

## Roomies: MARIGOLD



At **One More Multiverse**, I doubled as a writer for multiple character storylines and as the lead editor for my teammates' work. Our cast of characters existed in the same universe, yet each appealed to different genre tropes. For Marigold, our aim was a cozy, slice-of-life, sunshiney story with a few sudden spikes of darkness. The player's relationship with Marigold could be interpreted either romantically or as a deep friendship full of awe and admiration, pending the choices the player made. In total, Marigold's story spans 12 chapters and completes a full narrative arc.

This branching narrative format was limited to 90 characters per line. Included here are samples of Chapters 1-3.

### **MARIGOLD, CHAPTER 1:**

It's a beautiful day in the sad little dirt plot you call a garden.

The sun is shining, the birds are singing...

And a tiny, skeletal netherbeast is breaking forth through the soil, clawing its way up from the depths of Hell.

You: Wait, what?!

-> Scream for help!

You: SOMEBODY?! UM!! HELP!!

Your yell reaches the ears of at least one of your housemates— you can see a flurry of motion just inside the window.

But they won't make it in time! The skinless creature is already out of its hole!

-> Hit it with a shovel!

You: Not today, you little bastard! I've seen EVERY horror movie!

There's a hollow clanging sound as you smack the top of the monster's slimy, exposed skull again and again.

The creature seems undeterred, its only reaction being to cock its head sideways with curiosity after you've finally exhausted yourself.

-> Hang back. Maybe it's friendly?

You take three BIG leaps backwards and then hold deathly still.

You: Maybe it operates on T-Rex rules. Like, if I don't move, it can't see me.

Skeletal Beast: ...

You lock eyes with the thing (well, your eyes against its hollow sockets) and a sense of unearthly dread settles in your pounding heart.

You: Woah...

-> It's kind of...cute!

You reach down to pet the beast, but it suddenly jolts to its feet.

Its bony jaw clacks as it flaps its mouth like the world's most horrifying sock puppet.

-> I must be REALLY bad at gardening.

You: I knew I had a black thumb but... necromancy?!

Suddenly, the creature moves. The whole skull clacks back and forth as it rattles out an oddly familiar sound.

-> Get away from me! Shoo!

You wave your arms at the beast. In response, it unhinges its rotted, sinewy jaws and clacks out an infernal message.

Skeletal Beast: HI HONEY!!!

Skeletal Beast: I MISS YOU!!!

Skeletal Beast: DID YOU REMEMBER TO PACK YOUR WINTER SOCKS?!

The shock is too much! Your eyes roll back into your head and the ground rushes up at you.

Just before you hit the dirt, someone catches you.

Marigold: Don't freak out, \$Player! I can explain everything.

*Six Weeks Earlier...*

Marigold: You're serious? I can really live here? That's so cool!

Marigold: Her eyes sparkle— literally sparkle. Being a witch comes with perks like that.

-> Cooler than having magic powers?

Marigold: Cool is cool. It's not a competition.

Marigold: Besides, I never got the hang of ice magic.

-> Should I get a parking pass for your broom?

Marigold: I think I'll stick with taking the bus. I get broom-sick easily.

-> Are you a good witch, or a bad witch?

Marigold: If I were a bad witch, why would I answer honestly?

Her laugh is like a sunbeam cutting through storm clouds. Every time she moves, you catch the scent of mulled cider in the air.

You: Truth is, you're our last hope. Every other applicant for the room failed the vibe check.

You: Plus, our rent's nearly due and we need the cash.

You: I've been working this temp gig at a stuffy, boring office and it's really beating me down.

-> I'm sure you know the feeling.

Marigold: Actually, I love my job! But I know I'm luckier than the average intern in this city.

-> But enough about me!

Your cheeks turn hot. Since when do you babble all your problems to total strangers?

Marigold: No, I'm fascinated! I've never worked in an office before.

You glance down at her rental application one more time. Cutely, she's dotted the i in Marigold with a daisy.

You: I see here you have a job at a flower shop?

Marigold: Yes. Godfrey's Florals. We deal in magic blossoms exclusively.

-> Sweet gig! How did you land it?

You: Let me guess— nepotism? I'll bet Godfrey's a family friend or something.

Marigold: I wish! Godfrey is anything but that. If he knew who *my parents* were...

-> How long have you been a magical florist?

Marigold: Officially? Just a few weeks. But I've been crazy about nature magic my whole life.

Marigold: My parents wanted me to go into the *family business*, but it just... wasn't me.

-> Is anything you grow dangerous?

Marigold: No way! Cross my heart and hope to kill my favorite hydrangea.

Marigold: Godfrey doesn't allow anything *wretched* in his shop. No exceptions.

For just a second, her gaze falls downwards. The air in the room goes stale and clammy.

Marigold: Actually, maybe this isn't the best place for me. I'm sort of... Well...

You interrupt, shoving the pen and paper into her hands to make things official before she can change her mind.

You: Say no more. We want you.

-> I *promise* to make sure you love it here.

You: Everyone needs a place to call home. I really want this to be yours.

-> This offer expires in 3, 2, 1...

Marigold squeaks in surprise and lunges for the paper.

Marigold: Okay... okay! I'm really doing this. Nice to meet you, Roomie!

And just like that, you nabbed the perfect housemate...

Or so you thought....

*Today...*

When you come to, you're in an unfamiliar room.

You: Whuh—? Marigold?

Your vision clears and you realize that, for the first time, you're in Marigold's bedroom.

It's exactly as you imagined — except everywhere you expected life and warmth, there's dry, dead plants and a deathly chill.

Marigold's room doesn't feel anything like her bubbly, cozy presence elsewhere in the apartment.

Marigold: \$Player! You're awake!

A shadowy, looming figure appears behind Marigold's shoulder! You choke back a scream.

-> Say something! Anything!

You: M-Monster! Marigold, get it!

-> Run for your life!

You roll to your knees and start to crawl towards the door, but Marigold stops you.

-> Throw yourself at it before it can reach her!

Reacting on pure instinct, your body hurtles itself up and towards the figure, but Marigold steps between you at the last second.

Marigold: Wait, \$Player, no! You've got it all wrong!

Marigold snaps with both hands and a large UV lamp turns on. The shadowy figure winces, but then steps forward into the light.

It's... a sweet middle-aged lady.

Marigold's Mom: Oh, aren't you precious? Poor thing. I must have scared you half to death back there.

She tugs you onto your wobbly legs, then brushes a clump of dirt from your shoulder.

Marigold: Don't make light of this, Mom! You know that humans are sensitive to your kind of magic!

You: Oh... you're Marigold's mother!

-> Were you that dead thing in the garden?

She laughs. It reminds you so much of Marigold's that you can't help but relax some.

Marigold's Mom: I sent that little pet to bring Marigold a message.

Marigold's Mom: It was supposed to wait in the garden until she stopped by to greet it, but it met you first.

Marigold: Which is why I keep telling you it's time for a cell phone. Or you can just use snail mail!

Marigold's Mom: Well I tried to send a snail! But they have so few bones... It's dreadfully hard to reanimate them properly.

-> I'm so sorry! I hope my panicking didn't offend you.

Marigold's Mom: Not at all, child! It's hardly the worst greeting I've gotten from you city folk.

Marigold's Mom: Besides, that's what I get for trying to cut corners.

Marigold's Mom: I sent that undead messenger instead of coming myself, and it tried to give my message to you instead of Marigold.

Marigold: Mother! You're just lucky it was \$Player and not a total stranger. Or my boss!

-> Are you a good witch, or a bad witch?

Her eyes sparkle in the same way Marigold's do, and you find yourself more at ease.

Marigold's Mom: There are no such things as bad witches. Or bad magic.

Marigold's Mom: Even if my daughter has started to believe otherwise.

For the first time, Marigold starts to crack under pressure. She puts her face in her hands and exhales slowly.

It looks like she's suppressing some kind of power— is it dangerous?

-> Reassure her.

You: It's all good, Marigold. I'm excited to meet your mom— and besides, that monster thing was kind of awesome.

The tension breaks immediately, and Marigold seems grateful. Her amber eyes fill with renewed warmth.

-> Take her hand.

As she lets her hands fall from her face, you gently tug one into your grasp.

For a second, she seems surprised. But then, her grip relaxes into yours.

-> Lighten the mood.

You: So, Ms. Marigold's Mom... I take it you're as bad at gardening as I am?

Marigold's Mom: Oh, I'm much worse. Your garden only had ONE dead body in it.

Marigold can't help but crack one of her award-winning grins, and the tension in the room vanishes.

Marigold's Mom: Well, now that I've cleaned up my own mess, I think it's best I get back to the hunt.

You: The hunt?

Marigold: Mom's a pretty famous Dark Witch. Her work's been keeping her busy lately. Fighting shadow monsters and all.

You: Dark Witch? But she doesn't seem...

You cover your face with a palm and mouth the word "EVIL" in Marigold's direction only.

Marigold: I'm not!

Marigold: I mean— my Mom! She's not evil! None of the Dark Witches are.

Mom: True. But I am a bit late for my next appointment. Before I go, though—

Mom: Marigold, honey, I do hope your new job is going well?

Marigold draws in a breath, then hesitates. Her eyes are panicked and wide.

-> Answer for her.

You: Marigold's been doing great here in the city. Everyone who meets her falls in love!

Marigold's Mom: That's becoming more obvious by the second.

Marigold's mom winks, and you turn pink.

-> Change the subject.

You: Marigold, didn't you leave the kettle on?

Marigold: Oh, crabgrass! You're right!

-> Nudge her to speak up.

You gently bop your shoulder against hers. Marigold clears her throat.

Marigold: It's been fine! Really, Mom. Don't worry so much!

Marigold's mother raises an eyebrow, but doesn't bother to pry.

Mom: Well, I'll let you both get back to it, then. It's been a wonderful visit.



The second her mother is gone, Marigold flops onto her bed, relieved and exhausted.

Her soft hair flows around her shoulders and her chest heaves with a sigh.

She pats the spot next to her and before you know it, you're both laying back, staring at her ceiling.

Marigold: So... I guess you know my secret.

-> That you have an awesome mom?

-> That you've been having trouble getting your plants to grow?

-> That your mom has been sending dead things to our place?

Marigold: Yep. And that I come from a family of Dark Witches.

You: But... you're not one?

Marigold: Actually, I am.

Marigold: I'm fantastic at Dark Magic. I could do an advanced necromancy spell in my sleep— and I have been, lately.

Suddenly, the terrors that have been befalling the apartment at night for the last few weeks make sense.

The stench of sulfur that's been filling the hallway during the witching hour, but fading away by dawn...

The humming, purple light emanating from the floorboards that vanishes if you look twice...

...And how every rogue spider you put out of its misery comes back by the next night, twice as miserable.

Marigold: Sorry about that. I've never been this stressed before!

Marigold: It's just— I know so much about flowers, but I need more hands-on practice.

Marigold: Tending Light magic gardens might not be in my blood, but it's my dream.

Marigold: No one thinks I can do this, but I can.

-> I know you can. You're incredible.

She turns to look at you, and you can't help but notice that you've never been this close before.

Marigold: Thanks, \$Player. When we're together, I feel like I can do anything.

Marigold: If I didn't think it would ruin your cute face, I would zombify you so we could be friends forever and ever.

You: Thanks! I think.

-> Why not study Dark magic with your mom?

Marigold: I want to do my own thing.

Marigold: Mom chose to follow the family traditions, but I want to grow flowers.

Marigold: And maybe get a septum piercing? I'm still deciding on that one, though.

You sit up, suddenly struck by a thought.

You: Why don't you use my garden for practice?

Marigold: Oh... I don't want to hurt your feelings... But, um...

Marigold: Nothing will ever grow in that garden. Sorry, \$Player.

You: Ouch...

Marigold: No! It's not your fault! The, um, sunlight just hits that plot wrong!

She's lying, but in a sweet way.

Marigold: But...we could start a new garden. Right here, in my room!

Marigold: With your help, I know I could grow something beautiful.

She hops to her feet and then holds out her hand.

Marigold: So how about it? Partners?

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**MARIGOLD, CHAPTER 2:**

You: Ugh... It's so early, even the cafe isn't open.

You rub your bleary eyes as the sun starts to rise. Only one shop is lit up.

You: Godfrey's Florals. Hey, I know that place.

-> I'll kill some time while I wait for the cafe to open.

-> If Marigold is there, maybe I'll get a VIP tour.

As you swing the door open, a bell chimes and Marigold stumbles to the register.

Marigold: Welcome to Godfrey's. How can I help you today?

Marigold: Wait, \$Player? Good morning, Roomie! What brings you here?

Her smile perks you up better than the coffee would have.

-> I pulled an all-nighter for work and wanted caffeine.

Marigold: Don't overwork yourself, \$Player! Seriously, that's so bad for you!

Godfrey: You're one to talk, Marigold. You've been here since yesterday.

-> Nevermind me. Why's a flower shop open at 5AM?

Marigold: Some of our flowers need tending at dawn. It's my turn to volunteer.

Godfrey: Actually, Marigold insisted. Take her home soon, would you?

A croaky voice rattles out from a back room. After a moment, a man shuffles out.

Godfrey: While I appreciate Marigold's *dedication* to my garden...

Godfrey: I think the orchids are quivering in fear just looking at her.

He points to a raised flower bed in the corner. You squint and only see horrors.

It's like a mini version of a 100-year-old haunted house's backyard cemetery.

This is a place where flowers go to die. It's sending chills down your spine.

You: Oh, wow.. Um...

-> Don't tell me that's your doing, Marigold.

Marigold: The orchids and I... have had some disagreements.

Marigold: It's a work in progress.

Godfrey: It's also the only part of the shop I've entrusted solely to you, Marigold!

-> Lovely orchids. Can I buy a bouquet?

Marigold: The orchids and I haven't been seeing eye-to-eye. In case you can't tell.

Godfrey: That's an understatement to say the least.

Godfrey: I'm trying to teach you, Marigold, but you seem to kill every plant you touch!

Marigold remains unshakeable. As always, she's a beacon of calmness and joy.

Marigold: Godfrey's been very patient with me. I owe him a lot.

Marigold: Once I master Light Magic, I'll know all there is to know about magic flowers.

Marigold: Practice makes perfect. And perfect is almost good enough for Godfrey!

The old wizard grumbles, then looks at you. You feel obligated to say something.

-> So you're Marigold's boss. Nice to meet you.

Godfrey: Likewise. But I won't be her boss much longer.

Godfrey: At least, not if she doesn't start taking her lessons seriously.

-> I don't suppose you're hiring more interns?

Godfrey: Absolutely not. Marigold is the first one I've ever had.

Godfrey: And she'll be the last one, too, if she doesn't buckle down.

-> It's not my business, but you could be nicer.

You: Marigold's obviously trying her best.

You: Plus, look at her. She's a ray of sunshine. How can you be mean to that face?

Marigold: \$Player! It's just how he teaches! Really, I'm fine!

Godfrey: You're not fine at all. You need to focus harder on your training.

Godfrey: Your intern test is coming up soon, Marigold.

You: Intern test? As in, you have to pass an exam to keep your job here?

Marigold: Yes. There's a magical plant exhibition being hosted in this city.

Marigold: It's highly prestigious! Every magical botanist and florist will be there.

Marigold: We're entering our best Light Magic flowers into a contest there.

-> Why only those?

Marigold glances sideways at a vine growing up the wall nearby.

She pokes it and it turns luminescent, a pale glow dappling her cheeks.

Marigold: It's pretty, right? Every witch like me wants to grow plants like these.

Marigold: Light Magic is the gold standard. Anything else is... *forbidden*.

-> Are they hard to grow?

Marigold: Only if you're totally incompetent at wielding Light Magic!

She nods her head, breathing in slowly. Then exhales in a frustrated puff.

Marigold: ...:Like me. I'm really, really bad at it.

Marigold: It just doesn't come naturally to me! Because... well, you know.

Marigold winces and you're reminded of her secret:

She's a Dark Witch, born and raised.

The prodigal daughter of a whole line of Dark Witches, going back centuries.

Godfrey: Speaking of the plant show, I have the seeds you asked for.

He flicks his wrist in a "go away" motion.

It magically sends a small paper bag towards Marigold, who catches it eagerly.

Godfrey: Stellifoils are one of the most challenging Light Magic blooms to achieve.

Godfrey: Your ambition is admirable... but I still say you're not ready.

Marigold: That's not true! I—

Her voice trails off. It's your time to jump in.

-> Join Team Marigold and go all-in on supporting her!

You: You've got this! And I'm here to help, just in case.

Marigold: Thanks, \$Player. We'll grow a whole field of Stellifoils if we have to!

-> Try to temper Marigold's expectations, in case things go bad...

You: Hey, even if they die, at least you'll know you gave it your all.

Marigold: You're right, \$Player. It's a big risk, but I'm not going to let that scare me.

You: Good! I'm in this with you, and I'm scared enough for both of us!

-> Ask Godfrey what makes Stellifoils so hard to grow.

Godfrey: Pop quiz, Marigold. Your friend here has asked a pertinent question.

Marigold: Oh gods! An easier question would be what's easy about growing them.

Marigold: They need the soil to be just perfect.

Marigold: And the amount of Light Magic funneled into them has to be perfect too.

Marigold: There are certain incantations, which all need to be spoken—

You: Let me guess: perfectly?

Marigold: You got it. Stellifoils are very unforgiving.

You: Well, then we'll just do it perfectly. Together.

Marigold's face turns a cute shade pinker than usual. Is she flushed?

Godfrey: Hm. Nevertheless, I threw in a few extra seeds.

Godfrey: It certainly seems like you'll need backups.

He sighs and shakes his head. However, Marigold seems totally reinvigorated.

Marigold: Let's head home, \$Player.

Marigold: Now that I have the seeds, I need to get ready to plant them in our garden!

Godfrey: Yes, yes. Get a move on, Marigold.

Godfrey: The two of you will need to plan your foray into the magic forest.

-> Why do we need a forest if we have a garden?

Marigold: We won't be growing anything out there. We'll be harvesting!

She's glowing with excitement— literally. It lights up the plants around her.

-> There's a magical forest around here?

Marigold: There certainly is! If you know how to find it.

She winks. It's impossibly adorable.

Marigold: To grow any Light Magic plants, you need Light Magic Crystals.

Marigold: They store pure Light Magic and radiate it out, sort of like...

-> A UV light, but for magic?

Marigold: Exactly! They're an essential part of the natural magic ecosystem!

-> A battery? That grows plants?

Marigold: Yes, that's it! They'll steadily feed our seeds Light Magic until they run out.

-> How Godfrey radiates disappointment and onion breath?

You mutter it just too low for the grumpy wizard to hear. Marigold snorts.

Marigold: He's really nice when he warms up to you, honest!

You both pack up quickly and head home.

Despite your exhaustion, you chat happily about magical gardening the whole way.

Marigold brings you a mug of tea as you flip through one of her magical tomes.

Marigold: It's my own special blend. I even grew the plants that went into it.

-> Down it fast. You've seen how she grows orchids...

You throw it back like a shot and let the searing liquid go down fast.

But you burnt your tongue doing it.

You: Thankth, Marigold. It wath delithious!

(It actually was! Now you feel a little bad for doubting her.)

-> Drink it slowly and savor it. You'll take your chances.

You sip it hesitantly. Then deeper.

You: Mm! You should quit your day job and be my personal tea-maker.

It's herby and sweet, with a honeyed, mellow scent that warms you up inside.

Marigold: I made that blend just for you, you know.

Marigold: It's all the tastes and scents and feelings I associate with you.

Marigold: I just wanted to thank you for being a part of this whole mess with me.

Her warm gaze searches yours for an answer to a question she hasn't yet asked.

Her full lips part softly, but then go together again.

Marigold: Let's go to my room. We'll need to do some research.

When you turn her doorknob, you're prepared for a grisly sight—

But instead, the whole environment seems to be thriving!

The greenery is so dense, it feels like you're already in the magic forest.

-> What changed? Last time I was here, the plants were all dead!

Marigold: No, I was just setting up still! I promise, nothing's changed.

Marigold: Well... except, I guess my mood has been a lot better.

Marigold: I've just been feeling so at home here. With you.

Marigold: I guess the plants can tell.



-> You're full of surprises, Marigold. I can't figure you out.

Marigold: Good. I'm doing my duty as a witch then. Mysterious is sort of our thing.

She wrinkles her nose and you feel a pang in your chest.

You wonder how many people fall in love with Marigold at first sight.

It's probably everyone.

Marigold: You get half the credit from this! These plants are all from your garden plot.

You: No way! You're telling me all this came from that literal pit of death?

Marigold: Yes way! All they needed was a little TLC and a tiny bit of witchcraft.

Marigold: Like, only a smidge. I didn't even have to collect your blood or anything.

You: Wait, you— blood?

Marigold: What? Ha... I mean, Nooo, of course not! Who said anything about stealing blood?

Marigold: Or just, like, borrowing it. For a good reason. Once in a while.

Before you can respond, she magics a pile of heavy books into your arms,

Marigold: You take that stack, and I'll take the other.

Marigold: Once we've gotten through them all, we'll be ready for the forest!

She pops a single Stellifoil seed in a corked glass jar and holds it up.

Marigold: I just don't *get* plants like these. But I want to.

-> What's not to get? It's a plant.

Marigold: It's a Light Magic plant. Sure, I'm good at regular plants, but...

-> Just be more confident in yourself!

Marigold: I'm plenty confident in my Dark Magic skills.

Marigold: I just don't think they'll help me this time.

-> I want to understand too. But not just the plant.

Marigold: What, the world of witchcraft altogether?

You: Yeah. Your world. And you.

Marigold's eyes flicker like a warm fire as they meet yours.

Marigold: Casting Light Magic isn't anything like what I'm used to.

Marigold: Dark Magic is easy. It feels... grounded. It feels strong.

Marigold: When it flows through me, I feel like a blacksmith shaping metal.

Marigold: But Light Magic is so delicate.

Marigold: Like I'm trying to thread a needle but I'm wearing boxing gloves.

-> So thread it another way.

You: If it's hard, find a workaround that works for you. Like, get a bigger needle.

You: Who cares if it's not the right way? If it works for you, that's all that matters.

-> Just don't give up.

You: They say the first step at being awesome at something is sucking at something.

You: What you're feeling right now is proof you're on the right track.

Marigold: I kind of love that thought. Thanks, \$Player.

Marigold: We'd better get back to it. Those books won't read themselves!

You read and read until your eyes are heavy and the words melt off the page.

The last sight you take in is Marigold poring through another old, musty tome.

She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear, and it guarantees you sweet dreams.

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### MARIGOLD, CHAPTER 3:

It's a cheery just-afternoon and the apartment smells like heaven.

The scent of rich maple syrup and chamomile draws you to the kitchen.

Marigold: Perfect timing! I could use an assistant.

Marigold is stirring batter furiously. The kitchen is a wreck, but in a fun way.

-> Tell her I'm in! At least, if pancakes are involved.

You: You found my one weakness: breakfast food. Let's do this.

(And your other weakness: Marigold being so goddamn cute...)

She hands you a whisk and puts you to work stirring eggs.

-> Brush the flour off her cheek.

You: Hold still a sec. I just have to do something.

Marigold: \$Player? What are you doing...?

You brush the pad of your thumb against her soft cheek, and she smiles shyly.

Marigold: I thought you were going to kiss me for a second!

Marigold: That's so ridiculous, right? I must be sleep-deprived.

You're stunned. What if you had? Was that your chance?

-> Start cleaning up. She hates that part.

Say no more. I'll handle the cleaning. You just keep doing what you're doing.

Marigold: Gods, you're the best. I could kiss you.

She pauses, like she's trying to reel back the words she's just said.

Marigold: But— I won't. Of course. We're friends. And it'd be...weird?

Before you can react, she spins around and reaches for a mug.

Marigold: I made tea. Of course.

You: What kind this time?

Marigold: Light Magic tisane. It's brewed from plants at Godfrey's Florals.

-> Will it give me superpowers?

Marigold: Only the power of being very warm and cozy.

Marigold: This is my first time using Light Magic flowers for this.

You: You normally drink Dark Magic tea? That must be a wild experience.

Marigold: Actually, no. It's just regular tea too.

Marigold: All it does is create a different flavor. Both are lovely.

Marigold: One's a little spicier, the other a little sweeter.

You: Sounds like Light Magic and Dark Magic flowers aren't so different in the end.

-> Will I turn into a skeleton monster?

Marigold: No! Even if I used Dark Magic plants, all that would change is the flavor.

You: So then... What's so different about those two types of magic anyways?

Marigold starts to say something, but pauses, smiling.

Marigold: Wow. Are you sure you're not from a wizarding family?

Marigold: Sometimes, you say things that just...

She makes an explosion sound and mimes her head coming apart.

-> You're just too close to the problem.

Marigold: Maybe I need a distraction or two.

-> I'm bluffing to try and impress you.

Marigold: Then it's working.

Her playful look unleashes a storm of butterflies in your stomach.

She sets a plate of thick, buttery pancakes with crispy edges in front of you.

Marigold: Eat up! We'll need our strength to brave the forest today.

Marigold: We can't leave until our pockets are full of Light Crystals.

(Background Art: Magical Forest)

Marigold: Here we are! Home sweet home.

Marigold: What do you think? Do you love it?

The forest is eerie and dark, more like a cursed bog than a fairytale grove.

The stench of rot and petrichor hang in the fog rolling across your feet.

-> I love it. Let's never leave.

Her eyes light up. She wiggles with excitement.

Marigold: I knew you'd understand! It's so beautiful out here!

-> What do you mean by "home"?

Marigold: My mom lives nearby. She's probably around here somewhere.

Marigold: I grew up studying this place.

Marigold: My grandma was actually a caretaker for the forest and its Dark Magic.

Marigold: She was a Dark Witch by nature, like me.

Marigold: But she knew every plant here like they were old friends.

Marigold: Even the Light Magic ones would grow for her.

-> Your grandma sounds like a badass.

Marigold: She was! She loved it here, more than anyone.

-> Is she still around?

Marigold: No. But I like to think that this place keeps her legacy alive.

Marigold: This is the Dark Magic section of the forest.

Marigold: In case the vibe of the place didn't make it clear.

-> What are the other regions?

Marigold: Well, it's just Light and Dark.

Marigold: But every other element exists within both.

-> Is this where you grew up?

Marigold: More or less. I spent a lot of time here in the Dark Magic region.

Marigold: The Light Magic region... not so much.

Marigold: The forest is full of primal magic. Light, Dark, Fire, Water... maybe more.

Marigold: They all thrive here in perfect balance.

Marigold: Drawing too much on any one type of Magic can send its opposite out of control.

Marigold: The responsibility is on witches like me to keep everything in check.

The two of you wander down a worn-in path through the branches.

There's a ferocious hissing sound and a flower snaps at you!

Marigold: Hey! Naughty thing. That's my friend \$Player. Be nice!

Marigold coos and pets it until it simmers down.

Marigold: Sorry. They're not evil! Just a little.. overwhelmed?

Marigold: Nobody but Dark Witches tend to come to this part of the forest.

-> What about the Light part of the forest?

Marigold: Oh, everyone who's anyone goes there. Including us, right now!

-> Why not? It seems like these plants are plenty useful.

Marigold: No magical florist deals in Dark Magic plants. They look down on them.

Marigold: It would be like having a flower shop that only sells weeds.

Marigold parts a thick wall of brambles and there it is:

The Light Magic section of the forest.

It's gorgeous. Pristine and maintained like a nature preserve.

Everything about it seems clean and meticulous. The air is even sweeter.

Marigold: Wow... Amazing! I— I had no idea it was like this!

Marigold: It's beautiful here. I'd love to explore it. Maybe we could take a break?

-> Why do you sound surprised?

Marigold: It's my first time visiting. I knew it would be different, but I'm amazed!

She looks perfectly at home here. It's like a paradise designed just for her.

-> Then let's do it! I want what you want.

You: I mean, we're not in a hurry or anything as long we get the Light Crystals.

You: Let's take in the scenery! You clearly want to.

Marigold does a little happy dance and your heart melts.

Marigold: I knew you were the perfect person to partner up with, \$Player!

The two of you find a cool, starlit patch of soft grass and settle down into it.

A moonbeam breaks through the trees and dapples the landscape.

You: The real question is if you brought snacks.

Marigold: How could I not?

She reaches into pockets you didn't know she had and pulls out a small feast!

The crackers, jams, hard cheeses, and fresh herbs are wonderful. So is Marigold.

It almost makes the pain of your soulless office job melt away. Almost.

After you eat, Marigold sighs happily and leans her head on your shoulder.

Marigold: Honestly, I could stay right here, in this moment, forever...

You: But we have a job to do. I know. Let's get going.

As you walk closer, the glowing lights in the crystalline pond become defined.

Marigold: Oh. The Light Crystals are in there— under the water. How pretty!

Marigold: I hope you brought a bathing suit.

-> You know I didn't.

Marigold: Then I hope you're prepared to get wet. This is going to be so fun!

-> Is skinny-dipping an option?

Marigold: \$Player! I— I could never! Not with—

You: Kidding, kidding...

Marigold laughs sheepishly, her cheeks bright red. You snicker.

-> Can't we solve this with magic?

Marigold: Good point. There's no harm in trying, right?

She closes her eyes a moment, pushing and pulling energy between her fingertips.

She bites her lip. There's a crunching sound as the earth spits something out.

Marigold: Oh. I was trying to call upon something a little less...undead? That could swim?

A very undead rat dejectedly runs off into the bushes, tittering angrily.

You: Aw, Marigold. You hurt his feelings!

You steel yourself and step up to your calves into the fountain's pond.

Marigold isn't far behind. With every stride, glimmering ripples encircle her.

You: Wuh-oh!

Your foot catches a slick rock and you start to fall!

Marigold: I've got you!

A warm body and the scent of mulled cider envelops you.

You open your eyes and realize you're wrapped in Marigold's arms.

Your lips are only a whisper apart.

-> Lean in closer...

You can feel her breath between you, quickening pace as you draw nearer.



Marigold's embrace tightens. She closes the gap, her eyes falling closed.

You: Marigold, would it be totally crazy if I ki—

-> Thank her for saving you (again.)

You: You know, this is the second time you've stopped me from falling.

Marigold: Then why do I always feel like you're the one who's looking out for me?

There's a splash. You're not alone!

You both swivel, looking for the source, and spot another magic-user wading in.

Wizard: Well howdy, folks! Reckon you're out here collecting Light Crystals too?

Marigold: Yes! That's what we're doing. Just collecting Crystals!

Marigold nudges you hard. Is she embarrassed to have been seen holding you?

-> Yep. Light Crystals. Can't get enough of 'em.

Wizard: Me either! Ain't it terrible?

-> You're not here to stop us, right?

Wizard: Me? Of course not. I'm here to get some for myself. Or at least try.

-> That wasn't what it looked like, for the record.

Wizard: Not sure what you mean. I couldn't see a thing with this pond as dim as it is.

He leans down and plucks a palm-sized chunk of crystal from the mud.

Wizard: Nowadays, you're lucky to find any full crystals. Look! These are just shards.

Wizard: Seems like there's less and less every time I visit. What a shame.

Wizard: It used to be that you could spot the glow of this pond from a half-mile away.

Marigold: You think the forest is running out of Light Magic?

->Is that even possible, Marigold?

-> What would happen if it totally ran out?

A visible chill runs through Marigold. She stops cold and gazes into the trees.

Marigold: Grab as many shards as you can carry, \$Player, but do it fast.

Marigold: We need to go home. Now.