in front of the television where a man and a lady are hugging and crying and hugging. The man, too, crying. Marjorie touches the spot that Gram points to, says, Here, and Gram leans and nods and watches.

I never meant to hurt you, the television says.

Marjorie tears some tape off the roll and looks at the paper to make sure she’s got it facing the right way. She does not read the words, does not want to bother what is private for Gram. Marjorie, careful, rubs her thumb over the paper to smooth it down. To make it good and right for Gram.

That look okay, Gram?

Gram strains her neck to the side to look and she squints her eyes and looks and looks and then nods.

That’s good. You’re a good girl, Margie.

20. MARGIE

Lucy came with her ma and her ma’s friend LD sometime during the long-day lazy sunlit-start of summer. The two big-bellied women and the pretty little girl came sometime during that time when chocolate-chip-cookie-hiding Margie was every day making a little more of herself. Her skin, slowly widening, reaching out to touch a bit more of the world. Margie was eight or nine or ten, or maybe younger, or older.

Margie from behind the dust and sunlight of the big window in her and Gram’s high-up bedroom watched the three new people move in. She held her limp blue stuffed bunny by one ear and pressed her nose and cheeks and lips to the glass.

We have to wonder about that window. That high-up bedroom window. The shine, the streaks, the face and tongue and handprints left on that very important window. We have to wonder if there might be a little bit of little Margie still there. If even the smallest window-trace of Margie could still be found today.

Margie from the window watched the pale blonde girl turn cartwheels on the front lawn as the two women lifted big cardboard boxes out of the bed of a gray pickup truck. And with her other hand, her unholding hand, Margie slowly rubbed the smooth blue surface of the secret-covering paper sea Gram had made for her.

Margie had watched new people move in and move out of downstairs Apartment #1 before, but always a boyfriend and girlfriend or a husband and wife. The downstairs people had always come and gone quickly, had always played
loud music and gotten into yelling fights with Ma. There had never been another kid living in the big peeling-gray house before.

We do not know why Margie waited so long to speak up, to show herself. For weeks, Margie watched the little girl below her, the small, smiling girl rolling in the overgrown grass around the big gray house. We cannot know why Margie stayed silent, sitting, pressing her cheek to the cool clear glass and waiting each day for the time when the golden-haired girl ran glowing out into the sunlight.

For weeks, Margie waited for Gram to settle into her chair in the living room with her stories and while Gram sat with the problems of the people on the television, Margie spent hours alone and free with herself, with her nose and forehead and sometimes tongue touching window glass. She watched the little girl skip on the sidewalk in front of the slanting blue porch steps and lie on her back in the middle of the road.

The more Margie watched, the more she saw the differences between the two big-bellied women who had come to live below. Margie watched the one woman with short hair and wide shoulders drive away in the morning in the gray pickup truck, wearing the blue clothes that all the quarry workers wore. She watched the other woman, shorter, hair longer, her belly just a bit bigger, her legs just a bit curved inward, sometimes come out into the yard to wave her arms and yell at the little girl. Margie, high up and behind the thick of the glass, could not hear what they said, but she watched how their bodies moved and she saw, maybe for the first time, that wide-mouthed yelling did not always come with the red of angry. Once, Margie saw them hug, there, below her, the big woman and the little girl, there, holding, in the sunlight, and Margie, alone in her place against the window, felt it, could feel it too.

Why not open the window to hear what they said, what they yelled? To hear what the little girl’s laugh sounded like? We cannot understand how good the glass felt on Margie’s lips, to Margie’s small, warm, tongue. We were at work or watching television or at the bar. We did not know that Margie was made in a way that we were not.

There is a certain comfort that comes from assuming we are all the same.

Maybe Margie would have stayed quiet and happy watching from the window all summer long, but one day Ma came home in the middle of the afternoon with the friend Margie had seen once or twice before. The big, tall, black-haired, no-shirt, hairy friend smiled when Ma yelled at Margie to get out. A spitting, lip-moving, chewing friend who stayed quiet and smiling and hold-
ing on tight to the sides of Ma while Ma swayed and sighed and red-faced yelled for Margie to get out.

Margie by now was used to getting out. Gram had a headache and Margie got out. Ma came home angry from work and Margie got out. Friends showed up at the red front door with six-packs of beer and pretzels and Ma made Margie get out.

Margie got out into the thick, hot summer air and for a while spun in circles in the front yard. Spinning and spinning, standing up, feet moving in the slow shape of a circle, lying down on the soft of the grass, rolling. Margie, moving the world with her circles.

That was how Lucy met Margie. Spinning, in circles, world-upside-down, eyes closed, smiling, tongue and teeth flashing red and white, spinning and breathless and happy. Made by Ma to get out and Margie feeling nothing but good and free to be finally outside in the sun. Inside, we were pushed or let him push us to the floor to our knees and we kept our eyes closed and we waited for the warm moment when he would open and soften so that we could feel something too. Outside, Margie made a friend.

Hi!
The little girl opened her arms wide and started spinning beside Margie.
Hi. Hi. Hi.
Margie smiled but Margie did not, could not, stop her circles.
Hi.
Hi.
Hi, Margie said, and she opened her eyes, and swayed a little, slowed a little, and spun.
My name is Lucy.
My name is Margie.

We did not care about the two little girls spinning in the hot afternoon sun in front of the old house with the sagging porch. We figured they had names, and things they liked, things they didn’t like. We could have guessed about what made them happy and what made them sad. Sun, swimming, dolls, frogs, boys, homework, and on, and on, whatever. We probably knew that each had a whole separate world of what they were afraid of somewhere inside their growing, firming bodies. We might have walked by and seen them spinning and assumed they were friends. But we were busy, we were hurt and happy and afraid in our own worlds. We were teaching summer school classes, we were digging through piles of exploded rock at the quarry, stealing candy bars at the convenience store, fucking, getting fucked, driving our cars in drunk straight
lines down Main Street, praying for babies not yet born. We didn’t know that these were the first moments of Margie’s first friend, and we didn’t care.

Margie cared. Margie. Spinning, spinning, laughing. Lucy fell down laughing and got up and held onto Margie’s bigger, softer arm with her two small hands.

Hey, Lucy said.
How do you do that?
How do you spin without falling down?
I don’t know, Margie said, spinning slowly, letting Lucy hold onto her arm, spinning Lucy in a slow circle around her.

I don’t know. I just do it. I put my arms out like this and I close my eyes like this and I stay here inside my circle like this.

Okay, come see this, Lucy said, and she pulled on Margie’s arm to stop her mid-spin.

Come see these frogs I found.

We might have told Lucy we knew about the frogs already. We might have told her that we had cut-out frogs living on the blue-paper-water window beside our bedroom window. We might have said that we had been here from the beginning. That this was our place, that we had found the frogs in the brook at the end of the street a long time ago. We might have told the little golden twig of a girl that they were our frogs, not hers.

This is, after all, the usual division of the world.

What is ours and what is not.

But Margie was not like any of us. Margie smiled and let Lucy lead her past the dusty dead-end end of the street to the tall grass and smooth stones at the edge of the brook. Margie crouched low in the mud with Lucy and felt happy and surprised at the sight of these frogs she had seen so many times before. Margie looked at the little brown bodies of the frogs blowing up and down with breath and she made her heavy brown eyes into Lucy’s light blue eyes and she smiled and felt all over again that she wanted to hold the frogs. Margie felt the cool of the trees that stretched out long and tall to protect the brook from the sun. She felt happy to see the frogs with someone else, happy to feel Lucy’s small fingers cold around her sweaty wrist.

Lucy’s thin body shook with excitement and she pointed and whispered in Margie’s ear. Her breath, hot on Margie’s skin.
Do you see my frogs? They’re my pets, all of them.

Do you see my frogs, Margie?
I see them, Margie said.
I see your frogs.

We might have told the girls not to touch the frogs. To stay away from the mud, to stay clean, to stop rubbing their eyes and get their fingers out of their mouths. And besides, we would have said. Besides, little girls don’t like frogs. We might have laughed and held them on our laps. The little one, at least. Maybe told them stories about good frogs and bad frogs and frogs that could turn into princes and about rich beautiful women in France who ate frog legs for breakfast.

But where were we? Sunk down drowned in ourselves and what mattered there. And what mattered there had nothing to do with two little girls making friends in the mud of a dirty brook at the end of a dead-end street in the bad part of town.

I love them, Lucy said.

I love them too, Margie said.

We all loved them. Or the idea of them, the frogs, the brook, the sun. The idea of little girls in the world will always be a good enough thing. The details of it, what they talked about and how the big one’s skin seeped sweat while the little one shivered, the smell of the mud under their fingernails, seem less important, seem impossible to know.

But there they were. Margie and Lucy, shoulders touching, lying belly-down in the mud at the edge of the brook. Left alone and unseen. Watching the frogs watch them. Lucy told stories and Margie listened and laughed at all the wrong parts and Lucy laughed at her wrong laughing. Big sweating skin touching pale, thin skin, the thick, sucking feel of the mud and the scratch of the tall grass that hid them from view. This was the making of Margie’s first friend.

21. MARGE

Didn’t mean to surprise you, honey.

Your ma had to go out for a while.

Don’t know where. The store I think.

She told me about you.

What’s your name again?

Margie? What kind of name is that?

Margie Bargie Largie.

I’m just kidding, honey.

Marjorie? Wow what a name. Too much name for you. Too long for me to say.