

It Was My Cake That Done It

By Chloe Hall

The day the Alien Ambassador arrived on Earth, I was makin' my hummingbird cake for the seniors in the old folks home on the edge of town. I had my beat-up television nattering away in the corner and was halfway listening to Dr. Phil 'splain to some folks why teaching their three-year-old how to jaywalk wasn't the best in mom-and-dad skills. Sheesh. You'da thought the dimmest bulb woulda waited till the kid was six or seven. Especially in a big city like Greensboro. Some of them city folks ain't got no sense at all.

I was foldin' in the pineapple bits and the smushed bananas into my cake batter when an alert sounded. Aliens land on Earth! Dr. Phil was dumped – right in the middle of one of his best snark-fests – in favor of one of those super-serious behind-the-desk folks who said an alien spaceship landed smack-dab in the National Mall in Washington D.C. (Why do they call it a mall when there ain't no Dollar Tree store anywhere near there? That's what I wanna know.)

Later, while I was icing my hummingbird cake, they had pictures of the Alien Ambassador coming out of the ship and greetin' Mrs. President and her staff. Everything was real nice and friendly-like. Kinda warmed my heart to see everyone treating things so pleasant. I didn't see no one aiming their buckshot guns at the ship or nothin'.

A few weeks later, I was makin' my brandied peach cobbler for the VFW Hall folks – woo-wee, them vets do like their brandied peaches! They sure do. The flies was buzzin' around something fierce the past few days, so I had to keep watch to keep 'em off the fruit. I was addin' in the self-rising flour – I use White Lily myself – when my phone jangled real loud. Almost made me spill everything all over the counter, which woulda made anyone a little persnickety. It rang and rang till I got everything poured into the pan and the peaches spooned on top.

When I answered the phone, there was some kinda official mucky-muck on the phone with a bunch questions. Yep, I heard about the Alien Ambassador visitin' Earth. Yep, I knew he (or she?) was takin' a tour of various individuals all over the country. Yep, I knew that how she (or he?) found our folks reactin' to those visits would Make A Difference To The Nation. I s'pose he figgered I knew what kinda difference they was talkin' about, but I didn't ask. I ain't no politician, so I don't pay no heed to what those Washington folks do anyhow.

Anyhow, they said my name had been drawn out of someone's mighty giant hat and Mr. (Or Ms?) Ambassador was comin' to stay with me for three days, startin' next week. The Call, as I dubbed it, was my official notice that I'd play host to an interstellar space alien.

Huh.

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The Ambassador arrived in one of those long limo cars with an escort of soldiers and such in fancied up uniforms. I'd spent several days cleaning house till everything was spic-'n-span. I even trekked out to the Super Walmart to get a new set of cafe curtains for the kitchen window. The colorful roosters and yellow daisies cheered up the kitchen real nice.

Once they deposited the alien on my front doorstep, the escort retreated. Prob'ly head-in' down to Asheville to take refuge in the big-city hotels and such there. Meanwhile, there was Ms. (or Mr.?) Ambassador, standin' on my front porch.

She—I figgered out she was a she by doin' the obvious thing and askin'—was real cute in an alien kinda way. She was about an inch or two taller than me and had her purply green hair done in a real cute little bun with yellowy wisps around her eyestalks. I asked her who did her hair cuz she looked so cute and she blushed—if that darker blue color under her aqua skin was a blush—and said she did it her own self. No one else had asked her that, she said.

So I invited her in. Her name was Yxggryllwyn, but after I mangled it a few times she said I could call her Ms. Iggy. She was super polite. She perched on my couch like the grandest Southern matriarch and looked around and said she liked my house. I gotta admit I kinda glowed at the compliment. My home was real ordinary, a shotgun house near a century and a half old, but I thought it was homey. So I brought out some of my best sweet tea and we settled down to a real good chat.

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On her last day, Ms. Iggy and I sat down to lunch. Ms. Iggy, as was her habit, didn't actually eat the fried chicken and waffles I put before her. She did use some kind of fancy probe thingy to test the food, while she unwrapped a kinda bland lookin' bar to eat instead. She told me the first day that she didn't eat our food, but the probe would chirp if it was compatible with her biologically. So far, everything she tested had gotten a cute little chirp, but she hadn't taken nary a bite of anything I served her.

"Ms. Iggy, how come you're trottin' all over and visitin' us folks? I'da thought you'd be spendin' your time with all the important government folks."

She shared that her visits went all over, from New England, the northwest, and southern California. I was her last stop before returnin' to her ship. "We are here to determine trade opportunities with your world," she said. "We are most interested in cultural exchanges."

I sipped my sweet tea. I figured that anyone who could park a space ship on the National Mall probably didn't need any of our weapons or computers or such. "That makes sense," I told her. "Have you found anything your folks might like?"

She took a tiny nip at her bar. Seemed to me she nipped at it with less and less enthusiasm as the days went by. Maybe she followed a dietary rule or something, kinda like Kosher. "Yes. We know about your radio and television transmissions, but we have not known how those translated to the life of everyday people."

"I guess I can understand that. Them Hollywood folks sure do like to make stuff up a lot."

"I have found that so." She cocked an eyestalk down at the plate before her. "Why do you keep offering me food when I keep refusing to ingest it?"

"It's a Southern thing, I guess. We like to feed folks around here. Make 'em feel welcome. Did no one else you visited do that?"

"No. Not once I refused the first plate offered."

"If that don't beat all," I said. "Kinda rude if you ask me. It ain't polite to eat in front of folks without offerin' to share."

"They did not eat in my presence. They ingested their food only when I was not in the immediate area."

I tried to imagine that and couldn't. "Did you enjoy your visits?"

Ms. Iggy hesitated. "I found them confusing. I attended many cultural events. A movement recital with people in their underwear bouncing and contorting their bodies. A

sporting event where large men ran over each other to move an oddly shaped ball around the field. An ancient play by a revered person—Mr. Quiversword? I did not understand most of those events.”

I puzzled over the name, then nodded. “You mean Shakespeare? I never did understand that literature stuff much either. Seems an odd combination, though: ballet, Shakespeare, and football.”

“Yes. I thought them peculiar too.”

“So how did you end up visitin’ with me? Not that I mind a bit,” I added quickly. “I’ve enjoyed our visit, but I’d thought they’d plunk you down in a fancy city with someone a whole lot more important than me.”

“I requested to visit you.”

“How’d you know about me? I’m no one important.”

Again she hesitated. “I used probes. I had only a limited amount of time to visit so I sent out many probes. They reported back with the most useful candidates.”

“I sure didn’t see no robots or such around here. How’d they find me?” Surprise stopped my fork halfway to my mouth.

“They were tiny. I designed them to look like one of your insectoids. A *Musca domestica*.”

“A what?”

Another hesitation. “A housefly.”

I remembered the pestiferous flies that had buzzed around my baking for days before I got The Call. “Them flies were your probe thingies?”

“Yes.”

“Well, if that don’t beat all!” I finished the last bite of my chicken and waffles while I pondered that. You never really know, do you? I figured it was a real good thing I never managed to swat any of those pesky flies.

“What made you choose me?”

“You seemed more...real than others. We wanted to find out the ordinary people not those with economic advantages. We wanted to understand your species better than that.”

“I guess I got lucky, then, didn’t I?”

Ms. Iggy watched as I cleared the table. “Do you think you were lucky to have this visit with me?”

“Oh, yes! I’m enjoyin’ your stay ever so much! I like your stories, and you’re good company. I can get kinda lonesome up here in the mountains.”

“Is that why you keep so busy providing food for others?”

She’d seen me prepare all kinds of desserts and dishes for everyone from old Mrs. Jackson who had bad rheumatism to the local PTA bake sale. “I’m tryin’ to be a good neighbor. Fact is, I’m going to bake again today. I want to send you back with a little present as a thank you for your visit.”

Ms. Iggy observed intently while I pulled out the ingredients for my Granny’s chocolate mayonnaise cake. The flour, sugar, strong coffee and lots of cocoa powder were a given, along with the Duke’s mayonnaise. I soon had the layers baking away.

A couple hours later, the cake was done in all its chocolate glory. Thick chocolate ganache with a sweet gleam from a bit of corn syrup made the frosting gooey and lush.

Ms. Iggy stared at the cake with greedy eyestalks.

“Would you like to try a piece?” I asked.

“I should not.” Her answer wasn’t her usual polite no-thank-you.

“You sure? I made it for you.”

Finally, she agreed to try a very small slice. I cut her a thin wedge and laid it out on my best dessert china, the plate I got special when I went all the way to Gatlinburg as a girl. Her probe gave the cake another approving chirp. For the first time, Ms. Iggy picked up her fork and cut a tiny corner of cake and icing. She hesitated, then pushed it into her mouth opening.

She chewed, then swallowed. Her eye stalks kinda bugged out a little as the moist, rich chocolate exploded on whatever taste sensors she had. She actually swayed a little while she chewed. More eagerly, she took another, bigger bite. Then another. And another. Then she asked for another slice.

And that’s how I became the Official Dessert Provider to the Xdagglonoth Solar System. And how Earth became the Foodie Planet Destination for the Stars.

It was my chocolate mayonnaise cake that done it.