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Theme: GUESTS

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OUR LITTLE BED AND BREAKFAST

By Joel Curtis Graves

We opened our bed and breakfast on Bogo Prime in the capital city of Whimly on the south side close to the old Musk Spaceport. In retrospect, we had no idea what we were getting into. We did the required research and settled on the Robert's Variegated Species List: those species most closely aligned with Terran physiology. That way we would not have to make any special modifications to our house.

The first weekend guests were the Yamamotos, so we could pretty much anticipate their needs. I cooked breakfast and Audrey prepared the afternoon tea/coffee and cookies engagement. She also did light housekeeping. In the months that followed, the Amesese, Gipsons, Ta'apises,

and Federovs all enjoyed our open hospitality and we enjoyed their warm company. After five couples, we thought the bed and breakfast was a fun and relatively simple business to manage.

When the ship arrived from Glich-bok, everything changed. The Boks, as we call them, are a little smaller than humans and have two legs with stubby webbed feet, two long tentacles about where our arms are, a knobby grass green head with a central mouth on the very top, and two roving eye stalks, which can vary in length while you talk to them. The eyes are a captivating pale blue with large reddish-gold irises. For clothes they wear something like a loincloth and add a jacket for special occasions. Some people call them orcs or snail heads. I can see how they arrive at that conclusion.

I like Boks. They are neat and conscientious. Although they don't have lips, with a little effort, they are easy to understand.

In our brochure, we offer an afternoon dinner on the first day. I knew from their application that they liked fish and berries, so I had a wonderful salmon and raspberries with orange glaze ready in the oven, asparagus and brown rice on the side.

The shuttle dropped them off Friday afternoon. Mister Im'ek Chk emerged from the back door and stretched a tentacle toward me. I knew to take the flat side of the suckered "hand". We politely brushed palms and his mouth pulled apart into the Bok version of a smile. My hand felt slightly sticky and itchy. I tried not to rub my pant leg.

"Good to arrive," he chortled.

"Yes, good to see you," I replied.

He reached behind him and helped his wife from the vehicle. "This Im'mish Chk."

“Pleased to meet you,” I said, bowing slightly.

Her stalk eyes blinked at me several times as if trying to focus.

Im’ek nodded toward her and smiled again. “Close to ekgkrrg,” he said, and one eye winked at me.

I looked at him blankly, but he did not volunteer more.

I picked up their one suitcase and escorted them through the house to the back guest bedroom. “When you are ready, I have dinner prepared.” I knew they were here to attend the annual convention, and added, “The home page on the screen shows the convention schedule, local activities and places of interest.” I placed the suitcase on the low couch table at the foot of the bed. “Lots to do on Bogo.”

Im’ek waved his hand in front of the Screen and it sprang to life, automatically noting his species and listing languages. He pointed at his and smiled. “Dinner?”

“Oh yes. Let’s see. It’s four now, so why don’t we eat at five? Will that give you enough time to get settled in?”

“Yes, good,” he said, scrolling through the options.

I glanced at Im’mish. She was studying something on the back of her right hand; it looked like it was moving. I shrugged and closed the door behind me.

Promptly at five, I heard them coming down the hallway. A low moan began, so I took a quick peek around the corner. As Im’mish walked down the hall, she dragged her flat suckered hands along the walls on each side. Out of each hand, there appeared to be a clear jelly trail flowing behind, now dripping down the walls. I gritted my teeth. What the hell was that!

Her moan grew louder. Although I felt anger rising, now I wondered if she was in some sort of distress or pain. “How can I help?”

Im’ek’s right eye swiveled around to point at me. “She soon ekgkrrg—maybe tomorrow.”

I stood in the doorway, studying her. Whatever ekgkrrg was, which I could not pronounce, she did not seem to enjoy it. What would happen tomorrow?

Im’ek nodded. “Go in?”

I was blocking the entry. “Yes, yes, of course.” I turned toward the kitchen. Was it impolite to question guests about unusual practices? Unusual discharges? Would that clear jelly crap come off the walls? Should I even touch the stuff?

They seated themselves on either side of the table, facing each other, and I heard Audrey in the hallway. “What the hell? Smells like rotten eggs.”

What to do? I might have to call the Visitors Bureau and see if they can enlighten us on this development. I wondered if the jelly would harm the paint. Maybe I could market the stuff.

The serving dishes came right out of the oven. “Be careful. Let me serve you, please, so you don’t get burned.” I dished up their plates and made a small one for myself and sat at the head of the table.

Im’ek took the spoon, scooped up some salmon, and unceremoniously dropped it into the hole on top of his head. He chewed loudly then smiled. “Ah, most good. Very good.” His stalk eyes opened wider.

Im’mish seemed to have trouble scooping up the food, so he reached over to her plate, spooned up some salmon and berries and poured the mixture into the top of her head. At least

that's how it looked. I knew he was feeding her by mouth, but it just seemed quite unusual and fascinating to watch.

She chewed the food a few times and swallowed, then leaned forward. Im'ek seemed to understand that she wanted to be fed, so he ate a bite, then gave her another spoon full.

Audrey suddenly appeared in the doorway with a bucket and sponge, eyes blazing. I excused myself and went to her.

“That shit ruined the paint and everywhere it dripped took the stain off the oak floor. No one said anything about this at the Visitors Bureau. Nothing!” She spoke softly, but this last part came out rather loud.

I leaned around the corner. They were still eating. “Well, get plenty of pictures and I'll let the Bureau know what is happening after I clean up.”

“Maybe they should clean up their own messes!” she hissed, but turned away still talking, “Rubber gloves, old towels, maybe the shop vac will work...”

I sighed and entered the dining room to find Im'mish standing on her chair, her tentacle arms waving all around. Her skin seemed to glow. Now the yellowish clear substance covered her from head to toe. It must be a kind of sweat, I thought, only thick like *Karo* syrup. What's that smell? Audrey was right; it does smell a little like rotten eggs.

Im'ek sat in his chair, smiling, his eyes riveted on his flailing wife.

“Uh sir, may I ask what is going on?”

“Time now. Ekgkrrg!” He shouted the strange word with what I might describe as pridefulness.

Im'mish began to moan louder and louder. Audrey appeared in the doorway, wearing a Costco home hazmat suit, and that's what saved her. I was just waving for her to back out of the room, when Im'mish exploded.

From where I was standing, it seemed like her outer layer of skin just up and shot away from her body. I am not sure if the word disgusting quite captures the experience of the moment. You've watched the screen and seen people being slimed? Then you know what I looked like, only it smelled much worse.

At first Audrey was livid, then she looked at me and began to giggle. "You look pathetic," her mask-muffled voice said.

I looked down at my slimed body. "I feel pathetic."

Audrey's eyes grew large and she stepped back. That's when I felt the wriggling. I looked down again. Inside the yellowish clear jelly, things were crawling. I was covered with them. They were on my head, dripping down my face and back, everywhere.

I screamed, tearing off my shirt.

Audrey pulled the shop vac from the hallway into the dining room and turned it on. As she began vacuuming me off, Im'ek screamed. At least it sounded like a scream. After his wife exploded, she fell to the floor, apparently unconscious, and I thought he was screaming like me—in fear and disgust. But oh no. He rushed around the table and threw me to the floor and began tenderly scooping up the squirming horde of worms. A pouch appeared on his belly and he tenderly deposited handfuls of the creatures into it.

The doorbell rang.

Audrey opened the shop vac so Im'ek could scoop the worms out of the basin. It sounded like he was humming a tune.

I pulled myself up and went to the front door. Mr. Morrison of the Visitors Bureau stood there, his eyes large, mouth open but no words came out at first.

“I am so, so sorry. We just learned that a Bok arrived about to gestate and got over here as fast as we could.” He studied me up and down. “I am so sorry.” He touched something on his wrist pad.

Four people stood behind him, all grinning broadly. They opened a large white plastic bag. Well, it is not actually plastic. No one makes things out of plastic anymore, but you get the idea.

Mr. Morrison put on a half-hearted smile. “Excuse me. My team will help clean the area and collect up any young, although it looks...” he leaned around me to look into the house, “like your wife and Mister Chk might have it under control.”

“Have what under control?” I growled. “Do you see what happened to me? To our house?”

“Yes, again, I am so sorry. Boks are supposed to declare this condition before travels and we did not see any signs at debarkation. Mister Chk mentioned something about her condition in the arrival form, but we didn't notice it until just a short time ago.”

I glared at him with clenched teeth, willing myself to remain silent.

“We hurried over as fast as...” He turned at the sound of another van landing in the front yard. A team in orange hazmat suits pile out and entered the house. This group had different sprays, buckets, and tools. I sighed and went upstairs to shower and change.

When I came downstairs thirty minutes later, everyone had gone.

Audrey was in the kitchen, washing the dishes. “Turns out they have a Bok wing at Mercy Medical for just this sort of thing. The Boks will stay there. Im’mish recovered and thanked us for the wonderful meal. She said the salmon was so good that it released her young two days early. They thought they would be home before anything happened. Imagine that. The Bureau cleaned everything up and repainted the walls and re-stained the floor and dining room set. You can’t even tell a Bok birth happened here. Channel Five will be down later this evening to interview us about the incident. The Bureau reminded us to put a nice spin on it, you know, so inter-species relations are not strained in any way.”

I sat at the kitchen table and poured a cup of warm milk.

Audrey looked over her shoulder at me. “And Im’ek said he would send us a bonus for allowing his wife to second gestate here.”

I could only frown. How many of these “incidents” could we handle before it was too much to handle? “Makes it sound like the birthing episode was in the plan all along,” I murmured. I wondered if a B&B was such a good idea, after all.

Audrey put the last dish away and turned to me. “I haven’t eaten, honey. Why don’t we go out? Maybe Pepper’s?”

I looked up at her and finally had to smile. She had gone from annoyed to angry to laughing at me, and now taking it all in as if just another day. I playfully wagged my tail at her and she leaned in to lick my ears with great affection. This got my right leg jumping and we both laughed hysterically, the tension finally released. Her tail intertwined with mine and she sat in my lap, so our noses and whiskers brushed affectionately.

I reluctantly leaned back. “Wonderful idea, darling. Maybe we could split a deep-fried rat with albacore fries; and for dessert, how about a couple of chocolate covered mice on a stick?”

The End