

# Trending Now

The mighty cauldron stood black, silent and accusingly cold in the darkened fireplace. Sasiya turned her back on it, pointedly ignoring it, and took another long sip of her gin. She didn't need that reminding her of her hunger; the tastes of steaming hot ... no! She quickly turned her mind to preparing the spice rub for dinner. Chermoula Chicken with Potatoes and Tomatoes – again. Tonight she was feeling it badly. Even preparing the chicken had reminded her too strongly how long it had been. She brushed back a tear.

These last few years had been particularly hard. She'd tried everything. She took another long sip of her gin and slid the heavy earthenware pan into her electric oven. There was no point going through the whole rigmarole of getting the fireplace lit just for a baking pan. The chicken would take a while, so she took her glass outside and sat on the old bench to catch the dying rays of the day as the colour bled from the surrounding forest leaving it dark and gloomy.

The last rays lingered on the line of delicate marzipan flowers alongside the path, sparks of light and colour setting the sugar crystals aglow. It had taken her weeks to fashion them. Skill, pride, and sugar had been poured into their creation in equal measures. Had even one child been down that path and taken a nibble of a petal? No. Not a one. She took another swig of her gin and leaned back against the sun-warmed gingerbread.

She closed her eyes. Nothing had worked. What was she missing? Down at the start of the track leading up to her cottage the only attention her big new signs had attracted were from teenagers with spray paint and the local health inspector. Flyers she had distributed around the town had apparently been consigned to rubbish bins very quickly. Her much more subtle approach of dropping trails of sweets from various parts of the city to her door had resulted in complaints in the newspaper and another visit by the health inspector. The people in town had labeled her as evil, but not for eating children but because she tried to feed them sugar. Some even went as far as suggesting she was in collusion with the sugar industry. She shuddered at the stern telling off she'd got from the health inspector about the societal costs of high sugar diets. How was she to be a proper witch when she couldn't even attract children? In the old days, it had been easy. In the old days there weren't anti-sugar campaigners. In the old days you weren't shamed for giving children sweets.

What else could she do? She felt like a failure. To be a witch required certain standards. You had to live in a house constructed from confectionery. You had to look old and crooked. You had to eat a child at least once a fortnight. Sasiya took a sip of her gin. She was letting witchcraft down. She'd tried so hard over the past few years to maintain the standards and meet the expectations of her fellow witches. How many of them were still going? Agantha had given up and retired. Myrtle the Mad had died, the Twins had both prettied themselves up, got into crystals, gone vegan and called themselves Wiccan like those pretend witches some of the teenagers dressed up as. Vegan for Puck's sake! Who else was there? Sasiya pondered a while but couldn't think of anyone. She went to take another big sip of her glass but found it empty.

She staggered to her feet and pushed into the darkened cottage seeking the gin bottle. The bottle stood empty on the bench. A nice gin infused with rosemary and kaffir lime leaf suggested itself to her grasping hand as she searched the gin cupboard. She smiled, that should complement the robust flavours of the Chermoula Chicken. There were still five minutes on the oven timer, so Sasiya unsteadily went about setting the table and pouring herself another generous serving of gin.

Steam curled and the warm scent of smoked paprika and cumin spread from the dish to fill the room. Sasiya had just laid the chicken on her plate and had her fork poised for the first taste when there was a smart knock on the door. She sighed. That wasn't a child's knock.

She hobbled to the door and opened it on a smiling dark-haired young man with a clipboard.

“Good Evening. I’m Yazan of Data2U.” He displayed his identification card. “How are you on this fine evening?”

“I’m okay thanks.” Sasiya mumbled.

“Great to hear. I am in the neighbourhood this evening looking to connect new customers to our services. Several of your neighbours have signed on with us under our new starting offer.”

Sasiya raised an eyebrow and glanced past his shoulder at the darkened forest. “Uhuh?”

“We offer unlimited broadband, and super-fast speeds, all for just twenty dollars a month with our introductory offer. What is your current provider charging you?”

“My current provider?”

“Internet.”

“I don’t have internet.”

“Well! We have a special package for new entrants to the internet world.” Yazan flipped through his notebook. “Your first two months free and we throw in a free laptop and smart phone. Just basic specs you understand. Enough to browse the web.”

“I don’t know....”

“If you don’t like it in your first month we will stop the service for you. No charge, no risk to you.”

“Well I ....”

“Don’t worry. Give it a try and see how you go.”

Sasiya took a sip of her gin and signed her name on the paper Yazan held out to her.

“And here too please.”

Sasiya signed again and cast a critical look at her handwriting. A bit wobbly but that was just the effects of the gin. She smiled and handed the pile of documents back to Yazan.

“Wonderful.” he stowed the papers. “The installers will be around tomorrow to get you set up. Thank you and welcome aboard.”

The first rays of the morning found Sasiya sitting at her table riffling through the pile of paper Yazan had left behind. “What on earth have I signed up for?” Half of the documents made no sense to her. The other half made sense if you read them as if consulting a scrying device. With a fresh helping of porridge in front of her, she returned to deciphering the glossy documents. The first spoonful had just about made it to her mouth when there was a knock on the door.

“Good morning Ma’am. My name is Changaz from Data2U. How are you this morning?”

“Fine thanks.” muttered Sasiya.

“I’m here to install your broadband connection and get you set up with your new laptop and smart phone. My team are busy laying the fibre and will be here soon. In the meantime where would you like your WiFi router and ONT?”

Sasiya suddenly realised how hungry she was. This web thing was extraordinary. The whole afternoon had disappeared in a wandering trail of links, pages, and blogs. Now it was threatening to absorb her evening too. When she considered how many food blogs she had read and how many carefully composed photos of delicious looking dishes had flown by her fascinated gaze, it was small wonder she was feeling peckish. With a bowl of left over potato and chickpeas in tamarind sauce for company she continued her exploration. As she read more she realised there was a lot of plagiarism between the various recipe sites but they could all be traced to some innovative cook somewhere. To be plagiarised meant that the recipes must have been good. It all seemed to be happening on a site called Instagram. Sasiya felt an excitement she hadn’t felt in years. She could be one of the innovators. She could see it now. Her own corner featuring her recipes, her photos. Maybe here she would find herself a new place.

Sasiya gazed at the button. She felt nervous. What if people didn’t like it? In a way it was a thrill. She hadn’t felt like this since she was a girl trying out her first spell. For the millionth time she

reviewed her post. The spelling and grammar were perfect. The photo was crisp and clear. She was particularly proud of the photo. Having a ready supply of black tablecloths, exquisitely polished silverware, and dribbly candles had made the set up easy and accentuated the colours of the capsicum and rich darkness of the sauce. “I’m doing it!” she said and clicked the “post” button before she could come up with another reason to delay.

A couple of days went by before Sasiya dared look at her post again. With her heart in her mouth, she logged in. There was her post and beside it some numbers. At first the numbers did not register with her and she stared at them dumbly. It had been viewed 53 times, someone had downloaded her recipe, and she had 45 “likes”, and now had two followers. There were other people out there who liked what she had to offer. She wiped a tear from her eye. This was far better than she had expected. In her mind a swathe of recipes jostled for her attention bursting with the common desire of all recipes; to be shared.

“By including citrus in the dressing this ensures good uptake of iron. ‘Til next time, thanks for watching and please subscribe.” Sasiya gave the camera a smile and paused. Instagram had been a great start but her followers had been very keen to see her in action and encouraged her to start a Youtube channel. Gone was the bent and crooked old lady look. Sasiya had done her research and quickly realised that smart looks but with a large wedge of individuality were essential for your personal branding. Now Sasiya stood straight, almost imperious, her gray tangle of hair had been regrown black as midnight and cut to a chic bob. Her wardrobe had been replaced with sleek long sleeved black skivvies, black bolero jackets, and sharp black trousers, none of which ever seemed to pick up flour. She strode around to the camera and stopped recording.

It was so much easier now. Her “cooking with kids” channel was doing well. She wondered why she had persisted with her old traditional wicked-witch routine for so long. The recognition she had sought so hard was now a massive tide that would carry her away if she wasn’t careful. She marked a section of video as a fade out, and scrubbed the bar back to the start of the clip. She would see how long she could run with this. Like all things, it had its own lifetime. Who knew where the future would go? This time around she was resolved not to get trapped in expectations but instead move and adapt as things changed. In the meantime she was busy and happy.

She fiddled with a pen beside her laptop. Maybe a party recipe. Some sort of finger food for her next edition.