

# CAITLIN MORAN

## You'll never guess my death row last meal – we lived on it growing up. It's cheap and delicious

I am not one to throw the cat among the pigeons. As someone who likes both cats and pigeons, I dislike how unpleasant it would be for both of them. But recently, I was in a conversation where I felt *compelled* to become momentarily controversial.

The subject was – as is true of half of all controversial conversations – food. The unfortunate prospect of the Third World War had prompted everyone to speculate on what meal they would miss most, when we are, in but a few short months, reduced to fighting each other on the streets for the last rat carcass. There were the usual roasts, curries and pies. Chips were recurrent. And, as always, no one said salad. In the Shag, Marry, Kill of foods, salad is never, ever the bride.

Anyway, everyone had been debating for a while, until I could bear it no more.

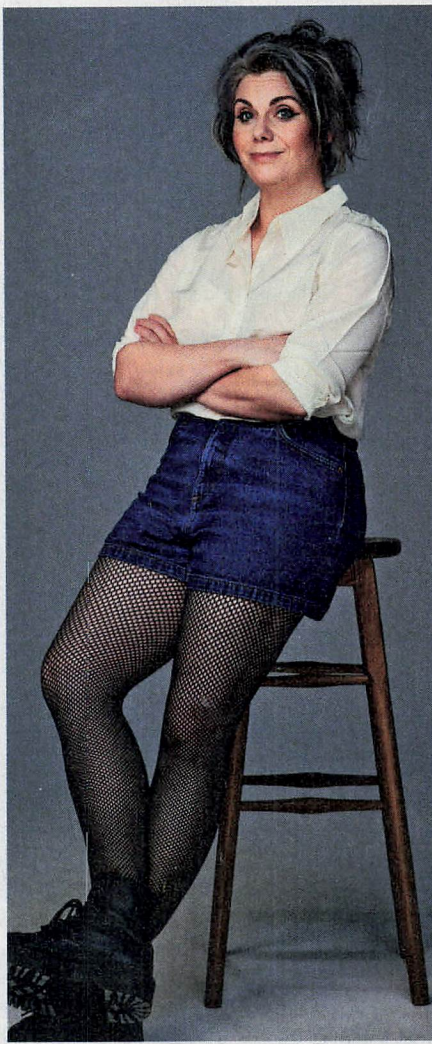
“It’s *mad* that there is any discussion about which is the best food,” I said, after “tinging” my glass with my fork for silence. “It is *obvious* which is the best food. It towers above all the rest. It is in a different category entirely.”

I allowed a dramatic pause.  
“It is *soup*.”

Well, in the kerfuffle that followed, many heated words were exchanged, and several people did not cover themselves in glory. People are passionate about food. They love what they love. But if they, and you, do not love soup the best, they and you are, sadly, wrong.

Why is soup the best? That is not the question. The question is: why *isn't* soup the best? Let's begin with the primary power of soup: that it isn't merely “a food” – *but a whole format*. If we accept my – correct – definition that soup is essentially something “half savoury liquid, half any other delicious thing you want to throw in there”, we can immediately see the freedom, the joy, the *miracle* of soup.

Soup is a world-building concept. It can handle whoever you want to be today. If you are feeble and in need of comfort, you can turn to the comfort of leek and potato. If you feel more complex and in need of *zing*, construct a glorious, fragrant pho. And if the day has been a bitch and demands you end it full of two pints of hot, salty cream, then clam chowder is there, waiting.



**‘In a world before IV drips, it was soup that kept invalids going. Even now, Heinz cream of tomato soup is the NHS in a tin’**

The Soup Galaxy contains both the no-nonsense pan of lamb scouse and the delicate tureen of lobster bisque. Whoever you are and whatever has happened, soup has your back. Soup is going to make this work for you. Soup is your guy.

And soup has always been your guy. For let us now turn to Everyone's Personal History With Soup. If we accept my – again, correct – definition that all loose purees are soup, then what do we wear our babies on? *Soup*. Soup is the first meal of every human. And then, at the other end of our lives – a bit low on energy and teeth – what is likely to also be our *last meal*? Again, soup.

Every single person who died in the 19th century passed away full of beef tea, aka soup. In a world before IV drips, it was soup that kept invalids going. Even now, if you have a cold, what is it that you require? A tin of Heinz cream of tomato soup. Heinz cream of tomato soup is the NHS in a tin.

Let us finally turn to the world's second most controversial topic: money. Economically, soup is the true friend of the poor – because the primary ingredient in any soup is “half a pan of water”. Soup *really* knows how to pad out an onion. We all know the folk tale of *Stone Soup* – wherein a charming stranger arrives in a village with an empty soup pot and tells everyone she is about to make the miracle of “stone soup” from just water and stones. “All I need from the village is a little onion/celery/potato/salt... *for the flavour*,” she says, cunningly. An hour later, there is a delicious soup. And all the awestruck villagers agree, they had no idea stones were so ambrosial.

As someone who basically lived on stone soup from 1985-92, I can confirm how low cost it is. And nutritious too – for while, as we know, no one's favourite meal is salad, pop all that veg in a stock, blitz it with butter and *wham*: vegetable soup is the hot, creamy, *drinkable* salad you will actually enjoy.

So yes, if and when the bombs start raining down, I shall say a regretful farewell to civilisation, climb into a cupboard with a full tureen and recite the rosary that comforts me best: “*Bouillabaisse, borscht, chicken noodle, consommé, Cullen skink, egusi, fufu, gazpacho, gumbo, laksa, lentil, matzo ball, miso, ramen, ribollita, tom yum, vichyssoise...*” ■