

THE COLOR OF GREEN TEA

—Saiho-ji Moss Temple, Kyoto

In this sacred place, trees still grow out of rocks—
rocks anchored to a pond shaped like the Chinese
character for Heart-Mind.

Dragonflies hover over empty spaces, filling the air
with wingbeat. There, among the ripples, a boat
abandoned for a century or a fortnight in this moss
garden where past is present.

Who has rowed this cedar plank boat?
A thirteenth-century prince regaling his beloved
with poems about the passage of time?

Or perhaps the tea master Rikyū who lived in a hut
bordering the pond—his refuge from a vengeful warlord.
Did Rikyū find solace rowing through water lilies,
whisking the still water with oars until it was the color
of green tea?

Today mourning doves break the silence,
chiming in with their hypnotic calls.
Be like the boat, be like the boat, they drone.
I sit on a ledge, surrounded by this lushness,
in a country not of my origin.

Watch reflections of clouds and sky
in the clear water. And me,
a single leaf drifting.

—Margaret Chula

Utagawa Hiroshige, *Lake Suwa*. 19th century

