

THE MOONLIT PAGE

The Portrait Facing the Pond



Every Wednesday, Mara brought her sketchbook to the town pond. She had been asked to draw portraits for the community centre, and Mrs. Venn, who had run the bakery for forty years, volunteered to sit for the first one.

“Tell me where to put my hands,” Mrs. Venn said. “They usually have flour on them.”

“Anywhere comfortable,” Mara replied.

That was easy until a mallard appeared beside the reeds. It paddled slowly across the water, leaving a narrow V-shaped wake. Mrs. Venn turned to watch it.

Mara waited for her to face forward again. She did, briefly, but when the duck passed beneath a willow branch, her eyes followed it once more.

“I'm a hopeless sitter,” Mrs. Venn said.

“Not at all. Stay exactly as you are.”

Mara drew the line of her cheek, one resting hand, and the quiet water beyond her shoulder. She left the mallard small, no bigger than a thumbnail, near the edge of the page.

When the portrait went up at the community centre, Mrs. Venn studied it for a long time. She seemed pleased to have been drawn looking at something rather than looking important.

“And the duck?” Mara asked.

Mrs. Venn smiled. "He sat for free. I hope you thanked him."

To remember

1. Mrs. Venn offers to sit for Mara's portrait
2. A mallard passes the pond and keeps turning her head
3. Mara draws her in profile, watching the water
4. The finished picture includes a tiny duck; Mrs. Venn jokes about his free sitting.