

Sanshirō – Chapter 13

Natsume Sōseki – 1908

Haraguchi's painting was finished. The Tanseikai staff had positioned it prominently in its own room. A long bench had been set out in front. The bench was both for those wishing to rest and those wishing to view. It was also for those wishing to view at their leisure. In this manner, the staff had provided for the many visitors expected to dwell before a major work. It was a special arrangement, on behalf of an extraordinary piece. There were also thoughts that the title of the work should draw people in. Some even attributed the extra attention to Mineko as the subject. A couple of members contended that its size made it exceptional. It was certainly grand. A thick gold frame greatly enhanced its scale - it hardly looked like the same piece.

Haraguchi came the day before opening for one last check. He sat on the bench for a long while, smoking his pipe and gazing on his work. Then, he suddenly stood and made a thorough tour of the room. Finally, he sat back down for a slow, second smoke.

From opening day, Lady and Woodland was mobbed by visitors. The bench, so thoughtfully provided, was of no practical use. A tired visitor could rest there, but not while viewing the work. Even so, some paused on the bench to discuss what they'd seen.

Mineko came on the second day, accompanied by her husband. Haraguchi escorted them. "What do you think?" He turned and addressed his guests as they arrived in front of the painting.

"Splendid," replied the husband, fixing his gaze from behind his spectacles. "This pose with the fan is wonderful. A masterful composition - clearly the work of an expert. The illumination of the face is also superb. The contrast of light and shadow is so precise -- even within the face, the transition is fascinating."

"Actually, it was all at the model's discretion. I can't take credit."

"It's wonderful work." Mineko expressed her appreciation.

"My thanks goes to you." Haraguchi expressed his gratitude in return.

The husband beamed on learning of his wife's role. His appreciation, among the three of them, was the most effusive.

In the afternoon of the first Saturday after opening, the whole gang arrived en masse -- Professor Hirota, Nonomiya, Yojirō, and Sanshirō. Leaving the other works for later, the four of them headed straight to the Lady and Woodland gallery. "There it is, there it is!" Yojirō exclaimed. A large crowd filled the room. Sanshirō hesitated at the entrance. Nonomiya proceeded with full composure.

Sanshirō glimpsed the work from in back of the crowd and turned away. He leaned against the bench to wait for the others.

“Look at the size of it,” Yojirō marveled.

“They say he was hoping to sell it to you,” the professor replied.

“Not me. It was ...” Yojirō, seeing Sanshirō at the bench with a vexed expression, held his tongue.

“The man has a flair with color. It’s really quite chic.” Nonomiya offered his assessment.

“It’s almost too sharp. He did confess that he could never paint the sound of the tsuzumi,” the professor added.

“What does that mean, to paint the sound of the tsuzumi?”

“It means to paint to a simple rhythm, sophistication be damned.”

The two of them laughed. They were focused on the artist’s technique, but Yojirō took a different view. “Who could paint Miss Satomi otherwise? Sophistication is a given.”

Nonomiya put his hand in his pocket, searching for a pencil to mark his program. He didn’t find a pencil, but he did draw forth a printed card. It was his invitation to Mineko’s wedding party. The party was now long past. Nonomiya and Professor Hirota had attended, dressed in their frock coats. Sanshirō, on the day of his return to Tōkyō, had found his invite on the desk in his room, the date already passed.

Nonomiya tore up the card and discarded it onto the floor. After a bit, he and the professor moved on to other works. Yojirō remained and came to Sanshirō’s side.

“What did you think of Lady and Woodland?”

“I don’t like the title.”

“What should he have called it?”

Sanshirō gave no answer. The words in his mind, though, were “Stray Sheep.”