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JOANNE BROWN



Scoshi

For many years, Joanne Brown hung her undergraduate and graduate degrees over her washing machine. "Education is the housewife's curse," she'd say as her three children were growing up. In those years, writing and part-time teaching were her links to the world beyond her home.

When Brown began working full time at Des Moines Area Community College, she taught speech, drama, and composition. She later took on administrative responsibilities as dean of Humanities and Public Services at the college, through which she became involved with a number of international programs. The exchange with Japan that she writes about in "Scoshi" grew out of the college's commitment to bring other cultures closer to its students and faculty.

Today Joanne Brown is on the faculty of the English Department at Drake University in Des Moines, where she teaches composition, creative writing, and business writing. She is also a writing consultant for various business communications.

Before you read "Scoshi," write about a time in your life when a friendship with someone started out well but then seemed to disintegrate. Describe the situation as your friendship began, the reasons for its promise, and the subsequent decline. As you think back to it now, how can you explain what happened? (You might also write about a friendship that evolved in the other direction—that is, in which you expected gaps with the other person but instead discovered a real friend.)

The noodle shop was small and dimly lit. Behind the counter, a man stirred liquid into an enormous steel bowl, closing his eyes as he sniffed the rising steam, like a wine connoisseur about to sip from a rare vintage. A group of men at the back of the room rose from their table. As they filed past the booth where

Yoshiko Sajima and I sat, they turned briefly to stare. I was the only Caucasian in the room.

Ignoring them, Yoshiko Sajima took another sip of tea and leaned forward. She was slender and graceful, her face framed by thick black hair that curved into a pageboy and brushed her cheek when she moved. "Are you tired?" she asked.

We had been sitting at our low table for nearly two hours, and I was trying to conceal a severe case of jet lag. Back home in Iowa it was midnight. "Scoshi," I said, using the Japanese word I had learned for "a little." It was an answer I had already found handy when people asked if I spoke Japanese or wanted more sake.

"Would you like to leave?" she asked. I shook my head no. She would be spending three months at the community college where I worked as dean of a liberal arts division, and I was glad for this chance to know her better. We were discovering that we had much in common. Like me, she had earned graduate degrees in English with an emphasis in American literature, and we enjoyed the same authors, respected the same critics. She was the first and only woman faculty member in her division, I the first and only woman dean at my college. We had both suffered miscarriages, liked museums, and avoided housework.

She told me that she once visited the United States briefly, and now that we had met, she was looking forward "with great thrill" to a longer stay. But she was worried about her English. Was it satisfactory?

She spoke English very well, I said, addressing her as *Sajima-sensei*, meaning teacher, a title of great respect.

She smiled broadly, then ducked her head as if the smile might have revealed too much. "Please, call me Yoshiko," she said.

I smiled back, pleased at the friendship her request implied.

She explained that her special interest was American drama and that she hoped to do some research on Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams while she was in the States.

"Do you approve, Dr. Brown?" she asked.

An undergraduate drama major myself with more than a passing interest in both O'Neill and Williams, I nodded—with great thrill.

"Please, call me Joanne," I said in Japanese. I wanted to say more to her in her language, but the unfamiliar words filled my mouth like marbles, awkward and slippery, almost as if I had wandered by accident into a play for which I hadn't rehearsed.

In fact, this trip *was* an accident of sorts. Until the previous year, when I had helped to write a federal grant for a faculty exchange between a Japanese university and my own college, I had known little about Japan. Then the grant was approved, and plans evolved for me to spend a week in Japan getting acquainted with the exchange faculty.

Despite my sense of being unrehearsed, my preparations for the trip had been intense. I had read slender paperbacks on Japanese religion and weighty tomes on Japanese history, enrolled in a crash course in Japanese taught from a text

called *Japanese for Busy I* tended lectures on Japanese social customs so that I

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other sip of tea and leaned forward. I was surprised by thick black hair that curved into a wave. She moved. "Are you tired?" she asked. It was nearly two hours, and I was trying to stay awake. In Iowa it was midnight. "Scoshi," she asked for "a little." It was an answer I gave her. Did I speak Japanese or wanted more

she shook my head no. She would be the first woman at the college where I worked as dean of a college. We had a chance to know her better. We were friends. Like me, she had earned graduate degrees in American literature, and we enjoyed the exchange. She was the first and only woman faculty member to be a woman dean at my college. We had a close relationship and avoided housework.

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Until the previous year, when I had been on an exchange between a Japanese university and a college about Japan. Then the grant was renewed for a week in Japan getting acquainted

my preparations for the trip had been about Japanese religion and weighty tomes. The course in Japanese taught from a text

called *Japanese for Busy People*, sat through a five-hour *kabuki* performance, attended lectures on Japanese flower arranging, and learned enough about Japanese social customs so that I could eat with chopsticks and bow with poise.

But having read of the celebrated Japanese politeness, of their unwillingness to criticize and their high regard for harmonious relations, I harbored some concerns about the exchange. What if our guests found some arrangement unsatisfactory—but were reluctant to speak out? I hoped that this visit to Japan would provide me not only with the opportunity to meet our guests prior to their arrival in Iowa, but to assure them that they should feel free while there to speak openly to me about anything.

My conversation with Yoshiko was reassuring. If her easy informality was at all representative, I had worried needlessly. She told stories about friends who had visited the United States, one of whom refused to sleep in a bed for fear of falling out, and another who was so busy taking photographs that he complained at the end of his stay that he hadn't had a chance to see anything. Her amusement implied that nothing would arise that a sense of humor couldn't overcome. In my mind, I was already composing the quarterly report to Washington: "The Japanese faculty members have approached their exchange visits in a spirit of marked cooperation and flexibility . . ."

Yoshiko gathered up her purse and wrap, indicating that it was time to leave. But we continued to sit while she spoke of her plans. Because she would be the first of her faculty to come, she wanted "to make a thriving start." She hoped to speak to our students and faculty about the contrasting roles of women in Japan and America. Did I approve? Of course. She would come for the spring semester. Did I approve? She would arrive on April 1.

Her arrival date coincided with the start of her spring term, a time convenient for her, but—as I had already explained in an earlier letter—so many weeks into our semester that she would be coming just as the term was winding down. No longer buoyed by the great thrill, I explained again that our academic calendars differed, that American schools did not observe the long winter break between January and March common to Japanese universities, and that if she didn't come until April, much of her visit would coincide with the vacation between spring and summer terms when neither students nor teachers would be on campus. Could she come earlier, in February perhaps? Or even March?

She nodded (assent or politeness?), but made no other response except to rise. I rose too, but persisted: A local Eugene O'Neill festival was scheduled the last week in February. Should I reserve tickets? Again, she said nothing, only touched my arm and led me from the restaurant.

The week at the university passed rapidly. Everyone was unfailingly cordial, eager to answer my questions about Japanese culture and to talk with me about American culture. A professor of law divulged that his hobby was tap dancing to American music of the 1940s, and a professor of anthropology showed me his

collection of American presidential campaign buttons. The exchange faculty seemed well prepared for their visits; the advance arrangements they wanted me to make for their research kindled my own interests in their subjects, which ranged from the AIDS epidemic to criminal court proceedings. Yoshiko asked for help in obtaining some recent essays by American feminists. When my visit ended, I felt sad to leave the friends I had made.

They lined up beside the car that was to take me to Tokyo, waving and smiling. "Sayonara," they called as I climbed into the back seat, "goodbye. Take care of yourself. *Ogenki de*. We hope to see you soon."

I rolled down the window and leaned out for a final farewell. "Yes," I said. "Soon." I smiled meaningfully at Yoshiko as I repeated with deliberate emphasis, "Soon."

She nodded back. "Very soon," she said.

Soon. I was to discover that it was a flexible word.

Upon my return to Iowa, I again sent letters to Yoshiko suggesting arrival dates in January or February. To each of my letters, she responded warmly ("Speak of angels and you shall hear their wings"), but ignored the question of when she would come. As January moved toward February, I hoped for March. In late February, she called to explain that she had encountered a delay in obtaining a visa. I began to wonder if she would make it to Iowa before summer.

Then I received a letter saying that she would leave Japan on March 19 and spend ten days in New York with a friend who was studying drama at New York University. "I would like to warm up," she wrote, "before I begin the true American life with you." She would arrive on April 1.

Late on the afternoon of April 1, the phone rang as I was arranging flowers for Yoshiko's room. She had accepted my offer to stay with my husband and me for a week or two until she felt comfortable enough with American culture to move into her own place, a one-bedroom furnished apartment that the college had outfitted with dishes, linens, cleaning supplies, and grocery staples.

"Joanne? It is Yoshiko, your friend." I tensed, afraid she had arrived early at the airport with no one to meet her. Her voice sounded subdued and muffled, barely audible.

"Yoshiko? Where are you?" Perhaps she was calling from Chicago to say her plane had been delayed.

"I have been thinking of you." The crackle of static nearly drowned out her voice. "I am in London. I will arrive in Iowa in a few days."

"London?" I set down the irises I had been holding and switched the receiver to my other ear, as if changing ears would change what I was hearing. "What are you doing in London?"

"To see theatre, of course."

"Theatre?"

"*Les Miserables*. Glenda Jackson in *Strange Interlude*." Through the static, I could detect an undercurrent of polite amusement: Didn't I know what was

playing in London? She went at an "excellent" rate from New York to London, she had gone on to Paris. On her return to the States, her scholarship and its departure had been postponed. She arrived in New York.

Nothing that I had read about Japanese development, and I stood, muttering a goodbye (what sounded like "Tori") as a dial tone hummed over the wires. Perhaps I had not learned as much as I was going to learn at home.

I was also alarmed. Yoshiko's behavior was and manipulative. *You can't trust* her. In two years, I had heard that warning now it stung me with the force of a grant—each of its 60 pages, plus the way it flew away into a giant maelstrom of

Then I replaced the receiver and thought of the I had made in Japan and ashamed of one incident with one person, and I had sat so long in the noodle shop as women and as scholars.

As I arranged the irises one by one. Perhaps after years of abiding by the Japanese woman was to behave, Yoshiko had anticipated, more than she could.

Although I had known something of the docility and obedience that their culture had dramatized the difficulty and they could. Women were so often excluded from home on the bus after an evening of dinner with us to eat and drink at a restaurant. Intelligent and well-educated—had asked the dean of the law college for a job. He answered, "None," a terse reply. (Worth preserving.) And gender roles for women—all women—were defined. Yoshiko had poured water for even a man. This domestic gesture with his brim of hair. I know that you are not so much

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playing in London? She went on to explain that she was able to get a "very excellent" rate from New York to London via Air India. As long as she was in London, she had gone on to Paris and Venice. However, when it was time for her return to the States, her scheduled plane had some mechanical difficulties, and its departure had been postponed for "a while." She promised to call when she arrived in New York.

Nothing that I had read about Japanese women had prepared me for this development, and I stood, mute, trying to take it in. Then she was saying goodbye (what sounded like "Toot, toot"), there was a click on the line, and the dial tone hummed over the wires. I thought wryly—and with a surge of anger—that perhaps I had not learned as much about intercultural matters while abroad as I was going to learn at home.

I was also alarmed. Yoshiko's behavior seemed not only irresponsible, but rude and manipulative. *You can't trust the Japanese.* Growing up in post-World War II years, I had heard that warning many times without paying much heed, but now it stung me with the force of truth. I had a quick mental image of the grant—each of its 60 pages, plus subsequent letters and memos—being swept away into a giant maelstrom of suspicion.

Then I replaced the receiver and took a deep breath, remembering the friends I had made in Japan and ashamed of my facile judgment. After all, this was only one incident with one person, and that person was the same Yoshiko with whom I had sat so long in the noodle shop while we explored all that we shared, both as women and as scholars.

As I arranged the irises one by one in a slender vase, I tried to understand. Perhaps after years of abiding by the constraints that dictated how a proper Japanese woman was to behave, Yoshiko was finding freedom headier than she had anticipated, more than she could handle. Temporarily beyond her control.

Although I had known something of the role of women in Japan, about the docility and obedience that their culture insisted upon, even my brief stay there had dramatized the difficulty and uneasiness of that role as no amount of reading could. Women were so often excluded. (One professor had sent his young wife home on the bus after an evening reception at the university, then had stayed on with us to eat and drink at a local restaurant.) Women such as Yoshiko—intelligent and well-educated—had few outlets for their ambitions. (When I had asked the dean of the law college about the number of women deans in Japan, he answered, "None," a terse reply clearly intended to reflect a status quo well worth preserving.) And gender seemed to be the main principle by which women—all women—were defined. (During lunch in the school cafeteria, when Yoshiko had poured water for everyone at our table, one of the men had toasted this domestic gesture with his brimming glass and joked, "Ah, Yoshiko, now we know that you are not so much teacher as woman.")

So perhaps when Yoshiko wrote about "warming up" and "the true American life," she was telling me about her need for flight—not a means of travel, but escape—an impulse to cut loose before settling down to serious work. If that were

the case, and by now I had convinced myself that it was, then her behavior was as inevitable and as temporary as adolescence.

By the time Yoshiko actually landed in Iowa, I took some pride in what she had done, prompting her in those first days to "tell where you went after you left Japan," like a mother whose righteous indignation over a misbehaving child is dimmed by the daring of his exploits.

Still, I was wary. On the one hand, Yoshiko seemed delighted with everything: "full of happy," she said. She made charming speeches at a reception in her honor and to the board of directors, praising New York cabdrivers, the college faculty, Ronald Reagan (then president) and me, who together, she implied, had made her trip possible.

On the other hand, once she rented a car, learned to drive on the right side of the street, and moved into her own apartment, we saw her less and less. She seemed uninterested in getting to know our students or faculty, instead seeking out other Japanese living in the community. During her time on campus, she secluded herself in her office with the door closed. There were days when she didn't appear at all. She promised several instructors that she would address their classes at specified times—and never showed up. A month into her visit, I received a call from Northwestern Bell asking me if I were aware that Yoshiko Sajima had already incurred long-distance charges of over \$500.

There were also troubling rumbles from Japan. An exchange faculty member from our college now in Japan wrote, "Perhaps Yoshiko has not been able to adjust to our country. She has taken a hostile attitude toward many things, and her criticisms have put our college in an unfavorable light." The comment, jotted in careful script at the end of a typewritten letter, offered no further explanation.

Was Yoshiko calling her colleagues long-distance with \$500 worth of criticism? Had she written unhappy letters, like a homesick child at camp? And what could she have said?

Yoshiko had expressed no criticisms to me over anything other than the refrigerator in her apartment, which she said was noisy and kept her awake at night. I had called the landlord, a cooperative man who responded promptly to all our requests. He called back so quickly to report the problem solved that I had forgotten about it.

Had the complaint about the refrigerator masked more serious matters? Perhaps an incident at the college had upset her so much that, restrained by her sense of Japanese propriety, she could not bring herself to discuss it. Had she resorted to reporting "criticisms" as a ploy to gain our attention, knowing that we were likely to learn of what she had written or said?

Or were domestic tensions back home clouding her experiences here? Although she was married, she never spoke of her family except to say that her husband was a city official and that she had left her nine-year-old son in the care of her mother.

To resolve the problem—or at least to define it—I stopped by Yoshiko's office several times, dropping casually into a chair to ask about her research or some

event I knew she had attended. Here everything was "coming along exc-

I teetered between irritation and could hardly expect me to read he-

that encourages ambiguity over ca- Remembering that the grant ma- making cultural adjustments, I retr- I was looking for on a page titled " list, directed at Americans studyi- frustration, hostility, and "deep de- an international project. Whether exactly my own state of mind.

To compound my anxiety, sever- in the last few weeks. None was considerable time and energy, leav- I reread the postscript several times doing much else, that everything

The next week there was a dinner to drive her there, thinking that ou- to talk frankly. Uncertain of how- discarded several openings on the

She had hardly settled herself in- introduced her own subject and w- a profound dissatisfaction with he- furniture too worn, the refrigerator the gas one she had, and she want- white set that we had lent. And s-

When she had first seen the apa- and professed "large joy." She was rolltop desk we had provided, the

But now as I swung the car into- bitterly about that same apartmen- but she demanded the microwave a- like anything old. We have to have- apartment must be in a different

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event I knew she had attended. Her answers were always guarded, but reassuring:
everything was "coming along excellent."

I teetered between irritation and worry. Was she unhappy or wasn't she? She
could hardly expect me to read her mind. But of course, coming from a culture
that encourages ambiguity over candor, she could.

Remembering that the grant materials had included some information about
making cultural adjustments, I retrieved the packet from my files and found what
I was looking for on a page titled "Common Symptoms of Culture Shock." The
list, directed at Americans studying in Japan, described feelings of isolation,
frustration, hostility, and "deep doubts about the wisdom" of being involved in
an international project. Whether or not the list applied to Yoshiko, it depicted
exactly my own state of mind.

To compound my anxiety, several major administrative problems had surfaced
in the last few weeks. None was related to the grant, but all were requiring
considerable time and energy, leaving me little of either to deal with Yoshiko.
I reread the postscript several times during the next few days and hoped, without
doing much else, that everything would work itself out.

The next week there was a dinner in Yoshiko's honor, and I made arrangements
to drive her there, thinking that our ride might provide her with an opportunity
to talk frankly. Uncertain of how to introduce the subject, I rehearsed and
discarded several openings on the way to pick her up.

She had hardly settled herself in the passenger seat when she unceremoniously
introduced her own subject and what seemed to be the source of the problem:
a profound dissatisfaction with her apartment. The building was too old, the
furniture too worn, the refrigerator still noisy. She preferred an electric range to
the gas one she had, and she wanted a color television, not the small black-and-
white set that we had lent. And she needed a microwave.

When she had first seen the apartment, she had thrown her arms around me
and professed "large joy." She was delighted with the pictures we had hung, the
rolltop desk we had provided, the bookshelf and the night light above the bed.

But now as I swung the car into the freeway traffic, Yoshiko was complaining
bitterly about that same apartment. She could get along in less space, she said,
but she demanded the microwave and a different refrigerator: "We Japanese don't
like anything old. We have to have good equipment." And, she added, the new
apartment must be in a different neighborhood.

She had been living near the campus of a private university, within walking
distance of the university library. Originally, she had been enthusiastic about the
location of the apartment and the library privileges she had been granted, but
now she complained about seeing men (students?) walking about on warm days
without shirts. One sported a tattoo. Some were black men. Why had I put her
in a neighborhood with black people?

I knew that Japan was a homogeneous, exclusive society, but I was offended
by her remarks and overwhelmed at the thought of moving her. The search for
Yoshiko's apartment had been intense and frantic. We had agreed to provide

housing for the Japanese professors when the president of their university, aware that the weakening dollar threatened to make housing prohibitively expensive for our teachers, suggested a housing exchange. Although our college owned no housing, not even student dormitories, a local landlord had offered a free apartment for the duration of the grant.

Then, just before Yoshiko left Japan, the landlord suddenly sold his building, leaving us to scurry around for another place. To complicate the situation, the college was in the middle of a funding crisis, with a budget too tight to cover even modest rental fees. After inspecting a dozen or so possibilities, we had been fortunate, we thought, to find one so reasonably priced, so clean and nicely furnished and roomy, with so much free parking space.

But tonight Yoshiko wondered aloud why we had chosen that apartment, repeating her criticism of the television set and black men as if the two had some relationship to each other and insisting again on new equipment for the kitchen: "It is the Japanese way."

Weaving furiously in and out of traffic lanes, I swallowed hard against what I dare not say—that she was not in Japan but in Iowa, that she had come to learn about another culture instead of clinging to her own, and that it was time she tried making compromises instead of demands. "It is the American way," I wanted to say.

Only later did I learn that in Japan, men with bare chests, especially those with tattoos, are perceived as menacing. At the time, I brushed aside what was probably an honest fear for her own safety by curtly explaining about American warm-weather attire. But Yoshiko was firm: to remain in that apartment was "impossible."

I had signed a six-month lease, thinking to use the apartment at least through the summer for the next exchange professor. Finally, wondering how to break the lease, I said that we would make other arrangements for an apartment, but that she would have to remain where she was a little longer while we found another place.

She agreed, and we drove in silence. Then, "Perhaps you are upset," she said. "Scoshi," I said, gripping the steering wheel and refusing to look at her.

During the next week, I scanned the want ads and made some phone calls without results. Yoshiko had gone on her own search and presented me with a list of possibilities, all of them at least double what we could afford. Meanwhile, I received another letter from our instructor in Japan. Continuing word of Yoshiko's dissatisfaction was threatening the affiliation between the two institutions.

Then came an unexpected offer from the widowed mother of one of the faculty. Her house had many spare bedrooms, and she invited Yoshiko to move into one. She herself would be spending the summer in Maine, but Yoshiko was welcome to remain in the house for as long as she liked.

Wondering how a liking for Eugene O'Neill's plays had involved me in this international complication, I tagged along with Yoshiko while she inspected the

house and asked questions about it. Yoshiko accepted the offer and moved in to a house in Japan that said, "You have finally found a place to live." Yoshiko rejoiced.

The end of the semester coincided with finding my dean's job increasingly difficult to administer. There had been a change in administration and at the end of May, I became the new dean. I moved near where Yoshiko had lived, and we became neighbors.

Yoshiko was upset and baffled by my decision. She asked again and again.

I could only imagine what she was thinking behind my decision, she could hardly understand it. It is very little moving about from one place to another in a life-long. People are expected to do what is best for the common good. How much a person is expected to do. She had told me that she considered resignation and that she had disagreed with me. A resignation was another matter.

I tried to explain, without divulging my own motives, but she seemed not to understand. I had forced my resignation. Did she understand? Was the president angry with me? I was right.

She had begun to write her final report. It was for American women, to be presented at a conference. It was sporadic in her preparation, delayed. It was the end. On several occasions, she had written to me.

When I read what she had written, I was surprised. A month visit to another country. I was surprised. Japanese women, to what she surprised. American women drew conclusions from them myself. (Married women, but they were doing household chores than me.)

Although she was concerned about the form than the substance, about the appearance of her mind and partly to encourage me to edit the paper. As we sat working, she would look up to find her watching me. She had caught hers. "Why?"

In mid-June Yoshiko was joined by her mother. There had been some question about her mother's health.

the president of their university, aware of the housing prohibitively expensive for college students. Although our college owned no local landlอร์ด had offered a free apart-

landlord suddenly sold his building, forcing us to leave. To complicate the situation, the college was, with a budget too tight to cover a dozen or so possibilities, we had been reasonably priced, so clean and nicely furnished with parking space.

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with bare chests, especially those with dark skin. At that time, I brushed aside what was probably a white man's explanation about American warm-weather clothing. The main reason for my stay in that apartment was "impossi-

to use the apartment at least through the summer. Finally, wondering how to break my current arrangements for an apartment, but it was a little longer while we found

When I said, "Perhaps you are upset," she said, "I'm not." She turned her wheel and refusing to look at her. I looked at her and made some phone calls. I did my own search and presented me with a list of what we could afford. Meanwhile, I was a professor in Japan. Continuing word of the affiliation between the two institu-

the widowed mother of one of the students, and she invited Yoshiko to move to the summer in Maine, but Yoshiko was not going as she liked.

Neill's plays had involved me in this way. I was with Yoshiko while she inspected the

house and asked questions about the washing machine and piano. Finally she accepted the offer and moved in the next week. When a third letter arrived from Japan that said, "You have finally succeeded in making Yoshiko happy," I rejoiced.

The end of the semester coincided with my own professional crisis. I was finding my dean's job increasingly difficult, rocked by constant turmoil in the top administration. There had been an exodus of deans from the college that year, and at the end of May, I became the sixth to resign. My new job, at the university near where Yoshiko had lived, would start in September.

Yoshiko was upset and baffled by my resignation. "But why? But why?" she asked again and again.

I could only imagine what she thought. Even had she known of the politics behind my decision, she could hardly have understood it. In Japan, I knew, there is very little moving about from one job to another; employment is usually life-long. People are expected to stay put, to adapt their individual concerns to the common good. How much adapting Yoshiko had done seemed problematic. She had told me that she considered the president of her university a "tyrant" and that she had disagreed with him "in loud voice" on several occasions. But a resignation was another matter entirely.

I tried to explain, without divulging confidential information, what had motivated me, but she seemed not to comprehend. Aloud, she speculated about who had forced my resignation. Did the teachers no longer want to work with me? Was the president angry with me? There seemed little point in trying to set her right.

She had begun to write her final report, a comparison of Japanese and American women, to be presented at an open meeting in late June. She had been sporadic in her preparation, delaying for so long that she felt great pressure at the end. On several occasions, she told me, she had trouble sleeping.

When I read what she had written, it hardly seemed the capstone of a three-month visit to another country. Yoshiko had limited most of her discussion to Japanese women, to what she surely knew before coming to Iowa; her comparisons to American women drew conclusions so obvious that I could have written them myself. (Married women, both Japanese and American, spend more time doing household chores than married men or unmarried women.)

Although she was concerned about her presentation, she worried more about the form than the substance, about "saying the correct English." Partly to ease her mind and partly to encourage her to broaden her approach, I offered to help her edit the paper. As we sat working side by side at a table in my office, I would look up to find her watching me. "Why do you resign?" she asked if my gaze caught hers. "Why?"

In mid-June Yoshiko was joined by Tadaharu Shibata, a sociology professor. There had been some question over whether he would come, as his wife was

nt of his university had urged him to
e dissuaded. Yoshiko worried about
e approve?" she sometimes wondered
Then, reassuring herself, she would

erously, with many pauses while he
ad gazing into the distance. But he
n the very beginning he made himself
ad eluded Yoshiko. I attributed the
les they played, he assured and out-
o conceal her own strong will beneath
en as uncomfortable as clothing worn

ier rental experiences. For him we had
downtown complex that boasted an
it. The rent was far beyond what we
used car that he promptly purchased,
ar budget problems—loved everything
he didn't want to make it up each day.
acts among the faculty and emulated
d new acquaintances and sprinkled his
bureaucratise, shaking his head, for
earch had engendered, over the "up
r the delays that interfered with his

ained in Japan, prematurely delivered
omplications, both baby and mother
a lot. He did not, however, return
so. We assured him that we would
refused to consider such an alternative:
ing off further discussion. I wondered
thought about the urban prince, but
withdrawn and more responsive when

I said to him one day.
nt but patronizing. "At my university

works out."
o bad?" I asked.
He stroked his chin in the familiar
t. "Her apartment troubled her very

"Yes, I know," I said. "I'm sorry about the apartment, but at least now she has a nice place."

Tad shook his head. "She does not like it. It is not her home." His voice grew sharper. "She must worry all the time about breaking things and who pays. It was the same at your house. Not good." I tried to keep my face impassive, but he responded to something he saw there. "Perhaps you do not understand. We Japanese need privacy." He stared at me, his eyes stern. "There have been many problems with her visit."

For once we were in total agreement. "You're right," I said and changed the subject.

We videotaped Yoshiko's presentation. The tape, filmed by the college's media department, captures the scene in careful detail, zooming in for a closeup of Yoshiko's face at just the right moment, panning across the audience to catch someone nodding in agreement, frowning in concentration. Watching it, I am there again.

The auditorium is full, packed with both teachers and students. Yoshiko walks to the podium, hesitant and demure, very much the Yoshiko I remember from our first meeting. She expresses her appreciation to the American women she has met, those who have assisted her during her stay. "It is entirely thanks to their help that I can stand here." Her voice is soft, and she leans toward the microphone. She is so tiny that the lectern hides all but her shoulders and head.

"In ancient times," she begins, "we women were like the sun, shining with glory. It is said that Japanese history begins with the goddess of the sun. She was angry with the males because of their lesser behavior, so she hid herself in a dark cave and closed the entrance with a heavy rock so that her light could not escape. People could not be without the sun, so they asked the god of power—a male god—to put the goddess out. He opened the door and begged her to leave the cave. Being begged, she finally appeared again and gave her sunlight to the world. This was the beginning of Japan."

She looks up from her notes, uncertain. Is she saying the words right? Does the audience approve of what they are hearing? Somewhere among all those faces, she finds the encouragement she needs and resumes again: "Today women in Japan are trying to be liberated from their burden, to be like the sun, as they once were." Her voice gains power. "When I was in college, I was strongly influenced by the American women's liberation movement. I believed that I could build a successful career, get married, have a child, and lead a happy life." She has added this material since I last read her report, and I am moved by her words, by her intensity.

"My parents worried when I decided to attend graduate school to study American literature. They believed if a woman was highly educated, she couldn't find a good husband because in those days men disliked highly educated women." She looks up from her notes and searches the auditorium until she finds Tad. "Most people still think like that."

There is a long pause while she scans her notes, the forefinger of her right hand skimming down the page to find her place, the fingers of her other hand to her lips. She shifts her weight slightly, picks up her manuscript with both hands, and taps it smartly on the lectern, as if to align the pages. Without setting it down again, she begins speaking. I am not sure if she is reading or improvising. "After I had my son, I realized how difficult it is to have it as I thought. Every woman who has had a baby in mid-career can understand. Both my home life and my professional life demanded much time, and I was always tired. After I gave birth to my son, I tried to have a second child, but the result was miserable. I got pregnant three times, but I miscarried twice, and then I had a stillborn. After those sad experiences, I finally gave up giving my son a brother or sister, and now I feel a kind of guilt for him."

Her voice falters. There is an uneasy silence, she again consults her notes, then looks up to finish her story. "When I had a stillborn baby, my doctor said, 'You have to choose whether to quit your job and have a baby or to work and give up having another baby.'" She tells how her teaching position at a girls' junior college in Tokyo required her to commute two hours, and she is explaining that her doctor felt that the demands were too much for her when she interrupts herself. "Two hours each way." She spreads her hands, as if indicating a huge distance. "People would ask me why I didn't quit my career, but—" Her tempo slows, and she pauses between phrases, her voice striking each word like a hammer: "I knew that if I quit that full-time job, I could never get a full-time position again." She knows where I am sitting, far to her left in the front row, and she turns in my direction, thin-lipped and reproving. I smile encouragingly, neutrally, as if she is discussing Japanese recipes or geography.

"I was staying at home," she says, "feeling sad for two months after that birth, and I would look around at my neighbors, all full-time housewives. They spent their time chatting with each other outside their house until their husbands and children came home. They spent their daily lives doing nothing. They now have two or three children, each without problems. Their husbands are supported by a tax credit for dependents while I pay expensive taxes without tax exemption."

There is another silence, this one very long, while she alternately shuffles through her papers and looks up at the waiting audience. She drops a page and retrieves it. Then she resumes, reading from a section already familiar to me. It traces the history of women in Japan, their decline from the days of the emperors, through the period of the shoguns. "They became men's possessions. They could have never their own houses. When they were young, they lived in their father's houses, and they obeyed their fathers. After marriage, they lived in their husband's houses and obeyed their husbands. Then, when they grew old, they lived with their sons and obeyed their sons. Women had no place where they could rest their soul. They only had to obey men. So obedience was a life-long duty."

She is reading in a sing-song rhythm, hurrying along. "Also, they were considered child-bearing machines. If they could not give birth within the first three years of marriage, the husband could divorce his wife at will by writing a letter that stated in three and one-half lines that he wanted her to leave."

Things improved, she tells me. She says that in the United States, Japanese women feel that we have a constitution that gives us fundamental rights, as if confiding in the American way.

"My father often said to me, 'You must be a feminine way. Don't put on a man's pants. You must learn how to cook.' Sometimes my father would blame me: 'You must be a man. You would feel that he was not fatherly. You must obey my brothers when they are angry. My father would get angry.'

"When I decided to go to a women's college. He was a university where male students were feminine. I knew that femininity was not what I wanted. I disagreed with my father's decision."

"Fortunately, Mother was a woman. She had the same opportunities as my brother. She made her own decisions. Because of this, I came to study at a large school, Mother's school. It was what was a truly happy life for me. I wanted." She smiles a very slight smile at the edges of the lectern. When she looks at me, her eyes are full of tenderness and scorn that I am not Japanese.

"Why did she allow me to go to a women's college? My experience when she was young. My parents did not allow it even though I wanted to. I must obey her father's decision and not my own. Sometimes an arranged marriage was made without prestige, but she could not do anything. She ran away from her husband. After that, she met my father."

The camera swings across the room, less, absorbed by the story, then it comes up at them, lifting her chin in a challenge. She must feel the bond of their culture. Her features relax; she looks down at her figures comparing American and Japanese. The audience becomes silent, turning at the sound of the clock in the back of the room. Her manner softens again, and she looks at her mother when I worked on this. I have learned through these

notes, the forefinger of her right hand, the fingers of her other hand to her manuscript with both hands, and turn the pages. Without setting it down if she is reading or improvising. "After to have it as I thought. Every woman understand. Both my home life and my and I was always tired. After I gave birth, but the result was miserable. I got twice, and then I had a stillborn. After giving my son a brother or sister, and now

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Things improved, she tells us, after World War II, when a new constitution was imposed by the United States occupational forces. "So sometimes we Japanese women feel that we have been saved by the United States, because this constitution gives us fundamental rights. Fundamental rights." She leans forward, as if confiding in the audience.

"My father often said to me, 'You are a girl, so you should behave in a feminine way. Don't put on pants and sit like a man. Help your mother and learn how to cook.' Sometimes I would quarrel with my brothers and then my father would blame me: 'You are a girl. Don't talk back to your brothers.' I would feel that he was not fair, so I talked back to Father. 'Why do I have to obey my brothers when they are not right?' I did not understand. Then my father would get angry.

"When I decided to go to the university in Tokyo, Father wanted me to go to a women's college. He was afraid I would lose my femininity if I went to the university where male students were in the majority. But I had already lost my femininity. I knew that femininity was obedience to men and being coquettish. I disagreed with my father's demands and was disgusted with my father.

"Fortunately, Mother was always on my side. She thought I should have the same opportunities as my brothers and always persuaded Father to agree with my decisions. Because of this, I could always have my own way. But when I decided to study at a large school, Mother could not agree at first. Then we discussed what was a truly happy life for women. Finally she encouraged me to do what I wanted." She smiles a very small, private smile, her fingers gently tracing the edges of the lectern. When she speaks again, it is with such a strange blend of tenderness and scorn that I am glad we have preserved the moment on tape.

"Why did she allow me to do so? I think it was because she had a bitter experience when she was young. She wanted to take higher education, but her parents did not allow it even though they could afford the tuition. She had to obey her father's decision and was forced into a marriage he arranged. In those times an arranged marriage was very common and a love marriage was considered without prestige, but she could not understand to get married with an unknown man. She ran away from her husband's house on the first night of her marriage. After that, she met my father and she married him by her own will."

The camera swings across the auditorium, row after row. Everyone sits motionless, absorbed by the story, their eyes fixed on the stage, on Yoshiko. She looks up at them, lifting her chin in a defiant gesture that I do not understand. Surely, she must feel the bond of their approval. But her glance is aloof, even fierce. Then her features relax; she looks down at her manuscript and reads the flat facts and figures comparing American and Japanese women. Gone is the tenderness, the passion. The audience becomes restless, listening politely, but shifting occasionally, turning at the sound of the auditorium door opening, twisting to see the clock in the back of the room. Yoshiko reads faster and faster, then stops. Her manner softens again, and she takes a deep breath. "I thought often of my mother when I worked on this paper," she says. "I think she was a brave woman. I have learned through these bitter conflicts in my family that I am very lucky

to have such a brave mother. I am proud of her from the bottom of my heart. This is my mother's story."

Yoshiko left for Japan the next day. I drove her to the airport, making chitchat about the weather and her return trip, but thinking of her office, its walls stripped of her posters, the shelves emptied of her books. During the preceding weeks, I had often looked toward this moment with anticipated relief, but when I waved her off at the boarding gate and watched her plane lift into the clear sky, I felt hollow and disappointed.

Months later, she sent me a Christmas card, signed "with fondness." I sent her a review of a Tennessee Williams revival and jotted a brief note. We have not corresponded since.

Early in her stay, Yoshiko had confided that she would like to buy a house in Iowa and return every summer. Does she still harbor that dream? Would we be friends if she returned? Politics, as Sam Rayburn once said, is always local. I hoped to learn about a people, but understanding even one individual—a woman much like myself—had stymied me.

Not long ago, I said as much to a friend. "But surely," she responded, "you learned a lot. Didn't you? All those books you read. You must have learned something."

I thought back to Yoshiko and smiled at my friend's certainty. "Maybe," I said. "Scoshi. I don't know."

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. At the beginning of the international exchange, what are the expectations held by both Brown and Yoshiko? On what bases does each person build her expectations? Use brief passages from the story to support your response.
2. In what ways do you think each woman is responsible for the outcome of their relationship, and why? What cultural assumptions and values influenced their relationship? What cultural assumptions and values have influenced your assessment of their roles?
3. Why does Brown tell us so little about her own reactions to Yoshiko's final speech? What effect do you think the speech had on the author, and why? In what ways does Yoshiko's speech alter your understanding of who she is?
4. Near the end of the story, Brown quotes Sam Rayburn: "Politics are always local." What does this passage mean to you? What does it explain about Brown's story?
5. What narrative techniques does Brown use to tell her story? In what ways do they or do they not keep you interested in the narrative?

Born in 1909 in Manhattan, Kimball earned a Ph.D. from Harvard University and has lived in and studied many cultures. In "Learning a New Culture: My first experience in anthropology," she discusses her 1930s. The essay was first published in James B. Watson, Crossing Cultures: Intercultural Experience. Kimball's experience of being foreign long before she was is delineated.

Prior to his death, Kimball was a professor of anthropology at the University of California. He wrote a number of books on the subject, including Learning and Culture (1962), Learning and Cultural Process (1974).

In "Learning a New Culture," he discusses taking on the characteristics of a culture, especially at the subconscious level.

Before you read "Learning a New Culture," when, through prolonged experience, you surprised yourself by taking on the characteristics of a culture, you were aware of in your surroundings? How did you respond to this surprise in your life?

Soon after the beginning of my life, a set of guiding principles about culture became a field worker. It is now more significant if I were able to pinpoint the principles were accumulated. The