

Anna Lee

By

James Gregory Maynard

4/2019

A tempest brushed passed me that year, leaving wisps of clouds smelling of lavender, sweet on the tongue. Locks of straw-colored hair floated off her shoulders like a contrail that I followed for a season. The summer of “73” I drifted on the currents of a force of nature, pushed and pulled, sometimes tumbling fast and hard, sometimes gently rolling through the days. But the season changed leaving a chill to the touch. Wrathful gusts brushed coarse against the skin, pushing me away.

On a balmy afternoon, warmed by the sun’s northern trek, spring breached from the long bitterness of the Massachusetts winter. Students lounged about the commons grounds, some studying for finals, most simply sponging up this premature leak in the season. T-shirts, shorts and sandals were shaken out of the bottoms of drawers. Sunglasses and for the prudent few, sunscreen, were donned, defending against Ole Sol’s full bloom in the clear blue sky.

From a gathering on the far side of the grounds a vision appeared, crowding out attention for others. Conversations silenced and heads turned to absorb the lithe apparition wafting across the grassy stubble. I sat under a tree watching as a light breeze pressed against the sheer, pale yellow, sun dress revealing ample breasts and sensual contours. Golden locks fell in waves to the shoulder blades and the wind picked at the fringes, whipping up a corona as she walked directly at me. Looking at me..... Me.

This heavenly body stopped in front of me and, before I could clamor to my feet, folded onto her knees and said, “Hi.”

I smiled. “Hi, back.”

“You’re Jeremy Sloan.” She said.

“Do I know you?” I asked, scratching at the periphery of memory to remember whether I had met this young woman before.

She said, “Probably not. During the school year I spend nearly all of my time studying. Pre-med.” She shrugged.

I nodded and wondered how such perfection, those bold blue eyes, perfectly freckled nose and full lips, all without a touch of makeup, could go unnoticed during the last eight months. At no time during my academic career had I ever been so serious about my studies as to become oblivious to such beauty, or even those less gifted for that matter.

“You’re a junior chemical engineering student.” She said.

“How do you know that?” I asked. She didn’t answer.

“I am staying here for summer break. In the fall I begin the med. program. Since you live in town, at home, I thought maybe we could do some things together this summer.” She said.

“Well. Ah. Sure. I would like that.” At least I thought I did.

She smiled and took my hand, pulled my fingers open and ran her finger over my palm then up and down each finger. Then she put my hand to her breast and held it there, staring into my eyes, as if reaching into my core, reading me.

The soft warm touch of her hand pressing mine to her left me wordless, left me just looking back at her, allowing her to lure me in. I watched as she pushed my hand away, turning it palm up. She reached for my pen, clicked it open and wrote on my palm. Then, she folded my fingers into a fist and said. "Call me after exams." She held my hand in both of hers, leaned in and kissed me on the lips. The sweet fragrance of her shampoo lingered when she stood and walked away. I opened my hand, on it was written:

Anna Lee

747-3281

"So what happened?" You ask. Imagine you are walking down a street and bam someone cold cocks you and you wake up in an alley with no clothes on, no money, no watch and then you wander out into the morning sun with an old newspaper for coverage and ask the first person who walks by, "What the hell happened?" That is how I felt later that fall. What little I have been able to piece together of the summer of "73" goes something like the following.

Friday evening, the day of my last exam, I called Anna Lee. She said, "Meet me at Dexter's at eight." Dexter's is a pub a block off Main Street, about a half mile from the campus. Not necessarily a big hang out for the college crowd, it did host a young, hip crowd, and was rumored to be *The* place to score most anything a partier might desire.

I arrived ten minutes early. There were only a five people, one sitting at the ancient oak bar. One was the bartender, no Anna Lee. As I held up my glass for a refill, I heard a door at the back of the bar slam closed. I turned and saw her waltz her way to the bar. She sat on the stool to my right, hooked an arm around my elbow and said, "Two drafts and shots of Jose," to the bartender. He winked at her. She said, "Hi. How'd exams go?"

“Good. Yours?” I replied.

“Aced em,” She said. “Let’s celebrate.” She sucked down the shot of tequila and drank half of her beer. With her tongue she wiped the foam from her upper lip and pointed with her pinky finger at the shot glass sitting in front of me. After I downed my shot, she held up two fingers, and Joe (no kidding the bartender’s name was Joe—Joe the Bartender) refilled the shot glasses. Joe, by the way has been a wonderful resource to my efforts to reconstruct the summer of “73”, most evenings beginning at Dexter’s.

I don’t remember much of our first date after ten that night. I’ve a vague memory that it was after five the next morning when I drove home. I woke up sitting on the back seat of my car in Dexter’s parking lot. No Anna Lee. I think we must have had sex at some point, though. Where? I have no idea but, my t-shirt was inside out and on backwards and my underwear missing. If we didn’t have sex, I refuse to consider how that might have happened.

One poignant memory from that first night has stuck with me to this day. After our fourth or fifth shot - who was counting - Anna Lee looked me in the eyes and said. “I’m monogamous. You’d better be too. I catch you sleeping around or if you give me any shit, I’ll cut your nuts off.” At first I thought she meant giving her any lip. The next morning I understood what she was talking about, I think. Given the shape I was in that morning I wouldn’t have realized missing nuts until two or three days later. Now, that scared me. I checked every morning.

After spending the summer with Anna Lee I still know little about her, however, through the fog of that summer I was able to glean a few fundamental truths about her. One, she had a voracious zest for life, living each summer evening full throttle, with daring and a lot of alcohol and sex. I can’t remember what number two was but have cloudy recollections of sex in ways that would have made Vātsyāyana, author of the Kama Sutra, blush. We had sex parked on Main Street, in church parking lots, in front of the Dollar Store, outside the City Police

Headquarters, the Catholic Cemetery, everywhere except her place or mine. I still have no idea where she lived.

I remember referring to our evenings together as dates. She corrected me with something like, "I don't date. We hang out together." The evenings were ours, as were the better part of the early mornings. How she made it to work at the university hospital every day at seven in the morning is beyond me. Fortunately, I worked part time at my dad's pharmacy. I'd negotiated a noon til six shift assuring five to six hours of sleep every day. But, there were weeks I had to beg off our *hangin out* in order to get a decent night's sleep.

As summer nights began to chill, so did our relationship, if that's what it was. Two weeks before classes were to begin Anna Lee stopped drinking, yet the sex continued. I drank less and remember more of those nights, and our discussions, and oh my yes, the sex. That was the week I fell in love with Anna Lee.

Friday night, the last Friday before classes started, I went to Dexter's, sat down at the bar and nodded at Joe. He sat a beer in front of me. By nine, I knew I would never see Anna Lee again. Why I thought that is uncertain, but in the pit of my stomach I knew.

For months I searched for her, across campus, at the hospital, at Dexter's. No one had seen her, most did not know her. When the first beautiful day of spring arrived, I sat under the tree where I first met her. I sat there until the chill of the evening shivered me loose from all hope. The summer of "73" a storm blew through my life in a blur, uprooting all norms, pushing and pulling me in undreamt directions and in an instant dropped me back to earth leaving me grappling for meaning to the experience. In the end I realized that as with much of nature, while there are explanations, most are unknown and so it was with Anna Lee.