

Don't know where I'm going. Now it's the end of July—not much longer till Sashie might be going to San Diego. Jace and I are crossing our fingers that she stays out there for good. ★

### Kati and Marty and Heather

When Kati signed her name, she dotted the i's with bubbly hearts. I thought they looked stupid. Kati was always trying to be a big shot. Marty and I sometimes talked about her, but then we felt bad. Once Kati made Marty cry. "Your sister is a slut," she said, pursing her lips and squinting her eyes. We were in fifth grade, but she already wore eyeliner. My mother wouldn't let me.

"No, she isn't," Marty had yelled. Her face had become all red and splotchy, like it did when Mrs. Harney called on her to read aloud in English class.

"What's a slut?" I asked, but they ignored me.

"My older brother told me so." Kati grinned wickedly. She had pointy teeth. She scared me when she was trying to be mean.

"I hate your brother," Marty said.

"Just say that to his face." Kati whirled around and left us. We were at the mall in Oakridge, and I knew that her mom was picking her up soon anyway, but Kati always tried to be dramatic.

"What's a slut?" I said to Marty.

"I don't know." She was sniffing like a little dog. I handed her some pink Kleenex from my coat pocket.

"Then why are you crying?"

"I know it's bad. I know how Kati is."

"She's just trying to be cool." I patted Marty's shoulder. I hoped she would stop bawling. People walking by looked at us like we were weird.

By seventh grade, we knew what slut meant. That's what we called Kati, but not to her face. In gym class, she sneaked out the door in the girls' locker room and did stuff with the eighth grade boys. For a few weeks, she was hanging around a lot with Richard Hilzen.

"Is he your boyfriend?" I asked one day. We were at her house.

"Shhh!" She looked at me sternly. "My dad's upstairs."

"Why is he home in the afternoon?"

"Because he lost his job." Kati was spreading peanut butter on a piece of Wonder bread. She accidentally stuck the knife through the slice of bread.

"Oh."

"Yeah, well . . ." She carried her plate to the

table where I was sitting. "I'm sure my dad will get . . . another job. He's really smart." She grinned at me. I couldn't tell if she believed what she was saying; if Kati felt bad she never let you see it.

"So about Richard?"

"Nothing." She shrugged her shoulders.

"But I always see you two together."

"Like he'd go out with me." Kati gave a brittle laugh. "Like anyone would."

"Of course they would. Chad Michaels sits with us at lunch every single day."

She looked at me strangely. "He likes you, Heather."

Kati never gave credit to anyone. I didn't know what to say.

In November they started smoking. They liked Camel Lites, and when Jill Harrison brought in animal crackers, they all said, "Give me a camel, where are the camels? I loooove the camels!" They eyed each other like it was funny. I never smoked. My mother used to and it took her three tries before she could quit.

"Why don't you ever light up?" Marty asked me.

"Light up?"

She held an imaginary cigarette between two fingers and pretended to drag on it. "You know."

"Oh. Well, it's kind of gross."

"What?" Marty looked like someone had just told her the world is flat. "Are you serious, Heather, or are you teasing me?"

"I'm serious."

"But it's so relaxing."

The year before it would have cracked me up to hear her say that, considering that she almost



**Kati grinned wickedly.**

**She scared me when she was  
trying to be mean.**



coughed up a lung every time she inhaled. But now it just made me sad. "I don't know. I just don't like how it smells."

"Oh." Marty nodded her head rapidly. "I see what you mean."

The best time the three of us ever had was at Marty's sister's Sweet Sixteen party. We were the youngest ones there, and all these older guys asked us to dance. After a while, we sneaked some beer and went inside Marty's room. Everything any of us said seemed so funny. I almost peed in my pants, I was

laughing so hard. We went out on the roof and yelled really loud and Kati pulled up her shirt so you could see her bra, but the music was so noisy that no one even looked at us. We were allowed to sleep in the backyard, after we helped clean up.

In the spring, my grades started to be pretty good. I don't know why; I guess the subjects were easy. My parents wanted to send me to Oakridge Country Day. And I didn't protest at all, that was the weird thing.

In June, we sat in the schoolyard and signed each other's yearbooks. I had been the only seventh grader on the yearbook staff. "I have a present for you," Marty told me. She looked so pleased with herself that I was afraid it would be awful and I would have to pretend that I loved it. She handed me a little square package.

"Make me look dumb," muttered Kati. I think I



**Someone had written**  
**"Kati, Marty, Heather: best**  
**friends forever."**  
**I almost started crying.**



was the only one who heard her.

"Open it, open it!" screamed Wendy Marshall. She'd been hanging around with us a lot lately. She was always screaming.

Inside the box was a plastic picture frame with a photograph of Kati, Marty and me. Marty's mother must have taken it in the fall. We had all been on the soccer team together, before Kati quit. In the picture, we were smiling hugely, our arms slung around each other's necks, our faces flushed from the game. Across the bottom of the frame someone had written "Kati, Marty, Heather: best friends forever." I almost started crying. When I looked up, Wendy had disappeared.

"I can't believe this," I said.

"You like it?"

"I love it." I hugged Marty, noticing uneasily how skinny she had gotten. Kati should make her eat.

"Well, my mom had the idea, but I agreed with her, you know . . ."

I nodded. "It's from me, too," Kati piped up.

"Thank you so much." I turned to hug her. She was smirking.

Kati's mother dropped me off after the class party that afternoon. Kati walked me up the driveway to the back door. "I can't believe you're really

ditching us," she said and mock-frowned.

"Aw, come on. I'll be back to visit so often that you'll be sick of me."

"Sure."

"I will."

There was a silence. "So you'll be a private school chick now."

"Ha! Never!"

"Don't turn into a snob." I knew she was trying to be serious, trying to give me helpful information.

"I won't." She raised her eyebrows, disbelieving. "I promise."

"Okay." And then her face went flat, and I knew that all the times I'd thought she didn't really like me, I had been wrong. I wished she wasn't being like this. I wished she was smoking or cussing or saying she didn't care if she failed pre-algebra. We had been swimming at the class party, and our clothes, hastily pulled on over wet bathing suits, were soaked. I shivered.

"Don't forget us townies," she said. Her lips curled up. I had never seen Kati cry.

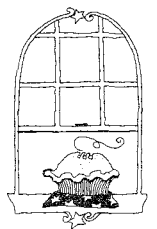
"What's a townie?" I asked dumbly.

"Jeez, Heather. You never know anything." She hugged me then, a loose, awkward hug. And then she turned away without saying good-bye or anything. I saw her shoulders shake as she retreated to her mother's car.

"Bye," I called suddenly. "I'll see you soon." But that's another weird thing: I never did see Kati or Marty after seventh grade. ★

## Summertime Street Fair

She plops her baby on the counter,  
cheeks like garden strawberries,  
and orders  
everything . . .  
sweet pepper sloppy joes,  
lemonade, fresh  
seeds still stirring in the bottom,  
a grandma's donated piece of  
stringy saucy rhubarb pie and  
the prices  
are always even because  
everyone knows that  
farmers don't carry  
odd change.



—Beth Harper,

Tenth grade, Mercer Area Jr./Sr. High School,  
Mercer, Pennsylvania

[Another poem by Miss Harper, "Invasion of the Lemons,"  
appears in this issue.]