

# The Funky Chicken

by Gary Lark

We came out of the desert dry as bible leaves, dust caked and sore, lizards crawling toward town. We came from war games in the sage brush gullies and ridges. We came from firing the 105mm recoilless rifle into old car bodies doubling for tanks. When the rifle was fired the concussion raised dust for fifteen feet around and shook the sinuses loose in our heads. We didn't think about other parts. We wanted beer to slake our thirst and dull our fuddled endeavors. And we wanted the Funky Chicken.

The air hung like a light amber gauze over the city of Yakima as we taxied its broad main street. In a bar down a side street genuine exotic dancers plied their trade. Before a packed house they would do slow enticing strips to reveal pin-up bodies, or twirl the tassels on each breast independently while bending over backward touching their hands to the floor behind them. A sea of hands and faces reached like tentacles waving in an ebbing tide. Outside hookers patrolled.

After seeing this counterfeit show three of us never went back. It was forbidden fruit. A sucker's game, like a casino you plunked down your money and received a plastic smile. We went to the Sundowner. It was never crowded, had a mediocre rock band, and a waitress named Jane. She had an easy laugh and bounced around the room like a ball of energy.

Inevitably someone would hold up a twenty dollar bill and yell out FUNKY CHICKEN. Jane would come over and snatch the twenty from his hand and say, "Don't you wish." But she would soon disappear behind a curtain reappearing moments later wearing a cheerleader's uniform. The band would strike up the Funky Chicken and she would start clucking. She made no pretense of grace or seduction. She became a funky chicken clucking and strutting and throwing clothes at random. Before long all she had on were sequined panties and pasties. Her breasts could never be airbrushed into perfection, her hair was a rigid one curl flip bouncing only on the most athletic maneuvers, and her voice was mainly loud. But there she was: the real funky chicken. She visited every table. It was high camp and low

camp all in one. We yelled and hollered and sang along handing her fives and tens as she clucked and jiggled through the coop of a dozen GI's.

It always ended with a short encore before she disappeared into the curtain. Jane would be gone for about a half hour before reappearing as a cocktail waitress, a little flushed but her affable self. Someone would yell for the band to play Purple Haze and we would drink into it knowing the best part of the evening was behind us.

Around midnight we drove back into the hills where the ghostly enemy waited and the poker game was breaking up. We crawled into our shelter-half tents knowing tomorrow, hung over, we would pretend to care about learning the killing trade.

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