

Where Home Is

"Your seltzer, sir," the flight attendant smiles with lipstick on her teeth. I am high in the air between Chicago and Portland, the friendly soreness of completing a month of yoga school giving way to the far less pleasant soreness of being confined to an airline seat for hours. I try to stretch my arms without invading the personal space of the guy next to me but fail terribly; he pulls away as my arm passes in front of him.

"Sorry about that!" I say, smiling sheepishly. "No problem," he says, smiling back. "We're all in this together, right?"

He introduces himself—Martin is a fortysomething gay man, coming to Portland for the first time on business dressed in the conservatively pleated pants of a man 10 years his senior, the blue polo shirt of someone who practices his golf swing on the weekends. With my untrimmed beard and prayer beads, I feel like the Radical Faerie to Martin's Mattachine Society, but we get along smashing anyway.

"Are you worried at all about going home?" he asks me.

"How do you mean?" I ask, sipping seltzer.

"I mean, it must be unsettling, going from the yoga ashram environment back to the normal world. Are you worried at all that it'll be jarring to come back?"

I glance out the window at the earth far below. If I had an airplane view of time as well as space at the moment, I would be able to see myself 48 hours in the future. I could



remember to breathe

BY NICK MATTOS

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watch myself lying beside a fire pit beneath an ancient tree and a starry sky, riding over the Hawthorne Bridge on the bench seat of a tiny white pickup truck, gripping the microphone at the Lovecraft's Slaughterhouse Karaoke, soberly holding a dear friend's hand as he twitches his way through a cocaine freak-out in the soft light of the Monday morning sunrise. If I had the airplane view of what was to come, I'd see that I would utterly neglect to pace my reentry to my life, that I would swiftly transition from the Mary Oliver poem of my time away to a reality closely resembling a Brett Easton Ellis novel, depressurizing from my travels so quickly and harshly that I give myself the bends.

However, now in the narrow airline chair thousands of feet above the earth, the gift of

prophecy escapes me. "I'm sure that won't happen," I tell my traveling friend. "I'll take it easy when I get home."

"Ah—home," Martin says with a distinct wistfulness. "I travel so much for work these days I'm losing track of where home is."

"That must be really tough for you," I note, handing garbage to the attendant, putting up my tray table as the pilot announces the descent. "How do you find a place to call home?"

"Home is a place, certainly," Martin says, his eyes focused out the window, "but it's so many other things, too. It's a time, and a mood, a speed that you travel. Home has something to do with where you are—but it has everything to do with who you are in the space you find yourself. Home is a place, but it's a place inside you."

I look out the plane window, digesting Martin's surprisingly philosophical statement. The shocking green landscape of Oregon in early summer spreads beneath me, the neatly arranged squares and circles of agriculture fields splitting up the ground like patchwork. Everything becomes familiar: the jagged bends of the river, the spiny texture of the evergreen

forests, thin lines of snow at the very top of mountains. The landscape becomes dotted with buildings, they multiply into houses and churches and businesses, shopping centers and schools. Portland draws closer to me, rises up and expands to fill the plane windows, and my heart beats hard with recognition.

I realize that the old cross-stitch sampler quote is only part right: Home is indeed where the heart is, in that the heart is your home—its rhythmic beat that defines the pace of your life, the energetic place where you connect with the rest of the world, the core of you that races and soars and shatters with defiant vulnerability. The wheels of the plane touch down upon the tarmac and I exhale, sighing with the knowledge that regardless of what is to come next—whatever excitement or frustration or elation or depression is on its way, whatever surprises that the Rose City and its fabulously weird residents can throw my way, whether it's a Mary Oliver or a Brett Easton Ellis life I lead—that as long as I stay connected to the vital center of myself, home will be inside me and all around me as well.

I turn to Martin, see his broad smile. "Welcome back," he congratulates me.

"Yes," I say, smiling as I unbuckle my seat belt. "Welcome home." ☐

NICK MATTOS is glad his home is back in Portland. Reach him at nickmattos@justout.com.

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July 14th through 17th

VOZ ALTA:
Amor Indocumentado
Thursday, July 14
7pm Reception, 8pm Performance
The Little Church, 5138 NE 23rd Ave
Featuring Edna Vázquez and Joaquín López
Tickets: Sliding scale \$15-\$25

CHICAS CELEBRATION
Saturday, July 16
Brunch, 11am - 2pm, Q Center
Ticket: Sliding Scale \$10 - \$15
Cycle Ride, 2:30pm - 4:30pm
Dance Party @ Crush w/Chocolate City
6pm Social, 9pm Dance

Celebración Dance Party
Friday, July 15, 9pm
Boxxes, 330 SW 11th Ave
Door Charge: \$5

LA LUCHA FESTIVAL
Sunday, July 17, 12pm - 9pm
Eastbank Esplanade, All Ages
\$5 Suggested Donation

Performances by:
Meesha Peru, Tryniti LaCroix,
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