

## The Yoga Experience

“You look tight,” Janice heard, took a couple more steps, and then realized that the voice had been talking to her.

“What?” she asked, nearly yelling.

“So,” he tried again, smiling, “Ever think about a yoga class.”

She willed herself to say something reasonable.

“Well,” she began, “There are just so many kinds. I wouldn’t know where to begin.”

The line inched forward. Janice began to sweat a little, suddenly wishing that the line weren’t advancing and that she had a little more time to talk to this man.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Janice”

“Janice, I’m Dana. I’m glad to see that you’re open to the idea.”

Janice has been so distracted by his girly name and deciding whether she thought that it enhanced or detracted from his appeal that she hadn’t followed his logic.

“What?” she asked.

“I can tell that you’re open to the yoga experience. Most people don’t know that there are many varieties of yoga.”

Janice’s body language betrayed her evaluation of him when she tilted her head to the side, yet stepped back a bit.

“Hmph,” she responded.

Blowing right over her ambivalence, he reached in his pocket, which pulled his pants down a bit so that she could see both the top band of his plaid boxers and just the slightest sliver of hip. He gave her a card for a yoga studio.

“Tuesdays. Eight-o-clock. You should check out my class.”

She took the card answering, “Maybe I will.”

They stood there in awkwardness inching forward in line until her turn had come.

Her friends had told her that she should take the class. Everyone she talked to about this gave her two reasons. One of the reasons was the same among her friends. That she *had* to go to the class because she always had the most interesting things happen to her.

The day she finally decided to go, she was bored and figured that she could benefit from yoga in her life. She hoped that it would relax her, or at the very least make her less stiff. If yoga proved to be everything the converts had said, she could perhaps kick her road rage problem.

So after work, she ate a light dinner and headed to the local sportswear section to look for yoga pants. She found the best fitting ones she could find and stopped by the cosmetics area to pick out new quick-dry toe-nail polish and an emery board. She changed her clothes in the restroom and painted her toenails in the car. As she waited for her toenails to dry, she spritzed herself with body spray and created an I-don't-care-that-much tousled ponytail taking care to ensure that the wisps she let out in the front framed her face flatteringly.

She went to the studio, parked and strode through the front door. She paid for her drop in class and looked around. She was shocked to see the variety of body types in the class and the unabashed stretching that was happening right before her eyes. And the bending. She hadn't anticipated advanced bending when she had coiffed her ponytail.

When she saw the sundry straps, blocks and mats that people took from their bags, she realized that she was unprepared. She hadn't even thought to bring a water bottle. According to the woman at the desk, the class was ninety minutes long.

Just as she turned around to leave, Dana was right in front of her.

"I was wondering if you would ever come check it out. Here, let me show you around."

He placed his hand on her shoulder and began to guide her. She liked the feel of his hand on her body, through a slight pull in her gut told her to proceed with caution.

After she got a mat, a strap, a pair of blocks, a blanket and a bolster from the closet, he gestured to a spot on the floor near the front of the class.

“You’ll want to sit up front where you can see me, especially since this is your first time.”

He smiled at her again.

Janice smiled back, blushing because that smile had just made her twelve dollars and ninety minutes worth it.

Janice went through the class and was able to do most of what Dana taught, at least in the modified poses until the end of the class came and he began to lead relaxation activities.

She was good right through, “Everyone find a space near the wall. Take your mat, your bolster and your blanket. Lie down with your legs up against the wall. Relax. Close your eyes.”

The command to close her eyes always made Janice uncomfortable. Upon hearing it, her torso shot upward which would have been fine if her legs weren’t against the wall. In response to the sudden movement, her legs bent reflexively and she found herself in a position that reminded her of an expired beetle. Legs in the air, arms in the air, head up and in an awkward pose.

Dana glanced at her and smiled again.

“If this is uncomfortable to you, just try to relax using the deep breathing we did at the beginning of class.”

Janice lay on her mat trying to breathe deeply while looking at the ceiling tiles. She had zoned out until she heard, “quiet your mind.”

That instruction was like throwing a match into a container of fireworks. Her mind went everywhere all at once. Pop! *Look at that girl’s panties. What color is that? Is that more of a beige or*

*an ecru? Crackle! Is he double-jointed? Bang! That guy looks dead. Fizzle. Fizzle. Fizzle. I wonder if yoga helps sexual stamina. I wonder what Dana is like in bed. I wonder it would feel like to grab him by the shoulders and pull him down right...*

She heard the blocks around her making that wood-thunk sound and heard the sound of bare feet striking a wooden floor.

She looked up and found Dana staring right down at her.

“It looks like you really got into it at the end. I think that if you come back a few more times, then you’ll really start to enjoy it.”

Janice had been going to yoga class for several weeks when Dana approached her after class.

“So, Janice, how are do you like it so far?”

“I keep coming back,” she said, smiling at him.

“I think you’re ready to take your yoga practice to the next level.”

She looked at him, appraising him again. Being in the class with him had taken away some of the luster of his appeal. Every once in a while before class she heard him say something that she didn’t quite think was correct. That and he seemed to trip over himself trying to impress people. Just that evening she heard him talking to some girl she had named in her mind, History Girl. When she overheard him mis-Roosevelt to her, she looked at the girl who just shook her head and rolled her eyes, then joked that he should stick to yoga.

“Oh?” she answered him.

“Yes, your experience could be so much deeper. Wait here.”

It occurred to her that she did not like being given orders outside of the context of the class. He smiled at her and touched her shoulder.

*Never mind.*

She waited.

When he came back, he handed her a few books on yoga practice.

“Janice, I also do private lessons.”

“I don’t know...”

“The first session’s free.”

“Where is it?”

“Right here in the studio. We could do it next week, right after class.”

“Uh, okay.”

She nodded him a good-bye-and-this-conversation-is-over nod and made her way home.

The next week, she has almost forgotten about the extra session until the end of class came and Dana invited the class to let go of their thoughts and let their mind be silent. As usual, her mind did the opposite. She had come far in her physical exploration of yoga but seemed to get worse and worse about letting go of her thoughts. Something about that rang wrong to her. She feared that if she just let her thoughts go that they might go forever, that she might never get them back.

After everyone left the class he closed the door to the room they were in.

“Would you prefer if I left this open?”

Janice shrugged.

“What I want to do with you to day is show you some ways you can go deeper into your yoga practice. Did you have a chance to read the books I gave you last week?”

“I’ve been really busy...”

“Don’t worry. I do a lot of reading on the topic and I think that you could benefit from some added techniques. I would like you to go into the downward facing dog.”

She did, step by step, textbook.

“You are going to feel me place my hand on your lower back, and my other hand on your left leg.”

“Okay...”

He placed his hands on her, but she could barely feel them. I need you to concentrate on the sensation of my hands on your body.

“Okay.”

“I am going to make small circles on your back and on your leg. I have been studying this technique...”

Janice tuned him out. She didn't like when he talked about his own practice or his own studies. He never brought those stories back home, never showed how they would help the class. They came off as bragging, all look-at-how-transcendent-I-am. While thinking about this, she began to feel a tingling sensation in her arms. It was as if there were mild pleasant electricity buzzing right below the surface. The feeling spread up her arms to her shoulders and her back and her legs. It grew more intense, and more pleasurable. She felt like all of the tension throughout her body were being loosened, detached from all of the tough and tight muscles where it hid and hung on.

“Janice,” he said getting her attention by use of her name, “I am going to place both of my hands on this leg. I can feel your energy flow increasing, and according to my studies...”

Janice tuned out again. She felt the sensation increase and then suddenly it felt like all of the tension streamed toward his hands. She concentrated on staying in the pose though her body, without the everyday tightness, felt foreign to her.

Suddenly, she heard a very loud popping sound.

A warm calm came over her. It was as if all of her body parts sighed, one-by-one and thanked her. First her left arm, then her right. Then her left shoulder, than right. It continued on like this, very methodical, symmetrically. Just as she expected to feel her left leg say thank you, she felt nothing. No warmth, no relief. Nothing.

She concentrated on her leg when she realized that she felt coolness. Cooler. Cooler. Cold. She opened her eyes to find that Dana did not look gloriously tan, but pallid. She let her eyes fall from his face and saw that he was holding in his hands a leg.

Her leg.

She screamed.

“Wait, calm down. This is just a part of...”

“No, motherfucker, you need to put my leg back on right now.” And then she fell out of the downward dog and flat on chest. Her forehead hit the ground and she fainted.

She woke up on her back and found Dana hovering above her.

“Did you enjoy the experience?”

Confused, she looked from him to her leg which was now reattached and back to him.

“What?” She said not knowing what else to say. She didn’t recognize her own voice. It was raspy, as if sand swirled around in her throat. He placed his hand on her forearm and guided her into a standing position and walked her toward the door, with insistence.

“Remember to drink lots of water. That is the best way to make sure you stay loose.”

“But wait...what...”she tried to ask.

But by this time, he has pushed her out of the door and locked it behind her. She stared toward the door for a very long while and waited for him to come back out.

Dana didn’t leave until he saw her go, and even then he waited another hour.

That night was the last night he taught yoga. And Janice has never spoken with a clear voice again.