

Jack's

by Gary V. Powell

Me and the other old guys come for lunch at Jack's on Fridays. Touted as a gourmet pub, there's really no gourmet here unless you consider fish tacos with tazicki sauce gourmet. It's a sports bar with decent food. On Fridays, drinks are two for one starting at noon. Plus, on Fridays, the girls wear their lowest cut tops and shortest Daisy Dukes.

They know their audience.

We come alone, leaving our wives at home or dropping them off at the club for lunch with the ladies. We sit at individual tables, nodding friendly enough at one another, newspapers spread before us. But we're not here for idle chit-chat, or ESPN, or fish tacos. We're here for Wendy and Cherie and Haley.

When Merry arrives to take my order, I perk up and act like the two of us have some connection beyond the twenty-five percent tip I always leave. Instead of standing next to me, she leans across the table, breasts grinning beneath her V-neck tee. I ask for two beers with Wild Turkey back, the tacos, and a cup of chili with jalapeños.

I'll regret it later on.

Me and the other old guys pretend to read our papers and watch Wimbledon re-runs, all the while wondering how we'll spend the next twenty years, wondering what we'll do when the money runs out and our hearts beat on. Fighting off the fear of catheters, tubes up our noses, and drool on our chins, while stealing glances at Lacy and Mallory, ripe and tight across the bar.

Actually, they're smug. Smug and secure in their youth.

But they don't know that once there was a Chevy Camaro parked on a farmer's lane, four on the floor, bench seat in the back, and footprints on steamy windows, snow piling outside. Once, there was a Big Red cheerleader, sassy between classes on autumn afternoons that sang yellow and orange outside our dormitory room. Once, there were white powder beaches, surfer girls dancing drunk

in the sunset glow, and that slippery slick-slide-slick under sweaty blankets. Once, there were New Orleans nights and Austin mornings, zydeco staining our sheets and the sickly scent of gardenia sneaking through the screens. Once, there was a stolen Chicago spring, ice melting and water rushing outside the brunette warmth of a sleek and slender corporate condo—cheated hearts splintering in the distance.

I sip my beer and wonder what Candy would make of that.

