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Typhoon in Japan

Anita Raichand

The overcast sky that morning was a sure sign of the impending typhoon. Japanese television had told us that we would have to stay another day in Hiroshima due to the impending bad weather. There was only a light drizzle as I stepped outside of our hostel that morning. I had heard about a beautiful Japanese garden and decided that a little bit of rain was not going to stop me. I enjoyed that pleasant stroll from the hostel, across a little bridge, and through the central business district. The light rain rolled off my rain poncho. I stopped into the 7 Eleven to ask for directions as the rain stopped intermittently. I walked down a small side street and came upon the entrance. I bought a ticket from the disaffected young girl who was in no mood to try to have a conversation with a *gaijin*. The garden was like a small version of all the best elements of the Japanese gardens. It was picture post card perfect. The garden is meant to be viewed from various angles while strolling around the circular route path. Near the middle, there was a covered wooden platform where I decided to enjoy my bento box that I had picked up at the 7 Eleven. I removed my shoes, took the bento box out of my backpack, sat down cross-legged, and inhaled the beautiful views. I mixed some of the rice with the pickled vegetables and some of the fish and took a bite with the chopsticks. I was sitting in a spot from where the entire garden design could be appreciated and admired. In the center was the water feature across which were interconnecting foot bridges connecting various parts of the garden. A few steps to the right was a bamboo forest where hidden benches concealed stolen moments, a few steps to the left was a royal tea house, a few steps forward were little bridges for crossing the central pond surrounded by immaculately manicured gardens.

As the rain started falling harder, I was happy with having found such a great spot to wait out the rain. The rain, the sound of the rain falling into the water, and the quietness was almost spiritual. The sound of the wind through the bamboo trees was both eerie and awe-inspiring at the same time. I came out of my reverie as I saw the elderly garden keeper approach me. I was worried that perhaps I wasn't supposed to eat in the garden. As he spoke to me in Japanese and as I used my hand and facial gestures to communicate with him, I realized that he was genuinely concerned and just trying to warn me of the approaching storm. I thought to myself that I might as well wait out the storm here rather than in the streets or the walk back, knowing that I would not be able to find a cab back. This was summer in Japan. The weather was warm and the garden was green and lush. Being alone in my own private garden like the empress—while enjoying the sound of the wind rustling through the bamboo forest as the rain fell—was a mystical and magical experience. I felt like the typhoon was inviting me to stay and welcome it. I was hypnotized and drawn to the typhoon. I could not bring myself to leave.

They say that it is always silent before the storm. There was a strange eerie silence just before the sounds of the wind started to pick up. To me, at that moment, the garden took on a different more beautiful aura. One may think that the brute force

of nature bearing down on the tranquil beauty of the Japanese garden would be heartbreaking and melancholy. Oddly, connecting with the magnificent and opposite forces of nature as they collided was uplifting and joyful. An umbrella was no sanctuary from the rain pouring down horizontally with the whipping wind. I walked through the bamboo forests towards the wicked currents of the river under siege from the typhoon. While many people sought sanctuary indoors from the typhoon, I instead wanted to embrace it and feel it. I watched as the wind sliced branches off the trees. At times, the wind gusts were so strong that I had to brace myself against a bench or tree as I walked the circular route alone around the garden. In following the teachings of Zen and ancient Chinese thought, the garden embraced the opposing forces of nature rather than resist. The branches falling were signs of a nature doing its job in the cycle of life and rebirth. I realized that the storm was not going to let up for a while so I took refuge in the adjoining art museum. A couple of times, I tried leaving the museum but the winds were too strong and I saw a hundred year old tree uprooted and people clinging to poles and buildings. Finally, I made a dash for the shopping mall a ten minute walk away. Along the way, signs of the storm were everywhere, like tree branches in the streets and garbage everywhere. About a half-hour after the storm abated, one could see signs of renewal and of a new day. Cars started emerging into deserted streets strewn with branches. People were back in the streets trying to go about their regular routines.