

Twinkies

At night I breathed in the smell of the tent's old canvas, laced with the scent of the surrounding pine trees. I let them tickle my memories from days long ago. I spent a weekend in the Adirondacks a few times each summer with my old high school buddy, Marty. We were happy to have just the basics of life on those trips ... hot dogs and hamburgs, my soft drinks, his martinis, my potato chips, his Twinkies. The latter had been around since we were kids.

While I watched Marty wolf down his second package of Twinkies one morning, I began to think about change. Twinkies were exactly the same as when we were in the seventh grade. While everyone I knew and the rest of creation never stopped changing, Twinkies had remained the same. The only other part of my life that never changed was my memories. They were fixed, although by now fading as I rapidly advanced through my seventies.

We sat in Marty's rowboat on a small lake and I thought of our conversation around the campfire the night before, about all the fun we had, from calling up girls together in the seventh grade to camping out up in the South Woods as teenagers.

And now in the quiet of the morning out on the lake, when I spoke he may have been dozing.

"So, is this as much fun as when we were sixteen?"

"No, Jack," he said, "at sixteen I was out here on the lake with my high school girlfriend."

"Come to think of it," I said, "so was I."

Marty smiled and pulled his cell phone from his pants pocket. "Do you think we should call up our old flames?" he said.

"I don't think I would," I said. "And neither should you."

"They still live in the area, somewhere around town," he said.

"I think yours does," I said. "Mine may not be far away."

Marty put his phone away and for a time we were silent again as we cast flies, lost in our own thoughts. I had lied, just a little. Sally and I had sat on the dock. We were fifteen and sixteen. She would have never gotten in a rowboat and gone out on the lake with me. Her parents were too concerned for her well being to put her in the hands of a boy whose sanity they must have wondered about. Had we rowed out fifty feet and her mother heard of it there would have been hell to pay. Leaving us alone with each other happened only within the prescribed format of a date or a dance. Only as we

got older was I allowed to whisk her off alone in my father's car.

At the time neither of us appreciated such restrictions, implemented for both our physical safety as well as our moral virtue. I have to assume when Sally became a parent her mind changed. Mine did. Our parents' watchfulness helped us to enter our adulthood with options that otherwise might have been lost to the demands of our hormones. Everyone in our teenage crowd would no doubt remember a girl named Mary Jane and when she got pregnant. The father abandoned her. She had to work to support the baby, losing any opportunity for college. Gone was her personal freedom she could have invested in the start of a career. Her circle of acquaintances became luckless souls in similar circumstances and she wound up marrying one of them. Marty and I were lucky. We had parents who cared and we married the daughters of parents who did likewise.

But as I looked out over the quiet lake I remembered Sally in a white summer dress. Short enough to show off her beautifully tanned legs, it also gave a satisfying view of her sunburned chest and the curved tops of her young breasts. I dwelt on the conundrum of why less covering provided by a swim suit was not any sexier. A lovely riddle to contemplate. I was sure she looked quite different today, but I knew it would be nice to renew our acquaintance. Some might feel we should leave old flames in the ashes of our past, but as my boyhood friend and I sat out on the lake I got to thinking that we had recently turned seventy and that made things somewhat different than if we had all been in our thirties when disloyal possibilities might have loomed.

"Maybe it wouldn't hurt," I said aloud.

"What wouldn't hurt," said Marty.

"I don't think our wives would mind if we called up our old girlfriends just to say Hi," I said.

"You don't?" said Marty. "Which universe are you living in?"

"But this is just as old friends, not lovers," I said.

"I assume that's your story and you're sticking to it?"

"OK, maybe we could call their husbands first," I said, "and explain we're just sitting out here fishing and thinking about their wives."

"Oh, sure," he said.

"They would probably understand."

"You think?" he said, shaking his head, "I doubt it."

"I mean, after all, the women should see us now. Don't you agree?"

"No, I don't."

"But we're mature now, accomplished, successful," I said.

"We're also fifty pounds heavier, sagging and balding."

"Who would see us on the phone?" I said.

"You can hear fat and old in our voices."

"Well, maybe they are too," I said.

"Precisely," he said as he glanced at me.

"Right," I said. "None of us are Twinkies."

“Pardon?”

“Twinkies,” I said, “they never change.”

“People do,” said Marty.

We continued to fish while I walked around in my head, thinking about past times with Sally, a girl who surely didn't exist any more, but had grown into a woman. Ten minutes later I reached in my pocket and felt for my cell phone. Pulling it out and flipping it open, I saw the reception bar nudged up by the nearest cell tower. I called Information.

Sally had married a young man I remembered from the Boy Scouts long ago. He and I lived in different parts of the city and were not in the same troop, but I saw him each year at the town-wide Scout celebration night. He often received another award ... for helping old ladies, for building an air raid shelter. I really can't remember any of them, only that they were always impressive. And I sat on the sidelines wondering how the heck anyone found enough time to pursue all that glory. He had worked hard on his Scout craft and wore a sash with more Merit Badges sewn on than I had ever seen before or since. I might have remembered more about his Scouting exploits than about his bride, my old girl friend. I would never forget his name. I had their telephone number in sixty seconds.

“I found her,” I said to Marty.

“And what are you going to do with her?” he said.

“Just call up and say ‘Hi’.” I answered.

“I have an idea,” he said. “Why don't we rehearse this?”

“What do you mean?”

“You play yourself,” he said, “and I'll play Sally.”

Marty raised his fist to his ear and used a falsetto voice as high as he could muster.

“Hello-o-o. This is Sa-a-lly.”

I laughed and played along.

“Hi Sally, this is Jack.”

“Jack! Where have you been? You were supposed to mow the lawn this morning and you didn't show up. I'm going to fire your ass, Jack, if you miss me once more—“

“Hold on. Sally didn't talk like that.”

“But it's fifty years later,” said Marty.

“Start again,” I said. “Hi Sally, this is Jack.”

“Jack who?”

“Jack from your teenage years. We used to date. I gave you my class ring. We were—“

“I don't have your class ring, Jack. I threw it out.”

“Wait minute, Marty—“

“Wendell found it in my jewelry box and became incensed.”

“Who is Wendell?” I said.

“Whatever her husband's name is,” said Marty.

“This isn't helping,” I said.

“And then Wendell said ... if I ever had any kind of contact with you, Jack ... any at all, even if my car broke down in the swamp out yonder and you happened by ...

he would absolutely never give me my allowance again. Ever!”

“What allowance?”

“A guy with a name like Wendell would certainly give her a thousand or two a week.”

“Really?” I said, witheringly.

“At least.”

“OK.”

“How much would you have given her?” said Marty.

“I've never thought about it.”

“Uh huh,” he said.

“How should I know how much?” I said.

“Face it, you cheap bastard,” said Marty. “You would have been good for no more than a hundred bucks a week ... tops.”

“That would have been a lot of money back then,” I said.

“You're right. Then half of that.”

“What the hell does it matter, anyway, Marty?”

“Because it's the first question Sally will ask you, right after she realizes you're not the guy who mows her lawn. ‘Jack,’ she'll say, ‘how much of an allowance would you have given me?’”

“She wasn't like that, Marty.”

“It's fifty years later,” he said.

I sighed. “Some people don't change.”

“Really?” he said. “Then you'd better hope she's a Twinkie.”

I put my phone back in my pocket.

“I called Rosalie last night when you fell asleep in your lawn chair out by the fire,” he said.

“You're kidding me, Marty. Aren't you?”

“No, I'm not kidding.”

I laughed. “Did she ask you how much of an allowance you would have given her? Or did she threaten to fire your ass for not showing up to mow her lawn?”

“No,” he said. “As soon as I told her who was calling, she hung up on me.”

I felt bad for him. I didn't know what to say.

“I suppose,” he said, “she asked herself why on earth would she want to have a conversation with some old geezer who had dated her a half century ago.”

“That's probably a good question,” I said.

“And you know what? We're the Twinkies.”

“How do you figure?” I asked.

“We haven't changed,” he said with a laugh. “After all these years, here we are on a Saturday afternoon still trying to call up girls who don't want to talk to us.”

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