

## FLOATING GHOST POSE

Miraculously, I'm one of the first ones here. Maybe that shouldn't be much of a miracle, considering I sign up for this class every week and end up cancelling the day of about half the time. Because half the time, between my job and my kids, something always seems to come up. They can't fault me too much; who has time to go to a noon yoga class on a Wednesday? Well, today I do. But only because I left without telling anyone I was going. What is it about announcing you have an appointment (if you reserve a yoga class in an app, it counts as an appointment, right?) that somehow breathes dumpster fires into existence?

Because I am one of the first ones here, I don't notice her file in behind me. I'm too busy exchanging small talk with the instructor I have been practicing with for over a decade, ever since I moved here. He's giving me a hard time for canceling my reservation the past three weeks. I look around me and see the class is only half full, so clearly my reservation isn't impeding the Wednesday noon crowd in a significant way. It's then, 30 seconds before the start of class, just as the instructor is closing the door, that I see her.

Only I don't think it's her. I think it's just somebody who looks eerily similar to her. After all, how could she be here? It's been ten years since we worked together in another city half an interstate away, since we were friends, colleagues, carpool buddies, and happy hour playmates.

Come to think of it, we were yoga comadres then, too, at least before the Great Recession. Back then, every tech company was shilling their catered lunches, ping pong table, and open offices in an attempt to woo the millennials desperate for stable employment. Ours did all that, and one-upped the others with its twisty slide from the third floor to the first, and its dodgeball court, where we also did free yoga classes twice a week. She and I would stay after work to perfect our down dog and cat-cow while my dog and her cat waited at home, because why not? We were in our mid-twenties with mid-twenties level responsibilities and walk-up apartments in the same mid-twenties populated neighborhood.

The resemblance was uncanny, really. She had the same hair that I'd always been jealous of – huge and dark and curly while mine was dishwater blonde, straight, and clung to my scalp like it was afraid of the outside world. If we'd still been friends, I'd have snapped a clandestine – and probably inopportune – yoga photo of her and texted her about her Austin doppelganger. I still had her number saved in my phone, many phones later. I think it was then that she felt me staring, and her dark eyes met my light ones, which I quickly averted.

We weren't friends anymore. We stopped being friends soon after the yoga classes stopped being offered, the catered lunches stopped arriving, and roles started being eliminated. We were both told our roles were safe, but she thought mine was probably safer than hers. Though I would never have admitted it at the time, she was right. As soon as a position on my team opened up, she'd applied for it, begging for a recommendation she probably knew I wouldn't give, and not just because we had run interference with potential one-night stands for each other.

But it didn't matter, because that was business, not personal, and it was more than 10 years ago, and it was halfway around the country. She couldn't be here now, in *my* yoga class with *my* instructor, trying not to fall out of half-moon pose. From this angle, I could only see her back, her perky yoga butt, her

gorgeous ponytail. The instructor paused while we held our half-moon pose and our stomachs grumbled, late for lunch (I certainly wasn't going to eat a big lunch before yoga), to praise our form.

*Beautiful, Lisa.* That was me.

*Wonderful, Shelly.* That was someone a row in front of me.

*Excellent work, Melissa.* That was her. That was her name.

But it couldn't be Melissa, because Melissa couldn't be here, couldn't have followed me down I-35 fifteen hours and randomly be in the same tiny Wednesday afternoon yoga class as me. Melissa was a common-enough name for women of my generation who weathered the 2008 recession when we were barely starting out; it could just be a very incredible, uncanny coincidence. I still couldn't see her face, of course, because she was behind me and slightly to the right, and any time I was looking behind me, she was also looking the same direction.

And even if it was her, which of course was impossible, there's no way she would recognize me. Yes, I still had the same extreme introvert hair and the same complexion that reflected how little time I spent outside, but I'd birthed two children in those ten years, my former narrow hips and perky tits absconding along with the end of my twenties. She, on the other hand, if it was her, looked like she hadn't gained a pound since the last time we carpoled to the office together. Facing the back of the room in a standing split, I fight the urge to examine her hips and look for a wedding ring instead of keeping my own parallel to the floor.

Besides, she was the one who decided to stop being friends with me. After she applied, my boss had asked me about Melissa, since he knew she and I were friends. He probably didn't even know he was putting me in an awkward situation, since he was the kind of boss who would send me an email, then come to my desk to tell me he sent me an email, then stand next to my open office desk while I read the email. I did what any self-respecting rule follower would do: I told my boss the truth. Melissa was a great culture fit (the kind phrase tech companies co-opted to describe people they thought they could entice with office beer fridge socialization, so they'd stay at the office later), but I didn't think she had the right set of technical skills for the role.

After she was passed over for the position, the change in our friendship was immediate and permanent. She wasn't able to carpool to work anymore. The weekly standing invitation to hang out at the dive bar between our apartments was rescinded. She unfriended me on Facebook and blocked me from commenting on her blog "You Wish You Had My Hair" (yes, I totally did). And so, there I sat, gainfully employed and alone in my apartment, texting my old friends from college who all lived hours away from me. What choice did I have? She was the first friend I'd made when I moved to Des Moines, already my second city that year. My local friend group consisted entirely of people she'd introduced me to; it wasn't hard to imagine who they'd side with in a friend divorce. She *new-phone-who-dis*-ed me like we hadn't spent the majority of every day together for months.

*Let go of the tension in your breath. Let go of the tension in your hands. Let go of the tension in your face. Find your way into Floating Ghost Pose.*

Because my mind had transported me back a decade to my sad recession-era Des Moines apartment, I had momentarily forgotten that I was in a yoga class in Austin with the person who'd been my best

friend for a few intense months. I slowly moved into a squat, hoping my hips, which had never been the same since that first third trimester of pregnancy, wouldn't pop so loud the whole class would turn and look at me. More specifically, that Melissa wouldn't turn and look at me. I spiked my heels and glued them together, wondering if she was staring at my back and remembering how I'd stabbed her in hers.

But I hadn't stabbed her in the back. I'd simply been honest when asked if I wanted to work alongside this woman I carpooled with, the wingwoman who'd gotten me laid because I didn't have her confidence to approach attractive men in bars for the sole purpose of getting laid. She must have stored that confidence in her hair. But even unbridled confidence couldn't qualify her for a job she wasn't qualified for – one that required focus and knowledge she didn't have. She avoided me at work after that, of course, and I'm ashamed to admit that after her entire department was eliminated, all I felt was relief. I never saw her again. Until today, that is. There are only ten minutes left in class and I'm praying to all the gods (just to be on the safe side) that she doesn't recognize my Warrior II.

*Nice, Lisa.*

I don't want the instructor to say my name. I want to forget this class and this gym were ever part of my life the way she forgot we were ever friends. As we move through our final vinyasa and into down dog, I watch as the ends of her hair softly brush her colorful yoga mat, ponytail full of secrets about how we ended up in the same city, in the same yoga class, a decade after she deleted my number and never looked back. In savasana, I usually have to fight against sleep in a way I don't in my bed at night, yoga having quieted the voices in my head that enjoy reminding me of all the ways I failed today and all the opportunities I have to fail tomorrow. Today, though, my thoughts are like wildfire as I lie in corpse pose plotting an exit strategy.

I put a towel over my face to hide while people around me relax. It's one of the scratchy white hand towels provided by the gym and washed free of other people's sweat multiple times per day, and it does little to inspire higher brain function. I wonder if people from work have noticed I've disappeared and I wonder if Melissa has noticed her former friend, formerly skinny and single, now wears a wedding ring and a yoga top crafted out of a t-shirt from a PTA fundraiser. The instructor tells us to wake, but I've never been more awake in my life. I want to bolt out the door before we gather our knees, roll onto our sides in the fetal position, press and rise to a seat, place two palms together, then bow and honor my own effort and the effort of those around me. *Namaste*. But I'm a rule follower. I can't. Those are the rules of yoga.

I've practiced with this instructor long enough for him to know I don't do post-class small talk, so he won't be surprised when I sneak out the door before most people are done with their *namaste*. But of course, Melissa is not most people, and when I turn to dart out the door with my hastily rolled yoga mat under my arm, I run face-first into her knowing gaze. A gaze that says: *I know it was you, Lisa. You broke my heart.*