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Marigold awoke as she had every morning for the past five years—despondent, widowed, empty—like a shriveled flower not yet dead. Her eyelids had betrayed her yet again, answering the call of a new day that held little worthy of anticipation or pleasure.

She rolled onto her side, away from the flickers of dawn’s rose-red fingers tracing their way up her bedroom wall. That room once held the pillars of her life: a caring husband of fifty-seven years and a cross gathering dust high above her headboard. Now they were fading memories of another era, a time when life bubbled with happiness and relationships. All that Marigold cherished now was the daily hope of not waking, thereby ending the relentless heartache. Eight decades into life, she felt ready to leave it. But her religious impulse, or what remained of it, stung her conscience at the thought of usurping the Almighty’s divine timing. Even the old woman, burdened by the great sorrows she carried, knew

she must wait to die. Resigned once more to that unhappy thought, she slid her weathered feet to the floor and began another wearisome day.

The irony of her current state was not lost on her as she shuffled mindlessly from one barren room to another each gray morning. In fact, it deepened her misery. Long-ago friends used to call her “Mary Canary” for her light heart and innate felicity. Since the passing of her husband and their only child shortly after, the canary had departed, leaving just the coal mine. Memories of better days, once a comfort after the untimely deaths, had since turned against her. That was why framed photos of smiling faces lay face down on shelves or buried deep within forgotten boxes in ignored closets.

Marigold’s thin slippers moved slowly along a well-worn path on her linoleum floors. She no longer noticed the layers of dust gathered beyond the trodden passageway; she did not care to notice. Not much bothered Marigold anymore. Her breakfasts were bland, her coffee was cheap, and her curtains were drawn most of the day. After eating a paltry meal of toast and canned soup, she moved to her usual place of daily repose: a soft chair facing its twin, where her beloved partner used to sit contentedly. Nobody had burdened that recliner since his passing, and in her mind, nobody ever would. Like a moth to flame, however, she watched it every day, as if hoping he would suddenly materialize and the sadness would finally end. Every day was another disappointment.

As she sat rocking, the unfamiliar sounds of a car door shutting and steps on her front porch echoed into the dim room. Curious, she rose slowly and shuffled to a window, where she pulled back the edge of a curtain to peer outside. The strange sensation of new daylight stunned her weak eyes, but she made a sustained effort to see who might have

come to visit. Nobody was there. *Of course not. How ridiculous a thought.*

Her unpracticed reasoning skills notwithstanding, Marigold was quite right. Nobody would visit her. Hardly a shadow—and rarely even her own—had darkened her doorstep in many months. The old widow was alone in every conceivable way. That realization, by far her most frequent companion, troubled her as she trod a less-familiar path back to her chair. Marigold had already begun to brood on lost friendships when a nearby thought interrupted the regret-filled world she was formulating—she knew she had heard a car door and steps.

Setting aside her ruminations, Marigold walked anxiously to the front door and squinted through the peephole. Again, nothing. Nobody. She stood looking a few more seconds and then placed her hand on the cool handle, which creaked from disuse as she turned it clockwise. The ancient door clicked and slowly opened. A calm breeze rolled down the hillside and kissed Marigold's pale, forgotten face. She instinctively inhaled. The breath enlivened her momentarily, and she performed the act a second time. Again, life! Peace seemed to float on the air. The rising rays of sun, heretofore an intruder upon her subterranean existence, held her gaze like a cherished lover returning from a lengthy journey. In these delicate moments, Marigold recognized something distant, yet dear, in the recesses of her memory, though she had no words for it. Was this experience what she used to know as living? As beauty? It beckoned to her. Unthinking, she loosed her grip on the doorknob and stepped into the morning.

Then, as unexpectedly as it had come, the moment passed. She stood upon her threshold, between two worlds—one full of darkness, the other of light—and wondered what to do

next. For the first time in years, Marigold felt uncomfortable returning to shadow. She asked herself if, perhaps, she remained in that place long enough, might she breathe life once more? The thought brought a moment of happiness to her frail frame and weary heart. Marigold imbibed a last breath and receded into her house, feeling more than thinking.

What had just happened? Something felt different: something deep and wordless, something unfamiliar and yet intimately familiar, something rich and divine. She paused in the middle of the living room and gave utterance to the feeling that stirred below the layers of darkness within.

“I want to live.”

In that instant, her chest began to tingle. The sensation moved to her arms and then to her legs. The feeling turned to fire, as if her heart began pumping acid through her veins. Pain coursed through her body like a flood, sweeping away all sentience and replacing it with guttural cries. She writhed in anguish as her organs failed one by one, culminating in a final breath, a final beat, a long-awaited demise.

The canary, reborn, was dead.