

THE AWFUL SECRET OF M.BONNEVAL Paul Gallico (Abridged)

M. Bonneval is a short, friendly man with grey hair and a kind face. He owns the restaurant and cooks the food. Mme. Bonneval, his wife, is a large lady with a warm heart. She runs the business and looks after the money. The Bonnevals have a small black and white cat. Her name is Minette. She is not very beautiful, but they love her very much.

For many years, M. Bonneval had a dream that was dear to his heart. To be included in the Michelin Guide_ The Michelin Guide is a book that gives a list of all the best restaurants in the country. Inspectors from the Michelin Guide visit every restaurant to try the food. They give one, two, or three stars. M. Bonneval knew that he couldn't hope for three stars. His dream was to get one.

One summer day a letter arrived for M. Bonneval. It said...

My Dear Bonneval

You won't remember me, but many years ago you were very kind to me when I was in trouble. I have never forgotten that. Now I can do something to help you. I have found out that on Friday, September 14th, an inspector from the Michelin guide is coming to your restaurant to try the food. I know that your wonderful cooking will please him. I wish you the very best of luck.

An old friend.

"I'll be famous! We'll grow rich!" Monsieur Bonneval shouted. But then he cried, "Today is Friday, September 14th! He's coming today!" Mme. Bonneval looked out of the window just then and cried, "This must be the inspector now. He has just arrived. He has come for lunch!"

A big car had just stopped outside the restaurant. A very large man got out. Clearly, he ate large amounts of the very best food: he was very, very fat and he was carrying the Michelin Guide in one hand. He walked in through the front door with an angry look on his face. "This man must be the inspector from the Michelin Guide. This is the man who can give me that star!" M. Bonneval ran off to the kitchen. He shouted to Mme. Bonneval, "I shall cook FISH-IN-THE-MOON for him!"

He ran into the kitchen, and almost fell over Minette, the cat. Minette was going to have kittens. She was already very large and moved slowly. M. Bonneval shouted for Brazon. He was the man who did all the heavy work in the kitchen. Then he called Celeste, the woman who helped him to cook. Celeste and Brazon had just had a quarrel. Usually they worked well together. But today was different.

M. Bonneval started to cook his FISH-IN-THE-MOON. Almost at once, trouble began. Celeste was very careless. When M_ Bonneval asked her to put in some salt, she put in sugar instead. Then she spilt a plate of hot soup onto the legs of the fat man from the Michelin Guide, and a loud angry shout came from the dining room.

Clouds of horrible black smoke began to pour out of the stove. "It will be ruined!" cried M. Bonneval, and he pulled the dish from the stove. Just then Minette the cat walked across the kitchen. M. Bonneval almost fell over her, and spilt half of the dish on the floor. It was all too much! He raised his right foot and kicked Minette hard. With a scream of pain, Minette ran out of the open door and disappeared. "Silly cow!" he shouted at his wife. "Fool!" he

screamed at Celeste. "Animal!" he shouted at Brazon. Brazon said that he was going to leave, and Celeste started to cry very loudly and Mme. Bonneval ran out of the kitchen, upstairs to her bedroom, and locked the door. M. Bonneval himself carried the remains of the fish into the dining room. He placed it in front of the fat man.

The fat man took a small bite, then gave a shout that filled the room. "Fool!" he shouted. "You think you are a cook? Your restaurant is awful! This fish tastes of sugar." And with that he walked out of the restaurant. All M. Bonneval's hopes and dreams were dashed. Slowly and sadly he went upstairs and stood outside the door of his wife's room, and spoke through the keyhole.

"Come now, my dear. It's all over. The inspector has gone, and we shall be poor again. Come, my dear, don't cry"

"You said I was a silly cow!"

"I'm sorry, my dear, I was angry" he said. After a moment, the key turned slowly in the lock.

He told Brazon that he was sorry, and promised Celeste some more money, and she stopped crying. The restaurant was calm and quiet again. But M. Bonneval was still sad. It was late in the evening, and Minette had still not returned. She was going to have kittens and he had kicked her. He felt that he had done an awful thing. He went outside and called her several times. But there was no sign. Suddenly he had an idea_ Minette loved chicken. It was her favourite food "If I cook some chicken for Minette, she will come back. I will cook a very good CHICKEN SURPRISE_" Now, all went beautifully. The stove worked well and nothing went wrong. He was still sad about his Minette, and he wanted to please her so he looked through his cupboard of herbs and spices and found a special ingredient, just for Minette_ He added it to the dish. He had never added this herb to any dish before.

When the wonderful dish was ready, he cut it in half. He put half of the chicken onto a plate, and went outside to find Minette. "Minette, Minette!" he called, but there was no answer. After some time, he returned to the kitchen. He was surprised to find that they were all very busy. Coffee was on the stove and Brazon was making a sweet dish, and the other half of the CHICKEN SURPRISE had gone.

"What a good thing you cooked the CHICKEN SURPRISE!" said his wife. "Only fifteen minutes ago a man arrived. He was very hungry, and he asked for some cold food. I gave him your special dish, and he was very pleased. He is eating it now"

M_ Bonneval stared at his wife. "But I cooked it for the cat! It was for poor little Minette: I kicked her and she..."

The door from the dining room opened suddenly. A small man with glasses stood there. He looked at them for a moment. Then he ran over to M. Bonneval and threw his arms around him.

"You are the man!" he cried. "You cooked this wonderful dish! You are truly a great cook! I haven't eaten a CHICKEN SURPRISE like this in thirty-five years. Well, you shall have your star - no, what am I saying? Two stars!" Then he stopped, and the look on his face changed. "Or perhaps three stars? There was one ingredient that I could not name. If you tell me the secret ingredient, I'll give you three stars."

M. Bonneval could only stare at him. He did not understand. Wasn't the other man, the fat man, the Michelin Guide inspector?

"I don't ...I don't understand," he said slowly.

"My dear man," the other replied. "I am Fernand Dumaire, inspector for the Michelin Guide. I was on my way here to try your cooking, but I had trouble with my car. And then I arrive at midnight, and I find ...this wonderful dish in front of me! You will certainly have two stars_ And I will give you the third star if you will tell me the secret ingredient."

M. Bonneval's face became rather red. "The--- the secret ingredient?" he repeated.

"Yes, of course," M. Dumaire said. "I can name all the other herbs and spices, but there is one... your secret ingredient! You have changed CHICKEN SURPRISE, you have made a new dish. You shall give it a name. But first, tell me your secret, and you shall have the three stars." Nobody spoke for a moment.

Then M. Bonneval said slowly, "I cannot tell you, Monsieur. I shall be happy with two stars."

Mme. Bonneval stared at her husband in surprise. But the inspector again threw his arms around him and kissed him. "You are right, my friend. You are an honest man and a very great cook. A really good cook must never tell his secrets."

At that moment a little noise came from outside. Minette ran softly into the room. She was thinner now, and in her mouth she carried a little kitten. She put it down in a warm place beside the stove, and went out again- She came back with another kitten, and another, and another. She came in and went out again thirteen times. They stood quietly and watched and counted the baby cats. There were tears in M. Bonneval's eyes. Minette carefully placed the last kitten with the others, and lay down beside them. Then M. Bonneval spoke.

"You said that I could give my CHICKEN SURPRISE a new name. Very well. I will call it CHICKEN SURPRISE 'THIRTEEN KITTENS'.

The secret ingredient was indeed a little unusual_ There is a herb that all cats love. Its name is Catnip. M. Bonneval cooked the chicken for Minette. He found some catnip in his cupboard, and put lots of it into the chicken. That is the secret of CHICKEN SURPRISE 'THIRTEEN KITTENS'.