

THE TEA KETTLE CHRONICLE

CHAPTER 1. TEMPEST IN A TEA KETTLE - by Minda Stephens

She threw away the tea kettle on the day they broke up. It was the tea kettle that had a quarter-sized chip on the white enamel finish. The chip had happened when she had asked him to stir the spaghetti sauce and he grudgingly left his spot on the couch plodded his way over to the stove, reached up to the cabinet above the stove and accidentally dropped the jar of oregano. The jar of oregano landed first on the tea kettle, chipping it, then in the spaghetti sauce, causing the molten brew to splash and sputter all over the stove and all over him. A few drops had landed on his face and one almost hit his eye. Missing his eye it singed his eyelid and he acted like his hair was on fire. She remembered this because she had been getting ready to go to her night class at that moment and she was beginning to get exasperated because she had gone to the store on the way home from work, and had made the spaghetti, and the spaghetti sauce, and the salad, and the faster than fast cheesecake recipe retrieved from an old issue of Family Circle magazine she had found in the waiting room of her doctor's office the week before. She remembered all this because she was a multitasker - and a woman.

While she dabbed ice cubes wrapped in a wash clothes on his eyelid, she wondered if he would ever be able to help her with little things like meal preparation, but she overlooked it because the relationship was new and she figured that this was just a freak accident. As for the tea kettle - she had saved up to buy that tea kettle and deliberated over it at the Pine Castle Wal-Mart for quite a while during a time in her life when twenty-five dollars for a tea kettle was an extravagance.

She had wanted a white enamel one that whistled when the water boiled. She wanted the whistle to remind her to turn off the burner because she understood herself enough to know that this feature would keep in check her tendency to forget when the stove was on and inadvertently start a house fire.

Looking at the chip on the tea kettle, a chip she had viewed through ten years of marriage, she tossed the tea kettle into the trash with the gusto of one who is casting away a bad dream. Her hips swayed from side to side in a victorious swagger as she strode away from the trash can with confidence. Then she stopped. Many a cup of tea had been shared from that tea kettle - not just with him, with other people, with loved ones. Tea mixed with tears and teasing, treasures and tragedy.

In an instant she changed her mind, pivoted around, retrieved the tea kettle from the trash, placed it in her charity donations box and set the box in the car. It wasn't that the tea kettle was not working. The point of the matter *was* that it was a white enamel tea kettle, the kind that whistles when the water boils with a chip that reminded her every day of his lack of understanding- of her, of himself, of the relationship, of the phenomenon of cause-and-effect. The chip, the flaw, was a constant reminder of how many things she had overlooked, little, tiny, teeny-weeny, minute, seemingly insignificant details that added up to ONE GREAT BIG FREAKIN' CHIP on the tea kettle and on her shoulder!

She dropped off the donation box at the Salvation Army and in very little time she was on her way to buy a new tea kettle. She ended up at the kitchenware's department of Macy's where she stood in scented air-conditioned comfort while pleasant renditions of 1970's music played in

the background. The new tea kettle was a solid, stainless steel copper-bottomed whistling beauty. This one would remind her of a new life.

Meanwhile, the chipped white enamel tea kettle sat in the donations bin at the Salvation Army and eventually ended up on the shelf there where it was purchased by a man who was starting out on his own after twenty-five years of two marriages and three kids. He had left his first wife after twenty years, and in less than a year married his second, trophy wife. The former was kind and he had fathered two sons with her, the latter was sexy and had produced one daughter, after which the second wife had left him when a shyster Ponzi investor had caused him to lose his 401K and his retirement. Then, after five more years of struggling along, came the lay-off from his corporate job with which he had supported all the kids and both wives.

Never one to whine, he decided to start up his own motorcycle repair shop and within six weeks he had obtained three major accounts. His long days and nights of work gave him a desire to make coffee while on the job, and he found himself for the first time in his life shopping at the Salvation Army resale store. He looked at the shelves and found a single hotplate. Then his eyes fell upon the tea kettle. *This thing's perfect*, he thought, *it's got a chip on the side, but who cares?*

His daughter from the second marriage was visiting the shop one weekend and decided to learn about motorcycle mechanics. At ten she was at the perfect age to memorize details about auto and motorcycle parts, models and name brands. Of course, she adored her dad and she loved the moments he made a cup of coffee for both of them on the mornings of her visitation weekends. These were their special times, when they shared a hot cup of motorcycle

mechanic “café con leche” served with the guava pastries Dad would buy from the Spanish market next door.

The tea kettle stayed in the shop for years, until her dad had passed away. By that time she owned an auto parts store and a shop of her own as well as a mountain cabin that she and her husband shared with their two young children. When it came time to disassemble her dad’s shop, she found the white enamel tea kettle with the chip on the side, the one that whistled when the water boiled.

She reverently took it and wrapped it up, then put it in a box to use it at their mountain cabin where her kids would remember that it had belonged to Grandpa...chip and whistle and all.

For chapter 2 see the website of author Dave Lapham at www.davelapham.com.