

Call Returns

In the movies as in so many ancient stories, we think about the call coming as a blinding flash of light or a thundering command. Yet sometimes it's as soft as the purr of a ringing phone.

The call to me was indirect, not from my brother but from my mother-in-law Marge. She'd been the first to get it, hearing the call as the ringing of her doorbell.

One morning in 1997, she and her husband were cleaning out a large closet in their basement. She'd phoned the Haven of Rest, a local charity, to pick up their furniture donations. A crew came out, loaded up their truck, and drove off.

One of the men stayed behind, turned back, marched up to her front porch, and rang the bell. "I'm Call" was all he said when she opened the door.

His tone was matter-of-fact. No malice, but also no joy. No embarrassed getting around to the point. No apology. And also no pleading. This man was simply stating a fact.

"Good grief, Call," Marge said. "You know Rebecca's been looking all over for you. Come on in, and we're going to get her on the phone." She tried to keep the emotion out of her voice. If somehow she upset him, maybe he'd turn around and disappear again.

"You know, it's been twenty years," she said cautiously.

"Yes, I do know that," he replied. Then came the hint of a chuckle, and his round face lit up with a smile. "So, don't you think it's about time?"

Why had he walked in on Marge? I was the one who'd been looking desperately for him—for years. It wasn't that she didn't care. But I was his sister, and everyone in my immediate and extended family knew that I had—with or without their blessing—made finding him my mission, to the point of obsession.

Maybe the answer is that he was finally ready to be found. And there was Marge. She was living near Greenville, South Carolina, our hometown. My husband Jim and I were with our teenage daughters Kim and Lauren over 130 miles away in suburban Atlanta. One day all those years ago, it had been in Greenville where Call walked off, never to be seen or heard from by anyone we knew—until two decades later when he announced himself to Marge.

Her explanation was "I think maybe there was a plan Upstairs for that."

She phoned me and put him on.

Me, I screamed. I bawled. But my screams were yelps of pure joy.