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Reader's Digest

SEPTEMBER 2022

YORKSHIRE'S "ATLANTIS"

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City On The
Verge Of
Rediscovery

100

Word-Story
Competition

Winners Revealed

JANE FONDA

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In This Issue...



Finally—the issue we've been impatiently counting down the days to. Why? To reveal the winners of our

100-word-story competition of course! After many months of carefully sifting through the thousands of entries, agonising over who gets onto the final shortlist and then holding our breath as we watched you, the readers, vote for the winners, we're incredibly excited to publish these inspiring, whimsical, sometimes sad but all equally scintillating stories on p58.

Congratulations to Rachel, Ameerah, Evelyn and all the runners up, and a huge thank you to everyone who has submitted their story—we've been dazzled by your talent and creativity, and can't wait to see your stories again next year.

Eva



And another thing to be excited about in our September issue, this time for the animal lovers out there—the introduction of our new monthly pet column on p110. We're working with the much-loved British animal welfare charity, Blue Cross—who this year celebrate their 125th anniversary of changing pets' lives—to bring you the very best expert advice on caring for your furry, feathered or scaly friends.

What's more, this issue we launch our brand new Pet of the Month competition. Think your best friend is the cutest in the land? Then email a photo, along with their name and yours, their age, and a fun fact about their personality to us at readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk and they could have a starring feature in our next edition.

Anna

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Reader's Digest

DIGESTED

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Over the past year, *Reader's Digest* has navigated the woes and wonders of modern life, weighing in with leading experts on the everyday tools we need to survive and thrive in the modern world. And what better time than now to catch up?

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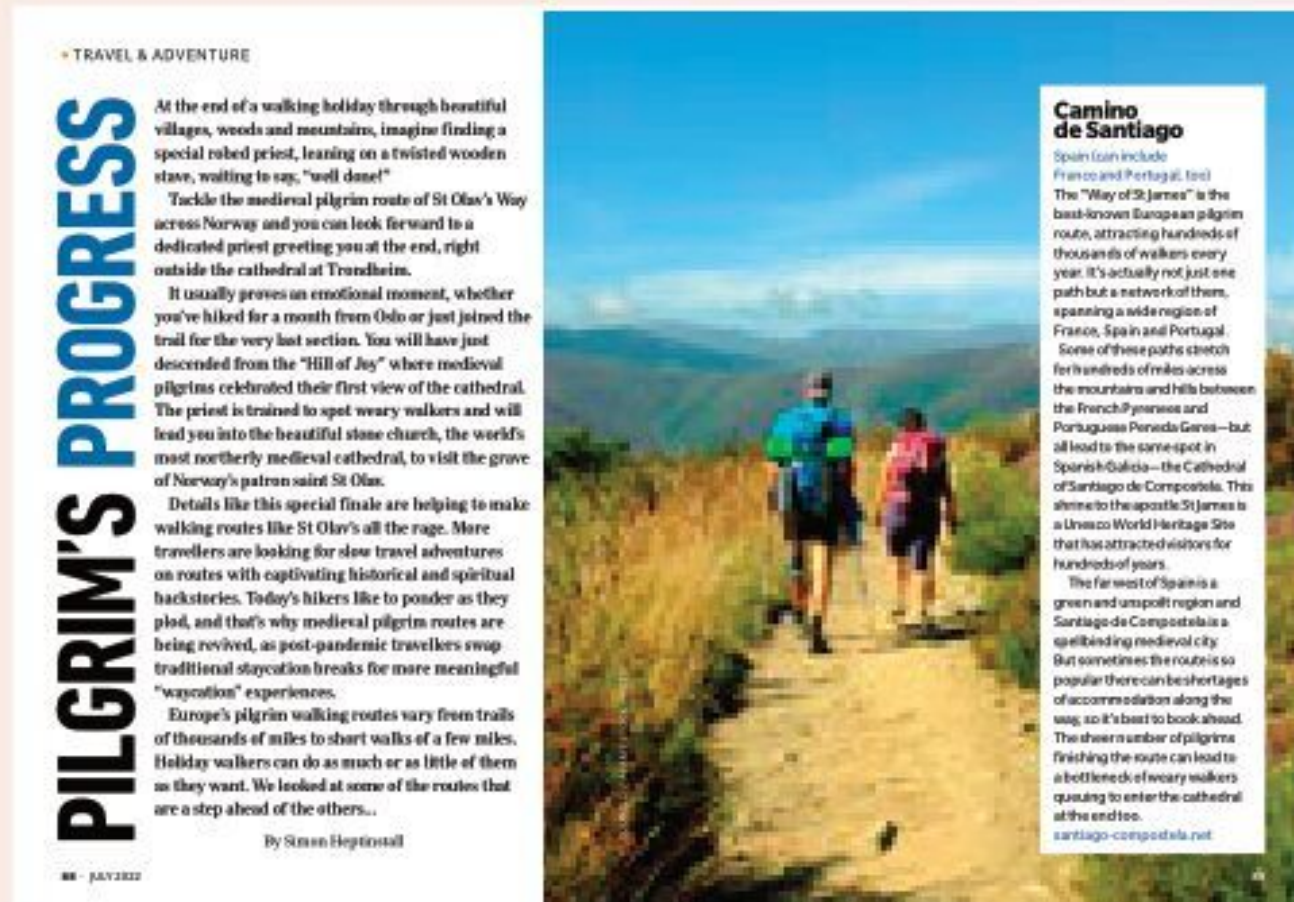
Over To You

LETTERS ON THE *July* ISSUE

We pay **£50** for Letter of the Month and **£30** for all others

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed reading "Pilgrim's Progress". So much so, that I've clipped out the pages to remind me of the wonderful walks (and to provide inspiration for future "waycations"). There is something so glorious about walking away from everyday life, from the modern world and the yoke it puts upon us, towards an expanse of freedom. The quiet calm that settles upon striking out, the questions one is forced to confront, the knowledge one gains. I walk regularly for precisely these reasons and now I feel even more inspired.



Even just reading about these pilgrimage routes makes me feel uplifted. And this is exactly the point. These paths are as significant to the armchair traveller as they are to the actual

walker because of their symbolism.

Pilgrim or not, we can all search for truth and meaning as we tread our way across the land, be it for five minutes or five months, on foot or in our heads. These journeys can and will enrich our lives, helping us to gain a deeper understanding of who we are and how we fit into this wonderful world.

JENNIE GARDNER, *Bath*

ALL FOR ONE

Although communal living wouldn't suit everyone, it should be applauded as one of the highest factors in combatting loneliness and depression among those in the autumn of their years.

Each contributes by playing to the skills they have. With cooperation, effort and commitment, it is like a well-oiled machine, addressing issues as they occur in these shared spaces, so every member feels involved and valued.

These inspiring ladies are a shining example to us all. Having something to contribute to society is key to improving our wellbeing, having a focus in life and feeling positive in general.

GLORIA WILDING,
Merseyside

GETTING INTO HOT WATER

I wholeheartedly agree with Sheila Hancock's standpoint that all showers should be the same. The most memorable event of my recent stay in a five-star hotel was the shower. The chrome gizmo glinted invitingly in the sleek and chic bathroom. It had an array of heads, hoses and pipes, plus more dials than a 747 cockpit. Tired from a long journey and in need of reinvigoration, I stepped behind the wall of glass and perused the control panel. In full safe-cracker mode, I fiddled with the host of dials in front of me. The slightest turn of one brought Fireman Sam-style jets



of icy water shooting at me from all sides. The twist of another instantly transported me from the Arctic to the Amazon as the rain shower jolted into monsoon-mode.

The touch of a third knob transformed the hand-held shower into an animated serpent, spraying water back and forth conveniently at eye level.

Squinty-eyed, I frantically grasped at the controls, doing random righty-tighty, lefty-loosey manoeuvres to try and stop the deluge. I emerged bedraggled and drained, and sought solace in the luxury dressing gown and contents of the mini-bar.

MARY ROSS, *Colchester*

LIFE LESSONS

Great Britain would be even greater if Sheila Hancock was in charge. The fact that boys must be educated about respecting women and girls has been unaddressed for too long—and “age

appropriateness” should never be an issue, because the younger the children are when taught things, the better they will absorb them, such as learning to brush their teeth and to look both ways when crossing

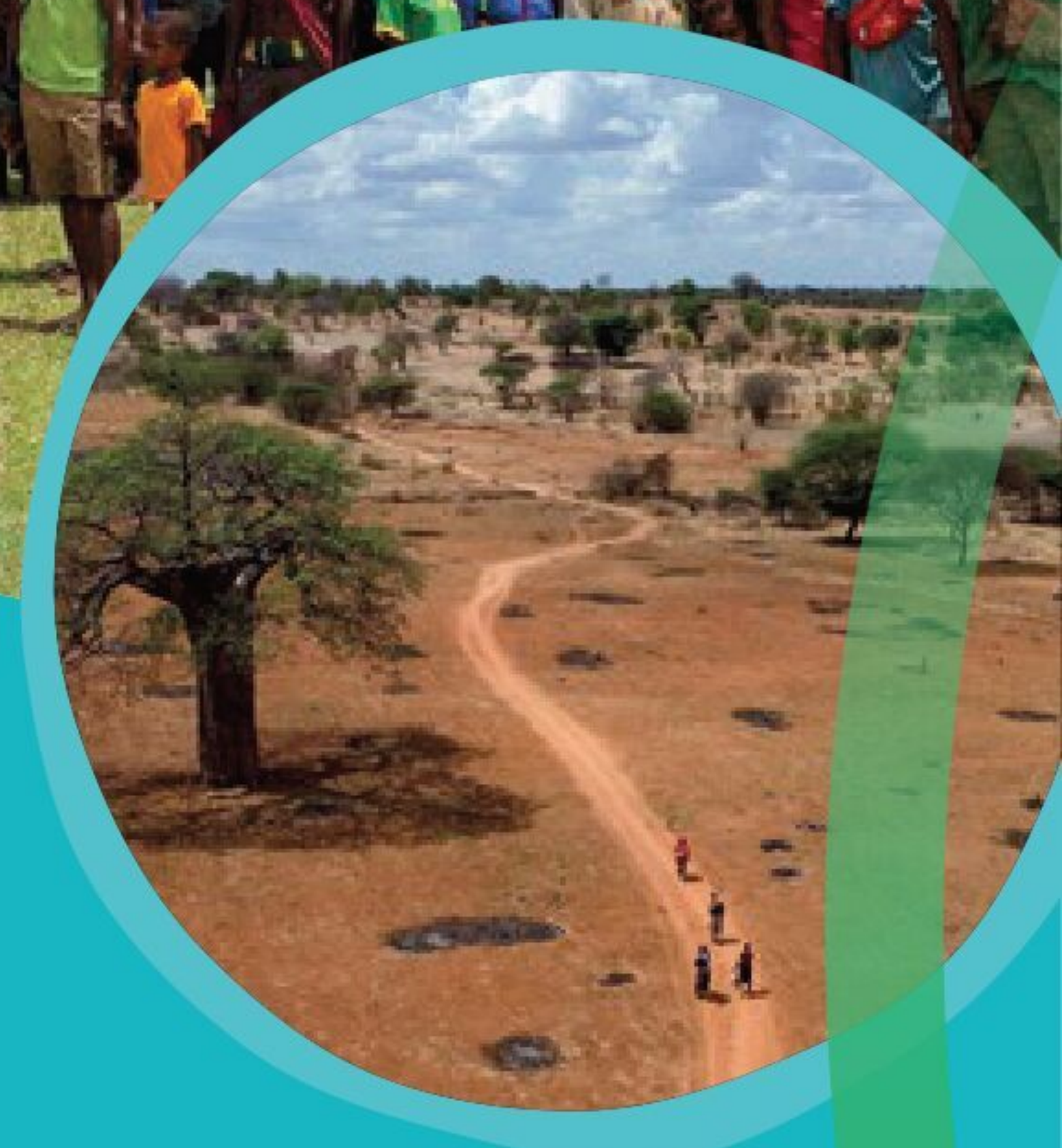
the road. I doubt very much that men who think it is acceptable to leer or whistle at women and girls would swagger into the road without checking first for oncoming cars.

ANNABEL BARKER,
Wandhurst

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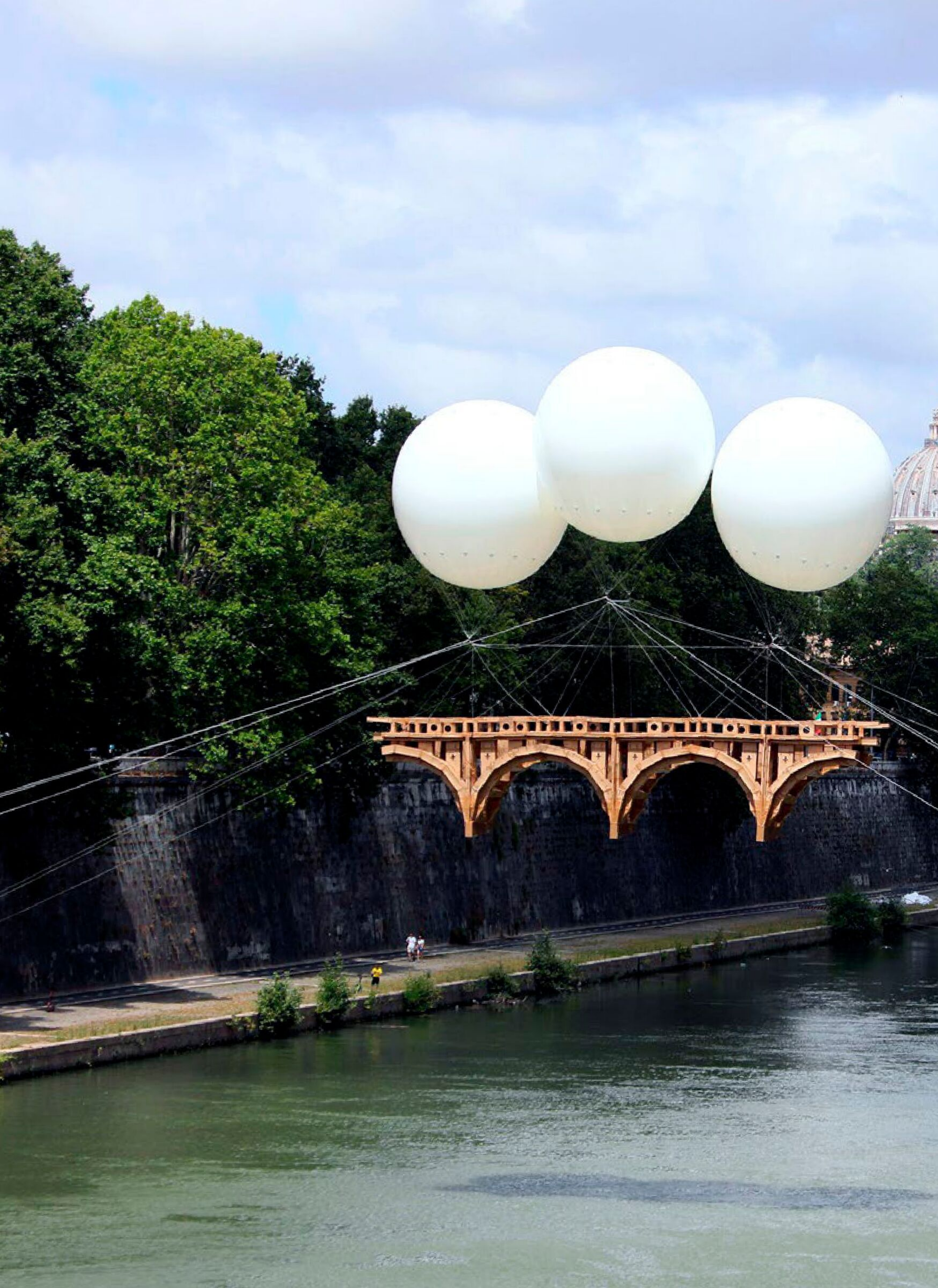
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...DIFFERENTLY

A new “bridge” in Rome. In the early 16th century, cardinal Alessandro Farnese wanted a bridge built connecting Palazzo Farnese to the gardens of Villa Farnesina on the Tiber river’s opposite bank. The man who would become Pope Paul III commissioned none other than Michelangelo for this job. However, Michelangelo’s designs were never realised—at least, not for nearly five centuries. In the summer of 2021, French artist Olivier Grossetête finally made the cardinal’s wish a temporary reality when, using balloons, he suspended this partial cardboard model above the river.



Blinded By The Light

*Olly Mann
finds himself
something of an
unofficial "brand
ambassador"*



Olly Mann presents
Four Thought for
BBC Radio 4, and
the podcasts *The
Modern Mann*, *The
Week Unwrapped*
and *The Retrospectors*

YESTERDAY I MET Liz; a highly intelligent woman in her fifties. She's a school friend of my mate Brett, and she's spent the last 20 years working in brand marketing. As a result, she has a swimming pool. And a designer handbag. And a silly job title I can't quite bring myself to recall: "Chief Inspiration Leader" or "Treasurer of Top Ideas" or something equally cringe, calculated to put the FUN in "strategy-led market research".

She's very smart, I said to Brett. "Yes," he replied. "What a shame she's wasted her brain, rather than doing something PROPER".

I smiled at this and indicated agreement—I knew what he meant; it's not like she's curing cancer or engineering electric planes—but then, having thought about it for a second, found myself responding defensively. "It's quite a rigorous job she has though, isn't it? I mean, she'll take a product that seems... pedestrian, and think about it so deeply that she'll know exactly why, say, Pepsi Max is associated with extreme sports,

but Pepsi Max Cherry isn't. It seems trivial, but I guess if they flog more products as a result, then more people keep their jobs."

Brett looked at me like I was totally mad. "There are scientists," he said softly, sipping from his smoothie, "dermatologists, with PhDs and CBEs and everything, working on formulas for *make-up*." He virtually spat out the words. "Cosmetics already exist! The world doesn't need more

exactly how it would taste—"Kit Kat" equating to wafer and chocolate, "Chunky" indicating an oblong gob-full, and "Peanut Butter" promising an umami hit of salty-sugar yumminess—I still felt compelled to pick one up as soon as they hit the shelves (and I was not disappointed. In fact I have seriously considered travelling to Japan to try the 300+ limited edition flavours they've released over there).

IT'S WEIRD, BUT THERE'S A PART OF MY BRAIN THAT BEHAVES AS IF IT RUNS ITS OWN TEST KITCHEN

wrinkle cream! You can't reverse the progress of time! They could be doing something that benefits everybody, instead of shilling something pointless!"

Again, I reflected for a moment. Brett was correct, of course, that someone with a sharp mind and a state-subsidised further education turning their back on public service, and accepting the most lucrative job offer on the table, is, to some extent, unethical. But, truth be told, I for one enjoy the novelty of trying and buying new products. I like that clever people spend time planning how to tell me about them. I want to be told about them.

Take, for instance, the day that Nestlé launched Kit Kat Chunky Peanut Butter. Even though I knew

Even when I have absolutely no intention of buying the products being thrown at my brain, I still obligingly inhale those newspaper columns in which a food writer tries out ten supermarket brands of rosé, or compares the rind of blue cheeses, or rates the best brandy butters at Christmas. It somehow matters to me when hey, guess what, Tesco Finest tastes better than M&S! Or Aldi trumps Lidl with a marginally superior chutney.

Scanning back through my Amazon history is to encounter a time capsule of household goods and pop-cultural ephemera (my first purchase, in 1999, was *The Best of Texas* on CD; my most recent bargain is an anti-microbial copper tongue scraper). It's also proof of

my efforts over the years to try out different items; always seemingly on some unspoken quest to uncover the ultimate exemplar of each product category.

It's weird, but there's a part of my brain that behaves as if it runs its own Test Kitchen. Perhaps that's just what happens when you're brought up with consumerism all around you, and you've lost religion. For instance, I experimented with dozens of tea bag brands before settling upon Welsh Brew (having had a free sample at the South Bank food fair, and falling in love with their calming Kenyan Assam blend).

I'm equally evangelistic about Dual Action Microfibre Sponge and Scourer pads from Lakeland (so soft, yet so robust!), my Powerbeats Pro wireless earphones (so low-key! So reliable!), Lush's Big shampoo (sea salt flakes! But MOIST!), the Baby Jogger City Mini Stroller (a pram you can steer with one hand!), Mayonnaise de

Dijon, by Amora, imported from France because the shops don't have it here, and my phone holder from Typo. I could go on.

Brett, meanwhile, is a Head and Shoulders kind of guy; he considers it a waste of energy to think about stuff like this. When he goes shopping, he simply selects a well-known product he knows works just fine, and if there's an own-brand rip-off on offer for less, he'll buy that one instead, even if it's not as good.

I'm jealous, in a way, of this approach to life. I sympathise with Brett's prejudices—but I can't deny my interest in shiny bright new things. Would I like, in an ideal world, to turn off, or at least turn down, the part of my brain so flooded with pointless knowledge about peripheral brands? Perhaps.

But Brett should feel a little jealous of me, too. When the apocalypse comes, I'll be the one eating the best baked beans. ■

Dungeons And Dramas

Tunnels & Trolls was a direct and early competitor to Dungeons & Dragons released in 1975, just one year after the pioneering role-playing game

The JRR Tolkien Estate sued Dungeons & Dragons for using the words "dragon", "dwarf", "elf", "ent", "goblin", "hobbit", "orc", "balrog", and "warg". As a result, all but hobbit, ent, and balrog were ruled as public domain

Actor Vin Diesel has played Dungeons & Dragons for 20 years, and even wrote the official introduction to the 30th-anniversary commemorative book

Jane Fonda

“I Used To Want To Be Perfect. That’ll Kill You”

By James Mottram

The legendary Hollywood actress talks activism, ageing and the vital role that luck has played in her career

“**R**EADER’S DIGEST HAS been around longer than I have!” guffaws Jane Fonda when I introduce myself. She’s 84 now, but the iconic actress and activist has clearly not let the passing years dim her self-deprecating sense of humour. Nor has age withered her. The one-time fitness guru, who almost single-handedly created an empire from her Jane Fonda Workout videos, still looks utterly fabulous.

We’re chatting over a video call, with Fonda seated in an ornate living area next to a tasteful orange-hued floral display. Dressed in a blouse bedecked with bold yellow, pink, and grey stripes, she’s every bit as immaculately groomed as her

surroundings. Ostensibly, we’re here to talk about her new project *Luck*, an animated film now appearing on Apple TV+, which gave her a rare opportunity to take on a voice-over role (as a pink-suited dragon, no less).

“I was very happy because I want to do more voice over,” she says. “First of all, it interests me. I like animated films. Also, I’m old! It’s a great way for an old person to stay involved because it doesn’t matter how you look. It doesn’t matter if you can’t walk. It doesn’t matter if your hair is bad, or whatever! Any of that doesn’t matter. It’s just being able to understand an animated character and figure out how to bring her to life. And I like that challenge.”

It’s interesting to hear Fonda speak so pragmatically about the business,



Starring in
Barbarella,
1968



and so enthusiastically about a career that she once left behind. Put simply, it's in her bones. Her father was the legendary actor Henry Fonda, famed for such classics as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *12 Angry Men*. Her younger brother was Peter Fonda, who starred in *Easy Rider*. Fonda herself starred in a string of classics, from kitsch space romp *Barbarella* to 1970s dramas *Klute* and *Coming Home*, which both won her Best Actress Oscars.

I wonder if *Luck*, one of her first real forays into animation, was a way of making something that her grandchildren could enjoy. "Well, I just spent seven years doing *Grace and Frankie*, and that's something

my grandkids could see," she says, reminding me of the Netflix show about two ageing women who discover their respective husbands are in love. Spanning seven seasons, and earning Fonda an Emmy nomination, it paired her up with her old friend Lily Tomlin, co-star of the 1980 workplace comedy *9 to 5*.

"Definitely they were on my mind, my grandkids," she continues. She has three, including Malcolm and Viva, by way of Vanessa, her eldest child, whom she shares with the late French director Roger Vadim (with her second husband, Tom Hayden, she gave birth to Troy Garity, who later became an actor, and adopted another daughter, Mary Williams).



Alongside
Lily Tomlin in
Netflix's
*Grace And
Frankie*

“I BELIEVE LUCK IS PREPARATION MEETING OPPORTUNITY”

Clearly, she cherishes their opinion. When I ask if her previous animation experience—voicing a character on *The Simpsons*—was a career highlight, she pauses, then bluntly says: “No. I mean, it was fun. My grandkids got excited about it!”

IN *LUCK*, which has been produced by former Pixar maestro John Lasseter, a young girl named Sam is whisked to the Land of Luck by a black cat (voiced by Simon Pegg) and into the realm of Fonda's fire-breather. One of the more amusing

moments sees the characters pass a place where lucky moments are doled out, like “Jam Side Up” for your toast. Luck is random, the film tells us. So what does Fonda think? “I do think it's something that comes to some people and not to others,” she muses. “And it's complicated.”

Warming to the theme, it's one she's clearly given a lot of thought to. “It's like love. I know people who are surrounded by love, but they can't metabolise it, they can't bring it inside their body, and experience it, because they have issues that they've

Jane Fonda
and her
Luck
character



never really explored and dealt with and worked on. And in a way, luck is the same. I don't know who said this, but I believe in this sentence: luck is preparation meeting opportunity."

The way Fonda sees it, you must be prepared to grasp those precious few opportunities. "It means working on yourself as an individual," she adds. "How can I be a more stable individual? How can I be a person capable of forgiveness? How do I forgive? How can I be a person who knows how to relax and not judge? How do I turn myself into somebody who is more curious and more desiring to learn? All of these kinds of things you don't necessarily start

taught by my father that how I looked was all that mattered," she once said.

"I've spent so much time in my life trying to be better," she says now. "Not perfect. I used to want to be perfect, and that'll kill you. Because we're not meant to be perfect. But it's not an issue of being perfect. It's an issue of being everything you can be. Be the fullest you possibly can be. And that's what I've tried to do in life, and it involves paying attention. It involves being intentional. For me it involves meditation. And staying curious."

As I point out to Fonda, *Luck* has a strong message about putting good back into the world, something she's repeatedly tried to do. Famed in the

"I USED TO WANT TO BE PERFECT, AND THAT'LL KILL YOU, BECAUSE WE'RE NOT MEANT TO BE"

off with, but you can develop them as you go through life."

LISTENING TO HER, you could imagine Fonda making an excellent life coach. She's been through it all—illness, divorce, grief—and survived. Born in New York, when she was 12 Fonda's mother, Canadian-born socialite Frances Ford Seymour, took her own life. She'd suffered from bulimia, a condition that later affected Fonda in her forties (by which point, she was at the peak of her Hollywood career). Fonda's own upbringing had seen her father raise her a certain way. "I was

1970s for protesting the Vietnam War, when she was dubbed "Hanoi Jane", she's supported causes ranging from LGBTQ+ rights to the plight of Native Americans to teen pregnancy prevention (in 2001, she founded the Jane Fonda Centre for Adolescent Reproductive Health).

Recently, she's ploughed her energy into environmentalism. Inspired by eco-activist Greta Thunberg, in 2019, she founded Fire Drill Fridays, weekly protests in Washington DC. She was arrested three times in consecutive weeks (and even grandchildren Malcom and Viva joined her for a



Jane Fonda
visited Hanoi in
July 1972

“THE MINUTE I BECOME AN ACTIVIST AGAIN, MY DEPRESSION GOES AWAY”

bout of civil disobedience). A year later she published the book, *What Can I Do?: The Truth About Climate Change and How to Fix It*, and in March this year, she founded a political action committee designed to pinpoint politicians supporting the fossil fuel industry.

Part of this overwhelming desire to put something good back into the world is, she says, a self-help mechanism. “You’re lucky if at a certain point in your life, you realise that if you do something good, and put it out into the world, that it will come back to you and make you feel better. You know, it’s like when I get

depressed, I turn to activism. The minute I become an activist again, my depression goes away, because I know that I’m doing everything I possibly can to make things better.”

NO DOUBT THE FACT that she pulled herself out of retirement also helped. In 1991, after three decades working in film, Fonda stepped away from Hollywood, just at the point that she married her third husband, media mogul Ted Turner.

While she and Turner divorced a decade later, Fonda turned back to her career with 2005’s rom-com *Monster-in-Law*, in which she co-

starred with Jennifer Lopez. She has since sought out acclaimed directors like Lee Daniels (playing Nancy Reagan in *The Butler*) and Paolo Sorrentino (whom she worked with in *Youth*).

Fonda clearly is revelling in this late career bloom. She's just completed a further two films with Lily Tomlin. *Moving On* sees her and Tomlin play old friends who reconnect at a funeral and decide to take revenge on the widower (*A Clockwork Orange*'s Malcolm McDowell) who crossed them in the past.

The second is *Eighty for Brady*, "with Lily and me and Rita Moreno and Sally Field, about four older women in their eighties who are obsessed with [NFL star] Tom Brady. Very funny."

Seeing as fortune is the theme of the day, towards the end of our chat, I ask Fonda to pinpoint a lucky moment in her career.

"I have many, many, many, many, many. Very often they come through books. Chance encounters. You know, meeting a person who will give you a bit of wisdom at exactly the moment that you need it. Or meeting someone who gives you a



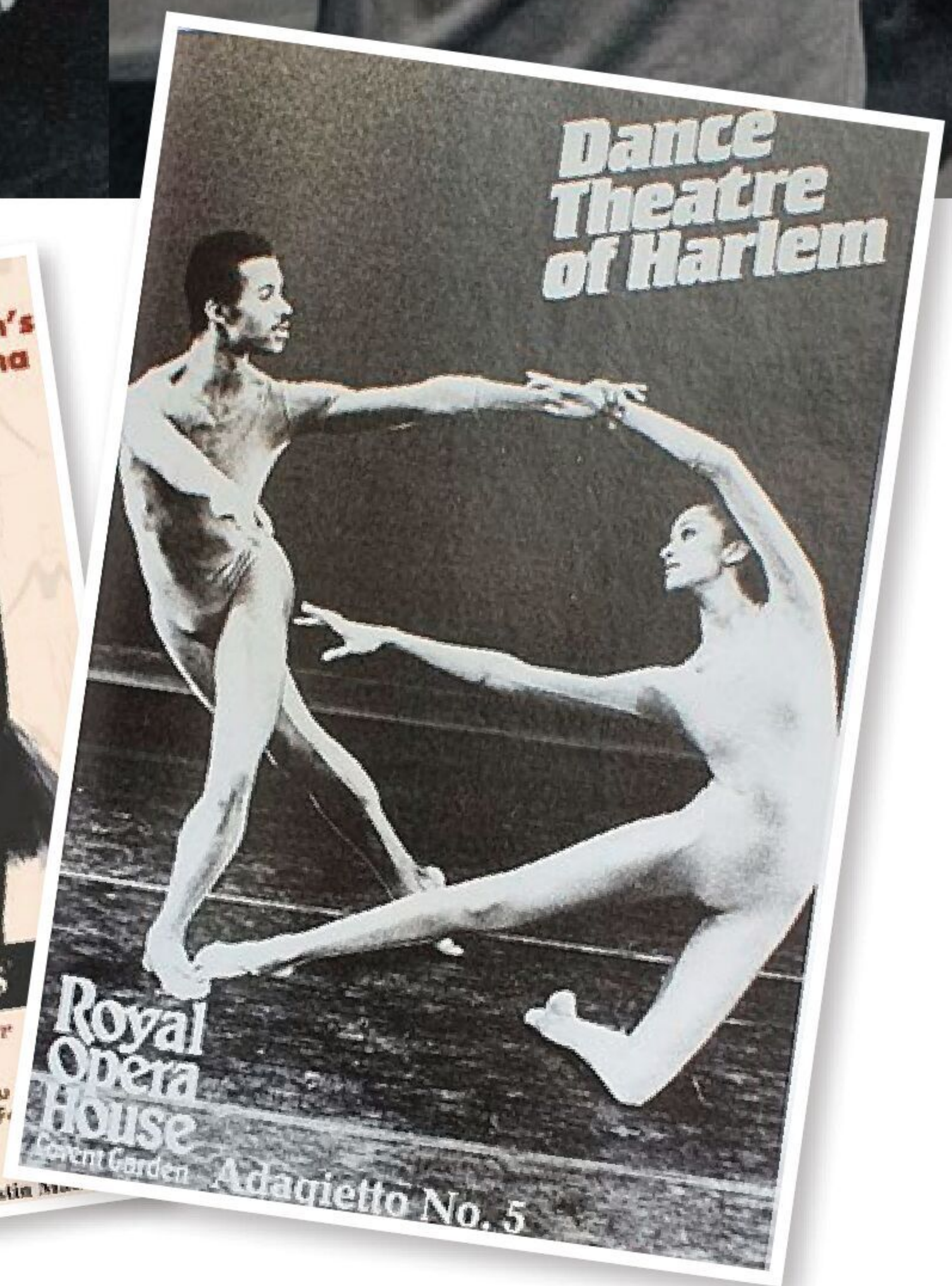
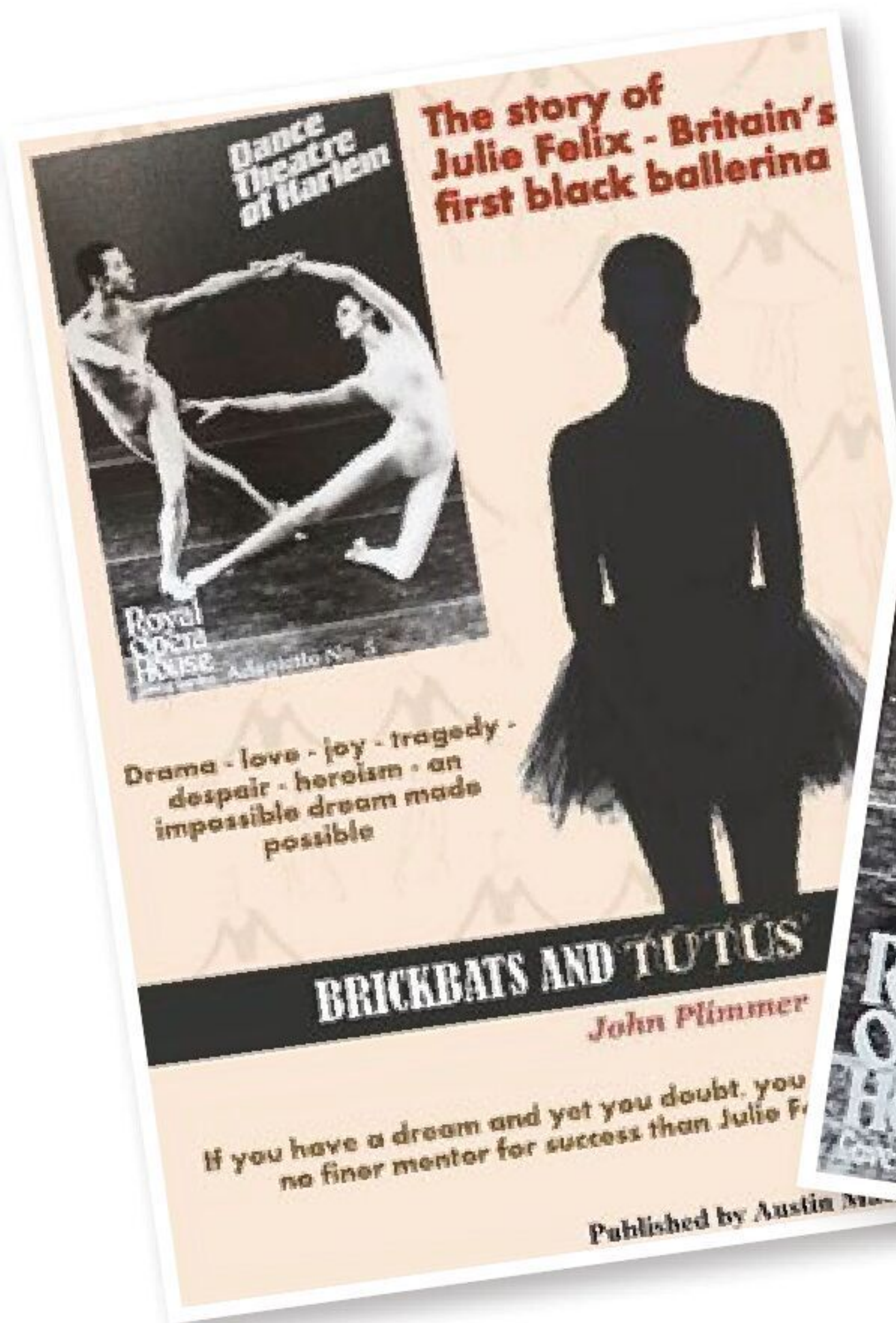
Starring alongside Jennifer Lopez in *Monster-In-Law*, 2005

book that's exactly the book that you need to read right at that time. That has happened to me all my life. And I guess that's luck, isn't it?"

Except that, Fonda now has the wisdom to realise it isn't really about luck—it's about being open to new ideas.

"You see, if I wasn't wanting to get better, and grow, I wouldn't have read the book. Or I wouldn't have really listened to what the person said to me," she says. "And so I think being lucky requires a little bit of courage, a lot of curiosity, and a lot of humility." Something Fonda seems to have acquired bags of during her time on this planet. ■

.....
Luck is available on Apple TV+





I REMEMBER...

Julie Felix

Forced to leave England for New York when the English National Ballet told her that her skin was not right for the stage, ballet legend Julie Felix went on to lead a new world of Black excellence in dance. Here, she reflects on the many steps her life has taken her in...



...GOING TO THE LOCAL PARK IN EALING. The swings were my favourite, because I could get myself as high up in the sky as possible. I would jump about the house because it gave me the same feeling. My mum said, “What are we going to do to stop you from jumping around all over the place?”. There was a ballet school around the corner, and when she asked if I wanted to have lessons, I said, “Oh, yes, please!”.

...I WAS 11 WHEN MY MUM REALISED HOW SERIOUS I WAS ABOUT DANCING. Growing up, my

mum showed great talent as a mezzo-soprano opera singer. Her parents wouldn’t let her pursue her dreams and neither did my father, unfortunately. It was such a shame, but she put all her effort and love of performing into my joy and love of ballet. She was never pushy though.

...SEEING MY FIRST LIVE PERFORMANCE. My mum took me to see *Madama Butterfly* at The Royal Opera House—her favourite. We could only afford the cheapest tickets. Sitting up in “the gods”, we looked down on the stage and she

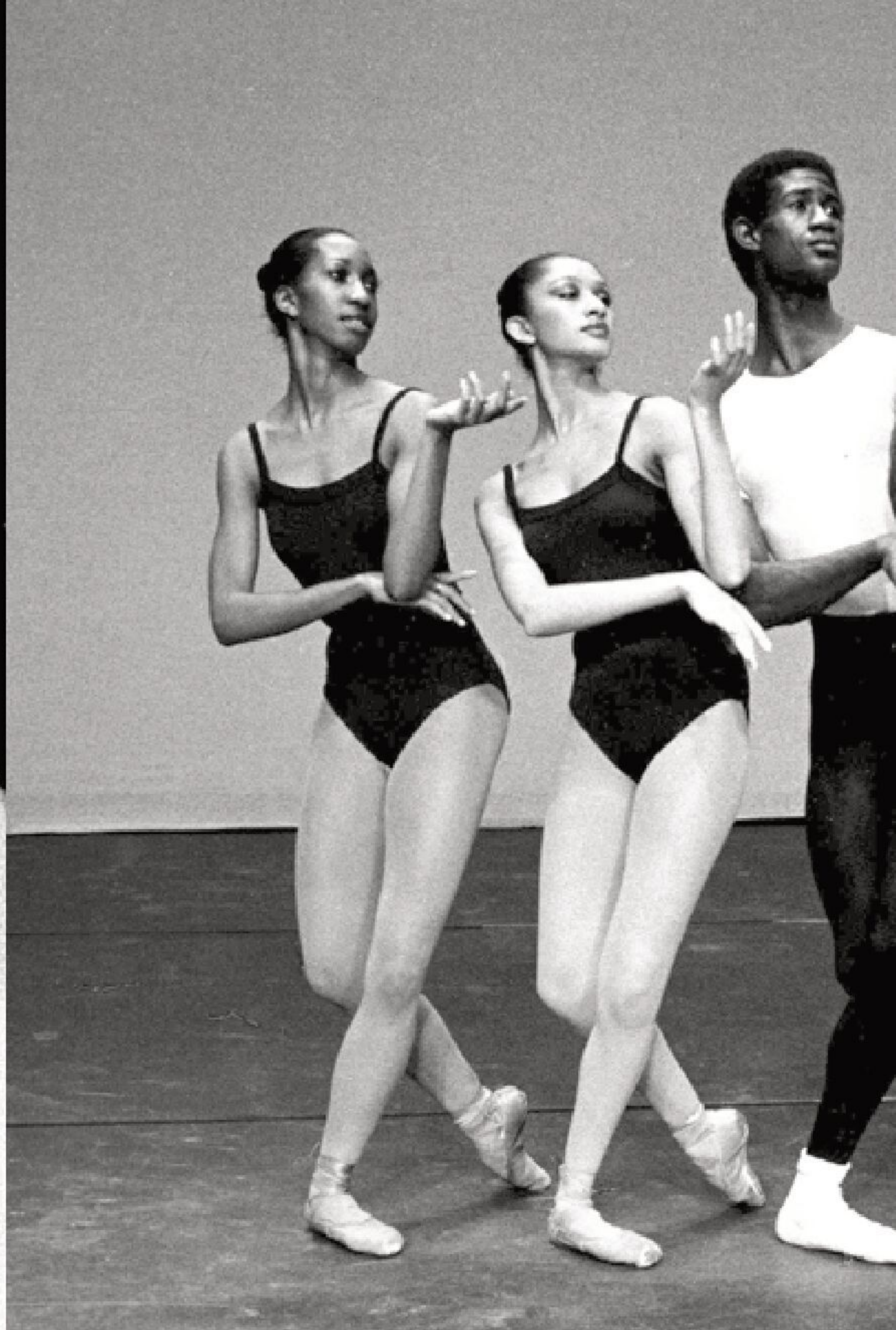


whispered, “Julie, if you continue to work really hard and put all your passion and love into ballet, then one day, you could be on that stage.”

...LOVING JULIE ANDREWS. Even though she was a musical theatre star, I thought she was incredible. So, when I was almost 16, I investigated where she went to school for her training. She had attended London’s Arts Educational School—quite a few famous people have gone there. I applied and auditioned—I even had the audacity to sing “My Favourite Things” as part of it! I danced too, of

course, and I was offered a place. When the school fees came in the post, I knew there was absolutely no way we could afford it. I gained so much courage and strength and determination, though—I was not going to let anything deter me. I knew that I could do this. So, I carried on and upped everything, doing higher level ballet exams and festivals.

...THE MINUTE I WALKED INTO THE DOOR OF RAMBERT SCHOOL OF DANCE, I THOUGHT, I’VE GOT TO GET IN HERE. It was in the Mercury Theatre in Notting Hill Gate



at the time and was still a classical ballet school.

The atmosphere, the teachers, even in the audition, it wasn't a cutthroat feeling. It just felt right. I auditioned and waited to hear back.

...IT WAS A SATURDAY MORNING AND THE POST CAME JUST BEFORE I NEEDED TO GO TO MY DANCE LESSON. I saw the letter from Rambert and called Mum into the kitchen. Between the two of us we managed to open the letter. She read it and told me I got in. I was absolutely elated. I felt like this was

where it truly would begin for me.

But my mum's face fell as she turned the page and saw the school fees. Yet again, it was too expensive. We could not stretch to that amount of money.

Something in me said, "Mum, don't worry. I'm going to get funding." At this point, I had a little bit more about me, so I started to investigate. In those days, the Inner London Education Authority were giving grants to talented artists. But I had to audition yet again.

Eventually, they offered me a 75 per cent grant. Our beloved holidays to Cornwall were put on the back



burner. I'll never forget the sacrifices that my family made for me.

...GETTING ASKED TO DANCE WITH LONDON FESTIVAL BALLET (NOW THE ENGLISH NATIONAL BALLET). I had so much support from the staff and teachers at Rambert. They obviously saw that I had a huge talent and they nurtured that. In my third and final year there, about three or four of us were selected as trainee apprentices with the London Festival Ballet. We had no formal contract, but were to do a season with them and take classes,

with a performance at the end, and feel what it was like to be a part of a professional dance company.

...HOW RUDE RUDOLF NUREYEV WAS. One day, we were doing company class and were told that the famous ballet dancer and choreographer would be coming in to teach us in preparation for his version of *Sleeping Beauty*, which we would eventually perform. We were all in class early—we were very disciplined. We waited 15 minutes, he didn't arrive. We waited a half an hour, an hour, and finally, the doors



flung open. Rudolf was notorious for wearing a long, heavy fur coat. Even in the heat. He never put his arms in the sleeves. He flew into the studio, took his coat off, swirled it around his head like a matador, let it fly across the studio floor, clapped his hands and said, “Let’s begin!”

We hardly got started dancing and he stopped, picked his coat up, didn’t say goodbye to anybody, walked out and left. I’ve known lots of famous people, but I don’t care how famous you are, you must be humble.

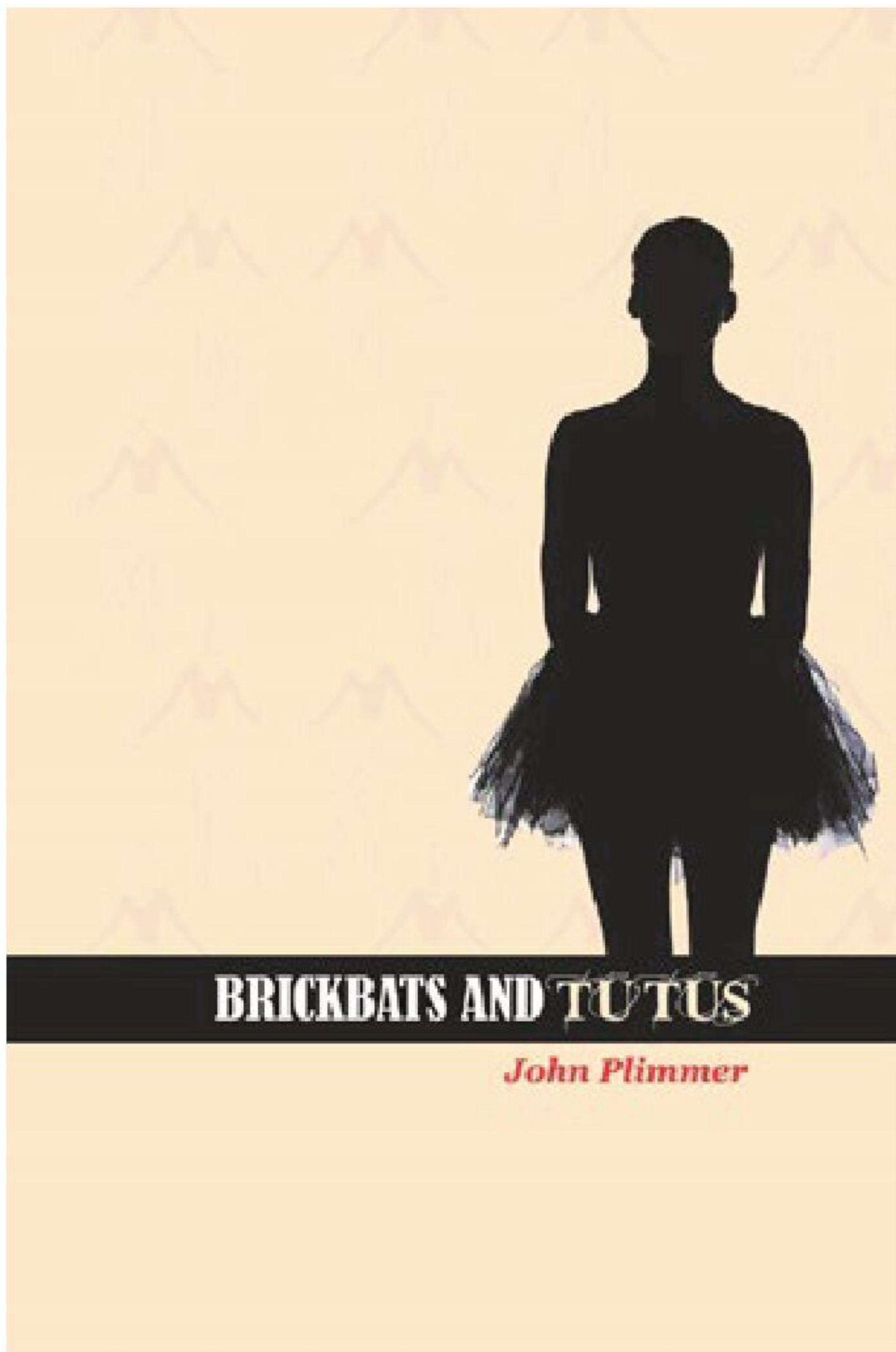
...IT WAS LIKE SOMEBODY HAD PUNCHED ME IN THE STOMACH. I was loving every moment of working with a professional company. There was no doubt that this is what I wanted to do with my life.

At the end of my time with them, the artistic director of the London

Festival Ballet spoke to my ballet teacher at Rambert and said that they would love to offer me a contract, but that, unfortunately, due to the colour of my skin, I would not look right in a *corps de ballet*. They said that I could train with them, but that I would never perform.

...THE MOST DAUNTING THING I HAD EVER DONE was getting on a plane to New York City. I’d been offered a contract with the Dance Theatre of Harlem, but didn’t even have a passport. In July 1970, I left my beloved Ealing, my beloved family, and touched down in NYC without knowing a single person.

My new employers told me what to do, and I had the money ready, got a yellow taxi and moved into the Webster House for Girls on 34th



Street, which was sort of like a hostel. I had to take the subway up to 147th Street in Harlem to get to the studios—it went through a lot of dodgy areas.

New York City was incredibly dangerous in those years, the subways were filthy, there were blackouts, there was looting all the time, cars set on fire. Once, I saw a Black man shot in the middle of the street by white police officers for some petty theft.

...THE HARLEM DANCE THEATRE AND THEIR CAMARADERIE. When I began with them, they became my family in a way. I was this young girl

from London, and they were so caring, and not just about helping me navigate a new city or learning to be savvy. It was in the classes and rehearsals, too. If there was a step that somebody didn't get, we worked on it together.

...COMING BACK TO DANCE AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE. By the early 1980s, I had toured all over the world with Harlem Dance Theatre, but I was not allowed to dance on a stage in London. So, I had to go and join a Black company in order to come back and perform at the Royal Opera House.

Both my parents came to the performance, and I'd never seen my dad so proud of me. My mum had the poster from the front of house framed and it was in pride of place in her home until her death. Now it's in mine.

I stood on that stage, alone in the theatre except for the cleaners, I put my hand on my heart, looked right up at "the gods" and said, "Mum, I've done it. I am here dancing on the very stage that you said I could dance on if I worked hard enough. Thank you."

If I had been offered and accepted a contract with London Festival Ballet, I don't think I would have had anywhere near the experiences I got to have or reached the level that I did in my career. ■

As told to Valentina Valentini

THE
PLACEBO

*Could fake medicine be as
effective as the real thing?*

CURE

BY *Lia Grainger*

PHOTOS: (THIS PAGE) ©GETTY IMAGES
(OPPOSITE PAGE) PHOTO BY K. SYNOLD/TMB STUDIO





Michael Wharrad held the envelope in his hands, certain of what the paper inside would tell him. The then 72-year-old former investment banker in Kent, England, had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease nine years earlier. Now it was 2017—a year since he had been in a trial at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London. Researchers were testing whether a drug approved to treat type 2 diabetes could also ease Parkinson's symptoms. Wharrad received a daily dose of either the drug or a placebo, but he didn't know which.

During the trial, Wharrad had thrived. His joints ached less, and he could get up from a chair more easily and take walks around the block. Friends and family commented on his obvious improvement. And his score on a Parkinson's assessment tool improved significantly. "My wife and I were convinced I was taking the drug," says Wharrad.

But at his end-of-trial meeting with one of the researchers—who also didn't know whether Wharrad had been on the drug or not—he got a surprise. When he opened the envelope to find out what he'd been taking, he read the word "placebo."

Wharrad's reaction was disbelief. "I was speechless," he says. "I had been feeling so much better."

How Placebos Work

A PLACEBO CAN be a sugar pill, a saline injection, or a glass of coloured water: inert treatments that shouldn't produce a physiological response. But often they do; Wharrad's case is not unusual. In fact, placebos are increasingly proving to be more powerful than active drugs in trials—and they may just be the key to reducing our dependence on medications.

The so-called placebo effect

happens when the brain convinces the body that a fake treatment is authentic, which stimulates relief. Doctors have known of it for centuries, but in the past 50 years, neurologists have uncovered the molecular mechanisms and pathways at play when a sham treatment creates real healing.

To a large extent, the phenomenon is still a mystery, but scientists have confirmed that simply perceiving that you are being treated affects the

**IN SOME TRIALS,
REAL MEDICATIONS
NO LONGER
OUTPERFORM
PLACEBOS**



same part of our brain that processes physical sensations like symptoms. They have also confirmed that measurable improvements can occur when only a placebo is administered.

“We can observe spikes in brain activity and changes in neural discharge with a placebo treatment,” says Luana Colloca, a medical doctor and professor at the University of Maryland’s department of anesthesiology. Researchers have also seen in medical trials designed to prove drug effectiveness that fewer drugs are beating the placebo

groups—as if the placebo effect were growing stronger. A 2021 Danish meta-analysis showed that more than half of the treatment effects in some 180 drug trials could be attributed to the placebo.

Placebo research is now its own area of study. Experts say that we should harness the strategies that generate the most powerful placebo effects in drug trials and incorporate them into clinical treatments for patients suffering from a range of chronic conditions.

Since the body-brain response that controls the placebo effect is neurological, placebos work best on conditions like pain, irritable bowel syndrome, depression, and Parkinson’s disease—all controlled by the neurological system. Placebos can’t change things like a viral infection. Nor will they lower your cholesterol, shrink a tumour, or reduce a cold’s duration.

Research has shown that when placebos do work, expectations play a significant role. If you think a pill can cure you, it is more likely to do so. In a 2004 *Lancet* review of placebo studies, researchers described one study in which post-surgery patients were given morphine for pain. For some, the medication was delivered secretly with a hidden pump, while others received it from a physician who explained it would make them feel better. The patients expecting

the drug and its positive effects experienced far greater pain reduction than those who were unaware they had received it.

Placebos can also work as a result of “pharmacological conditioning”—when clinicians teach a patient how to respond to a placebo by first administering an active treatment. A 2015 review published in the journal *Pain* found that in many studies, patients given several doses of a real painkiller followed by a placebo responded to the placebo as if they had received the analgesic—though they were never told which one they were given.

SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND THAT PLACEBOS CAN WORK EVEN IF YOU KNOW YOU'RE TAKING THEM



Dr Colloca says this can result in the strongest placebo effect. “When we start with an active treatment or intervention, the placebo effect is larger and more durable,” she says. Studying this across a range of conditions, Dr Colloca has observed via fMRI scans and other objective measurements that placebos use the same neurological pathway of the brain that the medication did.

“The placebo response is like a pharmacological memory activating the same part of the brain,” she says.

This specificity means that placebos for depression activate serotonin, and those replacing painkillers reduce activity in the brain centres responsible for pain while also activating the opioid systems, or pleasure centres. Your brain is tricked into generating a drug response.

Just As Good As Meds?

PLACEBOS ARE SO powerful that they’re affecting the way medications get tested. To prove that a drug works, scientists must show it performs significantly better than a placebo in a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial (in this type of trial, neither the researchers nor the participants know who is receiving what).

Over the past two decades, scientists and drug companies have noticed that placebos are helping patients so much that some drugs can no longer outperform them—not because the drugs are less effective but because the power of mind over body seems to be growing.

While this increase is not well understood, says Lene Vase, a professor of neuroscience and psychology at the Aarhus University in Denmark, it's presenting a problem for drug companies. “Some drugs that were approved in the past



would not beat a placebo today,” she says.

This phenomenon seems to be strongest in the United States. For example, in 2019, the pharmaceutical company Intra-Cellular Therapies was on the verge of a major development. It was testing the drug Lumateperone as a bipolar disorder treatment; it had performed well in earlier trial phases, and the company’s scientists were expecting success.

Yet in the American arm of the trial, patients who received the drug and those who received the placebo *both* experienced significant improvement. When Intra-Cellular Therapies released its findings showing the drug had failed to consistently outperform a placebo, its stock dropped 22 per cent—although the drug was later approved in the United States due to successes in other countries.

Professor Jeffrey Mogil of McGill University in Montreal isn’t surprised; he published a study that found the placebo effect has indeed been increasing of late, particularly in the United States. “Maybe these drugs work,” says Mogil, “but we can’t prove it because they can’t beat the placebo response, which has been amplified.”

Why? Mogil posits that because American drug trials are often well-funded and hosted in nice clinics, the patient is conditioned to believe that since the company is spending a lot on the drug, it must work.

Neuroscientist Alexander Tuttle, a co-author of the McGill study, hypothesises that advertising also plays a part. Americans who view ads depicting patients helped by pharmaceuticals could be more likely to believe that the pill they take in a trial will heal them (the

United States is the only country besides New Zealand that allows pharmaceutical companies to advertise prescription medication directly to consumers).

A Case For Honesty

BUT CAN PLACEBOS work if patients know they're taking one? Ted Kaptchuk, director of Harvard University's Placebo Studies and Therapeutic Encounter, has been a trailblazer in

“USE OF OPEN-LABEL PLACEBOS COULD REDUCE THE MEDICATION USED FOR SOME CONDITIONS”



the field for decades, and in 2010 he explored this question. “All my colleagues said, ‘You can’t tell a person they are receiving a placebo and expect it to work,’” he says.

Kaptchuk’s team gave some patients with IBS inactive pills labelled “placebo.” Those patients experienced a 60 per cent improvement to their condition, while those receiving no treatment improved only 35 per cent.

It may sound unlikely, but the effectiveness of “open-label placebos”—sometimes also called

“pure” placebos—has also been shown in numerous other studies. “The key ingredient to successful treatment with a placebo is honesty, not tricks,” asserts Kaptchuk.

Already, without telling patients, some doctors are prescribing something that they know is unlikely to treat their patient’s ailment—a vitamin, for example—but that may instead generate a placebo effect.

In fact, a 2018 review of studies from 13 countries found that anywhere from 15 to 89 per cent of physicians reported using placebo treatments at least once a month. Doctors surveyed said they sometimes do this to satisfy patients’ demand that something be prescribed. The hope, then, is that open-label placebos could replace this ethically murky practice.

“Use of open-label placebos would reduce the amount of medication we use for common conditions,” says Kaptchuk. But he and others have found that for open-label placebos to do their job, the patient must trust their physician. This, alongside the typical rituals of medical care—the visit to the clinic, the act of paying for a prescription—make the treatment work.

Fabrizio Benedetti, a placebo studies expert at the University of Turin in Italy, agrees that the doctor-patient relationship “can make a huge difference in therapeutic outcomes.” He believes it’s the most immediate

way we can incorporate the placebo effect into practical treatments.

Knowingly taking a faux treatment is clearly not for everyone—Wharrad, for instance, isn't convinced that he would have experienced the improvements in his Parkinson's symptoms had he known he was taking a placebo. But a 2016 American study published in *BMJ Open* found that up to 85 per cent of the 853 respondents felt that it was acceptable for doctors to treat patients with open-label placebos in various scenarios.

In 2017, Benedetti, Vase, Kaptchuk, Dr Colloca, and 26 other placebo researchers gathered in the small Dutch city of Leiden to begin developing official recommendations for doctors' use of open-label placebos, some of which were published in the journal *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* last year. They include informing patients about placebo effects, fostering warm, trusting, and empathetic patient-doctor relationships, and training physicians to communicate in a way that maximises the placebo effects. The goal is for these recommendations to be put into practice by health organisations worldwide.

“What we are proposing is that the placebo is a legitimate therapy if it's honest, transparent, and has informed consent,” says Kaptchuk. “That's a radical shift in medicine.”



THE LIVES OF some people who have participated in open-label placebo studies are already being improved. Troy Mack, a 57-year-old resident of Baltimore, had been suffering for two decades from intense pain in his face, neck, and jaw due to his temporomandibular (TMD) joint disorder. When a group of University of Maryland researchers announced a study of an experimental TMD treatment, Mack was told that based on his medical history he might be a good placebo responder.

That prediction turned out to be correct. After just a week of knowingly taking a placebo, most of Mack's jaw pain disappeared. His face felt more relaxed, and the joint no longer cracked when he yawned. He was finally experiencing relief.

“If I could get a long-term prescription for this,” says Mack, “I'd take it.” ■



8 Easy Ways To Improve Heart Health

Keep your ticker on track with these simple changes to your diet and lifestyle



Susannah Hickling is twice winner of the Guild of Health Writers Best Consumer Magazine Health Feature

1 Eat nuts Just a handful of nuts a day can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease. In fact, research suggests that they help your heart in a number of ways, including lowering “bad” LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol and triglycerides and the risk of blood clots. So, ditch the crisps and biccies and reach for the unsalted nuts instead. But beware, they’re high in calories!

2 Keep a cat A study of more than 4,000 people based on data from the American National Health and Nutrition Examination Study found that those who’d never owned a cat were 40 per cent more likely to die of a heart attack and 30 per cent more likely to die from any cardiovascular

event, such as stroke or heart failure. It's probable that stroking Tiddles lowers levels of anxiety and stress, which can have a protective effect against heart disease.

3 Go green Fill your diet with antioxidants, fibre and good fats—found aplenty in green foods. Dark leafy greens and cruciferous veg (think broccoli, Brussels and cauliflower) and green tea contain antioxidants, which protect against cell damage. Avocado and extra virgin olive oils are high in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. Meanwhile, peas are not only high in fibre but research has also found that people who eat peas and other legumes four times a week cut their risk of heart disease by 22 per cent.

4 Meditate Opt for a mindfulness app that you can practise whenever you have a spare moment. One study found that people who meditated regularly to reduce stress were 48 per cent less likely to have a heart attack, stroke or to die from all causes.

5 Answer the call of nature A full bladder makes your heart beat faster and puts extra strain on the coronary arteries, which makes them contract, research from Taiwan University found. This could result in a heart attack in people who are vulnerable.

6 Move differently We all know that exercise is good for heart health, but you don't have to go to the gym. Making regular non-exercise physical activity a priority can boost cardiovascular health. Whether it's walking meetings, a few minutes on your balance board when you're on the phone, squats while you clean your teeth, or cleaning the house, it all adds up.

7 Say yay to vitamin K Vitamin K, in particular vitamin K2, is good for the arteries and has been shown to reduce deaths from coronary heart disease, yet many of us are deficient in it. Eat more sardines, dairy, chicken, egg yolks and sauerkraut.

8 Ride your bike Cycling to the shops or across town to see a friend, or riding a stationary bike at home will improve fitness. It might even help if you already have ticker trouble. A German study found that men with angina (mild chest pain) who rode a stationary bike for 20 minutes a day were less likely to have a heart attack or other cardiovascular problem than other men who had an angioplasty to clear their arteries. ■

For more weekly health tips and stories, sign up to our newsletter at [readersdigest.co.uk](https://www.readersdigest.co.uk)

Live And Learn

It's the start of a new academic year and there's every reason to go back to school—or at least acquire a new skill

Start with art If you've always fancied yourself as a bit of a Picasso, consider joining an art class. As with learning anything new in a group, you'll meet like-minded people and boost your self-esteem. Trying your hand at life drawing will help your motor skills too, and there's research from Angela Ruskin University to suggest that it has a positive effect on body image, especially for women.

Be a masterchef Signing up for a healthy cooking course will teach you about nutrition as well as how to rustle up delicious meals.

Speak a foreign language Just back from holiday and feeling ashamed of your halting attempts to speak Spanish to waiters? Brushing up your language skills could be just what you need. Research shows that learning a foreign language can keep your brain in trim and possibly delay dementia. A University of Edinburgh study



suggested there was still a benefit even if you took up a foreign tongue later in life.

Take photos to feel good Enrolling on a photography course to take better pictures could improve your mental health. According to researchers from the universities of Sheffield and Lancaster, taking a photo a day and posting it online is beneficial, because it helps people to connect with others, see the world differently and get out of their usual routine.

Pick up an instrument Playing an instrument has been shown to boost mental acuity and might even stave off dementia. Expressing yourself musically can also lower stress levels.

Know how to knit It's sociable, calming and might help you to avoid mild cognitive impairment. It's even been shown to lower blood pressure and help distract people from chronic pain, according to Knit for Peace, an initiative from the Charities Advisory Trust.

And think about learning several new things at once—research from the University of California Riverside found that when older people learned several skills at a time, their cognitive abilities increased to the level of people 30 years younger. ■

Ask The Expert: Life After Menopause

Tania Adib is a consultant gynaecologist at The Lister Hospital, London (part of HCA Healthcare UK)



How did you become an expert on menopause?

I was a gynaecological oncologist, doing cancer surgery, and became a trustee of a charity that helps women who have been through breast cancer. I learned about the effects of treatment which is often geared to blocking oestrogen. Low oestrogen is essentially the menopause. From this, I developed an interest in managing menopause symptoms.

To what extent can women expect menopause symptoms to stop when periods stop?

Perimenopausal symptoms—fatigue, low mood, anxiety, low libido—can start years before the last period in the late thirties or early forties. Around the time women's periods stop they can get more classic symptoms—hot flushes, sweats, insomnia, joint pain, vaginal dryness. Those symptoms may go on for another six or seven years.

What are the main challenges once women reach menopause?

The drop in oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone has adverse effects on the body. As well as menopause symptoms, metabolism slows and women can struggle with their weight.

It's the start of a new era. If you have a high-pressure job, teenagers or sick parents, it's a lot to take on.

How can they overcome them?

HRT is the most effective treatment. It reduces the risk of heart disease, dementia, osteoporosis, colon cancer, diabetes. We now use bioidentical, instead of synthetic, hormones—the same as the ovaries produce—so the risk of breast cancer is minimal.

How can women ensure they have a healthy, happy life after menopause?

You can feel fabulous every day if you exercise, eat well and balance your hormones. A Mediterranean diet with lots of vegetables and fewer carbs is the healthiest. Focus on aerobic exercise to keep your heart healthy, and weight bearing exercise to protect the bones. Take omega-3, a probiotic and vitamin D supplements. Manage stress with mindfulness or yoga. ■

For more advice, visit [hcahealthcare.co.uk/facilities/the-lister-hospital](https://www.hcahealthcare.co.uk/facilities/the-lister-hospital)

Set Your Self Free

Practising forgiveness is essential for a happier life, writes Dr Max

IT'S OFTEN SAID that the three most powerful words in the English language are "I love you." But I think there are another three words that give it a good run for its money: "I forgive you."

Sure, forgiveness doesn't have the same rush of electric charge in it that love does. It doesn't evoke the same frisson of excitement. It might not be the subject of as many films or have as many songs written about it as love does. But it is no less powerful. Forgiveness is such an underrated virtue, yet it holds the key to happiness in life.

There is a tendency to blame others for our faults and difficulties,



but this sense of grievance helps no one and actually stunts and restricts the direction of our lives. I have met so many people who hold a grudge and it dominates their life. Lots of people blame their parents for their problems, for example. It is an excuse—an easy pass to flash when life gets tough or difficult or things don't go how we want them to. These people wallow in self-pity, holding on to their grievance like a talisman. But as I often say to my patients, one of the scary things about being an adult is that you're responsible for your own life. It's also one of the greatest things because, while your mistakes are no one's fault but your own, so are your achievements.

The first step in this is forgiving your parents for the mistakes they made and accepting that, from now



Max is a hospital doctor, author and columnist. He currently works full time in mental health for the NHS. His new book, *The Marvellous Adventure of Being Human*, is out now

on, the ups and downs of life are your responsibility. Forgiving someone frees you from the shackles of the past. It liberates you.

One of the amazing things about forgiveness is that it doesn't actually involve the other person. When you forgive someone, they lose their control over you. Your emotions are no longer in their grip, your feelings no longer at their mercy. I think one of the reasons we are so reluctant to forgive people is that we mistakenly think it means that what has happened is no longer affecting you, or no longer matters. That's not true. At the heart of forgiveness is tranquillity and peace. That's not weakness—it's what we are all striving for in life. In fact, forgiveness puts the person who is doing it in a position of incredible power. It neuters the perpetrator.

I do a lot of work around forgiveness with my patients. I think most of therapy has forgiveness at its core—forgiving yourself and forgiving others. Understanding that people are complex and are capable of hurting you either intentionally or unintentionally and how you deal with that and move on can take years, but is ultimately incredibly rewarding. Most of us can console ourselves with the idea that the

WHEN YOU
FORGIVE
SOMEONE,
THEY LOSE
THEIR CONTROL
OVER YOU

person we are forgiving is sorry. But that's not always the case. Sometimes people die before they can apologise. Sometimes people aren't sorry. This sometimes torments people as they think they need to hear the word "sorry" before they can forgive. This isn't true. I remember one woman I saw for several years in outpatients who wrote to her father who was in prison, forgiving him for sexually abusing her and murdering her mother. I was astonished that she felt able to do that, especially as he had never shown any remorse for his actions. She had battled for years in therapy trying to accept and understand what had happened, had written to him several times and tried to see him in the futile hope he would apologise, which he never did. But ultimately she found peace in forgiving him unconditionally.

"The day I decided to forgive him, I felt a weight lift off me," she explained. "It didn't matter that he wasn't sorry. I realised that until I forgave him, he would always have power over me. I was always his victim." She showed me that forgiveness is about freeing yourself. It is a display of power—of asserting your authority and taking back control. Forgiving someone and moving on is one of life's true joys. ■

The Doctor Is In

Dr Max Pemberton

Q: Dear Dr Max, I have developed thread veins on my legs that look like a bruise. They are affecting my confidence. How can I get rid of them? Thanks.

- Sarah

A: Dear Sarah, thank you for your question. These little thread veins are very common, especially as we get older. The medical name for them is *telangiectasia varicose veins*—they are also sometimes called spider veins. They are small clusters of blue or red veins that typically appear on the face or legs. Unlike the large varicose veins that appear on the legs, they do not bulge underneath the surface of the skin. The two types of varicose vein do often occur together and are caused by the one-way valves in the blood vessels becoming weak.

Thread veins are harmless, but, as you mention, people are sometimes self-conscious about them. There's no known way to prevent them, although some people have suggested that wearing support stockings, managing your weight and regular exercise might reduce the risk of them occurring. There are a few different ways to treat them. As this is for cosmetic

reasons, rather than because they pose a risk to health, this is only available privately and not on the NHS. Sclerotherapy involves injecting a special solution into the thread veins with a tiny needle. This solution displaces the blood in the veins, causing them to blanch and turn white. It then irritates the blood vessel and causes it to close up, preventing further blood from entering it. The thread vein will gradually fade and disappear over two to eight weeks.

Another option is using a laser. This also works by destroying the thread vein but not the surrounding skin or tissue. Small spider veins may fade immediately after treatment. Larger spider veins will darken, and you'll likely see them for one to three months before they disappear. People sometimes need more than one treatment to completely remove the thread vein.

It's best to get a dermatologist to check your skin and help you decide which treatment is best for you. ■



Got a health question for our resident doctor?

Email it confidentially to askdrmax@readersdigest.co.uk

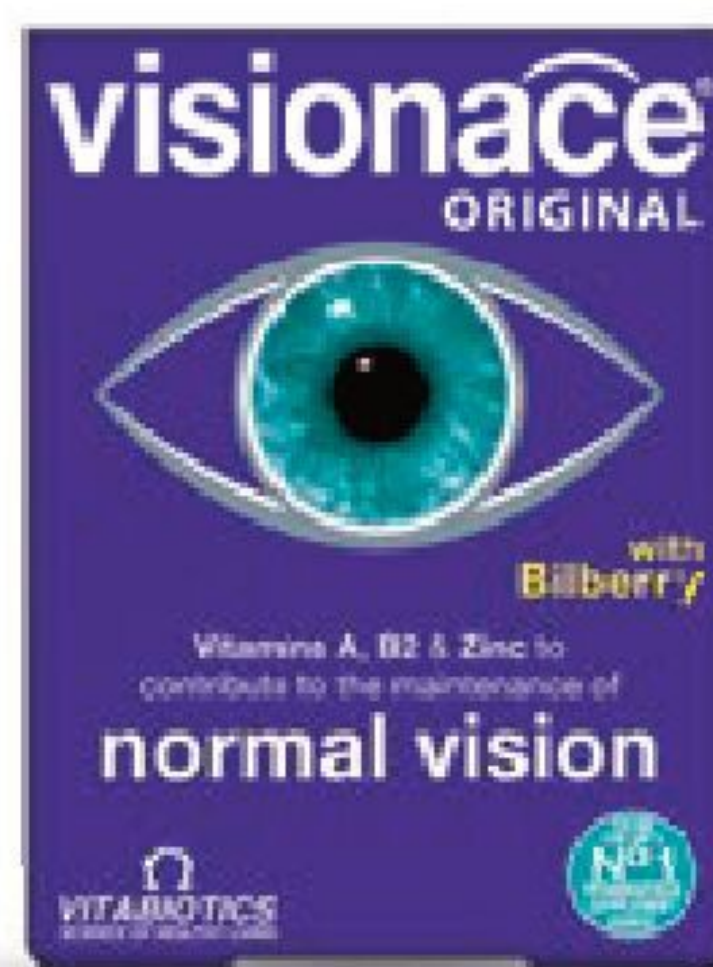
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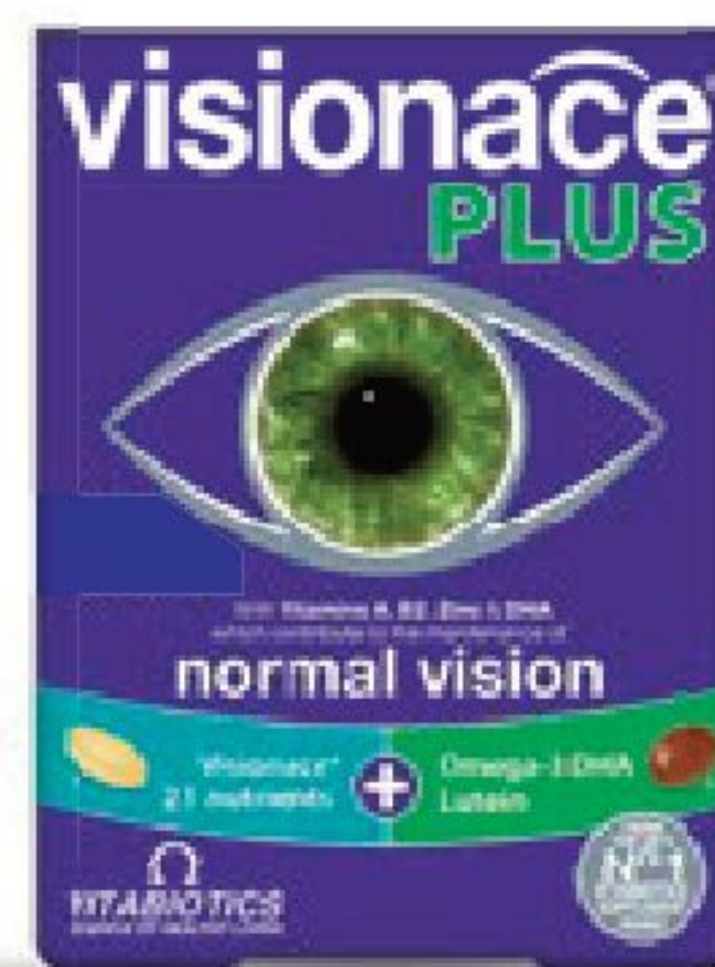
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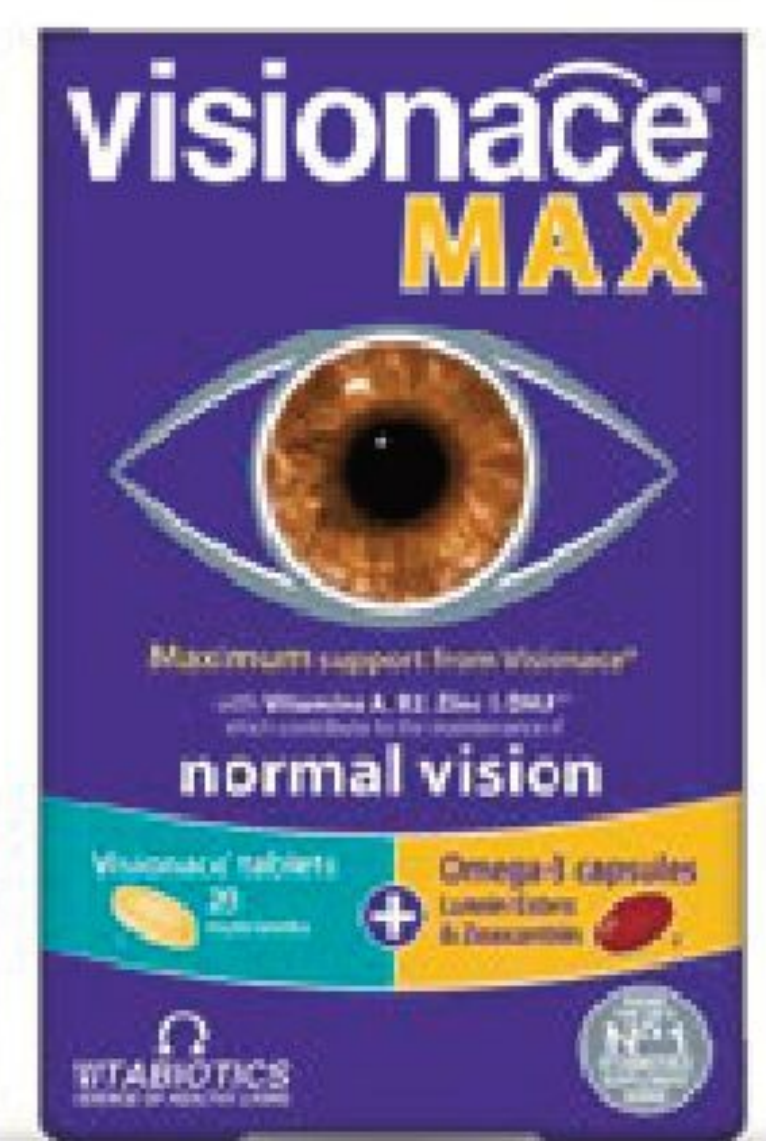
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Celebrate Those Senior Moments!

Hopeful news for older brains from our memory expert, Jonathan Hancock

THE LAST TIME I watched a grand prix race with my son, he made fun of my forgetfulness. I'd started to say something about one of the drivers—a huge star of the sport—and I knew he was called Max. But his surname just wouldn't come. Max... von Sydow, I wanted to say, although I knew that was wrong. I could feel my brain straining to sort through the other possibilities. Max... Miller? Bygraves? Wall...? After an awkward silence, my son put me out of my misery (it was Max Verstappen, of course). And, fair enough, he's usually faster than me at this type of recall. But maybe he shouldn't look so smug.

Because, according to new research, if older brains like mine struggle sometimes, it's not because our memories have become impoverished. It's because we've squirreled away such a vast array of valuable information over the years.

I bet my son only knows a few people called Max. But my mind takes me to Max Hastings, Max Planck, even Max Headroom, before it makes the link I was looking for. I've had 30 years more than him to load up my

memory banks, so no wonder they take a little longer to navigate.

Scientists scanned older people to observe this sort of thinking in action and marvelled at the wealth of connections they saw. Other studies are revealing the extra creativity and insight exhibited by older brains.

So revel in having a more mature memory!

- **Don't beat yourself up** if you're slow to recall a familiar name. Similar memories can interfere with each other. It may be that your brain is so good at storing your experiences that it just needs a bit more time to sort them out.
- **Capitalise on all the connections** made possible by a crowded mind. Remembering the wrong friend for a moment might prompt you to catch up with them, for example. And if you confuse two dates, maybe there's a useful reason your brain made that unexpected link.
- **Be persistent.** Follow the threads of association until you get to the information you were looking for. It's a great way to exercise your brain.

As the researchers put it, we shouldn't describe older brains as "cluttered", because that sounds negative, and ignores all the benefits of having a mind stocked with decades of interconnected memories. A much better word, they say, is "enriched"! ■

Just Cycle And fold away

There's no excuse not to get on your bike this Spring. Get your indoor cycling fix and feel the benefits.

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"Best Present EVER are the words from my 77-year old father who received his Roger Black fitness bike for his birthday. He said it is so simple and easy to use, with no complicated gadgets. The seat is VERY comfortable, so using it everyday is a pleasure. It folds away neatly so it can be stored behind a door if need be"

Anna, Farnham



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The True Ick-Factor In Age-Gap Relationships

Up to 25 per cent of all couples in Western countries are at least ten years apart

IN MAY OF this year, 19-year old Giuseppe D’anna proposed to his 76-year-old fiancée. She said yes, and like millions of newly-betrothed folks before him, he shared his news on social media.

I’ll admit that when I saw his then-viral post, I felt a prickle of unease.

It seems that others did, too. “She’s his grandma,” commented one user on the video-sharing app, TikTok. “Dress in blue if you need help,” added another.

While the 57 years between D’anna and his beau could certainly be considered extreme, here I was, indulging the tired and familiar scorn that comes with age gap relationships. I know better, so why did I react that way?

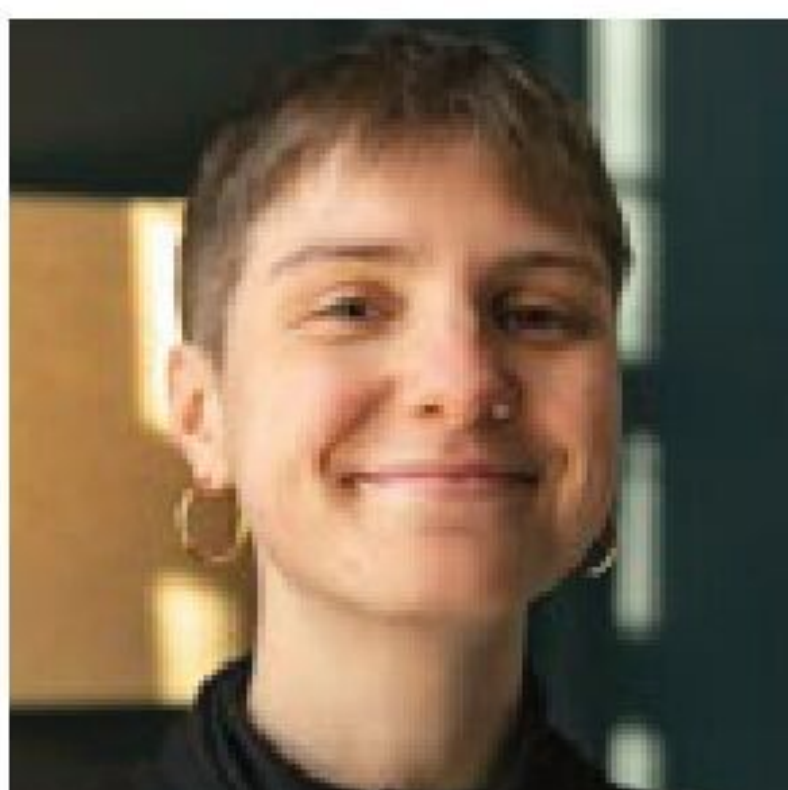
Age gap relationships are as old as time, yet they’re the dating taboo that just won’t die. Up to 25 per cent of all couples in Western countries are at least ten years apart, while in the US, it’s estimated that around one per cent of heterosexual relationships have an age difference of 28 years or more.

If all of these people are consenting adults, then why does their choice in partner still make us feel icky?

Speaking for myself, it was because I had made a snap assumption that D’anna was being taken advantage of. According to Oakland University, this is a pretty common prejudice.

Their research found that people consider age-gap partnerships unacceptable because they assume there is an element of exploitation at play, or that the relationship is exchange-based rather than rooted in a “real” connection.

That he must just be in it for the money was another common theme in the comments section of D’anna’s social media post.



Monica Karpinski is a writer and editor focused on women’s health, sex, and relationships. She is the founder of women’s health media platform *The Femedic*

These stereotypes are literally centuries old. Think of the cigar-puffing older man who seeks beautiful young things to hang on his arm, or the “gold-digging” waif waiting to collect his inheritance.

Or, if we look back to the early noughties, we meet the cougar—a desperate older woman who preys on younger men.

Why can't we let these characters go?

Possibly because they've grown from grains of truth. Men do have greater economic power than people of other genders, age does tend to come with more wealth and authority, and our culture does see feminine youth and beauty as desirable.

Socially speaking, then, there may well be power dynamics at play in age gap relationships that benefit some, but could also leave others in a vulnerable position.

Where we go wrong, though, is assuming that this is the case for all age gap relationships—and forgetting that age isn't the only thing that can disrupt the balance of power between people.

Insecurities, personality clashes, and a mismatch in how partners value each other can do the trick, too—it depends on the

people in that relationship and what they bring to it.

For a relationship to be healthy, we must feel secure and loved, and be able to be vulnerable with our partner. There's no reason why people of different ages can't be these things to each other.

An age gap may indeed cause differences in perspectives and expectations, but it's down to the people in that relationship to work through these challenges, just as they would any others.

Besides, age difference isn't always something to overcome—it can also be a source of joy.

One user on discussion app Reddit shares that she's drawn to younger partners because “they're fun, exuberant... I'm extremely active and a bit of a daredevil, and younger men can keep up with me.”

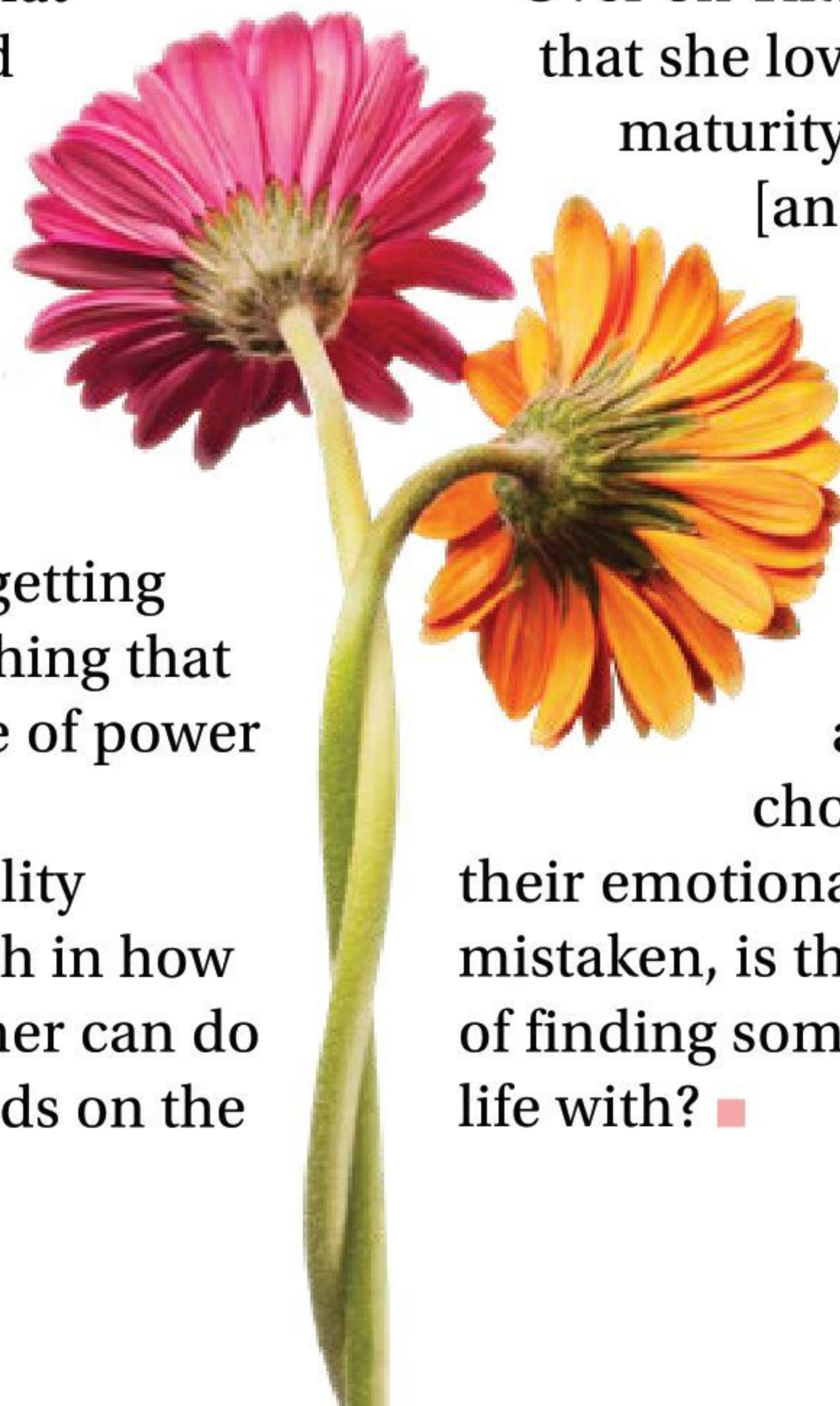
Over on TikTok, another user posts that she loves her older partner's maturity. “[He] wants a family, [and] just knows what he

wants in life in general,” she says.

Are these generalisations? Maybe. But these

two consenting adults have simply

chosen partners that fulfil their emotional needs and, if I'm not mistaken, is that not the whole point of finding someone to spend your life with? ■



Relationship Advice

Monica Karpinski

Q: Lately, I've been feeling a disconnect between my mind and body when starting to have sex with my partner—I feel like I am enjoying it and want to continue, but my body isn't reacting in the same way and this makes sex uncomfortable. What could be going on?

- Elizabeth

A: What you're describing sounds like a phenomenon called arousal non-concordance, which is when there's a disconnect between our emotional and physical responses to sexual stimulation. It can happen in the way that you've described but also the other way around, when the body is responding but mentally you're not into it.

This is a perfectly normal thing to experience and doesn't mean that anything is wrong with you. The body and mind have different ways of responding to sexual stimuli, and these are separate processes that don't always fire at the same time.

Our body can react to physical stimulation or even to cues that are sex-related—this is behaviour that our body learns and happens automatically—even if we aren't in the mood. Our brain, on the other hand,

deals with our subjective experiences of desire, which is us wanting sex or feeling turned on. You may well be in a horny headspace, but physically, your body has not got the memo. It could be useful here to explore different types of play to see how you respond—what type of touch, for example? There could also be a physical explanation for your body's lack of response, such as insufficient blood flow to the vagina. For people going through menopause, the drop in oestrogen can cause vaginal dryness, which can make sex uncomfortable.

I'd suggest getting checked out by your doctor to be sure, who may also recommend some treatments that can help. In any case, using lube is always a good idea!

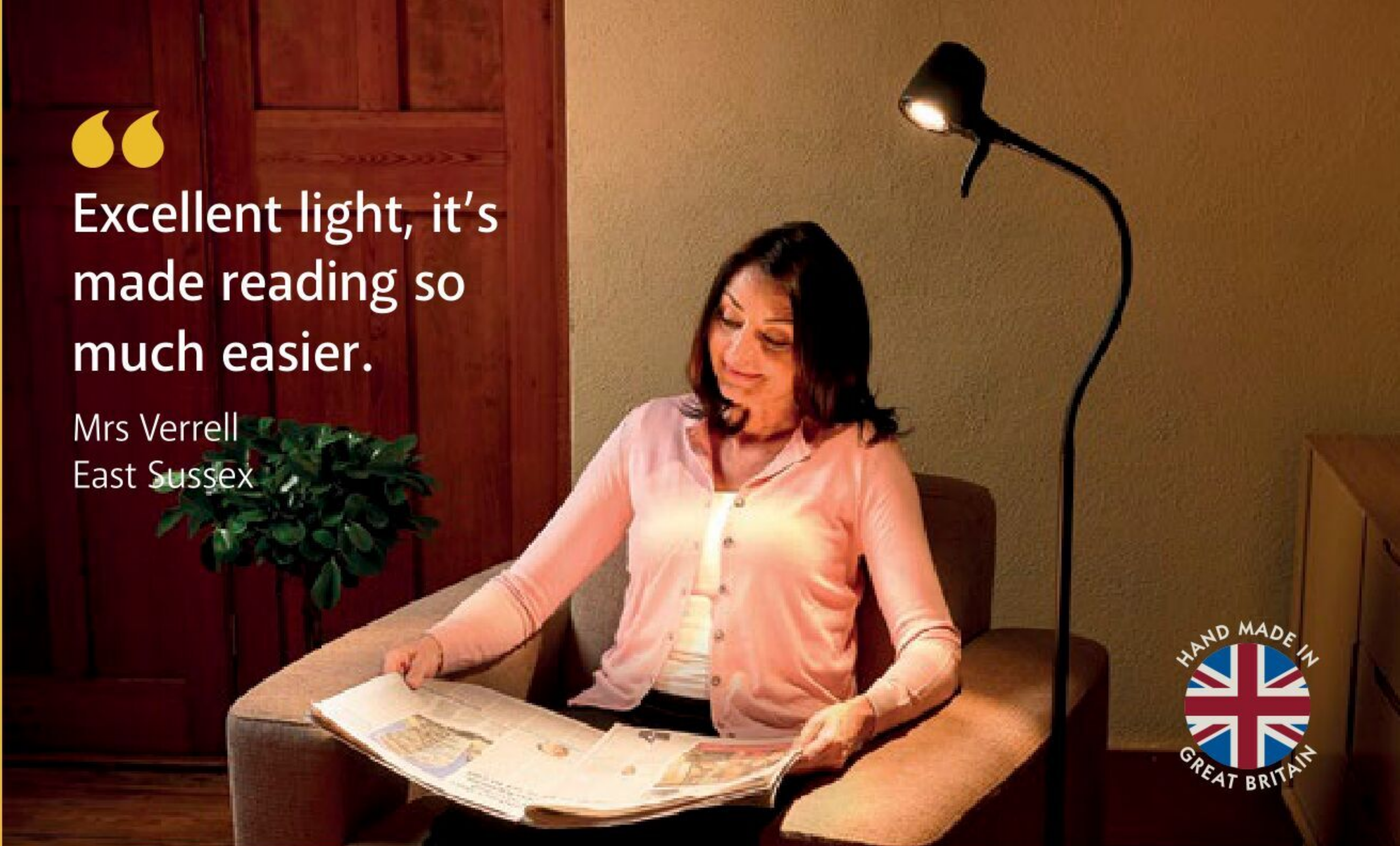
The most important thing you can do in the moment, though, is communicate with your partner and let them know how you're feeling. If sex isn't comfortable and you decide you want to stop, it's important that they understand this despite the contradictory signals your body appears to be giving. ■

Got a question for our resident sex and relationships expert? Email it confidentially to thelovedoctor@readersdigest.co.uk



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Mrs Verrell
East Sussex



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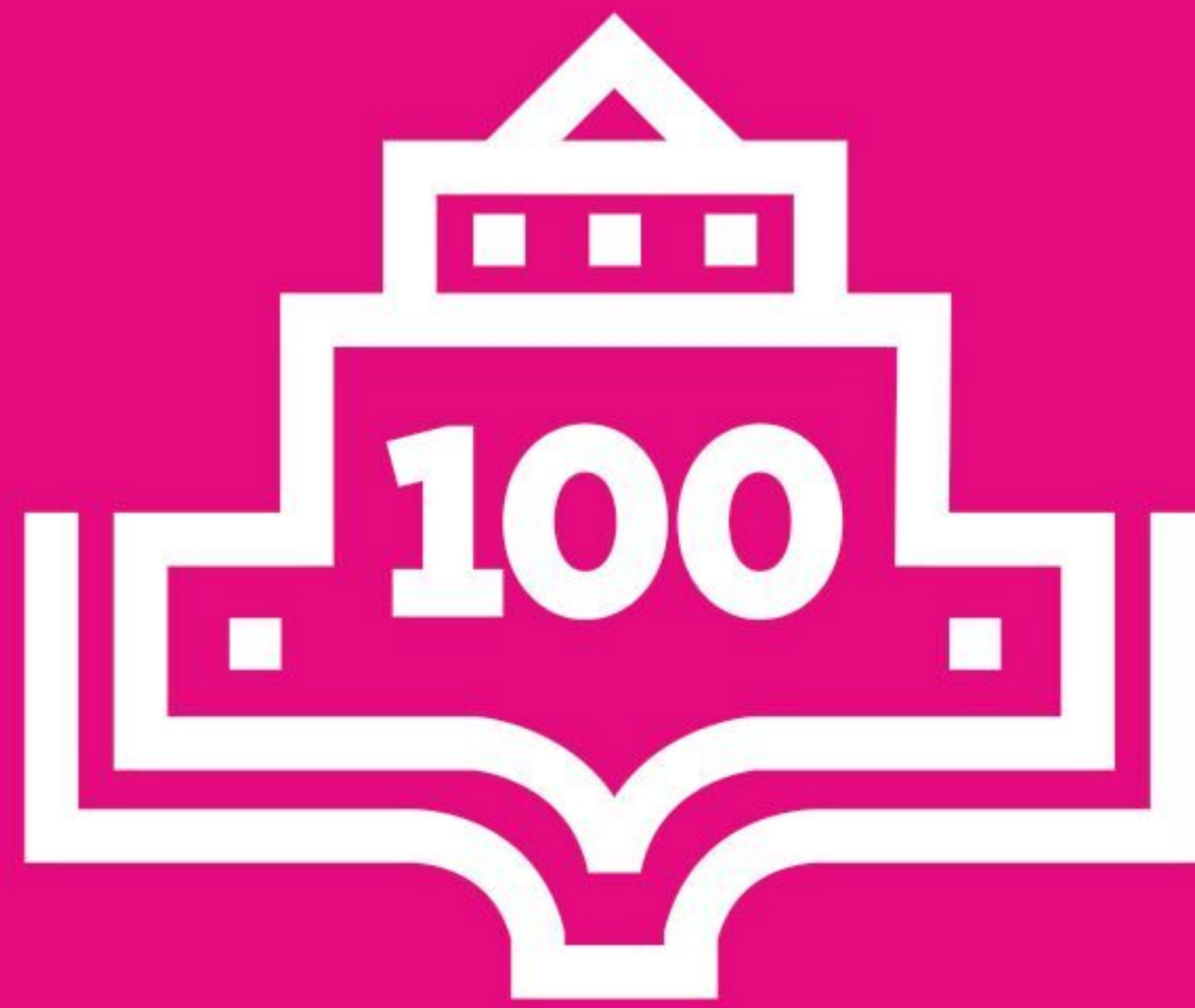
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WORD-STORY COMPETITION

Winners

After thousands of entries—and months of voting—we can finally reveal the winners of our 100-word-story competition

We've been delighted by the huge response to our 100-word-story competition. The entries have flooded in thick and fast during the past few months, but while we've enjoyed reading every story, only a few can come out on top!

You, our readers, voted to whittle the shortlist down to the ultimate winners, which are revealed overleaf, alongside comments from our judges and the winners themselves.

100
WORD-STORY
COMPETITION

Winners



WHAT SHE WOULD RATHER TELL A STRANGER

by Rachel O'Cleary, Tipperary

My mother's bare foot rests in my lap, softer than expected, toenails thick. My knuckles complain as I squeeze the clippers. "Call me Lily," she says, and I think, *what else?* I paint her toenails "Big Apple Red" while she talks about her estranged daughter, gone to the city years ago. "That girl was always an odd one," she says. "I'll bet she leaves me here to rot." I stare at the deep furrows between her eyebrows. See myself: hard-peddalling, smoke unspooling, highway breeze through messy hair, whisky-burnt, split by childbirth, circling home. I hold my breath, and wait.

*Runner-Up***WRITE CLUB**

by Katherine Bebo, Dorset

The first rule of Write Club is: You do not talk about Write Club. The second rule... you know the rest. We are guerrilla grammarians, changing the world one semicolon at a time. Under the cover of darkness, we correct the inexcusable: misplaced apostrophes (*shudder*), misspellings and other travesties—then meet to share our victories. A knock. We freeze. The figure enters, then asks: "What's the difference between a cat and a comma?" A tense silence. "One has claws at the end of its paws, and one is a pause at the end of a clause." I nod. "You're in."

*Runner-Up***BEHIND THE FILTER OF A MOTHER**

by Sian Shaw, Coventry

"Smile, smile at Mummy". My baby wriggles, kicks and fusses, his skin is irritating him. Neither of us have slept for weeks and none of the creams are helping. His eyes meet mine and his smile melts away my tiredness for a split second. I upload the picture to my social media, add a filter to smooth out his skin and remove the heavy bags from under eyes. In the caption I type "Good morning", and I post. Within minutes my phone starts pinging with likes and comments. "What a happy baby", "So cute", "Looking fresh mama". The crying continues.

THE JUDGES SAID:

We loved the visual vividness of this story and its huge emotional pull. In a few brief words, Rachel draws us into the stories of two lifetimes. In the spaces between her words the reader imagines those lives diverging, circling and finally coming together in this moment of held breath. Our chests tightened as we read it and the tears started to form too. A really powerful piece of writing.

RACHEL SAID:

Writing a 100-word story is so challenging! Like many writers, I find it difficult to make something resonate with so few words. In this case, I had actually written a longer piece of flash fiction and edited it down, so I know what happened in those intervening years she thinks about, and I believe that is what really made the story come alive.

I was beyond thrilled to find out I had won and I'm looking forward to seeing my story published in *Reader's Digest*. Younger me, who dreamed of being an author, would never have believed this.



NO PRIVILEGE

by Ameerah Kola-Olukotun, 17

“But I’ve got no privilege,” she protests. I stare at her shoes, bought by grandparents leeching off colonial fortunes. Her hair lies flat and presentable; my curls violate policy in any style. Her canvas-coloured skin will never raise questions. Mine is a brown cage that closes every door. But I hold my tongue. The others explain, but her whiteness turns to cotton and lodges itself in her ears. Her parents just worked harder. She’s just studious. “Blame me if you want.” She doesn’t see the landmines lurking in our paths. And if she did, she’d think she had them, too.

*Runner-Up***A LIVING MONUMENT TO US**

by Alice Wentzell, 16

Two boys lay in the grass, considering the weather. “The sun is very strong,” said one to the other. But under the tree, in amongst the roots, it was cooler. The bells of the church rang out, the sound rushing through the soil, sending bone-quivering quakes down their spines.

St Mary’s stood tall in its fertile grounds, the deep, green blades surrounding it appearing like an algae-covered lagoon, spattered with engraved, jutting rocks; the central spired building, a great flint island. In the yews, blackbirds hopped from branch to twig. The boys’ headstones cast arching shadows across where they lay.

*Runner-Up***A GIRL BY THE SEA**

by Noah Bradley, 13

There once was a girl who sat on a lonely, solitary, grey rock by the sea. She longed for the sky and the ocean to meet but they never did. They were separated from each other, and the only time they neared one another was at the end of the water, but as you got closer to the end, they were still parted.

She wished they could just be in love. They were in love, but they would never truly hold the others’ hand. It’s quite a sad story, really. But in every story, there is always a silver lining.

THE JUDGES SAID:

This story was such an eloquent evocation of advantage and disadvantage and the blindness that comes with taking things for granted. We loved the way the writer captured centuries of injustices in physical detail and metaphor. There was also a wonderful structure to this story: a standoff, rising tension and resignation. So much was said and done in these 100 words.

AMEERAH SAID:

I am overjoyed that my story has been chosen as the winner and I am so grateful for everyone who voted for it! When I started writing, I had no concrete idea for my story—I only knew that I wanted to highlight injustice.

Ultimately, I chose to write about the race-related privileges that are often invisible to those who benefit from them. I am so happy that my story has resonated with people and hope that it inspires them to fight against inequality whenever they notice it.



IM-PEN-DING DOOM

by Evelyn Walters, 11

My cap was pulled off today. I was indignant and embarrassed, more than I can say! Yet again I was gripped tightly around the middle and forced to do the mum's tedious receipts. My murky blood seeps from my single vein onto the paper. I know I am dying. I can feel my impending death oozing out with my last reserves of liquid. I see, ironically, pens are listed on this stationery receipt. Imagine their hopeful faces! Vitally, I would warn them, "Life as a pen, though long, is full of monotonous and painful tasks. Just don't run out of....."



UNDER-12
Winner

*Runner-Up***A DOG CALLED ENZO**

by Lucy Vargas Soffer, 7

One morning a dog called Enzo wanted to go on a countryside walk. His owner fastened his lead and they set off for a long walk. He spotted another dog and pulled on the lead. He pulled so hard that his head slipped through the collar and he was free. He ran and he ran.

Meanwhile his owner was looking for him everywhere. She searched under the bushes, over the hills, and even went to his favourite butcher shop, but she couldn't find him anywhere.

When she got home feeling super sad, she found him waiting patiently on the doorstep.

*Runner-Up***THE NIGHT-SCUTTLERS**

by Isobel Black, 10

In the abyssal inky blackness of the night, the Night-Scuttlers crawl and squirm in the shadows of your pitch-black bedroom. PITTER PATTER... The feet of the hard-armoured goliath beetles and scuttling titan beetles stretch and creak as the insect's eyes boil with hate and let out low groaning, grumbling murmurs as they creep threateningly along the walls and floor, multiplying rapidly; uncontrollably.

The tarantulas and brown-violin-spiders cascade out of your cupboard ominously followed by deadly wolf-spiders and jumpsman-spiders. In the hollow silence of an ordinary night, the Night-Scuttlers writhe and worm along until they reach their sleeping, unsuspecting victim. YOU.

THE JUDGES SAID:

We loved the lively style and wit of this story and it appealed to the writers in us. There's wonderful movement in the writing. The whole piece is a brilliant metaphor for writing with a pen and a wonderful paean too. Evelyn's writing was so full of life. Perhaps she will breathe new life into the humble ink pen too!





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My Britain: LIZARD *Peninsula*

By Anna Walker





The UK's most southerly point, the Lizard Peninsula is one of Cornwall's undisputed gems of natural beauty. But despite boasting miles of one of the most stunning coastlines in the UK, diverse wildlife and a beguiling history, the Peninsula remains one of the lesser-visited spots in Cornwall, and is all the more special for it.

Just two roads lead onto the Lizard Peninsula, and little redevelopment has taken place in the seafaring villages that call this stretch home. As a result, the area wears its history proudly and offers a glimpse into a very traditional Britain.

The rather curious name of this Cornish jewel doesn't indicate an above-average number of reptiles, as you might suspect, but is in fact



derived from the old Cornish "Lisardh", which can mean "fortress", "high court" or "headland", depending on your interpretation.

Visitors to the Lizard Peninsula will be spoiled with places to explore. There's Poldhu's surf school, where you can learn how to catch the waves alongside locals and visitors alike. Mullion Cove is home to the pretty, and once bustling, Mullion Harbour

with a fascinating history and plenty of wildlife. Goonhilly Downs boasts an Earth station working on a Moon exploration project. Meanwhile Gunwalloe was once the location of Cornwall's oldest settlements and is now a bird watcher's paradise.

We spoke to two long-term residents of this special part of Cornwall to get a sense of what daily life is like on the Lizard Peninsula.



Daniel Thompson

Daniel Thompson, 35, is the general manager at the Mullion Cove Hotel and Spa and has worked on the Lizard Peninsula for seven years



Hospitality has always been in my blood and when the opportunity arose to manage the Mullion Cove Hotel, it was an offer I couldn't refuse. My wife and I have always loved the Lizard, holidaying here annually, so it was a dream come true for both of us. We are bringing up our children here and it is the perfect place to give them an active outdoor life.

Everything about Mullion Cove Hotel shouts the Lizard, from the views that can be seen from almost every part of the hotel to the locally made organic products used in the spa (even the stones used in the signature hot stones treatment are hand-carved serpentine stones from the peninsula). This local flavour is fundamental to our food offering too, with the dishes served in our 2AA restaurant and casual bistro-made ingredients sourced largely from nearby producers. Guests get a real sense that the hotel is part of our community and has been for many years. The villagers genuinely care about the place, and

many of our staff live locally—that's quite unique for the area.

Getting back to the views, I think that's what makes the place so special. It doesn't matter what time of year it is—whether you're watching the sun twinkle on the water in the summer or taking in the winter's stroppy stormy seas—every day brings a new view just as

hypnotic as the last. Maybe that's why we have so many repeat guests! And as for the sunsets... well, they are something else! Guests love nothing better than bookending their day with a sundowner in the bar to take it all in.

As for my favourite things about the Lizard Peninsula, I love the amazing views, the wonderful communities and Mullion Harbour, because it is perfect for swimming, paddle boarding and harbour jumping. I love the colours of the cliffs and coast—on a sunny day you could be in the Mediterranean. My favourite spot is a perfect fishing mark not far from the lifeboat station (I won't give it away). Sitting on the rocks in the sun, fishing rod in hand, taking in the scenery, the peace and quiet refreshes me, and takes away the stresses of running a busy hotel.

Plan a future visit to the Lizard Peninsula at mullion-cove.co.uk

Gillian Sadler

Owner of Golowi Wellbeing and body movement therapist, Gillian Sadler, 44, has spent 24 years on the Lizard Peninsula

I was born and bred here and there's a certain magic energy that I feel on the Lizard Peninsula that I feel nowhere else. I travelled globally at the age of 19 and, although I visited beautiful locations, nothing equated to the beauty of Cornwall and the Lizard area. I'm so proud to call the Lizard Peninsula my homeland. There's something steadfast and strong about living here, and I'm so proud that my children have their Lizard roots too!

I love the Peninsula's rawness, the flora and wildlife of the cliff tops, the ocean and its dramatic changing nature, but most of all the colours. Sometimes when I walk the coast path I'm reduced to tears by its beauty.

With lockdown, I was forced to close my Falmouth-based dance studio and instead offer lessons via Zoom. It was quite a revelation as I found a whole new wave of clients—those ordinarily too self-conscious to join in person—wanting to sign up to my virtual class. This time away from the physical studio made me change direction, so post-pandemic I sold my studio-based business, returned to my Lizard Peninsula roots and started Golowi to bring that joy of dance, wellbeing and nature to Mullion.



Golowi Wellbeing is a haven for those who long to connect to the elements of nature through creative activity, dance and yoga. Participants embrace the Cornish landscapes, with some classes taken outdoors, which lets participants immerse themselves in nature and take in the sea views as they dance or do their yoga class.

I suppose it felt right to start the business here because the Lizard Peninsula makes me feel like my truest self. It has a power by enabling me to create and co-create. It's like the surroundings move me to move others. And, as an added homecoming, my dear friend and collaborator Kathryn and I worked together at Mullion Cove Hotel at the sweet age of 18, so returning with Golowi Wellbeing felt like a perfect full circle.

I can't think of any place better than the cliff tops between Mullion and the Lizard. I look out there and see the vast blue of the ocean ahead and the grounding green under my feet and behind me. Heaven. ■

To find out more, head to golowi-wellbeing.com



If I Ruled The World Glenn Moore

Comedian Glenn Moore is a regular face on *Mock the Week* and can be heard daily on Absolute Radio's *The Dave Berry Breakfast Show*



Cinema armrests would come with a little mouse that the audience could wiggle when they want to see how long is left of the film. Especially for those films that are about two hours and 40 minutes long. In those sorts of films they would also pinpoint moments where you could go to the loo and not miss anything.

Car alarms would shout the owner's name and address. This is for two reasons. First, if the alarm goes off in the middle of the night then you'll know it's your car.

Second, if *another* car alarm goes off in the middle of the night, then you'll know which annoying neighbour to blame.

When boarding planes, the people with a window seat would board first, then everyone with a middle seat, and finally those with aisle seats. It would make everything very, very easy. Now the argument against this is, "What would you do about babies? Would they be left unattended?". Well, on this airline no babies would be allowed. Which

would mean it's a great airline. I think it's a perfect, perfect method.

I'd revolutionise escalators at train stations. Escalators are usually split into two lanes. You stand on one side if you're happy to just stand on the escalator, then there's a separate lane for people who are in a rush. That's how most escalators work. But I think there should be *third* lane. So there'd be a standing lane, a separate lane for if you're in a rush, and then a third lane for when you're in a rush and you're also fast. I think those are two separate things. People can be in a rush but also slow. And they need to be in a separate lane to people who are in a rush and also quick.

Cash machines would have a double-or-nothing function. It would only be when you're taking out a fiver, so nothing really consequential. And similarly, you'd only be able to do it once a month so you wouldn't get addicted. But imagine it's Friday night, you're just taking out five pounds, and the machine asks, "Do you want the option to double or nothing?" There's a chance you'll end up with zero and it will ruin your weekend. But if you win a tenner that would really, really make your Saturday and Sunday, I think.

Heists would be legal. Obviously in this world we'd be very strict on

crime in general. However, if someone puts on a really committed, non-violent heist, like a jewellery heist, or *The Italian Job*, and they get away with it, then I think let them. The way I see it is that if they really put the thought in, and it's going to make an excellent film one day, then well done. If anything they should get a cut of the movie profits, too.

In election campaigning, there would be an independent vote deduction committee. Now what I mean by this is that if any party is found to have been lying about something on the campaign trail, then a percentage of the votes they get would be deducted. It would be done by an independent committee, like a cross-party group of MPs, but they would make sure that everyone fully tells the truth. The only downside is that everyone's manifestos would be really boring, because they'd only tell you stuff they know they could stick to...

Adults would get to do French exchange trips. I think we should give older people the opportunity, too. So every now and then your dad would just get switched out with 62-year-old Anton. It'd be fun for the family to mix it up a bit.

Glenn Moore is touring throughout 2022. Visit glennmoorecomedy.com/live for dates and tickets



FULL CIRCLE:

THE EVOLUTION OF FOOD DELIVERY

BY *Anna Richards*



The neighbourhood milkman used to be a common sight, but residents of some UK cities are now more likely to have their dairy products delivered by robots.

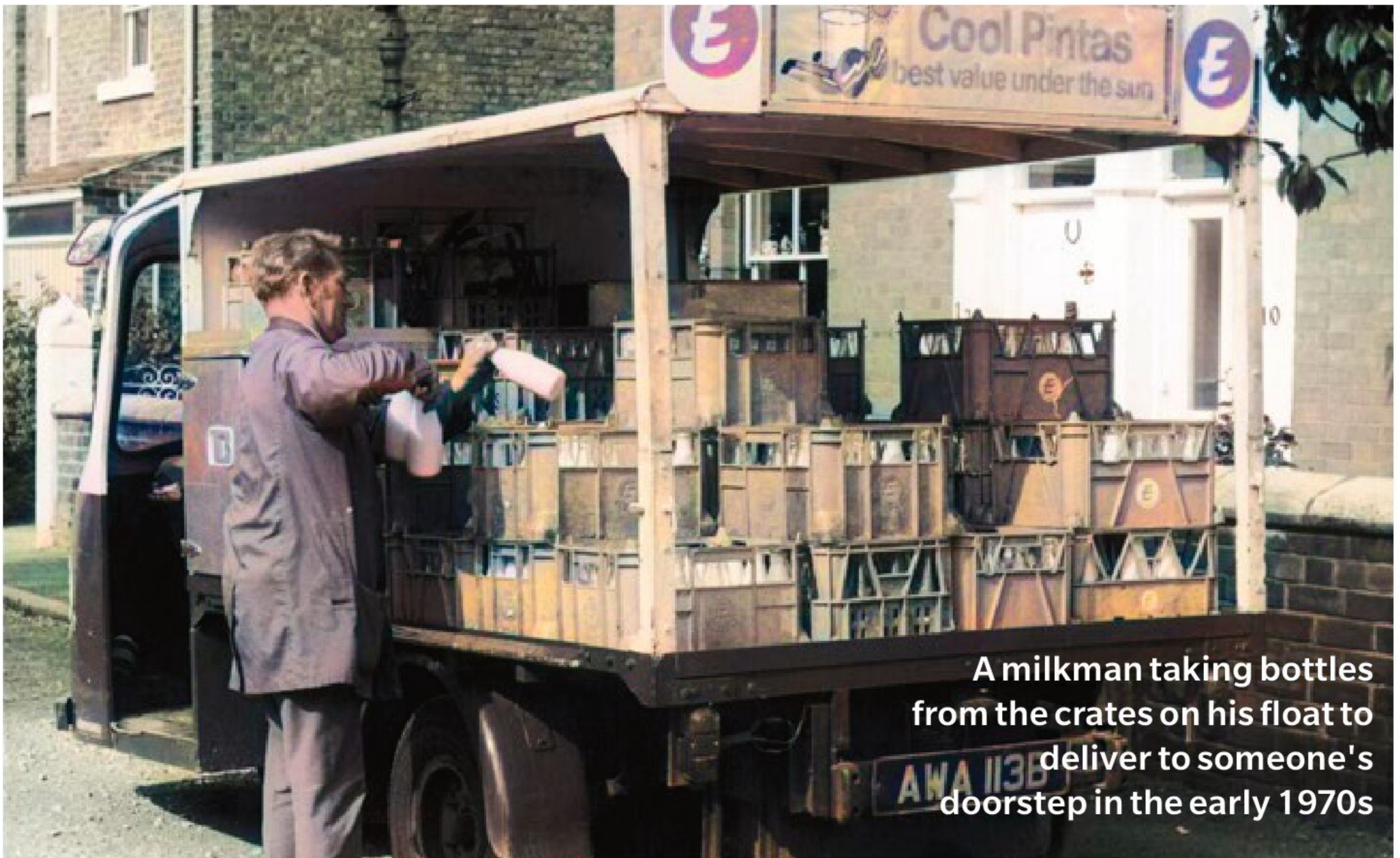
PULLED PORK BAO delivered with one click by a Deliveroo rider on a motorcycle. Co-op's own-brand vodka brought to the door by your Uber driver to replenish depleted supplies mid-house party. A supermarket home delivery in enough carrier bags to make a large, plastic parachute, complete with thimble-sized jars of honey where you messed up the size ordering online.

The predecessor of Deliveroo, Uber Eats, and a hard-fought, carefully scheduled home delivery slot from Tesco, was the milkman—once a regular sight on British streets, now somewhat of a novelty. For the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, most homes in Britain had their milk delivered by the milkman. As late as 1980, almost 90 per cent of UK households had milk delivered

to their door, but by 2016 that figure had fallen to a mere three per cent. Milkmen, it seemed, were to join the ranks of redundant jobs; town criers, lamplighters and pinsetters.

During COVID-19, milkmen made a comeback from the brink of extinction, with the UK's largest milk delivery service, Milk & More, adding 25,000 new clients to their database during the first month of the pandemic. Housebound and worried about the next national shortage (what would follow toilet paper and bread flour?), companies got creative. Stone House Urban Winery in Hagerstown, Minnesota, even began delivering wine to their clients using their dog, who became affectionately known as Soda Pup.

Growing up in Falmouth, Cornwall in the Nineties and Noughties, my family was unusual in that our milk



A milkman taking bottles from the crates on his float to deliver to someone's doorstep in the early 1970s

was still delivered by a milkman. John Forster was known to all in the community, delivering his first milk round at the age of 17, and finally retiring last year at 71. Early morning runners and dog walkers would hear the tinkle of the milk float as it wound its way around the steep streets. So well known was Forster that he was chosen to carry the Olympic flame during the 2012 London Olympics, and for some time after he delivered milk with the Olympic flame in one hand, brandishing it with pride.

If you're a person living in a single household and driving to and from the shops, then an online grocery delivery is better for the planet than going there under your own steam.

MILKMAN FORSTER DELIVERED MILK WITH THE OLYMPIC FLAME IN ONE HAND, BRANDISHING IT WITH PRIDE

But e-commerce is still responsible for a huge amount of CO2 emissions. Increasingly, food delivery services are transporting produce in novel ways to reduce its carbon footprint. In the Ain department of eastern France, Les Transports de Lingot delivers groceries using a horse and cart. Mid-pandemic, in September 2020, Deliveroo launched their first roller skate delivery service. In Lyon, eastern France, young entrepreneur Caroline Foucan delivers baguettes

Baguette à Bicyclette



and *viennoiseries* (baked goods) by e-bike.

While the milkman was once a regular sight across the UK and the US, the French were more accustomed to seeing the "breadwomen," or *les porteuses de pain*. These women went door-to-door serving as many as 300 clients a day. They'd carry their wares either in heavy baskets or wooden frames strapped to their backs, or sometimes even in aprons. The luckier ones had pushcarts supplied by the bakeries that they worked for. They often had to climb as many as seven floors up Paris's gangly Haussmann buildings. Although many buildings were equipped with lifts, these were for residents only,

and the *porteuses du pain* were not permitted to use them.

In the countryside, bread was delivered by horse and cart, and later by van. It was this childhood nostalgia of the bread delivery van doing the rounds that first inspired Foucan's breakfast by bicycle delivery service. She'd spent many childhood holidays at a rural family home in the Haute-Loire, Central France. In the morning, the bread delivery van would do the rounds, sounding out a tune like an ice cream van at the British seaside. Old and young alike would pour from their houses to receive crusty baguettes fresh from the oven.

Foucan grew up in Lyon, France's third-largest city. With bad traffic

and an elaborate one-way system, there was no bread delivery van here, and it would have been neither practical nor economical. Looking for a greener, more cost-efficient alternative, she wondered why it couldn't be done by bicycle instead. In 2018, alongside her friend Déborah Libraty, she launched Baguette à Bicyclette. All they had was a pair of Decathlon bikes, plenty of grit and motivation, and just €500 between them.

My alarm sounds at 5am and I dress sleepily. It's still dark, but there's no time to wait for the sun to rise; Lyon's inhabitants are ready for their *petit déjeuner*. At the Baguette à Bicyclette headquarters I'm greeted by a hum of activity and the heady smell of butter mixed with flaky pastry. The team is already hard at work.

Baguette à Bicyclette has evolved considerably from its humble origins. Foucan now runs a team of seven men. Today I'm joining Environmental Sciences student Jonas on the delivery round. Since he finishes his shift before breakfast, it's an easy job for him to slot around his studies. These days, the whole team has e-bikes, a considerable upgrade from the original Decathlon bicycles, equipped with large containers for the breakfast orders. Even though Jonas is pedalling a considerable weight, there are moments when I struggle to keep up with his electric

bike as we tear around the streets.

"It wasn't always so efficient," says Foucan when we return a little over an hour later, the delivery shift complete. We've deposited our wares at some of the most fascinating, historic buildings in Lyon: luxury apartments hidden in the old *traboules* (covered passages formerly used for transporting silk). Many of Baguette à Bicyclette's

WE ENTER USING A SELF-SCAN SYSTEM, WE NEVER SEE THE CUSTOMERS—I FEEL LIKE A CROISSANT FAIRY

clients are guests at MiHotel properties—self-catered apartments scattered across the city. We enter using a self-scan QR code system and we never see the customers. I feel like a croissant fairy.

"We used to let people choose any time slot for their delivery," says Caroline. "And it was a logistical nightmare. We'd spend hours planning the route, trying to optimise it as best we could. Now, everyone has breakfast delivered between 6am and 7am on weekdays, or 7am and 8am on weekends."

Route optimisation was also what inspired Ahti Heinla and Janus Friis to found Starship, a delivery

service operated by robots. They felt that while long-distance food transport was becoming largely more cost-efficient and environmentally friendly, the issue lay in the final few miles. Between paying the wages of delivery personnel and the cost of a van and fuel, or even of a bike, companies were struggling to break even. They needed a solution that would reduce overheads, and keep

ONE DELIVERY ROBOT USES THE SAME ENERGY IT TAKES TO BOIL WATER FOR A CUP OF TEA

their clients happy, at minimal cost to the planet. But would the public accept having their groceries delivered by a robot, or would they feel as though they'd fallen into an episode of *Black Mirror*?

Before implementing robot delivery, Starship piloted their machines in 100 cities across 20 different countries. The verdict was overwhelmingly positive. People found the squat little boxes on wheels cute. Equipped with an illuminated red flag to make them visible to motorists and pedestrians, the Starship robots travel at four miles per hour along the pavement, looking like a spruced-up troop of WALL-Es.

“They’re more cautious than humans,” says Henry Harris-Burland, vice president of marketing at Starship Deliveries. “They wait longer at pedestrian crossings.”

Each robot can carry three heavily-laden grocery bags. They’re now a common sight in Milton Keynes, Northampton and Cambridge, and the Starship robots are also trundling their way around Estonia, the United States and, most recently, Finland.

“We’ve tried to have fun with them, which is another reason for their popularity,” continues Harris-Burland. “Our robots play songs to their customers for special occasions, for example, ‘Happy Birthday’ or Christmas carols.”

Their popularity in Milton Keynes is evident; the Facebook page for

Starship Deliveries



Starship Milton Keynes counts some 11,000 followers with users regularly sharing photos of Starship robots that they've spotted out and about. One Starship robot making a delivery uses the same energy as it takes to boil water for a single cup of tea. Even les porteuses de pain wouldn't have been so energy efficient delivering on foot.



While companies like Baguette à Bicyclette and Starship are revolutionising the last few miles of grocery delivery, long-haul food transport isn't being overlooked. Putting sustainability at the heart of long-distance food delivery are New Dawn Traders, a company based in Cornwall, UK, which ships Fair Trade food from overseas by sail. Founder Alexandra Geldenhuys had the idea when on a cocoa plantation in Bahia, Brazil. She channelled her efforts into learning about permaculture, and dreamed of sailing cocoa beans from Brazil across the Atlantic. In 2012, New Dawn Traders shipped their first load. The first cargo was rum from the

Dominican Republic, which the team blended and bottled in Falmouth, Cornwall. It was the first rum barrel to arrive in the UK by sail for almost 100 years. Their offerings have expanded considerably since then, and now they ship herbs and spices, oils, tea and coffee, wine, and, of course, cacao, the original inspiration.

While the number of people taking on jobs as milkmen or bread peddlers is not likely to ever return to historic levels, it's not hard to see a future where Fair Trade coffee arrives from South America by sailing boat, before being delivered to our doors by e-bike, or even robot, with virtually no CO2 emissions whatsoever. ■

Quirky cleaning facts

The first vacuum cleaner, invented in 1901, was horse-drawn and petrol-powered

Ketchup's acidity means that it can break down the tarnish on silver, while banana skins are great for giving your silverware a polish

Listerine was originally sold as an antiseptic and—wait for it—a floor cleaner!



YORKSHIRE'S ATLANTIS

*Against all the odds: how Yorkshire's
"lost Atlantis" could soon be found
after 700 years under the waves*

BY Paul Drury-Bradey

**Spurn Point is an iconic and
constantly moving peninsula
which curves between the North
Sea and the Humber Estuary**



MR. NUT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

An extraordinary quest to find England's lost medieval city may soon be coming to an end. Could its discovery help solve some of today's biggest challenges?

IT'S NOT HARD to see the appeal of searching for a lost city. Could there be treasure? What secrets do these almost-mythical places hold? And what was life really like in these mysterious places?

Answers might soon be found in an unassuming corner of northern England, as scientists and historians believe they are getting closer to finding Yorkshire's "lost Atlantis", the town of Ravenser Odd, swallowed up by the fierce waves of the North Sea in 1362.

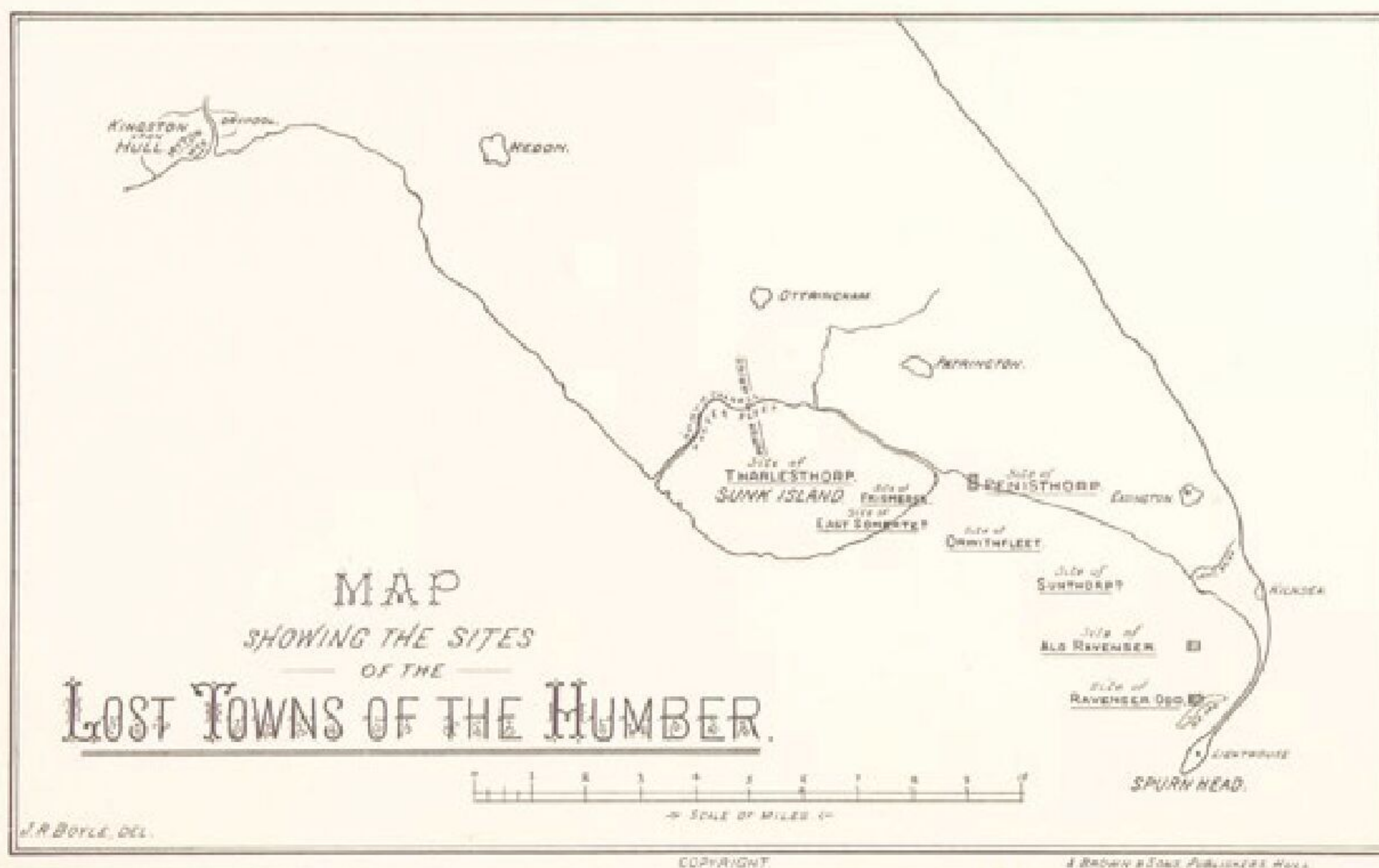
Its story is unlike anything else in English history. The sunken town was once rather like a little Venice—a wealthy, outward-looking place. Built on trade on East Yorkshire land, between what is now Hull and Grimsby, historians believe it was one part of England's key

trading route at the very mouth of the Humber Estuary.

It was one of England's most international and distinctively cosmopolitan places too, welcoming seafaring traders from Germany, Scandinavia and beyond. An average week might have seen Scandinavians, pirates and merchants from Italy plying their trade. But does it all sound too fanciful to be true?

Reader's Digest spoke to author and historian, Phil Mathison, who has dedicated many years of research to finding out more about this remarkable town.

"Ravenser Odd is truly an amazing and inspiring place," Mathison explains. "Once people learn a little bit about it, they just want to know more and more. It fires up people's



The name Ravenser
Odd came from the
Old Norse phrase
"Hrafn's Eyr" (meaning
"raven's tongue")

ILLUSTRATION BY GARETH SLEIGHTHOLME



“IT FORESHADOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SEA AND EUROPE FOR THIS REGION”

imagination like nowhere else. I think most people like a legend, a mystery story, and something that hasn't been solved. Well, here we've got a legend on our own doorstep. And the curious thing is that 99 per cent of people living around Yorkshire haven't even heard about it.”

A cosmopolitan and remarkably European place

Raverser Odd was founded as a key trading port around 1235. It quickly grew to a town of national importance due to its fishing and the merchants

sailing in and out—historians believe that it had many wharves, a warehouse and even a prison.

It was an outpost of the Hanseatic League, a trading alliance that was, in some ways, like an early forerunner of the EU. Mathison explains, “This made it a key port for Europe. It foreshadows the importance of both the sea and Europe for this region. It made the place very outward looking. You've got to remember that this was a time when folks didn't travel far beyond their hamlet or village—but the people of Ravenser Odd were

successfully trading with Sweden, Denmark, Estonia and beyond on an almost daily basis. It was really international and cosmopolitan, certainly compared to anywhere else in Yorkshire at the time.”

Some of the main goods traded in the town were fish and herring. Whale oil came in from Sweden and, of course, wine from France was popular too!

Although the town was home to only 1,000 people, this still made it one of the biggest places on the East Coast at that time; the river was absolutely key to its success.

Mathison adds, “Although this watery place might sound remote

by modern standards, back then the Humber was the place to be and the best way to get around. There were few roads in existence really, and the ones that did exist were dangerous with threats from highwaymen. Getting around by boat just made sense, and helped to make Ravenser the vital and important place it was.”

Today, scientists believe that Ravenser Odd lies at the bottom of the sea. Changes to the Humber Estuary and a type of coastal erosion led to the town’s decline, and it was eventually flooded by the middle of the 14th century. A storm and flood around 1362 probably brought about its dramatic final end, leaving it completely submerged in the waters of the North Sea.

I am not aware that the scan in May found any “distinctive stonework.” In the past an echo sounder has located a ridge near the shore on the seaward side of Spurn, but high beach and seabed levels in the last year appear to have masked it.

A new search closer to the shore this year, uncovered a distinctive ridge just a few metres beneath the water’s surface, but changing seabed levels are making the search difficult. Advanced sonar equipment could be deployed in the hope of finding the harbour walls of the lost town, but more funding is needed to complete the research.

Scientists are confident that finding Ravenser Odd beneath



Dr Steve Simmons

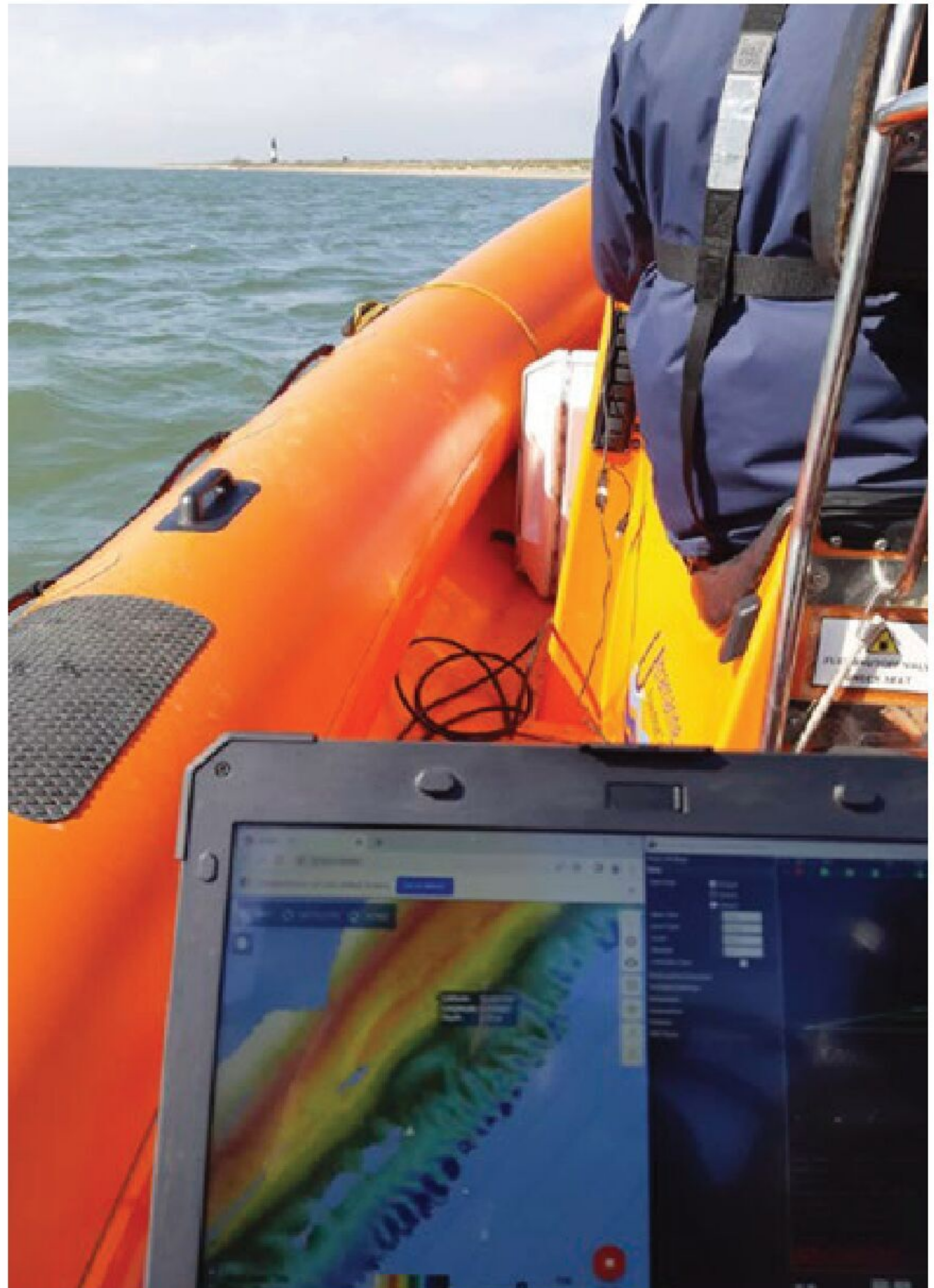
the Humber would be as legendary as the discovery of Pompeii, after it was buried under volcanic debris, or like uncovering Atlantis itself.

Dr Steve Simmons, a sedimentary expert from the Energy and Environment Institute at The University of Hull, is part of the team investigating the seabed and the River Humber for clues.

His latest state-of-the-art surveys use an advanced echo sounder to process and interpret data. It sends pulses of sound energy below the survey boat in a fan-shaped beam and listens for reflections in a similar manner to an ultrasound scanner—but on a far larger scale. These reflections from the seabed allow Dr Simmons and his team to map the seafloor in amazing detail, with an accuracy of a few centimetres.

Listening to the locals for clues

Dr Simmons explains how the team listened to local fishermen for advice. The fishermen had pointed out water surface disturbances that might have been caused by the foundation of Ravenser Odd's sea wall. The team are now combining this advice from people who make



their living in the North Sea with historical accounts that might offer new clues or ideas about the whereabouts of this elusive town.

The story of its watery fate is not entirely unique. But Dr Simmons says, “The fact that a town of such significance can simply disappear so suddenly, and its exact location be lost to history, that captures the imagination. Around 30 villages have been lost to the sea along the Holderness coastline near Hull, but none were as significant and remain as enigmatic as Ravenser Odd.

“The loss of Ravenser Odd reminds us that coastal erosion is not a new phenomenon. People living and working along the Yorkshire coast have had to constantly live with and adapt to a retreating coastline that has resulted in the loss of many settlements. It helps us to understand that adapting to change is nothing new, but at the same time that the threat of erosion is likely to be greater with rising sea levels and increased storm frequency.”

Ravenser Odd was a place that

the people of the town could see the sea levels rising and the banks of the town eroding for at least 40 years before. “There’s a lesson here,” he explains. “We need to be really careful with where we build houses. Nature decides after all. I think that’s one of the reasons this is such an important story—because it can shine a light on the coastal erosion threat faced by communities on Yorkshire’s east coast today.”

Today, the Holderness coast is one of the most rapidly eroding coastlines

THIS STORY HAS SHAPED CHARACTER HERE. WE'RE PEOPLE ON THE EDGE

grew quickly. But according to Dr Simmons' research, it had huge untapped potential too. He says, “Historical accounts of piracy suggest that daily life in the town would have been quite interesting—almost like a medieval version of the Wild West! It’s intriguing to think how Ravenser Odd could have developed into a modern town and what impact that would have had on the development of the rival ports around the north. If it had developed into a larger town that extended inland, then better transport links may have opened up what today feels like a remote area of Yorkshire.”

The loss of Ravenser Odd wasn’t a sudden thing. Mathison believes

in the world, with some areas retreating up to ten metres a year.

“It is one of the reasons that I love local history so much. Understanding the past helps us to prepare better for what might come along in the future. How many people have a legend like this on their own doorstep?” Mathison explains.

Shaping people’s character

“Yes, it’s a warning about erosion. But people living here know that the landscape and our coastline is changing all the time,” says Mathison. “What’s really interesting is how Ravenser Odd's story has shaped the character of people here. We’re people on the edge, and those

kinds of people have always tended to be innovative. It's created a survivor character. The people of Hull, Grimsby and all around Humberside make the best of what they've got. Because they were fighting a battle that they ultimately lost."

Future surveys will cover further areas off the Holderness coast and around the Humber. The team's ground-penetrating radar might find some basic foundations. And then it is hoped that archaeological explorations could allow the town walls, warehouses and even lost homes to eventually be pinpointed under the water.



It might not be *Up Pompeii*, but down the River Humber still has a few more secrets to share. ■

The hunt for forgotten civilisations

The city of Troy was thought to only be mythical, as described in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, until archaeologists excavated possible remains in Turkey in 1871

El Dorado continues to elude researchers, although in 2019 a multidisciplinary team may have pinpointed Lake Parime, which it is said to have sat next to

The Mayan city **Lagunita** was discovered twice. Eric von Euw found it in the Mexican jungle in 1970 but did not note its exact location. A second team rediscovered it in 2014

*In this Danish archipelago,
fantastic landscapes, rare wildlife,
and Norse mythology lend a
dreamlike quality to everyday life*

Magical Realism

On The
Faroe Islands

BY *Chloe Berge*
FROM CANADIAN
GEOGRAPHIC TRAVEL



Breathtaking sights, such as the Múlafossur waterfall on Vágur Island, greet visitors at almost every turn

THE SETTING SUN pours its amber honey down onto a steep trail carved through meadows of emerald grass. I hike up the hillside, reaching a breathless, abrupt stop on a narrow ridge. A view of the tiny, turf-roofed village on Mykines—one of the most remote members of Denmark's Faroe Islands—is sketched in shadow in the valley below. On the other side of the vertiginous cliff, there's nothing but the wild, churning North Atlantic, and on the ridge's edge, puffins strut and hop—hundreds of them. Their feathers ruffle in the briny wind as they huddle together, bobbing their bright orange beaks and blinking teardrop-shaped eyes. Spotting so many of them together, cast against the yawning ocean, feels like happening upon a congress of mythical creatures.

Heightening the surreal scene is the utter lack of other tourists, or any people for that matter. Isolated in the North Atlantic Ocean between Iceland and Norway, this string of 18 islands has managed to evade the world's attention (for now) and on Mykines, the permanent resident count sits at just 16. Only accessible by boat or helicopter, the island is mostly cut off from the rest of the archipelago during ice-hardened winters. But from May to August, travellers can venture over for a day trip, or, as my fiancé and I have chosen to do, to stay and spend the night.

After arriving on an afternoon ferry from the island of Vágur, we stopped into The Locals Cafe in Mykines' storybook village, where owner Katrina Johannesen sold us a hiking pass for 34 euros per person. "I was born here, left to study abroad in London, but I had to come back," says Johannesen. Taking in the bucolic scene outside the cafe's windows, it's easy to see why.

The discovery of the puffins has slowed our progress on our three-hour round-trip hike to the Hólmur Lighthouse—a postcard sight that marks the western tip of the Faroes' westernmost island. We linger on

MIND-BENDING VISTAS WAIT AROUND EVERY CORNER IN THE ARCHIPELAGO

this narrow sliver of land to marvel at the birds. They create burrows on these steep seaside cliffs during nesting season, from June to August, and are most social at sunset, the best time to spot them. Because the birds linger so close to the trail, hikers are advised to observe them from a distance, sticking to the path and never touching chicks or eggs. The rest of the walk only grows more beautiful. Clouds of puffins and gannets soar overhead, fog cloaks the headland's



Faroese horses
play an important
role in the islands'
mythology

rocky peaks, and the salty wind whips around me in wild gusts, pulling my hair skyward. As dusk descends, cotton-candy sheep escort us down the winding path.

THE NEXT DAY, we ferry back over to Vágur, where the feeling that I am in a dream continues. Navigating our rental car down spiralling roads with hairpin turns, we reach the Lake Sørvágsvatn trailhead. Our hike comes to 27 euros per person, but I'm happy to pay for the permit knowing the fee helps combat over-tourism, an increasing issue in the Faroe Islands. A gentle, rolling path traces the edge of the three-and-a-half-square-kilometre lake. Tiny pink and purple flowers are sprinkled across the surrounding verdant hills like tossed confetti.

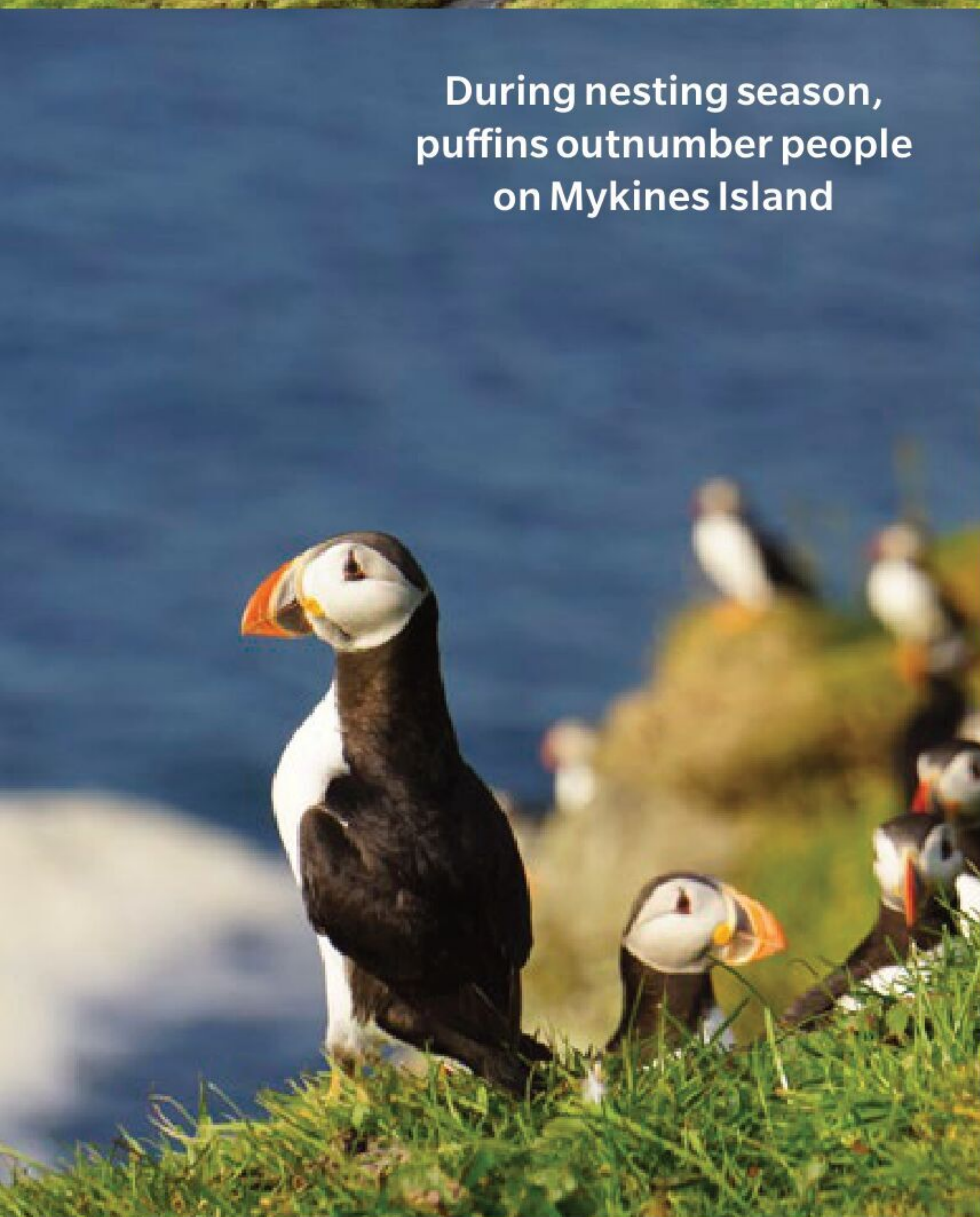
A short but steep incline at the end of the hike brings us to a cliff's precipitous edge. Turning back towards the direction we came from, the lake appears to hover, suspended, hundreds of metres above the ocean's violent waves in a physics-defying optical illusion. The crescent-shaped slice of water seems to tilt towards us, yet only one small waterfall pours from its edge.

Mind-bending vistas wait around every corner in the archipelago. Before a tunnel was built on Vágur in 2004, the postman was charged with the task of hiking over a mountain pass to deliver mail to the hidden village of Gásadalur. To get a sense of life on the islands before the advent of major infrastructure, we follow in his footsteps (the trailhead can be found to the left of the tunnel's



During nesting season, puffins outnumber people on Mykines Island

Grass-roofed homes in the village of Saksun on Streymoy Island



entrance, heading towards Gásadalur from the Vágur airport.) The two-to-three-hour hike is rugged but ends with a birds-eye view of the small scatter of buildings that freckle the green headland. The village is punctuated by a 30-metre waterfall

that tumbles into the ocean, and my fiancé and I let out audible gasps at the sight.

AS DUSK'S SHADOW turns the landscape blue and mauve, we head towards the historic village of Saksun on the island of Streymoy, where we'll be staying for the next few days. We weave down a frighteningly narrow, one-way country road, and arrive at a cluster of grass-roofed homes that hug a shimmering inlet. The 1897 farmer's house we've rented still has all its original bones, and as we duck past the small entryway, we're greeted by the words of Faroese poet Marjun Kjelnæs written in English on a chalkboard: "This is an ancient place, famished you want to stay here, sit until your skeleton turns to cliff, watch until your eyes wash out, listen to the labyrinth in your

PHOTOS: (TOP) ©GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM) ©CHLOE BERGE

ears swoosh like shells." It's true. The landscape outside the French windows reveals the kind of beauty you could contemplate forever.

In the morning, we wake to the happy trumpeting of snow-white ducks gathered outside.

Later that day, we drive into the highlands that overlook the Faroese capital, Tórshavn, to reach Fjallaross, or "Faroe Horse," a local horse-riding outfit. The Faroese horse was only domesticated 50 years ago and isn't found anywhere else in the world. The breed is also under threat of extinction, with just 80 left in the archipelago. "The Faroese horse is important in our culture and history," says Fjallaross owner, Anna Louisa Joensen. "I'm fighting for the support I need to help conserve them."

We ride our two horses bareback—which is more comfortable for the horse—across a rocky, windswept plateau. I grasp the wiry black mane of my mount, Grani, and use my legs to steady myself as he trots up and down the gentle ridges. As we ride, Joensen explains the horses' prominence in Faroese myths and ballads, where they starred as the heroes' stalwart companions. The horse Grani belonged to the hero Sjúrdur in one of these old Nordic tales. "The ballads are forgotten in most of Europe, but we preserved them because they're sung during our traditional chain dance," says Joensen. Elves, dragons, and magical

rings also abound in the stories, and Joensen says it's widely believed that they inspired JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Steeped in ancient myth, so much of the Faroes' romance lies in how life has remained unchanged for centuries. For dinner that evening, we head into Tórshavn, which means "Thor's Harbour" and is named after the Norse god of lightning and thunder. Dating back to the ninth century, it was the site of an early Viking parliament. Reyn, the town's historic centre, is home to a cluster of black-tarred wooden houses with overgrown turf roofs, intersected by cobblestone streets.

Like walking through a Brothers Grimm fairy tale, we meander down the lantern-lit chiaroscuro alleyways and arrive at Ræst, which serves traditional Faroese fermented cuisine. Fermented fish and meat have been integral to the Faroese way of life for centuries, as the harsh climate and long winters made farming and hunting year-round impossible.

Outside the restaurant's windows, lights dance on the harbour's inky water. Our candlelit plates of hearty fish stew and fermented lamb evoke the cold, howling winters of long ago. The Faroe Islands feel like a haunting melody from another time, a myth whispered by the wind, a magic trick pulled from the ocean. The beauty here has the soft edges of a dream, yet I've never felt more awake. ■



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We hope to see you at an event soon!

My Great Escape:

Paradise At St Pete

*Our reader Jenni
Warrior escapes to
sunny Florida*

MY HUSBAND AND I visited the coastal resort city of St Pete Beach, Florida earlier this year, thanks to being fortunate enough to have a relative with their own beachfront apartment there. With its picturesque sandy beaches, crystal-blue waters and year-round sunshine, it's clear to see why St Pete is a popular tourist destination among travellers around the world.

Just a few feet from our apartment we found ourselves walking on powdery, white sand towards the glistening azure ocean. We were soon greeted by a vendor offering us the use of one of his luxury cabanas for the day for a very reasonable price and settled into a full day of relaxation. The serene atmosphere was a true escape from the hustle and bustle of life back home. It was so easy to while away the days from



morning until dusk, relishing the warm embrace of the sun's rays and getting lost in a good book, before dipping into the tranquil ocean waters to cool off.

Once the sun set, there was an eclectic range of bars and restaurants to choose from just a short stroll away. The warm evening atmosphere was peppered with the tantalising



aromas of sizzling freshly-caught fish and the sound of ice rattling inside cocktail mixers. The only hardship was trying to decide where to dine and drink each evening with so many tempting options!

After a while we began to crave a bit more adventure on our trip which, to our delight, we discovered was easy to come by.

On one of our excursions, we took a boat trip to the secluded island of Egmont Key State Park. Here we explored the ruins of Fort Dade, a military garrison built in 1898 during the Spanish-American war, and a 150-year-old working lighthouse. The island is also a protected wildlife reserve and home to hundreds of species of birds, gopher tortoises and a popular nesting site for vulnerable leatherback turtles. On our return journey from the island, we were mesmerised to discover we were being followed by over a dozen bottlenose dolphins, who were taking it in turns to leap out of the water playfully in the wake of our boat. The delights that this wonderful place has to offer are too numerous to possibly squeeze into one visit. We had many more trips planned that we simply hadn't the time to tick off our list—but that just gives us an excuse to return! ■

Tell us about your favourite holiday (send a photo too) and if we print it, we'll pay £50. Email excerpts@readersdigest.co.uk

PALACIO DE LAS DUEÑAS

Seville

HIDDEN
GEMS

There's no skipping Seville's legendary Alcázar palace. Instead, to best elude its famously long entry queues and the densest throngs, the trick is to visit first or last thing, ideally on a weekday.

During your free afternoon or weekend, as everyone else heads there, you can be smugly, subsequently enjoying another late-15th-century wonder. Found just north of Las Setas, the under-the-radar Palacio de Las Dueñas features its own fine interiors, admirable artworks and glorious gardens.

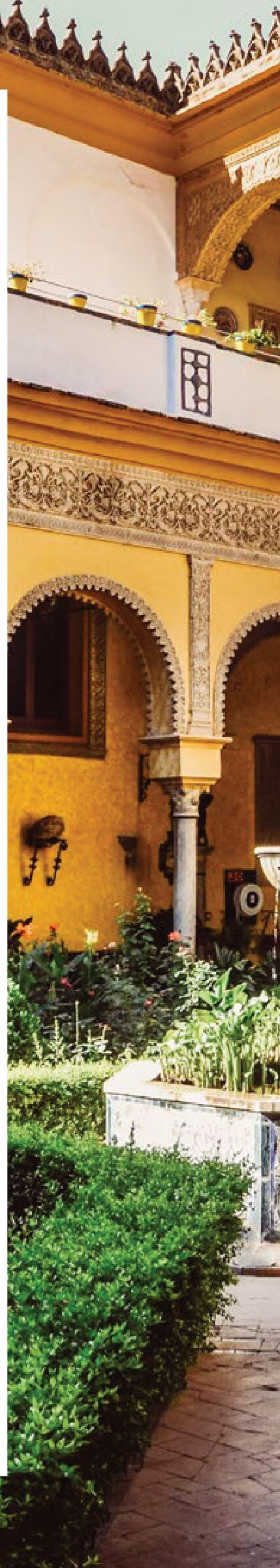
Built in Renaissance style but with myriad gothic and Moorish influences, the palace belongs to Spain's aristocratic Alba family. The late Duchess of Alba hosted Grace Kelly and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis inside its walls. Before then, legendary Spanish poet Antonio Machado was born here while his father served as caretaker.

Entering via a gilded Mudéjar-style door, you discover a galleried, palm-shaded Andalusian patio of banana-coloured walls. This in turn provides entrance to the main, partly-private residence.

To one side are the various, tiled Moorish gardens, best known for their spectacular bougainvillea blooms, botanical species, fountains, white-marble arches and citrus plants. "My childhood memories," Machado later wrote, "are of a patio in Seville, and a bright orchard where a lemon tree ripens."

Some of the accessible rooms inside are festooned with fabulous artworks: everything from Flemish tapestries to 17th-century Italian and Spanish paintings, plus a watercolour created by Jackie Kennedy during her stay here in 1960. Many of that colourful Duchess's fascinating former belongings stress her love of Sevillano and wider Spanish culture. ■

By Richard Mellor





Rethinking Your Landline



Landlines as we know them will soon be a thing of the past. By 2025, making calls via a copper line into our homes will be replaced by calls over the internet—something Ofcom are calling “The Future of Voice”.

I’m sure for a lot of you this won’t make any difference. Personally I’ve not had a landline for the last four years, and even before, though I connected a phone, it wasn’t used for many years. Instead all my calls are made via my mobile phone.

But three quarters of homes still have a landline, and that figure is even higher for those over 65. When the switchover happens, you’ll need to plug your phone into your broadband router rather than a phone socket.

This could require new digital telephones or adaptors. If you don’t have the internet right now, a new router will be provided for free, and in some cases that might require engineers to visit. You won’t have to pay any more than you do right now though.

The big concern is that you’ll no longer be able to make a call if there’s a power cut. Similarly, if your internet goes down there won’t be a



line to use. Even people who use a mobile phone more and more have liked the security of a landline as a back up.

Faced by this criticism, a gradual roll out to homes has been delayed by BT while it looks for more resilient solutions, such as longer battery life and mobile signal back ups. But that doesn’t mean the big change won’t still happen in three years’ time, and other companies might still want to move you over earlier, especially if you switch providers.

Change is coming whether you like it or not, and I think it’s worth getting ahead of it—and hopefully saving some money in the process.

First up, rethink your mobile phone tariff. Most of these now offer unlimited calls to other mobiles and



Andy Webb is a personal finance journalist and runs the award-winning money blog, *Be Clever With Your Cash*

local rate calls (anything 01, 02 and 03), while 0800 and 0500 numbers are free anyway.

If these make up the majority of your calls, then ensure your plan covers these, and use this instead of your landline.

This will allow you to ditch any call plan you have with your landline, or if you don't have one, to save the money you would have spent on the pay-as-you-talk individual calls.

THE BIG CONCERN IS THAT YOU'LL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO MAKE A CALL IF THERE'S A POWER CUT

The savings here can be decent. It's possible to get unlimited calls on a mobile plan for as little as £5 a month. I think it's likely your existing mobile deal is more than this, so not only can you reduce that bill, but wipe another £5 to £10 a month off your landline bill.

Where you could miss out is on calls to 084 and 087 numbers, which some landline providers might include in packages. However, these aren't as common as they used to be, and you can often find alternatives that are included on your mobile plan. Try saynoto0870.com, or check providers' websites and letters.

As you move your phone usage more and more to your mobile, it's also an opportunity to stop paying for other extras you might have on your landline plan, such as

voicemail. The likelihood is you won't need them.

You might also want to reassess your mobile phone handset—but don't worry, it doesn't have to be a smartphone. There are still relatively cheap basic mobile phones available which will make calls and send text messages—and that's it.

Eventually you might feel you can get rid of the landline completely and save yourself even more money.

There are more and more broadband tariffs that are internet-only, so see if you can get one of these—or haggle with your provider to pay less since you don't need or use a home phone.

But if that feels like a step too far, it's still worth seeing if your phone company provides a landline saver rate. You'll pay upfront for 12 months and get a discount on the monthly bill. However, these aren't anywhere as good as they used to be, and you might be saving just £20 a year. ■



On The Money

Andy Webb

Q: I'm 40 years old, and I assume that I will get my state pension from 2050 when I turn 68. This leaves me with 28 years to pay into the system to get my full state pension.

Having checked my pension summary, it says that I need to contribute National Insurance for another 16 years before April 5, 2049 (having already 16 years of full NI contributions). I've got two years where my NI is not full.

My question now is, if I make up for those two years and pay in another 16 years (which would be 2038), am I running a risk that I "overpay" from 2038, as I would be paying NI (assuming I'm still working then) but my state pension would not increase further (apart from inflation adjustments)?

-Chris

Topping up your National Insurance (NI) to fill any gaps can be well worth it if you're short of qualifying years for the State Pension.

Normally, you can only backdate these extra payments for the last six years, but until April 2023, you can look for missing years as far back as 2006. You'll pay roughly £824 per extra year, which should pay for itself after three years of retirement.

But in your case there's plenty of time to get the extra years you need. So I wouldn't top up now. Maybe if you choose to retire

early, before you have a full

NI record, you'll want to voluntarily make contributions. But for now just keep contributing via your salary.

And, yes you're right, if you pay more than the 35 (or however many years) required you don't get any extra State Pension. ■



What's No Dig Gardening?

The ins and outs of no dig gardening by a world expert on the trend, Charles Dowding

What is no dig?

No dig means leaving soil undisturbed, with a surface application of organic matter. That's it! Sometimes we need to make holes for plants and trees, and the surface compost may need light hoeing if it has many weed seeds.

No dig benefits

No dig soil grows far fewer weeds than the same soil after digging or rotovating. It retains moisture while allowing excellent drainage.

In spring, the surface warms readily thanks to compost's dark colour, which absorbs sunlight and then converts it to warmth. For gardeners, there are huge savings of time and effort. No digging, less weeding and watering, easy sowing and planting into the soft surface compost—perfection.

Importance of soil life

Until recently, the advice has been to feed plants with nutrients from



fertilisers. The results from no dig, however, show that when soil biology is preserved and increased, growth happens without using fertilisers. The mycorrhizal network, for example, helps plants to find nutrients and moisture which might otherwise stay unavailable.

Hence, an annual feed of compost

This feeds the billions of organisms which inhabit all soils, and enables them to maintain structure, aeration and drainage, and to organise plant feeding. A surface layer of 2.5cm each autumn or early winter is enough to keep soil in a state of high fertility. For pathways and shrubby plantings, including fruit bushes, the mulch can be woodchip of a reasonably fine grade.

What is compost

Compost is any decomposed organic matter. You can make it and

buy it. Suitable ingredients are garden wastes including lawn clippings, tree leaves, old animal manure, kitchen wastes, also commercial materials such as coffee grounds and spent hops. Garden compost heaps can include diseased materials and weeds of all kinds with their roots. No dig means that you spend less time weeding, and more on making compost!

Tips for seed sowing

You sow and transplant into the surface compost. Seeds and seedlings love to start life in a surface rich in organic matter, just as happens in nature where we have not intervened.

Create a no dig bed

The approach varies, according to what is currently growing.

1 If starting with reasonably weed-free soil, no dig is as simple as raking the surface level, then spreading 3 to 5cm of reasonable quality compost on top.

2 If there are many weeds, you can place thick cardboard on top of them, then 7-15cm compost on top of the cardboard. Wet it thoroughly and you are ready to plant! Weeds die while your plants are growing in the compost.

After ten weeks the cardboard is degrading and some weeds appear

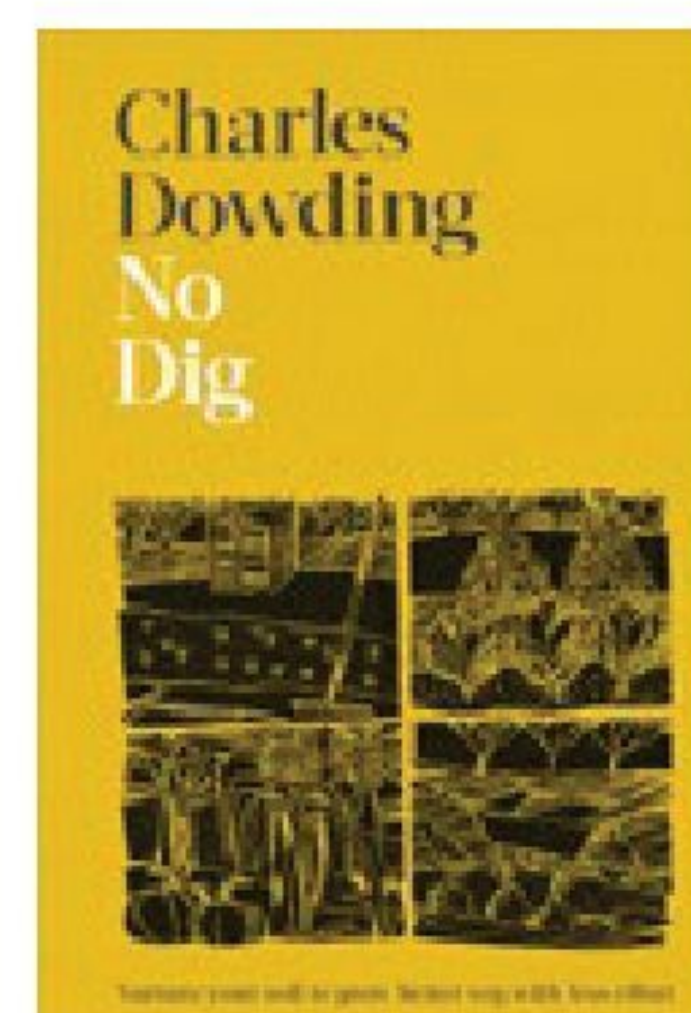
from below, which you need to pull. This means that plants can now root into the soil below.

3 For areas with persistent perennial weeds, spread 3-7cm compost and then lay black plastic on top. This is a start-up phase to eliminate weeds in the first year, while you can also grow vegetables such as potatoes. Simply make a slit in the plastic and pop your seed potato into the compost below. Its leaves will soon appear above the plastic, while potatoes swell underneath.

Links to plant and our own health

Soil in top health is full of microbes which are similar to those in our guts. It's healthy to eat a little good quality soil because this improves digestion.

Soil microbes improve our mood too. Examples are *Bacillus vacca* and L-tryptophan, which among other things enable our bodies to produce the hormone serotonin, which helps us to feel content. ■



No Dig by Charles Dowding is out in September, published by DK, priced £30



Paws For Thought

How to find the right pet for you?

OWNING A PET is a fun and rewarding experience. But every animal and their needs are different, so how can you make sure that you choose the right one for you? Here are some top tips from the experts at the national pet charity Blue Cross, which this year is marking 125 years of helping sick, injured and homeless cats, dogs, small animals and horses.

Do your research

You may like the look of a particular pet, but that doesn't mean they're right for you. Every pet has its own personality and certain breeds of animals often have strong traits, so

think carefully about what you want from your pet and do some research before you take one on.

Some breeds may also require more vet care than others. Flat-faced breeds such as French bulldogs and pugs can suffer a number of health issues over their lifetime, including problems with their breathing and skin conditions due to their exaggerated features. We'd urge owners to really do their research before taking on one of these breeds.

Think about your lifestyle

For example, if you work full time and you want a dog, who would be taking care of them during the day? If you decide that you want a cat, will they have access to outside space while you're out during the day?

Do some research on the size, temperament, and exercise requirements of different pets to make sure that they are the right choice for you.



Do your sums

From everyday things like insurance, food and toys to unexpected vet bills, having a pet is certainly a financial commitment. Make sure that you factor in how much your new pet will cost before you choose them.

Think about a rescue pet

Thousands of homeless pets are desperate for a good home. Charities like Blue Cross can offer support and advice about individual pets and help you find the right one for you. They will be neutered, microchipped and vaccinated so they offer great value compared to the outlay involved in buying from a breeder.

Use a reputable breeder

If you *do* want to buy a pedigree dog or cat, ask your local vet or breed club to recommend a responsible breeder. Ask the breeder for all the relevant paperwork and see the pet's parents/relatives/siblings to observe their temperament and general health and welfare.

Don't purchase animals online or from dealers who offer multiple breeds or types of pets—these may well turn out to be puppy farmers or commercial dealers who have little interest in the welfare of the pets they sell. ■

For more information, visit bluecross.org.uk

READER'S DIGEST'S PET OF THE MONTH



Czarek

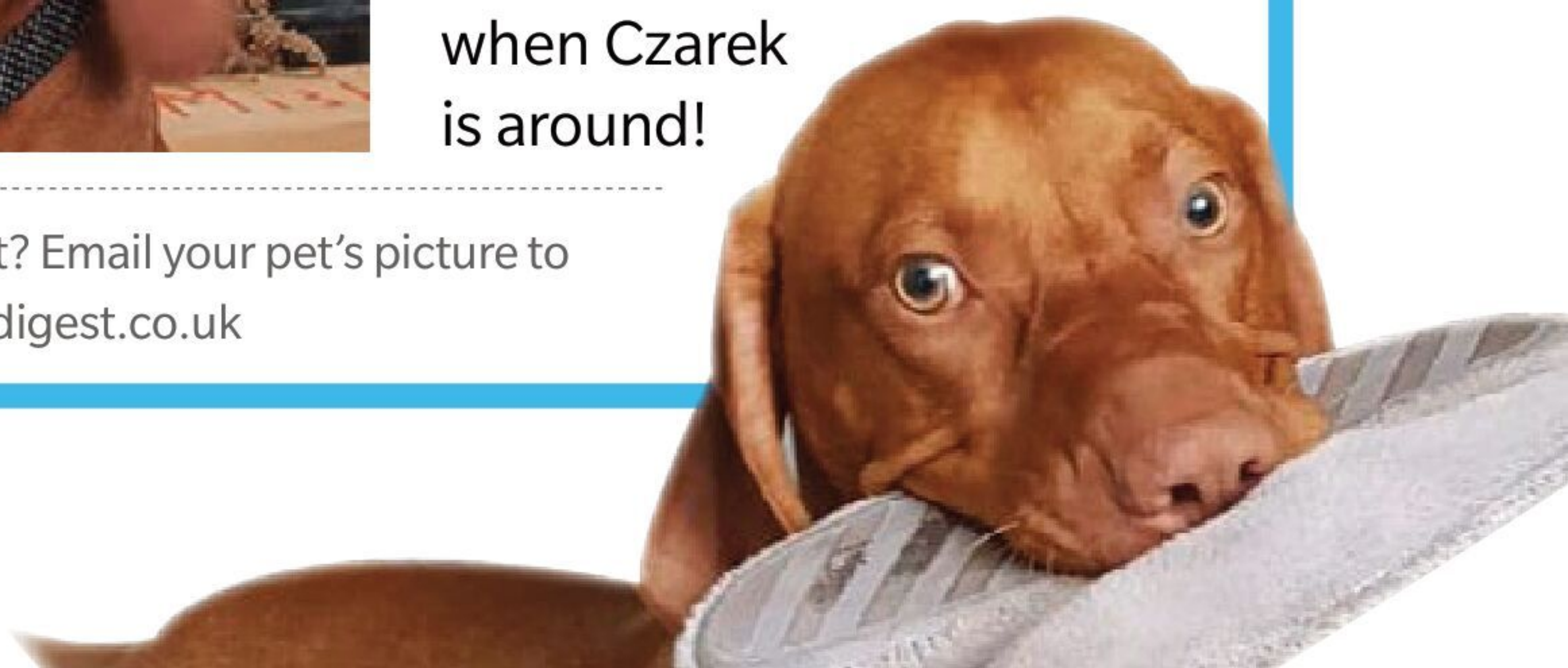
Age: One and a half

Breed: Hungarian Vizsla

Owner: Pavel P

Fun Fact: You had better hide your slippers when Carek is around!

Want to be featured next? Email your pet's picture to readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk



Sandy Tang

GALINHA À PORTUGUESA

Macanese Coconut Chicken with Egg Fried Rice

THIS IS A CLASSIC Macanese dish showcasing the use of spices, coconut, and flavours from other parts of the world, brought by Portuguese sailors on the trading route. This is a much-loved dish in my family and the first dish I cooked in the *MasterChef* kitchen! My mum taught me how to cook this dish just before I moved to the UK when I was 13—she wanted to make sure that I knew how to make something tasty if I needed to cook myself a meal. It's a very straightforward recipe—within just 45 minutes you could be dishing up this aromatic, one-pot bake to the table, ready to enjoy.

Method:

1. Boil water and add salt. After rinsing your rice, pour it into the boiling water. Cover the pot and simmer for 15 minutes. When rice is ready, scoop it up with a wooden spoon and lay out evenly on parchment paper. This will help the rice to cool down quickly.
2. Meanwhile, marinate chicken with turmeric powder, ground white pepper and salt. Let it stand for at least 10 minutes.
3. Dice onion, cut potatoes into batons and chop garlic finely. Cut chorizo into medium slices.
4. Heat olive oil in frying pan. Add onions and let sweat for 5 minutes. Add chorizo chunks and potatoes, turn up the heat and let cook for 2 minutes. Add chicken thighs and cook until both sides are brown.
5. Add garlic and coconut milk. Stir evenly before bringing it to boil. Add white wine and bay leaf. Lower heat and simmer for 10 minutes.
6. Pre-heat oven to 200°C.
7. Heat oil in a different pan. Transfer the rice from parchment paper to pan and turn up the heat to dry up the rice further. Make a well in the rice.
8. Whisk eggs and pour into well, pull the eggs across the pan so that they form large soft curds. Mix with the rice until coated evenly.
9. Transfer egg fried rice to baking dish.
10. Depending on the consistency of the coconut chicken, add cornflour to thicken up the sauce a bit.
11. Layer the chicken and sauce on top of the egg fried rice. Garnish with desiccated coconut and black olives, and put the baking dish into the oven for 10 minutes before serving.

**Ingredients:**

- 500g chicken thighs, skinless
- 200ml coconut milk
- 1 small onion
- 1 small chorizo
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large potato
- 1 bay leaf (optional)
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 tbsp cornflour (if required to thicken sauce)
- 30ml white wine/ cooking wine

For the chicken marinade:

- 1 ½ tbsp turmeric powder
- ½ tsp ground white pepper
- 2 tsp salt

For the egg fried rice:

- 2 eggs
- 1 cup Thai fragrant rice
- 1 cup water
- Vegetable oil

For the garnish:

- 20g desiccated coconut
- Black pitted olives

Sandy Tang was a *MasterChef* 2020 finalist and has recently launched *Journey to the West*, an exciting range of freshly made dumplings, ready to cook at home, with nationwide delivery

World Kitchen

WALES:

*Laverbread
and cockle
fritters*



CHEF FRANCO TARUSCHIO shares a very special recipe for a scrumptious snack that's easy to make but incredibly unique.

Laverbread is a traditional Welsh product made from edible seaweed, and it pairs very well with the delicious savoury flavours of cockles and parmesan.



Method:

1. Put the flour into a bowl, make a well in the centre and crack in the egg. Add a little water, then whisk the dry ingredients into the liquids until you have a smooth batter. Season with salt and pepper, but don't use a lot because the main ingredients are salty already.
2. Stir the grated parmesan into your batter, then fold through the laverbread and cockles. Make sure everything is well mixed and there are no lumps of flour left.
3. Heat the sunflower or grapeseed oil in a large sturdy pan with deep sides. Drop a small piece of batter into the oil to check whether it's at the right temperature to fry without browning too quickly.
4. Carefully place dessert spoonfuls of the mixture into the hot oil in small batches, turning as needed and removing the fritters when they have a good colour all over. It should take about six minutes for them to turn golden. Place them on kitchen paper to absorb the excess oil before serving at once, while the fritters are still hot.

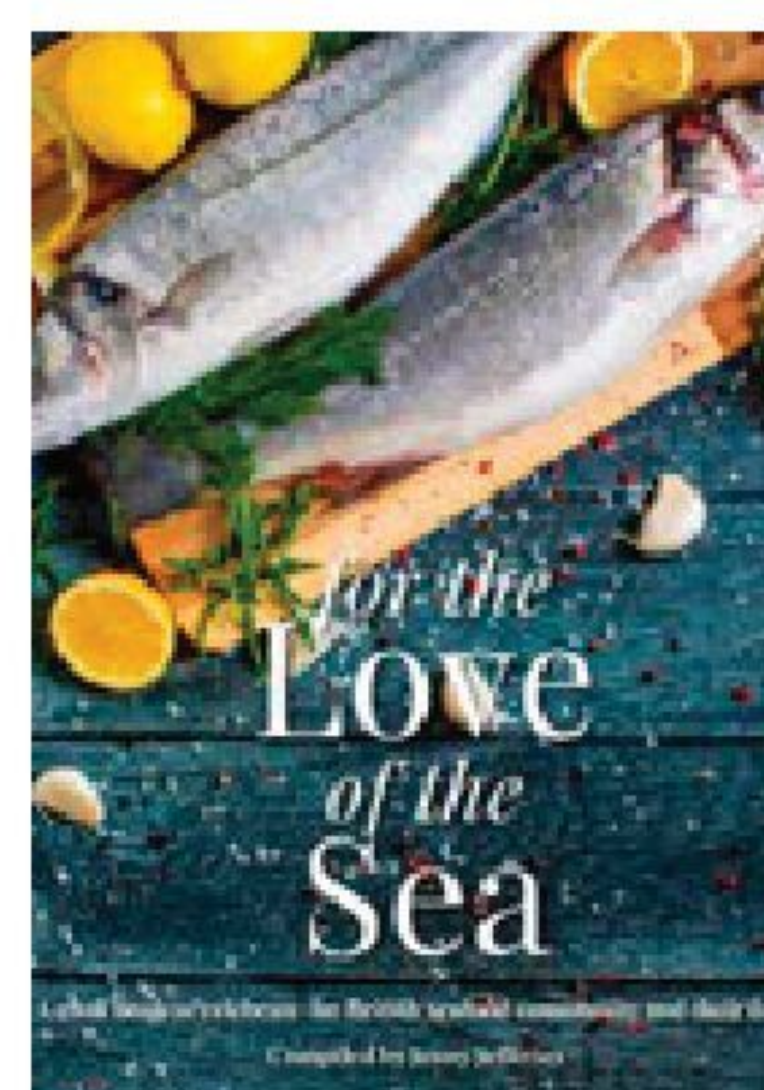


Serves: 4

Cooking time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 140g self-raising flour
- 1 egg
- Salt and pepper
- 30g parmesan, grated
- 100g laverbread (tinned or fresh)
- 110-140g shelled cooked cockles
- 1 litre sunflower or grapeseed oil



Taken from *For the Love of The Sea*, compiled by Jenny Jefferies

Reader's Digest

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equity release*

For more information visit:

www.readersdigest.co.uk/er2

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If you are over 55 and own your own home, equity release can be a fantastic way to unlock some well-deserved cash to fund your goals. House prices have risen significantly in recent years and there could be more equity available to you than ever before.

However, it's important to take your time when making any financial decision. Looking in the right places and getting trustworthy information is key if you are considering utilising the value of your home, particularly as taking from this value will reduce the value of your estate and could affect your entitlement to means-tested benefits.

At Reader's Digest, we want to make sure that you can get all the facts you need to make an informed decision if you are considering using your property wealth to fund your retirement. You can trust us to keep things simple like we always have, which is why we have created our free and informative guide to equity release.

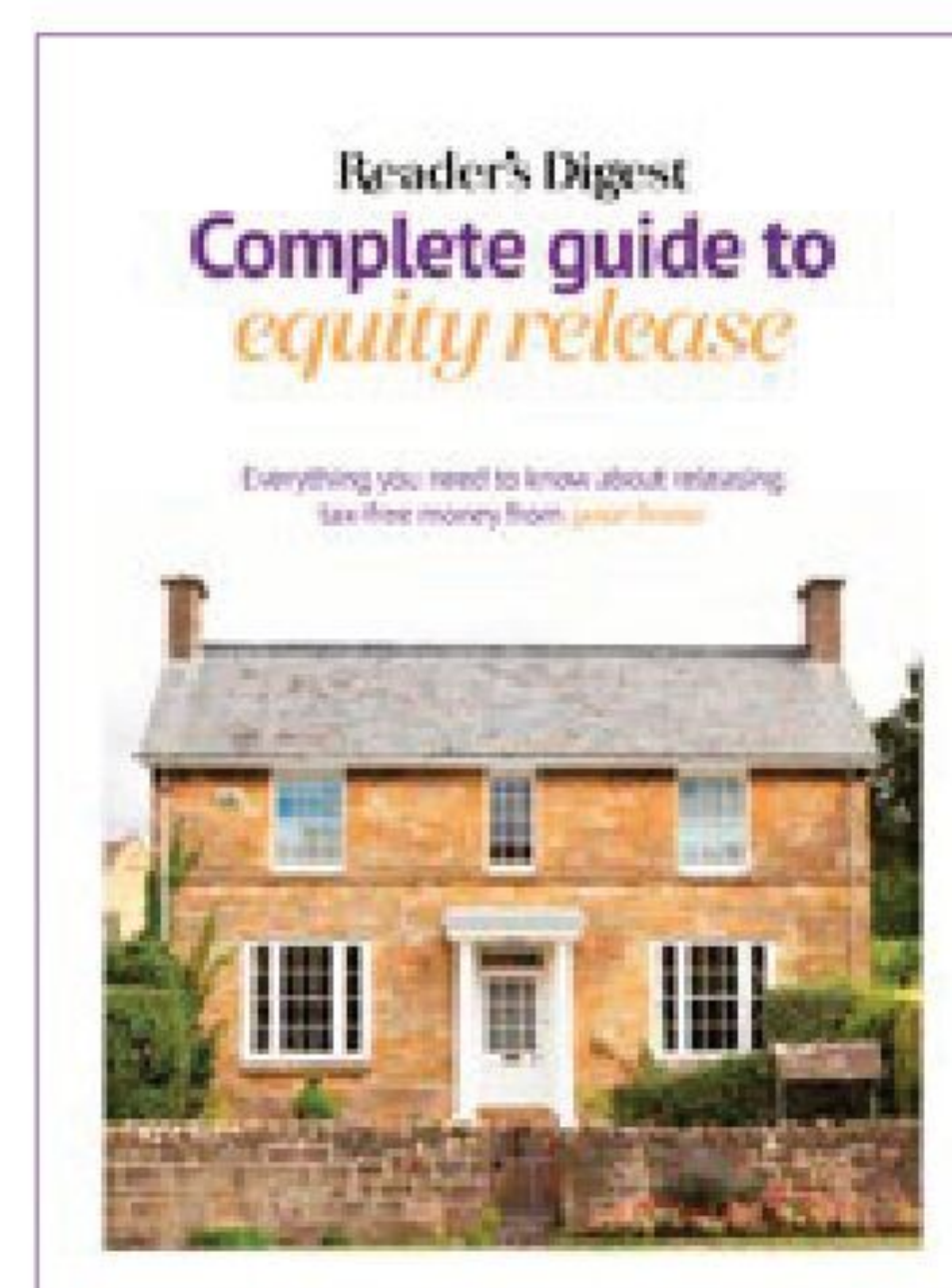
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★★★★★

MR MALCOLM'S LIST

WITH shows like *Bridgerton* and *Persuasion* continuing to break viewing records around the world, it seems our appetite for Regency romps is insatiable. And the entertainment industry is more than happy to oblige. The latest addition to the sexy period drama canon is the cheeky and whimsical feature debut from director Emma Holly James, *Mr Malcolm's List*. And what a joy of a debut it is! Featuring an excellent cast of both distinguished and relatively unknown actors, it's a deliciously shot and clever imitation of a classic Jane Austen social satire.

The story revolves around the titular list penned by one Jeremy Malcolm. Don't be fooled though; it's no Schindler's list with a noble agenda behind it. The list is in fact a summary of requirements that

the London's most eligible bachelor has outlined for a prospective bride. When a hopeful Julia Thistlewaite fails to meet one of these demands and gets painfully jilted, she plots an elaborate scheme to humiliate Mr Malcolm by enlisting her friend Selina to play the role of his ideal match and then turn him down.

Is it predictable and occasionally embarrassingly lame? Yes. Is it wildly entertaining and genuinely funny? Absolutely! The tremendous cast really makes the script sing, with special mentions going out to the honey-voiced standout Zawe Ashton who imbues the cunning and grandiloquent Julia with elegance and grace; and Oliver Jackson-Cohen whose watertight comedic timing makes Julia's gullible cousin Cassie a total scene-stealer.

By Eva Mackevic

From The Vaults

THE PIANO (1993)

From the fanciful world of Regency-era London, we venture to the remote, rugged forests of 19th-century New Zealand in Jane Campion's searing classic, *The Piano*. This Palme d'Or and three-time Oscar winner tells the story of a mute Scottish woman, Ada (Holly Hunter), who arrives with her strong-willed young daughter Flora (Anna Paquin) and a grand old piano in the New Zealand wilderness for an arranged marriage to a frontiersman Alistair (Sam Neill). Yet it's not him she falls in love with—a development that wreaks havoc on the lives of everyone involved.

Whether you've never seen this extraordinarily beautiful film or it's been too long since you have, now's the perfect time to revisit it, as Studiocanal are releasing a 4K UHD version, which includes bonus material such as brand-new featurettes including interviews with cinematographer, Stuart Dryburgh, production designer, Andrew McAlpine and the film's Maori advisor, Waihoroi Shortland. The release also comes complete with a limited edition poster.

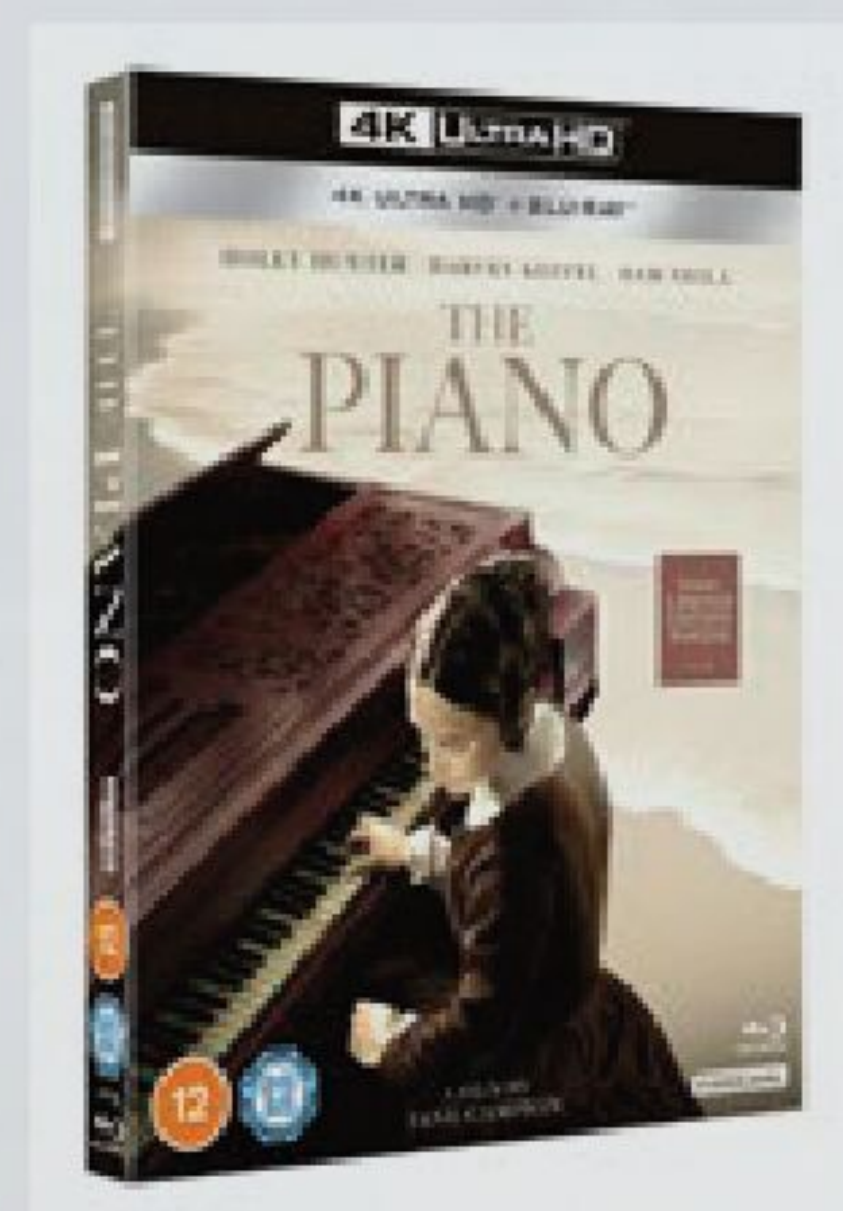
The Piano is a haunting, impactful piece of cinema in which every



scene looks like a painting, and every glance carries the weight of a thousand words. Playing a mute character, Hunter had no lines of dialogue throughout the entirety of the film, only when she was providing narration, resulting in an impossibly challenging performance that earned her a Best Actress Academy Award. Before deciding on Holly Hunter, Jane Campion met with several actresses including Sigourney Weaver, Anjelica Huston, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Isabelle Huppert and Juliette Binoche.

Interesting fact: Kurt Cobain saw this movie with a couple of friends one day before he committed suicide, making it very likely it's the last film he had seen.

 Studiocanal's 4K UHD version of *The Piano* is out on September 5



• TELEVISION

SUCCESSION'S SUCCESS HAS made it even easier for execs to commission shows reflecting their own high-flying lifestyle, all Caucasians in chichi hotel suites. Yet TV, like life, gets less predictable—and more relatable—the further one slides down the social scale.

Comedy-drama *Killing It* (All4) has easily 2022's most leftfield set-up, introducing several ragged-trousered Floridians competing in a state-sponsored snake-killing contest as the 2016 election looms. Yet its aptly serpentine plot draws out the myriad absurdities and iniquities baked into the gig economy, coming on like *Breaking Bad* with jokes and an economics degree.

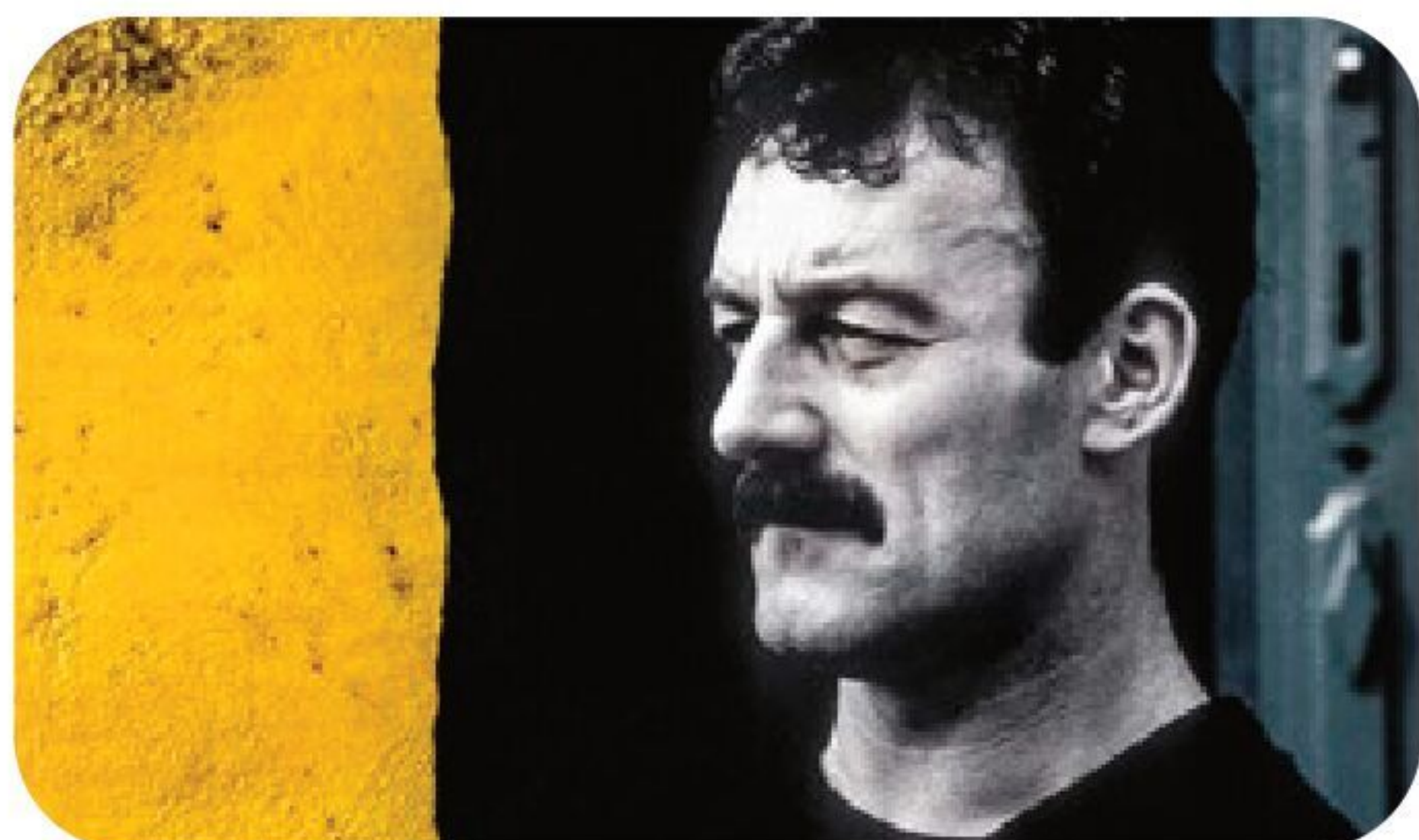
The wonderful *Lodge 49* has finally reached free-to-air: well, free-to-air if you have BT TV (it's on Prime Video for everybody else). This, too, is a show that benefits from an unusual milieu: the legend of a slacking surfer (Wyatt Russell, son of Kurt,



shaggy charisma his own) who falls in with the Freemasons in a small outpost beset by financial and spiritual austerity. It's the kind of gamble only cable television could encourage, forever offbeam but also warm, generous and funny. Two seasons were made before the plug was pulled; enjoy it while it lasted.

Easy to see why *Abbott Elementary* (Disney+) has become America's new favourite sitcom. Watching its Pollyanna-ish protagonist striving to mould minds at a cash-strapped Philadelphia public school, it becomes apparent creator-star Quinta Brunson has learned the lessons of those standout mockumentaries *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation*. If the framing's familiar, the rest is a triumph of sharp writing and sharper timing. This ensemble clicks in every combination, and even the homilies are informed by hard-won public sector experience.

by Mike McCahill



Retro Pick:

Boys from the Blackstuff (*iPlayer*) Revived as part of the BBC's centenary celebrations, Alan Bleasdale's 1982 drama remains a potent evocation of life on the breadline.

*Album Of The Month:***Ride**

by Walter Trout



IF YOU'RE A sucker for heady harmonica, the effortlessly cool licks and grooves of Hammond organs and a bottomless well of high-octane guitar solos, all beautifully combined to make sweet, sweet blues, *Ride* is a record you just can't let fall off your radar. The low-key blues legend, Walter Trout, made his bones as a jobbing guitarist for everyone from John Lee Hooker to Big Mama Thornton (!), before an unhinged tenure in an 1980s Canned Heat line-up controlled by Hell's Angels, and has lived to tell the tale.

Following in the great blues-rock tradition of folks like ZZ Top, Joe Bonamassa and Johnny Winter, *Ride* is an album that's both riveting and plaintive, celebrating the carefree nature of youth and longing for adventure, but also addressing the formative yet often destructive chapters of Trout's early career.

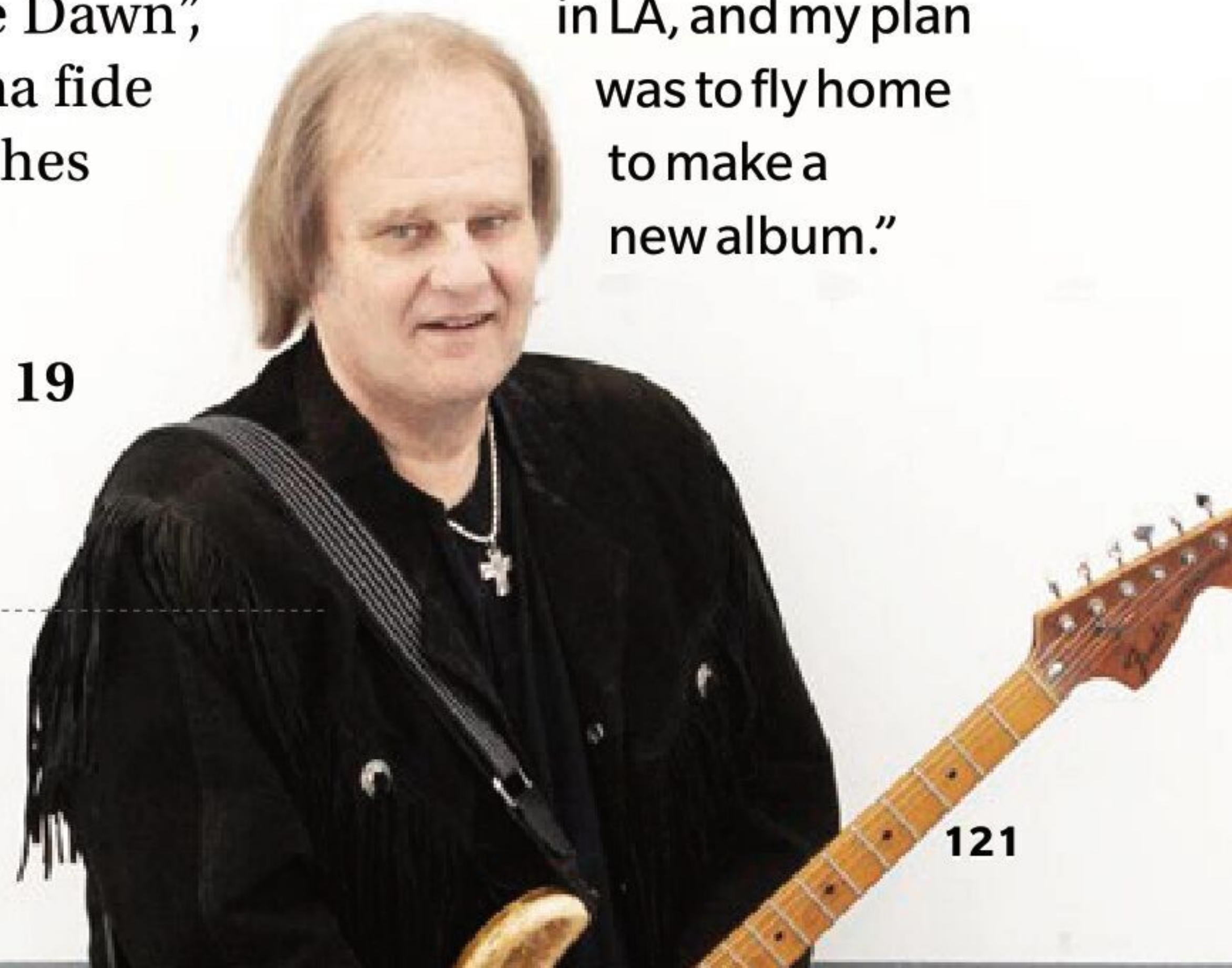
If anything, the record really showcases how versatile and virtuosic his vocals remain at 71; shifting between rip-roaring growls on tracks like "Ghost" or "High Is Low" and effortless high notes and smooth vibrato on power ballads such as "Follow You Home" or "Waiting for the Dawn", the album truly shows him off as a bona fide modern bluesman who lives and breathes the genre.

***Ride* by Walter Trout is out on August 19 via Provogue/Mascot Label Group**

 By Eva Mackevic
Walter Trout on his new album...

"This album is a snapshot of how I was feeling through this pandemic. I think I still have something new to say about the world, and that's important to me. But my life has been one hell of a ride, and when I listened back, I realised there were a lot of songs about dealing with the past.

I've been at this since 1969, when I started out in the New Jersey bars. Suddenly, I'm sat on my ass for 16 months, although I did still practise guitar every day. My wife and manager Marie knew I needed to make music. So her present to me for my 70th birthday was a brand-new record deal she had negotiated. My producer, Eric Corne, scoped out a new studio in LA, and my plan was to fly home to make a new album."



September Fiction

This month's fiction pick is the latest from Britain's pre-eminent literary novelist

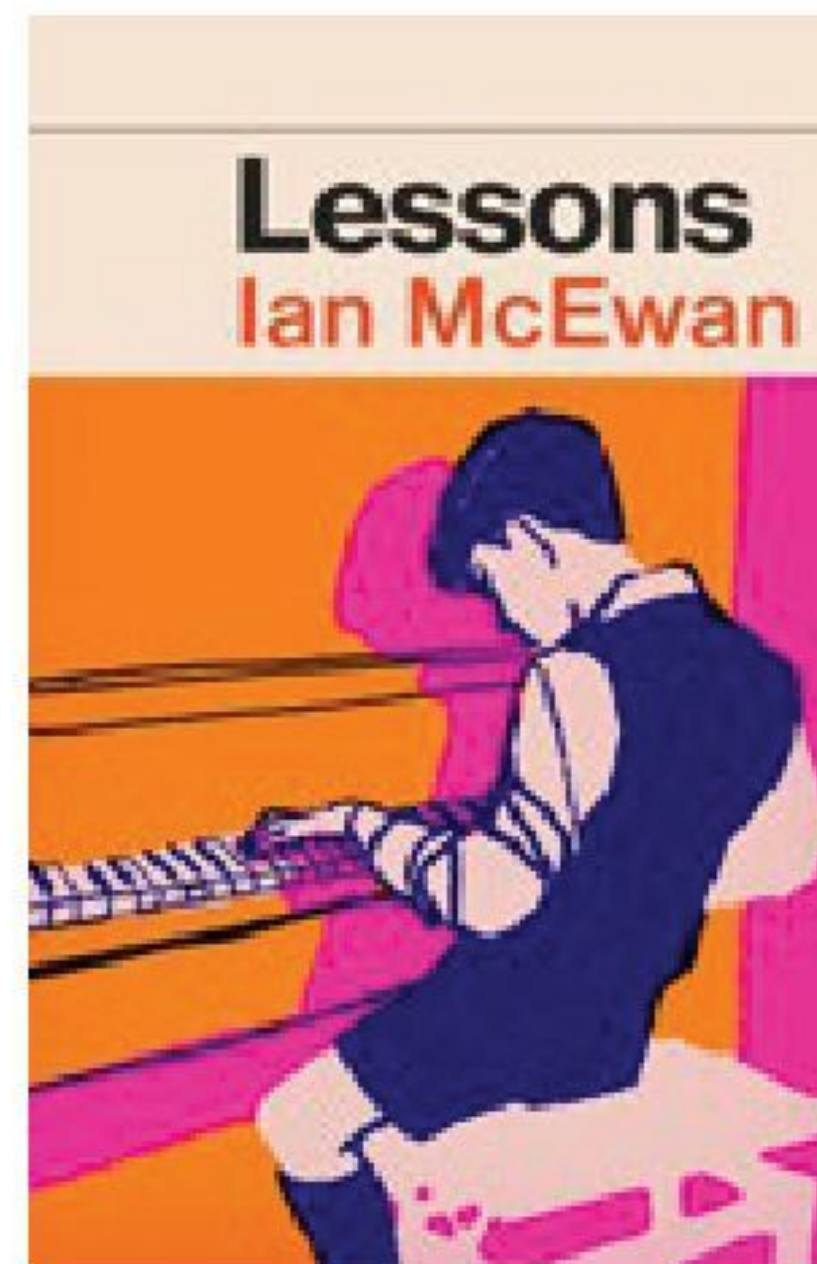
Lessons

by Ian McEwan

(Cape, £20)

AT THIS STAGE, Ian McEwan could be forgiven for coasting a bit. Now 74, he soared clear years ago of such former competitors as Martin Amis and Salman Rushdie to become established as Britain's leading literary novelist. Yet, not only is *Lessons* his longest novel so far, but it's also one of his most ambitious: a book that sets out to explore the strange mixture of personal experiences and historical forces that shape a life.

The protagonist is Roland Baines who, like his creator, had the luck to be born "in 1948 in placid Hampshire, not Ukraine or Poland in 1928". As a



result, he grew up believing that "the world was sympathetic and fair" and would look after him. Of course the Second World War cast a shadow, but not necessarily a malevolent one. After all, "if Hitler hadn't invaded Poland", his soldier-father wouldn't have been invalided back from Dunkirk to Aldershot, and wouldn't have met his mother. In short, Roland wouldn't have been born.

And from there, the "commonplace and wondrous" intertwining of global history and everyday life continues—explaining, among much else, how Roland meets his wife, how he comes to have a ringside seat at the fall of the Berlin Wall, and how his post-1989 optimism led to a conviction (as it turned out, a misguided one) that



James Walton is a book reviewer and broadcaster, and has written and presented 17 series of the BBC Radio 4 literary quiz *The Write Stuff*

tolerant liberalism would prevail for generations.

But, as for most of us, the importance of these wider social forces is only clear to Roland when he thinks about them. The rest of the time it's the equally commonplace and wondrous business of daily living that dominates, parenthood in particular.

Towards the end, set in the gloomy present day, he realises that, thanks to ordinary family life, he's experiencing "happiness that could not be dispelled, even by rehearsing every looming disaster in the world" — adding ruefully "It made no sense".

For all McEwan's craft, *Lessons* doesn't perhaps hang together completely, sometimes feeling (admittedly, like many human lives) cobbled together from various random elements. Fortunately, with one or two exceptions, all these elements—whether historically dramatic or quietly domestic—are so beautifully done as to provide abundant proof of why McEwan still occupies that number-one spot. ■

Name the character

Can you guess the fictional character from these clues (and, of course, the fewer you need the better)?

1. His first name is Reggie.
2. His creator's first name was Pelham.
3. His employer's first name is Bertie.

Answer on p124

Paperbacks

Word Perfect by Susie Dent

(John Murray, £10.99). *Countdown* presenter with a different, suitably obscure word for each day of the year. Packed with the kind of great facts that you will want to share with whoever will listen.

The Paris Apartment by Lucy Foley

(HarperCollins, £8.99). The latest brilliantly twisty murder mystery from one of crime fiction's rising stars.

Forever Young by Hayley Mills

(W&N, £9.99). A memoir of 1960s Hollywood from the British child actress who was mentored there by no less than Walt Disney.

Sorry I Missed You by Lorraine

Brown (Orion, £7.99). Winningly sharp rom-com in which an out-of-work actor becomes a high-flying city woman's irritating new neighbour. More irritatingly still, he appears to be rather handsome...

Match of the Day: Top 10 of

Everything by Gary Lineker,

Alan Shearer and Micah Richards

(BBC Books, £10.99). The *Match of the Day* pundits debate the greatest-ever games, best-ever goals, hardest-ever hard men and plenty more besides.

RECOMMENDED READ:

Greasing The Wheels

This month's recommended read is a fun-filled history of travel by two wheels

A S WITH WHEELED suitcases, it's perhaps surprising that bicycles, with their simple design, didn't become part of human life sooner. After various primitive 19th-century versions had some limited appeal, it was only in the 1890s that the coming of the safety bike and pneumatic tyres led to the first cycling boom.

Not that everybody was keen. As the US writer Jody Rosen shows in this terrific book, the arguments between horse-users and cyclists then were eerily similar to those between motorists and cyclists today. The people on two wheels were accused of ignoring traffic rules and generally getting in the way.

For their part, cyclists pointed to the pollution caused by horse manure—and their own virtuous refusal to add to it.



The idea of cycling as a progressive force was further strengthened by its transformation of women's clothing, as whale-bone corsets and hooped skirts controversially gave way to more bike-friendly garb. Meanwhile, the new sense of freedom felt to many cyclists like "flying"—which, as Rosen also shows, isn't purely metaphorical. For one thing, bikes do travel above ground on a band of compressed air. For another, the Wright brothers were originally bicycle mechanics who saw aviation as a natural next step.

Rosen covers all the aspects of cycling that you could imagine—and some than you possibly couldn't (or in the case of bike porn, might not want to). As he discusses the vital role played by bikes in the Boer War, the Vietnam War and the transformation of China, we realise once again that the history of

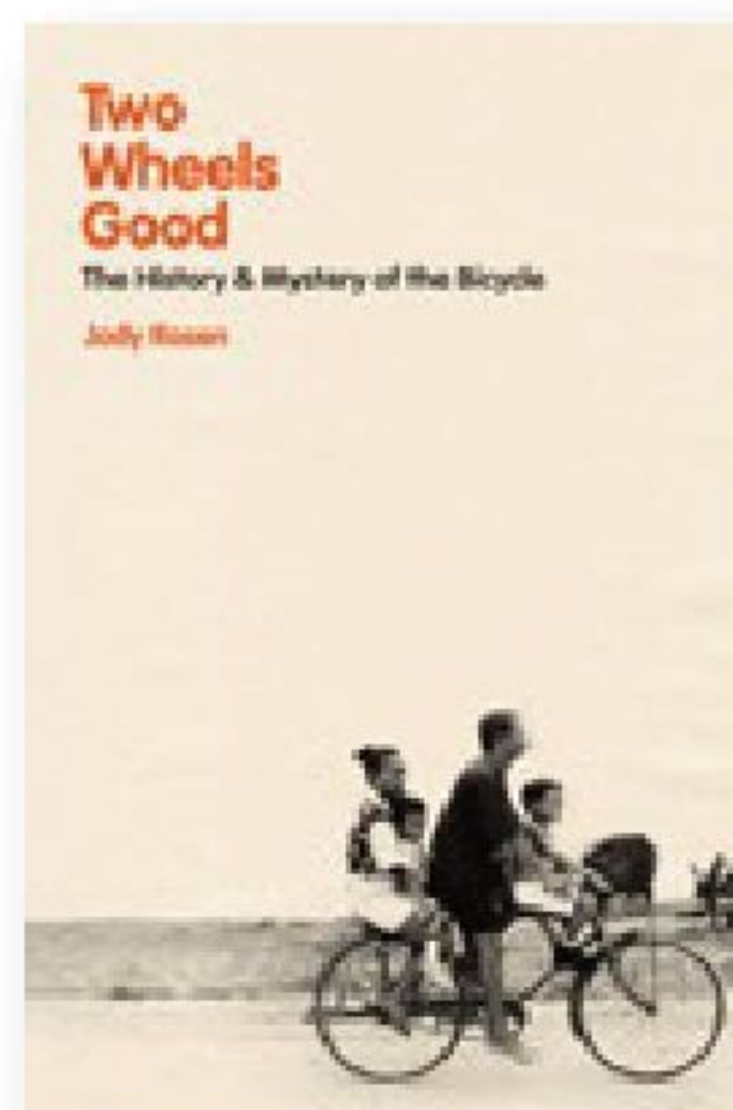
anything is the history of everything.

Central to the book, though, is Rosen's convincing belief that the biggest cycling boom of them all is happening right now...

“The bike's pre-eminence is irrefutable. There are approximately one billion cars in the world today. There are twice as many bikes. The number of bicycles manufactured this year in China alone will exceed the total worldwide production of automobiles. The cities and towns we inhabit, our economies, our laws are designed for cars; we hop between continents on airplanes. Yet we live on a bicycle planet.

Around the world, more people travel by bicycle than by any other form of transportation. The bicycle is the primary means of transport in the rural hinterlands of the Southern Hemisphere and in city centres of northern European capitals. There are 23 million bicycles in the Netherlands—5 million more bikes

Two Wheels Good: The History and Mystery of the Bicycle by Jody Rosen is published by Bodley Head at £25



than there are Dutch citizens. Almost anyone can learn to ride a bicycle. Nearly everyone does.

The bicycle's ubiquity is a testament to its versatility. A bicycle is a vehicle for transport and for sport, for leisure and for labour. We ride bicycles to deliver the mail, to tour the countryside, to burn calories and tone muscles. A bike can be a child's toy and a commuter vehicle that brings that child's mother to work. Bikes are people movers and load bearers, carriers of bodies and carters of stuff. Thousands of pedal-driven taxis jam the streets of Singapore and Manila. Subsistence farmers in Vietnam, India and other countries use modified bikes to plough and till and harrow. In Peru, bicycles function as mobile fruit and vegetable stalls; in Zambia, cycles bring goods to marketplaces and the sick to hospitals. In much of the world, it is pedal power that keeps cities running, that keeps commerce flowing, that stands between life and death.

The bicycle's continuing relevance upends myths of progress, challenging our convictions about history's steady forward march and the linear course of technological advancement. Other 19th-century inventions—the steam engine, the typewriter, the telegraph, the Daguerreotype—have been rendered obsolete or modernised beyond recognition. The bicycle, though, is

essentially unchanged, a machine of improbable simplicity, elegance, and ingenuity: two wheels of equal size, two tyres, a diamond-shaped frame, a rear chain drive, a pair of pedals, handlebars, a seat—and on that seat, a human being who is both the vehicle’s passenger and its engine.

This was the design of English inventor John Kemp Starley’s breakthrough Rover bicycle of 1885. The bicycle Maurice Garin pedalled to victory in the inaugural Tour de France in 1903, the bike Albert Einstein rode around the Princeton University campus, the Flying Pigeon roadster enshrined by Deng Xiaoping as a glory of China’s social covenant; the bikes ridden by food deliverymen, by weekend warriors wrapped in spandex, by ‘anarcha-feminist’ cycling collectives; my bicycle, your bicycle—they’re all more or less the same machine, barely modified versions of that pioneering Rover. ”

Answer to Name the Character:

Jeeves, Bertie Wooster’s valet in the books by PG Wodehouse. When he finally learns Jeeves’s first name Bertie is “stunned”—mainly because, “It had never occurred to me before that he had a first name”.



A Chain Of Quotations From America’s First Cycling Boom in 1896

“It would not be at all strange if history came to the conclusion that the perfection of the bicycle was the greatest incident in the nineteenth century.” *Detroit Tribune*

“Bicycling . . . has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world.” *Susan B Anthony, American feminist*

“Miss Charlotte Smith, the president of the Women’s Rescue League, says that bicycle riding by women is “leading them headlong to the devil,” and proposes to have it stopped by an act of Congress.” *The Nebraska State Journal*

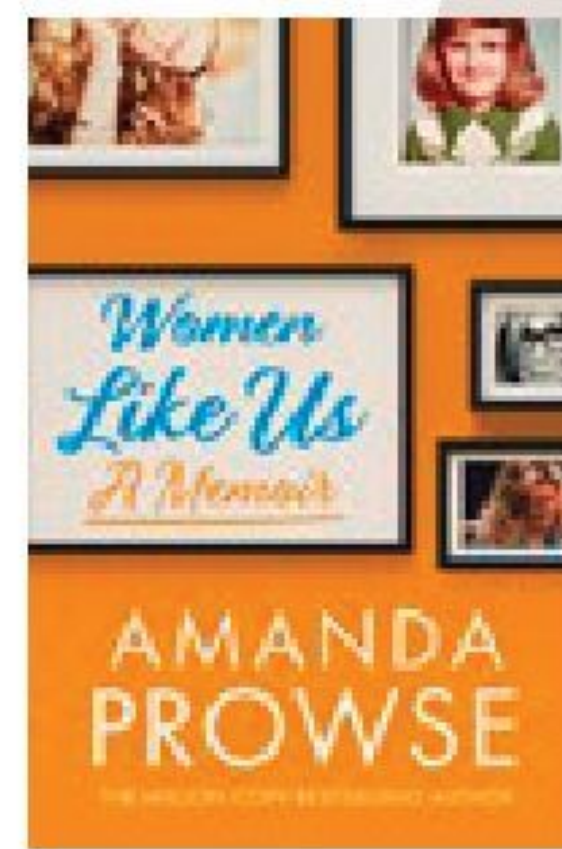
“I think Jesus might ride a wheel if He were in our place, in order to save His own strength and the beast of burden.” *Charles Sheldon, Congregationalist minister*

“The world is bicycle mad. Man, woman, and child—the population of Christendom—is awheel. The church? It is forgotten. The Sabbath? A cycling day.” *The Journal, New York*

Books

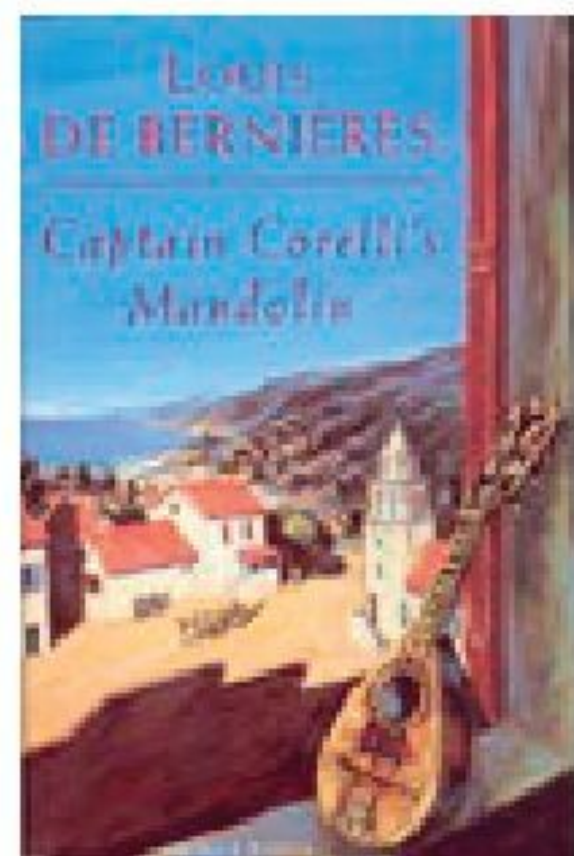
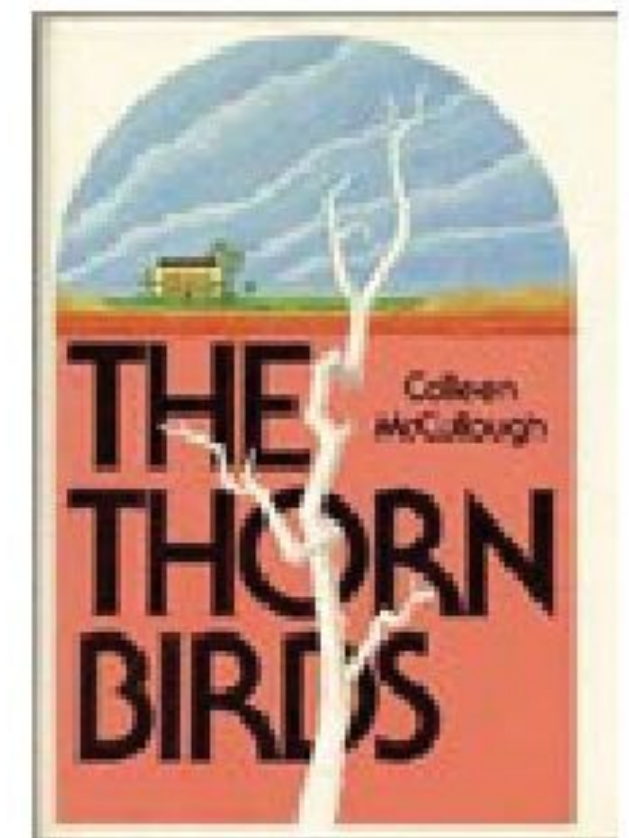
THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

International bestseller Amanda Prowse has written 27 novels, including *What Have I Done* and *My Husband's Wife*. Her first memoir, *Women Like Us* (Little a, £8.99), is out on September 6



The Thorn Birds by Colleen McCullough

The first “grown up” book I read. Aged 14, I snuck my mum’s copy from her bedside table. It was the first time I felt consumed by a book. It had the lot; a rollercoaster of a family saga, coming of age, unrequited love, lust, and to top it all it was set in Australia—an exotic land so very far away in every sense from the little terraced house in a London suburb that was my whole world. I remember thinking that if ever I wrote a book, I wanted to make people feel the way Colleen McCullough made me feel, like I was taking every step with the main character.



Captain Corelli's Mandolin

by Louis de Bernieres

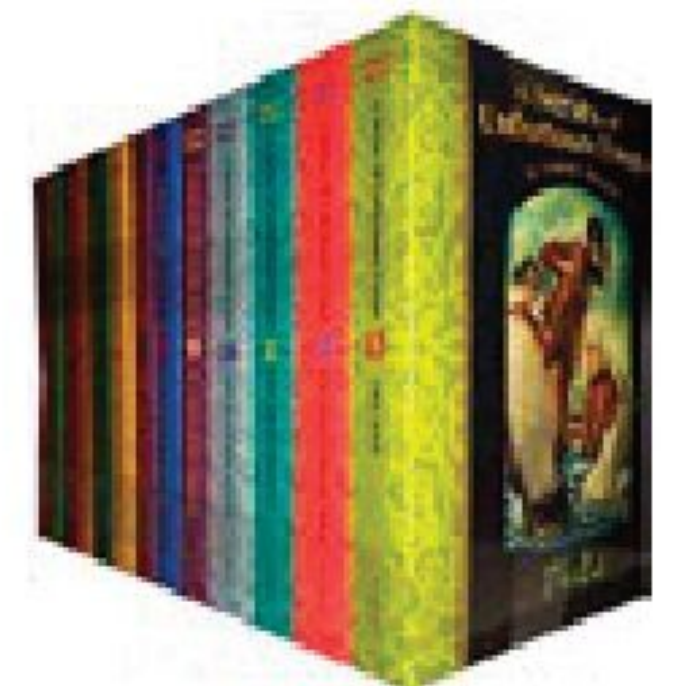
A stranger put it into my hands nearly two decades ago and said, “You must read this!” I was on the

island of Andros in Greece, which certainly helped. It wasn't Cephalonia where the book is set, but I could see the characters around me, could walk among the same trees, hear their language and was eating their food, all while drenched in sunshine! This book for me is a lesson in how to take the heart of your reader and shred it into fragments—so much so that it takes weeks before you can start to put it back together again. No book better describes what it is like to be parted from love.

A Series of Unfortunate Events

by Lemony Snicket

On the surface this series of funny young adult novels appears irreverent, but they are a wonder. Slickly written, they contain life lessons on adversity and perseverance. They'll make you laugh out loud and have you hanging on to the edge of your seat! I was introduced to the world of the Baudelaire orphans when I bought the books for my toddler son. That toddler is now well over six foot; drinks beer, loves rugby and has a beard. But when I hold those books, I recall the feel of his little body, folded against me like a soft cushion and remember how much we looked forward to the next chapter...



Ding Don't: What To Look For When Picking A Smart Doorbell

*James O'Malley goes
knocking for answers*

DO YOU EVER get the feeling you are being watched? Last year I moved to the suburbs, to an estate full of millennial couples and young families. And walking through the neighbourhood recently, I noticed something unexpected. Without anyone really noticing, smart doorbells have quietly become incredibly popular.

In fact, I counted. Of the 40 houses I passed, 21—so more than half—had a camera pointing outwards, surveilling the street outside for posties, takeaways, and burglars.

Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised. For somewhere between £30 and £200 (depending on how fancy you want to be), you can ensure that you never miss a delivery again. Whether you're in the garden or on the

other side of the world, if someone rings your bell, you'll know who's calling thanks to the built-in camera. And if you can't get to the door, you can even talk back to them using your phone.

It's a great idea for everyone, from people who don't work from home, to retirees who aren't as mobile as they once were, to people like me, who are simply lazy.

However, figuring out which doorbell to actually buy is much trickier, as there are dozens of different brands to choose from. So how should you choose which one will work best for your home?

THE MOST OBVIOUS THING is to look at features. Some doorbells have a wider field of view than others, meaning the camera will see more. One increasingly common feature on doorbells is a second camera that points down towards the ground to spot any packages that have been dropped outside your door.

Similarly, AI features can transform what a doorbell is capable of. For example, some doorbells designed for Apple's Home platform (which works on iPhone) will identify packages using computer vision, and will let you know if you have a delivery. Google's Nest doorbell identifies callers using facial recognition, so that you won't even need to load your doorbell app, as the notification will tell you who is

there via text. Another consideration is the subscription fee, which is usually tied to the cloud storage where video recorded by the camera is stored. For example, if you pick up a Ring doorbell from Amazon, it might only cost you £35 for the actual hardware. But if you want to make the most of it, you'll be paying another £35 a year for the rest of your life.

In my view, the most important consideration to make when picking a smart doorbell is security. This might sound like a strange concern, given that the point of a smart doorbell is to protect your home. But precisely because your doorbell camera will be recording the exact times when you enter and leave your own house, it's important to make sure your data is kept safe.

For most people, this means that the best option is to look for a doorbell that uses end-to-end (or "E2E") encryption when it communicates with the cloud. This means that the footage will—in theory at least—be completely scrambled should anyone, even the company that makes the doorbell, try to view it.

The good news is that finding a service that supports this is relatively

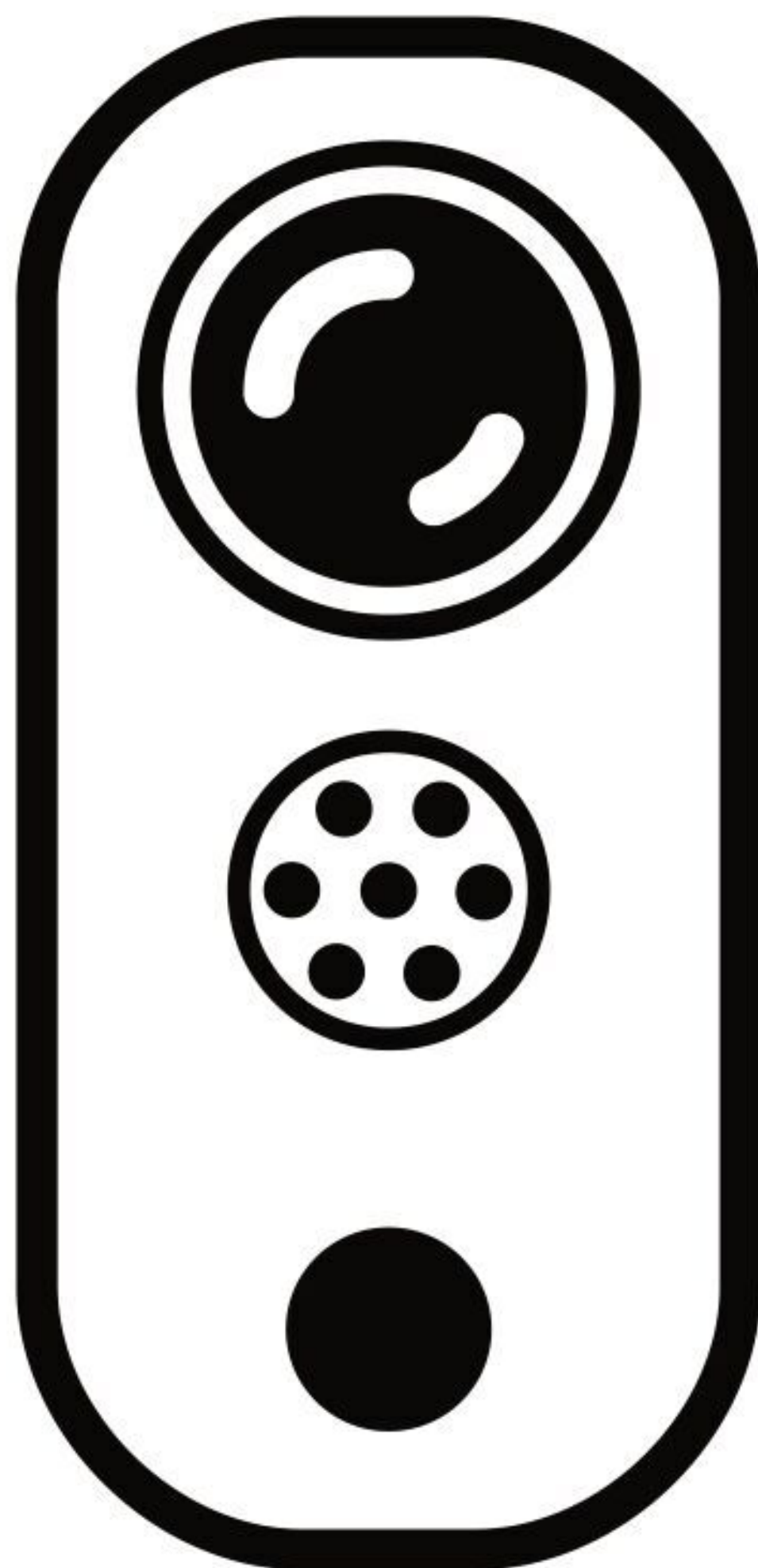
straightforward, as most major manufacturers now use E2E. For example, Ring users can turn on full encryption in their settings, and Eufy claims to encrypt everything by default too.

If you're really worried about your privacy, there are doorbells that are designed with "local" storage in mind. For example, if you don't mind spending the cash, Unifi and Arlo doorbells will communicate with hub devices on your home network, and store the video on a hard disk in your own home.

For the same reason, I think it is important to carefully consider where you're comfortable with your data being sent. For example, I would be more reluctant to buy any smart doorbell made by a company based in China, because it's less clear what or who might have access to my data.

And finally, the big question: which brand should you go for?

Given the current state of the market, I would recommend sticking with a big name that you have heard of before, such as Amazon's Ring, or Google Nest. Because while you might pay a little more up front than others, it will make you more secure, and will probably be more reliable in the longer term. ■



£50 PRIZE QUESTION

FRIENDS?

What do the following words have in common?

LEAF
SIGN
BREAK
SPILL
WRECK

THE FIRST CORRECT ANSWER WE PICK WINS £50!*

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ANSWER TO AUGUST'S PRIZE QUESTION

THREE-IN-ONE

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LUCY PESARO, *Middlesex*

You Couldn't Make It Up

Win £30 for your true, funny stories!

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Apparently, my 94-year-old mother had been told that she'd be able to drive home following her eye treatment. Remarkable, we agreed, as she doesn't drive.

I shared the reason we were laughing with the waiter who was clearing our table. I said not to look so worried, as she hadn't a licence.

"That's good," he said, "because she's just gone into the Gents!"

EILEEN COX, *Goathland*

At school, Hayley, my eight-year-old granddaughter, is learning about famous inventors. This is what she wrote in her homework book:

"Macaroni was a famous man who invented the radio."

CAROL GASAN, *Devon*

My six-year-old's toy pirate had fallen apart and he was upset that one of its arms and both its legs were missing. So my husband came to the rescue with a couple of jokes.

"Don't worry, he's 'armless now!"
And then, "He's had so much to
drink he's legless too!"

JENNIE GARDNER, *Bath*

Jibbing at the cost of paying £25 to have one of my husband's old suits dry cleaned, I donated it to a charity shop. Imagine my surprise when I spotted it in the window a few days later, all spruced up and labelled as a star item.

Unable to resist, I hurried inside and was more than happy to buy it back for £8.50.

MAGGIE COBBETT, *Ripon*

My young granddaughter was very excited when I collected her from primary school.

"That's our head teacher over there," she said, pointing across the school yard.

"No, dear, that's your class teacher," I said.

She shook her head and replied, "I know who she is because she was in our classroom this morning checking all our heads for nits."

RHODA PIPPEN, *Cardiff*

"Come on. It's time that all good little boys were in bed," I told my five-year-old Samuel as he lingered around past his bed time.

"But Mum," he pleaded. "I haven't been very good today, have I? In fact, I'm sure I've been quite naughty."

LUCY LASTIC, *Gloucester*



"I FINALLY FOUND SOMONE THAT
COMPLETES ME"

I once went on a date with a girl who was a librarian. I had a bit of a job finding her house and consequently arrived slightly after the appointed time.

When she opened the door to me, she said, "You're five minutes late, that'll be ten pence to pay."

ROGER GOMM, *Woking*

I was telling my partner about my friend's new baby.

"Poor little chap's got a forked tongue," I said.

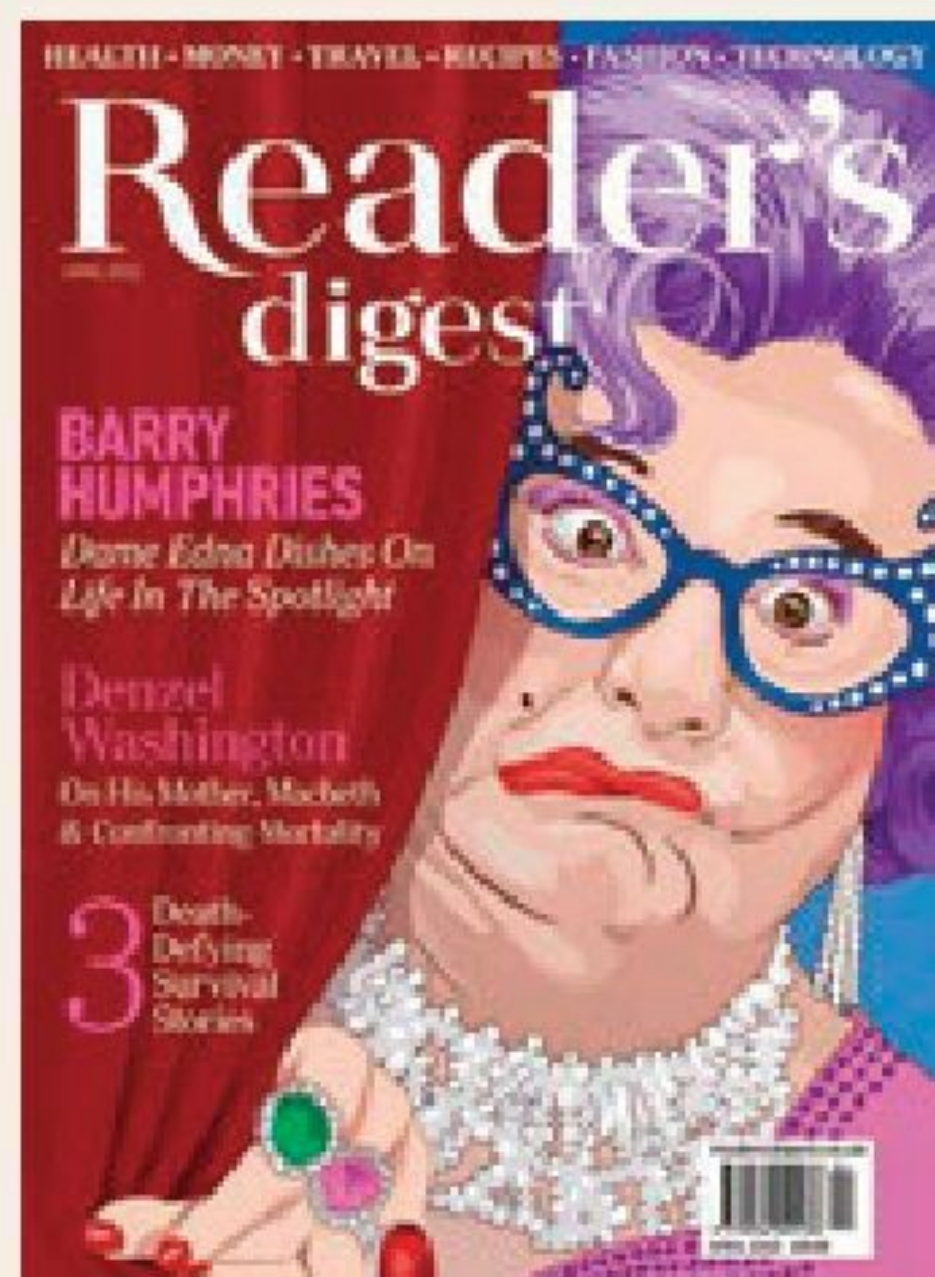
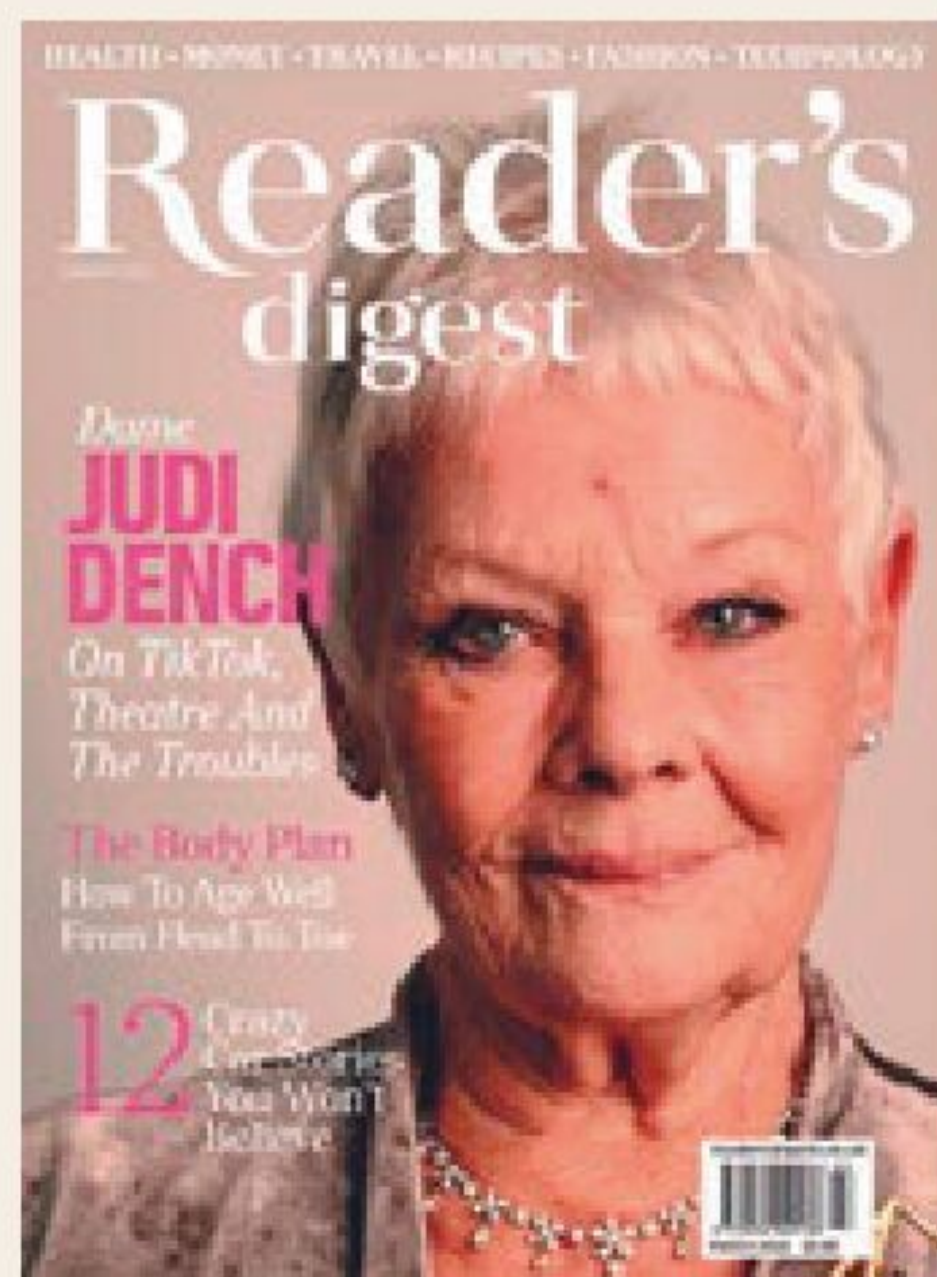
"Are you sure that's what she said?" he asked, disbelievingly.

"Yes, I'm sure!" I argued.

"So he's got a tongue like a snake? Or do you mean he's telling lies?" my partner quipped.

I then realised I may have meant tongue-tied...

ESTHER CHILTON, *Retford*



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IT PAYS TO INCREASE YOUR

Word Power

*Whether you find it a pleasure or a chore, shopping is a fact of life.
See how many of this month's retail terms you've learned
while spending your pennies*

BY CRYSTAL BELIVEAU

1. flog—A: act rudely toward a customer.
B: damage merchandise.
C: sell aggressively.

2. cosset—
A: pamper. B: make to order. C: browse.

3. sundries—
A: contraband products.
B: miscellaneous items.
C: styrofoam stuffing.

4. showrooming—
A: buying a product solely to impress your peers.
B: returning a product after using it.
C: examining a product in a store before buying it online.

5. pop-up—
A: door greeter.
B: store that opens temporarily.
C: daily markdown promotion.

6. shrinkage—
A: lost stock.
B: decline of customer base.
C: decrease in buying power due to inflation.

7. cupidity—
A: narcissism.
B: overspending.
C: greed.

8. catchpenny—
A: cashier's till.
B: intended for quick, cheap sales.
C: expensive purchase.

9. gleanings—
A: bargains.
B: advice from previous buyers.
C: items collected bit by bit.

10. popinjay—
A: chatty shopper.
B: person given to vain displays.
C: impatient patron.

11. appurtenances—
A: accessories.
B: clothing tags.
C: online sales.

12. float—A: cash to begin the sales day.
B: customer unlikely to buy anything.
C: legless mannequin.

13. upsell—A: place an item at eye level.
B: push a more expensive product.
C: auction above market price.

14. dicker—
A: buy in installments.
B: window-shop.
C: negotiate.

15. sybaritic—
A: fond of luxury.
B: inclined to buy in quantity.
C: easily influenced by advertising.

Answers

1. flog—[C] sell aggressively; Apple unleashed an ad blitz to *flog* its new watch.

2. cosset—[A] pamper; The boutique's sales strategy was to *cosset* customers with attention and free samples.

3. sundries—[B] miscellaneous items; Layton came back from the corner store with pens, soap and other *sundries*.

4. showrooming—[C] examining a product in a store before buying it online; Before deciding which appliances to order, let's go *showrooming* at the Bay.

5. pop-up—[B] store that opens temporarily; Hurry to check out the new *pop-up* because you never know when it will close.

6. shrinkage—[A] lost stock; The local bookshop is in danger of shutting down due to too much *shrinkage* from shoplifting.

7. cupidity—[C] greed; Aleksandra's *cupidity* for shoes was insatiable.

8. catchpenny—[B] intended for quick, cheap sales; The *catchpenny* world of fast fashion creates new looks weekly.

9. gleanings—[C] items collected

bit by bit; This weekend's estate-sale *gleanings* added up to a rocking chair and two side tables.

10. popinjay—[B] person given to vain displays; Check out that loud jacket Raj bought—he's turning into a real *popinjay*.

11. appurtenances—[A] accessories; as, The computer comes with *appurtenances*, namely a printer and mouse.

12. float—[A] cash to begin the sales day; The cashier's *float* was too small to give me change for my £20 note.

13. upsell—[B] push a more expensive product; When I took my watch in for repair, the salesperson tried to *upsell* me on a new model.

14. dicker—[C] negotiate; Want a good deal on a car? Take my husband. He loves to *dicker* over prices.

15. sybaritic—[A] fond of luxury; My ex's *sybaritic* lifestyle nearly bankrupted us.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

7-10: fair

11-12: good

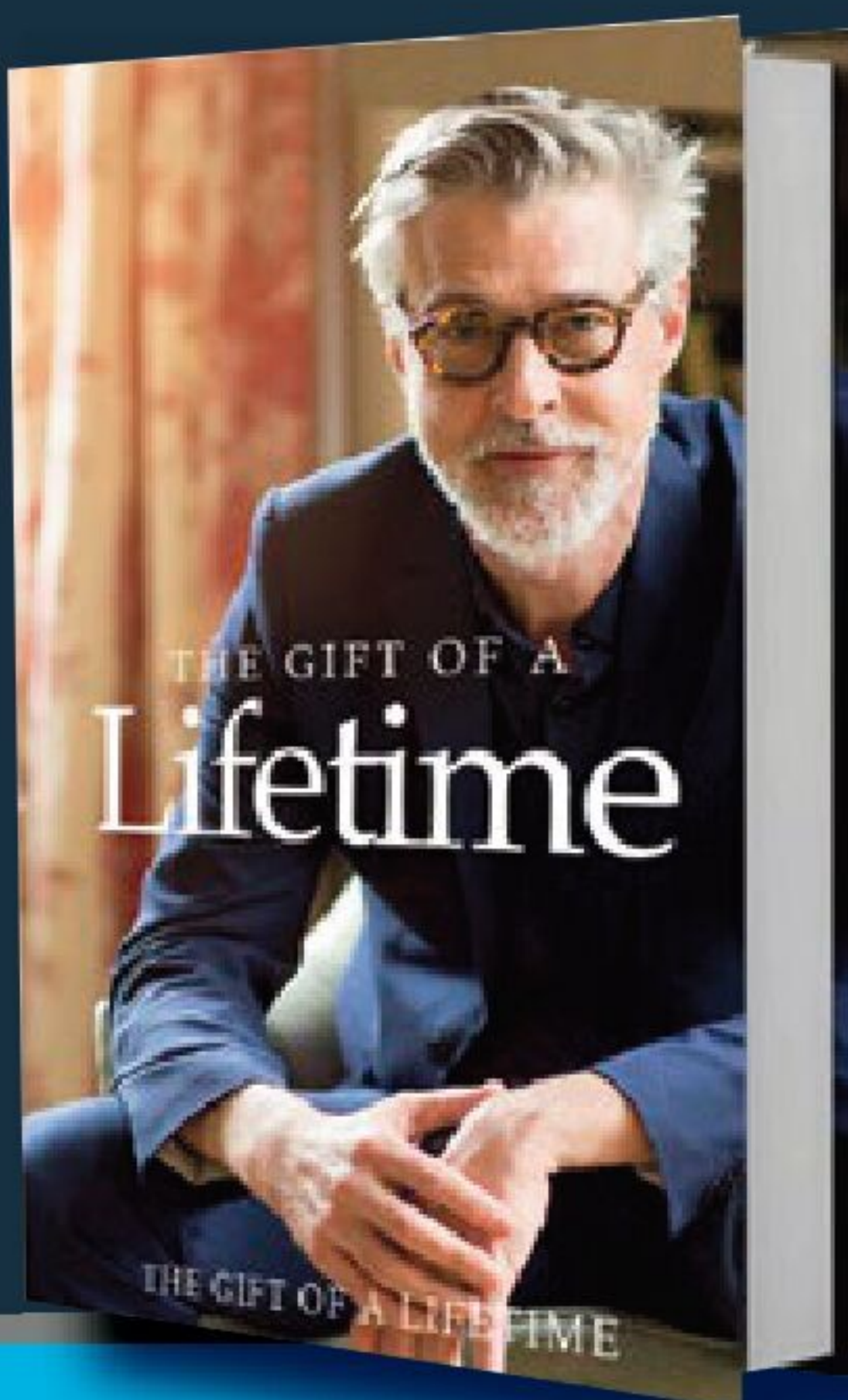
13-15: excellent

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BRAIN TEASERS

Picture This

MEDIUM Reveal a hidden picture by shading in groups of horizontally or vertically adjacent cells. The numbers represent how many shaded cells are in each of the

corresponding row or column's groups (for example, a "3" next to a row represents three horizontally adjacent shaded cells in that row). There must be at least one empty cell between each group. The numbers read in the same horizontal or vertical order as the groups they represent. There's only one possible picture; can you shade it in?

				4							4		
		3	1									1	3
		2	1									1	2
		2	1	9	5	5	5	5	5	9	1	2	
		2	2										
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		2	2	2									
		1	6	1									
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Dream Holiday

EASY Anahita is trying to remember the cost of an expensive trip that she saw advertised. She remembers these facts:

- The cost is a four-digit number, and one of the four digits is 5.
- The second digit is twice the first digit.
- The last digit is two more than the third digit.

What is the highest possible cost of the trip Anahita saw advertised?

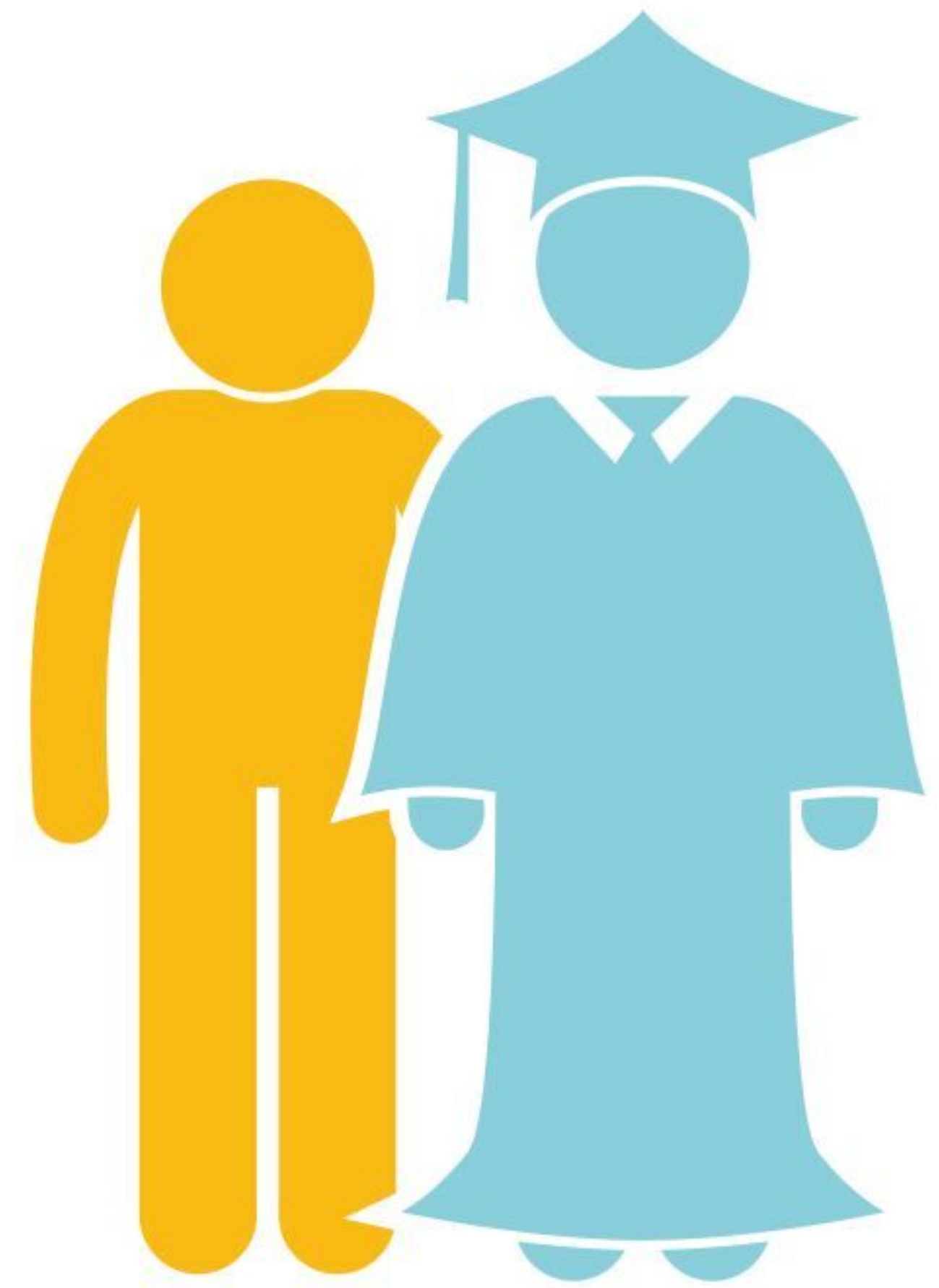


DIANE BAHER (PICTURE THIS). FRASER SIMPSON (DREAM HOLIDAY)

Grads and Dads

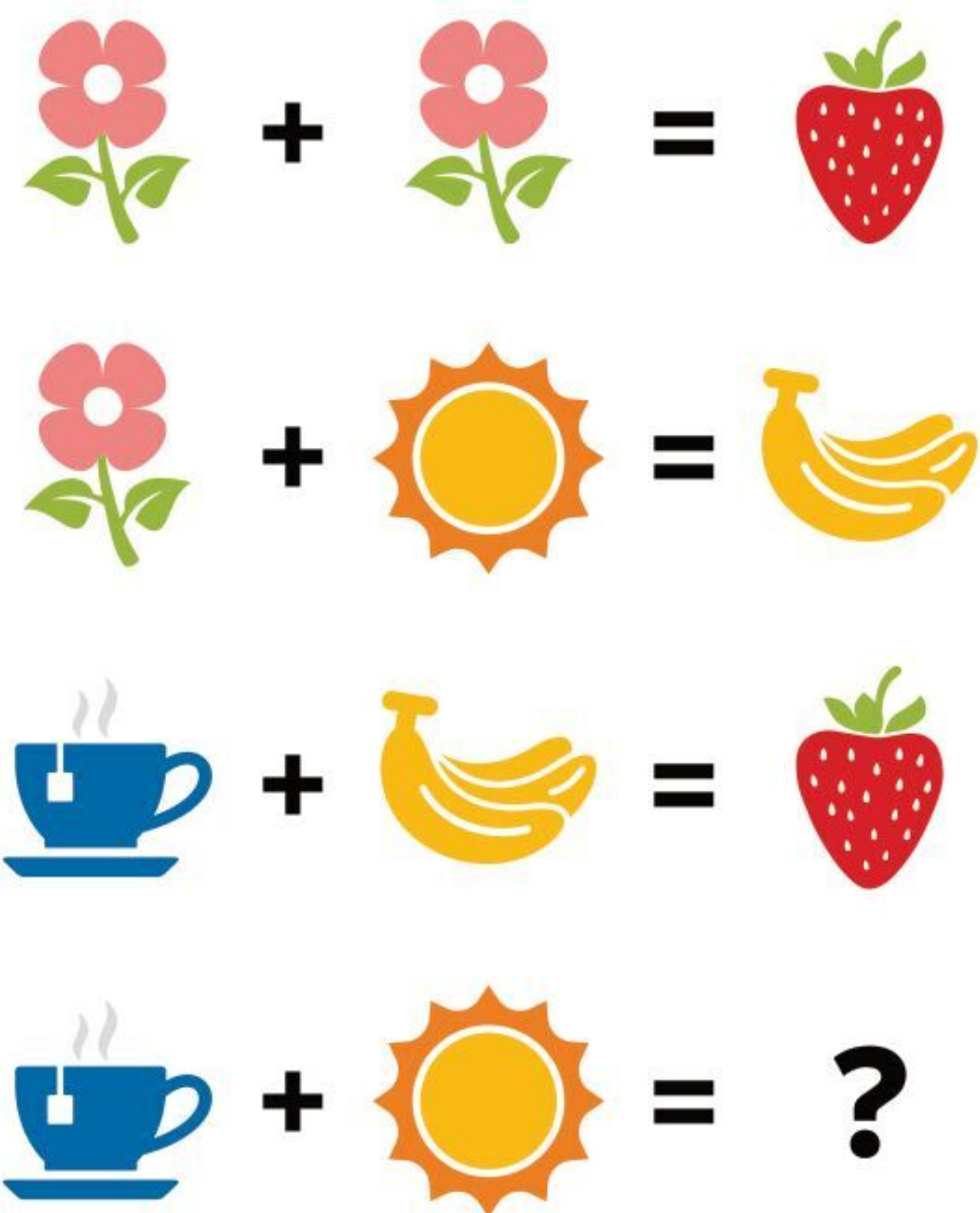
EASY A graduation party is attended by Michael, Ken, James, Alberto, Elias, and Stephanie. Three of them are newly minted secondary school graduates; the other three are their fathers. Based on the following clues, can you figure out who the graduates are and who each of their dads is?

- ◆ Stephanie went to the graduation dance with Michael's son.
- ◆ Elias and James played on the school's football team. One of them is Alberto's son.
- ◆ Michael and Elias are not related.



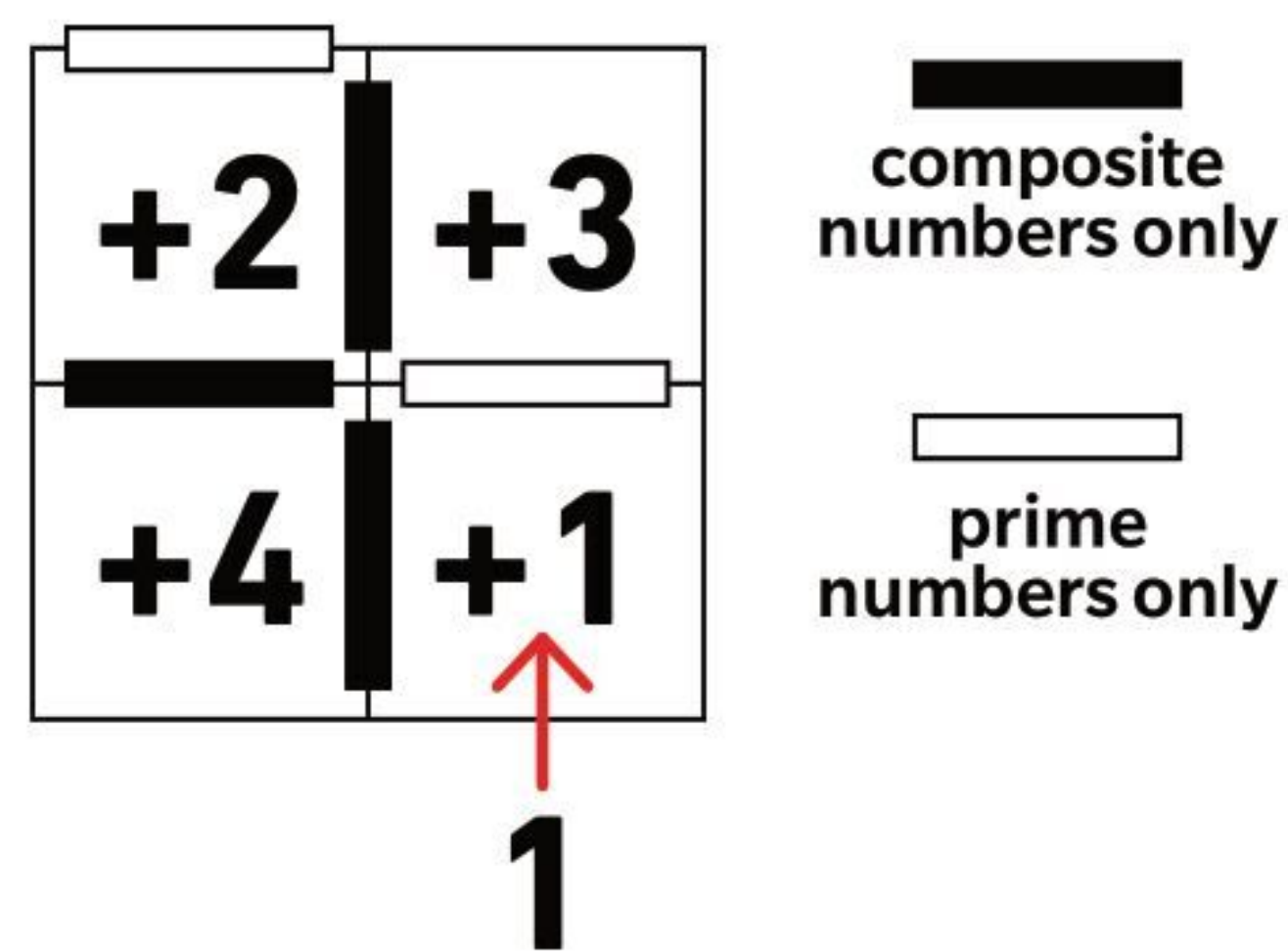
Symbolism

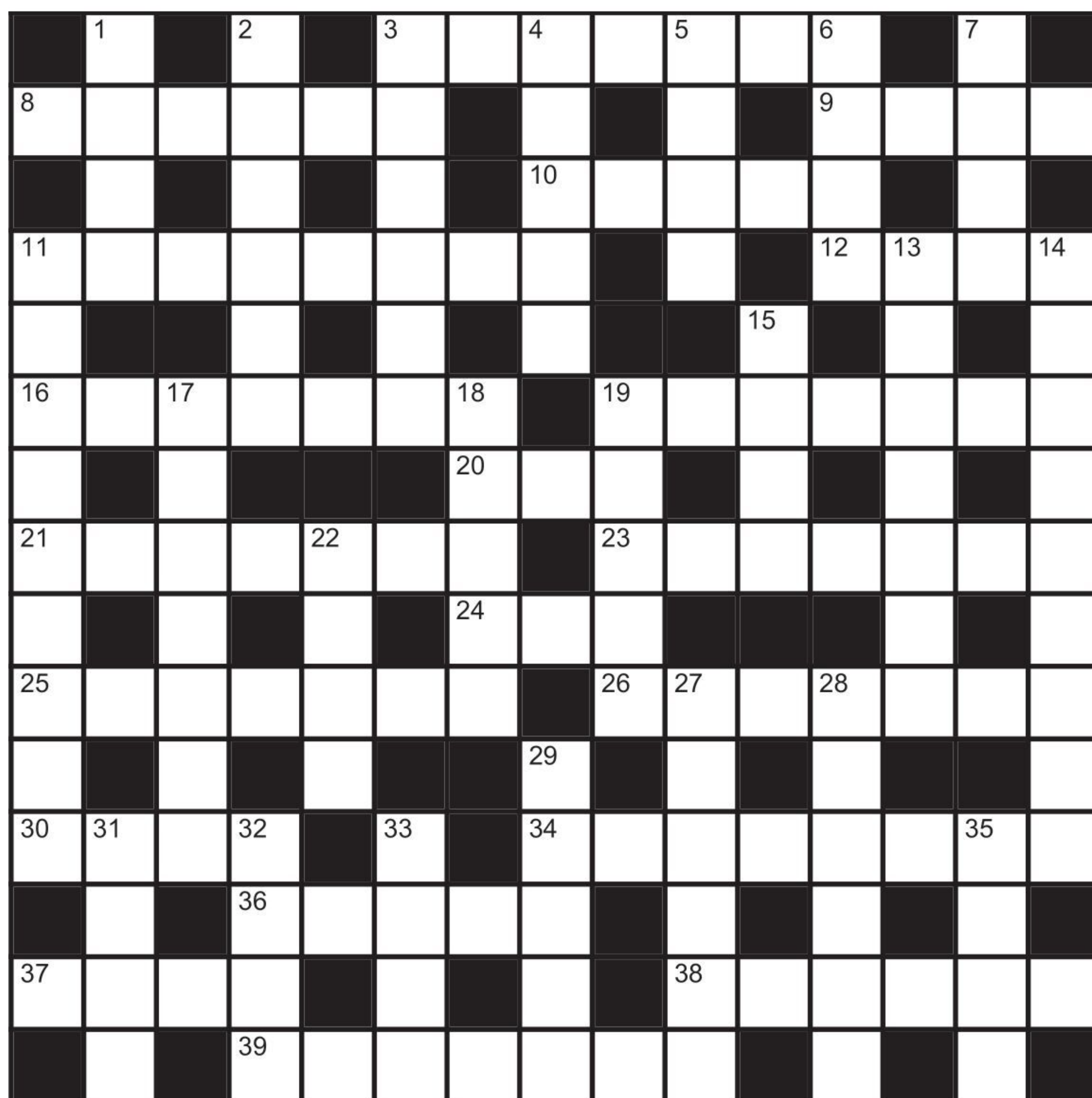
DIFFICULT Based on these equations, what's the missing symbol?



The Smallest Maze

DIFFICULT A prime number (for example, 11) is only evenly divisible by itself and one, whereas a composite number is evenly divisible by itself, one and at least one whole number other than one and itself (for example, $8 \div 2 = 4$). Every time you enter a room in this maze your number increases as indicated, and you may only pass through a door if the number you currently have is the right kind (as soon as you enter with your 1, it becomes a 2, which is a prime number, so you can only pass through the white door). There are many ways to leave the maze, but what is the smallest number you can leave the maze with?





CROSSWISE

Test your general knowledge. Answers on p142

ACROSS

- 3 Ringed (7)
- 8 ___ Goldberg, actress (6)
- 9 Motorway (4)
- 10 Lax (5)
- 11 Last (8)
- 12 Heavy blow (4)
- 16 Predicted (7)
- 19 Spark off (7)
- 20 Belonging to us (3)
- 21 Old match (7)
- 23 Its capital is Montevideo (7)
- 24 Involuntary muscular contraction (3)
- 25 Up-to-date (2,5)
- 26 Covered (7)
- 30 Young lady (4)
- 34 Instruction to keep cool (4,4)
- 36 Tyrone county town (5)
- 37 Forbidden action (2-2)
- 38 Vortices (6)
- 39 Learned the ropes (7)

DOWN

- 1 North Wales seaside resort (4)
- 2 Incentive (6)
- 3 Shrill chirping insect (6)
- 4 Canons (5)
- 5 Landlocked SE Asian nation (4)
- 6 Sketched (4)
- 7 Father (4)
- 11 Spreading out (9)
- 13 Top brass (4-3)
- 14 Death for a cause (9)
- 15 Place (4)
- 17 Earthquake scale (7)
- 18 Value (5)
- 19 Armistice (5)
- 22 Smoke duct (4)
- 27 Approached (6)
- 28 Assent (6)
- 29 Grey (5)
- 31 "Prince ___", Borodin opera (4)
- 32 Spoils (4)
- 33 Individual facts (4)
- 35 Sediment (4)

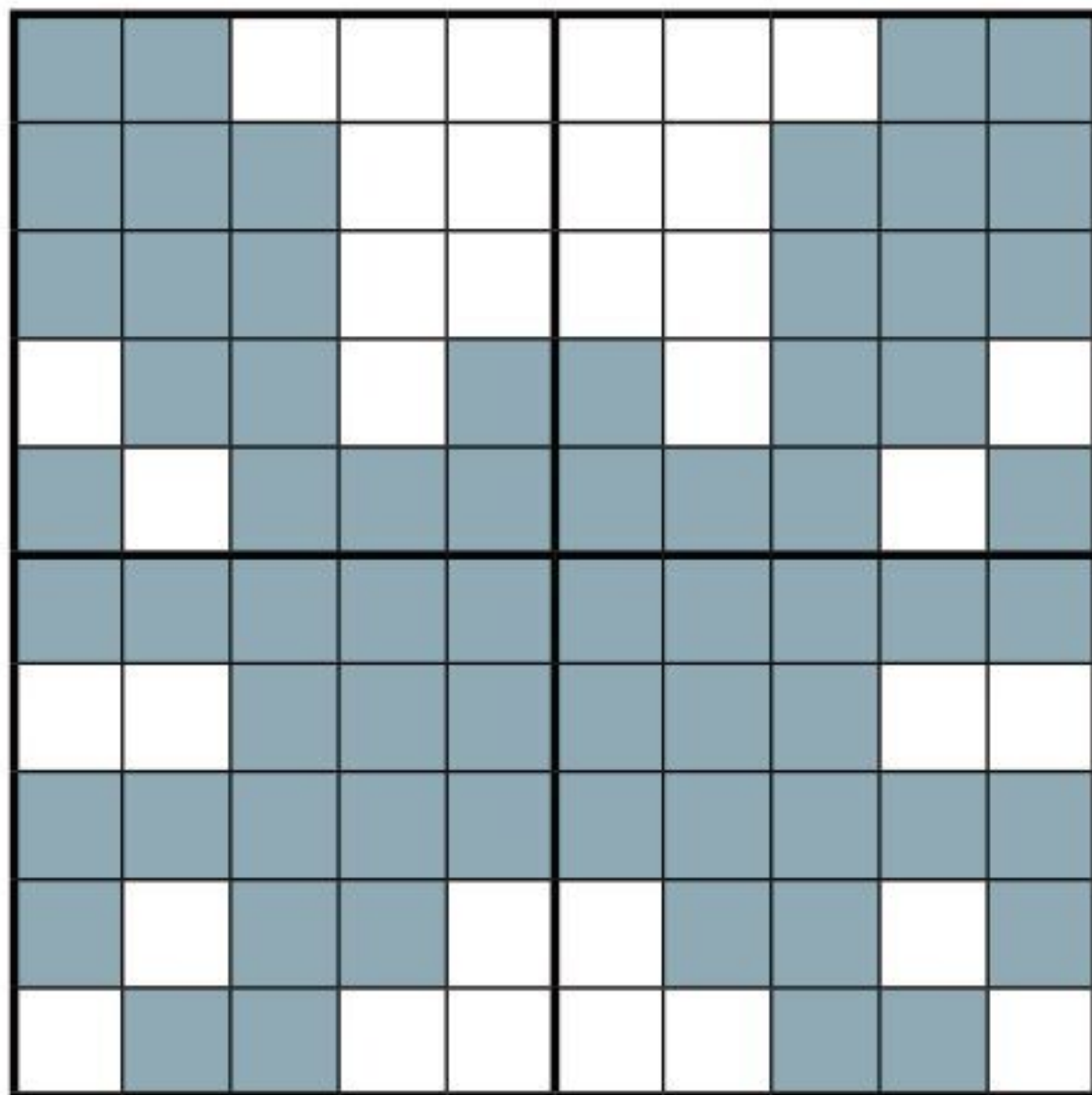
BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS



BY Jeff Widderich

Picture This

It's a crab.



Dream Holiday

\$4,857

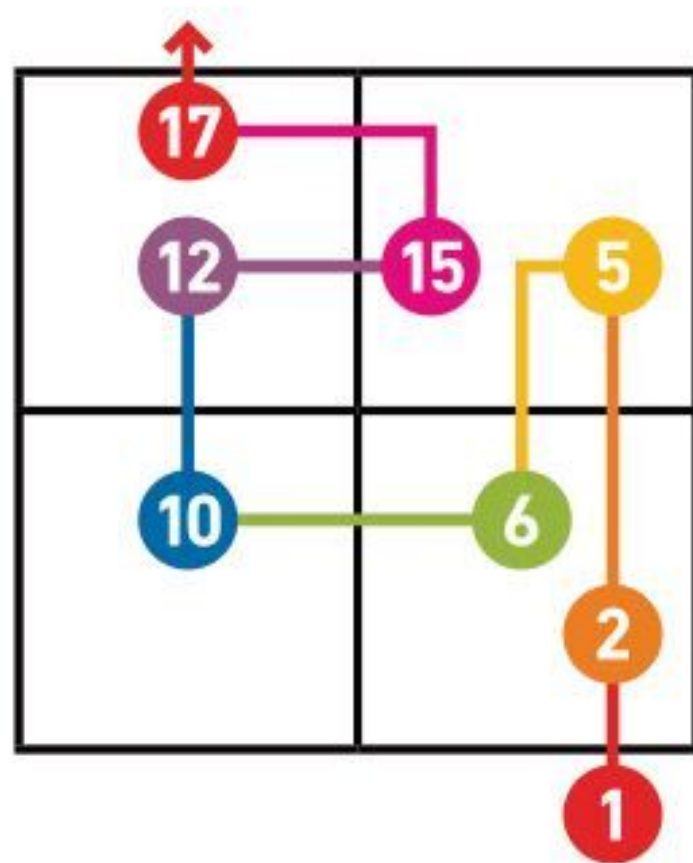
Dads and Grads

Alberto is Elias's dad, Ken is Stephanie's dad, and Michael is James's dad.

Symbolism



The Smallest Maze



		3	2			6		
1		2	4					8
						3		9
5	1						6	
7								4
	2						8	1
2			3					
						9	1	2
		9				8	7	

To Solve This Puzzle

Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that:

- every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;
- each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

SOLUTION

3	5	7	8	2	1	6	9	4
2	4	1	6	9	7	5	3	8
6	6	8	5	4	3	4	7	2
1	8	5	7	4	6	9	2	3
4	3	2	1	5	9	8	6	7
7	9	6	2	3	8	4	1	5
6	2	9	4	2	3	4	2	9
8	7	3	9	6	4	9	2	5
5	1	5	8	7	8	2	3	4

Laugh!

WIN £30
for every reader's joke we publish!

Go to readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us
or facebook.com/readersdigestuk

I recently attended a funeral that used a transparent coffin.

Will this catch on? Remains to be seen. *Seen on Twitter*

My uncle was a lion tamer. When he went bankrupt they took nearly everything, but at least he's still got his pride. *Comedian GARY DELANEY*

You know that you bought the right fireworks when the guy running the stand gives you a high four. *Comedian SIMON HOLLAND*

I'm going to sell the husband's theremin. He's had it for years and he's never touched it. *Seen on Twitter*

Pennsylvania is where Dracula gets his stationery. *Comedian SANJEEV KOHIL*

I just flew in from that Transformers convention. Boy are my arms tyres. *Comedian TIMOTHY CLARK*

I love that bands still pretend to leave before their encore. It's like peekaboo for adults. *Seen on Twitter*

I just threw a ghost boomerang. That's gonna come back to haunt me. *Comedian GLENNY RODGE*

Tubes full of tennis balls should come with serving suggestions on the side. *Comedian OLAF FALAFEL*

Just burned 2,000 calories.

That's the last time

I leave brownies

in the oven

WHILE I NAP

Submitted via email



I have been told I have an avoidant attachment style, but I get out of those conversations pretty quickly.

SIÂN DOCKSEY, via Twitter

One time I was stood behind Sir Paul McCartney at the supermarket, and it took him about seven minutes to purchase a banana. *Seen on Twitter*

Raymond Blanc's middle name is Blonkety. *Seen on Twitter*

Never buy too much rocket. It goes off quickly. *Comedian IAN POWER*

Writer: My biggest fear is a blank sheet of paper.

The Rock: I hear ya, buddy.

ANDY RYAN, via Twitter

What is the set up with penguins?
They have emperors and kings,



Not My Job

THREE HILARIOUS MOMENTS
WHERE PEOPLE DID THE
ABSOLUTE BARE MINIMUM
AT WORK

via boredpanda.com



LAUGH

which suggests a hereditary system, but also in *Batman Returns* Danny DeVito had to shill for votes to become mayor. *Seen on Twitter*

I want my 13-year-old to understand how important honesty is, but also to know that she is 12 when kids eat free.

Comedian SIMON HOLLAND

One time at school the bullies threw a dart at me, and that really stuck in my head for some reason. *Seen on Facebook*

Where are all the average things manufactured? At the satisfactory.

Submitted via email

They say you become like the people you spend most of your time with.

That's why I'm a nobody. *Seen on Reddit*

I know that my ex-girlfriend isn't doing well, because she had to get married *and* start a family, just to get over me.

Submitted via email

Someone called me a narcissist recently. Really? They couldn't think of a better insult than that? I know I could!

EMILY CHEIFER, via email

Airport Fails

Twitter users share  horror stories of their worst airport experiences

@_ColleenM: I was fiddling with the side of my plane seat and grasped something I thought was the recliner handle. Then I realised that somebody had decided to stretch out behind me, and I'd just grabbed their bare foot.

@BohemianJenn: A legit clown once sat next to me on a plane. When we made eye contact, he felt the need to assure me that he was, "a good clown, not a creepy clown."

@Danielita89: I fell asleep during a long layover and woke up to a little girl poking me and asking out loud, "Mummy, is she still alive?"

@KatyByrneDesign: Man next to me slammed two portions of nachos, then during turbulence yelled, "This isn't going to end well!"

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

Across: 3 Circled, 8 Whoopi, 9 Road, 10 Loose, 11 Ultimate, 12 Wham, 16 Foresaw, 19 Trigger, 20 Our, 21 Lucifer, 23 Uruguay, 24 Tic, 25 In touch, 26 Encased, 30 Girl, 34 Stay calm, 36 Omagh, 37 No-no, 38 Eddies, 39 Trained

Down: 1 Rhyl, 2 Motive, 3 Cicada, 4 Rules, 5 Laos, 6 Drew, 7 Papa, 11 Unfolding, 13 High-ups, 14 Martyrdom, 15 Lieu, 17 Richter, 18 Worth, 19 Truce, 22 Flue, 27 Neared, 28 Accede, 29 Ashen, 31 Igor, 32 Loot, 33 Data, 35 Lees

Beat the Cartoonist!



Think of a witty caption for this cartoon—the three best suggestions, along with the cartoonist's original, will be posted on our website in mid-September. If your entry gets the most votes, you'll win **£50**.

Submit to captions@readersdigest.co.uk by September 7. We'll announce the winner in our October issue.

JULY WINNER



Our cartoonist's caption, "**Can you believe he's trying to get crowdfunding for this?**" was topped by our witty reader John Lynch this month, who won the vote with his topical caption, "**I think the EasyJet budget cuts have gone a little too far now.**" Congratulations John!

IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE



David Hasselhoff

The star of *Knight Rider* and *Baywatch* on family, fans, and "being a legend"



Glitz & Glamour

Celebrating the fascinating legacy of British Showgirls



EXTREME MEDICINE

Meet the people saving lives under extreme circumstances

A Century Of Change

As we continue our centenary celebrations, we look at how office working has changed in the last 100 years...

NO ONE COULD blame you if you hardly remember what an office looks like—you might not even have been to the office since March 2020, after all! The rise of remote working is, however, just the latest in a long evolution of the office.

In the early 1900s, offices resembled factories: workers were crammed into an open-plan floor space with managers watching from private offices. Brothers Eberhard and Wolfgang Schnelle changed this in the 1950s, introducing a new design. Gone were the rows of desks, replaced by *Bürolandschaft* (“office landscape”)—a more collaborative workplace with managers being pulled out onto the main floor.

In the 1960s, American designer Robert Propst invented the “Action Office”, initially intended to be semi-enclosed workspaces that would give workers privacy. As with many ideas, it took on a life of its own. Companies created tiny boxed-in desks rather than the roomy spaces that Propst had envisaged.



By the 1990s, these were known as cubicles and were widely seen to represent the worst of corporate life—mundanity, isolation. In 1999’s *The Matrix*, Neo trades in a cubicle-restricted life for uncertain freedom, desperate to get out of the office. No doubt anyone who has faced the prospect of working late on a Friday night has found themselves wishing for Morpheus’s red pill.

The 21st-century, however, brought in offices that were more open-plan, collaborative and social—as well as technology like smartphones that meant work followed people home. Post-pandemic, office spaces are wildly varied. Your office may be a shared workspace full of natural light and a cutting-edge coffee machine.

Or it may be a dining table, with assorted bits and bobs hurriedly pushed aside to create space for your laptop, or your sofa and a pile of blankets for maximum comfort and a midday nap—don’t worry, we won’t tell! ■

BY ALICE GAWTHROP

