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White Light

By Jack Coey

Lights out was at ten o'clock. He lay in the dark for an hour or so listening to the heavy breathing, and sometimes snores of his roommates before he slipped out of bed, and with an occasional squeak of a floorboard, snuck out of the room, and down the creaky stairs to the second floor. The second floor was classrooms, and was somewhat lit by the moon coming through a window. In one of the rooms he had a knapsack with clothing, a flashlight, and some snacks. With his knapsack, he came out of the building, and saw stars, and heard crickets. It was May, and he hadn't got into the college he wanted. He walked the school road until he got to Route 20 which went over the mountain. He guessed it to be around midnight. To the east was Pittsfield; to the west Albany. His plan was to hitchhike to New York. Once in Manhattan, he figured he'd get a job as a busboy, and figure out what to do next.

He felt exhilarated standing by the side of Route 20; he could make his own decisions; he was an adult as of right now. His name was Eugene Carter Endicott, IV, and he was seventeen years old. He looked at the stars and listened to the silence. After a time, he heard a far off noise. He stuck out his thumb as a truck barreled by him, and felt the tail wind in his face. He looked up at the stars: *They're far away,* he thought. It was silent again, then, he heard a noise from the woods. He looked around and saw the moon-lit darkness. He became anxious and realized he had no way to protect himself. *I should've stole a steak knife from the dining room,* he thought. He pictured Lester drunk in his apartment; he laughed when he saw how he mixed his martinis in a saucepan on the stove; brilliant and eccentric that was Lester. They wouldn't know he was gone until breakfast, and by then, he hoped to be half-way to Manhattan. *What if I don't get a ride?* he panicked, *I could never go back and admit I failed.* He thought about naked women, and promised himself the first thing he'd do in Manhattan was be with a woman. He jerked himself off plenty, but now he told himself, it was time for him to be with a woman for real. *Manhattan is white light around the clock with barrooms and brothels*

up and down the block with a few businesses thrown in. Women are half-dressed; well, maybe in winter they wear a coat, and you can make a lot of money from tips from rich men for serving them their dinner or shinning their shoes. The women are all over the place: I could have a morning girlfriend, and an afternoon girlfriend, and a night-time girlfriend, or maybe all at once if I wanted. Instead of getting up at seven in the morning, and going out into the freezing cold to walk to chapel I'm going to be laying in bed with some babe who I'll replace with another the second she bores me. And all those boarding schools chumps who go to Columbia and work on Wall Street, I'll be the King of Eighth Avenue who has more fun than they could even conceive of. There was a noise. He quickly looked behind him. He listened and watched: quiet and dark. *Manhattan is still a hundred and fifty miles away*, he thought. He found a log to sit on and thought about how his father had changed since his re-marriage. *Seems like the only place he wants to shop now is Fifth Avenue, and before it didn't matter. It is true my mother drank too much, and she made some scenes in public that were embarrassing, but she was a frustrated talent. She could paint, but my father never encouraged her. Mr. Coombs bought one of her landscapes and was friendly and supportive of my mother where my father wasn't. Come to think on it, and she spent a lot of time at Mr. Coombs's house which father didn't like.* He heard a noise in the dark. He listened and got up and went to the side of the road. It was a car. He saw the red lights flash, and ran to catch up. He looked in the window and hesitated. It was a youngish man with orange hair and tattoos on his arms. Gene froze.

"Ya wanna ride or not?"

Not thinking, Gene got in the car. He smelt incense or maybe it was pot.

"It's obvious you have some sort of terrible story to tell so I'll only ask you where you're going?"

"New York City."

"This car wouldn't make it to New York. How about I drop you at the Taconic Parkway?"

"Okay."

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They were silent. Heavy Metal music was coming from the speaker. Gene was anxious; he was accustomed to men in polo shirts and Bermuda shorts. After a few miles, the driver turned down the music and said,

"Hey, I got some weed if you want?"

Gene thought about that. He'd heard about it but never tried it. *Yeah, but I don't know this guy at all,* he thought.

"No, no thanks," he answered.

"You haven't run away from the Army have you? I think I'm entitled to know that before I get mixed up with you."

"Don't worry there's no one looking for me."

"How sad is that?" said the driver as he turned the music back up. Gene watched the dark woods go by.

"I'm Felix, by the way."

"Hi Felix. I'm Gene."

Ugly name, Gene thought. *This guy's got to be a fuck up. Who in the world would dress like that for one, and second what's with the hair? What if he tries something? No girl I know would be attracted to this joker. Maybe I should pretend to be car sick and get him to drop me off.*

"You like Black Sabbath?"

Gene shook his head, and Felix smiled.

"Probably too far out for you."

"Frank Sinatra is more my style," facetiously said Gene.

"Frank's my man when I can't go to sleep."

"Yes, I see."

"Do be, do be, do be, do," mocked Felix.

Who's sold more records? thought Gene.

Felix pulled the car over to the side of the road.

"I gotta pee," he said. He got out of the car and peed. He got back in the car with his penis exposed.

"I can make it bigger," he offered. Gene opened the door and ran across Route 20 into the woods. He got behind a tree and watched Felix's car. It sat for a moment until he slowly drove off.

Jesus, he thought. *I haven't gone twenty miles and I got some freak waving his cock at me.* He cautiously walked out of the woods to Route 20.

Next time talk to the driver before you get in, he told himself, *and if it don't feel right, don't get in. I mean it's not like you're going to see that person again.* He figured it was the middle of the night. Maybe he could go to sleep.

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The sun was coming up when he woke on a bed of leaves he made for himself. He heard a truck on Route 20. He had to pee and got up and did so. He took a candy bar from his knapsack and ate it. He knew he would have to eat soon. He had thirty dollars in bills and a check book. *Now that's it's daytime, I should make better time,* he thought. He walked out to Route 20 and waited for cars. It was the good part of an hour, and three or four cars, before he saw the brake lights go on again, and he ran to catch the car. He looked in the window. *Oh My God!* It was a girl. *Oh My God!* It was a good-looking girl. *Oh My God!* She was looking at him. His heart was pounding.

"You need help?"

"I'm trying to get to the Taconic Parkway."

"You promise no funny stuff?"

"Sure."

"All right get in."

Gene got in the seat; looked at her and she was gorgeous. She drove the car down the road. She didn't speak or look at him. He tried to think of something to say to her.

"My name's Gene."

She glanced at him like he was an annoying fly. She drove. Five minutes went by.

"You live around here?"

"Listen Gene, I usually don't do something like this, but I saw you on the side of the road, and you looked so pathetic I took pity on you. I don't have anything to do with men if I can help it because I was raped at twelve and have never gotten over it."

"I see you're angry."

"Yes, I am."

"I'm sorry."

"Before we go any further with this just know that I've spent years talking to counselors, priests, psychiatrists, and concerned older men, and so I've heard it all, Gene. You understand that – I've heard it all. There's nothing you're going to say to me that's any different from what I've been told by others."

He reached over and squeezed her breast. Her eyes widened and her mouth opened, and she slapped him. The car veered, and she regained control.

"How dare you!"

"Fair enough."

"I can't believe you did that."

"I'm sorry."

"Thank God there wasn't another car…"

"For sure."

"You broke your promise there'd be no funny stuff, and you violated me."

"And I did something unexpected which forced you to see me in a way you wouldn't have otherwise."

"So what?"

"I'm not just a man whom you lump with all the other men, but the man who touched your breast."

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"You're joking, right?"

"Do you want me to get out?"

She said nothing, and Gene watched the trees out the window. After a time he asked,

"Do you want me to get out?"

She smiled in spite of herself.

"You don't have to on my account although I don't know why I'm saying that."

"Because you respect the chance I took."

"Open the glove compartment."

He saw the pistol.

"That's how big a chance you took."

"Duly noted. My name's Gene."

"I'm Chastity. And don't say it; I've heard it a thousand times."

"Duly noted."

"Okay so what's your story? Why are you out on some lonesome road early in the morning luring fair damsels to your rescue?"

"I ran away from school."

"Not enough females?"

"That's part of it."

"Yeah and…"

"I let down my family."

"How so?"

"My life is not going in the direction they want it to."

"Especially when you run away from it."

Gene didn't respond.

"That's my equivalent of grabbing your tit, and you don't like it much either, do you?"

"I'm searching for the white light."

"Cocaine?"

Gene smiled.

"Illumination."

"That's not cocaine?"

"I've never tried to tell it to someone else so I may as well now. Have you ever heard Ella Fitzgerald or read Steinbeck's description of migrant workers sitting around a campfire? Or a poem by Robert Frost? There's a purity about it that the product and creator are the same. I don't know how else to say it."

"You mean like The Beatles?"

"No, Chastity, that's not what I mean. I'm sorry; I'm not explaining it very well."

"Oh you mean like Olga…"

"I don't know."

"Olga Mininski is a psychic who can see the future. I went to see her in Times Square and everything she predicted came true. She said I would fall in love with a women two years older than me with red hair and that was an exact description of Colleen who I met two weeks after that."

"I don't believe in that shit."

"Fuck the White Light." She stopped the car, and glared at him. He opened the door and got out. She gave him the finger as she drove off. Once more, he was on the side of Route 20. *Jesus,* he thought. He walked the road. *Maybe this isn't a good idea after all,* he thought. *Maybe there is no white light, maybe I'm making that up. How can I go back?* Cars were going by him, and he made no attempt for a ride. *If I could get to Manhattan, I bet I could find others who would understand what I'm looking for. I think I want to be a writer. There's probably thousands of writers in New York City – thousands of them, for sure. I've got to keep going is all. I have no choice.* He stopped walking and turned around and stuck out his thumb. Probably seven cars went by before a dirty Ford Pinto flashed its brake lights. He ran to the passenger side window. He looked in on a grandmotherly, white haired lady who said.

"I'll give you a ride if you promise not to rob me."

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He couldn’t get in fast enough.

The End

Jack Coey bio: Jack Coey did the things male people do in this world: played Little League as a boy, went to school, college & got married, had children & worked in a store. The wisdom he has to share is that if you want to be a writer he says you have to read, read, read. What he knows is far more interesting than what he's done.