

Coney god.

THERE'S A coney dog place in downtown Detroit right next door to another coney dog place. They're both narrow places that bridge two sharply intersecting streets, Lafayette and Michigan, like the horizontal cross bar in a capital letter A. They've both been there for years. The one's got a shiny façade and plate glass windows. Above the door is a relief of a robed woman with the heads of three dogs. It's always busy. The fast-paced, organized bustle calls to you like a shrine.

The dog makers, dressed in white with white caps, prepare the dogs right in front of the plate-glass window. You knew from a glance that these dogs were not to be taken for granted.

Codell stood outside the window and watched the white-frosted, white capped coney dog maker. He was intense. He sucked a toothpick that was constantly in motion, and he never took his eyes off his work. His hands were a blur putting together one coney dog after another. To him every dog came. Then he bunned them in chili, diced onions and mustard, creating perfect dog after perfect dog, dropping them into paper trays. Behind him, other workers doled out the dressed dogs to countertop customers. Through the glass storefront, Codell could see them talking, see their lips moving, but he couldn't hear them. It was as if they didn't have anything meaningful to say, or at least what they had to say meant nothing to the coney dog maker.

Codell was mesmerized. The coney dog maker ministered to order after order. The toothpick darted from one side of his mouth to the other. His hands vivified the

dogs with exquisite timing. Each hotdog jumped into its bun, spread open and waiting for it. Chili splashed over the hotdog in a red wave. With a flick of his fingers, chopped onion rippled down the full length of the dog. Almost at the same time, from a practiced squeeze with his other hand, neon yellow mustard squirted over the onion. It was done.

There was a break in the orders. The toothpick rested; the dog master wiped his hands on a towel and looked up. A crop of hair jutted from under his cap. He had jug ears, a snout-like nose and unshaven cheeks. He looked out the window. Codell was face-to-face a few feet away. Their eyes locked.

Codell pressed his hands together, raised the tips of his fingers to his chin, and inclined his head. He barely needed to move his lips. "Dog god," he intoned.

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