

love
among
the
recipes

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Praise for *Love Among the Recipes*

“A perfect escape. This romantic and engaging story has a wonderfully humorous touch. Cram’s lovely writing brings Paris and its many treasures to life. I truly felt like an armchair traveler...what a delight!” – Amy Maroney, Author of *The Miramonde Trilogy*

“A delicious feast for foodies and Francophiles ~ Paris has never tasted better!” – Patricia Sands, Author of *Drawing Lessons*

“Mix together the flavor of new-found friendships; blend in the mystery and thrill of romance; season with humor and love and set it amid the architectural beauty and gastronomical delights of Paris and you have *Love Among the Recipes*. A delicious read.” – Edythe Anstey Hanen, Author of *Nine Birds Singing*

“It’s a wonderful, fluid and beguiling read, a marvelous book, which made me laugh out loud.” –Martin Lake, Author of *Cry of the Heart*

Chapter One

Genna settled into a chair at an outdoor table facing the busy Boulevard Raspail, signaled the waiter with a nod, and ordered in French. He responded with a barely raised eyebrow and a sniff.

She was improving.

Many minutes later, the waiter swept back, deposited a café au lait on the table, and slipped a scrap of paper under the ashtray. He did not look at Genna or ask if she wanted anything else or appear to care if she drank her coffee or let it grow cold. She doubted he'd return in a few minutes to ask how her coffee was tasting.

Genna found the indifference comforting. Nothing was expected of her beyond leaving the correct number of euros when she finished her coffee. Paris had indeed been the right choice. Here, she could be alone in a crowd, which was much better than being alone in her dreary basement suite back home.

From her table, Genna overlooked the swirl of pedestrians and traffic, the sounds incessant yet soothing—the bass rumble of traffic, discreetly low French voices, clinking cutlery. Two men strolled past. One wore a pink shirt and gray suit; the other was dressed all in black except for a blinding white shirt. They met, clasped hands, half embraced, their hair impeccable, cut to the bone.

They were not handsome.

They were beautiful—as beautiful as the women gliding by on high heels, strings of beads swinging across flat chests, arms sculpted, cigarettes held between French-manicured fingers.

A young man slid into a chair at the table next to Genna. He was so gorgeous that he literally made her gasp (but discreetly). He nestled his sunglasses into a thatch of thick blond hair and raised an eyebrow. While Genna had waited ten minutes for her coffee, young Monsieur was served almost before his toned butt hit the red wicker chair seat.

Fifteen minutes later, as he was finishing a massive plate of steak and *pommes frites*—enough to add ten pounds to any North American—he waved at someone out on the street. Genna was positive it would be a willowy girlfriend as gorgeous as he was, but she was wrong.

Two little blonde girls ran up and took turns proffering fresh cheeks to Papa for a kiss. They were followed by Maman. The word conjured an image of a rounded, matronly lady, kind of like Genna. But perched atop thickly wedged, strappy sandals was a thirtysomething woman with masses of curled and hennaed hair, her fitted white jeans smooth across tight thighs.

How could she possibly have mothered two children?

Maman held up her purchases, her French rapid-fire. Papa nodded as the well-behaved girls waited quietly. Genna didn't need to know French to get the gist.

"Don't forget to pick up milk on the way home. We're meeting the Delauriers at eight p.m. Yes, I know he's a bore, but his wife might give me a contract. Is the babysitter coming? Have a good day, my love. See you around seven."

Maman and her adorable offspring tottered off, leaving Monsieur to finish every last scrap of his *déjeuner*. Then, with one sensitive hand, he plucked the sunglasses from his tresses, threw a handful of euros on the table, swung his jacket over his shoulder, and set off.

With a pang, Genna recalled when her own children had been small and how she and Drew would pile them into the back of the car and drive to the beach. Drew would throw Frisbees and take the kids swimming, always careful to keep them within arm's reach. Genna would sit on a log, her pale skin turning pink in the sun, her heart at ease.

Shaking her head at life's unexpected twists, Genna extracted a few euros from her wallet and left them in the ashtray before gathering her shopping bags and squeezing around the side of the table to the sidewalk. She was returning from a marathon shopping expedition that had separated two hundred euros from her meager budget. But she'd had no choice. Her rental apartment—her sanctuary for the next six months (four if Drew didn't sell the house)—reeked with the musty odor of neglect.

She bought a yellow cloth to hide the worst of the Formica table, several bright cushions to pierce the drabness, and abstract prints to replace the ghastly needlepoint reproductions of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. She desperately wanted to remove the six-foot-wide needlepoint of *La Grande Odalisque* by Ingres hanging over the couch, but it was fastened to the wall with steel pegs. The figure of the nude courtesan resembled Ingres's painting in size, shape, and subject, but the resemblance stopped there. Checkered patches in three shades of pinky-orange wool made the courtesan's skin resemble a sunset on acid.

The only cooking equipment in the dusty kitchen was a frying pan caked with the muck of a thousand dinners, a battered saucepan with its coating long stripped, and one knife warped into a corkscrew.

Genna needed a well-equipped kitchen for the work she planned to do in Paris, and to her delight, the shelves of the kitchen supply store pulsed with gastronomic promise. She swooned over gleaming ranks of spoons, whisks, ladles, and mashers, hefted perfectly weighted frying pans, and fought to resist a glossy aluminum truffle grater.

She had gone only a few steps from the café when she felt a tap on her shoulder. The waiter, long faced and long aproned, held up an envelope, his eyebrows raised.

Mon Dieu!

It was the check for the bulk of the money she needed to finance the first two months of her Paris escape. It must have fallen out of her wallet.

Genna was so grateful that she forgot to speak French and let out a heartfelt "*Thank You!*" The waiter cracked a thin smile, long nose quivering.

"De rien, madame." It is nothing.

But it certainly wasn't nothing. Genna could have kissed him, although of course she restrained herself. Instead, with as much dignity as she could muster, she nodded at the waiter, then hoisted her bags and set off for her apartment on the Rue Bonaparte in the chic sixth arrondissement.

She tried not to think about what would have happened if she'd really lost the money. After plotting her escape to Paris for months, failure was *not* an option. She shuddered at the thought of what Drew would say if she returned home mere weeks after she'd left, her dreams shattered. Hadn't he always said she was too careless for her own good?

The pedestrian light up ahead flashed green.

Without looking, Genna stepped off the curb and narrowly escaped being lobbed from the bumper of a speeding Citroën. A man grabbed her elbow and yanked her to safety.

"Gardez-vous, madame."

Genna swung around and collided with his other arm, sending his phone clattering to the pavement.

"Merde!"

"Désolée!" Genna's heart twanged like an unbound bungee cord at the near miss.

Ignoring her, the man stooped to retrieve his phone and then cradled it between both hands. Whereas the good looks of the monsieur at the café owed a great deal to his youth, this man belonged on the cover of *L'Urbane Parisien: Watch Him Smolder – Mature Edition*.

Chiseled features, a South of France tan, dark hair speckled with gray, pushing fifty.

Mais oui.

Wonder replaced terror. Genna could count on the fingers of one hand how often in recent years she'd been within ten yards of a man who had made her little heart flutter.

Actually, she didn't need any fingers.

"Merci beaucoup!" Now, all she could think about was how ridiculous she must look in sensible running shoes and with a purple daypack slung across one shoulder.

Ce n'est pas chic. No kidding she wasn't chic.

Still ignoring her, Monsieur Hottie looked down at his phone. The screen flickered. Sighing with relief, he bent low over the display, almost planting firm lips on the mirrored surface.

"Merci," she said again. *"La circulation . . ."* The traffic.

"Ah, oui." The man let loose a stream of French presumably about the dreadful state of the traffic in the nation's capital. Genna pasted on her trying-to-understand-French smile, but only the odd word penetrated her consciousness – *voiture* was car, *extraordinaire* – obvious, another *merde* – the only French swear word she knew.

The man cocked his head toward the pedestrian light, which was still green. After making a good show of looking both right and left, he started across the road. Genna followed a few paces behind, suitably chastened.

When they reached the safety of the other side, the man glanced back.

"Merci!" Genna said again. If he didn't already think she was several cents short of a euro, he surely would by now.

He acknowledged her with a tight smile and a nod before striding to the left into the narrow Rue de Grenelle. Genna carried on to Rue de Sèvres and from there along Rue Bonaparte to her apartment, steps from the Boulevard Saint-Germain and directly across the street from the fabled

café Les Deux Magots. As soon as she found a way to get online, she'd email Nancy and describe the dishy Frenchman who'd just saved her from Death by Citroën. Nancy was convinced that Genna had gone to Paris to find a new man.

Nancy was dead wrong, but no matter how many times Genna explained the purpose of her Paris sojourn, Nancy refused to believe her.

"Don't be ridiculous. After what you've been through? Besides, you can't spend every minute of your day cooking."

Oh yes, she could! Genna wrestled open the heavy wooden door to her building, crossed the quiet courtyard, and started up the circular staircase. Five flights later, her chest heaving, she rounded the last twist to come forehead to toe with two scuffed shoes.

"*Bonjour, madame.*"

She looked up to see a man who had long since bid *au revoir* to the back end of eighty.

"*Ah, bonjour.* Um . . ."

"Gustav Leblanc," he said, raising one hoary eyebrow.

"Yes? Oh! I'm sorry. I mean, *désolée*. Please, come in."

Genna squeezed past him, her shopping bags clanking. Monsieur narrowed his eyes. She unlocked the door and ushered him into the dingy apartment, feeling embarrassed about the hideous art, stained walls, and shabby furniture until she remembered that as the owner of the apartment, Monsieur Leblanc could hardly object to its decor.

He planted himself in the middle of the living room and stared as she deposited the bags on the couch. He exuded a feral, gnome-like quality wrapped in body odor spiced with the stench of stale Gauloises.

"You are comfortable." It was not a question.

"Yes, the apartment is fine. Thank you." The attendant at the rental agency where Genna had picked up the key had informed her the owner was a recluse whom she'd likely never meet.

And yet, here he was.

Monsieur shuffled to a heavy sideboard next to the table, pried open a drawer, and extracted several sheets of paper. "You see?"

"Ah, no." Genna walked toward him.

"Rules!" Monsieur Leblanc barked. "*Les règles*. Four languages – *Anglais, Allemand, Italien*, and, *bien sûr, le français*. Please to read them. This place, this *appartement*, belonged to my *grand-mère*."

Genna wondered if old Grandma Leblanc had been responsible for the needlepoints. She started to read the faded, uneven type of Monsieur's rules. The subject of water, or, more accurately, its lack, occupied the entire first page. Long hot showers were not something Monsieur countenanced for tenants, nor for himself, evidently.

"Thank you. *Merci.*"

He grunted. "*Bon*. Now, you see books?" He gestured to a dust-choked bookshelf under the window. Most of the books were English paperbacks and Parisian guidebooks, with spines

showing dates in the eighties, almost three decades earlier. There was even one from the year she was born. The Beatles might still have been together.

"Books are for you, but please . . ." He wagged his finger under Genna's nose. "Do not take them from the *appartement*. I have a list!"

"No, of course not."

"And cooking."

"What about it?" Genna edged in front of the pile of shopping, hoping Monsieur wouldn't notice the elegant stainless-steel whisk slithering out of its bag and threatening to bounce across the threadbare carpet.

"*Le gaz*. You know how to use?"

"Yes, thank you. I have gas at home."

"Do not use too much."

She wondered what constituted too much. Now was probably not the best time to tell him she planned to cook a great deal during her stay in the apartment.

"*Eh bien*." Monsieur grinned, showing brown teeth that tightened her stomach and made her glad she hadn't eaten for several hours. He handed her a creased card. "I run the *tabac* on Rue de Grenelle. Come see me if you need anything. My son also. He is *un avocat*, a lawyer. He helps me when he can."

"How lucky for you."

He closed his mouth and shrugged, as Gallic a movement as any Genna had yet seen in Paris. "The rent . . ."

"Yes? I paid the first two months as agreed in the contract, and then the terms are week to week."

He looked at her blankly and then flapped one gnarled hand. "*Oui, oui, mais*, but—the rate, *vous savez*, you know, it is reduced because you stay so long."

"Yes, I realize that. It seems reasonable." Truthfully, it was exorbitant compared to what she'd pay back home, but compared to other apartments in the neighborhood, it was a deal for someone with plenty of money.

Unfortunately, she wasn't someone with plenty of money.

"*Eh bien*." He shifted from one foot to the other. "It is lower."

"Yes, I understand." How grateful did he need her to be?

"So, *l'électricité, les lumières, vous savez*, the lights."

"Yes? I mean, *oui*?"

"Not too much."

"You want me to use less electricity because the rent is lower?"

Monsieur peered up at her through sharp black eyes. "*Oui*."

"Oh."

Monsieur cocked his head toward the door to the bedroom. Without a word, Genna went into the bedroom, snapped off the bedside light, and returned to the living room.

"Bon." He moved toward the door.

"Ah, *monsieur*?"

He paused, a scowl on his face. "*Oui*?"

"I need to use the internet, but I can't figure out how to get online. Do you have the Wi-Fi password?" She pronounced it *wee fee* in the European way and smiled hopefully.

Monsieur Leblanc could not have looked more shocked if she'd stripped and jiggled her breasts in front of his red-veined nose.

"The internet?" He shook his head as if trying to rid himself of appalling thoughts.

"Yes. I want to be able to check my email and do some research."

"Email?"

Genna was beginning to wonder if a lifetime of penny-pinching had unbalanced him.

"You know about the internet," she said, hoping she didn't sound patronizing. "*Pour l'ordinateur*. For the computer."

"*Oui, oui, je le connais, je le connais. L'internet. L'ordinateur.*" He sucked in sallow cheeks and then let out a long sigh. "No internet."

"But . . ."

"Non."

She decided that asking him to fix the television, which so far had emitted only static, was tantamount to throwing herself off the top of the Eiffel Tower.

"*Au revoir, Madame.*"

After the door shut behind Monsieur, Genna sank onto the hard couch. The complete isolation of no internet and no television for at least four months generated an unexpected rush of panic. What was she thinking coming to this city of two million souls, none of whom knew her nor cared whether she lived or died? Did she honestly need to spend month after month in solitary confinement, her sole companions excruciating needlepoint reproductions of Old Master paintings?

"Get a grip, Genna," she said out loud.

The sound of her voice brought her back to reality. Her phone had the cheapest data plan available, but that didn't need to be the end of the world. If she wanted to go online, all she needed to do was find a café with Wi-Fi or, better still, a place with computers and internet access.

Big deal.

It also occurred to her that no Wi-Fi meant she could receive Drew's daily emails at one sitting every few days, and then delete them all at once.

Chapter Two

On her master list of Parisian sites, Genna placed the Eiffel Tower in the top spot followed by each of the museums, gardens, and monuments she thought had potential. One of her least attractive qualities—or most attractive, depending on one’s point of view—was a fondness for list making. Drew liked saying that Genna had a list for everything, and that if death wasn’t on her list, then it couldn’t happen.

He exaggerated, of course, but it was true that Genna loved to make lists, the more elaborate the better.

After spending three days equipping her kitchen for serious cooking and familiarizing herself with the food shops and markets in the neighborhood, Genna struck out on a warm April morning for the Eiffel Tower. She headed west along the Boulevard Saint-Germain for several blocks before angling north through quiet residential streets toward the Seine.

A sense of calm flooded her when she stepped onto the cobbled walkway bordering the river. The smell of river water mingled with wet stone stirred memories of the Capilano River near the house that she and Drew had purchased sixteen months earlier.

Her former house, she reminded herself.

The two rivers had little in common. The Seine was an ancient waterway that for centuries had carried kings and peasants, guillotined heads and triumphal generals, and now hosted wide-eyed tourists and bored sophisticates on its sleek *bateaux-mouches*. The Capilano River in rain-soaked West Vancouver tumbled from the mountains with unabashed exuberance, and in season was full of salmon swimming back to their beginnings and their deaths.

What was *she* swimming toward? Would she find the peace she craved in Paris? Genna smiled to herself. Such questions were not helpful. Better to keep focused on the day’s mission and not get sidetracked by thoughts of the future. Drew also used to chide her for overthinking things, and she had to concede that on that point, at least, he was right. Maybe that’s why she loved making lists.

She quickened her pace in an effort to neutralize the consequences of imbibing too much rich food and wine the night before. Already, the waistband of her skirt pinched uncomfortably. Cookbook authors these days couldn’t afford to look like they ate what they cooked. The rawboned Julia Child figure was no more, which was a shame since Genna tended more toward Julia Child than Julia Roberts. These days most of the biggest cookbook authors (big in terms of sales, not girth) looked like movie stars.

If she was to continue as a player in the obscenely competitive cookbook market, she needed to look the part.

The new cookbook (her sixth) was to be called *Eat Like a Parisian* and would be her first crossover cookbook/guidebook. Sara Banks, her editor at Gowan Publishing, had been enthusiastic about Genna’s pitch.

Eat Like a Parisian combines a passion for travel with a love of cooking to produce a new kind of travel cookbook. Intrepid travelers can use the book as a jumping-off point for their own explorations of Paris, while adventurous cooks will enjoy creating the tasty, bistro-style recipes. With names like Eiffel Tower Duck, Steak Musée D'Orsay, and Mona Lisa Crème Caramel, each recipe offers a playful homage to a different Parisian site.

Genna got the idea for the book a few months before her second Christmas without Drew. In March, she'd received a modest advance on royalties from the publisher (the check she'd almost lost) and a promise from her financial-advisor guy that by June he'd top up her account with the proceeds from several surefire investments.

With the money and a visa that allowed her to live in France from April to September, Genna was prepared to devote herself to eating and sightseeing, cooking, and writing. She wrapped fierce determination around her plan. She had to make it work. The alternative didn't bear thinking about.

The tip of the Eiffel Tower was just visible above the high wall of the embankment. Genna was sure she'd soon be mounting the stairs to the street at the base of the tower. But after another fifteen minutes of brisk walking, she didn't seem to have moved an inch closer. The sun that had earlier warmed her face with the softness of an early April morning now blazed across the river, bouncing off the water, searing in its intensity. She kept walking, her feet hot now with a blister just starting to form on the ball of her right foot. She tied her sweater around her waist, took a swig of water from the bottle in her daypack, and trudged on.

"It can't be much farther. Look at the map." A woman's voice, the accent broad New York.

"I don't need the map to tell me it's miles away. Can't we just get a cab?" The man, middle-aged and sweating, passed without looking at Genna, his attention fixed on the cobbled walkway.

"It's a waste of money," his wife was saying. "We've got to stick to our budget. We're already ten euros over and it's not even nine o'clock."

"We're wasting time with all this walking. I can stay at home and go for a walk, and it would be a helluva lot cheaper. Come on, here's a stairway. I bet we can hail a cab at the top."

"We'll be broke at this rate," grumbled the wife.

"At least we won't be crippled."

"Ha, ha." The woman glanced back at her husband, her expression a mixture of exasperation and affection.

With a sharp stab of envy, Genna recognized the bickering as the back-and-forth of a marriage that had settled over the decades into comfortable predictability. The woman worried about money; the man grumbled at the first sign of physical discomfort. The pattern would continue until one of them either fell sick or died.

Why couldn't she have had that? What had she done wrong?

She watched the couple climb the stairs to the road and decided the man had a point. Walking had its place in the grand scheme of sightseeing, but when it started to resemble the Death March

of Bataan, then that was why God had invented taxis. Genna reached the road just in time to see the couple disappear into a white one. Within minutes, she flagged down her own.

"La tour Eiffel, s'il vous plaît."

The driver glanced back at her, bushy eyebrows raised above eyes veined red with exhaustion. He looked like he would kill for a soft bed and a respite from stupid tourists. *"C'est près, Madame."* It's near.

She shrugged, he shrugged, and seconds later they screeched into the traffic.

The Eiffel Tower *was* close, and it was enormous. The driver dropped her off across the street, so she had a good view of the tower's four massive pylons enclosing a huge square across which snaked long lines of hot tourists. She crossed the street and joined one of the lines. Ahead surged a large group of boisterous schoolchildren. She moved to a different line that was longer but consisted of docile-looking seniors led by guides holding umbrellas aloft. Several of the poor dears looked as if they'd much prefer a nice sit-down and a cup of tea to shuffling toward what was essentially an elevator ride.

The line moved quickly, the wait just long enough for Genna to gaze up at the crisscrossed underbelly of the *premier étage*—the first level—and contemplate the feat of engineering it represented. Built in 1889 for the Paris World's Fair, the tower was meant to be taken apart a year later. Was a structure built over 120 years ago sturdy enough to carry an average yearly load of six million tourists up its gray-gold girders?

It didn't bear thinking about.

Genna rode straight to the second level along with a gaggle of seniors that, from the sound of them, hailed from the north of England.

"Eeee!" exclaimed one as the elevator lumbered skyward. "It's a good thing that breakfast we had was so sparse."

"Aye, I'd have murdered for a fry-up."

"I've a mind to complain. Imagine! Five bloody euros for a glass of juice and a bit of bun."

"It's a disgrace."

"Aye."

Squashed into an outside corner, her face turned to the view, Genna thought fondly of her Yorkshire-born granny.

"Mabel's got the gout, did you hear?"

"No! Mind you, it's to be expected."

"She was always one for the rich food."

"Aye."

One of the ladies elbowed her way in front of her companions so she stood next to Genna. "She'd have been well chuffed with this," the woman said. She smelled of lily of the valley and peppermints.

"With what?"

"This here. The view."

"Aye. Champion."

"Do you think there'll be somewhere to sit up top? Me poor feet are howling."

"You shouldn't have worn them shoes."

"Aye, well, serves me right then."

Genna resisted the temptation to give the lady next to her a hug. They'd have thought she was mad, but what a story to tell when they got back home! Genna's grandmother had dragged her husband on bus trips all over the continent and never remembered what she'd seen.

The elevator juddered to a stop at the *deuxième étage*. Genna detached herself from the tour group and found a place to sit overlooking the view.

Two young women strode past.

"I told Joy she must leave him before it's too late."

"Did she?"

"Of course not! Joy's so stubborn, she's . . ."

The two women looked to be in their thirties, both tanned, sleek, and North American. Before Genna was able to find out more about Joy's stubbornness, the women turned the corner to continue their conversation without so much as glancing at the view.

"I told you to put that away!"

"Mom!"

A young woman stopped near Genna and dropped to her knees before her sniffing child, a boy of about six. One chubby hand clutched a video game.

"This vacation is costing us a fortune," the mother hissed. "You can play your game in the hotel and that's it."

The venom in the mother's voice was so palpable that Genna flinched. Her reaction was not so much distaste at the mother's behavior as recognition of her own. She heard in the mother's desperate tone the frustration she remembered feeling with her own children when they hadn't done something she wanted.

The little boy's face was crimson, his eyes teary, but his grip on the video game defiant. What did he care about a bunch of rooftops? Genna saw her son, Michael, at the same age, heard her own voice hissing with a suppressed fury that she only ever used on her children. She'd never, would never, use that tone with any other person, even Drew – and he deserved it.

"Do you hear me?" the mother demanded.

The boy nodded tearfully. "But, Mom, I'm bored."

"Bored? You're in Paris!"

"I want to go to the hotel."

The mother saw an inroad and, to Genna's relief, took control of herself.

"All right," she said, her voice softening into the universal tones of parental wheedling. "How about you put away the game for now and we'll look through this nice telescope? Then you can play the game while we're having a snack."

The little boy looked up at his mother and then beyond her to the telescope. Genna could almost see the wheels grinding as he weighed his options. Slowly his fingers softened their hold on the video game. His mother took out a tissue and wiped his face, and then suddenly clasped him to her chest. She turned toward Genna and smiled sheepishly.

"It's a lot for little ones to take in," Genna said. "I remember needing to make time for breaks when my children were young."

The mother nodded. "I'm starting to realize that."

"But they grow up so fast. The next time you come, he'll be chasing the French girls."

The mother managed a weak laugh as she stood up and took her son's hand. "Have a nice day," she said.

"You too."

The woman led the boy to a telescope where she was joined by a man and a girl of about ten. The girl was reading the descriptions of the skyline that circled the ledge and giving her father a bossy commentary.

The two children looked to be the same age apart as Genna's two children. At twenty-seven, Becky was making a success of her first real job as a junior curator at Vancouver's anthropology museum, while Michael at twenty-three was . . . Genna despaired of his lack of direction, although she wouldn't put it past him to figure out a way to show up in Paris. The prospect of free accommodation and his mother's cooking might prove irresistible. All he needed was the fare, and he'd find a way if he wanted to. Her son might not be ambitious, but he was resourceful.

As Genna watched the family walk off, the idea for her Eiffel Tower dish popped into her head. She'd pair it with *steak haché et frites* – fried hamburger and french fries, the lowliest dish on any Parisian bistro menu, always reserved for the *menu enfant*.

The summer when she'd traveled around France for six weeks with Drew and the kids, eight-year-old Michael had eaten *steak haché et frites* almost every day. One beef patty, grilled and crispy, accompanied by a mound of light, hot, salty, and crunchy french fries – the best fries in the world. *Steak haché et frites* was as basic as cooking got in France.

The Eiffel Tower, arguably the most important tourist site in Paris, should be paired with the all-time favorite of parents traveling with children and desperate to get something nutritious into their stomachs.

Tour Eiffel Steak Haché and Frites – perfect. Genna took out her notebook and began to write.

If you're traveling in Paris with young children, the Eiffel Tower will be high on your list of must-sees. The size and shape of the soaring tower, its elegance undimmed in well over a century, captivates even young children. And the ride up the elevators to the troisième étage – the third level – has the power to excite children brought up on video games and Disney rides.

Just remember that the end result of the ride is a view, and for most children a view is as appealing as broccoli. Minimize your time at the viewing platforms and head instead for the souvenir stands at the first and second levels. Here, you'll find plush Eiffel Towers sporting tiny red berets and Eiffel Tower-

shaped earrings, lighters, and paperweights along with T-shirts, caps, bags, mugs, wineglasses, and underwear emblazoned with images of the Eiffel Tower. What child can resist? To keep the peace, consider allocating a small portion of your budget to let them buy one thing.

Steak Haché and Frites shows up on every children's menu in every bistro in France. Cooked in the French bistro way, the humble hamburger patty is slightly charred, meaty, and melty. For the real bistro flavor, pair this dish with homemade mayonnaise or a grainy béarnaise sauce.

Good start! Genna snapped the notebook closed, shoved it into her daypack, and stood up for a stretch, then strolled around the viewing platform encircling the second level. On the trip with the kids, she'd taken them up to the very tippy-top. Even now, she shuddered as she remembered the terrible vertigo that gripped her when the tiny elevator broke free from the second level and shot skyward toward the impossibly slender apex of the tower.

The rooftops of Paris blurred into a gray mass. Only the solid black monolith of the modern Montparnasse Tower to the south kept pace with the skyward momentum. At the top, she glued her back to the wall, too frightened even to go to the barred edge of the viewing platform. That evening, she needed a good half liter of wine to recover.

Genna descended the two levels to the ground and walked a few blocks east to find one of the bistros on her list. At 1:00 p.m., the place was crowded. Unsmiling servers weaved and twisted their slim bodies around earnest businesspeople as intent on their food as on their conversations. She ordered a carafe of house white, a thick slice of quiche lorraine, and a tossed salad from the reassuringly traditional menu. After lunch, she walked back to the apartment and worked out a good recipe for Steak Haché and Frites, which she then ate for dinner (it was wonderful!).

Feeling pleasantly full, she spent the evening taking another walk along the Seine, this time to the east as far as the Île de la Cité. At an open area near Notre-Dame Cathedral, rollerbladers swept with dizzying speed around a series of plastic pylons. Genna spent an entertaining half hour watching them and thinking about her son. He'd have been right at home with the rollerbladers, speed being one of his favorite things.

She remembered Drew complaining with a mixture of pride and exasperation about Michael's fearlessness when at the age of six he'd ridden his bike at breakneck speed down one of the steepest hills in West Vancouver. Drew was not a daredevil himself—far from it. Many times, Genna had refereed his clashes with Michael. She usually took Michael's side, not because she wasn't worried about him (she was), but because she admired his confidence. Drew liked to play it safe and Michael did not.

On the other hand, Genna had to believe that her Michael would never be capable of doing what his father had done.

Genna walked slowly home, dodging the swarms of young people in the tiny streets leading from Boulevard Saint-Michel. This part of the Left Bank was her favorite—a bit seedier than the posher area around Rue Bonaparte, the smells of cheap gyros and hot dogs heavy in the air. She missed Michael and Becky. Well, of course she did. But she didn't regret coming to Paris. Her daily routine was becoming set with sightseeing in the morning, lunch at a bistro, writing and

cooking in the afternoon, and then sampling the results for dinner before enjoying a walk in the evening air.

That night, she snuggled her head into the pillow and drifted to sleep, for the time being a picture of contented womanhood. So long as she could keep the sadness at bay and tame the anger, she'd survive.

Drew had taken so much from her. She wouldn't let thoughts of him and their lives together get in the way of what she'd come to Paris to accomplish.