A Heart Beating Hard

Goodman, Lauren Foss

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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.
That sounds like a certain kind of love. Affection, maybe. For objects, things that we feel somehow make our lives better.

Yes. A lot of love of things.

Any other ways you see love, Marjorie?

Animals. Suzanne’s son Tony has a pet puppy he has brought to the Club and he carried that puppy close to him and he kissed the puppy’s head and was saying I love you, I love you, I love you, like that.

Okay. Anything else?

People love. Friends. Moms and babies. Not so much the dads. People come in holding hands but not in that way. As friends. Some families seem nice.

Sure. In a good family there is a lot of love. And maybe people from bad families make new families with their friends. Do you feel that way, Marjorie?

I feel fine, Dr. Goodwin.

Some people say that in families or with very close friends the kind of love they have for each other is unconditional. Have you heard that before?

No I have not.

It means that the love between them stays forever. That no matter how good or bad someone is, they will always be loved and accepted. Many mothers feel unconditional love for their children.

You don’t feel cold in here today, Dr. Goodwin?

No, I feel comfortable. Are you cold, Marjorie?

Yes Dr. Goodwin, I am cold today. I am going to put my coat on if it is okay with you.

Sure, Marjorie. I want you to be comfortable.

Feel better, now?

Better, yes. Good.

So that’s what I mean by unconditional. Even when a child is bad, and even when a mother is angry, there is still a lot of love between them.

Yes. Good.

Do you think your mother felt that way, Marjorie?

Not again with Ma, Dr. Goodwin. Ma’s gone. Put away.

I don’t want to upset you, Marjorie, but I do think we need to talk about these important things. Your mother is gone but I think she is still very much alive inside your mind and I think that’s why we need to talk about her.

She’s pushed under. The bed. Right now I have no Ma on my mind. Nothing to say about Ma.

Okay. We don’t need to talk about your mother right now if you don’t want to. But sometime.
You have a very beautiful office, Dr. Goodwin.
Thank you, Marjorie. I’m glad you feel comfortable here.
I do. Four lamps and four lampshades. A lot of light.
I like to keep it bright. But I think you are trying to change the subject, Marjorie.

Just saying what is in my mind, Dr. Goodwin.
Can you think of any other ways you see love happening around you?
Valentine’s Day. People love hearts and chocolates. But all that is over now, in the Store.

Any other ideas you have about Valentine’s Day besides chocolates and hearts?
It’s a love day. Men and ladies together. Kissing. That kind of love.

Yes Dr. Goodwin. I watch the Stories. People and what they do in the dark. I know about that.

I think it’s best if we try to say the right words, Marjorie. Are you talking now about sex? How people in romantic relationships often use their bodies to show love? The love in a healthy sexual relationship.

Oh Dr. Goodwin.
You don’t need to be embarrassed, Marjorie. We’ve talked about this before. I don’t know anything about that. I just go to the Store. See the People. Watch the Stories.

I’d like to ask you some direct questions, Marjorie. Try to answer them if you can. If you feel ready.

I need to get out of this coat now, Dr. Goodwin.
Take your time.
Relax, Marjorie. Open your fingers. Good. Take some deep breaths.
Good. Can I ask you some questions now?
You can ask, Dr. Goodwin. But I don’t know.

Do you ever think about sex?
Oh Dr. Goodwin. I already said. I watch the Stories. I see the men and the ladies. The no clothes. What is moving around in the dark. I think about what I see.

Do you ever feel like you want to have sex, Marjorie?
No, Dr. Goodwin. That is not for me.

Breathe deep. In and out. Slow. You don’t need to worry.

You okay?
Okay.
Marjorie, do you remember having sex?
No, Dr. Goodwin. I have said so before. No, I have not done that. That is not for me.

You are a smart person, Marjorie. I know you know that to make a baby a man and a woman must have sexual intercourse.

Yes, Dr. Goodwin. I know you know I know that. Yes, I know.

What about Lucy?

Dr. Goodwin, I do not want any more of these questions. Lucy is let go. Like you said. Why talk about Lucy? Too hot in here. All these lamps. And bright. I don’t want to talk about Lucy.

Calm down, Marjorie. Deep breaths. Good. I don’t want to upset you.
I am not upset. Fine.

We don’t need to talk about Lucy any more today but I think this is something you must think about, Marjorie.

Think about and don’t think about, Dr. Goodwin. Let go and let in and go away and stay. Always another thing. And I am fine.

You aren’t fine, Marjorie. Inside, I think, you aren’t fine. Am I right?
I said fine and I am fine, Dr. Goodwin. Inside. Outside. Under.

Can I tell you something I’ve learned from talking to a lot of people, Marjorie?
Sure, Dr. Goodwin.

I’ve learned that people are very strong. That when people have been hurt or when people have some reason to protect themselves, they build walls inside their minds. That people’s minds are very powerful and that our brains are very good at pushing away what we don’t want to think about.

Good. I see. People are strong.

But people can’t live that way forever, I don’t think. Our walls usually aren’t as strong as we think they are. They can break. Thoughts and images and feelings start to come through. Do you know what I mean?

Like a leak.

Yes, like a leak. And a small leak builds and builds until there is so much pressure built up inside that something breaks. The leak becomes a flood.

Sounds bad, Dr. Goodwin. So much water, everywhere.

But one way to prevent that from happening is to talk about these things that are hiding in there. The things we don’t want to talk about. What hurts us. What bothers us. What we need to remember and what we need to feel.

Okay, Dr. Goodwin. But I keep my mind very clean. I wash the bad things
away with my waters and I feel fine. No leaks. Not a flood. Like a shower, warm.

But maybe you need to think about some of those things, Marjorie. Maybe you need to feel the bad things. What if you didn’t wash them away?

People have to wash, Dr. Goodwin. People have to be clean to go on with the day.

And people also need to be honest with themselves.
Yes. Right.
Even when the feelings are bad, even when it hurts to remember, our minds can’t push things away forever.
Okay.
I have a question and I want you to answer me honestly.
Okay.
Where did Lucy come from, Marjorie?
Lucy, Dr. Goodwin.
Yes. Where did Lucy come from?
From me, Dr. Goodwin. Lucy came from me. I know that. I am remembering. From my self. Never had a chance.

And where else?
I want you to think about this, Marjorie.
Breathe.
Breathe.
Good.
Let’s just sit here for a while, Marjorie. Until you feel better.
Better?
Marjorie?
Okay, Dr. Goodwin.
Did you think of what you love, yet, Marjorie?
I am thinking.
I am still thinking.
What is it you want, Marjorie?
I don’t know, Dr. Goodwin.
From life, I mean. From the world. What do you really, really want?
I just want, Dr. Goodwin.
I just want.