

Ballad of Jimmy Lee

Jan 19, 2013 Williamsburg, 2:30 AM-Dec 2013

Back in nineteen sixty-two I had a 54 Ford that ran like new C F C
You could fill it up for pocket change Drove like a dream F C G
Pack of Luckies in my sleeve Duck tail like you wouldn't believe C F C
Took me twenty minutes to get it right Dab of Brylcreem F C G C

Jimmy Lee was a friend of mine Pumped gas over on Fifth and Pine
"Don't pay much," he liked to joke, "But it's honest toil."
I'd hang out there on Saturdays Talking Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays
We'd grab a couple of nickel Cokes And Jimmy'd check the oil

Both of us were small town boys Didn't make a lot of noise
Nobody thought that either of us would be going far
But I got plans Jimmy would say Gonna hit the big time far away
You'll see me driving with the top down and a big old cigar

If I had me a time machine I'll tell you what I'd do F C G C
I'd set the dial straight and clean For 1962 F C C G
I'd head right over to Fifth and Pine, home of honest toil F C C F
Grab a couple of nickel Cokes and say Jimmy check the oil F C G C

Round about 1964 Jimmy Lee went off to war
I wrote him once or maybe twice That was a long damn year
When he got back he'd become a man Drinking some with a steady hand
Didn't talk much about it and I guess I didn't want to hear

We tried our best to ease back in but there was something angry in the wind
Like a twister full of memories with no place to hide
Jimmy and me in the midst of it all, deep in the writing on the wall
Caught up in some American dream that had already died

Things were changing pretty fast Seemed like nothing good would last
Folks you'd known all your life wouldn't look at you no more

Days of rage, nights of fear, teenagers in riot gear
The sound of some dark mystery bird scratching at the door

Chorus

They closed the Esso station down Replaced it with a burger clown
The Rivoli theater where we watched John Wayne got done in by the mall
Jimmy and me we'd say hello but what he'd seen I didn't know
By the time Chicago hit the news we hardly talked at all

It must have been around 71 Jimmy packed a bedroll and a gun
Pointed a rusty pickup truck toward some distant star
That was the last I saw of my old friend and if I don't see him ever again
I hope he's driving with the top down And a big old cigar

Chorus

An invented story about the real social trauma brought on by the Vietnam War.