

Sanshirō – Chapter 11

Natsume Sōseki – 1908

Yojirō was making rounds at the school, selling tickets on behalf of the Literary Society. After working through his acquaintances in a matter of days, he set his sights next on anyone he could corner. For the most part, he grabbed them in the hallway. Once he had them, he was tenacious in closing the deal. On occasion the bell would sound in the middle of his pitch and he'd lose his quarry. Yojirō would then declare that he'd been "thwarted by time." On other occasions, his target would smile and smile yet never acquiesce. Yojirō would then declare that he'd been "thwarted by character." On one occasion, he caught a professor coming out of the washroom. The professor, still drying his hands with his handkerchief, begged him off for a moment and hastily entered the library. He didn't reappear. As for this one -- Yojirō wasn't sure how he'd been thwarted. He watched the professor walk away, then reported to Sanshirō that the man, without doubt, must be suffering from digestive ailments.

When asked how many he was assigned to sell, Yojirō said as many as possible. He conceded, when pressed, that the venue might be oversold. Even if that happened, it would still be all right. There'd be plenty of no-shows. Some had purchased out of sheer obligation, some would be hindered by mishap, and some would be down with digestive ailments. Yojirō was utterly unconcerned.

When he made a sale, Yojirō would, of course, take money on the spot from those who had it. However, he handed out tickets to others as well. To Sanshirō, who fretted over such things, he was doing this far too often. When asked if he could really collect all the money, Yojirō replied quite candidly that he could not. In general, he said, it's better to sell a lot with abandon than a few with care. He compared his approach to how *The Times* used to peddle its encyclopedia sets in Japan. The comparison made great sense, but Sanshirō still had misgivings. For what it was worth, he cautioned Yojirō. Yojirō's response was intriguing.

"These are Tōkyō Imperial University students."

"Be that as it may, when it comes to money, most of them are just as loose as you yourself."

"If they can't, in good faith, make payment, then the Literary Society won't raise a fuss. No matter how many tickets are sold, it's a given that they'll never cover costs."

Sanshirō, pressing the matter, questioned if this was Yojirō's personal opinion or that of the Society. Yojirō answered conveniently that it was, of course, his own view, but was also shared by the Society.

According to Yojirō, anyone not at the upcoming performance would kick himself later. His sales pitch ensured that. It wasn't at all clear, however, if Yojirō's passion was for the performance or just for selling tickets. Or maybe he was simply out there to flatter himself, flatter his clients, talk up the performance while at it, and liven up the general mood of the world. His pitch was compelling, but ambiguity of motive hindered its effect.

He would start by detailing the intensity of the rehearsals. If one took him at his word, most of the players would be rehearsed out and have nothing left for the big day. Then he'd describe the backdrops. They were something special. The best young artists in Tōkyō had all come together and applied their respective skills, holding nothing back. Next he'd talk up the costumes. All the costumes, from the head to the tips of the toes, were constructed as full period pieces. He extolled the scripts, too. All were freshly written and highly engaging. He'd go on and on from there.

Yojirō told how he'd sent complimentary tickets to Professor Hirota and Haraguchi. He also told how he'd sold premium tickets to Nonomiya and his sister, and to Satomi and his sister. Everything, he reported, was proceeding in top form. Sanshirō, by way of encouragement, expressed his full confidence in a highly successful show.

That same evening, Yojirō called on Sanshirō at his lodgings. It was hardly the same Yojirō from earlier in the day. He sat stiffly by the hibachi, complaining of chills. By the look on his face, there was more going on than simply chills. He first leaned forward to warm his hands over the coals. Then he pressed them deep into his pockets. To lend some life to Yojirō's face, Sanshirō shifted his desk lamp from one edge of the desk to the other. Yojirō, however, dropped his jaw dejectedly. The light fell, without effect, on the large dark crown of his closely-cropped head. He didn't come round. When asked what was wrong, he lifted his head and gazed at the lamp.

"Hasn't this place been wired yet?" His question bore no connection to the look on his face.

"Not yet. They say they're working on it. Oil light's too dim, isn't it?" Sanshirō replied.

Yojirō seemed suddenly to forget about the lamp. "Things have gone terribly awry."

Sanshirō was compelled to ask what had happened. Yojirō produced a wrinkled newspaper from his pocket. It was two papers stacked together. He took one, opened it up, and then refolded it. Pointing to an article and flattening the paper with the tip of his finger, he told Sanshirō to read. Sanshirō brought his eye close to the lamp. The article was titled University Department of Literature.

The university's department of foreign literature has, until now, been staffed solely by Westerners. The administration has entrusted the full curriculum to foreign instructors. In response to changing times, and pressed by popular student sentiment, the necessity for inclusion of a Japanese national lecturer has finally received its rightful recognition. Consequently, a search has been underway for a suitable candidate. A certain man has now been selected, and an announcement is imminent. The man selected is a brilliant scholar who received directive to study abroad and is recently returned. As such, he is most duly qualified. Such was the gist of the article.

"It's not Professor Hirota, then." Sanshirō looked over at Yojirō. Yojirō's eyes were still on the paper. "Are you sure this is right?"

"It seems to be so." Yojirō tipped his head to the side. "It all looked to be going so well. Now it's all come to naught. I had, of course, heard that this man was lobbying hard for the post."

“But it’s all just rumor so far. We won’t know for sure till it’s announced.”

“That’s not the worst of it. If that were all, the professor could remain oblivious to it. However ...” At this point he refolded the second newspaper, flattened it with the tip of his finger on a certain headline, and set it before Sanshirō.

The article began in a similar vein to that of the previous paper. So far, there was nothing new worth noting. What followed, though, caught Sanshirō fully off guard. It questioned Professor Hirota’s integrity in no uncertain terms. This man of no worldly renown, a mere language instructor of ten years’ tenure, had, upon learning that the university was seeking a Japanese national for foreign literature instruction, immediately begun scheming on his own behalf. He’d disseminated his credentials among the students. Then he’d cajoled a follower into authoring a piece titled Great Dark Void for submission to a minor publication. The piece had appeared under the pen name Reiyoshi, but its true author was now known to be Sanshirō Ogawa, a student of the college of liberal arts who frequently called on the professor. There it was - Sanshirō’s name had made it into print.

Sanshirō turned to Yojirō with a strange look on his face. Yojirō had been watching for his reaction. Both were silent for a moment.

“This is not good,” Sanshirō finally said. He was not happy with Yojirō.

Yojirō was largely indifferent to Sanshirō’s reproach. “What do you think?” he asked.

“What do you mean, what do I think?”

“No doubt it’s a reader’s submission, published verbatim. The news staff did nothing to confirm it. There’s no shortage of such fodder at Literary Review. Most of what comes in is outright villainous. If you dig deep enough, it’s concocted rubbish, some even blatantly so. You want to know why? They’re all motivated by desire for personal gain. When I held the editor’s pen, these sordid submissions went straight to the trash. That’s exactly what this is – folks working to thwart us.”

“Why my name and not yours?”

“I wonder.” Yojirō paused for a moment, then proposed an explanation. “That could be it. You’re a regular student, and I’m an elective studies student. That’s why.”

To Sanshirō, however, this explanation was wholly inadequate. He was still put out.

“I should never have used that petty Reiyoshi pen name. I should have gone boldly as Yojirō Sasaki. Who else but Yojirō Sasaki could author such a piece?”

Yojirō was serious. He was, it seemed, genuinely upset that credit for Great Dark Void had been usurped from him and assigned to Sanshirō. To Sanshirō, this was all asinine.

“Have you talked to the professor?” he asked.

“That’s the crux of it. It’s not about who authored Great Dark Void, be it you, me, or whomever. The professor’s character is under attack, so I have to tell him. Under normal circumstances, I could simply feign ignorance, say it was some sort of mistake. An essay titled Great Dark Void had appeared in a periodical under an assumed name. It was penned by an admirer, so he needn’t worry about it. He’d simply raise his eyebrows and that would be the end of it. I can’t do that this time. I have to come clean and take full responsibility. If all had gone well, I’d have gladly denied involvement. To stand silent as all goes awry, though, is sheer torture. After all, I started this, and I can’t watch from the sideline as a virtuous man is dragged through the muck on my account. Aside from the issue of right vs wrong, I simply will not see him suffer.”

Sanshirō, for the first time, regarded Yojirō with a sense of admiration.

“Do you think the professor knows?”

“There was nothing in our paper. That’s why even I didn’t know. However, the professor reads various papers at the school, and even if he doesn’t see these himself, someone’s bound to say something.”

“So he probably does know.”

“I suppose he does.”

“He hasn’t said anything to you?”

“He hasn’t. We’ve hardly had time to talk, so he hasn’t had a chance. I’ve been running around these days, morning to night, busying myself with the performance. -- Ah, that performance. Who cares anymore? Maybe I ought to give it up. Where’s the interest in powder-faced drama?”

“When you talk to the professor, I expect he’ll have some harsh words for you.”

“I expect he will. I can handle harsh words - I’ve got it coming. I feel bad for the professor. I meddled in his affairs, and now I’ve landed him in trouble. -- He’s a man of no indulgence. He doesn’t drink, he doesn’t smoke ...” Yojirō broke off mid-sentence. The volume of philosophical smoke expelled from the professor’s nostrils, if summed over a month, was by no means modest.

“He may smoke a lot, but that’s it. He doesn’t fish, he doesn’t play ‘go,’ he doesn’t partake of family life. That’s the worst of it. If only he had children. He’s a bona fide ascetic.” Yojirō paused and folded his arms.

“I try, just once, to pull some strings on his behalf, and this is the result. You should call on him too, to lift his spirits.”

“Forget about lifting spirits. I have some hand in this as well. I’ll go and apologize.”

“You don’t need to apologize.”

“Then I’ll go and clear the air.”

At that, Yojirō took his leave. Sanshirō retired, but he tossed and turned in his bed. He'd slept much better, he felt, back home in the country. Fabricated stories - Professor Hirota - Mineko - the dashing gentleman who'd come for Mineko - all raced through his mind.

He fell asleep late and then slept soundly. It took great effort to rise at the usual time. In the washroom was another student from the liberal arts college. They knew each other by sight and greeted each other habitually. Sanshirō sensed that the other student had seen the article. The other student didn't, of course, broach the subject, and Sanshirō made no move to explain himself.

As Sanshirō took in the warm aroma of his soup, he was handed another letter from his mother back home. It was, as usual, a lengthy one. Not troubling to change out of his Western clothes, he slipped his hakama on over them, put the letter in his pocket, and departed. The outside world glistened with a thin frost.

The thoroughfare was packed with students, each headed in the same direction. All rushed on their way. The cold street was covered over with youthful vigor. In the students' midst was the tall figure of Professor Hirota in his gray overcoat. Slipped in among these ranks of youth, his gait alone marked him as an anachronism. Compared to all around him, he was decidedly unhurried. He passed through the school gate and out of sight. Inside the gate was a large pine. It spread its limbs like a giant umbrella, obscuring the entrance beyond. By the time Sanshirō came even with the gate, the professor was well out of sight. All that was visible were the pine and the clock tower rising above it. The clock in the tower was always off. Or perhaps it had stopped.

As he looked through the gate, Sanshirō repeated the word "hydriotaphia" twice to himself. Of all the foreign words he had learned, this was one of the longest and one of the most difficult. He didn't yet know what it meant. He was intending to ask Professor Hirota. Yojirō, when queried, had suggested it was something akin to "de te fabula." To Sanshirō, however, the two expressions felt completely different. "De te fabula" had a light and easy air to it. "Hydriotaphia" was a chore just to learn. Repeating it twice was enough to slow his pace. One could imagine, on contemplating its ring, that it was fashioned by men of old, expressly for Professor Hirota.

Once at school, Sanshirō, as author of Great Dark Void, felt scrutiny from all sides. He wanted to step outside, but the day was remarkably cold, so he stayed in the hallway. Later, between lectures, he took his mother's letter from his pocket and read.

He was instructed to come home during the winter break, just as though he were still in Kumamoto. On one occasion in Kumamoto, in fact, he'd received a telegram, just as break was starting, telling him to return at once. Assuming his mother had fallen ill, he'd rushed home. She was well as ever and received him with great delight. He asked what it was all about. Impatient for his return, she'd gone to the shrine of Oinari-sama for a reading. She was told that he'd already left Kumamoto, and she'd become concerned. She worried some mishap had befallen him en route. Thinking back on that time, Sanshirō wondered if she hadn't gone back for another reading. However, there was no mention of Oinari-sama in the letter. There was a note in the margin on Omitsu Miwata, who was said to be awaiting his return. She'd left the girls' school in Toyotsu

and was back at home. A quilted shirt, that his mother asked Omitsu to sew, would arrive shortly by small parcel post.

The carpenter Kakuzō had lost ninety eight yen gambling back on the mountain. -- The circumstances were related in detail. Not having much interest, Sanshirō skimmed them over. Three men came by and expressed an interest in purchasing Kakuzō's land. Kakuzō took them out and walked them around the mountain, and in the process was relieved of his money. At home, he explained to his wife that he didn't know how they'd done it. His wife suggested that they must have drugged him somehow. Kakuzō replied that, yes, he seemed to remember now smelling something odd. The general consensus in the village, however, was that they cheated him at gambling. Sanshirō's mother closed with an admonition. If such a thing could happen in the country, then all the more reason for him to watch himself there in Tōkyō.

As he was rolling the long letter back up, Yojirō appeared at his side. "Letter from a girl, huh," he remarked. Compared to the previous evening, he seemed revitalized and back to his spirited self.

"From my mother." Sanshirō replied with mild annoyance as he returned the letter to its envelope and stuck it in his pocket.

"Not from miss Satomi?"

"Certainly not."

"Speaking of miss Satomi, have you heard?"

"Heard what?" Sanshirō asked in return.

Just then, another student came to tell Yojirō that someone wanting tickets to the performance was waiting downstairs. Yojirō headed down at once.

That was the last Sanshirō saw of Yojirō. He tried to find him, but to no avail. He went to his lectures and diligently took notes. After lectures, he dropped by the professor's house as he'd promised the night before. The house, as always, was quiet. The professor was stretched out in the hearth room, sleeping. He asked the old lady if something was wrong. Nothing was wrong, she said, but he'd been up late the night before. When he'd come home today, he'd said he was sleepy and immediately lain down. A small quilt had been spread over his long form. Sanshirō, in a quiet voice, asked the old lady why he'd been up so late. She replied that he was always up late, but last night, instead of his usual work, he'd been talking with Yojirō. It was the first time in a while they'd spoken. Trading his work for Yojirō didn't explain his fatigue. No doubt they'd spoken on the affair in question. Sanshirō was tempted to ask how hard the professor had been on Yojirō, but the old lady, most likely, wouldn't know. If only he'd cornered Yojirō at school. But given Yojirō's resurgent energy, it couldn't have been that bad. On the other hand, Sanshirō could never fathom the workings of Yojirō's mind. He had no idea what might actually have transpired.

Sanshirō sat before the long hibachi. The iron kettle piped. The old lady, in show of deference, withdrew to the maidservant's room. Sanshirō, with legs crossed in front of him, warmed his hands over the kettle and

waited for the professor to awaken. The professor was sleeping soundly. Sanshirō relished the stillness of the moment. He checked the kettle with taps of his nails. He filled a tea cup with hot water, blew on its surface, and sipped cautiously. The professor was facing away from him. He must have been to the barber a few days prior. His hair was closely cropped. The tip of his thick mustache was visible, but his nose was not. From his nostrils came a gentle wheezing sound. He was sleeping peacefully.

Sanshirō took out *Hydriotaphia*, which he intended to return, and began reading. He skimmed at random. He couldn't comprehend much. There was something about the tossing of flowers into graves. The Romans, it said, "affected" roses. The meaning of this was unclear. He assumed it meant they "preferred" roses. The Greeks, it said, used amaranth. He didn't know this word either, but it had to be some sort of flower. Jumping ahead, the text became fully incomprehensible. He lifted his gaze from the page and looked at the professor. The professor was still asleep. He wondered why the professor had lent him such an onerous work. At the same time, he wondered why this onerous work, in spite of it all, captivated him so. He finally concluded that, in the end, Professor Hirota was *Hydriotaphia*.

At this moment, the professor awoke. He lifted his head and looked in Sanshirō's direction.

"Have you been here long?" he asked.

Sanshirō offered that the professor should rest further. In truth, he did not mind waiting.

"No, I'll get up." With that the professor arose. Per habit, he immediately produced his philosophical smoke, columns of which ascended through the silence.

"Thank you for the book. I'm returning it."

"Ah - did you read it?"

"I did, but I can't say I understood it. For starters, I don't know what the title's about."

"*Hydriotaphia*."

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know what it means myself. At any rate, I think it's derived from Greek."

Sanshirō lacked the pluck to pursue this further.

The professor yawned once. "I really was exhausted. I slept well, and I had an interesting dream."

The dream, he said, was about a girl. Sanshirō thought he might elaborate, but instead he suggested they go and bathe. With towels in hand, the two of them set out for the baths.

After soaking, they used the guage in the floored area to measure their heights. The professor was a hundred and seventy centimeters. Sanshirō was only a hundred and sixty five.

“You may still be growing,” the professor told him.

“I’m afraid I’m done,” Sanshirō replied. “No change now for three years running.”

“I wonder,” the professor remarked.

It occurred to Sanshirō that the professor must see him as a child.

Back at the house, the professor invited Sanshirō to stay and talk, provided he wasn’t busy. The professor opened the door to his study and led the way. Sanshirō, feeling obligated, at any rate, to clear the air of that matter at hand, followed him in.

“Is Yojirō not home yet?”

“He said he’d be late tonight. He’s run himself ragged these days on account of that show. He likes to take on assignments, or maybe he just likes running about, but he never works long enough at any one thing.”

“He’s good at heart.”

“His intentions may be good, but that mind of his does no one any favor. Nothing he does bears fruit. At first glance, he seems an achiever, or even an overachiever. In the end, though, it all comes to naught in the worst of ways, and one wonders what he’d thought to achieve. I’ve given up on ever straightening him out. His reason for being is mischief and nothing but.”

Sanshirō thought he should argue in Yojirō’s defense, but the situation at hand was, indeed, a case of good intentions gone wrong. He let it go and shifted the subject.

“Did you see what they wrote in those papers?”

“Yes, I saw them.”

“And that was the first you knew of all this?”

“It was.”

“You must have been quite surprised.”

“Surprised? -- I can’t say I wasn’t a bit surprised. On the other hand, such is the world we live in. These things don’t faze me like they might a younger man.”

“You must be somewhat perturbed.”

“I can’t say I’m happy about it. At my age, however, with the benefit of experience, I know that not everyone takes such things at face value. I’m not as upset as a younger man might be. Yojirō talks about making things right. He’ll have a friend at the paper set things straight. He’ll search out the source and retaliate.

He'll offer a thorough rebuttal in his own publication. It's all rubbish. Rather than escalate things now, he needs to learn not to start them in the first place."

"It was all with your interests at heart. He didn't mean any harm."

"I know full well he meant no harm. But first off, his campaigning on my behalf, behind my back, scheming and acting as he pleased, was nothing more or less than to trifle with my existence. For the sake of my reputation, I truly wish he'd desist from meddling."

Sanshirō, having no good response, kept silent.

"Then he writes this Great Dark Void nonsense. -- The paper said it was you, but Yojirō was the true author, was he not?"

"He was."

"He came clean last night. He's put you out as well. Who but Yojirō could produce such asinine prose? I gave it a read. There's neither substance nor style to it. It bangs away like a Salvation Army drum. One can only conclude that it's written to arouse resentment, contrived so from start to finish. Any reader with good sense will see right through it. The author's motives are plain as day. Little wonder they accused me of having it written. After reading it, I have to concede that the paper's assertions aren't fully unfounded."

Professor Hirota stopped there. His signature smoke flowed from his nostrils. According to Yojirō, one could read the professor's mood from this smoke. When it surged forth thick and straight, he was at the height of philosophical thought. When it dissipated loosely, his mood was calm, but one also risked being ribbed. When the smoke lingered beneath his nose and seemed to cling to his whiskers, he was pensive, or perhaps poetically inspired. Most fearful of all was immediate swirling. When swirls appeared, a harsh scolding was bound to follow. Sanshirō, of course, took Yojirō's words with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, on this occasion he observed with care the shape of the smoke. None of Yojirō's patterns appeared distinctly. At the same time, most all were present together.

Sanshirō, as though overwhelmed, held silent all the while.

The professor spoke further. "We'll let bygones be bygones. Yojirō apologized profusely last night. He's probably back to his usual self by now, flitting about in high spirits. Even as we rue his indiscretion, he's out peddling tickets or such, oblivious to our censure. Let's talk of something more interesting."

"Agreed."

"Earlier, while napping, I had a remarkable dream. In it was a girl whom I'd only seen once before in my life. I suddenly met her again. It sounds like the plot from some novel, but you might enjoy hearing it. It's a cut above those newspaper stories."

"By all means. What kind of girl?"

“A pretty girl of twelve or thirteen, with a mole on her face.”

On hearing her age, Sanshirō’s hopes were somewhat dashed. “When had you first seen her?”

“A good twenty years prior.”

Sanshirō was surprised again. “It’s a wonder you would know her.”

“It’s a dream. That’s why I knew her. In a dream, one indulges the wondrous. At any rate, I was walking through a deep forest. I was wearing my faded summer clothes, with that worn-out hat on my head. – And I seem to recall I was thinking difficult thoughts. Every law that governs the universe is immutable, yet everything in the universe, subject to its laws, is transient. That implies, then, that laws exist apart from physical form. -- It all sounds tedious now, but in my dream I was lost in such thoughts as I moved through the woods. Suddenly, I encountered the girl. We didn’t meet in passing. She was standing there motionless. I looked at her, and saw that she hadn’t changed. Her outfit was that of long ago. Her hair was that of long ago. Her mole, of course, was still there. She was not, in fact, changed in the least from the girl of twenty years prior. I told her she hadn’t changed, and she answered back that I’d aged a great deal. Next, I asked how time hadn’t touched her. It was, she said, because her face of that year, her outfit of that month, and her hair of that day were most to her liking. When I asked what year, month, and day she meant, she said it was twenty years prior, that moment I’d seen her. I wondered to myself then why I had aged so. She told me it was because, from that prior moment, I’d hungered for ever more beauty. ‘You’re a painting,’ I said to the girl. ‘You’re a poem,’ she replied.”

“What happened after that?” Sanshirō asked.

“After that, you were here,” he replied.

“That encounter of twenty years prior wasn’t a dream, was it? It actually happened?”

“It actually happened. That’s what’s interesting.”

“Where did it happen?”

The professor expelled another cloud of smoke through his nose. He gazed into the smoke in silence for several moments. Finally, he began again.

“The Meiji Constitution was promulgated in 1889. Arinori Mori, the Minister of Education, was murdered that same day. You likely don’t remember. How old would you have been? Yes, you were just a small child. I was a high school student. Told to attend the minister’s funeral, a large group of us set out with rifles over our shoulders. I thought we were headed for the cemetery, but that wasn’t the case. The physical education instructor led us to Takebashiuchi and lined us up along the side of the road. We were to stand there and see the minister’s casket on its way. See it on its way is just what we did. We observed as it passed us by. I still remember how cold it was that day. Standing motionless, our feet ached in the bottoms of our shoes. The fellow next to me looked at my nose and told me how red it was. Finally, the procession arrived. It was quite

an affair. A great number of carriages and rickshaws passed quietly before us through the cold air. Among them was the young girl I spoke of. I can recall the scene only vaguely now, not with much clarity. But I can still see that girl. With the passing of years she's slipped away, and I only recall her rarely anymore. Until my dream today, she was tucked in the back of my mind. On that long ago day, though, she captivated my soul. Her image burned itself onto my consciousness. -- It's a curious thing."

"You've never seen her since?"

"Not once."

"Then you don't know who she was or where she was from?"

"Not at all."

"You didn't try to find out?"

"Nope."

"Is that why ..." Sanshirō halted abruptly.

"Is that why what?"

"Is that why you've never married?"

The professor laughed out loud. "I'm no such romantic. Compared to you, I'm outright prosaic."

"Even so, if that girl had reappeared, I'll bet you would have married her."

"I wonder ..." He paused for a moment to reflect. "I suppose I might have."

Sanshirō looked at him sympathetically, compelling him to continue. "To attribute my bachelorhood to that girl is to imply that she somehow handicapped me. Some folks, however, are inherently unfit for marriage. And others, due to circumstance, are rendered unmarriageable."

"I can't imagine there being many such circumstances."

The professor looked through his smoke toward Sanshirō. "Hamlet, you'll recall, had no desire to marry. There may be only one Hamlet, but there are others like him."

"What sort of others?"

"For example," the professor said, then fell silent. Smoke surged forth. "For example, imagine a man who lost his father early. Imagine his mother has raised him up alone. The mother falls ill, and finally, as she's breathing her last, she tells him to seek out a certain so-and-so after she's gone. He's never met this certain person, never even heard of him. When he asks her why, she doesn't answer. He persists, and she reveals in

a weak voice that so-and-so is his true father. -- It's just a story, but imagine a man with such a mother. It's only natural, isn't it, that his faith in marriage lies shattered."

"There can't be many such cases."

"There aren't so many, but there are some."

"But surely that story's not yours."

The professor laughed quietly. "Your mother's still living, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"And your father?"

"He's passed away."

"The year after the Constitution was promulgated, my mother died."