

Behind a house there is a pond. We walk out of the house, down a grassy slope; either it's littered with fritillaria or we think about fritillaria past on the way to the pond. Just above the surface of the water is a transparent bridge, and from grass we step above mud and low water, clinging weeds, across deep water and clean reflections until we reach an island. It is a small island and a small pond. We take 9 steps from the bridge through thick grass to the center of the island and instead of a dead branch we open a hatch.

From the hatch are wooden stairs that descend into a dark interior: the Pond Bakery. Our irises expand that we might see the likewise expanding stairs, which become an amphitheater of irregular landings which are sometimes stairs, sometimes tables, sometimes benches, sometimes drawers full of silverware and silver trays and glasses and teacups, and only once a landing is a large console hiding the kitchen: a sink, a small refrigerator, a modest oven, an electronic tea brewing machine, a multilevel bamboo steamer, and a mysterious wide tap. Various stairs bear tall candles, and so there are no bulbs inside the bakery.

The amphitheater faces crystal glass exposing the murky world of the pond. Illuminated globes are set irregularly into the depths, providing ambient light for the bakery, supporting the candles. Occasionally a little gray fish swims into the yellow light, but most often the green view is still or shifting slowly.

A few people sit on one landing or another, side by side or at a slight angle. Facing each other but also facing the huge crescent of water. Before them is a silver tray with two cups of murky tea, two bowls of murky soup and two "sun in the mouth" buns.

The tea is green but a different green on different days, chosen based on the weather report and amount of direct light hitting the pond.

The soup is drawn from that wide tap directly from the pond. Either the life forms and dirt particles in the pond have been analyzed by a special computer system and each one replaced robotically in exact proportion by a suitable ingredient, or the pond is magically comprised of delicious soup pulled directly off the tap.

The buns are steamed bao with a sweet egg yolk center, topped with a small red dot.

Each day a "house pastry" is also prepared and paired with a drink selection, usually a chosen tea but sometimes coffee, juice or even cold water. These are strictly forbidden to repeat.

*"Please, stay as long as you'd like and let us know if we can provide you with anything further."*