

WHERE IS ANN?

By

Terri L. Atkins Febuary

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SETTING

Small Park in Jacksonville, Illinois
Today

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR: A woman around 50 years old. She is remembering a time in her past and her friend, Ann, whom she has not spoken with since childhood. She is haunted by the memory of her friend, Ann. All talking is done by Narrator, who does not see Ann.

LISTENER: Person of any age, sex, or color. Listener hears Narrator and sees Ann. Listener interacts with both, especially Ann, as if she really was there.

ANN SEYMOUR: The Narrator's monologue is about her. She is a full grown woman dressed the way Narrator remembers her. Ann is playing in the park and seems to be acting out the events Narrator is reliving. Ann does not see Narrator, but interacts with Listener. Ann is just a memory.

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Lights up in park

(ENTER NARRATOR & LISTENER on bicycles. They ride a moment)

NARRATOR

Oh, my! Look. Look at the park. I haven't seen this little park in years.

(Stop down center stage. Straddling their bikes and looking around at the park.)

Strange coming back here after so many years.

NARRATOR

It really dredges up a lot of lost memories. Looks just like it did when I was a young girl, just like those hot summer days when... *(Takes a deep breath)* We use to collect old pop bottles to trade-in at the store for 5 cents a bottle. *(Laughs)* Kept the dentist in business with all the penny candy we ate. Ah! Tootsie Rolls, they were the best. I could eat one right now. Five cents would get you a big fat Tootsie Roll.

NARRATOR

Look, look all up and down the streets. Old Victorian homes. The college campus is up the way there. I always loved this part of town. If we ever moved out of Louisiana, this is where I would want to come back to. Close to family, close to the memories. Huh, the memories. This park was one of my favorite places, all secluded in this old neighborhood.

I came here with my best friend in grade school. Well, actually, I spent more time here in fourth & fifth grade with a girl named Ann Seymour than with anyone else. Ann Seymour. Yeah, Ann Seymour. You know, I still think about her.

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NARRATOR

(ANN Enters on bike, riding in background. NARRATOR does not observe her. LISTENER rides around the park, but in a different direction from ANN. NARRATOR leans forward on her bike, pensive.)

(LISTENER comes back near NARRATOR and stops.)

Ann Seymour, I never told you about her? I don't know where she came from, she just appeared at school, then just as suddenly she was gone. She was the most awkward gangly girl I ever met. Thick bushy, black pony tail, bright colored socks, slouching over the top of her black and white Oxford shoes. **Bright** colored socks, like purple or red! They **never** matched her clothes...

(Remove glasses and begin to clean them)

Ann wore thick black rimmed glasses. Her lenses were so thick it made her eyes magnify like owl eyes. She would shuffle down the hall, pressing her shoulder against the wall to the exit door at school. She ran like a galloping camel. I don't mean that as an insult, Ann just had a different way about her. Today we would say she was a "nerd".

(ANN parks her bike next to the cannon. She climbs on it and plays like she was a kid.)

NARRATOR

Ann and I spent so many hours riding bikes all over this town, but we always ended up back here at the park.

(LISTENER joins ANN on the cannon.)

She was an odd person. At least, that is what everyone else thought and--well—I agreed since I didn't want people thinking I was "weird" like Ann. But I found myself becoming a friend to her.

(Laughs softly and rides back and forth across down stage.)

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NARRATOR

My mom said something very odd. She told me that Ann was so close to a genius IQ that she was borderline retarded. I don't know if that is possible, but if it is Ann had to be.

(ANN runs around park with her arms out spinning around and running gleefully. LISTENER joins her.)

NARRATOR

(Parks bike. Sits on park bench.)

See that old cannon? I guess it was left over from the civil war or--something historic like that. We would climb on it and pretend there were pirates. We were the damsels in distress one minute, then we would blast away at the bad guys the next.

(Deep breath—slowly lets it out through pursed lips.)

We could stay here for hours, just feeling free.

(NARRATOR wanders over to the cannon. Strains trying to pick up a cannon ball. leans on the cannon quietly reflecting. LISTENER comes back to the cannon, watching ANN who is now playing hopscotch.)

NARRATOR

(Smiling) It is almost like I can see her now. Those purple socks! *(Shakes her head)* Those purple socks! You know, she would actually be in style now. Well, except for the shoes.

(ANN begins running in circles again)

Look there! Hopscotch squares. I haven't played hopscotch since my own kids were little. Let's see if I remember. *(Works through the game as she talks.)* Throw the stone on a number then hop on one foot, pick up the rock and hop back to start.

One.

(She hops on the grid with one foot. Throws again)

One, two.

I almost feel like I'm haunted by her. What is it about her that sticks in my crawl?

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(Throws again)

One, two, three

(Back at start)

I wasn't **that** good of a friend to **her**. Four! One, two, three four.

(Pause)

Maybe its regret, or guilt or just the fact that she was a person in need at that time and I was reluctant to be her friend. I don't know why she considered me her friend. All these years I think about what may have happened to her. And—Well, I think--‘**What was really happening to her then?**’

(ANN squats down picks up a little stick and begins wrapping it with a scrap of cloth or tissue she finds on ground. Plays with it like it is a doll.)

NARRATOR

I'm too old to be hopping around on one foot.

(NARRATOR pauses, looks at the hopscotch grid)

She sat next to me in class at school. Salem Lutheran. It wasn't a bad school...but it seems like she was constantly in trouble with our fourth grade teacher. He had rotten teeth and bad breath; we couldn't figure out why the cafeteria ladies liked him so much. We only liked him when his chair went over backwards and he fell out of it. When he got mad at the class he would throw rolled papers at us.

Poor Ann. That teacher treated her like a mangy rabid dog.

Do you know what terrible atrocity Ann was guilty of? Instead of putting the numbers in the box and dividing them the traditional way; she wrote division in columns like a multiplication problem. She always had the right answer, but because she did it different, Ann was punished.

Punished!

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(NARRATOR picks up a switch, goes over to the cannon and demonstrates the action of the following.)

I mean, he **beat- her- butt** with wooden rulers in front of the class! A great many rulers were broken over her. They kept on breaking until he finally used one of those heavy triangular ones to pound her with. O-o-h! He was proud he could whip her and not have the ruler break in half! Where I was sitting I could see her face. She fought so hard not to cry. I couldn't look at her; I was embarrassed for her and even hurt for her. Every person in that class was thinking, "I'm glad it isn't **me** he's hitting". Sometimes, he sent her out to the hall to put her nose to the wall. How humiliating that must have been! He timed it just as the eighth graders went to recess. You know how cruel kids are to the ones they don't like. Makes me **sick** to think about it!

(NARRATOR throws down the stick. ANN throws down the stick person. LISTENER observes them both.)

I wish I could either stop thinking about her or find out how her life turned out.

(NARRATOR goes to the swings. Starts humming a little tune. ANN follows to swings. They both begin to swing gently. There is a pause. As ANN swings she is looking at the ground. NARRATOR begins to swing more. She puts her head back and her feet out in front of her. Closes her eyes. She begins to hum again.)

(LISTENER leaning on the cannon puts her head back, closes eyes for a beat. Then picks up a stick and taps the cannon to the beat of the NARRATOR'S hum. After a moment ANN looks up smiling and begins to swing harder. LISTENER taps faster, NARRATOR'S hum is a louder "La-da-da" LISTENER begins to dance around while tapping on the cannon. Simultaneously we hear ANN and the NARRATOR laugh.)

*(NARRATOR sings a chorus to "**Those Were The Days My Friend.**")*

"Those were the days, my friend.

We thought they'd never end.

We'd sing and dance forever and a day.

We'd live the life we choose.

We'd fight and never lose.

For we were young and sure to have our way.

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Ly,ly ly ly ly ly, ly ly ly ly ly ly .

Those were the days, oh yes those were the days!"

(LISTENER is dancing over to the swing set. She goes behind ANN and starts pushing her swing. ANN is enjoying herself, feet pointing out in the air as if she were flying out of the swing.)

NARRATOR

Root beer Floats! She loved to make root beer floats when I came to her house. Root beer floats and dominoes! She taught me how to play dominoes. All I knew how to do was to stand them on end in a row like soldiers and knock them down so they would slither around in a design.

(Pause while they just swing a moment.)

(There are sounds of glee and laughter from both the NARRATOR and ANN as they enjoy the moment.)

I loved to swing. It was like flying. We were birds—airplanes—butterflies! We could forget all the garbage we were dealing with when we played here in this place. Humm, I didn't know everything going on with Ann. She never talked about it. Except once when she told me her grandmother was the only one who really loved her.

(LISTENER moves away from the swings. Both swings slow down, ANN is looking down sadly. NARRATOR looks up in the sky pensively. ANN twists her swing around and lets it circle back again. She does this a number of times during this next part of the monologue.)

I met her grandmother. A lovely woman...still her house smelled like the dust of old age and sickness. I felt sad there, but Ann beamed with joy. She told me afterward:

(ANN'S voice is heard in unison with the NARRATOR'S. LISTENER watches ANN.)

NARRATOR & ANN

“My Grandmother is the only one who loves me.

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ANN

My little sister is everyone’s favorite. My family likes her best. She’s blonde and pretty. They don’t love me. Nobody does- except my grandmother.”

NARRATOR

See that old two story house? You can just see the corner of it. Over there! That was her house. Ann’s room was the smallest in the house, the size of a walk-in closet. She took me there once to show me her dolls. She loved her dolls, especially the ones she could hide in cubby holes. Ann made a doll house in the book shelves above her bed. She loved to play like they were the perfect family. Free from misunderstanding, criticism, abuse. *(Pause)* I guess...like I always thought Sandy Price’s family lived.

(To LISTENER.)

Push Me.

(LISTENER crosses back of NARRATOR, pushes her swing. ANN starts to swing again.)

It great being a kid! Running around having fun. Ann had a tire swing hanging on a huge old Oak tree beside her house. I don’t think grass ever grew in her yard, it was always dirt. That was Okay-I mean it made a great place to play. *(Pause)* You know, thinking on that, I don’t believe it was very much fun for Ann. I don’t know...it’s just that I remember things that still haunt me. Like the day my brother and little sister and I were playing at her house. Some others were there too...Oh-I can’t recall who they were now-Well, we were all out there around her tire swing just having fun. Suddenly Ann started to scream at us. **She was totally wild!** I never knew what happened or why she was so terrified. None of us knew. We just left. *(Pause)*

Another time, while she was at my house, her brother came to the door looking for her. Oh, my goodness...

(Suddenly both swings stop abruptly, ANN looks horror-stricken.)

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... she was horrified!

(As this next part is spoken Ann acts it out. Finally riding her bike to off stage.)

She ran out of the house and charged to her bike, speeding away faster than I had ever seen her. I'll never forget her face--white with fear! I can still hear the hysteria in her voice.

(ANN EXITS with Bike. LISTENER is watching ANN with great concern. NARRATOR and LISTENER walk to their bikes)

NARRATOR

No one ever talked about child abuse or sexual abuse back then. I mean, what did we know about abuse? Everyone got spanked when they were bad! I sure did! I wasn't abused. I knew my parents loved me, I didn't like how they showed it at times, but that was just the way things were. *(Pause)*

Two other times I could have befriended her after her family moved to California. Once, there was a letter to the newspaper asking anyone who collected dolls or had an interest in them to correspond with her. It was from Ann. My mother mentioned the letter., but I never did write to her. It would have been alright even though I was a teenager and didn't care about dolls anymore. We could have been pen pals. That was what she wanted. Another time in high school, I went to the Ice Cream Palace on the corner of Main and College St. where my friend Karen worked. At a table in the corner sat a young woman with flowing black hair shrouding her shoulders, pretty brown eyes, very graceful, no glasses, no purple socks, no black & white Oxford shoes; I didn't know who she was. Karen whispered to me it was Ann. All grown up, teenage Ann. No, I didn't say anything to her. I don't know why. I left the store and here I am many years later wishing I

had been a better friend. Wishing Karen hadn't been there so I could have talked to her.

Wishing...I'd had some closure with the simple young girl who only wanted someone to like her.

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(LISTENER has quietly ridden off the stage somewhere in this monologue. NARRATOR looks out toward the audience)

I can't help wondering where you are, Ann. Your memory haunts me even as an adult. Your letter to the newspaper tugged at me...It really did. But I was a teenager after all, too busy for dolls and friends, I hadn't seen for so long. The last time I saw you, you did not wear the thick black framed glasses. Your hair was long and combed out around your shoulders and back. You were not the awkward ungraceful child. Indeed, I wasn't sure this was the same girl until our chance to speak had passed. Ann, did you survive the turbulent 60's? Have you married and passed on your love of dolls on to your daughter? Is there hope for the future in your heart as you discard the darker times of the past? Have you forgiven those who did not understand you? Only God knows where you are today, my friend. My prayer? That someday I will too.

(NARRATOR rides off stage on her bike.)

Lights Out

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