



The Art of Cuisine: Fragrant Vapors of Goulash

By CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER



A Little Slovak (1909) by Marianne Preindlsberger Stokes

A “plump and drawn” face upon which sit “tiny, watery eyes” that stare out from under “masculine eyebrows” and a nose frequently red make the eponymous heroine of Dezsó Kosztolányi’s 1924 novel *Skylark* a difficult woman to love. Indeed, she is without hope of marriage, being past 35. Even her parents secretly confess to despising her.

Thus they find occasion to celebrate when Skylark leaves her small provincial town of Sárszeg to visit distant relatives. In her absence, her father, a meager pensioner with a passion for heraldry, blazonry, archivology, and sigillography, absconds with his wife for the King of Hungary, a local restaurant, to determine whether what their daughter, a champion of simple, economical home-cooked meals, says of eating places was in fact true: that they serve nothing but “dishwater soup,” “tough gristly meat,” and “carelessly concocted desserts.”

No sooner do Skylark’s parents enter the King of Hungary then they discover quite the opposite: “Fresh and crusty rolls,” “salted croissants and small white loaves sprinkled with poppy seeds,” “a battalion of vanilla slices, whose rich egg fillings shone a gorgeous gold beneath their crumbling red-brown pastry crusts, sprinkled thick with icing sugar” — such are the restaurant’s many prandial enticements.

Trumping all, however, is the King of Hungary’s rich and spicy goulash, which wins Skylark’s father’s heart. Kosztolányi describes how Skylark’s father “lowered his gristly, pale, almost cadaverous nose towards the red liquid in the silver bowl, steeping himself in the dizzying delight of inhaling the goulash’s fragrant vapors deep into his lungs ... it really did smell superb! And as for the taste! It was simply indescribable!”

Skylark’s return brings an end to her parents’ gastronomic idyll. But the memory of goulash savored that lingers in her father’s memory shows that economy is not life’s sole virtue.

Should you like to break from your thrifty habits, you could do worse than prepare for yourself a pot of savory goulash. This recipe, from *The Hotel of St. Francis Cook Book* offers a fair approximation of that Hungarian ambrosia enjoyed by Skylark’s parents.

Hungarian goulash — one pound of shoulder of veal, one pound loin of lean pork. Cut in pieces one inch square. Mix a little flour, salt, pepper and plenty of paprika. Put in sauce pan a piece of butter, two chopped onions and the fat from the loin of pork. Simmer till brown, then add the meats and flour; a little bouillon, stock or water; one-half cup of puree of tomatoes, a little thyme, one bay leaf, one clove and a little chopped parsley and celery. Cover tight and cook for three-quarters of an hour. Then add three potatoes cut the same as the meat, and cook till done.



June 20, 2011

ART OF CUISINE

Previously by
CHRISTINE BAUMGARTHUBER

Cooking Class
History Against the Grain
The Art of Antarctic
Cooking