

ONCE A LOUBOUTIN-SPORTING MARTINI DRINKER, SALI HUGHES HAS BECOME A JAM-MAKING, HOME-BAKING CHARACTER FROM THE 1970S (FLORAL APRON AND ALL)



HELP! I'M TURNING TWEE

One afternoon, three months ago, my husband returned home from work to find me standing over a traditional cast-iron bakestone in a floral apron, making Welsh cakes and decanting them into a pretty tin, before I lovingly dusted them with caster sugar. 'What's all this in aid of?' he asked. 'They're for the vicar, as a thank you for filling out the baby's passport application.' We looked at one another for a moment before collapsing into embarrassed giggles. How did two atheist, London-centric media workers end up living like characters in *Trumpton*?

It's been creeping up on me. In the past few years, I've become terribly twee. Afternoon teas with butter-drenched crumpets and proper leaves, cashmere bedsocks, sensible raincoats and Hunter wellies where once were Louboutin heels – all have imperceptibly infiltrated my

urbane lifestyle in ways that, in the past, I would have found terrifying.

My idea of heaven is no longer browsing the rails of Topshop; it's porning over stationery in Paperchase (I recently bought some treasury tags, despite having no idea what possible purpose they could serve in my iMac world). On a quiet day, nothing gives me greater satisfaction than the realisation that I've landed on an ill-targeted mailing list for an equestrian wear/JML/action-slacks-and-handy-jigsaw-holder mail-order catalogue. Ditto the joy of receiving a breadmaker for Christmas, then the thrill of realising it has a jam-making setting. I am but a hop, skip and a jump from knitting toilet-roll holders and joining the Women's Institute.

My sense of twee has extended into my community. I've taken to writing in my local


library, complete with toddler story-time sessions and old ladies thumbing the recently reissued Georgette Heyer over a Thermos of hot soup. For me, there's a huge satisfaction in having a proper milkman (and yes, he actually whistles) or in wandering into the local, cellophane-free butcher's shop and having Paul personally suggest a nice brisket.

As I look around, I see that everyone's guiltily indulging in nostalgic pursuits. Camping in Cornwall is the new villa in Tuscany, and sewing workshops are more keenly subscribed than a waiting list for the latest It bag. Meanwhile, becoming a writer of children's books suddenly seems to represent the giddy heights of personal ambition. I know three career women actively pursuing the fantasy of becoming the new Enid Blyton. I also know several who, to my surprise, have recently taken their husband's surnames in the interest of tradition and, as much as I rather draw the line there, I identify with the desire to hark back to more innocent times.

When the world seems to teeter on a knife edge and the internet gives us exactly what we want, whenever we want it, it's perhaps no surprise that we occasionally reject it in favour of a little cosy mundanity.

Does anyone get the same thrill from an email as they do from the sight of a handwritten envelope? Or from throwing together a stir-fry versus waiting four hours for a succulent pork to finish roasting to a crackling perfection? And who hasn't deleted that worthy documentary on their Sky+, in the knowledge that an episode of *Kirstie's Homemade Home* is true balm for the soul? I even have a weekly alarm on my iPhone to remind me *Desert Island Discs* is about to start on Radio 4.

Sadly, though, my aspirations of twee often fall short of the fantasy – I never did make that jam, and those shallots I pickled went mouldy before I could get around to covering the jar lids in gingham fabric. However well-intentioned, I realise I am, deep down, still the girl with an addiction to Marc Jacobs and the internet, who loves filthy jokes and vodka martinis. And on that

note, I have a shameful confession: the Welsh cakes never made it to the vicar's house. I raided the tin and scoffed them with a Pinot Noir in front of *The Sopranos*. Well, you can take the girl out of her Louboutins... 

'I am a hop, skip and a jump from knitting toilet-roll holders'