



Lily Prior

La Cucina
ISBN13: 9780060953690

Q: How would you summarize *La Cucina*?

A: A delicious tale of risotto and rumpy-pumpy.

Q: Describe your travels in Italy and how they related to the inspiration for and creation of this book.

A: I knew from the very beginning that Sicily would be the setting for *La Cucina*: a larger-than-life backdrop for my larger-than-life heroine, Rosa Fiore. This magical island has all the ingredients I needed: Mediterranean sun, light, color and culture: intense heat inspiring intense passions; a culinary tradition that exalts the concentrated flavors of the island's food; an air of mystery and melancholy; the fascination of the mafia; the dark, deserted alleyways of downtown Palermo; the danger and disappearances; the crumbling palazzi, the quirky characters; curiosities like the miles of expensive autostrada on stilts that lead precisely nowhere, and of course, the volcano; I like volcanoes.

Q: What ideas came first in the process of writing this novel? Did you conceive of the setting, the plot, or a particular character first?

A: What came first were the very clear ideas of the central characters, Rosa and l'Inglese. Their shared passion for food was what led to their extraordinary love affair, so the novel was always going to be a culinary saga.

Q: Throughout the novel Rosa and others are cooking sumptuous dishes and meals. Do you yourself cook?

A: Yes, I love cooking. Like Rosa, I love to make bread, rustic soups, pasta dishes and sumptuous deserts, but I should point out (for those who have written in with complaints) I personally have never slaughtered farm animals.

Q: Do you have a favorite scene in *La Cucina*?

A: Oh lots! I love Rosa's erotic fantasies, the early skirmishes between Rosa and l'Inglese, and the farcical love scene when they struggle to remove one another's clothes.

Q: *La Cucina* is divided into four sections, each based on one of the seasons. What was your motivation for doing this?

A: The seasons are significant because each reflects a stage in Rosa's life. The novel opens with the winter, and what is probably the darkest time in Rosa's life. Then the spring comes, when her sap is rising, and she is preparing to blossom like the cherry trees that line the city streets. There follows that exuberant summer of love she shares with l'Inglese. And finally comes the fall, when she has reached a stage of emotional maturity, an acceptance of her life and herself.

Q: *La Cucina* is being made into a feature film. Are you involved in the process of translating it to the screen?

A: I hope to be. I am hugely excited at the prospect of the movie, and entertain myself with casting the various characters. I'd love to hear readers' ideas on this.

Q: What would you like people to come away with after having read *La Cucina*?

A: I hope when people read *La Cucina*, they will smell the bread baking, the fragrant basil just plucked from the window box, the coffee brewing on the stove. I hope their taste buds will be awakened by the irresistible garlic and melting cheese concoction, formaggio all'Argentiera, which Rosa prepares in the middle of the night, and which rouses her neighbors from their sleep, its succulence pervading their dreams. I hope readers will feel the intensity of the sun on their skin, hear the cries of the vendors under their red awnings in the market place, blink in the dazzling intensity of the white light on emerging out of doors in the midday sun, and I hope they will feel the cold kisses of oysters on their bare flesh.

But beyond appealing to the senses, I hope readers will enjoy the characters, feel heartened by Rosa's resilience, and shed a tear at the end. I would like to think readers will agree with Joanne Harris (author of *Chocolat*) who said of *La Cucina*: "Like an excellent meal, it leaves the reader feeling warm, satisfied, and in greater harmony with herself and the human race."

Q: What is *Nectar*, your second novel, about?

A: It is the magical story of a woman with a scent without a heart.

Q: What authors do you admire?

A: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and many other marvelous South American authors. Vladimir Nabokov, and his god in the details.