

# *The Cat with One Life*

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The situation in the home of Monsieur Jean Bajouette was one of fascinating complexity. M Bajouette was deeply in love with his wife, Michelle, while she, with a sort of light-hearted Parisian insouciance, had a lover – less from inclination than from conformity with current fashion.

The maison Bajouette was a small house in the rue du Chat Qui Pêche, facing the Seine. The street was no more than a few yards long, the house being close to the rue Dante where M Bajouette managed a firm with a good business in commercial wax, run with the clerical methods of France in the 1920s.

Why the street should commemorate a fishing cat was a mystery. It was said by Courbet the taxidermist in the Place St Michel that during the annual flooding of local cellars by the Seine, an enterprising cat used to sit on the bottom step of the Bajouette cellar and hook up passing fish.

The Bajouettes also housed Madame Juillard, M Bajouette's mother-in-law, a formidable female of astonishing rotundity who ruled the house with an iron hand and worked little Charmaine, the skivvy, to death.

One September morning those long years ago, Madame Juillard was snapping at the wretched Charmaine with her usual '*Alors toi!*' which more or less meant what you wanted it to mean. The cowed M Bajouette crouched over his breakfast, forbearing, less