



**Monday 18th December 2017**

Dear Customer,

I can't believe it's Christmas day next Monday. I haven't written one card yet and I haven't had time to catch the rats. I've done nothing to start preparing the house for the next Airbnb guests. I'm extremely stressed. I've been wrapping Izzy Lane orders day and night and going back and fore to the Post Office. I'm massively grateful for the orders of course. On Wednesday when I was picking Izzy Lane orders in our store on the local 'industrial estate', I couldn't find the fob, must have dropped it in one of the boxes meaning I couldn't close the roller door. After hours of searching I had to give up, it had vanished. I had to go to see the landlord leaving the door wide open to get a replacement. I came back with the replacement, the only one he had, and it didn't work. He then came over. There was no way to manually close it. I spent hours again looking but to no avail. He had to call the people in Middlesbrough who had installed it but they couldn't come until the next day. We had blizzards, and snow was blowing straight into the unit. I moved all the boxes of clothes as far back as I could and dragged a sack of wool into the entrance and had to leave it like that overnight, filling with snow, and probably rats, until they came at 4pm the next day. I still can't find the fob.

I've been hauling big buckets of feed from my house to the paddock where the very old sheep are and have done something to my arm. I'm not very strong these days and all the heavy things I lift are through willpower and not muscle mass. I pull my arms out their sockets, my right arm has been hurting all week. Carrying water was what did the damage. So I bought a really long hosepipe on Amazon which goes across my neighbours garden, over their fence and into the water trough. They don't live there, they live in Manchester and come for a day once a month to rake the garden. It's been like that for 12 years. On Monday the new postman posted all my mail through their letterbox including an envelope of sock labels which I desperately needed. I went down the road to see if anyone held a key for their house. No-one does, so I had to cut labels off other pairs of socks to put on the ones I had orders for. I could have done without that.

Ernest comes round and starts saying " You just can't take it, you just can't take it...nobody could..." in his thick Yorkshire accent, he shakes his head and holds it in his hands. He's been saying this for years and can't believe I still haven't cracked up. I tell him that this is normal life. The more you do, the more there is to go wrong. If you do nothing, nothing can go wrong. Ernest lives frugally, his house and land are paid for, he gets his pension and the rent I give him for grazing, he gets up in the morning, goes to buy a newspaper and walks round the sheep – there is no fob to lose, no sock labels needed, no mortgage to pay, businesses to fund, no fight for survival. He tries to make me feel like I'm persecuted. Then from time to time I get a reminder that it isn't just me. A business friend in London texts me a photo of his caved in warehouse wall that one of his staff had reversed the fork lift truck into. That brought back memories.

I went to feed the sheep and was greeted by the usual group who mob me and nearly send me flying as I try to climb over the fence with their buckets. It was foggy and Rocky had blood pouring down his face from a broken horn and next to the fence one of the sheep was lying dead. It was like walking onto the battlefield of Culloden. The sheep had no wounds so I'm fairly sure it was natural causes and not murder, I had never ever known Rocky fight or tussle, he must have caught his horn on the fence. I can't deal with dead sheep, it's too upsetting, but thankfully it doesn't bother Ernest. He collects them and takes them to a spot behind the gates on his land and I call the disposal company. It's illegal to do it any other way, we aren't allowed to bury them. Hours later the lorry drives past my window and then back past with the sheep on board and no doubt dozens of other carcasses from around the Dales which I don't like to visualise. "Good bye little sheep" I always murmur as it passes, another one gone.

And so to conclude another merry letter, here are some ideas to prepare your Christmas vegetables:

#### **Honey-Glazed Carrots and Parsnips**

*500g parsnips*

*2-3 tbsp olive oil*

*1 cinnamon, broken in two*

*1-2 tbsp clear honey*

*few knobs of butter or margarine*

*500g carrots*

*few thyme sprigs*

*3 star anise*

*splash of water*

*sea salt and black pepper*

*Peel and halve or quarter the parsnips and carrots so that the pieces are of a similar size. Heat the olive oil in a large saute pan then add the carrots and parsnips and toss to coat in the oil. Add the thyme, cinnamon, star anise and some seasoning. Cook over a medium heat for 15-20 minutes, turning the vegetables frequently until golden brown and almost cooked through. Drizzle over the honey and cook until the vegetables start to caramelize. Deglaze the pan with the water and increase the heat. Cook for 2-3 minutes until the liquid has evaporated and the vegetables are cooked through. Stir through a little butter or margarine to glaze.*

#### **Red Cabbage**

*1 red cabbage, shredded*

*2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced*

*¼ tsp cloves*

*1 tsp crushed black peppercorns*

*2 tbsp brown sugar*

*100ml port or fruity red wine*

*1 onion, chopped*

*2.5cm piece fresh ginger, grated*

*¼ tsp ground cinnamon*

*50g butter or margarine, cut into small chunks*

*1 tbsp red wine vinegar*

*Layer everything up in a lidded casserole, sprinkling with the ginger, spices, butter, sugar and salt as you go. Pour in the liquid. Put the lid on, bring up to a boil then reduce the heat and slowly simmer for one hour, stirring every so often.*

I hope you have a lovely Christmas, and 'thank you, thank you, thank you' for being such amazing and wonderful customers. It humbles me that you stick by us and I am so grateful. I hope 2017 was a good year for you despite the world going off its rocker.

Kindest wishes,

Isobel