



# RISING FROM ASHES

BY KATELYN BELYUS



CHEF CARMEN GONZALEZ IS A SENSATION. A restaurant veteran of fourteen years, she relies on her Puerto Rican heritage to shape the peppery tastes, citrusy sights and bombastic sounds that inhabit her meals like family members around the dinner table. At Miami's Carmen the Restaurant, the family was warm, passionate and unguarded, and always critically acclaimed.

Gonzalez welcomed the praise, but it also struck a nerve. "I realized I had a huge responsibility not only to my restaurant, but to my clients. People would come expecting something. Every time we got a good review, it was a little more pressure."

This pressure worked to motivate Gonzalez, and even setbacks she takes in stride. In August 2006, Carmen the Restaurant was ruined by water damage during a fire upstairs, and she was forced to close. Most people would have been discouraged.

Thankfully, Carmen Gonzalez isn't most people.

Instead, she moved to New York, where she opened Lucy of Gramercy within three months of her arrival. There she cooked every day, moving from *adobos* and marinades to spices with the confidence of a woman as comfortable with her ingredients as she is with family.

For Gonzalez, food has always been a way of life. As a child growing

up in Puerto Rico, she accompanied her mother on Saturday mornings to the Crashboat, a well-known beach. A local woman would wait for her fisherman husband to haul in his fresh catch of snappers and groupers. "She would clean the fish right there. She'd take the fish, cut it, and she had a big cast iron pot in the sand, over wood. She'd throw the fish into the pot and fry it right there, then serve it with a few *tostones* (fried plantains) on a purple plate," Gonzalez says.

"When I dream of eating—if I had the chance to eat anything tonight—that would be it."

Lucy of Gramercy retained the familial Puerto Rican charm that has made Gonzalez a star. "My food is American cuisine with a Puerto Rican flair. That means that all the influence is from Puerto Rico and not anywhere else." It also means that she serves Puerto Rican classics such as *sofritos* (spicy, fragrant sauces), *gandules* (pigeon peas) and pork.

Though the menu at Lucy didn't offer the purple-plate-option, Gonzalez is nevertheless quite fond of her cooking. "I love all the stuff on my menu, because they are my creations. I can tell you that the most popular tends to be the lobster and avocado terrine. The shrimp *pio-nono* is one of my favorites, and I love the pork chop, the snapper and the short ribs." These are her favorite foods, and the foods she plans to serve her guests at the soon-to-open Bar Picadera, a new concept restaurant that will introduce her favorite Puerto Rican street foods to a wider audience.

It all sounds like some very tall orders for a chef standing at a height of just five feet, but tall orders are what Gonzalez has built her career on. In fact, Gonzalez is recognized as a giant not only within the restaurant industry, but also the philanthropic community. It began as an extension of cooking: "I think that chefs are very giving people. It's one of the reasons that we're chefs—what we're doing is giving, literally, certain pleasure to certain people every day. I'm extremely appreciative for the things that I have and the talent I've been given. I'd feel selfish if I didn't try to help others at least a little bit."

Chef Carmen Cooks for the Cure is an organization that raises money for financially disadvantaged women with cancer. Feeding the Mind goes one step further, teaching women "how to fish." "FTM was created specifically as a culinary program in which disadvantaged women could participate and hopefully get out of the black cycle of life."

But Chef Gonzalez tries not to focus on the negative. She is humble and pleasant, but confident, promising that at Bar Picadera, "You will have a great experience and you will learn why Puerto Rican food is known as the best in the Caribbean!"



## A few of Chef Carmen's favorites...

### PAN-SEARED SNAPPER FILLET WITH CLAMS AND CHORIZO STEW

SERVES 4

- 8 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup thinly sliced leeks
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 24 small clams
- 12 1½-inch slices Spanish chorizo
- 8 fingerling potatoes, steamed
- 1 tomato, diced
- 3 cups white wine
- 4 tablespoons cilantro leaves
- 3 cups fish stock
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 5-ounce fillets red snapper
- 8 chives, chopped, for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven with a lid, heat half of olive oil over medium heat. Add leeks, garlic, clams and chorizo and cook for 2 minutes.
3. Add potatoes and tomatoes and deglaze pan with white wine.
4. Add cilantro leaves and fish stock. Cover, reduce heat, and cook until clams open, about 4 to 8 minutes. Stir in butter.

5. Heat remaining olive oil in an oven-safe skillet over medium-high heat. Add snapper and cook, skin-side down, for 2 minutes. Turn fish and transfer to oven. Bake 3 to 4 minutes, until fish flakes under light pressure.
6. To serve, arrange 6 clams around side of a wide, shallow bowl. Mound potatoes and chorizo in center. Place fish on potatoes, skin side up, and sauce with remaining stew mixture. Garnish with chives and serve.

### BRAISED BARBECUE SHORT RIBS WITH CREAMY FUNCHÉ

SERVES 4

*Funché is a smooth and creamy corn pudding. Serve ribs with Chayote Slaw (recipe follows).*

For barbecue sauce

- ¼ large onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- ½ cup Bacardi dark rum
- 1 cup ketchup
- 2½ tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 4 tablespoons brown sugar, packed
- 6 tablespoons molasses
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper



- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste

For marinade

- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary
- 1/4 cup minced garlic

For ribs

- 2 pounds boneless beef short ribs
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups chopped onion
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 3 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1 cup red wine
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 2 bay leaves

For creamy funché

- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/2 cup fine cornmeal
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

1. Make barbecue sauce. In a small saucepan over medium-high heat, combine onion, garlic and rum. Cook onion and garlic for 5 minutes or until onions are translucent. Add remaining ingredients and bring mixture to a boil. Lower heat to medium and simmer, stirring constantly, for 15 to 20 minutes.
2. Force sauce through a fine-mesh sieve and cool.
3. Combine all marinade ingredients and whisk thoroughly. Pour 1/2 cup marinade over meat and refrigerate for 6 hours, or overnight.
4. Heat oil in a large, heavy skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add ribs and brown well on all sides. Remove ribs with a slotted spoon and transfer to a plate.
5. Add onions, carrots and garlic to skillet and cook, stirring, for 10 minutes or until they begin to color. Add red wine and cook until reduced by half.
6. Add chicken stock and bay leaves and bring to a boil. Add ribs and cook at medium-low heat for 1 1/2 to 2 hours.
7. While ribs cook, prepare funché. Bring heavy cream and butter to a boil in a large, heavy saucepan. Gradually whisk in corn-

meal. Reduce heat to medium-low and stir constantly until thickened. Keep warm until ready to serve.

8. Remove ribs, reserving cooking liquid, and cover both to keep warm. At this point ribs and cooking liquid may be refrigerated for up to 2 days. To reheat, bring reserved liquid to a boil and add ribs. Lower heat to medium-low and cook for 10 minutes or until warmed through.

9. Brush barbecue sauce on ribs and serve with funché and Chayote Slaw, if desired.

## CHAYOTE SLAW

SERVES 4

*The chayote is a pale green, squash-like fruit with a white interior. The bland, crisp flesh can be used both raw and cooked.*

- 1 chayote, pitted and sliced into thin strips
- 1/4 medium red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/4 red pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup cilantro leaves
- 1/4 cup chives, cut into 1-inch pieces
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

1. In a mixing bowl, combine chayote with red onion and red pepper.
2. In a separate bowl, whisk together lime juice with olive oil, cilantro and chives. Add to chayote slaw, mixing well, and season with salt and pepper.

## ROASTED DUCK TOSSED WITH CARAMELIZED ONIONS, CILANTRO, AND PASSION FRUIT VINAIGRETTE

SERVES 4

*Note that the duck needs to marinate in adobo sauce for two days. The onions can be made up to a day in advance; reheat before tossing with duck. Serve duck with corn pancakes (recipe follows).*

For adobo marinade

- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup minced garlic

- 1/4 bunch cilantro
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

For pulled duck

- 1/2 duck, giblets and neck removed, rinsed and patted dry
- 1/2 medium onion
- 1/2 bunch cilantro
- 1/2 medium carrot
- 2 bay leaves

For passion fruit vinaigrette

- 6 tablespoons passion fruit juice concentrate, thawed
- 6 tablespoons minced shallots
- 8 teaspoons sherry vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 6 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 tablespoon cilantro leaves
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

For caramelized sweet onions

- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large Vidalia or other sweet onion, thinly sliced
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon white vinegar

1. Make adobo. Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl.
2. Place prepared duck in a medium bowl. Pour marinade over duck, cover bowl and refrigerate for 2 days.
3. Preheat oven to 250°F.
4. Pull out large pieces of fat from cavity of duck and stuff with onion, cilantro, carrot and bay leaves.
5. Place duck breast-side down in a roasting pan and place in center of oven. Roast for 45 minutes, then remove pan from oven and drain out fat. Turn duck breast-side up and roast another 45 minutes.
6. While duck roasts, prepare vinaigrette and onions. For vinaigrette: In a small mixing bowl, blend passion fruit juice, shallots, sherry vinegar and Dijon mustard; gradually whisk in oil. Set aside.
7. Toss cilantro leaves with salt and pepper. Set aside.
8. For onions: In large skillet heat oil over



medium-high heat. Add onions, salt and pepper; cook, stirring frequently, about 8 minutes or until onions begin to brown. Add vinegar. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until vinegar reduces, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes. Set aside.

9. Remove duck from oven, transfer to a baking sheet and let rest until cool enough to handle.

10. Remove and discard skin. Pull meat from bone, keeping meat covered so it will stay moist.

11. In a mixing bowl, toss shredded duck with caramelized onions, vinaigrette and cilantro leaves. Serve with Roasted Corn and Scallion Pancakes.

## ROASTED CORN AND SCALLION PANCAKES

SERVES 4

- 3 ears corn, shucked
- 2 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil  
Salt  
Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced diagonally
- 1/2 bunch cilantro, chopped
- 1 1/2 to 2 cups flour
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
Extra virgin olive oil, for frying

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Brush corn with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
3. Heat a charcoal or gas grill to medium-high heat. Grill corn for 3 minutes on each side or until golden brown in color. Remove from grill and set aside until cool enough to handle.
4. Slice corn off cob into a mixing bowl. Add scallions, cilantro, flour and egg and mix thoroughly.
5. Add heavy cream, milk and half of water. Mix until all ingredients are incorporated. Add vegetable oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add more flour if mixture is too wet.
6. Heat a cast-iron pan over medium-high heat. Pour in a small amount of olive oil to



lightly coat bottom. Drop pancake mixture 1 tablespoon at a time into pan. Cook each pancake until golden brown on both sides.

7. Transfer pancakes to a baking sheet and place in oven for 2 minutes or until thoroughly heated through. If serving with duck, serve 3 pancakes per person.

## CALABAZA FLAN

SERVES 4

- 1 cup Bacardi Gold rum
- 1 vanilla bean, split in half
- 1 8-ounce calabaza squash
- 1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 12-ounce can evaporated milk
- 8 eggs
- 3 to 5 tablespoons sugar (depending on sweetness of calabaza)

For caramel

- 1 cup sugar

For garnish

- 8 cinnamon sticks, optional

1. Slice open vanilla bean and scrape out seeds with back of a paring knife. Place rum

and vanilla bean and seeds in a small saucepan. Cook on medium-high heat until liquid reduces to 1 teaspoon. Set aside.

2. Preheat oven to 450°F.

3. Cut calabaza into quarters, remove seeds and place on a baking sheet. Roast for 20 minutes or until soft.

4. Remove calabaza from oven. When cool enough to handle, peel and place in food processor along with vanilla-infused rum and remaining ingredients. Purée mixture at medium speed until creamy. Check for sweetness, adding more sugar if necessary.

5. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F.

6. Place sugar in a small skillet over medium-high heat and stir while it liquefies. Continue stirring until sugar boils and turns a brown color.

7. Divide caramel among four 4-ounce ramekins. Pour flan mixture on top.

8. Place ramekins in a large roasting pan. Pour boiling water into pan until it reaches halfway up sides of ramekins. Bake 30 to 40 minutes, until a knife inserted in center comes out clean.

9. Remove from oven and allow flans to cool completely. When ready to serve, place a plate on top of flan and invert onto plate. Garnish with cinnamon sticks, if desired.