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My Big Pot

Ariane Lodkochnikov

**FOR A LONG TIME,** I cooked little meals in little pots, the smallest meals that would fill me up, cooked in the smallest pots that would do the job. I was often wrong about how small a meal would fill me up and how small a pot would do the job, and when I was wrong, things would boil over and make a mess of the stove, or while adding ingredients I would reach a point where the next ingredient wouldn't fit in the pot and I would have to transfer the whole hot concoction to a larger pot, or when I'd finished eating the little meal I'd made, the pot would be empty, but I wouldn't be full. Why did I persist in that folly, always making little meals in little pots? I was reacting against my mother's cauldron.

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Ariane's big pot, from above, at an angle

## My Big Pot

Ariane Lodkochnikov

**FOR A LONG TIME,** I cooked little meals in little pots, the smallest meals that would fill me up, cooked in the smallest pots that would do the job. I was often wrong about how small a meal would fill me up and how small a pot would do the job, and when I was wrong, things would boil over and make a mess of the stove, or while adding ingredients I would reach a point where the next ingredient wouldn't fit in the pot and I would have to transfer the whole hot concoction to a larger pot, or when I'd finished eating the little meal I'd made, the pot would be empty, but I wouldn't be full. Why did I persist in that folly, always making little meals in little pots? I was reacting against my mother's cauldron.

It was an enormous pot that looked like a prop from the witches' scene in *Macbeth*. She had other pots, but only that one would do for chowder. She would have had an easier time with another pot, because the cauldron was really too heavy for her to handle, but she wouldn't use anything else. I thought that cauldron made us look like peasants and made her look like a witch. I wanted her to get rid of

it or disguise it as a planter.

I couldn't manage to tell her any of that directly, of course, so I tried to be subtle. One day when she was making chowder I asked, "Ma, why don't you use a smaller pot?"

You see how subtle I could be in those days. She looked at me with her brows knit and said, "A smaller pot?"

"Yeah." I said. "You wouldn't have to struggle

# My Big Pot

(continued)

with it the way you do with this thing.”

“I couldn’t use a smaller pot,” she said, as if the idea were preposterous.

“You could,” I said. “Look at all the chowder in there. That’s more chowder than we can eat. Lots more.”

She put her hands on her hips and shook her head, and she smiled the indulgent smile of a mother who sees that her daughter has a lot to learn. “You’ve got a lot to learn,” she said.

“Maaa!” I said, and I frowned the impatient frown of a daughter who is convinced that her mother has nothing to teach her.

“Look,” she said. “You see how much extra chowder there is in this cauldron?”

“I sure do.”

“That has to be there. There has to be some extra, just in case.”

“In case what?”

“In case your father comes home extra hungry, or in case cooking the chowder makes me extra hungry, or in case company drops in.”

“Oh, sure,” I said. “In all the years that I’ve been living here, no one has ever dropped in.”

“But someone might,” she said. “Someone might. You’ve got to have extra, because you never know what might happen, and you never know who might come along.”

“Oh, Ma,” I said, and, in effect, I went on saying it for years by cooking small meals in

small pots. It was a way of telling my mother that she was wrong, or that I thought she was wrong.

Eventually, after my mother died, I began to see that I had been the one who was wrong. Small pots will do for the cook who wants no surprises, who wants to keep things under tight control, who will entertain no guests who weren’t invited, but another kind of cook keeps the door open, welcomes guests and welcomes surprises, and that kind of cook needs a pot like my mother’s cauldron. When I realized all that, I understood that my attitude toward my mother’s cauldron and her overabundant batches of chowder had diminished me. I had become as small as my meager meals.

I hung my little pots on the wall, and I went out and bought the biggest soup kettle I could find. It isn’t as big as my mother’s cauldron was, but it’s big enough so that when I make chowder now there’s always extra.

My mother’s example taught me another thing about big chowder: it’s no use wishing for someone new and interesting to drop in unexpectedly and make the extra chowder necessary; wishing won’t make it so. So, whenever the urge to make a batch comes upon me, I send out invitations, and I add “bring a friend.” I never know who might come along,

Near right: Ariane’s big pot, from above, with lid

Far right: Ariane’s big pot, from directly above

“I am large, I contain multitudes.”  
Walt Whitman,  
*Song of Myself*

“A good chowder is a big chowder, so make extra, just in case.”  
My Mother

