

A cold case

In the darkness the sheep were showing bright white teeth. I smiled back. It was Sunday – traditionally the day when I give my brain a rest. No, alright, the day when I give what is left of my brain a rest.

There was about four inches of snow on the ground. It was cold. I had been chosen to give them their supper because the sheep's owner (my wife) had her feet up as she was recovering from a gruelling drive around the M25 in heavy snow. She is not a delivery driver – though it may come to that if Mr Djanogly and friends don't stop making the lives of ordinary solicitors a misery. She had gone to Heathrow to collect her bronzed daughter who had arrived back from Australia in a straw hat and sandals, apparently unaware that in crossing the world the outside temperature had dropped from 32 degrees to minus two.

I looked more closely. Could the white really be snow, not teeth? I brushed against a mouth – it was warm. Not snow. Not a smile at all. Then I panicked and ran into the house shouting: "Don't panic, don't panic the sheep are foaming at the mouth."

It is an unwritten tenet of sod's law that if a vet is needed the animal in question will fall ill at the most inconvenient hour, when the vet is on double or treble time, and when most normal human beings and animals should be asleep.

For the second time in little over a month it has happened to us. Inevitably the first was on Christmas day, when one of the cats was apparently looking a little grey. It was actually a grey cat, but was looking greyer than usual. These things are never easy. The 'don't panic' then was because I saw a rat in the house (we live in rural Norfolk and these things happen) so I decided to feed it – poison. The rat then disappeared and the cat started to look grey. Fearing the worst – that the cat had consumed a poisoned rat, and that it would shortly be for the next world – we raced through dark lanes until we saw a lone glow in the sky. Apart from a few people who had gone overboard for Christmas and had illuminated every radish and brussel sprout in their gardens in an excess of festive zeal, we had driven through darkness for many miles – until now.

The all-night veterinary centre was in full activity – coping with a guinea pig

with laryngitis, a budgerigar with indigestion and now a grey cat that was greyer than usual. At the sight of the vet the cat perked up immediately, was seriously affronted when it had its temperature taken and, as the vet relieved me of £100, spontaneously made a complete recovery.

"To me Wensleydale meant cheese but when these animals arrived they did not resemble cheese at all"

Sheep on the scene

It was a couple of years ago that the sheep arrived on the scene. Farming is not in my blood, and I never dreamt that one day I would be spending at least part of most days tending sheep.

But I reckoned without the gentle eccentricity of my wife Kirsten who had cherished an ambition to have a small flock of Wensleydale sheep.

To me Wensleydale meant cheese but when these animals arrived they did not resemble cheese at all.

We started with four ewes: sheep with distinctive Rastafarian hairstyles. Apparently four sheep do not make a flock and it was not long before they went to Suffolk for a few weeks of pleasure, as a result of which they all came back with coloured markings on their backs to denote that they had been 'covered' by a ram whose task it was to 'service' a whole flock of sheep. This being a family publication I will withhold further detail.

Then along came the lambs. For a few months the lambs leaped and gambolled, and everyone who saw them breathed: "Ahhh how cute." Then the lambs stopped being lambs and are now fully grown sheep which have absolutely no risk of being turned into chops as they all have



names and have become as tame as dogs.

For months the sheep safely grazed and regularly demanded extra food and all was well until... last Sunday was when the sheep chose to smile at me. But their kind of smiling meant a late-night call to the vet. It would not have been practical to put 12 large Wensleydale sheep into the back of the car and take them to the glowing lights of the all-night vet. Besides I did not have the £1,200 that it might have cost me.

Looking a little like the latest reincarnation of Dr Who, the vet arrived and diagnosed that the sheep had been supplementing their diets during a snow storm by eating things they ought not to have done in the hedgerows, and that their guts now needed balancing.

What was now needed was egg whites and bicarbonate of soda. I don't know if you have ever tried, in freezing cold, to extract egg whites, mix bicarbonate of soda in a bucket and administer it to a dozen foaming sheep. If you have not, I suggest you put it low down on the list of things you would like to do most in 2012. Sheep do not like it, and wrestling with them in the snow on a Sunday night with the Dr Who vet looking on is bad for blood pressure.

So, my advice is stick with jurors, but, if they start foaming at the mouth, then best to change your submissions or sack your counsel. It may be tough to administer bicarbonate of soda and egg whites to sheep, but I guess it would be well nigh impossible to do so to members of a jury... and what about the judge?



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