

ONE'S CUP OF TEA

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

ROSIE	A woman dealing with frustration at work.
DIANE	A woman diving head-first into a relationship.
ROGER	A strange, quirky waiter at a diner that specializes in tea.

## SETTING

Present day at a diner somewhere in America.

SCENE

*(Two women enter a diner and take a seat at a table.)*

ROSIE

I heard the same thing, but just never got around to eating here.

DIANE

I can't imagine what would make it so special. Tea is tea, right?

ROSIE

Apparently not. Well, I guess we'll find out soon enough. Anyway, so tell me about Gary. How is that going?

DIANE

Oh my god. He's so great!

ROSIE

So you're still—

DIANE

We've gotten together four times this week already.

ROSIE

I don't know, Di. That sounds pretty...

DIANE

Honestly, I think he might be the one.

ROSIE

You've only been dating for like a month.

DIANE

Three weeks.

ROSIE

That's not a lot of time for—

DIANE

More, actually. Almost a month.

ROSIE

Still seems...

*(A waiter walks up to the table.)*

ROGER

Greetings, ladies. Welcome to the Triple T Diner. Is this your first time here?

ROSIE

I thought it was the called Double T.

ROGER

We're having a special. So, I take it this is your first time dining with us?

DIANE

Yes.

ROGER

Oh, good for you. Excellent choice. A lot of people don't even get this far.

DIANE

What?

ROGER

The seats, the table. Excellent choices, every one of them. Oh, and may I commend you on the way you sat down? Very natural, very graceful.

*(The women stare at Roger in confusion.)*

Right. Well, I'll let you settle in. Enjoy our fresh oxygen. It's complimentary, and do try the napkins. Cheerio.

*(Waiter walks off. They watch in silence for a few more moments.)*

DIANE

What... what just happened there?

ROSIE

No idea. So, about Gary. Four dates this week...

DIANE

I know – crazy, right?! But it's just so...

ROSIE

Fast?

DIANE

...right! I mean, I can really feel it.

ROSIE

Okay...

DIANE

But what about you? You don't want to hear about Gary all the time.

ROSIE

Oh, I'm...

*(Roger has returned.)*

ROGER

Well, all settled, I see. And I would love to take your order now.

DIANE

We don't have—

ROGER

Menus. Right. You don't. Look at that. Aren't you special, declining menus in order to...

*(Interrupting, but not stopping him...)*

DIANE

We didn't decl—

ROGER

...experience the mystery of ordering like they did in prehistoric Egypt.

DIANE

In Egy—

ROGER

Back when they used to dine in the pyramids.

DIANE

Can we just get—

ROGER

Get some menus? 'Fraid not. We do all our ordering psychically here. You know, suck the knowledge from the ether and all that. So what can I get you?

ROSIE

The Ether?

ROGER

Oh, I don't recommend that. Put you right out.

*(They just stare at him.)*

Yes, fine. I see. You are having trouble connecting. Not Egyptian, are you? No problem. I'll get you the menus. Do either of you need children's menus? No? Something in Braille. Not that either, I see. I won't ask about the French. Right. Stay put. I'll return in an instant without your menus.

*(Roger starts to turn away...)*

DIANE

Did...

*(And then he immediately turns back.)*

ROGER

See how that worked? Fast, right?

*(They all stare at each other.)*

You're really struggling with this. Fine. Menus. Don't let me interrupt.

*(Roger leaves.)*

DIANE

I feel like I missed something there.

ROSIE

Were we supposed to order something just now?

DIANE

How could we? He hasn't brought us any menus—

*(Roger zooms at the table, making zooming noises, a menu in either hand held out horizontally like they are airplane wings. He goes past the table, and as he does so he turns and makes machine gun fire sounds and then zooms past.)*

ROSIE

Did...

*(Roger makes another airplane pass, this time making a bomb-dropping whistling noise as he lowers the menus like shells onto the table. As they hit he makes an explosion sound, and then is off again.)*

Are you seeing this?

DIANE

I told you I'd never been here before. Maybe—

ROSIE

We should probably look at the menu before he gets back.

DIANE

This is too weird.

ROSIE

Definitely memorable.

*(They open the menus, and an instant later Roger returns.)*

ROGER

May I recommend the ice? It's in season.

DIANE

What?

ROGER

But I should warn you. It's cold. Very cold. Like a snake's ass in a wagon rut.

DIANE

What?

Can I take your drink order?  
ROGER

I haven't had a chance—  
ROSIE

You came for the tea, didn't you?  
ROGER

Is there something in it?  
DIANE  
*(Getting a little snitty...)*

Oh no. Not even tea.  
ROGER

Your tea doesn't have...  
ROSIE

So many, many things. It doesn't have rhythm, or chucks, or a place to call home. All our tea still lives in its parents' basement. So you'll have that then, will you?  
ROGER

Wait, what?  
DIANE

Hot or cold?  
ROGER

Hot or—  
ROSIE

Cold. Opposite of hot. Not sick, that's a different kind of cold. Definitely not that. We only serve the healthiest of teas. From the Adirondacks. There's a fitness test. So, hot or cold?  
ROGER

ROSIE  
Hot

DIANE  
Cold



ROGER

Excellent choice. So many people get that one wrong. But not you. You're really up on your game. I'll be right back.

*(He starts to turn away, then stops and turns back.)*

See? What did I tell you? *Right* back. Like right away. I don't waste time. *(He stares at them.)* You're thirsty. I see that now. Let me get your drinks.

*(Roger leaves.)*

DIANE

Did we just order something?

ROSIE

I think so.

DIANE

We got the tea, right?

ROSIE

I think so.

DIANE

Where were we?

ROSIE

I honestly have no idea.

DIANE

He's something else.

ROSIE

Yeah.

DIANE

Oh, right. I was asking how your interview went.

ROSIE

Oh, that. Honestly, I don't think it went so well. It's been over a week now and I still haven't heard anything.

DIANE

Did a lot of people apply?

ROSIE

I don't think so. Just me and Susan.

DIANE

From accounting?

ROSIE

Yeah.

DIANE

She'd be a terrible manager.

ROSIE

I certainly don't want to work for her. She's so all over the place.

*(Roger comes back, and puts down a cup of tea in front of Rosie.)*

ROGER

Now be careful. This is hot. It just came out of the volcano.

ROSIE

It came out of—

*(Roger has turned to Diane, and is putting down a tall glass of ice tea in front of her.)*

ROGER

And you be careful too. This is cold.

*(She reaches out and slides the drink towards her.)*

DIANE

Thank you.

ROGER

*(Slapping her hand.)*

What did I say? What did I *just* say? Be careful! Careful! This is very cold. Do you think I'm joking around here? You think I'm doing this for my health?

DIANE

You were just holding it.

ROGER

I'm a trained professional, for God's sake. Would you walk up to a lion tamer and start swallowing swords just because he drives a motorcycle through a ring of fire? Well, would you now? Now for the love of God... be... careful.

*(He starts to turn away, but then suddenly turns back and gets right in front of Rosie.)*

You didn't want a mongoose in your tea, right? I assumed you didn't, but I probably should've asked.

ROSIE

No...

*(As he walks off...)*

ROGER

Whew. Sometimes you just get lucky like that.

*(The ladies just stare at each other, then look down at their respective drinks. Then over where Roger just exited. Then back at each other.)*

DIANE

Right. *(Pause.)* So. Susan.

ROSIE

Right. Susan. It's looking like she's going to—

*(Roger rushes back onstage and to the table, as if there was an emergency.)*

ROGER

I saw you looking over at me. Is everything okay? Is your tea just the way you like it?

DIANE

It's fine.

ROGER

How would you know? How could you possibly know? You haven't even tasted it yet, have you?

ROSIE

I—

ROGER

I thought not. This is a tea of immense disposition and hearty aroma. Smell the tea, my friends. Smell it. *(Beat.)* I'll wait.

*(The women are just staring at him, and he looks back and forth between them.)*

I meant that I'd wait a *little* while. If you are holding out for St. Patrick's Day, I won't wait that long.

*(Again, they are just starting at him.)*

Smell the tea, and become one with the great spirit of Muwali!

DIANE

Moo... wahl...

ROGER

Muwali, Sifter of the Grains of Sands of Portugal, Fermenter of Fine Chinese Monkeys. Will you not smell the te— Fine. I'll do it for you.

*(He lifts up a spoon, and breaths in its aroma.)*

Ahhh, the fruity nectars of Milwaukie.

ROSIE

That's a spoon.

ROGER

Oh, good for you. *(At Diane...)* Always on the ball, this one. *(Back to Rosie...)* I like you. *(Turns back to Diane, and his face becomes deathly serious.)* Jury's still out.

DIANE

What?

ROSIE

That's so rude!

ROGER

Oh, don't say that. She didn't mean it.

Not her.  
ROSIE

I'd like to talk to the manager.  
DIANE

Ahh, that would be relaxing.  
ROGER

We're serious. We insist on seeing the manager.  
DIANE

*(Roger turns to leave, and then immediately turns right back.)*

Yes?  
ROGER

I didn't say anything.  
DIANE

Oh. I thought you wanted to speak with the manager. My mistake.  
ROGER

You're the manager?!  
ROSIE

Am I? Damn. Is it my turn again? Alright, very well. What can I do for you toda—  
Oh, look. You got the tea. Hot and cold. Good for you two.  
ROGER

If you're... We'd like to speak with the *owner* then.  
DIANE

*(Roger opens his mouth and lifts a finger as if to object. They all stare at each other for a moment, and then Roger turns and exits.)*

This is totally uncalled for.  
ROSIE

And after the week you've had.  
DIANE

ROSIE

I don't even remember the waiter's name. Did he even tell us his name?

DIANE

I don't think so. But there can't be any mistaking him.

ROSIE

I haven't even seen another waiter.

DIANE

Oh, look. He's coming back.

*(Roger enters, approaches the table.)*

ROSIE

We'll be sure to get his name before—

ROGER

Good afternoon, ladies. You asked to speak with me?

DIANE

We *asked* to speak with the *owner*.

ROGER

Of course. Is there a problem? Something wrong with the tea?

ROSIE

Is there a problem?!

ROGER

I can see you haven't even touched your tea yet. Is it the service? Has Roger not been taking care of you properly?

DIANE

That's the understatement of the year!

ROGER

I am *so* sorry. I'll have a word with him.

*(In the following lines, Roger shifts between Roger the owner and Roger the waiter. The women watch in total bewilderment.)*

ROGER (CONT)

Roger, we've had a complaint from a customer.

Oh dear. Is there something the matter with the tea?

No, it's not the tea. These ladies have indicated that you have been a bad waiter.

Oooh.

Yes, Roger. You have been bad.

I—

No. Bad Roger. Bad. (*Slaps the back of his own hand.*) You have been a very naughty waiter.

I'm sorry.

Did you offer them tea?

I did.

With or without a mongoose?

Well...

You didn't offer them a mongoose, did you?

I...

You forgot again, didn't you?

I...

Eh eh eh. I want you to apologize. Right now.

*(Roger turns to the ladies, and in a surly, scolded child way...)*

I sorry.

*(Again to the ladies, but now as the owner...)* I'm so sorry. We'll bring you some biscuits on the house. *(Back to bad Roger.)* No go back into the kitchen and think about what you've done.

*(Roger the waiter turns and walks off, ideally with Roger the owner flashing the ladies a charming departing smile. Roger exits. There is a long, awkward silence as the ladies look at each other in confusion. After a while, each reaches for her tea and takes a sip. They put the beverages down, but their faces reveal that the drinks are unexpectedly good.)*

That's... that's very...

DIANE

Very good.

ROSIE

It really is, isn't it?

DIANE

What kind of tea is it?

ROSIE

I'm not sure. It's got a touch of fruitiness, but... there's something...

DIANE

Something else. Like a hint of...

ROSIE  
*(Overlapping...)*

*(They taste it again.)*

Is it cinnamon?

DIANE

No, I don't think so. Maybe cardamom?

ROSIE

*(Diane takes another sip.)*

Cloves?

DIANE  
*(Shaking her head...)*

*(Rosie takes a sip.)*



ROSIE

It has a warmth like cloves, but...

DIANE

You're right. That's not quite it.

*(Roger enters, and starts walking past. He is not in the least upset or offended.)*

ROSIE

It's such an unusual flavor.

ROGER

There's nothing quite like it, is there?

ROSIE

It's so...

DIANE

Soothing.

ROGER

We're known for our tea. Now aren't you glad you didn't go with the ether?

*(Roger is about to walk past, but Rosie calls out...)*

ROSIE

I'm sorry, but—

ROGER

Would I tell you what's in the tea? Well, well. Are you sure you can handle such knowledge? It's not for the morbid of heart.

DIANE

If you don't mind.

ROGER

Ahh, my friends, our tea is brewed from the delicate leaves of the frivoli cactus. In the quiet of night, they are harvested by tiny inchworms dressed in paraffin sundresses. They scour the desert in hordes of—

ROSIE

A cactus? This is cactus tea?

ROGER

The frivolous cactus is one of the rarest plants to grow in the swamps of—

DIANE

A cactus in swamps?

ROGER

Aromatic swamps filled with jutter fish that... Oh! The biscuits!

*(Roger rushes off.)*

ROSIE

What's a jutter fish?

DIANE

I have no idea.

ROSIE

Do you think he is making all of this up?

DIANE

You mean the jutter fish? I'm sure he must be.

ROSIE

That, and the bit about the frivolous cactus growing in a swamp.

DIANE

He's probably making everything up. In fact, I bet there's no such thing as a frivolous cactus at all.

*(They pause to consider this, and then chuckle a little.)*

DIANE

You want to know something funny?

ROSIE

What's that?

DIANE

I kind of wish I could do that.

ROSIE

What do you mean? Do what?

DIANE

You know, just make up stuff like that off the top of my head. Like the waiter does.

ROSIE

I don't know, he's pretty wacked out.

DIANE

Yeah, but...

ROSIE

But what?

DIANE

Nothing.

*(They sit in silence for a moment, taking another sip of their drinks.)*

ROSIE

I know what you mean.

*(Diane looks at her.)*

I mean, I still think he's pretty weird, but it must be nice to be that creative. Always seeing things from a different angle.

DIANE

It takes a special kind of person, I think. You know, someone who's wired to think like that.

*(Roger comes back out with a plate of biscuits. As he approaches the table, he's turning the plate back and forth so that different biscuits are closer to the table.)*

ROGER

And it's Fluffy Pastry in the lead by a crumb. But wait, Soft and Chewy is sneaking up from behind! Soft and Chewy is gaining on Fluffy Pastry, it looks like he might just— Oh, look at that! Soft and Chewy has taken the lead! Who could have guessed that this longshot biscuit from Alabama could possibly be the next Double T Derby champion? Oh oh oh! Just when we thought it was over, Crunchy Cheddar has come out of nowhere and is suddenly leading the pack! Fluffy Pastry is making a run for it, but Crunchy Cheddar's not letting up! Oh, it's gonna be close! Looks like...

*(He slides the plate onto their table.)*

ROGER (CONT)

Crunchy Cheddar takes the race! Oh, what an upset! Who would ever have guessed?

*(The ladies have been watching this, amused and enjoying the commentary. After the plate is securely on the table, they laugh and give a little round of applause. Roger bows, smiles, and heads off stage.)*

ROSIE

Now what do we do?

DIANE

What do you mean?

ROSIE

Well we can't eat that one *(she points to the lead biscuit)* – not after coming up from behind like that for the win.

*(Diane laughs.)*

DIANE

I guess we'll just have to start with some of the ones on this side of the plate.

*(She takes a biscuit from the other side of the plate and takes a bite. Rosie then takes one, and they each eat for a moment, and then have a little more tea.)*

ROSIE

This really is so good.

DIANE

I can't believe we waited this long to come here.

*(Roger has come back on, walking across the stage.)*

ROGER

You can, you know.

DIANE

Can what?

ROGER

It doesn't take a special person. It takes a state of mind.

ROSIE

What?

ROGER

To think differently. State of mind. That's why we serve the tea.

DIANE

The tea? I don't understand.

ROGER

From the frivoli cactus. That kind of tea can help you find the right state of mind.

DIANE

Oh my god! Are you saying...

ROSIE

Is this some kind of drug?

ROGER

A drug? What in the world are you talking about?

DIANE

You know, a drug. Something that changes the way you think and feel.

ROGER

Is there anything that doesn't do that?

*(Both ladies open their mouths to speak, then close them in unison.)*

The trick is finding stuff that make you feel better in the long run. Here at the diner, we find that frivoli tea does a pretty good job of that.

DIANE AND ROSIE

Huh.

ROGER

You should make a point to indulge in some from time to time.

*(The ladies just stare at him.)*

Well, I'll leave you to it.

*(Roger heads off, and the ladies sip their tea as they watch him leave. Once he is off stage, they giggle a little, and the lights go out.)*