

She says now that she will stock the pantry with a few bottles of mirin before she leaves. Just as quickly, the redness in our faces dissipates, like steam from a boiling pot as soon as you lift the lid. We are both getting better at being patient, finding solutions.

My mother, after all, is known in our family as a culinary artist, and she has been in Taiwan with me for over half a year, serving up broiled squid dribbled with notes of lemon and truffle pasta tossed with shrimp plucked fresh from the sea. My stomach growls at the thought of her leaving me.



But there was a whole other time before this, before our languages diverged, before our tongues forked, like a river plunging out of the mountains of Taiwan and stretching like fingers into a turbulent ocean. I was raised in a family with a reverence for fresh food and flavorful eating. When I was a child, my grandmother's fourth-floor walk-up in a dead-end alleyway sat at the center of my small universe. She lived in the kind of old Taipei neighborhood where you could hear the clash of pans through open windows and smell the numbing tang of sesame oil and rice wine and ginger roots stewing in someone else's kitchen. On my grandmother's wicker couch, my aunt's shih tzu raised his head, his black nose wet and twitching. I, too, felt the buds in the back of my tongue come alive, tingling with the zest of sesame oil chicken soup.

“我 wu 餓 e 了 le!” I hopped off of the couch and announced to my older brother: I'm hungry!

He slammed his detective manga shut and sighed. “Again?”

Imagine this: a small Taiwanese girl with doll-like cheeks and a bowl hair-cut racing through narrow lanes, flanked on both sides by potted plants and parked mopeds. My brother trailed, ambling, his manga still in hand, in the shadows of charmless concrete blocks and sputtering air-conditioning vents. My arms and legs were a juicy feast for Taipei's summertime mosquitos—here, everyone was always out for a bite—and I looked like a body with four