



Dirty Sugar Cookies: Culinary Observations, Questionable Taste

Ayun Halliday

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Ayun Halliday's fourth book, *Dirty Sugar Cookies*, takes readers into the unpredictable mind and comical experiences of a true anti-foodie, giving even the most hopeless cooks a moment of relief from self-criticism, and the least discriminating eaters a reality check. Halliday started out a repressed picky eater without so much as a single fast-food-loving sibling to save her from the gourmet ambitions of a mother whose recipe for Far East Celery once received favorable mention in the *Indianapolis Star*. Her palate has since expanded to the degree that she'll fork down anything from chili-smothered insects that pass for an exotic destination's local delicacies to a peanut found wedged between the cushions of a theater seat.

From summer camp's unlimited Pop-Tarts to the post-coital breakfasts of a well-traveled actress-waitress and the frustrating payback of cooking for some finicky offspring of the author's own, *Dirty Sugar Cookies* is an omnivorous, hilarious chronicle of culinary awakening.

Dirty Sugar Cookies: Culinary Observations, Questionable Taste Details

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jess says

This is the story of the culinary awakening of a picky eater. I spent a lot of time going, "I AM (WAS) EXACTLY LIKE THAT!" I am also a former picky eater. Like Halliday, I cook for a kid with peculiar food preferences, albeit not as limited as Inky. I, too, spent time in college dabbling in hippie foods. Some might make the case that I still dabble in hippie food, and to that, I say, I challenge you to a duel.

I love Ayun Halliday's zine, the east village inky, and I have to give her big extra credit for not just rolling old material from the zines into this book. This book is as funny, witty, clever, and charming as her zines and every David Sedaris book you ever read. It's a quick, enjoyable read with a few recipes scattered through. Some of the recipes sound genuinely gross. They are part of the story, however. The mise en place is more important than actual taste tests. I did convince my wife that we should try Ayun's chili verde recipe, though. The ingredients are waiting at my house, tomatillos and all. I have high hopes that it will magically be done in time for dinner. *sending psychic messages to my wife*

Elizabeth says

Hee-larius. I might have even given it five stars except that I'm annoyed I didn't write it. I, too, grew up in the midwest, got dumped by friends when they got popular, had a mother who made fancy with Mastering the Art of French Cooking, ate college post-coital breakfasts in greasy diners, lived in New York, have a snarky sense of humor, write books, and talk too much about what I eat. I'm telling you I could have done this, but Ayun actually did. I especially love it when, mid-recipe (there are just a few and they are soooo part of the story), she tells you to get your mind out of the gutter.

By the way, in case her name makes you think she hails from a foreign land, Ayun is apparently the author's phonetic spelling of her given name Ann in Indianan.

By the way too, I got this for \$1.09 used on Amazon. It was even worth the extra \$3.99 for shipping.

Nonito Abbu says

Ayun Halliday is such a very keen observer of herself and of others, and I love how her voice in her books reminds me of my own issues when it comes to food. How she turned from a picky eater to an adventurous foodie is a remarkable journey with lots of culinary twists and turns, and her accounts of her forays in the kitchen and in the restaurants of the world are oftentimes punctuated with hilarious anecdotes. I love how sincere Ayun is, and she does not hold back with the frank and foul language, which all the more makes this book one hell of a powerhouse of a personal memoir/food journal. And of course, her recollection of her Easy Bake Oven days and her adventures with the Betty Crocker kids cookbook were some of her treasured gems which she shared in this book.

Violet says

I love Ayun Halliday - something about her writing really resonates with me - so this was a very cool glimpse into her life.

I laughed heartily at her semi-obsession with a children's cookbook from her youth; I had a similar obsession with a kids' cookbook that I had as a child (and ended up re-buying it at a "rare" book shop because it was discontinued in print and someone lost my copy!)

All told, a nice, light-hearted, funny, culinary adventure + bonus bio.

Ciara says

the author of this book is obviously also the author of the zine "the east village inky," which i used to carry in my distro & have been reading almost since its inception. so i also read all of her books, out of curiosity & with the thought that if i like the zines okay, maybe i will like the books too. i found the books to be something of a mixed bag (not unlike the zines), but i have to give props for how she hasn't just recycled zine content into a manuscript & called it a book. i approve! this is what i think of as "the food book". (there is also, in my head, "the parenting books," "the job book," & "the travel book".) not being real into food or cooking myself, i wasn't entranced by the subject matter, but the stories are pretty amusing & it kept my attention. it's kind of like david sedaris-lite--goofy, funny essays that aren't necessarily striving to be great prose or anything. it's great reading for if you are sick, or maybe on an airplane or something, & want something that doesn't require a lot of concentration & huge blocks of uninterrupted time in order to absorb. nice, escapist fun.

Juliette says

After reading No Touch Monkey a few years ago, I looked forward to reading another book by Ayun Halliday. I was pleasantly surprised that my local library had this book, so I requested it. This is a funny book recounting the author's different experiences with food. I loved the sweet story about eating at buffet style restaurants with grandparents as a kid and the food she relished at summer camp. I almost stopped reading during the post-coital breakfast joints chapter, which dragged on a bit. I'm glad I didn't give up, because I was able to read about Australian pizza in Bali (gulp!) and her rise and fall and climb back to vegetarianism. Sometimes her sentence structure is a bit awkward, but overall, I like reading Halliday's work.

Brandy says

Not what I wanted this to be. While it's a collection of essays on the theme of culinary awakening, it's more about the "awakening" than the "culinary."

I wanted food porn. What I got was a mash note.

The essays are a little scattershot, running from the few things she'd eat as a picky child to the bizarre things in her hippie pantry post-college to feeding her own picky child, but it's not quite chronological or topical in its organization. On the bright side, it's still light and funny--just not what I'd expected it to be.

Lucy says

This book got off to kind of a slow start but by the end I was totally into it. Ayun is a really, really funny writer, and goes to show that David Sedaris is selling in the hundreds of jillions and she's pretty unknown. That said, I prefer her hilarious travel memoir No Touch Monkey to this book. Also, I wish she'd written more about her crazy hippie days instead of as a married mom. Still, a good book and I am glad I finally got around to reading it!

J says

Another funny book by Ayun Halliday. If you were a picky eater, this is the book for you. Halliday speaks to the (former) picky eater in all of us, relating hilarious childhood stories about driving her parents and grandparents wild with her eating habits and how her own daughter now does the same to her. I was awash in my own childhood memories as I blazed through this book, laughing out loud the whole way.

karen says

i'm kind of in love with this lady.

she is, of course, the author of "always lots of heinies at the zoo". which is as fine as any children's book about animal asses, yet given the choice between animal ass and food, i'm always going to go with food, so this book was just one step above for me.

they aren't cooking or food stories so much as personal stories in which food plays a role, if you see the distinction. difficult pregnancy, summer camp, problematic roommates; personal experiences all woven into an exploration of world cuisine, comfort food, good old relics of recipes involving aspic, and childhood experimentation. the mangosteen episode is one of the most well-rendered stories about falling in love with a previously unknown fruit - it was very moving. but then, i really love food and can relate to that yearning for tastes - that need for a certain food - i get it to this day. her back pain/cookie story was another favorite and is funny and painful and inspirational - true grit, ladies.

she just seems like the kind of person it would be fun to cook next to - it would be messy and unfussy and just balls-to-the-wall flavor. she does provide recipes, and i guarantee you i will be making her spanakopita soon because she just made a fucking valentine out of it, plus the idea of making a "little spanakopita factory" under a damp towel as the instructions dictate sounds very appealing.

and this is my favorite quote about her daughter's refusal to eat exotic foods:

"speaking as a former finicky eight-year-old, i wish i could be more empathetic, but for some reason her retarded palate drives me totally fucking batshit".

i have not been so pleased since louis c.k. referred to his five-year-old daughter as an asshole. kids can be frustrating. and that makes me laugh.

Lara Messersmith-Glavin says

Ayun Halliday is one of the funniest people alive. I had to pace myself with this one - only a chapter at a time, like rationing one's cookie consumption, or shots of whiskey - partly to savor it, partly because I just couldn't laugh that hard for that long.

I also really appreciated the recipes that end each chapter - not that I've actually tried any of them, but it was the way they are presented, the little metacommentaries on the structure of *how-to*. It's made me very conscious of my cooking verbs: fold, rinse, dust, lather, fling.

I wrote her an email once and thanked her for making me laugh, and asked her to read my blog, which she graciously did. It's all part of my master plan to invite her over someday for a bottle of wine.

My favorite times involve funny women in kitchens. With wine.

And mangosteens.

Tarryn says

Two and a half stars. Usually, I'm a big fan of Ayun Halliday's hilarious reminisces about her proto-hipster lifestyle -- No Touch Monkey and Job Hopper are two of my faves. This collection of essays / recipes attempts to chronicle Halliday's Life Through Food -- from a childhood spent as a picky eater, to an adventurous, global-hopping, urbanite adulthood that expands her palate. Her stories are still amusing and chummy, but lack a certain spark found in some of her other work. Maybe I'm just not that into food writing -- or maybe I was just really hungry while reading this book!

Nancy says

When I first started reading this I didn't think I'd pick it up again after I got off the plane. I did end up finishing it but only found it mildly amusing.

Molly says

I thought this would be lot of fun to read but it was just silly. The author tried too hard to be amusing and it hurt the content. Most of her stories were "cute" but I didn't really feel they were worth a whole book. Disappointing.

Jennifer says

This one was fun! It's one woman's evolution mostly as an eater, sometimes as a cook. Yes, she's a Chicago/Brooklyn hipster parent who writes a zine about her life and raising her kids in New York, but she steps outside the hipster worldview, too. The recipes interspersed with her stories sound alternately disgusting and delightful, and they're all funny.
