

The Secret Ingredient

by corianderpie

Draco goes the extra mile for love. Warning: fluff.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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'All she can eat is crêpes. Plain crêpes.'

'Well, that's not so bad...'

'Yeah, I'm not done talking, Blaise. Only crêpes from a certain stand in Montmartre, of all places. Fresh from the pan...not cold, not reheated. The nearest Apparition point is two blocks away and up five flights, in the back room of the seediest duelling club in Paris. Do you get it now?'

'That's... utterly random. How the hell did she decide that was what she needed?'

'It's my fault. Sort of. A few weeks ago when things started to get bad for her, she said, "Oh, Draco, remember that trip we took to Paris and the crêpes we had at the foot of Montmartre. Blah, blah, blah." All I heard was that there was *some* food *somewhere* in the world she actually craved. And it was within Apparating range, so I went and got her a couple. Now here I am. Completely fucked.'

'Merlin's balls, Malfoy. Can't Girard make her crêpes? He's a French chef, and the last I heard he's your employee.'

Draco grimaced. 'He's tried. I even paid the owner of the damn crêpe stand to give him a lesson. You can guess how he felt about that. And it didn't work...Hermione puked them up anyway and Girard threw a tantrum. It's a fucking nightmare.'

'Worse luck, mate. Who'd guess Granger'd be so picky?'

'Pregnancy hits potioners like this. Their palates go haywire, maybe even worse than other women.'

Blaise smirked. 'You have, what? Seven months to go? Think you'll survive it?'

'Of course we will. She needs to eat; I'll make sure she *can* eat. Whatever it takes. Simple as that.'

Simple, but not easy, thought Draco as he stood, once again, in the queue at the crêperie.

'Ah, Monsieur, back again.' The counterman smiled jovially and winked. 'And how is Madame this morning, eh? Still hungry for my wife's crêpes?'

Oh, to punch the familiar grin off your fat, Muggle face Draco gave the man a tight smile. 'Well enough, thank you. And yes, the usual order, please.' He pushed the money

across the counter. Exact change.

'Celeste, it's our young man!' the man sang out, and turned back to Draco, enjoyment written all over his face. 'So, your fancy chef couldn't match my Celeste's crêpes? It's no surprise to me. You see,' he said, leaning forward confidentially, 'he did not have the secret ingredient.'

What!? Draco saw red. 'The *what?* What secret ingredient did you NOT share with Girard after I paid you a *great deal* to teach him how to make the ONE AND ONLY food my pregnant wife can stomach?'

The counterman took a step back and held up his hands in a typically French gesture that was half placation and half condescension. Celeste, tiny and grey-haired, popped her head out from behind the kitchen partition to scold her husband.

'Paul! Don't tease the boy.' She looked at Draco quite calmly...with perhaps the tiniest twinkle in her eye. 'My dear, I kept no secrets from your chef. It's just...' She shrugged.

'Just *what?* You're just a rotten teacher? Is that it?' He knew he was being rude, and that it was imprudent to be rude to this woman. But at that moment, he felt he'd had enough of Parisian nonchalance, foreigner-baiting, and bloody *shrugging* to last him until forever ended.

She twinkled at him more openly, then ducked behind the partition again. When she reemerged, she said, 'Perhaps, darling, perhaps. Why don't you find out?' She handed him a bag with the warm crêpes folded and wrapped inside it. 'Take this home. Then come back and we'll talk more.'

Draco grabbed the bag with a muttered 'Merci' and took off down the street. He had a family to feed in London, and seconds counted.

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'Flour. Eggs. Salt. Milk. Melted butter. Cold water.' Celeste said, pointing at each. 'This is your *mise en place*. I'll tell you where to buy the correct ingredients after.'

Draco stood at her elbow in the crêperie's tiny kitchen, the top of his head inches from the ceiling fan. A huge eight-burner stove took up one side of the room, rows of small round pans hanging above it. A scrubbed wooden countertop stretched across the other end of the room, with shelves of bottles, jars, crocks, bowls, and boxes ranged above and below. A sink and a tall refrigerator filled out the third wall.

'Bowls, whisk, scoops, scale, pans. This is your *batterie de cuisine*. We will discuss them as we use them.'

The stand was closed for the day. Celeste was going to teach him how to make the crêpes Hermione could eat. She seemed to think he would have more success than Girard and, desperate for a return to some domestic sanity, Draco had agreed to try.

If Blaise ever hears about this, I will AK myself.

'The first thing is to make the batter. It must be perfectly smooth, no lumps, and just the right consistency. Like syrup or cream, you understand?'

Draco suppressed a Gallic shrug, substituting a British nod. He wrote down *Consistency of cream no lumps*. He supposed he would understand when he saw what she was talking about. He hoped he would.

'Eggs in the bowl. Flour...plain flour will do, I'll show you. Sea salt...fine, like this, not big.'

'Wait.' Draco was scribbling madly. 'How many eggs to how much flour? I need amounts!'

'Yes, darling, it's all written down here,' Celeste waved a scrap of paper in the air, then tucked it up on a shelf. 'Put that paper away and just watch.'

'Mix until it's thick, like this. Put milk if you need to thin it, yes? When it is smooth, smooth, smooth, no lumps, put the rest of the milk, the butter. Mix, mix, lift, let it fall down in a smooth fast stream like this...syrupy. If it's too thick, put a little water, then a little water, until just right. Now cover,' she whipped plastic wrap over the bowl 'and let it rest,' and put it in the refrigerator.

'Goodnight now, sweet boy. Come back at five; we'll have coffee for you.'

'Wait!' Draco yelled. 'Aren't you going to teach me to cook them?'

'Not tonight; of course not.' She gestured around the tiny space. 'We are closed. In the morning, the batter is rested and will make lovely, tender crêpes that melt in your mouth, mmm?' She reached up and pinched his cheek. 'Kiss her for me.' She turned away to the sink, humming tunelessly.

Draco stood, mouth agape. *Merlin's baked balls on a china platter. I am just... completely fucking fucked.*

* * *

And he was.

In the godsforsaken dawn, he stood bleary-eyed at the stove, clutching his coffee to him and trying to take in Celeste's instructions.

'The right pan is important. The temperature is most important...not too hot, not too cool. The pan has to get in the mood for you, yes? Like a woman.'

Oh, fuck, I am NOT having this conversation with you, old lady.

She flicked a drop of water into the pan and it sizzled and disappeared.

She talked fast, but again she wouldn't let him write things down. 'Now tip the pan, scoop some batter, pour, swirl, thin thin thin, like this. Cook until the edges look like that, see? Then smash, and flip!'

He jumped as she hit the pan against a folded towel on the counter to loosen the crêpe and jerked her arm back, sending the crêpe spinning up. It landed neatly, cooked side up, in the pan, for another two dozen seconds on the burner.

When a crêpe was cooked, she'd slide it out of the pan onto a sheet of waxed paper and push it through the pass window to Paul, who would finish it with jam or chocolate or confectioners' sugar in front of the customer.

She moved fast, working three to seven pans at once depending on the speed of orders. He had to stand, just watching, all morning as she worked the stove. At first, her movements were an indecipherable blur. But gradually he began to anticipate the moment when she would grab a pan and *Bam! Jerk!* settle it back down smoothly on the stovetop.

At eleven she patted his cheek, handed him a bag of fresh crêpes, and told him she would see him in the morning.

Draco Floo'd his secretary later in the day and told her to rearrange his appointments...he'd be taking mornings off for the next two weeks.

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The next day Celeste let him work two of the burners. Using her batter, he managed to achieve crêpes that were bumpy, thick, torn, hard, stuck to the pan, burnt, half-burnt, dirty from falling on the floor, undercooked, and misshapen. Hot and footsore when he left at noon, he thought he'd mastered the full gamut of inedible crêpes.

He was wrong. Two days later, when she let him make a few small batches of batter, he added greasy, lumpy, bland, salty, flabby, and tough to his repertoire.

But by the middle of the second week, he was producing very creditable crêpes, working three and even four burners alongside Celeste. And that Friday, just before the usual midmorning rush began, she shocked him by hanging up her apron and putting on her coat.

'Wh-where are you going?' he spluttered. 'It's nearly nine-thirty!'

'I'm off to the market,' she said, plucking her purse off its hook. 'You'll be fine.'

Paul was apparently about as convinced as Draco that they'd be fine without her, judging from the fast and furious argument they had the moment she stepped round the partition. Once she'd had her parting shot, Paul stuck his head into the kitchen and gave Draco a look that said, 'Do NOT fuck me.' Draco could only shrug helplessly.

It was hell. Then Draco got into a glorious kind of flow and it was great. Then he burned two in a row and lost his rhythm and it was hell again. Then it was over.

When the orders had slowed to a trickle, a sweat-drenched Draco looked up to see Celeste sitting on a stool next to the counter, sipping coffee and watching him.

'Bravo, darling,' she said, then hopped down and grabbed one of the crêpe pans off its hook. She kissed him on the cheek and handed him the pan and a large paper bag. He peeked in it: eggs, flour, salt, butter, milk.

'All but the secret ingredient,' she said, nodding and laying her hand over his heart. 'Come back tomorrow and tell me how it went, mmm?'

Merlin! THAT'S was what this was all about? LOVE was supposed to make him into a master chef? *Crazy old bat*

Draco thought he detected more than a little relief in Paul's smile and farewell handshake. As for himself... 'secret ingredient' or no...he felt the thin edge of panic sliding into his mind as he shut the door of the rank back room of Club Gervais, the gateway to home and a hungry, moody, miserable wife.

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'Oh, mmm, mmff, darlimm, didju bri'g a'y more?' Mouth stuffed full, Hermione looked up at him hopefully.

'You just ate four,' Draco said a little uncertainly.

She swallowed. 'I know, but they're just so *good* today, I feel like I could eat four more. Would you mind going back? Oh, and get some strawberry jam. Do you remember that jam we had in that tea shop in Cornwall? *That* jam with *these* crêpes would be just... heavenly. Don't you think? I could eat that all day long.'

Well, fuckitty. Here we go again.

A/N: This was originally written as a birthday ficlet for Blue Paris, who gave me the prompt 'Draco + Paris.' When I think 'Paris,' I think 'food.' And when I think 'Draco,' I think...how to put this delicately? oh yeah... 'whipped.' Thanks, Ms BP! *glomps* And thanks, hehicera, for the beta. *moar glomps*