

## A PIECE OF MY WORLD: GRANDMOTHER'S GARDEN

Hesitant March is slow to thaw, but even in a different country,  
Grandmother recognizes the telltale signs of winter's retreat.  
To her, my English sounds like the first crunch of a shovel hitting dirt,  
of soil and gravel giving way to an insistent demand for growth,  
utterly foreign to a tongue accustomed to bell tones.  
Yet with a spade in hand, she promises life to a dead patch of grass,

and I watch her build a nursery for a legion of silent seeds,  
speaking to them in her dialect of love.  
My mother buys a *xiangchun*<sup>(1)</sup> sapling, no taller than my knee.  
These leaves taste like home, Grandmother says,  
but the home she describes is one I have never known.

We spend springtime working stubborn soil,  
carefully fencing in row after row of empty ground.  
I grow impatient with Grandmother's relentless toil,  
but instead, she laughs and continues watering,  
eyes gently wrinkling into waxing crescents.  
When the first green shoots finally peek out, shy and delicate,  
Look, she tells me. That is the meeting of you and I.  
She coaxes homeland plants out of American soil:  
grows *bai luo bo*<sup>(2)</sup> and *ku gua*<sup>(3)</sup> in the gaps between my words,  
teaches me to harvest scallions so that they will yield and yield again,  
teaches me how to listen to the garden.

Through summer, our garden blooms green with voices:  
the tomato stalks bend over, laden with fruit, to make confessions,  
the *jiu cai*<sup>(4)</sup> gossip amongst themselves with the billows of the wind,  
even the weeds protest weakly when we move them elsewhere.  
But Grandmother and I gain a language in common:  
the snap of sweet cucumbers, freshly picked,  
become a satisfactory replacement for English.  
I carry full baskets of lumpy *dong gua*<sup>(5)</sup>, of misshapen squash,  
of bundled green beans, of golden ginger roots, of stout garlic heads,  
my mother turns them into aromatic Chinese dishes.  
*Tastes like home*, Grandmother says again, while we eat  
and I realize that the home she speaks of is one I know:  
it is the one she has sown into the soil of our garden.

Translations:

1. Chinese Mahogany, whose sapling leaves are commonly eaten in certain Chinese cuisines.
2. White radish
3. Bitter melon
4. Chinese chives
5. Winter melon/Ash gourd