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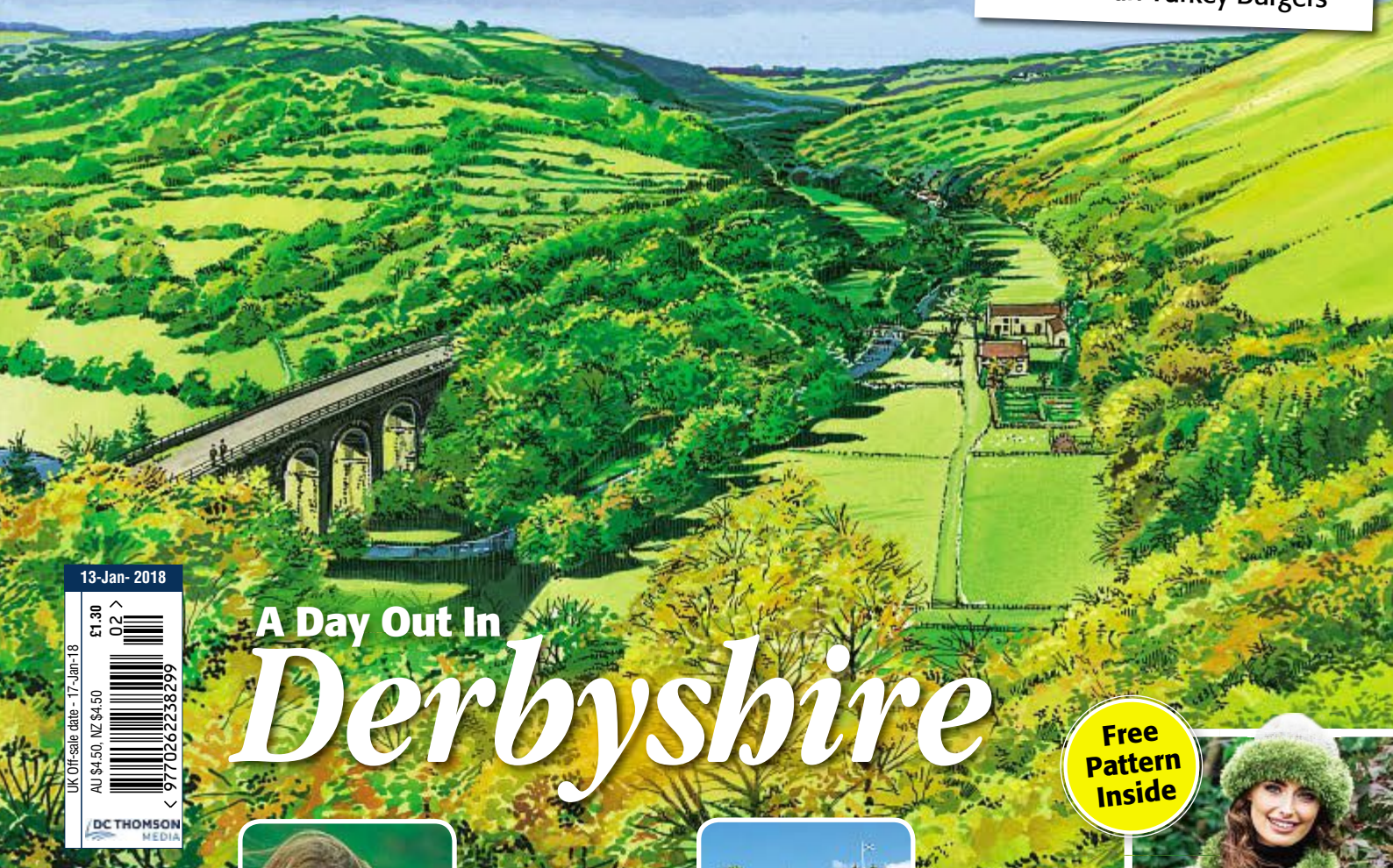


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Inside The People's Friend *this week*

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The People's Friend Special No 151, priced £2.99

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Many of you will remember our serial "Life At Langrannoch", which appeared in the magazine a year ago and was the last to be written by the late Neilla Martin. When Neilla sadly passed away leaving the story unfinished, Joyce Begg stepped in to complete it, and I'm delighted to say that Joyce has created a sequel to the original serial, which begins this week.

In "Return To Langrannoch", governess Caroline is now married to her beloved Rory and facing the challenges of running the Langrannoch household herself. Neilla would have been delighted to know that her characters were in such safe hands, and I do hope you enjoy reading the first instalment – you'll find it on page 30.

This week, the "Friend" celebrates its 149th birthday – which means that next year is going to be a milestone! With one year to go till the big-150, I'm really excited to launch our "Share Your Stories" appeal. Turn to page 43 to find out how you can be part of our birthday celebrations.

Angela

Angela Gilchrist, Editor.

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The diner could be busy at times, but Sugar liked the work . . .

“Sweet and sugary, that’s my little girl,” Mama always said.

Brian, her high school sweetheart, had liked that about her. They’d been crazy in love when they were teenagers. Mostly crazy, Mary Ann used to say, rolling her eyes.

Somehow they messed it all up the year they graduated. Brian’s dad announced that his job was transferring him to Texas for a year. Brian had a choice. He could go with the rest of his family or stay behind and get a job.

And get married, Sugar thought with a tingle of excitement. She bought a bridal magazine in secret and flipped through it countless times, fantasising about the perfect wedding and wondering what her ring would look like.

Then Brian was accepted at university in Texas. She hadn’t even known he’d applied.

She cried when he told her, then got angry because it felt like she’d been left out of his life.

Brian became defensive, and things went from bad to worse. Why didn’t she just come with him, then?

“Just? Leave my family and friends and ‘just’ come with you?” She’d thrown those words back at him.

“Well, don’t, then, if you feel that way.”

He said it like he meant it, but afterwards she remembered the look in his eyes and knew he hadn’t. But it was too late, because he was gone.

That was six years ago, and maybe she was crazy, because she still thought about him sometimes. She’d met some nice guys since, but there was no-one special in her life at the

All Through The Night

THE diner was almost empty. It was a roadside diner that stayed open all night.

During those hours, most of the customers were truck drivers or people working the late shift.

There were also random strangers en route across the United States who needed to stop for a bite to eat on this particular stretch of interstate in Tennessee.

Sugar had been a waitress there for almost two years. At first, she’d hated night shifts, but she’d grown to like them.

It was interesting to see the folks who were awake

all hours. Some would come in for a full meal and others for just a slice of pie and some caffeine to keep them awake as they drove.

Often she wondered what their stories were. Sometimes they told her.

It was Friday night, so it had been busy earlier. But it was almost one a.m. now, and things had slowed down.

Richard, a regular customer, sat at a corner table eating a grilled cheese sandwich with a side of fries doused with ketchup.

He always finished his shift at midnight and stopped for dinner. He didn’t have a family, so

there would be no-one to share a meal with him at home.

Sugar knew what that felt like. She came home to an empty apartment, too. Mama and Papa had their own place about 10 minutes away, and Mary Ann, her younger sister, lived in Missouri with her husband.

Being a waitress wasn’t the most glamorous job, but it paid the rent. Not much left over, but then she’d never been too hung up on money.

Love was all that mattered to her, sappy as that sounded. People, teasing, said she was aptly named.

moment. Most days, she didn't mind too much.

* * * *

Richard paid his bill and left, and Sugar walked over to clear his table. She exchanged smiles with a guy in a cowboy hat who had come in for apple-pie and was on his third cup of coffee.

"Enough caffeine yet?"

He smiled.

"Almost. I should hit the road soon."

She walked to the kitchen with the dishes. Joe, the chef, sat at the table near the back eating a sandwich.

Terry, the night-shift dishwasher, was in the corner, nodding to the sound of whatever music was blasting in those earphones of his.

There were more staff working during the day, but most left around midnight. Tonight it was just her, Joe and Terry.

"Run off your feet, I see."

"As always." Joe smiled at her, his blue eyes warm.

His baseball cap sat askew on his head and blond hair poked out from under it. He removed his large, sneaker-clad feet from the other chair and Sugar sat down.

She propped her chin on her hands and sighed.

"It's barely one o'clock, and I'm sleepy already."

"Maybe you need coffee. Or I can cook something for you."

"Thanks, but not yet. Maybe later."

"Your wish is my command."

Sugar laughed. She enjoyed night shifts with Joe. During those long hours they'd had many conversations.

She knew a girl had broken his heart two years ago; that he was saving up for a motorbike, and that he treated everyone with kindness, from their boss to the homeless man who came in on cold nights and begged a cup of coffee.

Joe would usually find food for him that would go to waste if it wasn't eaten.

It was a good thing she could trust Joe with secrets, too, because he certainly knew a few of

hers. She'd told him all about Brian, her fear of large dogs, and that she'd been saving up her tips for guitar lessons.

A chime sounded, and Sugar stood up. As she approached the door, she saw a man standing there, waiting to be seated. Sugar walked towards him and then everything seemed to stop . . .

They stared at each other for several seconds, and then recognition finally lit his eyes.

"Sugar?"

"Hi, Brian."

She struggled to find composure. The love of her life, back in town. What was he doing in Tennessee, and in her diner at this hour?

Her hands were shaking as she grabbed a menu and cutlery.

"Table for one, or would you like to sit at the counter?"

He blinked.

"Er, counter, please."

He followed her over, and she set the menu on the shiny grey surface. Brian shed his black leather jacket, pulled out a high stool and sat, all without taking his eyes off her.

"You look exactly like I remember."

"So do you."

Except that he was even better looking. A hint of stubble covered his jaw, and the haircut was different. It made him look more polished.

Silence stretched. She pressed her damp palms against her apron.

"Do you need a few minutes?"

"Yes, I think so."

She meant to give him a chance to peruse the menu, but she was definitely in need of time to recover from the shock. She escaped to the kitchen, and Joe looked at her with curiosity as she came in.

"Are you OK?"

"Just a bit flustered from talking to that customer."

Joe glanced towards the dining-room, but Brian wasn't visible from where they stood.

"A problem customer?"

Sugar let out a shaky laugh.

"My old boyfriend, from way back."

He stared.

"The one who moved to Texas?"

"You've got it."

"I'll be right back."

"No!" She grabbed his arm, suddenly aware how solid and muscular it was. "Don't do anything."

"I just want to have a look." A dimple appeared in Joe's cheek. "Though if you want me to do something, just say the word."

What was the love of her life doing back here in Tennessee?

He stopped near the window, and Sugar watched him study Brian for several seconds before turning away.

"Huh," was all he said. That meant, in Joe-speak, a thumbs down.

* * * *

She found Brian tapping away on his mobile, the closed menu in front of him.

"Are you ready to order?" He slid the phone into his pocket.

"Yes, thanks. I'd like a cheeseburger and fries, please. And a shake. Strawberry."

"Of course."

She took the menu he slid across the counter and turned to go. There were about a million questions she wanted to ask him, but she could barely think straight, let alone talk sensibly.

"Sugar?"

She turned.

"Will you join me?"

His dark eyes held hers. She had never been able to say no to those eyes.

"OK. I'll just give your order to the kitchen."

"I'm going to sit down with him for a few minutes," she said to Joe. "I think I'll need a shake, too. Could you make mine chocolate, please?"

Joe nodded but didn't say anything until he'd made both shakes. When he handed them to her, their eyes met.

"I'm right here," he said.

It was his way of saying he was going to look after her.

Sugar placed the strawberry shake in front of Brian, then climbed up on the stool next to his. Brian turned to face her, and they both sipped their shakes without speaking for a minute or so.

"It's been a long time,"

Brian said finally.

"Six years, I think."

Actually, she didn't think, she knew. Had he kept track, too?

He didn't say so, just nodded.

"What brings you back to Tennessee?"

He crumpled the wrapper from his straw into a tight wad.

"An old friend is getting married tomorrow. Do you remember Ben?"

"Of course." Ben had been Brian's best friend in high school. So Brian had kept in touch with Ben, but not her.

"I thought I might see you at the wedding, actually."

She shrugged.

"I didn't get an invitation. Ben and I don't see much of each other these days."

Their old circle of friends had somehow dissolved. It was sad, really. Sugar blinked back sudden tears.

"What do you do now?" she asked to distract him from noticing.

"I'm a math teacher."

"Wow. Well, you always were good at math."

Brian had spent many an evening helping her with algebra and geometry homework. Math problems were made much sweeter by a few kisses, although such distractions made it difficult to concentrate. Not that they'd been too concerned about that.

Brian yawned.

"Sorry. I'm exhausted from driving all day, but I couldn't go to the hotel without eating first. I have to say, though, that you're the last person I expected to see here.

Do you always work the night shift?"

"Usually."

Sugar wondered if he was looking down on her. He'd done all right for himself. Her job was nothing to brag about.

"How's your family? Are y'all still in Texas?"

"Yes, although my parents are cruising the Bahamas at the moment." Brian grinned. "Thirtieth anniversary gift from us kids."

Sugar had never been on a cruise in her life. She'd looked at the brochures, but the real thing didn't fit in her budget.

"Very nice. Tell them I said hello."

"I will."

There was a pause.

"I've missed you."

Brian hooked his foot over the rung of her stool. Keeping his eyes on hers, he tugged the stool closer.

"Pick up," Joe's voice said from somewhere behind her.

Sugar scrambled off the stool and went to get Brian's order. She couldn't help noticing Joe's serious expression, so she nudged his arm and spoke quietly.

"Don't look so worried. Everything's fine."

He nodded but still didn't smile. She wanted to reach up and playfully flick the brim of his baseball cap with her finger, like she often did when they were teasing each other, but the knowledge that Brian was probably watching made her hesitate.

"This looks great." Brian looked at the plate she set in front of him with appreciation.

She slid back on to the stool and watched him reach for the cheeseburger.

"Have some fries," he said, nudging his plate towards her.

Sugar shook her head.

"Thanks, but I'm not hungry."

Brian wiped his fingers on a napkin and then surprised her by reaching for her left hand. He held it up and examined it for a second.

"No ring. I thought you'd be married by now."

Something about the way he said it rubbed her the

wrong way.

"I could say the same of you," she said, wondering if she was being overly defensive.

"You could. I suppose I just haven't met any Texan girls I'd like to marry."

She waited for him to add, "So that's why I'm here. The only girl for me lives in Tennessee."

For years, she'd imagined him coming back and saying words like that.

But he didn't.

"Oh," she said awkwardly and could have kicked herself for such an inane response.

He went back to his food, and she sipped her milkshake. The silence seemed to go on and on, but she couldn't think of a thing to say to fill it.

When Brian finished eating, he folded his napkin and set it down. They were still sitting close, and for the first time she noticed the dark smudges under his eyes.

"You must be tired."

"It's been a long day. And a long drive."

"I'll get your bill."

He surprised her by capturing her hand in his as she got up.

"You should come to the wedding with me."

"I told you, I wasn't invited."

"Ben will understand. I'm sure he'd be delighted to see you again. We'll go together, the two of us, just for old times' sake."

Old times' sake. Was that all this was to him? All she was to him?

"I have to work tomorrow."

"The wedding's at four-thirty. Maybe you could still make it."

"My shift starts at seven. It doesn't allow for much of a social life."

He didn't pursue the subject.

When she returned with the bill, he was putting his jacket on. He pulled out his wallet and tossed fifteen dollars on the counter.

"I don't need any change."

"Thank you."

"Maybe I'll drop in and see you on my way out of town," he said.

There were a thousand things he could have said.

He could have asked for her phone number. Could have promised that he'd find a way to see her again, no matter what. Could have acknowledged that he'd broken her heart and that she'd broken his, too.

Except she wasn't sure she had.

"All the best, Brian," she said.

He gave her a quick nod. "Bye, Sugar."

* * * *

She watched the door close behind him and then turned back to the counter.

The sight of the two stools perched so close together somehow undid her. She took a shuddering breath and then bolted for the refuge of the kitchen.

Terry was still at the table, his eyes shut, lost in his music. At the sound of her footsteps, Joe glanced over his shoulder.

It took him about two seconds to notice her tears. Then he came towards her and gathered her into his arms.

She slid her arms around his waist and cried against the soft cotton of his faded T-shirt while he held her tight and didn't say a word.

When she leaned back and sniffled hard, he released her long enough to grab a tissue.

Grateful that his tall form was shielding them both from Terry's view, Sugar blew her nose, wiped her eyes and straightened her ponytail.

Then she saw the fire in Joe's eyes.

"What did he say to you?" His voice was as calm as always, but it was probably for the best that Brian had already left.

"Not much." Her voice wobbled. "He was nice to me. Polite. It's just that, when you wait for someone to come back into your life, you think things will turn out differently."

"How did you want them to turn out?"

"For years, I wanted nothing more than for him to come back for me and tell me that we should be together. But he didn't say

anything like that tonight.

"And now, well, I don't think I would go with him even if he asked. But I wanted him to. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, it does." Joe's blue eyes held their usual warmth as he looked down at her.

"I didn't feel anything for him." She was talking too much now, but she couldn't stop. "I thought I would, but I didn't."

"Maybe it's just been your mind holding on to him, not your heart."

Sugar couldn't help smiling. Wise words about love were not what she'd expected from Joe. But then, in his unassuming way he'd said many wise things since they'd started working together.

"You know, you could be right."

He reached out and cupped her cheek in his rough, large hand.

"Do you think it might be time to let go of him and move on to someone else?"

For seconds Sugar couldn't move. She could barely breathe. They'd talked, laughed, bantered, and even hugged on occasion. But he'd never touched her like this before.

Was this why he'd looked so stone-faced while she was sitting with Brian? Had she somehow missed something very important that was right in front of her? When had their friendship been transformed into something else?

She wasn't quite sure how long it took to sort through all these thoughts, but Joe didn't seem to be in any hurry. He just stood there, his palm warm against her skin while he waited for her to speak.

"I think," Sugar whispered, "that you've been really patient. And I've been really blind."

He gave her a slow smile.

"Is that a yes?"

"Uh-huh."

And right there, in a diner on the interstate, somewhere close to one-thirty a.m., a tall chef in a baseball cap kissed a pretty waitress with a ponytail and a heart which had finally healed. ■

This week we're *loving*



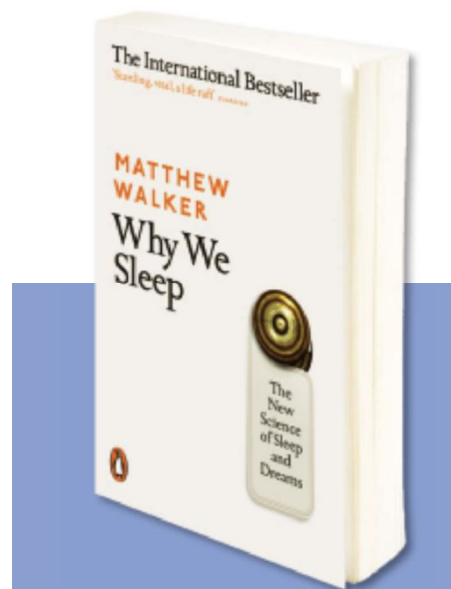
Pixar Magic

The makers of "Toy Story" and "Finding Nemo" release their new film, "Coco", this month. It follows the story of Miguel, a talented young guitarist. It broke box office records over its opening month in the United States and is in cinemas now.



Knit Off The Net

It'll set you back over £5,000, but Kniterate's digital knitting machine lets you design or download patterns on your computer, and send through for the machine to knit for you. Modelled on industrial knitting technology, it knits everything from rugs to tank tops.



Rest Easy

New research has led scientist Matthew Walker to assert that sleep might be more important to your health than diet or exercise. Read why getting your forty winks is crucial to your wellbeing in this acclaimed paperback, RRP £9.99.



Cracking News

Eggs are more popular than ever, after the FSA relaxed guidelines on consuming raw or soft eggs. Sales have topped the six billion mark for the first time, not surprising considering that one egg is packed with 18 vitamins and minerals.



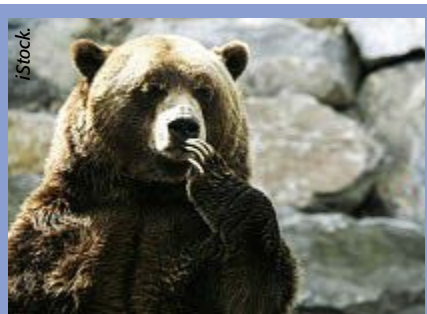
In The Fast Lane

Patrick Dempsey turns fifty-two on January 13. The Maine-born actor starred in "Grey's Anatomy", but has admitted he would give it all up in a heartbeat if he could make a living out of his other love – racing cars.



Lobster Made Easy

Iceland have released the UK's first shell-less lobster. You can defrost the meat, pop it in the pan with some butter and have it ready to eat in just a few minutes, promising all the great taste of lobster without the fuss. RRP £15 for 140g.



So Near, Yeti So Far

A number of yeti remains in various private and museum collections have been DNA tested for authenticity, and found to be fakes. Tests done by the University of Buffalo revealed they were either bears or dogs.



Wonder Wheels

Meet Ben the spaniel, who is the first dog in Scotland to sport this US-made wheelchair. Ben lost his leg as a pup, and was fine until he started developing arthritis in the remaining one. Now he's got a new lease of life.



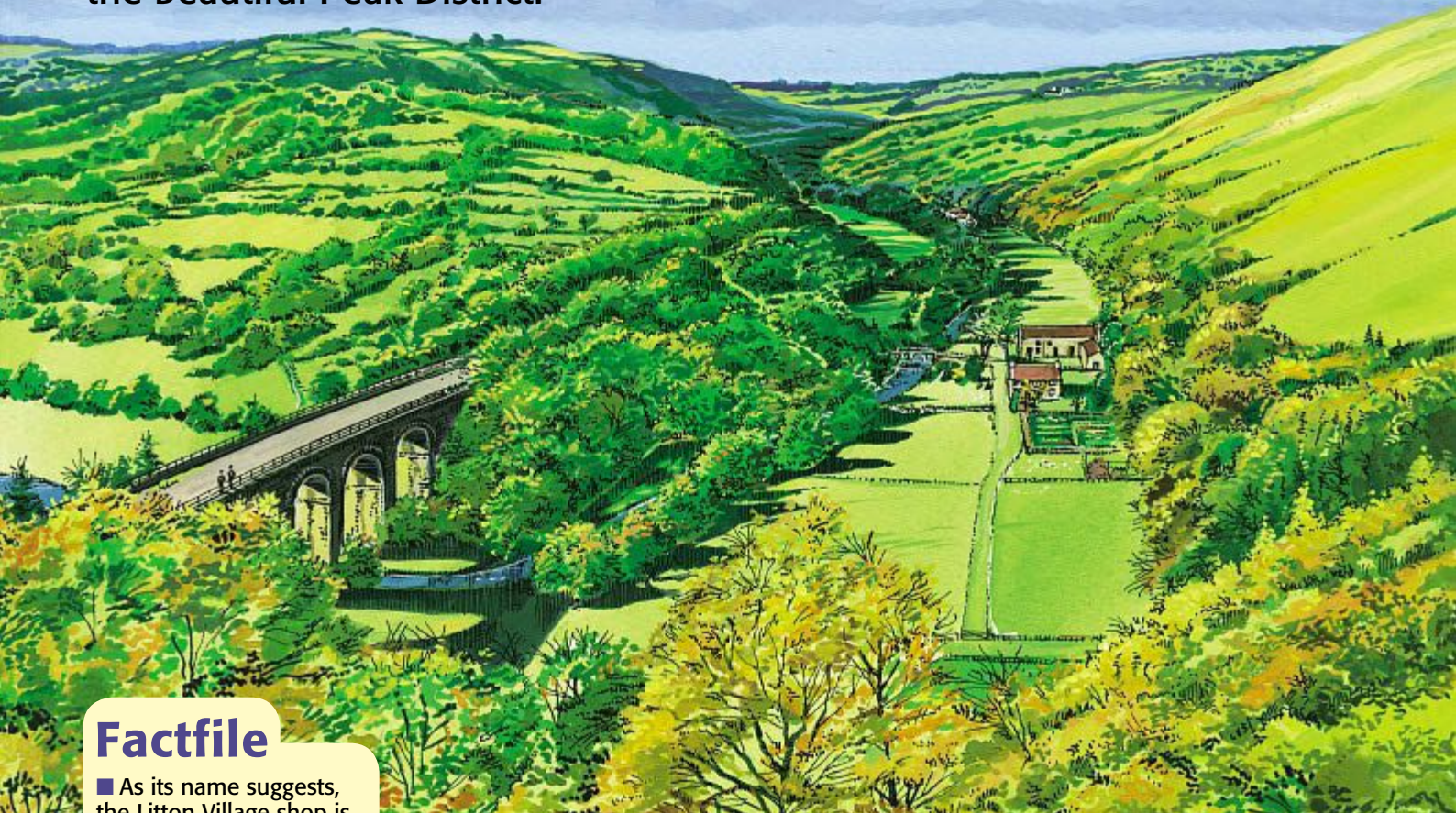
Winter Wassailing

Take part in some ancient traditions linked to Somerset's cider-making heritage at Sheppy's Cider Farm with their Wassailing Event. From 7 p.m. on Thursday, January 18. Find out more at www.visitsomerset.co.uk.

A Day Out In *Derbyshire*

Neil McAllister takes a walk along the border of the beautiful Peak District.

This week's cover feature



Factfile

■ As its name suggests, the Litton Village shop is owned by villagers and has been running for over 10 years.

■ Ashford-in-the-Water became wealthy through mining and producing items from Black Marble – a type of limestone found locally.

■ John Ruskin said of the railway, “The valley is gone and the Gods with it, and now, every fool in Buxton can be at Bakewell in half an hour, and every fool in Bakewell at Buxton; which you think a lucrative process of exchange – you Fools everywhere.”

■ Every June, Tideswell welcomes the Eroica Britannia, when cyclists on vintage bikes stop in the village on their route.

THINK I’ll change my name to Jack Sprat. Whilst I can’t hear high frequencies, like birds singing, Hazel has lost the low ones, so between us we hear perfectly.

Weather is a similar situation. Whilst I am happy sitting in the shade on a sunny day, my spouse likes

nothing more than wrapping up warm on a chilly day, which is why, after a delightful early morning spin, we parked up in the Derbyshire village of Ashford-in-the-Water.

Children were still on their way to school as we waited for the sun’s first rays to warm the picture-perfect

stone cottages.

Until the 1950s, these were part of the Chatsworth Estate, until they were sold off to pay for death duties.

In winter, trees keep the River Wye’s most famous feature in shadow. With temperatures well into minus figures, steam swathed the water as it flowed under the ancient stone arches of the Sheepwash Bridge where, a generation ago, farmers used the river for washing their sheep.

Beside Top Pump, where the village’s unusual peace memorial seat was installed after the Great War, we paused to chat to an early morning dog walker who had recently moved from somewhere “between Derby and Nottingham”.

“I live a bit out of the village and have yet to

The sheep grazing near Litton cast long winter shadows.





Ashford-in-the-Water in the grip of a crisp frost.

experience what it is like in summer, when the village fills with visitors, but on a day like this I have it to myself," he said.

With smoke from coal fires swirling over the recreation ground, we set off along Pennyunk Lane, where a farm track leads off into the fields. Even though this part of Derbyshire is well-drained limestone, this path is best in summer.

Today, with the ground frozen solid, we easily followed the contours beside Monsal Dale, emerging from the shadows at Monsal Head to enjoy the splendid panoramic view towards Cressbrook and Miller's Dale.

The old five-span Headstone Viaduct seems an established part of the landscape, but when it was built in 1863, the artist and critic John Ruskin was horrified that the railway had destroyed such a beautiful valley.

Ironically, a preservation order was placed on it in

the 1970s. Even in deepest winter, dog walkers and ramblers use the old track, undeterred by a series of tunnels which emerge further down the dale.

Despite the sub-zero temperatures, we found a pair of window cleaners at work on the teashop overlooking the valley. When I commented that the water would be freezing on the glass, they laughed.

"Yes, it could be warmer, but look where we are and what a beautiful morning!"

Our route led us down the hill, following the lane beside the Wye, to the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, where Richard Arkwright built a water-powered mill in 1779.

The beautiful structure of Cressbrook Mill which faces down the valley isn't the original, which burned down six years after construction, but a replacement built by his son.

Today it has been converted into luxurious apartments.

No doubt, whilst working conditions here weren't good, they would have been an improvement on labouring in the local lead mines.

Litton Mill, a mile or so along Miller's Dale, had a terrible reputation, employing children from large towns to do dangerous work.

Here the route divides into two. The left fork is our normal winter option, sticking to the road, which is so lightly used it is almost a footpath.

It climbs very steeply for half a mile, passing Cressbrook Hall on a ridge overlooking the river, continuing into the village, where we often pause to admire this isolated hamlet.

The road then meanders past dry stone-walled fields filled with sheep, munching grass as they enjoy panoramic views across the countryside.

In the distance, smoke rising from Hope Cement Works indicates the

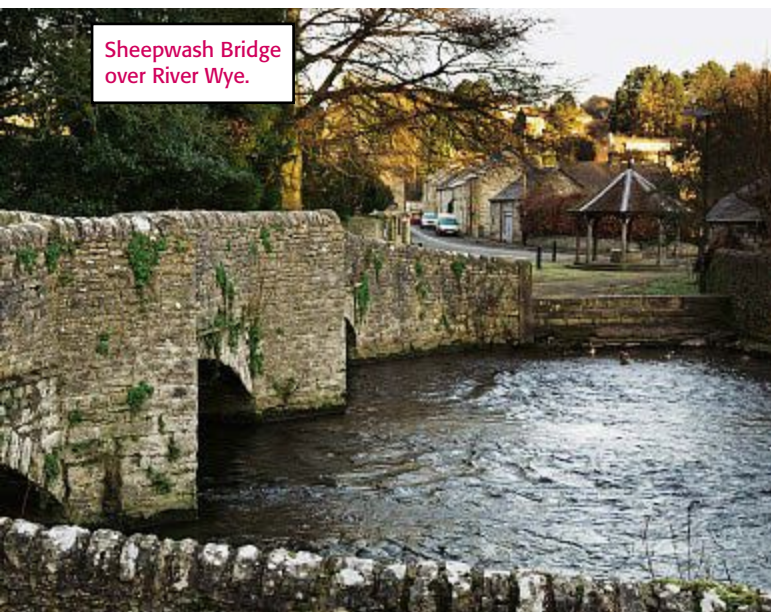
direction of Kinder Scout and the start of the gritstone Dark Peak.

This way avoids a wonderful but muddy winter walk, but with Jack Frost firming up our progress, we took the right fork at Cressbrook Mill, which rises a little less steeply until the lane on the right drops down to Ravensdale.

This part of the walk leads through one of Britain's hidden gems. First the lane descends in sunshine streaming through bare-branched trees, where, to the right, fields in deep shadow remain frost-encrusted.

At the end of the lane, past a small parking spot, are two rows of cottages, known as "Bury-me-Wick", or just "The Wick", which look like a film set.

Some locals say that these were built for mill workers, but they are so remote that the other explanation – that they belonged to lead miners – seems a



Sheepwash Bridge over River Wye.



Country lanes as quiet as footpaths.

bit more plausible. Standing face to face down a shallow slope, they are particularly attractive, but must be a lonely place in winter as we were told only one has a full-time resident. The others are let as seasonal holiday cottages.

Cressbrook Dale is a magical, mysterious place, where everything is carpeted with thick moss.

Trees, rocks and the dry stone wall on both sides of the brook are covered in soft green growth, which as well as looking very otherworldly, deadens the sound in a remarkable way.

"You could film one of those swords and sorcery dramas here," Hazel noted as I slithered down a bank to take a picture of the shallow stream, fringed with translucent ice.

Deep in the valley, everywhere was frozen solid, whilst the trees high up the steep-sided slope glowed golden in the morning sun.

"If it wasn't so cold, our boots would be covered in mud," Hazel said as the ground crunched and cracked with our every footstep.

"It is so eerie today. I can't ever remember being anywhere with this kind of atmosphere. It is as if we are in a really special place."

The path continues beside the water for a mile or so



"Bury-me-Wick" in winter, in shady Cressbrook.

before emerging into a steep-sided valley. It's breathtakingly bright when emerging from the shady confines of the woods, although whilst warming the upper slopes, the winter sunlight doesn't penetrate down to the valley floor.

The valley is renowned for displays of rare wildflowers like cranesbills and orchids, which are said to have inspired a young David Bellamy when he stayed in nearby Ravenstor Youth Hostel.

In winter, despite a clear blue sky and sunshine, the arrival of floral delights is still many months away.

Peter's Stone, high on the valley's side, has a gorie

local name – Gibbet Rock.

It was here that Anthony Lingard's body was suspended in 1815, as a warning to others, after he has been convicted of murdering Wardlow toll-house keeper Hannah Oliver.

In a dark coincidence, a short while after, her sister, also a toll-house keeper, met a similarly gruesome end near York.

We spotted dog walkers using the path rising steeply to Wardlow on one side and up Tansley Dale to Litton – our destination – on the other.

It is a bit of a strenuous climb, but we paused every now and then to gather our breath, turning round to enjoy the lovely view where the slopes are studded with rocky outcrops, before emerging in farmland a short, level walk from Litton village.

If you were to make a list of all the things which make a perfect village – school, shops, affordable housing, churches, community spirit, transport links and a traditional pub beside the village green – Litton ticks all the boxes.

It also helps that it is very attractive and is surrounded by well-kept farmland.

The lively town of

Tideswell is a five-minute drive away and it doesn't take much longer to walk along Church Lane, which emerges above the Cathedral of the Peaks, but we had timed our walk to arrive at the Red Lion just as the doors opened, to enjoy a warming lunch of home-made soup.

As we settled beside the fire, three chaps of a certain age took their regular seats, as they do most lunchtimes, and after saying their hellos drew us into conversation. All were village men, who were delighted to have such a lovely local.

Like characters from "Last Of The Summer Wine", they ribbed each other with the familiarity only a lifetime's friendship can create, just breaking off the chat to natter to the postie leaving a pile of letters on the bar.

We could have easily spent all afternoon in this cosy haven, but the bus back to our car was due, bringing an end to a perfect winter walk. ■



A dew pond just outside the lovely village of Litton.

Getting there

Ashford-in-the-Water is regularly served by Transpeak buses between Derby and Buxton, and the 173 Castleton to Bakewell bus connects Litton with Ashford-in-the-Water.



Want to know more?

For visitor and tourist information, telephone 01629 816558, or you can visit www.visitpeakdistrict.com or www.peakdistrict.gov.uk.

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"The Taj is as awe inspiring in real life as it is in photos"



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

IT was just before sunrise when the gates opened at the Taj Mahal.

I'd been queuing in the female line for about half an hour, chatting to a young American woman who was touring the country with her husband after a wedding in the Punjab.

"It lasted five days," she said. "I had to have a different outfit for each day of the week."

It transpired that it was the wedding of a former colleague with whom she'd worked on the west coast of the USA. She said it was truly an amazing experience.

I envied her, I said, having been to a Greek wedding a few years ago and finding that pretty incredible.

But a Sikh wedding – well, that must have been magnificent.

The two of us compared notes, then the queue started to move as a colourful group of Hindu ladies swished past in sari and kameez, chattering nineteen to the dozen.

"Looks like we're on our way," the young lady said.

We shook hands and said goodbye as we entered the fray, and never saw each other again. All I know is that her name is Charlotte and she is a piano teacher in Ohio. Oh, the stories that surround us – and we'll never know the half of them.

After being searched at the security gate, I met up with Mr Grigg and our guide. We were escorted along the path by a large rhesus macaque. We kept our distance, as these monkeys can be quite aggressive.

Even though it was early, there were still scores of people making their way through the great entrance gate to get their first glimpse of the Taj.

And there it was, this beautiful building in all its glory, rising as if on a magic carpet above formal gardens.

Commissioned in 1632 by the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, as a mausoleum for his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj is as awe-inspiring in real life as it is in photos.

This was one of the main highlights of our trip to India,

which I had promised myself after my sister died suddenly last year.

She had always spoken with great fondness about her trip to India a few years ago, and I wanted to follow in her footsteps.

So, at the great gate, Mr Grigg and I stopped for a moment to take in this breathtaking sight.

It didn't matter about the crowds swirling around its base, or all the people just standing there, gawping, soaking up the spectacle.

The people disappeared from view, the Taj Mahal looming so large and incredible on our horizon.

The spell was broken by a gathering at the entrance. A man with a camera on a tripod was filming someone

talking about the Taj in calm but enthusiastic tones.

"You know who that is, don't you?" I whispered to Mr Grigg.

The face and voice were unmistakable: gardening broadcaster Monty Don.

"We need to get a picture of you with him," Mr Grigg said.

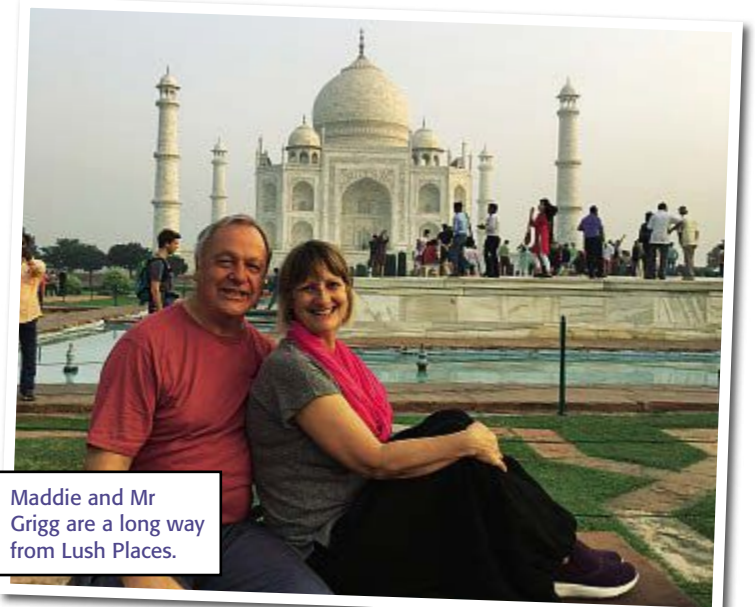
"But they're busy at the moment. We can't interrupt," I said, always wary about approaching celebrities and not one at all for selfies.

Filming over momentarily, Mr Grigg pounced.

The good-natured Monty Don said we could take a photo, but it would have to be "now or not at all".

He's obviously very practised at having his photo taken, because in the resulting photograph, the presenter looks calm and serene and I look like I'm chewing a wasp.

After that excitement, we made our way along the gardens to the Taj. And, after not much persuasion from our guide, we held each other in a quick embrace in front of this magnificent backdrop. ■



Maddie and Mr Grigg are a long way from Lush Places.



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An Unclaimed Treasure

Being single, that's what Judith called herself. But the truth was, she was lonely . . .



A **QUEUE** stretched from every single one of the checkouts. Judith picked one at random, put down her basket and prepared to wait.

It wasn't as though she was in a rush, and no-one was waiting for her. Not now.

She slid her mobile phone out of her pocket. No messages.

What would they be doing at the office right now, she wondered. It was nearly ten o'clock.

Becky would be circling everyone's desk, collecting up the mugs and making tea. Karen would have brought in home-baked biscuits and they would be sampling them and pretending they were the judges on "The Great British Bake Off".

She felt a pang for the daily bustle, the clack of computer keyboards, the printer whirring and phones ringing.

The queue shuffled forward a few paces.

I retired too soon, she thought. Sixty-four wasn't old. She was fit, active, and hadn't had a hint of a senior moment.

She'd run her own business for 30 years, and when her trusted deputy had come into an inheritance and tentatively offered to buy the business, Judith had seen it as an opportunity.

Her business stayed in safe hands, her staff kept their jobs, and she had the luxury of early retirement

with plenty of time and energy to pour into a new challenge.

If only she could figure out what that challenge might be.

A squeal interrupted her reverie and she snapped back into the present moment.

The woman in front of her was struggling with a laden trolley, two children in the front seat – a baby and a toddler. As the shopping jerked down the conveyor belt, the baby grabbed at packets and dropped them on the floor.

"Daisy! Stop it!" the woman cried.

She hoisted the baby out and bounced her on her hip, unloading the shopping one-handed. Denied her fun, the baby scrunched up her face and howled.

"Daisy, don't cry," the woman said, jiggling harder.

The howl intensified and the toddler started to drum his heels against the trolley.

"I want out! I want out!" "Just a minute, Thomas," the woman said.

Her shopping was flying through the checkout and building up in a pile in the packing area. She fumbled with her bags, trying to shake them open whilst bouncing the baby with one arm and trying to pacify the little boy.

"Can I help?" Judith said, stepping forward.

The woman looked up, flushed. A strand of her hair stuck to her cheek.

"Thank you. I'm just trying to . . . you know."

Judith smiled.

"Shall I hold the baby

while you pack?"

The woman hesitated.

"That's very kind, but your jacket looks smart and she's not long been fed."

Judith glanced down at her jacket: well-cut navy wool worn over a cream silk blouse and tailored navy trousers. It was hard to get out of the habit of dressing as an executive, even if she didn't have a job to go to.

"That's all right," she said, holding out her arms for the baby. "Come on, Daisy, let Mummy pack the shopping."

Two surprised blue eyes met hers and Daisy stopped crying. Judith settled her on her hip, savouring the scent of talc and rusks.

She wriggled her fingers at Daisy and was rewarded with a chuckle.

"What's your name?" Judith asked the toddler.

"Thomas," he said. "I'm three in May."

"That's very grown up," Judith said. "Are you Thomas like the engine?"

"I've got a wooden track

and an engine and a signal box," he said. "It's red."

"That sounds lovely. You're a lucky boy."

"I have a teddy called Thomas. He's only got one eye."

"Is he a pirate in disguise?" she said and Thomas giggled.

The children's mother had packed her shopping and was lugging it into the trolley when the handles snapped on one of the bags, and her groceries spilled all over the floor.

"Oh!" she cried, and burst into tears.

People scurried round to pick up the tins and apples, and the checkout girl supplied a new shopping bag.

"Thank you, you're very kind," she said, over and over.

"End of your tether?" Judith asked gently.

The woman nodded. "It's silly to get upset about such a little thing."

"We've all been there," Judith said.

▶ “How about I take you for a cup of tea, and you can tell me all about it?”

“I don’t want to hold you up.”

“You’re not. I’ve only got a few things to buy.” She held out her hand. “I’m Judith.”

“I’m Carrie. Lovely to meet you.”

Carrie waited with the children while Judith went through the checkout, then they headed into the supermarket’s café.

Judith held Daisy on her lap while Carrie helped Thomas unpeel his banana.

“You’re good with them,” Carrie said, nodding at Daisy, who was peacefully taking it all in. “Lots of grandchildren?”

Judith shook her head.

“I don’t have any grandchildren, or children, or a husband,” she said.

“I’m an unclaimed treasure!”

It was what she always said when someone asked, and it had never bothered her until now.

Carrie smiled.

“Well, I’m glad of your help. Sorry about earlier.”

“Not at all. Want to talk about it?”

“My husband’s got a six-month contract in London and is only home at weekends,” Carrie said. “I love Thomas and Daisy, but some days I feel frazzled.”

“Perfectly natural,” Judith said. “Are their grandparents nearby?”

Carrie shook her head.

“My parents are two hundred miles away, and I only see them a few times a year,” she said. “My father-in-law is closer, but not much. I wish we could see him more often. Still, it’s more than many children have.”

“One of my friends only sees her grandchildren over Skype,” Judith said. “Her son and daughter-in-law moved to New Zealand.”

“That’s a shame,” Carrie said. “What do you do, Judith?”

“I retired six weeks ago.” Six weeks, two days and seventeen hours, to be precise. “I used to run my own recruitment business.”

“That sounds interesting.”

“It was. The thing I loved

most was matching the candidate to the perfect job. I used to look at their personalities and make sure they’d enjoy a particular workplace and thrive there. A happy employee is a productive employee.”

“Definitely,” Carrie agreed. “How are you spending your retirement?”

Judith thought about her diary. Six weeks ago every page was scribbled over with meetings and appointments. Now the blank pages mocked her.

She glanced at Carrie, her throat tight.

“To be honest,” she said, “I’m a little bit lost.”

* * * *

A little bit lost didn’t cover the half of it, she reflected as she let herself into her house and put away her shopping.

She made a cup of tea she didn’t really want, and sat at the kitchen table listening to the silence.

“Your problem is you didn’t plan for retirement,” she scolded herself. How many times had she addressed staff meetings and intoned, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail?”

If only she’d listened to her own advice!

She drummed her fingers on the table and tried to see this new phase of her life as an opportunity.

She was lucky: she had the time and energy to do whatever she wanted now. If only she could work out what that was.

The best remedy for self pity was to keep busy, she thought, so she changed into old clothes and went out to tackle the garden.

Heavy rain followed by days of warm sunshine had given everything a growth spurt, especially the weeds.

With the radio in the background and a trowel in her hand, she set to work, relishing the sunshine across her shoulders.

As usual when she gardened, her mind wandered.

Maybe I should have married, she thought, but who? There had been romances over the years, but no-one with whom she would willingly stand

shoulder to shoulder facing whatever life brought.

Now her home seemed as lonely as she was, and she wondered how it would be to have a family: grandchildren running in with paintings and stories, bumped knees and new bicycles.

“At least I don’t have grandchildren I never see because they live in New Zealand,” she told herself.

How bittersweet that must be, watching them grow up via a screen, in touch with them yet apart.

She thought of her friend and of Carrie, both of them with families far away. They weren’t the only ones: there were lots of grandparents ready to make clothes for dolls and to read bedtime stories, and lots of children who hardly saw their grandparents.

Judith paused, then sat back on her heels. Her mind raced and tingles ran down her arms.

An idea had opened in her mind. She abandoned the weeding and dashed inside, grabbed a pen and notebook, and sat scribbling at the table until the sky bloomed purple and the room darkened.

Then she called Carrie.

* * * *

A banner stretched across the front of the church hall announced *Unclaimed Treasures – Launch Today*, and bunting fluttered from the trees. Inside, the hall rang with chatter and laughter.

Judith stood in the doorway, fizzing with a mixture of pride and amazement.

“You did it!” Carrie said, hugging her. “Well done.”

“Thanks for all your help,” Judith replied. “And for inspiring me to give it a go.”

A TV news reporter bustled up and dragged her away for an interview.

“How did you get the idea for *Unclaimed Treasures*?” she asked.

“I realised there were lots of older people who wanted a grandparent role and had plenty to offer, and there were families whose grandparents were far away,” Judith explained.

“*Unclaimed Treasures* matches them up!

“I used to work in recruitment, matching the perfect candidate to the ideal job. This is just the same, only I’m matching seniors with children who need grannies and grandpas,” she finished.

Judith looked around the hall, relishing the hubbub. Shy children sidled up to silver-haired seniors, offering toys and books.

Knees creaked as people hunkered down on the floor to build towers and help lay out train tracks.

It had taken weeks of organisation to set it up, then a mammoth round of advertising.

Judith’s voice grew hoarse from all the interviews she gave to TV, newspapers and radio, never mind all the presentations at libraries and social clubs.

Carrie had been wonderful, using her contacts at toddler groups and schools to help spread the word.

Then the applications had started to come in, and Judith had used her recruitment expertise to interview everyone, check their references and get them police checked, before matching up families.

Now she thrilled at the sight of the unclaimed treasures making friends with their new families.

“Someone wants to see you,” Carrie said, leading Thomas by the hand.

“Nanna Treasure!” he cried, holding up a plastic dinosaur.

“That’s lovely,” Judith said. “What sort is it?”

“A scary one!”

“Oh, I’ll be careful then.”

“I’ll protect you, Nanna Treasure,” Thomas said solemnly. “With my sword.”

Judith and Carrie exchanged smiles. Every time Judith heard the name Nanna Treasure, her heart glowed.

Her diary was full, her days were spent doing something she loved and making people happy, and she had a purpose again.

But the best thing was, she was no longer an unclaimed treasure. She had Carrie and Thomas and Daisy: her new family. ■

Now there is help for tired and heavy legs

I was so unhappy because of my tired legs



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

had really grown tired and she had to say no to many adventures. Marta also began to have trouble getting up and down stairs.

the food supplement called Wonder Legs, a tablet based on pine bark and wine leaves. Marta decided to try in the hope that it would help her.

tell me that they have got back the old happy Marta - and that is a good thing!"

Marta lives in a lovely sun-filled flat. She is a former canteen assistant – now on a pension – and she loves going on outings with friends and neighbours. But her legs

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

Marta had tried almost everything, until another elderly lady from the next door came for morning coffee and told her about

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Where to find Wonder Legs™

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

Health & wellbeing

Great advice to keep you happy and healthy

Q. I love going for walks in the countryside, but I have a continuing problem with athlete's foot – can you help?



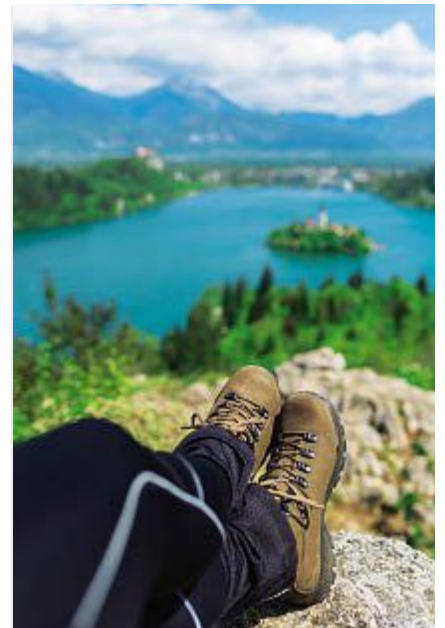
Podiatrist Trevor Prior, foot care expert with Vionic shoes, is here to help.

Athlete's foot is not a serious fungal infection, but it can cause discomfort and irritation between the toes or on the soles of the feet if left untreated.

Although walking is great for you, your walking boots will be the place where the fungus can thrive in the most warm and moist conditions.

I recommend washing and drying your feet thoroughly every day; don't share towels, and check feet regularly to treat any athlete's foot to prevent it spreading. Invest in some cotton socks or socks that can draw the moisture away from your feet, too.

The key thing to remember is to change footwear daily. Don't wear the same boots every day as it takes longer than overnight for the natural sweat to dry out. Avoid ones made of synthetic materials and clean the inside of your boots regularly with some commercial anti-fungal treatment.



In The News

Listen Up!

Use your right ear, not your left if you want to remember something. A new US study has shown we could be up to 40% more likely to remember what we hear when we block noise from our left ear and listen attentively with the right.

It seems we use our right ear for processing and retaining information as sounds entering there are processed on the left side of the brain, which controls speech, language development and portions of memory.

The study showed this right/left distinction becomes more apparent the tougher the memory challenge we have to face.

Focus On Fitness

There's no such thing as a good excuse not to be active. Try these motivational snippets to get you moving:

What's your excuse?

✓I'm injured: ask your GP for recommendations of what you can do and focus on exercising uninjured areas.

✓I haven't got time: **modify your daily routine to include activity (stand at work, use stairs instead of the lift).**

✓It's too cold: wrap up warm or exercise indoors.

✓I hate exercise: **combine activity with something fun (music, audio books, podcasts, TV shows, movies or get-togethers with friends).**

✓I'm too old: try exercising in a pool (resistance exercises or brisk walking in the shallow end), and try yoga, tai chi or even ballroom dancing. Elliptical machines and recumbent bikes are great for reducing pressure on stiff or aching joints.

Health Bite



Leeks are an important member of the garlic and onion "allium" family and bring numerous health benefits to meals throughout the winter.

They combine health-giving flavonoids and polyphenols (which help protect blood vessel linings from damage) as well as sulphur-containing nutrients. They are also a great source of "prebiotic" fibre on which our gut bacteria loves to feed.

Leeks are known to contain 29% of your daily requirement of vitamin K and good amounts of B6 folate (which supports our cardiovascular system) and the minerals manganese, copper and iron.

After chopping, let your leeks sit for five minutes to maximise the power of the natural plant nutrients released in response to "injury", then lightly sauté and enjoy!



Don't let devices become a real pain!

Shedding Light On Sleep Patterns

Studies show that between 50 and 70% of us don't get the restorative sleep our brains need beyond midlife.

One reason is that we lose our ability to absorb daylight (through the retina of the eye) as we get older. After the age of sixty, as much as 40% of the daylight is not absorbed properly, meaning the daylight sensors in the brain become confused, impairing their ability to set the "circadian clock", which tells us when to feel sleepy and when to wake up.

Your brain needs bright, natural light during the day, and softer light at night. So try to get out into the light for a brisk morning walk and again at dusk to help your brain react to the changing light and naturally prepare for sleep.

You can also spend a few minutes in front of a light box in the morning and turn off all electronic devices in the bedroom to ensure your brain gets the best morning/night-time light messages.

Preventing Tech Neck



Our Health Writer, Colleen Shannon, finds out how to avoid this modern malady.

TECHNOLOGY is swiftly becoming part of our everyday lives, and the way we use it is changing fast, too. According to Ofcom, seven in 10 UK adults now use a smartphone and 50% of people use a tablet device to go online. Use has grown fastest among people over the age of sixty-five.

We're still adapting in so many ways, and that includes protecting our health. One of the problems that can happen is stiffness and pain caused by incorrect or over-use of phones, tablets or computers.

To learn more, I contacted the Royal College of Occupational Therapists and had a chat with their Professional Adviser, Paul Cooper.

Occupational therapists provide practical support at home or at work, to help people recover and get on with the activities that matter to them.

Paul told me that the human body was made to move. Crouching over a mobile phone, tablet or computer puts the body in an unnatural position. If we spend a long time doing this, it affects the neck and spine.

It is very easy for the time to slip away when you are absorbed in reading or watching a film. But it's so important to stand up regularly and move around.

One easy solution is to set a reminder on your device, so it pings an alert to tell

you when it's time to get up and move.

You can also take micro-breaks, looking away from your screen for a moment and doing some simple stretches.

It's also fundamental to have the right equipment and set-up. If you're looking at a portable computer, put it on a table and not in your lap. When you're looking at a tablet device, place it on a stand and again, put it on a table.

Whatever device you are using, make sure your chair is the right size for you, and properly supports your back, neck and head.

Think about your vision, too. If the screen is hard to see, you will strain your neck and your eyes when trying to focus. You can change the settings on your device so the text is bigger.

If glare is a problem, you can get a filter to place over the screen, or sit where the lighting is more comfortable.

Stress makes the situation worse, because your muscles tense up. So it is worth practising some mindfulness or relaxation exercises during the day.

At work, an occupational health professional can help you make adjustments, so do tell your boss if neck pain is troubling you.

If you have neck pain and it's not getting better, please see your GP. (Of course, it is vital to see a doctor immediately if your neck hurts after an accident or injury.) It's important to investigate and treat other possible causes.

Your GP can also refer you for further care from an occupational therapist or a physiotherapist. They can suggest exercises and adjustments to your everyday activities, and help you get back to a comfortable and productive life. ■

Spray Relief

If you are bothered by a sore, hoarse throat at this time of year, try the new 100% natural Otosan throat spray.

Its active plant ingredients include natural beta glucans which have an immunity-stimulating and hydrating action, hedge mustard extract which has an anti-inflammatory effect in the upper airways, thyme essential oil which acts as a disinfectant, orange essential oil for its calming properties and anethole for its anaesthetic action.

Together they help soothe and rehydrate an inflamed throat to reduce irritation and calm a dry cough and form a protective layer against possible viral invaders.

Otosan Spray Forte is priced £8.99 from health shops or www.healthy2u.co.uk.



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Butter On His Paws

It was Oscar's first time outside, but Linda knew he would soon return home . . .



GRAN, Oscar's been outside for hours," Ava said, her brow furrowed as she wrung her hands.

"Don't worry about Oscar, he'll be home soon."

Linda put some dishes into the sink so she could discreetly look out the window for a glimpse of the black and white kitten whom they hadn't seen in nearly five hours.

She was surprised he wasn't home by now. When she let kittens outside for the first time, they didn't usually wander far, and were in and out all day.

But he would be back. Linda knew he would. Aunt Jessie's trick had never failed yet.

She turned back to Ava. "How about we get started on a salad to have at the barbecue?" she said, hoping to distract her.

Ava nodded.

"I can't wait for the barbecue," she said, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

"I know you can't, so let's make a start before Grandad gets back with the gas. You can sit up at the table and pull this lettuce apart, then put the leaves in the colander while I do some chopping."

As Linda prepared Ava at the table, the cat flap rattled. They both looked up expectantly as Millie, her older tabby cat, sauntered in, ignoring them both.

Millie was an old hand; outside was no big deal. She had looked on earlier, unimpressed, while Oscar

pounced on blades of grass and passing shadows.

Ava looked up at Linda with wide eyes.

"How do you know Oscar's going to come home?"

"I know he's going to come home because he's left footprints so he can find his way back," Linda replied, recalling the story Aunt Jessie had told her when she had once asked a similar question.

Ava frowned.

"Footprints?"

Linda went over to the fridge and took out the butter dish, then fetched a piece of paper. She sat beside Ava and scooped out some butter with her finger and encouraged Ava to do the same.

"Don't ever do this at home," she whispered.

Ava grinned conspiratorially.

"When Oscar went out this morning," Linda explained, "I put some butter on his paws, just like this. So when he wants to come home, he just follows his footprints. See?"

She walked her finger over the piece of paper, leaving a trail of greasy circles. Ava copied her, giggling.

"Oh! But what if it rains?" Linda took a deep breath. Ava was too smart for her sometimes.

"Cats have a very good sense of smell. So even if the butter washes away, he'll still be able to smell it."

Ava nodded, satisfied with her answer, and made a circle of butter dots on

the paper, while Linda reached for the kitchen roll.

"Now, let's clean our hands and get on with that salad."

As Linda chopped cucumber slices, she remembered watching with wonder as Jessie put a small pat of butter on an old saucer, scooped her finger through it, then daubed some on the top and bottom of each paw.

The cat would pause to lick some off before the back door was opened and it was unceremoniously dumped on to the step, nose twitching and eyes blinking as it adjusted to this sudden expansion of its world.

Linda had no idea how Aunt Jessie's superstition worked, or even if it really did, but it had given her peace of mind, as it did Ava.

She loved seeing her cats set off into the wilderness of the garden, tentative and springy as they tried to take in every smell and sound.

She wanted them to enjoy life, to make the most of it and explore their world, but she also wanted to know that they would find their way home again.

"Granny," Ava asked, "can butter help people find their way home as well

if you put it on their shoes?

"Because I was thinking about when I go to the big school. It's quite far away and if I have to walk by myself, I might get lost and not remember the way home."

Linda suppressed the urge to laugh. Ava had only just started primary school, so the big school was many years away.

"You know what, Ava?" she began. "I'm sure that by the time you go to the big school, you'll know how to find your way home. But if not, I'll make sure and tell Mummy to put butter on your shoes, just in case."

"That's good, I don't ever want to be lost," Ava replied, shaking her head.

Linda knew without any doubt that butter worked just as well on people.

As with her cats, Linda had wanted her children to make the most of life and explore their world.

Now Kate was a hairdresser on a cruise ship, James was a photographer based in Germany, and Laura had worked in Vietnam as a teacher until she'd settled in the local area to start her own family.

Linda never held them back; indeed, she encouraged them to

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Tales From Prospect House

Being a vet
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▶ follow their dreams, as much as it hurt to watch them set off into the world on their own. But they always came back.

Laura lived just a few streets away, Kate came home every couple of months, and James made a point of visiting once a year.

"I'll be back soon," Kate had told her as she set off for the first time. "Just like James and Laura always are."

"Oh, I know," Linda had replied, choking back tears at the thought of daily life without her youngest child in it. "I know that for sure."

What she didn't add was that the night before each of them left, she had dabbed a tiny dot of butter on to the soles and tops of their shoes.

Laura and Kate had both left with barely noticeable shiny patches on their boots, while James had had discreet greasy dots on the tongues of his trainers, just under the laces. She was sure that he would never notice.

Just like the cats, she wouldn't let them out into the world without butter on their paws. She wanted them to leave their own greasy footprints, so they could follow them back home any time they needed or wanted to.

Although they often followed those prints back home, it was rare for them all to be there together at the same time.

But today, for the first time in years, they would all be together for a family barbecue, and she could hardly wait.

The cat flap rattled again. "Oscar!"

Ava abandoned the lettuce and scrambled down. Oscar's eyes were bright and his tail was swishing.

"Clever boy! You followed your footprints!" Ava cried, kneeling beside him and stroking his head.

Linda smiled, wondering at the stories he no doubt longed to tell them after his first day outside.

"Buttered paws always find their way home," she said. ■

THE call came in just after I'd finished morning surgery. "It's the Stockwell sisters," Beryl

hissed, one hand over the receiver, the other gesticulating wildly at me. "They're in a bit of a fix. They want you to visit."

Beryl thrust the receiver in my hand.

"Is that veterinary?" the voice enquired.

"Paul Mitchell, yes."

"We need you to come out and see to Daphne, one of our Jerseys."

"What's the problem?"

"She's stuck."

In the mud? In a cow stall?

"In a tree."

"A tree?"

"Yes. An oak tree."

After a few words of reassurance, I said I'd be over in the next half hour, curious to discover how a cow had ended up in a tree.

I'd been to the Stockwells' house several times in the two years I'd been at the practice. The view of Hawkshill Farm tucked down in the valley was pleasing.

The farmhouse, red-roofed, flint-walled, tile-hung, with small-paned windows, harked back to a bygone age. A "Far From The Madding Crowd" era.

Farmers in breeches; cows lowing in the byre. A rosy-cheeked Bathsheba Everdene with a trug of freshly picked raspberries, picking her way across the clean, straw-littered yard.

Except that the Stockwells' yard was a morass of cow dung, puddled and odorous. Sunk in it, waiting for me, were two welly-booted women, the Stockwell twins.

Madge and Rosie were both in mud-splattered overalls. Both with pudding-

basin grey hair. Both indistinguishable from each other.

"You've arrived," one said.

"Come to rescue Daphne," the other said.

"Well, if possible," I replied, having donned my own boots to join them in the middle of the yard's lagoon of cow slurry.

"Anything's possible," the twins chorused.

"Let's get cracking. Lead the way," I said, anxious to see this arboreal cow.

"You want to take him, Madge?" Rosie said. "I'll fetch a bow saw and shears."

"Or I can get them, Rosie, while you take him," Madge countered.

I eventually found myself wading out of the yard led by Madge or Rosie – I couldn't tell the difference.

We slipped and slithered along a hoof-pitted track round the back of the farm complex until we reached a wooden five-barred gate, tied shut with a piece of orange baler twine.

"Best climb over," Madge/Rosie said.

Ahead, stretching into the distance up a slope, was a wide meadow, much of the grass eaten down, the results of its digestion scattered in piles as far as the eye could see.

Almost central to that meadow was a solitary tree, house-high and dead, its branches bleached and ridged by countless storms and summer sun.

There was a natural bifurcation of the trunk into two limbs about shoulder height. Weathering over the years had caused a split between those two limbs.

The result was a crack

which had spiralled down to open up in the bole of the tree as an ovoid cavity of decayed wood, large enough to be filled by a Jersey cow's head.

Daphne's head was engaged in doing just that. Immersed in that hole, out of sight.

Approaching her, I could see that Daphne looked remarkably calm. There were regular movements of her rib cage as she breathed, but otherwise she stood stock still, with only the occasional swish of her tail.

Several of the Jerseys had gathered round, curious as to what had happened.

Madge/Rosie shooed them away while I put my black bag down and bit my lip, wondering what to do.

The other twin turned up with the bow saw and a claw hammer. The tree was far too big to hack any of the tree's two limbs away from the cow's head, but it gave me an idea.

I walked round to the other side of the trunk and tapped it. As I'd hoped, it sounded hollow.

"Let's try chipping the trunk away here," I said.

"Veterinary wants a hole," Madge said to Rosie. Or was it Rosie to Madge?

Fifteen minutes later we'd succeeded in making a large enough aperture for us to see Daphne peering through at us from inside.

"Let's see if we can shoo her backwards," I declared.

Rosie and Madge started waving their arms and shooing for all their worth. There was a moo from the trunk of the tree and then a scrabbling of feet as Daphne backed away from the sight of the twirling twins and freed herself.

What a relief! Daphne had got herself out of a hole.

And I had done likewise.

More next week.

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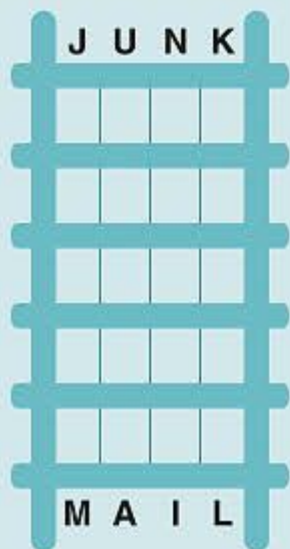
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Brain teasers

Answers on p87

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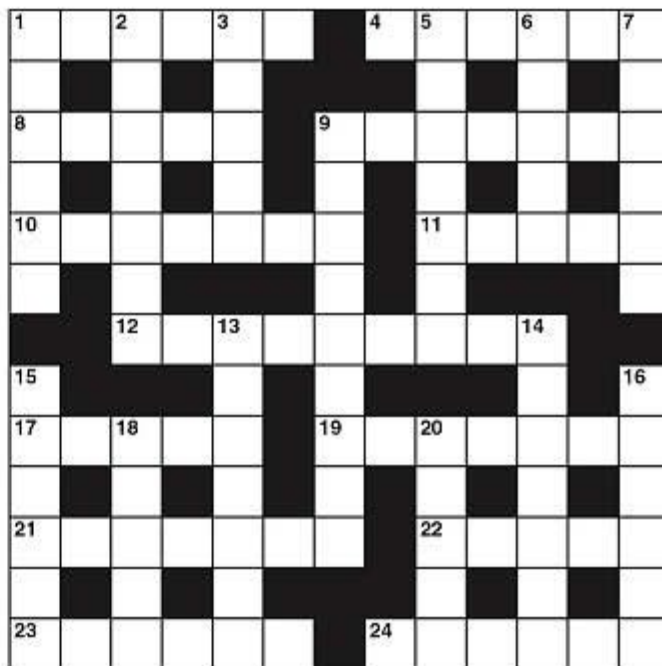
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ACROSS

- 1 Vehicle reversing next to road tunnel (6)
- 4 Commercial times produce wise sayings (6)
- 8 Bent against back road (5)
- 9 Dry gate turned and turned (7)
- 10 Letter from America? (7)
- 11 Ben is novel writer (5)
- 12 Craftsman with time on his hands? (9)
- 17 Start on TV (5)
- 19 Characters on the slope? (7)
- 21 Mimic one friend eating it (7)
- 22 Defamation of the Spanish after liberation (5)
- 23 Make point inside box (6)
- 24 Non-returnable type of ticket (3-3)

DOWN

- 1 Cut north to river (6)
- 2 Below a Scottish mountain, hate develops (7)
- 3 Distribute a load, say (5)
- 5 Beloved brave (about fifty) (7)



- 6 Computer guru Bill's ways in (5)
- 7 I'd sign off train storage track (6)
- 9 Girl leading 'er out (9)
- 13 Take back RE pamphlet (7)
- 14 Artist in front colours in the sky (7)
- 15 Astrological signs in palazzo Di accessed (6)
- 16 He lays out Fred Elliott's son in *Corrie* (6)
- 18 Take hold of oceans, we hear (5)
- 20 Exhausted everyone at home (3-2)

Pieceword

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



ACROSS

- 1 Speak contemptuously of God
- 2 Change back and forth
- 3 Remote branch
- 4 Encircled
- 5 Plant of the daisy family with brightly coloured flowers
- 6 Filch, steal
- 7 Rich, dark variety of soy sauce
- 8 Marked with indentations
- 9 Obliterated
- 10 Despicable
- 11 Thought generated in the mind
- 12 Jutted out

Sudoku

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



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All Are Welcome

Gillian Thornton meets the man who is bringing history to life for National Trust visitors.

EVERYONE loves a good day out, and heritage sites across the country are seeing a steady rise in visitor numbers.

But with so many different attractions competing for public time and money, it's a highly competitive market.

So there's a huge challenge facing John Orna-Ornstein, who recently took up his new role as Director of Curation and Experience for the National Trust.

John joins the Trust from the Arts Council where he was Director of Museums. Before that, he spent 15 years at the British Museum. But he has no wish to turn

National Trust properties into museums.

John's mission is to bring them alive, engage visitors through new presentations and experiences and attract visitors who've never tried a National Trust property before.

"I've had so much pleasure myself from museums, heritage and the arts, and I saw this new role as a unique opportunity to work not just for an organisation I love but hopefully to enhance other people's lives as well," John, whose responsibilities range from buildings to archaeology, conservation to collections, says.

We meet in the spacious

café at Anglesey Abbey in Cambridgeshire, a Jacobean manor house close to Newmarket which was bought by racing enthusiast Lord Fairhaven in 1926.

It's packed with his collection of paintings, ceramics and many treasures, but equally attractive is the park that was landscaped from rough fenland with avenues of majestic trees and intimate hidden gardens.

Anglesey Abbey was a favourite family destination when my own children were young. Not just the acres of outdoor space where they could play and let off steam, but the interior, too.

We'd look out for special clocks and unusual objects. Thirty years on, we're all still active supporters of the National Trust.

John has a similar story to tell. He grew up in Sussex where his parents regularly took the family to grand National Trust properties such as Petworth House, and to areas of open countryside like the Seven Sisters cliffs, high above the English Channel.

"If I'm honest, I preferred the open spaces where we could run around, but I can clearly remember my first visit to the British Museum



John is getting to know the National Trust's attractions.

and looking up in awe at those huge sculptures."

So when his grandmother left him £1,000 in his twenties, John assured himself of unlimited visits with Life Membership of the National Trust.

He and his wife have since brought up their own children with a love of National Trust properties.

A particular family favourite is Wimpole Hall and Home Farm in Cambridgeshire.

Not surprising then that John is delighted to see National Trust membership rise significantly in recent months – now topping the five million mark – and to find that the biggest growth is in Family Membership.

More people now belong as part of a family group than any other sector, which has to bode well for the future.

And whilst my generation of parents was grateful just

Ploughing at the Home Farm, Wimpole Hall.





The Seven Sisters cliffs and the English Channel.

to find a child-friendly leaflet and menu, today's family visitors are treated to a wide range of special activities and interactive experiences to engage younger visitors, parents and grandparents.

Many properties offer deckchairs, croquet lawns and outdoor games, whilst indoors you can often relax on selected sofas, play the piano and browse books.

"Not that it's all about younger visitors," John says firmly. "I received a number of letters from members before our AGM in October asking us not to forget the Trust's older members.

"And we certainly won't. One of my tasks is to devise new ways of getting people of all ages and social backgrounds engaged with what we do.

"People really do care about the National Trust. We welcome some twenty-five million paying customers to our properties every year and August last year was our busiest month on record with four million paid visits.

"Then there are the millions more who roam freely over Trust-owned countryside in areas like the Lake District and our coasts.

"But whilst general visitor numbers are rising steadily, the fastest growth is in memberships, which is great. Last year, we invested £137 million in the conservation of our houses and natural environment, and the more members we have, the more investment."

Little by little, John is getting to know the Trust's broad portfolio. His official base is at Trust HQ in

Swindon, but his responsibilities stretch the length and breadth of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, so he's constantly on the road, meeting the staff and the army of volunteers without whom the National Trust couldn't operate.

There were, he admits, some controversial decisions made at some Trust properties in 2017 as they celebrated the Trust's year-long LGBTQ-themed Prejudice and Pride season, but he knows all too well that you can't please all the people all of the time.

"If we did, I think we'd be doing something very anodyne," he points out. "But this year, there'll be less room for controversy as we celebrate the centenary of women's suffrage at properties across the country that are connected with strong and powerful women. And not just from the last century, either."

Take Elizabeth Shrewsbury, better known as Bess of Hardwick, who rose from humble beginnings to become one of the richest and most influential women in Elizabethan England.

Advancing her position further with each of her four marriages, Bess was seventy when work began on her new property, Hardwick Hall, in Derbyshire.

And key Trust properties such as Hardwick now offer visitor experiences for many more weeks of the year. Gone are the days when the National Trust put its houses "to bed" as autumn

approached, "waking them" up after their winter slumber in time for Easter.

Now, many properties are open most of the year

"Here at Anglesey Abbey, for instance, there's a seasonal programme in the house, with two history and two conservation seasons," John explains.

"So when you wander round at certain times, you'll see volunteers and specialist conservators looking after the collections. Visitors can stop to ask questions and in some instances, even help.

"We have two specialist conservation centres at Blickling House in Norfolk and Knole in Kent, but there are still lots of housekeeping tasks that the public can get involved with."

John will also be looking to stage more themed exhibitions at Trust properties, maybe arranging short-term loans of items between properties.

"But the spirit of each individual place will always be paramount and any exhibition must be relevant to its location," he insists.

"We'll be looking at new ways, too, of highlighting particular treasures, perhaps by special lighting or simply rearranging furniture. Rooms can be so busy that it's hard to spot the real treasures or unusual objects."

So keep your eyes open next time you visit a National Trust property. And if you've never thought to visit one before, make this the year you try something new. But be warned, heritage quickly becomes addictive – just ask John! ■

Women And Power

The Representation of the People Act in 1918 granted some women the right to vote in British parliamentary elections for the first time.

The Trust will be commemorating this anniversary by telling stories from their properties, many of which have been overlooked until now.

Women and Power will see events, exhibitions, on-site tours and creative commissions taking place at properties with links to both sides of the suffrage movement.

For more information use the contact details given in the Want To Know More? panel.

The National Trust In Figures

Founded in 1895, the National Trust looks after:

- 775 miles of coastline
 - Over 248,000 hectares of land
 - Over 500 historic houses, castles, ancient monuments, gardens, parks and nature reserves
 - Close to one million objects and works of art
- Most of the property in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cannot be sold or developed without the consent of parliament

Want To Know More?

For information and inspiration from the National Trust, visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk or call 0344 800 1895 (local call rates apply). Open 9.00 a.m. – 5.30 p.m. weekdays, 9.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m. weekends and bank holidays.

Starts today!



Set in the 1800s

Return To Langrannoch

A large house like this did not run by itself. A new housekeeper must be found!

I DON'T need a valet, Mother. I know how to dress myself." Rory Grant-Smyth smiled at his mother. Lady Gertrude liked to think of herself as progressive, but in truth she preferred certain things to be as they always had.

Her husband had had a valet, and so had her older son, Alisdair, but Rory was a different kettle of fish.

Since Alisdair had given up the lairdship and was living with his wife in France, Rory had taken over the role and was running Langrannoch estate as well as the family business in Glasgow.

He had a team around him, but he was the boss. And if he didn't want a personal valet, then his mother would find it difficult to persuade him.

"Well, be aware Philips will be too busy to give you a hand when you need it. This is not the biggest house in the county, but being butler of it is enough for one man. There's Sandy, who could double up as your valet when you need one. Does that suit?"

"None of us need this level of pampering, Mother," Rory said impatiently.

Lady Gertrude straightened her shoulders.

"There are standards to be maintained, Rory. Your father thought so."

They were in the sitting-room of the Dower House, to which Lady Gertrude had retired when Rory married Caroline Hepburn and took over the main house.

Lady Gertrude had dreaded boredom without the challenges of running Langrannoch, but in fact found herself enjoying the peace and quiet, with just the help of her maid and companion, Grace.

She was still renowned in the county for her charity work, but had felt the weight of responsibility slip from her shoulders with

surprise and pleasure.

Rory's wife had come to Langrannoch from a much less elevated though respectable background, being at first governess to Alisdair's son, Donny.

Caroline then became Lady Gertrude's companion. No-one had been more delighted than her ladyship when her son asked Caroline to be his wife, thus supplanting Lady Gertrude as chatelaine.

Although it took a little time to build Caroline's confidence, she was well suited for her new role, and the two women had a splendid rapport. Lady Gertrude was happy to give

advice to Caroline, and Caroline made sure her mother-in-law was always welcome.

Still, now that she was in the Dower House, Lady Gertrude ought not to concern herself with new appointments in the main house. Rory refrained from pointing that out, and gave a patient smile.

"I'll see what Caroline says," he said.

Caroline herself was at that moment in the nursery with her daughter, who had just turned two years old. Helena Gertrude was ruling the roost over the other occupant of the nursery – Isa's son, William David.

"Not do that, William," she pouted as the little boy lifted one of Helena's favourite toys, a cloth elephant that he coveted.

Caroline noted her daughter's automatic assumption of authority. Lady Gertrude was definitely present in the next generation!

As assistant cook, maid of all work and now nanny, Isa was indispensable to the running of Langrannoch House. She had befriended Caroline when she came as governess, and had proved herself invaluable.

She was married to Davie, who worked in the gardens, and soon after Helena was born had produced her own son, William. The children had been in her care from the beginning, though things were changing now.

Since the last housekeeper had married and left to run a bed and breakfast establishment, the post of housekeeper had remained vacant, which meant Isa had to take on more of the housekeeper's responsibilities.

It was definitely time for a proper nanny to be installed, to release Isa from nursery duties. Caroline had interviewed the most promising candidate in a hotel in Perth, and that very afternoon she was due to appear at Langrannoch.

* * * *

Alice Macleod made her way past the stone lions at

the foot of the wide steps to Langrannoch House. She carried on up to the front door, as apprehensive as her employer had been four years before when she took on the job of governess to Donny Grant-Smyth.

Alice couldn't know that, of course. All she was concerned about was her own ability to succeed in her new appointment.

She had been recommended to Lady Gertrude by friends of her ladyship in Inverness-shire, and she liked what she had seen of Mrs Caroline Grant-Smyth. But there was still a huge element of stepping into the unknown.

The imposing door of Langrannoch House was opened by a maid of around seventeen. Alice herself was twenty-three, and had already looked after two children from infancy to school age. Her experience and her delightful Inverness accent had commended themselves to Caroline.

"I'm the new nanny," Alice said shakily.

Tillie Brereton, housemaid with ambitions to be a fully fledged housekeeper eventually, possibly at Balmoral, gave a brief nod.

"Miss Macleod? I'll take you to see Mrs Grant-Smyth."

She looked beyond Alice to the porch and steps behind her. The pony and trap that had brought Alice from Langrannoch Halt stood beside the stone lions, while Spowart, the morose groom, glowered his displeasure as he lifted down the luggage.

Tillie smiled disarmingly.

"Good afternoon, Mr Spowart. Miss Macleod will need her bags, please." She turned to Alice. "Sandy will take them to your room. Come this way."

Though Tillie was not unfriendly, she did prize briskness and efficiency. Saying little beyond "I hope you had a good journey," she led the way to the nursery.

Caroline Grant-Smyth happened to be on the floor fixing the link between two wooden carriages when Tillie knocked and opened

the door.

Caroline scrambled to her feet, handing over the toy and saying, "There you are, William. That's it fixed."

Alice didn't know whether to be pleased or astonished. Here was a member of the local aristocracy playing with two small children on the floor!

Still, it was good to know Mrs Grant-Smyth was human. Alice had only met her once, at her interview in Perth, and had found her pleasant and agreeable, but it was hard to determine more than that in the space of half an hour or so.

"Miss Macleod." Caroline smiled. "Come in and meet your charges. You must be tired and hungry. I'm sure you could do with a cup of tea. Tillie, would you be good enough to ask Isa to come, and to bring us all some refreshment?"

"Certainly, Mrs Grant-Smyth."

It had taken the staff time to learn to say Mrs Grant-

Alice was beginning to feel she might enjoy her new position

Smyth instead of Miss Caroline, but Tillie learned quickly. Isa still struggled.

"Let me introduce you to the children," Caroline said. "This is my daughter, Helena, and the little boy is Isa's son, William. You will be looking after both of them most of the time. William goes home with his parents in the evening."

Alice nodded to indicate she understood, and turned to the children with a smile.

Helena and William were hesitant about the stranger in their midst, but Alice held out a hand to William and met Helena's level stare with equanimity.

Isa came in with a laden tray, put it on the nursery table and turned to Alice.

"Miss Macleod," she said, holding out her hand.

"Alice," she said faintly, taken aback by Isa's bustling manner.

"Right you are, Alice. I'm Isa. You'll have met the weans – I'm William's mother. Called William after my father, and David after his own."

Caroline turned to Isa with a smile, remembering her friendliness when Caroline had first arrived in Langrannoch. Isa had cut through Caroline's misery and offered hope.

In spite of Caroline marrying into the family, thus widening the social gap between them, their friendship had endured.

"There's Donny, too, of course," Caroline put in. "Donny is my husband's nephew, and lives here at Langrannoch. He's almost eleven, and attends the local primary school, so on rare occasions you may be asked to watch him. He'll be interested to meet you."

"Master Donny's a great lad," Isa said. "His friend Leckie's here almost as often as he is. Leckie lives on the estate – he's the wee brother of Tillie who answered the door to you."

Isa turned to Alice and saw she had confused her.

"Never mind," Isa said with a grin, "it'll all become

clear in time."

As Isa poured the tea and fended off the children, who spied refreshments just out of reach, Alice started to breathe normally.

She hadn't realised how tense she had been until the warmth of the tea and the warmth of her welcome seeped through her body.

The children seemed to be well enough behaved, and although she could see there might be trouble ahead with Miss Helena, she was an experienced nanny. Things could be a great deal worse.

* * * *

Lady Gertrude Grant-Smyth had, over the years, chaired many committees devoted to various charities, and she had kept an interest in a few.

One was a charity trying to improve the lot of people living in the Glasgow slums.

Lady Gertrude had only twice visited the slums for herself, but had been shocked into action by what she had seen. ►

▶ That level of poverty was deeply shaming in any civilised society.

It was 10 days or so after Alice's arrival that Rory and Caroline awaited an overnight guest. Dr Luke Jardine was an enthusiastic doctor attached to the Western Infirmary in Glasgow.

He also had been deeply affected by his first venture into Glasgow's east end, and had been lobbying members of Parliament and local authorities for years to try to obtain improvements.

The problems were immense. The housing was vile, and many of the landlords were interested only in collecting rents.

In vain had Luke Jardine tried to appeal to their better nature. Most didn't have one, and the others were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem.

Meantime, Luke Jardine tended, dosed and tried to cure the local inhabitants of the diseases that attended such acute poverty.

Rory and Caroline had met Luke on various occasions. It was her idea to invite him to Langrannoch for a couple of days, both to hear his latest news and to offer him a modicum of peace and quiet and healthy air.

"The poor man looked gaunt when I saw him last," she said to her husband one morning, when she was taking him through their latest social commitments.

"I'd like to have him here, just for a short break. He's in danger of working himself into the ground, what with the duties he gets paid for and those that he takes on for no emolument."

"Good idea," Rory said, checking through the mail Philips had brought in. "My mother could organise that, if you like."

Caroline didn't point out that the invitation had been her idea.

"Lady Gertrude might well like to join us for dinner, but I don't expect her to act as hostess," she said, a little crisply.

Rory looked up.

"Sorry. I keep forgetting she's no longer in charge." He leaned forward and

kissed Caroline. "I must go. I'm catching the eleven o'clock train and I don't want Spowart in a bad mood for keeping him waiting."

"But you approve of inviting Doctor Jardine?"

"Of course." He stood before her. "I should say this more often, but you're doing a splendid job, Caroline. I'm immensely proud of you, and so very glad to be married to you."

He turned at the door.

"I'll be back on the evening train. Ask Mrs Campbell to leave me something in the kitchen, would you? Kiss Helena for me. Goodbye, my dear."

With that, he swept out of the room, leaving Caroline speechless with surprise and pleasure.

* * * *

Luke Jardine was a young man in his late twenties, full of ideas and enterprise. His brown eyes gave him a look of seriousness. When he laughed, his face lit up the room, but it didn't happen as often as it might.

What he was most serious about was the general health of Glasgow's poor. Lady Gertrude had made two visits to the worst areas while he was there on a regular basis. He was surprised to get Caroline's invitation through the post.

In the study of his modest Glasgow apartment, he read the letter, wondering if he could possibly take a couple of days off.

He remembered Caroline from the several occasions their paths had crossed, and thought his friend, Rory Grant-Smyth, had done very well for himself.

He looked out of the window on to the busy city street, and had a mental vision of a country estate, with lawns and trees and gardens and sunshine.

Suddenly the idea of visiting seemed to be just what the doctor ordered.

And he should know.

He thought of his calendar over the next couple of weeks, and tried to find a gap.

Deciding he could put off a charity meeting till a more convenient date, he sat

down at his desk to write an answer straight away.

Arriving at Langrannoch Halt the following Friday afternoon, Luke looked around for the pony and trap he had been told would pick him up.

The only one that fitted the description stood a little way off from the station platform, as though the driver, and possibly the pony, were too elevated to come any closer.

He strode towards them, swinging his small suitcase.

"Mr Spowart?"

Spowart gave a gloomy nod, and Luke leaped up to the seat beside him.

"Good of you to come for me," Luke said again, and Spowart turned down the corners of his mouth.

Luke commented on the fine weather, then, when silence again ensued, he decided not to try any further.

In any case, he didn't need conversation. The Perthshire countryside took his entire attention, with its rolling pastures backed by hills and forests.

If he thought about Spowart again after that, it was to reflect that he must be a wizard with horses for the Grant-Smyths to put up with him.

It was Philips the butler who met him at the front door.

"Good afternoon, sir. I'm Philips. I trust you had a good journey. Mr Grant-Smyth asked me to show you to your room.

"He has been called away to solve a problem with one of the farm cottages, but will return soon. And Mrs Grant-Smyth has gone down to the village school to take some books to the dominie."

"That's quite all right with me, Mr Philips."

Luke did not confess that he was looking forward to lying down for ten minutes, or possibly just standing at his bedroom window admiring the view.

As he followed the butler up the wide staircase he thought he had never seen a grand house so welcoming in appearance.

There was a hint of lavender and beeswax in

the air, a bunch of early roses on a side table and a toy elephant in a grey fabric halfway up the stair. Philips ignored it, so Luke did, too. But it was heartening, just the same.

Luke's bedroom, when they reached it, was high-ceilinged and handsome. The wardrobe was big enough to accommodate a stay of several months, and likewise the chest of drawers.

There was also a chaise longue upholstered in blue velvet, the woodwork in light oak. Luke could see that it would take several servants to keep the furniture gleaming the way it was.

He could also see that the bed had not been made up, and that the blankets and eiderdown were folded neatly on top of it. There was no trace of a sheet.

Fortunately, Philips spotted the problem at the same time.

"I do apologise for this lapse, Doctor Jardine. I shall instantly seek out the housemaid and reprimand her."

Luke gave one of his rare smiles.

"No harm done, Mr Philips. At the very most, it's a simple mistake. The room is beautiful, and I'm sure I'll be very comfortable here."

Philips left with a bow, promising someone would be along immediately to make up the bed.

Luke turned to the window, and did not hear Philips's magisterial tones as he chastised the first maid he met, who happened to be Tillie Brereton.

"I have just conducted Mrs Grant-Smyth's guest to his room, and the bed is not made up! Who is responsible for this, Tillie?"

Tillie looked shocked.

"I thought it was Isa, Mr Philips, but perhaps Isa thought it was me. I'll see to it at once."

Off she shot to the linen cupboard, while Philips strode on with a sombre expression, wondering how he could drop a hint to Mrs Grant-Smyth that ▶

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the lack of a proper housekeeper was becoming problematic.

* * * *

Although Caroline did not hear about the small incident with Luke's bedroom, she could see that, as the season progressed and more visitors would be arriving, the need for a housekeeper would become urgent.

Isa and Tillie were doing stalwart work, but they couldn't do everything.

Caroline hoped the latest applicant for the post, due to be interviewed on Tuesday, would be the right person for the job.

In the meantime, she had Luke Jardine to entertain for the weekend.

"Come in, Doctor Jardine," she said, when the door opened and Philips ushered Luke into the drawing-room.

"Mrs Grant-Smyth," Luke said, giving her a brief bow and holding out his hand. "This is most kind of you. I haven't been out of the city for months, and to such a wonderful place! You must love Langrannoch."

Caroline smiled.

"I do. I'm sorry no-one was here to greet you. Is your room comfortable? Have you seen any of the gardens yet?"

Luke shook his head.

"I'm afraid I lay down on the chaise longue, and the next thing I knew an hour had passed."

He did not mention that his bed had been made up while he slumbered. Tillie had done it at speed and in total silence.

Rory came into the room, greeting Luke like the old friend he was, and the conversation moved on to general topics.

They were interrupted again before dinner by the arrival of Helena Gertrude. She came to say goodnight to her parents and was accompanied by her nanny, Alice Macleod.

Alice was good at staying in the background, and Helena was good at taking everyone's attention, so it was some time before Luke saw beyond the child.

Many children in Helena's

privileged position saw very little of their parents, but Helena's parents seemed much more approachable.

The child was keen to chat, and told them of the events of her day in as articulate a fashion as her age permitted. Luke struggled a little to understand everything she said, but he was amused and admiring just the same.

It was only when Alice had been there for 15 minutes that Luke saw her look at the carriage clock on the mantelpiece.

"Time to say goodnight, Helena. You'll see Mama and Papa tomorrow."

Caroline started.

"I'm so sorry, Alice, I haven't introduced our guest. This is Doctor Jardine from the Western Hospital in Glasgow. Doctor Jardine, this is Helena's nanny, Miss Macleod."

Luke stood up and bowed briefly to the nanny. Then he looked at her properly. Alice was a little taller than average, of slender build with hazel eyes.

Nothing remarkable at all, but he had the feeling, there and then, that there was something special about Alice Macleod.

* * * *

Luke was to be their guest for three nights, so Caroline decided to wait till the Saturday evening, when Lady Gertrude was also in attendance, to mention her latest idea.

Rory spent most of Saturday showing Luke over the estate, including the farmland and various agricultural projects. Luke could see Rory's genuine interest in all that was going on.

Although he had appointed an estate manager, he kept himself well informed and was not above mucking in with some hard labour.

The conversation at dinner on the Saturday evening was taken up, for the first part, with Luke enthusing about everything he had seen.

"I'd never imagined the countryside could be so varied and interesting."

"Oh, it can," Rory

retorted. "We don't have the massive problems of the slums, though rural poverty is not to be underestimated, but life in the country does have its fascinations."

"Having said that," Lady Gertrude interposed, "my son spends as much time as he can in town, Doctor Jardine."

Rory sighed.

"That's business for you. The company supports the estate, and the estate offers respite to the needy. That's you, Jardine, in case you didn't realise it."

Luke laughed.

"Well, I certainly feel the better for the fresh air and wonderful food. Thank you both for inviting me."

"There is an ulterior motive," Rory said with a smile. "Caroline has a project in mind and would value your advice."

Caroline shook her head.

"I do have a project in mind, Luke, but the invitation for this weekend was separate. You looked a little peaky the last time I saw you, and already, after only twenty-four hours, you are looking quite a bit better. And, of course, we also enjoy your company.

"However, the idea which both Lady Gertrude and myself have been pondering is to host a large charity dinner here at Langrannoch in the summer, in aid of your work in the Glasgow slums."

There was a silence while Luke absorbed the implications.

Caroline went on.

"We would invite mainly local county people, and some from the city, like yourself and your supporters. We couldn't offer overnight accommodation to everyone – Langrannoch is not as big as all that, nor as grand – but our Glasgow guests would, of course, stay.

"I hope that you, and perhaps someone else who is as well informed as you are, might address the company and let them know how their money is to be spent."

She smiled at her guest.

"I believe we could raise

a substantial amount, and I don't think we could come up with a more worthy cause."

Luke Jardine's brain started whirring as he retired to his room for the night. Ideas raced in and out, some noted, some discarded.

But when he finally fell asleep at two in the morning it was with a sense of wellbeing and anticipation. Langrannoch and its occupants had widened his horizons.

* * * *

Tuesday morning saw Spowart drop off yet another stranger at the stone lions. This time there was no luggage.

Mrs Margaret Lightfoot straightened her spine and progressed up the stairs towards the stately front door of Langrannoch with as much dignity as she could muster.

This was a job she must make a success of. Chances like this did not come along very often, and without steady work and a place to call her home she would be in dire straits. She must make as good an impression as possible.

She was met at the door by the magisterial Philips, who looked at her down the length of his nose.

"Mrs Lightfoot, I presume."

Margaret's stomach sank momentarily, but she gave the butler a steady smile, pleasant but not too enthusiastic.

"Yes, I am Margaret Lightfoot. I have an appointment with Mrs Grant-Smyth."

He inclined his head to acknowledge her without actually bowing.

"Follow me, Mrs Lightfoot."

Caroline was waiting in her sitting-room, where she kept her desk and the calendar for all her commitments.

She turned in her chair as Philips announced the visitor, and stood up to welcome her.

"Come in, Mrs Lightfoot. I am Caroline Grant-Smyth. Do take a seat here."

"Thank you, madam."

"I hope your journey

wasn't too arduous. Edinburgh, wasn't it?"

The woman nodded.

"The train was a little slow, and I was anxious not to be late, but we were only five minutes behind time. Your Mr Spowart very kindly waited for me."

Caroline gave a small smile. Kindness did not come easily to Spowart.

"Would you care for a cup of tea? Mr Philips will see to it."

"That would be most kind. Thank you."

Caroline nodded to Philips, who retreated as though from the royal presence.

Caroline looked at her visitor, the latest applicant for the post of housekeeper. She had Mrs Lightfoot's letter before her, and as Lady Gertrude had done on the previous two interviews, she asked for any references the woman might have.

Margaret Lightfoot produced a handsome envelope from her capacious bag.

Caroline raised her eyebrows.

"Gloucestershire, I see. Are you from England yourself, Mrs Lightfoot?"

She nodded.

"I'm originally from Derbyshire, but I had the good fortune to find employment with Lady Thorn in Bristol."

Although Lady Gertrude could not be with her this morning, Caroline could hear her mother-in-law's voice clear as a bell in her next question.

"Did you enjoy your time there?"

"I did indeed."

"Lady Thorn says you were a most reliable and efficient worker. I'm pleased to hear it, but a little surprised. Was there some reason for your leaving Bristol?"

Caroline saw the other woman go pale, and wondered why.

"Lady Thorn thought I might benefit from country air, and when I saw your advertisement, I was greatly attracted to the idea of

Perthshire. It's a part of the country I don't know at all."

"I see."

Caroline knew that her ladyship would have pushed for more information, but she decided against it. Instead, she would offer to show Margaret Lightfoot what her responsibilities would be and make her own judgement as to her character.

As Caroline showed her round the house, and detailed what she would expect of her, she made mental notes of the other woman's responses.

She seemed pleased with everything, and anxious to say the right thing. She had a quiet dignity that appealed to Caroline, though she couldn't help feeling there was something she wasn't saying.

If there was something she was unhappy about in Lady Thorn's establishment, surely she could have found something a little nearer than Perthshire? Why come quite so far?

In the end, Caroline overcame her slight reservations and decided to offer Mrs Lightfoot the post of housekeeper. She was not at all sure Lady Grant-Smyth would have agreed, but it was Caroline's decision.

Housekeeper was an important position. It gave the person access to all sorts of information about the family who employed her. But in spite of the air of mystery, Caroline decided Margaret Lightfoot was worthy of her trust.

"It wasn't so much mystery as sadness," she said later to her husband. "Something in her past seems to haunt her."

In a small bedroom in a cheap hotel in Edinburgh, Margaret Lightfoot wept tears of relief. Not happiness – she didn't hope for that. But thanks to Caroline Grant-Smyth, her life had taken a turn for the better.

To be continued.

The Farmer & His Wife



John Taylor learned the farming business thoroughly!

WAS inspecting my sheep, grazing on turnips, which set me thinking back to my dad's day when I was just a lad. He grew turnips for sheep and cattle feed and the farm labourers used to have the back-breaking job of singling them.

I well remember Dad said I should join them one evening if the grieve approved. He couldn't very well say no.

You'll never believe the ritual that had to be followed when thinning turnips. The grieve led the team, first horseman, second, and so on down the ranks on the farm. The loon (lad) came last.

I was the loon that night. It looked so simple but, believe me, I fell far behind. There was an art in knocking out the unwanted plants to leave just one standing.

And what a cold and back-breaking job it was when they seemed to be frozen to the ground.

I'll be honest, I hated the job, but Dad insisted I learn every task that had to be done on a farm by doing it myself.

On another occasion, I had the job of putting the turnips into an Albion turnip cutter and turning the handle whilst it chopped them into slices for the cattle.

The cut turnip fell into woven baskets which, when full, were as much as I could

carry into the manger in the byre.

My arms ached with turning the handle on that cutter, but at least it was a job that was done indoors.

I'll always remember that, before I went to bed, there had to be twelve of those baskets full of sliced turnips placed ready for tipping over to the cattle in the morning.

The turnips that were not lifted for cattle were put in small clamps in the field and carefully covered with straw against frost. The field was then fenced off round a clamp and the sheep let in. The main benefit was that the sheep, enclosed in a relatively small space, left their droppings to fertilise the land.

Times have changed. Nowadays, we haven't the labour Dad had to fold the sheep into small areas. So I'm afraid I let the sheep have the free run of the field to eat the turnips.

Well, I remembered to bring Anne not one but two turnips when I came in later that morning. We will be having a big bowl of really mouth-watering vegetable soup for lunch. You can't beat it on a cold day on the Riggan. ■



More next week

Love reading? Don't miss the Daily Serial on our website: www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk.

Add Some Spice

Pep up your palate
with our easy,
tasty recipes.

Crab and King Prawn Laksa

Course: **Lunch or light main**
Skill level: **easy** | Serves: **4**

- 2 tbs sesame oil
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped finely
- 2 spring onions, sliced
- 1 red or green chilli, chopped finely
- 100 g (3½ oz) raw king prawns
- 1 x 213 g can white crab meat
- 1 x can coconut milk
- 300 ml (½ pt) vegetable stock
- ½ x 400 g can chopped tomatoes
- 1 x 400 g can green beans
- 1 x 300 g can sliced carrots
- 200 g (7 oz) rice noodles
- 1 lime, halved
- A good handful of chopped coriander

1 In a saucepan, warm the sesame oil and gently fry the garlic, spring onions and chilli.

2 Once these are soft, add in the king prawns, crab meat, coconut milk, stock, tomatoes and the vegetables and bring to the boil. Leave to simmer for 5 minutes.

3 Cook the noodles according to packet instructions, then drain.

4 Divide the noodles into soup bowls, spoon out the broth on to each and serve with a squeeze of lime and a sprinkle of coriander.

Indian Shepherd's Pie With Peas

Course: **Main** | Skill level: **easy** | Serves: **4**



- 1 tbs rapeseed oil
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped finely
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
- 2 cm (3/4 in) fresh ginger, peeled and grated finely
- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) lamb mince
- 1 tbs korma curry paste
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 1 tbs tomato purée
- 150 ml (1/4 pt) chicken stock
- Squeeze of lemon juice
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- A handful of fresh coriander leaves, chopped
- 300 g (10 1/2 oz) frozen peas
- For the Topping:**
- 1 kg (2 lb 4 oz) floury potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
- 50 g (1 3/4 oz) butter
- A little milk

1 Pre-heat the oven to 200 deg. C., 400 deg. F., Gas Mark 6.

2 Heat the oil in a frying-pan, add the onion, garlic and ginger and fry over a medium heat until the onion is soft and just beginning to brown. Add the lamb, korma paste and cumin and mix with the onion mixture, then fry for a further 30 seconds until lightly browned. Stir in the tomatoes, tomato purée and stock and lemon juice. Season, cover and simmer for 30 minutes until the mixture has thickened but is still

moist. Add more stock if needed. Stir in the fresh coriander and peas and transfer the mixture to an ovenproof dish.

3 Meanwhile, to make the potato topping, put the potatoes into a large pan of salted water, bring to the boil and simmer until tender. Drain the potatoes and return to the pan. Add the butter, milk and seasoning then mash well. Spoon the mashed potatoes over the lamb mixture and bake in the pre-heated oven for 30 minutes until golden brown.

Moroccan Turkey Burgers

Course: **Main** | Skill level: **easy** | Serves: **4**

- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) lean turkey breast mince
- 4 spring onions, chopped
- 2 tsp Moroccan Spice mix
- 1 tsp Very Lazy Garlic Paste
- 2 tsp Very Lazy Chopped Red Chillies
- 4 tbs freshly chopped mint
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tsp salt
- For the Chilli Yoghurt Dip:**
- 200 g (7 oz) 0% Greek yoghurt
- 1- 2 tsp Very Lazy Chopped Red Chillies
- 1/2 lemon, grated rind and juice
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

To Serve: flat breads and salad leaves.

1 Place all the burger ingredients in a large bowl and using your hands mix everything together. Divide the mixture into 4 and shape each part into a burger.

2 Pre-heat the grill to medium-high. Place the burgers on a baking tray, brush with a little oil and cook for 5 to 6 minutes each side or until cooked through.

3 Whilst the burgers are cooking, make the dip. Place all the ingredients in a small bowl, mix together and season to taste.

4 Serve the burgers with flat breads and salad with a large spoonful of the dip.



Remember: recipes have been given in both metric and imperial. It is important to use one method throughout as they are not exactly the same.

▶ Chorizo, Halloumi and Tomato Pasta

Course: **Main** | Skill level: **easy** | Serves: **4**



- **300 g (10½ oz) fusilli**
- **1 tbs light olive oil**
- **225 g (8 oz) halloumi cheese, cut into 2 cm (¾ in) cubes**
- **200 g (7 oz) chorizo, sliced thinly**
- **1 red onion, peeled and chopped roughly**
- **120 g (4 oz) canned sliced mushrooms**
- **2 yellow peppers, stalks removed, deseeded and chopped into 2 cm (¾ in) pieces**
- **1 x 400 g can chopped tomatoes**
- **1 tsp smoked paprika**
- **Pinch of sugar**
- **1 tbs freshly ground black pepper**
- **1 x 400 g can chickpeas in water, drained**

- 1** Boil the fusilli for the time stated upon the packaging whilst heating the oil in a large frying-pan over a medium heat.
- 2** Add the halloumi, chorizo and onion, frying for 5 minutes until the ingredients begin to brown.
- 3** Add the mushrooms and peppers and fry together for a further 3 minutes.
- 4** Pour the chopped tomatoes, paprika, sugar, black pepper and chickpeas into the pan and stir well. Leave to simmer and reduce for 10 minutes.
- 5** Once the sauce has reduced, add the drained fusilli and stir well until the pasta is well coated. Serve immediately.

Spiced Sausage Shakshuka

Course: **Brunch or light main** | Skill level: **easy** | Serves: **6**

- **1 x pack MOR Moroccan Spiced Pork, Cauliflower & Chickpea Sausages**
 - **1 tbs olive oil**
 - **1 green pepper, sliced thinly**
 - **1 red pepper, sliced thinly**
 - **1 large onion, sliced thinly**
 - **3-4 garlic cloves, crushed**
 - **1 tsp paprika**
 - **1 tsp ground cumin**
 - **1 x 400 g tin tomatoes**
 - **Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
 - **6 eggs**
 - **2 tomatoes, each cut into 6 wedges**
- To Serve:** *chopped parsley or coriander.*

- 1** Begin by grilling the sausages as per pack instructions, until deliciously golden brown.
- 2** While the sausages are

cooking, take a large ovenproof sauté pan, drizzle with oil and fry the peppers and onion for 6 to 7 minutes (until they've softened nicely).

3 Add the crushed garlic and spices and cook for a further 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in the tinned tomatoes and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes until bubbling. Season to taste.

4 Take the cooked sausages and place them in the sauce, leaving space between them. Now crack an egg between each sausage. Scatter over the tomato wedges.

5 Cook for a further 10 to 15 minutes, making sure to baste the eggs with some of the tomato juice. If you'd rather, just cover the pan with a lid and finish cooking the dish in an oven pre-heated to 180 deg. C., 350 deg. F., Gas Mark 4 for 10 to 15 minutes.

6 To finish, sprinkle over the herbs – then tuck in.



With a few extras, shakshuka also makes a hearty evening meal. Just add a handful of kale to the tomatoes and sprinkle over some feta before serving.

Next week: perfect pudding recipes.

For more delicious recipes visit our website:
www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk

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HERE ARE A FEW OF THE PLACES WE ARE GOING IN 2018



Our Irish Craic

5th May – 11 days

A fun filled journey around the whole of Eire unfolds. Bray, Kilkenny, Tralee and Athlone provide our springboards for the best of the Emerald Isle on a not to be missed "craic" – to be sure!



Highland Island Fling

9th May – 8 days

Join the most comprehensive Highlands adventure there is. From hotels in Inverness and Thurso we include the best rail lines, wildlife, scenery, cruises, the Jacobite Steam Train and the islands of Skye and Orkney.



A Steamy Affair

24th May – 6 days

Here is a truly inventive holiday to the Netherlands staying in Tilburg. Lots of steamy attractions to include and a literal overdose in store at the largest steam power event in Europe – Dordt in Stoom.



Snowdonia

4th June – 5 days

A Welsh narrow gauge bonanza amid the finest scenery in the land. From our lovely hotel in Porthmadog this is five days of transport nostalgia full of highlights – Snowdon summit for one!

Many more holidays to a wide variety of exciting destinations are featured in our 2018 catalogue.



ENGLAND



SCOTLAND



WALES



ISLE OF MAN



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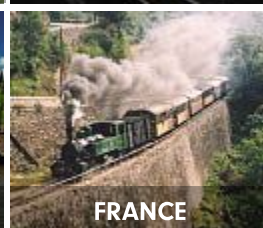
GERMANY



HOLLAND



BELGIUM



FRANCE



EIRE



LUXEMBOURG



TALL SHIPS

Going For Broke

Jake had only seen Grace a few times, but he knew she was the girl for him!



SHE was beautiful; she was beguiling. She was everything he wanted in a woman, but how come every time he met her she either had her “entourage” with her or was going off in a totally different direction?

Jake was in love. There was no other word for it. He had never felt like this before.

They were a match made in heaven, he observed as he made his way on his crutches to the receptionist window of the orthopaedic ward.

She had broken her left ankle. He had broken his right.

“Snap!” She had laughed as they hobbled past each other in the hospital corridor.

Jake had spied her at his very first clinic. He wanted to say something, but she had her two bodyguards with her: her mum and her younger sister, he’d presumed.

Her name was Grace, he knew that much. He had heard the receptionist call her Grace Lindsay, this raven-haired beauty with a smile that lit up the waiting-room.

It was one of those smiles which broke hearts and was all the more endearing

because Grace appeared to have no idea how far her power extended.

Jake desperately wanted that smile to be reserved exclusively for him.

He realised he was staring.

“How are you getting on with your stookie?” he heard his voice say. Oh, no! Had he actually asked her out loud about her plaster-cast? How lame!

“Not bad.” She smiled and her eyes shone. “Could be better. You?”

“I’m doing OK, too. Would you please marry me, Grace Lindsay?”

Thankfully, Jake had kept the second bit to himself, but he was still surprised at the sentiment.

He had never felt like that about any of the girls he had dated, but with Grace Lindsay he could envisage waking up next to her for the rest of his days and then watching her sitting at her dressing table, doing the big loose plait to the side with the unruly little wisps of hair that poked out so rebelliously.

Jake felt like a complete fool. The gorgeous Grace was difficult to read. Did she like him or was she just being polite?

“Find out if she’s single,” Jake heard a little voice in his head say. “Ask her how

she’s coping.”

Finally, he plucked up the courage to speak.

“Would you like a mint?”

Inside, he raged.

“A mint? Is that honestly the best you can do?”

But Grace’s adorable face lit up and she extended her hand.

“That would be lovely, thank you.”

Jake limped over and handed her the packet.

“You’re right-handed,” she observed. “That must be really hard. Presumably you’re right-footed, too,” she added with a sympathetic look on her face.

“Yes,” Jake replied. “My killer right foot, the coach called it. It won’t be such a killer now.”

Grace smiled brightly. “Stay positive, killer! You should be as good as new after physio. Who knows? Maybe even better than before.”

Then her name was called and she disappeared into an examination room.

* * * *

On the day of Jake’s next appointment, he was like an excited puppy waiting for his owner to return from work. He couldn’t wait to see Grace Lindsay again.

Would she still have the long plait that made her

look like an exotic mermaid, only with a cast where her shimmering, silvery tail should be?

Would she even remember him?

In the waiting-room there was no Grace and no Grace’s entourage – only a couple of elderly ladies who looked as though they had broken their hips. Poor souls.

Jake felt completely downcast. He had practically crossed off the days to this appointment and his next conversation with the intriguing Grace Lindsay.

He felt so dejected he almost missed hearing them call his name.

His consultant concluded his appointment in a very officious manner.

“Yup, bread and butter stuff, your op. Healing OK? Pain tolerable? Any questions?”

“Plenty,” he was dying to reply. “Is the lovely Grace Lindsay coming in today? How did she break her ankle?”

Was she attached? What did she do for a living? Would their paths cross again?

But he simply shook his head.

“Nope, all good. I’m doing fine, I guess. Thanks to you and your terrific job of fixing me up.”

The consultant

cleared his throat.
 “Ahem. I imagine you’d like to know about returning to fitness, going back to your sport. You’re a footballer, if I’m not mistaken.”

Jake corrected him.
 “Was a footballer. That’ll be in the past now.”

The consultant shook his hand.

“Let’s just take it one step at a time.”

Jake paused in the doorway.

“Hilarious, Doctor! One step at a time,” he said, none too pleased that his consultant had made a joke at his expense.

“No, Jake, I’m deadly serious. Don’t get ahead of yourself. One step at a time, quite literally, and then physio. Plenty of physio, as much as you can take, and then some. If you apply yourself you’ll be as good as new.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Jake smiled. “But I’m not holding my breath,” he added to himself.

But that’s exactly what he did as he left the consulting room. For there she was, Grace Lindsay, minus her entourage.

“Grace Lindsay!” he heard his voice say in a really weird manner, and he almost hugged her. Then he realised he should be keeping his cool.

He shouldn’t even know her name as they hadn’t officially been introduced.

Grace smiled, that smile of an angel.

Jake was embarrassed. Did she like him, too, or did she smile like that for all the boys whose hearts she melted?

Along came the entourage.
 “Phew, Gracie, parking was a nightmare today. Mum had to dump the car miles and miles away.”

Grace’s sister flicked a glance Jake’s way.
 He suddenly felt as if she could read his mind and was slightly despising him for his hopeless crush on her sister.

He had to get out of there. He’d made a real clown of himself.

Suddenly, he heard a voice behind him.

“Excuse me, hold on a minute.”

He turned to see the young girl he suspected was Grace’s little sister. Same eyes. Same determination.

“Erm, hello,” she said, rather shyly. “I’m Hope Lindsay, Grace’s bodyguard.”

“Grace is away in to see the doctor. She wondered if you could possibly wait in the café until she gets out.”

Jake nodded.
 “Tell Grace that’s fine by me!” He gave her an awkward thumbs-up and immediately cringed.

“Who even does that?” he berated himself.

Hope looked very smug as she headed back to the waiting-room.

* * * *

Half an hour later Grace Lindsay, minus her cast, walked rather tentatively into the hospital café.

Jake leaped up as Grace approached.

“Thank you for inviting me here, Grace,” he ventured cheerfully. “I suppose I should introduce myself. I’m Jake O’Neill.”

Grace frowned.
 “You’ve been waiting here under false pretences, Jake, and I’m so sorry. My sister is the most annoying little madam on this entire planet!”

“But she told me to wait for you!”

“She had no business! I didn’t ask her to.”

“But why would she do such a thing?” Jake protested.

Grace blew a wisp of hair from her forehead:

“No idea, but I’m really sorry. Who does she think she is, that little girl from ‘Sleepless In Seattle’, matchmaking with all her might?”

Now it was Jake’s turn to be mortified. He tried to defuse the situation.

“I’ve had an idea. How about we meet on top of the Empire State Building in three months? Or back in this café in one month’s time?”

* * * *

One month later Jake found himself back in the hospital café, clutching a

cold banana milkshake, as the WRVS busied themselves in the background, replenishing the fruit bowl and checking the date on the sandwiches.

“Well, well! So you turned up, Jake O’Neill.”

Grace Lindsay was wearing a denim jacket and a maxi striped skirt.

Her hair was piled up in a messy bun, with those unruly wispy bits poking out. She was gorgeous.

“I thought maybe my crazy little sister would have chased you away!”

“So how come you showed up, Grace Lindsay? I thought I was going to be like that little boy in your film, stuck up in the Empire State Building for hours.”

“You might have been. Because you forgot to specify a time! I just took it to be one month from the exact time we met in the café last time.”

“Good thinking, Miss Lindsay. So how come you showed up, anyway?” Jake repeated, curious to hear Grace’s answer.

“I had to show up, to check if you were here.”

Jake looked puzzled.

“Mum and Hope bet me you would be here.”

“So you’re only here to check on your bet?”

Much as he adored her, that was offensive.

“You can report that I turned up first thing this morning when the café opened, and I was ready to wait until it closed. Sorry about your bet.”

And he marched off – as well as you could march with a fragile foot that was still healing.

* * * *

Grace Lindsay stood with her mouth wide open.

What had actually happened there?

How had she managed to offend the gorgeous Jake, whom she had spotted at her very first appointment and had been itching to chat to?

Hence the strange “Snap” comment that jumped out of her mouth in the hospital corridor and almost made Jake jump

out of his skin.

Now, after one whole month of anticipation, Jake had flounced off in anger, after perhaps the most crucial 15 minutes of her romantic career.

And what’s more, he could be flouncing out of her life for good.

Should she chase after him? Should she just let him go? Her next steps could alter the course of both their lives.

Grace Lindsay made a most uncharacteristic move. She did not set off in hot pursuit of Jake O’Neill.

She simply sat there and had a wee cry. Very untypical of her, but then you couldn’t plan your every move, now, could you?

* * * *

“Left my car keys, didn’t I?” Jake O’Neill picked up his keys from the window-sill next to their table.

Grace hadn’t even noticed they were there.

“Life mirrors art!” Jake smiled sheepishly. “Just like when the little guy forgets his teddy in ‘Sleepless In Seattle’. It’s my mum’s favourite film.”

Grace wiped her eyes.

“Why are you crying, Grace Lindsay?”

“I’m not crying . . . it’s not what it looks like. I’m crying because I ruined everything, Jake O’Neill.”

“The lengths I went to, to have a chance to talk to you! I confess, I did tell Hope to keep you in the café.”

“And I left the keys behind on purpose.” Jake took Grace’s hand and looked her straight in the eyes:
 “So, Grace Lindsay, you actually like me, too. You told Hope to make me wait? I can’t believe it! It’s like magic!”

“I tell you what, let’s just follow my doctor’s orders: one step at a time. See you back here in a month.”

Grace Lindsay smiled one of her dazzling smiles:

“No, Jake O’Neill, I’m afraid I can’t wait until then. How about same time tomorrow?”

And Jake O’Neill just knew life was going to be even better than before. ■

Tell Us Your Stories!



Dear Readers,

In exactly a year from now, on January 13, 2019, the “Friend” will celebrate its 150th birthday. We’re planning a whole year of celebrations to mark this amazing achievement, and we want you to be part of them. Read on to find out how to get involved!

Angela

Angela Gilchrist, Editor.



From our postbag

1930

Just a short letter from an exiled Scot. I live in one of England’s largest cities, and it is just like “a breath frae the heather hills” to see the familiar green cover and read the dear old “Friend”. It often makes me long to be back in bonnie Scotland, but we maun stay whaur the work is.

My father is a seafarer whose ship sails between here and Norway, and he got to know of an old Scots lady there, and promised to bring her papers and periodicals on his next visit. He did so, and she started to weep seeing among the bundle “the paper with the green cover”. It was many years since she’d seen it, she told him. That was ten years ago, and since then, each time the ship is moored on the quay, that old frail body is down there, waiting patiently.

2017

When I picked up a copy of “The People’s Friend” while in a waiting room a few years ago, I didn’t think it would be the start of such a beautiful friendship.

I now have a subscription and whatever else is going on around me I know I can always look forward to it being delivered every Saturday, when I can lose myself in the magazine.

With such a great variety of interesting, quality writing, I’m never disappointed. Roll on 2018 and fresh copies of the “Friend” to look forward to.

THE first-ever issue of “The People’s Friend” was published on January 13, 1869, and it’s been in continuous publication ever since, making it the longest-running women’s weekly magazine in the world – and therefore the first to reach the milestone of 150 years of age.

The secret of the magazine’s success is due, in no small part, to its connection with its readers, and we want to celebrate that bond by doing what we’re famous for – sharing stories. Specifically, your stories!

We want to hear all about what the “Friend” means to you. Maybe you’ve been a reader for many years, and first picked up the magazine as a young woman? Or perhaps you’ve started buying it quite recently in memory of a much-missed mum or grandma? Does it bring back memories of home, or has it helped you through difficult times in life?

However you came to find the “Friend”, and whatever part it’s played in your life, we’d love to hear about it.

Just send your letters, by post or e-mail, to the address on this page. We’ll feature as many as we can in the magazine and on our website throughout 2019 as part of our anniversary celebrations, creating a worldwide community of friends of the “Friend”.

Make sure you’re part of it! ■

Send your letters to us at 150 Years, Between Friends, “The People’s Friend”,
2 Albert Square, Dundee DD1 9QJ, or e-mail us at
betweenfriends@dctmedia.co.uk, putting “150 Years” in the subject line.

At Work With The *Scottish* SPCA

Part
5 of 6



Nicola with Nevis.

Polly Pullar meets Nicola Turnbull, Head of Small Mammals at the Scottish SPCA's Wildlife Rescue Centre.

LIKE all the extraordinarily dedicated staff at the Scottish SPCA's state of the art wildlife centre at Fishcross, near Alloa, Nicola Turnbull, the new Head of the Small Mammals Department, is no stranger to long hours often involving little or no sleep.

When it comes to hand-rearing the hundreds of orphan mammals that are brought to the centre each spring and summer, none of them ever complain.

It's a way of life for the staff and it is vital to

recognise the value of their work, their patience and adaptability.

It was another day of torrential summer downpours and strong winds as I arrived to meet Nicola. The kind of day that would doubtlessly lead to another huge influx of unfortunate casualties: fledglings blown from nests, birds flooded out of waterside haunts and chilled mammals, in particular hedgehoglets and bats.

Nicola was sitting on the floor feeding a litter of minute short-tailed field

voles, little bigger than her thumb. The writhing, wriggling creatures were feeding voraciously from a specially adapted catheter tip attached to a syringe, eagerly devouring mouse-size amounts of Royal Canin puppy milk.

"I am feeding them at least five times a day," she explained with a broad smile on her face. "I was getting up through the night, but they are OK now as long as we feed them very late and very early."

Nicola began as a seasonal worker for the Scottish SPCA before taking on a permanent role as Wildlife Assistant, and then due to her ability was soon promoted to Head of Small Mammals where she tends to specialise in hedgehogs, and bats, but is frequently in demand helping out in various other sections.

One of her key roles is to help wildlife and exotic animal specialist vet Romain Pizzi, who comes to the centre twice a week.

She can find herself

assisting with operations or going round with him listening to various instructions and ensuring all the patients are seen and treated.

Often they have a lengthy list to get through and this may involve time in their operating theatre.

Today there are several hedgehogs requiring surgery scheduled for later in the morning. We are now in a hedgehog ward where she and other members of staff are feeding tiny babies whose eyes are still shut.

The babies are kept in a brooder or on special heat pads, and Nicola and the other staff frequently take them home so they can rise in the night for feeds. It's no different from having a newborn human baby.

Other young hedgehogs, toddlers at various stages, are in adjacent cages; some have detailed medical cards on the doors and need specialist care, others may be the unfortunate victims of accidents.

A few hedgehogs are



The hedgehog is out for the count.



Feeding a tiny bank vole.

singled out for operations and Romain walks in. He, too, is laced with the same passionate dedication to all the animals here, and though he also works with exotic animals and birds at Edinburgh Zoo and has worked all over the world he claims to enjoy his wildlife work the most.

He and Nicola have an easy rapport and soon they are operating on the first casualty, a young hedgehog

that had to have its jaw pinned with wire.

"They often fall from a height, land on their feet and then fall forward on to the hard surface and subsequently break their bottom jaw. I wired this some weeks ago and now the wire has done its job and must be removed," Romain tells me.

All is done with no fuss in a calm and efficient atmosphere whilst Nicola



Time to go to sleep!

helps to anaesthetise the hedgehog. It is soon out for the count.

All the while the pair monitor its breathing to ensure all is well, adjusting the flow accordingly. It's over very swiftly and the patient is soon recuperating back in the warmth.

The third hedgehog fares less well. Romain has sat patiently on the floor watching the way the animal moves but cannot find out what is wrong and why it is struggling so badly. In the end it also must be given anaesthetic so it can be X-rayed as it won't uncurl properly so he can fully check its limbs.

This reveals a series of bad breaks to its pelvis that Romain points out clearly showing on the screen.

"It would be impossible to mend that," he says.

Back in the ward the other two hedgehogs are already active again, and it's almost time to feed baby bats, voles and more tiny hedgehogs. One of the girls appears to say another batch has just arrived. It's relentless.

"I have to tell you about Nevis," Nicola says excitedly as she brings out her phone to show me wonderful pictures of a leveret sitting bolt upright.

"He's a mountain hare leveret that weighed well under a hundred grams on arrival. He was found near Inverness and I had to feed him on milk five times a day. Interestingly, compared to brown hare leverets he was far easier and did not

How you can get involved

"There's something very satisfying about knowing our end aim is to release things back to the wild," vet Romain says. "The team here work so incredibly hard and I also witness their outstanding dedication on a day-to-day basis. Though there are days when I have to put a lot of animals down due to the fact they are too severely injured, unlike the staff I am lucky to be one step removed. It can be very hard for them."

If you'd like to support the Scottish SPCA's work, donations can be made by calling 03000 999 999 or sent to Scottish SPCA, Kingseat Road, Halbeath, Dunfermline KY11 8RY.

Cheques should be made payable to "Scottish SPCA".

seem to get so stressed.

"I take him home with me at night but he is now fed a varied diet of natural plants including grass, dandelions, rowan, willow and heather shoots and he also nibbles at soil for vital minerals.

"He is very tame with me and we have to find a really safe suitable place for him to be released. I don't want to let him go at all but I know he must. I have really loved looking after him."

She is now once again feeding milk to the frenetic little voles. They seem to have grown since this morning. Romain passes through the corridor armed with medicines, stethoscope round his neck.

"Everyone here works so long and hard," he says. "It's a real privilege to witness and I feel their dedication makes such a difference."

And he is gone to look at another patient. ■

Next week: Polly meets Sheelagh McAllister, Head of the Large Mammal Unit.

Tiny hedgehoglets will need regular feeds.



The People's Friend

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Culwell Tank Week

Set
during
WWI

Money was
needed, and all
it took was a
tank tour!



WE'RE cheerful about having a tank in the square, aren't we, Joseph?" Mr Brigham said.

Marsha looked up to see the councilman standing in the doorway of the civil engineers' office.

"A what, Cecil?" her father said from his drawing board.

He was squinting dreadfully at Mr Brigham, and Marsha saw that he had forgotten to remove the spectacles that he used for close work.

Why, she thought to herself, am I surrounded by men who are so clever, but so scatty?

"A tank, Joseph," Cecil Brigham repeated.

"Oh, is this the tanks going around the country? Well, I'm not sure . . ."

"We've had a letter," Brigham explained. "They mean to bring one to Culwell in January, show it off, and get everyone in town to buy war bonds."

Marsha's father blinked. "They're big items, these tanks, yes?"

"Thirty tons is the figure in the letter, but apparently it depends on which model they send."

"Thirty tons? On these ancient roads?" Joseph looked at the map of Culwell pinned to the wall. "Depends on the way they bring it in. Let me have a think."

Marsha stepped forward. She had no official job in the office, but she was well known as the knowledgeable dogsbody of its two employees, being the daughter of one and the fiancée (to all intents and purposes) of the other.

"I've heard of this," Marsha said. "Tank Weeks, or Tank Banks. It's a project likely to involve lots of work, and I really do think it would be better handed to Tom."

She glanced at her father, anxious not to offend.

"Dad's retiring, you see, Mr Brigham, and his health . . ."

Joseph Rathbone smiled.

"She wraps me up in cotton wool, Cecil, but I love her for it. Marsha may be right – the idea of thirty tons of iron knocking against the timber frames on the high street makes me feel tired just thinking about it! I'll talk to Tom."

Marsha's mother, many years her husband's junior, had died years before, and

Marsha knew her duty must be to keep an eye on her father's health.

She also felt it her duty to follow the progress of this terrible war. Her newspaper had told her that these new tanks had led to victory at the Battle of Cambrai.

The authorities had swiftly realised that the tanks were an exciting symbol of success. They were a way of rousing the country to patriotism and, more usefully, to investing.

One of them had quickly been hauled, battle-scarred, back from France, and displayed in Trafalgar Square by the end of November 1917.

"Look, Father," Marsha had said, passing her newspaper over. "That's a tank. It's got a name – Egbert. How funny."

The government had been so pleased by the reaction of citizens viewing the tank, that they had announced a tour of the giant weapons.

"Tank Weeks" began, during which citizens could see one of the iron beasts in their town or city, and then (fired with enthusiasm) buy a savings certificate – to ease the Treasury's lack of money – from the travelling Tank Bank.

Tom was Culwell's junior engineer and, when Joseph and Marsha spoke to him, was delighted to take on the project.

"It appears my Marsha knows more about this than I do," he said, sneaking an arm around her waist.

Marsha laughed with happiness. She was his own, and he was hers. People sometimes referred to her as a fiancée, but in fact the question had never actually been put.

While Joseph forgot that he was wearing spectacles, Tom forgot that, to get married, one had to take action. Marsha knew that one day soon she would have to give him a push.

Life (as this war indicated daily) was short. For now she simply loved him, and helped him in his work, biding her time.

Mr Brigham called again with his letter from the National War Savings Committee.

"They want us –

well, they want you, Tom, I suppose – to agree a route for this parade of vehicles, soldiers, a band and so on. We're to prepare for a proper spectacle –"

"And for holes in the road, possibly," Tom interjected.

Mr Brigham looked up. "Surely not?"

Marsha pointed to the map.

"It's Culwell's geology, Mr Brigham. The solid Roman roads in the rest of the county sadly pass us by.

"We have streets and bridges, especially by the river, built on not very much at all. There was work in the 1860s to shore up various spots."

"You'll sort it, I know," Mr Brigham said to Tom.

"Of course, we can't be unpatriotic," Tom replied.

"No, indeed!" Mr Brigham agreed. "I'll leave this in the capable hands of our civil engineers!"

Marsha sighed. He wasn't referring to her. She had gone as far as schooling and reading could take her down the path of becoming an engineer, but as far as the world was concerned she merely made the tea in her father's office, and arranged the appointments.

But as Tom's wife, at least, she could continue to play a part. Once she was Tom's wife . . .

* * * *

The tank was on its way, and Tom had to make sure that its weight would not cause irreparable damage to the ancient town.

Marsha sketched out a survey of the risks.

"It's all very well winning a war," she said, "but we mustn't flatten Culwell in the process."

"Flatten? Tell that to the poor folks in Belgium," Tom replied. "There's been a lot of flattening there."

"Shall I start a fresh notebook?" Marsha asked Tom, who was deep in thought. "This is not the usual sort of run-of-the-mill work."

"A what?" Tom blinked at her, then smiled. "Jolly good idea, my sweetheart.

What would I do without you?"

"A question I often ask myself," Marsha said quietly, but he was out of the door, without his coat.

* * * *

On the second day of Tom's check of the town's infrastructure, a party arrived from the Savings Committee. A man and a woman arrived in a motor, all the way from London.

They drew up outside the council buildings, from which Tom and Marsha happened to be emerging.

They had just finished a tiring day examining the bridges that crossed the Culwell River at two points on its tight curve around the town.

Marsha wore a straight skirt and plain matching cardigan in a dull dark green – supremely practical.

The hem of the skirt was faded, but it was the best choice when she so frequently ended up climbing over weed-draped rocks, or getting covered in road dust.

Tom peered across the driveway.

"Gracious me! Isn't that a Ford Model T?" he asked. "Brand new!"

From the car stepped two individuals. The man was about fifty, with a stupendous moustache. The woman was half his age, and at first Marsha assumed she was his daughter, along for the ride.

The woman was handsome – tall, with a tiny waist and a great deal of dark hair topped with a gorgeous hat. It had scarlet fabric daisies carelessly scattered around its soft brim.

Fashions had become rather masculine in 1917, probably in a gesture of support to the men off fighting.

Long, fitted jackets were worn over skirts that got shorter and more racy. Hats were smaller, in dark shades of felt.

This girl, whose dark eyes scanned her surroundings keenly, wore the latest shapes, but somehow looked utterly feminine and alluring.

"Mr Peters?" the man said, holding out a hand.

"We are from the War Savings Committee. I am Stanley Johns and this is one of our sales assistants, Miss Royal."

Miss Royal stepped forward and took Tom's hand. Marsha watched his eyes, dragged from the details of the new Ford to the face of the woman, and saw them stay there.

"We always come on ahead of a Tank Week and scout about, if you know what I mean," Mr Johns explained. "Get the lie of the land and make sure you have everything you need."

"We haven't done many," Miss Royal added in a cut-glass accent, "but we've learned quickly." She leaned towards Tom.

"Anything you need," she finished.

As they talked, it became clear to Marsha that the visit was really about what Miss Royal and Mr Johns needed. He was polite, but forceful, and in her way so was she.

With all her charming smiles and talk of "The fine people of Culwell", it was clear that she had to reach a sales target. The tank about to roll into town was just decoration.

Mr Johns talked about the schedule.

"Our tanks must follow a route. They cannot zig-zag across the land, you see?"

"The team of trained salespeople and soldiers accompanying these magnificent weapons – they must arrive in the right place at the right time, in the right way. It is all in the cause of the war effort," Miss Royal added.

Mr Johns was to return to London that same day. Only Miss Royal was to remain, to give assistance during the fortnight before Culwell's Tank Week.

* * * *

"Assistance, certainly," Marsha said to Tom that evening. "Also persuasion. She knows how to chivvy."

Tom had called at the Rathbone house, ostensibly to spend time with his darling, but (as so often) ending up discussing work.

"Chivvy?" Tom was puzzled.

"Her instructions are to make sure nothing stops that tank. She's not been picked just for her pretty face. She knows how to sell war bonds, but she also knows how to keep you in line."

"I don't know about a pretty face," Tom said.

His tone was vague, but when Marsha looked into his face, she felt a pang of anxiety. He was recalling that exact pretty face.

"She told me," Marsha began, "that when the tank is here she'll have a smart little marquee beside it, and people will step inside to be wooed into buying her savings certificates."

"Wooed?" Tom repeated. "People will want to buy, surely?"

She frowned.

"All I am saying is that Miss Royal is a saleswoman. She's also an enforcer."

"That's a strong word," Tom said, smiling. "She doesn't look like any kind of enforcer to me."

Marsha didn't want to dislike Miss Royal, but it was hard to keep the feeling down.

"Nevertheless, she will make sure you do as you are told," she insisted.

* * * *

Joseph woke the next morning feeling faint. His daughter confined him to bed and called the doctor.

He was told to stay at home and build his strength while Tom managed all the work. For once, Joseph obeyed.

A few days later an aeroplane came roaring across the sky above Culwell, and hundreds of pamphlets fluttered down, rousing the citizens of Culwell to *Beat The Rest And Be The Best* by buying more savings and bonds than another town in the kingdom.

Miss Royal (Shirley, as she had insisted Tom call her) said that competition was the key to making as much money as possible.

The tank was to arrive from the east, and would halt for preparations on a patch of rough ground on the far side of the river.

"The obvious route,"

Shirley said to Tom, “is along that lovely wide lane, then over the river where your swans look marvellous against the mediaeval stone, and on into the square.”

She had an odd habit of never looking at Marsha when she talked. Marsha was usually in attendance, making the tea or finding the relevant map or instrument. But then, it was Tom who was the engineer.

Marsha knew that the strength of the older bridge should be a concern. She looked at Tom.

“I see the attraction of that route,” he said. “But our other bridge, built in 1887 to the south, offers a guarantee nothing will –”

“But the older bridge is perfect for the project,” Shirley interrupted in her soothing voice. “You said that there’s no evidence of annoying doubts?”

“Well, Miss Royal . . .”

“Shirley, please.”

“Shirley. There has been no actual testing of the bridge for some time, funds being short –”

“But you, as the skilled engineer here, can reassure me that my little tank can cross to impress the fine folk of Culwell frightfully?”

At this point there was a knock on the door of the office, and the doctor called Marsha outside to report that Joseph was a little better.

“Plenty of liver,” he said. “Iron is required.”

She did not hear the rest of the conversation indoors.

* * * *

The days passed. Shirley Royal could in no way be accused of slacking. She was always nattily dressed and kept up her enthusiasm for the plan.

Marsha noticed her beginning to touch Tom – just the brush of a hand across his chest; a nudge against him as she made a joke – and knew that Tom was transfixed.

Marsha hated herself for doubting him. Hadn’t he said how much he loved her? Shirley Royal was all show, but did she need to wind a poor, scatty civil engineer round her beautiful little finger?

The town aristocracy were also charmed by Miss Royal.

“Goodness, no,” Marsha heard Shirley tell the doctor’s wife. “I don’t sell the certificates at fifteen and six!”

“No, I sell the large war bonds at fifty pounds and above, to the upper stratum of Culwell society. I have a young colleague coming, Miss Keith, for the ordinary people.”

Marsha felt herself side-lined. Shirley took Tom out often in the frosty weather, wearing an exquisite fur-trimmed coat, to talk through the plan.

Marsha’s time was taken up with her father, and Tom’s by Shirley Royal. He began to wear a dopey smile, and Marsha would hear Miss Royal’s ringing laughter in the evenings as Tom passed their house on his way home, escorting her to the hotel.

* * * *

The Saturday of Culwell Tank Week arrived, and Marsha had not been involved in the work for days.

The town was plastered with posters, bunting was everywhere, and every child was desperate to see the tank, which was called Nelson.

Joseph felt much better, and with Marsha he met Tom in the square to survey the scene. They had set off through the crowds, out towards the river.

“So, people are lining the route from here to the new bridge?” Joseph asked.

“In the end we plumped for the prettier one,” Tom replied quickly, striding on.

“Prettier what?” Joseph stopped.

“Bridge. It was crucial to create the spectacle.”

“I didn’t know this.” Joseph frowned. “Thirty tons, Tom?”

“A little less, so that’s good. We don’t have evidence that the old bridge isn’t up to the task. Shirley understands that the way this event is staged –”

“Shirley? Staged?” Joseph was shaking his head. “Tom, it’s our job to look after the bricks and mortar, not this

young woman’s ambitions. Of course she wanted the Cul Bridge. Good Lord.”

Joseph set off half at a run, and Marsha dashed after him, calling for him to slow down. They ran past the last shop, and then the last row of terraces, until they were on the bridge and saw the brown of the rough ground beyond, and the huge rhomboid shape of the tank.

It was just beginning to thunder its way towards the bridge as Shirley Royal waved and hurried to join them. She took Tom’s arm tightly in hers.

“Culwell – my next triumph!” she said joyfully.

“Miss Royal,” Joseph said. “I am going to be bold. I am going to risk the wrath of your London committee by insisting that you turn that thing to the right and take the river walk which is solid, and then the southern bridge.”

She laughed gaily.

“Too late,” she cried.

“Tommy is happy with the prettier bridge, and just look at the crowds!”

There was indeed a crowd. Even from this distance Marsha could see their eager faces, small children on the shoulders of men, flags waving.

“Here comes Nelson,”

Shirley cried.

Then she actually stood on tiptoes and kissed Tom’s cheek, and he blushed.

Nelson crawled slowly on. Its front, with fat scorpion-like protrusions, tilted up as it reached the long ride to the old bridge. Its engine roared with the added effort, and Marsha saw her father scurry down the footpath to the riverbank below the bridge.

“There’s movement already,” he shouted. “The slabs that run from this wing wall out to that slope, they don’t like this pressure! I don’t need any instrument to tell me that. Tom, you know the exact appearance of the abutment. Go down there!”

Tom’s arm was still entwined in Shirley’s. He looked down at her like a timid schoolboy asking permission.

“Tom!” Marsha shouted.

He seemed to wake up, and scabbled down a scree path to look at the stones that supported the bridge at water level. He stared at the structure, then looked up into Marsha’s face.

“Don’t be silly, Tommy,” Shirley said. “We talked about this. It’ll be fine.”

“This is wrong,” Tom said. “You have to stop. Now.”

Nobody minded much that the parade suddenly halted, or that there followed a furious discussion on the bridge, or that the whole thing shifted south and entered town another way.

In fact, Mrs Protheroe, owner of Protheroe’s Rock and Confectionery, was delighted, because her shop now lay on the route.

Culwell did not win the competition to raise the most money in a Tank Week – that honour went to West Hartlepool – but a good time was had.

Miss Royal and Miss Keith extracted a decent sum of money, though Miss Royal seemed most disgruntled at the result.

Joseph observed that the young lady had lost some of her sparkle.

“She wanted it to go her way,” Tom mumbled.

“Literally!” Joseph laughed.

* * * *

Tom and Marsha were watching the tank rumble away one freezing morning when he turned to her.

“It wasn’t just the Cul Bridge that nearly crumbled away on Saturday,” he admitted.

Marsha smiled.

“No, I suppose not.”

“I’ve been the biggest fool,” Tom said. “Sometimes a person doesn’t know what he’s got until he almost lets it slip away.”

“The bridge, you mean?”

He kissed her.

“No, not the bridge, sweetheart. Here.” He dug a hand into his surveyor’s jacket pocket and pulled out a tiny black box. “You should have had this at least a year ago. I do love you, Marsha Rathbone.”

“And I love you.”

“Will you have me, idiot that I am?”

“I will,” she replied with a smile. ■



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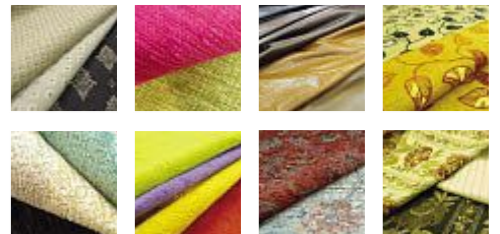
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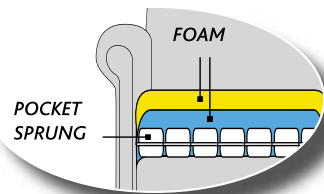


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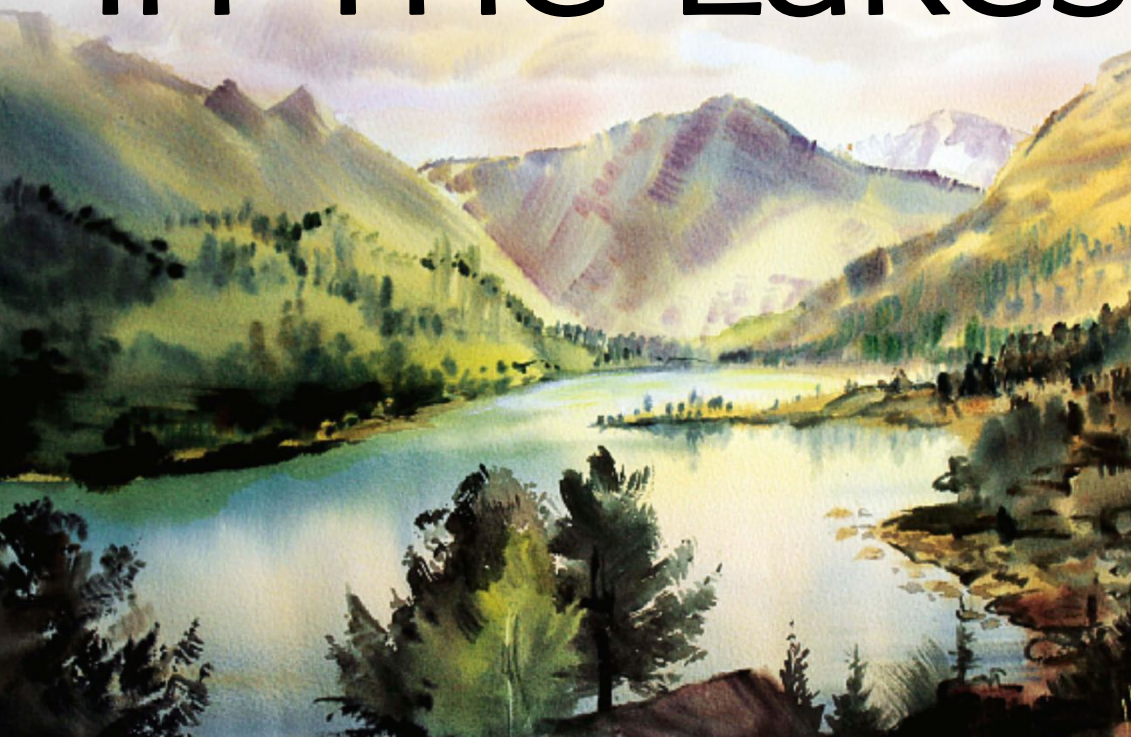


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In The Lakes



My childhood was spent holidaying in this lovely spot. How can I tell Mum we can't go?

kept on going to the cottage.

How am I going to tell her?

* * * *

I stare out of the window. I don't want to upset her and make her feel we don't care any more, but really everyone seems to be too busy with other things this summer.

"Ahem." It is my turn to clear my throat. "Don't do anything about the cottage at the moment, eh, Mum? I'll come round at the weekend and we can talk about it."

I put the phone down. There, I've put it off for another few days.

I feel awful, but Ian told me he and his wife are going to South Africa to visit their daughter who is working there, so they wouldn't be able to go to the Lakes this year.

"Do you think Mum will mind?" Ian asked. "It's not as if we've ever missed before, and this is a trip of a lifetime. You'll still go, won't you, and Louise?"

I nodded, but then Louise caught me for a quiet word.

"Maria, I've been meaning to speak to you about the cottage in the summer. Henry needs surgery on his back and it's scheduled for spring.

"It's going to be a long recuperation and he'll have limited mobility so I think we'll have to skip Grasmere this year. It's not fair on him if

AHEM." Someone clears their throat. I recognise the voice.

"Hello, Mum," I say into the phone.

"Maria! How are you, love? I was looking at the calendar. It's time to book the cottage."

Outside, the grass is white and there is a frosty sheen over the car. Summer holidays are a long way from my thoughts, but Mum is right.

I've been meaning to talk to her about the cottage, ever since Christmas when everyone had a quiet word with me.

My family has been going to Grasmere for a week each year since, well, for ever.

At first it was just my parents, but after they were married there came my brother Ian, then my sister Louise and later, me. We rented the same cottage each year all through my childhood.

I loved it. We walked on the fell. We climbed the peaks: Scafell Pike in the rain, Skiddaw in the rain and Helvellyn in snow flurries!

But I remember those holidays mostly as sunny days, of swimming in the lake, riding the steamer on Ullswater or having picnics and ice-creams.

As we kids got older we would bring friends for the week away, people from school or pals from university. Some had never been to the Lake District before.

"How can I have missed this?" one friend wailed. "We always go to Spain, but this is so beautiful."

When Ian got married he brought his wife to the cottage and in a few years a new generation arrived and the cycle started again, with us introducing Ian's children to our favourite places.

When Louise married there were more kids to visit the cottage. Often we all squeezed in with mattresses on the floor. Other years, deals were struck so the whole family got some time there.

"We'll come for the first half of the week and you for the second, right?"

One summer Louise's family managed to rent another cottage nearby,

but usually it was a full house.

When I got married and had two children of my own I lived through them the whole excitement of the cottage and the Lake District again.

My children loved the magical holiday with their grandparents. I suppose I thought it would go on for ever.

But Dad died nine years ago. Ian, Louise and I had whispered discussions about what was for the best and we agreed we should continue to book the cottage and make sure Mum got away for a break. "We don't want her to feel anything is different," Louise said.

It didn't feel the same. Our father had been an outdoors man and we missed his leadership, rounding us up first thing in the morning to set out the day's challenge.

"Walk round Buttermere? Shopping in Keswick? Picnic?"

Even the evening games of Scrabble were more subdued without him, but it was good for Mum to have the family round her, so we

he can't get about."
"No, of course not." I made the right noises.

"You'll still be going, won't you, and Ian?"
"Actually –" I began, but Louise's attention was diverted and we didn't finish the conversation.

"Neither Ian or Louise can make it to the cottage this year," I told my husband later in the evening when we were on our own again. "Ian's family are going to South Africa and Henry's having an operation."

"Oh, poor Henry. Actually, Maria, I was wondering about us. I know you like to go to the cottage and all, and it was a fabulous holiday when the kids were little, but I'm not sure they want to come with us any more."

Kieran looked at me. "I'd really like to go to Ireland this year and continue the research on my family."

"Oh." I twisted my hands together, sat down and then stood up again.

I looked around the room for inspiration and found none. My husband had been growing his family tree. He'd got back to the 1850s, when his family had arrived in England during the potato famine, but he wanted to go to Ireland to look at church records there.

"Whatever am I going to tell Mum? Could we take her to Ireland with us?"

"To trail round churches and graveyards and maybe council offices?" He raised his eyebrows.

I rang Louise.

"What am I to say to Mum? No-one wants to go to the cottage. She'll be so disappointed."

"Are you sure?"
"Of course. She and Dad lived for that week every year. She still wants to go,

doesn't she?"

"Mmm." Louise didn't agree or disagree. "I expect she'll understand," was the best I could get from her.

So that's the situation. I haven't thought of what to tell Mum, so I've put it off and now she is ringing me to see if she can go ahead and make the booking.

I think about what a disappointment it will be. Once she'd got over Dad not being there she'd rallied round and enjoyed the holidays. How will she feel if we all abandon ship?

* * * *

It's with a heavy heart that I drive over to Mum's the following weekend. I wish either Ian or Louise was with me. It shouldn't be up to me to be the bearer of their bad news.

"Hello, Mum," I say as cheerfully as I can when she opens the door.

"Hello, dear. I've got the kettle on. Go through."

I wander into Mum's living-room. It is neat and tidy, as always. There's a pile of brochures on the sideboard.

Mum puts a tray down on the coffee table.

"About the cottage, Mum?" I say and swallow hard.

"Ah, yes, the cottage," she says, busy pouring the coffee.

I clench my fists. I still haven't decided what to say.

"It's just . . ." I begin.

"Maria," Mum says.

I glance at her but she is putting milk in the coffee and doesn't meet my eye.

"You first," I say.

"No, you first."

"Well, Ian has told me he's going to South Africa in the summer. They think it's a great opportunity to visit while Natalie is working there."

"Yes, I suppose so."
Mum nods. "And it will be nice for Nat to have visitors."

"And," I plough on, "Louise says she won't be able to make the Lake District this year because Henry is having an operation on his back and won't be so mobile."

"Oh, dear. Poor Henry."
"So that doesn't leave many of us."

My stomach is churning and I put down the coffee Mum has passed me. I've still to break the news that Kieran would like us to go to Ireland.

Mum isn't looking at me. She's watching something out in the garden.

I take a deep breath.

"So, what I'm trying to say is that I'm not sure it's worth booking the cottage this year."

Mum turns round sharply and looks at me. I feel eaten up with guilt at spoiling her holiday and her chance to spend time with her children and grandchildren.

"You understand, Mum? I don't think many of us can come this year."

"Yes, I understand."

She briefly closes her eyes. Was there some way I could have broken the news more gently?

"No cottage this year. No need to book." She nods and smiles.

"You don't mind?"

"No. In fact I was going to suggest we didn't go this year. The grandchildren are getting too old for sharing rooms and walks with their parents, aren't they? They want to do their own thing."

"And you and Ian and Louise, you've always been tied to this week at the cottage. It was your dad's holiday, really, wasn't it?"

"He loved the Lake District, walking out on the

fell and the countryside, and he wanted all of you to enjoy it, too."

"We did, Mum. We did," I reassure her.

"But it was always hard work for me, you know, providing food and picnics and tidying up after everyone. Not much of a holiday, really." She looks down at her hands.

I gasp. "Why didn't you say something?"

"It was your dad's holiday. I couldn't change anything. But since he's gone, I'd like to try something new," Mum continues.

"I've got these brochures for Mediterranean cruises. Maggie from next door goes every year and she asked me if I'd like to join her. If I don't have to pay for the holiday cottage I can afford it."

"Oh, Mum!" I laugh with relief. "How long have you been cooking this up? We've all been terrified of telling you we couldn't come this year."

"Ian and Louise left it to me to talk to you. And all the time you wanted to tell us you couldn't come!"

I rock back in the chair, feeling lighter as a great weight is lifted from me.

"Show me the brochure," I say. "Which cruise are you thinking of?"

She smiles and collects the pile from the sideboard.

"We were talking about this one." Mum opens a colour brochure to a well-thumbed page. "It starts in Southampton and goes to Lisbon, Gibraltar, Malaga, all the way to Dubrovnik and Venice."

"It looks lovely. Waited on hand and foot, day trips organised for you. No picnics, mind."

"No rain, either," she says mischievously. ■

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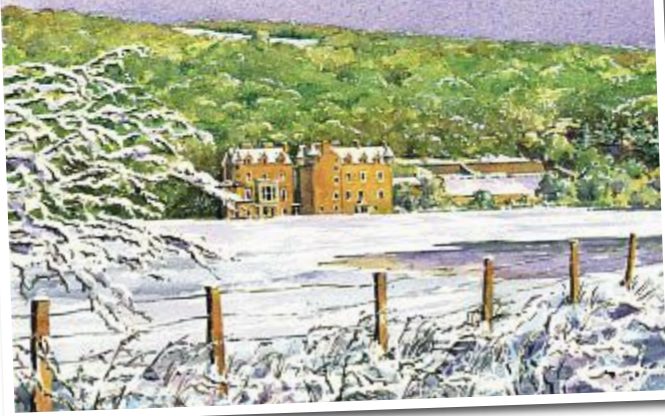
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The People's Fridge

With an initiative named like that, how could we not send Dawn Geddes to investigate?

ONE of the biggest problems facing communities around the UK is food poverty. With food banks in the country handing out more than a million emergency parcels each year, it's clear that we have a problem.

The South London district of Brixton is no different. When members of the community sat down to address the problem, they decided to try something quite radical – a People's Fridge that would help Brixton cut down on wastage and provide food to those who need it.

The idea behind the fridge is surprisingly simple. Situated in local food market POP Brixton, the fridge is opened between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., Monday to Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday to Sunday.

During those times, local people and food businesses can leave food that is in



Fridge volunteer
Dottie Allan.

date, but is surplus to them, for other people to take home and consume.

After an initial crowdfunding campaign to raise money for the project, the fridge was officially opened in February 2017.

The initiative is run completely by volunteers and local traders who make sure that the fridge is properly stocked up and adheres to all the right health and safety standards. Twenty-four-year-old

Fridge volunteer Dottie Allan tells me that the fridge has already made a huge impact in Brixton.

"The response so far has been amazing. The great thing about the fridge is that it helps so many people in the area who would otherwise rely solely on foodbanks.

"What we have to offer is quite different from what you'd get in a food bank, too. While the focus there is on food with a long shelf life, we get a lot of baked goods, sandwiches and treats that would normally be sold in a bakery or a café. It's great to be able to provide a little bit of luxury to people."

While visitors to food banks are usually referred by social services, the People's Fridge is open to all.

"It's a judgement-free zone. All that we ask is that they sign a sheet so we can record what's gone in and what's gone out. And



Helping stop
the waste of
fresh food.

normally everything does go out, and very quickly, too!

"We often see people on low incomes and single parents who use the fridge as a way of topping up the food that they get on a weekly basis. It's a brilliant way to support local people."

"I live locally and I've always been passionate about the issue of food wastage because it's something that I see a lot and I think that it's really unnecessary.

"Just a couple of weeks after the fridge opened, I saw an advert asking for

Community Fridges

With a number of them now running around the country (check www.hubbub.org.uk/Event/community-fridge-network for a map) and the world, community fridges are first and foremost about reducing waste. Unlike foodbanks, recipients don't have to prove they're in need – the idea is simply to avoid throwing things away, so anyone is welcome to take from the food on offer.

The UK's first was set up in Frome, Somerset, and turned over 1,000 unwanted items in the first three

months alone.

Frome's fridge was set up by students of Adventure, an organisation that teaches community-minded courses. Ten students were challenged to tackle the problem of food waste in the town, and this was the result!

There's a bit of red tape involved in making sure the food that goes in is properly prepared and safe, but then the fridge is monitored by volunteers, with it being the responsibility of individuals to check that the food is in date and right for them.

Factfile

1 While the People's Fridge is the first community fridge project in London, similar initiatives have been successful in Germany, Spain and India.

2 It's estimated that 8.4 million people in the UK face the challenges of food poverty.

3 In the UK alone we throw out an estimated seven million tonnes of food and drink each year, most of which is unnecessary waste.

4 After the success of fridges from Frome to Brixton, similar projects are appearing around the UK, including Paisley, Newcastle and Fishguard.



Foodbanks focus on food that will last.



volunteers and decided to get involved. There are about ten volunteers now and we meet every Monday night to talk about food safety stuff and to make sure that the project is running smoothly."

One of the Fridge's many supporters is Jamie Oliver. The TV chef, who campaigns against food wastage, has appealed to communities across the UK to also start their own community fridge schemes to help locals.

As the first community fridge in London, Dottie says that they've provided a helping hand to other

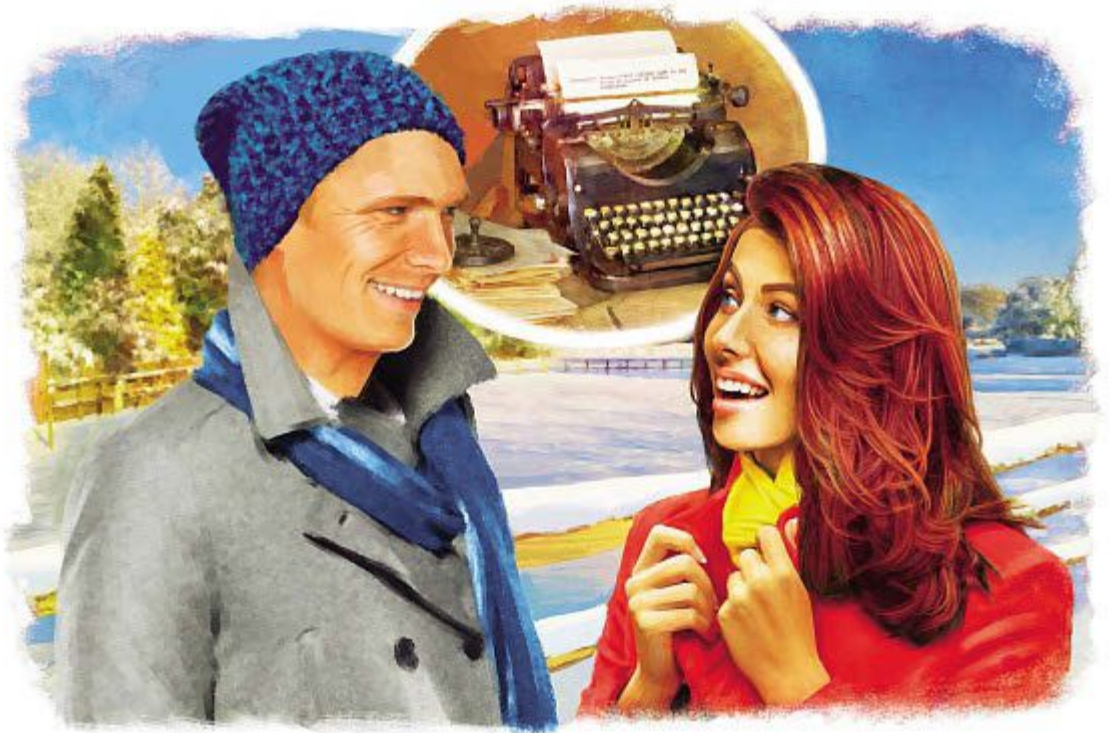
towns and cities across the globe who are looking to start their own.

"We've had loads of people getting in touch via social media asking for advice on how to start their own fridge project – from everywhere from New York to South America!

"It's great to be able to chip in and help however we can. It's a brilliant initiative for any place to consider – not only does it help with food poverty, it also really engages the community. It sparks conversations and gets people talking about these important issues." ■

For more information about the project, visit: www.peoplesfridge.com.

Secrets had caused a lot of upset in Mossfield Hills. It was time there was an end to them . . .



The Mystery Of The Missing Du Mauriers

THE winding cemetery footpath glistened as beams of light from the rising sun reflected across the light frosting of ice. It reminded Hannah of the yellow brick road from "The Wizard Of Oz".

She breathed in the chilled air as she followed the sparkling route.

"Good morning, Mum." She stooped to yank the frozen yellow roses from the stone pot, placed them to the side of the gravestone and replaced them with sprigs of the frost-hardy lavender that grew in abundance in her small garden.

"Mum, I found your note and decoded it. I wish you'd told me earlier, rather than keeping the secret to yourself.

"But now I know, and I promise you that the community will not be dragged down again. Sadly the last piece of the puzzle is still a mystery as someone took our books,

but maybe they'll find their way home."

She stood, stroked her mother's gravestone and then carried the dead flowers to the bin on her way to Words On Pages.

A light shone from the window of the shop. Vivian. She was early.

Hannah opened the door.

"Good morning," she called, hearing the clatter of teacups from the kitchen.

"Morning, love." Vivian poked her head round the archway. "Cuppa?"

"Yes, please," Hannah said, placing her coat on the hanger.

Vivian stomped from the kitchen clutching her purse, mumbling to herself.

"What's the matter?"

"I forgot to bring the milk. I tell you, I'll be glad when this saga is over, so my head is not so cluttered. Won't be long, love."

"Your coat!"

But her godmother was gone.

Sitting behind her desk, Hannah rummaged in her

handbag for her phone and dialled a number.

"Morning, little brother."

"A very good evening to you, Hannah. And stop calling me 'little brother'!"

Mitch's red hair was spiked, resembling the harsh mountain range where he was carrying out his research.

"How's work going on the other side of the world?"

"Bit blustery out here today, but on the whole, it's going well." He took a sip of something steaming. "Did you work it out?"

"Yes, that's why I'm calling. You're the only one I can talk to about it."

Hannah shuffled in the seat and twirled her hair round her fingers as she told her brother about the hidden message.

"The final code is concealed in 'Jamaica Inn', but that's no longer here."

Hannah suddenly shivered and sat straight, staring wide-eyed into the camera of her mobile.

"Hannah, what's wrong?"

You've gone white."

"I know why the books were stolen. Mitch, someone else must have known about the code Mum wrote in the book! It all makes sense. That's why the fox pin was left.

"The fox pin led to the photograph of the Vixens, which led to me looking through Mum's things, which led to me finding her coded message. It's all linked, isn't it?"

"Sounds like it. But why would someone want to lead you down that path? It sounds a bit suspicious." He raked his hand through his hair, flattening the red peaks. "And dangerous."

Hannah laughed.

"Don't worry, it's just a theory." She bit her lip. "But it's a strong one, isn't it?"

The door burst open and a shivering Vivian walked in with a carton of milk. She rushed towards the kitchen.

"Gotta go. I'll call you again later. Get some sleep. Love you, Mitch."

“Love you, too. Be careful.”

“I will.”

Hannah leaned back in her chair and stared through the window.

A green delivery van was parked in the road, blocking the way as an oversized man unloaded large packages to the Italian restaurant opposite.

A neighbour in winter sportswear sprinted past the bookshop window, waving a hand at Hannah.

An elderly man manoeuvred gently down the slope with his walking stick, his Jack Russell moseying after him.

Her gaze rested on the antiques shop on the other side of the road. Strange, the lights were still off. She glanced at the clock. The major was late.

Hannah frowned. The major was never late.

Her train of thought was interrupted by the trill of the telephone. She leaned across her desk and picked up the receiver.

“Words On Pages. Good morning, how may I help you?”

Hannah’s mouth dropped open as she listened.

“What is it, love?” Vivian was holding two mugs.

Hannah dropped the receiver in its place.

“That was Tony calling from the station. They’ve arrested the major.”

* * * *

Noah stared out of the window of his office, arms crossed against his chest.

“Come and sit down, Noah,” Tony said, ending his call with Hannah. “We need to talk.”

Noah stepped to his desk to take a seat. The chair creaked under his weight.

“Have I got it so wrong, Uncle Tony? All the evidence is there,” he said tapping the Words On Pages file.

“It’s all circumstantial.”

“But the soil samples? I called in a huge favour matching the soil samples. The particles left at the scene are a perfect match to the soil on the major’s driveway.”

“It’s Mossfield Hills, Noah. You can find the same type of soil all around

here. And the major’s cottage is right at the bottom of the hills. Any walker, resident or visitor could have traipsed that soil through the shop.”

“But the pin, the major’s knowledge of code, as well as the major having full access to the security system at the shop. That’s more than circumstantial.”

Tony leaned forward, linking his hands on the desk. Noah’s heart lurched at his uncle’s glare.

“It’s a good thing you’re my nephew, boy. Anybody else falsely accusing a dear friend of mine wouldn’t last two minutes behind this desk. I’d snatch my job back in an instant!

“I didn’t step aside lightly, even if it was past my official retirement age.”

“I know, Uncle Tony, and I’m grateful that you used your influence to get me this job. I don’t know what I’ve have done.”

Tony sat back in his chair.

“Noah, I understand your loss and I know you blame yourself for your colleague’s death, but it wasn’t your fault and you need to stop feeling guilty that you lived and he didn’t.

“You’ve suffered enough and you have to live with the daily pain of your injuries. The only guilty person was the man who made the conscious decision to ram into your police car.”

A knock on the door interrupted them.

“Thought you two might like a coffee,” Christine said. “I’ve given the major one, too. He looks a pitiful soul in that cell. He doesn’t belong there, you know.”

“Thank you, Christine,” Tony said firmly and she exited quickly.

“Noah, there is no doubt you have excellent skills and will make a fine detective, but one thing you need to learn very quickly is that you are no longer in the city. In Mossfield Hills you are working within a community, as part of that community.

“There is no them and us. You are dealing with actual people on a personal level. Not like the city, where victims are known as numbers and every arrest is

just another notch on your belt. You’re management now, young man, and the responsibility is huge.”

Noah stood up.

“I understand that, Uncle Tony, but I also believe that the major is hiding something, even if he isn’t the actual person who stole those books.” He paced in the confined space.

“Do you want me to talk to him?”

“No, thank you. I must do

“That was Tony calling. The major’s been arrested!”

this alone, and I would still like to keep our family tie to ourselves for now. I need to stand on my own two feet.”

Tony finished his coffee and pushed himself out of the chair.

“One last piece of advice before I get off: work with your heart as well as your head. Sensitivity is of the essence if you want to succeed in our town.”

Noah rubbed his shoulder, the wound all too fresh. He pondered over his uncle’s advice before grabbing the file from his desk. Time to talk to the major once again.

* * * *

The cuckoo clock chirped as Vivian steered Hannah into the tearoom.

“I don’t think this is a good idea, Vivian.”

“Nonsense. We need to get to the bottom of this. Morning, Tilly,” she called.

The kitchen doors swung open and Tilly stepped to the counter with a smile.

“Good morning, ladies. Two teas?”

“Make it three, love. We need to talk.”

Tilly’s shoulders slumped and her smile faded as she poured three teas and placed the cups on a tray with a plate of freshly baked shortbread biscuits.

“Take a seat. I’ll bring them over.”

Hannah pulled her arms from the sleeves of her coat and placed it over the back of her chair. She wrapped her arms across her chest as a chill of uncertainty washed through her body. What had Tilly done? What did

she know?

Tilly placed the tray on the table with no eye contact. Hannah took a sip of her tea, her gaze flicking from Vivian to Tilly and back again.

Tilly’s hands shook as she picked up her own cup and saucer, and Vivian placed a calming hand on her friend’s arm.

“Tilly, love, I think it’s time you told us what’s going on. Hannah deserves

to know the truth.”

With watery eyes, Tilly took a deep breath and glanced at Hannah before averting her gaze.

Hannah leaned in as Tilly spoke in a hushed tone.

“Speak up,” Vivian urged.

Tilly cleared her throat, placed her cup on the table and looked at Hannah.

“Do you remember that I used to visit your mum’s shop every day?”

“Yes, I do. And I’m really sad that you’ve not visited since Mum passed away. I know it’s hard, Tilly, but Mum wouldn’t want you to feel sad about coming into the shop. You love reading.”

Hannah shifted forward in her seat and perched on its end.

“Remember how you, me and Mum spent hours discussing character arcs of the books we read together, and acted as sleuths, trying to figure out whodunit? I miss those times. I miss Mum, and I miss you, too.” Hannah squeezed her arm.

Tilly gently pulled away from Hannah’s touch and took a sip of tea.

“It’s not because I miss your mum that I don’t come into the shop.” A tear rolled down her rosy cheek.

“Then why?”

Hannah leaned back in her chair at Tilly’s expression.

“I couldn’t face you, Hannah.”

“Why ever not?” Vivian asked.

Tilly’s shoulders quivered and the tears fell.

“I’m ashamed.” She jerked from her chair



and stomped back and forth through the small space, weaving in and out of the tables and chairs.

"For goodness' sake, Tilly, sit down and explain!"

Hannah winced at her godmother's harsh tone, but Tilly retook her seat and slumped forward, holding her head in her hands.

"I'm so sorry, Hannah. I never meant to hurt you."

"Please, Tilly, just tell me what's happened to make you feel this way. You've never hurt me. I don't understand."

Tilly lifted her pale face.

"A few weeks before your mother passed, I was in the bookshop with her. We were alone. I was reading and she was writing something. I took no notice, but then I saw her doing something rather strange.

"She appeared to be taking one of the books apart. My curiosity got the better of me and I went to pry. She was writing a lot of gibberish inside the dismantled cover of the book.

"I gasped aloud and your mother heard me and tutted. She explained she was leaving you a coded message inside the book. She made me promise to keep it a secret so that you'd find it by yourself one day."

Vivian giggled, breaking the intensity of Tilly's story.

Hannah blinked.

"Why are you laughing, Vivian?"

"It's typical of your mother! She adored leaving you secret messages, knowing you'd find them and work them out. She liked to keep you on your toes."

Hannah drummed her fingers on the table, thinking.

"I don't mind you keeping my mother's secret, Tilly. And she was right. Of course I'd find it eventually. Actually, I found some last night." She sighed and placed a hand on Tilly's. "But why would you feel so ashamed that you stopped visiting the shop?"

Tilly sobbed.

"Because I broke my promise. I told the major!" Hannah leaned in close

and lifted Tilly's chin.

"That's OK, Tilly. The major is your friend and Mum wouldn't have minded. I don't mind."

"No, that's not all. I think I know what the message is, and it has serious consequences."

* * * *

"Good morning, Major." Noah opened the metal door to the cell. "Please come with me."

Noah led the major silently to the interview room, offered him a chair at the Formica table and then sat opposite, resting his elbows on the table top.

He studied the man. The confident appearance had dissipated. His shoulders were rounded rather than pushed back and his chest deflated, no longer reflecting pride.

A dark shadow of overnight stubble coated his chin and the usually neatly combed hair hung over his solemn eyes.

"Would you like to call your solicitor now, Major Wharton?"

The major shook his bowed head.

Noah shuffled in his chair and leaned back with a sigh, grappling with his own conscience. His gut feeling was yelling that the major was innocent, and Uncle Tony had told him to follow his instinct.

But he couldn't ignore the evidence.

"Major, I've explained all the things that led me to taking you into custody, but I don't understand why you would rob Hannah.

"And as you've not said a word since I brought you in, I have to make my own conclusions, which quite frankly, when I think about it on a deeper level, make no sense. I need your help. Talk to me."

The major lifted his head.

"How's my grandson, Detective Inspector? It's not a nice thing for him, seeing his grandfather being escorted away by the police."

Noah sat straight.

"He's fine, Major. Tony and Sally Primrose are taking good care of him. We tried to contact your

daughter, but –"

"She's away on business. China."

"Please look at me, Major."

The man obeyed. His eyes had lost their sparkle. Noah hunched over the table, his stomach churning at the sight of the broken man before him.

"Just answer one question, Major Wharton. Did you break in and steal the books from Words On Pages?"

The major's stare didn't falter.

"No, I did not."

* * * *

"I'll meet you at the shop later, Vivian. I need a brisk walk to clear my head."

"OK, love, take your time. I'll have a cuppa waiting for you when you get back."

Hannah set off down the hill, her pace matching the speed of the thoughts swimming through her mind. Everything Tilly had said confirmed her suspicions.

She had overheard their mothers' heated conversations behind closed doors, the word "vixens" constantly being mentioned.

Tilly had witnessed the coded message being inscribed into one of the du Maurier books and been sworn to secrecy.

The poor woman was being tormented by family history. It had to stop.

Hannah yanked the hood of her jacket over her head, shoved her hands deep into its pockets and, after stomping round most of the town, headed for the one place where she could resolve the mystery once and for all, and put an end to the misery the older generation had caused . . .

* * * *

"Hello, Mum. We need to talk. Things are getting out of hand. The new policeman arrested the major for stealing our books. But I know it wasn't him, was it?"

"No, it wasn't."

Hannah gasped and spun to see Noah standing behind her.

"You've a habit of making me jump out of my skin."

"Sorry, Hannah. I've just been to your shop and

Vivian told me I might find you here."

Hannah flicked off her hat and her hair immediately flew on the wind, wild.

"Well, you certainly messed up this time. The major would never steal from me. He's the sweetest man I know."

"I'm learning quickly.

Please, Hannah, will you come for a coffee with me? I need to talk to you."

Hannah sighed.

"OK, but no more sneaking up on me, and no more arresting the people I love. Do you hear me?"

"Loud and clear, Miss Barker." He saluted with a cheeky grin.

Hannah smiled and Noah held out his arm.

They stepped over the road and into the coffee shop where they'd had their first proper conversation.

"Hot chocolate and a muffin?"

"Yes, please." Hannah pulled off her coat, brushed her hair back into place with her fingers and sat at the same table as her previous visits.

"Madam," Noah said, placing the drinks and muffins on the table.

"Thank you."

Once Noah was seated, Hannah began.

"You said you were learning quickly. So, enlighten me, what have you learned so far?"

With his elbows resting on the table, Noah cleared his throat and gazed at Hannah.

"The biggest lesson learned is I'm no longer a city police officer. I have more responsibility and must get to know the members of this community a whole lot better.

"I know you and Vivian pointed that out on my first day but it wasn't until Uncle Tony gave me a drilling that it finally clicked."

Hannah's brows pinched together.

"Uncle Tony?"

Noah pushed back from the table. His cheeks reddened, and he ran his hand through his hair.

"I don't know what it is, but you have an effect on me. I can't keep the truth from you."

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“Well, your slip-up is safe with me. But now that you’ve said it, there is a strong resemblance. The jawline. Vivian will work it out soon enough. I’m surprised she hasn’t figured it out all ready.”

Hannah’s face relaxed and she stirred her hot chocolate.

“To be honest, secrets have caused a lot of upset in Mossfield Hills and it’s about time there was an end to it.”

Noah leaned in.

“What secrets?”

“Before we get into that, what did you want to talk to me about?”

Creases forged across Noah’s brow as he removed a piece of paper from his jacket pocket and handed it to Hannah.

“Vivian found this in the letter-box when she returned to the shop this morning.”

Hannah’s pulse raced as she examined the typed note.

“Hannah, I’m worried for your safety. This is a clear threat.”

“No,” she said, springing from her chair. “This just proves the major’s innocence.”

“Hannah, please sit down. We need to talk about this.”

She leaned across, her nose almost touching his.

“Noah, you said you trusted me, so trust me and meet me in the Cavalier this evening and I’ll explain everything. I promise.”

Running out of the coffee house, Hannah grabbed her phone from her handbag.

“Vivian, meet me at the antiques shop. Bring the keys and a sheet of white paper. I’ll explain when I get there.”

* * * *

Hannah panted and rested her head on Vivian’s shoulder to catch her breath.

“What is it, love?”

“The note,” she wheezed. “Vivian, it’s all making sense. Open the door.”

Vivian flicked on the lights to the major’s antiques store and Hannah closed the door.

“Did you bring the paper?”

“Yes, love,” she said and handed Hannah the piece of white A4.

Hannah stepped over to the old typewriter nestled amongst other knick-knacks. She quickly rolled in the paper and typed the message that had been written on the note Noah had shown her.

“Love, what are you doing?”

Ripping out the paper, Hannah studied each character.

“Look, Vivian. The ‘a’ is off. I know this typewriter. I used to spend hours playing on the thing. The threatening note was written here on this very typewriter.”

“By whom? Are you telling me that the major –?”

“No!”

“Vivian, I think the books are around here somewhere. Help me look, will you?”

Hannah and Vivian

scoured the numerous shelves, jam-packed with other people’s cast-offs: porcelain vases, brass ornaments, Victorian clocks and trinket containers.

Hannah rummaged through baskets lying on the floor filled with old books.

She grumbled.

“You’d have thought the major would take more care of these precious books. How could he just dump them in baskets on the floor? I can smell the rot. I’ll be having words with him.”

Vivian chuckled.

“Well, they’re not here, love.”

“Let’s look in the back.”

As Hannah stepped towards the back room something caught her eye – the major’s black Pilot briefcase lying at the side of his workbench. She moved towards it.

Her hands shook and her eyes widened as she flipped the cover.

Vivian took a sharp intake of breath.

Hannah crouched and removed the books carefully from the case.

“They’re all here, Vivian!” she said, clasping them to her chest. Her eyes stung with relief.

“What’s going on?”

Hannah almost dropped the books as she spun to

see the major and Noah in the doorway. Noah strode towards her.

“What have you got there?” He peered closer.

“Are they your books?”

“Yes.”

“Major Wharton, I am placing you under arrest –”

“Stop, Noah. It wasn’t him.” Hannah regarded the major.

His head dipped and a tear trickled down a cheek. He swiftly wiped it away.

“I’m sorry, Major.”

“What are you sorry for?” Noah asked.

Hannah moved towards the older man.

“It’s not your fault. I’m sure his intentions weren’t malicious. He likes the thrill of a puzzle.”

“That boy will see my wrath! He must have taken my keys when I was sleeping. I’m so sorry I wasn’t more careful around him, Hannah.”

Hannah peered in Noah’s direction, her head tilted, and her eyes pleaded with him to find a solution.

“Bradley?”

Hannah nodded.

* * * *

“Thank goodness that’s over, love,” Vivian said. “I wonder what Noah will do with young Bradley.”

“Well, I’ve told him I don’t want to press charges, but due to the police time invested and the crime committed, I’m not sure my wishes are worth anything.”

“I’m sure he’ll work something out. I’ve decided he’s a good sort. He reminds me of someone. Can’t quite put my finger on it just yet. But I will.”

Vivian flicked the duster across the shelves.

“When did Noah say you can have your books back?”

“A couple of weeks, but he’ll try to make it sooner. I hope it’s sooner; the buyer won’t wait around for too long.”

“So you’re still selling them?”

“Not all. I’ll keep ‘Jamaica Inn’. After all, that’s the key to all this mess and holds the final message from Mum. I just can’t let that go.”

Hannah rested her elbows on the desk and scanned

through the recent photographs on her mobile phone. Noah couldn’t allow her to take the evidence but he had turned a blind eye whilst she carefully peeled off the back cover of “Jamaica Inn” and photographed her mother’s final message.

“Right, love,” Vivian said, popping the duster back in its cupboard, “I’m going to check on Tilly and then I’m heading home.”

“Thanks for everything, Vivian. I couldn’t have got through the day without you.”

“Oh, love, I wouldn’t have missed the drama.” She tightened the belt on her mac and picked up her basket. “You doing anything special this evening?”

“Actually, after I finish here, I’m going to meet Noah for a drink at the Cavalier.”

Vivian kissed Hannah on the top of her head.

“Enjoy. I’ve got a good feeling about young Noah.”

Hannah locked the shop door and flipped the *Closed* sign. She had work to do and code-breaking required full concentration.

* * * *

The friendly atmosphere of the Cavalier Inn mirrored the warmth in Hannah’s heart. She’d worked out the code!

Butterflies fluttered in her stomach as she listened to Noah report on the case. Bradley wouldn’t be prosecuted but would receive counselling, and the major had already enrolled him on a course during the next school holiday.

“It’s for highly intelligent children, with an emphasis on problem solving. I think that boy will do great things under the proper guidance,” Noah predicted.

“It was all just a game to him. With the exception of the threat. That was anger at his grandfather being arrested.”

“I understand,” Hannah said, nodding and sipping her white wine.

“What will you do about your shop?”

“I’ll sell the books, all but one, and Mitch will lend me the rest to tide me over.”

He's coming back next week for a holiday and he'll come with me to the bank, and help me update my business approach. He's very talented that way."

Pharrell Williams screamed, "I'm Happy" from Hannah's handbag. She fished out her phone with a huge grin.

"His ears were obviously burning," she told Noah. "Hello, little brother."

"Stop calling me that!"

"Mitch, this is Noah."

Hannah turned her phone to face Noah.

"Hi, officer. I've been hearing a lot about you. I hope we can meet properly next week when I'm in town."

"I'd like that," Noah said.

"Are my sister's cheeks crimson yet?"

"Not really." Noah laughed.

"Then we definitely need to get together. I love winding her up."

"Stop it, you two,"

Hannah protested.

Mitch sniggered.

"Nice to meet you, Noah, but for now, if you don't mind, me and my big sis have some family business to tend to."

"I'm ready if you are, little brother." Hannah turned back the phone. She shoved her arms through the sleeves of her jacket and finished off the last of her wine.

"Where are you going?"

"Mitch and I have to speak to Mum."

"You do realise this is the second time you've left me stranded today, don't you?"

"Sorry." She kissed Noah gently on the cheek. "See you tomorrow, and thank you for the drink."

* * * *

"So, sis, did you decode the message?"

"Of course I did, cheeky. It was a set of co-ordinates, and this is where it leads."

Hannah reversed the camera image on her phone to show an unmarked grave.

"Who lives there? And how come it's overgrown with lavender?"

Hannah's skin tickled beneath her scarf as she glared at the lavender. It glittered as the frost dusted

its purple florets.

"My guess is that this is our grandmother's grave. I recognise the lavender. It grows in abundance in my garden. Mum must have planted it."

"Why would Mum send us here?"

Hannah snapped the camera image back to her.

"Call yourself an academic? What do you think?"

Mitch's eyes widened.

"You found the hidden treasure!" he squealed.

"Shh, we don't want to wake the residents," she teased.

They both took a moment. Hannah's breath made clouds on the cold air and her teeth clattered.

"I know I'm only your little brother," Mitch said, breaking the silence, "but I think it's best left where it is."

"My thinking exactly. Grandmother has kept the loot safe all these years and the grief buried with it. Retrieving it would only dig up more pain and sorrow. Let it be."

* * * *

Hannah held a glass of Prosecco in the air.

"Thank you all for coming, especially you, little brother. Here's to Words On Pages. May it for ever be the reading hub of Mossfield Hills."

Hannah couldn't stop smiling as she observed her friends, chatting and chuckling amongst themselves.

Vivian sat in the comfy corner with Tilly and Christine, looking through new books, and Mitch was animated, describing his New Zealand experiences to the major and Tony.

"I'm so happy for you, Hannah," Noah said, placing his arm around her waist. "I have every confidence in you making a real success of Words On Pages."

"Thank you, Noah."

"As I haven't startled you in over a week, what do you say you repay the courtesy and have an uninterrupted dinner date with me?"

"I'd love to."

The End.



On Reflection

From the manse window

By the Rev. Ian Petrie.

EVERY Christmas, I get from Santa, via my daughter Fiona, a new pair of slippers. My year-old slippers are well worn in every sense, but I have a problem.

I find it difficult to discard them – so much so that my 2017 models linger still, far from outstaying their welcome.

They are so snug and moulded to my feet in a way my new pair, in the process of being broken in, are not.

I feel my behaviour is normal when compared to my father's, who never threw old slippers out at all! He had his favourites, and one particular favourite which survived several visits to the bin!

As the boxes of new slippers, optimistically given, grew, he persisted with his beloved old pair, resorting to patching them together with tape.

The amount of tape he got through would have purchased at least one pair of new slippers, as my mother pointed out, but in vain.

Then there was the saga of the sports jacket. My father had worn it for years and passed it on to me, as I was about to embark on my university career away from home, in Edinburgh.

I faithfully wore it for most of the first term, all the while hankering after a new one which I could call my own. In those days of more generous student grants, I set out one day to make my purchase.

Now the owner of a new sports jacket, I wore it proudly and, fortunately, did not dispose of the old one or even try to trade it in.

On my next visit home to Arbroath I was wearing my still-new sports jacket. Having noted this, my father asked me what I had done with the old one.

I told him that I had kept it and, with a huge grin, he asked if he could have it back! My mother's glare in my direction said it all and, sure enough, the next time I visited home, he was wearing it, very comfortably!

I have always been fascinated by old and new, past and future, and so I'm intrigued by Sydney Carter's challenging words, entitled "The Future In The Past", where he suggests: "In that past the future lives for ever, what I hope is still around the corner. When I smell lime trees in flower, I am seventeen and walking in Geneva."

I wonder what Sydney Carter would make of old slippers and jackets, which don't become old until the new arrive. Jesus touched on this subject when he spoke of old and new wineskins.

"No-one," he said, "pours new wine into old wineskins, because the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins will be ruined. Instead, new wine, new wineskins!"

Paul put it in a nutshell.

"In Christ, we are new beings; the old is gone, the new has come!"

Hanging on to the old can imply that we're clinging to the past, and while this might be an eccentric irritant in the world of slippers or sports jackets, as far as discipleship is concerned it is far more important, enunciated in Jesus's command to us all: "Follow me." ■

Next week: the Rev. Susan Sarapuk is happy with second-best!

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“Ideas can come from contemplating all life throws at you”

An unexpected diagnosis inspired Mick Oxley to turn his life around. Steve Newman finds out more . . .

To live in a cosy cottage a stone's throw from the shore in a small fishing village is the wish of many of us. Maybe we even dream of running our own business with a gallery, exhibiting paintings of the sea, inspired by its many moods and ever-changing light.

Such is the life of Mick Oxley, an acclaimed seascape painter living in the tiny village of Craster on the Northumberland coast. It wasn't always his life, however, and the story of how he got here is an inspiration in itself.

Enjoying a career as a PE teacher in Bradford, Mick began to experience extreme tiredness and started suffering exhaustion, especially after exercise.

He was diagnosed with ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, also known as Chronic

Fatigue Syndrome).

A native of Northumberland, he moved with his family to Craster, overlooking the sea, to rest and recover.

“I spent those first few days wondering what on earth I was going to do with my life,” Mick recalls. “My illness got worse and I couldn't even walk a few steps without feeling exhausted. Gradually I began to realise I would need a wheelchair.”

The wheelchair gave him a chance to move around and thus get close to the sea and the shoreline.

“A wheelchair isn't a great thing to move over rocks and pebbles, but getting outside exposed me to the sea with its taste of salt in the air, waves crashing across the rocks and the sight of a beautiful sunrise reflected on a calm morning.

“I also taught art at school so I enrolled in a Workers' Education Authority art class where the tutor was very inspirational and very encouraging.

“The staggering power of art as part of the therapeutic process began to dawn on me and I started to wonder if I could make a career out of painting.

“Like anyone starting their own business, I was terrified that I would invest so much and it simply wouldn't work.”

With the help and support of his family, the business gradually began to develop.

Mick's work started to sell, and they converted an old joiner's shop into a studio and gallery. Today his work – both in watercolours and acrylics – is held in galleries and private collections

across the world.

What make his paintings so different is that you can see and feel the texture of the sea and shore in the canvas. Not many artists would think of using onion bags and other materials to achieve this, but the results are very effective when you study Mick's style closely.

“From eight a.m. I'm working in the studio, either drawing, texturing or painting. I can be doing this until late morning, often painting to music.

“I still need time to rest during the day, and then I can make Biro sketches from memory for new works or think about new commissions from clients.

“The area around our home is my source of inspiration. To create a piece I suck in what I see, smell, feel and hear around me from the roar of the sea to the sound of gulls and the wind.

“Ideas can come, too, from sitting and staring out to sea, contemplating life and all it throws at you.” ■

Want To Know More?

If you want to see how Mick gets his inspiration then you can follow on Twitter his daily photograph taken every morning looking out to sea at

@SeaSkyCraster. Artwork, both original and limited-edition prints, can be bought securely from his website www.mickoxley.com or call 01665 571082.



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Last year's winner Hazel Wilson and her sister-in-law Shiela also met Oor Wullie during their visit!

How To Enter

Six letters will be printed in the "Friend" – the first two appeared in our **January 6** issue, the next two are below and the final two will appear in our **January 20** issue. Simply cut them out or make a note of them, as you will need to rearrange them to provide you with the answer to the question which will appear in next week's issue. This competition is postal entry only and closes at noon on Monday, February 5. Don't miss out on your chance to win this fabulous prize.



Terms and conditions: Purchase of "The People's Friend" is necessary. The prize is as stated, items with * are date and time dependent, no cash alternative will be offered. The prize can be redeemed from 19/02/2018 until 31/08/2018. Visit to meet the "Friend" team is only possible Monday to Friday. We recommend booking accommodation in advance, the following dates are excluded: March 8, 9, 10; April 13, 14; June 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22 and July 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 2018. Full competition terms apply, visit www.thepeoplesfriend.co.uk/competition-terms or send a stamped self-addressed envelope to "The People's Friend" marketing, Competition terms, DC Thomson, 2 Albert Square, Dundee, DD1 9QJ.

COMPETITIONS may come and go, but every now and then you get a truly bespoke prize that creates memories to last a lifetime.

No monetary value can be placed on our special competition – a visit to "The People's Friend" office, where the winner will have the chance to chat with the friendly staff who help to put your favourite magazine together.

Not only that, you and a companion will have the chance to meet Angela, the editor – tea and cake included!

The "Friend" headquarters are based

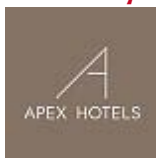
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Apex

Edinburgh's New Town

Willie Shand unearths the fascinating history of this part of Scotland's capital city.

It doesn't matter how often you visit Edinburgh, there's always something new to discover. Few streets in the world can have more stories to tell than the Royal Mile between the castle and the Palace of Holyrood. But this is by no means the only jewel in the city's crown.

Looking north from the castle battlements, there's a fantastic bird's-eye view over Princes Street, its gardens and the part of the city I've come to explore today – the Georgian New Town of Edinburgh.

It's amazing to think that just 250 years ago, this view from the castle would have looked out over nothing but empty fields, and below us wouldn't have been green, inviting gardens but a loch.

A terrible, stinking loch it was, too, since it served pretty much as an open cesspit for the near 50,000 inhabitants of the Old Town.

In the early 1700s Edinburgh was the most overcrowded city in Europe. Crammed tight within the protection of the city walls, it desperately needed to expand.

Its old tenements, some rising to 12 storeys high and only a few feet apart, were in a dreadful state of disrepair and collapse. Disease spread like wildfire.

When Lord Provost George Drummond proposed expanding the city to the empty lands on the other side of the Nor' Loch, to many the idea seemed quite unthinkable. All it needed, in his opinion, was to drain the Nor' Loch and to build a bridge.

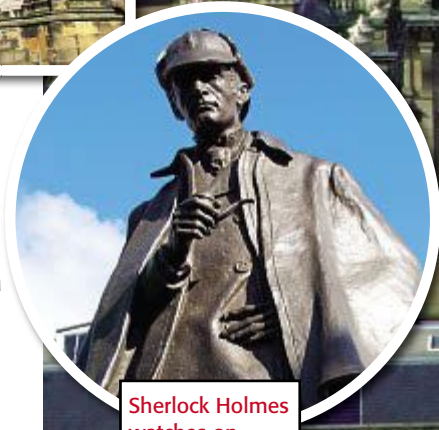
It was more than 40 years later before his idea finally left the starting blocks with the draining of the loch and building of the North Bridge. Times had changed, and changed for the better.

With the Treaty of Union and the quashing of the subsequent Jacobite rebellions came something people hadn't known for a long time – peace. There was no need to hide behind the protection of the city's defensive walls.

A competition was held to find the best design for the town and it was won by a young architect by the name of James Craig. His design was based on a grid-iron



The Scott Monument.



Sherlock Holmes watches on.

pattern with wide streets, open squares and parklands. It included three parallel streets – Princes Street and Queen Street, both designed as terraces looking out to the Old Town and the Forth, and between them, George Street.

At either end of George Street are the spacious and elegant St Andrew Square and Charlotte Square.

Demand generally outstrips supply and property prices are high. That's something that certainly wasn't a problem for the early residents.

Even after the North Bridge was built, folk were surprisingly reluctant to leave the cramped, dirty Old Town. This proposed new town was only a windswept ridge and, but for the bridge, was cut off from all the amenities of the city.

Like the layout of the streets, the street names were carefully planned.

Thistle Street and Rose

Street, Frederick Street and Princes Street – they symbolised the parliamentary union between England and Scotland and served to glorify the House of Hanover.

All over the New Town you'll find statues and memorials to the great and good.

In Picardy Place stands a statue of Sherlock Holmes close to the old home of his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Prince Albert takes pride of place in the centre of Charlotte Square gardens,

Heriot Row sits on the northern edge of Queen Street Gardens.



Factfile

1 A DES RES
One of the most prestigious addresses in the New Town is Heriot Row. Number 17 was once home to Robert Louis Stevenson, author of "Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde" and "Kidnapped". The old street lamps that he watched the leerie light each night are still there, along with a few lines of poetry he wrote about them.

2 TREAT YOURSELF
After tramping the streets of Edinburgh, afternoon tea at the Dome in George Street is a perfect reward. In the festive season, it's renowned for its Christmas tree and decorations.

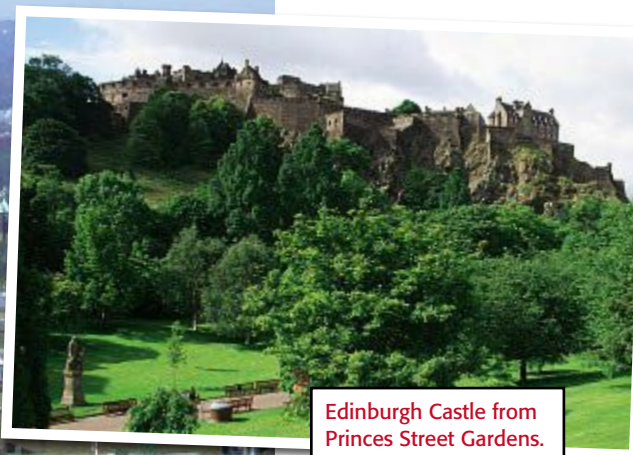
3 DAYLIGHT ROBBERY
As well as introducing income tax, William Pitt the Younger brought in the unpopular "window tax" whereby folk were taxed according to the area of glass in their windows. You can still see lots of built-up windows, known as "Pitt's portraits", around the city. Little wonder this tax was seen as daylight robbery!

4 COUNT TO 10
At No 52 Queen Street lived Sir James Young Simpson. It's thanks to him that we have the anaesthetic chloroform. Mind you, I'd have been a bit wary accepting an invitation to any of his dinner parties. Guests were often used as guinea pigs!

the design of Princes Street Gardens.

They were, of course, to be private gardens – locked and available only to residents of Princes Street – but it wasn't long before duplicate keys were being made and any Tom, Dick and Harry were gaining access!

Now, of course, they're open for all to enjoy. ■



Edinburgh Castle from Princes Street Gardens.



The Melville Monument has Henry Dundas – the 1st Viscount Melville – on top.

in bronze, by Steell."

Register House is one of architect Robert Adam's finest works. It was founded in 1774 to house the National Records for Scotland.

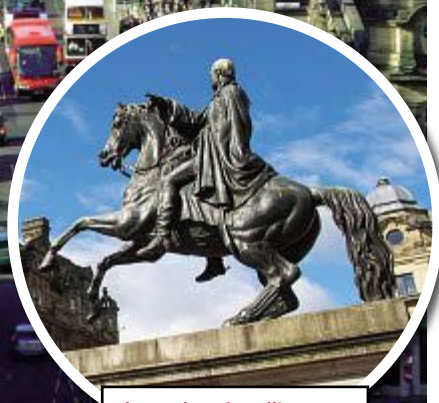
It was Robert Adam who was also commissioned to design the buildings of Charlotte Square. This was to be one of his last works.

And what a magnificent job he made of it, too. The north elevation of the square encompasses the Georgian House and, next door, Bute House, the official residence of Scotland's First Minister. This is one of Europe's greatest architectural gems.

Princes Street is Edinburgh's main shopping thoroughfare. For a city's main street it's quite unusual when compared with the world's other major cities as it's only one-sided.

Along its full south side run Princes Street Gardens. Shoppers need only cross the road (watch out for the trams!) to exchange the busy pavements for wide lawns and colourful borders.

It's James Skene, a close friend to Sir Walter Scott, who we need to thank for



The Duke of Wellington, held up by a horse's tail.

while King George IV stands in the middle of George Street – dressed in the short kilt he took to wearing.

As he wasn't too proud of his knobby knees, he is also wearing the tights that he wore along with the kilt!

Not far from him stands a man who might have had few friends – the man who introduced income tax, William Pitt the Younger.

In the centre of St Andrew Square, standing 150 feet in the air atop a Doric stone column based on Trajan's Column in Rome, is the "uncrowned King of

Scotland", Henry Dundas.

He was Treasurer of the Navy and for more than 20 years pretty much in charge of all Scottish affairs.

I think my favourite statue, though, would be that of Wellington on his horse in front of Register House.

The 12 tons of bronze were cleverly balanced on the horse's two hind feet and tail by the leading artist Sir John Steell.

During its unveiling in 1852, there had been a terrible storm of thunder and lightning. Thus it was said, "Behold the Iron Duke,

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Spring Daffodils LYN1335

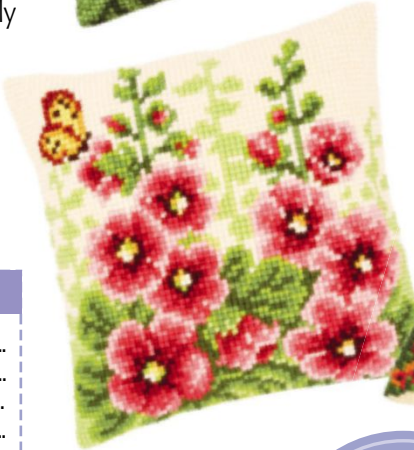


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LYN756	Cushion Pad		£9.99	
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Got a question? Get in touch through e-mail wouldyoubelieveit@dctmedia.co.uk or *write to "The People's Friend", 2 Albert Square, Dundee DD1 9QJ.

I'D LIKE TO KNOW

Q I was amazed at the number of different pasta shapes and sizes available in a big supermarket I recently visited. Roughly how many types are there?

Mrs A.K., Perth.

A The estimate is thought to be around 350, though due to the fact their names can vary from region to region this can give the impression of hundreds more!



Q I used to be plagued by unsolicited calls on my landline and they were a real nuisance. Unfortunately, they seem to be on the increase again. What can I do about this?

Ms P.F., London.

A Tim Bond, who spoke on behalf of the Telephone Preference Service (TPS), says, "The TPS is a free, official opt-out register for people to request they do not receive unsolicited sales or marketing calls. People can register their landline and mobile phone numbers, either via the website (www.tpsonline.org.uk) or the new TPS Protect mobile phone app. Or phone 0345 070 0707.

"It is a legal requirement that all organisations do not make such calls to numbers registered on the TPS unless they have your consent to do so. If you receive a call you believe you shouldn't, we encourage you to make a complaint. This information will allow the TPS team and the Information Commissioner's Office – the body responsible for enforcement – to investigate and take enforcement actions (such as fines) when necessary."

Q Can you remind me when the Loch Ness Monster was first supposedly caught on camera?

Mr B.B., Newcastle.

A A gentleman by the name of Hugh Gray took a photograph of the "monster" in 1933, although there were reported sightings prior to this. The following year revealed yet another snap, which became known as "the surgeon's photograph" after the London doctor who didn't want his name revealed. Most people agree the image was a hoax, but it didn't stop the news spreading worldwide. Real or not, the legend of Nessie is still a monster hit!

26,000 miles
of receipts are
churned out by
supermarket tills
every week.

**January 9,
1768**

showman Philip Astley staged the modern world's first circus, which featured "feats of horsemanship".

600 million

people watched astronaut Neil Armstrong take his first steps on the moon in 1969.

6,818 tonnes

was the weight of the world's biggest wedding cake, a six-tier extravaganza made by 57 chefs.

90 years old

is the age of the world's oldest known fish in a zoological setting. Known as Grandad, the lungfish lived in a Chicago aquarium until he died in 2017.

76% of dads read their children bedtime stories.



Something we didn't know last week...

A website set up to record possible sightings of UFOs chronicled almost 84,000 flying visits by aliens in 2017. Most of the UFOs reported on www.ufostalker.com were in the skies above the USA. However, UFO Stalker includes many UK UFO sightings, including a bright light flashing red and white in Aberdeen's air space, an orb flying at high speed over Yorkshire and a close encounter with a seven-foot-tall alien in a Cambridgeshire wood!

HALF PRICE OFFER

Tiny Rechargeable Hearing Device

Recharge while you sleep

If you struggle to hear people on the phone, think people are mumbling, have difficulty keeping up with conversations, or turn up the TV louder than others then help is at hand!

Using the latest digital technology you can enhance your hearing and live life to the full with the new **Micro Infini Ear**.

Discreet design

This amazing new super small device fits in your ear – in fact it's so discreet you can hardly notice it. Simply slip it in your ear and adjust the volume to suit your hearing needs and away you go! The design is so compact and comfortable you'll soon forget you're wearing it.

Advanced Circuitry

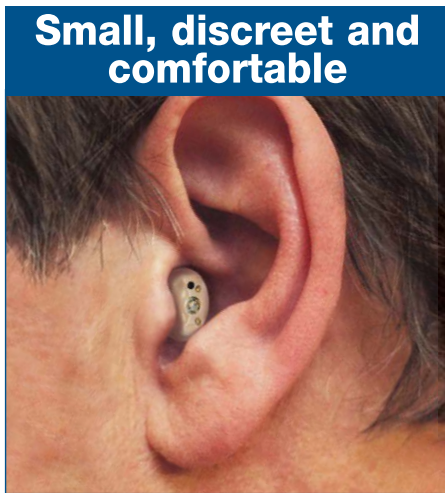
The advanced microelectronic amplification circuitry will give you enhanced hearing without any whistles or interference that you find with cheaper imitations. And because we are selling direct to customers we are able to offer the **Micro Infini Ear** at an affordable price. Other companies like you to believe that improved hearing costs a fortune, but not with **Micro Infini Ear**.

No more batteries!

And what's more you'll never have to worry about the cost or having to replace batteries. The **Micro Infini Ear** is fully rechargeable! All you need to do is pop it into the charger and turn it on. You can charge it while you sleep. It's so much more convenient than having to fiddle about with batteries. As it doesn't need to carry batteries it's smaller than other devices. Ditch your old-fashioned fiddly device and try the new **Micro Infini Ear**.

Guaranteed Best Price Promise

Buying direct you can be 100% confident that you are paying the lowest price. Order today, try it at home, talk to friends, watch TV, go to the cinema, and hear for yourself the difference. You'll be amazed at the superior quality sound amplification.



Don't miss out – SAVE 50%

As part of our introductory launch we are selling the **Micro Infini Ear** at half price, saving £49.95. What's more you can **SAVE A FURTHER £20.00** when you order 2 **Micro Infini Ears**. The **Micro Infini Ear** comes complete with charging unit which also doubles up as a storage case.

Fully Rechargeable

No more costly, fiddly batteries

SAVE A FORTUNE!

- Latest digital technology
- Amazing new super small device
- Adjustable volume to suit your hearing needs
- So comfortable you'll forget you're wearing it
- No whistles or interference
- Rechargeable – no more batteries
- Best Price Promise



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BEST DEAL 2x Micro Infini Ear £199.80	£79.90	<input type="checkbox"/>
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intermediate

MEASUREMENTS

To fit sizes:

76/81 cm (30/32 ins), 86/91 (34/36), 97/102 (38/40), 107/112 (42/44), 117/122 (46/48), 127/132 (50/52).

Actual size: 94 cm (37 ins), 103 (40½), 114 (45), 123 (48½), 134 (52¾), 143 (56½).

Length (approx.):

55 cm (21½ ins), 57 (22½), 58 (23), 60 (23½), 62 (24½), 63 (25).

Sleeve seam: 44 cm (17½ ins).

Hat: to fit average woman's head.

MATERIALS

Jacket: 6 (6, 7, 7, 8, 8) 100-g balls of **King Cole Cotswold Chunky** (shade Malmsbury 2379) **M**, and 2 50-g balls of **King Cole Moments DK** (shade Sage 3037) **C**. **Hat:** 1 100-g ball of **King Cole Cotswold Chunky** (shade Malmsbury 2379) **M** and 2 50-g balls of **King Cole Moments DK** (shade Sage 3037) **C**. One pair each 4 mm (No. 8) and 6 mm (No. 4) knitting needles. 4 buttons. For yarn stockists write, enclosing an SAE, to: **King Cole Ltd., Merrie Mills, Snaygill Ind. Estate, Keighley Road, Skipton BD23 2QR.** Telephone: **01756 703670.** Website: **www.kingcole.com.**

TENSION

14 sts and 20 rows to 10 cm measured over pattern using 6 mm needles.

ABBREVIATIONS

Alt – alternate;
beg – beginning;
dec – decrease;
K – knit;
P – purl;
rem – remain;
st-st – stocking-stitch (knit 1 row, purl 1 row);
tbl – through back of loop;
tog – together.

Important Note

Directions are given for six sizes. Figures in brackets refer to the five larger sizes. Figures in square brackets [] refer to all sizes and are worked the number of times stated. When writing to us with your queries, you must enclose a stamped, addressed envelope if you would like a reply.

BACK

With 6 mm needles and M, cast on 67 (73, 81, 87, 95, 101) sts.

1st (right-side) row – Purl.

2nd row – P1, [K1, P1] to end.

3rd to 9th rows – Repeat 1st and 2nd rows 3 times, then 1st row again ★★.

Change to st-st and beg with a purl row for wrong-side, work straight until back measures 34 cm from beg, ending after a purl row.

Shape raglan –

1st and 2nd rows – Cast off 2 (2, 2, 3, 3, 4) sts, work to end – 63 (69, 77, 81, 89, 93) sts.

3rd row – K1, K2tog tbl, knit until 3 sts rem, K2tog, K1.

4th row – K1, P2tog, purl until 3 sts rem, P2tog tbl, K1.

5th row – K1, K2tog tbl, knit until 3 sts rem, K2tog, K1.

6th row – K1, purl to last st, K1.

Repeat 3rd to 6th rows 0 (0, 3, 2, 3, 4) times more, ending after 6th row – 57 (63, 53, 63, 65, 63) sts.

Now repeat 5th and 6th rows only until 21 (23, 23, 25, 27, 27) sts rem, ending after a 6th row. Cast off.

RIGHT FRONT

With 6 mm needles and M, cast on 37 (41, 45, 49, 53, 57) sts and work as back to ★★.

Change to st-st and border:

1st (right-side) row – Purl until 8 sts rem, [K1, P1] 4 times.

2nd row – P9, knit to end.

Repeat these 2 rows until work measures 34 cm from beg, ending at side edge.

Shape raglan – Cast off 2 (2, 2, 3, 3, 4) sts, work to end – 35 (39, 43, 46, 50, 53) sts.

2nd row – Work until 3 sts rem, K2tog, K1.

3rd row – K1, P2tog, work to end.

4th row – Work until 3 sts rem, K2tog, K1.

5th row – K1, work to end.

Repeat 2nd to 5th rows 0 (0, 3, 2, 4, 4) times more – 32 (36, 31, 37, 35, 38) sts.

Repeat 4th and 5th rows only until 19 (22, 22, 25, 25, 28) sts rem, ending at front edge.

Shape neck – Cast off 9 (11, 11, 13, 13, 15) sts, work until 3 sts rem, K2tog, K1 – 9 (10, 10, 11, 11, 12) sts.

Work 3 rows, dec at raglan as



before on 2nd of these rows

and AT THE SAME TIME

dec 1 st at neck edge on every row – 5 (6, 6, 7, 7, 8) sts.

Continue to dec at raglan edge only on every knit row until 2 sts rem. Work 1 row. Cast off.

LEFT FRONT

With 6 mm needles and M, cast on 37 (41, 45, 49, 53, 57) sts and work as back to ★★.

Change to st-st and border:

1st (wrong-side) row – [P1, K1] 4 times, purl to end.

2nd row – Knit until 9 sts rem, P9.

Repeat these 2 rows until work measures 34 cm from beg, ending at side edge.

Shape raglan – Cast off 2 (2, 2, 3, 3, 4) sts, work to end – 35 (39, 43, 46, 50, 53) sts.

2nd row – Work to end.

3rd row – K1, K2tog tbl, work to end.

4th row – Work until 3 sts rem, P2tog tbl, K1.

5th row – K1, K2tog tbl, work to end.

6th row – Work to last st, K1.

Repeat 3rd to 6th rows 0 (0, 3, 2, 4, 4) times more – 32 (36, 31, 37, 35, 38) sts.

Repeat 5th and 6th rows only until 19 (22, 22, 25, 25, 28) sts rem, ending at front edge.

Shape neck – Cast off 9 (11, 11, 13, 13, 15) sts, purl to last st, K1 – 9 (10, 10, 11, 11, 12) sts.

Work 3 rows, dec at raglan as before on 1st and 3rd rows, AT THE SAME TIME dec 1 st at neck edge on every row – 5 (6, 6, 7, 7, 8) sts. Complete as given for left front.

SLEEVES

With 4 mm needles and C, cast on 40 (40, 42, 42, 42, 44) sts and work in g-st for 12 cm.

Next row – K1 (1, 2, 2, 2, 3), [K2tog, K1] 6 times, K2, [K2tog, K1] 6 times, K1 (1, 2, 2, 2, 3) – 28 (28, 30, 30, 30, 32) sts.

Break off C and join in M.

Change to 6 mm needles and beg with a knit row, work 4 rows in st-st.

Continue in st-st and shape sleeve by increasing 1 st at each end of next row, then on every foll 8th (6th, 6th, 6th, 4th, 4th) row until there are 34 (36, 46, 44, 44, 52) sts, then on every foll 10th (8th, 8th, 6th, 6th, 6th) row until there are 44 (48, 52, 54, 58, 62) sts.

Work straight until sleeve measures 51 cm, ending after a purl row.

Shape raglan –

1st and 2nd rows – As given for back – 40 (44, 48, 48, 52, 54) sts.

3rd row – K1, K2tog tbl, knit until 3 sts rem, K2tog, K1.

4th row – K1, purl to last st, K1.

5th row – Knit.

6th row – As 4th.

Repeat the last 4 rows 1 (1, 0, 2, 2, 2) times more – 36 (40, 46, 42, 46, 48) sts.

Now repeat 3rd and 4th rows only until 4 sts rem, ending after a 4th row.

Cast off.

TO COMPLETE

Join raglan shapings.

Collar (worked sideways)

– With 4 mm needles and C, cast on 25 sts and work in g-st until side edge fits all round

neck edge, starting and ending at centre of front borders.

Cast off loosely.

To Make Up – Join side and sleeve seams.

Stitch one long edge of collar to neck edge of main part, beginning and ending at centre of the borders.

Sew buttons to inner edge of left border using photograph as a guide, then work a buttonhole loop to correspond with each at outer edge of the front border.

Fold back approx. 7 cm of cuffs to right side.

Cast off evenly in rib.

HAT

With 4 mm needles and C, cast on 111 sts and work in g-st for 17 cm.

Next row – [K2tog, K1] 36 times, K3tog – 73 sts.

Break off C and join in M.

Change to 6 mm needles

Next row – Knit.

Next row – K1, purl to last st, K1.

Repeat these 2 rows until work measures 23 cm from beginning, ending after a purl row.

Shape crown –

1st row – K1, [K2tog, K7] 8 times – 65 sts.

2nd and every alt row – K1, purl to last st, K1.

3rd row – K1, [K2tog, K6] 8 times – 57 sts.

5th row – K1, [K2tog, K5] 8 times – 49 sts.

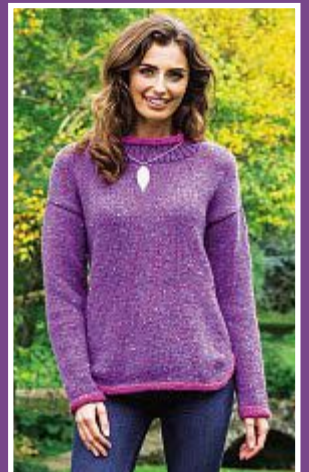
Continue in this way (dec 8 sts on every knit row) until 17 sts rem.

Work 1 row.

Break yarn and run end through sts, drawing up securely.

Join seam then fold back approx. 9 cm to right side. ■

Next week: knit this stylish tunic.



The People's Friend



Lauren O'Farrell, www.whodunnitknit.com



A Long History

The Love Darg is "The People's Friend's" very own charitable appeal. Its name comes from an old Scots phrase meaning "a day's work done for love", and throughout its long life and various incarnations it has stayed true to that founding principle.

The Love Darg began in 1885 as a Grand Exhibition and Bazaar of Juvenile Industry to raise funds for a cot in the Children's Ward of Dundee Royal Infirmary, and the original commemorative plaque is still on show in the city's Ninewells Hospital.

The Love Darg developed into a nationwide charity appeal that saw "Friend" readers make and donate thousands of gifts which were distributed to hospitals, children's homes and hospices the length and breadth of the UK. More recently, we began to support specific charities and ask readers to make items such as the comforters and play mice for Cats Protection.

IN 2017 we teamed up once again with Cats Protection as our Love Darg charity partner. We asked readers to knit or crochet squares that could be used as comforters, or mice which would either be given to the cats as toys or sold to raise funds.

A comforter is given to each cat when it arrives in a centre and stays with it wherever it goes, ensuring the cat has something familiar whatever happens.

And how well you responded to our appeal. To date, Cats Protection have received around 600 donations of mice and comforters by post, with more handed in directly to local centres and shops, and over £600 in donations.

Over the last six months, the "Friend" staff have been busy contributing, too. Following a launch in our new headquarters, we managed to persuade several non-knitters to pick up their needles and have a go – with great success!

Once they started, they didn't stop!

Walk into the "Friend" office at lunchtime and the needles will be clicking away with Jaelyn, Wendy, Jacki and Nicole in particular forming their own knitting bee.

To date, we have produced over 100 comforters and a few mice (well done, Sarah) which will be donated to our local Cats Protection branch.

Commenting on the 2017 efforts, Richard Howard, Corporate Partnerships Manager at Cats Protection, said, "We were delighted to be selected as the chosen charity for 'The People's Friend's' 2017 Love Darg charity appeal. We have since received hundreds of knitted mice and squares from generous readers and monetary donations, too. A big thank you to all the readers of 'The People's Friend' for making the appeal such a success!"

And we would like to add our own thanks to readers for all your sterling efforts! ■

Ready to be finished off: some of the comforters knitted by "Friend" staff.





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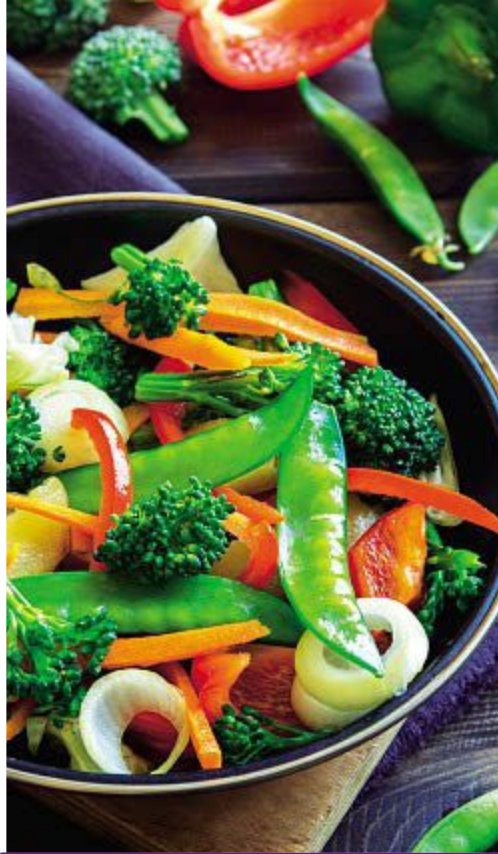
If you had just a few days to experience the beauty and diversity of Scotland's scenery, there could be no better place to go than Arran.

PRICE INCLUDES

- No single room supplement, subject to availability*
 - Return coach travel from pick-up points throughout Scotland
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 - Comfortable coach transfers
 - Guided tour of Arran
 - Visit to the gardens of Brodick Castle
 - Service of a Tour Manager
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DAILY SERIAL



Such an
important event
– and Tracey had
nothing to wear!

Party Dresses



BETTER make a start on the ironing.” Tracey sighed. On her day off she never seemed to manage to do anything other than catch up with chores.

At least it was a clean, dry job, unlike the nursery where she was in and out of greenhouses and sheds, shifting seed trays or cleaning pots.

Most of the time she liked being amongst plants and in the fresh air. But sometimes, like now in these winter months, she thought longingly of central heating.

“You’re the one who chose not to go on to higher education,” she chided herself.

Unlike Tim. Her twin had done it all, even uni.

As Tracey ironed Katie’s school skirt she thought fondly about Tim. They had always been there for each other; liked the same foods; played the same games. They even looked alike until she started growing her hair in her teens.

“Then Tim shot up and left me behind.” Tracey’s smile was rueful.

Perhaps it was as well, because she had fallen for Chris who was not much taller than herself.

Her marriage hadn’t marred her close

relationship with her brother. Tim had approved of Chris from the start, and he adored Katie. Chris, for his part, was very understanding about the close bond between the twins.

Tracey worked through the ironing, recalling all the encouragement and support that had passed between them over the years.

Tim had backed her up over wanting to leave school as soon as possible, while she had encouraged him over university exams, job and flat hunting and, of course, his tangled love life.

“Mine was straightforward,” she told herself as she carried the laundry upstairs.

When he was settled in a flat in their nearest large town, Tracey had thought things would go more smoothly.

His girlfriend, Candice, seemed just what Tim needed. She played nicely with Katie, made a lovely trifle for Tracey and charmed Chris by chatting knowledgeably about snooker. Even Fluff took to her.

But now that was all over.

All over with Candice, Tim had texted. Not really suited. But have met this dream of a girl! Flora.

Watch this space!

In the next few weeks, by a series of texts, Tracey watched with some misgiving. Was this Flora suitable?

Stunning face and figure.

Well, Tim was a typical male.

Always looks a million dollars.

Expensive tastes?

Runs her own beauty salon.

Out of Tim’s league?

Knows what she wants.

Bossy?

Three years older.

Not ideal.

Allergic to cats.

Oh, dear.

Tracey put the uniforms into the wardrobe and sank on to the bed. What if she didn’t get on with this girl?

“Maybe it will all fizzle out,” Tracey told herself. “After all, he would bring her to see me if it were getting really serious.”

* * * *

She had spoken too soon. The postman had come while she was upstairs, and there, on the mat, was a glitzy envelope.

It was a good thing she had perched on a stool to open it, because the content left her legs weak and shaky.

Candida and Guy Mannering have pleasure in announcing the

engagement of their daughter, Flora, to Timothy Weston. Please join us for drinks . . .

“Tim, how could you? How could you have let it get this far without introducing us? Or even warning me?”

She was flooded with sensations of loss and jealousy, which she despised though she couldn’t overcome them.

“I’m not possessive. It’s not that I don’t want Tim to settle down and make his own life,” Tracey argued with herself. “I’ve always wanted that for him ever since Chris and I got together. But not to have told me!”

However, there it was in black and white, or rather, in a flourishing gold scroll.

“Why so quick?” she asked herself as she noticed the date of the invitation. “That’s only a couple of weeks away.”

By now, she was calming down.

“What’s done is done.” She tried to be matter of fact. “There must be an explanation as to why it’s all happening so fast.”

Her mobile rang. It was Tim.

The explanation was simple. Flora’s mother had somehow wormed out the secret that Flora and Tim intended to get

engaged, and immediately arranged a small party as a surprise.

"Not a pleasant surprise, Trace, we've not even chosen a ring yet! Besides, we wanted you to be the first to know. It's all got out of hand, and we're both cross with her."

Tracey swallowed hard.

"When I opened the post just now I was hopping up and down."

The dress she desperately wanted to wear was no longer there

"Understandable. We can't even visit you, because Flora's away on a course. Her mother has really upset the apple cart."

Tracey's gaze was fixed on the invitation again.

"Can we talk again tonight, Tim?"

After Tim had rung off, Tracey stood staring at the invitation, her heart sinking.

She'd need something special to wear.

If this had all happened three weeks ago, she'd have had the very thing – a designer dress which she had bought for a best friend's wedding.

It had been far too expensive, but Chris had insisted she indulge herself. It was an "occasion" dress and there weren't many occasions in Tracey's life when it would be suitable to wear.

It had intricate and colourful embroidered flowers all over a black background.

A dream dress.

But three weeks ago, with funds running short after New Year bills and an expensive MOT on their car, she had wrapped it up in tissue paper and reluctantly handed it over to the elegant dress agency in the town where Tim now lived.

If it sold – and the gushing girl behind the counter assured Tracey that it was a popular label – the cash would be very useful.

"Three weeks," Tracey murmured. "What if it's still there?"

It was worth a try. If she got the next train into town

she could be home in time to pick up Katie.

* * * *

"You'll be delighted to know, madam, that your dress sold only two days after you brought it in."

Tracey tried to look delighted while the assistant worked out how much money was owing to her. After all, it was what she'd wanted, extra cash to

go towards the bills.

She couldn't use it, of course, to buy another outfit. She would have to make do with what was in her wardrobe.

"Which means black trousers and the scarlet shirt," Tracey mused on her homeward journey. "No wow factor, but then, I'm not going to be the centre of attention."

Later, Chris soothed her.

"You'll look great whatever you wear, and after all, the invite is just for early evening drinks. It's not a party, or a meal or anything. Just a case of family introductions."

"True, and with that timing Katie can come with us."

Days later, when she caught up with Tim again, he was vehement that Katie should be included.

"Of course you must bring Katie. We shall want her as a bridesmaid eventually."

"I'd better not tell Katie that yet," Tracey warned, "or we'll never hear the end of it."

As it was, Katie didn't take in the news properly.

"Can I wear the party dress I had for Christmas?" she asked. "I can show it to Candice."

Tracey had to explain that Uncle Tim had a new friend called Flora.

"I can still show it to Candice," was Katie's response.

Tracey raised enquiring eyes to Chris.

"Maybe," Chris said cautiously. "We'll have to see."

"We'll explain it nearer the time," he told Tracey reassuringly.

* * * *

Which they did two weeks later, on the way to the country house hotel a few miles away.

"Flora is a new friend of Uncle Tim's and this is a little party for us to meet her and her parents."

"I can show her my new dress, then," Katie said sensibly.

It was left for Chris to answer, because Tracey was gazing apprehensively at the brightly lit building at the end of the sweeping drive.

"What will I do if I don't like her?" Tracey whispered, clutching Chris's hand as they walked into the panelled hall where a log fire was burning.

"Pretend you do," Chris advised firmly.

And there was Tim, hurrying over to meet them, looking so happy that Tracey realised she must make the best of it even if Flora seemed unsuitable.

They were soon introduced to Flora's parents, her two brothers and their families and some uncles and aunts.

Tracey was finding it difficult to match faces with names, but Katie was unfazed by it all.

"Uncle Tim, where is Flora?" she asked.

"Mummy said I could show her my party dress instead of Candice."

"Candice?" Tim's eyes met Tracey's. "Oh, I see. Yes, Flora will love to see it. She'll be here any minute. In fact, here she is."

An attractive girl, about Tracey's own height, was standing confidently at the bar entrance surveying the scene.

She gave a little wave and made her way over to them, her fair hair gleaming and her dress highlighting her slim figure.

And what a dress! Tracey stifled her gasp of astonishment just in time and pinched Chris's arm meaningfully to stop him saying something embarrassing.

"Flora," Tim said lovingly, "This is my darling twin, Tracey, and Chris, my brother-law. And not forgetting a very important person, my lovely niece, Katie."

Dazed, Tracey shook hands, murmuring all the conventional things. She registered that Flora's greetings were warm and her smiles genuine.

Katie broke the ice, too, by twirling round excitedly so that the pattern of butterflies printed on the soft blue material of her dress almost seemed to dance.

"Do you like my new party dress?"

Flora bent over and took Katie's hands.

"It's enchanting, Katie. You must have a very good dressmaker!"

"No." Katie giggled.

"Mummy bought it."

"Do you like my dress Katie?"

"Oh, yes. It's like . . ."

"Beautiful," Tracey interrupted hastily, afraid that Katie was about to give the game away.

"I haven't got a dressmaker, either," Flora went on. "I bought this in a second-hand shop."

"Really?" Tim was taken aback. "But you look wonderful."

"I always spend my money wisely," Flora told him jokingly. "You'll be glad of that one day."

Good for you, Tracey thought.

As time went on, she began to like Flora more and more.

So much so that, just before they left, Tracey dared to confess to her how apprehensive she had been.

"I thought my bond with Tim would be broken because you and I would have nothing in common."

Flora smiled warmly.

"Tracey, we have the most important thing in the world in common. We both love Tim."

Relief flooded through Tracey. Everything was going to be all right.

We also both have the same taste in dresses, she thought, amused.

But that was a secret shared only with Chris. ■

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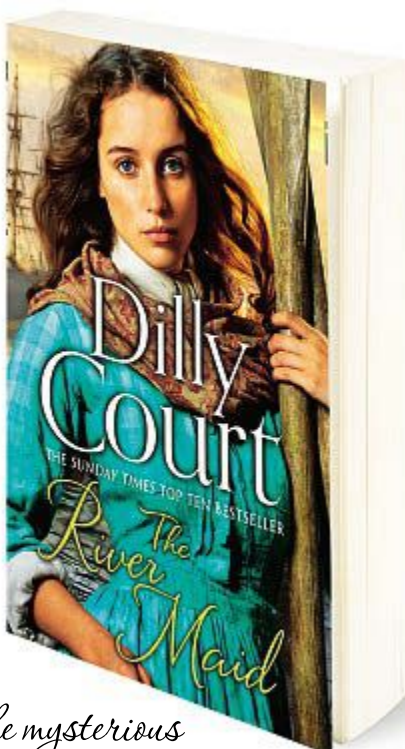
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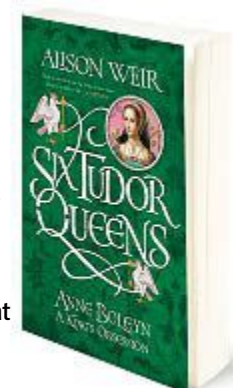
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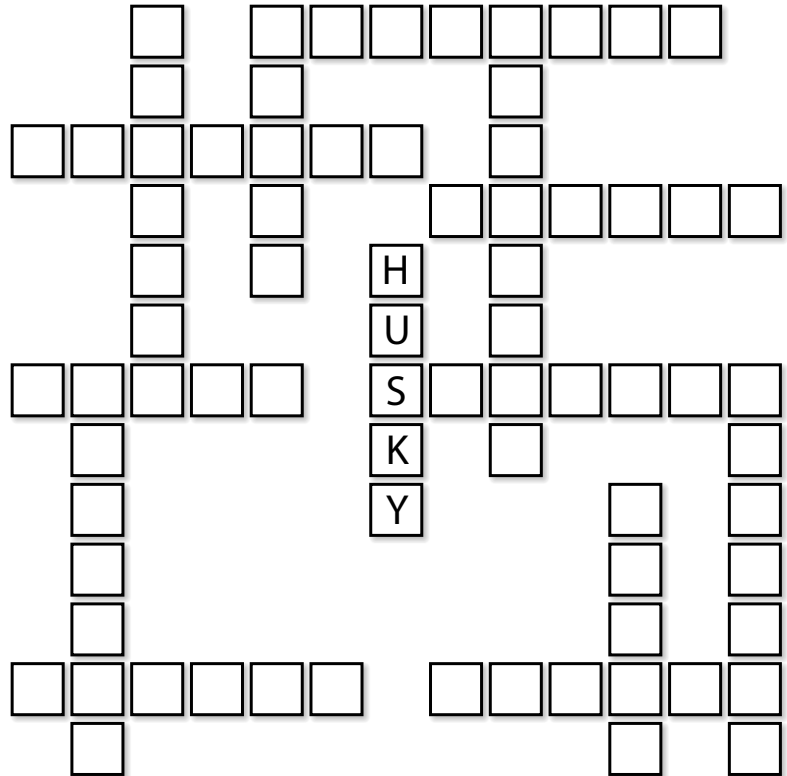
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8 letters

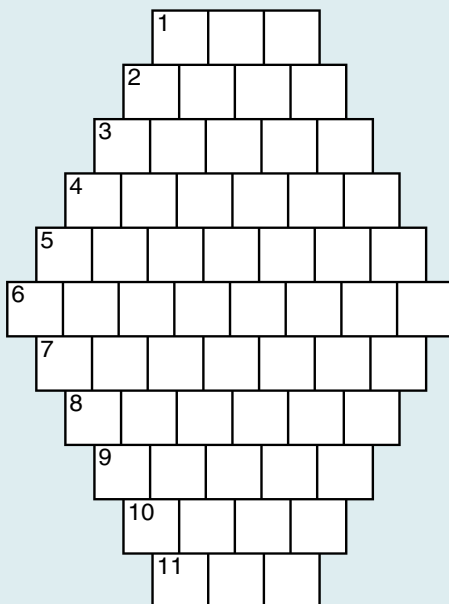
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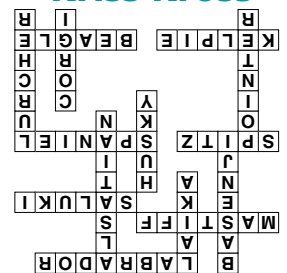
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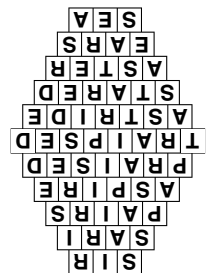
- 1 Gentleman's title (3)
- 2 Indian gown (4)
- 3 Couples (5)
- 4 Dream of achieving (6)
- 5 Spoke highly of (7)
- 6 Travelled about on foot (8)
- 7 Mounted on (a horse) (7)
- 8 Watched, gazed (6)
- 9 Daisy-like flower (5)
- 10 Seed spikes (of corn) (4)
- 11 Body of water (3)

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OUR WEEKLY SOAP

Everyone is out looking for Buster . . .

HAVE you seen Buster this morning?" Anna shook her head.

"Sorry, Jim, I haven't." She smiled. "Mind you, we don't get a lot of dogs calling in here for a perm or a fake tan."

"Who's Buster?" Carol asked from the back of the salon.

"Jim's dog, from the Ship," Anna replied. "You must have seen him when we've been in the pub, although he's usually fast asleep under a chair."

"Can't say I've noticed." Carol shrugged, walking towards Jim. "But while you're here, Jim, if you fancy a trim, I've got time this morning."

Jim cut her short.

"I'm sorry, I can't stop. I've got to find Buster. He's been missing all night."

With that, he slammed the salon door behind him and strode away along the riverside path, calling for his beloved pet.

Once he'd gone, Carol busied herself laying out a pile of fresh towels by the wash basins.

"I thought you and that fella from the pub were supposed to be going on a date at some point?"

Anna sighed.

"Jim? I thought so, too.

But I gave up on him ages ago. I wasn't going to make a fool of myself by asking him over again. If he couldn't be bothered to make the effort for me, then more fool him."

A shy smile played around Carol's lips when she heard this.

"So you wouldn't mind if I tried fluttering my eyelashes at him, then?"

"Help yourself." Anna sniffed. "I think he's still single. Or at least, he was the last I heard."

* * * *

"Has anyone seen Buster walking past today?" Jim asked in the Old Engine Room.

"Slipped his leash, has he?" Dave replied, barely glancing up from the reservations book.

"No, he's missing," Jim said in a voice that demanded Dave's full attention. "It's the first time he's gone missing in all the years I've had him!"

Dave stopped what he was doing and looked up. He was surprised to see Jim in such a state, with his face red and blotchy and tears threatening to fall.

"I'm desperate, Dave," Jim said. "I've been searching for hours, walking up and down the riverside, crying out for him, hoping he might just be stuck somewhere and not . . ."

Jim glanced through the windows of the deli café to the river beyond.

"I just want him back, Dave. If anyone reports

seeing him, would you let me know?"

Dave felt himself softening.

"I will," he said. "And as soon as I get my break this morning, I'll go down to the river and try calling out for him. I'll ring Susan, too."

"Now she's on maternity leave she's going stir-crazy upstairs in the flat, but she'll be able to keep a bird's-eye view over the riverside area."

Jim barged out through the door of the Old Engine Room, intent on finding Buster.

Just as Jim was leaving, Eric walked in with a man Dave recognised.

What his customers got up to was none of his business, Dave knew that, but he thought it strange that Eric, who worked for Ryemouth Council planning department, was meeting with Henry Mason, the land developer, at a table Eric had booked for brunch.

* * * *

"Buster!" Ruby called out. "Come on, boy! Buster!"

There was nothing in response. No barking, no scampering of feet along the pavements, no whining.

Ruby had promised Jim she'd help in the search for his dog – what else could she do?

She'd been the first person he had called when he'd discovered Buster's empty bed.

Ruby had to admit she'd always had a soft spot for Jim's dog.

It pained her to know that Jim was suffering, and she

would do what she could to find him.

* * * *

Back at the Ship, Jim was beside himself with worry.

"Who do I ring to report a missing dog?" he asked Sam, but without waiting for a reply, he was already jabbing his phone into life.

"You could try the vet," Sam said. "Or the RSPCA?"

Jim shook his head without looking up.

"It says here to contact the local dog warden, vets, the animal hospital and rehoming centres. I'm going to make some calls.

"Can you put posters up around the bar offering a reward if anyone finds him?"

"How much, Uncle Jim?"

Jim thought for a second. "How can I put a price on Buster's life? Say it's a significant reward and that should do it."

The pub door opened and Jim was stunned to see a young policeman walk in.

"I'm looking for the owner of a dog called Buster," he said, glancing between Jim and Sam.

The policeman extended his hand across the bar and in his palm was a silver dog tag with Buster's name and address on it.

Jim felt his heart drop.

"That's me," he said, squaring his shoulders. "He's my dog."

The policeman cleared his throat.

"Then you might want to sit down. I'm afraid I've got some bad news."

More next week.



Just For Laughs

I've enjoyed reading about the penfriends in the "Friend" over the last few months, and thought I'd share a picture of me with my good friend Vera – I've known her nearly all my life. We've even worked together.

Over the years we've dressed up for certain events, such as Hallowe'en and other occasions, so have numerous pictures of us wearing everything from fairy outfits to clown ones, as you can see by the picture. I hope this gives other readers a laugh.

Mrs M.H., Nottingham.

Library Trip

Thank you so much for your article on M.C. Beaton.

I love Agatha Raisin and Hamish Macbeth. I have 86 of the author's books and would love to buy more.

Unfortunately, living in a small bungalow means I don't have the room.

I guess I'll just need to visit the library instead!

Mrs D.F., Southport.



Dynamic Duo

Here's a photo of my daughter's dog, Eddy, a seven-year-old beagle.

My daughter runs between eight and ten miles at a time, training for marathons, and Eddy is with her every step of the way come rain or shine.

Mrs D.D., Leeds.

Between Friends

Write to us at Between Friends, "The People's Friend", 2 Albert Square, Dundee DD1 9QJ, or e-mail us at betweenfriends@dctmedia.co.uk.

Star Letter

Thank you for the Free From Sticky Toffee Layer Cake recipe (in Nov 25 issue). I made it for a family celebration – my granddaughter Helena's twenty-first birthday party, as her mother is coeliac.

I used golden syrup as I find black treacle rather bitter. The instruction to chill the cake in the freezer for 30 minutes is a clever one, as the hot topping then settled easily on the cold cream cheese filling.

The whole thing was a triumph and the cake was enjoyed by everyone present. Definitely one for the family recipe book!

I'm afraid the cake had disappeared before I even thought to take a photograph, so I've sent a picture of Helena instead!

Ms P.B., Leeds.



Our Star Letter will receive a Dean's all-butter shortbread tin worth £13.69 RRP. Consume as part of a balanced diet.

All other printed UK letters will win one of our famous tea caddies and a pack of loose tea. Our friends from overseas will receive an alternative gift of a pen.

Bubble Fun

I love this picture of our great-granddaughter Orla-Anne McLean, aged ten months.

She's a very happy little girl who is cherished by all the family.

Mrs E.R., Caithness.



Intriguing Tales

I read with interest the article about the author M.C. Beaton. I have read 26 of her books and was intrigued by each and every one of them.

It amazes me how she manages to think up all the intriguing plots and I shall definitely continue to read more, as once you pick up one of her books you don't want to put it down.

Mrs B.M., Blackpool.

Testing The Grey Matter

At sixty, with grey hair, I have occasionally been mistaken for a friend's mum, even though there's only ten years of difference between us.

The ultimate, however, was when I was out with a distant cousin who I think of as Auntie, given the fact that she's ninety-nine years old – but someone thought we were sisters!

Recently, I was in a waiting room and the lady who sat next to me recognised me from boarding school. The last time she saw me I was just seventeen.

I'm puzzled – am I ageing well or not?

Ms S.W., Cumbria.

Horsing Around

I thought this photograph of my friend's Welsh Mountain pony was so comical as the carrot looks like a nose!

Mrs J.P., Cheshire.



The Perfect Mix

Although the magazine is later in arriving here in South Africa, I so look forward to reading it.

I have just finished the moving story "A Place Of Refuge" by Hilary Spiers and it was written so beautifully it had me very close to tears. Another brought back some happy memories.

It's this wonderful mix that I love so much. Thanks for such a fantastic magazine.

Ms S.S., South Africa.

Winners!

Congratulations to Ms K. Ashdown, Bath; Mrs V. Borley, Isle of Wight; Ms E. Paterson, Aberdeen; Ms E. Douglas, Wishaw; Mrs L. Jones, Thetford; and Ms J. Hayres, Leeds, who each win a Lumie Bodyclock Starter clock.

Congratulations to Mrs Cowie of Swansea, too, who is the winner of our November Bookshelf competition.

If I Could

*If I could give you something to make your life complete,
I'd try to gather sunshine, to place upon your feet.
I'd ask the birds to sing a song, in orchestra so loud,
I'd wish for instant blue skies, removing every cloud.
I'd want the untamed horses, with heads of unleashed mane,
To gallop through the fields and take away your pain.
And I wish with every breath I take, that soon you will be well,
But every day I'm here for you, on that you can depend,
Because you are the sweetest mum, my confidante, my friend.*

Mrs M.M., East Preston.

Puzzle Solutions from page 25

Word Ladder

One answer is:
Junk, Sunk,
Sank, Sand,
Said, Sail, Mail.

Crossword

S	S	U	B	W	A	Y	A	D	A	G	E	S
E	E	E	L				A	A				I
V	E	N	A	L			G	Y	R	A	T	E
E	E	E	O				E	L	E			I
R	E	A	L	T	O	R				I	B	S
N	T		A				N					G
Z			H	O	R	O	L	O	G	E	R	
			E				D			A		A
O	N	S	E	T			I	T	A	L	I	C
D	E	R					N	L				H
I	M	I	T	A	T	E				L	I	B
A	Z		C				I	O				E
C	R	E	A	T	E		O	N	E	W	A	Y

Pieceword

B	L	A	S	P	H	E	M	E		G
R	S	I	N				V	A	R	Y
O	U	T	P	O	S	T		E		I
G	E	R	B	E	R	A				
H			E			P	I	L	F	E
T	A	M	A	R	I	N				
B						N	O	T	C	H
E	R	A	S	E	D		E		A	H
I	D	E	A			O	I	G	N	O
I	D	E	A			G	S		I	A
E						P	R	O	J	E

Sudoku

5	6	8	1	4	3	7	9	2
1	7	3	9	2	6	8	4	5
9	2	4	5	8	7	3	6	1
2	9	6	4	3	5	1	8	7
4	3	1	7	9	8	5	2	6
7	8	5	6	1	2	4	3	9
3	4	9	2	5	1	6	7	8
6	5	2	8	7	4	9	1	3
8	1	7	3	6	9	2	5	4

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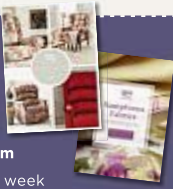
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