Sketch

Volume 76, Number 2 2012 Article 4

Satellite, Texas

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We grow up like most children, but slightly brighter. We stand in the yard, waving; in the doorway, smiling; in snapshots and videos captured before we grew into or out of ourselves. We are more precious than anything in the world. Only in Satellite, Texas.

My first and second families sit among a crowd of faces. We - my best friend and I - are meant to perform. The song is familiar, and we never stop singing.

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We are all children once.

Two girls share the purple crayon in pre-school. From this wax grows friendship, loyal as tides to the moon. Next come gingerbread houses, sing-a-long concerts. Horses. The horses are in both girls by nature. Equine platelets, cells, molecules within their blood. Texan cowgirl. Midwest farm girl. Could be carriage drivers, diving girls, but the origin of the thing never matters. Two girls shake out their hair - their manes - and prance through the neighborhood on invisible steeds.

“Sonny boy!” I call to my mount, watching his black and white, the paint of him, trot up to stand beside me. I decide he will now be brown.

“Diamond!” She calls to her own. I watch a gorgeous dapple trot up, halt regally at her side. He could be her personal palomino, any color any moment.

Best friends ride into the sunset, film grain snowing around them.

The girls grow from four hoofed feet, but never away. Split them up. Send them to different schools, different districts. They will find their way back to each other. Bring on the headgear, the braces, blemishes, bruises, awkward years. They will survive this together to seek another sunset.
The endless conversations. Telephones, computers. The girls are the product of a new generation. They do not lose contact for a day. Save your weekends, your holidays; haul model horses in backpacks from one home to another. Midwest to Satellite, Texas. Back. Forsake your own pajamas to fit one more friend in an overstuffed bag.

Stay up all night. Talk about nothing. Plan a hopeful, naïve future. We are going to do great things, the two of us. We write our own books, swap poetry. Call the boy down the street, make friends, make futures, never mind that these things change, things fall apart. He will be instrumental in every breath - for a year, two - and then he will set off into the distance. He is not like you, best friend. He is not made of the things we are, the things we know. These sights we see, so changeable, so sure.

Two girls stay up till early morning, watching movies, fighting sleep. Momma D comes fluttering down the stairs, pink bathrobe tied around a tiny waist, short hair like upright pins behind an elastic band. “If both of ya’ll don’t lay your heads on those pillows right now, so help me, there will be no more sleepovers.” She is angry, but we have no doubt she loves us both.

Maybe because she pretends not to hear the door scream on a worn hinge. Feigns not to realize the shaking shoulders beneath strata of quilts will never surrender to sleep. Does she smile to herself in the dusty morning darkness?

Two girls watch the sun rise from lawn chairs planted on the lawn, their own vista. Time is too crucial to waste seeking sandmen.

Juice boxes give way to coffee, paper cups encircled by fingernails painted black. Bright eyes over the rim, coated in mascara. A girl stares at her best friend, best friend stares back, creatures so different from the fleshy preschool
days. So much more the same. Nothing ever breaks us.

It only takes a few short years until we forget how to play pretend. Webster appears, a horse of her own. She finds him standing, four legged, bright eyed, hers. Soon I have my own mare, Dixie. “Happy Birthday” and “Merry Christmas” for the next seven years. These girls are the luckiest in the world.

Nothing holds us down, not my best friend and I. We show our horses proudly, compete against the world, with each other. Ribbons of blue, red, yellow, purple – purple again surrounds us. Everyone sees our horses’ colors, but none of the magic is lost.

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They don’t remember years slinking past, catlike in the darkness, but neither do they remember falling asleep. What happened to the days of purple crayons? Of laughing through midnight? When a horse could be any color in the world.

Things fall apart, fall away. Remember the spats, frustration, phone calls devolve into angry silence, neither side willing to break. Running up the minutes as a phone line crackles, snaps. I will not be first to hang up, but neither will I be first to speak.

In this solitude I tremble the way only a lost girl can shiver. I am no longer a best friend, a second daughter. I have forsaken my own identity. My family. Satellite, Texas can pack up and ship out like a single-run play. Limited engagement. I am easily left in the dust, empty cans and picked-over popcorn scatter at my feet.

Find her immediately. Nothing is more important than family. Nothing more tenuous than realization: the foundation of belief is not firmly rooted, but can roll away into the night. A stone across the desert disappears over the horizon.

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Looking back, remembering nights when I settled to sleep, ensconced within pillows and sheets and blankets, I cannot be certain whose voice calls my name. So too when morning sunlight falls in slanted bars over rumpled sheets. Whose perfume wafts in from the
hall? Which mother’s hands roll dough in the kitchen, pour orange juice from jar to glass? Do I awaken today in Midwest or Texas? I had two families, two personalities. A second go at growing up.

We sing a single song, my best friend and I. And it will never end. My rightful sister, product of Satellite, Texas, the other half of my childhood.

Looking back, none of it matters. Not my nervousness, not the rising song, not the audience or children screaming outside the window. Only my best friend at my elbow, the eight eyes of my parents; two pairs whose color mirrors my own and two that watch us both, their daughters. Eyes from whom I was born and those by whom I was raised. Is there any difference?

I have a best friend, an audience, a family – two families – and, in this moment, faith like a child.

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