

The Pot:

Some Thanksgiving Days are cold in Detroit. Some are snowy. This one is both. It's a beautiful night, around midnight. The sky is beginning to clear and today's snowfall is crunchy under foot.

Inside the house people are still up and laughing. The fireplace is warm and orange yellow. The place is full of happy folks, old friends partying, the children long off to bed. The stories are getting longer and funnier. People are singing together. We're on key and in time. We actually sound pretty good. That's a great thing about simple folk tunes. People can sing them. That's why, as Martin Mull once said, "In the 60's that stuff almost caught on."

This is a beautiful old house in the once fashionable section of Detroit called Boston-Edison. It's a Georgian brick, large and meticulously cared for by a frenetic, chain-smoking chef. We've had yet another of his spectacular meals and he's kicking back with us, now that his part of the night is done. He knows when he's nailed it. And he nailed it.

He's used to barking orders at his staff and when he cooks at home he barks orders at his guests. It's OK though. We're used to it and we love him anyway. "Steve, Eddie take the stock pot out back and empty it. Make sure you close the lid on the garbage can. The rats are hungry."

Steve and I should be brothers. We're short, funny Irishmen. Each of us thinks the other is the greatest wit of our time. We are both fond of Irish whiskey. Without hesitation we rise from our chairs and head for the still hot kitchen to get the pot and do our master's bidding. I know the pot that he's talking about. I should know. Veronica and I bought it for him a couple of Christmases ago. It's copper. It's tall. It's full of turkey bones that have given up all their flavor for tomorrow's soup. It cost about three hundred bucks.

Now, this is a job that Steve or I could have done alone but we're having such a good time that neither of us wants to miss a minute of the other's nonsense. So out we go into the night each of us holding one handle of the pot. The snow is up past our ankles. Our Johnston-Murphy loafers have changed color. We're in shirtsleeves. We've got the giggles, bad. We look like two first graders heading off to school.

"Sshh! You're going to wake the neighbors." "OK, yeah, you're right, quiet." Now, when you're Irish and your buddy starts humming the tune "*Tied up with a black velvet band*" you cannot help but sing. When you're both fond of Jameson you cannot help but sing with feeling. It's 12:30 AM. The first of our neighbor's window shades has rolled up.

So we've made it to the trashcans out back. The contents of the pot are frozen. We are not. The lid is up and we go at our task with gusto. We quickly found it easier for one person to pound a heavy copper pot against a trash bin rim because you can get your full weight behind it. You don't have to get in sync with a partner and you can go all out because there is a fresh body waiting in the wings. Steve is a lot stronger than I am so he's able to lift the pot high over his head, give dramatic pause, and bring it down with momentous impact. I'm more of a finesse player and prefer rapid, repetitious blows to a concentrated area along one side of the pot. It's 1:08 AM.

The frozen contents finally break loose and the mass crashes into the trashcan's perfect echo chamber. We really haven't noticed the shades on so many neighbors' windows going up all around us. What started as a job in the black of night is now rather warmly lit by window glow. A Kincaid painting, if you will.

Triumphant, we march back to the house looking forward to our reward for the job well done. Perhaps another dram and a song or two for Ireland. The kitchen feels oven-hot after an hour in the cold and our faces are flushed and grinning.

Chef Tom was waiting for us. Chef Tom does not drink. Chef Tom was not grinning. Chef Tom was not looking at us. He was staring at the pot.

It's important to mention at this point that copper is not the hardest of metals. It's softer than, say, garbage can steel. We had not taken this into account during the performance of our task. In our diligence we seemed to have overlooked the physics involved.

Chef Tom gingerly took the pot from Steve. He picked it up by its handles with the thumb and forefinger of each hand. Sort of like you would pick up your eyeglasses or... road kill. The pot he was holding bore some resemblance to the pot we started with but it had been caved in all around its circumference. The dents in its sides were deep enough to have been made with an axe.

The effect of this was to shorten the pot by quite a lot, tilting its rim decidedly downhill. It looked like the Cat in the Hat's hat.

Chef Tom took a drag on his cigarette and said, in his best deadpan, "So guys, what happened?" Steve looked at me hoping I had something better to say than what he was preparing. When I looked back in a way that suggested I was ready to run, he turned to Chef Tom and spoke directly, with conviction. "The neighbors jumped us. The pot saved our lives." I was awestruck. The man is a genius.

Chef Tom leaned his hands on the edge of the butcher block. He lowered his head and his shoulders began to bounce. At first I thought the poor man was grief stricken for his pot but soon realized he was beginning the longest, most pronounced bout of uncontrollable laughter. "The neighbors?", he said, "jjjjumped you?" Well, if the boss is going to laugh, what else could the two of us do but join him. We all dissolved into gasping giggles. Contagious giggles. Giggles of the sort that cause others to giggle even though they have no idea what the joke is. Sheer joy.

There we were, very early in the morning, three grown men with tears rolling down our cheeks, all of us laughing at the three hundred dollar stockpot, bent, bowed and sitting silent in our midst.