

Backsliding.

AT FIVE p.m., Detroit's downtown buildings ejaculated office workers onto the sidewalks. The carriers of briefcases and tote bags clogged every street corner. At the busiest intersections, uniformed traffic cops braved vehicles and pedestrians, stopping and starting them with whistles and hand signals. To bystanders, it was a cacophony of honking and jostling. To a traffic cop, it was a symphony, and he was the conductor.

The City National Bank Building towered at the corner of Fort and Griswold. Everybody called it by its past and future name, the Penobscot Building. With its forty plus floors and express elevators, the Penobscot was one of the most virile buildings when it came to restoring feet to the street.

In this two-legged milieu, Codell found himself on the street curb at the corner at the front of a restless crowd held back by one of Detroit's finest. The light was red for pedestrians waiting to cross Griswold. In an eerie moment, as when all conversation in a room stops at the same time, there were no cars or busses, nothing, coming from either direction on Griswold. Everyone on the corner stood there, waiting for the light to change.

In that silence, the Penobscot Building spurted another dozen parishioners into the street corner congregation. Pressed from behind, the congregation surged forward. Codell took two steps off the curb and looked both ways. The street was still empty. Codell took a few more steps into the street. The traffic cop glared at him. A few people behind Codell also stepped off the curb. The officer's shrill whistle froze them all.

“The light’s red! What do you think you’re doing?!”

Codell was well into the street. The officer approached him.

“Nobody coming,” said Codell. “Look for yourself.”

“I don’t care if nobody’s coming, the light’s red.”

“Why should everyone stand here waiting when nobody’s coming? Why wait for nothing?”

“It’s irresponsible! The light’s red! Get back!”

“That’s not responsibility, that’s blind obedience.”

Codell’s eyes wavered from the officer to the crowd behind him, and the officer turned around. The pedestrian mob had left the curb, advancing across the empty street *en masse*.

“To hell with all of you! You can all get hit!” The cop, emasculated and muttering, traipsed out of their way. “You people think you can do anything you want.”

Codell did his best backslide* the rest of the way across Griswold.

*A dance move dating to the 1930s, popularized and renamed “moonwalk” in the early 1980s by Michael Jackson. It was a *Thriller*.

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