and after-Ma. Not really even Ma, then, after, just someone sitting alone in her room with her salt-and-vinegar potato chips, feeling what secrets she was feeling.

Enough.

Away.

Get away.

Go.

Marjorie’s legs are very warm from all her rubbing. Sometimes when Marjorie goes into these departments she forgets that she is her self, now, here, in her body. Marjorie breathes, to feel her self, to remember, rubs her skin, to remember. Squeezes, softly, to feel. Feels her solid self big and alive beneath her. Says some words to stop all the quiet.

Hello.

Welcome.

Cold Out There Today.

It is good to hear good words. Marjorie looks around the room and sees that she cannot see. Sitting in the dark. This is not what People do. Marjorie leans over and turns on the bare bulb lamp and the room lights up too naked and bright. People use lampshades to quiet the light.

Marjorie has her wind back here with her. Her heart, back in time with her.

Is this what Dr. Goodwin wants?

Too many things to know.

Marjorie sits back down into the warm soft circle she has made here and looks around at the big shadows this let-out light makes. Maybe she will buy some lampshades. Make the living room into a room where People might want to live and come and talk. Make this room more into a room where Marjorie wants to be.

Ma won’t mind. Ma can’t mind. Ma, gone under. Out of the trash and back under the bed. Under the bed, as good a place as any, for now.

Marjorie will keep thinking about it. She will stack this lampshade idea in her mind with all the others. She will see how and what and if she feels.

25. MARGIE

At recess Margie waited for Lucy by the wall. In the still-strong sunlight of back-to-school, Margie stood, Margie waited. Quiet and patient, for her friend.

The wall was not a wall. More a fence, really. Hexagon holes in green wire
and silver poles holding it all together. We might even have called this a chain-link fence.

A cheap way to separate this from that.

Us from us.

But Lucy called it the wall so Margie called it the wall, and though these particulars of language seem important to us, Margie did not care about the words. Margie and Lucy walked to school together and in the morning they went to the wall and at recess they went to the wall and after school they met at the wall. A wall, a fence, a place. All Margie seemed to care about was Lucy and the world they had there together.

Meet me at the wall, Lucy would say.

Margie would nod and all through math class and silent reading time, Margie’s mind would crawl out through the rectangular classroom windows, across the dried-up kid-feet-killed playground grass, to the wall.

Lucy said that small people lived in the tall grass that grew around the bottom of the wall. Small people with small houses and small furniture and small animals they walked on small leashes. A whole small city going on around the wall. Small lives so much better than the big, normal, boring life they had on dead-end Summer Street. Lucy said that she had seen the small people a few times. Eating small dinners, singing small songs, a small man dancing slow and close with a small woman. Lucy had seen the small people, but Margie still had not.

Stuck in her classroom, at the back, big belly pressed against small school desk, Margie stared out the window and thought about the wall and wanted. Wanted to be out there, to wait for Lucy and look for the small people. Margie wanted to be away from the words and papers and pencils and raised hands and questions and whispers of school. To be outside where she could feel and touch and see a small place better than where she was.

When we called Margie’s name, it was as if she wasn’t there. Her body, the soil smell of her body, was there, but where was the rest of her? We cannot say. We cannot say we wondered much about it. All we knew was that we called on her. We tried. We did what we could manage, and because Margie did not look up, because she kept quiet and caused no problems beyond the absence of her eyes, we soon stopped calling, trying, caring. We soon stopped seeing Margie much at all.

But Lucy, we saw. Pretty, little, wild, light-haired Lucy could not go unnoticed. Lucy, who belonged to Margie.

Though we would have said it was the other way around.
Lucy was almost always late for their daily recess meetings at the wall. Lucy was loud and touched too hard and teachers liked to make her sit inside to make her learn not to pinch or push or sing or swear. Margie waited at the wall for Lucy, half of her watching the grass for any signs of the small city moving and half of her watching the school doors for the moment when Lucy would break free. Margie liked to put her fingers through the wall, to feel the smooth, hard hexagon shapes against her skin. She held on there, waited, watched.

Maybe, in the beginning, we tried to help Margie play with the other kids.

Maybe we said, Go run around, Margie.

Once or twice we might have asked her what she was doing there, but Margie only smiled and shrugged and it was easy enough for us to forget. To leave Margie alone and free to hold and stare and wait.

And then there were those of us who did see Margie. Or, not see her. There were those of us who sometimes thought to look at Margie and we did not so much as see Margie, we smelled her. We smelled cigarette smoke in the knit of an unwashed sweatshirt. Maybe we felt sorry about it, or probably we held our noses and giggled. We smelled powdered cheese dust eaten directly from the packet from the box of macaroni and cheese. If we did see her, maybe we saw Margie put her head down on her desk at the end of the day. Margie, rolling her forehead in slow circles. The shine of her hair, how it fell in slick strands that touched her shoulders. We smelled the smell and maybe we did not know what it was or maybe we did, the smell of what were once chicken nuggets dipped in honey and the soft skin of cafeteria french fries kept in a pocket.

Days when we had nothing better to do than look, we laughed at Margie’s pillly purple sweatsuit. We asked each other why she didn’t just wear normal clothes? If we thought no one was looking, which was almost always – almost always no one was looking – we threw dried leaves or sticks or lunch leftovers at Margie. We said all the bad things we say to each other when we are young. Now, maybe now, a very few of us will remember what we said and we might wonder about Margie. Why was she like that? Whatever happened to her? Were we at all to blame?

Margie did not mind the teachers who blew their whistles or the kids who threw things. She stayed quiet and calm inside herself and almost never felt angry or sad. Felt, in fact, less and less and less. Margie was busy with the wall, with the smell of the sap releasing from the trees, the feel of the grass against her skin. How the light changes as clouds move through. Margie rolled and looked out far away to where the hills were, to where the hills sloped into hills and more hills. She was happy to be with the wall, with the idea of the small city out
there, down there, all around her, somewhere. Margie did not mind the loud world outside and above her because Lucy was coming, because once Lucy was there, everything else went away.

Lucy did the talking that Margie did not like to do. She knew all the words. Lucy could fit her body into spaces much smaller than where Margie could go. She would lie down low against the wall and squint through the grass and tell Margie what was going on down there, in there. Lucy had all the words and Lucy could see all sorts of things that Margie could not.

There’s a small hat. A very small hat. Like a boy’s hat. And I see a tiny pink dress too. Definitely a small dress, with straps, and a big bottom part, like a ballerina, like a ballerina’s dress. I can see them for sure, Margie. But no small people. I don’t see the small people but I can tell that they’re there. They’re back there, I think. Behind those dandelions, see? The grass is moving a little and I know they’re in there. The boy and the girl, and she doesn’t even have her dress on. They’re naked in there. Do you see, Margie?

Margie held herself up on her elbows and knees and tried to see what Lucy saw.

I don’t see.

You know what they’re doing in there, Margie? Do you know?

I don’t see. I don’t know.

They’re doing it. I bet they’re doing it back there. Behind the dandelions, in that tall grass there. The boy and the girl, they’re naked and it feels really good and they’re doing it.

Margie liked to stare at the ground and through the grass and to think about the small people out there. She wondered if the small people looked like her, like big people. If there was a small Margie and a small Lucy and a small Ma and a small Gram somewhere down there around the wall. Or if the small people were new and different and not like them at all. Margie wondered, but she did not ask. Margie lay down low and looked and waited and listened to hear what Lucy saw.

One day Lucy told Margie that she had gone back to the school at night and that she had caught a small person. Lucy had not taken Margie with her. Lucy said it was a thing she had to do alone. She had waited until her ma and LD were sleeping and then had run all the way to the school. Lucy said that the streetlights were strong enough for her to see. She said that the small people had been out having a party. Small cups and plates and small men in bow ties and small women in only their underwear. Lucy said she had seen a small man in a suit laughing and climbing the wall and that she had taken him. She said she
had taken the small man home with her, and that he lived with her now, and that someday they were going to get married and have babies.

Margie wanted to see the man. Margie wondered about the man. More than anything, Margie wanted to smell and see and touch the small man in the suit who lived somewhere secret in Lucy’s room.

But Lucy said, No.

Lucy said that there were some things she had to keep all for herself.

It’s private, Lucy said.

This is private.

Lucy talked about the small man for a few days, and then she stopped. Margie understood that private meant not asking questions, but long after Lucy stopped talking about the small man, Margie kept thinking about him. She wanted to see him, to see how his small body moved and to watch how Lucy took care of him. What did he feel like? How did he eat? Some nights, lying awake in bed next to the slow snores of Gram, Margie thought about leaving Apartment #2 and running to the school, like Lucy had done. She thought about going to find her own small person to keep in her room, under her bed, to take care of and watch and touch.

But Margie stayed in bed. Margie did not know anything about the town at night. Lucy said there were streetlights, but when Margie looked out the high-up window of Apartment #2, she saw only black, dark, black. Margie thought that the streets at night might change shape, that she might lose the school, Lucy, herself. And Margie was not sure if a small person would want to come and live with her. She did not know if under the bed she shared with Gram was a good place for a small person to be. Margie wanted to meet Lucy’s small man first, to watch him eat pieces of candy bars and ask him if he liked living in a world where everything was so big.

Because sometimes even Margie wanted to live somewhere else. Sometimes Ma’s yelling and the slamming front door and the loud of Gram’s stories and the sounds of Ma’s friends who came in the day, in the night, in the in-between and all the time, made Margie want to be somewhere else. Even school might be better. Margie wondered if maybe she could live with the small people at the wall, instead of bringing them to live with her in the banging and yelling and cigarette-smoking of Apartment #2. Maybe the small man liked living with Lucy because it was quieter there. Better air, down there. Margie very much wanted her own small person, but Margie worried about it, about what a small man might feel if she were to take him to live with her.

So Margie stayed in bed. At school, at recess, she stayed alert and looking for
the small people. Margie was afraid Lucy might have forgotten about the small man. That Lucy had forgotten to bring food and water to the small man, that the small man forgotten under Lucy’s bed had no air to make wind, that the small man’s small heart had stopped beating. Margie was afraid but Margie said nothing, because this was Lucy minding Lucy’s business.

But in secret, another secret, secretly, Margie worried about him.

Margie thought hard about his small, soundless heart.

Maybe we should have worried about Margie. Maybe we should have asked what was on her mind. Small people? What would we have said to that, anyway? What kid doesn’t stare out windows? And how were we supposed to know that the school lunch we found in her pockets, the smeared meat and carrots and potatoes, were not there because she did not know enough to eat her lunch. We just could not have known about it, about how Margie was trying hard to save some food for the small people, to keep a whole small world alive out there by the wall.

But there she was. Breathing her breath as slow as she could, watching, waiting for Lucy. Margie, keeping her secrets, wanting things that could not possibly be.

26. MARJORIE

I think you know more than you think you do.

Love is not for me, Dr. Goodwin. I am happy to be with my self and the People. Doing what I do.

I know, Marjorie, and I’m happy that you take such good care of yourself. But talking about love can’t hurt, right?

I don’t know about all that.

What do you love, Marjorie?

Me?

Oh, I don’t know, Dr. Goodwin.

Too many things to say. I will need to think some more about that.

How do you see love happening around you, Marjorie? In your life?

The People. I see love happening with the People who pass by.

What do you see?

Oh, the People see a shirt and they say, I love that shirt. Say to each other, I love that shampoo, I love that lamp, I love that pen. Lots of things to love in the Store.