

Tea with Mrs. Doyle

by Doug Bond

Her corded braids fell a straight mile it seemed, all the way to her butt, dancing in and out of the tied loops at the back of her baking apron. I said I was hungry.

Totsie Doyle said "Fiddle Faddle...That's what you need." Then she said it again raising her finger to her lips, a signal for me to keep quiet. "Fiddle Faddle!"

While she was in the kitchen I tried to sneak a sip of her tea, but it was much too hot, steam blooming above the gold rimmed cup, and it burned my lips and brought water to my eyes.

As I tongued the last ice cube out of my water glass, Totsie came back in and told me she must have eaten the last of the Faddle last night.

I didn't dare ask, but did anyway, "Do you have any Ferrero Rocher?"

She cut me off sharp before I could get it out of my mouth. "Don't ever ask that again!"

Her face was serious, but not her eyes. "I'm heating you up the last of the Leprechaun Pudding. You'll have that."

She gave me a fork and said the best way to get ready for dessert is to suck on the fork. She'd dipped it in clover honey. "Just slip it in and lick it."

In the bowl the pudding was hot. I looked at it awhile waiting for it to cool. She said, "Ahh, go on! - Go on, go on."

My lips tubed up and I blew on it and held it until I grew dizzy and watched the steam, rising in thinner ruffles.

From out the dining room window I could see the new green coming up on the path towards my house, dirty snow still clinging to the opening rings of the bare trees, and further to the back porch where my Dad was up on the ladder flinging wet leaves from out the gutter. He'd be busy at that for awhile and wouldn't get to making my dinner for another hour or more.

I called to her in the kitchen, "Totsie?"

She turned, a fresh lit Pall Mall lilt from her mouth. "What dear? Whatever it is, don't ask me to take out my teeth again."

"No, sorry, no. I only ask for that when my sister's here."

"Ok, so we're straight up on that. Whatta ya need?"

"Can I go up and look at your perfumes?"

Totsie protested at first as she always did, but I could tell she enjoyed it, even with me.

"You asking for that again, Patrick, you little scoundrel...I'd just give you one of 'em but not sure your Pop would be happy...and I don't want your sister getting jealous neither."

We walked up the twisting old stairs to the small room off the landing before her bedroom. This was the converted opened closet where she kept all the family linen rolled up on shelves. And all her best clothes too, the ones she said she wore years ago, back when she was young, and Danny would take her into the city to see her brother at the Tavern for dinner and dancing. There were even some old country clothes tucked away from when she was a girl.

Totsie ducked slightly as we entered the space and we were it seemed at once surrounded by cedar and lilac and the faint smell of mothballs. She held my hand and we stepped past the hangers and suit bags to the vanity on the far wall.

Stacked up against the backing mirror were a tableau of small colored bottles of various shapes and detail. The two leaves of the vanity were pulled towards the center at an angle spreading the display in a widening arc in front of me. Behind the others stood a frosted white globe, its delicate smooth clear glass buds poking out all around the outside. I could see in the reflection from the joined mirrors that it was almost completely empty, just a spare wash of green liquid flattening inside the base.

"That's the one! That's the one I want."

Totsie reached carefully over the array of cork stoppers and shiny gold nozzles and pulled it out holding it up in the last bit of sun slanting in from outside. She leaned towards me tipping the bottle slowly and gave it a little push until a few pale emerald beads hit my outstretched arm and dribbled down towards my palm. I felt the soft

burning on my wrist and promised her I'd wash it off before I went home.

