The imperfect Lucy.
What Marjorie, alone, must have done wrong.
Lucy.
What Marjorie did not know.
Marjorie, alone.
Arms held out wide, ready to touch and hold and feel and know.
Catching her wind when she can.
Marjorie, alone, stands out of her place.
In front of the swinging door, beside the air where the baby is not.
Blown-up big, beating, feeling bad.
The gone of Lucy.
The never here of Lucy.
The pains.
People passing by, through, in, into.
In need of the needed things.
And Marjorie stands.
Wanting.
But what?

41. MARGIE

Gram, in darkness, said it like this.
Time to get up, Margie.
Time to get up and face the day.
Margie got up and faced her days. The part of the day she spent in Apartment #2. Big and chewing and hiding. She got up and got on with her long, slow day at school. Margie’s day made longer, now, slower, now, because Lucy was not there. Lucy took a bus now. Lucy, still below, in Apartment #1, but moving on, up. Margie still walked. Lucy left, Margie stayed.
Separated. We had no choice. For school, that’s all. And not because they touched, not because of what the other kids said about them. Because this is the natural course of events. This is the truth. What we all could see. That Lucy was normal and Margie was not. Lucy was lazy, maybe, and had a mouth on her, for sure, but she was quick, she was smart. Margie was slow, quiet. So stuck in her own world the easiest thing for us to do was let her stay there. In, down, wherever she was.
That’s what happened. That’s what we did.
Lucy moved on, moved up, and Margie stayed where she was. In the room at
the edge of the school where we left her alone, where we saw and did not see all the signs of things we did not stop to name. There are so many needs out there. So much need, so much help being asked for. How could we choose which one to pay attention to?

How could we have answered what was never asked?

Margie made her way through her days at school by staying quiet and inside herself. She heard the voices of her teachers and ate all of her lunch and thought about Lucy. Went to the wall when she was allowed. Waited for the teachers to say, Time to go home.

Time to go home, Margie.

Margie took her time going home. All day she waited for the time, and when the time came, she moved even more slowly than her usual slow. Margie put her pencils and her notebook and her packages of crackers into her blue backpack one by one, each one into its separate place. She walked slowly so that the other kids would pass by. So that we would not notice Margie in her t-shirt with holes, her pants stretched tight and starting to tear, in her cigarette-smoke and school-lunch smell. Margie, slow, floating, weighed down by all that she had built up against the outside.

Usually, it worked. Usually, we didn’t notice Margie. We were looking at girls and how they bounced and bent over and pulled each other’s hair. We were passing notes to boys. Tongue-kissing behind the school. We were driving home. We were passing through.

Margie took her time going home because more and more Lucy was not there. Every day, long before making the slow, creaking climb up to Apartment #2, Margie knocked on the door of Apartment #1 to see if Lucy had made it home yet. Every day Margie knocked, because Margie knew, now, about knocking, about showing the people inside that she was there, outside, waiting. Wanting to come in.

Days when Lucy was home, they sat together on the sidewalk or in Lucy’s room or in the shade of the trees at the edge of the brook. Lucy, grown taller, her breasts grown bigger. Blonde-haired becoming-beautiful Lucy who rode the bus, who went to another school, now, who sometimes did not come right home after. Lucy told Margie stories about the kids in her school, what they did, what they said. Margie listened and nodded and smiled when Lucy smiled and laughed when Lucy laughed and at the end of the story Margie did not remember how it had begun. Sometimes Lucy drew pictures for Margie of boys in her class or showed her the notes they wrote. Sometimes Lucy gave Margie candy bars the boys took from the store on the corner.
They think this is a present, Lucy said.
But they stole it. They didn’t even bother to buy it.
What’s that supposed to mean?
Margie ate the candy bars and sat beside Lucy when Lucy was there. When Lucy said she was sad, when Lucy wanted her to, Margie put her arms around Lucy and squeezed. When Lucy asked Margie about her day, Margie always said it was good.
Good. The days were good.
But the days with Lucy dwindled. Most days, Margie knocked, and Lucy’s ma opened the door and said something like, Sorry, Margie.
Lucy’s busy. Lucy’s not home.
Lucy’s out.
For a long time, Lucy’s ma held the door only half open and said just these few words.
Sorry, Margie. Lucy’s not here.
Okay, Margie said, and in her mind Margie could see Lucy’s ma inside, could see how Lucy’s ma had looked out of her clothes. Margie would think about her big, round, white body, how she had rolled off the sofa and tried to cover herself with pillows. Her freckles, the roll of them. Margie remembered. Lucy’s ma’s body, moving in waves, breathing hard. Let loose. What Gram said to LD.
The bright red drying to brown where it had soaked into the white tissues. All the bumps and thuds and scrapes and creaks of Apartment #2, above.
Margie said nothing.
We said nothing.
And time was hard to tell.
Until that day in the almost-winter, one sunless day when dried leaves blew up the steps and into the hallway, when Margie needed help and Lucy was not there.
What, Lucy’s ma said, opening the door. Margie?
What’s wrong?
Me, Margie said.
Margie could see her breath big in front of her in steam when she breathed, could see her words as a cloud when she spoke.
My pains.
Lucy’s ma opened the door a little wider, put her warm fingers around Margie’s cold wrist, pulled her closer. She looked up Margie and down Margie, all over the whole of Margie.
Where are you hurt? What happened?
Margie, red-faced, put her hands around her belly and looked down at herself.

We knew. We had seen.

Out in the dark of the hallway Lucy’s ma could not see, but once she had let Margie inside, once she had Margie in the warm yellow light of the living room, she saw.

You’re not hurt, Margie, Lucy’s ma said.

It’s normal. It’s just your time.

I don’t know, Margie said, and she held herself tight, closed her eyes because she was not sure where to look, what to do.

Your ma hasn’t talked to you about it, Margie?

Ma’s busy.

Busy, right. God, Margie. I keep hearing things up there.

But it’s not my business. Come on, Margie. Come into the bathroom, you’ve got to learn.

Margie listened to what Lucy’s ma said and did what Lucy’s ma told her to do. She learned, let Lucy’s ma tell her about her inside. Herself, her body, what was happening in there. How to watch it and listen and know it. What would happen. What could happen. What should not happen. Not to be afraid of it, the bright red of it, the heat of it, the touch of it. The blood-letting-loose of it. Margie sat with Lucy’s ma a long time in the bright white light of the bathroom and Margie understood.

Her time.

Margie, catching up to Lucy.

Releasing.

Margie, her body, leaking.

Margie, this is what we call growing up.

This is what we call becoming a woman.

This is the smell of it.

This is the look of it.

This is how to hide.

This is the danger.

This is the pain.

This is normal.

42. MARGE

Where’s Marge?