

Home Economics and the Art of Fine Cooking

“Good morning, class. Now, Mrs Pomfrit will not be here today -”

The teacher was interrupted by a low, but distinctly recognisable cheer from the Home Economics class.

“What’s wrong with her, sir?” asked Nicola from the back row, with an extremely concerned look on her face.

“Food poisoning, I believe, Nicola. Anyway, that is neither here nor there. I’ll be taking the class today, so just settle down.”

There was a loud groan. Leo Gally the physics teacher was perhaps one of the most boring teachers in the whole school. More boring even than Miss Anna Solemnis in R.E. Worse by far than Mrs Stein in Maths. And certainly more hard of hearing than Charlie Amel, the janitor.

“Now, who can tell me what Mrs Pomfrit was doing with you last week? Is that you I see, young Ferguson?” Mr Gally was a bit short-sighted.

Louise Ferguson stood up and put on her dark glasses and a heavy Continental accent. “Non, monsieur. I am not ze Fergus of which you are speaking. I am ze - how you say - ze exchange student de Paris.”

“Oh, I do beg your pardon, young lady. Or mademoiselle, if I may call you that?” Mr Gally blushed slightly at his success in remembering a word of French. It was long ago when he had learned it at school; Napoleon was still fighting his wars. “May I say how nice it is to have you visiting us. Now, class, who can tell me and this young visitor what Mrs Pomfrit was going to do this week?”

There was a great deal of feet-shuffling before Malcolm stood up.

“It was going to be Cheese Soufflé, Mr Gally, sir. We were all going to bring in an egg. But I’ve lost mine.”

“Oh you silly boy,” groaned Mr Gally, sitting down heavily in the teacher’s chair. “Where did you lose --- eeuh!”

Malcolm had accidentally placed his egg on the teacher’s chair. Mr Gally’s trousers were now soggy, and everything was just getting too much for him. He got out his hanky and blew his nose loudly.

Kind-hearted Jessica came up to the teacher with a bundle of paper towels. “Here, sir, these might help.” Mr Gally took them sadly, and sat on them; as his trousers dried a bit, he became more cheerful.

“OK, class, let’s see if we can find the recipe. Where does Mrs Pomfrit keep her recipes? In this cupboard?”

Mr G. tugged at the handle of the cupboard just behind him. The door was stiff. Just as Jessica shouted “Don’t pull too hard...!”, the teacher pulled with all his might. With a clatter, a sudden stillness, a crash and a whoosh, the door flew open and Mr Gally was hit on the head by fifteen bags of flour, two tins of treacle and enough salt to keep the roads clear all winter.

There was a shout of despair and then total silence, interrupted only by the slow ponderous drip of treacle mixed with flour as it plopped from Mr Gally’s head on to the floor.

“... the cupboard is full of stuff,” finished Jessica quietly.

“And Mrs Pomfrit always opens it gently,” added Alastair helpfully. “Here, sir, will I call Mrs Nightingale, the school nurse?” Mrs Nightingale was always eager to mend broken heads and apply plasters. But Mr Gally lived in mortal fear of her.

“No, no!” he babbled, “I’ll just go and get cleaned up. You get on with finding the recipe and then we’ll make some soufflés.” Leaving behind a trail of coagulating treacle and a set of salty footprints, with eggs dripping down his legs into his shoes, Mr Gally sadly left the classroom and headed for the Physics department.

“All right, zen, my leetle class-mates,” said the unexpected French girl, “Oo’s got ze recipe?”

Rachel, who was always the most organised girl in the class, knew exactly where Mrs Pomfrit kept her recipes: in an empty whisky bottle under her desk. The only difficulty was deciding which was the empty bottle and which were the ones the HE teacher was still using. Even then, there was a whole pile of empties with nothing in them, and a couple with a stash of coins for the off-licence.

But at last the class had unearthed the roll of slightly evil-smelling recipes. Eagerly, they looked through them: Chocolate Muffins, Drop Scones, Bread Rolls, Almond Fricassée with Truffle Trimmings, Omelette, Boiled Egg, Tea, Tomatoes Stuffed with Flageolet Beans with a Wild Mushroom and Blaeberry Sauce on a bed of Cous-Cous - they were all there.

“Here it is!” shouted Dennis triumphantly, holding up a dog-eared and stained scrap of cornflake packet. On the back, written in Mrs Pomfrit’s distinctive scrawl, was the recipe for Cheese Soufflé.

“Now, what do we need,” muttered Mona, who liked her food. “Mm, grated cheese, eggs - separated, a white sauce, parmesan - nice!” She smacked her lips in a rather gross manner. “Let’s get on with it!”

Just then, Mr Gally returned, wearing a boiler suit which he had borrowed from Charlie Amel. It was a very bright fluorescent pink and the class had to turn away its eyes, they hurt so much. Louise still had on her dark glasses, so she was all right. Even Mr G. had to keep his head tilted slightly upwards, the glare from below being just too much for his peripheral vision. Since his socks had stuck to the paste inside his shoes, he wore a pair of slippers fashioned from the previous month’s copy of *Science*; on his left foot was an advanced article about the effect of Halley’s comet on the neutrino particles in the interstellar clouds, and his right foot was encased in a rather dim photograph of a previously-unknown species of deep-sea fish.

“Right then, class, let’s get on with this soufflé,” he mumbled, all the while gazing at the ceiling so as not to be blinded by his pink suit. “McPhie, you shout out the instructions. Are we ready? Mamzelle, you are watching? This will be the best of Scottish cookery in action!”

Anna McPhie stood up on her table and began to decipher Mrs Pomfrit’s instructions.

“Separate the grokes and the whistles of two eggs,” she read, vainly trying to read between the whisky stains and the black-edged holes where burning matches had been dropped.

“I believe that must be ‘yolks’ and ‘whites’, young lady,” said Mr Gally sternly. “Here, give that thing to me, and go and join your class-mates. Now

then, what's next: "Grate 4 oxen of cheese - no, that can't be right... Four ozones? Any thoughts, anyone?"

"I think it must be 'ounces', sir," said Jessica helpfully.

"OK, where does Mrs P. keep the cheese? Must be in this fridge..." Mr Gally grabbed the handle of the fridge and wrenched it open, before Jamie's shout of "No, sir, not that one!" could stop him.

It was not the fridge. It was Mrs P's secret supply of jams, to which she was a slave, kept in an old abandoned fridge. It being old, the shelves were shaky. In less than five seconds, Mr Gally's pink suit had disappeared in an avalanche of sticky red and orange jam. Raspberry pips spattered the nearest onlookers. At that moment, the door to the classroom flew open and Mr Ranter the headmaster strode in.

"What in the name...!" he bawled, and stopped. His eyes bulged out of their sockets as he caught sight of the pink and red streaky figure in the corner. "You, sir, what are you doing in this classroom - oh, it's you, Gally? What on earth are you up to?!"

Mr Gally's mouth was now full of apricot conserve, so he could not reply to his headmaster. He tried to clear some space around his mouth, but only succeeded in sticking his sleeve to his moustache, and the more he pulled, the more it became tugged at his hairs. "Ow! Oo!" was all he could reply.

"Please sir," said Louise, "Mr Gally had some trouble with Mrs Pomfrit's fridge-door."

Mr Ranter drew a deep breath. "Mr Gally, sir, you are a disgrace. Go and change into proper teaching attire, and don't ever let me catch you wearing these unsuitable clothes again. What have you got on your feet man? Is this an example to set these young minds? Be off with you before I have you flogged!"

Mr Gally trudged unhappily away out of the door. His sleeve was still over his mouth, and each step he took sounded like the tearing of a velcro strip, as his feet stuck to and were pulled from the floor.

"Now, then, class. I'll take over for the rest of this. What are we making - cheese soufflé? Oho, well I'm a bit of a wizard in the kitchen. Mrs Ranter would kill for my soufflés. And frequently does. Right, Ferguson, take those dark glasses off and let's start beating those eggs. No, in fact, let's just make one giant soufflé - get all your eggs into this basin here. Ah, these hand-beaters will be no good - Chalmers and Robertson, nip down to the CTD department and borrow one of those large upright drills they have. We're going to make us the biggest soufflé ever!"

Mr Ranter strode about, rubbing his hands with glee. He had never had a chance like this before.

All the eggs were put into one bowl, and the heavy drill placed over it. Mr Ranter and Mr Cunning, who had come up from CTD with his precious equipment, made some improvised beaters out of string and some spoons. All was ready.

"Switch on, Miss Fraser," commanded the headmaster. "And stand back everyone!"

The paddles slowly began moving, stirring about two gallons of egg-whites. Faster and faster they went, with a most satisfying high-pitched whine. The egg-mixture gradually turned from transparent to white and began to froth. Mr Ranter stood by proudly, nodding his head.

Just as peaks started to form in the mixture, things went wrong. The string which held together the spoons slipped and the spoons began to beat wildly, now in the mixture, now out. Egg-white started to spray out over the rim of the basin. A whole blob flew out and deposited itself down Mr Ranter's jacket.

"Switch off!" he spluttered.

But the egg was too much: it flew everywhere. Anyone who moved anywhere near the basin was covered. The floor became slippery, then the windows and walls. A moving mass of egg-white emerged from the basin like a monster from the deep and began to crawl over the table and on to the floor. Then it attacked Mr Ranter. Mr Cunning took one look and fled screaming.

The Soufflé was on the move...