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## Scenes From the Gaijin Life

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SCENES FROM THE GAIJIN LIFE

by

Ian M. Rogers

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Jonis Agee

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2015

## SCENES FROM THE GAIJIN LIFE

Ian Rogers, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2015

Adviser: Jonis Agee

*Scenes from the Gaijin Life* contains eight interconnected stories about foreigners (*gaijin* in Japanese) living and working as English teachers in urban Japan. It recounts their daily lives and initial struggles, their jobs and their nights out, their formal conversations and their personal ones. The first five stories use a detached, neutral narration that forces readers to interpret sensory details on their own, while the latter three use an omniscient narration that helps readers understand the characters' interactions with Japan. Though the eight scenes are all different, they're connected by estrangement, longing, uncertainty, and the characters' ever-present dissatisfaction with the unfamiliar world around them.

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## Morning Walk

Beside the vacant lot of vending machines a one-story house was being torn down. A miniature crane was parked between the street and the half-demolished stone wall by the entrance, and a team of men had set about tearing open the walls and removing the plaster and bits of scrap wood from behind its walls.

Will shuffled around the wreckage of the house, his walk unsteady and his head down. He wore gray dress pants, a necktie, and a dress shirt a half size too small for him. A black case's reinforced strap straddled one shoulder, while over the other he carried a brown suit jacket made from stiff, inflexible fabric. Dry weeds rose from cracks in the street, and an emaciated cat peered from behind a stone wall then darted behind a building flower pot. Will stopped as it passed, steadied himself, opened his eyes very wide, then continued walking with his head down.

At the end of the alley two women with shriveled faces sat under an awning green with potted vines and flowers. The house behind them had large sliding doors and windows. The women nodded as Will passed, and one of them said, "*Konnichiwa.*"

Will shielded his eyes and said, "*Konnichiwa,*" without stopping, then lowered his head again.

Further down, posters of stern-faced men in suits hung on stone walls, their captions bold and terse. Beside them a smiling Caucasian man on another poster clutched a textbook to his chest above an AGD logo, and beside him a smiling Caucasian woman gestured to a whiteboard where QVZ led a comet's trailing tail. The edges of both posters curled upward in the sun.

A corner warehouse, shuttered and chained closed, guarded unopened boxes behind broken windows. The etched window of a stucco building beside it read *Fresh Bakery*, soft rolls filling the trays inside. In an empty lot, colored cylinders rested in rows inside more vending machines propped on cinderblocks under a ハッピードリンクショップ sign. Another sign read *Hair Salon Extraordinary*, and on it a woman in a colored robe fanned voluminous black hair falling over her shoulders.

Beside the shops, four steel rails ran along an open corridor beneath overhead wires. A whistle blew in the distance, and striped barriers lowered on both sides. Will leaned against a lightpole as a train shot past, its cars rounded and purple, and the signal's clanging ceased. When the gates raised in unison he joined an elderly man shuffling crook-backed in a corduroy jacket and wool hat. The man turned silently as Will overtook him, taking two steps to Will's three.

The pictureless signs of storefronts joined together where Will crossed the unmarked pavement, glancing sideways through cars backed up at a signal. He then crossed at a crosswalk where Greensleeves played from a speaker and a green man held a single foot forward on a signal light. More buildings rose over the faded shops, some of stucco, but others of metal and glass towering over street level, their windows dark and their open plazas jammed with bicycles. Opposite, a chain-length fence blocked off a concrete lot half-empty with cars under a towering blue *P*. Another sign above a red-roofed building read *Jonathon's*, with ジョナサンズ smaller, beneath, and in its windows hung posters of gravy-slathered hamburgers captioned *Tanzania から!*

More people walked the street now: black-suited men with expressionless faces and eyes facing ahead, an old woman with blue hair and a leopardskin coat carrying three clunking shopping bags in each hand, two college-aged girls with black socks revealing an inch of bare thigh beneath their jean shorts, a spiky-haired man in tight pants whose t-shirt read *Take surreptitious action to protect the fruits of labors hard won in the face of corporate adversity*. Will crossed paths with the spiky-haired man in front of a corner window marked エロイ山中央銀行, its neon dim in the noon light. Here he felt a churning in his stomach; his head, warmed by the sun overhead, pounded with a dry emptiness.

The street opened into a square in the shadow of a five-storied building stretching over the tracks, and in the square's center people sat on shaded benches staring patiently at the sky or scanning upright silver maps with numbered lines, and bright green buses unloaded old men and women as the sitting people rose to meet them. Words abounded everywhere: JR 痴漢駅, Kazeko, AGD 英会話, Club Busu, 止まれ, ¥enshop, PARLOR PACHINKO SLOT パチンコとスロット. Cars painted green and white waited in square rows, leaned on by white-gloved men holding lit cigarettes at their sides. On the sidewalk, a woman with hair tied in a kerchief stood outside stalls calling "*Irrasshaimase!*" "*O-kashi!*" and "*O-nigiri!*" as she gestured exuberantly to handpainted posters of 100 and 500 円. Another woman handed packs of tissues to passers-by, and Will took one without response. On the cellophane pack, *13% ~ 19%! glowed golden* between a vacant-eyed man's spread arms, and Will shoved the pack into his inside jacket pocket. A white plaster cat waved a paw on a shelf jammed with posters of

colorful bills and ¥ symbols, near a window where a man washed glass with a red squeegee dripping with foamy soap.

The convenience store doors opened accompanied by a buzzer as Will passed through, cringing at the noise. By the window, young men with slicked-back hair and black suits stood at a magazine shelf gazing into comic books bound of rough, brown paper, while behind them a blonde Asian woman selected a package of pantyhose from the lowest shelf. A man in a striped smock stocked green shrink-wrapped triangles, his eyes moving between his wheeled tubs and the refrigerated shelves. He said, “*Irasshaimase*,” and the word reverberated through Will’s pounding head. Will contemplated the cuts of rice and vegetables rolled in black wraps, and after some seconds took one of the noodle boxes.

At the counter, where balls of paste in a rainbow of browns simmered in an open vat, and corn dogs turned on rolling cylinders inside a perspiring glass case, a smiling girl with thick mascara and a smock said “*Irassahimase*” very loud and continued talking. She scanned the noodle box with a gun’s pink light and swung her arm toward a microwave behind her. Her eyes fell as she looked expectantly at Will.

“*Iie, kekko desu*,” Will said. He shook a hand from side to side. “*O-hashi, onegaishimasu*.” He smiled at the girl.

The girl smiled back at him and resumed speaking as she placed the box into a plastic shopping bag and added a paper-wrapped pair of chopsticks, three napkins, and two packets of soy sauce before taping it closed.

“*Arigatō gozaimasu*,” the girl said, bowing deeply.

“*Arigatō gozaimasu,*” said Will, bowing too, and keeping his eyes on the girl’s face.

He took the bag and stepped toward the automatic doors, but as they opened he turned back to where the girl scanned chewing gum and bags of chips for one of the men in black, her smile bright and her hands never ceasing to move. The girl had soft cheeks and her teeth were very white. When both she and the man had bowed and the man had walked away, she sunk backward against the cabinets, hands at her sides, mouth closed, eyes on nothing.

## New Student

In the AGD lobby, Will pulled a nametag from his jacket and clipped it to the front pocket. In the lobby, a girl in a white blouse and jean skirt sat at the low counter nodding as Sachiko pointed with a pen to sheets coated with colored pie charts, rising bar graphs, and a pyramid of trapezoidal sections marked with many class names. Next to the pyramid, a dark-suited cartoon businessman held one hand in the air shouting *GOAL!* The girl looked up.

“*Hai, Will-sensei desu,*” said Sachiko.

Will extended his hand to the girl. She gave him her limp wrist with a glance back at Sachiko.

“*Ganbatte kudasai!*” said Sachiko, laughing again. “In English.”

“Hello,” said Will. “My name is Will. What’s your name?”

“Will?” asked the girl.

“Yes,” Will said. “What’s your name?”

“My name is Hiromi,” the girl said.

“Hello, Hiromi,” Will said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too,” said Hiromi.

“I’m from America,” Will said. “Do you live in Chikan?”

“Yes,” Hiromi said. “Near here.”

Will reached his left arm to its maximum length. “How long does it take to get here?” He pointed down with his right hand.

“By bicycle,” Hiromi said, “it takes fifteen minutes.”

“Wow,” Will said. “That’s very close.”

“America’s,” Hiromi said. She turned back to Sachiko, her mouth moving without sound. “*Amerika no doko kara desu ka.*”

“Ah,” said Sachiko, smiling. “*Where in America are you from?*”

“Where in America are you from?” Hiromi asked.

“I’m from Connecticut,” Will said. “It’s in the *north east* US. Near New York City.”

“New *Yōruku!*” said Hiromi excitedly.

“It has many mountains and many lakes,” said Will. “Like Eroi-yama.”

“*Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.*” She paused. “How long...live in Japan?”

“I came to Japan six months ago,” Will said. “*What is your job?*”

“I have part-time job,” said Hiromi. “I am student.”

“Ah,” said Will. “What’s your major?”

“Major?” asked Hiromi.

“*Senmon,*” said Sachiko.

“Ah,” said Hiromi. “My major is...” she turned to Sachiko again. “*Kokusai kankei?*”

“*In-ternational re-lations,*” said Sachiko.

“*In-ternational re-lations,*” said Hiromi. She paused. “Why did you come to Japan?”

“I came to Japan because I wanted to teach English,” Will said. “And because Japan is an interesting place.”

“Un,” said Hiromi.

Sachiko said something to which Hiromi nodded. “Hiromi will start Kozue-*sensei*’s lesson from October,” said Sachiko.

“Very nice,” said Will. He extended his hand again. “Well, I have to go. It was nice to meet you. Good luck in English!”

Hiromi gave him her limp wrist again. “Nice to meet you too.”

“*Sugoi! Eigo ga jozu!*” said Sachiko excitedly. Then, “Will-*sensei*, Mr. Akutagawa cancelled.”

“Thanks for letting me know,” Will said.

He went into the empty teacher’s room and stared out the window with his back against the filing cabinet. Under the unbroken line of mountains, rice fields and low houses yielded to stucco apartments, buildings capped with rooftop terraces, aerial antennas, and rooftop gardens, all beneath the power lines running across the basin. The metal and glass buildings lining the street blocked his view, as did a large billboard with the letters *JAL* divided by a red arc. Below the billboard, an old woman shuffled between the potted plants of a rooftop garden with brief, truncated steps. She wore an enormous straw hat and billowing robe. Trees covered a slope above the city, and a haze clouded the sky above the mountains.

Sachiko pushed the door open enough to poke her head in. “Will-*sensei*,” Hiromi is *lea-bing*.”

Will jumped away from the filing cabinet. “Of course. I’ll be right there.”

In the lobby, Victor stood smartly beside the long hallway with hands at his sides. Azusa, smiling, held an armful of clearfiles beneath a green textbook. Sachiko walked around the low counter speaking rapidly as Hiromi nodded with occasional *Hais* and *So desus*. She slung a large purse over her shoulder and with her other hand gripped the plastic handles of a shopping bag with the AGD logo stretched across its middle.

“Goodbye,” said Victor. “It was nice meeting you.”

“Nice to meet you too,” said Hiromi.

Will stood next to the glass door. “See you.”

“*Ja*, from October, *ne?*” said Sachiko. She swiveled into the landing, one hand holding the door ajar as the girl crossed the threshold. The landing was tiny, with only a few steps separating the elevator from the stairwell. Hiromi pushed the elevator down arrow and for a split-second eyed the digital *1* above the doors with a strained smile. The others formed a half-ring inside the doorway.

“See you,” said Azusa. “Let’s study English together!”

The girl bowed rapidly with her fist raised at chest level. “*Ganbarimasu!*”

“Good luck in school,” said Victor.

“Study hard,” said Will.

Sachiko’s smile remained steady, though her eyes moved above the doors and back down to Hiromi as the *3* became a *4*. The doors opened and Hiromi stepped inside.

“See you!” said Sachiko, eagerly waving.

“See you!” said Azusa, eagerly waving.

“See you!” said Victor, eagerly waving.

“See you,” said Will, waving.

Hiromi bowed with legs unmoving.

When the doors closed they wordlessly turned back into the empty lobby.

## The Perfect Lesson

**The AGD lesson structure is designed to maximize student speaking time while providing students numerous opportunities to acquire natural English phrases and explore their communicative potential.**

**Each lesson requires exactly fifty minutes of classroom time to attain a satisfactory conclusion. Teachers are advised not to waste time on introductory “chit-chat” by asking individual students questions (for example, “How are you?” or “How was your weekend?”).**

“Hello, Kie,” Will said as he placed an open textbook on the folding stand. “How was your weekend?”

Kie’s face shook with involuntary surprise. She was a small girl with permed hair and a dress that hung from her shoulders to her cowboy boots. “Ah,” she said. “Nothing special.”

“That’s good,” said Will, and took her receipt. Kie sat at the leftmost of the four chairdesks while Will spoke to Shikibu. “How about you, Shikibu? How was your weekend?”

“It was all right,” Shikibu said. Her brown, even hair hung down over the wrinkles around her eyes. “I had a dinner with my brother and his family, and I cleaned my room.”

“That’s good,” Will said. Behind Shikibu, Chifumi shuffled through the doorway of Room Two with a large backpack bouncing between her shoulder blades. “And one more. Chifumi, what did you do last weekend?”

“It was good,” said Chifumi. “On Sunday I worked my working restaurant, but on last Saturday my teacher was cancelled *kimono*’s lesson because some of students was too busy, for example to go to barbecue with there’s co-workers, so, he was cancelled that lesson. Instead, I go to Matsuyama’s *soba* restaurant with my friend from there.”

“Sounds like fun,” Will said, and closed the classroom door.

## 1. Warm Up

**AGD Warm Ups help students adjust from speaking Japanese to speaking English by participating in an activity unrelated to the day’s lesson (though students may of course incorporate skills from the Warm-Up into the rest of the day’s activities).**

### **Pronunciation Practice (1 Minutes)**

**Teachers should refer to the AGD Pronunciation Warm-Up Calendar to determine the day’s pronunciation drill. (Do not “mix and match” drills, as students will be practicing the corresponding sounds at home with their AGD Pronunciation BOOST DVDs.) Briefly say each word on the pronunciation sheet and have students repeat. Pay no attention to meanings, but make sure the students understand the difference between the sounds. Praise the students for a job well done.**

“Thank you everyone for coming,” Will’s voice rang out in a sharp boom as the students’ eyes locked to his. “I’d like to go right into today’s topic, which is *Restaurants*.” He scrawled, then underlined with a flourish, the word *Restaurants* on the whiteboard, writing still as he spoke, “And I want to know, what is the *worst* [the students sat up at the word] restaurant you’ve ever been to?” Below the word *worst* he drew three crooked lines.

“Worst?” Shikibu whispered confusedly.

“That’s right.” Will dashed into the half-circle of desks, chopping the air with one palm toward Shikibu and the other toward Chifumi. “Shikibu and Chifumi, partners. Tell your partner about the *worst* restaurant you’ve ever been to. It could be *any* kind of bad restaurant, Japanese or foreign, where there was bad service, terrible waiters, brown water, dirty silverware, long waits, smelly bathrooms, bad food, sold-out specials, *yakitori* that fell on the floor, or where there was hair in the ramen, I promise, anything is okay!” He shouted these last words as Naoko burst into the room, her bead-strung necklace rocking up and back against her chest as she slid into the remaining seat.

“So sorry for to be late!” Naoko cried breathlessly. She removed a textbook and pencil case from her purse.

“That’s all right,” said Will. “Naoko and Kie, please be partners.”

## **2. Model of Proper Usage**

**The purpose of the Model of Proper Usage is to introduce a brief sample of the day’s Topic or Grammar Point without making corrections or instructing students in the**

mechanics pertinent to the lesson, thus allowing them to approach the lesson topic using what English they already know.

### Topic-Based Discussion (3 minutes)

Place the Topic Introduction Card on the whiteboard with the Topic Point hidden. Choose one student to model, and read only the first question. Have the student answer from their seat, then praise them for their response. Divide students into pairs and have them ask each other all four questions. This should take no more than three minutes.

Kie squinted as she rushed to read the words on the whiteboard. “What is the worst restaurant you’ve ever been to?”

“I don’t have worst restaurant experience,” Naoko said, “but sometimes some waiter make mistake to bring food or drink, and I have to say, *Excuse me, this is wrong meal*, or something like that.”

“When I did homestay to Canada, I and my friend went to small, not so nice restaurant in Toronto,” Chifumi said. “We all my friends was waiting, but even there was waiter in that place, he didn’t come.”

“Wow, said Shikibu. She giggled nervously. “How long were you waiting for that waiter?”

Will paced an uneven half-circle around the room, hands behind his back.

Kie gazed wide-eyed at Naoko, her head jerking irregularly up and down. She paused, then said, “What, ah... what is

“Maybe twenty minutes,” Chifumi said, “Not so long. After that, we try to find our waiter, and we ask someone, *Hey,*

your favorite restaurant?”

“I like Japanese restaurant,” said Naoko, “but maybe we don’t go to Japanese restaurants so often, because usually I’m making a dinner at home for my husband or my family, or something. Also, I’m usually have to wake up early for make a breakfast and maybe some special lunch box for my children.”

Kie blinked and leaned forward in her chairdesk. “What is special lunchbox?”

“Oh, you know, sometimes I’m making some, ah, rice balls which is looks like some *kyaracutā* from *animeshon*. For example, do you know *Naushika*?”

Kie nodded and laughed. “Yes, I know!”

*we’re waiting for long time*, and that person said *Okay, I’ll go and getting your waiter*, but still we was waiting—”

“We *were* waiting,” said Will.

“We *were* waiting that waiter,” said Chifumi, “and then he came and was saying *I’m sorry to make you waiting*, and we said *No problem*, but I think he forgot to we waiting, and then he bringed us some free, *nan dake*, I don’t know how to say.”

Will squatted by Chifumi’s chair and asked, “What kind of food?”

“It’s kind of appetizer,” Chifumi said, “like *foraido poteto*, but cut like,” she brought her thumb and middle fingers together, “*koko*, with some sour cream or maybe *bēkon*, or *chīzu*, or something.”

### 3. Classroom Instruction

**The AGD Classroom Instruction, or “teaching” portion of the lesson, allows students to practice the day’s Learning Point. The six portions of Classroom Instruction present different aspects of the Learning Point, providing a holistic**

perspective of its usage and helping students understand how the Learning Point can be utilized in various circumstances.

### 3.1 Introduce the Topic (1 minutes)

Thank the students for their speaking and take the Topic Introduction Card down from the whiteboard. Reveal the hidden portion of the Introduction Card and announce the day's Topic Point.

Naoko twisted her body around in her chairdesk. "How *about* you. What is the worst restaurant you've ever been?"

"Worst restaurant?" Kie said. Her eyes widened and her breath came fast. "I don't have bad restaurant... experience?"

"Oh," said Naoko. "I envy you."  
Silence.

"Over here," Will interjected, "what is your *worst* restaurant experience?"

"I don't have," said Kie.

"That's OK," said Will. He uncapped a marker from the whiteboard tray and crossed off *Restaurants*. Above it he wrote *Hotels*. "How about hotels?"

Will jumped to the whiteboard again. "You can call them *potato skins*," he said, and scribbled the words crookedly.

"Potato skin," said Shikibu. "Not *foraido poteto*?"

"No," said Will, forming both arms into an X. "*Never* fried potato. That's Japanese English."

"Wow," said Shikibu. She wrote on a pink notepad. "I didn't know that."

"He bringed us some potato *skins*," said Chifumi, "and the waiter ask to us *What would you like?* Then, we ordered something meal, but still our waiting is long time, but then he was come back and

“Once, when I was college student,” Kie said, “I went to *bizinesu* hotel in Osaka for trip but I didn’t like there because...” Her silent mouth formed words as she stared at Naoko.

“Why?” Will asked.

he was carried our something we ordered like this,” she balanced her right arm, elbow bent and palm facing up, “and something happened I don’t know but he tripped and the steak and hamburger fell on the ground everywhere.”

### 3.2. Listening (3 minutes)

**Have the students open their textbooks to the Listening page. Point out the picture and elicit the character names, along with any relevant vocabulary:**

*Teacher: Who is he?*

*Students: Mr. Underhill.*

*Teacher: What is he doing?*

*Students: Talking on the phone.*

**Read the Listening questions aloud, then play the CD and have students mark their answers in the textbook. To avoid singling out individual students, correct the exercise as a class.**

“Why?” asked Kie. She moved her mouth for a long tine, then said, “I didn’t like it because the room was a little bit...old? Also, the floor was kind

Shikibu covered her mouth with her hand while she laughed. Then, she stopped. Wrinkles lined the outsides of her face. “That’s too bad,” she said. In my o-

of...dirty?"

"So what did you do?" said Naoko.

"Did you talk to some clerk?"

Kie shook her hand in front of her face. "Maybe no," she said. "We didn't do anything."

Naoko laughed loudly.

Kie laughed loudly too.

Then they looked at each other.

"So, by the way, how about your trip to Osaka?" Naoko asked.

"It was so fun," said Kie. "I stayed Osaka for three days. We ate many delicious foods, and we went to *yūnibasaru* Studios. It was exciting place."

"Dessert," Will said. He wrote the word on the whiteboard. "Desert."

"I have been to Osaka many times," Naoko said. "My younger sister lives there, so my husband and I often go there to see her and her family."

"Sounds nice," said Kie.

pinion, most of foreign people aren't

interested in fast service. I think their

thinking way is food, or maybe atmosphere

is most important. For example, when I

went to American restaurant, foreign

people were always talking and saying

hello to waiter or waitress and asking

questions about some food or some

desserts—"

"*Desserts!*" shouted Will, striking his arm in the air on the second syllable.

"Be careful of *desserts!*"

"*Desserts,*" said Chifumi.

"*Desserts,*" said Shikibu, copying the word on her pink notepad.

"They were always talking to waiter

or waitress about *desserts,*" said Shikibu,

"or asking *Where are you from?* or some

questions, so I was very surprised."

"Me too," said Chifumi. "In

Silence. Toronto, most of people was always  
 “So, how do you think about Osaka friendly to read bus’s schedule, or find  
 people?” asked Naoko. office to government things.”

### 3.3 Unit Dialogue (4 minutes)

**Praise the students for their responses and move on to the Unit Dialogue. Elicit the characters from the textbook picture, along with any relevant vocabulary. Have students follow in their textbooks as you play the CD. Ask two comprehension questions to test students’ understanding:**

*Teacher: What time are Yoshio and Joanne going to meet?*

*Students: 7:00.*

*Teacher: And what are they going to do?*

*Students: Go to a movie and have a drink.*

**Read the dialogue line by line and have students repeat. Assign pairs and roles, and have students practice and switch. Practice two more times, the second time with eye contact, and the third time using eye contact and relevant gestures (e.g. taking a picture).**

“I think,” said Kie, “Osaka people are Naoko nodded.  
 “Osaka people are friendly,” Kie said, “and they have a big voice. And they are so funny, so I feel lots of...energy.”

“How about in Japan?” Will asked  
 “Do Japanese people have conversations with waiters?”  
 Shikibu and Chifumi said nothing.  
 “What do you think?” Will asked.

Sometimes, too much.”

“I agree with *you*,” Naoko said eagerly. “In my case, it’s sometimes difficult to get along some Kansai people, especially they’re too friendly, or asking too, too—” Naoko halted and gritted her teeth, scrunching her eyes into slits and balling her fists on the desk as she swung her head back and forth.

“No Japanese!” Will yelled with his hands cupped around his mouth.

Kie and Naoko turned in surprise toward Will, then back to each other.

Will approached and asked, “What do you want to say?”

“Directly!” Naoko said. “Kansai people are very directly.”

“Careful,” said Will. “Kansai people are very *direct*.”

“Yes, that’s right,” said Naoko.

“Kansai people are very direct.”

“Yes,” said Kie. “I think Osaka

“As you know,” said Shikibu, “Japanese are :

“But how about simple conversations?” Will asked. “Every time I go to a restaurant, the waitress asks my order, brings the food and leaves. Why is that?”

Chifumi laughed and kicked her feet beneath her chairdesk. “Maybe because you are foreigner, *deshō*?”

Will said, “Maybe. But I think waiters also don’t speak casually with Japanese people.”

“I think,” Shikibu said, her eyes darting back to Chifumi, “Japanese waitresses are very formal, and maybe they are not so interested in conversation. They want to work hard their job, because they’re kind of...professional?”

“We have kind of distance,” said Chifumi, “because Japanese people are

people asks too many questions.”

“Over here,” said Will. “Do you pre-

Kie looked at Naoko.

“Eeeeeeee?” said Naoko. She rubbed her palm against her cheek. “My feeling is I’m always thinking in Kanto way because my hometown is Saitama prefecture, so I think Kanto people are much...cooler than Kansai people. For example, if I meet Kansai person, he will usually be very outgoing to say something like *Are you in good mood today?* and so on. But, on the other hand, Kanto people are very formal and keep a distance, so we cannot know true feeling.”

“Yes,” said Kie. “We cannot know true feeling.”

“What do you mean *We cannot know true feeling?*” asked Will. “Can you explain?”

“I want to say,” said Naoko, “that Japanese people cannot say directly their

very shy, and always embarrassing—”

“Always *embarassed*,” said Will.

“Always embarrassed,” said

Chifumi, “and we have to act in our growing up way—*chigau*.” She looked at Will. “How can I say *growing up way?*”

“Oh!” Will said. “You can say *the way we were raised*.” He wrote this on the whiteboard.

“The way we were raised,” said Shikibu, her eyes delighted as she wrote on her notepad.

“Japanese people have to act *the way we were raised*,” said Chifumi. “We have to talk to people with polite way, say *Excuse Me* and always some formal things. Actually, I used to work big company in Tokyo but I am waitress from six month ago, so I have to tell customers in polite way even I don’t want to.”

“Wow,” said Shikibu. She spoke slowly and leaned back in her chair.

true mind, and sometimes keep a distance, especially in some situations we don't know that person's feeling, so we talk to them in kind of formal way. Japanese say *honne to tatemae*. I don't know English words."

"I'm sorry," Will said. "I don't know how to say in English." He stood up and briefly glanced at first his wristwatch, then the wall clock.

"Those jobs are very different."

"Yes," said Chifumi. "Sometimes I don't like to speaking in polite way, but I have to because it's job and everyone speak to customers in polite way even that Japanese is difficult or strange, and *e-ben* sometimes I'm thinking, like, what is polite way to say something."

"Yes," said Shikibu. "It's difficult problem for us."

### 3.4. Homework Check (2 minutes)

**Have the students turn to the Content Homework page. Go around the room, praising students who have completed their homework and encouraging those who haven't to do so next time. Using the small Content Practice cards, check student answers. If a student's answer is different than the answers on the cards, inform them that while their answer is technically correct, today, you're going to practice the phrases from the AGD textbook.**

**NOTE: As of this April, the lesson Content Practice cards have been updated to include pre-printed answers, thus eliminating the need to record student responses on the whiteboard. Teachers are now required to use the new Content Practice cards and should throw away the old Content Practice cards.**

The wall clock read 2:13. Will held up his arms. “Okay, everyone! That’s all!”

Everyone stopped.

“Thank you for your conversation,” Will said, clearing the whiteboard with furious sweeps of his eraser. “Today, we’re going to practice complaining about services at some terrible restaurants and hotels. Please open your books to Unit 28, and, as always, let’s start with the Listening.” With textbook open to the class he swept an open palm across a drawing of a man in jeans and a brown jacket. “And *who* is he?”

They looked blankly at their books. Kie examined the picture, then the words above it. Shikibu and Naoko turned in unison to page three and contemplated a grid of captioned character sketches. Naoko giggled and called out, “Mr. Underhill!”

“Yes, Mr. Underhill!” Will said. “And *where* is he?”

Silence. Will’s smile wavered around the edges.

“Restaurant,” said Chifumi.

“Yes!” said Will. “He’s at the restaurant! And he’s going to complain about some services. So, everyone, please listen, and write True or False.”

He pushed the play button on the CD player and stood before the whiteboard with the textbook held behind him. The voices spoke without his hearing. When there were no more voices, he pushed stop and said, “Okay everyone, let’s check. Number one!”

### **3.5. Content Practice (4 minutes)**

**Divide students into pairs and have them read through the Content Homework and switch roles. Then, have them practice again with the answers hidden.**

“True,” said everyone.

“Excellent!” said Will. “Number two!”

“False.”

“Very nice. And number three!”

“False.”

“Beautiful!” said Will. “And moving on!” From the clearfile’s inner depths he pulled four faded cards and stuck them to the whiteboard with magnets pulled from the outer edge. “Let’s check homework. First, *where* are they?”

“Restaurant,” said Chifumi.

“That’s right,” said Will. “And what’s this?”

“It’s a spoon,” said Shikibu.

“Correct,” said Will. “So, here, what can the customer say? *There...*”

Pause.

“Doesn’t seem to be a spoon?” said Naoko.

“Excellent,” said Will. He scribbled the words below the card. “How about the waiter? *I’m sorry, I’ll get one...*”

“Immediately,” said Shikibu.

“Great,” said Will.

“How about *right away*?” said Chifumi.

“Both okay,” said Will. He wrote down both. “Same meaning. How about here? *Where* are they?”

“Hotel.” said Naoko.

Kie copied *immediately* and *right away* in her textbook blanks.

“Very nice,” said Will. “And here, what’s this?”

“E?” said Shikibu. “Name card?”

“Close,” said Will. “In English we say name *tag*. Never *name card*. Name *tag*.”

“Name *tag*,” said Shikibu. She copied it down on her notepad.

“How about here?” “What can the customer say?” asked Will.

“I’m afraid that,” said Chifumi.

“Excellent,” said Will. “How about the desk clerk? *I’m...*”

“Terribly sorry,” said Shikibu.

“Great,” said Will. “Any more? There are a million ways.”

“Extremely sorry?” said Naoko.

“Also good,” said Will. He added it below the card. “All are okay, all are very polite for the desk clerk.” He gestured at the third card. “How about here? *Where is she?*”

“In the room,” said Naoko.

“That’s right,” said Will. “In the hotel room. And what can she say?”

“There doesn’t seem to be any towels,” said Chifumi.

“Careful,” said Will. “Here, you should say that there *don’t* seem to be any towels, because we’re going to take many showers and use *many* towels.”

“Ah, *so ka*,” said Chifumi.

“And number four,” said Will. “One more time, where are they?”

“They are in the restaurant,” said Shikibu.

“And what can the customer say?” said Will.

Naoko looked around and said, “I’m afraid that I’m waiting for thirty minutes?”

“Very close,” said Will. “I’m afraid that *I’ve been* waiting for thirty minutes.”

“How about *I’ve been waiting for a long time?*” said Shikibu.

Will stopped and whispered *I’ve been waiting for a long time* quietly two, then three times to himself. He stared at a spot where the back wall intersected the ceiling.

“*A long time* is okay,” said Will, “but *thirty minutes* is more polite.” It also gives more information, which is better for this situation. He wrote *a long time* under the card, then with the red marker added *rude* in parenthesis next to it. “If you’re a little bit angry, or want to be very strong, you can say *a long time*.”

Shikibu nodded and wrote on her notepad.

### **3.6. Phrase Repetition (2 minutes)**

**Have students open their books to the Today’s Phrases section. Read the phrases one after another and have students repeat as a group.**

“I’d like you all to please *stand up*,” Will commanded. He raised his arms and the students stood. Kie continued to write in her textbook.

Will cast his arms in front of each pair and circled the room, flipping his hand to each. “How about, Shikibu and Chifumi, partners, and Naoko and Kie, partners, Ay, Bee, and Ay, Bee. Everyone, practice all four,” he indicated the four whiteboard cards, “and switch.”

Everyone practiced all four and switched.

#### 4. “Real Life” Scenario

The “Real Life” Scenario gives students the opportunity to experience a more realistic English situation by employing the phrases they’ve mastered during the Classroom Instruction section. As this is the most critical portion of the AGD lesson, it is vital that as much time as possible be devoted to it so students have more opportunity to practice English in everyday situations. During the “Real Life” Scenario, the teacher remains on the sidelines, correcting serious errors and highlighting advanced phrases to optimize student performance.

##### 4.1. Brainstorming (1 minutes)

Praise the students and have them sit down. Put up the picture card for the day’s lesson. Read the picture caption to the students and go over the roles. Elicit suggestions to fit the given scenario and write them on the whiteboard.

*Teacher: Today we have a Canadian friend (A) and a Japanese friend (B), and they’re talking about their hobbies. What hobbies can they talk about?*

*Students: Playing tennis.*

For sample brainstorming charts and ideas, consult the lesson packet.

“That was good,” Will said, “but now I want to try without the answers!” He swept the eraser across the board. “Books open is okay, but try to use only the cards.”

Kie huddled her open book to her chest.

“And one more time,” said Will, “Ay, Bee, Ay, Bee, and go!”

Everyone practiced one more time.

#### 4.2 Modeling (2 minutes)

**Call one student to the front of the class to model with the instructor. Assign roles, having the student act out the easier role. Practice the scenario using student brainstorming suggestions. Then, switch roles and model again.**

“Be careful!” Will said. “There don’t *seem* to be any towels.”

“There don’t *seem* to be any towels.”

Chifumi nodded and said, “*So ka.*”

“And one more!” Will pointed to the final card and with his other arm raised.

“Here, the waitress is *very* sorry, and she *really* wants to be polite. So here, *me* is the important information, and it has a *big* stress. Everyone: *Let me take your order.*”

“Let *me* take your order.”

“And again! *Let me take your order!*”

Their voices rang together, louder, fuller. “Let *me* take your order!”

“Excellent,” Will said. He lowered his palms. “You may sit.”

They sat.

“So now,” Will said, “let’s practice for real. I want you to *imagine* that you’re at a restaurant—the *worst* restaurant you’ve ever been to. And I want to practice complaining about some services. As always, we’ll have Ay, and Bee. Ay will be the customer, and Bee will be the waiter. A *bad* waiter.” He wrote as he spoke:

Restaurant  
A: Customer

B: Waiter – VERY Bad!!!!

“So,” Will said, “what kind of services can we complain about at a bad restaurant?”

No one said a word.

“Anything at a bad restaurant,” he said. “I promise, *anything* is okay.”

Still, silence. Naoko’s eyes stayed on her textbook.

“How about earlier,” Will said, “some of you were talking about waiting for a long time.” He wrote *I’ve been waiting for twenty minutes* on the whiteboard, and above it, *I’m afraid that \_\_\_\_\_*. “Let’s practice some sentences with *I’m afraid that*. What else can we complain about at a bad restaurant?”

“I’m afraid that I don’t have any spoon,” said Naoko.

“Excellent!” said Will, writing. “I’m afraid that I don’t have a spoon. What else?”

“I’m afraid that I don’t have any water,” said Shikibu carefully.

“Perfect!” said Will, still writing. “Anything else?”

“I’m afraid that my meal is different,” said Chifumi.

Will stopped and looked at Chifumi before he spoke again. “Ah! Here, you should say, *I’m afraid this isn’t what I ordered.*”

Shikibu nodded and wrote this down on her notepad.

“How about one more?” Will said. He turned his head from Shikibu to Chifumi, then around to Naoko and Kie. “Can anyone give me one more?”

Kie said nothing.

“I’m afraid that this plate is dirty,” said Shikibu.

“Very nice!” said Will, and wrote.

#### 4.3. “Real Life” Scenario Speaking Time (27 minutes)

**Split students into pairs. Assign roles and have them practice using the suggestions on the whiteboard, then their own ideas. After students have practiced the scenario and switched, make new partners and practice again. If necessary, prolong the scenario by initiating a more complex Foundation Expansion (see lesson packet).**

“That’s enough,” Will said. “Now, I will demonstrate. How about…” he scanned the room. “Shikibu! Please be my partner!”

Shikibu made a disgusted face for an instant, then smiled and came to the front of the room. She stood with her eyes on Will and her back to the other students.

“So remember, Shikibu,” Will said with authority, “we are in a restaurant, and it is *terrible*. The walls are dirty, and it smells like dead rat.” He unfolded a chair before the whiteboard while Shikibu turned away in a half-disgusted chortle. “I will be Bee, the waiter. Please be Ay, the customer. You’ve been sitting at this table for five hours.”

“Five hours?” said Shikibu and sat down.

“Yes, five hours!” said Will. “You haven’t eaten any food since Tuesday, so you *really* want to talk to the waiter. And *go!*”

Will crossed the room behind Naoko and Kie, walking with his head straight. When he reached the wall he turned ninety degrees, continued past Chifumi’s desk, then returned to the whiteboard.

“Excuse me,” said Shikibu.

Will walked past Shikibu and addressed the closed door with his head bowed.

“Good evening, sir. Would you like to see the wine list?”

Shikibu was laughing and couldn't say anything as Will extended his hand in to the wall. “Here you are, sir. Might I recommend our Sauvignon Mont Blanc Chardonnay Vinot, a fine vintage 1873 made from only the freshest grapes handpicked in both Paris *and* California. What's that? It's six million yen per bottle. Oh, you'll take two? I'll be right back, sir.”

Shikibu held up her arm. “Excuse me!”

Will halted at once. “May I help you?”

Shikibu turned her head slightly to the whiteboard. “I'm afraid that I've been waiting for five hours, and also I don't have any water.”

“I'm very sorry,” said Will, bowing deeply. “I'll send someone to get you some water right away.”

“Thank you very much,” said Shikibu.

Will suddenly knelt down and scurried fingers of his right hand across the floor. “Mouse,” he said in a low voice. He stood and dashed again to the back of the room where he outlined a square on the wall with both hands. “Bathroom.” He made a twisting motion, squeezed through the small space between Kie's desk and the filing cabinet, then formed with both arms a cylinder rising out of the classroom floor. “Toilet.” Naoko laughed and twisted to watch him. Chifumi laughed too and stamped her feet below the table.

Will scooped a cupped hand downward and into his other hand with its grasping fingers holding nothing. Then he cocked his head back and with a mighty gathering of saliva spit air into his lowered hand. He rubbed his shirtsleeve across his mouth and returned to Shikibu with his palm facing up. “Your water, ma’am.”

Shikibu winced. “No thanks—I’m not thirsty today. By the way, there seems to be a mouse on the floor.”

Will sliced the air and yelled “Scene!” as the others burst into enthusiastic applause. He bowed low while Shikibu in her chair nodded imperceptibly. Will clapped and said, “Thank you, Shikibu. You were wonderful.”

Shikibu returned to her seat shaking her hand from side to side below her chin, a large smile on her face.

Will turned to the class and raised his arms above his head. “Everyone! Let’s talk.”

## Waiting to Go Home

“Erika,” Will said as he leaned over Erika’s computer, “You’re coming out with us, right?” They were alone in the AGD lobby.

Erika rested her chin in her hands, her bent elbows splayed on either side of the laptop keyboard. “*Ne*, thank you, *Will-sensei*, but not tonight.”

Will clutched a tense hand to his chest and recoiled. “Why not?”

“Because I have something to do tonight.”

“*Arienai*. You never come out with us anymore.”

“*Chotto*.” Erika swatted a hand at him.

“That’s what I think. You’re a housewife now, so you have to cook lots of dinners and clean the house every night. And have many babies.”

“*Chotto!*” Erika said and swatted again.

“You can bring your husband,” Will said. “It’s okay!”

“No, but *Will-sensei*, I think he doesn’t like to drink so much. Also, maybe his English is not so good, so if he try to say something, he could get embarrassed, *ne?*”

“That doesn’t matter. We’ll teach him English.”

“*So*.” Erika tapped Will’s hand on the counter. “I will ask him, *ne?*”

The lobby clock read 7:52. Will walked into the teacher’s room where at the table Kozue bent over her electronic dictionary and at the window computer Sachiko spoke on the phone, her voice alternately rising to hysterical giggles and falling to a low, even tempo. She said *Hai* a lot. Will sat at the other computer and opened a list accompanied by boxes. Most of the boxes said *Present*, though three said *Cancel* and four were empty.

In two of the empty boxes he marked *Present*, and in the other two *No Show*. Beside the *No Shows* he typed *Called—No Answer* and *Called—Left Message*.

In the lobby where Erika still typed at her computer, Azusa came out of Room One speaking to a very tall man. The very tall man bowed when he spoke, and used short sentences that made Azusa and Erika laugh. At seven fifty-seven, Victor opened the door to Room Three and Tatsuya came out with a girl who wore very high heels. Tatsuya said “*Konbanwa*” to Azusa and Azusa looked surprised and said “*Konbanwa*” back to him, and Tatsuya said something that made Azusa laugh while the girl who wore very high heels said nothing at all. While this was going on, Victor erased *There is a ten-foot rope* from the whiteboard and followed them to the landing.

In the teacher’s room, Kozue turned from her dictionary to a sheet of four large-print words. In the table’s center sat a plastic, slotted tray, each slot containing a silver-stripped cellophane packet. Will took one of the packets and tore the cellophane along an inward vee. The city lights shone through his reflection in the window, bright against the night sky.

Victor and Azusa said goodbye to the tall man and the girl who wore very high as they got into the elevator. The lobby clock read 7:56.

“*Will-sensei*,” said Kozue. She pointed at the paper. “How do you say this one?”

“*Sheath*,” Will said, and took a bite of cookie.

“*Sheef*?”

“*Sheath*.”

“*Sheath*?”

“Yes.”

“What is sheath?” asked Kozue.

With both hands curved into cylinders, Will formed a bent cylinder hanging from his hip. “You use it to carry a sword on your belt. Like a samurai.”

“Eeeeeeeeeee,” said Kozue. “So how do you say? I wear my sheef?”

“You can say, *I put my sword into my sheath*. No, *its* sheath. *I put my sword into its sheath*.”

“Not my sheef?”

“No—*its* sheath.”

“Why not *my*?”

“Because,” Will said, and thought. “The sheath belongs to the sword, not the person. Also, be careful with the ess-aitch sound.”

“*Ii, na*. I put my sword into its sheath. *Muzukashii!*”

“You can do it!” said Will. “You should have more confidence. The students like it when we have confidence.”

Kozue turned the paper toward Will. “So, how do you say this one?”

“Seethe,” said Will.

Victor burst suddenly into the room through the side door. “No more work. Let’s hit the town!”

“*Chotto matte*,” Sachiko said. She was typing at the window computer now.

“I’m almost finished, *deshō*.”

Victor opened one of the packets from the table tray. “Where are we going?”

“Maybe I don’t know,” said Kozue.

“I don’t know either,” said Will.

“I made reservation at Hachisenbei from eight-thirty,” said Sachiko. “I think Toshifumi-*san* will meet us there.”

Azusa entered and sat next to Kozue. She set down her textbook and took up a list of names.

“Which one’s Hachisenbei?” said Victor.

“Maybe it’s on Ringo-Dori,” said Kozue. “But I’m not sure.”

“*Will-sensei*,” said Sachiko, “you and Victor can go now if you want to meet the others at *izakiya*.”

“Don’t worry,” said Will, “we’ll wait. I also don’t remember where it is.”

Victor chewed his cookie. “I got the banana one. Who brought these?”

“Yoshihito-*san*,” said Azusa. She wrote notes on her list.

“Azusa’s student,” said Kozue.

Victor went into the lobby and asked Erika, “Are you almost finished?”

“Maybe I am okay, *Victor-sensei*,” Erika said. “Because maybe I will go back my home tonight.”

“I see,” said Victor. “Don’t worry—I’ll have a drink for you.” He winked.

The lobby clock read 8:03. Victor and Will turned out the lights in all the classrooms while Erika and Sachiko worked on their computers and Azusa wrote something next to all of the names on her list. Kozue read clearfiles of lesson material at the teacher’s room table and entered words from the textbook into her electronic

dictionary. She read every word on every page and wrote notes on paper flags she stuck next to particular sentences.

When they'd turned off all the lights, Victor gathered the bags from the garbage cans in the kitchen and teacher's room. He tied each bag closed and drew a number 8 enclosed in a circle on each one. Then he threw the bags in the kitchen corner and washed the teacups and saucers in the sink. There were empty tubes of sugar next to the saucers, and Victor threw these away in a new bag he placed in the kitchen trash can.

Will returned to Room Four and turned the lights back on. He took out a paper that said *AGD Teacher Homepage Profile* and wrote several sentences in the unlined area below each question. When he'd finished, he brought the paper to a tray cabinet in the teacher's room and placed it in a plastic drawer.

He sat on the lobby couch next to Victor, his bag leaning against his shin, listening to the clicking of Erika's keyboard and Sachiko's occasional conversations with Azusa until Kozue came out of the teacher's room and sat with her purse in her lap when the lobby clock read 8:34, and Azusa came out wearing her suit jacket and began talking to Kozue in a familiar way, and Sachiko asked Erika a question that made Erika say "*Daigaku wa sugoi kibishii*" with a table of figures in hand, and Sachiko finally came out carrying her suit jacket and said "*Otsukaresamadeshita!*"

## Night Out

“Some TOEIC test question is always require many grammatical points,” said Toshifumi. “When I was high school days, I learned most of grammatical point for college entrance exam, and studied very hard them, but now I was forgotten and often, mistaked. But grammar is not so important, I think. My *o*-pinion is speaking is most important thing.”

Victor raised his beer glass by the handle, his tie drooping between half-empty plates of salad and fried chicken. “The TOEIC is all textbook English. Long live speaking!” He beat the table with his fist.

“I agree that one,” said Fujiko. She drank from a glass of clear liquid in a wooden box.

Miho’s hair hung over her ears. She asked Victor, “Did you use chopsticks in Canada?”

“No,” said Will. “Tonight is his first time.”

“*Hontō?*” said Azusa, laughing.

Victor drank. “I sometimes used chopsticks in Canada. My old Japanese friends taught me to make many interesting foods, for example, oh-nigiree.”

Will said, “And then you gave them some poutine and they hated it.”

“Nah, they never tried it.”

“Oh,” said Fujiko. “You eat *pu*-tine?”

“Were you happier then, or now?” Will asked Victor.

“Yes,” Victor said to Fujiko, then, “Life in Japan’s better. No question.”

“It’s good things, I think,” said Toshifumi seriously. He wore a skintight vee-neck t-shirt under a black leather vest and leaned forward to speak. “Most of time, foreign people now believing Japanese life is difficult one. Some of time, they—how can I say?—can’t to understand something.”

“Toshifumi-san,” Sachiko said. “Another beer?”

“Yes,” said Toshifumi, and finished his glass. “I will go my home by *daiko* this night.”

“Will-sensei, another *bīru*?”

“Of course.”

“Victor-sensei?”

“Sure.”

“Kozue-sensei?”

Kozue waved her hand from side to side and said something. Sachiko pushed a raised button beside the chopstick box.

Will asked Miho, “Are you having fun?”

“Of course,” Miho said. She smiled. “Why do you ask that question?”

“Because I want to check. Fujiko never has any fun.”

“Why?” said Fujiko. Her eyes went suddenly wide.

“You never have any fun.”

“I’m having fun,” Fujiko said. “It’s okay.”

A man in black slid open the door and knelt on bent ankles, his finger poised to a computer tablet. Sachiko said, “*Gurepufurutsu sāvā o hitotsu to, mosukaru myūru o hitotsu to, nama bīru o mitsu onegaishimasu.*”

“*Sumimasen,*” said Kozue. “*Ūron-cha o hitotsu onegaishimasu.*”

The man repeated this to Sachiko and said, “*Hai, ittekimasu.*”

“*Will-sensei,*” said Azusa. “Why you ask some questions?”

“I always ask questions.”

“It’s good thing,” said Toshifumi.

“You ask many questions,” said Miho.

“I never ask questions,” said Will.

Miho laughed and spoke rapidly at him with rising intonation.

Toshifumi said to Victor, “As I was saying earlier time, most of Japanese people can only speak Japanese language. For communicate with foreigners, it is not good way. First point is almost foreign people cannot speak Japanese, so we must learn English to communicate with them.”

“I agree,” said Victor. “You have to be open to new kinds of ideas, and English helps people to accomplish that goal.”

The man in black slid open the door balancing a tray heavy with beer, mugs of clear alcohol, a grapefruit half, and a juicer.

“Second point is, Japanese people are afraid to mistake something,” Toshifumi said. “I think this is not good way. If Japanese people can’t have a chance to speaking

English, they can't say their feelings well. It is my *o*-pinion. So, I think mistake is okay, and always I'm speaking English, I never become to worry about mistake something."

"In Japan," Will said, "the clerks treat people with respect. And I walk the darkest of streets without fear."

"Even in Chikan?" said Kozue.

"I'm not scared," said Will.

Miho waved her arms excitedly. "Yes, but sometimes in Chikan there is crime of theft. One of my friends was in her apartment, maybe three years ago, at night, and someone knocked on her door very loudly and she was frightened."

"Ha!" said Will, and drank.

"She was scared," said Miho.

Fujiko rested her back against the cushioned seat and spoke to Miho. She blinked a lot and opened her mouth very wide when she spoke.

"In Calgary," Victor said, "that's nothin'."

"I agree to Victor-*sensei*," said Toshifumi. "Japan is safe country."

"Japanese people never steal," said Will. "They're a team."

"I think it's good point," said Toshifumi.

Sachiko said something to which Azusa responded with interest, though Kozue appeared confused. Then Azusa got very excited and said something that made the others laugh. Victor ignored them and instead took a fish slice from a platter set with colored vegetables shaped like flowers.

“Will-*sensei*,” Sachiko said, “I heard this summer you and Tatsuya went to ocean together, *deshō*?”

Azusa held her face in her hands and huddled on Kozue’s shoulder.

“Yes,” Will said. “We had fun.”

Victor drank. “Azusa’s in love with Tatsuya.”

“*Honto?*” said Miho.

“*Usu!*” said Azusa.

“Yes!” Victor pointed at her. “You are!”

Miho spoke excitedly.

“I think you and Tatsuya should get married,” said Victor.

“Okay,” said Azusa. “I will.” She drank.

“I’ll set you guys up,” Victor said. He raised his leg from the hole under the table and rested it on the seat beside him. “It’ll be great.”

“*Victor-sensei no dētingu sābisu*,” said Sachiko and laughed.

“Do it,” said Will.

Fujiko bent over her drink in its square box, her breathing slow, and her eyes focusing on everyone in the room one after another, rotating around the table, to the sliding door, to the jackets hung on hooks above them, to the food on its clay plates and to the drinks spread around the table, one in front of each person. Then Miho spoke softly in Fujiko’s upturned ear and they both laughed.

Azusa drank again. “I don’t know about dating so much. You know my job is very busy and I don’t have time for some things which I want to *do*, but I like my job and

I don't want quit but maybe someday I meet my husband and take care of him by cooking and so on, but maybe he makes much money I will quit my job and become housewife because I don't want to work in future time."

"Woman in Canada marry and have a job all the time," said Victor. "Like Erika."

"Yes, but *ne*," said Sachiko and stopped.

"We can have it all," said Will. "We're the number one school in Shikoku!"

"Number one school!" said Victor.

"It's good thing," said Toshifumi, "I think Chikan's teachers is very good and always explain something well."

"Yes," said Sachiko. "We must work very hard."

"Fujiko-san," said Sachiko. "*Daijōbu?*"

Fujiko laughed. "*Daijōbu.*"

"Fujiko's bored," said Victor.

"We're all exciting people, and we have more to live for than anything!" said Will, and drank. "I never want to go home ever again."

"Another beer?" Sachiko asked Will.

"Yes!" said Will, then stopped. "No!" He opened a menu to a page of colored drinks. "Something else. I'm in Japan and I want to try something new."

Kozue's middle finger ran down the menu's left page. "This is Japanese one."

"Excellent!" said Will. He closed both eyes and smacked his index finger on the page's center next to 泡盛.

"E?" said Kozue. "You want *awamori*?"

“Let’s do it,” said Will.

“*Awamori* is very strong,” said Miho. “You are brave person.”

“It’s fine,” said Will. “Japanese alcohol is not so *abunai*.”

“Anyone else?” said Sachiko.

“One more, please,” said Miho.

“*Kozue-sensei?*”

Kozue waved her hand. Sachiko pressed the button beside the chopstick box.

“*Ittekimasu!*” Will announced, and stood on unsteady legs. Sachiko and Azusa edged themselves into the space between booth and table as Will crossed the cushions in his socks.

The hallway was narrow, with dimly lit passages extending in many directions lined with lattices of wood crossed with white plastic. Sounds came from everywhere, voices talking apart then laughing all at once. Men in suits visible through a gap in one door sat on bent knees around tables laden with beer mugs and meat platters. Will asked a woman in black balancing empty soup bowls, “*O-tearai wa doko desu ka?*” She pointed down a hallway where he pushed through a door marked 男 and on wooden-soled slippers urinated in a closed stall.

Back in the compartment, a clear drink waited at his place.

“This is Aomori?” he asked, sniffing.

“*A-wa-mo-ri*,” said Kozue. “From Okinawa.”

The drink burned in Will’s throat. When it was down, his back stiffened and his body jerked upward in teeth-clenching spurts. Azusa and Miho laughed.

“How was it?” said Sachiko. She drank from an identical glass.

“Fine,” said Will, and sipped again.

“Japan,” Toshifumi said, “is famous for many kinds of alcohol, especially some ones which is popular only in Japan. *Awamori* is example. Many country’s people enjoy Japanese *shōchū* or *sake*, but in Japan we can enjoy some *umeshu* or famous wine from Yamanashi prefecture.”

Kozue said something in Japanese. She sounded worried.

“Everyone,” Sachiko said, “let’s go to second place!”

Fujiko looked away from Victor and at Sachiko. “Okay.”

“Second place, second place!” said Victor.

Will drank again and shivered. Then, he drank what liquid remained.

“Are you all right?” Miho asked.

“I’m great,” said Will.

Sachiko said, “*Chotto matte*,” and flipped open her cell phone. Silver straps dangled from its corner. “*Ni-man sen kyūhyaku go-jū en.*”

Victor tossed three blue bills on to the black tray.

“I only have *go-sen*,” said Azusa.

“*Daijōbu*,” said Sachiko. She shuffled the bills from the tray and exchanged Azusa’s purple for two blues, straightening the others into a stack. Then, she flipped up their corners, counting, and moved the coins along the table. “Okay.”

“*Ikimashō!*” said Will. He stood and, swaying on the cushions, removed his jacket from a hanger.

They walked in line out of the room, Sachiko leading, down the stairs and into the foyer, where they removed from their purses, pockets, and jackets metal plates cut with grooves and etched with curved letters, sticking them into locker slots to remove shoes, loafers, heels, and sandals. Will jammed his plate in at an angle, fumbling, then turned it all the way straight, and pulled his dress shoes from the locker.

Outside the air was cool. Unsteady men poured into a car's backseat while another white-masked man stood expectantly at the passenger door.

"To the second place!" Victor shouted at the air. "But I don't know where we're going!" He turned to Azusa. "Do you?"

Azusa raised her arm and tripped one foot in front of the other.

"I'm sorry," said Toshifumi, "but I have to go." He pulled a clear umbrella from a grid of wire holes, let it rise to its maximum height, and caught it on the downturn. "Last night I drank my co-worker's farewell party, so tonight, I must go back my home for sleeping."

Miho spoke to Fujiko and Fujiko said something back in a low voice that turned into a whisper when she leaned closer to Miho's ear.

"Are you leaving?" Will asked.

"Yes," said Miho with her face scrunched.

"Thank you for coming," Will said. "I had fun."

"I had fun too," said Miho. She stood smiling, her hands set on her hips, her purse resting against her side as it dangled from its leather strap, though she did not move.

"Let's go!" said Victor.

Toshifumi raised his umbrella in their direction as he crossed the street. Fujiko took large steps along the sidewalk, Miho skipping beside her, waving. “*Oyasuminasai!*”

Kozue clutched her arms to her chest. She wore a thin sweater and held her legs close together under her skirt. “Please have fun. I’ll see you next week, *ne?*”

“Don’t go!” Will shouted with alarm, grabbing Kozue by the elbow. “Come have fun with us. Everyone else is leaving.”

“But my father is coming,” Kozue said.

“I want to eat something sweet,” said Azusa.

“Me too,” said Victor. “Like ice cream.”

“Not sweet,” Azusa said. “I mean spicy.”

“At least walk with us,” Will said. “We’ll all get ice cream together.”

“Maybe pizza,” said Azusa. She gazed at the cars rushing down the separated avenue, the trees along the median swaying in the night wind.

“The convenience store has ice cream,” said Victor.

Kozue’s face shone in the light of her cell phone screen. “Okay, I will call to home first.”

Will looked at Sachiko and pointed. “Yes—*ikimashō!*”

“You know Japanese very well,” said Azusa. One of her feet pointed toward the street, the other pointed toward Sachiko.

The lights shone along the avenue. Black-suited men missing their ties cavorted down the sidewalk, some leaning on shoulders and others facing the sky. Across the way, neon blazed from a Seiko sign above a rising building. Bicycles rested in a sloppy, fallen

row, their handlebars entangled and pedals wedged against the pavement. A pillared stone structure set back from the street waited behind a barred gate, but everywhere else the signs shone above buildings and doors. Men jammed into an open-windowed bar at street level where lanterns read Kirin and Asahi. A cigarette machine flashed lights against a stucco building wall.

“Miho’s all over you,” Victor told Will.

“Shut up.”

“You should try and bang her.”

“Sure,” said Will. “And then you can ask out Kie and Fujiko.”

“It’s true, man. In Canada there’s plenty of hot girls, but you see lots of ugly ones too. Then there’s the girls who just pull on their sweat pants to go to class or whatever. Here, though, girls go out of their way to look good. When did you ever see a Japanese girl with bed head and no make-up? Fuckin’ never.”

“We live in the promised land,” said Will.

“I’d take ‘em all,” Victor aid, his voice low.

“You can do it,” Will slurred. “We can do anything we want!”

“We can do it!” said Azusa. She walked behind them with crooked steps.

Three ragged brown cats poked their heads out of an alley ahead of them, then retreated into the darkness.

“We all have day off,” said Sachiko. She spread her arms wide. “*Will-sensei*, what will you do this vacation?”

“I’m going on a trip!” Will shouted. “I’m going to Sapporo.”

“*Ja*, what will you do in Sapporo?”

“I don’t know!”

“Kozue,” Victor said, falling in synch with her step. “You know you love comin’ out with us. We always have fun.”

“Yes,” Kozue said. “But, *tabun*, recently I’m very busy.”

“Quit your other job.”

Her eyes avoided his. “Maybe I want to quit, but I can’t.”

“Quit quit quit!” Will jumped across the line of yellow bumps in the sidewalk.

An unmarked building formed of identical windows rose above them, dark except for three lights on the sixth floor. An AM-PM sign shone on the street corner.

“Let’s eat ice cream,” said Will.

“You can go,” Sachiko said. “We will eat at second place.” From her purse she pulled out a cell phone while Azusa leaned against a lamppost.

In the side aisle of the convenience store, Victor pulled up only the magazine covers with pictures of naked girls, their pages secured by cellophane and fat cardboard bands, then let them fall to the racks. Will searched along the refrigerated shelves, empty except for salads and a plate of spaghetti topped by a hard-boiled egg. Over the open freezer he considered the ice cream cups, cones, and cellophane-wrapped bars.

Victor took a plastic bowl of vanilla ice cream with fudge lines dripping down the sides. “Don’t sweat it, man—I’m buyin’. We got payday next week.”

Will chose a bar packaged with happy-faced strawberries. Behind the counter a girl in an AM-PM smock wiped down the microwave.

“See that girl working?” he said to Victor.

“Where?”

“It’s that prospective from the other day. The college girl.”

“What college girl?”

“Wait until she turns around.”

The girl sprayed thin spurts of cleaner on the counter.

Victor pounded the ice cream case. “Oh, what’s her name? The cute one.

Misaki? No—Hitomi. Let’s go say hi.”

At the front of the store they set the ice cream on the counter. Hiromi set aside the spray bottle and mechanically pulled a scanning gun from its register holster.

“Hello again,” said Victor.

For two frightening seconds Hiromi raised her head to look Victor in the face, her mouth half open and her eyes blank. She stuttered and looked quickly to the automatic doors. “Hello.”

“How are you?” Victor asked.

Hiromi was silent for several seconds, then took a deep breath. “I’m fine.”

Will swayed against the counter. “We’re out having fun,” he said.

Hiromi looked at him but said nothing.

Victor spoke again. “You must be very busy. *How long* have you *worked* here?”

Hiromi gave a short, deep nod. “Yes,” she said. “Busy.”

No one spoke.

“We’re going to eat ice cream,” said Victor.

“Yes,” said Hiromi. “*Aisu-kurīmu.*” She ran the scanning gun over the ice cream and placed both in a plastic bag. “*Nanahyaku jūgo en desu.*”

“Here you are,” said Victor, handing her coins.

Hiromi took the coins and said, “*Happyaku en desu.*” She pressed buttons on the register and gave him back a single coin with a hole. When she was finished, she bowed.

“See you,” said Victor.

Hiromi stared at him. “See you.”

The doors opened as they exited.

Will kicked the pavement in front of the trash cans, extending his arms as he steadied his balance afterward. “That was awkward. Why did you ask how long she’d worked there? There’s no way she could handle present perfect.”

“Yeah, guess I forgot how bad she was. She’s pretty fuckin’ cute though, eh?”

Will suddenly laughed. “You said it! You Canuck!”

“So what if I did?”

Sachiko stood illuminated by the streetlight, a cigarette held at her side. “Victor-*sensei*, what did you say?”

Victor spoke excitedly. “I said something that Canadian people say sometimes, but I don’t care. I’m proud of it.”

“So, uh, eh then, eh?” Will said. He ate his ice cream in three bites and threw the stick in the leftmost garbage can.

Kozue closed her cell phone. “What is this meaning?”

Sachiko said, “*Ja*, you have to tell us!”

“Never mind,” Will said, loud again. He walked with Sachiko in an even step down the sidewalk as the others followed. Together they walked past a fenced city block in front of a towering crane and through a roofed alley of shuttered bakeries and jewelry stores. Other walking groups formed strange shapes in the road around them, laughing merrily.

“Will-*sensei*, do you like working at AGD?” Sachiko asked.

“I love working at AGD,” Will said.

“I am glad, *ne?*” said Sachiko. “Because you know some foreign teachers was not so happy in Chikan, and you know sometimes old teacher was not so friendly to our students and did not like teaching many lessons. And sometimes when I asked him to sell something, he always said, *Sachiko, why do I have to sell this CD or this textbook? I am teacher, not salesman!*”

“Screw him,” said Will. The road spun up and down.

“Yes, but I think you and Victor-*sensei* are good team for Chikan school because many students likes you and we have many new students recently. And last month we got Number One School so I know we can do better, even Erika-*san* doesn’t work hard and recently she leaves work early sometimes.”

“Don’t say bad things about Erika,” Will said wearily. “She loves her husband and wants to be a good wife.” His head fell back to the sky; above him stars shone through the brown air. Clouds moved to the mountains, the city lights gleaming on their curves. The multistoried Nishido department store towered above the street corner.

“It’s kind of happy thing,” Sachiko said. “And maybe Azusa is thinking that way too.” She clutched his arm tighter. “Do you want to get married someone? I mean in future, *ne?*”

“If I meet a nice girl to date, then maybe.”

“I think Victor-*sensei* wants to date many students, *deshō?*”

Will’s smile faded. “What?”

Sachiko leaned close, almost whispering. “I know sometimes foreign teachers dating some girls students, and it’s not AGD’s rule, but it’s kind of dangerous thing because sometimes something bad happened, so you must be very careful with our students, *ne?*”

Will loosened his grip on Sachiko’s elbow but hung on. “Yes,” he said. “I understand.”

“But Will-*sensei*, I know you are okay because you love no one.”

“Yes!” Will yelled. “I love no one!”

Azusa called out, “Will-*sensei*, you love no one?”

Will spun out of Sachiko’s grasp and faced Kozue under the awning of the department store. “No, I love you!”

Kozue laughed. “What do you mean?”

He took Kozue’s hand in his. “I love *you!*”

“What is this?” She giggled and held her hand to her mouth.

Azusa laughed with her head crooked.

“You’re crazy,” said Victor. He held the plastic shopping bag with his ice cream and walked to the stairs descending beneath the department store. In the shadow of the alley Scott held hands with a girl in a vertically striped dress. Victor sauntered next to them.

“What’s that son of a bitch yelling about?” Scott asked. He pointed at Will.

“Damned if I know. Who’s your friend?”

“I’m Mayumi,” said the girl. “And you?”

“Why do bad things happen to good people?” Will said. “Why do people hold back? Why do they restrict themselves from doing what they really want to do?”

“I don’t know,” Kozue said. Will held her shoulder for a moment.

Mayumi watched Will. “Your friend seems a bit strange.”

Scott said to Victor, “This place is packed with some lame-ass crowd. I say we split for one of those counter places to get some oden.”

“Will-*sensei!*” Sachiko called from the sidewalk. “Kozue is *leaving!*”

“Don’t go,” Will said. “Stay with us.”

“But maybe I have to.”

“Please stay!” He held her hand very tightly, squeezing it, though the hand was very limp.

“I have to go,” Kozue said.

Then she left and the others were alone outside of the department store.

## The Perfect Date

In the months since their initial conversation at the second-floor station bookstore, Will had run into Susan three times on the street and a fourth time when she'd spotted him over her grilled cheese and tomato sandwich at the Happy People Always café and waved to him through the window. He'd sat down with her and another ALT hunched over a JLPT study book making *kanji* flashcards with consistent left-right up-down strokes. The ALT's name was Carter, though he showed no interest in conversing with Will after ascertaining that his Japanese ability was less than mediocre, and went back to making his flash cards. Their interaction had ended with a transfer of contact information, though since Susan's couldn't decipher the Japanese menus on her phone, the task was accomplished through a calling of phone numbers and manual typing of e-mail addresses. Now, his initiation of a meetup had resulted in Susan's inviting him to an ALT dinner in an adjacent town.

"I haven't seen you in a long time!" Susan told Will with an excited upswing in her tone. They rode on the Tokushima line local leaving Chikan as the sky had begun to grow dim, and she'd worn a black fleece jacket with an outdoor company logo stitched prominently on the left breast. "Us gaijin have to stick together! You should come to *Nihon-go* lessons at the International Center!"

Susan's inability to recall that Will's work schedule precluded his attending Japanese lessons at the International Center stemmed not from an inadequate memory,

but from her inexperience interacting with people whose routines revolved around nontraditional working hours.

“I’d like to,” Will said as a way to skirt saying that he couldn’t. “I’ve been thinking a lot lately about my way of interacting with Japan, and whether I want to keep doing it on a shallow level in the gaijin way, or whether I can adjust my way of living to suit the Japanese way.”

“Wow,” said Susan, who hadn’t understood any of this. “Like, how?”

Exactly how he might accomplish this, Will wasn’t sure, and he attempted to explain that it involved—as far as he could ascertain—speaking, acting, and thinking in a way harmoniously concordant with the Japanese standard.

“You should do it,” said Susan, since his explanation had sounded positive enough. “You should also come on FALT trips with us! In December we’re seeing sumo wrestling in Tokyo, and in January we’re going snowboarding in Nagano.”

“Do you ever go anyplace farther away?” Will asked as his back rattled against the back of the train seat. “Like Sapporo?”

“I don’t know where that is,” Susan said. “But you should suggest it if you want to go!”

Suggesting such a far away trip to people he did not know seemed somehow imprudent to Will. “I’ll see what the others say,” he said.

They were met at the station roundabout by a girl driving a mid-size Toyota sedan from a recent model year, and Susan offered Will the front seat because he was taller. The girl smiled and said, “I’m Cynthia. It’s great to meet you!” in a friendly manner,

then spent the entire trip exchanging teaching stories with Susan in the backseat as they drove out of the station, away from the single-street downtown and into a neighborhood of dark, straight streets with houses guarded by low stone walls ready to crumble at any moment. The top row of each wall had been carved with its own pattern of river-like flower chains and vines connecting one wall to the next, and though the walls allowed no views of the yards beyond Will watched the tree branches reaching over their tops with their hanging vines gripping the stonework, and he tried to imagine what the gardens looked like on the other side.

On the street, triangular and hexagonal signs pointed to hazardous turns and strange yielding signals, with convex mirrors hanging from the walled streetcorners that distorted the car's reflection as it rounded the narrow corner that would have given them no time to pass had another car chosen that moment to come at them from the perpendicular street. Will was amazed Cynthia could drive so well on the tight streets while sticking to the left side of the road.

"It's just like driving back home," Cynthia said. Her long, blonde hair trailed along the head and shoulder rests of the driver's seat as she stared straight into the windshield. "And my school is far outside town, so I got used to driving fast."

Will said nothing in response and an awkward moment passed. "Do you have a car?" Cynthia finally asked to break the silence.

"No," Will said. It had seemed a strange question to ask, since he'd expressed surprise at her driving abilities, and anyone in her position should have been able to ascertain from this that he didn't have access to a vehicle. It was possible that she hadn't

been paying attention, hadn't been conditioned to looking at body language and eye movement like he had, hadn't become accustomed to deciphering people's way of thinking through alternate means.

"I live in Chikan," Will said, "so I walk everywhere."

"Oh," Cynthia said in a manner that made further discussion impossible, and went back to talking with Susan.

At the *tonkatsu* restaurant where the ALTs were all meeting, Susan waved to the table of others their own age and they took seats at the far end, for they had been late. There were no other people in the restaurant on a Sunday, and outside no headlights passed outside the large windows facing the street; the restaurant was in a rural neighborhood surrounded by rice farms and stayed in business only by offering enormous cuts of pork *katsu* whose size served as a draw for those willing to drive out from Eroi-yama City. The ALTs were all cheerful twentysomethings whose median age was exactly Will's own but who alternated between acting much older in their banal discussions of work and much younger in their giggling evocations of pop culture and movies. They were college graduates from different parts of the country, veterans of international relations programs and Japanese studies minors, though they cursed far less often than McCoy did. Most of them had grown up in the suburbs of large coastal cities, but named only the city in response to where they were from. They worked as assistant teachers at middle and high schools around the area and led speaking activities designed to bring their self-conscious uniform-wearing students out of their clannish shells. They had plentiful office hours and often hung out on the internet at work. Most of them were

taking gap years between college and graduate school and discussed whether prep classes or regular tutors provided greater preparation for the GRE. The ones who were fluent in Japanese did not speak the language at all during dinner, while the ones who knew nothing openly mispronounced words and orally sounded out the *katakana* on the restaurant menu even though they'd lived in Japan longer than Will and also should have known better. They'd all gotten to know each other through the Chuo region day trips Susan was always recommending Will take, and they wore tight jeans, polo shirts, and jackets that did not adequately keep out the cold, though the ones from California complained often about the November chill. They told the table about plane trips they'd taken to other Asian countries and to well-known areas of Japan that always involved riding the *shinkansen*. Most of them watched a lot of anime and played Japanese role-playing video games regularly; none of them had ever heard of AGD. They thought it was interesting that Will got to teach adults, and viewed him with looks of odd curiosity. They complained about the heaters in their apartments and the shyness of their students, the difficulty of garbage sorting and the lack of video arcades, the quaintness of Chikan and the distance from Eroiyama to Tokyo. Most of them ordered soda, green tea, or orange juice, and those who'd ordered beer didn't ask for a second round.

It was the most wholesome night out Will had been on in months, and he found not a single person there with whom he could relate regardless of how many conversations he attempted to enter into. It was, perhaps, a blessing (though he never would have considered it as such had the situation been different) that the night ended at eight o'clock, since the ALTs had work the next morning.

He rode back with Susan on a train car vacant except for an old man reading a newspaper and two schoolboys wearing uniforms even though it was a Sunday.

“I’m sorry you all had to work the next morning,” Will told her. “I usually stay out later than this when I go out.”

“Wow,” Susan said in surprise. “That must be fun!”

“Do you ever go out drinking with your co-workers?” Will asked. “The Japanese ones, I mean.”

“Sometimes,” Susan told him as she scrunched up her face in methodical thought. “But usually they just talk with each other and I don’t have anything to say.”

There existed a concrete difference between Susan’s position and Will’s own whose exact specifications he could not yet clarify, though he was determined to figure them out. “Do people at your job work very hard?” he asked.

“The Japanese ones do,” Susan said in a voice of acknowledgement. “They always have work to finish, and stay late most of the time. I ask my *sensei* sometimes if he needs help, but he always tells me he’s doing just fine.”

Will’s next question was more difficult to express, and he struggled to relate a particular sentiment in a way Susan might be able to understand. “Do you,” he finally asked, “feel like a team?”

“Of course we’re a team!” Susan answered. “My *sensei* and I prepare our lessons separately and come together in the classroom to teach the students.”

“But,” Will asked again, for the words were still not quite right, “do you feel like you’re working to achieve something bigger?”

“Of course,” Susan said. “We teach great lessons together.”

But this was not the something bigger that Will was trying to express either, and when he realized that Susan was not going to figure out what it was he changed the subject and allowed her to talk for some minutes about how cute and shy her junior-high students all were.

When the train stopped and they’d climbed off the platform and up the escalator, he watched a tall young man in a conductor’s cap for lack of anything else to look at. He stood with Susan in the corridor above the tracks between the rows of coin lockers.

“I’m going this way,” Susan said, pointing toward the south corridor. “But we should hang out again! A bunch of the people from the FALT forums are going out next Saturday, and you should come! We meet there the third Saturday of every month.”

“Okay,” Will said. “Maybe I’ll see you there.”

“Okay,” Susan said. “*Oyasuminasai!*”

“*Oyasumi.*”

Will didn’t go out with Susan and the ALTs the following Saturday, since there seemed no point. Instead he went to *karaoke* with Victor and Tatsuya and Chifumi and some of Chifumi’s friends from high school who didn’t speak English but were excited to be around two gaijin men after they could exchange flirtatious banter with, and though Will had wanted very badly to see Susan he also detested the very idea of being around her and the others again.

### Pronunciation

When the airplane had come to a full and complete stop and the people in front of him had all disembarked, Will stumbled crookedly on to the airport connecting bridge, his feet wobbling with each uncertain step, his clothes wrinkled and stinking, and his eyesight clouded from the in-flight television's artificial gleam. He followed some Western men dragging rollerbags colored in gray and black, then stopped to rest until the other passengers had all walked by, most of them silently, but some saying *Excuse me* or *Sumimasen* in ways that made him turn in fearful surprise. His stomach still curdled from the airline's microwaved chicken casserole, and his lips stung faintly from oversalted peanuts. He felt sick.

Beside a partitioned wall a long-haired Japanese woman in a white surgical mask said, "Welcome to Japan!" and raised her closed palm to a sign that read *Are You Bringing Any Fruits or Vegetables?* Her words were slow, friendly, and muffled only slightly by the mask. Will waved no and the woman said, "Okay. Have a nice trip!" in the same slow, friendly way. When Will had walked on she stepped back against the partition, hands at her side, feet apart, eyes on nothing.

Through a most unfortunate happenstance, the first person Will encountered at the airport meeting area was Harriet, who had flown in on the same connecting flight from San Francisco and elbowed her way through the lines of people so that she might get through customs before everyone else. Will had given no thought to elbowing anyone, and followed the carefully marked bilingual signs and colorful arrows through customs

and immigration (where the young, well-manicured women with sparkling eyes and bright smiles asked him simple questions about where he was from and happily stamped his passport between the red lines) and down to the terminal floor. Around the airport terminal, the walls, the carpet, and the airline workers in their suits were all spotlessly clean. He halted before a booth selling colorful cell phone straps and from his pocket unfolded the official map of the Narita airport terminal he'd printed and painstakingly memorized the night before. The blocks on the map vaguely corresponded to some of the more prominent walls of the terminal, and with their guidance he studied a narrow section of orange seats clearly labeled *MEETING AREA* in English, Japanese, and Korean. Before committing himself to this particular meeting area, common sense suggested it wise to ensure that it was the correct one.

It was at this point that Harriet, who had already found the orange meeting area, spotted the AGD logo on Will's map and took it upon herself to assist him.

"I'm excited to be back in Japan," she said after deducing from Will's rudimentary questions that he was less experienced than her. "It's my second time living here, and my third time at Narita *kūkō*. Japan's a great place once you learn your way around. After we finish teacher's training, I'm going to work in Omiya-*shi*."

"Is that far from here?" Will asked.

"Nope, it's really close to Tokyo," Harriet said. She had an ovular, freckled face and faint blue eyes that reflected the terminal's fluorescent light. "Last time I taught English with a small *eikaiwa* in Kanagawa-*ken*, but all the big *eikaiwas* are pretty much the same. Teaching's easy because you just talk to people, and teaching adults is *way*

easier than teaching kids—but don't worry, you'll get the hang of it. In Japan, they learn all the English grammar in school, but they can't speak naturally like we can. I've done all this teaching stuff before, so I can help you out. You have to talk slowly so people can understand you."

"They said that in our AGD materials," Will said. He felt uneasy and kept checking to make sure he hadn't left his carry-on suitcase aboard the plane.

Harriet, her flurry of thoughts not yet complete, dismissed this statement and continued speaking. "Uh-huh. And you *definitely* need to get a Suica. And your *keitai* right away. It's important to learn how the menus and texting symbols work, because nobody here ever calls each other. I still have my old *keitai*, so I can show you on the way to Tachikawa. Tachikawa's a pretty fun place, but Omiya's a lot better—you should visit when you get a chance!"

Will allowed their conversation to slow to a silence that Harriet broke after a mere quarter of a minute. "How's your Japanese?" she asked.

"Not great," he said. "I can read hiragana and say areegato, but that's about all."

"You're doing it wrong," said Harriet immediately.

"What?"

"Your *arigatō*. The *ri* is totally off. The Japanese *arr* is much more subtle than you're doing. You have to say it softer, with the *ell* sound thrown in. *Arigatō*."

"I can't really hear the difference," Will said.

“That’s not surprising,” said Harriet in a tone of excited disdain. “You haven’t gotten accustomed to the language yet. It takes a while for most *gaijin* to pick up the basic sounds.”

During her time in both America and Japan, Harriet had dutifully studied Japanese every morning, except when she was tired or had other things to do. She wrote new vocabulary on thick index cards looped together with solid metal rings, then never looked at them again.

“Try it like this,” Harriet said. “*Arigatō.*”

Will looked hesitantly around the meeting area. People both Japanese and foreign, conversing or otherwise occupied, sat in the rows of orange seats, some of them near enough to potentially hear everything he was saying. “*Areegato.*”

“That’s still wrong. Listen: *arigato.*”

“Could you say it more slowly?” Will asked, moving his ear closer.

Harriet spoke at the same speed as before. “*Arigatō.*”

“*Areegato.*”

“Nope. *Arigatō.*”

The young woman two seats over looked rapidly down at her phone when Will checked to see if she was watching him. “*Areegato.*”

“Still not good,” Harriet said. “You should practice more at home. How often do you study?”

Will struggled to hide the embarrassment in his voice. “Well, I’ve been pretty busy preparing for the trip, so I haven’t been studying as much the past few weeks.”

“If you want to get the most out of your time in Japan, you should really try to learn the language,” Harriet said reproachfully. “You should also use *keigo* when you speak. Don’t use the casual forms with people you don’t know very well.”

Will said that he hadn’t gotten that far in the textbook yet.

“Japanese verbs conjugate in both casual and polite forms,” said Harriet. “Their language changes depending on who they’re speaking to. Always use *desu* and *masu* with strangers, co-workers, and older people. If you treat them with respect, you’ll fit in better, and Japan is all about fitting in. Like, when you want to say *Thank you*, you shouldn’t just say *arigatō*. You should say *arigatō gozaimasu*. It’s most common at shops and restaurants.”

Will said, “*Areegato gozaeemahshu.*”

“Not even close,” said Harriet. “*Ganbatte!*”

Will looked down at his hands and resolved never to speak Japanese in front of Harriet again.

## First Times

Will told Clay he needed a few minutes to get ready, then spent these few minutes staring at an ovular blotch on his bedroom wall, the only one of its kind in the room. When he stood up he became aware of an uncomfortable stiffness running from his inner thigh to his ankle. He did not want to go outside, but felt compelled to do so by some force he couldn't identify, a force rendered all the more powerful by the presence of the others in the seminar house. To calm himself he repeated Japanese phrases aloud without paying attention to the arrs: *Ikura desu ka? Mizu onegaishimasu. Koko no chikaku ni resutoran ga arimasu ka?*

Outside it had grown dark, and as it was a Sunday, the manager of the seminar house trainers had gone home after introducing himself and warning them to get a good night sleep before the morning's training. This left them alone in the seminar house, which (in all its simplicity and distance from the bars) AGD had selected as the most cost-effective place to instruct new teachers in an environment free of distractions. It consisted of seven identical bedrooms along narrow hallways filled with posters from old marketing campaigns (including the recently discontinued English Chat for Fun! campaign), with one open corner wide enough for a coffee table and two chairs. The first floor housed a conference room with attached kitchen, a carpeted kids room filled with plastic toys and stuffed animals evocative of an American barnyard, and the trainers' locked office—which they'd been informed was absolutely, without exception, off limits to all of them.

Will met the others in the entryway where the shoes were stored, and at Harriet's suggestion they set off in a direction they vaguely presumed would lead them back to the station area to find a restaurant. Harriet wore an expensive-looking white trenchcoat with glistening silver buckles, while Lloyd wore no jacket at all despite the cold, though he insisted in long verbose sentences that it didn't bother him. Faded, single-family houses behind crumbling retaining walls surrounded them, their miniscule gardens bearing long-leaved ferns and thick bushes. Tacked to the stone walls were posters of stern men with writing all in Japanese, the men raising their fists or glaring confidently into the street, while one wall supported larger, sun-faded posters of Western men and women in suits holding textbooks, the names QVZ and AGD written in block Roman letters sometimes curved, sometimes sharp, but each one of them strikingly prominent.

As they walked, Harriet followed Clay because he seemed to know where he was going, Lloyd followed Harriet because he didn't want to be the last one in the group, and Will trailed last because he didn't want to be near Harriet. Clay led them down the middle of roads, sometimes stepping to the side when cars drove around the corners toward them, and sometimes ignoring them while he told stories of the exotic bars, karaoke rooms, amusement parks, dance parties, and brothels he'd stumbled upon in Thailand. He told his stories with an innocent elation that made him seem much younger than his age, and once, a square hatchback careened around a blind corner and braked sharply to avoid hitting them, but Clay casually gave the driver a wave and said, "Sorry!" as he walked on.

It soon became apparent that they were not headed toward the station at all, and their attempt to turn around brought them to an alley filled with tiny, windowless shopfronts with pink signs written in *katakana* alongside silhouettes of long-legged women with their knees bent. All of the doors were closed.

“Let’s try one of these places,” said Clay, reaching for the nearest door.

“You shouldn’t go in there,” Harriet warned. “That’s a *sunakku*. Old men go there to drink and flirt with middle-aged women.”

“Maybe they have something to eat,” said Clay.

Lloyd, who found bluffing to be an effective way of dealing with people whose opinions differed from his own, said, “You can go in if you want, but I’m going to find food somewhere else—there’s no point in trying something new like that when Harriet just said it was a kind of strip club, or maybe some girl bar where the women talk to you for money—which I’ve heard is common in Japan, though of course they also have prostitution and an entire legalized sex industry.” (He wasn’t sure if this was true, but it seemed like a knowledgeable thing to say.)

While Lloyd was speaking, Will watched to see what Clay would do.

“Even if you can get food there,” said Harriet, “you’re going to pay a lot.”

“Let’s find out,” said Clay, and went inside.

The door was heavy and shut tightly behind him. He walked around a corner and into a purple, fur-covered room where a chubby middle-aged woman with dyed red hair leaned lazily against a bar stocked with bottles of brown liquor and trays of chocolate, foil-wrapped cheese wedges, and green grapes. The woman leapt up as he rounded the

corner and looked at him strangely, as did the withered old man with glasses and a large coat holding precariously on to his whiskey glass. A woman on a wood-paneled television sang vocals to a piano-intensive soft-rock Japanese song; her hair had been dried into a thick, voluminous perm and her eyes glittered with sparkling make-up dulled by the television's poor contrast. Pink and orange fish swam in a tank cast in a mellow green light.

The red-haired woman bowed graciously and said, "*Irasshaimase, konbanwa.*"

"Do you sell food here?" asked Clay slowly. He raised a cupped hand to his mouth as he spoke.

The woman laughed nervously with her head tilted and said, "*Ne...mina-san wa tabemono o amari kaimasen...Taitei, o-sake o nonde, Mama-san to hanashimasu.*" She turned to the withered old man and said something very rapidly, to which the man chortled in hesitant, coughing bursts that shook his gaunt body and shriveled face.

"Okay," said Clay, and walked out.

He caught up with the others around the next corner, where they found a small noodle shop built into the bottom floor of an elderly couple's house, and as they slid open the door and moved aside the cloth hanging over the entryway, the old woman ushered them hurriedly over to a low table and pillows. They sat cross-legged while the woman spoke for half a minute in rushing Japanese, then returned to the kitchen to ignite the multi-burnered stove and drain the noodles in their square colanders while the man watched television on a raised *tatami* floor. Rice paper hung on the walls above him on

which was written *hiragana* that Will struggled to understand and *kanji* he skipped over without any hope of identifying.

Though Will's guidebooks had told him that Japanese restaurants always came with picture menus or life-sized plastic replicas of available food dishes, the old woman's living room had neither of these things, and he realized this as he sat with his legs crossed on the pillow wondering how he would order when it came to be his turn. Harriet offered to place orders for everyone at the table and began a lengthy speech explaining the difference between the thick wheat *udon* and the thinner, buckwheat *soba*, but Will immediately forgot which was which after she'd finished and told Harriet that he wanted hot *soba* because it was what she had explained most recently. That he had caved before this first challenge agonized him, since ordering in restaurants (*Kono* [food name] *o hitotsu kudasai*) was one of the three phrases (along with asking for the bathroom and requesting directions) he'd practiced every day as part of his Japanese routine, and to have given up on something he had previously felt so confident with made him slump his shoulders in pitiful failure.

Beside him, Harriet asked Clay if he wanted her to place his order.

"Nah," said Clay. "I should probably practice ordering myself."

The old woman emerged from the kitchen and spoke rapidly in Japanese, her withered fingers clutching a notebook a pen.

"Ramen, please," said Clay, holding up a single finger.

"*Soretomo miso to shōyu?*" the woman asked immediately.

Harriet said, "She's asking whether you want—"

“Sho-yu,” said Clay, and held up a single finger again.

Will watched in amazement as the woman wrote this on her pad of paper and dashed back to the kitchen where she immediately threw wet handfuls of noodles into the square colanders and lowered them into the vats of boiling water. That these simplest of words had achieved such spectacularly practical results astounded him. He asked Clay why he had gone inside the *sunakku*.

“Because it was there,” said Clay. “I couldn’t not go inside.”

“Weren’t you scared?”

“Of what?” Clay asked.

Will couldn’t explain.

“We’re foreigners,” said Clay. “We can do anything we want to, and no one here will care.”

“How can you say that?” Harriet interjected with staggering outrage. “Japan is a society with strict rules and social customs that dominate people’s everyday interactions, and it’s our responsibility as visitors to follow them as best we can.”

“I guess,” said Clay. “For now, though, just try. Learn what works and what doesn’t. If something doesn’t work, don’t do it again.” He rifled in his pocket for a tissue in which to wrap his gum. “That also goes for when we start teacher training.”

This advice flashed through Will’s mind again when they’d finished their noodles and stepped up to pay at the small table near the restaurant door where the old woman worked the metallic cash register and spoke to them using a great many numbers and variations of *arigatō gozaimasu*. While he waited behind the others, Will clutched a blue

thousand-yen note (carefully selected as the surest way of covering the meal, whatever the cost) in his hands so very tightly, then stepped up to the old woman.

“*Go-hyaku roku-ju en desu,*” she said with both hands held obsequiously across the front of her apron.

Will handed her the crumpled bill, silently repeating the words to himself but unable to place a numeric value on the word *go* until he looked at the cash register’s LCD display and read 560. Then he smiled and said, “*Areegato gozaimasu. Gochiso-sama deshita.*”

The old woman dropped a great heap of coins on to a plastic tray that Will scooped up and into his pocket. With her hands again crossed in front of her apron she said, “*Hai, arigatō gozaimasu.*”

When it was finished, it seemed as if the entire process had always been that easy.