

A PERFECT PLAN

As she slid off his knife, she dragged all his anger away with her, and then he felt – nothing.

Well, not exactly nothing. He felt screwed.

Viki's blood ran down the blade and dripped off the point onto her body, which was now lying on the kitchen floor at his feet. No, not really the point of the blade, Bobby noticed. The point of the blade had broken off, somewhere inside Viki, probably on a rib.

He hadn't meant to kill her, not that she hadn't had it coming. He'd had a real bad day at the warehouse and on deliveries, an even worse day with his co-workers and his customers, and worst of all, he'd almost punched out his boss, except he'd backed down, like always, and that made him feel like – made him feel like his shriveled balls were nailed up on his boss' trophy wall, right next to his perfect 300 game bowling plaque.

So today wasn't a good day for Viki to spring on him that she was pregnant. They had agreed they wouldn't have kids. Bobby had been totally upfront about kids. Sure, he'd marry her if she wanted, in a year or two, when he got his feet on the ground; but no kids, and then she goes and stops taking the pill without telling him, and boom, there's a kid on the way – his kid – and she starts right in leaning on him about getting married right away, like this weekend. She shouldn't have pushed him, but she shined at pushing, and most of the time she acted like she had his balls nailed to the wall over their headboard, on her side of the bed, of course.

“So, either shit or get off the pot, Bobby,” she'd yelled, hands on hips, glaring at him. “What's it gonna be?”

Bobby dropped the knife, which bounced off her bare belly and clattered to the floor. She kept staring at the ceiling.

He felt panic start to slice up his gut. Yeah, now he was really screwed. He bent down and grabbed Viki's ankles and dragged her to the back door, then stopped. A trail of blood streaked across the kitchen floor. The knife still lay next to the pool of blood at the end of the trail. He went back and got the knife, then slipped the blade into the low waistband of Viki's jeans. He grabbed the doorknob, then stopped again.

Shit. He should dig a grave first, before he started dragging her body around the yard. He took his hand off the doorknob, leaving a slop of blood behind. Shit. He had to remember to clean everything he touched. But first, he needed a shovel. Or maybe he should cut up the body first. In which case he needed a saw. But then blood would get on everything, so he needed to cut the body up in the bathtub upstairs.

No, wait. What he really needed was a 55-gallon drum of acid. No, wait, shit. Where was he gonna get acid? He needed to get his propane torch out of the garage and burn off her fingerprints and her face and her tattoos and then cut up her body and then bury the pieces separately in the woods south of town and then clean the blood out of the bathtub and the bathroom and the stairs and the kitchen, and then bury the knife.

No, wait, maybe he should keep the knife, since it was part of a set, and if one went missing then it would call attention to itself, except that the point had broken off inside her, and shit, he didn't know what to do with the knife, except for sure he'd have to say that she'd gone out somewhere – he didn't know where – and just never came back. Just disappeared. Women disappeared all the time. She must've been kidnapped, maybe murdered, by – Satanists, so they could use the baby for human sacrifice rituals and – no, wait. Shit. He probably shouldn't mention the baby at all. Keep it simple, stupid. Yeah, K.I.S.S. He giggled at the thought of kissing Viki now.

What's the best way to clean off blood? He knew the cops had ways to find blood traces. He watched CSI. He stared at his hands clutching Viki's ankles – blood smearing her skin. His fingerprints on her skin. Shit. What else didn't he know? He stared at the bloody boot-prints on the floor.

Shit. OK, so, dump her in the woods, call her in missing, and clean up. No, wait. Clean up first, then call her in missing; but, call it in right away, or wait a day or two? How long did it take to cut up a body? And should he say that everything had been going great between them, or should he give her a motive for leaving, say she'd been kinda restless lately?

No. Shit, no.

He closed his eyes, forced his thoughts to stop swirling.

No. No cutting, no burying, no Satanists. That kind of shit never worked anyway. Hell, he was her boyfriend. He lived with her. He would be the first one the cops looked at, maybe the only one. And they'd find the body, sure as shit; they'd find evidence; they'd find holes in his story. They'd figure it all out pretty quick. He watched COURT TV and COPS.

Shit. Now he was really, truly, one-hundred-percent, grade-A screwed with a capital S. Why the fuck hadn't he just knocked her around a little instead of killing her?

So. What to do? He needed a plan. A good plan. No loose ends. Hell, he needed a great plan.

He stared at her belly, at the knife stuck in her waistband, the handle making an X with her hipbone, and he wished she wasn't dead, really wished he hadn't killed her, when –

– when, just like that, the plan came to him. Simple and doable and perfect.

He dropped Viki's legs with a thump-thump and went upstairs to get his pistol.

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Bobby peeked around the corner of the 7-11 into the alley, then pulled his head back. Darryl sat in his police car, like always, probably eating cheese fries. Bobby looked at his watch. 11:14 p.m. Didn't matter really. The town of Newton rolled up the sidewalks at about ten. Bobby felt the bricks prickle his back through his shirt as he leaned against the wall.

He didn't look forward to this, but he couldn't think of any other way to fix everything. He took a deep breath and slipped around the corner. The 7-11's Dumpster smelled like a sonuvabitch, the stink like a force field, and Bobby walked wide

around it, making for the driver's side of the police car.

Darryl had his window rolled down. Bobby smelled cheese fries. He grinned. Good old predictable Darryl. Bobby lifted his pistol until the muzzle touched Darryl right behind his left ear. Darryl twitched and started to turn and speak.

Bobby pulled the trigger before he could see Darryl's eyes. The shot sounded like a cough. Trace evidence splotted all over the inside of the car like a bouquet of bloody flowers. Darryl slumped over, sprawled across his computer console.

Bobby opened the driver's door. The idiot-alarm went off – BONG-BONG-BONG – because Darryl still had his keys in the ignition. Bobby jumped at the sound and banged his head on the door-frame. The pistol went off, shooting Darryl through the leg. The shot flashed like lightning and sounded much louder confined inside the car.

"Shit," said Bobby. He jerked the keys out of the ignition, and the bonging stopped. He took Darryl's revolver and shotgun, then closed the door.

He stood next to the car and listened for a minute, clutching Darryl's shotgun and pistol against his chest with his left arm.

He heard nothing.

OK. That hadn't been so bad.

He started walking the two blocks to Sheriff Gault's house. He figured no one would stop him. By eleven, everyone in Newton had usually already fallen asleep, and even if anyone did see him walking around with two pistols and a shotgun, he knew he was doing something that no one – absolutely no one – in Newton could possibly figure out. His plan was that good.

People left their doors unlocked in Newton, so when he got to the Sheriff's house, he just walked right in. He didn't turn on the lights. He let his eyes get used to the quiet darkness before he crept up the stairs to the bedrooms.

The Sheriff and his wife Marge didn't wake up while he stood over their bed. He knew they had a kid, down the hall in another bedroom, maybe eleven or twelve. Gary, he thought the kid's name was. So he didn't want to make any unnecessary noise.

He slipped a cushion out from under the Sheriff's pants on a chair next to the bed. He pressed it over Sheriff Gault's face, pushed the muzzle into it and fired through the padding.

Surprisingly, the idea worked pretty well. A little flash, a little thoomf, and he pulled the cushion away, and Sheriff Gault's head looked like – well, Bobby didn't see any point in dwelling on what Sheriff Gault's head looked like any more.

Next, he did Marge Gault. Flash, thoomf. He left the cushion covering her face.

He didn't need a cushion for Gary, because there was no one left to hear anything.

He closed the front door behind him. He'd just eliminated Newton's entire law enforcement community, and armed himself with another shotgun and pistol to boot. So, with no investigators, there could be no Viki Ann Rollins murder investigation.

Except –

There was always Ethel Clack. She was Sheriff Gault's secretary, the department's dispatcher. She was a cop, almost. At least she knew how to dial the State Police. And Doctor Davis too. He did coroner's stuff, wrote out death certificates. He had written out Bobby's mother's certificate two years back. He knew cop stuff too.

But neither of them lived far away. No one lived far away from anyone else in Newton.

Bobby started walking.

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Killing Viki's mother was a no-brainer. Mrs. Rollins had never liked Bobby anyway. She always told Viki that she could do better – and this was when Bobby was standing right there in the room with them.

He let Mrs. Rollins wake up before he did her, with the shotgun, and with more shells than were strictly necessary, but there was, after all, a certain measure of personal feeling involved with Mrs. Rollins.

Twelve-twenty-two clicked over on Mrs. Rollins' bedside clock as Bobby's hands stopped vibrating from the shotgun blasts. He took stock of his evening.

Viki. Darryl. Sheriff Gault. Marge. Gary. Ethel. Doctor Davis. Harold Standish, the editor and publisher of the Newton Pantograph-Leader. Jim Kastner, a part-timer at the Pantograph-