

THE FULL STORY

CHAPTER II

Ask for Pity



CHAPTER TWO: ASK FOR PITY

1961: Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.

2024: Ask not for forgiveness. Ask for pity.

There was no dignified confrontation or beautifully composed confession—only me, a telephone, two people I cared about, and the horrifying realization that honesty might cost me both relationships. The question was no longer whether the truth would emerge. It was whether anything could survive once it did.

January 20, 2024. The consequences of what I had been doing finally arrived, and they did so with all the subtlety of a grand piano falling from a sixth-story window. Charles had discovered the affair. I was at work when his message came through, and I remember the immediate physical sensation of reading it. My stomach dropped. Then the rest of my body seemed determined to follow.

There are moments when fear feels less like an emotion and more like an internal mechanical failure. Every organ appears to abandon its assigned position, the blood drains from your face, and your mind begins calculating a thousand possible consequences while remaining utterly incapable of producing a coherent thought.

This was one of those moments. The secret I had carefully maintained was no longer a secret. And suddenly, the excitement of the preceding months seemed extraordinarily far away. I stepped away from work to call Charles. It was not a conversation I could reasonably have conducted while continuing with my responsibilities. Nor was it one that could be postponed without making an already terrible situation considerably worse. He had questions. Naturally, he had questions. *Who was this person? What had happened? How long had it been going on? Why had I done it?*

No answer could make the betrayal disappear. Charles had trusted me for nearly six years, continued showing up through physical suffering, medical procedures, and frightening uncertainty, and I had wounded him. Whatever explanation I offered, that fact remained.

There is no particularly elegant way to describe that realization. I had fucked up. Spectacularly. And unlike the smaller mistakes we make throughout our lives, this was not something that could be corrected with an apology and a promise to pay closer attention next time. I had damaged something fundamental. Trust.

I didn't know how to repair it. I barely knew how to remain composed long enough to have the conversation. I remember feeling so overwhelmed by shame that I wanted to disappear from everyone's life entirely. Not because disappearing would have solved anything, but because the prospect of confronting what I had done felt almost unbearable. Yet there was another person who needed to know what had happened. Michael. And this was where my fear became particularly complicated.

Until that point, our arrangement had existed within the circumstances I had presented to him. Now the truth had emerged, and I had to acknowledge that I had not been entirely forthcoming about my relationship. I had placed him in a situation whose full implications he had not understood. Whatever feelings I was developing for him, that was unfair.

So, at approximately 6:30 that evening, I sent an apology. A spectacularly long, emotionally disorganized apology. A sprawling collection of explanations, regret, self-reproach, and increasingly desperate attempts to communicate that I had never intended to hurt him. It was less a carefully composed message than the literary equivalent of someone emptying every drawer in a burning house.

I explained what had happened. I acknowledged my selfishness. I admitted that the relationship I had been conducting was not permissible under the arrangement Charles and I had previously maintained. And I told Michael something that, looking back, reveals just how emotionally invested I had already become. I liked him. A great deal. More than I had anticipated. Possibly more than was good for me. I also acknowledged something he had said when I initially disclosed the situation.

"Way to bury the lede." An economical assessment, really. Not exactly the sentence one hopes to hear while attempting to explain an extraordinarily uncomfortable personal catastrophe, but not entirely undeserved.

I apologized repeatedly. I told him that if he wanted to end our involvement, I would understand. I told him I didn't want to hurt him or drag him into the consequences of my decisions. And then I waited. He did not respond that evening.

Which, naturally, gave my imagination ample opportunity to begin conducting its own private tribunal. By the following morning, I had convinced myself that I might never hear from him again. Every passing hour seemed to reinforce that possibility.

I had already devastated Charles. Now I was confronting the possibility that I had also destroyed whatever was developing between Michael and me. And then, on January 21, his name appeared on my phone. Michael.

Those same five letters that had previously caused such an extraordinary rush of excitement now produced an entirely different sensation. Dread. I could see the beginning of the message in the notification preview.

"Sorry I did not respond until now..."

My heart practically imploded. There it was. The beginning of the goodbye, surely. I could already imagine the remainder. A polite acknowledgment of my honesty, perhaps an expression of disappointment, followed by some variation of wishing me well. I didn't particularly want to open it. But eventually, I did. And what I read was not what I had expected.

"You have absolutely nothing to worry about and I look forward to seeing you later tonight."

I stared at the words. *What?* I read them again. What the actual fuck?

Where was the condemnation? The rejection? The polite dismissal? The devastating conclusion I had spent the previous several hours rehearsing in my mind? Instead, he explained that he had been occupied with plans and suggested we meet after he finished seeing a friend. He was still willing to see me. He wanted to see me. And I had absolutely no idea what to do with that information.

Relief arrived so violently that it was almost indistinguishable from the anxiety preceding it. I felt as though lightning could strike me where I stood and I might have requested a second bolt, purely to ensure the experience was complete.

We coordinated for later that evening. Around nine o'clock, I made my way over. I was nervous. Of course I was nervous. I had spent the previous day convinced that my entire life was about to collapse, and here I was preparing to walk into the home of someone who had responded to my confession with reassurance rather than rejection.

We talked. We spent the night together. And the following morning, life continued, including a physical therapy appointment waiting patiently to remind me that the rest of the world had not suspended operations for my personal catastrophe.

Somehow, things were okay. Or at least they appeared to be. Charles and I had begun confronting the consequences of my infidelity, and our relationship was entering a new, difficult period of honesty and renegotiation. Michael, meanwhile, remained present. And I found myself increasingly grateful for that presence.

Our encounters became more comfortable. We had already managed the occasional indulgence of seeing each other twice in one day, and overnight visits were becoming a more realistic possibility rather than a fantasy requiring extraordinary logistical creativity. Charles and I had discussed opening the relationship, and the arrangement that emerged permitted me to continue seeing Michael under agreed conditions. He was the exception. The one person I could spend the night with. A private, shiny, golden fucking hall pass.

Apparently, even my relationship agreements were becoming unnecessarily theatrical. And perhaps because the immediate threat of losing Michael had passed, I allowed myself to become comfortable again. Too comfortable, perhaps. The affectionate messages continued.

I told him how much I enjoyed sleeping beside him. How difficult leaving could feel. How much I loved having his arms around me. After an overnight together on January 28, I wrote the following morning:

"Every time I leave you I wish we didn't have to."

He responded warmly, remembering how comfortable the bed had been. I told him that being wrapped in his arms felt like heaven and that I could happily remain there for days. Then, later that evening, I jokingly apologized for being something of a human space heater. It was an innocuous observation. A little affectionate banter. Nothing particularly extraordinary. At 11:41 that night, Michael responded.

He began by assuring me that the warmth had probably been a combination of our body heat, the blankets, the heating system, and the unseasonably mild weather. Then the conversation changed. He explained that he had wanted to discuss some concerns during our previous evening together but hadn't found the opportunity. What followed was the first explicit articulation of the boundaries that would come to define much of our subsequent relationship.

He wrote:

1. I don't like when you come over and you're drunk. I would prefer to interact with sober you (well, alcohol at least 🤔). If we have plans for you to come over, please either go easy on the drinks beforehand or don't drink. If you do drink, let's just plan to reschedule.
2. Is your husband truly ok with this? From comments you've made, I don't get the sense that he is, and I reeeally don't want to be involved in any drama whatsoever. Long story there.

3. I appreciate the affectionate words and the romantic stuff, but it makes me very uncomfortable. Cuddling in bed and holding you is one thing but the rest (though nice) concerns me. I want to be ABSOLUTELY sure you know I am not available for anything more than friends with benefits. The rest of it gives me the impression you want or are seeking more than that, and I cannot offer that. We can definitely talk about that part.

And there it was. The ceiling. A boundary drawn in writing, accompanied by the rather peculiar assortment of qualifiers that would become increasingly familiar to me. *Well, alcohol at least. Though nice. Reeceally.*

Apparently, the English language had discovered that a sufficiently enthusiastic adverb could soften practically anything. But the words themselves were serious. He was uncomfortable with the romantic nature of my messages. He wanted clarity regarding Charles's consent. He did not want me arriving intoxicated. And he wanted to make absolutely certain that I understood he was offering friendship with physical intimacy, not a romantic partnership.

Those were legitimate boundaries. I want to be clear about that. He was entitled to establish them, and I was responsible for deciding whether I could participate in the relationship under those conditions. But I also remember how abruptly the message changed my emotional state. Only hours earlier, we had been reminiscing about the warmth of sleeping together. Now I was reading a carefully articulated statement about the limits of our connection.

I felt embarrassed. Ashamed, even. As though I had mistaken something beautiful for something it was not. As though I had been handed something precious, allowed to admire it, and then reminded that I had misunderstood the conditions under which I was permitted to hold it. I had not asked him to leave his life behind and build an elaborate romantic future with me. I had told him I enjoyed being held. But his discomfort was real, and I did not want to disregard it. The distinction mattered to him. So, it had to matter to me. I took some time before responding.

On January 30, I told him I would appreciate discussing everything in person and clearing the air. He agreed.

For several days, there was little communication. I remained uneasy, privately replaying what he had written. Then, on February 3, he reached out. He wanted to know whether I was available the following evening. I answered with a single word.

"Yes."

No affectionate elaboration. No enthusiastic declaration. Just yes. The following day, he explained that he was watching the Grammy Awards with friends and would need to postpone.

I wasn't particularly upset. I was still nursing the embarrassment of January 29, and a little distance was not unwelcome. He left the opportunity open for another evening. Then, on February 6, he asked whether my schedule still permitted Sunday and Monday availability. More interestingly, he asked whether I could now stay over on other nights, given that Charles and I had opened our relationship.

We discussed the practical limitations of my early working hours and eventually settled on Sunday. An overnight. Once again, the relationship continued. And once again, I found myself

attempting to reconcile the warmth of his invitations with the limitations he had established. On February 11, I went over.

The following morning, I had a dental appointment. I was attempting to avoid another crown, having apparently decided that the dental profession had already received enough of my money. Fortunately, the procedure required only a filling. He checked in afterward to ask how it had gone. A small gesture. Kind. Thoughtful. And another example of the ordinary attentiveness that made me appreciate him.

Later that month, he reached out again. It was February 21, and he was preparing for the end of his working week. He told me about a little ritual of his. Pizza. Whiskey. The welcome transition from a demanding week into the freedom of the weekend. It sounded wonderfully simple. He wanted to know whether I could join him.

There was some confusion about which Friday he meant, because our respective work schedules were practically operating in separate time zones despite our living in the same city. He clarified that he meant *his* Friday. My Thursday. A perfectly absurd arrangement, but one we understood. We coordinated the evening of February 23.

I don't remember every detail of that night, but I do remember the state I was in emotionally. I was struggling. Something had been weighing heavily on me, and I was not particularly good company in my own mind. The following afternoon, I thanked him for having me over. I apologized for being something of a mess and told him that his company had helped.

His response was reassuring. He told me it had been a relaxing evening and that he was glad spending time together had helped. Again, there was that kindness. The quiet, ordinary consideration that required no extraordinary declaration to be meaningful. And I held on to it.

March arrived. I was housesitting again, surrounded by horses, mules, a donkey, and an assortment of animals whose collective daily needs were considerably more straightforward than those of the human beings in my life. Animals, at least, tend to make their expectations clear. Feed me. Water me. Stop standing there looking stupid. A remarkably efficient system of communication. But there was grief accompanying me. I had recently lost my dog.

Anyone who has experienced the death of a beloved animal understands the peculiar devastation of it. A creature becomes woven into the ordinary rhythm of your life, occupying spaces so familiar that you barely recognize their significance until suddenly those spaces are empty. I was preparing to collect her ashes from the veterinarian. The loss had left me emotionally exhausted.

Michael reached out on March 3, asking how I was doing and whether I wanted to spend the following evening together. I explained that I had several things happening and wasn't certain what the next day would permit. He expressed sympathy for my loss. We left the possibility open. Then, in the early hours of March 4, another emergency arrived. Charles had been taken to the hospital by ambulance.

He had an existing esophageal condition that could cause serious swallowing difficulties and other frightening complications. This episode had become severe enough to require emergency attention. There were also concerns involving pneumonia and an elevated white blood cell count. And I had slept through it. Not deliberately. Not because I didn't care. I had simply fallen asleep, unaware that paramedics had been called and that Charles had been transported to the hospital.

I woke to the messages. I cannot adequately describe the particular horror of discovering that someone you love has experienced a medical emergency while you were unconscious and unable to help. There is an immediate, irrational sense of failure. A feeling that you should somehow have known. Should have been awake. Should have done something. Anything. But there was nothing I could have done differently once I was asleep. That knowledge did remarkably little to diminish the fear. I contacted Michael early that morning and explained what had happened.

I told him I wasn't certain whether I would be returning to Seattle as planned. Charles's condition would determine whether I needed to rearrange work and remain with him. Later, I provided an update.

Charles was receiving treatment, and the immediate situation appeared to be improving. Further care was planned, but the expectation was that he would be released. Michael eventually responded, explaining that he had only just seen the messages and was relieved that Charles was improving.

He called the situation frightening. He asked whether another evening might work. I chose the following Sunday. I needed time. Time to recover from the emotional exhaustion, the emergency, the grief, and the seemingly endless collection of misfortunes that had decided to make themselves at home in my life. We agreed.

Sunday, March 10. A date I would come to remember for reasons far removed from anything either of us had anticipated. That evening began with a small misunderstanding. Michael reached out shortly after eight.

"Howdy!"

I responded. He asked how I was. I told him I was "fine," placing the word in quotation marks because even then I apparently recognized its questionable relationship with reality. Then I asked whether he was still expecting me that evening. He believed we had made plans. I agreed that we had, but explained that I had been waiting for him to confirm. He apologized for the misunderstanding and assured me he was ready whenever I was, needing only to shower. I told him I would take care of a few things at home and let him know when I was on my way.

At 8:19 p.m., he responded: "Ok, sounds good!"

And that was the last ordinary message of the evening. Because somewhere between those plans and the next time I opened our conversation, my life took an abrupt and terrifying turn. I had an accident. A serious one.

One that would leave me injured, frightened, and extraordinarily fortunate to be alive. The next thing Michael received was not a message telling him that I was on my way. It was a message from Charles. I was in the hospital.

I remember the aftermath in fragments. The emergency room. The neck brace. The blood on my face. The injuries that would require stitches and leave a scar beneath my right eye. And Charles. Walking into that room and finding me there. The person I had already hurt so profoundly was now confronting the possibility that something catastrophic had happened to me.

I remember crying. I remember asking him to please let Michael know what had happened. And I remember realizing, with a fresh wave of guilt, what an extraordinary position I had once again placed Charles in. He was standing beside me during a medical emergency, frightened for

my safety, and I was asking him to contact the man with whom I had betrayed him. There was no malice in the request.

I wanted Michael to know why I hadn't arrived. I didn't want him waiting. I didn't want him worrying without an explanation. But intention does not erase impact. And I knew how much I was asking of Charles. That realization has remained with me. He contacted Michael.

Later, after I was discharged, I sent a message of my own. It was shortly after one in the morning on March 11. I told him I was out of the hospital. His response was immediate concern. He was sorry to hear what had happened and glad that my head appeared to be all right. Then he asked something I had not anticipated.

Could he come see me the following day? I said yes. Please. He reassured me that no apology was necessary and that he was simply glad I was relatively okay. We coordinated around his work schedule. He even offered to come to me rather than making me travel. And the next afternoon, he did. He came to my home. Not for the usual arrangement. Not because we had managed to carve out another little window for physical indulgence.

He came because I had been hurt. Because I was recovering. Because he wanted to see how I was doing. That mattered to me. It mattered enormously. He asked whether I needed anything. I thanked him for visiting. We discussed seeing one another again while I recovered, and he offered to bring lunch. I was already considering purchasing an eye patch, partly for the swelling and partly because, if life insisted on injuring me, I might as well attempt to look vaguely interesting while recovering. He suggested the accessory could only improve my coolness factor. A generous assessment, considering I was currently resembling the unfortunate survivor of an argument with industrial machinery.

Over the following days, he continued checking on me. He asked about the swelling. The pain. My shoulder. Whether I was resting. He offered food and company. He made time between appointments. And I found myself feeling extraordinarily grateful.

Not because he was obligated to do any of those things. He wasn't. But because he chose to. There is a particular kind of affection that develops when someone sees you at your least glamorous and remains willing to show up. I was bruised, stitched, exhausted, and emotionally fragile. And he came anyway. For someone who had spent so much of his life trying to remain useful, composed, and reasonably attractive to the people around him, that meant more than I knew how to express.

Then came March 17. Charles and I were driving home from dinner when my phone suddenly interrupted the music playing through the car. The screen lit up. Michael. But this was different. It was not a message. He was calling me. Actually calling. This had never happened before. I remember being so surprised that I disconnected my phone from the auxiliary cable almost reflexively. Even Charles noticed.

Michael was outside my building, waiting to pick me up. That was new. Unexpected. And, to me, rather exciting. There was something intimate about the spontaneity of it. Not an elaborately coordinated exchange of messages stretching across several hours. Just a telephone call. He was nearby. He wanted to see me. And so we spent another evening together. By then, Sunday nights were becoming something of an unofficial tradition. Our day. Not always, of course. Nothing about our respective schedules was particularly predictable. But enough that I had begun looking forward to Sundays with an enthusiasm normally reserved for holidays or the arrival of particularly good news.

As March progressed, my injuries began healing. I provided updates. The bruising faded. The swelling diminished. The stitches gradually disappeared. The scar beneath my right eye remained. My shoulder was still giving me trouble, but I was recovering. Michael continued expressing concern and encouragement. And somewhere amid those visits, conversations, and small acts of kindness, another aspect of our relationship began developing. We were becoming acquainted with each other's creative lives.

He was settling into his apartment at The Cobb. I had known him near the beginning of his time there, and looking back now, there is something strangely poignant about how much of our history would eventually become associated with that building. The arrivals. The departures. The nights spent together. The conversations. The books. So many ordinary moments that would later become extraordinarily difficult to remember without feeling something. I purchased copies of his work because I was genuinely interested in what he had written. I wanted to understand that part of him.

He was not simply a handsome man whose company I enjoyed. He was someone with an intellectual and creative life beyond our encounters, and I found that fascinating. I also gave him a copy of my omnibus.

There was something meaningful about that exchange. Two people offering pieces of their creative identities to one another. He signed his books for me. And those books became objects I treasured. Not because they were especially valuable. But because they represented a connection that had begun extending beyond the original circumstances of our acquaintance.

I was proud to share my writing with him. I was proud to own his. There were moments when the whole arrangement felt surprisingly ordinary. Almost domestic. And perhaps that was part of the problem. I had begun finding comfort in something whose boundaries had already been made clear. I was enjoying the closeness while trying not to examine too carefully what that closeness meant to me. Then Easter arrived.

March 31, 2024. Michael reached out that afternoon. He wished me a happy Easter and explained that he had expected us to spend the evening together, but preparations for an upcoming trip to Palm Springs had overtaken his schedule. He was leaving the following Friday and would not return until April 14. Could we catch up when he got back?

I told him that was perfectly fine. I wished him a pleasant trip and said I looked forward to seeing him afterward. He complimented my recovery and assured me that although he would be away, we could still communicate by text or telephone. There was nothing particularly alarming about the exchange.

Travel happens. Schedules change. People have responsibilities. And after the intensity of March, a little interruption seemed entirely manageable. I had no reason to believe that Easter would become one of the last relatively uncomplicated exchanges of that first chapter.

April arrived. He traveled. We exchanged occasional messages. I continued sharing little pieces of my life, the kind of ordinary things friends send one another when they encounter something amusing or interesting. There was the ongoing absurdity of Seattle's infamous Hellcat driver, whose vehicular antics had apparently become a shared source of irritation and entertainment.

We discussed the news. He mentioned work. I continued recovering. The relationship had settled into something that felt familiar enough that I was no longer analyzing every interaction as a potential turning point. At least, not yet. After he returned from Palm Springs,

we attempted to coordinate another evening. His schedule was demanding. Mine remained constrained by early mornings.

We made plans, adjusted them, and eventually managed another overnight on April 21. I enjoyed seeing him. I expected we would continue seeing one another. Why wouldn't we? We had already navigated a difficult disclosure. We had discussed the limits of our relationship. Charles and I had renegotiated our arrangement. We had continued meeting.

He had shown genuine kindness during my recovery. And we had begun sharing parts of our lives that existed well beyond the physical nature of our connection. It seemed, at least to me, that we had established something. Not a conventional romantic relationship. Not a partnership. But a friendship. A meaningful one. Something I wanted to preserve. Then the communication began changing.

The delays became more noticeable. Messages that previously seemed to receive relatively prompt attention began lingering unanswered. At first, I thought little of it. He was busy. His work was demanding. He had just returned from vacation. There were perfectly reasonable explanations for someone not responding immediately. But as the days passed, I began sensing a difference.

On April 28, I sent a simple question.

"Would you like me over is the question?"

It remained unanswered. A week passed. And then, on May 5, 2024, Michael wrote. His message began with an apology for having disappeared.

He explained that the period surrounding his vacation had been particularly stressful. His workload had been substantial, with thirty-five sessions during the preceding week, technical problems, and a client crisis. He had fallen asleep after receiving my previous message and neglected to follow up.

Those were the circumstances he described. Then came the part that changed everything. He needed to pull back socially. He wanted to stabilize his life. And he had begun dating someone. He explained that a polyamorous arrangement was not ultimately what he wanted and that he wished to focus his attention on one special person. Continuing our involvement, he said, would therefore be inappropriate.

He wished Charles and me well. He acknowledged the care we had demonstrated toward one another during my accident and recovery. And he wished me happiness in the future. It was a thoughtful message in several respects. He offered an explanation. He stated his decision. He acknowledged the significance of communicating it. And he did not leave the relationship suspended indefinitely under some undefined arrangement of possible future availability.

The answer was no. I understood that. I respected it. And it fucking hurt.

I had known him for barely more than six months. Six months. An almost laughably short period when measured against the grand chronology of a human life. Yet somehow, within that brief interval, he had become extraordinarily important to me. I thought about the first afternoon we met. The excitement of his messages. The secrecy. The guilt. The discovery. The night I thought I had lost him. The reassurance that followed. The boundaries. The comfortable mornings. The way his arms felt around me. The accident. The hospital. The visits. The books. The Sundays. All of it. And suddenly, there would be no more Sundays. No more invitations.

No more looking forward to the little notification bearing his name. At least, not in the way I had come to know it. I responded nine minutes later.

I thanked him for being my friend, even if the friendship had been short-lived. I wished him well. And I told him that he would always have a special place in my heart. I meant it. Every word.

He responded later that evening with a brief, affectionate goodbye.

I could have left it there. Perhaps I should have. But I was grieving something I had not yet learned how to name. I sent another message. A longer one. I told him that he could still wish me a happy birthday or check in on me if he ever wanted. I expressed how grateful I was for the time we had shared. And then I finally wrote something I had spent months circling without saying plainly. "I love you Michael." There it was. Not a request for him to abandon his decision. Not an ultimatum. Not an expectation that he return the sentiment. Just the truth, as I understood it.

I loved him. I did not know what kind of love it was supposed to be. I did not know where it belonged among the existing relationships in my life. I only knew that someone had become important to me, and I was extraordinarily sad to watch him leave. I wished him happiness. I told him how much he had meant to me. And eventually, after one final musical offering that seemed appropriately suited to the occasion, I stopped.

The first chapter was over. And unlike the terrible uncertainty of January, this goodbye was clear. He had made his decision. I had acknowledged it. There was nothing left to negotiate.

So I returned to my life. Or attempted to. I returned to the life Charles and I had built, a relationship that still deserved my attention and care. Michael's departure did not suspend those obligations, yet grief continued long after the practical circumstances had been resolved, surfacing inside a life that otherwise kept moving.

I missed him. Not constantly. Not every waking moment. But enough. Sometimes it was a memory. Sometimes a place. Sometimes something ordinary would remind me of a conversation we had shared. And sometimes I would simply wonder how he was doing. I had no particular reason to expect another message. The ending had been clear, and I was doing my best to respect it.

Then June 15 arrived. My birthday. And at 11:41 that morning, my phone lit up. *Michael*.

"Happy birthday! Hope you're well."

I stared at the screen. There was his name. Again. After everything. After the goodbye. After the weeks of absence. He remembered. It was such a small thing. Five words and a birthday greeting. Nothing elaborate. Nothing that could reasonably be mistaken for a declaration of renewed intentions. But he remembered. And I cannot adequately explain how much that meant to me. I had spent the preceding weeks attempting to accept the disappearance of someone who had become unexpectedly important. I was still learning how to experience that particular kind of grief. And here he was, briefly interrupting the silence to acknowledge that I existed. That the day mattered. That somewhere, however momentarily, he had thought of me. I thanked him. Later, I sent him a photograph. Along with two words.

"Doing superbly!"

A cheerful little declaration. Almost offensively optimistic. He responded with a heart. And that was that. The conversation ended. But I remember smiling. I remember how profoundly such a small acknowledgment could affect me. And I remember that, beneath my enthusiastic declaration of doing superbly, I was still learning how to live with the loss of something I had never entirely understood. It was my birthday. He had remembered. And for one brief moment, that was enough.

