

BEETLES

At the foot of the driveway between the Abelsons and the Kings a grassy lawn stretched uninterrupted in both directions from one end of the street to the other. For some reason people on this side of Woodale Road didn't bother to fence their backyards, contributing to a feeling of lawlessness, accentuated by the fact that beyond the lawn was a sheer drop to Willow Grove Avenue far below. The houses down there were old and made of stone. Up here we were still new and made of brick. There was nothing about the planet we took for granted. The lawn, the drop, the row of identical garage doors, the dandelion heads turning to fluff, and near the eastern end of the street a big outcropping of stone I would learn years later from my boyfriend the archaeologist was called Wissahickon schist. The sky was very blue then. My best friend Peggy and I were lying in the grass behind Ellen Abelson's house, looking at the clouds. What if there isn't a world? We liked discussing the possibility. Given the absence of fences we were uncontained enough to feel the curve of the planet under us and our selves ever so faintly curved around it, making the planet seem less like a real thing and more like a feature of our dawning selves, the neighborhood empty of people but full of sentient beings, chiefly squirrels and chipmunks, songbirds, beetles. Lots of beetles. There were and always will be more beetles than anything, since most of us spend millennia this way before getting a form even remotely bipedal, let alone human.