

## MR. McQUIMBY TAKES HIS TEA

By Ian S. Johnston

The sounds of the light jazz soundtrack filled the air, mingled with the subdued clinks and muted conversations in the coffee house. Sanders McQuimby, the morning paper tucked dutifully under one arm, sat down in a corner booth near the establishment's ornately constructed faux fireplace.

It wasn't often that there was a lull in investigative activities with the police force, so Sanders was taking advantage of his time off to catch up on a little reading and perhaps visit the Natural History Museum after his morning tea. The Coffee Savant was one of the most popular coffee and tea houses in the city and McQuimby was a dutiful patron on days when he could step in for a cup or two.

The morning sun streamed through the window, warming Sanders and casting a warm, inviting glow across the burnt orange laminated table top. He sighed with contentment as he unfolded the paper. However, he only had time enough to catch a headline or two before the server arrived with his drink.

"Here you go, sir," said the prim, attractive girl with a smile. "One medium pot of Darjeeling with a lemon wedge and scones."

"Wonderful!" said Sanders, smiling more at the tea than the server. "Thanks so much."

"You're quite welcome, sir," said the girl, still smiling. "My name is Denise if you need anything."

"What is your name if I don't need anything?" asked Sanders.

Denise giggled. "It's still Denise. It wasn't a conditional statement, sir."

"Oh. Yes, of course," smiled Sanders, now looking at the young lady. "How silly of me. Thanks again."

"You are most welcome," said Denise. "I'll be back after a while to see if you need anything."

With that, she was off and Sanders was left with a steaming cup of delightfully fragrant Darjeeling tea. The bright citrus smell of the lemon never failed to please him and he quickly squeezed

the bright yellow wedge into his tea, methodically using his off-hand to shield from any inadvertent spray that might get into his eyes. Then, once the juice was successfully extracted, Sanders place the crushed wedge back on the small saucer, stirred the cup, and then lifted it for a sip.

The beverage was extremely hot, but Sanders couldn't wait for it to cool. He craved the tea's one of a kind fruity floral flavor and this cup of tea did not disappoint. Wincing a bit from where the hot liquid burned his tongue, Sanders smiled to himself and started to set the cup back down on the saucer when he noticed something.

*I can't believe I didn't see this before!* he thought.

Sanders set the cup down on the table and ran his finger over the surface of the saucer. It was completely smooth. Its glossy texture was pleasant to the touch, but it disconcerted the man nevertheless. There was something wrong here -- the small depression made for cradling the bottom of the tea cup was missing.

Denise was passing by with an empty tray and Sanders raised a hand casually to get her attention.

"Miss," he said, signaling her over.

"Yes, sir," said Denise. She came and stood by his table.

"I believe I have a defective saucer here," said Sanders.

"Oh, really? I'm sorry about that, sir," said Denise. "What seems to be wrong with it?"

"It's a lovely piece of dishware, to be sure," said Sanders, holding the saucer up for Denise to see. "But it doesn't seem to have a depression to hold the cup." He tapped his finger on the saucer where the depression should be for emphasis.

Denise inspected the saucer. "It sure doesn't," she said. "Is that a problem?"

"I'm afraid it's put me into a bit of a quandary," explained Sanders. "You see, I will not be able to properly center the cup on the saucer without the little depression there."

Denise smiled broadly and looked at Sanders, as if he were kidding. She quickly was able to ascertain that he was not. She nodded solemnly, as if in agreement with his observations.

"I know I hate it when that happens," she said, her tone serious. "I think we changed our dishes here just recently and this must be a feature of the new design we bought."

"You mean lack of feature?" said Sanders.

"Precisely, sir."

"Do you happen to have any of the old saucers about?" asked Sanders.

"I'm not sure," said Denise. "But I will ask my manager and see what we can do."

"I would appreciate that greatly," said McQuimby.

"Sure."

Denise left the table and circled around the short line of customers to get behind the counter. After a brief conversation with the manager which Sanders could not hear, she disappeared through the swinging doors into the back of the coffee house. A few moments later, she returned.

Sanders was buttering his scones when she arrived back at the table. She carried a tray with a saucer on it.

"It just so happens we didn't throw these out yet. I found a stack of clean ones in the back and brought you one," she said, placing the saucer down on the table in front of Sanders.

Sanders set down his butter knife carefully and looked at the saucer. Sure enough, it had a depression for his tea cup. He smiled broadly.

"This is perfect," he said, beaming at Denise. "Thank you so much."

"You're quite welcome sir," said the server, smiling again. "I hope that helps you find your center a little better."

Sanders picked up the cup and placed it carefully in the saucer. It was perfectly centered.

"Most excellent," he said.

"Okay, then," said Denise, turning away. "Let me know if you need anything else."

"Miss," said Sanders.

"Yes, sir?"

"Do you think I might purchase those saucers before you throw them out? That way, I can bring one in with me when I come for my morning tea," said Sanders.

Denise, a bit befuddled by the request, said "I'll ask."

She left again to speak with the manager, returning after a few minutes.

"Jerry says they're twenty bucks if you want them," said Denise. "We can add the cost to your bill if you like."

Sanders grinned.

"Yes, that would be perfect."

After finishing his tea and scones and paying the bill, Sanders made his way out of The Coffee Savant, clutching a small box of saucers. He made his way down the busy sidewalk, clutching his new purchase next to him as if they were the crown jewels of England.

*This is going to be a marvelous day, he thought. Marvellous, indeed!*