

First, There Is A Mountain

I don't recognize the number as it appears on my telephone screen. It's Saturday afternoon, and I'm cleaning up my apartment, the windows wide open, Donovan playing on my iTunes.

"Is this Nick?" a man's voice asks.

"Yes," I say, cradling the phone between my shoulder and ear, turning off the kitchen faucet.

"I have great news for you."

The man introduces himself as the director of a prestigious yoga teacher training program in New York state. "I wanted to call personally to tell you that the essay you submitted for our scholarship contest was fantastic, and that you are a finalist for the full scholarship for teacher training."

I stand in the middle of my sunny kitchen, my mouth open, silent and shocked. The dishrag drops from my hands, plops damply by my feet. "First, there is a mountain," Donovan trills from the speakers, "then there is no mountain. Then, there is."

"Are you still there, Nick?" the director asks, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"Yes! I mean, yes, I'm here. I'm just... I'm shocked!" I stammer. "I mean, this is such an honor! I've been studying yoga for 11 years! This is amazing!"

"We at the school are just as excited as you," he continues. "It sounds like you're an excellent candidate and will make a great teacher. How-



remember to breathe

BY NICK MATTOS

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ever, I was also calling to make sure that if you were offered the scholarship, that you'd be able to take it."

"What does the scholarship cover?" I ask, leaning against the counter to steady myself.

"Tuition and costs for our monthlong residential training program in New York," he says, his voice giving away the warmth of a smile. "I understand that some people can't take a month straight out of their lives, certainly. Also, it's intense—250 hours of instruction in 30 days, 2 hot yoga classes a day, lots of reading and study and self-reflection. That being said, from what you wrote about in your essay, we think you can handle it and would do excellently."

Blame it on an upbringing influenced by the Book of Proverbs or my degree in communications, but I tend to find most aphorisms overly

simple. I am the man who spent the other evening sitting at a bar downing Diet Cokes and picking apart the concept of "bros before hos" for over an hour (Tip: Learn from my mistake and *don't do this*). "Fundamentally, loyalty is good," I explained to Marshall, "but for a 'bros before hos' system to be anything but extremely toxic it requires a certain kind of 'bro,' and a particular relationship with the 'ho.'"

"Jesus Christ," Marshall sighed bemusedly over his beer. "Are you still parsing that shit out?"

"There is more meaning to unpack!" I laughed.

As insufferable as this tendency of mine may be, here in my kitchen I would similarly parse out another favorite Nag Champa-scented hippie trope: "Live your bliss, man." I acquiesce that "leap, and the net will appear" may be true, but to be successful it probably requires a certain sort of leap, a particular vantage point for the leaping, an environment full of things that can assemble themselves into a net. I would also assert that many who make drastic leaps to "live their bliss" underestimate the firm ground of rock bottom—that if no softer net appears, the

hard earth obliges itself to catch you. *Will that happen to me? I worry. What if I leave for a month and lose everything: my jobs, my house, my boyfriend, my money, my serene little life here in Portland? Am I willing to leap just to hit the ground?*

I look out the window. "First, there is a mountain," Donovan repeats. A breeze comes up, the cherry tree outside releases its hold on the blossoms, they rain elegantly to rest on the lawn. "Then, there is no mountain." *What would I lose if I did this?* I think, a frantic sense of indecision tightening my chest. I watch the tree release its flowers in the wind, the sun streaming into my apartment, my yoga mat rolled up and leaning against the wall. *Even if the aphorism is wrong and the net won't appear, I wonder, am I willing to leap anyway?*

"What do you say, Nick?" the yogi on the line asks. "If offered the scholarship, would you accept it?"

The answer stands out boldly inside me, a new mountain on my horizon, the landscape of my life changed by the formation. I close my eyes and smile. "Yes," I speak into the phone, surprised by the breathlessness in my voice, the certainty of my nodding head. "Absolutely." ☐

NICK MATTOS was later named the first recipient of the Evolution Yoga Teacher Training Scholarship and is spending the month of June in New York getting certified to teach hot yoga. Send Portland updates to nickmattos@justout.com.



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