

Heart Mountain

Robert A. Rees

At the Japanese American National Museum
a pile of small stones, most
no bigger than my thumb, each
with a single *kanji*,
found buried at Heart Mountain.
Each stone names something of the world—
horse, river, flower, snow,
kimono, sword, blossom, death—
piled up like a miniature mountain
in a bonsai landscape.

No one knows why.

I see her there walking along the barbed fence
and the empty river bed that runs
through the camp. She bends or squats
to pick up the stones,
carefully choosing each one
before placing it in her pocket.
As she walks, she thinks of her son
buried in a forgotten field of France,
of her aging husband sick in the barracks
with no medicine, of her home in Fresno
inhabited by strangers, and of her daughter
whose dreams lie dead along the San Joaquin.

She dreams herself of a village outside Kyoto,
of the peonies in her father's garden,
of plum blossoms on Mount Fuji.
She fears she will go mad here
where summer dust blows through the walls
and in winter no fire can keep them warm.
Each day she picks up new stones
and carries them to the tar paper rooms
where they are prisoners.
At night when everyone is asleep, she
names the world and all its parts—
earth, apple, jade, moon,
sun, dog, table, heaven.

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