

# Rebecca Barker



I'm not a household name... even in my own house

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## BREXIT STAGE LEFT FOR MAY

**LITTLE known fact:** if you look up 'bungle' in the dictionary, you'll find Theresa May's picture next to it. The under-fire British prime minister suffered a humiliating defeat this week after her own Conservative MPs rebelled against her to demand the UK parliament have the final say on the Brexit divorce deal with Brussels.

Doh! Meanwhile, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has quite

rightly pointed out that Brexiteers need to acknowledge they created the difficulties surrounding the Border with Northern Ireland.

Varadkar insisted: "They are the ones who created this problem and I am one of those people who is trying to resolve it, trying to retain what we have had for 20 years."

Hear, hear. Theresa, just give it up already...

● THERE are two types of people in this world: those that like Ed Sheeran and those that believe he is the lovechild of Danny DeVito and Shrek with a singing voice to match.

Needless-to-say, I fall into the latter camp. So I was dismayed to discover that the pocket-sized pop star, 26, has butchered Shane MacGowan's Fairytale of New York just in time for Christmas.

Ed's version even makes Ronan Keating's limp rendition look like a Grammy Award-winning hit. Ho-ho-NO!



## THE MAD WORLD OF PREZ

WE have suspected it for a while and now mental health experts have finally confirmed it — Donald Trump is increasingly displaying mental instability.

Twenty-seven US psychiatrists have publicly questioned their president's fitness to serve and have penned a bestselling book — The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump — outlining their arguments.

According to the experts, the president's bizarre Twitter rants, his boasts about sexual assault and his "attraction to violence" are personality traits that are linked to a "psychological disability".

Of course, we didn't need a bunch of experts to point that out.

As far back as the US election primaries, fellow candidate Ted Cruz denounced him as "utterly amoral", while Marco Rubio suggested simply that he was a "lunatic".

Whether Trump is mentally unwell may be irrelevant, however, as the office of US president has been held by many unstable men over the years.

Teddy Roosevelt is said to have suffered from bipolar disorder, Abraham Lincoln had depression, while Ronald Reagan had Alzheimer's disease.

Nevertheless, perhaps now would be a good time to talk about that impeachment...

## STARS IN MY EYES

I HAVE had my tinfoil hat on the ready for years and my underground bunker fully stocked.

Now I can finally put my whole Operation UFO plan into action after scientists this week confirmed the existence of an alien starship in our solar system.

Astronomers from the University of Hawaii have identified a huge cigar-shaped object, dubbed Oumuamua, travelling at up to 196,000 mph, which may be a UFO.

Lead scientist Dr Andrew Siemion revealed that they are trying to make contact with Oumuamua.

Either way, I'm ready to embrace our interstellar cousins.

So how do you organise a welcome party for an alien race? You planet.



## BOFFINS: HAVE AN ICE DAY, LADIES

YOU know that woman huddled in the corner of your office, wearing two fleeces, a blanket, a hot water bottle and fingerless gloves?

Yeah, that's me. This week's cold snap has turned our office into an outpost at the Arctic Circle, it's that bloody Baltic.

And while the menfolk of the office continue to wear short sleeves and bask in the temperature-controlled air-conditioning, us ladies have to shiver our way through the work day.

Thankfully, boffins have finally revealed why women are always so cold in offices.

According to an article published in the Journal of Applied Physiology, it turns out women have slower metabolic rates than men and building temperatures are based on male metabolic rates from an outdated model first developed back in the 1960s.

Aha, I knew it! So the next time your female colleague gives you the cold shoulder or an icy stare, remember it's not her fault. It's science.

# Didn't catch my name? Well, it's Bec in fashion

**HIM:** It's over, Rachel.

Me: It's Rebecca.  
Him: It's not you, it's me. I'm sorry, Rachel.

Me: It's Rebecca.  
We've all been there, right? The One That Got Away, that former colleague, that person you've spent all evening chatting to at the party — all of them forgetting your name.

I've been called everything from Rosemary and Rachel to Rachelle and Rowena in my time.

I mean how hard is it to remember Rebecca? Becky, Becca, the Becs-meister! It's easy, right?

Unfortunately, remembering names is not as easy as it should be. Boffins have revealed the further down the alphabet your name occurs, the harder it is for people to recall it.

American economists Leat Yariv, of the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, and Liran Einav, of Stanford University, California, studied hundreds of names of academics working in economics departments at US universities and discovered that those with initials early in the alphabet



BECS APPEAL ... Loos and Storm

were more likely to be in the top departments, to become acclaimed fellows and to win a Nobel Prize.

I've always had a suspicion my name was holding me back. Who knows what I could have become if I'd been called something more exotic and further up the alphabet?

*Maybe I could've won a Nobel Prize too if I had been named Aphrodite or Anastasia. Thanks a lot, mam and dad.*

Recently, my husband and bestie of 18 years revealed he'd always thought my name sounded like something a Star Trek Klingon would utter. "Rebe-ka-ka-ka-ka!", he gleefully cackled.

And just like that, with one dodgy alien

impression, my beautiful name was ruined forever. Thanks a lot, hubby dearest.

Meanwhile, the Central Statistics Office this week launched its new app that allows prospective parents to see how the popularity of names has changed over the past 50 years.

I was straight onto it to see if anyone still called their kid Rebecca. And although my name limped in at No75 on the popularity list, it turns out there's 86 new little Beckys running around out there since 2016.

Which is marginally better than my own year of birth 1979, when only 79 of us came wailing into the world.

In celeb land, there's even fewer Rebeccas.

I mean, can you name any famous ones? Apart from Rebecca Storm and, er, Rebecca Loos (she ruined it for us all), we're few and far between.

Of course, there's Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel Rebecca but she turned out to be a right so-and-so.

Even Beyonce penned a scathing 'Becky with the good hair' song lyric in reference to her husband Jay Z's alleged scarlet woman.

Brilliant. Go Rebecca. However, there's still time to change the downward trajectory of my name.

Firstly, I've started talking about myself in the third person, just to get my name out there: "No, Rebecca does not want to go into work today as Rebecca would rather stay in bed and watch Netflix all day."

*I've also been using my name as a noun for positive action, casually dropping it into conversations: "Leo Varadkar totally did a Rebecca by securing that Brexit deal, didn't he?"*

Finally, I'm organising a Rebecca Convention, for like-minded Beckys, entitled Are You Rebecca? — where we'll discuss the finer points of the moniker and serenade one another with Robin Gibbs' fine tune called, believe it or not, Rebecca. (No Rachels, Rosemarys, Rachelles or Rowenas need apply).

So join me in my quest to make Rebecca popular again. Besides if all else fails, there's always deed poll...

## A SENSELESS ACT OF EVIL

THIS is the moment a would-be suicide bomber blew himself up on the subway in New York City this week.

Brooklyn cab driver Akayed Ullah, 27, detonated the bomb strapped to his chest — but fortunately it failed to fully explode and he only injured himself.

My initial reaction to the photo was anger and that he deserved to get badly maimed by his own disgusting actions.

How many innocent lives would this idiot have claimed with this act of evil?

On reflection, I also feel a misplaced sympathy for the man. Only a deeply disturbed person could subscribe to this sick ideology.

Blowing up people is senseless, barbaric and will achieve absolutely nothing.



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Available to proofread tattoos...

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## Guide to: SURVIVING SNOWMAGEDDON

I'll admit I thought the pre-Beast from the East hype was all media-driven (guilty as charged).

So while my fellow countrymen and women panicked and stockpiled bread and milk, I figured I could brazen the storm out with the few bits I had in the fridge.

I know — what an idiot!

Here's what else I learned from the may-

hem that was Storm Emma:

- We're certifiably insane over bread and woe betide anyone who comes between us and our loaf of Brennan's.

- We barely need an excuse to loot. Imagine us in a real food emergency.

- It's surprising how good any old crap from the bottom of the freezer tastes when you're trapped indoors for days.

- Red is our children's (and school teachers') new favourite colour. Someone say snow day?

- Runners are not effective snow shoes.

- Ditto for Ugg boots.

- Our snowman building skills are now worthy of a LinkedIn mention.

- Finally, don't ever mess with chicks called Emma.



## MOTHER HAS US A BIT DAFF

IF you just got the mammy the obligatory bunch of daffs for Mother's Day tomorrow, you might want to think again. Flashy fighter Conor McGregor has splashed €60,000 on a new motor for his mam.

Famously flaihulach, McGregor's past pressies include luxury Rolex watches and cars for his missus Dee and both his sisters.

Meanwhile, the cocky champ now claims to be wealthier than Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo after rocketing up the Forbes rich list. He boasted: "I have now surpassed Cristiano Ronaldo as I told him I would in 2016!"

Admittedly, €60k on the mammy's car is spare change to McGregor, worth an estimated €140million, but it's making the rest of us look positively stingy with our petrol station blooms.

ITS Jobstown store may have been bulldozed by thugs during Storm Emma but Lidl had the last laugh on Twitter. On the morning after the looting, the funsters posted: "So err... anyone do anything nice over the weekend?" Lolz.



## FRANKY, MY DEAR

THIS next story comes with a trigger warning for millennials.

A university professor in Britain has revealed his fragile students believe Frankenstein's monster was a misunderstood victim with feelings.

Prof David Punter, of Bristol University, told this week that students had expressed sympathy for the murdering villain of Mary Shelley's classic novel. The students also claimed the beast has rights. Snowflakes, eh?

Go back to your Snapchatting, hipster, bean-eating ways.



## DODGY SILVIO'S RETURN

HE has weathered sex scandals, corruption allegations, tax fraud convictions, and is banned from holding public office until 2019. But that hasn't stopped old slimeball Silvio Berlusconi throwing his hat into Italy's political ring again.

The wrinkly ex-Prime Minister, 81, claims he's still kingmaker in Italy despite his Forza Italia party being beaten by its right-wing coalition partner, the Northern League.

I guess you could say Berlusconi was looking for a PIZZA the action but I'm afraid it's PASTA la vista. (I'll get me coat).

## TAN HAS BENEFITS

BREAKING news — sun tans are now good for you. Well, for this week they are anyway.

Sun-loving boffins have revealed that spending time in the sunshine slashes cancer risk by up to half by boosting Vitamin D levels.

Breaking news next week — ice-cream helps you lose weight and smoking tobacco is good for your lungs. You heard it here first...

# Sorry Varadkar, you spin some, you lose some..



## APOSTROPHE CATASTROPHE

TATTS off to millennials' reliance on smartphones and their resulting inability to spell.

Hollywood young one Emma Watson, 27, unwittingly showed off her misspelt tattoo at this week's Oscars in support of the Time's Up movement.

Missing the apostrophe, Emma's "Times Up" tattoo went viral with fans mocking the Harry Potter star's gaffe.

Thankfully, the Brown University-educated star's inking was temporary, so she could wash away her mortification.

But god love her — her heart was in the right place.

THERE'S a great line in BBC classic *The Thick Of It* when the Prime Minister's vicious spin doctor Malcolm Tucker turns on a junior PR trying to defend yet another political cock-up.

Tucker, *below*, rages: "Who was it that did your media training? Myra Hindley? It's terrible!"

When I want your advice, I'll give you a special signal. Which is me being sectioned under the Mental Health Act!"

Personally, I think we all need a Tucker in our lives to tell us where we are screwing up.

One Government department that could certainly do with his merciless advice is Leo Varadkar's team of hapless spin doctors.

The Strategic Communicators Unit — or as Tucker might fondly call it the Stupid C\*\*\*\* Unit — definitely needs a Tucker at the helm to rein in its cock-ups.

An outraged Opposition also think the unit needs a kick up the arse or, better yet, a kick out the door.

After the SCU's misleading adverts for Project Ireland 2040 appeared in newspapers as if they were the work of journalists, Sinn Fein, Labour and Fianna Fail all called for the unit to be disbanded.

Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald said the SCU has now become "an issue of public confidence and ethical use of public monies".

McDonald also added Varadkar should appear before the Public Accounts Committee to be quizzed about the debacle.

It was later revealed how a video of Varadkar that had been posted on social media by Dublin Fire Brigade during Storm Emma contained an

invite to "sign up at Fine-Gael.ie" to receive the weekly message from the leader.

"Yeah, so what?" you might be thinking. Well that little bit of political propaganda, dressed up as warm and fuzzy social media posts, is costing you and me €5million of our tax money.

So while 9,104 Irish people (including 3,267 children) remain homeless at the time of my writing this column, our Government is spending millions of taxpayers' cash funding a bunch of PRs to dither over which snowy selfie of the Taoiseach best sums up Storm Emma.

Now Fine Gael are, of course, entitled to run their own adverts, social media campaigns and videos featuring Varadkar — but not at our expense.

The Government is already overrun with teams of special advisors, so why this unit needed to be established in the first place is not entirely clear.

As far as I can see, it's an expensive vanity project, with echoes of Bertie, Biffo and Haughey to it.

Even Enda Kenny didn't waste this much cash on his image, to give him his dues.

After all, there was no amount of SCU brainstorming that could have come up with Enda's cheesy photocalls (Enda chasing a goose, anyone?).

In short, the extravagant PR team has to go. And while we're at it, Varadkar should ditch the novelty socks too.

In the meantime, the Taoiseach might do well to heed Tucker's advice to his fictitious Prime Minister: "People don't like their politicians to be comfortable."

"They don't like you having expenses. They don't like you being paid. They'd rather you lived in a f\*\*\*ing cave."



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Still waiting on my Trump birthday pressie..

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## A MONTROSE POO-DUNNIT

RTE's phantom pooper has us all wondering poo's responsible.

Telly staff out at Montrose were left holding their noses after someone hid human faeces in a fan at the back of a fridge.

It doesn't bear STINKING about!

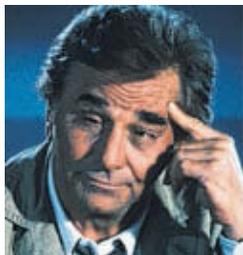
Workers complained of the lingering stench before a horrified cleaner discovered the hidden poop. Meanwhile, comic Dave McSavage

is the first RTE celeb to break ranks and admit he's not the phantom pooper.

He revealed: "It wasn't me. I didn't go there in disguise as Pat Kenny and do this.

"But whoever is responsible is something of a people's champion."

Perhaps it's time RTE called in TV detective Columb-poo, right, to work out poo-dunnit. (Sorry, I've pooped to a new low...)



PEOPLE don't know what to make of Bono's declaration of support to repeal the Eighth Amendment on May 25.

Fondly referred to as "a pox" by his fellow Dubliners, Bono's detractors struggled to hate on the U2 frontman's pro-choice stance.

One Twitter user quipped: "At least Bono is a pro-choice pox..."

Another confused punter mused: "The 16-year-old me would've LOL-ed hard at the idea of Morrissey: A Prick.. Bono: A lovely man. But here we are."

Fair play, Bono. You're temporarily not a pox.



DO NOT EVA RUB MA TUM

HOW do you make a pregnant woman uncomfortable? Give her belly an unsolicited rub.

Poor old preggers Eva Longoria experienced the unwanted rub on the red carpet this week when fellow actress Roselyn Sanchez went in for a pat.

I can't tell you the amount of unsolicited belly rubs I had to dodge during pregnancy.

As someone with serious personal space issues, having people place their hands on my tummy was my worst nightmare come true.

There's something about pregnancy that makes the world and its mother feel like they own you. Complete strangers would see your burgeoning belly and come up for a pat. And it doesn't stop even after you give birth.

I had one woman stop to touch my belly five months postpartum, asking me when I was due.

Morto. So for all you potential belly rubbers out there, back off and leave us mams alone.



LORD, HE IS A TWIT

"I'm no racist" is the standard racist's response.

So former Ulster Unionist deputy leader Lord Kilclooney's denial rang a little hollow this week after he had dismissed Taoiseach Leo Varadkar as a "typical Indian".

While a one-off comment might be forgiven, this is not the first time the peer, 80, dissed Leo. Kilclooney, above, last year tweeted he hoped Simon Coveney was "clearly hoping to undermine the Indian" before later retracting his comment. Hmm.

Might want to lay off the old Twitter machine for a while, Kilclooney.



CONSENT CLASS A POSITIVE

IT was great to hear Jamie Heaslip lend his support for sex consent classes for pro rugby players following the Belfast rape trial.

Ulster rugby players Paddy Jackson and Stuart Olding, who had their IRFU and Ulster contracts revoked last month, were acquitted of rape in March.

The trial, which ran for nine weeks at Belfast Crown Court, sparked a wave of protests across the country and highlighted the issue of consent among youngsters.

Speaking about the fallout from the trial, former Ireland rugby hero Heaslip revealed: "I think in society at large, some really good questions were raised and asked."

Rugby Players Ireland, which represents professional players, will now incorporate "sexual health and relationships" into its "well-being" workshop programme for the first time this year.

Together with the proposed changes to how rape trials are conducted on the island, it's good to see something positive finally come from that deeply troubling nine-week trial.

## 1ST LADY NOT TOP PRIORITY

OLD romantic Donald Trump admitted this week he has been too busy to buy wife Melania a birthday present.

When asked if he'd remembered his wife's 48th birthday, the silver-tongued lothario revealed: "I'm very busy to be running out looking for presents, OK?"

God love her. Imagine having to put up with THAT and not even receiving a gift.

With this in mind, I've compiled a list of presents I think Melania would have loved for her special day this year...

- A wall, as Melania clearly can't stand being in the same room as her husband (exhibit A, right).
- Staying faithful to her, rather than cheating with porn star Stormy Daniels (etc).
- Some respect for her fellow woman.
- Some respect for her fellow immigrants.
- A divorce, so as to finally release her from his tiny clutches.

Happy birthday, doll.

# How on earth can women ever trust smear tests now?

THERE is nothing worse, really, than hysterical women.

Hysterical women kicking up a fuss, trying to access accurate medical records, trying to assert their rights to their own bodies.

Best to keep the women of Ireland in the dark. Best to keep on passing that buck, shifting the blame, drip-feeding the facts just in case the women get uppity and sue.

Facts such as 3,000 women diagnosed with cervical cancer since 2008, 1,500 smear tests yet to be independently audited, 208 women with possible misdiagnoses, 162 women who were never informed their

cancer could have been caught earlier, 17 women now dead, ten more women suing the State and one brave woman, Vicky Phelan, who blew the lid off the whole scandal.

A scandal that the HSE, the State and the gaggle of Very Important Men making very important decisions about women's bodies below the waist, did not want to get out.

Keep them in the dark about a decade's worth of mistakes on their smear tests, the bungling and the cover-up.

We're a great little nation of bureaucratic buck-passers. The monstrous scandal that is the CervicalCheck crisis is the worst example of this buck-passing in recent memory.

And the fallout will potentially destroy many more women's lives in the years to

come. By now we are all familiar with the tragic story of Vicky Phelan.

The 43-year-old Limerick mother-of-two with terminal cancer was not told about an incorrect 2011 smear test until September 2017.

Following her landmark High Court battle last week, the HSE has finally admitted that hundreds of women may be affected by the controversy – and 17 of these women have died so far.

Let that fact sink in for a minute... Seventeen women have needlessly died for a cancer that is treatable. When detected at an early stage, the five-year survival rate for cervical cancer is 91 per cent. No woman needs to die from this.

The crisis and its cover-up is

beyond despicable. The question now is, who knew what and when?

According to reports this week, a senior doctor claims he warned HSE chief Tony O'Brien over a decade ago that outsourcing of the screening programme to a US lab would result in this very crisis.

Dr David Gibbons, formerly of the National Cervical Screening Programme, told Morning Ireland he took his concerns directly to O'Brien.

Meanwhile, under-fire Health Minister Simon Harris has admitted this developing scandal is set to get a lot worse with beleaguered O'Brien admitting the HSE is currently facing ten more legal actions similar to Ms Phelan's case.

O'Brien has also repeatedly defied calls for his resignation, unbelievably telling the Oireachtas Health Committee: "I didn't personally make that cock-up so I can't take full responsibility for it."

This scandal touches us all. Every mother, daughter, sister, aunt and niece in your life has been for one of these tests and, most likely, were given the all-clear. It's not unreasonable for us all to now question those results. How can we possibly trust the service after this week's revelations?

Ultimately, we need to know who made the decision not to tell the women affected.

While we understand mistakes can happen, even among our trusted medical professionals, what is unforgivable is the deliberate withholding of information from women and their families in an attempt to cover up those mistakes.

Once again this country has let Irish women down. And with less than three weeks to go to the referendum on what is essentially women's reproductive health, we are asking women to trust in a system that has repeatedly shown it does not respect them.

Were it not for Vicky Phelan and her bravery and determination to take this issue to court, this scandal might never have come to light.

And while it doesn't change her prognosis, I hope Ms Phelan knows that the women and men of Ireland owe her a debt of gratitude for undoubtedly saving many more lives.

