

Little Miss Muffet is not on her Tuffet

Sophia Muffett was a bit difficult. Not because she led a privileged life, which she did, but because she had a most peculiar attitude for a child. When the call came in that a young girl of 8 was missing from her tuffet, the dispatcher radioed the Amber Alert to the officers who would respond. It fell to Roland McDonald and his partner Prins Charming. This would not be their first visit to the Muffett residence; just the first one where little Miss Sophia Muffett was not the one placing the distress call.

McDonald was a total clown. He felt he was great at relating to children. Most children over age 4 were light years ahead of his special version of humor and were a bit put off by his overly rosy nose. When he was off duty he liked to drive about town in a tiny, silly car sporting very large red shoes. It made controlling the car a bit difficult, but they made the outfit. The shoes and his past history of infusing his cokes with rum had led to the demise of more than one mailbox.

Locals were well aware that he was the current sponsor for Santa Clause at the weekly AA meetings. The meetings were held at Eve's Garden of Eden.. Eve's was a large children's garden she had put in a few thousand years ago. Originally it was for all the children she had as a result of in vitro fertilization. A process so successful, it was hard to find anyone in town who was not related to her or one of her many offspring. This open air venue made the entire privacy angle impossible to manage.

Some of the AA members had lobbied for a different location, but the convenience for parents who attended and the handy daycare properties of the neighborhood park kept it at the top of the list.

When they pulled up at the Muffett house, McDonald was prepared to hear Miss Sophia's latest grievance and was surprised when her mother

answered the door in the early stages of panic. After calming her down, she managed to express that her precocious young daughter and aspiring civil rights attorney had been out back on her tuffet eating an afternoon snack of curds and whey when she disappeared.

Officer McDonald was awkwardly silent. He did not find communication with adults as comfortable as children. He often sat next to Ms. Muffett at the weekly meetings imagining her to be as attracted to him as he was to her. She thought he was a buffoon, but he always saved her a seat, which she accepted because she could clearly watch Sophia at the park.

Prins jumped in and began to ask the first two most obvious questions he needed answered to start solving the case. What exactly is a tuffet? And what child willingly eats curds and whey as an afternoon snack? Her mother pointed breathlessly to a small velvet covered stool parked under a shade tree in the back yard. Lying next to the stool was a half eaten bowl of the alleged snack, now crawling with ants.

On closer inspection the tiny insects were sporting military style boots and marching in pairs. Previous experience with this particular colony led Officer Charming to warn the tiny second ant to look up from tying her boots just in time to avoid being mowed over by Sophia's well-heeled grandfather Paddy Whack. He was just rolling home from work at the Knick Knack Second Hand and Antique Emporium.

McDonald remembered the last time young Sophia had called in announcing attempted murder charges against her mother after she had tried to get her daughter to drink a glass of milk. He asked if Sophia had overcome her milk allergy. Her mother shrugged but added that Sophia had gone on line and found a homeopathic product for dealing with it and had decided to attempt to eat the curds and whey as a test. She had asked her mother to keep an eye out and the epi-pen at the ready. One minute

she was there and the next time she looked out the bowl was tossed into the yard and the tuffet was unoccupied.

Neither officer was comfortable saying tuffet and inserted the word stool, into the report. Closer inspection by officer Charming was followed by a girlish shriek and the exclamation that they were standing in a nest of tiny, brown recluse spiders. All three leaped backwards and started to jump about and shake the hatchlings off before they reached any exposed skin.

A tiny laugh was cascading down from a nearby tree and a spider, once heralded as a wordsmith, moved to the edge of her web abandoning a freshly caught cricket. The cricket was dressed out in a tux and top hat and was muttering that he was too young to die, having expressed a desire to live beyond the age of 100. He may not have been a fool thought the spider to herself, but he certainly hopped right into her web. He had been practicing a catchy little song and dance number about paying attention. Irony she thought as she moved down to eaves drop on the conversation.

She asked if the officers were looking for the bossy little girl that had been sitting there earlier that afternoon. They confirmed it was the nature of the visit. They asked if she may have been frightened away by the spiders. The large black spider said that the nest of spiders had been undiscovered by the girl because they had not yet started crawling. Miss Muffett had been sitting there arguing with the mature spider about the virtues of a vegan/vegetarian diet and how barbaric she found the practice of eating other creatures when the clever little cricket had tripped into the web.

The spider's unwillingness to release the Cricket and honor his demands to be freed and addressed by his proper name had agitated Sophia. Miss

Muffett was arguing rights which inspired the cricket until she informed the cricket she worked on the "big picture" scale and individual cases were not her special interest. She did however find the screaming and kicking unpleasant. When the spider refused to cease wrapping him up and release him, she tossed her bowl to the ground and marched haughtily off through the garden gate.

McDonald was familiar with the spider, as she had once been on his uncles farm, romantically linked to a small pig. Rumor had it that when the relationship soured the spider faked her death at the fair and relocated. The pig, had put on a great deal of weight while enjoying the leisurely life of traveling around taking credit for Charlotte's web spinning of hyperbole. Eventually his fame and funding subsided and he had an ill-fated run in with the Spratts that he met at a local market. Jack Spratt was the first to tout the benefits of a lean diet, while his wife consumed all that Jack avoided. So no evidence of the pigs existence remained.

McDonald wondered if she still kept in touch with his cousin named Fern who had befriended the pig and the spider as a young girl. The prevailing opinion as to who was actually the mind behind the statements in the web had been originally considered to be the pig. It was not until after the relationship tanked that the spider was discovered to be the brainchild of the web novels. Spiders were generally solitary and often found smashed flat by house slippers.

When asked if she knew the whereabouts of Sophia, she suggested they search at the East of Eden Children's Garden. She often went there to swing and form snooty opinions about the activities of locals when her mother was sleeping off her morning Irish Coffees. They thanked her and assured Sophia's mother that they would return with the little girl.

One might think it odd that a young child could move about so freely without parental intervention if they had not just finished questioning a spider about what led to the disappearance. Officer McDonald was nodding goodbye when he realized he had smashed the ants in platoon eight when he turned to exit the gate they were attempting to shut.

As they rolled up to the park they saw the fussy little miss swinging rigidly and talking to herself. She cast a quick glance, then returned to her private soliloquy. She resisted their pleas to go home, and she began to rant about the afternoons events. They assured her that she was entitled to her opinions, but her mother was worried and they were charged with her safe return. If she would just consent to going home and putting away her little stool she could return to the park when they finished the report.

Both found the practice of eating flesh to be controversial, but were far from embracing the practice of vegetarianism. McDonald had a part time job hawking burgers for a local restaurant and Charming suffered from diverticulitis which limited his ability to eat certain vegetables.

Sophia consented and began to clamber into the driver's seat of the patrol car. When informed that she was not going to be allowed to take the wheel she stamped her little black patent leather shoe on the sidewalk. Her knowledge of McDonald's past history with mailboxes and meeting attendance had shaken her confidence in his ability to drive. The final agreement was that they would follow her slowly as she walked home. By the time they reached the gate, the ants had buried the dead, the elderly cricket had been silenced and Sophia's mother had dressed for the meeting scheduled later that evening.

Sophia demanded a copy of the final report which she fully intended to edit and resubmit, making notes of any civil liberty infractions. She was detailing the gruesome habits of certain spiders and reporting police

brutality, in the death of the ant by the gate, when the officers pulled out of the driveway. Busily marking through the word stool and re-inserting the word tuffet she was unaware that the baby spiders had matured enough to seek a target and with Charlotte's guidance they were moving steadily up her fancy little lace socks.

The spider hummed softly to herself and prepared to feast and enjoy the upcoming theatrical display. She considered her next move and started making plans to relocate to the water spout after dinner. A move she might have thought twice about if she had listened to the most recent weather broadcast calling for *very heavy* rain.

Never the End...