

Monday 4th June 2012

Dear Customer,

I hope you have been enjoying the Jubilee celebrations in some form or other ! Whilst the concert made me feel patriotic to the core, I do get sick of the same old artists singing the same old worn out songs. I enjoyed Stevie Wonder, and Madness on the roof – the graphics on Buck Pal were fantastic and the fireworks. If it had to be retro, couldn't we have had The Kinks playing Waterloo Sunset, for example. Tom Jones still has a fantastic voice hasn't he, ageing gracefully, unlike the others. Cliff looked and sounded terrible. I'm sorry, I'm sorry !

To turn to more serious matters, we have cauliflowers from Brittany in the bags and melons still flowing in from Andalucia. Jonnie Watson's lettuces have started and are in the bags this week. A bit more warmth would help the English produce on a bit.

Here are a few recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Cauliflower Soup

*1 medium onion, peeled and chopped
1 cauliflower, in florets
1 litre vegetable stock
½ tsp grated nutmeg
75ml double cream*

*20g butter
200g potato, peeled and cut into small chunks
300ml milk
1 bay leaf*

Gently fry the onion in a large saucepan in the butter until softened but not coloured. Add the cauliflower, potato and plenty of seasoning, cover and cook over a low heat for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Pour in the stock and bring to the boil, then pour in the milk, add the nutmeg and bay leaf and simmer until the cauliflower is tender, about 20 minutes. Discard the bay leaf, then blend the soup in batches in a processor until smooth. Pour into a saucepan, add the cream and gently reheat. Serve sprinkled with extra nutmeg.

Penne Pasta with Crispy Courgettes, Cherry Tomatoes and Pesto

*40g capers
3 spring onions
20cl double cream
jar pesto
80g Parmesan shavings*

*200g cherry tomatoes
450g courgettes
450g penne pasta
8cl olive oil*

Cook the penne according to packet instructions. Cut the courgettes into small cubes. Cut the capers in half, quarter the cherry tomatoes and thinly slice the spring onion bulbs. Put a splash of olive oil into a hot wok and sweat the spring onions and courgettes, adding a pinch of salt. After 2 minutes add the penne and finish cooking. Then add the capers and jar of pesto. Lower the heat and add the cream. Bring to the boil, check the seasoning. Then remove from the heat and mix in the tomatoes. Sprinkle with the Parmesan and serve.

I think Robbie is dead. My new humane rat trap arrived but I didn't unpack it, having spotted Robbie only once since my last letter, and that was in the garden. The other day I started telling my neighbour about him and she told me that they too had found a rat and it was living in their garage. After attempting to drown him in a water pipe, they put poison in some food in the garage. She told me that the next day, the food had gone. So that was that. I guess we shared him. I feel very sad. If he had managed to find his way into my original trap I would have escorted him away to live out his days.

Early last week an envelope came through the door, a card, with 'By Hand' written on it. I opened it, started to read, was struck with horror and immediately put it back in the envelope and a under a pile of newspapers. I've been feeling perturbed ever since and as I write this I have just gone to find it to read it properly. I now have it here on my desk and I shall open it again.

"Dear Isobel, just a reminder about your willingness to come to our Guild at the Methodist Church. The date Thursday June 7th – 7.30pm. We meet in the upstairs hall entrance from Dundas St. (*no, please don't come*). It was July-Aug 2011 when this date was fixed so do hope it's still ok. We are a mixed group of ladies and gents. Very much enjoyed your TV appearances on the Dales programme and look forward to hearing from you".

Enclosed is the evidence, the 2011-2012 programme, and I am clearly printed on it.

Last summer, someone else took the call and I agreed I'd do it as it was nearly 12 months away and in my town. But as you know, I can't do public speaking, I get too much adrenalin – palpitations, nervous spasms, light headedness to the point of near passing out. What I'm going to do – God only knows !

It's ridiculous to agree to do things on the basis that they are in the distant future as that future eventually becomes imminent. I fell into the same trap last week. I had an invitation to give a talk to next year's first year students at the Royal College of Art. I was given a choice of dates so picked the one the furthest into the future – march 2013. I felt so honoured, I couldn't decline but eventually I will have to actually go and do it, and that's the problem !

I finally found a car in Liverpool on the internet - the right model, age, price, number of keys (3). It was black, I didn't really want black but my car was going from bad to worse. They agreed to give me a decent trade-in on mine despite telling them the engine light was on and that it was losing power. I got the map out and plotted a route to Liverpool which avoided motorways. Ten miles into the journey, the engine was grinding, I couldn't go at more than 20mph and could barely get up inclines. It got worse and worse until I was at 5mph with hazard lights on, driving against the curb, mile-long tailbacks behind me. Eventually, somehow, I got to the garage. After the shock of finding that my new car was not only black but had blacked out windows, I went for a test drive, while they did the same in mine. I waited in the office and the man came back looking very miserable. He said he didn't know how on earth I had got there, that I hadn't told him how bad it was and that it would have to be scrapped. I tried to take my father's advice - 'to not be sentimental over inert objects'. I felt like I was leaving her at an abbatoir. 'Goodbye little car you've been brilliant' I told her.

My new car is fantastic - so clean and powerful. It's just the windows. My friend said I was like P Diddy. I can't see Myfa in it - she's too black. If I peer through I can just about make out the white crescent of her eye like a new moon. She's hard to see at the best of times. I've given up trying to take photos of her as she usually just looks like another dog's shadow.

Well that's been my week and I hope you enjoy the rest of yours,

Kind Wishes

Isobel