

The Pitiful Case of the Pompous Pickle

Jannean Elliott

It has long been rumored in the human world that toys come alive and animals converse with one another after the sun goes down. But the meticulous housewife who, in the morning, finds a little sugar spilled or tell-tale crumbs across the table is apt to suspect a rat. Little does she know that her pantry, too, has a life of its own.

But existence in a kitchen is tough. A short life expectancy and the constant population turnover cause extreme anxiety and stress, conditions under which friendships and feuds are quickly formed. The Pickle had not been in the Millender kitchen two days before his reputation as a sour puss was firmly established.

The Pompous Pickle's chief enjoyment seemed to be watching his vegetable friends wilt and wither beneath his acid comments. The first night he began by accusing a banana of being yellow. He called the honey grahams "country crackers" to their faces. He disparaged the poor salad dressings for, according to him, Wops and Frenchies had no business in an American kitchen. When he spied the Russian dressing sneaking in a corner, rage caused him to grow a new wart. The Pepto-Bismol, as usual, tried to soothe the upset, but he labeled her a "pinko." In general, the Pickle was as obnoxious as possible.

The second night the sausage dared to make a comeback whereupon the Pickle remarked that the kitchen was certainly fed up with the tripe sayings. He suggested that the ice cream might be frigid and hinted that the salt and pepper were engaged in an immoral relationship, simply because the one black and the other white were always seen together at the dinner table. When he announced where the deviled ham should go, a cookie crumbled with impotent rage; and the pantry retired for the night, unable to enjoy the common chit-chat as of yore.

Perhaps resentment would have continued to smolder in a purely passive way if certain events had not occurred the next morning. Mrs. Millender had

Jannean Elliott is an Information Systems Specialist with the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville.

set out a couple of eggs in preparation for her omelet, and they began to sweat with fear, not to mention the temperature change.

“Come on,” said the Pickle nastily, “let’s see you chicken out.” At that the eggs cracked up. That night the Pickle was tried in a kangaroo court. Yes, he was really in the soup now.

After an avocado had been chosen for the people and the lettuce appointed as judge (since he had the steadiest head in the bunch), a serious problem was noted. No one would defend the Pickle; no one wanted to be associated with his case. Finally, however, the freezer opened and a compassionate sole fillet stepped forth. He agreed to act on the Pickle’s behalf. The carrots nodded and said they had noticed something fishy about that sole from the beginning.

Each fruit or vegetable took the stand to testify to the insults he had received. The Pickle at first tried to heckle the witnesses, yelling that the potato was just sprouting off, that the fruitcake was nutty anyway. The asparagus got so mad she stalked off and wouldn’t even finish her testimony. Finally the case of the people was completed, and the sole stood to make the defense. Having no witness to call to the stand (He could scrape up any number of character witnesses but they were all for the other side!), he had to build a case on background.

“The Pickle can’t help it,” he argued. “His environment made him what he is.” He explained that the Pickle’s family had been a bunch of cukes. His mother had gone to seed, and he had been uprooted early in life. And surrounded with brine, how could he be other than sour? It did not work, of course. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty, guilty of slander, obnoxious behavior, and disturbing the peace of the kitchen. The sentence was ostracism. No one was to speak to the Pickle ever again.

Three days passed; three days of dreary solitude for the Pickle. Though he shouted insults galore, he got no gratifying response, not even a rise from the yeast. He had become that rare thing involuntarily, a peerless pickle.

And then Mrs. Millender bought a jar of sweet pickles. The jars sat side by side, and the Pompous Pickle noticed the enticing curve of a particular little girl pickle; silently he admired her deep, even, green color. She had noticed him too, his broad, thick chest, his huge size. Timidly that night she crept to his jar.

“My, how well preserved you are,” she ventured. There was a tense

silence in the pantry. "I'm a sweet Gherkin pickle." With a haughty sniff the Pickle remarked, "You do seem to be somewhat of a jerk." She fled, crushed, and the Pickle cursed himself for a fool. The next day she was eaten by Mrs. Millender's granddaughter, and the Pickle knew he had lived too long.

The kitchen was amazed as midnight struck to see him climb ponderously out of his jar. Slowly he pulled himself to the edge of the kitchen sink. The pantry held its collective breath. The Pickle looked up. His gaze fell upon the bacon staring avidly at him.

"Go fry, shrivel and die," the Pickle snarled. And to the potato just across the counter he wished, "May a masher attack all of your children." And without another word, he leapt straight into the garbage disposal.

His suicide became legend in the pantry, handed down for generations along with the insults that had seared themselves into the memory of the people. Freed from the real presence of that tongue, the kitchen mocked his life, ridiculing what they had shunned and feared when it dwelt among them. Few remembered what the sole had said the day after the suicide. Speculation over the cause had been the topic of conversation when he came forth with his opinion.

"The Pickle wanted love. Everyone needs love, but some don't know how to ask for it in regular ways. The Pickle asked for love and attention in the only way he knew; we just didn't recognize it."

The sole was hooted down that day, and he never brought up the subject again. The kitchen gossips carried on as before; life continued in the kitchen; so did death. Certain mysteries remained unexplored.