



A la Carte

Tanita S. Davis

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SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD LAINEY DREAMS of becoming a world famous chef one day and maybe even having her own cooking show. (Do you know how many African American female chefs there *aren't*? And how many vegetarian chefs have their own shows? The field is wide open for stardom!) But when her best friend—and secret crush—suddenly leaves town, Lainey finds herself alone in the kitchen. With a little help from Saint Julia (Child, of course), Lainey finds solace in her cooking as she comes to terms with the past and begins a new recipe for the future.

Peppered with recipes from Lainey's notebooks, this delicious debut novel finishes the same way one feels finishing a good meal—satiated, content, and hopeful.

A la Carte Details

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Author : Tanita S. Davis

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From Reader Review A la Carte for online ebook

Haley Todd says

I enjoyed this book! The plot takes an unexpected direction, in a good way. I really loved the role food plays, especially because I'm such a foodie. At times, I found Lainey's character a little annoying, but I liked how much she grows by the end and all that she learns.

Abby says

I felt like the book wasn't very well developed. The characters' actions were inconsistent, and some of the plot points seemed to come out of nowhere.

Rashika (is tired) says

I am not exactly sure how to rate this one. I loved some things about it but was frustrated by Lainey a lot. She was AMAZING by the end of the book though so yay for character development.

Also the writing style seemed to be very tell-y at times and I didn't like it. It stopped bothering me about half way through but the beginning of the novel seemed like it would have benefited from a tad more polishing.

But if you love food, this book is SO MUCH FUN and comes with a bunch of awesome recipes you can try out for yourself ;)

Obsidian says

I thought that this story told in the first person from Lainey's point of view was very well done. I have been this girl in high school having a crush on someone who was in Lainey's mother's own words 'not worth her at all' and would feel frustrated to the point that I was incapable of much else besides sitting and thinking about them all of the time.

Ms. Davis writes Lainey very well and to me this character sounds like a 17 year old African American teen to me. And she sounds like one that is obsessed with cooking. Ms. Davis obviously did research into the recipes and restaurant industry because everything she wrote and showed at what goes behind the scenes at a restaurant sounds real.

I also liked that she touched upon Lainey's weight troubles and how she was eating healthier throughout the book. Most African American teenagers do tend to be heavier and as Lainey shows in our families, food is love. That was the way it was in our household too. You could run to friends' and relatives homes and there was always a meal waiting for you. I can't count the number of times that I would forage door to door until I saw a meal I actually wanted to eat and then stay put there for dinner. Lucky for me and my brothers we played sports constantly and all were rail thin. It wasn't until I moved to DC and got a desk job I started to

gain any weight. Yeah I know you are all coming me a bitch right now lol.

A couple of times I shook my head because as typical with kids that age you listen to Lainey's inner rationalizations about why her used to be best friend Sim has drifted away from her. And I felt badly for her for not realizing that Sim was only around when he did need something from her. I also had male friends like that. Either they are hanging out with you to get some attention from you or they need a 'favor' that they are always promising to return to you soon. However, soon never happens.

It was enjoyable to see Lainey's eye open to the fact that she had opportunities and a dream that she could make into a reality if she would just let go of all of the other things that were holding her back.

I also really liked Lainey's mother and her grandmother in this story. I thought they were drawn very well and I cracked up a few times since I thought for a second Ms. Davis was channeling my mother in a couple of scenes. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The only reason why I gave this book 4.5 stars was that the recipes at the end of the chapter were hard to read on my Kindle. I tried reading this book on my PC at one point to see if the recipes would become more legible and they didn't. I did blow up the text on my Kindle and it made the recipes bigger but blurrier sometimes. I think it was a cute idea to have a recipe at the end of each chapter and have them written on school notebook paper. However, it would be nice to actually be able to read what was written. I am very much interested in vegetarian recipes.

Angie says

A la Carte is one of those feel good reads that you can't help but smile and nod, or cringe and nod, as you read it. Lainey reminded me so much of what it was like to be a teenager with all of the wanting to be accepted by your peers even if those people aren't who's best for you. She also wants her mom to stop trying to manage her social life, even though she really is lacking in that area. But above all she wants to be a chef. Not just any chef though: the first African American, vegetarian TV chef! Lainey is on track for that goal until her once-upon-a-time best friend Simeon comes back into her life and asks for the biggest favor: help him disappear.

A la Carte made me really hungry. Lainey is always cooking something! It's her go-to activity when things aren't going right. She even practices talking to her studio audience while she whips up something new at home. And each chapter ends with a recipe! I'm very interested in many of them; all of them are vegetarian and some are "low fat" alternatives since Lainey is trying to make healthier decisions after a period of time where she ate her feelings.

While cooking is a huge part of Lainey's life, the real focus of *A la Carte* is on Lainey and Simeon. It's not a romance, just a friendship. Although she does have a crush on him, which is part of why I think it's so hard for her to say no to him! I think we've all been there at some point! Lainey and Sim went different ways in high school, but he pops in and out of her life as he needs favors. And now he's put her in an awful position since he's leaving home, and she's the only one he filled in on his plan, and now she has to lie for him! I loved how Lainey's mom was super involved, instead of being absent as many YA parents are. She is a great voice of reason, even if Lainey won't listen. I know at seventeen (and probably even now) I wouldn't listen either, but it was still so nice to read about a great family dynamic where there's a parent who actually cares.

A la Carte was just really great! I loved how it dealt with something that teenagers and even some adults deal with, but in a light-hearted way. We all seek acceptance and want recognition for what we do for others, and sometimes it's hard to take a step back and realize that it's not really needed and actually bad for us! Lainey got off track from her goals because of this, but with the help of her mother, an unexpected friend, and Julia Child, she found her way again.

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Doret says

This started off as a pretty good novel and finished very very strong, turning my like into love. 17 yr old Elaine (Lainey) lives in the Bay Area with her mother who is co owner of La Salle Rouge restaurant. Lainey is pretty good in the kitchen as well and dreams of having her own vegetarian cooking show. *A la Carte* is about much more than a girl who wants to be a chef. Its also about a teenage girl who falls for the wrong guy. Lainey has known Sim since grade school. The two used to be very close friends when high school started Sim no longer had time for Lainey. As soon as the author introduced Sim I didn't like him because Lainey seemed like a nice girl who deserved a good guy. Not a guy who strings her along or only comes by when he needs something, making empty promises. But the author tricked me into thinking maybe Sim wasn't so bad after all, when he went crying to Lainey about needing to runaway because his parents didn't understand him.

I just wanted to say goodbye. I'm not coming back. I finally figured it out, my parents are crazy and its them that's making my life such crap. I can't live like this so I'm not going to. It's not like they don't want me to go

As I read this chapter of Sim leaving I was thinking ohh he isn't that bad just misunderstood. Even when he asked to borrow 500 dollars from Lainey I was still blind. Though I hate to be tricked it makes it easier to see how Lainey could fall for a guy like Sim. Cooking comforts Lainey, throughout the novel she cooks various recipes. Lainey's cooking doesn't stop the flow of the novel, only slows the pace so Lainey can catch her breath again. Lainey's vegetarian recipes are included in the book. Lainey's mom was great, not allowing Lainey to stop living her life for a guy. It was a long slow process for Lainey to rethink her relationship with Sim and how much she is willing to take or do for a guy making this story very believable.

Sim comes back

I've thought about you alot, Laine. Not enough to call though huh? I smile back, almost sad that I know it's so true. Sim laughs shortly. Man, Laine you're brutal. Okay so I screwed up. His finger traces my lower lip. I'll make it up to you. Come see me this summer? Now he asks when all I have ever wanted was for him to want me with him, to need be to be around , to take notice of what I do . Now it's not what I want anymore. I'm not a girl who's meant to be a side dish. I won't stand around and wait for some boy while he chooses me. I can choose me too.

I am pretty sure my like turned into love right around here. I highly recommend *A la Carte*. If you know a girl who is stuck on the wrong guy, or maybe you want them to avoid the wrong guy give them this book. If you know a girl who likes to cook, is a vegetarian or enjoys cooking shows give them this book. *A la Carte* is

appropriate for preteens.

Susan Berger says

I pre ordered the paperback of A la Carte March 24th. It arrived last week. I started reading it last night and couldn't put it down till I finished.

I loved it. I loved Lainey and her mom and her friends and the jazz choir and the Salle Rouge and I adored the recipes. The first one I am going to try is the gingerbread.

I got to the end about three AM and I was so sad it was over. I can't wait to share this book.

Sian Jones says

One of my obsessions lately is voice -- in that I bow down to folks who create narration that makes me feel as if I'm hearing a human voice, confused, struggling, funny, smart, flawed. This one really manages that, manages to be inside the head of a seventeen-year-old girl who far more resembles the teenager I was than the ones I usually read about. Lainey makes mistakes and missteps that make my insides twist in recognition, and at the same time I feel her frustrations so keenly. This book is messy and real emotionally -- hallelujah! -- about the poignancy of childhood trust being replaced with adult judgment. It's an honest, powerful, funny book, and by all means, not just for young adults. Oh, and between chapters, recipes that will make you drool like a Pavlovian dog.

Suzanne says

Because I love to cook, I like novels that have recipes and center around cooking: Dianna Mott Davidson, Joanne Fluke, etc. This novel is similar in that it had food at its core and is filled with recipes in the text. I like the recipes and ideas, but the novel left a rather bland taste. It might appeal to some teens, but, I think its plot does not have enough flavor to satisfy most.

Lynn says

Lainey dreams of being the next Julia Child and having her own cooking show. But first she has to negotiate the remainder of her senior year, avoid being too organized by her mother and deal with the gorgeous boy who only shows up when he wants something. Sim and Lainey were childhood friends and Lainey has had a crush on him forever. When he decides to leave town, he asks Lainey to keep secrets and take actions that violate her mother's trust in her. Characterizations are nicely done here and Lainey slowly begins to realize that she needs to stand up for herself and move on. The relationship between Lainey and her mother is a strong feature of this book. Filled with recipes and a satisfying ending.

Amy Y. says

A la Carte by Tanita S. Davis is about a young 17 year old girl named Elaine whose dream is to become a world famous chef inspired by Julia Child and becoming a star in her own cooking show. However, her dreams of becoming of becoming a world-renown chef is halted when her secret crush and best friend runs away from home. Alone and determined, Elaine does whatever she can do to pursue her dream of vegetarian cooking and save her long term best friend before everything in her life shatters into many pieces.

I got a hold of this book by the library's shelf of book recommendations. When I first read the blurb, my first reaction was "Whoa, I think I've heard of this book somewhere". And I was right. This book reminded me of another book called Dance. Where the a 17 year old girl tries to pursue her dream of becoming a professional ballerina. On the other hand, Davis's writing style is very simple yet very sophisticated. I love how she includes different recipes that anyone could follow and make in their very own homes! Also, this book made me reflect on my own life because it comes to a point where young adults have to find out what they want to do in their lives. Overall, if I would've rate this book on scale between 1-10, I would give it a 6 because of its simple writing style and it made me reflect back on to my own life.

Jenny says

3 1/2 stars. Really enjoyed this, especially the bits about cooking and creating recipes and the actual recipes mixed into the book.

Becky says

An empty plate hits the stainless steel deck in the kitchen of La Salle Rouge with a clatter. (1)

Rarely do I so completely agree with a jacket flap. But in this case, it is right on.

Seventeen-year-old Lainey dreams of becoming a world famous chef one day and maybe even having her own cooking show. (Do you know how many African American female chefs there aren't? And how many vegetarian chefs have their own shows? The field is wide open for stardom.) But when her best friend--and secret crush--suddenly leaves town, Lainey finds herself alone in the kitchen. With a little help from Saint Julia (Child, of course), Lainey seeks solace in her cooking as she comes to terms with the past and begins a new recipe for the future. Peppered with recipes from Lainey's notebooks, this delicious debut novel finishes the same way one feels after a good meal--satiated content, and hopeful.

A La Carte does not overwhelm you with its greatness. Perhaps overwhelm isn't the right word, what I mean is that it is subtle and gentle. It's not overpowering. (It's the kind of 'greatness' that sneaks up on you and takes you by surprise.) Most YA novels in one way or another deal with the 'issue' or 'theme' of identity. And A La Carte is no different. It is without a doubt a coming of age story. Lainey--as a person--grows, changes, evolves, learns, awakens through the course of the novel. The Lainey we meet on page 1 is not the Lainey we say goodbye to on page 280. Some things stay the same, of course, but quite a few things change. One is the way Lainey sees herself, knows herself, respects herself.

But A La Carte also offers an in-depth look at family life. Particularly the relationship between Lainey and her mom. It is so well done. So dimensional. I hope that makes sense. In other words, both Lainey and her mom, Vivianne, are fully developed. And their relationship has depth and life.

And then there's the friendship angle. The popularity angle. Lainey is on the fringes, the outskirts of high school society. She's more of a loner. And content to be that way. Sure she wishes that some of her former friends hadn't ditched her for the cool crowd. But she's happy staying in the kitchen. Or so she thinks most of the time. This book examines what it means to be a friend, to have a friend. What does healthy friendship look like? What doesn't it look like?

In a way A La Carte says a great deal about longing. I don't want to say too much more about that because I don't want to spoil this one for anyone.

A La Carte is good. It resonates in meaning-of-life internal drama. There's a richness to it that I can't quite explain. I suppose I mean it has depth and layers.

Saint Julia always said that in cooking, there are very few mistakes that can't be corrected. You can add a pinch of salt and some chopped herbs to the butter if you forgot to put salt in your bread. If your souffle falls, you can serve it with a sauce over it, and it'll look just fine. Gummy mashed potatoes can be resurrected as potato pancakes. But once you add too much pepper to something--it's over. You can't make something less spicy than it is. (179)

Definitely recommended. (Though I must admit the ending seemed a bit too happy to be realistic. Still, overall, I enjoyed it and found it a satisfying read. In fact, it made me a bit hungry!)

Vivian says

There wasn't much romance in this book, sadly but im glad that there was so much more meaning to this book, like growing up. as a matter of fact, i was jealous of Elaine, or lainey because she knew exactly what she wanted to do and is just so certain of her future, unlike me. it kind of made me want to consider more of what i wanted to do for my future, since im getting closer and closer to college.

In addition to growing up, Sim, lainey's crush, made a very dramatic decision, which was to run away from home and start a fresh life, where he would be the boss of his own life. I'm not sure if this would be considered a courageous action or a immature action. courageous because he isn't fully an adult, i believe he was only 16 or 17 in the book, and without a high school diploma, finding a job would be hard. I mean if i was him, i would've sucked it up for a little longer and then go away for college. But under his circumstances and his parents, i can see why it would be hard. which is why i consider his move to be courageous, because he is finally rebelling, but at the same time, he is considering his future. However i thought it was immature because of the fact that he isnt fully an adult, hasn't gotten his high school diploma and it seems that everything wasn't planned out well. As well as affecting others, like lainey. i mean its a little unfair to be playing with a girls heart and knowing that she would do whatever for you because she obviously likes you. There was also topher, or christopher ... i really don't understand why he had to change his name, and really to topher? at least make it more interesting if its suppose to show that you've changed. Any who, Sim was to blame to get him caught with having possession of drugs. Yet because sim was too drunk, he couldn't remember. That's kind of ... RUDE. which adds on to why sim is still consider an immature person, because he wasn't even able to control the situation. but at the same time i can't blame him for wanting to let loose but i mean, you can talk it out with your parents and although actions speak louder than words, sim seems to be

hurting himself more, than actually benefiting himself. But im glad topher/ christopher made lainey realize the truth and allowed her to gain more ... confidence? or realize that she didn't need sim in her life, would that be considered independence? since lainey doesn't really hang out with many people, she is always alone ...

I also enjoyed the bond between mom and daughter. it was so well developed that it didn't really seem like mom and daughter but more like sisters. The issue of trust was also brought and the theme of trust taking forever to build and seconds to break seems true once again. but i also like how since this family is only female, there was a theme of female dominance, like you don't need a man to keep you happy. Which goes for all ladies on this earth. =)

TheMistressofBooks says

I enjoy so very immensely having black fiction not centered around the hood, civil rights, or anything else that's really heavy (they all have their place of course, but sometimes I want some escapism, y'know). I wanted to love this book. A black girl that loves to cook? This beautiful cover? Unfortunately, this is just essentially a girl yearning for a fuckboy. Sigh...
