Middles of the nights Marjorie, free from her bra, from Gram, from the Store, rolls over to lie in the worn-in place Ma left in the soft sinking mattress and presses the button on the clicker that turns on the soundless television. The set is an old brown box with only two channels that come in clear enough to see People inside all the dots and waving lines of light. Marjorie lies in the shape of Ma, held by the mattress of Ma high up above what is left of Ma, Marjorie’s arms and legs curled up near to her to feel warm to feel the whole big whole of her. She is careful with her self, careful not to make the headboard sounds. Marjorie holds her hands close to her chest and slows her wind, slower and slower until her skin is so still she can feel her heart beating beneath her fingers.

Marjorie holds her self close and warm under her blankets and from inside the very dark of the room she watches the way People move through the television light. The men and ladies on the screen smile so much. Their mouths move quickly, teeth flashing bright white and their lips are big and red and wide and open and closed and open. Marjorie stares at the light lines of the television that take the shape of lips and when the television People smile, she smiles, and when
Marjorie sees the People laughing she hears laughing in her head. When the television People are sad Marjorie follows along with the falling curve of their lips. She does not ask what the People are sad about. Or wonder. Marjorie just watches, just moves her face together with the light.

The People on the television are mostly involved in very long commercials. They hold up gold-topped bottles of shampoo or strong mops or big containers of soap that can clean up any and every mess. Marjorie watches the People smile and touch their hands to the things, rub the things, watches them hold the things up close to their noses to smell the things, showing how much they love the things so that People will buy the things.

Some People go to the Store, some People go to the television.

Marjorie lies very still inside her self and watches the People move their small bodies inside the bright shifting colors. The light leaks out quiet and always changing on the walls of the small room and Marjorie feels far, far under the water, at that place where the light comes through only in pieces, where the People float and touch and do not speak.

Sometimes the men and ladies in the television kiss and push their bodies together and Marjorie watches, breathing and beating from inside the big warm bounds of her self. Gram does not like People together and touching. Dr. Goodwin wants Marjorie to talk about it. But Marjorie just wants to see. Marjorie watches. She watches the big hairy hands of the men and the smaller surprised hands of the ladies. The men grab and rub and hold with their hands with their whole bodies. The ladies squirm and laugh and push and push away until something must change inside and they give up and in and move with the slow hands of the men. Marjorie watches the men and ladies touch skin to skin and she touches her own soft skin of her chin and her belly and her neck. Her heart, Marjorie touches. Marjorie watches the People touch lips to lips and Marjorie touches her finger soft and gentle to her lips.

Yes, Dr. Goodwin, Marjorie thinks about this.

But some things are for night and quiet.

Always a man and a lady touching in the long late-night commercials and Marjorie has never seen them do anything except kiss and lean and rub and hold. Afternoons when Gram falls asleep or is too slow with her clicker, Marjorie sees the People in the Stories move around the bed under the sheets. Marjorie sees the sheets roll up and down and in Gram’s room she can hear the sounds the People make and Marjorie does not need any more than this, what the People want her to see and hear and know. Here, the People in the underwater light of the television in this middle-of-the-night room sometimes kiss
and touch but they never roll or rub because they are the commercial People, are workers, there to sell things.

Marjorie understands. Marjorie does not mind. She watches the People in love with their things inside the television and she watches the colors of the light burning bright around the People and she watches the light on the walls rise and fall and rise. Ma is here but held in by her box under the bed. In this deep middle of the night Marjorie's departments are closed down. She does not need to think or remember or try. Marjorie just watches, just feels. She is warm and soft and surrounded.

Marjorie stays very still in the soft bed where Ma used to sleep. The only sound let out into the room is hers, is the slow, big, warm beating of her heart. And inside, sometimes Marjorie hears the People laughing. Marjorie watches the light of the lines of the lips and if the People on the television have their heads thrown back, hair swinging, mouths wide open and no-sound screaming, this is something that Marjorie can feel, a sound she can hear loud inside the uncontained love of her self.

31. MARGIE

And then the day Margie came looking for Lucy, and Lucy was not there.

He was there, now, always. There in Apartment #2, sitting in Gram’s chair with Ma beside him. Chest bared, chewing. Gram, down, always, gone off to somewhere else to be with her stories. Him making his sounds and Ma making her sounds and Margie getting out of Apartment #2 as quiet as Margie knew how.

We do not know where Lucy was.

We did not hear Margie or see Margie or smell her.

Margie, gone down deep inside herself, did not think to knock or call or say, Hello, I’m here. Margie wanted only to get out and away. Margie ran quiet as she could down the stairs to Apartment #1, to where Lucy should have been. Margie turned the doorknob and let herself in.

Margie walked through the doorway into Apartment #1, walked down the hall and into the living room. She might have called Lucy’s name like a question, like, Lucy? But Margie stayed quiet because she was listening, because she heard sounds like running, like lost breath, like snoring or crying or whispers. Fighting sounds, pain sounds, waves of sound creaking through the wooden floorboards. Margie heard these sounds, and Margie saw.

Lucy’s ma, her skin, all of her skin, her whole body laid out naked and rising