



Monday 4th April 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope you had a nice Easter break. It's absolutely freezing here, grimmer than grim. It never used to be this bad. When I first moved here we would get sunny spring days and sunny summers. Not anymore – we are permanently separated from our sun, shrouded in some form of grey – wall to wall gloom. I don't really know why anyone lives here. In fact I think it is slowly becoming uninhabitable. The Tour de France was the last hoorah, we are returning to the ice age. But it is so beautiful, that's the problem. It's hard to imagine living anywhere else.

You could try roasting some vegetables in an ovenproof dish – small cubes of celeriac, carrots, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, aubergine, peppers, courgettes, fennel, mushrooms – whatever you have in any combination. Roast in the oven until tender and serve piled on top of couscous (cooked according to packet instructions). Finish with a good dollop of houmous or crème fraiche.

We've got 'ugly' in the bags this week, and you can mash him, stew him, roast him or eat him raw grated into a salad. He is of course celeriac and is high in fibre, calcium, potassium, magnesium, phosphorus and contains vitamins B1, B2 and E. Here are some tasty recipes you could cook him into:

Celeriac and Cauliflower Soup

800g celeriac

1 leek, roughly chopped

olive oil

1 small cauliflower

1 tbsp cumin seeds, toasted

900ml whole milk

1 onion, roughly sliced

3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped

natural yoghurt

Peel the celeriac with a serrated knife removing any tough green flesh at the same time. Cut into 3cm cubes. Put into a small pan with the milk and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to a low simmer for 30 minutes. When the celeriac is soft, allow to cool a little, then ladle into a blender with enough milk to make a thick, smooth puree. Add a knob of butter. Saute the leek and onion gently in the olive oil for 10 minutes until soft. Add the garlic and saute for a further 5 minutes. Cut the cauliflower into florets then add them with any young leaves to the onion mixture. Cover with water, bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes or until the cauliflower is soft. Ladle into a blender in batches and blend until smooth. Return the soup to the pan on a low heat and season. Reheat the celeriac puree over a low heat in another pan, adding more milk to get a soup consistency. When both are hot but not boiling, the soup is ready to serve. Half-fill wide bowls with the cauliflower soup, then ladle the celeriac soup into the middle. Top with a spoon of yoghurt and a sprinkling of cumin seeds.

Baked Celeriac with Butter, Lemon and Thyme

750g celeriac

40g butter

rosemary, 3 sprigs

juice of ½ lemon

thyme, 6 sprigs

Set the oven to 180C / Gas 6. Cut some baking parchment about twice the diameter of the baking tin, leaving plenty of overhang. Peel the celeriac, slice it in half and cut each into 4-6 wedges. Chop the wedges into thick slices and drop them into a bowl. Squeeze the lemon into the bowl. Melt the butter in a small pan and add it to the celeriac, then pick the thyme leaves and add to the bowl. Pick the needles from the rosemary sprigs and finely chop them, then add them to the lemon and butter. Season with salt and black pepper. Tip the celeriac and its seasonings into the paper-lined baking dish then fold the paper over and seal. Bake for 35 minutes then open up the paper. Turn the pieces of celeriac over then return to the oven and leave to cook for a further 15 minutes until pale gold.

Ernest hurt his back after hitting it on a tree branch while scrabbling through the woods trying to get some of the sheep back in their field. There have been escapees every day recently. He told me he that with immediate effect couldn't take anymore. He said he knew that they were my sheep and that I love them, but that for him, they were all *****.

He said they are completely ungrateful. So anyway, I am now looking after them for the time being. Spring is when they are at their naughtiest and they spend their time prowling about in gangs looking for holes in the fences, pushing at them, testing their whole 70-acre boundary....plotting. I had a concerned call from the landowner on Wednesday – a whole load of them were in a neighbour's corn field. They were eating and trampling the crop. I went up there with a bucket and they followed me back through the woods in a long stream, about 60 of them. I was praying they'd all just keep coming after me, which they did. Then I ran back and shut the gate. Since then I have been spending my time patching the fencing – just as I close one gap, another appears. If they can't get through a gap they will just push the whole fence down.

The synopsis is causing me immense torment. I was too busy to tackle it in the week but it never left my mind – I would do it at the weekend. It's not even that I'm procrastinating anymore. On Saturday I had to go to Leyburn to buy sheep nuts for the geriatrics, then go round the sheep and I took Myfa for a walk in gardens in Constable Burton. I would have to watch the Voice so decided I would devote Sunday and Monday to writing it.

Today is Sunday. I awoke with the terror that it was, and still is, synopsis day. I came downstairs, made a cup of tea and watched the Andrew Marr Show. Then I watched The Big Question, which I hate, then I started to watch Down Under, which I hate, an episode from 10 years ago. Then I made myself switch it off. I had been wondering if it was a reluctance to spend even more time than I already do on the computer. I sat a while staring at the screen. Then I decided to take pen and paper and cup of tea upstairs to my bedroom and lay on the bed as it might be more conducive. I immediately switched Down Under back on but

turned down the volume. Instead of sitting staring at a blank computer screen, I was lying down staring out of the window. Then I started nodding off.

I laboured over just one paragraph then thought 'this isn't a synopsis, this is the book - it's no good', I screwed it up and chucked it on the floor. Paper wasn't going to work. I came downstairs again, made another cup of tea and sat back down and stared at my blank computer screen. She's only asked for one page. But that page has to sell the whole book. I had another go. And so it goes on.....

Kind wishes, Isobel

PS I've just seen the weather forecast. 19C in London. That's very nice for you, I hope you enjoy it. Since you ask, yes, I think the first daffodil might bloom up here in the next few weeksall being well that is.