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Suizenji Joujen Garden, Japan

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Sui Zenji Joujen
Garden, Japan

I enter this ancient tea retreat
beneath fragrant curtains
of hydrangeas, heavy bulbs
of purple sunshine.

Along the path pebbled in stones,
I pass shrines with peaked roofs
built to honor the ancestral lords.
Our heads bowed, their spirits awaken
to tolling bells and the plink
of my copper yen as it lands
in a box of prayers.

Later I buy a paper fortune
from a woman in a red kimono.
I tie it to a string lined
with hundreds of fortune slips,
soggy in the slow drizzle.
The oracles of others
dissolve in front of me
as the words of their futures
drip from the delicate paper.

The pond is filled with yellow
and orange carp. They sway
in murky water, oblivious
to the soft rain rippling
the uneven surface.
The cherry trees surrounding
the pond give away their blossoms.
I steal one from the water
and press it against my palm,
molding the petal into its center,
tenderly closing my fingers
around it.