

Sisters

Jerrilyn Black

My sister and I had no whispered secrets
between us, shared no hollyhock days.

For us the center of the double bed
was a solid yellow stripe.
Sagging springs might have invited
cozy curl-ups, hugging warmth
from one another on white-cold nights.
I possessed one slat side next to wall,
mattress edge ridged like a misplaced spine
where I often clung to keep from rolling.
She was pink. I was brown. She danced
as fairy princess with a magic wand;
ruffles of blue tissue fluffed the skirt.
She never let me wear the shining dress,
cut it to pieces, then threw it away.

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She appropriated the open part of the closet,
the best drawers, mirror and dressing table.
I, two years younger, like a visitor, watched
her pluck her brows, paint her nails, brush
her natural-wavy hair. She appropriated
my boyfriends too, knew pink tricks
of phrase and how to flirt like tinsel.
Then she shrugged them back to me, like treats
she sometimes gave me, her tooth marks
marring the edges.

Years later I discovered
what she had really wanted—
my easily tanned skin,
my Joan Crawford arched eyebrows,
the way I could vanish into a book,
and my eyes that crinkle when I smile.