



Wouldn't It Be Nice?

text by Adam Polaski
photo by Fabrizio Mingarelli

I don't know what compelled me to wish you a happy birthday.

I mean, sure, I guess I had been mulling it over for a few days. I knew it was coming up – my one chance to make it seem like I was only messaging you because of the little birthday gift that popped up on my Facebook page urging me to say hello and buy you a \$25 Starbucks gift card to show you I care.

But in the days before your birthday, I couldn't figure out the best way to reach out to you.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" was, of course, too standard, too easy to get lost in the monsoon of friends taking advantage of the annual reminder that you exist.

"Hey you! Happy birthday! It's been so long – want to do dinner at this sushi place I like next Tuesday after work, like 6:30? I'll make a reservation!" was too likely to make me seem like I put way too much thought into how I could land myself on your calendar.

My latest draft, the draft that was closest to how I really felt, was even worse.

"Happy birthday – have an amazing day! And when you get a chance next week, let's hang out and celebrate! I miss you. I want to pick up where we left off now that you're here and settled into the city. I want to tell you how often I think about

what we could have been and what we were supposed to be. I want to make sure that you don't become the phone call I regret never making or the text I regret never sending. See you soon?"

Obviously, I couldn't send that. I couldn't have you thinking that I'm someone who writes in clichés and crosses his fingers that someday he will be the boy who inspires a syrupy-though-hummable pop song.

Because I don't. Not really. It's just.

It's just... I know you live in the city now. I know that you're loving your smug little Upper East Side apartment with your new roommates and your new cat and your new workout regimen that you talk about too much on Facebook.

You've already been here for a few months – why haven't we reconnected yet? Did anything even really go wrong since the last time I saw you?

I feel like, maybe, things just ended – a natural break. An excuse for you to stop and eject your college life, switch it out for a new cassette – a blank tape with space for the next eight years of your medical school training.

But there was still some room left on the old cassette – wasn't there? Or couldn't we, like, transfer it all to MP3 and mash up the old memories with new memories? Take the best of the classics (me!) and spring board it into a new compilation

called *My Life Becoming a Doctor Alongside My Wonderful and Encouraging Boyfriend Who Has a Nice Ass and a Tilted but Endearing Smile*.

We had a good thing going. That one week – the week where you started classes but I didn't have school yet – we had worked out a system. I wrote all day in my underwear, cleaned up the house, and started on dinner. You came back, and you greeted me with a reassuring kiss – a kiss that told me that you wanted me there, the reliable boyfriend who would support your crazy busy lifestyle and keep himself satisfied with his own career and his own projects and his own plans to decorate the nursery.

I loved that we could talk for hours – that you could help me with my Spanish homework and that I could be your sounding board while you debated all of the things you could do after college. I loved hearing about your graduation and sharing with you the amazing highs and dark lows of my semester abroad. I loved cheering you on when you got five med school acceptance letters and chatting you with a passionate *fuck those UPenn assholes* when the rejection letter arrived.

I loved our trip to the beach, the mini-vacation you suggested right before you set off for your new life. You held my hand on the boardwalk and told me how cute I looked in my stupid sunglasses, and I teased you about your tiny bathing suit, and we ate a dinner destined for only the Kingliest of the Jersey Shore Kings.

We had a really perfect night.

When we kissed goodbye, I got a vibe that told me *Can't wait to see you again, and it won't be for a really long time – but wait for me, you amazing stud, because we're really cute together*. I was pretty sure we were leaving the door open for a time like this. A time like now. A time when you're here and I'm here and time has done only good things for both of us.

You've been doing your doctor thing and all – but I've been growing up, too. I graduated from college, began working in a field where I'm told I "show potential," moved into a shitty apartment, then moved again to a less shitty apartment. I fell in love, I was dumped, I tried to convince him that he didn't really mean to dump me, and then he assured me months later that yes, indeed, he really did mean to dump me.

But the wound grew fainter and my heart stopped hurting, and since then, I've been on dozens of dates. The Mormon who told me how much he hated himself and the world. The first date who confessed to preemptively Googling me before picking a fight over something I wrote about Adam Lambert in my college magazine. The guy who I fell asleep on before I could even take my clothes off.

And throughout all of that, a part of me was thinking about you and wondering when we would get the chance to start things up again, pick up right where we left off, rediscover what a Power Couple we were destined to be.

When I saw that it was your birthday, that's what I wanted to tell you.

I was going to call you up and I was going to wish you a happy birthday and tell you how excited I was to see you back in the city. I was going to ask you to dinner – just a polite welcome-to-the-city catch-up – and I was going to suggest meeting up at this cute tapas place that you would really love. I was going to tell you how proud I am of all that you've accomplished, and I was going to tell you how happy I am with my life and my career and my apartment and my weight. And I was going to subtly demonstrate to you that, if you made room for me on that new cassette, I could be your guy. I could be a really great guy for you.

But when I picked up my phone, I thought back to nine months before, and six months before, and four months before, when I had Facebook chatted you, and left you a voicemail, and sent you a text message. And I remembered how disappointed I was when I never got a response – even after the Facebook chat window assured me that my *WELCOME TO THE CITY! How did the move go?!* message had been *√ Read*.

And so, instead, the conversation on June 28 was quick. Simple. A text that didn't require a response but left it open to a conversation where you could tell me that you had also been thinking about me, wondering when we would finally commit to a connection we made four years ago.

"Happy birthday! I hope you're doing well."

It took you a minute to get back to me:

"Thanks – you too."

Adam Polaski is a writer living in New York City who doesn't want to have to wait so long. @AdamPolaski