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My Weekly

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Your Christmas starts today! We thought long and hard about the festive season this year, with Covid still affecting our lives, but in the end, I think we all need something to celebrate and enjoy, and Christmas is the ideal opportunity. So, we're bringing you our traditional bumper mag, packed with cookery, gift guides, celebrities, fiction and much, much more. I hope you enjoy it and find it a welcome dose of normality – normal is the best present for all of us in 2020! Our next issue is on sale Tuesday, November 24, so see you then. Meanwhile, enjoy your bumper issue.

Stuart Stuart Johnstone, Editor
myweeklyeditor@dctmedia.co.uk



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MasterChef host Gregg Wallace talks to us about life as a dad in his 50s and looks ahead to his latest TV show.



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There's festive fiction galore this week, with wonderful stories from the likes of Jo Thomas and Stacey Halls.

The true star of Christmas has been revealed, and it's not what you would likely think!



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We speak to a lady who is aiming to raise half a million for charities at Christmas.



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Win a fab luxury moisturiser to keep your skin in tip top shape as we move into the winter months.

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All About YOU!

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Phone Box Beauty

On my last trip out to London I came across this lovely old decorated phone box. It's a shame the old boxes are being made redundant and taken out of service, but wouldn't it be great if they could all be decorated like this one to make our towns and villages look pretty?

S Sharman, Lincs



DÖGGÖNIT By Anthony Smith



PAST PICS



The end of the war

This is my late father Harry (then aged 5) with his paternal grandparents. They are enjoying a WWI victory tea at their home at Station Cottages in South Shields. Dad's grandfather worked on the railways as an engine driver.

Susan Dickinson, Sunderland

LITTLE TREASURES



Free spirit

This little darling Lo (2) proves that fairies really do exist!

Louise Milne, Worthing



Can I go too, please?

Here are my two little ones, full of smiles. Charlotte (5) has just started school and her little brother Ben (2) wanted in on the action!

Ellie Salter, Dundee

Photos of children under 18 should be accompanied by written permission from a parent or legal guardian

Each week we'll print some of the comments you've sent or posted.

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Four-Legged Friends

STAR
LETTER

All through lockdown my husband and I have tried to have a daily walk (weather permitting) and one of our favourite routes takes us through a local rare breeds centre. There are wallabies, alpacas, lemurs and reindeer among the animals roaming there but my favourite is this lovely donkey! Ever since enjoying donkey rides on Blackpool beach on childhood holidays, I've had a soft spot for these friendly creatures.

Melanie Lodge, Mirfield



Who needs alpacas?

MY PASSION

Happy camper



My husband Andrew really makes me laugh. He was so disappointed that we couldn't go away on holiday in our new caravan, he decided to camp in our front garden instead. Now that's what I call Carry On Camping!

Sue Gough, Doncaster

RANT & RAVE OF THE WEEK

RANT



When food shopping I always try to buy responsibly-sourced food. So it's upsetting when on closer inspection I find that I've bought eggs from caged birds. The box says "large fresh eggs" but the tiny writing tells me they are caged. The writing should be a lot bigger so you can see at a glance what you are buying.

June Robinson, Broadstairs

During these unsure times you don't have to go on a plane to see wonderful sights. This was lovely Dorset one recent morning. England has so much to see, especially if we have the weather!

Christine Bartram, Derby

RAVE



FROM OUR INBOX THIS WEEK

Snippets from readers' emails, Facebook and Twitter

♦ Sylvia Robbins commented on one of the delicious recipes posted on our website: *I love Arancinis. I first saw them in an Inspector Montalbano programme. They were pyramids and contained peas. We enjoyed similar at a Sussex Fair and the sauce inside was macaroni cheese – also, very large pyramids. The young Italian lads making them said they were from Sicily. Yours look lovely, too.*



♦ I had to write and say how much I enjoyed the feature on Fiona Phillips (edition 5536). It was a beautiful picture of her on the front cover – her smile and eyes lit up the page. I too am in my 60s and feel that my lines reflect my life's journey and I'm proud of them. So Fiona, don't go for fillers, you look beautiful just the way you are!

J Hearn

Sunshine years

PETS CORNER

This is Milo, our four-year-old rescue cat. He loves the morning sunshine on the windowsill! We wish more people would give older cats a chance, they have so much love to give.

Tania Ghienne, Ireland

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TIME for a CHAT

Catch up with all our latest news & views



We're Wishing...

Prince Charles a happy 72nd birthday! The heir apparent will celebrate his special day this Saturday although it'll be a much quieter affair than his 70th birthday two years ago. That milestone bash included a garden party, a gala and a television show! This year, we can safely say, will be much more low key with the Duke of Cornwall likely spending it with his close family. Who knows? They may even watch the new series of *The Crown* which comes out the same day!



We're Pensive...

It's one word we have for our state of mind in a challenging situation. Language experts at **Babbel.com** explored how other races describe their uncertainty; while Norwegians have "kukelure" to describe that dreamy state of thinking deeply while putting off taking action, in South Africa, to be in a "dwaal" is that spaciness people feel when

they look blank and befuddled. The Inuit people are philosophical; "ayuranamat" means there's no point in worrying about events you can't change. Indeed.



We're Smelling...

Nothing says Christmas like the aroma of mulled wine and pine trees. While you might be soaking in the smell of spice in the kitchen or lighting a seasonal scented candle in the living room, you can now even enjoy the scents of the season while cleaning the bathroom! Zoflora Disinfectant in new Frosted Peppermint £1.48, Morrisons, is described as a "festive twist of candy cane-inspired notes". It's almost enough to make us put on the Marigolds.



Plug in and keep cosy

We're Loving...

Christmas at Kew! Bright colours and magical illuminations have been brought to the iconic gardens, creating a fairy tale wonderland. There will be plenty of Covid-friendly measures put in place to ensure you have a great time while staying safe. This year Kew Gardens have partnered with Montezuma's, who will be providing delicious chocolates for visitors to sample. A feast for the eyes and the stomach – what more could you want?

We're Cheesy...

Have you got a cheese of which you are particularly fondue? Guess whose favourite fromage is the noble Stilton? This particular person is the first ever cheese fan in our brand new Cheese Club, which launches in the sparkling My Weekly Christmas Special, out next week! With top tips from celebrity cheesers, cheese tasting notes and our best buys, there's so much to get on board



Everything from fine cheeses...

We're Thinking Of...

Unusual gifts for the students and teenagers in our lives, and apparently one of the items high up the wishlist this year is none other than the electric blanket! You would perhaps associate these more with slightly older people wanting to keep cosy at night, but according to Silentnight, cash-conscious youngsters are snapping them up in droves in a bid to reduce the cost of heating flats. What a clever idea!

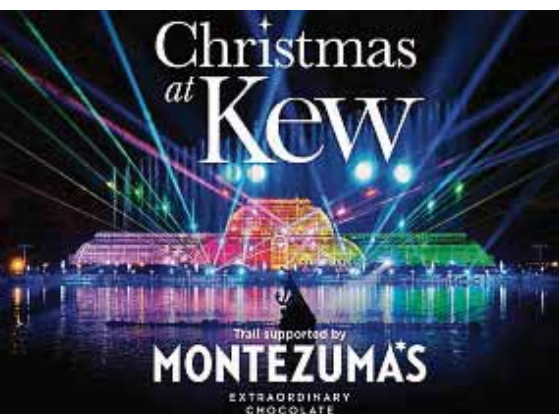


We're Surprised...

That a cleaning cloth could be so different. The Marigold Squeaky Clean Microfibre Cloth, £1.99 from all major retailers including www.marigold.co.uk, is a next-generation microfibre cloth which both deep-cleans and shines your surfaces. The handy cloth has a unique Marigold rubber-effect coating for extra absorbency, locking in liquid to ensure no smears are left behind, so even the shiniest surface is left gleaming and streak-free. It's machine washable up to 60°C, so can be used time and time again.

We're Watching...

The Crown on Netflix. The hit royal drama returns this week for its fourth series, this time focusing on the family's life in the late 1970s/ 1980s. We'll see the relationship of Prince Charles and Princess Diana unfold and be introduced to a young Prince William and Prince Harry. The infamous break-in by Michael Fagan will also be depicted, as well as the Queen's relationship with Margaret Thatcher, played by Gillian Anderson. Olivia Colman returns as Her Majesty along with Helena Bonham Carter as Princess Margaret and Tobias Menzies as Prince Phillip. Long live *The Crown*!



with... including our favourite cheese snacks! Top of this list is the Macaroni Cheese Toastie – irresistible! And of course, nothing is better than a good cheese joke – or three...

How did the cheesemonger paint his wife? He double-glossed her!

How does the cheese lover hide his horse? He masks-a-pony!

What did the cheese say to itself in the mirror? Hello me!

For even more cheese fun and games, don't miss the Special – only £3.99!



...to toasted macaroni cheese sandwiches!

We ♥ Lists...

With the cinemas being closed right now, we've been talking about films that had a real impact on us because we saw them first on the big screen. Do any of these movies listed ring a bell with you, too?

- ♥ The Day After Tomorrow
- ♥ A New Hope – Star Wars
- ♥ 12 Years A Slave
- ♥ The Blair Witch Project
- ♥ The Dark Knight
- ♥ Dr Zhivago
- ♥ Amour
- ♥ Jaws
- ♥ Gravity
- ♥ Finding Nemo



Bad news for Mandy

Mandy is house-hunting this week in **Emmerdale**, wanting to find a home for her, Vinny and Paul. She's got enough money for a deposit but doesn't tell Paul as she's afraid he may use it for gambling. Soon her fears are confirmed when Paul hears about the cash and secretly pockets it. Will he head to the bookies?

It's the end of Oliver's court case this week in **Coronation Street** and Leanne is feeling stressed. The judge's ruling devastates her and things get worse when Steve refuses to take her side. Elsewhere, Carla and Peter return to the cobbles and find the factory in chaos.



A Tale Of Two Women

Gillian Anderson and Olivia Colman portray the most powerful women in the world in this series of *The Crown*



Hair in a bouffant and clad in a power suit, Gillian Anderson makes an incredibly convincing Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The *X-Files* actress has even mastered the Iron Lady's idiosyncratic walk and voice to bring her to life in season four of *The Crown*, which debuts on Netflix this week.

Given that Mrs Thatcher was such an important figure in Britain's late 20th-century history, and that most viewers of *The Crown* remember Mrs T very well, Gillian admits she felt pressure to get the role right.

"Definitely – and I have to say for Thatcher more than any iconic persona I have played before," says Gillian, 52. "She had such a specific way of speaking and moving, and divided people so thoroughly, that showing all sides of that kind of character becomes even more vitally important and challenging."

As you'd expect from such

an accomplished thespian, Gillian worked hard on her portrayal of the former Conservative Prime Minister.

"I think I pretty much watched everything there was to watch on her – every documentary and many, many interviews," explains Gillian.

"I read a few books including a good chunk of Charles Moore's [authorised] biographies. *The Crown* has an exemplary research team... so whether it was

team was there to provide."

The fourth season of the hit Netflix historical drama sees the monarchy shaken up by two important female figures of the 1980s – divisive Prime Minister Thatcher and also Princess Diana, whose marriage to Prince Charles in 1981 ushered in a new era of openness that the Queen found difficult.

The linchpin of the drama remains the Queen, expertly portrayed in middle age by Olivia Colman. Thatcher's

the same age, have the same drive, same devotion to their fathers, same work ethic. But yet they don't. It's not the beautiful friendship that the Queen hopes it's going to be at the beginning."

Gillian explains why their relationship was rocky.

"They have many similarities," she says. "But where the Queen leans back, Thatcher leans in; where the Queen stays mum, Thatcher makes very clear her opinions; where the Queen does nothing,

"Every now and then I got a proper chill. She was so like the real thing"

them handing me an initial Thatcher pack, or me asking for details on every last cabinet member and what their specific roles and leanings were – or even, 'Is there archive footage of this particular joke she told while canvassing?' the

election and audience with Her Majesty open the drama, but it's clear the monarch's hopes for a close relationship with the first female Prime Minister will be dashed.

"On the face of it, Elizabeth and Margaret should get on," muses Olivia, 46. "They are

Thatcher takes action."

For starters, we'll see them on different sides of the fence when it comes to the Falklands War and sanctions against apartheid South Africa.

Yet off screen and in between takes, says Olivia, she and Gillian got on

Fun Facts From Filming...

◆ On season four: "It's jam-packed. We've got Princess Diana, Margaret Thatcher, the Falklands, sibling rivalry, Michael Fagan, who was the palace intruder and sat on the Queen's bed. Additionally, in 10 Downing Street we have rivalry between the Queen and Margaret Thatcher." *Ben Caron, director.*

◆ On Princess Di's wardrobe: "I loved her casual stuff," says Emma. "There were two jumpers which were replicas – one was a sheep jumper, one of which is in the V&A, and we got the only other one in the world. A pink jumper she wore in episode one – the original makers hand-made one for us."



Portraying Diana, the innocent fiancée...



...and the royal bride...



Gillian studied hours of footage of Mrs Thatcher

The Queen's life is one of public duties and unexpressed opinions

The Crown season four starts on Netflix on November 15



famously while filming all their royal audience scenes.

"They were very heavy 'lines' weeks," explains Olivia. "While in one location, we have to film all of those [audience] scenes, one after another. Gillian is incredible to work with – every now and then I got a proper chill. She was so like the real thing – but yet so able to grin and

be silly the moment we cut."

Season four also introduces audiences to a young Lady Diana Spencer, whose arrival proves difficult for the Monarch.

"The Queen is very aware of Diana's youth and inexperience," Olivia says. "She is unlike any creature Elizabeth has come into contact with before. There are

ways of doing things, head down, don't complain, come to an agreement etc. Diana doesn't play by the same rules and it makes things very difficult."

Relative newcomer Emma Corrin plays Diana, who captures the heart of Prince Charles after they meet while he is dating her sister Sarah. To land such a plum role so

so immediately I knew I was in good hands.

"[But] it just felt ridiculous to be joining *The Crown* – I had watched the previous seasons and it was completely surreal and it still is, a bit, having filmed it now and waiting for it to come out, it's like, 'Did this actually happen?'" **MW**

◆ On filming Diana's wedding day: "I had 10 people trying to put me in this dress with the train, which was so long," says Emma Corrin. "No one had seen me and then these doors opened and everyone fell silent, because I think everyone felt, out of respect, you shouldn't speak."

◆ On the new sets: "We built the PM's flat above Downing Street above Elstree studios through research given to [production designers] with enough detail to be able to recreate it exactly. This allowed us to see a Prime Minister in her own kitchen, wearing an apron and cooking." **Suzanne Mackie, executive producer.**



Stephen Boxer as Denis Thatcher

◆ On locations: Goldsmiths College in London doubled as Clarence House, where Diana prepares for her wedding; Manchester's Northern Quarter was transformed into New



Josh O'Connor as Prince Charles

York for Diana's famous 1989 trip there. The Queen's Balmoral estate is recreated at the Highland sporting estate of Ardverrick in Inverness-shire.

Getting to know... Gregg Wallace

The *MasterChef* judge talks about being a dad in his 50s and the new series of *MasterChef: The Professionals*

● **Being a father at my age and having that chance again is almost magical.**

Seeing my beautiful little boy running around is heavenly. I'm aware that I'm going to be far older than all the other dads, but I want to be able to run around and kick a ball with Sid.

● **I've lost four and a half stone.** I'm not narcissistic, but I hated what I was seeing on television. I've become a person who has fitness and wellbeing at the forefront of their mind all the time.

● **There are five adults in my house, which is a wonderful thing.** I live with my wife Anna, my baby boy Sid, my grown-up daughter, my in-laws and two rescue dogs – it's a glorious place to be. I love having everyone around the kitchen table.

Not one person cooks a meal, two or three people do it; there's always company.

● **You don't forgive any slip-ups on *MasterChef: The Professionals*.** That's what they do, so I look for

perfection all the time. I'm not a chef, but I've been eating fine dining food for 30 years, so I have a seasoned palate.

● **I've set up my own weight loss and fitness website.**

It's called ShowMe.Fit. I set it up with my daughter and my wife. It costs £7 a month and we have exercise programmes, a nutritionist and also a psychologist to help with the psychology of weight loss.

MasterChef: The Professionals has moved from BBC Two to BBC One



Gregg's Greats

● **My guilty pleasure is a pint of bitter. Not gassy, yellow lager, but a proper big brown pint of ale. With my grown-up son, with my friends, or in the garden. I come home on a Friday night and I just want that pint of beer.**

● When we decided to have a baby I made Anna promise that we would

have two weeks away, just me and her, every year. When you're my age normally your children are grown up and you get your wife back, but I'm going to be in my 70s before Sid is 21. This year we went to a remote desert hideout in Abu Dhabi.

● **My favourite book is *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* by John le Carre.** I got to the penultimate chapter, put the book down on my lap and actually exclaimed out loud, "No way!" It's fiendishly clever. I also love to read history books.



Sporting Chance

I'd have still been a greengrocer selling fruit and veg if I hadn't become a judge on *MasterChef*. Or maybe I'd have been coaching rugby professionally. I'm passionate about rugby and a qualified coach.



Pet Hate

I can't abide any film where the star is an animal or a car. If it's *Herbie* or *Lassie* I'm out of there. There are only so many facial expressions a dog or a car can do!

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BY
JO THOMAS

A Christmas Surprise

Who was this vaguely familiar man eager to buy as much holly as Cerys could give him?

Cerys stamped her feet and blew into her fingerless-gloved hands. Her feet felt like blocks of ice despite her two pairs of thermal socks and heavy-soled boots.

The crowds were thinning out now. She had just a little more holly to sell and a last half-dozen of mince pies. She added a little more icing sugar and straightened the one sprig of mistletoe left in its festive jam jar.

As the day darkened, the fairy lights sparkled over the last Christmas market before the day itself in Swn Y Mor, down at the harbourside. The boats bobbed on the water, masts lit up with fairy lights too.

Cerys hugged herself. She loved this place. It was home. Back at the farm, her father would be sitting in front of the fire after a day selling Christmas trees there, with Gelert, the collie, by his feet.

"Excuse me!" A voice broke her thoughts. She looked up to see a man in a large Parka, the hood pulled up against the cold air, his hands stuffed into the pockets.

There was something about him, though. From what she could see of his face, she thought she recognised him... but couldn't place him.

"How can I help?" She smiled.

"Do you have any more holly, or is that all you have left?" He nodded to the last bunches on the cloth-covered table under the tinsel covered awning.

"Plenty more where that came from." Cerys thought of the trees at the farm.

"In that case, I'll take that and whatever else you can give me."

He lifted his head and smiled. Again, that smile... something Cerys recognised. A few flakes of snow started to fall, like glitter. Cerys couldn't help but smile back.

He took out his wallet.

"Will this cover it?" He held out a note. "Actually, I'll take the mince pies as well." He pulled out a bigger note.

"Oh, that more than covers it. Wait, I'll give you change."

"No need," he said, "but is there any chance you could deliver it? I'm staying at Seagull Cottage."

"I can do that, no problem." Cerys nodded towards her van, with her new catering company logo down the side.

"Is that you? Cerys Cooks?" he asked.

"Yes. Well, hopefully. Still all a bit new."

She felt nervous all over again. Just as she had done since taking her first booking.

"I'll see you at Seagull Cottage soon."

He waved as he walked away.

Cerys pulled up and parked as close as she could get to Seagull Cottage, on the lane outside.

It was still snowing. The boats were bobbing happily and the Christmas lights in the houses around the harbour and up towards the town were spreading cheer. Cerys carefully pulled out the holly.

"Come in!" a voice called as she knocked. The front door was ajar.

Inside Seagull Cottage, it was bright – really bright.

"Put it anywhere. Thank you! That's loads – brilliant!"

He smiled even wider. He was even more attractive in the flesh than he was on YouTube

Cerys put down the armful of holly and looked around. This was one of the smarter holiday cottages on the harbour but she hadn't been inside for years.

"Wow. It looks like a TV set!" she said.

"Well, yes, I suppose that's what it is."

Turning to her customer, immediately she realised where she knew him from.

"You're Joe Kitchen, *Kitchen's Travels!* On YouTube!" she said.

He smiled shyly and nodded.

"And is that what you're doing here? A YouTube video?"

He nodded again.

"Seems like a great setting to rustle up a Christmas party!" He smiled even wider. He was even more attractive in the flesh than he was on YouTube.

"I've watched your channel – cooking bouillabaisse in the south of France, paella

in Spain, and picking olives in Greece."

Cerys felt a little starstruck – at least, she thought that's what it was. He certainly was making her skin tingle.

He picked up some holly and began to put it in the waiting vases.

"I'll just get the mince pies," Cerys said. "They're on the front seat. Then I'll leave you to it." A thought suddenly crashed her happy mood. "Gosh, I hope you like them, what with you being a chef!"

He laughed.

"I'm not a chef, more of an enthusiastic cook," he said, smiling that smile again. "A cook with a camera. I just started filming what I was cooking one day, and posted it for a bit of fun, really. And, well –" He held out his hands. "It seems to have taken off."

I should say, thought Cerys. He has tons of subscribers!

"Well, good luck. I'll get the mince pies."

"Thank you." He went to follow her to the door, when his phone suddenly rang. "Oh, excuse me. It's my partner."

"Ah." Cerys smiled. So he was taken – not surprising, really.

She went to the van and picked up the plate of mince pies. She'd piled on extra because he'd paid so much and decorated them with the last sprig of mistletoe, feeling a little embarrassed now and wondering whether to take it off in case he thought she had a superfan crush on him.

She walked back along the cobbled path to the cottage, which had a light covering of snow, and hesitated.

"Hey!" He appeared at the door and held it open. Cerys blushed.

"Here," she said, holding out the plate. "Like I say, I hope you like them."

"I'm sure I will, and the mistletoe looks great. Thank you! Come in," he said, not taking the plate from her and walking back into the kitchen, dining, living room. The fire was lit and welcoming in the grate.

"That was Danny, my work partner and cameraman. Snow's much heavier where he is, apparently. He can't make it."

Not a girlfriend, Cerys noted, then chided herself for noticing.

"Would you like a glass of wine?" He lifted a bottle of red. "Looks like I won't be filming after all."



He poured two glasses and handed her one. She hesitated. She could leave the van where it was and pick it up in the morning.

Why not? It's not every day you get to meet one of your favourite YouTubers.

"Tell me." She pulled off her gloves and hat. "How did you start cooking?" She sat on the stool by the kitchen island.

He told her he'd always cooked. He had cooked for his mother after her shifts at the supermarket, and for his two younger siblings. It had been hard for her, but those mealtimes had always been happy ones. It was what he liked to do, cook for people.

She was the same, she told him. It was just her and her dad at the farm. She had always cooked for them and the farm workers. She enjoyed it.

He picked up a mince pie and bit into it.

"Oh, wow! These are gorgeous!"

Cerys felt herself blush and wasn't sure if it was the wine, the heat, or the happiness she was feeling right now.

"Look," he said. "I'm all set up here, I don't suppose you'd stay and work the camera for me? I'd be really grateful."

"Me?"

"It's really straightforward," said Joe, looking at her. Something inside her told her she wasn't ready to leave right now.

"OK," she laughed. "If it really is!"

"It is!" he beamed. "I'll show you."

He directed her to the tripod, stood behind her and showed her how to work the camera, his breath on her neck making her tingle with excitement.

Merry Christmas!" Joe raised a glass to the camera and smiled.

Cerys was smiling too. She'd never known time fly so fast.

"Oh, and one more thing," he said to

camera. "If you're in the Swn Y Mor area and looking for a great cook to do your outside catering, I can really recommend Cerys Cooks. These mince pies are the best!" He picked up another and bit into it.

"OK, that's it!" Joe clapped his hands together and turned off the big light.

The food looked amazing – glistening sausage rolls, slices of home-made pork pie, filo pastry parcels – everything for a Christmas Eve party with friends, he'd told the camera. It was a glorious spread. Cerys was chuffed he'd included her mince pies.

"Another glass of wine?" he asked.

"No." Cerys smiled. "I'll leave you to your friends." She pulled on her hat. "It was lovely to meet you and this was fun!"

"My friends?"

"Yes, your guests. The party food."

"Oh, no, this was just for the camera. I'm going to be eating this for days!"

Cerys looked at the food.

"What, no guests?"

"No. I'm just going to hole up here and work on new ideas for the channel. Maybe do more UK stuff. The butcher here is amazing, and the fish! What about you? Big Christmas planned?"

"No, actually, I'm working. It's my first big outside catering job. Christmas Day lunch and tea at Ty Mawr, the big house."

"Really? Good luck with that and I hope you get some work from my shout-out."

"Thank you." She turned to leave, then turned back. "Actually, if you really don't have anyone to eat all this food, I know where it will be very well appreciated."

They walked along the coast path towards the bright lights of The Mariners pub on the harbourside. Fairy lights swung in the light snow, the sound of

a banjo and guitar playing Christmas songs drifted from inside. Cerys pushed open the pub door with her behind.

"I've worked here all my growing up," she smiled. "Every weekend and holidays."

He smiled back, following her in, to the sound of a cheer as she put down the trays of sausage rolls and filo pastry parcels on the bar. Everyone welcomed her.

"Hi, love." Her dad kissed her from his stool at the bar, having his pint.

"This is Joe. He's a cook."

"Like you," said her proud dad, kissing her cheek. It made her feel she shouldn't worry about Christmas Day. It would all be fine. She was a cook. Maybe not on YouTube, but she cooked to make people happy, like Joe. It would be fine.

Drinks were bought for them and Joe was welcomed in like part of the family as he and Cerys moved around the tables handing out hot sausage rolls and pork pie. The fire was roaring. The baubles sparkled, carols played out and everyone hoped they would see Joe back over Christmas itself. This time he was beaming.

"This place is amazing!" he said. "Looks like this could be turning out to be the best Christmas ever! Oh, and about that...?"

"Yes?" Cerys tilted her head at him.


"I don't suppose you could use a sous chef for Christmas Day, could you? Extra pair of hands, washer-upper? Will work for mince pies! You only have to say!"

She smiled back at him, her eyes fixed on his just like his were on hers.

"Actually, that would be great, if you're sure there's nowhere else you'd rather be."

"I'm sure." He smiled and then, from his back pocket, he pulled something out.

"I thought... maybe we could seal the deal with this." He held the mistletoe above his head. "If you're sure there's nowhere else you'd rather be!"

"I'm sure." Cerys leaned in and kissed him gently on the lips to cheers and claps in the pub. *Best Christmas ever!* she smiled to herself. 

Caterer Connie is set up on a date with baker Henrich at a scrumptious German Christmas market. But with a bus full of pensioners to cope with and Henrich's rival William on the scene, it may be a case of out with the tick boxes and in with a bit of spontaneity. *Finding Love at the Christmas Market* by Jo Thomas published by Corgi, PB0, £7.99.



3

Days of

CHRISTMAS EVE

Evening Glamour

The pressies are wrapped, the veggies are prepped; mix up a cocktail, it's your time to shine



Dress £65,
SugarhillBrighton.com



£45,
Next



£45,
Wallis



£16,
Next



£40,
Next



Blouse £28,
Trousers £32,
Wallis



£34,
Next

Festive Style

Easygoing looks for every day of Christmas

Luxury Sparkle

Slip into something comfortable – silky fabrics with a sprinkle of sparkle are a perfect match



£70,
Next



Top £30,
Trousers £32,
Wallis



Jumper £39,
Kaleidoscope.co.uk



£16,
Next



£27.99,
BonPrix.co.uk



£60,
Monsoon



£120,
Dune London

CHRISTMAS DAY

Elegant Emerald

Celebrate Christmas Day in style in a truly joyful statement coat, teamed with cosy velvet accessories



Coat £100,
Beret £21,
Gloves £21,
Joe Browns



£80,
ChiChiClothing.com



£12.50,
Next



£79.95,
Joules



£42,
Next



Jacket £169,
Dress £49,
Joe Browns



£28,
Next

Ruby Bright

Nothing says Christmas like red – mix and match with gold for classic and comfy seasonal style



Tunic £35,
Joe Browns



£59,
Autograph at M&S



£179,
Thomas
Sabo.com



£55,
Next



£45,
Joe Browns



£16,
George
at Asda



Coat £90,
Joe Browns

BOXING DAY

Casual Chic

The big day may be over, but there's plenty of fun in store; soft, sleek separates are the way to go



Top £29.95,
Jeans £59.95,
Joules

£45,
Studio.co.uk



£20,
Tu at
Sainsbury's



£12,
Studio.co.uk



£40,
Joe Browns



Jacket £55,
Shirt £31,
Cotton Traders



£190,
Dune
London

Cosy Comfort

Too much Christmas pud? No need to worry about the bulge in these easygoing pieces



£79.95,
Joules



Jumper £35,
Cotton Traders

£179,
ThomasSabo.com



£22,
F&F, Tesco



£45,
Monsoon



£44,
Joe Browns



Jumper £69.95,
Skirt £59.95,
Trainers £69.95,
Joules

Delicious Surprises!

These so-special recipes hold a secret something inside to dazzle and delight

Thai Turkey Moneybags With Cranberry Chilli Butter

Ingredients (Serves 6)

- ◆ 2tbsp vegetable oil
- ◆ 150g turkey stir-fry strips
- ◆ 1 red pepper, deseeded and thinly sliced
- ◆ 80g mangetout, sliced
- ◆ 80g baby corn, sliced
- ◆ 6 spring onions, thinly sliced
- ◆ 2tsp grated fresh root ginger
- ◆ 1tbsp chopped fresh coriander
- ◆ 12 sheets filo pastry (thawed)
- ◆ 60g butter, melted
- ◆ Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the cranberry chilli butter:

- ◆ 30g dried cranberries, soaked overnight
- ◆ 80g butter, at room temperature
- ◆ 1 small red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped

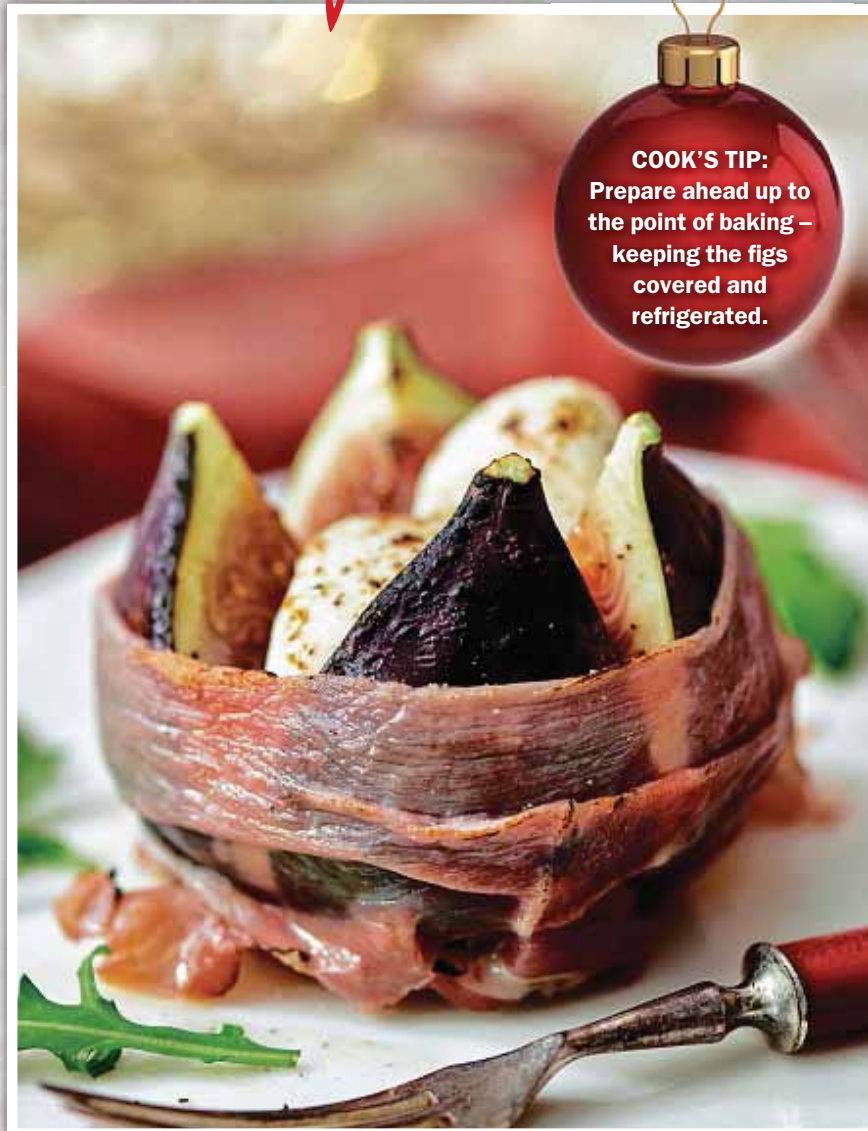
1 First, make the cranberry chilli butter. Pat the cranberries dry and chop them finely. Mix into the butter with the chilli. Form into a sausage shape, wrap in foil or greaseproof paper and freeze for at least 30min.

2 Preheat the oven to 210°C, Fan Oven 190°C, Gas Mark 7.

3 Heat the oil in a wok or frying pan and stir fry the turkey strips for 2-3min, then add all the vegetables and ginger. Stir-fry for 4-5min more. Season, add the coriander, then cool.

4 Cut each sheet of filo pastry in half to make 24 squares in total. Brush each one with melted butter, layering them to make 6 stacks of 4 squares. Share the turkey mixture between them, then slice the frozen cranberry butter into pieces and place on top. Bring up the pastry around the filling to make parcels – like moneybags – pressing the gathers together firmly. Brush with melted butter. Bake for about 15-20min until golden brown, then serve. →

COOK'S TIP:
Prepare ahead up to the point of baking – keeping the figs covered and refrigerated.



Baked Parma Figs With Mozzarella Melt

Such a wonderful melding of flavours!

Ingredients (Serves 6)

- ◆ 6 large figs
- ◆ 12 mozzarella pearls (or sliced mozzarella)
- ◆ 6 slices Parma ham
- ◆ 3tbsp Marsala or sherry
- ◆ 2tbsp olive oil
- ◆ Freshly ground black pepper
- ◆ Rocket or salad leaves, to serve

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, Gas Mark 6.

2 Using a sharp knife, cut deep crosswise cuts through the middle of each fig, then open them out a little and put two mozzarella pearls into each one. Wrap a slice of Parma ham, folded in half lengthways, around each fig. Place in a baking dish and sprinkle with the Marsala or sherry and olive oil. Bake for 6-8min.

3 Serve the figs, seasoned with black pepper and garnished with rocket or salad leaves.

COOK'S TIPS:

Prepare ahead up to the point of baking. Just keep covered and chilled. For a veggie version use canned chestnuts or mushrooms instead of turkey.





COOK'S TIPS:

Use prunes instead of apricots if you like.
Nervous with knives? Ask your butcher to cut a channel through the centre of the meat for you.

Roast Loin Of Pork

With Apricots and Port

Ingredients (Serves 6)

- ◆ 80g ready-to-eat dried apricots
- ◆ 3tbsp port or sherry
- ◆ 25g butter
- ◆ 2 shallots, finely chopped
- ◆ 20g shelled pistachio nuts
- ◆ 50g dried breadcrumbs (Panko are good)
- ◆ 1tbsp chopped fresh mixed herbs (thyme, rosemary, sage)
- ◆ 1 egg yolk
- ◆ 1.5kg boned and rolled pork loin joint (ask your butcher to score the rind)
- ◆ 1tbsp vegetable oil
- ◆ Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Several hours before cooking, soak the whole apricots in the port or sherry.

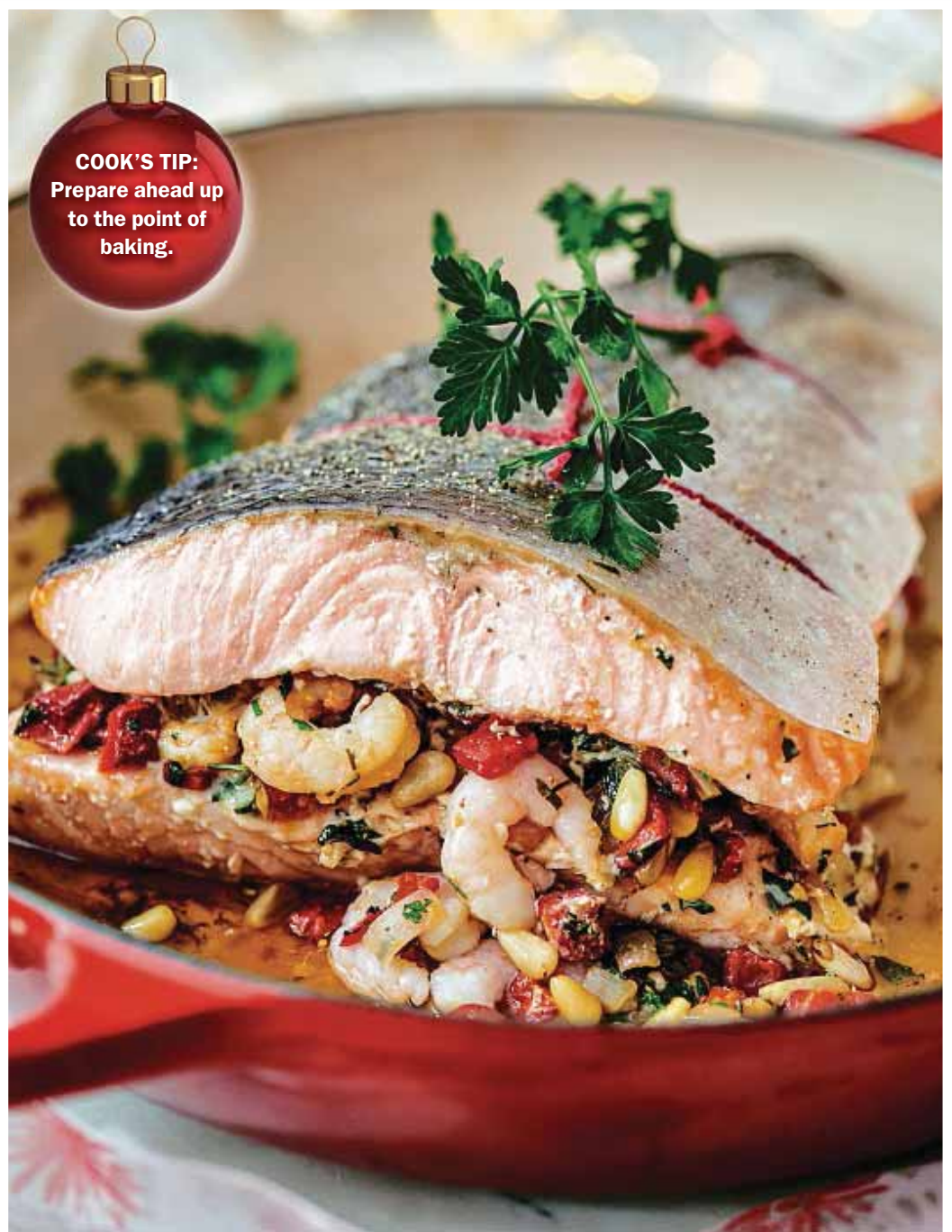
2 When ready to start cooking, preheat the oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, Gas Mark 6.

3 Heat the butter in a frying pan and gently fry the shallots until soft. Remove from the heat and stir in the pistachios, drained apricots, breadcrumbs, herbs and egg yolk. Season and then cool.

4 Stand the pork joint on one end. Taking care, use a sharp knife to cut a channel through the middle of the joint from one end to the other. Push the stuffing into this channel. Put the joint into a roasting tin and rub the oil over the rind, then sprinkle with sea salt.

5 Roast for 2 hours 15min. Cover and rest for 15-20min, then carve.

COOK'S TIP:
Prepare ahead up to the point of baking.



Supreme Salmon Fillets

With Red Pepper, Prawns And Pine Nuts

Ingredients (Serves 6)

- ◆ 1-2tbsp olive oil
- ◆ 2 x 450-500g fillets salmon (each one must be the same size)
- ◆ 20g butter
- ◆ 1 large shallot or small onion, finely chopped
- ◆ 150g roasted red pepper (from a jar), drained and chopped
- ◆ 100g North Atlantic prawns, thawed if frozen
- ◆ 2tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- ◆ Finely grated zest of 1 lemon or lime
- ◆ 40g pine nuts
- ◆ Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ◆ Parsley sprigs, to garnish

1 Preheat the oven to 190°C, fan 170°C, Gas Mark 5. Grease a baking dish with a little olive oil, large enough to fit the salmon in.

2 Heat the butter in a frying pan and gently fry the shallot or onion until soft. Remove from the heat and stir in the red peppers, prawns, parsley, lemon or lime zest and pine nuts. Season.

3 Lay out one of the salmon fillets on a worktop, skin side down. Put the prawn filling on top to cover evenly. Place the second salmon fillet on top, skin side up. Tie along the length with string, 2-3 times, to secure. Carefully lift into the baking dish and drizzle with a little olive oil.

4 Cover with the lid or a piece of greased foil and bake for 40min. Rest for 5min, then serve, garnished with parsley sprigs. ➔

Molten Chocolate Maraschino Puddings

COOK'S TIPS:

If you like, make this with one large panettone, then serve cut into slices. You could use vanilla ice cream – or any flavour of your choice.

Ingredients (Serves 6)

- ◆ 100g butter, plus a little for greasing
- ◆ 200g dark chocolate, broken into pieces
- ◆ 4 medium eggs
- ◆ 80g light muscovado sugar
- ◆ 40g plain flour
- ◆ Pinch of salt
- ◆ 12 Maraschino cocktail cherries
- ◆ 6 cherry liqueur chocolates or truffles
- ◆ 1-2tsp cocoa powder

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, Gas Mark 6. Grease 6x200ml pudding basins with butter.

2 Melt the butter and chocolate in a small saucepan over a low heat, stirring often. Remove from the heat before fully melted, so that the mixture doesn't become too hot. Cool slightly and stir until completely smooth.

3 In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and sugar together, until the sugar has dissolved. Stir in the chocolate mixture, then fold in the flour and salt. Share between the pudding basins, then gently push two Maraschino cherries into each one. Place on a baking sheet.

4 Bake for 15min. Stand for 2min, then run a knife around the basins and turn out the puddings onto individual plates or dishes. Serve, topped with the chocolates or truffles and sprinkled with cocoa powder.



Panettone

With Ice Cream Freeze And Strawberry Sauce

Ingenious, impressive and SO delicious!

Ingredients (Serves 6)

- ◆ 6 individual panettone (weighing 100g each)
- ◆ Approx. 600g (1½ tubs) white peach and raspberry ice cream
- ◆ 300g strawberries
- ◆ 30g caster sugar
- ◆ Mint sprigs, to decorate

1 Several hours (or days!) before serving, make space in your freezer. Remove all the packaging and paper bases from the individual

panettone. Carefully cut off the domed tops and set these to one side. Next, use a sharp knife, then your fingers, to remove most of the insides of the panettone bases, leaving about 1cm around the base and sides.

2 Allow the ice cream to soften a little, then scoop it into the panettone bases, pressing it in to fill all the spaces. Replace the domed tops, then wrap each one tightly in cling film. Freeze for 1-2 hours (or longer if preparing well ahead).

3 Remove from the freezer 20-25min before serving. At this point, make the strawberry sauce by pureeing the strawberries and sugar together in a blender. Serve with the desserts, decorated with mint sprigs.

COOK'S TIP:
Try Hotel Chocolat
Cherry Deluxe or
Mulled Wine
chocolates to top
the puddings.





BY SUE
MOORCROFT

Saturdays In Stockholm

FINAL PART: Can Cecily cope with the shock of her ex's secret torment and rekindle their love?

All week Jaxon buried himself in work in the hope he could likewise bury lurking worries about Cecily. *I'm a bit adrift...* she'd said.

On Saturday morning he opened the dating app and, ignoring the matches and messages that had stacked up, clicked on Cecily's profile just as he had every day since they'd spoken. He scrolled through her images of Stockholm and Midsommarkransen. Some were selfies, taken at arm's length with a background of giant reindeer wrought from Christmas lights or ice skaters at Kungsträdgården. Only one picture included others and was headed, *New colleagues!* – two middle-aged men and a pregnant woman sitting at computers, Cecily smiling beside them.

I hardly know anyone here apart from the people at work and they're all caught up in their families. That's why I thought it would be nice to meet up...

Guilt stabbed him and when his phone rang, he snatched it up, hoping it was Cecily. Ebba's smooth voice sounded in his ear instead. She sounded American, a legacy of attending university in the US.

"I hate to hassle you but are you able to turn out to collect toys for the kids today? The Christmas Crew's shorthanded."

Jaxon checked his watch. Nine-thirty.

"I can help," he agreed. Then his mouth went on without consulting his brain.

"Would you mind if I brought someone? She's British, working here for a few months and doesn't know many people. I'd like to help her."

"Sure." Ebba sounded delighted. "Does she live in Bromma?"

"Midsommarkransen."

"Oh-kaaay." The rapid-fire clicking of a keyboard came over the phone. Then, "I can allocate you an area between Midsommarkransen and Södermalm."

"Fine." He hoped Cecily would come now, as he'd committed to a patch across the city from his home. "I'll call her."

It took him a moment after ending the call to wipe his sweaty palms and do it.

Cecily answered, "Hello."

"It's Jax."

"Yes. Your name came up." She sounded neither pleased nor displeased.

He cleared his throat but his voice still emerged in breathy, nervous chunks.

"Do you remember I told you about a volunteer group at work? They're short-handed. Are you interested in helping collect donated toys and books from drop-off points?"

He'd told himself he was doing this for her but the way his heart jumped while he waited for her response felt a lot more as if he were doing it for him.

"Today?" A thread of interest now.

"Yes. The Christmas Crew usually does its thing on Saturdays."

She snorted a giggle. "The Christmas Crew? Not Santa and the Elves?"

*"Cecily..."
Just one word,
but it seemed to
echo through the
vehicle like a
whisper in a cave*

A wriggle of pleasure loosened his shoulders. "You can dress as an elf if you like." He glanced out of the window. "Did you get winter gear? The sky looks like it will dump snow on us any minute."

"Yes, complete with red gloves and snowboots – quite suitable for the Christmas Crew. Where shall we meet?"

He arranged to pick her up and ended the call with emotions warring. It wasn't a date – just an opportunity to augment the Christmas Crew and let Cecily meet people, he told himself.

It was natural to feel nervous and excited about seeing once again the gorgeous girl he'd once loved, though.

With a deep breath, Cecily jumped into Jaxon's black SUV when it pulled up outside her apartment building. She'd gone

over the possibilities while she'd waited for him, shifting foot to foot as feathers of snow floated down. If she hovered on the pavement waiting for him to get out... then what? Shake hands and reintroduce themselves? Much better to hop in and greet him, "Hej, hej!" in her dubious Swedish accent and it would all feel casual.

But her "Hej, hej!" came out as a croak as her heart beat up in her throat.

Jax, bulky in coat and hat, fastened his inky black eyes on her. "Cecily."

Just one word but it echoed through the vehicle like a whisper in a cave.

She swallowed. "Jaxon. You look great." She meant it. His couple of days' of stubble accentuated a jaw that had become firmer now he was in his thirties and extra laughter lines edged his eyes.

He mumbled, "You look better than ever." He pulled his hat low and checked his mirrors, ready to join the traffic.

She almost said, "Soooooooo... this is awkward," like on a TV sitcom. She decided it would be better just to be herself. "Tell me more about what we're going to do today."

He joined the stream of traffic.

"We're visiting six shops. They've kindly acted as drop-off points for donated presents for kids who might otherwise wake up to little or nothing on Christmas morning. We'll take the gifts to a basement in the building where my colleague Ebba lives. You'll like Ebba. The Christmas Crew is full of generous, energetic people." He glanced her way. "I thought they might help widen your social circle."

"Great!" Cecily said brightly, to hide her disappointment. Jax had invited her as a favour. Well, she'd told him she didn't know many people; she couldn't complain if he was helping her. It wasn't his fault her belly was performing somersaults.

Soon they reached the first shop. They parked outside, entered, and Jaxon showed his ID. The staff was expecting them – "Ebba's so efficient," Jaxon observed – and he signed for bulging bin liners of toys, before they carried them through the snow to his big vehicle. The

flakes were falling fast, giving the buildings white hats not unlike Jax's black one. Cecily pulled up her hood.

"How fabulous. It's like being in a snow globe."

Jax panted as he stacked the bags into the back.

"If we get a bad winter, you might soon be sick of it."

"Can't imagine that." Cecily climbed into the front to gently pull the sack he was trying to fit on top of another. "People are so generous. I'm beginning to feel the spirit of Christmas."

He grinned. He seemed to be relaxing now and those dark eyes shone from beneath the knitted hat. "Ebba got the support of a local radio station. The public's been great."

After the final pick-up, Cecily had to have two bags by her feet and one on her lap.

"Bleugh. I'm totally squashed," she complained.

Jax laughed, patting down the bag on her lap so she could see.

"Not far to the sorting station."

The sorting station was a basement lit by bare bulbs, furnished with folding tables. A dozen people looked up and shouted greetings. Jaxon introduced Cecily to Ebba, a tall, fair woman in her forties.

"Welcome and thank you for helping!" Ebba cried, depositing a stack of books on a table. She gave Cecily a beaming smile. "So, you guys know each other from uni? Let me introduce you to the Christmas Crew. Lars, Gunbritt, Chicki, Pernilla, Pia, Anna, Linn, Andreas, Gianni..."

Each person welcomed her as Ebba called their names – Swedes, a Brit, a German and an Italian.

Cecily grinned. "So great to meet you. I work in the centre of Stockholm but it's a small office and everyone spends the weekends with their families."

"Whereas we are a family!" Ebba beamed. "Now, we need to phone our order to the sandwich bar. We can sort gifts until lunch is ready. Before you take off your coat, can you and Jax bring in the rest of your bags?"

The Christmas Crew members proved to be universally friendly and called out to each other as they allocated books, toys and games to appropriate tables.

"I don't have to put this dinosaur on the boys' table because it's blue, do I?" Or,



"Are you sure it's a charity that delivers the gifts to the children? Because I was definitely told it was Santa."

Cecily laughed and chatted, all the time conscious of Jaxon working alongside her, the ribbing of his beanie low over his eyes. Occasionally their fingers touched as they delved into a bag and neither pulled away. They sat together when lunch arrived and pretended to squabble over the chocolates Ebba passed round.

"This is fun," Cecily told Jaxon sincerely. "Thanks for inviting me."

"I'm glad I did."

His smile was the one she used to know and woke butterflies in her stomach.

In fact, it all seemed so familiar that she found herself saying impulsively, "Blimey, you look boiling. Have you forgotten you're wearing your hat?"

She reached towards it. Jax tried to bat her away. But Cecily was too quick and grasped the woollen hat.

"Give it back!" Jaxon snatched it from her hand and crammed it on his head.

Cecily's laughter froze on her lips. Where curly fair hair had grown now gleamed a closely shaven scalp.

"Sorry." She flushed, horrified she'd

upset him and not knowing whether to reassure him that many men lost their hair. It was natural and a real "look" these days, but he was obviously self-conscious. "I didn't mean to be thoughtless. I am sorry."

With jerky movements, he balled up his sandwich bag.

"I need to head off. Shall I drive you home?"

She cursed her insensitivity, saying miserably, "There's a metro station nearby. I'll stay. You leave when you're ready."

He was ready right then, evidently, because he called his goodbyes to the group and made for the steps to street level.

Cecily watched him go, then turned to the final bag of toys with tears pricking her eyes.

It had been a lighthearted moment on her part but she'd exposed something he'd chosen to keep hidden, made him want to get away from her.

Ebba arrived suddenly at Cecily's side. "He's had a bad year," she murmured.

A horrible suspicion and dread hit Cecily.

"Has he had chemotherapy?"

Is that why he's lost his hair?"

Ebba gave Cecily's arm a reassuring pat. "No, no! He's developed alopecia," she said carefully, obviously choosing her words. "After some... unpleasantness, it fell out in handfuls. He was distraught."

"Oh, poor Jax." Cecily digested the information. "Thanks for telling me."

She stayed on as Lars brought out gaily printed paper and tape and paired her with Linn to wrap toys for toddlers, outwardly puzzling over how to wrap a push-along duck, but her thoughts all on Jax.

Finding him on the dating app had somehow led her to assume him to be the same super-confident Jaxon of their uni days. She'd taken his kindness for granted when he'd introduced her to his friends, and hadn't asked herself whether he needed help and understanding too.

By the time the gifts were wrapped everyone had cricks in their backs from stooping over tables.

"Fantastic job, everyone," Ebba called. "Who's hungry? The bistro round the corner has offered us a discount."

"Me!" said almost everyone. Outside, they found a two-inch blanket of snow.

Cecily could smell it on the air as her →

snow boots scuffed through it. She pulled up her hood, thought of Jax wearing his hat all day, then fell back beside Ebba.

"You have another project next Saturday, I hear?"

Ebba nodded, her hair frizzing beneath a fleece hat. "Gift boxes for the homeless."

"May I join in?" She didn't say, "Because I want to spend more time with Jax," but she thought Ebba understood because the other woman gave her a sharp look before finally agreeing.

"OK. Give me your email address. I'll contact you with the plan."

Another Saturday in Stockholm. Cecily hadn't heard from Jaxon. She'd worked all week on the do-your-own-legal app her company were about to launch and she'd received her email from Ebba. It was open on her laptop as she dialled.

"Hi, Jax," she said, when he answered. "It's my turn to ask you to be on my team."

His voice held both caution and surprise. "What team?"

Cecily made sure to keep her voice light. "As an honorary member of the Christmas Crew I need someone to help me with shopping for the homeless." He didn't immediately reply. "It'll be too much for one trolley and Ebba's told me about a wholesale grocery not far from Bromma." This time, she let an expectant silence fall.

"Well... OK," he said, clearly dubious.

When she ended the call she was surprised to feel her heart beating hard at the knowledge he'd been quite close to refusing to see her.

She picked him up this time and they made polite conversation. At the grocery store they worked down Cecily's list, taking everything from canned food to chocolate bars, socks, thermal layers, toiletries and pet food.

As before, Jaxon unwound gradually.

"The charity gives Ebba maps with all the shelters on to put in the parcels, too. Sweden's a cold place to be homeless."

Cecily shivered. "I can only imagine. Thank goodness for kind-hearted folk."

They staggered down to the basement with their booty.

"Wonderful!" Ebba cried. "The boxes are over there." She waved a hand at a stack of cardboard. "Here's a list of what we're trying to get into each box."

She thrust the paper at Jaxon and they got to work. A shop had donated printed labels for each box, too. *Best wishes from the Christmas Crew.*

Cecily paused as she stuck one on.

"Would it be nice to add *and Cecily and Jax*, too? The recipients might like to feel



real people are thinking of them."

"Great idea." Jax. paused, elbows on a filled box. "You know, you've changed."

"How?" Cecily stopped too. The conversation felt too important not to give it her full attention.

He frowned thoughtfully.

"You've got a ton of self-confidence."

She shrugged.

"I suppose it's life, isn't it? You work, learn, develop. It was a bit of a curveball when things didn't work out with my ex, but it gave me a reason to try working abroad. As you were brave enough to do ten years ago when I wasn't."

"Yeah." He sighed, meeting her eyes. "There were times I wished I hadn't."

His gaze was unreadable. She thought she'd got it wrong again

The expression in his eyes warmed her. "We approached things differently but we've ended up in the same place. You've changed, too. If anything, you're less self-confident." She reached up to bestow a friendly pat on his shoulder.

Instantly, he grabbed his hat. She dropped her hand, mortified.

"Oh, Jax. I wasn't going to snatch your hat," she cried. "I'm sorry. I meant to be playful last week but I was thoughtless. But, honestly, you look good, Jax. A lot of guys rock the shaven look and you do too. It never did Vin Diesel any harm." She smiled before adding softly, "You once told me, 'You're beautiful as you are'."

His gaze was unreadable. For a moment she thought she'd got it wrong again. Then he sighed and slid the hat off, self-consciously stroking his head.

"It's a stress thing." He glanced around but everyone was busy. "I told you about

my ex who 'forgot' to say she was married. I found out when her husband stormed into the office. It was horrible. He had family with him. I honestly didn't know."

"You're not the type to mess around like that," she put in swiftly, her heart breaking at his haunted expression,

He rubbed his head again. "The husband threatened me. His brothers, too. He told the office I was trying to break up his family, steal a mother from his poor kids. I felt like a monster. He wouldn't accept my explanation." He shuddered. "I never saw Maya again – obviously – but the threats went on for ages."

Cecily took his hand. It fit snugly over hers, as it always had.

"You were the wronged party almost as much as the husband."

His old smile flashed. "It's been hard to think like that. Especially when my hair began to come out in clumps." He gestured to his head. "The doctor says it's stress but I feel like it's a punishment."

She took his other hand, too.

"You didn't do anything wrong."

"Maya's husband said I should know dating apps are full of married people looking to cheat," he answered morosely.

"That's victim blaming! Most people on dating apps are perfectly respectable." She managed a smile. "Like me."

"Clearly." His dark eyes began to dance. "I'm glad I didn't take down my profile now." He lifted one eyebrow, like the old Jax. "Because next Saturday it's our company julbord – that's Christmas smörgåsbord – at a beautiful hunting lodge." He pulled her slightly closer and dropped his voice. "And I need a date."

Her heart rate picked up. "So you're going to check out the dating app?"

"No need." He laughed. "Cecily, are you free to be my Christmas date?"

Pleasure filtered warmly through her.

"I'd love to." She smiled into his face, a decade older but as dear as ever. "I'm always free on Saturdays in Stockholm."

He stooped and dropped a tiny, hot kiss on her temple. "Maybe not any more." **MW**

Set in Stockholm, childhood friends Hannah and Nico set out to make romance work under the snowy sky. But fate has other ideas... A perfect story of love and friendship, a slice of festive magic to snuggle up with.

Sue's research brings home the sights, sounds and tastes of Sweden. *Christmas Wishes*, Avon, PBO £7.99.



Laughter is the best medicine

Gaby Roslin opens up about the power of positivity and feeling fit in her fifties...

Maintaining a long and successful career in the fickle world of television can be tricky – unless, of course, you're Gaby Roslin.

Three decades on from her first major TV gig, co-hosting Channel 4's *The Big Breakfast* with Chris Evans, she's become one of Britain's best-loved presenters. Now, as she prepares to enter her 34th year in broadcasting, she

naturally positive person. Even when I wake up my youngest daughter in the morning, I sit on her bed and sing musical theatre songs!" laughs Gaby, 56, who is mum to 19-year-old Libbi-Jack, from her previous marriage to musician Colin Peel, and Amelie, 13, with her publisher husband David Osman.

It's true that you'd be hard pressed to find someone quite as perky as Gaby. Brimming

good time. "My guests have told me some very deep, personal things, but it's all in a very relaxed setting. It feels more like a kitchen table chat, rather than an interview.

"I just think everyone needs a bit of entertainment, particularly right now, and laughter is always the best medicine."

Gaby reveals that she had a rather ambitious line-up in mind for the podcast and was

"I cannot begin to tell you how I screamed when Judi said yes"

admits she loves it as much as the day she started.

"It's still the best job ever. I wanted to do this back when I was a little girl because I had this urge to entertain people, to make people laugh, probably because I'm a

with energy and talking ten to the dozen during the course of our interview, she's someone you naturally warm to. And it's her desire to spread a little joy that has inspired her latest project, *That Gaby Roslin Podcast* – her first ever podcast, which she's calling "the party everyone is invited to". It's a series of celebrity interviews that are focused on having a

astounded when she was able to convince many of her dream guests to join her for a chinwag.

"People ask me who I would most like to interview and I always say Oprah Winfrey, Dame Judi Dench and the Obamas. So I thought, 'I'll start by asking Judi'," says Gaby. "I cannot begin to tell you how I

screamed around the house when she said yes. She came on with her daughter, Finty, and they were an absolute delight.

"And I learned some really surprising things. Judi told me that of all the people in the world, she would most like to meet



Dame Judi and her daughter Finty

Keir Starmer. Honestly, I think if Keir got a call from Dame Judi, he would be very flattered!"

Though she's not given up on securing the Obamas and Oprah, Gaby's got plenty of other talent in the pipeline – from David Tennant and his wife Georgia, to Rob Brydon and Celia Imrie. And the second episode features her "mate" Robbie Williams.

"With Robbie, I had just pressed send on the email and he came back to me straight away saying, 'Of course I will'. We've been friends since he was 16 and I can honestly say he's the same person. He's a great entertainer and a really super bloke."



On *The Big Breakfast* with Chris Evans and Mark Lamarr



Co-hosting *Children In Need* with Sir Terry

A Healthy Attitude

Gaby admits she's never felt healthier, thanks to some major lifestyle changes. Since she started wearing a Fitbit, she's walked miles every day. And a couple of years ago, she also decided to cut alcohol from her life completely. "There were days when I thought, 'Oh my God, I have no energy to do the walking that I love'. And actually that was because of a hangover. I decided I didn't want hangovers any more and it's changed my life. If I'd known years ago how good I'd feel not drinking, I would have quit earlier."



As part of the podcast, Gaby bonds with her guests and some of her own insecurities and issues are discussed too. In the episode with Robbie, they both talk candidly about dealing with shyness over the years – something that Gaby has struggled with since childhood. She admits it's the reason you won't catch her on *Strictly Come Dancing*.

"I love watching it – I'd watch it until the cows come home – but I'm too shy to do it. I will absolutely not be on it. And the same goes for other reality shows. I'll watch *I'm A Celebrity*, but it's not for me, thank you!"

There are plenty of other things Gaby would still like to check off her list, though. She admits she would love to present another daily TV show and hopes her podcast will continue. "And I'm still obsessed with telly, too – I'd do it seven days a week if I could. I've had some wonderful years doing wonderful things, like *The Big Breakfast* and working on *Children In Need* with Terry Wogan, who was such a great man, and I have no plans to slow down yet.

"I still have plenty of dreams, hopes and ambitions, and I fully intend to keep going for another 34 years." **MW**

INSPIRATION
& ADVICE

HOME comforts

Try a touch of stylish Scandinavian chic in your home this year to make it warm and welcoming – perfect for Christmas



Ask The Expert

My home is draughty due to the windows, front door and floorboards. How do I fix this?

“A draughty home is a drain on your heating bill in the colder months. Luckily, this is an easy fix,” says Chris Moorhouse, Wickes Category Director for Décor, Building and Gardens.

“The Wickes Extra Thick Draught Seal (Wickes, £6.25) is perfect for doors and windows and a simple and cost-effective way to save energy by reducing heat loss and preventing draughts. The Wickes Internal Letter Box Draught Excluder (Wickes, £6.25) also reduces heat loss.

“You can draught-proof floorboards by using filler for the gaps. Wickes Decorators Caulk (Wickes, £1) is an interior gap filler that is easy to use and ideal for floorboards. You could also lay down a large rug as this would add further insulation to your home.”

Wickes

As days grow shorter and Christmas draws closer, it's time to make our homes warm, welcoming and full of festive cheer.

When it comes to seasonal style, our Scandinavian cousins are experts. “Christmas, or Jul in Swedish, is the time our homes are at their most cosy and welcoming,” says Catharina Björkman, Scandi lifestyle expert at Contura.eu. “Christmas décor is typically understated and unpretentious, but also stylish. Keep the overall look devoid of clutter, and focus on adding festive touches.” This could be as simple as adding bedlinen, towels, blankets and throws chosen for warmth and seasonal colour.

“Lighting is key. It should be soft and warm to add to the ambient atmosphere, so use table and floor lamps wherever possible as these create pools of soft light, instead of overhead lighting or ceiling spotlights, which can look too bright and harsh. Alternatively, hang strings of fairy lights on the walls or around mirrors, window frames, fireplaces or bookshelves.

“In Scandinavian



£22,
Shop.Nationaltrust.org.uk

£10,
Next



£10-£14,
Matalan



£153,
Pooky.com



Duvet set £25-£55, Next

Star £32.99, Mini Christmas Tree
£11.99, Sets of TruGlow Candles
from £24.99, Lights4fun.co.uk



homes, candles are used year-round, but even more so at Christmas. We use candles to adorn the tree, mantelpiece and windowsills, adding to the cosy atmosphere. Build up a collection of candles and cluster them together for a stylish look. These add to the soft glow, perfect for snuggling up with a hot drink to watch a movie.

Forage for foliage to decorate your home; it's beautiful, eco-friendly and free. "If you have a fireplace, greenery placed across a mantelpiece looks especially festive," recommends Catharina.

Designer Anna Agapova adds, "As an alternative to a traditional Christmas tree create floral compositions using flowers and cedar, larch and pine tree branches.

"These will fill the room with an amazing aroma and look stunning on a fireplace, for example.

"Instead of buying new decorations, try the trends for vintage and handmade.

"Hanging decorations with handmade Christmas baubles are eye-catching. You can use cotton wool, felted wool and knitting yarns. Involve family and friends in the creative process and they'll become favourite decorations for years to come." 

Tip!

"Of course, Christmas tree decorations can share a story of generations, but if you don't have any of your own, buy vintage ones. Collecting them could be the start of an enjoyable new hobby," says Designer Anna Agapova. As well as charity shops, try online retailers Ebay and Etsy for handmade and secondhand decorations

Chair £380, Throw £25, Cushion £14,
Lamp £30, Moorlands range,
Sainsbury's



Foliage,
Festive Fables
range, Dobbies
Garden Centre



BY
HEIDI SWAIN

Snowed In For Christmas

The cottage being double booked had ruined Cass and Josh's solitary Christmas plans – or had it...?

When children's author Cass Greenwood announced she was going away for Christmas her parents were horrified.

"But your sister is coming home," her mother had unnecessarily reminded her. "She's had to fight to get the time off and your father and I are convinced she's going to make an announcement."

That had been the clincher for Cass. It wasn't Catherine's fault, but having her sister's perfect career, perfect partner and now no doubt, perfect pregnancy paraded in front of her for the entire festive season was more than she could bear.

Suffering from a crippling creative block, which was proving impossible to shift, the last thing Cass needed was to have her sibling's successes highlighted, so she was heading to Scotland in the hope that two weeks in a remote highland cottage would give her brain a break and restore her writing mojo.

"Well, it's booked now," she said. "I'm not cancelling."

She refused to apologise, especially given that her parents had just assumed she would be going to them, rather than asking what her plans were.

"I'm leaving tomorrow." She firmly said. "I'll see you all next year."

The drive was tiring and the further north she went, the whiter the landscape became. She was pleased the cottage owner had offered to stock the cupboards. With supplies laid in and with no interruptions she would be able to properly relax.

It was dark when she arrived at the whitewashed crofter's cottage and the air was freezing. Cass slipped down the snow-covered path, grateful for the warm glow she could see through the windows and the reassuring smell of woodsmoke which hung in the air. She found the key under a pot and let herself in.

The cottage was Lilliputian, but perfect. There was a real Christmas tree, beautifully decorated, lit with sparkling

fairly lights and boughs of holly studded with ruby berries and bunches of mistletoe adorned every surface. With the scent of cinnamon in the air, the squishy sofa waiting to envelop her and the comforting crackle of logs in the grate, Cass had never seen a more magical hideaway. The next two weeks were going to be bliss.

A sudden hammering on the door pulled her out of her wistful reverie and she jumped. The owner had said she wouldn't be disturbed and she hadn't seen any other properties nearby.

"Who is it?" she called, her voice quavering as she wished she'd locked the door behind her.

"Josh Addington. I can't find the key." Came the quick response. "Can you let me

*With snow dashing
against the
windows they had
no choice but to
hunker down for
the night*

in? It's really coming down out here."

Cass didn't know what to do. She'd booked the cottage from a woman named Isla Ferguson. She had no idea who Josh Addington was or why he was looking for the key to her sanctuary.

"Can you open up?" he shouted again.

With her heart hammering, Cass opened the door then took a hasty step back as the guy, who looked more snowman than human, rushed inside.

"Thanks," he said, closing the door and stamping snow off his boots. "The forecast predicted snow, but I was not expecting..."

His words trailed off as he pushed his dark hair away from his face and spotted Cass, wide eyed and mildly terrified.

"Oh," he said. "Hi. You must be Isla."

"No," said Cass, unnerved to feel her heart racing at his intensely blue eyes and dark lashes. "I'm Cass Greenwood."

"I wasn't expecting a meet and greet, but hi. Do you want to show me around?"

"Not especially," she frowned. "And I'm not here to meet you. I've booked the cottage for the next two weeks. I've only just arrived myself."

"But I've booked the cottage for that time too," Josh frowned back, pulling out a booking form which was identical to the one Cass then presented him with.

The cottage had been double booked.

With no phone signal or landline and with the wind howling and the snow falling thick and fast, it was impossible to contact Isla or drive to the nearest village to look for alternative accommodation.

Not that either Cass or Josh were willing to do that.

"I'm really sorry," said Cass, "but I'm not leaving. I've spent the best part of the day driving here and I need this holiday."

"Why do you think I arrived late?" Josh stubbornly countered. "I've driven for hours too. You're not the only one who needs a break."

They had reached an impasse and with snow dashing against the windows, they had no choice but to draw straws for the bedroom and hunker down for the night.

Next morning, the blizzard had blown itself out, but Cass and Josh were taken aback by the view. Their cars were little more than hillocks and the snow had drifted halfway up the cottage door.

"I don't think we'll be driving anywhere for a while," Josh frowned down at Cass.

"No," she agreed. "It looks like we're stuck with each other."

Having quietly shared breakfast, made a recce of supplies, and waited patiently for the bathroom, Cass announced she was going for a walk.

"There's a bridge over the stream into the woods," she elaborated, feeling determined to salvage something from the holiday's unexpected turn.

"I'm heading that way too," said Josh. "I'll come with you."

Josh and Cass held hands as they crossed the slippery bridge and, so entranced by what they discovered on the other side, their former frostiness thawed and they almost forgot to let go.

Together they explored the dense pine and fir woods, and more than once Cass thought she saw something move out of the corner of her eye. It could have been a bird, or even a change in the light as the sun penetrated the beautiful wintry scene, but Cass's imagination was in overdrive.

"Look," Josh pointed, as they made their way back, their pockets full of pine cones.

Two roe deer stood on the path. They leapt into the trees as Cass's phone suddenly rang and she grinned up at Josh. Their eyes locked and Cass felt her cheeks flush with more than the cold as she answered the call.

"Cass!" Gasped her mother. "We saw the forecast. Are you safe?"

"Yes," Cass smiled. "I'm here, I'm safe and I have company too, so don't worry about me." She quickly explained what had happened before the signal cut out, feeling much more inclined to wish everyone back home a merry Christmas.

Why were you so keen to get away for Christmas?" Cass asked Josh during their lunch of thick, hearty soup and soft, warm bread.

"Family," Josh simply said. "My mother has a bee in her bonnet about finding me a more stable job and fixing me up with the daughter of her best friend. You?"

"You're not keen?" said Cass, bouncing the question back.

"No," he grinned. "On both fronts. I'm happy in my work and more than capable of finding the right girl myself. I've simply been waiting for her to stumble into my path."

Cass's heart skittered. She had known Josh for less than twenty-four hours. His presence had put paid to her plans for a solitary seasonal celebration and yet there was something about him which made her feel comforted and safe and not at all resentful. The warm smile he gave her suggested he felt the same.

"So," he said, "what about you?"

Cass then found herself telling him all about the situation with her family and how she'd recently been struggling to



focus on her work. A little later, with her head still full of the woods, she unpacked her notebook and started to write.

She carried on for hours and went to bed exhausted, but also exhilarated that her creativity hadn't deserted her for good. She imagined the woodland fairy clan, who she named the Fae Family, living among the trees with all manner of magical creatures and she was bursting to record their adventures.

Cass and Josh's highland holiday followed the same pattern for the next few days. They talked, laughed, walked in the woods, and in the evenings, Cass wrote down the stories she had narrated during their snowy strolls. Josh was engrossed in something too, but Cass didn't ask what.

"There's been more snow," she noticed, as she emerged from the bedroom on Christmas Eve morning.

"I've seen," Josh smiled, expertly arranging logs next to the burner. "We better head out early today. Happy Christmas Eve, by the way."

"And to you too," she smiled back.

In the woods, Cass was delighted to again hit the signal hotspot and quickly video called her parents, this time pulling Josh into shot.

"You look amazing, Cass," her sister beamed. "Scottish air agrees with you!"

"Something certainly does," her Dad chimed in.

Cass flushed and shook her head.

"Merry Christmas!" They all happily shouted from opposite ends of the country.

Cass felt surprisingly pleased to have spoken to them as she and Josh headed back to the cottage.

"What's this?" she asked, noticing a book on the table once they were inside again.

"My sketchbook," said Josh. "I don't know how it got there though. Take a look."

Cass gasped as she flicked through the pages.

"It's the Fae Family," she whispered, taking in the intricate ink drawings. "Exactly as I imagined them. You drew these?" she asked, looking at Josh with even stronger feelings than she'd had before.

"My head's been full of them since that first walk in the woods," he smiled, "And when you described them, I had to bring them to life."

"So, this is your unstable line of work," she swallowed, only then

realising that he hadn't told her what he did. "You're an artist."

"An illustrator," he said. "I've never drawn anything like this before though."


"They're perfect," said Cass. "They have to go in the book."

She hadn't even pitched the idea to her agent, but Cass could already see the beautifully illustrated book on the shelves.

"A professional collaboration," nodded Josh. "I'd be up for that."

A gust of wind blew the door open and Josh rushed to close it, picking up the mistletoe which had been knocked from its hook above the threshold. He carried it over to Cass and held it up.

Their first kiss was sweet, tender and filled with magic.

The Fae Family clearly had more than a professional partnership in mind for the two strangers who had found themselves snowed in for Christmas... 

The Winter Garden by Heidi Swain, Simon & Schuster, PBO, £7.99. Out now. From the Sunday Times Bestseller comes Heidi Swain's tenth dazzling novel. When Freya Fuller realises her childhood dream of becoming a gardener, life is looking up. That is until local artist Finn makes an appearance, along with Freya's estranged family. Full of all things Christmas, snowfall, roaring fires and warming romance.



Chris Pascoe's
Fun Tales

A Room With A View

Chris reflects on a strange hum in the middle of the night...

Has anyone heard the “hum”? Strange opening line, I know, but a few nights ago I awoke at two in the morning and realised the motorway sounded quite a lot closer than usual. Starting to drift back to sleep, I suddenly jerked awake because, not for the first time while trying to adjust to having moved homes, I realised I was on the Isle of Wight and there are no motorways. In fact, I shouldn't have been able to hear traffic noise from the bedroom at all.

I tried to open the window fully which has started sticking as we move into winter. I wiggled the handle and gave an almighty tug. The window stayed firmly shut, mainly because, had I been properly awake, I'd have realised I needed to push, not pull. My

From our window were festive lights reflected in the water

hand slipped off the handle at rocket speed and I fell back onto the bed, almost doing a backward roll as my legs shot high in the air and my head slapped down on my wife.

“What on earth are you doing?” came the immediate shout. Lorraine can go from deep sleep to intense rage in the blink of an eye.

After a brief scuffle we both stood at the bedroom window, slightly dazzled at the sheer quantity of Christmas lights

that had appeared on a house on the opposite side of our inlet, but marvelling at their beautiful twinkling festive reflections on the water. We

were also aware of a hum that seemed to emanate from just about everywhere, so deep it pulsed right through you. We had no idea what it was, but it was still going when I next woke at 4am.


We haven't heard it since.

The next day a neighbour confirmed he'd also heard it but assumed there must be something wrong with our fridge. That's quite an assumption to make about a hum that filled the entire night

sky. Explaining that our fridge is incapable of that sort of thing, I Googled the hum and it seems we'd heard a mysterious phenomenon that's been occurring at various times all around the world. Nobody knows what it is, but it's so intense some are officially named by the scientific community, such as the Windsor Hum and the Bristol Hum. Some think it comes from the Earth itself, but everyone agrees they haven't a clue.

The only suggestion I could find relevant to our proximity was that it could be submarines communicating at incredibly low frequency. If that's true, I wish submarines would refrain from chatting with each other right outside our house all night. Pack it in! There's another noise I'm

struggling to get used to and I know this one's coming from you, Wightlink Ferries. We live so near their port we sometimes hear onboard tannoy announcements. It's quite surreal to be sitting watching TV, and suddenly hear *Bing bong. We're now approaching the Isle of Wight. Will all passengers please return to their vehicles.*

Twice, without thinking, I've stood up to do just that. Wightlink have me trained like Pavlov's dogs. 

NEW!

Our latest Fun Tales Collection, *The Daftest Rabbit Hops Again & Other Stories* is available from www.dcthomsonshop.co.uk for just £7.99.



Ready For Your Close Up?

Bobbi Brown Senior Pro Artist Warren Dowdall shares his tips for beautiful, glowing Christmas make-up

Prep Up

Prep your skin after cleansing with an illuminating moisturiser (such as Illuminating **Moisture Balm in Bare Glow** £45, BobbiBrown.co.uk) by pumping 2-3 pumps into the fingers and concentrating on the high points of the cheeks, nose, chin and above the eyebrows, giving an instant glow on the skin. Pearl particles give a gorgeous light-reflective glow.

Or try... **Filorga Oxygen-Glow Radiance Cream** £37, Escentual.com



Dewy Skin

Next, for foundation; think dewy, hydrating formula such as **Intensive Skin Serum Foundation SPF40**, a multi-purpose product with skincare benefits and lightweight formula. The active ingredients plump the skin and this combined with prepping skin with moisture balm will ensure the serum foundation doesn't crease or gather in fine lines. Apply with a foundation brush for a luminous, natural-looking finish. £50, Bobbibrown.co.uk Or try... **Illamasqua Beyond Foundation** £33, Illamasqua.com



Conceal Plus

As you get older, your skin's natural oil production starts to slow which can lead to a duller, drier complexion, so it's important to use hydrating products. Apply **Intensive Skin Serum Concealer** to the under eye area to rejuvenate and instantly brighten. Apply with a touch-up brush for an even finish. £30, Bobbibrown.co.uk Or try... **Diorskin Forever Skin Correct** £22.50, Escentual.com



Get Glowing

Apply Bronzing Powder to emulate a healthy sun-kissed glow. Sweep your bronzer with a blending brush where you naturally catch the sun: top of the forehead, around the face to across the cheeks and nose, under the jaw and onto the neck. Pro tip: If your hair is up, don't forget to bronze your ears lightly for an all over, natural looking flush! £7.99, Superdrug



Fluffy Brow

Brush the brow hairs up for a lifted effect and apply your pencil/powder/gel in brushstroke-like motions in line with your hair. Try **Perfectly Defined Long Wear Brow Pencil**; it's long wearing, waterproof and easy to apply. £30.50, Bobbibrown.co.uk Or try... **Stila Sketch & Sculpt Brow Pencil** £18, Stila.co.uk



Blush Flush

For a bloom of colour, apply blush on the apples of your cheeks. For a healthy radiant glow, I recommend cream blush such as **Pot Rouge**. Simply press with your fingers on to your cheeks for a touch of colour. Top off with a dusting of highlighter. Swipe over blusher on the cheekbones, plus a light dusting down the nose and forehead – areas naturally bronzed by the sun.

£22.50, Bobbibrown.co.uk
(highlighter) **£20**



Smoky Eyes

Cream eyeshadow is best for mature skin, such as **Long Wear Cream Shadow Stick**. It blends without dragging and feels natural. Apply a base colour to suit your skin tone to the whole of your eyelid and blend with your fingers. For a smoky effect, apply a darker colour along the lash line and smudge upwards with your fingers. **£24, Bobbibrown.co.uk**

Or try... **Lasting Colour Luxe Cream Eyeshadow £10**, Autograph at M&S



All The Gloss

For a fuller glossy lip, apply your lip pencil just along the outer edge of your natural lip line and slightly fill in the lip. Apply your favourite lip gloss to the centre of the lip for a plumping effect. I love our **Crushed Oil-Infused Glosses** as they are super moisturising and compliment any lip colour.

Or try... **High Shine Gloss, £8.99**,
mybimahinamakeup.com



Hey Presto!

Apply your favourite mascara and add 2-3 coats for a dramatic fuller lash. Choose one such as Smoky Eye Mascara, with the blackest kohl pigment for that beautiful dark lash effect and a small wand to get every single lash to separate and lengthen.

£25.50, Bobbibrown.co.uk



The Magic Of Christmas

When her son asks Santa for a different gift out of the blue, will it be the last straw for beleaguered mum Jen?

Jack stared up at Santa, his little face a picture and, despite the heavy parcels dragging her down, Jen couldn't help a lump forming in her throat.

"And what would you like Santa to bring you for Christmas, young man?" Santa was asking him. Jen held her breath.

"A guitar," Jack announced, his stocky little body planted firmly in front of Santa.

Jen's heart sank. Where on earth had that come from? He hadn't asked for a guitar, never mentioned one. Nobody in the family played the guitar.

"I'd like a twelve-string acoustic guitar," he declared boldly.

Santa's stomach bounced up and down as he chuckled.

"My, you really know your guitars, don't you? Well, I'm sure he will bring you one."

Santa gave Jen one of those knowing looks, the sort that says, *You have a very smart young man here and I'm sure you have just the thing for him this Christmas.*

But she didn't. She and Steve had bought their five-year-old son his first bike. It was what he had wanted more than anything. Money had been tight this year, but with the extra shifts she'd done at the surgery and the long hours Steve put in at the garden centre they'd managed to get some of the things they knew the children wanted, plus a few surprises.

She knew nothing about a twelve-string acoustic guitar. And now Santa had promised Jack that he would get one for Christmas.

Jen wanted to shout at Santa, tell him he was being unreasonable – that he should never have asked her son what he wanted for Christmas. That was up to his parents; it had nothing to do with him.

But of course, it had everything to do with Santa. Wasn't that why she had trailed the kids into this busy shopping centre on the last Saturday before Christmas? She should have brought them to see him weeks ago, but time had caught up with her.

Ellie was next, and Jen was tempted to curtail this visit before she had two nasty surprises to contend with. But all was well. Her seven-year-old posed no problems. Ellie wanted a selection of board games and art products. That was fine. They

knew about those, and had them safely wrapped and ready.

Santa produced a parcel for each of her children, they thanked him and she ushered them out of the grotto.

"What's a thingy string guitar, Mum?" Ellie asked. "I didn't know Jack wanted a guitar for Christmas."

Jen sighed. "Neither did I, love." She turned to her son. "What's all this about, Jack? What do you want a guitar for?"

Jack launched into a complicated explanation about how one of his friends at school was getting one for Christmas and how they were going to form a pop group and go on telly and be famous.

"But you've never played a guitar."

"Steven said that didn't matter. He's going to teach me."

Jen tried her best to persuade him it would be better to wait until he was a bit older for that. But Jack was adamant. Santa had said that he would get one. He was beaming all over his face and Jen felt panic rising.

*"No!" she barked.
"We can't feed the
kids on chips just
because we're too
busy to cook them
proper meals"*

When she arrived home, Steve was chatting to that Gloria woman over the fence. The kitchen sink was still full of breakfast dishes. Wearily Jen dumped the shopping, rolled up her sleeves and set to.

Steve came into the kitchen and opened the fridge for a can of beer.

"Had a good day?" he asked, trying not to notice what she was doing.

"No, not really. I've done the shopping, taken the kids to see Santa and come home to a sink full of washing up. How about you? Have you had a good day?" she said sarcastically.

He gave her a guilty look.

"Sorry, love. I only got in an hour ago.

It's been hectic at work, everyone wanting last minute Christmas trees and holly wreaths. Look, you sit down and I'll make you a cup of tea."

"And who's going to wash the dishes and cook the dinner?"

He came up behind her and put his arm round her waist. She wriggled free and turned to face him.

"Somebody has to do it. And that somebody always seems to be me."

"Look, let me get something from the chippy, save you cooking."

"No!" she barked at him. "We can't feed the kids on chips just because we're too busy to cook them proper meals."

"OK, OK," he said defensively and, sensing he wouldn't get anywhere just then, backed out of the room.

Sighing deeply, Jen finished the dishes and took some potatoes out to peel. She really shouldn't get at him like this. He worked hard, too. It was just that there was so much to do and she was so tired.

Can we try on our costumes for the Nativity play?" Ellie asked Steve, after they'd eaten.

"Of course you can. Ask Mummy where they are."

Jack went running up to the bedroom where Jen was busy making up spare beds for the family, ready for their arrival on Christmas Eve.

"Mum, have you finished my Nativity outfit?" he shouted.

Jen left the beds and went to sort out suitable things to drape round him for the church Nativity play the following morning. Why did the church have to do this so near to Christmas when there was so much else to do?

The problem of the guitar loomed large in her mind. She would have to discuss it with Steve after the children went to bed.

That's totally out of the question," Steve retorted when she broached the subject. "They cost far too much. He can't even play a simple guitar yet."

"I don't think he knows what this expensive one is. But he is expecting a



guitar. Santa asked him what he wanted and he told him. You can't blame him for that," she protested.

"Well – he won't be getting one and that's all there is to it. We've got his bike. That's enough, surely."

"It will spoil the magic of Christmas for him." Jen sighed.

"Then he'll have to get used to it."

Steve got up and walked from the room. Jen knew it was the end of the discussion.

And he was right. There was no way they could afford any sort of guitar. But it was just one more thing to worry about as she sat finishing the angel costume for Ellie to wear at the Nativity play at church in the morning.

Finally, she went to join Steve where he was dozing in front of the television. He woke when he heard her come into the room and pulled her down beside him on the sofa.

"Look, tell me what all this is about," he insisted. "It's more than this thing about the guitar. You've not been yourself for days, Jen. Everything I do seems to annoy you, and the children can't do anything right either."

She tried to explain how stressed she was trying to cope with everything, but it sounded pathetic.

Steve squeezed her hand reassuringly.

"Look, we have loads of presents for the kids, more than is good for them. Mum will help with the dinner. And no one's going to inspect the house for dust."

Jen wasn't sure about that. Steve's mum was very houseproud and she was a superb cook. They usually went there for Christmas dinner, and everything went like clockwork. The table looked like something out of a magazine, the food was delicious and Eleanor always seemed so relaxed.

This year, because Steve's dad hadn't been too well, they had decided it was time they took over the chore and had ended up with twelve for dinner in three days time. The thought terrified Jen.

The children were up early next day, excited about the church Nativity. Jack had his shepherd's outfit on by eight, though the service wasn't until eleven.

"I'll ice the cake when I get back," Jen told Steve. She had hoped that he would

come with her to church this morning. He didn't usually, as he worked most Sundays at the garden centre.

Today, he told her, he wanted to relax and she could understand that. But it would have been nice for the children to have had him there just this once. She left him reading the local paper and, as she ushered them out through the door, she couldn't help feeling a stab of resentment.

It was a crisp, bright morning as the three of them walked through the village to the church. Ellie trotted in front taking tiny steps in her angel dress while Jack plodded behind and kept tripping up on the piece of blanket she had secured round his waist.

As the tiny stone church came into view, the bells began to ring and Jen felt her mood lift. Somehow, she would get everything done. Somehow, she would get dinner on the table on Christmas Day... and somehow she would get the house clean and tidy.

If only she didn't have to do that extra shift at the doctor's surgery she'd volunteered for tomorrow. It had seemed a good idea at the time. In fact, they wouldn't have been able to get the →

things they had for Christmas without that extra bit of money. They had both wanted to make sure it was a good Christmas for everyone.

She deposited the children with Madge, their Sunday school teacher, and found herself a space at the end of a pew with some neighbours. By the time she'd exchanged pleasantries the bells had ceased and the minister was leading the choir down the aisle.

The service was to be a simple enactment of the Nativity, interspersed with carols. Madge began to read from the Bible, in her soft, gentle voice, the story of Christmas.

In small groups, the children began to walk silently down the aisle. First came Mary and Joseph. They positioned themselves around the crib in the stable scene which had been set in front of the altar. Then came the angel with her star held high. Jen felt a lump in her throat. It was her very own little angel, the one who had been causing her so much stress only hours ago, now proud and solemn.

Then came three little shepherds, bent over their crooks, slowly making their way down the aisle towards the scene. Her little shepherd adjusted his headdress, which had slipped down over his eyes.

"Let us now stand and sing," the minister was saying. The organ piped up and the whole church resonated to the sound of *While Shepherds Watched*. Jen felt a wonderful sense of belonging as she gave it her all.

Then they sat again and the Wise Men were walking proudly down the aisle towards the stable, precious gifts carefully borne aloft. There was silence in that tiny church. Old and young alike were experiencing the joy of that first Christmas.

The story unfolded, the singing loud and joyous, the children playing their part without fault. Jen felt a peace she hadn't felt for some time.

This was the true meaning of Christmas. The presents and cards and all the fuss about food and entertaining were part of it because it was a celebration. And not only of Christmas. It was a celebration of her lovely family. Her children, so precious, her husband whom she loved dearly and their parents and grandparents who would all share her joy on Christmas Day.

When they got home Steve was out but the car was on the drive. When she went to look in the garden for him, her nosy neighbour, Annie, called over the fence. "Saw your Steve driving off with



Gloria. Want to watch that one, you do."

Jen felt a moment of concern. Had she driven him away with her constant fussing and worrying?

"Why's Dad gone off with Gloria?" Jack wanted to know.

"I've no idea," she snapped at him, then when she saw his downcast face she tried to smile. "I expect he'll be back soon."

"Dad likes Gloria. He said she's a good sort. And she does throw the ball back if it goes in her garden. Not like Annie. She keeps it and we have to go and ask for it."

Jen busied herself getting lunch, worrying all the time. What was he

*The story unfolded,
the singing loud
and joyous. Jen felt
a peace she hadn't
felt for a long time*

doing going off without telling her, and with that awful woman? She'd already had two husbands, and had recently sent a third packing.

After another hour had passed, and being unable to contact Steve on his mobile, she was seriously worried. Maybe Gloria was better company than she was, with all her nagging and fretting.

When she heard the front door open, she made an effort not to snap at him. She'd let him tell her in his own good time. But he was behaving in a very strange way and her unease grew.

"Any chance of a sandwich? I'm starving," he remarked, following her into the kitchen.

She handed him the plate she had

saved from lunchtime. When the children went out of the room and upstairs to find a game they wanted to play, he looked up from the kitchen table.

"So, don't you want to know where I've been?" he asked.

"I expect you'll tell me eventually," she snapped.

"Jen – I couldn't say anything in front of the children."

A horrible chill gripped her.

"I went to get the guitar for Jack."

She turned and stared at him as if he'd told her he'd robbed a bank.

"Don't look at me like that," he said in alarm. "I was looking for a cheap second hand guitar in the paper when you went out this morning. It's why I didn't go to church. I wanted to surprise you."

"Then Gloria came knocking and said Jack had told her he'd asked Santa for a guitar for Christmas, and that her nephew was selling his. She took me to see it because it was easier than explaining where he lived. It was some back-of-beyond place. I couldn't even get a signal to let you know where I was."

"So where is this guitar?" she asked, still trying to take all this in.

"In her house. I'll get it later when the kids are in bed. It's second-hand and not exactly what Jack described to Santa, but I really don't think he'll notice. It was quite cheap and it's in perfect condition. I think he'll be happy with it."

Again he hesitated. "It was like you said. Santa asked him what he wanted."

She still looked stunned.

He was becoming more and more anxious. "Jen, I did it because I thought it was what was upsetting you. That you thought it would spoil the magic of Christmas for Jack if Santa didn't keep his word. You are pleased, aren't you?"

She was so pleased she could hardly contain herself and flung her arms round him. He hugged her back.

"Am I forgiven for not going to church?"

"Of course you are, you dope."

Steve had gone to all that trouble to find the present Jack had asked for and he had done it to make her happy. And she was more than happy. Somehow the turkey would get cooked, the house would get cleaned, and the family would get fed on Christmas Day. And Jack would have the present Santa had promised him.

It may not turn out to be the perfect Christmas... but it was going to be their best Christmas ever. 🍷

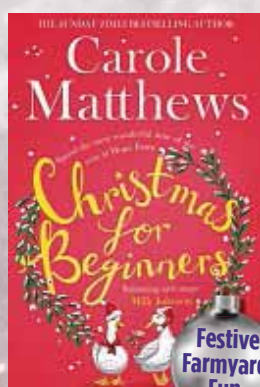
BY JEAN ROBINSON

Best Festive Books

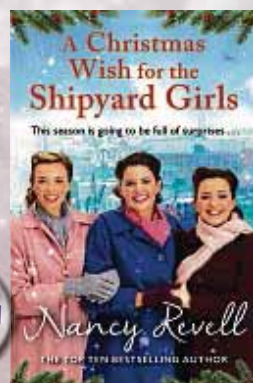
Here's our fiction editor Claire's pick of the best reads for the Christmas season...



CHRISTMAS CRACKERS



Festive Farmyard Fun



One Family Christmas

by **Bella Osborne**, Avon, PBO, £7.99

Time for one last big family Christmas for Lottie at the home she grew up in. Dinner for 12 should be fun, but family tensions bubble as hot as the sprouts on the stove...

A Christmas Wish For The Shipyard Girls

by **Nancy Revell**, Penguin, PBO, £7.99

Set during WWII, this latest instalment follows Helen, Bel and Polly as they navigate Christmas at the shipyard. The usual warmth from Revell, featuring lovable characters and heart-warming storylines.

Christmas For Beginners

by **Carole Matthews**, Sphere, HB, £14.99

A Nativity full of alpacas, sheep and badly behaved humans... will it be a seasonal success or showdown? Super sequel to the best-selling *Happiness For Beginners*.

All I Want For Christmas

by **Joanna Bolouri**, Quercus, PBO, £8.99

There's nothing like losing your job at a top law firm, only to find yourself accepting a post as Santa in a local Christmas grotto! A festive romance in all its Technicolor® fairylight glory.

CHRISTMAS CHILLS

The Chalet

by **Catherine Cooper**, HARPER COLLINS, PBO, £7.99

Four friends, one French Alps getaway... the perfect murder. Split between 1998 and 2018, this books spans time and snow in a fabulous, thrilling debut. A ride-of-your-life kind of read.

Silent Night

by **Nell Pattison**, Avon, PBO, £7.99

On an overnight trip to the snowy woods, five teenagers from a school for the deaf go to sleep but only four wake up. Sign language interpreter Paige Northwood is back on hand to help with the creepy investigation.

Seasonal Showstoppers!

With easy-to-follow recipes, these desserts will give your festive table the wow factor – why not make all three?



Chocolate Orange Cheesecake

Ingredients (Serves 8)

For the biscuit base:

- ◆ 200g digestive biscuits, crushed
- ◆ 80g butter
- ◆ 50g dark chocolate, broken into pieces
- ◆ 1tbsp cocoa powder

For the filling:

- ◆ 1 tablet orange jelly
- ◆ Finely grated zest and juice of 1 orange
- ◆ Juice of ½ lemon

- ◆ 3 x 250g packs full fat soft cheese

- ◆ 100g caster sugar
- ◆ 150ml double cream

To decorate:

- ◆ 150ml double cream, whipped until thick
- ◆ 1 orange, segmented
- ◆ 8 chocolate pretzels
- ◆ 80g dark chocolate, melted

1 Gently melt the butter and chocolate in a saucepan, removing from the heat before fully melted to make sure that it doesn't get too hot. Stir until smooth, then add the biscuit crumbs and cocoa powder and stir well.

2 Tip the biscuit crumbs into a 20cm loose-based or spring-form cake tin and press into an even layer with the back of a spoon or your hand, or try using a potato masher to press the crumbs down gently but firmly. Chill in the freezer for 10min.

3 Dissolve the jelly in 200ml boiling water, then add the orange and lemon juice. Cool. In a large bowl, beat together the soft cheese, sugar and orange zest. Whip the cream until it holds its shape. Stir the cooled jelly into the cheese mixture, then fold in the whipped cream. Pour over the biscuit crumb base and chill until set – at least 2 hours, or overnight.

4 To release, dip the tin in hand hot water for 10-15 seconds up to the rim. Carefully turn out onto a serving plate. Decorate with swirls of whipped cream, orange segments, chocolate pretzels and drizzled melted chocolate. →



Cook's tip:

If you use chocolate digestive biscuits for the base, you don't need the chocolate and cocoa powder.



Raspberry And Lemon Drizzle Trifles These luxurious trifles are such a treat!

Ingredients (Serves 6)

- ◆ 400g Madeira cake, cut into 1cm slices
- ◆ 4-5tbsp raspberry jam
- ◆ 200g raspberries (thawed if frozen)
- ◆ 180ml sweet sherry or Marsala
- ◆ 3tbsp lemon juice
- ◆ 1 jar lemon curd
- ◆ 150g ready-made custard
- ◆ 200ml double cream
- ◆ 12 mini lemon meringue shells (from M&S)
- ◆ Mint sprigs

- 1 Spread half the Madeira cake slices with jam and sandwich together with the rest. Cut into pieces and share between 6 serving glasses (or use 1 large dish).
- 2 Share most of the raspberries between the dishes, reserving some for decoration. Mix together the sherry or Marsala and lemon juice with 3tbsp water and spoon over the cake.
- 3 Mix together the lemon curd and custard, then share this between the dishes. Chill until ready to serve.
- 4 To finish, whip the cream in a chilled bowl until it holds its shape. Spoon on top of the trifles. Decorate with the mini lemon meringue shells, reserved raspberries and sprigs of mint.

Rum And Mince Pie Ice Cream

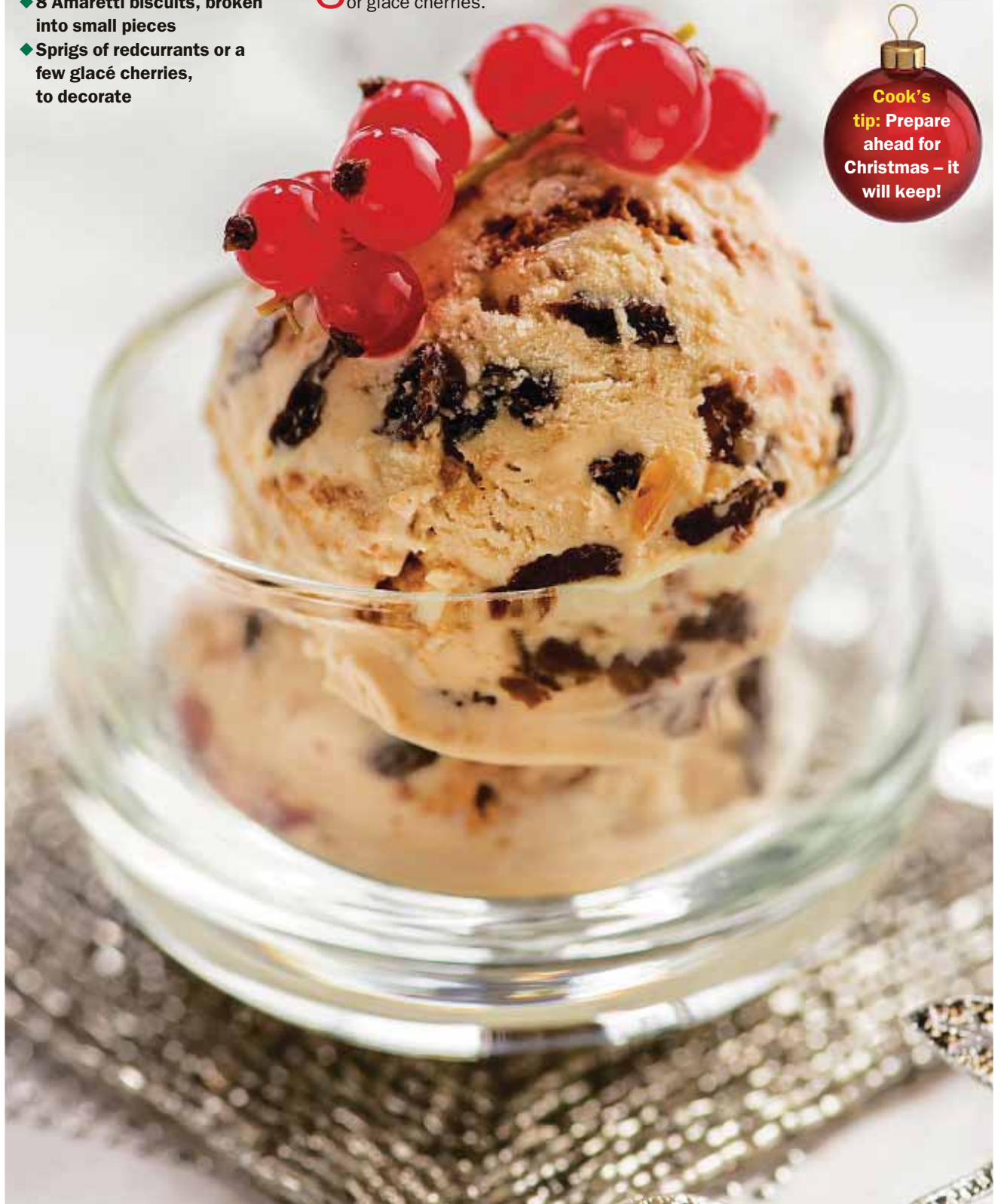
Give a festive flavour to this delicious ice cream!

Ingredients

- ◆ 6tbsp luxury mincemeat
- ◆ 50g glacé cherries, quartered
- ◆ 3tbsp rum
- ◆ 2 x 500ml tubs good quality vanilla ice cream
- ◆ 8 Amaretti biscuits, broken into small pieces
- ◆ Sprigs of redcurrants or a few glacé cherries, to decorate

- 1 Mix together the mincemeat, glacé cherries and rum and leave to soak for 10-15min while the ice cream softens.
- 2 Tip the ice cream into a bowl and break it down with a fork. Stir in the mincemeat mixture and broken biscuits. Return to a freezer container and freeze until solid – preferably overnight.
- 3 Serve, decorated with redcurrant sprigs or glacé cherries.

Cook's tip: Prepare ahead for Christmas – it will keep!



The REAL Star Of Christmas!

Pigs in blankets, kilted sausages, Wesley Dogs – call them what you like, we all love them! Make your own or try a tasty variation

With research from Tesco revealing pigs in blankets are the nation's favourite trimming, we thought it was about time we recognised this delicious snack.

Our American cousins like to claim that they invented them, and the first recipe for them did appear in a *Kids Cookbook* by Betty Crocker in 1957. However they can be traced back to Czechoslovakia or Germany, where they are known as Würstchen im Schlafrock (little sausages in a dressing gown).

Pigs in blankets are traditionally made by cutting streaky bacon rashers in half lengthways and wrapping each mini chipolata sausage tightly in the bacon. It couldn't be simpler! You might like to try smoked streaky bacon for added flavour, or dip your chipolatas before wrapping them. Try a little honey with



Asda's Candied Pigs in Blankets

wholegrain mustard, or mango chutney and 1tsp sesame or poppy seeds. You could always rustle

up a quick dipping sauce for the pigs in blankets – mix honey, Dijon mustard, mayonnaise, sour cream and lemon juice for a sweet dip that balances out the salty pork taste.

For a real sweet treat, try **Candied Pigs In Blankets, £2.25, Asda**. These tasty morsels come with a sachet of spiced sugar and are perfect served with pancakes and maple syrup. You don't have to wait for Christmas dinner – you could have them for breakfast!

Try Lidl's Deluxe Pigs In Blankets crisps, 75p, if you need a quick hit. They taste just like the real thing!



Go Large!

Of course you don't have to have mini pigs in blankets. **Tesco are doing Giant Pigs in Blankets, £2**, that could make a whole meal. Or for something completely different, what about **pigs in blankets chocolates**? Chocolatier Paul A Young invented them to celebrate the launch of Sony Movies Christmas festive movie channel. We love Christmas, and we love pigs in blankets – but chocolate ones? We're still debating that!



Would you try one?



Giant Pigs in Blankets (left) from Tesco

Pigs In Blankets Yorkshires

Such a great combination!

Preparation time: 15min

Cooking time: 30min

Serves 6 (2 per person)

- ◆ 12 pigs in blankets (bacon-wrapped cocktail sausages)
- ◆ 2tsp vegetable oil
- ◆ 50g plain flour
- ◆ Pinch salt
- ◆ 1 small egg
- ◆ 100ml semi-skimmed milk
- ◆ 1tsp wholegrain mustard

1 Preheat the oven to 210°C, fan oven 190°C, Gas Mark 7. Put the pigs in blankets into a 12-hole mini muffin tin. Add a few drops of oil to each one. Bake for 15min while making the batter.

2 Whisk together the flour, salt, egg, milk and mustard to make a smooth batter (this only takes seconds). Pour into a jug. Cover and leave to stand.

3 When the sausages have been baking for 15min, quickly pour in the



batter over each of them and close the oven door. Bake for a further 15-20min, until risen and golden. Cool for 2-3min, then serve.

Pop Them In Your Trolley



◆ **Tesco Plant Chef Pigless Blankets (Vegan), £2.00, Tesco.** 10 juicy Cumberland-style sausages packed with pea protein, roasted mushrooms and onions, hand-rolled in a vegan pastry.



◆ **Extra Special Pigs On Fire, £2.75, Asda.** Made with prime cuts of British pork and blended with Carolina Reaper hot chillies, these fiery sausages are wrapped with a jalapeno in oak-smoked streaky bacon.



◆ **Maple & Bacon Whorls, £6.50, Waitrose & Partners.** Pork sausagemeat, smoked bacon and sweet maple syrup – a classic mix of savoury and sweet.



BY STACEY
HALLS

Joy To The World

She crossed busy London streets, alive with the joy of the season, carrying her precious bundle...

The bells at St Martin-in-the-Fields were ringing when I left the house. Mrs Spencer closed the door behind me and I stood for a moment on the step, looking down to the river and up to the Strand. I turned right at the bottom, ascending the gentle incline of Craven Street, which was alive with festivities. Doors stood open despite the winter night, with neighbours going in and out laden with bottles and packages. Most of the windows had the shutters thrown open, revealing lamplit scenes of joviality.

Mrs Spencer had accompanied me to the front door, giving the baby's cheek a final stroke as the air swept in. It was the first time I'd been outside in almost a month, the first time I'd felt the cold, since the little fire in my room had been burning for nine days, and the thick curtains drawn against the drafts. It was the longest I'd been idle in my life.

Tomorrow was Christmas, the end of my lying in. Mrs Hobbes the cook had been preparing the food for days. From my bed in the attic I had heard the area gate clanging open and closed all morning with deliveries, and the pleasant scents of cloves, cinnamon and sugar drifted up from the kitchen.

St Martin was all aglow, and the sound of carollers flooded the square. My baby was fastened in a warm shawl, dressed in the Spencer children's old clothes that had lain in a trunk for more than thirty years: a fine holland cap, with a cambric border, white corded dimity sleeves, the shirt ruffled with cambric. Mrs Spencer had taken great pleasure in choosing my daughter's garments and having them laundered and pressed, presenting them to me as she might a Christening gown. I set them on the bed with a heavy heart and told her I was grateful. I would have liked to have made something myself, but it was too late.

The carol was *Joy To The World*. I paused for a moment at the doors, with their golden edges, the mark of safety and comfort within. I had not been with the family to church for several months, unable to hide my stomach, and my

shame, though of course the servants spilled my secret over Craven Street's cobbles: Alice with her loose tongue had a cousin in the next road, and Mrs Spencer's sister-in-law Mrs Phelps had found me on the stairs when I was big, noticing my stomach.

*Joy to the world, the Lord has come,
Let earth receive her king!*

I hoped she was not cold, and moved on briskly, up St Martin's Lane and along Long Acre. Mrs Spencer had offered to come with me, but I preferred to make the journey alone. I'd walked there twice myself before in the autumn, once in daylight and once in the darkness to make certain that I knew the way.

*And every heart prepare him room
And heaven and nature sing*

The frivolity was almost unbearable. I would have liked a month with her, but

*The assumption he
made was a
comfort to me –
that I was an
ordinary mother*

the family needed me at Christmas. They needed me every day. Relatives were descending in the morning, and all the bedrooms had to be aired and dressed. The scullery was full of dripping sheets and roaring fires, and I'd noticed a most displeasing streak of coal dust on my palm from the banister.

Order had to be reset; in my absence as housekeeper the house had not been kept. I had worked for the Spencers for sixteen years, beginning the week after Albert died. The pox took him from me and left me with nothing, no children, no income. I'd gone to the covered market in Covent Garden where domestics presented themselves for work and bawds circled, and on the fourth day Mrs Spencer had approached me. I was very grateful, going along to her house on

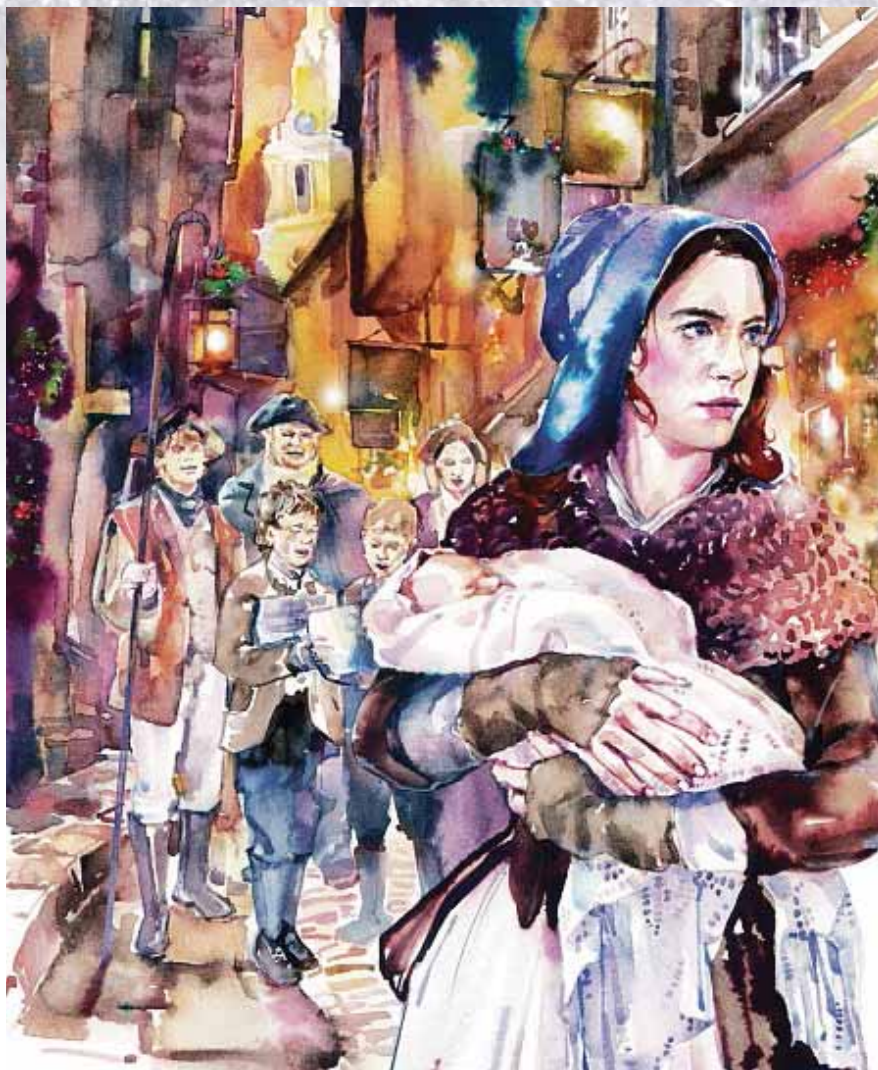
Craven Street and starting as a chambermaid, carrying coals and boiling water and eventually rising upwards in the house, from a cot in the kitchen to a bed in the attic.

I'd been twenty-nine years old then, was now forty-five, in the twilight of my life. Nobody had been more surprised than me to find myself with child. In seven years of marriage to Albert my monthlies came without fail, and all the little blankets I'd sewn and saved I gave to a neighbour, who birthed a babe every year between January and April.

Lincoln's Inn Fields was quiet, the lawmen home for the holiday, their wigs and books shut away. My daughter was sleeping, unaware of the fact we were outside, that it was Christmas Eve, of what would happen next. She was a week old exactly, though I felt I'd known her all my life.

A man snored in a sedan, and one of his carriers shared a wry look, glancing at the baby in my arms and giving a smile. It was a comfort to me, the assumption he made, that I was an ordinary mother, on her way perhaps to her own mother's, or somewhere else for Christmas. I nodded politely and continued north, crossing the thoroughfare to Red Lyon Street, which began amid throngs of carriages and shops and people, peering out from between a vintner's and a furniture shop, and melting into countryside half a mile north, where fields spread wide beneath a velvet-dark sky. With all the coal smoke the stars did not often come out in London, but here at the edge of the city, on the distant horizon they glittered like snow.

The street was quiet, the grander houses here shut up for the season, their occupants gone north and east and west to even grander homes. A set of wide black gates stood at the furthest point, with a statue atop a stone edifice. No carriages came here, and the road was deserted as I came to a halt and heaved a great sigh. A porter's lodge glowed merrily behind the gates, a trail of smoke




dreadfully moving I could not bear it, but I let go, and she was inside the basket, like Moses in the reeds. A great bell hung on the gate, and I rung it before scurrying off like a beetle into the darkness, empty of arm and heart, finding a spot beside a high wall and watching the porter's lodge. The chimney went on smoking, the windows glowing. I watched and trembled but nobody came out.

I had no sense of how long I waited. I turned my attention to the laundry, and the larder, and Alice's forgetfulness, reminding myself to check that the cornicing in the hall had been dusted. Tomorrow the family would descend, Mrs Spencer's three grown-up children, two of whom had families, bouncing babies and older children, filling the house with noise and life and joy.

Joy, that was her name, I realised as still no one came. I hadn't wanted to name her, knowing she wasn't mine to keep, but it felt right, the curling J like her little finger, the perfect round O, like her tiny pink mouth.

Mrs Hobbles had bought two plump birds for tomorrow, a goose and a chicken for the feast. She had been very kind to me, sending up ginger biscuits and brandy when I was lying in. She had been practising her recipe for the youngest Spencer son returned from Antigua, for they were his favourite. She wanted to perfect it because he always made such a fuss of her, and it was his first-time home in over nine months.

Before I knew what I was doing, I walked to the basket and lifted the baby, putting my hands beneath her, holding her to me. She barely stirred, tilting her head towards me, to where it fit at my breast. Together we walked back the way I came, down through Bloomsbury and Covent Garden. The streets were quiet; Christmas had moved from the pavements to the parlours.

The carol service was almost over at St Martin's as I carefully entered the vestibule, shutting out the cold and the silence, and finding the warmth. The congregation was standing, a body of hats and coats and voices. I opened my mouth and began to sing. 

drifting from a single chimney. I looked along the length of the railings and saw it on the right-hand side: a brown basket, looped with lengths of cord around the iron. It was so ordinary looking, so insignificant.

I felt the grief come then, as though it had been waiting for that moment to land like a blow to my chest. I wiped at my eyes with my free hand. My tears were as silent as the stars. Nearby came the low of livestock, and I thought how unfair it was that cows could keep their calves, and sheep their lambs, for longer than women could keep their babies.

I sighed again, feeling the weight of my child, the only child I had, the only one I would ever have. I'd hidden my growing stomach for months beneath aprons, letting out my stays and half-expiring with relief upon returning at night to my rooms in the attic. However, Mrs Spencer missed nothing. I had thought she hadn't noticed when I was tired and peaky. Once or twice she had attempted a conversation about the father, but I had told no one. I knew she was wondering how it could possibly

have happened, with just a day's leave a month, and my advanced age. She had been good to me, insisting I rested when I passed it off initially as a stomach complaint, and becoming generously complicit when it became clear it was not. Many mistresses would have turned out their servants like dust from a pan.

Mr Spencer had passed four years before in his sleep, his soul slipping out into the night. He was a good master, kind to his wife and respectful to his servants. He treated me with the same detached courtesy as a housekeeper as when I'd been a chambermaid. He liked having women in the house, his wife had said; he had been raised with five sisters and found it quite a comfort.

Distantly, bells chimed again. Tomorrow the servants would rise at five, an hour earlier than usual, to begin the day's work. I lowered the baby into the basket, trying to picture the candlesticks on the mantelpiece and the enormous jelly Mrs Hobbles had made that morning. My daughter shifted and gave a little snuffle, the sound so



The Foundling
by Stacey
Halls, Manilla
Press, PB,
£8.99. Out
now.



Our Vision Burns More BRIGHTLY



Mary's Meals founder tells us how the charity is feeding 1.6 million children and shares his hopes for the future

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow is the founder and CEO of Mary's Meals. At the age of 20, he and his brother took a trip to Bosnia with an old Land Rover full of donations from family and friends which set him on a path that saw him leave his job, sell his house and focus his life on feeding the world's poorest children, from the shed in his parents' garden in Argyll.

Among many awards for his endeavours, he received an OBE and is on the 2015 TIME 100 list of the world's most influential people.

He still works from the shed, but he took some time out to talk to us about the

particular problems Mary's Meals has faced in 2020.

"There have been huge challenges. In virtually every country in the world, schools have closed because of the pandemic. Obviously there have been good public health reasons to suspend schools, but you can't suspend feeding children, especially when we know that for many of those children, the meal they receive from Mary's Meals is the only good meal they get in a day.

"As soon as schools started closing our challenge was to find a new way to keep the

promise of a daily meal, and we've managed to do that by working with local communities and health authorities to come up with a new model which allows parents or community leaders to come to our stores at the school and take food home and cook it for the children. So we've been able to keep our promise to the vast majority of the 1.6 million children we were feeding."

And what changes has the pandemic made for Magnus personally?

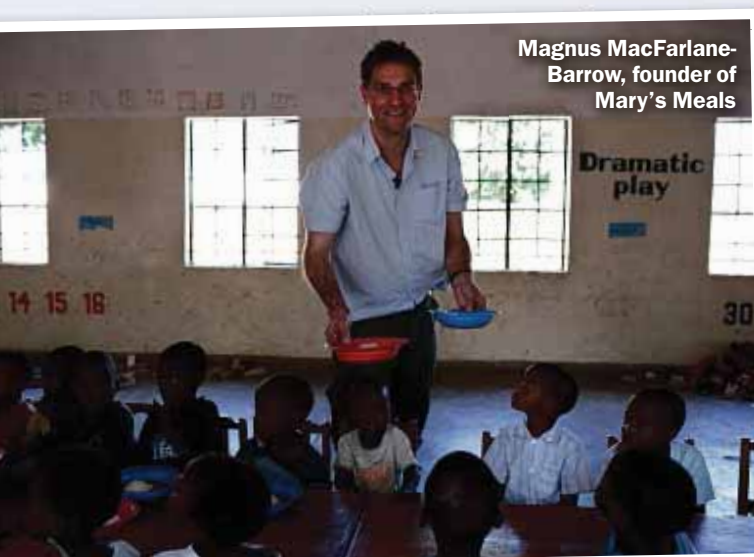
"My life has been very

home for a week but instead I did it by Zoom."

Magnus also told us all about the Aid Match project for this year. "It's a wonderful boost. Donations made by supporters from the beginning of November through to the end of January will be doubled by the UK Government and that's wonderful. That's specifically for a project in Bong County, Liberia, a place which suffers extreme poverty and this campaign will allow us to expand to reach many more children there."

Mary's Meals first began in

"We fed Veronica, who is now a young woman and a leader in her community"



Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, founder of Mary's Meals

different this year. Normally I'm travelling a lot but I haven't travelled at all since March so there's been lots to be thankful about that – more time with my family in particular. I've even been growing some vegetables which I've wanted to do for years but have never been able to do.

"I've also had to learn new ways of doing things, which has been exciting. I should have been in Iowa last week speaking at a conference and would have been away from

2002 and we asked him if he had updates on any of the early recipients of the daily school meal.

"Absolutely! There was a girl called Veronica who was in the very first bunch of children we fed in 2002. She was an orphan raised by her older sisters. She tells us she would never have gone to school if it hadn't been for the meal we were serving there.

"Veronica has recently graduated from university in Malawi and I think she sums up what Mary's Meals is all

HELPING HAND APPEAL 2020


Every child should have at least one good meal a day

about. All of this would have been worth it, just for Veronica. That young lady who is now a leader in her own community, who can bring about change there.”

What plans does Mary's Meals have for the future?

“Well, we see already that thankfully, in many of the countries where we work, schools are reopening, and although there's still huge uncertainty, we do see some signs of normality returning. Our vision that every child in

the world should at least eat a meal every day at school, that vision burns more brightly than ever. That's absolutely possible. So even looking to next year, we have hugely ambitious plans to reach many more thousands of children.

“And we're ready to do that in terms of our plans and our teams on the ground and that's why something like this Aid Match appeal is so important, that we can gain the support to go on to the next child that's waiting.”  MW

Magnus's Message To You

“I'd like to thank every My Weekly reader who has supported this appeal. I want to thank you with all my heart and I want to thank you on behalf of the children who eat because of you. Because I get to meet those children on a regular basis, I hear them say thank you, I hear the stories of how their lives have changed and I know most people who donate don't have that privilege. My Weekly and Mary's Meals have been walking together for many years and it's been amazing to see that faithfulness to our mission. My Weekly has been a very precious part of the Mary's Meals story and I could not be more grateful for it.”

PICTURES: CHRIS WATT, HEATHCLIFF OMALEY

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Donate today and double your love! Give until January 31, 2021 and your donation will be doubled by the UK Government, up to £2 million – meaning we can reach even more hungry children in Liberia with life-changing school meals. Any funds raised above the £2m matched funding target will allow children across 19 countries in which Mary's Meals work to receive a nutritious meal every school day. A donation of just £15.90 to Mary's Meals will feed a child for a whole school year. To help hungry children, send a cheque or postal order, made out to Mary's Meals, to: My Weekly Helping Hand Appeal, Mary's Meals, Craig Lodge, Dalmally, Argyll PA33 1AR. To donate by phone call Freephone 0800 698 1212 or visit www.marysmeals.org.uk to donate online.



Open The Door To Giving

Two years ago, Kristina Salceanu launched an advent calendar which raises money for good causes. This year, she hopes the Advent Of Change will raise half a million pounds for 48 incredible charities...

As the fallout from lockdown continued, I was heartbroken to read in the news that the charity sector had been hit hard. This year, charities face a £10bn fundraising deficit as events were cancelled.

Yet many charitable services are more necessary than ever, with domestic abuse charities, hospices, food banks and those that help the homeless seeing an influx of calls. It has been an unprecedented year, but I have a fire in my belly and a determination to help as many charities as I can.

Three years ago, I noticed a boom in advent calendars with a twist. Behind the doors

were gin, make-up, beauty products and luxury gifts. Greggs even sold a sausage roll calendar.

I had an idea for an advent calendar that donates to a different charity every day of December. In January 2018, still working full-time in marketing, I wrote a presentation for the Advent Of Change and approached charities such as Willow and Born Free. My partner Paul (36) works for a company selling baby goods to John Lewis and I asked him to show my presentation to his contact at the company.

To my amazement, it was passed around until it reached the John Lewis Christmas team. I received an



The 2020 Advent Of Change calendar



The new eco-friendly crackers

email from Dan, the Head of Christmas, telling me he loved the idea. Dan is known as Mr Christmas and he was so enthusiastic, it was thanks to him that the Advent Of Change was ready to launch in time for Christmas 2018.

On social media, people sent videos of themselves opening the doors every day. There was an amazing outpouring of people saying it was the best thing they'd ever

bought, or that they'd be running a marathon in the new year for one of the charities we'd introduced them to. We raised £100,000 and although it was a relentless, exhausting experience, I knew I wanted to go bigger for 2019.

Last year, we supported 72 charities over three calendars, including one for children and one in Braille. We raised £200,000 and helped Emmaus, the homeless charity, help guests find safety, warmth, companionship and support over Christmas. We helped Farms For City Children offer rural respite breaks to inner city children and we donated enough to Winston's Wish to fund 257 memory boxes for bereaved children.

We helped Farm Africa



Kristina's calendar has helped feed children...



...and clean coastlines with the MCS



Kristina has started a movement

“I was humbled to know my idea had connected good people to good causes”

provide life-changing training to chilli farmers, and supporting Wood Green meant we could help provide Christmas dinner for rescued cats and dogs.

Every donation we gave the Marine Conservation Society could clear 12 metres of beach of plastic and litter.

Advent of Change is a non profit organisation. It's all for the charities. The calendar is made with sustainably sourced paper. Rather than plastic, it's wrapped in paper-starch film which composts in 12 weeks.

One of our customers sent us a video last Christmas Eve. All the calendar doors have a description of a charity on, so they'd put all the doors in a hat, picked one and committed

to more fundraising for that charity. It was humbling to know my little idea had connected good people to good causes.

I've introduced products such as candles, a wall calendar and plastic-free crackers. The cracker and contents can be recycled and the hat is compostable. The crackers contain a donation to charity, responsibly sourced paper hats, a card bauble and a joke from a celebrity, including Joanna Lumley, Michael Morpurgo and Ben Fogle, whose joke will make you groan. I'm so grateful to all the celebrities, politicians and customers who supported the cause.

This year, 250 charities applied for 48 slots. So many customers who bought one product in 2018 came back a year later and bought two. I feel the idea is becoming a sustainable, traditional part of Christmas for our customers and it gives me a tremendous sense of purpose.

We're supporting 48 charities this year, including The Cares Family, who bring neighbours together; Shivia, who give families in rural India the tools to escape poverty; FoodCycle, who nourish communities using surplus food; and Cavell Nurses' Trust, who support nurses, midwives and healthcare assistants in the UK. I'm

hoping we'll raise another £200,000, taking us to half a million raised so far.

The last few years have surpassed my wildest dreams but 2020 blindsided us all. Covid-19 has wreaked havoc on society but I think a community spirit has emerged. Charities do so much to support so many. Through the simple yet magical act of pulling a cracker or opening a door of an advent calendar, we can help them carry on. 

◆ The Advent Of Change range is available in store and online at [John Lewis and at \[adventofchange.com\]\(http://adventofchange.com\)](http://JohnLewis.com) Follow the Advent of Change on Instagram @adventofchange

Advent Calendars

◆ **The advent calendar was originated by German Lutherans in the late 19th century.**

◆ **The first ever chocolate advent calendar was created by Cadbury in 1958.**

◆ **President Eisenhower is said to have brought the advent calendar to the United States after a photograph of him and his grandchildren opening one appeared in numerous newspapers.**

◆ **The world's most expensive advent calendar was created by the Belgian company Octagon Blue GCV and cost a £1.7 million! It contained 24 diamonds and specially carved glass angels.**

◆ **The largest advent calendar was built at St Pancras Station in London to mark its refurbishment. It stood 71m high and 23m wide!**

The Christmas Walk

The toddlers may now be teenagers, but a tradition started by two harassed mums continues to give joy...

The winter woods beckoned. A light dusting of snow lingered in the depths of the undergrowth. Liz and Amy could not help grinning as they watched their posse of student daughters lope so easily up the hill in front of them.

It was good to hear them all laughing together, ponytails swinging, mobile phones rammed tightly into the back pockets of their jeans.

The holly walk had been part of their Christmas ritual for as long as Liz could remember. It was Amy's idea initially, she recalled. They were new friends then and both had a houseful of toddlers, all driving them to distraction. Liz had rung Amy at breakfast time after a particularly bad night, where she had been up and down at least twice to both her daughters. One was teething, the other simply refused to settle. Liz was desperate for adult company and the chance to escape the house, whatever the weather. Otherwise she wasn't sure she could answer for her sanity.

"You've heard the carols. Let's deck the halls with boughs of holly and whatever else we find," Amy declared. "I've got secateurs," she added, ever the practical one. "You bring baskets. The girls are bound to sleep better tonight if we can wear them out on your hill."

Amy had been right, of course, and the rescue therapy turned into a favourite Christmas walk. These days the girls wielded the secateurs and were much more daring about reaching for the highest branches. The competition was on to find holly sprigs with the best berries attached.

"This one will be perfect for the Christmas pudding, Mum," Amy's youngest daughter, Polly, called out gleefully. There were shrieks of amusement as the branch she was balancing on snapped and Polly landed, unhurt, in the muddiest puddle.

"Time to head home, I think," Liz raised a quizzical eyebrow as Polly transferred most of the mud to Amy's new red coat as she helped her up.

Polly attempted to apologise, glancing mournfully at her jeans. Mortified, she seized the holly basket her mother held and marched off to rejoin the others.



"Why is it always one of mine who gets soaked?" Amy groaned. She attempted to clean her dirty sleeve with a glove.

"What you need is a nice glass of mulled wine at my house," Liz consoled her, joining in the brushing. "A good dose of Christmas spirit."

Amy grinned and slipped her arm through her friend's as they followed Polly back down the slippery footpath.

Liz checked her secret cupboard and gave a whoop of glee when she found a whole tin of cinnamon stars

Leave your wellies outside!" Liz shouted just in time, as Sophie, her eldest, reached for the handle of the front door.

Luckily her husband, Steve, had the pan of mulled wine on the hob. The comforting scent of spice and orange wafted through the warm kitchen. He ladled them each a glass and they collapsed in the chairs by the fire. The girls swiftly monopolised the sitting room next door, swiping the plate of chocolate biscuits on their way.

Liz checked the Christmas goodies she had tucked away in her secret cupboard. She gave a whoop of glee when she

discovered a whole tin of cinnamon stars. With a house full of hungry students, it was usually safest to hide her favourites.


The afternoon was growing dark by the time Amy and her family left. Liz and Steve waved them off and did a perfunctory tidy up so they could get down to the serious business of decorating.

"I got the boxes down from the attic while you were out," Steve said. "And I managed to fix the tree into our old stand."

Liz stepped back to admire it. The branches looked lovely in the firelight, even without their ornaments. She could smell the heavy scent of fresh pine where Steve had trimmed them.

Decorating the tree felt more like a treasure hunt than an artistic endeavour to Liz. All the baubles and ornaments, hastily wrapped in tissue paper in January, were revealed and spread across coffee tables for selection. Old and fragile, glitzy or just plain silly, they each had their memories. She enjoyed watching her daughters place their favourites on the tree with exaggerated delicacy.

Meanwhile Steve searched for carols to play. The holly on window ledges and picture frames was the final touch.

The girls drifted upstairs. Liz switched off the sitting room light. The tree-lights glowed like tiny stars and drew Liz back down the tunnel of the years to her own childhood. She smiled. You never got too old for the magic of Christmas. 

BY BETH MCKAY

All Aboard The Polar Express



Take an unforgettable journey in comfort through these stunning winter wonderlands!

Discover the beauty of Switzerland aboard the Glacier Express. But don't let its name fool you – this journey is anything but high-speed.

Passengers will spend eight hours travelling through the Swiss Alps from Zermatt to St Moritz. With breathtaking views of the Matterhorn, you'd better remember a camera!

You'll pass over the Landwasser Viaduct and through the Landwasser Tunnel, two of the most iconic sights of the train ride.

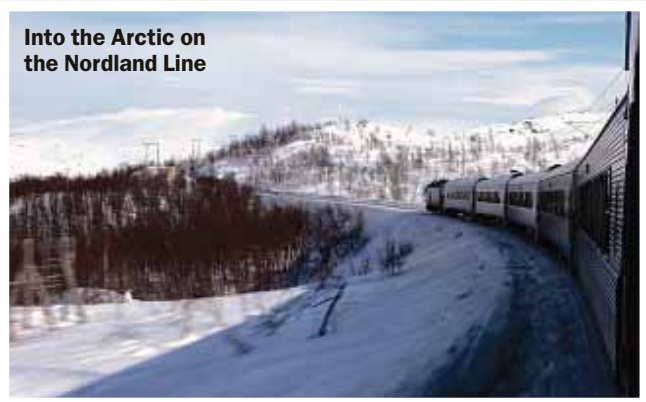
Journey through the Swiss countryside spotting gorges, rock faces and valleys. Pass

through 91 tunnels and cross 291 bridges, catching glimpses of the picturesque snowy capped mountains which are truly mesmerising. If you'd prefer to see more colours, take the train during autumn. Reds and browns replace the wintry white but the views are just as spectacular.

While on board, dine on delicious delicacies like Swiss cheese and meats, paired with wines from the cantons of Graubünden and Valais.

Once you arrive in St Moritz, take a walk around its famous lake. Soak up the views of Dorf (old town), feed the ducks and relax.

Into the Arctic on the Nordland Line



Meanwhile on the Nordland Line in Norway, passengers will cross into the Arctic Circle and hopefully experience the majestic Northern Lights. This line will take you from Trondheim to Bodø on a 10-hour journey crossing 729km of Norwegian wilderness.

There are plenty of stops along the way, including Hell!

Yes, you can take a train ride to Hell which has become something of a tourist attraction. Or get off in Mosjøen and wander down to Sjøegata Street, famous for its colourful buildings.

Hop back on the train and continue to Bodø. At your destination, take a walk along the coast and enjoy its mountainous views. It'll

**Spectacular if terrifying
views on the Swiss
Glacier Express**



probably be cold so remember to wrap up warm!

Staying in Norway, the Flåm Railway shows passengers some of the best mountain views in the country. During the warmer months the train stops at one of the waterfalls. Soon you'll hear beautiful music and a woman dressed in red performs a mystical dance at the foot of the waterfall.

However during the colder months this display is replaced with wonderful wintry views.

Snowy Scotland

The Far North Line transports you around the Scottish Highlands from Wick to Inverness. Follow the North Sea coast and spot seals at Helmsdale and the fishing port at Wick. In the colder months you'll see frozen lochs and snowy landscapes aplenty. You may also spot red deer near the line, if you're lucky!

Or you could take the West Highland Line from Mallaig to Glasgow. This scenic line passes over the spectacular Glenfinnan Viaduct and travels near the mighty Ben Lui. Starkly beautiful Rannoch Moor is a must-see and the deer who roam the area add to the picturesque scenery.

**Glenfinnan Viaduct
in the Highlands**



**The scenic
Flåm railway**

Alaskan Trail



Mount Denali

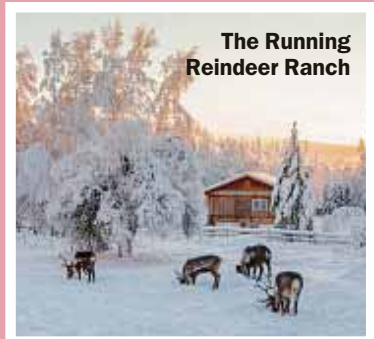
Take the Aurora Winter Train and ride through the rugged terrain of Alaska. While you're cosy inside, marvel at the icy landscape as you travel from Anchorage to Fairbanks. Look out for Denali, the highest mountain in North America and the Hurricane Gulch Bridge on this 12-hour excursion.

Wave to the moose and coyotes as you travel around the state, and make sure to stretch your legs at the various stops along the way such as Wasilla or Healy. (www.alaskarailroad.com)

While you're on board, take the opportunity to try the tasty reindeer sausage. Luckily it's not one of Santa's crew, so he'll still be able to visit you this year!

Once you reach Fairbanks, if you want to get up close and personal with some native wildlife then visit the Running Reindeer Ranch. Here you'll be able to tour the local woods and make some reindeer friends. (runningreindeer.com)

**The Running
Reindeer Ranch**



Remote Japan

Mountains and tiny villages



Take the 83-mile trip around Japan on the JR Tadami Line. Experience the remote region of Oku-Aizu, just north of Tokyo, as you travel from Aizu-Wakamatsu Station to Koide Station in Niigata Prefecture. Meander through tiny Japanese villages and gaze out

into the surrounding wintry woodlands. Unfortunately train lovers aren't able to ride the full route at present as there is maintenance work being carried out but these are due to finish in 2021. This lesser known route is a hidden gem worth discovering. ➔

Welcome To Christmas

It's all in the name ... the whole year round!

The town of Santa Claus in Indiana doesn't shy away from its Christmassy name. In fact they've based their tourism around it!

Stop in at Santa's Candy Castle, where you can literally roast chestnuts over an open fire! The frozen hot chocolate is a festive favourite too, and there are mounds upon mounds of sweets for you to devour.

The local post office is, as you'd expect, inundated with letters to St Nick. Workers (also known as Santa's Elves) ensure that every letter gets a response from the main man himself.

Take pictures beside the Santa Statue and explore the Santa Claus Museum before you leave. This town is surely every Christmas lover's dream!

On the opposite side of the country is Snowflake in Arizona. The John A Freeman Home is known as the town's "Gingerbread House" and is filled with antiques from the 19th century. The home can be toured free of charge – remember to stop for a pastry at their on-site café.

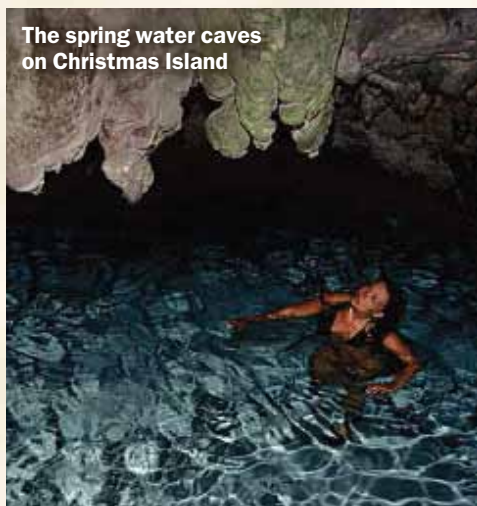
This town is filled with historic buildings so take some time to visit the Locy Rogers Cabin and the James M Flake Home.

Despite its name, Snowflake is anything but chilly. Spend warm

days at Pioneer Park enjoying a picnic under the sun, or play a round at the Snowflake Community Golf Course. You might not see any snowfall in Snowflake, but you'll still have a jolly old time.

A more famous festively named location is Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean. If you take a trip to The Grotto, don't expect to find snow and Santa Claus. Instead you'll discover some majestic spring water caves, which are great for a quick dip to cool down. Unsurprisingly there are no reindeer here, either – but if you visit during the wet season you'll get a chance to see the famous migration of the red crabs.

The spring water caves on Christmas Island



FESTIVE UK NAMES


A winter walk in Oxfordshire



Christmas Common in Oxfordshire is the perfect place to spend the festive period. The origins of the hamlet's jolly name isn't certain – however there are three possible theories. It's believed to be named either after the local Christmas family, the holly trees in the area, or after a truce during the English Civil War which occurred on Christmas Day.

Make sure to take a walk along the Chiltern Hills and finish your day off with a merry tipple at The Fox & Hounds pub.

Another Christmassy location is Star in Fife. Although this Star won't lead you the baby Jesus, it can lead you to some beautiful scenery. Wander around the village and spot the old world cottages that line the quiet streets. Walk along to Star Moss – but remember to bring suitable footwear, as this marshland can get quite wet.

Other festively named locations in the UK include Stocking in Herefordshire and Christmas Pie in Surrey! 

Please check latest Covid travel restrictions at www.gov.uk



Dolly Beach on Christmas Island



BY FIONA VALPY

The Christmas Vigil

Thoughts of Christmas in their Polish homeland brought hope to them all

S now had fallen in the night. When she'd awoken, for just a moment she'd thought she was back in her village at home, with the boughs of the fir trees outside her window dipping low under the weight of their white coverlet.

But this was Scotland, not Poland, and she was lying on an army cot in a Nissen hut in the grounds of a baronial castle, rather than tucked up in her warm bedroom under the eaves in the family home. Reluctant to push back the blankets and feel the chilly floor beneath her feet, she lay for a few more precious minutes and thought about her parents and her brother.

Wherever they were, would they be fasting today in preparation for the Christmas Eve vigil? Would there be good food on the table tonight and a bottle of something to warm the spirits?

But there wasn't time to linger for long and she was soon forced to brave the freezing water in the ablution block, put on her nurse's uniform and hurry through the snow to the castle.

Magda Kapowski was on duty when the young airman was wheeled into the surgical ward on Christmas Eve. She'd seen such cases before – especially where Hurricane pilots like him were involved. They were very brave, these boys, determined to fight for Poland. Or at least for the memory of a Poland that was no longer theirs, not since the Nazis had overrun the country. Those who'd managed to get away fled westwards and many eventually washed up on the shores of Britain, like her and this airman and the other patients and staff at the Polish Military Hospital Number 1. There were over a thousand injured servicemen here in the rather austere-looking castle in the Scottish Highlands requisitioned for the purpose.

She winced as she carefully peeled away the dressings from the airman's face. His burns were severe, a well-known hazard of the Hurricane's design. The surgeons had operated that morning to try to save his shattered right leg. Once she'd treated his burns with ointment and covered the painful-

looking wounds with a clean dressing, she adjusted the blankets over his plaster cast, doing what she could to make him comfortable. He was still out for the count and she knew the best thing for him was to sleep. But she also knew there was a strong chance it would be a sleep from which he'd never awaken. She checked the thready flicker of his pulse and gently placed his hand back to rest on the sheet, which was as crisp and white as the snow on the ground outside.

The tall metal stand beside the airman's bed silently dripped clear liquid into the tube running into his hand, each droplet keeping the young man's body functioning for a few seconds more. Magda would have liked to have spent a little longer with him in case he stirred, his pain breaking through the wall of morphine they'd pumped into him, but

*When he smiled
back at her, the
shadow of sadness
seemed to lift from
his eyes*

she had other patients to see to. The sapper who'd lost his hand when his rifle mis-fired was calling for a bedpan and she still had to get everything cleared away in preparation for the surgeon's ward round, so she straightened her cap and hurried away.

Magda had volunteered for the late shift on Christmas Eve – one of the least popular ones on the roster – because she'd wanted to keep herself busy. Today, her homesickness had been worse than ever. She hadn't heard from her parents for months now: how were they coping under German rule? And her brother Mischa, who had accompanied her on the long journey across Europe, was on a ship somewhere in the Atlantic, she supposed, doing his bit to help the British Navy keep the convoys safe from

the constant threat of U-Boat attacks.

It was already dark by the time the doctor arrived to check on his patients. In this wild, northern land the days were short and the nights long at this time of the year. She knew Doctor Vrulevski well. He was skilled at his work and on his rounds, he always took the time to talk and joke with the men.

Finally, the two of them stood beside the bed of the young airman. The doctor silently checked the chart recording his vital signs, which she'd hung on the foot of the iron bedframe.

"Do you think he'll make it?" she asked softly.

Doctor Vrulevski shook his head, drawing the corners of his mouth downwards. He had dark shadows beneath his eyes and, now that he was no longer laughing and joking with the other patients, there was a deep sadness in his expression. "We've done all we can for him. It's in God's hands now." He turned to face her. "Thank you, Nurse Kapowski, you've done a good job here."

She pulled up a chair and gently took the hand of the pilot in hers. "I'll sit with him a while," she said.

The doctor hesitated. "What is your name? Apart from Nurse Kapowski." She looked up at him. "Magda."

"I'm Stefan. Will you be coming to the common room later? Some of the others are planning a traditional Wigilia feast tonight. Although Scottish rations probably mean it will just be the usual stew and potatoes. But if we're lucky, who knows, there might be a nip of whisky to wash it down."

She smiled and nodded. "I'll see how things go here. Thank you, Stefan."

"Alright. Hope to see you later then."

He smiled back at her and the sadness seemed to lift from his eyes. She saw that they were filled with a light that was as warm as the glow of the hearth in her childhood home. It reminded her of the lullaby her mother used to sing to her on Christmas Eve. What was it called again? Ah yes, *Lulajze Jezunio*.

Once the doctor had left, she quietly began to hum the tune, still holding the



gently awake. She winced, her neck stiff and sore, her limbs aching, then sat up straighter in her chair.

"What is it?" she asked. "Has he...?"

Stefan shook his head. "No. It's good news. I think he stirred just now. He seems to be coming round."

She took the airman's hand, checked his pulse. Was she imagining it, or was it really a little stronger and steadier now? And then his eyes flickered slightly and his lips seemed to be moving in the gap between the dressings. She bent her head closer to listen and then looked up at Stefan again, her eyes shining.

"What did he say?" the doctor asked.

"*Wesolych Swiat* – Merry Christmas."

Later, when the young airman had grown strong enough to talk, he told Magda about the strange dream he'd had on Christmas Eve. He'd been lost and alone in a dark forest, and despair had overwhelmed him. He lay down in the snow, waiting for death to arrive. But then, out of nowhere, came the sound of voices singing the lullaby his mother used to sing to him when he was a little boy. The sound drew him to his feet, and he walked on through the darkness, following the light of a single star. He could smell delicious food cooking – borscht with uszka, and pierogi with wild mushrooms, fried in butter. And, even though the going was hard and he was very tired, he kept walking to the star.


Magda told Stefan this on the day they went for a walk together in the castle grounds. The snow was melting, and the couple paused beneath the spreading branches of a pine tree.

"Look," said Stefan. The first snowdrop had pushed its way through the dark earth.

"It looks a little like a teardrop."

"Do you think it's a tear of sadness or of happiness?" Stefan asked, reaching for her hand.

"I think it's both," she replied, turning to face him. "But most of all, I think it's a sign of hope."

And as he folded her in his arms and kissed her, the tiny white flower stirred in the wind, nodding its head in agreement. 

airman's hand. Silence fell in the room all around her as the others began to listen and one or two softly joined in, their deeper voices mingling with her lilting soprano. For a moment, while the music filled the ward, the air seemed scented with woodsmoke and pine needles and the smells of traditional dishes cooking for a Wigilia feast, transporting Magda and her charges to their homeland.

Through the window at the airman's bed, the stars gleamed in the night sky and the rising moon cast its light onto the snow, illuminating the darkness.

The ward had fallen silent as midnight approached. Magda sat on at the bedside of the young airman. The lonely hours of the night were often the ones when people slipped away. She was determined that if it was this boy's time then he wouldn't be alone.

A shadow in the doorway made her look up and she smiled to see Stefan standing there. He walked carefully across the polished floorboards, his steps as quiet as possible in order not to waken any of the sleeping men.

"I thought I'd find you here," he whispered. "We missed you at the feast. I've brought you a piece of something called a cloutie dumpling – although don't expect it to be anything like the dumplings back home." He passed her a slice of fruitcake. "Do you mind if I keep you company here for a while?" The

doctor picked up the airman's hand and checked his pulse. "He's been on my mind as well."

"Please." Magda gestured to the chair beside hers and Stefan sat down. "How was the feast?"

Stefan smiled. "Well, if I tell you that this strange dumpling was the best thing there, you'll get the gist. The local people had been kind though – they'd brought this and a few other bits and pieces from their own rations for us to share. That added a lot to the Christmas spirit."

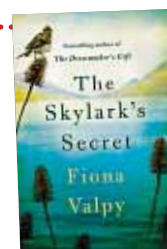
Magda nibbled on the cake. It was dry and crumbling, but it tasted good. "What was your favourite dish at the feasts we used to have back home?" she asked.

"Ah," he sighed, remembering. "A good borscht with little uszka dumplings – my mother always made the best. And the poppy seed roll. What about you?"

"It's so hard to choose just one dish out of the twelve, but it would probably be my mother's pierogi, filled with wild mushrooms from the forest and fried in butter."

They reminisced about the feasts they'd enjoyed sitting around a table groaning with good things, surrounded by family and friends. From the hallway came the sound of a clock chiming the hours as they continued their vigil.

Magda must have fallen asleep sometime in the small hours of the morning because Stefan was shaking her



The Skylark's Secret by
Fiona Valpy.
Lake Union,
PB0, £8.99.
Out now.

Superboost Your Immunity

Optimise your immune system over the winter months with our nine-point plan for better health!



Add seeds and nuts

Healthy Oils

Nuts and seeds contain healthy oils, and almonds are rich in immune boosting vitamin E. Omega 3, often short in western diets, can be topped up by eating walnuts, hemp seed, hemp oil, oily fish, soya products, or by adding ground flaxseed or chia seeds to your breakfast cereals. Having healthy oils in your diet is important for a strong immune system.

Immune Boosting Foods

Foods that have the biggest positive impact on your immune system are those packed with nutrients – especially fresh produce like leafy greens, broccoli, berries, citrus fruits, garlic, and colourful fruits and vegetables. Unprocessed foods are more nutritious than convenience foods, so think salads, roasted vegetables and stews. Top your meal off with a nutrient packed fruit salad or a home-made apple and raisin pie.



Get Moving

Exercise can help boost immunity by promoting better circulation, so immune cells and antibodies can circulate more quickly and do their job fighting off disease. If you don't like exercise, then any kind of physical activity will do. Find something you enjoy, such as dancing, walking, swimming, or even tidying the house! Any movement is good for your all-round health, and it may boost your mood!

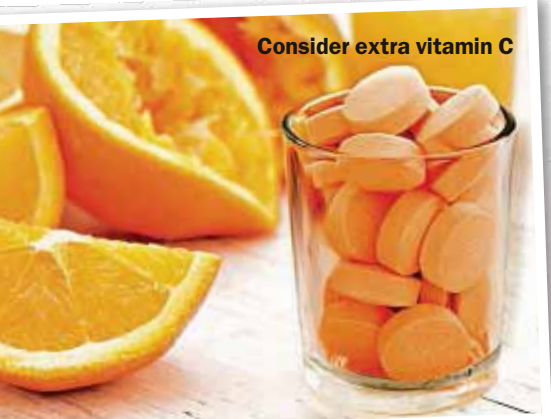
Vitamin D

During the winter, we're often short on vitamin D, because our primary source of it is sunshine, which is in short supply. The NHS says, "Between October and early March we do not get enough vitamin D from sunlight. It's difficult for people to get enough vitamin D from food, so everyone should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D during the autumn and winter."



Top up your vitamin D

Consider extra vitamin C



Vitamin C

Vitamin C is good for immunity, and may reduce the severity of a cold, or stop it from developing at all. In 2017 Harvard Health reported, "Taking at least 200mg of vitamin C per day did appear to reduce the duration of cold symptoms by an average of 8% in adults and 14% in children, which translated to about one less day of illness."

Echinacea

Echinacea is a common immune booster. A review of studies published in 2014 showed a slight benefit from taking Echinacea in preventing colds. The researchers discovered that in some studies, Echinacea increased the number of white blood cells, and concluded that extracts of Echinacea do seem to have a moderate beneficial effect on the immune system.

Eat lots of colourful fruits and vegetables



Sleep Well

Getting a good night's sleep is important for strong immunity. Key tips to improve your sleep include keeping regular bedtimes and rising at the same time every morning. Avoid stimulants and screen time before bed, limit alcohol in the evenings, keep your bedroom cool and dark, and eat early – preferably at least three hours before you go to bed.

Replace Bad Habits With Better Ones!

We all have bad habits, but making positive lifestyle changes can benefit your immune system. Smoking suppresses immunity, so giving up smoking is worthwhile. Treat yourself to a new hobby or reward for going smoke free. Caffeine can cause anxiety and sleeplessness, so choose decaffeinated beverages, especially in the evenings. Try to eliminate stressors as too much stress suppresses immunity. Fresh fruit juices instead of alcohol can reduce stress and provide immune boosting nutrients.



Have a good laugh!

Laugh Out Loud

A good laugh can give you bellyache and does wonders to lift your spirits! There is modest evidence that it may also boost immunity. In 2010, Dr Lee S Berk and colleagues from Loma Linda University said that laughter leads to reduced stress and increased immunity by "increasing production of antibodies and activation of the body's protective cells, including T-cells and especially Natural Killer cells' killing activity".



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NOURISH is your ultimate guide to health and happiness. Available from www.dcthomsonshop.co.uk/nourish or by calling 0800 318 846. Price £6.99.



My Weekly's favourite GP **Dr Sarah Jarvis**
from TV and radio writes for you



Is Your Prescription Right For You?

More than half of people in the UK take at least one regular medicine on prescription, but while many are life-saving, or can hugely improve your quality of life, all medicines have risks. It's also possible that not all your medicines are necessary, and in fact, some of them may be doing more harm than good.

Half of older people admitted to hospital have been prescribed a medicine that over time has more risks than benefits. Yet at the moment, fewer than one in 10 patients has one of these medicines stopped while in hospital.

A new NHS initiative is hoping to increase reviews of medication by pharmacists when people are in hospital, to

spot medicines which can be safely stopped. And more and more general practices have on-site pharmacists who can do the same job. Your community pharmacist too may be able to go through your

medicines with you and they'll certainly be happy to answer any questions you have.

However, it's important not to stop taking your medicines without checking first with your GP or having a review with your pharmacist. Many of the medicines your doctor will prescribe are "preventive" – they don't make you feel any better in the short term, but protect you against heart attack, stroke and lots more.

Common examples of medicines it's really important to continue include:

- ◆ Blood pressure tablets (including water tablets) which significantly cut your risk of stroke in particular. When

taking these, you may need a blood test at least once a year.

- ◆ Statins to lower cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.
- ◆ Blood glucose lowering drugs if you have diabetes.
- ◆ Anticoagulant tablets, including warfarin. These are most commonly prescribed if you have an abnormal heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation. This condition raises your risk of a major stroke at least five-fold and anticoagulants can dramatically drop that risk. But they need to be monitored.
- ◆ Epilepsy and thyroid medication.
- ◆ Preventer inhalers for asthma and COPD, which reduce the risk of life-threatening flare-ups of breathing problems.

For other drugs, while there will have been a good reason to start it, your condition may change as time goes on. In addition, you may have started



“Don't stop a medicine your doctor has prescribed without advice, either from your doctor or your pharmacist”

FROM MY SURGERY

BE SUDEP AWARE

Epilepsy affects more than half a million UK people each year. Some are at risk of SUDEP – sudden unexpected death in epilepsy – which accounts for 600 potentially preventable deaths annually. NightWatch, creators of a clinically proven system for detecting dangerous epileptic seizures during sleep, is raising awareness of SUDEP. If you or a family member is affected, then visit www.nightwatchepilepsy.com

EYE CHECKS – URGENT!

Eye Health UK has warned that about five million routine eye tests were missed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Now a top surgeon from the London Cataract Centre is warning this could lead to cataracts being missed, resulting in a greater risk of falls among older people. Opticians are open for business and can check for cataracts, as well as possible eyesight-threatening glaucoma. So make your appointment now!

BRUSSELS SPROUTS: NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS

Dr Sunni Patel, founder of Dishdashdeets, which aims to bring plant-based food and science together to improve our health, is on a mission to get us eating sprouts all year round. They're member of the brassica family, which also includes cabbage, kale and broccoli. All of these are rich in fibre and compounds that help nourish our healthy gut bacteria. Find some great recipes at dishdashdeets.com



Your pharmacist is an expert in medication, so if you're worried about side effects or whether your medicine is safe, speak to them

on other medications which could interact with them.

One particular risk of some medications which interact is that they may increase the risk of drowsiness. This in turn can make you more prone to falls and fracturing a hip or other bone. They can also affect memory and brain function, especially if you're taking several related medicines.

Common examples of medications that might increase your risks include:

- ◆ Sleeping tablets.
- ◆ Medicines for overactive bladder or incontinence issues.
- ◆ Tablets called tricyclic antidepressants. The most common is amitriptyline. These are prescribed if you're having problems sleeping, but are also be used in nerve pain (such as trigeminal neuralgia). They are less commonly used for depression these days.

◆ Some antihistamines that make you drowsy.

◆ Some medicines for COPD and Parkinson's disease.

However, stopping them can make symptoms worse so you should never stop them without medical advice.

Painkillers also have side effects, especially at high doses or used long term. Anti-inflammatories like ibuprofen and naproxen can damage kidneys or cause stomach ulcers. Try a topical (cream or gel) version which can work just as well for pain, but with fewer side effects.

Strong opioid painkillers like codeine can cause drowsiness, constipation and a significant risk of addiction. In the long term, they can also become less effective. If you're taking them, speak to your doctor.

NEXT ISSUE: Coping with hair loss

HERE TO HELP

THIS WEEK: Bladder Control

By Barbara Vega, Global Medical Director at Axeen Pharma



Q My bladder control is terrible. Do you have any advice?

A Avoid drinking after 10pm and limit coffee, tea, fizzy drinks and alcohol after 6pm. Identify triggers, like cold weather, and plan loo breaks when out. If planning a day or night out, limit liquids beforehand and plan loo time to avoid panics.

Also, avoid processed foods, eat more fruit and veg and lose weight if you need too. Consider joining a Pilates or Yoga class as they can work wonders on pelvic floor muscles. There are also supplements which

may help, like scientifically-tested **Femaxeen®**, made from plant-based ingredients **UriCyTonin® AF&UI Complexes** and **Pumpkin Seed extract**. **Femaxeen®** is available from www.femaxeen.co.uk and Amazon UK – 30 tablets is one month's daily supply at RRP £49.90.



Eat a healthy diet

FOCUS ON... KILLING GERMS

Protect Your Household

Safe for disinfecting food preparation areas, the new **Cif Anti-Bac & Shine Multi-Purpose Spray**, £2.50 from Waitrose, Morrisons and Home Bargains, is ideal for cleaning frequently touched surfaces in the home. The surface spray and ecorefill, £1.50, contains a 100% naturally-derived cleaning agent and a 100% biodegradable fragrance which is proven to kill 99.99% of bacteria and viruses.



Cleans And Disinfects

Bleach free, vegan friendly and fragrance free, the Hycolin Antiviral Cleaning Range, available from Iceland and The Range, contains powerful and safe disinfectants that have been proven to kill coronavirus. The environmentally-friendly range includes **Kitchen Cleaner**, £1.79, **Bathroom Cleaner**, £1.79, **Toilet Gel**, £1.25 and **Quick Spray**, £1.49.

Made from 100% recycled plastic, the trigger spray bottles are 100% recyclable after use.





Celebrity agony aunt **Helen Lederer** gives you her heartfelt advice every week



Ask Helen

As someone who has been a social worker, mother, wife and divorcee I have been around the block a few times. I'm humbled to answer your questions and feel that if a problem can be shared it can be halved – at the very least.

I Feel Guilty About Time With Family!

It's a second marriage for me and a first for my husband. I've got children – and grandchildren – and we've always been close. My husband has really surprised me by declaring that I spend too much time with them and not enough with him. He's fed up having to cancel plans when I'm needed for babysitting or go off shopping with them. He's making me feel guilty about spending any time with them at all. I don't know what to do.



Is there some truth in what he says?

Try to involve him more with your family – he is important to you, and so also to them

This must be so hard for you. Having children is a lifetime commitment and while we all go through many phases, the commitment is always there. Now you also have grandchildren, so family is even more important. As your husband does not have his own children, he may not understand how important they are. He won't have had that sense of "mucking in" and getting on with family life. But that's not his fault. He loves you

and wants to be with you which is lovely. On the other hand, he must know that you have a responsibility to your family, and he will have seen that during your time together. Has something changed to make your husband more "needy"? Time for a conversation! There are several ways of improving the situation. Try to involve him more with your family – he is important to you and consequently to them. Take him along to the babysitting,

as well as the birthdays and festivals, as he does need to feel part of them. Take a look at yourself, too. Is there some truth in what he says – can you spend more time with him? How about some special treats for just the two of you? Go to an event or an outing so that you can re-establish your relationship. If all fails, then some couple counselling might throw light on this. You will never stop being a parent – but involve him, too.

Write to Helen Lederer at: Ask Helen, My Weekly, 2 Albert Square, Dundee DD1 1DD.
Helen is unable to enter into private correspondence with readers.



No Effort Required!

Be the host with the most this Christmas as you use the Cuisinart CW050U Style Collection Wine Bottle Opener, RRP £45 from ao.com, to open all those bottles of wine. Cordless with an 8-hour battery life, you won't have to worry about it running out on the day. It comes with 3 helpful accessories – a vacuum sealer, foil cutter and docking station – and can be used on natural and synthetic corks. The vacuum sealer is perfect for preserving wines, while the foil cutter effortlessly removes the foil casing around each bottle. It doesn't matter if the wine is bubbly or a rich red, this cordless wine bottle opener is up to the task. It also comes with a 3-year manufacturing warranty, so you have complete peace of mind.

PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Bright Ideas

What do you do every day that makes your life easier? Here are your **Top Tips!**

Pretty Peggy

When our little one outgrew her pretty T-shirts, I sewed along the bottom and arm openings and inserted a hanger to make peg bags. They make useful gifts for family and friends.

Lynne Newton, Durham



Bag Your Masks

Put your washable face masks inside a laundry bag before putting into the washing machine to avoid them getting lost inside the machine.

Ruth Stuart, Aberdeen



Spoon Stop

To stop a spoon from sliding into the pan when I am cooking, I wrap an elastic band around its handle.

Bailey McGuire, Cleethorpes

Spray Swap

After years of trying to scrub the tide mark off my plastic bath, I find sprays with bleach do not work half as well as the grease remover I use on kitchen pans. I am amazed how easily the grime comes off.

Julie Ashley, Whitley Bay



Anthea Turner How I See It...



During our weekly chit-chat, Editor Stuart asked me to give you a few Christmas tips. Well, I'm your girl for that task, as under my writing belt I have my book *The Perfect Christmas* which is awash with tips on how to survive and relish the festive season. So this week, next and all the others until the big day, you'll get a little nugget from me.

My first tip, however, isn't in the aforementioned book because it wasn't relevant at the time. *Quit moaning!* I, like a lot of us, have moaned daily about Covid restrictions, inconsistencies, its impact on my life and our economy – but no more.

Higher powers will make decisions we have no control over – but there's one we totally do, and that is how we deal with it. So, as from today I am taking only one course of action which is to stop griping. I am rolling my sleeves up, making the best of the freedoms and resources I have left to play with because "it is what it is" and as long as I'm alive and healthy that's all right.

Now, back to Christmas!

Preparation is key as you don't want to spend more than you can afford. By starting the hunt now and being imaginative, your money will go further. I'm going to give you three gifting ideas and I promise you, once your mind starts thinking in this way, you'll fix every difficult present in your life.

Cooking Friend

Into a Christmas carrier bag goes a copy of a food magazine. Choose a dish you

know your friend would like, buy all the ingredients; add a T-cloth or any other kitchen item; apply tissue paper, bow, label, and look forward to handing it over.

Girls Night In

Copy of Platinum Magazine, bottle of wine, few chocolates, bath soak and a face pack sachet. You can present this in a small basket with maybe a small hand towel in the bottom all scrunched together with Cellophane and a bow.

Doggie Loving Friend

Copy of a magazine about our four-legged friends, Christmas dog treats, poo bags and maybe a fun seasonal accessory.

You can use this formula for just about any subject. Buy gift bags and tissue online or my high street favourites are Sainsbury's and Poundland. Cellophane, a presentation must, can be used all year round so it's worth investing in a large roll.

Also don't forget about the gift that keeps on giving – a magazine subscription. I do a gardening one for my Mum and Dad every year, and they adore it.

Love, Anthea X



Brain Boosters

Puzzles to do just for fun or to win some great prizes!

Sudoku

Fill in each of the blank squares with the numbers 1 to 9, so that each row, each column and each 3x3 cell contains all the numbers from 1 to 9.

Turn To
Page 97 For
Solutions

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 8 | | 7 | 4 | | 6 |
| | | | | 6 | | 3 | | |
| | | | | | | 7 | 8 | |
| 2 | | | | 3 | 4 | 8 | 9 | |
| | 8 | | 2 | | | | | |
| 7 | | | 5 | | | 2 | 4 | |
| 1 | 2 | 7 | 6 | | 5 | | | |
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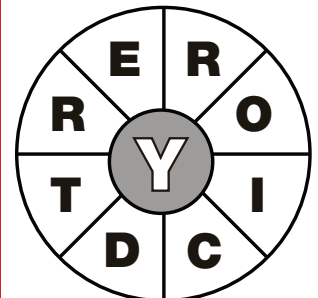
Word Wheel

You have ten minutes to find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each word must be three letters or more and contain the central letter. Use each letter once and no plurals, foreign words or proper nouns are allowed. There is at least one nine-letter word.

Average: 20 words

Good: 21-30 words

Excellent: 31-39 words



Codebreaker

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 14 | 24 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 24 | 7 | 24 | 18 | | 2 | 19 | 10 |
| 13 | | 20 | | 25 | | 16 | | 22 | | 1 | | 19 | | 16 |
| 13 | 7 | 19 | 22 | 10 | | 22 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 10 | 19 |
| 25 | | 25 | | 22 | | 10 | | | | 18 | | 2 | | 11 |
| 23 | 1 | 10 | 22 | 1 | 11 | | 7 | 25 | 22 | 23 | 2 | 25 | 7 | 18 |
| | | 24 | | | | | | | | 24 | | 26 | | 24 |
| 12 | 19 | 18 | 15 | 24 | | | | | | | 8 | 24 | 24 | 7 |
| 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 24 |
| 10 | 1 | 15 | 25 | | | | | | | 17 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 18 |
| 10 | | 16 | | 25 | | | | | | | | 7 | | |
| 24 | 11 | 1 | 7 | 4 | | 1 | 19 | 17 | | 13 | 7 | 22 | 15 | 16 |
| 7 | | 17 | | 25 | | | | | 25 | | 25 | | 25 | 5 |
| 8 | 1 | 10 | 25 | 11 | | 22 | 2 | 25 | 23 | | 8 | 22 | 11 | 15 |
| 19 | | 23 | | 18 | | 25 | | 10 | | | 8 | 21 | | 24 |
| 15 | 19 | 9 | | 25 | | 11 | 10 | 22 | 1 | 3 | 22 | 18 | 25 | 11 |

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

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|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | M | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | N | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | D | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | A | 25 | 26 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 5 | 22 | 23 | 18 | D | 25 | 10 | 16 | 24 | 25 | 7 | 10 |
|---|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|

Each letter of the alphabet has been replaced by a number. The numbers for the first name of our pictured celebrity are given.

Work out which number represents which letter in the grid to reveal a TV drama in which Amanda Holden starred as Sarah Trevanion.

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each cell in a bold outlined cluster of cells contains the digits 1 and 2, a cluster of 3 cells contains 1, 2 and 3 and so on. No same digit should appear in any neighbouring cell, not even diagonally.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 4 | 3 | | |
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | 4 | 5 | |
| 4 | 1 | | | 4 |
| | 3 | | | |

More
Puzzles
Overleaf

Turn To
Page 97 For
Solutions

All Muddled Up

We've mixed up the names of three classical music pieces featured on the Myleene Klass album *Moving On*.

Can you say what they are?



FLORIDIAN GRASSPLOT

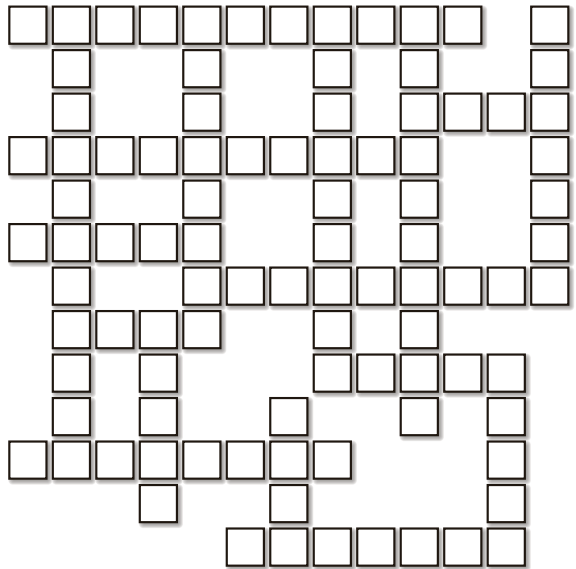
FAUNA COCA GUTTED

ATONAL SMOOTHING

Kriss Cross

Try to fit all of the listed words back into the grid.

| | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 4 letters | DETOX | 8 letters | 10 letters |
| ACER | ERODE | ACADEMIC | CONSONANCE |
| AIDE | SQUID | LABOURER | OBSEQUIOUS |
| STYE | 7 letters | 9 letters | 11 letters |
| 5 letters | GEARBOX | ANONYMOUS | AERODYNAMIC |
| CYBER | STERILE | EXFOLIATE | FACILITATOR |



Discover the hidden word
in the shaded squares and
enter by email

Missing Link
No 667

ACROSS

- 8 Easy, Out, Within (5)
- 9 Dramatics, Golf, Radio (7)
- 10 Government, Republic, Reserve (7)
- 11 Look, Man, Snakes (5)
- 12 Intelligence, Language, Plea (9)
- 14 Mind, Square, Twin (3)
- 15 Busy, Honey, Keeper (3)
- 16 Photographic, Property, Web (9)
- 19 Half, Moth, Worm (5)
- 21 Ill, In, Michelin (7)
- 23 Electoral, Technical, Trinity (7)
- 24 Barn, Commutation, Map (5)

DOWN

- 1 Mere, Sherry, With (6)
- 2 Majority, Man, Sum (8)
- 3 Coal, Grill, Lady (4)
- 4 Angel, Arches, Crest (6)
- 5 Bars, Parking, Universe (8)
- 6 Colon, Detached, Skimmed (4)
- 7 Catholic, Hole, Hood (6)
- 13 Margin, Paragraph, Text (8)
- 14 Lives, Tables, Ways (8)
- 15 Baby, Birth, Delivery (6)
- 17 Blood, Seagoing, Seed (6)
- 18 Bed, Cliche, Flea (6)
- 20 Boy, Order, Walk (4)
- 22 Freeze, Hero, Social (4)

TO ENTER:

BY EMAIL: Send your answer, name and address to mwlink@dctmedia.co.uk with 'Missing Link No.667' in the subject line

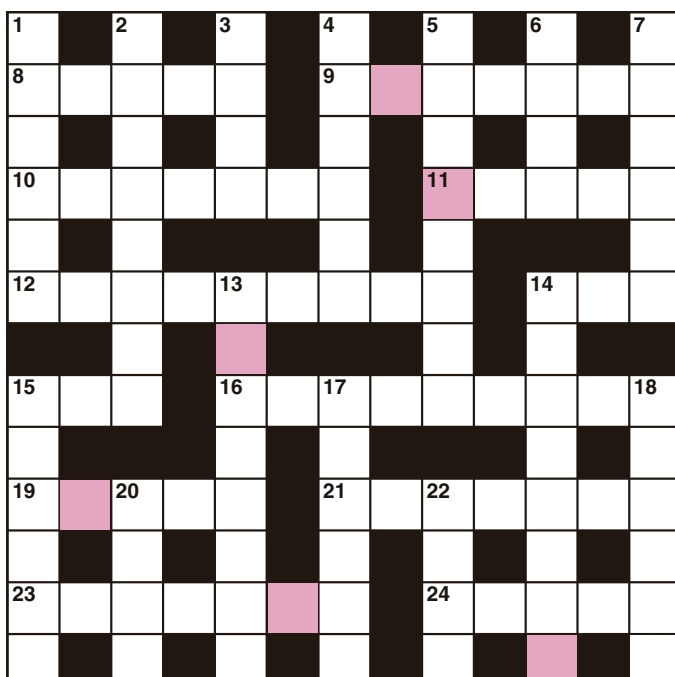
Closing date 9am, November 27, 2020

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2 READERS
CAN WIN
£25
CASH PRIZES

Entry
currently
by email
only

The answer to each clue is a word which has a link with each of the three words listed. This word may come at the end (eg **HEAD** linked with **BEACH**, **BIG**, **HAMMER**), at the beginning (eg **BLACK** linked with **BEAUTY**, **BOARD** and **JACK**) or a mixture of the two (eg **STONE** linked with **HAIL**, **LIME** and **WALL**).



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PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Winter Wonderland

The true spirit of Christmas abounds for all the shoppers in this local shopping centre...



Standing at the cheese counter in the supermarket, Jazz gazed at the vast selection. Mouth-watering! Since Nick walked out she'd been through it all – the anger and the pain – yet she had kept her appetite. A good sign?

Sleigh bells ring, are you listening? She sighed. Michael Bublé's velvet tones overhead, singing *Winter Wonderland*, didn't help. It might be nearly Christmas, but Michael's dreamy voice was too much. She and Nick had loved his music.

The young assistant grinned at her. "Can I help, Madam?"

Jazz frowned. *Matt*, his name badge said. That *Madam* grated. Today she felt more like fifty-two than twenty-two. She pointed to a cheese that was Nick's favourite.

Snow is glistening... sang Mr Bublé. And Jazz realised it wasn't just the snow that was glistening. Furiously, she blinked away tears.

"You OK?" Matt asked, concern in his very blue eyes.

"Yeah, thanks. It's just that song..." she blurted out. Grabbing her cheese, she quickly turned away. Today promised to be one of those days.

Geoff reached for toilet rolls: magnolia, four-pack. He and Marie had been coming here every Friday for years – he knew the rota by heart, right from the black seedless grapes to the lemon kitchen cleanser. He could have done this blindfold. But today their shopping was not going well.

He stared uneasily across the aisle to where his wife, Marie, was faking an interest in tinned soups. It was two hours now since they'd exchanged a word. A silly argument over Christmas had done it. He'd suggested they stay home this year – have Kate and family come to them instead of the other way around and save him that long drive. Plus he could escape to the pub, leaving his

son-in-law glued to his beloved football. "Just for a change?" he pleaded. But Marie didn't like change.

A beautiful sight, we're happy tonight...

Something registered in his brain – someone was singing *Winter Wonderland*. He was suddenly back in the Sixties, at a Christmas concert with this song playing over and over and saying hello to the pretty stranger sat next to him: Marie. He blinked. Fast forward to the twenty-first century... Marie was hurrying towards him.

"Geoff, that's our song!" she cried. "Not the Dean Martin version – some new-fangled fella, but..." And she was only kissing him on the cheek in the middle of the supermarket! Too chuffed to be embarrassed, he grabbed her hand, grinning. They'd go to Kate's as usual this Christmas, he decided happily. And they'd all have a whale of a time.

*The cafe, the tinsel,
the Christmas
cheer, was a true
winter wonderland,
and things were
looking up*

In another aisle, Millie was trying to manoeuvre her stick with one hand and open egg cartons with the other. Happy eggs, organic eggs, extra-large eggs... too much choice.

Then she blinked. A familiar figure in a scarlet coat and heels was trying to dance in time to the piped music, jerking her trolley around and singing along to the lyrics. Millie smiled. Joyce, from her old ballroom dancing class, seemed oblivious

to the giggles and chaos she was causing.

"Hi Joyce!" she called. "Practising the quickstep?"

The trolley stopped.

"Millie! How are you, darling?" Joyce came over. "Are you coping all right on your own?"

"Yes, thanks," Millie nodded. Eight months now since her husband had died, but people continued to be kind.

"Remember jiggling to *Winter Wonderland* at last year's Christmas party?" Joyce added. "Such a shame, now, about your arthritis."

"Oh, I manage," Millie interrupted. "But I do miss the class." She swallowed a lump in her throat. Loneliness was something she hated admitting to.

"Right, I'm putting you down for this year's party," Joyce declared. "And you must come round to mine for a cuppa. An excuse for cream cakes!"

Here to stay, are the bluebirds...

Millie beamed. That crooner could well be right.


Jazz made her way out of the store with her shopping, trying to ignore *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* now playing.

But someone was tapping her on the arm. "Excuse me! You OK now? I was worried," Matt said breathlessly.

Well, how nice, Jazz thought, smiling at him. In books, blue eyes were often "icy", but not so with this guy.

"Yes – I'm fine, thanks," she replied.

"Bublé's great, isn't he?" Matt hesitated. "I'm on my way to the café. Fancy a coffee?"

Jazz nodded happily as Matt grabbed her heavy shopping bag. A warm glow crept through her. Things were looking up. The café, the tinsel, the Christmas cheer, was a true winter wonderland. Surely a good omen for the future... 

BY BARBARA DYNES



STARRY INSIGHTS WITH RUSSELL

NOVEMBER 10 - NOVEMBER 23

SCORPIO OCT 24 - NOV 22

It costs nothing but time to play around with ideas but if it is money that someone wants out of you, curb your impulsiveness.

Astro Tip: Accept offers of help and support.

SAGITTARIUS NOV 23 - DEC 21

Take care about what you say in case your words are taken in the wrong way. Don't hit Reply To All if you don't want them all to read it!

Astro Tip: Avoid someone who gossips.

CAPRICORN DEC 22 - JAN 20

You feel a little lost and alone even though there are people you could reach out to. Why aren't you asking for help to relieve your burdens?

Astro Tip: Patch up differences with friends.

AQUARIUS JAN 21 - FEB 19

Jealousy in the workplace is causing tension. Someone isn't giving you the information you need. Expect positive results from past efforts.

Astro Tip: Take your health concerns seriously.

PISCES FEB 20 - MAR 20

There is a lot of paperwork to get through. It's annoying but often little things must be dealt with and cleared away before you can start on something new and exciting.

Astro Tip: Avoid temptations.

ARIES MAR 21 - APR 20

Someone has been trying to curb your activities and movement. They have no influence over you now. You're ready for something different.

Astro Tip: Follow your desire to lead.

TAURUS APRIL 21 - MAY 21

You sense someone is about to walk out of your life. If you aren't ready for this you need to let them know. Let them see how and why life will be very different without you.

Astro Tip: Speak up!

GEMINI MAY 22 - JUN 21

Don't let anyone pressure you into agreeing to arrangements you aren't happy about. You need to find the confidence to go for what you truly want.

Astro Tip: Make time to relax to ease stress.

CANCER JUN 22 - JUL 23

A close relationship will reach an important turning point. You feel a temptation to spend when out and about feeling relaxed and carefree.

Astro Tip: Avoid being extravagant.

LEO JUL 24 - AUG 23

You enjoy your friendships but a new friend or partner is moving too fast. If you would rather take it slow, tell them so and expect them to listen.

Astro Tip: Steer clear of toxic relationships.

VIRGO AUG 24 - SEPT 23

You're worried a young relative is about to make a big mistake. They'll be defensive if you try to give advice but don't give up on them.

Astro Tip: Use your charm and sense of humour.

LIBRA SEP 24 - OCT 23

Someone is making you feel guilty as a means to get their own way. Not wanting to hurt their feelings is noble but don't let them play the victim.

Astro Tip: Honesty is the best policy.

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Next Great Issue!
My Weekly

CORRIE'S MAUREEN LIPMAN



CHRISTMAS IN A PIE



PLUS • Coping with hair loss

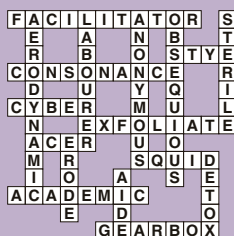
- Get to know Aled Jones
- 12 ways to be happy and healthy at home
- 4 super seasonal stories
- How to save money this Christmas
- Meet a real life fairy godmother

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PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK, STUART MACGREGOR

Solutions To Brain Boosters On Pages 93 & 94

KRISS KROSS



WORD WHEEL

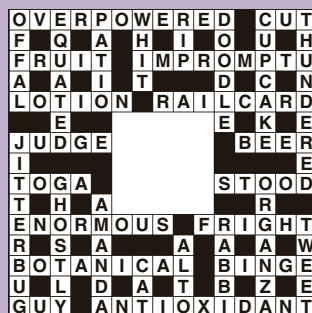
The nine-letter word is
DIRECTORY

ALL MUDDLED UP!

Palladio for Strings, Toccata and Fugue,
Moonlight Sonata

CODEBREAKER

Phrase: WILD AT HEART



SUDOKU

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 5 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9 |
| 6 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 5 |
| 2 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 1 |
| 3 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 7 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 1 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 8 |
| 8 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 4 |
| 4 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 2 |

SUGURU

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| 1 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 |

MISSING LINK 664

ACROSS: 8 House 9 Tooting
10 Grenade 11 Queen 12 Spaghetti
14 Pea 15 Dam 16 Dissolved 19 Servo
21 Attempt 23 Retreat 24 Canoe
DOWN: 1 Thighs 2 Lukewarm 3 Beta
4 Street 5 Mosquito 6 Nile 7 Agenda
13 Hydrogen 14 Pavement 15 Desert
17 Starts 18 Dotted 20 Rate 22 Tuck

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