

island. On those indigo evenings beneath our watery, Pacific skies, young couples share oyster pancakes and skewers of stuffed squid, families slurp bowls of oh-ah mee-sua and boxes of たこ焼き takoyaki, and Vietnamese migrants seek out steaming bowls of phở. Maybe, I think, all of the people stuffed into night markets in Taiwan are ravaged for dishes from continents away, all of us in a pursuit of a taste that language cannot describe, that only the tongue can remember.



Up on the mountain, I am sipping on yet another cup of 波霸奶茶 as I watch my grandmother's fingers tap in mid-air, rhythmic, as if she is making a string puppet dance. "*Kili-kala, kili-kala*," she says. "That's the sound our ceramic tiles makes on the roof when a typhoon plows through." My father translates for me, equal-part Mandarin and English.

We are, once again, gathered around her dining table, and I have just asked her about the loofah that she stir-fries on high heat with ginger roots and fresh clams. Since I've found enough Mandarin words to ask her about the dishes on her table, the stories have kept on coming. My grandmother is telling me about their brick-and-mortar farmhouse on Xinyi Road, where the edges of Taipei once shimmered in an endless field of 稻 dao 田 tian — rice paddies pregnant with golden stalks in the shape of 禾, organized into patches that look like 田, rolling for kilometers across the basin's rivers and streams.

*Crack.* My grandfather snaps the whiskered head off of a shrimp, curled like an orange comma. He recalls, "After the typhoon, we had to pick up the tiles one by one across the 稻田! It was hard work!"

My uncle shouts, "Oh, please, Mom did all the work! You were napping at the police station!"

I laugh, along with my aunt, my father. Excited, our dog barks.

"*Ah-ma*," I ask, gesturing to a plate, "What fish is this?"

My grandmother touches the pan-fried fish with her fingers, rubbing it like a block of dough. "It's a freshwater fish from northern Taiwan." She picks