

The Witch Who Saved Paris

By
NJ Bayley

Catarina Dupré is the best consulting chef in Paris. If your restaurant is slated on Tripadvisor, everyone knows that Catarina can investigate the state of your sauces and might even persuade Michelin to give back your stars.

What most people don't know, is that Catarina is also a witch. Cooking is a kind of magic, but sometimes a bad sauce can disguise something worse, much worse below the surface. Something so evil that it threatens everything

Prologue

It is so much easier to be a witch in the city. In the country they would sniff at me and cross themselves reflexively, but here in Paris I am just another woman of indeterminate age, living alone with her cat.

At the Academy, so many years ago now, they warned us to be on our guard against the self-appointed judges and jurors of God. A quick glance through the history books will show you how many innocent women were burnt, drowned or hung as enchantresses. Now of course, most people have forgotten such fears, forgotten that old God too, but we witches are still here, getting on with things as we have always done.

Let me introduce myself, my name is Catarina and I am a consulting witch. I don't write that on my *Curriculum Vitae* of course, that would be too bold, even in this secular day and age. My business card announces to the world that I am,

natjustin@hotmail.com

Catarina Dupré
Consulting Chef

What does that mean? Well, I suppose that in this city, this country obsessed by food it is my role to ensure that standards are maintained. I am *La Sorcière de la Sauce* and am called upon by the owners of restaurants, both failing and successful, to check up upon their investments. Is their chef making magic for them or resting upon his laurels?

When I walk into a kitchen the chef, *l'homme le plus égoïste* and so majestic in his boastful whites, often tries to dismiss or ignore me. Then, inevitably he cowers and quivers and tries to justify or excuse the lumpy *béchamel*, the salty *velouté*, watery *espagnole*, the rancid *hollandaise*, the oily *tomate*. Most of the time I don't even have to use magic, just my spoon and my spices. These men know themselves how to prepare the mother sauces, the *cinq sauces de base* correctly, they have just become lazy or complacent.

Every now and then though, I find a place that has become so sour, so curdled, the ingredients so out of balance that the bitterness spreads far and wide. Then some real magic is required to set things to rights. This is the story of such a place. It is also the story of how I came to realise that sometimes a bad sauce can disguise something worse, much worse below the surface.