Marjorie remembers.

Today Marjorie does not want to talk to the People. She wants to sit in her quiet with her self. Marjorie wants to sit in her self and not talk and not think and not see.

But the Store. The People entering. The swinging door opening and this old lady in her blue raincoat who wants to talk.

The lady stands beside Marjorie. Small and old and bent-backed and dripping, here, beside Marjorie.

Do you, the lady says, her words coming slow as she catches her wind. Do you remember when all this wasn’t here?

I remember, Marjorie says.

The day outside is warm, warmer, but wet, but gray clouds cover up the underwater sky. The display beside Marjorie is yellow and pink and green. All the red of Valentine’s Day long replaced by candy eggs and smiling Easter Bunnies.

My first date with my husband was right here. God rest his soul. Right here, can you believe that? Back long before this store was here. When this was the drive-in movie theater. Are you a local girl? Do you remember that?

Marjorie is far away. Dug-into by the straps of her bra. Still and quiet and sunk down inside her self. But here is the door, here are People passing by.

Hello.

Here is this old lady stopping to talk, to pass the time. Holding her dripping coat close to her thin body. About the size and shape and bent of Gram. And yes, Marjorie remembers.

I remember.

It was so lovely, here, back then. That wide-open field. Silver poles holding speakers. I remember those speakers were heavy. But so clear. And that enormous screen. The tallest thing in town. That huge white square and behind it just black sky and stars. And we’d park our car and sit together in the backseat and with the speaker there in the car the sound was just for us. And it felt so good, nothing else all around but trees and sky and those handsome actors a hundred feet tall looking down on us. Right there, it was, that beautiful screen. Right out there where the parking lot ends.

Marjorie looks out beyond the glass of the swinging door to where the lady is pointing. She remembers. But all that is gone, now. People sit inside to watch
their movies. The screen and the field and the trees taken away to make room for the Store. What People did People cannot not do.

Hello.

I can see that you are busy here, the lady says. I won’t keep you.

Marjorie nods. Another day she would have liked to stand and talk to the lady. She would have liked to hear about what it was like to sit and watch giant People lit up against the dark sky.

But today Marjorie cannot talk to the People. Today Marjorie is gone inside. Just saying Hello, Marjorie says.

Well, it’s good of you to do, the lady says. It makes all this feel like a friendlier place.

The lady starts taking her slow steps into the Store.

And, she says, turning back toward Marjorie. And, you know what I’m remembering? Before the drive-in was here, this place was just nothing. Just trees. When I was a little girl, there was nothing here at all. My sister and I used to walk here and look at the birds and build little houses out of branches.

Sounds good, Marjorie says.

Yes, good, the lady says, holding tight to her coat. But what use was all that nothing? I couldn’t come to the trees to buy my detergent on sale. That’s for sure.

The old lady walks slow away into the Store and Marjorie stands in her place. Outside, the belly of the sky hangs heavy and dripping. It is hard to see, now, what was here before. But Marjorie, mostly, remembers.

The day, the rain, is making Marjorie feel her pains. And what is happening inside her, all this thinking she cannot think, is giving her a kind of hurt in her mind. This sorry Marjorie has is like the rain, something she feels inside and outside her body. Marjorie moves her neck in a slow circle and picks her legs up one by one. In her knees and her elbows she can feel this rain. All sorts of pains inside her self and outside her self. Sorry all around.

Hey, Marjorie, hey.

Benjamin. Here again. Two times already today Benjamin has been by. Stacking Easter Bunnies and mopping the floor. Benjamin, today, too, seems far away and quiet, for Benjamin. No whistling, no singing, no stories.

Sure you’re okay, Marjorie? Sure?

Yes. Sure.

Today a day to make People stay inside the warm quiet of their self. Out of the rain and away from the People. Marjorie does not know what Benjamin has got inside him. But she knows that all People have things inside that make them
sometimes quiet and far away. Even Benjamin, long-haired, singing, swinging, always moving, laughing Benjamin, must have things inside he does not want People to know.

Hey, Marjorie. Did you hear me? I said, Hey.

Hi, Benjamin.

What was that lady talking to you about?
I don’t know. What was here before.

Weird. Probably lonely. Just wants somebody to talk to.

Benjamin is pushing a cart of plastic-wrapped boxes of foil-wrapped chocolate eggs. Marjorie steps to one side so that he will have more room to work.

Hey, Marjorie, he says. I know I asked and I don’t mean to be annoying but are you really sure you’re okay today?

Sure, Benjamin. Fine. Just some pains. You know, the rain.

Really? Because, I don’t know, you seem different today, Marjorie. Sad or something. You’ve always got that big smile and you always seem pretty happy but today, I don’t know, you seem different.

Marjorie smiles as best she can. For Benjamin.

But today Marjorie does not want to be seen.

Today Marjorie has nothing she wants to say.

In the quiet between Marjorie and Benjamin there is no quiet. There is the sound of the Store, the carts wheeling, People talking, registers beep, beep, beep and beeping. Benjamin puts his hand on her shoulder. Lays his thin, soft hand down warm and gentle on Marjorie’s shoulder. Marjorie tries to rise from her self, to feel the feel of Benjamin here.

Hey, Marjorie, I’m sorry. I know how it can be. Some days the shit just rains down and piles up. Some days you don’t know your head from your asshole, right?

Marjorie holds on to the smile she has made and hopes her face will turn away from red and back to the usual color of her face. She does not want Benjamin to think that she is angry. Marjorie wants Benjamin to be Benjamin, even with his bad words, even though today she wants to be only with her self.

Sorry, Marjorie. Sorry. My big mouth.

It’s okay, Benjamin. I don’t mind.

How about this, Marjorie. I have this idea. Remember how I told you about the Glen? That place I go to check out the animals and the hills and the bugs and ponds and trees and shit? Where it’s quiet and you can think, you know?

I know. I remember.

Well there is this one great spot up there. This, like, I don’t know what it’s
called. Like an opening. Like this place where there are trees all on the side but this one spot is open and you can see out into this field. What do they call that, Marjorie? Like, a clearing? You know what I mean?

Marjorie nods. In her own way, inside, she can see what Benjamin is talking about. She does not know the word for it, but Marjorie thinks she can see.

Yeah, okay, so this spot. This place. Fucking amazing. Sorry. Amazing. Beautiful. The trees all around and this wide-open place and the hills out behind the trees and around you on all sides. And these fireflies. I don’t even want to tell you about it, Marjorie. I want you to see it. I want you to come up there with me. You said you’ve never been, right?

Okay, Benjamin. Sounds good.

I’m serious, Marjorie. I really want you to come and check this out. Something different. Get both of us out of this shithole and into the air, you know, the woods, nature, the sky. Freedom and all that good shit.

Benjamin and his plans. Benjamin is always thinking about how to be out, away. He needs the air and the woods to feel free from the Store. Marjorie understands this about Benjamin and Marjorie knows it is different for her. She does not need the air and the outside. Marjorie is fine in, inside, in the Store, in the Club, down in her self with the good things, with what was good about before, with Lucy. With what good of herself is left for her to be with.

Promise me you’ll come with me sometime soon, Marjorie. Once it dries out up there. Once it gets a little warmer there are going to be so many beautiful things to look at and you can just sit out all night up there. You look like you need to have some fun, Marjorie. I think you’re sad, or something. I’m not going to ask about it. But it’s been a long bastard of a winter, right? So tell me you’ll come up and check it out.

Okay, Benjamin. Sure.

You promise? I got your word, Marjorie?

Her word. Marjorie and all the words that are not hers, all the words unheard by Marjorie. People and their plans. Marjorie knows Benjamin is good and she knows that Benjamin says many words he does not mean or does not think about or will forget. But even on this bad day Marjorie can almost feel the good feeling of sometime going somewhere with Benjamin. Just an idea to put away inside, to hold and touch and remember.

Okay, yes. Thank you.

Great. I’m going to hold you to that, Marjorie. I’m going to take you up there and you won’t be able to be sad. You’ll be so fucking in awe you won’t be able
to talk or feel bad. You can really think. And no people around up there, either. Just quiet, and the trees, and those fireflies. It’s going to blow your mind.

Good, Benjamin.

All right, Marjorie. I know you want to get back to that door. And I have these asshole eggs to put out.

Benjamin lifts his hand from Marjorie’s shoulder and her skin under her vest feels cold and tingling. All this time, Benjamin had been touching her. And Marjorie, so far gone inside herself, is only now noticing. Only now feeling these cold little fires, here, where Benjamin’s hand was. Marjorie, feeling what was there only after. This huge feeling of what has already gone.

47. MARGIE

Margie kept the secret under her side of the bed so that Gram would not see it.

Her secret, pushed just far enough under so that it could not be seen, but close enough for Margie’s fingers to find in the dark.

When Margie was alone, at night, or during the day when Gram was out, away, when Gram was gone off to wherever she went, Margie reached her arm down under the bed and felt for the secret. Margie felt for it and when the smooth fabric of the secret touched Margie’s skin, she put her hand tight around it, pulled it out from under the bed, and held it.

Margie held the soft secret Lucy’s ma had given her close to her nose and breathed it inside her. She rubbed her cheek to the soft-hard circles and twisted the springy straps around her fingers. Margie held the secret close and thought about Lucy and Lucy’s ma and LD down there, below her, moving or sleeping or eating or talking, living, slow, quiet and safe in the good of Apartment #1.

Alone, at night, when Margie could not sleep inside the rise and fall of Gram’s snores and the sounds of Ma’s bedroom, Margie held on soft to her secret and went down with her breath into the slow, steady beat of herself. And down in there, inside Margie’s inside parts, was Lucy. The smell of Lucy’s grape lip gloss spread out strong and warm inside Margie. Lucy’s colors, her pinks, the light blonde of her hair, the brown of her freckles, were painted up and down and all over the inside of Margie. Sometimes when she listened to her heart beating, Margie wondered about Lucy’s inside, about what she smelled like in there, about how her heart sounded. Margie wondered if they sounded the same, her and Lucy, if friends could beat their blood to the same beat.

Can any of us be expected to understand what Margie felt?

Are we all really as separate as we seem?