

her toes, I hold them with gently, and when I shimmy a shirt over her head, I make sure the cloth goes over smooth, not bunched, wide around the neck, pulled all the way down the back and sides.

young. Tells me I visited her when I wish I really did.

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One summer, I crawled next to Mama who lay on the couch in the late afternoon light and pulled her limbs around mine.

I feel warm inside and I giggle, but as I close my eyes to breath, the little faces of

ke the way my own eyes feel so inscrutable to me. I force emotion onto

- to make

sure the cool girls see me as human and not pet- to make sure-

I grew older and more careless- *so what if I'm strange... so what?* I started to let myself
be animal. Eyes that dart, nervous hands. Anf

Baba is quiet, at least, in my memory of her, but she is sharp as a knife. At breakfast, where we slice tomatoes and blow cool air on our vegetable soups, Baba says to my mom,

turned around, and the chair has been squeezed behind her knees, forcing her to sit back down, Baba lets out a long, rattling sigh. Perhaps her first big breath, all day.

Look there.

maybe I took those out. But

Mama is shocked, but not too shocked. Baba has proven over and over again that her memory for plates is unmatched. I wonder where in her minds she keeps them all- stacks and stacks of hundreds of pieces of silverwares and clayware pushed in every corner of her mind. Oribe plates stacked on French plates, all cluttered with fancy forks and nice dinner clothes, and

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Baba is quiet often. She speaks succinctly. She does not elaborate. I want to know more about her past- I want to hear her weave stories and draw great pictures in my mind, with color, but she will not. Perhaps she cannot.

Baba is silent like much of her generation. World War II happened, but it was very tragic and very bad. America hurt us very bad. I know Baba lived on the northern island of Japan, as a

is gathered from the threats that Mama used to give me as a child.

I understood, just enough. I also understood that Baba would not say such things. There is Baba, in particular, inhabits this silence. We are the strong ones, her generation seems to say. We are the survivors, the rebuilders, the ones who overcame everything. Why are you so lazy?

and I know that if she does, I might not understand it. Stories can only survive the fighting, desperate minutes in which they are born, if they are properly incubated with repetition and

struggle to extract stories from the calcified faces of a survival generation, and I struggle to keep them alive.

holds the rest of her memories in her body.

There is a silence that cannot speak.

There is a silence that will not speak.ⁱⁱⁱ

And there are objects that do speak. Memory in plates, memory in empty containers, memory in the bend of her body.

II. Losing Objects

ly,

inside I can warm my chin in the halo of steam rising up from my morning cup. I can only breathe when it t in the rain. Mama and I were on a walk when the sky dimmed just so slightly, then the air quivered, then a demure thunderclap and a sudden sheet of rain. The water filled our shoes and we got to skip all the way home.

bowl and spoon in my hands change shape as I move. When I dropped a jug of new milk at breakfast at seven in the morning before a day of third grade, my father was quiet. He told me,

Many objects are strange like this-

g-man-self ran two miles down a straight road every week. He ran from the tree-lined edge of the road straight into the great open field then turned around to look at before heading home.

mother. Around and around and around-

do anything else. It was a rainy day when we rounded the corner of a shady street many times. Here, big trees with thick leaves form a canopy across the street, allowing only muted light through its web. Fat raindrops slide from sky to leaf, to leaf to ground. Wet ground, and concrete, around the corner, right on the wet ground, we find a hawk with its beak to the floor and its wings splayed out to the side. In our and Usually so small in the sky, so big and so dead with its face to the ground.

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“Somewhere here,”^{iv} my Obasan says.

“Eyes can no longer see,”^v but the body remembers. *Memory comes skittering out of the dark.*^{vi} *The word for “lost” also means “dead.”*^{vii} Nakunatta.

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I am such a sucker for good jewelry. I hang dozens of necklaces from push pins that are stuck into a cork board. This entire apparatus is stuck to my wall with suspicious-looking Command strips. I like it when these pendants catch the light and reflect the sunlight in pretty shards of light on my walls.

The first thing I notice in the room is the piano. It is one of those electric keyboards that are often pushed up against the wall in a small room, but this one was made to look like it is made of yellow wood. I sit down on the seat cushion. I gently press its keys, but no sound comes

it, I know I want it. I easily hand over 25 dollars to the elderly Chinese woman behind the stand who nods and smiles and tells me the necklace will look beautiful on me.

I wear the necklace for that whole weekend in Boston. I wear it to the Korean barbecue restaurant where the smell of sizzling beef rises around me and sinks into my clothes. I wear it to a house par

wear it around that same house where the kitchen never seems to stay the same shape or size because I only ever see it dizzily and half-lit at night, or in the stark and clear morning light. I intend for this necklace to be part of my uniform now. I want it to be my identifying ornament. I want it to be part of the outfit I would wear if I were a videogame character. I want it to be my habitus. When I get back to campus, I wear it to my first class. I fiddle with the sliver chain. I

you can have it

giving me net zero. Grandpa + Piano = Zero. My friend showed me how to turn the piano on. I could make it speak, now, and make it change voices. First, I played it like a concert piano, then an organ, then I startled myself with the overwhelming sound of synthetic strings, and the shut the whole thing off instantly. Tentatively, I began again. I found middle C. I noodled my way

to the beat of Tchaikovsky.

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I used

mom always warned me to be extra careful crossing the street the dusk, and extra careful

er if

there is science behind this, but for the time being I know that at dusk people are colored the same gray as the buildings behind them, and somehow it takes longer to detect movements, and for some reason I can never make out the expressions on peopl

on a whiteboard. I squint to see if I am imagining things but squinting only makes it worse. A red-white board.

I got glasses last winter when I was back-to-school shopping in Walmart and discovered I amongst kitchen supplies when I was looking for notebooks and filing cabinets when I wanted a

-aged

men in matching red t-shirts. They smile and nod and say good morning, and I try to do the same, but I can barely see through my morning vision. I lead them to my room, my unmade bed and my clothing draped on my desk chair, and they swiftly grasp the piano from either side and maneuver it out of the apartment. They come back for the chair and the music stand. I tell them thank you, and have a nice
in the space where the piano used to be. I do not know where to sit so I climb back in bed.

III. Saving objects

Mama keeps us safe with tokens of water in the appropriate corners of the house a crystal beside the southeast wall. A fridge stocked with health juice. Ring fingers that dab on the t and only comes out when your fever is so bad you can hardly see straight. No Advil.

Mama keeps plates safe for their passage to the America with thick wads of Japanese newspaper. The plates immigrate for their own safety, because Baba and Mama know that when we pack the plates, Baba tells us where she got each one. The pretty blue plate is a gift from her student, the French teacup a souvenir from a trip long ag

stretch out over the table to steady her at it, and she slowly turns her head to face Jiji, who stands at the stove a few meters away.

creation, apron on, ladle in hand, back straight. He turns to smile at Mama, Baba, and me.

Mama and I get up at the same time to help Jiji. We stand back-to-back in the kitchen as she reaches for the bowls above the sink, and I start pulling out chopsticks and spoons from the drawer in the kitchen island. Sit, sit, we say to Jiji, so he wipes his forehead with a handkerchief and makes his way around the island and over to bother Baba.

Mama and I, well-trained and well-practiced, we assemble the soups. One of us at the pot, the other bussing dishes to the table.

When the table is set, we have at the table, four brown bowls, eight chopsticks, mismatching cups of water and tea, prettier utensils for the elders, colorful woven placements, a

Bibliography

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. 1st Anchor books ed. New York, Anchor Books, 1994.

ⁱ Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. 1st Anchor books ed. New York, Anchor Books, 1994. p. 25.

ⁱⁱ Kogawa, 8.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kogawa, epigraph.

^{iv} Kogawa, 25.

^v Kogawa, 26.

^{vi} Kogawa 27.

^{vii} Kogawa, 26.