

*Anita Sachanska*

### **Doris and Ruby Sleep Together**

Leslie stared up through the branches of the apple tree at the sky as blue as robins' eggs. She closed her eyes. She felt herself run faster and faster with large low strides across fields and fields of green green grass until she left the ground, her arms outstretched, her hair blowing straight behind. She raised her head and chest, and lifted upward. The tops of great pointed fir trees tickled her feet and she brushed the soft wingtips of pudgy robins and small brown and grey sparrows. She flew above the light and dark patches of fields and forest and lakes, randomly quilted together, and she and the clouds left their shadows below. "I know a secret." Janet's voice shattered Leslie's blue sky and it fell away into the darkness behind her eyes.

Leslie looked over toward the raspberry bushes. All she could see of Janet were slivers of brown hair and yellow dress between the flat green leaves and full red berries.

"Aren't you listening? I said I know a secret." Janet's secrets were always about people at her school. Leslie never knew any of them. They never meant anything to her.

Janet stepped out from behind the bushes, and popped a raspberry into her mouth. "Come on, Leslie. Don't you want to know?"

"All right. What's your secret?"

Janet crouched down in the shaded semi-circle where Leslie sat. The grass was soft and cool. Janet stared, her eyes wide. "Doris and Ruby sleep together." Then she sat back on her heels, her arms wrapped around her knees.

So? Leslie thought. She and Janet slept together in Leslie's double bed when Janet stayed over. Sometimes they crawled under the comforter, pretended they were in a tent, ate ginger biscuits and told stories, stories about people who were bricked up behind damp castle walls by jealous lovers to die a lingering death, or about dismembered hands which wouldn't rest until they gripped the throats of their murderers.

Janet stared, wide-eyed, as if expecting Leslie to say something. "You know, like men and women."

Leslie imagined her mother and father under their pale green comforter with the big yellow flowers. Did they eat biscuits in bed?

"God, you are thick!" Janet's eyes were round and large and her face red. She took Leslie's left hand and joined the thumb and forefinger to form an O. Janet's first two fingers went through the hole, in and out, in and out. She looked up into Leslie's face. "There, now do you understand?"

No, but to say it out loud would label her stupid, a baby. Obviously this was something that adults and Janet understood all about. But Leslie nodded. It was awful to tell lies, especially to your best friend. She hoped it would all make sense when she got older.

Janet leaned back beside her. "I can't imagine what they do in bed. They don't quite have the equipment, you know. But Dee heard it from one of her boyfriends and he heard it from a friend of his dad who knows them."

*Your sister's always telling stupid tales about people she hardly knows*, Leslie wanted to say but Dee was Janet's sister. So instead she asked, "Do they kiss?" and hoped it wasn't a dumb question.

"Of course they do. And they probably stick their tongues in each other's mouths."

But tongues were slimey and full of germs. It would be like sharing someone else's gum. You'd get diseases. Leslie didn't think she'd want anyone to put their tongue in her mouth. "Have you ever kissed a boy?" she asked.

"Sure."

"Who?"

Janet scrunched up her face as if she'd just eaten a sour apple. "Bobby Trimble—but it was on a dare."

But Bobby Trimble was a dirty boy who'd stolen some tools from Leslie's father's nursery. And he always had a sore on his upper lip. It was big and red and stuck out. "On the lips?"

"On the lips."

"What was it like?"

Janet scrunched up her face again. "Dead dog breath!"

Leslie buried her face in her hands to try to block out the sight of those big lips.

"Hey, I have an idea," Janet said. "Let's follow them."

"Who?"

"Doris and Ruby." Janet leaned toward her. "Come on. Let's follow them, spy on them. They go shopping every morning at the bottom of Old Mill Road. Then we'll find out for sure."

"But that's private."

"No it's not. What people do in the bakers and the greengrocers is fair game. Come on."

Leslie didn't want to spy on Doris and Ruby. She liked Doris and Ruby. Besides what if someone found out and told her parents?

"Look, if you won't do it, I'll go with someone who isn't such a baby," and Janet pushed herself to her feet.

Leslie watched her crumpled yellow dress walk away. After all, Janet was her best friend. "All right. I'll go."

Leslie's father sat in the deep chair by the fireplace, reading his paper. He was right beside the big square radio so that whenever someone came on he didn't like, he'd flick the large black dial with his thumb and send the radio speeding through static and bursts of songs and voices, until he found something better. Right now Frank Sinatra was singing. He liked Frank Sinatra. Leslie's mother clanked dishes in the kitchen and the water gurgled down the drain.

Leslie lay on the brown rug in front of the fireplace, her head propped up on her hand. Her father looked tired tonight. He didn't look young much anymore. Not old like Grandad, but not young. His hair was still dark brown and wavy, but his eyes were puffy with tiny lines like streams or tributaries must look from the sky.

He didn't look like that in the grey and white picture on her dresser. He stood to attention, so young and thin, in his grey pilot's uniform with

the shiny buttons. He stood smiling in front of his plane with a big grey and black bullseye painted on the side. His uniform was really dark blue and he'd put it away in a large box in the back of his wardrobe. His medals were in a cigar box in the top drawer of his chest and he took them out every so often, and he and Leslie sat in his deep chair and he told her what it was like to tumble through the clouds. Once he pinned his gold wings onto her sweater and she ran down the hill with her arms outstretched, the wind tugging at her sweater and whistling around her. She knew if she just ran fast enough she'd get off the ground. And if she flew up far into the blue sky everything would turn blue, even her skin. But in science class they said that air was clear. And the sky was only air after all, wasn't it? But it would be so pretty if she could turn blue.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Marigold?"

"Will you ever fly again?"

He folded up his paper and turned down the radio so that Frank Sinatra was only a faraway murmur. "Someday. I wouldn't want to believe I'd never get up there again. When you fly through the clouds you're above everything—the trees and lakes and people. And for a little while you begin to believe that nothing, not even gravity, can touch you, can hold you back. That even if you run out of petrol the sky will hold you up and you'll fly on through the clouds forever."

"So why are you a gardener?"

The lines around his eyes deepened. "Because nobody pays you to fly." Then he smiled, a tight-lipped smile, with just the corners of his mouth upturned and he blew air out through his nose like a gentle snort. "I work with the earth, and the earth and the sky need each other. If there were no air, no sun, no clouds to make rain, there would be no grass and trees and pretty flowers. I like to help things grow. I planted you and now look at you."

"Don't you hate being down here on the ground?"

He smiled, and looked over her shoulder. He must be looking at the sky, out into the dark blue of the late afternoon. "It's like being hungry for something special, like chocolate eclairs. You eat potatoes and peas and thick slices of bread and butter and you feel full up, but in the back of your mind is a little voice, saying 'I'd really like a nice chocolatey

eclair.' No matter how full up you get, there's always room for that éclair and you know you'll never really feel satisfied until you get it."

Yes, that's exactly it, that's the way it felt, like her need to understand, to know everything. But there was so much. And she knew she wouldn't ever feel satisfied until she knew everything. She wanted to ask him to tell her everything, everything that Janet knew. He wouldn't laugh at her for not knowing. He wouldn't call her a baby or roll his eyes. "Daddy, what's sleeping together?"

He leaned his head toward her, and his eyebrows came down over his eyes. "What do you mean, Marigold?"

"Janet was talking today about people sleeping together."

He rubbed his hands on the knees of his thin blue pants. "I think Janet talks too much nonsense. You're too young to know about that sort of thing. When you're older your mother'll explain it all to you."

*Why can't you tell me now?* She didn't like Janet knowing things that she didn't. It was because Janet had Dee. Dee had lots of boyfriends and she told Janet everything, everything about sleeping together and kissing and putting her tongue in a boy's mouth. She wished she had an older sister. Then she'd know it all.

"Can't you tell me now, Daddy?"

"Not yet, Marigold," he sighed. "But I want you to remember that you have to love someone very much to sleep with him. You have to be married to him to sleep with him. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, Daddy. Thank you." That was something Janet didn't know. She could wait for the rest.

Leslie and Janet leaned against the dusty metal wall of the bus shelter at the bottom of Old Mill Road.

Janet elbowed Leslie in the side. "Look, there they are."

Doris and Ruby marched toward them, arm in arm, in stout walking shoes with thick heels. Doris was round and curvy, and her thick legs, with crooked stocking seams, showed below her knubbly brown and beige and black tweed suit. She'd pinned a brooch that looked like a big gold buckle to her left lapel. Over her arm, she carried a big woven basket and walked in great strides, making Ruby trot beside her.

"Look," and Janet whispered as they walked by. "Doris has Ruby's arm. That means Doris is the husband. One always plays the husband and

the other's the wife. I bet Ruby does all the housework and the cooking. Doris probably does the gardening and drives a car."

"My father does their garden." This was something else Leslie knew that Janet didn't. Janet said nothing.

Ruby was small and birdlike, with a thin nose and tiny rounded shoulders. She wore a print dress, full of mauve and blue and pink flowers with a high neck. A double row of pearls bounced against her chest with each step. She carried a string bag folded up into a square. Leslie couldn't see how that thin hand and wrist could carry anything heavier than an empty bag.

Their first stop was the news agent. Leslie and Janet waited outside, and squashed their faces against the glass.

"Good morning, Mr. Wilkins," said Ruby.

"Good morning, ladies."

"Quarter of Mrs. Fairchild's mints, please," Ruby said. "Do you want anything, Doris?"

Doris stared at all the jars full of bright candy and at the boxes laid out on the shelves. "Licorice," Doris said at last, "I'd like some licorice. Licorice whips and pipes."

Janet nudged Leslie with her elbow. "See."

No, Leslie couldn't see. She liked licorice whips and pipes. What was so peculiar about that?

Mr. Wilkins curled the licorice whips into a square white bag and then plopped in two pipes. Ruby paid. Doris took one of the pipes out of the bag and presented it to Ruby. She took out the other and pulled off a piece with her teeth. "Nice and fresh, Mr. Wilkins. Come on, Ruby."

Ruby's was still in her hand. "No, I can't, Doris. It'll make my teeth go black."

Doris put her arm around Ruby's thin shoulder. "Don't worry about that, my dear. Enjoy yourself. No one ever died from licorice teeth, did they, Mr. Wilkins?"

"Not that I'm aware of. Why look at Mrs. Fairchild—still eating humbugs at her age."

"But she hasn't a tooth in her head to call her own," Ruby returned.

Doris tugged off another bite of licorice and they left the store. Janet and Leslie followed them down to the bakery where they bought eclairs and custard slices and little fruit tarts, and to the greengrocer where they

picked out "some tiny potatoes to boil with a bit of fresh mint for Mrs. Fairchild's tea." Each time they walked side by side, Ruby's shoulder brushed against Doris's arm. Doris cocked her head in Ruby's direction to hear her thin voice. Finally they finished and climbed back up the road toward Mrs. Fairchild's house.

Janet and Leslie lay back on the cool grass in the shade of the bus shelter.

"Do you think Mrs. Fairchild knows?" Janet asked. "She's blind and almost deaf. It'd be very easy to keep it from her. They could sneak down the hall at night to each other's bedrooms. And she wouldn't hear their moaning in ecstasy in the middle of the night."

*What do they have to moan about?*

Leslie stared up at the sky, her hand over her eyes to shade them from the light. Even with her eyes closed, the light hurt, made the insides of her eyelids red.

"I bet Mrs. Fairchild's one of them," Janet went on.

"But she's a Missus. That means she's married."

"Maybe long ago. Lots of women marry to get a man to look after them but still sleep with women. Maybe they were all lovers when she was younger and now she's old, they take care of her. Dee says there are secret newspapers where old lesbians advertise for women to come and live with them. She has pots of money. I bet Doris and Ruby live for free and get pocket money. And all they have to do is go shopping and tidy up and take her out for tea once a week."

Do Doris and Ruby sit together in front of the fireplace and cuddle? When women cuddled, two sets of breasts must get squashed instead of one, but that wasn't a real problem, was it? Doris had breasts like full melons, rising large and firm under her suits and sweaters. Ruby's were barely the size of a fold in the fabric, two little powderpuffs stuck to her chest with sticky tape. Ruby and Doris were a good match.

It was so much easier to talk to women. Boys just cared about cars and football and they were always slapping each other on the back and punching each other in the arm. Why would anyone want to be with boys? What did you talk to them about in bed?

Dee spent all her money on makeup and nail polish and tight sweaters and blouses with little round collars. And she always seemed to have wet nails because if she got the tiniest chip or scratch she had to redo them.

And it was all because of boys. Doris and Ruby seemed much more suitable. When she grew up, Leslie thought, maybe she'd sleep with girls.

"Do many women sleep together?" she asked Janet.

Janet snorted. "Only depraved ones. Only depraved girls want to be with other girls. Makes you want to be sick when you think about it, doesn't it?"

Leslie stared down at the dark grass. It didn't make her want to be sick at all. She felt sorry for Doris and Ruby. Nobody understood them. But she nodded. She didn't want Janet to think she was depraved.

Leslie's white sandals clipped along the stone pavement that ran beside the grey-brown water of the canal. Her father held her hand. His was stained with streaks of dark green where he'd been tearing weeds from someone's garden all afternoon. The air was still hot from the sun and now his large hot hand made her feel even hotter.

Ahead of them, rows and rows of folding wooden chairs lined up in front of the bandstand—a small open building, like a summer house, painted white and red. The paint peeled off the sides where the rain had gotten to it. She could hear the band, their wild toots and booms, as they played random notes, warming up their fingers and testing out their instruments. And the low rumble of the drum.

"It's a pity Mummy couldn't come," her father said.

At dinner her mother had looked hot and flushed. Sweat had left small tracks down the side of her face, like tiny dried-up river beds. A small crumb of pastry dough hung in her dark hair and Leslie had reached over and gently lifted it out.

After dinner Leslie went upstairs to sit by her window and try to cool off. Voices seeped up from the kitchen.

"Look, I'm tired." Her mother's voice was shrill. "I've been making jam and baking pies all day. And all because of that damn garden you put in and never attend to. I end up doing all the weeding and the watering and the picking and God knows what else. I just want to lie down. Take Leslie."

"I want to take my wife." His voice was hard.

There was a great clank of dishes. "You can't expect me to do everything all day and still be full of the joys of spring in the evening. I'm tired, Hugh. I'm going to lie down."



Her muffled footsteps slowly dragged up the stairs. What if she came into Leslie's room? What would Leslie say? But her steps continued on and a door closed behind her.

Leslie's father came up the stairs. *Don't argue again. Please,* Leslie repeated to herself. He paused outside her door and cleared his throat. He knocked and his head came around the door.

"How'd my best girl like to go to the park, come and listen to the band with me? How about it, Marigold?"

Leslie was settled in by the window and it was really too hot to go anywhere. She'd seen the posters in the store windows and at the bus shelters. It was a military concert. Her father liked military music. It must remind him of the war. "All right, Daddy," and she changed into her second-best dress—the pink one with the tiny red rosebuds on it—and her white socks and sandals.

"Let's sit in front," Leslie pulled on him as they neared the bandstand. She liked to study the instruments and try to figure out how they could make so many notes with just three or four valves.

"All right, all right," and he laughed.

The first few rows were fairly empty. Everyone was sitting at the back. Girls with red lipstick and red nails wrapped themselves around young men's thin arms, sticking out below rolled-up cotton shirt sleeves, cigarette smoke trailing up from between their fingers. One man had a tattoo, but Leslie couldn't make out what it was. It was red and blue, but whether it was a ship or a flower or even some sort of animal, she wasn't close enough to see. Do women ever get tattoos? Older couples sat staring straight ahead, not touching. The men sat with their hands hanging loosely between their thighs, the women covered their laps with huge purses of straw or white leather. They sat side by side, surrounded by empty chairs. *Why do people stay together? Why would you be with someone and never speak anymore?*

As they walked along the front row, Leslie stared at two women sitting there. It was old Mrs. Fairchild and Doris.

"Hello, hello," said her father. "What brings you here?"

*Where's Ruby?* Leslie wondered.

Doris stood up. Her hair was fluffy as if she'd teased and combed it. She wore a blue dress, dark blue with small white dots all over it, tight across her chest and waist, and flared to a full skirt which came down

almost to her ankles. She wore white sandals with square heels and her toenails were bright red squares. Her nail polish matched her lipstick and rouge, and under the rouge tiny red lines crawled across her cheeks like snail tracks. She was almost pretty. Maybe Janet was wrong. Maybe she wasn't the husband after all.

"What a surprise to find you here." Doris held out her white gloved hand to Leslie's father, and her gold bracelet jingled.

He took her hand, shaking it ever so slightly. It was more a brief clasp, than a shake. "Same here. I didn't know you liked band music."

"Not me—Mrs. Fairchild. All the Fairchilds were in the military, you know," and she smiled.

"Who is it, Doris?" Mrs. Fairchild's voice was tiny and dry.

Doris bent low and shouted in her ear. "It's Mr. Hogarth, the gardener."

Leslie's father bent toward the other ear and shouted, "Hello, Mrs. Fairchild. How are you tonight?"

She smiled and exposed a row of yellow teeth. Too many humbugs, Leslie thought. Someone had tried to paint a line of red along her thin wrinkled lips, but the red had flowed up the lines running away from her mouth. "Good evening, Mr. Hogarth."

"You know my daughter Leslie, don't you?"

Mrs. Fairchild nodded and held out her hand. "Come here, my dear," and Leslie came close and touched her hand in their beige gloves. Mrs. Fairchild's bones stuck out from under her face, like an ivory sculpture whose elastic covering had begun to sag. Her eyes were deep and sunken, the blue pupils covered by a white coating, as if someone had poured milk over them and all she had to do was rub it away and she'd see again. Leslie could see the skin of her scalp beneath her hair, hair like bits of white clouds glued to her head, easily blown away by a stiff breeze.

Leslie held her hand, not knowing if she should try to speak to her, to yell in her ear. The thin hand squeezed hers, surprisingly strong, and then fell back into her lap. "I've brought some sweeties. Do you like humbugs, my dear? All little girls like sweeties. Doris, give the child a sweetie."

"Do you mind if we sit with you?" her father asked Doris. "Leslie likes to sit up close."

Doris smiled, and offered the seat next to her. She lowered her voice. "Not at all. Usually the front row is full of old people. It'll be nice to have some young people up here with us," and she folded her skirt under her and sat down.

Leslie's father sat down next to Doris.

Doris leaned over and asked, "Where's your wife today?"

"She wanted an evening to herself."

Doris nodded and settled back. Leslie leaned around her father to look at her. In her smart dress and hair, Doris looked like some man's wife coming home from church or the gardening club or from taking the kids to town.

Doris reached into her purse. She pulled out a white bag like the one from the news agent. Doris looked over. They stared at each other for a moment. Doris reached across in front of Leslie's father, offering the open bag. Doris turned pink, and then red. Leslie reached out to take a humbug. But they were stuck together with the heat. Leslie struggled with the sticky brown clump, staring into the bag the whole time, not wanting to look up at Doris's red face. Finally she managed to break one off. She fell back into her seat, hidden behind her father's shoulder.

Chairs creaked and people coughed. The bandleader in his red and gold-braided uniform came down the aisle and stepped onto the bandstand. Leslie put the humbug into her mouth. The bandleader turned to the audience and bowed. People applauded. He tapped three times on the music stand and the band began to play.

By the end of the concert the sky was dark, with one tiny stretch of orangey-pink light flowing down beyond the canal.

The streets were cool, streets full of people walking to escape their hot rooms. Leslie walked beside her father, his arms at his side.

"She's a pretty lady, Miss . . ." Leslie realized that she didn't know Doris's last name. "I mean Doris."

"Mrs. Fairchild."

"No, Doris."

"She's Mrs. Fairchild too."

"And Ruby?"

"She's another Mrs. Fairchild."

"Who's she married to?"

"Doris and Ruby were married to old Mrs. Fairchild's sons, Bert and Charlie. Bert and Charlie joined up at the beginning of the war. Doris and Ruby moved in with the old lady. Within a year, both boys were dead. It hit them all hard. Ruby and Doris were just young girls—and widows. I don't think Ruby ever got over it."

"Can't they get married again?"

"Some women don't, Marigold. They just die inside." He sighed. "Especially Ruby. She has such sad eyes."

"And Doris? Is she still sad?"

"Doris is full of life, more life than this place has to offer. She belongs in London—or Paris. I've told her she should leave."

"Have you?"

He pushed his hands down into his front pockets. "Well, we talk while I weed. She brings me a cup of tea, and we talk—sometimes. She's much too good for this place, much too good."

Leslie saw Doris running slowly, sometimes jumping to try to get her body off the ground. But once she was off, she was strong and able to go on and on until she disappeared into the dark night sky. "She's a flier."

He stopped and Leslie looked up into his face. A dark shadow fell across it from the streetlamp behind him. "What do you mean by that?" His voice was hard.

"Just that most people are happy to stay where they are. Others fly away. You said she should go away, so she's a flier."

His body seemed to roll into itself and he took her hand. "Yes, Marigold, I guess she is."

Their house was up ahead. Her father's pace slowed. Their light threw a tunnel of yellow over the front door, orangeing the shiny red paint. The rest of the house was dark. Her mother had gone to bed.

The next morning Leslie was late. There wasn't any use being on time. There was no mystery anymore. Dee and her silly stories . . .

"You've missed her. She's alone today, Ruby's alone." Janet sat, her back up against the side of the shelter. "She went by fifteen minutes ago. Come on. We have to catch up." Janet walked away from the shelter.

"They aren't lesbians."

Janet stopped and turned around. "Of course they are."

Leslie stepped up to her. "No they're not. My father told me last night."

Janet put her hands on her hips. "You just came right out and asked him?"

"No. We met Doris and old Mrs. Fairchild in the park last night. Dad said Doris and Ruby were married to Mrs. Fairchild's sons. They died in the war and now Doris and Ruby take care of her."

"Well, that doesn't prove anything."

"Of course it does. They were married."

"Lots of women turn to other women after a bad experience with men. Don't you know anything?" She shook her head. "Now are you coming?"

"There's no use."

"Fine, I'll go by myself." Janet marched away in the direction of the news agent.

Leslie had nothing to do. She could go home and sit in the garden and read but that was boring. And besides, her mother might tell her to weed or something. Maybe she should go and sit in the cafe for a while. As she walked, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a handful of change. She had enough.

The cafe was full of women with shopping baskets, wearing small hats with blue or yellow or white flowers or round red cherries. Some of the older ones had scarves wrapped tightly around their heads. Leslie chose a table close to the window. A waitress came over. "Yes dearie?"

Leslie looked at the women at the table in front of her, sipping tea and eating square pink iced cakes from small plates. They looked so elegant. But she didn't have enough money.

The waitress tapped her pencil against her order pad. "Are you going to order, dearie?"

"Orange squash."

She watched the waitress disappear behind the swinging white door. Just to the right, at a table all by herself, sat Ruby.

Ruby's table was close, but not close enough. Leslie wanted to see what sad eyes looked like but all she could see was Ruby's back. Ruby looked so small sitting there all alone. She needed more shoulder to fill up the white blouse. It flowed from her neck to her elbows with barely a break.

The waitress came out of the swinging door with a tray of tea and cakes and one glass of orange squash. As she came toward Leslie's table, she narrowly missed dropping her tray as a red dress pushed by and sat down beside Ruby. It was Doris.

Leslie craned her neck around the waitress to see Doris pull off her white gloves and throw them onto the table. Doris raised her hand and called out, "Another cup over here. And a chocolate éclair."

The waitress snorted and clunked Leslie's glass onto the table.

Ruby's tiny shoulders hunched as she bent forward to speak to Doris. Leslie could see Doris's face, sideways. Doris wore no makeup and the lines across her cheeks were even stronger. Her eyes were shadowy and her hair lay flat against her head. Ruby's voice disappeared into the air. Leslie had to lean forward and concentrate very hard on Doris . . .

". . . didn't mean to make you worry, my dear. I know I should have left you a note . . . be by myself . . . morning walking, down by the canal, along through the . . . face out of my mind." Doris twisted her gloves.

Now Ruby was talking. *Speak up.*

They were both quiet as the waitress brought a cup and a large shiny éclair. Ruby dropped two lumps of sugar into Doris' cup and a dribble of milk and filled it with tea. Doris took her fork and pressed down through the éclair. She pushed large pieces into her mouth. She chewed and swallowed. A piece of chocolate stuck to the corner of her mouth, but she didn't wipe it away. "I knew he'd be there . . . likes band music . . . poor old Mum out with me, bribed her with humbugs. I wanted to see his wife . . . what she looked . . . to make things easier, easier to say no . . . never expected the little girl . . . awful, worse than I'd imagined. The way she looked at me . . . sure she knew."

*What little girl? Whose little girl?*

"It was only ever supposed to be bit of a giggle, a bit of fun . . . drinks . . . only once, just once . . . he keeps pressing and pressing . . .

*"Who? Who?"*

". . . written all over my face, it had to be . . . slept with her father. . . all over with the wife, that's what he told me . . . feel so awful."

*Daddy? She couldn't be talking about Daddy. She must be talking about someone else's father, not Daddy. You have to love someone to sleep with them, that's what he said. You have to be married to them. So*

*it must be someone else's. Daddy couldn't love Doris. He isn't married to Doris. He loves Mummy.*

". . . charm the birds from the trees, he could . . . to take me up in a plane, show me the sky. But Leslie . . ." Doris pushed the last of her éclair into her mouth. She looked around, searching for the waitress.

It was one of those times when Leslie knew that the one thing she didn't want to happen most was going to happen. Like when a voice inside told her if she didn't move a glass, she'd tip it over, or if she tried to climb a certain fence she'd tear her dress. And she knew that Doris was going to see her, she just knew it. But she didn't leave or turn away, and there it was—and Doris looked up right at her. Her eyes were wide, her pink lips fell apart, and her face was white, as white as Leslie's mother's pastry dough.

*It wasn't her Daddy, it wasn't. It was someone else. She was talking about someone else's father. Someone else with a Leslie . . .*

Leslie looked away, down at her orange squash. It was so so orange. A drop clung to the opening of the white paper straw, a red stripe running down its length until it was lost in the orange glass. The drop held tightly to the straw, held on as if it would never fall off.

And her body felt light, as if she was an empty shell. She closed her eyes and concentrated very hard, muscle by muscle, cell by cell, and her body lifted slowly, so very slowly, barely moving, but lifting up off her seat, up and up. And tea cups disappeared into the white squares of the tables, the tops of people's heads shrank to small dots, and the café fell away beneath her. She rose higher and higher, up up into the blue sky, up up above the café, the greengrocer's, and her father's nursery. Her father stood there, leaning on his spade, shading his face with his hand, his head raised to catch sight of her. And her shadow passed over him. She flew up and up through the wispy white clouds of old Mrs. Fairchild's hair, flew on through the sky, knowing she never had to come down ever again. And as she watched, her outstretched arms turned blue, as blue as robins' eggs.