

it up and smells it, “Freshly caught, not farmed.” As she tells me about the fish’s migratory patterns in our island’s rivers, she dissolves into her mother tongue and I do not understand. My father freezes, mouth-open, unable to translate words we do not have in English.

But, perhaps, that doesn’t matter. What matters is this: even now, my grandmother beams, comes brilliantly alive, when she talks about food. It is as if she is able to once again pull sweet potato leaves and water spinach from the soil of her island. As if she can wander the lane of hawking vendors, her fingers kneading garlic bulbs and a-choys. As if she is once more the master in her kitchen in that dead-end alleyway, the fan whirring and woks sizzling louder than my grandfather’s voice, her octopus arms cooking up a dozen dishes at a time, to feed whole families of daughters and sons and in-laws and grandchildren and dogs.

That night, in the hours before my red-eye flight, I step off the community bus at a place where the city meets the mountain, and this modern metropolis of gastronomic affairs seems a bit quieter, a little slower. It is plum rain season again. The afternoon shower has washed the basin’s dust and exhaust out of the air, and the asphalt roads glow with red brake lights and yellow discs of street lamps. I amble through the back alleyways of my childhood—past where the bubble tea shop with wicker chairs and a dancing uncle once stood, past the hairdresser who used to dye my grandmother’s hair out of her second-floor living room. I pause, for a while, at the dead-end road where a fourth-floor walk-up once smelled of garlic and ginger and chicken broth and the smacking lips of dozens of laughing relatives. But I no longer remember which of the buildings belonged to my family. I no longer remember how to find the place where my grandmother stepped out of her kitchen to shout at us all, “*Jia bian lo!*”

吃 chi 飯 fan 了 le!

Time to eat!

I am not sure how this story of our tongues of broken languages and faintly remembered tastes will end: After all, my father still chases after