

Aleksandra Mir

THE HOW NOT TO COOKBOOK

Lessons Learned the Hard Way



“Culinary slapstick at its best.”

—*The Punch*

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

Advice by 1,000 cooks
from all around the world

Aleksandra Mir

THE HOW **NOT** TO
COOKBOOK

Lessons Learned the Hard Way

RIZZOLI
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Burns

Do not burn water. Do not burn the beets dry, do not boil the rhubarb dry—or you will be constantly in the soup over burnt pans!

Always check that elements are switched off—and cool—before placing objects on top of them that you do not want heated, such as tea towels or utensils. Even better, do not put anything on top of an element that would not normally go there.

Do not cook meat on a high flame or it will burn.

Do not ever force open a pressure cooker! And do not ever place your head right above the cover if you were to force open a pressure cooker after cooking. If you do, you can burn your face quite badly.

Do not forget that hot oil and water are major causes of accidents in the kitchen. When handling a pan with hot oil, always keep the grip to the inside of your stove; this way you do not have to worry about accidentally flipping the pan and burning yourself.

Do not forget to place a trivet under a hot pot, especially before setting it on your parents' eighteenth-century table.

Do not heat a pan without anything in it.

Do not microwave already baked or fried plantains, as they have become dehydrated and may begin to smoke.

Do not put a pot with something inside it into a frying pan with oil in it. The steam could go into the oil and make the oil spit and burn you.

Do not put hot pots on the table without a potholder underneath.

Do not think about how nice it would be to have a Rice Pudding, then make one and put it in the oven, forgetting about it until you realize that the smell you can smell and the thought of “how nice it would be to have a rice pudding” are one and the same thing. You will discover the pudding reduced to a black tar in the bottom of the dish.

Do not touch a pot on the stove; even the handle may be scorching!

Do not, in hope of saving time, heat up butter or oil in a pan before you start cutting the vegetables and meat that you want to fry. The oil or butter will probably be burnt before you are finished with the cutting, and you will have to start all over again, with no time saved.

For a Burns Supper do not make deep-fried Bounty Bars if you have already drunk three glasses of wine. There is a high risk of serious injury from hot fat and melted chocolate.

If the risotto sticks to the bottom of your pot, stop stirring and save what is on the top. With a bit of luck the flavor will not be too smoky and you will have stopped your food from having bits of black, burnt crust in it.

If you are going to use Pam or any other aerosol oil, do not spray it on after heating the pan. That type of oil burns really quickly.

If you are very small or quite young, do not try to use a cooker or frying pan without standing on a stool or chair that brings your head well above the level of the pan.

If you are working with hot or boiling water, do not carelessly remove the lid from your pot, steamer, or pressure cooker. Both water and steam are extremely dangerous and can cause severe third-degree burns.

If you burn yourself, do not forget to cut a potato in half and put it on the affected area—the starch will do wonders.

If you have a shockingly short attention span, do not think that burning things has to be the norm. Buy a timer, one that you cannot accidentally turn off when you put it in your pocket.

If you need to taste something that is caramelizing, think twice before you dip your finger into it.

If you pyrolyze oils, you have just created a goopy black carcinogen. Do not try to save it. Throw the whole thing away or pay later on down the line.

If you stir something with a metal implement, never leave it in the pot while it is on the heat. If you do, make sure you use oven gloves to touch it.

Never, EVER try to figure out if you turned on the hotplate by laying your hand on it. The police may wonder why you do not have fingerprints anymore.

On Sunday morning, do not try to pry out that yummy little piece of toast from the toaster using the butter knife. You could end up toasted yourself.

Only cook Turducken outdoors with plenty of space to run if the huge pot of oil is somehow knocked over, spilled, or splashed. It would be a nasty burn!

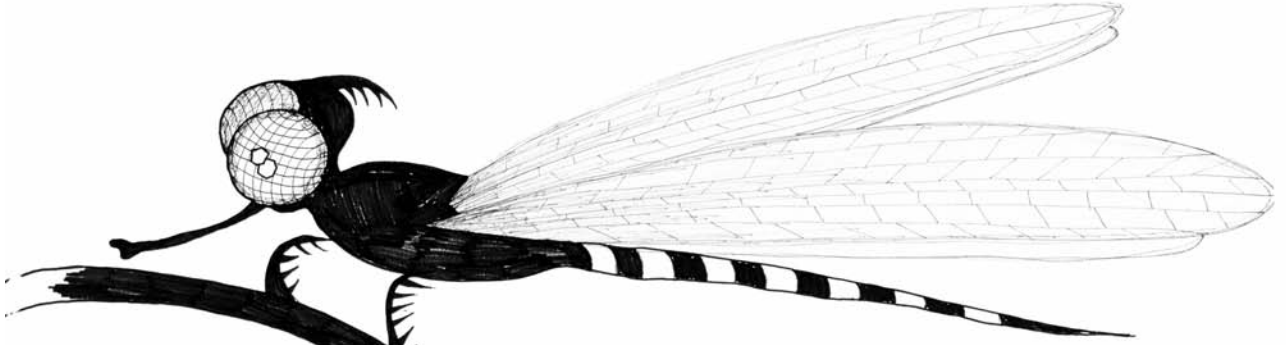
This might sound obvious, but never use a metal knife to extract your stuck piece of toast from the toaster. If you do, you might get a strong electric shot! When cooking polenta, stir, but do not boil. Polenta bubbles splash and burn when they burst.

When heating oil in a pan, do not forget to make sure the pan is completely dry. Otherwise when the oil gets hot, the water will cause the oil to pop, and it can really burn you.

When living in a vegetarian, nonsmoking collective household, do not try to eat a truly disastrous casserole cooked by a roommate on his designated night to cook dinner for everyone. Do not let the roommate combine his mixture of vegetables with a pound of uncooked noodles. What will come out an hour later will be a crunchy, inedible pile of dry, burnt noodles mixed with dried-out vegetables, leaving you with an inedible dinner and ten empty bellies that evening. When in doubt, always cook the noodles first.

When working with hot sugar or caramel, avoid any contact with your skin. If you burn yourself DO NOT try to remove the caramel. You will probably take a piece of skin with it. Just place the affected area under cold water and wait until it dissolves.





Dating



It may seem macho to use a hand whisk in place of an electric mixer, but do not be tempted, especially when the recipe says to whisk for fifteen minutes. She will not be impressed and you will look like a fool.

When cooking a Cheese Fondue in a small kitchen, do not put the wine on the heat and then go off to get ready for your party with your best friend without either opening the window or checking on the concoction from time to time. When you return to the kitchen, you will find it so filled with alcoholic smog that neither of you will be able to make it to the cooker or window without getting high on the fumes. While the eventual dish can still be rescued and enjoyed by your guests, the state of your hair, makeup, and general demeanor will be quite beyond repair and your bemused guests will not understand your sustained giggliness at all. This is particularly important if you are trying to impress a potential new partner with this dish. You will not.

If you are preparing a very romantic dinner, with a very sophisticated menu, for the first time in order to impress your date, do not buy two big, beautiful artichokes at the market unless you are aware of the fact that they are supposed to be cooked. Do not serve them raw.

If you have invited your latest flame to dinner and you want to make them Seafood Spaghetti, do not forget to check each and every clam. Sand is not much of an aphrodisiac.

If you have planned to impress your date by cooking pasta with prawns and you forget the cream, do not add milk instead. Slimy lumps of curdled protein in an otherwise thin and tasteless sauce will be the result—and an indignant-looking girl on the other side of the table.

If you want to feed your date by cooking tomatoes mixed with eggs, take into account that after adding butter and oil do not also add a jar of peanut butter. She will not feel like having sex after eating this.

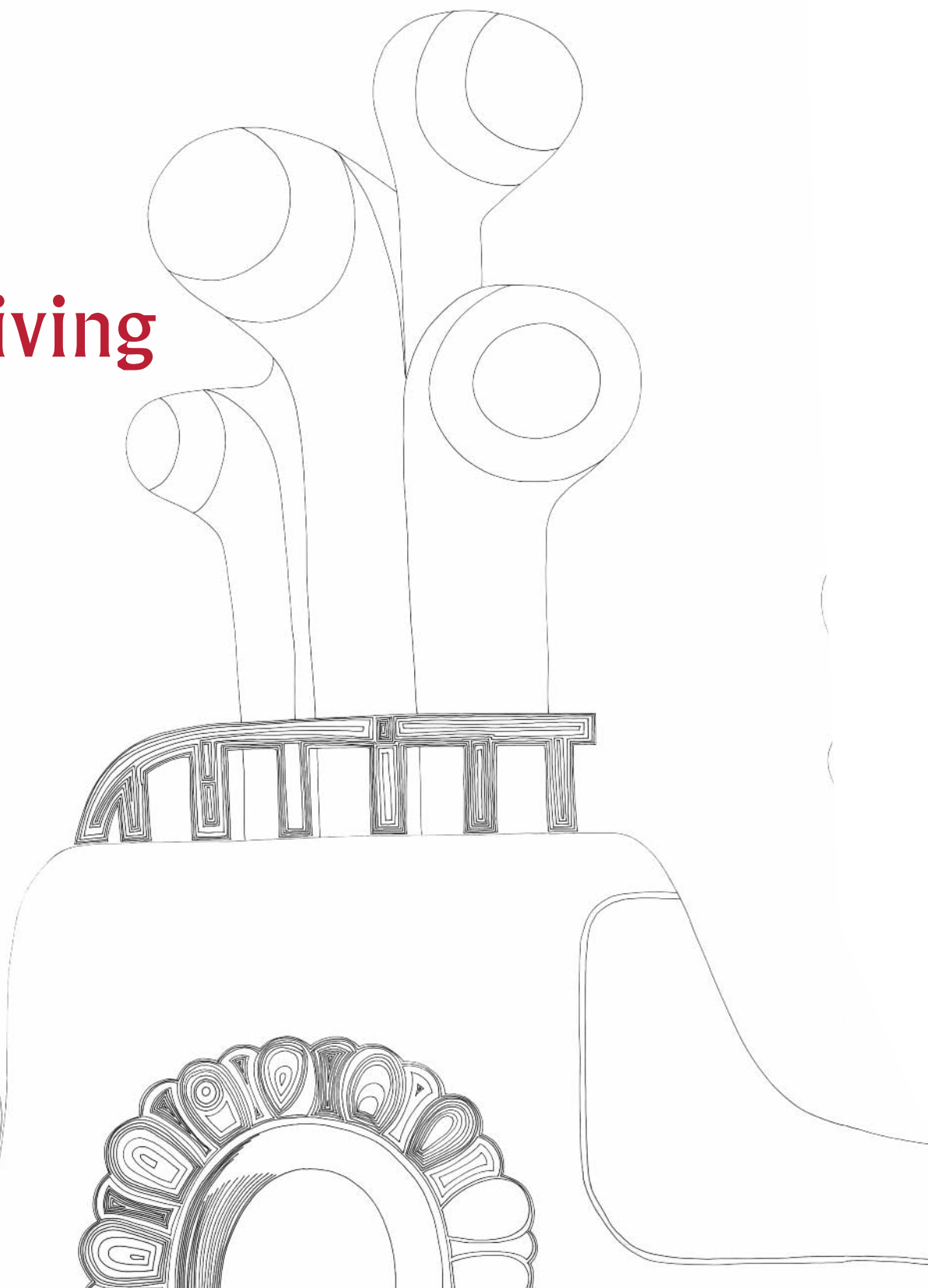
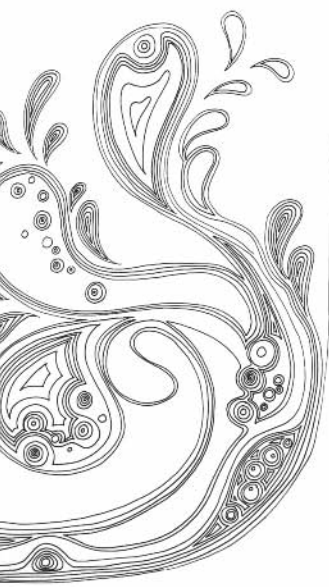
Never allow your university-educated girlfriend to boil water in a plastic cup on an electric cooker ring. It will melt the cup and cause a bad smoke to fill the tiny apartment. If this happens, do not ask pointless questions like: “Why did you boil water in a plastic cup? Didn’t you know it would melt?” Henceforth, be suspicious of all educated people in general.

When cooking with your boyfriend, do not forget to make it clear who is the chef in advance. If not you might end up fighting and lose your appetite.

When making the Northeast delicacy Garlic Stottie, do not use raw garlic paste. It is better to melt some softly browned garlic with butter. The resulting side dish will go spankingly well with lasagna and will easily win you a place in a Geordie’s heart.

When your son invites his girlfriend over for the first time, try not to cook something fairly unconventional. It should be noted that pig’s tails are not conventional and may cause an uncomfortable half-hour silence while she pokes a single boiled potato with her fork before excusing herself from the dinner table.

Living



Do not forget that a kitchen is like a pirate boat. You must live with the danger, and the language often changes.

Do not cook when you are in a bad mood.

Do not cut your toenails in the kitchen!

Do not put your finger in the couscous, because it will ruin the result.

Do not eat when you are hungry.

Do not forget love and patience when you are cooking.

Do not forget that cooking is an art—not a science.

When buying fast food, do not order like a kid: fish without the chips, pizza without the cheese, or hamburger without the meat.

Do not hurl a cast-iron Le Creuset casserole dish out the back door of your house onto the patio after having burned the dinner in the mistaken belief that these things are unbreakable. They are, in fact, breakable. And expensive to replace.

Do not nibble on your ingredients or stuff your face in the kitchen while preparing your meal and before sitting down at the dinner table. For example, do not eat all the Parmesan cheese you just shredded, or else you will get full and there will be no more shredded Parmesan to cook with.

Do not despair of your failures in the beginning. Do not underestimate that cooking needs a lot of practice. It might take years—but it is worth it.

According to experts, making toast does not count as cooking. The same is true for ordering take-away and using a can opener.

Avoid squeezing a lemon if you have a paper cut on your finger.

Cooking is about passion. If you do not enjoy it or are not having fun, do not do it!

Do not believe the use-by dates on all your food. They are put there by lawyers. Ordinary humans are much more resilient than the law would have you believe. Test results on self first, twenty-four hours before fobbing off on family and friends.

Do not cook when you are angry—your dishes will be furious too!

Do not cook when you are hungry.

Do not put hot beverages near your hard drive or you might have to replace your hard drive.

Do not smoke when cooking!

Do not sneeze or cough in front of your dish or ingredients.

Do not start cooking when you are already too hungry.

Do not store cookbooks in the oven.

Do not stress! It is all about putting love in your food.

Do not surrender to any dish you are cooking. If something fails, do your best to rescue it.

Do not fall into the trap of refining canned or frozen dinners and believe you can sell this for cooking.

Do not taste your food with the same utensil that you are using to cook with.

Do not try to make Beef Stroganoff if you are feeling even slightly emotional—it is a trigger food. There are certain tricky parts to the recipe that will set you off if you get them wrong, and if you screw up the whole thing the ingredients are mighty expensive. It will make you cry, and cry, and cry.

Do not wear your hair loose.

Do not leave home very young or you will be hungry. Do not wish to make bread and forget to add yeast. Do not attempt to copy illustrations of kneading techniques and wonder if this is how it should be. Bake until done. Enjoy breadlike aroma. Do not attempt to consume bricklike product by moistening with last remaining reconstituted tin of Campbell's concentrated mushroom soup. Consume soup, scraping last drops off concrete croutons. Be hungry.

Even when cooking simple things like ground beef, stews, scones, and shortbread, take your time, and do not forget when you have put something on the burner.

If a dish has turned out to be no success, do not throw it out the window. Your neighbors will not appreciate this.

If you are lucky enough to remember all of the ingredients, but then forget the cooking time, you were probably born to eat out.

If you do not like to cook, it will be tasted in the food.

Do not not cook! It has a lot of advantages and time is always well invested: It is a form of meditation and thus will increase happiness. It contributes to your state of health. You can give a lot of love to your friends and family by cooking. You are more attractive to potential sexual partners. You are a better parent. And you're more likely to survive a war, based on my grandmother, who is a skilled cook.

If you ever get to whip mayonnaise yourself, offer it your most beautiful thoughts. Give it compliments and let it know it is the best mayonnaise ever to be beaten! Never do it in a bad or sad mood—it will not rise!

Never be barefoot when you are chopping, cooking, or doing anything in the kitchen, or you might get a knife stuck in your foot.

Never cook with too much enthusiasm!

Never eat something that just came out of the oven, a casserole, or a pan. It is probably going to be too hot to taste and you will burn your hands, lips, tongue, or palate, thus ruining every actual chance of enjoying anything you cooked.

Ordering take-out for dinner is not a sin. Ordering take-out for breakfast is.

Show no fear when cooking. Do not worry too much; if you do, you will skimp on putting enough ingredients in and experimenting. Who cares if the carrots are a bit crunchy? You can taste when a meal has been cooked with passion and confidence, and it is more nourishing.

When cooking for people who live in a residential home, do not forget how much they will enjoy a choice of three meals for lunch.

When learning to cook you are told—with love and hope—that you are sure to make wonderful dishes as long as you taste your creations as you go. What they do not tell you is that you are also sure to end up with a waistline that fills your kitchen from counter to sink!

When preparing a meal, do not think about someone you dislike. Also be aware of all the effort and human toil that have made the ingredients available to you.

You can talk while you are cooking but never have a conversation. A conversation is communication among two, three, or more people, but talking only uses the mouth. Although a conversation, like cooking, must have a specific balance to be successful, a successful conversation will represent a failure in cooking. Either you burn something, administer too much of something, or you forget to add a necessary ingredient. This is not the time to practice your social skills. So whether you like it or not, whether you enjoy more than anything sharing the process with others, do share drinks, snacks, a helping hand—but never establish a conversation.



Worms



Maggots should not be put into the soup.

Before you stir-fry your wild mushrooms, make sure they do not have any worms in them, especially if your dinner guests are vegetarians.

Do not ignore the label saying, "Wash before use" on lettuce leaves. A slug in your Salade Niçoise does not taste good.

Do not insult your host by turning down food you have not tried before. If you are visiting the island of Samoa at the exact time of the year during the arrival of the palolo worms, your hosts will most likely serve these to you. The palolo (*Polychaete annelid*) is a rare and arcane creature with a transparent body that is green and wormlike. Similar to the habits of the California grunion, the palolo emerges annually from under the Samoan coral reefs. The palolos' appearance is determined by season, tide, temperature, and phase of the moon. Samoan chiefs and wise men try to determine the exact date and hour of their emergence. From your airplane window, you will already see the reflections of torch lights flickering on the waves, as fishermen attempt to gather up as many of the worms as possible, for they are a great gastronomic delicacy. The cooked palolo look like translucent green spaghetti Jell-O and taste like crunchy seawater. The morning after the meal, the villagers will carefully look you up and down and approvingly see that you have survived the banquet. After that, each night for a week, you will receive a heaping plate of worms. European (palangi) stomachs usually do not fare so well; accordingly, you will gain a little more respect in the eyes of the islanders.

During your one and only scout camping trip, do not take the initiative to make this recipe: one old Fray Bentos can, one hundred milliliters orange cordial, and slugs from a dry stone wall, heating it long enough to make yourself ill.

When having guests over for dinner, do not forget to wash the vegetables. This can help to avoid unpleasant caterpillars being found in the broccoli.

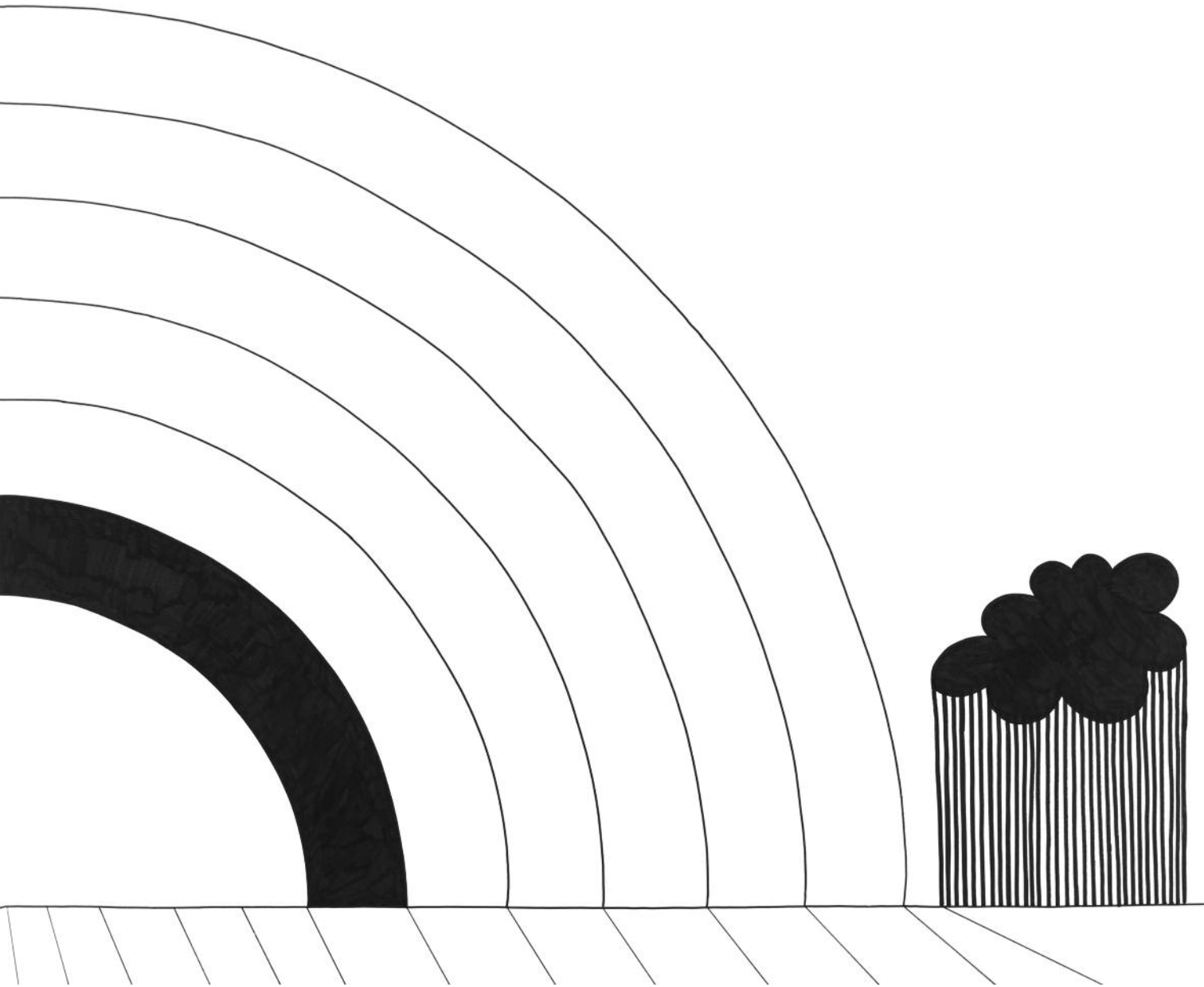
When making Poached Pears for a dinner party, try to remain sober before starting the preparations, and remember to check each ingredient before chucking it in. Otherwise, if you do not sort your larder regularly, you may end up with the unfortunate combination of pears marinated in Cointreau and slug pellets.

When serving lettuce from the garden, look obsessively for slugs and snails before feeding it to your guests. Do not forget this, especially in spring, when the slugs are very tiny, but active.



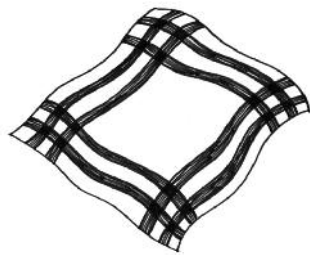
Wurst

When you are cooking wurst, do not use too much oil; do not make it too fatty. Grilling the wurst reduces the fat.



You do not want to leave your wurst for too long in the frying oil.

If a customer tells you not to put too much curry powder on their wurst, then do not put too much curry powder on their wurst!



Anonymous	Agnes Wegner	Anna Palazzolo
Anonymous	Agustina Ferreyra	Anna Redpath
Anonymous	Aida Perez	Anna Reid
Anonymous	Al DeBolin	Anna Sottile Ciancimino
Anonymous	Alberto Nicolino	Annabel Bartle
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Anonymous	Amelia Best	Barbara Campbell
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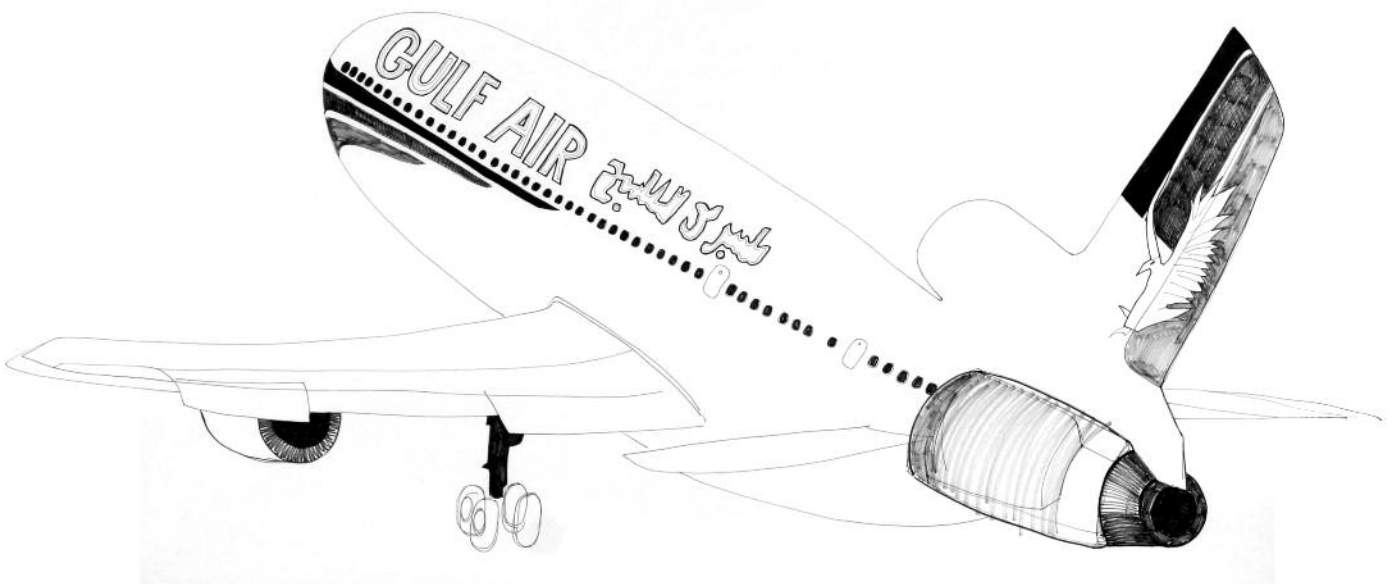
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The typical cookbook gives you a recipe for success but does not take into account the many ways you can fail due to lack of experience. So the artist Aleksandra Mir decided to put together *The How Not to Cookbook*. She invited everyday home cooks from all around the world to contribute their own kitchen disaster stories. This volume collects 1,000 tidbits of their advice:

When you have accidentally added dishwashing liquid to your salad instead of oil, do not attempt to wash it out and serve it to your children. They will be able to tell the difference. Even the teenagers.

Never season a salad while holding a cigarette.

Never start cooking before you have a glass of wine. But do not start cooking when you are already having your second glass.

Do not wear your wife's new dress while cooking Spaghetti Sauce.

Do not look into a gas oven too fast after opening the door. Especially while wearing mascara—it will make your eyelashes glue together.

Apparently putting things in water does not count as marinating.

Do not tell your grandmother you like something she made for you if you actually did not like it. She will make it for you over and over again for the next six months.

“A dash of encyclopedia and a pinch of kitchen-cautionary tale.”

—*The New York Times*

“Fascinating insight into the kitchen mishaps of others ... utterly refreshing.”

—*The London Times*

“A brilliant and obvious idea in a world somewhat overstocked with books that tell you how to cook.”

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— Ferran Adrià, chef of elBulli



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