

He was done. He had stared at the canvas for months now, coming back to it over and over. It stood in a place of honor on the easel among the other unfinished pieces in the spare bedroom-turned-*atelier*. He didn't want another unfinished piece of crap. He wanted a painting.

The painting had other ideas.

His original plan had been in blues and shades of white, like a sky. He finished it in an evening, and gloated to his girlfriend over the dinner that she made. But the next day, when he came home from work and saw it in the daylight, he was repulsed. Had he been drunk the night before? Flashbacks to college mistakes drove him to add gold, orange, red. Dinner was sullen.

Now, on after almost a quarter year of fussing, he had come to the realization that everything he did made it uglier and uglier. This was it. The end. He was done.

There were 47 failed paintings in the apartment. He refused to have a 48<sup>th</sup>.

"Honey? Can you take the trash out before it gets dark?"

He did it with gusto. It looked almost right in the twilight, leaning against the royal blue dumpster. He stopped to look at it, trying to figure out if there was any way to get it back to what he had wanted for it. His doubt lasted a millisecond, then No. 48 was out of his mind.

Until the next day, when he saw it on TV.

They were calling it The Trash Can Monet.

"Is that our dumpster? Is that your painting?"

She was overjoyed, but he was repulsed. That was his trash. And someone plucked it from its journey to its burial and put it on TV. A huge, dirty man in a jumpsuit was holding it up with an oddly uneven smile.

"You find lots of stuff in the trash," The man talked like his tongue was too big for his mouth. "But this is the best thing I ever found by a longshot."

Before he knew it, the man's uneven smile had spread across his face too.

The next trash day, he picked another of the unfinished paintings and put it out, after dark. The day after: Trash Can Monet strikes again. Who is this amazing artist? Does he live in this apartment building? Anyone with any information should call the news.

"We should call in! You could get on TV."

He didn't want to be on TV. What would he even say? The speculation of local celebrities was more exciting to watch than the most creatively embellished tale of how he had hated a painting and thrown it out. For once, he was glad that they didn't know many people. He was actually glad that he never found a career in the degree he worked so hard for. He made her promise not to tell. She didn't understand, but she listened to him.

The next week, he put his least favorite of the bunch in the trunk of his car, stayed late at the office, and dropped it off in some suburban side street he had never been down.

He was called the city's very own Banksy. There were people walking the streets in the early hours, looking for his work. There were discussions about his identity on the internet. There was a fan site. Week after week he faded from a headline, to a quick 30-second segment, to nothing. But he didn't need the news. His fans were alive online. He had an article in the paper. Magazines. She made a little scrapbook of everything.

After almost a year, he ran out of rejects. Then, when faced with a blank canvas, he until he didn't want to anymore and put it out with the trash. Again, and again. Sometimes he kept them, touching them up, adding more before throwing them out. Sometimes he worked furiously into the night before giving up and throwing them out the next day without even a second glance.

She asked him if he wanted to start painting full time. She asked him if this was the start of the career he'd wanted since they were holding hands in high school. At night, while they were lying in bed, she asked him what his inspiration was. He didn't have any answers for her. He had found his place, and those details didn't matter.