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A smooch to leave 'em swooning

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On Valentine's Day, your honey might want chocolate, dinner out, flowers, all the usuals, but one definite s/he'll demand is a kiss (or two, or maybe more). Unless your kissing sucks. But, then, if you're that bad, this Valentine's may be your last with that special someone ...

Go down fighting. Prepare that pucker for battle. Or maybe more.

For those who are out of shape or talent, there's a book for you: Andréa Demirjian's "Kissing: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About One of Life's Sweetest Pleasures" (Penguin, \$9.95). Now, turn your manuals to Chapter 4, "Kissing 101: The Fundamentals of Great Kissing." In five steps, from "getting your pucker into shape" (yes, exercises for your tongue) to "master the kissing commandments" (people, please brush, floss and gargle), Demirjian helps those who need it most.

"Everyone is capable of kissing at a capable level," Demirjian says. "Common mistakes are people getting too aggressive with the kissing, too fast, the tongue gets inserted into the mouth way too quickly. It's really nice to build to a sensual, succulent kiss."

Demirjian's book was inspired by a smooching famine she'd endured, one that ended suddenly one night at a dinner party. "I met this guy and I couldn't kiss him fast enough. It was like waking Sleeping Beauty." Then, she recalls, she kissed guys. Many, many guys.

With this newfound lip-locking action in her life, one day her job as a marketing analyst morphed into kissing analyst. She created a spreadsheet tallying traits of the men she'd kissed (height, eye color, etc.) - tips for doing your own are in "Kissing" - and began sharing it with friends male and female.

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- "A man who kisses his lady good-bye when he leaves for work every morning averages a higher income than the guy who doesn't."

Demirjian delves into the first kiss, which she found to be universally memorable. "People remember their first kiss in more detail often than the first time they make love," she says. "All the women and men I talked to could remember it in great detail."

Demirjian's first kiss ended up with the boy falling into a bathtub and hitting his head on a soapdish. (Writer's note: Mine resulted in a rock mistakenly being lobbed at my head, but we don't need to go there.)

Of course, the author also imports tips from the Karma Sutra (focusing on the lower lip was hot-hot-hot pre-sixth century), and she offers advice from guys and gals.

But the best advice she offers (besides brushing, flossing and gargling) is brief: "Carpe kiss 'em."

