

MULTILINGUAL

On job applications I'm unilingual, fluent
only in my second language. Forgive me,

I never learned how to say *I've lost*
my mother tongue in French class,

remember only how to ask for permission
to *aller aux toilettes*. I've forgotten

how to say *I grew up speaking Cantonese*
in Cantonese. To the Aunties

I say *sik teng mm sik gong*—*I understand*
but I can't speak, a common refrain

amongst second-generation immigrants,
a nonsensical kind of immigrant

who's never moved countries, who's never seen
the motherland, who struggles to speak

to her own mother. Instead, I cook
what I remember: mapo tofu, tong yuen,

ginger scallion fish. My mother listens
for the whisper of her child's hunger

after a long journey, prepares ramen
at midnight, sits in silence until I return

the empty bowl. I read the laboured way she moves
and understand the weight of the years

and the heavy resilience in carrying on. I wonder
whether we'll be able to speak to each other

when we come back as hungry ghosts,
whether we'll have a communal place to haunt.