

# Blue Sky Thinking

## Chapter Nine

### December 04/January 05

Christmas came and went, as it does. The goose was lovely, the relatives were well behaved and everyone seemed to have a good time. However, the festive spirit was dampened somewhat by the terrible news of the Asian tsunami on Boxing Day. Closer to home, on New Year's Eve one of the livery horses was found lying ill in the gateway and subsequently had to be destroyed, so before partying, I found myself coping with a distraught owner, a succession of vets and a large corpse. Not the best start to the new year! Eventually we made it to the fancy dress party at the 'Laughing Fish'. The theme was 'Heroes & Villains', so Michael donned his dinner jacket and went as James Bond, complete with one of Timmy's replica pistols. People expressed surprise at how well he scrubs up! This left me to root through my wardrobe in search of that elusive 'Bond girl' look - I settled for a black leotard and tights, with a velvet smoking jacket and impossibly high boots and spent the whole evening trying to stay in control of what felt like someone else's legs! However, I did win a bottle of bubbly for my efforts.

The arrival of 2005 also forced us into a decision about my future employment, as my NHS contract required three months notice of my intentions on the first of April. After a brief discussion with Michael, I decided that I was having far too much fun on the farm to go back to the NHS full time, so I resigned my job and asked to continue working for them just one day per week. Happily, they have agreed to this.

A few days later, I received one of those delightful phone calls that always occur when Michael is nowhere to be found, i.e. 'Your sheep are out!' I shot off in my mini towards Ringmer to find a kindly neighbour standing in the lane by the field gate. 'The gate is locked, but I've taken it off its hinges and put them all back - I've got to rush,' he proudly informed me. I thanked him and started wandering down the hedgerow, looking for a hole. At that point, an upstairs window opened in a nearby cottage and a scantily clad blonde woman leaned over precariously, nearly falling out, in every way! 'They came out of the stream by the bridge', she said, pointing to a spot on the **other** side of the road. I took a closer look at the sheep, which were just joining the rest of the flock in our field and saw black ears! Unfortunately, our sheep are Romseys, with not a bit of black anywhere! I went off home to ring the neighbouring farmer and tell him that unfortunately, his sheep were now all mixed up with ours - thankfully, it was all in a day's work to him and he had no trouble sorting them out.

The cattle have also caused one or two difficulties. While feeding the young stock, we noticed some over-enthusiasm on the part of a couple of the bullocks. Closer inspection revealed several 'rigs', i.e. those sporting an intact testicle. This meant dealing with 21 potentially pregnant heifers,

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as well as removing the rogue appendages. Unfortunately, the dogs were waiting eagerly for anything which ended up on the floor - they have an irritating ability to eat at breakneck speed and then regurgitate all of it, slowly, on the kitchen floor. I got the blame, for my supposed incompetence with the elastrator!

In spite of such minor hiccups, the meat enterprise is doing well. I decided to have a sale in January to make way for fresh stocks. This proved to be a real winner and I sold out of beef and lamb in 2 weeks flat! I booked in another bullock and rang Tom, our sheep man, to ask for more fat lambs. 'Oh, I won't have any ready until Easter,' he said! This necessitated a few panicky phone calls, until I found a local farmer who was prepared to sell me a few lambs. I am now contemplating more special offers - this month I am going to offer free gravy or mint sauce!

In addition to the beef and lamb, we will soon be able to sell pork. We were recently offered some New Zealand Kune Kune piglets - the unexpected result of another botched castration! After some deliberation, Michael was dispatched to collect three piglets. However, he can never resist a damsel in distress and came back with four piglets and Spot, the boar! Still, Spot obviously has the potential to breed, so I will find him a Kune Kune sow and get into pork with a pedigree!