

LET IT OUT

AND TELL ME



AHMED NASSER AL AWADHI

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A conversation for the things men don't always say

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This book reflects the author's personal observations and conversations. It is not medical or mental-health treatment, and it is not a substitute for care from a qualified professional.

*For the man who has learned how to answer
before he has learned how to explain.*

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A Note Before We Talk

I've had these kinds of conversations with friends when they were dealing with things they didn't really know how to talk about. And a lot of serious conversations still begin with the easiest answer in the world:

"I'm good."

Sometimes "I'm good" really means good. Other times it's just the quickest way to avoid explaining something. I'm not saying that because I think I can read people. I'm saying it because I've listened to friends when they were going through problems, and I know how different a conversation sounds once a guy stops trying to make everything look fine.

That's where this book comes from.

I'm not trying to talk to you like a therapist. I'm not trying to diagnose you, fix you, or convince you there's something wrong with you. You might be doing completely fine. You might have

good friends, a family you love, plans you're excited about, and still have a few things you don't really talk about.

That's normal.

Those conversations weren't therapy sessions. They were normal. We'd talk, go off topic, joke about something, come back to it, and at some point one of my friends would stop giving me the easy version and tell me what was actually bothering him.

I'm keeping those friends private. I'm not going to put somebody else's worst day on a page just to make this book hit harder. I've changed or left out details, and a few moments in these pages combine pieces of more than one conversation. When I remember something a friend said, I'm giving you the meaning of it, not pretending I recorded his exact words.

So I don't want you to read this like I'm standing at the front of a room giving you advice. Read it like we're having one of those conversations.

I'll ask you things. I'll disagree with you sometimes. I'll probably tell you when I think you're lying to yourself. Other times I'll just stay with something for a minute because not every problem needs an immediate solution.

And I'm not going to make every normal difficulty sound like a mental-health crisis. Missing somebody doesn't mean you're broken. Feeling jealous doesn't mean you're a bad person. Worrying about money doesn't mean you've failed. Not knowing what you want yet doesn't mean you're lost forever. Sometimes life is just uncomfortable, and men are very good at acting like uncomfortable means nothing.

I think we can be more honest than that.

You don't have to tell everybody everything. I don't believe in that either. Some people haven't earned that access to you. But there should be at least one place where you stop editing every sentence before it leaves your mouth.

For the next few pages, let this be that place.

Forget the perfect answer for a second. How are you, really?

CHAPTER 01

You Don't Always Have to Say "I'm Good"

There's a small kind of lying that almost nobody considers lying.

Someone sees you outside a classroom, in the lift, at work, at the gym, at a family gathering. They ask, "How are you?" and your answer is already leaving your mouth before you have checked whether it is true.

"I'm good."

The whole exchange can take three seconds.

"Good, bro?"

"Good. You?"

"Good."

Two men can both be worried about their futures, both sleeping badly, both thinking about conversations they wish had gone differently, and somehow finish the interaction having confirmed that everybody is good.

I find that funny until I think about how normal it is.

The phrase does a useful job. It keeps things moving. Nobody wants to explain his entire life beside a coffee machine. Privacy is normal. Sometimes "I'm good" simply means, "I'm fine enough, and this isn't the place." There is nothing wrong with that.

The problem begins when the answer follows you everywhere.

You say it to people you barely know. Then you say it to people who love you. Eventually you say it inside your own head.

A bad week becomes "nothing." A disappointment becomes "whatever." Something that embarrassed you becomes a story you tell as a joke. You learn to reduce the size of anything that could make you look affected.

I want you to notice how often men do this with language.

A relationship didn't hurt us; it was "just a girl."

A friendship didn't end painfully; "we just stopped talking."

We aren't scared about the future; we're "figuring stuff out."

We didn't feel rejected; "it is what it is."

Those phrases aren't bad. I use them too. Sometimes they're exactly right. But they can also become places to hide.

You know the kind of moment I mean.

It's late. You're in a car with one friend after everybody else has gone home. The engine is off but neither of you has opened

the door. The conversation has reached that strange quiet point where you could say something real or you could reach for your phone and kill the moment.

Your friend asks, “You alright, though?”

There’s a difference between that question and “How are you?”

He put *though* at the end.

He has noticed something.

You have about two seconds to decide whether the door opens or closes.

“Yeah, bro. I’m good.”

And there it goes.

Now, I’m not telling you the correct answer was a twenty-minute confession. I’m asking something smaller: did you choose the answer, or did habit choose it for you?

That’s what I want you to notice.

There are men who are very good at speaking and terrible at being known. They can fill a room with stories. They can make everybody laugh. They can talk for two hours and reveal almost nothing that costs them anything to say.

You might be one of them.

I might be one of them sometimes.

I remember one of those conversations because nothing about it looked serious at first. We’d been joking around, talking about normal stuff, and then there was a pause that lasted a little longer than usual. My friend stopped looking at me and started picking at something on the table while he told me what had actually been

bothering him. I didn't give him a speech. I asked one question and let him finish. That was it. The whole conversation changed without either of us announcing that it had changed.

That's why I don't want this book to become another voice telling you to "open up" as if your chest has a zipper. People earn access to you. Some people interrupt. Some turn everything into advice. Some use personal things against you later. Some panic when a conversation becomes serious and make you regret starting it.

You're allowed to be selective.

But selective is different from unreachable.

Think about the people closest to you. Pick one person in your mind. If something really important happened tomorrow, would you tell him or her the truth? I don't mean the public version. I mean the version before you clean it up so you look sensible.

Would you say, "I'm jealous and I hate that I'm jealous"?

Would you say, "I know this sounds stupid, but I feel left behind"?

Would you admit, "I wanted that more than I told everyone, so losing it actually hurt"?

Those sentences are difficult because they don't protect your image. They expose contradiction. You can be grateful and jealous. Confident and uncertain. Happy for somebody and disappointed for yourself. Over someone and still miss them once in a while.

Real feelings are untidy like that.

A lot of us try to make them presentable before we say them. By the time they're presentable, they're barely true.

Let me give you a different answer to “How are you?” One that doesn’t turn the hallway into a therapy session and doesn’t lie either.

“Honestly, a bit tired. I’ll be alright.”

That’s it.

Six words can open a window without removing the whole wall.

Or: “A lot on my mind, but I’m handling it.”

Or: “Good overall. Just thinking about some stuff.”

I think there’s something solid about being able to say what’s actually going on without making it everybody else’s responsibility.

That’s what I want for you more than “vulnerability” as a slogan. Accuracy.

Know what is happening inside your own life.

If you’re good, say it and mean it.

If you’re disappointed, call it disappointment instead of pretending you never cared.

If you’re angry, ask what the anger is attached to before you throw it at the nearest person.

If you miss someone, missing them is already true whether you admit it or not.

Men sometimes fall into the trap of acting like a feeling only counts once they say it out loud. So if we never say it, we can pretend it was never there.

Life doesn’t work that way.

Silence can hide a thing from other people. It can't hide it from you.

Before you move to the next chapter, I want you to finish one sentence. No list. No exercise with ten steps. Just one sentence.

Right now, if I answered honestly, I'd say I'm _____.

Don't make it impressive.

Make it true.

CHAPTER 02

When Did You Stop Telling Your Parents Everything?

There probably isn't an exact date.

You didn't wake up one morning, look at your parents, and decide they would now receive the edited version of your life.

It happened quietly.

When you were little, information spilled out of you. You came through the door talking. Somebody at school annoyed you, you told them. You got picked for something, you told them. You were hungry, angry, bored, excited, scared of a test, obsessed with a new game—none of it required a strategy.

Then the answers started shrinking.

“How was school?”

“Fine.”

“What did you do?”

“Nothing.”

“Who are you going with?”

“People.”

At some point, a whole day became one word.

Growing up is supposed to create privacy. That part is healthy. Your parents don't need access to every message on your phone, every thought in your head, every person you like, every mistake you make. Becoming a man means building a life that belongs to you.

Still, there is a strange moment when privacy becomes distance and nobody announces the change.

Think about dinner at home for a second.

Your mother asks a normal question: “What are you thinking of doing next year?”

You have actually been thinking about it every night. You have searched universities, jobs, businesses, cities, salaries. You have imagined five different futures and become worried by all of them. You have compared yourself with people who seem more certain. You have opened tabs at 1 a.m. and closed them without deciding anything.

At the table, you shrug.

“I don't know yet.”

She nods. The conversation moves to something else.

You can be sitting right across from someone you love while they have no idea what's been keeping you up at night.

Why do we do that?

Sometimes the answer is simple: we don't want advice.

Parents can hear "I'm worried" and immediately become engineers. Here is what you should do. Here is who you should call. Here is what your cousin did. Here is why you're overthinking. Here is the decision they would make if they were you.

You wanted somebody to say, "Yeah, I can see why that is difficult." Instead you got a plan.

After enough conversations like that, you stop bringing unfinished thoughts to them. You wait until things are solved. You tell them about the job after you get it, the problem after it is over, the person after you're sure the relationship is serious, the failure after you have a new success to place beside it.

They hear the finished version after you've already dealt with the messy part on your own.

There's another reason too: protection.

At some age, the direction of worry begins to reverse.

You notice how much your mother worries, so you remove details. You see your father carrying enough responsibility, so you decide not to add one more thing. You hear yourself say, "Don't worry, I've got it," and realize those are the kinds of words adults used to say to you.

It's a strange promotion.

Nobody gives you a new title, but you start protecting the people who protected you.

That can be love. It can also become loneliness if you overdo it.

Your parents don't need to solve your life to be allowed inside it.

You may have had a conversation that lasted less than a minute but stayed with you. Your father asks if something is okay. You say yes. He looks at you for a second longer than usual, like he knows there's another answer, then lets you keep it.

Those moments matter because they show the limits of love. People can care about you deeply and still not be able to enter a room you keep locked.

They can't respond to sentences you never say.

Of course, not every parent is safe to talk to. Some relationships are difficult for reasons much bigger than teenage privacy or awkward communication. A book shouldn't flatten that. If speaking openly has repeatedly led to humiliation, control, threats, or harm, distance can be protection. You know your home better than I do.

I'm talking here about the ordinary distance that grows even where love exists.

The missed ten minutes in the kitchen.

The car ride spent on your phone.

The call you decline because you'll "call later," then forget.

The answer "nothing" when the real answer was sitting right there.

Parents have their own coded language too.

"Did you eat?" can mean "I've been thinking about you."

"Text me when you get there" can mean "Your safety still matters to me even though I can't protect you the way I did when you were eight."

“Do you need anything?” can mean “Please let me still be useful in your life.”

Sometimes love becomes practical because practical words are safer than emotional ones.

Men learn that language early.

Your father might never say, “I missed you this week,” but he asks what time you’re coming home. Your mother might complain that you never sit with the family, and underneath the complaint is a request she doesn’t know how to make gracefully: stay a little longer.

One day you’ll understand that ordinary access to people is temporary.

I don’t mean that as a threat. I mean it as a reason to pay attention.

There will be a last time somebody shouts your name from another room. A last time your parent asks where you’re going. A last drive to a place you have visited a hundred times together. Nobody gets told which ordinary moment is the final one while it is happening.

That’s why “later” can be such an expensive word.

You don’t need to tell your parents everything again. You aren’t seven, and closeness doesn’t require surrendering adulthood.

Try something smaller.

The next time one of them asks a real question, give a real answer one level deeper than usual.

“How is everything?”

Instead of “fine,” tell them one thing.

“I’m thinking about changing direction.”

“I’m nervous about this interview.”

“There is something I’m excited about, but I don’t want to get ahead of myself.”

“I had a bad day. I don’t need advice. I just wanted to say it.”

That last sentence is useful. It teaches people how to be with you.

You can grow up without becoming impossible to reach.

And sometimes, being a man isn’t proving you can carry everything alone.

Sometimes it is letting the people who raised you know what they’re still standing beside.

There Are Things You Wanted Your Father to Say

A father can love his son very much and still leave him guessing.

That sentence might make sense to you immediately.

Many fathers communicate through action. They pay. They drive. They fix. They stand outside an office waiting. They call somebody who can help. They ask whether the tyres are good, whether you have enough money, whether you arrived safely. Their love has receipts, kilometres, phone calls, and work hours attached to it.

A son can be grateful for all of that and still want a sentence.

Both things can be true.

If you've ever shown your father something you were proud of while pretending it was no big deal, you already understand this. It might've been a grade, a medal, an idea, something you built,

something you worked hard on. You act casual because admitting how much his reaction matters would make you feel exposed.

Your father looks.

“Good.”

Then he points to the part that could be better.

The father thinks he is helping his son improve.

The son hears: still not enough.

Nobody in that room is trying to hurt anybody.

That’s what makes certain wounds difficult to explain. There’s no villain. There are just two meanings colliding.

A lot of fathers were raised in worlds where praise was rationed. Too much softness could “spoil” a boy. Compliments were saved for major achievements. Providing was love. Correcting was care. Toughness was preparation.

If your father grew up like that, he may have given you exactly what he was taught a good father gives.

Understanding that can soften anger. It doesn’t erase what you needed.

What did you want to hear?

Don’t answer too quickly.

For some men, it is obvious: “I’m proud of you.”

For others, it is different.

“I trust your judgment.”

“You don’t have to prove anything to me.”

“I was wrong.”

“I should have listened.”

“You handled that well.”

“I know I’m hard on you because I want a lot for you, but I love who you already are.”

A sentence like that can change the temperature of an entire childhood.

The difficult part is that sons often wait silently for fathers to guess the sentence.

We test them without telling them there is a test.

You mention something casually and watch whether he notices. You pretend an achievement is no big deal and secretly care whether he celebrates it. You say, “It’s fine,” after an argument and hope he comes back later. You become colder to see whether he will cross the distance.

Then both men wait.

Pride is patient. It can keep two people silent for years.

You’ve probably had a car ride with your father where there was enough time to talk about anything, and somehow you both stayed with the safe subjects. They have thirty minutes alone. They talk about traffic, fuel prices, football, work, somebody in the family, what needs fixing at home. The conversation is full and empty at the same time.

The son thinks, *Ask me what I actually want to do with my life.*

The father thinks, *If something was wrong, he would tell me.*

Neither says either sentence.

Then they arrive.

I don't know your father. I won't tell you to forgive what I don't know happened. I won't tell you he "did his best" because sometimes people don't. I won't turn every difficult father into a misunderstood hero. That would be easy writing and unfair reading.

What I can say is this: if there is love underneath the awkwardness, time is worth using while you have it.

You can ask for words.

That sounds almost childish until you try it.

"Dad, do you think I'm doing alright?"

"Were you proud of me when I did that?"

"Did you ever feel lost at my age?"

"What were you scared of when you were starting out?"

Those questions do something useful. They stop requiring your father to become a different personality before a real conversation can happen. They give him a door instead of waiting for him to find one in the dark.

You may be surprised by what is behind it.

The man who seemed certain may tell you he was guessing too. The man who rarely praised you may say he spoke about you proudly to everyone except you. The man you thought never worried may tell you how much fear sat behind his rules.

Or he may not.

He may answer with three words and change the subject. He may not know how to do the conversation you hoped for.

That can hurt.

But there is a kind of adulthood in seeing your father as a man before seeing him as a father. A man with his own father. His own unfinished conversations. His own rules about masculinity, many of which he inherited without choosing.

At some point, every son discovers that his father isn't a finished product. He is a person who was improvising while you were growing up.

That realization can feel disappointing and freeing at the same time.

Disappointing because children want certainty.

Freeing because you no longer have to spend your whole life waiting for one man's approval to tell you who you are.

Wanting your father to be proud of you is human. Needing his approval before you can respect yourself is a prison neither of you should have to live in.

There may be a sentence you never receive in exactly the form you wanted.

If that is true, I want you to ask a harder question: what would change in the way you live if you stopped auditioning for it?

Would you choose a different career?

Would you stop hiding something you care about because it doesn't look impressive enough?

Would you allow yourself to enjoy an achievement before asking what comes next?

Would you speak to yourself with a little less correction and a little more recognition?

Sons often inherit their fathers' voices. Years later, the father doesn't even need to be in the room. The son can criticize himself in the same tone.

You're allowed to edit that inheritance.

Keep the discipline. Keep the standards. Keep the parts that made you stronger.

Leave behind the belief that love must always sound like criticism.

And if your father is still here and the relationship allows it, don't spend ten years hoping for a conversation you could begin with one honest question.

You can keep waiting because of pride, but the people in your life won't be around forever.

CHAPTER 04

Your Mother Still Sees the Boy in You

You can be taller than your mother, stronger than your mother, older than she was when she first became responsible for another human being, and somehow she can still look at you as if part of you is eight years old.

It can be annoying.

You're leaving the house and she asks whether you have eaten.

You're driving somewhere you have driven a hundred times and she says, "Drive carefully."

You're sick for one day and she reacts as if the entire medical system should be notified.

You tell her you can handle something and she asks again five minutes later whether you're sure.

You roll your eyes.

Then one day, if you're paying attention, something shifts.

You see her carrying a bag and reach for it before she asks.

You notice she repeats a story you have heard before.

You see a new grey hair. A tiredness around the eyes. A pause before standing up. Nothing dramatic. Nothing you'd post about. Just a quiet piece of evidence that time has been moving while you were busy becoming yourself.

That can hit harder than expected.

Mothers often keep old versions of their children alive. She remembers the foods you refused to eat, the fever that scared her, the shirt you wanted to wear every day, the way you mispronounced a word nobody else remembers. You have reinvented yourself six times since then. To her, all six versions still exist at once.

That's why she can sometimes speak to you in a way that feels too protective. She has access to footage you don't.

She remembers how small you were.

You remember wanting to be bigger.

There's tension in that difference.

A son wants independence. A mother's instinct may still be care. He hears control where she means concern. She hears rejection where he means adulthood.

"Where are you?"

"Why do you need to know every time?"

"I was just asking."

“I’ll be home later.”

“Okay.”

Five sentences. Two people irritated. Underneath it, one person wants space and the other wants reassurance that he is safe.

If you’re close to your mother, you have probably had some version of that exchange.

If your relationship is complicated, the details will be different, but the strange fact remains: mothers are people too, and sons often learn that later than they should.

As children, we experience parents as functions. Mom knows. Mom finds. Mom remembers. Mom makes. Mom fixes. We notice the meal, not the planning. The clean shirt, not the load of washing. The ride, not the schedule she changed. The call, not the worry that caused it.

Growing up means slowly discovering the person behind the role.

Ask your mother about herself before you existed.

It’s a simple question and sometimes a shocking one.

What did she want at eighteen?

Who was her best friend?

What did she think her life would look like?

What was she afraid of?

What did she give up, change, delay, or discover?

There’s something humbling about realizing your mother had an entire inner life before your first memory of her.

She wasn’t born knowing how to take care of you.

She became that person while you were becoming yourself.

This chapter isn't asking you to worship your mother or pretend every mother-son relationship is warm. Some mothers are difficult. Some are controlling. Some are absent. Some sons have real pain attached to the word. Love doesn't erase boundaries, and biology doesn't automatically make every relationship safe.

But if there is love in your relationship, even imperfect love, don't make appreciation something you only feel privately.

Men can be strangely generous with gratitude everywhere except home.

We thank a waiter. We thank a driver. We send a polite message to somebody who helped us with work. Then our mother does something she has done a thousand times and we accept it like gravity.

Of course the food is there.

Of course she remembered.

Of course she called.

Of course she stayed awake.

Until one day "of course" disappears.

I'm not trying to make you sad just to make a point. I'm trying to get you to notice what's already there.

The people closest to us become background because they're always there. Familiarity turns miracles into furniture.

Look again.

Notice her laugh when she is genuinely amused, not politely laughing at something somebody said. Notice what she orders when nobody is choosing for her. Notice what makes her tired.

Notice the subjects that make her talk faster. Notice how often she asks about everybody else before talking about herself.

You don't need a dramatic speech.

In fact, a dramatic speech might embarrass both of you.

You can say, "I know I don't say it much, but I appreciate you."

You can sit down without needing anything.

You can put the phone face down for twenty minutes.

You can ask a question and stay for the answer.

The older you get, the more love becomes attention.

When you were a boy, your mother watched you constantly because you needed it.

Now that you're becoming a man, one of the kindest things you can do is learn to look back.

CHAPTER 05

The Friend You Used to Talk to Every Day

There are friendships that end with an argument.

Those are easier to explain.

You can point to the night, the message, the betrayal, the thing that was said. There's a before and an after.

Then there are friendships that end at 2:14 p.m. on an ordinary Tuesday, except neither person knows it ended.

One of you sends a message. The other replies. A few days pass. Somebody gets busy. Plans are suggested and never confirmed. The group chat becomes quieter. Birthdays still get a "happy birthday bro" with a heart or a joke. Months become a year.

Nobody did anything wrong.

That's almost worse.

Think of somebody you once spoke to every day.

There was a time you knew what he had for lunch, which teacher or manager annoyed him, who he liked, what his parents were arguing about, what game he was playing, what he wanted to buy, where he would be on Friday.

You knew useless details because closeness is mostly made of useless details.

Now you might know his life through a story he posts.

New haircut. New city. New girlfriend. New job. New people in the background.

You tap the screen and keep moving.

It's strange to know somebody's old bedroom better than you know his current life.

Male friendships are often built side by side rather than face to face. We do things together. Drive. Train. Play. Eat. Work. Sit somewhere for hours talking about everything except the fact that the friendship matters.

That can make the ending quiet too.

Nobody says, "I miss being your friend."

You say, "We need to link soon."

He says, "100%."

Neither of you chooses a day.

I want to stay with that because it is one of the most ordinary forms of loss and one of the least respected.

If a romantic relationship ends, people understand that you might miss the person. If a close friendship fades, you're expected to accept it as adulthood. People get busy. Life moves on. That's true, but truth doesn't make the loss weightless.

A friend can hold an era of your life that nobody else can access.

He remembers the version of you before you became careful.

He knows why a certain nickname makes you angry. He was there when you had no money. He knows which story you have improved over the years because he was there for the boring original. He has seen your family house when everybody was younger. He knows people who no longer exist in your daily life.

Losing touch with him can feel like losing a witness.

There's a photo somewhere—probably not even a good one—where you're both younger and unaware that the moment will become old. You aren't posing like people trying to preserve history. Somebody has food in his hand. Somebody is looking away. The lighting is terrible.

That photo can become more valuable with time because it contains something photographs can't deliberately capture: a period when none of you knew you'd miss it.

Should you call him?

Sometimes yes.

Sometimes absolutely not.

People romanticize old friendships because memory edits aggressively. You remember the jokes and forget the disrespect. You remember the loyalty and forget why you eventually stopped

trusting him. Time can make a bad friendship look beautiful from far away.

So don't confuse history with obligation.

A person being important to your past doesn't automatically earn a place in your future.

But if nothing terrible happened—if life simply pulled the rope until there was too much distance—then pride is a stupid reason to let somebody disappear.

The message doesn't have to be emotional.

"Bro, I just realized we haven't actually spoken properly in ages. How are you?"

That's enough.

If the conversation returns, good.

If it feels forced, let it be what it is.

Some friendships belong to a season, and trying to recreate the exact old chemistry can make both people feel like actors in their own memories.

You're allowed to love what a friendship was without demanding that it become that again.

There's also another kind of old friend: the one you still see, but don't really know anymore.

You meet in the same group. You laugh at the same stories. You call each other brothers. Yet if I asked what he is most worried about this month, you'd have no idea.

I had this happen with a friend I saw all the time. We were talking like we always did, laughing about something stupid, and then

he mentioned a problem he'd been carrying for weeks. I actually stopped him and asked, "Since when?" He told me. My first thought was: how did I not know this? We were around each other constantly. That stayed with me, because being around someone a lot doesn't mean you know what's going on with him.

Friendships don't survive on history alone. They need new information. New honesty. New memories. Otherwise two men can spend years talking only about the version of themselves they used to be.

Ask your friend a better question.

Skip "What's up?" once.

Ask, "What are you actually trying to figure out right now?"

Ask, "Are you happy with how things are going?"

Ask, "What do you want this year to look like?"

You may get laughed at for thirty seconds. Survive it.

One of the tragedies of male friendship is how deeply some men love their friends and how rarely they give that love language.

A man can drive across the city at 3 a.m. for his friend and still feel strange saying, "I appreciate you."

He can fight for him, lend him money, defend his name, sit beside him in a hospital waiting room, and then end the night with, "Alright, idiot, see you later."

There's something beautiful about that language.

There's also room for one honest sentence inside it.

You don't need to turn your friendships into emotional meetings. Keep the jokes. Keep the insults that only make sense because both of you know they're love. Keep the stupid voice notes.

Just don't let the friendship become so masculine that neither of you is allowed to admit it matters.

Somebody you speak to every day can become somebody you used to know faster than you think.

If there is a friend whose name came into your head while reading this, you already know why.

CHAPTER 06

The Girl You Never Really Got Over

You can stop wanting somebody back and still feel something when her name appears.

People confuse those two things.

They think getting over someone means complete emotional amnesia: no curiosity, no memory, no song that catches you off guard, no moment when you wonder what she is doing now. As if healing is proven by becoming indifferent to a person who once mattered.

I don't think people work that cleanly.

There might be a café you avoid without consciously deciding to avoid it. A road you associate with a particular conversation. A perfume that belongs, unfairly, to one person forever.

A song can begin and your brain doesn't ask permission before opening an old room.

For three minutes, you remember.

Then the song ends.

That doesn't mean you should text her.

Missing her doesn't mean you need to contact her. You already know that.

Keeping those two things separate can save you from texting someone you already know you shouldn't.

Missing a person means the relationship occupied real space in your life. Wanting the relationship back is a separate question. Sometimes you miss the laugh and not the arguments. You miss being known, not the way you were treated. You miss who you were during that period. You miss having somebody to send ordinary things to. You miss the future you had imagined more than the relationship that actually existed.

And when you call all of that "missing her," you can end up confusing yourself about what you actually want back.

Let me make this less abstract.

It's 11:47 at night. You aren't heartbroken in any dramatic sense. Your day was normal. You ate, worked, studied, trained, spoke to friends. Then you're in bed and, for no useful reason, you search her name.

You don't follow. You don't like anything. You just look.

There's a new photo.

For a few seconds you become a detective in a case that no longer belongs to you. Where is that? Who took the picture? Is that someone's shoulder at the edge? Does she look happier? Has she changed?

Then comes the embarrassing part: you're slightly annoyed with yourself for caring.

Close the app.

Open it again.

Close it properly this time.

A lot of men have had some version of that night and then woken up the next morning feeling ridiculous.

You aren't ridiculous. You're just discovering that the mind keeps old addresses longer than the heart keeps old relationships.

The danger is when remembering becomes rehearsing.

You replay only the best scenes. The first weeks. The messages that made you smile at your phone. The private jokes. The one night everything felt easy. Memory creates a highlight reel and deletes the reasons it ended.

Your brain isn't a neutral historian when it is lonely.

When you're lonely, your brain can make the past look cleaner than it really was.

This is why going back deserves more thought than missing.

Ask yourself what you actually miss.

Her specifically?

Being wanted?

Having someone to talk to late at night?

The version of yourself who felt more confident because another person chose you?

A routine?

Physical closeness?

The idea that your future had a clear shape?

Once you name the missing piece, the person sometimes becomes smaller.

There's another difficult truth: you may have been part of the reason it ended.

Books about heartbreak often make the reader the injured one because that is comfortable. But sometimes you were unfair. You became careless. You wanted attention without responsibility. You were jealous and called it love. You expected understanding you didn't return. You said something designed to hurt because you were hurt first.

You can miss somebody and still admit you weren't your best self with her.

That admission is useful only if it changes you.

Guilt that does nothing becomes another form of self-obsession. Learn the lesson. Apologize if an apology is appropriate and wouldn't reopen a door that should remain closed. Then stop making the next person pay for what you learned too late with the last one.

Heartbreak can make a man cynical if he lets pride write the conclusion.

“She taught me never to trust anyone.”

No. One person taught you what happened with one person.

“She proved love is a waste of time.”

No. A relationship ended.

“All girls are the same.”

That sentence usually means, “I’m hurt and I’d rather generalize than admit one person still has the power to affect me.”

Bitterness feels strong because it removes uncertainty. If everybody is bad, you never have to risk being surprised again.

It also makes your world very small.

Don’t let one ending become your philosophy.

There may always be a girl whose name carries a little more history than the others. That’s fine. You’re allowed to have a past.

The goal isn’t to erase her.

The goal is to remember without returning every time.

One day the song will play and you’ll notice halfway through that you were listening to the song, not thinking about her.

That’s how these things often leave us.

Quietly.

Without a final speech.

You Pretended You Didn't Care When She Left

I remember a friend telling me a relationship had ended. At first he gave me the clean version: it was done, he was good, there wasn't much else to say. So I didn't push him. We talked about something else for a while. Then he looked down at his phone and admitted what was actually getting to him: she seemed able to move on while he was still thinking about everything. That was the part he cared about. It just took him a little longer to say it.

Someone asked what happened.

You said something like, "It's done."

They asked if you were good.

You shrugged.

"Yeah. Whatever."

Then somebody insulted her on your behalf, somebody else told you there were plenty of other girls, and within ten minutes the conversation had moved to something else.

You laughed too.

There's a particular performance men give after rejection. It has very little rehearsal because we all seem to know the script.

Act unbothered.

Make the story funny.

Say you were going to end it anyway.

If she chose somebody else, suddenly you "never trusted her." If she lost interest, you "weren't that serious." If she ended things first, your pride starts editing history before your heart has caught up.

This performance is understandable. Rejection does something awkward to the ego. It says: you wanted, and you weren't chosen.

Men are often more comfortable admitting failure in things than in love. You can say you failed a test. Lost a match. Made a bad investment. Misjudged a business decision. Those failures can be turned into lessons.

Romantic rejection feels more personal because the product being rejected appears to be you.

That's the lie hiding inside it.

A person deciding not to continue with you is a decision about a relationship between two particular people at a particular time. It isn't a court ruling on your value as a man.

It doesn't mean you're unattractive, weak, boring, replaceable, or behind everyone else. It means this didn't continue.

I want to tell you about an ordinary moment after a breakup because ordinary moments are where pride usually cracks.

You're with friends and doing well. Truly. You have laughed for an hour. Your phone is on the table. Someone else's screen lights up with a notification, and for half a second your body expects her name on yours.

Nothing happens.

You pick up your drink.

Nobody notices that tiny disappointment.

This is the part men rarely talk about: heartbreak is often made of embarrassingly small absences.

No "good morning."

No person to send the photo to.

No update on how her day went.

No routine argument about something stupid.

No name at the top of your recent calls.

The big ending happens once. The little ending happens fifty times afterward.

You discover the relationship was woven through parts of your day you didn't notice until the thread was removed.

Pretending none of that affects you doesn't make you stronger. It just makes the adjustment more private.

You don't owe your friends a dramatic account. You do owe yourself the truth.

It hurt.

There. A complete sentence.

You can survive saying it.

The next question matters more: what exactly hurt?

Was it losing her?

Was it how she did it?

Was it the feeling of being replaceable?

Was it knowing you ignored signs because you wanted it to work?

Was it embarrassment because other people knew?

Was it the future you had quietly built in your head?

Men sometimes chase a person after rejection because winning her back feels like repairing pride. Be careful with that. You can convince yourself you're fighting for love when you're really fighting against the humiliation of not being chosen.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is accept the answer, even when you hate it.

No begging for basic affection. No turning your social media into a message aimed at one person. No posting a better life in the hope she watches it. No rushing into somebody new to prove you're desirable. No asking mutual friends for intelligence reports.

Carry yourself well because you have to live with yourself after the story ends.

That doesn't mean act cold.

Acting cold doesn't prove you stopped caring. Sometimes it only proves you don't want anybody to see that you cared.

You can wish someone well and still keep distance. You can admit a relationship mattered without trying to revive it. You can have questions you never get answers to.

Closure is useful when it comes. It isn't a human right.

Sometimes the last conversation is unsatisfying. Sometimes the explanation makes no sense to you. Sometimes people can't articulate why their feelings changed because feelings aren't spreadsheets.

If you wait for the perfect explanation before you move, you give another person control over the length of your goodbye.

At some point, you have to close a door from your side.

There's one more thing I want to protect you from: turning rejection into revenge against yourself.

Men do this quietly.

They inspect their face in the mirror differently. They compare their money, body, height, popularity, car, job, social status, confidence with whoever came after. They begin upgrading themselves with a hidden audience in mind.

Get fit if you want to feel strong.

Make money because you want options and independence.

Dress well because you enjoy respecting your appearance.

Build a life you're proud of.

Just don't make your entire development a letter addressed to someone who left.

She shouldn't remain the main character in your improvement.

You should.

One day you'll tell the story without needing to make her look bad or yourself look unaffected.

You'll simply say, "Yeah, that one hurt. I learned a lot."

There's more strength in that sentence than in all the "I never cared anyway" speeches combined.

CHAPTER 08

Watching Your Friends Get Ahead of You

You can be genuinely happy for your friend and still feel terrible in the car on the way home.

That contradiction deserves a chapter.

He got the job.

She said yes to him.

He launched the business.

He bought the car.

He got accepted.

He moved out.

He became the version of himself everybody knew he was trying to become.

You hugged him. You meant the congratulations. You smiled in the photo. You aren't secretly hoping he fails.

Then you leave.

At a red light, with nobody around to perform for, the question arrives.

What about me?

That question can make a decent person feel ashamed.

You think jealousy means you're a bad friend, so you deny it. But jealousy is often information before it becomes poison. It points at a desire.

His success didn't create the dissatisfaction. It illuminated it.

If your friend's new job makes you uncomfortable, that might be telling you that you care more about your own career than you've admitted. If his relationship makes you ache, the casual life you say you love might not be what you want forever. If his discipline embarrasses you, you probably already know where you've been making excuses.

If seeing somebody else move ahead bothers you, use that feeling to look at your own life instead of turning it into bitterness toward theirs.

Feeding it looks like reducing his achievement so yours feels less absent.

"His dad helped him."

"She only likes him because he has money."

“That business probably isn’t making much.”

“He got lucky.”

All of those things could contain some truth. Luck exists. Connections matter. People do receive advantages. But there is a suspicious moment when every successful person around you begins to look undeserving.

That’s usually not analysis anymore.

That’s pain trying to protect pride.

Social media makes the comparison faster because it removes context. You see outcomes without the boring middle.

A twenty-three-year-old posts the keys to a car. You don’t see the family money, the debt, the three years of work, the lucky investment, the finance payment, or whatever combination of circumstances sits behind the photo. You see keys.

Your brain supplies the rest.

He is ahead.

Ahead of what?

This is a question worth taking seriously.

Life has no single track, yet men talk as if there is a hidden scoreboard. Salary by this age. Marriage by that age. House by then. Certain body. Certain car. Certain confidence. Certain answer when relatives ask what you’re doing with your life.

The scoreboard changes depending on the room you enter.

Spend time with entrepreneurs and you feel behind because you don’t own a company.

Spend time with married friends and you feel behind because you're single.

Spend time with people who travel constantly and your normal week looks boring.

Spend ten minutes online and there is always a seventeen-year-old making more money than you, a nineteen-year-old with a better body, a twenty-one-year-old founder, a twenty-four-year-old homeowner, and somebody your age explaining how everybody who has not done the same is lazy.

If you accept every scoreboard offered to you, you'll spend your life losing games you never chose to play.

So choose.

What actually matters to you?

I don't mean what looks good when people ask. I mean what kind of Tuesday you want to wake up to.

Do you want money because you enjoy building and earning, or because you imagine money will finally make other men respect you?

Do you want marriage because you want partnership and family, or because everybody around you is pairing off?

Do you want a certain career because the work interests you, or because the title sounds impressive when someone asks what you do?

There's nothing wrong with ambition. I like ambition. I distrust borrowed ambition.

Borrowed ambition is exhausting because even when you achieve it, the satisfaction belongs to an audience.

A useful test is to imagine nobody could see the result.

No Instagram. No family group chat. No reunion. No friend to compare with. No one asking how much it cost.

Would you still want it?

If yes, keep going.

If the answer becomes less clear, pay attention.

Now let's return to your friend.

He is ahead in one area. That doesn't make his life better in every area, and it doesn't make yours late.

Celebrate him without turning his timing into a judgment on yours.

Then go home and let the discomfort teach you something.

If you want more, admit it.

If you've been lazy, admit that too.

If you're working hard and the result has not arrived yet, learn the harder skill: continuing without visible proof.

There's a period in almost every worthwhile effort where nothing looks impressive from the outside.

You're studying and still unqualified.

Training and still not where you want to be.

Building and still unknown.

Saving and still unable to buy the thing.

Applying and still receiving no.

That stage is psychologically expensive because you have to believe in work that has not paid you back yet.

Your friend's success can make that stage feel even slower.

Don't quit your road because you saw somebody else at a different kilometre.

And don't rush into major decisions simply to produce evidence that your life is moving.

A bad relationship isn't progress because it has a ring.

Debt isn't progress because it has leather seats.

A job you hate isn't automatically progress because the title impresses relatives.

Being busy all the time doesn't automatically mean you're getting somewhere.

You need a life you can live inside, not one that photographs well beside somebody else's.

Next time a friend wins, congratulate him properly.

Then when you're alone, ask the uncomfortable question without insulting yourself for having it:

What did his success reveal that I want for my own life?

That answer is more useful than jealousy and more honest than pretending you felt nothing.

CHAPTER 09

The First Time You Realized Your Parents Were Getting Old

It's rarely a birthday that does it.

Numbers are too clean.

Fifty. Sixty. Seventy. We hear them coming years in advance.

The realization usually arrives through something smaller.

Your father asks you to read something because the text is too small.

Your mother says she is tired and goes upstairs earlier than everyone else.

A parent who used to carry everything hands you the heavier bag without thinking.

You're walking somewhere and notice you have shortened your pace.

That's when age stops being arithmetic.

It becomes physical.

I want to be careful here because fear can ruin the very time it is trying to protect. Once you notice your parents aging, you can become so frightened by the future that every grey hair feels like bad news.

That isn't the point of this chapter.

The point is presence.

There's a photograph many families have without realizing what it contains. Everybody is standing together at a wedding, a holiday, a restaurant, a birthday. At the time, it is just another picture. Years later, you look at it and notice how young your parents were.

You didn't think they looked young then.

Children imagine their parents as a fixed age. Your father was simply Dad. Your mother was simply Mom. They occupied a category outside normal time.

Then one day you see an old photo of your father at your current age and it unsettles you.

Same age.

Different world.

He had fears you never knew about. He made decisions without knowing how they would turn out. He might already have

had people depending on him. The man you experienced as authority was once a young man wondering whether he was doing any of it correctly.

Your mother too.

There's something about seeing a parent's younger face that breaks the illusion that they began as parents.

They were people first.

They still are.

Ask them questions while the answers are available.

Family history disappears surprisingly fast. The name of a neighbour. How your grandparents met. What your father's first job paid. The first car your mother drove. Who was difficult in school. What the family used to argue about. Which relative was secretly funny. The story behind a photograph nobody labelled.

We assume these details are stored somewhere permanent because an older person knows them.

Sometimes that person is the storage.

When they go, entire libraries can go with them.

You don't need to turn family dinner into an interview. Curiosity is enough.

"Dad, what were you like at my age?"

"Mom, what did you want to do before you had us?"

"What was Grandpa actually like?"

"What was the hardest year for you?"

"Did you ever think you'd end up living this life?"

Questions like these change the relationship because they move your parents from authority figures to people with stories.

You may like them differently once you know them differently.

There's another change that comes with age: helping can reverse direction.

At first they book the appointment, drive the route, handle the paperwork, speak to the person at the counter, know which document you need.

Later you find yourself explaining the app.

"Press here."

"No, not that one."

"Give me your phone, I'll do it."

You can become impatient because the task feels obvious to you.

Remember how many obvious things they once explained to you without expecting you to already know.

Tie this.

Hold that.

Look both ways.

Say thank you.

Try again.

We owe people dignity when roles begin to shift.

That doesn't mean treating your parents like they're fragile when they're perfectly capable. Nobody wants to be aged by other people before their body requires it. It means noticing where help is actually useful and giving it without making the person feel small.

There's a beautiful moment in adulthood when care becomes mutual.

You bring medicine.

You make the call.

You insist on driving.

You quietly pay for something before they can argue.

You notice the thing that needs doing and do it.

For years, love came toward you in practical forms. Now you get to send some back.

Do it while they're still strong enough to complain that you're overdoing it.

And please, if your relationship is good, take the photo.

Men are terrible at this sometimes. We stand outside family pictures. We say we look bad. We say take one without me. We assume there will be another dinner, another holiday, another gathering when everybody is together and nobody is in a rush.

Take the photo.

You aren't taking it for tonight.

You're taking it for a version of yourself who will one day want five more minutes inside an ordinary evening.

That future version of you won't care about your haircut.

CHAPTER 10

Money Changes the Way a Man Sees Himself

The first time money embarrasses you, you remember it.

It might be at a restaurant when everybody orders without checking the prices and you check them twice.

It might be when friends make a plan and you calculate the plan against what is left in your account.

It might be standing beside someone your age who has a car you can't imagine buying.

It might be hearing your parents discuss a bill and realizing money isn't an unlimited adult resource. It's a number, and numbers end.

Money is practical. It's also emotional, especially for men.

We attach words to it that don't appear on bank statements: capable, successful, independent, respected, safe, useful, powerful, behind.

That's why a low balance can feel like more than a low balance. It can feel like a judgment.

A man can know intellectually that his worth isn't his salary and still feel different when he is unable to pay for something he wants to provide.

You invite your family to dinner and want to reach for the bill.

You want to buy your mother something without checking whether it will ruin the rest of the month.

You want to help a friend instead of saying you can't.

You want the freedom to leave a job that treats you badly.

You want to stop asking permission from numbers.

There's dignity in wanting financial strength. I don't think men should be shamed out of ambition with slogans about money not mattering. Money matters. It pays rent. It buys time. It creates options. It can protect people you love from certain kinds of stress.

The mistake is asking it to answer questions it can't answer.

How impressive am I?

How masculine am I?

How much should people respect me?

Do I deserve to walk into this room confidently?

Money is terrible at those questions because the answer keeps changing with the comparison.

Earn ten and someone earns twenty.

Buy the car and another model exists.

Move into the apartment and somebody has a villa.

Reach the salary you once dreamed about and spend enough time around wealth for it to look ordinary.

If money is your measuring tape for manhood, you can become richer and smaller at the same time.

I've actually been around this kind of conversation: men sitting around a table and, without planning it, the talk turns to watches, cars, investments, salaries, properties. Nobody says, "Let's now compare our status." Nobody has to. The objects do the talking.

One man grows louder because he has good numbers.

Another becomes quieter because he doesn't.

The second man may be kinder, more disciplined, a better son, a better friend, more reliable, more honest. None of that is visible in the conversation.

That's what rooms like this can do. They give everybody one simple scoreboard and make you forget how much of a person can't be measured by it.

Don't let a price tag tell you where to place yourself among men.

At the same time, don't use self-worth language to avoid financial responsibility.

"I'm more than my bank account" can be true while you still need to stop wasting money.

You can respect yourself and build a budget.

You can believe status is shallow and still learn how investing works.

You can reject materialism without becoming careless.

It's control.

Know what comes in. Know what goes out. Know what you owe. Know why you're buying the thing before you buy it. Know the difference between enjoying money and performing money.

That last one is expensive.

Performing money is ordering for the table because you want to look generous when you can't afford it. Financing an image because the monthly payment hides the total. Buying clothes for rooms where you hope somebody notices the label. Refusing to admit you can't join a plan, then spending the next two weeks stressed about it.

There's confidence in saying, "That's too much for me right now."

It may not feel glamorous, but neither is lying awake because you wanted to look rich for three hours.

I've heard enough conversations between guys to know money can change the tone of a room fast. We still need to be able to talk about earning without turning every conversation into hustle propaganda.

You don't need to monetize every hobby.

You don't need to be a millionaire by twenty-five because a man with a microphone said so.

You do need to become useful.

Learn skills people value. Become reliable. Understand how money moves. Take your work seriously. Build the ability to support yourself. If you have people depending on you, take that responsibility seriously too.

There's pride in providing, but providing is larger than paying.

A father who earns a fortune and is never emotionally present is providing one thing and withholding another.

A brother who has less money but shows up every time the family needs him isn't a lesser man.

A young man building slowly isn't a failure because somebody online rented a Lamborghini for a video.

Money should expand your ability to live according to your values.

If it replaces your values, the price was too high.

Think about the richest version of yourself you can realistically imagine.

Now remove the car, watch, house, travel, clothing, and number on the screen.

What kind of man is left?

That man is the one you should be building at the same time.

CHAPTER 11

The Mistake You Still Think About in the Shower

The shower is an unfair courtroom.

No witnesses. No lawyer. No new evidence. Just you, hot water, and a case from six years ago that your brain has decided to reopen for no reason.

You remember the exact sentence you said.

Then you invent the sentence you should have said.

You replay the room with better timing, better confidence, better judgment. In the new version, you notice what you missed. You leave earlier. You stay longer. You say no. You say yes. You keep your mouth shut. You speak when it mattered.

The imaginary version of you handles everything perfectly.

He has one enormous advantage.

He already knows what happened.

Regret often judges an old decision using information the younger you didn't have.

That doesn't excuse everything. Some mistakes were obvious even then. You knew the message was cruel before you sent it. You knew you were lying. You knew you were treating someone badly. You knew the deadline and ignored it. You knew what you promised.

Call those what they were.

But after you call them what they were, decide what the punishment is supposed to accomplish.

This is where men can become strangely attached to self-punishment. We think continuing to feel bad proves that we're good now. If I stop hating myself for what I did, maybe that means I never cared.

It doesn't.

Remorse has a job. Its job is to teach, repair where possible, and change behaviour.

Once it has done those things, repeated punishment adds no moral value.

Suppose you hurt a friend with something you said. Years later you still cringe when you remember it. Ask three questions.

Did I admit what I did without hiding behind an excuse?

Did I apologize if an apology could still help the person rather than merely relieve me?

Did I become less likely to do the same thing again?

If the answer is yes, then the mistake has already collected its tuition.

Take the lesson from what happened, but stop making yourself sit through the same punishment every night.

There's a version of regret that is really grief for an unlived life.

You didn't apply.

You sold too early.

You stayed too long.

You chose the safe option.

You let fear make a decision and now you can see the road you might have taken.

Those regrets are harder because there is nobody to apologize to. The injured person is an imaginary future version of you.

You picture him constantly.

He took the chance. He got the opportunity. He married differently. He moved. He started. He became the person you believe you could have been.

Be careful with him.

He is fictional.

Your mind gives him all the benefits of the choice and none of the consequences. In the life where you took that risk, something else could have gone wrong. The opportunity could have failed. The person you wanted could have been wrong for you. The move could have made you miserable. The path not taken remains perfect because reality never got the chance to damage it.

You can't compete with an imaginary life.

You can only use regret to make the next decision more honest.

This is one of the few good things about becoming older: you start recognizing your own patterns.

You know the feeling of staying silent and regretting it.

You know what happens when you postpone until the opportunity becomes unavailable.

You know which kind of person you become around certain people.

You know what pride has cost you before.

A mistake should make your future sharper, not your past louder.

There are also mistakes that other people refuse to let you outgrow.

Family can do this. Old friends can do it. Somebody brings up the stupid thing you did years ago and the room laughs. You laugh too, but part of you hates being returned to a version of yourself you worked hard to leave.

You're allowed to say, even if only internally: that was me, and it isn't all of me.

Growth becomes impossible if identity is a life sentence.

Don't demand that people forget. Memory belongs to them. Demand something from yourself instead: become so consistent that the old story no longer predicts the man standing in front of them.

That takes longer than an apology. It's also more convincing.

If your mistake harmed somebody seriously, accountability may include consequences you don't enjoy. Accepting that is part of

becoming trustworthy. Forgiving yourself doesn't mean declaring yourself innocent. It means refusing to build a permanent home inside your worst moment.

Forgiving yourself and pretending you did nothing wrong aren't the same thing.

Tonight, when the shower courtroom opens again, try refusing the trial.

You already know the evidence.

Ask for the lesson instead.

What did that version of me not know yet?

What do I know now?

What will I do differently when life gives me a similar choice?

Then turn off the water.

You have a present to get back to.

You Miss People You Would Never Text Again

There are people you shouldn't contact.

You know this.

If their name appeared on your phone tonight, your stomach would react before your judgment did. History has that power. Still, after the reaction settled, you'd probably remember why distance exists.

And yet you miss them.

This confuses people because we like clean conclusions. If someone was wrong for you, you should feel nothing. If ending the friendship was the right decision, you should never look back. If a relationship became unhealthy, every memory should turn ugly the second you leave.

Real life is less organized.

A person can be wrong for your future and precious to your past.

Hold both.

You can miss how hard an old friend made you laugh and still know you no longer trust him.

You can remember a relationship tenderly while knowing the two of you brought out the worst in each other.

You can love a relative and require distance.

You can hope somebody becomes happy without volunteering to be part of how they get there.

You can miss somebody and still decide that contacting them would be bad for you. Those two things don't have to lead to the same decision.

Scroll far enough back through your camera roll and you'll probably run into a year you haven't looked at in a long time. You weren't even trying to get emotional. You were looking for something else, and then there they are.

A table full of people who no longer sit together.

A face you once saw every week.

A screenshot of a conversation that made sense only to two people.

A video where someone is laughing in a way you had forgotten.

For ten minutes you aren't missing a person. You're missing an ecosystem.

The place. The age. The routine. The version of yourself who had no idea the group would change.

This is why texting the person sometimes fails to solve the feeling. You weren't actually trying to reach them. You were trying to reach a time.

Time doesn't answer messages.

That realization can save you from reopening relationships that ended for good reasons.

Nostalgia is a skilled editor. It removes waiting, tension, disrespect, disappointment, and boredom. It leaves golden light around the parts that hurt less.

If you ever feel tempted to return somewhere that damaged you, remember the whole story, not only the beautiful screenshots.

At the same time, don't poison every good memory just to prove leaving was correct.

You don't need to hate somebody in order to move on from them.

It's easy to turn one person into the villain because villains make exits easier to justify. Sometimes nobody is evil. Two people changed. Trust broke. Priorities separated. A line was crossed. The cost of staying became greater than the cost of leaving.

You can respect what the relationship once gave you and still keep the door closed.

Sometimes the more honest sentence is simply this:

"I miss him. I still wouldn't go back."

Or:

"I hope she is doing well. I don't need to know whether she is."

That second sentence is difficult in an age where knowing is easy. You can check. Search. Ask. Watch without follow-

ing. Find a mutual friend. Learn enough in three minutes to disturb an entire evening.

The fact that you can check on somebody in ten seconds doesn't mean checking is good for you.

In previous generations, losing touch often meant truly losing touch. Now we can keep people half-alive in our daily lives through screens. We know where they travelled, who they married, what they bought, what they ate, even if we have not spoken in years.

That can delay a goodbye indefinitely.

If seeing somebody's life keeps pulling you backward, use the tools available to create the distance your mind needs. Mute. Unfollow. Delete the old thread if you keep rereading it. That isn't childish. Sometimes technology keeps doors open that life already closed.

Sometimes keeping a door closed isn't about anger at all. It's just you remembering why you closed it.

It can be respect for what you learned.

The person you miss may also be someone you owe gratitude to. You don't have to send it.

There are people who helped shape you and will never know the final result. A former friend taught you confidence. An ex taught you to communicate better. A teacher believed in you during a year when you didn't believe much in yourself. Someone introduced you to a hobby, a place, an idea, a version of ambition.

Relationships can end and still leave gifts behind.

You can keep what the relationship taught you without giving the person access to your life again.

CHAPTER 13

Nobody Warns You How Lonely Growing Up Can Feel

When you're young, friendship is built into the architecture of the day.

You don't schedule it.

People are simply there.

School puts hundreds of people your age in one building. University can do the same. You see friends between classes, in corridors, at lunch, after practice. Somebody says, "What are you doing after?" and a plan exists five minutes later.

Then adulthood begins to remove the architecture.

One friend works mornings. Another works nights. Someone moves. Someone gets married. Someone becomes serious about the gym and is always training. Someone is building a business.

Someone has a baby. Somebody has family responsibilities he never talks about. Three people are technically free this week, but not on the same evening.

A group chat with twelve men can take forty-seven messages to arrange one coffee.

That quiet group chat is a pretty accurate picture of what happens as everybody gets older and busier.

The strange part is that nothing is necessarily wrong.

You have people.

They love you.

You could call them if something serious happened.

You're simply no longer woven through one another's days.

That creates a type of loneliness men often misread. You can mistake it for a sign that friendships are dying when the real problem is that spontaneous access disappeared.

Closeness now requires administration.

Calendars. Calls. Effort. Driving across town. Booking ahead. Saying no to something else.

This feels less romantic than childhood friendship, but it is how adult relationships survive.

There's an evening that captures the change. It's Thursday or Friday. A few years ago, you'd have known exactly where everybody was. Now you send, "Who's out?"

One person has dinner with family.

One is travelling.

One doesn't reply until the next morning.

One sends, "Next week 100%."

You look at your phone and feel an emotion too small to call sadness and too noticeable to ignore.

So you stay home.

Nothing happened.

That's the point.

Growing up contains a lot of empty spaces created by things no longer happening automatically.

You have to fill them intentionally.

This is where men can make a mistake. We wait to be invited because organizing feels needy. We assume everyone else is busy. We tell ourselves, "If they wanted to see me, they'd call." Several men in the same group can think this at the same time and accidentally produce six months of silence.

Be the one who calls.

Calling first doesn't make you desperate. Sometimes a friendship stays alive because one of you decided to make the effort.

If you want strong friendships as an adult, somebody has to be willing to send the boring message: "Wednesday, 8 p.m., same place. Who's in?"

Specific plans beat "we should meet soon."

One thing I've learned from friends opening up to me is that a friendship feels very different once you know you can talk about more than whatever you normally do together. You also need friendships that survive beyond entertainment.

This matters because a lot of male friendships are excellent at having fun and underdeveloped at carrying life.

You know who is good for football, who is good for a night out, who knows cars, who can get you tickets, who always has a story. Do you know who you could sit beside after a bad day without needing to entertain him?

Those friendships usually don't appear by accident. Somebody goes first.

Somebody admits the job isn't going well.

Somebody says his relationship is struggling.

Somebody says he is worried about his father.

Somebody admits he has no idea what he wants next.

Once one man breaks the rule that every conversation must remain light, the friendship gains another floor.

It can still be stupid on the ground floor. In fact, I hope it is. Men need friends they can laugh with until nothing makes sense.

The point is having stairs.

Growing up also teaches you that quantity is less useful than access.

You can know hundreds of people and have nobody you'd call at 1 a.m.

You can have three close friends and feel rich.

Social life looks impressive from the outside when it is busy. Connection is quieter. It's the person who notices your tone changed. The friend who remembers your interview. The one

who sends “home?” after you leave late. The person who can sit in the passenger seat without needing every silence filled.

Build more of that.

And if you currently feel the distance growing between you and people you love, don’t immediately turn the feeling into a story about being unwanted.

Look at the calendar first.

People can love you and be exhausted.

They can miss you and still fail to call.

They can think about you while dealing with a life you barely see.

Friendship in adulthood needs grace for other people’s seasons and enough effort that grace doesn’t become neglect.

Both.

There’s no shame in admitting you miss when everybody was easier to reach.

I miss things before they’re fully gone sometimes. A room changes, a group changes, a routine ends, and part of you notices before the rest of you is ready.

That awareness isn’t weakness.

It’s proof you were present enough to know something mattered.

CHAPTER 14

You're Allowed to Not Know What You're Doing Yet

There's a question adults ask young men that sounds harmless until you have heard it fifty times.

“So, what are you going to do?”

The sentence changes clothes depending on your age.

What are you studying?

What job are you getting?

What is the plan after graduation?

Are you going to stay there?

When will you get married?

Are you saving?

What is the business plan?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

You're expected to answer as if your life has already held a meeting without you and approved the strategy.

Sometimes you have an answer.

Sometimes you have a sentence that sounds like an answer.

Sometimes that sentence is only there to stop people from asking another question.

I like people with plans. Plans create direction. Ambition is easier to use when it has somewhere to go. But we need to stop pretending uncertainty is a character defect.

At certain ages, uncertainty is simply accurate.

You don't know what a career feels like until you work in it.

You don't know what kind of partner you need until you understand yourself better.

You don't know whether you enjoy a city by visiting it for five days.

You don't know how much responsibility changes you until people truly depend on you.

Real life answers questions you can't answer just by thinking about them.

Still, men hate saying "I don't know."

We worry it sounds weak, lazy, unserious. So we borrow certainty.

"I'm definitely going into finance."

"I'm going to start a company."

“I’ll probably move.”

“I don’t want marriage until I’m thirty.”

The statement becomes part of your identity because you repeated it publicly. Then new information arrives and you’re embarrassed to change your mind.

Don’t become loyal to an old answer just because people heard you say it.

Changing direction after learning more isn’t inconsistency. Sometimes it is intelligence.

The important question is whether your uncertainty is active or passive.

The problem isn’t saying “I don’t know.” The problem is saying it for three years while doing nothing that could help you know more. If you’re unsure, go collect information. Take the class. Do the internship. Build the small version. Apply even if you aren’t sure. Talk to someone who actually works in the field. Read the boring part, not just the motivational part. Give real life a chance to answer some of the questions in your head.

You don’t need a complete map to take a useful step.

That’s more useful than forcing yourself to invent some perfect five-year plan just so you sound certain.

A man can become paralyzed trying to choose the perfect life. There are too many paths, and every path closes others. Choosing one course means not taking another. Choosing a city means leaving another. Committing to one person means letting other possibilities become irrelevant.

Choice always contains loss.

You can't avoid that by refusing to choose. Refusing is also a choice, and time still moves.

So give yourself permission to be uncertain without giving yourself permission to be motionless.

You can be unsure and still move.

There's something else underneath the need to "have it together": fear of looking behind.

You don't want relatives asking questions you can't answer.

You don't want your friends to think you're lost.

You don't want your parents to worry.

You don't want the person you like to think you lack ambition.

So you build a public version of the future and then feel trapped by it.

Try this instead.

"I'm exploring two options right now."

"I thought I wanted that, but I'm reconsidering."

"I don't know yet. I'm working on finding out."

That last sentence only works if you mean it.

You don't need a perfect five-year answer every time somebody asks what you're doing with your life. What you do owe yourself is enough effort to find out.

There will be periods when your life looks unimpressive from the outside because you're in between identities. You finished something but have not started the next thing. You left a path and

have not chosen another. You're building a skill nobody can see. You're saving instead of spending. You're applying and waiting. Don't manufacture a dramatic move just to escape the discomfort of an unfinished chapter.

Some things need time before they need action.

Others need action before confidence.

Learning which is which is part of growing up.

I can't tell you what to do with your life. A book that claims it can has not met you.

I can tell you that the man you become will probably laugh at some of the certainty you have today.

And that's okay. You're supposed to change your mind about some things as you learn more.

Leave him something worth inheriting: curiosity, discipline, good relationships, useful skills, a reputation for keeping your word, and enough humility to change direction when reality teaches you something new.

You aren't late because your answer is still being written.

Just make sure you're actually writing it.

CHAPTER 15

Before You Close This Book, Tell Me One Thing

We've talked for a while now. A lot of what I've said here comes back to the same thing I've seen in real conversations with friends: once somebody feels safe enough to stop performing, the problem usually becomes clearer.

Long enough that I don't want to finish with a speech.

Speeches are easy at the end of books. This is where I'm supposed to tell you that you're strong, that everything will work out, that you should become the best version of yourself and walk into tomorrow transformed.

I don't know whether everything will work out.

Neither do you.

Some things will work. Some won't. People will surprise you in both directions. You'll make decisions that age well and decisions you'd pay to take back. You'll outgrow people you were certain would stay. You'll meet people you can't currently imagine. You'll earn things that once looked far away and discover that achievement doesn't stop life from immediately asking another question.

That isn't pessimism.

What I hope changes after these pages is smaller and, I think, more useful.

I hope you become harder to lie to when the liar is you.

When you say you don't care, I hope part of you asks whether that is true.

When somebody else succeeds and jealousy appears, I hope you can use it without becoming ugly.

When you miss someone you shouldn't return to, I hope you can let missing remain a feeling instead of turning it into a decision.

When your parents ask a real question, I hope you give them a little more than the headline when it is safe to do so.

When a friend matters, I hope you tell him before friendship becomes a memory you only visit through old photos.

When money gets tight, I hope you deal with the number without turning the number into your identity.

When you make a mistake, I hope you pay for the lesson once and actually learn it instead of paying forever and changing nothing.

I'm not asking you to leave this book as a completely different man. That would be ridiculous.

I want to return to the title now.

Let It Out and Tell Me.

I chose those words because “tell me” changes the feeling of “let it out.”

Let it out by itself can sound like a command. *Tell me* is an invitation.

There’s somebody on the other side.

That’s the part I care about.

Men are often told to speak more, communicate more, be more open. Fine. But speech requires somewhere to land. A man won’t keep opening doors into rooms where people laugh, lecture, panic, dismiss, or store his words as ammunition.

If you want men around you to speak honestly, become a safe place for honest sentences.

When your friend says something real, don’t immediately turn it into a joke because you’re uncomfortable.

Don’t rush to fix what he only wanted to name.

Don’t repeat it to the group later.

Don’t make him regret trusting you.

The culture between men changes in very small rooms.

Two friends in a car.

A father and son after everybody else leaves the table.

Brothers awake late.

A message that says, “You good?” followed by another one when the first answer sounds false.

You don't need a campaign.

You need better conversations.

And you need at least one with yourself.

So here is the one thing I promised to ask you before you close this book.

What have you been calling "nothing" that is actually something?

Don't search for the darkest answer. This isn't a competition in pain.

It could be simple.

You miss your friend.

You want your father's approval more than you admit.

You've been pretending you're happy with a direction that doesn't fit you.

You're jealous of someone you love.

You're still angry about an apology you never received.

You want to earn more because you're tired of feeling dependent.

You're scared your parents are getting older.

You still think about her.

You're proud of yourself for something and have been too embarrassed to say it.

You want a different life.

Name one.

That's all.

If you can name it, you can decide what it needs.

Some things need a conversation.

Some need action.

Some need an apology.

Some need distance.

Some need patience.

Some need to be accepted because there is nothing left to do.

And some things only needed you to stop pretending they meant nothing.

When you close this book, the room is going to look exactly the same. Your phone will still have the same messages. Tomorrow will still have the same responsibilities waiting for you. Nobody is going to know which page got too close unless you tell them.

Closing a book doesn't magically change your life. I'm more interested in whether you leave with one thing you can finally say honestly.

A man can change a surprising amount of his life once he stops wasting energy pretending he doesn't want what he wants, miss what he misses, regret what he regrets, or care about what he cares about.

You don't have to announce any of that to the world.

Start with one person.

If no person feels right yet, start with yourself.

But when somebody you trust eventually asks, "How are you?" and there is more to say, don't make "I'm good" carry the whole weight of you.

Give them one true sentence.

Then another, if you want.

Usually that's all a real conversation needs to get started.

And if this book has done what I hoped, you already know what I'd say next.

Go on.

Tell me.

You know the answer you give when somebody asks how you are.

"I'm good."

Sometimes you mean it. Sometimes you just don't feel like explaining everything behind it.

Let It Out and Tell Me is a conversation about the things men don't always know how to say out loud — fathers, mothers, friendships, love, money, pressure, regret, growing up, feeling behind, and having no idea what comes next.

It isn't therapy. It isn't someone telling you how to live.

It's the kind of conversation that usually happens when everybody else has gone home.

So be honest for a minute.

How are you, really?