

A kitchen in the London home of STAN and MADGE. STAN is sitting at the kitchen table, hunched over a newspaper. MADGE stands upstage by the kitchen counter. The counter is lined with various glass jars of different shapes and sizes filled with a variety of contents, as well as a number of other typical kitchen items. A telephone sits near the end of the counter. At rise, MADGE is opening an envelope. She removes a card from the envelope and begins to read its contents, her lips silently mouthing the words as she does so. Upon finishing, she closes the card and holds it to her breast.

MADGE

Ahh... ‘int that nice?

STAN

(Irritated.)

Shhh!

MADGE

It was from me sister, Sylvia – the one in Margate.

STAN

(Belligerently.)

Shut up, I’m tryin’ to read the bloody paper!

MADGE

Listen to this, Stan...

(She opens the card and begins to read aloud.)

She says, “Dear Madge, sorry this is a week late. Got you and Dora mixed up this year – so she got ‘ers a week early!”

(Looking up from the card.)

Ha, ha, ha! Imagine!

STAN

Shhh!

MADGE

Never could keep things straight in ‘er ‘ead, our Sylv. Runs in the family, I s’pose.

(Continuing from the card.)

MADGE (Cont'd.)

“ ‘Ope you ‘ad a nice birthday, anyway. Lots o’ luv, Sylv.”

(Looking up from the card.)

Ahh... ‘int that nice?

STAN

Shhh!

MADGE

(Continuing from the card.)

“P.S. Why not come and visit this weekend? I’ll buy ya a nice meal – my way of sayin’ sorry.”

(Looking up from the card.)

Ahh, bless ‘er... ‘int that nice, Stan?

STAN

‘Ow am I supposed to read this bloody paper with you yakkin’ in me ear’ole? Can’t you shut that trap for five minutes?

MADGE

Don’t you fancy it, then?

STAN

What? Fancy what? What’s for dinner?

MADGE

I fancy it. I quite like Margate.

STAN

Margate? What d’ya wanna go to that shit ‘ole for? Anyway, I’m not spendin’ two days ‘oled up with that pinched-faced sister of yours – you know I can’t stand ‘er. ‘Er and that stuck-up ‘uband of ‘ers, thinkin’ they’re a cut above the rest of us, just ‘cause they got some poxy time-share in the Costa-del-bleedin’-Sol!

MADGE

Pr’aps I could go on me own, then?

STAN

What?

MADGE

Pr’aps I could go on me own?

STAN

You selfish cow! What about me? Who'd do the cookin'? The bleedin' servants, I s'pose?

MADGE

I could make ya sandwiches, and bits and bobs – to tide you over?

STAN

You're the bloody limit, you are, aren't ya? As if it's not bad enough I've 'ad to put up with thirty-odd years of your shitty cookin', bollockin' up me stomach – almost sendin' me to the bleedin' 'ospital – now you wanna starve me to death!

MADGE

But, Stan, I could make–

(Suddenly distracted by something she's heard.)

Listen! There it is again!

STAN

There what is again?

MADGE

That rat. Can't you 'ear it?

STAN

No, I can't 'ear it.

MADGE

Listen!

(Pause.)

It's scratchin'...or gnawin', or summit.

STAN

Oh yeah, I can 'ear it. And I've got summit to say to it, too: Where's my bloody dinner?

MADGE

It's a rat, Stan. A rat! They're 'orrible. I don't wanna a rat in me 'ouse, do I?

STAN

I told you before, it's not a rat – it's a mouse. And if that fat, lazy over-fed cat o' yours is too bone idle to kill it, we should 'ave 'em both put down.

MADGE

Don't be like that, Stan. Moxie can't 'elp it. A rat's prob'ly not appealin' to 'er. Everythin' she eats comes out of a tin, dunnit? She's lost the animal instinct, I s'pect.

STAN

Yeah, well most of what I eat comes out of a tin an' all, and I 'aven't lost me animal instinct, 'ave I? I'm bloody starvin'! What's for dinner?

MADGE

Any'ow, I've taken care of it. Come tomorrow mornin' I s'pect we'll all be sleepin' a bit easier.

STAN

Are you deaf? I asked you what's for dinner?

MADGE

Toad-in-the-'ole.

STAN

Toad-in-the-'ole? We 'ad that last Friday. Gor, bloody 'ell! You've got about as much imagination as a bleedin' minnow, you 'ave, ain't ya?

MADGE

But you never like it when I try somethin' a bit new, Stan. You always say it's muck and I end up goin' down the chippie.

STAN

What d'ya mean? Like that curry crap ya slopped up last week? On the crapper all night with the runs. Is that what you want? You vindictive cow!

(STAN reverts back to reading his newspaper. MADGE hypothesizes.)

MADGE

I followed the recipe. Least, I think I did? Pr'aps it was 'cause it was from an old book. You know, from when they first come 'ere – the Hindus and such. I got it from that second'and bookshop on Moulton Street. Ooh! I forgot to tell ya, din' I? He ran off – Mr. Truelove, the owner – with the cashier. She was only nineteen. They'd been married for twenty-two years – 'im an' 'is wife, that is, not the cashier. Pr'aps I put too much coriander? 'Course, she could'a been married, too, I s'pose. It's anythin' goes, these days, innit? Gawd knows where they are now...Morocco, I s'pose...or Sweden. It was only 50p. 'Course, she may 'ave undercharged me. Well, she's not to know, is she? She's new – or was. S'pect it *was* too much coriander? Well, 'ow you s'posed to know? There's not much call for it, is there? Not in normal food. Imagine 'is poor wife.

STAN

Gor, bloody 'ell! Listen to this...

(Reading from his newspaper.)