

The Calamansi Conversation

A One - Act Play

Natty Mark Samuels

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Dedication

to **Kate Pritchard**
and **Petra Mead**

of the **Oxford Botanic Gardens**

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A woman and a girl enter the Conservatory, in the Oxford Botanic Gardens, where the citrus fruit grows. It is 9.05 and they are the only ones there. As they step in, there's vocal acknowledgement of the invitational warmth. Veering towards the right, they stand in a sun spot. They stand for a little while, side by side, holding hands, as the January sunshine comes through the rooftop glass. The yellows, green and orange of the citrus, interspersed, contrast well with the purples, pinks and blues of the other plants. They stand like two people, entranced by a sunlight reverie.

Woman: Isn't that lovely?

Girl: Perfect! *Looking to the right of her, at the label on a potted plant, she breaks the hand link.* Ah, this is the tree of the photograph on the net, without its fruit! I love the name: Calamondin. Like it should be the name of a great queen, or a legendary warrior. *The woman sits on the bench near the calamondin tree.*

Woman: I agree!... The great Queen Calamondin of Citresa. *Bowing and curtsying to the girl, who grins and embraces her.*

Girl: I like that too mum: Citresa... Yes, Citresa: the magical land of citrus, ruled by a benevolent young queen.

Woman: It could be located in the Phillipines.

Girl: Why there mum?

Woman: Because that is the country – of seven thousand islands - most associated with calamondin, where they call it calamansi.

Girl: Even better mum: Queen Calamansi of Citresa Island! Seven thousand Islands?

Woman: Nearly seven thousand seven hundred! And the fairest one is where our popular queen will reside.

Girl: Ahh, bless you.... There's a girl in my class called Dalisay, who's from the Phillipines: her mum's a nurse at the JR. In Biology, she told us that Jasmine is the national flower of the Phillipines. Do you think they've got one here in these Gardens?

Woman: They may have, we'll go and look when we leave here.

Girl: She also told us that her name means 'perfect.' Those fruits looked perfect on that photo on the net. Perfect in their bright orange clothing, that could tempt me, make me want to pick one, like Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Woman: We'd be accused of polluting perfection again! *They both laugh.* Plus, they'd be one less for the other visitors to enjoy.

Girl: That's also true!

Woman: Now, whenever you have a cold, I make you a drink of lemon, ginger and honey. Well, a Filipino mother would make a similar drink, but would also have the option of using calamansi. As I've told you before, all the citrus fruits – whether they be grapefruit, lemon, lime, orange or any other member of their family - have so much to offer, for the betterment of our health.

Girl: And since you told me that, I have a lemon or lime drink when I wake up and before I go to bed at night.

Woman: I know Sweetheart! You do it without me ever needing to remind you. I would be so proud and happy, to be Queen Mother of Queen Calamansi.

Girl: As I would be proud of being her daughter ***The girl bows her head to her mother, while holding her hand across her heart: they smile and embrace.***

Woman: Come, sit on your throne. ***She stands up, leaving the bench for the new occupant.*** Your majesty, may I interest you in something to drink? A drink of calamansi juice? ***The girl nods her head. We see her mother miming the following actions.*** I cut the calamansi and squeeze it into this tall glass; I add a handful of ice, pour in some water and sprinkle a little sugar. ***She gives her the imaginary drink.*** A gift of citrus for you, my queen.

Girl: ***She takes what is offered to her and pretends to drink, slightly tilting her head. Smiling, she hands the invisible item back to her mother, who places it on the shelving, under the Bhudda's Hand.*** Thankyou very much for the gift: may your days overflow with blessings....Come, sit beside me and tell me of some of the other culinary splendours of Citresa Isle. I am a child queen of thirteen and I need to learn from you. ***The woman sits.***

Woman: Well, next time we go to London, beloved one, we'll find out where from and get some - and together, we'll make Calamansi Muffins! Using the zest as well as the juice! I'll indulge your sweet tooth for once!

Girl: Yes! Lets go to London next weekend!

Woman: If not next weekend, your highness, the weekend after.

Girl: OK my treasured elder... So you've told me of a drink, and a possible dessert, tell me of a main course.

Woman: Because you're a lover of chicken: Chicken Adobe with Calamansi! I'll use ginger, honey, black pepper, chilli peppers, soy sauce, oyster sauce, garlic, sesame seeds, water, and calamansi juice. Got a feeling that they cook this in other countries too, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, where they also enjoy calamansi juice.

Girl: It always amazes me mum, how you continue to cook meat for me, even though you're a vegetarian.

Woman: The things we do for love!

Girl: *Blowing her a kiss.* Thankyou mum...When we go to London, maybe we can sample some Filipino, Malaysian or Indonesian food.

Woman: Your wish is my command! *She salutes her daughter, who responds by putting her hands together as in prayer and bowing her head. The girl grins and her mother, head on one side, smiles.*

Girl: Even better, let's go to the Phillipines!

Woman: Shall I have the jet fuelled and ready my lady?

Girl: Possibly, possibly! *They both laugh and embrace.* Seriously though mum, wouldn't it be great to go there and try the food: fresh and cooked by the hands of experience. Dalisay showed us a video of some waterfalls in her country. It looks lush mum! Awesome! I can imagine us, taking it in turns or in tandem, jumping off the cliffs into the warm, blue water: then finding a quieter spot, to picnic and to talk.

Woman: Ahhh, perfect Sweetheart, that would be perfect.

Girl: Isn't it great to have this though? I would never see a calamansi tree, if it wasn't for these Gardens. You did tell me, but I've forgot: when was it founded?

Woman: In 1621, the oldest botanic gardens in the country. It is great. Look – *pointing to it* - we have the Chinotto of Italy, small as a table tennis ball, to the citron – *pointing to it* - of India, pendulous like a sacred bell. Plus two of the citrus ancestors are here; the citron I've just mentioned and over there – *pointing to it* – one of the two mandarins. We can travel the world when we come in here, Sweetheart.

Girl: Yes! 1621! And we're sitting here, in 2020, in the Conservatory: our Citrus Palace of Citresa.... And on our Isle of Citresa, wherever it is, there shall be the daily drinking of calamansi water; and everyone shall be asked to grow a calamansi tree. It makes sense mum, when that fruit can be used to maintain standard blood pressure, lower the risk of cancer, support the heart and bolster the immune system. So once a year there shall be the Calamansi Carnival: a day of inter-generational fun and learning.

Woman: Yes! And there can be stands all over the city, where people can get free shots of calamanasi water all day. Cafes and restaurants will feature food with calamansi, like the lemon festivals of Italy. Community centres – like the East Oxford one - and pubs, will offer live music and libraries and colleges will open their doors, giving space for drop-in workshops.

Girl: Yes mum! Yes! *She holds and squeezes her mum's hand: her mother kisses her on the forehead.* We could involve the whole city, from Blackbird Leys to Wolvercote. And in tribute to the countries of its popular use, we'll decorate the streets in the flags of the Phillipines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. We'll make links with any local Far Eastern cultural associations or societies: see what the two universities have to offer.

Woman: Sounds awesome, Sweetheart! And as the great Queen of Calamansi, you'll naturally assume the role as Queen of the Calamansi Carnival. And I shall be your Lady-in-Waiting, waiting to serve you.

Girl: And I shall be truly blessed, to have you by my side: my constant source of guidance.

Woman: You are most kind ma'am. *They laugh and embrace. Raising her mother from the bench, she guides her to the sun spot, where they again link hands. They remain like that for a little while, until they hear the door open and two muted voices: the spell is broken.* Right, let's go and have our breakfast picnic on one of the benches by the river: I wonder if the heron is still up in the tree.

Girl: Yes, I'm ready to eat! And if the Grey Sentinel of the Citrus Palace is still there, I'll take a photograph for you. Can't wait till Monday mum, to tell Dalisay that I touched a little piece of her homeland! To tell her that I've seen a Calamansi Tree! *She kisses her mother on the cheek. Bearing the widest of grins, they exit, the woman behind the girl.*

The End.

Sources

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Kawaling Pinoy

Panlasang Pinoy Recipes

Filipino Healthline

Mom Junction

Oxford Botanic Gardens and Arboretum