Foreigners

(Julia Howard is now a ‘landlady.’ She had two foreign students: Miguel, a Spanish law student; and Abouzed, a Tunisian who has been sent by company for management training. She is expecting a third student to arrive at any moment.)

‘Julia, a foreign girl just rang up. She didn’t give her name, but I think she was Japanese.’

‘How on earth could you tell she was Japanese?’ Julia asked.

‘By the way she talked,’ replied Miguel without hesitation, ‘and because she sounded so polite.’

Julia had once worked as a welfare officer in a college where there were a lot of foreign students, so she knew what he meant. People were always ready to make judgements about foreigners, and to identify them according to such simple ideas as *Japanese = polite*.

‘Tell me, Miguel,’ she went on, ‘would she know that you were Spanish, just hearing you on the phone like that?’

‘Of course not,’ replied Miguel at once. ‘I speak English without any accent, and she would ot be able to see how good-looking I am on the phone!’

‘You are terrible conceited!’ Julia said, laughing at his exeggeration. ‘Anyway, what did this so-called Japanese girl say?’

At least Miguel had managed to understand the girl’s message, and a taxi arrived about fifiteen minutes later bringing Miss Yasuko Goto and several enormous suitcases. Miguel went out to meet her. They shook hands. He offered to carry her luggage into the house for her. Yosuko thanked him nervously and followed him into the house, where Julia was waiting to say hello. Over a cup of tea, Julia tried to make conversation with the new arrival. Once Miguel had left the room, Yosuko asked Julia a question. It was something which she had been anxious to ask ever since she had arrived: ‘Is Miguel a relative of yoursm Mrs Howard?’

Julia told her who Miguel was.

‘Really?’ said Yosuko sounding surprised. ‘I thought he was English; his accent is so good. But I can see now that he is Spanish: he is so’ – she searched for a suitable word – ‘handsome, isn’t he?

Julia smiled and thought to herself¸’Thank goodness Miguel didn’t hear her say that’