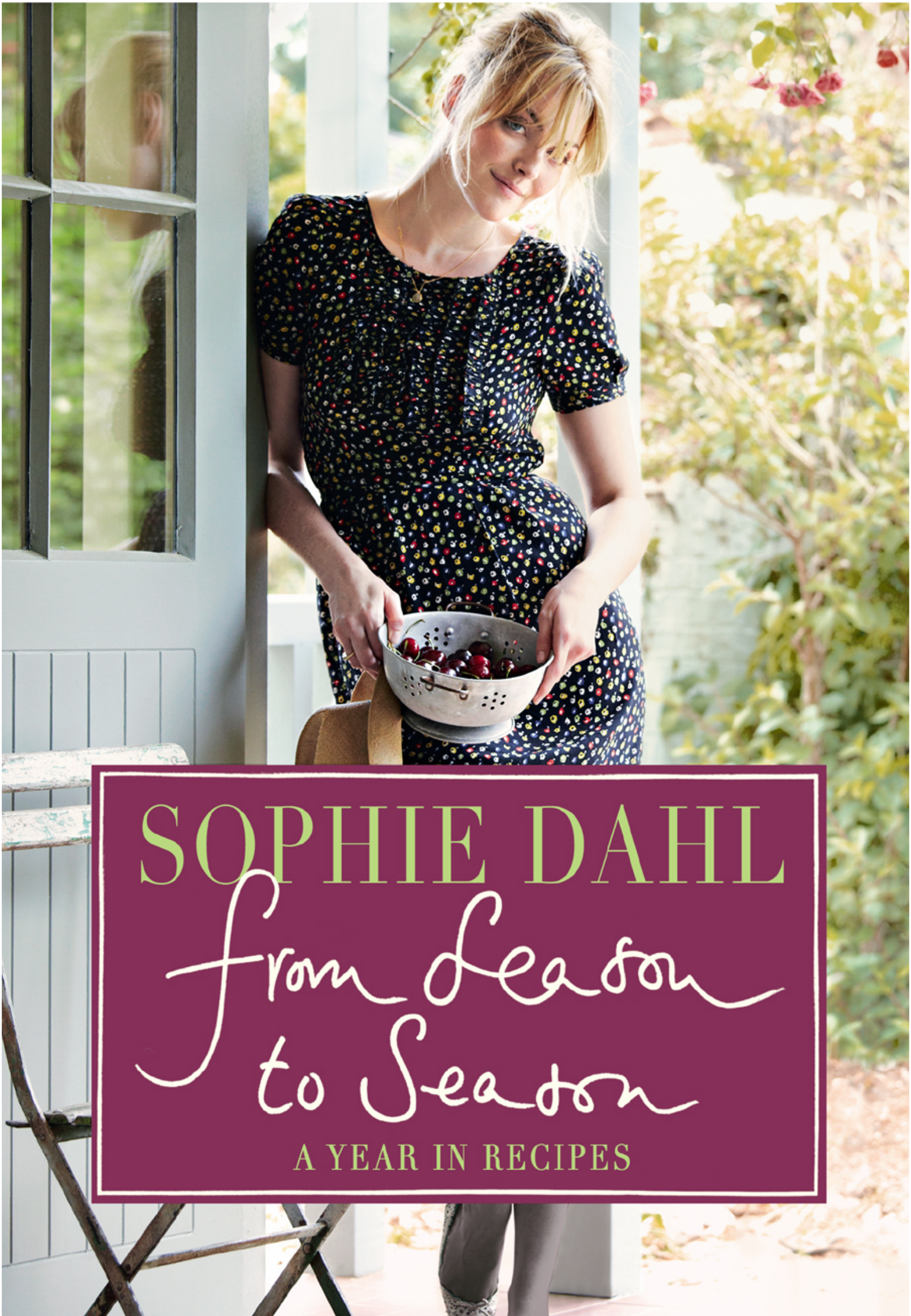


SOPHIE DAHL

From Season to Season

A YEAR IN RECIPES

Sophie Dahl

From Season to Season: A Year in Recipes

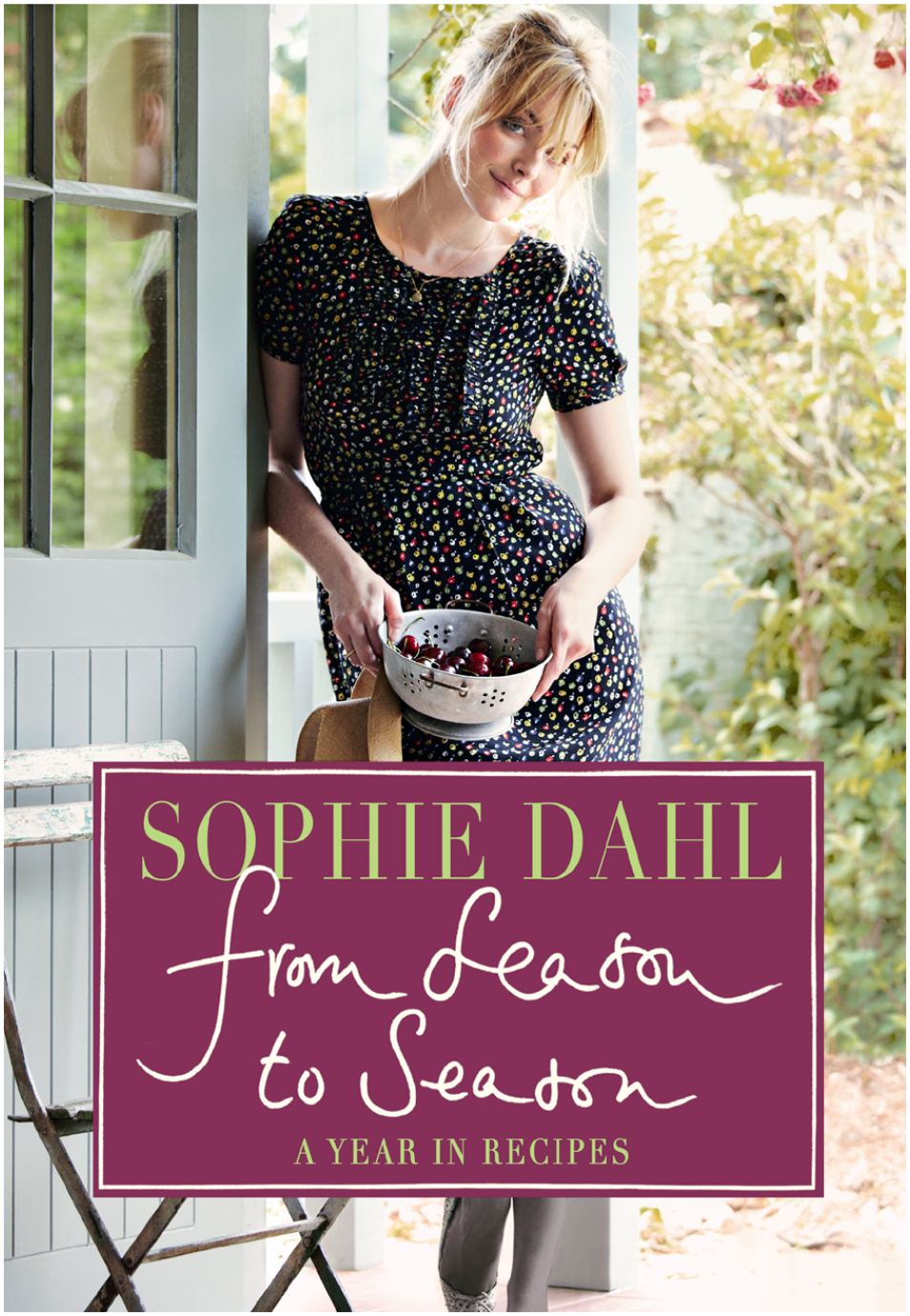
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Dahl S.

From Season to Season: A Year in Recipes / S. Dahl — «HarperCollins»,

Continuing where her hugely successful Voluptuous Delights left off, best selling author Sophie Dahl offers up a seasonal almanac of bountiful dishes alongside warm food-filled memories and musings.Taking a gastronomic journey through the seasons, from the Victorian Beeton era to a recent sodden Parisian evening, Dahl captures the smoke filled days of Autumn with a nostalgic Squash and Parmesan soup, the blooming warmth of an English garden in high summer with Grilled Peaches with Pistachios and Ricotta; and the burgeoning beginnings of Spring with a Butter Lettuce, Lobster and Crayfish Salad.Bursting with moreish yet nutritious recipes for budding foodies and seasoned gourmets alike, stunning photography and Sophie's delightfully quirky illustrations, this latest offering promises pleasure, indulgence and of course, simple, good food.

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from season to season
a year in recipes
by Sophie Dahl
photographs by Jan Baldwin

HarperCollins*Publishers*



Dedication

For my Jamie, as everything is.

And to my grandmother, Patsy Louise, who had the courage of a lion and loved her family, along with avocados, cheap wine and hymns.

SD

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Cook’s notes

All pepper is freshly ground black pepper. I also like to use a coarse sea salt like Maldon.

I’m a big believer in free-range, cruelty-free produce. To that end, try and buy dairy and meat from a supplier you trust, one who treats their animals with respect.

We are overfishing our painfully understocked oceans. To get a list of what fish are sustainable and plentiful, please go to the Marine Stewardship Council website (the MSC) www.msc.org.

Stock: I use fresh or, if being lazy, Marigold Vegetable Bouillon or Kallo’s Organic Free-range Chicken Stock.

Good usefuls to have in the larder and fridge, in no particular order and given in haphazard fashion:

Belazu Balsamic Vinegar (really thick and syrupy)
Miso paste (for dressings and marinades)
Rice vinegar
Tahini
Pomegranate molasses
A good, strong mustard
Tamari
Mirin
Marsala
Horseradish root
A bunch of fresh herbs
Tarragon
Parsley
Coriander
Chives
Argan oil
Pumpkin seed oil

Some good-quality dark chocolate
Some cheap chocolate for eating on the spur of the moment or when miserable
Lemons for zesting
Chickpeas
Lentils (both Puy and yellow)
A good home-made garam masala
Star anise
Cardamom
Arborio rice
An onion
Some garlic
Pearl barley for soups and stews
Arrowroot for thickening gravies or sauces for the gluten-free
Spelt flour
Good vanilla extract
Runny honey
Fresh coffee
Stock in ice-cube trays in the freezer
Sunflower seeds to toast and add to salads and bread



Introduction



‘It’s a question of discipline,’ The Little Prince told me later on. ‘When you’ve finished washing and dressing each morning, you must tend to your planet.’ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince

In my last book, Miss Dahl’s Voluptuous Delights, I began with writing that many of our grandparents ate healthfully and seasonally before there was a name for it, eating with an innate common sense and practicality that somehow, along the way, many of us have forgotten. This doesn’t stand for everyone’s grandparents, as I discovered on a book tour to Denmark. A journalist there asked me if I knew what her grandparents were eating fifty years ago. I knew from her smile I was on treacherous ground and took a deep breath of preparation.

‘No,’ I demurred politely. ‘What did they eat?’

‘LARD!’ She said. ‘They lived on lard and potatoes! I eat far better than they would have ever dreamed! What do you think of that Miss home-grown-seasonal-vegetable-garden-have-a-walk-every-day?’

I immediately morphed into a filmic parody of Hugh Grant and said something very English and vague like, ‘Well, yes, I don’t know what everyone’s grandparents ate, hmm, easy to generalize, mutter, ho hum.’ And blushed.

Under the gaze of watchful Danes, I stand corrected then, and speak only for my own grandparents, who grew fruit and vegetables in their garden, buying fish from the local fishmonger, meat from the local butcher and dairy from their local farmer. Every meal on their table came to fruition with an unspoken nod to seasonality and availability.

I am keenly aware that if you are a busy working parent, or if you live somewhere isolated, sometimes all that is on offer (or is bearable) is a one-stop shop. I am sometimes guilty of it myself. But I also believe that if each one of us makes a concession towards being a conscious consumer, we are in turn making an active contribution to looking after our lovely planet, which has enough exterior torment going on in it without us adding to it.

We are blessed in England to have our very definite seasons. Sometimes they feel never ending, dragging winter in particular, but the reward is tangible, both in the garden and on the plate. There is a finite certainty to the seasons that I, as a neurotic ever pursuer of order, find blissfully predictable.

I like knowing that on a damp autumn evening, whilst the wind is pounding at the windows, I can transport myself with a bowl of molten comfort, a soup of squash and Parmesan, served with a thick hunk of buttered bread. This is when food meets the call of the weather, as it's hard to imagine the summer when it's been replaced by lashing rain. The memory of a ceviche, tart with lime, can propel you through the darkest days of winter, carrying you right to the moment when you can actually eat it in the garden, as drowsy bees sail past, the air throbbing with sun and lavender.

I come from a long tradition of home cooks. I write about some of them here. England is full of them, hundreds upon thousands of them practically more skilled than I. You only have to look within one of the many branches of the Women's Institute or similar to find women whose lemon bars are like the tender tears of an angel, whose puff pastry flakes with an unparalleled buttery grace. I worship at the altar of these culinary high priestesses. I still can't chop an onion properly, and my apple coring looks like the prelude to a horror film. I very occasionally make a cake that could be used as a weapon or forget to put the sugar in something. I am content with this haphazard state of affairs; it keeps me honest. I own an apple corer, and I make whoever is lurking in the kitchen around Sunday lunch time chop my onions. I lob shards of my occasional missile cakes at the voracious crows poaching my raspberries. I happen to be a greedy writer who likes to cook and then write about what I've cooked, not a chef, or a teacher. If you are looking for a voice of stern culinary authority, go elsewhere! I can give you stories, and ideas for things, along with food that is lovely, simple and straightforward. No forgotten sugar either, I promise. This book is a collection of recipes that were either written down as they were cooked, imagined late one sleepless night and then realized, admired and reprinted, or passed down by a stoic Norwegian great grandmother. They are all pretty easy, with minimal fussing required. I like honest cooking that speaks for itself, cooking that begs for seconds and a satisfied smile, and I truly hope that resonates from my kitchen to yours.

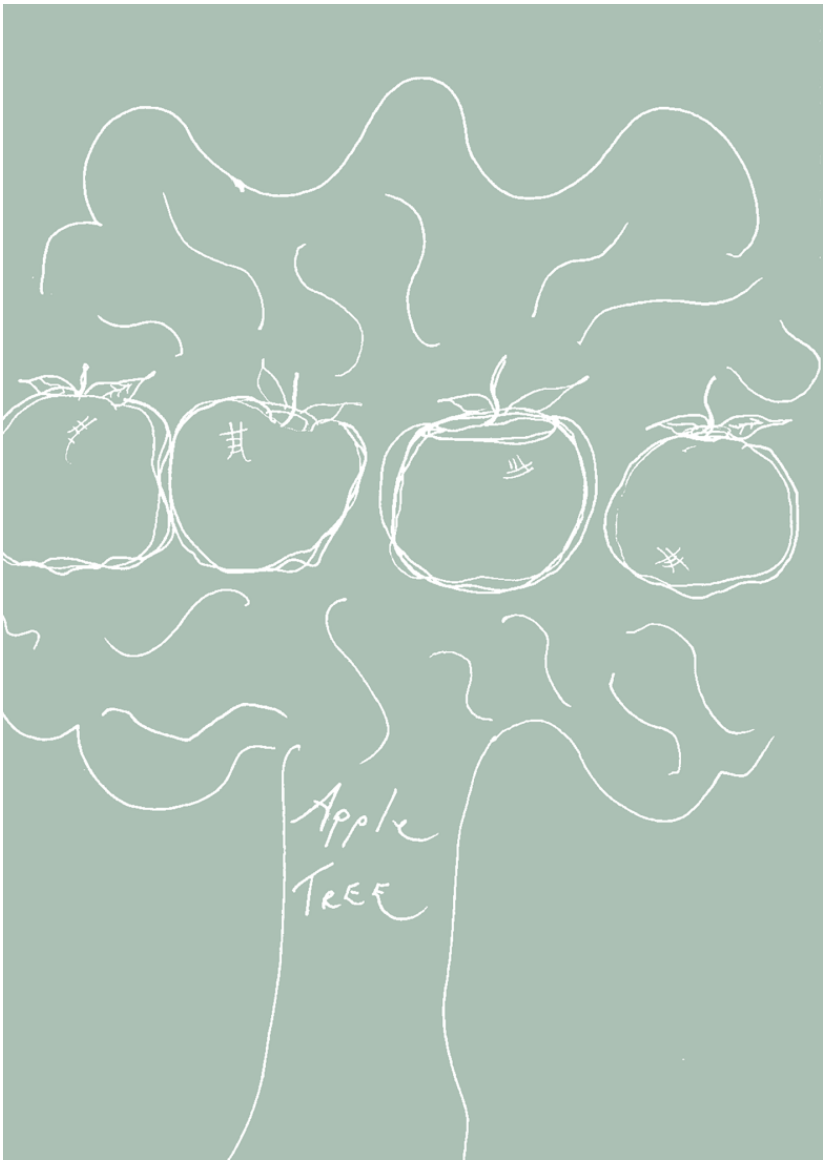
In the in-between, I wish for you an army of onion choppers, sponge that is light as a feather, soufflés that defy gravity and, if all else fails, a shoulder to cry on. Cooking is not tight-lipped and mean, and it is not judgmental either. It shouldn't be, and nor should eating. Both in their very nature are providers – of nourishment, family, warmth and community, alchemy and adventure.

So whether your grandparents were lard-eating Danes, Burmese farmers, molasses-eating Mississippians, prairie-sowing Middle Americans or, like mine, a mix of staunch Scandinavian, Scottish Presbyterian, Tennessee hillbillies and vegetable growing East Enders, most of all, I wish you happy eating. Whatever the season.

With love,

Sophie Dahl

Autumn



Autumn is all about nostalgia. For me it will forever be the season of back to school, first loves, and bonfire night. The food of autumn captures all of that in a net. Even the scent of autumn is sweet, smoky and wistful.

From four to seventeen I attended quite a few schools, from the call your teacher Bob and do yoga as a sport sort, to the white gloves and curtsying to the headmistress after prayers, draconian institute that is particular to England. The one constant in the merry-go-round was the familiar feeling that flooded to the surface during the last week of August, the week before the autumn term began. It was a cross between an itch and a promise, as the evenings grew colder and supper was suddenly hot soup or a baked potato. It was furthered by buying tights and the accoutrements of junior academia: shiny pencil cases, as yet unmarred with the initials of the boy who we all had a crush on, scratched on with a compass, and virginal geometry books, so hopeful without the vivid red crosses that were sure to come.

If it was boarding school, which it was for a bit, there was the heart-plunging goodbye at the train station on a Sunday evening, the inevitable pall of rain steaming up the windows, staining the summer with a tearful goodbye. At day school, the first-day rain ceased to be a symbolic backdrop for all that was ill in the world, and more of a vanity irritant, mussing up the fringe that was so carefully straightened the night before, in honour of the sixth form boys.

Your classmates felt new like pennies, and you saw them with new eyes, at least for a day or two. Chloe now had a chest to rival Jane Russell; Joe's voice had broken and he had freckles from some faraway sun. Lola had a worldly weariness that could have something to do with a Greek waiter, and fat Robert was now thin and mean with it. Our teachers struggled with the new us, trying to gauge our emotional temperature with the old jokes that used to work, before we went and grew quietly behind their backs. So much can happen in ten weeks. Long gone from school, I still know that much can shift in a summer.

Maybe this is why autumn makes me so nostalgic. The tangible chrysalis effect of what's changed. I watch it now with my younger cousins and the children of friends. Fun fairs and post graduation nights of camping in places that parents would balk at, sangria and sunburn, and thinking you're in love with a person who can barely say hello in your language. Discovering that some friends won't, as you thought, walk into adult life with you, that all of those nights spent whispering secrets when the lights were out will be instead relegated to the yellowing pages of a diary.

During the summer I was in Los Angeles, far, far away from the thought of rain, tights or cosy autumnal food. I stayed at my aunt's house, which was filled with kids home from college for the summer and her menagerie of animals, including a bowl of violently coloured jellyfish and Frances Bacon, her pot-bellied pig. Frances is of variable temper, enormous and partially blind, she hates babies and cats in no particular order. She is very fond of strawberries, bed and sitting on the dogs, who live in mortal fear of her. We have always got on reasonably well. This all changed when my aunt went away for a week. Although I did all the things Frances likes – scratching her ears, rubbing sunscreen on her broad scaly back, feeding her banana skins and tucking her in at night – I think she connected my arrival with my aunt's disappearance and decided, like an errant stepchild, to make my life complicated. She crept stealthily into the larder (my favourite place) and trapped me there daily, blocking my exit with her two hundred pound bulk, trying to bite me if I attempted to get past her. We engaged in a ridiculous game that involved me holding a spoonful of strawberries aloft, and dancing from the kitchen into the garden like a pig Pied Piper, depositing the fruit into her open milky mouth, and running as fast as I could to lock the door behind me to the sound of porcine fury. In defeated distress, I called my aunt's assistant Sharon and explained the situation.

'Here's the thing,' she said, in dulcet Zen tones. I took a deep breath and wondered what Doctor Dolittle trick she was going to impart, 'It's very simple. Frances doesn't like change.'

In the spirit of change, I give you the following. It's for leaf-sodden days and misty mornings.

Autumn Breakfasts



Tapioca with stewed apples and apricots

Tapioca, like semolina, is one of those things that a school kitchen could have turned you off for life. I couldn't eat it for years, having been force-fed it at primary school aged six, with tinned jam, as it oozed like frogspawn out of the bowl, and I wept and retched. For years I had the same malicious feeling towards beetroot and mashed potatoes, which were instant and came in lumpy granules. My teacher and I had a silent war every lunch time; a war that eventually came to an end after my parents removed me from the school. Made to your own wont, in your own kitchen, tapioca is ambrosial, and worth being a grown-up for, as is semolina. This could also be a pudding not a breakfast, just don't serve it with dog food-like tinned jam. Try a lovely home-made compote instead.

SERVES 4

70g/½ cup of tapioca (soaked overnight in plenty of water)

350ml/1⅓ cups of milk

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

A knob of butter

2 tablespoons of runny honey or agave syrup or brown sugar

For the apple and apricots

12 dried apricots (like the tapioca, soaked overnight, but in about 250ml/1 cup of orange juice)

250ml/1 cup or so of water
1 cinnamon stick
A few tablespoons of orange juice
1 tablespoon of agave syrup or honey
2 eating apples, peeled, cored and sliced

Having soaked the tapioca overnight, drain and place it in a saucepan with the milk, vanilla extract and a knob of butter. Bring to the boil, turn to low and simmer, stirring in the honey, agave or sugar, for another 10 minutes.

Cut your overnight magically plumped apricots into halves or quarters if desired. In another saucepan, place the water, cinnamon, orange juice, agave or honey and apple and bring to the boil, giving it a good stir now and then. Simmer for about 10 to 15 minutes or until the apple is tender.

Now, here you can do one of two things. Serve the stewed fruit as is on top of the tapioca or put the tapioca in a small ovenproof dish with another knob of butter, pour the apple and apricot on top and bake at 180°C/160°C fan/Gas 4 for 15 or so minutes. The choice, Cilla, is yours.





Argan oil, almond and honey smoothie

Argan oil comes from the Argan tree, a Moroccan tree with magical properties. The oil is now easy to obtain through mail order or online, or if you live in a city, at your local health food shop. I get mine from Wild Wood Groves, www.wildwoodgroves.com. If you can't access it, use a cold-pressed oil instead, something like an almond oil. I eat Argan, put it on my face and in my bath. It's also great for babies with eczema. Frozen bananas are perfect for adding to smoothies, so have some in stock. Chop up the banana and put it in the freezer in a Ziploc bag or Tupperware.

SERVES 1

½ a frozen banana

8 or so blanched almonds

1 glass of soy milk

1 teaspoon of Argan oil

1 tablespoon of runny honey

Put your banana, almonds, soy and Argan in the blender with your honey. Blend until smooth and drink and be joyful.

Crab cakes with poached eggs and spinach

Perhaps the thing I miss most about living in the US is the ubiquity of brunch, or the ready availability of breakfast foods in a restaurant, long after breakfast is normally finished. Crab cakes are such a thing, perfectly so with eggs on top. If the mountain can't come to Mohammed…

SERVES 2

For the crab cakes

450g/1lb of cooked crab meat – white and brown

1 tablespoon of home-made or good mayonnaise

1 teaspoon of mustard

A few drops of Tabasco sauce

A small handful of fresh mixed herbs – dill, chervil and parsley

Salt and pepper

1 egg

2 tablespoons of olive oil

A handful of spinach

A dash of vinegar

Salt

2 eggs

Get the crab cake mixture ready, by mixing all the ingredients, bar the egg and olive oil, and forming into little cakes. Beat the egg and brush the crab cakes with it, then heat the olive oil in a non-stick pan. Throw on the crab cakes and cook them for a few minutes on each side until golden. You can also wilt the spinach in the same pan for a few minutes. Plate, with the spinach around the crab cakes.

In another pan, boil some water with a dash of vinegar and some salt. When it is simmering away, carefully add your eggs and poach for 3 minutes. Drain and put the eggs on top of the crab cakes. Eat immediately.

Spelt French toast with smashed blueberries and blackberries

Another very happy childhood food memory. French toast is as comforting as a feather-filled bed.

SERVES 4

A day-old spelt loaf

4 eggs, plus 1 egg yolk

125ml/½ cup of milk

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

2 tablespoons of agave syrup or brown sugar

Pinch of salt

1 tablespoon of butter

For the smashed blueberries and blackberries

2 generous handfuls each of blackberries and blueberries

1 tablespoon of water

3 tablespoons of agave syrup or honey

4 heaped tablespoons of Greek yoghurt

Put the berries in a saucepan with the water and agave or honey. Bring to the boil and simmer for a few minutes, or until they begin to split into a big jammy autumnal mess.

Slice the stale loaf into manageable toast-sized pieces. In a mixing bowl, beat together the eggs and egg yolk with the milk, vanilla, agave or sugar and the pinch of salt. When well incorporated, pour this mixture into a shallow baking dish. Start putting the bread in it, making sure it's fully dunked. You need to let the bread sit in this eggy bath for at least 20 minutes, so it can really soak it up. If the bread needs help, prick it with a fork to help the egg mixture permeate.

Take a big griddle pan or large heavy-bottomed frying pan and melt the butter. Put the egg-soaked bread in, in batches if needs be. Cook it for about 4 minutes on each side, until the bread is bronzed on the outside and soft on the in. Serve on warmed plates, with the smashed berries and yoghurt on top.





Mushrooms on toast

This is also perfect for a Sunday night supper when there are few around and you can eat this on your lap, a poached egg on top of it, watching a good old costume drama.

SERVES 2

A good few handfuls of mixed wild mushrooms, roughly chopped

1 tablespoon of olive oil

1 clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped

A handful of fresh parsley

A pinch of fresh chopped tarragon

A knob of butter

A whisper of single/light cream

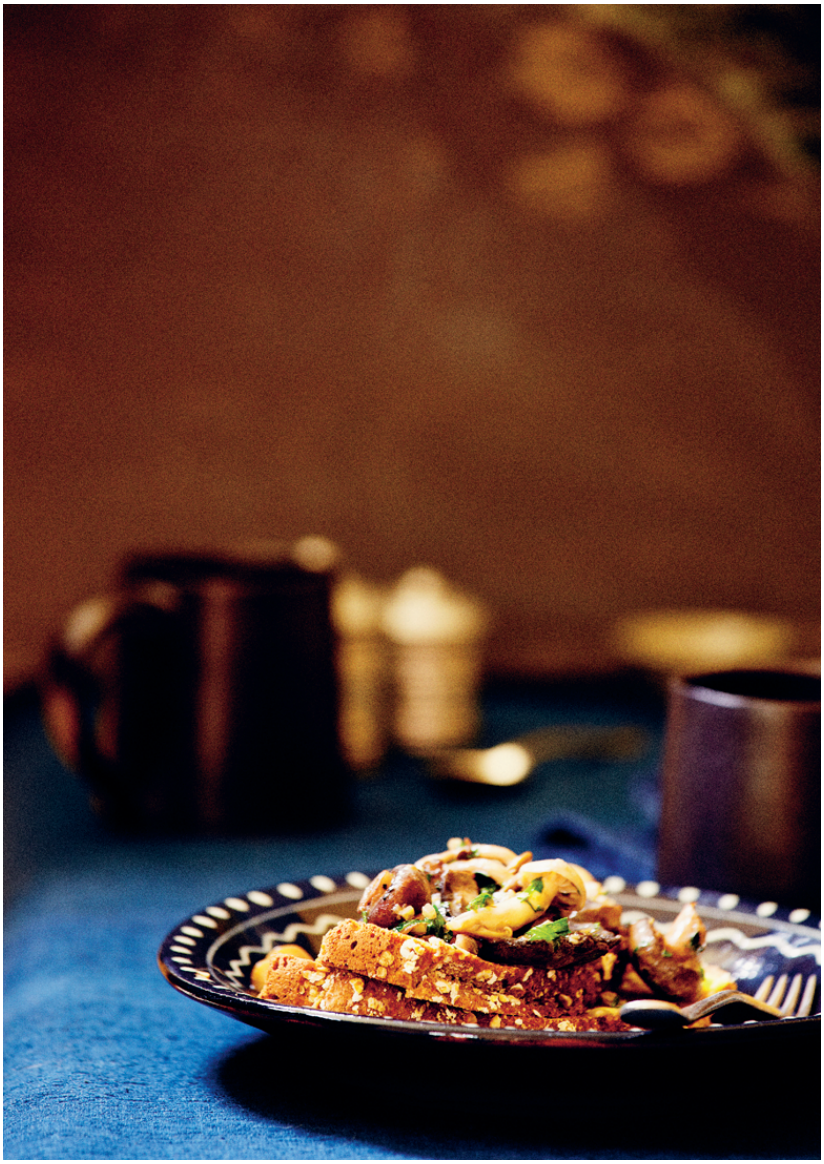
Salt and pepper

Slices of soda bread or dark rye, toasted and buttered

First of all, make sure your pan is searing hot. Otherwise, your mushrooms can get soggy and unpleasant and, frankly, a soggy mushroom is a bit grim. Toss in the mushrooms at the same time as the olive oil and the garlic. You should hear an angry hiss. Hurrah!

Keep throwing it all around and when the mushrooms are the burnished shade that appeals to you, toss in the parsley, tarragon and butter. There should be lots of juices in the pan and I suggest you add to them with a trickle of cream. And maybe a splash of white wine? But I suppose it is breakfast. Season to taste and serve on crispy buttered toast with a big cup of tea.





Apple cider omelette

There is nothing more English nor more autumnal than an apple swollen from the tree in late September. This omelette celebrates that in my house. Put your scarf on and kick some leaves!

SERVES 1

2 tablespoons of butter

¼ of a small onion, peeled and finely chopped

2 teaspoons of apple cider vinegar

Salt and pepper

3 eggs

50g/½ cup of mature/sharp Cheddar cheese, grated

1 teaspoon of sumac

1 teaspoon of fresh chopped thyme

Melt 1 tablespoon of butter, on a medium heat, in a non-stick frying pan. Add the onion and turn the heat down, cooking until it is soft. Add the apple cider vinegar and season, cooking until the vinegar is absorbed. Whisk the eggs and, adding the rest of the butter to the frying pan, pour in the eggs over the onion mixture, making sure it's distributed easily. Agitate it a bit and add the Cheddar, sumac and thyme. Flip it, cooking for another 30 seconds or so until cooked, and serve.

Gooseberry yoghurt

Dedicated to my Aunt Lucy – a gooseberry fan. So much so that when she was in Amsterdam and saw gooseberries on the menu, she began shouting ‘Gooseberries!’ at the top of her voice and did a little joyous dance, much to the amusement of my cousins, her daughters. She does live in Los Angeles, so is gooseberry deprived, rather than just a bit weird.

SERVES 4

400g/14oz of gooseberries

2 tablespoons of brown sugar

1 teaspoon of orange flower water

185ml/¾ cup of Greek yoghurt

Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/Gas 4. Put the gooseberries in an ovenproof baking dish and sprinkle with the sugar and orange flower water. Cook, uncovered, for about 20 minutes, take out and leave to cool thoroughly. Strain the gooseberries, pour into the blender and purée for a minute or so.

This can be eaten in a multitude of ways. Pour on the top of the yoghurt so it drips through, leave on the bottom of the yoghurt to find as a surprise or ribbon through it.

Autumn Lunches



Heartbreak carbonara (or the first thing I ever cooked for a boy)

To marry with the wistful theme of my autumn, here is the first thing I ever cooked for a boy who I loved quietly and secretly. The carbonara in the pan lingered longer than he did — he wolfed it down with a bottle of Chianti, and informed me he was actually in love with a dancer called Willow (or something infinitely more exotic than Sophie). Then he disappeared into the night. I lay sobbing on the floor, wishing I could be angular and coordinated like Willow. Indeed, I cried such a ridiculous amount that in the morning I looked as if I had a black eye, and my mother gave me a heartbreak dispensation day off school.

SERVES 4

125g/4½ 0z of pancetta, bacon or ham

2 tablespoons of olive oil

4 egg yolks

30g/¼ cup of grated Parmesan

A splash of white wine

2 tablespoons of single/light cream

Salt and pepper

500g/1lb 2oz of spaghetti

Cut the pancetta into bite-sized pieces. In a medium-sized frying pan, put a small glug of oil and cook the pancetta until crispy. Put to the side.

In a mixing bowl, beat together the egg yolks, Parmesan, splash of wine, the cream and some salt and pepper. Add the pancetta and mix it all together. Cook the pasta and, as soon as it is ready, mix it quickly with the sauce so the egg doesn't cook.

Heartbreak not essential.



Squash and Parmesan soup

This is what blowsy October days are made for. Comforting and golden, this soup is a hymn to autumn. I first made this clucking around in upstate New York when I had some leftover squash. It works just as well with pumpkin or sweet potato.

SERVES 4

50g/½ stick of butter
1kg/2lb of squash, cubed
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped
2 tablespoons of sherry
875ml/3½ cups of chicken or vegetable stock
½ teaspoon of cayenne pepper
A couple of bay leaves
Salt and pepper
2 tablespoons of double/heavy cream
A handful of toasted pumpkin seeds
A handful of fresh chopped parsley

A handful of grated Parmesan

In a heavy-bottomed pan, melt the butter and add the squash, onion and garlic. Cook for a few minutes. Add the sherry, stir and then add the stock, cayenne pepper and bay leaves. Cook until the squash is tender, about 10 to 15 minutes. Remove the bay leaves and blend the soup either with a hand-held mixer or in the blender. Season and add the cream. Serve with a topping of pumpkin seeds, parsley and grated Parmesan.

Spanish omelette

Like a frittata, a bit of a recycling dish for what you've got lying around. Also great for a lunchbox for a small or big person – just wrap in greaseproof/wax paper.

SERVES 4

3 tablespoons of olive oil

225g/1½ cups of potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced

150g/1⅓ cups of onions, thinly sliced

8 eggs

Salt and pepper

Preheat the grill to a high setting. In a large non-stick frying pan, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil on a medium to low flame. Add the potatoes and the onions and cook until golden. Take off the heat and reserve.

Whisk the eggs and season them. Pour the onion and potato mixture into the eggs and heat another tablespoon of olive oil in the pan. Add the egg, potato and onion and turn the heat down to low. Loosen the edges and agitate the pan.

When the bottom is set and golden brown, take an oiled plate, turn the omelette out and put it back in the pan, this time face-side down. Transfer the omelette to under a hot grill and cook for another minute or two until the top is set, then turn out, serving happily either hot or cold.

Bonfire night

I had been raiding the memory bank in order to come up with a recipe that captured all of the hissing November glory of Bonfire Night, but I first arrived at a feeling rather than a taste. Whether wrapped in the crisp skin of a twice-baked potato, or hidden amidst the charred sweetness of a sausage, rolling anticipation is the abiding sense of that night for me. Maybe it's a hangover from those teenage days – crushes seen through a wreath of bonfire smoke, against a backdrop of technicoloured sky, or the electric feel of cold fingers handing over an oozing marshmallow. Either way, the visuals are made flesh as soon as you eat something with a November tinge, from jaw-locking candy apples to mellow roasted pumpkin, and how....

'Fireworks in the heavens, fireworks in my head, one vodka too many, now I wish I was dead.'

These were the words I wrote on the sixth of November, aged seventeen, nursing an aching head and heart. I had seen my love rat ex-boyfriend across a bonfire the night before and, oh woe, necked a couple of stiff vodkas and wobbled up to him, professing undying affection in the face of his horrible cheating ways. Love rat was a classic; twenty-seven to my seventeen, he'd disappear for nights on end and then eventually return with love bites and a bedraggled bouquet, probably nicked from a grave. He never had any money and was constantly dipping into my babysitting funds, and he only ever wore a black polo neck, probably to hide the love bites.

On that night of sparklers, over the smell of chestnuts, he greeted my tear thick protestations with fluttering eyelashes and a sly smile.

'Oh sweetheart, I've been away. Went to see a man about a dog in Leicester, you know how it is.'

I didn't know how it was – how could I? I was green as a milk-fed calf, and I thought that if I just looked after him, made him lasagne and kept him warm, he would love me as he had in August, and he might even stop drinking and disappearing. And after all, weren't the greatest love affairs meant to be a bit tortured in their onset? I was highly romantic and believed we were playing out a drama of old, I Caitlin to his Dylan, or he Burton to my Taylor.

As my friends rolled their eyes around the bonfire, he kissed me behind a bush, and then sloped home to his new girlfriend, a twenty-something Dane with stumpy legs, a BMW and her own flat in Chelsea. I did not have a flat in Chelsea; I lived in Balham with my mum, had a curfew and I couldn't drive.

'He doesn't really love her,' I told my friend Cassie afterwards, the relief of his kiss still reassuringly near. 'He loves me. He told me, it was very sincere. I feel awful for him. He feels beholden to the Dane because she doesn't know anyone in London, and he's painting her flat. It's temporary. And anyway, I have better legs.'

'Love,' she said. 'He's a total prat.'

'Aren't they all?' I asked wearily, as the Catherine wheels sang over my head. I felt that this was one of life's MOMENTS, one that I would remember always.

My association with the love rat lasted until Christmas, when the stumpy Dane who had stolen him from me called me crying. She read from my script, and I felt oddly sorry for her.

'He's gone missing,' she said.

'He does that,' I said. 'It's horrible.'

And as I said the things to her that everyone had said to me, it became real.

'You're worth more than this. Love is not meant to be about uncertainty. He's very lucky to have you.'

The truth was liberating.

'He's a total arse,' I told her. 'I'd get rid of him if I were you.'

It was November a good seven years later when I bumped into him. Red wine stained his teeth, and gathered in the creases of his mouth. He looked like a vampire and stumbled with drink. He told me I was the great love of his life. I laughed. He still wore a polo neck.

Baked pumpkin with lemon, sautéed greens and toasted cumin dressing

This is perfect to serve with some quinoa or wild rice as a main to a non-meat eater, or as a side with some roast chicken for the carnivorous. It's also good served warm the following day with a little grilled tofu added.

SERVES 4

1kg/2lb of pumpkin, deseeded and chopped into rough chunks and/or slices

1 large red onion, peeled and roughly chopped

A few fresh sage leaves, roughly torn

Salt and pepper

2 tablespoons of olive oil

For the dressing

1½ teaspoons of cumin seeds or ground cumin

Juice of ½ a lemon

1 tablespoon of olive oil

1 teaspoon of crème fraîche/sour cream

For the sautéed greens

2 tablespoons of olive oil

1 clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped

A handful of Swiss chard

A handful of curly kale

Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C fan/Gas 7. Put the pumpkin in a roasting tray with the onion and sage, season, and pour over the olive oil. Cook for around 30 minutes or until the pumpkin is tender.

While the pumpkin is cooking, make your dressing. In a small frying pan on a medium heat, toast the cumin seeds. This should only take a minute, and you will know it's ready when the dusk of the cumin is wafting round your kitchen. Cool for a minute, then squeeze the lemon juice into

the pan, followed by the olive oil. Put this into a jug or something and leave to the side, stirring the crème fraîche in just before serving.

Now, the greens. In a big frying pan, heat the olive oil and garlic. Throw in the greens and cook until tender, about 5 to 10 minutes.

Take the pumpkin out of the oven, put the greens on a plate, with the pumpkin on top and cover with the dressing.



Soba noodle salad with rainbow vegetables and sesame dressing

I put soba noodles in everything – soups, salads and stir-fries. This is a quick, healthy, bountiful lunch and one to give to your friend who's allergic to EVERYTHING.

SERVES 2

250g/9oz of soba noodles

⅓ of a large daikon (about 150g/5oz), cut into thin strips

½ a small head of white cabbage, shredded

1 medium carrot, grated

A handful of radishes, thinly sliced

1 spring onion/scallion, finely shredded

1 small handful of sesame seeds

For the dressing

3 tablespoons of sesame oil

1 tablespoon of brown rice vinegar

1 teaspoon of tamari (wheat-free soy sauce)

1 teaspoon of agave syrup or honey

Cook the soba noodles by bringing 2 litres/8 cups of water to the boil, adding the noodles and cooking on low for 6 or so minutes. Drain and cool. When the noodles are cool, put them in the bowl you are planning to serve them in and add all of the vegetables – shredding, grating and thinly slicing.

In a small frying pan, toast the sesame seeds for a minute or so. Add to the noodles. Make the dressing by whisking all the ingredients together, adjusting according to taste, and pour over the noodles.



Lentil salad with a mustard dressing

Lentils are always good things to have in stock, along with chickpeas. You can turn them into a salad or soup on the spot. This is a hearty salad that is also good warm.

SERVES 4

225g/1¼ cups of Puy lentils

2 celery sticks, chopped in fine rounds

A handful of cherry tomatoes, finely chopped

150g/1 cup of feta, crumbled

A small handful of fresh chopped mint

For the dressing

4 tablespoons of olive or rapeseed oil

1 teaspoon of white wine vinegar

2 teaspoons of Dijon mustard

1 shallot, peeled and finely chopped

Salt and pepper

Place the lentils in a pan and add just enough water to cover. Simmer over a low heat for 20 minutes, then drain.

In a serving bowl, mix the lentils with the celery, tomatoes and feta.

Make the dressing by whisking all the ingredients together, adjusting according to taste. Dress the salad and then toss with the mint.





Beef Stroganoff

I know, I know. Totally from the same school as Chicken Kiev in terms of 80s nostalgia and naffness. But wasn't it good, particularly if it came in a ready meal? We knew not what we did. I used to beg for Beef Stroganoff as a child. I think, as a worthy vegetarian, it became Quorn Stroganoff and now, somewhere in the middle, the last time I had anything resembling it was a mushroom variety in a pub in Cornwall. Good old retro food.

SERVES 4

1 tablespoon of olive oil or butter, plus extra oil
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped
2 handfuls of mushrooms, roughly chopped
500g/1lb 2oz of beef fillet, chopped into strips 1cm/½ inch wide and thick
1 teaspoon of paprika
Juice of ½ a lemon
A splash of vermouth
60ml/¼ cup of sour cream
A handful of fresh chopped parsley

Put a frying pan on a low heat and drop in the oil or butter. Add the onion and garlic and sweat for a few minutes, making sure they don't brown. Add the mushrooms and cook until they are golden. Put this mixture to the side.

In the same pan, heat a little more oil and add the beef strips, the paprika and the lemon. Toss around. Cook for a minute or so, and then splash on the vermouth. Pour the mushroom and onion mixture back in the pan, cook for another minute but no longer, and then take off the heat and add the sour cream and the parsley. Mix it all together and serve with some simple boiled potatoes or rice.

Autumn Suppers







Salmon steaks with a wasabi coating

I adore the kick that wasabi gives to anything in its path. Buy it in powder form and add SLOWLY to dressings or mayonnaise, or if anyone you know goes to Japan, get them to bring you back some of the toxic green stuff in a tube.

SERVES 2

2 salmon steaks, about 175g/6oz each

Salt and pepper

For the rice

100g/¾ cup of wild rice

1 large beetroot/beet

1 pomegranate

1 tablespoon of olive oil

A small handful of fresh chopped mint

For the wasabi coating

2 tablespoons of mayonnaise

½ teaspoon of ground cumin

1 teaspoon of wasabi paste or powder mixed to a paste with water

Cook the wild rice (two parts water to one part rice) by boiling for 45 minutes. Leave to the side to cool.

Meanwhile, cover the beetroot/beet with water; bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for about 30 minutes until the beetroot/beet is tender. Drain, and when cool enough to handle, peel off the skin and cut the beetroot/beet into rough chunks.

Chop the pomegranate in half and extract the seeds. Add the pomegranate, beetroot/beet, olive oil and mint to the rice. Leave to the side.

Make the wasabi coating by mixing the mayonnaise, cumin and wasabi together. Taste and adjust if you want. Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/Gas 4.

Wash and dry the salmon, and season. Heat a griddle pan or ovenproof frying pan big enough to fit both salmon steaks and, when it is searing hot, drop the salmon in, skin-side down. Turn after 5 minutes or when the skin is brown and crispy. Take off the heat, carefully turn again, and spoon the wasabi mayonnaise onto the top of the salmon. Put the pan into the oven and cook for around 10 minutes until the glaze begins to brown. Serve on the wild rice.

Baked vegetables smothered in scamorza

Scamorza is an Italian cow's milk cheese, available in most Italian delis. If you can't find it, use mozzarella instead. The smoked scamorza lends a smoky depth to sauces and whatever it touches. It is also pretty bloody good on it's own, eaten from the packet. This is a variation on a recipe given to me by my girlfriend Emma.

SERVES 2

1 large aubergine/ eggplant

Salt and pepper

2 tablespoons of olive oil

1 ball of smoked scamorza or smoked mozzarella (or use regular mozzarella)

For the pesto

1 large clove of garlic, peeled

A large handful of fresh basil

A few tablespoons of pine nuts

3 tablespoons of olive oil

30g/¼ cup of grated Parmesan

Salt and pepper

Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/Gas 4.

Start with salting the aubergine/eggplant. Slice it lengthways, put on a tea towel and sprinkle it with sea salt. Turn after 20 minutes or so, and do the other side. Rinse and dry thoroughly.

Make the pesto in a big pestle and mortar by grinding up the garlic. Add the basil, keep mashing away, and then add the pine nuts. Slowly add the olive oil, and then the Parmesan. Season to taste.

Put all the aubergine/eggplant in an ovenproof dish and give it a good dash of olive oil. Cook for around 10 minutes. Take out and spread the pesto on a layer of aubergine/eggplant, followed by a layer of scamorza or mozzarella (if using). Repeat the process until everything is used up. Bake for around 30 minutes and serve with a crisp green salad.

Root vegetable cakes with a cheesy béchamel sauce

Basically, a bubble-and-squeak cake with melted cheese on top. You could also serve this as an accompaniment to roast beef or any meat. Children seem to like these, they are crispy outside and sweet and moreish on the in. Serve with a gravy, either meat eaters or a mushroom or onion one for non- meat eaters.

SERVES 4

2 sweet potatoes, chopped into rough pieces

2 parsnips, chopped into rough pieces

2 carrots, chopped into rough pieces

A handful of chopped curly kale
½ a celeriac, chopped into small pieces
A handful of spinach, chopped
½ a leek, cut into small rounds
2 knobs of butter
Salt and pepper
2 tablespoons of olive oil
For the sauce
500ml/2 cups of milk
A few slices of carrot and onion
A few sprigs of fresh parsley
A few peppercorns
1 tablespoon of butter
1 tablespoon of arrowroot
50g/½ cup of grated cheese
Salt and pepper

To make the sauce, put the milk in a saucepan with the carrot, onion, parsley and peppercorns. Bring to the boil, turn down and simmer for 5 minutes. Pour the milk into a Pyrex jug. Wash the saucepan out and dry, then melt the butter. Slowly add the arrowroot, stirring continuously. Very slowly add the milk, again stirring all the while. When this is incorporated and smooth, add the cheese and stir until it melts. Season to taste and if too thick, add a few more drops of milk.

Bring all of the vegetables EXCEPT the spinach and leek to the boil in a pan of salted water, cooking until soft. This should take about 15 minutes. Take the pan off the heat and mash the vegetables roughly with a knob of butter and some salt and pepper.

In a separate pan, heat a knob of butter and soften the leek and spinach for a few minutes. Mix the spinach and leek into the coarsely mashed vegetables and form into small cakes. Pop in the fridge for an hour or so.

In a big frying pan, heat the olive oil. Put the cakes in and cook for a few minutes on each side, until they are lacy and golden. Serve with a big spoon of sauce.

Tofu lasagne

Something I used to make a lot when I lived in New York on a brisk night, that once again, even fussy children seem to like. If your carnivores are horrified by tofu, just substitute 400g/14oz of coarsely minced beef, and brown in a very hot pan with the olive oil. Instead of leaving to one side, carry on cooking with the sauce, and assemble as you would the original.

SERVES 4

300g/1 block of firm tofu, drained, sliced across to make 1cm/½ inch thick rectangles (and patted dry with kitchen towel)
4 tablespoons of finely grated Parmesan
Salt and pepper
4 tablespoons of olive oil
4 portobello mushrooms, thickly sliced
200g/7oz of cherry tomatoes
2 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely sliced
3 tablespoons of balsamic vinegar
A handful of fresh basil leaves
2–3 fresh lasagne sheets per person

Coat the tofu in cheese, season generously and fry slices in 2 tablespoons of the oil until brown. Set aside. Fry the mushrooms in the remaining oil until browned, add the tomatoes and garlic and fry until the tomatoes are bursting. Add the balsamic and bubble down to caramelize. Throw in a

splash of water along with the basil leaves to make a dressing. Stir and remove from the heat. Season with salt and pepper.

Cook the pasta according to the pack instructions. Drain in a colander and toss in a drizzle of olive oil to prevent the sheets sticking to each other. When just cool enough to handle, layer the pasta, tofu and mushroom mixture up on each plate, finishing with a couple of spoonfuls of the dressing in the pan and fresh basil leaves.



Chickpea/garbanzo bean mushroom burgers with tahini sauce

Hearty, and not at all worthy feeling, these are an easy thing to pull together if you have little time. They would also be good for a barbecue, woodsy and delicious.

SERVES 4

2 tablespoons of olive oil
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
2 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely chopped
500g/1lb 2oz of cooked and drained chickpeas/garbanzo beans
A handful of wild mushrooms, roughly torn
2 teaspoons of ground cumin
2 teaspoons of ground coriander

A small handful of fresh chopped parsley
3 tablespoons of spelt or plain/all-purpose flour
Salt and pepper
For the tahini sauce
3 tablespoons of olive oil
1 tablespoon of tahini
Juice of ½ a lemon

Heat a frying pan and pour in a little olive oil. Add the onion and garlic and sweat for a few minutes. Keep to one side. Put all of the other ingredients in a blender and add the softened onion garlic mixture. Pulse until you have the consistency of breadcrumbs. Take the mixture out and fashion into burgers.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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