Aftertaste

by Daria Lavelle



About the Book

What if you could have one last meal with someone you?ve loved, someone you?ve lost? Combining the magic of UNDER THE WHISPERING DOOR with the high-stakes culinary world of SWEETBITTER, AFTERTASTE is an epic love story, a dark comedy, and a synesthetic adventure through food and grief.

A food story to binge.
A ghost story to devour.
A love story to savor.

Konstantin Duhovny is a haunted man. His father died when he was 10, and ghosts have been hovering around him ever since. Kostya can?t exactly see the ghosts, but he can taste their favorite foods. Flavors of meals he?s never eaten will flood his mouth, a sign that a spirit is present. Kostya has kept these *aftertastes* a secret for most of his life, but one night, he decides to act on what he?s tasting. And everything changes.

Kostya discovers that he can reunite people with their deceased loved ones --- at least for the length of time it takes them to eat a dish that he?s prepared. He thinks his life?s purpose might be to offer closure to grieving strangers and sets out to learn all he can by entering a particularly fiery ring of Hell: the New York culinary scene. But as his kitchen skills catch up with his ambitions, Kostya is too blind to see the catastrophe looming in the Afterlife. And the one person who knows Kostya must be stopped also happens to be falling in love with him.

Set in the bustling world of New York restaurants and teeming with mouthwatering food writing, AFTERTASTE is a whirlwind romance, a heart-wrenching look at love and loss, and a ghost story about all the ways we hunger --- and how far we?d go to find satisfaction.

Discussion Guide

1. As Kostya discovers, aftertastes are food memories so potent and special that they form a tether between the Dead and the Living who love them. What would your aftertaste be? Who would it connect you to?

2. Share an early memory of food or cooking, and the ?flavor? that memory has for you. (Sweet, sour, salty, bitter, savory, spicy, etc.)

3. Kostya keeps his clairgustance a secret for most of his life. If you had the power to taste the Dead, would you keep it hidden?

4. Vera?s fear and inability to cope after Sergei?s death is one of the things haunting Kostya into adulthood. How do her actions and their relationship impact Kostya?s decision-making?

5. Which of Kostya?s restaurant experiences did you like best? Library of Spirits, Saveur Fare, Hell?s Kitchen or DUH? What did he learn about his gift at each one?

6. Kostya goes to extreme lengths to see his dad again. How far might you go to see someone you loved one more time?

7. Who (or what) is the villain or antagonizing force in AFTERTASTE? What causes the conflicts in the living world? What causes the issues arising in the Afterlife?

8. Maura?s confession at DUH sends Konstantin reeling. What might have happened if she had chosen to be honest sooner? Why do you think she kept her hunger and her visits to the Afterlife hidden, and did those reasons change during the story?

9. The characters in AFTERTASTE keep many secrets throughout the book. Which were the most surprising to you and why?

10. The book is structured with chapters that alternate between narratives from the living world (Kostya?s story) and the Afterlife (Frankie?s tour, Everleigh?s experience, Maura?s trips), meaning that the reader always knows more than Konstantin does about the effect his food is having. How would your perspective change if you only had access to Kostya?s narrative?

Author Bio

Daria Lavelle is an American fiction writer. Born in Kyiv, Ukraine, and raised in the New York metro area, her work explores themes of identity and belonging through magic and the uncanny. Her short stories have appeared in *The Deadlands*, *Dread Machine* and elsewhere, and she holds degrees in writing from Princeton University and Sarah Lawrence College. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, children and goldendoodle, all of whom love a great meal almost as much as she does.

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