

Celebrity Sighting

by Smiley McGrouchpants, Jr-Esq-III

No, that can't be him, Joe thought.

The guy was messing around the displays in back. He had walked in three or four minutes ago, by now, and he certainly looked the part — or at least Joe thought so.

But, I must admit, Joe thought, *his skin does seem to have more of an olive sheen than I would have thought. Sandals, beard, long hair . . .*

He looked closer, leaning forward across the counter.

Wait a minute . . . are those Birkenstocks?

Joe shook his head, quickly and involuntarily, to clear it. *No, it can't be . . .* he thought (again). *Not possible.*

Now, Joe Scarborough had been raised Roman Catholic all his life, said his prayers each night, went to church on Sunday — was even an *altar boy* as a kid, growing up in Brooklyn — and he knew for a *fact* that Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour, does not just waltz into a 7-11 quickie-mart on hot summer's day for a Slurpee.

PLOP! The guy — *whoever* he was — had dropped his purchases on the countertop in front of Joe, waking him from his few-seconds-long reverie.

Joe looked down. He saw: a four-pack of *Seventh Generation* toilet paper, and a three-pack of chocolate "Zingers."

He looked up. The guy met his eyes, and smiled. "Yeah, I know the Zingers aren't good for me, but I figure you've got to cut yourself a little slack now and again . . ."

"Amen to *that!*" Joe said, too quickly to think about what he was *really* saying, or anything like that. "That'll be . . ."

"Oh, and a pack of American Spirits. In the Red. Please."

Joe wordlessly and stiffly retrieved the pack and — as diplomatically as he could manage — completed the transaction. The "guy" paid with a \$20, and nodded and half-smiled in salutation as he left. Joe nodded back, pseudo-reverently, thought whether it was in a manner in keeping with his training from his altar-boy days

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or two tours in the U.S. Army, he couldn't tell.

Some time after the guy had gone, Joe rang himself up for a pack of the Blues (just out of curiosity) and went outside of the first of the predictable mid-afternoon weekday lulls to take his smoke break.

He found himself coughing, from inhaling *too much*, rather than because the cigarettes were too strong. He took a breath, relaxed a bit, and then, a little later, on his next pull, took it in a little lengthier and let it out luxuriously.

It still wasn't quite hitting him, but he could taste it more, feel it more going in and out. He had heard these "Native" cigarettes had none of the chemicals or pumped-up nicotine additives of his "old standard" brand, but he hadn't expected to be able to *tell* the difference. He had always figured it was just more of the usual rhetoric people use to sell cigarettes (or *something*) — just, this time, in the opposite direction.

He drew again, and breathed it out a bit more deliberately. It seemed a little smoother . . . it would take some adjustment, and he still felt the primes of the old cravings not quite being met — but, by now, he was honestly curious.

He looked around, into the quietude of the not-very-busy street, the telephone lines strung along the street, the birds (*black!*) roosting there, that he had never taken the time to *watch* before.

Well, he thought, taking another pull, *whoever that guy was — or not — at least this is something . . .*

*for Anne Brontë
(for reasons that should be obvious)*

