

**The Seventh Man**  
by Haruki Murakami  
Translated by Christopher Allison

"It was a September afternoon during my tenth year when that wave nearly brought me to my end," the Seventh Man began in a quiet voice.

He was the last person to speak that night. The hour hand on the clock had already past ten. The sound of the wind blowing to the west outside in the black darkness could be heard by everyone sitting there together in a circle in the room. Leaves rustled in the garden, the panes of the window rattled slightly, and the wind rose up in a shrill whistle before blowing away into the night.

"That was a special type of wave, a colossus, the like of which I've never again seen," the man continued.

"That wave only missed finishing me off by hair's breadth. But instead it drank up the most essential part of me, and transported it to another world. It took such a long time before I was finally completely recovered. So much precious time."

The Seventh Man looked to be in his mid-fifties. Tall and gaunt, he had a profusion of whiskers around his mouth, and there was a small but deep wound by his right eye, that appeared to have been made by a knife stroke. His hair was short, and had bristly touches of white here and there. His face seemed to bear the expression of a man who suddenly doesn't know quite what to say, except that he seemed to have worn this expression consistently for a long time, and there was something quite familiar about it. He wore a cheerless blue shirt under a grey tweed jacket. He occasionally took the collar of his shirt into his hand. No one knew his name. There was probably nobody who knew anything about him.

The Seventh Man coughed quietly. All other words dropped away into silence. Without saying anything, everyone waited for him to go on.

*"In my case*, it was a wave. Of course, I can't say anything about how it is with other people. But in my case it just *happened* to be a wave. I had no advance warning. Suddenly it was just there in front of me one day: that fatal force presenting itself in the shape of an enormous wave.

"I grew up in S Prefecture, in this town by the sea. It was such a nowhere town that even if I told you the name, it probably wouldn't make an impression on you. My father was engaged as a medical practitioner there, and at first I had a relatively untroubled childhood. I had one very close friend for as long as I could remember. His name was K. He lived in the house next door to ours, and was a year behind me in school. We walked to school together everyday, and when we returned home in the afternoon the two of us always played together. We might as well have been brothers. Though we were friends for a very long time, never once did any kind of trouble arise between us. I actually had a real brother, but because he was six years older than me we didn't have much in common, and to speak frankly, there wasn't much love lost between us. It was because of this that I felt more fraternal love for my friend than I did for my real brother.

"K was pale and slight, and had the delicate features of a girl. He also had a speech impediment, and couldn't talk well. When strangers met him for the first time, I imagine they got the impression that he was retarded. And since he wasn't very strong, I frequently found myself acting as his protector both at school and after school when we were playing. Anybody can see right away that I'm a pretty big guy, and fairly athletic. The thing that I liked most about being with K was his kindness and the beauty of his soul. There was absolutely nothing wrong with his mind, but his impediment led him to have academic problems, and going to class was troublesome for him. He was exceptionally gifted at drawing pictures, though, and whenever he took up a pencil or his paints, he created such exquisite pictures exuding such vitality that even his teacher was blown away. He frequently won prizes in competitions and received commendations. If he had grown up unpreturbed, I think that he probably would have made a name for himself as an artist. He was particularly fond of painting landscapes, and went to the shore incessantly to draw the sea. I spent countless days sitting next to him, watching his nimble hand guide the pencil over the paper. The way he could bring such life-like shapes and colors out of the pure white of the paper in an instant impressed me deeply, and was truly amazing. When I think about it now, it was really nothing short of genius.

"One year in September, the region where I lived was beset by a fierce typhoon. According to the report on the radio, this was going to be the biggest typhoon the area had seen in ten years. School was quickly dismissed, and all the shops in town were closed and shuttered tight. My father and brother got out the tool box and began putting up storm doors around the house, while my mother busied herself in the kitchen preparing *onigiri* as emergency rations. Bottles and canteens were filled with water, and we all packed backpacks with necessities, in case we had to be evacuated somewhere quickly. To the adults, who had to face the hardship of typhoons nearly every year, it was just a noisome and dangerous fact of life, but to us children, removed as we were from the hard reality of the situation, it was nothing less than a great and exciting event of considerable moment.

"The color of the sky began to change dramatically just after noon. There seemed to be an unnatural hue mixed into it. The wind rose to a howl, making a strange dry, crackling sound like beaten sand, and I went out onto the veranda to watch the sky until the rain began to beat fiercely against the side of the house. In the darkness of the house sealed off by storm shutters, the family gathered in one room and listened to the news reports on the radio. The volume of the rain wasn't that great, but there was a lot of danger from strong winds, and many houses had had their roofs blown off, and numerous ships had been overturned. Heavy objects flying through the air had killed or injured several people. The announcer repeated his warning not to go outdoors under any circumstances. Occasionally, the strong winds would cause a creaking sound in the house, as if some giant hand were shaking it. Once in a while, we would hear a great *wham* as some heavy object crashed into the storm shutters. Father said that they were probably roofing tiles from a house somewhere. We had a lunch of the *onigiri* my mother had made, along with some fried eggs, and listened to the news on the radio, waiting for the typhoon to leave us and go somewhere else.

"But the typhoon wouldn't leave. According to the news, from the time the typhoon had reached the eastern part of S Prefecture it had lost speed, and was now moving to the northeast no faster

than a person walking briskly. The wind didn't slacken at all, and made a brutal sound as if it was trying to rip up the very surface of the earth and blow it away.

"That fierce wind probably lasted about an hour from the time it first began to blow. But then I noticed that it had grown very quiet. You couldn't hear a single sound; not even the crow of distant birds. Father opened one of the rain shutters a little and peered out from the crack to see what was happening. The wind had died down and the rain was slackening. The thick grey clouds were slowly rolling away. Here and there, patches of blue sky appeared between breaks in the clouds. The trees in the garden were dripping with rain water and droplets hung off the tips of the branches.

" 'We're in the eye of the typhoon right now,' my father told me. 'For a little while, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, we'll get a short break from the storm. Then it will pick up again, as fierce as before.'

"I asked father if it was ok for me to go outside. It's ok to take a walk around, father told me, as long as you don't go far.

" 'But as soon as the wind begins to pick up even a little bit, hurry back home right away.' I went outside and looked around. I couldn't believe that just a few minutes before everything was being buffeted by fierce winds. I looked up at the sky. I had the impression that the typhoon's huge eye floated up there above us, glaring down malevolently. But of course that was just my childish imagination. We were merely in the midst of a temporary lull at the center of an air pressure vortex.

"While the adults walked around the outside of the house checking for damage, I decided to wander down to the sea shore. A lot of limbs from trees in the neighborhood had been ripped off by the wind and dropped on the roadway. Some of them were fat pine branches so big that an adult couldn't possibly lift them alone. Shattered roof tiles were scattered all over the ground. A rock had hit a car windshield, and caused a large crack. There was even a doghouse that had been blown onto the road from somewhere. The sight looked like a giant hand had reached down from the sky and calmly wiped across the surface of the earth. K spotted me as I was walking along the road, and came out of his house. Where are you going?, K asked. When I replied that I was going down to take a look at the sea, K fell in behind me without saying a word. There was a small white dog that lived at K's house, and this dog trailed the both of us as well. 'We have to go home right away when the wind picks up even a little bit,' I told K, and he nodded silently in reply.

"The sea was no more than a 200 meter walk from my house. There was a breakwater there that was about as tall as I was at the time, and climbing a short set of stairs, we arrived at the seashore. We came to the shore nearly every day to play, and we knew this stretch of beach like the backs of our hands. But in the eye of the typhoon, things seemed different from normal. The color of the sky, the color of the sea, the crashing of the waves, the smell of salt, the breadth of the scene, everything about that stretch of sea coast had changed. We sat on top of the breakwater for a moment and just stared out at the sea wordlessly. Even though we were in the middle of a typhoon, the waves were dreadfully still. When the waves struck, they retreated

farther than normal. The white sand beach was getting wider as we watched. Even at ebb tide, the water didn't recede so far. It was like a large room after all the furniture has been moved out, when it looks unbearably empty. Assorted pieces of flotsam washed up into a line on shore, almost as usual.

"I got down off the sea wall, and keeping my eye on the sky as I walked along the newly expanded beach, I looked more closely at the junk that had been deposited there. Plastic toys and sandals and chunks of wood that seemed to have once been pieces of furniture and loose clothing and rare bottles and boxes made of wood with foreign writing on them and other things of unknown character were scattered as far as the eye could see. Most likely, the great waves of the typhoon had transported it all here from some far away place. Whenever we noticed anything particularly unique, we would pick it up and examine it closely. K's dog stood beside the two of us wagging his tail and sniffing each thing we picked up.

"We were there for at most 5 minutes or so. Suddenly, however, I noticed that the waves had made their way up the beach. Without any sound, without any indication at all, the silvery tongue of the sea had silently crept to our very feet. There was no way that I could have anticipated this. Having been raised close to the ocean, I knew well the terrors of which it was capable. I knew that it could on occasion produce brutality of a scale impossible to predict. We thus moved away from the place where the waves were lapping, exercising all due caution, to a place that seemed safe to me. But before I knew it, the waves had reached up to within a 8 inches of where I was standing, and then soundlessly receded again. And then finally they didn't return. There was nothing particularly menacing about these waves. They were quietly and discreetly washing the beach. But there was something secretive and terribly ominous in them, like the serpentine feel of reptile hide, that immediately sent chills up my spine. It was fear without any obvious cause. But it was fear real and true nonetheless. I realized intuitively that it was something alive. There could be no mistake. *Those waves were alive.* The waves would grab hold of me, and toy with me according to their whim. And as I fantasized about that giant carnivore honing in on me and devouring me with his sharp teeth, the wind lurked somewhere out there in the fields. *We've got to get out of here,* I thought to myself.

"I turned to K and said to him 'Hey, let's go.' He was standing about ten yards away with his back to me, and looking at something as if it were his reflection. I had spoken in a plenty loud enough voice, but it was as if K didn't even hear me. Or maybe he was so absorbed in what he had discovered that my voice didn't reach his ears. As if in a dream, the outside world was forgotten. Or perhaps my voice wasn't as loud as I thought. I remember clearly that it didn't sound like my voice. It sounded entirely like somebody else's voice.

Then I heard a groan. It seemed loud enough to shake the earth. No, but before the groan another sound could be heard. It was the strange sound of a lot of water gushing through a hole. After this gushing sound had continued for a while, there came an almost insensible groaning sound, like the rumble of distant thunder. But still K didn't look up. He just stood there distractedly staring at something at his feet. All of his senses were concentrated on it. K probably couldn't even hear that groaning sound. I don't know how he could not have heard that tremendous sound, like the very earth trembling. Maybe it was a sound that I alone could hear. It may sound strange, but I wonder whether that sound was made only to reach my ears. That is to say, the dog which

stood at his side didn't seem to notice the sound either. And dogs do have especially acute hearing, after all.

"I had to go over there and get him and drag him away, I thought to myself. There was no other way about it. I *knew* that the wave was coming, and K did not. My feet, though, which knew what was about to happen, turned away from my *willin* exactly the opposite direction. *I ran away to the breakwater alone*. I guess it was the overwhelming fear that made me do it. It robbed me of my voice, but it got my feet moving well enough. I fled stumbling across the soft sand beach and, arriving there, turned to shout at K.

" 'Watch out! There's a wave coming!' I yelled in a loud voice. Then I noticed that the rumbling sound had stopped. K finally noticed my shouting and raised his head. But it was too late. At that very moment, a great wave rose up, like a viper preparing to strike, and pounded the coast. I had never seen anything like it in my entire life. It was taller than a three-story building. It hardly made any noise at all (or, at least, my memory of it contains no sound. It came soundlessly in my memory), and rose so high as to block out the sky behind K. He looked at me for a moment with an expression of incomprehension. But then he seemed to realize something and turned around. He was trying to get away. But there was no escape. In the next instant, the wave swallowed him up. It was like a collision with an unfeeling locomotive running at full speed.

"The rumbling sound rose and the wave broke, smashing down violently on the beach and, like an explosion, threw off fragments which came flying through the air to attack me at the breakwater. But secreted as I was behind the seawall, it passed by me. The tendrils of spray that managed to surmount it only soaked my clothes. Then I climbed up on top of the breakwater quickly and looked down the shoreline. The wave was rolling back out to sea at full speed, raising its savage shout all the while. It looked as if as someone had stretched a giant wool carpet at the extreme edge of the land. I looked as hard as I could, but there was no trace of K anywhere. In the space of a breath, the wave had passed so far out to sea that it seemed as if the ocean were drying out and the seafloor would be exposed. I cowered alone on the seawall.

"The silence returned. It was a hopeless silence as if the world had been violently stripped of every sound. With K still swallowed up inside, the wave passed far away. I couldn't begin to guess what I ought to do next. I thought that maybe I should go down to the beach. Maybe, by some chance, K had been buried in the sand somewhere nearby... But then I changed my mind and didn't move from atop the breakwater. I had learned from experience that these big waves could come two or three times together.

"I can't remember now how much time passed. I think it probably wasn't very long. 10 or 20 seconds, something like that, anyway. At any rate, after that impenetrable interval, the wave returned again to pound the shore, just as I had anticipated. That rumbling sound shook the earth violently just as before, the noise ceased, and at last the wave raised its head like a viper. All exactly like before. It blocked out the sky, and hemmed me in in front like a mortal cliff face. But this time there was nowhere to run to. As if bewitched, I stood there petrified on top of the breakwater, watching my impending demise. I had this feeling that, K having already been abducted, there was no use in trying to escape. Or then again, maybe in the face of that

overwhelming fear, I could do nothing but cower. I don't clearly remember now which way it was.

"The second wave was every bit as big as the first. No, it was even bigger. The shape distorted slowly at first, like a brick rampart collapsing, as the wave toppled down from above. It was far too big, and didn't look like a real wave. It looked like something completely different that had the shape of a wave. Something come from some distant world *in the shape of a wave, but altogether different*. I steeled my resolve and waited for the instant when darkness would seize me. I didn't even close my eyes. I remember hearing the sound of my own pulse. When the wave was immediately before me, however, it stopped and floated in the air, as if it had suddenly lost power. It only lasted for a second, but in that moment the wave hung there, midway through breaking, *and stopped*. And in the foam at the crest of the wave, in the middle of that vicious, transparent tongue, I clearly recognized the shape of K.

"Perhaps not all of you can believe such a thing. That's probably inevitable. To speak frankly, even I still can't comprehend how something like this could happen. Of course there is no explanation. But it wasn't a vision and it wasn't an illusion. That's exactly how it happened without the slightest fabrication. As if enclosed in a transparent capsule, K floated on his side in the crest of that wave. And that wasn't all. K was *laughing at me*. There, right before my eyes, so close I could reach out and touch him, I could make out my best friend's face, who only moments before had been swallowed by the wave. There was no mistake. He started laughing at me. And it was no ordinary laugh either. His grin literally stretched from ear to ear. Then his look grew cold and dire, and he fixed his gaze on me. He stretched out his right hand in my direction. As if he wanted to take my hand and drag me into that world. His hand was unable to grasp me, however. Then K opened his mouth even wider and laughed once again.

"I guess I lost consciousness after that. The next thing I knew, I was on a bed in my father's hospital. When I opened my eyes, a nurse went to call my father and he came running in right away. He took my hand and measured my pulse, looked in my pupils, and put a hand to my forehead to check my temperature. I tried to move my hand, but it was impossible for me to lift it. I had a fever like my whole body was on fire, and I was dazed and couldn't hold a thought. It seems that I'd had a high fever for quite a while. You slept for three days straight, my father said. A neighbor who had been watching the whole time from some distance away picked me up after he saw me fall and carried me home. K was carried off by the wave and we still don't know where he is, my father said. I knew there was something I wanted to tell my father. There was something I *had* to tell my father. But my tongue was swollen and numb. I couldn't get any words out. It felt like some completely different type of creature had taken up residence in my mouth. Father asked me my name. I tried to remember my name, but before it came to mind I lost consciousness again and plunged back into the darkness.

"In the end, I was in bed for a week, hooked up to an I.V. I threw up many times and had nightmares. The whole time, Father was deeply concerned that the severe shock and the high fever might cause permanent brain damage. My situation was so grave that it wouldn't have been unusual if that had happened. But my body slowly recovered somehow. Over the course of many weeks I gradually returned to my former life. I ate the usual foods, and I went back to school. But of course not everything was back to the way it was.

"K's corpse was never recovered. The dog that the wave had swallowed up with him wasn't ever seen again either. Usually, people who drown off that part of the coast get carried by the tide to this small inlet to the east, and after a few days wash up on the beach, but what became of K's body was never known. Maybe the overwhelming size of the waves during that typhoon carried him so far out to sea that his body never made it back to shore. He probably sank to the bottom of the ocean somewhere and became food for fish. The search for K's body continued for quite a long time with the assistance of the local fishermen, but at some point tapered off and eventually stopped. Since the allimportant corpse was missing, in the end no funeral was held. From then on, K's parents were half- mad with grief, spending every day wandering aimlessly up and down the beach, or else shut up in their house chanting sutras.

"And despite the fact that they took the blow so hard, K's parents never once blamed me for having brought him to the beach in the middle of the typhoon. They knew well that until then I loved him as my own brother and valued him tremendously. My parents also seemed to avoid touching on the incident in my presence. But I knew it. If I think about it a little, I know I could have saved K. I'm pretty sure I could have gone to the place where he was standing and brought him safely to some place where the wave that carried him off wouldn't have been able to reach him. It would have been close, but when I go over my memory of it and the amount of time I had, I think I could have made it. But, as I said previously, I was overcome with blinding fear, and abandoned K to save myself. Since K's parents didn't blame me, and everybody else avoided talking about the incident as if it were cancerous, I suffered abundantly. For a long time, I was unable to recover from that psychological shock. I didn't go to school, I didn't eat much, I just lay on my back and stared up at the ceiling.

"No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't forget the sight of K reclining in the foam of the crest of that wave, with a merry grin on his face. Nor could I drive from my mind the individual fingers of his hand, each reaching out to me invitingly. When I went to sleep, that face, those eyes would appear in my dreams as well, as if he were waiting impatiently for me. In these dreams, K would leap out from his capsule in the foam, grab me by the wrist, and pull me into the wave.

"And I also had this other kind of dream. In it, I was swimming in the ocean. It's a beautiful summer afternoon, and I swim across the flat water far out to sea. The sun beats down on my back, and the water wraps around my body luxuriantly. But then something in the water grabs my right foot. I feel an ice-cold grip around my ankle. It is very strong and I can't shake it off. And just like that I'm pulled down into the deep. I see K's face there. Just like that time, he's looking dead at me, his face nearly split by that immense grin. I try to scream, but no sound comes out. I just gulp water in. My lungs fill up with water.

"I wake up in the dark, screaming, covered in sweat, and breathless.

"At the end of that year, I begged my parents to let me leave town immediately and move away somewhere else. I couldn't continue to live by that beach where K had been carried off by the wave, and I was having nightmares nearly every night, as you know. Some place fairly far removed from here. If I couldn't, I'd probably end up going mad. When he heard my request, my father made arrangements for me to relocate. In January, I moved to Nagano Prefecture and started going to a public elementary school there. My father's family home was nearby, and I was

allowed to stay there. I advanced to junior high and then to high school in that same place. When vacations came, I didn't ever go back home. Every once in a while, my parents would come up for a visit.

"And to this very day, I still live in Nagano. I graduated from a technical college in Nagano City, found a job with a precision machinery company, and that brings us up to the present. I have had the life and career of a completely ordinary person. As you can see, there is nothing particularly different about me. I'm not a very social person, but I enjoy mountaineering, and I have a number of close friends through that. As soon as I moved away from that town, the nightmares decreased in frequency, almost to how it was before. But they didn't depart from my life completely either. They would come back to me periodically, like a bill collector knocking at the door. Just as soon as I would start to forget, there they would be. The dreams were always exactly the same, down to the minutest detail. Whenever that happened, I'd wake up screaming. My sheets would be drenched with sweat.

"That's probably why I never married. I didn't want to be continually waking up whoever was sleeping next to me at two or three o'clock in the morning with my yelling. There have been a number of women thus far that I've been quite fond of. But I've never spent the night with any of them. The fear is suffused into the very marrow of my bones, and is not something that it is possible to share with anyone.

"At this point, I'm over 40 years old and I'd never been back to my hometown, nor had I gotten near that stretch of coastline. It's not just that stretch of shore either, but the sea itself that I could not bear to be near. I was afraid that if I actually went to the sea there, the things that happened in my dreams would come to pass in reality. At one time, I loved swimming more than anything, but since then I hadn't even been able to swim in a pool. I couldn't get near a deep river or the tide. I avoided riding in ships. I had never been overseas on a plane either. I couldn't scrub from my mind the image of me drowning in some unknown place. Like K's cold hand in my dreams, I couldn't shake loose that dark presentiment from my consciousness.

"In the spring of last year, I revisited the site of K's abduction for the first time.

"Father had died the previous year, and my brother had sold the family home in order to divide up the proceeds. As he'd been putting the storage room in order, he came across a cardboard box full of my childhood things, and had sent it to me. Most of the stuff was worthless junk, but deep inside, a bundle of pictures that K had painted for me caught my eye. I think K's parents had given them to me as a remembrance of him. The fear was so strong it took my breath away. I had the feeling that K's spirit was revived before my eyes in those pictures. I wrapped them back up in their flimsy wrapping and, intending to destroy them right away, put them back in the box. For whatever reason, though, I was unable to throw away K's paintings. Several days later, completely at the end of my rope, I ripped the paper off K's watercolors, and boldly took them in hand.

"They were nearly all landscapes, familiar ocean and beaches and forests and store fronts, all done in K's distinctive shades. They were unfaded to a peculiar degree, and marks that had been there when I had seen the pictures years before still appeared as though they were fresh. As soon

as I took the pictures in my hand, before I had even had a chance to really look at them, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of longing and remorse. Those pictures were far more skillfully executed and artistically superior than I had even remembered them being. I could feel acutely the presence of K's deep spirit in those pictures as if it were my own. I was able to understand fully how K saw the world around him. As I gazed at those pictures, the things that I did with K and the places that we went together came rushing vividly back to me, one by one. Yes, that's it: it was as if they were my own *personal* perceptions. I could see the world distinctly and unclouded, exactly as it had been then, the two of us side by side.

"Everyday when I returned home from work, I would take one of those pictures in my hand and stare at it. I could look at them endlessly. They contained the beautiful scenery of my youth that I had long before forced out of my mind. When I looked at K's pictures, I had the feeling that they permeated quietly into the center of my body.

"Then, after about a week had passed, I was taken aback by a new thought. Hadn't I, perhaps, been completely mistaken in my thinking? As K was lying in the foam of that wave, did he really hate and resent me, or was he not, perhaps, trying to transport me to somewhere else? That weird smile on his face--might it have just looked like a smile? Was he not already unconscious by then? Or could he not have just wanted to give me one last final, affectionate smile before we parted forever? Could the color of violent hatred that I saw in his face have been nothing more than the projection of my own deep fear?... As I examined those ancient watercolors of K's, my thoughts in this direction became stronger and stronger. No matter how I looked at them, nothing but K's unblemished, pacific spirit emerged from the pictures.

"For a long time after that, I just sat there. I was completely unable to stand up. The day passed and dusky darkness slowly enveloped the room. Finally, a deeply silent night came on. The seemingly unending night continued on until the counterbalance of the darkness could no longer sustain its weight, and then gradually day broke. New sunlight dyed the sky a pale rose, and the birds woke up and began their crowing.

"I realized then that I had to go back to that town. And right away.

"I packed a suitcase with the bare essentials, called the office to tell them that something urgent had come up, and took a train in the direction of my hometown..

"The town was not at all the quiet seaside town of my memory. Out of the rapid growth period of the 1960's had emerged a manufacturing city, and this had wrought a great transformation on the scenery. The area around the station, where once only a few souvenir shops stood, was now crowded with merchants, and the only movie theater in town had become a supermarket. Even my own house was no more. It had been demolished some months before and now was nothing more than naked tilled earth. All the trees in the garden had been cut down, and weeds sprouted here and there from the black earth. Needless to say, the house that K had once lived in had vanished too. The land had been paved over for monthly parking, and cars and vans were lined up side by side. None of this really made me nostalgic at all, though. It had been so long since this town had been my own.

I walked to the shore and climbed the stairs to the top of the seawall. Facing the breakwater just as always, impeded by no one, the sea spread out wide. It was a huge ocean. Far away I could see the unbroken line of the horizon. The view from the beach was exactly as it had been long before. The beach stretched out like before, the waves lapped the shore like before, and people walked along the surf like before. The weak light of early evening enveloped the area and, as if the sun was considering something carefully, sunk slowly into the west. I sat down on the beach there, set my bag down next to me, and silently watched the sunset. It was a truly soothing and peaceful sight. The sight gave no clue that this was the same place where a great typhoon had once blown in, where a wave had swallowed up my best friend. There was probably hardly anyone left who even remembered that it had happened, forty years before. I began to wonder whether it was just some private phantom that I had conjured up entirely in my head.

"Suddenly I noticed that the deep darkness within me had been extinguished. Just as suddenly as it had come on it was gone without a trace. I slowly got up from the beach. I walked to the edge of the surf and without rolling up my pants waded out into it. Waves lapped at my feet, still covered by shoes. The waves hit the shore just as they had when I was a child, and as if making a peace offering, washed over my feet, dampening my shoes and my clothes. Waves approached intermittently and then retreated. Passersby stared at the peculiar sight of me, but I didn't pay any attention to them. After such a long time, I had finally made it back here.

"I looked up at the sky. Small grey clouds, like finely chopped cotton, floated by. There being hardly any wind, the clouds seemed to stay stopped in one place. I can't really explain it, but I had the feeling that those clouds floated there for me alone. My thoughts turned to the time when I was a boy that I had gone out looking for the great eye of the typhoon, and how at that time I had looked up to the sky in just the same way. The huge axle of time gave a mighty screech within me. The past and present crashed together, like my old desiccated house being demolished, and mixed together in one vortex of time. All ambient sound ceased, and the light wavered. I lost my balance and toppled into the approaching wave. My heart made a loud noise in my throat, as sensation in my hands and feet dissipated. I lay prone like that, where I had fallen, for a long time. I was unable to stand up. But I wasn't at all afraid either. There was nothing to be afraid of. All of that was past.

"Since then I haven't had a single bad dream. I haven't once woken up screaming in the middle of the night. I wish I could start my life over from the beginning now and live it right. But no, I guess it's too late for that. From here on out, I probably don't have that much time left. But in spite of having lost so much time, I'm so grateful that I was redeemed before the end, and managed to recover. That's right. The possibility was there for me to end my life without receiving redemption, screaming into the fearful void."

The Seventh Man fell silent for a moment, and looked around him at the people seated there. Nobody said a word. There wasn't a sound in the room except for the faint whisper of breathing. Nobody so much as twitched. The wind had died down completely, and no sounds could be heard outside either. As if searching for a word, the man started once again to fidget with the collar of shirt.

"The way I see it, the true fear for us as human being is not terror as such," the man said after a little while. Terror certainly exists there....It manifests itself in various forms, and from time to time overwhelms our very existence as human beings. But the most fearful thing of all is to turn your back on that fear, to close your eyes to it. By doing that, we end up alienating the very most essential part of our make-up. In my case--it was a wave."