



NEE UPON A

ZOMBIE

BY STORM STOKER

To

Kath, Melly, Sky, Phil, Stacey, Nova, Pat, Katrina, Jackie, Sue and April.

Your brains are inspiring... and probably quite tasty.

ONCE UPON A ZOMBIE

By

Storm Stoker

Mortui vivos docebunt

The dead shall teach the living

CHAPTER ONE

A lace curtain fluttered in the second story window of a crumbling Victorian house and dark, troubled eyes anxiously watched the deserted street.

A lone figure turned the corner onto Commonwealth Road and hurried along the shadowy sidewalk then climbed the steps to the front door.

“He’s here,” Eliza let the lace curtain fall back into place.

“Then he’s not dead,” Hal said.

“No, he’s not dead,” Eliza said

“Yet,” Hal said.

“Yet,” Eliza answered softly.

There was a single knock on the door and then it was pushed open by a pale, chubby, middle-aged man. He stepped inside and stated the obvious.

“I’m here,” he said, “I’m sorry I’m late, Princess.”

“Hi, Niles,” Eliza greeted her friend. “When are you going to promote me from princess to Queen?”

“Don’t be silly, I’m the only real queen in this group,” he gave a sad smile. Melancholy dripped from Niles like rain, his idea of a good day was any day he didn’t spend sobbing uncontrollably and threatening to kill himself.

“Now we can finally get started,” Sri said, and lifted his nose and took a whiff of Niles as he sat next to him on the couch. Sri was allergic to practically every food and fragrance on earth and was constantly sniffing the air to test for contamination; the wrong cologne on someone could send him to the emergency room.

Niles gave a nod to Willow, Yuki and Cat, the three women sitting on pillows on the floor. Willow’s long, brown hair flowed out around her like spilled coffee. Willow’s excessively colorful, flowing clothes seemed to flutter around her like butterfly wings and no one would have been surprised if she'd suddenly taken flight. Yuki on the other hand, was totally Goth in every aspect from the five silver studs in her left ear to her black leather mini-skirt and black fishnet stockings and black lace blouse that screamed, “I’m a Japanese art student and I will not conform to the image of a Japanese art student!”

Hal was sitting in the rocking chair drinking soda. He was a big guy and always wore his “Gone Fishin” baseball hat over his buzz cut. He hated his full name, Harold, so everyone called him Hal.

“You look fabulous, Cat, beige becomes you,” Niles said and she rewarded him with a smile. Her smile was perfect because her teeth weren't and the very fact they were crooked made her smile endearing and forced people to return it. Cat was the only one of the group who dressed up to Niles's sense of fashion.

The strange group of seven misfits met every Sunday night to watch a movie, eat dinner and discuss how to survive a zombie apocalypse. They usually met at Eliza's and Sri's house. They had been roommates for years, only roommates, as they viewed each other as no more than friends. It was also painfully obvious to everyone except Sri and Cat that the two were hot for each other. They had been renting the place from a nice old man who seemed to think that rent prices had stopped rising in the 1980's. Eliza and Sri were happy to keep him in the dark regarding inflation, but it also meant that they felt they could not contact him when repairs were needed. They rented the entire second floor which threatened to fall into the first floor at any moment. The floor boards squeaked loudly with the lightest step and their downstairs neighbors had frequently left passive-aggressive notes on their door, before they finally moved out. The house was currently vacant except for them. Despite the gas stove that didn't quite work and the non-working fire place, Eliza and Sri loved the place. It had that crumbly Victorian old-world charm that gave the place a real sense of history. The giant windows, hard-wood floors, crown molding and high ceilings gave the place the feel of a haunted house. It was perfect for watching creepy old movies.

“Does anyone want anything before we start the movie?” Eliza asked.

“An apple martini would make me feel special,” Niles said and used his fingers to groom his spiked blond hair.

“You can have water, tea or cheap wine,” Eliza said.

Niles sighed and Eliza put on the movie, turned out the lights and sat on the floor next to Sri.

Ten minutes into the movie they began ripping it apart.

“What an idiot! Why are people in horror films always so stupid?” Hal groaned.

“I’ll never understand why they don’t just head for a deserted area or head for an island,” Yuki said.

“In the case of a zombie apocalypse, depending on the type, getting away from people is the only sensible option,” Eliza said.

Niles groaned, “Oh for heaven’s sake! Spare us nothing! They’ve spent five minutes showing the hero parking his car.” He dipped a tortilla chip into a jar of chocolate-hazelnut spread.

“I think the parking the car scene is Oscar worthy,” Eliza said sarcastically, “Notice how it built tension and set the mood.”

Half way through the movie they decided to take a break and have dinner.

Eliza refused to pause movies, but instead always narrated the movie so no one would miss a valuable second.

“Potted plant! Then there is a guy with a drink and now a close up of his pantleg...” Eliza shouted from the living room.

In the kitchen they served themselves bowls of a strange, soupy liquid containing chickpeas and other UFOs, unidentified floating objects.

“Did you make this witches brew, Eliza?” Yuki shouted towards the living room.

“Of course not, Willow made it. You know I don’t cook. I haven’t cooked a meal since the Reagan administration!” Eliza shouted back.

“I haven’t been laid since the Reagan administration,” Niles groused.

“I haven’t had a job since the Reagan administration,” Sri added.

“I was four during the Reagan administration,” Yuki gloated.

“Who is Reagan?” Cat joked.

“OK, I get it. I’m old! I’m older than all of you. I’m an ancient forty-one years old, that’s like eighty in gay years,” Niles complained.

“I’m old, too,” Eliza shouted, “I’m almost thirty-five.”

A few eyebrows went up but no one dared mention she’d been thirty-five for a couple of years.

Yuki, at twenty-six, was the youngest of the group.

“Do you think we are all getting too old to keep having these sci-fi Sunday meetings? I mean, shouldn’t we be doing something? Getting real jobs, careers, building meaningful relationships with other humans or something? Do you think we are wasting our lives?” Cat asked.

They all looked at each other for a few seconds and then shrugged and went back to filling their bowls.

“What could be more meaningful than Sci-fi Sunday?” Eliza asked from the living room.

Yuki smashed some tortilla chips and sprinkled them into the soup hoping to give it some flavor, or if not flavor, at least some texture. Yuki hated soup, preferring food that crunched.

“If everyone has some food, we shall continue our epic journey to the 1950’s where earth is blighted by hordes of rampaging zombies created by the ever-loathsome invention known as atomic energy. Hold onto your seats kids, it’s modern science gone awry!” Eliza said, imitating the typical narrator voice of the 1950’s horror movies.

“Sorry the soup isn’t better. It’s hard to cook something Sri isn’t allergic to,” Willow said.

“Stop apologizing, you are a brilliant chef, the soup is delicious,” Hal said.

“I wish people wouldn’t make food with so many unnatural chemicals in them,” Sri said in his soft Calcutta accent, “I needed an epi-shot the other day because of red-dye number twenty, whatever that is. I appreciate you changing the menu for me”

“There are no epi-shots allowed after one of my meals! Besides, it’s better for us to eat all natural foods and not things that have been polluted with chemicals,” Willow said.

“Like atomic energy!” Eliza picked up the remote, turned the volume up and continued in her narrator voice. “This brilliant movie epitomizes the fear awakened in the human psyche after WWII; the specter of atomic warfare replaced our fears of black magic and the undead. Up until this time, zombies were a product of voodoo magic and zombies could only be called forth by an evil living human being. Movies go from the religious supernatural fear to fear of modern science and technology.”

“Yeah, remember *The Creature with the Atomic Brain*, the 1955 flick we saw three weeks ago where the Nazi scientists raise an army of zombies with atomic energy? The movie we saw two weeks ago was Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* made in the 1960’s and zombies had become scarier and had become evil without needing evil

masters to control them. They could become zombies in more ways too, like mutating diseases, animal bites, passing through the tale of a comet, radiation, toxic spills....can you think of any other ways to become a zombie, Cat?" Eliza asked.

"Well, sometimes the undead just rise for no reason at all, or because hell runs out of room, but my favorite are the disease based zombies because that could sort of actually happen," Cat said.

"If there was really a zombie outbreak, we would totally kick ass," Hal said, opening his sixth can of Coke. Hal and Willow always carried a cooler of Cokes with them to feed their addiction. "Who in the world has watched more zombie movies or played more zombie video games than the seven of us?"

"You're right, we're probably the world's leading experts. Also, the heroes in all of these zombie movies give us a perfect blueprint of what *not* to do," Cat said running her hands through her short brown hair and tugging at it as if she could make it grow faster. She had her haircut the week before at a crappy mall salon to save money, and they had butchered her.

"Which survival approach would you use, *When the Zombies Came to Town* or *Brains! Brains! Brains!* Part one and two? Willow asked.

"Ah! The eternal question! To fortify and hide or to flea to a deserted location?" Eliza exclaimed.

"Didn't everyone die in both of those movies?" Yuki asked.

"I wish it would just happen already. I hate my life. If zombies would eat me, I wouldn't have to go to work tomorrow. They'd probably reject me for insufficient brain

matter, though,” Niles said and gave up on his bowl of unnamed health soup and picked up a bag of chips and the bowl of chocolate-hazelnut dip.

“I know we talk about our zombie survival plan every Sci-fi Sunday, but I’m not convinced that Eliza and Sri’s house is the place we should meet. I just don’t think it is isolated enough,” Yuki said. She grabbed half of her black ponytail in each hand and gave it a yank, sending the red rubber band back into place firmly against her head.

“We have been over this, the plan is perfect. We’ll just meet here at The Manor, gather supplies and go to a more secluded spot from here,” Eliza explained.

“I love calling this dump, ‘The Manor’,” Sri smiled.

“But I don’t want to go north, can’t we go someplace warmer?” Yuki asked.

“Zombies don’t do well in cold weather, that’s why it is best to go north,” Cat said.

“Humans don’t do well in cold weather either,” Yuki argued, “What will we eat? How will we stay warm?” Her voice was low and throaty, but strangely threatening, like a tiger's purr that could suddenly turn into a growl.

“The tropical Hawaiian chunk can’t handle our frosty New England winters,” Hal teased, using a nickname she had been assigned since arriving in New England six years ago.

“I hate snow, I can’t believe my parents named me Yuki, which is the word for snow in Japanese,” Yuki complained. “But I can handle anything!” She resented any suggestion that she was weak or couldn’t handle something.

“Hey, when can I have a cool nickname?” Niles asked jealously.

“When you decide on one!” Willow said.

“We have to have a plan for every possible contingency and every possible zombie scenario,” Eliza said.

“I hope we get the slow style zombies and not the new-fangled, high-speed zombies you see in the movies now,” Cat said.

“Yeah, and I hope it is the type that only spreads through a bite and not one of those deals where every single human that has ever died and that ever will die from now on rises from the dead,” Yuki said.

“If that happened we would all be screwed,” Niles said gloomily. “You’re all younger than I am, you can outrun the zombies. I’ll just die.”

“No way! If the zombie apocalypse happened we would go right from the bottom of the food chain to the top of the food chain. It will be so awesome!” Hal said, pumping his beefy arms in the air, causing the cat in his lap to meow in protest.

“At least I would be living in a world where I actually understood the rules and could be you know—successful instead of being a starving artist,” Yuki said.

“It’s a sad statement that the only way we can fit in and succeed is if the dead rise and feast on the brains of the living,” Eliza said.

“I need a patron! Then I wouldn’t need the zombie apocalypse!” Yuki slammed her head down dramatically on the arm of the sofa. “Why must artists always starve? Why must genius suffer?”

“Maybe instead of the abstract paintings and weird sculptures you should draw some animee,” Hal suggested.

“Just because I’m Japanese doesn’t mean I want to draw animee!” Yuki growled and glared at him through her too long and weirdly chopped bangs.

“Sorry, I do like some of your sculptures, especially the one where you welded all those knives and forks and spoons together. I’d buy it if I could afford it but being a part time trumpet player barely pays the rent or feeds the rats.” Hal said.

“Yes, he’s right, you’d be surprised at how much food ten rats will eat,” Willow said, “Oh, I know none of you understand why we have ten pet rats, but they are really very lovable pets.”

“I need a patron!” Yuki repeated.

“Me too!” Hal and Eliza said at the same time.

“Where does one find a patron?” Hal asked.

“Medieval times, I think,” Yuki answered. “I just don’t know why it is so impossible to find someone willing to help a starving artist!”

“Well, you know what they say, give a man a match and he’ll be warm for a moment but set him on fire and he’ll be warm for the rest of his life,” Hal said.

“What?” Yuki snorted, “That doesn’t make any sense!”

“I know, I just like saying it,” Hal admitted.

“It’s ironic that we are all over-educated, geniuses and we are all unemployed or under employed except for Niles who works at Dunkin’ Donuts!” Eliza pointed around the room, “Sri, degree in Physics, Niles, degrees in psychology, Willow, degree in English and journalism, Hal music and history degree, Cat, anthropology and computer expert, Yuki art student, and me, an expert in everything, and all we have to show for a stack of useless degrees is bone crushing student loans. Life isn’t fair!”

“I sometimes wonder how many more crappy jobs I will have to survive until retirement,” Cat said wistfully.

“Ok, whoever has had the worst job gets the last Oreo,” Sri said waving it in his hand, “I’ll start- I worked at a domestic violence agency when I was a student and my boss was the most emotionally abusive person I have ever met. I need years of therapy and vats of medication after being screamed at by that horrible woman,” Sri said.

“I can recommend someone,” Niles said helpfully.

“Remember that job Yuki had at the day care?” Cat asked.

Everyone started laughing.

“She sat there all day guarding the babies and periodically checking to make sure they were still breathing!” Cat said rolling on her side giggling.

“Well...none of them stopped breathing on my watch,” Yuki said tartly.

“You are about as maternal as a cactus,” Willow said grinning at Yuki.

“Well, what about you Willow, you took a job at a veterinary clinic where you had to watch the doctor put animals to sleep all day. You, the biggest animal lover of all time, having to watch animals suffer and die all day long for minimum wage,” Yuki said.

“Yeah and it didn’t help that the vet was a total perv and would chase me around the desk all day long,” Willow said folding her arms in anger.

“I still say we should have sued the bastard,” Hal said his face flushing pink.

“Sadly, that still wasn’t the worst job I have ever had, Honey, do you remember that job we had at the chicken factory? We had to pull the guts out of the chickens as they passed on the conveyor belt and the manager kept screaming at us to increase our quotas?” Willow added.

“Complain all you like, at least you people have had jobs! I can’t even get anyone to hire me, it’s been years since I have had insurance, I haven’t been to a dentist since... since...” Eliza trailed off.

“Since the Reagan administration?” Niles asked. “Anyway I have to get up every morning before dawn and make donuts while my boss, who was born after the Reagan administration mocks me,” Niles said sadly.

“Well I once worked for my mom for a summer in her lab, she criticized everything I did,” Cat said, looking depressed.

“Your mom is evil incarnate but I gotta go with chicken guts this time,” Sri said regretfully. “Divide it as you see fit,” Sri said handing the Oreo ceremoniously to Willow.

Willow handed half the cookie to Hal and the two of them high-fived victoriously.

“Ooh there is still one more brownie left. Whoever has the worst-family-ever wins the brownie!” Niles announced.

Everyone groaned.

“You win Niles, hands down!” Hal said giving Niles a sympathetic look. Part of the reason Niles was always so depressed was because his entire family disowned him when they found out he was gay.

“I don’t know if I deserve this brownie I mean Cat’s mom is a...” Niles was interrupted by the persistent ring of the cell phone.

They all knew it was Cat’s mom calling because Cat had programmed the ring tone to play Beethoven’s fifth symphony when she called. Everyone rolled their eyes as Cat stood up and moved to the kitchen to take the call.

“My parents never call me,” Eliza bragged. “The way I grew up it was always assumed that at the age of eighteen, your lease was up, and the formal agreement between parent and child would cease.”

“That seems cold,” Willow commented.

“Emotions were to be stuffed down far into your guts, where they belong and all crying was to be done quietly face down into a pillow,” Eliza said primly.

Everyone giggled.

“Well my family wasn’t that bad but I have to say everyone always blatantly favored my sister over me in every way, they didn’t even try to hide it. Her college was paid for but when it was my turn, I was told to try for a loan,” Willow said.

“Hey, we don’t need them or their money...ok we need their money, but at least you have your bachelors now, even if it is a wee bit useless,” Hal said. “My family... well let’s just say if they were a bottle of tequila I would be the worm.”

Everyone laughed again, Hal’s family all had addiction issues.

“I never get to see my parents, they are always out spending my pitiful inheritance on cruises and RV’s. They never call me. What about you Yuki? I’ve never heard you mention your family,” Sri asked.

“They are all dead to me,” Yuki said, with a far away look in her eye.

Eliza coughed uncomfortably.

“What did she want this time?” Niles asked, as Cat reentered the room looking upset.

“The usual, why won’t I come and work for her in the lab? When am I going to stop wasting my life? She thinks everything that is wrong with her life is my fault” Cat said sitting down angrily, rubbing the throbbing vein in her forehead.

“The lab, where she tortures cute little rats, for the military?” Willow asked.

“You know I would rather gouge out my own eyes than work there,” Cat said.

There was a collective sigh.

“This is depressing me,” said Niles, who was never anything but depressed.

“Let’s finish the movie, the Princess has been waiting three weeks to see this.”

“This movie is hard,” Hal complained.

“This is two hours of my life gone...I’ll never get them back,” Niles said.

“This is the best zombie movie ever made!” Eliza said from her place on the floor mere inches from the television.

“Are we still on for Disaster Saturday?” Cat asked.

“Oh, yes, I’m making a tofurkey dinner with all the fixings!” Willow said, “We’ll be watching the original *Poseidon Adventure*, the new remake is inferior of course. All remakes are inferior to the original.”

“I like it that we have Thanksgiving dinner in June. Who says we can only have a turkey dinner in November?” Yuki asked.

“Tofurkey,” Willow corrected.

“Look at these idiots,” Hal said, pointing at the television. “They are doing everything wrong, I mean for the love of god, we are half way through the movie and no one has thought to pick up a weapon? I would have a board with a nail in it at very least by now.”

“Screw the board! I would have my sawed-off pump-action shotgun, my thirty-ought-six, my AK47, my Glock-nine, my midnight special, my Japanese steel, a couple of pipe bombs and a machete by now,” Yuki said. “Never corner something more dangerous than you are, and nothing is more dangerous than me!”

“Calm down,” Cat said, “The machete is the most useful anyway, you don’t have to worry about running out of ammo.”

“My therapist said I’m not allowed to have guns,” Niles said.

“I’d have to figure out a way to take my rats along, I couldn’t bear to leave my rats behind,” Willow said.

“I envy your ability to love,” Niles said blandly.

“Shh! You’re going to miss it!” Eliza whispered.

“They all turned to watch as a horde of zombies broke through the doors and windows of the poorly constructed shack the heroes had chosen to hide in. They laughed as some of the characters were consumed by the horde.

“Not bad for 1950’s special effects,” Sri said.

“They deserve to die for their sheer stupidity,” Hal said critically, “Darwin award! I mean, who in their right mind would choose an indefensible home base? You need a secure place in the middle of nowhere with easy access to food and a defensible perimeter. In a pinch you could go into a barn with a loft, or a house with at least two stories and chop down the staircase behind you. Everyone knows Zombies can’t climb.”

“The trick to survival is knowing early-on that you are in a horror movie. It’s all the denial at the beginning that increases the mortality rate. I’m sorry but if I saw one, just one, dead person reanimate – well, that is all it would take,” said Eliza. “I realize that

natural disasters in stressful times make people ascribe heightened meaning to random events of physics but hey, a zombie is a zombie!”

“I prefer the Romero movies,” Cat said, “His commentary on whether or not the human race is worth saving is so true. Watching those movies though, I don’t understand why anyone would head towards an enclave of more people, especially a military base.”

“Yeah, that never works for the women who are inevitably turned into sex slaves. Trust me, I would get as far away from people as possible. You can only travel with people you know, that is the only way to survive the zombie apocalypse,” Yuki said.

“That’s why our plan is so perfect, it’s based on years of zombie genre knowledge. As long as we stick to our carefully crafted plan, we will be triumphant,” Eliza stated confidently. “Between the seven of us, we have all the skills we need to survive. Hal would be our zombie-killing expert since he has logged thousands of hours playing *Z-Wars*, the zombie killing simulator video game. You are also good at fishing and food gathering. Yuki can weld things for our defenses and is a weapons specialist. Cat is a computer and biological expert and has logged thousands of hours on *FarmyTown*, the farming simulator game. Niles could be our sailor, Sri our navigator and mechanic. Willow could provide and prepare food and maintain morale and I am pretty and would inspire chivalrous acts of selfless heroism,” Eliza finished and primly adjusted the worn red bandana over her unruly curls.

“The women in these movies are so pathetic, all they do is cry and tremble,” Yuki complained, “If they would stop crying and screaming and run or fight they might actually live. Oops! Now she’s a zombie snack!”

“And it’s over, roll the credits. Once again the zombie triumphs and death wins the day,” Eliza sighed happily.

“Crap, I have to go if I’m ever going to drag myself out of bed and go to work tomorrow,” Niles said in a defeated voice, “I have to get up at 4:00 in the morning so people can have fresh donuts at 6:00.”

“You need a better job, Niles, you have two masters degrees, you should be able to get a better job,” Sri said.

“I’ve applied at over twelve thousand places,” Niles lied, “I’m so glad I got my masters in psychology and communications so I can ask people if they want sprinkles on their donuts.”

“Well, I’m in art school and we all know that is going to end in tragedy,” Yuki complained.

“We are all creative, intelligent people, so why does the world want nothing to do with us?” Cat asked.

“Because we are creative, intelligent people,” Eliza said flatly. “Sometimes I wish I had a normal life.”

“A normal life means you lack courage,” Sri said.

“I’ll take an elegant set of china over courage any day, what is life without decent china?” Eliza asked.

“You are all jeopardizing my sobriety and I think I feel death’s cold breath on the back of my neck. I’m going home to sob until I pass out. Goodnight all. I had a wonderful time,” Niles said and departed.

“Thrive!” Eliza called after him and lifted her fist into the air.

“We need to go home, too,” Willow said, “We don’t like to leave the rats alone too long. They get worried.”

“I wanted to stay and play a video game,” Hal said.

“Do you want to worry the rats?” Willow asked, “You know how anxious they get when we are late getting home.”

Hal shrugged and headed toward the door.

Cat and Yuki joined the migration.

After everyone was gone, Eliza went into the kitchen and pulled a sack out of the freezer and threw it into the trash.

“Why do you do that? Why do you try to cook something and then hide it in the freezer?” Sri asked.

“Because, if at first you don’t succeed – destroy all the evidence that you even tried!” Eliza said, “It is important that one of us learn to cook something in case there is a zombie apocalypse and they eat Willow. Who will cook for us on Sci-Fi Sunday if Willow gets killed?”

“Do you ever listen to yourself?” Sri asked. “What did you attempt to cook?”

“Rice and chicken strips,” Eliza said, “I thought it was something you could eat.”

“That was sweet of you. What happened to it?” Sri asked.

“The rice was mushy and I burned the chicken. I put it in the freezer so no one would find it in the trash. You must never tell anyone that I make any attempt at cooking. Ever!”

“I swear!” Sri said.

“It’s about survival,” Eliza said.

Sri nodded.

“Self preservation,” they both said.