

Namaste Apocalypse

a Short Story by Jessa Forest

And now...bring your attention back to the present moment and sit up whenever you are ready. Next time you feel inspired to practice this sequence, consider going out barefoot and dancing under the bounty of the full moon or the light the sun shines down to us through her divine beauteousness," the soft breathy, melodious monotone of Lucky's husband's voice made me want to puke in my mouth.

From Corpse Pose, with all my attention glued to the creaking of my ribcage as my bones and cartilage moved with my breath, I felt irritation looming up like a malevolent zombie hoard.

You try going out barefoot and doing yoga on the rocks and spilled blood you stupid rhododendron, I thought.

When I was little my mom told me to substitute every bad word with the name of a flower. When you get a tranquility lecture from someone who never had to leave the confines of his wife's meticulously manicured yoga studio and spa attachment and had no realistic grasp of what the word apocalypse actually meant, you can't help being slightly prickly.

There were no plushy, soft, green lawns anymore—except in the studio's back yard where no one else is allowed to go—there were no safe parks where you could fall on your tulip while jumping into Headstand. So unless you were stupid enough to cut up your feet and catch lock jaw out there doing yoga barefoot on the slag heap, there would never be barefoot dancing under the full moon.

“Now as we come back into our healthy, uncontaminated physical bodies, I will read from the poetry of our dearly departed Rebekah Morris,” I tried to keep my face as relaxed as possible while squeezing my eyes tight shut as his not-so-soft, bare footsteps padded next to my head. I heard him rummage around on a bookshelf and flip through page after page, slow and thoughtful as if he were savoring fine cuisine.

One day, I thought, someone is going to break in and put a hollow point in his brain just for those books. But maybe not Ms. Morris's...

“Oh! There do I see the multitude of the dead rise before me,” Lucky’s husband intoned. I exhaled deeply and pulled another deep breath in. Instead of listening, I pretended that I was sinking into the floor.

I liked yoga before the apocalypse and I still liked it. My mom was a yoga teacher. She was so dedicated that she continued teaching at the HappyHealth Heart Hospital where all the people with Hypertension and Coronary Artery Disease tried to maintain their sanity with yoga. Even after the quarantine zone shrank and the city became an all you can eat buffet for the undead she still went to work with a smile on her face and an OM in her heart.

One day a handful of zombies a hopeful Nurse Practitioner had secretly chained up in the basement got loose. One crawled up through the air ducts, jumped down through the ceiling and ripped my mom's throat out as she was explaining the benefits of Plank Pose to an 80-something Vietnam Veteran. The Combat Vet shoved his spiked cane into the zombie's skull and then did the same for my mom before dastardly escaping with the other patients, but not before leading the ravenous pack into the locker room and trapping them in the sauna.

Steamed fillet anyone?

I liked yoga because my mom used it to help other people, including me. I could co-exist with the apocalypse in all its kill-or-be-killed glory because of her. I also liked yoga because I could do it—mostly—by myself and I had a strict routine going.

If I had a clock to track my time, I'd say I practiced yoga about five hours a day. The other three or four I devoted to scavenging for edibles and coffee beans. But the thing I didn't like about yoga was, now that my mom was gone, I didn't have anyone to teach me. I needed to learn more. And to learn more I had to interact with other people, other survivors. I didn't like other survivors much.

They tried too hard to push their own beliefs onto everyone; mortality can make people intense. Lucky, the studio's founder, renamed herself after a traveling cellist rescued her from a zombie pretending to be Cujo. She'd been trapped in her minivan for five days without food or a piss jar. She was the one who told me about my mom's death. Lucky also made me want to puke in my mouth a little. But my mom really liked her and she gave me free admission to all future yoga classes because she and her husband really liked my mom. (Everyone else had to pay with whatever food they could spare and the occasional 'favor.')

"...We are so glad we are not dead. We are so grateful we are not eaten," Lucky's husband finally stopped talking. I heard the familiar rustle of bodies rising from the floor.

Grateful indeed, I was still mumbling to myself about Lucky's husband's stupid voice and stupid face in my not-very-mindful mind as I rolled up my mom's purple mat and plopped down on the bench to lace up my steel toed boots.

Sports bras, machetes, leggings, revolvers, sticky mats, great big cudgels, bolsters and crowbars began filing out of the studio through the reinforced steel sliding door. Lucky's husband

was supervising his students' exit in an attempt to lull them into a false sense of security. I wouldn't trust him to protect cheese from a dead mouse.

I wrangled my mom's mat into the special carry bag some useless marketing genius invented before the world went roses up and pulled my backpack on my shoulder. In my backpack, in addition to my three day emergency food stash (the sausage and omelette MREs that no one wants to eat) and water purification kit was my notebook. I wrote down everything I could remember my mom saying about yoga and I recapped each class once I reached Safe Point no. 1 on my route home which, on that day, was the Starbucks three blocks away.

TIP NO. 347 for surviving the zombie apocalypse: never be predictable. Plan out and travel alternate routes to regular places. You never knew when a zombie would suddenly remember how to be a stalker.

I went to the weapons rack and reunited with my double-barreled shotgun. Bill, another long time yoga lover and zombie hunter, came up behind me and wrapped his long, bony fingers around the hilt of his claymore and pulled it free.

I breathed out very slowly.

"Got any good ones today, Jane?" Bill asked.

"Meh," I flicked my hair out of my face and grinned at him. I crushed the brains of one under my boot when I snuck through the dumpster grave yard at the bottom of the hill and pistol whipped another to literal death at the bottom of the hill. But it was nothing to brag about. "How about you?" I asked.

"Popped a fast one off the other day. Out by where Purple Cow used to be," he said.

"By the reservoir?" I asked.

“Where the reservoir used to be,” he gave my bicep a good, friendly slap. “Great class today.”

“Yeah, catch you later,” I watched the lean sway of his body gracefully cross the open barricade.

I popped my 12-gauge open. Checked, double checked. Yes, my slugs were still there. They hadn't gone anywhere. I slunk towards the door with the last group, hoping Lucky's husband wouldn't notice me. They were five girls, ladies really, in a pack that always traveled together. But safety in numbers never spared them the unwanted attention from Lucky's husband. If I squeezed behind Tiffany and Robin I could use them as human shields and escape without—

“Jane, wait up!”

Snapdragons! I thought. Tiffany and Robin slid past the barricade unscathed.

“Your Triangle is looking really stellar. I can tell you've been practicing,” he purred.

“Yeah, it's about all I do these days. Now that there's nothing left to clean up in mom's house I have lots of spare time,” I said in my best trying-to-be-nice-voice. I felt the strain.

After mom died I took everything outside and set it on fire. The huge antique table her great-grandmother brought over from Scotland, all her clothes, the sofa, the dresser, all the cookware, the refrigerator that would never taste electricity again, the mattress, the bed frame. All the books. Thousands of books. Everything. Now I have a five bedroom blank slate and I absolutely love it.

“You're breathing's gotten stronger too,” he said, “I've noticed.”

Gross, I thought. What I said was, “I've been meditating more.”

“Lucky really misses your mom,” he continued, “I know she'd just love it if you came over for dinner sometime. You're welcome to join us tonight.”

Breathe in, breathe out, Mom's dead voice floated across my brain, Only think about your breath, how it feels in and out your nose. Don't say anything that will make you look like a fucking bitch and get you banned from the only yoga place within a 500 mile radius. Violets! Fucking violets!

“Maybe next time,” I mumbled, pulling myself through the mezzanine as if my legs had been gnawed to bloody stumps and the threshold was the guillotine that would put me out of my misery. “Right now I gotta go help my neighbor clear some rubble before it gets dark.”

Lucky's husband moved behind me and I reveled in the reassuring clang of the big steel door as it shut behind me. I took the flashlight out of the water bottle pocket on the side of my backpack and flicked it on.

TIP NO. 365 for surviving the zombie apocalypse: always have a flashlight or something to make fire, especially if you're traveling at or after dusk. (You might have heard some people say light attracts zombies but I'd rather not trip over something and break my leg.) Have your route planned ahead of time (see Tip No. 347) and always scope out your areas as you go. I'd made the trek from the house to the Starbucks thousands of times. But if you got complacent you got eaten.

I saw the dust trail of Bill's RV plowing away towards the sliver of sun that hadn't yet disappeared beneath the horizon. I think he said something the other day about taking his kids to the old water park and hunting bikini clad brain munchers. The only unattractive thing about Bill

was that he has kids. And a wife. A badass wife who once killed a zombie with a tube of toothpaste.

A ton of bricks fell on my shoulders and I felt hot breath on my neck.

TIP NO. 366 for surviving the zombie apocalypse: If you're going to walk everywhere like I do, especially after dark, do not daydream about Mr. Unattainable. The zombie jumped from somewhere. Where was I? The parking lot. Right. Damn thing jumped from the security light. Hiding behind the bright fluorescent light and the growling generator made things almost too easy for the zombie.

The zombie ground my face into the gravel and tore viciously at my backpack with sharp fingers. I felt its chin graze my shoulder blade as it snapped at the shoulder strap. The strap tugged against my armpit and flung me off balance as the zombie thrashed and gnawed into the nylon and foam.

“Fuck you! You are not fucking up my bag!” I growled.

My face burned and blood gushed down my forehead and cheek. I shifted onto my side, pushed my arm under my ribs and swiveled my shotgun around; Locus Pose to Vashistasana with 90 pounds of slobbering zombie on my back.

BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT.

Shotgun mudra.

BOOM.

The zombie's right shoulder exploded. Its grizzled body arched away and fell on its back with a dull thwack. I jumped up and fired the other slug into its third eye. The top of the zombie's

skull flew off in a spray of fetid blood and sparks. I shook my bag off my back and snapped my 12 gauge open. The empty shells popped out and I slid two new ones into place.

Check. Double check.

My jaw was sore and two of my teeth wiggled as I tried to shake my head clear. I heard the scrape of metal behind me. I snapped the 12-gauge shut and leveled it to my shoulder. Lucky's husband flung his arms up in surrender.

“It's just me!” he shouted, hands raised. “Don't shoot!”

“You been there long?” I spat. “Thanks for the help.”

My flashlight had jumped out of my hand and rolled away in the scuffle. It glowed forlornly under the wheel of an abandoned car Lucky converted into a memorial to Pinterest as an unsuccessful apocalypse garden complete with scarecrow and dead daisies.

“Are you okay?” he called from the safety of the doorway, undeterred by the malice dripping with the blood from my split lip.

“In the sense that via inter-being, I am okay because something else in the universe is also okay. And by okay I mean peacefully in pieces,” I retrieved my flashlight and examined the gnawed strap of my backpack.

Sickly yellow saliva dripped from torn canvas. I unzipped my loyal but now contaminated and useless friend and pulled my notebook free. Food I could scavenge, supplies I could replace. Knowledge was precious. So were slugs. Couldn't forget those. Ammo and notebook rescue: successful.

“You want to come back in?” Lucky's husband called.

“Fuck no!” I yelled back. “Your coward ass can rot in there. I'm going to go dance barefoot in the fucking moonlight.”

Lucky's husband's face twisted into a pale, sweating mask. His eyes bugged out as if he'd been electrocuted. Or he'd eaten something that didn't stand up to his pre-apocalyptic dietary standards. I watched his mouth fall open and I gave him the first genuine smile to ever grace my smug, sarcastic, blood stained lips; my back was to the darkness beyond the yoga studio.

The second zombie was one of the fast ones. Fast and quiet. It lunged out of the dark, probably from the same spot the first one jumped from. I didn't see it, I didn't hear it. I felt it though; its bony feet landed on my shoulders and its rotting fingers dug into my face as it rode me to the ground. It twisted me over with the grace and efficiency of a red tailed hawk pulverizing a rabbit.

The zombie had no lips. It probably didn't have a face either, just two dry, bloodshot eyes floating above the razor sharp maw of a beast doomed to eternal hunger. Its teeth smashed into the tender flesh under my jaw, right at the juncture between my head and my chin.

In my mind I was screaming but the zombie's fingers caught my throat like a spring trap and its rough palms squeezed all the air and fight out of me.

I couldn't breathe. The one thing I loved doing more than anything in the world and I couldn't anymore.

Mommy! I screamed. *Mommy!*

The zombie ate quickly. Beyond the ripping of flesh I heard the reinforced door of the yoga studio slam shut. That should have made me mad but for some reason I found myself not caring

so much. Everything felt warm and fuzzy, like someone had put me under a blanket and I was sweating out a fever.

My dead mom's voice floated towards me from the darkness. She said something about feeling the air in my nose but she clearly didn't notice I didn't have a nose anymore. That should have made me mad too' she always said things without realizing the obstacles I had to overcome to do whatever she wanted.

I should shoot myself before I turn, I thought. I tried to squeeze my hand around my trusty 12-gauge but I grasped at nothing, empty air.

...namaste...warrior...namaste...apocalypse...namaste...mommy...

My body grew numb under the gentle gnashing of teeth.

I woke up cold and hungry. Exceedingly hungry. I curled my hungry body into Child's Pose, let my aching gut hang down between my thighs. I rolled my head back and forth, touching my ears to my shoulders. I rolled my spine into a perfect horseshoe for Cat and then pulled my heart up through my collarbones for Cow.

I was so hungry I could have killed something. It didn't help that I could smell something amazing cooking not too far away. Whatever it was, it was mine. It just didn't know it yet.

Where was I, anyway? I shifted my weight up; spine straight, stretching space between each vertebra. I pivoted on my heels and floated my arms up over my head into Warrior 1. My arms were blades of bone. My body was a vessel of intensity. I looked straight ahead and I saw the heavy steel door.

There was a millimeter of space between that door and the wall. Sometimes, when Lucky's husband shut the door too hard it would bounce off the frame and not lock properly. I once heard her scolding him about it one evening when I was trying to catch a glimpse of Bill.

He did invite me to dinner.

I lowered my arms until they were parallel to the bloody ground and I bent my front knee to test my spring, like a cat settling in for a pounce. Then I swooped my hands down and dug my fingers into the gravel of the parking lot. Warrior 2 to Low Lunge.

I stretched the backs of my knees out, shoved my hips to the sky and ground my heels into the gravel. Downward Facing Rabid Dog. I shifted my gaze up between my arms and through the tiny, minuscule gap in the door. My fingers made claws as I launched myself forward and slammed into the sliding door.

It flew open as if it wanted me to come inside.

Maybe it did. Karma is a Rhododendron.