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Friends Forever

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The doorbell rang tonight. It would have been a normal occurrence if someone had been there. No one was; there wasn't anyone hiding in the bushes either. I felt as if only one person could have been there--one person, Amy, who would know that I would recognize her presence, dead or alive. She was my best friend who had been dead for nine years. As I tried to concentrate on my homework, my thoughts kept drifting back to her.

I met Amy in the second grade, thanks to my other best friend Melissa. The three of us were soon inseparable. We were together so much of the time that people began to think we were sisters. We weren't, of course; our coloring was too

that they just wanted to keep us apart so that we couldn't cause any more trouble. The next thing we knew, Amy started chemotherapy and radiation treatments. The three of us were walking home from school one day when the startling announcement was made.

"Guess what, guys!" Amy's blue eyes sparkled with excitement.

"You're going to Europe for the summer!" Melissa squealed. She was the dreamer of the group.

"No, not quite. Kayla, it's your turn," Amy laughed. "The cancer is gone! Wait, fat chance, right? Let me see.

Ashley is going to boarding school!"

"Now look who the dreamer is," Melissa intoned. I ignored her.

"Ashley is only four years old! Try to be serious, Kayla." Amy wasn't one to be serious. I just looked at her and shook my head, having a hard time believing that statement.

"Do you two give up since you'll never figure it out anyway? Good! I'll tell you my news."

Melissa and I looked at each other, rolled our eyes, looked back to Amy, and smiled. She was looking at us disappointingly.

"Now if you're through acting like children, take a look at this." The next thing we knew, Amy reached up to pull her long brown hair loose from her scalp.

She laughed at our shocked faces. "You should have heard my mother! She couldn't stop screaming! 'My baby's losing her hair! My baby's hair is falling out!' It was all I heard for ten minutes."

Melissa and I were speechless for a few minutes. Then: "How did this happen? How did your mom find out?" I had finally found my voice.

"This is one of the nasty side-effects of my chemotherapy treatments. Mom found out because of my hairbrush. I asked her to watch me brush my hair. When she saw what was happening, she started screaming," Amy stated simply.

We began walking again and suddenly realized that Melissa was still where we stopped and was still staring at us. We ran back to get her, and she surprised us by saying, "Wait 'til you start wearing wigs! You can wear the latest styles!" Melissa was our fashion consultant even then. "Kayla and I will be able to wear them, too! Then

FRIENDS FOREVER

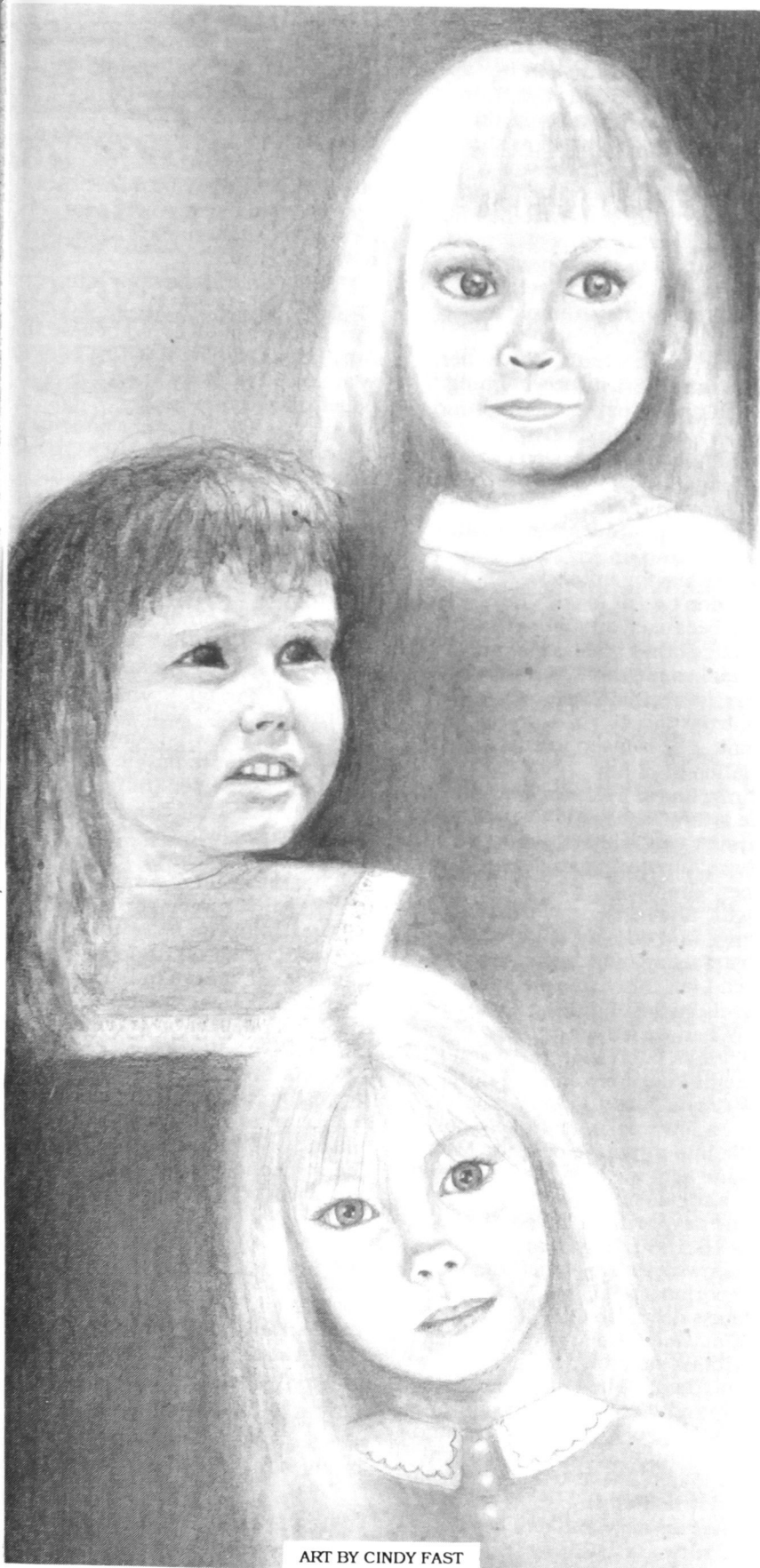
By Marcia Trent

different. Melissa and I looked very much alike: blonde hair, green eyes, pale skin. Amy resembled us only in the paleness of her skin.

Our personalities were similar, but also not exactly alike. We were quiet when we had to be, but most of the time we were playing practical jokes on everyone. One trait that set us apart was the fact that Melissa and I could read each other's minds, to a certain extent. We couldn't read Amy's mind, nor could she read our minds. That was one of the many things she was able to tolerate. Her high tolerance level was only one of the things that made her special.

When she was two years old, Amy's parents discovered that she had diabetes; at age five, the diagnosis was cancer. Amy never let any of it depress her. Even when her body was reacting violently to the medication she was taking, she kept up her spirits and tried to make things seem normal for the rest of us.

Life went along smoothly for about two years. In the fourth grade, Melissa, Amy, and I were suddenly separated into different classrooms. The teachers said it had something to do with ability level in schoolwork. We decided



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we can play some fantastic jokes on everyone." We did as Melissa predicted, but soon we realized that the situation we were in wasn't a joking one.

Amy grew weaker. The cancer was eating her alive. The diabetes had somehow stabilized and wasn't as much of a factor as before. During the fifth grade, Amy spent some time in the hospital. She had to have three ribs and part of a tumor removed from her chest. The surgeons couldn't remove the entire tumor, and it began growing at an even faster pace. From then on, no matter how hard she tried, Amy wasn't quite her usual, spunky self.

As time went on, things began to look worse for Amy. She began losing weight and strength rapidly. When we started attending middle school in the sixth grade, she came to school in a wheelchair. Every Tuesday, Melissa and I would see her in the lunchroom. Amy was always quiet and seemed tired by lunchtime. By Halloween, it was obvious that she could handle school for only half a day. After Christmas, she quit coming to school altogether, but she continued her lessons with the help of a private tutor.

Christmas was terrible. Amy's physical state was only one of the reasons I hated Christmas that year. The other reason was supplied by my parents; we were moving from Southwestern Oklahoma to the Panhandle. The idea of leaving my best friends was hard, but it was even harder considering one of them was dying.

"You're moving? Kayla, you can't! How am I supposed to deal with Amy and everything she's going through?" Melissa was clearly distraught.

"First of all, I am moving, but that doesn't mean I have to like it. Second, you can deal with this. 'You'll be able to keep me updated on her condition. Besides, you are just as strong as Amy and I are, maybe even stronger. We have to face one terrifying possibility: I may never see her again. This news won't do her any good, but I can't keep it from her. She has every right to know about it!' I hated to be blunt with Melissa, but she took it better than I expected.

"I guess you're right. What are you going to tell her?" "The truth. I can't lie to her about this," I said in a

GIRLHOOD

matter-of-fact tone of voice. "After that, I don't know."

The next afternoon, Melissa and I went to Amy's house. She was sitting in bed surrounded by books. She looked better than she had in weeks.

"Gee, Amy, we never realized you were so busy. Melissa and I could come back later if you wish," I said sweetly.

"Don't leave! Sit down and talk to me!" It was a command, not a request. Amy's sarcastic personality was in perfect working order again. "My tutor has given me all of this, and it's due tomorrow!"

"Amy, how long have you had this work? If you've had it for a long time, I won't feel sorry for you. If not, then I'll try to help," I replied. Amy was a procrastinator when it came to anything, especially homework.

'Remember me always. Not as I am now, but as I used to be.'

She didn't answer my question; instead, she changed the subject.

"So what brings you two over here on such a," she looked out the window, "gray but otherwise lovely day?"

I told her the reason for our visit. She was stunned, of course.

"Moving! Why? That's not fair." But before I could say anything, she rushed on. "We have to make plans for your departure--going-away parties, things like that. But first, I need help with my homework. Understand?"

Melissa began to panic. "Don't look at me! I know nothing about homework!"

"Yes, we know, Melissa. All you know are boys and fashion!" Amy grinned. "I only trust Kayla to help me with my homework."

Amy and I started to work while Melissa read a magazine. She looks so wonderful, I thought. Melissa looked at me and nodded.

Things were fine for about three months. Then Amy was in the hospital for a routine check-up when she found out that the cancer had been in remission. Now it wasn't, and her doctors said that she didn't have much longer to live. I went to

see her soon after she returned home.

I walked into her room and was shocked by the change in her appearance. She had always been thin, but now she was only skin and bones. The veins were showing through her skin. There was a slight patch of fuzz on her head that looked as if it used to be hair. She was wearing an oxygen mask hooked up to the tank next to her. There was a television set that was turned to a Shirley Temple movie. Chills ran down my spine.

I had no idea what to say to her. The situation was overwhelming. I sat in a chair, just looking around the room and thinking.

"Well, just sit there. Don't say anything. I know what you're thinking--'Amy, you really need to clean this place up.'" She always knew what to say.

"We're leaving in two weeks. I really don't want to go." "Because of me or because you just don't want to go?" "Both, I guess. This scene just makes me think." "At least you're honest. Melissa only talked about the

past. She refused to deal with the situation at hand."

"Amy, I have to know. How much time is left?" "Not much for me, but years for you and Melissa." I hated to hear Amy sound so defeated, but I knew she was

right. She sensed my mood change and quickly changed the subject to try to lift my spirits. When I left, Amy was sleeping peacefully, but I didn't feel any better. When we left for our new home two weeks later, I felt the worst I thought I possibly could. I never saw Amy again.

For a few weeks, I managed to settle into a routine of sorts. My routine kept me busy, but my mind was always on Amy.

One day, Melissa called. It was July 16, 1980. "Kayla, are you sitting down? I have something very important to tell you."

"She's dead, isn't she, Melissa?" Instinctively I knew she was. Neither of us said anything for a moment. Then: "When did it happen?"

"Around ten o'clock this morning. She asked for a piece of paper and a pen about nine. When I brought them to her, she asked me to write this down: 'Remember me always. Not as I am now, but as I used to be. The two of you have been there

for me throughout everything. This is the only time I'm glad that I'll be alone. We have learned many things from each other, and we have taught each other some things as well. I will miss you, Melissa, and you, Kayla, and I'll never forget either of you. Don't forget me either. You are my best friends! I love you two like my very own sisters.' After that, she fell asleep and never woke up."

Melissa and I talked for a few minutes longer and then said good bye. Neither of us could believe that Amy had died. She was just twelve years old. Two days later, the disbelief turned into reality.

Amy was buried in her favorite dress made of pink lace. The church was decorated with pink ribbons and pink roses. At the cemetery, everyone was crying. When the coffin was lowered into the grave, Melissa and I realized that the end of a life had come. We looked at each other and knew that the friendship we had with Amy would go on forever, as would our own.

Since that day, Melissa and I have wondered what Amy would think of life as we have come to know it. We decided that she would probably think the same things we do. It's basically a good life. However, at times it's depressing, morbid, and death oriented. Amy would manage to keep going. She would fight for what she believed in, and she would make those people she was against believe in her and that her way was right. Amy just had that kind of effect on whomever she touched.

Now, every time I hear a doorbell ring, I think of Amy. No one in the flesh may be at the door, but someone in the spirit is always there. The someone is always Amy, my best friend.

(MARCIA TRENT is a SOSU senior English Education major from Weatherford. "Friends Forever" is based on a true story and is her first published work.)