

**Monday 11<sup>h</sup> March 2013**

Dear Customer,

Here in Richmond there is no hint of spring whatsoever - not one bud. There's no sun. It's stark and bleak and blizzarding and feels like we're in the wake of a nuclear holocaust. Everyone's pale and miserable and saying they can't take any more. I'm snowed in and had to cancel today's dental appointment .....absolutely mortified ! As you can imagine.. there ain't much coming out of the ground here, in fact, there ain't much left in the ground full stop. It has been the most abominable year for farmers ever and they really deserve a break this year. It needs to warm and dry up so they can start sowing this year's crops.

Here's a little recipe you could try with this week's bags:

**Courgette and Lemon Spaghetti**

200g spaghetti

2 courgettes, thinly sliced lengthways

1½ tsp sage

2 tbsp Parmesan ( optional)

zest of ½ lemon

3 tbsp olive oil

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1½ tsp rosemary

100g feta, crumbled, optional

*Cook the spaghetti to al dente according to packet instructions then drain in a colander and set aside. Pour the olive oil into the same pan and put on a medium heat, then add the courgettes and sauté for 4-5 minutes before adding the garlic and herbs and mixing well. Saute for a couple more minutes. Return the cooked pasta to the pan and heat through, then mix in the cheese and lemon zest with a little sea salt and a grind of black pepper. Serve.*

I have always been upset by life's brevity. I don't know about you, but I can't bear to see my life planned out ahead of me. I don't even like seeing anything in my diary. Meeting Tuesday 3pm ! Well come Monday 5pm when I see Tuesday 3pm..... I don't like it.

The Northumberland project has focused the mind. I haven't lived in New York yet or Los Angeles or lived in Florence / learned Italian. Not to mention my life on the Riviera writing film scripts and novels. But time marches on doesn't it, and eventually it runs out and so we have to think very carefully about how we choose to spend that time. One life span is simply not long enough. And there's the perpetual bind of having to earn a living of course.

A customer who is a scientist sent me a document which I read with alarm. Adverse reactions to prescribed drugs is one of the principal causes of death in UK, US and Europe. Indeed it is the third biggest killer in the US. The document tells how animal testing is done, not to ensure safety of new medicines, but rather to free the pharmaceutical companies and regulatory authorities from legal accountability when death or disability occurs through drug reactions. It is actually what killed my father. He was given a new arthritis drug which destroyed his white blood cell count, destroying his immunity, necessitating fortnightly blood transfusions and leaving him unable to fight infections. On morphine for the pain of an infection, he fell, broke a rib, then died from pneumonia - all over the course of a month or so.

He only mentioned the drug to me once and this was very casually. So casually that I never took it very seriously but I guess that was his intention. He knew he was a guinea pig. His rheumatoid consultant, who he was very fond of, sought him out in hospital and held his hand as he was dying. They knew, what I, am only just coming to realise. Like Helen's father, he was of the generation who survived the war and went on to have long, happy lives, but never forgot those who didn't. To have a medical trial conducted on one at the age of 83 probably didn't feel like much of a sacrifice. But given the genes on that side of the family, it probably robbed us of 15-20 years. I was always convinced that the drugs he was prescribed - the primary medications and then the set prescribed to counter the side-effects of them - would bring on his premature demise and they did. People always say I should see a doctor about my migraines - take something. I can't treat medication that lightly. As a species, we are all different, our chemical make-ups, yet in medicine we are treated virtually the same. I was given antibiotics in France for a tooth infection, 3 large pills 3 times a day, which I built up too gradually as it looked excessive. By the time I was on 2, the infection had cleared, when, as I thought I had better, I took 3, I went stone cold and started hallucinating. I was an 8 stone vegetarian being prescribed the same dose as a 20 stone burger-eating man. What may cause cancer in one, may cause nothing in another. Cancer rates have doubled since the 1950's.

Ernest was telling me the other day about the solution they used to, as advised by DEFRA, pour down the spines of the dairy cows from the shoulder to the tail. A solution so toxic they had to wear special gear and couldn't inhale or get on their skin. It made him shudder at the thought of it. They knew at the time that it was wrong, they kept 2 cows untreated for their own milk. The horse 'meat' episode has demonstrated that most of the meat consumed here is from coming from countries which show little regard for regulation. Heaven knows what's being eaten - the noxious chemicals and hormones - and what the medium and long-term effects of that are. That plus all our medications - it's health into the twilight zone. The very things taken to nourish and heal can easily kill us. One

good thing.....we now have the internet at our fingertips, we can do our own research and take our own informed decisions. The information was practically inaccessible before.

On a lighter note, look at this brill text I just got from my neighbour who's in the Alps:

“Hope all well. Just had a great day's skiing in the sun. I've just had a thought there's a very slight chance I've left the oven grill on. Next time you go out - no hurry - could you go into the back garden and have a look through the window.....”.

Kind wishes,

Isobel