

**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014**

Dear Customer,

I am still in France, I am sitting out in the garden, it's about 29 degrees, the sky is blue, I can hear the sea gently lapping at the shore. I noticed the shelves in the Coop had been stocked with chocolate Father Christmases. I may attempt to make a habit of this in future. It doesn't feel quite right as I sit here with my bikini on, popping a black olive in my mouth, to be giving you a swede. But it's too late, you've got one. Here is a delicious, nutritious autumnal recipe you could slave over while I'm sunning it in Provence:

**Vegetable Cobbler**

<i>½ bulb garlic, chopped</i>	<i>1 onion, chopped</i>
<i>½ swede, chopped</i>	<i>2 carrots, chopped</i>
<i>1 sweet potato, chopped</i>	<i>3 florets cauliflower</i>
<i>3 florets broccoli</i>	<i>handful mushroom, chopped</i>
<i>punnet cherry tomatoes</i>	<i>2 tbsp cornflour</i>
<i>stock mixed with water</i>	<i>oregano</i>
<i>225g self-raising flour</i>	<i>4 tbsp butter</i>
<i>115g cheese</i>	<i>1 egg</i>
<i>150ml milk</i>	

*Preheat oven to 180C/ Gas 4. Saute the onion and garlic in some oil over a medium heat. Add the swede, carrot, sweet potato and cauliflower ( you may want to pre boil the harder veg a little ). Cook for 2-3 minutes over a medium heat, then add the mushrooms, tomatoes and broccoli. Mix the cornflour with 2 tbsp of water to form a paste. Mix water and stock until stock dissolves. Add to the mix in the pot. Stir and simmer for a while, add oregano and then put the mixture into an ovenproof dish. Place in the oven for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, sift the flour into a bowl, add the butter and cheese and rub together. In a separate bowl, beat the egg and milk and then stir into the dry mixture to make a dough. Roll out and cut into small circles of about 5cm across. Take the dish out of the oven and place the little circles around the edges of the dish, just overlapping a little. Brush the dough with milk and sprinkle extra cheese over the whole lot, Return the dish to the oven and increase the temperature to 200C/ Gas 6. Cook for a further 10-15 minutes until the scones have risen and turned golden brown.*

I suspect it is in bad taste to be talking about a summer holiday at the end of September so I will stick to the bad bits. I have just dropped Caroline off in Saint Tropez so I can concentrate on writing this in peace and without criticism of my feet. Yesterday I was standing in the sea throwing a stick for Myfa and she came over and told me my feet were fuschia pink. I looked down, they were a shade of pink. I said it was probably because I'd just taken my shoes off. 'Was it the dye', she asked ? I looked over to my black Converse trainers. "No, it's not, they are black". She then told me that the other day she had noticed that my feet were purple. I hadn't noticed. Last night walking in from the beach she asked me whether I wore heels back home, I told her sometimes but not normally. "Because your feet look really flat", she added. I haven't looked at her feet once, I am not interested in them. I have however, looked with relish at the mosquito bites proliferating all over her.

By day two, despite me being completely covered from dusk to dawn in either a DIY burka and socks, or being rolled up in a sheet through the night, I still received ten bites. Caroline had only two more than me despite staying out in the evening with her flesh bared and sleeping normally and nonchalantly in her bed. But then when my mosquito net went up over my bed, my daily count of new bites fell dramatically and hers soared as she had also decided to sleep with her doors wide open. Now she is completely covered in them and looks like she has bubonic plague.

One of my bites was just inside my elbow and was particularly aggravating. I made the mistake of outstretching both my arms to compare them and found to my horror that the bitten elbow had really swollen up. My heart started pounding. Maybe this one wasn't a mosquito bite, maybe this was a hornet bite or a spider bite, the same tiny spider that had seen someone I knew, hospitalised and fighting for his life for 6 months when he stood on it on the Cap Ferat. I was now the walking wounded. My arm swathed in towels of ice, I checked it against my other arm every five minutes to check the swelling wasn't working its way up. Was I being melodramatic, I know I can be, should I go to A & E. The people around me told me it was normal. It was very traumatic.

Anyway my arm has now gone back to normal, last night I was bitten on the other elbow. On the beach yesterday, I bent down to throw some sea in my face and felt a sting on the back of my leg, I swished it and saw a black insect flying off. Here, everything that lands on you bites you. I've been avoiding the sea on jellyfish days.

What other bad news have I got ? Well the weather has been pretty mixed and tomorrow there is supposed to be a big storm.

I am being subjected to snobbery. Snobbery about enjoying sunbathing, snobbery about preferring milk chocolate with rice crispies in (Crunch) to bitter dark chocolate, snobbery about preferring strong Tetley's tea to hot water, snobbery about liking biscuits for breakfast, snobbery about preferring to hang out in the villa in flip flops rather than making a cultural visit to something or other to improve myself. Do I care ? No. Life is about enjoying your life.

Ingrid and her son Alex have just left to go up to the Alps along with a Brazilian guy who'd turned up for a few days. Thanks to Alex, I am now a serious convert to French hip hop. I know what will be blaring out across Swaledale this winter.

Caroline rang me when I'd just started the letter to say she had no money with her and could I take her passport to her so she could go to the bank. I said I would when I'd finished the letter. I may just go down to the beach with Myfa for a swim first, make another mug of builders tea, lay out in the sun for a bit reading Var-Matin, and nip down there after that.

Heading back this weekend unfortunately - I have some serious work to do when I get back. However, I am still working. That is the glory of technology. Whether I'm sitting on my computer on Pampelonne beach or at my desk in Richmond makes no real difference to anyone or anything.

Hope this finds you well,

Kind wishes,

