

Monday 5th January 2015

Dear Customer,

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Yep, here it is being inflicted on you yet again. Those three, once just bland, now really annoying, words which are sure to have been coming at you thick and fast through corporate emails, tweets, facebook and every way elsethey simply couldn't proliferate like this 10 years ago. We need to get this under control my friends before it erodes the sentiment completely. We are becoming a world of megalomaniacs expressing so much goodwill, so often, to so many. But I do wish you a Happy New Year and hope you have had lovely holidays. We have Jonnie Watson's dark, sultry cavolo nero in the bags this week and some chippy sweet potatoes from Andalucia. Here are a few easy recipes you could try:

Sweet Potato, Carrot and Ginger Soup

450g carrots, peeled and chopped
3 garlic cloves, crushed
¼ tsp ground cumin
900ml vegetable stock
salt and pepper to taste

2 medium onion, chopped
350g sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped
1 piece fresh ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
2 tbsp fresh thyme, chopped

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan and gently fry the onions until soft but not browned. Add the garlic, cumin and ginger, then cook for a further 30 seconds. Next add the carrots, sweet potato and vegetable stock. Bring to a steady simmer and cook until the carrots are tender. Blend until smooth. Stir in the thyme, season with salt and ground black pepper.

Cavolo Nero Pasta

500g dried penne
300g cavolo nero, leaves stripped from stem
150ml olive oil

2 garlic cloves, peeled
3 tbsp pine nuts, lightly toasted
3 handfuls grated Parmesan

Cook the pasta according to packet instructions. Meanwhile, in another pan, bring some salted water to the boil with the garlic cloves. When it's boiling, add the cavolo leaves and cook for 5-10 minutes until tender. Drain reserving the garlic. Transfer the cavolo, garlic and pine nuts to a food processor and blitz to a fine puree. Add the olive oil and parmesan, then blitz again and season to taste. You should have a glossy, rich dark green sauce. Drain the pasta, reserving a cup of the cooking water. Toss the sauce through the pasta, loosening it with a little cooking water. Finish with another drizzle of olive oil and a dusting of Parmesan.

Sauteed Cavolo Nero with Chilli and Garlic

1 head cavolo nero
2 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 tbsp olive oil
½ to 1 red chilli, roughly sliced

Strip the leaves from the thick stems, wash under cold water and finely shred. Steam or boil in salted, boiling water for 5-7 minutes until just cooked. Drain but reserve a few tablespoons of cooking water. Heat the oil in a large frying pan and when hot, add the garlic, chilli and salt and pepper. Fry for a couple of minutes until they soften, then add the cooked kale and fry for around five minutes, stirring constantly. If necessary add a little cooking water to stop it sticking. The kale should have wilted and become coated in the chilli and garlic oil.

It's Friday evening and I am feeling wretched that I haven't driven to London tonight, to my Aunt Gwerfyl's 90th Birthday Party, and gathering of my Welsh side.

On New Year's Day, yesterday, I went over to my friend Liz' house, our friend had come up from London. Liz has a pristine Georgian mini-mansion up in the Dales with lawns which slope down to the river, flag stone floors, big open fires. One knocks on the front door, one glides in, transformed into Jane Austen. We ate 'tagine' and drank rose champagne. I've been teetotal for 25 years, I used to love champagne and couldn't resist having half a centimetre in the bottom of the glass – three little sips. That with a champagne truffle actually made me drunk.

I was worried about driving home as a storm had been raging all night. I was worried about fallen trees but decided to brave it and set off at about 11pm. To get home took me down the Swale valley, a road that runs alongside the river and passes through a string of tiny Viking villages like Thwaite and Muker. Everywhere was black and deserted, the road was strewn with bits of tree and the water was pouring off the valley sides across the road into the river. There were no other cars on the road. I would take a breath each time I drove into water, not knowing how deep it was but I could see tarmac at the other side. Then I went round a corner and ahead of me the road was just river. I couldn't have reversed, or done a three-point turn so I just had to keep driving. It must have been a mile like that of river with water sloshing halfway up my car. It was utterly terrifying. I kept wondering if I should just abandon the car and climb over the wire fence and up the valley side. Anyway I made it through, managed to stop another car who was heading for it and they diverted.

But when I got home I made a cup of tea and sat down and then noticed that the bottom right corner of everything I looked at was missing. Myfa's front leg had gone, a quarter of the television, a quarter of my mug, a quarter of my blackberry. I had to run up to bed and switch the light off. Had I been spiked, was it food poisoning. I guess it was maybe the champagne, the emotional distress of Eastenders and the fear of being swept away down the river. But then Liz told me it was a migraine and that she gets it on long drives, as do all her family. Great, you can't see half the lorry you're trying to pass in the fog. I prefer my normal migraines. Anyway this morning my car was gurgling with water and I was still seeing spots. The idea of joining the returning holiday traffic on the M1 to London – well I just couldn't face it. So here I am, about to miss this important family occasion.

I emailed one of our suppliers to try and order some onions. There was no response – then a late night email “ sorry, just got your message, I was ice skating”. It's the twilight zone. Normal people, liberated from the daily grind for a week, going bonkers.

Just before Christmas we got an email greeting card from Duncan at Lyncroft Farm wishing us Happy Christmas in Spanish “Feliz Navidad”. I mentioned it to Jonnie Watson who said he’d had it too. We roared with laughter, Duncan, in his peaty potato furrow in Ormskirk – well known for not being able to even speak English. “Hola Duncan, que tal ? Tienes unas patatas por favor ?”..... inevitably followed.

Right, that’s 2014 dragged across the screen and dumped in the recycle bin. Now for 2015, let’s get this show on the road !

Kind wishes,

Isobel