

# On The Brink



Visions of a retirement spent making jam and reclining in a rocking chair are all very well, but Olivia Greenway is discovering that her life isn't really turning out that way



In the past, I would daydream longingly about my retirement. It was light years away but I could see it clearly: a little cottage in the country with an Aga in the kitchen and a pretty garden filled with hollyhocks and honeysuckle. I'd spend my days casually swinging on a hammock, slung between two apple trees, Labrador at my feet, reading the latest blockbuster (that maybe I'd written). My well-behaved grandchildren would come to tea and feast on rustic homemade scones with just-bottled strawberry jam.

Over the years, as retirement has zoomed up in front of me far too quickly, I've had something of a reality check. I'm not keen on the country any more. It's fine for a long weekend, but often dark, muddy and windswept. It's also quiet; there is only so much sheep bleating and owl hooting I can stand. I've discovered Agas are very slow and really nice scones can be bought from a shop. Ditto strawberry jam. Dogs are absolutely out of the question if you travel frequently, which I now do. I'm not a sweet, little old lady at all; according to my children I'm often moody

and crotchety and given to clucking at things in disapproval. I also shout at the television. The novel remains half-written and if there's any reading in a hammock to do, I'd have to find my book first, as I keep going into rooms and asking myself, 'Why did I come in here?' As a final blow, my son and daughter have both announced they are not planning on having any children. So my little fantasy of growing old has been well and truly compromised.

I've changed too. As the big birthday approaches, it doesn't seem like the great age I imagined it to be when I was in my thirties. There are a few creaking joints and I don't go white water rafting much these days, but I'm certainly not ready to down tools. I see Joanna Lumley, Bruce Forsyth and Judi Dench still going strong on television, and go to art exhibitions showing work that Monet and Twombly did in their eighties. I don't want to 'take it easy' either. There's a whole world out there that I've had a bite of and I want more. Retire? Hell, no, I want to squeeze the last ounce of fun out of my life and this is the best time of all in which to do it. Now where did I put my passport? ➔