

## The Kettle

In truth, the pot never called the kettle black. It never spoke to the kettle directly. Nor did any of the pots, but every time the kettle whistled, they expressed their disgust by turning slightly toward one another, shifting a handle up, or rattling their disapproval. None of them liked the kettle. It had a soft black finish, like charcoal, and a very queer asymmetrical handle, white plastic with maddening black lines that came in varying widths and ran in different directions. It had been designed by some prestigious Swedish artist whose name nobody knew how to pronounce. It was supposed to look very modern and dramatic, but everybody knows pots and kettles are for cooking in, not for looking at, and the pots liked to jeer at it. They ridiculed it with rattles and bumps. They muttered behind its back. They scoffed and they tittered, and sometimes, next to it on the stove, they gleefully splattered the kettle with grease. They could all tell from the lines on its handle and the way its spout stuck out, calling attention to itself, that the kettle considered itself more important than the others. And then there was the matter of its whistle, the way it screamed when it boiled and got louder and louder until the man came to turn it off—as though the kettle believed the man existed to serve it, and not the other way around. The very idea of the whistle outraged them. Besides, to add insult to injury, the kettle had been given to him by the woman.

That the woman never came around anymore changed nothing. They knew all about it, knew how the kettle had been bought at an expensive store and wrapped up in December with pretty paper and a ribbon, and had been presented along with some extra-large mugs and loose luxury tea leaves. The pots knew all about it, how the man and woman had eaten the stuffed chicken breasts and the apricot couscous and finished the bottle of red wine, and the pleasure they'd had. The pots told themselves it didn't matter, that they were more important because the man had bought them himself, with money that he earned those nights he came home too late and too tired to cook. They were capable of cooking so many things, soup

and fried rice and pasta and chocolate mousse, but the kettle was only good for boiling water, something any one of them could have done.

They couldn't forget, though, that night the woman had brought the kettle, the meal and the wine and the candles she lit around the house, and the way the man sang to himself after she left. They despised the kettle, but secretly they envied it, even though the woman had been gone for many months now, even though the pretty box had been thrown away and the man cooked more simply these days and had stopped singing softly in the kitchen. They were beginning to tire of mocking the kettle. They wished they had a sweeter way to pass the time.

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