

## Sanshirō – Chapter 6

Natsume Sōseki – 1908

The bell rang, and the lecturer left the room. Sanshirō shook the excess ink from his pen and started to close his notebook. “Hey, let me see that. I missed some things,” Yojirō called to him from the next seat over.

Yojirō pulled Sanshirō’s notebook over and looked at the page. The words “stray sheep” were scrawled about at random.

“What is this?”

“I was just scribbling. I got tired of taking notes.”

“I hope you paid attention. Kant’s transcendental idealism was being contrasted with Berkeley’s transcendental realism.”

“Something like that.”

“You weren’t listening?”

“Not really.”

“Just like a stray sheep. You’re hopeless.”

Yojirō scooped up his own notes and stood up. “Follow me,” he said to Sanshirō as he moved away from the desk.

Sanshirō followed Yojirō out of the room. They went down the stairs and out onto the grass in front of the entrance. There was a large cherry tree, and the two of them sat down beneath it.

In early summer, this lawn would be covered in clover. When Yojirō had arrived to present his application for admission, two students were resting under this same tree. One of them mused to the other how he wished he could sing romantic ballads in lieu of his oral examinations. Then he’d have plenty of words for his inspectors. The other improvised a verse and sang it quietly in response. “I’d like a professor who knows ‘bout the world. I’d like him to quiz me on romance and girls.” Ever since, this cherry tree was Yojirō’s favorite spot. When he wanted to talk, he would have Sanshirō join him here. After hearing this story, Sanshirō understood why Yojirō had wanted to translate “pity’s akin to love” into a ballad. Today, however, Yojirō was uncharacteristically serious. As soon as he’d seated himself on the grass, he pulled an edition of Literary Review from his pocket and put it in front of Sanshirō, face up and already open to a marked page.

“What do you think?” he asked.

The title, written in large typeface, read Great Dark Void. Below it was the pen name Reiyoshi. Sanshirō had heard Yojirō use the term “great dark void” several times in referring to Professor Hirota. However, the

name Reiyoshi was entirely unfamiliar. Before answering what he thought, Sanshirō turned his gaze back to Yojirō. Without a word, Yojirō leaned his face forward. Then, he pressed his right index finger to the tip of his nose and held it there. Another student, standing a ways off, observed the scene and broke into a grin. Yojirō took notice and finally lifted his finger off his nose.

“It’s me,” he said.

Sanshirō’s supposition was confirmed. “That piece you were working on as the rest of us set out for the chrysanthemum show. This is it?”

“That one? No. It’s only been a few days. They can’t set and print that fast. That’ll come out next month. I wrote this one a while ago. Can you guess from the title what it’s about?”

“Professor Hirota?”

“Exactly. The first step is to stir up grassroots support. That’ll open the door for a position at the university ...”

“Is this publication really that influential?” Sanshirō had never heard of it.

“Actually, no. That’s the problem,” Yojirō admitted.

“What’s the circulation?”

Yojirō didn’t give a number. “Well anyway, it’s at least worth a try.” He defended his effort.

On further inquiry, it turned out that Yojirō had a long history with this publication. Time allowing, he contributed something to each edition. At the same time, he always changed his pen name, so only a few close friends knew. Who could have guessed? Sanshirō himself was just now learning of Yojirō’s connection to the literary community. Still, it was beyond him why Yojirō would want to release his “important piece of work” under another silly assumed name.

Sanshirō asked Yojirō, rather imprudently, if he wrote as a side job to earn extra money.

Yojirō rolled his eyes incredulously. “You’re freshly in from the Kyūshū countryside, and you’re ignorant of the dynamic literary scene here in the capital. That’s why you pose such thoughtless questions. How could anyone with half an intellect, surrounded by a world of modern thought and watching it seethe with passion, stand idly by doing nothing? In this new age, young men like us hold the power of the pen. If we refrain from expressing ourselves, even with a single word or a simple phrase, then haven’t we squandered an opportunity? Powerful forces are flipping the literary world on its head. Everything is in violent turmoil and shifting in new directions, and if it leaves us behind we’re finished. If we don’t take initiative and harness these trends, then what are we here for? They cheapen the word “literature” through overuse, but that’s their university literature. Our new literature holds a great mirror to the true human experience. Our new literature is destined to inform every action of the new Japan. And it is, in fact, doing so. While they sleep and dream, it’s working its effect. It’s a fearsome thing ...”

Sanshirō listened in silence. It smacked a little of empty bluster. Nevertheless, the fervor with which Yojirō expounded it was authentic. The speaker himself, at least, seemed quite sincere. Sanshirō was duly impressed.

“So that’s your motivation. And the writer’s fee doesn’t matter, then?”

“I take the fee, whatever I can get. Unfortunately, the magazine doesn’t sell well, so they seldom pay me anything at all. We need some way to increase circulation. Do you have any good ideas?” Now Yojirō was engaging him in consultation. Sanshirō was bewildered by the abrupt shift to practicalities. Yojirō took no notice. The bell clanged noisily.

“Anyway, I’m giving you this copy, so read it. Great Dark Void is an intriguing title, don’t you think? It’s certain to impress. -- The title has to impress, or no one will bother to read further.”

The two of them went back inside, entered the lecture hall, and took their seats. By and by the professor appeared. They both began taking notes. Sanshirō’s mind was on Great Dark Void, so he set the copy of Literary Review, still open to the page, next to his notebook. When he wasn’t writing notes, he was glancing discretely at the magazine. Fortunately, the professor was nearsighted. Furthermore, he was thoroughly absorbed in his own lecture and took no notice of Sanshirō’s imprudence. Sanshirō enjoyed himself, note taking here and reading there. Doing the work of two men single-handedly, however, turned out to be an impossible feat. In the end, his lecture notes and Great Dark Void became jumbled in his mind. Only one line from Yojirō’s writing stuck with clarity.

“How many years does nature take to form a jewel? And how many years does it sparkle in silence before fortune discovers it?” This was the line he remembered. The rest was a blur. On the other hand, he’d made it through this whole period without once writing “stray sheep” in his notes.

As soon as the lecture ended, Yojirō turned to Sanshirō and asked, “What did you think?”

When Sanshirō replied that he hadn’t read it through yet, Yojirō reproached him for mis-prioritizing his time. Then he implored him to read it. Sanshirō promised he would read it at home without fail. At noon, the two of them left together through the university gate.

“I trust you’re coming tonight?” Yojirō asked when they stopped at the corner in Nishikatamachi. There was a class get-together that evening. Sanshirō had forgotten about it. Finally recalling the details, he replied that he intended to go.

“Stop by my place before. There’s something I want to talk to you about.” Yojirō had a pen barrel propped behind his ear, and he seemed in high spirits. Sanshirō accepted his request.

Sanshirō returned to his lodgings and went down to the bath. Refreshed after bathing, he came back to find a picture postcard on his desk. The picture was of a small stream bordered by scraggly grass in a thin strip. At the edge of the grass were two sheep in repose. On the opposite bank stood a large man with a walking stick. The man was drawn with a most menacing expression, like some depiction of the devil from Western

art. For good measure, the kana for “devil” danced around him. On the front side, below Sanshirō’s name and address, the words “stray sheep” appeared in small letters. Sanshirō knew immediately to whom this referred. Furthermore, he was overjoyed that there were two sheep included on the reverse, one of which must implicitly be a likeness of himself. It wasn’t just Mineko, it was the two of them. The meaning of Mineko’s “stray sheep” was finally clear to him.

He thought he should start on Great Dark Void, as he’d promised Yojirō, but he wasn’t in the mood for reading. His attention was fixed on the postcard. It had a flavor of witticism not found in Aesop. There was also an air of innocence to it, and something honest too. Most of all, there was something in it that touched him.

The quality of the work was extraordinary. Everything was vivid and alive, quite different from the persimmon tree that Yoshiko had painted -- such were Sanshirō’s impressions.

After a while, Sanshirō finally began reading Great Dark Void. He wasn’t really paying much attention, but over the first several pages his interest was gradually piqued. Before he knew it he was six pages in, and he continued on effortlessly through the entirety of a lengthy twenty seven pages. Only after reading the final line did he realize he was at the end. He lifted his eyes from the magazine, satisfied in his accomplishment.

However, when he tried in the next moment to recall what he’d read, his mind was blank. So much so that he almost had to laugh. He only knew that he had read a great deal, and with great enthusiasm. Yojirō was a gifted writer.

The piece had begun with an assault on contemporary literary scholars, and it had ended with praise for Professor Hirota. It was particularly severe in disparaging the Western faculty members in the college of arts and literature. Qualified Japanese nationals should be called up immediately to deliver lectures becoming of higher academics. Otherwise the university, which represented the pinnacle of scholarship, would find itself on a level with the temple primary schools of old, nothing more than a mummy swathed in bricks and stone. It would be one thing if there were no capable candidates, but here was Professor Hirota. The Professor had toiled at the high school level for ten long years, content to teach for meager pay and with a dearth of recognition. This was a genuine scholar. He was a man representing the new face of global scholarship, a man intimately connected to Japanese society, and a man worthy of a professorship. -- This, in a nutshell, was all it said. However, this “all it said” was padded excessively with high-sounding prose and brilliant quips that stretched it to twenty seven pages.

The piece included an abundance of noteworthy passages. “Only old men take pride in a bald head.” Or, “Venus was born of the waves, but no shrewd gentleman is born of the university.” Or, “To regard men of learning as a product of academia is akin to regarding jellyfish as a product of Tago Bay.” However, there was nothing more. One particularly curious thing was that, after likening Professor Hirota to a great dark void, it likened other scholars to dim round lanterns, incapable of throwing light more than a meter. These were the very words Professor Hirota had used to describe Yojirō. Then the piece went out of its way to incorporate Yojirō’s comments of the other day, disparaging round lanterns and goose-neck pipes as outdated relics, of no use to today’s young men.

Reflecting back on it, Yojirō's piece was packed with energy. He presumed himself the representative voice of a new Japan, and he pulled the reader along in this premise. However, there was no meat on the bones. It was like a war with no base of operation. Furthermore, his style of writing, if so regarded, could easily come across as politically intentioned. Sanshirō, green from the country, couldn't articulate the specific flaws, but his reflections left him uneasy. He picked up Mineko's card and gazed again at the two sheep and the devil man. His reaction to this work was wholly agreeable. This agreeable reaction threw his unease with the prose into sharper relief. He contemplated Yojirō's piece no further. He thought he should reply to Mineko. Regrettably, he couldn't draw. He could answer in words, but his words would have to be worthy of her picture. He couldn't think what to write. He dawdled away the time until four o'clock.

Sanshirō changed into his formal hakata and set out for Nishikatamachi to call on Yojirō. He entered through the side door and found the professor in the hearth room, a small table before him, eating dinner. Yojirō was by his side, waiting on him attentively.

"How is it professor?" he asked.

The professor had a cheek full of something tough. In a dish on the table were ten reddish-black charred disks, each the size of a pocket watch.

Sanshirō seated himself and offered his greeting. The professor chewed on busily.

"Here, you should try one too." Yojirō picked one off the dish with his chopsticks and held it out. Inspecting it in his hand, Sanshirō identified it as the dried meat of a bakagai clam, broiled in soy.

"Isn't this an odd thing to be eating?" he asked.

"An odd thing? These are wonderful. Try it. I went and bought these as a treat for the professor since he said he'd never had them."

"Where did you buy them?"

"Nihonbashi."

Sanshirō wanted to laugh. It was hard to reconcile this present scene with the tone of Yojirō's composition.

"What do you think, professor?"

"They're tough."

"Tough, but good, huh? You have to chew thoroughly. That brings out the flavor."

"If I chew till the flavor comes my jaw will go numb. Why'd you go buy such old-fashioned things?"

"You don't like them? It may be they don't suit your taste. I'll bet Mineko would appreciate them."

“Why is that?” Sanshirō asked.

“She moves at her own pace. No doubt she’d chew and chew till the flavor came out.”

“That young lady is calm on the surface, but she’s unmanageable,” interjected the professor.

“That she is. Just like a woman out of Ibsen.”

“Ibsen’s women are outwardly rebellious. That young lady is unmanageable at her core. When I said unmanageable, I didn’t mean in the usual sense. Nonomiya’s sister looks a little unmanageable, but deep down she possesses a feminine charm. It’s a curious thing.”

“It’s an inner turmoil, then, that renders Mineko unmanageable?”

Sanshirō listened to their comments in silence. He didn’t accept what they were saying. First of all, the use of the word “unmanageable” with respect to Mineko left him puzzled.

Yojirō finally went and changed into his hakata. “We’re off,” he called to the professor. The professor was quietly drinking tea. The two of them left through the front yard. It was already dark out. A few paces past the gate, Sanshirō engaged Yojirō.

“The professor referred to Mineko as unmanageable.”

“He always speaks his mind. Depending on the occasion or situation, he’s likely to say anything. It’s funny to hear him comment on women, though, a subject on which his knowledge is nil. If one’s never been in love, how can one understand women?”

“Be that as it may, weren’t you in agreement with him?”

“Yes, in regard to unmanageability. Why?”

“In what way is Mineko unmanageable?”

“It’s nothing specific that you can put your finger on. Anyway, all modern women are unmanageable. It’s not just her.”

“Didn’t you liken her to a woman out of Ibsen?”

“I did.”

“Which woman from Ibsen did you mean?”

“Which one ... take your pick.”

Sanshirō, of course, was unconvinced, but he pressed it no further. They continued for several paces in silence. Then Yojirō suddenly elaborated. “It’s not just Mineko whom I associate with Ibsen. Most all the

women of today fit the mold. The same for any man who breathes this modern air, even just a single breath. Very few, though, express it through freedom of action. Most of us are harboring frustrations.”

“I don’t harbor frustrations.”

“If you think you don’t then you’re deceiving yourself. -- No society, after all, is entirely free of deficiencies.”

“I suppose not.”

“It follows then, that those within a society feel some form of discontent. Ibsen’s characters sense deficiencies in the modern social system most acutely. Little by little, we’re growing to sense them too.”

“You really think so?”

“Not just me. All men of intellect think so.”

“Is your Professor Hirota of the same mind?”

“I’m not sure what the professor thinks.”

“Just now, though, didn’t he say that Mineko, while calm on the surface, is unmanageable? If we follow his thinking, it seems that he credits her calm exterior to her social skills. So doesn’t that imply, then, that it’s a deep-seated discontent that renders her unmanageable?”

“I see. -- The man really is insightful. Looking at it that way, he’s sheer brilliance.”

Yojirō transitioned suddenly to praise for Professor Hirota. Sanshirō would have liked to discuss Mineko’s disposition further, but Yojirō had outmaneuvered him.

Yojirō spoke again. “Actually, what I wanted to talk to you about ... -- Wait. First of all, did you read Great Dark Void? If you didn’t read it then you won’t understand what I’m after.”

“After we parted today, I went home and read it.”

“What did you think?”

“What did the professor say about it?”

“He hasn’t read it. He doesn’t even know about it.”

“Well, then, it was certainly engaging. -- But it was a bit like drinking beer to quell an appetite.”

“Good enough. As long as it evokes a reaction. That’s why I used an assumed name. This is just practice. When the time is right, I’ll publish under my real name. -- Anyway, here’s what I have in mind.”

Yojirō's plan was as follows. -- At the gathering that evening he would deplore, to any sympathetic ear, the lethargic state of their department. Sanshirō was to deplore it likewise. It was, in fact, lethargic, so others would deplore it too. Then, they would all formulate revitalization measures. Yojirō would propose the recruitment of suitable Japanese national faculty members as a pressing need. Everyone would agree. It was the right thing to do, so agreement was a given. Next, the discussion would turn to possible candidates. At that time, Yojirō would offer up Professor Hirota's name. Sanshirō's role was to back him up by praising the professor profusely. Otherwise certain fellows, who knew that Yojirō boarded with the professor, might stir up misgivings. Yojirō was, in actuality, the professor's boarder, so they could call him disingenuous if they liked. However, he couldn't risk landing the professor in hot water. He had other comrades too, so it should go well, but every additional ally improved their chances. Sanshirō should speak up as much as possible. Anyway, when they finally arrived at a unanimous consensus they'd select a representative to go see the dean and the president. All of this might not transpire in a single evening. It didn't need to. They'd play it by ear ...

Yojirō was a gifted speaker. Regrettably, though, his rambling often robbed his words of gravity. After a while, one wondered if his earnest persuasion might not be all in jest. However, his initiative was not without merit, and Sanshirō, for the most part, expressed agreement. His only objection was that he found the approach somewhat lacking in tact. On hearing this, Yojirō drew to a stop in the middle of the road. They were just before the Morikawachō shrine gate.

"You talk about lack of tact, but what I'm doing is nothing more or less than an insertion of human effort to ensure things run their natural course. Attempting some foolish scheme that subverts the natural order of things is fundamentally different. In my case, tact is irrelevant. It's not about tact in poor form. Tact for poor ends is poor form."

Sanshirō was completely nonplussed. He wanted to object, but he couldn't find the words. His mind was fixed on points of Yojirō's that he hadn't thought of. He couldn't help being impressed.

"I can see what you mean." He gave an ambiguous answer, and they resumed walking together. As they passed through the university's main gate, the world before them suddenly broadened. Grand buildings stood all about in silhouette. Above their crisp rooflines was a crystal clear sky. Endless stars were visible.

"It's a beautiful night," Sanshirō remarked.

Yojirō walked several paces with his gaze skyward. "Hey," he called out to Sanshirō.

"What?" Sanshirō answered, assuming Yojirō would continue their earlier discussion.

"When you see a sky like this, what do you feel?" Yojirō asked uncharacteristically.

Yojirō was certain to ridicule a trite response like "infinity" or "eternity." Sanshirō remained silent.

"What are we really accomplishing? Maybe tomorrow I'll drop it all. My writing of Great Dark Void was nothing but wasted time."



“What happened all of the sudden?”

“That’s what I feel when I see this sky. -- Tell me, have you ever fallen for a woman?”

Sanshirō could not provide an immediate reply.

“Women are frightful,” Yojirō remarked.

“I know they’re frightful,” Sanshirō replied.

Yojirō burst out laughing. His laughter rang loudly through the still of the evening. “What do you know? How could you know?”

Yojirō’s rebuke left Sanshirō dispirited.

“The weather will be fine again tomorrow. Field day should be great fun. Lovely young ladies will turn out in droves. You should come and see.”

They continued through the darkness to the student assembly hall. Electric light shone from within.

They wound their way through a wood-planked corridor and entered the main hall. Early arrivals had already clustered into three groups of varying sizes. There were also some others off to the side, quietly perusing the hall’s collection of magazines and newspapers. Conversation could be heard on all sides, and it seemed there were more conversations than there were groups. The tone of the conversations was relatively subdued. The tobacco smoke that curled toward the ceiling was far more animated.

By and by, more arrived. Shadowy forms emerged intermittently from the darkness, appearing in the drafty corridor. One by one they set foot into the light of the room. Sometimes five or six in succession would step into the light. After a while, the party was more or less assembled.

Since their arrival, Yojirō had moved busily about the smoke-filled room, engaging in quiet conversations. Sanshirō followed his movements, thinking he must be setting his plan into motion.

A short while later, the secretary called in a loud voice for everyone to take a seat. The table, of course, had been prepared in advance. In a mass of confusion they all took seats. There was no assigned order. Dinner began.

Back in Kumamoto, Sanshirō had only had red saké. Red saké was a low grade of saké brewed locally. If you were a Kumamoto student, out for a drink, then it went without saying that you ordered red saké. On occasions when they dined out, there was a beef house they frequented. Rumor had it that the beef at that beef house might be horse meat. The students would grab a handful of meat off the dish and slap it onto the wall. If it slid, it was beef. If it stuck, it was horse. The process was akin to divination. To Sanshirō, this evening’s formal gathering was a novel experience. He worked his knife and fork with pleasure, and he chased his bites down with generous gulps of beer.

“This assembly hall food is awful,” the fellow next to Sanshirō remarked. He was a mild-mannered fellow with close-cropped hair and gold-rimmed glasses.

“I suppose it is.” Sanshirō offered a lukewarm response. If he’d been talking to Yojirō, he would have replied honestly that to a fellow like him from the country, this food was excellent. In this case, however, he refrained. He did not want to be misconstrued as sarcastic.

“Which high school are you from?” the other fellow asked.

“Kumamoto.”

“Kumamoto? A cousin of mine was in Kumamoto. Said it was a dreadful place.”

“It’s not very cultured.”

As the two of them were talking, shrill voices erupted from further down the table. Yojirō was conversing energetically with the fellows around him. The words “de te fabula” occasionally punctuated his speech. Sanshirō had no idea what these words meant. However, Yojirō’s listeners burst into laughter each time he spoke them. Yojirō prattled on in high spirits, with, “... de te fabula, young men like ourselves of this new age ...” A refined fellow of fair complexion, diagonally across from Sanshirō, rested his knife for a moment and regarded Yojirō’s group. Finally he smiled and commented half-jokingly in French, “Il a le diable au corps (he’s possessed by the devil).” The boisterous group took no notice. In a triumphant toast, four cups of beer were raised together high in the air.

“That guy’s quite a character,” said the student next to Sanshirō with the gold-rimmed glasses.

“Yes. He’s very outgoing.”

“He once treated me to curry rice at Yodomiken. He approached me, even though we weren’t acquainted, and insisted I come along. In the end, he all but dragged me there ...”

The student laughed aloud. Sanshirō thus learned that he wasn’t the only one whom Yojirō had treated to curry rice at Yodomiken.

Finally coffee was served. One of the students rose from his seat. Yojirō applauded enthusiastically, and others soon followed suit.

The student who rose wore a new black uniform and sported a mature mustache. He was a tall man, and he cut an imposing figure as he stood. He started into what sounded like a formal address.

“We’ve gathered here together in camaraderie and enjoyed this evening to its fullest. That in itself is a wonderful thing. However, I’ve realized, to my own surprise, that this gathering harbors a deeper significance. Beyond the pleasure of each other’s company, our time tonight may well serve as a catalyst for great things to follow, and that’s what compels me to speak. Our gathering is much like any other. Except that the forty or so gathered here, drinking beer and coffee, are not like any others. In the time that we’ve

spent, from that first glass of beer to this final cup of coffee, we can already sense the expanding role of our own destinies.”

“Political freedom was gained long ago. Freedom of expression was also secured in the past. But the word ‘freedom’ should not be confined to just these superficial realities. I believe that we, as young men of this new age, have arrived at the critical point where the greatest freedom, freedom of thought, must be fought for and won.”

“We young men cannot live under the oppression of the old Japan. At the same time, we’ve reached a juncture where the world must know that we will not live under oppression from the modern West. To us, the young men of this new age, oppression from the modern West, in regard to society and also in regard to literature, is no less offensive than the oppression of the old Japan.”

“We are scholars of Western literature. However, scholarship of Western literature is fundamentally different from subservience. We do not study Western literature in order to be shackled by it. We study rather to emancipate minds from bondage. We possess the confidence and determination to refuse any literary scholarship, however coercively pressed on us, that is not aligned with our principals.”

“Our confidence and determination are what set us apart from others. Literature is not a technical trade. Nor is it administrative work. It’s the motive force of human society, touching directly on the fundamental meaning of humanity. That’s why we study literature, that’s what imbues us with the aforementioned confidence and determination, and that’s why we can assign extraordinary import to tonight’s gathering.”

“Our society is in the midst of a great transition. Literature, which is a product of society, is also in a state of transition. Riding the waves of change, we must unite our individual efforts into a greater whole. We must enhance, develop, and expand our individual destinies. And we must shape literature in accord with our ideals. The beer and coffee we’ve consumed tonight, if it moves us even one step closer to realizing our latent potential, has paid for itself a hundred times over.”

This was the essence of the speech. As soon as it ended, the entire gathering erupted in applause. Sanshirō was one of those applauding most ardently. At this point, Yojirō suddenly rose.

“De te fabula. Who cares how many tens of thousands of words Shakespeare used, and who cares how many thousands of gray hairs Ibsen had? I don’t imagine any of us being taken in by such asinine lectures. My concern, rather, is that these lectures are a terrible affront to this institution. It’s imperative that we bring in new talent, capable of instructing the young men of this new age. Westerners won’t do. First of all, they lack societal clout ...”

The full assembly applauded again. They all enjoyed a hearty laugh as well. A fellow next to Yojirō proposed that they drink a toast to “de te fabula.” The previous speaker immediately seconded the motion. Unfortunately, all the beer glasses were empty. Yojirō assured them they would have their toast, and he dashed off toward the kitchen. The serving staff appeared with saké. After the toast, someone said, “Another one, this time to the Great Dark Void.” The fellows seated near Yojirō laughed. Yojirō scratched his head.

When the gathering was adjourned, the young men dispersed into the dark of the night, and Sanshirō asked Yojirō, “What does ‘de te fabula’ mean?”

“It’s Greek.”

Yojirō offered no further explanation, and Sanshirō posed no further questions. The two of them returned home, walking beneath a beautiful night sky.

The next day, as predicted, the weather was fine. It had been an unusually mild year, and this day in particular was unseasonably warm. Sanshirō went to bathe in the morning. In these times of fervent activity, the bath in the morning hours was virtually deserted. In the changing room, Sanshirō saw a signboard for the Mitsukoshi dry goods store. An attractive woman was painted on the sign. Her face was somewhat like Mineko’s, but the expression in her eyes was different. Her teeth weren’t visible. The two things about Mineko that struck Sanshirō most were the look in her eyes and her even teeth. According to Yojirō, she was slightly buck toothed, and that was why her teeth showed so prominently. Sanshirō disagreed. ...

Sanshirō considered such things as he soaked, hardly bothering to wash. Since the prior evening, his awareness of himself as a “young man of the new age” was suddenly stronger. However, while his awareness was stronger, his body was unchanged. Compared to most, he was inclined to take it easy on days off. Today, he would venture out after lunch to see the track and field competition.

Sanshirō, by nature, was not fond of physical activity. Back home, he’d been rabbit hunting several times. He’d also once served as the flagman at his high school’s rowing competition. He was rebuked severely for mixing up his red and green flags. It started when the professor in charge of the starting gun failed to fire it on the final heat. Or, rather, he fired it, but it made no sound, leaving Sanshirō flustered. Since that time, Sanshirō had kept his distance from athletics. Today, though, was the first competition since his arrival in Tōkyō, and he was determined to go watch. Yojirō had strongly recommended attending, though less for the competition and more for the ladies in attendance. Nonomiya’s younger sister would probably be there, and Mineko would likely be with her. He would put in an appearance and give them his regards.

Shortly after noon, Sanshirō departed. The entrance to the event was in a corner of the athletic grounds on the south end. Large Japanese and British flags waved in the air. Display of the Japanese flag made perfect sense, but the British flag left Sanshirō puzzled. He imagined it might be in honor of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Then again, he had no idea what connection the Anglo-Japanese Alliance could have to a track and field competition at the university.

The athletic grounds were a rectangular lawn. Being deep into autumn, the color of the grass had largely faded. The spectator stands were on the west side. They were bordered by a large berm in the back and a fence in the front. The spectators, by plan, were corralled into the space between. It was a narrow space, and uncomfortably crowded by the great many people who’d turned out to watch. Fortunately, the weather was mild and there was no chill in the air. Many of the spectators, though, were wearing coats. At the same time, many of the women had arrived with parasols.

Sanshirō saw, to his disappointment, that the ladies' seats were sectioned off and access was restricted. Also, there were many distinguished-looking gentlemen present, dressed in frock coats and such. He felt himself, by comparison, of little import. His pride as a "young man of the new age" was taken down a notch or two. Even still, he didn't neglect to survey the ladies' section through the sea of heads. It was hard to see clearly from his angle, but the ladies, exquisitely dressed, made a lovely sight. From a distance, all of the faces were beautiful. At the same time, none stood out as exceptional. They were beautiful as a whole. A warm kind of charm that men cannot but revere. To Sanshirō's further disappointment, no single woman triumphed over another. However, he continued searching, keeping up his hopes. The two of them were indeed present, together in the very front, close to the fence.

Sanshirō, having found what he'd come to see, relaxed a little. Just then, five or six men came flying into sight. It was the finish of the 200-meter dash. The finish line was just in front of Mineko and Yoshiko, and the finishers were right before their noses. As Sanshirō gazed toward the girls, the valiant contenders couldn't help but intrude on his field of view. The rest of the runners arrived, and the five or six became twelve or thirteen. All were gasping for breath. Comparing his own disposition to that of these athletes, Sanshirō was amazed at the dissimilarity. What compelled them to run so with total abandon? On the other hand, the company of ladies seemed greatly taken with them. And among the ladies, Mineko and Yoshiko were as taken as any. Sanshirō felt an urge to try running. The first-place finisher, in purple shorts, stood facing the ladies. On closer observation, it looked like the student who'd spoken at their gathering of the night before. Any fellow that tall was bound to finish first. The official in charge of measurement recorded a time of 25.74 seconds on the blackboard. Then he tossed aside his chalk and turned toward the spectators. It was Nonomiya. He was dressed, uncharacteristically, in a solid black frock coat. With an official's badge on his chest, he cut a sharp figure. He took out a handkerchief, dusted off his sleeve, and crossed the grass from the blackboard toward the stands. He stopped directly in front of Mineko and Yoshiko. Bending over the low fence of the ladies' section, he called out to the girls. Mineko rose and walked to meet him. They talked for a bit across the fence. Suddenly, Mineko turned back around, beaming with a broad smile. Sanshirō watched them attentively from the distance. Next he saw Yoshiko rise from her seat and approach the fence. The three of them stood together. Out on the lawn, the shot put competition started.

Nothing requires more power than the shot put. And few things requiring such power are of less interest. True to its name, there's nothing more to it than putting a shot. No skill is involved. Nonomiya, from his place by the fence, grinned as he watched. Then, probably realizing he was blocking people's view, he moved away and withdrew onto the lawn. The young ladies also returned to their seats. From time to time the shot was launched. Sanshirō, from where he watched, had no way of telling how far it went. The whole thing was asinine. Still, he stood there patiently. When it finally ended, Nonomiya returned to the blackboard and recorded 11.38 meters.

After that came another race, then the long jump. Next the hammer throw began, and Sanshirō found his patience at an end. Each participant should hold his own event in private. Track and field was not for spectators. Sanshirō even decided that the ladies' enthusiasm must be somehow contrived. He slipped out of the crowd and up the berm on the back side. His way was blocked by tarps and rope. He doubled back down to the graveled area. A few others, who'd stolen out of the event, strolled here and there. Among them were lavishly dressed ladies. Sanshirō turned to his right and climbed a trail to the top of the hill. At the top,

where the trail ended, was a large boulder. He sat down on the boulder and gazed over the edge of the high cliff to the pond below. A cheer erupted from down on the grounds.

Sanshirō sat on the boulder for five minutes, thinking about nothing in particular. Finally deciding to move on, he rose and turned on his heels. Through the faded maple leaves at the base of the hill, he spied the two young ladies. They were walking together, skirting the bottom of the rise.

Sanshirō looked down at the two of them from above. They emerged from among the branches and stepped into the bright sun. If he kept quiet, they would walk on without noticing. He thought to call out to them, but decided he should move closer. He took several quick steps across the grass, descending toward the foot of the hill. As he started down, one of them happened to glance his way. Sanshirō stopped. In truth, he wasn't in a mood to engage with ladies. The track and field competition had left him a little sour.

“Of all places ...” Yoshiko called out. She laughed in surprise. This girl seemed to find great fascination in even the most mundane things. At the same time, one could imagine her shrugging off the exotic as though it were commonplace. Her manner was never oppressive, and she always put one at ease. As he stood there, it struck Sanshirō that this disposition must spring from those large black eyes and their lustrous pupils.

Mineko stopped too. She looked at Sanshirō. In her eyes, for the first time, was no sense of silent appeal. She could as well have been gazing up at a tall tree. In Sanshirō's mind, he was viewing an extinguished lamp. He remained where he was, riveted. Mineko didn't move either.

“Why aren't you watching the games?” Yoshiko inquired from below.

“I was watching, but I lost interest, so I came up here.”

Yoshiko turned back toward Mineko. Mineko showed no reaction.

“And what about you two?” Sanshirō continued, “It seemed you were awfully taken with the athletics.” He spoke in a strong voice, tinged with a hint of censure. This time, Mineko smiled faintly in response. Sanshirō didn't know how to read her smile. He took a few steps closer.

“Are you heading home already?”

Neither of them answered. Sanshirō took a few more steps in their direction.

“You're going somewhere?”

“Yes, just for a bit.” Mineko said in a soft voice. Sanshirō could hardly hear. He descended the rest of the way. He didn't inquire further, but just stopped there next to them. The sound of cheering rose from the field.

“It's the high jump,” said Yoshiko. “I wonder what height they cleared.”

Mineko gave a slight smile. Sanshirō remained silent. He had no intention of commenting on the high jump.

“Was there something of interest on the hilltop?” Mineko asked.

There was nothing up there but the boulder and cliff edge. Nothing anyone would take interest in.

“Nothing at all.”

“Really?” she said as though unconvinced.

“Let’s go see!” Yoshiko interjected cheerfully.

“You mean you’ve never been up there?” Her companion asked in a deliberate manner.

“Come on, let’s go!”

Yoshiko started up. The other two followed after. Yoshiko went as far as the edge of the grass and turned around. “It’s a precipice,” she called, using grandiose language. “Looks like the place from which Sappho might have jumped, don’t you think?”

Mineko and Sanshirō both laughed. At the same time, Sanshirō had no idea from what kind of place Sappho was purported to have jumped.

“Why not give it a try?” Mineko called back.

“Me? Should I jump? But the water’s so dirty.” So joking, Yoshiko came back from the edge.

The two young ladies finally started to discuss their plans.

“You’re going to go?” Mineko asked.

“Yes. What about you?” Yoshiko replied.

“I don’t know.”

“Either way is fine. I’ll just be a bit, so why not wait here?”

“Alright.”

They finally settled things. Sanshirō asked what it was all about. They explained that Yoshiko, since they were in the area, had wanted to stop and pay her respects to a nurse at the hospital. Mineko had also thought to call on a nurse she’d grown close to this past summer when a relative was hospitalized, but this was of lesser importance.

Yoshiko, in her candid and lighthearted manner, called out that she’d return shortly and descended the hill at a quick pace. There was no reason to stop her, and there was no necessity to follow, so the other two remained behind as a matter of course. Given the passive disposition of both, they were rather left behind than chose to remain.

Sanshirō sat back down on the boulder. Mineko remained standing. The autumn sun reflected off the muddy surface of the pond. In the middle of the water was a small island with two trees. Branches of green pine and faded maple intertwined artfully, just as in a manicured box garden. Beyond the island, where the water touched the far shore, dense foliage reflected darkly. From the hilltop, Mineko pointed to the dark shadows under the branches.

“Do you know that tree?” she asked.

“That’s a chinquapin oak.”

She laughed. “I see you remembered.”

“The nurse from that day is the one you thought to call on?”

“Yes.”

“Then she’s not Yoshiko’s nurse.”

“No, she’s the chinquapin oak nurse.”

This time Sanshirō laughed.

“It was over there, wasn’t it, where you stood with the nurse and held up your fan?”

They were on a height that towered over the water. Further down, and running off to the right, was a lower rise with no connection to their own. They could see large pines, a corner of the old estate building, tarps backing the athletic meet, and the gently sloping lawn.

“The heat that day was terrible. It was too hot in the hospital, so we came outside. -- How did you come to be there, crouched down in that spot?”

“On account of the heat. That was the day I first met Nonomiya. Afterward, I was wandering the grounds, feeling somewhat down.”

“Meeting Nonomiya left you feeling down?”

“No, it wasn’t that.” Sanshirō looked at Mineko and started to explain, then suddenly jumped to a different subject. “Speaking of Nonomiya, he’s hard at work today, isn’t he?”

“Yes, and in fancy dress too. -- It must be killing him. And he has to be there morning to night.”

“He seem quite satisfied with himself.”

“Who? Nonomiya? -- You can’t be serious.”

“Why not?”



“Because officiating at an athletic meet is not something he’d find satisfaction in.”

Sanshirō changed the subject again. “Earlier, he walked over to you and said something.”

“During the competition?”

“Yes, by the fence surrounding the field.” After speaking, Sanshirō suddenly regretted broaching this subject.

“Yes,” she replied, then carefully studied his face. Her lower lip curled a bit in a hint of a smile. Sanshirō was in agony. Just as he was about to redirect the conversation, she spoke. “You haven’t responded to my postcard.”

Sanshirō, caught off guard, answered, “I’m going to.” She didn’t pursue it further.

“Do you know the artist Haraguchi?” she continued.

“No, I don’t.”

“I see.”

“Why?”

“Well, Haraguchi is here today, sketching the event. Nonomiya came and warned us to watch out, lest we end up caricaturized.”

Mineko came over and sat down next to him. Sanshirō felt himself a fool.

“Will Yoshiko wait and go home with her brother tonight?”

“Even if she wanted to, she couldn’t. Starting yesterday, she’s living with me.”

Sanshirō learned now that Nonomiya’s mother had returned to the country. As soon as she’d departed, Nonomiya had cleared out of his place in Ōkubo and become a boarder. They’d agreed that, for the foreseeable future, Yoshiko would stay with Mineko and continue her schooling.

Sanshirō was surprised at Nonomiya’s nonchalance. If he was that willing to be a boarder again, then why had he taken a house in the first place? For one thing, what did he do with his household wares - the kettle, pans, and buckets? Sanshirō thought about such details, but they weren’t worth voicing, so he refrained from comment. By relinquishing his household and reverting to student-like living, Nonomiya had effectively backtracked on the path to establishing himself in society. To Sanshirō, this was a welcome bit of reassurance. On the other hand, Yoshiko was now with Mineko, and this brother and sister were inseparable. It was a given that Nonomiya would call on Yoshiko often, and his relationship with Mineko would evolve in the process. It was also conceivable that the chance would thus arise for Nonomiya to once again quit his lodgings, this time for good.

Sanshirō kept company with Mineko as myriad futures flashed before his mind's eye. His thoughts were unsettled, and he struggled greatly to maintain his outward composure. Much to his relief, Yoshiko returned. The two young ladies talked of returning to the competition. They decided, however, that with the short autumn day getting late, and with a growing chill in the outdoor air, they should head home.

Sanshirō thought to take his leave and return to his lodgings, but the three of them talked as they walked off, and no clear-cut point for disengagement arose. He felt that the two of them were sweeping him along. He also felt that he wanted to be swept along. Together, they skirted the pond, passed the library, and headed for the Red Gate, away from Sanshirō's lodgings.

Sanshirō turned to Yoshiko. "I hear that your brother is back to boarding."

"Yes, he's finally pawned me off on Mineko. Terrible, isn't it?" Yoshiko answered, looking for a little sympathy.

Before Sanshirō could comment, Mineko spoke up. "It's hard for us to understand a man like Nonomiya. His mind works at a higher level, engaged in ground-breaking ideas."

Mineko praised Nonomiya warmly. Yoshiko listened in silence.

True devotion to scholarship meant a life of austerity, away from the lure of worldly affairs. For a man like Nonomiya, whose work was known internationally, to reside in ordinary student housing was an act of great professional dedication. The poorer the housing, the more admirable was his sacrifice. -- Such was the gist as Mineko continued lauding Nonomiya.

At the Red Gate, Sanshirō took leave of the two ladies. As he headed for Oiwake he began to think. -- Mineko was absolutely right. Sanshirō compared himself to Nonomiya and saw a world of difference. Here he was, fresh in from the country and just starting his university studies. He had no significant scholarship to his name, and his personal views were still evolving. There was no reason for Mineko to respect him like she respected Nonomiya. Now that he thought about it, perhaps she took him for a fool. Earlier, when he said he'd climbed the hill because the meet was dull, she'd asked in all seriousness if there were something of interest up there. He hadn't noticed at the time, but maybe she'd been purposely mocking him. -- Sanshirō reflected now on her manner and language in each of their past encounters. In every case, he could imagine some negative nuance. He stopped in the middle of the road, his eyes cast downward and face turning red. Suddenly, as he lifted his gaze, Yojirō approached with the student who'd spoken at the prior night's gathering.

Yojirō greeted Sanshirō with a simple nod. The other student removed his cap in salutation. "What did you think of last night? Don't ever let them take you in," the other student remarked with a grin as they walked by on their way.