



Monday 17th October 2016

Dear Customer,

It's Monday morning and it's all a bit tricky. Last week I decided I would sit down and start on my book. I thought I was going to have to start from scratch but spotted a folder called 'book'. I opened it up, and to my surprise saw a very decent first few pages and thought I would carry on from there. Just as I was getting into a flow, the 'e' on my laptop keyboard became difficult. I was having to hammer it a dozen times before it typed. Eventually it stopped working completely. How easy it is to take things for granted – water, heating, food, an 's', an 'e'. It's impossible to function, to be coherent without an 'e'. I couldn't write an email. I tried working round it using words with no 'e's but that didn't work. Without an 'e' I couldn't even explain my missing 'e's in the email. Communication had broken down.

I went along to the PC surgery and sat in the waiting room to see the local tech guru. I thought it would be quick and straightforward. He would take the 'e' out, remove the crumbs and chocolate, put it back in and life would return to normal. He called me in and I handed laptop over. He took 'e' out, cleaned it, put it back in. It made no difference. He tried to take the keyboard out but said it wasn't replaceable and that the only solution would be a new laptop. I wasn't expecting that. He said he had a couple of old ones which someone had given him for parts and he could try and do one up for me. I drove home without my laptop, my email accounts, all my documents, access to the internet – cut off from the world.

It took longer than expected to transfer all the data across to the big old Toshiba. Yesterday, Sunday, he called to say it was ready but he needed all the passwords for the email accounts. He needed to know where they were hosted – all that sort of stuff. I knew nothing.

I had to collect it last night so I could write to you this morning, email and hosting conundrum unresolved. I seem able to type this on a thing called OpenOffice writer. How I save or send it I have no idea. It is going to be a difficult week.

So here, against the odds, are some tasty autumn recipes you could try including a recipe for the classic French Onion Soup, useful for clearing any onion backlog:

French Onion Soup

4 large onions

2 tbsp butter or margarine

4 slices baguette

salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tbsp sunflower oil

900ml vegetable stock

50g Gruyere, grated (optional)

Peel and quarter the onions and chop into ¼" pieces. Heat the oil and butter or margarine in a deep saucepan. Fry the onions briskly for a few minutes, stirring constantly. Reduce the heat and cook gently for a further 45-60 minutes. Stir them frequently not allowing them to burn on the base of the pan. When they are a rich mahogany brown, add the vegetable stock and a little seasoning. Simmer partially covered for 30 minutes, then season with salt and pepper. Preheat the grill and toast the French bread. Spoon the soup into ovenproof serving dishes and place a piece of bread in each. Sprinkle with the cheese if using and grill for a few minutes until golden. Season with plenty of freshly ground black pepper.

Carrot and Nut Roast

250g carrots, coarsely grated

100g walnut pieces

50g margarine

6 tbsp hot vegetable stock

1 tsp honey

2 tsp lemon juice

100g cashew nuts

100g granary or wholemeal bread

1 onion, finely chopped

2 tsp yeast extract

1 tsp dried mixed herbs

salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 180C /350F /Gas 4. Grease a 1½ pint shallow ovenproof dish. Grind the bread, cashews and walnuts together in batches in a blender until they are fairly fine. Tip them into a bowl. Melt the margarine in a saucepan, add the onion and fry gently for 5 minutes until soft and lightly coloured. Add the carrots and cook, stirring, for a further 5 minutes. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon and add to the nuts and bread mixture. Put the hot stock in a bowl, add the yeast extract and honey, and stir until dissolved. Stir into the nut mixture with the herbs and lemon juice. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Spoon the mixture into the prepared dish and bake in the oven for 45 minutes. Delicious served hot or cold.

The letter is upside down this week with the gravity of the computer problem taking precedence over weather report. Weather...distinctly autumnal and blustery. A friend came up from London for the weekend. We headed into the Dales. The valleys were stunning - flooded with light, the pale yellow and golden leaves translucent, trees dripping with red berries - we walked up the footpath to the Keld waterfall. In the hamlet of Keld was a signpost to the 'Garden of Well-Being' – a little fenced off garden area ironically closed off from the greatest garden of well-being of all. Lost in heavenly nature, for a while I managed to forget I have no emails.

Kind wishes and hope you're having a good week,

Isobel