2. MARGIE


Margie started there in that small empty place and there single-celled Margie started to divide and divide and divide. Unseen, unknown Margie, what was Margie before she was Margie, burrowed and billowed and became. Swimming in the warm dark waters where we all live before we live, growing skin to contain, lungs to breathe, a heart to beat.

Margie, started, sprouting legs to kick and eyes to see and a mouth to speak.

Margie, at the start, small and secret and shaping into the shape we all take. Growing and pushing inside that space that becomes smaller and smaller with every new bone and ear and eyelash. Turning and floating and kicking inside all of that inside fluid. Fish-like, flapping, fat forming, warming. Filling with the blood that would be her blood, building the brain that would be her brain, finding the lines of the body that would be her body.

Margie, started inside, hiding.

Margie, from the start, her body made secret.

Margie, from the start, the same.

Margie, from the start, different from the rest of us.

Margie, starting, eyes opening, light let in, waiting for what would come.

3. MARJORIE

Tomorrow is coming. Or here, almost. Tomorrow is almost today and still Marjorie is not sure if she should call Steve at the Store and say that today she will take her vacation day.

Marjorie, in her soft purple pajamas, sits sunk down into the deep shape of Ma left behind in this bed. Marjorie, in Ma's bed, sits still as she can in the quiet, quiet bedroom, in the weak blue light at the beginning of morning. Shoulders down low, the hard of the headboard making pains in her back. Marjorie sits, has been sitting for a long time, listens to Gram roll and snore and sigh in the next room. Looks at the dark turned-off shape of the no-sound television. Listens to her self, her wind, to her own breath breathing the last of Ma in and out. Marjorie sits and smells the smell of Ma, the late-night secret cigarettes, the
sting of salt-and-vinegar potato chips, the sour of a shut-door room and a body gone long unwashed. She squeezes her hands shut tight, holds, lets them go and feels how they tingle. Marjorie, sitting, breathing, listening, watching, waiting. Sleeping here, now, in Ma’s bed. Living, here, now, right now, alive, awake, up high off the ground on Ma’s soft sheets, Ma in the smell all around her. Marjorie, here, now, grown, feeling, free, alone, and here there are no Ma sounds and here there is no Ma, anymore.

Marjorie is not thinking about Ma.

Marjorie is thinking about the People who will come and how to tell Steve that today she cannot do her job.

She is looking at the light blue light coming in through the gaps in the window blinds. This is the light she likes most, the underwater light at the end of night. Marjorie is rocking just a little from this side to this side, feeling the deep strong spring of the springs inside this mattress, the shape of Ma that holds the body of Marjorie. Inside, she feels her pains, the hurt behind her knees and up and down her back.

Marjorie is thinking about the big and the soft of this bed. How different and good it might feel to sleep in a bed that is just a bed, that is wide and thick and does not need to be pulled out from the sofa at night and pushed back in the morning.

Not that Marjorie minded where she was before. Ma coughing, living, sleeping in Ma’s room and Gram, with her Stories, away, in Gram’s room. Marjorie coming back late from the Store, from the Club, to the small quiet of the living room, to the squeak of the sofa’s metal inside, the thin hold of the sofa bed. Marjorie did not mind. Marjorie had her place. Her place that was shaped like her, that was good and wide and soft enough, for her.

For years and years, from when Ma had stopped working and they all had to leave the tall windows and big rooms of Apartment #2 at the end of dead-end Summer Street, Marjorie has slept fine in her space on the sofa bed. All of them, together, fine in the place let out cheap to Gram by the Department of Apartments. Crowded, but fine, together. Better since He went away.

But the sofa bed. That sofa bed was Marjorie’s space and she knows the touch of those springs, knows not to roll too far to the right, knows how to measure exactly where her body is in that place and how to move around in it. Marjorie knows the living room, the sofa bed, the shape of that space and how to fit her self inside.

But change. People here and People gone. Marjorie blinks her eyes and looks at the blue light slowly turning white in the spaces between the blinds. Gram
sleeping her loud sleep behind the shut door across the hall. Him gone, left, taken away. Ma done, gone, given up. Ma’s room, free, left behind and Marjorie the only one still here to sleep in the wide high soft of this bed. Ma’s bed.

And Lucy. Almost here Lucy. Gone, gone, the big long gone of Lucy.

No. Marjorie is not thinking about Lucy. Marjorie is tired. Marjorie is sitting, still sitting, just sitting, not sleeping, not thinking, is here now in her self, in her new place. A headboard. This too-soft bed with a long wooden part and for what? A hard place for putting her head. Marjorie breathes her breath, follows her wind out of her mind, away from the departments where she does not want to go, far from the aisles of things she does not want to think about.

Marjorie, doing what Dr. Goodwin tells her to do.

Breathing, feeling, seeing.

Marjorie looks at the blue–wallpapered walls and sees them mostly as shadows, closes her eyes and sits with all that dark, looks at the wall and sees a little more of what is here, closes her eyes and sees nothing.

Open your eyes, Marjorie. Open your eyes. Here is today.

Marjorie is very good company for her self. Always alone and never alone, always together with her mind, her body, big, beating, her wind blowing through her and all the things stacked neatly on shelves built in the space of her inside. This whole long night Marjorie has felt good and quiet and safe sitting up in this bed, squeezing her hands together in the dark to remember that she is, was, will be here now in this place where Ma is not. In the dark she looked straight ahead at the dark and now in the getting-stronger light Marjorie looks right at that blue wallpaper and she knows that she is here, that she is here in the room that is for her now. She knows the sofa is just a sofa with a bed hidden inside it and that the sofa bed, the place that for so long has helped shape the shape of her, might never be pulled out again.

Gone, the sofa bed. Still there, inside, but gone, pushed down, in, away.

Sitting here, in the slow blue-to-white-to-orange sunrise walking up the walls of what was or is or was Ma’s room, Marjorie feels her self feel almost bad. Something like bad. Like empty, or upside-down, or blown open for all the People to see.

But no. No. No, a sofa is not something to feel bad about.

Marjorie thinks this is a good thought. Some good words to tell Dr. Goodwin. Something true and real and right.

In the deep soft orange light of the almost-here morning, Marjorie says it out loud, quiet, so that she can hear how the sounds sound outside her self.

A sofa is nothing to feel bad about.
No, no sorry.
A sofa is not a thing to feel sorry for.
Marjorie whispers because it is early, because this night in here has been so long and unmoved, because she is not yet sure what her voice will sound like in the shape of this space that so suddenly stopped being for Ma.
No need for sorry over some sofa.
Maybe Marjorie should say so to Gram. It was Marjorie who found Ma, quiet, cold, gray, blue, gone. But it was Gram who had the phone number of the People who would come, Gram who knew what to do. Gram who closed Ma’s door and told Marjorie to stay away, to call the People to come and help. Gram who talked to the kind People in the white gloves who came to take what was Ma away. Gram who used her two hands against the wall to hold her bent body up. Gram, down-day Gram who got up to arrange all the arrangements. Marjorie who sat still on the sofa with her eyes closed, breathing, smiling and saying Hello to the People who covered Ma in white and carried her away. Marjorie who in darkness had pulled the bed out of the sofa as usual and Gram who pinched Marjorie’s shoulder and made Marjorie push the sofa back into a sofa.
Gram who said, You finally got your own place, Margie.
Gram who said, No sense wasting a perfectly good bed.
And Marjorie who for these few days and nights now, since, has been sitting, mostly not sleeping, mostly staring, thinking, smelling the smell of Ma leaving. Marjorie thinks that Gram would be happy to hear what she is thinking about the sofa bed. She sits and looks and sees the light in the room growing stronger, feels the day coming.
Once more, out loud, loud enough for Gram in her room to hear, Marjorie says it.
No sorry here for a sofa bed.
Today is coming. Today is already here. The room that was Ma’s room is bright now with the cold light of another winter morning, and still, Marjorie is not sure if today she should take her vacation from the Store.
Because today the white-gloved People who took Ma away are coming back. Today the kind People who came to help are coming to bring Ma’s leftovers back. Not leftovers. The reminders. No, the sand. The dust. No, the remainders. Today whatever is left of Ma is coming back and Marjorie is not sure if she should call the Store and tell them that today she is taking her vacation day.
Marjorie spreads her big fingers over her wide thighs and she presses hard down into her self until she can feel the huge heat of her self.
Lucy, she thinks.
For just one thought, for just one second out of all the seconds that will make today into today, Marjorie thinks, Lucy.

But stop. Stop, Marjorie says.

Let Lucy be.

Today there is enough to think about.

Marjorie is very good at walking down her aisles and watching the things in her mind and telling her self when to turn, when to look away. She sends Lucy back to the far-away department where Lucy lives and Lucy stays there, safe, shapeless, quiet, unseen. Lucy, there for only a second, and only in a blink of winter morning light that breaks into stars in the dark as Marjorie squeezes her eyes shut and holds them that way. No Lucy let into today and no harm done. No sound and no talking out loud. No squeak of sofa bed springs and no living room light.

Marjorie opens her eyes and sees that she is here, still, sitting, still, smelling the smell of Ma and watching the morning begin. The shape Ma left in the mattress below her is so soft that Marjorie feels sinking, feels almost sunk. She presses her hands to her thighs and moves slow, starts to move out of the deep sink of Ma in this mattress. Rocks her back slow and careful against the solid touch of the headboard. Marjorie breathes her breath, feels her heart blowing in the wind of Ma that moves through. Marjorie will get her self out of this worn-in bed. Marjorie thinks about the phone, thinks about Steve and the Store, is really thinking about taking this day for her vacation day.

4. MARGIE

Margie came out same as other babies. Raw, red, wrinkled. Bruised blue, screaming, shaking. Tiny fingers curled into tiny fists, mouth open wide, beating inside, breaking through.

Margie came out as a surprise.

Margie, for many months, ignored inside.

Margie, a pain in her ma’s side.

Margie, forming and floating and growing and kicking and rising and falling and needing, needing, pushing, beating, fighting her way out.

Margie would not be ignored.

We said, Push.

We said, Fuck.

Fuck.

Fuck.