

STAYING INDOORS: Am I developing antisocial tendencies as winter draws in?

The winter blues, greens, greys and blacks



Anita **ROBINSON**

NOVEMBER – surely the most dank, dark, drearily depressing month of the year. Blinds drawn at four-thirty, heat on at six and something stodgy, warming and calorie-laden for dinner. There's no comfort in coul' oul' salad. All this, plus a profound disinclination to go anywhere unless absolutely necessary – apart from the hairdresser's of course.

Always enthusiastically gregarious, I'm worried about myself. Am I developing antisocial tendencies? With social mixing still suspect, on my once-weekly supermarket expedition I think: "Now I'm in town I might do a quick reconnaissance of the local fashion and shoe shops I haven't been in for months." Then I remember the rapidly thawing frozen goods in the car and rush home. Believe me, once melted, ice-cream Mars bars don't recover.

My mood is not enhanced by virtue-signalling friends who have used the lengthy Covid hiatus to refresh, refurbish and reorganise their lovely homes, their habits and their hobbies. Fortunately the 'baking boom' seems to be waning. There's only so much banana bread one can foist upon one's relations.

Devoid of practical skills but being of a literary bent, in search of something I could do sitting down, I resolved to read all the classic novels I've studiously avoided since student days but most of them are so infinitely gloomy I gave up the unequal struggle. I'm an avid newspaper reader anyway – and they're depressing enough.

Smitten by conscience, I sought something practical and constructive that might while away yet another long rainy afternoon with nothing on the telly but repeats or snooker – something that didn't involve any element of domestic drudgery, cleaning products, physical or mental stress. Brainwave! I could catalogue my wardrobe by colour, season and size. Since I only ever wear green, grey or black, it seemed a sensible, straight-forward and labour-saving notion at the time. Alas, my clothes are in four different wardrobes in three different rooms. I ferried back and forth, arms aching with laden hangers, until my bed disappeared under bales of stuff. It was a voyage of discovery. Forty shades of green, 50 shades of grey, enough black for a Mafia widow; the odd maverick (a jaundice yellow dress bought unwisely after a lengthy ladies' lunch) and an embarrassing number of near-duplicate garments purchased because I'd forgotten I had a similar item already in three different sizes.

Of the shoes, I'm too mortified to speak. Some, I've no recollection of buying – or worse, why I did in sizes ranging from 4½ to 6. No wonder I've cost the health service a packet in replacement hip-joints.

It was unfortunate that halfway through the exercise, a White Van Man chose to deliver a sizeable and weighty package that required me to answer the door barefoot in a dress I'd struggled into for sentiment's sake, whose zipper teeth didn't come within a hound's gowl of each other, so I had to lean nonchalantly against the hall wall while he carried it in for me. The whole exercise proved so fatiguing that I abandoned the lot, spent the night in the baby's room and the following day stuffed everything randomly back where it came from.

Meanwhile, my hyper-efficient female friends are ringing me, hyper-ventilating with busyness in preparation for the festive season. Fercryinoutloud! It's only the first week of November! One dear lady has already completed her Christmas shopping. Another wrote her Christmas cards last week. A third has been steeping her dried fruit in brandy since Halloween for Christmas cakes and puddings.

I can't be doing with the false bonhomie of a Christmas that starts so ridiculously early that momentum doesn't last and Christmas itself is an exhausted anticlimax. The festive Ho! Ho! Ho! rings a bit hollow when commercial jollity starts seven weeks before the event and our television screens are filled with the (admittedly brilliant) advertising fantasies of the major stores, vying with each other to tug the heartstrings and prise open the purses of the public. (John Lewis wins hands down this year.)

In this era of compulsory inclusivity I note that none have been bold enough to use the original Christmas story.

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ON THIS DAY

NOVEMBER 9 1971

Housewife Shot Dead

A YOUNG Derry housewife was shot dead early today in the Creggan estate as 200 troops were completing a search operation. She was named as Mrs Kathleen Thompson, Rathlin Drive. Reports said she was shot in the shoulder and was dead on admission to Altnagelvin Hospital. The circumstances in which Mrs Thompson died were still not clear this morning. During the military search shots were fired by gunmen at troops. The fire was returned.

Meanwhile a British Army major was seriously ill last night after being shot in his car outside his home in the Finaghy area of Belfast. Finaghy has seen numerous bomb attacks on the homes of policemen and their families.

Faulkner: 'Gunmen a Waning Force'

THE Prime Minister, Mr Brian Faulkner claimed yesterday it was a tragedy that the present conflict in Northern Ireland was often referred to as religious. It was only religious in that it contained a certain degree of group identification and historical association, he said. He told the gathering of Christian Businessmen that gunmen were a waning influence. He stated that there would have been a bloody civil war in NI if the community had not been united against terrorism.

Mr Faulkner described the suggestion of direct rule as a 'lunatic assumption'.

CS Gas Fired at MP's Home

TWO CS gas cylinders were last night fired into the rear of Mr Ivan Cooper's home while an Army presence was in the immediate area. Mr Cooper, who lives in Crawford Square, Derry, protested to the Army authorities.

Man Vows to Clear Dead Wife's Name

BELFAST man Jim Meehan vowed last night that he will clear his dead wife's name of the 'slanderous charges that she was a gun-woman'. Mr Meehan's wife, Maura and her sister, Miss Dorothy Maguire, were shot dead recently by troops at Cape Street, Lower Falls. The Army had claimed later that shots had come from the vehicle.

Troops Provoke Riot at Tyrone Church

A RIOT developed in the County Tyrone village of Carrickmore last night after soldiers had shouted obscenities while Mass was being held in the local church and continued to do so as the congregation was leaving. Carrickmore curate, Fr James Donnelly afterwards condemned the activities of the troops.

BY 1971 violence had spread to every part of the north as the IRA bombing campaign was matched by controversial killings and provocative acts by the British army. At the same time Catholic RUC officers were being forced out of nationalist areas. Faulkner's declaration that the IRA's influence was 'waning' beggared belief, while the likelihood of direct rule grew.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com