

The Simple Vengeance

by Bob Slocum, English Junior

I.

I'm gonna kill someone.

Not now, probably not soon. I'm not even mad. But someday, without a good reason, I'm going to kill someone.

Maybe it'll be that old guy in the park who leers at me every day when I go by. Not that it bothers me—it's kind of flattering. But who's he kidding? I'm not good looking. My nose is too big. I'm overweight—fat, actually. I wear dumpy clothes. He deserves to die.

Maybe my boss. He's never made a pass at me, tells me I do good work, and gives me a bonus at Christmas, even if I've been screwing up. There's no reason for him to live, either.

I wonder if capital punishment is used here. I'll have to find out.

Not that I care.

Like I said, my boss is nice to me. He's about forty, good looking, well dressed, and is always polite (at least to me). I find myself sometimes sitting at my desk in the typing pool wishing he would make a pass at me. I'm sure he's slept with a few of the other girls in the office, although I don't know who for sure. But I bet he has.

I don't know why I want him to try for me. It's not because I'm horny—I get more than I need, more than I want, at home. The thought of him taking me to bed even

scares me. I'm not sure I could go through with it. Still, I wish sometimes he would walk by me when I'm filing something and grab my ass, or make a lewd remark, or even ask me to dinner, even though I know I'd probably just get embarrassed and try to get away from him. He's probably the nicest person I know, but it seems like he's to blame for something.

I usually didn't wear underwear in high school. It disgusts me now to think about it, but then it kind of excited me, it gave me a funny feeling of freedom and power. It was my secret from everybody—beneath a pair of jeans or a skirt was just *me*, waiting, wanting, then. I didn't go out with many guys in high school but I fantasized about a few of them, especially one tall blond-haired boy in my eleventh grade science class. I sat next to him at a lab table and tried to think of ways of letting him know that I was available to him, that if he wanted to he could just put his hand under my knee-length skirt, but I couldn't do it, and at night in bed I would masturbate while thinking of him sliding his hand up my thigh and finding out. I felt dirty afterwards and couldn't remember why I liked him, and I would get out of bed and cover my naked body with a wool nightgown.

He took me out finally one night, to the amusement park, and I was so excited I thought I would melt from the inside out. I wore a blue cotton dress with little yellow flowers on it and a new pair of sandals. I wanted so badly for him to *know*, to know that I wanted him. I prayed that he wanted me, too.

He took me into this funhouse—it was the first time I had ever been in one—and right in the doorway going in was a fan under the floor blowing up through a grate—I had never seen one of those things before!—and it caught my dress just right and blew it up almost around my head, so that *everyone* could see, and it was two or three seconds before I could get my dress pulled down again and get off that fan. It was a Saturday night and the park was crowded, and everyone was laughing and pointing at me, some of them kids I knew at school. The boy I was with had

been in front of me and hadn't seen it, and when I ran off crying he ran after me and caught me and asked what was the matter, but I couldn't tell him, I was so humiliated. All I could do was cry and hold my dress down tight against me. I didn't go to science class for a week, and when I did I sat in a far corner of the room by myself. Most of the people there had heard about it and were whispering back and forth and glancing back at me, and they were teasing the boy I had gone out with, and he was laughing along with them. Ever since then I have always been fully clothed, and it still doesn't feel like enough.

I remember how I felt sitting in that acidy-smelling room—like I was burning on the inside, and kind of dizzy and sick, like I had the flu, and I just felt like I was going to explode like a bomb and kill everybody there. It's the same way I feel now, and I get like this more often than I used to—I really felt like I wanted to kill someone. I went home at noon that day and threw up, I was so sick.

A few years later, when I started dating my husband, he forced me to have sex with him in the back seat of his car on a black still country road. It was my first time and he hurt me. He still hurts me a little every time, almost every night, but I don't let on—I just lie there and let him do it. As far as he knows, it's all right with me.

I don't let on about a lot of things that bother me. Like our neighbor's dog. That stupid mutt comes running out at me every day snarling and slobbering, until he reaches the end of his rope and jerks back. He seems like he's making fun of me, like he thinks he's better than me. I wish that collar would break his neck. (I've seriously thought of poisoning him—I almost did once, but we didn't have anything I thought would work right.) When our neighbor is out in the yard, the dog acts okay and I smile and say hi, but all the time I'm wishing I had a gun, so I could kill that stupid two-faced dog and that asshole neighbor. They look just alike.

And then when I get home and think about it, killing a dog is *so* ridiculous that I can't believe I wanted to do it. I feel so stupid for thinking things like that. I don't know

what's the matter with me—I'm not violent, really. I've never hurt anyone on purpose in my life. I wouldn't even fight back when I was a kid and my brother picked on me. I'd go to my dad crying and he'd just tell me to hit him back. I *was* bigger than him. But I just couldn't do it. It didn't seem like it would make anything any better.

If he did stuff like that to me now, I'd want to hit him, or kill him, but I don't think I'd really do it. I think I'm afraid to. But every time I get upset about something I can't think straight and I don't feel as afraid as I used to. I can't understand it. I know killing someone wouldn't solve anything, but when I think about doing it I feel better, somehow. I'm not sure if I'd feel better if I killed my boss, or the old man in the park, but I don't think I'd feel any worse. It wouldn't matter which one of them, either—it'd be the same crime either way, and it'd be the same result—they'd put me in jail and I'd be the one suffering again.

When we had been married about a year, before I had started to work, I got pregnant. My husband and I had had a few fights, but we both wanted a baby, so we were really happy to find out. My husband wanted a boy, and it didn't matter to me, so we were making plans for our little son, our little Ronnie—that's what we were going to name him. My husband was really kind to me while I was pregnant and took very good care of me—took care of *us*, he'd tell me. One day, when I was about six months along, I was cleaning some things in the kitchen when I started to have some pains like what the nurse at the pre-natal class we went to said labor pains felt like, but I knew the baby wasn't supposed to be born yet so I just sat down and waited until they stopped, thinking it must be something else. I was kind of scared but I didn't want to tell my husband, who was out washing the car, and get him worried over what was probably nothing, so I went into the bedroom and lay down. I was all right for a while but then the pains started again. Pretty soon they went away, but I was really scared now, sweating and shaking. The next time it hurt real bad, it was horrible, and I started screaming and my husband came in and picked me up and took me to the hospital, but

it was too late and I had a miscarriage—a dead baby boy.

I left the hospital after about a week, and when I got home my husband tried to be as nice as he was before, but I could tell he was mad at me. He tried to keep from blowing up at me but he just kept getting madder at everything I said or did until one day he started yelling at me about something, I don't remember what, and then he started blaming me for killing the baby or something like that. When I started crying he apologized and said that wasn't what he meant, but I know it was, I could tell.

That night I had a dream that our baby was alive and I was feeding him. He was the most beautiful baby I had ever seen, with blue eyes and a little blond fuzz on his head, and dimpled cheeks when he laughed. I was feeding him some meat and kept giving him bigger and bigger pieces, which he couldn't chew, but I still fed them to him, and he was choking horribly and turning purple. My husband was sitting at the table reading the paper, but when the baby started choking the food out and throwing up, he got up and started stabbing me with a big knife. He just kept sticking it into me and there was blood splattered all over and I felt kind of hollowed out and then I fell down, dead, I think. A bunch of noisy policemen, who looked familiar somehow, broke in through the windows and the doors and started chasing my husband around the room, stepping on me every time they went by. My husband told them he didn't do it, so they all turned toward my poor baby and started saying "It's your fault, little Ronnie, you'll die for this," except for some reason the baby's name wasn't Ronnie, it was something else. They pulled their guns out of their pants and pointed them at the baby, who was different now and had long hair and had make-up on, and a dress. They were really big guns, two or three feet long, and big around as baseball bats, glowing red-hot, and they started poking the baby with them, burning scars on his arms and legs and stomach. He screamed a loud cry, so loud it hurt my ears, and he looked so innocent and helpless sitting in his high chair, covered with vomit and strings of meat and my blood, his tears making clean streaks down his face, that I *had* to help him, to save him, but I couldn't move. The

policemen started to tear off the baby's clothes. Under the dress he was naked, and I could see that he was now a girl. The policemen started burning him between the legs with their guns—they were huge men, with powerful chests and big, hard muscles in their arms and legs, so big that they ripped through their clothes—saying all the time, “It’s your fault Ronnie, we’ll show you who’s boss.” I had to do something; I tried to help him speak, to teach him the words. I worked every muscle in my body until it hurt like nothing I’ve ever felt before, trying to help him say something, to help him scream:

“It’s not my fault! It’s not my fault!”

My husband woke me up; he looked scared and confused, and when I saw his face above mine I started to scream and hit him. He grabbed my arms and held me down, saying, “Shhh, it’s all right,” to me like I was a child, and when I finally calmed down he kissed me and went back to sleep. I lay awake the rest of the night, afraid to sleep, afraid to give them another chance at me.

I don’t scream any more during my nightmares. I die in all of them. I’ve gotten so used to it now that it’s just kind of unpleasant, like a hangnail. At least I don’t remember it as being so bad.

I don’t think I would hurt anybody I kill. I could do a good job—quick, painless. I know what dying is like, and what the best ways are to do it. I think I’d be doing someone a favor, killing him. I’d probably do it to someone right now, except I’d get in trouble. I’d hurt myself more than whoever I killed. I’ve been hurt enough—it’s someone else’s turn.

II.

A few days ago I saw that old man in the park talking to someone. He was sitting at his regular bench between the bus stop and the fountain that’s never working, and he was talking to a young woman, a very pretty woman, except she looked kind of snobbish and overdressed. He was just sitting there like he always did, except he was looking at her instead of everyone else, and she was talking to him and

waving her arms around. When I walked by I heard her say something about “Mother and Jerome” doing something, but I couldn’t hear too well because of the traffic. He didn’t even glance at me. That night he was gone—his brown paper sack (lunch, I guess) was still sitting under the bench, unopened—and I haven’t seen him since then. Almost two years, every day, I see him there in the park—I *counted* on seeing him—and now he’s gone.

Our neighbor tied his dog up in the back yard. The dumb thing just lies back there now, not barking or anything. I haven’t seen our neighbor lately. I think maybe he’s out of town. I don’t know who feeds the dog, if anyone does.

Of course, I don’t *care* about the stupid mutt, or if that disgusting old pervert never comes back. It’s just that something funny’s going on. My husband took me out to dinner last night—what does he want from me now? I feel dizzy, off-balance.

I’d kill that old man or my neighbor right now if I saw them, but I think they got away—they knew, they saw it in me. I get the feeling I’ll never see them again. But if I do. . . .

I can see them all clearly now sometimes—when I lie awake in bed, when I start to daydream at work—I can see the faces, the same faces I saw on the policemen in my dream: white, scarred: my boss, my neighbor, the old man in the park, my little brother, people I don’t know. Bad people, their unfriendly faces snarling at me and hating and blaming me for their deaths. They torture me—they show me their bullet holes, their knife wounds, that look raped and sickening. They open their mouths to laugh and black, clotted blood oozes out. They attack me with their suffering—each scream of horror sounds like laughing, every cry of pain is a moan of pleasure. They caress me with their cold hands, they kiss me with their gray lips, they lick me with their fatal wounds. . .

And then my boss will ask me, kindly, if I would keep at my typing—he’s so goddamn nice about it!—or my husband will wonder if anything’s wrong—no, no, dear,

nothing's wrong, *I'm* okay, now wipe the blood off your face, off your arms, hurry, it's dripping on the floor and staining the carpet; and my boss, I tell him, sir, don't you think you should do something about that bleeding, he's bleeding pretty badly, all over those papers I typed, and I don't want to do them again; and the old man in the park, he reaches down and picks up the scarf I dropped, soaking it with blood when he touches it, and he shrugs his shoulders while the blood runs into his shoes and out the holes in the bottom. A dog's head comes crawling toward me, pushing itself along with its tongue, blood splattering from the open throat onto my legs.

The neighbor's dog barks. I sit up in bed, screaming, alive.

III.

It's funny how the blood comes out—smooth, shiny. Cut deeper and it spurts. I finally did it, and it was *easy*. I did it, I tell those taunting faces. They stare in disbelief—they see the blood, the deep slashes I made, and I get the feeling somehow that they are proud of me, or respect me, anyway. Look, I say, I'll cut some more, and I slice at the flesh with my knife, the beautiful maple-handled carving knife I got for a wedding gift, and there's more blood, more blood. Here's one for you, and for you, and for you, I tell them, slicing again and again, and they wince with the pain, I *know* they're feeling the pain because I don't feel a thing, not a thing except relief; and as the faces spin away—*they're* dizzy now, I can see clearly—and grow darker they tell me to stop it and they apologize and tell me it's not my fault.

Which, of course, I already know, and as I grow too weak to cut anymore, I tell them, that's why I'm punishing all of you. . . .