

## Mass catering.

Richard Warren stared at the pair of free-range Aberdeen Angus five-rib roasts filling their respective baking trays; then surreptitiously glanced towards the ancient range he was supposed to cook this birthday feast in.

‘Normally twenty minutes a pound, how does that translate to Aga?’

Auntie Janet let rip her Janet Street-Porter (no relation) laugh. ‘Shove it in; see what happens.’

Richard, inclined to agree; crammed the meat into top and bottom ovens. Mental maths followed a glance at his watch. Fourteen pounds multiplied by, call it twenty-five minutes per pound. ‘Five and a half hours, ish,’ he muttered to himself; not convinced.

‘I’ll take the spuds. Auntie Janet, you’re on carrot duty. He looked at the stacked bags of Tesco’s finest Maris Pipers and shuddered. How had he been railroaded into cooking birthday lunch for the massed family whilst on holiday. They should be whooping it up at the nearest celebrity chef’s bistro, not stuck in this sweltering galley. He glanced through the window down to the shimmering sea-loch where the dolphins frolicked. Say hello later? For now, there was the prawn cocktail starter to sort; one good enough for Rick...

Spuds spudded, Richard stretched his fingers air piano style. He stabbed the button on the radio and the kitchen filled with eighties entrees. A kitchen-disco around the table that would have filled Beowulf’s longhouse, ensured langoustine crowned cocktail glasses, fully loaded trays of par-boiled roasties, overbrimming pans of coined carrots and a large vat containing four-kilos of frozen peas. Enough for Nigella?

He opened the fridge to a cascade of profiteroles and rescued the crushed horseradish. A bottle of Gavi mysteriously appeared in his hand. If it’s good enough for Floyd...

He held it up towards Auntie Janet.

‘Don’t mind if I do.’

Richard then sought the largest mixing bowl; one as deep as a Hairy Biker’s helmet...

Yorkshire pud batter whipped and poured; he juggled trays between hot oven to not so hot oven. Agas. Pah. Golden oldies shuffled on the radio. Wine quaffed; another uncorked because watched pots...

‘Dad! Uncle Rich! Son! Starvin’ me!’ Heads kept showing around the door. All met with, ‘bog-off out of my kitchen,’ further expletives ensued, all good enough for Gordon...

‘ETA?’

‘Soon mum,’ Richard’s terse reply. ‘Grab volunteers; to help dish.’

Fifteen minutes later, '**SERVICE!**' ripped through the highland lodge.

Last to be plated, Richard transferred to the dining room, melt-in-the-mouth beef, crispest, fluffiest roasties and pea infused port and stilton gravy, steaming on his platter.

He counted unusually quiet kin, 'fifty, fifty-one and don't forget yourself.' Pukka, as Jamie would say...

His son gave a big thumbs up and rubbed his tummy. Happy eighteenth ballons and bunting flapped in the august heat. Birthday wish granted.

This exquisite beef deserved to be washed down with something equally classy. The Chateaux-Neuf-de-Pape stood unabused on the sideboard; yet.

Richard raised a glass, 'happy birthday.' He glugged, toasting culinary creations. A lazy wine-infused dolphin spotting afternoon lay ahead.

Birthday boy could do the washing-up.