

A THANKSGIVING STORY

THE LITTLE COOK



By Aunt Julia

“I shall ask my mother to prepare a thanksgiving dinner like what we read about.” Lety announced as she and her friends stepped out of the school building.

“With turkey and pumpkin pie?” asked Nora.

“Yes, stuffed turkey,” Lety answered.

“We can have chickens only,” put in Nora.

Idad listened to her classmates’ prattle, but said nothing. She knew she could not even hope to have beef stew on Thanksgiving Day.

“If Mother would buy some vegetables and pork, I could prepare the dishes I tried at the school kitchen,” Idad thought. She even feared to hope for anything better than herring, milkfish, and clams.

Meal after meal she patiently made-believe that she relished boiled *halaan* seasoned with a little ginger and salt, or milkfish *sinigang* seasoned with too much tamarind.

Idad’s father was a fisherman. He sometimes caught big shrimps and big fishes, but these were sold by her mother. Idad’s mother was frugal. She believed that her only duty as a mother was to make money and hoard it.

Thanksgiving Day dawned bright and clear. Idad’s father left earlier than usual. There would be a great demand for big fish. Idad’s mother awakened her before leaving.

“We shall come home late,” she told Idad. “Take care of your younger brothers and sisters. Send Andoy out for some *halaan*. There’s a milkfish in the *banggera*.” She threw a twenty-centavo piece on the mat where Idad was lying and hurried to the beach.

Idad got up and squatted on the mat. Thanksgiving Day! She thought of the stuffed turkey Lety would feast on and the chicken stew that Nora would have.

“We, too, could afford chicken stew and omelet and salad,” she thought. “If Mother were only willing to spend half of Father’s earnings, we would have a special dinner, too!”

After breakfast, Idad took her twenty-centavo piece to the market. With her younger brothers and sisters she worked on the family’s thanksgiving dinner. By twelve o’clock the lunch was ready.

“Father, Mother, just see what we have for lunch!” The younger children greeted their parents.

“I pared the potatoes,” a little girl announced with pride.

“I flaked the fish,” another shouted.

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"And I removed the clams from the shells," a little boy added.

Father and Mother could not believe their eyes. The bare table was richly laid with dishes they had never had before. A bamboo vase holding gay gumamelas was at the center.

"Where did you get all these?" Mother asked with a little resentment.

"Please be seated and I shall tell you all about it." And Idad's eyes sparkled with pride.

"The soup is chopped *halaan* with diced squash and finely cut pechay. I added a little cream and thickened the broth with mashed squash."

"I chopped the *halaan*," a boy interrupted.

"Our fish dish is called milkfish 'en blanco'," Idad continued. "It is the *baños* that Mother left. I just boiled it in water with a little salt, vinegar, and lemon juice. The broth is thickened into a sauce with powdered *biscocho*."

"How attractive it looks now," the father put in. "A garnishing of potato, tomato and *kinchay* can work wonders. Why, it is good enough for a big party!"

"Our fish balls are made out of our left-over *tunsoy*," continued Idad.

"It was I who flaked the fish," a little girl piped.

"Yes, Mother," Idad seconded. "We mixed the flaked fish with mashed potato and a little butter. We then cooked it in a little lard until brown."

"Where did you get the money for all the ingredients?" the mother asked.

"From the twenty-centavo piece you gave me."

"Well, well, Sion," Father said, "you have to admit that Idad is a better cook than you."

"I learned all that at school. Our teacher taught us to make use of left-over food and how to prepare attractive and palatable dishes from cheap fish."

"I have to confess it is the best I have tasted in my life." Idad's father pronounced with finality.