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sale
now!



March already – and spring is on the way! Our beautiful cover painting of Ben Venue in the Trossachs is making me want to pull on my walking boots and head for the hills. Willie Shand has done just that, and on page 8 you can read all about his latest visit to this lovely part of Scotland.

We have some fantastic reading for you this week. On page 62, author Helen Taylor looks at why women are such avid fans of fiction, and on page 27, historian Charlotte Lauder shares the incredible story of pioneering woman journalist Janette, who once wrote for the "Friend".

Another pioneering woman is Reverend Fiona Ogg, who has found an unusual way of touring her remote rural parish. Turn to page 75 to find out more.

Our experts have lots of helpful advice to share with you this week. On page 44, Stephanie Hawthorne explains how to go about choosing an independent financial adviser, and on page 68, Alexandra Campbell has some brilliant tips for gardening in awkward spaces.

Finally, don't miss our tribute on page 81 to Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas, who passed away recently.

Angela

Angela Gilchrist, Editor.

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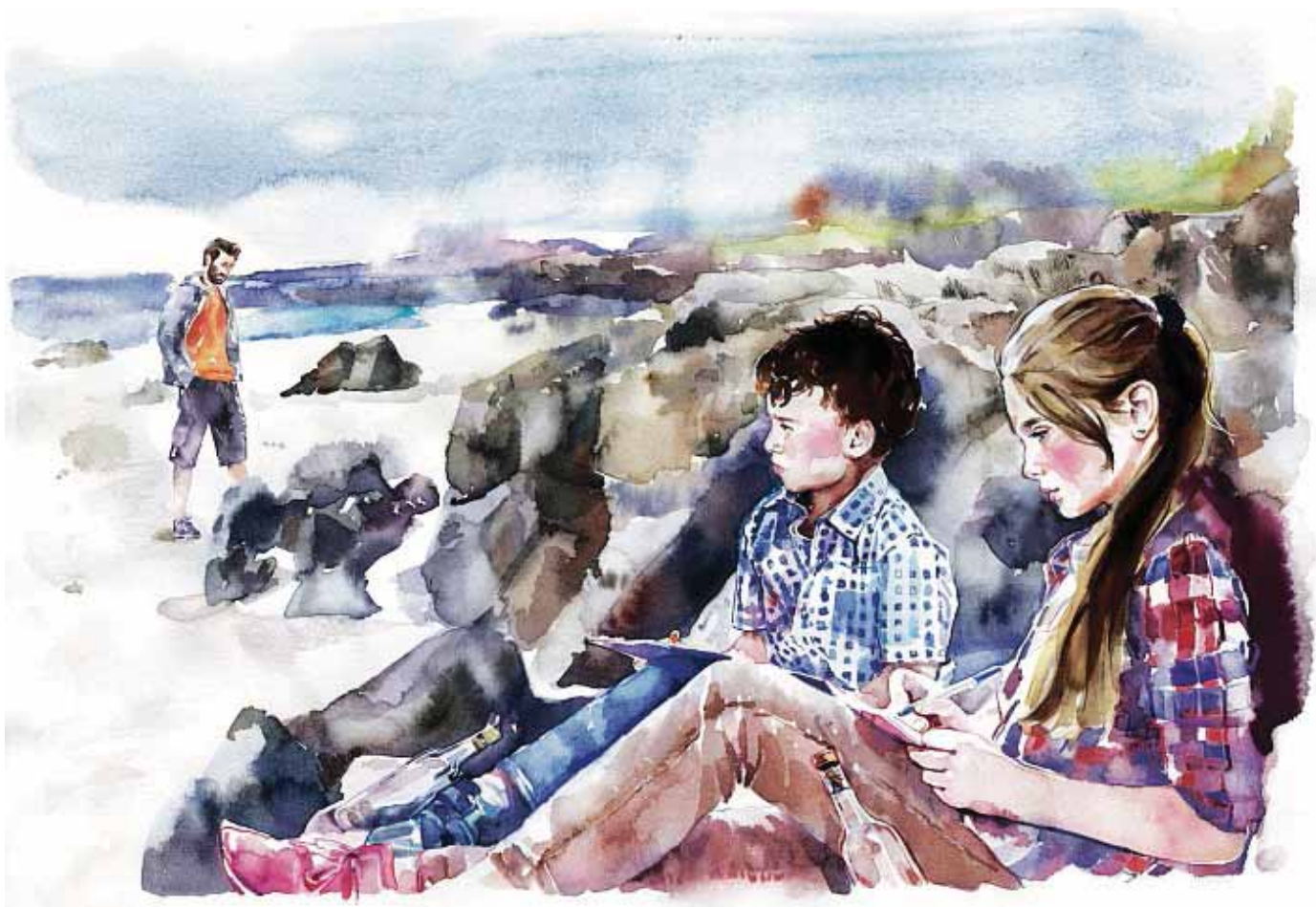
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Message Received

Was it possible
that a note in a
bottle had the
power to
change our
lives?

2010
DAD was trying his best, I could see that, but there was nothing I could do about the block of ice where my heart used to be.

I knew I was hurting him and hated myself, but I was helpless.

"Come on, Anja," he said. "It'll be a laugh. Do it for Cory."

I looked at my little brother, his pen poised as he considered what to write. He was eight, four years younger than me and far more malleable.

I gave a heavy sigh.

"Give me a pen."

"That's my girl."

"It won't bring Mum back, though, will it?" I muttered, and had to look away because I couldn't bear to see the hurt in his eyes.

Hurt that I'd put there.

It was hard to cope with Dad after Mum died. He went quiet and hardly spoke. It was as if he was on autopilot for months.

Then he started trying too hard, as if he felt guilty. In some ways it was worse than his silence.

His latest stupid idea was for us to write notes to put in glass bottles.

"I'll throw them in the sea when I'm sailing," he said. "You never know where they might end up."

"Smashed to pieces at the bottom of the sea," I said.

But Dad was anti-plastic. He said he saw a lot of it when he was on the water and wasn't going to add to it. If glass broke, it would break down and become harmless sea glass.

"Tell that to Mrs Chambers," I said. "Her dog cut his paw on broken glass on the beach."

"It isn't the same," Dad said, exasperated. "Look, Anja, do it or don't do it. I don't care."

Cory looked up.

"Stop arguing!" he cried. "Just stop!"

He burst into tears and Dad hugged him.

"Sorry, bud. We didn't mean anything by it, did we, Anja?"

I glared – I'd meant every word. But Cory was upset so I agreed.

"Of course not. Don't cry. You never know, someone might find your note and you'll end up with a pen friend."

"You haven't put your address on, have you?" Dad said. "Just my mobile number, that's right."

I began to write on my piece of paper and saw the smile on Dad's face.

* * * *

2013

"Hey, Cory," Dad said as we sat down for dinner.

"You'll never guess what I got today."

"Something for your boat?" I said.

That was the usual thing he looked pleased about.

He said if it hadn't been for that boat and being able to get out on the sea, he would never have coped with losing Mum.

As if Cory and I had nothing to do with it. As if we weren't important enough to help him turn his life around.

He'd taken up sailing after Mum died. One of his friends thought it might bring him out of himself.

It took him out of himself all right. It had become a real passion and it was all we heard about.

"More exciting than that," he said.

Cory shrugged and stabbed a chip with his fork, dunking it in a lake of tomato ketchup.

He'd changed over the past three years. He was turning into me, I thought guiltily.

Dad put his cutlery down and picked up his phone.

"I have had a text message!"

Cory and I exchanged looks.

"From someone called Natalie," he went on.

"Who is Natalie?" I said.

"I'm glad you asked," Dad said, grinning like an idiot.

"Natalie is the mother of Ryan. They live down the coast and Ryan's uncle is a fisherman."

"Fascinating," I drawled.

"He pulled up a bottle in his net," Dad went on. "A complete bottle with a message inside. Your message, Cory."

Cory was enough of a kid to be excited about that, but I remained unimpressed.

"He's a year older than you," Dad went on. "He's hoping you'll message him."

"He's going to send you a postcard of his home town and I suggest you do the same."

* * * *

2015

"Do I have to come?" I said as Dad loaded up the car.

"No, you don't," Dad said.

"But I'd like you to. You'll be off to university next year and we won't get as many chances to do things as a family."

But we weren't a family any more. A huge chunk of our family was missing.

Dad had filled the hole with his boat.

Over the past two years Cory seemed to have filled it with Ryan.

Since they'd been in touch it was all Ryan this and Ryan that.

Natalie, Ryan's mum, had invited us to go down there for a weekend.

There was some sort of racing event on and, like Dad, she was a keen sailor.

I asked Cory about Ryan's dad and he just shrugged.

You know what boys that age are like.

Ask them how many skins they've got for a character in a computer game and they'll bore you rigid, giving you comprehensive details for each one.

Ask them anything about their best friend's family and you get a blank look and a shrug.

Dad hitched the trailer to the car and off we went, boat and all.

I thought the boys might be shy around each other at first, but they'd been messaging every day.

They went straight up to Ryan's bedroom.

Natalie lived in a tall terraced house overlooking the bay.

Model boats in every window told of her passion. When they met, Dad's eyes sparkled.

I hadn't seen him twinkle like that for years.

Natalie hardly seemed to notice me at first, then she turned and held out her arms.

"You must be Anja. What a lovely name."

She tried to hug me, but I stepped back.

"Would you like to see your room?"

"We're staying here?" I said with a glare in Dad's direction.

I'd assumed he'd got us a caravan or a B&B.

"Come on," Natalie said.

"Bring your bag. I'll show you, then we'll have something to eat."

I threw another look at Dad and he looked down at his feet. As well he might.

"I've put you right at the top overlooking the back garden."

"Your dad said your bedroom at home overlooks the sea so I thought you might like a change of scenery."

"I like the sea," I muttered.

She made me feel like a small, rebellious child. I was actually taller than her, which made it even more awkward.

Dad looked down at his feet. As well he might

Cory was taller than her, too.

"I can move you to a different room," she said.

"Is this a B and B, then?" I asked.

"It belonged to my late husband's family." A shadow crossed her eyes.

"It was always open house here and I like to carry on the tradition. We often have friends and family to stay over."

Well, that put me in my place.

"Do you like sailing, Anja?"

"I hate it."

"Ever tried it?"

"No."

"Well, it's not for everyone. Ryan's not keen, either, and I wasn't until I met my husband."

I closed the bedroom door after she'd gone and went to look down at her garden.

It was thin, but went back a long way and was broken up by trees, a summer house and seating areas. The borders swirled in and out.

Mum would have loved it. We just had a small courtyard garden at home.

She filled our tiny garden with pots full of flowers and I know the one thing she wished for was a bigger garden.

We had fish and chips that night and the following day, Dad and Natalie went sailing.

There were a series of races and the boys went

down to the front to watch, but I stayed in the garden.

It was quite peaceful until they all came home, laughing and talking.

We went out for dinner and I felt like an outsider, as if Dad and Cory had found a new family.

The next day there were more races. I wandered round the little town.

It wasn't unlike home, but I supposed one seaside town was much like another, with the backdrop of the sea and a mix of old buildings and modern flats.

We ate at Natalie's house that evening. It was hot, so she made salad.

I took mine out into the garden so I could sit as far away as possible. No-one seemed to mind.

* * * *

2017

I had to come home from university to go to Dad and Natalie's wedding.

The boys looked handsome in suits. Cory was best man and Ryan gave Natalie away.

She'd asked me if I'd like to be a bridesmaid, but I politely turned her down.

My family had been like four sides of a square which had broken when Mum died, but now I saw a new square, one I wasn't part of.

What made it worse was that Dad moved in with Natalie and sold our house.

Mum's little courtyard garden belonged to someone else. I hoped they cherished it as she had.

I said I'd stay with the boys while Dad and Natalie went on honeymoon.

They went for a week to the Isle of Wight, so they could spend it sailing.

They'd moved all my stuff into the top back bedroom overlooking the garden.

I didn't think of it as "my" bedroom. I had no intention of returning there when I left university.

Ryan and Cory were perfectly capable of taking care of



▶ themselves, but I was seen as a safe pair of hands.

Probably only there to make sure they didn't leave dirty cups and plates all over the place.

There were loads of people at the wedding and they held the reception down at the sailing club.

I remember sitting in a corner hoping no-one would speak to me.

One guy tried. I assumed he was a cousin of Ryan's. He looked a bit like Natalie with dark hair and brown eyes, but he was taller.

"Hi," he said. "You must be Anja. I'm Jake."

He held out his hand and I ignored it.

"You all right?" he asked. "Fine."

"Can I get you a drink?"

I pointed at my full glass.

"Right," he said, clasping his hands together. "Nice meeting you."

I smirked with satisfaction as he hurried away, but inside I felt awful at my rudeness.

It wasn't his fault Dad and Cory had moved on. It wasn't mine, either.

Halfway through the week, Cory and Ryan went to the fair which was in town for a few days.

"Come with us," Cory said.

"I won't, thanks. Maybe later in the week, if you haven't spent all your money. It was kind of you to ask," I added.

"Why wouldn't we?" Cory said with a shrug. "You're our sister, isn't she, bro?"

Bro?

"Sure," Ryan agreed. He didn't look very sure. It must be weird for him.

Nice for him to have a brother who was also a mate, but hard to get used to having a sister who scowled all the time and rarely spoke.

I potted in the garden when they'd gone, pulling up weeds and filling up the bird-feeders.

Oddly, I felt close to my mum amongst the flowers with the bumblebees and flitting hoverflies. She used to love all that.

"It might be small scale," she used to say, "but the butterflies and bees don't seem to mind."

In my mind I was back in the courtyard with a sea breeze tinkling the wind chimes and the hum of bees.

I was there with my mum and all was right with my world . . .

Then the back gate rattled and I was shaken rudely from my memories.

"Hello again! Sorry." It was Jake from the wedding. "I didn't realise there was anyone here. I rang the bell."

"Do I know you?"

He looked slightly ruffled. I daresay, with looks like his, he didn't often meet anyone who forgot him. I certainly hadn't.

"Jake," he said. "We met at the wedding."

"Oh," I said as if I barely remembered.

"I'll just get on, then, if that's OK."

"Get on?"

"The garden," he said, looking round.

"Although it doesn't look as if there's as much to do as usual."

He caught my puzzled look.

"I'm the gardener. I took over from my grandad when he retired."

"Natalie didn't do this?"

He laughed.

"Natalie doesn't know a trowel from a trug. No offence."

"She knows everything there is to know about boats, but gardening, not so much."

"My grandad created this garden. It was just a long strip of grass when he took over."

"It's beautiful," I told him.

"That's the first time I've seen you smile," Jake said. "No offence, but you should do it more often."

I went inside and left him to it, but a little later I took out two glasses of lemonade and invited him to sit down with me in the shade.

He'd taken his shirt off and his hair clung damply round his face.

Knowing he wasn't part of the family I didn't feel part of made me warm to him.

"It was weird how your dad and Natalie met, wasn't it?" he said.

"Through a message in a

bottle."

Much had been made of that in the wedding speeches, and Dad had thanked Cory for bringing them together.

"I have one of those, too," Jake went on.

"My dad found it, out on the shore stuck in a sandbank. Around the time Cory's was found."

"Really?"

"I hung on to it because I always hoped to meet the sender one day. She hadn't put any contact details, though."

"Presumably she didn't want to be contacted," I said, feeling my face redden.

"I forgot about it to be honest until the wedding," he went on, taking a sip of his lemonade. "Wow, this is fantastic!"

"I made it this morning," I said and he laughed.

"I'm serious."

"I've never tasted home-made lemonade before." He drained his glass. "Is there any more?"

"No," I said.

His face fell and I laughed.

"Of course there is."

I took his glass and his fingers brushed mine. I was being silly, of course. My emotions were all over the place and I was missing my friends.

But it felt so good to feel normal – here, in this place I felt anything but.

When I came back out, the bottle was on the table.

It looked exactly as I remembered it. Thick glass with a rolled-up message inside tied with ribbon.

"Would you like to see it? I brought it round to show Cory."

"I know what it says."

"Did you mean what you wrote?" he asked gently.

I sighed.

"Please help! I lost my mum and now I'm losing my dad, too. I miss them both."

"And I'm being held captive on an island by my wicked stepmother, blah blah blah . . ."

It seemed so childish now, especially the made-up bit about the wicked stepmother.

"Yes, I meant it. Not the wicked stepmother bit."

There wasn't one back then."

"There isn't one now," he replied. "Natalie doesn't have a mean bone in her body."

"I know," I said. "But I've been horrible to her from the start. It's too late to change now."

"It's never too late." He drained his glass.

"I bet you're disappointed," I hazarded. "Waiting all that time and then it turns out to be me."

"I'm not disappointed at all." He grinned.

I stood up and picked up our glasses.

"I'm going to the fair tomorrow evening with the boys. Would you like to come?"

"That would be great."

* * * *

2020

It feels strange now, looking back. If I hadn't written that silly note, Jake and I might never have got together.

He'd still have come round to do the garden, but he wouldn't have known about the hurt I held deep inside and perhaps he wouldn't have understood me quite so well.

From not wanting to go home in the holidays, because it wasn't home, I found myself looking forward to it, and not just because I'd see Jake.

He'd set off a thaw in my heart that extended to everyone, and he fitted in with my new family as if he'd always been a part of it.

I didn't become close to Natalie overnight, but when I started meeting her halfway, she became a friend.

I realised I'd never lost Dad. He was there for me always, just waiting to make a breakthrough.

I stopped thinking of the family as being a square. I thought of us as a circle, with no beginning and no ending.

Jake was already part of the circle, and I had no doubt more would join us as the years passed.

The ice in my heart had gone and all that remained was love. ■

This week we're *loving*



Get A Grip

The OXO Good Grips Herb and Kale Stripper makes short work of stripping herbs from their stems with a simple pull. The different-sized holes also tackle kale and other leafy greens. Priced £7.00 from Amazon.

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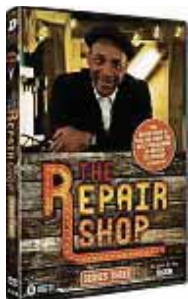
Parrot Pals

It's not only people and great apes who can show kind hearts. African grey parrots will lend a helping wing, too. In an experiment, they helped others, even spotting when help was needed, despite no benefit to them. Other bird species don't do this.



Green(ish) Guide

"The Sustainable(ish) Living Guide" (Bloomsbury, £12.99) is a friendly companion on the road to becoming more planet-friendly without radically changing your life. No preaching, just practical, down-to-earth suggestions.



Treasured Memories

"The Repair Shop" is feel-good television at its best, and shows dedicated craftspeople restoring broken family heirlooms with warmth and care. Series Three is out now, with the four-disc set priced around £24.99 from usual outlets.

Courtesy of Tracey Steel.



Birthday Greetings

Many happy returns to Sir Ranulph Fiennes, who will be seventy-six on March 7. When he visited DCT Towers last year we were thrilled to hear all about his exciting adventures, and our Tracey even managed a selfie!



Gnome Alone

Once disparaged, garden gnomes have been making a comeback since the Chelsea Flower Show abandoned its ban on the cheery ornaments in 2013. At only £6 each from Morrisons, why not keep Mr and Mrs Gnome together and buy the pair?



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Champion Skink

The town of Cullen is home to the seventh annual Cullen Skink World Championships on March 8, celebrating the heritage of the famous creamy soup. Visit www.discovercullen.com/cullen-skink-world-championship.php.



NASA.

In The News

NASA astronaut Christina Koch recently returned from the International Space Station after 328 days in the orbiting lab – the longest single spaceflight by a woman. See her scrapbook of her mission at <https://go.nasa.gov/2UEE8hK>.



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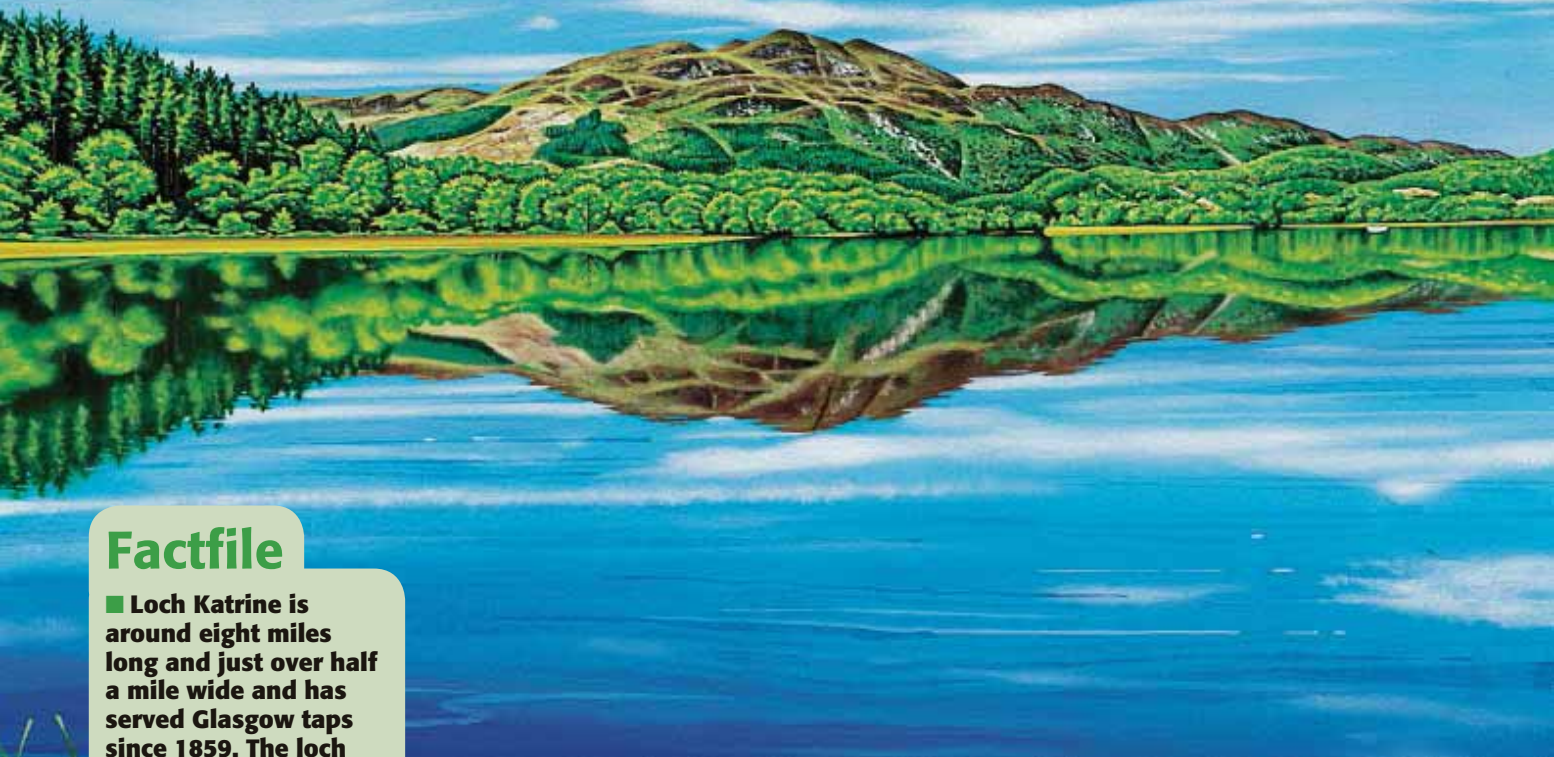
Each For Equal

March 8 is International Women's Day, which has celebrated the achievements of women for over a century. The theme this year is Each For Equal – we have the power collectively to create a more equal world.

Beautiful *Ben Venue*

This
week's
cover
feature

Though it's not a Munro, Willie Shand considers this hill to be one of Scotland's finest.



Factfile

■ **Loch Katrine is around eight miles long and just over half a mile wide and has served Glasgow taps since 1859. The loch supplies the city with more than 51,000,000 gallons a day.**

■ **Queen Elizabeth Forest Park was established in the year of Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation, and covers some 50,000 acres between Loch Lomond and Strathyre.**

■ **Loch Ard is one of 22 lochs that fall within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park.**

■ **The winding road connecting Aberfoyle and Brig o' Turk at the eastern end of Loch Katrine is known as the Duke's Pass. It was built by the Duke of Montrose in the nineteenth century to improve access to his estate.**

DRIVING along the hillfoots through Dollar, Tillicoultry and Menstrie at the back of five this morning, I needed dipped headlights. The Ochils were well shrouded in mist.

By the time I'd reached Stirling, I was beginning to wonder if it had been a bad decision to head west.

If it wasn't for the good forecast, I might easily have been persuaded to do an about-turn.

I was aiming for Loch Ard in the Trossachs with the intention of revisiting an old favourite hill – Ben Venue.

Putting my faith in the Met Office and an occasional glimpse of blue sky, I pushed on.

I'm glad I did, for by the time I reached Aberfoyle and the road for Inversnaid, the sun had burned away the mist.

I'd chosen to tackle the Ben by one of the most popular routes, starting up from Ledard Farm near the north-west end of tranquil Loch Ard.

Early morning often casts lovely reflections across the loch's sheltered waters and today was no exception.

It's from this wee loch – scarcely two-and-a-half miles long and a mile wide – that the mighty River Forth finds its source.

It was certainly living up to its reputation as the jewel of the Trossachs, with 3,193-foot-high Ben Lomond rising far beyond.

My eye, though, was more focused on the reflection of a wee boathouse on the opposite shore.

It often pays to be up with the lark.

The morning dew had left the bracken and roadside bushes covered in delicate moosewabs, or spiders'

webs, and even though it was just past seven a.m. and the mist barely gone, steam was rising under the sun's heat.

The layby opposite the foot of the farm road end

On peaceful
Loch Ard.





Driving through Aberfoyle.



Start of the walk at Ledard Farm.

was empty – I was on my own.

At 2,392 feet high, Ben Venue falls some way short of the 3,000-foot threshold to qualify as a Munro, but there can be few Munroists who would not rate Ben Venue among the very finest of Scotland's hills.

Being between 2,000 and 2,500 feet high, it falls into the category of hills known as Grahams.

Hillwalkers will be well familiar with the Grahams, Corbetts and Munros lists and, indeed, my own father had a few extra personal lists of his own.

But just as a book cannot be judged by its cover alone, nor should a hill or mountain be judged purely by its size.

Ben Venue's rugged top is a challenging climb and one with rewards far greater than many hills near twice its height.

Just before the farmhouse our track left

the driveway and entered the woods, crossing a wooden footbridge over the Ledard Burn.

A sign by the gate told us to *Take nothing – but photographs; Leave nothing – but footprints.*

The last time I left my footprints on Ben Venue was 18 years ago – a scary thought, especially when it seems like only five or six years ago!

There was a lot of water in the Ledard Burn today as it tumbled past in a series of spectacular falls.

I'd enjoy the company of the burn for a few miles, and pass lots more waterfalls to stop and photograph along the way. The foot track is easy to follow as it steadily wends its way up through the broadleaf woodland.

Recent rain, however, had left much of the way resembling a stream more than a path, and other bits quite boggy.

I started off with good intentions, hopping and jumping from one stone or divot to the next to keep my breeks clean, but it wasn't long before I gave up on that daft idea!

At the top of a particularly fine set of falls, a few loose iron girders provide a wobbly crossing over the burn.

I noticed some movement on the opposite hillside, then spotted two young deer heading towards me.

They obviously hadn't quite caught scent of me yet.

As we gain height, it's worth stopping every now and then to take in the view back over Loch Ard.

The rocky hill that rises directly ahead of us is Beinn Bhreac.

Ben Venue keeps herself well hidden all the way until we skirt round the foot of Beinn Bhreac.

From a two-step stile across a fence, our

destination comes into sight and, if you're already feeling wabbit, it's a sight that'll fair take the wind out of your sails. She's almost as far again!

If there's one consolation, though, it's that at the same point the views open north over Loch Katrine to an amazing skyline of far-flung peaks.

This view only improves the higher you go. From somewhere in these hills carries the distinctive call of a cuckoo.

We're in the heart of that area known as the Trossachs – an area widely regarded as among the most picturesque in the whole of Scotland.

Although its hills are not particularly high, their crags, cliffs and rocks make them appear much higher than they are.

It's quite fitting that the Trossachs should be dubbed "The Highlands In Miniature".



Ben Venue comes into sight.



Following the
Ledard Burn towards
Beinn Bhreac.



The summit
cairn.

Loch Katrine was looking stunning. The folks of Glasgow are so lucky knowing that the water that fills their baths and kettles comes from such a bonnie place as Loch Katrine, far from the busy city.

It was at Glengyle across Loch Katrine that the notorious Rob Roy MacGregor was born in 1671.

He would have been well familiar with all these hills and, in his cattle-lifting days, would undoubtedly have known all the best hiding places.

In the Corrie of the

Goblins (Coire nan Uruisgean) beneath the northern slopes of Ben Venue, he might easily hide a whole herd of stolen cattle.

That same corrie provided a retreat for Ellen Douglas and her father in Sir Walter Scott's "The Lady Of The Lake".

In the poem, the hero, Fitz-James, pursues a stag into the Trossachs, and here he meets Ellen.

Ellen, we are told, lived in a "sylvan hall" on a wooded island on the loch.

If you take a cruise on the *SS Sir Walter Scott* from the Trossachs Pier,

you'll pass Ellen's Isle.

You won't, however, see the replica sylvan hall that once stood upon it. It was destroyed by vandals in the 1830s.

From the steamship you'll also win a grand picture of Ben Venue, of which Sir Walter Scott wrote.

It was through the success of Scott's "The Lady Of The Lake", centred on Loch Katrine and published in 1810, that the Trossachs was introduced to tourism.

On the next stretch of the climb I was soon to meet those crags, knolls and mounds as the track became a bit more testing.

It may sound strange, but I'm convinced the slopes had become steeper since my last visit!

It's all worth it, though, when you reach the cairn and look out over Lochs Achray and Venachar.

Ben More, Stob Binnein, Ben Lawers and Ben Vorlich. They're all there to be identified.

It was just the spot to sit down and have what was left of my piece or, as Dad used to call it, "the unexpired portion of the day's rations".

It had certainly been a day full of pleasant

surprises, despite the unpromising start.

The early morning mist was quick to disappear, and on such a beautiful day, on my almost six-hour hike, I'm glad to say that in that entire time I never ran into another soul on the hill. ■

Getting there

By car: from Aberfoyle, follow the B829 Inversnaid road west for about five miles to near the western end of Loch Ard. There is a small parking layby opposite the sign for Ledard Farm. Allow five to six hours for the climb. Boots are essential.

There is no public transport to Ledard Farm.



SS Sir Walter Scott,
Loch Katrine.

Want to know more?

The Lodge Forest Visitor Centre with forest walks is just a mile or so above Aberfoyle on the Duke's Pass. Trossachs Road, Aberfoyle, Stirlingshire FK8 3SX. Tel: 0300 067 6615
For Loch Katrine Cruises on *SS Sir Walter Scott*, visit www.lochkatrine.com.

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The new beds were seized upon immediately



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

THE dogs love their new beds so much, they've eaten them. Well, that's not really being very fair. I don't think it's anything to do with Arty.

Naughty little Ruby appears to have improvised a midnight feast from both beds while they were meant to be sleeping.

I'd gone to a lot of trouble finding new beds for them both. Beds that are completely washable, inside and out.

Finally finding a style I liked, made from completely recycled material and looking to be very strong, I took the plunge and bought them. They weren't cheap, either.

While I was at it, I bought a bed for Jimi the cat, too.

Well, as expected, the cat took one look, turned up his nose and walked the other way, making for the newly covered sofa.

Despite several attempts to encourage him to use his new bed, I gave up after six tries and it's now being

enjoyed by my daughter's shih-poo, a cross between a poodle and a shih tzu.

Unlike the cat cushion, the new beds were seized upon immediately by Ruby and Arty, who snuggled into them straight away.

I should have realised, though, the writing was on the wall when, shortly afterwards, Ruby decided to use hers as a toilet.

Whipping it away from her, I put it straight into the washing machine.

After a cool, short wash the new dog bed came up a treat and I thought no more of it until she moved across to Arty's and did the same thing again.

Marking her territory, I thought. Although isn't that more of a boy thing than a girl's?

So Arty's bed was put into the washing machine and, while both beds were drying off, I put down their trusty blankets in front of the Aga.

That evening, I had a little chat with my girls before telling them that

before they used their new beds overnight, there was to be no more using them as a lavatory.

Although aimed at Ruby, the message was given to them both so that she didn't think she was being singled out.

The next morning, I came down to find Ruby had pulled her bed apart and there was stuffing everywhere.

The look on her face when she saw me said it all. She knew she'd done wrong.

I got out the sewing box and mended the ripped seam. You wouldn't have known anything had been damaged.

The next morning, I came down to find the other bed ripped to pieces.

I wasn't certain who'd done it but was pretty sure

it was Ruby.

So I got out my trusty needle and thread and did another repair. Again, it looked almost as good as new.

Before putting the dog beds out again that night, I spoke to Mr Grigg.

"Do you think I should risk it again?" I said.

"Nope," he said. "You'd be better off putting them away until Ruby grows up."

She is almost two years old, but Korthals Griffons are notoriously late in maturing.

Arty is five now, coming up to six, and she's pretty good when it comes to walking to heel or responding to the whistle, and she's grown out of the puppyish chewing phase.

So now, the beds have been washed and put away in a bin bag until Ruby can be trusted to be on her own with them.

The pair of them are currently making do with their trusty blankets, although Mr Grigg has offered to make a couple of elevated dog beds.

I'll believe that when I see it. It might be easier to go and buy them. ■



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The Weeping Willow

So many times
I've shared
my deepest
feelings under
its branches . . .



I FEEL like Pocahontas in the cartoon film, who always went to a willow tree to ask advice. Standing here, beneath feathery fronds rippling overhead, I feel faintly ridiculous, but also scared. Even though it's Justin.

"You can have my locker," he said on the first day in secondary school.

"I don't mind having one on the floor. We can swap."

I looked up into brown eyes blinking behind glasses that were too big for his face.

"OK, then."

He smiled.

"I'm Justin."

"Miriam." I squirmed as always at the old-fashioned name. Why couldn't I have been a trendy Charlotte or Emily?

I looked, but in Justin's face I didn't see the suppressed laughter to which I'd grown accustomed.

"Perhaps I'll see you in class, Miriam."

Even though on my first day my eleven-year-old self was desperate for a new best friend who was a girl, I recognised a kindness in that smile.

As it turned out, Justin wasn't in my class, but Libby was.

She had the enormous benefit of a beautiful name and didn't seem to mind being befriended by a Miriam.

Over the years this willow tree at the bottom of my parents' garden witnessed daisy-chain conversations, dissections of our favourite soaps and exam revision.

And lots of gossip about love, which was the subject that fascinated us most and about which we knew nothing whatsoever.

"I think Justin Edwards fancies you," Libby said more than once.

"Don't be daft," I replied, feeling a mix of pleasure at anyone's attention and disappointment at the suggested suitor.

Justin wasn't popular or trendy; he didn't excel at rugby or cricket.

He ran cross-country and represented the school at canoeing: he wasn't in the least bit glamorous.

Not like Andrew Mortimer, captain of everything, who made my teenage heart beat out of time.

"You look lovely today, Miriam," he'd say, and my tongue would twist into knots, making reply impossible.

His eyes always sparkled, as if he knew the effect he was having.

There had been lots of remarks like that in the week leading up to our school prom, so it was to the willow tree that I brought my tears when he asked blonde, leggy netball captain Emily Chester instead of me.

In the end, of course, it was Justin Edwards who asked me.

"You'd be doing me a

favour, Miriam."

I knew what he meant: nobody wanted to go to prom alone.

"OK, then."

* * * *

He brought me flowers, and seeing him in his dark grey suit I thought, for the first time, that actually Justin Edwards was a little bit handsome.

"Where are your glasses?" I asked, flustered by his appearance.

"I've got my contacts in." He grinned. "I normally only wear them for canoeing, but I thought, well, prom and everything."

"You look great, by the way. I'm, er, lucky to have you as my partner."

"Thanks."

I may have preened just a little.

Walking into that streamer-bedecked function room with Justin, I remember feeling 12 feet tall.

I think that was the first time I noticed Michael look my way.

Justin Edwards went to a different school for sixth form and I fell head over everything for Michael Jarvis.

He was in all the school teams, and when he wasn't excelling at sport, he was teaching me the kind of extra-curricular activities my mother would definitely not have wanted to know about.

I'd like to say it was Michael's fault I failed my A-levels but that wouldn't be true. It was my decision to let love take over my life.

We were the Danny and Sandy of Brockhurst High, dancing our way through our own summer loving.

"He's just swallowed you up like some sort

of Michael-monster," Libby said.

But she didn't have a boyfriend, so of course she was just jealous. Wasn't she?

My disastrous results meant I stayed at home while Michael went away to university and it was to this tree that we came to say our goodbyes.

"Don't cry, Miriam," he said. "We'll always be Danny and Sandy."

I remember he struck a stupid "Grease" pose and I laughed through my tears.

Throughout the university years, while I worked my way up the ranks of our local supermarket, I'd travel up to Manchester to be with Michael once a month.

I wonder now what his university friends thought. What a foggy-eyed little fool I was.

Communication is key, isn't it? But so is listening. Michael was always talking about his plans, and I wasn't listening.

I assumed, you see, that he'd come back to me after university; find a job in the local area. My mind plotted cosy wedding and christening scenarios.

"Oh, no," he said that night under this willow. "I'm going travelling for at least a year."

"A mate and I are doing Camp America and then we're taking a road trip."

"Which mate?" I asked, my insides twisting.

There was a long pause. "Kerry. My mate's name is Kerry. Actually, Miriam, you might as well know . . ."

During that long summer of heartbreak it was Libby, as ever, who was my rock.

She'd just got engaged but still found endless time to sit beneath this tree and listen to me sob and retell my sorry story over and over.

"Justin Edwards is back," she said one evening – no doubt trying to change the subject. But I took little notice.

I'm sure you might have guessed by now where this is headed. But it didn't happen; not for a very long time.

After Michael's betrayal it

was as if something broke inside me.

It wasn't just that I didn't trust other men; I didn't trust my own judgement.

I watched Libby have the happy marriage and children I had thought would be mine, and never found courage to care for another man myself.

I don't think I was bitter, just battered into romantic retreat. I dated, of course, but I plastered up my heart and found other ways to be happy.

I'm proud of what I've achieved at work. A career is a great focus for a fractured heart. It doesn't let you down and its direction is always in your control.

"But it doesn't keep you warm on a winter's night," Libby is always saying, which usually earns her an eye-roll from me and an offer to get in the next round of drinks.

"I can count on you for this school sports festival thing, then?" my director said one Friday last year.

"Sports?" I winced. "Not exactly my thing."

"You don't have to take part, Miriam, just be there to represent the company; present the prizes, that sort of thing."

"We're the main sponsors so we have to have someone there. It's this Sunday."

* * * *

The sports stadium was strewn with banners extolling the virtues of getting active. I guiltily promised myself renewed gym membership.

A local council member escorted me around. To be honest, I was a bit embarrassed to be treated like a VIP, although I understood it was the company's sponsorship money that mattered.

There were all the usual track and field events, and over on the river there was rowing and canoeing.

I don't know why I was drawn to the water.

I suppose you'd call it Fate if you believe in such things.

I noticed straight away that the team with the

purple bibs seemed to be winning everything.

After each victory the winner would clamber out of the water and rush to rejoice with the other purple bibs and their coaches.

It was lovely to see. From a distance they were a jubilant, bobbing purple bubble.

The last race was for children with physical difficulties.

At the inevitable purple victory one of their coaches jumped into the water to celebrate with the young winner.

My mouth dropped open in astonishment.

Justin says he saw me at exactly the same moment, but he may be embroidering the truth.

He eventually squelched his way over to where I stood.

"Hi."

"Hello."

"I didn't know you were back," I lied.

"Yeah, years now."

Every part of his face was smiling; I felt myself responding.

"You look great, Miriam."

"Thanks."

Instinctively I straightened the skirt of my business suit, feeling overdressed.

"I'm here for the sponsors."

"Of course. Miriam . . ."

At this point two over excited purple-bibbed pupils appeared with a bucket and proceeded to pour its contents over Justin's head.

"Aagh! You horrors!" He flicked wet hair from his deep brown eyes.

"It was good to see you, Justin."

"Miriam, wait. Could we get a coffee or something? It would be good to catch up."

"I've got to present the prizes."

"After, then." He squeezed his T-shirt, revealing a glimpse of toned stomach.

"When I might actually have dried out!"

"OK, then."

We met in the arena canteen, which could hardly have been less glamorous,

with peeling Formica and plastic chairs.

It was a lovely half hour of filling each other in on the last 15 years.

"I never had you marked down as a teacher."

"Oh, gosh, no. The coaching is a spare-time thing."

"Canoeing gave me so much when I was growing up that this is just a way to give back, you know?"

"Anyway, you've obviously had a stratospheric career!" Justin laughed. "You've come a long way from Brockhurst High."

I shrugged off nostalgia for the girl who had gone to prom with Justin so long ago.

He looked tender.

"I've never forgotten you, Miriam. Or the fact that you rescued me from going to prom alone."

I gave a little breathy laugh, pleased we'd both been remembering.

"I think we rescued each other."

His face flashed something I couldn't read.

"Have dinner with me, for old times' sake."

"OK, then."

That was over a year ago and slowly Justin has become a major part of my life. I've learned (or relearned) about loyalty, trust and kindness and having fun without fear.

But yesterday he asked me to marry him, and I am so scared.

Over these long years I've built up such a safety net – a great apartment, my own money, good friends.

Do I really want to risk all that to throw in my lot with Justin?

I look up into the willow branches for inspiration and am reminded suddenly of Grandmother Willow's words to Pocahontas in the film.

"You must choose your own path, child."

"Listen to your heart."

I stroke this ancient tree that has witnessed so many moments of my life and smile.

Because I know, of course I know, what my heart has always known.

That it is safe in Justin's hands. ■

Grandma where are your glasses?

"I am really thrilled about the situation with my eyes and I am telling all my friends, how excited I am with Blue Berry™ Eyebright."

Mona from Sweden, tells her story. Mona retired a few years ago. She always had reasonable eyesight but then she started to experience some challenges with her vision, it prevented her from living her life at the pace she was used to. But Mona has found relief in Blue Berry™ Eyebright. The product helped her improve her visual clarity. Making her feel much more alert!

Mona, 65, is a healthy woman. She always kept herself busy and has an active social life. A couple of years back Mona had some problems with running and irritated eyes. Cold weather, wind and sun seemed to make the problems worse - many days of the year Mona has to avoid going outside. Mona consulted her optician who told her that it was caused by age and there was nothing that could be done about it.

Read about Blueberries

In a newspaper Mona happened to read about the product Blue Berry™ Eyebright and the many who had been helped by this product with their eye problems. "It said that this product contained a number of natural ingredients such as

Blueberry extract, Lutein (from marigold) and a herb called Eyebright. I decided to give it a try."

Mona's grandchild noticed the difference

After a couple of months Mona started to feel some improvement. Her eyes got clearer and stopped being runny. A funny thing happened when she was out driving with her grandchild. - "Grandma, you have forgotten your glasses!" Said the 10 year old. It was then that Mona realised the difference that Blue Berry™ Eyebright tablets made. - "My optician is really thrilled about the situation with my eyes and I am telling all my friends, how excited I am with Blue Berry™ Eyebright", it worked for me, says Mona laughing.

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Great advice to keep you happy and healthy

Q. I had a cold recently and, while those symptoms have cleared, my ears still feel bunged up. Is this normal?



Roystone Bayfield MD, Bayfields Opticians and Audiologists, is here to help.

Having a cold makes us all feel a bit groggy and, for many, symptoms continue long after the cold has cleared. Being unwell can make us feel like our ears are bunged up, which impacts our hearing, the way we speak and, in extreme cases, our balance.

If you've had a cold and now feel better, but still feel like your ears are suffering, there could be a blockage in the middle ear causing this bunged-up feeling.

This happens when fluid travels up the eustachian tube into the middle ear cavity or the fluid blocks the eustachian tube.

Try not to worry; in most cases this will normally clear itself with time. If not, a simple over-the-counter decongestant can be used to help clear the blockage.

If your symptoms persist for longer than a few weeks, head to your doctor or local audiologist to have it checked.



In The News

Catch It Early

Perhaps surprisingly, prostate cancer has become the most common cancer in the UK, overtaking breast-cancer cases for the first time.

Although the news sounds daunting, medics believe the increase in numbers is attributed to the rise in the number of men being tested.

This follows publicity from celebrities such as Rod Stewart and Stephen Fry who have been vocal about their experiences with the disease.

This is good news, because when the disease is detected at an early stage, treatment is most successful and chances of survival are highest.

Can Your Joints Forecast The Weather?

Whether it's the barometric pressure, temperature, humidity, precipitation or wind, a change in weather can trigger joint pain. Now a new survey by supplement company Regenovex has found:

- 66% of people say the weather affects their joints
- 57% say the cold weather has the biggest effect
- 38% are affected by damp weather
- 27% report rain to be a trigger
- More than half of respondents notice a difference in pain 12 to 24 hours before a change in weather



Health Bite

Instead of eating a fresh whole apple, enjoy home-made stewed apple by simmering a cored and chopped apple in a little water or fruit juice.

Cooked apple is easier to digest and the sugars are absorbed by the body more slowly, which means you'll feel fuller for longer.

Apples are a great source of vitamin C and potassium, and they also contain pectin, which is a natural starch that helps to soothe the gut if you're feeling stressed or nauseated.



Get Motivated



Our Health Writer, Colleen Shannon, has tips to help you stay focused with exercise.

If exercise were a pill it would be flying off the shelves. It helps you live longer, feel better and look great.

But it's not that easy, is it? No matter how committed you are, there are days when you just don't want to do it.

Fortunately, there are ways to use brain science and trick yourself into getting – and staying – motivated.

Music is one way to do this. Research has shown that people who listen to music while they exercise stick with it longer, tire less easily and feel better about what they have achieved.

Julie Robinson, fitness expert and founder of Move It Or Lose It, has launched a national network of flexibility, aerobics, balance and strength (FABS) classes for people over sixty (find out more at www.moveitorloseit.co.uk or by calling 0121 250 5788).

She is a great believer in the power of music.

"Listening to music really helps you exercise for longer and makes it more enjoyable," Julie says. "We have a natural instinct to follow the beat."

According to Julie, exercising to music can also help to distract us, so we don't even feel like we're exercising.

Even if you're feeling determined on the day, staying motivated over time

is the real challenge.

Of course, it's been proven that doing something you enjoy – whether it be a dance class or walking – will mean you have more chance of sticking with it.

Similarly, having an exercise buddy will help you stay on track.

Fitness apps are another useful tool for measuring progress and setting yourself targets.

"Motivation will always come and go, so it's good to have a few tricks up your sleeve on those days where you're lacking," Lauren Gordon, Behavioural Insights Adviser at Bupa, says.

One thing you could try is a strategy called temptation bundling, she says.

You combine something that needs to be done, which often doesn't have an immediate reward, with something that you love doing.

It's about making a rule for yourself, e.g., telling yourself you can only:

- Listen to your favourite podcast or audiobook while going for a brisk walk outside
- Watch your favourite TV show while you're doing some stretches
- Listen to your favourite songs while you are at the gym

This makes your exercise habit much more attractive, and you might even start to associate positive feelings with exercise.

Research found that those who could only listen to an audiobook while at the gym visited 51% more frequently.

You can find some great exercise podcasts to listen to on the Bupa website at www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/podcasts, with health information also offered on the website. ■

The Arts And Health

Take up the next opportunity to visit a museum, because the brain stimulation you get from a visit can help protect against dementia.

A recent study in the "British Medical Journal" also found that over-fifties who often enjoyed trips to museums, art exhibitions or the theatre tend to live longer than those who rarely or never go.

The scientists believe that's because properly engaging in a museum or art exhibition demands a more intense level of mental engagement than you'd need when you're passively watching a film or TV.



Managing Menopause

Anyone struggling to cope with the symptoms of menopause might find herbal supplements useful.

Red clover and sage have long been known to support erratic female hormones and now vitamin company Solgar has produced a food supplement called Botanical Female Complex, which combines these two herbs.

It also contains Lifenol hops, a natural source of phytoestrogens, plus potent antioxidants such as curcumin (from turmeric) and grape seed extract, to help provide relief from night sweats which prevent sufferers from getting a good night's sleep.

Botanical Female Complex, £18 from health shops and www.solgar.co.uk.





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We call it Will Power

By leaving a gift in your Will to the British Heart Foundation, you'll be helping to power our research into heart diseases, vascular dementia, stroke and their risk factors.

Your generosity will mean generations can continue to make special memories for years to come.

Visit bhf.org.uk/wills to find out more and request a free gift in Wills guide.

Present Predicament

It was their granddaughter's birthday – but whose special gift would she like best?

UNLIKE most other Sicilians, Tanino and Melina had only one child. And the one daughter they had had given them only one grandchild.

No surprise that the little girl, Valentina, was the apple or, as they say in Italian, the pupil of their eye.

The only problem was that Tanino and Melina couldn't share even an apple, let alone an eye.

"What have you got Valentina for her birthday?" Tanino enquired with fake nonchalance, winding spaghetti around his fork.

Last year Melina had told him that she had bought a Barbie doll.

Later, he discovered that it wasn't any old Barbie doll: it came with an entire house, stables and horses.

"Just some sewing stuff," Melina replied, also with fake nonchalance.

She got up from the table, ostensibly to fetch the water jug, but more likely just to avoid his gaze.

Tanino remembered that Melina had given Valentina a sewing kit when she was four, so he guessed that the "sewing stuff" must be at least a sewing machine.

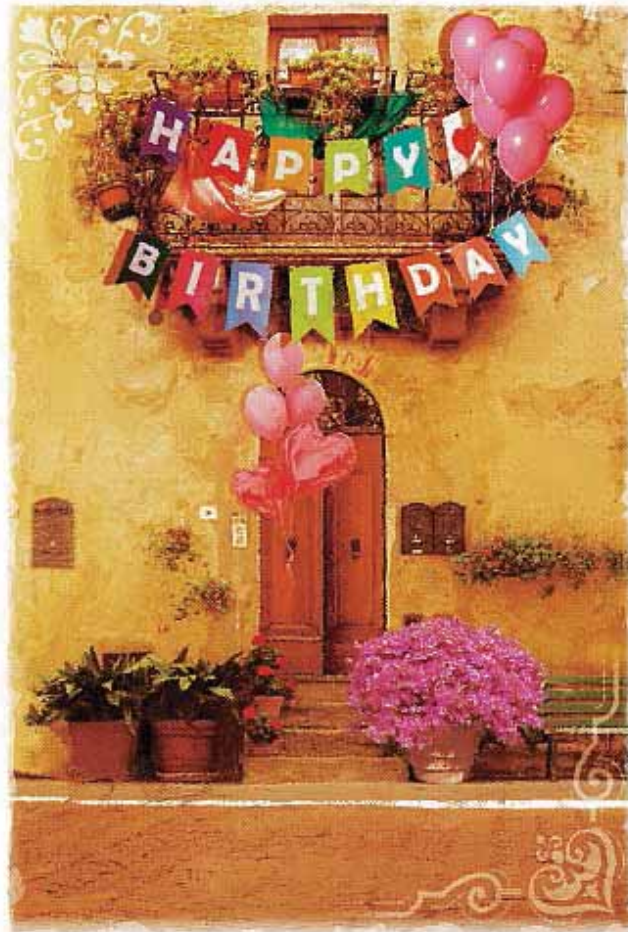
"Have you got her anything yet?" Melina asked.

"Not yet. Just thinking."

But Tanino had done much more than thinking: he had bought a new bicycle.

He'd instructed the shopkeeper to keep the secret and had hidden the purchase at his brother's house.

It was a beautiful white bike with pink tassels, a pink basket and a detachable pink backrest.



Even if Melina had bought an all-singing-and-dancing sewing machine, his bike was sure to come up trumps.

* * * *

As she did every year on Valentina's birthday, Melina served a lavish lunch.

A chocolate cake with sparkly candles finished the meal, but as far as Melina was concerned, the best was still to come: her birthday present.

Weeks before, her sister-in-law had informed Melina that a bicycle-shaped parcel had appeared in her house.

Melina had immediately swapped the sewing

machine she had bought for a bumper pack containing a sewing machine with attachments for embroidery and beadwork plus a circular knitting machine – all Barbie-branded.

No bicycle could beat that!

Valentina was sitting politely on the sofa like a princess, waiting for the present-giving ceremony.

Melina scuttled into her bedroom and unearthed the enormous box.

When Melina appeared on the threshold with the pink-wrapped parcel, Valentina jumped up and clapped her hands.

"What is it, Nonna?"

"You'll have to find out."

She watched her grandchild frantically tearing at the paper, grinning as she took in the contents of the box.

The little girl was speechless as she ran into her grandma's arms.

"You must teach her how to use it, Mamma, because I can't," Rosanna said.

"Of course I will," Melina replied, anticipating the pleasure of spending hours teaching Valentina all her sewing and knitting tricks.

"We haven't got space in our flat. Soon the people will have to move out to make room for the toys," Valentina's father commented dryly.

"No problem, we'll keep them here."

Melina pointed to a table she had cleared for the purpose. Everything was going just as she'd hoped.

"I suppose I had better go and get my present now," Tanino said.

Valentina didn't hear him.

* * * *

Tanino usually wished that his brother lived closer, but today he wished that it was further.

He had no desire to return to his flat with the bike, only to have Valentina give it a cursory glance before returning to Melina's machines – not one, but two!

When he finally opened his door, Valentina rushed to him and tugged at his hand.

"We need your help because . . ."

The little girl couldn't finish her sentence: she had seen the parcel and her eyes were sparkling.

There was still a chance that his present wouldn't fare too badly against Melina's.



Mike, with his daughter and granddaughter.

Meningitis - adults can get it too

Seventy-four-year-old Mike, from Kent, fell ill with meningococcal meningitis in September 2018.

He is backing Meningitis Now's 'Adults Get it Too' campaign, to raise awareness of the increased risk of this devastating disease among older adults.

"I went up to bed a little before my wife, Meg. I had been below par all day. I didn't join my running group in the morning and cancelled my volunteering stint at the local theatre.

"My wife came upstairs to find me sprawled over the bed, sweating profusely and

unconscious. She called the emergency services.

"This call certainly saved my life. How do you repay a debt like that? I was in a coma and on a ventilator at the Princess Royal University Hospital. I came to six days later.

Many after-effects

"I was profoundly deaf and wheelchair bound. My eyesight was impaired, and I was doubly incontinent. My legs 'fizzed' all the time.

"I was in hospital for seven months, the last 20 weeks being in rehab at Orpington Hospital.

"The NHS were superb.

They saved my life and have worked very hard on my rehabilitation. But it wasn't enough. I needed more time in rehab and have gone backwards since leaving.

Back home

"Since coming home I'm dependent on carers. This has been good for me but not for my wife and 28-year-old autistic son, Andrew.

"I've been told I will never walk again but I'm hoping that physio will help me get more independence.

"My worst problem seems to be neurological. My 'fizzing' legs have worsened and feel like they are burning and are about to explode.

"But I am lucky to be alive and see and hold my granddaughter Lexi born to my youngest daughter Maria and spend more time with family, with visits from my sister and nephews from Australia soon.

Improve my physical condition

"I hope to really get to grips with physio to improve my physical condition. Although I feel I've gone backwards since the attack, I am alive and kicking and positive about the future.

Meningitis Now is the only charity dedicated to fighting meningitis in the UK.

With over 30 years' experience, it is working towards a future where no-one in the UK loses their life to meningitis and everyone affected gets the support they need to rebuild their lives.

In the UK, an estimated 22 people a day will contract viral or bacterial meningitis.

For more information, visit [MeningitisNow.org](https://meningitisnow.org). Freephone helpline 0800 80 10 388.

Call 01453 768000 or go online at meningitisnow.org/adults to request an awareness pack that includes a signs and symptoms card, leaflet and window sticker.

"I want everyone to know that adults can get it too. This is the second time for me, so I know this especially well. Twenty-five years ago, I had viral meningitis from which I made a full recovery, but this time I have not been so lucky.

Positive about my future

"Meningitis has been a devastating experience, and I have lost a year of my life. But I'm still here and very positive about my future."

Meningitis - Adults Get it Too

Many people still believe that meningitis only affects babies and young children; this is not the case. Anyone can be affected by meningitis - but adults, especially those over 65 face an increased risk, as our immune systems weaken as we get older. **To find out more and to order a free awareness pack visit: meningitisnow.org/adults or call 01453 768000.**

Key Facts

- Meningitis is inflammation of the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord, usually caused by bacteria or viruses.
- Some bacteria that cause meningitis also cause septicaemia (blood poisoning).
- There are around 8,000 cases of all types of meningitis each year across the UK.
- Meningitis and septicaemia can affect anyone at any time, but certain age groups are more susceptible - the under-5s are most at risk, particularly the under-1s; teenagers and young adults are the second most at-risk group; and those over 65 are also at increased risk.

**Meningitis
now**

► “A bike! With a basket for my dolls!”

Valentina hopped on the saddle and started riding on the landing.

“Careful of the stairs!” Rosanna called.

Suddenly, one of the tassels caught in the tap of the floor’s fire hose and was ripped off.

“It’s broken!” Valentina’s face crumpled.

“Don’t worry, you can repair it with your sewing machine,” Tanino soothed.

At these words, Valentina burst into tears.

After he had left to collect the bike, Tanino learned, problems had arisen with the sewing machine.

Somehow the thread had got tangled in the bobbin and a spring had popped out of the rotating handle.

All the adults had struggled to fix the machine, and Valentina had been left on the sofa alone. That was when Tanino had arrived with the bike.

“If I sew the tassel, will you fix the sewing machine?” Melina offered.

“Of course,” Tanino replied.

He fetched his toolbox and unscrewed the sewing machine’s casing.

Before Valentina’s enthralled and apprehensive eyes, he inserted the spring back in and removed the knotted thread that had caused the accident.

Meanwhile, Melina pulled out her ancient sewing box and sewed the tassel back on to the bike.

* * * *

That night, before falling asleep, Melina kissed Tanino.

“You are a great grandfather.”

“And you are a great grandmother. Valentina loves you to bits.”

“She loves you, too.”

“That’s fine, then.”

They smiled at each other and there was silence for a moment. Then Melina spoke.

“I have an idea,” she said. “For her next birthday, shall we buy her something together?” ■



Living It Up

There are some aspects of sharing a house the ladies have overlooked . . .

ABIGAIL, Rachel and Flora were in the sitting-room of their new home, which was empty apart from a couple of chairs and a sad-looking small table.

“Well, it’s done.” Flora spoke with relish. “Spring is in the air. We can all look forward now.”

Rachel and Abigail were silent. They both stared at the papers from the lawyer. For them, it symbolised the end of a very precious part of their lives.

Rachel had sold the home that had grown with her husband and children.

The old cottage in the country that they had bought 35 years ago had changed.

A small room had been added to the kitchen and had given them a small family space – what they had called the dumping room.

Here the children played board games, hung around after school, kept their friends waiting while they searched for their tennis shoes.

Rachel now held in her hand proof that her first house was sold and that she was joint owner of a former bed and breakfast business.

She was struggling to hold back tears.

After a few minutes of quiet thought, Abigail

folded her papers in her hand.

She did what she had learned from her husband. She crushed her emotions.

There was little point in being sentimental about the past.

She must focus on the future and try to “make a fist of it”, as her husband had often told her.

“Let’s get organised,” Abigail said. “How do we want to arrange ourselves? This is a big sitting-room. How can we use it?”

“I think your piano should be in here, Abigail. You could play for us when we have visitors,” Flora suggested.

“Nonsense.” Abigail snorted, then saw her friend’s face. “Sorry, Flora. Didn’t mean to bite your head off.”

There was silence for a moment.

“I was thinking of playing in that large space underneath the stairs. That way you can hear it from the hallway but it won’t be a disturbance.”

Flora was not one to hold a grudge.

“That sounds fine, Abigail. Give us a chance for a bit of a knees-up.”

“Let’s have a good look around, then, now that the rooms are empty.” Abigail stood up and marched out.

Flora was anxious that there should be no

ill-feeling between them.

“Do you know what?” she said to Rachel. “I think Abigail’s a bit bossy because she was never her own boss. Not like us.”

“You were a teacher, weren’t you? People listened to what you said. And I had my own shop.”

“When Abigail starts up being bossy, I just pretend I’m listening to a customer who insists on buying a dress that’s wrong for her and I keep my mouth shut.”

Rachel laughed.

“She means well, I’m sure. I guess we’ll all have to learn to be tolerant of each other’s differences.”

They began to wander through the house.

“The kitchen is perfect as it is.” Rachel sounded delighted but Flora was dubious.

“A bit on the large side, I would have said. But then I’m not a cook.”

“Well, we know that you can sew wonderfully well. I’ve heard how good you are at alterations and we’ve seen your patchwork.”

Rachel prowled around, opening cupboards and examining worktops.

“I like a good-sized kitchen. One big enough for the whole family to eat in.”

Flora was quiet.

“I’ve got no family,” she said.

Rachel laughed.

“You have now. You have Abigail and me, and I very much doubt our families will expect you to be invisible when they visit.”

“Will they come here a lot, then?” Flora asked, looking more cheerful.

“I hope so.”

At that moment, Abigail came back and Flora turned to her.

“Will your family visit a lot, Abigail, do you think?”

“Not often, but they will stay for a few days when they do come. Why?”

“Do you think they’ll mind having me around?”

Abigail snorted again.

“I should say not. I’ll be relying on you to take them off my hands for a while.” She grinned at Flora.

“They’ll like you just as much as I do.”

More next week.

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KB0164	Begonia Apricot Shades 72 Plug Plants + Free Fertiliser £347.96	£19.99		
KA9686	Begonia Apricot Shades 15 Garden Ready plants	£9.99		
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Brain teasers

Answers
on p87

Missing Link

Fit ten words into the grid so each one connects up with the words on either side eg - wishing - well - done. Read down the letters in the shaded squares to spell out a bird.

PEARLY					PRAWNS
TURKEY					OUT
BAD					MOUNTAINS
TRACK					POLISH
ELECTRIC					CHIPS
PRAIRIE					WHISTLE
RUN					GEAR
FLOTATION					TOPS
LOCAL					OFF
SEE					GOES

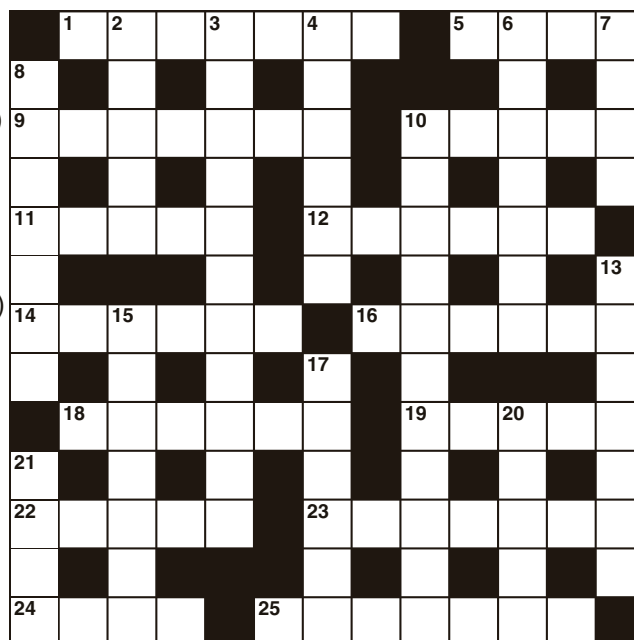
Try our quick crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Not on the internet (7)
- 5 Sharp, sour (4)
- 9 Shaggy (7)
- 10 Seat (5)
- 11 Desert traveller (5)
- 12 Extravagant (6)
- 14 Knight's assistant (6)
- 16 Coloured pencil (6)
- 18 Imitation cave (6)
- 19 Remain static in air (5)
- 22 Blackguard (5)
- 23 Perfect person (7)
- 24 Lustreless (4)
- 25 Keenly (7)

DOWN

- 2 Discussion place (5)
- 3 Washing shop! (11)



4 Annoy, provoke (6)

6 Crudely (7)

7 Appalling (4)

8 Timidity (7)

10 Flat fee in a bar (5,6)

13 One taking part (7)

15 Perpendicular (7)

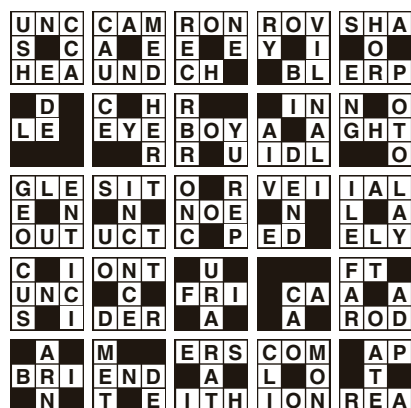
17 Fairground game (4-2)

20 Long watch at night (5)

21 Metric unit of mass (4)

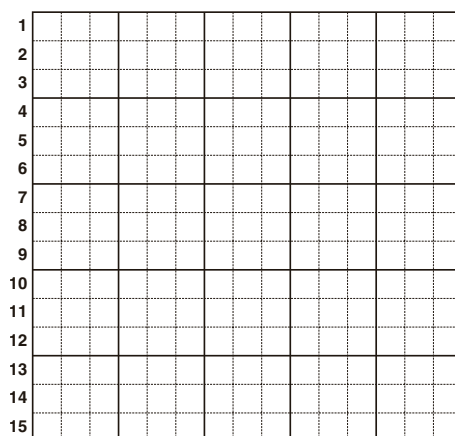
Pieceword

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



ACROSS

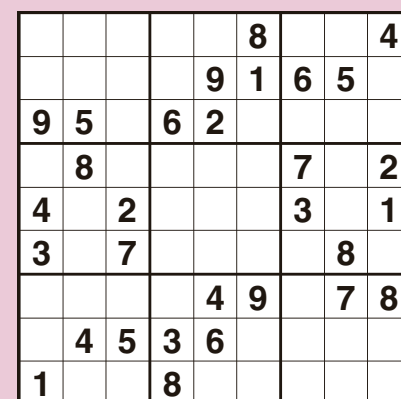
- 1 Part of an engine • Funny TV show
- 3 Poor output
- 5 Brother of your father • Heathland plant
- 7 Wheedle • Cook's clothes protector



- 9 Lazed • Community work
- 11 Male partner • Kayak, for example
- 13 Indisputable
- 15 Text at the top of a page • In a carefree way

Sudoku

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



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The Mystery of *Janette*

Who was the pioneer female journalist?

Charlotte Lauder is on the trail!

WOMEN have always held a special place in the history of your favourite magazine.

Sir John Leng, the first proprietor and managing director, supposedly once said, "I want 'The People's Friend' to be a friend of the mothers, wives, daughters and bairns of Scotland."

"I want it to be largely written for women, by women, and by good women who make other women good."

But what do we know about the "Friend's" historic female writers and journalists?

Well, one such woman was Janette, the pseudonym of the editor of the "Wives & Daughters" column between around 1895 and 1907.

In 1905 she announced that her readers could purchase a postcard featuring her photograph for a penny.

But although Janette revealed her face, her real name was never known to readers.

Who was the mysterious Janette, then? I was determined to find out.

During research, I discovered an early 20th-century photograph of a woman sitting behind a desk, pen in hand, a "Friend" poster hanging on the wall behind her.

The photograph was signed *Faithfully yours, Janette*.

However, the photo shed



no light on who Janette actually was.

I turned to local newspapers from the time and eventually found an obituary in the Dundee "Courier" in 1947 for a Mrs William C. Batey, naming her as "Janette" of "The People's Friend".

Her maiden name was Jessie M. King. She was born in Bankfoot, Perthshire, in 1862, and was a niece of the editor of the "Perthshire Advertiser".

She was educated at her local parish school and, as a teenager, began winning prizes for essays.

In Bankfoot, she studied to become a teacher and worked in the local newspaper office.

In 1881, aged just eighteen, she was hired by John Leng to his newspaper staff, and became the first full-time working female journalist in Scotland.

She wrote the Ladies Column for the "Dundee Advertiser" and, around 1885, became editor of the women's pages in the "Evening Telegraph".

Jessie attended night classes in English Composition and Rhetoric at University College from 1882 to 1884 where she graduated top of her class.

Jessie was often found at social parties, municipal



Jessie at work in the Dundee offices.

gatherings and political meetings in Dundee.

She was a member of the Dundee Literary Society, a co-founder of the Dundee Women's Liberal Association and held high office in the British Women's Temperance Association.

This work also took her to Europe. In 1889 she was at the Eiffel Tower Exhibition and in 1897 she attended the International Women's Congress in Berlin.

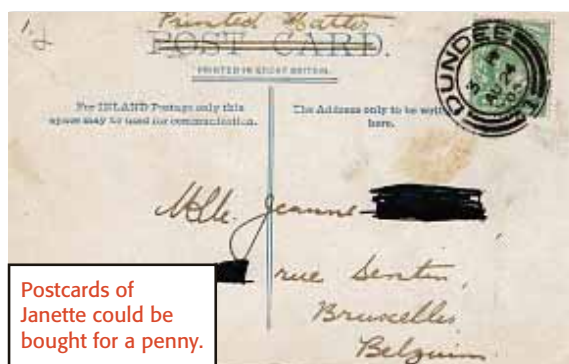
Jessie was known throughout Dundee as the "pioneer female journalist".

"To be a pioneer has its

difficulties, but it also has its compensations. I was a novelty, and a popular novelty," she said in an article in the "Evening Telegraph" in 1937.

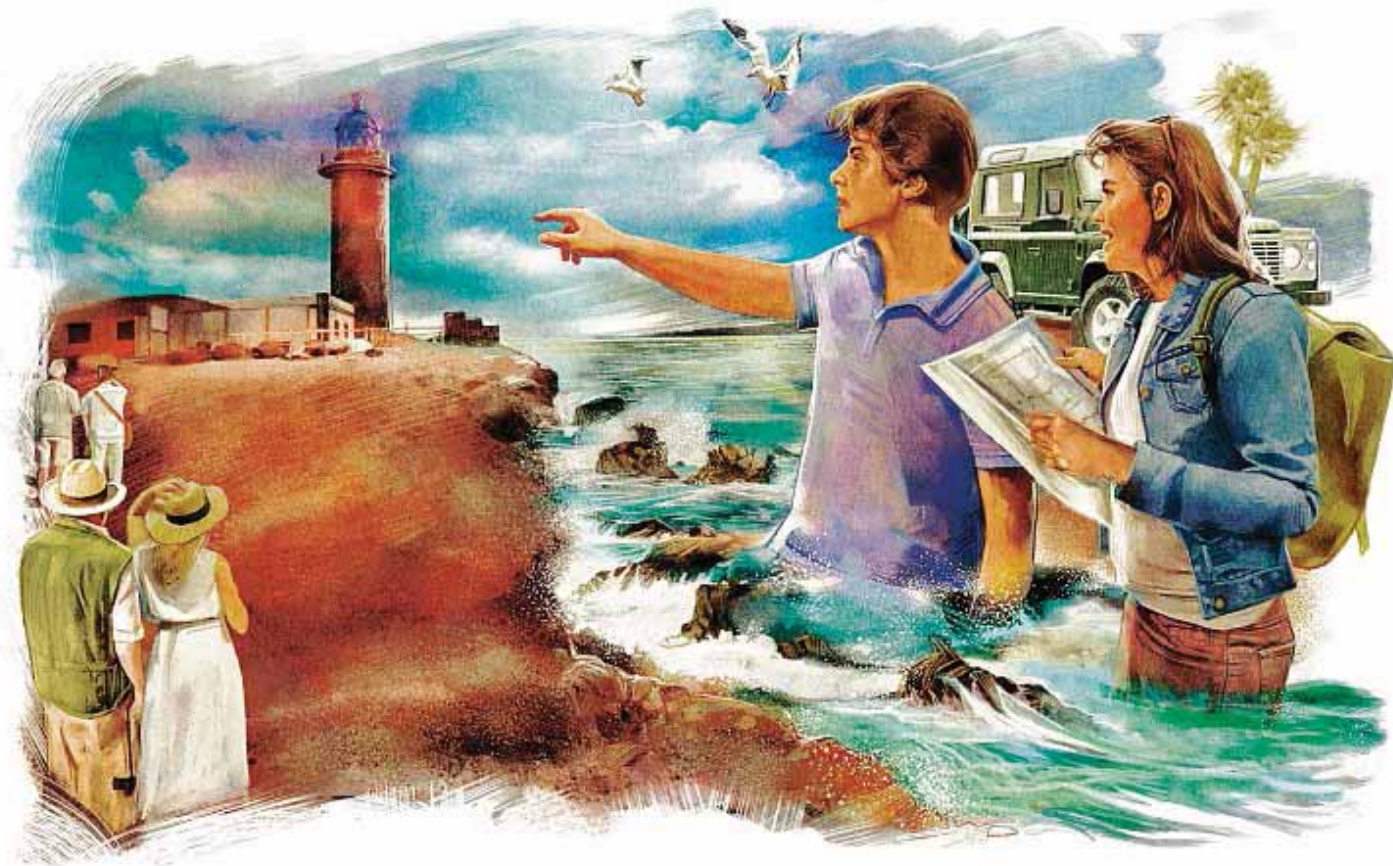
Jessie moved to Newcastle at the age of forty-five after her marriage to William C. Batey, an official of the London and North Eastern Railway.

Jessie M. King was a remarkable woman whose contribution helped the "Friend" grow into a leading national women's magazine, and I am delighted to have discovered, and revealed, her true identity! ■



Postcards of Janette could be bought for a penny.





Under An Island Sun

This area of Fuerteventura was breathtaking, and Mairi was happy to share it all with Philippe . . .

The Story So Far

MAIRI BRAITHWAITE has recently finished university, and she has also broken up with boyfriend **LIAM**. She decides to travel to Fuerteventura to help out her cousin **CHRIS**, who needs drivers and guides for his tour company.

A bigger company has stolen his staff and is trying to undercut his prices.

Chris's wife, **ISABELLA**, is struggling with her second pregnancy, so he also enlists the help of his

mum, **HILARY**.

PHILIPPE DURAND has recently been pushed into taking a sabbatical from his teaching job in France, and he, too, travels to Fuerteventura to drive for the company, much to girlfriend **NICOLE'S** chagrin.

Hilary finds herself strangely attracted to **ANTONIO**, an Italian man also employed by Chris, but determines to steer clear of emotional entanglements, despite how her heart reacts when he is around . . .

DESPITE some inevitable butterflies at starting the first day in a new job, Mairi revelled in the sense of freedom as she and Hilary drove along the coast road, the sun on her arms and the breeze in her hair.

In some ways the scenery was as different from the Lake District as it could be, as if an artist had painted everything in scorched browns and ochres instead of soft green and greys, along with a vivid blue for the ocean.

Yet she had the same sense of the volcanoes watching benignly over her as she did with the

mountains at home.

It was the best she had felt in a long time.

The fact that she was about 1,500 miles away from Liam and his new fiancée, Fiona, was an added bonus.

Mairi's thoughts wandered to her first impressions of the rest of the team at the meeting earlier in the week.

Philippe was good-looking in a quiet way, so it wasn't surprising that she'd felt a flicker of attraction when they'd shaken hands, but he seemed very reserved.

Antonio, on the other hand, was like a favourite, mischievous Italian uncle who enjoyed making

everyone laugh.

It said something that, despite his joking around, Chris clearly trusted him implicitly.

Her cousin had seemed more serious than usual, possibly because he was worried about the business and Isabella's pregnancy.

Isabella herself had looked exhausted.

All in all, Mairi was glad Hilary was involved. Mum had been right about having someone she knew for reassurance.

Today's tour was at the far south of the island, stopping off at two large, modern hotels, fronted by neat rows of shrubs and palm trees, to pick up passengers.

Even from the outside she could tell how roomy and airy the hotels were, as floor-to-ceiling glass entrances allowed peeks into reception areas that could have fitted whole houses into their marbled space.

For a moment, she imagined taking a dip in one of their pools, bliss on a hot day like this.

That would mean missing being out on the open road, though, passing volcanoes that had been extinct for around five thousand years, smoothed and shaped by millennia of trade winds.

She smiled at the thought that at least some of the material Chris had instructed them to learn had sunk in.

At the first hotel, they collected an amiable German couple in their fifties, who beamed and waved as the Land-Rover approached.

Marcus and Astrid hailed from Munich and spoke near-perfect English, though they looked pleased when Hilary told them she spoke German.

There was no sign of anyone waiting for them at the second hotel.

Hilary was about to go inside and check where they were when a tall, friendly-looking lad with dark hair loped out of the entrance.

"Hello! I'm Graham, the tour rep here. I make sure

everything runs smoothly – in theory, anyway," he greeted them in a Yorkshire accent.

His face broadened into a wider smile as his eyes met Mairi's.

"I must say, you're a nice surprise. The last driver was a right old misery. When Chris told me he'd gone, I said he was better off without him.

"Anyway, I'm pleased to meet you."

"Pleased to meet you, too, Graham," Mairi replied.

Once everyone in the Land-Rover had introduced themselves, Graham's expression became more serious.

He glanced back over his shoulder.

"I thought I should warn you about the two men you're taking today. They're already getting a bit of a reputation at the hotel.

"They think they know it all, expect things to have been done yesterday and complain loudly and endlessly if anything isn't to their liking.

"Their wives have opted to stay by the pool today, and I don't blame them."

He looked round as two burly middle-aged men came out of the hotel and sauntered towards them.

Graham raised his eyebrows.

"Good luck," he murmured, before turning to face the newcomers.

"Morning, gents! Looks like another cracker of a day. Enjoy your trip."

"We'd better, given how much it's costing," one of them growled back.

They climbed into the back of the Land-Rover, barely even glancing at the German couple.

Mairi turned round and forced a smile.

"Good morning. I hope you're looking forward to seeing the beautiful wild side of Fuerteventura.

"I'm Mairi, your driver, and this is Hilary, one of our guides."

"Oh, great," one of them said. "A woman driver. That's all we need."

Mairi suppressed a sigh as she put the Land-Rover

into gear.

Already the whole atmosphere had changed. In contrast to the friendly chatter of a few minutes ago, all conversation stopped and a stony silence descended.

The only consolation was that Hilary, used to dealing with awkward types and quietly exerting her authority, was with her.

That wouldn't last. Once they arrived at the southernmost resort of Morro Jable and met up with the rest of the group,

All conversation stopped and a stony silence descended

passengers would be divided between the three vehicles according to language and capacity.

Hilary would be transferring with them, while Mairi took more English passengers.

She could only cross her fingers that the two men might lighten up and enter into the spirit of the day.

* * * *

After the delay in collecting their passengers, Hilary wasn't surprised that they were the last to arrive at the meeting point near the harbour.

Antonio glanced at his watch but didn't say anything, instead introducing himself and the others and explaining the route they'd take.

When Antonio divided everyone between vehicles, Hilary joined him, along with Marcus and Astrid and another German couple.

With Mairi taking on a young couple, two older ladies and the two men, and Philippe organised with his four French passengers, their little convoy was soon on its way.

After just a few minutes, the asphalt road gave way to a track which twisted and turned as it climbed steadily, leaving all traces of civilisation behind.

Volcanic crags reared above them on one side, while flat lava rocks stretched down like a plain to the sea on the other. This felt to her like the

real Fuerteventura.

Perhaps a little too real. Hilary couldn't help some consternation at the fact there were no crash barriers or markings of any kind.

Just a few inches of earth pushed up at the edges stood between anyone straying off the track and toppling down the slope.

With the canvas roofs of the Land-Rovers down, letting in fresh air and allowing wider views, she was glad to notice the presence of roll bars.

Hopefully they wouldn't be needed, but it was nice to know they were there.

After a while, they reached the highest point of the track and pulled in for everyone to get out and take photographs.

"This is where we can see both the east and west coasts of Fuerteventura," Antonio announced, making a sweeping gesture while Hilary and Philippe translated.

"Behind us, to the east, is the calmer sea, while ahead is the wilder west side."

There was a collective gasp as they all took in the scene in front of them.

About a mile further on, past a plateau of rubble-like ground dotted with cacti and a few goats, massive Atlantic breakers crashed on to a seemingly endless white sandy beach beyond a tiny cluster of houses, all backed by mountains fading into the distance.

"The beach we can see is the Playa de Barlovento, the tiny hamlet is Cofete and the mountains are the Jandia Massif.

"A marvellous sight, is it not? And you'll be excited to know it's our next destination."

When they got to the beach itself, Philippe took over the commentary.

He had to shout to be heard above the pounding waves.

"We will spend half an hour here before



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▶ going on. Please be back in time, do not go in the water and don't be tempted to swim.

"The currents are very strong, even close to the shore. You can easily get swept out before you realise what's happening."

As the tourists wandered off, cameras at the ready, Hilary pulled off her sandals and started to walk along the sand.

The new sense of wellbeing engendered by her surroundings made her hopeful that Isabella's pregnancy would proceed successfully, ending with a healthy little brother or sister for Hugo.

Turning round to take in the scenery behind her, she noticed Mairi and Philippe were walking together, pointing out the waves and mountains.

It was natural that they should gravitate to each other, being similar ages, but some sixth sense again told her they looked right together.

"Isn't this amazing?"

Antonio's voice, raised above the ocean's roar, startled her from her thoughts. "This is my favourite tour.

"Just wait until we get to the Jandia Lighthouse, then taste the paella cooked fresh before your eyes at the small fishing village nearby."

His smile was so infectious, Hilary couldn't help laughing.

"I'll look forward to that."

Possibly emboldened by the invigorating Atlantic air, she was about to ask why he had chosen to live and work on a Spanish island when shouts behind them made them both spin round.

Mairi and Philippe were standing at the shoreline, calling out urgently towards the waves, which were several feet high.

A second later, they were stripping off their outer clothes.

Hilary soon saw why. Two heads were bobbing among the breakers.

She cried out in horror as Mairi and Philippe plunged in.

Antonio pulled off his

T-shirt and sprinted to join them, followed by the younger Englishman, whose girlfriend ran over to Hilary.

"He used to work as a lifeguard in Cornwall, so he's a strong swimmer. He won't be familiar with these currents, though."

The next minutes were agonising as Hilary, knowing she wasn't a strong enough swimmer to help, could only watch with everyone else.

Glimpses of the six people between the waves only added to her fears, especially as she couldn't see Mairi.

If anything happened to her niece, she would never be able to forgive herself.

After what seemed an age, they all made it back to the shore.

Antonio and Mairi pulled one man between them, Philippe and the lifeguard the other.

Hilary wasn't surprised to see the two men in question were the ones who had been grumbling earlier.

She could sense everyone's suppressed anger, but it was Philippe who expressed it, in no uncertain terms.

"What do you think you were doing?" he cried.

"You were told that the water was too dangerous, but you went in anyway."

"Did you think the rules didn't apply to you?"

One of the men lumbered towards him, but Philippe wasn't deterred.

"I will answer that question for you. They do. You are not special. You put other lives in danger."

"We were fine till you decided to play the hero," one men complained.

"No, you were not. You were being swept out as we approached."

"If we hadn't acted when we did, you would have been too far out to reach."

Both men were standing over Philippe now.

Hilary saw him square his shoulders and lift his chin, standing his ground as the second man, towering over him, jabbed his chest with his finger.

"I don't like your tone of

voice. You haven't heard the last of this. We'll be putting in a complaint about you."

"And we've got witnesses to how you've just treated us, haven't we?"

The man looked round as if for support, but no-one said anything.

Instead, Antonio moved between them and Philippe, followed by Hilary, Mairi, the lifeguard and his girlfriend.

Outnumbered, the two men backed off.

Hilary noticed, with a shock, that she was shaking.

As a teacher, she had dealt with potentially dangerous incidents with teenagers in the past.

This was different, with grown men angry and close to boiling point.

If Antonio and the others hadn't stepped forward when they did, she dreaded to think what might have happened.

As they walked back to the Land-Rovers, a cloud blocked the sun, plunging the beach and mountains into shade.

* * * *

The rest of the trip was soured by the incident, certainly for Philippe.

His mood was barely lifted even when several passengers quietly told him that they would have reacted in the same way.

Most seemed to avoid the men.

The young English couple ignored them completely, pointedly keeping their distance and chatting with the two elderly ladies.

The only silver lining was that the men weren't in Philippe's Land-Rover.

He felt sorry for Mairi, having to put up with them for the whole day.

Maybe he should have gone along with Nicole's plan of moving to Paris.

He wondered what she was doing at this moment, and whether she'd be having another expensive dinner with the colleague she had mentioned.

Their texts since he had arrived had been short, and there had never been much opportunity for

anything more.

Luckily his Land-Rover was a joy to drive on these tracks, which were demanding enough to require his full attention, and his passengers were happy to take in the views around them.

Philippe felt a little calmer when the land narrowed to a small peninsula with an asphalt road as they reached the next stage of the tour.

He was relieved that Antonio took over the commentary by the Jandia Lighthouse, unusual for being built from dark volcanic rock.

All Philippe and the rest had to do was translate the information for their own passengers, now standing around in little groups.

"This is the furthest south-west point of the island," Antonio told them.

"If you were to get in a boat and sail due west from here, the next land you would come to would be South America."

"So if you have plans to do anything like that, you will need to take a very big picnic."

A murmur of laughter rippled round their party.

The sea was quieter on the south-facing shore that curved back to the east side of this island, and a more peaceful blue, while the land was almost golden in the renewed sunlight.

The overall effect was of the island reaching out an arm, with the water on either side, to this point, and they were on the tip of an outstretched finger.

For all its seeming isolation, Philippe was amused to see there was a bus stop where the road ended – incongruous among the expanse of flat rocks and ocean – and a tiny huddle of white buildings back along the coast, where they would be having lunch.

Antonio gestured to the ocean, just a few metres below, and beyond the island's edge.

"If you look carefully, you will notice that the water approaches from two directions."

"See the white caps

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▶ of the waves and how they collide? That is where two currents meet, having travelled a long way to this point."

As Philippe watched, the waves slapped into each other at a perpendicular angle.

He was suddenly struck by the parallel in his own life.

He, Antonio, Mairi and Hilary had come all the way from France, Italy and England to meet on an island not far off the coast of Africa.

Like everyone else, he wandered round the exterior of the lighthouse, making sure to keep his distance from the troublemakers.

Mairi stood next to him as he paused at one of the viewing points.

He had been pleasantly surprised when they'd ended up talking on the beach.

She had commented on the way the volcanoes reminded her of the mountains in the Lake District, where her parents had a farm, which led in turn to him describing summers spent with his grandparents in the Pyrenees.

"This reminds me of a place called Lizard Point in Cornwall," Mairi said now. "Do you know it?"

"I've heard of Cornwall, but not Lizard Point. It's an interesting name."

"We used to go on holiday there when I was a child. It always felt magical. Something like that sort of puts everything into perspective, doesn't it?"

Philippe shrugged. "Are you still rattled about what happened? It'll be OK."

"I hope so. I don't want to face all that again."

It was only when Mairi looked puzzled that he realised what he'd said.

She opened her mouth, presumably to ask what he meant, when Antonio clapped his hands, signalling it was time to go.

The meal was as delicious as had been promised.

Paella, incorporating that morning's catch, was cooked in front of them in a

huge pan, with the adjacent ocean, lapping gently, audible during lulls in conversation.

Their party sat at two long tables, set with earthenware jugs of wine and water.

Antonio arranged it so that the two Englishmen were at the other one from Philippe.

Despite that, he could still hear them criticising the food and noticed that they managed to hog a lot of the wine.

He was glad when Mairi sat next to him, while Antonio and Hilary, as the team's senior members, supervised proceedings.

As well as distracting him with her conversation, Mairi's presence was a comfort in a way he couldn't describe.

He was glad she was with him, too, when they spent time on a sheltered sandy beach on the return journey, reached by a bumpy gully which tested the Land-Rovers to their limit.

Those of the party who wanted to swim had time for a quick dip in the crystal-clear water.

"Hey, that old German woman's gone in over her knees," one of the Englishmen shouted across to him at one point.

"Aren't you going to bawl her out, like you did with us?"

Mairi put her hand on Philippe's shoulder. He could feel the warmth of her skin through his T-shirt.

"Ignore them," she whispered. "Antonio's dealing with them."

Philippe felt a sense of relief when the day ended and they finally got back to the apartment.

"Sometimes people are unpleasant," Antonio told him as they settled on the balcony with a beer.

"And sometimes they are stupid. Often the two things go together."

"It takes a while, but you learn how to deal with them. I'm just sorry it happened on your first day. Most days are not like that, I promise you."

Philippe twisted his glass round and round.

"But even when you were less experienced, would you have lost your temper, as I did?"

His phone buzzed before Antonio could answer.

Expecting a text from Nicole, his spirits lifted, only to plummet again when he found it was a message from Chris.

I've received two complaints about you. Be at my house at seven a.m.

A wave of nausea washed over him, along with an overpowering sense of déjà vu as he remembered the day he had been summoned to the headmaster's office.

Having just started this job, was he already about to be sacked?

* * * *

Hilary could hardly believe her ears when Antonio phoned.

"That's ridiculous. We all know those men ignored the warning not to swim, and put others in danger in the process."

"What if one of you had got swept out, trying to rescue them?"

She sighed.

"How's Philippe taking it? I hope he stood up for himself."

"He didn't get the chance. Chris just sent him a text. I phoned to ask what was going on, but he said he was too busy to talk and he'd deal with it in the morning."

"He was quite short with me. As for Philippe . . ."

Hilary could imagine him holding out his hands and looking heavenwards. Mairi had joked on the drive back that they didn't come much more Italian than Antonio.

"He's almost ready to book a flight home. I can't believe Chris is acting like this, Hilary."

Neither could she. Then again, in some ways she could.

His father had always rushed at problems without considering all the aspects, invariably convinced that he was in the right.

She had found Ray's impetuous nature an attractive trait in their early days, but had gradually

come to learn it wasn't always welcome.

Chris had a lot on his mind at the moment, and she could understand why he might think that Philippe overreacted.

That still didn't excuse her son's behaviour.

"At least he's arranging a meeting to sort it out," she allowed.

"It'll probably be resolved once he's heard Philippe's side of things."

"I'm not so sure. The text was very short and the wording wasn't, shall we say, helpful."

Hilary cast her mind over what had happened.

"If anybody was to blame for the incident, it was me. I should have stayed closer and kept an eye on things."

"And what would you have done when they went into the water? It would have made no difference."

"I must go," Antonio added. "I'm taking Philippe out for a pizza and I'll go to the meeting with him in the morning."

"I'll be there, too. It isn't fair to let him take all the blame."

* * * *

Mairi was aghast when Hilary told her the news.

"Those men were a complete pain. You wouldn't believe the comments they kept making about women drivers."

"At least Graham gave me a lovely, understanding smile when we dropped them off."

Hilary, having been there, had noticed. She wouldn't be surprised if the lad had taken a shine to her niece.

"It's so unfair!" Mairi suddenly burst out. "Why do the mean people always seem to win? Well, I'm coming to the meeting, too."

"There's no need. You're not to blame."

"I don't care. Philippe's a nice guy. If Chris is going to give him a hard time, he'll have to contend with all of us."

* * * *

Chris seemed put out at the sight of them ▶



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all arriving.

Then there was Isabella, also up and about. Surely she should have a bit longer in bed?

Just over four months pregnant, she looked pale and drawn again. All of this couldn't be good for her.

Chris folded his arms and leaned against the door frame as they approached.

"I only told Philippe to come. There's no need for the rest of you."

"We were all there yesterday," Hilary replied. "I'm sure we all have something relevant to say."

The five of them sat round the table in stony silence.

"I trust you all know why I've asked to see Philippe this morning."

"The two gentlemen who complained . . ." Chris glared at Mairi as she snorted ". . . maintain that you humiliated them for simply going into the water for a couple of minutes."

Philippe stared fixedly at the surface of the table.

"They were swimming when they had been specifically warned not to. Myself, Antonio, Mairi and another member of the party had to rescue them."

"That's not how they put it. They said you took it upon yourself to wade in and drag them out as if they were children."

"Then they're lying," Mairi snapped. "They were out among the breakers. We had no choice but to get them out."

"The former person was a former lifeguard. He must have thought the danger was real enough to take action, or he wouldn't have joined us."

Chris scowled.

"That still leaves Philippe's behaviour towards them."

"They've said that unless I give them a full refund, they'll leave a review that will push our ratings right down." Chris slammed the table with his hand.

"Bad reviews are the last thing we need at the moment."

"And how bad would the

reviews be if they'd drowned?" Hilary argued.

"Granted, Philippe could have handled it better, but it was his first day. It would be incredibly unfair if he was penalised for someone else's bad behaviour."

"I'm as much to blame for not keeping an eye on them. If you're going to sack anyone, sack me."

"I am in the same shoes as Hilary," Antonio added. "If you fire Philippe, then I will resign."

"So will I," Mairi said. Chris stared at his mother and cousin.

"So even my family are turning on me now?"

"We're not turning on you," Hilary assured him.

"We're trying to make you see sense. If you're worried about reviews, contact the rest of the people who were there."

"They'll confirm how it was, and probably be happy to post good reviews to counter them."

Philippe gave her a grateful smile.

It was heartwarming the way the team had gelled even after their short time together.

She was also pleasantly surprised at her own assertiveness.

She would never done this a few months ago.

Chris sat back and rubbed his hands over his face.

"You're right. I'll draft a reply and make it clear to their rep that they've been economical with the truth." He turned to Philippe and gave him a wry grin.

"In the meantime, you need to learn to hold your tongue."

"Watch Antonio and see how he deals with awkward types."

An air of relief prevailed as everyone stood up and got ready to set off on that day's tour.

It didn't last long.

Isabella came into the room, her complexion grey.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, Chris, but I really don't feel well."

To be continued.

The Farmer & His Wife



Have John and Anne Taylor been breaking the law?

ANNE phoned her friend, Mary, the other night to see if she'd be going to the WRI meeting in Kingsbarns.

No, Mary didn't think she'd better go. She was in her husband's bad books.

When Mary married Ian she took over the paperwork for the farm – all the tractor and car licences and any other bits of business.

Well, two men had arrived at the back door that day in an odd kind of van.

"We're here to inspect your television licence, madam."

Ian had seen the van and came to find out what the men wanted. He's a blunt fellow, over six feet tall and about 15 stone.

He looked them up and down.

"The police have warned us about the likes of you. Where's your identity cards?"

The men produced said cards and Ian asked them to wait whilst Mary went to find the licence.

She found the form, all filled in, and the cheque for it, behind a china dog on the mantelshelf. They had never been posted.

It seems the form had come about three weeks in advance and Mary, being a careful sort, hadn't posted it right away. In the end, she had forgotten

all about it.

As soon as Anne came off the phone she turned on me in a panic.

"John, did you renew our TV licence?"

"No, dear, you did."

To be honest, I wasn't certain, but if in doubt blame somebody else . . .

Anne got out her cheque book stubs. No luck there – half weren't filled in. In my little "office" I went through the top drawer of my chest. Lots of TV licences from years back, but not this year's.

Where was it? Had we ever applied for one?

Anne and I were now speaking to each other in far from harmonious tones.

The outcome was, Anne didn't go to the WRI meeting in Kingsbarns, either. We spent all evening searching!

Oh, yes, we had paid it. We don't know which of us did. I suspect Anne, as she had put it away (why, I don't know) in a drawer in the drum table in the sitting-room.

What did we do then? Switched on the TV – with a clear conscience. ■



More next week

Easy Suppers

Call it tea, dinner or what you will, our tasty recipes make a delicious evening meal!

Succulent Chicken and South African Raisin Supper

Course: **main** Skill level: **easy**
Serves: **4**

- ❑ 1 tbs vegetable oil
- ❑ 4 chicken legs or 8 chicken thighs
- ❑ 1 large red onion, sliced
- ❑ 200 ml (7 fl oz) South African dry white wine
- ❑ 200 ml (7 fl oz) chicken stock
- ❑ 100 g (3½ oz) South African raisins
- ❑ 1 tbs chopped fresh parsley
- ❑ 2-3 thyme sprigs
- ❑ 2-3 tsp chicken gravy granules
- ❑ 100 ml (3½ fl oz) double cream
- ❑ 30 g (1 oz) ground almonds

*To Garnish: chopped fresh parsley; toasted almonds.
To Serve: baked potatoes or mash.*

1 Heat the vegetable oil in a flameproof casserole dish and add the chicken legs or thighs. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes, turning occasionally until browned on both sides (this is important for a good flavour).

2 Add the onion and cook for 2 minutes, then pour in the white wine and stock. Add the South African raisins, chopped parsley and thyme sprigs. Cover and cook on the hob over a low heat for 1 hour 15 minutes, or cook in the oven for the same time (pre-heated to 190 deg. C., 375 deg. F., Gas Mark 5).

3 Just before serving, stir in the chicken gravy granules to thicken, then add the double cream and ground almonds, reheating gently for a few moments. Serve, garnished with chopped parsley and toasted almonds.

Mushroom Veggie Bolognese

Course: **main**
Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**
Vegetarian

- ❑ 2 tbs olive oil
- ❑ 1 onion, chopped finely
- ❑ 2 cloves garlic, chopped finely
- ❑ 1 small carrot, chopped finely
- ❑ 1 celery stalk, chopped finely
- ❑ 100 g (3½ oz) chestnut mushrooms, chopped roughly
- ❑ 100 g (3½ oz) button mushrooms, sliced
- ❑ 1 red pepper, chopped finely
- ❑ 2 thyme sprigs, chopped
- ❑ 10 g (¼ oz) basil, stalks and leaves
- ❑ 2 bay leaves
- ❑ 100 ml (3½ fl oz) red wine
- ❑ 1 x 400 g tin chopped tomatoes

- ❑ 100 ml (3½ fl oz) vegetable stock
 - ❑ 1 tsp tomato purée
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
To Serve: cooked spaghetti; Parmesan (or vegetarian equivalent), grated.

1 In a large saucepan, heat the oil and sauté the onion, garlic, carrot and celery for about 5 minutes until soft. Now add the mushrooms, pepper, thyme, basil stalks and bay leaves. Continue cooking for a further 5 minutes.

2 Add the red wine, stock and tinned tomatoes and tomato purée. Season to taste and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes.

3 When ready, add chopped fresh basil and serve with freshly cooked spaghetti and a grating of Parmesan or vegetarian hard cheese.



www.justaddmushrooms.com

Warm Radish, Halloumi, Potato and Cherry Tomato Salad with a Mustard and Dill Dressing

Course: **main**
Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**

- ❑ 200 g (7 oz) baby potatoes (new potatoes if available), sliced
 - ❑ 150 g (5½ oz) mixed radishes, cut in half
 - ❑ 100 g (3½ oz) cherry tomatoes, cut in half
 - ❑ 1 tbs olive oil
 - ❑ 200 g (7 oz) halloumi, sliced
 - ❑ A slice or two of ham per person, optional
- For the Dressing:**
- ❑ 4 tbs extra virgin olive oil
 - ❑ 1 tbs red wine vinegar
 - ❑ 1 tbs Dijon mustard
 - ❑ Small bunch of dill, chopped
 - ❑ Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Adding a slice or two of ham turns this into a more substantial dish that will satisfy the carnivores among your friends and family!

cold water and lightly salt. Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes until cooked. Drain and set aside.

2 To make the dressing, in a medium-sized bowl mix together the olive oil and vinegar, then add the Dijon mustard and dill.

3 Add the potatoes, radishes and cherry tomatoes to the dressing, mix and season well.

4 Heat the olive oil in a medium sized non-stick frying-pan and cook the halloumi on both sides for 1 minute until golden brown.

5 Add the halloumi to the salad and mix gently, then divide between 4 plates and serve immediately, with a slice or two of ham.



www.loveradish.co.uk

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.

1 Place the potatoes in a medium-sized pan, cover with

► Pukka's Herby Root Veg Fries

Course: **main**

Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**

- ❑ **500 g (1 lb 2 oz) root vegetables – a mix of carrots, parsnips and beetroot**
- ❑ **½ tsp smoked paprika**
- ❑ **½ tsp garlic granules**
- ❑ **2 tsp dried rosemary**
- ❑ **2 tbs olive oil**
- ❑ **Salt and pepper, to taste**
- ❑ **4 Pukka pies of choice**

1 Pre-heat the oven to 200°C, 400 deg. F., Gas Mark 6.

2 Peel the vegetables and cut into fries, trying to make sure they are of a similar size and shape so they will cook more evenly. Place into a large mixing bowl.

3 Whisk the remaining

ingredients together in a small bowl and drizzle over the fries, tossing together to coat evenly.

4 Line a large baking tray with parchment and place the fries on it, making sure they are in

a single layer. (Use two trays if necessary.)

5 Bake in the pre-heated oven for 20 to 25 minutes or until tinged golden round the edges, adding a little salt and pepper

if you like.

6 Meanwhile, cook your pies according to pack instructions and serve alongside the Root Veg Fries for a tasty, hearty and wholesome meal.



www.pukkapies.co.uk

British Pork Chops with Jack Daniel's Smokey Sweet Glaze

Course: **main**

Skill level: **easy** Serves: **4**

- ❑ **Cooking spray**
- ❑ **4 x 115 g (4 oz) boneless British loin pork chops, about 1 cm (½ in) thick**
- ❑ **½ tsp salt**
- ❑ **¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper**
- ❑ **1 bottle Jack Daniel's® Smokey Sweet Barbecue Glaze**
- ❑ **1 tsp vinegar**
- ❑ **1 large red cabbage, shredded**
- ❑ **4 medium potatoes, peeled and chopped into cubes**
- ❑ **3 tbs softened butter**

1 Coat a large non-stick skillet with cooking spray and heat over medium-high heat. Sprinkle the chops with salt and pepper and cook for two minutes on each side or until browned.

2 Reduce heat to medium-low; add a generous coating of Jack Daniel's® Smokey Sweet Barbecue Glaze.

3 Cook for 10 minutes or until done, turning pork once. Reapply the Glaze during the cooking time with a pastry brush.

4 While the chops are cooking, bring a saucepan of lightly salted water to the boil. Add the vinegar, then add the shredded red cabbage. Boil for 10 to 20 minutes or until done to your liking, then drain and serve with a knob of butter.

5 Meanwhile, add the potatoes to a saucepan of lightly salted boiling water. Boil for about 6 minutes, or until done. Mash well with a potato masher, add the butter and beat until light and fluffy.

6 Serve with a pot of Jack Daniel's® Smokey Sweet Glaze to dip.



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So Far From Home

The train had taken them away from all that was familiar. Vera must set an example . . .

Set in
WWII

WE'RE here, children." Vera put all of the enthusiasm she could muster into her voice.

"Make sure you don't leave anything on the train. Margaret, gas mask," she reminded one of the girls.

Soon she was walking up the hill towards Westcote's village hall behind her 25 pupils, ready to round up stragglers.

As she walked, suitcase in one hand and Billy Martin's warm, sticky fingers clasping the other, isolated scenes from the journey came back to her.

The five-in-the-morning start: chilly, unreal.

The tears as mums, some dads and the children waved each other a frantic goodbye.

The smell of steam and coal, and the train's chirpy whistles.

And throughout the day, the children's endless questions.

It was early evening now. The blackout was in effect, of course.

The moon had not yet risen, and the only light came from a single streetlamp pointing a narrow shaft of yellow down on to the pavement.

A fug of warm bodies, tobacco smoke and hot tea met her as she entered the village hall.

The room was packed, as if the whole village had come to greet the evacuees.

As she threaded her way through to the front, snatches of conversation came her way.

Initial incredulity turned to outrage, growing stronger with every yard she advanced.

"Try to get that boy on the left, the one with –"

"That one with the dark curls, she'll be no trouble."

"He looks strong, an extra pair of hands . . ."

Vera stared at the first speaker, glared at the second and shot a sharp retort at the third.

Her pupils stood in a tight, anxious group, suitcases or bundles at their feet. Some clutched a teddy or doll to their chest.

Her chin came up as she turned to the man in charge.

"My pupils aren't horses at some livestock auction!"

His smile faded.

"Indeed they are not." He wore the blue uniform of the RAF and was in his late twenties, a few years older than she was.

"Why should you think

they would be?"

"Some of the things these people are saying. They'll be checking their teeth next."

"Let me assure you, Miss Grey, as Billeting Officer I will see to it that everything is done correctly."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Vera's tone was as cool and formal as his.

"Where possible, I've placed boys where there are boys in the family. And girls with girls."

"I have also endeavoured to keep brothers and sisters together."

"Thank you." A little of the tension eased from Vera's shoulders. "That's very good of you, er –"

"Warnsley. Pilot officer Henry Warnsley." He held his hand out. "Shall we get started?"

The next hour passed in a flurry of activity.

Reassuring her young charges, wiping away tears and giving hugs, Vera watched each of them leave with their host family.

Finally, it was over. Every child had been placed.

Vera picked a forgotten teddy up from the floor and turned to Henry.

"I must apologise. When I first arrived I was very rude."

"So not a livestock

auction, after all?"

Colour warmed Vera's cheeks.

"No." She found she couldn't meet his gaze.

For a moment neither spoke.

"I'll take you to your billet," Henry said finally. "It's just next door."

* * * *

"Lovely writing, John. And not a blot in sight! Well done."

It was the next day. The children were in one of the side-rooms of the village hall, busy writing letters home.

An assortment of tables had transformed the room into a classroom.

There had been tears that morning as the realisation they were far from their families sank in.

Vera, too, was homesick. The quiet that night had been unnerving.

She missed the noise of traffic, the banter of her colleagues – all, like her, evacuated out of London with their classes – and her parents' cheerful chatter.

For the children's sake, though, she had to stay positive.

"Finish now, children. Playtime in five minutes."

She sat on a bench

▶ on the village green and watched her pupils run and jump, laugh and shout as they played.

To her surprise, Henry Warnsley joined her.

Young Susie, eyes red-rimmed from crying, came and sat on her other side, and Vera put her arm round her.

"Several of the children," she said to Henry, conscious of the formal tone she was adopting, "have told me that someone's put up a sign on the main road pointing the way to London.

"Telling us to go home, in other words."

"Ah."

"Two village boys ambushed Susie here on her way to school this morning.

"She's finding it hard enough already. She doesn't need this, too."

"I agree." There was anger in his voice. "I'll have the signpost taken down and take steps to find and punish the two boys.

"There are many people here in Westcote who are fully aware of the dangers of staying in London and genuinely want to help."

"The government is giving them money for doing so," Vera cut in. "Eight shillings a week, if not more."

"That's not the only reason they do it. Some of the villagers, though, are uneasy about accepting evacuees.

"They've heard tales of nits and lice, of ignorant townies who don't know milk comes from a cow, of young hooligans bringing London crime to the country."

About to protest, Vera hesitated. There was some truth in what he said.

"We're on the same side, you know," he said quietly. "We ought to be working together.

"Now, Susie, do you think you can tell us what the two boys looked like?"

* * * *

"The baker caught Billy Martin stealing a bun this morning," Henry said at playtime the next day.

"I know," Vera said

unhappily. "I've given him a telling-off. He's promised never to do it again."

She shook her head.

"He said he was hungry. I don't think his host family are giving him enough to eat."

"I'll have a word with them."

Henry joined Vera on the bench the following day, too. Was he going to make a habit of it? She decided she rather liked the idea.

"Susie's still desperately homesick," she said.

The young girl was leaning against her on her other side, sniffing into a handkerchief.

"I've been thinking of ways of bringing my pupils and the village children together.

"If they were all outside at the same time at playtime, for instance?"

"Good idea."

She smiled.

"I'm glad you agree. I'll speak to the village schoolmistress this afternoon. I'd also like to organise a joint sports day.

"And I want my pupils to learn about the wild flowers, the birds, all the wildlife. Who could teach them that?"

It was Henry's turn to smile.

"I can think of quite a few round here who'd be happy to help you out."

For a moment he was silent, gazing above the heads of the children playing on the green towards the distant horizon.

"The countryside has a lot to offer, you know."

"You're right. We must make sure the children know that."

* * * *

At the end of the school day a fortnight later, Vera stood in the doorway of the village hall.

Black clouds were massing in the south-west, and the air was muggy.

A mix of boys shouted and cheered and jostled as they kicked a football around the green.

Susie skipped down the hill, holding hands with one of the village girls.

A village mum, coming to

collect her evacuee, waved to Vera.

Vera felt she'd become part of the village and knew her pupils felt the same.

She'd synchronised playtimes so that her pupils and those from the village school were out on the green at the same time.

She'd organised a visit to Henry's father's farm so the children could see how their food was produced.

There had been field trips headed by volunteer villagers to study the local flora and fauna.

The joint sports day would be a great success, she was sure.

Young Susie had made a friend and was no longer homesick.

Billy had confided he was now given second helpings – if he asked nicely.

All in all, her pupils had settled in well.

Vera missed what London had to offer: the cinemas, dances, libraries and museums.

But she was discovering that the countryside was a place of beauty and interest.

In large measure, it was thanks to Henry. Calm, patient, always fair, he'd worked hard to bring town and country together.

His leave was due to end, and he'd be rejoining his squadron in a day or two. She'd miss him immensely.

Much later, when it was dark, Vera sat in the armchair in her upstairs room and listened to the gentle patter of raindrops against the window-panes.

She heard a knock at the front door, her landlady and Henry speaking in urgent tones.

Her heart swooped into a fast, shallow beat.

"What's wrong?" she called, pounding down the stairs. "Is one of the children –?"

"No. Nothing like that." Henry stood in the doorway. "Come on, quick." Taking her hand in his, he pulled her out the front door.

Vera ran with him towards the centre of the village green. The air was damp with the remnants of the storm. Henry's hand

round hers was warm and firm.

He didn't slow his pace or answer her question, and she was breathless when finally he pulled to a halt.

"Look at the moon."

He stood behind her, his hands on her shoulders.

A day or two past full, the moon was low in the sky, spilling its cold light over the roofs of the cottages on one side of the green.

"Now turn round."

His hands on her shoulders steered her through a hundred and eighty degrees.

"Oh!" It was a gasp of pure wonder.

In that direction, the ground sloped away. In daylight you could see for miles, Vera knew, the view uninterrupted by any buildings.

Now, a ghostly, ice-white arc stretched in a vast curve across the land.

"It's called a moonbow."

"A moonbow," Vera echoed. "It's breathtaking. Eerie."

"It happens when moonlight shines through water droplets in the air.

"You don't get them often – conditions must be just right. It's only because the blackout's in force that we can see it."

She stood stock-still, as though movement might chase it away, and watched as it slowly faded.

"They last no time at all," Henry told her. "Just seconds. Minutes if you're lucky."

"It was beautiful," Vera turned to face him. "I don't think I'll ever forget it."

They stood inches apart. All at once Vera was conscious of the warmth of his hands on her arms. She swallowed.

"You were right. The countryside has so much to offer. I want to thank you for building bridges between –"

"Townies and countryfolk?" he supplied. "You did it, too."

"Thank you," she said.

She couldn't tell what the future held, but she knew that this village – and this man – would form a most important part of it. ■

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The register is a public record that shows details of firms, individuals and other bodies that are, or have

been, regulated by the Prudential Regulation Authority and/or the Financial Conduct Authority.

A recent change means the register no longer lists advisers as authorised individuals unless they have management responsibilities at their firm.

The FCA plans to have a more inclusive directory which should be ready by the end of the year.

In the meantime, look in directories of advisers for someone with the chartered financial planner qualification from the Chartered Insurance Institute/Personal Finance Society.

Malcolm McLean, former chief executive of the Pensions Advisory Service and senior consultant with pension consultancy Barnett Waddingham, says, "Such qualifications reflect professionalism, dedication to the profession and significant experience as an adviser."

Occasionally, the qualifications listed against some advisers may not be accurate, so caution is needed. But they are

helpful if you want to identify quickly those advisers near you.

Click on the adviser's own website and contact details, in order to get to know about the adviser and their firm "from the horse's mouth" rather than taking everything on the directory at face value.

Make sure any adviser is truly independent and can advise across the whole range of the market, not just a few products.

Draw up a shortlist of at least two firms. Usually, the initial interview is free so you can afford to visit a couple of advisers.

First impressions and gut instinct are important, but check their website, mobile phone apps (if any) and paperwork. Ask for testimonials.

Look for an adviser who has been in business for a decade or more, and is regularly quoted by financial journalists as a trusted authority.

Check reviews on websites and Google for more information as well as adverse comments.

Find out what areas of specialism the financial planner has and what back-up plans are in place for when he or she is away from the office.

Make sure everything is transparent, particularly charges, as there can often be hidden extras.

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- Workers who take financial advice usually see a welcome boost in retirement income – by nearly £800 a year on average.
- People are more vulnerable as they age. Between the introduction in 2015 of pension freedoms and 2017, around 130,000 people over sixty-five suffered financial abuse and more than £43 million of people's retirement savings were scammed.
- PPI found that, of those over seventy-five, only half are able to calculate the effects of interest and inflation and only 62% can correctly read a bank balance statement (compared to around 80% of those under that age).



Tough new sanctions for pensions cheats

Reckless bosses who endanger company pension schemes could face lengthy spells behind bars under proposals set out in the Government's landmark Pension Schemes Bill.

Three major reforms are included in the bill, including a new sentence of up to seven years in prison for company bosses who run pension schemes into the ground or plunder them to line their own pockets.

The bill also paves the way for the introduction of Pensions Dashboards, bringing information about retirement savings to people's

fingertips at the touch of a screen, and introduces the legislation underpinning the UK's first Collective Defined Contribution pension scheme for Royal Mail employees.

Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion Guy Opperman said, "We're ensuring those who put pension schemes in jeopardy feel the full force of the law, transforming the way people get information about their retirement savings and introducing a new pension that could boost returns for millions."



Ask the expert

Interactive Investor Head of Personal Finance Moira O'Neill is here to help.



Q How do fees affect investment returns?

A While we can't control the ups and downs of the stock markets, we can control what we pay to access them.

Even small differences in fees can do tremendous long-term damage to the value of your investments. The power of compound interest can turn a few pounds paid today into a loss of thousands of pounds 10, 20 or 30 years down the road.

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The trick is to strike a sensible balance between keeping charges as low as possible and getting access to good investments.

Next month: how to talk to family members about money.

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Did you know that over 9 million people in the UK suffer from some form of arthritic joint pain?

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Up until recent years, Mr Mitchell from Perthshire spent nearly every weekend walking up in the hills. However he found his sore joints were stopping him from walking any distances. Mr Mitchell said, 'After using the ActiveCare Cream for just a week, I have already noticed a difference in my knees.'

Company owner Adrian Whalley, 'We receive testimonials every week from happy customers. To hear such good news from Mr Mitchell makes our hard work worthwhile. We send our product all over the world. We find that once someone tries ActiveCare Cream, they come back for it time and time again.'

For continued relief please ask us about our sore joint bath oil.



Scottish company Natural Skincare Factory, based in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, have developed their ActiveCare Cream over many years. It works like a natural anti-inflammatory, soothing those sore joints getting them moving again. Company owner Adrian Whalley (33, pictured) said, 'We have even received a letter from a member of the Royal family. Every testimonial we receive is important to us, but this one was rather special.'

'It's great to have a product that is making such a difference to a lot of people.'

'Activecare Cream is made with natural ingredients and would not interfere with any medications from your doctor. Used twice a day, massaging into the sore joint, it's been known to make a difference in as little as 24 hours.'

Adrian further commented, 'We send our product all over the world. We find that once someone tries ActiveCare Cream, they come back for it time and time again.'



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The Girl In The Red Van

Derek didn't like strangers in our village. Would Alex be any different?

I KNEW by the way he came in from the garden that something was irritating Derek.

Maybe it was his stance or the extra pressure he was putting on the door handle, but after 30 years of marriage, I knew.

"Cup of tea?" I asked brightly, trying to offset any grumpiness.

"Please," he said, dropping his hat on the kitchen table from where I rescued it and hung it up.

I poured boiling water in the teapot and waited.

"That red van is still parked in the layby."

"Mmm." Tourists parking overnight were a constant annoyance to Derek.

"I expect they are too mean to pay campsite fees," he continued.

"I'm sure it'll be gone soon." I put a mug of tea down in front of him.

"It's been two weeks now. I should report it to the council.

"There are curtains on the windows, which were

shut this morning. They'll be throwing rubbish in the verge."

"You don't know that."

"Huh. Holidaymakers!

They don't care about the environment, scrambling to get their photos . . ."

I stopped listening.

Derek loves our village and the surrounding area of lakes and fells, and looking after it is our passion.

We take every opportunity to get out and walk, but with hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Lake District each year, the countryside isn't always treated as we would like.

Still, I wasn't sure the red van was doing any harm. I'd seen no evidence of rubbish and heard no noise.

But to Derek the van was like an itch he needed to scratch.

"Shall we go for a walk this afternoon?" I asked when he paused.

A good walk always cheered him up.

"Yes, all right."

"Buttermere? Loweswater?"

"We'll never get in the car parks," he said gloomily.

"It's too late already."

He was determined to remain in a bad mood.

"OK. What about local?"

He nodded and glanced out of the window, then thumped his hand down on the table, making the tea mugs jump.

"Skiddaw!" he exclaimed.

"We've haven't been up this year and the weather's good. We could take lunch."

I frowned and looked at the clock.

"It's late . . ."

"Not if we go straight away."

I looked at him. His mouth was set in a determined line.

I sighed.

"You get my rucksack and boots. I'll make some sandwiches."

Ten minutes later we were in the car, and 20 minutes later we were

starting up the gravel path that ascends one of England's highest peaks.

Although it was only mid morning, some early walkers were already on their way down.

As we climbed, Keswick appeared below us like a Lilliputian town.

Derwent Water stretched beyond with miniature yachts, while a ferry, like a child's toy, was making its way down the lake.

The hills around were rich with new green bracken.

Two and a half hours later, with me puffing and panting, we arrived at the trig point and small cairn on the summit.

The air was clean and fresh with a slight breeze, and above us a buzzard played on the thermals.

I shaded my eyes to admire the views.

I could see the Solway Firth, wind farms in the Irish Sea and a smudge on the horizon that was the Isle of Man.

Behind us was Blencathra, and then the Pennines away in the distance.

"It's a truly wonderful place," Derek said with a smile, all his grumpiness sweated out in the climb up the mountain.

We ate our lunch and sat appreciating the view for a while before beginning the long trek down.

We reached the bottom, tired but exhilarated.

We were woken in the early hours by a hammering on the front door

"I enjoyed that. How about the pub?" Derek asked.

I nodded. A drink would be welcome.

"Good to see you both!" Janis, our village landlady made us immediately welcome.

The pub was cosy with low ceilings and wooden beams. Even in the height of the summer there was usually a fire.

"Are you eating?" Janis carried on.

Derek looked at me and raised an eyebrow.

I shrugged.

"Yes," he said. "Just done Skiddaw. I don't think we feel like cooking this evening."

"Good for you." Janis smiled.

We perched on bar stools talking to Janis.

"Who's that?" Derek nodded towards a red-haired girl at the end of the counter.

"That's Alex," Janis said. "Been here ten days or so. She's bought Spout Cottage and was looking for a job."

"That's lucky," I remarked.

Janis nodded.

She had trouble keeping staff. As soon as she trained them, they moved on to better, bigger places, or they got bored with living in a quiet village and sought out the brighter lights of Windermere or Keswick.

Derek had even been known to help out on the odd occasion.

A pie and chips arrived

for Derek and a lasagne for me. The food tasted especially good after the exercise.

I was just putting my knife and fork together on an empty plate when Alex came over.

Janis introduced us.

"Alex, this is Derek and Sylvia. They live in the village and are regular customers."

"Make sure you keep them sweet!"

"So you've bought Spout Cottage?" Derek asked. "That's been empty a while."

"I know," Alex said with a grimace. "And the elements have not been kind to it. I've had to have all sorts of work done."

"The rewiring is nearly finished, then it'll be down to me to paint and decorate."

Derek nodded.

"I don't think the last people really wanted to sell," he said.

"Well, they did. In the end," Alex said with a grin. "I should be able to move in the day after tomorrow."

"I want to let out the spare bedrooms. Janis is pleased because it will bring people to the pub for dinner."

"She's always after customers!" Derek laughed.

"It's a cut-throat business, pub work!" Janis called over as she dried glasses.

"I've got a ton of decorating to do," Alex said. "Do you know where I can get curtains made around here?"

She turned to me.

"I'd buy them," I advised. "They're so cheap these days. They may not fit the cottage windows, but you can always alter them. I'd be happy to help."

Alex clapped her hands together and her eyes gleamed in the firelight.

"Would you? That would be fantastic."

"I love being here. I remember holidays with my parents in the Lake District

and it's always been my dream to live here."

* * * *

"Alex seemed nice," I said as we walked home from the pub.

"She reminds me of our Emily," Derek said.

I heard the catch in his voice.

The father-daughter bond between Derek and Emily had always been strong, and it nearly broke his heart when she went off to live in America.

"That red van is still here," Derek grumbled as we approached our house.

I could see it parked in the layby beyond the unlit windows of Spout Cottage, the last house in the village before the fields began.

I peered through the darkening sky at the van.

"It doesn't look as if there is anyone in there at the moment," I said. "I can't see any lights. Maybe it's just parked for a while."

"Tourists," Derek muttered.

* * * *

Next morning, I set out the ingredients for a cake.

"What are you making?" Derek asked.

"It's not for you. It's for Alex. I thought I'd make a fruitcake and take it round when she's moved in."

"You're a soft touch."

"Just being neighbourly."

When the cake was cooling a couple of hours later, Derek and I wandered up the lane to have a look at Alex's cottage.

A skip full of builder's rubble stood in the drive and an electrician's van was parked on the verge outside.

"Looks as if they're still working," I commented. "I hope for her sake they're finished soon."

Derek nodded.

"It's nice that young people are moving into the village instead of more holiday cottages."

"I'll bring the cake round tomorrow," I said. "See if she needs help with curtains."

In the end, the cake was the last thing on my mind for the next few days.

Derek and I went to bed as usual that night, but we were woken in the early hours by a hammering on the front door.

From the volley of blows it sounded urgent.

"Derek!" I grabbed his arm.

"It's OK. I'm going," he said, hauling himself out of bed and feeling for his slippers.

I put the bedside light on and he took his dressing-gown from the back of the bedroom door.

"Stay here," he said, but my heart was hammering wildly and I wanted to know what was going on, so I put on my own dressing-gown and followed him downstairs.

"Alex!" I heard the surprise in Derek's voice as he opened the door.

"Quick!" She gasped.

"Phone the police."

"There's a big lorry at the field next to my house and they're rounding up all the sheep in the dark."

"I heard a dog bark. It woke me."

"Rustlers," I said, moving up beside Derek. "Derek, phone Tim. It's his field. I'll ring the police."

I turned to the phone in the hall and dialled 999.

Once I was off the phone, I turned back to Alex, who was wearing an old tracksuit and had pulled an anorak over the top.

Her red hair was sleep ruffled and her face puffy.

"They'll send someone as soon as they can, but I'm sure they'll be a while. I hope Tim can get here quicker."

"I pulled my van in front of the gate," Alex said, biting her lip. "I thought it would block them in."

"A red van?" I asked, trying to keep the surprise out of my voice.

"Yes. I've been living in it while I wait for the cottage to be ready."

"Ah."

At that moment Derek came back from the kitchen clutching his mobile.

"Tim's coming over in his tractor. Apparently other farms around here have been hit recently."

"Alex parked her van in front of the gate to

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▶ stop them getting away," I told him. "Van?" he repeated. "A red one," I told him pointedly.

"Let's hope they don't ram it," Derek said grimly. "I'll put some clothes on and wait for Tim."

He rushed off upstairs. "Would you like a cup of tea?" I asked Alex.

She pulled the anorak tighter round herself.

"I'd prefer to check on the van," she said quietly. "It's got everything inside. I didn't think of them hitting it."

I reached out and put an arm round her. I realised she was shivering.

"Do you have the keys? I'll give them to Derek and he can move it when Tim gets here."

She reached in her pocket and pulled out a bunch of keys.

"Let me get you a thicker jacket and I'll put some shoes on. We can wait in the lane and see what happens."

I handed her a coat from a peg by the door and pulled on my wellies.

We hurried Derek down the path and on to the lane just in time to hear a tractor chugging round the corner.

"Ah, Tim's here. He was quick."

The tractor was followed by a van. Tim had brought reinforcements.

We rushed after them, passing Spout Cottage with its dark, staring windows.

Beyond, I could see the red van pulled across the gateway to the field.

I knew from our afternoon walk that Tim was grazing Herdwick ewes and their lambs in the field.

Some of Tim's Herdies had been prizewinners at local shows.

In the field, I could make out the dark shape of a large lorry.

Derek waved the keys at Tim in the tractor's cab.

"I think he's going to move your van," I said.

At that moment the lorry flashed its headlights on and revved the engine.

I clapped my hands to my face as it drove towards the gate, wobbling and

swerving over the rutted grass.

It wasn't going that fast when it hit first the gate, and then Alex's van. There had only been a hundred yards or so for it to build up speed.

But as the engine noise split the quiet of the night and the headlights ripped through the darkness, it appeared to come towards us like an express train.

There was a high-pitched screech followed by a crunch of metal, the snapping of wood and the tinkling of breaking glass.

We saw the red van rock and shift a little sideways, but it remained firmly in the way of the lorry.

The lorry's engine spluttered and died and the headlights went out.

I looked round for Alex but she was already running towards the van and the lorry.

Tim was out of the tractor, his son jumped out of the van and they were both approaching the lorry.

Derek hurried after them.

When I reached them, Tim had a man pinned down on the road and Roger was pursuing someone else across the grass.

A dog barked in the cab of the lorry and I could hear ewes and lambs bleating from the back.

If the sheep rustlers had separated the ewes from their lambs they would be very distressed.

Alex was staring at her van. I thought she was upset, but when I got closer I could see her fists were clenched, her mouth was set in a thin line and she was shaking with anger.

"How dare they steal sheep?" she demanded. "Can't the farmers let their animals out safely in the fields?"

I looked at her van. The lorry had smashed the gate into the side and both wood and the front of the cab were wedged against the side of the van.

Alex wouldn't be using it again without some lengthy repairs.

At that moment we heard sirens approaching and the next hour was spent with

the police, giving statements and releasing the sheep from the lorry.

It wasn't until almost six a.m. that we were finished at the field.

"Come with us, Alex," I told her. "You can use the spare room until your house is ready."

"The electricians told me I should be able to get in today," she replied. "As soon as I know for sure, I can release my furniture from storage."

"Well, come and have breakfast, at least," I insisted. "No-one will get any more sleep."

At nine o'clock, full of coffee, bacon and eggs and toast, Alex left to go to her house.

She'd told us the van was only insured third party so she was unlikely to be able to get it fixed.

"That's a shame," Derek said.

I looked at him.

"What happened to tourists throwing rubbish out and not paying camp fees?" I teased him.

He didn't meet my eye. "Alex reminds me of Emily," he said again.

"It's the red hair," I said.

"Emily would have done that, too," he continued. "Parked her van there without thought for herself. Stropy and stubborn."

"I wonder where she got that from," I said with a grin.

Later that day, I took the cake round to Alex's cottage.

"Welcome," she said, opening the door wide.

The walls bore marks of fresh plaster where the electricians had chiselled out the walls to replace cables.

Wallpaper hung in strips in the hall and there were damp stains that needed painting over in the bedrooms.

"It needs a lot of decorating now," she said with a sigh.

That evening I spoke to Derek. He made some calls and next morning he went to meet Tim.

Later, I took some freshly baked cookies round to Alex's.

"Look!" she squealed as

she opened the door.

In the sitting-room were Derek, Tim and Roger. Already they had painted the ceiling and half the walls.

"They've done a fantastic job," she said.

She wiped a hand across her forehead.

"It's overwhelming."

"Well, you did something for the village, sacrificing your van for the sheep."

She pulled a face.

"I didn't realise I was sacrificing it at the time," she pointed out. "And I probably wasn't going to keep it anyway."

"I don't want to sleep in a van when I've got a beautiful cottage in a beautiful place."

She touched my arm.

"Derek has been telling me about your walk up Skiddaw. He's promised to take me on the next good day we have."

I raised my eyebrows and smiled. How things had changed!

I had dinner ready when Derek came home that evening, tired, with paint in his hair and under his fingernails.

"Good day?" I asked.

"I think Alex is pleased," he replied. "We've done the living-room and most of her bedroom."

"We'll do the other bedrooms tomorrow."

"That's great. She'll want to get some visitors in as soon as possible to bring in some money."

"Visitors. Pah!" Derek exclaimed. "Did you see there were some people camping the other side of the road?"

"No doubt they'll leave their litter and goodness knows what else."

Obviously some things hadn't changed.

I stopped listening and my phone pinged with a message from Emily.

Will be over in the autumn. Booking tickets today.

I looked up at Derek and smiled.

Good news indeed, and it would give him a reason to be in a good mood for a while.

And maybe Em and Alex could be friends . . . ■

Inside next week's issue ⁵¹

Our cover feature:
Neil McAllister explores
the fascinating seaside
town of Malahide



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Pets & Vets

Turf Wars

Vet Linda Simon offers suggestions to stop other cats picking on your pet.

CATS are territorial by nature, often far more so than dogs. Some cats will decide that a certain area is "theirs" and will then threaten any other cat that attempts to cross their invisible boundary.

They may mark their territory with urine and patrol it.

If another cat places a paw over the line they will warn them away with hisses and growls.

If these warning signs are ignored, most won't hesitate to start a fight,

which may result in either party getting injured.

If your cat returns home with fur missing, scratches or even deep puncture wounds to their body, it is quite likely that they have been in a fight over territory with another cat.

It can be hard to tell whether a cat was the bully or the victim.

If unsure, monitor your cat when outside to see what they get up to.

A cat that has been in a fight should be seen by a vet: cat bites can cause nasty infections and antibiotics may be needed.

Any cat can be territorial, but unneutered cats tend to be the worst culprits.

If the local bully cat has not been neutered, this might be the first step.

For stray cats, local charities such as the RSPCA and Cats Protection can often help and may even be able to rehome the cat in some instances.

Frustratingly, some cats may suddenly decide that your garden is their territory, relegating your own cat to a life of staring out of the window, unwilling to venture out.

Signs include the bully

cat spending a lot of time in your garden and your cat suddenly becoming a homebody, using the litter tray they haven't visited since they were a kitten.

If they do go outside, it may only be for very short bursts, and they may even be unlucky enough to come back in with signs that they have been in a scuffle.

To deter other cats from your garden, never leave food or water out, as this could encourage them.

If you spot them fighting with your kitty, scare them off with a water pistol or a loud noise such as a whistle.

It's suggested taking the soiled litter from your cat's litter tray and placing it around the perimeter of the garden for a short while can establish that the garden is their territory.

This may be a step too far for some owners!

If you can find out who owns the bully cat, it might be an idea to have a chat with the owner about sticking to a timetable, whereby they agree to keep him in at certain times so that your cat can enjoy some fresh air and sunshine. ■



Is your cat the bully or victim?

Top tips to prevent trouble

- Cats should be thoroughly socialised in the first few months of life to prevent them becoming territorial in the first place.
- They need an enriching home life with lots of mental and physical stimulation like food puzzles, scenting games and interactive toys.

- Highly strung cats may benefit from some calming supplements and/or a pheromone diffuser such as Feliway to help reduce anxiety.
- Any aggressive behaviour that comes out of the blue may indicate an underlying medical issue, so it always warrants a full vet check.

Your pet questions answered



Answered by PDSA Vet Nurse Nina Downing www.pdsa.org.uk

Q How can I discourage my pup from nipping?

A Puppies demonstrate teething by chewing and biting. They'll need dog-safe toys to soothe teething gums. Nipping people or other dogs is part of puppy play, but it can hurt.

If your puppy is becoming too rough, calmly and quietly get up and walk away. Don't react, as your pup could wrongly interpret this as praise. Puppy classes can help if this becomes a behavioural issue.



Q Is it OK to give my cat tuna from a tin?

A A complete cat food contains all the nutrients cats need, so they don't really need treats such as tuna. However, a few occasional flakes won't cause any harm as tuna is low in fat, so is better than some other food treats. Make sure to select tuna in spring water rather than brine or oil, though. Tuna can also be a great training reward.



PDSA is the UK's leading veterinary charity. For further information visit www.pdsa.org.uk or call 0800 731 2502.

Set in
the
1800s



The Quest For The Dove Tree

The Story So Far

CAROLINE and LUKE HATHERN have left China behind and are heading back to England via Florence along with **ADA PEACE** and **MARIANNE TURTLE**, who is being taken to live with her grandparents in England.

Though they have lots of plant specimens, they were unsuccessful in acquiring a Dove Tree.

Luke has left Caroline's father, **WILLIAM WATERS**, in charge of Hathern's Nursery in his absence, along with the manager, **MR NASH**, and William's grandson, **MATTHEW FIELD**.

Damage to plants at

the nursery has been a concern and they suspect rival **HARVEY KELLARD**.

The director of Kew Gardens asks William to try to persuade Kellard to accept a position on an upcoming Arctic expedition.

The meeting goes better than expected, and Kellard confesses the damage at Hathern's was caused by his inside man.

Luke and Caroline stop over in Florence on the way home to stay with friends **PAOLA** and **JANE**.

While they are there, the women make a discovery – Caroline is going to have a child . . .

The expedition had not brought back a Dove Tree, but it had been successful in so many ways . . .

WHERE is Ada?" Luke asked. He was standing grim-faced on the mosaic of orange, brown and yellow stones adorning the grand *pensione* floor.

He felt sorry to leave, yet was burning with impatience to be gone.

"She'll be back before we must leave," Caroline assured him.

Luke grunted and heaved a wayward bag into place.

Once, he might have wished to stay longer in beautiful Florence, but (here he took a deep

breath) now he was to become a father he felt quite different.

He'd had growing misgivings, too, about the tone of William's recent letter concerning his London business. The sooner they all reached home, the better.

Although Florence no longer had the status of a capital city – that honour had quickly gone to Rome – they'd enjoyed visiting places they'd known like the Boboli Gardens, the Duomo and the markets fragrant with flowers.

Caroline had also insisted on a visit to the Porcellino.

She'd slipped another coin into the piglet's metal mouth, in gratitude for this second wonderful visit to the city.

But increasingly, Luke felt it was past time they left.

"Where is Marianne?" he persisted.

At that moment he heard children's voices and saw the girl, with Ada following. Behind came Jane, Fabio and their family.

"All here to wave us on our way!" Caroline said happily.

* * * *

London welcomed them with a light rain that soaked everything.

Fortunately, William had temporarily returned to Lyon Place to offer a welcome far warmer than the weather.

"My dears!" He shook Ada's hand, then Luke's, and patted Marianne's cheek.

When he saw Caroline, he stopped, resting his hands on her shoulders.

"My dear daughter," he said carefully, raising his eyebrows. "You look well."

"Indeed I am," Caroline said, and whispered her news in his ear.

"A grandfather once more, eh?" William boomed.

He hugged everyone again, and clapped Luke on the shoulder.

When each person was fed and settled, William asked his son-in-law if they might meet soon at the nurseries, where he could bring him up to date.

Marianne, still determinedly awake, was finally persuaded to bed by Ada.

"When shall I see my grandparents?" Marianne asked, wrapped in a robe that had been warmed for her in front of a fire.

"Very soon," Ada promised.

"Will anyone else come with me?" she asked plaintively.

"Of course," Ada said, sitting comfortably down beside her.

Marianne nodded.

"Uncle Tobie made you promise to look after me, didn't he?" she asked,

sleepy at last, sliding under the counterpane.

"And we loved you enough to agree," Ada assured her. "Now, goodnight and sleep tight. I shall be in the next room."

Marianne had been aware of every discussion about her future.

On the edge of sleep, she wondered what questions she could ask. What questions would her grandparents ask her?

"Aunt Ada, may I take Li?" she murmured. Her doll lay beside her.

"Yes, dear," Ada replied. "I'm sure your grandparents will be so pleased. Just remember to behave as well as you know how."

* * * *

Next morning, Luke once again stepped inside the familiar door at Hathern's.

It felt good to be back, and to see some of Caroline's exquisite paintings from her South American expedition displayed on the wall.

He paused as the scents of earthy greenery enveloped him, then set off down the corridor.

Before he reached his office, the door opened.

"I see you are back, sir. Welcome home."

"Thank you, Mr Nash," Luke said. "Has my father-in-law arrived?"

"He asked to meet you in the despatch sheds. Shall we take refreshment later?" Luke nodded, and strolled across to the sheds.

"As you can see," William said, pointing upwards as they stood in the yard, "the window of my new lodgings overlooks the back gate to Hathern's."

"Useful," Luke said.

"Also a way of keeping watch," William said.

Luke raised his eyebrows.

"Have you had concerns?"

"Normally, the gate is locked overnight," William reminded him.

"Except when early deliveries are expected," Luke agreed. "The keys are held by a trusted nightwatchman."

William explained that he had thought all was well until he and Matthew discovered damage inflicted

on plants waiting for despatch.

"Eventually, I realised someone had unexpected access in the early hours," William said.

"But it was difficult to see exactly who it was, flitting through the gate in darkness. I was never quick enough."

"No-one was identified?" Luke asked.

"We must stay alert until Kellard has left these shores!"

"Never – until someone else told me they would put a stop to the problem."

"Who was that?" Luke asked. He couldn't help noticing William's oddly conflicted expression.

"It was Kellard himself!" William said.

"The very person who'd become your main suspect?" Luke asked, disbelieving.

William explained that Sir Joseph had recently recruited Kellard to take part in an important expedition.

"It appears Kellard decided it was in his best interests to confess that he'd put a man in here and was now taking him out."

"We must stay alert until Kellard has left these shores," Luke studied William's anxious expression.

"I am sorry I bequeathed you problems. I should have dealt with Kellard earlier, sir," he said.

"The man remains a nuisance," William replied. "But he was flattered by Sir Joseph's offer. If he accepts it, he'll be out of our way for a long time."

"Hasn't he said yes?" Luke asked, trying not to show his disappointment.

He found it difficult to share his further thoughts with Caroline's father, but now he felt compelled.

"Disappointments prevail, it seems," he told William in a low voice. "The Dove Tree . . . sir, we found a whole specimen, but couldn't bring it back."

"Sir Joseph will be unhappy," William said. "But perhaps we'll have other chances?"

William sounded confident this failure could be overcome. A confidence, quite suddenly, Luke found he no longer shared.

"I have since thought about the meaning of success and failure a great deal, Mr Waters," Luke said.

"I do not want another chance to fail as badly again."

"What do you mean?" William asked quietly.

Luke explained, as best he could, his troubled feelings as he'd explored the mountains.

"My judgement grew unsound, sir. I wanted that specimen so badly, I was ready to wrench it from its native earth without permission and with no guarantee of safety for my people. Had it not been for your daughter . . ."

"Caroline was there?"

"No, sir. She'd barely recovered from illness, so I'd decided to travel without her. I confess, that was a mistake."

Luke looked up into William's kindly face.

"I believe I might have lost all self-respect had she not reached me. But the disappointment in myself is still hard to bear."

William got up from his seat and stretched.

"I remember feeling much the same when the Flower of Hope was lost," he said.

"I have come to believe we cannot, and should not, seek to own anything in Nature."

"We are set on this earth merely to take care of it. Come, my boy, Mr Nash has tea waiting."

* * * *

Ten days after the meeting at Hathern's, Luke, Caroline and Ada set off for the address Tobias Turtle had given them.

The journey seemed to Marianne full of stops and starts. But at last, two large gates swung open and their carriage rumbled to a halt in a wide driveway.



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▶ Luke strode up four steps to the front door. A servant let them in and conducted everyone to a large sitting-room.

Marianne, her eyes stretched as wide as she could make them, took in the patterned carpet, the patterned cushions, the deep rugs, the crowded furniture and the many side-tables each bearing ornaments or flowers.

She clutched her doll tightly.

"Doesn't this look splendid?" Caroline sank into a seat flanked by two enormous vases.

Marianne, unmoving in case she knocked over something precious, didn't think so.

She shivered, and Aunt Ada took her other hand.

In the next moment, a maid opened the door.

As the pleasantries swirled above her head, Marianne's first thought was that the lady who'd swept in looked nothing like a grandmother.

She glided towards them in a swish of brilliant skirts and placed her hand on Marianne's shoulder.

The whole world seemed to smell of lavender.

"So this is my orphaned granddaughter?" the lady asked. "I declare, she looks nothing like her mother."

Marianne had heard this sentiment before, but still remembered her manners.

"I am very pleased to meet you, ma'am," she said, in a voice slightly above a whisper.

"Speak up!" the lady said, with a sharp but not unkind smile. "I don't bite!"

She reminded Marianne of a pretty lizard she'd once caught in Fu Li, followed by the memory of the furious fight she'd had over it with the other children.

"I bit someone once," Marianne informed this stranger she must now call Grandmama.

"But the trouble was he bit me back, so now I would never do such a thing."

Beside her, Ada made an odd sound like a hiccup, and Caroline briefly closed her eyes.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I believe the child may be

over-tired," Caroline said.

"It's quite all right," the lady in the rustling dress said. She sat on one of the sofas, patting a place beside her for Marianne.

"Do you know who I am, child?" she asked.

"You are Mrs Parslow, my mama's mama, and so you are my grandmama," Marianne said.

"And do you know what I do?" Mrs Parslow asked.

Marianne shook her head.

"Well, I have another house, not far from here, where we look after children such as you."

"In what way – like Marianne?" Ada asked.

"Orphaned children, Mrs Peace. They have the best care, and now Marianne can be another such who will benefit."

In the shocked silence that followed, Mrs Parslow, in a further swish of silks and lavender, rang a bell and called for tea and cake.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but we had no idea this was the case," Luke said at last.

"I should prefer to discuss Mr Turtle's specific hopes for his niece. Perhaps with Marianne's grandfather?"

"Impossible!" Mrs Parslow said briskly. "Sadly, I am quite alone after my husband's passing, two years since."

"I had no family at the time but Marianne's parents, far overseas."

"But I had considerable funds at my disposal, which I was determined to put to good use."

"Surely, since Marianne is your family, you will allow her to make her home with you?" Ada asked.

Mrs Parslow smiled before explaining, in some detail, her many good works. Truly, she said, each endeavour continued to need all her organising skills.

"But surely, for Marianne's sake, you might decide to do less?" Ada suggested.

"Then who would look after my charges? No, no!" Mrs Parslow said vehemently. "I cannot abandon my duty."

At this point, a piled tray

of tea and cake was brought in. Marianne was handed a great slice, with jam, which she ate with enthusiasm.

Even so, she kept her eyes and ears alert. She well knew her future was under discussion.

Her keen gaze saw that Mrs Parslow's elaborate hairstyle had slipped its pins.

Perhaps this was a sign Grandmama was thinking harder than usual about the right thing to do?

Marianne, listening and waiting, hoped so.

"Naturally, my granddaughter may remain with you for as long as necessary."

"But I shall look forward to seeing her as regularly as can be arranged," Mrs Parslow said at last, pushing strands of grey hair into place.

"On no account should you imagine I'd abandon her, any more than I would neglect any child."

Marianne saw Caroline and her aunt Ada exchange smiles, while Mr Luke responded to this statement with a nod.

Marianne thought perhaps everything had been settled at last, and she'd soon go home.

"Perhaps we need to discuss this further," Caroline said in an unusually quiet voice.

Marianne glanced up from her cake to see four pairs of adult eyes looking in her direction.

Hastily wiping the crumbs from her face, she wondered what to say.

Luckily, Aunt Ada seemed to understand everyone's confusion.

"Not here, I think," she said firmly. She turned towards Mrs Parslow.

"If you don't mind, ma'am, we will return to Lyon Place to consider."

"Naturally, we must also discuss the finances," Mrs Parslow said as she rose from her seat, sounding both gracious and relieved.

A white lace handkerchief fluttered in her hand.

Ada also stood. Marianne saw that Aunt Ada was taller even than Grandmama.

"There will be no need for charity, Mrs Parslow."

"Don't be foolish, Mrs Peace," Mrs Parslow said with a sudden smile. "Children are most expensive."

I believe I do like my grandmama, after all, Marianne thought. But I'm perfectly sure I love my Aunt Ada the best.

As soon as Marianne was asleep that evening, Ada returned to the sitting-room.

Caroline was in a comfortable armchair, her feet propped on a low stool, while Luke shifted from foot to foot before the empty fireplace.

"You seem to be impersonating a boiling pot," Ada told him.

"He says he's not angry," Caroline smothered a yawn.

"Just astounded!" Luke burst out. "How could any grandmother suggest such a thing?"

"When her grandchild needs her love – and, what's more, when that child has travelled halfway across the world, after great loss, to be with her!"

"I think, in her own way, Mrs Parslow meant to offer support," Caroline said.

Ada sighed, sinking into another chair.

"I have a solution," she said. "As long as everyone – including Marianne – is agreeable."

* * * *

Ada was up earlier than usual next morning. She left word that she'd be gone some time, but would certainly return for supper.

She also left instructions that Marianne was to keep herself busy in the morning and that, if she was very good, Mrs Hathern would take her to the park in the afternoon.

By the time Caroline and Marianne were enjoying their walk, with the encouragement of Mrs Parslow, Ada Peace had secured a modest but comfortable house to rent.

It was situated between Lyon Place and the more expensive area where the Parslow house could be found.

Ada intended this

as a home for her and Marianne.

Two weeks later Ada and Marianne were able to put the finishing touches to the place they'd already begun to call "ours".

* * * *

William left his regular lodgings in Repton Road and made his way to Hathern's, via the back gate, to meet Luke, Matthew and Mr Nash.

When he reached Luke's office, he was surprised to see Caroline also there, greeting him with a smile.

They settled to the business of deciding their plans for the plants from Fu Li.

He'd just turned a page in his notebook when a bell shrilled. Mr Nash, with an apologetic glance, hurried into the corridor to answer it.

Luke heard a raised voice, followed by a sharp rap at his door, which swung wide to reveal Harvey Kellard.

"I told him we are holding an important meeting, sir," Mr Nash said.

Silently, Luke fixed his gaze on Kellard.

"This will not take long, Hathern," their visitor told him, removing his hat.

"What are you doing here?" William asked.

The man did not answer. Instead, he stood awkwardly clutching the chairback.

"I am here . . ." Kellard faltered, then he squared his shoulders to begin again. "I am here to apologise."

"What is it you wish to apologise for, Mr Kellard? Is it for the past theft of seeds? Or for damaging our London reputation?"

"Or, to bring things up to date, have you come instead to confess you placed a spy in our midst while I was away?"

For a while Kellard stood, shaking his head.

"None of these, not directly."

"Then what indirectly are you apologising for?"

"That I entirely misjudged the servant I installed here," Kellard said.

"Did it not occur to you

that you shouldn't have *installed* anyone at all?" William asked.

Kellard looked amused.

"Come now, Waters! You know running any business sometimes lures one into getting ahead by out-thinking the opponent?"

Luke recognised a sudden inward guilt. Had he not allowed himself to feel similar justification, when climbing the mountains around Fu Li?

"I think we should discover the reason for Mr Kellard's visit," Matthew said.

Caroline nodded in agreement.

"The man who, at my request, represented my interests in Hathern's – or was – my most faithful servant," Kellard said.

"I gave strictest instructions that he should report on his observations, instructions I expected him to carry out. Instead, he attacked the plants."

"I will cast him off without references! I never meant there to be physical damage."

"Those plants were chopped at the roots, Kellard," William said.

"Not by any order of mine!" Kellard cut in fiercely. "Hence my apology."

Caroline put on her gloves.

"Why have you come today, in particular?" she asked.

"Because I sail for America tomorrow," Kellard replied. "Thence to the Arctic shores. I do not expect to return for some time."

"Who knows? I may never see London again."

Astounded, Luke saw Caroline give a mischievous smile.

"How melodramatic, Mr Kellard! Here you are, setting out on an amazing experience many another botanist would envy."

"I'm perfectly sure you will live to tell the tale."

Kellard bowed towards Caroline at this as if he were quite the gentleman.

"So tell me," Luke heard his wife continue in that sweet, quiet voice he well knew she reserved

especially for gaining the trust of difficult persons.

"What became of your dear dog Rufus?"

"The dog?" Kellard spoke offhandedly, but Luke saw his expression change. That lolloping, hairy hound had shown Kellard great affection.

"He grew old, and would not have survived the journey home. So I arranged for him to live out his days with kindly monks in Florence."

"That action alone surely proves you to be an honourable man," Caroline said.

"I'd be even more pleased if you would treat a previously faithful servant with as much compassion."

Luke swallowed. Was Caroline really hoping, in one morning, to effect an improvement in Kellard's selfish and secretive character?

"Perhaps keeping a servant in my employment might be more fitting to my status as a member of a Kew expedition," Kellard mused. Then he brightened.

"After all, if I am posted to the Arctic wastes, why should a mere servant escape that fate?"

The leopard that was Kellard could not change his spots after all, Luke realised.

But perhaps Caroline had managed to make him act as if he might. Luke saw her lower her gaze and hide a brief smile.

After they were certain the door had closed behind Kellard, Luke saw William was smiling as well.

"The man remains unchanged," Luke said.

"But still you look pleased."

"I'm delighted my words managed to persuade him," William explained.

"But who was it who made sure he took his spy with him?" Caroline asked impishly.

"My clever wife, of course," Luke said, and kissed her hand.

* * * *

A few months later came the most welcome arrival of Caroline and Luke's daughter. Her aunt Eliza said, cradling the small

bundle, that she was glad her parents had decided on sensible names.

Frances, for their mother, and Eliza, in honour of her aunt and now godmother-elect.

"I'm sure she will be the most amazing child ever," Eliza's son, the recently accredited Dr Matthew Field, said. "But even prodigies need their rest, Mama."

Reluctantly, and with many instructions, Eliza handed the baby to the nursemaid.

"Your nurse is well qualified, I hope?" she asked Caroline in a stage-whisper.

"She is recommended by none other Ada Peace," Caroline said, smiling.

Eliza hadn't altogether approved of that lady's earlier departure from Lyon Place, even though Caroline had made it clear to both ladies she was now perfectly recovered from the birth and could run her own household.

"Ada and Marianne are very well, my dear Eliza. Marianne adores the baby, and they visit us often. They will certainly be here for our daughter's christening."

"Ah yes, the christening." Eliza wore a speculative look.

"I wonder if the weather might be warm enough for me to wear my new gown. What do you think, my dear sister?"

* * * *

The weather was, in the event, warm enough.

Caroline breathed a sigh of relief when the sky showed blue above the chimney pots and tiled rooftops gleamed in the sunshine on the day of her baby's christening.

In gardens all over London, spring had begun.

It was a day to appreciate pale green leaves on new, thin boughs, and the blessed quiet of a church.

A time to talk, and to realise how much had happened in recent years, as well as a day for showing a treasured child to her wider family.

Little Frances only protested once, when the

water from the font was cooler than she expected. Otherwise she observed the world with bright, friendly eyes very like her mother's, and charmed everyone she met.

"Are you happy?"

Caroline asked Luke, when their guests finally departed and they were alone in the nursery.

"I couldn't be happier."

Caroline sighed, contemplating the tiny curled fist at rest on the counterpane.

"She's dreaming, I think.

"Would you mind, my love? I would like to sketch our baby now, as she sleeps," she said.

Luke smiled, kissed his wife, and said he would see her downstairs whenever she was ready.

Slowly, Caroline assembled the familiar tools: thick paper, pencils and a board on which to rest.

It had been a long time since she'd drawn anything, but once her mind had the measure of it, her eye and her hand remembered.

Caroline viewed her sketch of her daughter in that glow, and by the pool of moonlight that was filtering through the leaves patterning the nursery window.

She thought suddenly of the far-off Dove Tree, and Mr Zheng.

* * * *

At a particular time of day when the light was clearest in Fu Li, Mr Zheng summoned a house servant to a tiny room that had a distant view of the mountain.

Afterwards, Mr Zheng drew his wooden stool close to the table by the window, where he could be sure of good light.

Methodically, he set out his brushes, one by one, and drew the ink forward to make sure it was in reach.

Mei had long since returned to her parents' house. From time to time she visited her uncle, but Mr Zheng was not someone who was worried by being alone.

He worked with great concentration. On this

occasion, the picture he was completing was of the Dove Tree, drawn earlier in its natural surroundings.

He'd climbed the mountain many times since the Hatherns had left, just to see how it did.

At his favourite time of year, the tree put forth the huge white petal-like shapes that were in fact bracts.

The true flowers, surrounded by these bracts, were tiny by comparison.

And yet it was a small flower of the Dove Tree upon which he was now focused.

He thought suddenly of Caroline Hathern, a fellow painter.

Mr Zheng rested his brush thoughtfully. If the Hatherns had failed to take his tree, they'd certainly packed a great many other Chinese plants instead.

He was sure that would keep them busy and ease their loss.

Although he sometimes regretted parting from the Hatherns in a less than friendly way, he could never regret his own part in keeping the Dove Tree safe.

Mr Zheng was a believer in caring for everything.

He chided himself a little for ever imagining the Hatherns might feel exactly the same as he did about everything.

But perhaps Caroline Hathern had been more in sympathy with him than most.

He continued painting by lamplight until the moon rose and the landscape beyond his window turned to white and silver.

There, one of Caroline's favourite sayings, as learned from her father, slipped into his mind.

Mr Zheng gazed steadily at the fat white moon in its deep blue setting above the mountain for a long moment, then smiled.

"In my travels, Mr Zheng, I look up and think of my father's words," Caroline had told him.

"That wherever we may be, the same moon shines on us all."

The End.



On Reflection

From the manse window

By Rev. Susan Sarapuk.

MY friend and I went out for a drive recently.

The forecast had predicted decent weather but, as so often happens, the reality didn't match the expectation.

We headed for the mountains nevertheless, to one of our favourite spots where you can park the car at the top and gaze out right over the valley and the surrounding hills.

It was gloomy when we stopped for lunch, but then, as we drove through country lanes, the sun came out, gilding the peaks of the mountains and lifting our spirits.

Yet the spot we were heading for was still shrouded in cloud cover. By the time we arrived at the top of the mountain the whole place was in a whiteout.

We could see the ferocity of the wind driving the mist across the windscreen.

But after a while, the mist and cloud lifted and revealed the view laid out in front of us, bathed in glorious sunshine – the river valley, the wooded hills, the farmsteads and scattered hamlets.

We sat there and enjoyed it until the mist came scudding across the hills again.

When we descended the mountain in the other direction, we soon discovered that the gloom had never lifted from this area, yet we knew the sun was still shining in the

valley next door.

It's good to remind ourselves that, even when the outlook seems gloomy, the sun is always shining above the clouds.

When Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain and was transfigured before them, the three disciples had a glimpse of what was there all the time – it was just that they hadn't been aware of it.

Sometimes we need to remember not just to rely on what we see with our eyes, especially when we're going through difficult times.

It's good for us to remember that the cloud cover is only temporary; the reality is that the sun is shining and we just need to open our eyes to see it.

Even the bad things can be turned to good, and every experience is a chance to grow in grace and knowledge and in the ability to be a help to others.

If my friend and I had decided to take note of the weather we might not have gone out to the mountains for the day, and opted to stay at home instead.

And then we would have missed the glimpses of that glorious view and the special way it made us feel.

We certainly learned a very important lesson that day!

Trust and keep going through the clouds, because the sun is shining somewhere – even if we can't see it. ■

Next week: David McLaughlan goes for a walk in the woods.

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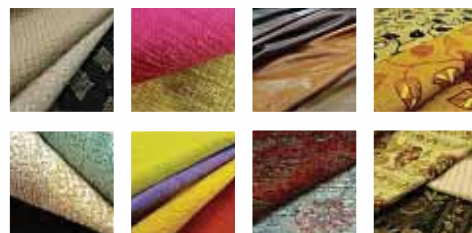
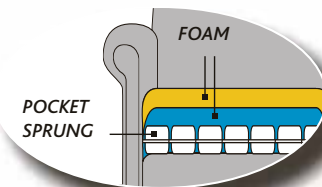
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Fiction is always about people

Why is reading such a huge part of our lives? Mairi Hughes thinks Helen Taylor might have the answer . . .



Derrick Price

Most women have fond memories of novels they've enjoyed throughout their lives, too.

How many of us have stayed up long past our bedtime to read "just one more chapter"?

Or whiled away the time on a tedious journey by visiting other, more interesting places between the pages of our novel?

Helen Taylor's book, "Why Women Read Fiction: The Stories of Our Lives", is a collection of anecdotes from women about how reading fiction has impacted their lives.

"People are very interested in each other – and fiction is always about people," Helen says.

"So I think what I have tried to do in the book is to analyse what the

fascination with fiction is," she goes on.

An academic in both Women's Studies and Literature, Helen has spent her professional life surrounded by women, both students and colleagues, who read avidly.

Women are widely recognised as the primary readers of fiction.

Two-thirds of novels bought from shops and loaned from libraries are purchased or borrowed by women.

They might read to escape the everyday, to live other lives or to broaden their perspectives.

"Several men have said to me, 'I like reading fiction, too,'" Helen says. "And I have said, 'Yes, I am

Which books influenced Helen?

"Reading novels about race and slavery shaped me enormously and helped me understand the terrible story of the slavery of the world.

"I continue to be interested in that, reading fiction by people like Toni Morrison, Marilyn French and Kate Chopin, an American writer from the South. All of them have been revelations to me . . .

"In recent years I have been fascinated by following writers like Hilary Mantell and Helen Dunmore and now Bernardine Evaristo."



Female readers were once frowned upon.



The majority of book festival attendees are female.



Marilyn Monroe was known to have been an avid reader.

sure you do, but the statistics are not there'."

The only genres of fiction read more by men than by women across the country are Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy.

In 1989 Helen wrote a book entitled "Scarlett's Women: Gone With The Wind And Its Female Fans", which examined women's enduring fascination with this iconic novel.

"People came up to me and said, 'What are you working on?'"

"And I said, I am writing a book about 'Gone With The Wind'."

"And all these women told me stories about their first reading of the book."

"They had often read it as many as thirty times and this was the book of their life."

"They had sat and wept over the film and they discussed it endlessly with their friends."

"This [reading fiction] isn't a frivolous hobby. Women talk about it being the love of their life."

Throughout Helen's book are images depicting women reading: candid photographs of Marilyn Monroe with a book in hand; mothers and

daughters enjoying stories together; centuries-old paintings of women devouring classic novels.

The book not only examines women's passion for fiction but also why reading benefits them so greatly.

Helen highlights why she feels time spent reading fiction is an effective method of education, both emotional and political.

"Women value it as a way of understanding the world, travelling to different countries and experiencing different ideas and different people."

"But it is also a way in which women try to evaluate what is happening in their own lives and in the lives of others."

"I think a novel like Marilyn French's 'The Women's Room' did more to turn women into feminists . . . than many a text book."

An essential element of the female reading experience is the exchange of ideas which generally goes with it.

Women make up the majority of attendees of book festivals, book clubs and other places where they can share their

reading experiences with other like-minded people.

Helen laughs as she tells me she often notices women at book festivals "parking their men . . . rather like parking the baby in the crèche" so they can enjoy the experience without disturbance.

"What we all do is we talk about books and share books, mothers with daughters, sisters with siblings and with friends," she says.

This wonderful female passion for fiction and the sharing of it allows it to continue and thrive.

Helen's book mentions an experiment carried out by novelist Ian McEwan, where he spent a lunch hour in a park handing out books free of charge.

The result? Many books were given away.

But what was most interesting was that women received them gratefully while men passed him by, empty handed and suspicious.

Ian's experiment proves that women have an ongoing infatuation with fiction.

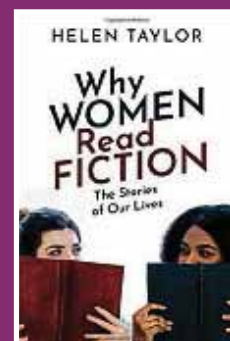
That's certainly good news for us – and long may it continue! ■

All About Helen

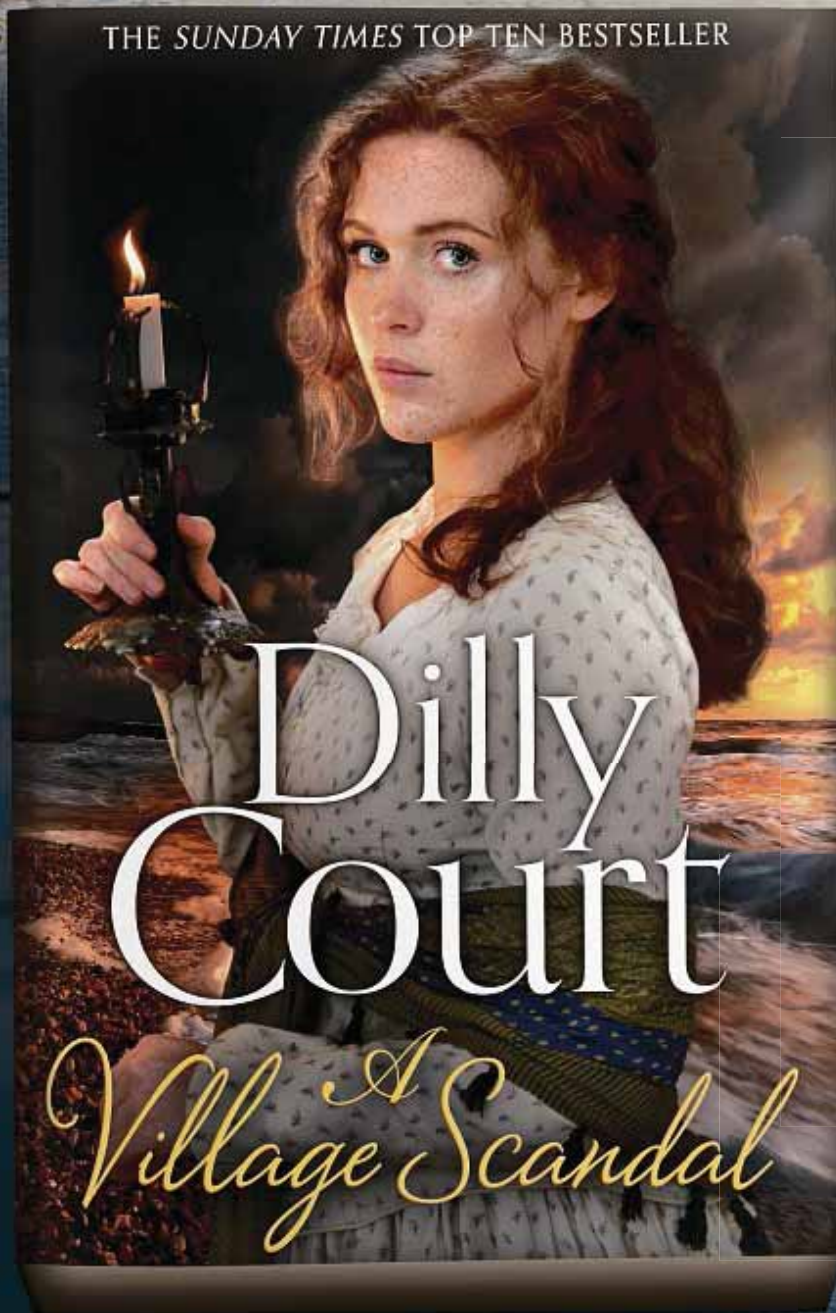
Helen Taylor has taught both English and American Literature and Women's Studies at various universities between the UK and the US. She is an elected Honorary Fellow of the British Association of American Studies.

She has written several books on the topics of gender, race, culture and more.

"Why Women Read Fiction: The Stories of Our Lives" is her latest release and can be purchased in hardback from Waterstones for £14.99. ISBN: 9780198827689



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Blind Date

Marlene was nervous about meeting Hector for the first time. Would they hit it off?



YOU can dress it up any way you want,” Marlene argued, “but it still amounts to a blind date, and I don’t do those.”

“Don’t be a spoilsport.” Ursula groaned. “Hector’s not a complete stranger – he’s my cousin. Give him a chance.”

“But I’ve never met him! What if he wants to talk about cars all night? Or pickled eggs?”

“Why would he want to spend all night talking about anything like that?”

“Because this is the type of man you’re left with when you’re a woman on her own over fifty – all the good ones are already married.”

“I’ve been on dates, Ursula – not many, but enough. I have the mental scars.”

“Stop turning it into a big deal. It’s only dinner. It would get you out of the house.”

“Mice would get me out of the house, but that doesn’t mean I’m keen,” Marlene retorted.

“Then do it for me,” Ursula begged. “I’ve always liked Hector and he’s lonely.”

“I’ll treat you to coffee at the Artisan the following morning and you can tell me all about it.”

Marlene hesitated. The

Artisan did the best flat white for miles, but it was hard to persuade any of her friends to join her there because it was pricey.

The invitation was tempting.

“Before you make up your mind, though, there’s something I have to tell you about Hector.”

“Oh, Ursula, he’s not married, is he?”

“He isn’t married, Marlene. He’s blind. But if I know one person who won’t stick a label on him because of it, it’s you.”

“That’s why you were the only woman I even considered trying to pair him off with.”

Marlene put her hand to her mouth.

“No wonder you didn’t like me calling it a blind date!” she wailed. “How insensitive.”

“Not at all; you didn’t know,” Ursula smiled. “You must have questions, I’m sure, so out with them.”

Marlene thought.

“This might sound shallow, but does Hector have any idea what he looks like?”

“Does he look after his hair? I suppose he doesn’t shave.”

Ursula giggled.

“Haven’t you heard of personal shoppers? Or electric razors? Hector’s a fine-looking man.”

Because Marlene didn’t want to seem prejudiced, and because she was curious and a little lonely, she said she’d go.

“Oh, good!” Ursula cried. “My favourite cousin and my best friend going out to dinner. Romance is about to bloom, I’ll bet!”

* * * *

It didn’t matter how old a woman got, Marlene thought, there was always, always the question of what to wear.

As she prepared for her date with Hector, she hunted through her wardrobe for something appropriate.

They were dining at the Stables and, although the food was reputedly excellent, the place was known for being draughty.

That ruled out lots of flimsier outfits.

She settled for her brown woollen dress with ankle boots and a big scarf.

Trying it on in front of the mirror, Marlene struck a pose.

It crossed her mind that all this would be lost on

Hector, as he wouldn’t be able to see any of it.

Yet surely he deserved the same effort as any other dining partner.

Perhaps the most nerve-racking part of a blind date was the moment when you saw each other for the first time.

Would there be an equivalent moment for her and Hector? She was able to look at him, after all, but he couldn’t see her.

Perhaps he would respond to her voice. Or her smell.

Marlene scabbled through her drawer for the expensive bottle of perfume her sister had bought her and which she’d been saving for a special occasion.

It looked like its time had come.

* * * *

Ursula thought it would be a good idea for Marlene and Hector to talk on the phone, ahead of their dinner date.

“It’ll break the ice in a more relaxed way,” she explained. “You’ll

▶ be in the comfort of your home and he'll be in the comfort of his."

"What if we don't hit it off?"

"Will we cancel dinner or make ourselves battle on?" Marlene wanted to know.

"Why do you catastrophise all the time? Of course you'll get along. I've known both of you for ages, and I'm positive about it."

"But you've barely seen Hector since you were a child. Hence why I've never met him."

"Oh, we've met up at all the family weddings through the years, and he's just as lovely as when we were kids."

* * * *

"Marlene? Hi. This is Hector. Am I calling at a bad time?"

"No! Not at all. It's lovely to hear from you."

"Ursula tells me you're great friends."

"We have been . . ."

Marlene began. "But depending on how our date goes, you're not so sure," Hector interrupted with a laugh.

Marlene giggled.

"I think she was right about this, though – us sharing a call before we meet."

"Otherwise we'd spend the first half an hour in the restaurant coping with our awkwardness, instead of enjoying ourselves."

"Agreed. Who needs to feel like a gawky teenager at our age?"

They chatted a bit about Marlene's work at the after-school club, and how pleased she was that it now catered for children with disabilities.

"There's always more we could do to improve," she told Hector, "but it's very satisfying to see a child on the autistic spectrum begin to interact with other kids."

"It must keep you young," Hector remarked.

"I can still hold my own at Twister!"

Then Hector told Marlene about life on the island where he'd been resident for the past 30 years, before recently moving back to the mainland.

"What took you there in the first place?" she wanted to know.

"What do you think? Love! I met an island girl at a festival and couldn't let her go," Hector explained.

"I followed her home, and by the time she broke up with me, it was my home, too."

Marlene smiled.

"Hector, I don't think you and I are going to have any difficulty chatting over dinner. So why don't we save our stories for Thursday night?" she suggested.

"I'll look forward to it."

* * * *

The taxi had been a little early, so Marlene guessed she was probably there first, and the waiter confirmed this to be the case as he seated her at her table.

Marlene asked for some water, then sipped at it nervously as she tried not to stare at the door.

Then she noticed a presence enter the dining-room.

She was struck first by a tall figure, a warm greeting for the host and a hand on his arm.

Marlene started to smile.

Then she saw the dog – a substantial golden shape in a hi-vis harness.

She thought of the children she worked with – some with issues they might work through, others perhaps not so fortunate.

She desperately hoped that, one day, they, too, would find love in the world.

What did it matter that Hector couldn't see?

If he could be as charming tonight as he'd been on the phone, and if he could eat his dinner without making a fuss or talking about pickled eggs, he'd be a step up from any other man she'd gone out with in the recent past.

She stood up and walked towards him.

What did it matter that Hector couldn't see?

"Hector? Hi. I'm Marlene. Are you going to introduce me to your companion?"

"Marlene!" Hector replied. "We meet at last. This is Gertrude."

"How old is she?"

"Six."

"You're in your prime, Gertrude. Enjoy it."

"Are you hungry, Marlene?"

"Ravenous – shall I read you the menu so we can order?"

"That will be a double pleasure – hearing your voice again and choosing what I want to eat."

"Can I ask you, do voices count for more when you can't see who's talking?" Marlene asked.

He smiled.

"I don't exactly have a superpower of listening to compensate for my lack of sight, but I do think you can tell a lot about a person from their voice."

"For example, I knew as soon as I heard you speaking that we would get along."

"I could tell you were smiling, for a start."

"You can hear a smile?" Marlene frowned.

"Of course."

They chatted all through Hector's roasted stuffed mushrooms and Marlene's brie and caramelised pear tart.

They laughed over Hector's chicken and prosciutto parmigiana and Marlene's salmon with white bean mash.

By the time the desserts came, Hector had placed his hand gently over hers on the table.

If the Stables was as draughty as reputed, Marlene didn't notice.

"I've really enjoyed this,"

* * * *

Hector admitted at the end of the meal. "Can we do something again? Perhaps next week, if you're not too busy?"

"I'd like that," Marlene replied with a grin.

When she met Ursula for coffee at the Artisan next morning, Marlene was buzzing. "I hardly need to ask you how it went," her friend observed.

"I've met a clever, uncomplicated man who likes to laugh and to listen," Marlene declared with a grin.

"And it doesn't hurt that he looks like Andrea Bocelli." Ursula laughed.

"I know!" Marlene gasped. "Do you think he's aware of that?"

"Oh, he knows," Ursula assured her with a wry smile.

"I really did have the best time," Marlene murmured dreamily. "And it's down to you, Ursula."

"I know I was a bit resistant at first, but I'm really glad you set us up."

"Don't mind me," Ursula said when Marlene's mobile rang and she saw it was Hector.

"Thanks," Marlene replied. "I just want to hear him smile." ■

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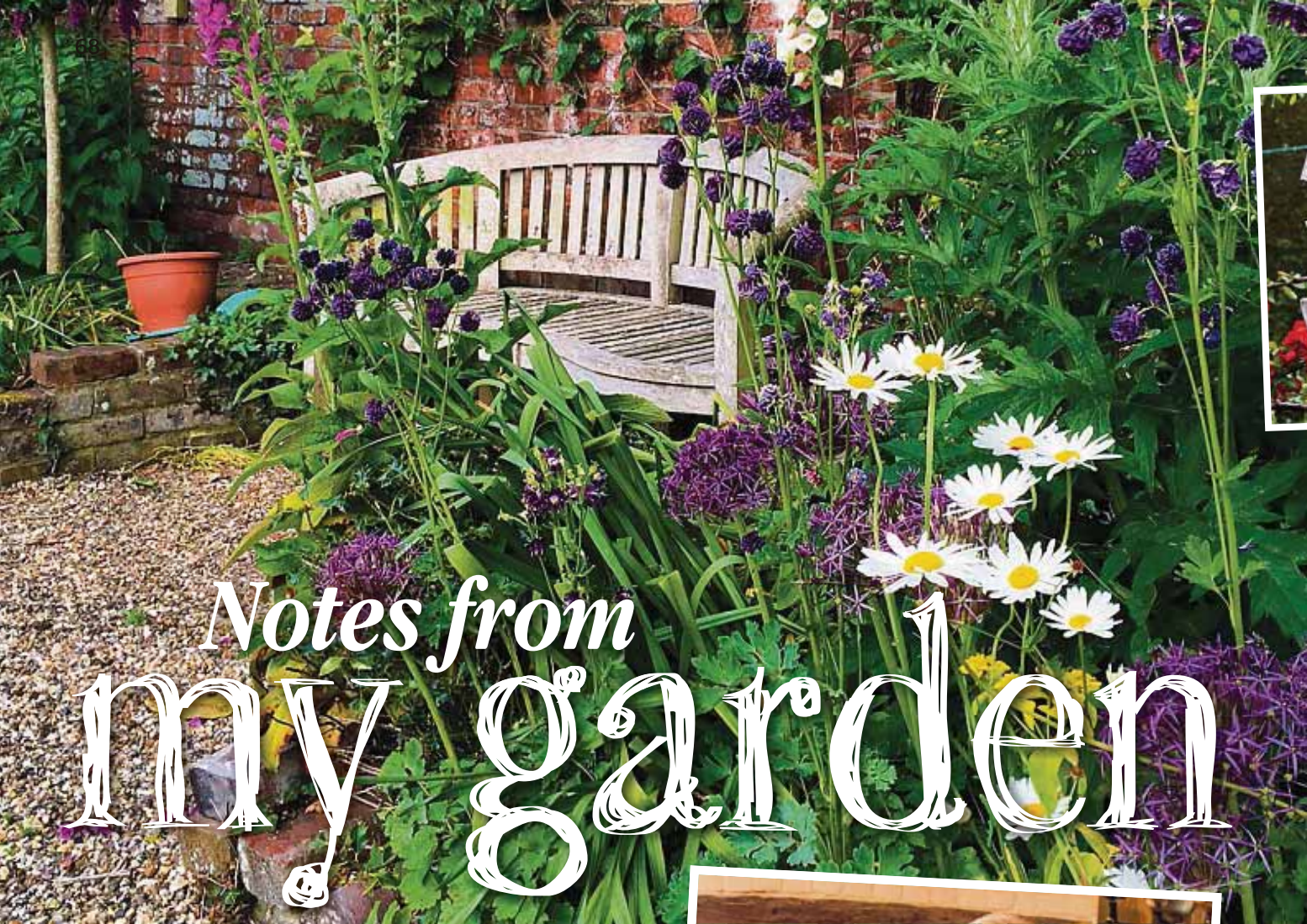
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Notes from my garden

Alexandra Campbell shares some tips on how to plant on a slope . . .

Start to sow seeds

From around the middle of March onwards, the day is long enough for many seeds to germinate well under cover. You can plant both summer and winter salad crops.

One of the best things about salad leaves is many actually prefer your cooler, more shady border. Leave the sunny veg bed for peas, beans, sweetcorn, courgettes and squash.



I'VE been visiting friends who have a large garden – but they live on a mountain so it is entirely sloping.

There is a slight slope in my own garden, most of which we have terraced, but one border still slopes down.

I find it difficult to plant there, and when I do, the plants don't seem to thrive.

I asked my friend, Stephen Ryan, broadcaster, horticulturalist and giver of garden talks and tours, about planting on a slope.

He recommends that you dig a very small, informal ditch, no more than about three to four inches deep, across the slope, just above where you plan to plant.

If you install an irrigation system, you run it across the slope in the same way. If planting on several levels, then you dig several of these tiny ditches.



Stephen calls them “swales”. They're very informal, and it only takes a few minutes with a trowel or small spade.

Next, you dig your hole, beneath the little ditch. Wedge a couple of large pieces of stone or bricks along the lower edge.

This holds some water in place and creates a reservoir so that when you water the plant, the water doesn't immediately run downhill.

It's not structural, so don't step on the stones if you're working there.

You then plant as normal, placing the plant in the

hole and backfilling with soil and compost.

Water into the little ditch and directly around the plant, then cover the area with mulch.

Stephen advises using a coarse mulch on banks and sloping borders.

Even if you add well-rotted manure or garden compost, he'd still advise adding a layer of something like coarsely shredded bark or straw on top of that.

These coarser mulches help filter the rainwater so it doesn't go rushing downhill, taking all the compost and soil with it.

The mulches and the



Check that potting shed

It's a good idea to check your stock of gardening goods once a year.

Make sure any out-of-date chemicals are thrown away. Stock up on anything you use regularly, such as organic slug pellets, liquid garden fertilisers, compost and mulches.

If everything is there, it's much easier to get on with gardening. And sharpen secateurs, too, if you haven't already.

plant's foliage will soon cover up the bricks or stones, as well as the little ditch above.

Stephen points out that a sloping bank is difficult to weed.

Using a weed-suppressing mulch, such as tree shavings or bark, on top of garden compost or manure helps keep light away from weed seeds.

Plants with clumps of dense foliage will also help deter weeds – something upright, like a lily, leaves lots of bare earth around it which weeds will love.

Something bushy like asters (or symphyotrichum) will discourage weeds by depriving the soil of light.

He advises choosing plants which clump up. Plants with spreading roots, like many ornamental grasses, will help keep soil in place.

And plants that spread easily, such as euphorbia, will also help to add roots

Stay peat-free this year

Peat extraction is one of the most environmentally destructive things we do, but British garden centres are still selling mainly peat-based composts.

The RHS says that no gardener should use peat.

I've just come back from Australia, where peat is never used as a growing medium, but they still grow and sell plants effectively.

Ask for peat-free when shopping. If it doesn't say "peat-free" it probably does contain peat.



to keep the soil in place.

My friends have a magnificent herbaceous border on a very steep slope.

There are plants that are good for slopes, such as ornamental grasses and several different types of euphorbia and persicaria.

But they also have conventional border plants, such as dahlias, cannas, monardas and lilies.

So you don't have to exclusively use mat-forming or clump-forming plants – just make sure you have a good proportion of them.

Stephen's final piece of advice for planting on a slope is not to forget about plant heights.

If you put very tall plants at the back of a slope, they will look disproportionately tall.

You can either plant plants that are all around the same height, or dot some taller plants in the middle or at the front. ■



How to succeed with hostas

I thought I'd given up with hostas. As a friend once said, "They look like ripped lace doilies once the snails have got them."

But at a talk from a hosta expert I felt some stirrings of hope.

He says you need to start with snail and slug control early – February or March – because there's nothing else for them to eat then.

If you wait until the tasty early fronds emerge, you are likely to lose the battle.

Scatter ferric phosphate-based slug pellets (certified for organic use) generously around your bare borders.

He also said people tend to buy the variegated hostas.

They don't realise these more intricate patterns need the contrast of a plain green hosta leaf beside them to look good.

So if you buy hostas, get at least one plain one to every two variegated.

Hostas do well in pots but he recommended only potting them up one size at a time.

They like their roots to be close to the edges of the pot, and if you put them in too big a

pot, their energy will go on growing their roots and not their leaves.

In a border, hostas don't like competition from other plants or from each other.

Give them a decent amount of space and don't pack them in.

They will clump up so you will have to divide them every few years.

He recommends digging them up and cutting the clump in half with secateurs.

Hosta leaves are very good in flower arranging, he said.

Properly looked after, they will last up to two to three weeks in a vase, as will hosta flowers. And you can propagate a hosta from a small piece of leaf.

I was cautiously interested. They grow well in shade and look spectacular in groups?

Perhaps the time has come to try again.



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I'd Like To Know

Q I enjoyed my first trip to the Hermitage near Dunkeld recently and was blown away by the natural beauty of this place, from the dramatic waterfall to the towering trees. But can you tell me what species of tree grow here?

Miss C.L., Aberdeen.

A Native trees such as oak, hazel and birch thrive here, as do Douglas fir trees, which can reach over 200 feet in height. Little wonder Perthshire is known as Big Tree Country!

The Douglas fir was named after Scottish botanist David Douglas, who brought the species to the UK from North America in 1827.

He was born in Scone, and later embarked on a plant-hunting expedition in the United States to send back seeds and detailed notes for the Royal Horticultural Society. He died in Honolulu in 1834, aged just thirty-five.



Q I am eighty-five years old and happened to mention the word "drent" to a younger person. I was surprised to learn they'd never heard the expression before. My mother worked in a small laundry and she used the term to describe wet clothes. Can you confirm it is actually a word?

Mrs J.W., Surrey.

A Drent, meaning drenched or drowned, is a word that has fallen out of favour in modern times, which explains why your young acquaintance had not heard it before.

Q My friend was telling me about the world's oldest working post office, but she can't remember how long it's been running for. My curiosity has got the better of me. Can you tell me the answer?

Mrs L.M., Nuneaton.

A The post office is in Sanquhar, Dumfries and Galloway, and it first opened in 1712, meaning it has been in operation for an incredible 308 years. Apparently, the current owners are to be retiring, so the hunt is on for new owners to carry on its legacy.

1 gallon

of milk is required to make 1 lb of hard cheese.

March 9, 1959

– Barbie made her debut at the American International Toy Fair in New York. She would need to wait two years before being joined by Ken.

1 trillion

scents can be detected by the human nose, according to scientists.

1/2 of a tree consists of water!

March 12, 1918

– Moscow became a capital city again after St Petersburg took on the title in 1712.

123,900 calories

on average, would need to be consumed by a cyclist over the three-week Tour de France race. Meals on wheels!

Something we didn't know last week...

A rare coin has been sold at auction for a staggering £1 million. The 22-carat gold sovereign depicting Edward VIII was sold to a private bidder earlier this year to become Britain's most valuable coin. It was part of a trial which never made it into production after Edward VIII abdicated in December 1936.

The coin was due to go into mass production in January the following year but only six were struck – of which only two are privately owned.





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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: 98 cm (38½ ins), 108 (42½), 120 (47¼), 130 (51½), 142 (56), 152 (60¼).

Length: 60 cm (23½ ins), 61 (24), 62 (24½), 63 (25), 65 (25½), 66 (26).

Sleeve seam: 42 cm (16½ ins).

MATERIALS

7 (7, 8, 8, 9, 9) 50-gram balls of **King Cole Big Value DK** shade Violet (4038) **M** and 1 (1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2) 100-gram ball(s) of **King Cole Sprite DK** shade Gozo (1913) **C**. One pair 4 mm (No. 8) knitting needles; set of four 3.25 mm (No. 10) knitting needles. For King Cole yarn stockists call **01756 703670**, e-mail **enquiries@kingcole.com** or visit **www.kingcole.com**.

TENSION

22 sts and 28 rows to 10 cm measured over st-st using 4 mm needles.

ABBREVIATIONS

alt – alternate;
beg – beginning;
dec – decrease;
fol – following;
inc – increase;
K – knit;
P – purl;
rem – remain;
rep – repeat;
st(s) – stitches;
st-st – stocking-stitch (K1 row, P1 row);
tbl – through back of loop(s);
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 4 mm needles and M, cast on 104 (116, 128, 140, 152, 164) sts.

1st row (right side) – K3, [P2, K2] to last st, K1.



2nd row – K1, [P2, K2] until 3 sts rem, P2, K1.

Rep these 2 rows twice more, inc 1 st at end of last row – 105 (117, 129, 141, 153, 165) sts.

Change to pattern:

1st row – Knit.

2nd row – Purl.

3rd row – K7, [P1, K5] until 8 sts rem, P1, K7.

4th row – Purl.

5th row – Knit.

6th row – K7, [P1, K5] until 8 sts rem, P1, K7.

Beg with a purl row for right side, work 3 rows in rev st-st.

Next row (wrong side)

– Purl.

Break off M and join in C.

Shape yoke – Place a marker at centre of last row. Beg with a knit row, work in st-st, inc 1 st at each end of next 6 rows – 117 (129, 141, 153, 165, 177) sts.

Next 2 rows – Cast on 4 sts, work to end – 125 (137, 149, 161, 173, 185) sts. Keeping st-st correct, work straight until yoke measures 19 (20, 21, 23, 24, 25) cm from marker, ending after a purl row.

Shape shoulders – Cast off 6 (6, 7, 8, 9, 9) sts loosely at beg of next 12 rows, then 8 (13, 12, 11, 10, 15) sts at beg of next 2 rows – 37 (39, 41, 43, 45, 47) sts.

Slip these sts on to a st-holder.

FRONT

Work as given for back until front measures 39 (41, 45, 49, 51, 55) rows less than back to start of shoulder shaping, ending after a knit row.

Divide for neck –

Next row – P63 (69, 75, 81, 87, 93), slip the last st (centre front st) on to a short length of contrast yarn and leave,

purl to end.

Continue on last group of 62 (68, 74, 80, 86, 92) sts for left side of neck.

Next (dec) row – Knit until 4 sts rem, K2tog, K2.

Next row – Purl.

★★Rep the last 2 rows until 46 (51, 57, 63, 68, 74) sts rem, ending after a dec row. Now work dec row on every foll 4th row until 44 (49, 54, 59, 64, 69) sts rem.

Work 1 row straight.

Shape shoulder – Cast off 6 (6, 7, 8, 9, 9) sts loosely at beg of next row and the 5 foll alt rows – 8 (13, 12, 11, 10, 15) sts.

Work 1 row straight. Cast off. With right-side facing, join in C to rem 62 (68, 74, 80, 86, 92) sts at neck edge.

Next (dec) row – K2, K2tog tbl, knit to end.

Next row – Purl.

Complete as left side working from ★★ to end but working 2 rows straight before shape shoulder.

SLEEVES

NOTE: the sleeves are worked from the top down.

With 4 mm needles and M, cast on 63 (69, 71, 75, 81, 87) sts.

Beg with a knit row for wrong side, work 3 rows in rev st-st. Change to pattern:

1st row (right side) – Knit.

2nd row – Purl.

3rd row – K13 (16, 17, 16, 19, 22), [P1, K5] 6 (6, 6, 7, 7) times, P1, K13 (16, 17, 16, 19, 22).

4th row – Purl.

5th row – Knit.

6th row – P13 (16, 17, 16, 19, 22), [K1, P5] 6 (6, 6, 7, 7) times, K1, purl to end.

These 6 rows set the pattern.

Next (dec) row – K1, K2tog tbl, work until 3 sts rem, K2tog, K1.

Continue shaping by working

dec row on every foll 8th (8th, 6th, 6th, 6th, 4th) row until 55 (51, 59, 63, 53, 77) sts rem, then on every foll 10th (10th, 8th, 8th, 8th, 6th) row until 41 (45, 45, 47, 49, 51) sts rem.

Work straight until sleeve measures 40 cm at centre (or desired length) ending after a 2nd or 4th row and dec 1 (1, 1, 3, 1, 3) st(s) evenly on last row – 40 (44, 44, 44, 48, 48) sts.

Beg with a 1st rib row, work 6 rows in rib as given for back. Cast off loosely and evenly in rib.

TO COMPLETE

Join shoulders.

Neckband – With set of four 3.25 mm needles, right-side facing and M, knit centre stitch left on length of yarn, pick up and knit 40 (42, 45, 48, 50, 53) sts evenly up right half of neck, knit across 37 (39, 41, 43, 45, 47) sts of back, finally pick up and knit 40 (42, 45, 48, 50, 53) sts evenly down left side of neck – 118 (124, 132, 140, 146, 154) sts. Working backwards and forwards in rows, not rounds, knit 4 rows, inc 1 st at each end of first 3 rows – 124 (130, 138, 146, 152, 160) sts.

Cast off loosely knitways.

To Make Up – Stitch cast-on edge of sleeves to the straight side edges of yoke. Join side and sleeve seams. Stitch down side edges of neckband overlapping right side over left as in photograph. ■

Next week:
knit this simple gilet.





Reverend Fiona Ogg with her dog, Maisie.

The eccentricity of the campervan seems to be appreciated!

Alex Corlett meets a minister with an unusual method of reaching her flock . . .

FOR eight years Reverend Fiona Ogg has covered the wild and beautiful linked parishes of

Ardnamurchan and Acharacle, in an area just north of Fort William.

For most ministers, even a fairly large parish can be easily and quickly negotiated by car or public transport or even on foot, but Fiona's patch is different.

Not only does it cover a part of the country with very few people, but the single-track roads of the Highlands significantly reduce the speed with which she can get about.

Fiona's solution to the problem? She's set up a "mobile manse" in her campervan!

"It's a combination of the distribution of the population and the

geography," she explains.

"There are just over eight hundred people spread over one hundred and thirty-one square miles, with ninety-nine per cent of the roads being single track with passing places.

"Seeing individuals outside the two villages can take longer than it would in an urban environment!

"Driving between the two villages takes about an hour depending on what's on the road.

"This can vary from sheep, deer or slow-moving tourists to animal feed lorries, and from one end of the linked parishes to the other takes two hours."

It's not just Fiona whose life is shaped by these roads and distances.

"There is a primary school in each of the two villages and a high school in the next village.

"Children in Acharacle go to the high school daily by bus, but the children from Kilchoan have to board during the week: it's over an hour each way on a travel-sickness-inducing road!

"The neighbouring minister and myself are both chaplains to the high

school and therefore there is continuity of spiritual care for the children."

Recent changes have made Fiona's life easier, including better provision of care for the elderly.

"There is now a care home in the neighbouring parish and it takes local people for respite care."

Before that, Fiona would have to make the trip to Fort William to visit parishioners, though she still needs to pay visits to folk in hospital there occasionally.

Extensive travel is an everyday part of her job.

"For me, being able to offer continuity of pastoral support for those in care in Fort William means a trip of

two and a half hours, minimum, as well as the time spent visiting.

"I use the time in the car to listen to podcasts, much like other clergy would spend time reading for research and study."

"I started using the campervan to cut down the time spent travelling between the manse in the parish of Acharacle and Kilchoan, the other parish centre, an hour away.

"If there was an evening event or meeting at Kilchoan and then something the following morning, it was easier to stay in the van than spend two hours travelling.

"The campervan has been really useful as a mobile home, an office, somewhere to chat to people and a talking point!

"If I'm away from the manse all day, having the campervan means I can make a meal or two, have a mobile kennel for my dog and be able to do some desk work – all so much more convenient than trying to do it all in the car!

"I can't think of any disadvantages . . . oh, wait, I've got no shower!"

So far, the van hasn't let Fiona down, though she uses it less in the winter.

The van's also ready for Fiona to set off on her holidays – she was away in it for 10 days last year.

"It really makes it easy to work away, yet with the comforts of home.

"And it's been a very tangible symbol of commitment to ministry in the parishes.

"It's been an ice-breaker. The eccentricity of the campervan seems to be appreciated!" ■

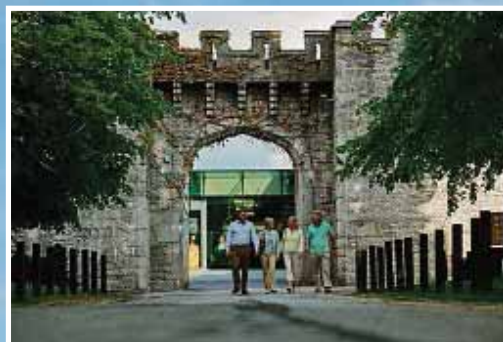


Fiona's "mobile ministry" is a conversation starter.

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Angela

Angela Gilchrist, Editor.

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She'd only met him a handful of times, but Sandra couldn't get him out of her mind . . .

Set in
the
1960s

Just A Boy

SANDRA had a decision to make. It would affect her whole life, and she was only eighteen.

Sitting at her dressing-table in her nightie, she stared at her reflection in the mirror.

Should she accept Terry's proposal of marriage?

Since he'd asked her last night, things had changed.

Especially since walking home from work a few hours ago and meeting that boy on the bench again.

His advice?

"I wouldn't ask the girl I loved to give up her dreams."

"Sandra, he's just a boy you've met three times in as many years," she told the girl staring back at her in the mirror. "You love Terry, and he loves you."

"Does he?" her inner self questioned.

She stared at the photo of Terry, his arm around her, which sat on her dressing-table.

She was leaning into him and they had ice-creams in their hands.

They seemed happy and were laughing. He was in his suit, with Brylcreemed hair, and she was in a floral

dress, a chiffon headscarf protecting her backcombed hairdo.

It had been snapped by a promenade photographer while they were on a day trip to Brighton last summer.

Terry was seven years older than her and the floor manager at the clothing factory where she worked.

He was a good catch, everyone told her.

But often she'd look up from her stitching to see him hanging over some new girl at her machine, making her giggle.

"I'm just showing her the ropes," he'd tell Sandra.

"But you should be a bit more distant with them now we're going steady," she argued.

"What I do in the factory is my business. So you just keep your eyes down and do yours."

The words were spoken gently enough, and when he caressed her cheek and smiled, she thought she must have read him wrong.

But there were other words, albeit still spoken with gentleness, that had stayed in her mind.

"I won't have a wife of mine working. It's up to me

to bring in the wage.

"Don't forget, you'll have babies to look after. Forget this silly talk of a career."

Now, feeling a chill from the heavy summer shower an hour ago, she got up and pulled on her dressing-gown.

Stepping over to the wedding dress which hung in front of the wardrobe door, she caressed the white satin.

The dress was knee-length with stiff net petticoats and was the first of many she hoped to make and sell. She'd made it in her size, and knew it looked professional.

It was a great start to what could be a successful career – her dream since she was ten.

Sandra sighed, turned the main light off and moved to the window.

She stared down the straight road directly opposite.

The tarmac glistened in the moonlight and the lampposts threw rounds of amber light along the paths like stepping stones.

She wished she could leap along them to the park. To the boy on the bench . . .

She didn't even know his name. They hadn't spoken more than five minutes on those three occasions.

But something about him had stuck in her mind. Maybe because he had dreams, too.

* * * *

A dozen streets away in another council house, Gordon couldn't sleep.

The face that smiled back at him when he closed his eyes was that of the girl on the bench.

He'd never forgotten her. And now, after their meeting a few hours ago, he knew he never would.

He kicked his covers back and went to the window.

There had been a shower and the plane trees along the road dripped diamonds in the moonlight.

Beyond the roofs of the houses opposite he could see the dark shadow of trees and the entrance to the park.

He had been fifteen when he'd first met her.

On his way home that afternoon after two interviews for his first job, he'd cut through the park and sat down on a bench.

▶ In the valley below, a congregation of children had just swarmed in, let loose from the nearby junior school.

Yelling and screaming on the swings and roundabouts, they didn't have a worry in the world.

He, though, was in the grip of one – his father's reaction to the job he'd accepted.

The bench creaked and he turned to see that a girl had sat down further along.

Another girl, another year, but no deep love

She was tugging off one of her fawn court shoes.

"Oh, that's better.

They're new. I've just been for an interview and I got the job. My first."

She smiled with glee.

He smiled back. He felt happy for her.

"I've just got a job, too."

"Good for you."

"Dad won't think so. He's been picking out office jobs for me.

"The better the job, the better the wage and the better chance of promotion'." He reeled off his dad's words.

"But I don't want to be stuck in an office. So I went for a job of my choosing. Junior assistant in a timber yard. The wages aren't great, either, which'll rile him."

"Yeah, my dad wanted me to work in an office.

"Like you, I'm starting at the bottom because that way you learn as you –"

"Work your way up," he burst in.

They laughed.

He gazed at her.

The girl was smartly dressed in a wine two-piece, with a fawn handbag and court shoes.

Her dark hair was backcombed, and she wore a wine chiffon scarf folded and tied round like a headband.

But it was her hyacinth-blue eyes, flaring with vitality, that attracted him.

"So, what is your dream?" He breathed in her delicate flowery perfume.

"I'm going to be a dressmaker. Bridal dresses. I learned the basics at school.

"I know I've a long way to go, but I'll never give up. I'll get there."

"I wish you luck. So where are you working?"

"Philips, the clothing factory. I'm on a machine, but it's all learning, right?"

"I'm also doing an evening course at the college," she replied.

"I'm a bit like you. I like

working with wood," Gordon said.

"At Hollins Timber I'll learn all about the grain, strength and seasoning of wood.

"I want to be a cabinet maker. I'm going to evening classes, too. I might see you there."

"I'll look out for you. I have to go." She pointed into the valley as she slipped her feet into her shoes.

"My mum and sister are waiting. Nice talking to you."

She jumped up, calling back to him as she left.

"Don't give up on your dreams, either, whatever your dad says."

"I won't. Bye."

He leaned back and watched her stumble down the grass slope to meet up with her mum and sister.

Her excitement showed as she told her mum about the job.

The hug from her mum proved to Gordon she was happy for her daughter.

His mum would be happy for him. But his dad?

Suddenly Gordon didn't care what his dad thought. He was doing what he wanted, and he'd succeed.

He jumped up and headed home, his heart lighter.

* * * *

Gordon saw her some weeks later from the bus he was on. He waved, but she didn't see him.

Her smile told him she was happy.

He saw her now and then while at college, but she was always with her friends, or sometimes meeting a boy.

As he was with his friends, he never sought her out.

A year later he was waiting for the college lift when the doors opened.

They stared at each other, then with sudden recognition they both spoke at the same time.

"Hello!"

"Going up?" she asked.

"Yeah." He stepped in beside her. "I haven't seen you in the park lately."

"No. My sister's now in secondary school."

"Still working towards your dreams?"

She laughed.

"You remember. Yes, I'm doing well. You?"

"Getting there."

They were both still smiling at each other when the doors opened.

"Nice meeting you again," she said, stepping out.

Gordon's decision to follow and ask her out was too late in the making. A friend called to her and she turned away from him.

The doors closed, leaving him with only her flowery perfume for company.

He waited in the corridor that evening to catch her when she came out of class, but again she was with friends.

He took the stairs as her group took the lift, and outside she was met by a boy again.

Gordon's heart sank.

On his way home that evening he met a girl at the bus stop. She'd lost her purse, so he paid her fare and saw her home.

It lasted a year before they broke up. Another girl, another year, but no deep love.

Now and then the girl on the bench drew his thoughts, but once he'd left college he never saw her again.

Until this evening.

Walking home from work through the park, he often stopped to sit on the bench.

Minutes later, she plonked herself down beside him.

She smiled.

"Hello. I hoped you'd be here."

"You did. Why?" He couldn't believe she remembered him.

"I wondered how your dreams were coming along."

"Great. I'm working as an apprentice for a cabinet maker. You?"

She looked at her pink manicured nails.

"I'm still at the factory. My boyfriend's the foreman, you see. We're thinking of getting married."

Gordon looked at the ground. That was it. Now he'd really lost her.

"Congratulations. I wish you all the best."

"I haven't said yes yet." She met his eyes.

"Oh." His heart thudded in anticipation.

"You see, he doesn't like wives working. He doesn't want me to have a career of my own."

"But all your dreams! You can't give them up."

"Like I said, I haven't given him an answer yet." Her fingers toyed with the staves of the seat.

"You sound unsure. You should wait a while longer. You're only eighteen."

He became bold and slid his fingers along the seat to take her hand.

"I wouldn't ask the girl I loved to give up her dreams."

She stood up.

"Thanks for the advice. I must go."

"I'll be here tomorrow at the same time!" he called after her.

* * * *

Sandra left her dressing table. She moved again to the wedding dress.

All her dreams were sewn into it. Her heart ached at the thought of giving them up.

After shrugging off her dressing-gown, she turned the main light off and climbed into bed.

Smiling at the dress shining in the moonlight, she set her thoughts on her future – and the one person who truly understood the importance of dreams. ■



In the final scenes of "The Vikings" with Janet Leigh.



Kirk's role as Vincent van Gogh was widely praised.



His film career began with Lauren Bacall's influence.

The Path To Glory

Alex Corlett celebrates the life of veteran actor Kirk Douglas.

THE son of two immigrants from Belarus, Issur Danielovitch Demsky was born in the city of Amsterdam in the state of New York.

His father was a rag and bone man, earning little for his son and six sisters, and Kirk would later claim it was this claustrophobic poverty that drove his formidable work ethic.

Kirk knew he wanted to act from an early age, and earned his way through a degree at St Lawrence University with a number of

part-time jobs including janitor and wrestler.

Showing clear signs of talent, he got a scholarship to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City.

There he met Lauren Bacall, who apparently had a terrific crush on the chisel-jawed actor and was instrumental in getting him his first movie part.

Before this, and before enlisting in the US Navy for World War II, Issur changed his name to Kirk Douglas. He served until 1944, then returned to New York and acting.

His first film appearance was in 1946 in "The Strange Love Of Martha Ivers" and he was soon offered other roles.

In 1947's "I Walk Alone" he starred alongside Burt Lancaster. Despite Burt later admitting that Kirk wasn't always the easiest to work with, the two starred in seven films together.

Kirk received his first Oscar nomination for

"Champion", then a second for "The Bad And The Beautiful" and a third for his portrayal of Vincent van Gogh in "Lust For Life".

He began his own production company, Bryna Productions, named after his mother. The first two films made were smash hits – "Paths Of Glory", a war film directed by a young Stanley Kubrick, and "Spartacus".

In what he later described as one of the proudest achievements of his career, Kirk recruited screenwriter Dalton Trumbo to work on "Spartacus".

Dalton had been blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee as having possible Communist sympathies. Kirk insisted he not only write but also be given full credit on screen for his work.

It was the start of a push back against the paranoia of the McCarthy era that saw it soon crumble.

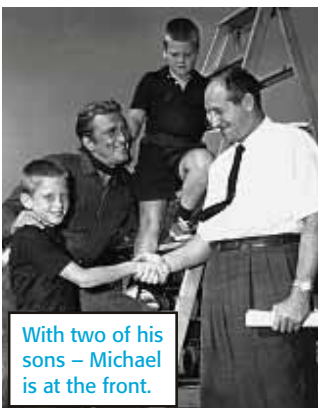
In 1963 Kirk acted in a Broadway adaptation of "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest", having bought the rights.

He gave the rights to his first son, Michael, who produced the film version starring Jack Nicholson. By now Kirk was considered too old to play the role.

Kirk's acting career continued apace, as did his interest in humanitarian causes. He and his wife Anne set up an award to provide financial assistance to the city of Los Angeles to remedy the sorry state of their public-school playgrounds.

The pair also travelled the world as goodwill ambassadors for the US Information Agency, talking to audiences about the power of democracy.

Kirk's recent passing at the incredible age of one hundred and three leaves only Olivia de Havilland as the last of Hollywood's "golden age" performers still alive. ■

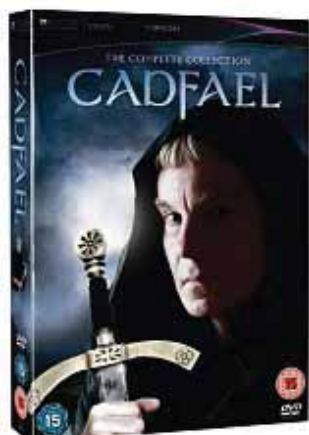


With two of his sons – Michael is at the front.

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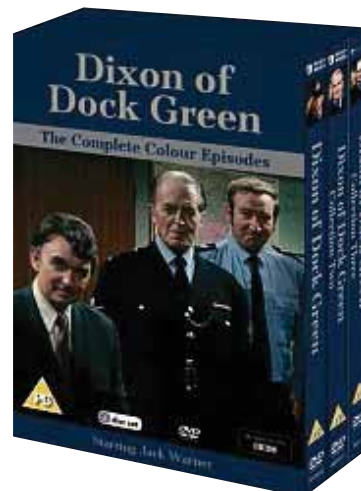
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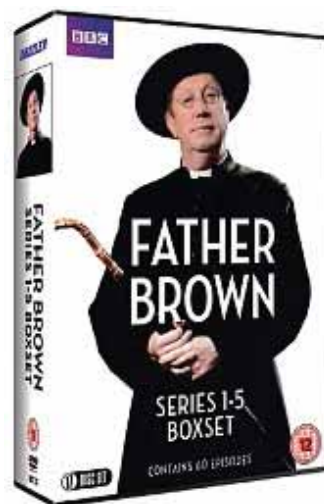
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Puzzle It Out!

Arrowword Enter the answers in the direction indicated by the arrows.

Go faster! (4,2,2)	▼	Exploiter	▼	Greek letter	▼	Bumper cars	Stake	▼	Female deer	Assuage	▼
Keepsake		Irish county		Moved slowly	▶				▼	Lissom, lithe	
▶		▼					Hurl	▶		▼	
Average	▶			Sum	▶			Adam's wife	▶		
Elation	▶										
▶			Beverage	Alehouse	Chew the ____, ponder		North of England city	▼	____ Fleming, Bond novelist		Visualise
Observe	▶		▼	▼	▼		Greases	▶	▼		▼
Yarns		Count, list	▶								
▶							Leg joint	▶			

Pathfinder

Beginning with the highlighted letter, follow a continuous path to find all the words relating to mirrors. The trail passes through each and every letter once, and may twist up, down or sideways, but never diagonally.

A	T	N	E	D	E	D	E	X	I	
L	A	S	S	N	S	V	E	D	O	F
D	L	G	F	G	I	A	C	N	O	R
E	V	E	L	A	T	A	S	O	C	N
C	I	T	L	E	T	L	E	T	I	O
O	R	A	E	S	C	E	R	C	E	L
I	N	G	A	V	O	P	A	R	E	F
D	L	H	E	Y	C	U	L	L	R	P
U	I	M	A	E	L	C	R	O	R	O
B	I	F	G	A	M	O	I	C	R	H
D	E	I	N	R	S	O	T	H	Y	S

BUILDING

CIRCULAR

CLEAR

CONCAVE

DECORATIVE

DENTAL

DESIGN

DOOR

FIXED

FLAT

GLASS

HEAVY

LASER

LORRY

MAGNIFIED

REFLECTION

SHOP

SMOOTH

TELESCOPE

Solutions

Arrowword

E	S	T	R	A	N	D	S	K	N	E
I	E	N	U	M	E	R	A	T	E	
S	I	C	E	C	E	O	I	L	S	

Pathfinder

FLAT, TELESCOPE, LASER
DENTAL, DECORATIVE, GLASS,
CONCAVE, DOOR, FIXED, DESIGN,
LORRY, SHOP, REFLECTION,
CLEAR, SMOOTH, CIRCULAR,
MAGNIFIED, BUILDING, HEAVY,

S	H	O	P	N	E	F	O	D	E	
G	L	A	S	S	N	S	V	E	D	O
C	I	T	L	E	T	L	E	T	I	O
D	E	I	N	R	S	O	T	H	Y	S

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OUR WEEKLY SOAP

Naming their new son is taken out of Susan and Dave's hands . . .

SUSAN dipped her hand in the hat. She closed her eyes and pulled out one of the strips of paper.

She took a deep breath as she opened her eyes. "Whatever name is on this slip of paper, that's what we're calling our baby, right?"

Dave nodded. "Right."

Susan held out her hand, keeping the slip of paper tightly clenched in her fist.

"Are you ready?"

"As I'll ever be," Dave replied.

"We haven't been able to agree on a name so far, so this seems as good a way as any to choose."

"Here we go," Susan said.

She opened her fingers slowly and exposed the slip of paper in her hand, willing the name to be one of the three she'd chosen – Milo, Leon or Finn.

Dave, however, was hoping it would be one of his choices of a more traditional name such as Albert, Archie or Fred.

Susan and Dave leaned in to look at the slip of paper in Susan's hand. Both were nervous and excited to see which name it would be.

A puzzled look came over their faces as Dave took the

paper from his wife's hand.

It was covered in a pattern of chunky, wavy lines of red and blue.

"Where has this come from?"

It was then Susan realised what had happened.

"Did you use one of the sheets of paper from the kitchen table?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "I took a sheet that was lying beside Sarah's crayons."

Susan burst out laughing.

"I was drawing with Sarah this afternoon, well, scribbling, mainly. We were doing shapes."

"So I've cut straight through Sarah's drawings?" He laughed. "We've written our choice of baby names on the back of her work."

"Turn it over," Susan said. "There will be one of the names we've written on the back of it."

Dave turned it over to reveal the word *Archie*.

He shrugged.

"Guess our boy's going to be called Archie."

"Hang on a minute."

Susan took the paper from Dave and turned it over to reveal their daughter's drawings of circles and lines.

She turned it this way and that, looking at it from different angles.

"Well, would you look at that?" she said to Dave.

"Can you see what I see?"

He peered at the pattern on the paper and a doubtful frown spread across his face.

"I think so."

"It's a bit of a stretch, I know," Susan admitted.

"But in the scribble of

Sarah's drawing you can make out some shapes that she's drawn.

"And if you try really hard, you can almost see that they look like letters."

"There's definitely a J at the start and a K at the end," Dave agreed. "As long as we use a lot of imagination!"

"So you can see it?"

Susan asked, excited. "And there's a letter A, sort of, and I'm sure that's almost a C next to it."

Dave nodded.

"Only just."

Susan flipped the paper over.

"So, what's it to be?" she asked. "Archie or Jack?"

Dave leaned across to Susan and kissed her.

"It's got to be Jack. And as soon as Sarah's old enough to know, we'll tell her how she chose her baby brother's name."

"Finally we've got a name – our own little Jack Brennan," Sarah said, relieved.

"Jack Brennan," Dave repeated, trying the name for size. "I like it a lot."

"Me, too," Susan smiled. "Although he sounds like a TV detective."

* * * *

The following day, in the kitchen at Ruby's house, Ruby's phone buzzed with a text message.

"It's from Mary," she told Jim. "Susan and Dave have decided to name their baby Jack."

She laid her phone on the kitchen table.

"Jack Brennan," she said, rolling the name around on

her tongue.

"Sounds like a TV detective," Jim remarked.

"I like it," Ruby said.

"Mary said she'll let us know the date for the christening as soon as it's arranged."

"Christening?" Jim said. "Will they need a caterer for a buffet? I could offer to do it, perhaps?"

Ruby shot Jim a look.

"You've only been to one week of your new cookery class."

"Maybe you should wait until you've got a few more dishes under your belt and a bit more experience."

Jim slowly raised his eyes towards Ruby and gave a little cough before he carried on.

"When I've got more cooking experience, I could offer to cook dishes for the Ship."

"Sam and Claire don't have time to cook when they're running the place, and now I've got time on my hands . . ."

"What do you think, Ruby?"

"I think you should speak to Sam and Claire before you do anything," his wife replied.

A silence hung between them as Jim let Ruby's words of advice sink in.

"Jim," Ruby began cautiously, "you're not just using this cooking lark to get back to working in the pub, are you?"

Jim cast his gaze to the kitchen floor.

"I've been rumbled again, haven't I?"

More next week.



Some Puddle!

It may be winter and some of us "old 'uns" might prefer to stay in and hibernate until spring, but not our two-year-old grandson, Nathan. He just loves water, especially jumping in big puddles left after a downpour of rain. When he was taken to the seaside at Southend-on-Sea he excitedly called out, "Puddle" and happily went into the sea. That really is some puddle!

Mr R.H., Essex.

A Christmas Treat

I first encountered "The People's Friend" when I lived in Forres, Scotland, back in the late 70s when I was a Forces wife. Over the years, I have occasionally purchased a copy to read, especially when on holiday. So I was surprised when I found, on a visit to Australia, that my cousin also bought the "Friend" and I still had something to read.

Last year my partner had a cancer operation and is undergoing light chemotherapy on weekly trips to the hospital. It was a chore at first, but then I found a volunteer-run café where every week I can enjoy a cuppa and read a magazine – they are all laid out for customers, with a large quantity of "The People's Friend". I can get through several stories whilst I wait. We decided not to buy Christmas presents last year so I treated myself to a subscription to this magazine.

Mrs S.F., Worcestershire.

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.



Peggy Loves A Paddle

My son's beautiful French bulldog, Peggy, couldn't resist a paddle when she came to visit. Bertie, his other dog, wasn't as keen as it was so cold. You can just see his leg in the top left of the photo!

Ms L.R., Milton Keynes.

Star Letter

This time last year I found an older copy of "The People's Friend" which had a knitting pattern for beginners.

I have never been a knitter. My granny was fabulous, but I never embraced the challenges of knitting or crocheting, even though she taught me the basics of both.

When I turned sixty I was trying to find a "little something" to do in the evenings to help with my weight loss and stop me from picking. I bought the wool and commenced knitting my first "adult jumper" from your pattern. I gave myself a target date to get it finished and achieved it.

I belong to Slimming World and it's become my weekly jumper I wear for the two hours I'm in group.

Just recently I've been receiving many favourable comments on how nice it looks, and now ladies are asking me for the pattern as they think they would also like the challenge.

Mrs S.K., Somerset.



Our Star Letter will receive a Dean's all-butter shortbread tin worth £13.69 RRP. *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.



World-class Read

Congratulations on your long-running magazine. My mother read the "Friend", and as a teenager I read it after Mum finished with it. When I returned home for holidays I would read what she had accumulated over months and sometimes a year.

Thank you for the article on Doune. I was born there 80 years ago. Long may you continue to produce the "Friend" as it is obviously enjoyed around the world.

Mrs M.W., Australia.

A poem just for you!

Where...

*Where there's love and peace for ever,
Where the sun is always shining,
Where there's hope for all and never
Tarnish on a silver lining,
Where there's happiness and laughter,
Joy in each and every action,
Cheerfulness for every after,
Blissful times of satisfaction,
Where accord is all around us,
Where to live is to be free,
Where friends in harmony surround us,
Such a place is where I'll be.*

Dennis W. Turner.

Lawn Labour

Now that spring is on its way and the lawn will need attention, I was rather impressed when I saw this large amusing sign painted on a wall in a café.

A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the

breeze is blowing, the birds are singing and the lawn mower is broken.

It made me smile, and I'm sure many hobbies with the task of cutting the lawn could only wish!

Ms M.G., Anglesey.

Withernsea Revisited

Being originally from the city of Hull, I was so pleased to see Withernsea mentioned in your cover feature on Spurn Point. As a child we had lots of days out to Withernsea, which I enjoyed because it wasn't as big and noisy as the likes of Scarborough. I remember the amusements were on one small street. I also liked the "café" we used to go to which was like a big hut structure on another small street facing us as we walked past the amusements. This was a great place as we were able to take our sandwiches in as long as a drink was purchased. It was so busy and lively.

Thank you for bringing back so many happy memories.

Mrs M.A.W., Edinburgh.

Rationed Fashion

I loved your article about "rationed fashion". When I was a new mother money was very short, so I decided to go to night school to learn to dressmake. I took to it like a natural; my two little girls were always in pretty clothes.

As time went by I made wedding and bridesmaid dresses, also going-away outfits which all brides had then. When my girls were young I would go to the weekly market and pick up a piece of material for half a crown. I could make them both a dress from the one piece.

I also had to pencil a line up my older sister's legs when she had a date.

Ms S.A.E., Skegness.

Perfect Brows

Here is my lovely mother-in-law, Irene. She is eighty-two and absolutely loves "The People's Friend". She is modelling eyebrows her son made for her, because she has to draw hers on daily.

Mrs J.N., West Midlands.



Puzzle Solutions from page 25

Missing Link

The words in order are King, Trot, Move, Shoe, Oven, Wolf, Riot, Tank, Call, Here. The bird is GREENFINCH.

Crossword

O	F	F	L	I	N	E	A	C	I	D
S	O	A	E	R	I					
H	I	R	S	U	T	E	C	H	A	I
Y	U	N	D	O	S	E				
N	O	M	A	D	L	A	V	I	S	H
E		E	E	E	L	E				
S	Q	U	I	R	E	C	R	A	Y	O
S	P	E	H	C						
G	R	O	T	T	O	H	O	V	E	R
G	I	T	O	A	I	A				
R	O	G	U	E	P	A	R	A	G	O
A	H		L	G	I	T				
M	A	T	T	E	A	G	E	R	L	Y

Piceword

C	A	M	S	H	A	F	T	S	I	T	C	O	M
A	E	O	A	A	N	L	O						
U	N	D	E	R	P	R	O	D	U	C	T	I	O
C	I	D	C	H	A	N	O						
U	N	C	L	E	E	Y	E	B	R	I	G	H	T
S	I					R	N	O					
I	N	V	E	I	G	L	E	A	P	R	O	N	
A	A	N	E	N	T	E	E						
I	D	L	E	D	O	U	T	R	E	A	C	H	
R		U	M			O	R						
B	O	Y	F	R	I	E	N	D	C	A	N	O	E
R	U	A	T	E	A	C	P						
U	N	C	O	N	T	R	O	V	E	R	S	I	A
S	C	C	Y	I	A	L	A						
H	E	A	D	E	R	B	L	I	T	H	E	L	Y

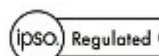
Sudoku

6	1	3	5	7	8	2	9	4
7	2	8	4	9	1	6	5	3
9	5	4	6	2	3	8	1	7
5	8	1	9	3	6	7	4	2
4	9	2	7	8	5	3	6	1
3	6	7	2	1	4	9	8	5
2	3	6	1	4	9	5	7	8
8	4	5	3	6	7	1	2	9
1	7	9	8	5	2	4	3	6

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