

Each Planned to Kill the Other

by Matt Rowan

What was heinous about it was how easy I assumed it would be. That was truly heinous, and it was a mistake in the end to think of it that way. But I've learned from what's heinous. I've bought a plastic cylinder filled with nylon zip ties. They're great for binding limbs. I didn't tell the guy at the hardware store what I was using them to bind. He would not have understood. He had a misunderstanding face that was fat and looked not very bright, also.

I am not delusional, either. I know most people usually don't understand these things. People do not see what exists to do and will be done, by somebody somewhere to somebody else. Not even in the society we live in where people aren't disgusted by you if you are only fictionally going to kill someone, like on television shows and in the movies.

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My name is Russell Sanderson. Very vanilla & very non-descript. I'm sure this will work to my ultimate advantage. The neighbors will all say, "He did not have a killer's name," and they will have an expression of genuine surprise on their dumb ruddy faces as they mention how nicely I offered to bring their garbage direct to the garbage dump but because I was going there anyway to dump bodies. I need a lot of garbage to justify my being there, dumping it all, if ever called into question.

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When I was a student at UW Madison I had a "run-in" with a drifter named Vic Levens. For starters he was heinous. Most times in

those days I kept a gun concealed in my red Bucky Badger anorak, in a secret pocket stitched inside. More recently I got a leather holster that has the image of a longhorn skull soldered to its exterior. I bought the holster for too much at a flea market they have on weekend mornings in the nearby Piedmont shopping mall. They once advertised having Hitler's sword at the same stall that I picked out the holster from. I didn't see any sword, but the vendor said it was in back behind glass and a curtain. To view it you had to pay.

Strangely, I witnessed the vendor getting arrested — probably for impropriety related to alleged ownership of Hitler's supposed sword. But who cared? They took the vendor away shortly after I bought the holster, which was good because I didn't enjoy the way he looked at me distrustfully. He had a big long scar on his cheek that didn't seem to have been attended very well by medical doctors whenever he was originally sutured up.

The arresting officer smiled at me as he took the vendor away in handcuffs.

The arresting officer tipped his cap, too, and I thought that was weird because people never actually do that it seems like.

* * *

When Levens betrayed me that was the worst feeling I've felt in my life. I've never had one of my victims betray me like Levens, who ended up not being a victim but one that got away.

Vic Levens was a drifter-hitchhiker I picked up and planned to kill, and this was during my college days or at the very end of them. I picked him up while traveling home to Aurora in Illinois, at a rest stop off of I-90 near the Wisconsin-Illinois border. Everything went according to plan until he tricked me to the side of the road and stabbed me in the head with a machete, deftly concealed in his pant leg, and left me for dead.

I should have been able to tell by his gray eyes that he was not a drifter who drifts quietly into the cold embrace of death. He soothed me off to my own kind of relaxed slumber with his way with words,

something so obviously a tell of the killer beneath that I want to stab my own self in the head for falling prey to it.

A state trooper found me.

The doctors dressed my wound so nicely that I barely have a scar, and I suffered only the mildest damage to my brain.

* * *

Levens has been a difficult person to track. I wasn't sure if "Vic Levens" was his real name or an alias. I've gone through the proper channels, and I can safely say that Levens' real name is "Victor Levens." It's at least legally his real name.

I used an investigator, claiming I was a concerned relative. Conducted business with a representative of the guy's firm entirely over the phone and disguised my voice in a husky whisper.

The investigator said, "Yeah so we got our boy, this Levens, he's circulating around the upper peninsula in Michigan. Has been for a good many years, what 'ccording to the police records that exist, and that's all we got on him. Seems he was bad at staying out of trouble, which stands to reason, judging by his mug in his mug shot I got. I'll fax all the mug shots on file so you can positively ID him our guy. But this guy sure looks how you described. Ugly as sin, no offense."

"Wonderful," I said.

It really was wonderful.

* * *

I'm tired of the Upper Peninsula. It's drab and it's dreary and it reeks of urban decay. Levens' "probable living situation" was a bust, a family living there said he'd most likely been evicted months earlier.

I was like a bloodhound who's lost the scent of blood. A terrible thing.

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Fortunately, a bartender I came across recognized Levens' picture, said he knew that Levens had shacked up with some "whore," and he would stop in for drinks at all kinds of weird hours, usually with the missus drunkenly in tow.

I waited a while, enjoying a gin and pineapple juice, which when I ordered it the damn bartender raised a mocking eyebrow, which made me mad and want to stab him, too.

Levens walked in an hour after midnight. The missus was drunkenly in tow. They appeared to be arguing, but I couldn't make out about what.

My plan was that I would take care to befriend Levens, a man I was sure would have no recollection of the violence he committed against me. I sidled up to him at the bar, the missus having recently excused herself to the bathroom or someplace, probably to do methamphetamines. She did not return, in any case.

"Ah, who are you? Quit staring at me, dumb prick. Hey lookie, I've got nuts for you." Levens grabbed his crotch. I was pleased to see the torpor of alcohol had long set in. His speech was slurred. If I played my cards right, I realized, I might be able to coax him out of the bar and into my own vehicle without much persuasion.

"I saw you were having some lady problems, and listen friend I'm no stranger to those. Here, let me buy you a drink. What do you like? Pineapple juice and gin?" I nodded towards my own half-full glass.

"Naw, that's for your likes! Let it be whiskey!" Levens's spat.

I was toying with alternatives when, finally, Levens offered me my opportunity.

"I need my papers. My papers are important. I need them. You, dumb prick, give me a ride to get my papers," Levens announced.

"You have papers you need? Now?" I couldn't help but question. The request was odd.

"I have papers I need and I need them now. C'mon, haven't you got papers you need? Don't you know? They're in my briefcase. Let's

go get my briefcase, all right? You drive. But wait in the car. Don't follow me inside. I don't want you to see my papers. My briefcase, sure, you can see that. But not my papers. Those are for my eyes only? Understand? Let's go, dipshit."

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Although his explanation for why was not very good, I took the time to drive him home. After all, in some ways I could understand. I do have papers, papers like these that I am writing of the heinous events having unfolded already or about to.

But I have already written this summary for too long. When Levens asked what all the nylon cables were for, I said they were for nothing. I hate to leave you at a moment of high drama like this, with the issue still in doubt. But it is my plan that even if I do not survive for some reason then at least this document will.

Sincerely,

Russell Sanderson, Murderer

* * *

The Epilogue

Russell Sanderson is dead.

But I, Vic Levens, live! Hardly a terrible trade off, when everything is considered.

You who've read everything to now might say I did it in self-defense, but that's not really true. That's not fair to anyone, least of all me.

People like myself tend to identify the outliers, the ones that display a lot of the same qualities that make us distinct from the rest of the huddled masses. Even before I ever saw Russ murder or even attempt to murder another person, I knew he was capable of it. I found work serving in the university cafeteria. I'd load and unload steam trays, replace the cereals and milk, empty trashcans, and do

so very cagily, unassuming like. That's where I first saw Russ. He wore his role as outcast well. But as I watched him it was obvious to me he was something much more than that.

Why did I stab him? I wanted to know him. I wanted the thrill of exposure. It was part of the greater thrill of stalking him. Further, I loved giving him cause for revenge, which seemed likely in a psyche so fragile. It's that I pegged Russ as someone who wouldn't let an injustice like that which I committed against him stand. I was happily very correct.

It had to seem to all observers to be a legitimate attempt at taking his life. Luck was on my side and Russ survived.

When Russ crept into my house where I said I went to go retrieve my "papers," he didn't expect me to come out of the shadows like I did, or fire a bullet into his chest. The look of stupefaction on his face excited me like a long delayed orgasm. He grunted and fell to the floor, playing up a death rattle. While he flailed he slyly reached for something under his armpit, concealed by the fact that he was laying face down. I considered for a moment that he might be playing opossum. I shot him once in the shoulder just to see if he responded, and he couldn't suppress a pained grunt. He tried to move a little, so I fired three more rounds into the base of his skull just to be sure he was dead and gone.

And you know?

I turned him over to reveal he'd gotten hold of that handgun of his. Was probably waiting for me to turn him over to inspect that he had, in fact, really died. Then he'd catch me off guard — or so he got to thinking — and fatally discharge his weapon into my face or torso. I was able to preempt him easily.

A lot of the time people are talking and they keep talking and talking forever, but that isn't me. I know when to cash my chips and move on.

Good-bye.

You're not to hear from me again, if I was ever really here at all.

Yours,

Vic Levens

