

Earth

Where She Knew Her Way

Ruth's husband suggested the new restaurant by the river.

"What's wrong with our usual place?" she asked.

"Nothing. I thought we could try something different."

She opened the new restaurant's menu. Several dishes had ingredients she didn't recognize. There were no photographs, and the reviews disagreed about everything from the food to the parking.

"Let's just go where we know it's good."

At their usual table, she ordered her usual meal. The server remembered. Ruth relaxed.

On the way home, her husband mentioned an invitation from their neighbors.

"They're having a few people over Friday."

Ruth looked out the window. Last time, someone had confidently repeated something she knew was wrong. When she explained, he laughed and said he hadn't given it much thought.

That had bothered her more than the mistake. How could someone speak with such certainty without bothering to understand?

"You go if you want," she said. "I'd rather stay home."

Once inside, she changed into comfortable clothes and returned to the book waiting beside her chair. It explored ancient accounts of consciousness after death. She had underlined a passage that seemed to connect with something she had read the week before.

Here was a conversation worth having.

She called her husband over and began explaining the connection.

“That’s interesting,” he said. “I’m going to make tea. Want some?”

She watched him leave. She hadn’t finished.

Later, she checked a discussion group online. Someone had asked a question she thought the book answered clearly. She wrote a long reply, then added a reading list. If they understood the background, they wouldn’t keep asking the same things.

Another person disagreed.

Ruth reached for a second book. She needed the exact passage.

By ten, her husband had gone to bed. She sat surrounded by notes, following a reference that led to another unanswered question.

The house felt very quiet.

She wished she had someone to talk to. Someone who wanted to look beneath the surface. Most people seemed content with explanations they had never examined. Her neighbors’ lights were still on. Through the window, she could see people gathered around their kitchen table.

She imagined sitting there with nothing to contribute to their chatter. Someone would ask what she was reading, then change the subject before she could explain. She drew the curtain.

Tomorrow she would stop at the same grocery store, buy what she always bought, and come home.

This can change.