

FLASH FICTION

by Rafal Krzystyniak

Burnt

Yonah raised his hands to his head, wormed them into his hair, pushing the white hat off, grabbed his mane tight, and pulled it up. His arms trembled, his wide-opened eyes stung and everyone in the kitchen held their breath, hanging, waiting to see what the chef would say next.

“Burnt,” Yonah said, still holding his hair. “It’s burnt, Nilsen.”

“Yes, chef,” Nilsen, who stood right next to Yonah and did his best to be as small as possible, replied. “I’m sorry, chef.”

“Sorry? You’re sorry?”

“Yes, chef.”

“I don’t care if you’re sorry or not,” Yonah yelled. “All I care about is the burnt meat on your pan! How did it happen, Nilsen? No, don’t tell me, I know how it happened, you are an ignorant and should never have stepped inside a kitchen, let alone my kitchen. Who hired you?”

“You did, chef.”

“Don’t mock me!”

“I’m not, chef.”

“Well, I guess you’re right,” Yonah said and slowly combed his hair back. “It is my fault. I shouldn’t have let someone like you handle the meat. I should have taken care of it myself. What an idiot. OK, Nilsen, tell me how did it happen.”

“I-I,” Nilsen started and gulped. “I wanted to take a peek at our guest, chef. I left the pan for no more than five seconds, and the pan wasn’t even hot yet, I swear.”

“Oh, Nilsen,” Yonah sighed deeply and turned. “What did I tell you all in the briefing, huh, anyone?”

“That we should be ten times more careful today, chef,” someone answered from behind Yonah.

“Exactly, and why is that?”

“Because we’re cooking for the ambassador, chef,” someone else answered.

“That’s right, and what is on the line?”

“Our asses,” the first person replied.

“And?”

“And your reputation, chef.”

“Yes,” Yonah turned back to Nilsen. “You saw the ambassador, Nilsen. Tell us, who is he.”

“He,” Nilsen stuttered. “He’s an alien, chef.”

“The ambassador is an alien,” Yonah shouted.

The chef turned with his arms stretched out and looked at his staff. All of them scuttled away to do their jobs, aside from the ones whose stations were close enough that they didn’t have to move to see Nilsen’s screw-up. Yonah turned back to the burnt meat and saw Nilsen untie his apron and take off his cap.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“I assume I’m fired, chef.”

“No, you’re not fired, not yet, You’re going to fix this, or at least help me fix this.”

“But, chef,” Nilsen said, his voice weak.

“No buts, Nilsen. You’re a moron, but I hired you, so you must be good, I don’t hire subpar cooks.”

“But, chef,” Nilsen replied and tied his apron back. “This was the only piece of the ambassador’s meat, there’s no way we could get more of it now and keep this fiasco under wraps.”

“You’re right, but I have a plan, we’ll make something else.”

“Didn’t the president request we make the ambassador’s favourite?”

“He did, but what choice do we have? Come on, you’re helping me.”

Yonah and Nilsen made their way to the well-stocked storage room of this unfamiliar kitchen and looked through their options. It was a tough choice, after all, what do you cook for a representative of a sentient race that came from a different planet? The first contact happened only a few days ago, so they didn’t have much to go on. The president’s men managed to get in touch with the ambassador’s staff and procured the ingredients for the official’s favourite dish, but the aliens didn’t want to share too much of their supplies. They were even more stringent when it came to any instructions.

If Yonah couldn’t treat the ambassador to his favourite meal, he decided the second best thing would be to serve him Earth’s most iconic dish. Looking around the shelves, Yonah started picking ingredients and handing them to Nilsen.

“What are we making, chef?” Nilsen asked.

“Something I never thought I’d make, but thanks to you, I am,” Yonah said and picked up a handful of potatoes. “Take that back to the kitchen and fire up the grill. I’ll get

the beef.”

“Chef?”

“We’re making a hamburger.”

With a fully staffed kitchen, they made quick work of preparing the sandwich. They toasted the buns crisp, made their own ketchup and mustard, sliced the cheese just right, and added the lettuce, a slice of tomato, and a slice of a pickle. Yonah, not wanting to repeat his mistake, grilled the meat himself. He made it a little pink in the middle, it was just right.

The chef plated the burger himself along with a basket of French fries and handed it off to the waiter. As the man left with the dish, Yonah turned to Nilsen.

“That’s done. Now, pack your stuff and get out. I’ll decide later if you’re getting paid.”

“Chef?” The waiter came back into the kitchen a few tense minutes later. “The ambassador wants a word.”

“My compliments, chef,” the official said bowing his head and smiling with his angular mouth. “I would have prepared my guest’s favourite dish, but this was a tasty and very bold choice.

“Thank you, I’m glad you liked it, sir”

“If I may say just one thing,” the alien said and extended one of his thin fingers. “I really like my meat burnt.”

END

Spring all the way!

Spring was here to move back in. She dropped her worn linen suitcases at the door, popped off her sandals, and rushed through the entryway.

"I'm here!" She announced in her bubbly voice, but no one answered.

Spring furrowed her brow and bit the corner of her lip. Winter was probably still asleep. No matter, let her sleep. Spring had her things to unpack since she would be here a while. But first the thermostat.

She went up to the wall and twisted the knob ever so slightly at first, but that didn't feel right. She nudged it a bit more and, with a jolly nod, stepped away.

Time for the luggage. She had so much stuff with her, it still amazed her how she managed to fit it all in there. The paint-stained worktable in the drawing room caught her eye and she felt a tug somewhere deep in her soul. The suitcases could surely wait, couldn't they?

She took a step, shy at first, but then with confidence, she rounded the table and slid her hands over its top feeling the grain.

Boxes and crates of supplies lined the wall to her left. She knew those boxes, she loved their smells and she pulled her favourites out. Digging through their contents, Spring found what she needed and piled it all up on the bench. She was ready.

She pulled up her baggy yellow sleeves and went to work. With glue and paste, she assembled flowers, painted the trees with organic paint, and used the special dust to sprinkle everything with a bit of her beloved sunny charm.

There was plenty more to do, she had to touch up the forests, freshen up the trees, add a little colour to the meadows and paint over the fields. She spent hours on the blossoms themselves, not to mention the days it took her to finish up all the leaves.

Spring lost track of time completely, she had way too much fun, but her first yawn reminded her she had to wake Winter up.

She went to the bedroom quietly and leaned over Winter's ear.

"Wake up sleepy-head, it's time," she whispered.

side.

Winter just grumbled and turned to her other

It took her a while to finally wake Winter up and push her off the bed and out of the house. Spring could not believe how she could be related to such a snore. Yes, Winter did a lot, she crocheted all the snow, but come on, how was that even work? She would sit in her armchair, wave her hooks for a bit and then sleep until Spring came back. She didn't even

have to clean up after anyone, she didn't need to wake no one up, and Father Frost painted all the windows for her.

Come to think of it, Spring had it the worst of all the seasons out there. She had to fix everything up after Winter, do all her own chores, suffer Summer's obnoxious personality and she wouldn't even get the recognition both of them got. It was all so unfair.

Sure, people liked Spring, but not nearly as much as Summer or Winter with all her festivities. Spring was sure she could do better than everyone, even the mopey Autumn with her always wet Wellingtons who she barely knew.

Maybe she should do it, maybe she should lock the door and never let any other season come? It would never be too warm, too cold, nor too wet. It would just be perfect all year round.

She spun quickly and locked the door.

Wow, she really did it, she doubted if she even could, but she did it. It was her time to shine. Sure, Autumn would complain, Summer would probably shout before starting a barbecue, but who cares, Spring was in charge now, it was so great!

She started her rule by a quick little dance. She spun and shuffled and twirled around the living room until she fell on Winter's favourite armchair. It was her armchair now; no more Winter meant no more blankets and pillows, so Spring threw them all into the closet. She tidied up the place, got rid of Summer's empty beer bottles that both Winter and Autumn ignored and freshened up the space.

That done she went back to the bench. She needed a plan, but she was never good at those, so she rummaged through other seasons' boxes and picked whatever she fancied. She made fruit taste, like ice-cream, and painted random leaves red; she threw the crochet hooks along with the snowy wool away and woke up all the bears.

Months passed by, it was Springs time to go and even Autumn came splashing and sploshing. She knocked on the door and she did complain, but Spring didn't care it was Spring now, baby,

Spring all the way!

She never felt better. She had all the power, all the fun and she could do whatever she wanted. She knew she was doing a better job than anyone else did.

A year passed in no time and Spring still had fun. The other seasons moaned and Summer even managed to get their tropical cousins to stop by and talk some sense into Spring. All their talk fell on deaf ears as Spring was here to stay.

Then one day someone slipped a note under her door. When she finally noticed it she,

cocked her head in confusion and picked the note up.

"Dear Spring," she read out loud. "You know we love you deep down inside, but please go away and let other seasons come back, we miss them. Sincerely, humans."

Her world spun and shook. They wanted her gone? Impossible. They are all stupid and wrong!

She did such a great job, what if she stayed a bit more, maybe try to sprinkle in a bit of snow? No, that wouldn't do. It was all no good, she messed up. She took Winter's blanket out of the closet and snuggled up in her favourite chair.

Her time was done, so she stood up, dragged her feet to the entrance and unlocked the door.

END

Joy!

When Agnes was born, the hospital room was silent. The only thing that was heard was the shocked gasp of the nurse when she realized that Agnes, although otherwise healthy, could not produce a single sound. The years passed, Agnes grew up, and the girl's entire family learned to live with her disability.

She was a good student, good at almost everything she set her mind to, but as every teenager, she was anxious when it was time to send out her university applications. The anxiety never really subsided. Despite what her dad had told her, she knew at the back mind, that something had to go wrong, it always did.

It was a Saturday, a day like any other, and Agnes cozied up on her bed in her favorite reading spot, when her sister Tessa burst into the room without knocking.

Agnes opened her mouth and turned her palm up in annoyance.

"I got something for you, Nessie", Tessa said, bouncing on her toes.

Agnes furrowed her brows.

"You'll love it," Tessa said and sat next to her sister with a bounce. "Here."

Agnes' eyes widened when she saw Tessa produce an envelope from behind her back.

"I told you, you'll love it."

Agnes scrambled to put a bookmark in and threw the book aside just before grabbing the letter from Tessa's hands. The younger sister scooped up to Agnes and looked closely as she carefully opened the letter; if she got accepted, she wanted to keep the letter and the envelope pristine. She pulled out the folded sheet of paper and gingerly opened it up. The smell of the paper and ink hit her nostrils and gave her goosebumps.

Agnes wanted to read the whole letter, find out what the admissions board had to say, but Tessa skipped to the most important bit.

"You're in!" She shouted. "They accepted you, Nessie! You're in!"

Agnes looked at her sister and then back at the letter. It was true. She stood up and joined Tessa, who was jumping and screaming with joy. Agnes still could not believe it; she was in. Just as her dad kept saying.

She grabbed her younger sister by her hands and pulled her down, to make her stop jumping. She signed to her as soon as she calmed down.

"Mom and dad went shopping, they should be back soon," Tessa replied. "You want me to phone them?"

Agnes nodded quickly.

“Ok, let me go grab my phone.”

When Tessa disappeared into the corridor, Agnes took a deep breath and read through the letter one more time looking for a catch.

It didn't take long before Tessa burst back into the room, her smartphone in hand, and the videoconferencing app already attempting to connect to their parents. She placed her phone on the stand on Agnes' desk and pulled her sister towards it. Soon enough, mom answered and her smiling face appeared on the screen.

“Hey, Tess,” mom said. “What's up?”

“Mom, guess what,” Tessa started, but Agnes signed straight to the point.

“You got in?!” Mom exclaimed. “Frank, come here.”

“What?” Dad appeared on the screen. “Oh, hi, girls.”

“Agnes got a letter today, dad, Tessa said.

“You got in, Nessie?” Dad asked.

Agnes nodded her head vigorously.

“I'm not surprised,” dad said with a straight face. “I knew it.”

Agnes looked at him with one eyebrow raised.

“I'm joking, I'm extremely happy for you, baby. What about you, are you happy?”

Agnes smiled a wide smile and nodded slowly, dipping her head low.

“We're so proud of you, Nessie,” mom said. “We need to celebrate.”

“Yes,” Tessa said with a sigh. “Finally, someone is making sense.”

“I'm feeling like listening to someone sing,” mom said. “Tess, didn't Jessica's mom tell us about this new karaoke place?”

“Oh, yes, let's go to karaoke, please,” Tessa said. “I want to hear Nessie sing!”

“Tessa,” mom said, her voice serious. “You know better than to make fun of your sister.”

“I'm not, it was all just a joke,” Tessa replied. “You're not angry, are you, Nessie?”

Agnes shook her head, pointed her finger, and pretended to clear her throat.

“Hold on,” Tessa said and froze. “She's gonna do it.”

“Stop fooling around, you two and get ready,” mom replied.

Agnes took a deep breath. When she was a little girl and realized that she could not speak, she stopped even trying, there was no point. A few times over the years, she pretended to speak, pretended to laugh, but never truly did so, all she did was move her lips. Now, however, she was filled with joy to the point, she could sing, so she closed her eyes and sang.

As soon as Agnes opened her mouth, all light in the room dimmed. Ribbons of green

and blue luminescence streamed out of her lips and hung in the air like curtains of light, shimmering, undulating. Agnes went through the melody in her head and the light that streamed out of her lips turned pink, then purple and blue only to circle back to green.

Tessa, mom, and dad all gasped. Concerned, Agnes stopped singing, opened her eyes, and saw the aurora slowly fade. She just knew something had to go wrong.

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