A Heart Beating Hard

Goodman, Lauren Foss

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Marjorie opens her eyes and she is sitting on the cold floor of the Store in the corner of the farthest department under the big blue hanging BABY sign. Again. Her wind, here with her. In and out and in. Marjorie stays sitting where she is, her back against two metal shelves of little baby shoes. Her legs spread out big in front of her, her black sneakers pointing up at a rack full of blue baby dresses on hangers. The lights, burning white bright lines above.

All the things.
All the things here smell sweet and soft like cakes like babies like baby powder like candy and flowers and Lucy.
All the things small and soft and waiting for babies not yet here in the world. But coming.

It is not that Marjorie does not remember her self walking to Baby. She remembers, in her way. Marjorie is sure it happens like this.

Her shift ends. Marjorie finishes giving the People their Hello and she leaves her place and takes her usual path through the Store, to the back of the Store. Marjorie leaves her place and turns left and passes the rows and rows of beeping registers and then turns right to walk through the pinks and greens of Women’s Wear and then straight and through the many moving bright lights of the televisions in Electronics.

She sticks to the wide center aisle. The main path. Where most of the People go.

Marjorie walks through the two big doors at the back of the Store and down a dark hallway and into the room with the gray box where she punches in. A special place. A place where the People are not allowed. Where the workers sit and eat sandwiches and candy bars and drink sodas. And Marjorie smiles to the room and says Hello to the room and she punches her card and she does not mind if the workers say Hello or do not say Hello. Marjorie takes her coat from the hook on the wall and she leaves the back of the Store as soon as she can because it is dark back there, many-roomed, back there. No bright colors back there and Marjorie prefers to be with the People.

Her coat. Her coat is here with her in Baby. Marjorie’s big purple coat is on her, around her. Keeping her warm here on the floor. So she put on her coat. So Marjorie walked in her way to the back of the Store and Marjorie had her coat on and Marjorie must have been on her way to the sliding glass exit door when some part of her self decided to change departments.

This is always the problem, for Marjorie. The leaving. The going back home.
The tired end of the day. The day long and smiling with People. The many, many paths that open up to her.

In the Store, People have many choices. All the things, yes. People can choose one or two or ten perfect things out of the millions and millions of choices of things. The forever choices of what is wanted. Needed. But in the Store it is also important for People to choose which path they will take to get to where they need to go. The Store has so many paths. In the Store it is important to know your self and what you need. Look up at the signs to know where is where and know what is needed and find the right path. Some People need, first and most important, soup for warming and potato chips for crunching, so they start their time in the Store in Food. Some People need to feel beautiful and on display, so they start in Beauty or Clothing. The People who are in the Store to slowly enjoy the Store usually start by touching the things next to Marjorie, to see what the holiday is, to see what is special this time. Some People know just what they need and they walk fast and direct to Garden or Electronics or Hardware. In the Store each of the People can choose which way they will go and whether they will follow the signs up above and walk down the shining smooth path the Store gives them or if they will find their own crooked way on the carpet through the racks and shelves and things in the departments.

Usual days Marjorie walks to the front of the Store on the same path she took to the back. It is easy to move her self down the wide aisles of the center Store path and there are always many People there pushing carts and even though she has punched her card, Marjorie still smiles. Marjorie still says Hello. Usual. The usual. A usual day, Marjorie stays on the path and leaves the Store and she does not need to open her eyes and see that she is sitting on the floor in Baby surrounded by racks and piles and baskets and boxes of tiny perfect things.

But here she is. It happens. Marjorie’s mind goes to darkened departments where she does not want to go. She sits in a corner inside her self and watches her self walk where she walks. Marjorie sees that she does not smile and say Hello when the inside light-outlined shape of her self takes over, that she does not turn toward the front of the Store but keeps going straight and all the way to the end of the path and into the tight all-around of metal racks and plastic hangers and clean-smelling baby things. Marjorie is there walking inside her self, together with her self, wind moving, heart beating, legs, arms, swinging, and then suddenly her self is dark and far away and her self feels gone from her.

Another Marjorie here inside Marjorie.

A difficult thing to describe.

Something about Marjorie that only Marjorie knows.
What Dr. Goodwin would say if he knew.
You can’t keep it all in, Marjorie.
Got to let it out sometime.
You need to feel.
Things.

Well. Marjorie is here. Feeling things. She has got her coat warm around her and a little soft baby shoe held tight in each hand. Baby shoes. Marjorie has got one baby shoe held tight in each hand. Little black ones. Sneakers, like hers.

Here she is. Again. Feeling. The floor hard under her legs and the shelves sharp against her back. It will be difficult for Marjorie to lean over and push her big self up so she stays sitting for a while. It will be difficult to put the baby shoes down. Marjorie knows. Marjorie is back in her self she knows. Marjorie knows the far-away part of her self that brings her to Baby is here because of Lucy. That she is here on the floor of Baby because of Lucy.

Marjorie knows.
This—Marjorie knows.
This—Marjorie does not need Dr. Goodwin to tell her why she is here.
This—Marjorie does not need Dr. Goodwin to know.
Because how can he?
How can any of the People know?
How it is to have had an almost-Lucy and not have any Lucy at all.

Marjorie knows how it is. She looks up at a small white dress covered in the smallest pink flowers and she sees Lucy small and perfect and wearing that dress. Marjorie looks at the little black shoes in her hands and sees Lucy wearing the shoes and at tiny hats and Lucy is in a hat and at soft yellow blankets and Lucy is pressed up close to her at night and they are keeping each other warm and safe and together. Dr. Goodwin knows that she sees Lucy sometimes in her mind but he does not know that Marjorie can feel Lucy too. That sometimes Marjorie touches her hand to her self to her skin to her big hanging breasts to her belly to her cheek and hips and heart and that she can feel there on her self what Lucy feels like.

Arms, legs, hair, eyes, eyelashes, fingers, nails, feet, sweat, skin.

Marjorie knows she cannot stay sitting, seeing, touching her soft warm self to the hard floor of Baby forever. Maybe she would like to. And maybe she could, if she really wanted. Because People are free to do what they want to do and the Store is open 24 hours 365 days a year and so sometimes Marjorie thinks about staying here. Sitting, thinking, feeling, being with the small soft things, forever.

But if she stays in Baby she would never see Dr. Goodwin again. Marjorie
would not have any People to talk about the day with. She would not smile and say Hello and help. Mac and Suzanne might wonder where she went. Ma would stay in that box under the bed forever and Gram would have no one to tape up her words on the wall. Benjamin might come by and see her, here, in Baby, and Benjamin might not even ask any questions. Benjamin might understand. But Steve. The big problem of Steve. If Marjorie stays in Baby, she is sure that Steve would come around and make her answer questions. Steve would stand above her and pinch and touch and push at her and just because of the problem of Steve, Marjorie would probably want to leave Baby, anyway.

But the real of the problem is that Marjorie staying in Baby means that Lucy stays in Baby, too. Marjorie wants to sit and stay and think about the look of Lucy and the feel of Lucy but Marjorie knows that Lucy does not want to stay in the Store. Dr. Goodwin wants to know where Marjorie thinks passed-along People go but how can Marjorie know about that?

Marjorie has secrets. She has the want for Lucy to have made it. To have gotten the chance to become Lucy, to be with the People, to kick real, growing legs, to see frogs breathing brook water and be in a place even bigger than the Store. Marjorie wants to know what Lucy was and is, what Lucy felt like, what that small, unshaped part of Marjorie's own self looked like. How Lucy almost came to be.

You don't want to see, the People told her, but Marjorie wanted to see and Marjorie wants to see. Marjorie wants to see how Lucy will be, and Yes, Dr. Goodwin, Marjorie understands that Lucy is just there in her mind and that maybe it is better to Let her go.

Which is why Marjorie is going to get up off of the floor of Baby and stop seeing perfect Lucy in the perfect clothes. Why Marjorie is letting go of these two little shoes. Why she is putting them back in their package and stacking them back on their shelf. Because Marjorie knows she does not know what Lucy looks like because she did not know Lucy until it was too late. Marjorie knows that she does not know what Lucy feels like because Lucy could not be touched because Lucy was not perfect because Lucy was unpackaged and undone and all wrong.

Marjorie bends one knee and slowly rolls over to a place with enough space to push her heavy self up with her arms. Her heavy self, feeling heavier, feeling more like Marjorie. She puts her hand on the shelf to help pull her self all the way up and she keeps her hand there for a while to help her mind come back to where she is. Picks up what she can of the mess of her inside departments. Opens up the closed of her self, lets the warm water wash down. Comes back
to her, to here, to where she is. In the Store. In Baby. In Marjorie. Bright lights all around so she does not know if it is day or night. Time in the Store might be minutes might be days might be never-ending and always. Tiny colorful things shining and kids crying, yelling, laughing, doing what kids do in the Store.

   Lucy. Lucy.
   Lucy.
   Released.
   Less here.
   Leaking.
   Away.
   Lucy.

   Marjorie washes up and down inside and makes her wind into a beat, a breeze. Says, Hello, just to hear a sound, just to touch the outside. Marjorie walks sideways on carpet past the racks and the shelves until she is through and out and past the danger of Baby. She moves slowly until she finds the wide shining center path through the Store. The People, the People are here. Pushing their carts and finding the things they need. Marjorie moves slow through the People, feels the pull and the roll of them and the things and the good. She walks head-up and more usual on her usual path toward the swinging door. Marjorie smiles and nods, breathes wide big-winded breaths, is doing her best to feel less and less Lucy.

23. MARGIE

Downstairs Apartment #1 where Lucy had come to live smelled sweet and a little sour, a lot like those white crackers packaged in plastic with the bright yellow cheese. Margie’s favorite kind, the crackers that came with the little red stick for spreading the soft cheese all over.

   Maybe we could have said something about how that cheese is not real cheese. About all that salt in those crackers. Something about chemicals, something like that. That a growing child should not be always eating out of plastic.

   But we said nothing.

   Minding our own business, we called this.

   After that first day of frogs and spinning, Margie spent the whole long summer out, together, with Lucy. Margie, let loose to sun, her pale skin turning red and staying red, her clothes becoming more and more streaked with green grass stains and the brown splash of mud. Lucy inventing all the games and Margie happy to play along. They made grass salads on the front lawn and had con-