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Opening Extract from...

Clarissa's Comfort Food

Written by Clarissa Dickson Wright

Published by Kyle Books

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To Sonic – always comforting and ready to eat the mistakes

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Conversion chart

Weight (solids)

7g	¼oz
10g	½oz
20g	¾oz
25g	1oz
40g	1½oz
50g	2oz
60g	2½oz
75g	3oz
100g	3½oz
110g	4oz (¼lb)
125g	4½oz
150g	5½oz
175g	6oz
200g	7oz
225g	8oz (½lb)
250g	9oz
275g	10oz
300g	10½oz
310g	11oz
325g	11½oz
350g	12oz (¾lb)
375g	13oz
400g	14oz
425g	15oz
450g	1lb
500g (1/2kg)	18oz
600g	1¼lb
700g	1½lb
750g	1lb 10oz
900g	2lb
1kg	2¼lb
1.1kg	2½lb
1.2kg	2lb 12oz
1.3kg	3lb
1.5kg	3lb 5oz
1.6kg	3½lb
1.8kg	4lb
2kg	4lb 8oz
2.25kg	5lb
2.5kg	5lb 8oz
3kg	6lb 8oz

Volume (liquids)

5ml	1 teaspoon
10ml	1 dessertspoon
15ml	1 tablespoon or ½fl oz
30ml	1fl oz
40ml	1½fl oz
50ml	2fl oz
60ml	2½fl oz
75ml	3fl oz
100ml	3½fl oz
125ml	4fl oz
150ml	5fl oz (¼ pint)
160ml	5½fl oz
175ml	6fl oz
200ml	7fl oz
225ml	8fl oz
250ml (0.25 litre)	9fl oz
300ml	10fl oz (½ pint)
325ml	11fl oz
350ml	12fl oz
370ml	13fl oz
400ml	14fl oz
425ml	15fl oz (¾ pint)
450ml	16fl oz
500ml (0.5 litre)	18fl oz
550ml	19fl oz
600ml	20fl oz (1 pint)
700ml	1¼ pints
850ml	1½ pints
1 litre	1¾ pints
1.2 litres	2 pints
1.5 litres	2½ pints
1.8 litres	3 pints
2 litres	3½ pints

To my agent, Heather Holden-Brown, without who this book would not exist.

To Sophie Allen, for her persistence.

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Starters

Potted crab

The easiest and most delicious of starters. If you don't want to pick over your crab, buy a fresh dressed one. Frozen or tinned will also do for this dish.

SERVES 4

25g butter per crab

1 dressed crab per person (or 100g crabmeat, both white and brown if possible)

½ teaspoon nutmeg

½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

salt and pepper

juice of 1 lemon

Melt the butter in a large sauté pan and stir in the crabmeat. Add all the other ingredients except the lemon juice, adjusting the seasoning to taste. Cook gently until all the butter is melded in. At the last minute, stir in the lemon juice and serve warm with toast.

Salt cod and tomatoes

I really only discovered salt cod when I was sailing in the Caribbean. A West Indian staple and, originally a cheap preservable slave food, it is to be found in the islands in many forms. This recipe – a lovely starter, main course salad or lunchtime snack – is the invention of my sexy Swedish photographer friend Carin, and I love it. Salt fish needs to be soaked overnight in cold water to both remove the excess salt and plump it up a bit.

SERVES 4

175–225g piece salt cod, soaked overnight

olive oil

1 onion, finely chopped

1 small garlic clove, chopped

1 small chilli, chopped (optional)

6 tomatoes skinned, deseeded and chopped

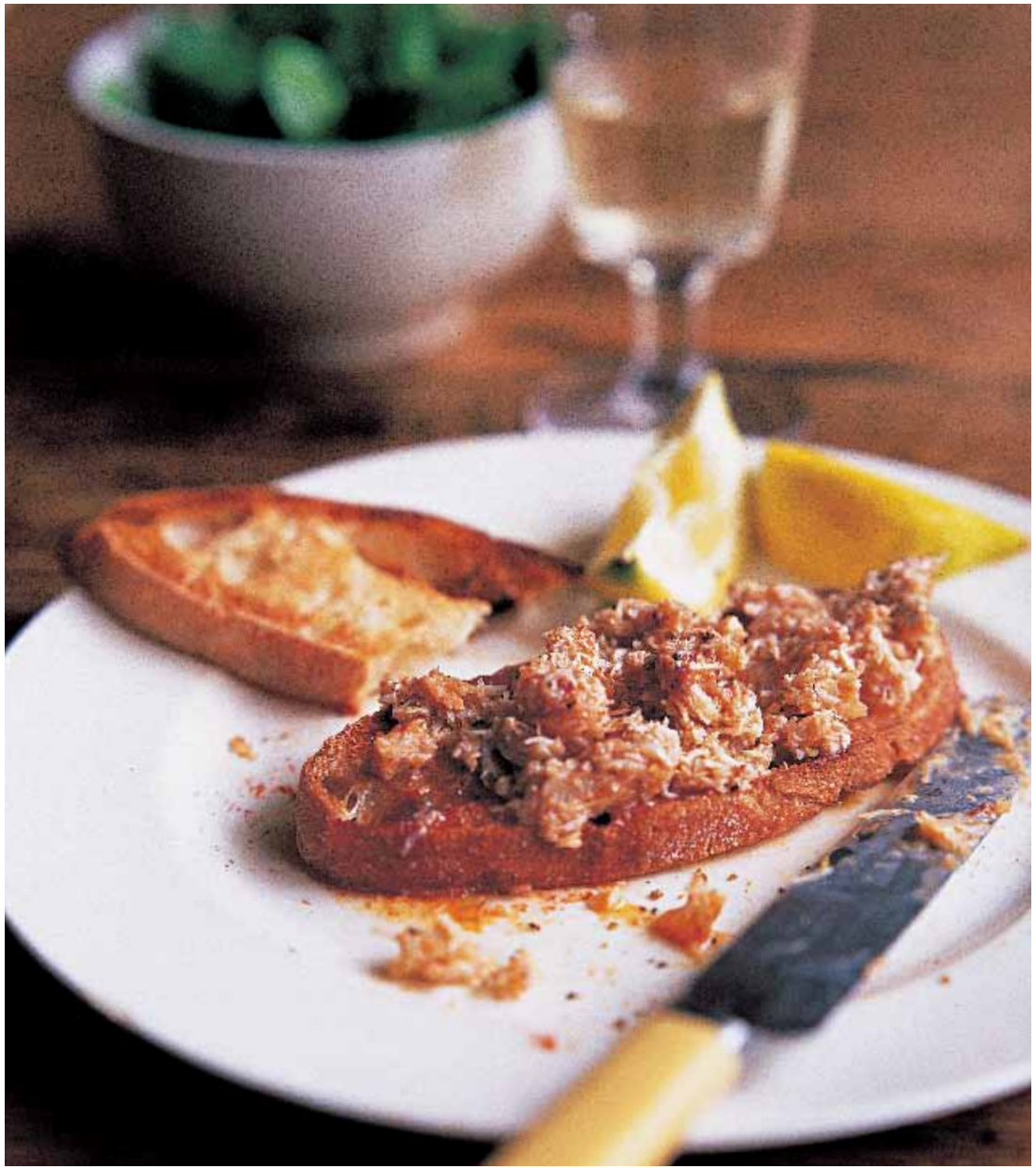
lemon or lime juice

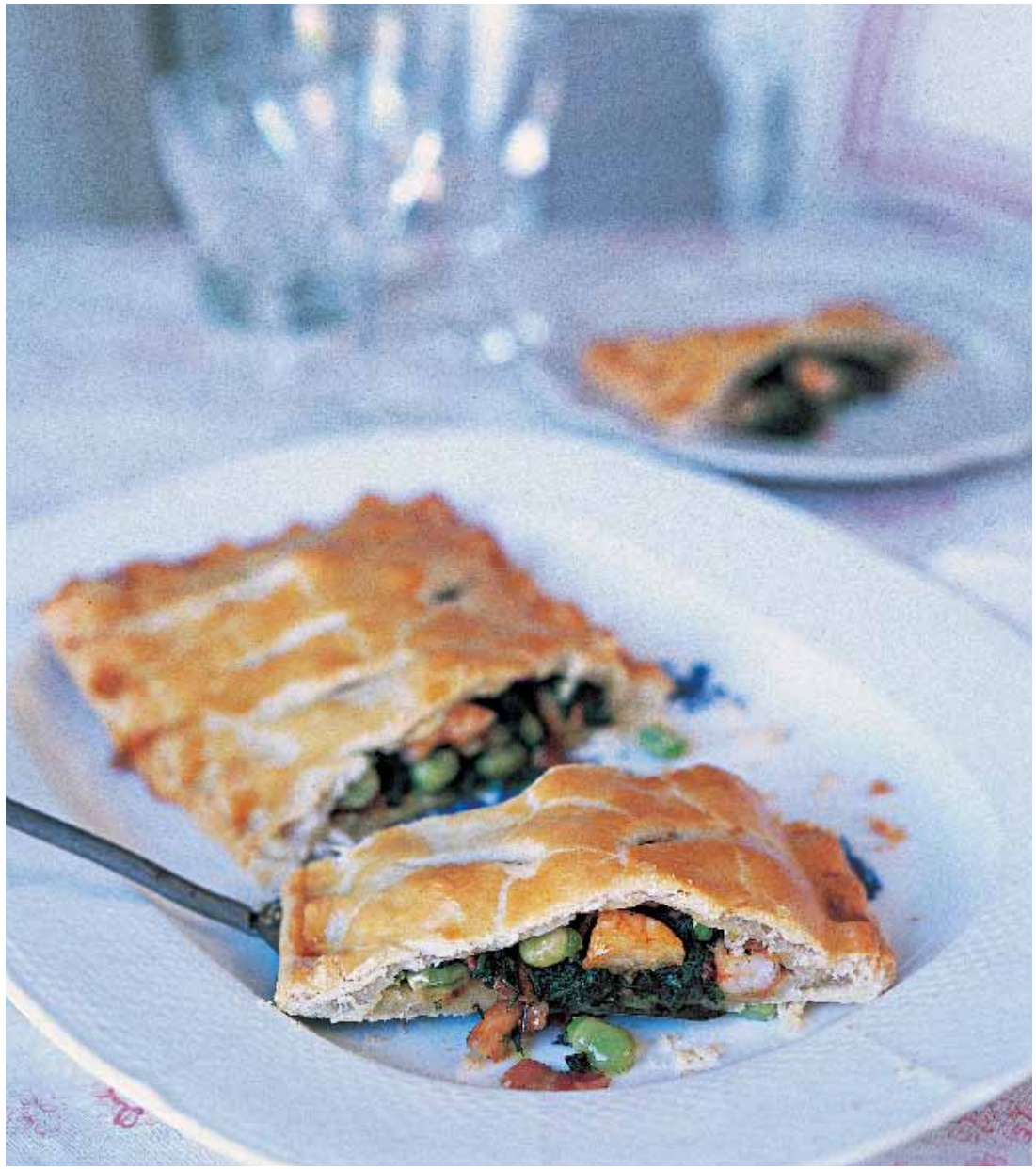
salt and pepper

Cook your fish gently in a little water for about 10 minutes until it is ready to come away from the skin. Drain, remove the skin and bones, then flake it into a bowl.

In a little oil, gently fry the onion, garlic and chilli, if used, then add to the fish, followed by the tomatoes.

Make a dressing with oil and the lime or lemon juice and mix into the fish. Eat cold.





Elly's lattice

I invented this as the last dish I typed up for this book. It is dedicated to Elly James, assistant to my dear agent Heather Holden-Brown. Without Elly's support, encouragement and gift of laughter, I would never have finished this book. It includes some of her favourite ingredients, and comes with my thanks.

SERVES 4

450g shortcrust pastry
1 dessertspoon olive oil
1 garlic clove, mashed
2 anchovy fillets
10 king prawns, peeled
175g wilted spinach
3 rashers streaky bacon, chopped and fried
110g baby broad beans
salt and pepper
beaten egg for glazing

Preheat the oven to 220°C/425°F/gas mark 7.

Roll out the pastry into an oblong, cut in half and chill in the fridge.

In a pan, heat the oil, add the garlic and the anchovies and cook until the fillets melt. Add the prawns and cook until pink, then cut into bite-sized pieces and season. Stir in the spinach and bacon. Blanch the broad beans in a little salted boiling water for 3–4 minutes. Drain, and add to the prawn and spinach mixture.

Place one half of the pastry on a lightly greased oven sheet. Spread the prawn filling onto the pastry, leaving a 2.5cm border around the edge, cover with the other sheet of pastry and seal the edges carefully with a little beaten egg. Cut slashes in the top and glaze with more egg. Cook in the preheated oven until golden – about 25 minutes.

Tomato summer pudding

Every cook has one invented recipe of which they are most proud and this was Jennifer's. The idea came from an Italian bread salad and I envied her this invention. It is perfect with cold meat or fish and I hope you enjoy it as much as I do. The better and riper the tomatoes, the better the pudding.

SERVES 4

olive oil

8–10 slices good white bread, crusts removed

2kg ripe tomatoes, skinned and deseeded

salt and pepper

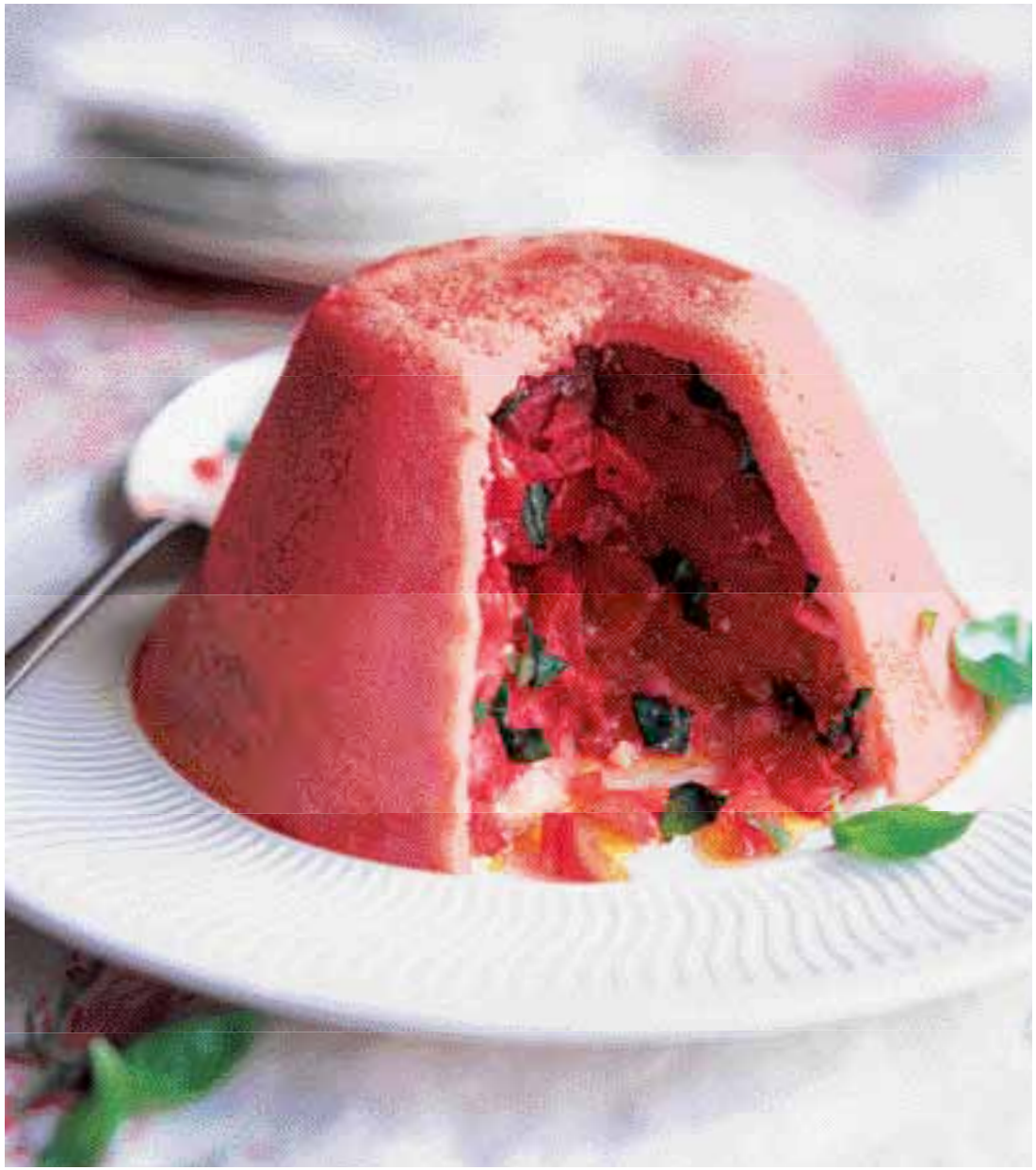
1 garlic clove, finely chopped

bunch of basil

juice of ½ lemon

Pour some olive oil on a flat dish and dip the bread quickly into it, then use to line a 1.2-litre pudding basin. Chop the tomatoes and pour any remaining oil over them. Season well. Add the garlic and tear the basil leaves into the tomato mixture. Put it into the lined pudding basin and squeeze on the lemon juice. Make a cover with bread and lay in place. Put a flat plate over the pudding and place weights on top to press it down. Leave overnight in the refrigerator.

To serve, run a knife carefully around the outside and turn the pudding out onto a flat dish. Good old Jennifer, delicious.



Military pork puffs

When I used to visit my grandmother in Singapore, we would have these delicious savouries made with cold leftover pork and the distinctive flavour of military pickle. Any tangy pickle will do, especially a lemon-based one but Branston is good, too, if you add a dash of lemon. As the meat is already cooked this is baked at one temperature.

SERVES 4

- 25g butter
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 25g flour
- 150ml stock
- 4 tablespoons natural yogurt
- 2 tablespoons pickle
- 175g cooked pork, finely chopped
- salt and pepper
- 225g puff or flaky pastry
- beaten egg, for glazing

Preheat the oven to 220°C/245°F/gas mark 7.

Melt the butter and fry the onion until golden. Add the flour, stir in the stock and cook for a few minutes more. Stir in the yogurt, pickle and pork and season well. Leave to cool.

Roll out one third of the pastry and cut into four 12.5cm circles. Place on a lightly greased baking sheet and spoon on the filling, leaving a margin of 1cm. Roll out the remaining pastry and cut into 4 rounds slightly larger than the first lot. Place these over the top of the filled rounds, damp the edges press firmly and scallop the edges. Cut a small hole in the centre of each (to let the steam escape), decorate with pastry trimmings and glaze with beaten egg.

Bake for 30–35 minutes until well risen and golden. Serve hot or cold.

Potato cake with ham and cheese

This is a really comforting savoury snack for a winter's afternoon.

SERVES 4

- 6 medium potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 4 slices ham
- 2 tablespoons lard
- 200g Cheddar cheese, grated
- pepper

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4.

Dry the sliced potatoes. De-rind the ham and cut into strips.

Melt the lard in a heavy, ovenproof pan, add the ham strips and cook until softened. Remove two-thirds. Add the potatoes in layers, interspersing with the removed ham, cheese and pepper. Cook until you think the bottom is browned – about 10 minutes.

Then place in the oven for an hour. Turn out onto a plate by inverting the pan – it will be a golden cake.

Poultry & game

Chicken curry

A really simple chicken curry for those days when you know better than to order a take-away. Serve with rice, poppadoms and any Indian side dishes of your choice (I've used a cucumber raita and tomato and onion salad here).

SERVES 4

2 tablespoons fat (if there is fat on chicken, render it down; if not, use ghee)

1 chicken, approx. 1.8kg, jointed from its carcass

2 onions, chopped

2 garlic cloves, chopped

2 red chillies, chopped

1 teaspoon each fenugreek seeds and garam masala (alternatively, use 2 teaspoons curry powder)

1 teaspoon dried mint

1 teaspoon coriander seeds, lightly pounded

6 green or black cardomom pods

1 teaspoon turmeric

small piece of tamarind

1 pickled lemon, chopped (optional)

600ml stock from the carcass

Heat the fat, brown the chicken joints and transfer to a cooking pot. Fry the onions, garlic and chillies in the remaining fat. Add all the spices (including cardamom pods, turmeric and tamarind) and allow the onions to soften. Stir, so the spices are well mixed in. Add the spice mixture to the pot with the chicken, along with the pickled lemon, if using. Pour on the stock, stir well and bring to the boil. Cover and simmer gently for about 1 hour or until the chicken is cooked. Uncover for the last 10 minutes of cooking, so that the sauce reduces slightly. You may want to remove the cardamom pods before serving.

Chicken with whole spices

This is a very simple Bengali chicken dish, very slowly cooked. Kashmiri chillies aren't particularly hot and are more like dried paprika, which can be used instead. It's an interesting-looking dish and is good for a supper party.

SERVES 4

1 medium chicken, cut in pieces

5 medium onions, finely sliced

50g ghee

3 Kashmiri chillies

4 bay leaves

10 cloves

12 crushed peppercorns

thumb-sized piece of root ginger, thinly sliced

2 garlic cloves, finely sliced

300ml yogurt

salt to taste

pinch of saffron

Mix all the ingredients in a flameproof casserole and marinate for 30 minutes, turning from time to time. Cover tightly, using foil to reinforce the seal, and cook very slowly on a low heat for 2 hours. Check the chicken and cook for a further 30 minutes. You can also cook this in a slow oven at 130°C/275°F/gas mark 1.

Soak the saffron in a little warm milk. Add to the dish and cook for a few minutes longer. Serve with rice.

Chicken and salsify pie

My friend Douglas raised salsify (or oyster plant, as it is also known); I love the flavour and it's particularly good with chicken, so this is a comforting pie.

SERVES 4

900g salsify

lemon juice

50g butter

1 onion, chopped

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 chicken, jointed and skinned

1 bouquet garni

150ml dry white wine

salt and pepper

100g flour

225ml double cream

2 tablespoons parsley, chopped

2 egg yolks

juice of 1 lemon

450–700g shortcrust pastry (depending on the size of the pie dish)

Peel the salsify and place in a bowl. Pour in a little water with lemon juice to prevent discolouring.

Melt 25g butter in a large pan and cook the onions and the garlic until soft. Remove them and add the chicken pieces to seal them. Add the salsify (drained), the bouquet garni, the wine and enough water to cover, if necessary. Season and simmer for 30–40 minutes or until the salsify is cooked. Strain, setting aside the stock, and throw out the bouquet garni.

Cut the salsify into manageable pieces and strip the chicken from the bones.

Make a roux with the remaining butter and the flour and add enough of the stock to make a thick béchamel sauce. Add the cream and parsley, season and return the chicken and salsify to the sauce. Cook gently for another 5 minutes. Remove from the heat. Beat the egg yolks with the lemon juice and stir into the mixture. Allow everything to cool and completely thicken.

Preheat the oven to 230°C/450°F/gas mark 8.

Line your pie dish with pastry, leaving an overlap. Spoon in the chicken mixture and place a support for the lid in the centre. Cover with the remaining pastry, seal the edges well and glaze with milk or egg, making a small hole for the steam to escape.

Bake in the preheated oven for 20 minutes, then reduce the heat to 190°C/375°F/gas mark 5 for a further 30 minutes, or until the pastry is golden.

Devilled chicken with breadcrumbs

This is a dish my mother used to make once my father had left, and we no longer had servants. My mother only knew about five dishes, having never cooked, and this was one of them. I loved it then and I do now.

SERVES 4

225g butter

1 chicken, jointed and skinned

2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

2 teaspoons Tabasco sauce

2 teaspoons cayenne pepper

1½ teaspoons dry mustard

salt

juice of 1 lemon

100g large fresh white breadcrumbs

Preheat the oven to 160°C/325°F/gas mark 3.

Heat half the butter in a pan and brown the chicken pieces. Transfer to an ovenproof dish. Mix together all the remaining ingredients, except the breadcrumbs and remaining butter, and pour over the chicken. Lay the breadcrumbs on top and dot with the remaining butter. Cook uncovered in the preheated oven for about 50 minutes to 1 hour, or until the chicken is cooked.

Guinea fowl

I find guinea fowl more exotic than pheasant or peacock, with its strange cave-drawing shape, designer plumage and weird cry, like a creaking gate. Its eggs are like a practical joke – hard as china; and at a full moon they will keep you awake all night.

SERVES 4

50g celery, chopped

5 sprigs watercress, chopped

salt and pepper

225g butter

2 lemons

2 guinea fowl, 700g each

2 garlic cloves, crushed

100g pork fat or bacon

150ml dry white wine

600ml stock

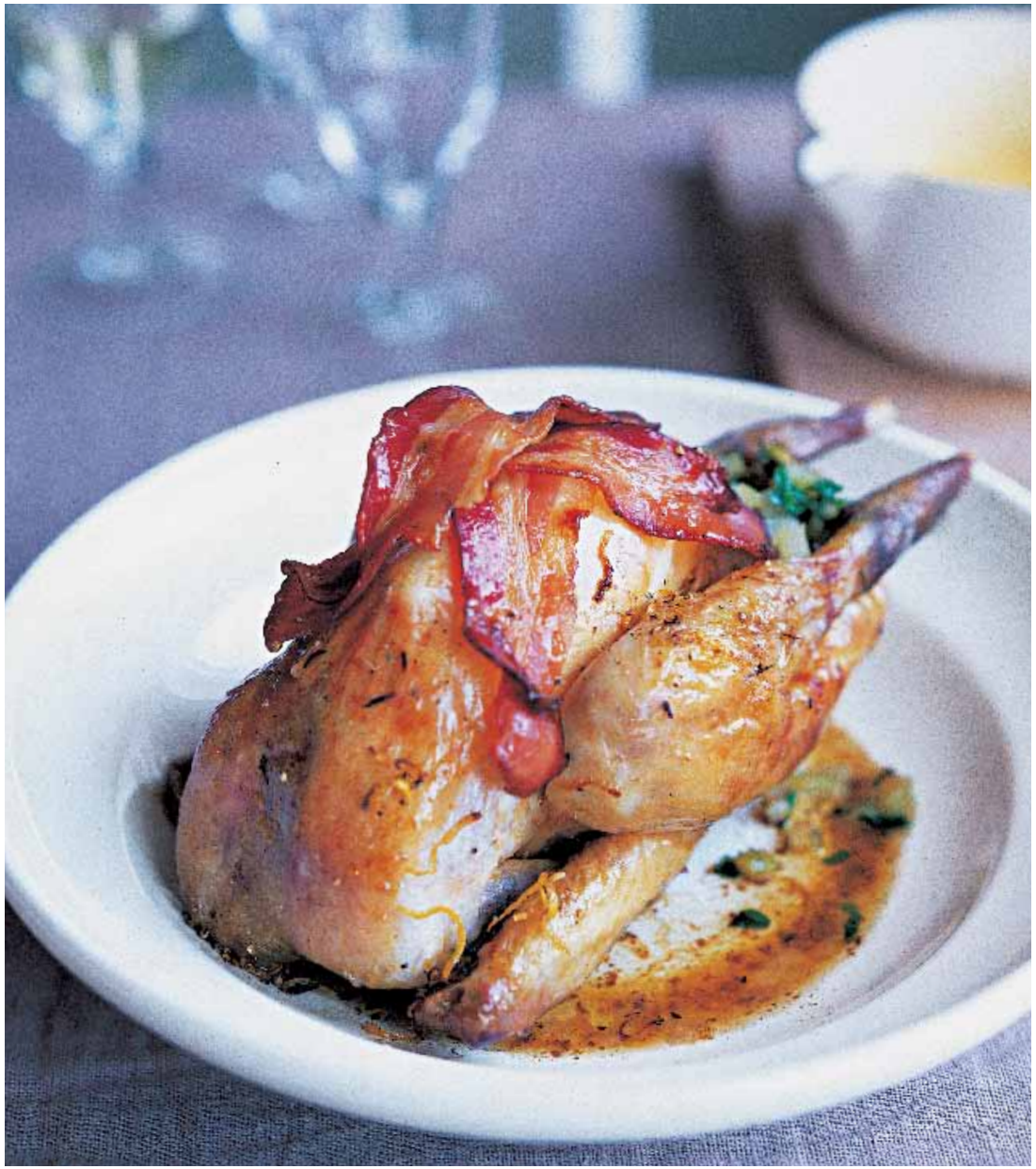
4 egg yolks

Mix the celery and watercress together in a bowl, season and bind with 50g melted butter. Grate the rind of the lemons and mix with some salt and pepper, then rub the skin of the birds with the lemon mixture. Put any remaining lemon mixture and the garlic inside the birds. Tie the pork fat or bacon over the birds with some string.

Heat 100g butter in a pan and brown the birds all over. Remove the birds from the pan and pour in the wine. Reduce slightly, then add the stock.

Stuff the birds with the watercress and celery mixture but don't truss them. Return the birds to the pan, cover, and simmer for 45 minutes. Remove the guinea fowl and carve them onto a hot dish.

Squeeze the lemons and beat their juice with the egg yolks. Add a little hot stock, stir well and pour into the pan. Blend in the remaining butter and allow the sauce to thicken. Do not let it boil. Pour over the carved birds and serve, garnished with watercress and celery leaves.



Duck fritters

This is a great way to use up a leftover duck. I often order roast duck in a Chinese restaurant and take home a doggy bag of the leftovers! These are quite delicious and make a great starter or supper dish.

½ roast duck
4 eggs
450g cooked rice
4 spring onions, finely sliced
½ teaspoon five-spice powder
dash of soy sauce
2 teaspoons hoi sin sauce
⅔ vegetable oil to ⅓ sesame oil, for frying

Cut the duck meat into small pieces. Break the eggs into a bowl and beat. Add the duck pieces, rice, spring onions, five-spice powder, soy sauce and hoi sin. Heat the oil in a heavy pan, drop spoonfuls of the mixture into the pan and fry until golden on each side.

PICKLE:
2 aubergines
125ml oil
2 tomatoes, chopped
1 small red chilli, chopped
1 pickled lemon, sliced
4 tablespoons rice or white wine vinegar
2 tablespoons caster sugar

To make the pickle, slice the aubergine and fry in the oil until soft. Add the tomatoes, the chilli and the lemon and fry gently for 5 minutes. Add the other ingredients and continue to cook until it all comes together. Chop the pickle, once cooled.

Serve the fritters with the pickle.

Cretan rabbit pie

I'm not really sure that there are many rabbits on Crete, but this is an adaptation of one of their chicken dishes, which works really well with rabbit. You can either cut the flesh off the bones before cooking or, for greater ease, cut it into pieces. This dish can also be made and served as individual pies.

SERVES 4

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 good-size rabbits

2 tablespoons seasoned flour

juice of 1 lemon

cayenne pepper

2 onions, roughly chopped

1 garlic clove, chopped

knob of butter

175g cooked rice

1 tablespoon sultanas

1 tablespoon capers, halved

225g Cheshire cheese, cubed and sliced

white stock to moisten

salt and pepper

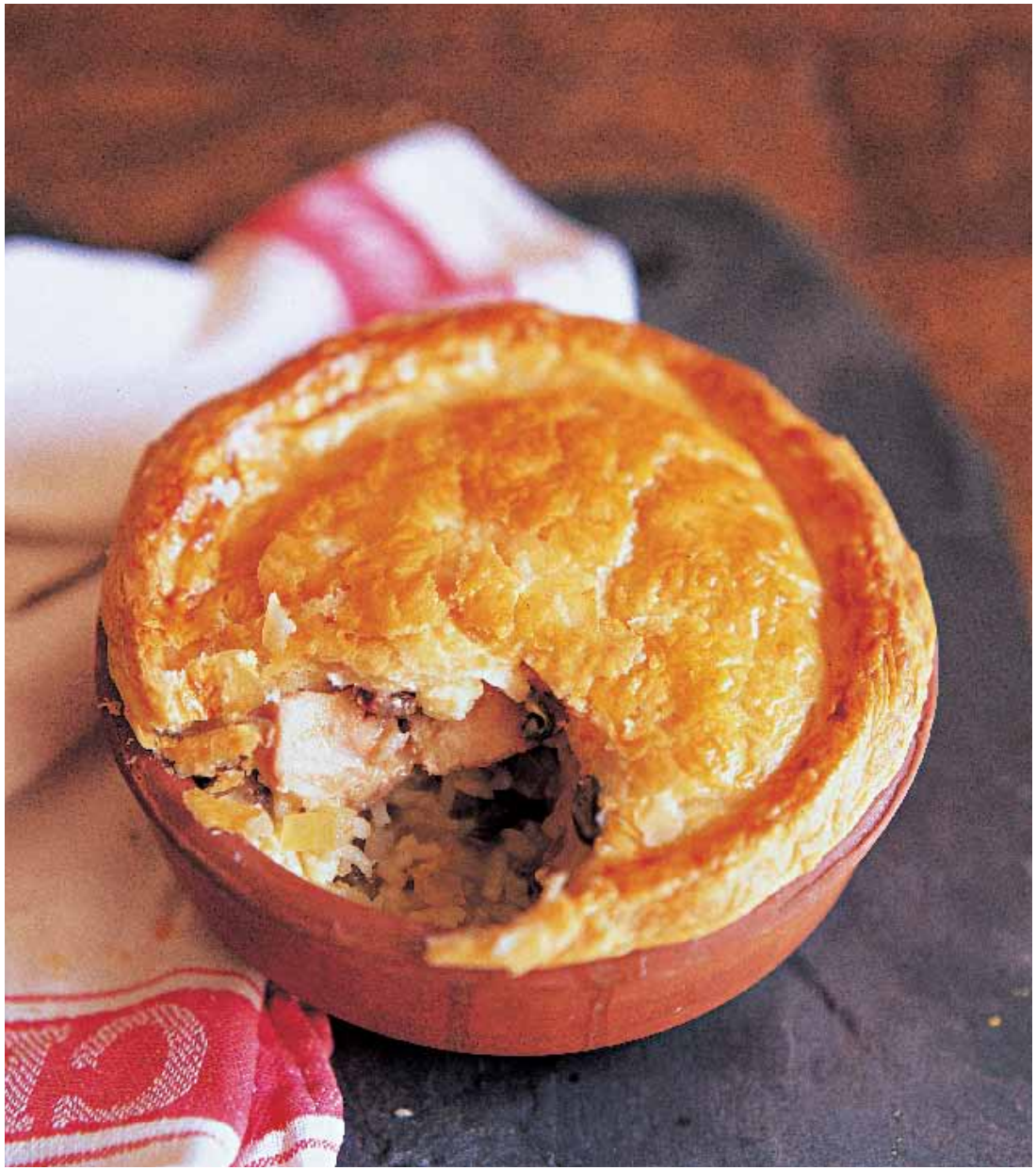
1 packet puff pastry

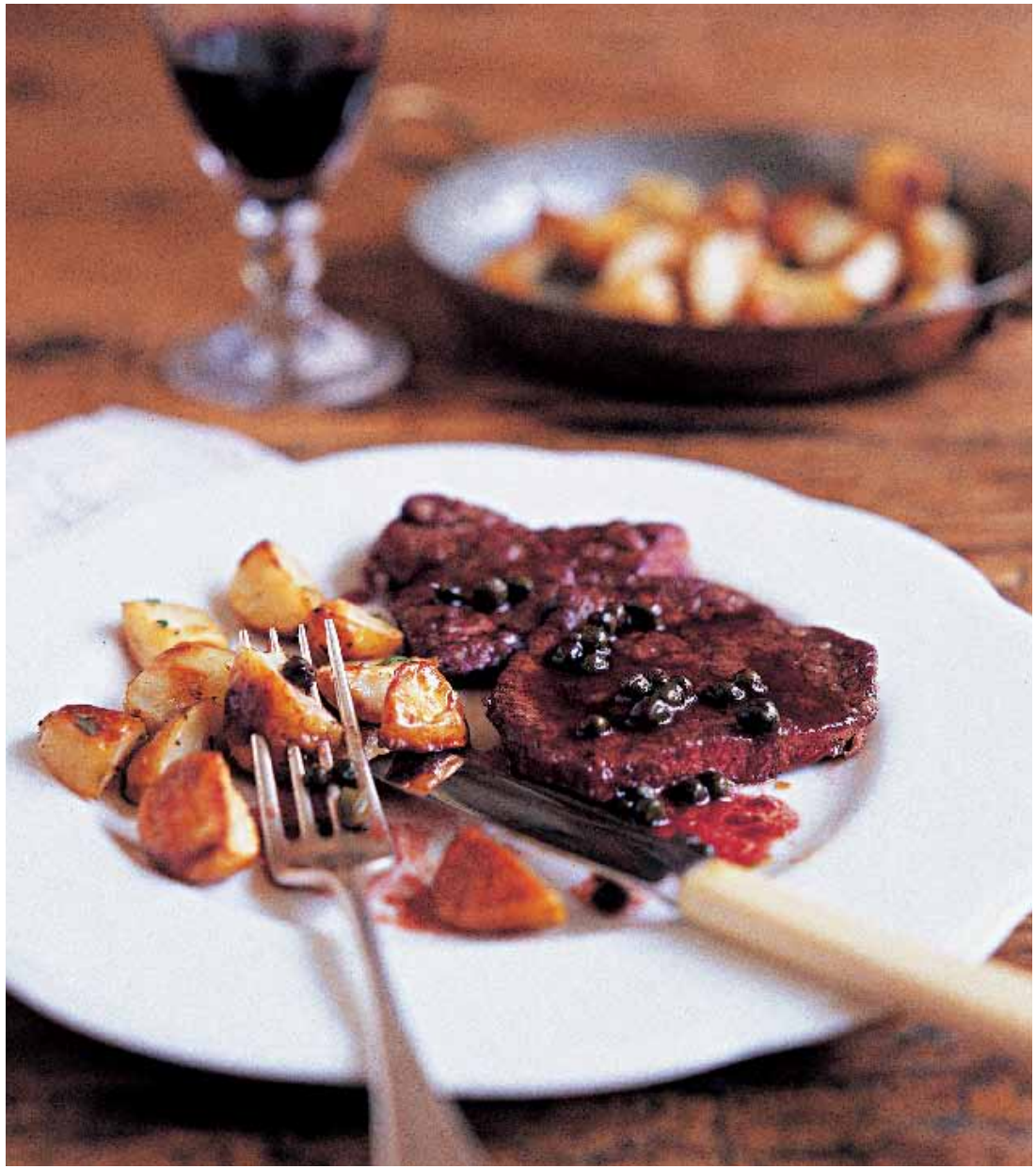
Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/gas 6.

Heat the oil in a pan. Toss the meat in the seasoned flour and brown in the oil. Remove the meat, pour over the lemon juice, sprinkle with cayenne pepper and set aside.

Fry the onion and garlic in the butter, until soft. Mix with the rice and put into a buttered pie dish. Arrange the meat on top, then the sultanas and capers. Sprinkle over a few cubes of cheese. Pour in any remaining lemon juice from the marinade and any stock you think necessary. Season lightly. Arrange a layer of sliced cheese over the mixture.

Roll out the pastry and cover the pie. Bake in the preheated oven for 40 minutes, until the pastry is risen and golden.





Venison schnitzel

My friend Isabel says venison must be cooked either very slowly or very quickly. This dish falls into the latter category. I sometimes add stewed plums to the sauce or, even better, the pickled umeboshi plums from Japan. Alternatively, you can now buy umeboshi paste, and a teaspoon or two stirred into the sauce instead of the vinegar is very good.

If the piece of venison is in any way tough, marinate it overnight in olive oil or red wine, and then dry it carefully.

SERVES 4

1 slice venison per person, beaten thin between sheets of clingfilm

seasoned flour

butter and olive oil

capers

salt and pepper

1 wine glass port

1 teaspoon sherry vinegar

hard-boiled eggs, chopped

Flour the venison slices. Heat the oil and butter together in a heavy frying pan and flash-fry the meat. Throw in the capers and fry for a moment. Transfer the meat and capers to a warmed plate. Pour the port into the pan to deglaze it, bring to the boil and pour in the sherry vinegar. Pour this over the meat.

Garnish with hard-boiled eggs and serve with fried potatoes.