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Upon Going Through Grandmother's Things: Summer 1993

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Two poems by Derek Otsuji

Upon Going Through Grandmother's Things: Summer 1993

It must have been April in Kagoshima
when you plucked this twig from a *sakura* tree,
its three pink blossoms then in full bloom.
And when you placed it
between the pages of this book
and clamped the cover shut,
perhaps you thought to seal in
the muted color of that morning,
the salt sting of the sea-scented breeze,
the songs of the peddlers carting
turnips and sweet potatoes
through neighborhood streets.

Part of the family folklore: you brought just one suitcase.
True or not, that is how I imagine you today:
suitcase in one hand, this book
with its three blossoms, clutched tight
to your bosom in the other.

And when you arrived here and laid
this book flat on a closet shelf
beneath a stone wrapped in white terry cloth,
did you in the clutter of your new life—
as you worked the cane fields, married a man who
never spoke to you but in commands,
watched your children grow
busy with forgetting your language
and ways until your words dried
into syllables, first meaningless, then oddly comic—
forget this book with its three pink blossoms?

Or did you place it there knowing that today
I would find it and open to
that morning in April at a temple near
your home in Kagoshima, Japan, 1905?