



**Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Reporting from North Yorkshire I rarely get to say this, but the weather has been stunning. This is the most beautiful spring. Well, it was until the doctor's cat ran past with a huge rabbit in its mouth, bigger than it was. I could hear the rabbit screaming. I ran out onto the road in my socks but they'd gone. Immediately opposite my house is a wooded bank which slopes away down, and in it, a rabbit warren. They're always popping under the fence to nibble on the grass verge or to lie flat-out on the road, on the warm tarmac. It puts me on edge with all the local cats sloping about. Not to mention the man down the road with two whippets who I have to keep an eye on as I know he goes 'rabbiting' on the moors. When I speak to him I remind him that I feed these rabbits. I lay pieces of cucumber or carrot, left surreptitiously at the entrances of their burrows. The last thing I want is for them to think they can trust a human being. They believe they live beneath a cucumber-slice tree.

Here are some tasty recipes you could try with your celeriac, in the bags this week:

**Courgette, Aubergine and Tomato Stacks**

2 courgettes, cut in half, sliced lengthways	1 aubergine, sliced
2 tbsp sundried tomato paste	3 tomatoes, sliced
20g fresh basil, finely chopped	100 ml olive oil
4 tbsp cheese, grated	1 tsp lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 200 C / Gas 6. Place the courgette and aubergine slices on a baking tray and brush with the tomato paste. Top the aubergine with tomato slices. Bake for 15 minutes. Mix together the rest of the ingredients along with 2 tbsp cold water to make a pesto. Season. Layer the cooked vegetable slices into 2 stacks and then drizzle with some pesto.

**Chard Tart**

300g shortcrust pastry	3 tbsp olive oil
2 medium onions, finely sliced	250g chard
2 Hen Nation medium eggs plus 1 egg yolk	200ml crème fraîche
salt and freshly ground black pepper	50g finely grated Gruyère

Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface. Loosely wrap around the rolling pin and carefully unroll over a 25cm, round tart dish. Press the pastry into the dish and prick the bottom with a fork. Line with greaseproof paper and fill with baking beans. Chill for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 180°C/ Gas 4. Put the pastry in the centre of the oven and bake blind for 20 minutes. Remove from the oven, remove the paper and beans and return to the oven for 5 minutes to dry out. Then remove from the oven. Keep the oven on. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a frying pan over a low heat and fry the onion until soft. Prepare the chard by ripping the leaves away from the stems. Finely slice both and add the stems to the onions. Fry gently until they begin to soften then add the sliced leaves and fry until soft. Season to taste and tip the mixture into the pastry case. Beat together the eggs, egg yolk and crème fraîche, mix in the Gruyère, season to taste and pour into the tart, making sure that it seeps through the chard filling to the base. Bake for 25 minutes until golden and slightly risen. Serve hot or cold

I'm sorry I never managed the letter and recipes last week. I had a bout of 'stomach' migraine - my new, new one, in contrast to the new zigzag migraines - ringing the changes, shaking things up. I probably brought it on myself with a resurgence of pandemic-related anger. I'd been quietly and solemnly resigned over much of the winter. Since January the Government had been doing what it needed to do - rolling out the vaccine programme, the lockdown, the slow and cautious reopening. The anger comes when there's a divergence, when their judgement veers off and the fear surges that we are going to blow it. I think the trigger was when flights continued to come in from India, and with an average of 5% of passengers testing positive, and potentially with the mutated mutant. Asked why they weren't banning these flights, they 'didn't know if it was a mutation of concern, didn't have the data'. After the experience of the last 12 months one might have assumed the leading principle would now to be to err on the side of caution.

The scenes from India are truly horrific with people dying in the streets - no hospital beds, no oxygen, the mass cremations. It's overt and graphic. Here, tucked up in care home and hospital beds, while it looked much tidier, our death rates per capita were 20x worse. Though of course India still has a long way to go. As for the virus being seasonal, with a winter preference, 40C in Delhi says it all. These are brutal times.

Anyway, getting back to rabbits. There's an elderly local man who I often see on walks. He has climbed all the Munros and walks about 25 miles a day with his dog, a rescued Romanian shepherd dog. For years I thought the dog was called Larkin, after the poet. It has big brown doleful eyes which glaze over as soon as he stops to talk to anyone, as he can talk. But I have now found out the dog is called Lachen after a German pop band. But I saw him the other day and he said he knew it was me from a distance because of the stripe down the side of my trousers. Basically, I'd been found out. I'm really upset. I didn't think anyone would notice that I wear the same thing every day. I have about 8 pairs of the same trousers - sort of stretchy slacks with a sporty stripe down the side, and at least the same number again of an identical baggy t-shirt, though there is some variation colour-wise in both the stripes and the t-shirts. It makes life easier, I don't have to think about what to wear each morning as it's the same as the day before and as tomorrow. It's not as if I'm going anywhere. It feels like an invasion of my privacy to have been found out. But anyway, he's a vegetarian and we got on to rabbits. He said that Lachen kills three or four on every walk and buries the first one. 'That's nature' he said, smiling. Why are the lives of some creatures so meaningless to people.

It's now Sunday morning. Another glorious one. I've just been to drop of some more of the turmeric-coloured corduroy with the upholsterer to give my swivel chair a makeover. I delivered it to his cottage in Dark Lane in Newsham, a village on the edge of the moors. I was surprised to recognise the cottage, the one next to the arch. "Did you know that Matthew Parris lived here as a toddler, his mother used to push him up that hill in his pram, onto the moor?" "Who?" he said. Matthew Parris' fabulous late mother, his brother, sister and brother-in-law came to visit me for lunch a few years ago. While here they wanted to visit the cottage where they'd lived back in the 1950's. His sister Deborah and her Catalan husband were heroically instrumental in ending bullfighting in Catalonia. It must have taken some doing.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel