

## Mail

Jack Price comes back to his childhood home for his father's funeral. Stops by the post office to see a girl he once knew. The girl is long gone but the clerk stops him.

"Are you here," he asks, "to pick up your mail?"

"No. I don't live here no more."

"You are Jack Price though, right?"

Stunned. "Yes. How -"

"Come with me sir."

He leads Jack Price down a cold, blue hallway with three darker blue doors. The clerk opens the last one and the man is overwhelmed.

Stacks on stacks on stacks of bound letters

Lined the room in neat rows.

"These are all for you," the clerk tells him.

"This...can't...be..."

"Oh, but it is," the clerk says, his tone somewhere between sighing and impressed that someone wanted to reach this man so bad. "You should order a U-Haul, sir."

The U-Haul seems tiny in comparison to its load. The paper expands inside the U-Haul.

Like a pale dick,

Inside an orange pussy.

Noah gets into the van and drives, drives it all the way to New York City and never stops.

Except to piss

And barely slows down even for that.

When he gets home, he opens the back of the van. He expects the van to spill her load but she doesn't. The white letters stay in place, still in neat little rows.

It takes him almost three hours but soon they fill up his study in large stacks.

He grabs one off the top

and settles into his red leather chair,

Cigar in hand,

Scotch in his cup

He opens the letter.

The first words hit him and he knows.

Dear White Boy Jack

He crumples the letter.

He stares.

He gets up

And gets another letter. Once it is in his hand

He starts again  
Dear White Boy Jack  
He lights it on fire.  
The next  
Drowns in his scotch.  
The next  
Torn to pieces  
Finally at Aug. 6, 1983  
He stops and reads

Dear White Boy Jack  
(He breathes)

I was staring at the moon the other day, thinking real deep thoughts. You know how I do. And I thought...your face...is even paler than the moon. I laughed and laughed at myself. It ain't funny but I was high at the time. Anyway, just wanted to say I'm thinking about you man.

Peace

Black Jack

He goes through them one by one.

Dear White Boy Jack,

I saw Rita today. Man, she was a mess, all in love with Alice and tryna share her with me. I told her nah I'm loyal to Marijane. I don't mess with Alice. Alice is crazy man. Anyway, just wanted to let you know I saw her.

Peace

Black Jack

And on and on.

Dear White Boy Jack,

I can't remember what happened before that day. You know, by the river. I can't remember anything from before that moment. It's all black and white until that moment when the world turned bright colors. Man, you got me saying things I ain't never said before. You got me insane.

Write back.

Peace

Black Jack

Years go by, still letter after letter. Jack White Boy Price kept going.

Dear White Boy Jack,

I learned by now you ain't never going to write me back. I think you moved or something. Or your daddy's stopping it. Either way, I've accepted it. Started college here. Man, it's so white. Like damn, how many white people are there? No wonder y'all took over the world. I like the classes though. I think the way I talk throws people off. I can just hear them - he sounds so black. But he knows what facetious means? How can this be? Whatever, man. Just because I sound different don't mean I never picked up a book, like damn. I found some cool peeps though, even another white homie. You think he kiss like you?

Peace

Black Jack

Dead White Boy Jack,

Man, that felt weird. I shouldn't have ended the letter like that. My bad. I think I wanna talk about it though. It's all I think about.

Peace

Black Jack

Dear White Boy Jack,

There I go again, leaving things weird. I mean, I know you're probably not reading these but still. That was rude man.

Peace

Black Jack

....

Dear White Boy Jack,

Fuck you man. I'm done. I gotta let go.

Peace,

Black Jack

Letters come now only filled with pictures of Black Jack kissing other men. Women. Black. White. Asian. Latino. Hundreds and hundreds of photos it seems. More years, and endless amount of letters go by. July 1, 2003 -

Dear White Boy Jack,

Twenty Year Reunion! Man I'm so excited. Sorry it's been awhile. I've been doin' well at work. Finally got a job I actually like at a small brokerage firm in Atlanta. My boss is black too. Kind of a jerk though. Anyway, can't wait to see you!

Peace

Black Jack

July 7, 2003

Dear White Boy Jack,

You weren't there. Ain't never so disappointed in my life. I thought these letters were just fun. But I can't let go.

Peace

Black Jack

It's been two days and Jack White Boy Price finally opens the last letter. He barely ate, barely slept. His eyes are tired and dry. He is ready for the pounding in his head to stop, for his ears to stop ringing with the memory of a voice.

Dear White Boy Jack,

They say I got something. Had it for a while. Just didn't realize it. I don't know if I'll be able to write anymore. I think I'm tired too. I just don't know how to stop.

Peace

Black Jack

The date is two months ago. White Boy Jack looks at the address. He drops the letter, then gets up. He showers, making sure to shave. He brushes his teeth and hair. He wavers at his closet, then chooses a button down, slacks and his varsity jacket. It barely fits but he wears it anyway. He can see Black Jack just ahead of him as their 16-year-old selves run out onto the basketball court in his mind.

The trip back to Georgia goes faster this time. Planes tend to do that. He rents a car and drives through slightly familiar streets in Atlanta. Long family road trips to the big city stay stagnant in his mind. The GPS beeps at him and he turns down the street. The assisted living complex is nothing but bricks and depressing signs, Home for the Elderly and Forgotten.

White Boy Jack walks up and through the door. The on-site nurse is nice and asks if she can help.

"I'm here to see Black Jack."

The nurse is confused. There is no Black Jack.

"Just Jack then."

She needs more but White Boy Jack has nothing else to give her. He shows her some of the letters and she shakes and clicks her tongue.

Then he shows her the newest picture Black Jack had sent him.

"Imagine him with clothes on and without the gag. And old. Much older. Like me, only black."

He realizes he isn't helping.

But someone passes by and noticed the photo.

“Oooweeee Mary, don’t he look familiar to you?”

“Eh? What’s that Effie?”

“That photo. It looks like someone don’t it?”

“It looks like someone crazy.”

“That’s what I mean, It looks like *him*.”

“No!...No...*no!*”

“Yes!”

“Who is it?” White Boy Jack shouts.

They remember him and tell him.

“That there is Mr. Johnson.”

He sighs and laughs. “Where can I find him?”

They look at each other, then at the nurse, who nods.

They lead him out to the pool area

And finally, he sees him.

Only it’s all wrong. Black Jack is leading a group of waterobics and hasn’t aged a day. White Boy Jack crumples.

This isn’t Black Jack.

The old ladies flutter over to the man who is not Black Jack and he comes around. He stops in front of White Boy Jack and his eyes travel up and down.

“You’re the letter guy, aren’t you? You’re shorter than I expected.”

“Am I too late?”

Black Jack’s son ignores him.

“You’re just...less impressive. I expected James Bond, to be honest, the way he talked about you.”

“Please.”

He walks over to a bag sitting in the sun. He pulls a damp and wrinkled letter.

“This is yours.”

Then grabs all of his stuff and walks off.

White Boy Jack wants to go after him but the letter is distracting.

Dear White Boy Jack,

I had a dream that I saw you under an white, lit up archway. St. Louis I think. Maybe I’ll go there and wait. Never seen the arch. Seems like a good a place as any. I’ve been waiting all my life. I can wait a little more.

Peace

Black Jack

The letter is unsent with no date.

He runs after the son. "When was this written?"  
The son stops and turns around.  
"Sunday. I haven't heard from him since."

White Boy Jack runs back to his rental car.  
He uses the fancy GPS system  
Desperation and arthritis make his fingers slip  
But he manages.

An insufferable amount of time later, he makes it to St. Louis.  
The arch draws him in like a beacon.  
He parks and walks through the park underneath the Arch, the only place he can think where  
there might be benches for an old man.  
He walks and walks, but doesn't see Black Jack.  
Finally, he sits down on bench.  
Exhausted,  
He falls asleep.

It's the humming that eventually wakes him  
That and the squawking of pigeons  
A man is sitting next to him  
Feeding pigeons.  
White Boy Jack doesn't need to look.  
His heart constricts  
And he looks anyway.  
Black Jack is as handsome as he ever was.  
Paunch, wrinkles and all  
He is bigger in life  
More real than White Boy Jack's strongest memories.

He is humming, crooning really -  
Hit the road Jack  
And don't come back  
No more, no more