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FATHER'S KITCHEN

By Elisabeth Kuhn

In some way it had always been my father's
kitchen. Even when I was in my teens
he'd walk in, sit in his chair and ask our mother
or whichever daughter was there to make

coffee. "Why don't you make it yourself?" I'd ask,
and he'd blow up. He was working to pay for all this,
he said; the least we could do was make him coffee
and play violin for him (he paid for those lessons too).

Now he makes coffee for us when we visit,
cooks lunch and dinner. The kitchen's all his.
Most things are where they've always been,
though he's added a bookcase by his chair,

next to the kitchen table, with *Reader's Digest*,
medical journals, letters, and books on his favorite
composers. On top, the program guide for the
classical music station, the radio, and pictures

of mother and him, and all of us. He's also put
plates and bins with cutlery by the window,
where he likes to chop herbs he's plucked
from the garden (dandelion flowers and leaves,

lemon verbena, parsley, *Boretsch*, and sage).
I can hear his radio blasting concertos and operas
from my room upstairs. When I enter the kitchen,
he tells me herbs have more vitamins

and minerals than the rest of our lunch
taken together. And he goes on, as he chops
and mixes ("You do like onions and garlic
in your salad, don't you?"), to lecture me

on the health benefits of the smelly bulbs
(which I know by heart), and about his years
as a student in medical school, when, he says,
his professors were stunned by his near-perfect

memory, about the war and the years he worked
in hospitals at the various places we'd lived,
and why we'd moved. I've heard it all before
but I listen as he moves in his green wax-

cloth apron to chop carrots and leeks.
"Would you like coffee?" he asks, then:
"You should put on an apron, so it won't drip
on your blouse. How about cheesecake?"

We still have some left from Sunday. It's good.
"What else can I make you?" We sit in our old
seats. He's at the head, I'm at the opposite end.
Between us would have been mother,

and my brother and sisters, who live out of town.
Above us the neon lamp buzzes. I can see dark
specks in the brightly lit shade (dead flies--
someone should clean it sometime). And we eat.