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The Chef Who Ate All the Food



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(Publisher)



The city of Paris is dark blue, gold and green. A river runs through it and, at night, people stand on bridges to marvel at the colored lights reflected on the water.

Paris is justly famous for many things: the Eiffel Tower, parks and bookshops, sidewalk cafes. Some people say its restaurants are the greatest in the world. In Paris a great chef is like a prince.



Prosper le Monde was such a chef. He prepared meals for the guests of a large and elegant hotel in the heart of the city.

Prosper loved his job. He loved wearing his white chef's apron and tall chef's hat. He loved the bustle, warmth and delicious aroma of the kitchen.

Most of all he loved the food.
Truffles, turnips and haricots.

Filets, cream fillings and
honeycombs. Juniper berries,
rhubarb stalks and
artichoke hearts.

Garlic cloves, asparagus and
fresh cherry tarts.

A ripe onion brought tears
of joy to prosper's eyes.

Baked Alaska warmed
his heart.

Copper kettles in Prosper's kitchen were polished bright as flame. His knives were made by the finest swordsmith in France and sharpened three times a day.

When Prosper went to work – slicing, basting, garnishing and stirring – everyone, from the boys who swept the floors to the dishwashers and even the waiters, smiled and said, "Makes you hungry, no?"



Prosper had one problem. A big problem. He loved his cooking so much he ate most of what he made!

First he took a taste.



He tried a spoonful.

He cut himself a slice.





The next thing his customers were having leftovers.
People who ordered turkey dinners got turkey sandwiches.

"This is very good," they said, "but it is not what we
ordered."

What could the waiter say?

"The chef ate all the food."



Prosper lost his job at the large and elegant hotel. But a chef with his gifts was not out of work for long. Another fine hotel hired him to create wonderful delicacies for its guests.





Soon Prosper was in command of another kitchen, taking charge of pots and pans like a general leading an armored battalion.

Alas, Prosper could not control his appetite. A pinch of paprika, a dash of salt and Prosper would make himself a meal.

He closed his eyes, his brow took on a rosy glow and, ever so slightly, his mustache curled upwards toward the ceiling.

"Delicious," Prosper sighed.

Then he dug in.



And so it went. Prosper was fired by one restaurant after another. "Prosper, you are a genius," the managers would say, "but you cannot eat the food yourself. It is intended for the guests."

Prosper only shrugged his shoulders. Cooking, eating - it was all the same to him.





Prosper carried his chef's hat and apron, his copper kettles and his knives home with him. What need had he for the world of restaurants and paying customers?

He tossed breadcrumbs to pigeons in the Luxembourg Gardens and thought, "Why waste my talent on other people when I can please myself?"

So Prosper went to market and purchased the freshest fruits and vegetables, the choicest meats and seafood. In the kitchen of his apartment above the Boulevard Saint Germain he prepared meals that were dazzling – even to himself.

There were saffron eggs for breakfast and almond toast at noon; a wild mushroom salad with pepper and chicory and silversides for dinner with savarin a la creme for dessert.





Full as a tick, Prosper fell into bed each night, exhausted. He would lie on his back, one arm thrown across his brow, in deep dreamless sleep.





Autumn came. Leaves fell from the shade trees in the Luxembourg Gardens, but Prosper no longer fed the pigeons gathered at this feet

"Ah !" he exclaimed, popping breadcrumbs in his mouth.
"Just the right amount of salt!"



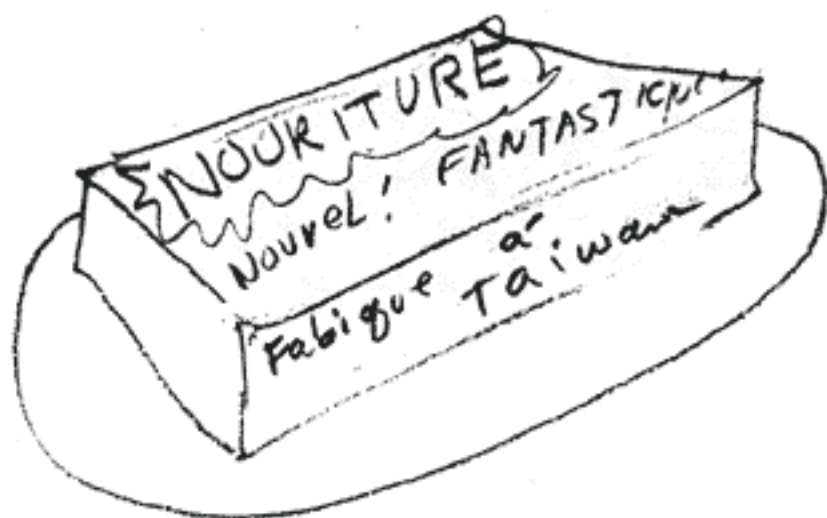
One morning, Prosper awoke and looked in the mirror. He was pale and wan. He did not feel like making breakfast. Instead, he went to the Luxembourg Gardens. The pigeons were nowhere in sight. Prosper went home and made himself a sausage sandwich.

He only ate half of it.

Snow fell in Paris. Flakes as large as macaroons fluttered through the air and dropped upon the old cathedral of Notre Dame, the Arch of Triumph, the Louvre.

It was Christmas Eve.

Prosper made his way through crowds of shoppers. He planned on purchasing a frozen dinner, carrying it back to his apartment and eating it in front of the television.



People around him carried groceries for their Christmas Eve celebrations but Prosper hardly noticed the aroma of freshly baked bread or the fragrance of baked garlic.



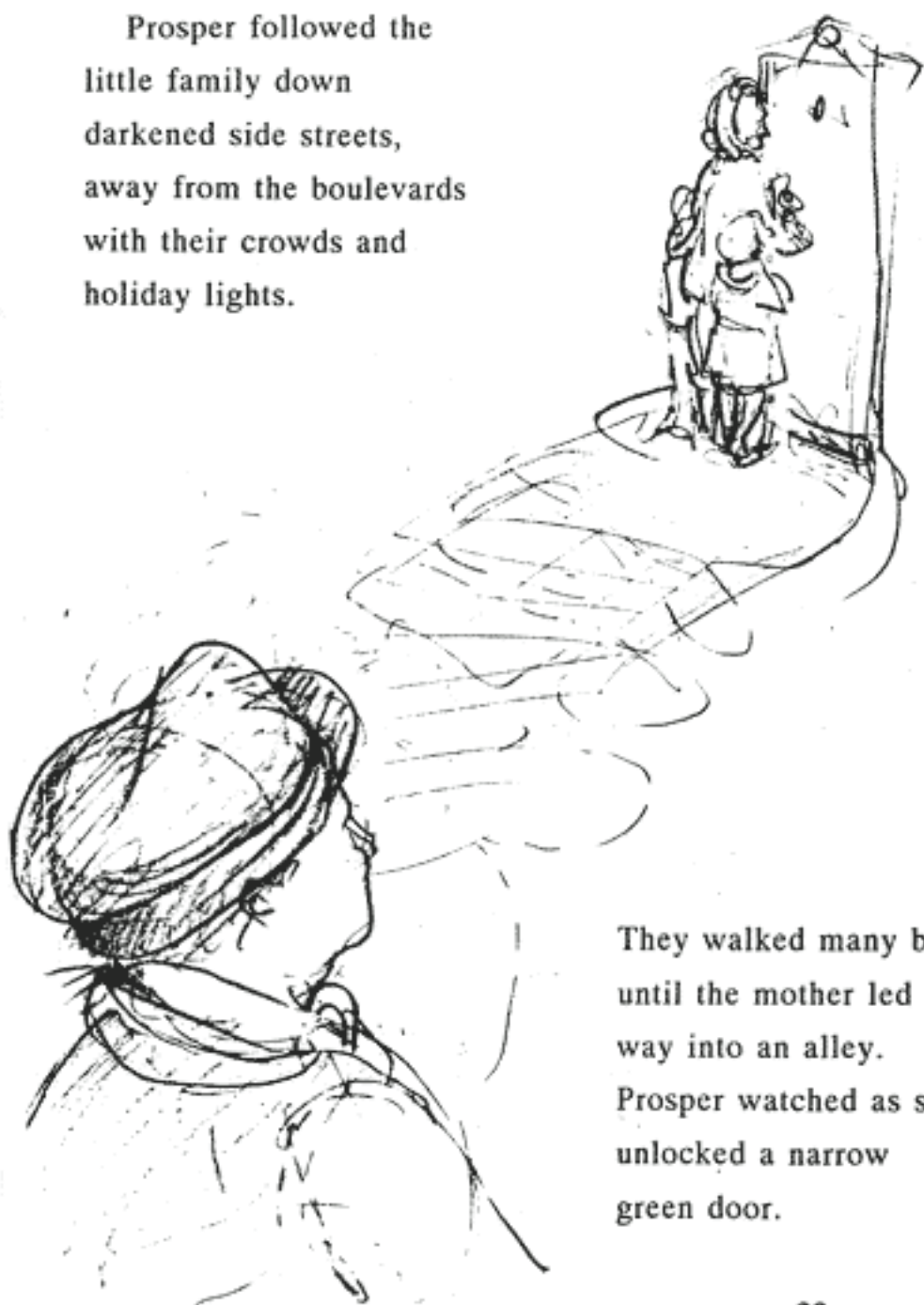


"What shall we eat for our Christmas celebration?"

Prosper overheard a child in the grocery store. A boy and girl stood on either side of their mother, a worried looking woman wearing a thin jacket.

"We can afford some cheese and soup, canned vegetables," Prosper heard the mother say. He thought of meals he might have made for such an occasion.

Prosper followed the
little family down
darkened side streets,
away from the boulevards
with their crowds and
holiday lights.



They walked many blocks
until the mother led the
way into an alley.
Prosper watched as she
unlocked a narrow
green door.





Later that evening there was a knock on the green door. The mother opened it slowly to find Prosper, his mustache drooping with snowflakes, his arms laden with foods from the market and a freshly frosted "buche de Noel."

"I am Prosper le Monde the chef," he said. "and if you will permit me, I will prepare a splendid feast for your family."

"I cannot pay," the mother told him.

"This will be my pleasure," replied Prosper.

The children, whose names were Nicole and Pierre, were delighted to help. Nicole found candles and set them on the table while Pierre rinsed lettuce for the salad. Their mother sat in her chair and stared in amazement as Prosper deftly assembled a feast of paté and potato tarts, roasted goose, salad, and cheese.

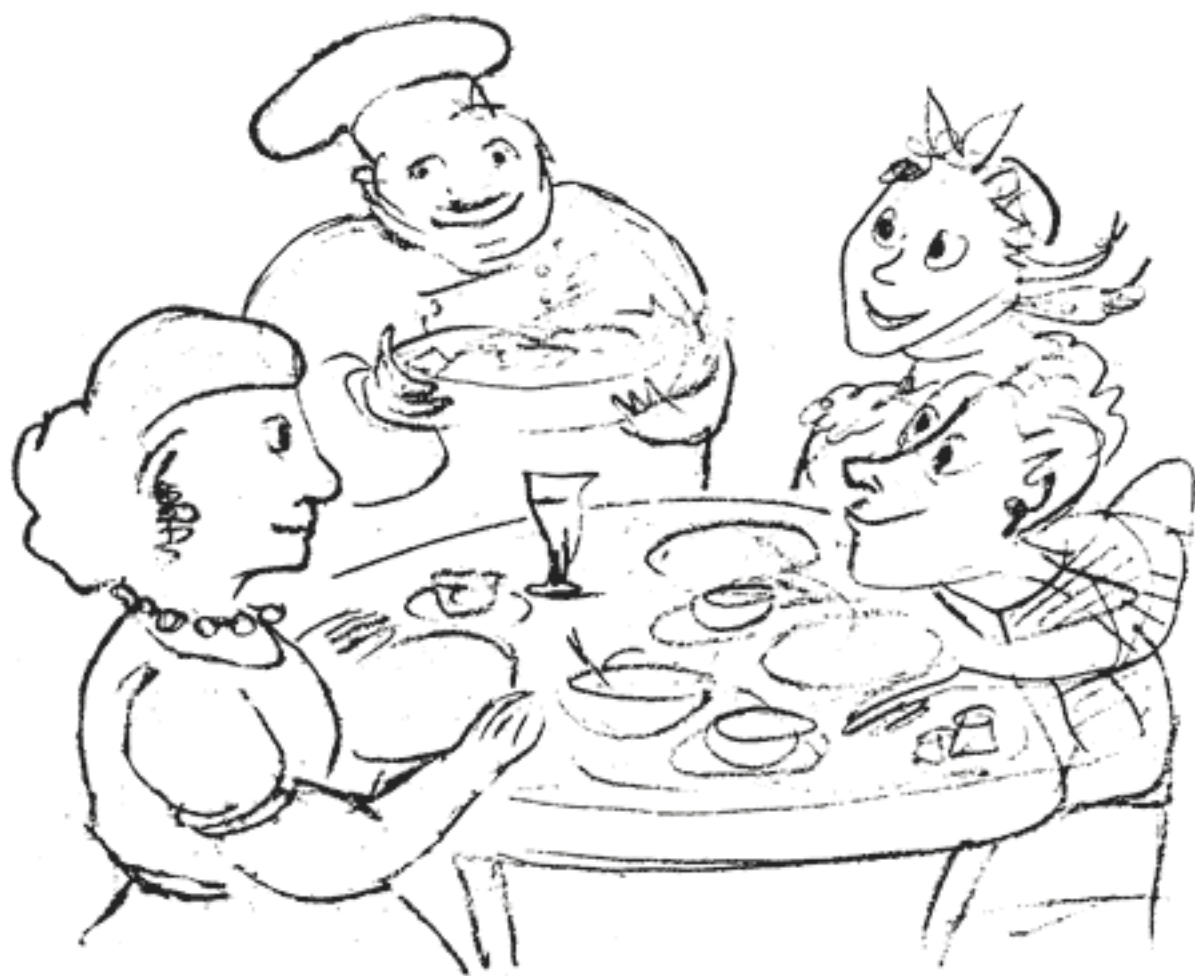


Prosper served the meal himself. He stood in the kitchen watching as Nicole, Pierre and their mother held hands before starting to eat the meal he had made for them. For the first time in a long, long while Prosper felt glad he was a chef. "I am lucky," he thought, "to be able to make things people can enjoy." Quietly, he slipped on his overcoat and got ready to leave.



"Please," said the mother, her eyes bright with candlelight,
"do not go. Share in this meal you so generously gave to us."

"Well," laughed Prosper, "I am a little hungry."



It was, Prosper thought, the best dinner he ever tasted.