

The steward was in more of a fluster than usual this morning. He was having trouble finding anything, the galley had been stripped almost bare. As he fretted about preparing breakfast he mumbled under his breath.

'I no understand it, spaghetti gone, forks gone, lids no, tin foil no..., ' and so on. Of course he didn't know that the Martians were using these and many other things from the kitchen in their crazy machines of mass destruction. The tin foil was a perfect conductor for transmitting to Mars for example and the cutlery was super for scooping out brains.

Margaret wandered past the open galley doorway humming to herself and the steward just caught her out of the corner of his eye. 'I no ready yet, madam!' he hissed to himself, growing increasingly incensed at the lack of implements available to him. Finally he grabbed an eggcup from the cupboard. 'This will have to do, she stupid old woman anyhow, she no notice nothing.' He stormed into the dining room and placed the eggcup next to a large serving bowl full of breakfast on the table. Quickly he turned round and ran out, banging into the doorframe even though there was no roll of the ship today, when he realised that she had nothing to eat it with.

Margaret peered into the bowl. Inside were three pieces of meat. Each piece was round with a large bone through the middle and was surrounded by thick yellow wobbly fat. They were sitting in a brown sauce that had a few carrots and peas floating in it. The steward reappeared and said in a panic

'You must use this,' he said and gave Margaret a wooden spatula. 'It's no my fault. All forks and things gone.' The spatula was left probably because it was made of wood and therefore of not much use to the

Martians in their machines. Margaret was caught a little off guard as she said quietly.

‘What is it?’

‘Is for eating.’

‘No, not that. What is in the bowl?’

‘Is sheepses neck.’

‘Oh, good, I haven’t eaten that for years. My mother used to cook it for me when I was a child in the north of England. Isn’t it a little unusual for breakfast though?’

‘Is for breakfast, yes.’

‘Have you been to England steward?’ Margaret was feeling like chatting as she hadn’t really spoken to anyone for days, except of course for her disappointing rendezvous with Millian in the paint store last night. There had been no one to join her for many meals recently, and although she had tried to fraternise only with the officers, she was getting a little desperate.

‘England madam? Very nice.’

‘You’ve been?’

‘No, no. Liverpool, it was night, very dark.’

‘What? I don’t understand, have you been or not?’

‘I went Hamburg.’

Margaret sighed and thought she’d try a different subject. ‘Steward, where is everybody?’

The steward sighed this time, he understood her perfectly. ‘I not know madam. I just cook, I just steward also.’ Of course he had noticed that absence of most of the crew, but wasn’t sure he wanted to risk his job by talking about it. In fact he just wanted to get his head down and get through the next five months and get home. He would be on a different ship next contract and then he could forget all about it. But then again, there were very strange things happening on the ship. He felt he could not even begin to tentatively talk about it in English as his confidence and vocabulary was low. Of course, he knew that Margaret wouldn’t speak Indonesian but he spoke German very well as he had lived in Hamburg for over ten years. So, in a rare moment of making a little extra work for himself he thought he might as well try the language he knew second best.

‘Sprechen sie Deutsch?’

Margaret stared at him. She had spoken German with Fritz for all her married life but unfortunately, like most of anything she had learnt, it had all been sieved out of her brain to make way for more important information like different kind of Belgian chocolates and knitting stitches and only a little remained. ‘Ja,’ she replied cautiously.

‘Was scheint das problem zu sein, Frau McKlusky?’ said Rudi. He thought, in a kind of backwards logic, that maybe, just maybe he could voice some of his concerns to her in German. At least then the remaining crew wouldn’t understand what he was talking about (even though they were they only two in the room). Margaret racked her brains, it couldn’t be too difficult, but her head was such a jumble. What was it Fritz used to say to her all the time?

‘Sie bringen mich um!’ she blurted out quickly.

‘Good morning steward, madam,’ said Professor George R. Morrello as he entered the dining room smiling widely at the steward and Margaret, showing a large amount of his impressive dentures. He was wearing a freshly pressed shirt and tank top with coordinating cords. He smelt invigoratingly of pinecones as if he’d just come from a shower in a forest. ‘Do you have any more of that carrot juice?’ he asked turning his eyes to the steward, and then added in a deeply menacing tone, ‘Seien sie kein idiot.’

The steward looked aghast and then said quickly, glancing at Margaret who was quite obviously oblivious, ‘No, no sir, I sorry. We have pomodoro?’

‘That will be fine.’

‘What is for breakfast my dear?’ He stood up slightly and leaned over the pot that was placed between them on the table. ‘Oh dear.’

‘Is the necks of the sheepses,’ said the steward.

‘I’ve said to you before Steward, I need to have at least something green every meal time. Can you make a salad at least?’

Margaret was shocked by tone of his voice, which

was very authoritative, and at the same time she was slightly impressed. But by the time she had decided she'd try barking an order at the steward too he had scuttled out of the dining room, banged into the wall and tripped over the step to the galley. 'Professor, I have missed you, where have you been?' Margaret enquired cringing at his wobbly, painful looking, swollen lips. 'Are you, er, unwell?'

'No, I have never felt better in fact.'

'But I've not seen you at meal times for days.'

'As I said before, madam, I am fine, I have just been reading that's all. I have my meals brought up to my room.'

Margaret scowled. 'Nobody told me that you could do that. Hmm, I'll order breakfast in bed tomorrow.'

'Anyway my dear, you look simply ravishing,' said the Professor and squeezed Margaret's hand under the table. Margaret flushed and smiled at his pear shaped head, trying not to look at those inflamed lips. 'Shall we go and see what that man is up to, my dear?'

And as with all the men that had shown any interest in her she did what he said. Rather like a pony being led to the glue house.