

BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

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the agony of the leaves

By EVELYN E. SMITH

Illustrated by EMSH

*When love came to Ernest, it
literally melted down his door!*



THE chimes over the door sounded. Ernest didn't want to answer, but he knew there was no use struggling any more—the outcome was inevitable. He walked to the foyer as slowly as he could, wondering which one of them it was this time. Whichever it was, she apparently thought he was taking too long to answer, for, when he was within a few yards of the door, his feet picked themselves up of their own volition and began to run.

He saved himself from a head-long crash into the door by thrusting his palm out flat before him. Instead of meeting inflexible wood, however, his hand was sucked into a spongy substance that became more glutinous the more it yielded. Damn the woman! She was melting down the door again. He was sure

it was Mrs. Greenhut—Miss Levesque would never do anything as subtle as all that.

He pulled his hand free and the door subsided in a puddle on the sill. Mrs. Greenhut stood in the corridor, a smile on her round, freshly washed face, a plate of cookies in her plump hand. Anybody seeing her for the first time—the bosomy, tightly corseted figure, the ruffled pink apron over the beflowered green housedress, the plainly combed brown hair sprinkled with gray—would have taken her for just a pleasant, middle-aged matron. That was how Ernest had placed her when he'd moved into the apartment . . . had it been only two months before? It seemed like several eternities.

AND to think he'd been fool enough to smile at this motherly looking fiend, just in the hope of getting invited to a home-cooked meal! She could cook adequately, but she couldn't even brew a good pot of tea!

"I've brought you some cookies, Ernest dear," Mrs. Greenhut purred. "I baked them this morning, 'specially for you. They're real nice too, if I do say so myself."

"They look very good," he said, without extending a hand. "But, as a matter of fact, I do have a touch of indigestion, and the doctor said—"

"Take them, Ernest," Mrs.

Greenhut said. "You'll love them."

His right arm moved out stiffly, almost dislocating his shoulder, and took the plate.

"You will eat every one of them, Ernest. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mrs. Greenhut," Ernest mumbled.

"I've told you a thousand times, if I've told you once, to call me Gertrude."

"Yes, Gertrude. I'll eat every one of them—I swear it."

"Good boy," she approved, patting his cheek with a soft, floury hand. "Maybe they'll help to put a little flesh on your bones. Lately, you've been looking mighty peaked, seems to me."

"I like my physique exactly the way it is," Ernest protested. After all, if she didn't like his appearance, why was she pursuing him with her attentions? "I don't want to get fat."

"I like a man to eat hearty," Mrs. Greenhut said with finality. "And I like him to *look* hearty, too."

"Yes, Mrs. Greenhut—Gertrude."

"I have no use for thin people," she went on contemplatively. "'Specially thin women. Take that girl on the ground floor, for instance. Some people might call her attractive, but I personally think she's just a bag of bones. Probably starves herself too."

"Disgustingly skinny," Ernest

agreed hastily. "Completely repulsive! Not at all womanly, like—" she gulped "—like you, Gertrude."

"You have *such* good taste, Ernest. That's one of the reasons why I . . . like you. Of course—" she pinched his cheek affectionately—"there are other reasons too."

Ernest turned red and looked away. How he could hate her, if she would only let him!

"Well," she said briskly, "I must be running along. I have a roast in the oven."

"Good-by, Gertrude. Thank you for the delicious cookies."

"Good-by, Ernest. And remember, don't break the plate this time. It made me very, very unhappy when you smashed that other one, after I'd gone and brought you such a lovely devil's food cake."

"I didn't break the plate last time," he defended himself. "It was Miss Levesque. She dropped a piece of the ceiling on it."

"Oh, she did, did she?" Mrs. Greenhut said darkly. "I'll fix *her*! She did it purposely—she knows I set a lot of store on my Rockingham. It was my grandmother's." She resettled one of the combs in her hair and changed the subject with a simper. "Wouldn't you like to maybe kiss me before I go, Ernest?"

HE bent over stiffly and gave her a peck on the cheek. Satisfied—fortunately, she did not make

the demands on him that Miss Levesque did—she started away.

"Wait a minute!" he called down the corridor after her. "How about my door?"

She turned with a giggle. "I do declare, that was a plumb silly thing for me to do, wasn't it? But I've always been such a giddy creature—I just can't control my mad impulses. That's what Mr. Greenhut always used to say. 'Land's sakes, Gertie, I guess you'll just never grow up,' he used to say."

Ernest wondered vaguely, as he had wondered many times since signing his ill-fated lease, what had happened to the apparently deceased Mr. Greenhut. He wouldn't have been a bit surprised to hear that the woman had authored his departure.

Aloud, he complained. "But I really do need my door, Gertrude. There's a draft coming in from outside. You know, if anything happened to my nasal passages, it could ruin my future." She sniffed, and he added, "Or I might catch pneumonia and die." It would serve her right too. . . . if only his death wouldn't involve himself so drastically.

"I'll solidify your door right away, dear boy," she said, apparently moved by this horrible prospect. "I wouldn't for the world," she went on archly, "want to lose you."

He groaned in an undertone.

She restored the door and Ernest trudged back into his living room, munching a cookie as he went. It tasted good. If only he could forget what was in it!

The gaunt, brightly painted features of Miss Levesque glared at him from the huge Venetian mirror over the mantelpiece. "Stop eating those cookies this very instant, Ernest. I *command* you!"

"I can't, Désirée," he said, fretfully. "You know that as well as I do. I'm under a spell. You remember what happened when you made me drink that champagne you made yourself?" In addition to being spiked, her wine had tasted as if she hadn't bothered to remove her shoes before trampling the grapes.

Miss Levesque emerged from the mirror, catching the train of her long red satin evening gown in the glass. She freed it with a jerk. "I *order* you to stop," she said, fixing him with her hot black eyes and gasping for breath, as she clambered down from the mantelpiece. Ernest held his breath until he could be sure that his *shu-dei* and *haku-dei* teapots were undamaged. She—both of them—were so careless with other people's property, as well as with other people themselves.

"Can't stop," he mumbled through a full mouth. "Besides, they're pretty good cookies at that. Why don't you try one? I don't

suppose it would have any effect on you. Go ahead," he urged.

MISS Levesque bit a cookie critically. "Wouldn't you know she'd skimp on the shortening? And she shouldn't have used the love potion *instead* of the vanilla."

"I'd offer you a cup of tea to go with 'em, but I can't stop eating long enough to go make it."

"Ernest Fitch!" She stamped her foot. "Stop eating the rest of those cookies. Do you hear me?" A heavy paperweight whizzed off the French provincial desk and shattered plate and cookies into bits.

Ernest mechanically got down on his hands and knees and began to pick fragments of the cookies out of the shards on the rug, dust them off and eat them. "Now see what you've done," he complained, chewing. "You've only given me more trouble, because I've got to eat them, every one. She put her spell on me first. And you've broken one of her good plates again too . . ."

"Hussy, *painted* hussy!" said Mrs. Greenhut's voice from thin air, for she was much too proper to materialize inside a man's apartment, even chaperoned by Miss Levesque. "Spoil my Rockingham set, will you? Two can play at that game, dear."

To his horror, Ernest found himself rising jerkily to his feet, walking—only it was actually more like

dancing—over to the desk and picking up a bottle of ink. This he poured methodically over Miss Levesque's head, down her decolletage. Although the act was against his volition, it was not against his inclination. "*Désirée!*" he yelped, fearing she could tell from his expression that he was not altogether unhappy. "I didn't mean to do it, honestly! She's *making* me!"

Miss Levesque forgot she was a lady. "Bless the heavenly woman!" she yelled. "Bless her, *bless her!* . . . just you wait and see, Gertrude! Will I put a spell on *you* later!" She tossed her head.

Ernest winced, as ink spattered on the beautiful new turquoise rug. Miss Levesque had selected it to match the color of his eyes, but he had paid for it, and a free-lance tea-taster's earnings — even if he were permitted to work steadily — wouldn't allow him to buy new rugs every day.

"I know it's not your fault, hon," she murmured in a tender bass, advancing upon him as he still scrabbled for crumbs on the floor. "Come here and give me a nice gooey kiss."

He backed away on all fours. She frowned ominously. "So you find me repulsive, do you?"

"No, no!" Ernest's voice rose to a squeak, as unseen, icy fingers used his spine for a xylophone. "You're fascinating, really *fascin-*

ating, *Désirée*, I assure you." His voice cracked. "But you've ink all over yourself. You wouldn't want me to get ink on my suit, would you? It's a Brooks Brothers' suit," he added lamely.

"I suppose not," she sighed, halting her advance. "I wouldn't want to do a single, solitary thing to make you less handsome than you are, sweetie."

HE hid his eyes in embarrassment and started again to eat crumbs hurriedly from the rug. It wouldn't even occur to her to offer to make him a cup of tea. Not that she could—without a tea bag, she'd be lost. Mrs. Greenhut and Miss Levesque being coffee drinkers were, like the rest of that vast, insensitive tribe, prone to foist their own vulgar tastes upon others.

"*Lover*," she went on huskily, "why don't you marry me? Then that Greenhut woman would never bother you again. She has old-fashioned ideas of morality and would never dream of coming between a husband and wife . . . as, of course, is only right and proper."

"I can't marry you, *Désirée*," he said through a mouthful of crumbs, "because I love Gertrude. And I can't marry Gertrude because I love you. Both of you have been feeding me so many love potions that I suspect you've ruined my digestion entirely."

"I'll bet, if you were left to yourself, you wouldn't marry either of us," Miss Levesque said darkly. Ernest chewed cookie crumbs and swallowed them without commenting.

"I've seen you giving the eye to that little blonde trollop who moved in the other week," she went on. "Nasty little foreigner. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's foreigners. If you ask me, a lot of these so-called refugees didn't escape from their countries—more likely, they were *asked* to leave." Miss Levesque glared at him disapprovingly. "*Refugee!*"

The idea of calling that angelic creature a trollop! To think that there was any country, any place or any one that did not find her desirable! But he must conceal his interest, or poor Nadia might find herself the innocent victim of some particularly unpleasant spell. It was for this praiseworthy reason that he had been avoiding her. Several times, in fact, he had actually lifted his hand to knock on her door and ask her to share a dish of tea with him, and each time he'd stifled the impulse.

"I only know her to say hello to," he protested, licking the last crumb off his mouth. That was almost true, but there are hellos and hellos. "Besides, I'm getting sick of all women. If I ever can get away from you two, I think I ought to join a monastery." He

looked up at her anxiously, to make sure she recognized a joke.

MISS Levesque smiled slyly. "And what makes you think we can't get into a monastery? Oh, Gertrude and I have had some jolly times together before you came between us."

"I certainly never *wanted* to come between you," Ernest muttered. Blast the day he'd accepted this woman's offer to help him decorate his apartment. Simply because she looked an artistic type! He should have known that it's usually the artistic types who are the most passionate and besides, she had proved to have terrible taste. He'd even been lucky that she'd let him put his Hokasais away in the closet instead of in the wastepaper basket.

"I'll gladly step aside!" he went on eagerly. "I realize that true friendship is far more important than—"

"Don't be ridiculous. It isn't. Nothing in the world is more important than the love of a man for a woman. And vice versa." She flung her arms wide. "Come, embrace me, Ernest, with ardor tempered by tenderness."

"I already told you why not," he repeated, annoyed. "You're dripping with ink."

"Of course," she agreed, sounding regretful. "I quite forgot—I always get carried away by the

intoxication of your presence, sweetie." Ernest repressed a shudder, remembering times when this had actually happened. On one such occasion, he hadn't been able to distinguish between Foochow and Faggot for days afterward.

She blew him a kiss. "I'll just float upstairs and change. Then, maybe, I'll put a spell on that Greenhut creature, if I can think of something really horrid. See you later, lover."

"Good-by," Ernest said. "Nice of you to drop in," he added perfunctorily. It was safest to be especially polite to these—women. They became provoked so easily. That's how he'd lost his best Chinese hoccoarro teapot.

As soon as she'd disappeared, he grabbed his hat, adjusted his muffler—for the early spring day could be treacherous—and made for the door. He had been abstinent far too long—he must have his *tea!* Although he made an infinitely better cup himself, at least he'd be relatively safe from all undesired attentions in Schrafft's. Neither of the ladies liked to make a public spectacle of herself if it could be avoided.

Besides, they couldn't really object to his taking a quiet drink alone—although he remembered the time well, when he had tried to go downtown to taste a break of fully fine Oolong that had just arrived from Formosa, on an after-

noon that Désirée had intended to spend with him! It had been a long time since he'd been allowed to have so much as a thought, let alone an action, of his own contriving. He might as well be dead. After all, didn't the old myth say tea-tasters always died young? His time had come, and it was probably none too soon.

HE flung himself down the stairs in a burst of energy that, he hoped, would provide enough momentum to carry him past any unseen impediments at the door. As he bounded off the bottom step, he collided with something warm and soft and sweetly scented, like extra high-grade Pouchong. "I'm terribly sorry," he apologized, reluctantly releasing the girl from the embrace in which he somehow found himself holding her. "I hope I didn't hurt you, Miss Koldunya."

"You did not hurt me by the runnings into me," she smiled, adjusting the small fur hat on her smooth, shining ash-blonde hair. "And I am very happy to see you, even if you are seeing me only to be knocking me down. Almost knocking me down," she added—for she was apparently a stickler for accuracy.

"Yes . . . well," Ernest said, gazing apprehensively over his shoulder at what seemed to be a shadow in the upstairs hall, "I must be running off. Awfully nice seeing

you, Miss Koldunya . . .”

“Are you making an avoidance of me, Mr. Fitch?” she asked, looking directly into his eyes. “You seemed so friendly when first we encountered. I thought you were interesting in me. Since then you have performed so coldly, so strangely. Have I done anythings—said anythings?”

In her earnestness, she placed a small, suède-gloved hand upon his arm. The glow he derived from the contact was very different from any of the sensations the ladies upstairs could evoke in him at their pleasure, although it was undoubtedly the kind they would have liked to be able to arouse. This was, he feared, the *real thing*.

But it was not to be. It was too late. He was doomed.

“Have I? Yes? No?” she persisted.

“Eh? Oh, yes—er—no. I really must be going,” he said desperately. “Not a moment to lose. A matter of life and death.”

“Where *are* you going?” she asked with disarming directness. Her large, luminous eyes looked at him intently.

How could he lie to *her*? “I’m going to Schrafft’s for a cup of tea,” he blurted.

“Good, *good!*” she said gaily. “I am absolutely attenuated from thirstiness. I will go along with you, and you will buy me also a drink, if you will be so kindly.”

He couldn’t refuse a request like that. But would *they*—he glanced fearfully upstairs—understand? They would not.

“Miss Koldunya—Nadia!” he declared, taking both her vibrant hands in his. “You mustn’t come with me. You’ll be in terrible danger if you do.”

She freed her hands, and he felt a deep, physical sense of loss. “Why, Ernest, how melodramatically you are sounding. Like the cinema almost. You excite my inquiry.”

“You don’t understand—danger!” he babbled.

She moved away slightly and looked at him with a sad little smile. “I—I am not understanding what danger is? *Ha!*” She laughed and, at last, he understood what a mirthless laugh was. “Haplessly, you do not know where I am coming from. I am a refusee—what is the euphemism?—a dispersed people. I have no country any more, no families, nothing. I am escaping from Eastern Europe underneath rather displeasing conditions.”

SHE shuddered and he shivered in sympathy. Poor little creature—she needed a man to protect her after all she’d been through. He flexed the muscles that lay dormant beneath the Brooks Brothers’ suit.

“I am assuring you, Ernest, danger is an elderly acquaintance

of mine." She shrugged her shoulders. "However, if you are not wishful to buy me a beverage, it is completely all right. I understand. I have been too forward. It is not the costum here for the womens to make the askings." She turned her face away.

"No, you *don't* understand!" Ernest protested, in spite of himself. "I *do* want to buy you a beverage. More than anything else in the world. Only—oh, what's the use? Please *do* come," he said recklessly.

Immediately, Nadia was as gay again as if she had suffered no rebuff. He swung open the heavy door of the old brownstone. Outside, spring lay bright over the shabby, nondescript street, but the sun's rays halted sharply at the gloomy entry, almost as if there were some barrier there. He felt that he too would be unable to cross that threshold, that he could not go out to meet the sun. And he felt very sorry for poor Ernest Fitch, doomed to stay forever in this gloomy brownstone, unable to taste the delights of Uji Yamashiro and Nadia's smile.

Then Nadia gave him her hand and they were out of the house, clattering down the steps . . . and actually on the sidewalk at last.

The very matter-of-factness of the street was enormously appealing to him, enhanced as it was by the sun's yellow rays, which

illuminated each homely garbage can with loving solicitude and left shimmering highlights in Nadia's long, pale hair—the exact color of Moyune Gunpowder — which the gentle breeze left undisturbed.

Feeling the warm sunlight on his face, listening to the girl's pleasantly innocuous prattle, he could hardly believe that, for the last two months, he had actually been undergoing such improbable experiences. For a moment, he felt relaxed and free and was moved to lift his voice in a Japanese teaplunkers' song. "*Natsu mo,*" he caroled, "*chikazuku Hachi-Ju-Hachi-Ya . . .*"

And then he stopped short. Why was it that, although there was no one near them in the street, he could hear footsteps following them very distinctly?

THE girl continued her cheerful chattering all the way, not seeming to notice the glances he kept throwing over his shoulder. But then, of course, if she came from behind the Iron Curtain, she would accept this as perfectly conventional behavior.

She told him how lucky she had been, as a foreigner of suspect nationality, to get a job as a school 'p-psychologist.' "Do you not think it fascinating to work with children, Ernest? To assist shaping their little minds as they make development? It is a wonderful

privilege and a tremense responsibility."

"Er—ah—yes, children," Ernest agreed, wondering perhaps whether he'd only imagined the sound of footsteps behind them. Mrs. Greenhut and Miss Levesque couldn't be watching him *all* the time. It was hard to distinguish between imagination and reality, when the latter was so much the more fantastic of the two. Yet, if he reasoned the matter out, he would know that Mrs. Greenhut and Miss Levesque undoubtedly had far more efficient methods of transportation than mere walking. What was that flash in the air over his head?

"Children," he repeated, comprehending that he was not making any notable contribution to the conversation. "Nice—er—children. Here's Schrafft's." And he plunged into its comfortingly murky interior, leaving Nadia to make her own way after him.

A swanlike hostess swam up to them, greeted Ernest with approval, regarded Nadia with hauteur and turned them both over to a waitress with the cryptic command, "Two."

"We'd like a table in a corner, where I can keep my back to the wall." Ernest turned on a charming smile. "I—I'm susceptible to chills in my back," he explained.

"*Ha!*" Nadia observed enigmatically.

"Two teas, please," he said to the waitress, when she had seated them in the darkest corner, "and two orders of tea sandwiches."

"Please to serving me in a glass, accompanied by two slices of lemming," Nadia demanded, stripping off her gloves with great deliberation. "Recollect that the water must be at the absolutely bubbly boil—and *no* little bandages around the tea!"

"But we *always* serve tea in bags, madam," the waitress protested, aghast, looking to Ernest for moral support.

"Not to me you are serving bandaged tea," Nadia said, looking the girl firmly in the eye. "And I am wanting a dish of preserves on the side. Any flavoring," she added graciously, "except quincy."

"But—yes, madam," the waitress said, a glazed look in her eyes. "Right away, madam."

"Er—I'll have my tea without a tea bag too," Ernest said feebly, marveling at Nadia's boldness in daring to beard Schrafft's. "But in a pot, not a glass. And with milk!"

NADIA snorted, as the waitress moved off. "*Milk!* An illegitimate innovation. Did you not know that milk is not being pushed into tea until 1680 A.D.? And it was some womans from West Europe who is doing this terrible thing—of course."

"There have been improvements

in many things since 1680," retorted Ernest, pleased to find himself still capable of argument. "The tea industry is continually progressing. After all, we don't flavor tea with ginger, onion or orange any more, do we?"

"You are never knowing in plenty restaurants," Nadia said. "Anybodies who is strangling their tea through bandagings have ability of anythings."

"Milk not only mellows the taste," Ernest explained, "but it prevents the tannin in tea from injuring the digestive organs."

Nadia drew out a long, gold-tipped cigarette and handed Ernest a lighter. "You are knowing considerable about the tea, Ernest." Her skin, he thought, was like the petals of a tea blossom which is, of course, of the same genus as the camellia.

"Well, I'm in the tea business," he explained.

"So, that is how you earn your existence? What are you doing particularly?"

"I'm a tea-taster," he said. "I can blend too—" He jumped up as a shadow fell upon him.

It was only the waitress, bearing a tray which contained a glass of tea and a pot of tea and a jug of hot water and a dish of lemon slices and a dish of strawberry jam and a jug of milk and two large dishes containing immense quantities of sandwiches. Schrafft's had

never done him so proud before. He could see Nadia knew her way around tearooms.

The waitress went away, and Nadia put a warm hand on his. He could feel tangible reassurance rising from it. She was a nice kind of girl to have around. Soothing.

"What is the matter, Ernest?" she asked. "You are trembling like an aspic. Is it that the secret police are trailing after you, yes?"

He was momentarily shocked out of his apprehension. "The police! Certainly *not*—I've never done anything wrong in my life."

"You certainly do look as if somebodies were haunting you," she said, sipping her tea and making a face. "Why you are not disclosing to me about it, if only for the therapeutic value of confession?"

WHY shouldn't he? Perhaps he would feel better if he could confide in someone—and who would be better for him to unbosom himself to than this lovely, sympathetic, altogether understanding girl? Besides, moral duty required him to warn her of the terrible danger she was exposing herself to by associating with him.

He looked around furtively to make sure they were not overheard. "As a matter of fact, there is somebody after me. But it's not the police—it's witches."

Nadia's expression was so well

trained that the sudden gleam of clinical interest in her eyes was barely perceptible. "My poor Ernest," she said, patting his hand. "My poor, paranoid Ernest."

He pulled his hand away. "You don't *believe* me!" It had simply not occurred to him that she would not believe him. Previously, of course, he himself had not believed in witches, but, now that he knew them to be factual entities, he expected her to accept his word. Couldn't she tell he was sincere? But it probably wasn't his sincerity she doubted, he realized—it was more likely his sanity.

"You don't believe there are witches?" he questioned with less assurance.

"For sure, there are witches," she said, eating a sandwich. "The middle-aged stereotype of the witch is only an unconscious symbolization of one's own guilt-feelings, a projectioning of them upon other peoples. You were saying before that never you had doing anythings wrong in your life. To the trained p-psychologist, such a statement is fraught with significantness. It—"

"But these aren't medieval witches," he interrupted. "They're modern, contemporary witches. They live upstairs from me. From you, too," he added, to drive the matter home. "Mrs. Greenhut owns the house."

"Regressioning to the fantasy

world of your childhoodness," she added kindly. "Not an uncommon dynamism, for sure, but potentially dangerous."

Nadia didn't seem to understand at all what he meant. He tried again. "You know Mrs. Greenhut and Miss Levesque? They're witches, I tell you."

"If they are witches, pigeon, why is it that they are seeming to me simplicilty just a coupling of nice, dull, medieval-aged womens?"

ERNEST thought he heard a hiss in the air and fervently hoped he was wrong. "Because the higher type witch doesn't advertise herself—that's why," he explained triumphantly. "Both of them told me so. Separately, of course, because they haven't spoken to each other—politely, anyhow—since I moved into the house. They don't want anything out of you, so why should they let you in on their secret?"

"Well, then, what is it so especially they are wanting out of *you*, Ernest?"

"They are wanting . . . they want to marry me," he said sulkily, wishing she would stop chewing when he spoke to her.

"Oh, Ernest!" she said, with her mouth full. "That is to project, indeed. You probably are imaginig every womans you meet is wanting to marry you or some-things, that you are an irresistible

fellow. Wish-fulfillment to almost pathological degree, as a result of thwarted developments of ego neediness." She gestured with an oversized tea sandwich. "I am loathsome to say this, Ernest, but I am fearful you are showing evidence of deep emotional maladjustment."

"I do *not* think every woman wants to marry me," Ernest protested, casting an involuntary glance at himself in the mirror set in the wooden paneling over the table. Catching her eye, he flushed.

"Tea must be brewed by now," he muttered, lifting the lid and peering into the pot. "One of the worst things about tea bags," he added absently, "is that they keep you from seeing the agony of the leaves."

"The *which*, Ernest?"

He smiled. "No, I'm not betraying any more interesting symptoms. That's a tea-tasting term—means the unfolding of the leaves when boiling water's poured on them."

She leaned over and looked curiously into the pot. The odor of jasmine that arose from her was almost overpowering. He would have enjoyed taking her in his arms. "It is looking to me as if somebodies put those leaves out of their agony much time ago," she observed.

She sat back and let Ernest light another cigarette for her. "Better imbibe it, pigeon. Even torpid tea

is stimulating and will have a favorable p-psychological affection upon you."

"You're quite right about that, you know," he agreed. "There was an article on the subject in the London *Lancet* sometime in the eighteen-sixties. Something about tea having a strange influence over mood, a strange power of changing the look of things, and changing it for the better, so that we can believe and hope and do, under the influence of tea, what we should otherwise give up in discouragement and despair."

HE poured the amber fluid into his cup and sipped. "Not too good a blend for hard water," he commented. And then, "I don't suppose you could expect much of a nose."

She blew a cloud of smoke and smiled at him. "Well, pigeon, have the lookings of things changed strangely for the betterment?"

He looked at her calmly. "You know, Nadia, Mrs. Greenhut and Miss Levesque are real witches. They cast spells on me and force me to do whatever they want. You psychologists are too much inclined to consider everything outside the range of your own textbooks as either nonexistent or unimportant. I tell you those were genuine spells."

"Compulsions, Ernest," she corrected him, eating a spoonful of

jam, "not spells. And it is you who are casting them upon yourself." She daintily licked the spoon clean.

"But they do all sorts of odd and inexplicable things," he protested. "I've seen them with my own eyes."

"You cannot always be trustful of your own eyes," she observed, wavering between two equally attractive sandwiches. "Obviously, you are demonstrative of typical phobic reactions. Some traumatic experiencing in your childhoodness is undoubtedly responsive for your presently maladjustive behaviorism."

"Maloo mixture!" Ernest snapped. He drank more tea. "They feed me love potions all the time," he said, flatly irritated at her narrow-mindedness. "I am madly in love with both of them."

She smiled, for a moment the woman, rather than the 'p-sychologist.' "If these so-said love potions are officious, pigeon," she said coyly, "how is it you are imbibing here with me and not with your witch friends, eh?" She glanced at the mirror and nodded her head, apparently feeling that what she saw there answered her question completely.

"Now," she went on briskly, once more the scientist, "you must not be evasive, Ernest. You must facing around your problems squarely and apply the intelligent-

ness and reasonable analyzing to them. Why should two respectful medieval women be using witchcraftiness to making you marry them?"

"And who do you think you're calling an elderly woman, slut?" shrieked Miss Levesque disrespectfully, as her cavernous head rose out of a crust on the table before them. "I'll give you just one second to clear out of here, baby, and leave my Ernest alone, before I let you have it!"

"Your Ernest!" stated a voice from the air, for Mrs. Greenhut wouldn't have dreamed of materializing in Schrafft's wearing a housedress. "You have some nerve! Your Ernest, indeed!"

And Miss Levesque's long, lank, black hair stood tautly on end, as if some invisible hand were tugging at it. She gave vent to prolonged and uninhibited ululation.

"There!" Ernest said triumphantly. "Who's having hallucinations now?"

NADIA raised bland blue eyes to his. "What are you intending to tell me, Ernest?" she asked, nibbling a piece of date-nut bread.

He pointed with a trembling finger. "D-don't you see Miss Levesque's head in the middle of the table?"

"A head in the middle of the



ta— Oh, Ernest, this hallucinating is of uttermost seriousness. You are betraying prominent schizophrenic tendencies.”

Miss Levesque’s hair suddenly subsided in limp streaks over her bony face, as the invisible power holding it relaxed its grip. “She’s a liar,” she declared angrily, blowing the hair out of her way. “Just pretending not to see me out of spite, the little trollop!”

“Maybe there’s something wrong with her eyes,” Ernest put in anxiously. “Nadia, have you ever tried sleeping on a pillow stuffed with tea leaves? It’s an old Chinese remedy for eye trouble.”

“Ha!” Nadia smiled seductively at him. “If you are really desiring to know what my pillows are being stuffed with, why don’t you—”

“Listen here, you little . . .” Miss Levesque began, in a voice choked with wrath.

The waitress approached the table apprehensively. “Anything else, sir?” she asked, keeping her eyes on her apron. “M-madam?”

Ernest greeted her arrival with enthusiasm. “Miss, what do you see on top of this cruet?”

The girl knitted her brows and bent herself to the problem. “I see oil, vinegar and mustard,” she replied conscientiously. “Did you want ketchup? For tea?”

“In Bokhara,” Nadia pointed out, pensively ladling jam into her tea, “they are flavoring tea with

mutton fat. After they have drunk-en it, then they are eating the leaves. Very economical, those Bokharans.”

“Ugh,” observed Mrs. Greenhut’s voice.

“I imagine ketchup in tea would be more like *letpet*,” Ernest commented. “Did you know they pickle tea in Burma?” he asked the waitress.

“N-no, sir,” the girl said, clutching her tray to her bosom.

“They make a salad out of it, with garlic, oil and, occasionally, dried fish. It’s a great treat—they eat it only on holidays and special occasions.”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” stated Miss Levesque’s head flatly.

“You don’t?” Ernest was angry. “I suppose you don’t believe that in Siam they chew tea mixed with salt and garlic or hog fat?”

Nadia opened her beautiful eyes wide. “Why, I *do* believe you, Ernest.”

“I don’t!” snapped Miss Levesque. “He’s making it all up.”

“I would like a large further quantity of little sandywitches,” Nadia interrupted, licking jam from her full pink mouth, “and another glass of what I am very politely calling tea, if you will be so pleasing.”

THE waitress looked at her cold-ly. “Those little sandwiches have an awful lot of calories.”

"I don't have to worrying about my outline," Nadia confided with a complacent smile. "I can eating all I want and it keeps staying just as nicely. I am a lucky girl, no?"

"Something to do with your glands, prob'ly," the waitress sniffed.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," Mrs. Greenhut's voice agreed.

"Miss," Ernest insisted. "Don't you see a head on the table?"

The waitress's eyes widened and she backed away. "Schrafft's don't like for you to spike your tea," she protested, all gentility lost.

"He has not put any spokes in the tea," Nadia explained, blowing smoke in the girl's face. "He is just thinking he is funny."

"Oh," the girl said feebly. "Ha, ha! Heads on the table," she repeated, laughing more conscientiously as she thought of her tip. "Ha, ha! That's a good one—I must tell the cashier."

"You can *perfectly well* see me!" put in Miss Levesque angrily. "You're lying too. It's all part of a plot."

"Your spells aren't strong enough, dear," another smug voice said from the air. "But it isn't your fault. You just can't do any better. You can hear *me* all right, can't you, young woman?"

"Another pot of tea for you, sir?"

Ernest nodded. "Better make it a double one," he said weakly.

"Young woman!" the voice from the air spoke again. "Will you kindly answer me when I address you? I declare, I don't know what the younger generation is coming to these days!"

THE girl picked up her tray and walked away, looking over her shoulder and giggling every time she caught Nadia's eye.

"Why are you looking so funnily, Ernest?" Nadia asked, spooning up the remainder of the jam greedily.

"She—she didn't see her," Ernest quavered. "She didn't hear either of them."

"Oh, dear!" Nadia sighed. "Auditorium *and* visual hallucinations both. Now, listening to me, Ernest. She is not seeing or hearing them because they are existing only inside your mind."

"Now, that's silly!" he said indignantly. "How can Mrs. Greenhut and Miss Levesque possibly exist only inside my mind? You must have seen both of them. They have their names over the mailboxes and everything." He tried to gulp some tea, but it was cold and tasted of dead fish.

"For sure they have real existence," Nadia said impatiently, "but they are not witches. They are simplicilty a coupling of harmless old womens whom you are fancifuling to be witches. The reality-irreality continuum is—"

"Harmless old woman!" Mrs. Greenhut's voice shrilled. "I'll show the little hussy who's old—and harmless," she added ominously. "Hit her, Ernest. Hit her right in that pasty painted face of hers."

ERNEST'S right arm swung out ahead of him. He struggled to gain control, even though he knew it would be impossible. Mrs. Greenhut had taken charge. Disregarding the wishes of its owner, the arm reached toward Nadia's lovely face. He watched with detached horror as his hand hovered in the air before her dainty nose. Then the stiff fingers relaxed and stroked her cheek clumsily.

"Why, Ernest!" Nadia giggled, patting his hand. "Already we are establishing rapport!"

"*Ernest!*" Mrs. Greenhut's voice emitted visible sparks. "I said *hit* her!"

"I can't," he replied, rolling his eyes up toward the point from which her voice seemed to originate. "I didn't want to, but I tried, and I couldn't!"

Nadia gripped his hand tensely. She was surprisingly strong. "Ernest, you are talking with much incoherentness. I am worrying intensely over you. You are now being demonstrative of hebephrenic symptomatology." Her eyes were intent on his.

"I don't understand it!" Mrs.

Greenhut wailed. "It's downright uncanny—that's what it is."

"Leggo his hand, you little tart," Miss Levesque snarled, "or you'll be plenty sorry!"

The waitress arrived with fresh tea and sandwiches. "I brought you some more jam, miss," she said defiantly. "But don't blame me if it sticks to your hips."

She departed. "There will be no jamb on my hips, pigeon," Nadia assured Ernest. "You will see."

"Watch me, Gertrude!" Miss Levesque commanded desperately. "This time, I'll show the heavenly little wench she can't ignore *me!*"

The glass of tea zoomed up from the table and hung upside down over Nadia's gleaming head. It descended a fraction of an inch in a vacillating sort of way. Then it halted and remained immobile in mid-air, not a drop of the tawny liquid emerging to dampen the chic little mink cap.

"Nadia!" Ernest screeched. "Look out!"

"Look out for what, pigeon?" she asked, removing the top from a sandwich and peering inside to see whether she approved of the filling.

"Your tea! It's hanging over your head. And I wish you'd stop eating all the time I'm talking to you!"

"Please do not being ridiculous, Ernest. My tea—if you are calling it tea—is right here in my hand.

What is more, you are much uncourtly."

She sipped her tea. Ernest looked to see whether there might be two glasses, but the air above her head was empty.

NADIA leaned forward, frowning anxiously. "Ernest, cannot you envision for yourself that there is something very wrongly amiss with you? Normal running-with-the-mill peoples are not believing in witches any more—you know that."

She gestured toward the roomful of stout matrons contentedly and obviously having their afternoon tea. "None of them is envisioning anything exceptionable. You are manifestating p-psychotic divergencies from the group thinking. Ergo, you are suffering from the deludings. You see?"

"I wonder whether I've been drinking too much tea," he mused. "An excess of any stimulant may very well prove deleterious to the nervous system."

"Good tea," Nadia said, "never hurt any bodies. You must coming to my apartment, and I will show you some good tea from my samovar. I will also show you other things."

"*Delusions!*" wailed Miss Levesque's head. "But I happen to know for a fact that we aren't delusions! We're real. I simply cannot understand why you don't see me, or

hear either of us. I don't know why everything is going wrong unless . . ."

". . . unless," Mrs. Greenhut's voice took up the sentence grimly, "she's a more powerful witch than either one of us. Let's face it, Désirée, that's just about the only logical explanation. There's a lot of talent for this sort of thing in Eastern Europe."

A brief baffled silence ensued. Ernest cleared his throat. "Now, look here!" he said firmly. Nadia and Miss Levesque looked at him, and he could sense Mrs. Greenhut's steady stare. Under their combined gazes, he felt like a tea leaf uncurling underneath the onslaught of the boiling water. "Er—ah—yes," he said.

"Have some more tea, Ernest," Nadia said softly.

"Gertrude," Miss Levesque said, with plaintive determination, "we were once friends. For old times' sake . . ."

". . . we must unite against the common enemy," Mrs. Greenhut finished for her. "Just what I was thinking myself. Now, Désirée, we must act together. One—two—three—*Go!*"

And Ernest found his legs propelling him past the other tables, past the cashier at a great rate, and out of Schrafft's at an even faster pace.

Then he was swooping into a postcard blue sky.

ERNEST zoomed up the street, but he had none of the delicious sense of flying that one has in dreams. He felt simply as if he were being pushed and pulled and hauled and mauled, but he knew enough not to struggle. They were perfectly capable of dropping him, inadvertently of course, but motives never count for much in the ultimate run. He closed his eyes and hoped he was not going to be seasick. An experience like this could damage his palate permanently.

The little aerial cortège finally halted outside the windows of his apartment. Few second-floor tenants are given the privilege of viewing their dwellings from this angle, but Ernest, fluttering wildly in the air, failed to appreciate his position.

"Heavens to Betsy!" he heard Mrs. Greenhut's exasperated voice exclaim. "I should have remembered that these foolish windows have to be opened from the inside! Can you hold him all by yourself, Dési, while I dissolve them?"

"All right, Gertie," Miss Levesque said almost amiably, "but hurry." Ernest felt himself shifted into an even more precarious balance and repressed a faint moan. "He's no lightweight, especially after all those cookies and things you kept on feeding him—and all that tea he's been swilling."

"I'm going as fast as I can."

Mrs. Greenhut retorted, "and please don't chatter. How can anybody work a good spell if you fuss, fuss, fuss? Be *careful!*" she shrieked, as Ernest started to slip from the invisible grasp in which he was insecurely held.

He gave a yelp as he plummeted downward.

"I've got him," Miss Levesque yelled triumphantly. Ernest could feel a bony hand twisting his jacket all out of shape. "But do hurry. We may not be able to put him together again if he gets smashed. At least, not in the same way. And I happen to like this particular arrangement."

Slowly—too slowly—the window liquefied and Ernest was inserted in the resultant aperture, one invisible lady pushing him, the other pulling. They dumped him on the rug, where he lay panting, unable to get up and not particularly wanting to anyway.

"Well, Ernest!" Nadia said, putting *Vogue* back on the marble top of the coffee table. "It's approximately the time for you to revert." She was sitting comfortably before the fireplace, her legs crossed to reveal a pair of handsomely filled nylons. "I do not think it was very couth of you to arise and digress in such a fashion, leaving me to settle for the account, including the teacup you sequestered."

"Teacup?" Ernest said vaguely.



He looked at his hand and there, sure enough, was a teacup with tea surprisingly in it. He'd never be able to show his face in Schrafft's again.

"Still," she added more gently, "I had fear you might perhaps be troubled, so I came to make an investigation."

"I—I didn't—I *didn't* get up and walk out! How can you say such a thing? I was being forced out. You must have seen me."

She shook her head slowly and sadly. There was a feeling of intense loneliness at the pit of his stomach.

Underneath the smart hat, the face of the model on the cover of the magazine looked strangely like Miss Levesque's. "Go on, ask her how she got in the door?" she demanded. "Or have you been giving out duplicate keys, Ernest?"

"Certainly not!" he said firmly. "I wouldn't dream of—well, I wouldn't *do* it anyway. Nadia," he asked obediently, "how did you get into my apartment?"

She helped herself to some cashews from a T'ang bowl on the table and raised her eyebrows. "Why, you are leaving the door unjarred, so I am ingesting. I did not think you would be objectioning."

"I'm not—no—of course—I—oh, hell, I don't know what's happening to me," he declared miserably, shifting to a more comfortable

position on the rug. "What's more, I'm beginning not to care. This is all just too much. I'm glad tea-tasters never live to grow old. I'm glad, I'm *glad!*"

THERE was a look of concern on Nadia's face. "But you are sickly, pigeon," she murmured, getting up. "You do look rather pallorous. Haplessly I am running you amuck, with too much analysis all in concert. I am undermining you, forcing you into apatheticity."

She went over to him and stroked his head with cool, comforting fingers. "I am so sorrowful, pigeon," she cooed. "I would not for all the hemisphere want to hurting you. All I am wishful to infect is a restoration of the integration of your personality resourcefulness. In other words—" and she gave him a long, lingering look out of her cobalt eyes—"I am just wanting to make you happy. Come down and see my samovar."

"I can't," he said wretchedly. The old spells were on him again. "They won't let me. You know they won't let me."

"I will boil some waters and make you a tea right here then," she announced. "In a cup," she concluded magnanimously.

"I have tea already," he said, and took a slug from the Schrafft brew, which strangely seemed to have retained its heat although it was flat and stale. "Nadia," he

asked, looking bleakly up at the girl, "tell me—are you a witch also?"

She sat down, cross-legged, beside him on the rug. "So you are one of those peoples who are terminating analysis as witch-doctors, yes?"

He shook his head. "Not a witch-doctor—only witch."

She shrugged. "If there are being witches," she said gaily, "then I dare to say that you could name a p-sychologist or a p-sychoanalyst one, as much as any other scientific population. But, Ernest, we know there are being no such creations existing today. This is a hard-hitted, rationalizing society."

There was a knock at the door. "Excuse me," Ernest said politely, scrambling to his feet. "I'd better open it, or else."

"Good afternoon, Ernest dear," smiled Mrs. Greenhut. For the occasion, she had changed her house-dress to a snug black crêpe, ornamented by a rope of pearls. "May I come in?"

He stood aside silently, knowing that, if she wanted in, she would come in. He had fought her—both of them—at first, and it had been painful and humiliating and useless.

"Why, if it isn't Miss Koldunya from downstairs," Mrs. Greenhut said graciously. "How do you do, my dear?"

Nadia got up from the rug and

brushed the well-shaped back of her skirt painstakingly. "How are you doing?" she replied, after a pause just long enough to be insolent.

"Ha, so you *do* see me!" Mrs. Greenhut snapped, abruptly shedding her company manners. "You admit it!"

Nadia looked with meaning at Mrs. Greenhut's portly form. "How could anybodies be not seeing you?" she asked pleasantly.

MRS. Greenhut turned a mottled red and began to swell like a balloon. Ernest watched, fascinated, as the seams of the black crêpe visibly stretched further than any normal seam ever could.

Then Mrs. Greenhut controlled herself with a visible effort and bared her teeth in a vicious social smile. "Since you seem to be trying to *delude* this poor, dear boy into believing that there are no such beings as witches, Miss Koldunya, how do you explain the fact that L—an ordinary, harmless woman, came into the room through the *closet*?" she demanded triumphantly. "You have the apartment on the ground floor, where the layout is slightly different," she continued, "so of course you didn't know his front door was on the other side of the foyer."

"Closet!" Nadia raised her eyebrows. "You are coming in through the closet? But, admissib-

ly, that is a common thing to be doing. Nice people are not injecting themselves via closets."

She crossed over to the door through which Mrs. Greenhut had entered and flung it open. The outside hall was clearly visible beyond.

Nadia smiled. "I am fearful you must have mistaken yourself, Mrs. Greenhut. This—" she opened what Ernest had always thought to be his front door—"is the closet."

And so it was. Ernest gulped a draught of tea. Pushing him around was bad enough, but he did not like having his closet displaced. Was nothing sacred to these women?

"What pretty depictions!" he heard Nadia exclaim. "All about Japanese peoples imbibing teas. Why are you not dangling them from the walls, Ernest, instead of hoodwinking them in a closet?"

"I'll bet you think you're pretty smart!" Miss Levesque growled, oozing out of the coffee table in a purple velvet gown. "Still claim you can't see me, baby?"

"Oh, I am seeing you very much indeed," Nadia replied, taking a mint from a Satsuma *gusuri chawan* on the piano. "You ingressed with this other womans. It is always nice for womans of a certain age to have friendshipmates of their own sex—it makes compensation for their not abling to distract other sex."

"Don't pull that on us, you—you *witch!*" Miss Levesque snarled.

"Ah, she is wielding the word in a colloquial sense, no?" Nadia observed to Ernest, with an air of enlightenment. "Maybe she is not as I diagnosed. She is signifying only that—"

"She is using the word quite literally," Mrs. Greenhut corrected. "I am a witch — you are a witch — she is a witch."

"My English is truly very bad," Nadia admitted. "I am so full of gratefulness for this lesson."

"We are *so* witches!" Miss Levesque shrieked, bursting into angry tears. She stamped her foot on the rug. "We are so—we *are*—we *are so!*"

"*Désirée!*" Mrs. Greenhut commanded. "Control yourself!"

BREATHING hard, Miss Levesque fanned herself with *Some Chinese Ghosts*.

"*Ha!*" Nadia said, comprehension appearing to dawn in her lovely eyes. "My poor Ernest," she apologized, "I have made a great fallacy about you. I admit it happily. It is not you who are frustrating—it is these two old witches. Sex-starved old haggises, who will use any means to acquisition themselves a mans, even if they are having to hypnotize him and themselves, into fancifulling they are using witchcraftiness to secure him."

"*Sex-starved!*" Mrs. Greenhut gasped indignantly. "A decent young woman wouldn't *dream* of using language like that!"

"Who said she was a decent young woman?" sobbed Miss Levesque. "It's my belief she's nothing better than a—"

Ernest tossed off the rest of his tea and got to his feet. "Look here," he said firmly. "I won't have you talking about Nadia like that. And take your paws off that book, you! It's a valuable first edition."

Lafcadio Hearn fell to the carpet with a dull thunk. All three women turned to him with startled expressions on their faces. "Whether all this witchcraft is imaginary or not," he continued, pleased to see that Nadia looked as incredulous as the others, "you ought to be ashamed of yourselves—all three of you."

"Me as well?" Nadia asked in a small voice. "Not *me*, Ernest?"

"You too—you haven't been behaving one bit better than the others. And you should know better, too, because you've had the advantage of a better education." He scratched his head. "I guess I just happen to like you, although heaven knows why, because you've been treating me like an idiot also."

"It's not *heaven* that knows why you like her," Mrs. Greenhut commented.

"If she is a witch," Ernest said, whirling upon her, "at least she had the grace not to *tell* me that she was feeding me love potions or practicing her wiles upon me. So, if I'm in love with her, there's a fighting chance that it was my own idea as well as hers. What's more, she shares my interests—or, at least, she's taken the trouble to bone up on them. She's very sound on tea—and she wouldn't dream of trying to make me drink *coffee!*" He spat out the word contemptuously.

"Well, we're at least frank," Miss Levesque pouted. "Don't you believe in the virtue of candor?"

"I happen," Ernest said spiritedly, testing the return of his independence, "to be a perfectly normal and conventional member of society, in spite of both of you—and you, *pigeon.*" He bowed toward Nadia. "And, as a perfectly normal and conventional member of society, I *like* hypocrisy—it is the basis of all civilized behavior."

"Bourgeois mentality," sniffed Nadia.

"Witchcraft," said Mrs. Greenhut.

Ernest grinned. "I'm not so sure it's all witchcraft," he said, giving Nadia a head-to-foot glance that should have made her blush, but didn't. "Look at her face and figure—*those* aren't witchcraft."

"Oh, *no?*" Mrs. Greenhut said meaningly.

"All right then, if it's witchcraft, why didn't you use some of it? At least she's got better taste than either of you two. And uses more up-to-date methods. I'm all in favor of such progress."

"*Ernest!*" Miss Levesque howled. "How can you *say* things like that about us? After all you and I have been to one another!"

ERNEST prudently affected not to hear this. "Either Nadia's just an ordinary girl. I mean," he added hastily, catching her eye, "an extraordinary girl, but without any supernormal powers. Or else she's a more capable witch than the two of you put together. If she's just a—girl—and it's the power of true love that's made me able to resist you two, then that's fine. And if she's a witch, why, it seems I like her blend of tricks better than yours."

"*Ernest!*" Nadia exclaimed, overcome by emotion. "Those are the nicest things anybody's ever saying to me without compulsiveness."

"What's more," Ernest concluded, taking her hand, "whatever she is, I'm going to marry her, so the two of you might just as well leave now." He lifted her hand to his lips. "Momikiri," he murmured. "That's the name of a high-grade Japanese blend of tea. It also means 'pretty fingers.'"

Nadia giggled coyly.

"*Pipsqueak!*" Mrs. Greenhut commented rancorously. "There're a thousand boys better looking, better everything than you. You were just convenient — that's all."

"Living in the same house and all," Miss Levesque explained, still sniffing. "It just saved time and b-b-bother, really."

The phone rang. Ernest picked it up. "Yes, Mr. Van Linschooten," he said crisply. "I'll be down without fail, first thing in the morning, to taste the Dimbula. Right you are. See you at the hong." He hung up.

"Is *she* going to let you go?" Miss Levesque sneered.

Ernest looked at Nadia. "She is going to let me do whatever I want to do, aren't you, pigeon?"

"With precision," Nadia agreed, smiling up at him.

"You'll do whatever *she* wants you to do," Mrs. Greenhut commented cynically.

"Whatever *he* is wanting to do," Nadia murmured, gazing adoringly at him, "is what *I* am wanting him to do."

THE shrill sound of a whistle screamed through the apartment. "The annunciation of the bubbly boil!" Nadia cried, hurtling toward the kitchenette. "I will concoct the tea."

"No," Ernest said firmly. "Let them make their own tea. I have quite a decent little Terai they may

use," he said graciously. "It's not the best, but they won't know any better."

"Tea!" said Miss Levesque. "I want coffee!"

"Not in *my* apartment," Ernest told her, quietly but firmly. "From now on no one is going to be permitted to so much as pass the door who has even a trace of mocha on his or her breath."

Nadia looked at him and again he felt like a tea leaf—uncurling sensually as the steaming water permeated his receptive tissues. But the sensation was pleasurable, not agonizing at all. He didn't even care if the water in his kitchenette had boiled without anyone's having put the kettle on the stove. A little witchcraft might come in very handy in coping with domestic routine.

"You and I, Nadia," he said, "will go down to your apartment

and you will show me how you make tea on your samovar."

"She not only makes him do what she wants," Mrs. Greenhut said, with grudging admiration, "but she makes him *think* it's what he wants. Let's face it—we're licked, Desi."

"Maybe," Miss Levesque said wistfully, "since she's taking Ernest away from us, the least she can do is teach us some of her modern methods. What with us being neighbors and all."

Nadia turned to look back over her shoulder. "In truth, ladies," she said, "I would be willing to teaching you my methodology. If only," she added pensively, "I myself can resolving just how it was I am doing it."

Evelyn E. Smith