



Monday 1st August 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. I'm completely fleeced out. After a whole week of sorting fleeces, the transport arrived to collect them and I was so relieved to wave them off. The next morning I was called down the Bradford where I was reunited with them. They wanted confirmation about which bags were in each colour batch. They then gave me the difficult news. I thought I'd sent them over 2.5 tons but I had in fact only sent 1.4 tons putting me in the premium charge bracket – three times the price per kilo. My only point of reference for guesstimating the weight was a 25k sack of potatoes which I am very familiar with, but I was wildly out. I decided to halt the scour and have it done once they return from the mill shutdown on the 15th August. By this time all my sheep will have been clipped so I can add those to the pot, but also I will have the time to sort through all the old stock of fleeces and get everything away, which I will try not to leave until the last minute.

We are having beautiful weather here – not particularly hot but warm and sunny with a slight breeze. I was very excited when a tree surgery van pulled up in the layby, blocked the road off and started sawing a huge, annoying branch off one of the old trees which blocked my view. I did feel sorry for the tree of course. Then they climbed up and sawed another branch off, and another. I started wondering if they were going to bring the whole tree down as it did look a bit dead. I was sending an email and heard a big crashing thud – it was down – suddenly there was more light, more sky, a view. I am so pleased.

I am harbouring a very dark secret and I am not proud of it, I know my behaviour is despicable. Some months, many months ago actually, I was contacted by someone from the Leyburn Women's Institute asking if I would give a talk. We agreed on the date, the furthest possible into the future, the 8th August. I didn't want to do it and told her I wasn't comfortable with public speaking, but that given they were so local and there would only be a few of them, that I would. Then a few months ago she emailed me to firm up the details as she was having the programme printed up for the coming events. I couldn't really face answering her as I didn't want to be in the programme so I didn't answer the email. I assumed I was out of it and thought no more of it until an email came through two weeks ago saying that she needed to speak to me as she had invited all the other groups in the area to my talk. I could see now that it could be packed out. All I could do was ignore the email again – as I said, I do realise that my behaviour is abominable. Then a few days ago I came home to a note through my door saying please could I ring her urgently. I haven't rung her yet. I bumped into someone in my road who said some women in a car had been looking for me and trying to find out where I lived. I told him it must have been the Women's Institute. I just don't know what on earth to do about it. I wondered if I should I ask my friend Liz to go instead, she's well-known so potentially a good substitute, or should I do it with her, or just not do it at all.

Then an email came through from a TV company who are making a programme for Channel 5 with Tony Robinson and were enquiring what they might be able to film with me, if there was anything of interest. I suggested the shearing and possibly taking him round the woollen mills to see the process. They suggested perhaps a walk through nature showing the colour palettes and landscapes which inspire my fabrics. Then it occurred to me, perhaps they could also come and film the Women's Institute event as the dates fit – they are filming in the vicinity from 6th-8th August. I could bring Tony Robinson and a film crew along to divert the attention away from me. All eyes would be on him – perfect. Ironically, being filmed giving a talk would be much easier anyway because I turn into a zombie. It isn't me, I'm just acting being me, one of a team making something. Not 'oh my God there's all these people looking at me' which is otherwise the case.

So it's all very excruciating as you can see. Heaven knows what's going to happen. As I said, I'm not proud of myself.

Just space for a two little recipes:

New Potato, Courgette and Mushroom Gratin

*500g new potatoes, scrubbed and sliced
400g courgettes
mixed dried herbs eg oregano, thyme, marjoram
100g Cheddar
25g Parmesan (optional)*

*3 tbsp olive oil
2 cloves garlic, crushed
150ml Greek yoghurt mixed with 1 tbsp milk
100g mushrooms, sliced
ground black pepper*

Lightly grease and ovenproof dish and arrange in layers the potatoes, courgettes and mushrooms with a sprinkle of herbs, seasoning and a tablespoon of oil over each layer. Pour over the yoghurt mixture and scatter with the cheese and another sprinkling of herbs. Bake in the oven for 40-45 minutes at 180C until the vegetables are tender and the top is golden and crisp.

Crunchy New Potatoes

new potatoes

1 tsp paprika

2 tbsp olive oil

Heat the oven to 200C/ Fan 180C/ 350F/ Gas 6. Boil the potatoes for 10 minutes or until just tender then drain well. Arrange on a baking sheet and crush each one lightly with a potato masher. Drizzle with the olive oil and sprinkle with paprika, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Bake for 20 minutes until crispy.

Kind wishes,

Isobel