in blood, and begins to worry he may somehow be responsible.

Even though all evidence points to the contrary, Kafka worries that he is in some way responsible for his father's death, because he believes that his desires—even if they are subconscious, and even if he does not act on them—have real-world consequences. That both Johnnie Walker and Kafka's father were stabbed to death at about the same time suggests that their deaths may somehow be related, and that Kafka's blackout may have something to do with either—or both.

Kafka says he doesn't want to go to the police, because he doesn't want to be forced to return to Tokyo and school. Oshima is supportive but points out that Kafka will have to be on the run from now on. Kafka says that he feels as if he is following a predetermined path decided by someone else, and losing his own identity in the process, which is terrifying. Oshima responds that Kafka is living the motif of many Greek tragedies, in which the protagonist is drawn into a horrible fate despite their most valiant efforts. He gives the example of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus inadvertently fulfills the prophecy of murdering his father and marrying his mother. But, says Oshima, this kind of story is a metaphor meant to teach us about irony and hope, rather than serving as a literal warning about murder and incest.

Despite the concerns expressed by his new friend, Kafka says that he is ready to face a lonely life on the run, fending for himself and simply trying to survive. He is resigned to this fate in part because of his strong belief in fate and predetermination. Kafka's belief in fate causes him to behave as if his path has already been decided. Oshima's story points to the fact that attempts to avoid fate often seem to backfire, pushing people in the very directions they hoped to avoid. However, he also suggests that Kafka shouldn't take such warnings too literally.

Kafka and Oshima decide Kafka will lay low in the library for a few days. Then, Kafka reveals something he's never told anyone before. He says that a few years ago, his father delivered a kind of prophecy or curse about Kafka, and then repeated it over and over. The prophecy was that Kafka would murder his father and sleep with his mother—the same prophecy made about Oedipus, Oshima points out. Kafka's father also added that Kafka would sleep with his older sister as well as his mother. To Kafka, the prophecy feels like "a timing device buried inside my genes," that can never be changed. It is inescapable. Kafka isn't sure if his father behaved in this way to get revenge on the woman who left him, or because his artistic work left emotional scars, or because he was simply cruel, but Kafka knew he had to escape.

Many of Kafka's preoccupations become clearer in this scene. Kafka is obsessed with the idea of fate because his father made him the subject of a literal prophecy, one that derives its form from a famous Greek myth. This explains why he is worried that no matter what decisions he makes, things will end up the same, and also why he is constantly worried that he is related to the women he meets in the world. He feels trapped in his body because he sees his very genes as part of the omen, carrying the evil he inherited from his father and the promise of future incest with his mother and sister. Kafka is unable to let go of the idea of the prophecy, to the point that it dictates how he sees himself and the world.

Oshima points out that the prophecy can't be true, because someone else killed Koichi. But Kafka is hesitant. He theorizes to Oshima that he may have killed his father in a dream and is therefore responsible. Oshima agrees, but comforts Kafka by pointing out that this isn't likely to hold up in court. Even though Kafka feels like his curse is inescapable, he should be safe in Takamatsu. But that night, Kafka sees a ghost for the first time.

Kafka gives voice to his belief that he has the power to enact real violence in his dreams, and reiterates his conviction that he is responsible for what he imagines. Oshima points out that these concerns are not grounded in reality, and that it is not actually possible for Kafka's ideas to act independently of his body.

CHAPTER 22

Nakata and the truck driver, Hoshino, stop for breakfast in Kobe. They fall into easy conversation, which is unusual for Nakata. Nakata explains that it's extremely important that he crosses a bridge into Shikoku, although he doesn't know why. While Hoshino finishes his delivery, Nakata reflects on his life. After the incident during the war, Nakata barely finished school, but never regained the ability to read or write. He worked for most of his life as a furniture maker, and spent the last decade living off a government subsidy in Tokyo. All but forgotten by family and without any friends, Nakata rarely speaks to anyone. When Hoshino returns, he tells Nakata that his plan has changed. Instead of returning to work in Tokyo, he will accompany Nakata to Shikoku by bus.

As Nakata and Hoshino begin to develop a relationship, Nakata, like Kafka before him, begins to learn the benefits of relinquishing some amount of independence in favor of forming friendships. This new friendship is thrown into sharp contrast with Nakata's earlier, extremely solitary existence. Meanwhile, Hoshino, too, decides to open himself up to this new acquaintance, trusting him to lead them onwards.

CHAPTER 23

In the middle of the night, Kafka awakes suddenly in his room in the library to see a young girl of about fifteen sitting at the desk. She seems too perfect to be real, and in fact, when she turns towards Kafka she seems to gaze right past him, as if she is in another world. Soundlessly, the girl exits through the door. For the rest of the night, Kafka remains motionless in bed, wishing she would return.

The presence of the ghost is another surreal element which emphasizes Murakami's focus on the split between the mind and the body. The ghost embodies the idea of disconnect between the mind and body: a disembodied spirit or self wandering around without physical form.

The next day, Kafka asks Oshima if he can help him find an original record of "Kafka on the Shore." Oshima agrees to help, but warns Kafka never to play the song where Miss Saeki might hear. In the storeroom of the library, they find a working record player, but finding an original record might be trickier. Kafka mentions the girl he saw the night before and Oshima jokes that it was probably a sexual fantasy, making Kafka blush.

The song from Miss Saeki's past is wrapped up in so many powerful emotions that Oshima worries it could be harmful for Miss Saeki if she were to hear it. Music has the power to bring back painful memories from the past, and, for Kafka, to help him understand his connection to this mysterious woman.

Luckily, Oshima finds a copy of the record later that day. The picture on the cover of the album confirms what Kafka already suspected—the girl who visited his room was a young Miss Saeki. Kafka is filled with questions. How can Miss Saeki have a ghost while she is still alive? What does it mean that he is intensely attracted to the younger version of her? Kafka asks Oshima whether he believes ghosts of the living can exist, and Oshima tells him about some examples of that phenomenon from Japanese literature. Those stories, he believes, demonstrate a split between the body and some unknowable inner darkness lodged in the subconscious. And, Oshima believes, such living spirits can only arise out of negative emotions or even evil.

In this exchange, Murakami reveals a connection between his own musings on the nature of the soul/body split and wider Japanese culture. By explaining this connection, Murakami grounds one of the novel's main themes in a broader literary context.

Back in his room, Kafka listens to the record several times. Though the lyrics are somewhat surreal, they begin to feel deeply familiar. Listening to it again and again, Kafka becomes convinced that the boy in the painting in his room is the subject of "Kafka on the Shore" and that the desk where he sits is the exact spot where Miss Saeki wrote the song. Though the lyrics are abstract and nonsensical, Kafka becomes convinced that each line speaks directly to him and his own experiences.

Although Kafka and Miss Saeki's ex-boyfriend have little in common, the emotions conveyed by the song foster a strong sense of connection between Kafka and Miss Saeki. This moment shows the various ways that music can be meaningful: in addition to its haunting melody, the song's surreal lyrics make Kafka feel as if the music is speaking directly to him. It is as if he is being drawn into the world of the song.

CHAPTER 24

Hoshino and Nakata arrive in Tokushima. Falling asleep that night in their hotel room, Hoshino quietly wonders what he's doing. On a whim, he has wrangled some time off to go on this mysterious journey with a stranger. He felt drawn to Nakata because he resembles Hoshino's deceased grandfather, but now that feeling has faded. Hoshino realizes he is genuinely interested in Nakata's life, and curious to see where their journey will lead.

Hoshino and Nakata are both relatively independent. Until now, Hoshino has been content with his solitary existence. He is unused to bonding with others and the experience of trusting another person feels odd. But, to his surprise, Hoshino finds that he is enjoying the newfound connection, and decides to continue pursuing it.

Hoshino reflects on his life. After high school, he tried unsuccessfully for some time to get a decent job and eventually settled on truck driving. He is relatively content, but not particularly fulfilled. He also remembers the various fights that landed him in trouble with the police, and the many times his grandfather picked him up at the station. Growing up, he often felt like his grandfather was the only one who cared about him, but Hoshino never properly thanked him.

Like Nakata's flash back, Hoshino's reflection on his life reveals that he has been mostly solitary. He neglected the one meaningful relationship that he did have, a thought that now fills him with regret. Hoshino seems to hope that this new friendship will give him the opportunity to form a connection in a way he has previously avoided.

Nakata sleeps soundly for more than twenty-four hours in the hotel room, and, upon awakening, announces that he believes they should continue west. He also gives Hoshino an extremely painful back massage that nonetheless seems to put Hoshino's spine into a much better alignment. Then, they head by train to Takamatsu. Once there, Nakata announces that he believes they must find "the entrance stone"—but he has no idea what or where it is.

Hoshino and Nakata are able to use their very different skill sets to help each other. Nakata seems to have some special, unique insights that have given them a sense of purpose. Meanwhile, Hoshino is adept at navigating the world and can assist Hoshino in achieving his unique goals. They begin to rely on one another.

CHAPTER 25

Kafka tries to stay awake so that he will not miss the moment that the living ghost arrives, but he does anyway. Suddenly, the young Miss Saeki is sitting at his desk, contemplating the painting of the boy on the shore. Kafka's heart pounds, and for a moment, she seems to be able to hear it. But then, like the night before, she quietly leaves. Kafka realizes that both he and the girl are in love with someone no longer of this world: he is in love with her, and she is in love with the boy in the painting.

Both Kafka and young Miss Saeki are haunted by connections from their past—Miss Saeki with her boyfriend and Kafka with the mother who abandoned him. Because they are both unable to let go of these connections from the past, they are both haunted.

Early the next morning, Kafka walks on the beach and realizes that he's jealous of the boy in the painting. In his head, Crow tells Kafka that Kafka wishes he could switch places with Miss Saeki's teenage boyfriend, even if that would mean dying a premature and pointless death. It is a more intense and painful emotion than any Kafka has felt before. Crow says it is as if he has wandered into "a **labyrinth** of time," and he has no desire to escape.

Kafka's desire to be loved and his fear of abandonment are so intense that he would rather die than face life alone. Even though Kafka has trained himself physically and mentally to be independent and self-sufficient as a teenager, these strong desires keep him from being happy by himself.

Later that day at the library, Oshima and Kafka discuss the dreamlike lyrics of "Kafka on the Shore." They both agree that the lyrics feel meaningful and urgent, yet their symbolism remains hard to grasp. Suddenly, Kafka poses the question that has been weighing heavily on his mind. He asks if Oshima thinks it's possible that Miss Saeki could be his mother. He has a number of reasons for suspecting this: the mysterious gap in Miss Saeki's life story lines up with when Kafka was born; Kafka felt pulled by fate to the library; and, most convincing of all, he is in love with Miss Saeki. Oshima is skeptical, but he doesn't rule out the theory.

Kafka makes explicit the connection between his desire for Miss Saeki and his belief that she could be his mother. This connection demonstrates two things: first, that Kafka's fear of abandonment is driving him towards a potentially unhealthy attachment; and second, that Kafka's obsession with the so-called prophecy about his family is affecting his perception of Miss Saeki. Kafka's circular logic is that the prophecy proves itself: because he is in love with Miss Saeki, she must be his mother, and vice versa. Kafka's overwhelming belief in such a destiny leads him to conclude that everything that has happened to him in Takamatsu is the result of fate, and not his own decision making.


Later in the afternoon, Kafka takes some coffee up to Miss Saeki in her office. She asks why he ran away from home, and he tells her it was to avoid becoming damaged by his family. Miss Saeki reflects that when she was fifteen, she simply wanted to escape to another world outside of time and preserve the fleeting happiness that she felt then. In comparison, she says, Kafka is very strong and independent. She observes that he looks like a boy she knew once. Just as Kafka is leaving the office, Miss Saeki tells him that she once wrote a book about people who had been struck by lightning. That fact seems strangely important to Kafka, but he's not sure why.

Miss Saeki's reflections on her past show that she, too, is haunted by a lost loved one and has been unable to move on. Even when he was alive, Miss Saeki's overwhelming attachment to her boyfriend kept her from enjoying life. Meanwhile, Kafka thinks that running away from his family has allowed him to escape those damaging connections and focus on himself, but instead he has simply found a new way to obsess over his connection to his past in the form of Miss Saeki.

That night, Kafka listens to "Kafka on the Shore" again, musing that the ghost girl must have found the other world Miss Saeki longed for. Suddenly, Kafka remembers that his father was once struck by lightning. He wonders if Miss Saeki met him while working on her book. It feels as if there are too many coincidences drawing them together—as if everything is speeding towards some unknown destination.

Because of Kafka's overwhelming belief in fate and prophecy, he looks for and finds evidence of his connection to Miss Saeki everywhere—from the lyrics of her song to the subject of the book she wrote.

CHAPTER 26

Nakata and Hoshino check into a hotel in Takamatsu. Hoshino asks Nakata if he can remember the accident from when he was a boy. Nakata remembers feeling as if his mind was floating separately from his body. He still doesn't know what the entrance stone is for, but he knows now that it is white, round, and about the size of an LP record. He also knows that he is destined to move the stone.

Like other characters in the novel, Nakata has both a sense of destiny and a sense of self that seems to be trapped within his body. But unlike other characters, because of his unique past, Nakata experiences these things very literally.


Nakata and Hoshino spend the next couple of days in the library, trying to find information about the entrance stone. But their search reveals nothing. On the second afternoon, Nakata announces that it will rain the next day.

Nakata seems to be gifted with prescience, but not complete knowledge—he knows about the existence of the stone, but not where to find it or what it does, and he seems to be able to predict the weather, but does not know why and is usually not believed.

After dinner, Hoshino wanders Takamatsu alone, thinking about their quest. Suddenly, he is approached by an old man in a white suit who somehow knows his name. The man introduces himself as Colonel Sanders and says he can set Hoshino up with a prostitute. Hoshino isn't interested, until the Colonel announces that he knows about the search for the entrance stone, and he knows where it is. Shocked, Hoshino follows.

These strange events seem to confirm Nakata's predictions, heightening the impression that the world is controlled by fate and it is possible to predict the future.

CHAPTER 27

Once again, the young Miss Saeki appears in Kafka's room late at night. This time, he calls out to her, saying her name over and over. He worries that if she leaves, he will be completely devastated. For the first time, she seems to see him. But then, she vanishes.

Kafka's desire to be connected to and loved by Miss Saeki intensifies, demonstrating his growing dependence on her. He no longer feels like he can survive on his own—a dangerous mindset for a runaway.

The next day, a detective stops by the library and chats with Oshima. Hoping to find and question Kafka, the police have tracked Koichi Tamura's stolen cell phone to Takamatsu. Oshima covers for Kafka, telling the detective that he hasn't seen Kafka for several days. When he tells Kafka this, Kafka says he doesn't want Oshima to put himself in harm's way by getting involved, but Oshima points out that it's too late for that. Kafka is still worried that he might be a suspect, because he feels guilty about his father's death.

Kafka realizes that he has fully drawn Oshima into his runaway plan, potentially putting Oshima in harm's way by making him an accomplice. Still, Oshima doesn't seem to mind, reflecting their growing friendship. Kafka's lingering feelings of guilt show that he continues to believe he is responsible for the contents of his dreams and imagination.

Oshima says the police also told him that Kafka had been suspended more than once for violence at school. Kafka admits that on a couple of occasions, he had blacked out and hurt classmates. During those times, it felt as if someone else were controlling his body. Oshima empathizes a little, saying that getting through each day in his physical body, which he calls a "defective container," can be a challenge. Yet that simple task, surviving each day in his body, isn't seen as an achievement. Kafka, too, says he hates the container of his body. His face, hands, and blood are all reminders of genes passed down from his parents, an inescapable inheritance. He wishes he could run away from his body like running away from home. Oshima tries to reassure him, counseling that it's what's on the inside of both of them—their essence—that matters.

Like Nakata, Kafka has had the experience of violent impulses that feel as if they are being controlled by someone else, and of a desire to behave in a certain way that is outside of his control. This becomes a point of commiseration for Oshima and Kafka: while Kafka feels trapped in a body that was made by his parents, Oshima feels trapped in a body that does not align with his gender identity. They both feel that they have an essence which is different from their bodies and would be better off in different containers. Nonetheless, they are both trapped.

In the afternoon, Kafka takes some coffee up to Miss Saeki. Kafka tells Miss Saeki that he's in love, but doesn't reveal with whom. As he's leaving, he tells Miss Saeki he has to ask her something personal. He asks if she has any children, a question that makes her uncomfortable. Finally, she says she can't answer. Back downstairs, Kafka feels confused—is he in love with the young ghost of Miss Saeki, or the real, middle-aged woman upstairs?

Kafka's intense connection to Miss Saeki continues to cloud his judgement. The connection is predicated on the fact that Kafka believes they are being pulled together by the strength of the prophecy.

CHAPTER 28

Colonel Sanders leads Hoshino to a large Shinto shrine. There, they meet a young woman who takes Hoshino to a nearby love hotel. As they're having sex, she talks to him about the philosopher Hegel (she explains that she's a philosophy student making extra money). They return to the shrine, and Colonel Sanders promises to take Hoshino to the entrance stone.

In Murakami's world, many characters are preoccupied with psychology, philosophy, and metaphysics, bringing up their theories in day-to-day life or at unexpected times. The prostitute Hoshino meets is one such character. The fact that seemingly everyone in the world of this novel has complicated theories about the mind emphasizes the importance of this theme and the extent to which it is an undercurrent of most conversations.

CHAPTER 29

Feeling guilty about his abrupt departure from her apartment, Kafka calls Sakura to let her know he's ok. She's a little annoyed, but glad to hear from him. She warns him to be safe, saying that she feels protective of him, like an older sister. Kafka feels slightly dizzy—no one has ever said that to him before. After he hangs up, he puts "Kafka on the Shore" on the record player, letting it transport him to another time and place.

Kafka is always thinking about his lost family members, to such an extent that a friendly, casual remark has the power to send him reeling. In this way, Kafka's independence is really just a façade covering the deeper sense of isolation that consumes him. Kafka turns to music as one way of escaping his feelings about his past.

That night, Kafka wakes up as usual to the living ghost sitting at his desk. But something is off: he realizes she isn't the young girl at all, but rather the real, middle aged Miss Saeki. She undresses and gets into bed with Kafka. He realizes she must be sleepwalking and think that he's her young boyfriend, since Kafka is sleeping in his old room. As they have sex, Kafka feels as if he's struggling to find the border between dream and reality. Then Miss Saeki slips out of the room and leaves. Kafka waits to hear her car pull out of the parking lot, but he never does.

In this dream-like sequence, it remains unclear whether Kafka has actually acted on his complicated feelings towards Miss Saeki, or is simply caught up in an extremely vivid dream. That blurred line is a reflection of the fact that Kafka believes his dreams are, in a sense, real, because they seem real, impact the world around him, and carry real responsibility.

CHAPTER 30

As Colonel Sanders leads Hoshino into the woods behind the shrine, he reveals that he's not really Colonel Sanders but a formless entity who decided to take on the shape of a capitalist icon. His job is to ensure that time continues to flow normally, and that the boundary between different worlds is maintained. They arrive at a smaller shrine in the woods, and the Colonel instructs Hoshino to open it and remove the entrance stone from inside. Hoshino is reluctant, afraid of transgressing against God by desecrating a shrine. Hoshino points out that God is a pretty flexible concept, anyway, and talks Hoshino into it.

The apparent presence of supernatural forces and boundaries between different worlds in the novel might help explain why so many characters feel unsettled.

Hoshino picks up the entrance stone, which is round and white like Nakata described. It seems to be heavier than it should be. With the Colonel's help, he lugs it back to the street and takes a taxi back to the hotel. He places the stone next to Nakata's pillow.

Again, Nakata's extremely specific and odd prediction proves to be true, heightening the sense that something like fate does exist and Nakata has the ability to predict the future.

CHAPTER 31

In the afternoon, Kafka takes coffee up to Miss Saeki's office. He studies her carefully for a sign that she remembers the night before, but she doesn't seem to. As they chat, she says that she believes that location of birth and location of death are very important. Kafka asks if she returned to Takamatsu so she could die there, and she responds that she isn't sure herself.

Like Oshima, Miss Saeki has spent some time contemplating her own death and the circumstances under which she would like to die. Such musing suggests that she, like Oshima, believes that she can exert control over her own fate. In a way, this is comforting, because it means that she does not have to fear a sudden death. On the other hand, it might suggest that suicide is the only way to escape or control one's own destiny.

In a rush, Kafka reveals the rest of his theory. He says he believes his father wanted to die because he was in love with Miss Saeki, and, after she left the family, delivered the prophecy that Kafka would murder him and sleep with Miss Saeki and his sister. Miss Saeki seems surprised. She asks if she knows Kafka's father, and he repeats that it's just a theory.

Kafka has crafted a convoluted theory in order to confirm the prophecy that he believes must be governing his life. Kafka is desperately trying to make reality align with what he believes should be happening according to his father's predictions.

Then, Miss Saeki asks Kafka if he desires her, and he responds that he does—not just in theory, but in reality. She gently points out their age difference. When Kafka tells her he's in love with her, she asks him to leave. He goes to leave, but turns back and tells her he feels as if he's getting closer to a distant truth. Miss Saeki responds that she's simply waiting for death—having wasted so much of her life wandering pointlessly, she now knows that she is ready for death and can picture when death will come. Kafka asks if Miss Saeki will sleep with him, and, more firmly, she tells him to leave.

Kafka believes that he must be in love with Miss Saeki now that he believes she is his mother (and vice versa). His belief in prophecy causes him to behave inappropriately, drawing him into a potentially damaging relationship with a much older woman whom he believes to be his mother. Meanwhile, Miss Saeki is fixated on her own perception that death is all that remains for her. Trapped in their separate visions of the future, both are tormented.

That evening, Kafka and Oshima have dinner together. Kafka talks about the difficulty of being in love, and Oshima agrees. He says that anyone who falls in love is looking for a missing piece of themselves, and so being in love is naturally a little sad.

Oshima's theory of love points to the potential dangers of codependence. Obsession with another person can in turn make one feel incomplete without them.

That night, Miss Saeki—the real one—comes into Kafka's room. This time, she doesn't seem to be sleepwalking. She looks at the painting on Kafka's desk and tells him that she remembers when it was painted, when she and her boyfriend were twelve years old. Miss Saeki takes Kafka down to the beach, and they sit at the spot where the picture was painted. Kafka says he was there at the time. As if he really is her long-lost boyfriend, Miss Saeki asks him why he had to die. They return to Kafka's room and have sex. Unlike the night before, Miss Saeki cries afterwards. And this time, Kafka hears her car pull out of the driveway. As a **crow** caws in the distance, Kafka thinks that everyone in the world is living in a dream.

Both Kafka and Miss Saeki have been unable to get over relationships from the past, and now those continuing obsessions are guiding their actions in the present. Just as Kafka is using Miss Saeki to get over the loss of his mother, she is using him to get over the loss of her boyfriend. Unlike the night before, this time events seem to be happening in reality and not a dream, but the events are so similar that Kafka can hardly tell the difference.

CHAPTER 32

Over breakfast, Hoshino and Nakata consult about the entrance stone. Nakata is still unsure what must actually be done with it. As they're discussing this, Nakata tells Hoshino he feels like an empty container—he didn't just lose his memories; he lost every part of himself. Hoshino comforts him, saying that everyone feels that way from time to time. It's important to keep in mind the advice of Hoshino's grandfather: life is made meaningful by chance encounters.

Without his memories or essence, Nakata has no sense of himself anymore. He feels strangely disconnected from reality. Hoshino's comment, that everyone experiences such things from time to time, reinforces the idea that Nakata is simply living a more exaggerated version of the discontent that many characters in the novel experience. Hoshino also returns to an overarching theme of the book by maintaining that chance encounters carry profound meaning.

Outside, a thunderstorm gathers. Nakata says that the stone is the entrance to a world he briefly visited during his coma. Now, he is afraid of what will happen if the entrance stone is opened again, but it must be done. However, the stone seems to have become impossibly heavy since the night before. It takes Hoshino every ounce of his strength to slowly flip it over. While he's collapsed on the floor, recovering, Nakata says that they have opened the entrance successfully.

Nakata feels pulled by destiny to complete a task that he does not want to undertake, showing that simply believing in fate can make it as good as real.

CHAPTER 33

Kafka takes the morning off from work at the library to work out at the gym and puzzle through his relationship with Miss Saeki. The boy named Crow tells Kafka that he's trapped—in the relationship as well as in his new life in the library. Heading back to the library, he passes some police officers and worries again about being apprehended.

Crow, an inner voice who dispenses both advice and criticism, points out that Kafka has allowed himself to become controlled by his belief in fate and destiny. Kafka has a sense that everything that happens is predetermined, which makes him feel stuck and powerless.

Back at the library, Oshima comments on the fact that Kafka took all of his possessions with him to the gym in his big backpack. He says the backpack is like a symbol of freedom for Kafka. Oshima warns him that true freedom and independence are unlikely to be achievable.Kafka brings Miss Saeki some coffee, and she asks about his trip to the gym. He says he wants to become stronger, because he has no one to rely on but himself—like a stray **crow**, which is why he chose the name "Kafka," because it means "Crow" in Czech. Kafka turns the conversation back to the book about lightning strikes, and Miss Saeki says firmly that she never met Kafka's father.

Oshima astutely picks up on Kafka's strong desire to be self-sufficient, which manifests itself in the form of the backpack he carries with him everywhere. His desire to be strong and independent also affects how he thinks about his body: he hopes that by training himself to be physically strong, he can become more independent. As his relationship with Oshima itself demonstrates, however, Kafka does need relationships with others to survive. Kafka's statement that he can only rely on himself is contradicted by the fact that he relies on Oshima and Miss Saeki.

Miss Saeki brings up the night before, and says she thinks she might have been making up for lost time. Kafka says that he is, too, in the sense that he's trying to make up for his damaged childhood. That night, they sleep together again.

Miss Saeki and Kafka acknowledge the fact that they are using each other and being drawn into an increasingly damaging relationship to make up for lost connections of the past.

CHAPTER 34

In the hotel room, Nakata settles in to a long nap. Hoshino realizes that he has abandoned his job, but finds that he doesn't much care. While Nakata sleeps, Hoshino wanders the city, eventually finding himself in a nice coffee shop. Thinking about how little he has accomplished, he suddenly has a vague sense of himself as unreal or meaningless. Yet he has a strange feeling that he belongs with Nakata, and that he's making the right choices.

Hoshino realizes that his newfound friendship has given him a sense of purpose that he lacked before. His friendship with Nakata is the first real connection he's had in a long time. Hoshino's arc demonstrates the limits of independence, showing that a meaningful friendship has allowed Hoshino to start living a richer life than he was living on his own.

The shop's proprietor, a retired Ministry of Education official, asks Hoshino if the music in the cafe is bothering him. He realizes he actually enjoys the music very much, and the shop owner says that it's Beethoven's *Archduke Trio*. The next day, Hoshino returns to the shop. This time, the proprietor is listening to Haydn. Listening to the music, Hoshino thinks back to the joy of his childhood, and realizes he's been leading a meaningless existence. He thinks it must be possible to change direction, even now. Decisively, he realizes he doesn't care about his job—all that matters is helping Nakata.

Just as embarking on a real friendship for the first time has been eye-opening for Hoshino, allowing him to grow in new ways, Hoshino begins to pay attention to music for the first time and find that it, too, has a profound effect on him. Listening to the music opens Hoshino up to the possibility of appreciating more art, and makes him feel as if his decision to trust a new person was the right one.

CHAPTER 35

Oshima wakes Kafka up with an early morning phone call and tells him to gather his things. Oshima picks Kafka up in the Miata and, on the drive, explains that the police are intensifying their search, so he's taking Kafka back to the cabin. They have traced the murder to an old man from Nakano, who traveled from there to Takamatsu. Oshima says it's as if everything is converging on one point. He also thinks its best if Kafka and Miss Saeki spend some time apart—Oshima knows they've been sleeping together, and he is worried because he believes Miss Saeki has lost the will to live.

Oshima worries that Miss Saeki and Kafka have become too interdependent. He is worried that this codependence has only exacerbated Miss Saeki's fixation on death and belief that she can bring about her own demise at the right moment. Meanwhile, the fact that the police are closing in suggests that Kafka's attempt to remain a fiercely independent and self-sufficient runaway is beginning to break down.

CHAPTER 36

Colonel Sanders calls Hoshino at the hotel and tells him to relocate to an apartment that the Colonel has rented in the city. Colonel Sanders says the police are after Hoshino and Nakata. Hoshino wakes Nakata up and they make their way to the apartment. There, they discuss the murder of Johnnie Walker. Nakata says he no longer wants to give himself up to the police, because he believes he must fulfil the mission of closing the entrance stone.

Nakata and Hoshino seem to be trusting fate, putting their lives in the hands of a mysterious supernatural being who seems to have special knowledge of parallel worlds. This trust aligns with Nakata's belief that they are acting on a mission of destiny, and must not waver before the mysterious tasks are completed.

Hoshino and Nakata go for a walk on the beach. They talk about the creatures living on the ocean floor. Nakata explains that now that the entrance stone is open something has begun to happen, and when it ends, they must close the entrance. Yet he doesn't know what that thing is, and now he worries that he's gotten Hoshino in trouble with the police. But Hoshino brushes this off. He says he feels like he's in the right place, because with Nakata, he never gets bored.

Nakata continues to feel pulled by forces beyond his comprehension to complete his mission with the entrance stone, yet many elements of the mission remain shrouded in mystery. Like Kafka with Oshima, Nakata worries that he has gotten Hoshino in trouble by involving him in his pursuit of destiny. Like Oshima, however, Hoshino maintains that the risk is worth it for their newfound friendship.

CHAPTER 37

Oshima and Kafka arrive at the cabin, where Oshima reiterates that he thinks it would be best for Kafka and Miss Saeki to spend some time apart. Kafka reluctantly agrees, but says it's difficult not knowing whether they will see each other again and whether she shares his intense feelings. Oshima says that being in love means dealing with those doubts alone. At the same time that Kafka gets to feel the wonderful emotions of being in love, he must also "wander through the dark" by himself.

Kafka expresses the extent to which he has grown attached to Miss Saeki. Oshima expresses one of the paradoxes of being in love: the intensity of Kafka's connection with Miss Saeki ultimately produces a sense of loneliness because he must grapple with his intense emotions alone.

As Oshima is leaving, he reiterates his warning to Kafka not to wander into the woods. He says that right before World War II, a couple of soldiers disappeared in these woods during a training exercise. No one knows if they got lost, or deserted. Oshima goes on to say that the forest is like another world paralleling their own. It's easy to step in, but not so easy to step out. He likens the woods to a **labyrinth**. Ancient Mesopotamians, he says, would inspect the complicated, labyrinth-like shapes of animal and human intestines to try to predict the future. In that way, the concept of the labyrinth is within Kafka as well as the woods outside. Stepping into the woods is like stepping into the labyrinth within him. With that warning, Oshima departs.

In this scene, Oshima connects the concept of the labyrinth with the turbulence of people's hearts and minds. Oshima says that attempting to understand oneself or understand the future is like getting lost in a maze. Conversely, Oshima suggests that entering into an actual maze like the dense forest might cause Kafka to feel as if he is becoming lost within his own mind. The physical world of the labyrinth-like woods mirrors the turmoil in Kafka's mind.

That night, Kafka thinks about Miss Saeki. Crow points out that while Kafka is little more than a child, full of questions and misconceptions about the world, Miss Saeki has experiences and emotions he can't even imagine. Thinking about this makes Kafka hate being fifteen. He wishes he could transcend his age and body and zoom like a **crow** to where she is, or that she would appear—for real or as a ghost—in the cabin. But he remains alone, and eventually drifts off to sleep.

In one of many instances in the book in which characters feel less than at home in their own skin, Kafka becomes intensely aware of the limitations of being so young. He feels trapped in a teenaged body.

CHAPTER 38

At Nakata's request, Hoshino rents a car. While Nakata consults with the entrance stone about what to do next, Hoshino listens to a CD of the *Archduke* trio over and over. He's amazed—before a few days ago, he had no interest in classical music, and now he finds it deeply beautiful and affecting. He is surprised that he is capable of such a change, and wonders what other art he might grow to like.

In their continued pursuit of the mysterious entrance stone, Hoshino and Nakata both agree to follow Nakata's vague instincts. This is further indication of the extent to which Hoshino is patient and trusting with Nakata, allowing them to determine their path even though he is unsure of where it will lead.


The next morning, they set out in the rental car. Nakata is still unsure of their destination, so they drive methodically around the city, gazing out of the windows. Hours pass, and they grow weary, but seem no closer to finding their location. The next day is the same. As they head back to the apartment in defeat, Hoshino realizes that they're in an unfamiliar, elegant residential area. They stop outside a gate with a sign reading "Komura Memorial Library." Nakata realizes that this is the place they've been looking for.

Hoshino patiently caters to Nakata's strange requests, hoping to help him find what he's searching for. For a moment, it seems as if Nakata's uncanny ability to determine the appropriate next step has waned—but at the last moment, his instincts pick up the path once again.

CHAPTER 39

On his second day in the cabin, Kafka feels restless. He can't seem to shake thoughts of Miss Saeki. After working out and listening to music, he ventures into the woods. He arrives at the clearing where the trees grow more dense, like a **labyrinth**, and decides to forge ahead. Trying to make himself feel afraid, he ventures into the dark forest until he isn't sure how to get back. A **crow** squawks in warning. Somehow, he stumbles back to the clearing.

Kafka continues to be obsessed by his relationship to Miss Saeki, to the point that the usually grounding effects of music and physical exercise have no impact. Keeping Oshima's warning in mind, he plunges into the woods, trying to affect his mind by plunging into the physical manifestation of his psyche.

That night, Kafka wishes Miss Saeki would appear, but again, she does not. Instead, he has a vivid dream about Sakura—a dream so realistic he wonders if it might be reality. In the dream, Kafka slips into bed with Sakura, who is deep asleep. A **crow** caws loudly, but he can't see it. As he begins to touch Sakura, he feels something within him struggling to break out of its shell. Feeling as if he can't control himself, he begins to have sex with Sakura. She wakes up and tells him to stop and get out of her dream. She says she's his sister, and it's wrong for them to have sex. But he says it's too late, and that he's already decided to have sex with her.

Kafka is plagued by the idea that he is responsible for what happens in his dreams, and simultaneously the idea that his dreams are manifestations of subconscious desires outside of his control. This vivid dream is no exception. In the dream, Kafka is unable to resist the sharp pull of the prophecy, which says that he will sleep with his sister—represented in this moment by Sakura. As this is happening, Kafka is reminded again of the sensation that his body contains a destiny he inherited from his parents which he can't control.

Crow chimes in, telling Kafka that Kafka wants to feel in control. Because he's already killed his father and slept with his mother, all that remains is to sleep with his sister, as he's doing now. Fulfilling the prophecy is the only way to be free of it and go on living as he wants to. As he continues to have sex with Sakura, Kafka feels as if he's in the forest, trying to remember the shape of the trees and find his way back, but it's impossible. He orgasms and wakes up, feeling incredibly alone. Crow says that the thing inside Kafka, a dark shadow, has revealed itself.

Kafka has let his belief in the prophecy drive him to do the very thing he least wants to do, demonstrating that a blind belief in fate can cloud decision making in potentially disastrous ways. Kafka feels trapped in his decision to rape Sakura in the dream because of his father's prophecy, which he feels is physically contained within his body. Because he also believes people are responsible for the contents of their dreams, he feels incredibly guilty about what has happened.

CHAPTER 40

Since it's Monday, the Komura Memorial Library is closed, but Hoshino and Nakata return the next morning. Oshima greets them at the door and then they settle down to read. Oshima and Hoshino begin to discuss Beethoven, and Hoshino asks if Oshima believes music has the power to change people. Oshima replies that he believes it can, like falling in love. They agree that such experiences are important to our lives.

As the separate storylines in the book converge, interesting interactions begin to occur between the two sets of characters. Hoshino's gradually growing appreciation for music and his realization that it has the power to change him reflects Oshima's long-held appreciation for classical music and its centrality in his life.

In the afternoon, Nakata and Hoshino join Miss Saeki's tour of the library. After the brief tour, they settle back in to read, but Nakata suddenly ascends the steps to Miss Saeki's private office, ignoring Oshima's protestations. Nakata tells Miss Saeki he wants to talk about the entrance stone. She gives a slight nod, and Oshima and Hoshino leave the pair alone in her office.

Similarly, Nakata and Miss Saeki seem to share an instant connection. They both have knowledge of the entrance stone, a special bond that brings them together. This bond is strengthened by the fact that they have both been misunderstood for much of their lives.

CHAPTER 41

Kafka returns to the woods with a number of supplies, including gloves, a knife, a compass, and some yellow spray paint. As he heads deeper into the woods, he marks each tree with some paint, leaving a trail back to the cabin. He feels like he's being watched. He thinks about the soldiers practicing in the forest before World War II.

Kafka, always hoping to be prepared and self-sufficient, gathers up supplies. He is hoping to venture into the woods without risking too much.

Kafka's mind wanders back to Sakura and the night before. Again, he thinks that if he's already killed his father and had sex with his mother, he has to fulfill the prophecy by sleeping with his sister so that he can be free of the omen. Crow, walking behind him, says that he shouldn't have raped Sakura, even in a dream. Crow says that even if Kafka completes the parts of the prophecy, it will still be inside him, inside his DNA, his breath, and the confusion inside him. Crow says Kafka has to face the fear and anger inside him, and melt the coldness in his heart—and then he really will be the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world. He can reclaim himself.

Soon, it becomes clear that Kafka's journey into the woods is no easy task. Kafka returns to his fixation on the prophecy and feels again that he is trapped on a path he does not want to follow. Worse, his sense of being trapped extends beyond the prophecy itself to encompass his entire life, because even if he vanquishes the prophecy, his body will still be tainted by his parents. Crow counsels him again to let go of the toxic relationships eating away at him so he can truly focus on independence and healing.

But Kafka suddenly feels confused, like he's lost in a **labyrinth**. He feels hollow, like there's nothing that makes him real. Crow has vanished, and Kafka wants to disappear, as well. He thinks the only way to escape the prophecy is to die. He tosses away his survival and navigation gear and heads into the trees.

Kafka is unable to follow Crow's counsel and soon loses control. Like Oshima and Miss Saeki, he becomes convinced that death is the only way for him to control his own fate. In throwing off his survival gear, he abandons the pretense of making himself strong and self-sufficient.

CHAPTER 42

Nakata takes a seat in Miss Saeki's office. They both feel as if they have been waiting for each other. Miss Saeki asks if Hoshino is Nakata's friend, and he says that he is—the first friend Nakata has ever had, besides cats. Miss Saeki says that she hasn't had friends for some time either, except in memories. She feels that memories are consuming her. Holding onto memories has tormented her, yet she can't let go. Meanwhile, Nakata says, he has no memories at all.

Nakata and Miss Saeki connect over the fact that they have both led extremely solitary lives. They are able to form their own kind of bond because of this overwhelming isolation. Miss Saeki's inability to let go of her old relationship has kept her from forming new friendships, while Nakata's lack of memory has led him to do the same.

Miss Saeki says that she knows about the entrance stone, and that in fact she opened the entrance herself many years ago, to try to hold onto her boyfriend. She wonders if that's why everything is warped now. Nakata responds that he's not sure, but he does know that Miss Saeki can't stay. Miss Saeki agrees. She says that for a long time her life has been a string of meaningless mistakes, which she's chronicled in a series of files. She gives the files to Nakata, asking him to burn them. He agrees. Downstairs, he tells Hoshino that they need to find somewhere to burn the files, and the pair departs.

Because of their implicit connection, Miss Saeki and Nakata slip easily into a discussion of strange supernatural events that might sound absurd to an outsider. This connection also leads her to trust Nakata with her most prized possession and an important task, even though they have just met.

After the library closes, Oshima goes upstairs to Miss Saeki's office. She is facedown on her desk—dead. Although he had been prepared for this moment, Oshima feels overwhelmed with loss. He realizes he needs to tell Kafka, but thinks that somehow, Kafka already knows.

Oshima knew Miss Saeki was fated to die, but now that the moment has actually come, he realizes that there are limits to how much a belief in fate can actually soften the blow of loss.

CHAPTER 43

Empty handed and unafraid, Kafka forges into the forest, as if going towards the heart of a **labyrinth**. He has the feeling that the forest is a part of him, and he's actually journeying deeper into himself. He thinks about his cruel father, dying in the empty house. He thinks about his mother, and wonders why she didn't love him. He remembers his mother leaving, and thinks that if she is Miss Saeki, he can't understand why she would do that.

To help himself work through the turmoil he has carried throughout the book, Kafka imagines his psyche in physical form as the forest. If he can conquer the forest, he feels he will have also conquered his own fears and past. In this scene, Kafka's insecurities and indeed his entire identity is defined by his relationships to adults who have let him down. Obsessed with the past and those who abandoned him, Kafka is unable to move forward or find peace with himself.

Kafka feels himself turn into a black **crow**. Crow tells Kafka that his mother did love him, and that by forgiving her or moving on, Kafka has the power to repair himself. He believes that his mother, possibly Miss Saeki, was scared and angry when she left, but he can't figure out why. As he thinks about it more, he grows more and more confused. Why is love—the love he feels for his mother, the love he feels for Miss Saeki—so painful? Frustrated, Crow flies away.

Crow, who often serves as a voice of reason within Kafka, tries to point out that Kafka is destroying himself by fixating on these past toxic relationships. Crow warns that Kafka should forgive others so that he can focus on himself, because dwelling on past relationships in such a way can be all-consuming. But, overwhelmed with emotion, Kafka is unable to take this advice. Instead of trusting his inner voice of reason, he gives way to his darker emotions.

Soon, two soldiers appear. They're wearing old uniforms from World War II. They tell Kafka that they're the soldiers who wandered off during training. They hoped to avoid killing or being killed, and have been hiding in the woods ever since. They tell him they're guarding the entrance, which is temporarily open. They ask if Kafka wants to enter, and he says that he does. He follows them down the path.

Once Kafka casts off this logical part of himself, he enters into a surreal situation. Kafka has committed to trying to understand his past relationships rather than trying to simply move on, and so ventures deeper into the dangerous woods of his mind.

CHAPTER 44

Hoshino and Nakata burn Miss Saeki's files in a dry river bed. Nakata says that he has to take a nap, but afterwards, they'll be able to close the entrance stone. On the drive back to the apartment, Hoshino thanks Nakata for changing his perspective. In the last few days, he's had more new experiences than in his entire life before, and he feels like he looks at the world through Nakata's eyes now. But Nakata doesn't hear, because he's already fallen asleep.

In a final moment of kinship and implicit understanding, Nakata carries out his final promise to Miss Saeki. Hoshino, too, feels a strong sense of connection to Nakata, because Nakata has changed his perspective and introduced him to new experiences. These are two different ways of connecting with others—either because of shared similarities, as in Nakata and Miss Saeki's relationship, or because of the meeting of two very different perspectives, as in the case of Nakata and Hoshino.

Hoshino carries Nakata up to the apartment, thinking Nakata is settling in for a long nap. Instead, Nakata dies in his sleep the next day. Hoshino feels overwhelmed by the silence in the apartment. He realizes he has to close the entrance stone by himself now. If he makes a mistake, it could have dire consequences. Unsure what to do, Hoshino spends the rest of the day pacing in the apartment, waiting for a sign that the time has come to close the entrance.

Nakata's sudden departure is a huge blow to Hoshino. Hoshino realizes that he has come to rely on Nakata, and feels extremely unsettled in his absence, even though a few days earlier they were strangers and Hoshino was perfectly confident on his own.

CHAPTER 45

Kafka follows the soldiers down an increasingly dark and overgrown forest path. The soldiers commend Kafka for keeping up. Eventually, they get to a steep ridge, and begin to descend. At the bottom is a small basin, with a handful of buildings and a couple of roads built on it. The soldiers take Kafka to one of the houses, which is the same size and shape as Oshima's cabin. Inside, however, this cabin has electricity. The soldiers tell Kafka that he'll wait here for a while, to get settled in. Someone will come in the evening to make him dinner.

In a somewhat unsettling parallel, Kafka's final destination in the mysterious woods closely resembles the point where he started, Oshima's cabin. However, unlike Oshima's cabin, where Kafka lived in complete isolation slowly coming to terms with his independence, this cabin has more amenities, and Kafka will not be alone. The self-discovery that he undergoes here will be of a different nature.

Alone in the cabin, Kafka falls asleep. When he awakens, it's evening and he hears someone cooking in the kitchen. He realizes that it's the fifteen-year-old Miss Saeki, and that she can see him. She sits down with him as he eats the meal she's prepared. She also says that she doesn't have a name, and she doesn't remember the library. She doesn't remember meeting him before. Kafka explains that he thinks he's there to meet her, and one other woman. As she leaves, night descends.

The arrival of the young Miss Saeki and Kafka's assertion that he is there specifically to meet her and someone else confirm that Kafka will need to open himself up to others at this cabin, rather than keeping himself isolated.

CHAPTER 46

Hoshino spends a listless day in the apartment trying to figure out what to do with the stone. He is reluctant to call the authorities to remove Nakata's body until he can make a plan.

Without Nakata's unusual but decisive direction, Hoshino feels lonely and adrift. He realizes that he has come to rely on Nakata and is unsure what to do now that he's dead.

Hoshino spends the next day talking to the entrance stone, telling it stories about girls he's dated. In the afternoon, he puts on the *Archduke* Trio, telling the stone he feels like the song is speaking to him. A black cat jumps up onto the windowsill, and Hoshino comments to the cat that it's a nice day. Much to Hoshino's surprise, the cat agrees that it is.

Still at a loss without Nakata, Hoshino turns to the other source from which he has recently drawn strength and direction: classical music. Using music and his recollections of the past, Hoshino becomes more comfortable with his solitude and begins to move towards making a plan.

THE BOY NAMED CROW (2)

The boy named Crow circles over the trees, landing in a clearing across from a man dressed in a red sweat suit and a silk hat. The man tells crow that he makes flutes out of the souls of cats, and he's traveling to where he can make the biggest flute of all. He says that the forest where they are now is like limbo: the man has died and is now a soul in transition. It's impossible for Crow to hurt him, he says, but invites Crow to try. Crow pecks out the man's eyes, but he just laughs. Crow rips out his tongue, and he continues to laugh, now soundlessly. The wheezing sounds almost like a flute.

In this extremely surreal chapter, Kafka's alter ego, Crow, takes on a man who resembles Johnnie Walker, who seems to be an alter ego of Kafka's father Koichi. In this way, the scene suggests that Kafka's subconscious desire to kill his father is being realized (just as the prophecy predicted). It also represents an important step in Kafka's attempt to free himself from his past and the uncomfortable bonds of his family, because the looming figure of his evil father is vanquished.

CHAPTER 47

In the morning, the young version of Miss Saeki comes and makes Kafka breakfast. She tells him that soon, he'll become a part of this place. She also says that she has no memories.

The young Miss Saeki in the valley is a strange, hollow version of Miss Saeki: while she physically resembles the real Miss Saeki, the fact that she has no memories confirms for Kafka that she isn't truly like Miss Saeki—as it is the real Miss Saeki's memories that make her who she is.

At midday, the middle-aged version of Miss Saeki arrives, and sits with Kafka for a cup of tea. She tells him that she burned up all her memories, so she won't be able to talk for long. She tells Kafka that it's important that he leaves from the valley. He asks, again, if she's his mother. Miss Saeki responds only that she once abandoned someone she shouldn't have, and asks if Kafka can forgive her. He forgives her, and, in his head, forgives his mother, and feels as if a frozen part of his heart has crumbled. Miss Saeki pricks her arm with a hairpin and lets Kafka drink some of her blood, and then leaves the cabin.

Like the young version of Miss Saeki, now that the real Miss Saeki has given up her memories, there's little that remains to give her an identity. Kafka, still absorbed by the prophecy which has hung over him for his entire life, questions one more time whether the intense feelings he has for her are because she is his mother. But Miss Saeki evades the question, suggesting that perhaps the question of reality is unimportant, and that they can help each other to heal even if she is not his mother. Miss Saeki encourages Kafka to let go of the intense resentment and loss he feels about his mother, as this is the only way he can become truly self-sufficient and move on with his life. Following her advice, Kafka realizes he must both rely on the help of others and let go of damaging grudges from the past.

Kafka walks out to the forest, where the two soldiers are waiting. They tell him the entrance is still open. They tell him to follow them quickly, and not look back. But as they're ascending the valley, he briefly glances back and suddenly feels like he can't possibly go on. After all, the young Miss Saeki is still down there. But with effort, he forces himself to continue walking. The entrance is still open, and Kafka is able to continue walking through the woods.

For one last moment, Kafka feels drawn in by his intense bond to Miss Saeki. Even if it means giving up his identity and never truly moving on, Kafka is tempted to return to this version of Miss Saeki in the valley. But, martialing his willpower, Kafka forces himself to go on, and face the future alone.

Somehow, Kafka stumbles back through the woods to Oshima's cabin. Feeling as if waves are overcoming his mind, he slips into sleep.

Kafka has undergone what feels like an intense psychological experience, venturing into the depths of his own deepest insecurities and subconscious desires. But, through strength of will, he has come out the other side feeling stronger and ready to let go of the past.

CHAPTER 48

The black cat, named Toro, offers to help Hoshino with the stone. Toro says that Hoshino will need to kill something that's trying to get through the entrance—he can't describe it, but Hoshino will know it when he sees it. Late that night, he hears a rustling coming from Nakata's body. A long, pale, thin object is emanating from Nakata's mouth. It's as thick around as Hoshino's arm, and glistening. Hoshino tries over and over again to stab the creature, but it heals immediately each time. Panicked, Hoshino realizes he must close the entrance stone before the thing can slither over. It has once again become impossibly heavy, and Hoshino strains every muscle in his body to flip it over. But finally, he succeeds.

Toro is one of many surreal characters in the novel who seem to be able to offer mysterious predictions about the near future. Toro's cryptic advice helps Hoshino know what to do. This is especially helpful given that Hoshino feels at a loss without the guidance Nakata provided. Although Nakata's directions up until his death had seemed to be fairly random and cryptic, without them, Hoshino realizes that he feels lonely and unsure of himself. With Toro's help, Hoshino relies on his own instincts to finish the supernatural mission that Nakata started.

After the stone is closed, it's fairly easy to dispatch the creature—Hoshino cuts it up into small pieces and bags them up. Hoshino realizes that it's time to go home. In a way, Nakata will live on through him, because he knows that from now on, he will try to see things from Nakata's perspective. He's almost a container for Nakata's soul. Hoshino leaves the apartment.

Hoshino has learned much over the course of his brief, strange relationship with Nakata. He feels a renewed sense of purpose and self-worth. He also has the strange feeling that Nakata's essence will live on, even though his physical body has died. He vows to honor that living memory.

CHAPTER 49

To Kafka's surprise, it is Oshima's brother who picks him up from the cabin. On the drive back, Kafka says that he wandered deep into the woods, even though Oshima warned him not to. Oshima's brother said that he once did the same. But they both agree that it would be impossible to express what happened to them out loud.

Although Kafka and Oshima's brother have both shared an incredibly unique, powerful experience, in this moment they realize that some experiences can never be fully communicated with others. Their own, separate conclusions are more meaningful than anything they might say to each other about the woods.

Back at the library, Oshima tells Kafka that Miss Saeki died of a heart attack. He says he believes that it was predestined, as did Miss Saeki. Kafka says that it's time for him to face the police and return to school and Tokyo. The two say goodbye, promising to meet again someday.

Oshima and Miss Saeki's belief in predestination softens the blow of her death, allowing Oshima to be more at peace with what happened—just as he is more at peace with the prospect of his own death because he believes he can control exactly when it will come. Meanwhile, Kafka enters a new stage of his independence, realizing that he must return to face his responsibilities at home. His sadness at the loss of Miss Saeki and bittersweet parting with Oshima are testaments to the close friendships he has formed, even though he set off to become a totally self-sufficient runaway.

At the train station, Kafka calls Sakura to tell her he's going home. She tells him she had a dream about him, in which he was wandering in a labyrinth-like house. When they say goodbye, Kafka calls her "sister."

Sakura's dream about Kafka is different from the dream he had about her, which undercuts his feeling that his own dream was somehow real or had the power to influence Sakura. Still, Sakura's dream does reflect Kafka's experience of wandering in the labyrinth-like woods, suggesting that dreams do have some power or relationship to fate. Kafka still sees Sakura as his sister, suggesting that he has developed a more expansive sense of identity—both his own and those of others.

On the train, Kafka thinks about Miss Saeki and everything that has happened to him. Crow tells him that he did the right thing, and even though he can't escape time and he has a lot to learn about the world, he's still the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world. Crow tells him to get some sleep, and he does.

Kafka is at peace, yet as he leaves Takamatsu he is still preoccupied by many of the same thoughts as when he arrived. He still imagines that there could be a better, stronger version of himself embodied in a new identity, Crow. He still feels trapped by thoughts of the future, even though the power of the prophecy seems to have lessened. He still values being tough and independent, even though he has formed deep attachments to people like Miss Saeki.

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