

# Sex *NOT SO* AND THE SINGLE GIRL

## A recipe for disaster

*This month there's trouble brewing  
(and burning) in Jo Usmar's kitchen*



PHOTOGRAPHS ANTONIO PETRONZIO. STYLING JARED GREEN. HAIR AND MAKEUP VICTORIA BARNES

**L**ast week I passed Stage 1 of my new cooking career ('Macaroni cheese should not come from a tin') and entered Stage 2 ('Do not panic and neck the white-wine vinegar'). I managed to marinate meat without resorting to anything concocted by Homepride, and even rubbed the goo in with my own hands.

'What's that smell?' Ben asked when he came home, opening all the windows in the flat. 'Um, a delicious chicken marinade I've made from scratch,' I replied. 'Did you use the fruit chutney in the fridge – the one that's meant to go with cheese?' Ben queried, sniffing the bowl.

'Might have done,' I conceded. 'Oh,' he answered. 'Well, I'm sure it'll be lovely.'

It wasn't. It was eye-wateringly foul. We had to scuttle down the road under cover of darkness and throw it in our neighbours' skip.

I'm determined to learn how to cook.

For years I've worn my inability even to make decent scrambled eggs as a badge of incompetent honour. 'Remember that time I put ham in the toaster?' I'd chortle, slapping my thigh and wiping away tears of hilarity. I've never really wanted to learn and have never had to. At home my mum was the chef; at uni I survived on cucumber on toast and snakebites, and now Ben does it all. He's an amazing cook and my job has always been to pass him knives, pour the drinks and wash up.

But now I want to learn. Eating is one of my favourite things, so Ben's always found it weird

that I've had zilch interest in cooking. Me, I don't see the problem – I love shoes, but I don't want to be a cobbler. That said, inviting friends round for burnt pitta and houmous has made me feel a smidgen sheepish. So Ben's started teaching me, and our kitchen has turned into a Japanese game show-style assault course, complete with sobbing, burnt limbs and flying skewers.

'You should have cooked the onions for longer. Vegetable oil and olive oil aren't the same thing. You've burnt the soup. Your eyebrows are on fire...'

It turns out taking orders from your partner is not a recipe for domestic bliss (cooking pun alert) – and 'only use wooden spoons

in that pan' is not exactly the language of love. Now, Ben is not aggressive with me, and he was right about the onions (even if I do believe that they looked perfectly 'glassy'); it's just that hearing the person who's meant to think you're the best thing since electric beard trimmers belly-

laugh at your apple strudel is not heartwarming. Criticism is hard to take at the best of times, let alone when you have garlic up your snout and oil down your jeans.

So we've decided it'll be better for everyone if for the time being I teach myself via recipes, and when I want advice I'll ask for it. But until I do, Ben's to stay out of the kitchen – and if Jamie Oliver doesn't say, 'Cook the onions out,' I'M NOT GOING TO COOK THE STUPID ONIONS OUT. (Mainly because I still don't know what that means.)

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*“Only use wooden spoons in that pan” is not exactly the language of love’*



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