

Day Old Donut Bread Pudding

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After a long day at his job, Brittany Schwan surprised her husband Charles with a new recipe she had perfected for a dessert called “day-old donut bread pudding.” All it took was a box of stale donuts and her signature custard mix (along with a secret special ingredient) and Brittany had created a rich and velvety treat that was to die for.

“I’m going to be honest,” Charles said upon his first bite of the pudding. “This isn’t good. Day-old donut bread pudding? What the hell is that supposed to be? The name sounds like a bunch of words randomly put together. It tastes, and I’m sorry about how blunt I’m being, bitter in the worst way possible.”

Brittany wasn’t offended by these criticisms. The one other time she had made day-old donut bread pudding (sans the secret ingredient, which was a new addition to the recipe), it was received with extravagant praise from every member of her romantic fiction book club. Their enthusiasm motivated her to make it Dish of the Week on her food blog Schwan Songs. Once the recipe had been posted it received close to thirty likes within a day and a comment by Catmom7819 that lauded it as “Perfectly sweet and creamy. Wow!” And Brittany could confirm, day-old donut bread pudding was perfectly sweet and creamy. It probably only tasted bad to Charles now due to the new addition of the secret ingredient — three ounces of a toxic chemical called “Mantis” known to cause hallucinations, painful spasms, and, an hour after digesting, death.

“It’s okay if you don’t like it, honey,” Brittany said.

“Yeah, well, I don’t,” Charles said. “Now get me something to wash this down with. Lemonade, maybe.”

Lemonade was a strange request from Charles (he was more at home with something alcoholic in his hand), but Brittany, too busy setting a mental clock for sixty minutes, didn’t think twice about it. She went to the fridge and poured two glasses from the pitcher. She set one in front of her husband and kept the other for herself. She took a long drink out of the cup but was disappointed to find that something about the lemonade tasted a tad bit unusual.

Brittany didn’t notice that Charles only pretended to take a drink of his. She also didn’t notice that he had a big smile on his face, a smile that was almost certainly there because his plan of dumping copious amounts of “Mantis” into their lemonade pitcher had succeeded.

In Mr. and Mrs. Schwan’s minds, two identical countdowns began.

59:00

Having thrown away the rest of the day-old donut bread pudding, Charles made his way to the living room to take a load off. Work had been a bitch, as usual, full of braindead customers who had seemingly never been to an art store in their lives. Instead of sitting around waiting for his wife to drop dead, he wanted to at least get a second to relax before he had to deal with the aftermath (disposing of the body, getting rid of the evidence, et cetera). He settled down on the couch and loaded up one of his favorite movies on the TV. It was a German silent film from the 1920’s about a poor boy who could seemingly never catch a break from the cruel, hateful world around him. Charles liked this movie because it was much more artistic than any of the shit they made nowadays, and because he often found himself relating to the main character and his struggles

within a society that didn't love him. The flick was called *Die Tragödie des Kindes*.

"This movie again?" Brittany walked into the living room and sat down next to Charles on the couch. "Didn't you just watch this last week?"

"It's useful," Charles said. He had explained this to her before but she had clearly forgotten. "I'm working on a painting inspired by it. I don't think you would get it."

"Oh," Brittany said. "Okay."

"It's going to be a really moving piece," he said. "I want to encapsulate the sadness felt by the child in *Die Tragödie des Kindes*, as well as the sadness within myself." His painting would be called *Black Schwan*.

"Your process with your paintings reminds me of what I do with my recipes," Brittany said, knowing how much what she was about to say would irritate him, but saying it anyway since he wouldn't be around much longer. "I like to listen to songs while I try different combinations of spices for whatever I'm making. I think food is, in some ways, my art."

Charles gazed at her with malice in his eyes. "It's different," he said. "That's not the same at all."

"Oh," Brittany said. "Okay."

She was intending on spending this last hour with her husband to watch him squirm and decay, but even now she was finding him completely insufferable to be around. She decided to retreat to their bedroom.

On her way up the stairs, Brittany felt a strange dizziness.

On the TV, the poor German kid slipped and fell into a puddle.

38:00

In the master bedroom closet sat a tall stack

of Charles's self-made paintings and a mound of dusty photo albums. Brittany stopped to look at the canvases, remembering fondly the moment a week ago when she made the bold choice to take down her husband's art from the walls and hide them away here. It was her first act of rebellion against Charles — the second soon to be his murder.

Next Brittany moved to the photo albums and leafed through one at the very top, a collection of snapshots from the Schwans' wedding. It was a bright, sunny day when two disillusioned young lovers made enough false promises to drown in. "Lovers" might be too strong of a word. Looking at the pictures now, Brittany struggled to think if she had ever loved Charles, even when he was much skinnier and healthier and still had a kindness in his eye. She had more than likely suffered from a simple infatuation that came from his appearance as a soft-spoken, intellectual artist — an appearance that eventually degraded into one of a bitter, mean-spirited failure.

This second version of Charles Schwan emerged quickly after their wedding day. They had just leased a house under the impression that a collection of his paintings would soon sell and take care of their debts. It didn't sell, and it never would.

It was all the little things that made Brittany grow to hate her husband. Not just the insults he threw, or the condescending tone he always used, or the fact that she suspected he was cheating on her with the single mother at the end of their street (that dumb slut) but also the little things. The way that he chewed his food loudly. The way he never closed the toilet seat. The way he always changed the channel when she was watching TV. It was the big things too, of course (especially the dumb

slut), but it was the small agitations that piled up and made her wake up one day with the idea that she didn't just want to divorce her husband, she wanted to see him six feet under the ground.

This marriage had wasted the last fifteen years of her life. If a kidnapper had stuck her in a basement for fifteen years, she would certainly want to kill him, too.

She looked down on the photo albums. A two-inch tall Charles dressed in a tuxedo had climbed out of one of the photos and now sat resting on her leg. A miniature version of herself quickly followed, her long white wedding dress trailing behind her. Brittany watched in awe as the little Schwans leaned in for a kiss atop the hill of her knee. Somewhere behind her, she heard a miniature organ playing a bridal chorus in a high-pitched ring.

"What the hell?" Brittany murmured.

27:00

Downstairs, Charles was on the verge of tears. It was the saddest part of *Die Tragödie des Kindes*. The poor little German boy discovered that his mother, who had been sick since the start of the movie, had died in her sleep. This scene always reminded him of the death of his own mother, and he could imagine now the type of painting he would make using his and the boy's collective sadness: a sea of dark blues and murky greens, whirling together in torment around a pitch black hole.

After his mother's body had been eaten by rats in the street, the little German boy on the TV started to talk to Charles. Among other things, this didn't make sense since *Die Tragödie des Kindes* was a silent film.

"Du hast ein schönes Haus!" the boy exclaimed.

Charles knew enough German to realize the boy was telling him he had a nice house. "Danke schön," Charles said.

"Haben sie eine Frau?" the boy asked. Do you have a wife?

Not for much longer, Charles thought. But he didn't want to make the boy any sadder than he already was so he said "Ja."

"Liebst du sie?" Do you love her?

That was a strange question. What was this boy's game? It did make Charles wonder, though, what the answer would be. He married Brittany because she was pretty, for one, and because she was kind. She was always so kind. He knew that he could say whatever he wanted to her and she would never object or raise her voice in the slightest. Even when he insulted her (honestly delicious) day-old donut bread pudding, she took it with a smile and a shrug. He liked receiving that kindness, as well as having that power over her, a power that was otherwise denied in a world where mothers often died and paintings often never sold. Yeah, he liked her for how kind she was, but did he ever love her?

Charles wasn't sure. He was sure, though, that he hated her on the day he had purchased the "Mantis" from a drug dealer in the city (who had, bizarrely and coincidentally enough, already been near the Schwans' area). He was driven to buy it after coming home one night from a shift that was as emotionally taxing and irritating as ever, only to find that his wife, for all the power he thought he held over her, had relegated all his precious paintings off the walls and into their bedroom closet.

In that moment, the qualities Charles had always hated about Brittany were amplified. He spent countless hours doing nothing but fantasiz-

ing about her choking on one of her own home-cooked meals. Divorce had always been an option, but something about her death was much more satisfying.

“Liebst du deine Frau?” the German boy asked again.

Charles really didn’t want to make the German boy sad, so again he answered

“Ja.”

15:00

In the closet upstairs, Brittany watched as little-Charles and little-Brittany built a little house by the laundry basket. She looked in through a window as the couple moved in their boxes of stuff, set up their bed, and made little love in their new home.

Brittany was amazed. She was watching her whole life with Charles being acted out before her very eyes by these miniaturized versions of themselves. It was all happening very fast, though, and it soon became obvious that there were many differences between this performance and the actual reality of the Schwans’ marriage. Brittany seemed to actually be viewing an alternate reality of how their relationship could’ve gone — one where Charles was successful with his paintings and never turned cruel in his older age. She watched as little-Charles sold his artwork to little men and women in an art gallery set up in the sock

drawer, then went back to their house with a check the size of a grain of rice to show to little-Brittany. The miniscule couple leaped into their bed and had small sex once again (judging by the falsetto moans coming from the little bedroom, little-Charles could do more with his one centimeter penis than big-Charles could do with his).

But it wasn’t until Brittany saw little-Brittany have a microscopic baby Schwan that she really began to feel herself break down.

9:00

Charles was having spasms. Incredibly violent spasms that almost distracted him from the incessant call of the German boy in the TV, who kept asking over and over again, “Bist du mein Vater?”

Charles couldn’t talk anymore or even try to respond to the boy. All he could do was lay on the couch, aggressively shaking, white froth running down his chin. Three words were running through his mind, also in German for some reason: Ich war schrecklich. Ich war schrecklich. Ich war schrecklich.

I was terrible. I was terrible. I was terrible. 7:00

Brittany held little-Brittany in her hand and crushed her body. A splash of blood trickled down her arm, no bigger than what you’d get from swatting a large bug. She grabbed little-Charles and did the same to him, then she crushed their puny house under her foot and killed the baby inside it too. She went into the sock drawer and took out all of little-Charles’s paintings and tore them to bits, save for one that she actually quite liked. It depicted gloomy shades of blue and green framing a colorless void. It was quite striking.

Then her own spasms set in.

5:00

Despite the horrible pain, Charles found the strength inside himself to climb the flight of stairs leading to the master bedroom. About halfway up he experienced a gut-wrenching spasm that almost sent him plummeting down to the landing below, but a helpful push from the German boy allowed him to regain his footing.

Charles knew his wife had gone up this way. He

needed to see her.

2:00

Brittany had made it from the closet to the bed. She was shaking badly, so badly, when she saw her husband enter. His own shakes caused his legs to quickly give out under him and send him plummeting face-first onto the bed beside her. Charles opened his mouth to speak but struggled to get any words out. Brittany spoke first instead.

"You... were really... bad to me..." she said.

1:00

Charles found the will to respond.

"I... liked... the donut... bread... pudding..." he said.

0:15

Brittany felt like laughing, but didn't. "Britt," Charles said. "I think I lov

0:00

End.