



Monday 7th February 2022

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Straight in with a couple of quick, tasty, February recipes:

Garlic Mushroom Spaghetti

2 tbsp olive oil

200g spaghetti

½ lemon, zest and a few drops of juice

200g mushrooms, sliced

3 garlic cloves, finely sliced

handful flat leaf parsley, finely chopped

Heat 1 tbsp oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add the mushrooms, season, and fry for 8-10 minutes tossing regularly until golden and any excess liquid has evaporated; tip onto a plate. Meanwhile, bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Add the pasta; simmer for 9 minutes. Just before draining, scoop out a cupful of the cooking water. Return the frying pan to the heat with the remaining 1 tbsp oil, add the garlic and fry for 2-3 minutes until just turning golden. Tip the mushrooms back into the pan and toss together; add the lemon zest, pasta, 3 tbsp cooking liquid, tossing together over the heat. Season and squeeze over a few drops of lemon juice. Serve scattered with the parsley.

Cauliflower Soup

1 cauliflower

1 large onion, roughly chopped

1 litre good vegetable stock

4 tbsp olive oil

½ tsp ground cumin

fresh parsley

Preheat the oven to 220°C/ Gas 7. Cut the cauliflower into small florets, chop up the core and some of the leaves. Scatter in a roasting tin and drizzle with 3 tbsp of the oil, and season. Roast for about 40 minutes, turning the cauliflower once or twice until turning pale golden. Heat the remaining oil in a saucepan and gently fry the onion until soft. Add the cauliflower to the saucepan with the cumin and stock. Bring to the boil and reduce the heat to a simmer. Cover and cook for about 20 minutes until the cauliflower is completely tender. Purée the soup in a blender. Add some chopped fresh parsley and serve with crouton

It's Saturday, it's wet, windy and pretty miserable. I'd planned to have a lazy morning: a hot bath, and a lounge about in my dressing gown until midday. But I looked out the bedroom window and Mick, who looks after the sheep, was standing outside. I'd forgotten, we were moving the pic arcs today, the sheep shelters. My grazing licence was not extended on the paddock I've rented since living here and this is the last of my stuff to be moved off. Then it's all ready for the 32 houses they are wanting to cram onto it – going through planning at the moment. I, of course, acknowledge the need for more housing. Just not next to me, that's all.

Years and years of heavy machinery, all the roads up, radios blaring off the scaffolding. The end of hooting owls, swooping bats and dark skies. Hello orange street lighting, tarmac pavements, parties, barbecues, another 64 cars....

It won't be very nice, but I do accept it. However, there are those for whom it really will be 'paradise lost', who lose all their views and will be completely surrounded by it. To put it mildly, they are freaking out. I am being copied into all the hundreds of letters to Gove, Sunak, Natural England, CPRE, you name it. My house faces the other way and there is a house in between but I feel their pain. It's so beautiful where we live, the prospect of this housing estate it truly frightening.

I thought I'd go down to the market to see if the flower seller was there. I bought some pink tulips. The weather was too wild to go far with Lainey. I passed Culloden Tower, a folly commemorating the battle, set above the river. I used to walk there until 2 years ago when dogs were banned after a sheep mauling. I'd dutifully stayed out but today, seeing no sheep, I was going in. At the ready, my excuse, 'haven't got my specs with me'. There was a massive NO DOGS sign at the second gate. It was lovely walking there again, through the dormant flower meadows, the footpath hugging the meandering river, past rocky crags with discreet entrances to underground medieval passageways. Continuing along and through the woodland, eventually one can go no further. There is a fence. However, just above it, something I had not previously noticed, a gate marked 'Private Woodland...No Right of Entry'. I put my hand over and let myself in.

I quickly realised I was at the bottom of someone's garden, the garden of a big Georgian house belonging to a Harley Street gut expert. Gut microbes. On the riverbank, the slabs of stone where the nuns used to do their washing. To the right, a woodland path edged with snowdrops, wound its way up, a hefty trek, towards the old, converted Convent. I found myself in its extensive grounds of lawns and orchards. Then I saw something which needed further investigation.

There was an old, black, wrought-iron gate. I went through, and there they all were. Either side of the path, lined up in this long, thin, graveyard, names etched into simple stone crucifixes, here lay: Marie Aloysia of the Immaculate Conception; Sister Mary Francis of the Blessed Sacrament; Sister Mineria of the Holy Bambina; Sister M Majella of the Holy Redeemer; Sister Franchoise Irene of the Incarnation; Sister M Camillus of the Eucharistic Heart; Sister M Hubertina of the Holy Family; Sister M Agapita of the Mother of Mercy. And so it went on, dozens and dozens of them. The older stones were inscribed IHS, shorthand for Jesus, the later ones RIP. At the far end a more elaborate crucifix towered over. Who'd have thought it, at the bottom of my road. A secret graveyard full of dead nuns.

What weird lives they must have led, and who were they really ? The glamorous, 'Marie Aloysia of the Immaculate Conception', is that Sheila Baggins from Tunbridge Wells ? Who knows !

Kind wishes,

Isobel..... wholeheartedly recommending that every walk should be an adventure 😊