



**Romancing the Palate**

**Rebecca Lynn, January 2012**

### **Course Description:**

How to incorporate food into your love story. Whether you have a food professional heroine, a chef hero, or a home cook, want to write a restaurant scene, a food-related love scene, or a big event, this class can be what you need. We'll cover food in the five senses, food as a character, food professions, food history (including using food authentically in historical romance), and food as sensual enhancement. Please join us and romance your palate today.

### **About the Instructor:**

Rebecca Lynn took an MFA in Creative Writing and an undergraduate degree in Linguistics and Literature, and has taught both writing and literature courses. She has published short fiction as well as some short non-fiction, and academic articles. She ran her own restaurant for five years and has also worked as a caterer and event planner.

<http://romancingthepalate.blogspot.com>

### **LECTURE ONE: FOOD EXPERIENCE DETAIL**

There are two sides to food writing. One is not fictional describing the food, talking about true food experience, food industry details, and the process of cooking and one is fictional. If you're taking this class, it's likely that you will be combining both of these kinds of writing, on some level, and probably adding them into a romantic story. Or using romance to enhance a food story.

I wanted to say up front, there is a difference between using food to enhance your romance novel and writing a foodie romance novel. Foodie romance makes food the centerpiece. In the same way that a paranormal romance novel is more than just having a vampire or werewolf run through a scene or two, a foodie romance novel needs to be more than just your main characters being in the kitchen once or twice, or sitting down to eat together in one scene. Great paranormal romance makes the un-real element part of the essence of both the story and the characters, in addition to the love story.

That being said, it's possible (and probable, even maybe necessary) to use food in your romance novel (or non-fiction writing) and not traverse into that territory. We're here for

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both the aspiring (or published) foodie romance writer, and for the romance novelist, writer, author who just wants to write more about food. So regardless of whether you want to write foodie romance or not, you're in the right place. We're going to eat, touch, smell, travel, think, drink, and cry (okay, maybe we won't cry), and then we're going to write about it.

On a side note, I do hope that you consider writing a foodie romance novel. It's a growing genre, and it's kinda the big hot thing right now. But I should say, as excited as I am about it, I just think that it's important to use food in all types of writing.

In this class, we're going to treat both the fictional and the non-fictional sides of food in romance. By that, I mean that we're going to talk about the food itself, in addition to what you can do with that food. So our writing assignments will reflect both our own (non-fiction) experiences and our fictional (character's) experiences.

Quite possibly the most important piece of food writing is the use of the five senses. There was a great workshop at RWA Nationals about using the 11 senses (and if you get a chance, I highly recommend picking up the literature, or taking the class, if you're a food writer), which I think is important as well, but I want to focus on the five senses because that's how we experience food.

What are the five senses? I'm sure you can name them.

Sight. Sound. Scent. Taste. Touch.

The most commonly used when writing about food is taste. It is important to know how to describe what a food tastes like. But food is a whole-sense experience, meaning that when I eat a strawberry, I don't just taste it. I see it, I smell it, I hear it, I touch it, and then I taste it.

The trick to making food feel real in food writing is to engage the senses, and that comes through judicious use of details.

Imagine I'm writing about a strawberry. I might be eating it from a plastic container, cutting it for a salad, cooking it into jam, or fisting it, fresh-picked, into my mouth. What makes this experience real for my audience, because they're experiencing it through my senses, is the detail.

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What color is the strawberry? What does its skin look like? What color are the seeds? Are they even? What is the strawberry's shape? How big is it? What does it look like in my hand? Or on the vine?

What sound does it make when I pick it? When I bite it? When I chew it? When I cut it? When I cook it?

How heavy is it? What is the feel of it on my skin? What does the inside feel like versus the skin versus the leaves? What is the texture of the fruit between my teeth? On my tongue? When does the juice spurt?

What does it smell like? Do the different parts of the berry smell the same? Do different berries smell differently? How old is it, will that effect the smell? What does the smell remind you of?

And then finally, what does it taste like? How sweet is it? How sour? Do different parts of the berry taste different? Do different berries from the same plant taste different? Does the taste change when you cook it? How so?

Then, of course, you have the other research details. What type of strawberry is it? Where does it grow? What time of year does it blossom? What time of year is it the freshest? How long is the season when it's edible? When was it first grown, and where?

Then, you have the contextual details. When did my character first have a strawberry? Is a strawberry important to him/her in some emotional way?

Now, notice that I said judicious. What do I mean by judicious use of detail? Well, obviously, every time I talk about a food in a piece of writing, I don't want to exhaust the reader with paragraphs of purple prose. I want to pick the pertinent details and focus in on them.

But first, I want us to focus on the full sensual experience of a food. All the types of details you can muster up. Freeze frame on a food experience. So here we come to our first set of assignments.

We'll do assignment #1 (about a new food experience from YOUR perspective) today and I'll post assignment #2 tomorrow.

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**Assignment One: Personal Food Experience**

Because I want us to focus in on details, we're going to write a short piece about a food experience, written in the first person. Please read this carefully. I want this to be a brand new food experience that you have right now (or whenever you write this).

It is **imperative** that you not rely on your memory. You need to experience the food for yourself, and then write about it.

I want you to pick a food, any food. It could be a prepared dish, or it could be a stand-alone food. You may invent a context if you wish, but I'd like you to keep your excerpt in the first person. Write about the full experience of eating this food. Please incorporate extensive details from all five of the senses. They do not have to be in any order, and feel free to be as creative as you want.

The key is detail.

I know it feels like I'm harping on this, but I want to make sure I catch everyone. I don't want it to be an excerpt you write from memory, or something from an existing work. For this particular assignment, I want you to actually eat the food, and then write about the experience of eating it. We'll cover food memory in our next lesson, and you'll have plenty of opportunity to submit writing from current works, but I want this to be a very real, very present experience. New.

As I said, feel free to contextualize it (tell a story other than the eating). Maybe you're eating your mother-in-law's pot roast, and it's not a good experience, in more ways than one. Maybe your spouse or lover made you a sensual meal in preparation for a night together. Maybe your kids brought you a fresh-picked apple. Maybe you bought a fresh donut from your local bakery. Feel free to add emotional depth and emotive responses to stimuli, but please focus on the sensual details of the food. And please make it something you enjoy, since you have to eat it. :)

Zero down on the experience of eating. Write about it. You may need to eat slowly, and have a notebook close.

Please, no shorter than 500 words, really dig into the experience. No longer than 1000 (mostly because I have to read and critique all the pieces). When I look at your pieces, I'm going to look for the five senses, and the detail, so don't worry about being too detailed. Also, don't worry about telling a whole story. This is just a piece of flash

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fiction. Just dialing down on one experience. Bring me inside your perspective and feed me.

### **Assignment #2: Food Experience (Fiction)**

Great job on the first assignment, everyone. Please feel free to keep turning those in as you finish them. Either posted to the loop or via email to me.

Now, on to the next assignment. I want you to take the piece you wrote for #1 (the food detail assignment) and pull out **four or five sentences** of food-experience detail that you really love. Let's say anything up to 200 words, word-for-word.

Translate this food experience into something meaningful for a character that you've created. Could be a specific character in a current work. Could be a character you make up on the spot. Either way, this character should not be you. Let your creativity run wild. Try to weave these sentences in to a new story. And now, instead of telling a story just about the food experience, use the food experience to tell a story about your character.

For instance, let's say you wrote about tasting that strawberry from the lecture. In my mind, I was eating those strawberries, by the fistful, right in my own garden. Regardless of where I translate this experience, the food details will be the same (except perhaps the visual details of my environment, if I included them). In my piece of fiction, my character might be feeding strawberries to their child for the first time, or bringing their new love interest some strawberries from their garden and sampling them together. Whatever context you come up with, keep the most evocative food details you came up with in your first assignment.

Let's not worry about conflict yet, unless you feel like you want to, but let's try to focus on the food details and using them to support the story.

### **LECTURE TWO: FOOD AS CATALYST**

Last lesson, we covered the importance of detail to engage readers in the food experience. We're going to build on that today by talking about the importance of using food experience as a catalyst for character development. So, once we get the food-detail writing down, how do we put it to work for our characters?

Some of the most potent memories we have are smell and taste related. In fact, research has proven that smell alone can bring memories out of dormancy, even from our early childhood. Because of this, food becomes a powerful way to communicate nostalgia and

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memory in writing. I have some particularly vivid memories that can be recalled simply by smelling a certain kind of oil or tasting a certain brand of salad dressing.

In middle school, my friends and I used to sneak away from school during our lunch period and walk to the convenience store to stuff ourselves with chocolate bars and hot dogs. I can practically taste the oily skin of the hot dogs under a heat lamp, and the way they used to pop when you'd bite into them the first time. The only condiments on the hot dog island were sweet relish, pungent yellow mustard that always seemed on the edge of rotten, and crinkly packets of Miracle Whip.

One day, my friend Jody stole a tiny bottle of ketchup, and we bought twelve hot dogs, stuffed our pockets with the other condiments, and sat in the dusty alley. Jodi produced the red bottle of ketchup from her coat sleeve like it was made of solid gold. We unwrapped the warm, silvery paper of each hot dog, bit off the corners of Miracle Whip packets, and Jody squeezed the ketchup bottle with a loud plop. I still remember the sticky sweet tang of the Miracle Whip on my tongue and the way it balanced out the buttery oiliness of the crunchy-skinned hot dog. To this day, when I smell convenience store hot dogs, I remember hunkering down in that alley and pulling off that warm silver paper. The detail of my memory astounds even me.

In addition to the detail of my memory, there's what it says about me. Consider the fact that I was in seventh grade and desperately hated the lunch room because I would get made fun of for eating the hot lunch that my family had to purchase from the government because it was the cheapest lunch we could get. So instead, we'd stop by Jodi's house, steal money from her mother's dresser, and eat ourselves sick with hot dogs.

From this food-related memory, I was able to see into myself as a seventh-grade girl. And if I'd massaged it just a bit more, in exposition, I could easily have gotten to the emotive and psychological detail that I would need if this were going to turn into a truly expositional memory moment.

Of course, from a writer's perspective, the fact that our characters have memories is not the most salient part of this lesson. Everyone has memories. Just dredging up food- or smell-triggered memories for pages upon pages is going to have your editor's red-pen-finger itching. The point of utilizing food as a memory trigger is to bring forth memories that will develop their character and support the conflict.

For instance, when we get to the lesson that includes food history, we'll talk more about how food is a political entity, especially in history. Think about the fact that most

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medieval families (unless they were either nobility or extremely rich) ate an essentially vegetarian diet. Not because they had an ethical issue with the treatment of animals, in fact, the animals they would eat tended to be equivalent to pets. Most families would raise their own food, and if they had a pig or a sheep, that animal would either be sold to buy more non-meat food, or would be butchered in the fall and cured to last the family several months of once-a-week meat meals. This one animal (or even two, for bigger families) would often be their lone source of protein the entire winter, and if that family was lost and there were tiny children involved, those children might die of starvation.

Imagine you have a medieval character who lost the family chicken/goat/pig as a girl and it led to the death of one of her siblings, for which her parents might even blame her. And every time she smells the cooking flesh of an animal, it reminds her of the winter they lost little Tommy, from which she's never recovered and because of which her father has decided to sell her into sexual slavery (or insert other not-as-brutal emotional/psychological circumstance here). That's a powerful way to provide character development, because it's not only emotional, but it's so sensual, and the senses engage readers in the story.

Or, if you're writing contemporary romance/fiction, you can use my ketchup-stealing incident as an example. My family was poor when I was a kid, and having to eat the hot lunch at school was a sign to every one of my friends that we couldn't afford to spend more than \$1 apiece on our lunches. It was humiliating, especially once I got into my older elementary grades. If I were writing a character who had this experience, unlocking this whole dark side of her past would be as easy as trotting her into a convenience store or past a hot dog street vendor with her love interest. Pretty soon, the food experience leads her to talking through the memory, which turns embarrassing before she realizes it, or her response to the memory is telling. And *voila!* Her character is revealed through a common experience (and a potentially very short experience, if I'm not writing foodie novels) without needing to insert details that don't align with the story.

This plays on what we learned in our last lesson, where we practiced noticing (and writing) the details of food experience, using all five senses. Part of the reason we try to use all five senses is that you never know what part of a food experience will be a catalyst for character development. It might, as I've said, be smell. It might be the sound of tin foil, or the taste of a particular food. It might be the texture of applesauce or jam, or the cut of meat or the color of strawberries. It will likely be different for each character, although the most common are smell and taste.

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There is something primal about smell and taste that imprint themselves into our long-term memory banks, and because food is so elemental to survival, it can often be the source of major trauma. Or extreme joy, of course, it's essential to point out that not all food memories need to be traumatic. Sometimes our food memories connect us to important people who have passed away, or to the happiest moments in our lives. Either one can be useful in developing character. But the food memory has to *do* something. It can't just be there.

This lesson will also have two assignments. I'll give you the first one today (which will be all about you) and give you a chance to get feedback on it before I give the second one on Saturday (which will be about your character).

### **Assignment Three**

I want you to go to this url and read the first excerpt from my absolute favorite food memoir of all time. This is from Ruth Reichl's *Garlic & Sapphires* which, if you have not read, you must immediately buy and read. But first, read this excerpt, and then do the rest of this assignment. <http://forums.egullet.org/index.php?/topic/78640-excerpt-from-ruth-reichls-garlic-and-sapphires/> (The last several paragraphs of the excerpt are the important part.

The easiest place to start writing about food nostalgia is to practice on yourself. Normally, I don't encourage experimentation of any kind. But I've really found that this works. So, for your assignment, I want you to write about a very vivid food-related memory of your own. Try to remember a food-related experience that was evocative. So perhaps the best food you ever ate, or maybe the first time you had a particular food, or a food memory from your childhood. Try to write about something that really happened, no matter how far past or how recent it is.

If you think this will help you, you can always make or buy the food in question. If I were going to write about the first time I ever ate Indian curry (which also happens to be one of my favorite foods), I might call my best friend's mum and see if I can get ahold of her personal recipe, so I can try to recreate that moment for my sense memory. Or, I might buy a can of Campbell's Chunky New England Clam Chowder (has to be the chunky stuff) and prepare it in the microwave, like I used to do after school when my mom was living in another town. Something to stimulate my senses.

Then, I want you to focus on one instance. One food memory. One scene.

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Hold the memory in your head before you start writing the scene. Think through it, ask questions of it. *What was I wearing? What was around me? Who was there with me? What time of day was it?* These may seem like strange questions to ask when you're supposed to be writing about food, but you want to heighten the way you attune into your senses. And it can be very helpful to probe your memories, just like you might probe your dream after you wake.

After you have a sense for the memory, and before you start writing the excerpt, start nailing down the details. Do you remember the name of the dish? The location of the table in the restaurant? How old you were when you baked this cake for the first time? Or when you tasted chocolate for the first time? Where did you stand in the kitchen? Who gave it to you? Why? What did they say to you?

Write down a few details about the food. What color was it? What did it look like (what was the texture on the outside, was it creamy or brothy, were there chunks of food in it, did you have to mix the lumps out)? What did it feel like (was it melting, was it warm, was it wet, what did it feel like when your spoon sunk into it)? What did it smell like (was it pungent, could you smell it from far away, was the smell comforting, did it remind you of anything)? Where did it come from (the refrigerator, the oven, a package, the garden)? Did it have a sound (did it crackle, did it pop, did it sizzle, did it crinkle, did it plop)? And then, at least, what did it taste like? What was the texture or the feel of the food in your mouth? Remember our lesson about details. Details will make this writing pop like Orville Redenbacher.

### **Assignment Four**

I'm going to work through all the assignments I have from students today. Just wanted to post the next assignment in case anyone has the weekend to work on writing.

Now that you've had a chance to write about food nostalgia from your personal standpoint, we're going to write about food nostalgia in reference to one of your characters.

Choose a character from your novel (could be a current project, and I highly suggest that it be current) and write a scene where your character experiences food nostalgia. The scene could incorporate details of a current experience, but please make sure that you have a trigger of some kind that places your character back into their food nostalgia. Remember the medieval girl who lost the family pig, or the little girls stealing ketchup from a convenience store? Food nostalgia is not necessarily just telling about the event

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that happened all those years ago. It needs to start in the present and be triggered by something present-moment related. Otherwise, it's just random backstory.

As you write, use the food as a way to show something about the character. Were they naive? Were they connecting with someone for the first time? Were they developing their palate? Were they running away from something? Were they feeling something? The story is not about the food, it's about the character. But the food is the vehicle through which the character learns or thinks or feels or experiences. Don't forget, of course, what we learned about detail. And then, in addition to that, the story has a message, based on what we (the audience) learn about the character and perhaps even the food through that experience.

Be creative. Be detailed. Tell a good story.

### **LECTURE THREE**

Hello, all! Looks like we're getting through things quickly. If anyone has assignments to submit, please send them along. I have a couple I need to look at today, but I'm happy to take them late, as well. Without further ado, I'd like to get into the last segment of the first half of the class. FOOD AS RELATIONSHIP.

First, I'd like to clarify something about the word relationship. In this class, it has two meanings. One is interpersonal, and one is more abstract (or mathematic). :collectivegasp: I know, I know, you thought there would be no math. Well, there really isn't. It's just similar to mathematics.

Food can be an important way of establishing our relationship. It can be part of an interpersonal relationship (and should, if you're writing foodie romance), but food is also an immensely political entity. Food history shows that wars were sometimes fought over food. People died over food (and not just from starvation). The presence or absence of a particular food, in any time period, can be a political or philosophical statement. So when I say Food As Relationship, I'm not just talking romance here. I mean the gamut of what relationship means.

So if you think of math, which I know we probably all hate, and how equations show numbers in relationship to each other (a 'plus' sign between two 6's is quite different than a 'division' sign, thus, changing their relationship to one another), this is the other kind of relationship I mean when I say that food is relationship. Or food determines relationship.

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In your writing, there will be several aspects of a character's relationship to food, and every single character will have some kind of relationship to food (not interpersonal, of course, but mathematic), whether you directly treat it or not. We'll cover culinary professionals in the next two lectures, but I'd like to start off this one by saying a quick word about the most common character in all fiction, the one that you have written many, many times (foodie or not): The Home Cook.

The home cook may or may not have culinary training. S/he may or may not have worked in the food industry. But s/he is the primary food preparer in the home.

Each home cook has a personality, and an important part of the depth of a character is their relationship to food. If you've ever watched *The Food Network*, you know that there are as many home cook personalities as there are hours in the day. Rachael Ray, Sandra Lee, Paula Deen, Robin Miller, Guy Fieri, Melissa D'Arabian, Aarti Sequera, Ina Garten—the reason they all have shows on *The Food Network* is because there are home cooks out there with that personality.

The quick-meal preparation. The comfort-food preparation. The entertainment preparation. The bachelor chef. The international cook. The cheap cook. The fresh cook.

Perhaps, like many food TV personalities, the home cook might have a nationality/ethnicity or cultural background that influences them. Italian, French, Indian, Greek, Canadian anything is possible.

Why is this important? One reason: Everyone eats. Whether we're a character in a foodie romance novel or not, food is part of our lives. And like any character, it's often the depth of the detail that makes that character real.

So when you're looking at your characters (especially main characters), their relationship to food can add a depth of reality to their character development. Even if it's just one scene, and even if it's just an illustration of character, or a plot counterpoint. The sensual detail of food experience draws us in, and especially in the case of common experience, can make a character more real.

Everyone eats, which means that every character eats. And every character from every era eats. Or they die. (Which could also be a part of your novel.)

In contemporary novels, if you have a heroine, her relationship to food is important. Even if it's only part of her backstory. One of our writing assignments is going to be about this,

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so let's think about it together. Your heroine's relationship to food says more about her than you might think. It might signal an eating disorder, or it might just be a tell about her past. But the way she relates to food matters.

Does she have a high metabolism? Do people make fun of her for eating like a guy? Does she have a low metabolism? Does she long to eat chocolate, but eat salad to maintain her weight? Does she care about her weight? Does she cook for herself? Does she eat out a lot? Does she think that women cooking is a stereotype and not do it out of principle? If she wants to cook well and can't, does she have a chip on her shoulder about it?

See, there's so much more to our relationship with food than first meets the eye. And more even than I've touched on. The important thing when it comes to home cooks is to realize that everyone has an abstract/mathematical relationship to food, and some of us have interpersonal relationships with it, so being aware is step one. Asking questions is step two. The other steps may or may not include the food relationship (including the step where you write). But it's important, I think, to establish who your character is in relationship to food. And I don't just mean what their favorite foods are, although that can be particularly important with some people. As a writer, be curious about your characters and their food experiences. It will make them richer for you, and for your audience.

In historical novels, a character's relationship to food can be a layer of their authenticity. For instance, if you're writing about the British Isles in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of potato dishes in a middle class household could be indicative of class disputes (since the potato was considered a low-class food). The presence of sugar or a certain spice might induce an anti-slavery character into a meltdown.

And, of course, if you write historical novels about other countries, each country has a unique culinary palate of its own. I can't think of Milan without thinking of osso bucco. Or think of Leeds without thinking of fish'n'chips. Those kinds of details can really help place characters in a real space.

So here's where we talk about food research. I have a couple of resources to recommend to you for doing food research in historical novels. I'll field any questions you have. But here is my 2 cents.

A lot of people downplay Wikipedia. And, certainly, if you're writing scholarly work, **stay away** from Wikipedia. But when you're looking for details for food writing, Wikipedia can be insanely helpful. Even if you only use it as a jumping-off point.

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Here's an example.

Let's say I'm writing a romance novel about 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland and I want to include a food nostalgia scene for one of my main characters to tease out an aspect of their character that will be in conflict with their love interest.

I go to Wikipedia and look up Ireland and down to the food and drink section. I see there's a sentence about the peasant diet in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. Next to it, there's a footnote that reads Garrow, John (March 2002). "[Feast and Famine: a History of Food and Nutrition in Ireland 1500, 1920](#)". *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* **95**: 160, 161. [ISSN 1758-1095](#). I happen to know that this is a reputable journal. It's not from some random hack's website. It's well-documented. I think I can trust this information.

If it were a less-well-known piece of food history information, I might actually try to find this article (since it is hyperlinked, although it might be in EBSCO or some kind of irretrievable hosting site unless I have an academic/professional subscription) and read it for myself. If you can ever get original source material, that's where the best detail is. Even this article might have another original resource it quotes (it probably does, articles outside of science typically rely on source material). Bibliographies are a historical novelists best friend, especially when it comes to food research, because there are a lot of obscure texts out there about one food through history that you probably won't find unless you mine someone's bibliography. I'll give you the names of a few that I've found particularly helpful when I hand out the class bibliography at the end.

On the other hand, let's say I'm writing a romance novel about 12<sup>th</sup> century Scotland and my heroine has decided to go into the kitchen and make something for dessert. So I go to Wikipedia and I look up dessert to get some idea for desserts in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Now, I would not recommend this. Why? If you look at the resources page at the end of the dessert entry, it only has one reference. That reference is a website. That website, if you click through to it, gives no reference for any of its facts.

Of course, if you go to the Scotland page, or read in one of the food history books that I'll suggest, you'll find much more information. Including the fact that because sugar was not widely available until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (and really, not widely available to all classes and cultures of people until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century), dessert was not really an addition to normal meals, according to the *Food in History* book that I'll recommend in my bibliography. So, perhaps having your medieval Scottish heroine baking an everyday dessert in her kitchen is not the most accurate picture of medieval culture.

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Make it a festival (as long as you can justify her being in the kitchen, depending on what class she's from), and you're fine. But every day desserts just weren't a part of culture until very recently.

Of course, it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility for her to bake an oat cake with honey. But still, how would you know that if you didn't research it? I highly recommend using accurate food detail as part of your history. Also, if it's vital to your character's development to have her in the kitchen baking a sweet dessert, have her in the kitchen baking a sweet dessert, and feel free to ignore me. Because in the end, it's the depth of the detail and the engagement with characters that will make your audience remember a particular scene. Not its accuracy.

I hope.

And all that to say, your character's relationship to food, regardless of what time period you're writing in or what profession/background your character has can be essential to their character development.

Now, let's try some of this out in your assignment.

### **Assignment Five**

Please do your research in whatever way is easiest for you. Feel free to use Wikipedia, as long as the sources are valid. If you use websites, please list them. If it's personal experience or you talk to friends, please note that. Pick one of the following two scenarios (depending on what you write) and then complete the assignment.

- A. Your contemporary hero/heroine (could be from a WIP or an on-the-spot creation)
- B. Your historical hero/heroine (could be from a WIP or an on-the-spot creation)

Now, here's the assignment.

- Your character is native to a particular place and time. I want you to do a culinary sketch of your character and their background. Please include the following:
  - **Name, age, gender, and other pertinent details.** I want to know their socioeconomic status, their profession, etc. And, of course, what year it is in their time.

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- **Current (in the WIP or in your imagination) geographic location.** If your location is made-up, pick a similar location in the real world.
- **Previous geographic locations of significance.** By this I mean, where have they lived that shaped who they are. Primarily, where did they spend their formative years?
- **Dietary restrictions.** If they have none, don't list any. But if they do and they're important to your plot and/or the character's development, please list them.
- Now that you have this sketch, I want you to take their current geographic location and do some research. Please find out the following things.
  - What is the climate like where they live and what foods are naturally grown there?
  - What dishes and/or foods are commonly served?
  - What is the culinary landscape like? (This is more important for contemporary novels, because so much of our food experiences happen outside the home. And if their culinary landscape is narrow, that's important to know. If they live in a city, what area do they live in? Are there restaurants within walking distance? What are they? Does your character have a favorite restaurant? Or a favorite dish? Are they a regular anywhere? This can vary greatly, depending on what the context of your novel is, small town with one diner, big city with every conceivable ethnic restaurant, medium town with lots of vegan restaurants, etc.)
  - Is there a particular food history element involved in this area? (The Irish Potato famine is one that springs to mind, or the sugar trade in South America, the Great Depression, think Grapes of Wrath, the current dolphin trade crisis, etc.) If not, no big deal, but if there is, please list it.
  - If your character is historical, what is it likely they would eat during the day? (Please make your best guess. I have some books to suggest at the end of the class, but this exercise is really to see what we can find just by going on the internet. For more in-depth research, I'll give you some resources later.)
- If they had previous geographic locations, please list a few details about them, as well. Pertinent details might include:
  - Region of the world/country.

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- Common regional food.
- Social background at the time they were there. (For instance, a woman living in South Carolina. Her social background and expectations will be different if she was raised in upper-class Columbia than if she grew up a Private's daughter at Fort Jackson.)
- Add any details specific to the character.
- Do they have favorite foods? Do they dislike any foods?
- Do they have social ambitions? Do they have philosophical or ideological issues with food in any way?
- Anything else you can think of.

This can be in any format you want, and doesn't need to be narrative. In fact, I find that for character sketches, lists of details are better for me. Feel free to do that, as well, if it works best for you. You can even just leave the questions there and write your answers below if that works best. It will be easier for me to make sure you've covered all the details. But as I said, feel free to do whatever works best for your brain.

I will say, this certainly doesn't need to be part of every character sketch. But I do think that if you're writing foodie romances and/or culinary professionals as characters, you should do this research into their background and influences every time you create a new character. Why? Because if you talk to real chefs, they are a product of their culinary history. It might be a reaction against it (the man who grew up eating fatty foods and decides to become a nutritionist as an adult), but it might be an embracing of it (the woman whose father-she-never-knew was a chef, so she decides to be a chef), but chances are, your chef character will be a product of their food history.

I am. Every chef I know is, to some extent or another. And certainly, the best characters are.

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**Romancing the Palate**

**Rebecca Lynn, January 2012**

**LECTURE FOUR: FOOD AS EVENT** (realistic catering business & event industry)

We're about to enter a few lessons about specific information for professional food workers. Most of this is for people who would write foodie romance, or culinary romance. We'll be talking about catering, event planning, commercial kitchens, and food professionals.

So we've taken all this time to talk about the specifics of food writing and some of you are wondering, when do we get into the nitty gritty of the food industry. Right now.

We're not going to talk about the production side of the food industry, mostly because I don't know \*anything\* about how factories work. I do know quite a bit about how farms work, since I grew up on one, but I'm sure that none of you want to hear about that. So if you have specific questions, feel free to ask them to the loop--you're probably not the only one asking. Otherwise, we'll get into the preparation side of the industry, which I'm much more familiar with.

There are really two main types of food preparation. There's food prep that happens in a restaurant kitchen (although there are many types of restaurants we'll get to that tomorrow), and the prep that happens at events. There may be some cross-over (some restaurants host events, and some catering is done off a restaurant menu), but essentially, I'm going to talk about them as completely separate entities, just for the sake of ease. If you have an experience in your novel where there is crossover, you can ask questions on the forum or you can message/email me and we can talk them through.

Here's why I think it's so important to separate out the different types of food preparation: I've worked them both, and they really do require different skills. My very first job (before I was legally old enough to work) was as a caterer's assistant. My next job was as a line cook in a restaurant. There was never a day quite so shocking as the day I started that line cook job. Completely different set of skills required. Not food-prep skills, but work-environment skills.

Please excuse the metaphor, but food preparation is like Major League Baseball. Every position requires a completely different set of work skills. While you still have to at least know \*about\* what the other positions do, you really will be best-suited for one position. What makes a good short stop (foot speed, quick response, high adaptability) won't necessarily make a good pitcher (who needs extreme accuracy, arm strength, ability to take direction well). Or, while both an outfielder and a pitcher need to be accurate in their throws, an outfielder who's consistently off his target by three inches probably isn't going to get taken out of the game. A pitcher will.

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Caterers are the catchers of this metaphor. They run the whole show, take the hard hits, and orchestrate more than anyone will ever know. (I say this not because I was a catcher, as I told someone recently, I have better skills for first base, which is what I played, but because I had a great catcher.) :)

As I said before, most catering is food preparation outside a restaurant, and generally at events. This is separate from the baking industry (where a baker provides a cake for a party), but more like large events where food must be prepared. Here's the major difference between catering and cooking.

In a restaurant, food is made to order, and generally goes out to the floor within minutes of completion. In fact, as we'll talk about later, there are many things that go into orchestrating the dance of the restaurant kitchen, but perhaps the most important is timing. Time effects food experience. The perfectly cooked piece of meat is at its peak of enjoyment for only a short amount of time, and should be served as close to that time as possible. Therefore, getting the food out in a timed and well-executed dance is important. But we'll handle that later.

It is relatively impossible to cater to-order. Because you generally are serving large quantities of the same type of food, you have an entirely different set of skills necessary for the restaurant chef. Perhaps the most important is understanding bulk food preparation.

If you have to individually fry the phyllo cups for each of your salmon tarts in order to make them at their peak food experience, then it's probably not the wisest idea to plan to prepare 2000 of them for the 500 people who are going to walk in the door of your event at the same time. Even if you can manage to have four different fryers, and each of the phyllo cups take only 10 seconds to fry, you can still only do (at most) 24 per minute. It would take you an hour and a half just to fry your phyllo cups, and by the time you'd finished enough of them to start filling, the first ones you fried would be (depending on your climate) either soggy or brittle. Neither make for a good food experience.

That might work for a restaurant chef, who only needs to put six of them on a plate at a time and can wait to fry the cups until right before the plate goes out, fill them with the hot, creamy mixture immediately, and send them out for service. See the difference?

Instead, a caterer might bake 2000 of the same tart shell, fill and decorate them, then refrigerate them until the guests arrive. That way, when all 500 people walk through the

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door, they can have fresh-made food, made to be enjoyed at the temperature (cool/cold) they are able to be served at in bulk.

Where a chef might make a 20 oz T-bone steak to-order in a restaurant kitchen, if a caterer tried to make 500 T-bone steaks at once, they'll need a grill the size of a basketball court. Or they'll have to make 8-oz strip steaks that can be cooked quicker, plated quicker, and sent out in waves, as freshly made as possible. This is why chicken is so common at large events. It's easier to make in bulk. And chicken breasts (for the most part) can be stuffed into a pan, cooked en masse, and will cook evenly without too much fuss. Portions of food that will cook in the same heat source need to be relatively the same size. This is why pork loins and chicken are so common. Or why it's also common to have a ham or standing rib roast or prime rib that can be cut to order. Cooking. There's a reason these things are staples of caterers everywhere: they cook evenly and can be served for a significant amount of time after they reach their peak temperature. They also maintain their internal temperature pretty well. These are important pieces of the catering industry, because they involve food safety. Food made for public consumption must always be at the right temperature, in addition to being more or less tasty at a certain level of doneness. That's a lot to juggle at one time.

Not unlike receiving a pitch and watching a base runner try to steal third at the same time. :) It takes skill, coordination, and quite a bit of knowledge. Big-picture thinking.

Caterers must be able to orchestrate large amounts of food (and potentially staff) all being ready at the same time. So they'll have to be more familiar with how food responds to heat (in warmers, under lamps, or directly from a refrigerator) than your average restaurant chef. Also, because some catering units are mobile, they have to be able to transport food and cook on-site in any number of different kitchen facilities, so they have to be very adaptable.

To get a good idea of what catering an event is like, watch the show *Dinner: Impossible* on the food network. Apart from the fact that you generally know about these events weeks in advance and have plenty of time to menu-plan, shop, prepare, get staff, and at least be familiar with your menu, it's a very realistic idea of what goes on in a catering kitchen during an event. It's intense because you only have one shot to get it right, but a lot of fun.

The bigger the city your caterer lives in, the more likely they will do two extremes of catering. There's the massive events. 2000-10000 people. This requires an insane amount of kitchen staff, plus servers (unless it's a buffet, and even then, you'll still need servers

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to serve the food from the buffet, restock the buffet warmers, and clear plates, etc). These usually are done in event facilities that have commercial kitchens run by the event facility designed for incredibly high-volume work. If you want to get an idea of what one of these is like, see if you can set up an appointment to tour your local event center sometime. They are massive, wide open places with ovens the size of a suburban, walk-in refrigerators and freezers (likely multiple of them), and counter space everywhere. It's not unusual for an event center to have a full kitchen staff, perhaps similarly to a restaurant, but there's no made-to-order food going on here. It's all catering. The one exception, which is often an interesting case, is the hotel kitchen. Hotel kitchens will often have an executive chef with a restaurant menu, and then a catering menu. Sometimes these kitchens are completely separate, and sometimes they're in the same place. It depends on how the hotel was built.

The other extreme is the home-held event. This tends to be a more mobile unit. They can be anywhere from two or four people up to twenty or even thirty people, depending on the capacity of the home. These range from the buffet style finger-food approach to a three-five-seven course sit-down dinner. I've had experience in both these types of catering (both the high-volume and the more mobile, smaller event side), so if you have questions about how they tend to work, email me or ask me either off-loop or you can post a question to this lecture.

I will also say a word about event planning. Generally, good caterers are booked months ahead of time. They have a menu to choose from, the client decides how many people they want to serve, what the menu will be (from either pre-chosen menu items or an agreed-on different item or two), and when the service time will be. Most caterers do not do event planning in addition to this. (Chairs, tables, silverware, decorations, etc.) An event planner and a caterer may form a business together, or a caterer who's very good at both may have a staff and oversee that staff. But on the day of an event, to have a person who both runs the kitchen and the event itself would be a nightmare.

A client consultation for catering contracts will involve three really important elements: size of event, budget, and venue. These three things will determine the menu and the kind of food that's serve-able or preferable for service. Caterers generally charge a per-head price because they price their food out per serving. They might have a pre-set menu (like many hotels will) where you say, I want to pay \$15 a person and then you can choose from x menu or x menu, that are always the same. Smaller or more mobile caterers will often give you the option to choose your own menu, or put a menu together for you depending on the price per head you can afford to pay and the needs of the group you're serving.

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Because of this, a caterer's recipes will often have notations next to each ingredient that will be a per-service price, per ingredient. And then a per-serving price for the entire recipe. So it might cost me \$1.70 per person for salmon tarts, \$1.05 per person for the meatball appetizer, and \$2.25 per person for the cheese plate. You'll have to charge at least \$5 per person, just to break even on your food costs. That doesn't yet pay you (the caterer) or any staff you have to pay, or any of your transportation costs. Depending on the size of the party, then you'll have to charge more money to pay your staff and yourself. People who have been catering for quite awhile are good at estimating these things and will often just charge a per-person cost for a flat menu, but it's not uncommon to allow people to choose their own menu and set the budget.

All that being said, some of the best conflict in professional food-related novels can be when someone who doesn't really know what they're doing (or who has an over-inflated sense of their own abilities to multi-task) tries to do something very difficult / impossible. Makes for good conflict. Or when someone asks them to do something they don't normally do. Or requires something of them that they don't want to (or don't normally) do/give. Again, this is fiction, so you can take liberties with the facts to serve your plot or your characters, but like history or the details of a cop's job, just make sure you're doing it intentionally and for a purpose, so that your audience will suspend their disbelief well enough to continue to engage. :)

And now on to the assignment.

### **Assignment Six**

Since we've learned about catering and events today, let's try something a little different than we've done. Instead of focusing on the food, let's explore the idea of conflict in relationship to expectations with events and catering.

Pick a character, either one that you've been working with or not. Write a quick scene where your character is either the client or the caterer. Pick any of the details we learned about today in relationship to the catering industry, and create some conflict around it. Remember, each of your characters should have a goal and a motivation going into this conflict, then explore it inside the conflict scene.

Please make sure to warn us at the top of your assignment if you use explicit language or explicit sexual imagery, but don't be afraid to use either. Just let us know first.

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The scene should involve some aspect of catering, and some type of conflict. All the rest is up to you!

### **LESSON 5: FOOD AS PROFESSION** (restaurants, chefs, food preparation)

If we're talking about food preparation, we have to talk about the one place that all of us are most likely to encounter food professionals: the restaurant. Specifically, the restaurant kitchen. I'm going to talk for a minute about a few different types of restaurants, and we'll hopefully get to cover both food prep and service inside restaurants as well as the life of a chef.

I want to talk about types of restaurants first, because I don't want to assume that just because you're writing about a food professional, we're all working with a restaurant like *Le Bernardin*. There are as many types of restaurants as there are types of customers, so let's approach from that level.

First, to make an initial distinction, Wikipedia would tell you that there are two basic types of restaurants: full-service and limited-service. Full service means that every part of the meal is staffed. There are staff to serve your meal, to cook your meal, to clean up after your meal. Sometimes (depending on the size and type of restaurant) the same person may do the serving and cleaning, but there's no distinction there. The main distinction is between the types of restaurants that provide table service and those that don't.

As a former chef, I would actually make a different distinction than the service (although that's important to consider). The two types of restaurants I address are standardized kitchens and non-standardized. Standardized (or serialized) kitchens come with a pre-prepared menu, and the chef's only ability to deviate from that is on the special ordering (when someone makes an amendment to the available menu). Standardized kitchens could be McDonald's or Ted's Montana Grill. But the key with restaurants like this is that they want you to be able to get the same meal in any restaurant in the entire country/world. And they structure their kitchens and processes around corporate procedure. I have some, but very little experience in standardized kitchens. Essentially, I have enough to know that I never want to work in one again. But also enough to know that people really appreciate the fact that they can get their Asian Chicken Salad to taste the same in every Applebee's in the world.

A non-standardized kitchen, on the other hand, has no corporate policy about menu. The menu is (read: should be) set by the executive or head chef, depending on how the

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kitchen is set up. Some owners who are not chefs want to set menus for their restaurants, and it's always an interesting project. That would be a great place for conflict in a book. But most of the time, in a non-standardized kitchen, the menu is set because the person doing the cooking has a particular set of skills they can showcase. So, if we think of *Le Bernardin*, the menu is reflective of Eric Ripert's personality and culinary background. If and when another chef takes over, that will likely change, and it should. Unless, of course, Ripert remains the owner and wants to keep it the same.

Here are my thoughts on the different types of non-standardized kitchens I've worked in.

Not all non-standardized kitchens are run by people who call themselves chefs. They don't need to be. There are plenty of diners, cafes, casual restaurants, and bistros that are owned by people who don't care about professional training. They care about good food. There's nothing wrong with that. (Not every chef will agree with me, but it's really true.) And let me say a quick word about these types of restaurants. It's not uncommon for an untrained person to provide better food than a trained person. While a trained person will know how to filet a fish in 60 seconds or less, they may not have better instincts about what to do with that fish once it's fileted. In fact, a good place for conflict might be between rival chefs in a mid-sized town, one of whom is culinary-school trained and one of whom is not. There's a \*BIG\* stigma attached to people who haven't been to culinary school the higher up in the ranks they rise. And I don't mean higher as in making it to head chef. But I mean higher in ranks, according to the quality of restaurant they work in. In reality, all you need to open a restaurant is money and a Food-Handler's license. But many, many trained chefs would say that you also need to go to culinary school. I'm here to tell you that's not the case. Preparing good food is about instincts with texture, flavor, and presentation.

However, the place where it's generally important to have trained people is in a fine-dining restaurant. The level of precision and technique required to survive in these kitchens requires significant training, and for a chef not to have that will cause ripples. Again, this is fiction, so you can feel free to have a highly skilled chef with no training, just make sure that's part of the conflict. Because it will be a conflict. Other chefs won't like it, and some diners won't like it if they know of it. Never miss out on an opportunity to bolster the conflict in your writing. And this would be a great place, if you have an untrained chef in a kitchen where others might be trained.

Think of it this way. There's no system requiring restaurant owners to hire trained chefs. Trained chefs see the hiring of untrained cooks to fine-dining restaurants the same way doctors look at chiropractors. They don't deny that people utilize their services, they just

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see them as, sort of, intruders. Certainly, if the untrained cook were to attempt entry into a fine-dining kitchen, they would have to prove themselves. They would definitely have to start at the bottom and work their way up.

For an idea of what the distinctions inside the kitchen are like, go to the Wikipedia page on Chef . Whoever wrote this did an excellent job of describing the distinctions. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chef> If you have any questions about it, feel free to ask me.

A quick word about chefs. Head chefs are the quintessential alpha males. They're bossy, pushy, arrogant, self-centered, and usually somewhat narcissistic. Why? Because they have to be. Chefs can't afford to have their orders questioned, their decisions second-guessed, their dishes compromised, or their vision dishonored. Why? Because a service has to run tight. From the orders on the floor to the expediting inside the kitchen, everything has to be precise. A chef must have his every order adhered to, both for the good of the food, and for the good of his/her ego. This profession attracts people who naturally want to be the quarterback of a very efficient/effective team. They have a vision, they want to see it executed. A nice guy chef will not survive in most kitchens, especially the fine-dining kitchens of the world. And the well-known kitchens are all connected in some way. The chefs might have gone to the CIA together or to Le Cordon Bleu, they might have been nominated for the James Beard, and they all follow the restaurant ratings very closely. But some way, they're connected. And they'll eat a nice guy for lunch. Really, they will.

Again, though, it's fiction. So feel free to do what you want. Just know when you're breaking the rules, and use it to create better conflict.

If you all have any questions, especially specifics about your WIPS, please let me know. I'm going to move on to the first assignment.

### **Assignment Seven**

Let's explore the dynamics of a professional kitchen. If we assume that there's a very strict hierarchy and at least a tinge of narcissism in every head chef, we can get pretty deeply into an awful lot of conflict in the kitchen very quickly.

So what I'd like you to do is to look at that Wikipedia page on the chef's job. Write a short piece about a head chef where they come into conflict with another person (could be inside or outside the kitchen) because of their alpha-esque personality. Include food

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detail, or don't, they certainly don't have to be cooking. But focus in on the elements of a chef's personality, and make the conflict feel real.

### **LESSON 6: FOOD AS STIMULANT** (aphrodisiacs, food sensuality)

There will be some EXPLICIT CONTENT in this lesson. If you'd prefer not to keep reading, that's understandable. You should be able to complete the assignment without reading the whole lesson, as there will be additional information in the assignment itself.

Now that we've covered several facets of food writing, and talked about food professionals, food history and nostalgia. And we're nearing the end of the class. So our very last lesson, before the tie-up, will be the true climax of the class, pun intended.

Food as stimulant.

As several of you already know, and as we've already discussed, we experience food with all our senses. In fact, food can often heighten our senses, producing a feeling not unlike the euphoria we feel when we fall in love. All our senses are on high alert, trying to experience this person that we've found who excites some part of us (whatever part that is). This is why food can be such a powerful connection to love.

So, of course, there are two parts to food as stimulant. One is using food as a seduction tool or a love-connection tool, which is fairly common. The other is using food as a sexual stimulant.

First, food as a seduction tool. This can be anything from your average whipped cream bikini to the kind of elaborate food preparation that someone who specializes in erotic foods might prepare. Your average Joe/Jane with no idea about what they're really doing is more likely to use the more common food seduction tools. These would be either foods that resemble sex organs or the whipped cream/chocolate sauce on the body techniques. People who aren't foodies or chefs or don't have a food obsession of some kind won't think creatively about food because they see it as a prop, not as an experience. Men who spray whipped cream on their erection don't really care about the experience of whipped cream on skin for a woman. They're essentially trying to make appetizing a part of the body that many women have no desire to put in their mouth. A man wants his partner to put his penis in his/her mouth, he tries to make it appetizing. It's pretty simple thinking. For both genders. It has nothing to do with their gender (or, I will say, sexual preference). It's all about how they see food.

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## Romancing the Palate

Rebecca Lynn, January 2012

On the other hand, a man with a lot of food knowledge will have an advantage on your average male. There is a way to use food as a seductive stimulant that is more about putting things in our mouths and simulating the sex act. For instance, he might know that hummus is a powerful aphrodisiac. Couple that with the phallic shape of a carrot, and preparing an appetizer of halved carrots with piped/spread hummus will benefit both partners. Of course, you can use any phallic-shaped food. But generally, what happens when we're already aroused (by food or by the promise of sex) is that our senses go on high alert. There are all sorts of openings (everything from taste buds to blood vessels to olfactory glands to minds) that are stimulated by this high alert. Once we're in a state of arousal, adding stimulating food to this is akin to using drugs. In fact, the chemicals produced in the brain when we're aroused and eat, say, chocolate produce brain scans that align closely with someone on a heroin high. It's important to be aware of this when you're writing food seduction or food sex scenes, because anyone who's had an experience like this will be on the lookout for these details. It enhances the experience. For everyone.

Additionally, because men are so visual and women tend to be more sensitive to touch, it's going to excite a man more to see his lover putting something phallic shaped into his/her mouth than it will to have an ice cube sucked on their neck. Of course, that combination of wet, lips, and cold would probably stimulate just about everyone. But there are going to be experiences that will be more exciting to certain people. These are things you should know about your characters.

The act of seduction using food will likely culminate in sex. Although I have to say on a personal note, one of the absolute best food-seduction scenes I've ever read before was between two Christian characters who were not married and had very strict moral boundaries about how far they could indulge themselves. The author masterfully took the reader through this amazing and beautiful scene where the hero and heroine ate a chocolate board in public together (without really realizing what it would do to them, as hyper-aware of one another as they already were), then they were both SO turned on they had a hard time controlling themselves, but they did. And they did not have sex! I was openmouthed in awe at this woman. It was honestly better than any of the food-seduction scenes that I've read, precisely because it highlighted how food can indulge the senses, and then left everyone wanting more. Everyone. So while it might be very hot to consummate the sex after being seduced, it can be just as hot (or for some people, even hotter) to not consummate anything.

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That being said, this particular book is the only one I've ever read quite like it, and if you're writing a romance novel, chances are that if you get to include a food seduction scene, you'll have to include a food sex scene. So let's talk about that.

The fact that food is fully experiential is what makes it so exciting. When food stimulates one sense, it tends to make all the senses come alive, as I hinted at before. This is the joy of how our bodies were created to function. The experience of being on high-alert like that is a unique and unparalleled experience. It's something that can be used to imbue any kind of love scene with that extra aliveness that will bring the reader into the experience. This requires a couple of things: extremely accurate and specific food details, and a sense of purpose.

So the food detail part, we've covered. Why purpose? Because while food is a part of life, the use of food as a sexual stimulant is not a part of everyone's life. It would be unrealistic for a prudish, highly religious woman to suddenly strip down to her birthday suit in a room full of salivating men. That could be part of her sexual journey, but it wouldn't just happen without provocation or motivation. Like anything, food as part of sex must have motivation. Why would your characters engage in this? Why would they use the particular foods they use?

And obviously, this goes beyond preference. Certainly, a vegetarian isn't going to put a sausage inside any of his/her orifices. It just won't stimulate them. If they don't want to eat it, they don't want to use it in sex. They might use a vegetable with a phallic shape, but not meat. This should be fairly obvious. Of course, there are also food allergies. Don't have your character who's allergic to shellfish eating oysters as an aphrodisiac. Again, these things are fairly common sense. Why bring them up? Because they go straight to the idea of purpose in using food as part of sex. The food should stimulate the characters in their sexual experience, and serve some purpose.

It might just be that it's handy, of course. Like they had caramel sauce on their ice cream, so they use the caramel sauce during sex. But it could have an even deeper purpose, of course. The hummus/carrot idea from earlier is an example of this. Someone who knows a lot about stimulating foods will want to use a food that not only enhances the sex texturally, but also could have some chemical effect on the brain of his/her lover. There's a book by Eden Bradley on food kinks that tells the story of a woman whose boyfriend used to cover her in whipped cream and it sort of scarred her about her sexuality, so when she meets this man who knows a lot about food kinks, he uses foods on her that will encourage her to explore this part of her sexuality, and not once do they go to the

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whipped cream. The purpose of each of their sexual interludes is breaking down the walls of her fears about herself because she likes to use food as part of sex.

On the other hand, if you haven't established your characters as being interested in food, I'm not going to believe it when they pull out a popsicle and start sticking it in various openings in the bedroom. Not because that wouldn't be stimulating, but because I wouldn't believe that these characters who have no interest in food outside the bedroom would suddenly have an interest in food inside the bedroom. Your characters are the same people, in any room and any situation, so just write them consistently. This is a basic rule of writing, I know, but I've seen way too many people trying to jump on the cool foodie bandwagon and sticking random sex scenes inside a book with characters that just aren't believable. Like any regular sex scene, a character has to have a motivation to have food-sex. But once they have that motivation, you can get pretty creative. If you're interested in writing romantica/erotica about food kinks, message me and I'll get you a list of books to read. Otherwise, I won't include them on the bibliography, since this isn't primarily a food sex or food seduction class.

But I do encourage you to explore how you intend to use food as a stimulant, and how it would be realistic for your characters to engage in using food to stimulate their love experiences.

Okay, now to the assignment.

### Assignment Eight

As we discussed in the lesson, the fact that food is fully experiential is what makes it so exciting. When food stimulates one sense, it tends to make all the senses come alive. This is the joy of how our bodies were created to function. The experience of being on high-alert like that is unique and unparalleled, except when it comes to being in the presence of someone you love. Love or the promise of love creates a similarly high-alert state. In order to draw readers into this experience, fiction writers employ the use of show-don't-tell details and high emotions. Food can be an additional tool to heighten these emotions and bring these details to the forefront.

Remember the five senses, and the very first lesson we did, where we tried to be as explicit with our food detail as possible? I want you to write a similar scene, except this time, I want you to use the food details to connect two people to each other.

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It could be as simple as them having a good food experience and then using that as a way to open themselves up to the possibility of falling in love. Or it could be a food seduction or a food sex scene. Use your creativity, be true to your characters and your context, and let yourself experiment. Use highly specific and evocative food details. Use all five senses. If you want, use food nostalgia or food history. But focus on the five senses and the experience of food connecting two people.

If you use explicit language and/or have explicit sexual imagery in your assignment, please be sure to post that at the very top of your assignment. Thank you, all! And now, write away!

Fly, my pretties, fly

### **CONCLUSION**

Well, we've had a fantastic class. All of you have been amazing to work with, and have provided great questions and thoughts, as well as posting great work for your assignments.

I have a couple of closing thoughts before we end the class today.

First, of course, is to say that writers write. So when all else fails, write. This will be the best way to find the way into your story, around your food, and through your characters. Practice writing. This will be your best tool.

Second, keep experimenting with food. The best food details in food writing are ones that are obviously real. It's important to have a bank of new experiences. If your characters are making clam chowder or paella, try making some yourself. See what it feels like. While you can rely on memory, don't always take that shortcut, because sometimes food memories can be deceiving. Or you could form some new textural or sensual experience from your new cooking.

I'm including, in the bibliography, some cookbook suggestions, but by all means, build your own arsenal. Food is a way of life. For your characters. For you. Any experience you have, use it. The more real fiction feels, the more engaged your reader will be.

That being said, fiction is not real. And sometimes (maybe intentionally) you have to sacrifice reality or real details for the sake of the story. Don't be afraid to do that. Or, as

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we talked about in other exercises, use the change in real details to create conflict in your story or to add depth to a character.

Also, here's my email: [rlcameron@yahoo.com](mailto:rlcameron@yahoo.com). Feel free to continue to email me with questions you have, follow-ups to assignments for the next couple of weeks. If you need someone to look at a food-related passage or to toss ideas around for a foodie romance, please feel free to email me at any time. It may take me a bit to get back to you, but I'll always answer my emails.

Thank you all so much for taking this class and for providing me with a great experience of teaching. I look forward to seeing you at some point in the future, and God bless all of you in your writing careers, your family lives, and your hearts and minds. It's been great to know you all.

Happy Food Writing!!

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Recommended Nonfiction Books**

*Becoming a Chef* by Andrew Dornenburg

*Comfort Me with Apples* by Ruth Reichl

*Cooking for Mr. Latte* by Amanda Hesser

*Food in History* by Reay Tannahill

*Garlic & Sapphires* by Ruth Reichl

*Heat* by Bill Buford

*In the Devil's Garden: Sinful History of Forbidden Food* by Stewart Lee Allen

*Kitchen Confidential* by Anthony Bourdain

*On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* by Harold McGee

*On the Line* by Eric Ripert and Christine Muhlke

*Ratio* by Michael Ruhlman

*Southern Belly* by John T. Edge

*Spiced: A Pastry Chef's True Stories of Trials by Fire, After-Hours Exploits, and What Really Goes On In*

*The Kitchen* by Dalia Jurgensen

*Tender to the Bone* by Ruth Reichl

*The Best Food Writing of 2008* edited by Holly Hughes (or any year, really)

*The Making of a Chef* by Michael Ruhlman

*The Professional Chef* by The Culinary Institute of America

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*The Taste of Conquest: The Rise and Fall of the Three Great Cities of Spice* by Michael Krondl

*The Saucier's Apprentice* by Bob Spitz

### **Recommended Cookbooks**

*A Return to Cooking* by Eric Ripert and Michael Ruhlman

*Bobby Flay's Throwdown* by Bobby Flay

*Classic Home Desserts* by Richard Sax

*Jamie at Home* by Jamie Oliver

*Kirsten's Cookbook* by Evert, Braun, and Mahal (food history)

*Momofuku* by David Chang

*Nigella Kitchen* by Nigella Lawson

*Seduction and Spice* by Rudy Sodamin

*The Joy of Cooking* by Irma S. Rombauer, Marion Rombauer Becker, Ethan Becker

*The Book Lover's Cookbook* by Shaunda Kennedy Wenger and Janet Kay Jensen

*The Flavor Bible* by Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg

*The New InterCourses: An Aphrodisiac Cookbook* by Martha Hopkins and Randall Lockridge

*The Orgasmic Diet* by Marenn Lindberg

### **Recommended Fiction Books**

*Bet Me* by Jennifer Cruise (no explicit sex, but general sex scenes)

*Can't Stand the Heat* by Louisa Edwards (some explicit, chef hero)

*Delicious* by Sherry Thomas (some explicit sex, fantastic food description, historical)

*Forbidden Fruit* by Eden Bradley (erotic-food fetish, explicit)

*Her Reluctant Bodyguard* by Jennette Green (inspirational romance, no sex, chocolate scene)

*Off the Record* by Camryn Rhys (explicit sex, good food detail, chef heroine)

*On the Steamy Side* by Louisa Edwards (some explicit, chef hero)

*Refired* by Jeeper Wade (chef hero--very accurate professional kitchen and male perspective)

*Scrumptious* by Amanda Usen (pastry chef heroine, some explicit)

*The Barn-Dance* by Camryn Rhys (explicit sex, erotic romance, food detail solid)

*The Lost Recipe for Happiness* by Barbara O'Neal (romantic elements, chef hero, amazing food description)

*The Perfect Dish* by Kristen Painter (chef hero, some sex scenes)

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**Recommended Foodie Blogs and Websites**

Amateur Gourmet - <http://www.amateurgourmet.com/>  
Cooks Illustrated - <http://www.cooksillustrated.com/>  
Eats Well With Others - <http://www.joanne-eatswellwithothers.com/>  
Lick the Bowl Good - <http://lickthebowlgood.blogspot.com/>  
Lucy's Kitchen Notebook - <http://kitchen-notebook.blogspot.com/>  
My Tasty Treasures - <http://mytastytreasures.blogspot.com/>  
Orangette - <http://orangette.blogspot.com/>  
Romancing the Palate , <http://romancingthepalate.blogspot.com>  
Ruth Reichl's blog - <http://www.ruthreichl.com/>  
Smitten Kitchen - <http://smittenkitchen.com/>  
Slice - <http://slice.seriousseats.com/>  
Sugar Plum - <http://www.visionsofsugarplum.com/>  
The Bitten Word - <http://www.thebittenword.com/thebittenword/>  
The Foodzie Blog - <http://foodzie.com/blog/>

**Recommended Podcasts**

Hungry Nation  
KCRW's Good Food  
The Sporkful

**Recommended Magazines**

Cooks Illustrated  
Cooking Light  
Food & Wine  
Food Network Magazine  
Saveur

**Recommended Movies**

*Babette's Feast*  
*Ratatouille*  
*Chocolat*  
*Like Water for Chocolate*  
*Sideways*  
*No Reservations*  
*Soul Food*  
*Julie & Julia*  
*Fried Green Tomatoes*

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Last Recommendation: GET COOKING YOURSELF!! Experimentation is the best foodie fodder. Happy food writing!

Rebecca Lynn

<http://romancingthepalate.blogspot.com>

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