

Write a commentary on *one* of the following:

1. (a)

“I give up,” said Jo. “We seem to lose ground every time. We dig her out, then she crawls back in, only deeper.”

Linda loyally and staunchly defended the fortress in which her mother seemed to have taken refuge.

5 Jo defiantly wanted to break through. “Like shock treatment,” she said. “It’s the only way to bring her out.”

Sharon, the middle daughter, gave her mother a loom.

And so, late in life, she took up weaving. She attended a class and took detailed notes, then followed them step by step, bending to the loom with painstaking attention, threading the warp tirelessly, endlessly winding, threading, tying. She made sampler after sampler, using the 10 subdued, muted colours she liked: Five inches of one weave, two inches of another, just as the teacher instructed.

For a year she wove samplers, geometric and repetitious, all in browns and neutral shades, the colors she preferred. She was fascinated by some of the more advanced techniques she began 15 to learn. One could pick up threads from the warp selectively, so there could be a color on the warp that never appeared in the fabric if it were not picked up and woven into the fabric. This phenomenon meant she could show a flash of color, repeated flashes of the color, or never show it at all. The color would still be there, startling the eye when the piece was turned over. The backside would reveal long lengths of a color that simply hadn’t been picked up from the warp and 20 didn’t appear at all in the right side of the fabric.

She took to her loom with new excitement, threading the warp with all the shades of her life: Gray, for the cold, foggy mornings when she had, piece by piece, warmed little clothes by the heater vent as Jo, four, stood shivering in her underwear; brown, the color of the five lunch bags she packed each morning with a sandwich, cut in half and wrapped in waxed paper, napkin, fruit, 25 and potato chips; Dark brown, like the brownies they had baked “to make Daddy come home” from business trips—Sharon and Jo had believed he really could smell them, because he always came home.

Now when the daughters came home they always found something new she had woven. Linda dropped by almost every week to leave her own daughter, Terry, at “Bachan’s house” before 30 dashing off to work. When Linda’s husband came to pick her up, Terry never wanted to leave “Bachi” and would cling to her, crying at the door.

She continued to weave: White, the color of five sets of sheets, which she had washed, hung out, and ironed each week—also the color of the bathroom sink and the lather of shampoo against four small black heads; blue, Cathy’s favorite color.

35 Sharon came by from time to time, usually to do a favour or bring a treat. She would cook Mexican food or borrow a tool or help trim trees in the garden. She was frustrated with the public school system where she had been substitute teaching and was now working part time in a gallery.

40 Sometimes Sharon bought yarn for her mother to weave: Golden brown, the color of the Central Valley in summer. The family had driven through the valley on their way to the mountains almost every summer. They would arrive hot and sweating and hurry into the cool, emerald

green waters of the Merced river. The children's floats flashed yellow on the dark green water. Yellow, too, were the beaten eggs fried flat, rolled, and eaten cold, with dark brown pickled vegetables and white rice balls. She always sat in the shade.

45 Jo was working abroad and usually came home to visit once a year. She and Michael had broken up. During the visits the house would fill with Jo and her friends. They would sit in the back room to talk. Jo visited her mother's weaving class and met her weaving friends.

"So this is the daughter," one of them said. "Your mother's been looking forward to your visit. She never misses a class except when her daughters are home."

50 Soon it was time for Jo to leave again. "Mom's colors," she remarked to Sharon as she fingered the brown muffler her mother had woven for her.

"Put it on," said Sharon.

Jo did, and as she moved toward the light, hidden colors leaped from the brown fabric. It came alive in the sunlight.

55 "You know, there's actually red in here," she marveled, "and even bits of green. You'd never know it unless you looked real close."

"Most people don't," Sharon said.

The two sisters fell silent, sharing a rare moment together before their lives diverged again. The muffler was warm about Jo's neck.

60 At the airport, Jo's mother stood next to Jo's father, leaning slightly toward him as an object of lighter mass naturally tends toward a more substantial one. She was crying.

When Jo was gone she returned to the house, and her loom. And amidst the comings and goings of the lives around her, she sat, a woman bent over a loom, weaving the diverse threads of life into one miraculous, mystical fabric with timeless care.

R L Sasaki, *The Loom* (1989)