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The Beautiful One Has Come

Suzanne Kamata
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Suzanne Kamata's collection of stories *The Beautiful One Has Come* explores the tension, and sometimes beauty, of straddling two very different cultures.

In some cases this takes a very physical form, like being an American mother in Japan. In "Between," Lisette struggles with the pride her young son feels toward Japan, a pride he does not seem to have toward *her* home country. "Even as he sat there snugly, warmly against her, his hand toying with hers, she felt disowned." In the end she discovers that pride can take different forms.

Others stories probe what it means to mother children with special challenges in Japan. From "Polishing the Halo": "Not only was Ana a girl in a society that favored boys, not only was she a mixed race child in a country that cherished pure blood, but also she was disabled." In these stories, Kamata's mother characters also deal with guilt over the seeming failures of their own bodies to protect their children.

In other instances, the two cultures become more figurative. "Woman Blossoming" opens with Yoshiko Saijo attending the unveiling of her late husband's art exhibit. Yoshiko, we soon learn, is quite the artist herself. Early in their marriage, as they sailed from their homeland to Paris, "Yoshiko sat on the deck, gathering images in her sketchbook—the vultures at the Parsi Towers of Silence, the young boys selling ostrich feathers in Aden, the purple hills of Egypt." And later, in their hardscrabble Parisian life she is the one who "rose at dawn and began mixing colors. She stayed at her easel until Taizo stirred and then she hid her work under a sheet." Paris, it turns out, will be the country of some of her greatest work.

It's clear that Kamata deeply understands the questions her characters grapple with emotionally, as well as the intimate details of day-to-day life in Japan. From Grand Haven, Michigan, she now lives in Tokushima Prefecture, Japan, with her husband and two children.

S. HOPE MILLS (July 19, 2011)

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