

THE CHESTERTOWN TEA SHOPPE by Keith Thompson

CHARACTERS

SHOPKEEPER: Male. Cool, calm, unflappable, resourceful and a bit of a smart aleck.

CUSTOMER: Male. Upper class, a bit arrogant, easily angered, and somewhat oblivious.

PATRIOT #1: Male. In a position of strength but friendly and not really threatening. The more talkative of the two Patriots

PATRIOT #2. Male. Slightly more threatening but much quieter of the two Patriots.

DELIVERYMAN. Male. Concerned, loyal, and sympathetic toward the Shopkeeper.

SETTING

May 1774 in a tea shop on the shore of the Chester River in Chestertown. There will be a sign reading "Chestertown Tea Shoppe" at the front of the stage depicting the sign next to the entrance. There will need to be a way to replace the word "Tea" with the word "Coffee" at one point and whether its done by nailing on the word over the old one, or scratching it out and writing over it, or painting over it, etc. is up to the director. The most important thing on stage is something like a counter that the Shopkeeper will stand behind and there should be easy access to the backstage area where it is implied the storage area is located. Also, the Deliveryman will carry a couple of crates on stage. All of the actors will be dressed in colonial garb, but the Customer's garb should be a bit more formal and upper class.

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(SHOPKEEPER is standing behind the counter and DELIVERYMAN walks in carrying a crate. SHOPKEEPER looks up and addresses him)

SHOPKEEPER

Good morning. Go ahead and set it down on the counter. I'll take care of it.

(DELIVERYMAN sets crate down on the counter and addresses SHOPKEEPER)

DELIVERYMAN

Have you heard the news?

SHOPKEEPER

What news?

DELIVERYMAN

News that will make you close down your shop.

SHOPKEEPER

What do you mean?

DELIVERYMAN

Well, they just read the Chestertown Resolves and now the buying and selling of tea is prohibited.

SHOPKEEPER

Whoa, that is big news. I knew those Tea Partiers were up to no good. Well, the law shouldn't go into effect immediately so I would think I would have time to clear out my storeroom. Folks will want to stock up and I can do a clearance sale before I find a new business plan, or before the law gets repealed.

DELIVERYMAN

I don't know about that. Some of those anti-tax demonstrators are already raiding the Geddes out in the Chester looking for tea. They're threatening to throw it overboard.

SHOPKEEPER

Well in that case I need to place an order.

(SHOPKEEPER starts frantically writing down something on a sheet of paper and hands it to DELIVERYMAN)

SHOPKEEPER

Please get this order delivered as fast as you can.

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DELIVERYMAN

Will do, sir!

(DELIVERYMAN exits the stage while SHOPKEEPER picks up the crate from the counter and carries it backstage. He returns to the stage when the two PATRIOTS suddenly burst into the shop with their muskets pointed at the SHOPKEEPER who raises up his hands. The PATRIOTS authoritatively addresses the SHOPKEEPER)

PATRIOT #1

My good sir, the Chestertown Resolves have been read and posted, and it is now illegal to sell or purchase tea in this town!

PATRIOT #2

We have been authorized by the mayor to confiscate all of your tea and toss it in the Chester!

SHOPKEEPER

(resigned) Yes, I have been reading the tea leaves lately and I have been expecting a visit from you rascals. Do your worst!

PATRIOT #1

(now cordial) Relax, and put down your hands...

(SHOPKEEPER relaxes and puts down his arms)

PATRIOT #1

(continuing)...and remember this is not personal, it's only that we have a job to do. Where's your tea?

SHOPKEEPER

(pointing backstage) Oh, it's in the storeroom. And you can just toss it off the dock.

PATRIOT #1

Thank you good sir.

(Both patriots shake SHOPKEEPER's hand before walking backstage. SHOPKEEPER remains standing behind the counter and after a few moments, the CUSTOMER walks in. SHOPKEEPER addresses CUSTOMER).

SHOPKEEPER

Welcome to the Chestertown Tea Shoppe. How may I help you?

CUSTOMER

I would like to buy some tea.

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SHOPKEEPER

I guess you haven't heard.

CUSTOMER

Heard what?

SHOPKEEPER

That's it's now...uh, never mind. What kind of tea would you like, sir?

CUSTOMER

What kind of tea do you have?

SHOPKEEPER

All kinds sir, the Chestertown Tea Shoppe prides itself on carrying every kind of tea imaginable, from every corner of the globe, and all imported directly from England.

CUSTOMER

Then I'll have some Earl Grey.

SHOPKEEPER

Coming right up!

(SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and hears a water splash, then heads back to the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

Not anymore sir!

CUSTOMER

Fine, then I'll have some Darjeeling Oolong.

SHOPKEEPER

In a jiffy

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and hears a water splash, then heads back to the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

I'm sorry sir, I'm afraid we are now out.

CUSTOMER

What the devil is going on here!

SHOPKEEPER

Well, didn't you hear?

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CUSTOMER

Hear what?

SHOPKEEPER

I guess you really haven't heard...

CUSTOMER

I haven't heard anything, all I want to do is to purchase some tea. So no Earl Grey?

SHOPKEEPER

No.

CUSTOMER

And no Darjeeling Oolong

SHOPKEEPER

No, not anymore.

CUSTOMER

Well, how about some Nepalese Black Tea.

SHOPKEEPER

Let me check!

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear a water splash and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

All gone, sir.

CUSTOMER

All right then, some Longjing Green Tea.

SHOPKEEPER

O.K., we have some.

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear a water splash and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

Well, we had some and now we don't!

CUSTOMER

Not my favorite anyway...how about some Russian Caravan

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SHOPKEEPER

Oh, good choice sir. The czar will be pleased...let me see if there's some in the other corner...

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear a water splash and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

Darn, just missed it. The Czar won't be pleased.

CUSTOMER

(agitated) Can you tell me what in the blazes is going on here?

SHOPKEEPER

You mean, you really haven't heard?

CUSTOMER

No.

SHOPKEEPER

Well after the reading of the Chestertown Resolves, the buying and selling of tea is now illegal and my stock is being tossed into the Chester as we speak. I figure that for the next few weeks, the crabs will have enough caffeine in them to keep you awake all night after dinner.

CUSTOMER

Those bloody tax protestors! Getting into everyone's business. *(getting angrier)* I'm a taxpayer and I demand to have my tea!

(Customer pounds his fist on the counter, then pauses and turns pragmatic)

CUSTOMER

Sounds like I need to stock up. Now quickly lad, do you have any Darjeeling Black Tea?

SHOPKEEPER

I'll look.

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear a water splash and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

No, apparently Darjeeling is no longer on the map.

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CUSTOMER

Then some English breakfast tea.

SHOPKEEPER

That's my biggest seller. I should have plenty of that in stock.

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear water splash several times and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

Well, they made quick work of that. Even tossed in my portrait of King George.

CUSTOMER

Well, how about some Irish Breakfast Tea, or Jasmine Tea?

SHOPKEEPER

I can look.

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear two water splashes and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

All gone, just like my business.

CUSTOMER

Well how about some white teas? Darjeeling White, Ceylon White, Bai Hao Yinzen, White Monkey Paw...you must have some of that hidden away where they can't find it?

SHOPKEEPER

You may be right!

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear a water splash and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

Or then again, you may be wrong.

CUSTOMER

Or some of that fermented Pu-erh, they may think its compost.

SHOPKEEPER

Good thinking.

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear a water splash and he walks back behind the counter)

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SHOPKEEPER

They're very thorough, they even threw out my compost.

(at this point there is a rapid fire exchange as we'll hear splashes while SHOPKEEPER is still behind the counter...)

CUSTOMER

I wonder if you have some Turkish Tea?

(splash)

SHOPKEEPER

No!

CUSTOMER

Red Tea?

(splash)

SHOPKEEPER

No!

CUSTOMER

Orange Pekoe?

(splash)

SHOPKEEPER

No!

CUSTOMER

Assam?

(splash)

SHOPKEEPER

No!

CUSTOMER

Edam?

SHOPKEEPER

That's not a tea....that's a cheese, sir.

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CUSTOMER

Sorry, I just got hungry...Thai Oolong?

SHOPKEEPER

Worth a look.

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear a water splash several times and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

Nope, they cleaned me out.

CUSTOMER

How about some Japanese green tea like Gyokuro, Sencha, or even Bancha?

SHOPKEEPER

Just got some of that in a few minutes ago. It's still in the crate.

(again SHOPKEEPER begins to head backstage and we hear an even louder water splash and he walks back behind the counter)

SHOPKEEPER

They just threw in the entire crate.

CUSTOMER

Well I hate to ask, but do you have any tea behind the counter?

SHOPKEEPER

Of course, I have my own personal stash of Junshan Yinzen.

CUSTOMER

Ah yes, a yellow tea. One of my personal favorites.

(As SHOPKEEPER starts to bend down to reach under the counter, PATRIOT #1 rushes onto the stage and quickly grabs the tea from SHOPKEEPER, then runs off stage and we hear a water splash)

CUSTOMER

Do you have any tea at all?

(Both Patriots walk back on the stage. SHOPKEEPER addresses them)

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SHOPKEEPER

Do I have any tea left?

PATRIOT #1

No, it has all been tossed in the Chester.

SHOPKEEPER

Oh, wait a second...*(he reaches into the pocket of his vest and pulls out a small jar)*, I do have this jar of instant that I keep for emergencies. *(he hands it to PATRIOT #1)*. Do you need to confiscate this?

(PATRIOT #1 sniffs the jar and recoils, Hands jar back to SHOPKEEPER)

PATRIOT #1

No, you keep it.

SHOPKEEPER

(addressing CUSTOMER) Do you want it?

(Shopkeeper holds it out under the nose of CUSTOMER who sniffs it and recoils)

CUSTOMER

No thank you.

(SHOPKEEPER puts the jar back in his vest pocket while DELIVERYMAN enters the stage carrying a crate. SHOPKEEPER addresses DELIVERYMAN)

SHOPKEEPER

Oh, you're just in time. *(points backstage)*. Please drop this off in the storeroom

(DELIVERYMAN carries the crate backstage while PATRIOT #1 walks up to shake SHOPKEEPER's hand)

PATRIOT #1

Well our work is done here, we must go.

(PATRIOT #1 walks away and PATRIOT #2 walks up to shake SHOPKEEPER's hand)

PATRIOT #2

Good luck to you, sir.

(Patriots exit the stage while DELIVERYMAN returns from backstage minus the crate. STOREKEEPER addresses DELIVERYMAN).

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SHOPKEEPER

Thank you, and here's a little something for your prompt delivery.

(SHOPKEEPER reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a couple of bills and hands them to DELIVERYMAN. They shake hands and DELIVERYMAN walks off stage counting his money. SHOPKEEPER addresses CUSTOMER)

SHOPKEEPER

Pardon me.

(While CUSTOMER curiously watches, SHOPKEEPER now walks to the front of the stage, as if he's out of the front door of his shop. He goes to the sign and removes the word "Tea" and adds the word "Coffee". He then walks back into the shop and addresses CUSTOMER).

SHOPKEEPER

Welcome to the Chestertown Coffee Shoppe, how may I help you?

CUSTOMER

Imagine that, this was a tea shop when I walked in here.

SHOPKEEPER

Well its amazing how fast tea party politics works. I've had to diversify. This is now a coffee shop. May I interest you in some coffee?

CUSTOMER

What is coffee?

SHOPKEEPER

It comes from the coffee bean. You grind them up, percolate hot water through it for a beverage.

(Suddenly the Patriots rush onto stage and point at SHOPKEEPER)

PATRIOT #1

This sounds like tea!

PATRIOT #2

This sounds like tea to me too!

SHOPKEEPER

No, coffee is stronger than tea.

PATRIOT #1

Is it stronger than rum?

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SHOPKEEPER

No, it's not that strong! *(pause)* Anyway, it's imported directly from the island of Java and not from England and therefore is not subject to the Tea Tax,

PATRIOT #1

O.K. sir, have a nice day.

(The Patriots exit the stage).

SHOPKEEPER

Where was I? *(pause)* Oh, yes. Coffee is a hot beverage derived from the coffee bean and destined to become the hot breakfast beverage of choice here in the colonies now that tea is no longer legal. Would you care to try some?

CUSTOMER

Oh, I don't know...

SHOPKEEPER

(continuing sales pitch) And here at the Chestertown Coffee Shop, we offer every imaginable type of coffee. We have regular, decaf, half caffeinated, Columbian, Kona, hazelnut, French vanilla, mocha, cappuccino, mochaccino, frappes, frappuccino, frappuccino mocha, lattes, and even iced coffee.

CUSTOMER

All right, I'll try one.

SHOPKEEPER

What kind would you like sir?

CUSTOMER

Just a regular coffee.

SHOPKEEPER

Sugar?

CUSTOMER

No thank you.

SHOPKEEPER

Cream?

CUSTOMER

No thank you please, I'm lactose intolerant.

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SHOPKEEPER

What size?

CUSTOMER

A large, please.

SHOPKEEPER

O.K. one Venti coffee, black, coming up!

*(SHOPKEEPER walks from behind the counter into the storage room backstage.
Lights dim)*

THE END