LD closed the door and Margie was left alone in the flashing-bulb-lit hallway outside Apartment #1.

Margie heard LD lock the door. She stood there in the hallway, beside the creaking wooden stairs, in that place between her home and Lucy’s, that dark downstairs space they shared, for a long time. Margie put her arms inside her t-shirt and held her breasts in her hands. She touched them, squeezed them, pretended. That her hands were not her hands. That she had not seen.

But this touch, this grab, this needing to feel, this was Margie. Margie, alone, left behind by Lucy, let out by LD, feeling the soft heat of herself, of her body. Margie on the outside, feeling. Finding out what was there, what was hers. This was Margie shut out, alone, with nowhere she was wanted, nowhere safe from the sounds of other people living lives that had nothing to do with her. Margie, heavy in her own hands, keeping this to herself, giving herself over to the soft, safe care of Margie.

32. MARGE

What’s this, Marge?
I see you.
Playing with your big titties down there in the hallway.
Trying to hide.
Your ma is going to crack up.
Marge the Barge caught red-handed.
Titty-handed.
Squeezing her big balloons.
Those dykes get you all worked up, Marge?
How do they feel?
Good, right?
Maybe I won’t tell your ma.
Maybe this will be between me and you, Marge.
Me and you and your big bags you’ve got.
Our secret.

33. MARJORIE

Spring Is Here.

Marjorie stands in the center of it, in the People-pushing-carts heart of the Store, next to a big yellow cardboard display with huge orange letters that say
Spring Is Here. She turns in a slow circle. Marjorie looks up at the hanging signs, trying to know where she should go.

Benjamin is coming, pushing a shopping cart stacked with boxes of sunscreen for the display. His eyes are red and kind and he is wide-smiling like usual.

Where’s your vest, Marjorie? You working today?

Hello, Benjamin, Marjorie says, turning her circle toward him. Not working today. Just needed to look at some things.

Oh, he says. Okay, but it’s too bad you had to come in on your day off. Me, I can’t fucking stand being here when I don’t have to, you know?

Marjorie nods.

Sorry, sorry, Marjorie. I know you don’t use bad words or any of that shit. Shit. Sorry. But, yeah, I feel so trapped in this place, you know? These walls and the ceiling and the shelves and all this plastic bullshit everywhere. And the lights, they drive me nuts. I forget what the world outside really looks like when I’m in here, you know, Marjorie?

I know, Benjamin. Outside there is more air.

Exactly, Benjamin says, starting to open the boxes of sunscreen. More air, all the air. And this piece-of-shit sign is wrong. Lies, all of it. Spring isn’t here. Spring is coming, you know, but not here. This place has no respect for what’s true, you know, Marjorie? I was out last night to see it. The snow is finally melting down off the mountain. You ever go up there, Marjorie? Up to the Glen, right at the bottom of the mountain?

No, Marjorie says.

Marjorie has never been up close to the mountain. Or a mountain. She has never seen the real sea. Or a lake. The brook, yes. The park, yes. Marjorie goes where she goes and where she goes there is always a sidewalk. No sidewalks go all the way to the mountain.

You should, you should. It’s beautiful up there. Fucking unreal. I ride my bike up. Or borrow a buddy’s car. Just go up there and sit in the dark and wait to see what I am going to see. So dark up there. You can really think, you know, in the dark. In here, all these lights everywhere, you just can’t think. But up there, it smells like life, you know? Like shit growing and shit dying and grass and air. And the dark is like something you can touch. Like you could take it home with you.

Good. Sounds good.

Benjamin closes his eyes and takes some deep breaths. Like he is there, now, in this place that he loves. Marjorie watches the bones of his shoulders move up
and down in his wind. She can understand this, the need to be in some dark for
a while.

Okay, okay, okay, Benjamin says, opening his eyes and staring at the rows
and rows of blue bottles of sunscreen in the boxes.

Okay, Marjorie says.

Shouldn’t think about it too much or my head might just explode right here.
Don’t think Steve would like that, much, my head popping open. I hope he’d
have to clean it up himself. Asshole.

Marjorie stands still. Today she is here in the middle of the Store for a reason.
For a problem. Not to say Hello to the People, not to walk down the center
path to punch her card. Her day off and here Marjorie is deep inside the Store,
where she almost never goes, surrounded by the waves and the pull of things.

Marjorie, standing in the heart of it, ready to go.

Because of need. A need.

Sorry, Marjorie. I don’t want to keep you. You look busy. And me, I’m just
killing some time. Killing some time thinking about killing myself. This store,
killing me, all of us, all the time. Dying right now as we stand here and stack
up bullshit and pick out bullshit and use coupons to get our bullshit cheap as we
can. I’d laugh but it’s not funny, you know. But I don’t mean it that way. Just
going one minute by one minute, you know? Hoping the day goes fast and the
night slows way down.

Take care of your self, Benjamin, Marjorie says.

You got it, Marjorie. You too.

See you soon.

Yep, I’ll be here, opening up boxes, putting out the shit.

Marjorie raises her arm up to wave to Benjamin and then steps some steps
away. She closes her eyes and turns again in her slow, slow circle. Spring Is
Here. Almost. The ice and snow in the parking lot are melting down into small
dirty lakes that steam up white when the sun comes out. Time happening and
Marjorie holding on. Marjorie and her question, still, the question of Ma in the
box under the bed and how Dr. Goodwin said that some People find a nice
thing to hold their dead People dust.

Marjorie opens her eyes and lets the light burn in. Steps one step by one step
around in her circle. Looks up and again at the signs that show her how to
know the Store. So many departments all around. Lines of light leading to this
center of the Store like roads like veins like all the words for what goes to and
from the heart. All the things stacked exactly where they should be, where they
belong. Aisles and aisles to choose from. Marjorie stands as close to the center
of the center path as she can, to see all the departments, to feel less of the pull of things.

So many things that would be fine for holding Ma.

How can Marjorie know where is the right place to go?

She stops her circle and looks up and away. Out there, ahead of her, is Electronics. Ma loved her television, but Marjorie does not think that television is the right place for People’s remainders. Televisions are expensive, and loud, and Marjorie would not know how to open one up and pour all that Ma inside. Or if this is even something she could do. Marjorie is not sure if there is enough empty inside in a television to hold a whole pile of Ma.

Next to Electronics is Auto Care and Marjorie does not even need to think about trying those aisles. Cars are not part of Marjorie. Big loud things that take People places. Marjorie has never had anything to do with cars and except for her first day in the Store when Steve gave her a tour of the whole place, Marjorie has never been to Auto Care.

A small turn in her circle and there is Lawn and Garden. Dr. Goodwin said that some People use a vase or a nice pot or a box. Lawn and Garden has these things, Marjorie thinks. But Lawn and Garden is another department where Marjorie never goes. Lawn and Garden has its own sliding door. There is a big part of Lawn and Garden that happens outside. Marjorie knows from Benjamin that they even sell small trees in Lawn and Garden. Sometimes Benjamin stops by to say Hello and his hands are dirty black with dirt and he smells like the sidewalk on a rainy day, like how Gram’s nightgowns can be when she has not washed in a while, and when Benjamin stops by like this, Marjorie knows he has been in Lawn and Garden.

Today is not the day Marjorie will go to that department.

Today is not a day for too much new.

Marjorie closes her eyes and turns, lets her self guide her self. She opens her eyes and sees all the bright pink-purple-silver stacked colors of Beauty and closes her eyes again. Beauty is not where she will find the right place to put Ma. All the powders and sprays and creams of Beauty. Things to put on, not put in.

And out there, in the corner of the Store, out far beyond Beauty, is Baby.

Today is not a day that Marjorie will end in Baby.

Marjorie has her question picked for today. A question of Ma that has an answer here in the Store, somewhere. The other questions, she stacks up high on her shelves. The other questions are not questions for today.

And out there, Marjorie sees the big hanging sign for Home Decor.
A department that might have an answer for Ma.

She walks slow and long past Food to get there. Down the wide center path, not too close to any of the aisles on the sides. Marjorie keeps her eyes on the bright light lines on the floor because the pull of Food on one side and Beauty on the other is strong, because she needs to stay here close to her self. Today is Marjorie’s day off, but still, she smiles and nods and says Hello to the People she passes.

Marjorie stops at the first aisle of Home Decor and looks down its long, shining throat but does not step in. After all this time in the Store surrounded by all of these things, Marjorie knows that the best way to stay her self in the middle of so much is to stay away from the things. From here, from the top of the aisle, Marjorie can see that here the things are big and seem shaped more like furniture. Things like desks and chairs and tables for holding televisions. Their apartment is small and what Marjorie has got left of Ma is small so Marjorie moves on.

Home Decor has an aisle for curtains and another aisle for rugs. There is an aisle for lamps. She would like to buy lampshades for the living room, for Gram’s room, for her room. Marjorie sees all the lampshades stacked on top of each other on one side of the aisle, on shelves and hanging from hooks. Big white ones, small colorful ones, medium-sized cream-colored ones with little ridges, some with wire inside, big light green ones with pink polka dots. So many sizes and colors and shapes. Always the problem of too many decisions to make.

Marjorie has bigger problems.

She knows to move on, to pass by, to leave the lampshades for another day.

The aisle next to the lamps and lampshades looks like it has more things that Marjorie might be looking for. Smaller things. Candles and candleholders on one side of the aisle. These are beautiful but too beautiful, not necessary, wrong. The other side of the aisle has big cloth albums for photos and silver picture frames and some boxes that must be for keeping photos. Dr. Goodwin had said something about People putting a frame with a photo next to where they put their loved person’s leftovers, but Marjorie does not think she will do this with Ma. The only photo she knows about of Ma is the one she found in the drawer of the table next to Ma’s bed, the one of unsmiling Ma and the shadow of His finger.

Marjorie turns and takes three steps toward the next aisle. This one might be the one.

But this aisle is all vacuum cleaners and vacuum bags and small plastic vacuum...
parts. Marjorie looks up at the signs to see where she is and she sees that she has stepped out of Home Decor and into Home Living. Sometimes this is what the Store does to People. People think they are right where they need to be, right about to find what they need to find, and the Store suddenly changes. The Store is a very huge wonderful place but the Store is not an easy place to be. The Store is strong pulls and rolls. Marjorie looks at how the light reflects red, purple, silver off all the different vacuums and she feels bad that this is not the aisle with a thing for Ma and good that People have so many vacuums to choose from. People need to feel free and open and allowed to decide. People need to look at a vacuum or any other thing and People need to look down low into their most self part of their self, down into their furthest department, and find out which thing of all the things, which vacuum of all the vacuums, is the one they were made to have.


Marjorie feels her body burn up red and she sees that she is standing here in the middle of the wide aisle and that the People cannot pass by her. She smiles at the yellow-haired lady with her cart who wants to move on further into the Store and the lady is eyebrows-together angry.

Excuse me, she says. Get the fuck out of the way.

Hello, Marjorie says.

Now, the lady says. God. Some people.

Marjorie steps a quick step back into the aisle with the pictures and the candles so that the lady can keep going. The lady is quiet, does not smile or look at Marjorie again. She holds on hard to the plastic handle of her shopping cart and pushes forward fast. The lady is not so big as Marjorie, but not so small either. Not so old, but red in her face and wrinkled, probably from a lot of angry. Marjorie sees a lot of faces like this lady’s face, like Ma’s face, the pulled-in wrinkle of a living gone on with a lot of angry. Lots of different kinds of angry and the very known, very different look of long-felt angry. The quiet angry, the angry that lives just under the skin, the down-deep angry, the angry that will come out in small pieces.

Stupid god-damned cow, the lady says once she has passed by.

Marjorie will not mind. Does not mind. Is not minding. She holds her arms close over her chest and finds her wind and on her wind is the smell of all the candles, the clean of the sea and the deep of gingerbread cookies. Marjorie knows she takes up more space than most People and she can understand that this might make People let a little bit of their anger out. Dr. Goodwin wants to talk about all the different kinds of love, but what about all these different
kinds of angry? Undone love, okay. How about undone angry? Marjorie sees a lot more angry than love pass by. Some moms hug kids but many more pinch and drag and squeeze. Red is the color of angry and red was the color of the boxes of heart-shaped chocolates for Valentine’s Day. Red is the color of blood and angry and the heart. And love, too?

Marjorie does not know. Too much to know. Marjorie does not know where all the angry comes from or the love or the red and what that means. All Marjorie knows is her self. The sound and the smell and the feel of her wind flowing through. The loose of her skin and the rough of her hair. Marjorie knows her self and she knows that today will not be the day she finds a thing for Ma.

Marjorie moves her legs with the in and the out of her wind and looks out and up and down the wide center path before she steps back onto it. The biggest bright vein, where most of the People pass by. Marjorie looks up it and down it and up it. She wants to be sure the way is clear, sure that she will not see any more of the angry of the People today. She needs to get back to the heart of the Store, to find her way fast as she can, to get out, out of the way, away.

34. MARGIE

Margie waited cheek-down on the ground, her round back pushed up against the wall, watching the pounding feet of the playground. Margie, too big to play, too big to lie there like that, like a little kid, looking. Too-big Margie looking carefully through the dry, beat-up grass for any sign of the small people.

The teachers kept Lucy inside longer and longer now that they had moved up and through and to the almost-end of middle school. Same building, same wall, but different recess time. Kids no longer playing, groups of kids standing in circles laughing and kissing and watching, always watching, for what was not the same.

Sometimes Lucy was not let out at all. Something about her, the lean, loud shape of her, made the teachers eager to keep her in. Still, Margie waited for her every day. Sometimes she stood and bent one knee and then the other knee, keeping herself warm. Some days Margie rolled slowly from side to side, lying down in the grass or standing up against the wall. Margie, making her circles. Growing up but not out of it. Margie, with every change of the seasons growing more and more down and in.

We had stopped noticing Margie and her circles a long time ago.