

Reinforced fingernails push through the skin above this woman's collarbone. I use her skeleton as leverage against her pushing struggles. My extended jaw closes around her neck and thrashes. Skin tears away in ragged strips. Lunge again. Stretchy veins stuck between my teeth. Tender muscle grips the bone with tendon.

Someone hits me with a chair. My barely healed wounds open up, making wet stripes in my fur. I lift the limp woman by her clavicles, and use her to swat Rick, the diner manager. He flies backward. As people try to break for the door I toss them away. Their fear goes desperate. Somebody had ordered pork chops slightly before my entrance. They sizzle on the unwatched skillet. The coffee is stale. The place uses pledge on the tables. Smells bombard me, I sift through them. Frustration. Anger grows.

The front door bursts open on the behest of an officer's shiny black shoe.

"Holy shit!" he says.

Waitress with my credit card number becomes a riot shield, and I bound towards the cop. He doesn't shoot. The body contacts the gun, pushing it to the side and my teeth find his skull. Trenches appear in rows down his face, like a field of flesh recently plowed. When my teeth meet they confiscate his upper lip. Swallow that first exquisite morsel, the hunger gives a tingle to my chest and arms, like they're waking up. Drug addicts should imagine giving in to the symptoms, only to feel them strengthen, even as the eyedropper empties.

I drop the woman. She thuds once for her hips, and again for her head. Claws raking and raking, taking the policeman apart in gouged chunks. Kevlar blocks my efforts on his torso, so it takes a little longer. His arms are twin bones, covered with raspberry jam. Face unrecognizable to any who knew him. Rick stirs from beneath an upturned table. The napkin dispenser once proudly in the table's center is nowhere to be found. He's first.

Tearing muscle with teeth, several yanks before it detaches. Trapezius, gluteus maximus, erector spinae, slick with blood, being devoured. Fur clumps together, sticky red. Since I'm blocking the door the rest of the diners scurry about in confusion. The smell of fear, like rancid sour cream, wafts through the door held open by a bullet proof skeleton. External and internal obliques, rectus abdominis, Rick's once prized six pack released from its mask of fat, prized again, eaten.

By the time I finish with Mr. Manager and start on the waitress the furnace inside is blaring. Sweat moves hair to hair down my back, gathers in my knee pit. A trucker throws a chair through a window and climbs out. Witnesses cannot be allowed.

In the morning the relatives will be asking: *Why them? What kind of psycho would inflict such violence? What did they do to deserve this?* They don't understand that's not how it works. It wasn't their threats on my credit. I picked the place for its proximity to the woods and the shack. They die because of the natural law of un-luck. Death is necessary and violence is its engine.

I let them hear me growling before launching through the doorway. Jowls and arms soaked with their friend's juices, membranes dangling from my gums. Middle aged parents, blocking their children. Older folks in slippers, teenagers in slippers. Seemingly pleasant people. Some scream. Some run. . Reconstructed ankles spring my tortured body in pursuit. I kill them all. When I've eaten my fill I bound down 4th Street, out of town. Everything hurts, and yet I am complete.

Trees welcome me with clean air, and up the hill, a herd of deer. They hear me, in the brush, but don't leap away until they see me. The sloping ground has a layer of moss and pine needles, and a couple of them slip flinging organics. I catch an old one by the leg, and latch my jaws to its throat.

When the sun comes up, not a single deer will ask a question.

To: The Avenger, (jsservant@yahoo.com)

From: (thebeast3031@hotmail.com)

Subject: RE: Do I bring justice?

Greetings Avenger! It's Vanessa.

I've been thinking about your question regarding justice through violence and I've come to the keystone. Essentially we have one side arguing that violence only begets more violence and so using it to try and defeat it is like trying to wash dirt off your clothes with mud. Unfortunately, I find myself caught in such a cycle. The other side feels that our current "humane" forms of punishment do nothing to rehabilitate and if anything cause dependence in which violent offenders commit acts just to return to their place of comfort. You know, that whole spiel Morgan Freeman gave in the Shawshank Redemption. Same thing with the old guy that got out and hung himself.

What you got to understand is that there will always be violence. The universe will keep itself balanced no matter what our insignificant race does. If we squashed all the forms of violence that we know new forms would emerge. Killing to eat is a natural instinct and is essential for the survival of life, but a man beating his wife is a symptom of bored intellect. This planet needs to prioritize our battles. If we allowed the least damaging forms of violence to survive then there would be no reason for violence to evolve.

So in terms of whether violence can be justice, of course it can! But you must be sure it is deserved and that what you do isn't worse than what they have done. Otherwise someone might come looking to give you the justice you deserve. And around and around we go. . .

Hope that helped,

V.

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