



The perfect Cup of Tea – a short sketch
By Beryl Hales



Characters:

Becky Who works in the cafe
Gretchen Guild Chair
Kay Guild committee member, programme organiser
Maggie Guild committee member, responsible for health and welfare
Wendy Guild committee member, Guild historian and archivist
Brenda Guild committee member, secretary
Bea Guild committee member, responsible for providing updated information

Gretchen Good afternoon, ladies and welcome to our Guild Committee meeting. Firstly, I'd like to thank The Cozy Copper Kettle Café for letting us hold our meeting here again. Before we start on the agenda, let's get some drinks sorted out. Becky is new to the café and is helping us for the first time today. Welcome Betty. We need to be precise in telling her what we would like. Shall I start? I'm Gretchen, the Guild Chair. Could you give me a tea bag, a cup of hot water and a small jug of milk, please. I can then make the tea just how I like it. The bag only needs to be in the cup for one minute before I take it out and add the milk, or it's too strong for me. What would you like, Kay?

Kay (*Can do actions*) Gretchen's tea sounds a bit watery. When I make tea, I put the teabag in a cup of boiling water, lift it in, out, in, out, shake it all about, do the hokey-cokey until it's the right colour, take the bag out, give it a bit of a squeeze and add a teaspoon of milk. That's what a good cup of tea is all about. If you give me the goods, I'll make the tea, Becky. Maggie's next.

Maggie (*Who is very prim and proper*) To me, it's not the strength that affects the taste, however you make it, it's the amount of caffeine in it. If you could use a de-caff tea bag, Becky, I'd appreciate it as I don't like too much caffeine. But if you haven't got decaff, I'll have an ordinary tea bag. It will still have less caffeine than coffee. Can you put the bag and a plant based sweetener in a cup, add the water then give it to me. I can wait until it's the colour I want and then take the bag out. Do you have skimmed milk to enhance the flavour? It's much better for you made that way. Being responsible for health and welfare I try to set a good example. What do you want, Brenda?

Brenda I like to try new ways of drinking tea. On a home visit I just made from school, the teapot was half filled with water and put on a burner on the table. The tea leaves were put in plus a small can of condensed milk and a tablespoon of sugar. It was then left to boil. It certainly upped my energy levels and kept me on my toes for the rest of the day.

Becky I'm sorry, I don't think we have any condensed milk and the nearest I have to a burner to go on the table is a tea light. It might take some time to bring the tea to the boil.

Brenda I think I'm confusing you, Becky. I was just saying about the tea that I was given, not that I wanted it made like that, Sorry. I'd actually like something much simpler. Could you put three teabags in a mug and add chilled water and a few ice cubes, please? It's a quick way of making iced tea and it'll be ready by the time I've finished making the notes to use to write up the minutes from. And I don't need milk with it. Did you just make a face, Wendy?

Wendy I hope for your sake that the tea bags they use here are filled with small pieces of tea leaf and not whole leaves or it won't mash in time.

Brenda Mash?

Wendy Yes, you know, mash. Seep. Steep, brew.

Brenda Mash, seep, steep and brew sounds like a firm who make cider.

Wendy Very funny. I'm old school. I like a decent brew of tea. No silly little china cups for me, where you only get one mouthful per cup. I like a big mug to put the teabag in, together with a good splash of milk, spoon of sugar and boiling water. I like it to be the colour of American Tan tights before I take the bag out and sup it. Then I rinse the mug and repeat. I can get a couple of cuppas out of one bag.

Maggie It's interesting that you put the milk in first. My granny insisted that milk should be added first to stop the hot tea from cracking the cups. But her cups were more Woolies than Wedgewood

Wendy Your Granny was a wise woman. The only cracking I get with my method is a cracking good cup of tea. The tea urn kept at a rolling boil was made for tea and me.

Becky I boil the water fresh every time I make tea. I've heard it said that tea urns boil all of the oxygen out of the water and that makes the tea taste funny.

Gretchen I've never heard that about oxygen in tea. Come on, Bea, it's your job to get to the bottom of this as you're responsible for providing updated information to the Guild. Do a googly on your phone and give us the answer.

- Bea *(Lifts phone, presses buttons and reads)* It says here that scientifically speaking it's not true. It's a matter of individual taste and an urban myth. Like Christmas cards are not put on sale straight after August Bank Holiday Monday. Or that cars are built with indicators. But it does say that for the perfect cup of tea, you should use soft water, tea leaves and a teapot.
- Becky *(Dreamily)* I liked it when we used tea leaves and had tea strainers. And teapots standing on brass trivets. Embroidered table cloths and double damask napkins. Sugar lumps with sugar tongs and ESPN spoons. *(Can sing using tune of 'Favourite Things' from Sound of Music)* Those were a few of my favourite things.
- Wendy And we had clogged sinks, more starching and ironing which left our hands all wrinkled and then mucky from using Brasso. No thanks.
- Gretchan And what happens if you don't have soft water? Our is so hard that the inside of my kettle turns into Mother Shipston's cave if I don't descale it regularly.
- Bea It says that you can use filtered or bottled water instead.
- Wendy Buy water! You'll be telling me next to wash the teapot with soapy water. Our family teapot is rinsed with hot water and left to dry. No soapy taste from ours. It has traces of tea drinking back to when it was bought for a memorial tea party when Queen Victoria died.
- Bea And that's why she's our Guild historian. Don't make faces, Maggie, it says that she's right about rinsing. It also says that the size and shape of the teapot play an important part in tea making.
- Kay I have a little teapot, short and stout, with a comfy to hold handle and a non-drip spout.
- Bea That sounds about right, as long as it's not too short. It says that even if you have a rounded bottom, you need a tall enough top to be successful.
- Maggie My Granny said that about hot pant suits. She also said that you needed a hot pot and to use one spoon of leaves for each person in it plus one for the pot.
- Bea Top marks to your Granny's hot pot. Warming the pot makes the tea stay hot for longer. But there's a debate about how much tea to use. There's a conspiracy theory that it's a cunning plan spread by people who sell tea, to boost their sales. But however much you put in, it says to add boiling water at 100 degrees Celsius to make normal black tea.
- Wendy It was 212 degrees Fahrenheit in my day. And didn't we use Centigrade?

Bea I'll believe you because you're our history expert, and whichever you use, add the water to the tea, be patient and let it brew. Did you know that there are more than 30,000 chemicals in tea and to get all of them out it needs to brew for at least for 2 and up to 4 minutes before you pour it? And when you've poured it, with milk in the cup or added after its poured, you should let the tea sit for up to six minutes to come to peak drinking temperature, around 140 degrees Fahrenheit or 60 degrees Celsius.

Wendy I don't think I could wait that long. I just blow on it and take my chance.

Maggie But then aren't you in danger of being what my Granny called a tea slurper? Trying to gulp in air to cool the tea as you drink it? Granny said that Miss Manners didn't like tea slurpers.

Brenda There's no slurping with my iced tea. And tea leaves wouldn't really work to make it as I'd end up with more leaves than tea.

Bea It does say tea bags are OK but you need ones which are big enough to let out all of the flavour, so they have to have lots of room inside.

Kay A bit like my yoga trousers. I need lots of room in those.

Maggie I wonder of if you should warm the mug if you're using a tea bag to make tea in one? My Granny didn't say because she didn't like mugs. She said that they weren't lady like but I think it's because they didn't have saucers to stop drips going on the tablecloth.

Bea It recommends warming cups or mugs and adding the milk last to keep it hot long enough to brew properly. I didn't think you had to know so much to make a cup of tea.

Maggie And we haven't even touched on green, white, yellow, herbal, Oolong and Macha tea.

Kay I feel that a Guild meeting about tea can be added to the programme I'm working on for next year. Perhaps we should have a tea tasting.

Gretchen And after all of that that, how do you want Becky to make your tea, Bea?

Bea Oh, haven't you noticed? I never drink the dreadful stuff. I hate the taste, which is probably genetic and connected to why I don't eat brussel sprouts. But that's for another day. Can I have a triple shot, half sweet, non-fat, oat milk caramel macchiato, please, Becky?