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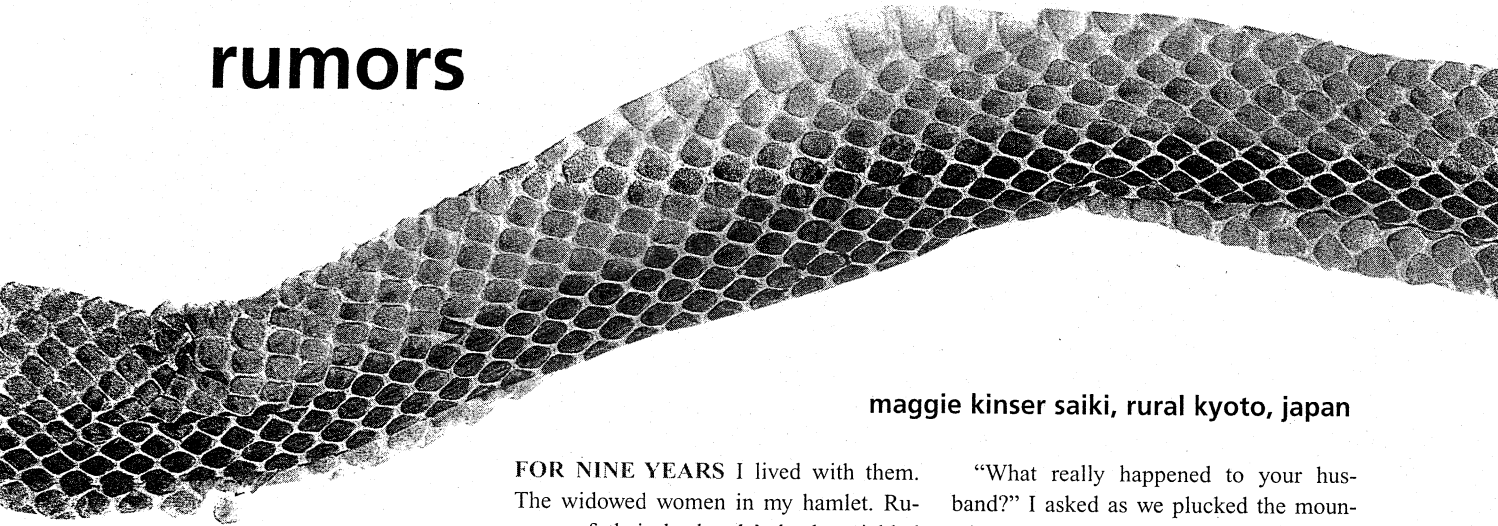
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GOING GEISHA

WHAT'S BEHIND THE FAD?

WOMEN'S LIVES

rumors



maggie kinser saiki, rural kyoto, japan

FOR NINE YEARS I lived with them. The widowed women in my hamlet. Rumors of their husbands' deaths trickled around their lives: dynamite, drowning, suicide out of desperation — she'd had a lover!

One week before I left for good, I joined the one I loved best, and her fifty-something daughter, divorced, who had left the city and her own two daughters to help her mother, well past eighty and confined to her house. The widowed mother had once killed a *mamushi*, or pit viper, in front of me and tied the sinewy skinned corpse to her cane for the walk home.

“What really happened to your husband?” I asked as we plucked the mountain pepper tree bare against the setting summer sun.

He had been walking from Miyama to Kyoto. Today it's a two-hour drive. He'd asked at a nearby shop when the last train had gone through the tunnel ahead.

He must have misunderstood the answer, for he was found in the tunnel, bloodied against the wall. “His kimono had caught on the third car,” his widow told me. “So we know it wasn't suicide.” Silence the rumors. ☯