

探索葉子

DISCOVERING THE LEAF

-Katherine Aplin / Mica Costerousse

Like many of our readers, these two women had a life-changing first encounter with Tea. Katherine and Mica both had amazing introductions to Tea. Their stories resonate with our own, evoking nostalgia for that first sip. They also capture aspects of Tea as medicine that remind of us of what is most important in Tea and life. These stories unfold in a way that will lead any tea lover onward, heart full of inspirational verve...

Katherine:

As the first light of the morning shines itself upon the walls of my tent and the birds begin to sing, I stir quietly. Unprepared for the temperatures that have fallen below freezing each night, the greeting of the sun means relief from the cold that has kept me awake for hours. I welcome its presence, no matter how early. I am in a tented city of women on the sacred land of Montezuma Well in Arizona, gathered to celebrate the Spring Equinox and World Water Day.

Trudging across the dewy grass in moccasins, wrapped in layers and blankets to keep warm, I make my way to a lotus bell tent with a handwritten sign, "The Tea House". Gathered outside on each side of the doorway are piles of shoes: more

moccasins, sandals, and boots, shed before the women wearing them entered. I do the same, then bow down to fit myself in the narrow opening, unsure what will be waiting for me upon my entrance.

Inside the tent, two women are seated on the edges facing inward. Low tables are placed in front of them with a group of women on the other side, perhaps ten in front of each in a half-moon shape. Soft music is playing and the smell of aloeswood incense floats above the steam rising from the bowls filled with piping hot tea. I find an empty space and sit upon the floor of rugs laid on the Earth below. The women drink their bowls in silence, many of them with eyes closed. When each is finished, she places her bowl

back on the table where they are rearranged by the woman pouring; a clean bowl is added to the line for me.

I wait with bated breath as the woman behind the table begins to serve. From the right hand, water makes its journey through the kettle to the side handle pot where it pauses for many seconds to steep. The stillness, the fluidity, the long moments with her eyes shut; she is in no hurry. Then the pot is taken by the other hand and I watch as it becomes an extension of her arm, a vessel held for many moons, a comfort and assuredness that only comes from much time spent together. The liquid leaves its spout like a gentle spring and is poured in rounded figure-eight motions, a bit into each



bowl until there are only drops left for gravity to take down, drip by drip, into the waiting ceramic below. It is a dance like I have never seen before, filled with elegance and stoicism—a proficiency gained from the immersion into a meditative state. When each bowl is filled it is placed in front of a woman, rotated from the center outwards with a twist of the hand and presented as an offering. Then the gesture of welcoming comes; it is time to drink.

I take the bowl in my hands—the deep red liquid inside steaming up into my nostrils. The first sip of tea is startlingly hot, much more so than any liquid I would have prepared for myself. The feeling of the tea going down my throat and into my body is visceral and I follow its

trace as it reaches into my core. The taste is of the Earth, a richness and purity that is foreign yet inviting. Each time the liquid reaches my lips and is taken in, I go deeper, falling into myself without any conscious effort to do so. I feel closer and more connected to the women surrounding me, none of which I have ever met. The liquor of the Leaf fills me and my skin begins to tingle. An immense feeling of gratitude settles in, an emotional weightiness that bubbles up in my throat, bringing tears to my eyes and a smile to my face.

After my inaugural experience, I come back to the tent each morning, my eyes opening easily before dawn, my body craving the warmth, the stillness and the community

of others in silence. Over the next two years, I attend two more gatherings where tea is served by the same women and where I feel the same feeling of homecoming. After the third, in the summer of 2015, the craving to connect with the leaf evolves into something deeper. I travel to Taiwan to visit the Tea Sage Hut, living at the school, seeking to learn how to make tea a part of my daily life. It is there that I meet Wu De and am serendipitously reunited with the first woman who ever served me, a sign I graciously take from the universe that I am on the right path.

Life at the Hut is simple. Moments are filled with laughter, and hugging is a daily requirement. The food we eat is pure, made with

love, passing through many hands before it is eaten. Our meals are sometimes full of words, sometimes silent, but each one overflowing with gratitude. We dance as we clean and we smile as we work. We drink many bowls of tea in silence; we learn; we share. But just as life is filled with both light and darkness, my time at the Hut is not without its discomforts and difficulties: Hours of meditation are overwhelming as my mind resists. My body aches as negative energy manifests itself into the physical, ready to be released. A shifting host of distracted thoughts come and go as they please; I falter but I continue on. And then the rain comes and a small group of us organically appears outside to stand beneath it, craving a cleansing that only the falling water can provide.

All roads that lead to tea are different. As Chajin, we are guided to Her in ways that speak to us uniquely and individually. For many years I searched for a practice, for a way—for something that could both nourish and challenge me. In Tea, I found a friend and an ally to help me along the path of healing. In Tea, I found a guide and a host to bring gracious people into my life. And in tea, most importantly, I found a teacher.

一位老朋友



Katherine in bliss...