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.
How about I call you Marge?
I knew a Marge once. Worked in a diner near here. Had pretty little legs and pretty little titties. Wore a pretty little nametag. Marge.
Hey, I am talking to you.
You stay put.
That Marge knew just what I wanted. Sunny side up so they jiggle. Used to look down her shirt when she poured my coffee. Drank so much coffee over there.
What do you do? Do you pour coffee?
Dumb as a lump. I can see that. Not nearly as pretty and little as that other Marge.
Not nearly as pretty as your ma.
What you are is plump. Not as pretty but not too bad to grab neither.
Don’t get that look I’m just playing with you.
How old are you, anyway, Marge?
That’s it? I thought more. You had me fooled on that one. Look at those big titties you’ve got already.
Come on, honey, I’m just joking with you. Just noticing. Can’t help it.
This is what men do, Marge. Men look. Nothing wrong with a look.
Bring me some of that paper you got.
I’m not going to bite.
Rip that up into pieces for me. My hands hurt today.
Good, like that. Like strips. Hand them over.
Look, Marge, your ma said for me to watch you so I’m watching you.
Nothing for you to be scared of, Marge.
Just me. Your ma’s friend.
Good, give me them pieces of paper.
How about this? I won’t even make you call me Mr. Mustang. You can call me just like your ma calls me. Just Mustang.
What’s wrong now, Marge? You don’t want to make friends?
Keep tearing that up. I want all of that. I want a mountain.
I’m watching.
Just like your ma told me to do, Marge.
I’m watching you.
I got my eye on you.