THE STIRRING LIFE

Hamudh Helu Inspired Short Ribs

Iraqi sour-sweet, with apricots, saffron and almonds

Short ribs braised low with dried apricots, raisins, almonds and chickpeas
Over a potato and carrot mash — no tomato, no sugar, the sweet is all fruit

INGREDIENTS

The Braise

- 2–3 lb beef short ribs
- 2 Tbsp avocado or other neutral oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 6–7 cloves garlic
- 4 cups water, to start

The Spices

- ½ tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp ground cardamom
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- A pinch of saffron, bloomed
- 2 tsp salt, to start
- Black pepper

Sour and Sweet

- 1 cup dried apricots
- ¼ cup raisins
- ¼ cup slivered almonds
- ½ cup dried chickpeas, soaked overnight
- ¼ cup lemon juice

Potato & Carrot Mash

- 2 lb potatoes, peeled
- 1 lb carrots, peeled
- 4 Tbsp butter
- ½ cup heavy cream
- Salt and white pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

The Short Ribs

1. Brown the short ribs. In the neutral oil, in a large heavy pot, on both sides. Lift them out and spoon off most of the fat they gave up.
2. Onion, then garlic. The onion into the same pot for about seven minutes, until it takes real color. Then the garlic.
3. Water, then the ribs back in. Four cups of water to start, and the short ribs return to the pot.
4. Spices. Turmeric, salt, cardamom and coriander.
5. Lemon, then saffron. The lemon juice goes in, then the saffron you bloomed.
6. Fruit and nuts last. Almonds, soaked chickpeas, raisins and apricots, all in together. Canned chickpeas work too — add those in the last half hour instead, or they go to mush.
7. Into the oven. Covered, at 325°F, for 2 to 3 hours — until the meat gives way against a spoon.

Potato & Carrot Mash

1. Boil them together. Potatoes and carrots cut to a similar size, into well-salted water, until a knife slides through with no resistance.
2. Drain and dry them. Let the steam come off in the colander before anything else goes in, or the mash will be loose.
3. Butter, cream, pepper. All in while they are still hot, then smooth it out with an immersion blender. A food processor overworks the starch and turns the potatoes gluey.

No tomato in this, and no added sugar: the sweetness is all apricot and raisin, which is why the sour comes first in the name. The medieval Baghdad version of this stew, mishmishiya, had no tomato either — they had not reached the region yet.