

CLOSURE-THE COMPLETION OF THE SPIRIT
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He sat in his chair, she in hers. Reading. The room was warm, almost hot, the heating system abetted by the early spring sun shining in the Southern windows. Where it struck her skin, she looked like an alabaster statue. Her hands looked smooth, yet were gnarled and wrinkled. Her life was confirmed only by the steady rhythmic breathing that slightly moved her head.

It was shocking to see her hand move to turn the page; then once again it was at rest on the arm of her chair. The chair had arms with worn fabric, covered with fancy doilies her once agile hands created. She was still again, just the slight movement in her eyes as she traced the lines on the page.

He was never as still as she. His cough and barking sound of clearing his throat never let the observer forget he was still with us.

Mary and Frank had lived in this house for most of their sixty plus years together. Indeed, they have lived in this house for nearly sixty years, been married for almost seventy. Thursday will mark their seventieth wedding anniversary.

"Those two okay?" Cecile asked.

"They're on monitor, yeah of course they're okay!" barked back an orderly.

"Thanks for caring," Cecile said under her breath. Angry, as usual. It seemed as if no one else in the nursing home cared about these two. A husband and wife, married nearly seventy years, both celebrated ninetieth birthdays just last month. "Celebrated," Cecile laughed at herself, "they weren't even aware of it being their birthday."

"What?" the orderly asked.

"Nothing," Cecile replied, "nothing you'd care about anyway."

There was nothing wrong with either of them, yet they were seemingly unconscious and very still. Their children had died and there was no one to care for them except a grandson. That man had never come to visit them. Cecile suspected there was a problem within the family, so the Patterson's became wards of the state. Lucky them.

The fire was burning a soft glow; this added to the warmth of the room. Frank paid close attention

to the fire, tending it when it fell quiet, adding logs as needed. He was about to add another log when Mary spoke.

"Frank, let it go."

"Why?"

"I'm ready, aren't you?"

"Not quite yet, I have some more reading I want to do and it just doesn't feel right," he answered.

"But it's so beautiful, the flowers are just starting, I want to go see the crocuses," Mary answered.

"I'm just not ready yet."

They fell quiet again. Mary went back to her reading, Frank let the fire go and settled back to his book. The glow of the fire receded into the shallow fireplace, until only a small red light could be seen. Frank was dismayed by the pitiful fire, but he had agreed with Mary to let it go. Not in words, but by not arguing the point any further. After almost seventy years, the communication was often without words, mere actions spoke more succinctly.

Frank became distracted from his book, he was looking at things around the room. He saw the curtains, the carpet and the fine paintings that hung on the walls. The paintings had hung so long that the walls were soiled many shades around them. The soot from the fireplace had marred the walls where the paintings rested. Frank remembered removing a painting and trying to clean the wall. It was fruitless, and he re-hung the painting, swearing to Mary he'd get them painted one of these days.

They had had a good life, many years together, more years together than some of their friends had lived. Now they were the last ones, even their children had passed. Maybe Mary was right, maybe it is time; Frank stood.

Beep, beep, beep. Droned the heart monitor, then it went flat and its tone fell to an annoyingly sharp pitch. Cecile turned and saw that Frank's heart had failed. She rushed to his side and remembered that these two were no resuscitate. She stood by, helpless. The monitor started to beep a broken rhythm, but beeping it was. As time went on it got stronger and steadier. Frank had held on. "Why?" Cecile thought.

"I'm really not ready," Frank said as he slumped back into his chair. He was out of breath and clasping his chest.

Mary looked over, "Okay then dear, you let me know." She went back to her reading. She was calm and looked content.

The carpet was a light pink rose color, it was bound on all four sides by carefully polished hardwood floor. The springs in all the chairs and the sofa had long since lost their foundation, yet the seats remained comfortable enough. On the mantel sat two or three dozen photographs, the children as babies all the way until a few years before their deaths. There was one photograph of a boy, yet nothing as he grew older. It was a photo of their grandson. He stopped visiting them years ago, both Frank and Mary were saddened by this, he was their only grandchild.

His mother had married their son, she was only able to conceive this one child. His birth had almost killed her. Frank didn't know why he was thinking so much about Jimmy, but he couldn't get him out of his mind.

"Do you know where Jimmy is now?" he asked.

"Yes dear. Remember he moved back into town? He lives in your home town again," Mary said without inflection.

"Oh, yes, I remember. Why do you suppose he doesn't visit?"

"He's afraid of us."

There was a long silence once more. Frank thought about that statement. It didn't make any sense to him. They had always been kind to him when he came to visit. True they were old when he was born, and almost unable to walk when he was five, but still, Frank was hurt by that statement."

"I think I'll give him a call," Frank said.

"That would be nice..." Mary agreed.

Frank stood.

The heart monitor on Frank went flat and its tone fell to an annoyingly sharp pitch. Cecile, still by his side, realized his heart had failed again. As she stood helpless to aid him, not a moment had passed and the tone of the monitor changed. No, it hadn't changed, Mary's monitor was flat as well. Cecile rushed to her side. She too had a failed heart. She had no vitals. Cecile opened Mary's eyes, shone her flashlight into her eyes, nothing. Frank and Mary had just died. Almost seventy years together and they died within a

second of each other.

"It's time, Mary," Frank said in a quiet voice.

"I'm ready."

Frank and Mary walked toward the back door of their house. The one that led to the gardens. Frank opened the door for Mary, and they walked through the door. It was a little dark, but the bright light of the sun shone clear down the pathway. They walked together off the stoop onto the gravel path. Mary pointed to the crocuses, snowdrops and Johnny-Jump-Ups. She was so happy and radiant. As they walked, the sun shown brighter on them. Frank looked at Mary, she was radiant.

The further they walked, the more radiant and beautiful Mary became. Frank realized he was no longer walking with a limp. He also noticed his hands didn't have that ache. Mary's hair was as bright as a Florida orange. She was young again, she was as he remembered meeting her. He quickly looked down at his hands, gone were the wrinkles and gnarly bent fingers. In their place were hands of a young man. He looked Mary in the face.

"What's happening?"

Mary smiled, reached out her hand. Frank placed his hand in hers and they continued down the pathway. The light was almost blinding now. There were flowers everywhere they looked, daffodils, tulips, gardenias, roses, phlox, and exotic flowers Frank couldn't even hope to name.

"Mary, what's going on?"

"It was time to go, we are going," Mary explained.

"Going where, Mary?"

"To the next phase, Frank."

"This looks like heaven to me," Frank answered.

"No, not yet, come on."

Cecile looked in on their empty room. Tears filled her eyes. She didn't even know why, she never knew them. They were always catatonic while in her care, but somehow she felt a deep loss. Behind her a man cleared his throat. Cecile turned to face the sound.

"Excuse me, I didn't mean to scare you. Can you tell me where Mr. and Mrs. Patterson are?"

That was too much for Cecile to take, she burst into tears and ran from the room, the entire time asking herself what had gotten into her head. The man followed her, not really following, but he was uncomfortable standing in an empty room. He went back to the reception area and sat on the couch. He picked up a magazine and waited. He flipped aimlessly through the pages, stopping every so often to look at a picture, or read a few lines of an article. His dispassionate pursuit was halted by a voice.

"Sir," Cecile said.

He looked up and said, "Yes?"

"Are you a member of the family?"

"Yes, I'm Jim Patterson, their grandson," he stated.

Cecile became angered, she tried to withhold her emotions, failed and said, "You're too late, they just died."

Jim Patterson burst into tears, dropped his face into his hands and wept. His body convulsed with violent quakes. He didn't hold back his sadness. He wailed and cried. Cecile had never seen a man react so. Only once had she ever seen such sadness, and that was a mother having lost her child. She walked over to him and sat in a chair across from him. She waited.

"What's that sound?" Frank asked.

"Jimmy!" Mary answered.

"I still don't understand," Frank said.

"He's crying. He doesn't understand either," Mary answered.

"We need to help him with his sadness," Frank said.

"How?" Mary asked.

"From here, all things must be possible, don't you think?" Frank asked.

"Yes, all things are possible, that's what I have believed all my life," Mary agreed.

The light was all around them now, the flowers were just spots of color against the brilliant white of the light. Even the colors were beginning to fade into the brightness. The light was so intense, it was creating sound, sound of a thousand angels singing. Or, thought Mary, it was angels singing. There was a sound of a very intense whoosh, then silence, darkness, nothing.

A doctor had given Jimmy something to help him sleep. He was home again and he had taken the medication, but was wide awake after several fruitless hours of trying to relax. All he could feel was guilt. He suddenly felt a warmth wash over him and a soft voice, not really a voice, rather a thought or memory of a voice. Yes, he thought, that's closer to it. He felt relaxed by his memory, he could see them, they were there.

The image was of his grandparents in their living room, the fireplace burning a perfect fire, an old dog laying on an oval rag rug by the hearth. Jimmy could see himself, sitting alone, far away from the others. His mother told him not to bother the dog because it was old. He could feel his sadness, his loneliness, his anger. The warmth washed these feelings away. The sadness and angry feelings were gone. In their place, deep inside he knew and could feel the love of his grandparents. He could feel that they were at peace and they understood.

"I think he'll be fine now," Frank said.

"Yes, he is fine now, he feels it," Mary agreed.

Jimmy found deep, restful sleep. He dreamed of beautiful fields, grasses and wildflowers. In the morning, when he awoke, his thoughts were clear and calm. He arose and as he sat drinking his morning coffee, he remembered his dreams, dreams like memories of things that could never have happen, yet it seemed as if they had. He smiled as tears fell upon his cheeks. He was not sad, rather very happy and at peace. His grandparents had visited him in his dreams last night, and left a thought that filled his mind, "closure" and he knew their death was the completion of their spirits.