

1.

On my counter are two bowls of rice and water. One bowl has black rice and one bowl has white rice, both bowls destined for black rice congee that may have nothing to do with the congee we might be served at Zebra even though we never will be served it and its nature will always be to us that which is unknown.

The white rice is later mixed with black sesame seeds to make a grey congee.

The black rice is cooked with coconut milk to make purple congee since black rice is actually purple. For now we are just sitting in water.

2.

The gray bowl was elegant. Rice cooked in water has clarity and then the sesame added aromatic fat. After a few spoons the nutty richness would mellow like being in a flower shop after unbelievable awareness of flowers. In a few minutes I'm less aware of being in a flower shop. I took a few steps back, ate something else, so I could remain on the threshold of the flower shop.

The purple bowl was more like rice pudding. It was delicious. Rich and soft. But pudding is inelegant.

3.

Let's bake bricks of sponge cake and make a full scale replica of Spring House. Two bowls of congee and a small vase of yellow tea roses replace the table garden. The congee is for breakfast. Each brick has its little paper floor and we eat from the ceiling down until we are tired of cake and tea and then we get back to work.

The bricks are all baked by Henry in the early morning before we eat congee, and so they are warm and fragrant as we arrive. The house is inside a thin bubble of water that only ghosts can pierce, and somehow the bubble preserves the warmth and moisture of the bricks. Henry, though, has to sit and focus his mind to keep the bubble intact, and even with his superior powers of meditation our guilt in burdening him (if not our full stomachs) means we only stay for a few hours.

4.

Two cones of sponge cake sit on the table, one gratuitously adorned with shaved almonds, if you can believe it. The cakes look similar at a glance, if you were to remove those almonds, but at a cellular level differences emerge which combine to mean a grave difference in merit. At the table birthday celebration in grimy chinatown bakery temporarily suspended with a dispute as to whether there is a difference in merit. What are you talking about, difference in the tooth and egginess, moisture and crumb? They are they same. Look, you cannot tell them apart. Close your eyes.

Two pieces of cake in two outstretched palms.

Undeniable difference. Even if the test results are based on confidence because the hands forgot which cake they hold. Eat more cake.