

Thank You Economy

by Diane Vivona

It started out small: just a cup of coffee, purchased, and an extra one that I gave away. A few regulars would accept my offer and hang out, drinking that extra cup and sharing a story or two. It became a habit, and I felt good about it. Soon, this practice created a litter of hangers-on hankering for a chai latte and, because it often went without saying, a carrot or zucchini muffin.

The entrance fee was small to this world of philanthropy — maybe \$20 for breakfast — and I was well on my way to greater things: making changes in the community, making the local coffee house a safe place for thinkers and writers and musicians who just needed more time to discover their voice and a free breakfast to produce that next novel or lyric that “said it like it is, that was real, man.”

My rise in this economy was quick. I took my records and books to a local swap meet, approaching the friendliest sales team or the vendor that seemed to have shaken out the pockets of all their jackets to sell. It was an easy ask. Would you please take these items off my hands? I explained that with every object's release — from Tina Turner's “Wildest Dreams” to Frightened Rabbit's “Bright Pink Bookmark” to Pink Floyd's “A Saucerful of Secrets” — a spiritual spotlight began to shine, fueled by the thrill of increasing absence.

“What happened to Aunt Philby's china set?” Melba asked. The second shelf of the cabinet in the dining room was indeed empty, but I was surprised she noticed before Thanksgiving. Never mind. The lavender flowers and silver trim had never suited us or our guests anyway.

“Mom, this is a TOTAL CATASPROPHE!” My son was stomping around his second floor bedroom. Despite my efforts to be careful,

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taking one or two items out of a storage box, another one out of a closet, the discovery of my gifts often caused fear. The baseball mitt and cards had been a key item at the church auction. The profits earned are keeping the post-service receptions stocked with free tea and shortbread cookies; the tantrums and quizzical looks at home are just part of the bargain.

Soap, toothpaste, a package of razors, and toilet paper: aisles two and four. I'm not into the jumbo packs, but if they have two-for-the-price-of-one, I'm in. The ABC house will always take supplies along with some help around the place. Today, it's faulty plumbing, a leak that has left a brown aureole on the living room ceiling above the TV. There are expectations here, and smiling faces when we are finished.

There are no expectations in an empty house with unfilled cupboards. I slide the car into the clean and hollow vacancy of the garage and imagine it: the release of thousands of cups of coffee to nirvana.

