

Snow falls quietly; small flurries penetrate the silent cabin through a shattered window pane. The walls are lined with letters, each carefully placed to form a wallpaper of scattered memories. A black trunk with silver accents sits underneath the cracked window, its contents hidden from its owner. The floor creaks from the added pressure of a skinny man rocking in the corner. He mumbles to himself, his matted black hair overlapping his crossed arms hidden under a black coat with red patches. His pants end at his ankles, his shoes worn with holes in the bottom of the soles, the left shoe without a shoelace.

Seiji, his last name stripped away, replaced by a number by those who held him prisoner, looks up and watches the snow fall, wishing it would make a sound so that he may have some company. At 27, his body shrivels underneath his clothing, his cheeks cling to his skull appearing to be sink holes on his face. His dull, brown eyes with red creeping in from the corners are no longer curious about his surroundings. Instead, they remain transfixed on the floor in a constant state of fear. He has not been able to rid himself of this sensation of fear since the summer of 1942.

The cabin, which he found in 1946 shelters him from the frozen flakes cascading from the sky. Before, he was one of many Japanese American's that were taken away from the familiar, transported to a wasteland whose lodging welcomed disease and was guarded by men who had sworn to keep him in tact until the war was over. Seiji stands, knees buckling, arms shake within his coat. He snorts the snot making its way down his upper lip back into his nose before rubbing his itchy eyes. Turning, the light from the sun leads him to the front door of the cabin which has swollen shut desperate to keep out the moisture when the snow melts.

The Shadow man, a dark figure waits in the snowy distance constantly watching Seiji. He wears a dark hat without a brim with two points at the top and back. Always carrying a long

pointed object, he stands at the end of the road. This figure has followed him since he was released from the camps, drawing closer at the sense of Seiji's longing. Once this feeling has disappeared, he returns to his post, never leaving a track in the snow.

Seiji withdraws from the door window, shaken by the figure that waits for him for an unspoken reason. As he turns to resume his huddled position, his shoe catches on a loose floorboard. He trips and hears a mocking clap but when he turns, no one is there just the letters sent to him over the years lining the walls. His eyes catch one, a crumpled letter from his father pieces cut out to blur the message. Approaching the letter, the sole of his right shoe claps against the floor, his brown eyes staring into the holes of the information his father was trying to convey.

Seiji's back arches, he closes his eyes as his fingertips brush against the top of the letter. He remembers that night, the smell of honey tickled his nose and he could not help but smile revealing his overlapping front teeth. That was the night he had carefully planned to catch a glimpse of Tessa on her back porch, snapping peas and lazily placing them into a barrel. She was humming to herself, her russet skin accented by the light blue dress she was wearing. The thrill of being two outcasts in a world that often lied to them drew him closer to her. Unfortunately, it was too close for her father's liking.

He ran from her, afraid of what her muscle bulging father might do if he managed to wrap his dark fingertips around his throat. His house was in the distance, a black car parked in front. Two men led his father toward it, his mother in the doorway crying as his older brothers watched from a window upstairs. His father, always a proud man, looked so lost compared to the two soldiers standing on either side of him. Seiji called out to him, his voice echoing in the warm air but his father did not answer. He was in the car, his head sunken to his trunk. Seiji continued running past his house after the car, his father never looked back.

His hand quivers as he withdraws it, a cut forming on his pointer finger. A hole in the letter disrupts his dream but he can still hear his voice echoing in the cabin. The snow has picked up, the wind forcing it to bend to its will as it invades the hole in the window. Seiji retreats to the door; the shadow man has begun to draw closer yet leaves no tracks in the snow. He was twenty-four when they took his father away, when he and his family were declared enemies of the state and forced to leave their homes and travel into the desert, locked away behind entangled barbed wire. This was all to protect the Americans, which on paper at least they were protecting him from himself.

The hot desert of California was where his mother, two older brothers and he were forced to drop their luggage. A guard stood by the silver interlacing wires that contained several rows of shacks, other Japanese Americans milling about behind him. His eyes, a steel gray, made Seiji's oldest brother a target. Stepping forward, the guard knocked the brown suitcase from his middle brother's grasp, demanding he pick it up. Unflinching, he held his stance, never taking his eyes off the guard. Seiji held his mother who was trembling from uncertainty of what was going to happen next. Quietly, his oldest brother bent down and picked up the brown case, bowing submissively to the guard.

The snow leaks onto his trunk, dripping onto the floor. Seiji makes his way over, listening carefully for the shadow man to continue his approach. Surely, once he draws closer to the door, the snow will force him to announce his presence. Kneeling so his hands rest comfortably upon his trunk, he pulls up his sleeve, brushes the snow away feeling the chilled water soak through to his bare arm. Shivering, he continues this action until the trunk is bare once again. Using it for balance, Seiji forces himself to stand once more. The trunk unhinges, the darkness inside draws his attention and he cannot help but sit in front of it once more. Its

contents include a death notice belonging to his oldest brother who sought to prove his loyalty by fighting for a country that willingly pinned him against someone with his features. A torn American flag, marking the last example of rage his middle brother would ever display in hopes of encouraging those around him to face the truth before being taken away. The final objects are two knitting needles, his mother's final gift to him before she wasted away on a cot with sepiastains they used to share.

His mother, with the beautiful black silk hair tightly pulled back at all times lay helpless looking out the window waiting for her sons to return. Their names slipped through her dry lips, calling for their return. During her crisis, Seiji always held her hand in his, although he was invisible to her, always the one lagging behind. His brothers were able to make a choice, one that involved abandoning their mother and yet, she still waited for them ignoring the one that had chosen to stay.

If he had joined the war, it would have pinned him against a man with his face. Someone who spoke the language he was associated with or would have forced him to choose between sides. Breaking the rules of the camp meant being misplaced, taken away as his father and middle brother had. The only option left for him was to wait with his frail mother, who was unable to move from the cot others had slept upon. He followed her gaze into the sand as a light breeze carried it into the air. In the distance he could see Tessa, smiling and beckoning him to come home. When he released the hand of his mother, reaching towards the black girl that captivated him from her porch back home, the skeletal hand fell, not making a sound as it hit the cot. When he gazed upon the woman that raised him, she was no longer there. He rubbed his eyes, ashamed to cry not because of the loss of his mother, but in that moment, he believed Tessa had chosen to take her away instead of him.

He was the only one left, the one that would leave the desert of barbed wire, tasked with finding a new life outside. Never planning to be alone, he depended heavily upon his family who had each found ways to leave him. His home was no longer a place of security, ransacked by neighbors that could only be compared to the rats that would scratch against the walls of their shed.

The wind moans, the snow beats against the window as the whole cabin creaks but Seiji remains in front of the trunk. Shadows of the barbed wire grow around him, his body too stricken to move. There is nothing more he can do, he is trapped once again disobeying an unspoken order that the shadow man has come to rectify. The wind picks up. The letters on the walls begin to rustle together in a chorus of nerves yet, he does not move.

Snow enters the cabin in a frenzied excitement, breaking through the front door. It sticks to his neck as the door clatters, being pushed by the intruder. The letters lose their grip on the wall and fly around the cabin, each battling for a space. Seiji's life at the internment camp being tossed about in front of him. The cold turns evil, the snow thickens and the letters never stop seeking a means of escape. A dirty letter with smudged lettering cuts him on his cheek, turning his head away from the trunk, forcing him to look at the floor. Shadows of the barbed wire are entangling themselves against his back as the shadow man draws closer, the pointed object he so dutifully carries on his shoulder now pointed in Seiji's direction. The shadow man does not make a sound and Seiji, hearing the voices of his mother and brothers, becomes too tired to move.