



Monday 31st October 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. It is Monday morning and hypnotically beautiful outside. The trees are golden and glowing in a misty sun and it is still and mild. It makes you want to be outside doing anything at all instead of sitting at the computer with a crooked neck.

Here are a couple of easy, tasty recipes you could try this week:

Lemony Leeks with Chickpeas

450g leeks	250ml vegetable stock
400g tin chickpeas, drained	
Dressing:	
2 tbsp olive oil	1 tsp runny honey
juice and zest of one lemon	1 clove garlic, minced
pinch salt and pepper	small bunch dill

Slice off the root from the end of each leek then cut the stalk into 5cm chunks on the diagonal. In a large frying pan or saucepan, heat the stock until simmering, add the leeks then cover and simmer for 4-5 minutes. Meanwhile make the dressing. Combine all the ingredients except for the zest and dill. When the leeks are just tender, remove from the pan and arrange on a serving platter, leaving the remaining broth. Add the chickpeas to the pan and heat for about 1 minute, tossing to warm through. Add half the dill and toss. Remove the pan from the heat and serve the chickpeas on top of the leeks. Add the dressing, sprinkle with dill, lemon zest and plenty of black pepper. Serve immediately.

Fried Potatoes with Peppers

6 large potatoes	2 peppers, diced
1 large onion, diced	4 tbsp vegetable oil

Place the potatoes in a large pot and cover with salted water. Bring to the boil over a high heat, then reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer for 10 minutes. Drain the set aside to cool. Once cool, diced into cubes. Combine the potatoes, pepper and onion in a mixing bowl, drizzle over the oil and gently stir until evenly coated. Cook the mixture in a non-stick frying pan over a medium-high heat until crispy and golden brown stirring occasionally for about 20 minutes.

My brother finally and definitively sold his house on Alston Moor on Friday, the holiday home he never holidayed in. His only visits there these last years were to assess for maintenance, adjust the timer for the central heating and organise oil deliveries. It was a difficult week for him. He was tetchy, waiting for the buyer to pull out at the last minute as the previous 7 had done. It had been on the market for 5 years. I have been waiting for 5 years for the spoils – the surplus flat-screen TV's and in particular, the surplus super deluxe, super king-sized beds. The buyers wanted to exchange and complete on the same day, Friday. Reluctantly, as he was still convinced it would fall through, he was forced to clear the house on Thursday, worried that it would then never ever sell unfurnished.

I persuaded him to ditch the transport company he was going to use and use someone from Richmond, an ex-serviceman who set up a removal company here and employs young ex-soldiers who are suffering from post-traumatic stress. Greg agreed to do this and it was all arranged. On Thursday morning he got up at 6am and drove over to the house, dismantled everything by 9am for when the ex-soldier and his men were turning up. He had no mobile reception or landline at the house and had to drive 5 miles to Alston to make a phone call. At 10am he rang me to say that they hadn't turned up and that their phone was switched off. He wasn't happy. Eventually I managed to make contact with the soldier. He told me that the vehicle was still in Belfast and that he couldn't contact his driver and that he was trying to find some alternative vehicles. He assured me he would sort it. As the time passed he then told me he was stuck and couldn't find a vehicle. Greg was going up the wall and it was all my fault. Diane and I got onto Gumtree and eventually found a man and massive van who would go straight up there to start moving him. Thank God!

Greg had talked me through what he needed to get rid of and I let him know what I would take – it included 2 giant beds, a new sofa which he had just bought to dress one of the rooms and which had never been sat on, coffee tables, shelves and stuff belonging to my parents which he didn't want to keep, TV's. The problem is my house is already full and I do err towards minimalism. At about 5pm the van arrived and everything was tipped into my house – the beds, the enormous oak kitchen table which he'd had specially made for his enormous kitchen and which had cost him thousands – it seemed a shame to send it to auction as he'd get nothing for it. They had a cup of tea and left. My house had been perfectly fine as it was and now it was an utter nightmare crammed full of furniture I didn't want.

I went upstairs – my lovely minimalist spare bedroom now had a second giant bed in it, a giant red sofa, a new dark wood chest of drawers, dark wood coffee table, dark bookshelves. The colour palette made me feel physically ill – bright red, dark brown and white walls. Honestly, it was unbearable. I had needed a new bed, mine was 23 years old. I'd moved my bed out and one of his in. It was incredibly comfortable but smelled musty. I googled and got out the bicarbonate of soda and white wine vinegar to treat it. I think it's ok now. And so it went on all through my house. I now have to get rid of it all.

The buyers, he is a surgeon, had no last minute reality check. Obviously it isn't a problem for him to not be able to get to Newcastle Hospital to perform his operations when he is snowed in for the entire winter and having to make a tunnel in the snow from the front door to the coal shed.

Greg called me on Saturday. The pieces of my parents (dark wood) which he was going to keep didn't apparently 'go' with the contemporary furniture of his Harrogate house. He was hoping that I would take all that too. He was disappointed when I said I couldn't. And then he was furious when I said I didn't want to keep the red sofa, that it was hard and that I don't like red and that it was too big. He said it was far better than my 'shabby old sofas'. Well at least he has got the house sold which is what really matters.

Kind regards,

Isobel