

# Freckles

by Meg Pokrass

Loretta, Trina, and Junie were real friends, and their backs were brown as beef jerky. None of them freckled, as I did. Freckles on my face, my arms, my back. Freckles on my lips, flecks of oil, or butter, or tomato sauce on my t-shirts. Everywhere I was spotted, defective. Only the dog's eyes followed me, as if I were banana frosting or a dog's version of it.

Not until my fourteenth birthday did an electric switch turn on. Out came the family neck, the swan neck - as though it rose from my birthday cake where it had been sleeping. My eyes became purple, and boys called them "picture windows". Well, not boys, exactly, but one girl did. Junie. It was still a compliment, since Junie was a ballerina and valued physical beauty, especially the neck above all else - she knew what to look for, called herself a slut. She had an unnaturally gravelly voice, as though she'd been smoking for forty years, as though she were half man, and when she laughed got worse.

"When I'm thirsty I sound like a guy," she'd brag. One night she slept over with her brown back and her dance bag. I became quiet around bedtime, couldn't think of funny stories. She started looking around my room, all nosy, for something to tease me with. When she crawled under my bed I could see her bellybutton popping, an "outie", like a Cheerio.

"Is this your little teddy bear?" she asked.

She'd found Ted my childhood pal, a ripped bear with a babyish face behind the plastic storage boxes. Holding Ted, giggling maniacally, Junie was trying to make him squeak like a dog toy. Perfect and

mean like a TV star.

I wanted to ask her how to change my personality, how to become tan without ruining my skin forever, wrinkling up and dying of cancer. Anything felt possible, and I slid next to her so she wouldn't rip Teddy up, kissed her for a long time to save him.

