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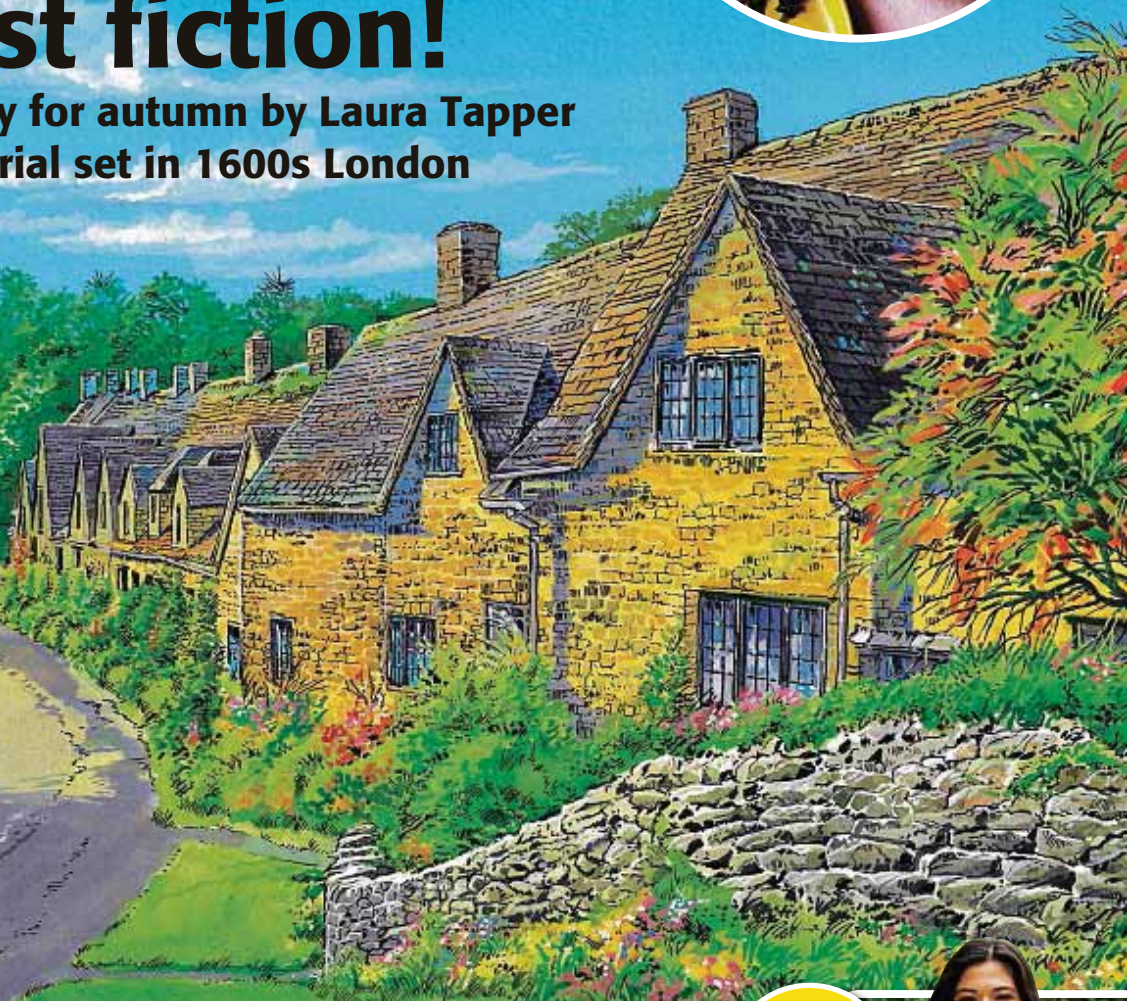
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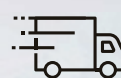
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# Inside The People's Friend *this week*

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It's been a tough year for most of us, and I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling in need of cheering up.

With that in mind, the "Friend" recently launched its Close Knit Friends campaign, which aims to bring smiles and joy to people across the UK with a yarn-bombed bus!

To find out more, we catch up with textile artist Emma Leith on page 50. She's the expert helping us cover a bus in knitting and take it round the country. I know, it sounds crazy, but it's going to be a lot of fun!

The great news is you can all get involved, by knitting or crocheting triangles for Emma's design, and by watching out for the bus when it sets off on its travels in a few weeks' time.

That's just one of many highlights in this week's issue.

On page 40, Mairi Hughes meets sound recordist Gary Moore, who's on a mission to help us all tune in to nature, and on page 26, Dawn Geddes looks forward to the judging of this year's Booker Prize and reveals some of the fascinating history of this literary award.

Finally, don't miss Alison Carter's new serial on page 28, inspired by the voyage of the *Mayflower*.

*Angela*

Angela Gilchrist, Editor.

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# Absolutely Conkers!

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Deirdre was excited to share an autumn tradition that everyone could enjoy!

---

**T**HANKS, Mum. I only have a few hours to set up and I can't cope with these two as well."

Susanna handed her mother a bag.

"There's a change of clothes for Noah, and Paige has all she wants."

Deirdre's thirteen-year-old granddaughter had yet to raise her eyes from her phone, and Susanna gave her mother a despairing look.

"You get off and don't worry. Your father will be back from the shop later, so I'll have reinforcements."

"OK, well, bye, you guys." Noah, who was eight, stepped towards the open car window and gave his

mother a hug.

"Be good for Grandma and have fun."

Susanna kissed his forehead, then raised her eyes to her daughter, who was studiously ignoring her.

"Could you put that thing away for a minute to say goodbye?"

Paige slipped her phone into the pocket of her jeans and stared at her mother.

"Bye." Paige's voice was flat. Her shoulders hung forward and her head was held at an angle.

"Best of luck, sweetheart. Dad and I are proud of you." Deirdre's voice was encouraging.

"We can't wait for this evening. Fancy us walking round the opening night of

an exhibition as the parents of the artist! Now, off you go – we have things to do, don't we?"

Deirdre put an arm around Noah's shoulders and Paige shrugged, but she stayed beside them until Susanna had driven away.

For a long time, Susanna had lived in the city, near her high-powered job in marketing, and Deirdre had only seen her grandchildren occasionally.

Then, a few years ago, the stress had become too much for Susanna.

She wanted to be with her children while they were still young, so she took the bold decision to follow her heart and

become a student again.

With the backing of her husband, she had achieved a degree in visual arts and the family had relocated to be closer to Deirdre and her husband, Ron.

They were only too glad finally to be able to help out a bit, especially as their son-in-law worked away.

\* \* \* \*

"One last time, then we'll carry on with our walk."

Deirdre watched Noah pelt up the slope as fast as his wellies would carry him.

Once at the top, he lay on his side and rolled over and over, down the carpet of brown, red and golden leaves, giggling all the way, until he landed in a heap at



his sister's feet.

Paige gave him a disdainful look.

"Get up, you idiot!"

Tutting, she shoved her phone back into her pocket.

"What's the point of coming out here, Grandma? There isn't any signal. And it's cold."

"It's a bright day and the trees look beautiful in their autumn colours. It was too good to miss," Deirdre replied.

"Besides, we've a job to do while we're out. I did say you might want a jacket."

"She's cranky because she wanted to go into town on her own and Mum wouldn't let her."

"Coats aren't cool so she won't wear one, in case she sees Danny Greenwell . . . ow!" Noah hopped on one foot and clutched the ankle that Paige had kicked.

"You're such a blabber mouth. That's why I don't want to be stuck here with you. All my friends go to town by themselves. It's ridiculous."

Deirdre intervened.

"Your mum just wants you to be safe, Paige. And I'm glad to have the chance to spend time with you."

"We can have some fun if we put our minds to it."

"Who's Danny Greenwell?" she asked, hoping to steer the conversation in a happier direction.

"He's her boyfriend," Noah said in a sing-song voice.

"He is not!" Paige shouted emphatically, her cheeks flushed.

"I've seen them, Grandma." Noah nodded at Deirdre. "He walks home with her every day after school. His name is written all over her school rough book, too."

"You little sneak!"

Paige chased her brother around the clearing, but he was fast and managed to evade capture.

Noah was so busy looking behind him, though, that he didn't notice when his path was blocked.

He ran straight into the legs of a tall man in his mid sixties.

"Whoa! What have you

done to annoy your sister?" The man laughed and ruffled Noah's hair.

"I suggest you apologise and get it over with."

"Grandad!" Noah gave the newcomer a hug, the argument forgotten.

Even Paige's face brightened.

"Ron! You're early!" At the sight of her husband, Deirdre's eyes sparkled in the autumn sunshine.

"I got away as quickly as I could." He walked over and took Deirdre's hand. "Right, shall we start the hunt?"

"What hunt?" Noah asked, frowning.

"For conkers! We do it every year, so I thought you could help."

Deirdre reached into her coat pocket and brought out two calico bags, handing one to each of the children.

"There will be prizes at the end."

"What prizes?" Paige's eyes narrowed.

"Chocolate, although the honour should be enough," Ron explained.

"There will be different categories – most collected, biggest, most interesting shape."

"I'm going to win!" Noah ran off into the woods.

"Stay within hollering distance!" Ron shouted after him.

Paige continued to drag her feet, looking doubtful, so Deirdre moved closer.

"Give it a try. You might as well join in and have a little fun."

An hour or so later, the four of them were heading home with bags and pockets full.

A couple of trees had recently dropped their bounty amongst the leaves on the forest floor, so they were spoiled for choice, although Noah was convinced that the winner was safely in his pocket.

"This takes me back." Deirdre smiled at Ron and squeezed his hand. "It feels like yesterday."

"Why do you collect conkers every year, Grandma?"

Paige was walking in front of her grandparents along the country lane.

"It all started when I was

not much more than Noah's age."

Noah dug his sister in her hip with his elbow.

"See, I'm not a baby!"

"Shush! I want to listen."

Paige turned to Deirdre.

"Carry on, Grandma."

Deirdre chuckled and shook her head, tucking her arm through Ron's before beginning her tale.

"When I was about nine years old, my family moved and I had to start at a new school."

"After the first few weeks, I hadn't made many friends, because I was shy, so I

got into an argument.

"In the end it was agreed that I could take part, so the tournament was rescheduled for lunchtime."

"And?" Paige turned around. "Did the first girl to take part in a conkers tournament win?"

"Yeah, Grandma," Noah chimed in. "Was yours the biggest and best in the school?"

"Those are two separate questions." Deirdre chuckled.

"As a reward for standing up for equality, I secretly gave Ron what I knew was

## "Did the first girl to take part in a conkers tournament win?"

used to play in the woods near our house by myself.

"One autumn day like today, I was out collecting conkers when I met a boy and we got chatting. His name was Ron."

"Was it Grandad?" Noah asked.

"It certainly was."

Deirdre's eyes crinkled as she looked at the man on her arm.

"We both went home with pockets full that day, but I was sure I'd found the best one."

"The next morning at school, there was to be a conkers tournament at playtime; it was a popular game in those days and lots of the boys had been out collecting."

"I went over and asked to play, but they wouldn't let me. They said I should go and play cat's cradle or skipping, like the other girls."

"You're joking!" Paige was outraged.

"It's plain silly. I don't know what conkers is, but I'm sure girls can play it if boys can," Noah added.

Paige looked at him approvingly for the first time that day.

"You're right, Noah, and that's exactly what I told them all." Ron smiled.

"There was quite a to-do about it," Deirdre continued.

"I almost wished I hadn't said anything, because your grandad and another boy

easily the best conker I'd ever found.

"He used it and went on to win the tournament by a mile. I took part with a different one and came in a respectable third place."

"But I consider myself the winner all round, because we've been best friends from that day," she finished.

"I'd say we were joint winners." Ron kissed Deirdre on the forehead.

"Stop kissing – it's yucky," Noah said, pulling a face.

"Well, no-one would give up first place for a toad like you," Paige teased.

"I tell you what," Ron said, a hand on each of their shoulders. "We could have our own conkers tournament before lunch, if you like."

By that time, they had reached the cottage where Deirdre and Ron lived.

As they opened the wrought-iron gate, Noah turned and ran further up the road.

"Look who it is!" he shouted, pointing to an older boy who was raking up some leaves in the garden of a cottage a few doors along.

"This is so embarrassing," Paige muttered under her breath.

It turned out that Danny Greenwell's nan lived a few doors away from Deirdre, and he'd come over to help tidy her garden.



She'd hurt her foot and couldn't manage it herself.

Much to his sister's horror, Noah invited him to join in the conkers tournament when he'd finished.

"I can't believe you did that!"

Paige scowled at her brother as they sat around the kitchen table trying to thread string through the holes Ron had drilled in their chosen conkers.

"It's embarrassing enough that Mum is a weird hippy artist, without Danny finding out that I have to be babysat by my grandparents, along with my little brother."

"I'm sure Danny won't think anything of the sort. After all, he's been helping his nan in the garden."

"At least you'll have a bit of company your own age for a while."

Deirdre warmed some milk to make hot chocolate, and it was ready by the time Danny came round.

Over their drinks, Ron explained how to play conkers and they spent a while agreeing the rules of the tournament.

It turned out that, in 50 years, things hadn't really changed that much, according to what Danny could recall from playing the game at Cubs.

They decided that they should each have a couple of possible conkers to use in competition, so that one final overall champion would be discovered.

Deirdre stood at the kitchen counter, listening to the discussion and watching Paige.

She looked more like her mother every day.

As the years went by, Deirdre tended only to remember the good times, but they'd had their moments when Susanna had been in her teens.

There were times when she'd thought they were speaking totally different languages.

It must be even worse for teenagers now, with all the social media and the pressures.

Deirdre shuddered. It was good to see her

granddaughter smiling and starting to relax.

Outside, the grand tournament began.

In complete contrast to Deirdre's story that morning, Ron was knocked out very early on.

Danny was quick to follow, but took it all in good spirits.

"See, I said mine was going to win!" Noah said proudly. "And this one is only my second best."

"I still have the very best one as a back-up."

"That's my boy!" Deirdre laughed.

"Don't think I'm going easy on you, though," she added as she took her next swing.

With a loud crack, her conker split apart and she was out of the running, which only left Paige.

Sibling rivalry is notoriously strong and those two were no different.

On Paige's third swing, she managed to break her brother's conker.

Immediately, her hands went up in the air in celebration, but Noah's face fell and his eyes began to glisten.

"Sometimes you lose a battle but go on to win the war," Deirdre reassured him. "Don't forget you still have the potential champion in reserve."

The boy put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his other conker.

It was definitely the largest one they had collected that day – a beautiful chestnut brown with a satin sheen.

He stroked it with his thumb.

Paige stood thinking for a moment.

"I don't want to take that one on."

Noah's head snapped up at his sister's words.

"Mine stands a good chance in one of the other categories, like . . ." she stared at the nut in her hand, searching for inspiration ". . . the most knobbly."

She looked round at Danny, who nodded encouragingly.

"If I play, mine is bound to get smashed because

yours is easily the biggest. Can I concede the match?"

"Absolutely!" Deirdre couldn't have smiled any wider if she'd tried.

"What does that mean?" Noah asked.

Danny went over and held up his conker.

"It means that you are the winner!"

He high-fived the younger boy, who did a lap of the garden, cheering all the way.

Once he'd asked his nan, Danny was able to stay for lunch.

Over soup and a sandwich, they all got to know each other better.

Danny's family had lived in the village for generations, so he was familiar with local folklore.

"I suppose you've all been on a conker hunt?" he asked Deirdre. "Do you happen to have any left over?"

"What is it with this village and conkers?" Paige pulled a face. "Do you eat them?"

Danny laughed.

"No, Nan wants some for her window-sills."

"We're bound to have some left over. I'll take them along to her, if you like," Deirdre replied.

She turned to Paige.

"The old wives would have it that putting conkers on your window-sills wards off spiders."

"Your grandad might have been my hero on the playground, but he's not quite so brave with our eight-legged friends, and neither am I!"

Noah giggled.

"I love spiders. I'll always catch them for you!"

"Conker champion, wellie wearer, spider catcher – you're going to fit in fine around here," Danny said approvingly. "You should join the Cubs."

They cleared the table and, while Ron and Noah distributed conkers all around the cottage, Paige and Danny did the washing-up.

Deirdre stood at the table folding some laundry and couldn't help but overhear their chat.

"You're great with Noah – so much better than me.

He drives me mad," Paige said quietly.

"He's a nice kid and I'd love a little brother. Being an only child isn't much fun, sometimes."

Danny's eyes met hers.

"I'm glad I came over to help Nan today," he added.

"Me, too," Paige whispered.

Just then, the back door opened and Susanna came in.

"Hi, Mum. How's everything been?"

"Susanna, you must be exhausted." Deirdre pulled out a chair. "I'll get the kettle on."

"It's OK, Grandma – I'll do it," Paige said. "Mum, this is Danny, my friend from school."

"Mum!" Noah ran into the kitchen and threw himself at Susanna. "Can I join the Cubs?"

Susanna laughed.

"I don't see why not."

What's brought this on?"

"Danny used to go. They have camps and play conkers. We played today and I won!" Noah hesitated. "Although Paige let me, I think."

His sister ruffled his hair.

"You would have won, anyway. I just wanted to keep my dignity."

A while later, the children were getting settled in the back of the car while Susanna checked the cottage to make sure they hadn't left anything behind.

"I have no idea what you did, today, Mum, but it feels like a miracle. Paige has been so angry about everything since we moved."

Deirdre rubbed her daughter's shoulder.

"One swallow doesn't make a summer, so don't get too excited."

"When you were her age, you used to be angry when there was nothing to be angry about."

"Coming here was a big step, and perhaps today has shown Paige that there might be some good things about her new life."

"I hope I turn out to be as good a mum to her as you are to me." Susanna smiled.

"You already are. She just doesn't know it yet." ■



# This week we're *loving*



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## Community Spirit

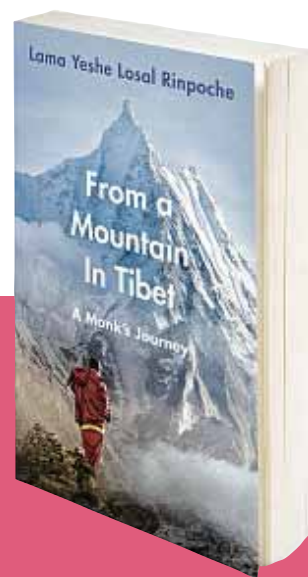
Amnesty International has reported that one in five UK adults spoke to a neighbour they had not met before for the first time during lockdown, while one in 10 adults said they helped a stranger in this time.



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## Victory For Nature

Fifteen beaver families have been granted the permanent right to remain on Devon's River Otter after a study carried out by the Devon Wildlife Trust proved how beneficial they could be to the local environment.



## A Monk's Journey

Lama Yeshe Losal Rinpoche is the leading monk at the Samye Ling monastery in Scotland, having escaped his country in the midst of the Tibetan Uprising. His memoir is an inspiring tale of hope. Buy now for £14.99.



## If Dogs Could Talk . . .

This planner for September 2020-December 2021 is perfect for dog lovers. With cute illustrations and reflections from the perspective of a loving pup throughout, this will make you smile every day. Get yours from [amazon.co.uk](https://amazon.co.uk) for £11.59.



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## Many Happy Returns

Hans Zimmer is sixty-three on September 12. One of the most influential film score composers of our time, Zimmer composed music for "The Lion King", "Pirates Of The Caribbean", "Dunkirk" and many more.



## Happy Houseplants

This cute gadget is perfect for your house plants. Both quirky and functional, this Ferris Wheel Planter allows you to rotate your plants easily to ensure they are all getting both sun and shade. Get yours from [redcandy.co.uk](https://redcandy.co.uk) for £28.



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## Dream Horse

A heart-warming tale of a rundown Welsh town which commits to raising a racehorse in the hopes of turning the town's luck around, "Dream Horse" is out in cinemas now, starring Toni Collette and Owen Teale.



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## A Green Manchester

The government has recently announced a £23 million funding boost for a new park to be built in Manchester.

Mayfield Park will be the first public park to open in Manchester for 90 years.



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## Discover Van Gogh

At St Mary's Church in York, this multimedia experience allows you to step into Van Gogh's paintings, displayed through projections and interactive elements. Book tickets at [vangoghexpo.co.uk](https://vangoghexpo.co.uk) or call 01904 501544.



# Beautiful *Bibury*

This  
week's  
cover  
feature

Pat Coulter takes a stroll around the Cotswolds village claimed to be the most beautiful in England.

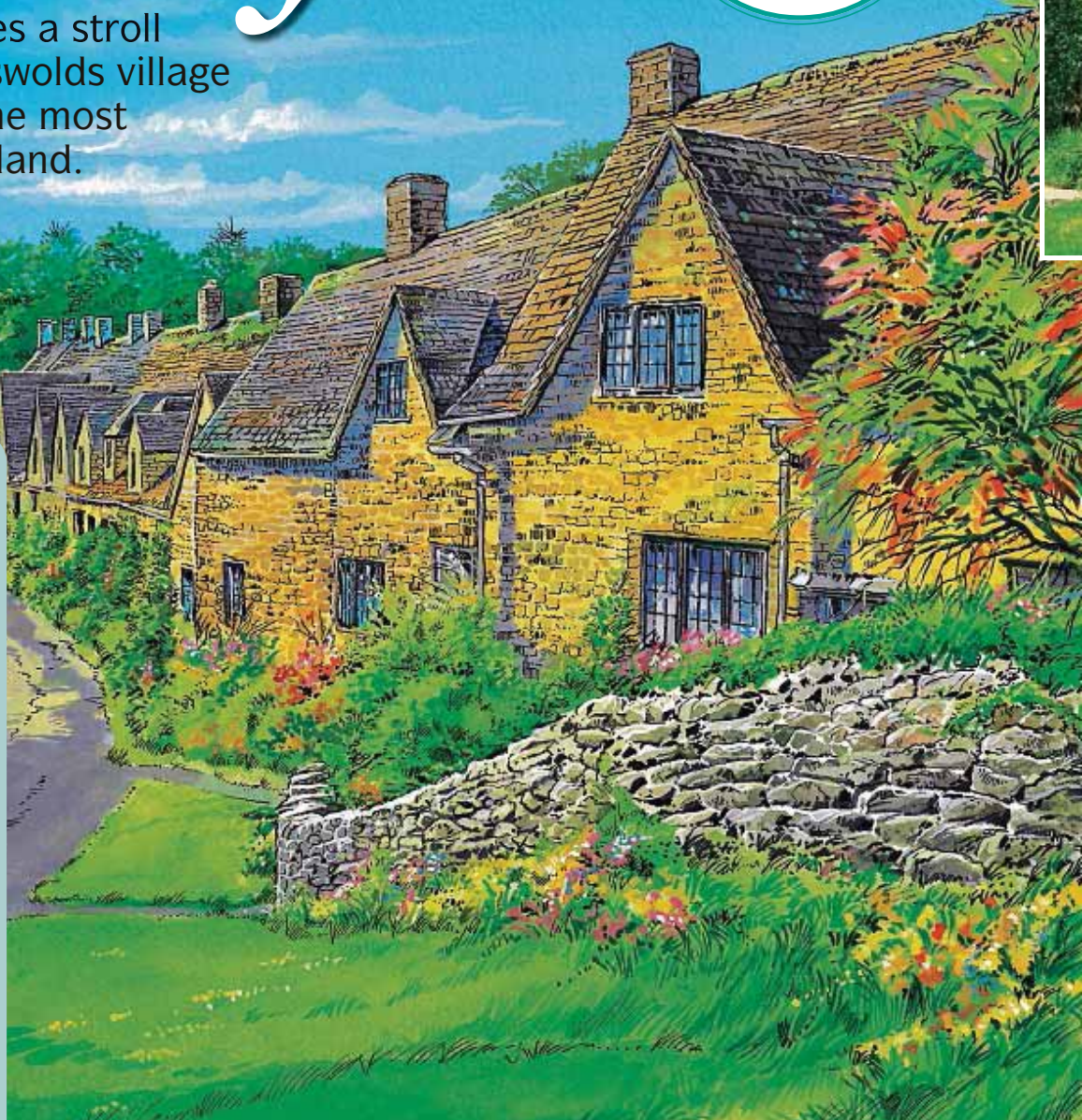
## Factfile

■ The Cotswolds stretch from Chipping Campden in the north to Bath in the south. The region is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the largest of its kind in the UK.

■ William Morris, writer, designer and founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, lived at his country retreat, Kelmscott Manor, from 1871 until his death. It is now a National Trust property open to the public.

■ Quarrying of the famous honey-coloured Cotswold limestone continues. Extraction of gravel has influenced the landscape to a positive effect, such as the creation of the lakes at Cotswold Water Park, providing a habitat rich in wildlife.

■ Just outside Bibury lies the National Trust's Lodge Park and Sherborne Park Estate, where you'll find the country's only surviving 17th-century grandstand.



**I** FEEL like the queen of my very own castle today, standing atop turreted Broadway Tower, deep in the Cotswold countryside.

The views are quite literally breathtaking, especially when you've climbed all the way up.

The mist is slowly clearing, revealing a painterly cerulean-blue sky.

We all love the Cotswolds' bygone charm, with honey-coloured cottages surrounded by

sheep-dotted fields and hedgerow-clad country lanes.

Over the years we've come to know the Cotswolds quite well.

Like most "staycationers", we have explored the well-trodden popular tourist destinations like Broadway, Bourton-on-the-Water and the Slaughters.

I could cheerfully go on!

Despite how well we think we know this sublime area, the beauty of these parts comes with its

sheer expansiveness.

Covering almost 800 square miles, it encompasses the counties of Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Wiltshire and Worcestershire.

Happily, there's always some valid reason to keep returning for delightful treasure-box finds.

Today we are heading to Bibury, the village described by designer William Morris as "the most beautiful in England".





At the scenic Trout Farm.



As pretty as a Monet painting.

We could say this is a tale of two villages. Bibury and Arlington are divided by the gently flowing, crystal-clear River Coln.

Thankfully, my slight underlying trepidation that William Morris's recommendation may have lured hundreds of equally avid tourists here on the same day was completely unwarranted.

It seems our out-of-season visit is just the ticket!

Come back in summer and, yes, there will be hordes, but today there are enough fellow incomers to create a friendly but jostle-free atmosphere.

Ideal, especially when we're all intent on sharing a photo or three with family and friends in our social media way.

Picture perfect it truly is, with photo opportunities at every turn.

First-time visitors would be excused for perhaps having déjà vu gazing at the string of riverside cottages known as Arlington Row.

If you're a British Passport holder, peek inside its front cover and you'll see the quaint buildings featured right there.

Down by the garden gate at No. 9, I get chatting with holidaymaker Mary from Birmingham, who enlightens me that the row of cottages belongs to the National Trust.

Lucky lady; she's staying

in the only one that's a holiday let.

"I enjoy my early morning cup of tea looking out over the water meadows," she says with understandable satisfaction.

The adjacent Rack Isle water meadow is so called as wool was once hung out to dry here on racks after it had been washed in Arlington Row.

It lies at the heart of the village, next to the river.

You could say it's a wildlife-friendly village green. The rather marshy area is out of bounds to the public, though – a playground only for wildlife to enjoy.

It's a safe haven for water voles, kingfishers, grass snakes and myriad kaleidoscopic-winged dragonflies flitting through abundant swathes of plant life, including pink ragged robin, yellow flag iris and marsh marigolds.

The area is sensitively managed with the help of a small herd of Belted Galloway cattle which graze Rack Isle during late summer.

These docile creatures help conserve this important natural wildlife habitat by happily munching through the vegetation, encouraging even more wildflowers to grow.

Of course, they're a wonderful picture opportunity for tourists, too!

Overlooking the pastoral

scene, the cottages along Arlington Row are believed to have been built around 1380 as a monastic wool store, and later converted into weavers' cottages in the 17th century.

Of course, many of us would love to live in such a beautiful dwelling, toasting ourselves in front of a cosy log burner and banging our heads on the low beams.

Some dream; others have the vision and financial resources to make this a reality, but not necessarily by simply buying and moving in.

One man had a much more extraordinary idea.

American automobile industrialist Henry Ford visited Bibury on his travels to the UK in 1912 whilst tracing his family's ancestral roots, along with his wife, Clara, and his son, Edsel.

Enthralled by the

picturesque stone cottages that dot the verdant hills of south-western England's Cotswolds region, he was particularly smitten with Arlington Row.

Audaciously, he planned to have all the cottages painstakingly removed, stone by stone, resiting them on his home-town soil in Dearborn, Michigan, near his car manufacturing empire in Detroit.

Thankfully, this was non-negotiable. The cottages were most definitely not up for sale and thankfully here they continue to stand to this day.

The story doesn't end there, though.

Undeterred, Henry Ford persisted in his quest to find his very own Cotswold cottage.

He eventually discovered a perfect limestone cottage in the nearby



The waterways are a haven for wildlife.



► village of Chedworth, and in 1929 he bought the 17th-century Rose Cottage for £500.

Built around 1620, the time of construction of this farmhouse fittingly coincided with the first waves of English immigration in the colonies of the New World.

Ford immediately hired a team of local builders to dismantle it stone by stone, numbering each one individually.

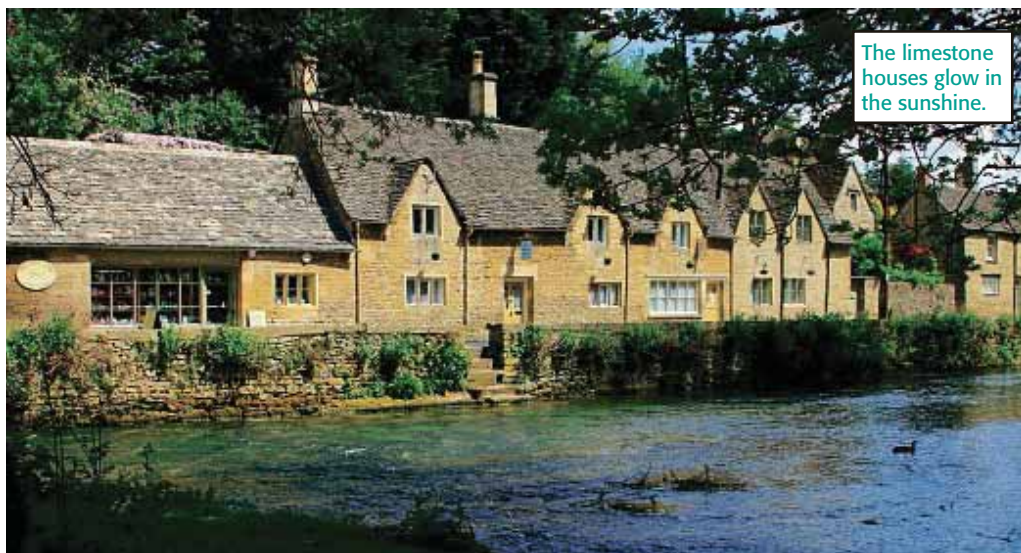
The stone was then loaded into 67 wagons and transported by train to Brentford Docks, where the contents were loaded on to barges and taken to London Docks for the Atlantic crossing.

Renamed the Cotswold Cottage, it's a central feature at the historic Greenfield Village museum, which he created at his former home in Dearborn.

For a slice of old England, visitors can take an "authentic" English tea in Rose Cottage's English-style cottage garden.

Henry Ford entertained many famous guests at Greenfield Village.

One of these guests was the writer H.G. Wells in 1931, when he posed for a picture with Henry outside the reconstructed



Cotswold cottage.

It's wonderful to see that Bibury remains a traditional English village with a welcoming riverside hostelry in the guise of a 17th-century former coaching inn called the Swan.

Poppy is more interested in the pub's namesake, as she's mesmerised by the swans gliding along the river and the ducks splashing about, gleefully showering her in water.

We pop into the Cotswold cottage, which is like a post office, in search of a postcard or two.

We all appreciate the effort made by loved ones who take the time to write a "Wish you were here" card.

A short stroll away is the lovely Saxon church of St Mary.

It is well worth a visit, with its strikingly beautiful stained-glass window of the Madonna and child.

Surprisingly, many of us have seen it before.

The exquisite artwork was featured on the 1992 Christmas stamp issued by the Royal Mail.

The cost? A mere 24p. Those were the days!

The window was designed in 1927 by stained-glass artist Karl Parsons who, like William Morris, was associated with the Arts

and Crafts movement.

Arlington Mill is also an enduring feature.

The property dates back to the Domesday Book and was once where corn from around the Cotswolds was brought and milled for consumption.

Nowadays, it's a *des res* holiday let full of character.

For its size, Bibury keeps on giving. The village boasts an unusual attraction which dates back over a century.

Reeling visitors in, Bibury Trout Farm is one of England's oldest working trout farms, founded in 1902.

It has a dog-friendly welcome for Poppy, too.

She's forgotten about the swans and become even more fascinated by the trout, and the fishery has a fun "have a go, catch what you can" approach.

Alternatively, you can simply enjoy a pleasant stroll round the scenic trout ponds with the serenity occasionally punctuated with shrieks of delight from first-time fisherfolk who have caught a proverbial whopper.

Fish pie for some lucky beginners tonight!

You can hire a barbecue by the water's edge and cook your own. Fish doesn't get fresher than that.

It's fascinating to discover some "fishy" facts along the way.

The trout residing here produce an incredible one million eggs a year, and the hatchery is fed by Bibury Spring, renowned

for its excellent water quality.

The young fish, meanwhile, can eat a staggering 3.8% of their own body weight per day.

"That's even more than you, Poppy," I can't help teasing her.

For unlucky fisherfolk suffering "the one that got away", or if, like me, you're a tad squeamish but fancy sampling some trout without catching your own, there's always the on-site café with treats to tempt an appetite.

Smoked trout pâté on hot buttered toast is certainly a lip-smacking way to end a memorable day savouring beautiful Bibury. ■

**Travel restrictions may still be in place.**

**Please check latest advice before planning your trip.**



## Want to know more?

Bibury, Nr Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 5NP.  
Telephone 01451 844257 or visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bibury](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bibury) for more information.

## Getting there

**By road:** Bibury lies south of the B4425, midway between Burford and Cirencester.

**By bus:** the 855 from Cirencester takes 16 minutes to travel to Bibury, several times a day.

**By train:** the nearest station is Kemble, 14 miles away.





## PREPARE YOUR BODY TODAY WITH THESE SIMPLE TIPS

# SUPPORT YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM THIS AUTUMN

It's important to make sure your body has the right levels of vitamins and minerals to keep you healthy. You can ensure your immune system is supported by following these expert tips this Autumn.

**1) Take Vitamin C.** This nutrient has several important functions according to the NHS, including protecting cells and keeping them healthy, maintaining healthy skin, blood vessels, bones and cartilage and helping with wound healing<sup>(1)</sup>. Manuka Doctor's Bee's Sneeze capsules contain 600 per cent of your recommended amount of Vitamin C.

**2) Use Zinc.** Since the human body does not store zinc, it must be consumed regularly as part of the diet. You can find it in seafood, red meat, chickpeas, eggs, pumpkin and sunflower seeds. The NHS website recommends women consume 7mg of Zinc a day<sup>(2)</sup>.

Manuka Doctor's new Manuka Middles contain Zinc, with just one lozenge providing 15 per cent of your daily requirement.

**3) Try Vitamin D.** The UK Government recommends everyone should consider taking a Vitamin D supplement all year round<sup>(3)</sup>. Vitamin D is necessary for maintaining good immunity. As well as sunlight, vitamin D is found in foods such as oily fish, eggs, mushrooms.

**4) Make a mouth-watering smoothie.** Smoothies are an excellent way to get a juicy hit of vitamins and minerals in one go. Blend a big handful of frozen berries with a small banana, a handful of spinach and Manuka honey. For great deals on Manuka Doctor honey, see the coupon below.

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MGO stands for methylglyoxal, the naturally occurring substance that gives manuka honey its anti-microbial properties. The number on the front of each pot refers to the amount of MGO in each jar.

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He says "If you are going to buy manuka honey, be sure to choose one that has been independently tested for strength and purity like Manuka Doctor."



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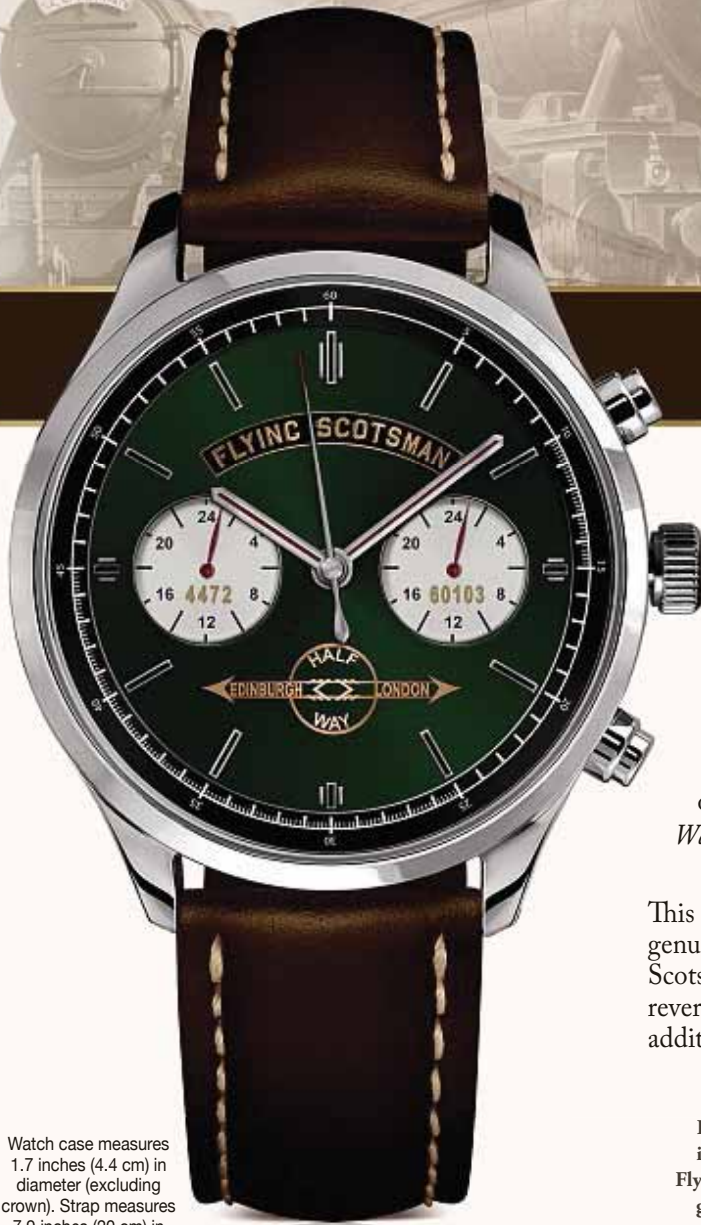
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# Today is the day; it's now or never



In her weekly column, Maddie Grigg shares tales from her life in rural Dorset . . .

**W**E'RE sitting out on the balcony, the dogs at our feet, gazing out across a garden which looks like a bomb has hit it.

The pandemic put paid to work we were having done on the house on France, but that's OK, as we're lucky to be here at all.

For three days, Jimi the cat has been kept inside with food and a litter tray.

He's been looking rather longingly at the door every time we open it.

But I haven't been ready to risk it, especially after his nocturnal outing near Le Mans, which I told you about last week.

I can't bear the thought of him shooting off into the wide blue yonder of south-western France.

Today is the day; it's now or never.

So, from the outside, I open the back door.

Ruby pricks up her ears, ready to chase whatever comes out of it.

I grab hold of her collar and tell her firmly, "No."

Jimi steps out rather gingerly, putting one foot in front of the other as if the floor is made of lava.

There is an old wives' tale of putting butter on a cat's paws to stop it wandering, but we didn't have any butter.

I am hoping he'll like it here more than he liked Le Mans.

He's out of the door now and jumps up on the stone wall of the balcony.

"I hope he doesn't jump off," I say quietly to Mr Grigg.

Last year, Ruby did just that.

It's a ten-foot drop and, back then, I squealed in alarm, which frightened the dog more than the actual jump.

She turned out to be fine, although I wasn't. Talk about frazzled.

Jimi looks around him at the bomb site, then walks along the wall, bypassing the gate that's keeping the dogs in, and heads off down the steps.

Jimi's taking everything in his stride and doesn't

seem at all agitated.

He reaches the garden and wanders off. We don't see him for another hour.

"I hope he's all right," I say, worried that he might have hitched a ride back to England.

Then, as we're having lunch and the dogs are in the utility room, I see him, slinking along the garden through the long grass.

"There he is," Mr Grigg whispers.

He looks smaller than usual.

"That's not him."

The cat we are looking at is a grey tabby with markings almost identical to Jimi's.

Then I see our cat walking slowly from the other side of the garden.

Jimi hasn't seen the interloper.

My hands grip the chair on which I'm sitting.

The tension is almost too much.

Will there be a fight? Will this smaller cat declare this his territory and see Jimi off for good?

Suddenly, Jimi sees his opponent crouching in the distance. A staring contest begins.

Who will be the first to blink?

Jimi, eyes fixed ahead of him on the young pretender, begins to walk

through the grass, his big, bushy tail swishing like a lion.

The other cat keeps looking for a second or so, and then he's off.

Round one to Jimi!

I'm proud of him.

Thirteen years old and he has still got what it takes to be the coolest cat in France.

He plods along and then makes his way up the steps before sitting in front of the gate at the top.

"He can jump over that," Mr Grigg says.

"I know, but I feel like he deserves to be spoiled. What a good boy he is."

Jimi saunters in, nuzzles against my legs and stands outside the back door mewing to be let in.

"I'm going to get him some cat treats," I say. "I think he's had enough excitement for one day."

After gobbling them up, Jimi sits in splendour on my mum's old Windsor chair.

It's a cat's life. ■





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# Worth The Wait

Marie knew that patience can sometimes be a virtue – but not always . . .

As she waited on the outskirts of the town, cars passing and dog-walkers

traipsing by, Marie shrugged her shoulders as if she was cold, though the warm day seemed determined to melt all the tarmac on the pavements.

A woman – a girl, really, since Marie considered anybody under twenty-five still to be one of those – stood a little further along.

She'd arrived five minutes earlier and wore a short skirt and cropped top.

Marie couldn't help but think that if she had worn something like that at that age, her mother would have demanded to know why she was wearing an outfit that had shrunk in the wash!

The girl wore gladiator-style sandals with straps that wound up her ankles, and she carried a sagging bag over one shoulder that looked heavy enough to hold an anvil.

Her hair, swept up, wagged like the tail of a dog every time she moved her head.

She moved it a lot as she searched left to right and back again.

"Where are you?" she muttered over and over again.

Marie knew how she felt. She took out her mobile. Her husband, Jonathan, answered before she even opened her mouth.

"Sorry. I'll be another five minutes at least. I just have one more thing to do."

"I could always catch the bus if you're really stuck out there. Hello? Hello?"

He'd only gone and hung up!

The girl turned Marie's way. Her perfectly made-up face was scrunched up.

"Are you doing it as well? Waiting for a man?"

"Er, yes – my husband. I told him I'd take the bus home from my mother's, but he wanted us to go for a bite to eat together."

"My boyfriend was supposed to pick me up from work. He said half five. Does your hubby keep you waiting a lot?"

"Sometimes. Yes."

"How long have you waited today?"

"About twenty minutes so far."

"Are you serious?" The girl looked shocked.

"Twenty minutes? That's insane."

The girl gave Marie a thoughtful examination from her flat shoes to her summer skirt, blouse and sensible pixie cut.

Marie read her thoughts

like a clairvoyant. A downtrodden, middle-aged housewife being taken for granted. The poor thing.

"He's not doing it on purpose. He's been held up."

The girl didn't look impressed.

"It had better be by a bank robber!"

"He's showing a client round a country house. He's an estate agent," Marie explained.

The girl, all tanned legs and arms, make-up, dangling earrings and bright red lipstick, looked self-assured, like a girl from a magazine, the epitome of a go-getting young thing.

Her sculpted brows rose.

"How long have you been married?"

"Since the dinosaurs died out. That's how my husband puts it!"

"Well, that doesn't sound very complimentary." The girl gave Marie another searching look.

What was she thinking this time?

"Has he always been the type to turn up late, then? Your . . . your . . .?"

"Jonathan. His name's Jonathan." Marie's frown deepened. "Actually, the very first time he did it has become a bit of landmark in our relationship.

"This was long before mobile phones, mind you, and keeping in touch every moment of the day."

Since the girl didn't interrupt, Marie kept going.

"We didn't live here back then. We both lived out in the countryside. My parents owned a farm, you see.

"Every year at harvest time they hired extra hands to help out. One year one of them was Jonathan.

"He was nineteen and just, well, glorious. We worked together bringing in the hay.

"There weren't any of those big forklifts to load up huge round bales left all over the fields in those days.

"The bales had to be lugged about, stacked on to a trailer, driven to the barn then stacked again.

"Those things weighed a ton. I always ended up carrying one with Jonathan. That might be why he asked me out, and why we started seeing each other."

Marie smiled, remembering.

"The night he kept me waiting, he invited me to a pub in the village. 'I'll be there at eight,' he said.



“I arrived right on time. Not a minute late. “Then I sat for ages, all alone, nursing half a cider. I expect nobody even noticed me, but still I felt watched.

“I tried to avoid checking the time but did it anyway. After twenty minutes, I started to feel quite sick. I’d never been stood up before in my life.”

“But you carried on waiting?” the girl asked.

“Yes,” Marie nodded.

“Why?”

“Indecisiveness, I suppose. Half of me felt mortified, the other kept thinking of how Jonathan always smiled at me, and how he made me laugh.

“He didn’t seem the type who’d hurt me on purpose. I suppose if I’d thought he was I’d have left like a shot.

“He did show up in the end. He came in carrying a bunch of wildflowers he’d plucked from the hedgerows.

“He’d added in some stalks of wild grass to remind me of the hay.

“It was beautiful. I was so glad I hadn’t run off. You should have seen the faces of everybody around us. I half expected them to applaud.”

The girl wore a somewhat wistful expression now, as if she’d got caught up in that slice of romance.

“That’s lovely,” she said before she blinked herself back into reality.

Peering at Marie, she clearly didn’t see a happy-ever-after on the horizon.

“What happened next?”

“Oh, the usual. We got married. We had the whole big do, the church, the dress, the cake, the reception, the honeymoon.

“Then, we bought a house and had two kids.”

Marie smiled.

“I still wonder to this day what might have happened if I’d stormed out of that pub and left. We might never have seen each other again.”

The girl’s chin thrust out.

“Then again, if you had split up that night, you wouldn’t have been left standing here all this time, would you?” she pointed out.

“You really shouldn’t let him treat you this way,” the girl went on, “especially if he does it all the time. You need to stick up for yourself.

“It’s not a proper relationship if one of you is treated like dirt, is it?”

She sounded like an agony aunt.

“Excuse me a sec.” She plucked her mobile from her bag.

She dialled a number then pressed the phone to her ear.

“I’m still waiting, you know!”

One sandalled foot started tapping on the pavement in an angry rhythm as she listened to whatever her boyfriend said in reply.

She turned her back on Marie and wandered off, clearly hunting for some privacy.

Marie watched as the girl’s back bowed and her shoulders slumped.

Suddenly, she stood flat-footed, all her limbs drawn inwards.

She’s wilted like a flower without water or sunlight, Marie found herself thinking.

What on earth was he saying to her? Why wasn’t she fighting back?

I bet she’s always keen to find the answers when it comes to other people’s problems, but when it comes to her own she’s staggering about in the dark, Marie thought sympathetically.

She waited and waited for that confident girl to reappear in her warrior shoes, the one who looked all set to take on the world.

“OK. Sorry, all right.

Bye.” The girl’s dull flat tones drifted down the pavement before she cut the connection.

She wore a fake smile on her return.

“He says he’ll be here any second.”

It sounded like a fib.

“Is this your husband at last?” The girl nodded to the road.

A car glided to a halt by the kerb.

At the wheel, Jonathan sat looking a little dishevelled in his shirt

sleeves. His tie lay a little askew and his hair needed a comb.

The girl glowered at him as fiercely as an angry dragon for Marie’s sake.

“Yes, that’s him,” Marie said with a fond smile.

“Well, I’d better go. It was nice meeting you.”

She climbed into the car and Jonathan leaned over and gave her a peck on the cheek.

“Sorry I’m so late. Who’s that you were talking to, and why is she looking at me like that?”

Marie laughed.

“She thinks you’re awfully disrespectful for making me wait,” she replied.

“If, by any chance, you’ve bought me flowers, now would be a very good time to hand them over.”

Jonathan frowned, as well he might.

He reached into the back seats and pulled from them a bunch of flowers wrapped up in white plastic.

He presented them with a flourish in full view of the girl out in the street.

Jonathan often bought flowers. Not always to say sorry, either.

“Oh, they’re lovely.”

Marie smiled. “Thank you.”

When she kissed him this time it was with a passion that he wasn’t quite ready for.

“Well,” he said, pulling away. “That was a surprise.”

“I’m making a point, I think. I hope,” Marie excused herself.

The girl still watched with crossed arms.

As Jonathan turned the car back into the road, Marie gave her a wave with the bunch of flowers.

Is that how her boyfriend greets you, she thought, with an apology, a kiss and flowers?

You need to listen to your own advice.

Moments later, Jonathan brought the car to a halt at a set of lights and Marie turned in her seat.

She could still see the girl in the distance, her ponytail blowing in the breeze.

“Go on,” she said under her breath. “Walk away. You know you want to.”

Maybe Marie’s romantic

tale had done it, or maybe things had just reached boiling point on the girl’s telephone call earlier.

Or maybe the flowers were the cause?

Either way, Marie dearly hoped she’d make the right choice.

The girl didn’t wait one moment longer.

She lifted her head, set her shoulders back and walked away from that place she’d been told to wait.

She did it with a confidence you only feel when you know you’ve made a good decision.

Marie thought it was likely she’d been left in the lurch by that boyfriend of hers a hundred times before.

“Good girl,” Marie whispered. “Go and find somebody worth your time.”

She stared down at the flowers in her lap.

Jonathan had added a few stalks of wild grasses to the bunch he’d bought.

He’d made himself a tiny bit later for the sake of plucking them from the edges of a field on the way home.

He’d done it to remind her of the very first time he’d kept her waiting, of course.

He’d offered her the flowers on one knee that evening like a gallant knight.

“I’m so sorry. I was late because I wanted to bring you these.” He’d looked embarrassed by his own sentimentality.

When it comes to making you wait, some men are in an entirely different league.

Every woman needs to find their own Jonathan, Marie thought affectionately as the car pulled away from the traffic lights.

“I have told you how much I love you lately, haven’t I?” she asked with a smile.

He laughed.

“Have I told you? I’m sure I did this morning. Still, there’s no need to delay on that score.”

And she didn’t keep him waiting for another second. ■



Now there is help for  
tired and heavy legs

# I was so unhappy because of my tired legs

**M**arta had grown so tired of her stiff legs and body, it started to influence her good spirits and energy.

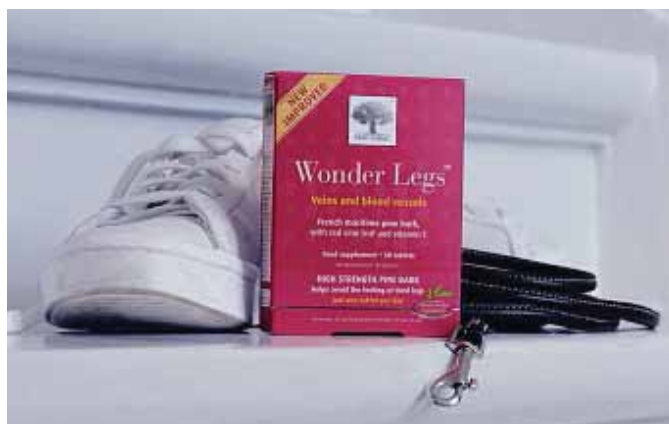
Marta lives in a lovely sun-filled flat. She is a former canteen assistant – now on a pension – and she loves going on outings with friends and neighbours. But her legs had really grown tired and she had to say no to many adventures. Marta also began to have trouble getting up and down stairs.

**This had a negative influence on her spirits and she felt lonely.**

Marta had tried almost everything, until another elderly lady from next door came for morning coffee and told her about the food supplement called Wonder Legs™, a tablet based on pine bark and wine leaves. Marta decided to try in the hope that it would help her.

**Energy and happiness**

"I am so happy that I started taking Wonder Legs™. I now enjoy getting out and about with friends and manage the stairs with ease.



Wonder Legs gives me supple legs and energy to do what I want. My friends tell me that they have got back the old happy Marta – and that is a good thing!"

**This quality mark is the most important to remember**

New Nordic is committed to excellence and uncompromising product quality, from field and forest to the package in the shop. New Nordic brings more vitality tablet by tablet.

## This is why the Wonder Legs tablet is so good!

Wonder Legs™ combines natural extract of pine bark with extract of wine leaves for an optimal effect on the veins in the legs. Natural extracts for tired legs. Do you feel that you get tired and heavy legs when you walk or when you have been sitting still? This is typical sign of getting older. The Wonder Legs™ tablets contain strong antioxidants, which reduce oxidation in the cells and help maintain normal venous function – thus lessen bloating in the legs.

**Where to find Wonder Legs™**

Wonder Legs™ tablets are available from Holland & Barrett and independent health food stores. For an information leaflet call New Nordic on **0800 389 1255**.

# Health & wellbeing

Great advice to keep you happy and healthy

## Q. Although it's some time since I had treatment for breast cancer, I still sometimes feel very low. I don't want to worry my family. Can you help?



Rachel Rawson, Clinical Nurse Specialist at Breast Cancer Now, is here to help.

Many people experience low mood and sadness after a breast cancer diagnosis, and often don't realise that these emotions can also continue after hospital treatment ends.

You may have been left with reminders of what you've been through or a sense of loss for how

things were before. It can take time to adjust.

It's common to want to avoid worrying your family, but try not to feel you need to put on a brave face or hide your feelings, as this can feel like an extra burden at an already difficult time.

A low mood will usually improve after a few days, but if it doesn't it may be a sign of depression.

Speak to your specialist team and GP for support and advice, as they are there to help. They can refer you to further support if needed.



Our expert nurses are also here if you need someone to talk to.

We're just at the end of the phone on our free helpline (0808 800 6000) or over e-mail.

Visit [breastcancernow.org](http://breastcancernow.org) for more information.

## In The News

### Statins Study

Although statins have been swathed in controversy for many years, a new study by researchers at Harvard University has found that taking these drugs, which are commonly prescribed to tackle high cholesterol, could slash risk of early death by a quarter.

In the UK, the over-seventy-fives are advised to take these cholesterol-busting drugs, but only a fifth do so. However, this study shows important health benefits of taking statins in older age.



## Gauge The Risk Factor

If you're concerned about your COVID-19 risk, it's good to know that scientists have issued guidelines which make it easy to differentiate between different activities:

● **LOW RISK:** opening your post, grocery shopping, eating a restaurant meal outside, playing tennis or golf.

● **MEDIUM RISK:** having drinks or dinner at someone else's house or garden, going to a shopping centre, working in an office building.

● **MEDIUM-HIGH RISK:** going to barber/hair salon, hugging or shaking hands, travelling by plane.

● **HIGH RISK:** eating at a buffet, using a gym, going to the cinema.



## Health Bite

Cinnamon is usually associated with distinctly unhealthy carbohydrate-heavy treat foods, but a new study has discovered a sprinkling of cinnamon on your food could help control blood sugar levels and even reduce your risk of diabetes.

The naturally sweet-tasting spice has antiviral, antibacterial and antifungal properties, and is a good source of anti-inflammatory antioxidants that help protect the body from disease.



## Encourage "good" bacteria



## Probiotics And Digestion



**Our Health Writer, Colleen Shannon, brings you some tips.**

**W**E naturally carry trillions of bacteria in our bodies every day, which sounds alarming.

This can actually be positive news, though, because some of these bugs are so-called "good" bacteria that promote health in many ways. They help digest food and crowd out harmful bacteria, but they also serve many other functions.

We can encourage a healthy balance of good bacteria in the gut by consuming probiotics. These are living, friendly bacteria or yeasts that occur naturally in certain foods, or which can be taken as supplements. There are many different types for specific purposes.

There is huge medical interest in probiotics, and scientists are looking at their applications for everything from mental health to a common cold.

One area where we already have lots of evidence is in the use of probiotics for digestive health.

To learn more, I asked Bahee Van de Bor, Harley Street Paediatric Dietician and a spokesperson for the British Dietetic Association (BDA), for an update and a few practical tips.

She told me about some research supporting the health benefits of probiotics for children and adults.

There is evidence that taking the right probiotic can help the diarrhoea that results from taking antibiotics to fight an infection.

In medical studies, a type of yeast called *Saccharomyces boulardii* has been effective for this.

For constipation, there is research to support *Bifidobacterium lactis* and *Lactobacillus casei* Shirota.

Getting some probiotics from your diet is a good place to start to promote overall digestive health.

Here are some of Bahee's tips:

Try to eat yoghurt every day, with breakfast or as a snack. Yoghurt is an excellent source of calcium and protein, and a relatively inexpensive way of trying probiotics. Check the label to verify that probiotics have been added to your chosen brand.

For probiotics to be effective, eat a diet that is also a source of prebiotics and fibre.

Prebiotics are essentially food for the friendly micro-organisms. This food helps them grow and survive in the gut.

Good sources of prebiotics include fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals, bread and pasta, oats, nuts and seeds. Cashews, pistachios, onions, garlic, leeks and green peas are great choices; so are dried mango, fig, pineapple and dates.

If you'd like to try a probiotic supplement, check with your doctor or dietician first if you have a health condition with weakened immunity.

A probiotic supplement with multiple strains isn't always an advantage. It's important to select strains that have been shown by clinical research to be effective for your problem.

If you are unsure, speak to the manufacturer: they may be able to advise on the best strain to try for the outcome that you are seeking.

You will also find an excellent fact sheet on probiotics on the BDA website at [www.bda.uk.com/resource/probiotics.html](http://www.bda.uk.com/resource/probiotics.html).

Visit the website for a wealth of information on many healthy eating topics. ■

## Foot Treatment

Warts and verrucas (foot warts) can be stubborn to remove, but Excilor has devised a clever two-in-one treatment.

It combines cryo-active technology to effectively "freeze" the wart or verruca on day one, killing the causative virus, plus a dab-on gel which you then apply twice a day for five days to help slough off the built-up layers of skin.

The two treatments are cleverly combined in a handy pen-shaped device.

Excilor 2in1

Wart And

Verruca

Treatment is

£24.99 from

Lloyds

pharmacies.



## When Your Back's Against The Wall ...

One great and simple exercise to improve mobility, posture and strength is "wall snow angels".

"Stand with your upper back, head, bottom and heels against the wall. Start with your hands out to the side with your palms facing outwards," Stephen Macconville, fitness lead at Nuffield Health, suggests.

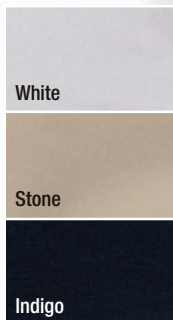
"Whilst maintaining contact with the wall, slowly raise your hands above your head, stretching as wide and as high as possible. Slowly return to your starting position and then repeat. Aim to complete five to ten times.

"Perform this two or three times, taking a break of forty to sixty seconds between each."



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## Get Online

If you're not already using the internet and communicating with friends and family via social media, ask someone to give you some pointers – it's much easier than you think! A recent study by University College London has found that the over-fifties who use the internet every day feel happier and less isolated as a consequence. Local branches of Age UK run classes in computing so phone their advice line to find out more: 0800 678 1602.

## Nip To The Shops

Social interaction is important for our mental health and has stress-busting benefits. You might think everyone's in a rush, but look out for "happy to chat" or "relaxed" checkouts cropping up in many stores, staffed by friendly faces willing to let you take as much time as you need.



# 7 Easy Ways To Improve YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

## Time To Study

This could be a great time to expand your learning and meet fellow "mature students". The University of the Third Age is a volunteer-run charity which offers courses. There are no exams, but instead you get the chance to do, play or learn something you may never have done before.

Local groups are still limiting their activities, but you can join an online community called Trust U3A at [www.u3asites.org.uk/trustu3a](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/trustu3a).

## Be A Volunteer

Offering knowledge or experience to others for free is hugely rewarding and is a great way to meet friends. Check the noticeboards in your area, ask in charity

shops, call Citizens Advice to ask about opportunities or, if you have access to a computer, tap your postcode into the "volunteer centre finder" page on [www.ncvo.org.uk](http://www.ncvo.org.uk) website to find out how and where you can help.

## Join A Local Group

A shared hobby is a great source of conversation and friendship, and whether you harbour a passion for knitting, bridge, golf, crosswords or books, there will be a group of like-minded people which meets regularly online or in person.

If you're over fifty-five you can call the Silver Line Helpline on 0800 470 8090 to ask about local groups and Silver Circles, which are facilitated group phone calls where six to eight people with shared interests discuss topics that interest them (it's free!)



## Make That Call

Don't wait for others to call – pick a time and call them! Talking on the phone with friends and family can be a great source of happiness, and gives us a sense of connection and control over our lives.

Ask if it's a good time to call and aim to be chirpy and ask lots of questions. Some organisations (such as Independent Age on 0800 319 6789, Age UK on 0800 055 6112, Friends of the Elderly on 0300 332 1110 or [reengage.org.uk](http://reengage.org.uk) on 0800 716543) can arrange for you to receive a weekly or fortnightly friendship call from a volunteer.

## Get Outside

When the weather allows, plonk a chair outside your front door and enjoy people watching, but make a point of saying hello to everyone who passes. It might feel odd to begin with, but this is precisely how the older generations pass their evenings in parts of Europe.

If you are fit and able, try to get out often for a walk. If you head out at a similar time each day you'll start to see familiar faces. This has the potential to make you feel more connected to those around you.



# Breaking The News

Auntie Jill had something exciting to tell the family . . .



**I** LOVE my mum and dad. My mum's the kind of mum who smiles a lot and sits down on the edge of my bed each night for a chat before she kisses me and tucks me in.

Dad buys me a new book every pay day, and reads to me when I'm sick. He takes me to the park to feed the ducks on Sundays, if it isn't raining.

But loving your mum and dad's just normal, isn't it? Everybody loves their parents.

The thing is, I have someone else I love just as much, and that's Auntie Jill.

Jill is Dad's younger sister. She's married to Uncle Conor, who works on the oil rigs, so he's away a lot, which is where I come in.

I stay over at Auntie Jill's every Friday night to keep her company.

"Shall we make popcorn and watch a movie?" she'll sometimes ask. "Or will we put on some music and do our nails?"

We like to relax, but that could mean anything from baking cupcakes to ordering a Chinese take-away.

We always have fun and stay up late, and I have my own bedroom with a lamp and a radio on a wooden chest, and a clean nightie in Auntie Jill's airing cupboard.

On Saturday mornings we have a lie-in, then we stroll to the café at the end of the street and have coffee and croissants at the tables outside, if it's dry.

When Dad comes to collect me, I give Auntie Jill

the tightest hug and say, "Love you, Auntie Jill."

And she hugs me back and says, "Love you, Bunny."

Then we rub noses.

I thought it would always be like this. Until Auntie Jill gave us her news.

"I wanted to tell you all together," she said when she called at our place one Friday evening to collect me.

"Tell us what? What's wrong?" Mum asked.

She looked worried as she dried her hands and threw the towel on the bench in a most un-Mum-like way.

"Oh, please don't get upset, Fiona," Jill said. "I've not got off to a very good start! It's happy news. Baby news!"

Who was having a baby? Someone close to Auntie Jill, it seemed.

"But that's wonderful!" Mum cried, pulling Jill into a hug.

Dad was grinning.

"I take it, if you're sharing it with us, then you've already told Conor."

So the baby was happening to someone Uncle Conor knew. I wished somebody would ask the obvious question: precisely who was having this baby?

I looked from Mum to

Dad, but when no-one obliged, I had to do it myself.

"Me!" Auntie Jill cried. "Uncle Conor and I are expecting a new arrival, Sophie."

"A little bundle of joy. He or she will be your cousin."

"Sophie." Not "Bunny". That change told me all I needed to know.

I tore out of the kitchen and upstairs to my room, where I threw myself on my bed and cried.

Auntie Jill was having a baby. She wouldn't need me any more.

I'd be excess baggage, like they have at airports. It was the end of me being her special one.

Nobody came to ask me why I was weeping, or what was wrong. Now that everyone was thinking about the new baby, I was soon forgotten.

\* \* \* \*

Mum said we'd have to make an extra effort to look after Auntie Jill, now that there was a baby in her tummy and Uncle Conor was still away on the rigs.

"It's not for long, Fiona," I heard Jill tell Mum. "We always said that once we started a family he'd get a job close to home."

"We've managed to save quite a bit, so we'll be all right even if it takes Conor a while to find something."

"Well, we'll support you all we can," Mum said. "But we don't want to suffocate you, so just tell us what we can do to help."

"Sophie, you'll still come round on Fridays, won't you?" Jill asked with a smile.

"We can look at baby catalogues together and decide what we need."

"I can't," I said. "Alice has asked me to join the Brownies, and I've said yes."

Mum looked at me in surprise.

"Really? It's the first I've heard of it."

"I meant to tell you," I explained. "But I forgot."

The truth was, Alice had been on at me about joining Brownies for ages, but I'd always said no because I didn't want to miss out on Friday nights with Auntie Jill.

But now I thought I'd rather learn how to light campfires and sew on buttons with my friend.

"I'll miss you," Auntie Jill said. "But I wouldn't want you to lose out on a chance of activities with other kids your own age."

Well, she didn't take much persuading, did she?

When we were leaving, I nipped out to the car before anyone could hug me.

Auntie Jill could keep her cuddles for the baby.

\* \* \* \*

The one good thing to come out of all this was that I loved Brownies.

Alice and I were in the same Six and we all decided together which badges to work for.

Mum insisted on having Auntie Jill round every Sunday for dinner, but I always slunk off when there was any danger of a hug, and it was a long time since



we'd rubbed noses.

All the while, Auntie Jill's tummy got bigger, and I must say her hair had never looked better.

Then, one Sunday, Auntie Jill seemed even happier than ever.

"You look like the cat who's got the cream," Mum remarked. "What are you up to?"

Auntie Jill giggled.

"I said I wasn't going to tell anyone just yet, but I can't keep it to myself.

"Fiona, you'll never believe it – I found out this week that the baby is actually twins!"

Auntie Jill explained that one of the twins had been hiding behind the other one, so it wasn't immediately obvious that she was in a buy-one-get-one-free situation.

"So, it's going to be double trouble," Auntie Jill declared.

"Sophie, I know you have a lot on with Brownies, but I really am going to need you to help me out.

"I don't suppose Brownies have a childcare badge?"

"I'm not sure," I mused, then ran up to my room to have a think.

Sitting on my bed, I realised that two babies didn't feel nearly as threatening as one.

After all, if there were two of them, neither could be the special one, could they?

And if Auntie Jill was busy with one twin, the other might feel sad and need a cuddle, or help with its bottle, or a clean nappy – or to rub noses.

I flew back downstairs.

"Auntie Jill, I could do Saturday nights at your place, if it would help."

"That would be brilliant." She beamed. "The extra pair of hands would make all the difference, Bunny."

She swept me up in her arms and hugged me as tightly as ever.

"Watch out for my cousins," I advised, trying to leave room for her tummy.

"Thanks," Auntie Jill replied.

Then, looking me straight in the eye, she rubbed her nose against mine. ■

# Paw And Order

Dan may have an admirer or two . . .



DAN was wishing he hadn't agreed to the neighbourhood watch gig as he stood up to the microphone.

He'd never worried about confronting criminals as a cop, and didn't mind being left in charge of a house in the middle of nowhere, but public speaking? That was a different matter.

Especially when his mother, who'd talked him into this, was beaming at him from the front row.

He cleared his throat.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name's Dan Gatsby, formerly of Dorset Police, and I'm here to talk about keeping your property safe from burglars."

There were nods and a lot of smiles, which made him feel better.

He began with the obvious things, such as not leaving doors and windows unlocked, which was quite common in Stratley on Avon, especially in summer.

"Thieves are opportunists. If they find an open door, they may just stroll in."

"In my kitchen they'd find themselves face to face with a German shepherd," a familiar voice piped up from the back.

There was a smattering of laughter.

"Dogs are one of the best deterrents," Dan agreed, craning his neck to see who had spoken.

It was Joanna Butcher. They'd worked together once, but she'd been in the dog-handling division. He'd always envied her that.

"Hi, Jo. Great to see you."

It made it easier knowing he was amongst friends.

He also recognised his cleaner, Sheila, in the second row.

He wasn't surprised – she lived on a road where there had been some burglaries lately – but he'd viewed her with different eyes since his daughter, Ella, had told him she had a thing for him.

Whether that was true remained to be seen, but Dan couldn't quite forget it.

Sheila was an attractive woman, but Dan had been single since his marriage ended three years ago.

He wouldn't stay single for ever, but for now he was happy with bachelorhood.

\* \* \* \*

"Gran said your talk went well," Ella said to him the following Sunday.

They were having a birthday celebration lunch at his ex-wife Helena's.

He and Helena might have moved on with their lives, but they did have two grown-up children.

"They all seemed pleased," Dan replied.

"Were any of your admirers there?" James, their youngest, asked as he reached for the salt.

"Admirers?" Helena's eyes lit up. "What's this?"

"Leave him be," Simon, Helena's husband, said, and Dan shot him a grateful glance.

It was something when your ex-wife's new partner had to stand up for you!

"Ella thinks my cleaner has a thing for me."

"What do you think?"

James pressed.

"No comment," Dan said.

He'd never hear the end of it if they found out Sheila

had been at the neighbourhood watch talk.

"Pack it in you lot, or I'll be skipping dessert."

"You won't," Ella said confidently. "Mum's made apple crumble."

It had been good doing the talk, Dan thought.

Afterwards, a few of them had retired to the Red Lion to continue the chat.

Sheila had gone along. So had Jo, and it had been quite a shock to discover she and Mark, her long-term partner, had gone their separate ways.

"We're on good terms, like you and Helena. Maybe you and I can catch up for a coffee some time?"

She'd leaned close enough for him to smell her perfume and her eyes had held his for just a fraction too long.

He'd always liked Jo, but after what Ella had said, maybe he was seeing romantic overtures when only friendship was being offered.

It was a good job he was off on a housesitting job soon.

Next week he was babysitting a border terrier called Molly and a flock of rare breed chickens in a country house in Wiltshire.

He would have some time to reflect on things.

"You look miles away," Ella said, jolting him back to the present.

"I just wondered if there was any chance of having a second portion of crumble," he said. "It's delicious."

Ella looked sceptical but stopped interrogating him.

Phew!

More next week.

# Innovative new pillow transforms lives

The Gx Pillow cradles your head and neck to give you an uninterrupted night's sleep

**A** NEAR tragedy has led to an amazing new development in sleep technology. When Georgia Miles was recovering from a serious accident, her father Alexander looked around everywhere for a pillow that would keep her comfortable throughout the night. After examining countless types, Alex, a furniture and domestic product designer, decided to engineer his own.

## UNIQUE BREAKTHROUGH

He made a breakthrough when he realised that all pillows spread out and flatten down as the weight of the head rests on them.

This flattening progresses through the night, leaving the head and neck poorly supported – and sleep interrupted.

This is why many people find themselves half awake and 'pillow-punching' in the middle of the night, desperately trying to get comfortable.

## EXTRA COMFORT AND SUPPORT

The innovative model that Alex designed has internal ties that hold the filling in place, and pull the pillow in and up to cradle the head and neck.

This provides extra comfort and support that lasts through the night and ensures that you get the most benefit from an undisturbed sleep.

**“ I can honestly say that your pillow has made the world of difference... and fully endorse your pillow as being quite unique in its ability to maintain support throughout the night. ”**

Dr Deane Halfpenny, Harley Street Consultant and back pain specialist

## LIFE CHANGING

Delighted customer Ann Morris says: "I've had pain-racked nights for years, but with this unbelievably



effective pillow I can at last sleep through."

Made in Britain, the Gx Pillow comes in a choice of two levels of support: Medium-Soft, which most people seem to prefer, or Medium-Firm for those who like a little more resistance.

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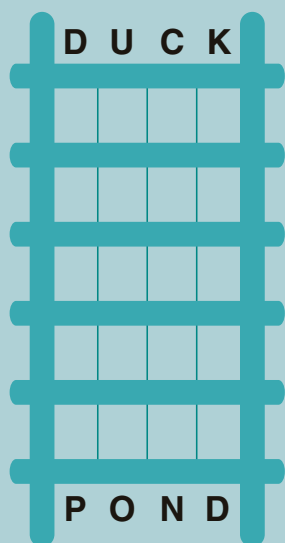


# Brain teasers

Answers  
on p79

## Word Ladder

Move from the word at the top of the ladder to the word at the bottom using the exact number of rungs provided by changing one letter at a time (but not the position of any letter).



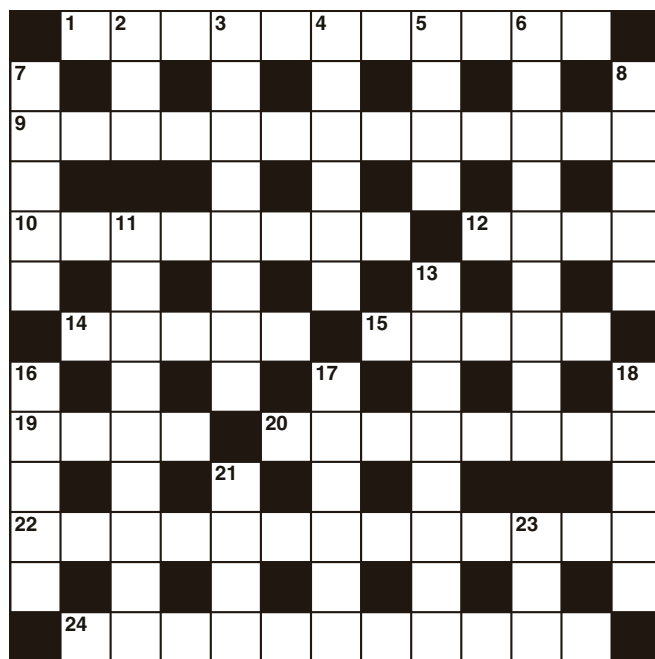
## Try our general knowledge crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Welsh coastal university town (11)
- 9 Lively Scottish dance for several people (9,4)
- 10 Comic verse with irregular rhythm (8)
- 12 Senior Service (4)
- 14 Snail in *The Magic Roundabout* (5)
- 15 First name of Superman's alter ego (5)
- 19 Scotland, in Scottish Gaelic (4)
- 20 Port in S Cyprus (8)
- 22 *Paint It Black* singers (7,6)
- 24 Small dog with a white curly coat (6,5)

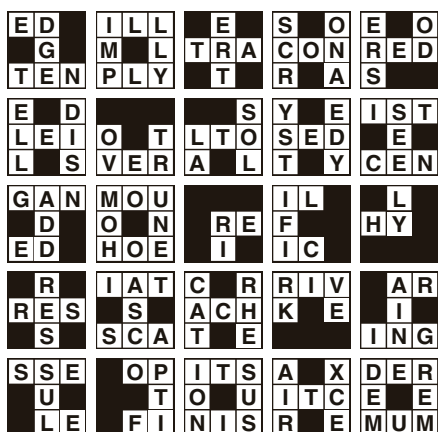
### DOWN

- 2 1988 Tom Hanks film (3)
- 3 Isle of Bute town and part of a royal title (8)
- 4 Surname of Dracula's creator (6)
- 5 Wartime woman sailor (4)
- 6 Roget's dictionary (9)
- 7 Composer of *La Traviata* (5)
- 8 Former county of NE Wales (5)
- 11 Currant biscuit (9)
- 13 Thorny shrub with leathery foliage (8)
- 16 South Pacific republic (5)
- 17 Caribbean islands divided between the UK and USA (6)
- 18 Surname of TV presenter Myleene (5)
- 21 Main ingredient of bouillabaisse (4)
- 23 Employer of doctors and nurses (initialed)(3)



## Pieceword

With the help of the Across clues only, can you fit the pieces into their correct positions in the grid?

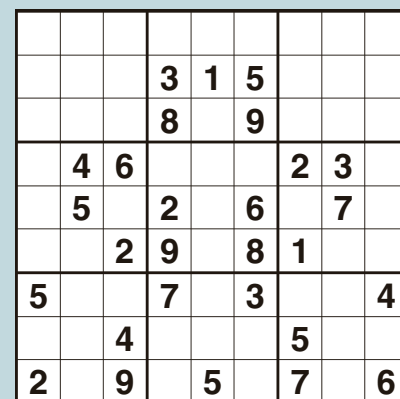


### ACROSS

- 1 Hairstyling foam or creamy dessert • Adult male gosling
- 3 Garden implement • Moved with a pivoted bar • Dad's wife
- 5 In need of a scratch! • Made restitution for
- 7 Poppy narcotic • Extract, refine
- 8 Hawaiian garland of flowers
- 9 Budgetary, monetary • Panoramic
- 11 Female singer • Manage to get to
- 13 Ailing • Achieved success • Possessive pronoun
- 15 Working steadily at • Court sport

## Sudoku

Fill the grid with the numbers 1 to 9 so that each row, column and 3x3 block contains the numbers 1 to 9.



**Puzzler**

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# The Booker Prize

Dawn Geddes anticipates the latest winner of one of the literary world's most prestigious awards.



Hilary Mantel, the 2020 Man Booker favourite.

**I**T'S that time of year again, when literature lovers across the world excitedly await the shortlist announcement for the Booker Prize.

Widely regarded as the most respected and coveted literary prize around, the Booker, which is supported by the charitable foundation Crankstart, was first launched in 1969 and aims to promote the finest fiction, written in English and published in the UK.

This year's longlist features 13 strong novels, including "This Mournable Body" by Tsitsi Dangarembga, "Burnt Sugar" by Avni Doshi and "The Shadow King" by Maaza Mengiste.

Booker favourite Hilary Mantel also appears on the long list with her critically acclaimed epic novel "The Mirror And The Light".

Mantel is no stranger to the Booker Prize. Her previous novels "Wolf Hall" and "Bring Up The Bodies", both featured on the shortlist, before going on to win the sought-after award.

The Booker, which was previously known as the Booker McConnell Prize, was set up by the multinational organisation of the same name.

The company, which made its fortune through shipping, sugar and wholesale goods, had its own authors' division which owned the copyright of

works by Ian Fleming and Agatha Christie.

On the very first year of the prize, the novel "Something To Answer For" by P.H. Newby scooped the winning title.

The inaugural awards ceremony took place in London's Stationers' Hall and saw the Sussex-born winner walk away with a prize fund of £5,000.

Since then, the impact and influence of the Booker Prize has only grown.

The shortlist is used by reading groups internationally, with many clubs working their way through it so that they can reach their own verdict before the official winner is announced.

And they're not the only ones who trust the Booker to point them in the direction of their next great read.

That small *Shortlisted for the Booker Prize* sticker carries huge weight and translates to increased sales.

This sales boost and the publicity opportunities that the shortlist brings can completely transform an author's career.

Take author Graeme Macrae Burnet, whose second novel, "His Bloody Project", was shortlisted in 2016.

The Scots writer, who was working as a painter and decorator by day, was relatively unknown before the announcement, but today his work is

internationally recognised, and his novel has been optioned for a film.

Booker winners, who have included Iris Murdoch, Salman Rushdie and Anne Enright over the years, benefit significantly more.

Not only is there a whopping £50,000 prize fund, but the winner is also given an incredible platform, with world-wide media attention.

For 2014 winner Richard Flanagan, the prize was life-changing.

The author had been contemplating shifting career to work in Australia's mines after disappointing sales numbers.

But following his Booker win, sales of his novel "The Narrow Road" went through the roof, and the author sold more books than he had in the previous ten years combined.

"You are fully aware that you are no longer standing in the same place you had been previously as a writer," Flanagan said, speaking about his win.

Judging an award like the Booker is no easy task, which is why a new judging panel is selected every year.

Judges are selected from a wide range of disciplines and have included critics, authors, poets, politicians and actors.

But despite their varied backgrounds and areas of expertise, the judges all have one thing in common:

## The Booker Prize 2019: A Historic Joint Win

The Booker is shared for the first time.



In 2019, the judges broke the rules by announcing that the winning place would be shared by two authors – Margaret Atwood for her "The Handmaid's Tale" follow-up, "The Testaments", and Bernardine Evaristo for her novel "Girl, Woman, Other", which depicts the realities of being a black woman in today's Britain.

Sharing the prize meant both authors made history, with seventy-nine-year-old Atwood the oldest person to receive the honour, and Evaristo the first black woman to win.



Bernardine Evaristo  
and Margaret Atwood.  
with Camilla, Duchess  
of Cornwall.



a passion for literature.

The 2020 panel is no different, featuring renowned editor, writer, broadcaster and critic Margaret Busby, international bestselling author Lee Child, broadcaster and memoirist Lemn Sissay, literary journalist Sameer Rahim and author and classical studies professor Emily Wilson.

Deciding on a winner for the 2020 crown will not be an easy task for the panel.

And while Hilary Mantel's "The Mirror And The Light" may seem like a safe bet after her two previous wins, the Booker has announced surprising nominees and winners in the past.

Take 2008, for example, when Aravind Adiga's

debut novel "The White Tiger" won the Booker, beating favourites Sebastian Barry, Linda Grant and Amitav Ghosh.

Or the 1985 announcement which saw Keri Hulme's only novel "The Bone People" win top spot over acclaimed novelist Iris Murdoch's "The Good Apprentice".

While the honour of being named this year's champion will be a dream come true for whoever takes the crown, it's undoubtedly true that every author who makes the shortlist is a winner in their own right.

After all, what every author wants more than anything is for their work to be recognised and read. ■

## The International Booker Prize

The Booker Prize's sister award, the International Booker Prize, is awarded annually for a single book, translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland. Every year, six books compete for the highly regarded prize, with the winner being announced in August.

This prestigious award recognises the vital work of translators across the world, with the £50,000 prize funding being equally divided between the translator and author. The 2019 winner was "Celestial Bodies" by Jokha Alharthi, translated by Marilyn Booth.

For further information on the Booker Prize, visit: [thebookerprizes.com](http://thebookerprizes.com).







# A New World

**I**T must be so, Barbara, my dearest friend. But you mustn't cry. We will never truly be apart." Josian held her friend at arm's length.

Barbara had been her childhood playmate, and now they were to part.

"But all the way to London?" Barbara said. "I will be all alone. Can you not dissuade your husband from the move?" She sighed.

"But I am unmarried and know nothing of the negotiations between husband and wife. I am the known spinster of Harwich."

"Mr Wellings will ask for your hand soon, Barbara."

"But you have lived in Harwich since we were little," Barbara said sorrowfully.

Although tired and upset herself, Josian laughed.

"You were never little, Barbara Moore. You sprang from your mother's womb tall and handsome."

---

**Margit needed a saviour, and she might just have found one . . .**

---

Barbara straightened up. She was slender, and above five feet and seven inches.

"You are the handsome and successful one, Josian Jones," she said. "You are a captain's wife."

Josian tucked her arm through her friend's.

"Come, after this news we both need wine, and I know just where the servant put it before she left."

The Jones family – Josian, her ship's captain and merchant husband Christopher and their children – were about to move to a house by the River Thames in London.

The decision had been made with little notice and their house was in turmoil.

The kitchen was terribly untidy and she worried

about rats, with the floor unswept and dishes unwashed.

There was no servant in the house: they had heard of the move and left without ceremony the day before.

"I suppose they wanted to find positions as soon as possible," Barbara said. "Houses in Harwich pick their servants carefully."

Harwich, Josian thought, was a place that thought a lot of itself.

It had sent three ships to join the Virgin Queen's forces against the Armada, and Elizabeth (dead now eight years) had called it a "pretty town".

Harwich still basked in her good opinion.

Treasure looted from the

Armada had made Harwich prosperous, along with cargoes of wool crossing the sea to Holland and beyond.

It was a town run by its merchants, who levied taxes and set laws.

Harwich had been Josian's home for her twenty-seven years, but she had always wanted to see London.

Her husband had trade there and had described the city to her.

Josian suspected that she would be freer in London.

In Harwich everyone knew her business and expected things of her – to set the fashion, to dress her children nicely.

Baby Josian was not yet two and had no say in the matter, but Tom and little Christopher, four and seven, resisted.

"Where are the children?" Barbara sipped her wine.

"Two of them asleep, praise be," Josian said,



"and Christopher happy with his ball in the garden, until he comes in to ask a thousand questions.

"It's a good day if I get half an hour to myself."

"But you'll find a servant soon? Some girl to help you finish packing and manage the children?"

"There's no time. We must leave tomorrow. The carriage is hired and my husband has work to do the following day in London. He says there are servants aplenty there."

"You cannot take an unknown Londoner into your house!" Barbara protested.

"But I must," Josian said, laying a hand on her belly.

"I must have help. With this pregnancy I feel as though I have run ten miles, all the time."

"You are lucky to have healthy children, and a husband like Master Jones," Barbara said.

"Oh, I know," Josian said quickly. Barbara didn't like to hear complaint.

They were the same age but Barbara claimed to be "unpopular with the gentlemen".

She insisted that she didn't mind, and that she was delighted at Josian's good fortune.

"Is John well?"

"I believe so," Barbara said.

John Wellings was curate of one of the Harwich churches, forty years old, bookish and kind with a constant smile.

He was so openly besotted with Barbara that the town laughed at him.

Barbara scolded him for it, but Josian wished her friend would value John more and worry less about social standing.

Even if John Wellings stayed a humble curate, he'd be for ever a loving husband.

The baby started crying. "It begins again," Josian said. "I've so much to do!"

They went upstairs and Josian took the baby from her crib.

She wondered where Christopher was; he hadn't said that he had business at the harbour.

She criss-crossed the

nursery floor, bouncing little Josian as Barbara fretted about losing her friend.

The baby kept on crying and Josian went out into the hall where a small portrait of her husband hung on the wall.

It had been painted on the occasion of his wedding to Sara, his first wife, ten years before Josian and he even met.

He looked young, with a wry expression on his face.

Sara had died when she was just the age Josian was now, and Christopher had looked for a second wife.

Josian Gray had been the sensible choice; widowed at nineteen, and from a good family.

Her alliance with Christopher Jones had been expedient rather than romantic. She had seen the security in it and so had her parents.

Her first marriage had been short and her loss painful; Christopher offered a settled future and an end to the sense of vulnerability that had overwhelmed her.

"But he'll be going to sea," Josian had said to her mother when the match was suggested.

A sailor's life meant storm and disease and shipwreck.

"Mr Jones is a rising fellow," her mother said. "He'll buy more ships and he'll have others sail them."

But Christopher still sailed, and on longer and more challenging voyages.

He was an important Harwich citizen now, an assessor of tax and a burgess, but still with the itch to travel.

Josian heard a crash in the hall below. She leaned over the balustrade.

"Christopher!" she said, hoisting the baby and heading downstairs. "He's broken something."

\* \* \* \*

Margit Taylor stood where the two lanes converged, waiting for Ann.

Their Essex villages lay almost within sight of each other and the two women met often.

Today they were going to walk to the spring fair at

Ramsey, watch the goose sales and look at the tinkers' wares.

"It's the privilege of women too old to be sweethearts but still healthy," Ann would probably say, "to go to the fair and do as we please!"

Ann came strolling down the slope, neat in her white cap, her rough brown skirts swinging.

Ann owned hardly anything while Margit had a little money, as well as the small house that had been her father's and a quarter acre.

They were both happy

"I'll wager you gave her the food from your table"

with their lot: Ann was skilled in medicines, herbs and midwifery, and made a living.

Women healers were not respected, though they plied their trade quietly, everywhere. Men were the "real" physicians.

Ann was teaching Margit, and Margit was gaining confidence.

"Ann Prender!" Margit called out. "You're late!"

Ann waved a dismissive hand, and Margit put her hands on her hips in mock impatience.

"Three women came to my door for remedies just as I was putting my cap on," Ann said when she reached her friend.

"What remedies?" Margit asked. "There's a cold in the head going about but it cannot be hastened away with anything you have in your cupboard."

"I know that, Margit Taylor. No, the first request was for a leg poultice. The owner arrived just as I prepared to leave. A simple rash was all it was."

"And then?"

"I advised the next patient to eat meat – her blood looked pale within her. I sent her away with –"

"With meat?" Margit interrupted. "I'll wager you gave her the food from your table."

"I had liver to spare."

"No, you didn't."

Ann shrugged.

"I reckoned my good

friend Margit Taylor would buy me a pie at the fair. Don't you want to know about the third visitor?"

"Tell me, then."

"It was Mary Webster. She wanted to know why her son was silent, except when angry with her."

"And you told her that every boy of fifteen is silent and angry, and that if he's not then he's strange and has the devil in him!"

Both women laughed, and they set off to the fair.

Margit was forty-one years old, the daughter of a Colchester bookbinder. Her parents had died in a fire

when she was young.

Only Ann knew how much the memory of that terrible day still haunted Margit.

Before their death Margit had spent much of her time with the books that were her father's trade.

Samuel Taylor had finally agreed to teach his child to read after she had begged for it for years.

Once she could read, she devoured everything that passed through the doors of the workshop.

Margit and Ann understood each other because they both loved to learn.

Ann's passion was herbs and remedies. Her husband had been an herbalist.

Margit loved legends and myths of the classical world, but she knew that to make a living she must understand medicines.

Since her parents' death she had been in service in large houses in Harwich.

She preferred gardening work because it kept her outdoors and away from the politics of the kitchen, and there was just enough of such work to supplement the produce of her cottage garden.

She never touched the little store of money that had come to her from her father, treating it instead as security for her old age.

But somehow its existence had become known and Margit

had received several offers of marriage. "You can't marry him, he hasn't a thought in his head," Ann would protest when some mud-stained farmer came, hat in hand.

Margit agreed. She saw no need for a husband. Ann had been widowed young and didn't, either.

But they felt eyes upon them: their choice was deemed eccentric, and people were suspicious.

Ann and Margit didn't worry. They lived quietly and talked together.

Ann couldn't read so Margit read to her – any book she could borrow on remedies.

"Rachel Wilson will be brought to bed within the week," Ann said. "I think it's twins.

"She's a tiny creature and her husband, that great oaf of a sailor, is in Spain, so I worry. Will you attend with me?"

Margit's heart leapt. She had been learning midwifery and this was a chance!

"I would value that very much," she said.

"Then we will not spend all day at Ramsey, for Rachel might start soon.

"We must keep these skills going – even humble women are thinking they need some town doctor to deliver their babies!"

\* \* \* \*

Little Christopher looked repentant. Josian and Barbara had found him standing over an open trunk, its hinges broken.

"You opened it so you could play," Josian scolded.

"I thought it might make a boat," the child said.

The front door creaked open and the handsome face of Sir William Spenny appeared.

"I've come at a bad time?" he asked, grinning at little Christopher. His dark eyes danced.

"Not at all, sir," Josian said. "Please come in."

Sir William was a new acquaintance of Christopher's and she must make him welcome, even with the house chaotic.

He was younger than her husband, dashing and well

dressed, a man with a private income who had taken an interest in the wine trade.

He hoped to be an investor in Christopher's import business.

"I have a man at my house who can mend that, Mistress Jones," he said. "Let me send for him."

"But I've no servant to send. We leave for London tomorrow."

He looked appalled.

"Harwich will be a poor place without you," he said.

"Indeed," Barbara said.

"No lady lights up our town like Josian."

Sir William pondered.

"I will find a street boy and pay him a halfpenny for the errand," he said.

While he was gone, and once little Christopher was banished to his room, Barbara turned to Josian.

"He's in love with you."

"Don't be foolish," Josian said. "And don't be wicked."

"Why not? Why should he not yearn for the prettiest woman in Harwich?"

"He's charming to all women. And I'm married, Barbara. Twice married, in fact, and —"

They were interrupted by the return of Sir William coming in from the street.

"How can such a beautiful lady have two marriages behind her already?"

"The second, sir, is not behind me," Josian said with a smile.

"That's true," he said.

"My error. But there are men who would give a great deal to be a third."

Barbara giggled, and Josian smiled politely. Sir William was amusing, that was certain, but possibly a little dangerous.

\* \* \* \*

The first person Ann and Margit came across at the fair was Humphrey Bartle, a man of fifty-five with a red nose who had twice asked Margit to marry him.

The second time, Margit recalled, he had been indignant and resentful.

A man did not like to be rejected by a woman he deemed neither young nor lovely enough to be fussy.

"Margit Taylor," Mr Bartle said with a curt nod.

"Master Bartle," Margit said with a smile.

He looked at Ann, his small eyes narrowing.

"You gave something to my brother's child, after Eastertide," he said.

"Was that Lisbeth Yardley?" Ann said. "Yes, I helped the girl."

"She had trouble with the kidneys, poor child, and was in pain. I used soapwort which —"

"She had a physician already," he interrupted.

"Yes, that gentleman came just as I had put away my jar of tincture."

"He attends all my family. My brother's wife is a silly woman and thought she needed the services of . . ." He looked the two women up and down, and Margit felt a chill run up her spine.

He could speak against a person if he chose – he had the ear of local men.

"I'm sure the physician made the same judgement about Lisbeth," Ann said, apparently unaware of Bartle's hostility.

"I hope the tincture was effective."

Margit swallowed: all she could think of was the recent whispers about witches and bad women.

Humphrey Bartle left them and entered the tent where there was beer on sale for the men.

The two women walked on, but Margit didn't share her unease with Ann. It was a day for pleasure.

Behind a pen packed with rams, a woman sat beside a girl of thirteen.

The girl had her arms wrapped around herself, leaning against her mother.

"Is the child hurt?" Margit asked.

The mother looked up at them and grimaced.

"She's not used to her monthly pains."

Ann crouched and tilted the girl's pale, narrow face towards her own.

"It's a bad thing to have at a fair. Let's see what can be done." She looked up at Margit. "We know something for this, I think."

"Lemon balm," Margit said with a confident nod.

"You are a mistress of physic already, my friend," Ann said with a smile.

The child looked at them. "There's a medicine?"

Ann nodded.

"Mistress Taylor, could you find some of that plant? There are cottage gardens all about. I will consult with our patient."

It didn't take long for Margit to find lemon balm growing from under a wall.

She borrowed a cup and fetched water, pressing the leaves in to steep them.

She hurried back, giving the girl a reassuring smile as she handed over her potion.

To her left, she saw three men approaching. One was Humphrey Bartle.

They stopped and looked at the women and the girl. Bartle murmured to his companions and they frowned.

"Better," the girl said, handing back the cup. She gave them a weak smile.

"That's good," Ann said. "God bless you."

The two friends walked away.

"It doesn't work that quickly," Margit said softly.

"The effect can come as much from the attention given by the nurse," Ann said, smiling.

"The child was worried. My kneeling beside her, and your fetching a cure – those were partly the medicine she needed."

They laughed and chatted as they went, but then Margit saw the men again, following at a distance. Humphrey was talking.

She imagined what he was saying – that women ought to keep their quack cures inside the home; that stubborn, unmarried women especially were not to be trusted.

"He calls us 'wise women', and worse names," she said to Ann.

Ann glanced at the men.

"But he knows we do no harm. It's just that he never forgave your refusing him."

"He takes it out on me, making up stories about us."

Humphrey Bartle melted away, but later Margit saw him again, a little drunk, leaning against a tent post.

Margit stopped a few feet from him.



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Something flared up in her; an urge to mock him, which she knew was unwise.

But she had an independent streak – she had often thought that it was this that stopped her taking a husband.

"We have potions to ease a broken heart," she said with an arch smile.

His face reddened.

"I know you," he said. "I know what you women brew in secret, and what devils you summon."

"Devils?" Margit said. She felt Ann's hand on her arm. "I'm as God-fearing as you, Master Bartle. Probably more so." She couldn't resist baiting him, fool that he was.

"Be quiet!" he shouted, making Margit jump. She knew he was embarrassed.

At that moment another fleshy male face popped out of the tent, pushing the canvas flap aside.

The man was dressed handsomely and Margit guessed he was a burgess, or at least a Harwich merchant.

"What's the trouble, Bartle?" the man asked. Margit felt uneasy.

She had intended only to mock Humphrey; it was more serious if other men came to his defence.

She and Ann had no power, and if Humphrey chose, he could blacken their names.

The fleshy man came outside the tent. Voices called him back to his ale.

Humphrey took both Ann and Margit by the wrist. She smelled ale on him.

"We've heard the tales of these women bothering folk in other towns," he said to the fleshy man.

"They claim to practise cures," the other man said.

"They're no physicians," Humphrey said. "People talk about satanic acts."

"Satanic?" Ann said, shocked. Margit felt guilty that she had got her friend into this situation.

"We gave the girl nothing," Margit said quickly. Her response had come out wrong: it sounded like denial, or even a lie.

"We saw it," Bartle said.

"There were witnesses."

The word brought to mind a court of law rather than a country fair, and Margit felt cold.

Women had been tried for witchcraft in other places – everyone knew it.

Humphrey Bartle was more threatening than she expected and she regretted mocking him.

Another man emerged from the tent. From his close-fitting black cap and ruff, Margit recognised him as a minister of the church.

She wondered if he'd seen them helping the girl.

"Fire awaits such women," the priest said.

He means the fires of hell, Margit thought, not earthly fire.

Nevertheless, her hand began to shake. Any mention of flames made her agitated.

"Oh, leave the women alone!" a muffled voice from inside the tent said.

"Let us alone, Norton!" Humphrey called back, grumpy and impatient.

"And Jones – you drink your ale and let responsible men do their duty."

"... and shall cast them into the furnace of fire," the priest said.

Margit felt faint. All she could think of was the day her father's workshop burned down, the sight of the flames as she came home, the thick black plume rising into the sky. Books were an ideal fuel.

Margit felt a frantic urge to run. She caught a glimpse of the lane, beyond the hedge, that led to the Harwich road.

The sides of the ale tent billowed and she knew that men were coming out.

If she picked up her skirts and ran, she could be away before they could follow.

She groped beside her for Ann's hand, thinking to take her friend with her.

But Ann had taken a step towards Bartle, her hand held up in conciliation.

Sweet, clever, innocent Ann would always choose persuasion! Bartle wouldn't punish Ann because she did not challenge him. The object of his anger was Margit.

She ran. In three seconds

she was halfway to the hedge.

A boy with a young pig on the end of a string crossed the path behind her just as she pushed open the gate and – bless them! – they made a barrier between her and the men behind her as she set off along the lane.

The pig squealed angrily; voices barked in fury. She heard the boy protesting.

The voices receded, and Margit knew she was out of sight.

\* \* \* \*

Josian's husband came back hot and tired, and greeted Sir William and Barbara politely but wearily.

He asked Spenny to come into his room and smoke tobacco, but the two were not friends and Sir William knew the invitation was only good manners.

He said he had an appointment and Christopher escorted him to the door, talking in vague terms about wine.

"He comes here only for you," Barbara whispered.

"Don't, Barbara." Josian shook her head in irritation.

Barbara herself left a moment later, off to dine with Mr Wellings.

Little Christopher appeared at the head of the stairs, followed by his brother Tom.

He looked sheepish but Josian knew he would risk a fresh scolding, just to be able to see his father.

"Did you go to the fair, Father?" Tom asked.

"What did they have?" little Christopher asked.

"I've been with friends, yes," their father said.

"Now, what has happened to this trunk?"

"He's been punished for the breakage," Josian said.

She saw her husband hesitate and wondered if he would reprimand the boy, but he looked up at his oldest son and said nothing.

Sometimes Josian did not know if the children interested him; other times, when he showed mercy, she thought he loved them as much she did.

"The Ramsey fair," she

said. "I'd forgotten."

He didn't say anything more about his day. He rarely did.

But Josian had resolved long ago not to mind: she would manage her aspects of the house while he managed his.

She looked at her husband's profile, searching his face for any sign of jealousy that Spenny had called on her again.

Sir William had visited her alone enough that a husband might be displeased, and Sir William was the most charming man in Harwich.

Something in her wanted Christopher to notice, but she knew it was an indulgent thought.

He looked from his sons to his wife, regarding her for a moment before going into his study. Josian stood, looking at the closed door.

Tom began to hum a ballad that his brother was teaching him.

"My Robin is to the greenwood gone," Tom sang in his pretty, piping voice. It sounded melancholy to Josian.

A question popped into her head: do I love him? Just then Christopher came running down the stairs.

"Tom has the tune wrong and is a booby and a fool!" he yelled, and the moment was broken.

\* \* \* \*

Margit ran a full mile towards the town and walked as fast as she could for the rest.

She had no idea what she would do next, but she knew that running away made her look guilty.

Going back to her village was impossible now: if Bartle and his friends had suspected her to be a witch before, how much more certain were they now?

She worried about Ann, but there was nothing to do.

The country lanes gave way to houses, and then to a row of commercial buildings.

Crammed between a ropemaker and a blacksmith was the tiny shop of a bookseller. The sweet sight of it made



Margit's pulse slow down.

She tried the door and found it open.

The interior was dimly lit and in a corner was the aged bookseller himself, asleep in a chair.

Margit ran her hand along a shelf and breathed the scent of paper and cloth and leather.

The book at the end of the shelf had a tooled spine.

"The Myth of Odysseus," she read, and below, "by Bartholomew McCutcheon-Parfitt". Margit smiled. Her father would have laughed at the name.

"Too much for one short spine," he would have said.

She regained her composure, left the shop and set off again. Rounding a corner into a street of handsome houses, she collided with a dashing man in a crimson coat.

He stopped, frowned, and ignored her as she passed.

She saw him glance back at one of the houses where a casement window had just been opened by a young woman.

The woman held a baby. The man, splendid in lace collar and with luscious black hair in the latest fashion, watched the young woman for a moment.

He had a strange look on his face – desire, perhaps?

Then the gentleman strode off, and the baby at the window began wailing.

Behind the mother two small boys could be seen jumping on a bed.

"Husband!" the woman called out, and a man of about Margit's age entered the room.

"I do not know how all this will be done," the woman said above the noise. "No servant, and tomorrow to Rotherhithe."

Margit had no idea where Rotherhithe was, but an idea was forming in her head and she didn't care if it was in darkest Africa.

If she could persuade this harassed young woman to employ her, and if this family was leaving Harwich tomorrow, then they might just be her saviours.

A minute later she was knocking on their door, and the lady was opening it.

Half hidden among her skirts was one of the boys.

"I heard you are in want of servants," Margit said.

"I cannot open a prayer book in Harwich but somebody knows all about it." The lady sighed.

"It was my sister here in Harwich who told me," Margit lied.

She held her breath in case the lady asked the name of the sister.

A clock chimed inside the house and the lady looked flustered.

"We must quit so soon, and so much still to be done." She looked at Margit, who smiled encouragingly.

"Are you strong?"

"As an ox," Margit said.

"Can you go to London, and stay there?"

"It has been a dream of mine to go."

"Your sister won't miss you?"

"We are not . . . close."

"What's your name?"

Margit stared at her for a second. She hadn't thought about the various aspects of reinventing oneself.

"Parfitt," she said, thinking of the volume of Greek myths. "Margaret Parfitt."

"A good name," the lady said. "Parfitt. That's another word for perfect.

Well, I will employ you, Margaret." She stood aside. "Come in. I am Josian Jones, wife of Captain Jones of whom you have perhaps heard?"

Margit hadn't, but she nodded.

"You've no belongings?" Mistress Jones asked.

Margit was startled again, and had no idea what to say, but at that moment the baby let out a wail in the room above, Josian Jones hurried away, and Margit saw a trunk.

She began to pack items into it and nobody stopped her. How easy it was to become part of a household!

**To be continued.**

# The Farmer & His Wife



## John Taylor goes to Perth – and brings home the bacon!

**A**NNE and I enjoy a nice trip to Perth. Our daughter, Mary, usually joins us. She and Anne go bargain-hunting.

That leaves me to wander about.

I usually go to the museum first. I can spend two hours just looking.

And I invariably pop into the delicatessen.

There are butchers' shops, too. I compare what we sold the last lamb or bullock for with the price tag on the meat.

One day, I fancied a bacon and egg sandwich.

"A pound of bacon, please. Smoked back, and cut at number eight."

"We don't cut bacon, sir. But you'll find this pack to your satisfaction."

"What is it cut at?"

I could see the bacon was so thin it would just shrivel away in the pan.

I didn't buy his bacon. I made my way back to the lounge of the hotel in not too good a mood.

Anne and Mary arrived, plus parcels.

"What's the matter with you, Dad?" Our Mary had taken one look at my face and guessed something was wrong.

I told them my bacon story. I didn't get any sympathy.

"What are you going to do? Write to the papers?"

"I'm going to buy a fitch

and hang it from a nail in the kitchen ceiling. I'll be able to cut rashers to any thickness I want!"

"Not in my kitchen, you won't," Anne informed me.

Anne says times have changed. I agree – but not for the better, if you have to take what the butcher offers, not what you want.

"Dad, why don't you buy a piglet, and put it in the sty?"

Mary can remember the old sty and the pigs we kept in her young days.

I didn't immediately agree to Mary's suggestion. I didn't say no, either.

"John – one will be no good. Get two."

I knew a piglet on its own would pine. I also knew from the way she spoke, Anne was trying to put me off.

"That's an idea. I'll go to Cupar on Tuesday and buy four young pigs."

"John – you'll do nothing of the sort!"

I didn't buy young pigs, but I bought a fitch. I wasn't allowed to put a hook in the kitchen beam, but I did hang it in the dairy.

Anne has never refused a thick bacon sandwich . . . ■



**More  
next  
week**

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# Midweek *Medley*

Easy-to-make recipes for when you're in a hurry!

## Cheat's Carbonara with Pancetta and Mushrooms

Course: **main**

Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**

- ❑ **250 g (9 oz) spaghetti**
- ❑ **100 g (3½ oz) cubed pancetta**
- ❑ **6 mushrooms, sliced**
- ❑ **A little oil or butter, if needed, for frying**
- ❑ **1 carton Paysan Breton French Sea Salt cream cheese (at room temperature)**
- ❑ **Small handful of flat leaf parsley, chopped**
- ❑ **Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

**To Serve: grated Parmesan.**

**1** Cook the spaghetti in boiling water as per the pack instructions.

**2** Meanwhile, cook the pancetta in a large frying-pan and once it is crispy, set to one side. Add the mushrooms to the pan and cook until golden. You may need to add a splash of oil or a little butter if your pan seems dry. Put the pancetta back into the pan and add the cream cheese over a low heat and let it melt.

**3** Drain the pasta, reserving half a mug of cooking water. Add the spaghetti to the pan with the chopped parsley and some black pepper. Stir everything together gently and add the reserved cooking water a little at a time to achieve a silky sauce.

**4** Serve immediately with grated Parmesan.



## Mushroom, Chicken and Tarragon Pot Pie

Course: **main**

Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**

- ❑ **Olive oil**
- ❑ **1 onion, chopped**
- ❑ **Salt and pepper, to taste**
- ❑ **300 g (10½ oz) closed cup mushrooms, chopped**
- ❑ **320 g (11¼ oz) diced boneless and skinless chicken thigh**
- ❑ **1 tbs dried tarragon**
- ❑ **2 tbs plain flour**
- ❑ **300 ml (½ pt) chicken stock**
- ❑ **3 tbs milk**
- ❑ **1 sheet of puff pastry**

**To Serve: seasonal vegetables of choice.**

**1** Heat the oven to 200 deg. C., 400 deg. F., Gas Mark 6.

**2** Heat a little olive oil in a saucepan and add the chopped onion. Season a little and cook



[www.justaddmushrooms.com](http://www.justaddmushrooms.com)

gently until softening. Add the chopped mushrooms, chicken and tarragon and cook for about 5 minutes or until the mushrooms have softened and the chicken is starting to cook through.

**3** Add the flour to the pan and whisk in the stock. Cook for

2 minutes until it starts to thicken then add 2 tablespoons of the milk and cook for one more minute.

**4** Pour the sauce into the pan with the chicken and mushrooms then divide the mix between 4 small pie dishes.

**5** Cut a pastry lid the size of

the inside of each dish and lay on top of the mushroom and chicken mixture. Brush with the remaining milk. Run a fork around each edge to press it to the side of each pie dish and bake in the pre-heated oven for 10 to 15 minutes until the pastry is golden and risen. Serve with seasonal vegetables.

## Pukka Bubble and Squeak Sweet Potato Skins

Course: **main**

Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**

- ❑ **2 large sweet potatoes, roughly 350 g (12 oz) each**
- ❑ **1 tbs butter**
- ❑ **100 g (3½ oz) mushrooms, finely sliced**
- ❑ **70 g (2½ oz) green cabbage, shredded finely**
- ❑ **3 spring onions, sliced finely**
- ❑ **60 g (2¼ oz) grated Cheddar**
- ❑ **Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

**To Serve: Pukka pie.**

**1** Pre-heat oven to 200 deg. C., 400 deg. F., Gas Mark 6.

**2** Pierce the sweet potatoes several times with the point of a sharp knife and microwave on full power for 10 minutes, or until tender. (If you don't have a microwave you can cook them



[www.pukkapies.co.uk](http://www.pukkapies.co.uk)

in the oven for 35 to 40 mins at 200 deg. C., 400 deg. F., Gas Mark 6.)

**3** Meanwhile, melt the butter in a small non-stick frying-pan, then fry the mushrooms until they have released any liquid and are nutty brown in colour. Next, add the cabbage and spring onions and continue cooking until soft.

**4** Cut the cooked potatoes in half lengthways (being careful as they will be hot) then scoop the flesh out into a small mixing bowl. Mash the sweet potato with a fork until smooth, then add the mushroom and cabbage mixture, half the cheese and mix everything together to combine. Season to taste.

**5** Place the sweet potato skins on to a baking tray, then spoon the sweet potato mixture back into the skins and sprinkle over the remaining cheese. Bake in the pre-heated oven for 15 to 20 mins or until the cheese is melted and golden brown.

**6** Serve alongside a Pukka pie for a tasty and hearty meal.

*Remember: recipes have been given in both metric and imperial. It is important to use one method throughout as they are not exactly the same.*



## ▶ SPAM® Kotlety Schabowy

Course: **main**

Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**

Kotlety schabowy is a Polish dish of pork cutlet coated with breadcrumbs and fried.

- ❑ **1 SPAM® Chopped Pork and Ham 340 g can (cut into 8 slices)**
  - ❑ **250 g (9 oz) plain flour**
  - ❑ **1 large egg (beaten with 1 tsp water)**
  - ❑ **250 g (9 oz) breadcrumbs (or panko crumbs)**
  - ❑ **125 ml (4 fl oz) vegetable oil**
  - ❑ **Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- To Serve: boiled potatoes; green vegetables; apple sauce (optional).**



spam-uk.com.

**1** Cover slices of SPAM® Chopped Pork and Ham in flour, followed by egg-water mixture, then breadcrumbs or panko crumbs. Allow slices to dry for

10 minutes before frying.

**2** Heat oil to a depth of 1 inch in a large frying-pan. Fry in small batches for 5 to 7 minutes per side until golden. Place on a

heatproof plate in a warm oven (pre-heated to 130 deg. C., 250 deg F., Gas Mark ½) covered with foil and until the slices are used up. Alternatively, use two

pans to speed up the process.

**3** Serve hot with boiled potatoes, a green vegetable like Brussels sprouts and apple sauce, if liked.

## Sausage Hotpot

Course: **main**

Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4-6**

- ❑ **400 g (14 oz) large, good quality sausages (about 6)**
- ❑ **1 tbs light olive or vegetable oil**
- ❑ **1 red onion, cut into wedges**
- ❑ **100 g (3½ oz) pearl barley, rinsed**
- ❑ **½ tsp dried oregano**
- ❑ **Pinch of dried crushed chillies or chilli powder**
- ❑ **1 vegetable stock cube, plus 500 ml (18 fl oz) boiling water**
- ❑ **3 carrots, peeled and sliced diagonally into 3 or 4 pieces**
- ❑ **1 red pepper, diced roughly**
- ❑ **1 x 400 g carton or tin chopped tomatoes**
- ❑ **150 ml (¼ pt) Eisberg Rosé**
- ❑ **Few sprigs of fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped**
- ❑ **Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**



www.eisberg.co.uk.

**1** Pre-heat oven to 190 deg. C., 375 deg. F., Gas Mark 5.

**2** Place the sausages on a baking tray and cook in the pre-heated oven for 20 to 25 minutes or until cooked through and golden, then set aside.

**3** Meanwhile heat the oil in a large saucepan or lidded ovenproof dish and fry the onion

for 2-3 minutes. Then stir in the barley, oregano, chillies and 400 ml (14 fl oz) of the stock.

**4** Bring to a simmer, cover with a lid, then either place in the oven for 20 minutes or turn down the heat and cook on the hob for 10 minutes. Stir occasionally and add a little more of the stock if required.

**5** Add the carrots, red pepper, chopped tomatoes and Eisberg Rosé, re-cover and cook for a further 20 minutes.

**6** Check that the barley is tender. Slice each of the sausages into about 3 pieces and add to the dish with the parsley and a good grind of black pepper. Heat through and serve.

**Next week: tasty recipes for autumn.**

**For more delicious recipes visit our website: [www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk](http://www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk).**



# The Health Kick

Stuart was beginning to realise that dieting was easier said than done . . .

**T**URNING into the confectionery aisle, Stuart skidded to a halt. At the bottom of the aisle, the familiar sight of his next-door neighbour caught his attention.

Panic took hold of him and he stood rooted to the spot, wondering what to do.

Luckily she hadn't noticed him, especially here and especially considering how friendly she was with his wife, Laura.

The conversation which would take place were he to be caught flashed through his mind.

His neighbour, full of the thrills of gossip, would take great pleasure in telling Laura all about what she had witnessed.

How Stuart had been spotted breaking the promise he'd made to Laura seven days before.

For the past week Laura had become obsessed with living a healthy lifestyle.

Every tasty treat in their house had been replaced by a variety of healthier options, all designed to help the couple lose weight and feel more energised.

Chocolate was banned, along with crisps and anything else Laura deemed wasteful for the body.

The items which took their place all seemed to begin with the letter K. Kale, kiwi, kumquat – even the quinoa sounded and tasted like everything else!



Stuart had tried to show solidarity, and not just because it was always best to agree with Laura when she had a bee in her bonnet about something.

And the thought of losing weight seemed good, especially as he wasn't getting any younger.

Looking after his health should be a priority, or at least he had thought so.

What he hadn't bargained for was how incredibly difficult the day-to-day existence on a diet would become.

The past seven days had felt like some of the worst in his life, with intense cravings for the pleasures of sugary foods and salty nachos.

It had reached the stage where he couldn't sleep without dreaming about junk food.

Turning on his heel, Stuart raced to the next aisle in the supermarket, hoping he could hide there until his neighbour was gone.

Surrounded by organic food, Stuart congratulated himself on his swift escape, and to such a fortunate place.

On the off-chance his neighbour decided to make her way down this aisle, at least she would only have good things to report back to Laura.

\* \* \* \*

"What are you doing?"

Stuart froze as the familiar sound of Laura's voice rang in his ears.

In his rush to avoid their neighbour, his wife's presence had gone unnoticed.

Turning to face her, he smiled brightly.

"This is a nice surprise," he replied. "I wasn't expecting to see you here. Shouldn't you be at work?"

Laura studied him through narrowed eyes.

"It's lunchtime," she replied. "Why are you hovering around the baby food?"

Stuart glanced at the shelf beside him.

With no children of their own, it must have looked odd to find him perusing the jars of mush neatly lined up to attract the attention of new parents.

Stuart's mind raced, searching for an excuse.

"Lunch," he replied, in a

tone which implied the baby food aisle was the most natural place in the world to be looking for it.

Laura's brow furrowed, clearly unimpressed with this explanation.

"I saw an article online about organic baby food and how beneficial it is for your metabolism."

"All the A-listers are eating it," Stuart elaborated, surprising himself with the story falling out of his mouth.

"I thought it might be worth a try. As part of your healthy living thing."

Laura's face softened, "Oh, Stu," she replied, rubbing his shoulder tenderly. "I really appreciate how seriously you're taking this."

Stuart felt a little guilty. If only she knew what he had really been up to.

"You don't need to resort to eating baby food, though," Laura said, looking at the jars of mush with concern.

Stuart breathed a sigh of relief. Thankfully his wife wasn't willing to take up any old healthy eating fad, especially ones plucked out of thin

air by her husband. "I suppose you're right," he said, pulling her in for a hug. "Best to stick to the grown-up food."

"Let me help you choose something better for your lunch."

She smiled, taking his hand and leading him towards the salad counter.

Stuart had no choice but to follow her.

Looking over his shoulder, his heart dropped as the confectionery aisle faded into the distance. His longed-for reunion with a bag of chocolatey goodness would just have to wait.

Back at the office, Stuart picked at the bland bowl of leaves his wife had lovingly selected for him at the salad bar.

Devoid of coleslaw or pasta to inject some flavour, it was a lunch more suited to Bugs Bunny than a grown man like himself.

Stuart shoved a leaf of lettuce into his mouth and chewed miserably.

He had hoped to make it to the snack van after they left the supermarket.

He could have been tucking into a juicy cheeseburger right now if he had.

Unfortunately, Laura had scuppered that plan, insisting on walking him to his office. It was on her way, after all.

"Laura still got you eating the rabbit food then?" Keith, his boss, smirked.

Stuart stared at him, expressionless.

"You need to tell her how you feel," Keith said.

"I can't," Stuart replied, leaning back in his chair and breathing in the faint waft of curry sauce from someone else's lunch. "She needs me to be on side with it all."

"But you're not!" Keith exclaimed. "No matter how much you keep it up to make Laura happy, you're not on side with it."

"You're only storing up trouble for yourself down the line."

"How do you mean?" Stuart asked, throwing the rest of his salad in the bin.

"Laura is doing this because she wants you

guys to be healthier," Keith explained.

"Telling yourself what you can and can't eat is only making you crave it more."

"You might lose weight now, but it's not sustainable long term."

Stuart mulled Keith's words over. They seemed to make sense, but still, Laura wouldn't accept excuses like that.

"I'm sure it'll be fine. Once I get past the initial cravings, my system will settle into the new routine."

Keith smirked, walking towards the microwave, where his own less healthy lunch was ready for him.

"If you say so."

Staring at his computer screen, Stuart felt guilty for nearly falling off the weight loss wagon earlier.

Laura was so dedicated to getting healthy, and at the end of the day, her reasons for the health kick were only good ones.

She cared about him as much as he cared about her, and wanted them to live a long and healthy life together.

They always said they would be a team, letting nothing divide them, so it felt wrong to be dishonest with his feelings.

After all, wasn't that what marriage was about? Being honest with each other and working as a team?

Scrolling through the various posts on his social media feed, Stuart wondered if perhaps Keith was right. Maybe he should just admit he was finding the whole healthy living thing impossible.

It would make life easier. As he mulled the idea over, it occurred to Stuart how difficult it might be for Laura to see him eating a sausage roll while she had something healthy.

No. It wouldn't be fair. He and Laura were a team, and he wanted to keep being a good teammate.

Focusing on his screen, Stuart silently promised to try harder for her. Then a post caught his eye.

*New foodstore open now! Everything you need for a new you!*

New Stuart studied the advert flickering brightly on the

screen before him. It seemed to be for a new health store.

He clicked on the advert, and the screen opened up to a website with various pictures of ready-made meals, freshly prepared by a team of chefs, and all less than 500 calories.

They looked more appetising than the food Laura had been creating lately. Excitement buzzed through Stuart's body. This was the kind of healthiness he could get on board with.

If he went to the shop after work, he could pick up a couple of meals and have them ready for Laura coming home.

Feeling more positive than he had all week, Stuart smiled, hoping this was the solution to his problem.

After work, he walked to the narrow street off the main shopping area, where the advert had informed him the healthy food store was located.

Rainclouds filled the sky, warning of the bad weather to come.

Picking up the pace, Stuart made his way past an array of salons, beauty parlours and independent businesses, keeping an eye out for his destination. Suddenly, he spotted his wife.

Stopping in the street, he stared at her through the window of a bakery as she stood by the counter, mulling over a display of brightly coloured cakes.

Oblivious to his presence, she smiled as the assistant behind the counter began taking cakes from the cabinet, placing them in a white cardboard box, while Laura tapped her bank card against the top of the debit card machine.

"What are you doing?" Stuart asked.

Laura jumped, startled by his question.

Her face reddened as she fumbled for words, clearly struggling to find a way to explain herself.

"It's not what it looks like," she said, pushing Stuart out of the shop and into the street.

He laughed.

"You're buying cakes.

Admit it."

Stuart chuckled as his wife fidgeted from foot to foot, unwilling to admit she had submitted to temptation.

"OK, you got me," she said, clearly ashamed of herself. "I'm a terrible person, and after you doing so well, too . . ."

"Don't be daft," Stuart replied. "You're not a bad person just because you want some cake."

"I'm struggling with the whole healthy living thing, too. I just didn't want to tell you in case you felt let down."

Laura stared at Stuart, her eyes concerned.

"You should have told me," she said. "Now we both know, maybe we can work harder together."

Stuart's smile tensed, Keith's words from earlier rattling around in his brain.

Maybe the way they were going about the new eating regime was just storing up trouble for later.

Both of them were clearly struggling more than they cared to admit.

It wouldn't do them any good in the long run if they lost weight now, only to put it all back on at a later date.

"You know what, I have a better idea," Stuart said, glancing down the street to the health food store.

"There's nothing wrong with a treat every now and again."

"Maybe some days we can eat healthily, and on others we can indulge."

Laura turned to look at the bakery, where her cakes sat on the counter waiting for her.

"Yeah," she said. "And exercise is always a lot more beneficial than dieting anyway."

"Maybe we could work a lunchtime walk together into our days. Burn off the calories, rather than avoiding them, and we'll get to spend more time together, too."

"Sounds perfect," Stuart replied, stepping back into the bakery.

"But we can start that tomorrow. Today feels to me like a cream cake kind of day." ■



# An inspiring tale of friendship through war-torn Europe

## Ashes

By Christopher de Vinck

In the opening days of World War II, eighteen-year-old Simone Lyon lives in fear that the Nazis will invade her beloved Belgium.

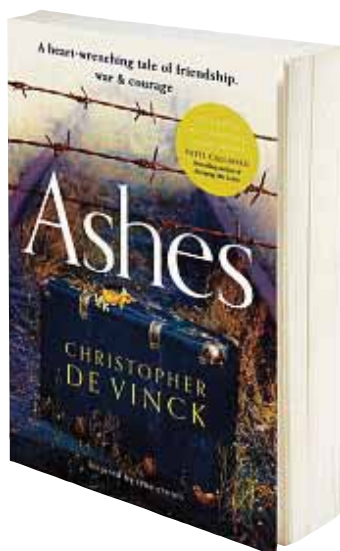
Left alone after her father, General Lyon, disappears to rejoin the Resistance, she takes solace in her blossoming friendship with Hava Daniels. But Hava is a Jew – and when the Nazis arrive in a blaze of battle Simone knows she must save her friend from the horrors to come. And so begins their dangerous flight across war-torn Europe.

This inspiring story never shirks from the horror of war and invasion, but through it all the strength of the girls' friendship shines through. Afraid they might be, but Simone and Hava are both heroines in every sense of the word. A moving and heart-breaking read.

RRP £8.99

★★★★★

*For fans of "The Tattooist Of Auschwitz"*



## Just The Two Of Us

By Jo Wilde

On the eve of their wedding anniversary, Julie has decided she's had enough of her husband, Michael.

Then lockdown is announced and Julie and Michael find themselves stuck together 24/7. Can their relationship be repaired before it's too late? A brilliantly warm story for our times.

RRP £8.99

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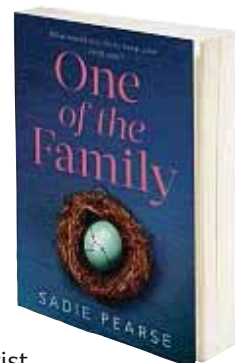
## One Of The Family

By Sadie Pearse

Freya's sister, Sam, has been missing for years. But now she's contacted Freya to ask her to look after her son. Where has Sam been and how will the arrival of a disturbed little boy affect Freya's own family? A character-led story with a thrilling twist.

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## The Second Marriage

By Gill Paul

Inspired by the story of JFK's assassination, this is a wonderful retelling of the love triangle between his widow, Jackie, opera singer Maria Callas and Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis. Told from both women's point of view, this bitter-sweet romance takes us into a glamorous world where celebrity and politics mixed all too tragically.

RRP £8.99

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# It's like yoga for your ears

Wildlife sound recordist Gary Moore used the quiet of lockdown to tune into nature. Mairi Hughes finds out more.

**T**HE recent lockdown brought with it many firsts. Notably, with streets emptied of people, nature stepped in to fill the void.

However, while many focused on how nature dominated the physical landscape, the drastic reduction in the noise pollution ordinarily caused by humans meant our soundscape was also dominated by wildlife.

Scientists and artists around the world even got together during lockdown

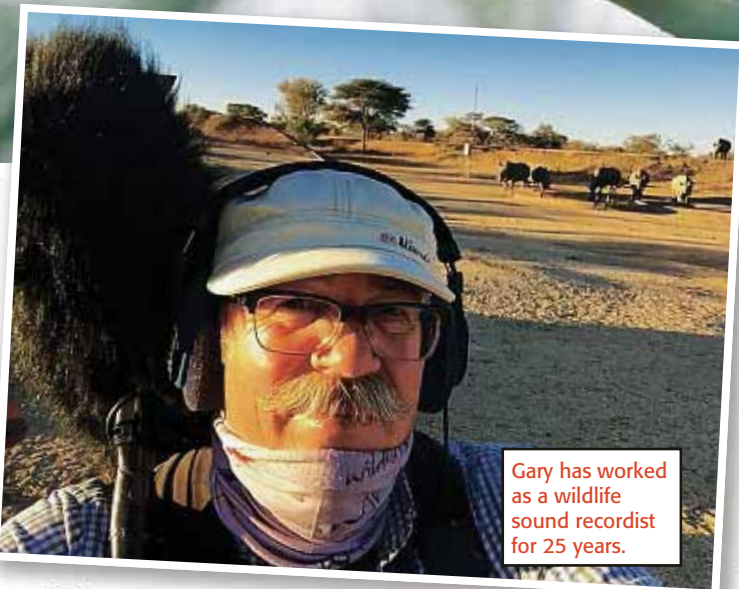
to create the first ever global sound map of the spring dawn chorus, one of the most significant annual events in birdsong.

"The first few weeks of lockdown were quite amazing.

"There was definitely a difference," professional wildlife sound recordist Gary Moore says.

"We are the most overflown country in the world. The thing I'm interrupted by in my daily work, more than anything else, is aeroplanes."

Gary says the sound



Gary has worked as a wildlife sound recordist for 25 years.

backdrop during lockdown was incomparable with anything in living memory, allowing us to hear wildlife in a way people have not done for over 100 years.

Gary, who specialises in recording birdsong, says birds in particular have not been heard this clearly since before the creation of the automatic engine.

Gary has worked as a

freelance wildlife sound recordist for 25 years, recording sound mostly for the BBC and "Gardeners' World", and has travelled to the jungles of Costa Rica and the North Pole to record wildlife.

During the lockdown, Gary mostly focused on his own personal sound library.

The lockdown happened





to coincide with the spring dawn chorus, which occurs mostly at the end of April into the start of May.

For Gary, this meant rising at around 3.30 a.m. and heading to nearby wetlands to catch the peak of the birds' singing.

"The reason the dawn chorus happens in the morning is that often there's a cold layer of still air, and sound travels further through cold air than it does through warm.

"So birdsong will carry better first thing in the morning than it will at midday," Gary explains.

What exactly do birds communicate with one another during the spring dawn chorus?

"Birds say two things," Gary says. "All birds call, but only males sing, apart from the odd exceptions.

"Basically what the males are saying is, 'This is my territory, come and mate with me' or 'This is my territory, stay away' to the other males."

Spring is breeding season for birds as it is warm, there is plenty of food available and long hours of daylight in which to find it.

"The females can tell a great deal about the quality of the bird just by its song," Gary says.

"The longer birds live, the more diverse and rich their song becomes, because every year they add more phrases and trills to their song."

This "richness" is desirable to females, Gary says, as it indicates the birds are strong and healthy, having managed to survive for a long time.

With a significant drop in

noise pollution during lockdown, many of us were immersed in birdsong like never before.

However, to those of us with untrained ears, variations in songs are not always obvious.

Gary says what we hear varies from person to person.

"For males and females, the dawn chorus is different. How old you are makes a massive difference as well.

"Human hearing is the most acute at the age of eight. And from then on, it starts to degrade.

"As we get older, men and women lose different parts of their spectrum," Gary says.

While women lose the ability to hear lower frequencies as they age, men lose the ability to hear higher frequencies.

So we all have a different experience when we tune in to the birdsong around us.

However, no matter what we hear, Gary says it is always beneficial.

"I always encourage people, on their commute in the mornings, just to try and get in a little bit of green space, even if it means you have to walk ten or fifteen minutes longer.

"Even if you're stuck in traffic, wind down the window. Expose yourself to that birdsong. It absolutely reduces stress levels," he emphasises.

Gary hopes people will

## Getting To Know You: Learning About Birdsong

**Did you become more in tune with bird song during lockdown? Gary Moore says we should all use this as an opportunity to learn more about birds.**

**"If you have spent longer in the garden, you may have witnessed that wren or robin building a nest in the hedgerow.**

**"It might have caught you unaware, or you might have got some real benefit from it. It might just be feeding the birds in the back garden. You might have had an experience with adult birds feeding young birds.**

**"It's important to be comfortable and watch that bird. So if you're sitting in that garden with a beer or a cup of tea, and you're interested, you've seen it call, you've heard it sing, you've watched it move, you have to identify that song with that individual species."**

**Gradually becoming more observant of the various characteristics of birds all around us allows us to slowly develop an awareness of the wide range of bird song associated with different species, Gary says.**

continue to tune in to this element of nature even once we get back to some sort of normality.

"It costs you nothing and it's amazing. We know the benefits of a little bit of birdsong. I say it's like yoga for your ears, but without the downwards dog," Gary says with a laugh. ■



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# As Time Goes By

Increasingly, Florence was starting to feel invisible. Did nobody notice her any more?

**FLORENCE PEARKS** knew that she couldn't really be invisible. It wasn't possible.

She had put on some weight since the start of the war and she'd been no sylph when Hitler invaded Poland, so you couldn't really miss her.

Goodness only knew, Florence thought, how she'd got fatter; she'd done such a lot of manual work since 1939 and she seemed to pass all the nice titbits of extra food on to the children.

Perhaps it was simply age that had caused her tummy and hips to expand somewhat.

But her daughter Audrey and the little ones didn't notice if she got any bigger or any smaller.

She was just Granny Pearks, and part of the furniture.

Today she was tired, getting over a cold, and beginning to wonder if the war would ever end and if she would ever have a life again.

The children nudged past her in the doorway to the farmhouse hall, scurrying to the window. Outside it was grey and misty.

"Who's that?" Walter asked.

Only five, and small for his age, he had very dark eyes – the eyes of his father, now serving in Italy.

"Who's who?" Florence replied.



Walter and Hazel were on the window bench now, looking out.

"Oh, it's the paraffin man." She looked out through the only section of the ancient window-pane not taken up by small heads.

It was a very old farmhouse with a ladder staircase and sloped floors.

It was quite unsuitable for a young family, but a war was a war and they couldn't very well have stayed in London.

Outside in the damp Gloucestershire day, the paraffin man's van had stopped in front of the house in a shallow lake of mud, and Florence saw Harold Palmer jump out.

He must, she thought, be around her own age, from the look of his greying hair and the crinkles at his eyes. But he looked sprightly.

Florence didn't always recall the names of the people who came and went – the woman who collected the old hens they didn't

want to eat, the postman grumbling about the mud, the new neighbour down the lane – but she knew that the paraffin man was called Harold Palmer.

"I love those teeny tiny drawers!" Hazel yelled, and she was out of the front door like a shot.

Florence sighed. Her white socks would be filthy in three seconds and it was school again on Monday.

She watched Hazel, pursued by her younger brother, approach the motor van and ask if they could open the many drawers of various sizes that were arranged in rows along one side of the vehicle.

The paraffin man, for some reason Florence had forgotten, acted as a sort of travelling hardware shop and had done so since war broke out, selling ropes and nails, bits of chain and shelf brackets as he went round delivering fuel for everybody's stoves.

Florence stood in the

doorway and watched him indulge the children, letting them investigate.

They were lovable children and Florence would do anything for them, but sometimes she thought she'd slipped too far into the background of her own life.

It was inevitable, of course – a widow, a minor smallholder, a woman way past her prime.

Audrey was the lovely one, a glamorous woman barely over thirty, straining at the leash of wartime domestic life.

Beautiful Audrey, Florence's only daughter, had been a pattern model in a West End couturier before her marriage and now she was breaking ice off milk in winter, hoeing in summer and waiting for war to end and Charles to come home.

"I think we're all right for paraffin, Mr Palmer," Florence called out.

He looked up and smiled, and Florence

recalled another distinct thing about Harold Palmer – that he didn't smoke.

His teeth were white, his smile bright and his skin had no yellow about it, which was a rare sight.

Florence's husband had smoked fifty a day and the house had been foggy with fumes.

"It's your bath, Mrs Pearks," he called back.

Then she saw it, poking out of the top of the van where it was open to the elements.

## Her looks were merely altered by time

"I'll bring it in," he said. "Give me a moment."

Florence had clean forgotten!

Audrey had ordered it because the current tin bath was in a poor state.

Goodness only knew when it had first been hung on the big hook in the back parlour. Not in the twentieth century, that was for sure.

"One of the new models, this one," Harold called from the back of the van.

"Come from Birmingham. They take up less room than the old rounder ones, and in three sizes."

He had lifted the shiny new bath on to his back and was hefting it in her direction.

She liked the way his long legs moved, stiffening up between each step as he steadied himself.

She remembered Harold's jokes, every time he visited, and his compliments about the farm.

"Is it Audrey?" he asked, straightening up at the door. "Your daughter? She suggested the small —"

He stopped, looking at her in surprise. Or was it disquiet? Florence didn't think she'd ever been so close to him before.

The paraffin man hardly ever came up to the front door; he'd haul the fuel round the side and into the lean-to, and as he did so Florence would dig out

whatever list of items she'd written on a scrap of envelope – a set of screws, ten lamp wicks – and she'd call it out as he walked back to the van.

Then the children would be all over him, eager to see inside the fascinating drawers and receive the goods.

"No, I have the wrong one here," Mr Palmer said, and he was off back down the path to the van, walking faster than before.

He took no notice of Walter and Hazel as he

hailed the bath back on board with a resounding clang, leaped into the front seat of the van and drove away. Mud flew everywhere and Hazel squealed in surprise.

"Granny, he's gone," Walter said in a hurt tone. "What did we do?"

Florence told them she didn't know and chivvied them indoors, wondering when the correct bath would now arrive.

Her right hip bumped against the table in the hall as she guided the children towards the kitchen and a tea that she'd have to rustle up.

It would soon be time to wear her winter coat again and she knew it was straining a little at the bust.

Nobody would notice, so Florence didn't know why she worried. She wasn't fat, she reminded herself; she was just rounder than before.

But in the kitchen the thought came to her in a sudden and upsetting rush: Mr Palmer had brought her a bath and seen that it would be too small!

He had taken one look at her and known that she'd have to cram herself into the blasted thing.

Audrey had placed the order – Audrey with her flat chest and non-existent behind, Audrey who had modelled satin wedding gowns to make prospective

brides sigh with longing.

Audrey hadn't stopped to consider whether the smallest, narrowest bath, ideal for storage, would suit old Granny!

Florence collapsed into a kitchen chair and felt a blanket of misery settle over her.

But no, there was no time for sitting – there were gutters to clear and pots to scrub, and Audrey was out.

Florence forced herself to stop at the mirror by the bottom of the stairs as she headed outside half an hour later in her waterproofs.

She stared at herself in the glass and saw encroaching age.

But then she stepped back and lifted her chin, tapping the underside with the back of her hand.

She was still a pretty woman. Donald, her husband, had spent hours gazing at her when they'd been courting.

Her looks were not so different from how they had been, they were merely altered by time.

Her face had the same heart-shaped charm and her mouth, though thinner, held the same hint of a laugh when at rest.

Just because nobody commented on the way she looked didn't mean she was unspeakable.

But the paraffin man had known immediately that she was too fat for the smaller bath. Florence felt mortified.

"Granny, Granny!" Walter was calling from upstairs. "Where is my blue sweater?"

"I have to do the gutters," she called back.

"Is it in the laundry?" he shouted.

Florence began to pull off her boots. It was quicker to sort out the problem right away than to keep calling back to the boy that her timetable did not always have to fit into his.

She set the boots down and gave the worn-out doormat a long stare.

"You and I," she said softly, "have a lot in common."

The next day the paraffin

man came back, and when she heard his van Florence clambered up the ladder stairs where she hid like a little girl.

It had to be another bath that he'd brought – a larger, wider one for her spreading body!

She heard the children running down the path.

"Granny! Granny!" Hazel called. "The paraffin man's here again!"

Hazel liked her granny to be on hand at all times, just like a book one takes on a bus ride, or a bit of bread available to soak up some runny egg.

Florence heard the paraffin man unload his van in the same way, first with a few metallic bangs and then a squashy trudge up to the porch pursued by two chattering children.

"Now then," she heard Harold Palmer say, "what is your granny's name?"

There was a silence, and Florence imagined the scene, with Hazel and Walter staring at him. It made her smile for a second – they had no idea what her name was!

"Um, is it Mrs Boddinham?" Walter said hesitantly.

"I mean her first name," Harold Palmer said.

The next silence was longer. The children certainly didn't know her Christian name. She wondered why Mr Palmer needed it.

There was a rustle of paper.

"Well," Mr Palmer said, "just the bill to deal with."

There was a tinge of disappointment in his voice, as though he really needed to see the lady of the house for this one.

But he didn't normally ask for payment on delivery; Florence had an account and settled up quarterly.

She presumed that for some reason he needed her full name to record the sale of the bath. Perhaps it was regulations.

She wished that Audrey hadn't ordered the bath at all. The old one didn't leak, and she could have avoided this embarrassment.

Audrey chose that



# Inside next week's issue

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From castles to crafts,  
Morag Fleming discovers the  
delights of the Isle of Arran



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moment to come hurrying up to the front door, back from helping with rehearsals for the village show.

"Mr Palmer, is it?"

Florence heard Audrey say to the paraffin man. "How marvellous, the new bath."

Then she swept indoors, straight up the stairs, where she found Florence sitting at the top.

"Mother, the bath's here," she said in mild surprise. "What in the name of all that's holy are you doing?"

She had a sharp London voice, and Florence knew

and the bath and what the paraffin man must be thinking, but when Mr Palmer had departed Audrey sat back.

"Well, I never."

"What does that mean?"

Florence asked.

"He's quite the gentleman."

"Well, yes."

Audrey faced her mother.

"You're a good-looking woman, Ma," she said.

"That is all I'm going to say."

As the days passed, Florence thought about Harold Palmer's visits, first with the small bath and

At times recently Florence had felt that she could shave her head or stand in the village square wearing only her girdle, and nobody would notice.

She went out to the hall mirror and looked at herself again.

"Some people," she murmured to herself, "do not care for skin and bone. That's a true thing."

She turned so that she was half in profile and admired her finely made chin and straight nose.

Upstairs, somewhere, she had a lipstick, and one day soon she might wear it.

Even if she was invisible to other people, she could take an interest in herself.

The village variety show came around and Audrey brought home tickets for the family.

Florence found her lipstick – it was in a shade she remembered she liked very much, called Gentle Red – and smartened herself up for the performance.

She banished the children from the back room and took a bath, enjoying the newness of it and giving herself time to relax, for a change.

In the village hall she saw Harold Palmer standing beside the rows of wooden chairs.

He was talking to another man and Florence saw him look up when she entered.

He stopped talking, his broad mouth half-open as the friend tried to get his attention back.

Florence moved around the room – there were fifteen minutes before the show began – and as she did so she could have sworn that Harold looked at her again.

It was an odd sensation, and she realised that before this moment she had not met him in any context except those paraffin deliveries.

He shuffled along the narrow gaps between two rows, knocking a hat to the floor, oddly clumsy in his movements for a fit and agile man.

"I was sent some very silly baths from Brum," he said when he reached her,

and several people turned for a moment, puzzled by his words.

Florence said nothing. He shook his head as if to clear it.

"What I mean to say is that there's one model that's no use to man nor beast –"

"Nor woman-wide-in-beam?" Florence suggested.

He looked horrified.

"Don't say that!" His face turned a shade of puce that made Florence smile.

She felt strangely nervous in the company of a man she'd had dealings with since 1939, but he was funny all the same.

"May I say . . ." He swallowed, and his Adam's apple shot up and down his long neck.

"May I say that you're a fine figure of a woman, quite the loveliest lady I see on my rounds."

"Let me say that I was not about to supply something of no use to a customer like you . . ." He swallowed again.

"I mean a customer for whom I hold the highest esteem, er, who I hold in the greatest respect . . ."

He dried up and simply smiled at her, a little goofy, a little deflated.

"There, I've said it," he said finally.

Florence felt a rush of pleasure.

The village hall really did look lovely, and soon it would be Christmas, and the dress she'd found at the back of the wardrobe still suited her terribly well at the neck.

She smiled.

"Shall we see if there's space at the front?" she said.

"I don't like to have to look past too many heads."

He looked delighted.

"Let's do that," he said, and they made their way forward.

"I notice your pretty shade of lipstick," Harold said.

"My sister uses something called Red Sequin but I don't think it's that. Very subtle, not too red."

"How nice of you to notice," Florence said. ■

## Her mortification might as well be complete

that Harold would have heard.

Florence sighed, stood up and climbed down the stairs, cursing their extreme steepness because naturally Mr Palmer would be observing her copious rear end as it descended.

Her mortification might as well be complete.

Audrey preceded her.

"I'll bring it through," Harold said.

As he shifted the blasted thing through the house, Florence told the story to Audrey in a few words – the wrong bath, Mr Palmer taking it away, the replacement.

"He called you fat?"

Audrey asked, peering at the departing bath as it bumped through the doors.

"Oh, no," Florence said. She explained how swift and silent he'd been throughout the process.

"How very discreet," Audrey said.

With the bath hung on its hook, and the old one loaded on to the van, Audrey offered tea to Mr Palmer.

"No!" Florence whispered. "Goodness, no!"

But Mr Palmer accepted with enthusiasm. Florence made the tea; her daughter tended to fill the kettle and then forget the rest.

There was an unremarkable half hour of small talk while Florence worried about her bottom

then with the larger one.

He had managed to supply the appropriate item without a word of rudeness or impatience, and that meant something.

Times were hard, and everyone was overworked, and the man had provided a personal service – she had to give him that.

As she thought about his regular visits, driving up the lane, she realised that each time he had come he had . . . what was the right word? He'd acknowledged her existence.

There had always been some comment about the weather, followed by a word on the smart appearance of her herb patch or her having the cleanest curtains he'd seen on his rounds.

They had been brief lines, spoken just as he turned to get into the van.

And this time, with the second delivery of a bath, he must have seen her clearly to know that the bath would be no good.

But she chuckled and laid her thoughts aside.

How silly it was to think that a paraffin man sizing up an old woman and finding her too large for a tin bath meant a thing!

She was turning potty.

Still, she thought, with her being invisible, nobody else would have removed that bath so quickly and made good.



# They don't make them like they used to!

Janey Swanson discovers it's a family affair when it comes to celebrating TV and film's golden years.



Noel and Sarah working on the latest viewing schedule.

Sarah Cronin-Stanley

**F**OR most people, a night with nothing much to watch on TV results in nothing more than a bit of grumbling.

But for film buffs Noel Cronin and his daughter Sarah Cronin-Stanley, a lack of shows they wanted to watch spurred them to launch their own channel.

"Talking Pictures TV broadcasts a mix of classic – mainly British – movies and vintage TV series and dramas," Sarah, who with Noel runs the free-to-view TV channel from their home in Hertfordshire, reveals.

"We take our viewers on a nostalgic trip down memory lane, often to a time when women wore gloves and a hat when going out and always carried a handbag."

Sarah explains that Noel discovered his love of movies when he was fourteen and delivering mail at the Rank Organisation's film-processing lab in London.

"Dad worked his way up and ended up working in film and television distribution in the 1990s," Sarah says.

"That's when he noticed that much-loved black and white films were no longer being shown on TV – so he started his own collection."

Talking Pictures TV began broadcasting in May 2015, and now has an average of

six million viewers every week.

The station's most popular films include the 1951 version of "Scrooge", with Alastair Sim in the title role, Elvis Presley's "King Creole", "The Blue Lamp", a 1950s police drama starring Jack Warner and Dirk Bogarde, and romantic comedy "Hobson's Choice".

"All true classics," Sarah says, adding that the TV series that always attract a lot of viewers are "Public Eye", with Alfred Burke as a private eye, the original "Van Der Valk", "Rumpole Of The Bailey" and – one of the latest additions to the schedule – "Budgie", the Seventies comedy starring Adam Faith.

Talking Pictures TV is on air twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

"We offer a great service for night owls as we show really good films and first-rate television series from dusk to dawn.

"There are no news bulletins. We're a safe haven. Talking Pictures TV offers an escape from the often grim reality of the twenty-first century," Sarah says.

Noel plans each day's schedule using pen, paper and an index box of cards.

"There's no computer here deciding what will be screened," Sarah adds. "My dad curates each day's viewing."

Sarah shares Noel's passion for classic film and TV, as do her husband and ten-year-old son.

"My husband Neill produces the weekly newsletter that tells our viewers what's on, while our little boy, Archie, who's obsessed with Norman Wisdom and Laurel and Hardy, is a fantastic help in the office."

Sarah explains that, in the station's early days, most of the films shown were from Noel's personal library of classic movies.

"Nowadays, we also license films and TV series from major archives such as Paramount and ITV," Sarah continues, revealing that "Spartacus" is the one film they'd love to show but have been unable to obtain.

"There are two TV series our viewers keep requesting

– 'Dixon Of Dock Green' and 'Z Cars'.

Unfortunately, even if we could get a licence, very little of 'Z Cars' has survived, and the BBC refuses to part with what remains of 'Dixon Of Dock Green'.

"However, we've found a few lost TV

series, including three episodes of British crime series 'No Hiding Place', which was very popular in the early Sixties.

"Talking Pictures TV is very important for preserving film and TV history," she adds. "Many of the films and TV series we show were at risk of being forgotten and would have been lost for ever if my dad hadn't bought them and broadcast them on Talking Pictures TV.

"These are slices of history that should be preserved and enjoyed.

"And, as our viewers will testify, they don't make them like they used to!" ■

Watch Talking Pictures TV on Freeview 81, Sky 328, Virgin 445 and Freesat 306.

Elvis Presley in "King Creole".



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Angela

Angela Gilchrist,  
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# The "Friend" On Tour

Trust your favourite magazine to find new ways to raise spirits in challenging times!

**T**HROUGH our entire 151-year history, 2020 will stand out as an unusually difficult year. The pandemic has kept us inside our homes for months, missing out on valuable contact with friends and family.

It's been a lonely time for many people.

Well, this autumn the "Friend" hopes to help!

We've always been proud to be a magazine readers reach for when in need of a bit of a boost, so this September we're going one step further and bringing the spirit of the magazine to you.

The "Friend" is going on tour across the UK in a bus. But not just any bus – this one will be covered in yarn patterns created by textile artist Emma Leith, our wonderful readers and other UK crafters!

Emma is an expert at "yarn bombing" – the art of covering street furniture or public spaces with bright knitted or crocheted patterns.

Emma's part of a joint effort between the "Friend", Stagecoach and Re-engage (formerly Contact The Elderly) to create our "Close Knit Friends" campaign, which will see our bus travelling across the country and delivering free copies of the magazine to anyone who pays it a visit.

We'll let you know the full event timings and locations in due course, but in the meantime we thought we'd introduce you to Emma – our crochet master! "I got into crochet properly about eight years ago and it all started happening for me when I did a yarn bomb for my local Peacock Art Trail advertising the fact that it was happening.

"That got picked up by a bigger company in Bath and they asked me to do a yarn bomb for their event!"

Demand for Emma's work snowballed after the public saw the finished articles across the city.

As much as the results of Emma's work are for the enjoyment of the

community, she loves that the projects involve communities right from the off – just as the "Friend" bus will do with readers.

"I've always enlisted the help of lots and lots of local people.

"We've always worked on these projects together and they've become community events.

"It's never just about creating a display – it's about the people behind it and the friendships that form.

"The group that I formed way back then still goes on today and it goes on without me now.

"So, for me, that's what yarn bombing became – this way of bringing people together."

This project will see Emma work with a team of four, and crafters who have been able to knit or crochet their own triangle of bunting using patterns available on our website.

Emma will then add these together to cover parts of the bus in addition to her own work.

"So with this particular project we've dedicated a space to display all the contributions.

"I want them to make triangles that we're going to stick on in addition to the display.

"There's going to be a crochet pattern and a knitting pattern; people can do one or the other or both.

"There is no limit to how many they can do, but the more they do then the more there will be on the bus!"

Emma already had a few design ideas in mind when we spoke to her in early August, but we won't spoil the surprise!



One thing she does plan on doing is avoiding anything with stripes, as it can look painted rather than knitted.

"We're doing the triangles because then visually you will know it's been knitted or crocheted for sure.

"That's what I want – I want to get people's attention when they see it and go, 'Oh, my goodness! There's no doubt that it's covered in wool!'"

With previous projects, including all kinds of street furniture, could the bus be one of the bigger challenges Emma's faced?

"I've always wanted to do a bus! I wanted to do the interior as well, but







One of Emma's vibrant crocheted flower displays.



obviously we can't do that with COVID.

"The exterior of a modern bus is actually the biggest challenge I've ever had because the bus needs to move.

"If the bus was stationary in a shopping precinct, it wouldn't be a problem, but we have to consider all the moving parts, the visibility for the driver and also any parts that are ventilating or heating up."

There are spots on the bus that need to remain uncovered for safety reasons, but that's not been the biggest challenge for Emma.

"We have to think how we can attach the piece to a

potentially smooth surface – there's nothing to tie it on to.

"That's the biggest challenge and we haven't overcome it entirely, but I think we have the solution.

"At first, we thought magnets were going to work, but it turns out that the buses aren't made of magnetic metal.

"Honestly, this is the

thing I've lost sleep over – every night I think, how are we going to do this?

"We couldn't do Velcro, either, because we don't want to damage the paint.

"Turns out that the way we think we're going to do it is to get a thousand suction hooks and stick them on. That's our plan!"

Together with our partners, Stagecoach, Emma will inspect the bus once the project is done to make sure it's secure and safe.

Emma's making the covering in bits, rather than having one big "jumper" over the whole thing that could easily catch the wind.

Emma's experience with these projects is invaluable, and one of the lessons she's learned over the years is that the final fitting always takes longer than you think.

She is prepared for the day of installation to be both the biggest challenge and the most satisfying of the project.

We can't wait to see the bus on its travels, and we hope you'll pop along if it's near you and say hello.

We know it's going to provide a colourful and cheerful few moments to lift everyone's spirits towards the end of a tough year.

"The thing with yarn bombing is the charm that it has.

"What we're doing is we're taking an urban bit of furniture that has no intricate charm in itself and covering it with something that is extremely familiar and has a real tactile quality to it.

"If it's a steel structure installation, for example, you're more likely to stand back and think I'm not sure what I'm looking at, but a yarn bomb says, 'Come closer; have a look!'

"It's a way of getting people to look at something that goes past every day with fresh eyes.

"It's a beautiful thing to do. That's why I like doing it!" ■



Keep your eyes on our website and social media channels for news on the bus and its stops around the country.

Visit [www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk](http://www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk) or go to [facebook.com/PeoplesFriendMagazine](https://facebook.com/PeoplesFriendMagazine) or [twitter.com/TheFriendMag](https://twitter.com/TheFriendMag). Find out more about Emma at [www.emmaleith.co.uk](http://www.emmaleith.co.uk).



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# Catch Me If You Can

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If I put my  
mind to it,  
I could  
accomplish  
anything . . .

---



**W**ORDS march across page five of "Running: The Next Steps" without making any sense.

My mind is at the bottom of my bag, where I've hidden a shiny new brochure.

All I can think about now is its talk of Greece and Rome. Those dark seas and that cloud over Vesuvius.

Earlier, my to-do list had consisted of three tasks.

One: get Max to the local university's open day by 10 o'clock.

Two: collect this book from the library.

Three: pick up Malcolm from work.

Two down, one to go?

No.

While I was doing those

chores, I picked up that brochure.

It made my to-do list grow like Pinocchio's nose.

I shut my book with a snap. The only thing I want to look at is the booklet hidden away out of sight under my tissues and purse.

I check my watch. There's no time for a sneaky peek at those smiling photos and slick promises.

Malcolm will be here soon.

I put "Running: The Next Steps" on the passenger seat. Maybe I should hide that, too?

Too late. My perky, porky husband flings open the car door.

"What's this, Sue?" He rescues my library book before plonking himself down in its place.

Opening it at random, he inspects a few lines and snorts.

Is it the book he finds funny, or the idea of me running?

Peeling off a page, he turns it over and taps his finger on the words.

In Malcolm's hands, silent reading becomes performance art.

My makeshift bookmark flutters to the floor. Retrieving it, Malcolm squints at its message.

His eyebrows rise and my spirits fall.

"This is the entry form for a 5K charity race. And it's been filled in."

"Yes. By me," I say before he can make a joke.

I send a glare burning straight through my stupid trainers to my stupid new running socks.

They are the latest addition to the partwork of my kit, which has been acquired bit by bit over the past few months.

"Getting ambitious in your old age, Sue?"

"That's rich, coming from the man who said he'd divorce me if I ever got fat!"

It's a running joke from the early days of our marriage. Back then, I was as thin as a rake and could eat what I liked.

My reply was to say Malcolm ate like a bird – a gannet, that is!

It's not so funny today.

"Calm down," he tells me.

"I suppose you will need something to do in the spare time you'll have once you've stopped doing the school run."

"Don't worry about me. The excitement of acting as your taxi service keeps me going."

Sarcasm is a foreign language to Malcolm.

He gives me the same smile he gave the magistrate who took him off the road and tosses my book on to the back seat.

I start reversing out of the parking space.

"How did you and Max get on, looking around the university?" Malcolm asks.

His agenda doesn't give me a chance to answer.

"Look at us! All three kids going to uni. And you and me with only a handful of GCSEs between us."

"With them out of the way we'll have the house to ourselves," he crows, rubbing his hands together.

"It makes me wish I'd finished that Open University course," I slip in before Malcolm can get any more embarrassing.

That takes the zip out of his pip. He

looks uncomfortable.  
"I suppose it could have got you a job in a museum or a library or something. If the kids hadn't come along."

"Yes."

Our eyes lock with the telepathy developed over the course of nearly 25 years.

"Max and I both had a great time today." I decide to drip-feed him the news about my big decision. "I'm glad I went with him."

Malcolm fidgets, screwing round to see what I'm watching in the wing mirror.

"Why have we stopped?"

"Somebody's crossing behind the car." I'm watching the progress of an old lady hobbling across the car park. "She'll lose her bag, hanging it from her walking frame like that."

Malcolm loosens his belt a notch so he can settle into his seat.

"Let's stop off for chips on the way home."

"You big kid! If I've made the effort to take up running, you could at least try cutting back on the junk food!" I exclaim.

"No way. I'll do some exercise to compensate. Tomorrow."

"OK." I stretch the word out. It's a warming-up exercise. "Bert Morris has stuck up an advert on the library noticeboard. He's starting a walking rugby team."

See what I did there? Parenthood teaches you to be crafty.

Unfortunately, Malcolm served the same apprenticeship.

"Play rugby? At my age?"

"You're barely middle-aged. Old Bert's looking at sixty down the wrong end of a telescope."

We're laughing together now. That's how it always used to be.

A commotion over by the park gates catches my eye and I stop.

A ruffian in jeans and hoodie has wrenched the handbag from the old lady's walking frame.

He's galloping off towards the park gates with his prize.

I yank on the handbrake, kill the engine and jump out of the car.

I'm halfway across the car park before Malcolm catches me up. He's panting like a bloodhound as we reach the pensioner.

She's incoherent with shock.

Malcolm has to stop.

"Wait here. Call the police!" I shout, sprinting after the kid.

"Come back! He might be dangerous!" the old lady wavers.

Malcolm's voice cuts her off.

"A youngster with a head start? Don't worry. Sue will never catch him."

My plan had only been to keep the mugger in sight, but hearing Malcolm laugh, I accelerate.

It's true what they say about making sure you've got the right tools for the job. My fancy trainers throw me forward, into my stride.

The park's springy turf makes running more fun than it is on my treadmill.

Not long ago I couldn't catch my breath, much less a bus.

Now, as the boy heads uphill towards the main road, I start gaining on him.

The steep slope slows him slightly.

Snarling over his shoulder, he flings the bag at me. It flies off in crazy somersaults down the hill.

I don't let it distract me and keep on running.

The failed thief and I are in sight of the main road. That'll be the finishing line. Beyond it is thick, concealing undergrowth.

If he reaches it, the greenery will close over him like an Olympic crowd surrounding a winner. He'll disappear for ever.

I have to catch him before then!

He's half my age; I'm twice his size.

Words chase across my mind, helping me to focus.

I can do this.

Wait! It's his noisy puffing I can hear, not mine. If I can find another gear, maybe I really can do this.

I close the gap.

In six more strides he'll be across that road. I'll

have to stop and look both ways before I follow him.

I may be keen, but I'm not stupid.

"Stop!"

If I have enough breath left to shout, I can take one last risk.

Launching myself through the air, I fling out my arms in a tackle.

Eat your heart out, walking rugby team!

The thief and I crash to the ground.

I recover first and drag myself into a sitting position.

Crawling astride the thief, I sit in triumph on his bony bottom. He grunts in protest.

"Sue!" Malcolm toils up the slope.

He's got the pensioner's bag dangling from his hand.

"The police are on their way. That was fantastic. You're a marvel, Sue!"

He's surprised, I'm amazed and the young whippersnapper underneath me is speechless – and no wonder.

His rib cage is going up and down twice as fast as my own.

\* \* \* \*

While I explain to the police what happened, Malcolm's face softens with pride and wonder.

I haven't seen him wear an expression like that since the night Max was born.

"The guys at work are going to hear all about this," he says once we're alone.

"My wife, runner and thief-catcher! You have to post that entry for the 5K race now, Sue. There'll be no stopping you."

With the excitement over, we walk back downhill towards our car.

I'm staring at my feet again, but for a different reason.

Dreams are dangerous things. Once you put them into words, they take on a life of their own, so when Malcolm catches my hand, I hesitate before speaking.

"You know what you said about me getting ambitious?"

He squeezes my fingers. "That was mean. I'm sorry."

"No, you might be right. The charity race isn't the only thing I found out about today. I picked up a prospectus at the university."

"It's hidden at the bottom of my handbag. I thought I might . . ." I falter.

As Malcolm doesn't laugh, I plough on.

"They're mad keen to attract mature students. They offer all sorts of courses, including ones which might get me that job in a museum or library after all."

"Are you going to go for it?"

I stop, because I can't keep moving on this gradient and stare at him at the same time.

"What?"

"Why not? If our three can get into university, then you'll have no trouble."

I was expecting Malcolm to try to put me off. Thinking big was easy when I assumed my dream would never come true.

His mockery was going to be my escape route.

It looks like I might have to take the plunge after all.

"It'll be tough, going out and studying after so long stuck at home."

"No tougher than raising three kids. You managed that."

"That was different," I point out.

He smiles.

"And harder. You were stuck at home all day without anybody to help you. And you've just chased down that mugger."

"Going to university will be a doddle compared to all that."

His arm slips around my waist. I respond by leaning into him.

"Tell you what, Sue. You join a uni course, and I'll give up the chips. Your new life will help make my old life healthier."

"You could start running, too?" I suggest.

He pulls me closer still. It's like the old days.

"I could, couldn't I?" He kisses me. "But only if you promise to catch me once in a while!" ■



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# May The Best Team Win!

## The Story So Far

**MAEVE** and **BRAD**, landlords of the Flying Duck in Frenton village, hold two pub quizzes every week. The two most competitive teams – the Smarty Pints and the Master Minds – have an on-going friendly rivalry.

The reigning quiz champions, the Master Minds, are builder **CAM**, his wife **ALI**, who has a jewellery-making business, **EWAN**, a handsome divorcee, and their leader – the fearsome **PRISCILLA**.

The Smarty Pints are **RACHEL**, her best friend **DAWN** and Dawn's husband **GRAHAM** – both teachers – as well as **NEIL**, a general

knowledge master and Rachel's old school friend – who never goes anywhere without his dog **APOLLO**.

Divorced mother-of-one Rachel is struggling to accept her teenage daughter **SOPHIE**'s crush on **OLLIE**, Maeve and Brad's older son, who has been in trouble in the past.

Rachel wonders if she is ready to get back into the dating game, too, and thinks perhaps Ewan might be interested.

The Quiz Quartet, a pub quiz tournament of teams from the Duck, as well as Frenton's surrounding villages, is approaching, and both the Master Minds and the Smarty Pints are feeling the pressure . . .

---

The big competition was fast approaching, but were all the contenders ready?

---

**M****AEVE** was feeling flustered as she wiped down the tables and refilled the bowl on the bar with fresh nuts.

She ran a clammy hand through her short brown hair. A pipe had burst and the basement was two inches deep in water.

To make matters worse, it was quiz night and soon the pub would be full.

The plumber wouldn't arrive for at least an hour, and with Brad and Joan moving kegs and trying to limit the damage, she was

short-staffed and minus a quizmaster.

"Evening, Maeve. It's a beautiful night."

She looked up to see that Neil and Apollo had arrived. She put on a smile and did her best to be a good hostess.

"I'm glad to hear it. Can I get you a drink?"

"A pint, please. How are you and Brad this evening?"

Maeve shrugged.

"Oh, fine really, but it's a bit fraught. We have a leak in the basement."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Neil looked concerned.



"Can I help in any way?"

"I don't think so." Maeve smiled at him. "Though it's very kind of you to offer."

"The main problem is the quiz – I think we'll have to cancel it, but it's too late to let people know."

Neil adjusted his glasses and returned her smile.

"I wouldn't worry about that," he told her. "We'll all enjoy a drink and a chat."

"Thank you, Neil." Maeve felt a little better.

She supposed it couldn't be helped.

"We'll have to make Sunday's quiz doubly exciting."

"I'm sure you will." Neil nodded reassuringly, picked up his pint and wandered over to a table to await his team.

Apollo padded after him and curled up at his feet.

"Evening, Maeve. I'll have a pint, and something for this beautiful young lady. What will you have?"

Rachel, who had followed Ewan into the pub, smiled self-consciously.

"Oh, a glass of Prosecco, please. If you're sure you don't mind, Ewan."

"It will be my pleasure, ma'am."

As Maeve turned to sort out their order, she thought she heard Rachel giggle and she raised an eyebrow.

Maeve wondered if something was brewing.

Ewan flirted with everyone, of course, so perhaps not. She wasn't sure.

Anyway, it was none of her business. She had more pressing concerns.

She turned back to her two customers, who were deep in conversation, and passed them their drinks.

"I'm really sorry," she said, "but we're going to have to cancel tonight's quiz. We're dealing with a leak in the basement."

To her relief, neither of them looked concerned.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Maeve. I wondered where Brad was. Can we help at all?"

Maeve shook her head and smiled at Rachel.

"I'm more than happy to take an evening off when I have such stunning company to console me." Ewan winked at Rachel,

who laughed.

It wasn't long before the pub was full.

Ali and Cam were sitting at a table eating crisps and talking contentedly.

Dawn and Graham had joined Neil and Apollo, and were laughing at something someone had said.

The room was cosy. Candles flickered in glass holders on the tables and music played softly in the background.

Maeve noticed that Rachel and Ewan hadn't sat down yet and were talking in a corner.

Neil seemed to be glancing over at them and he looked miserable.

She felt sorry for him. He was a lovely man, with a tragic history, and she'd often wondered if he held a candle for Rachel.

Maeve filled a bowl with crisps and headed over.

"I've brought some snacks by way of apology for the quiz cancellation," she said. "I hope you're still enjoying yourselves."

"Cancellation? You can't cancel the quiz!"

Maeve almost jumped a mile high as Priscilla's voice boomed out behind her. She wheeled round.

"Priscilla, I nearly dropped these crisps. I didn't know you were there."

Priscilla snorted and removed her camel coat to reveal a tweed skirt, cream jumper and silk scarf.

"You can't cancel the quiz. What's going on? It's Wednesday night and it's out of the question."

"I'm sorry, Priscilla." Maeve took a deep breath. "We have a leak in the basement."

"Brad is far too busy sorting that out to be quizmaster tonight."

"What about you or Kirsten? Surely someone can take over?"

Maeve gritted her teeth. "We need to serve the customers."

"Maeve has more than enough on her hands. Why don't you join us for a drink, instead?" Neil smiled at Priscilla.

"What can we get you?" Graham asked.

Maeve offered up a silent

prayer of gratitude for her supportive friends. She was about to turn away when Priscilla spoke again.

"Thank you. I'll have a glass of wine, but this isn't acceptable. If no-one else will do it, I'll lead the quiz."

There was stunned silence and the others exchanged glances.

"That's very kind of you

## "If no-one else will do it, I'll lead the quiz"

Priscilla." Neil cleared his throat. "But if you take over as quizmaster, the Master Minds will be a man down."

If he'd thought that would stop Priscilla, however, he'd underestimated her.

"Nonsense, I can read the questions from my seat. I don't need the answers."

"Kirsten can do the marking afterwards. It won't hurt to shake things up a bit."

Maeve's mouth fell open, but before she could reply, Priscilla was taking matters into her own hands.

"Ewan, stop talking and turn the music down. Also, I shall need the microphone. We're going to do the quiz."

As Priscilla picked up the question sheets from behind the bar and sat down with Ali and Cam, Maeve's heart sank.

She hoped that an evening with Priscilla at the helm wouldn't drive everyone crazy.

She didn't want to lose all her customers!

\* \* \* \*

Neil wandered along the supermarket aisles wondering what to buy for his supper.

He'd already loaded the trolley with dog biscuits and a bone that he'd got from the meat counter.

Perhaps some fish tonight, or pasta? He paused by the salmon and scratched his head.

Everything came in packets of two, but he could always have some in his sandwich tomorrow.

He was just trying to make up his mind when he heard a voice behind him.

"Evening, Neil. All right?"

It was Graham. He was a tall man with grey hair and, as usual, was wearing tracksuit bottoms and trainers.

"Work going well?"

Neil nodded and adjusted his glasses.

"Yes, thank you. It's busy, but all well. How about you?"

Graham's cheery face clouded.

"Well, I love working with the kids, but it is very challenging at present."

Not everyone was cut out to be a secondary school teacher. It was a stressful job, but Graham loved it.

He and Dawn were both fantastic with children. Neil really admired them.

They had been unable to have a family of their own but it hadn't stopped them from helping others.

He knew they had supported Sophie during Rachel's divorce and they'd been a tower of strength for Kirsten, the barmaid, whose father had died when she was only twelve.

He smiled at his friend.

"Have you got time for a cuppa?" he asked. "You could tell me all about it."

Graham glanced at his watch and nodded.

"That would be great. I'm sure Dawn can manage without me for half an hour. I'll meet you at the café in ten minutes."

The two men finished their shopping and it wasn't long before they were sitting at a table with mugs of coffee. It was quiet this evening.

"So, what's the problem?" Neil asked, taking a sip.

Graham sighed.

"I suppose it's nothing new, really. So many of the students have difficulties – problems at home, learning challenges or mental health issues."

"It's becoming increasingly hard to support them."

Neil nodded. It was a difficult world to grow up in.



“There’s one new student,” Graham continued, “who’s particularly challenging. It’s not that he’s any trouble, but he has anxiety issues.”

“Sport is often great for helping kids like that, but I can’t seem to reach him.”

Neil felt for his friend.

“You mustn’t beat yourself up about it,” he told Graham.

“You and Dawn are fantastic with youngsters. I know you’ll do everything possible.”

“We do our best for all our students. Sometimes it just doesn’t seem enough.”

Neil shook his head. He wasn’t sure what to say.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” he said. “I’m just going to check on Apollo.”

The golden retriever was waiting patiently outside the supermarket. He got up as Neil approached and wagged his tail.

Neil patted his head and gave him a handful of biscuits. The bowl of water that was always outside was still full.

“I won’t be long, old chap,” he told him, fondling the dog’s silky ears.

Apollo looked up at him with huge brown eyes. It was amazing what a blessing a pet could be.

“Hey, you’ve given me an idea!” he said. “Got to go.”

A moment later, he was back with Graham.

“What do you think of this?” he asked excitedly.

“You know there are charities that take pets into residential homes and hospitals? How about I bring Apollo to school?”

“You know, pet therapy for some of the students. I could come once a week. What do you think?”

“It’s a fantastic idea! I’ll need to clear it with the head, but let’s try it.” Graham beamed.

They discussed the details for a time. Graham would talk to senior management and Neil would get DBS checked, but overall it seemed like an excellent idea.

“I really appreciate your help,” Graham told Neil, patting him on the back. “Can I get you another drink?”

“I’m fine, thanks.”

“OK, then tell me how things are with you. Any news?”

Neil shook his head and there was silence for a moment. Then he cleared his throat.

“The quiz went well in the end with Priscilla at the helm, didn’t it?”

“She has a commanding presence!” Graham laughed.

Neil grinned. In fact, when Priscilla had got into her stride, she’d made a rather good quizmaster, he thought. Then he frowned.

“Rachel and Ewan seemed to be spending a lot of time together,” he added, as nonchalantly as he could.

An expression that Neil couldn’t quite pinpoint passed over Graham’s face.

“I didn’t notice,” Graham said, watching his friend closely, “but Dawn did comment on how much they were talking.”

“Do you think there’s anything happening there?” Neil asked, avoiding Graham’s eye.

Graham shrugged.

“You know what Ewan’s like. I wouldn’t set much store by it. I can’t imagine that Ewan is Rachel’s type.”

Neil didn’t really think so, either, but he was in no doubt they’d been flirting and he didn’t like it one bit.

\* \* \* \*

The pub was festive. Rachel thought it looked great. Maeve and Brad had gone to town for their younger son’s fifteenth birthday.

There were banners and streamers everywhere and silver and blue balloons hung from the ceiling.

They’d laid on a magnificent buffet, too, full of sandwiches, pork pies, crisps and salads.

Jamie and his friends were tucking in hungrily.

Rachel smiled – teenage boys were bottomless pits when it came to food.

Jamie seemed to be having a great time. All his friends were here, and Maeve and Brad had also invited some of the pub regulars.

There was a pile of gifts

on a table at one side and a big cake, waiting to be cut.

Then Brad was going to take the boys out for some paintball before the honours were done.

Rachel smiled as she remembered Sophie’s birthday celebrations over the years.

Where did the time go?

At that moment, her daughter appeared, hand in hand with Jamie’s older brother, Ollie, and Rachel’s face fell.

Their first date had gone well, and they were now an item. Rachel couldn’t help wishing that Sophie had chosen a more reliable young man.

She put on a smile as her daughter made her way towards her.

“Hey, Mum, having a good time?” Sophie asked. “It’s a great party, isn’t it?”

Rachel nodded.

“Ollie and I are going to go paintballing with the others. Is that OK?”

“Of course.”

Sophie leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

“Later!” she said, and was gone.

Rachel sighed and picked up her drink.

“You look a bit glum for a birthday party,” Ali sat down beside her. “Here, have a sausage roll.”

Rachel laughed and took one from the plate that was being offered.

“Thanks, Ali. I don’t mean to be a party-pooper. I’m enjoying myself really.”

“Good.” Ali grinned and took a sausage roll herself. “Mmm. Delicious.”

“How are you?” Rachel asked, as she wiped her hands on a serviette.

“Really good, thanks.”

Ali looked amazing. She was wearing a short black skirt and an ochre jumper, with her blonde hair cleverly piled on her head.

She wore a stunning pair of earrings, which Rachel suspected she had designed herself.

“What’s your secret?” she asked, with a grin. “You look fabulous.”

Ali blushed.

“Why, thank you,” she replied, “but I don’t think I have a secret. I guess it’s

just happiness.”

“That’s good to hear.”

Rachel raised an eyebrow.

“I may as well let you into a secret,” Ali continued, her colour deepening. “Cam and I are trying for a baby, and I’m really excited.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful.”

Rachel was thrilled.

“Yes. We’ve always

wanted a family and now seems a good time. I think it’ll be great to be a mum.”

“Yes, it is,” Rachel agreed.

Then she thought of Sophie, out with Ollie.

“It has its challenges,” she told Ali, “but I wouldn’t be without my Sophie for the world.”

“Of course you wouldn’t. She’s a lovely girl.” Ali smiled and squeezed her hand.

“I must go and get some of that delicious quiche. See you later.”

Rachel watched Ali make her way towards the buffet.

What a wonderful time of life for her.

“Hey, beautiful. How are you today?” Ewan sat down opposite and grinned.

He ran a hand through his blond hair and Rachel couldn’t help noticing how muscular his arm was.

“I couldn’t leave it any longer before I spoke to the most attractive woman at the party,” he told her.

Rachel felt her face growing warm.

“How are you?” she asked.

“Not bad, not bad at all.”

“Enjoying the party?”

“Maeve certainly knows how to put on a good spread.” Ewan smiled.

“Yes, it’s –” Rachel stopped suddenly.

The paintball party had returned and there, framed in the doorway, was her daughter – and she was kissing Ollie.

“Hey, what’s the matter?” Ewan followed her gaze and burst out laughing. “Oh, I see.”

Rachel frowned, but then Ewan came to sit beside her and his arm went round her.

“Don’t worry, babe,” he told her. “Ollie’s a decent lad, and a bit of romance is only natural.”

“How about we go out for



dinner to take your mind off it?"

Rachel wondered if she'd heard right. Had she just been asked out on a date?

"Thank you, Ewan. That would be lovely."

Ewan grinned and pecked her on the cheek.

"Pick you up at eight," he said, and sauntered away.

Rachel wasn't sure whether she felt excited or petrified. She hadn't been on a date for years.

\* \* \* \*

Neil was feeling uncharacteristically low, partly because of Rachel. He'd been about to go over and talk to her at the party.

She'd been looking a little down, but just as Neil began to make his way across the room, Ewan had plonked down and put his arm around her.

Neil hoped his intentions were honourable. Rachel had been through enough.

Her husband had had an affair when Sophie was only six years old. Rachel had been devastated.

Now, it seemed Ewan had taken a shine to her, but Neil couldn't help feeling she deserved better.

But the main thing weighing him down was Apollo.

He looked at his beloved friend, limping along beside him, and bit his lip.

Poor Apollo wasn't at all well and Neil was on his way to the vet's.

In the park, a warm sun shone through the russet leaves and, over on the lake, the ducks were arguing and a squirrel raced up a nearby tree clutching an acorn.

Apollo didn't turn a hair.

"Hey, Neil. Apollo. How are you?"

Ali and Cam were coming towards them across the grass, their shoes wet and their faces glowing.

"Oh, hi."

"Good to see you, mate. Hello, Apollo, old fellow." Cam patted the dog's back and Apollo whimpered.

"What's up with you?"

Cam looked startled.

Usually, Apollo would be barking a welcome and leaping around them.

"Is everything all right,

Neil?" Ali asked, looking at the golden retriever.

Neil shook his head.

"I'm taking him to the vet," he told them. "He's off his food and he seems to be limping."

"Oh, no, poor boy." Cam knelt down beside the dog and stroked him gently.

"I'm so sorry, Neil. How long has he been like this?"

Neil shrugged.

"I didn't notice anything wrong until last night. I rang the vet first thing this morning."

"Well, they're really good at the surgery. They'll sort him out."

Neil nodded. He hoped Cam was right.

He hadn't had much call to go to the vet's with Apollo in the past, other than for routine matters.

Ali gave him a reassuring smile.

"We all get ill from time to time."

Neil felt comforted. That was true. He smiled for the first time that morning.

"Good day, all."

Neil turned to see Priscilla marching towards them.

She was wearing a long coat. Her honey-coloured hair was neat and she wore an arresting brooch.

Neil wondered if it was one of Ali's.

The satisfied look on her face seemed to confirm it.

Usually, Neil enjoyed Priscilla's company. She was a very intelligent woman who had been high up in the Civil Service before she'd retired.

Neil often savoured a conversation with her, and her pithy remarks amused him. However, he wasn't sure she was the person he wanted to meet on a day when he was low.

"How is everyone?"

Priscilla asked, her sharp gaze sweeping their faces. "Is something wrong, Neil? You look like a wet weekend."

Neil tried to maintain a pleasant smile.

"I'm afraid that Apollo is unwell, Priscilla. I was just taking him to the vet's."

She turned her gaze on the golden retriever.

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that, Neil. Although I can't

say I'm surprised."

Neil took a breath and made a conscious effort not to raise his voice.

"And why's that?" he asked. "Apollo has always been very healthy."

"I'm sure he has." Priscilla nodded. "But you do spoil him. Perhaps a stricter diet and more exercise would do the trick?"

"I'm not sure that walking a sick animal to the vet's is the best idea in the world."

Neil didn't trust himself to reply.

"Neil takes excellent care of Apollo." Ali was indignant. "Really, Priscilla, you should be supporting Neil, not criticising."

Priscilla raised an eyebrow and Neil thought he could detect a flush of pink along her cheekbones.

"There's no need to be touchy," she retorted. "Constructive advice is always helpful."

"I'm sure Apollo will be much better before long," she added awkwardly.

There was an uncomfortable silence.

"I tell you what," Priscilla said at last. "I'll take a quick look at him. I've had a lot of experience with pets and all dogs love me."

Neil saw Ali and Cam exchange glances.

"Here, boy, let's see what's ailing you." Priscilla moved towards Apollo, who nestled closer to Neil and watched her warily.

As soon as she bent down to stroke him, he howled.

Priscilla stepped back hurriedly, her face red.

"Well," she said. "There's nothing I can do for him, after all. You'd better get him to the vet. Good luck."

The others managed to hold on until she was beyond earshot, and then they erupted.

\* \* \* \*

The Fancy Pheasant was packed and the excitement tangible.

It was the first round of this year's Quiz Quartet and the Smarty Pints, along with the other teams that were competing from the Flying Duck, had driven to the neighbouring village of Quinton, ready to take on the challenge.

The owners, Jan and Pete, had decorated especially for the occasion.

Bunting hung from the rafters and blazing displays of autumn flowers had been arranged in large vases in the fireplaces.

It wasn't the Flying Duck, of course, but it was lovely, and it was fun to have a change of scene.

The first round of the quiz was always chaotic. Thirty-two teams from the four local pubs involved met for a head-to-head.

Names were drawn out of a hat to see who would be pitted against whom.

The Smarty Pints were to take on the Quizzee Bees.

Rachel had heard they were very good, and they were on home territory.

It was a daunting start. If they won, the Smarty Pints would be out of the tournament at the start.

"Well, good luck, everyone." Rachel glanced up to see Priscilla, unfazed as ever.

"I hear you've drawn the Quizzee Bees. An unfortunate start, but do try not to let the Flying Duck down."

Rachel raised an eyebrow and caught Dawn's eye and her friend grinned.

"You've got the Trivia Pursuits from the Fox and Ferret, I believe." Neil smiled mildly at Priscilla.

"I don't suppose you'll have any trouble there, but good luck anyway."

Priscilla gave a regal nod.

"Thank you, Neil. They went out in the first round last year and, I daresay, will do so tonight."

She swept away and Graham burst out laughing.

"Well, I wish I had her confidence," he remarked. "Though I daresay she's right. I don't think the Master Minds will lose."

Rachel agreed. They were an excellent team. How would she and the rest of the Smarty Pints get on?

Her excitement mounted as the landlord rang the bell and a hush descended.

The Master Minds were one of eight teams going first and Rachel and the others moved over to see how they would get on.





# On *Reflection*

## From the manse window

by Rev. Ian W.F.  
Hamilton.

**E**ACH year my wife and I, along with other ministers and their wives, all of whom are dear and long-standing friends, get together to go on a retreat.

Many of these retreats have taken place in Scotland, but in recent years we have been going rather further afield, to Bournemouth, Ireland and Bruges in Belgium.

We all boarded the ferry at Rosyth, bound for Zeebrugge, and had a calm overnight crossing!

After berthing in the Belgian port we were whisked off by bus to our hotel in the Centrum which is, of course, at the very heart of the ancient and beautiful city.

Visitors cannot fail to be impressed by its history, its cobbled streets and its architecture, not to mention its countless canals which wind their way from one end of the city to the other.

Bruges is one of the finest examples of a mediaeval town, and it has enormous appeal to residents and visitors.

Horse-drawn carriages pull tourists from one part of the town to another while boats glide around the canals and under the many delightful bridges, offering a rather different perspective of the ancient and historic town.

Walking through the narrow, age-old streets, as we did, you will discover beautiful buildings and squares, and if you have a head for heights you can

experience a spectacular view from the top of the Belfry, one of the finest bell-towers in Belgium.

It is obvious that Bruges clearly and carefully cherishes its past. In the year 2000 the historic city centre was added to UNESCO's prestigious World Heritage List.

However, it becomes evident that, though proud of its past, Bruges is also proud of its present.

Standing alongside its mediaeval splendour are examples of some brilliant modern architecture.

Back in 2002 the city was named the Cultural Capital of Europe, an honour that revived its cultural and artistic life.

That year left permanent legacies, not least in the Concertgebouw, the new concert hall, and Kanaaleiland, Canal Island.

Not to mention the many monuments restored at that time.

In the New Testament we read a lovely story, a parable told by Jesus of a householder who brings out of his household store treasures old and new.

All of us tend to hold on to old things that we regard as "treasures" which we cannot part with, especially if they evoke cherished memories.

But we need new treasures, too, those which we see immediately as most necessary for life today.

Old treasures or new treasures, it's not a case of choosing between them: we need both.

The same is apparently true of our world's great cities . . . it is certainly true of Bruges! ■

**Next week: David McLaughlan learns from mistakes.**

▶ "They all look relaxed," Dawn whispered. "My stomach's doing somersaults."

Rachel squeezed her hand.

"We'll be fine."

As she listened to the questions, she began to feel better.

The first round was the easiest, after all.

The Master Minds certainly seemed happy. They were putting down answers for everything.

Priscilla wielded the pen with a confident smile, Ali and Cam were laughing and joking, and Ewan looked relaxed.

Forty minutes later, and the four rounds were complete.

Noise escalated as people ordered drinks and discussed the questions.

"Well, that wasn't hard."

Priscilla came towards them, a glass of white wine in her hand.

"The one on capital cities in Africa was tough." Ewan stood beside Priscilla. "I think we'll be OK, though."

The results were soon announced and the Master Minds came through with flying colours.

The next set of teams were called up and the Smarty Pints were delighted when two more teams from the Flying Duck made it through.

However, as the results were announced, Rachel's stomach fluttered.

"We're up!" Neil smiled round at his teammates.

"Remember you're a great team. Have fun!"

Neil was always so calm, even tonight when he was worrying about Apollo and waiting for an X-ray and some test results.

Rachel took a deep breath.

After a few questions she and her teammates relaxed.

Between them they knew most of the answers and they had a good stab at the few which eluded them.

Whatever happened, Rachel felt they could be proud of their performance.

The time passed quickly and, before she knew it, the fourth round was over.

Had they done enough to

beat the Quizzee Bees?

"How did it go, beautiful?" Ewan was at her side with a glass of Prosecco and a bag of crisps.

"It looked like you all did well."

"I think it was OK. We knew a lot of the answers." Dawn nodded.

"I don't think we've disgraced ourselves. The only thing is the other team looked pretty competent."

Neil smiled at them.

"I'm very proud of my team, whatever happens."

"Really, Neil, encouragement is all very well, but you have to have a more competitive spirit if you want to succeed."

Priscilla had been listening and clearly felt it was time to intervene.

"We'll have to hope that your approach has been good enough to get you through to the second leg."

Rachel hoped so, too.

Participating was a great deal of fun, and if only they could get an opportunity to do better than the Master Minds . . .

Rachel shook her head. That wasn't likely, but she couldn't help thinking that it would be wonderful to see the expression on Priscilla's face if they did!

"We have an unusual situation." Rachel looked up as the landlord, Pete, began an announcement.

"Before we can give the results, I have to tell you that there has been a draw."

Rachel raised an eyebrow. She couldn't remember this happening before.

"The Smarty Pints and the Quizzee Bees will have to answer one last question."

"Whichever team is first with the correct answer takes this round."

Rachel gasped, and the Smarty Pints stared at one another. It wasn't over yet.

What was going to happen now?

Would they be able to answer the deciding question or would they go straight out of the competition in Round One?

**To be continued.**



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# Notes from my garden

It's worth seeking out resilient plants to deal with the UK's fickle weather, Alexandra Campbell says.

## Veg to sow now

You can sow spring cabbages, spinach, broccoli and winter salads from seed now, though you will probably need to protect them from hungry birds with netting. Also sow turnips, radishes, onions and garlic, as well as broad beans.



**I**T'S just beginning to feel like the end of the gardening year. That's a time to look back on your successes and identify what you'd like to plant for next year.

How has the weather treated your garden?

Dry weather has been an issue for many people – interspersed with torrential rain and flooding.

We had the driest May on record, while August was exceptionally hot. But June was wetter than usual!

Headlines may talk about the UK's "Mediterranean summers", but in my experience, hot summers are often followed by several successive years of gloomy, damp weather.

So perhaps the answer is to look for resilient plants rather than specifically drought-tolerant or



damp-tolerant plants.

One thing that annoys me about plant labels and online descriptions is that they often play it safe by saying that a plant needs "moist, well-drained soil".

I once went on Twitter to ask how many people actually had this. About one in 20 people said they did.

That leaves 19 out of 20 of us without much guidance when it comes to choosing plants that will do well in our drier or wetter than average soils.

I'd call roses resilient, provided they're given rose feed in spring and summer.

Dahlias are forgiving, too. They won't like very wet soil, especially in the winter, but otherwise they seem to deal with what the weather throws at them.

If you live on the warmer coastal edges of the UK, then you can often leave them in over winter, covered in a mound of garden compost or manure.

Some plants have drought-resistant and damp-loving varieties. For example, you may have been told that salvias love dry gardens, but there are also some that need regular rainfall or watering.

And there are salvias that





## Divide perennials

If you see a bald spot in the middle of any of your perennial plants, then it's time to lift and divide them. Typically the plants spread underground, away from the original plant. If they're vigorous, they'll out-compete other plants and you'll get a big clump with a bald spot in the middle. If they're less vigorous than the surrounding plants, then they'll die out because they can't spread.

## A light prune for roses

In September, you can give roses a light prune. This helps to shape them, and if you get very windy weather, they're less likely to suffer wind rock. I do like my roses to be quite tall in the border, however, so that they can be seen above the dahlias and grasses.



## Trimming hedges and topiary

This is the time of year when I call in some professional help to trim the hedges and the topiary before winter. They won't grow much after the end of September, and sharp edges and distinctive shapes make a big difference to the winter garden.

There's varying advice on when to trim a conifer hedge, because you're more likely to get brown patches if you trim it late in the season. If you cut back the sides of conifers such as Leylandii too much, they won't regrow.

However, earlier in the year there will be birds nesting and it's illegal to disturb them (and I wouldn't want to, anyway). Also, if you have a fast-growing conifer, such as a Leylandii, then it'll probably need two trims a year. So, being careful not to cut too deeply into the side of the hedge, take the top down to the height you want.

I have several kinds of topiary – holm oak trees cut into a pom-pom like a poodle's tail, a holly "Golden King" cut into three circles, one on top of the other, two lollipop-shaped privets and a small potted box spiral. The privet really needs cutting three times a year. It's very fast growing.

The holly and the holm oaks only need shaping once a year, and we always do it between late September and mid-November. If you're growing holm oaks as ordinary trees, you should prune them in late winter or early spring, but as topiary, they are key to the winter garden.

The holly and the privet, too, are best pruned in spring, but have been fine with earlier tidy-ups. If you get some very sharp frosts, it may kill any new growth on the tips, but that has never happened here. If you do get frost damage, leave it, then prune the plant as recommended in late spring.



over-winter in the ground, some that have to be lifted and stored, and annuals.

When I bought some beautiful salvia "Love & Wishes", I expected them to be as hardy as those I'd grown previously.

I left them in the ground over winter and they died because they're tender and don't like cold, wet soil.

But they did flower continuously from the end of June to October.

I should just have done some research, and not made assumptions!

Salvias do well in pots, so if the variety you like doesn't suit your soil, grow it in a pot.

Shasta daisies (Leucanthemums) seem resilient in damp or drought, but once again, there are lots of variants, so choose one that suits your soil and climate.

Echinaceas, too, seem quite adaptable, although they are not long lived.

I find that they don't come back year after year,

so have to be planted again every spring. But they do seem to deal with both dry and wet weather.

Yet when I tried rudbeckias in my dry soil, I struggled to get a decent season out of them even when watering regularly.

In terms of late summer flowers, Japanese anemones seem almost indestructible and they are very pretty.

While you will probably find "needs moist but well-drained soil" on the label, they have done exceptionally well in my dry (but occasionally sodden) garden.

As so much of the UK ranges from dry to damp and back again, this aspect of choosing plants is very dependent on trial and error. So see what's done well in your neighbours' gardens, and give it a go.

If a perennial plant doesn't do well for you, it may be that it actually really does only like "moist but well-drained soil". ■

Visit Alexandra's blog online at  
[www.themiddlesizedgarden.co.uk](http://www.themiddlesizedgarden.co.uk).

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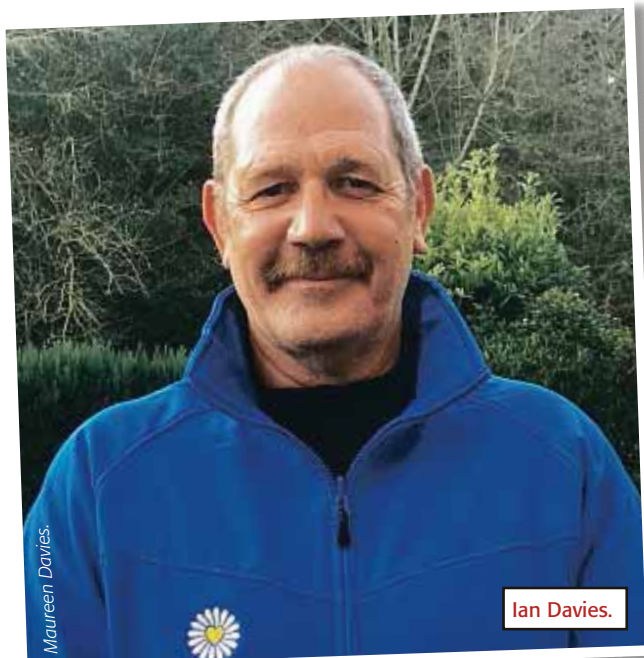
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Maureen Davies.

Ian Davies.

# We had some very scary moments...

What inspired Ian Davies to take on the super-human challenge of rowing across the Atlantic in just 50 days? Steve Newman finds out.

**I**AN DAVIES thrived on setting himself challenges, such as driving a one-litre car to Mongolia and swimming the Solent.

However, just one week after swimming the English Channel in 2014, Ian Davies was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, cancer of the plasma cells. It was a devastating blow.

"I received eighteen months of treatment and had a transplant on my fifty-fifth birthday," Ian says. "Fortunately, I am now in remission."

"At the end of the treatment, I felt it was time to prove to myself that I was still capable of regaining my fitness and raising funds for people less fortunate than myself, so I entered the Dart 10k, an endurance swim down the River Dart."

After completing that, Ian decided that a long-term challenge would be the ideal way forward to raise significant amounts of money for some great charities.

It was also important to him to show that having cancer should not stop people from doing things and stretching themselves.

He chose the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, an annual ocean rowing event which challenges competitors to row a distance of more than 3,000 miles west from the Canary Islands to Antigua

and Barbuda.

It's no surprise that more people have been into space or climbed Everest than have rowed the Atlantic.

It's known as "the world's toughest row" and it takes a certain kind of person to keep going when faced with blisters, salt rash, sharks and sleep deprivation.

Being ex-military, Ian and his three rowing companions decided to raise money for the Royal British Legion, Riding for the Disabled, 353, and Myeloma UK to help their great work combating bone marrow disease.

"We used a Rannoch 45, a 24 feet/7.3 metre fibreglass ocean rowing boat specially designed by the Essex-based manufacturer for this type of expedition."

"She cost £80,000 when new, but was purchased privately on the second-hand market from a team that had done an independent crossing from Portugal to Rio de Janeiro."

"We then worked on her to bring her up to the specifications required to enter the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge."

"We'll sell her on, to add to the funds we have already raised."

Many preparations had to be made before the team were ready to set off.

Ian used a rowing machine at home and undertook RYA (Royal

Yachting Association) courses in first aid, sea survival and navigation.

Life at sea presented a great many different challenges.

"We made drinking water by taking the seawater and processing it with a reverse osmosis machine."

"Our power supply came from batteries on board, and this was topped up with solar panels."

"In so many ways it was such an uplifting experience with a total lack of responsibility, other than surviving."

"For fifty days we knew nothing of what was going on in the world, just concentrating on helping each other and being a part of the team."

"We had some very scary moments but we laughed a lot, too!"

Ian and the team had to put a lot of their own money and efforts into the project, but sponsorship arrived in the form of the organisation Driving Miss Daisy UK.

"Driving Miss Daisy are normally known for their land-based Driving and Companion Services."

"They help anyone who needs additional

support with transportation and companionship, with a focus on the older generation."

"They offer Assisted Home to Holiday transfers for disabled or elderly people to reach their UK holiday location or departure point."

"We cannot thank them enough and we just had to call the boat *Miss Daisy* after that!"

Ian's cancer is treatable but not curable.

If there is one thing that he really wants to get across to people it is that cancer does not have to stop you doing amazing things.

If you would like to donate to help Ian and his friends in supporting these wonderful charities, then follow the link [www.atlanticmavericks.com](http://www.atlanticmavericks.com). ■



Ian with his specially customised boat Miss Daisy.

Danielle Jones.

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# Finding true friendship

True friendship is a real safety net during difficult times. Birmingham resident, Pauline Jones, couldn't agree more.



"After that first event, I knew I would be coming back" says Pauline (third left), pictured with Joanne (left), Bridget (second left) and Sheila (right).

"I had a very fulfilling job, working as a PA to a consultant in a children's hospital," says Pauline. "But when the time came to retire, I felt completely lost. That's where the Oddfellows came in. I went along to my local group and it introduced me to a brilliant group of new friends I could spend time with."

Pauline, 75, joined her local Branch of the Oddfellows in September 2019, as part of its annual Friendship Month celebrations. She found the group full of welcoming people that she could try a variety of new things with.

Pauline had struggled after retirement as she'd often worked long hours and hadn't built up a strong circle of friends outside of her job. When she heard about a coffee morning being held by the Birmingham Oddfellows, she didn't hesitate to give it a try.

"After that first event, I knew I would be coming back, I didn't even question it. Walking into a room full of people you don't know can be intimidating, but it's such a lovely group of people, that I didn't feel nervous in the slightest. Since then, the group has been my

safety net and they've filled a huge hole in my life.

"During the lockdown I had so many calls from different members checking in on me, I never once felt lonely or forgotten, although nothing is better than seeing my friends in person," added Pauline.

The Oddfellows has offered friendship and support to its members for more than two centuries.

It is one of the UK's largest friendly societies, with 309,000 members across its 121 Branches. It's a non-profit mutual (membership from £25 a year) run by members, for members, to improve the quality of people's lives.

Members can enjoy regular social events, such as coffee mornings, craft sessions, lunches out, guest talks and excursions.

There are also group holidays run by Oddfellows Travel in addition to benefits which include care and welfare advice and support, special member discounts and historical archive access\*.

Pauline adds: "When they say everybody is welcome at the Oddfellows, they truly mean it. If you don't know anybody when you arrive, you'll certainly leave with a handful of new friends!"

Throughout September, the Oddfellows is celebrating Friendship Month. Its Branches will be hosting hundreds of special social events, including online activities, with an open invitation to give their local group a try.

**INFORMATION:** To learn more about the Oddfellows ([oddfellows.co.uk](http://oddfellows.co.uk)) and to receive a free information pack and local events diary, call 0800 028 1810 or email [enquiries@oddfellows.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@oddfellows.co.uk).

To find your nearest Oddfellows Friendship Month event, and what to expect, visit [www.friendshipmonth.com](http://www.friendshipmonth.com).

\*T&Cs apply to member benefits.

## A friendly invitation

September's Friendship Month, and it's a great opportunity to meet new people in your area and to discover your community. We've lots of online social events planned, and a few socially-distanced outdoor ones, too.

So come say hello and give the Oddfellows a try, whether that's from the comfort of your home, or near to where you live. Wherever makes you feel most comfortable.

Membership costs from just £25 a year, plus join in September and get a £5 Love2shop voucher.\*

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When they say everybody is welcome at the Oddfellows, they truly mean it. If you don't know anybody when you arrive, you'll certainly leave with a handful of new friends!

Pauline,  
Birmingham Member

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# Would you *believe it?*

Got a question? Get in touch through e-mail [wouldyoubelieveit@dctmedia.co.uk](mailto:wouldyoubelieveit@dctmedia.co.uk) or \*write to "The People's Friend", 2 Albert Square, Dundee DD1 1DD.

## I'd Like To Know

**Q** My husband and I enjoyed a trip to New York a couple of years back and were recalling watching the many squirrels we saw in Central Park. Does anyone know roughly how many inhabit the park?

*Mrs F.K., Hull.*

**A** Thanks to the first-ever census being conducted last October, 300 volunteers undertook the task of counting the eastern grey squirrels residing in the 840 acres that make up Central Park. They came up with an estimated figure of 2,373.



**Q** I have several DVDs and CDs of Scottish entertainers the Alexander Brothers, which I still play and enjoy. Can you tell me a little bit about them?

*Mrs M.S., Bristol.*

**A** The duo, brothers Jack and Tom, had a successful career in traditional Scottish folk music which spanned more than 50 years. Popular songs included their 1964 hit "Nobody's Child", which is reported to have outsold the Beatles in Scotland, and "These Are My Mountains", which peaked at number 29 in the charts.

Originally from Lanarkshire, the brothers were painters and decorators before they launched their professional music careers, and their fan base spanned the world, ensuring they enjoyed success touring, among other places, the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

The brothers are sadly no longer with us, but were awarded MBEs for their contributions to the world of music in 2005.

**Q** I'm curious to know when passports were first introduced in the UK.

*Mrs G.R., Bolton.*

**A** The concept of a passport was first introduced by Henry V back in 1414 and the documents were known as "safe conducts".

All passports would have been issued and signed by the King or Queen until 1794, when it fell to what would now be known as the Foreign Secretary.

The modern-day passport with photograph and signature came into being in 1915, with a booklet-type following in 1921.



**September 14, 1984**

– the date when Joe Kittinger set off from America in the world's first journey across the Atlantic Ocean in a gas balloon.

**26 years**

**of an average person's life will be spent sleeping.**



**228 million km**

**is how far, on average, Mars is away from the sun.**

**1 in 10**

**people – it is estimated – is left-handed.**

**370**

**different types of reptile are found in the Amazon.**

## Something we didn't know last week...



**British people spend around £5 billion a year on average to repair DIY disasters, according to new research. The botched jobs admitted by embarrassed survey respondents included causing water to leak through the ceiling, fitting the hot and cold water supply the wrong way around and, somewhat worryingly, causing a brother-in-law to fall through a roof. The safety message is – if in doubt, get a professional!**





# End a tragedy. Leave a legacy.

A gift in your Will could help end loneliness and isolation in later life.

Our later years should be full of life and companionship. But for too many older people in this country, life is unbearable. Almost 2 million live without the food, warmth and financial security they need. Nearly 4 million say the TV is their only friend. We believe this is wrong.

You can help end this tragedy by leaving a gift in your Will to Independent Age. Our mission is to ensure that as we grow older, we all have the opportunity to live well with dignity, choice and purpose. With your support in the years ahead, we can reach out to many more older people with vital advice, guidance and friendship services.

To see the impact a gift in your Will could make on older people like Peter, please get in touch.

“ *Before Fiona started visiting me, I felt full of misery. Now I have someone who gives me the lift I need.* **Peter, 81.**

You can also ask us about making or updating your Will for free with a participating local solicitor, through the National Free Wills Network.

In 50 years, there'll be an additional 8.6 million of us over 65. That's why we're counting on the support of gifts in Wills from caring people like you. You can help end the tragedy of loneliness and isolation, and make older age a time of joy, friendship and hope.

**Request a free Will Guide today to see how you can make a lasting impact on older people's lives.**



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# Add A Layer

This gilet with a cabled central section and ties is worked in a lovely soft yarn, perfect for cooler days or evenings.



## MEASUREMENTS

**To fit sizes:** 76/81 cm (30/32 ins), 86/91 (34/36), 97/102 (38/40), 107/112 (42/44), 117/122 (46/48), 127/132 (50/52).

**Actual size:** 84 cm (33 ins), 95 (37½), 106 (41¾), 117 (46), 128 (50½), 139 (54¾).

**Length:** 57 cm (22½ ins), 58 (23), 60 (23½), 61 (24), 62 (24½), 63 (25).

## MATERIALS

5 (5, 6, 6, 6, 7) 50-gram balls of **Stylecraft Batik DK** in Storm (1913). One pair each 3.25 mm (No. 10) and 4 mm (No. 8) knitting needles; cable needle. For details of your nearest Stylecraft stockist telephone **01535 609798** or e-mail **info@stylecraftltd.co.uk**.

## TENSION

22 sts and 30 rows to 10 cm measured over st-st using 4 mm needles.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**alt** – alternate; **beg** – beginning; **CF** – slip next 3 sts on to cable needle and hold at front of work, K3, now K3 from cable needle; **cont** – continue; **dec** – decrease, **foll** – following; **inc** – increase, **K** – knit; **P** – purl; **patt** – pattern; **rem** – remain; **SKPO** – slip next st, K1, pass slipped st over; **slP** – slip next st purlways; **st(s)** – stitches; **st-st** – stocking-stitch (K1 row, P1 row); **tog** – together.

## Important Note

Directions are given for six sizes. Figures in brackets refer to the five larger sizes. Figures in square brackets [ ] refer to all sizes and are worked the number of times stated. When writing to us you must enclose an SAE if you would like a reply.



## BACK

With 3.25 mm needles cast on 103 (115, 127, 139, 151, 163) sts.

Work slip stitch border:

**1st row (right side)** – P2, [with yarn front slP, P1] to last st, P1.

**2nd row** – Purl.

**3rd row** – P3, [with yarn front slP, P1] until 2 sts rem, P2.

**4th row** – Purl.

**5th - 8th rows** – As 1st to 4th rows ★★.

Change to 4 mm needles and st-st:

**1st to 12th rows** – Beg with a knit row, work 12 rows straight in st-st.

**13th (dec) row** – K16 (18, 20, 22, 24, 26), SKPO, knit until 18 (20, 22, 24, 26, 28) sts rem, K2tog, knit to end (2 sts dec).

Keeping st-st correct, cont working dec row on every foll 12th row until 93 (105, 117, 129, 141, 153) sts rem.

Work a few rows straight until back measures 23 cm from beg, ending after a purl row. Change to 3.25 mm needles and patt border:

**1st to 6th rows** – Rep 1st to 4th rows of slip stitch border then work 1st and 2nd rows again, but inc 1 st at centre of last row – 94 (106, 118, 130, 142, 154) sts.

**7th row** – P4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [K6, P4] 8 (8, 10, 10, 12, 14) times, K6, P4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4).

**8th row** – K4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [P6, K4] 8 (8, 10, 10, 12, 14) times, P6, knit to end.

**9th to 12th rows** – Rep 7th and 8th rows twice.

**13th row** – P4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [CF, P4] 8 (8, 10, 10, 12, 14) times, CF, purl to end.

**14th row** – K4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [P6, K4] 8 (8, 10, 10, 12, 14) times, P6, knit to end.

**15th row** – P4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [K6, P4] 8 (8, 10, 10, 12, 14) times, K6, purl to end.

**16th to 20th rows** – Rep 14th and 15th rows twice, then 14th row again.

**21st and 22nd rows** – As 13th and 14th rows.

**23rd to 26th rows** – Rep 7th and 8th rows twice, but dec 1 st at centre on last row – 93 (105, 117, 129, 141, 153) sts.

**27th to 32nd rows** – As 1st to 6th rows – 94 (106, 118, 130, 142, 154) sts.

Change to 4 mm needles and beg with a knit row, work

straight in st-st until back measures 57 (58, 60, 61, 62, 63) cm at centre, ending after a purl row.

**Shape shoulders** – Cast off 6 (7, 7, 8, 9, 10) sts loosely at beg of next 8 rows, then 5 (6, 10, 11, 11, 12) sts at beg of next 2 rows – 36 (38, 42, 44, 48, 50) sts. Cast off loosely.

## RIGHT FRONT

With 4 mm needles cast on 49 (55, 61, 67, 73, 79) sts.

Work as given for back to ★★. Change to 4 mm needles and st-st:

**1st to 12th rows** – Beg with a knit row work 12 rows straight in st-st ★★.

**13th (dec) row** – Knit until 18 (20, 22, 24, 26, 28) sts rem, K2tog, knit to end, (1 st dec).

Keeping st-st correct, cont working dec row on every foll 12th row until 44 (50, 56, 62, 68, 74) sts rem.

★★★★Work a few rows straight until front measures 23 cm from beg, ending after a purl row and inc 1 st at side edge on last row – 45 (51, 57, 63, 69, 75) sts.

Change to 3.25 mm needles and patt border:

**1st to 6th rows** – Rep 1st to 4th rows of slip stitch border (see back) then work 1st and 2nd rows again, but dec 1 st at side edge of last row – 44 (50, 56, 62, 68, 74) sts ★★.

**7th row** – [P4, K6] 4 (4, 5, 5, 6, 7) times, P4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4).

**8th row** – K4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [P6, K4] to end.

**9th to 12th rows** – Rep 7th and 8th rows twice,

**13th row** – [P4, CF] 4 (4, 5, 5, 6, 7) times, purl to end.

**14th to 20th rows** – Work 7 rows working knit and purl sts as they present.

**21st row** – As 13th row.

**22nd to 26th rows** – Work 5 rows working knit and purl sts as they present and inc 1 st at side edge on last row – 45 (51, 57, 63, 69, 75) sts.

**27th to 32nd rows** – As 1st to 6th rows – 44 (50, 56, 62, 68, 74) sts.

Change to 4 mm needles and beg with a knit row, work 4 rows in st-st.

**Shape front slope** –

**Next (dec) row** – K4, SKPO, knit to end (1 st dec).

Cont working dec row on every foll 4th row until 34



(39, 41, 46, 50, 56) sts rem, then on every foll 6th (6th, 6th, 6th, 4th, 4th) row until 29 (34, 38, 43, 47, 52) sts rem.

Work straight until front measures same as back to shoulder shaping, ending at side edge.

**Shape shoulder** – Cast off 6 (7, 7, 8, 9, 10) sts at beg of next row and the 3 foll alt rows – 5 (6, 10, 11, 11, 12) sts.

Work 1 row straight.

Cast off.

## LEFT FRONT

Work as given for right front to ★★.

**13th (dec) row** – K16 (18, 20, 22, 24, 26), SKPO, knit to end.

Keeping st-st correct, cont working dec row on every foll 12th row until 44 (50, 56, 62, 68, 74) sts rem.

Work as right front from ★★ to ★★.

**7th row** – P4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [K6, P4] 4 (4, 5, 5, 6, 7) times.

**8th row** – [K4, P6] to last 4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4) sts, knit to end.

**9th to 12th rows** – Rep 7th and 8th rows twice.

**13th row** – P4 (10, 6, 12, 8, 4), [CF, P4] to end.

Complete to match right front working from 14th row of patt border and noting that dec row for front slope will read – Knit until 6 sts rem, K2tog, K4.

## TO COMPLETE

Join shoulders. Place a marker 56 (60, 64, 70, 74, 78) rows down from shoulder on each side edge.

**Sleeve borders** – With 3.25 mm needles and

right-side facing, pick up and knit 91 (97, 103, 113, 119, 125) sts evenly between one set of markers.

Purl 1 row.

Work 1st to 7th rows of slip stitch border as given for back. Cast off evenly knitways.

**Front borders (both alike)**

– With 3.25 mm needles, cast on 9 sts.

**1st row** – K2, [P1, K1] to last st, K1.

**2nd row** – K1, [P1, K1] to end.

Rep these 2 rib rows until strip, when very slightly stretched, fits up front edge and round to centre back of neck. Cast off in rib.

**Ties (both alike)** – Cast on 11 sts and work as front borders until tie measures 21 cm. Cast off evenly in rib.

**To Make Up** – Press work on wrong-side, omitting cables, and following the yarn care instructions on ball-band. Join side seams including the side edges of the sleeve borders.

Sew the cast-off edge of ties to inner edge of patt border as in photograph. Press seams. ■

**Next week: create a stunning Kaffe Fassett quilt.**



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# A Mystery At The Cat Café

Who was to blame for the babies' missing socks?

**I** DON'T understand." Maxine searched the nursery, lifting all the babies' paraphernalia in turn.

"I'm sure I put them down on the changing unit just a minute ago."

"What have you lost?" Angus tidied away the changing mat and frowned.

"More socks." She sighed.

In the scheme of world events it wasn't a huge problem, but it was causing Maxine untold annoyance.

"That's the fourth pair this week that have disappeared into thin air."

"They'll be somewhere," Angus told her reasonably. "I'll have a look when you're at work."

He lifted first Lily, then Rosie, and transported both carefully as he followed Maxine through to the living-room.

"That would be great."

Maxine paused, still not sure she was doing the right thing in going back to work quite so soon. "You're sure you'll be OK?"

Angus glanced down at their daughters, both sleeping in his arms, and smiled.

"We'll be fine. It's only for an hour while Josephine's at the dentist."

Maxine nodded.

However hesitant she was to end her maternity leave, even temporarily, an hour wouldn't hurt anyone.

"Besides," Angus went on, "you're only going to be downstairs. We can shout if we need you."

She kissed each baby on the forehead.

"We'll see you downstairs in an hour," he promised.

Pauline was at the counter and greeted her with something resembling a smile.



Pauline Watkins wasn't given to overly enthusiastic displays of affection, so this meant a lot.

"Welcome back."

"Thanks." Maxine's eye was drawn to a shopping bag and a cardboard box under the counter and she frowned.

She didn't like to criticise, but it wasn't like her staff to keep an untidy café.

As she peered closer at the box, however, a pair of feline eyes stared back at her.

"Who's in there?" She peered in, trying to see without disturbing its resident. "Is it Mick?"

"It's Mick," Pauline confirmed. "He's taken that box over. We were going to throw it out once the stationery was put away, but we didn't have the heart."

"Leapt straight in, he did. Josephine thought it might upset him if we took it away."

Maxine gave a short nod.

Was there a cat in the world who didn't like a box?

"And what about the bag?"

"That's mine. It's potatoes. I popped to Hill Farm on my way here this morning to see Annie. She insisted I take them."

At least they would be gone when Pauline went home mid-afternoon.

It took Maxine all of five minutes to feel like she'd never been away.

Soon she had a cat in her arms and a brush in her hand, and was busy getting to grips with making Gladys look nice for the guests who would soon be arriving.

"What's going on with Josephine and Billy?" Pauline asked as she was busy running through the bookings for the day.

"What do you mean?" Maxine pounced on Teddy so she could brush him, and she waited for Pauline's reply.

As a rule, Maxine didn't

gossip, but she had wondered herself what was going on with Billy and Josephine, and the romance that never quite seemed to happen.

They often went together to a quiz night at the local pub and had even been out for dinner.

A while back, Josephine had reacted badly when Billy seemed interested in another woman.

But while they were friendly, nothing ever seemed to come of it.

Pauline glanced towards the kitchen door, which Billy was safely behind, preparing the café's daily cakes and bakes.

"Well, I've noticed something between them," the café assistant admitted. "A spark of interest."

"They're good friends," Maxine supplied. "And colleagues."

"Are you sure there isn't more to it?"

"I really don't know."

Pauline seemed put out.

"It's a shame. They're a nice young couple and ideally suited if only they could see it."

The door opened and Josephine arrived back, putting an end to the conversation.

Two minutes later Billy walked in from the kitchen.

"Tell me," Maxine said in the few minutes before opening time, "how are things here with the cats?"

They all exchanged glances and Maxine knew at once it had been the right question to ask.

While she received daily updates, they were hardly detailed, and she could see from the worried faces now that something had been kept from her.

"Well," Josephine

▶ began, "we didn't want to worry you, but there's been a bit of unrest."

"It's Gladys," Billy supplied. "She's been very aggressive towards the others."

"Nothing major," Josephine rushed to reassure. "But we've had a keep an eye on her."

"Poor Teddy spends most of his time on that high bed over there on the shelf." Pauline pointed to the farthest corner of the café.

"And Mick still hardly comes out of his box," Josephine added.

Maxine's heart sank. Since being told of problems with the cats' behaviour, she and Angus had made sure they spent as much time as they could down in the café in the evenings. It obviously hadn't been enough.

Maxine felt guilty that she wasn't doing enough to help the cats adjust.

"I'm sure it will all settle down," Josephine told her. "Once you're back at work."

\* \* \* \*

Angus arrived in the café a short while later with both babies bundled up for an outing.

Pauline, Josephine, and Billy went to admire the youngest café residents.

The cats took very little notice and went about their normal business.

The exception being Gladys, who gave Angus a lazy look from the window-sill.

At one time she would have jumped on to his shoulder.

Angus noticed the snub and shrugged helplessly at Maxine, but didn't say anything.

"We're heading out," Maxine explained as she fetched her coat from the cupboard.

"Meeting friends from antenatal class," Angus filled in.

There had been a huge gap in Maxine's life recently, since her best friend had moved away.

But life went on and gradually they were increasing their social circle with new faces.

"Have a lovely time," Josephine told them. Maxine intended to try.

\* \* \* \*

It was near closing time by the time Maxine and Angus made their way back.

"They're nice people," Maxine said of their new friends. "I'm pleased we kept in touch."

"Yes, we'll need to suggest meeting up again. We can maybe have them round to ours next time."

Maxine felt a pang of anxiety. She shouldn't be making plans to enjoy herself until the problems with the café had been addressed.

Her heart melted as she saw Gladys and Millie watching from the window.

"Oh, Maxine." Josephine met them at the door, her face pale.

Maxine knew a moment of panic.

Something had happened.

"What is it?" She hardly dared to ask.

"Sadie's missing."

"We've looked everywhere," Billy told her as she and Angus came into the café. "Everywhere."

"Did you check the flat?" Angus asked.

He looked crestfallen.

"Well, no, but the door's been closed since you came down earlier, so we didn't think there was any chance she'd be there."

"I'll check." Angus took two strides to the door and Maxine could see him going up the stairs two at a time.

Of all the cats, Sadie was the one most likely to be in the flat at any given moment.

Maxine dared to hope right up until the moment Angus reappeared and shook his head.

"What about outside?" Maxine could barely speak for worry.

"She's not in the catio, and there's no sign the fence has a gap in it," Josephine confirmed.

Sadie was one of the smallest cats in the café.

She had followed Maxine up to the flat every night and slept at the foot of her

bed until they had brought their babies home.

And now she was gone.

Maxine wondered if this escape was another protest against the changed order of things.

"She must have found a way out," Angus surmised.

"We're always careful," Billy replied. "Whenever someone arrives or leaves we watch the door."

"We'll need to go out and look for her," Maxine decided. "There's nothing else for it."

"You stay here with Rosie and Lily," Angus said to Maxine. "Sadie might come back of her own accord and you can let us know if she does."

"Billy, Josephine – how are you fixed for some overtime?"

There was a quick exchange of glances between the assistants.

"No problem," Billy said, and Josephine nodded.

The search party was on the verge of setting off when a very flustered Pauline Watkins arrived back at the café, carrying the bag that had been under the counter earlier.

"I seem to have something of yours," she said, placing her bag on the floor and opening it up.

Maxine peered inside and could have cried with joy.

"Sadie!" She lifted the little cat out of the bag and cuddled her close. "How on earth?"

"She must have slipped in when I wasn't looking."

"How could you not know she was there?" Billy asked.

"Well, I thought the bag was a bit weighty, of course. But it was full of potatoes, so I was expecting it to be heavy."

The burst of laughter from everyone startled babies and cats alike.

Lily and Rosie began to cry, and the cats scattered here and there – including Sadie, who leapt from Maxine's arms in fright.

It took a while for everyone to settle down.

"I almost forgot to say," Billy said once they were settled with cups of tea.

"When we were looking for Sadie earlier, we did a

thorough search of the café. We found these in Teddy's bed."

He dug into his pockets and pulled out a collection of tiny socks.

Suddenly the mystery was solved. Teddy was the tiny sock thief.

"It's a relief to know it wasn't me forgetting where I put them," Maxine admitted.

They finished their tea and Josephine got to her feet.

"If you don't mind, Billy and I should be going."

"Pub quiz?" Pauline asked.

The two younger assistants locked gazes for a little longer than expected.

"Dinner," Josephine confessed without taking her eyes from Billy. "And dancing."

Pauline sent a meaningful glance Maxine's way.

It seemed suspicions were confirmed beyond doubt.

\* \* \* \*

Later, once all the excitement of the day had calmed down and the babies were asleep, Maxine sat down next to her husband.

"You look serious." Angus put an arm around her.

"We need to make some changes around here," she said. "We need a new addition to the café."

"Not more cats, surely? At least not until we get the ones we have back on to an even keel."

"No, not more cats."

"Babies?" He sounded even more alarmed at this prospect.

"Don't you think we should resort to some kind of normality before we think of more children?"

Maxine smiled.

"No. Not more babies. I was thinking, given the way the cats have been, that I should think about going back to work."

"But we can't do all the childcare ourselves."

He nodded slowly as realisation dawned.

"We should start looking for a nanny," he declared.

"Exactly," Maxine said, smiling. ■



**Arrowword** Enter the answers in the direction indicated by the arrows.

## Pathfinder

## Solutions Arrowword

[illegible]

## Pathfinder

UNIPOD, TIMER, POLAROID,  
FIXER, PLATE, FLASHGUN,  
SPOTLIGHT, SHUTTER,  
RANGEFINDER, TRIPOD,  
FLASHBULB, FILTER, EMULSION,  
MAGNIFIER, CINE CAMERA

AMPLIFIER	PLATE
CINE CAMERA	POLAROID
EMULSION	RANGEFINDER
FILTER	SHUTTER
FIXER	SPOTLIGHT
FLASHBULB	TIMER
FLASHGUN	TRIPOD
MAGNIFIER	UNIPOD

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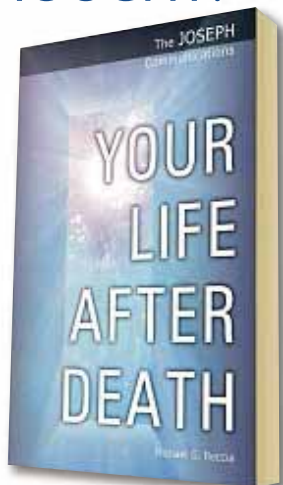
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## OUR WEEKLY SOAP

### What on earth is Carol up to now?

**G**RAEME, the kitchen apprentice at the Old Engine Room, was about to head inside the deli café to begin his work.

He was looking forward to chatting with Clive to brainstorm ideas for the new autumn menu.

Graeme's ideas had come while eating one of the little pork pies his mum bought from the supermarket.

As he'd chewed the crispy pastry, and his teeth sank into jelly and then the meat inside, he'd come up with some ways of improving the pork pie using local ingredients.

A movement to Graeme's side caught his eye and he spun around to see someone behind him.

It was his younger brother, Adam.

"What are you doing here?" he called.

Adam shrugged.

"I had nothing else to do today."

"Have you followed me?" Graeme asked.

Adam kicked the ground.

"Might have done."

"Go home," Graeme ordered. "Don't you have an appointment with the youth leader today?"

"It's cancelled," Adam replied sulkily. "I just wanted to come to see

where you work."

Graeme softened and walked towards his brother.

"Look," he began gently. "You can't come in. It's not for the likes of people like us from North Ryemouth."

"But you're allowed inside," Adam huffed.

"Yes, in the kitchen, out of sight," Graeme said, his voice catching. "Go home."

Adam nodded towards Ryemouth's heritage centre along the riverside path.

"What time does Geoff open that place up?"

"Who's Geoff?" Graeme asked, confused.

"The fella who runs the centre. The one who saved Grandad's life when they worked at the shipyards together."

"He's called George, not Geoff," Graeme laughed. "And he usually opens up about ten."

Adam shifted from one foot to the other.

"I'll go and wait, then."

"Watch what you're doing and don't give him any cheek," Graeme warned.

Adam walked away to the heritage centre to wait for George, while Graeme headed inside to work.

\* \* \* \*

Outside the heritage centre, Adam sank to the grass, turned his face to the sun and closed his eyes.

When George arrived at ten, he carried his rucksack on his back with a flask of coffee Mary had made.

He was rather taken aback to find a young lad asleep at the door.

George coughed loudly and Adam opened his eyes.

"I know you, don't I?"

George asked, taking in Adam's face.

Adam stood quickly.

"We met last week. I'm Eddie Little's grandson. You're the fella who saved Grandad's life."

"Ah, yes," George smiled, remembering his encounter with the unruly lads.

"What have you come back for?" he said with a touch of caution in his voice. "If it's valuables you're after, there's nothing kept on site."

George whipped out his phone from his back pocket and held it high.

"I've got the police on speed dial. So don't even think about trying any funny business with me."

Adam staggered backwards.

"No . . . George. I don't steal. I didn't come here for that. I came to see you."

George stood stock still.

"Me?"

Adam nodded.

"I wanted to find out all about the shipyards. Grandad won't talk about those days; he says it's all best forgotten."

George eyed Adam warily.

"What about the gang of lads you were here with last week?" he asked.

"I'm here on my own. I just want to talk. I want to learn about the ships."

George frowned.

"You're not playing me for a fool, are you?"

"No," Adam shook his head.

George breathed a sigh of relief. He put his hand into his pocket and brought

out the key to the centre.

"If you want to talk, we'll need two chairs set up."

George pulled his flask out of his rucksack.

"Do you drink coffee?"

Adam's face clouded over and he glanced towards the Old Engine Room.

"Yes, but I can't afford –"

"Nonsense," George interrupted. "Mary made this and I'm sure there'll be enough for two."

George and Adam positioned their chairs so that they could gaze out over the river.

George made himself comfortable, and offered a plastic cup filled with coffee to Adam.

"Now, where would you like me to start?"

\* \* \* \*

Meanwhile, at Anna and Carol's plush riverside apartment, Carol was in a state of excitement.

She was opening all of the kitchen cupboards and emptying them of tins of soup, rice and pasta and was stuffing them all into an oversized plastic bag.

Carol looked particularly glamorous, wearing heavy make-up more suited to a night out on the town.

Anna watched her sister, confused by her appearance and her actions.

"That should be enough," Carol announced once her bag was full.

Anna watched her sister leave the flat, bag in hand, and wondered what on earth Carol was up to now.

**More next week.**



## The Perfect Holiday

After a long drive in our motor home to get to our holiday destination, my partner was tired and needed to nap.

Probably guessing I'd be happy to sit and chat, he came up with the perfect solution by choosing this beauty spot to park at, and presenting me with this copy of my favourite magazine.

Clever lad! Now we are both very happy.

**Ms P.D., Co. Tyrone.**



## Secret Squiggles

Thank you for the excellent article on Pitman shorthand.

I studied shorthand in 1960 and spent my first years at work in a bank using shorthand.

I would travel by train and read books printed in shorthand and received many curious looks from fellow passengers.

When I married, I continued using shorthand, taking minutes at the PTA meetings of our local school.

I returned to work as a medical secretary after having children, again using my shorthand.

The last years of my working life I spent as a school secretary, and the children were always fascinated to see my secret squiggles.

Once learned, it is second nature, and I do hope it will continue to be used. I'm sure there are lots of ex-secretaries amongst your readers who still write shopping lists in shorthand.

**Mrs P.C., East London.**

# Between Friends

Write to us at Between Friends, "The People's Friend", 2 Albert Square, Dundee DD1 1DD, or e-mail us at [betweenfriends@dctmedia.co.uk](mailto:betweenfriends@dctmedia.co.uk).

## Star Letter

Please see attached a photograph of some of the teddy bears my mother, Ivy, has knitted over the last couple of weeks.

One of your avid readers, Ivy is now ninety-seven years of age and has always been very active. She has knitted or crocheted hats and baby clothes for charity for quite a few years.

Yarn for garments soon became difficult when the local shops had to close their doors due to COVID-19. So she decided to use up the oddments to make a teddy bear.

As you can see from the photograph, one became many, and some have already found homes. Though she can now go to have her hair set every



week, the local church and her Thursday club remain closed.

Who knows how many there will be to give away to her worthy causes?

**Ms C.W., Gloucestershire.**

Our Star Letter writer will receive a Dean's branded jute shopping bag containing three tins of delicious Dean's shortbread.

*Consume as part of a balanced diet.*

All other printed UK letters will win one of our famous tea caddies and a pack of loose tea. Our friends from overseas will receive an alternative prize.



## A Silver Lining

This may sound bizarre, but I am so glad that my filling dropped out!

Otherwise, I would not have found a copy of "The People's Friend" in the dentist's waiting-room. The blend of articles and short stories is really entertaining and absorbing.

What I love the most is the weekly instalment of "Riverside". Every week I can't wait to see what George has been up to and whether Harry's plotting and scheming will cause more disruption within the community.

**Mr A.B., Yorkshire.**



## At My Ease

*I see her sitting over there,  
Curled up in the old armchair.  
Slowly sipping a cup of tea –  
Oh, wait a minute, I think it's me!*

*The walls are filled with photo frames  
Of stiff-collared gents and regal dames.  
Memories of days gone by –  
My, how the years do fly.*

*The evening sun sets the room aglow  
As I snuggle more deeply into my throw.  
Dust motes dance in a stir of air;  
The cat brushes by and I stroke her hair.*

*The book I'm reading falls across my knee.  
I close my eyes and let it be.  
The next chapter rests upon my lap,  
To be continued after my nap!*

**Ms M.A., Canada.**



## Cousin Camaraderie

From left to right are my five great-grandchildren, Miller, Ellie, Charlie, Jack and Alex. Miller is an only child, Ellie and Charlie are sister and brother, and Jack and Alex are brothers.

They were visiting for their great-granda's eighty-fifth birthday.

**Ms B.R., Aberdeenshire.**

## A Multi-vocational Pup

My kids and I are all canine crazy so we've very much enjoyed your "Dogs With Jobs" articles and thought our own four-legged superstar deserved a mention.

Dasher was born just after Christmas, so naturally we named her after a reindeer, and the name certainly suits!

When we're out on walks, people often stop us and ask "What is she?", to which we answer "a Yorkshire terrier cross Pomeranian" or "Yorkie Pom" for short. She looks like a teddy bear, but has all the feistiness of the Yorkie!

As for jobs, Dasher makes an excellent door bell, vacuum and shoe stealer and can bring a smile to the saddest of faces. It's fair to say there's never a dull moment when she's dashing around!

If any other readers have a Yorkie Pom, we would love to know!



**Ms S.M., Cheshire.**

## Gratitude For Gratitude

I enjoyed the article on thank-you letters. It brought to mind a time when our granddaughter was at the age when we thought she should dispense with her dummy, but she had other ideas!

I discovered a storybook about a family in the same situation and the tactics they used.

Our granddaughter identified with the story and we were hopeful of a success story of our own.

I was so appreciative that I wrote a thank-you letter to the author, describing the impact the story had had on our family.

Then there arrived a thank-you letter from the author herself and a copy of her latest children's story as a gift for our granddaughter for giving up her dummy!

Of course, another thank-you letter was needed then! Sophie still has the letter and book she received.

**Mrs M.F., Merseyside.**

## Puzzle Solutions from page 25

### Word Ladder

One answer is:  
DUCK, DUNK,  
DANK, BANK,  
BAND, BOND,  
POND.

### Crossword

A	B	E	R	Y	S	T	W	Y	T	H
V	I	O	T	R	H	C				
E	I	G	H	T	S	O	M	E	R	E
R			H	K	N	S	W			
D	O	G	G	E	R	E	L	N	A	V
I	A	S	R	O	U	D				
N	B	R	I	A	N	C	L	A	R	K
N	I	Y	V	E	U	K				
A	L	B	A	L	I	M	A	S	S	O
U	A	F	R	S	A					
R	O	L	L	I	N	G	S	T	O	N
U	D	S	I	E	H	S				
B	I	C	H	O	N	F	R	I	S	E

### Pieceword

M	O	U	S	S	E	G	A	N	D	E	R
O	N	U	O	T	D	E	E				
H	O	E	L	E	V	E	R	E	D	M	U
A	X	L	E	O	R	Y	E				
I	T	C	H	E	R	E	D	R	E	S	S
R	E	S	S	S	T	Y					
O	P	I	A	T	E	D	I	S	T	I	L
T	S	L	E	I	E	F					
F	I	S	C	A	L	S	C	E	N	I	C
S	O	E	S	S	C	R					
C	O	N	T	R	A	L	T	O	R	E	A
R	A	T	A	L	I	T	E				
I	L	L	A	R	R	I	V	E	D	I	T
M	L	I	K	E	G	O	U				
P	L	I	N	G	T	E	N	N	I	S	

### Sudoku

8	2	5	4	6	7	3	9	1
6	9	7	3	1	5	8	4	2
4	1	3	8	2	9	6	5	7
9	4	6	5	7	1	2	3	8
1	5	8	2	3	6	4	7	9
3	7	2	9	4	8	1	6	5
5	6	1	7	8	3	9	2	4
7	8	4	6	9	2	5	1	3
2	3	9	1	5	4	7	8	6

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