

Faded Memories

by

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I step out of the cool darkness of the band room hallway into the afternoon sunlight and blink rapidly. Erin bounces past me in that graceful way of hers. She's happy with life. I take pride in being able to tell her disposition. I walk more calmly, not wasting energy with random jumps and too prone to embarrassment by antics. Neither of us is in an insane babbling mood. Someone smart has shoved their backpack in the heavy black school door to keep it from locking behind us. If it did close, we'd need to pound on the door and hope someone will take pity on us and let us back in. Life can be like that.

With the door secure, Erin and I both drop our homework heavy backpacks against the step. Where to now? It's the recurring question. It can take on so many meanings. And it seems to have been the pattern of the last four months. Sometimes, here is the easiest place to be.

Erin flops down on the sidewalk, lying full out in the sun. She reminds me of a cat. The sidewalk is taken and besides is too dirty for me. The step I'm standing on is covered in shade. Feeling like a klutz, I scramble onto the warm, cream-colored stone of the ledge beside the door. I move very carefully. My intense fear of heights causes an over reaction to the slight drop on the other side of the ledge on which I'm perched. I envy Erin with her easy balance and fearlessness. She never worries about dirt, falling from high places, or, for that matter, what local "gossips" think. Below me, the spring grass covered hill slopes back toward the school to reveal the basement windows. Students' pop bottles litter the edges. I try not to look again. If I rest my back against the solid brick school behind me, I feel secure.

And isn't security what we are all searching for? A picture of my navy bed-spread turning black with my tears as *Eve 6* pounds out of my stereo flashes across my mind's eye. No security then, just the feeling of the world dropping out from under me; only the anguished abandonment of being left behind and replaced. I was precariously perched on sanity, not knowing who to look to.

Now, I look across the near empty school parking lot. Cars are dotted here and there; I recognize a few. Trees dot the boulevard also, oddly more linear than the cars. Across the street they line is the park with its tennis courts, baseball diamond, and the beloved red playground castle. Idly, I contemplate going over and playing on its two towers that appeared so much taller to my bright child eyes.

It's an odd mood that covers both Erin and me this afternoon, though not unusual for us. The silent breaks are much longer than the words we say. My occasional question reflects my introspection, though it is more of a station passed than the actual train track of thought. Much more is going on in my mind and heart than I say. I imagine it's the same for her. Here the emotions are dull, faded by sunlight. I feel the secure brick once again at my back.

That thought train curves back to painful territory. I remember the emotions that welled up within me as I sat feverishly scribbling down the contents of my heart. Anger and fear battled with pleas for forgiveness. The desperate attempts to save the friendship I saw being destroyed. My painful and slow introspection to recognize my own flaws. Crazy late night plans to change the world and keep Erin from changing schools. I was killing myself with anxiety. Clinging desperately to what turned out in the long run of several years to be unnecessary.

Fellow students drift in and out of the door beside me chatting of familiar trivialities. The white Sweeny van pulls up and we wave goodbye. It's odd to realize I now feel like I fit in with

these “band geeks.” The band room is no longer a place I, musically untalented, don’t belong. Will all this remain next year?

Erin’s now calm face is so different from when we fought earlier in the year. I remember the busy school cafeteria. I’m standing in the lunch line surrounded by my classmates. Erin shows me her pass to go back to the band room to hang out with an older group of friends to which I don’t belong. She always chooses them over me! It’s not fair; I have so few classes with her, and now she has stopped coming to the lunch table too. An old pot of anger, jealousy, and fear boils over in me again. That pot was mainly filled with my own adolescent insecurities. The slow lunch line gives us lots of time to fight in those short, mean comments of ours. I never scream or yell, just stab. Her face becomes stoic, but the eyes that won’t meet mine are filled with pain. Poor Katie, trapped in the middle, hardly realizes what is happening. I know that I shouldn’t be always telling her how wrong she is and how she only seems to hurt me, but I feel justified in my anger because I must be hurting more. With a shrug, Erin stalks off and nothing is solved. I sit down at my friends’ table and try to breathe. Instead, all my control begins to crumble and I rush, head down, to the bathroom to cry in private.

A small breeze laden with the feel of near summer blows across my face. The music from a middle school kid’s band lesson has stopped drifting out the open windows. Bored with being still, Erin begins to do backwards walk-overs. She quit gymnastics a couple years ago, so she must carefully think each move through. With little laughs, she gives me a running commentary of her difficulty. My irrational heart tightens slightly each time with fear. I hope she doesn’t smash her head on the unforgiving pavement. Still, I try to bite my tongue realizing this is exactly what I promised to change. I make myself repeat what I promised that night.

Stars shine bright in the black sky. Erin sits on a steel chair with faded gray padding. I just dangle my feet off the dilapidated wooden porch and hope my parents know where I am. She's actually opening up for once and showing there's much more than her usual "I don't care." Concern, instead of the usual frustration, fills me as I begin to understand. And I'm learning a lot. My customary dozens of questions, clear points of argument, planned changes, and soliloquies aren't necessary. It works better to just be patient, to accept the mood and wait for the explanation. I'm too controlling and nosey. Yes, she has trust issues and an inability to communicate how I want. But, maybe my way isn't the only right way. Friendship isn't just communication, it's the right communication.

I glance back through the door at the room full of chairs and instruments where Erin would hide from me when I always wanted to bring up topics she wasn't ready to discuss. But with some people, confrontation is the only route. Like with a bossy, vindictive senior. Looking at Erin stretching in the sunlight, some of the defensiveness and pride that I felt defending her comes back. No one is ever going to bash my best friend to my face again. The surprise on Kate's face as I turned away after telling her off brings a smile to my own yet. It was terrifying but felt very good. I actually stood up for what I believe in. I'm sure Erin would do the same for me. No doubt she will get the chance.

My mind shies away like a skittish horse from these dangerous thoughts of the future. Better to not worry. The changes will come soon enough. Where to now? I thank God that my best friend is back, though she never really left. I am yet resolved. Friendship can stand every test, including the hardest of time. Better not to analyze. Better to just live in this sunlit moment.