

Ye shall be as Men

By: Rob Forbis

Mitsuo of the Kokono Asagi Clade exited his sprinter. And with a stylish flip of his left pec he snapped its portal shut behind him. He let the fresh smell of water hyacinth envelop him a welcome relief from the stifling environment of the dry suit he had worn of late. He had come to deliver a report to Council Kokugyo upon the significance of the rogue floater. Mitsuo was more comfortable in the dry world than most. For a swim time or even two he could pass through its thinness traveling from flat place to flat place. But to stay there for many times, to too many times, had been very hard. And add to that the disconcerting tale told by the visitors, which was somehow confirmed by their presence, it was more than a young sekigo should have to bear. And he knew that many in the Council of the Gosanke, of the assembled Kokugyo, would regard his report as bad news, some would even say it is obscenity, so he didn't expect a warm reception.

It was not half a swim ago that he was with the Kohaku Queen. He had met with her in the daylight Imperial Pond, along side of her wonderful bubble. His patroness, whose hi is hi and whose shiroji is shiroji, no sumi, no shimi, is a well cultured oyagoi even by contemporary standards. She and he had hovered in silence letting the simple grace and the magnified antics of her nishikimen soothe and amuse them. The many lenses embedded in the wonder bubble refracted the lines and colors of her champion collection. There he told her what the Impersonators had said. And TopQ had seen the likely truth of it. But this is she, whose keitou in an unbroken line runs deep into the Sarasa. So although she saw little immediate physical threat to the Realm from the new arrivals, their manhood claims concerned her on many levels. Not in the fifty three generations of record was such an event known. Not in the twenty generations since Shusui Scientists had established that our genetic structure indicated a special creation. And not since those heady early times had anyone even dare suggest of us an otherworldly origin. Even though, at least among the educated it is generally recognized now our hereditary code, and its underlying substrate, is so different from the indigenous food forms that our creation can only be explained as intelligent design. Human intervention if you will. So scientifically speaking the Impersonators revelations weren't altogether out of context. But talking men was the stuff of kego's stories. And actual talking men were very disconcerting to the ordinary carp in the stream's sense of consciousness.

The pond fish would never understand it; it was too much for that lot to swallow. So the Queen sent her messenger and message to the Council. Wise, but the Shusui weren't going to like it.

If that had been all, then fine, he could stand before the Council. But, that wasn't all, what made him really nervous was that she was sure to be there. It wasn't only her fins though oh man oh man, or merely her eyes oh man oh man. Ai-no-Fukidashi, not just the blue of her ai sashi. Aoji, her shita zumi was coming on. Kashira, and her perfume. If the very sight of her wasn't enough, it was her movement, the way she slipped around that got his lateral line. I mean really got it. As he entered the Council Chamber he searched for her scent in the swirl of a passing ring vortex. He cast an eager eye around the assembled. She wasn't in her usual place. And just that quick, before he could settle, the sergeant-at-arms announced him. "The Queen's Messenger", he was proclaimed, no further elaboration was required as he had answered their summons. He could see in their faces fear and hope, angst and anticipation, friend and foe, and there she is oh kuchi beni, the rouge of her lips. And she was settled into one of the Three Judge's Spots! With an s-flick of the caudal he accelerated and then glided to stage center, a flare of pectoral fins brought him upright, a push from the pelvics stopped him in space.

He waited for the applause, what there was of it, and the whispers, not so well concealed, to subside. A deafening quiet fell. He let the magnitude of the moment sink into him and into his audience. He couldn't resist letting his gaze fall upon her once again before he spoke. Teri, the silkiness of her complexion calmed him. A subtle pearlescent flash of her ozutsu reminded him of the fertility connection that binds one and all. But for her to be a Judge, today of all days, a lesser heart would have burst, and his might still. So he didn't waste time with preliminaries. "I return to you straight from the Queen's Lake with a message. I come to you after many days in the dry presence of the Impersonators, the so-called talking nishikimen who some claim to be Men." He paused letting the collective gasp at such an assertion convey his equal amazement. "The talking nishikimen said", once again he paused to emphasize the pronouncement and to steady himself, "We are the men that made you. We brought you up out of the mud, we spread you over the home world, we ate you, we colorized you, and we took you to the stars".

"Liar" shouted the showa. "It is a Shusui plot", charged the chags. "It is not", the collective Shusui declared in their defense. "Talking nishikimen", one old sanke said in satirical voice, "what next flying fish". That brought a nervous laugh that spoke for the tone of the assembled.

“Silence”, demanded one of the three Judges to little affect. “Silence” demanded the Chief Judge over the tumult. “Silence” whispered the Beautiful One and quiet returned and every eye turned to him again. “How is it that you were able to talk with these airy freaks”, asked the chief judge.

“Inside of their strange bubble they would make the air shake with their throats, I could hear it quite plain through the dry suit’s head piece. And they could hear me likewise”.

“You just happen to speak the language of men?” the second Judge questioned him with obvious disbelief.

Here he saw his opening to the sympathy of the unsympathetic crowd; this was why TopQ had sent him. He would use their disbelief against them. He’d mirror their narcissism. “No but they spoke the language of koi.” Make them wait for it he thought. He waited and then said, almost as an aside. “Or perhaps they just repeated by rote what they had heard in some Shusui lab bubble” he accused as he turned to the gathered Shusui.

“No, it is not true. We’ve nothing to do with these nishikimen”, the Honmeibara Shusui rose to counter.

“Was it not the Shusui who first found the rouges?” asked the Beautiful Judge.

“Yes, it was Council-mena, but”, the Shusui answered her.

“It was the Shusui who reported this discovery as talking nishikimen was it not?” asked the Ippin sharpening her inquiry.

This opening was not lost on the Tacho, who honor what is remembered not what is written. The most respected among them, a Showa with a Inazuma Hachiware like a blue black lightning bolt silhouette against a scarlet sun, seized the moment. “The Shusui have made up yet another of their wild tales to undermine the ancient traditions and beliefs”, she accused.

“Yes”, the showa affirmed. “Yes”, the chagoi insisted. “It is the only sensible explanation”, the Tacho reaffirmed with force. This shout echoed the sentiment of the Council Kokugyo as it was fast becoming the Mob Kokugyo.

This moment was why TopQ had sent him. “Perhaps that does explain it”, he shouted over the shouting and as order returned he said. “But TopQ has already dealt with the matter, there is no need to accuse the Shusui’s Oyagoi. A hoax by a small band of misguided chobo zumi at worst. A nisai’s prank that deserves a season in Tancho’s Doroiike.

“What does TopQ say is to be done with these creatures?” asked the Gentle Judge.

“She has already added them to her collection”, he replied matter of fact.

“That figures doesn’t it?” lamented the Shusui, seeing that they were now off the hook. “Somehow I knew she’d get to keep the wild types”.

“It is settled then”, declared the Chief Judge cutting off further conversation. “Thank for your report Mitsuo Kokono Asagi, convey our sincere affection to our Sovereign. And get yourself something to eat. This Council stands adjourned”.

Well that had gone better and quicker than he had expected. Thank Man for her help, as Judge she had pushed the proceedings his way. Mmmm that smell, oh the pressure on the line, it was her, she cruised up and lit beside him. Wow, up close the Hanagara Moyo on her shoulder was stunning.

“Flower”, he acknowledged her as the exemplar of Mameshibori Goshiki Showa.

“You got away with one there Kego”, she intoned.

“Whatever do you mean Kuro Me?”, he played dumb, easy since he was nearly struck dumb by her.

“Otomo, you know that they truly came from the Home of Rivers” she said in a tone of intimacy.

“We all come from the Home of Rivers” he answered as his formal position required.

“Shall we go see the Mistress’ new stock then?” she said with a precocious look. “Is it true that one has green eyes?”