Help me, Margie.

Margie held her hand up and out so that Lucy could balance, so that Lucy would not fall. They walked slowly in the last cracked yolk of sunlight, slowly, so that Lucy could balance on the smooth metal rail of the railroad track, so that Lucy, hovering there, those few inches above Margie, would not fall. Margie held Lucy’s hand and they walked side-by-up-high-side along the tracks through the woods, not toward school and not toward dead-end Summer Street. Just walking, together, to places Margie did not usually go, to wherever Lucy was going. The two girls, arms bared, the autumn air warm enough for walking but the wind a threat, the wind a hard line of cold cutting through.

We can get there through the woods, Lucy said.

There’s a cool spot I want to show you. At the way-back of it.

Margie nodded. She listened for the crashing sound of a train coming behind them. Margie held tight to Lucy’s thin hand and felt her heart pulsing, softly, just below the surface where her skin touched Lucy’s skin. She did not care where they went. Margie just liked being beside Lucy.

I can’t believe you believed me, Margie.

Why?

Not why. Ask me, about what?

About what?

The small man. Remember, you believed me when I said there were small people? When I said that I had a small man living in my bedroom?

I believed, Margie said.

I know, it’s funny. It’s funny that you believed in him. I don’t know, I wanted to believe it too, I guess.

I wanted to see the small people.

Me too, Lucy said. I wanted the small man to be real. I wanted him to be mine. To be my boyfriend.

Margie and Lucy followed the train tracks through the woods, across the road that led to the quarry, past the red abandoned brick factory. Lucy stepped slowly, so that she could balance, so that Margie could keep up. Margie, putting one foot in front of the other, her big thighs brushing together, rubbing together, creating heat, and her heart, moving, beating, bringing sweat up to the surface of her skin.

Do you want a boyfriend, Margie?
Margie shook her head. Moved her shoulders up and then down. Let go of Lucy’s hand just a little and breathed her breaths in beat with her heart.

No, Margie said.

So, what do you want? A girlfriend?

Margie’s heart in her chest like a ball, bouncing, fast, and faster, and faster, sounded in her ears like thunder, like the train that would come and eat up those tracks.

I’m just kidding, Margie. Chill out.

But really, Lucy said.

What do you want?

No wants, Lucy, Margie said.

Just friends.

No school.

Quiet.

Lucy laughed.

Easy enough, she said.

Lucy pointed to a place where the trees opened up and a little limestone path went through.

It’s here, Margie.

Lucy jumped down off the rail and pulled Margie’s hand, gently, not letting go. Margie followed, held tight, did her best to keep her wind steady, her heart, steady. The bright white rocks crunched and slid beneath their feet, made a low white cloud of dust where they stepped.

At the end of the path was the place Margie had seen before, the big empty place with the rows and rows of gray poles rising from the ground. But this time, Lucy had taken them to the behind of it, to the place farthest from the white sky-tall screen. They walked out of the woods and behind the boarded-up building that used to sell popcorn and candy and condoms to a place at the back that had once been a playground.

Lucy led Margie past a rusted set of swings and a small red slide to a big metal merry-go-round. To the big circle with four iron handles, the circle that spun in circles, that could be pushed, that could whirl you around, around, around.

Sit down, Lucy said. I’ll spin you.

I’m too big, Margie said.

The wind was stronger here, out in the open. Colder, here, than it had been in the woods in the protection of the trees. Lucy pushed Margie’s shoulders down onto the metal merry-go-round and Margie let her big body relax, release.
You’re not, Lucy said. Just sit there and put your legs up and hold on.

Margie sat and pulled her legs close. She pushed her knees up near her head, made herself as small as she could, held on tight to the cold metal. Lucy pushed the arms of the merry-go-round slow, slowly, at first, and then faster. The circle moved Margie around slow, slow, slow, and then the weight of Lucy pushing, the wind, the momentum of Lucy’s hands, of Margie spinning, moved Margie faster and faster around. Spinning and spinning, Margie coming around to Lucy again and again and faster. Margie, a white soft moon passing by, passing by. Margie, orbiting.

Lucy pushed until the merry-go-round was moving too fast for her to keep up, and then she put her two hands on the metal arm and pulled herself up onto the fast-spinning circle. Margie and Lucy spun, and spun, fast at first, the world around them a blur, a whirl. Laughing, holding on tight, afraid, and alive, and laughing, together, turning and then slowing, slower each time the circle completed a circle, losing speed, losing strength. And Margie and Lucy laughed, held on hard, watched the world come to a stop.

Everything is spinning, Margie, Lucy said. Lucy laughed and laughed.

Lucy crawled beneath the merry-go-round arm that separated her from Margie. She rolled over close to where Margie was, Lucy’s thin body pressing up against the big curled-up ball of Margie clinging to metal.

Lucy crawled and rolled her small, curving body close to Margie’s body, closer, so that Lucy’s body covered Margie, so that their skin, where it showed through, touched, so that the warmth could be felt, the warmth of skin under the thin layers of their cotton shirts, the warming that happened through Lucy’s jeans and into Margie’s worn purple pants. Lucy moved quickly, slowly, quick and slow at once, was how it felt for Margie. Lucy put her leg over and between Margie’s leg and her head on Margie’s shoulder and her hand, her small, warm hand, Lucy put her hand gently down around Margie’s big, soft, beating, breastless breast.

She squeezed. Lucy squeezed, slowly, her fingers firm and slow, squeezing, feeling. Lucy touched Margie gently, but hard enough for Margie to feel it. Margie held her wind inside and felt Lucy feeling. What should have been private. These parts of Margie that no one should know.

It felt good. Margie felt good. All over, warm, spinning, her wind coming back to her hard, fast, her heart, hard, fast, trying to break out. Margie felt Lucy there feeling her, felt the weight of Lucy and felt fully, and only, good.

Lucy put her lips to Margie’s cheek and pressed. She put her lips to Margie’s lips and she stayed there, pushing, pressing. Lucy’s slick grape-scented lips hold-
ing on to Margie’s thin, chapped lips. Margie more and more uncurled from
the ball of herself and Margie lay back and felt the softness of Lucy, felt Lucy’s
tongue, warm, wet. Margie stayed still, open, feeling, letting Lucy move, touch, feel.

Lucy put her mouth near Margie’s ear and she made the warm, whispered shapes of words there.
I love you, Margie.
And she laughed. Lucy laughed and rubbed her hand up and down Margie’s body, squeezing Margie’s thigh, her knee, her breast and her cheek.
How does that feel, Margie?
Good, Margie said.
When Margie caught hold of her breath, when Margie could speak, she said, Good.
Good, Lucy said.
She laughed.
Lucy’s laugh, kind, low, a different laugh from all the other laughs.
See, Margie. Now you know.
Now you know about boyfriends.
How they feel.
What they do.
Margie knew her inside was warm, liquid, spilling, boiling, feeling good. Margie knew Lucy’s fingers, now. The shape of them, the length, the smooth sharp of her fingernails, the weight of them on her skin. Margie knew the smell of wind in Lucy’s soft blonde hair and the warmth of Lucy’s legs, Lucy’s belly, the everywhere smell of the grape of Lucy’s lips.
Get up, Lucy said, pushing her small body up to sit cross-legged on the hard circle of the merry-go-round.
Margie rolled slowly to her side and put her hands beneath her body and pushed herself up.
Stand up, Margie. Stand up there in front of me.
Margie did not ask Lucy questions. Margie wanted Lucy to feel good and happy. Still spinning, her eyes trying to focus, trying to catch hold of something that was not a circle, Margie slid along the metal surface and stood on the soft ground facing Lucy. Margie, in the losing-yellow-light, stood in front of her friend.
Take your shirt off, Margie, Lucy said, sliding closer.
I want to see.
I want to see you under your clothes.
Why? We want to ask. Why ask such a thing of Margie?
There is so much we will never know.

Big, gone-inside Margie who put her pajamas on in the dark, who squeezed her eyes shut when she dried off with her towel. Margie dressed with her back to the cracked bathroom mirror. Margie saw herself in pieces, in white flashes of soft skin, in patches of rough dark hair. Margie in her unwanted body slept as stiff and far from Gram as she could. She knew the inside of her, the slow current of her blood moving up and down and through, the tides of her breath and the beat of her heart in her ears, her chest, her belly. That inside place, where Margie lived, she knew, she could see, hear, feel. But her outside, the skin that kept her in, was a secret Margie kept from herself.

A secret every one of us but Margie could see.
Don’t be scared, Margie.
I just want to see.
You know, if you are like me.
What you look like under there.

Here, Lucy said, pulling her arms inside the sleeves of her shirt. I’ll do it too.

Lucy wiggled and used her hands inside to push her shirt up and off her body. She sat, small, white, and open, in front of Margie, in the going-and-going light of the almost night, to Margie, Lucy glowed like television. Her skin was thin, soft, smooth. Lucy’s skin like skim milk, white, watery. Lucy’s breasts rose up above her chest like cupcakes, vanilla cupcakes that ended in small pink points. Margie stared, not just at Lucy’s breasts, at all of her, there, uncovered, let out, in front of her.

Margie pulled her purple shirt over her head and let go of it, let the stretched cotton she wore outside fall to the ground. She did not look down at herself, at her big body hanging there, her breasts heavy on her belly, her dark nipples big circles on the end of her big round chest. Margie felt the wind blowing cold on her, on parts of her kept so long secret, hidden, covered. Margie looked at Lucy, at Lucy looking back at her.

Wow, Margie, Lucy said. You’ve got big ones.
Margie did not nod, or smile, or say anything at all.
Margie looked, breathed, stood, showed.

Jump, Lucy said. For fun. Just a couple of times. Jump up and down, Margie. Like, jumping jacks. I just want to see.

Margie jumped, once. Jumped, again. Margie jumped and her whole big body went with her, rising up into the air and falling back down to the ground. Margie did not jump high and she did not think about why or how she looked
as she did it. Margie jumped and felt herself for a moment weightless and then heavy with the weight of all that she carried. Margie jumped because Lucy had asked.

Okay, Margie. Okay. You can stop jumping.
Come back, Margie.

Margie stepped closer to Lucy.
Lie back down. It’s cold but it feels good.

Margie lay back down beside Lucy and felt the rough metal circle cool and firm under her back. Her breath blew hard through her chest from the jumping, from the feeling of being there, bare, beside Lucy.

Lucy moved as close to Margie as she could get, and then closer, pushing her small body again against Margie’s big body, finding space for herself in the big soft gaps of Margie. She put her hand back on Margie’s body, slower now. Lucy’s hand, warm, moving slowly, in circles, rubbing. Squeezing, slowly, circling. Margie’s heart beat up against her skin in the valley between her breasts and Lucy moved her hand there, to touch the beating parts, to feel Margie alive beneath her. Margie closed her eyes and felt Lucy feeling her, felt the air blowing across her wide, open skin, felt good, safe, touched, held.

Margie felt and beat and felt and breathed and felt and felt and felt until Lucy took her hand away.

I know, Margie, Lucy said.
It feels good, right?
You can do it too, if you want, Lucy said.
If you want to.
To me, I mean.

Lucy moved her body away from Margie and lay out small and bare beside her. Lucy, spread wide, open, waiting. Eyes closed, Lucy’s white, freckled, beautiful belly rising up and falling, in the cool of the wind that blew through. Margie stayed where she was, pounding, looking at Lucy. Margie did not understand, did not know that Lucy was waiting for her, waiting for her touch. Margie knew only the loss of Lucy, felt the cold of Lucy’s body pulled away. The pain of autumn air stinging skin so recently touched, warmed, revealed.

They lay there a long time, in the abandoned playground at the back of the soon-to-be-torn-down drive-in, in the deep-yellow-sinking-into-slow-blue light, in the rising wind, in the quiet of uncertain desire. Margie, deep inside herself, cooling quickly, feeling, feeling where Lucy was. And Lucy, thin back resting against the cool metal merry-go-round, knees spread wide, feet just barely touching the ground, open, offering, waiting. The two girls, grown
up and away and out and almost into women, lying together, still, waiting for what would come.

Dykes, we might have said.
Do it, we might have said.
Come on, Margie.
This is your chance.
Your moment.
Who hasn’t done such a thing?
Let loose, we might have said.
Touch her, we might have said.
Feel her.
Show her.
Love.
Love.
Try.
It'll be dark soon, Margie, Lucy said.
We better go home.

57. MARGE

What’s this, Marge?
Another fucking thing you’re trying to hide from me.
You think I don’t go into your room, Marge?
This is my house. I go where I want.
I like this. Feels soft.
Smells like you, Marge. Like fat titties.
Why keep it secret? All the way under your bed.
This what you touch at night, Marge?
I bet that’s it.
I bet this ain’t even yours.
I bet you stole it from those dykes downstairs.
You are a dyke, aren’t you, Marge?
No? It’s yours? I don’t believe you.
I think you stole it. I think you smell it and you look at it and you touch yourself and you think about those dykes.
Is that it, Marge? Is that what you do? Why you tried to hide this from me?
I’d like to take this down there and tie it around their necks.
Watch those dykes beg for their lives.