



## STEPHANIE HART

### *THE GIRL IN THE NEXT BED*

The light from the hallway fell into the room, and I could just about see the girl in the bed next to mine. She had Shirley Temple curls and a smile that turned up at the corners. It was my first night at boarding school in the fall of 1956. The room felt big and cold. Our beds were lined up in rows facing one another.

The girl made a grumbling sound in her throat. "Who are you?" she asked. I could hear a smile in her voice and a frown too.

"I'm a second grader," I said. "My name is Stephanie."

The girl leaned closer to me, taking the sheets and blanket with her.

"I'm Jill. I'm in third grade. I'm from Florida. I like alligators and salamanders. I don't like it here. My parents are going to take me home soon."

"I live in New York City," I said. "I like swimming and ice skating and—"

Loud heavy footsteps were outside our door. "Go to sleep, girls," our headmistress, Miss Rohm, said in a deep, scary voice. I could feel her presence in the hallway waiting for us to comply.

I closed my eyes and opened them again, trying to adjust to the darkness. The sheets felt scratchy and unfamiliar. I ran my hand against the silky rim of the blanket, which was soft to the touch.

My parents had driven me to school earlier that day, but now that seemed a long time ago, and they seemed far away. I turned toward the window. A sheer curtain covered it and through the curtain I tried to see the night sky. Finally Miss Rohm began walking in another direction.

"Are you asleep," Jill whispered, "or just pretending?"

"I'm awake."

"Wanna climb out the window and look at the stars?"

"Isn't it cold out?" I asked.

Jill laughed. "We can take our blankets."