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## Suizenji Joujen Garden, Japan

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# Suizenji 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.

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