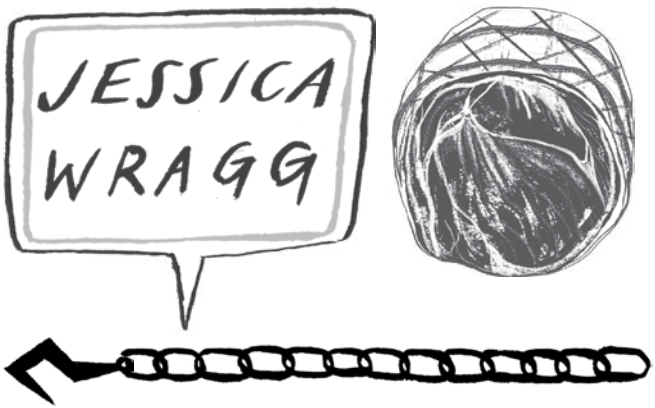
GIRL ON THE BLOCK

A TRUE STORY OF COMING OF AGE BEHIND THE COUNTER



The names and identifying characteristics of some individuals discussed in this book were changed to protect their privacy.

FIRST EDITION

Designed by Paula Russell Szafranski
Title page lettering and art © Alice Pattullo

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-0-06-286392-8

19 20 21 22 23 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

JOINT WORK

The Chicken

Jointing a chicken might just be one of the most useful things you can learn when it comes to trying butchery skills at home. Not only does it save money by allowing you to buy a whole bird instead of already prepared pieces, but you'll have the carcass at the very end of it for some stellar soup.

STEP 1 Buy the bird. Free-range birds should always be a little bigger—they've grown for longer and you'll get much more flavor from them. The skin should be intact and fairly dry, and the breast and leg of equal ratio. If you find yourself looking at a chicken with tiny legs and lots of breast meat, this chicken came from a long line of genetically engineered breeds. Make sure you ask your butcher to include the giblets. If at any point in the future you're going to be making gravy, the giblets are an essential ingredient for flavor.

STEP 2 Sharpen your knife. You'll need a fairly thin blade, and it will have to be sharp. Chicken bones are soft, but they can prove a little tricky to navigate if you're a beginner.

STEP 3 Place the bird on a trustworthy chopping board with the neck facing you. Use your hands and try to feel exactly where the breast and legs are. When you get a better sense of this, jointing the chicken will become much easier. Remember, the breast is actually the front of the chicken, but we lay the chicken on its back for cooking purposes.

STEP 4 Start by removing the wings. Pull the wings out until they are stretched away from the carcass. At the very corner of the breast, where the wings attach, you will see a small joint, much like where our arms meet our shoulders. Using the tip of your knife, cut around the end of the wing so that you can see the joint itself. Then grasp the wings close to the joint and bend them downward. This will shake the bone free from the joint. Use your knife if you get stuck.

STEP 5 Remove the breasts. Between the two breasts, you should be able to see a thin, slightly sunken bit of skin that runs the length of the bird. This indicates where the bird's backbone is. Use your fingers to feel it—it's usually around three inches long with a little point on the top. To remove each breast, you'll need to make a cut at each side of the backbone. Starting on one side at the back of the bird, bring your knife forward, cutting as close to the backbone as you can. Then do the same on the other side. Use your hands to pull the meat away from the middle of the bird. Beneath it, you should see more bone—an oval-shaped carcass that curves around slightly. On each side, use your knife to follow the curve of the carcass until the breasts are free from the bone.

STEP 6 Remove the legs. This doesn't take much cutting, and it can be done very easily by pulling the bone from the joint socket. Turn the bird around until you're looking into the cavity. Now that the breasts are removed, you should be able to see where the legs join the carcass. With a similar technique as the wings, grasp both of the legs and bend them backward beneath the bird. You should feel the joints pop and the thighbone will become exposed. Using

your knife, begin close to the carcass and cut around the thighbone as close to the carcass as you can. The closer you get, the more meat you will keep on the legs.

STEP 7 Trim any loose skin from the carcass. You should now have two wings, two legs, two breasts, and a carcass to do with what you will!

CHICKEN PARCELS

A Fine Art

Chicken parcels might sound like something you'd only find at a seventies dinner party, but they are fantastic comfort food and a perfect, easy meal for four. After what felt like a lifetime of making these at the farm shop, I have chicken parcels down to an art. All you need is a little precision, these four essential items, and an appetite:

1. TRUSSING LOOPS Many butcheries will give these to you for free. Trussing loops are usually used for dressing chickens and look like small, stretchy elastic bands. You'll need at least four.

2. A DOUBLE CHICKEN BREAST This might be hard to find, as most butcher shops only sell single breasts. If you can't get hold of a double breast, ask your butcher to crown a chicken for you and then remove the meat from the carcass. You'll be left with two single breasts from the carcass, attached by the skin that covers them. It's essential that the skin is left on—this will protect the meat during roasting.

3. SAUSAGE MEAT MIX Instead of requesting the actual mix itself, you can just ask your butcher to remove the casing from a few sausages. Choose a sausage with plenty of peppery flavor. You'll need 9½ to 10½ ounces (275 to 300 grams) of meat mix (about three sausages' worth), rolled into a ball with a pinch of dry breadcrumbs.

4. THINLY SLICED SMOKED STREAKY BACON In addition to the trussing loops, this will be used to keep the parcel together. You'll need four slices.

You can also opt to add a small amount of grated cheese or garnish the final parcel with a slice of orange on top. If you do choose to add grated cheese, a sharp cheddar works best and will melt during cooking into the stuffing ball.

Once you have all of your ingredients, follow these steps:

Preheat the oven to 475°F (250°C).

Lay out the breast in front of you, skin-side down. You should see two teardrop-shaped pieces of meat, with smaller flaps on each side. The flaps are the mini fillet, and they are attached to the breast itself. Open them out away from the breast so that you're left with a "pocket" in the middle where the two breasts meet.

Roll the sausage meat into a tight ball (it should be around the size of your fist), add any extras, like the cheese, and place in the very center of the breast, then fold the mini fillets back in and over the top of the stuffing ball in the same motion as closing a pair of curtains. The stuffing ball should now be completely covered by the breast meat. If it's not, pull a little harder and tuck the fillets around the ball until complete.

Carefully, being mindful not to move the fillets from the sausage meat, flip the breast over so that the skin side is facing upward. Using cupped hands, tuck any edges underneath the parcel. When you're finished, you should be left with a tight-ish ball of chicken, with only skin visible on the top side.

Take each slice of bacon and wrap it all the way around the circumference of the parcel, overlapping a bit at the base. Pull quite tightly—this will help to keep the parcel together.

To secure your parcel before cooking, place two trusses over the bacon, opening them up as wide as they will stretch, being careful not to shift anything, and securing the bacon in place. Then secure two more trusses across the breast in the other direction, so that each overlapping truss forms a cross on top. Add a few more trusses here if you want to be extra secure.

Brown the parcel in the preheated oven for 5 minutes, then turn the oven temperature down to 320°F (160°C) and bake for another 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the sausage meat is completely cooked.

To plate, slice as you would a cake so you end up with a wedge of chicken with sausage meat inside and a little bacon, too. Serve with some roasted potatoes and buttered greens on the side.

KNOW YOUR KNIVES

Rule number one of kitchen knives: a dull knife can be much more dangerous than a sharp one. I can't tell you how many times I've found myself stuck in my parents' kitchen, trying to chop onions or mince garlic with knives that haven't been sharpened since the late nineties. Sharp blades are accurate. Used correctly on a piece of meat or a vegetable, there is very little chance of a sharp blade slipping. Dull blades, however, with their larger surface area, won't make a cut but will slide instead, meaning there's much more chance of you losing a finger.

Knife-sharpening steels are easy to come by in cookware shops—look for a steel that's made of material closest to that of your knife, as anything that's too rough can tend to over-sharpen, making the blade uneven after a while. If you find yourself in a situation with a dull knife and no steel but you have another knife from the same set, use the back of it to sharpen your dull knife. Don't make the mistake of putting too much pressure into sharpening. The idea is to glide the blade at roughly a twenty-degree angle on the steel from blade to tip. Do this four times on each side, alternating sides of your knife blade, and you'll see an improvement.

Butcher's knives are similar to kitchen knives, but whereas chef's knives and kitchen knives are made from thick, sturdy steel, butcher's knives tend to be a little more flexible. These are the knives that any good butcher will have in her arsenal:

BONING KNIFE These knives can have either a straight or curved blade. Straight boning knives are good for removing larger pieces of meat from the bone, whereas

curved boning knives are better for the fiddly bits and have a little more give in the metal.

STEAK KNIFE With a blade around ten inches in length, these knives are, obviously, used for cutting steaks and slicing larger bits of meat. Again, they come either straight or curved, but I much prefer a steak knife with a curved blade thanks to the extra movement the curve allows.

HANDSAW Handsaws generally come in all different sizes, but the most important thing will be the blade. With the frame shaped like a bow, the blade will be thin with a slight bend but sturdy enough to saw through bone accurately. The actual size of the saw will depend. Some butchers prefer shorter saws so they have more control, and others prefer them longer. I prefer something right in the middle. To me shorter saws require more effort, and it's much easier to get on with a saw that's got a bit of length so there's less back and forth.

CLEAVER Used to chop through smaller, more manageable bones in one fell swoop. Accuracy is key, so the cleaver needs to be heavy enough for gravity to help with the movement but not too heavy for the one using it to lose control. The blade will have a much bigger surface area than that of a knife but still will be sharp enough to cut bone.

There are many other types of knives that a butcher might keep in her kitchen, but in my opinion, these essentials are all you really need. If you're just starting out, Victorinox makes the best, most reliable knives out there that won't break the bank.

AN ODE TO THE WOMEN OF MEAT

Beneath a Styrofoam canopy, lit by the false white of the overhead lamps, she considers the animal in front of her. The block, wood worn down in the middle to a curve by years of use, bruised and splintered and toughened in places, wobbles beneath the force of her cleaver. The metal legs on which it stands, rusting in the top corners, gleamed silver a long time ago. Now the steel is matte, almost gray, and over the years has bowed to appear misshapen.

As a child, she wanted to be a veterinarian. She remembers every night between six and seven a program on television that captivated her—about a kindhearted vet who treated cows and sheep and dogs. She always hid her eyes behind a pillow during the gore of the operating footage.

Is what she is doing now so very different? Her knife is sharp, its blade worn down until it is as thin as a scalpel. In front of her, a middle of pork, two and a half feet long and a foot and a half wide. Ribs exposed, glistening beneath thin silver skin, meat protected on the underside. The skin, with an inch of fat beneath its surface, is tan, the small nipples of the sow still attached. No, it isn't so different.

On a late night surfing the internet a few months ago, she had read the blog of a food writer who estimated that she is one of only twenty-five female butchers in the UK. She wondered, immediately, who took the time to count them, and set about searching for more on Google and via telephone, cold-calling other butcher shops to see if the voice that answered the phone belonged to a man or woman. After a while she began to believe it; it was accurate enough to her to illustrate

how alien she felt in her workplace, a statistic that made her feel special and justified in explaining her love for the trade.

All over the world, women have begun to take hold of the meat industry—others like her are stepping up to the block and shaping their shared craft with a keen eye for animal husbandry, a compassion for welfare, and a palate for new and interesting flavors and varieties of meat.

FEMALE-FRONTED BUTCHERIES AROUND THE WORLD

BAVETTE MEAT & PROVISIONS

Pasadena, California

Run and founded by Melissa Cortina, Bavette is a shop that's committed to moving away from a grain-fed beef supply in favor of meat that is pasture raised and humanely treated. Cortina discovered butchery after leaving a PhD program to study under a James Beard Award–winning chef. She works with local ranchers, and her store sells a fantastic array of other home-cooked goods, too.

FOSTER SUNDRY

Brooklyn, New York

Cara Nicoletti is as close as they come to a celebrity butcher, hosting her own show on VICE TV and famed for the incredible array of flavored sausages she makes at Brooklyn's Foster Sundry. She's a fourth-generation butcher, and she'll admit that since working behind the counter, she eats less meat, incorporating ingredients like kale and pesto into her sausages.

JOCELYN GUEST AND ERIKA NAKAMURA

TBD

Guest and Nakamura were formerly partners with April Bloomfield at White Gold Butchers in New York City. It's still up in the air as to where these two meat mavens will end up next, but keep a close eye on their Instagram. Whatever their next venture is, it's guaranteed to involve some incredible butchery skills and some stellar meat.

CHICAGO MEAT COLLECTIVE

Chicago, Illinois

The Chicago Meat Collective is not so much a butcher shop as an education center dedicated to offering a wide range of courses in whole-animal butchery to home cooks. Founded by McCullough Kelly-Willis in 2013, the school boasts a number of female instructors.

SEBASTIAN & CO, VANCOUVER

British Columbia

Headed by Tess Fuller, a renowned female butcher who boasts more than thirty thousand Instagram followers and some serious knife skills, Sebastian & Co is widely recognized as the best butcher shop in Vancouver. This shop takes quality and nose-to-tail seriously.

CHARLOTTE'S BUTCHERY

Newcastle, UK

Known as "The Girl Butcher," Charlotte Mitchell was one of the first female butchers to gain fame in the UK when she began in the trade as a university student. Ten years later, Newcastle's only female-fronted butcher shop was born.

YE OLDE SAUSAGE SHOP

Oswaldtwistle, UK

Co-owned by Jessica Leliuga, Ye Olde is famous in its area for catering to its customer base with a fantastic oven-ready selection. Leliuga's award-winning artisanal skills are what make this shop special, and she was even chosen to represent Great Britain at the World Butchers' Challenge 2018.

VICTOR CHURCHILL

New South Wales, Australia

Anthony Bourdain once described this shop as the most beautiful butcher shop in the world. He wasn't wrong. To me, VC is the pinnacle, and it boasts some of the most incredible suppliers, produce, charcuterie, and delicatessen items in Australia. Working there alongside Head Butcher Mickey Peacock is Luci Kington, whose dedication and talent exceeds anything I've seen before and who was trained in part by master butcher Darren O'Rourke.

GARY'S QUALITY MEATS

South Yarra, Australia

A fourth-generation butcher, Gary McBean also employs Ashleigh McBean, his daughter, who has been butchering for thirteen years. With an expertise in dry-aging, Gary's hosts an impressive counter display as well as a fantastic uniform of leather aprons and flat caps. The real deal.

THE ESSENTIAL CUTS FROM NOSE TO TAIL

Lamb

SCRAG END AND MIDDLE NECK The neck of lamb is a bony yet rewarding cut. When sliced for a casserole, stew, or hot pot, its high fat content makes it a force to be reckoned with.

SHOULDER Kept on the bone, cooked for five hours at a low temperature, nothing beats this cut. The shoulders are some of the hardest working groups of muscles on the body, so that low cooking is essential to tenderize the meat. The flavor is sweet and rich, and the meat can be sliced thinly while still on the bone to make an excellent grilling cut.

RACK The most expensive cut on the carcass and the most tender. Whereas the shoulder is cut from the first five to six rib bones of the animal, the rack is cut from the next seven to eight. Encased within the ribs are two thin strips of lean loin meat. Traditionally the rack is French-trimmed, pan-seared, and quickly roasted.

LOIN/SADDLE The saddle, without the full rib bones, is best for lamb chops. The equivalent of a beef short loin with the fillet of lamb running on its underside, the saddle can be cut to make miniature T-bones, which when cooked on the grill are nigh unbeatable. For a great roast, I recommend the

saddle, boned and rolled. It's lean on the inside with a lovely layer of fat to keep it moist circling around the outside.

LEG Less tough than the shoulder, the leg is comprised of leaner muscles and usually has its covering of fat on the outside rather than the inside. Great for a traditional Sunday roast, the leg of lamb doesn't take a lot of cooking time, offering a speedier and leaner alternative to the shoulder.

BREAST The breast, two oval-shaped strips that are usually removed from the carcass during the breakdown, is mostly fat and therefore the cheapest cut on the lamb. However, once you render the fat, the slow-roasted meat of a lamb breast is sweet and a lovely meal for two.

Pork

CHEEKS Pork cheeks went out of favor for a decade or so toward the end of the twentieth century, but with the popularity of nose-to-tail eating, they are now firmly back in style. The whole cheek, or the jowl when removed, is used to make guanciale, an Italian charcuterie that adds a great flavor to pastas and stews. The actual cheek muscle, or the plum, is smaller than your fist, and will need a very slow cook before it falls apart. When you get there, though, the flavors are sublime.

BUTT/SHOULDER The pork shoulder, or butt as it's known in barbecue terms, is a portion of the neck end of pork split away from the front leg. Highly marbled, it's the perfect slow barbecue cut for pulled pork, but when prepared properly it also makes a very good steak.

HAND AND SPRING/HAND OF PORK With lots of bone, this is the lower part of the shoulder that usually has the foreleg and trotter attached. With the bone removed, the joint can be tied for slow cooking, and the leg can be cut into rounds of shin. A great and economical option.

LOIN This cut includes the sirloin and little rib eye of pork, comprised of the first eight bones after the shoulder. Pork chops, rolled loin, French-trimmed rack of pork, and pork T-bone are all cuts that come from the larger pork loin. But if you're looking for something special, ask your butcher for chops cut from the rib end. They'll be the most marbled with the most flavor.

BELLY Much like the breast of lamb, the belly is roughly 50/50 fat to lean. Belly is a versatile cut, though—a slow roast with fennel and garlic brings out the sweetness in the meat, and once properly rendered, the fat helps to keep the meat moist to the point of falling apart. Located on top of the diaphragm, the belly is a well-used muscle, but when cut very thin and grilled it can be a beautiful supper.

CHUMP Cut from the very top of the leg, the chump is lean and if not prepared correctly can be dry. Boned out and sliced thinly for escalopes is one way to combat this.

LEG Pork leg was once the choice cut for roasting, but it has given way to the more marbled cuts from the upper carcass. Today its hulking muscle is used mainly for hams and gammons, yielding a large amount of lean meat with enough fat cover on the top. Farther down the leg you'll find the hock, which makes a beautiful roast for two with plenty of delicious marrow.

TROTTER The trotters are filled with rich, beautiful jelly that renders when cooked. They also make a flavorful stock,

or if boiled for long enough can provide nuggets of rich, gelatinous meat.

Beef

CHEEK Cows spend eight hours a day chewing their food and very little time walking around; thus the cheek is the most used muscle on the entire carcass. The cheeks are filled with sinews that might not look appetizing, but when cooked down turn to a rich jelly. Ox cheeks prepared in a ragù are sublime, if you have the patience for it.

BRISKET The larger breast of the carcass, comprised of a number of interconnecting muscles. In British butchery, brisket gets trimmed of most of its fat for pot roast. The lean meat on its own is very tough, so it needs to be cooked in liquid to soften. Left with the fat on, though, brisket is the barbecuer's choice cut for smoking low and slow.

CHUCK Cut from the shoulder, chuck is the ideal meat for a stew, taking less time to cook than the cheek or shin but still ending up tender. The connective tissues in chuck house a nice amount of fat (roughly 80/20 lean to fat) that melts during cooking.

SHORT RIBS Cut from below the brisket, the short ribs are usually four short bones covered in at least two inches of meat. In butchery, they can be cut "flanken"—across the bone—or "English style" with each bone cut individually. Like brisket, they're great for grilling or smoking.

BAVETTE Bavette, or flank steak, is a long, thin yet fibrous muscle cut from the flank. It should be pan-fried and offers tons of flavor. Don't go past medium-rare and you'll have

a fantastic and much cheaper alternative to sirloin or top round steak.

ONGLET Also known as thick skirt or hanger steak. Once upon a time onglet was called butcher's steak, as it is a well-kept secret. The onglet is technically offal, coming from the diaphragm muscle and close to the organs, and it takes on a strong, beefy flavor. Opt for this if you're looking for a cheap steak with plenty of bite.

SHIN The shank of beef harbors the best bone marrow on the carcass. A series of tough and lean muscles surrounding a large bone, the shin is best cut across the bone or diced. It's a cheap alternative to chuck, arguably with more flavor.

RIB EYE The most popular steak cut on the carcass, usually taken from ribs that come after the chuck. A forerib consists of five bones before tapering off into a leaner sirloin steak. Removed from the bones, the rib eye steak is marbled, filled with sweet fat, and tender. On the bone, with the tail of fat left on, it's a great grilling cut.

SHORT LOIN The short loin comes from the three ribs after the forerib. Bone-in for roasting as a "wing rib" or boned out, the short loin has a beautiful nugget of fat that sits at the edge of the meat and a strip that surrounds it. It's lean yet flavorful, and extremely tender.

T-BONE A lower portion of the short loin with the tenderloin attached, separated by a T-shaped bone. The steak is the ultimate sharing cut, popular for barbecues and in steak restaurants. Beneath this umbrella is the porterhouse, cut from the part of the loin where the tenderloin is at its widest, although this depends on who you're asking. The definition of the porterhouse is widely contested.

TENDERLOIN The absolute king of cuts, the tenderloin is the least used muscle on the entire carcass, hidden below the rib cage on both sides of the spine. As it's the least used, it's also the most tender and thus the most expensive. The top end of the tenderloin, the chateaubriand, sits on top of the sirloin and comprises three muscles. It makes a great meal for two, while the center cut is most desired for beef Wellington or steaks thanks to its uniform size.

SIRLOIN Sirloin, or "rump" in the UK, located at the top of the leg and the bottom of the loin, can withstand more dry-aging than other cuts because it's a slightly tougher steak than the rib eye or short loin. It's packed with flavor, and if you're not looking for the most tender of steaks, a thick-cut sirloin to feed three or four people will fit the bill. Get to know your butcher and ask for a picanha, too—it's a muscle that comprises the sirloin and is usually sold in one large triangular steak. It's great for grilling or barbecuing.

TOP ROUND Cut from the top bit or top leg, the top round, or "topside" in the UK, produces thin-cut frying steaks, escalope style, or large roasting cuts best served medium rare. Top round is fantastic when cooked for forty minutes over high heat, with the leftovers making a pretty unbeatable sandwich.

TAIL The tail is the secret weapon on the carcass. Once skinned, the tail is cut through the joints into sections, each piece with marrow in its center and a small amount of meat surrounding. Casserole the tail with Carribbean-style flavors for an authentic take on the meat, or braise it in red wine and beef stock before shredding from the bone for a hearty pie filling.

PRIMAL CUTS

Breaking Down a Lamb

Breaking down a lamb was one of the most useful things I was ever taught. Lamb meat is expensive, and the bones are small, so it is imperative to respect the animal and to take care when using your knife and your saws. The rack of lamb, the most expensive cut on the carcass, retails in the UK for an average of thirty pounds per kilo of free-range meat (roughly forty dollars).

Mastering the breakdown of a lamb is essential in another sense: once you understand the anatomy of a lamb, you can apply this understanding to other bovine beasts, large and small. A lamb is the first step in this chain of mastery, with bone and muscle structure that is almost identical to that of a pig, whose anatomy is similar to a cow, only smaller. The larger the animal, the more muscles there are to break apart, but the principle is the same.

To begin, source a carcass of lamb from your local butcher. Most good butcheries will deal with lamb in carcass form, so it shouldn't be hard to find one. The fat should be creamy and white and the muscle beneath barely visible. If the muscles are visible through the top layer of skin, the meat will be lean and the animal is probably a bit older than lamb age (twelve months or less). You'll also need a good-quality boning knife and a handsaw.

Place the lamb on a large, clean workspace with its cavity facing upward. The cavity is the area, hidden by the breasts, where the organs have been removed. The first step is to remove the breasts. At the front of the lamb are its forelegs, which will be bent slightly. Make the first cut just

below them and run your knife from there down the cavity, tapering off toward the legs. Do the same on the other side—this will leave you with two breasts marked out in long oval shapes.

With your handsaw, begin at the top of the carcass and remove the breasts by using one hand to saw through the bone and the other to pull the meat slightly. You should only go through bone for half of the breast—the rest can be removed by using your boning knife to cut through the fat and skin. Do not put too much pressure on the saw. The trick is to let the saw do most of the work. The more you push, the harder it will be.

Once the breasts are removed, you should be able to see inside of the carcass and clearly make out the ribs running the length of it. Rib bones one to five are the shoulder and six to twelve are the rack of lamb. After the rack comes the saddle, then the chump and legs.

By removing the breasts you've allowed yourself clear space to cut between the bones. Count five ribs and make a long cut to the spine in between bones five and six on each side. Ideally the cuts you make should meet in the middle, separated by the spine. Using your handsaw, remove the shoulders by sawing through the spine.

Next, the rack of lamb. At this point, you can remove most of the primal cuts by utilizing the cartilage in between each spinal joint to your advantage. If you get your knife in the right spot, it's possible to break the joint without using your saw at all. For now, though, we'll use our saw so that you can learn the places to cut.

Count eight ribs. This is your lamb's best end, where the racks come from. After the eighth bone, make a cut down to the spine just as you did with the shoulders and use the saw to separate them from the carcass as you did before. Set them aside.

The saddle, chump, and legs should be all you have left in front of you. Separating these could well be a little trickier, as you'll have to find the joints in between and use those.

Depending on where they've trained, some butchers leave the chump on the loin. In my experience, we've always taken the legs away from the carcass by leaving the chump on the legs. To do this, find the O-shaped cavity between the two legs at the bottom of the spine. You may need to remove a little fat and sinew, but have a look at the spine itself—you should see the joints. They're the cartilage between each bone and they look like lowered white lines. If you still can't figure it out, use the tip of your knife to explore—the knife should slide easily into the joint. If it doesn't, that means you've hit bone and you'll need to head a little farther north or south.

To remove the legs, count one joint up from the bottom of the spine and push your knife all the way through. Then use your saw to separate the saddle and legs.

Now you have your primal cuts of lamb—the shoulders, the rack, the saddle, and the legs. The next step is to prepare them further.

The shoulders are fairly simple to remove. Turn them upside down so that the neck is on the block and the ribs are facing you. Using your knife, cut along the rib cage on each side and follow the bones around. The closer you cut to the bones, the less waste and the more meat will be left on the cut when you finally go to cook it. When you get to the bottom, you'll hit the neck bone that separates the two shoulders. The neck bone runs down the center of the two joints, with a beautiful piece called the neck fillet on the underside. You'll want to keep that on the shoulder itself, so cut down the neck on each side and move your knife around the knobbly joints.

Next, the rack of lamb. The first step is to chine the

rack, meaning to remove the rack from the spine for ease of carving. Place the blade of your saw parallel to the spine of the rack and move it upward by around an inch. Saw very gently—you'll want to cut through the bone but stop before you hit the meat. One you've cut through the bone, remove the rack from the spine by scooping the eye of meat away from the large spine bone. Do the same on the other side.

The saddle is great for lamb chops. You'll need to use your prowess in finding the joints of the spine to cut through the chops here without damaging too much of the delicate meat with the saw. If you can't see the spine clearly (it should be in the center of two small strips of fillet), then remove some of the fat and the veins that run down the length of it. Ideally you will be able to see the spine clearly enough to know where to put your knife.

Poke the tip of your knife through each joint of the spine. This can be a little tougher to do, as there is also a small bit of cartilage on each side that needs to be cut through. Push as far through as you can, then use your saw to cut the chops away from the piece. Do this four more times and you have your Barnsley chops (essentially, double lamb T-bones). Don't be tempted to cut some of the straggly tail meat off—that's where all of the fatty flavor lies.

The legs are the trickiest to remove from the bone, given that the bone they're attached to is an irregular "aitch" shape. The aitch bone is essentially the same shape as our pelvis, with intricate lumps and bumps that require some concentration to work free.

The first job is to remove the meat from the upper part of the bone. Using the very tip of your knife, make cuts around any visible parts of the bone. The top part of the aitch bone is similar in shape to that in the saddle—a cross shape where you'll have to first remove meat from the top, then work your way around the corners to the bottom. There's

really no way of explaining the best way to do this—all you can do is take your time and explore the bone structure, cutting as close as you can to the aitch.

Once you've removed as much as you can from the top part of the aitch bone, start to delve a little deeper—you'll see where you need to cut as the two legs are separated by the bone and that bone only. You'll find a socket soon enough—with the ball of the femur bone tucked inside. You're nearly there, but you will need to remove the ball from the joint socket to continue your butchery. The best way of doing this is to be firm—push the point of your knife into the socket and twist it until you feel the joint come free. Once it's free, you'll find that you can much more easily identify the bottom of the aitch bone. Go back to using the tip of your knife to cut around the remaining part of the bone and separate any remaining meat to free the leg entirely.

Any spare bones from the shoulder or leg that you are left with can be sawed into smaller pieces and used for stock.

TYING A BUTCHER'S KNOT

Tying an easy, quick butcher's knot is one of the most useful tricks you'll ever learn. A good butcher's knot can be the difference between a neatly prepared roast and one that falls apart in the oven. Heck, you can even use a butcher's knot when you're camping to tie down your tent if you really want to.

It goes without saying that almost all butchers will have been taught a different way of tying the knot, with each one arriving at the same end goal. For five years I used a technique that I'd been shown during my time at the farm shop, only to have a colleague teach me a new, easier, and altogether quicker way that would save me tons of time and fooling around with string and fingers.

The type of string you use is paramount—make sure that you have butcher's twine on hand and do not, under any circumstances, no matter the emergency, use regular string from the hardware store. Butcher's twine has been specially made out of fibers that won't singe while cooking and therefore won't affect the flavor of whatever it is you're cooking.

First, find yourself something to tie the twine around. Start with a boneless pork loin, perhaps—it's small enough to be easy to manage but big enough not to prove too fiddly. Get your butcher to give you a boneless loin with no strings on it and buy a roll of twine off him or her, too.

Place the meat on a board in front of you and put the ball of twine in your apron pocket (don't try putting it in your jeans pocket, as you will need your ball to move freely and unroll as you work). If you don't have an apron, place a bowl

on the ground between your feet, with your ball of twine resting in the bowl.

Put the loose end of the twine in your right hand, and using your left, grip it around 12 inches (30 cm) lower down. Pull the loose end below the piece of meat and shimmy it down to the very center of the loin. Your right hand with the loose end should be slightly raised, with your other hand still holding the tighter end close to the board.

Adjust your grip slightly on the tight end and lay it across your index and middle fingers. This is the basis of the loop you're about to make. Pull the loose end back across the meat to meet your two fingers. The two ends of twine should be lying next to each other.

Wrap the loose end of twine around the back of your two fingers to form a loop, then before bringing it all the way back around, cross it over the tight end. Tuck it through the loop you've just made once, and then twice.

Using the tight end of the twine, pull to tighten the knot. Tighten it as far as you can by placing two fingers on the knot to push it closer to the meat. Finish off with a regular knot on top to secure and cut the ends free.

A RECIPE FOR PROPER PORK CRACKLING

Pork crackling, when served alongside a Sunday roast at my house, is always the first thing to go. There's something about the unctuous saltiness, the almost tooth-shattering crunch, and the explosion of the rendered fat on your tongue that makes it the most treasured part of the meal. This, unfortunately, also means that when crackling is done badly, it's the worst kind of disappointment.

Proper crackling is easy enough, but there are certain elements you'll need to control to make sure that it comes out perfect. Too much moisture in the skin itself and you won't get the crispiness desired, too much fat beneath the skin and it will render too much and undo any work the oven has done before you.

Crackling, I've found, is best cooked in one larger piece first and then shattered into smaller pieces afterward. Ask your butcher for extra pork skin, and he or she may have to order it in for you specially (crackling is so popular in the UK that leftover pork skin is often in short supply).

The skin you buy should be firm and tan in color with just under an inch of fat beneath, and that's normally down to high-welfare rearing, as the animals will have been allowed to lay down fat gradually. Some butchers will sell pork with thin, floppy pale skin. This barely ever has enough fat on the underside and is a surefire sign of low-welfare rearing—the paleness in the skin itself is a giveaway of no light or sunshine and a poor diet.

You'll need a piece that's about 10 by 7 inches. Ask your butcher to fine score the skin in lines, not in crisscross, as at the end you want strips, not diamonds. It should be scored

finely, to let as much moisture evaporate as possible. Then ask your butcher to cut it into strips approximately ¾ inch wide.

Rub a good handful of coarse sea salt into the scoring of the skin. Shake off any excess and leave the skin outside the fridge for 15 minutes while you preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C).

With a dry kitchen towel, pat off any moisture that the salt has brought out of the skin. In a small bowl, mix sea salt, crushed fennel, black pepper, and garlic powder in a ratio of 4 parts salt to 1 part everything else. Massage the salt mixture into the skin, being careful to get right in between the score lines.

Once your oven has preheated, place the skin on a baking sheet and bake for 20 to 25 minutes. It should crisp and bubble, with the fat beneath rendering off into the pan below. As necessary, pour off some of the pork fat into a pitcher (when cooled, it makes a great fat to baste potatoes with) and place the skin back in the oven.

When finished, the skin should be light and deep golden, the fat almost rendered, and very crispy, a little like puff pastry. Allow it to cool before breaking it into smaller pieces, if so desired.

Serve with applesauce for dipping or alongside a roast dinner.

RIB EYE WITH DUCK FAT CHIPS, CREAMED SPINACH FOR HATTIE, AND A SALSA VERDE FOR ME

The trick to this recipe is to prep. In all my cooking, I tend to do as much of the prep as I can beforehand so that I'm not left doing three things at once. With steak, especially, this is essential. You want the majority of your attention focused on the meat and not on anything else. Contrary to popular belief, it's almost always better to prepare your sides in advance and reheat later.

Creamed spinach is comfort food at its very finest. It goes with almost anything, or on its own if you fancy. Hattie and I have even eaten it while sitting with our spoons and a bowl full of thick, green unctuousness in front of the television. The nutmeg is key.

To me chips are by definition thick-cut potatoes that have been fried with copious amounts of salt and vinegar. Not quite as thin as American-style fries, not quite wedges. They're something in between, and they are perfect. Served with a side of tangy, bitter salsa verde, they're elevated to levels unknown.

And then the steak. Rib eye steak has gained so much popularity over the last few years that it's become as expensive as (if not more than) short loin steak. Seek out a good butcher, though, and you'll be well rewarded. A reminder of what to look for when buying steak:

Rib eye steak should be marbled, with a large eye of creamy fat in the center. The marbling should extend outward between the three connecting muscles, thin white

veins that will keep your steak moist as you cook. The amount of fat might seem unnecessary, but you're paying for flavor and that fat will render. If you're looking for leaner, you want short loin or tenderloin.

Breeds aren't necessarily the key to finding a good steak; it's all in the rearing. You want slow-matured, grass-fed, native, or rare breed. If you can't find that, find another butcher.

Dry-aging isn't for everyone, but it's something you must try for the full experience. Source a butcher that dry-ages in house. The flavor will intensify and the steak will be more tender and taste the way beef used to.

Thin steaks are pointless unless you're making a sandwich. At the very least, the cut should be an inch thick to ensure an even, steady cook with a beautiful crust yet a juicy inside.

If you can master all that, you're on the path to a fantastic steak experience.

YOU'LL NEED

SALSA VERDE

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon Dijon or whole-grain mustard, depending on your preference

8 anchovy fillets, chopped

3 tablespoons capers

A large handful of chopped parsley leaves

A drizzle of lemon juice

A good glug of good olive oil

Sea salt and freshly cracked black pepper

CREAMED SPINACH

A good chunk of butter

1 red onion, very finely chopped

1 clove garlic, minced

1 pound (450 grams) spinach

All-purpose flour

⅔ cup (150 ml) whole milk

⅔ cup (150 ml) heavy cream

Sea salt and cracked black pepper

Whole nutmeg

A pinch of ground cinnamon

STEAK AND CHIPS

2 (12- to 14-ounce/350- to 400-gram) rib eye steaks, at least 1 inch thick

5 large starchy potatoes, peeled and cut into large rectangular batons

10 ounces (300 grams) pure duck or goose fat

Olive oilCoarse sea salt

All-purpose flour

TO MAKE THE SALSA VERDE

Blitz the garlic, mustard, anchovy fillets, capers, parsley, and lemon juice in a food processor. Drizzle in the oil and blitz very lightly to incorporate. Season with salt and pepper and set aside for later.

TO MAKE THE CREAMED SPINACH

1. Melt the butter in a large frying pan over a medium heat, add the onion and garlic, and cook until softened—this should take 5 minutes or so. Meanwhile, place the spinach into a colander and pour boiling water over it until all the leaves are wilted.

Cool the spinach, then pat it dry with a kitchen towel and finely chop it.

2. Turn down the heat and add a good sprinkle of flour until the onions and garlic have a light covering all over. Add the milk and stir until you have a thickened sauce.
3. Turn up the heat very slightly and stir in the chopped spinach. Add the cream, bring to a simmer, and simmer until it has thickened further—this takes around 1 minute. If it's too watery, add a little more flour.
4. Season with salt and copious amounts of black pepper, grate the nutmeg over it, and add a pinch of cinnamon. Set aside in an ovenproof dish to reheat later.

TO MAKE THE STEAK AND CHIPS

1. Two hours before you're due to cook the steaks, take them out of the refrigerator and allow them to come to room temperature.
2. Preheat the oven to 390°F (200°C).
3. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the potatoes and cook them until they're almost soft—not quite, though! You should be able to stick a knife through them with some resistance—normally this will take 7 to 8 minutes, but be careful not to cook for longer. Drain and set aside.
4. While the potatoes are cooking, add the duck fat to a rimmed baking sheet. Place the sheet into the oven and heat the fat until it's scalding.
5. Turn to the steaks. Heat a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Rub a small amount of oil onto the surface of each piece, then sprinkle a good covering of coarse sea salt on top.

6. Add the steaks to the pan and turn them every 30 seconds or so. Do not add oil—you won't need it. For medium rare, go for 4 minutes each side.
7. As the steaks are cooking, add flour to the drained potatoes. Shake them within the colander until they're covered—this will help to get the crispy coating on the outside. Then, being very careful, pull the rendered hot duck fat from the oven and place the chips inside. They will spit, so be aware! Shake the pan so that the fat covers the chips and place it back into the oven along with the creamed spinach. Decrease the oven temperature and cook for 15 minutes.
8. As the steaks cook, push the eye of fat down into the pan to help it render. After the 4 minutes (or 5 to 6 if you're looking for medium), remove the steaks from the pan and place them on a plate or board. Immediately cover them with foil and a kitchen towel and allow them to rest for 10 minutes.
9. Remove the creamed spinach and the chips from the oven—they should now be golden brown and crisp. Using a slotted spoon, remove the chips from what's left of the fat and dry them slightly on paper towels. Grate a little extra nutmeg over the creamed spinach.
10. Slice the steaks, plate them up with the creamed spinach, chips, and salsa verde, and serve.

A FIELD GUIDE TO RARE AND NATIVE BREEDS

ANGUS Of which the best-known sub-breed is the Black Angus. The Angus cattle have huge numbers in the US at the moment, with the majority of beef cattle registered under this breed name. Although not technically a rare breed, pureblood Angus cattle are known for their intensely marbled meat, which usually flourishes with grass-feeding over grain.

BELTED GALLOWAY A breed of cattle derived from Scotland and seeing a resurgence in numbers in the last ten years, thanks to the fantastic quality of beef it produces. The cattle themselves are black, with a white “belt” around their middles, and fairly petite in stature. The breed reaches maturity slowly, leaving plenty of time for the beef to develop a beautiful marbling and fat cover to help the dry-aging process.

SHORTHORN A British breed of cattle with a thick and speckled coat that began as a dual-purpose cattle, producing good beef and good milk simultaneously, before being crossbred to enhance each characteristic separately. Shorthorn have beautifully marbled and good-proportioned muscles for the beef, and in the time it takes them to reach maturity develop a creamy yellow fat covering when grass-fed.

LONGHORN Longhorn cattle are large in stature and look somewhat ancient in appearance. Their shaggy coat and, you guessed it, long and pointed horns can be tricky during the farming process, so many cattle bred for beef have their horns removed to prevent injury. Truly free-range longhorns, though, keep their horns until just before slaughter, as the cattle themselves are gentle in nature. The beef produced by these cows is large in the eye and the fat cover tends to be less than other breeds, but the cattle lay down a fantastic intermuscular marbling instead.

LINCOLN RED A protected breed in the UK, the Lincoln Red was one of the first recorded cattle breeds in texts dating back to the seventeenth century. Now the breed boasts lean meat beneath a red coat with good fat covering, known for its succulence and flavor.

DEXTER Dexter cattle, originating in Ireland, are a tiny, hardy breed that is best left to roam in pastures to graze. To put their size into perspective, while a Hereford cattle reaches maturity at around 1,500 to 1,800 pounds, Dexters mature at a third of that. What they lack in size, though, they make up for in beef quality. Dexter beef is notoriously rich, with a nutty, creamy fat.

HEREFORD A large brown and white breed of cattle that now exists in more than 120 countries, the Hereford are known for their hardiness and reliability in producing good beef. First established as a breed in the US in 1817, the cattle are famous for farming top-quality beef and are sought after not only to develop breed herds but to cross with others—so much so that a breeding bull in 2013 set the world record for cattle sale at six hundred thousand dollars.

WHITE PARK Not to be confused with the American White Park or the British White, the White Park is considered critically endangered in the US, with fewer than fifty breeding females. In the UK, this number is a little more, around five hundred. White Park beef is therefore sought after and produces lean meat that's well suited for dry-aging.

TEXAS LONGHORN The Texas longhorn, with its outrageously sizable horns that measure on average six feet across, produces beef that has been proven to be lower in cholesterol than most other commercial breeds. They resemble a buffalo more than a livestock cow. The cattle are notably ancient and grazed America's pastures before settlers, but they are now considered endangered, numbering around one thousand in the US in 2018.

HIGHLAND Highland cattle are one of the most sought-after breeds of beef on the planet, with origins in the peaks of northern Scotland. The cattle are notoriously robust and resilient, dealing with the most extreme weathers in the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands for the past 1,500 years. They're natural foragers, supplementing their grass diet to produce a unique strength in flavor and beautifully deep marbling.