

July Fourth, 1989 started out just like any other normal sweltering Texas summer day but took a hard turn towards bizarreness the instant Lara Nelson showed up unannounced at our house. I had been fairly acquainted with her most of my life but didn't know her that well. Although we had been in marching band together and had mutual friends, our circles very rarely intersected.

'What are you doing today, Chris?' she asked me as I stood in the frame of the front door.

'Nothing much,' I said, 'Something I can help you with?'

'You can take me to see a movie.'

'A movie?'

'You heard me. You have the time, I have the dime.' she said tapping on a petite leather purse.

I smiled as I let this haphazard twist in my day settle in. I shrugged my shoulders and said, 'Any particular movie?'

'Whatever is playing. I'm not picky.'

'OK, give me just a couple of minutes to get ready. Meet me over by the Pontiac in the driveway.'

I shut the door, grabbed my wallet and keys, then exited through the back.

We got in the car and headed to the Paramount Theater.

As I entered the highway, she said, 'I joined the army, Chris and I'm leaving tomorrow for Basic at Fort Jackson. Got my bus ticket right here.' She tapped on the purse again.

'Never pegged you for the military type, Lara.'

'What type did you peg me for then?'

I blinked and said, 'Nerdy, quiet, always scribbling poetry in a journal type.'

'That's kind of like the pot calling the kettle black isn't it?'

'I don't deny that.'

“So , anyway. I’m leaving in the morning and I have a list of things I’ve never done. I’m trying to mark off as many as possible before my ass belongs to the government.”

“And you’ve never been to a movie?” I asked.

“Never.”

“Have you been living under a rock all your life?”

“You have no idea!” She said rolling her eyes.

We arrived at the theater, she bought tickets, popcorn, drinks and candy. The movie was “Dead Poet’s Society”

She wanted to stay until the end of the credit roll before we walked back to the car. “Lara, I don’t know where you live,” I said as I opened her door.

“Don’t take me home yet. Just drive around,” she commanded.

So I drove.

“Chris?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Can you take me to the band practice field?”

“Sure.” I said nodding.

In five minutes, we arrived at the stadium and parked.

She got out and began walking to the field and motioned for me to follow.

We approached the crow’s nest and she began climbing. “Come with me.”

I followed her up the ladder. We stood next to one another at the top.

“Four years down there marching around. I always wanted to see the view from here.” She looked down on the field and then peered towards the horizon “And now there’s one last thing you can do for me, Chris”

“What’s that?”

“Kiss me.”

“Kiss you, right now?”

“Right now. Kiss me like you love me. Like you’re never going to see me again.”

“But Lara I hardly know you.”

“Just do it, damn it.” She stomped her foot on the platform.”

We paused and let the uncomfortable moment pass.

I leaned over, gently put my arms around her and cautiously moved my lips upon hers.

We interlocked, Our bodies drew closer, our embrace grew tighter. Our legs weakened. I held her upright. We drew further and further into each other’s existence.

After what seemed an eternity, I released and stepped back. We breathed deeply of the night air. She smiled and said, “That was magnificent!”

“Very nice.” I replied.

Her posture stiffened and she proclaimed , “This doesn’t mean I’m promising myself to you! Understand? It was just a kiss. Just to get it off my list. Clear?”

“Crystal clear, Lara.”

“Now I want you to leave me here. I need to be alone now. Got it?”

I offerered my hand and said, “Well, good luck with the Army. I know you’ll succeed and go far, Lara”

She stuck out her hand and shook mine. She gave me another quick hug and relased. “Now climb down and leave, please.”

As I descended, I could hear her begin to cry.

I got back in the Pontiac and drove home. It was 10:30 when I arrived. I resolved to sleep on it and figure it out the next morning.

But as I slept in a faraway dream, I detected the sound of a window opening. I stirred into consciouness as a limp body fell on my bed and flopped onto the floor before I knew what had hit me. I jumped to attention.

“Chris can fix it...Chris can fix it.” She mumbled

It was Lara and she was out cold in my bedroom smelling like a whiskey still.

The clock indicated about 2:00 AM so I took her purse and looked through it. I found her bus ticket fro Houston to South Carolina. I lifted her off the floor. There was no time to try get her sober. It was all I could do to drag her through the house without waking my parents.

I threw her in the Pontiac, drove to the bus station and put her on the 5:25 to Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

After that early morning drop off, I never saw her again,

But I did receive solitary postcard from her about year after that night. On the front of the card was a medieval castle with the message “Greetings From Germany” printed on it. On the back she had written “The beer is so much fucking better here. Love Lara”.

And more than thrity years on, I’ve ceased trying to figure out what odd set of circumstances brought Lara Nelson to my door that day. I just let it be. I let it be and smile.