

Lola Elina Maria's Savory-Sweet Cookbook of Poetry

*delicious, nutritious, and heartwarming poems
all made with love*

Poetry Written for Children

English Division

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pandesal, Tsokolate, and Homemade Jam	3
“Home-Style” Tapa	5
Ginataang Hipon at Kangkong	6
Lumpiang Sariwa	7
Adobong Manok	8
Crispy-Sweet Turon with Secret Sauce	9
Summer Day Banana Shake	10
Spaghetting Pinoy	11
Lugaw	12
Cooking with Love	13

Pandesal, Tsokolate, and Homemade Jam

Like most days, I welcomed
the dawn fire in the ovens
tended every hour at Dimas-Alang.
Flame and crackle and all,
I collected our favorite gems:
round *pan de coco* buns,
hopia baboy (curious dice),
and *kalihim*, the dough folded
over its sugar-red secrets –
but above all, the humble
bread of salt.

But my idea grew ripe
as the mangoes did,
a week plucked from the farm,
and as our lemon tree's
hard green stone
softened and soured.

How could I make all those colors
squeak and bubble?

I cubed the gold flesh
and mashed it, golder yet,
into a pulp, and added only
enough water and sugar
to tide it all over low heat
and whistle-simmer away
until thick as wild honey
with one long sliver of *dayap* peel.

Then, when it cooled,
I mixed into it tiny ribbons of
the freshly grated rind.

It all sings through an otherwise
rather rich and sweet breakfast
of soft bread and butter,
dunked into the steaming bath
of ground *tablea* dissolved
into hot milk sugar –

my homemade jam,
a whole week's worth,
hitting all the right notes!

“Home-Style” Tapa

the secret to “home-style” is
get the right cut! but
temper the toughness of
the hardworking cow
with a no-nonsense marinade
of soy sauce, minced garlic,
salt, pepper, and sugar.

the secret to “home-style” is
patience, a virtue,
a steeping time minimum
of a full twelve hours.

the secret to “home-style” is
sautéing the sirloin strips
with no sleight of hand
but a quick sprinkling
of toasted garlic chips.

the secret to “home-style” is
even more garlic infusing
the hot oil and coating
firm rice grains
with a sheen,
and a texture!

the secret to “home-style” is
how do Dad, Mom,
Ate, and Kuya all like it?
a kick of spicy vinegar?
a dash of crushed pepper?
how do *I* like it?
egg with yolk runny
as early morning light?
tomato wilting with heat
like a summer flower?

– oh, the secret is many things,
but what few can copy
is my singular magic touch!

Ginataang Hipon at Kangkong

gotcha! – there, feisty you, shrimp
in my pan come to life again in a sea of
fine spice and salinity brittle bite of ginger knob
and tiny buttons of crushed chili
peppering path of thick swamp cabbage forest
all steeped in suncast wave upon wave
of frothy white white water coconut.

Lumpiang Sariwa

Rabbit food, you say?
You don't see 'healthy'
and 'mouthwatering'
and 'tasty' all the same way?

— here, our daily veggies and more,
large buds chopped and mixed
and wrapped as if in a bouquet:

the fragrant onions and garlic and
reduced stew of lean pork and shrimp and
cubes of softened firm *kamote* and tofu
and matchsticks of carrots, cabbage, and beans
and a spritz of fish sauce when cooled,

and the savory-sweet sauce
of brown sugar and
slurry and salt,
and the delicate pan-cooked blanket
of beaten egg and milk and flour

with one last adornment
of lettuce leaf and
crunchy crushed peanuts.

The farthest from rabbit food,
I dare say!
No finer morsel than this,
my own fresh take!

Adobong Manok

On the art of the perfect *adobo*,
my father knew best!
Father's strong hands cleaved
the chicken bones, skin, and neck
and carefully soaked them in
a plate-topped bowl in
their simple soy garlic brine
and after three hours lifted
the lid and timed a kiss
for his daughters before
teaching them how to brown
the meat on all sides before
pouring in the sharp juices
and simmering it all with
dried bay leaf and peppercorn
and lastly layering with vinegar
and a quick sprinkle of salt and sugar
and a throwing of our worries
out the door. My father
taught best! Life's to be
no more complicated than
well-timed time well-spent
right where you need it to be
(in the pot!), and hearty servings
of piping hot rice shared
by everyone.

Crispy-Sweet Turon with Secret Sauce

One bunch of bananas
all peeled in a pile;
one cup of ripe jackfruit,
thinly sliced alongside.

Roll the strips in a wrapper
with a brown sugar coat.
Seal the ends with cold water,
leave in oil to float

until surfaced from there
toasted, heavenly gold,
with a caramel-sesame
crunch to behold.

But my treat for the adults
is a top-secret sauce —
well, rather, from the pages
of a magazine long-lost.

Dissolve instant coffee
into a hot-water paste
and beat, with condensed milk,
to form a hardy brown glaze.

Eat the rolls as they are
with unhampered delight,
or dip in the sauce to be
awake the whole night!

Summer Day Banana Shake

Come now, don't frown,
let's all be of good cheer!
The heat scorches,
but no sluggishness
prevails with us here.

A quick secret to bring back
any lost energies:
blitz up some crushed ice,
a sliced-up ripe banana,
and as many scoops as you like
of your very favorite ice cream.

Add a splash of fresh milk
and chocolate syrup
for good measure.
Top with puffs
of whipped cream
and red cherry
for a treasure!

Best savored indoors,
but if it cannot be helped
take this cold treat outdoors—
share it all with your friends!

Spaghetting Pinoy

The way we did it back then was
to welcome, all at once,
sweet, savory, and uncanny.
Why, just ask your 'Nay
what she wished for
at most birthdays,
beyond far-fetched whims
of treehouses and ponies:
her own fairytale carousel
of cabbage or pineapple
speared with hotdogs and mallows.

And o, sweet spaghetti,
the *piece de resistance*!
The signature chewy cakes
of noodles (for long and full lives)
stirred in sweet-blend tomato sauce
with all the more of those red hotdogs.
At your 'Nay's parties, we served it
in both *bilao*s and huge plastic tubs.
How we smiled back then
at the happy returns yet to come.

Lugaw

My own mother's recipe
for cough, cold, fever,
loneliness, melancholy:
a full stomach
and a calmed soul
from a simple chicken broth
that stews white rice
until it's liquid-soft
and seasoned sparingly
with boiled ginger and salt,
but freely with fresh
calamansi juice
and a garlic-chip crown.
The porridge was enough
to stave off the rainiest days,
loudest storms,
cruellest hours
of ache and illness,
and you can cross my heart
in a hundred directions
to hold true that I will
pass the warmth on.

Cooking with Love

When I'm gone – that you may
mourn less than paint
brand new smiles from
bellies nourished,
bellies full.

Worry not that
I grew old
and my teeth fell
and my hands faltered
where they would have
made space on the table.

Rather, remember
I left more than I took:
my favorite steel pots still
hanging from their hooks,
my spoons and my trays,
my metal sheets
and square pans –
and dozens of cards
in the wooden recipe box –

and that what's best left behind
are the resolute measures
and steadfast procedures
and lingering flavors
that I've taught
with this principle:
seasoning with care,
and cooking with love.