

# Call Me When You're Out of Rehab

Wednesday morning—one of the two phones on my nightstand is sounding an alarm. I can't tell whose it is and it's too early to care. I yawn and pick it up—6:30? I met Jack last night at Rontoms, smiled seductively at him over whiskey Cokes, broke out all the French I knew to impress him. Now he is awake next to me, log-rolling out of my bed.

"Heading to work?" I ask, stretching my arms wide, stifling a yawn.

"No, actually," he tells me, sliding on his pants, buttoning his shirt, smoothing his hair in the mirror. "Rehab. Check-in at eight." Suddenly I'm awake, hung over, my eyes wide with disbelief.

"Rehab!? We were both drinking last night!" I say, confused. It is far too bright for being this early, far too hot in my apartment.

"Yeah, I'm not in for drinking, but it's definitely rehab," he tells me cryptically, leans down and kisses me on the cheek. *When was the last time I got a fucking kiss on the cheek?* "I gotta get out of here. Talk to you soon!" Suddenly, he is gone, dashing out of my studio door—it slams shut and I sit up in bed so fast the comforter flies off me in a crumpled pile. The yellow door stays shut—I am naked and cross-legged staring at it, my head starting to pound, utterly mystified. I raise my hands to my face, lie back, and begin to laugh.



## REMEMBER TO BREATHE

by Nick Mattos

For all the philosophical and sociological debates one can enter about addiction and recovery, for me it comes down to one thing—the task of bettering one's life requires a steadfast determination to change... Jack's ambivalence about making a positive change in his own life was the biggest red flag I could ask for.

Later, Kathryn meets me on the swinging bench beside Wolf & Bear's vegan Iraqi Jewish food cart. It's still early, but her white

blouse is already wet with perspiration. Cars speed past on Twentieth Avenue with an air of importance, mocking those of us with nowhere to be this morning.

"I'm not even going to fuck around on this one, Nick—run," Kathryn says between bites of her pita. "Just run. I don't even think I need to catalogue how many bad signs there are with this guy, or why you specifically shouldn't date someone in recovery."

"You act like I'm some sort of mega drunk!" I laugh, pouring hot sauce onto my falafel. "I'm not that bad, am I?"

"All I will say—one, if he's in rehab, he's got more important things to focus on than going on dates. Two, you're not a mega drunk, but... I'll just say it. Remember the last time we were at Invasion?"

I slap my forehead with sickening recollection. "Oh God. Thanks for not-scheduling an intervention that very night."

"Anytime, Nick. Just remember—run."

As I walk home down Morrison Street, I realize that Kathryn is right—for all the qualities for which I've been praised, sobriety is almost never one of them. For all the philosophical and sociological debates one can enter about addiction and recovery, for me it comes down to one thing—the task of bettering one's life requires a steadfast determination to change. As someone ardently trying to shift my life to more closely re-

semble my dreams, Jack's ambivalence about making a positive change in his own life was the biggest red flag I could ask for.

My phone chirps cheerfully—one text message from Jack. *Great time last night! River later this week?* I slide my phone back into my pocket with hung-over weariness—I won't text him back. *Definitely a great time, I think, sending out my telepathic message, but we both have far bigger things to wrestle with. You can absolutely change your life, just as much as I need to, but we have to do it ourselves.*

Around me, bamboo has won its siege upon my neighbor's lawn and shoots skyward, hipster boys in ironic tank tops ride fixed-gear bikes past me with scowling faces, the air above the asphalt undulates with heat and life. Everything is vibrant with a million reasons why our lives are worth saving, Jack's and mine both, vibrating so strongly that I stop in my tracks on the sidewalk. *Godspeed to you, Jack, I send out into the vast mouth of the cauldron of the world, Godspeed to both of us. And please, handsome, I think, starting to walk home—call me when you're out of rehab.* **JO**

NICK MATTOS gives a shout out to his dear friends who've saved their own lives in recovery. He is the Portland correspondent for NYC-based men's fashion blog *HommeBoy.net* and co-editor of the literary zine *When to Change*.

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