

popsicle sticks spotted with red adzuki beans.

“波 bo 霸 ba 奶 nai 茶 chai!” I ran shouting into the teashop with wicker stools and braised pork rice. This was in the early nineties, and bubble tea had just been invented in a city south of us. 波霸奶茶 — coined for the big breasts of Hong Kong cinema sex symbol, Amy Yip — didn’t have an English name yet.

My grandmother’s coins clinked on the counter. The neighborhood uncle in a white apron grinned, “Coming right up, beautiful young lady.”

I stood on my tiptoes, lifted my head above the counter, a front row seat to a private performance: the uncle ladled milk tea and ice cubes into a cocktail shaker. His powerful arms held it shut and swung it wildly back and forth, his entire body jiggling. A film of condensation crawled across the stainless steel like tendrils of fog. He opened the lid with a *pop*. I licked my lips as he poured it into a frosted glass, the froth tumbling out with the aroma of Taiwan’s high mountain tea and fresh milk.

Upstairs in my grandmother’s fourth-floor kitchen, spring onions and ginger sizzled, garlic popped in oil like firecrackers. The tongues of brilliant flames licked the belly of sooted woks. I nursed on the straw of my 波霸奶茶 in the living room, listening to the adults’ polite conversations — just biding time until my grandmother stepped out of the kitchen to yell, “*Jia ban lo!*” Time to eat!

In those days, our dinners were gaggles of aunts and uncles, all of us children, a few too many dogs. My grandmother’s dishes spun on a circular table top with the festivity of drunken chicken, steamed fish with red chili and spring onion, cold cuts of bamboo shoots frosted with mayonnaise, and glassy mee-fun stir-fried with mushrooms and scallions. A clay pot of chicken soup, stewed since the early morning, sat in the middle. It held the promise of a long night, a raucous, mouth-watering affair of drumming chopsticks and smacking lips.

My grandfather held court in the airy, coarse texture of his Minnan dialect. In the dining room, situated at the center of the apartment, his