

Douglas Adams:

## Tea

One or two Americans have asked me why the English like tea so much, which never seems to them to be a very good drink. To understand, you have to make it properly.

There is a very simple principle to the making of tea, and it's this—to get the proper flavour of tea, the water has to be **boiling** (not **boiled**) when it hits the tea leaves. If it's merely hot, then the tea will be insipid. That's why we English have these odd rituals, such as warming the teapot first (so as not to cause the boiling water to cool down too fast as it hits the pot). And that's why the American habit of bringing a teacup, a tea bag, and a pot of hot water to the table is merely the perfect way of making a thin, pale, watery cup of tea that nobody in their right mind would want to drink. The Americans are all mystified about why the English make such a big thing out of tea because most Americans **HAVE NEVER HAD A GOOD CUP OF TEA**. That's why they don't understand. In fact, the truth of the matter is that most English people don't know how to make tea anymore either, and most people drink cheap instant coffee instead, which is a pity, and gives Americans the impression that the English are just generally clueless about hot stimulants.

So the best advice I can give to an American arriving in England is this: Go to Marks and Spencer and buy a packet of Earl Grey tea. Go back to where you're staying and boil a kettle of water. While it is coming to the boil, open the sealed packet and sniff. Careful—you may feel a bit dizzy, but this is in fact perfectly legal. When the kettle has boiled, pour a little of it into a teapot, swirl it around, and tip it out again. Put a couple (or three, depending on the size of the pot) of tea bags into the pot. (If I was really trying to lead you into the paths of righteousness, I would tell you to use free leaves rather than bags but let's just take this in easy stages.) Bring the kettle back up to the boil, and then pour the boiling water as quickly as you can into the pot. Let it stand for two or three minutes, and then pour it into a cup. Some people will tell you that you shouldn't have milk with Earl Grey, just a slice of lemon. Screw them. I like it with milk. If you think you will like it with milk, then it's probably best to put some milk into the bottom of the cup before you pour in the tea.<sup>\*2</sup> If you pour milk into a cup of hot tea, you will scald the milk. If you think you will prefer it with a slice of lemon, then, well, add a slice of lemon.

Drink it. After a few moments you will begin to think that the place you've come to isn't maybe quite so strange and crazy after all.

<sup>\*2</sup> This is socially incorrect. The socially correct way of pouring tea is to put the milk in after the tea. Social correctness has traditionally had nothing whatever to do with reason, logic, or physics. In fact, in England it is generally considered socially incorrect to know stuff or think about things. It's worth bearing this in mind when visiting.

Douglas Adams:

## Cookies

This actually did happen to a real person, and the real person is me. I had gone to catch a train. This was April 1976, in Cambridge, U.K. I was a bit early for the train. I'd gotten the time of the train wrong. I went to get myself a newspaper to do the crossword, and a cup of coffee and a packet of cookies. I went and sat at a table. I want you to picture the scene. It's very important that you get this very clear in your mind. Here's the table, newspaper, cup of coffee, packet of cookies. There's a guy sitting opposite me, perfectly ordinary-looking guy wearing a business suit, carrying a briefcase. It didn't look like he was going to do anything weird. What he did was this: he suddenly leaned across, picked up the packet of cookies, tore it open, took one out, and ate it.

Now this, I have to say, is the sort of thing the British are very bad at dealing with. There's nothing in our background, upbringing, or education that teaches you how to deal with someone who in broad daylight has just stolen your cookies. You know what would happen if this had been South Central Los Angeles. There would have very quickly been gunfire, helicopters coming in, CNN, you know . . . But in the end, I did what any red-blooded Englishman would do: I ignored it. And I stared at the newspaper, took a sip of coffee, tried to do a clue in the newspaper, couldn't do anything, and thought, *What am I going to do?*

In the end I thought, *Nothing for it, I'll just have to go for it*, and I tried very hard not to notice the fact that the packet was already mysteriously opened. I took out a cookie for myself. I thought, *That settled him*. But it hadn't because a moment or two later he did it again. He took another cookie. Having not mentioned it the first time, it was somehow even harder to raise the subject the second time around. "Excuse me, I couldn't help but notice . . ." I mean, it doesn't really work.

We went through the whole packet like this. When I say the whole packet, I mean there were only about eight cookies, but it felt like a lifetime. He took one, I took one, he took one, I took one. Finally, when we got to the end, he stood up and walked away. Well, we exchanged meaningful looks, then he walked away, and I breathed a sigh of relief and sat back.

A moment or two later the train was coming in, so I tossed back the rest of my coffee, stood up, picked up the newspaper, and underneath the newspaper were my cookies. The thing I like particularly about this story is the sensation that somewhere in England there has been wandering around for the last quarter-century a perfectly ordinary guy who's had the same exact story, only he doesn't have the punch line.