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The Typhoon Lover
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Q: Rei relates differently to her American cousin Kendall than to her Japanese cousin ChikA: What are some of the key differences that you would like readers to notice about her relationships with the two cousins? Are Rei's family relationships based on your own experiences?

A: I have cousins in Germany and India, and while the German relationships are easier, because of language and cultural similarities, I treasure the times I've spent with my family in India. In my case, I feel like both sides of the family are wonderful, but I don't think Rei feels that way about her American relatives. If you read between the lines of the last two books, Kendall is predatory toward Hugh Glendinning and Rei's grandmother, Grand, is an insufferable snob who hated her daughter's interracial marriage.

Q: Rei often seems to feel like she is failing both the American and Japanese sides of her family (i.e., Grand and Aunt Norie). Why is this? Is it possible for someone from multiple heritages to feel at ease?

A: Having an extra culture (or two, or three) in your life is a gift, it means that many more good things to learn, eat, see, experience. However, I believe that there remains a poignant, lifelong sense of being an outsider in each culture. In Germany, I would be the "America" or the "Indian" and in India, I would be the "American one," and in England, where I was born and held citizenship until recently, I was the "Indian girl." Rei thinks life would be perfect if she were treated fully Japanese in Japan and fully American in the US, but the problem is, that's not who she could be, even if she tried.

Q: You mentioned in another interview that you are now able to travel to Japan more frequently than when your children were younger. Does this mean you will continue to set Rei Shimura novels in Japan rather than the United States? Do you prefer Japan as a setting? If so, why?

A: Yes, I'm delighted to be spending more time in Japan again. I heard from many readers that, they really missed the streets of Tokyo. It was a pleasure to go back to learn things I needed to know for *The Typhoon Lover* and the one right after it, *Girl in a Box*. I guess I like to write about Japan so much because I really miss living there, and the research trips back have been richly satisfying in terms of authenticating details, getting new ideas, and catching up with old friends.

Q: In *The Typhoon Lover*, we are left with the feeling that Takeo and Rei have transitioned to a certain extent to a friendship, which is uncommon between former lovers in Japan. Are the mores changing in Japan to be more like those in the United States, where ex-lovers are not necessarily excluded as possible friends?

A: I have not yet met any Japanese who talk about having casual, relaxed friendships with their exes. Perhaps this is because so much of what people really want to say to each other remains unsaid. Sex is easy in Japan; emotional frankness is not. Takeo is a character who was adored by some readers who maintain that he shouldn't have been dumped in *The Bride's Kimono*, because he actually was a better boyfriend for Rei than Hugh was. I decided to go back to Takeo to solve this unfinished business and figure out if he was Rei's ideal partner after all.

Q: How much did you have to learn about Mesopotamian art for *The Typhoon Lover*? How does Near Eastern pottery compare to Japanese pottery? What are the similarities and differences and why are they significant? How do they reflect the differences between the two cultures?

A: I became interested in Near Eastern pottery after the initial reports of museum looting after the US invasion of Baghdad. The pottery traditions of Japan and the Near East are not especially similar, so I had to be creative to build the clues that lead Rei to authenticate the priceless piece she's seeking. One thing that worked well for my story is that very rustic pottery styles are adored in Japan and that current potters there devote their lives to learning age-old techniques. However, I couldn't have pulled together Rei's great moment of truth in clay without the help of several curators at the Sackler Gallery of Asian Art within the Smithsonian Institutions and a top notch antiques dealer friend in Japan.

Q: The character Emi is addicted to prescription diet pills, which, as we learn, can be fatal. How widespread is the abuse of diet pills in Japan? Is the pressure greater to be thin in Japan than in the United States? Why did you include Emi's drug addiction as an element in the story?

A: Amphetamine abuse began after World War II, and interestingly, the problem was mostly with overworked salary men addicts until recently. Now there is a flood of illegal drugs coming in from Southeast Asia and China that is attracting youth in Japan, and yes, girls are supposed to be a lot thinner in Japan than here. I remember a Japanese friend expressing shock that I weighed almost 120 pounds. The daily diet in Japan is changing from small portions of organic meat, vegetables and fish to super-sized junk food, dairy products and sweets, which may be fueling women's stress about staying slim.

Q: How common are arranged marriages, such as Takeo and Emi's, in Japan today? Do you think arranged marriages will continue to work in Japan as the culture continues to change?

A: I have a few Japanese friends with arranged marriages, so I know the practice still exists, but it seems to be a dying tradition. Right now there are many Japanese women who prefer to remain single as long as possible to "enjoy life." Rei's own choices about matrimony more closely resemble those of women in Japan than they do women in the United States.

Q: Why does Rei have a one-night stand when she has a devoted boyfriend back home? Was it difficult to write a situation where a sympathetic heroine does something that might seem amoral?

A: These days, this is my most frequently asked question via email. So many readers have followed the turbulent, tender relationship between Rei and Hugh through the preceding seven books that Rei's activity is a shock. My opinion remains that Rei was led into a slippery situation that she didn't understand until it was too late, and then she gave in because of job stress and the personal insecurity she was experiencing about turning thirty. There are two serious disasters that result from the fling, so it's not as if she gets off lightly. I was really torn about this scene, because I don't even believe that infidelity always has to end in a breakup or divorce. Originally I wrote a happy reunion scene at the end of the book, but I thought about it for a while and changed what Hugh said to Rei, because I thought it was meant to be. I realized there had been too many troubling power struggles between the two over the course of the series, and

while Rei felt too constrained to ever voice it—here is her Japanese side in operation!—she wanted out. And while Rei's new independence is bittersweet, it places her in a position to grow in her work and have an extremely happy ending in my next novel, *Girl in a Box*.