

A Pound of Feathers, A Pound of Bricks

The mother in question – always in a red parka, one hand occupied by a dull blue coffee container and the other pushing a double stroller – stepped into the walkway at the same moment as Eugene. Undoubtedly Eugene was born with a last name and that last name was attached to his first name on government and bank documents and junk fliers sent to his address, but nobody that smiled and said hello to him every morning or afternoon knew what it was. He was Eugene and Eugene only. A man with thick white hair and matching moustache who was once a man with thick brown hair and matching moustache that now adorned his khaki and navy and grey wardrobe with a neon-born green vest that doubled as a billboard for his title and duty. Crossing Guard. Most assumed Eugene hadn't spent the better part of his adulthood as a crossing guard, but rather, retired into it, providing him an excuse to wake up early, get in his car, drive to an intersection, and interact with people. It would be much easier to sit in his house and pass the time waiting for his Social Security checks by catching up on morning news and talk shows and judge shows and shows where people subject themselves to polygraphs and submit DNA evidence for proof of parentage but instead he helped people cross at the intersection of Hill Side Drive and Peak Road.

Everyone was grateful for Eugene's services because he seemed like such a nice guy when he said things like "it's gonna' be a real beaut today" and "good thing ya' brought your umbrella because those clouds look good and full" and "that haircut works somethin' real special on you". With the elementary school and the church and the college and the nursery all within shouting distance, it was always a busy intersection. Parents felt safe because Eugene was there and his vest was respected – or at least noticed – by all drivers. It also helped that he carried a portable STOP sign with him at all times and held it just high enough for everyone to see.

Eugene had done such a wonderful job guarding the intersection of Hill Side and Peak that he was recognized at PTA and school board meetings and always collected a healthy bounty right around the holidays. His blood sugar was too high to indulge in all of the pound cakes and cut-out cookies he received, but the gift cards to A&P and AMC Theaters and TGI Fridays never lasted too long in his underwear drawer.

Eugene and the mother in question knew each other for two years and they always shared a few friendly words. They'd never exchanged names nor did she ever remove her Breakfast at Tiffany's shades, but it had nothing to do with rudeness. She was trying to get two-of-her-three kids to school and the other dropped at the sitter so she could participate in the modern phenomenon of working at home. Eugene didn't expect more from their relationship. She was one of the hundreds of faces he glanced at every day. She was unique in that she always wore the red parka and carried the coffee cup and pushed the double stroller and had given him a \$10 gift card to Starbucks which he passed off to his niece Lindsay who was quite happy with it but he didn't *really* know anything about her.

Which is why the mother in question surprised him that morning. Surprised everyone really. Just as she and Eugene stepped into the bright white grid of the crosswalk, a woman in a red Mercedes who had just dropped off her twin boys buried her foot onto the gas pedal and spun her wheel like the captain of a schooner to try to beat the pedestrian traffic. And she nearly did. Unfortunately for the woman in the red Mercedes, her passenger side mirror brushed against Eugene's arm and knocked the STOP sign out of his hand. It was shock more than pain that jolted Eugene, followed by a rising anger in the fact that the woman in the red Mercedes continued onward, adding insult to injury as her rear right tire left tread marks across Eugene's STOP sign. The woman in the red Mercedes might have continued driving if it weren't for the

mother in question. While a few angry bystanders decided to hurl curses and insults at the fleeing car, the mother in question sent her dull blue metal coffee container at the red Mercedes with the accuracy of a sniper and the velocity of a Major League pitcher. The mother in question didn't utter a sound as the container flew from her hands and shattered the back windshield of that red Mercedes. A scene was born.

The red eyes of the red Mercedes stared at everyone as the driver threw open her door and marched toward the intersection demanding to know who threw the container. The crowd, in a silent unanimous vote, practiced solidarity. None of them had seen where the container had come from and maybe someone had thrown it from their car like a discarded cigarette? That's the sort of thing that could happen. Freak accidents were unexplainable. Traffic in all four directions lurched toward the middle of the intersection, traffic lights be damned, as everyone wanted a better view of the unfolding drama. The driver was talking faster and louder and pointing her finger at everyone and anyone to demand answers. She would have her answers before she left or she would call the police. The police! No need to waste your cell phone's battery, the mother in question mentioned, because I've already called them. This was all the proof the driver needed. She had found the person who laid waste to her windshield and the silent unified front gave way to a barrage of fiery arrows. Eugene considered stepping in to clarify the situation, but he was too entertained to do anything but watch. Parents covered their children's ears and pulled out cell phones to document the greatest show on Earth.

The squad cars could not squeeze their way through the traffic jumble and the principal in all of her power suit glory arrived on the scene before any punches were thrown. There was too much information to process, coming from too many willing witnesses, that the principal turned her attention to Eugene. He would be the one to settle this dispute and bring closure to the early

morning and allow the world to continue spinning. Eugene thought about truth and its many forms and appreciated its darker qualities, but in the moment he wasn't feeling like simple was better; some times complicating matters was the only way to make people understand how simple life was. Eugene nodded as the principal quieted the crowd by talking over them and directed the attention to Eugene. Her line of questions was easy enough to follow and they all boiled down to: what happened?

Eugene sauntered over to the red Mercedes and imagined himself driving it, though he was never the type to indulge himself. He was just as fine with American or Korean manufacturing. He looked through the shattered back windshield and thought he felt a tinge of pain in his left elbow and decided that it was just his imagination. The car was still running and tried to lure him inside with an old Mariah Carey song; Eugene teased the car by resting his knee on the driver's seat and reaching into the back seat. The top of the coffee container was nowhere to be found, but the body was there and that's all he needed. He examined it as he walked back toward the anxious crowd and he found exactly what he was hoping to find: a silver scar cutting through the bottom half of the container. Eugene held the damaged container up for the principal to see, then handed it to the mother in question. At first, the mother in question thought that Eugene was incriminating her and before she could overreact to her false assumption, Eugene turned to the driver and principal and stated: "you see what happened Mrs. Tollman, is this woman driving that car put a dent in this mother's coffee cup." The echoing sound of nodding heads drifted through the intersection.