

THIS IS AN EXCERPT!!

SO UM THANK YOU
by Sheila Callaghan

Night.

About ten yoga students sit on mats on the stage, waiting. And waiting. They aren't actors, they are audience members who purchased discount tickets in advance with the knowledge they will be performing yoga poses on the stage during the show. They wait.

The room is more like a small multi-purpose space in a community center than a genuine yoga studio; vinyl flooring, fluorescent lights, small sink and cabinets in the back, folded tables and chairs off to the side, small platform stage, etc.

A sign somewhere reads "HARBOR COMMUNITY CENTER."

Finally, LEIGH, mid-30s, bursts into the room, flushed and soaking wet. She wears a hooded sweatshirt, duck boots, and leggings with basketball shorts over them. She carries a giant duffel bag that is very very beat up and worn. At immediate glance she does not seem to have a typical "yoga body," but it's difficult to tell through the baggy clothes.

Heavy rain is heard outside against the window.

LEIGH

I am so sorry I'm late. I don't have a car. The buses were a mess. I left my place an hour ago. Shoulda walked.

I'm the instructor. I'm subbing for Linda. She has bronchitis. Just need a sec. Breathe and stuff, ok?

She drops her stuff onto a bench. Retrieves a small gym towel from her duffel and pats herself dry. Removes her duck boots, then her giant woolly socks. Pulls a small pack of foot wipes from her duffel. Wipes down the soles of her feet.

Done. She looks around the room. She has clearly never been in this place before.

Is there a trash, or...? Oh.

She drops the wipes into a large trash can.

Ok. Props, props... Ah. Great.

Heads to the prop area. Grabs a mat, a blanket, two blocks, a strap, and a bolster. She lugs them sloppily to the platform in the front of the room.

Anyone need a blanket, a strap? No? Cool. I am psyched to be here. Don't let my lateness mess with your bliss.

She unrolls her mat and carefully adjusts it so that it is directly perpendicular to the students' mats. She places the blocks at the front of her mat on the highest setting, perfectly parallel to one another. She moves the bolster carefully to the side of the mat. She loops the strap to the exact width of her shoulders, then rolls it and places it at the top of the bolster. She unfolds the blanket and re-folds it so the creases are perfect. She smooths it out, then folds it again and lays it across the top of her bolster.

She crosses her legs and sits at the top of her mat. Closes her eyes. Rests the

backs of her hands on her knees. Takes a deep breath. Exhales.

Strange look on her face. She opens her eyes.

... just a sec...

Heads back to her duffel bag. Unpacks a water bottle with the word "NAMASTE" on it. Takes a swig. Leaves the bottle on the bench.

Returns to the platform. Sits in *Sukasana* at the top of her mat once again.

Closes her eyes. Deep breath. Opens her eyes.

Hi. Uhhh so thanks for coming tonight. In the rain, too. Know how hard that is. When you're cozy in your home and stuff. What's your name? Cool. And yours? Cool. And yours? Alright. And yours? Cool. And yours? Alright. And yours? Right-on.

Ok.

What was yours again?

She repeats the name a few times.

Cool. Got it. Usually takes me two or three tries. My name is Leigh. As in "bulimia." Which I don't have. Eating disorders are very serious and very common in my profession. And tragic. But "strong is the new skinny," so.

If you didn't sign in don't worry about it. Since I'm a sub, this is gonna be a community class. Donation-based. Pay what you can. Honestly I didn't think they would call me. I'm waaaaaay down on the sub list.

But I'm soooo happy to be here. I've never been part of a community before. It's great to connect to something larger than yourself.

Oh—hang on—

Jumps off the platform. Heads to her duffel on the bench. Pulls out eight fake candles. Places them around the room.

Heads back to the platform and sits on her mat. Presses a button on a small remote aimed at the candles. They light up and flicker.

Boom. Atmosphere. Normally I'm like, fake candles, whatever. But I gotta use 'em. Liability stuff. Don't wanna burn the place down. Almost did that with my last studio.

Beat.

No I didn't.

Beat.

Uh yeah I did. Gotta live in my truth, right? Deep breath.

She takes a deep breath.

Temperature ok? Any injuries? Anyone new to yoga? Anyone pregnant? Peg legs? No? Cool.

Beat.

I feel like I should— before we start—like, maybe do an intro? I dunno. Do you guys do that?

I just moved here a week ago. I dig all the rain. We don't have weather in LA. And people are so fucking nice! A cop waved at me in the street! Who does that? I mean I was blocking traffic, but. He was so chill about it. And the lady at the library was asking all about my travel books. They got some weird-ass names. *Sally Forth*. *Let's Jam*. *Asia Through The Back Door*. I think that one's for gay dudes. I'm a front-door person. Not like, sex or— I mean—uh...

She jumps off the platform and heads to her duffel. Grabs her water. Takes a sip. Returns to her mat.

I mean I like to follow rules. I enter through the entrance. I park in the parking lot. I study the study guide. I had a traumatic experience in Los Angeles. But now I'm here. This is a yoga class, it's not about trauma, but it is about trauma, cause we're working through it.

I'm sorry I said "fucking" earlier. That's like, the opposite of yoga. I'll try to keep the swears down.

Ok ready?

Let's begin.

She jumps off the platform again and heads to her duffel. Retrieves a bluetooth speaker and her iPhone. Sets them up on the bench. "One Less Bitch" by NWA blasts, mid-song. She quickly turns it off.

Yo! That's from my 4am playlist when I rage-clean my apartment. Heh. Hang on...

She adjusts it. A yoga-friendly song starts to play. She returns to the platform and sits on her mat in an easy cross-legged position.

Ok. So uh. Do this, what I'm doing. It's called *Sukasana*. *Sukha* means "happy." But also "easy." If this isn't easy for you, you're really bad at yoga. Just kidding. There's stuff you can do to help. Props, adjustments...

Except I'm not making adjustments. I don't know what Linda does, but I don't touch people. And I don't like people touching me either, so.

Also I'm gonna try not to demo. Which means you have to really *listen*. It's not what we look like, it's what we *feel*.

Close your eyes.

They do. She makes sure their eyes are closed, then pulls back the right sleeve of her hoodie. Words are written on her wrist. She squints at them, reading.

"You can sit up on a block or a blanket. Keep your hips above your knees."

She pulls her sleeve down and grabs a block and sits up on it.

Like this. Open your eyes. See? See how long my spine is? My spine is suuuuper long. Don't be afraid of props. Props are your friends...

She scans the students. Spots one who needs help.

Oof. Yeah, you should probably grab a block. Or no, maybe try a blanket. Fold—ok the fold side goes—the fringe faces away. Away. Like towards the back of the—sit on the fold part. Right. Ok. I'm not touching you. Now slide the flesh of the buttocks outward so you can sit directly on your sitting bones. Buttock flesh out. You just grab the buttock flesh and move it. In an outward direction. Nice. Ok. Close your eyes again.

Now. Rest the backs of your hands on your knees. Palms up. To accept the... uh vitalism... Pull your core in, float your sternum up through your um thing. Now like, press the flattest part of your tongue against the roof of your mouth, and then stick the pointiest part right behind your teeth, so like, you're making a kind of tapered bowl, like a bad little clay bowl your kid would make... I don't have kids... and, and then, like then you hum with the back of your throat. Just do that. It's non-traditional. Hum. Go ahead.

As they do, she stands and walks to her duffel.

Cool. We're just trying to turn down the, uh, the brain-noise. Keep humming.

She takes a sip of her water. Starts to rifle through her duffel.

We're placing our hands on that volume knob and slowly twisting it to the right. No, left. Stop. Done humming.

She grabs some gum, pops it in her mouth, and returns to her mat.

Great, now pull your shoulder-blades up and down—

She does this, then—

I mean, up and then back and then down. Melt them like two slices of American cheese on two hot hamburger patties. Sit up super tall and don't shove your chest out like you're inviting a rape.

Oh my god. I don't, I don't mean— it's about posture, ok. Like, as women. Um we have trouble with—I mean, not all. But some of us have bad posture because we're constantly navigating a conversation between our chests and the world. We stick 'em out for attention, we cover 'em to hide... "look at me / don't look at me." We never get to just have a chest and like, not think about it.

Hence the rape comment. So.

This is the brain noise I'm talking about. Ha! Back to the breath. Rain on the window, mat beneath your buttock flesh, my voice in your ears. Breathe.

Also you don't have to breathe only when I tell you, you can breathe like whenever you need to, obviously, I'm not like a breath-jockey, but when I tell you to inhale or exhale you're gonna extra *extra*-breathe.

So as you release, extra *extra* exhale, like whoa. Big. Send out everything bad and toxic. I mean like deep ancient stuff. Out of your mouth. Out. BIG. Like...

Um. Ok, how about, can you make your breath super audible?

Louder.

Louder?

Ok, great. This is great. On the journey together. Eyes closed.

She makes sure their eyes are closed.
Pulls up her left sleeve and reads the writing on her wrist. Pulls it back down.
Jumps off the platform and spits out her gum into the trash. Returns to her mat.

'K so here's what you're gonna do next. Lean forward and walk your hands up to the front of your mat. This is a hip opener. You want to feel your back ribs expanding and your front ribs softening and your side ribs...

She thinks about what her side ribs would be doing.

...doing nothing. Hang on...

She demos. The pose is emotionally affecting almost immediately.

Side ribs ELONGATE. That's right. You're like, you're kind of making space between your ribs and your hips. Gooooood...

She gets a little lost in the pose.

Ok, now, come back up slowly one vertebrae at a time, like Legos...no like Jenga blocks. You're like a tower of Jenga bricks. Solid like wood but you could also fall apart at any minute, that's the human condition.

Good so ok um when you get to the top, pretend there's an invisible string attached to the crown of your head. It's glued to your scalp, not your hair, cause, I dunno, hair would hurt, and it's pulling you up to the ceiling. But doesn't pull hard enough to lift you off the ground. It's not actually designed for that. It just wants you to sit up straight.

She sits up super straight.

Great. Now switch the crossing of your legs and do the same on the opposite side.

She switches the crossing of her legs and walks her hands towards the front of the mat again. Students follow.

SO great you guys... that feels sooooo good... we need that pretty bad, right? Oh man... wow... yeah... jesus....

Ok great. Rise back up slowly, one centipede at a time.

I mean one *centimeter*. Ha.

Man, I'm doing great up here.

Nice and tall at the top.

She draws herself back up to a seated position. Places her hands on her knees. Students do the same.

Beat. She blanks. Panics.

Uh, dope. So, yeah, let's go back to breath for a hot sec.

See, that's what's so rad about yoga. You can always return to your breath. Because you have to breathe in order to not asphyxiate.

Her phone dings.

Cable guy. Keep breathing.

She jumps off the platform and checks her phone. Her face changes. She struggles with something, then buries it.

It's nothing. A person. It's fine.

But it's not fine. She grabs a sip of water and returns to her mat, attempting to compose herself.

Still breathing...

Ok.

So this time I want you to picture... like I want you to picture the air around you like cool clean crisp transparent immaculate unsoiled sparkling, whatever. It's pristine. And you have two nostrils and two sparkling pristine tubes of blue air are like...waiting by your nose, and all you need to do is suck 'em in. Suck really hard through your nose and allow those amazing tubes of beautiful pristine air, let 'em just shoot into your face, let 'em scour your insides and scrub you out.

Scrub out whatever you got stuck between your tiles. Anything. Your impossible family, your bad period acne, the cupcake you ate at midnight, the terrifying odor in your utility closet, the person from your past who calls you in the middle of yoga class, ha, yeah that's me, exhale and release...

DING. Phone.

Ignoring. Um ok great so let's reeeeeaaaaally get into those hips now, ok... *Balasana* with wide knees. Come up to table top like this. Then make your toes touch and bring each knee to the outside of the mat, like this...

She demos.

Knees wide, nice and wide. Good. Relax your chest. Place your head on a block. All of you. Heads on blocks. Blocks. Blocks. Blocks. Blocks. Right good.

She places her head on a block.

Now stretch your arms forward... nice and looooooong... really reach your fingertips... as if you're like, you're trying to touch a thing you want really really bad but some dick keeps yanking it away from you....

She stretches her arms forward.

So good you guys. Oh yeah. That's that's really something.

Beat. Too much. She pulls herself out of it.

Whoooo. Ok, heads up. Hip openers can get emotional. 'Cause hips are like the junk drawer of the body. It's where we dump all our emotions when we don't know where else to put them. So when you stretch 'em out, all the stuff you shoved into the back of the drawer just... you know...

DING. Phone.

Ha, she won't go away. Inhale those two sparkling blue tubes, exhale the darkness out. Just sigh that out. Sigh that right out. All the things...

She jumps up, her voice a bit shaky.

I'm gonna walk around, not touching you...

She walks around, looking at people's poses.

You know um, back when we were primates we had this mechanism that got triggered when we fell out of trees... like our hip flexors got super tight real quick, and yanked our ribs down to protect our organs. Babies still have it. ...hoooooo... you feel it, right? Yes? No? Ok...

She moves on to another person.

Gooooood, nice... feel it... so eventually we stopped falling out of trees and started walking, but this—the flexor muscle, right? The one you're leaning into right now? It kept on being the center of our fight or flight response.

It's ok to back off the pose whenever you need to. This is a lot.

So like when we get chased by bears or whatever, that whole area, it charges up so the legs can... can run... or... kick...

She heads over to her duffel.

If you're shaky it's probably 'cause a long time ago your mechanism got triggered and you didn't run or kick anyone. So you stored that charge like a battery for later.

She grabs a sip of water.

This what makes people cry in yoga. Cool, right? You learn the most amazing things in training. It's not just poses and sequences. It's philosophy, physiology, psychology... I loved all that nerdy shit.

She checks out another body.

You're feeling it, aren't you? Yeah you are. You stay in that one. You need it.

Another body.

And *you*, you tell yourself the threats around you aren't real because you're soooooo evolved, right? Then you surf the net or eat cupcakes or whatever. And all the shit that floods your muscles—the juice from your adrenal glands, the tightness, the increased

blood flow... it just like, hangs on til you let it go. Which you're doing now. Stay as long as you need.

She heads to another body.

Did you know we're like the only animals who hold on to stuff like that? In our bodies? All the other animals do this:

She makes her entire body shake. For maybe too long. It would be scary to be in a class with. But funny for us.

You know? Then they go back to playing in the sun or rolling in the grass or licking the genitals of their siblings.

DING. Slightly different this time.

Ha, ok she's texting now. Great. Do we breathe through the dings, or do we put the phone on silent?

Let's breathe. The harder the world tries to invade, the harder we exhale and send it away. *Yogas citta vrtti nirodha*. It's Sanskrit. "Yoga is the ceasing of the fluctuations of the mind."

She sits on her mat. Eyes closed.

Breathe.

DING.

Breathe.

DING.

Breathe.

DING.

One sec.

She stands and heads to her phone. Reads her texts. Unplugs her phone from the speaker and throws it in her bag.