\*\*1. What happens in the story?\*\*

The narrator encounters Q, an old college friend, at a swimming pool after twenty years apart. While swimming, the narrator observes Q unnoticed as he conducts a tense business call about company restructuring. Through this voyeuristic observation, the narrator witnesses Q's transformation from an idealistic college student to a weary Wall Street executive, glimpsing the personal cost of his professional success. The encounter prompts reflection on lost friendships, the price of ambition, and shared human vulnerability.

\*\*2. What is the theme?\*\*

The central theme explores the hidden costs of worldly success and the disillusionment that comes with achieving conventional markers of greatness. It examines how youthful idealism erodes under corporate pressures, the loneliness of power, and the universal nature of human struggle regardless of external achievements. The story also addresses the natural drift of friendships over time and how we construct facades to hide our vulnerabilities while yearning for authentic connection.

\*\*3. Does it propose other interpretations, in addition to the literal one?\*\*

Rating: 4 (Agree)

\*\*4. If the above question was affirmative, which interpretation is it?\*\*

The title "The Kingdom That Failed" suggests Q's corporate empire as a hollow kingdom built on sacrificed ideals. The pool setting symbolizes emotional depths and reflection, with the narrator's submersion representing introspection while Q remains on the surface. The voyeuristic dynamic mirrors how we observe others' lives from a distance, making assumptions about their happiness. The story can be read as a meditation on different types of success—Q's visible achievement versus the narrator's quieter path—questioning which represents true failure.