

Minidoka is the First Camp Your Grandma is Incarcerated in, Crystal City is the Second

You thumb through your grandma's yearbook
from when her middle school-self wore
whatever dress her mother could conjure.
Maybe it belonged to a neighbor girl

from another barrack who grew out of it.
Maybe it was unhemmed but fit well
enough. In camp, your grandma couldn't miss
school without every other kid finding out

so instead, she missed her bedroom
the daffodils off 14th near the temple,
how smooth Lake Washington was
midsummer. She missed her dad

who looked like her but was taken
elsewhere. In Germany, a grenade
goes off & your grandma is shoveled
onto a train. Texas smells like pinewood

& sunburn. There's an unending fence
similar to before. Your grandma is back
with both her parents & the war
somehow feels a bit bearable.

The country you & her were born in
eventually wins & still she isn't
given back her dad's laughter, his morning
hum, all of what disappeared

for three years until her family was
imprisoned together. Decades after
your grandma is released she returns
to each camp her dad wrote to her from.

Montana Louisiana New Mexico Texas.

The land is bare & whatever mess hall
or guard tower was once there isn't
as if the war is done, as if there isn't

a daughter left who's separated
from her dad. Somewhere a daughter
still is. If not in a camp, then at an airport
or behind a wall. Somewhere a dad

not your grandma's hasn't seen the sun
in three days, hasn't breathed beyond
cement walls since before detainment.
& still your country says it won the war,

says it's proud of its name in its mouth.
You are in your grandma's home
as she bakes a sheet of sugar cookies.
Her memory becomes a kitchen knife

you hide beneath your pillow. You sharpen
its blade every night. You trust no country
that can smile & say its own name
with so much of someone else's blood

in its mouth. It's 1941 & you are at the center
of your grandma's camp. She's looking
at a mountain miles away. Says *sometimes*
I stand here, right here, staring & I swear

I can hear the other side.

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Decades after your grandma is released

she returns to each camp
her dad wrote to her from.
Montana. Louisiana. New Mexico. Texas.

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or guard tower was once there isn't
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as if there isn't a daughter left

who's separated from her dad.
Somewhere a daughter still is.
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Somewhere a dad not your grandma's
hasn't seen the sun in three days,
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& still your country says it won the war,
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Her memory becomes a kitchen knife
you hide beneath your pillow.
You sharpen its blade every night.
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that can smile
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in its mouth.

It's 1941 & you are at the center of your grandma's camp.
She's looking at a mountain miles away.
Says *sometimes I stand here, right here,*
staring & I swear I can hear the other side.

At this moment your grandma becomes
a knife hidden below your pillow.

You sharpen her blade every night.

Your grandma reminds you to hide a knife
below your pillow,

to sharpen each one

impales into a wood block on the kitchen counter

in the kitchen drawer.

or My Grandma Is Reunited With Her Father In Crystal City, Texas After Three Years Of Forced Separation

She lets her 14 year old hand squeeze her father's,
a quiet man, a Buddhist minister on his best days,
a prisoner of war on his worst.

She sees his face and his glasses seem smaller
than she remembers the bags beneath his eyes are larger.

They wake up the next day and everyone is bowing east toward Japan
to honor the emperor's birthday.

Months later and the prisoners of German descent salute Hitler.

Here, my grandma is imprisoned, is surrounded by another enemy
both those imprisoned who fought for the fascist side
and those in the guard towers who are suppose to be fighting for her rights.

She doesn't mention the dust storms, how they swelter taller than in Idaho.
She sees only her father, the man she knew at 11 and then again at 14.
Even on the heaviest days that felt like rocks and dirt and bags of stone on her chest
she didn't forget how she's reunited.

She didn't care for war or the guns but it was all there still, big and wide.
I think she cared most about seeing her parents together, her family together.
Felt like being pulled out of the mine from the deepest part in the biggest mountain.
Felt like finding light in a mineshaft and being pulled up to the earth's surface.
Breathing well, so well.

She's been separated from her father for so long that I don't think the hot sand storm
bothered her as much as before in Minidoka.
At least here, they are all together.

The camp was a camp in ways and so much a prison in others.

I think what she notices most is how three years on her dad looks,
how three years separated can make any person look new again but still so similar

Sometimes my grandma tells me stories of her time in camp
She reminds me to always keep my kitchen knives sharp in whatever drawer I keep them in
She bunked in a single barrack circled around a pot belly stove with all seven of her siblings to
keep warm every aching cold winter night like ash dancing around an eruption

Sometimes my grandma tells me her stories of camp while we're in her kitchen
She'll fill the tea kettle with water or set out a dish of sugar cookies
Sometimes she'll even show us her yearbooks from school behind the fences
I flip through the pages like I'm bringing memories alive
For a second I'm at the camp with my grandma
She's her middle school self and probably in whatever dress her family could conjure
or maybe it belonged to a neighbor girl who grew out of it
We walk to the center of the camp, look toward a set of mountains
She tells me sometimes she looks out to the peaks and hears the other side

She brings the tea kettle to a boil
slips a baking sheet of sugar cookies into the stove
and

She shows me her yearbook from her school behind the fences

Sets a plate of sugar cookies on the table

You flip through the pages of your grandma's yearbook. The one from the years she spent at a
makeshift school built behind an unending Idaho fence.

On the most boring Wednesdays the nisei kids would gather like a group of any other school kids
They'd find something to do just the same
Only this time they had to stay in whatever Idaho field they were fenced in

Somewhere an atomic bomb ripples its radiation in Hiroshima
And still my grandma is on the other side of the world feeling groundless

If it's not a fairground of barracks,
a hot desert of sandstorms
a baseball field behind barbed wire
stripped of family home and heirlooms and farms

three years of illegal detainment
Then it's a wall
or a travel ban
or more funding for ICE
and expansion of cages and guns and surveillance
It's usually always detention though somewhere
It's usually always a family separated somewhere
between walls or a border or a sea

If it's not a fairground or desert of barracks
it's a southern border wall
a banned religion
a shooting spree

Today the rich can do something about everything
And isn't that really what America is?

Today, if it's not barbed wire it's a wall
If not a wall, then a drone strike
I'm reminded to always keep a good friend close who has a rifle
to push back when another pushes first

My grandma reminds me about her detainment, her separation
The state reminds me it can happen today
We're kept from freedom knowing at any moment my grandma's memory can reloop in real time

If it isn't a barrack of chanting Buddhists, it's a place of practicing Muslim families,
a caravan of displaced people
someone not a president or politician
What really was won in the war?

The desert is still hot
The winter nights are still an aching cold
The grenades go off somewhere in Germany and my grandma hasn't seen her dad in 3 years
Even if someone wins whatever war this is this time
My grandma has been behind barbed wire for most of junior high

She's seen as the enemy by both sides
Not American

Not Japanese

At the end of the day when there's no light to tell the difference
she's incarcerated because the US wants to protect its wealth and power

My grandma is finally together with her family
Here the gates are still closed
The wind is a thick air of dust
I think of my grandma when there are other families locked up or separated
Some years it seems like the war is happening again
This time the men aren't Buddhists
And the women aren't named Ysashi or Estuko
And the ones in cages aren't those with hair silk as silver
black as shadow
I wonder if we could hear the atomic bomb from the Seattle docks
Did Hiroshima's smoke sail to this city
Could Japan feel our people's loneliness
When the bombs dropped my grandma was still in camp, still the enemy

On a normal Tuesday my grandma woke up to something not spectacular
She stepped out of her barracks and outside were hundreds of Japanese prisoners of war
bowing east for the emperor of Japan's birthday
They honor his life and leadership
I imagine my grandma waits in wonderful seconds before carrying on to the community wash
room where she splashes her face with water to wake up
Months later she walks outside again
This time German prisoners of war are heiling hitler for his birthday
Their arms like a legion of planes rising in the air
Each one strong and straight without waivering
My grandma is around many who want to end her

Even here in the desert winds, the hot July, the smell of wood fences and chains, of locks and
sweat
my grandma is swelling of joy to be here
is holding her heart full and bursting
My grandma must be the brightest flare in the deepest mine carved into a mountain
Some days I wonder what kept her glowing
Why didn't she cave in and bury whoever was around?
My grandma made it out of the mine and now bursts a thousand flames
so much like a sun

Here, an administration will separate families time and time again,
will lock them up in the deepest back room of some dark place
and the grocery stores will still run
and the stop lights will flicker green and then yellow
and the business tower with all the men and their money will keep crunching their numbers

My grandma goes to the cafeteria every day
walks back to the barracks
paths of dirt and dust
In the winter, Idaho is part flatlands and all ice
Powdered snow is slippery
My grandma still goes to class
At least here there wasn't ever a day she could miss the school bus or class
But there were plenty of other things to miss
The garden near the temple
The alter, the Seattle summer, a smooth Lake Washington
She missed the people who looked like her but were taken elsewhere

My grandma is reunited with her dad three years later after forced separation
She remembers her dad's face differently
The bags under his eyes are bigger
His hand not as much the same size while fitting in hers
They are in a Texas summer and the dusty sand sticks to their face, their wet tears
Here, they are together again
Still they're behind someone else's fence,
another roll of razor wire
Here she is with her family again
Something about that made the end to this war feel less far away
At least until the bombs burst over Hiroshima
and then again over Nagasaki
What could be done to my grandma next

She and her siblings are back with both their parents
And the Texas sun, the southern sun seems to drip a little brighter
the winters are less cold
and somehow maybe the war was more bearable
And even if she didn't know when everything would come to an end or if it would end at all
She knew she wanted to be with her family, together, intact and whole

Idaho flatlands were vast, its rolling hills on the way out never ending too
Now my grandma was in Texas
and all that was in Minidoka isn't here except for the security, and the walls, and the guards
Decades later my grandma visits each site her family was imprisoned at —
Idaho, Texas, Montana, Louisiana, New Mexico
She sees barren land where most of the barracks once were
I imagine the federal government tore down the buildings and cleaned up the sites
as if to say, "See, look, it's gone, we've gotten rid of it, we're not believers of that anymore."
Or maybe they demolished everything without care and would do it again if they had to — like
they are now, only this time it's also a travel ban and a border wall
My grandma makes a pilgrimage out of her trip
Drives hundreds of miles with my grandpa beside her in the passenger seat, and her camera full
of new film

She hears separation of families and 500 miles between her and her dad are felt again
She hears proposals for a wall to be built and the whole west coast is built of barracks again —
flashing back
Or maybe she is calm and knows this country could never have gotten it right with this kind of
system
Maybe she is less surprised and more furious
Maybe her sadness is more fury and maybe that's what we need right now

What I know is my grandma will tell me stories and sometimes when I hear the news I mix it up
with what once happened to her

She drives coast to coast and has seen where her dad was detained. Now, she sees the news and
other parents are separated from their children at the border, at the airport. My grandma didn't
survive the war to ever want to see what was happening then, happen now again. She hears
"families are separated" and 500 miles between her and her family are felt again. She hears,
"build a wall" and the whole west coast is built with barracks and barbed wire again. Maybe she
is calm and knows this country could never have gotten it right with this kind of system.

Even if someone wins whatever war it is this time
she's spent most of her junior high behind a fence.

hasn't seen her dad in three years.

barren where baseball fields once were

Maybe not in a camp
but at an airport or behind a wall.

of immigrants is a flare flickering
in the deepest end of a cavern

If not at a camp,
than an airport or behind a wall.

& soon will be flung
over the border.

see, look, we don't believe in the dark anymore.
We've wiped away that dirt.

hasn't been told how long
he'll be detained.

Says

Missoula, MT.
Livingston, LA.
Santa Fe, NM.
Crystal City, TX.

with so much blood in its mouth.

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In Germany, a grenade goes off
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Texas smells like pine wood & sunburn.
There's an unending fence similar to before.
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with both her parents & the war

somehow feels a bit bearable.
The country you & her were born in
eventually wins & still
she isn't given back her junior high,

her first middle school dance,
the pep rallies.
It's a spring day & prisoners of war
heil Hitler for his birthday.

Their arms levitate like a legion of planes
giving birth to a long shadow.
Your grandma watches in spectacular seconds
then walks to the makeshift washroom

at the end of her block. She splashes her face
rinsing off any leftover wonder.
Decades after your grandma is released
she returns to each camp her dad was imprisoned at.

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who's separated from her dad.
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You sharpen its blade every night.
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his forehead kisses.

All of what disappeared