

The Rise of the Baker's Dozen

Chapter 4:

Dougie
McShortbread



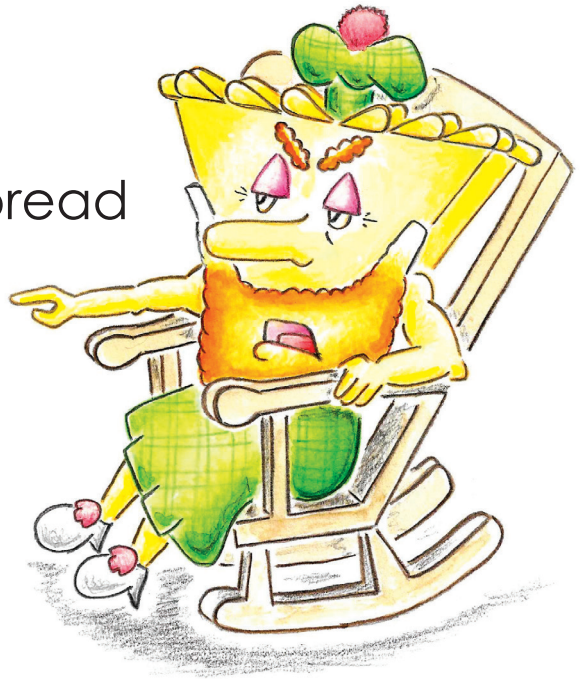
By Arnu Rausi



Avatar
English



Dougie McShortbread



Chapter 1

So long had passed since Dougie had seen the night sky that he could barely remember what the stars looked like. Sitting in his front garden, he tried to imagine the constellations that would guide him across vast stretches of land at night, but the sweltering heat of the never-ending day numbed his mind and eradicated all his imagination.

He kicked back in his armchair, closed his eyes, and listened to the multiple songs of birds. For a moment, he disappeared from the world, until suddenly, loud bangs had him jumping in his seat. In total panic, Dougie reached for his knife in his kilt and checked in all directions.

Walking down the street were two teenagers. Their heavy dance music blared from a distance, the thumping beat getting louder and louder as they approached.

Dougie took some deep breaths, let go of his knife, and shouted at the boys.



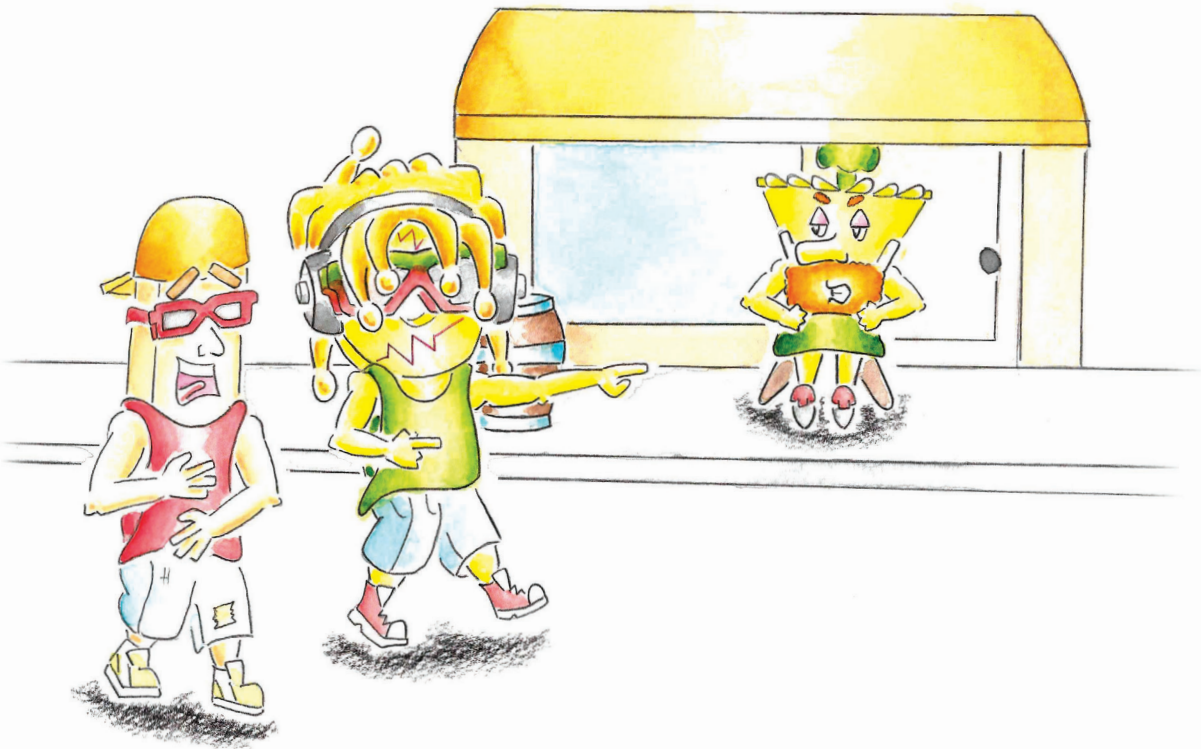
"TURN DOWN THAT
WRETCHED MUSIC
IMMEDIATELY!"

The scruffy appearance of the boys was an absolute disgrace. One laddie had long, wild dreadlocks that dangled around his face, while his loose tank top exposed his nipples.

His friend wore ripped jeans with giant holes. From behind, their baggy shorts barely covered their butt cheeks, dropping a little lower each step and exposing their underwear.

Dougie's teeth grinded as the teens passed his house. "Oi, laddies, have some decency! Pull up your trousers and cover up your buttocks. This ain't the place to be exposing your bahoochie!"

The boy with dreadlocks pointed at him and laughed. "I'll pull up my trousers when you get some trousers! I can't believe I'm getting fashion tips from a man in a skirt!"



The two teens burst into laughter, ripping Dougie's tolerance into shreds. "This is no skirt, you fools! This is a kilt, an item of clothing with more class and history than both you knuckleheads combined! Moreover, it's a great alleviation against the heat. A cool breeze between the legs keeps the family jewels fresh!"

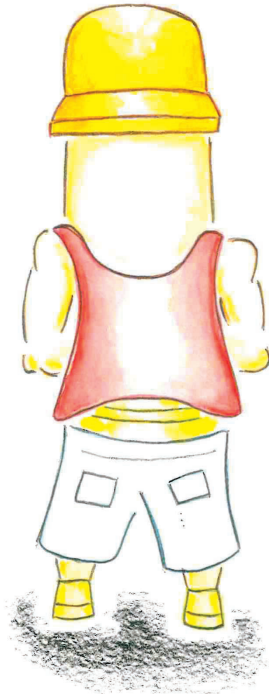
The teens cringed. "Eww! That's gross!"

Dougie pointed to the boy with dreadlocks. "If you think I'm gross, you should take a look in the mirror! Go get a haircut! Or at least have a wash! Your hair looks like a bowl of spaghetti!"

The pair of teenagers skipped away laughing, clearly not taking a word of Dougie's advice seriously.

Dougie stood up and shouted down the street. "Your elders didn't fight for liberty so you could dress and act so disgracefully!"

The boys ignored him and turned their loud music on again. The heavy baseline made Dougie's nerves tremble. "I'll teach you youngsters respect, if it's the last thing I do!"



“Leave them alone,” Mrs Maggi said from the neighbouring garden while hanging her clothes to dry. “Don’t you remember what it was like to be young?”

Dougie grunted. “Aye! But at least we were rebels for a worthy cause.”

The old lady frowned. “That’s strange. I thought you said you don’t remember your younger years.”

Dougie’s tongue tied as he realised his slip up. He marched away without saying another word and went to the only place he could find peace.



Chapter 2

Dougie rubbed his hands with content as he entered the barber shop.

Carl the barber swivelled a chair in Dougie's direction. "This is the second time this week. Is everything okay?"

Dougie jumped into the seat and got comfortable. "If a biscuit is to have hair, then it should be kept in fine fashion, for it is a defining factor between biscuit and beast! Give me the usual beard trim and wash, please. Extra soap today, and give her a good brush."

With his eyes closed, Dougie relaxed as Carl's deep massages soothed his brain, letting him drift into a world of peace. Yet, it wasn't long before his state of tranquility was again destroyed by the booming sound of dance music. Through the door strolled the same teens he'd seen only moments ago in front of his house. Each thumping beat of their music made Dougie's body jump. He grabbed tightly to the seat, his hands shaking as panic spread through his entire body.

"TURN DOWN THAT WRETCHED MUSIC!" Dougie shouted at the boys. Seeing them was the last thing he wished, yet maybe the laddie with dreadlocks had taken his advice and was about to get a haircut.

Dougie stared at him through the reflection in the mirror. "Finally getting rid of your ridiculous hair, are you?"

The teen shook his head. "No, I'm here to get my dreadlocks tightened so they grow longer and stronger."

"WHAT?! Don't tell me you pay to look like that?!"

Carl paused cutting. "That style is one of the hardest to master."

Dougie scoffed. "They must be called dreadlocks because anyone in their right mind would dread to have them!"

The teen shrugged.

"If that was the truth,
we would call you
dread-head."



Everyone in the barbershop laughed hysterically, the joke coming at Dougie's expense from a boy a fifth of his age.

Dougie turned his chair and looked at the teen straight in the eye. "What's your name, you little weasel?"

"Ringo."

"Well, Ringo, keep talking like that, and I'll cut off all your dreadlocks myself while you're asleep. Then we'll see who the funny guy is."

The barbershop turned silent, and Carl placed a hand on Dougie's shoulder. "It's just a joke."

Dougie pushed the hand away. "Someone has to teach respect to these youngsters."

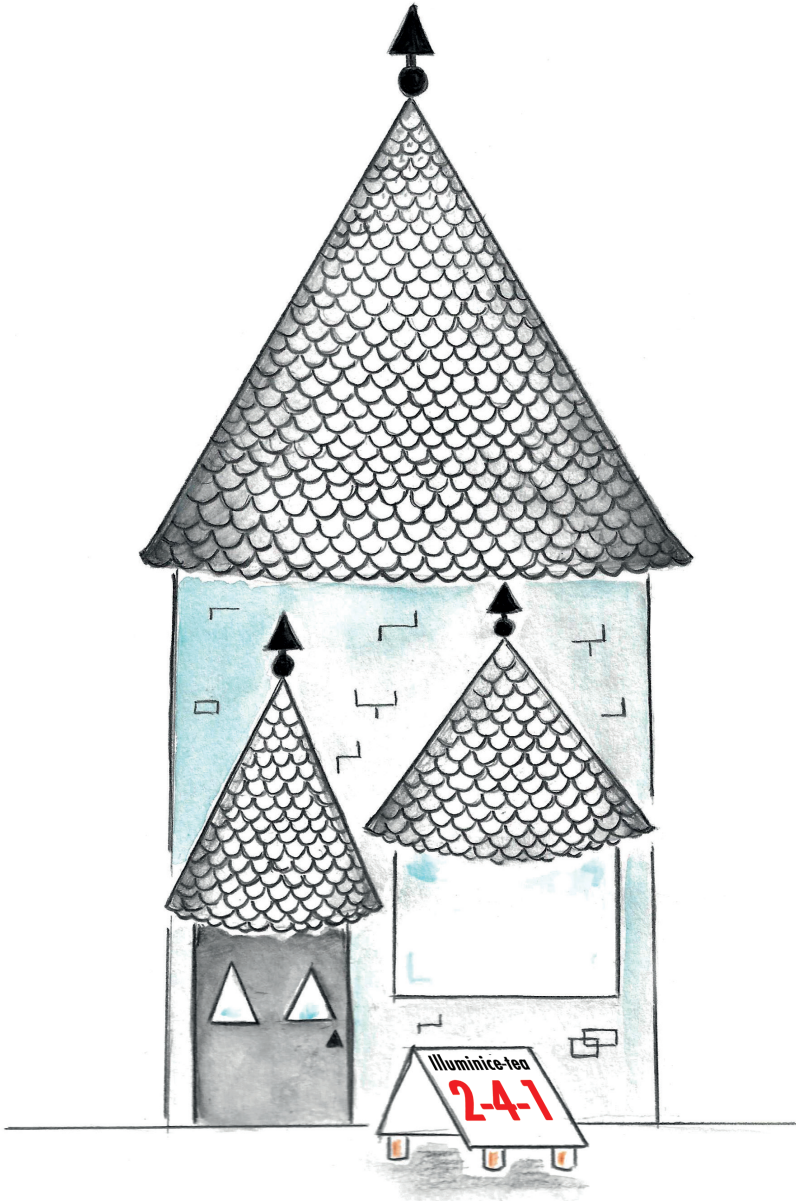
Carl turned to Ringo. "Why don't you come back once Dougie's finished?"

Ringo nodded and made his way to the exit.

Not much conversation was shared after Ringo's departure. Those who remained whispered or communicated behind covered mouths. Eyes glanced sneakily at Dougie and then turned away when he caught their surveillance. The discomfort totally ruined his time in the barber's.

Once finished, Dougie hastily left and walked home. Passing down the main road, a group of rowdy teenagers distracted him as they entered the Tea Bar. The design of the building intrigued Dougie to no end—the dark grey tiles and spiked roof were truly unique, and the intricate designs held a sense of tradition and history.

Admiring the structure, he realised there was nothing the day had to offer—if he returned to his house, he would most likely be disturbed by more uneducated youths. But that stirred a thought. If they bother me all day, why don't I return the favour and see how they like it? I can always go home if things aren't quite my cup of tea. He chuckled to himself as he walked into the Tea Bar.



The interior of the establishment proved just as impressive as the exterior. Fine furniture filled the room. A vintage sofa occupied one side, and spread around were wooden tables and chairs. In the far corner, a rocking chair called Dougie's attention the most.

Thick velvet curtains covered the windows, blocking all natural light. In every corner, tall candleholders supported large candles. Their flickering flames gently illuminated the classy room, producing all the effects of a night-time ambience.

Contrasting the fine decoration, and spoiling the place completely, were the individuals occupying the space. The majority stood half-dressed in ridiculous clothing; ripped jeans, short skirts, and low cut-tops revealed chunks of skin that made Dougie very uncomfortable.

The surprise of his presence in the Tea Bar was depicted on everyone's faces. His company, it seemed, was as well received as a fart in a lift, with most biscuits backing away from him. Yet their hostility and discomfort put a smile on his face; this was exactly why he had come.

He approached a young couple obviously trying their hardest to ignore him. "Excuse me, please tell me what's so great about the tea they serve here?"

"It's revitalising and liberating," a girl in a miniskirt spoke.

Dougie laughed. "Is that why you're wearing so little clothes?!"

A man with ripped jeans stepped forward. "It frees the mind."

Dougie nodded. "So that's why you don't care what you look like!"

"The tea is magical!" the girl claimed. "My friend's knee was sore for years, yet when the Teabags gave him a special cream, it relieved all his pain. Another friend was going bald until he used a shampoo prepared by the Teabags. Now, he has a full head of hair! I'm saving up so they can straighten my crooked nose."

The man lifted his arms. "Well, you know what they say..."

"Whatever the flaw, illuminice-tea has the cure!" the pair shouted in unison.

Dougie shook his head. "What a load of gobbledygook! You guys really are doolally!" He headed to the bar and waited to be served. A plump Teabag in a green sweater approached him.



Dougie leaned on the bar. "One illuminice-tea, please."

"Do you want it with lime, raspberry, or cherry?"

"Just give it to me straight."

Bean took a glass half-filled with ice and placed it under a bar tap. A bright amber liquid flowed out, and once filled, Bean passed him the glass.



Dougie took his drink and sat down on the rocking chair. The only living thing that accompanied him was a vibrant sunflower on the table. Everyone else stayed far away from him like he was a contagious disease.

Standing in the middle of the bar, two biscuits kissed passionately, running their hands up and down each other's bodies. The public show of affection was completely inappropriate. Dougie pointed at them and shouted.



Walking towards him was a teabag smartly dressed in a white shirt, black tie, and with a well-trimmed moustache. "Pardon, *monsieur*, but can you refrain from shouting at le customers?"

Dougie huffed. "Our elders did not fight for our freedom so they could behave so indecently!"

The Teabag nodded. "I completely concur."

Dougie leaned forward. "What's your name?"

"Le Nag Bag. A pleasure to meet you."

Dougie shook his hand and introduced himself. "How do you keep your cool with these uncouth individuals?"

Le Nag Bag closed in so no-one else could hear. "As much as they are a disgrace, they are also my customers. And without customers, I have no business!"

Dougie winked. "I understand you loud and clear!"

Le Nag Bag grinned. "How do you like le tea?"

Dougie looked down and examined his glass, still as full as the moment he bought it. "Honestly, I haven't even tried it yet. I've been too distracted by the circus clowns in here."

"Please, while I am here, try le tea and tell me your honest opinion."

Dougie swirled the brew under his nose. The aroma was truly curious—smoky yet sweet, like a burned fruit tree. He took a large swig and swashed his mouth with the ice-cold beverage. The refreshing taste had him gasping with delight. "Now that is a fine drink!"

Le Nag Bag bowed. "Voila! Hopefully, it will help you get accustomed with le less favourable crowd in here!"

Dougie finished the rest of his drink. "I think you might be right!"

Le Nag bag smiled. "This world is changing by le day, but we can't let juveniles ruin our lives. If they want to act like clowns, then let them provide us with free entertainment! You will never enjoy life if you occupy your time correcting le mistakes of others."

That day turned out to be the first of many for Dougie in the Tea Bar. He returned on a daily basis, and with his grand pal, Le Nag Bag, they would laugh for hours at the many young fools while drinking numerous cups of delicious illuminice-tea. The brew really was magical, capable of converting the offensive teenagers into hilarious jesters.

Dougie was surprised not to see Ringo in the Tea Bar, the scruffy teen would fit in perfectly. But the dreadlocked boy was no longer his concern. All that mattered was Le Nag Bag and his illuminice-tea. Finally, Dougie had found someone he could connect with, someone who understood him and shared his vision, giving him a sense of belonging in the world of madness.



Chapter 3

The last place Dougie expected to see Ringo again was in the jazz section of the music store. The two of them flicked through records when their hands accidentally met.

Dougie stepped back and frowned at Ringo. "Don't tell me you like jazz."

Ringo shrugged. "I'm a party biscuit. I like all music."

"Well, at least there's one good thing about you."

The scruffy teen took a deep breath. "I know we got off on the wrong foot, but I gotta talk to you about Le Nag Bag and illuminice-tea."

Dougie put his hands on his hips. "Go on."



“Someone told me that you're in the Tea Bar a lot lately. I just wanna warn you that Le Nag Bag is a fraud, and that illuminice-tea he serves is awful for your health.”

Dougie huffed. “What do you mean, Le Nag Bag is a fraud?! I'll have you know he's a good friend of mine!”

Ringo raised his hands. “I can guarantee he's only your friend as long as you're drinking illuminice-tea. I've fallen for his tricks before and it nearly killed me. I was so addicted to that drink, I almost lost my mind. It'll make you crazy!”

“And why should I believe you?! You can't even be trusted to brush your hair or dress yourself properly!”

“I'm only trying to help. You don't have to believe me. If you're as clever as Miss. Maggi says you are, then you'll soon figure it out.”

“Aye! I'm clever enough not to take any recommendations from a guy whose hair looks like a bowl of spaghetti!”

Ringo picked up his bag of records and walked out of the store. Dougie shook his head in disbelief and continued to search through the jazz records. The first title he read was 'Think Twice', by 'Dave and the Skunks.' A day full of coincidences, he thought. He placed the record in his bag and went to the cash desk.

Chapter 4

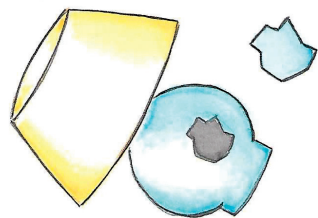
Later that day, Dougie lay on his bed, trying to get some rest. With the Sun at its lowest point, it was the perfect time for sleep, the house finally cooling to a moderate temperature. Yet, as he tried to relax, Ringo's warning about Le Nag Bag had his mind going in circles. How dare the scruffy teen offend his friend?

Unable to lie still, Dougie got up and paced around his bedroom. He decided a bit of music would sooth his mind. He took out one of the new records he bought that day and placed it on the vinyl player.

He had hoped for relaxing jazz, but instead, heavy dance music blared through the speaker. The thumping beat instantly sent his body into a state of shock. His head throbbed with pain and his entire body trembled, so much so that he was incapable of turning off the wretched song. He must have accidentally taken Ringo's music.

All of a sudden, the sound of exploding bombs pounded in his mind. Flashbacks of hellish scenes haunted him—an apparition of a soldier tried to strangle him ... fury burst from the ghost's every expression as his hands grasped at Dougie's neck.

Next, another soldier charged at him with a knife at the ready. Dougie swung his arms and legs wildly in defence. He kicked ornaments and punched the walls, smashing everything within close range.



Finally, an ex comrade lay dying in his arms, holding a wound over his stomach. Beyond saving, the dying man wept his final words. “Was it worth it?” Dougie could only watch as his friend’s life sapped away. His body slowly faded and then disappeared.

The booming music finally came to an end and Dougie collapsed on the floor. He looked around his room, surrounded by the destruction of his outburst. Sharp pains stung in his hands. Blood flowed from his knuckles while bruises and cuts pulsed. Worst of all, his soul had deserted him, leaving a hollow space within his heavy beating heart. The violent reactions had him disgusted with himself.

A deep craving for illuminice-tea suddenly came over him. He scratched his beard and pulled at the hairs as his body filled with another round of rage. Ringo’s words—‘it’ll make you crazy’—kept repeating in his head. Could the teen be right?

Dougie breathed deep, holding back the fury within him. He hated Ringo for his ridiculous music and hair, but if his warning about illuminice-tea was true, then a grand crime was being committed. It was time to test Le Nag Bag’s sincerity and the drink’s potency.

Chapter 5

The following day, Dougie ordered a glass of illuminice-tea in the Tea Bar and made his way over to his usual place in the rocking chair.

Le Nag Bag soon approached in his typical joking form, pointing at a biscuit with ridiculously baggy trousers and an overload of make-up. "Look at le clown's wonderful outfit today!"

Dougie smiled. He swung back and forth in the rocking chair, observing the behaviour of everyone drinking. His glass of illuminice-tea remained untouched on the table.

Le Nag Bag placed a hand on his shoulder. "Is everything okay, my friend?"

Dougie looked at Le Nag Bag directly in his singular eye. "This tea is so fine that it's almost addictive. But you wouldn't make a drink that's harmful, would you?"

Le Nag Bag sniggered and shook his head. "Oh, *monsieur*, I totally comprehend your concern. You are not le first biscuit to interrogate me. I really should put a notice on le bottle ... to inform everybody just how dangerously exquisite it is!"

Dougie laughed. "So, it's not addictive?"

"No no no, *monsieur*. I assure you, this beverage is contrived from le angels."

"And it's not bad for the health?"

"Please, Dougie! Where did you get these terrible ideas? illuminice-tea is medicine for le body and soul. Just look around ... le evidence is on le face of every customer."

Dougie could not deny Le Nag Bag's words. Each biscuit present in the Tea Bar was laughing, smiling, and joking.

Dougie raised his glass of illuminice-tea and saluted Le Nag Bag. "Cheers. To the truth." He then drank the whole contents and slammed his cup on the table. "I didn't think there was anything wrong with it."

With trust restored in Le Nag Bag and illuminice-tea, Dougie returned to the Tea Bar day after day and drink after drink with his grand pal. With so many young clowns entering the establishment, there was never a shortage of entertainment. All the while, illuminice-tea flowed from the barrel like water down a river, along with a large portion of Dougie's savings. Yet, who could put a price on happiness?



Chapter 6

Two weeks of heavy drinking passed before Dougie started to feel extremely sick. His weakened state was clear for all to see as he slammed open the front door in the Tea Bar and clumsily made his entrance.

Coughing and wheezing, he drew concern from all corners, yet while everyone stared at him, no-one shared a word.



He walked past the crowd and collapsed in his rocking chair. "Bring me a large pot of illuminice-tea, please," he called to the bar.

Le Nag Bag soon came with a fresh glass of illuminice-tea. "How are you feeling?"

"Terrible. I woke up with chest pains and a headache, as well as a nasty cough. Everyone's telling me to go see the doctor. What do you think, pal?"

Le Nag Bag shook his finger. "No no no, my friend. Le doctor here is this stupid mademoiselle, not much different from le juveniles that come drinking here. illuminice-tea is all le medicine you need. Let me serve you a special cup of hot tea to improve your condition."

"There's even hot tea for illnesses?!"

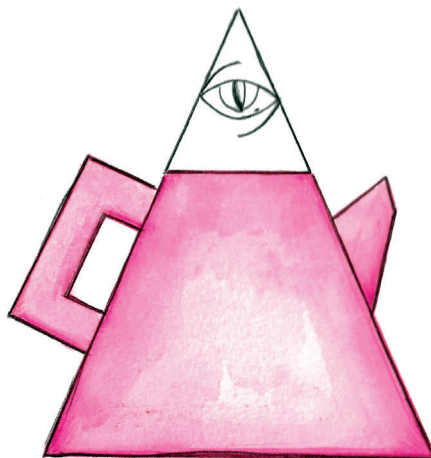
"*Monsieur*, we possess tea for every requirement. Whatever le flaw, illuminice-tea has le cure."

Dougie gasped. "Thanks, buddy. I knew I could count on you."

Le Nag Bag rushed to the bar and soon returned with a marvellous, triangular teapot, full of steaming hot tea.

Dougie took it with two hands. "This looks like it'll do the job! I better let it cool down a bit first, though. Go look after your other customers while I catch my breath. I'll drink this in no time."

Le Nag Bag bowed. "As you command, my friend."



Over the next few days, Dougie drank gallons of tea, hot and cold. Yet, despite Le Nag Bag's best efforts, Dougie's state only got worse. His cough grew deeper, his body turned weaker, and breathing became harder.

Le Nag Bag twiddled his moustache. "I can't comprehend why le medicine is not working!"

Dougie wheezed. "Things are going from bad to worse. pal. Maybe you should take me to the hospital? A second opinion can't hurt."

Le Nag Bag placed a hand on Dougie's shoulder. "No no no, my friend. I will care for you." The Teabag passed Dougie yet another pot of hot tea, but as Dougie took a big swig, he instantly choked, spitting it out and spraying it all over the table.

The onlooking crowd watched in shock as Dougie struggled to breathe. Le Nag Bag quickly called Bean, who came running into action from behind the bar. The two Teabags hoisted him on their shoulders and carried him out the Tea Bar and to his home.

Lying in his bed, Dougie heaved and grabbed Le Nag Bag's arm. "I'm not sure if I'm gonna make it through this night. Maybe, you should send me to the hospital."

Le Nag Bag tutted. "No no no, my friend. Just stay here at home and get some respite. You don't want to pursue le stupid opinions of le juvenile doctor, do you? I will leave you some tea on your bedside table to improve your condition. Bean will arrive with more tomorrow. You can repay me next week."

Dougie coughed and choked. "Thanks, buddy."

"Not a problem. After all, what are friends for?"

The Teabags departed, leaving Dougie all alone as he struggled for breath.

Chapter 7



Ringo knocked multiple times on Dougie's front door, yet there was no response. Miss. Maggi approached from her garden with her zimmer frame.

Ringo waved to her. "Still no sign of Dougie?"

She sighed and shook her head. "I haven't seen or heard of him all week. I'm getting very worried."

"Don't stress yourself too much. Maybe he just needed some time alone. It's definitely what I needed after my experience with illuminice-tea."

"Would you like to come in for a glass of water?"

"I'd love to, but I got an important meeting to get to."
Ringo unfolded a note in his hand and read the message.

'Please attend the Tea Bar at 5pm on Tuesday to receive compensation for your damages suffered from illuminice-tea. We would like to repay you in person.'

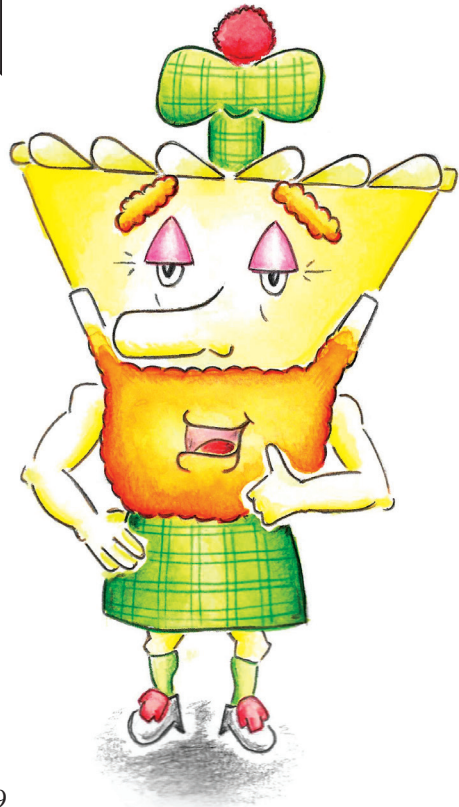
Yours sincerely,

The Teabags.'

Ringo walked to the Tea Bar and paused before entering. He had promised himself never to return, but some unfinished business with the Teabags had forced the occasion, and their note sounded like they were finally coming to his terms.

As he entered the building, he was not surprised to witness the place packed with customers, but at the far end of the bar was a sight that left him awestruck. Looking healthier and happier than ever, Dougie gave Ringo a smile and a thumbs up. He then called out to the entire bar.

“Fine residents of Biscuitville, please gather round as I have a very important announcement to make.”



Half the crowd gave recognition to his call but others looked away, avoiding any contact with the seemingly crazed pensioner.

Dougie continued nevertheless. "I'm sorry for being a grumpy old fart, but this ever changing world has become a little too much for me. I would usually declare an apology by offering you all a decent drink, but I'm afraid to tell you that you won't find one here in the Tea Bar. Don't expect to find an honest friend, either, as that weasel, Le Nag Bag, claimed to be with me. When my health was in terrible condition, his only offering was to help me lift another glass of illuminice-tea, even when it was clearly making me worse."

Suddenly, Dougie had the full attention of the bar. "Lucky for me, I was only pretending to drink illuminice-tea to see what Le Nag Bag's reaction would be. When I appeared at the point of death, he still advised me against going to the hospital. It seems that he's scared of what the doctors might discover about his so-called heavenly drink."

Dougie pointed at the groups of people in the bar. "Let me tell you from personal experience that illuminice-tea is addictive and detrimental to your health. And if you don't believe me, then take a wee look at this poor sunflower."

The old biscuit held into the air a dying plant that barely stood upright, its colour a murky brown from root to tip. "I pretended to drink cup after cup of illuminice-tea at this table. I was actually throwing the brew into this plant pot, thinking it would do no harm. None of you noticed because you were all too busy ignoring me. Look at the poor sunflower now! Does it look like this drink isn't harmful?!"

Angered faces in the crowd looked at the plant and then the beverages in front of them.



Dougie appeared mighty proud of himself. "If any of you think illuminice-tea isn't addictive, I dare you to go a day without it. I nearly lost my mind from the withdrawal symptoms! It'll make you crazy!" He winked at Ringo.

Gasps of shock fell among the biscuits in the Tea Bar.

Dougie raised his glass of illuminice tea. "It's time to free yourselves from this foul brew and the lies of Le Nag Bag!" Then, he turned his glass upside down, pouring the contents onto the floor.

Although no-one joined Dougie in pouring away their tea, the old biscuit looked confident he had given the residents of Biscuitville something to think about.

The pensioner took a bow. "This is the last time you shall see me here. I wish you all the best of health." He then climbed down from the table and walked out of the building.

Ringo accompanied Dougie until the pair were outside. The old man gave Ringo a pat on the back. "I see you got my message! I hope you liked your compensation!"

Ringo held the note for Dougie to see. "So you wrote it! That was freaking awesome!"

Dougie nodded. "Thank you for your advice, young laddie. And sorry for being so rude."

"No worries. We all have our moments!"

"By the way, I like your dreadlocks. I'm just jealous that my bald head doesn't grow hair anymore!"

Ringo laughed. "At least you got a beard! It seems I'm still too young to have hair on my face!"

"Don't worry, it'll come in time. But by then your dreadlocks will be gone and your head will be as bald as mine!"

The two strolled down the road together, and Dougie tentatively put his arm around Ringo's back.

Ringo frowned. "You don't really like my dreadlocks, do you?"

"Not really! But at least I don't judge you for them now! Actually, you look like a set of bagpipes, which I think is just great!"

Dougie's face suddenly turned serious. "How did you discover Le Nag Bag was a lying scoundrel?"

"Come back to my house. I got something to show you that will make your head pop!"



