

# a smidgen to be smitten

“Look how sweetly he’s eating! എന്തൊരു രസം!” my mother says as she puts a mashed-up banana into our favourite baby’s mouth. She loves feeding people, especially when they’re eating happily. The baby in my arms goes through all sorts of movements to get to her hand, he dives, twists and pushes.

Four recipes make sense to me this way, I’d dive, twist and push for them. Unlike favourite-baby, I never loved eating, and saw it as a chore. I’ve used this metaphor for love so many times that it feels familiar and sweet to use, but not stale. There’s not a lot of food I love like this, so I’m stingy with this love and I treat it with kindness. While thinking about writing for this piece, I wondered what made me find my family. The answer that first comes to mind is my favourite books; and the girls in them, but they feel like sisters, I didn’t have to look for them or find them.

Food has brought me closer to the *finding* part of the *found* family, that is always what I wanted these narratives of *found* family to be centred around. In a world that constantly prides itself on having found perfection, the perfect friend/resume/employment/skillset, the world doesn’t often talk about *finding* and *making* the friend/resume/skillset/employment.

In that way, food is always a fully conscious process. No food stays constant throughout time. It moves in states— warm to cold, fresh to decaying, loving to bitter.

Writing this included conversations with people who are precious to me, an understanding of what food means to them, and how their relationship with food evolved with their families.

## [MYSELF]- PAN ROLLS-

Pan rolls are a delicacy to be made the day before Ash Wednesday, one day before a 40-day period of fasting begins. They are sweet, rich, and uncomplicated. My memory of pan rolls resides in our older house. The kitchen opens into the hall. I sit at the corner farthest away from it, and yet the scent of roasted coconut and caramelized sugar travels smoothly. Pan rolls were a way to use up everything nice and rich before Lenten season started, put them all into thin pancakes and do away with that love for a little bit.

### **batter**

- 1/2 cup flour
- a few teaspoons of sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 cup milk

- *vanilla essence*
- *3 tbsp water*
- *butter*

### ***filling***

- *2 cups coconut*
- *few teaspoons of sugar*
- *a little bit of grated nutmeg to taste*

### ***The How-To***

*Blend all the ingredients for the batter until smooth. there should be no lumps, and it should have a thin, watery consistency. Heat a pan to a medium heat and pour the batter onto it. The batter should move around and spread evenly. Once it coats the pan, allow it to cook through. once the batter turns solid, flip it over onto a plate.*

*Mix the filling evenly.*

*You can use jaggery, but slightly caramelized sugar works just as well. Place it onto the centre of the lower half of the pancake, and fold two sides in, rolling as you go forward, like a spring roll. once you've tucked everything soundly in place, grab some orange marmalade or a citrus jam to cut out some of the richness, and tuck in.*

This recipe was brought to me unconvincingly because I firmly believed all good desserts came from ovens. It seemed too simplistic to contain genuine love. I was wrong about pan rolls, and many other things, I came to realize.

### **[N]- TOASTED BANANAS**

I met N nine years ago. Whenever I talk about things in that time frame, it seems absurd, because frames of time larger than a year don't seem to exist when you're ten. Whenever I meet N, it doesn't feel like I have crossed a nine-year time frame to get to this moment. It feels like we are a tomorrow away from ten years old. My favorite memory of N, the one I love talking about is one where I didn't see her.

We'd planned a friend-exclusive Secret Santa, and she'd brought me homemade cookies. It was the first time anyone made cookies, especially for me. I hadn't gone to school that day, having been sick for the umpteenth time that year. The cookies arrived in a magenta-capped glass bowl. I vividly remember my mother asking me what I'd given my secret friend, because this to her was the loveliest gift she'd seen. I'd bought a comic book for another friend, and in reporting this to her she passed me a mother-exclusive glare. N's cookies were

crunchy, smelled delicious and tasted fresh. They tasted like some version of my home but not my own.

N & I always talk about this, how we are alternative versions of each other.

N's favourite dish is simple like this, when I ask for a recipe she sends me one long sentence that explains it. I'll add many more so that you hear the sentences that have long passed between us.

### ***ingredients***

- *ghee*
- *one ripe banana*
- *sugar*

### ***The How-To***

*Heat a pan on the stove. Slice the banana and place it on the pan until it caramelizes and turns brown at it's edges and toasts. Add some ghee to make it softer, and less starchy. Take the banana slices off the pan, and garnish with sugar.*

N always loves the most simple, easily constructed dishes. It speaks volumes about how much perfection she likes to put into her love, how much sweetness she seems to contain and how easily loving her comes to people. If you met her, you'd strike up a conversation in the short time it takes to slice a banana. By the time they were toasted, you'd have found a unique life experience you shared with her.

N often describes herself as a collection of many artefacts, and if you pulled them apart, you'd find that they were all well-chosen, characteristic pieces full of personality. There isn't anyone I love like her, it is almost impossible to find a love that comes so effortlessly, if not for butter cookies in glass bowls.

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There are around twenty recipes that truly make me who I am; including but not limited to *Thalassery* chicken *biriyani*, American fudge cookies, beef roast and Malabar *parottas*, anything and everything involved in an Onam *sadhya*, pineapple spiced buttermilk (*pulissery*), and fish pickle. But these are all loves that come and go like far-away cousins. I love them when I have them, and I love them when I don't. My love for toasted bananas and pan rolls is consistent, sweet, and calm. I never think about it on my way home, it is already home, waiting for me.

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Grace Treesa is a writer, sweet treat enthusiast and reader. She finds her solace in the quirks of language and spotting calico cats. She deeply treasures media centred around women, multi-generational stories, visits to bookstores and thoughtful gifts; all of which go promptly

into her overflowing memory box. She is currently pursuing her degree in English & Psychology at St. Joseph's University, and aspires to unearth people like she finds her literature. You can find her for conversations on books, internet culture and other people @gracetreesawrites on Instagram