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No-No Darkness

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No-No Darkness

Lawrence Matsuda, poet

Suto-san refuses machine guns
and foxholes in Italy,
checks "No-No" on
the loyalty questionnaire.
Minidoka bunk, young wife
and two baby girls traded
for steel bars and hard time
at McNeill Island Federal Pen.
His "No-No" brand exiles
him to purgatory littered with
conscientious objector leper rags,
an untouchable pariah.
Upon his release, old friends
cross the street to avoid him.
Others refuse to shake his hand.
He acts and looks like a regular Joe
after President Truman's pardon.
Gossip pursues him until he dies,
no forgiveness from Japanese neighbors.
He never asks for pardon,
lives his life in joy and celebration,
concocts his secret *tsukenomo* recipe,
pickled cabbage full of zest and magic
fermented under a large stone for weeks in a crock,
Japanese sauerkraut that fumes noxious fragrances
when the lid is popped.

He always shares a jar with me.
In its salty tang.
I can taste the "No-No"
depth of his resolve.