Upon Going Through Grandmother's Things: Summer 1993

Derek Otsuji
Two poems by Derek Otsuji

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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?