

*Ghost of John MacMurphey*

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The priest waved his hands towards the congregation asking if anyone wanted to speak. The room was small and there was only a couple dozen mourners, but as usual they all refused the invitation. The priest nodded his head in understanding and stepped back towards the microphone.

“It is important for us all to remember John as a man, a friend, a husband, a father.” He paused as he watched the family and friends nod their heads. “He will be missed, and it is our memory of his greatness and his contributions to the glory of God that will live on. They will live on right beside him in the kingdom of heaven.”

The priest stepped back and motioned for the Pall Bearers to take the casket. The rest of the ceremony was typical. John’s widow would describe it for years to come as a respectful ceremony. His kids, both in their thirties, would dream of that day for the rest of their lives. They would dread sleep at times to avoid losing one of the most important people in their lives in consecutive nights. Maybe because he was the first close person in their lives to go. And his grandkids would barely remember the man from memory. A few specific experiences would stick, but mostly they would learn of him through others.

Less than six months after his passing the first of his passages would find its way back to his family. No one had considered him a well-spoken man. He had spent much of his life working in insurance as an accounts receivable rep. He was expected to calculate the money and compare it to the receipts. But his first contribution to the world sans his existence was a simple thought. “Assume the best in people. What time will you be back?”

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Who will you be with? Or call me when you get there. Are ways of me saying I love you, not I want to control you.”

It was a post he had made in the early years of his marriage to Cynthia. They had gone to counseling to try and reconcile a growing animosity they had towards each other. The session was lost to time and space. But the essence of what was learned lived on.

“Mom, did you see what was posted in the daily inspiration today?” Kirk had called his mom just minutes after noticing the post on his daily board was attributed to John MacMurphey.

“No, I don’t think I am subscribed to that group.” Cynthia was always trying to explain to her son that she didn’t really understand technology and that if he wanted her to see something it was going to have to be presented right in front of her.

“Oh mom. Here, let me send it to you.” His voice quickly faded over the line as he pulled the phone away from his face to take a screen shot and send it over via text. “There. Check your texts mom.”

“Ok Kirk.” She hung up the phone to do as he asked.

As Kirk’s phone gave him the ever-familiar bleeps and bleeps of an ended call he dropped his head and planted his palm flat against his forehead. He chuckled to himself amused by his mother’s belief that her phone could only do one thing at a time.

Cynthia, miles away sat at her kitchen table and let a swell of pride and longing well up in her as she read and re-read the quote from her late husband. She shed a few tears, but her memories of how much her husband

loved her kept the smile on her face. She looked up at the ceiling and whispered, "Thank you, John."

Cynthia called her son back and thanked him as well. "Where did you find this again?"

Kirk had already let the excitement of his father's quote pass him by. "Oh, mom. It is a group that posts daily inspirational quotes. I think they have some kind of web scraper that searches all its members accounts, friends, wish lists, books read, movies watched, and whatever else is tied to our presence nowadays. Anyway it posts a quote or two each day to the group. I thought it was neat it chose a quote from dad."

"But Kirk. How did they find this? Dad is gone and this quote must be thirty years old."

"But I'm still friends with dad. On facelogic, tubestreams, fumble, woofier. I'm pretty sure we're still friends everywhere."

Cynthia smiled at the idea. She had spent a lifetime trying to instill religion into that boy and it was the stupid apps on his phone that told him he had an everlasting relationship with his father. At least religion found its way to him one way or another.

This was the first of many quotes that Kirk would find of his dads. He would eventually rummage through his father's old social media posts, his texts from his last phone, his comments on videos. And he put together a collection of quotes. Things to uplift himself.

"Mom, I had something made for you." Kirk walked into his mother's house knocking on the door as he entered.

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“Kirk! Hi, how are you doing my little man.” She was not going to let on that it was her anniversary to his father. It had been five years since John passed and their forty-fifth wedding anniversary just felt like an odd thing to bring up.

Kirk, nodded at the little man comment, he was used to the nickname even if it felt like it should be emasculating. “I’m good. Doug is doing well in rehab and might come home soon.” He meant the news of his son who recently attempted to take his own life as uplifting, but just the mention seemed to bring things down.

In an attempt to lighten the mood he pulled a wrapped present from behind his back and handed it to his mother. “I know today is supposed to be your forty fifth.”

Cynthia took the present from her son and patted him on the cheek. “It is my forty fifth. Your father is still with me.” She of course meant it symbolically, but when she opened the present, she had a wave of energy flow through her.

“I had Dad’s quotes printed up for you. They mostly are about the two of you and I thought it was a nice way to commemorate you two.”

Cynthia shook a bit as she hugged her son. She appreciated the thoughtfulness. But more than anything else she appreciated the ghost of her husband speaking through her son. It was as he said, the perfect way to commemorate their marriage.

Nearly a decade later Kirk’s sister, Gwen was reaching out to her brother. Her daughter was in her early teens and had cut marks up and down her arms. She was going through a few tough years trying to find herself.



Feeling like she had no options left, afraid to go to sleep and wake up without a daughter she texted her brother hoping and praying for help.

GWEN – I don't know what to do. I think it is about a boy, but she won't tell me.

KIRK – Is it bad? What do you think she is doing?

GWEN – Like I said. She has cuts all over her arms. I think some on her legs. And a few are deep. Deep enough that I thought about taking her to get stitches.

KIRK – You could. Might keep things from scarring. Might keep her from having repercussions later in life.

GWEN – You know I have no insurance. And with my record, they may decide I'm unfit. But taking her away from me is better than her taking herself.

KIRK – I can send over Doug. He had a tough time when he was thirteen. Maybe he can talk to her? I mean they are cousins, it is family, right?

GWEN – Please do. She doesn't want to talk to me and I'm just afraid.

Within an hour Doug arrived at his aunt's house. When Gwen answered the door to the sight of her tall burly nephew, she almost lost her breath. It was amazing that the little boy that she watched her brother raise had become such an intimidating man. His hair was in long black strings covering his round and full face littered with small tattoos. He took up most of the door frame as he came through. Gwen flung herself towards the chest

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of her nephew, her face cooled on his leather jacket, soaking the patches with her tears.

The voice that came out of him was soft and serious. "Aunt Gwen. I think it will be ok. Just let me talk to Ruby."

Gwen sat back on her couch clutching her phone and watching Doug walk into her daughter's room.

Ruby was surprisingly serene. She was reading a book propped up in the corner of her room with a pillow at her back. Doug always felt oddly at home at his cousin's house. She lived in a trailer park where there were people all around. He often felt that his upbringing in the uppity neighborhood and the weekends at the country club just weren't what he was meant to do.

"They sent me to talk to you." He let out the words softly as he lowered himself to her floor.

"I know. Mom is worried." She put her book down but refused to look up at her cousin.

"It's the cutting Roob. She thinks you're suicidal. She thinks you're going to end up in the hospital like I did. Or worse." Doug was very careful with his words. He watched Ruby's face as he spoke to see if anything triggered any emotions. He thought the girl was looking for attention, not trying to run away, but he couldn't be sure.

"You are right. I am not trying to kill myself." She tilted her head to the side allowing her blond braided bangs to dangle in the air. "I wouldn't say I'm trying to live either though."

Doug took a deep breath at those words. "Can I see the cuts?"

She held out her arms as she wiggled her butt across her bed to get within reach of her cousin. The cuts were mostly scratches that brought up a bright redness compared to her overly pale skin.

Doug pointed to her inner bicep. "That one is damn deep Roob. I want to believe you, but that feels like you are pushing the envelope too far."

"Come on Doug. That is no where near an artery. It might be gruesome, but I'm not bleeding out from that."

"It's going to get infected!"

"Yes, and that is what I am doing. Suicide by infection. Doug, I am not suicidal." She laughed at his ridiculous suggestion. "But I am sad." She paused to take a deep breath. "I don't understand what we are doing here. I don't get why I am alive just to hurt all the time. My friends suck. My boyfriend sucks. My life..." She gestured to the room, "Sucks!"

Doug looked at her with a new understanding. "It'll get better."

"No it won't. It is hopeless. I am destined to be a nothing loser living in trash forever."

Doug pulled out his phone and flipped through his bookmarks. "I went through something similar. I can't say it was the same, but I felt like I was living just to live. I felt like I was being forced into a life I didn't want." He caught Ruby rolling her eyes. "I am going to send you something. When I took all those pills and ended woke up in that rehab clinic, I had nothing to do but go to therapy and look through whatever stuff my dad sent me. And my dad had sent me a bunch of links to random religious blogs. But in them was a link to an old blog that PopPop used to keep." He finally found the bookmark and texted it to Ruby.

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“PopPop had a blog?” The idea that her grandfather who was considered a quiet and dorky man would have written to the masses made her giggle a bit.

“I don’t remember much of PopPop. I was eleven when he passed. You were what? Five or six? I’m sure you don’t really remember him, but when I found this blog, I felt like I actually met the man. There are a lot of thoughts and feelings in those pages that I think you will be able to use.” He stood up and leaned over to hug his cousin. “I will try and calm your mom down. And I will let her know that you aren’t doing anything here that is permanent, other than some wicked scars.” He winked at Ruby as he walked back out her door.

Ruby looked at her phone and saw the link that Doug had sent her. There was a note that told her to look at her birthdate.

She pulled up what felt like an ancient blog site where there were no ads, no pictures, just black text on white backgrounds. She scrolled down through the linkable dates realizing that there were decades of journaling housed before her. She found the date she was born and clicked on the link.

My second grandchild was born today. Seeing life and all the potential and everything that gets to be learned makes me happy. It sounds strange because I am always writing about how depression takes over. But, for one day I think I am happy. I hope it drags into the next day and the next and the next.

Yesterday I asked a question. Why even try? I saw a homeless man on the street begging for change to eat. But what is the point. It will only get

him far enough to have to do it again. And I realized that I am in the same boat. I have it better off. I have a wife and two kids, and a couple of grandkids now, but I am just fighting to get through the day so I can face tomorrow. What the point?

I think today is the point. There are still things in life that bring joy. There are still times in life where I can be surprised and want to contribute to another person, another life.

Yesterday I thought that my life was a waste and wasn't worth it anymore. Today I think my granddaughter has given me purpose. My granddaughter has saved my life today. Maybe someday I can return the favor.

Ruby leaned back in her bed thinking of her grandfather, her PopPop. She didn't know him. But suddenly she wanted to. She was happy at the moment that he had been her grandfather. She smiled at her ceiling and whispered, "Thank you PopPop. Thank you for returning the favor."

Ruby and Gwen eventually made their situations better. There was a light at the end of the tunnel, they just couldn't see it when they were in the middle of the darkness. Doug and Ruby remained close. The strange connection they both felt to their grandfather created a bond between them that lasted their entire lives.

When Cynthia passed away a few years later the priest asked what they wanted to do for a ceremony. Kirk could only think of his father's funeral where the words meant nothing to him. No one would speak up and talk of the man. It made him sick to his stomach because of how much he loved his

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father. But he also knew that he would not be in a place to get any words out this time around either. Gwen tried to ask what else they could do, but she had just lost her mother, life wasn't something she could understand at the moment.

They agreed to the traditional funeral service. And it was typical. Something they would all say for years to come was a respectful service. But when the priest stood at the microphone and asked if anyone wanted to say anything of the deceased Doug and Ruby stood.

They approached the altar where the priest stood in his ornate white robe. They crossed under the hanging image of Jesus reminding them that their lives are worth living. As the priest motioned for them to go to the microphone, they shook their heads. Their tears were too much to allow them to speak. Instead they handed the priest two books, both with a page tagged with tape.

The first book was the book Kirk had made for his mother with John's quotes about his life and wife. The second was the book Doug and Ruby had bound that contained all the blog entries of their grandfather. The words that helped them through their hardest times. They returned to their seats and listened to the words of their grandfather to once again help them through some of their hardest moments even as a ghost.