

Patsy

how sisters can hate each other!
 war scars on our arms and legs
 like crimson ribbons
 "Keep Out" the sign
 on your slammed bedroom door
 me in the next room making tales
 out of cracks on walls
 hiding under sheets from posses
 with German shepherds

like the pearly black dogs
 at Jack's Convenience Store
 that bit my hand & smashed
 the bottles i was returning for 2¢ each
 crying i dragged my body home
 to an empty house
 why do i call it empty, anyway?
 you were there all the while
 mom lay in our parents' shaded room
 with a mask over her eyes

remember the times
 committing crimes
 when you made me your patsy?
 except after you flushed
 mom's gold watch
 down the toilet
 & dad paid a plumber \$32.50
 i yelled "Patsy did it!"
 they believed me

mom whacked your bum so hard & long
 it crackled red-hot
 the one real beating
 either of us ever got
 i grieved for your shocked bum
 & your shock at being fingered
 still it was sweet evening the score
 with you who slapped down
 (always) my sister love

one day dad told us about our sister
 or brother on the way
 you stomped up to your room
 i clapped my hands and ran outside

already gone
 from your smirking mockeries

i welcomed my imaginary brother
 led him on & on
 a roving suburban course
 snuck him inside my hiding-place
 charmed him with cracked stories
 our flashlit faces dreaming

then that one twilight hour
 a skipping rope tied between maples
 me in the house with "I Love Lucy"
 you out front playing hangman
 wrapped loose rope around your neck
 & pushed off from a lawnchair
 & i got outside somehow
 unwrapped you oh so carefully
 my breath hot and scared in your mouth
 all the Y swim class drills
 crowding my eight-year-old brain

we never told mom about it
 did we, Patsy?
 didn't think about the life
 we gave & took from each other
 soon mom went to hospital & came back
 arms straight down the sides
 of her flat long form
 gaunt mom with a martyr's face
 home in the sanctuary of her dark room
 dad said "girls, we four
 are all we'll ever have
 we should be kind to each other"

on summer afternoons
 when golfers hit their moony balls
 over our fence
 i rushed & retrieved & smiled thanks
 for the quarters & dimes
 dreaming of a sweet laughing
 brother & all my opportunities
 all my missed opportunities
 but what i missed most was a girl
 back inside
 somewhere
 that was you

Janet Fraser