The big fat one she keeps under the bed.
I know all your secrets. Everybody in this house.
Get me that book she loves so much and we’ll do it together, Marge.
You and me.
Together.
Teach her a lesson.
Do what I say. I’m sick of her thinking she’s so much better than the rest of us.
Who cares what God thinks? God never gave me anything.
No? You won’t do it, Marge?
Don’t want to upset your dear old gram and her heart, oh, her heart, her heart?
Fine.
Then you come over here and keep me company.
You go and get your gram’s book and we have some fun with it or you come over here and keep me warm.
It’s so cold out, Marge.
I can’t be alone all the time.
Your ma would want you to take care of me.
Your ma understands that men got needs.

66. MARJORIE

Lucy in her small purple box is here beside Marjorie. What little is left of Lucy, not much, but more than enough for Marjorie. More than Marjorie’s one hand can hold. Lucy, seen, now, the soft, thin silver of Lucy dust that Gram kept safe for Marjorie inside this purple box. Here for Marjorie to touch and see and know. Marjorie, with just a pinch of the sand of Lucy kept in her pocket, now, does not need to go through her departments looking for Lucy. Lucy is all around, and inside, and here on the table beside Marjorie’s bed. Lucy is here and carried and safe and can be felt with Marjorie’s fingers, felt in the inside way Marjorie can feel the good of things.

Marjorie says Hello to Lucy in her box beside the bed and turns on the bare-bulb lamp. The room lights up bright with shadows and Marjorie goes to the window to shut the blinds. It is good to feel the new air, to smell the exploding spring, but Marjorie does not want the People to see in. Marjorie wants to be unseen and safe here inside with these important things she needs to do.
Marjorie has three big plastic bags with her, one white lampshade in each of them.

She has done it.

Marjorie feels good.

She takes the lampshades out of the bags. Each one is protected by plastic that Marjorie must unwrap, plastic that must have protected the white of them from the dangers of dust and dirty fingers on the shelves of the Store. The lampshades are big and thick and wrinkled. Marjorie touches her finger to the shade’s hard outside and draws a long circle around it. A thing made to protect the light. To hold the light. To hold the light in and make the living a little softer, easier to see. Three bare-bulb lamps in their tiny apartment and now these three beautiful lampshades.

Marjorie takes a lampshade into the living room and puts it on the lamp in there. It is easier than she had thought. Hold the big circle of the lampshade above the bulb and push down careful as she can. Push down careful and the thin wires inside the shade open up and let the bulb inside. A perfect home for the light. Push, push, gentle, push, until the whole round body of the bulb fits right inside the wire inside of the lampshade. Marjorie switches on the lamp and the living room glows soft and yellow and safe. The sofa is there, brown and hiding the bed inside. Not needed and left alone. This light, here, now, is something good to see. The room looks more like other rooms. Warm. A place People might want to be.

Gram’s room is next. Marjorie knocks soft at Gram’s door and there is television inside but no answer. She pushes the door open wide enough for her head to fit through and says, Gram?

Gram?

Gram’s answer is a cough and the scratch of nightgown against sheets and the voices of the television being turned down so low the words are not words, are only sounds. The light of the screen glows blue and red and yellow on the paper-breathing walls of the room.

Marjorie holds the lampshade behind her back with one hand and pushes the door open with her other.

What do you want, Margie?
I want a place for People to be, Gram.
I brought you something.
I don’t want nothing, Margie. No people for me.
Gram sits up small and straight as she can against her pillows.
I don’t want nothing except for you to get your ma out of here. That’s what I want.

Okay, Gram, Marjorie says, stepping sideways toward the lamp so that Gram will not see the surprise. Okay, I know. But I brought you this anyway.

And for you to get yourself a friend. That’s what I want, Margie. For you to be less alone all the time.

Okay, Gram.

You need someone with you.

I know, Gram. I have People. I am good. Just watch.

Marjorie takes the lampshade from behind her back and gently presses it down over the bare bulb of the lamp in the corner. This one easier, now that Marjorie knows how to do it. She turns on the light and Gram blinks and blinks and closes her eyes and then slowly opens her eyes back up and looks from the lamp to the television to the lamp.

Makes it hard to see the television, Gram says.

Marjorie turns the light off so that Gram can go back to the dark of her Sto-

ries.

Okay, Gram. But now when you want some light you won’t have to squint at it. You can see and feel good. Look around.

Gram nods and Marjorie walks back around the bed to the door.

It’s good, Margie.

Good, Gram.

You want to sit and watch some Stories?

Not now, Gram. I’m busy. Got to do this. Maybe later.

God bless you, Margie.

Thanks, Gram.

You too.

Gram nods and sinks back into the soft of her bed. Marjorie walks out of the room and closes the door behind her. Marjorie is moving. Marjorie is doing what she needs to do. She does not want to sit in Gram’s room right now. Mar-

jorie does not want to be in the dark with the television People and the sad and the happy of the Stories. Marjorie wants to be with Lucy, and her self, and the good and the new of these lights she can look at with no pain.

Back in the too-bright of the bare bulb lamp in her room, Marjorie picks up the last of the lampshades. She pushes the big white circle down gently on top of the bulb and the scream of the light goes away. Marjorie looks around the room and she is not in the bright white of the Store and she is not in the dark and she is not in the shifting underwater blue of the television light. Marjorie
is in the room, in the quiet yellow glow of light held and let out slow. In her room, in her self, alone, alive, different, and the same.

Here with Lucy.

And Ma.

Marjorie puts her hands on the edge of the bed to help lower her big self down to her knees. Puts her hands on the floor and presses all the way down to the floor, to the black under of the bed. Marjorie reaches and reaches and moves her arm around under there until her fingers touch the rough edge of the box of Ma. Big gray balls of dust and hair and under-the-bed roll out around the box as Marjorie slides the cardboard toward her. She brushes the box off and sits down with her legs crossed, the rest of Ma here inside the cardboard walls, resting on top of her lap.

Marjorie is going to see what is inside. What is inside is not Ma. Inside the box of Lucy was not Lucy. Just dust, sand, left-behinds. Soft and crumbling. Inside the box of Ma is just, what? A thing. The bits that People leave behind. Just that, just burned-up things, not People.

Marjorie stays down low on the ground. She does not want Ma spilling out and onto the bed and into the good air of the room. Marjorie slides her fingers underneath the wide tape that holds the box together and pulls it back and away. The top two flaps flop free and Marjorie moves her wind through her, feels her heat here, alive, beating. Here in the soft yellow light rolling out from the lampshade, Marjorie opens the box and looks inside to see the whole of what Ma left behind.

Inside, like Dr. Goodwin said, is another box. A box of Ma inside a box of Ma. This one is black and plastic and a little smaller than the cardboard one, just small enough to be held inside it. Inside the purple box of Lucy was just the dust of Lucy. Gram must have opened Lucy up, must have held her carefully and found the right safe place for her to rest. And Ma has just been in cardboard under the bed. Catching the dust and hair as it blows through. Marjorie picks the plastic box of Ma up and holds it close to her chest for a moment, just to feel it, just to know the weight of it. Then she puts it down on the floor and flips up the two hooks that keep the box shut tight.

Marjorie is done with all this thinking about Ma. Her inside aisles feel wide and easier to walk down. She knows where to find Lucy. What departments to visit and what departments to pass by. Marjorie is here in the room, in the light that can be looked at, in her self, her warm, safe self who is ready to see.

Marjorie opens the plastic box and inside is a thick, clear plastic bag and inside the bag Marjorie can finally see what is left of Ma. Dust, like she thought. Dust,
like Lucy’s dust, only darker, heavier, more. Marjorie holds the plastic bag in her two hands and moves the weight of Ma from hand to hand. Inside the plastic is what Ma is now, a million little burned up pieces of Ma. All that Ma ever said or thought or did or felt or loved or hated all burned up into the two-hands of dust Marjorie holds now, here, close to her. All that red-faced angry and the white quarry dust and so many colors of pills inside there, all burned to black, to gray. All the sounds Ma ever made from before, from her bedroom, from the living room sofa, from after, from where she sat closed-door alone and coughing. What Ma brought into Apartment #2. What Ma brought to Marjorie. Him, in there in the dust of Ma, in the black of what Ma left behind. In there in the burned-up bits of Ma must still be some of Him, the black hairs lost all over and the balls of wet paper pushed into all the openings. Ma burned up with what Ma let in. Ma who maybe Marjorie should throw out with the trash, like Gram wanted. Ma who wanted to sit quiet and watch the fish. Ma who came home white-dusted and coconut-smelling. Ma who hurt Margie. Marjorie who remembers. Ma who did not know Marge. Ma who must have known. Ma who saved Lucy. Ma who carried Marjorie for so long warm and safe and growing inside her. Ma who started it all is finished, now, here in this plastic bag. The last of Ma, burned out, up, down to the smallest that People can be.

Marjorie is ready to let go of this pile of Ma.
Marjorie who might be feeling what it is to forgive.

The strong pull of the wave of wanting to move, of wanting to make the weight of what she is holding go away.
Is that forgive?
The giving in, to, away?

Marjorie stands up slow and tall and stretches her arms and legs. She picks up the bag of Ma and puts it down on the small table behind the box of Lucy. Things feel bigger, now, in the new lampshade light, bigger now that Marjorie has seen, now that these boxes have been opened and felt. Marjorie sits down on the bed and leans back, puts one hand on the purple box of Lucy.

Sorry, she says.
But I didn’t know.

67. MARGE

You can’t get away, Marge.
This is your home.
Your blood, Marge.