

Monday 7th January 2012

Dear Customer

I hope you are well. What a joyful week – the tree has gone and the Hoover has hoovered. Blissful normality has returned. The first snowdrops and the first purple sprouting broccoli (PSB) have joined the roses still in bloom. What a lovely, peculiar and mild winter so far. The 'PSB' is from Royal Oak Farm in Ormskirk as well as the Chioggia beetroot. I don't want to alarm you but Chioggia is also known as bullseye beetroot – you will see why when you cut it open ! It tastes slightly sweeter than normal beetroot but you can prepare it in the same way. You could try baking your beets with a squeeze of orange over the top and scattering with thyme. Roasted beets are excellent dipped in a mix of horseradish sauce mixed in with crème fraiche. You could make some **Beetroot Brownies**: Boil 3-4 beetroot for 12 minutes then peel and chop them into a whizzer. Add 200g chopped plain chocolate into the whizzer too, then whizz. Whisk 3 eggs and 250g sugar until pale and foamy then fold in the beetroot mixture then fold in 100g plain flour. Pour into a buttered 20 x 30cm baking tray and bake at 180C/Gas 4 for 25 minutes. Cool completely then cut into squares.

PSB is delicious. Trim any tough ends or leaves with a knife and diagonally slice any thick ends so they cook at the same speed as the florets then boil or steam for 3-6 minutes until tender. Delicious with butter or margarine and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Beetroot and Walnut Hummus

50g walnuts

1 tbsp cumin seeds

15g stale bread, crusts removed, torn into chunks

200g cooked beetroot

1 tbsp tahini or smooth peanut butter

1 large garlic clove, crushed

juice of 1 lemon

a little olive oil

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 180C/Gas 4. Toast the walnuts on a baking tray in the oven for 5-7 minutes. Leave to cool. Warm a small frying pan over a medium heat and dry-fry the cumin seeds, shaking the pan, until they start to darken but not to burn – less than a minute. Crush the warm seeds with a pestle and mortar. Put the bread and toasted nuts into a food processor and blitz to fine crumbs. Add the beetroot, tahini, most of the garlic and cumin, the juice of half lemon, half a tablespoon of oil and some salt and pepper. The blend to a thick paste. Taste and adjust by adding more cumin, garlic, lemon, salt and pepper, blending again. Loosen with a dash more oil if

required. Will keep for a few days in the fridge. Serve at room temperature with heated pitta bread.

Ernest couldn't speak to me all last winter and I put this down to the bleak and impossible weather. But it may also have been down to me giving him Tolstoy's 'War and Peace'. Before he was roped into looking after my sheep he'd only ever read 'One man went to mow...'. On realizing this I started feeding him with some of our classics - Middlemarch, Jane Eyre, Pride and Prejudice, then onto Hardy in preparation for the Russians. This Christmas I bought him To Kill a Mockingbird – he'd read it by the 27th and was still quite cheerful. But, I also gave him Crime and Punishment and since he started it, he's been looking utterly tortured and has been complaining of stomachache. I'll have to keep an eye on him, especially if it starts snowing - I'll go and take the book back off him.

An Izzy Lane friend in America sent him a baseball cap with Obama, 44th President, on it – he loves it. Isn't he brilliant – the Dales farmer sitting by his gas fire reading Dostoevsky and then trudging up the muddy fields to feed the sheep in his Obama baseball cap.

Talking of baseball caps I've been busy writing a letter to William Hague, my local MP, Babba. A list of suggestions to 'reinvigorate' the economy. That is unfortunately how I spent Christmas. I must have been suffering withdrawals from normal news and politics so had to fill the vacuum. I did get myself quite worked up and had to go back over the letter to take out all the strong language.

I'm not sure if I told you at the time but..... 9 months or so ago I contacted the UK Fashion Export body to get some advice, a starting point, on how to find markets in China for Izzy Lane and I also asked the same of the British Wool Marketing Board – both told me not to even think about it as it was far too complicated with red tape and taxes, then the different provinces and languages. I was flabbergasted – their *raison d'être* is to help us find markets abroad. I didn't doubt that it was complicated which is why I went to them in the first place. Frankly, they just couldn't be bothered to get their heads round it. So it was no surprise to then learn we export more to tiny, Ireland than to Brazil, India, China and Russia put together. We focus on one of the PIGS and ignore the BRIC at our peril. It also suggests that the export body for the fashion industry isn't the only export body suffering such apathy.

My first suggestion, therefore, to Babba, apart from planting some wake-up bombs in various offices, is to get Richmond twinned with Pingpangpong instead of Fleur-sur-Seine. And then twin Yorkshire with Zingzangzang. We start using chopsticks, they start eating Wensleydale cheese and tomato chutney sandwiches. We start wearing paddy hats, they start wearing flat caps.

Number two on the list is to take all small business owners completely out of tax (I know !!! – with the exception of me) in exchange for employing some of the million young people before they all join the long-term unemployed, and the long-term unemployed. There would be zero unemployment in weeks – business owners would be rioting to get at them. They'd expand their businesses and take people on quicker than you could say 'Jack Robinson'. A penny off corporation tax just isn't going to do it.

Anyway, it was a long list which I'm sure he pored over on his flight to Burma.

Two years ago when I went to 'The Women of the Year Lunch', I met and spent most of the time with an incredible woman called Elspeth Juda. She turned 100 last year. A brilliant photographer, she came out of the Bauhaus movement in Germany. Sigmund Freud was a family friend and saved her life as a baby. As a German Jew, with her husband Hans Juda, she was forced to flee from the Nazis and was given refuge in Britain. She and her husband then founded and edited The Ambassador, The British Export Magazine, which had the slogan 'Export or Die'. They spent the next 30 years as two of the greatest champions for export, promoting British manufacturing, culture and arts around the world and helping us to rebuild Britain after the War. That's gratitude isn't it - and don't we need some of that spirit today !

Kindest wishes,



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