

***Arsenic and Adobo* by Mia P. Manansala**

The first book in the *Tita Rosie's Kitchen Mystery* series starts off with a very helpful Author's Note and Glossary and Pronunciation Guide. The book's protagonist, Lila Macapagal, like the author, is Filipino and so some Tagalog is used throughout the book. As someone who does not speak Tagalog at all and basically only knows the honorifics used in the language from watching some TV shows, the guide at the front helped me quite a bit. Since there are a lot of new, more diverse cozy mysteries out there, I hope that this is something that becomes more common.

Lila has come back to her hometown – Shady Palms, Illinois – a relatively small (fictional) town 2+ hours away from Chicago, after a harsh break-up to help out with her aunt's restaurant. But after the local food critic, who also happens to be Lila's old high school boyfriend, dies after eating at Tita Rosie's Kitchen, Lila and her family are accused. The new detective in town doesn't seem too interested in finding new suspects, so Lila and her best friend start investigating on their own. This is definitely a similar plotline to a few other culinary cozy mysteries, but Manansala takes this in some interesting directions. There are A LOT of twists and turns! This is a great introduction to the characters and the town, and I really enjoyed figuring out the mystery. I also really liked that there is a big emphasis on the importance of family and friendship, and there was good explanation of how the family dynamics are different for Lila's family vs. those of her friends. I am very much looking forward to reading more books in this series!

GK