



**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. It's been pleasantly dry and bright up here. The birds are singing, the days are lengthening, it feels like the cusp of spring... always such a relief.

### **Cavolo Nero and Tofu Sambal**

50ml vegetable oil  
1 onion, finely sliced  
15g fresh root ginger, finely chopped  
1 tbsp tomato purée  
1 tbsp sambal oelek (or some chilli sauce)  
2 tsp light brown soft sugar  
fresh coriander, leaves chopped

200g tofu, cut into 2cm pieces  
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
100g cavolo nero, leaves roughly sliced  
1½ tbsp soy sauce  
2 tomatoes, chopped  
1 tbsp rice vinegar  
steamed rice, to serve (optional)

*Fry the tofu in the oil for 10-12 minutes, until golden on all sides then set aside on kitchen paper. Add the onion, garlic and ginger to the pan and fry, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes, until starting to soften, then stir in the cavolo nero. Fry for a further 5 minutes, reduce the heat and stir in the tomato purée, soy sauce and sambal oelek. Then add the tomatoes and 150ml water. Bring to the boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes, until thickened. Stir in the fried tofu, sugar and vinegar; season and take off the heat. Stir in ½ the coriander leaves, then serve with steamed rice, if liked, scattered with the remaining coriander.*

### **Cavolo Nero and Bechamel Pasta Bake**

200g cavolo nero  
100g margarine  
75g plain flour  
1 tbsp olive oil  
flat leaf parsley, chopped

500g penne or other pasta shape  
4 cloves garlic, chopped  
850ml oat milk, or alternative  
25g toasted almond flakes  
75g panko breadcrumbs

*Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Bring a pan of water to the boil. Strip the leaves from the cavolo nero, roughly chop them, then finely chop the stalks. Add the pasta and stalks to the pan and cook for 8 minutes, then add the leaves and cook for a few minutes more. Melt the margarine in a saucepan over a medium heat, add the garlic and fry for a minute. Add the flour and cook, stirring for 2 minutes, then gradually stir in the oat milk, whisking constantly. Cook for 3-4 minutes whisking constantly to prevent lumps. Drain the pasta and cavolo then combine with the sauce and season. Melt the remaining margarine in a frying pan with some olive oil, add the breadcrumbs and cook for 4-5 minutes, stirring occasionally until light golden, then stir through the almonds and parsley. Tip the pasta mixture into a baking dish, sprinkle with the breadcrumbs, then bake for 20-25 minutes until golden on top.*

### **Carrot and Fennel Soup**

450g carrot  
small onion  
800ml vegetable stock

1 fennel bulb  
2 cloves garlic  
olive oil

*Preheat the oven to 190°C / Gas 5. Peel the carrots and onion, then trim and slice, along with the fennel. Toss in a roasting dish with 2 tablespoons of oil. Roast for 20 minutes, then add the unpeeled garlic cloves. Stir and return to the oven for 20 minutes more, or until the vegetables are soft and browned. Remove the skin from the garlic cloves. Put the veg in a large pan with the vegetable stock and bring to the boil. Simmer gently for 15 minutes, then liquidise with a stick blender until completely smooth.*

Not a lot happening here. It's Sunday afternoon. I've been out posting postcards giving the date of the Planning Meeting which takes the vote on whether or not this 'development' as they call it, this 'housing estate', will be built. The main complaint, on top of all the traffic, sewage, school places, lack of doctors and dentists, destruction of trees, habitats, 217 metres of stone wall and hedgerows dating back to the early 1800's etc., is that it will be visible. It will be visible. It might be bearable if, somehow, no one could actually see it.

My friend is in the market to find a new home so on Saturday mornings we often go and view properties. This time, she asked could I call the agent and pretend it's for me, and she could come with me. Obviously some history with that agent. I made the appointment to see the quirky rectory in Hornby with 7 acres and stables. Thankfully the agent didn't ask me if my house was on the market as I pathologically can't lie. I know Hornby well as my sheep grazed the fields between the house and Hornby castle for about 5 years. Gangs of them used to escape through the fence into the grounds of the castle and I would spend enjoyable hours exploring the woods and parkland looking for them, usually finding them in the vegetable garden.

Long gone are the days when I used to wear make-up or get 'dressed up.' Here, we just dress for the weather. And yet I had to look like I could afford to buy a Georgian rectory. I tracked down my make-up bag. Terrible. It meant having a close encounter with my face - the ageing, the winter pallor. But make-up is like magic, the eye-liner and mascara drawing the attention away from the bags under the eyes. Blusher and shade to bring colour and create the illusion of some structure. I had to spit on my mascara as it was bone dry.

It's been a harrowing week though hasn't it, seeing the scenes from Turkey and Syria. The agony. That unimaginable hell.

Very Kind wishes, Isobel