

WHERE IS JESUS?

Friend, you may well ask what I'm doing here on this bar stool in an old tavern at four in the afternoon staring down the barrel of a warm beer. It's about a car, that's all, just a plain old goddamned car when you get right down to it. Sold it this morning to an illegal alien type of guy.

Started out like this: My buddy, Mobley, got me a classic 78 Lincoln with all leather interior, stereo and tape deck. That Mobley's a heck of a businessman. Runs a body shop up there on 31st. Got the body shop and a lot of other things going. To tell you the truth the shop's just a cover. What he's got himself up there is one of them chop shops, you know, gets a hot car or a cycle, breaks it down and ships it off to a fence.

Showed it to me a little while back, "Hey, dumb shit, you like this Lincoln?" Good condition. A long sleek navy blue town car. I do like it.

"Ok, then, you drive it to L.A., park it overnight, drive it back and it's yours," he said. So I drove it to L.A., followed a map he gave me, left the Lincoln in a parking lot by a police station and spent the night at a flop house

Next day, Lincoln's still there with a note sitting on the windshield behind the wiper on the driver's side. "Remove from premises by noon today." After I drove it back to Mobley's shop, he signed the title over to me using a strange name. He took it to another room and brought it back notarized. Didn't want to cross him so I kept my mouth shut.

Then I asked him about the Chevy I've been driving. "Hell, I'll sell it for you," he says. "Just leave it on the lot, put a sign on it and give me 20%."

I don't have a place to park two cars so I said, "Okay, hotshot," and he laughed and squeezed my nose together with his fat greasy thumbs until it hurt..

He's a hell of a businessman but truly I don't like him much. The only reason I work for him is that since I got back from Nam I just can't concentrate much. So I end up working one or two days at some lowlife job and then I get fired for sitting around daydreaming and such. Mobley said, "Hell, it's that goddamned pony tail. Go out and get a real haircut and get rid of those army duds you tramp around in. You got money. Go out and buy some civilized clothes. That's why nobody wants to keep you on. You

look like a goddamned hippy is what you look like and they ain't no goddamned hippies anymore."

Somehow I feel better in my jungle fatigues and my camouflaged boots. Got used to my pony tail too. Grew it when I got back from DaNang because the sons a bitches in the military were always shaving my goddamned head. Actually, I think Mobley keeps harping on that because he's got bad teeth, bad skin and bags under his eyes. Still, working for Mobley, I can work once or twice a week and then just play and go to the library and read. Or lay around my apartment with some honey and listen to the stereo.

My second tour is what got me into it, being a no good fucking crook. I was in an infantry company up around DaNang and I seen a lot and I done a lot. The things I did would make a man with a cast iron stomach puke his socks off. When my year was up, I felt real scared and didn't know what to do, so I signed up for another thirteen months. The thought of going home made me shake like a man in the electric chair. I'd think about the old neighborhood or my little brother and sister and aunts and uncles and grade school teachers and wonder if they knew about the things I'd done over there if they'd still look up to me. I got myself assigned to these old lifer sergeants who were running a black market over there and they told me, "Hell, Quinn, you already risked your life more than once. And for what? Those bastards in Washington don't give a rat's ass about you. Work with us. You deserve better. We'll send you back a rich man." So I threw in with them and drove trucks all over Nam. Hell, they'd steal anything. Sold off air conditioners, generators, C-rations, even ammo and weapons. I don't know who all bought the stuff but I got paid real well. That's how I got spoiled on a one or two-day work week. I'd make my round trip and then be off to the steam house. Played a lot of poker, drank a lot of beer and fucked a lot of gooks. Had me a new girl every day, sometimes two a day. Liked the Frenchy types: tall, thin, caramel colored.

Before I knew it, I was in the brig. Those old NCO's set me up because the intelligence guys were getting too close to them. Said they didn't even know me. Said I must have been AWOL. At least I didn't have to go to jail permanently. Would have killed myself in there. Can't stand being locked up. Like the time I was trapped in a bunker three days getting shot at by AK-47's and such.

Then I met Mobley at a bar and told him about my dishonorable discharge and he said, "Hell, I've got work for you. Lots of work. Can always use a savvy errand boy." Got the Lincoln for me and I been making good money ever since.

The Chevy I put up for sale at Mobley's lot was the first thing I went out and bought when I got back. A mighty fine car. One hell of an automobile. Four barrel carb. Four on the floor. Double fuel injection. Of course, I just drove that son of a bitch right into the ground. Even General Motors wouldn't know who its mother was. Me, I don't work on cars. Too impatient. Can't concentrate any more. Just want to beat on the damn thing with a wrench. So I got this fine Lincoln from Mobley and I put the Chevy up there on Mobley's lot and asked a thousand for it.

"Hell," he said, "nobody's going to pay no goddamned thousand for that piece of shit." But I stuck to my price. At least for a few weeks. Then Mobley calls me up. "There's a messican up here wants to buy it. Desperate for a goddamned car. Illegal kinda guy. Has to take his family to Oklahoma so's they can work in the fields. But he can't pay no thousand dollars."

Hells, bells, I've spent more on it than that. So I tell Mobley just to sit on it and see what else comes along.

Excuse me. Back in a minute.

* * *

Sorry. Had to take a leak.

Now about the time I put the Chevy up for sale, I met a gal up there at the university named Rita. Rita Morales. She had a Mexican name but she didn't look or talk like no fucking Mexican. Looked European and spoke real smart. She was a sophomore up there and was looking to cut her teeth on a little lust.

I was standing up there by the bar at the *Raven Raven* staring out the window and she edges in next to me and asks if I'm a war monger. I'm guessing it's because of my outfit.

"Hell no," I said, "I'm a pacifist."

"I see. You're making an ironic statement," she said and laughed. Best part of her, that wild throw back the head laugh. "An anti-establishment pacifist with a pony tail and an earring and military gear. I like that."

She didn't care for college boys because they don't know from up and she could tell from our conversation that I've seen things and done some things and my eyes tell many sad stories.

"Have you read the Kama Sutra," she asked. I really have read it so we talked about it over a couple of beers and she said, "You really have read it." She finds out I've read lots of books and even though I don't look smart or act smart she decides I've got a good handle on things. Me, I like what I see. Tall, short black hair, strong pretty features. Slender, but breasts enough to satisfy me. Don't pay that much attention to them anyway. Leg and ass man myself. I end up taking her to my apartment and show her what I know, and by god, if she doesn't come back and show me a thing or two.

"Last year," she said, "I got involved with a lesbian, a professor of divinity I met at a lecture. She showed me how to appreciate my body, how to get the most out of my sensuality. It was an entirely beautiful experience. I felt such cosmic release. I came and went with that woman and afterward I would sleep for hours, the most peaceful, most other worldly sleep. My spirit flowed above me into the eternal sweetness that surrounds us all. I found I could leave this grimy, heartless world for a place removed from all time."

Then one day the lesbian showed up out of the blue knocking on the door of her apartment. Her lover looked tired and wrung and beaten down like an old hag.

"I don't know what befell her," Rita said, "but the spell she had over me was broken and I felt dirty and used."

Rita tried getting it on with other women but couldn't get a rise out of it anymore. Dejected and alone, she drifted from one bar to another until one night at a frat party this guy pulled her into a bedroom, made an opening in a pile of coats and just fucked the living shit out of her right there on the spot.

"I decided I really wasn't a lesbian, just a woman who'd been allowed to discover herself."

That was the only bad thing about Rita. Being philosophical and meloncholy. Sometimes she'd be laying there with me listening to the stereo and get all stirred up about something, stupid shit like apartheid, women's rights, poverty, abortion and yack-yack for hours on end. Once she got started I knew I wasn't going to get any so I'd just

lay back with my beer and watch her jabber. I don't know how anybody could talk so damn much. Looked like her mouth was a high-speed engine that ran on its own power and the drive shaft that connected it to her brain had busted. I was careful not to bring up any serious topics unless I was too drunk and didn't care. And don't you argue with Rita either. She gets mean and starts stabbing her finger at you. Often had the impulse to bite one off but I'd just say, "All righta, Rita. Whatever you say, babe."

"Oh fuck you right back there, Quinn," she'd say and smile and know she had her nose out of joint. But what the hell. I didn't have aorta or intestines enough to tell Rita she didn't know shit from Shinola. She'd never really had to face up, you know, kill somebody, or nearly be killed, or try to make money. Rita was all theory. She didn't have to do dirty work, steal, CIA shit, like me. What the hell, Rita, I'd think, you always got to shit in a real toilet. You never got mange or jungle rot or watched your feet melt away. You're just Third World in a safari clothes ad, a make believe thrift store junkie.

I'd tell her, "Hey, Rita, I wasn't always a worthless no-good bastard. Example: In high school, I was the guy that befriended the rejects. Take the case of Jon LeDon. A fat kid, real fat. His parents had an investment company. They were fat too, a couple of hogs. We called them The Three Pigs. That kid didn't even know how to pee right. He'd unzip his pants and hold open both sides of the zipper and then aim his little wiener at the urinal but it was so short he'd weewee all over his shorts. His underwear was yellow around the fly. Took a lot of crap about it. The guys would stand around and cheer while he tried to pee. "Get away," he would whisper, "Just get away." Couldn't pee half the time so he'd just zip her up and then wet his pants later. After a while I think he just stopped peeing at school. Another kid, Philip Moore, decided he would make a career out of making Jon's life miserable. The day before the Spring Fair at the high school he pulled Jon aside and told him he couldn't be a part of it. "We don't want no fat kid out there. If we catch you outside, we'll take those dirty old pants right off of you. We'll pull them down in front of the girls and give them a look at that little wiener of yours."

The fair was on the football field which was right behind the school. So the poor guy sits by the window all day watching the everybody having fun, going from booth to booth, girls laughing, someone dragging a teacher to the Olde West Jail. I'd forgotten about Moore's threat. When I went inside to go to the can I spotted him sitting there by

the window like a buddha looking out, hands folded, quiet, real quiet, stoic like. A feeling or two went through me, anger, disgust, sadness. I wanted to hit him for being such a pussy; yes, I wanted to help him too. I wanted him to go outside and stand up to that asshole, Philip Moore. But I knew he wouldn't. He was scared to death that Moore would haul him to the ground and pull down his britches and call the girls over for a big laugh. As they would have done, being as they were at our fucked up high school. So I sat there with him and when I put my arm around his back he began to cry to himself, tears as big as grapefruit, sobs as tiny as peas. We sat there together the rest of the afternoon watching the other guys playing games, teasing girls, throwing water balloons, generally playing grab ass. Of course, when they came in to take a leak, they took shots at us.

"Hey Quinn. Oink. Oink. Come on, Jon. Let's see your little dick." That afternoon his parents came to pick him up in their Cadillac and I walked him to the car. As he got in I heard his mother ask if he'd had fun at the fair and he nodded his head and began to tell them how much fun he'd been having. So I tell Rita these things but that's a big mistake because she starts crying and saying things like, "And now look at you. Look at me. Look all around us. Yak, yack-yak...." Ad infinitum. Anyway, that's Rita for you.

One night I took her to a little bar that had a spiced shrimp special and we sat over in a corner booth and ate a lot of shrimp and drank a lot of beer and made a lot of jokes about fucking. We always liked to plan out the sexual blueprint of the evening and then execute. Learned that in the army. I was feeling pretty good about my Lincoln and my fortunes in general when Rita turned blue on me and didn't say much and stared up at the ceiling.

"Hey honey," I said, "maybe it's about time to go to my place and rub a little tummy." For an unknown reason she started crying great big tears that didn't take long to get from her eyeballs to her chin and drip on the plastic tablecloth. I didn't say much because I didn't want that double lipped engine of hers to get revved up. Then she sobbed and said "...and you know what I just realized is that, aside from fucking which comprises such a short period of one's life, there's really nothing, well, nothing real. It's such a sham. It seems when one contemplates history there was a time when things were real, good meant good and evil meant evil. Now — now — there's no such distinction, no definitive scale upon which one can measure one's life, no ability to judge if all the work

and pain will lead to anything other than another day. It's a long time between fucks and during that time all of that total darkness keeps pressing down, pressing down, and people start wars and they're mean to each other, they're boring to themselves and they're boring to others. It seems that when one examines things in an historical perspective there was one a time when the hand of God reached down through the darkness and raised us up into the beautiful light, up from the greed and the pain and the stench of this confining morbid place. Now listen to me, Quinn, goddammit. Don't go to sleep on me. Where is God these days? Where is Buddha and Jesus and, yes, where is the mighty sword of Mohammed?"

Whether she answered these and other questions of great importance to us all, I don't know. I laid my head on the table, hearing each of her words reverberate through it but not understanding where they came from and fell asleep.

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My throat's getting real dry. Shove me over another one of them cold ones. Thanks. That's better. Much better.

Next thing I remember is the jangle of a telephone. I don't know what happened to Rita. I was back at my apartment and must have been dreaming, parachuting down from a high place and as I got closer to the ground a clanging desperate sound like a fire truck grew louder and louder. I rolled over and propped up on my elbow, heart opening and closing like tappets on a race car. When I finally realized it was the phone and I wasn't back in Nam, I yanked it so hard I nearly tore it from the wall. It was Mobley.

"Goddammit, Quinn. Get your ass over here. That fucking messican is making me crazy. Says he's got to have your Chevy pronto. Has five hunnard bucks. I'd say, take it. Just to get the silly bastard outta here. Can't get no work done."

"Okay, Okay," I said, "let me catch a quick shower and battle the midnight mung and I'll be right there."

I sure felt cranky, real cranky. I like to sleep late and I hate to be hustled out of the sack. Reminds me too much of the goddamned army. That's why I take so many showers. Had to live like a roach over there in Nam. Never again. A hot shower always helps. Out of the womb. Like brand new. The mouth too. "Clean and fresh from hole to hole, makes a pure heart and a happy soul," I say. I scrambled a couple of eggs and made

some toast and instant coffee. By the time I crawled into my Lincoln and listened to her hum, and by hum I mean so silently it'd put you to sleep, and felt the rush of the air conditioning, I began to feel halfway alive. I wasn't ready for no radio yet. Just wanted quiet. Hell, I said to myself, the messican can have the fucking Chevy. Five hundred was way more than it was worth. Lucky if it got him halfway. All kinds of engine problems. Bad radiator. Probably would break down out there on the highway in hundred degree weather. I started laughing to think about it. Such a dumb bastard. So I pulled into the lot behind Mobley's body shop and Mobley's pacing and puffing in front of his mangey little office.

"Jesus H. Christ, Quinn. We got to get him outta here. Guy's got sumpin' wrong with him. Acts drunk or doped up or sumpin'. Guys like that 'tract attention. He'll bring the cops in here. Keeps honkin' the horn. Bad for bidness."

"Okay, Okay, don't get your bowels in an uproar," I said. "I'll take care of the guy. No need to panic."

I parked my Lincoln and headed over to the Chevy. This little wormy looking guy was in the front seat on the driver's side with the door open, one leg dangling between the door and the seat. Maybe he was my age and looked old or maybe just old and could barely walk. Half his teeth were gone and the skin on his face was scarred, maybe from zits or maybe he'd been in a fire. But there he was, a greasy, dirty little twerp, all beat up, ugly, a fucked up kinda guy. Smelt like a mixture of burritos and B.O.

"Friend," I said, "hear you want to purchase this fine automobile."

He sort of smiled and showed his black and yellow teeth.

"Got the money? "

"Uh huh," he says, pointing to his pocket.

Well," I said, "we got to go down to the bank and sign over the title and get it notarized. So's the pigs won't try to take it away from you and ship you back across the river.

"Si," he said smiling, "the peegs."

I motion him over to my Lincoln and when he gets in, he sits very still, hands on his knees, like he was in a church. We get to the bank and one of these marshmallow ass banking types pops up from his desk right there in the lobby and walked over to greet us

with a surprised look on his face. Like Billy the Kid and Pancho Villa had just crashed through the front door. If I hadn't needed him, I'd have pimped him about his wing-tipped shoes, Calvin Coolidge suit and MBA haircut. One of those chickenshit brainless turds that can't do much else but sit behind a desk at a bank, kissing the ass of the rich and kicking the bum of the poor.

"Need a notary, I said, "Got us a car to sell. I'd sell it to you if you had any money," I threw in. His pinhead did a minor wiggle of superiority. I looked over at the little guy — maybe he was a pigmy from the Andes — and gave him a big used car salesman smile. He stared down at his feet.

"Follow me. This way," the gutless wonder said leading us back to his desk. The Mexican and I sat down at the front of his desk. I started to fill out the blank on the back of the title and then look up at Mr. Banker and say, "We've got to see some money first."

The little guy doesn't move so I turn to him and repeat, "Money, pesos." He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a wad of smashed up bills and lays them on the desk. I count them out and only get three hundred forty-nine.

"We're talking here about a five hundred dollar deal," I said and held up five fingers. "Five hundred U.S. dollars."

He just mumbled around and made a strange noise, "Umma, umma, umma."

"Five hundred dollars," I said, looking laser beams into his eyes, making major mouth movements, like talking to a deaf guy. He sits there and stares at his feet, looking ashamed. Then he reaches back into his other pocket, pulls out another wad of bills and checks out my reaction from beneath his eyebrows.

"By my count that's only four forty-nine," I said. "I need me another fifty-one here." Banker boy starts to say something through his asshole shaped mouth but I stick up a hand and snort, "Just hold on there, Mr. J. P. Morgan, I'll take care of this."

"Feeftewon dollars," I tell the little guy but all I get is, "Umma, umma, umma." My used car salesman smile begins to get a little ragged and I notice the bank guard is edging in our direction.

I leaned over to the Mexican real close and whispered, "Look here, Pancho Villa." I squeezed his shoulder hard enough that his head popped upright. "I ain't fucking with you. You said five hundred, you'll pay five hundred. You'll pay it now."

Mr. Banker begins to make a few pitiful noises and I say, "I'll take care of this. Back off a minute, Bud." Then, another thought occurred to me. "By the way," I asked, "How much for the notary?"

"Five dollars," banker boy sniffed back.

So I pulled the Mexican outside by his shirt collar, dragged him around the corner and slammed his ass against a marble column. I waited for his knife but he didn't show one.

"You little son of a bitch, you sneaky little bastard," I yelled. "You cough up that money or your ass is grass. Got me out of bed. Make me look bad at the bank."

"Please, sir," he said. "My family. I need for food. I need for gas."

I shoved him against the wall and hissed at him through my teeth.

"I don't give a rat's ass about your shit. How do I know you even got a family? How do I know you ain't just another pot head? Clever little bastard, right? Just want to snort coke all day at my expense. Think people will feel sorry for you. Well, listen up, motherfucker. You just ran into a goddamn freight train going a hundred miles an hour. I'll tell you this right here and now. I'm going to break each and every rib in your chest and all those rotten lying teeth to boot. Unless you cough up five-oh-five. Five hundred for the car and five for the notary. Got that straight? Comprende?"

I backed away. He stared at his feet and stirred around, making his "Umma, umma, umma" sound. He knelt on the pavement, reached into his back pocket and pulled out another clump of tangled bills, unraveled each one until he built himself a neat pile. I'm standing there ready to kill the son of a bitch. I want to smash his goddamn head against the marble column until his brains pop out. But I ain't going to jail over no fucking Mexican. No way. Would have taken his money and run and forgotten the notary but I didn't want that car in my name. He stopped unfolding the bills and I counted them out.

"Ok, you cheating little bastard," I said, "let's go in ad finish this deal."

My head's still pounding from the night before and I'm really sweating.

Back inside Mr. Dumb Fuck still sat there playing with his pencils. So I sign over the title and a stick woman with glasses carries over her notary instrument like a hot turd and we get the deal done.

“Walk back, idiot,” I said getting up and stomping out of the bank. The Mexican sat there, staring at his shoes. Boy, was I glad to get back to the Lincoln. I turned on the air, the radio, lit up a joint. That engine's so sweet you can't hear a thing and then I gave it the juice and it slid out like vodka going down the esophagus. Once I got calmed down, I moved out of there fast and just start driving around.

Down Main Street. Nothing but fast food joints, bars, car dealers, banks, carpet stores. Mobley's bad but hell these people make Mobley look like Robin Hood. All these law-abiding citizens, meaning your ordinary, lying, cheating, mean spirited U.S of A. fuckheads, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, order of the moose, goose, roach and rat-faced liars. Just a little more polished than Mobley, that's all. Off to one side I spotted a Deli Delight and began to feel some food deprivation. I picked up a huge sub and asked the little honey behind the counter for lots of produce, meaning pickle, onion, shredded lettuce, thinly sliced tomato, lots of ham and beef and hot mustard. Needed a Big Cold Drink to water it down. Back in my Lincoln I took a sip of the Big Cold Drink and decided I needed a better spot for lunch.

So I kept on driving up one street and down the other, under trees and overpasses, past bums rolling stogies and mamas tooling their babies down the sidewalk. Before I knew it I was on a freeway. Takes a long while any more to get out of the city. Eventually I saw a barn or two sagging against the horizon, pastures rough with wheat, meadow grass crossing the ragged lines of hedgerows and, of course, the sky. That's your basic Kansas look. I turned off onto winding roads, some paved with asphalt, some with gravel and then roads giving up dust.

It was such a nice day, you know, not too hot, not too cool. I opened the windows to feel the breeze. My blood pressure was going down and I felt real swell. I could hear red winged black birds. I can could smell hay and manure. The dirt road took a big curve and formed a spot off to my right where I could park under a grove of trees, sycamore, elm and oak. I parked the Lincoln, sat myself down between the roots of the sycamore and sucked another joint. Made me even hungrier. I unrolled some of the paper on the sub and bit through the thick bread, the crunchy lettuce and onion, into the meat and spicy mayonnaise, chewing slowly and remembered when I was a little kid.

Used to come to places like this. With mom and dad. Halfway to my uncle's farm, they'd find a place off the highway to have lunch. Bologna, mayonnaise, white bread, apples. Dry, crackling grass. Mom in a summer dress made from a pattern from the dime store. Knees up to her chin, reaching over to pour the Kool Aid.

I finished my Big Cold Drink. Felt like Nam on a slow day. Sitting in the shade and breeze, feeling normal, thinking there wasn't a war going on around me. On some days I could smell something like a farmyard. Some guys were afraid over there. For others, it was like a great big hunt. They'd come in from one search and destroy mission and volunteer to go right out on another one. I just wanted to come back alive in one piece.

Made me think about the Mexican who bought my Chevy. Ah, what the hell, I thought, that little son of a bitch probably had a lot more cash than he had in his pockets. I've seen it time and time again. Con man. Acts poor. Cries a little. Tries to make you feel sorry. Well, I've been screwed before and I wasn't going to let it happen again.

I stretched out on the ground. The joint was really doing a number on me. Good Columbian stuff. I felt real close to the sky. So blue it seemed to rub against me. "You're ok," I told myself. "You're ok, Quinn. Nothing's wrong with you. Just lay here and let the breeze smooth you out. Then I closed my eyes and they felt so hot, I said, "What is this shit?"

Big wet hot fucking tears. "Oh Quinn," I started saying. "Oh shit, Quinn. What happened to little Jimmy Quinn? Got big, didn't he? What happened to all that time between little and big? Somewhere in there, between the crack of a baseball bat and the thump of a mortar round, blown away, rubbed out. Riding bikes. Bouncing basketballs. Serving mass. Bringing mom a dandelion bouquet. All that. Gone."

I sank deeper into a spot between the roots of the sycamore and kept saying my name over and over: "Jimmy Quinn, Jimmy Quinn, Jimmy Quinn."

Must have slept. When I opened my eyes, I looked up through the limbs of the tree and thought I was over in Nam again. Felt like the time I got blown out of bed. Got to spend the night at Cu Chi Base Camp. A friend of mine let me use the bunk at his hootch. It was the best bed I had over there. The hootch had a cement floor and a tin roof. It was fortified with sandbags and there was screening to keep out the bugs and let in the

breeze. I was having a dream about home. My mom was bringing me a cake that said "Jimmy" on it. She was coming toward me smiling and then the cake exploded and I was laying on the cement floor with a big hunk of nasty looking shrapnel the size of a cantaloupe still spinning beside me.

Sitting by the sycamore, I felt like I had been dropped from the sky. It looked never-ending, like over there in Nam before a typhoon. Clouds had formed like columns of ruins. I began shaking at the thought of a grand cold god that could make me so small. Scared hell out of me, let me tell you. I says, "Shit, I got to get out of this dream." Thought I was going to fall off the face of the earth. My heart started doing double time.

I halfway crawled to my Lincoln and hauled my ass inside as fast as I could. Locked all the doors and reached under the seat so I could feel the handle of my Forty-Five. Felt a little better then, holding the Forty-Five. Held it like a girlfriend's hand. "Your weapon's going to be your best friend," the drill sergeant said over and over. Was he ever right. So I got my nerves on an even keel and I said, "Ok, Mr. Lincoln, you freed the slaves, now free me."

Got the hell out of there.

Back to the freeway and the city. Drove around and drove around. Don't know how long I drove around. City looked crummy, old, real old. Run down. Fat old women on front porches staring at the trees. Bums limped along scruffy storefronts. I couldn't stand to see all that fucking misery. So I drove up here, parked and hit the bars, played the pinball machines. I'd wandered in and out of four or five bars before I sat down on a curb. That's when I saw him.

Swear to God. Just bigger than shit. At first, I thought, well hell, it's just an old hippie or a swami in a long white robe. He had soft brown hair parted in the middle that dropped down on his shoulders, took the wind naturally like a thick leafy tree. What got me most was how bright he stood out from the sidewalk and the store fronts and bar windows and the lampposts. He glittered, so much so that I wished I had my sunglasses on. I could see he was wearing sandals made with ritzy leather and stitching. Probably Italian. His moustache and short beard were neatly combed. What shook me, shook me real hard as he headed straight at me — and that's why I am so nervous, friend — were his eyes: shining blue, direct like the eyes of a wild animal charging out of a jungle. They

overpowered me, his eyes. They destroyed all my theories, ideas about myself. I felt small and ugly and worthless. I wanted to drop down at his feet and say, "O Jesus, I am so sorry, man. Jesus, I am so fucking sorry."

He just kept coming towards me, then turned to move down the street. As he passed by, he smiled and held up two fingers that said, "Peace."