

The woman in the dumpster 2.

Inspired by Gabriel García Márquez, "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World."

DEATH IS as essential to life as waste is essential for creativity, and Detroit had plenty of both.

On the way home from treating himself at the White Castle one Wednesday night, Codell took the scenic route. The White Castle was at Warren and Baltimore, where Warren dipped about fifteen feet under the railroad tracks. This left a steep incline behind the White Castle leading up to the tracks. All the north-south streets dipped under the tracks, creating a miles-long east-west ridge on which the trains ran.

His hunger sated by White Castle sliders, Codell was fueled for adventure and prone to wander. He climbed up to the railroad tracks behind the White Castle, picking his way through undergrowth, fast-food debris, and unidentifiable organic detritus. He broke through at the top, where train track rails protruded like half-buried fossils. Standing on the track, you could see to the vanishing points of the rails in both directions. Walking was easy, lit by the moon in a clear sky.

Codell set out east. Below him was desolation, empty parking lots to his right and vacant lots to his left where only the foundations of buildings remained. He crossed John R Street and then Brush. At Beaubien he left the tracks, slipping and stumbling down into the habitat. Walking south, unhurried, he passed the old Piquette Ford plant, long stark edifices on both sides of the street, and crossed Piquette Street. To his left almost the entire block was empty, a cracked and weed-filled manscape bathed

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but not cleansed by moonlight. A block away, traffic hummed on I-94, an expansive, divisive seam in Detroit's urban garment.

From a dumpster in one of the empty lots, something shiny in the moonlight, a long cylindrical object, pointed to the stars. Codell veered towards it. It was a street light post, stripped of its lamp. When Codell was a step from the dumpster, a rat scurried beneath the bin mere inches from his feet. He leapt back, then laughed at the cheap rush the rat had given him. Out of his childhood habit, he lifted the top of the dumpster, peeked in - and gagged. The nude body of a woman sprawled face up. Her insides were exposed at her chest, dark and amorphous. Her eyes stared to eternity.

The dumpster lid fell out of Codell's hand and crashed, and he stumbled backwards. Heart pounding, he ran all the way back to his apartment.

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The next day, Codell returned to the dumpster. It squatted the same as last night, the lampless post pointing to the heavens. He waited several long moments before he pushed the lid up.

The woman was still there. Her hair was matted. Flies crawled on her face. Her nostrils flared. Her legs splayed out and her arms were akimbo. She was young and thin, her hips narrow, her clavicles protruding. Codell held his breath against the odor. He did not stay long.

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All Friday morning, Codell thought about the woman in the dumpster. He imagined her alive. She was attractive, even beautiful. She would've been a model. She must have been smart. She had the highest grades in school, A's in all her classes. She was one of those girls who got along with everyone and everyone liked her, not just the teachers but the girls who were snotty to other girls, because she was nice to them even though they were snotty. She could've had any boyfriend she wanted, but she didn't; she was nice to all the boys, even the unpopular ones. There was a skip in her step and a twinkle in her eye. She was brave and courageous, able to take a stand and speak out. She was destined to do great things and be famous, Codell just knew it. Everyone would know her. Her name was easy to remember. Her name was Maria.

That afternoon when he opened the dumpster, the smells had dissipated and the flies were gone. Maria's wounds had dried and she seemed smaller. Her face looked less pallid. She did not look afraid. The air shimmered as if it would carry her up.

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A day later, Codell laid newspaper over Maria's body. He gently closed the dumpster, and he tried not to cry, and he cried.

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In the cool early air Sunday morning, Codell hurried to the dumpster. The top was open and sunshine lit the inside. Maria was gone. Church bells rang, the Baptist church and Our Lady of The Rosary and others, and their choirs sang, they sang for Maria. She was the most worthy victim in the world; she would not go to waste.

Everything would change because of her, Codell thought. Because of her, we will be new creations. We will fill the streets, dancing, the streets so full that there will be no room for cars. We will join our voices in a song that will echo around the world and no one will ever forget. Like Stevie Wonder sang, we will “change our words into truths and change that truth into love” and we will live that truth until the sun reverses course, and more than anything we will remember our future. Remember our future, when we will be better than ourselves. Maria will make us better than ourselves. We owe it to her. Maria is mine, thought Codell; she is all of ours. We created her, and she will recreate us. This is her city and our city. This is *Detroit*.

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