doing her business in the bathroom. Some days, Gram tried, but Gram had her pains to pay attention to. Gram had her book to read and her church to go to and her yard sales. Gram, like Ma, must have figured that Margie would learn. That Margie was fine, that Margie would catch up, that Margie would sooner or later find her way into the true, real, right of the world.

Margie learned to leave words alone. Ma said Cat and Gram said Dog and Margie stopped listening. Margie looked, instead. Margie saw small, big, soft. Noses wet, noses dry, ears made of lines and circles. Margie learned that making words made her loud. That she could only hear or see or taste or smell the world when she was quiet, when she did not try to remember the shapes of the sounds and the names for what surrounded her.

Margie sat on the floor of the bedroom in the hot of the sun coming in through the window and with her skin felt the different of this through-glass hot, different from the hot of hot dog on her tongue, different from the hot of hot water on her hands. She lay in bed beside Gram and felt the warm wind that came from Gram’s mouth as she moaned and rolled and rumbled. Margie smelled the sour of Gram, the pinched-nose smell of Gram’s sour different from the sour of milk left out, different from the sour smell that lived in the dark below the sofa.

At night, in the warm and sour air beneath the blankets, in the next-to of Gram, Margie put her small hand over her mouth and breathed out and in and smelled her own air, the nothing of it, the smell she could not match to any other smell, the smell of herself, what seemed to belong to her and only her. Margie felt her wind blowing through her and knew it was different from Gram’s, different from the wind that shook the trees outside the window, different from the wind that went through Ma and the slow wind that moved from room to room in the open-window summertime of Apartment #2.

Margie shut her eyes and rolled slow from side to side, listening to her heart making sounds. Not words, but sounds. Her inside, sounding, pounding. Margie, little Margie, staying quiet, slowly building the world in her inside, the world that was only for her, a place built in shapes and colors and sizes that no one but Margie would ever know existed.

9. MARJORIE

Marjorie sits in the low pink and blue and yellow and green light next to the wall of signs at the bar at the back of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and inside her sneakers she is secretly moving the pains down and out and
through her toes. So many hours spent standing at the front of the Store, smiling, saying Hello, helping the People find what they need. A lady with three tiny crying kids needed to know where the popcorn machine was and Marjorie helped her with that. A man needed to buy socks for his wife and Marjorie showed him the way. So many People with so many needs and all day long Marjorie helps and helps, stands and smiles. Now, in the dark of the Club that is lit up by all of these candy-wrapper colors, Marjorie feels good and worked all over, and now Marjorie is waiting for her Shirley Temple that will show her that this day is almost done.

The Club is a special place. Members Only. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Marjorie likes to read the big white blue-lettered wooden sign above the bar quiet, inside herself. This is a name too big for her mouth to get right out loud. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. A good name for a good place, the only place within Marjorie’s walking from the Store and the apartment. Marjorie is not a member of the Club but Mac knew Ma from a long, long time before, and Mac always lets Marjorie come and sit and drink her Shirley Temples as his guest.

Today the Club is busy and it is taking Mac longer than usual to make her drink. Marjorie does not mind. She waits. She is good at waiting. Marjorie can see balloons and wrapped boxes with bows at the other end of the room and she is guessing that one of all these People here today is having a birthday. She wiggles her toes inside her socks, feeling the pains, releasing the pains, and kicks her sneakers a little against the big wooden bar and watches the birthday-party People talk and laugh and smile and drink.

Marjorie likes to be a guest. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the sign says. Members and Invited Guests Only. Marjorie is an invited guest. Members of the Club need to pay money and members of the Club need to be U.S. citizens who believe in God. This is what the sign under the sign above the bar says. Marjorie is a U.S. Citizen. God, Marjorie is not so sure about. Marjorie believes in the things she can see, the People and the Store. She can believe in the things she has seen, the blue-covered wall of her bedroom in Apartment #2, the grass wet at night. But God. Who knows about God? God is who keeps Gram company in Gram’s room. God is a big unseen something to believe in. Marjorie has not yet made up her mind about God.

Except for in the Club. In the Club, where Marjorie is an invited guest, she can believe in God. Because why not? The People in the Club are kind, are good, and the People in the Club are here to help. And the bad of God in the Club. Always the good of God, the good of God, but what about the bad of
God? Marjorie waits for her Shirley Temple and looks at the faces of the People, at their wide-open happy mouths, how they touch shoulders and how their hands reach for each other and how some of the men put their arms around some of the ladies and how the ladies touch and touch their beautiful television hair. God in the pink and blue and yellow and green bar light. God in the drinks that make People laugh, that make People mean. Maybe there is God in here, in the pink light in the ice cubes, in the soft shining of the hair.

Marjorie puts her hand on her head and touches her hair and it does not feel hard and it does not feel soft. She rubs her hand over her whole head and closes her eyes to feel her self more. No, not hard, but a little stiff, dry, like drive-in grass at the beginning of winter. Marjorie’s hair is shaped in waves, by its nature, and cut short, the way she likes it. Once a month, always before Marjorie goes to see Dr. Goodwin, she has her hair cut for a good deal by Sylvia in the small salon at the back of the Store. To take care of her self, to give the People something good to see.

Marjorie opens her eyes and looks around again. The Club. Marjorie has a huge history with the Club. The bar is long and wooden and it stretches out the whole length of the back wall and the wood is dark and smooth and feels good against her cheek. Marjorie sits here, at the end of the bar farthest from the bathroom, next to the wall with the signs that glow and buzz. A huge history with the Club. But before is before and this is the Club where Marjorie is an invited guest. The People at the birthday party are loud and laughing, are strangers. Marjorie squints her eyes and stares at the People at the other end of the bar, the quiet People who are looking at their hands, who are not here for the birthday party, who are drinking their beers and believing in God. Men, all of them. Mostly men, here, in the Club.

Hey, Marjorie, hang in there, Mac, from far away, yells.

Marjorie nods and waves. Mac there, in the dark at the end of the bar, calling out to her. Marjorie is hanging in, feels fine sitting here in her place by the wall, watching the People and taking her load off her feet for a while. Mac is big and strong and kind to her. So kind. If there is a good God in the Club it is Mac smiling and saying, Hello, Marjorie, and mixing her Shirley Temple and asking, How are you today? Mac there before, Mac here after. Mac who said her name. Mac who invites her in, who puts his big hand on her big hand, who lets her sit and stay and be.

Dr. Goodwin knows about Mac of course and of course Dr. Goodwin has asked Marjorie how she feels about him.

Dr. Goodwin’s favorite words.
How do you feel?
How do you feel today, Marjorie?
How do you feel about that, Marjorie?
How do you feel about Mac, Marjorie?

Good, Dr. Goodwin. Good and good and fine and good. Dr. Goodwin’s questions. Marjorie does not mind. She understands that Dr. Goodwin has a difficult job and just like how she is so used to saying Hello, Welcome, Come On In, Dr. Goodwin is used to saying, How do you feel?

And, Let go. Let go.
You need to let go.

How do you feel about Mac, Marjorie? Do you think maybe you love him? Dr. Goodwin and his love. His feelings. Love this and love that. Love the things, love the People, love your self. Love your Lucy and Let go.

Good, Dr. Goodwin, Marjorie had said. I feel good about Mac.

That was the most truth Marjorie could think of for how she felt about Mac then and now this still seems the most she can say. So many words out there in the world, and People always wanting to hear new words and different words for what can just be said as good or bad, yes or no. For Marjorie, good is the right word because good can mean so much. Good is a big word, a wide word with lots of space inside it. Good can have love inside it. So many words. Good can hold on tight to warm and happy and Thank You and true and right. Even God, in there, in the good, if that is what People need to see.

Marjorie closes her eyes and sucks in her wind. She is going inside her departments now, thinking about too many things and forgetting what things she is thinking about. Wandering, looking at shelves and shelves of words and what she remembers. Marjorie does not want to get into a headache like she is into this footache. She keeps her eyes closed for a minute and for that minute she sits in her dark and she uses the light-outlined part of her self to go to her mind, to touch her mind, to pick up her mind and in that inside place Marjorie begins to wash her mind all over with soap and a little warm water. This is her way of keeping her self clean and free from any thoughts she does not need to be thinking. Marjorie, the other Marjorie, the inside Marjorie, rubs her mind, the smooth gray bumps and curves of her, gently. Gently scrubbing all the soft sides of her, rinsing her self with warm water and then letting her mind sit back down clean, alone, happy, soaking.

Marjorie opens her eyes and here is Mac, standing in front of her, smiling and holding out her Shirley Temple.
Here you go, Marjorie, he says. Gave you three cherries instead of two today. Sorry about the wait.

Thanks, Mac, Marjorie says, and she slides the tall glass close to her. The birthday People are laughing and now Marjorie can smell cake.

I heard about your ma, Mac says.

Oh. Yeah.

I was sorry about it, Marjorie.

Yeah. Thanks, Mac.

Marjorie leans toward the straw and takes a long sip of her cold, sweet, bubbling drink.

You and your gram getting along okay over there?

Yeah, Marjorie says. Good. Getting along.

Marjorie knows that Mac is like her, Mac is not a talker, and so Marjorie is not sure why he is still standing here in front of her. He seems to be waiting for her to say more, so Marjorie thinks of what more she can say.

Okay, Marjorie says. Not so different than before. Just quiet.

Mac nods and reaches his hand out across the bar and touches his hand to her shoulder. Marjorie does not mind because Mac is on her list of People She Does Not Mind. She is just surprised, a little. A touch. She feels her shoulder go stiff, a little. Mac keeps his hand there for a little while and once Marjorie is finished with her surprise her shoulder drops down again and she feels soft again and she smiles.

Where is Suzanne?

Marjorie’s mouth asks the question quick, before her mind even knew she was wondering it.

Off today, Mac says. Some kind of family thing. Nothing too serious, don’t think. She’ll be in tomorrow.

Marjorie nods. She would like to see Suzanne. Suzanne, new to the Club. Suzanne is good. Beautiful and always smiling and always talking and always touching Marjorie’s arm and hand and shoulder. Suzanne whose big, soft body makes Marjorie remember the heated-up good of before.

Hey, Mac says. That one is on the house.

Thanks, Mac.

He takes his hand away and Marjorie’s shoulder tingles a little, remembering. Okay, Marjorie, you enjoy yourself. I got a lot to get done.

Marjorie nods and she drinks her drink. She looks at the People and feels good about sitting here, about being together, out in the world, free.

Marjorie drinks her cold sweet drink down slow as she can. She sucks
each cherry around in her mouth and squishes them between her teeth. The birthday-party People are having a very good time and Marjorie is happy about it and the sugary smell of their cake is making her hungry. She will go home and heat up some supper for her and Gram.

And Ma. Not supper for Ma. Just the remembering of Ma. Ma in the cardboard box beside the sofa. Delivered. Waiting. For what? Marjorie will go home and there Ma will be and what do People do with a box of their Ma dead in the living room?

Maybe Dr. Goodwin will know. Of course Dr. Goodwin will know. Probably all the People know. But Marjorie does not. Marjorie will have to spend some time in that department, will have to think about what place is the right place for stacking Ma.

She sucks hard on the straw and moves it around between the ice cubes and does her best to drink down the whole drink. Marjorie gets up slow from her stool, lets her toes stretch out inside her socks, bounces a few times on her feet to make sure they are strong enough to hold her up. She zips up her puffy purple coat and puts down two dollars on the bar, which is one dollar more than she usually gives. Marjorie puts her hands deep in her pocket and calls down to Mac at the end of the bar.

See you tomorrow, Mac.

See you, Marjorie, he says, and he waves.

Marjorie keeps her head down and her hands hard at her sides as she walks sideways against the wall of the Club, out of the way of the birthday People.

Get home safe, Mac says, as she pulls the heavy door of the Club toward her, as the cold air blows in.

10. MARGIE

The quiet of a usual day sounded like the television talking and Margie chewing. The not-there of Ma. Ma gone, out, away, at work or somewhere else far from Apartment #2. Usual days were down. Down-day Gram sat low inside the soft of her green chair and Margie laid out low and long as she could make herself on the rough living room rug. Gram watched her stories and did not speak. Margie rolled from side to side, looking up at the ovals of Gram’s pink slippers, looking at the bright moving lights of the television. She put her eyes up close to the hard brown shining square of the coffee table and touched her tongue gently to the side of Gram’s soft chair, just to know, to taste the taste of green-chair green. Margie put her small, thick fingers deep down inside the