

The Power of Showing Up

By

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Arthur Murphy stands at the sink, his arthritic hands rinsing his breakfast dishes. Breakfast. If you can call it that. His toast was hard and dry, his eggs too runny. Even his coffee tasted bitter today. He pauses, glancing out the window. Nothing is the same without her. She used to tease him and call him a grumpy, old bear. Well, today he is grumpier than ever. Although it is only morning, he can't wait for night to fall and for the day to be over. As he sets his dishes on the counter, he can't help but peek over his shoulder at the calendar. The date taunts him. During this past year, without Margie, the calendar has become his enemy. He turns and glares at it, his arms folded across his chest as he leans against the sink.

The phone rings, interrupting his standoff with the calendar. He scoffs and ignores it. He doesn't want to talk to anyone. It's probably a telemarketer anyway. Shuffling over to the table, he sits to do his crossword puzzle. Each clue proves impossible to solve. His sweater is too itchy. He can't focus. He takes off his sweater and flings it on the chair next to him. Looking around the table, the empty chairs amplify the loneliness of their bungalow - his bungalow. The phone rings again. He gives in, knowing they'll just keep calling - damn telemarketers - and looks at the caller ID. It's his daughter. His mood softens a little as he looks at her name on the screen, but he quickly turns the phone off, leaving her call unanswered.

He returns to his wallowing. Feeling guilty, he picks up his phone wondering if he should call Jane back, but decides against it. He's too surly, too angry, too broken. He can't be

the father she needs him to be today. He knows she's hurting, too. He knows he should comfort her, but he just can't. Realizing this only makes him more miserable. He was always the one to be depended on. The one who fixed things and came to the rescue. What has he become? Who is he without Margie?

Uncomfortable with the intensity of his emotions, he leans on the table. He rests his head in his hands and tries to figure out what to do. What can distract him and get him through the day? He could clean out the gutters, but Jane will scold him for climbing up on the ladder. Maybe he'll vacuum out his car, even though he just did that last week. He knows his buddies from the VFW Post are meeting up for their weekly coffee down at the diner right now. He usually goes, but couldn't muster up the courage today. He couldn't bring himself to face their sympathy, or worse, their ignorance if they didn't realize it was the anniversary of Margie's death. He couldn't bear it if she were forgotten.

Deciding that the crossword is a lost cause, he flings his pencil across the table. His knees and back protest as he stands and makes his way to the garage to get the shop vac. He's about to open the garage door when he's interrupted by the doorbell. He pauses and looks in the direction of the front door. He mutters to himself and turns back toward the garage door. Before his hand reaches the knob, loud knocking commences on the front door. Realizing that it's probably Jane, he changes course. He knows she gets worried when he doesn't answer his phone.

Opening the door, he is shocked to find Herman standing there instead.

"You weren't at coffee this morning," Herman announces.

The two men stand looking at one another. He doesn't know why, but Arthur feels like a kid who's in trouble. Sheepishly, he turns away from the door.

Herman lets himself in. They stand awkwardly in the foyer. Herman sets down a canvas tote that had been slung over his shoulder.

"What's in the bag?" Arthur diverts the attention off of himself.

"Supplies."

"Supplies? For what?"

"Come on. Did you really think I'd forget what today was?"

Arthur's face falls. "You remembered?" he asks with a mixture of surprise and relief.

Herman's voice is soft, "Of course I remembered." He places his hand on Arthur's shoulder. "I'll never forget what you did for me on the anniversary of Shirley's passing, Arthur. Margie deserves the same kind of tribute. The fellas packed up their lawn chairs and thermoses and are waiting for us at the cemetery. Jane is there, too."

Arthur's shoulders drop, and the anguish he's been carrying around about the day falls to the floor. His eyes mist up. Regaining his composure, he deflects to the bag again.

"You still didn't tell me what's in the bag."

Herman peeks inside and gives Arthur a knowing grin. “Just some of Margie’s favorites: yellow roses, a KC and the Sunshine Band CD, and the fixings for Brandy Old Fashioneds.” Arthur is at a loss for words. He shouldn’t be. He and Herman go back a long way. They’ve been through a lot together. But, still - Arthur doesn’t know what to say. He blurts, “Extra cherries?”, as he wipes his eyes.

“Just the way Margie would order it. If we’re going to make a toast to her, we’ve got to do it right.” He gives Arthur a wink.

Arthur inhales deeply, letting the unexpected plan for the day sink in. “Let me grab my sweater.” He enters the kitchen and retrieves his sweater. As he turns, he passes the calendar once more. He pauses. His eyes study the stark numbers - the ones that had evoked dread in him just minutes before. They don’t seem as ominous anymore.

From where he is standing, he can see Herman reach down to retrieve the tote bag.

“I guess I’ll be alright, Margie. I’m not alone afterall,” he whispers.

He joins his friend in the foyer and, together, they head out the door.