On Share and Share Alike

When I was in college, we had a porter in our fraternity house. His name was Art Simpson. Art was a five foot three inch skinny black man who wore a tattered painter’s cap that was always a little crooked as it rested on his bald head. Up early in the morning dusting and cleaning while most of us Brothers were sleeping off hangovers, Art was always cheerful. He would be singing and whistling and smiling and laughing while he was vacuuming or polishing the hardwood floors. We paid Art room and board and a token few dollars each month for his labor. His room wasn’t really a room; it was a cot behind the boiler in our dark and dirty basement. It amazed me how anybody who lived like he did could be so upbeat.

We all liked Art, so one Christmas the Brothers and I chipped in to purchase the biggest and finest jug of whiskey money could buy. The night we gave it to him he thanked us with his usual good-natured grace and humility.

The following morning, I stumbled out of bed and went downstairs into our foyer to get the newspaper. In our large entry way rested a massive solid oak rectangular table. On it sat the container of whiskey surrounded by a number of small glasses. Attached to the bottle was this note:

Brothers,

Thanks very much for your generous gift, but you shouldn’t have, for I believe in share and share alike.

Art

Although I never asked Art why he was so chipper, I concluded that his needs were met when he shared. He was a humble and caring soul, always reaching out. He was a special gift, one that I will not forget.

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