

The Telegraph Magazine

11 FEBRUARY 2023



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in the old dog
yet... if the
scientists have
their way

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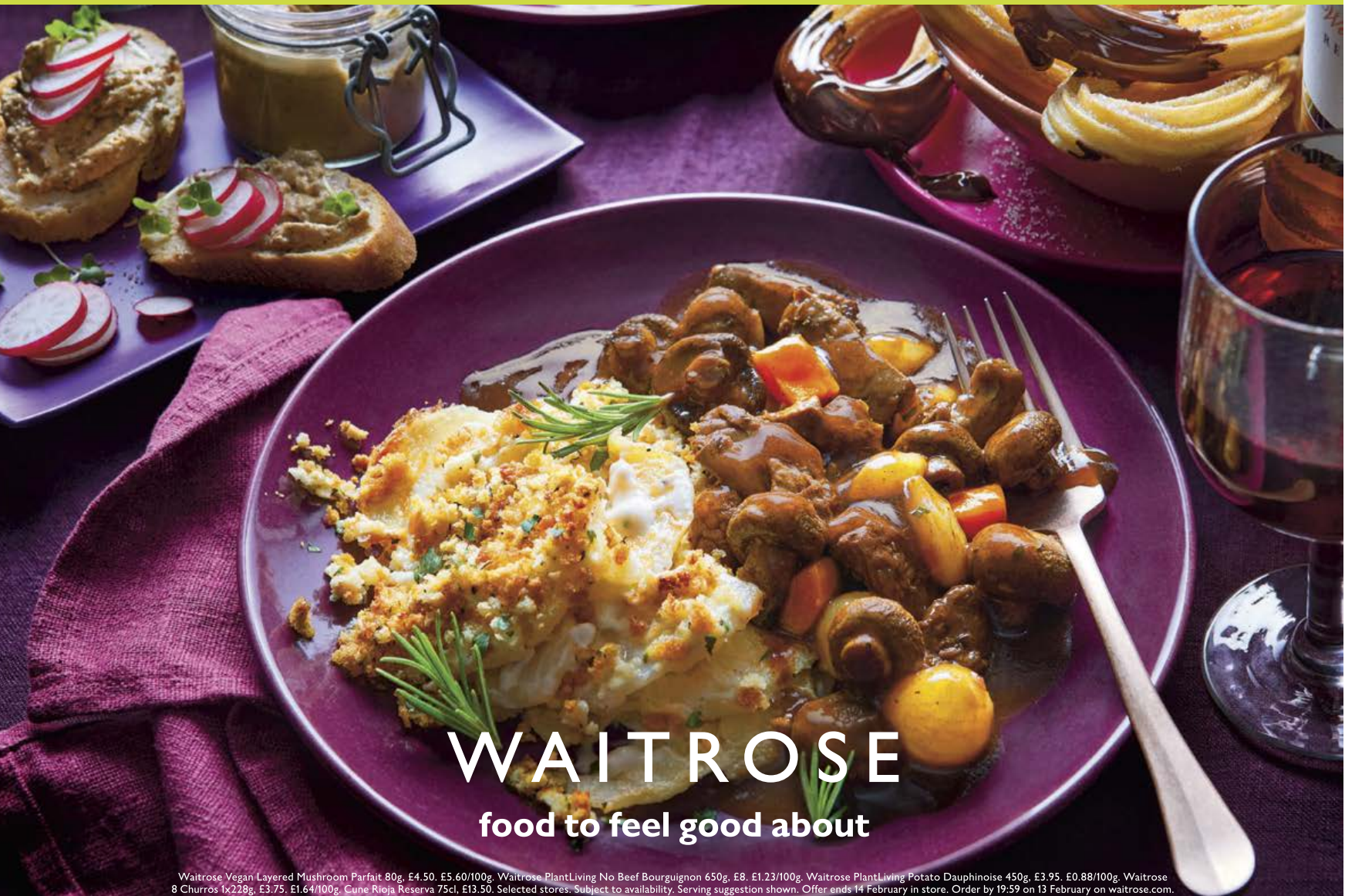
HEAD OF MAGAZINE ADVERTISING, CLAIRE JUON: claire.juon@mailmetromedia.co.uk. INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNT SALES MANAGER, JASON HARRISON: jason.harrison@mailmetromedia.co.uk

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Jon Sopel

My Saturday



The journalist and podcast host, 63, on life in Lycra, spurring on Spurs and drinking good wine

7.30am I make a cup of tea, then there will be a short debate with my wife [Linda] about which of us is going to walk Alfie, our Miniature German Schnauzer. Alfie and I will go to Regent's Park and Primrose Hill [near their home in north London]. He's a very well-travelled dog because I was living in the US for eight years [as the BBC's North America editor].

8.30am There's a really lovely farmer's market in Primrose Hill. If I'm being naughty,

I'll get myself a smoked salmon and cream cheese bagel.

10am If I said I try to have a social media-free zone, my wife would say 'you bloody liar'! There are times when I try to switch off but I'm a news-aholic. A year ago it looked like I was going to be taking a new job at the BBC as the political editor. And then this offer came along to set up a podcast with Emily Maitlis, *The News Agents* [available @Globalplayer, globalplayer.com and other platforms]. It's up to us what we say, who we interview and we've got to appeal to a diverse audience.

11am Rather tragically, I have become a Lycra lout and will often be found hurtling around Regent's Park or other parts of London on my bicycle. During Covid I was in Washington by myself in an apartment and bought a road bike.

2.30pm I'm a season-ticket holder at Spurs. That was one of my treats to myself when I got back from America. I sit with a mate of mine, Paul. We meet for a pie and a pint in the ground

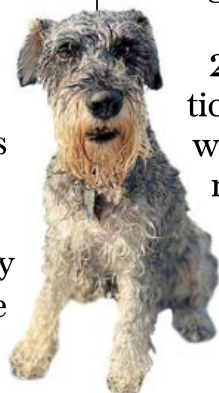


before the game, and put the world to rights.

7.30pm We FaceTime 'the Down Unders', as we call them: our son Max lives in Australia and is married, and we've got a baby grandson and a granddaughter. It's 6.30am on Sunday morning in Sydney when we call. Obviously it was incredibly painful not to be able to visit during Covid but in the past year crazily we went to Australia three times. Our daughter Anna lives in London.

8pm Evenings can be anything from the theatre to cinema, seeing friends, occasionally getting out of the smoke. I do love it when I've been shouting coarse abuse at the referee in the afternoon and then in the evening I'm at some poncey play, trying to be all sophisticated. My new year's resolution is to drink less during the week but drink better at the weekend. Life is too short for cheap wine.

12am There has to be a good reason to be on the naughty side of midnight for going to bed. It's either if friends are round or I'm out.



Words by
HANNAH BETTS

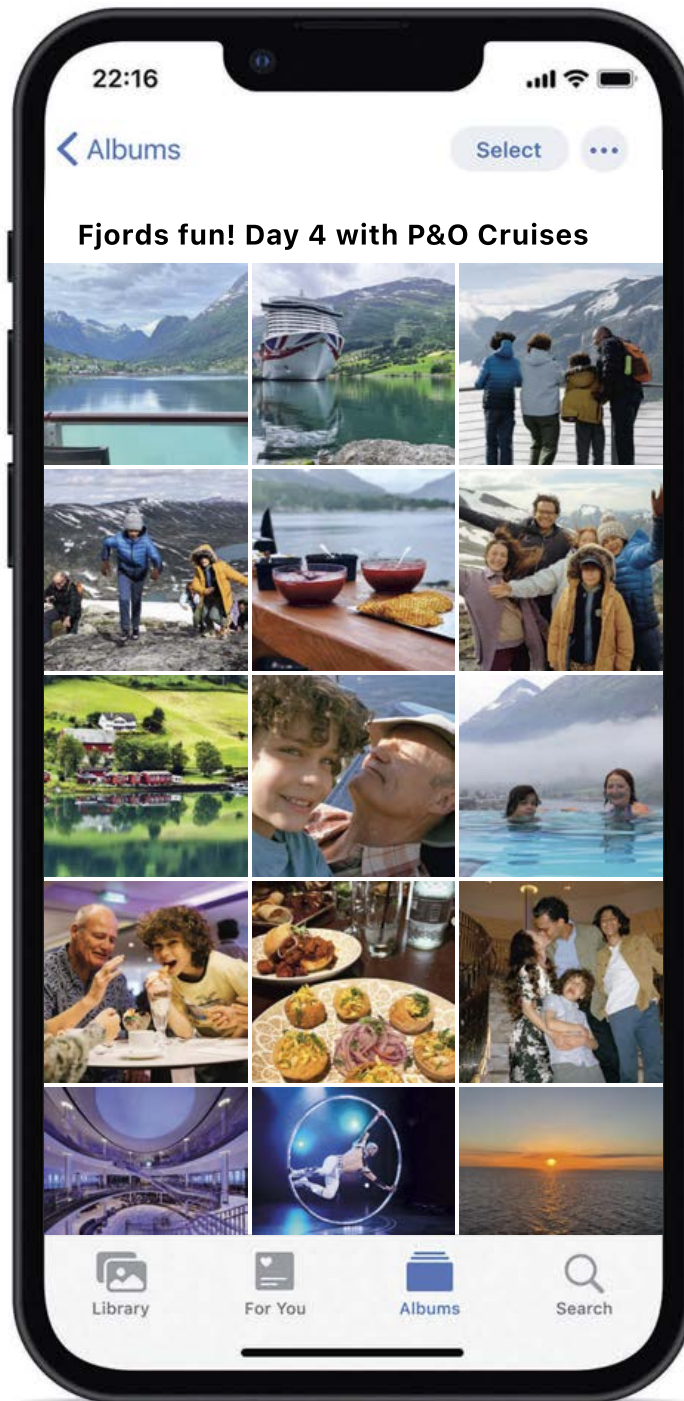
Your pet under the microscope

Photographs by
JO SAX





With dogs ageing seven times faster than us, it's inevitable that we will suffer the pain of losing our most faithful friends. However, scientific research into canine longevity hopes to extend lives – and may dial back the clock for humans, too



And that was just Tuesday.
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Four-year-old blue whippet, Pimlico



With Britain's post-pandemic dog population having increased by at least 10 per cent to more than 11 million, I may be at the extreme end of cynophilia, but I doubt I'm alone. Canine life expectancy varies by breed: according to *The Journal of Small Animal Practice*, Cardigan Welsh corgis boast the longest odds, with us for 16-and-a-half years on average. Meanwhile, poor Neopolitan mastiffs have the shortest, with an average life expectancy of merely 2.33 years. Still, science is beginning to provide help with the issue of dog longevity for all of us whose hopes and fears are contained in four-legged form. Just as there are pioneers attempting to expand humans' allotted years via an assortment of bio-hacks, so scientists are turning their attention to increasing canine lifespan.

There is Vaika, a charitable research organisation looking at ways to increase longevity through a study of retired sled dogs, named after a husky. It was founded by Dr Andrei Gudkov, a professor of oncology at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, New York. His team focuses on DNA damage in dogs between eight and 11 years old, monitored

I got back from my first term at Oxford and asked where my childhood bull terrier was. 'He's in the garden,' said my family, collapsing with collective mirth. I looked: he wasn't. As you've doubtless realised, he *was* in the garden – only six feet under. They'd been distraught about this at the time, deciding not to inform me so it didn't ruin my college introduction. Only now they were over it, and found the whole thing darkly hilarious.

It was tough love in my family. But I still dream about Pooh Bang Betts, my first four-legged love. Canine mortality – and its limits compared to our own – is one of life's harsher realities, however one learns the news. At 51, four years into adult dog ownership, I worry about my blue whippet's death daily, despite her relatively young age. At six months, Pimlico nearly died of meningitis, rendering her uninsurable and me neurotic. The months of steroids required to save her involved weight gain and muscle loss.

At the same time, Pim's earliest weeks were

with toddlers and she thus knows no fear. Cue her delight in being chased by froth-mouthed rottweilers and flying over farm walls to land on enraged bulls. Whippets injure easily and south London's chicken shops present a constant choking challenge. I've taken a dog first aid course – something I am yet to do for humans – swotting up on cardiopulmonary resuscitation, sight-hound Heimlich manoeuvre, bleeding, bandaging, poisoning, fitting, burns, broken bones, bites, stings, allergies, anaphylactic shock, head and spinal injuries, drowning and road accidents.

Meanwhile, Pim, my partner Terence and I are in a relationship a dog psychologist described as a 'three-way oxytocin high'; a ménage à trois in which she sleeps between us, the ultimate barrier-method contraception. How many more years of this feral bliss will we be allowed? Her father died at 12 – better than some breeds, but still unthinkable. My boyfriend hates it when I say, 'When she dies, I die', however, I do believe this. I feel the way friends with children describe parenthood: and, lo, there is my heart roving untethered in the world – about to be run over in pursuit of KFC.

My boyfriend hates it when I say: 'When she dies, I die.' But I do believe this...

at a site in Ithaca. Here Vaika is trialling an experimental anti-ageing drug that could also have implications for humans.

Then there is Loyal, a business biotech start-up founded by scientist Celine Halioua to develop drugs to increase health and wag span. It will shortly be launching clinical trials of two drugs: the first an implant aimed at larger dogs; the second, a pill to be tested on older animals. Halioua's goal is that, if successful, these could ultimately be trialled on – and sold to – people.

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canine investigations, America's Dog Aging Project (dogagingproject.org), is a vast academic undertaking involving almost 45,000 citizen scientists and their hounds, 30 scientists and 60 staff across 12 institutions, with many millions of funding. It was the brainchild of the biology of ageing specialist Dr Matt Kaeberlein, based at the University of Washington, Seattle. Dr Kaeberlein grew up with dogs, and typically maintains a small pack. It was his beloved long-haired German shepherd, Dobby, now 12, who inspired his light-bulb moment a decade ago.

'I'd been studying the biology of ageing for 15 years in different laboratory animals, starting with simple-celled yeast, then nematode worms and, eventually, mice,' Dr Kaeberlein explains. 'It has never occurred to me that there was an opportunity to investigate how much we'd learnt inside the laboratory in the real world until conversations with my now co-director [evolution of ageing expert] Dr Daniel Promislow.

'Suddenly, it occurred to me that there might be an opportunity not only to understand the biology of ageing, but to actually have an impact on the health and longevity of dogs because they age so much more rapidly than humans -

and they share the human environment. I don't know why it took me 15 years to make that connection, but as soon as I did it became something I had to do because of Dobby. If we're able to give dogs an extra two, three, four years of healthy longevity, that's a big deal. No one really cares if we can make a mouse live 50 per cent longer. It's neat academically, but it's not going to change anyone's life.'

DNA-wise, dogs are not much closer to us than mice. However, the shared habitat factor is hugely significant, given that approximately 75 per cent of what drives longevity is believed to be environmental, a mere 25 per cent genetic. As species, humans and hounds have enjoyed 30-40,000 years of co-evolution. Moreover, unlike in, say, cats, the structured breed component offers rich potential for genetic study. These affinities mean that what we learn about canine ageing might also lead to human life spans being increased.

When Dr Kaeberlein mentioned his dog-based plans in an interview in *Nature* in 2014, it immediately captured the attention of the world's media - and animal lovers. Owners signed up in their droves, happy to fill in a



'If we give dogs an extra four years of healthy longevity, that's a big deal'

meticulous, 10-part health survey that takes anywhere between one and three hours to complete, and thereafter annual updates. Over six thousand pack members have also had their genomes sequenced. The project started with a small safety trial in 2015, Dr Kaeberlein insisting that they use the same caution as in paediatric trials, given the devotion owners feel. (He and his microbiologist wife Tammi have two sons, yet note that 'Our first child was a dog'.)

The Dog Aging Project's current dataset of almost 45,000 subjects is not only the largest

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animal ageing study ever amassed, but is ever expanding. (Thus far only Americans can participate, but there are hopes to extend its reach.) It will be a long-term investigation. The 36 papers it has released over the last 18 months have been based on the first year's data when the pack numbered 20,000. Matters are thus at a very early stage, the tip of the canine-ageing iceberg.

Still, its findings have confirmed that the most important diseases – cancer, heart and kidney disease – increase exponentially with age in dogs as with humans. Dementia is similarly age-related, after which first exercise, then diet, are factors. Once-a-day feeding has been associated with reduced risk of being diagnosed with several age-related diseases, possibly because of calorie restriction. Early trials of the drug rapamycin (also known as sirolimus) have shown encouraging signs, providing evidence for improved heart function and increased activity, demonstrating that the drug can be used safely in dogs, as in people.

The declarations of some human 'life extensionists', aka 'immortalists', have been so fantastically extravagant that this may sound like

'We can modify the biology of ageing to keep dogs – and us – healthier for longer'

small beer. After all, the non-profit Methuselah Foundation has a mission to 'make 90 the new 50 by 2030', after which 900 surely cannot be far behind. Indeed, it takes its name from Noah's grandfather, fabled to have lived 969 years.

Dr Kaeberlein exhibits justifiable frustration: 'So much hyperbole and nonsense gets into the media, but a key point is that there is a biology of ageing. Different animals age at different rates, but we can modify the biology of ageing in ways to keep dogs – and people – healthier for longer. In this way, we can have an outsized impact on health span compared with waiting until people and dogs are sick, which is the kind of 19th-century medicine we still practice today.'

Could this eventually lead to our dogs living many more years – doubling their life spans as has been achieved in laboratory mice, and, perhaps, in time, being able to live as long as we do? Dr Kaeberlein laughs: 'Given where we are today, don't hold your breath!' 'Ever?' I plead. He smiles: 'As a scientist, ever's a tough word. But, in the short-term, it's not unreasonable to expect a 25 per cent increase in life span and a larger increase in health span.'

Dr Lizzy Pearson, 32, a veterinarian based in Texas, and researcher with the Dog Aging Project, is more optimistic about where its work might carry caninekind. Another lifelong hound obsessive, her other half is Rimmington, 10, a golden doodle, the runt of a premature litter whom she tube-fed. 'My goal is to get Rimmi to be 15 – but a happy 15,' she tells me. One of her tasks in the trial is to make clear to owners that its benefits are aimed at future animals.

'Some have high hopes that this will help dogs live for ever,' she reports. 'Others think, "I don't know if this will help dogs, but I want to participate because it might." Does she think humans

and canines might one day share the same life span? 'Right now, it might seem impossible, but time and perseverance have proven that many things thought to be impossible actually aren't. If you think back to where medicine was a couple of hundred years ago, no one would have been able to foresee what we can do today.'

Because, still, when Kaeberlein and co say 'longevity' many of us hear 'immortality', however irrational. Robert Graham, 62, a nurse living in Austin, Texas, is the owner of Bear, 13, a stray and 'the most wonderful dog ever'. Bear is a participant in the Dog Aging Project's current rapamycin study, which delights Graham, aware of the drug's reputation as a life-extender. 'When I was asked about my expectations on joining the project, I said I wanted Bear to live for ever,' he admits wryly.

We debate the issues. Would we actually want our loves to live longer than us, at risk of harm and loneliness? Well, no. Could we all be euthanised at once by some benevolent super-vet? 'I say to Bear what I say to my wife: "I want to live one minute shorter than you,"' Graham concludes. Like me, he's joking, but also not joking. Unlike Barbra Streisand, we won't be paying \$50,000 a

pup to create spooky lookalike-yet-not-personality-a-like clones. However, given the option, we'd test the patience of the wise heads at the Dog Aging Project.

Dr Kaeberlein understands this. When I bleat: 'But what can I do to make Pim live as long as possible now?' he patiently enumerates the strategies science currently gives us. Namely: focus on dogs not being overweight, getting lots of exercise, having good oral care (guilty as charged), being up-to-date with vaccines, and receiving annual check-ups. In humans, sleep would be another aspect, but dogs appear to have this cracked, snoring all the way to superannuation.

Instead of conjuring a world of bio-hacked bulldogs, the point is for human and hound to live as healthily and happily as possible, however long life is. Both of us are simply passing through, but the joy is that we are doing so together. Still, good luck telling me this as the decade wears on. *The Journal of Small Animal Practice* puts whippet life expectancy at 12.79 years, meaning that Pim has around nine years left. My own life expectancy is around 83. How, pray, am I to function between 60 and 83?



Uyghurs in exile

Monitored, persecuted, brutalised – China’s Uyghur population is under constant pressure, with stories from ‘re-education’ camps shocking the world. Thousands have taken their chances on gruelling escape routes. The Telegraph’s China correspondent Sophia Yan reports on their journeys, and the challenge of building lives abroad – while under the threat of being forced to return





Teetering on a narrow cliff in a mountainous jungle, somewhere between southern China and Myanmar, Abdurehim Imin Parach focused on carefully placing one foot in front of the other. His life depended on it. Hundreds of feet below lay piles of suitcases and clothes – the lost belongings of people who had attempted this perilous journey before him.

‘I was shaking,’ he says. ‘It looked like no-man’s-land.’

It took four hours, in withering heat, flanked by men carrying machetes, to cross the border into Myanmar. On the other side, he was overjoyed to find wild bananas and a spring. ‘I was covered in dust and dirt but I’d never tasted water so sweet.’

Parach is one of an estimated 20,000 Uyghurs to have illegally escaped China, where they have long faced persecution. Many were assisted by traffickers who arranged fake passports, found safe houses and helped evade Chinese spies, charging tens of thousands of dollars to do so. But it is a dangerous journey. Some people died along the way. Others were exploited by traffickers who stole their money; or were captured and deported to China. Those who were sent back simply disappeared, likely imprisoned, tortured or executed.

Parach’s relief at having reached safety is bittersweet. Though he made it to Turkey – a longtime Uyghur diaspora hub – his wife, Buhelchem Memet, and their children

Photographs by
ALESSANDRA
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were never able to join him. Worse, his eldest son, Shehidulla, 11 at the time, who was with him on part of the journey, disappeared. Months later Parach would find out the dark truth about what had happened.

He will never see Shehidulla again.

It is a sunny morning in Istanbul and Parach is sitting in a café in Sefaköy, a bustling neighbourhood. He is 47 now, a poet, and makes ends meet by doing translation work and helping Uyghurs write books. His own memoir is in the works. He has the air of a professor, with black-rimmed glasses tucked into his shirt pocket. Parach's escape was almost a decade ago, but as he recounts it, his eyes fill with tears and he glances nervously around the empty café. 'There are Chinese spies everywhere.'

Parach was living in Kashgar, a city on the ancient Silk Road in western China, when he fled. He had just opened a mattress factory when he received a call about a trafficking route. He decided to run – there was no other option.

It was 2013, and the Chinese government was gearing up to impose its 'Strike Hard' campaign, directed at Uyghurs, a mostly Muslim ethnic group living largely in Xinjiang, where they are a community of 11 million. Their oppression dates back to the 1700s, but control tightened in the 1940s after the Communist Party took power. By the time Parach was preparing to leave, restrictions were ramping up further: police had started detaining men with beards; religious materials were confiscated. The government was monitoring mobile phones and laptops, and installing facial-recognition cameras. Such surveillance would increase in the years that followed, as authorities began mass collection of DNA, iris scans and voice samples.

'Even our kitchen knives had to be chained to cutting boards and all blades had QR codes on them,' Parach remembers. 'Uyghurs harboured deep-seated hatred against the Chinese government. They had complete control [of our lives].'

His own hatred of the authorities dates back

Previous page, left to right: Abdurehim Imin Parach in Istanbul; Abdülehet Abdulaziz at home in Turkey; Abdulla Tohti Arish, now living in Stuttgart; Eysajan Hekim fled to Germany via Turkey



to 1997, when he was arrested for various 'crimes', including praying and fasting, as well as studying literature with an Uyghur professor accused of having separatist views. He was detained in a secret prison, where he was forced to do gruelling work in a stone quarry that left him badly wounded. Sitting in the café today, he hides his hands in his lap, but when he raises his coffee mug, rows of pinprick scars cover them.

After his release, Parach says that his 'political criminal' status haunted him. 'My wife and I moved from place to place [but] no matter where I was, the police would take me to the station and interrogate me. There was no peace.'

Chinese authorities refused to issue Parach with a passport. Others he knew had bribed police, but though he spent ¥100,000 (about £12,000) trying to do the same, he never succeeded. His only chance, he realised, was to escape illegally.

One of his prison cellmates, a teacher, had attempted to flee years earlier; he had made it

to central Asia before he was caught and jailed. Parach started asking around for people who might help him.

So when he received that call from a friend to say there was a way to get out – even though it meant leaving that same day – Parach rushed home to tell his wife. They decided that she would stay back with their five youngest children, and he would make the journey with Shehidulla. 'People I knew had died on the way. [So] my wife said, "When you're safely abroad, you can find a way to get us there, too."'

Parach paid someone to drive him and Shehidulla the 900 miles from their home in Kashgar to Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang. The next morning, father and son flew to Nanyang in central China, but the contact, arranged by traffickers, who was supposed to meet them there didn't turn up.

It would be two weeks before the contact finally got in touch – in the meantime, they

were sheltered by a kindly Uyghur they had met at a mosque – and instructed them to go to a jade market. From there, they were escorted to a building that housed dozens of other Uyghurs.

Three weeks later, Parach received a telephone call from a Uyghur in Turkey, who worked with traffickers. He instructed Parach to travel alone, without Shehidulla. No explanation was given. Parach was stunned, but he complied. 'At that point, I was desperate to get out and did whatever I was told,' he says.

He sent Shehidulla home, but kept begging traffickers to get his son out of China some other way, and eventually they agreed, taking \$2,000 to ensure his safe passage on the first leg of the journey.

Over the next two months, Parach and 10 others were shepherd through southern China – by bus, by boat and on foot – and across the border into Myanmar, where they were driven into a border-police station. 'We were so



'We were treated like animals. We were starving; we quenched the hunger with water'

scared; we thought we'd been sold,' he recalls. 'But it turns out there was no one inside.' He suspects that traffickers had bribed the police.

The most frightening part of the journey was near the Myanmar-Thailand border, when they crossed treacherous river rapids in a flimsy boat with a sputtering engine. 'The current was so strong, even good swimmers probably wouldn't have stood a chance if we capsized,' says Parach. 'We were prepared to say goodbye...' The next leg, getting into Malaysia, involved crawling through a hole in the border fence.

By now, it was October, and Shehidulla soon joined Parach in Kuala Lumpur, though the reunion was short-lived; they would be separated again. Nine months later, after traffickers arranged a fake passport, Parach boarded a plane bound for Istanbul. He had made it.

Shehidulla, however, was nowhere to be found. He had flown to Istanbul too, a month earlier, posing as the son of another Uyghur man, but when Parach arrived, there was no sign of either of them. He panicked. 'I looked everywhere,' he says. 'I was so desperate.'

It took months to piece together his son's fate: Shehidulla had been kidnapped by the traffickers who helped him escape, and taken to Iraq.

Then came another twist: traffickers offered to reunite Parach with his son if he too went to Iraq. 'I was numb,' he says. 'I felt paralysed.' He suspected that Shehidulla was being used as leverage to draw him into Isis, or another militant organisation.

The situation would play out over three years; traffickers allowed father and son to exchange short voice messages via a mobile-phone app. Shehidulla sounded casual, almost upbeat, he says, adding that those messages were monitored by his son's captors. At times Parach nearly acquiesced, but ultimately he decided not to go. 'I was sure that they would not let us leave alive.'

The last time they spoke was in May 2017. Shehidulla was 14. When Parach talked to the traffickers, they told him: 'Your son has chosen to become a martyr.' The words chilled him.

Months later, Parach learned from another

Uyghur, whose son was also in Iraq, that Shehidulla had died in a suicide attack. 'I remembered our final conversation, when Shehidulla said he was being trained to drive...

'I blame myself,' Parach looks away. 'It's the nature of these people to exploit and kill for their own benefit. It's my fault I didn't see that, in my naivety and stupidity; I should have stayed away from them, and made sure they couldn't hurt me and my son.'

The story is not an isolated one. Other Uyghur refugees report that traffickers plied them with extremist propaganda and urged them to travel to Iraq or Syria to join jihadist groups. It is unclear how many Uyghurs ended up this way and estimates vary vastly; one from 2017 put the number at 5,000 people. Theories also circulate among Uyghurs: some believe that the Chinese authorities deliberately allowed Uyghurs to escape illegally, an easy way to rid the country of them. Others point out that it was to the benefit of the Chinese government if Uyghurs were forced to join Isis, as it gave Beijing an excuse to claim that they were



terrorists. Why else, Uyghur exiles argue, was the illegal trafficking route open for roughly a year at the height of Isis's power?

'[For years] we didn't have any kind of freedom to live the way we wanted,' says Abdulehet Abdulaziz, 43, a shopkeeper from Ghulja, of the long heavily restricted lives led by Uyghurs in China.

He says police forced him to sell alcohol in his corner shop, which went against his Muslim faith. When he faked bankruptcy to avoid stocking it, police accused him of 'extremism' and 'wrong political thought'. Harassment intensified: he was threatened with 15 years' imprisonment for having videos about Islam on his computer, narrowly escaping arrest by giving police his new car.

Eventually, he fled to Turkey with his two sons, but never found a way for his wife and their daughter, now nine, to join them.

The persecution of Uyghurs drew global attention with the expansion of China's network of so-called 're-education camps' in recent years. More than one million Uyghurs and people from other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang are believed to have been held between 2017 and 2020. Hundreds of thousands more have been imprisoned for praying, fasting and other things considered by the government to be extremist crimes. Former detainees recount being tortured in the camps - some say they were electrocuted with cattle prods, or forced to take medication that they believe made them infertile; others say they were beaten and raped.

China has defended the camps as necessary to reform 'would-be' terrorists. The Chinese embassy in London denied all allegations of human-rights violations and forced labour, saying that 'at present, Xinjiang is at its best in history', and that there are 'active efforts to eliminate terrorist threats'.

Beijing previously said that everyone had 'graduated' from re-education in Xinjiang by 2019. But *Telegraph* investigations in the

Far left: many of Abdulla Tohti Arish's relatives have been detained in China. Above: Eysajan Hekim at his local mosque. Left: Abdulehet Abdulaziz in the living room of the home he shares with his sons

region and interviews with former detainees, along with police files leaked by hackers, indicate that many of those held were sent to prison or forced into labour. It is believed that camps still exist in remote locations. Even those who have been released live under heavy surveillance. This, some Uyghurs tell me, feels like being in an open prison.

In 2021, the UK Parliament declared that Uyghurs and other ethnic-minority groups in China were suffering 'crimes against humanity and genocide'. Earlier that year, the UK Government, along with the US, the EU and Canada, sanctioned four Chinese officials: assets were frozen and they were banned from certain countries. China responded with its own sanctions. Nearly two years on, it's unclear whether the lives of Uyghurs in Xinjiang have been improved by sanctions.

Eysajan Hekim, 39, was detained for a month in a re-education camp in 2017 after travelling to Malaysia to buy halal goods to sell

as a way out of prison, and out of China, never intending to do it. Later he sought asylum in Germany, where he now lives with his wife and their five children, aged between four and 18.

Today he struggles with guilt. He especially misses his father, who is 73. 'The longer we can't see relatives, the heavier [the burden] feels, to the point where we sometimes think maybe we shouldn't have abandoned them.

'But other times we're so happy that we now live in a place where we have our freedom.'

Life after settling abroad is not without its difficulties, as Uyghurs adapt to new languages and traditions. Learning a new language is a particular challenge for Eysajan. Every day he writes a new German word on a whiteboard for the family to memorise, but some are especially confusing, like 'ja', which means 'yes' in German but sounds the same as 'no' in Uyghur.

Western customs can also be confusing: he

was surprised to see a dog-walker pick up her pet's excrement. 'I went home and googled it, and was shocked that there is a law, and you can be fined if you don't pick it up - to approach dog poop [in Xinjiang] would be unthinkable!'

But the greatest worry for Uyghurs living abroad runs far deeper than this: the threat of being forced back home. China routinely pressures other governments to deport 'suspects'. Authorities have also targeted Uyghurs living abroad by threatening family members in China.

Abdulla Tohti Arish, 39, a former teacher who settled in Stuttgart, says that authorities confiscated the passports of his wife and children back in China. His wife was also imprisoned for receiving a money transfer from him. Other relatives have been detained too: 'My father, sister, brother-in-law, his father' - he ticks off a long list.

Uyghurs living in Turkey, meanwhile, are concerned about an extradition deal between Turkey and China, signed in 2017, which is awaiting ratification by Ankara.

Parach believes he could be executed if sent back; he hopes to leave Turkey and settle elsewhere in Europe, or in North America, even if it means using another dangerous route.

'I feel a lot of hatred towards the [Chinese] government, the Communist Party... I hope for some kind of revenge at some point,' he admits. 'They destroyed my life, the lives of my children and my family, and the lives of many, many Uyghurs.'

He is particularly concerned about the family he left behind. Calling his wife would put her at risk so, for years, he checked Chinese social media for signs that she was still alive. In October 2015, she suddenly stopped posting. 'I was worried she had been arrested.' He later discovered that she was sentenced to nine years in prison for purported 'links' to a terrorist organisation.

Another of his sons has died in a road accident after being hit by a police car. He knows nothing more of the safety of his four surviving children, including his daughter Shahida, a 10-month-old baby when he left.

On his darkest days, Parach wonders whether he should have stayed. At times he bitterly regrets trusting the traffickers. He puts it like this: 'If I go live in the woods with a tiger, can I blame the tiger afterwards for biting me? That's their nature... I should have known better.'

His residence permit in Turkey is due to expire within weeks of our conversation; he has had no response to his request for an extension. But wherever he is - in Turkey, or on the road - he is plagued by memories of what he left behind. 'Everything I do, [all of the poetry] I write, is connected to my home,' he says.

'If I ever have the chance to go home, I would lay down and hug the ground.'

In his most recent volume of poetry, he captures his homesickness: 'My tears leak drop by drop... Everything seems so strange to me, even though I try to comfort myself,' he writes.

'My homeland, I miss you so much.'

Additional reporting and translation by Rune Steenberg



in his import-export business, activity that marked him as a potential 'terrorist'. He recalls dozens of prisoners squeezed into a cell so small that they had to sleep facing the same direction. Torture and interrogations were, he says, part of daily life: electric shocks, beatings with wet towels to cause internal injuries while leaving no external marks. 'We were treated like animals,' Eysajan says. 'We were starving; we quenched the hunger with water. But we couldn't [wash] as there was no soap.'

One prisoner was, he recalls, chained to a huge block of stone and forced to drag it along whenever he moved. 'He begged to be released; I can't forget his pleas.'

Before this, he had been held in a detention centre, where he was strapped to a 'tiger chair', a metal contraption that can contort the body into painful positions, and kept there for two days.

He was released after agreeing to spy on Uyghurs in Turkey - he says he only assented

Above: Abdurhim Imin Parach pictured in the Sefaköy neighbourhood of Istanbul, where there is a significant Uyghur community. Parach arrived in the city in 2014 - his journey there took almost a year

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I fell in love with a psychopath

Before I begin, I should prefix this with the fact that he never called himself a psychopath. He used the word only once. It was quite early on, we were at his old flat, making tofu curry, and for some reason we were discussing the narcissism spectrum, and that's when he said it: 'Psychopaths are entirely misunderstood. It's a defamatory word for successful men, mostly CEOs.' I laughed. 'Exactly what a psychopath would say.' I waited for him to laugh too but he looked away. He was silent for a very long time, then he started dishing up the rice. 'We should eat this before it gets cold.' We never spoke of it again...



His eyes are pink when he opens the front door. His luggage for our mini-break is on his hall floor, stuffed into plastic bags from Waitrose. He was up all night writing his life goals, he says. Later he tells me he ate bad fish, slept with a bucket by his bed.

Inside, his living room is filled with wet foam. Krystyna*, his 'handygirl', scrubs plaster from the cornicing. 'Looks great,' I say politely, careful not to overstep my opinion. Last time I stayed over I'd offered Krystyna a cup of tea and he said it was embarrassing: 'It's not your place to offer.' He talks about her like a commodity: 'I can own her for £15 an hour, £30k a year.' A few days later, he remembers that he left his prostate massager on his bed – his niece is staying when we're away and he considers whether to ask Krystyna to hide it. 'Isn't that a bit inappropriate?' I say, aghast, and suggest he asks his friend Joe, but he doesn't see the difference.

We walk to an Italian delicatessen near his house for bagels for the journey. He talks a lot about this deli, his new local, a place where scruffy rich people go – 'authentic rich people'. He talks often about rich and poor: I took him to Sussex once, one of his first trips to the British seaside. 'This is a poor person activity,' he

observed, as we yomped across the sand.

It was the week after Queen Elizabeth died. I'd worked for six days straight and was a coiled spring of anxiety but the second I was with him, it dissipated. We laughed constantly that day, swam in the icy sea, and as the sun set we ate vinegary chips, batting away seagulls. But back at mine he went quiet. He stood in front of a blue print, an Yves Klein, and ran his fingers over a cashmere cushion. 'Your stuff's so different to mine.' The hairs on my neck stood on end, something about his tone. 'It's like you're a stranger; you don't show yourself to me.' I wanted to say that this made no sense but I'd been argumentative with exes; I'd promised myself I wouldn't be any more.

At the deli I order a mozzarella bagel and he begins to instruct me

Beacons will be our first trip away together, our second attempt at one. I'm embarrassed to tell people I'm going because last time he didn't show up, didn't tell me he wasn't coming. Just... nothing.

When my friend Jess finds out, she WhatsApps immediately: 'How did he get you back after last time?'

Me: 'It was a mix-up. He wanted me to book his train and thought I was angry when I didn't.'

Jess: 'You mean *he* was angry that you didn't.'

Me: 'He cooked me dinner. It's fine now.'

She sends four red flag emojis.

I tried to explain him to her once but his magnetism is impossible to capture. He's like no one I've met, a series of fascinating contradictions: playful, almost wonderstruck at times, but driven and ambitious; there's a sensitive,

My friends looked horrified by anecdotes I thought painted him as charming. Their concern felt misplaced: I was on an adventure

otherwise. Often he tells me what to order, what's best, and often I let him but on the occasions I have a clear idea of what I want it becomes a battle of wills. I read that this is how it starts with narcissists, psychopaths, sociopaths, whoever; after a while you're so beaten down, it's easier to do what they say, but at the same time they become bored by being with someone so plasticine, so unless you stay firm, you're on borrowed time.

This mini-break to the Brecon

bruised side too beneath his cocksure façade.

I have a contradiction of my own where I'd love a family and a house on a rugged bit of coast but picturing anyone I've dated in this dream makes me feel like I can't breathe properly. He is the only person who doesn't give me that. Even a trip to Costa Coffee with him is an exhilarating adventure.

Sometimes he sends me Rightmove links to cottages in Cornwall and texts, 'I'm buying this after



flipping my London place.' I tell him he's plagiarising my dream. He sends me a link to a converted church next. 'How about here?' And against my better judgment, I let myself imagine.

It's December when we go to Brecon, zero degrees, but he insists on driving with the roof down. He takes calls from a plasterer, an electrician and instructs me on the optimal angle to hold his phone. Between calls he plays tinny music and I suggest

we listen to The xx instead, but he switches it off altogether.

'What are you doing?'

'Punishing you.'

He looks sideways and we laugh but I don't know why because he really is punishing me.

'You like being punished,' he is suddenly serious.

We drive past his old house in west London, where he lived alone from 15, after he was expelled from boarding school. Later his ex-wife moved in. They

threw parties, were happy until they weren't. He was less handsome back then. He told me he'll hit peak attractiveness soon, girls often fancy him. 'It's a shame that women's looks go the other way by our age.'

We were in The Shard at the time; I'd booked the table to celebrate his new house but he looked at my small black dress and said, 'Why are you wearing that?' and, 'I hate places where people pretend to be rich.' In the bathroom, I washed the lipstick off my mouth and when I returned I was about to tell him I was off home but he looked tearful. 'Thanks for booking this. No one's ever done anything like this for me.' He touched my arm. 'Here, try my whisky.'

He didn't like other things of mine: a novel I'd once published; my flat; my career, which he considered pointless. I told myself he was just direct, Germanic, and anyway he never sounded malicious. I never saw myself as a victim – the opposite in fact. I could 'take' feedback, the way others couldn't. And when my friends looked horrified by anecdotes that I thought painted him as charming, I thought I'd explained badly. Their concern felt misplaced: I was on an adventure with an exhilarating man, what was there to worry about?

I met his best friends once; funny, interesting people. He was kinder around them. But he was circumspect about mine. 'I can tell we won't get on,' he said about one after a picnic, a pleasant, innocuous day, 'at least you're not close.' 'She's one of my best friends,' I corrected him. He looked confused: 'Really? Seemed like she didn't know you.'

One day he asked to listen to a voicemail I'd received from my grandmother – a lovely, warm ramble about her week. Tearfully, she added that she missed me. He went

quiet afterwards but later, at dinnertime, he put a self-help book on my table mat, *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents*. 'You should read it.'

If someone else told me this I'd be horrified. I love my grandmother dearly. But I reminded myself that his upbringing was tough; his mother had psychotic episodes. She had Munchausen by Proxy, he said once; she'd taken him from surgeon to surgeon until one agreed to remove part of his perfectly healthy intestine. Only later did it strike me that he didn't have a scar.

By then, I was a paper doll version of myself with him, two-dimensional and flat. Everything I said felt uninteresting. Around that time I went to the Falkland Islands for work; I climbed a mountain there with war veterans. My colour ran back. I was bursting to tell him but he went quiet. 'I was going to tell you about my planning permission...'. And suddenly, my words seemed inconsequential again.

He could sound loving too. Like the day I returned from that trip. I'd been on a crest of adrenaline but after 30 hours of travel, I crashed and back at home I sobbed. Really I just needed some sleep but he praised me for crying. 'Well done, it's the first step.' 'To what?' 'To realising you hate your life. And realisation is the first step to change.'

He told me once he wanted to lead a cult. I laughed but he was adamant. 'Someone said I'd be good at it.' I played along: 'I'll be the speechwriter, help you indoctrinate the masses.' 'No,' he frowned. 'You'll be *in* the cult, locked in a room and I'll let myself in and do whatever I want.' A stupid joke, I told myself, and I said something silly about him not being able to afford my speechwriter salary. 'Of course I can



afford you. I know what you want: a place by the sea, a kid or two. Once you know what people want, you can own anyone.'

We reach Brecon after dark. The bungalow is nondescript; pleather sofas, dishes of potpourri, strip-lights that hum. He found it on Airbnb. He tenses up and I say, 'Let's make the best of it,' and I rearrange some lamps. Then we snuggle in front of *Come Dine With Me*, his favourite, and the next morning off we go to Hay-on-Wye.

It's a bitter day. We wander past shops selling lovespoons and second-hand books. Inside Hay Castle he examines the craftsmanship of some shutters. An elderly volunteer smiles: 'You must be a carpenter.' He just looks at her, so I say, 'He's bought a house and is renovating it.' 'How lovely,' she says. As we're walking out, he whispers, 'It would be so easy to kill her.' 'Stop it!' 'But it would. She'd be completely unsuspecting.'

We weave through the farmer's market and I say, as casually as I can: 'Have you thought about killing someone for real?' 'Of course.' 'But seriously...' He tells me that he pulled apart some insects as a kid, and when things were bad at home he'd beat a neighbour's dog with a stick. 'When she had puppies I tried to drown them in the sink but my mother caught me.'

He considered murdering the mother of his son, who he had

dated for eight weeks. She was taking him to court for backdated spousal support. 'How would you have done it?' 'Poison,' he says immediately, then adds the cons outweighed the pros. 'What cons? Prison?' 'No, raising Jacob alone. I deliberate whether to ask my next question: 'Have you considered hurting Jacob?' 'That would make no sense, I wouldn't take pleasure from the act of hurting people. It's just the removal of an obstacle.'

He's probably just bored, trying to shock, I decide, but that night, as we soak in a hot tub, his words sit with me. Other things he'd told me too: throwaway comments like how he imagined raping someone as a teenager.

I told him I loved him once, and he shook his head. 'You're not in love, you're in limerence.' That's not true, I insisted, but he continued: 'You see only good things in me but one day you'll see only bad, then you won't want to be near me.'

He switches on the hot-tub jets and turns to me. 'Are you happy with where we're at?' We talk properly then. For some reason I'm franker than ever before; perhaps I've stopped trying. I admit how badly I want children, that I'm scared of leaving it too late. He asks what's stopping me and it strikes me that *he* is – or rather that I am letting him; this man who texts me hourly, who I go on 12-hour dates with, weekend-long

adventures; but who, six months in, won't commit.

He talks next and this time I listen properly. He describes his last break-up, forgetting he has already told me, but this account is different. He lets slip, too, that he took her on a replica of this trip: Airbnb; Brecon Beacons; Convertible car. Even the same tea stop. Before I can interject, he leaps out of the hot tub. He wants ice cream. 'Let's go to the all-night petrol station!' 'It's a 30-minute drive.' 'But I want ice cream!'

He speeds 100mph around twisty country lanes, and we laugh, the way we always do, only tonight it doesn't feel the same.

There is no climax here, as I might expect were I reading this. No threats, violence, no strategically placed knives. Really, he was the least violent man. Save for bursts of boyish excitement, his emotions were entirely

evening. My friend, the host, has baked a birthday cake, shaped like a Guinness barrel, for her Irish husband, and it strikes me how kind they are to each other, how beautifully normal everyone is. They drink rum, discuss fixed-rate mortgages. I chat, laugh, I'm almost myself again. But I feel strange. Suddenly, I need to be alone.

Days later, I wake to a message from a man called Paul who invited me on a date last spring. He'd cancelled 10 minutes before – a headache. I'd forgotten him. Now: 'Hey. Drink?' I throw down my phone. How dare he waste my time? I'm hit, suddenly, by rage, great torrents of it. Not at Paul, but at him, though mostly at myself.

He once said that everyone in his life had a calculable value, that his ex-girlfriends were very rich, or very beautiful. He'd repeatedly asked about my salary, my parents' postcode and I'd deflected but he knew I wasn't wealthy. And clearly I wasn't model-beautiful. So what had he wanted?

It strikes me then that the question is wrong. More concerningly, what had I wanted from him? What could anyone want so badly that they'd let themselves shrink so small? I feel like someone I don't recognise. But something inside me lifts.

Hours later my phone flashes again. It's him. A Rightmove link to a Cornish cottage: 'I'm buying this next.' 'Why are you sending me this?' I reply. My phone pings again: 'These 1-2 kids you want, would you educate them in Cornwall?' 'Why?' 'I worry we/they wouldn't fit in.' 'I'll decide that with my future partner,' I say firmly. Later, another message: 'Shall we adopt a dog? You could sell your flat and...'

Finally, I stop reading.

Taking a deep breath, I reply: 'Please stop sending me this stuff.'

At some point I scroll to his number. I press delete.

controlled. He told me once he enjoyed provoking his ex-wife then sitting serenely, watching her explode. None of that with me, but something had shifted.

The next morning we drive home. 'I wish I could stay here with you for ever,' he says. I nod, ask why he enjoys holidaying with me and he says I'm easygoing and spontaneous, and I think: those are the last two words anyone who knows me would use.

I've a party back in London that

He tells me that he pulled apart insects as a kid, and when things were bad at home he'd beat a neighbour's dog with a stick



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"Truly excellent: patient, friendly, helpful and a mine of knowledge, tips and advice."

Polly Morgan has a freezer full of snake corpses and a nail technician in her
Renowned for abstract, unsettling taxidermy pieces, she has suspended
Ahead of a new exhibition of her most ambitious, intricate sculptures to



basement. As a creative force, the British artist is anything but conventional. pheasant chicks from balloons and made baby giraffes kneel on the ceiling. date, she talks to Jessamy Calkin about finding the magic in the macabre



Death becomes them

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Several years ago, Polly Morgan, who uses taxidermy in her art, was getting so many offers of small animal corpses from helpful members of the public that her freezers were full. Like most taxidermists in this country, she would never use anything that hadn't died from natural causes, but she often got calls about birds, rodents, squirrels, road-kill or stuff that the cat had brought in from people who had found her number on her website. 'And I generally didn't want the things I was getting offered anyway, so I said, if anyone calls, say no.'

One evening the phone rang and she heard her assistant say, 'Oh, thank you for offering but no, she really can't accommodate anything else at the moment, but I'll pass it on, yeah - a baby giraffe - OK, thanks, bye...'

And Morgan shrieked, 'Wait! Can I speak to them?'

It turned out that the giraffe had been born in a zoo but died of an

asked Morgan. Yes. Clay? Yes. Glass? Yes. Wire? Yes. Well, in that case I have another package to go.

Fine, said the woman. What is it? It's a sculpture, said Morgan, and it looks like a giraffe...

So the giraffe came back, and is now kneeling upside down on someone's ceiling in London.

Because that's what taxidermy is: sculpture. But that was a long time ago, and this was possibly Morgan's most conventional enterprise, and nothing like the work that she does now.

Morgan lives with her husband, the artist Mat Collishaw, and their two young sons, Bruce and Clifford, in a superbly converted pub in Camberwell, south London. Her studio is on the ground floor and her workshop is in the basement, which used to be the beer cellar. Upstairs,



infection after five days. The caller was an art student who was a fan of Morgan's work and who also helped out in the zoo. 'I couldn't bear it to go to waste,' she says.

The problem was that the zoo was in Bahrain. But with the help of the person who had offered it - whose family had a construction company there and provided Morgan with a workshop, and tools, and even a flat to stay in - off she went.

Two weeks later, the giraffe was packed up and ready to return to the UK, where Morgan already had a buyer lined up. But when she called the shipping companies they said, we don't ship taxidermy. Ah, said Morgan, do you ship fibreglass? Yes, said the woman. Leather?

in a large, light kitchen, she makes coffee while we discuss nail art and the intricacies of albino snake scales. Dressed in a paint-splattered boiler suit, she has a beautiful face with delicate features. Banksy once called her 'Britain's hottest bird stuffer'.

Morgan has been exhibiting her work since 2005, and is particularly revered in the art world. A line-up of some of her early work includes a phone receiver with quail-chick heads sprouting from it, a robin flying through a pane of glass, a rotten tree being suckled by piglets, a wilting bird suspended from a balloon in a glass dome, and a cardinal bird inside a rib cage. Morgan doesn't recreate animals in their natural settings. It's not about making dead things look alive. It's about them being dead. Her art is abstract, unsettling and memorable. Her mind, she once said, works more like a digestive system. 'I may see a baby

Above: Polly Morgan in her studio, with works from new exhibition *False Flags*

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suckling its mother and go on to make a number of piglets suckling the sap from a dead tree.'

Lately, snakes have been on her mind. Her new exhibition, at the Royal Society of Sculptors in London, is inspired by snakes but doesn't involve any actual taxidermy. Snakes have featured in her work for quite a while now, and her freezers are still full of them. In 2020 she had an exhibition at the Bomb Factory in east London, entitled *How To Behave at Home* – which featured thick, vibrantly coloured coiled snakes tightly packed into polyurethane or concrete structures, or spilling out like voluptuous bodies tipping out of corsets.

Some were the real thing, others were casts – models – but they retained all the flamboyance and shiny beauty of actual snakes, thanks to meticulous painting of the scales. Snakeskin tends to dry out and lose all its iridescence; a lot of its pigmentation, too. 'And if it was going outside, it wouldn't last because it has no feathers or fur to cover the actual skin. When it dries out – which is what all taxidermy does – all the moisture evaporates.'

In 2021 Morgan won the Royal Society of Sculptors' First Plinth Public Art Award – a biennial prize for artists who've never previously had a public sculpture commissioned. The award provides the winner with funds to create the work, which is displayed at the RSS's Dora House and then moves to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park for a year. 'And then – if it hasn't been trashed – it's mine if I want to sell it.'

The work is currently under construction in her studio: a vast concrete structure with an enormous grey iridescent snake curled up in a cavity, scales gleaming. Morgan couldn't find a snake of a size adequate for the task, so she made a model. 'I've got big snakes in the freezer and I chop them up and mould them inside these cavities so I know they will fit properly, then I pack them in, pour rubber over them to make a mould, and make casts out of them.'

'When I first started working with snakes I tried so many different techniques, but the best result was always casting them and putting them directly into the gaps. Even if I had had a snake big enough, it would have been extremely difficult to get them to hold the position I wanted – when they're dead there's no musculature so they just flop.'

But recreating the iridescence of snake scales was a problem. 'As soon as I began to paint on a cast it opened up a whole world of opportunities



Below: *Catch 'em Young, Treat 'em Rough, Tell 'em Nothing*, 2023

because I could try out loads of different methods. I wanted to be able to mimic the iridescence because that's one of the most beautiful parts. I tried rainbow spectral paints and I had a bit of success, but not enough.'

Then Collishaw came home with an idea. 'He had been on the bus and the girls in front of him were discussing their manicures and one of them had iridescence on her nails – he said, you should look into nail art and what they use in nail bars.'

So she did. 'And I was fascinated by all the different techniques they use – base coats, filler gel, top coats, and this powder that you rub in which turns transparent things into iridescent pink or green. But the problem was that it completely blocked the colour underneath. Then I found these iridescent sticker transfers, and if you apply it really perfectly to the cast it looks exactly like the real thing.'

'I got into this whole world of nails. It's like a secret world of materials that artists don't really know about.'

So now, her workshop downstairs is 'basically a very messy, dusty nail bar' with hundreds of small bottles of paints and gels and varnish; and her assistant Sophie is an actual nail technician who Morgan found via Instagram. Wearing a puffer coat against the cold, Sophie is painstakingly painting glossy sculpting gel on to the apex of the giant snake, scale by scale.

Polly Morgan didn't go to art college – she didn't even do an art A level. 'I was always at my happiest when I was making things but I was just a bit slow to cotton on to that.' She grew up in Little Compton in the Cotswolds, with her parents and two older sisters (Emily is now an editor on ITV News, and Sophie a teacher).

Her mother, Kate, was a secretary and her father, Arden, who had gone to Cirencester agricultural college, worked with animals. 'We had hundreds of angora goats in the fields nearby and he would sell the wool, and then he had llamas briefly but I was never quite sure what they were for, and eventually they got sold to a circus. Then during the BSE crisis he cottoned on to the idea that ostriches were going to be the new thing, so he bought a pair of ostriches, but one died. He was eccentric and very sentimental and attached to all his animals, and I think that was his undoing in the end.'

Morgan studied English at Queen Mary University in London, where she lived in Shoreditch and worked at a bar called the Electricity Showrooms – first as a glass collector, then a waitress, then manager. In the late '90s it was a hangout of the Young British Artists – Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas, the Chapman Brothers – and it was where she met Collishaw. 'Everyone would come in. Mat was friends with the owner and he was going out with Tracey [Emin] at the time, and they'd all arrive really pissed and we'd roll our eyes and think, oh no, we won't be going home any time soon.'

Polly and Mat were both with other people at the time – but they stayed friends and eventually got together 'about 15 years ago'. They were married in May last year.

In 2004, she did a one-day course with taxidermist George Jamieson, and that got her started. Some of her pieces were spotted by Banksy, and in 2005 he invited her to contribute to *Santa's Ghetto*, a group exhibition or a 'squat art concept store' he held regularly. The first work she sold was a white rat curled up in a Champagne glass which was bought by the art maven Vanessa Branson. There have been many exhibitions since.

The Royal Society of Sculptors show is called *False Flags*. The work adorns the vast walls of her studios – vertical rows of false-nail-shaped snakeskin casts, arranged on a sprue (one of those plastic frames that modelling parts come attached to; and the packaging for acrylic nails). They are lined up commandingly in rows of 12, and from a distance look like bunting, or flags, or small shields. There is something tribal about them, with their alluring, intricate designs.

The pieces in *False Flags* will be on sale for between £7,000 and

'I've got big snakes in the freezer and I chop them up and mould them so I know they will fit'

Morgan sees the bodies as raw material, 'just like a lump of clay to a potter'

£11,000 (her work has sold for up to £100,000); her co-exhibitor is her close friend Leena Similu, who makes anthropomorphic ceramics. The snake/nail association was an obvious theme, says Morgan. The exhibition is about sending out signals, to 'draw parallels between the animal world and the way we adorn ourselves with wigs and false nails, appropriation – that idea of either luring people in, or sending out signals to mislead.

'I was reading about how snakes camouflage themselves, or mimic the design of a more venomous breed to put off predators to make them think they're more toxic than they are,' she continues. There is, for example, a snake called a False Cobra which is basically just pretending to be a cobra to put off predators. 'It expands its head in the same way a cobra does, but it's false – and that's what the show is about: the oldest form of appropriation, one thing pretending to be another.'

To experiment, she made an acrylic model of a nail and then stretched a snakeskin over the top ('I found this boring old snake in my freezer – it



was dried up and brown but I noticed it had these incredible scales'). She made several attempts until she had a perfect one, which she cast. She then paints the moulds in batches, in designs based on real snakes, but sometimes taking liberties with accuracy. 'I don't have to be too literal.'

'That's a garter,' she says, pointing to a vividly striped sheath, then, 'that's an Asian beauty rat snake', and then another, based on a cobra hood, which looks like the design on a spitfire fighter plane – almost like a target. 'Cobras are not easy to come by and anyway I wouldn't work on a deadly snake,' she says. 'There are taxidermists in America who have died working on deadly snakes; if you nick the wrong spot...'

In the workshop she shows me the starting point – a white acrylic mould that looks a bit like a cuttlefish – 'they come out of the mould pretty much like that, and then I paint them, in batches. The trick is to add layers of paint and quite often I will sand bits of it back to reveal the white or colours underneath and use oil to bring out the highlight and lowlights.'

The painting, she says, is her favourite part of the process. 'That's the bit I love. I have friends who are painters and they talk about it in a really transcendental way and I understand that now. It seems to appeal to

women more than men – it's very painstaking and I think it's like therapy. I don't have any mental health problems, I can happily say – and I think that's down to creating something every day. That and exercise.

'If you took those two things away, I'd probably be a mess,' she says cheerfully. 'Wanna look in the freezer?'

The freezer contains a tangle of dead, mostly skinned, partly chopped-up snakes – casualties supplied by professional snake breeders. And an ice-cream carton containing two deceased bearded dragons ('I'm quite excited by these'). What do her children think about all this? They are unfazed, she says. 'They get quite excited by the weird parcels I get in the post. Mostly they say, can I touch it?'

She mentions the time when she was asked to give a talk about her profession during lockdown, to her son's reception class, on Zoom. Other parents had done the same thing and she was the last up. The teacher apologised – it was the end of the day and the children were very wriggly and not sitting down or paying attention.

Until Morgan came on the screen. 'Now then,' she said. 'Who wants to see some dead snakes in the freezer?'

And they all shouted 'Yeah!' and instantly sat down.

Nowadays, when she goes to collect her children, she is known as Snake Lady.

Morgan has clear views about taxidermy – she sees the bodies as raw material, 'just like a lump of clay to a potter'. She is not bothered about skinning and dismembering animals (and tried to feed her dogs the raw meat because she'd read it's the healthiest diet, 'but they are too domesticated') but she is, she says, very squeamish about living things.

'I remember my dog getting a cut on his leg once, he had a big gash and you could see the bone and the flesh and it looked exactly like the cut I would make if I was skinning a fox – but I could barely look at it.

'It's amazing to me what vets and surgeons can do, because there's such a consequence to their actions. That would terrify me and I'd be really squeamish about that. [With what I do] there's no consequence.'

Or rather the consequences are different. Polly Morgan extracts magic from the macabre – her creatures are preserved in an entirely new context, suspended in a different kind of reality.

Polly Morgan, OPEN! CHANNEL! FLOW! and Polly Morgan & Leena Similu, False Flags are at the Royal Society of Sculptors from 27 February to 29 April; sculptors.org.uk. Morgan's work is also part of BIG WOMEN, curated by Sarah Lucas, at Firstsite, Colchester, from today until 18 June; firstsite.uk



Above: *Unite in a Common Goal*, 2020. Right: *Understand Your Audience*, 2021



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Food



MARK HIX

GET FAMILIAR
WITH FRENCH
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VEG YOUR BETS

Diana Henry's luxurious dinner-party dishes will please
vegetarian friends and meat eaters alike

Photographs by HAARALA HAMILTON Food styling by VALERIE BERRY

The Telegraph's award-winning food writer Diana Henry on feeding a crowd of friends with 'grand' vegetarian fare



My cooking so far this year has had two aims – to warm me and to anchor me. It's amazing how single-minded you become about warmth. You can't do much if you're freezing, including think. Last night I came home, put a pot of stock from the fridge on the hob and added chopped leeks, potatoes, carrots and lentils. There was no sautéing or sweating of vegetables, no attempt to make anything beyond basic. I stood at the hob in my coat, willing the soup to cook faster. After 20 minutes, I crushed the vegetables with a potato masher and hugged a warm bowlful. Stews and soups have sustained us this year and I haven't wanted anything more complicated. But I'm beginning to miss food that's a bit more luxurious, that's taken a little effort.

Valentine's is coming up, but I don't celebrate it these days. I haven't had butterflies in my tummy over what the postman might bring since 1981. It was thrilling to study postmarks and handwriting – even taste in cards – guessing the identity of the sender. More recently, I've gone out for Valentine's dinners but never really enjoyed them.

Cynical though I may be, Valentine's Day is, at least, something special. We're still enduring long dark days with nothing significant in the calendar until Easter. Valentine's is a celebration of love; it might be romantic love (the kind that breaks your heart) but it's love, nonetheless. I think we need a day that celebrates love between friends. Friendship is now seen as a factor in our physical as well as our mental health. I keep reading pieces about how Covid is still affecting our ability to be sociable (I have not been untouched by this), so I'm taking the bull by the horns. Instead of celebrating Valentine's Day I'm going to throw a dinner for friends, for the people who sustain us as much as a real fire and a big bowl of soup.

I don't want to make a dish for meat eaters and a different one for vegetarians, so I'm doing what I think of as 'grand' vegetarian. I know a mixture of vegetable dishes can constitute a meal and, in many cultures, does. I also know one 'statement' vegetable dish is easier to make than lots of smaller ones. The dishes I offer today are luxurious. Two of them are built, literally, of layers; you experience contrasts as you eat. The

lasagne on p41 is primarily bosky, then there's the nutmeggy sweetness of bechamel and the umami hit of strong cheese. If you offered me this dish or steak with a creamy peppercorn sauce, I'd take the lasagne for the layers and the melting softness of pasta.

The winter pie is inspired by strudel, coulibiac and beef wellington. These are all wrapped in pastry – enclosed in buttery richness – and built on layers. Traditional coulibiac has salmon as the star with layers of mushrooms, rice, eggs, onions and dill. I first made the pie overleaf only recently, and the contrasts and alliances hiding inside have made it a favourite. I think there are just enough elements, but if you want a slightly sweet layer, add pumpkin.

The pumpkin dish below – there's no pastry, its beauty is boldly on show – doesn't depend on layers but has contrasts: sweet, spiced pumpkin; cold, smoky yogurt; hot paprika butter; and robust, slightly bitter leaves.

A celebration of friendship, a dish that's worthy of it and your favourite people at your table. It's the best way to survive February's gloom. And you don't even need to buy a card.

Spiced pumpkin with lentils, cavolo nero and smoky yogurt

Prep time: 20 minutes
Cook time: 50 minutes

Serves 6

It sounds like a lot of components but each one is simple. You can make yogurt smoky by adding a little oak-smoked water (it's produced by Halen Môn and stocked by Ocado), or just leave the yogurt plain.

INGREDIENTS For the lentils and cavolo nero

- 2½ tbsp olive oil
- ½ onion, finely chopped
- ½ celery stick, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

- 200g puy or black beluga lentils (black ones are better if you can get them)
- 400g cavolo nero, leaf parts removed and torn into pieces, ribs discarded
- a pinch of chilli flakes
- 200ml dry white wine
- 4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1-2 tbsp white balsamic vinegar, to taste
- a good squeeze of lemon, to taste
- 2 tbsp chopped dill

For the pumpkin

- 3 tsp caraway seeds
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- a generous grating of nutmeg
- 4 tbsp olive oil

- 1.5kg pumpkin or squash, deseeded, cut into wedges 2.5cm thick, and peeled if you like
- 20g butter
- ½ tsp hot and sweet paprika

For the yogurt

- 400g Greek yogurt
- 1 tsp oak-smoked water (more if you think it needs it, but go easy)
- 4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

METHOD

Heat the oven to 200C/190C fan/gas mark 6.

Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a saucepan and add the onion and celery. Sauté until soft

but not coloured. Add one chopped garlic clove and cook for a further two minutes, then add the lentils and enough water to cover by about 5cm. Bring to the boil then turn down the heat and simmer for about 20 minutes, or until the lentils are tender (they may need longer, depending on their age, but they must retain their shape).

Meanwhile, cook the pumpkin. Mix together the caraway seeds, ginger, nutmeg and olive oil. Put the wedges in a roasting tin and pour the spicy mixture over them, using your hands to make sure the pumpkin gets coated all

over. Season. Put into the oven and cook for 20 minutes, or until tender and slightly caramelised at the tips, turning the pieces over halfway through.

Put a tablespoon and a half of olive oil in a sauté pan and add the cavolo nero. Sauté for about three minutes, then add the rest of the garlic and the chilli flakes. Cook for another two minutes then add the wine, cover, and cook for about four minutes.

Remove the lid and increase the heat so the wine evaporates. The cavolo nero should still seem bright and be a little 'chewy'.

Drain the lentils and add four tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil, the balsamic vinegar and lemon juice to taste, the dill and some seasoning. Mix with the cavolo nero and taste again for seasoning.

Mix together the yogurt ingredients and season with salt.

Gently reheat the lentils and cavolo nero. Spread them in a broad, shallow serving dish.

Put the pumpkin on top. Spoon over the yogurt. Quickly melt the butter and add the paprika. Drizzle this over the dish. The rust-coloured butter looks great against the yogurt.

Serve immediately.



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Winter vegetable pie with dill cream

Prep time: 30 minutes, plus chilling time
Cook time: 1 hour
40 minutes

Serves 8

This is a combination of a strudel, a wellington and coulibiac. The best thing is to cook the fillings – except the cabbage – the day before, then cook the cabbage, assemble and bake the pie on the day.

INGREDIENTS

- 100g mixed basmati and wild rice
- 3½ tsp olive oil
- 250g chestnut mushrooms, sliced
- 1½ tsp crème fraîche
- 1 tsp chopped dill
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, grated to a purée
- 20g unsalted butter
- 450g celeriac, peeled and cut into 1.5cm cubes

- 100ml dry white wine or white vermouth
- 250g cooked (not pickled) beetroot, cut into 1.5cm cubes
- ¾ tsp paprika (you might want more)
- 2½ tsp soft light-brown sugar
- 1 tsp cider vinegar (you might want more)
- 1 tsp caraway seeds (you might want more)
- 300g savoy cabbage, quartered, coarse central core removed and leaves cut into broad strips
- 600g puff pastry (I use Dorset puff pastry)
- flour, for dusting
- 1 egg beaten with 1 tbsp milk

For the cream

- 300g crème fraîche
- 75g dill pickles, chopped (I use Vadasz fresh pickles), plus 3 tbsp pickle juice
- 2 tsp caster sugar, or to taste

- 2 tsp German mustard, or Dijon if you don't have German
- 2 small shallots, finely chopped
- 2 tsp chopped dill

METHOD

Put the rice in a pan and cover it with 2cm of water. Bring to the boil, then boil hard until you can see that the surface has become pitted and the water has disappeared. Pull the pan off the heat, cover it and leave for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat a tablespoon and a half of oil in a large frying pan and cook the mushrooms. You need to get a really good colour all over them. Season and cook until the liquid that comes out of them has completely evaporated.

Add the crème fraîche and dill, and taste for seasoning. The

mushrooms should be well seasoned. Scrape into a bowl and set aside.

Wipe out the pan with kitchen paper and heat a tablespoon of olive oil. Sauté the onion over a medium heat until golden and soft. Add the garlic and cook for two minutes. Season and stir this into the rice.

Add half a tablespoon of olive oil and 5g of the butter to the frying pan and add the celeriac. Toss this around over a medium heat until the pieces develop golden patches. Add the wine or vermouth, bring to the boil, turn the heat down and cover. Cook the celeriac until almost tender. Remove the lid and turn the heat up until the wine has evaporated. Transfer the celeriac to a bowl.

Heat another half a tablespoon of oil and 5g of butter in the pan and

add the beetroot. Toss this around, adding the paprika and some seasoning, then the sugar. Keep stirring until you can smell that the sugar is slightly caramelising. Add the vinegar, let it evaporate and taste for heat (the paprika), seasoning and sweet-sour balance.

Lastly, melt the remaining 10g butter in a saucepan that will hold the cabbage. Add the caraway seeds and turn them over in the butter. Add the cabbage, some seasoning – you need plenty of black pepper – and two tablespoons of water. Cover and cook for four minutes. Shake the pan every so often.

Remove the lid. Cook until the water has boiled off and the cabbage is glossy (don't overcook it). Set aside to cool.

Roll out a third of the

pastry on a lightly floured piece of baking parchment to a rectangle of 38x18cm, keeping it an even thickness, for the base of the pie. Roll out the rest of the pastry to a 42x26cm rectangle; this will cover the filling. Score this piece with a knife to make a trellis design. Keep both pieces of pastry in the fridge until you're ready to assemble the pie.

When you're ready, check your various fillings are seasoned properly and take the pastry out of the fridge. Position the smaller rectangle, still on its parchment, with a short edge towards you. Spoon the rice in a thick line down the centre, leaving 2cm uncovered at the top and bottom.

Put the celeriac on top, followed by the mushrooms, cabbage and beetroot. You need to form a raised filling, like a hump.

Using some of the egg mixture, paint the edges of the pastry. Place the larger rectangle on top, draping it tightly around the filling to avoid air bubbles. Gently press on the edges to seal the sides and ends. Trim any excess pastry, and crimp the edges or press down with a fork.

Lifting the pie on the paper, slide it on to a large baking sheet. Put in the coldest bit of your fridge for an hour.

Heat the oven to 210C/200C fan/gas mark 6½. Juices may run out of the pie so it's a good idea to put an oven tray under the baking sheet the pie is cooking on.

Brush the pie with the rest of the egg mixture and make four small incisions in the top so steam can escape. Bake for 45 minutes, turning it round halfway through. It should be golden brown. Let the pie settle for 15 minutes.


Stir the crème fraîche to loosen it then add the other ingredients for the cream. Serve with the pie.



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Ultimate mushroom lasagne

Prep time: 25 minutes, plus infusing time
Cook time: 1 hour
50 minutes

Serves 8

My idea of heaven. It's based on vincisgrassi – a rich lasagne that includes prosciutto and, sometimes, chicken livers – but has no meat.

INGREDIENTS

For the bechamel

- 1.2 litres whole milk
- 2 bay leaves
- ½ large onion, peeled
- 12 black peppercorns
- fresh nutmeg
- 75g butter
- 115g plain flour
- 100-200ml double cream (optional)

For the lasagne

- 20g unsalted butter, plus extra for greasing
- 30g dried porcini
- 4½ tbsp olive oil
- 1.2kg mushrooms (a mixture of oyster, chestnut and shiitake), sliced
- 3 long shallots, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, grated to a purée
- 250g fresh lasagne sheets (I use The Fresh Pasta Company's egg lasagne sheets)
- 135g Parmesan, finely grated, or vegetarian alternative

METHOD

For the bechamel, put the milk, bay leaves, onion, peppercorns and

a grating of nutmeg in a pan, and heat to just below boiling. Take off the heat, leave to infuse for an hour, then strain.

Meanwhile, butter an ovenproof dish approximately 30x20cm and 7cm deep. Put the dried porcini in a bowl and pour in just enough boiling water to cover.

Heat one tablespoon of the oil in a large frying pan and sauté a quarter of the sliced mushrooms, getting a good colour all over them. Add a little knob of the butter for flavour. Season and continue to cook until the mushrooms have exuded their moisture and it has evaporated – any excess moisture

will make your lasagne watery. Tip into a bowl. Cook the rest of the mushrooms in batches in the same way, adding each batch to the bowl.

Add the final half a tablespoon of oil to the pan and gently sauté the shallots. When they're soft, add the garlic and cook for two minutes. Stir into the mushrooms.

Drain the porcini – reserving the liquid – and chop them. Put these in the frying pan with the reserved liquid and cook until the liquid has disappeared. Add the porcini to the rest of the mushrooms. Set aside.

Melt the butter for the bechamel in a saucepan and add the flour. Stir

together until you have a ball of butter and flour. Take the pan off the heat and add the strained milk a little at a time, stirring in each addition so the mixture doesn't go lumpy. When you have combined everything, put the pan back on the hob and heat, stirring all the time, until the mixture begins to boil and thicken. Turn the heat down a little and cook for five minutes so the sauce doesn't taste 'floury'. Season well and add more freshly grated nutmeg.

Add the mushrooms to the bechamel. If the sauce seems too thick, add some cream then

check your seasoning.

Heat the oven to 210C/200C fan/gas mark 7.

Cook the pasta sheets according to the packet instructions, then drain. Put a layer of sheets in the bottom of the dish, cutting them to fit; don't overlap. Cover with a layer of sauce and scatter on some cheese. Follow with another pasta layer, a layer of sauce and a scattering of cheese.

Continue layering, keeping enough sauce to spoon over the top and a final sprinkle of cheese. Bake for 40 minutes, or until the top is brown and bubbling.

Let the dish settle, out of the oven, for about 15 minutes before serving.



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MARK HIX

French connections

When I went to catering college in 1979 we were taught only French classical cooking techniques and all the menus were written in French. When I moved to London two years later, nearly all the menus there were also written in French, and the best restaurants were French-influenced.

Much has changed, of course – British cuisine has polished its previously rather tarnished reputation and London is one of the top gastronomic cities in the world – but we remain familiar with the French classics. The following trio should be part of everyone’s repertoire.

MOULES MARINIÈRE

Prep time: 20 minutes
Cook time: 10 minutes

Serves 4

This recipe is the simplest and quickest way to enjoy mussels, but another option is to serve them mixed with cockles and/or clams. I've also had great Asian versions. You can add cream to the classic moules marinière to give them a luxurious finish, as I do here, but that's up to you. If your mussels have already been cleaned and scrubbed, simply pull out the cotton-like beards, then rinse in cold water. Discard any that are open and don't close when you handle them.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 large shallots, finely chopped
- 5 garlic cloves, grated
- 125ml white wine
- 200ml fish stock
- 2kg mussels, scrubbed and de-bearded
- approx 100ml double cream (optional)
- 2 tbsp chopped parsley

METHOD

Put the shallots, garlic, white wine and fish stock in a large saucepan. Bring to the boil, season with salt and pepper, then add the mussels, cream, if using, and chopped parsley. Cover with a lid and cook on a high heat for roughly 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally, until all the mussels have opened (one or two may not, but don't keep cooking just for them; simply discard the closed ones). Serve immediately.





STEAK TARTARE

Prep time: 20 minutes

Serves 4

Some of the few UK restaurants that still serve steak tartare will actually mix it in front of you at the table. It's crucial to use very good-quality beef here, and preferably meat that hasn't been hung for too long. You can use fillet of course, but the eye of the meat from a rump or trimmed sirloin are good because you can cut them with the grain then chop – and the flavour will be far superior to fillet. Or go for chateaubriand, which I've used here. It's about the same price as sirloin, and a rather overlooked cut that no one tends to buy any more. You can serve a small raw egg yolk on your steak tartare if you wish, or just mix it in with the meat.

INGREDIENTS

- 500g very fresh lean fillet, sirloin, chateaubriand or rump steak
- 2 medium shallots, very finely chopped

- 50g capers, drained, rinsed and finely chopped
- 50g gherkins, finely chopped
- ½ tbsp tomato ketchup, or as needed
- 2 tsp Worcestershire sauce, or as needed
- a few dashes of Tabasco, or as needed
- 1 tbsp rapeseed or olive oil
- 4 small egg yolks (optional)

METHOD

With a very sharp chopping knife, chop your beef as finely as possible. Mix all of the ingredients together with the chopped meat (adding the egg yolks at this stage if you like) and season to taste. You may wish to add a little more Tabasco, ketchup or Worcestershire sauce; it's up to you. Divide the tartare mixture between four plates or, if you prefer, divide it into four and push each portion into a ring mould to make a neat disc. If you want to add an egg yolk now, carefully set one on each serving. Serve with a leafy salad and chips, or with toast.

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CREME BRULEE

Prep time: 10 minutes,
plus chilling time
Cook time: 20 minutes

Serves 4

A classic and simple French dessert that shouldn't be messed with. I've used Burford Browns here, which give the custard a really deep, rich orange colour, but any hens' eggs will be fine. You can use the egg whites for meringue or pop them in the freezer to use when making a consommé.

INGREDIENTS

- 600ml double or Jersey cream
- ½ vanilla pod, split lengthways
- 5 egg yolks
- 25g caster sugar
- 3-4 tbsp demerara sugar, to glaze

METHOD

Put the cream in a saucepan and scrape the seeds from the vanilla pod into it. Throw in the pod.

Gently bring to the boil, whisking every so often to infuse the milk with the vanilla, then remove from the heat and leave for about 10 minutes.

Beat the egg yolks and caster sugar together in a bowl until well combined, then pour the cream over them, discarding the vanilla pods.

Return the mixture to a clean, heavy-bottomed or non-stick saucepan and heat gently, stirring constantly until it thickens - don't let it boil. While it cooks, give it an occasional whisk off the heat then return it to the heat.

This should take about 6-7 minutes in total, but it's important to get in the corners of the pan and keep the custard moving.

Pour into a large, round, shallow dish or individual dishes (you want the mixture to be about 2cm deep) and leave to set in the fridge for a few hours or overnight.

When you're ready to serve, sprinkle the demerara sugar evenly over the surface of the set custard. Light a kitchen blowtorch and work the flame evenly over the sugar until it caramelises. If you don't have a blow torch, put the crème under an extremely hot grill to brown. Return to the fridge for 30 minutes before serving.

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Ed Cumming That's amore?



Valentine's Day is not easy to love. The horror in restaurants is obvious. Dining rooms become a monoculture of duos, like a mass wedding for the members of a cult.

Young couples peer around the darkened rooms, desperate for examples of what they might become. All they see is a lonely archipelago of tables for two, populated by the Ghosts of Marriage Yet to Come. The only way to get through it is to pretend you're doing it ironically, but you are still part of the Valentine's Industrial Complex and you are fooling nobody but yourselves.

Then there are the special menus. At Alain Ducasse at the Dorchester, the *coup de grâce* is a heart-shaped dessert that splits easily in two, which is the last thing the Mayfair divorce lawyers want to encourage. At Soho's Choto Matte, a sharing platter has been designed around ingredients with aphrodisiac qualities, which apparently means sushi and avocado. Some at least try to have a bit of fun with it: at its four London restaurants, Temper offers heart and tongue skewers.

Shops do their best to put you off, too, with deals on rosé and chocolate and lobster. The worst offender was M&S's heart-shaped 'Love Sausage', a cursed item, possibly dreamt up by an abattoir intern on a fag break, the sort of thing that might be left at the scene by a serial killer. I haven't seen it this year, but that doesn't mean it, and its imitators, are not lying in wait in the chiller aisles. You can't be too vigilant when it comes to heart-shaped sausages.

Yet despite this evidence, I don't hate V-Day, because it has one redeeming quality. It is the one day of the year where overambitious event cooking (OEC) at home is not only sanctioned but encouraged. You must stay in, because it's your chance to indulge your wildest *Master-*



Sushi is the star of one London restaurant's aphrodisiac-themed platter

Chef fantasies. Don't be put off by the fact that you have never eaten it, let alone made it. Back yourself. How hard can it be? Wellington that beef. Bake that Alaska. A l'orange yourself a little duckie. This is no time for a one-pot wonder: 14 February is an armistice. For one day, in the service of showing off, you are allowed to pile up as many pots and pans as you like.

This overconfidence has been the source of many of my more memorable cooking experiences. I have served oysters flecked with blood, having repeatedly stabbed my palms with a new shucker. No, that's not Tabasco, darling...

For a group of fellow singletons, I once slopped out 'Swiss soufflés': little pucks of soggy cake floating in watery cheese broth. Another experiment with spun sugar left the kitchen coated in stringy caramel, as though Willy

Wonka locked Jackson Pollock inside the factory by mistake. For months afterwards, I would find little brown daubs where they shouldn't be.

None of this was edible, but it didn't matter. Humiliation is a great social lubricant and no food is more romantic than toast anyway. This is the beauty of Valentine's Day. It doesn't improve your situation at home, but it makes the outside world much less appealing. Whether you are with a partner, or friends, or family, or solo, you can be certain that whatever meal you contrive is not as bad as anything diners face at restaurants, where they lurk in the candlelight, looming over their heart-shaped sausages, wondering where it all went wrong. Enjoy the free pass. What is love if not the realisation that you could have it so much worse?

This week's specials...

The latest news and views from the culinary scene



Remembering Jimi

A plaque has been unveiled to honour Folajimi - 'Jimi' - Olubunmi-Adewole, a waiter at the famed Cinnamon Club restaurant in Westminster, who died after jumping into the Thames to save a woman's life in April 2021.



Roe with it

The caviar industry continues to ignore the cost-of-living crisis. Specialists Petrossian have opened a café in South Kensington, with a menu including boiled egg, baked potato and croques... all served with, yep, caviar.



Martin's starting...

ITV's James Martin is getting back to his day job, opening not one but two restaurants at Lygon Arms in the Cotswolds: called Grill and Tavern. One will be, um, flame-focused, the other will have more of a, er, pub vibe.



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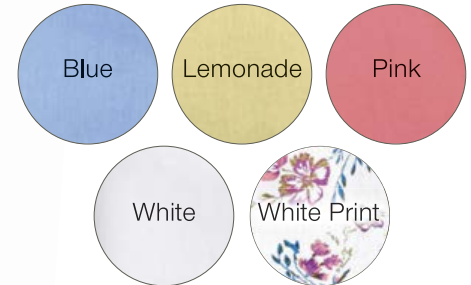
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Victoria Moore A wine romance



The British pursue cheap wine so keenly that finding the most inexpensive bottle we can manage to 'get down' could almost be considered a national pastime. We're good at it, too, though of course it helps that there are plenty of extremely good inexpensive wines on the high street. As a result, a mere four per cent of wine in the UK retails at over £10, according to market analyst Nielsen, and while there is a caveat – as commentator Chris Losh points out, 'the data behind this figure does not include many independents and some online businesses where prices are higher' – supermarkets sell so much of the wine we drink that it paints a pretty accurate brushstroke picture.

So what happens when you want a different sort of drinking experience – let's call it the full cinematic, rather than clips on YouTube on an iPhone? Some stroll down to the cellar and reach for one of the bottles their private wine buyer Hugo suggested in his latest email, or a burgundy they bought years ago, *en primeur*. For others, trained only on discounts and low prices, there's very often a system malfunction. I'm often asked for advice on buying £15+ bottles, and Valentine's Day this week has acted as a bit of a prompt, so here goes.

Spending more on wine works better if you give yourself time to do it properly. Don't just dump a £15 or £20 bottle in your trolley at Aldi. If you like buying online then find a website that suits you and make time to browse.

I'll suggest a few. The Wine Barn is excellent for those who love German wines. Yapp is brilliant on Corsica, the Loire, the Rhône, southern France. The buyers at Haynes Hanson & Clark favour wines that are fresh, finely delineated and fragrant (try Scorpo Noirien Pinot Noir from the Mornington Peninsula in Australia, 13.5%, £25.30 – dreamy with a homemade burger). Those with traditional tastes (Chablis, Bordeaux, and so



on) who also like modern classics (Margaret River, South Africa) could check out Private Cellar (try Lenton Brae Southside Chardonnay 2019 – 13%, £18.50 – with prawn cocktail, or Château Julia Assyrtiko 2021 – 13.5%, £18.50 – with crab linguine) and Lay & Wheeler (its very tempting emails will introduce you to parcels of wine that sell out fast).

Which raises another point: smaller production wines tend not to be constantly available, so be prepared to buy wines you like the sound of when you see them rather than when you hope to drink them. For instance, I love Chianti Classico and once bought a mixed box of

wines from Riecine, Fontodi and Felsina from The Wine Society the moment a new vintage dropped, knowing they wouldn't be in stock for long (The Wine Society currently has the beautiful Fontodi Chianti Classico 2019, 14.5%, £22.50; I'd pair it with leg of lamb).

Another good website, particularly for more contemporary wines, is The Sourcing Table. Strong on Spain and South Africa, it stocks a broad range of orange wines and seeks out wines with organic or sustainable credentials.

And, of course, there are local wine shops. Mine is Lea & Sandeman, which is brilliant on northern Italy, Champagne and Bordeaux, but has quirkier wines too (like the Quinta da Romaneira wines from Portugal, great with steak). If you have a good wine shop nearby, explore it. If you repeat-visit, you may well find someone there who learns your taste and becomes a personal wine guide.

WINE CELLAR

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WINES OF THE WEEK



Porcupine Ridge Shiraz 2022, South Africa (14.5%; Waitrose, £5.99 down from £8.49 until Tuesday)

A steal of a Cape red, with dark fruit and notes of smoky bacon, wood spice and black pepper.



Finest Peumo Carménère 2019, Chile (14%; Tesco, £8)

A rich red that smells of coffee beans, black tea, mulberries and red peppers. It's great with cottage pie.



Château la Canorgue Rouge 2020, Luberon, Provence (14.5%; yapp.co.uk, £17.75)

Scents of tobacco, dried fig, dried herb and berries waft out of this blend of carignan, syrah and grenache. One for steak and chips or mushroom risotto.

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This clifftop retreat looks out to Mawgan Porth beach. Interiors are inspired by Scandinavian design, and the ethos is natural and sustainable. The Herring restaurant serves excellent dishes made with local produce.

Sherelle Jacobs, Telegraph Travel writer, says:
"Funky Bedruthan is ideal for a break with a spa, craft workshops, and a lovely on-site shop."

- ◆ Call **0330 162 3696** quote **TELEM1102**
- ◆ telegraph.co.uk/tt-bedruthan

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- ◆ Return car ferry from Southampton
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This handsome hotel sits in exotic gardens on Ventnor's scenic coast, with commanding views across the bay. Victorian interiors are enhanced by contemporary furnishings. Serving exceptional modern British dishes, Geranium restaurant has held two AA Rosettes for over 25 years.

Antonia Windsor, Telegraph Travel writer, says:

"One of the Isle of Wight's most prestigious addresses, with excellent cuisine and lofty rooms."

- ◆ Call **0333 060 1492** quote **TELEM1102**
- ◆ telegraph.co.uk/tt-theroyal

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Overlooking scenic Christchurch Harbour, this boutique hotel is in the historic town of Christchurch with its priory and castle. The onsite spa features an indoor swimming pool, steam room, sauna and salt room, plus a range of treatments and a gym. Dine on impressive British and international dishes at The Jetty or Upper Deck restaurants. Nearby is the fabled New Forest.

Benjamin Parker, Telegraph Travel writer, says:

"Christchurch's arresting natural harbour is the backdrop to this relaxed seaside-vibes hotel with extensive spa facilities."

- ◆ Call **0330 818 9636** quote **TELEM1102**
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William Sitwell

'I'm uneasy about pasta in sharing plates'

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THE MENU

Crostini
•
Vitello tonnato
•
Salad of puntarella
•
Pappardelle with
slow-cooked oxtail
and shin of beef
•
Squid ink spaghetti
with a sauce of
sardines, garlic,
sweet peppers and
tomato
•
Bucatini with a
bolognese of
winter vegetables

Pasta, in authentic Italian settings, is one part of a meal. Of course we Brits grabbed and bastardised it, making it the whole shebang, and now there are joints where pasta is front, centre, the start and the finish. Our digestion pays the price.

And they encourage this at Notto. If there are two of you they suggest sharing three pasta dishes. And as adjuncts to this they lob in crostini and Parmesan butter biscuits as snacks (although there are starters like vitello tonnato, chestnut soup and burrata). So if you want carbs, this is the place.

Notto started as a London-only delivery company, one of several businesses run by the brilliant chef Phil Howard, an exceptional cook, who ran The Square in Mayfair for 20 years before opening a posh place in Chelsea, another in Barnes and another in La Plagne, in the French Alps (which means he *has* to go skiing for much of the year).

I wonder if Notto is hoping to be a rollout; open some in London then a few more across the UK before, five years later, finding some venture capitalist to take the burden off you in return for a comfy life in a chalet in the Alps with a driveway that has under-floor heating.

Who knows, but here's the first one: stark, pale, bright, with lots of glass, breezy, informal and with elegant service and not a hint of cosiness.

If this is a joint for a quick bite at lunchtime for office workers around Piccadilly then it's a considerable leap for the wallet from a sandwich, as the pasta averages at £13 and they reckon you need 1.5 of them and possibly some crostini. Which isn't a cheap bowl of pasta lunch.

But then neither is this a place to linger. With glass covering the entirety of one side that looks on to Church Place,



you're completely exposed to the street.

But to the food: an early bite of Parmesan butter biscuits offered an irresistible treat. They're the sort of thing I would stalk a waitress at a wedding for. And as my guest has a dairy intolerance I had to eat all three.

Happy days. And they were better than the ensuing crostini which, heaved variously with minced chicken liver and mushroom, were obviously not for sharing and so were too piled high and too rich.

I had an excellent vitello tonnato, which was a delightful and generous plate, an inviting whirlpool of swirling tuna and cream and capers. Meanwhile, my guest Beverley was freshening up with a perky salad of puntarella with fennel and an anchovy and orange

Alternate mouthfuls of fishy squid and beef shin become a rather less distinguished and confused stew

dressing: the food equivalent of having your head pushed into a pile of snow, if you like that kind of thing.

Then came the pastas. Three bowls of pappardelle ragu, squid ink spaghetti and root vegetable bucatini. Here the sharing concept collapses. I'm uneasy even twisting my fork into my wife's plate of pasta, and me and Bev hadn't even got to first base.

So out of my mouth comes my fork, and into the pasta, awkwardly decanted on to a smaller plate before the next mouth journey. And we rather felt the flavours then merged into one; well-made pastas but alternate mouthfuls of fishy squid and beef shin becoming a rather less distinguished and confused stew.

There was one thing I did love, though. Head to the loos and appreciate the collection of chopping boards hanging on the wall of the stairwell. They are beautiful things. Handmade, rustic, misshapen and worn, they are tactile objects, now works of art. Notto needs a dose of their warmth and romance.

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Style

It's Valentine's week, so set pulses racing in pink and red, says Tamara Abraham

It's the colour of danger, rage and passion, and can be a potent aphrodisiac too – we speak, of course, of red. The red rose is a token of love, and studies have shown that those who wear red in their dating profile photos are more likely to generate a response. That's why 14 February is *the* time to channel your inner Elizabeth Taylor.

Pink, red's softer sibling, is today more associated with femininity, youth and romance; but up until the 1920s it was an indication of masculine traits, and it was beloved of court peacocks in the 18th century. Given we might blush when flirting, pink plays its own role in the art of seduction.



Elizabeth Taylor in 1953

It can have just as much impact as red: some of the most outstanding fashion moments of the last 12 months have been in pink (see Florence Pugh in Rodarte at the British Independent Film Awards, or Elle Fanning in Armani Privé at Cannes), while Viva Magenta is Pantone's colour of the year. And it's not just for the ingénues: it looks so striking with grey hair, it's become a favourite with A-list silver foxes too, such as *Succession's* Jeremy Strong.

You may require a little courage to embrace the red/pink end of the colour spectrum, but even a swipe of crimson lipstick can have a transformative effect.

Above all, there's something joyful about these tones. It's hard to feel blue when you're wearing red or pink – so whatever the coming week holds, these shades will work for every kind of Valentine's celebration.

Shopping by
Sophie Tobin



Clockwise from top left: a model in red evening gloves in 1966. Marilyn Monroe in 1955. Nancy Reagan, 1988. Liz Hurley with Valentino Garavani in 1997. Actor Morgan Fairchild in 1985. Victoria Beckham in 2017. Lady Diana Spencer, 1981. Influencer Alexandra Guerin in 2019. Sophia Loren in 1957. Timothée Chalamet in 2022





Tory Burch

£85, Boden



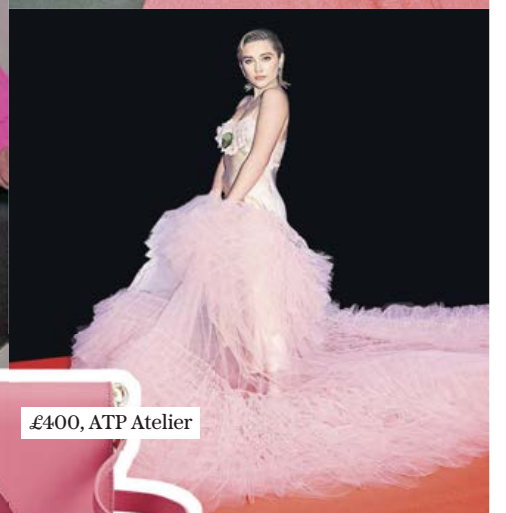
£290, Issue Twelve

Clockwise from above left: Jeremy Strong at the 2022 SAG Awards. Elle Fanning at Cannes last year. Models c1955. Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1993. Florence Pugh at the British Independent Film Awards last year. Paris Hilton in 2001

£245, Etre Cecile



Erdem



£400, ATP Atelier



Lisa Armstrong

Is this the perfect date night outfit?

1. Posh Lipstick in Pop, £37, Victoria Beckham Beauty (victoriabeckhambeauty.com)
2. Silk shirt, £195, Lyia (lyiastudio.com)
3. Silk shirt, £230, With Nothing Underneath (withnothingunderneath.com)
4. Patent-leather shoes, £130, Boden (boden.co.uk)
5. Bottega Veneta The Classic mini leather shoulder bag, rent from £55 a week, Cocoon (cocoon.club)

LISA WEARS

Silk shirt, £100, Sézane (sezane.com). Trousers, from a selection, Sassi Holford (sassiholford.com). Patent-leather shoes, £229, LK Bennett (lkbenneett.com). 30 Montaigne East-West bag, £2,550, Dior (dior.com)

Far right: pearl and crystal earrings, £145, Soru (soru jewellery.com). Diamond and gold hoop earrings, £250 each, Otiumberg (otiumberg.com)

Right: gold-plated bracelet, £115, Missoma (missoma.com). All other jewellery, Lisa's own



When it comes to date nights, the inadvertent faux pas can blow up in your face. How were you to know that their certifiably insane ex wore the exact same shade of blue? Or that the person sitting opposite you, looking a bit sweaty and swivel-eyed, finds Rouge Noir nails triggering?

Perfume? A Proustian minefield, as anyone who's read Prince Harry's book will know. One sniff of Van Cleef & Arpels' First conjured up the corporeal presence of his mother so powerfully he almost couldn't cope.

Shoes? Come on, who hasn't been fatally put off by a potential love interest's footwear? Superficial, yes. But that's the human race for you. We can't help it. We're hardwired to make snap decisions when it really matters.

No one promised they'd be the right decisions.

So we – by which I mean the committee of the stylist, photographer and make-up artist who were in the studio with me – came up with this look, which will (hopefully) circumnavigate such barriers to romantic bliss.

Classic heels that you can walk in easily – you don't really want to come off as the kind of person who has to be limo'ed to the table. Monochrome outfit, but with the light colour up top so as not to be too harsh. A blouse that's not over-the-top frilly, but different enough from a basic that you won't be mistaken for the staff. Focus on this because you're probably going to be seen from tabletop up. Perfectly cut trousers but not from any obvious designer, because

overdesigned black trousers are the mark of a troubled mind.

OK, maybe I'm being harsh there – but have you seen how judgey everyone is Out There?

Since we didn't want to come across as totally vanilla, we included a Dior bag, which might weed out some Marxists, although not if they're French. If you love a fancy bag and you've worked your socks off to buy one, why pretend otherwise? Unless you've told everyone you're a vegan... As for jewellery, it's pretty much what you fancy – you need to show some of your personality.

Don't be tempted to overdo the make-up if that's not your usual style. Wrong message and no one wants to get halfway through the evening and discover it's all gone to smear. That said, here we

layered on – and blotted – lashings of red lipstick, a notorious repellent for men who might otherwise lunge at your lips on the first date (if you want them to lunge, you can always surreptitiously wipe it off after drink two). If you're eating, I'd counsel against a bright lipstick as it can wear off in uneven patches, which rather mitigates the worldly image you're going for.

That's it. Making sure your clothes are all ethically produced and avoiding endangered species is a good rule of thumb at all times. Good underwear, clean hair, nothing that doesn't feel comfortable (all of which still applies to your 900th date with the same person, by the way). Ultimately it's about making an effort – enticement rather than grand deception.

85-year-old hillwalking again thanks to Sore Joint Cream

Did you know that over 9 million people in the UK suffer with arthritic joint problems?

Scottish company Natural Skincare Factory, based in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, have been selling their ActiveCare Cream for over 20 years. Soothing those problematic joints and getting them moving again. It doesn't interfere with any medications from your doctor and in many cases, it's been known to make a difference in as little as 24 hours.

Up until recent years, Mr Mitchell from Perthshire spent nearly every weekend walking up in the hills. He found his poor joint health was stopping him 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 problematic joints getting them moving again. Company owner Adrian Whalley (44, 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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Jan Masters

Soothing rituals to help keep calm

Adopting a self-care routine can help mental well-being, as our columnist attests



I no longer hide it: I suffer from anxiety, an affliction that has truly mucked up chunks of my life and barged its way into many a beautiful day. It hasn't stopped me holding down responsible jobs (in journalism) or taking amazing journeys (travelling to both polar regions) but often it's been a right bugger. Sometimes, a loathsome beast.

While mental health issues should never be taken lightly – when they start to gain the upper hand, sufferers need to seek professional advice – I've come to realise as an adjunct to such support, or if you're managing stress levels that aren't too severe, positive daily rituals can help smooth the path to a better place.

A simple beauty or grooming routine is a great example. When performed calmly and consistently, it can airdrop a little safe space into your day, bringing a number of benefits. Indeed, it's partly because it is superficial and undemanding that it's useful. For me, it's a 'quieting' moment come evening, signalling it's time to stop scrolling, searching and striving to solve. It's my psychological landing mat. It's like wiping away the day, making way for sleep.

A morning skincare routine is useful, too. Mental health media site psychreg.org reports that waking up to a barrage of digital feeds, emails and texts can elevate normal levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Whereas choosing what you expose your mind and body to – say, a refreshing facial cleanse, a gentle stretch, a healthy breakfast – can set a better tone for the rest of the day. And the more you mindfully repeat these good habits, the better.

Throughout history, humans have performed rituals, often in religious contexts. Dimitris Xygalatas, assistant professor of

anthropology at the University of Connecticut, studies how rituals impact health, and explains our brains are like predictive machines that anticipate what's coming next. 'Ritual helps reduce anxiety by providing the brain with a sense of structure, regularity and predictability,' he said on the university's news website.

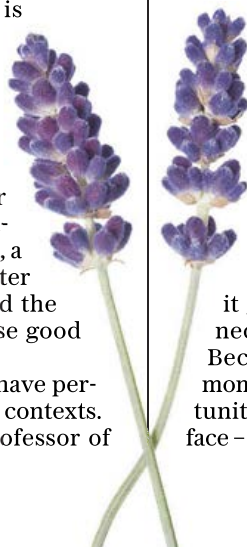
Apply that to my beauty regime. OK, it's small fry, but set within the vast realm of things I can't control, it gives my mind a sense of something I can, alleviating some of the angst.

Self-care also provides a sensorial sanctuary, particularly when it comes to scents. Lavender, rose and ylang ylang are said to be calming. I love that all three are in Mitchell and Peach's Flora No 1 Bath Oil (£46, mitchellandpeach.com), which forms an exquisite olfactory cloud as you bathe.

Touch is important too and if I'm keyed up, I favour cleansing balms that require massage. Find one that you love. To me, The Body Shop's Camomile Sumptuous Cleansing Butter (from £6, thebodyshop.com) is a fabulous oasis of a balm. But I've also treated myself to a Rhug Wild Beauty Deep Cleansing Balm with Wild Berries (£65, rhugwildbeauty.com) because it smells like the countryside distilled into one glorious, gloopy pot of wholesome goodness.

Dip into tactile textures. Silky facial oils are super-nurturing and Tea & Tonic's Saving Grace Rich Face Oil (£48, teaandtonic.co.uk) is blended with British-grown seed oils and an adaptogen herb complex to comfort and build skin's resilience. My complexion has a just-back-from-a-spa look when I use this, too.

And that's another positive. When you can actually see results – from glowier cheeks to glossier brows – it gives you a lift. Is that shallow? Not necessarily. Nor is vanity always a sin. Because when times feel tough, those moments in the mirror give you the opportunity to pause. To tell yourself – to your face – you matter.



This week I am mostly...



Swinging by the Officine Universelle Buly boutique in Selfridges London... I love Huile Antique Tubereuse du Mexique (£42, in-store only). Selected products are also available at selfridges.com, or check out the entire range at buly1803.com.



Scenting my living space with my fave First Light candle by La Montaña (£39, lamontana.co.uk), inspired by the founders' Spanish mountain home. With fennel, rockrose and rosemary, the room smells gorgeous, even when the candle isn't burning.



Slicking on CO Bigelow's Sakura Rose Salve (£8.50, libertylondon.com). Great for chapped skin, the multi-use balm also reminds me of marvellous times working in Japan.

Above: calming ylang ylang; Rhug Wild Beauty Deep Cleansing Balm with Wild Berries. Left: lavender



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THINK OF YOUR
LEGACY AS A
MACMILLAN
NURSE,
SUPPORT
WORKER
OR ADVISOR
LOOKING AFTER
A FRIEND
WHEN THEY
NEED IT MOST



How do YOU want to be remembered?



Impressionist **Rory Bremner** asks what we mean by legacy – and looks at how a gift left in your will to Macmillan Cancer Support can be the most lasting legacy of all



The question, “How would you like to be remembered?” isn’t one I’ve spent much time considering; I always instinctively preferred Joanna Lumley’s answer (“Vaguely”). But there’s no doubt the question takes on greater relevance as you reach that age when you start to lose close friends and find yourself increasingly recalling the good times you shared, and wondering if Four Funerals and a Wedding might be a more topical reflection of your social diary.

In my case, you could say that every time someone I imitated passes on, a little part of my act dies: Bruce Forsyth, Keith Floyd, Sean Connery, Richie Benaud – they live on as voices in my head. But each of them has left, through many hours of TV and audio archive, a legacy we can enjoy.

The same is true, in a sense, of the friends I’ve lost recently. There’s that shock and sadness at their passing, of course. That moment when all the noise, the laughter, the life – stops. But then it’s as if, in their place, you get given a DVD of all the memories – the times you enjoyed, the jokes you loved, the company you shared. It’s a montage you play in your head, a lot at the beginning, then more randomly over time, as something reminds you of them or they pop into your head. It is, in a sense, their legacy.

Legacy. It’s a word we hear a lot. After an Olympics or a World Cup, a major event, the death of a head of state. It may take the form of a stadium, a rebuilt community or a call to action. Very few of us can leave that kind of legacy – one that changes the world or has a lasting effect on the next generation. But each of us can leave something real and tangible in our will, by means of a bequest.

Bequests take many forms: while Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island*, bequeathed his birthday, 13 November, to a young girl whose birthday fell on Christmas Day, the Emperor Napoleon left his hair, to

be shaved and made into bracelets for his relatives. William Shakespeare famously left his wife his second-best bed, while Canadian financier Charles Vance Millar bequeathed his Jamaican holiday home to three lawyers who notoriously hated each other.

Our own legacies may be less remarkable, but no less impactful. If, like me, you’ve often wished you could have done more for a friend who’s no longer with us, you could make a donation in their memory. Macmillan Cancer Support is one charity that relies on gifts and donations to carry out its brilliant work.

And it all began with a legacy. Back in 1911, Douglas Macmillan was given £10 as a birthday present by his father before he died of cancer. Douglas used the money to help people living with cancer, campaigning for more hospital beds for cancer patients and even delivering coal to families struggling to keep someone with cancer warm. Over 100 years later, Macmillan keeps that legacy alive, supporting families, campaigning for better services, even providing grants to help pay heating bills and living expenses.

The difference is the number of people now living with cancer – currently over three million in the UK alone, with a new diagnosis every 90 seconds. It’s pretty much a given that we know, or are related to, someone whose life has been affected by cancer. Encouragingly, though, survival rates have doubled in the past 40 years and so we more often speak about people living with cancer now, rather than dying from it.

And that is where the work of Macmillan Cancer Support is so critical: by leaving a gift to Macmillan in your will, you’re helping them to continue Douglas Macmillan’s legacy in so many ways – this could be them helping people with advice about work and money, offering confidential counselling, providing a vibrant online community or funding Macmillan Buddies to help people feel more supported, less alone.

“
IN ITS
EARLIEST
USAGE, A
‘LEGACY’ WAS
A PERSON –
A LEGATE,
SOMEONE
SENT OUT ON
A SPECIAL
MISSION

Before I embarked on this feature, I had no idea how much Macmillan depends on gifts in wills for its funding. In 2021 these types of gifts made up approximately 40 per cent of its fundraised income, funding over a third of its vital services. That same year those services reached 2.4m people.

In its earliest usage, a ‘legacy’ was a person – a legate, someone sent out on a special mission. By leaving a gift in your will, you could think of your legacy as being a Macmillan nurse, a support line worker, an advisor – someone real who you’ve appointed to look after a friend or stranger when they need it most.

And it needn’t be hard. Macmillan offers a Free Will Service and a Gifts in Wills guide to help you draw up your legacy. They are simple and helpful – and you’re not even under any obligation to leave anything to Macmillan. Although, of course, that would be hugely appreciated.

My own father died of cancer when I was 18, having himself worked as appeals secretary for a cancer charity for over 20 years. I know he’d have been amazed and hugely grateful for all that Macmillan is now able to do to help people living with cancer. It may be one of the great challenges still facing medical science. But as long as cancer is with us, people will need advice and support in how to live with it.

As to how we are remembered, well, most of us would probably settle for being remembered as kind, good company, a good friend, parent or grandparent. But the knowledge that, in your will, you’ve left a gift that Macmillan can use to help those who need support means you’ve done something more. You’ve left a legacy, and in doing so you’ve ensured that the £10 given by Douglas Macmillan’s father now supports millions when they need it most.

Isn’t that something worth being remembered for?



Create your lasting legacy

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Richard Madeley

Agony uncle



Dear Richard

I was quite athletic in earlier life, and still do a decent amount of exercise. Middle age has taken its toll but I'm still in what I would describe as pretty good nick. During the working-from-home times I wore my exercise gear for much of the day, scrubbing up for online meetings.

Now I'm back in the office three days a week, and in general that suits me fine. Only I think I am being pursued romantically by a neighbour. On my home-working days she invariably pops round at coffee or tea time. She has made what I would describe as flirtatious comments, 'I didn't recognise you with your clothes on' and so on, and she touches my arms and chest, which I know is not automatically a statement of

intent but she seems to do it a lot.

My wife is back in the office full time and I haven't discussed this with her yet. I am not at all minded to stray, though I suppose I am flattered to be the object of any sort of attention at my age (I'm 58) – but I am also conscious of how close we got to our neighbours during the pandemic, enjoying a permitted gin and tonic at the garden wall and so on. So I don't want to be rude or unfriendly. And I don't want to make a bigger deal of this than it warrants. Should I talk to the neighbour – or to my wife?
— Anon, Wilts

Dear Anon

As long as things don't move beyond the flirtatiousness you describe, my answer to your double-question is 'no' and 'no'. Flirting is

Flirting is a common human behaviour and I think you may be reading too much into it

pretty common human behaviour and I think you may be reading too much into your neighbour's little chest-prods and arm-strokes. And a few arch comments – 'I didn't recognise you with your clothes on' – are hardly an invitation to spend the night together at a nearby hotel, are they?

So quite what you'd say to this woman rather eludes me. 'Don't touch my arm'? 'Don't mention my clothes'? Hmm. You see the potential for embarrassment, Anon.

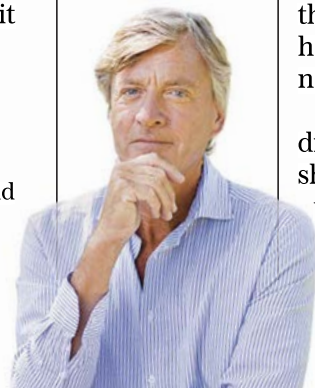
Similarly, why trouble your wife with such a minor matter? Of course, if your neighbour *were* to make an unambiguous pass at you, then of course you should disclose it and call a halt to these teatime trysts.

But we're not even close to that, are we? It's just harmless flirting. You're flattered, and why shouldn't you be? But as long as that's how it stays – harmless – take the grown-up view and dismiss it for what it is. You've just got a bit of unexpected colour in your life. There's nowt wrong with that.

Dear Richard

I am a woman in my early 60s. Ever since the technology to do so was invented, my younger sister has sent me text messages and emails that were ostensibly a comment on some family event or piece of news, but which were unmistakably needling and cruel in tone. Three years ago, I took the reluctant step of blocking her number and resolved to have nothing more to do with her.

As if on cue, our mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's shortly afterwards. My sister, who lives near to our parents, now goes in to help them out for an hour or two each day.



I resumed contact with my sister to manage the practicalities of the situation. The digs and barbed comments have started up again, together with critiques of anything I try to do for our parents. I understand she is also bitching to mutual friends about how little I am doing – though I am doing as much as I can.

The latest thing is that she's taken to asking me to intercede with our father, suggesting that he change his will in our favour – presumably if he dies before our mother has to go into care, she will get local authority help with the fees sooner. I find this morbid and distasteful.

We were always going to have to deal with one another at this stage in our family story, but I feel my sister has trashed our relationship beyond repair. Yet if I distance myself from her, I'll be letting my parents down. What's your advice? — Abigail, via email

Dear Abigail

First and foremost, there is little or nothing you can do to alter your sister's character or behaviour. She is what she is and at her age – I'm assuming she's well past the half-century mark – there's no prospect of her reviewing

her unpleasant treatment of you. I'm afraid you're stuck with it.

SO. You have to manage it. You made a good start by 'blocking' her – I'd have done the same, given all those little poison blow-darts puffed in my direction – but circumstances have overtaken you and you've had to adapt.

Here's what I'd do. Firstly, count your blessings. At least your sister is taking her share of responsibility for coping with your mother's dementia. That's something. Actually, it's more than something – it counts for a lot. So give her credit for that.

Secondly, treat all these childish barbs and digs with the contempt they deserve. Don't respond to them and don't worry about what others may think. People are quite shrewd, you know – your friends have probably seen for themselves that your sister is pursuing a vindictive personal agenda, and quietly disapprove of all the backbiting against her own sibling. It's not exactly a good look, is it?

Thirdly, to your father's will. You need to be absolutely straight with your sister. Tell her calmly and clearly that you have no intention of talking to your dad about it. If she wants to do that, you can't stop her – but you'll have no part in pressurising him.

Then continue to do your best for your mum, and try to find a way of mentally compartmentalising your sister's sniping into a little corral or box. I'd suggest sticking a label on it: 'Unimportant.'

Treat all these barbs and digs with the contempt they deserve. Don't respond

Dear Richard

My husband and I divorced fairly acrimoniously five years ago. Our two daughters, now 15 and 13, see him on alternate weekends. My concern is that several times now my ex has introduced the girls to women he's been seeing – I don't think any of these relationships have been very serious. Obviously he's got work during the week but I do think he might just devote his 'dad' weekends to the girls – and I don't want them to be confused or upset.

I don't have much chance of forcing him to stop doing this – any conversation we had about it would degenerate into a shouting match. So is there something I should be doing to 'prime' the girls about these encounters? — Susanna, via telegraph.co.uk

Dear Susanna

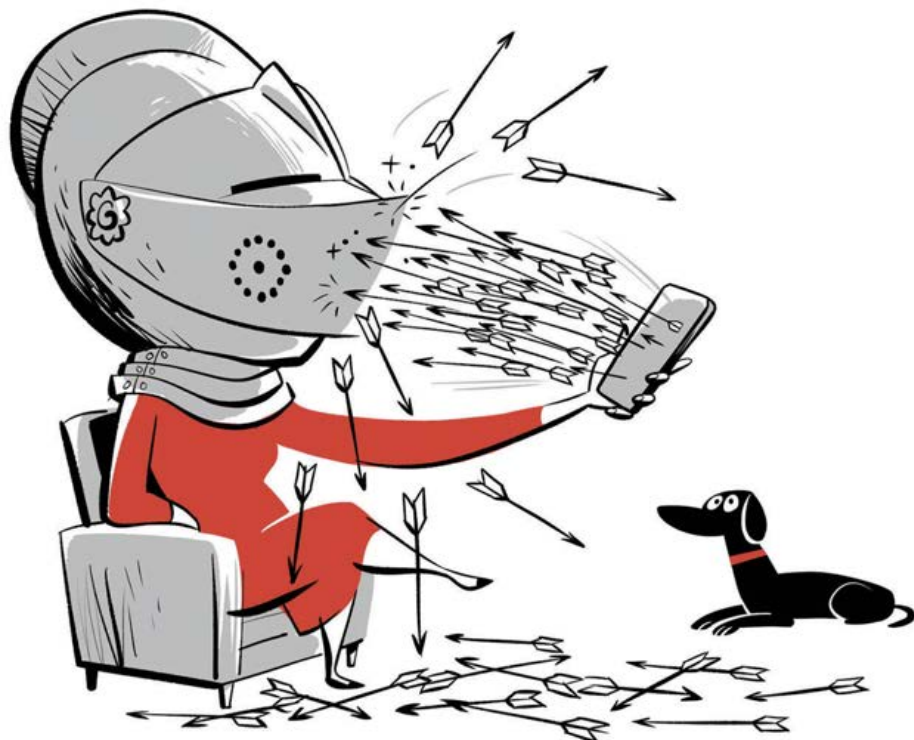
The absolutely key issue here is your daughters. If they were upset or confused by meeting their father's girlfriends, I'd hope they would have told you and you would have told me. But they haven't and you haven't.

So what, exactly, is the problem? Your girls have had five years to come to terms with their parents' divorce and they'll be far more au fait with such matters than you think. They'll certainly have friends whose parents have split up and will undoubtedly talk about how that's working out in terms of new partners.

To be honest, I can't quite see what the matter is here. Your husband is perfectly entitled – as are you – to have partners that aren't necessarily 'the one'. Would it be better if he kept such relationships a secret from his daughters? I'm not sure it would. They may spot telltale signs around the place – perfume, make-up – that would alert them to the fact he was seeing someone, and they'd wonder why he was keeping that hidden from them. I think the fact that he's choosing to be open is far more healthy than it is unhealthy.

So yes, keep an eye on your daughters and be alert to signs of distress. If any emerge, then that would be the time to talk to him, and them. But not yet.

Have a question for Richard? Write to Dear Richard, The Daily Telegraph, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT, or email DearRichard@telegraph.co.uk



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The way we live now

Keeping it light

How many columnists does it take to change a light bulb? Two: old hand Christopher Howse and young gun Guy Kelly, who resolve modern 'which is the right one' dilemmas with a couple of bright ideas



From Frequently Asked Questions: What do I do if I accidentally break a compact fluorescent lamp (CFL)?

Answer: Ventilate the room. Wipe the area with a damp cloth, place the cloth in a bag, and seal it. Use sticky tape to pick up small residual pieces or powder from nearby soft furnishings, then place the tape in another sealed plastic bag. Place both plastic bags into another larger bag and seal that one as well.

I found this advice when trying to discover how to buy a light bulb. The advice is not a joke, even though CFLs are perfectly safe. Oh yes. They're the kind of bulb that hotels like: too dim to read by. Their best trick is to take time to come on, so that one on the landing gives useful light just after you've tumbled down the stairs after tripping in the dark.

Those CFLs were the lights we were told to use after ordinary incandescent bulbs were outlawed, their families sold into slavery, their fields sown with salt and all mention of their existence declared a hate crime.

We have been saved from obscurantist CFLs by LEDs. They're bright and polite and last for thousands of hours. But they cost a fiver each. It's as though boxes of matches were all replaced by silver-plated lighters.

So I find it annoying to buy the wrong light bulb, as I often seem to. My kitchen is now like an operating theatre – not splashed with

blood, but too bright because the bulb's too powerful. They tend to say things on the box like: 'Equivalent to a 60-watt incandescent bulb'. Yet somehow the scale seems uneven.

Lumens are the key to brightness, but there is also a unit called a candela. I'd thought that was an artificial sweetener, but it is equal to the good old British candlepower. One candlepower was defined by law as the light produced by a pure spermaceti candle weighing a sixth of a pound and burning at a rate of a quarter of a Troy ounce per hour. Even though spermaceti (oil from whales) is seldom used in my household, I am sure this simple formula will enable me to find a replacement bulb for my reading lamp.



Here's a position I've quite literally just decided on, but will claim is long-held and carefully thought-out: as with phone chargers and, I don't know, currency, there should just be one, universal light bulb.

Think for a moment about how much better our lives would be. For too long, we've been trying to discern the subtle differences between options like 'crystalline pear', 'ellipsoidal reflector', 'flambeau' and 'Philips Corepro LED 13w (100w) A60, B22 Bayonet Cap, Bulb, Warm White, Non-Dimmable, Frosted [Energy Class E]'.

Ridiculous. If we're honest with ourselves, there is no practical need for more than one: they are

all just the same thing, varied at the design stage so we'll keep buying them. It is high time for somebody to stand up to Big Bulb and say: 'No. No longer will I flail helplessly in front of a wall of identical-looking cuboid cardboard boxes in B&Q, hating myself for not noting down which precise lightbulb my side lamp takes before I threw the old one away. No longer will I get home, realise I have the right type of bulb but with the screw end, rather than the bayonet, and then scream into the dark void of my living room. No, no, no.'

Luckily my foresight is perfectly lit, so I can see the backlash coming, from the brightest and best at Philips, or Thomas Edison's descendants, or anyone who knows how lights function, such as electricians. 'How would having one bulb work, given a lot of lights are wildly different sizes and brightnesses?' they'd whine, dimly.

Actually that's a good point, maybe we'll need to requisition all lights as well. But no great idea arrives fully formed, and what symbolises a great idea? A light bulb. They don't call it a 'Corepro LED 13w moment', do they?

This is a campaign I passionately believe in – especially since I've spent the last two months having to illuminate my bathroom with a torch on a string, owing to the broken spotlights being of an obscure type, and our landlord flatly ignoring our pleas for help.

I am excited. The future's bright. At least, it would be, if we could find the right thingamajig for the whatsitcalled.



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