Dear Robin,

The garden gave me a small surprise this morning. I had gone outside with a cup of coffee, intending only to check whether the rain had reached the pots beside the steps. Instead, I found a goldfinch balancing on the tallest stem as though it had reserved that particular seat. It stayed just long enough for me to stop thinking about my list of chores. Then it disappeared over the fence, leaving me with cold coffee and a much better start to the day.

Your news about the marigolds made me smile. There is something satisfying about putting a little promise into the ground and waiting to see what happens. I have been moving my own pots around, trying to discover the exact patch of sunshine they prefer. My neighbor says that gardening is mostly observation, with occasional digging. After carrying the same heavy pot across the patio three times, I am beginning to suspect that she is right about the observation and rather optimistic about the digging.

Later in the morning I visited the library book sale. I told myself that I would look for one cookbook and come home. You can probably guess how that turned out. There was a narrow table near the window with books about walks, birds, old houses and local history. I opened a small volume about ordinary gardens and found a pressed leaf tucked between two pages. I left the leaf exactly where it was. Someone had chosen that place for it, and it seemed a pity to disturb the arrangement.

The cookbook I finally chose has a handwritten note beside a recipe for apple cake. The note simply says to give it another five minutes. I like the practical kindness of that instruction. It tells me that somebody stood in a kitchen, checked the middle of a cake, and decided that the next person deserved a useful warning. I will try the recipe when the weather turns cooler. For now, I have put a scrap of paper beside the page so I can find it again.

On the way home I stopped at the farmers market. There were tomatoes in several shades of red and yellow, little bunches of herbs, and a basket of beans that looked almost too neat to be real. I bought enough for supper and then

spent a few minutes talking with the woman who grows the herbs. She recommended keeping a small pot close to the kitchen door. That sounds sensible, provided I remember to water it before I begin thinking about what to cook.

This afternoon brought the sort of rain that arrives quietly and then decides to stay. I sat near the window and sorted a few old photographs while the kettle warmed. One picture showed a picnic table covered with paper plates and an enormous bowl of potato salad. Nobody had written a date on the back. Even so, I remembered the uneven ground beneath my chair and how everyone kept moving their glasses away from a particularly determined wasp. Small details can hold a whole afternoon together.

I wonder whether you have a favorite place to sit when you want to watch what is happening outdoors. It might be a window, a step, or a corner of the garden. There is no need for it to be picturesque. One of my favorite views is simply the stretch of fence where the birds pause before visiting the feeder. It changes a little every day, even when I think I have already seen everything there is to see.

I will leave the marigolds to their patient work and see what the next week brings. Perhaps the goldfinch will return to inspect my rearranged pots. If it does, I hope it appreciates the effort. In the meantime, I hope there is something small and pleasant waiting in your day, whether it is a good book, a familiar tune, or a cup of coffee that stays warm long enough to enjoy.

Warmly,

Ruth