

THE BIG STORIES

02

**A running start.
Eventually.**



AT OUR TABLE

07

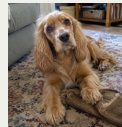
**Helen's Sunday
apple crumble**



PETS

05

**Local dog declines
to comment**



Everyone round the same table

One Sunday, three generations, two puddings and the folding chair nobody trusts. The Harpers finally get the whole family round the same table.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

The original plan was just lunch. Helen sent a message on Wednesday suggesting that anyone who was free should come over on Sunday. By Friday, the conversation contained seventeen messages about potatoes, three offers of pudding and absolutely no agreement about what time “about one” meant.

Leah arrived first, carrying flowers and the spare folding chair. James turned up in his running clothes, which prompted a brief discussion about whether walking from the car counted towards his training. Maya and Ben brought bread from the bakery near their flat. Tom brought the last of his tomatoes in a container considerably larger than the harvest.

“We should do this more often,” said everyone. This time, they put a date in.



Sunday at Helen's: the rare moment when everyone was sitting down at once.

Good food, better company

The children spent the first twenty minutes building a restaurant beneath the garden table. Poppy wrote an imaginary menu; Oscar charged everyone a leaf to enter. Arthur was appointed their first customer and remained there until someone mentioned roast potatoes.

Nothing particularly remarkable happened. The sun stayed out. Someone went back for seconds. Helen told a story that half the table had heard before, and the other half asked her to tell properly from the beginning. For once, nobody was trying to squeeze the visit between two other things.

Small moments make the big days

By four, the plates had been cleared but nobody had moved very far. That was the bit Helen wanted to remember: not what she cooked, but the sound of everyone still talking long after lunch was over.



*Best friends
for life*

PAGE 5

Inside this edition



A running start, a room reclaimed and four days by the sea. Family news, pages 2–3.



The camera roll, the children, an old holiday and Helen's crumble. Stories to keep, pages 4–7.



Put the kettle on for puzzles, dates and birthday cake. The last word, pages 8–10.

THE BIG STORIES

All the gear. Three runs.

James has entered a new sporting era. Meanwhile, six weekends and nine paint samples later, Leah has reclaimed a room.



James after run number three. The smile came back once he had caught his breath.



Leah, still painting. The final coat really was the final coat.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

A running start. Eventually.

James’s new trainers arrived on a Tuesday. His first run took place the following Saturday, once he had finished researching the correct socks. He accepts that the preparation phase may have got slightly out of hand. “I wanted to give myself the best possible chance,” he said, without mentioning the watch.

The first outing began with confidence and ended beside the park café. He had set off far too quickly, spent several minutes pretending to admire a tree and then decided that a flat white was a sensible part of recovery. His second attempt used a slower pace and a much shorter route.

Run three was the breakthrough. He left his phone

in his pocket, stopped looking at the time and managed the whole park circuit without walking. It was not fast. It was, however, considerably further than he had managed the week before, and nobody else on the path appeared remotely interested in judging him.

Now there is a local 5K in the diary for 7 November. James has asked the family to come along, preferably near the finish rather than the first hill. Helen has offered to hold his coat. Arthur has volunteered to locate the nearest café, a role for which he considers himself exceptionally qualified.

“I’m enjoying it more than I expected,” James said. “Even the running bit.” His next purchase, he insists, will be a coffee after actually completing the race.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

The spare room is officially a room

For almost a year, Leah referred to the spare room as “the room with the boxes”. Visitors were directed past it at speed. The door stayed closed. If something could not find a home elsewhere in the flat, it usually ended up in there.

The turning point came when Maya asked whether she and Ben could stay in October. Leah said yes before checking whether the bed was still visible. The next morning she opened the curtains, moved the boxes into the hall and found the mug she had been missing since Christmas.

Six weekends later, the walls are painted, the cur-

tain pole is straight and the bedside lamp works. Most of the delay came from choosing a colour. The nine samples looked almost identical to James, who wisely declined to give that opinion a second time.

The best discovery was a shoebox of old photographs beneath a pile of spare cables. One of them has made it into this edition. The cables have not. Leah says the room feels bigger now, although Arthur points out that this is what happens when a room contains furniture instead of cardboard.

Maya and Ben arrive on 16 October. Leah has bought fresh bedding and cleared a drawer for them. The paint samples are still on the kitchen table, but she says that is a separate project.

OUT & ABOUT

Four days away. A very full camera roll.

Maya and Ben's Northumberland break brought big skies, a very small cottage and the discovery that a rainy day can be the best one.



The beach walk that lasted twice as long as planned. Neither of them minded.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

They had booked the cottage in June, during a week when September seemed certain to be sunny. By the time Maya and Ben arrived in Northumberland, the weather had developed other ideas. Their first job was finding the heating instructions. Their second was agreeing that the sea still looked lovely in a coat.

"We had finally stopped trying to fit everything in."

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

The coast was worth the coat

Monday was for walking. They followed the beach until the houses behind them became tiny, then sat on a low wall to eat sandwiches that had acquired a small but unmistakable amount of sand. Ben took the same photograph several times because the clouds kept changing. Maya maintains that the first one was fine.

Tuesday's rain was not the sort you could optimistically ignore. The coastal path was replaced by a museum, a very long lunch and a second-hand bookshop. They went in to shelter for ten minutes and came out with five books, a postcard and a recommendation for somewhere to eat that evening.

Back at the cottage, they put the kettle on and read while their coats dried over the chairs. No reservations to rush to, no list to complete. Maya said it was the first afternoon in months when she had read more than a chapter without being interrupted by something she supposedly needed to do.

On their last evening, the sky cleared. They walked down to the shore after dinner and stayed until the light had almost gone. Ben stopped taking photographs after a while. "That was probably the best bit," Maya said. "We had finally stopped trying to fit everything in."

They have already decided to return for a week. The packing list will include more socks, fewer ambitious plans and enough space for whatever they find in the bookshop.

BEN · THE OTHER REVIEW

Postcard from the kitchen

Best meal: fish and chips eaten outside, with coats zipped to the chin. Best purchase: a paperback neither of us had heard of. Best decision: abandoning the itinerary on Tuesday.

What we would change: staying longer. What we would not change: the tiny cottage, the late walks and the fact that we could not remember what day it was by Wednesday.

We came home with more books than clean socks. On balance, that feels like a successful holiday.

FAMILY CLASSIFIEDS · JUST FOR FUN

THE NO-ITINERARY TRAVEL BUREAU

Four days. Five books.

Big skies, small cottages and no obligation to stick to Tuesday's plan. Coats strongly recommended.

More room for books. Less room for plans.

THE FAMILY ALBUM

The ones we nearly forgot to send.

Not every photograph needs a big occasion. Six little windows into the last few months.



Tom and the famous tomato. Five others went straight into salads; this one got its own portrait.



Poppy and Oscar's cardboard rocket. The kitchen was mission control until teatime.



The room is finished. The painting clothes may never recover.



A windy beach, an unplanned walk and a photo Maya nearly deleted.



Biscuit, photographed at the scene. His legal team has requested snacks.



Nothing staged. Just the bit after lunch when the stories got good.

FROM THE FAMILY NOTEBOOK

Keep the ordinary ones

The best photograph in a family album is not always the sharpest. Sometimes it is the one with half a thumb in the corner, somebody looking the wrong

way or the kitchen in its usual state behind them.

These are the pictures that tell you what life actually felt like: the jumper somebody wore all summer, a project spread across the table, a dog in the patch of sunlight everyone steps around.

For the next edition, the Harpers are each choosing one photograph they would otherwise leave buried on their phone. No holiday required. A good Tuesday will do.

FAMILY CLASSIFIEDS · JUST FOR FUN

THE CAMERA ROLL AMNESTY

Wanted: your ordinary Tuesday.

A thumb in the corner? Someone looking the wrong way? Perfect. Rescue one photograph from your phone for the next edition.

No occasion necessary. No tidy kitchen required.

SMALL PEOPLE. BIG PERSONALITIES.

Mission control requests more sticky tape.

Poppy and Oscar aim for the moon. Biscuit aims for the remaining slipper. Both projects are being closely monitored.



The launch team beside their prototype. The cereal box is an essential component.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

One giant leap for the kitchen table

The rocket began as a delivery box and a disagreement about whether it needed windows. Poppy said astronauts should be able to see where they were going. Oscar said the driver could look out of the top. After a short negotiation, they installed two windows and appointed nobody as the driver.

By Saturday afternoon, the spacecraft had silver-paper engines, bottle-top controls and a cereal-box compartment for emergency sandwiches. Arthur was invited to inspect it. He asked how it would land. Poppy explained that they had not reached that part of the instructions yet.

The first test flight took place along the kitchen floor, propelled by Oscar and watched by Biscuit from a safe distance. A wing came loose beside the fridge. This was described as “useful information” rather than a failure, and the tape was fetched again.

Their next version will be big enough for a passenger, although Helen has suggested measuring the back door before construction begins. Poppy has put a notebook by her bed for ideas. Oscar has already reserved another empty box.

Asked what they learned, Poppy said that the first design does not have to be the final one. Oscar said that space travel uses a surprising amount of tape.



Biscuit is available for comment, provided the interview takes place near the biscuit tin.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

Local dog declines to comment

Biscuit’s quarter began well. He learned to wait while his lead was clipped on, discovered a new walking route and completed a weekend at Helen’s without rearranging any of the flowerpots.

Then James’s left slipper disappeared. It was found shortly afterwards beside Biscuit, who looked pleased to be included in the search. The photograph was shared

with the family. Biscuit has neither confirmed nor denied involvement.

James has moved the surviving slipper to a higher shelf. Helen says this is an excellent solution, although it raises the question of why it took three slippers to arrive at it.

In more positive news, Biscuit can now sit calmly through most of a cup of tea. He remains less convinced by the rule about crumbs belonging to the person who dropped them. Negotiations continue.

FAMILY CLASSIFIEDS · JUST FOR FUN

BISCUIT & CO.

One careful chewer.

Discreet slipper disposal and thorough crumb inspections. References unavailable. Payment accepted in snacks.

All enquiries via the biscuit tin.

FROM THE FAMILY ARCHIVE

Same beach. Three different memories.

A photograph from the shoebox starts a conversation about the holiday nobody remembers in quite the same way.



A summer by the sea, sometime in the 1990s. The red bucket outlasted almost everything else.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

Leah found the photograph while clearing the spare room. It was tucked behind a birthday card in a shoebox labelled with something entirely unrelated. The edges had curled, the sky had faded and there, in the foreground, was the red bucket everyone remembered.

“I remember the towel. I couldn’t tell you the year.”

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

The year of the red bucket

Helen remembers packing sandwiches before dawn and discovering halfway there that nobody had brought a knife for the butter. Arthur remembers taking a route he still describes as a shortcut. The children remember stopping for ice creams. All three versions are probably true, although they are rarely told in that order.

The family stayed in a small rented flat above a shop. There was a folding bed, a kitchen with two mismatched pans and a window from which you could see the sea if you stood in exactly the right place. James apparently spent the first evening standing there to prove the point.

FAMILY CLASSIFIEDS · JUST FOR FUN

What surprised Helen was how little of the holiday they could date precisely. They remembered the smell of warm sand in the car, a blue towel that never quite dried and Arthur carrying everybody’s shoes back from the beach. Nobody could agree which year it was.

The photograph has now been scanned and sent around. Within an hour, Tom had found another from the same trip. Leah recognised a jumper. Arthur spotted the café where they had breakfast on the last morning. A whole holiday had come back from a picture smaller than a postcard.

They have decided to bring one old photograph each to the next lunch, and write down what they can remember before the details disappear. Helen

says dates would be useful. Arthur says his directions were perfectly reasonable at the time.

A PROMPT FOR THE NEXT EDITION

Three questions for an old photo

What happened just before the picture was taken? That is often where the story starts.

What can you remember that the photograph cannot show: a smell, a song, an argument about directions?

Who else might remember it differently? Ask them before you settle on the official family version. Leave uncertainty in the story when nobody is sure.

ARTHUR’S SCENIC ROUTES

The long way. Confidently.

Seaside navigation with sandwiches, sea views and a spirited debate about whether that really was a shortcut.

Arrival time: a family discussion.

AT OUR TABLE

The recipe has left the notebook.

Helen finally writes down the apple crumble properly. “A bit of flour” has been replaced with quantities. The custard debate remains unresolved.



Helen's crumble: a crisp top, soft apples and no intention of leaving leftovers.

IN THE KITCHEN

Helen's Sunday apple crumble

Family kitchen · Serves 6 · About 1 hour

For the fruit: 800g peeled, cored apples; 40g caster sugar; 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon; 2 tablespoons water. For the topping: 150g plain flour; 100g cold butter, cubed; 75g demerara sugar.

STEP BY STEP

How Helen makes it

1. Heat the oven to 180°C fan / 200°C conventional. Slice the apples evenly and put them in a medium baking dish. Mix with the caster sugar, cinnamon and water. If your apples are particularly sharp, taste a slice before deciding whether they need a little more sugar.

2. Put the flour and cold butter in a bowl. Rub them together with your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse breadcrumbs. A few larger buttery pieces are welcome; Helen says they become the best crunchy bits.

3. Stir in the demerara sugar. Scatter the topping over the apples without pressing it down. Place the dish on a baking tray to catch any bubbling juices.

4. Bake for 35–45 minutes, until the top is golden and a knife slips easily into the apples. If the top colours before the fruit is soft, cover loosely with foil and give it a little longer.

5. Leave it for ten minutes before serving. Helen chooses warm custard. Ben chooses ice cream. Everyone agrees that a second helping is easier to negotiate if the serving spoon stays on the table. Contains wheat and milk.

BY OUR FAMILY REPORTER

Why this one stayed

This is the pudding Helen makes when she wants to spend time with the people coming round. The apples can be prepared before lunch and the topping kept cold until it is needed. There is no decoration to finish while everyone else is talking.

Her old notebook has several versions, with the sugar crossed out and rewritten depending on which apples were available. The page is marked with butter and a faint ring from a mug. She has kept it even now that everyone has a copy.

The family's next request is the soup she makes without measuring anything. Helen says she will try to write it down. Arthur has suggested watching the saucepan instead.

FAMILY CLASSIFIEDS · JUST FOR FUN

HELEN'S PUDDING CLUB

Seconds encouraged.

Warm crumble. Custard or ice cream. Membership: one empty plate.

Please leave the serving spoon on the table.

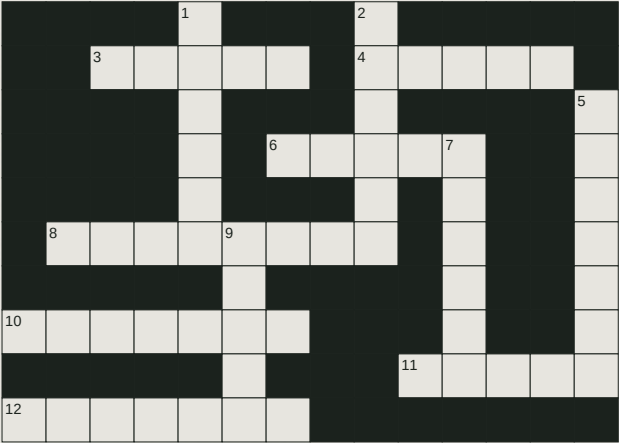
“I followed the recipe exactly. Apart from the ingredients.” — Ben

Pens out. Phones down.

A family crossword, a word search and a little brain-teaser. Everything you need for a happily competitive half-hour.

The family crossword

The answers come from this edition. Names count, spelling matters, and asking the dog is unlikely to help. Write one letter in each white square.



Across

- 3. Maya and Ben came home with five of these. (5)
- 4. The fruit in Helen’s crumble. (5)
- 6. Leah tried nine samples of this. (5)
- 8. The occasion Arthur celebrates on the back page. (8)
- 10. The family’s favourite apple pudding. (7)
- 11. Maya and Ben headed here for their break. (5)
- 12. James’s new hobby. (7)

Down

- 1. Poppy and Oscar’s cardboard creation. (6)
- 2. The people this newspaper brings together. (6)
- 5. The dog with a slipper-shaped problem. (7)
- 7. Tom proudly grew six of these; singular. (6)
- 9. Whose crumble recipe is on page seven? (5)

Find the family

X D V X L E A H R C S
N J A M E S B A C G H
O S C A R Q T A R G W
P U W R N B H M O S I
Z O A Y Z E F W A N K
I E P G Y N K D C Y M
D L L P T I Z B X O A
R D M C Y R J T U T L
S G W C B V H Y O J C
H D M I O U L F L M L
G A R T H U R V I W V

ARTHUR · JAMES · LEAH · TOM · MAYA · BEN · POPPY
· OSCAR

The biscuit-tin puzzle

Helen, James and Leah each bring something to lunch: flowers, bread or pudding. James did not bring bread. Helen brought neither flowers nor bread. Who brought what?

No phones. No peeking. No asking Helen.

Find the family quiz on page 9 and every answer on page 10.

Find ARTHUR, JAMES, LEAH, TOM, MAYA, BEN, POPPY and OSCAR. Names run across, down or diagonally, forwards only. Circle them on your printed copy.

THE NOTICEBOARD

Dates worth putting on the fridge.

The next lunch, a finish line to cheer at and eight questions to find out who was actually paying attention.



Tom's gardening ambitions are growing faster than his tomatoes.

THE HARPER DIARY · AUTUMN 2026

Coming up

18 October — Sunday lunch at Leah's, from one. Helen is bringing crumble. Everyone brings an old photograph and whatever they remember about it.

7 November — James's first local 5K. The family will meet near the finish. Arthur is researching the post-run coffee arrangements.

29 November — Games afternoon at Helen and Arthur's. Bring a favourite game, a snack and the ability to lose with dignity. Ben has requested written rules.

THE FAMILY QUIZ · ONE POINT EACH

Were you paying attention?

1. How many runs has James completed so far?

FAMILY CLASSIFIEDS · JUST FOR FUN

TOM'S VERY SMALL FARM SHOP

Six tomatoes.
Unlimited ambition.

Five went into salads. One got its own portrait. Locally grown, individually celebrated and unlikely to trouble the supermarkets.

Wholesale enquiries may be ambitious.

THE HARPER DIARY · AUTUMN 2026

16 October — Maya and Ben arrive for the weekend. Leah's spare room makes its official debut. Guests are politely asked to admire the walls.

GOOD THINGS, PASSED AROUND

Little recommendations

Leah: a Sunday walk without headphones. Start with twenty minutes on a familiar path and notice what you usually miss. Her best discovery so far was a kingfisher. Most weeks, it is puddles.

Maya: leave room in the suitcase for a second-hand book. The bookshop was not on the itinerary and turned into one of the best bits of the trip.

Tom: grow one thing next spring. Six tomatoes may not transform the weekly shop, but eating something you have grown yourself feels surprisingly good.

THE BACK PAGE

Another candle. Same terrible jokes.

Arthur celebrates a birthday, the family settles the puzzle arguments and everyone gets the last word.



Arthur, seconds before the annual debate about who gets the corner slice.

FROM ALL OF US

Arthur asked for a quiet birthday and received a kitchen full of people. Helen says these two things are entirely compatible, provided he stops telling the same joke while she is trying to light the candles.

FROM ALL OF US

Make a wish, Arthur

The children made the card. Poppy drew the cake; Oscar drew what he described as “Grandad running very fast”, which everyone agreed was an ambitious artistic choice. James brought a present small enough to fit in a bag. Tom brought his appetite.

Before the candles were blown out, Arthur was asked for the best thing about the past year. He thought for a moment, looked around the table and

said he was pleased they had all made it over. Then he asked whether anybody had remembered a knife.

There are better photographs of the cake, but the family chose this one. It has everybody leaning into the moment, which is probably the point of keeping a picture at all.

OVERHEARD THIS QUARTER

The last word

“Can the rocket have a downstairs?” — Oscar, expanding the brief.

“It’s not clutter if I know which pile it’s in.” — Arthur, defending the study.

“I’m resting. The slipper is also resting.” — Biscuit’s unofficial statement, supplied by James.

Joke of the edition: Why did the photograph go to prison? It was framed.

Until next time: keep the little moments. They turn out to be the big ones when you look back.

The answers. No arguments.

Crossword

Across: 3 BOOKS · 4 APPLE · 6 PAINT · 8 BIRTHDAY · 10 CRUMBLE · 11 COAST · 12 RUNNING
Down: 1 ROCKET · 2 FAMILY · 5 BISCUIT · 7 TOMATO · 9 HELEN

The biscuit-tin puzzle

Helen brought pudding, James brought flowers, and Leah brought bread. Helen’s clue fixes the pudding; James cannot have bread, so he must have flowers.

The family quiz

1. Three. 2. Northumberland. 3. A museum, lunch and a bookshop. 4. Her missing mug. 5. Red. 6. A cardboard rocket. 7. Six. 8. The left slipper.

Word search

X D V X L E A H R C S
N J A M E S B A C G H
O S C A R Q T A R G W
P U W R N B H M O S I
Z O A Y Z E F W A N K
I E P G Y N K D C Y M
D L L P T I Z B X O A
R D M C Y R J T U T L
S G W C B V H Y O J C
H D M I O U L F L M L
G A R T H U R V I W V