

I got the idea for “It Came to Eat Our Chicken Wings” while eating at a certain restaurant chain during my travels in the United States. *RicePaper*, the magazine of Asian Canadian arts and culture, commissioned the story for its Technology issue (Winter / Dec. 2002). Ironically, a computer glitch turned all the exclamation marks (!) and question marks (?) into “é” throughout the Technology issue. *RicePaper* subsequently held a contest to count the number computer-created typos. Here is the story with correct punctuation.

## It Came To Eat Our Chicken Wings

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Her friends thought her uniform looked silly: the tight little orange shorts, the white tank top with the picture of an owl, the shiny beige pantyhose, the white running shoes. Her father wondered what type of restaurant would publish a swimsuit calendar of its waitresses. But despite the raised eyebrows of friends and family, Kyra Ling liked working at Hooters. At least she made more money serving beer and chicken wings than she had pushing a *dim sum* cart.

However, there were moments when the job seemed distinctly unglamorous, like this moment, when the two college frat boys were lolling their heads, nearly unconscious.

The guy in the Cocoa Beach University golf shirt shook his buddy’s shoulder as she passed by. “Hey!” he yelled to Kyra. “My friend thinks Asian girls are hot.”

Kyra smiled. How could she get these two drunks out? “Thanks,” she replied. “Do you guys want a coffee?”

His buddy drooled as he leered at her. “I’m looking for a geisha.”

Kyra shrugged. “Go to Japan.”

The student was unfazed. “So do you speak Asian?”

Kyra lips curled into a bemused grin.

“Non, mais je parle anglais, français, et un peu de chinois,” she replied.

The student didn’t give up. “So can you teach it to me? It’s one of those languages that’s best taught by a – ” he mumbled before he slumped over the table.

Kyra tapped him on the shoulder. “I think you’re done.” She handed the check to his friend. “Here’s the tab.”

“Oh, sure,” the frat boy said as he handed a fifty-dollar bill to her.

Kyra took the money and pushed the change into his shirt pocket. "We better get you into a cab. Don't drive, okay?"

"Sure thing," he muttered.

Kyra motioned to Maria the Manager. They walked the two frat boys out the door and into a cab. When they returned into the restaurant, the regular customers burst into applause. Kyra curtsied to the audience.

Maria laughed. "That was great. You should negotiate the Middle East peace treaty."

"Get out," Kyra teased. "Did you hear those two morons? 'I'm looking for a geisha.' I bet he doesn't know what a geisha really is. Is that all these guys think about when they see an Asian woman?"

"You, Kyra dear, can be a lot of things," Maria suggested as she gave a bag of chicken wings to her. "You and Nicole can munch on these. Brandy called in sick, and Nicole's at the car show alone, so you can stay there and work at the booth."

"Cool, my first promo." Kyra retouched her lipstick. "How do I look?"

"You look fabulous. Don't keep fussing, it's only a promo, not a calendar shoot," Maria reminded her. "Actually, it can be fun. Come on, get going, or you'll be late."

Kyra hopped into her red convertible, threw the bag of chicken wings into the back seat, and drove onto the highways around Cocoa Beach, Florida. With clear weather and no traffic jams, she should be at the convention centre in no time.

Then she saw a bright light in the sky. A shiny, silvery object, engulfed in red flames, was falling to the Earth.

"Oh my God, is that a crashing plane?" she wondered.

The object plummeted steadily until it disappeared into the horizon. The sound of a crash boomed in the distance. Curious about the object, she sped ahead.

A mile later, she stopped her car, walked onto the roadside, and looked at a nearby swamp, her eyes widening with awe.

A cylinder, like a grain silo about thirty feet long, lay at the edge of the swamp. Its silver surface was charred black in spots, and it had a few dents and creases, but it seemed mostly undamaged. Steam rose from the waters surrounding the cylinder, but no fires burned anymore.

She looked up and scanned the sky. It was blue and cloudless, quiet and peaceful. No storm or hurricane had brought this thing down.

Lowering her gaze back to Earth, she looked at the swamp again. She stood still for a long time, staring at the shiny, steaming cylinder.

A vehicle screeched to a halt behind her. She spun around and saw a NASA van beside her car. NASA workers, holding cameras and equipment, jumped out of the van, ran into the swamp, and waded towards the object.

"What is it?" she asked a man whose badge read: *John Evans. Recovery Team Leader.*

"I don't know," Evans admitted. "It doesn't look like one of ours or a Russian or a Chinese or any other country's."

"It doesn't have any markings!" a recovery worker yelled from the swamp.

Evans gasped. "Darn, maybe it's somebody's secret weapon! Get out of there!"

"It's okay, it's okay," the recovery worker reported. "Nothing -- no radiation, no biological or chemical contaminant -- is registering on our equipment."

"It's not on fire now, but it was on fire on the way down," Kyra observed.

"That was probably the surface burning as it entered our atmosphere," said Evans. "Thank goodness it fell in the water. If it had fallen on trees or grass, the whole countryside could be on fire now."

He pulled out his notebook and glanced at Kyra's Hooters name badge. "Uh, Kyra? May I ask you some questions? Did you see the spacecraft come down?"

*The spacecraft.* The NASA guy had called it a spacecraft. But it wasn't from any country in the world. "Maybe it was from beyond this world," thought Kyra.

She told him about the fire in the sky, the spaceship's constant speed of descent, and the sound of the crash.

Then she remembered the chicken wings in the backseat of her car. "Oh dear, the car show," she muttered. "I am so late for the car show. Can I go now?"

"Sure, and thank you," said Evans. Kyra smiled, ran back to her car, and drove off.

A few minutes later, a recovery worker pointed out the open hatch to Evans.

“Someone was flying this ship,” Evans guessed as he swung the hatch door open and closed. He looked into the ship.

“There’s no one inside the ship. Where’s the astronaut?” he asked. Nobody knew.

“Hey, look at this,” cried Dr. Steve Potter, the biologist.

Evans walked back to the roadside. Potter led him along a streak of blue liquid that stretched from the swamp to a stand of trees to a pair of tire tracks in the mud. The tire tracks were where Kyra had parked her car.

“What could that be?” asked Evans. “Mechanical fluid from the spacecraft?”

Potter shrugged. “I dunno. I’ll take a sample back and analyze it.”

“Whatever it is, someone dripped it on a path from the swamp to the Hooters Girl’s car,” said Evans.

“Do you think the astronaut left the swamp, went to that clump of trees, and then went to the girl’s car?” Potter suggested. “Maybe it sneaked from the trees to the car while she wasn’t looking. Maybe our missing astronaut hitched a ride on the undercarriage of her car.”

“I hope she’s not taking more than chicken wings to the car show,” Evans said.

“You’re late,” Nicole complained. She moved away from the racing car emblazoned with the orange and white Hooters logo on its hood. “What took you so long?”

“I saw a spaceship crash beside the highway,” Kyra squealed. “It was so exciting. I think it was an alien ship.”

“As if,” Nicole replied. She pointed at a stack of posters of the contestants of the Miss Hooters of East Central Florida bikini pageant. “Come on, help me hand out posters to horny car show fans.”

Nicole sat down and began autographing the posters, which showed her flipping her blonde hair while posing in a pink bikini. She signed each poster “Breast wishes, Nicole XOXO” before handing it with a smile to the next guy in a line-up of car aficionados.

As Kyra passed another poster to Nicole, a teenager asked her, “Are you in the poster too?”

“No,” said Kyra, “but I’m on the coupon for ten free chicken wings.” She handed a coupon to him. “Do you want one?”

“Awesome,” said the kid. “Uh, can you sign it?”

Kyra signed it “Hugs and hooters, Kyra” and gave it back to the teenager. As he walked off, she turned to Nicole. “Don’t you love it when you can make the day for a fifteen year old kid because he’s seen a Hooters Girl?”

Nicole laughed. “Sure love it. Hey, I think those guys want to take a photo of us.”

The car show promo continued: handing out posters, posing for photos, and selling the swimsuit calendar. A newspaper photographer took a photo of Kyra reclining on the hood of the Hooters racing car.

During a lull in the show, Kyra began eating the chicken wings. “So, Nicole, are you going to continue your modelling?”

“Oh, yes,” said Nicole as she reached for a chicken wing. “I did a shoot for a travel magazine: *Clothes For Hiking in Theme Parks*.”

“That’s great!”

“And what about you? Still thinking of the State Department?”

“Yep. I figure when I get a degree in languages, I can get a job as an interpreter. Who knows, I might even get to work in an embassy in some place like Paris or London.”

“Our little Kyra, in the diplomatic corps, talking to foreign V.I.P’s,” mused Nicole. “You can do it, girl.”

Potter held the beaker of blue liquid up to the light. “Interesting stuff.”

“What is it?” Evans asked.

“It’s not mechanical fluid, that’s for sure,” said Potter. “It’s biological; it has DNA.”

“It has DNA? You mean it’s from somebody’s body?”

“Not somebody. *Something*. It has the amino acids, but it’s not human. I think it’s something’s blood.”

“Blood? What animal on Earth has blue blood?”

Potter hummed. “Perhaps it’s not from Earth.”

Kyra and Nicole couldn’t help but notice when the babbling in the exhibit hall had suddenly grown louder.

“What’s going on?” asked Kyra, staring at the crowd forming near the vintage Mustangs.

A creature stomped out from the crowd. Bellowing like an elephant, it waved its arms around. It walked upright on two legs and was the size of a man, but it wasn’t human; it was a green reptile wearing a torn silver spacesuit. Its bulging eyes looked around.

“What’s he trying to promote?” Nicole wondered.

“I don’t think he’s advertising anything. I think it’s an alien, the outer space type,” said Kyra. “But it seems harmless, like an overgrown iguana.”

“Hey, look, I think it’s bleeding blue blood,” Nicole observed. “That spot on its upper arm.”

“Godzilla! Godzilla!” a boy shouted. Squealing with delight, he ran to the alien, threw his arms around it, and hugged it. As he jumped up and down excitedly, he hit the alien’s bleeding wound.

The alien growled and quickly pushed the boy away. Seconds later, flames burst from the alien’s head, arms, and parts not covered by the torn spacesuit.

Screams of panic filled the air. As people stampeded past them, Kyra and Nicole watched the alien run from car to car.

“There’s gas and oil in those cars,” Nicole realized.

“He could blow up the place!” Kyra said excitedly. “We have to stop it, but how?”

She saw a fire extinguisher hanging on the wall. “Hey, why don’t we use the fire extinguisher?”

“Good idea, but look at it,” Nicole said as they pulled the fire extinguisher from the wall. “It’s running around. How do we make it stay still long enough to spray it?”

Kyra glanced at the alien. “I’ve got an idea. I’ll get its attention, and when it’s standing still, you sneak up behind it and spray it.”

“It’s a plan,” Nicole agreed.

Kyra poured the chicken wings on a tray. Swaying her hips, she strutted to the alien.

“Hey, have you eaten yet?” she cooed the traditional Chinese greeting in Cantonese.

The alien stood still, looked down at Kyra, and reached down for a chicken wing. Kyra flinched as she felt the heat from the flames, but she held out the tray and smiled.

Still on fire, the alien began devouring the chicken wings, bones and all. Kyra kept smiling; in the corner of her eye, she could see Nicole sneaking up with the fire extinguisher.

Nicole crept behind the alien. Without any warning, she blasted the foam all over it. The flames went out.

The alien roared, turned around, and threw foam on Nicole. Then it flung foam on Kyra.

Kyra brushed the foam off her hair. “You can have all the chicken wings you want, but you’ve gotta show some table manners!” she scolded.

The alien looked down at her and said, “Okay.”

Kyra’s eyes widened in surprise. “You speak English?”

Fifteen minutes later, NASA scientists and police officers stormed into the convention centre. They saw nobody, just an exhibit hall full of cars.

“We heard there was a monster,” shouted a police officer. “Where is it? Is anybody here?”

“We’re over here,” came the reply from the Hooters booth.

They went to the Hooters booth and found the big iguana eating chicken wings as the two Hooters Girls watched.

The police officers drew their pistols and pointed them at the alien. Kyra waved her hand at the guns dismissively.

“Guys, you don’t need the guns,” she said. “We’ve negotiated an interstellar cease fire here.”

“A first contact situation,” Potter marvelled. “You’re obviously feeding it. Does it need anything else from us?”

“Yes, he does,” Kyra said. “Can you give this guy a lift back to his spaceship?”

The alien ship, a little dented and charred from its trip to Earth, blasted off from Kennedy Space Center. Kyra, Nicole, Evans, and Potter watched the ship disappear into the sky.

“Our first contact with an alien species, and it came here to eat our chicken wings,” Evans said, shaking his head. “Unbelievable.”

“It’s actually quite believable,” said Kyra. “Our TV transmissions have been going into space for years. He saw our commercial and decided to drop in and try our chicken wings.”

“And thus American consumerism paved the way for interstellar diplomacy,” Nicole added.

“An amazing species,” Potter remarked. “Even on its own world, it’s the only species that can inflame itself to protect a wound from infection.”

Kyra nodded. “Its fire wasn’t intended to hurt us. It was intended to heal that nasty cut he got when his spaceship landed.”

“You called it ‘he’ early on,” Evans remarked. “How did you know it was a male alien?”

Kyra and Nicole giggled. “He did what every male tourist to Florida does at Hooters,” Kyra explained. “He took photos of us.”

Aboard his spaceship, Argon put the chicken wings into the cryogenic suspension chamber and wandered back to the control room. He looked at the photograph of himself between the two smiling Hooters Girls, evidence of contact with the inhabitants of the blue planet. Finally, all those years of learning their language from their television signals had paid off. At the next song festival, the Science Academy would sing his praises.

He would have to visit Planet Florida again, if only to try the cheese burrito.

End