

I'm washing my windows.

SOMEONE THREW a hunk of brick through Codell's window. The crash of glass and thud on the floor had woken him with a start out of a heavy, dreamless sleep. Codell remained prone on his back, eyes wide, heart racing. After a few quiet minutes, he sat up. The piece of brick lay next to a wall. Beneath a gaping hole in the lower pane of the window, shards of glass twinkled in sunlight filtered by Detroit's urban haze.

Codell got up, picked up the brick, and threw it back out the broken window with an emphatic "fuck you!" There was no one to be seen out the window. "FUCK OFF!" he yelled, to no one and to everyone, to the whole deaf world.

Codell swept up the broken glass. He ran his index finger along the haphazard geometry of the remaining glass in the pane and breathed deeply. Although rain had cleaned the air two nights earlier, the day's heat was cooking a new blanket of smog. The sunlight was searing. He sat in the armchair in the corner of the room, out of the sunlight. Who the hell would heave a brick through his window and why? Probably just kids. Probably just kids, but it must have taken quite some effort to put a brick through a fourth floor window. With this type of crap there's always a darkness lurking that it's something personal or worse.

The brick, the brick, the brick. *Why me?* Codell puzzled. He simply couldn't see it, couldn't think clearly. Even without the brick, it had been a long, hot day. As the earth raced around the sun, the slant of its rays increased and brought into relief the filthy opacity and smears on the window.

Maybe if he cleaned his window. He took a plastic pail from under the sink and filled it with hot water. He took off his tee-shirt to use as a cleaning rag and exposed his upper body to the full force of the sun.

He worked methodically and with no haste, spending as much time watching the parking lot, sidewalk and street as he spent attending to the window. Two children, one chasing the other, raced past below him. On the sidewalk, a couple strolled hand in hand. Codell frowned and got to work in earnest on the interior of the unbroken upper pane, working from top to bottom, and then tracing around its edges and into the corners. In the unforgiving sun, he was sweating in no time. After using one end of his tee-shirt to wash, he used the other end to dry. He moved to the shattered lower pane and gingerly washed what was left of it so as not to break out any more pieces. He dabbed it dry, stepped back and surveyed the product of his efforts. The sun, twenty minutes lower in the sky, glared at him through the glass. Sweat lubricated his eyes. Both panes remained cloudy from a film of grime on the outside of the glass.

Codell sighed, rewet his tee-shirt, and cautiously snuck his forearm through the jagged hole in the lower pane. Supinating his forearm and wrist, he dabbed the exterior of the lower pane with his left hand while gingerly holding the jagged broken glass in place with his right hand. Changing hands, he did the same for the other side of the lower window and then dried both sides. To finish, he rubbed away a few lingering specks and smudges, invisible but for the glancing angle of the sun. Codell was illuminated and wore a sheen of perspiration. An ambulance pulled into the parking lot and turned around, its middle-aged driver glancing up at him.

To wash the outside of the unbroken upper pane, Codell carefully raised the lower window. The jagged pieces of glass trembled. Codell rewet his tee-shirt, turned his back to the window, arched his back, and ducked his head and torso outside. The edges of the broken glass were above him. Leaning backward out the window, he counterbalanced his weight by pushing the calves of both legs against the inside wall below the window. Suspended outside of his building, he peered down at the concrete below him. His perspective was novel and frightening in its potential.

Invigorated, and with a care born in no small part by the precariousness of his position, he defied the glare of the sun. He stretched one arm up, tee-shirt in hand, and cleaned the exterior of the pane.

The top of the outer pane seemed too far up. To extend his reach, he sat on the window sill, body outside, legs inside but no longer with his feet on the floor. He clutched his tee in one hand and with the other hand clung to the vertical frame of the lower window. He leaned out farther with his entire body and his arm up as high as he could. What if the wood gave way? If the tee-shirt dropped four stories to the concrete below, the cleaning job would be over. If HE dropped four stories to the concrete below, these stories would be over.

A few unclean inches remained at the top of the window. Codell lifted one leg over the sill onto a narrow ledge between his apartment and the one below. He straddled the sill, kneeling on the little ledge, grasping the vertical frame, sucking in his gut to stay away from the broken glass. With his torso outside and most of his weight on the ledge, he once more straightened and extended. With that, he touched the top of

the upper pane, washed it and dried it. Finished, he remained more outside of his apartment than in it. He discovered another new perspective - the inside of his apartment seen from the outside. In the nearly horizontal rays of the sun, the newly cleaned glass seemed to magnify the cracks in his discolored walls. The floor of his room was a faded, dull brown. They called to him.

On the sidewalk a slow-moving elderly gentleman spotted Codell. Codell dangled out the window, motionless on the ledge and holding the frame with one hand. The old man did a double-take and stopped, stock still. He stared at Codell, his eyes wide, eyebrows raised, crinkling his forehead. Arms out and hands shaking, the man glanced up and down the sidewalk, across the street, and back to the scene above him. His voice burst out with surprising amplitude. "DON'T JUMP! DON'T JUMP!"

Codell twisted his head to the man on the sidewalk. "Are you talking to me?"

"DON'T JUMP!"

" 'Don't jump'? I'm washing my windows!"

The elderly man stutter-stepped closer. "What?"

"I'm washing my *WINDOWS*." Codell made a circular motion with his tee-shirt over the window pane. The old man staggered backward. "Oh! Oh!"

Codell climbed back into his room and lowered the broken window. He wiped his face and torso with his cool, wet tee-shirt. He sat down in his arm chair. The fading sunlight condemned him to clarity. There was much to do.

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Two weeks later, hot air still blew into Codell's apartment. When it rained, which was seldom, Codell taped cereal box cardboard over the broken window. The damn building superintendent still hadn't done a thing. Nothing had changed.

Codell kicked his desk chair so hard that it hit the wall. He picked it up and heaved it at what was left of the window. The chair legs knocked out most of the remaining glass, which flew out and tinkled on the concrete four floors below. Codell's intent was that the chair fly out, too, but it hit the sill and bounced back in. "It figures," Codell said aloud and alone.

He realized that he was hungry. Slowly he made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and slowly he ate it. No, nothing had changed, and that changed everything.

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