

## **Nissifer the New!**

I open the pantry door and begin to remove last year's preserves: gooseberry jam, carrot whiskey and pickled rhubarb. Placing the last of the jars on the sink-top, I reach in and snick open the hatch revealing my secret harvest of seasonal golems. It's that time of year again when my house-bound companions begin to falter and become melancholic. The transferral of their tiny, simplistic souls can be a tricky business, akin to the baking of scones for the local fête – a whole weekend's work in my cramped but homely kitchen.

But this year is different. My fall in the lobby last week (resulting in snapped antennae, volumous releases of semi-lethal gas, and a visit from the local police) served as a timely reminder that it has been over a half-millennium since my last subscription to this mortal coil. Renewing my own sweet corpus is a lengthier task. A real pain in the stinger but it has to be done.

I seek out the largest of the containers from the motley collection of glassware. An old Irn-Bru bottle, the label simply marked 'me' in faded biro. I hold it up to the sunlight and give it a gentle shoogle. There I am (or will be) spinning gently in the vinegary mix. By hovering slightly I can peek through the window into the garden and see the dark patch by the shed where I dug myself up only last year. An oddly disengaging experience.

Sliding the glass bottle into my pinny, I shimmy towards the front room to check on the others. My darling Sooty is the first to greet me with an asthmatic request for anchovy soup. I remind her that it is 'nil-by-mouth' for the time being but notice she is looking a little deflated. I take a drinking straw from the glass of disinfectant on the TV and pump her up a little. Just a few puffs, enough to keep her going until tonight's operation. Most of the others are asleep by the radiator apart from the horse who glances up from his shoebox to enquire about the Celtic game. "Check yourself," I say, and throw him the remote.

The chairlift takes me all the way up the stairs and into my bedroom. Arranged on my bed is a series of small wooden caskets with our names stencilled on the front. A different kind of root vegetable lies in each, nestled on a tiny pillow and tucked beneath hand knitted blankets. Sooty will start as a carrot this year. I will start my next five hundred years as a kind of turnip.

Someone is barking downstairs. I must remember to cancel the papers for the next three weeks. Steven will drop by to look after us and check all is well with the lab gear. Bathgate Jobcentre has kindly let me have my annual holiday extended this year. I will be spending it in Ullapool (*I wish!*) All seems to be in order and yet I cannot stop the fear of decay creeping in at this penultimate stage. Watching the discarded vessels of my beloved creations rotting in the garden always makes me shiver. One year Clevus (freshly re-spawned) flew downstairs before I could catch him and ate himself! Disgusting!

Och! All will be well I'm sure. As a colleague said to me before I left work last week, "A change is as good as a rest."

Madame Nissifer,  
12:30pm, June 3, 1994.

**M. Nissifer** now works for the Department of Work and Pensions in Bathgate,

*Scotland. Her age and place of origin are unknown. Excerpts from her diaries, however, have been found throughout Europe, some dating back at least eight or nine centuries.*