

## LIFE ON A PLATE

### SEASON 4, EPISODE 8: Ashley Jensen

#### SPEAKERS

Ashley Jensen, Alison, Yasmin Khan

#### Yasmin Khan 00:00

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Hi, I'm Yasmin Khan. And you're listening to *Life on a Plate*, the podcast from Waitrose. Throughout the season, my co-host Alison Oakervee and I are going to be talking to a range of fantastic guests from many walks of life and asking them to share their stories through the food memories, dishes and ingredients that mean the most to them.

Hi Alison, how are you?

#### Alison 01:49

Hi, I'm really well, thank you. How about you?

#### Yasmin Khan 01:51

I'm good. I'm good. I am very excited this week because it feels like we're kind of approaching and entering the festive season now. Opened up my advent calendar yesterday. I've got a very nice, PIP and nut chocolate one. So do you have an advent calendar? Do you go down that route?

#### Alison 02:08

No, not this year. I'm not a big chocolate fan. I like buying them for other people but I'm quite happy to be spared the chocolate.

#### Yasmin Khan 02:15

You can get other kinds of ones now can't you, with like cheese and gin and tonic?

**Alison**

Gin and tonic?

**Yasmin Khan**

Alright, I'll make a note of that for next year. I mean, how does Christmas unfold for you? Do you do most of the cooking?

**Alison** 02:28

Yeah, I mean, I'm part of a big family and we all get together. So you know, Christmas Day, I probably do most of the cooking but we all are quite good at coming into the kitchen and helping each other out and kind of, doing the vegetables at the same time.

**Yasmin Khan** 02:40

Do you have any tips? Like what are your top few Christmas cooking tips?

**Alison** 02:45

Do you know, the top tip is something that Heston said one year and that is base the timing and serving your meal around the roast potatoes, because yeah, everything else can wait and doesn't really spoil if it's too, you know, not cooked enough or needs to wait five minutes. The turkey improves by resting or the goose improves by resting, the stuffing will stay warm and red cabbage doesn't take that long to heat through. Whereas the roast potatoes if they're not quite right, they're not as good. So get them really cooked and perfect and then serve dinner around that.

**Yasmin Khan** 03:22

Well yeah, I kind of agree with that, because I feel timings is where I get the most stressed. I mean, I'm a big proponent of kind of, doing as much prep as possible in advance.

**Alison** 03:33

But also there's some things that if you do ahead - improve, like red cabbage, and cranberry sauce can be done a couple of days in advance, and they kind of get better if they're not served straightaway.

**Yasmin Khan** 03:44

Absolutely. And that kind of brings us on to the theme of this week's interview because we were very fortunate to talk to the wonderful Ashley Jensen, a Scottish actress who is in the new Waitrose Christmas ad, isn't she?

**Alison** 04:03

She is. She was really great.

**Yasmin Khan** 04:05

Yeah, she's such a brilliant actress and is well known for her roles as the seamstress, Christina in Ugly Betty, and more recently in the comedy series Catastrophe as well as Afterlife. And what I love about

her work is even though she plays these kind of so called supporting roles, she's always so brilliant in them and brings such subtlety and variety and humor to everything she plays.

**Alison** 04:31

I mean, she's just so funny. And we had a great conversation about food.

**Yasmin Khan** 04:36

Yeah, what really struck me was her real passion for social justice. And the way she talked with such concern about food poverty in the UK, which was really inspiring and very, very moving.

**Alison**

It was.

**Yasmin Khan**

So without any further ado, here is our interview with Ashley Jensen.

Hi Ashley welcome to Life on a Plate, we are so happy to talk to you.

**Ashley Jensen** 05:07

Thank you for having me, talking about one of my most favorite things - food.

**Yasmin Khan** 05:11

Well you've come to the right place and I was particularly excited to talk to you this week because, drumroll, you are the star of the Waitrose Christmas ad this year aren't you?

**Ashley Jensen** 05:23

I am. Me and Heston Blumenthal. My good mate, Heston.

**Yasmin Khan** 05:29

Tell us a little bit of the behind the scenes of that, you know, what was the filming like?

**Ashley Jensen** 05:34

It was very easy actually. It was a really really pleasant experience, it was like me, as me, dressed up in lovely clothes going to various Christmas dinners, Christmas lunches, Christmas parties and just generally getting in the Christmas vibe and talking about the wonderful food and how Christmas is frankly all about the food really.

**Yasmin Khan** 06:00

Absolutely! What I really liked about it is not only are you a comedy genius, as you always are, but I feel like, let's be honest, Christmas can be quite stressful for various reasons can't it but there is that moment when you've like got a plate full of food and you can kind of put your feet up and you know in my case just drown everything in gravy and just really enjoy yourself, so I love the theme because if nothing else I think some of the food is certainly what gets me excited.

**Ashley Jensen** 06:30

Well it is, I mean I think with Christmas, it can actually be quite divisive with food can't it?

**Yasmin Khan** 06:34

What's your favourite bit of the Christmas meal?

**Ashley Jensen** 06:36

Listen, I'm a sprout lover! I love Brussels sprouts with stilton and walnuts, I love them with chestnuts. I love them with mostly pancetta, which I remember when I was doing that line and I said should I be saying sprouts and then kind of almost in the background kind of going, *that are mostly pancetta*. So there's something there for everyone. You don't need to eat the sprouts, it's mostly pancetta anyway.

**Alison** 07:02

I was gonna say, what about in the dressing room - were you able to have a Heston mince pie before you started filming at all?

**Ashley Jensen** 07:08

Do you know, they didn't because we shot it about a month ago and it wasn't really Christmassy then really. So nobody was really thinking about mince pies quite at that point, about actually eating them as it were. I'd say that now that the advert has launched I think it is officially Christmas isn't it really? No. So I think we can, we can indulge.

**Yasmin Khan** 07:31

It's probably time for me to have a mince pie because I've not had one yet, have you?

**Ashley Jensen** 07:35

Well my son has already got involved with the mince pies. He's like, can I have the mince pie? Can I have it now? Can I have it now? When are we putting the tree up?

**Yasmin Khan** 07:42

It's funny I saw this thing or something on Instagram a few weeks ago where Tana France had put up his Christmas tree on Halloween. Which I thought well that's just confusing. That's bold!

**Ashley Jensen** 07:53

Yes. That's mixing all different kinds of foods. You can't have a toffee apple and a mince pie in the same room. That's just too confusing!

**Alison** 08:00

Also it's got winter and autumn kind of all muddled up.

**Ashley Jensen** 08:03

Yes, it's all muddled up the colour scheme. Get them out of the way. Yeah, then have a bit of fireworks and then we can go boldly into Christmas. Can't we? Yes.

**Alison** 08:14

So you've not had any mince pies yet, but your son's had mince pies?

**Ashley Jensen** 08:18

He's got involved with Heston's mince pies, yes.

**Yasmin Khan** 08:21

I've actually never met Heston but he carries quite a lot of like authority and gravitas, doesn't he?

**Ashley Jensen** 08:25

He's amazing actually, it was really fascinating. That was the first scene - the first day and the first scene, I kind of wheeled out wearing a long, silvery catsuit with a plate of Heston's mince pies and walked up to him and said, 'I just whipped these up myself'. And then he glares at me and then in between the takes him and I ended up having, we got into quite an in depth conversation quite quickly, we ended up we were talking about lockdown and, and how there was elements of it that actually, we quite liked, like the fact that hedgehogs came into your garden and that the world stood still. And I mean, I'm in a very fortunate position, that I have a garden and in some ways, it's just like being out of work actor, a little bit. Where the world stands still, but just to sort of, you know, stop and know that everybody else had stopped. And you know, that, obviously, there was a whole home schooling thing, but I kind of, sort of, got into that a little bit as well and baked banana bread, like everybody. Bought a bread maker like everybody.

**Yasmin Khan** 09:35

I think that's a really interesting point, though, isn't it? Because I feel, obviously given everything that's happened, you know, and there still are, you know, huge terrible repercussions with the pandemic, you know, in terms of health and economics and to people's sanity. But I do also feel that there was another element, I think of just appreciating the world pausing and stopping for those, you know, who had the privilege of that being a financially okay thing to do.

**Ashley Jensen** 10:02

I know, I know and it's interesting that the whole climate crisis has really reached a crescendo at the minute and I don't know whether that's maybe on the tail end of that. That people actually realising, looking at our beautiful world and having time to stop and think and not rushing to get a train and rushing to be here and there and fit this meeting in and do that and go here and go there but people. Heston, my mate Heston -we were talking about like a sort of period of, of reflection, and like self reflection and, and just stopping and thinking about important things and, you know, tiny moments of joy and holding on to those little moments.

**Yasmin Khan** 10:49

I mean, I really remember really early on, you know, when it was like dead stressful and panicky, we thought the world is going to end in a, like an apocalypse.

**Ashley Jensen 10:55**

When everyone bought toilet roll and pasta?

**Yasmin Khan 10:59**

I didn't do that but I do remember just having this moment when I opened my fridge, and, you know, just saw that it was full of food and it was just this moment, I just was like that, I'm just so grateful that I'm in that position where I've got food in the house, and that I've got shelter.

**Ashley Jensen 11:16**

Do you know it is interesting that you talk about that because the young man, that without any doubt, who stands above everybody else for me during this whole year is Marcus Rashford and I can get quite emotional actually, when I think about him, in fact, Marcus Rashford and his mum, because his mum produced that wonderful young man who, I don't know, just his strength of character and his goodwill and his sense of injustice and inequality and his dignity and his authority of who he is as a person. He held the government to account and he got the government to U turn. And he's still doing it apart from being an amazing footballer. You know his graft, his determination, his, I just have so much respect for Marcus Rashford at the moment and what he's continuing to do. And you know, and that is one of the big things that came out of this, is a food crisis that in this day and age in 2021, there are children that don't have enough food, there are families that are really struggling even more than they were two years ago. And that for me is just, it's horrifying. And for me, I'm an ambassador for Save the Children, and at the beginning of all that it would be like we're going to Africa and going to a remote village and you know, it's difficult for these children or the migrants in Lesbos, and then you go, I'm going to Wales, because there are children there, in our country, that are struggling and families that are struggling. And that as a mum, for me just makes my heart ache. Really I find it so hard. And you know, my son and I used to watch the news every day, you know, it was the obsession with the news and the numbers and the figures and what was happening. And, and I think it's our responsibility, as you know, the older generation to educate the young generation, about what's going on in the world, because that's the only way that things can change. And that is for everything, it's for racial discrimination, poverty, climate crisis, it's everything and is educating all the kids below us, you know for the next generations coming up, and I think that people are doing that now, I think a lot of the younger generations are more politically aware than, than maybe I was when I was that age, which I think is an excellent thing, and a positive thing.

**Ad: Yasmin Khan 13:57**

*This year, Waitrose and John Lewis are continuing their work with FareShare and HomeStart. To help support families in need at Christmas, the partnership will donate 1 million pounds to these and other local charities. And it's easy for you to give, just visit [waitrose.com/love](https://www.waitrose.com/love). Together we can make a real difference to families in need to find out more, including full terms and conditions, please go to [waitrose.com/love](https://www.waitrose.com/love).*

We're gonna come back to Christmas. But let's start with a little journey backwards into Ashley Jensen's life. So you grew up in Scotland?

**Ashley Jensen** 14:39

I did. I've got the accent to prove it.

**Yasmin Khan** 14:43

Yes. Me and Alison were talking, you know, ahead of this interview that we feel, which is probably universally felt isn't it, that Scottish food - it gets a bit of a bad rep, doesn't it?

**Ashley Jensen**

Yeah, It does get a bit of a bad rep.

**Yasmin Khan**

So I wanted to ask you, you know, what was food like for you when you were growing up?

**Ashley Jensen** 14:57

Well, I think for me sort of growing up in the 70s and 80s. I grew up with my grandparents as well as my Mum and my Gran did a fair amount of the cooking so she was coming out of that sort of post war thing so it was very traditional meat and two veg. You know, your mince and tatties, your stew and your rissoles and you're...

**Yasmin Khan**

Oh, what's a rissole?

**Ashley Jensen**

Never mind a rissole, what's a beef olive, have you heard of that? This was one of my favourite meals and...

**Yasmin Khan**

A beef olive?

**Ashley Jensen**

Nothing to do with olives. No idea why it's called an olive. It's kinda like a sort of bit of roast beef wrapped around a kind of spicy sausage thing I think, but you never see them anymore. It's like one of these 70s foods that's just died out like a rissole. What was a rissole? I think it was kind of like a burger.

**Alison** 15:51

It's a burger, a burger made up of the mince from your Sunday lunch. You put your cold leftover lamb or beef through the mincer and then you made a burger up with it as a rissole with a bit of onion and egg

**Ashley Jensen** 16:04

Yeah, so it was very much kind of that.

**Yasmin Khan** 16:06

Hearty kind of, yeah.

**Ashley Jensen** 16:09

But when it became the 80s and we started getting, tins were very fashionable. And one of my favourite things were... Another thing that's disappeared was the four corn and the cobs in a can

**Alison**

Oh, yeah.

**Yasmin Khan**

What!

**Ashley Jensen**

Do you remember them?

**Alison** 16:26

I'm about the same age as you, so yeah I do remember

**Ashley Jensen** 16:29

Why are they not around anymore? They're brilliant.

**Yasmin Khan**

So you get four?

**Ashley Jensen**

Four big corn in the car. And it was a brilliant can. And you know, with that can, I was in the brownies in the Guides and I was, a very, very good Brownie and Guide.

**Alison** 16:41

Did you use it for quite a lot of badges.

**Ashley Jensen** 16:43

Well, we used it for a sausage sizzle. Oh, because it was big enough to be that little sort of pan. So you'd like drill, my grandpa would drill little holes in the side bit, make a little hooky thing and you'd hold it over the fire with your beans in it. So you know, see, that's very, very kind of eco friendly now isn't it doing all that sort of repurposing your four corns in a can? But the other thing was my Mum was kind of segwaying into the 80s. And then exotic foods began to come into my life like a kiwi fruit. Which was very exotic in about 1983. And the other thing was that she'd made chilli con carne. And this was a thing that we still laugh about, where I didn't want to eat it and my Mum couldn't understand why I didn't want to eat it. And I was like, I don't want to eat it. And then I ended up crying about it. And she was like, you're eating it, I've cooked it, you're eating it. To me, I was looking at the little kidney beans. And to me, they were either the kidney of a baby animal or a small edible rodent, one or the other. And I,

because I was coming from the world of my Gran, which was all living on onions and rissoles and beef olives and kidney pies and things. So I thought this was a tiny kidney. And it wasn't until later on. I was like that was why I didn't eat it because I thought it was like a sort of edible mouse's kidney.

**Alison** 18:07

If only she'd told you it was a bean.

**Ashley Jensen** 18:08

I know. I know. I know. Yeah.

**Yasmin Khan** 18:11

So I read somewhere that you were veggie when you were younger. Was that true?

**Ashley Jensen** 18:15

Yeah, well I was a pescatarian for 20 years

**Alison**

20 years, that's a good innings

**Ashley Jensen**

Before it was easily accessible. And when I was in America, one of my pescatarian, vegetarian moments was Christmas because it was almost, like well, clearly one can't have a turkey? Have you heard of the tofurky?

**Yasmin Khan** 18:39

I have had a tofurky before actually.

**Ashley Jensen** 18:41

Have you? Well, you can't get them in this country. It was like imagine like a small, slightly squashed chicken in a cardboard box. So you would take it home. And then you'd stuff this sort of... was it soy? Or was it Quorn? I can't quite remember...

**Yasmin Khan** 18:57

It was made from tempeh, I think.

**Ashley Jensen** 19:01

Oh was it? But it looked like a turkey shaped, fashioned into the shape of a chicken really, it wasn't quite as big as a turkey. But you stuffed it and it puffed up. And then you could carve it. So yeah. But I was a vegetarian for 20 years. And I tell you in 1990 in Scotland was quite difficult, especially because I did a lot of theatre at the beginning, and I would do all this sort of theatre where you would get in the back of the van and drive to the village hall. You would put the set up, you'd perform the show to seven people. You'd take the set down, you get in your van and you go somewhere else again and everywhere would be shut and you'd go to these little boarding houses and stay in these little rooms

where there were still kind of like nylon sheets in the bed and things and the wee lady would be like 'I can make you something to eat, yes'.

'Well, I'm a vegetarian'.

'Oh, but you'll take a sausage?'

'No, no, I won't because that's meat.'

'Ay, but that's not real meat. What about, what about this soap? There's not much ham in it.'

'But if there is ham in it, there is in fact ham in it'.

So yeah, it was quite difficult being in Scotland in the early 90s and not eating meat.

### **Yasmin Khan**

What stopped you from being a vegetarian?

### **Ashley Jensen**

It was when my wee boy was born. And at the time I was a vegetarian, and I was giving him some meat substitute bacon, ham, sausage thing. And I was just sitting sort of early one morning, and I happened to pick up this packet of, and this was in America at the time, so there were obviously a lot more vegetarian products. And it was also 20 years later. And I looked at the back on the ingredients, and I didn't recognise any of them as a food stuff. And I was like 'what am I feeding him' and had been so diligent throughout my pregnancy with what went into my body. And I went, why am I giving him this? With funny colourings and preservatives, and I don't know what it is. So it was at that moment that I decided, well, if I ate meat, but ate it sustainably and sensibly then, so that was why I reverted to eating meat.

### **Yasmin Khan 21:14**

What about cooking? Do you enjoy cooking?

### **Ashley Jensen 21:16**

I do enjoy cooking. But I would say that I'm not, I'm not a fancy cook. I'm all a bit rustic. And it's a bit improvisational, I'm not keen on following a recipe, which is why I'm a terrible baker. Because that's all science, if you deviate from that, plus, I just think I look at how much sugar goes into things. And I'm like, Oh, I can't be doing that. So I don't really do baking, really, but I do cook. And so this is why I love Jamie Oliver's school of cooking, where you just throw it into a pot and people like him who I think have taken the fear and the pretension out of some cooking because I think it can be quite kind of intimidating, really. So I'm a bit, I can be a bit wild in the kitchen in that I just I will taste it. And I'm the best at cooking when there's nothing in the house.

### **Yasmin Khan 22:10**

So basically, you'd be great on Ready Steady Cook, is what you're saying?

### **Ashley Jensen 22:13**

Yeah, well, yes, yes, that sort of thing. But I can open a fridge and people will go there's nothing there. And I'm like, no, no, no, wait, wait, wait a minute, wait a minute, and I kind of look there is no waste in my house.

**Alison** 22:24

is there one thing that you always have as a go to ingredient in your store cupboard?

**Ashley Jensen** 22:29

I've always got a noodle. I love a noodle soup like a ramen

**Alison** 22:32

And dried noodles just stay in the back of the cupboard easily.

**Ashley Jensen** 22:37

Forever! There was a while when I first went to London and I discovered Chinatown. I was just like, I am in heaven here. I just, I loved it. And that was a day out for me. And I would just wander around the supermarkets in Chinatown. And I would buy things that I didn't even know what they were. And I mean, honestly, it was black fungus, lotus seeds, fish balls and bonito flakes that made the fish look alive and stuff. So I really got into all that when I first moved to London because I'd never really had that. No, I'd come from a different, very different world, sort of like Southwest of Scotland, quite traditional cooking. And I was like, Oh my gosh, this was like amazing. And it was so inspirational.

**Yasmin Khan** 23:24

I mean, that's one of the joys of food, though, isn't it? It just, it's almost kind of goes to the counter of what you were saying, you know, that feeling of instead of being scared of the kitchen, just really seeing it as a place to kind of have some fun and experiment.

**Ashley Jensen** 23:35

Yeah, I think I've never been very much one for like, a rulebook really and I remember I felt that when I went to America, everybody was very organised and had five year plans. And then you I was like, I don't even know what I'm having for my tea, let alone a five year plan.

**Yasmin Khan** 23:56

So you became interested in acting quite young, didn't you?

**Ashley Jensen**

I did. Yeah.

**Yasmin Khan**

What was it that sparked your interest in the stage at that point?

**Ashley Jensen** 24:05

But it wasn't really the stage I wouldn't say, it was, it was funny actually it was. Allison will remember this, Some Mothers Do 'Ave Them. Frank Spencer, and that was, I mean, he was my acting hero. And I was just like, I was obsessed with him. I used to do impressions of him and I used to go about in a little berry and a little rain coat doing my little voice.

**Yasmin Khan 24:39**

So did you always liked making people laugh?

**Ashley Jensen 24:42**

I think, actually yeah, I don't know whether it's to do with being an only child. But I was just speaking to somebody the other day about how I used to ask for things like false noses and make up for Christmas presents or I would go in and go 'look I'm a zombie' and I've done like, I've given myself a false nose with a prosthetic nose thing and fake blood and wigs. And I would do radio shows with funny voices. But yeah, but I think I always was sure of what I wanted to do. But I didn't quite know how I was going to do it. And in the same breath, I never thought that TV would be a world that I would get into. And I thought that actresses in this country, went to the theatre and you did the theatre. And that was really how I started, I suppose I went to the National Youth Theatre. And I think my Mum was like, well, this will either make her a break her, she'll either come back and she'll go, Oh no, it was terrible. It was Yeah. And I was like, 'No, this is definitely what I want to do'. And applied to drama school, and at the time, they were all, I didn't think I was going to be able to get a grant for anywhere down in England, because it was, you know, it was expensive, because you had to pay your train fare down there, you have to pay an audition fee. So I had two options, which was the one in Glasgow or the other one, that was a bit sub, in Edinburgh. And my first edition was Glasgow; I didn't get into that. So I got into the other one that is, unfortunately no more, which is another little cause that I can feel a bit kind of passionate about is like, you know, children from working class backgrounds, being able to find access to a career in the arts. There were a whole lot of doors that were already shut to me, because I couldn't get to London to, you know, the train fare down the audition fee. I was fortunate enough that I did get into this one in Edinburgh, and at the time was called Queen Margaret college. And I had the best time because I was surrounded by like-minded people who, who were as daft as I was at the time and wanted to act and perform.

**Yasmin Khan 26:57**

And did you take on like more comedic roles back then, as well? Because I feel like that is obviously what you're known for I feel more in your TV and film work.

**Ashley Jensen 27:07**

Well not really actually. I mean, at the beginning, I predominantly did theatre for about 10 years. And I'd say that my bag was kind of, it was new writing and I would work at places like the Tron and the Traverse in Scotland, like small new writing theatres or the Royal Core of the national studio in London. And then it began to be that I would be doing a theatre show and then I'd do my one line on television, which is more terrifying, I think than being the lead in a show because I feel as if I feel as if I'm well and truly served my apprenticeship because I've done theatre for some people who didn't really want to be there. And then started to do TV which involved going in and doing one line and having the director say 'Oh Ashley, you've got to wait until we say action'.

Right? Yes, yes. Because they don't teach you things like that. Or they didn't when I was at drama school about how to hit a mark and how big the lens is and don't do big faces if the cameras like right there, and technicalities that nobody tells you about - you just learn on the job really. So yeah, so I kind

of, I sort of like kind of went up the rungs of the ladder and then sometimes would find myself in America with the man bringing half a million pounds worth of diamonds for me to wear to the Emmys with a hair girl, a makeup girl and nail girl and a chauffeur out the back with a stretch limo and me with a dog hair all round the bottom of my dress.

**Yasmin Khan** 28:40

I mean, what was that transition to Hollywood like? You know, because it's a lot of people's dream isn't it, especially in the acting world.

**Ashley Jensen** 28:47

I know. It was never on the cards for me, I feel as if I sort of got there slightly by default, really. And I think I was also 30 when I went over there so I was, I'd been around the block a few times and I wasn't gonna be taken in by anything really. I don't know. I think I've still got the postwar granny thing of like 'Ay your feet firmly on the ground, and don't get carried away with your own self-importance' kind of thing, you know. But I think, I embraced what it was. And I would go, gosh, I can't believe I'm here. And sometimes watch myself and Ugly Betty, and I'd go, How did you get in? Why are you in this? In this big shiny show?

**Alison** 29:24

Do you have a favourite, whether it's movies, TV, or theatre?

**Ashley Jensen** 29:30

I don't feel as if I've done enough film to have a proper kind of opinion on that. But I feel as if I've, served a lot of time on television and I feel very comfortable on a set now. And I know I feel as if I know what I'm doing. I mean there's always things to learn and I think having an open mind and an open attitude to things as always, you can always glean from other people. I love being part of television and being, for me being part of something like Extras, or, or even Ugly Betty, which touched a lot of people's hearts, you know, the whole ethos of what Ugly Betty was about and it was, you know, just be yourself and beauty is within, in this mad world that we're in at the minute, you know what it's all kind of about your outside package. Although I don't know, maybe we're beginning to understand that there is a wee bit more and things like kindness can be and love can be revered as much as an unlined face.

**Yasmin Khan** 30:39

How is that for you, though? Because you have such admiration for people within your realm and field? Because of course, it is so external, isn't it? And, you know, how do you navigate that, as you know, especially I think, as a woman, which just, you know, so much more challenging?

**Ashley Jensen** 30:56

Yeah, well, it's almost like one of the last taboos as a woman, and how dare you get old and I think that, you know, hopefully the tide is turning ever so slightly on that now. And that we can have women in lead roles, talking about being a woman, and a woman who is getting old and what a woman that gets old goes through. And there's this obsession that we have to be, that women are not allowed to get older, and we have to try and make ourselves look younger again. And I find that awful sad, and I hope that

I've got enough dignity to be able to just go, I'm 53. Yeah, this is what a face looks like. Because what's the alternative? Being dead actually, not being here. And I feel that we owe it to younger generations to actually say it's okay. It's okay, I can still see, ish, although I've got my glasses here, I can still hear. I can still walk, bits of me, don't work quite as well as they did. But you know, I've done a lot of walking in my life. I've done a lot of talking in my life. And I feel it's about just kind of getting to the point where you feel grateful for, for the little things. And you know, when I don't want to have to inject my face to try and look like other people. And I just it's not, it's not a great message. I don't think to send your children. I mean, and I don't have a girl, I have a boy, but I even don't think it would be a good message to send him, which was an interesting thing, because you were asking me, I think there was a thing we were talking about comfort food. And I thought about that question. I thought that's an interesting way of putting it. Because I don't think I have comfort food, because food in general just makes me happy. Do you know what I mean? And I get excited about food, and I don't need it to find solace. And I don't need it to find comfort. If you start denying yourself food, like say like, I did think about this and I thought quite a lot of the food, if I had to categorise it would be cheese, with some form of carb, be it cheesy mash, or mac and cheese or a big camembert with white crusty bread or whatever. I think if we start, if you start denying yourself, food, I mean, obviously, don't eat that everyday for every meal. But if you start denying yourself food, that's when you become obsessed by it. If I want a Monster Munch, I'll have a Monster Munch.

**Yasmin Khan** 33:35

What flavour would you have Monster Munch?

**Ashley Jensen** 33:39

Pickled onion.

**Yasmin Khan**

Well done, that's the right answer. Yeah.

**Yasmin Khan** 33:48

This is a time of year when, you know, we all start thinking about some of the things we've discussed about, you know, things we're grateful for, but also some of the things that we care about. And we you know, you mentioned Marcus Rashford. And the incredible work that he's done, you know, literally feeding, you know, schoolchildren with his campaign work. If Santa could grant you one wish for the world? What would it be?

**Ashley Jensen** 34:14

Oh, gosh,

**Yasmin Khan** 34:15

I know it's hard isn't it.

**Ashley Jensen** 34:16

But that is it. That's a difficult one because there's a lot of them, isn't there? I think, keeping it within the theme of food. I think that it would be, it'd be wonderful if we could have our country, a place to be proud of, that every child is not hungry and every family has got enough food at Christmas. And for the foreseeable... forever, forever. It kind of like I said before, it just makes my heart ache that there are little children that are struggling to eat. So I think that if we could all eat and be warm, and that's another thing that's very relevant at the minute, isn't it? Oh, gosh, my wish would go on and that everybody would have enough money and everyone would have a roof over their head. And yeah, I think we need the next generation of people in power to talk a little bit of sense really, don't we!

**Yasmin Khan** 35:13

I reckon if you leave out some of those Heston mince pies, Santa's bound to give you those. I think that seems like a very good Christmas wish to say, well, I'll ask the same thing for Santa as well. Let's see if he comes back to us on it. Yeah.

**Alison** 35:29

And now it's time for Kitchen grill, our quick fire round that enables us to find out even more about you. Tea or coffee?

**Ashley Jensen** 35:37

I can barely answer that with a one thing answer. I start my day with Lapsang souchongh tea. And there's sometimes in the morning when I'm a bit half asleep, and I put the wrong... I put in a Yorkshire tea bag. And I go oh, that's not right. And I have to start with Lapsang souchongh tea.

**Yasmin Khan** 35:58

Is it not too smokey. It reminds me of Scottish whisky. Back to the Scotland thing.

**Ashley Jensen** 36:06

But having said that, I'm a Scottish person who doesn't like whisky.

**Yasmin Khan**

Oh, Okay.

**Ashley Jensen**

So I would say, see I love I get excited about a decent flat white coffee as well. And I'm very much a coffee snob. And I'm a tea snob as well, to be honest, but I think so much so, that on set people say to me Ashley, you're very low maintenance, you never ask for tea. And I say to them, it's because I don't want that amount of disappointment on a daily basis of having the wrong amount of milk and the wrong temperature of my tea. Or instant coffee that's not made from you know, I've got my own little can have all sorts of little gadgets where I can get proper coffee, I'd rather not bother if I can't have a proper coffee.

**Alison Oakervee** 36:52

Porridge or cereal?

**Ashley Jensen** 36:55

Porridge.

**Alison Oakervee**

How do you have it?

**Ashley Jensen**

I do have salt in it. But I'm afraid I do put sugar in it. And then I put milk on the top of it again. So that the porridge actually swings about like an island

**Alison Oakervee**

Nice.

**Ashley Jensen**

In and the sugar kind of goes can go brown on the top a little bit when it hits the top of the porridge.

**Alison Oakervee**

Is it brown sugar on the top?

**Ashley Jensen**

Brown sugar on the top. Yes.

**Alison Oakervee** 37:20

Nice. That's how I take my porridge too.

**Ashley Jensen** 37:23

Is it, is. It? Yes. Sometimes I will deviate and have a little maple syrup on it. Here's a one have you heard of peanut butter porridge?

**Alison Oakervee**

I've not tried that.

**Ashley Jensen**

I've not had it either. But there was somebody on set that was trying to sort of maintain a high protein healthy diet so they put peanut butter

**Alison Oakervee** 37:41

But I like the cold melt and the hot porridge combo

**Ashley Jensen** 37:45

I do, see that's these are tiny moment of joy that we need to hold on to Alison that little moment.

**Alison** 37:50

And mash or chips?

**Ashley Jensen** 37:53

Oh mash! Possibly cheesy mash, Buttery, cheesy mash maybe with even a tiny bit of spring onion. So that would be cheese and onion mash.

**Alison** 38:08

Nice. bacon or smoked salmon?

**Ashley Jensen** 38:13

Bacon. Oh, but done to a crisp.

**Alison** 38:17

Nice. butter or olive oil?

**Ashley Jensen** 38:28

Butter!

**Alison**

You look so guilty saying that?

**Ashley Jensen**

Do you know what, here's another discovery that I've had – a crumpet with butter, Marmite and cheese. Oh. Have you ever done that?

**Yasmin Khan** 38:38

I've done that. Yeah. Done that!,

**Ashley Jensen** 38:40

This was a whole new world to me. This was another actor that did this. And I just couldn't believe

**Yasmin Khan** 38:44

I'll tell you what. I've got another one on that. A crumpet with butter, cheese and lime pickle.

**Ashley Jensen** 38:56

Yes. Yes. Give that a go.

**Alison**

Right. Chocolate or crisps?

**Ashley Jensen**

Crisps, all the way.

**Alison** 39:03

What flavour?

**Ashley Jensen** 39:04

Well, oh gosh!

**Alison** 39:06

If it's pickled onion, Monster Munch

**Ashley Jensen** 39:08

Do you know what, I might even say - A frazzle

**Yasmin Khan** 39:11

Oh, sticking to the bacon theme

**Ashley Jensen** 39:15

It's kind of like, of like a sort of, they're more of a maze snack than a crisp, though aren't they? And it's funny. My cousin and I are kind of aficionados on crisps and maze snacks and the difference. And in fact, me and this other actor used to have conversations about 70s crisps when we probably should have been learning lines but we were talking about crumpets with cheese and Marmite and 70s crisps. When I was young, I remember, you might remember these Alison, do you remember, Bones crisps? Bones?

**Alison**

Oh, no.

**Ashley Jensen**

They would a maze snack salt and vinegar in a black packet. Now discontinued, sadly. But they were you know that salt and vinegar that makes you go, Ooooh

**Alison**

Nice. I like that. Yeah, yeah, really lip puckering. Fruit or veg?

**Ashley Jensen**

Veg. Hmm

**Alison** 40:07

Spicy or mild?

**Ashley Jensen**

Spicy.

**Alison**

And final one – Restaurant meal or sofa supper?

**Ashley Jensen 40:14**

Oh you see this is a difficult one.

**Alison 40:18**

Post pandemic, pre pandemic, we all might have all said something slightly different.

**Ashley Jensen 40:21**

But yeah, I think pre pandemic when people maybe went out a little bit more, sometimes I'd go how much? Could have made it at home for that, could have made it that's No, but no, I think I might say going out again, because I've kind of when, I've still, obviously all through work, I was very cautious and I didn't do anything really because I felt the responsibility of I can't have the show go down on my shoulders. But yes, I do. I think I might. I might go out, although I do quite like sitting on the sofa because the fridge is really near. But I'm going to say going out. Because I'm looking forward to kind of the world becoming a little more back to normal and, and being able to sort of look people in the eye and eavesdrop on people's conversations and discuss what people are wearing and all those wonderful people watching things that we did back in the old days.

**Alison 41:24**

Yeah, And it's an excuse to get dressed up again.

**Ashley Jensen 41:26**

I know.

**Alison 41:27**

Thanks, Ashley. That was the kitchen grill.

**Yasmin Khan 41:29**

And that was a lovely way to end this episode. And also this season of Life on a Plate. And Ashley, I just wanted to say it's been such a pleasure talking to you, not only about food, but your passion for social justice and against inequality just really shines through and it's been really kind of moving talking to you about that actually, and I really appreciate you raising it all.

**Ashley Jensen 41:52**

Thank you very much for having me. Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

**Yasmin Khan 42:00**

You've been listening to Life on a Plate from Waitrose with me, Yasmin Khan. Thank you to my co-host, Alison Oakervee. And our guest, Ashley Jensen. If you've enjoyed this conversation, you can find more

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