

a recipe for steaming almost-dragon by Diane Sun

every few centuries, when the carp gathered at the base of the 龙门 lóngmén in thunderclouds, riled with legend and youth, we waded into the brinks of the waterfall and waited. that night we would feast upon 清蒸龙 qīngzhēng lóng.

check for freshness

its scales should be taut – a bowstring still drawn long after the arrow has departed. its eyes should be clear – a divine glimmer of a future once promised. its gills should be stark red – the intrusion of fate into viscera.

dress it to your liking

with a blade, furrow its body in angles, such that its exterior still lays neatly. only you should be aware of the aromatics buried in its torso, of the ginger rooted in its nervous system, of the scallions that replaced arteries.

steam for 7 minutes

in death, we replicate glory with an opiate haze. here we unwind the dreams tucked in little carp skulls: the lacy hemlines of cascades, the rumble of cast-iron gates opening, the pale heat of the heavens.

this is flesh cleaved from the mountainside, skin sheened in gold, and bones that prickle at the roof of the sky, still tasting faintly of thunder.

龙门 lóngmén - the dragon gate, in chinese mythology, carps who leap over a waterfall through the dragon gate become dragons

清蒸龙 qīngzhēng lóng - steamed dragon