

think of how you will help your daughter, you are the only thing she has here. Don't lose your spirit, your vitality."

"You see, it is difficult to be the same. One month ago, a woman prisoner was inside with my daughter. She has liberty now, she wrote and she tells us that our daughter is no longer alive." Alicia looked at us, put her hand on the encyclopedia and tightened her lips.

### *Questions for Discussion and Writing*

1. What techniques does Zaldívar use to create Mrs. Pérez de Roca and Mr. Roca? What are their dominant characteristics? How do you think and feel about this couple as a result? What clues does the title give you in these considerations?
2. What personal attitudes and values do the characters bring with them? What cultural attitudes might they reflect? On what bases do you yourself interpret what is personal and what is cultural?
3. What personal attitudes does Jenny bring with her to class? What cultural attitudes might she reflect, and why?
4. What has Jenny learned at the end of the story? Why or why not does the story's ending work for you? For what reasons might you assume the writer chose to end it as she did?

## YEARN HONG CHOI



*Bloomington, Fall 1971*

*Yearn Hong Choi was a young Korean poet when he came to the United States for advanced study. His poems have been translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil. He continues to write short stories and poetry in both Korean and English. His literary works have been published in many journals and newspapers. "Bloomington, Fall 1971" was published in Short Story International in 1988.*

*In his time off from writing, Dr. Choi is a professor of public administration.*

Before you read "Bloomington, Fall 1971," write about a time in your life, if there was one, when you fell in love with the wrong person, at least according to your family's assessment. Describe the situation, the cultural differences involved, and how the relationship was resolved. What have you learned about love, family constraints, and decision-making as a result?

Summer vacation was almost over. Mr. and Mrs. Shin invited me to dinner at their apartment as they had done from time to time. It was an established custom for the married Korean students to invite single, particularly male, students to dinner at Indiana University. Korean men often didn't know how to cook.

Mr. Shin was a graduate student in music. He had taught at Seoul National University. He was about ten years older than most Korean students.

After dinner he asked me, "Mr. Kim, are you going to marry a Korean girl?"

It was a totally unexpected question. He hadn't asked that kind of question before. It might be reflecting the fact that I liked to date American girls. The question was really two questions in sequence: are you going to marry? If so, are you going to marry a Korean girl, or an American girl?

"Mr. Kim, if you decide to marry, I truly advise you to marry a Korean girl.

I like you; you are a most able young man. You want to enter the field of Korean politics. You can do many good things for our country, many more than for the United States."

I replied with a grin, "If I can find a beautiful girl, yes . . ."  
"That is good."

It was a strange response to my words.

"Well, there is good news for you. A very beautiful girl is coming from Korea to attend Indiana University. She is a graduate of Seoul National University. She was one of my best students. She is from a very good family, and I know her parents well. They called me this morning and asked me to find them a future son-in-law. They told me that she will be too old for marriage after she earns her Ph.D. degree. She will be here this Saturday. I will pick you up on the way to the airport."

He was not kidding. Teachers, parents and students form a close triad in Korean society.

I listened to him with some interest and told him, "I don't have a gold ring for her yet, nor money to buy it."

He smiled.

I was poor. I relied on a fifteen-hour-a-week campus job and \$150 monthly from my parents. A gold ring for a wedding ceremony was beyond my reach.

"Don't worry! You don't need to worry about money or a gold ring. Her father is a tycoon."

The days were getting shorter, and the twilight after the sunset was as pretty as an oil painting. In the darkness of my apartment, I was reflecting on my long single life, and felt that my single voyage was ending. I was 27, working on my dissertation. Marriage had been far from my thoughts before dinner that evening. In Korea, a decent job was a pre-condition for marriage. A decent job meant a decent income. A gold wedding band was a necessary indicator of a man's condition. He should be able to buy a gold ring or a diamond ring for his bride. Student status was not a proper status for marriage.

Indiana was thousands of miles away from Korea. But I was still a Korean influenced by Korean custom, tradition, and inertia even though I liked American culture and dynamics.

I liked to see young American couples being married in churches or court-houses, without decent jobs or gold wedding rings. Their marriages start as healthy as their bodies. But many of their marriages often break up and end in divorce. Whether they have decent jobs or not, whether they have bought gold rings or not, they often break up and end in divorce. Marriage is not a serious thing to Americans, but is to Koreans.

I had planned to come to the United States since I was in high school. The more I had been attracted to the American lifestyle, the more I had disliked the Korean way of life. I had rejected Korean authoritarianism, formalism and "seri-

ousness." I had protested against college teachers who tried to dominate students with age and gray hair, not knowledge and wisdom. I had rebelled against my father who had tried to teach me the words of Confucius. I had even come to dislike the smallness of Korea's territory, and missed the Manchuan territory of the Koguryo dynasty.

Upon arrival in the United States, however, I discovered the virtue of Korean things. Actually, I was a prisoner of Korea. I missed my college, the narrow streets of Seoul, the tearoom, friends and, of course, my family.

I liked the American lifestyle, but had not acquired it. The distance between me and the United States was still thousands of miles.

Typing my dissertation was the major work in my little nest. But I could not concentrate on typing. One mistake, and two. Three on one page. I gave up typing and went out into the darkness of the summer night, the still, hot and humid Midwestern summer night.

I don't mind the single's life. I couldn't commit myself to one woman among so many beautiful and smart women. I thought I could continue a bachelor's life with dignity. Gold ring, money and status were merely excuses.

Gary Capp's girls had also changed my views of girls, American girls. Gary, my friend, changed girls every night, nearly every night. I called his girls "common market" girls. I had looked long upon girls as "angels." Gary was a carefree man who was concerned about me, the foreign student next door to him. He was kind. He sometimes worked at a construction site as a laborer. When he had enough money for three months' rent and groceries, he stayed in his apartment and played the saxophone all day. Many college girls came to him and slept with him. He sent girls over to me. I did not like such an arrangement, and some girls complained.

"You don't like American girls?"

"I like American girls more than any American boy!"

Jane, an English literature graduate student from Boston, tried to interpret the "common market" girl as unladylike.

"Kim, oh, I know what that means. That means I am not a lady you want to sleep with." She was smart.

Freedom, freedom from sexual restraint, prevailed.

She told me, "Kim, sex is like a meal here in the United States. We should eat."

Saturday afternoon, Mr. Shin picked me up on the way to the airport. It was a fine day. He was somewhat embarrassed by my casual dress. For this occasion, I was supposed to be dressed up. I was deliberately showing my unpreparedness to the girl who was to be landing soon at Bloomington.

"Why don't you dress up?" he said. "We still have enough time."

I insisted, "What I am wearing is O.K."

He was a bit disappointed.

In his car, there were two women. One was Mrs. Shin, and the other was a Korean girl whom I hadn't met before. She was a stranger, an attractive stranger. Sexy, glamorous. Mr. Shin introduced her to me.

"Mr. Kim, this is Miss Kyoung Sook Kim. She arrived here a week ago to attend music school. She is a classmate of Young Sil's."

Young Sil was the girl I was going to greet at the airport.

Kyoung Sook smiled.

In response to her smile, I joked, "The music school will be crowded with Korean girls."

Indiana University is known for its music school. And Korea is known as a nation of musical talent. Koreans are a very virile, passionate and temperamental people, which makes for ideal musicians. Many Korean students come to Indiana.

Young Sil arrived at the small airport on time. It was awkward . . . I didn't know what to say or how to greet her. Silence on that occasion was not very comfortable. I was uneasy all the way to Mr. Shin's apartment.

From our dinner conversation, I learned that Young Sil was the niece of Dr. Chon, a lawyer specializing in international commerce at the Asian Development Bank in Manila. I had met him during my one-year stint in Manila before I came to the United States.

The world is small for Koreans. Korea is a small country. Many times when first meeting, Koreans find they have mutual friends after five minutes' talk. The same town, the same high school, the same college, the same military duty might be found between any two Korean people. If they didn't share the same town, they might have lived in the same province. Province is smaller than country. If they didn't share the same high school, their high schools might have been in neighboring towns.

Young Sil and I became more comfortable when we sipped coffee.

Kyoung Sook politely left right after dinner. I stayed until late at Mr. Shin's apartment.

Registration began the following Monday. Thirty thousand students suddenly flooded the town, a campus town. The field house looked like the Stock Exchange in New York City. It was hell to many foreign students. Long waiting, slow processing. Slow proceeding.

I met Kyoung Sook there. We had the same last name, Kim.

I rescued her and helped her complete the registration process. I remember how I had felt in the same field house three years before. I had been lonely and terribly confused. I couldn't understand the registration instructions; I couldn't speak English very well. I was scared. Helpless.

When we left the field house, Kyoung Sook spoke to me as if she were one of my younger sisters.

"Mr. Kim, you should know what day today is."

"Wednesday."

"No," she said. "It is my birthday."

I smiled at her.

I could not go off and leave her there. It was only noon.

We went to the student union. I had an unexpected luncheon in the Commons at the Memorial Union with a Korean girl. It was my first date with a Korean girl. She expressed her thanks with her eyes.

I was glad to treat her on her birthday, her first birthday in the United States, away from her home and home country.

The university quickly forgot the summer vacation. School was full of young bodies and minds. Vitality and rhythm. I was just one of these 30,000 souls. Other than dissertation writing, I was idle.

The first Friday evening after school opened, I had to meet the new international student senator who would succeed me. Gabriel, from a Latin American country, had asked my advice and suggestions for his leadership of the 1500 foreign students from 80 different nations. I had helped him get elected.

I was about to leave for the meeting with Gabriel when the telephone rang. It was from Kyoung Sook. She asked me to come to her place for dinner.

"Yes, I will be there soon."

It was strange. I was supposed to meet with Gabriel. And, moreover, I had to see Young Sil, not Kyoung Sook. I was not supposed to see Kyoung Sook.

She looked fresh and happy when she opened the door for me. She wore an apron. I discovered the beauty of an apron for the first time. She was shy. She justified this sudden invitation as a return for my treat on her birthday. The justification made me uncomfortable.

I smiled at her. "You don't need to justify any act. You are an opera student, not a political science student, my fair lady!"

We quickly became friends; we were already very close. I held her hand. We shared Bach, Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry, and our lives in Korea and at Indiana University. We discussed the Beatles, hippies, and an underground newspaper. I was a contributor to the underground campus newspaper which had been born during a turbulent time in the late 1960s; it was against the Vietnam War and the Establishment, and was popular and well-circulated to town students, not to the Greek house students.

The underground newspaper printed my poems . . . I didn't know whether a poet could be a good friend to a singer.

She invited me to come see her the following Saturday. We called each other every night. We got together everyday. We shared many events on the university calendar: opera, art, the tavern, strolls in the woods.

I told her, "You are Madame Butterfly."

She told me, "You are Hamlet and Don Quixote."

We laughed. We shared many, many laughs.

She liked my poems and I liked her songs. Her favorite poem was:

### To a Violinist

The pain of fingers is not enough.  
 Agonies from soul.  
 He assembled himself  
 by a piano, under a Miro  
 abstract painting.  
 He is supported by  
 the strings and bow.  
 Space and vacuum  
 are filled with image.  
 An hour is translated into  
 time infinite.  
 Is he a magician  
 offering the meaning  
 to the object(s)?

I spent every evening with her. She was a good cook. I didn't know how to cook. For the previous three years I had only opened cans, or gone to the cafeteria for a cheeseburger. I was tired of canned food and fast food. She seemed happy to cook for me. She told me that she did not like cooking for only herself.

After dinner, we often took a long walk across the meadow. There was a small railroad station at the end of the meadow. We saw an old man working there. The train did not stay very long. We did not see any passengers in or out the station. We did not know where the train went to, where the railroad ended.

We seemed to be perfect lovers in a most romantic and classical background. When we returned from the long walk, we listened to Bach. One night I confessed to her, "I like Bach. I still like Beethoven and Mozart. I also like the Beatles. Maybe I need a religion."

She responded, "You are a fragile man. I want you to go to church with me. Anyway, man is fragile, whereas woman is resilient."

She smiled. I laughed.

Kyoung Sook was dreaming of becoming a prima donna at the New York Metropolitan Opera. I became Rudolfo and she became Mimi. We were going into an opera. Music was a splendid thing.

I wrote a long letter to my mother about Kyoung Sook and my vague plans to marry her. I needed her blessing. Long before, I had determined not to marry any woman without her blessing, if I married. She had sacrificed her life for me, for my schooling here especially. She hadn't bought any nice clothes since I left Korea. My sister wrote me that my family did not buy meat regularly anymore, and mother prayed every night for my health, my studies, and my success in a country far from her. All mothers are great. I claimed that my mother was greater than any other.

Our secret love was no longer a secret in the campus town. We were spotted by many Korean students. Indiana University is a town. We were all there together, whether we liked it or not. We could be easily seen by other Korean students in the cafeteria, library, opera house, and woods. We were sensational news to them, whether we liked it or not. But we didn't mind. They needed a love story for good entertainment in their simple and monotonous foreign student lives. They confined themselves to the university dormitory, library, classroom, and the struggle for good grades for four years or longer. Most Korean students had only one objective—their Ph.D. degree. Most single students, both men and women, did not find each other attractive romantically. They were all stoic scholars.

My mother's letter came. It was a shock! A bomb! She did her best to convince me that Kyoung Sook should not be my bride. Her explanation created darkness and fears for our future. And the future included the present. She wrote me that Kyoung Sook was talented and beautiful, but her family background was not acceptable.

My mother had gone to the Seoul National University of Music and met Kyoung Sook's former professors. She had met her mother who was a hairdresser and her father who was a policeman. She emphasized and reemphasized that her family background would be detrimental to our marriage. She ended her letter by urging that I should set an example to my younger brother and sisters.

Family and the family name were the most important considerations to my parents' generation. Birth and education were the two most important factors in judging a man and a woman in Korean society. The landlord-gentry class produced royal bureaucrats for centuries in the Korean dynasty. Their grandchildren, my father and mother, no longer owned vast tracks of land, but maintained the old pride and honor of the dynastic class system, or more accurately, the caste system. The landlord-gentry class had been replaced by the merchant-entrepreneur class. My parents had lost their land, but culturally and socially remained in the gentry class.

I loved and respected my mother more than anyone in this world. I attributed my luck, my health, and my life in this foreign country to her prayers. She sent me \$150 monthly, which was every cent she could afford. She was always gentle and kind. My father was like a stormy sea whereas my mother was the sunshine after a stormy night.

I went to Kyoung Sook's apartment that evening, not for supper. She noticed something was wrong, and asked me to tell her what it was. I could not at first. I asked her out to eat. We drank beer at a tavern with our cheeseburgers. A crowd was there, but the crowd and the tavern's dim light could not change my feelings. Maybe I could not hide myself in the crowd. On the way to her apartment, I said to her, "I received a letter from my mother."

"I know what the letter said about me."

She was very upset.

"What does my family background matter? I am myself," she burst out in

anger. "Our relationship is a mistake. I never thought you were that kind of outdated man. I thought you were a modern man."

She cried.

Near her apartment, she stopped crying and said calmly, "I don't want to see you again. I don't love you anymore. I don't know anything anymore. Please leave me alone."

It was near midnight. On the way to my apartment, I knocked on the door of Mr. Shin's apartment. For the first time I felt the need to talk to him about our romance. He and his wife were not surprised by my late night visit. They understood very well my state of mind. They were as kind as they had always been.

"Mr. Kim, marriage is not as simple as you think. Family background is an important factor that you should consider. When you are passionate, you cannot distinguish fire from water. Calm down, and think it all over again."

Mrs. Shin added, "One or two months are very short compared with the rest of your life. You and Kyoung Sook went too fast. We knew it. This town knew it. Marriage is a lifelong commitment. It is not like affairs, affairs are sweet. But marriage is not an affair."

Pain, sorrow, sadness and loneliness invaded me. I tried to defend myself from the invasion. I tried to forget her and to blank out the last two months' relationship. Nothing worked for me. I tried harder to forget her, but my attempts were futile. Every night I dreamed of her. I was running to her. She came to me with her smile. She was already a part of my life. I dialed her number and hung up before the phone rang. I dialed again, again, and hung up again, again, So many times a day.

I wrote a poem:

### Untitled

I cannot listen to your songs,  
and you cannot read my poems  
even though others listen and read  
our songs and poems.  
A long walk to the railroad station  
on a fine evening is beautiful  
as is counting the railroad ties beautiful.  
Do you still remember how many?  
Remembering is not so good  
after we leave Bloomington.  
I just wonder whether  
you know nostalgia is an arrow  
not just passing by.  
The shadows on the wall,  
they are like lovers in  
an opera.

My pain soothed at the opera house. We saw each other at a Leontyne Price recital. Of course, we did not arrange that meeting. We happened to see each other.

Outside the opera house, we hesitated. Then we walked by a small stream, across a wooden bridge and down a narrow brick road in the woods where we used to walk. No words were spoken. We couldn't talk. Instead, I squeezed her hand. At last, I spoke to her, trying to control my emotions.

"How are you?"

I did not show any pain. I tried to control my emotions.

She stared at me, her eyes showing tears.

As we left the woods, she spoke.

"Next week, I am going to audition for *Don Giovanni*. Will you come to the audition?"

"Then, next, next week, you will go to the New York Metropolitan Opera?"

"Don't be ridiculous!"

"I mean it. You don't know how to speak English yet, but you are now ready for the university audition."

We continued our walk through the woods, stopping at the Observatory. We used to stop at the Observatory and sit on the benches of the Well House. We were surrounded by Japanese maples, tulip trees, Norway maples, and American beeches.

In the woods, we tried to hide our happiness at our reunion, but we could not completely hide the sadness inside us. We stared at each other as if we were staring at a broken vase we once owned. After the walk we could not say good-bye to each other. I realized that I loved her more than anyone or anything.

I asked myself whether I should consider my mother's advice against her. There was no easy answer. Conflict, pain, the broken vase. No conflict resolution, no pain resolution. Insomnia.

Kyoung Sook was chosen to be Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*. *The Daily Student* printed the cast of the opera on its front page. I was happy when I saw Kyoung Sook's name in the newspaper. But I could not call her or approach her. Insomnia continued. I would be awake for forty-eight hours, then asleep for two or three hours.

I had a seat in the opera house. I was extremely tired. I could not watch Kyoung Sook's performance. I just stared. I could hear her voice, but as if it were coming from a distant land. I was almost unconscious. I had no bouquet for her.

After the final curtain, I went backstage to congratulate her. I kissed her on her lips. I didn't know whether the kiss was hot or cold. We went out into the darkness of the night again where the crisp air surrounded us. We were crying. Darkness helps a man cry. I said good-bye at her apartment door, and walked the two miles to my own. A long walk. When I entered my apartment, the telephone was ringing. It was Kyoung Sook.

"Please come!"

Her voice was faint and trembling. She could not manage her loneliness, the vast loneliness after her prima donna debut. I went to her.

At the door, we embraced.

“Don’t leave me!”

“I will not, Kyoung Sook!”

The next morning, we went to the courthouse to get our marriage license. Kyoung Sook told me, “Diamonds are not useful in our lives now.”

It was a fine autumn day.

### *Questions for Discussion and Writing*

1. What Korean cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes does Yearn Hong Choi establish in his essay/story?
2. What American influences play a part in his eventual problems over Kyoung Sook? What become the central conflicts that he must face and make choices about?
3. What has Choi lost and what has he gained in his decision at the end of the story? What decision would you have made in the same situation, and why?
4. At the end of the essay, when Choi and Kyoung Sook are walking in the woods, Choi writes, “We stared at each other as if we were staring at a broken vase we once owned” (p. 327). What do you make of this comparison between the couple and the image of the vase? Does the author use other images in similar ways elsewhere in the story, and if so, how do they work? What does Choi’s writing style tell you about him? Use brief passages to support your response.

## JAMES R. COREY



### *Cultural Shock in Reverse*

*Born in 1937, James R. Corey grew up in a small farming and ranching community in Montana. He received his undergraduate and master’s degrees from Montana State University and the University of Montana, both in English, and went on to earn his doctoral degree at Washington State University in American studies.*

*When Corey left the United States to teach in Saudi Arabia in 1969, he boarded an airplane for the first time. He taught at the University of Petroleum and Minerals in Saudi Arabia until 1977. The late King Faisal had decided in the 1960s against sending young Saudi men to the United States for their education, fearing Western influences on them. Instead, the king organized a university in which professors—Corey among them as part of a two-man humanities team—were imported to teach on the Saudis’ turf. In spite of the King’s plan, many Saudi students still came to the United States to earn their graduate degrees. When these students returned to Saudi Arabia, sometimes ten years later, Corey witnessed their great difficulty in readjusting to conservative Muslim customs. This experience prompted him to write “Cultural Shock in Reverse” in 1979.*

*When Corey returned to the United States in 1977, he joined the faculty of the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, where he is a professor of humanities and American literature today. He also directs a program in technical communications for people who want to be trained in writing and editing for computer, engineering, scientific, and environmental companies.*

*In 1986, Corey returned to the Middle East, this time to Jordan for a year on a Fulbright scholarship at Yarmouk University.*

Before you read “Cultural Shock in Reverse,” write about a time in your life when returning home (especially after time away at school) was more of an adjustment for you than entering the world you had left home to visit. Explain why this reentry was difficult.