chamorrodo dreams

I lay awake last night
in the starless, smoggy, L.A. night

and I must be eating too much cheap Thai

because when I fell asleep
I dreamt of chamorrodo

I had chamorrodo dreams

yeah, dreams.
don't laugh

rich, chocolate rice
thick with a lola's love
steam rising like smoke

my grandma appeared in a duster and announced,
your grandpa used to eat this with dried fish

and I go,
eew, gross! but secretly wondered
what it must taste like,
the sweet thickness of it
meeting the tuyo
like a car crash in your mouth
a cockfight on your tongue

swallow and it fights
all the way down into your stomach

chamorrodo
and the delicious knowing
that this chocolate
was really chocolate
and not the
mysterious red chocolate
in the milk jug in the back of the
Frigidaire

I dreamt of kare kare
a big pot of it with my family's name
scribbled on a piece of old masking tape
stuck to the side
the meat slipping off the bones
and to myself, I think --

shit, this is the cow's tail
but you eat it anyway
cause it's so damn good
orangey, and always with the bagoong

and when I woke up,
I missed home so much I cried
I called my grandma
and after I asked
how she was and she said "i'm dying" and how
no one calls her anymore and that she's just waiting to be
shipped back to Leyte folded halfway into a Balikbayan box,

she asks me
what's really wrong..
and I said,
"Grandma...I dreamt about champorado"
and she called me crazy
said I was spending too much on long distance, I better call
next time on the weekend and goodbye

some other day

you can
teach me the Tinikling
and debate the Philippine Revolution with me
speak to me in Ilonggo
another time
we'll talk cultural production
and theories of race, class and gender oppression
and the white woman in your class who said oriental

some other day, please
right now, today

I'm going to Bahay Kubo restaurant
on Temple Street
where Aling Lucing feeds me like
my mother's hands

Right now,
I want to talk about food

let's talk about
sineganga
a sour, sour sineganga
and its many variations
a soup I can swim in
with pork, beef or shrimp
or working class flip style: fish head
when I was a child
when I thought everybody ate
salmon heads in their sinigang
I ate it with a passion
digging the cheeks out
and sucking the eyes out of the head

let's talk about Filipino parties
where the food can feed the whole province
and all the visiting relatives from Aklan
and you're looking
with morbid fascination
at the lechon's burned out eyes
and Manong Fred says,
"Pet the head!

your aunties have cooked all day
and you don't eat
you grub

but you always have room for
that crowning glory,
that jewel of flip parties,
that dessert that only old aunties can make
the secret recipe for the striped wonder

finger jello

let's talk about
lumpia
I'll take it fresh
with that sauce that'll give you garlic breath for days
or fried, crisp and brown
and drowned in that sweet and spicy sauce
they always forgot to buy at the Asian
and sent you back to buy

or pancit
with lemon, of course
or with shrimp and chicharon
palabok style

and then afterschool
when we were cooking flip but didn't know it then
fried hot dog and baloney with rice
with jiffran or regular ketchup
or spaghetti from a can
washed down with lukewarm Tang
or for the upwardly mobile Flip
Sunny Delight, in all its citrus splendor
Bibingka, in banana leaves
with cheese or without
but always the corner piece

stuffed eggplant
and fried bangus
with hot rice
fresh tomatoes
suka and garlic
eating it with your hands
and smelling like fried fish and patis
so that white people wrinkle their noses
when you pass by

I'm craving
corned beef, the colonialism in a can
with tomatoes/garlic/onions/cabbage/potatoes
soury or dry,
with eggs or cold
carne norte feeds the multitudes
like the loaves and the fishes

now that
is heaven

don't wake me up
'cause I'm having champorado dreams

and I am remembering myself
as I look down into a plate
of adobo

December 1995