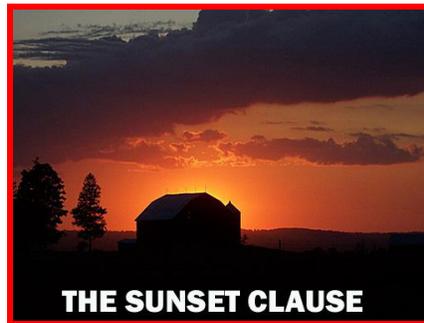


# THE SUNSET CLAUSE

A Short Story  
by Bob Goodwin

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**The Sunset Clause**

If the opinion of some of the group was to be believed, the end of the world as we know it must surely be closing in on us. I heard all the debate, or rather, the heated arguments of a small minority, and to me their point of view held little sway. It was late afternoon and the discussion had been robust, but clearly some were tiring. As for me, I was biding my time. I felt the longer and later it went on, the better chance I had of making a clear and convincing response.

As a logical discussion of facts it had all become lost on the emotional roller coaster that the few had used, with considerable skill, to convince the many. It was Michael that had become the self proclaimed leader of the vocal minority. He was tall man with long untidy grey hair and a short beard, in fact somewhat of a Billy Connelly clone, even down to the accent.

To me, the “eye for an eye” proposal that had been put forward could not possibly be used as the basis for any logical argument. Such a proposal requires a number of assumptions that we do not possess the facts to sort out – that is that one individual is both identical and equal to another in every respect. Quite clearly this seems highly improbable given the incalculable number of variations between people.

Michael blurted out again – interrupting my thoughts.

“We are the ones here and now who can put this thing to rest. It is our responsibility. In fact I believe it to be our duty.”

Duty! Responsibility! Catch words to gather commitment from the others. I could see a few nods, head tilts, and looks of consideration among some of them. Michael was making an impression. This could present some difficulties when it comes my time to respond.

“We must all see that what we need to do is for the good of all people. This is a selfless act that we embark upon. No doubt it is not an easy one – but a necessary one. A vital one!”

Now he seeks to empower them with righteousness - *the power of good; an essential act that must be done*. Once again using logic, if it was for the good of *all* people then there must not be even one exception. And it is here where his statement falls down immediately as personally, I see no benefit to myself from his proposal. In addition, I know of many others from my background who would also find his intentions rather distasteful.

Excluding Michael and myself there were ten others, five men and five women, with quite a diverse range of backgrounds from what I had gleaned thus far and ages possibly between 25 to 45 years. It was two of the women, Hazel and Dawn, who were on Michael's side from the outset. Somehow they had processed the data in the same irrational way as had he.

Sure, there was no doubt a killing had occurred... Interrupted again! This time it's the loud and grating voice of Hazel.

"It is clear this murder must not go unpunished! The victim's body speaks for itself. I agree with Michael. We are obliged to do what is right!"

Interesting! And spoken with a good degree of venom too! Let's not bother to consider if it was, in fact, murder. Let's just go straight to the execution! What about justifiable homicide? What about self defense? Doesn't self preservation count for something?

Dawn was an attractive blonde, and to be honest I found her to be sexually quite appealing. She had all the curves in the right places and a little extra weight that gave her a powerful disposition. Amazonian to a degree I guess, but still with a clear feminine quality. Her voice too was commanding and quite deep.

"We have all been here long enough," she announced. "It is important we all agree. It would be great if we had the benefit of forensic evidence, but we do not. We must form a conclusion on what we know, and if what is being suggested really did happen then time is of the essence."

I didn't mind Dawn's statement. It had some degree of balance to it and a good use of the word "if" – not a word that seemed to be in lynch-mob Michael's vocabulary.

The sun was dropping quickly now and the few shafts of light against the wall were quickly losing their intensity. As for me, I continued to sit in the darkest corner considering my reply - a reply that needed to be emphatic and decisive.

"Come on people. For goodness sake," continued Michael. "Let's do what we need to do and leave this place. I want to go home and put all this behind us. All those in support raise your hands."

Michael shot his own hand in the air. Over about ten seconds seven more arms were raised. Maybe they were all too tired to argue. My arm stayed down.

The last rays of the sun disappeared from the wall and with the onset of early evening I could feel a rising level of energy and anticipation. Someone flicked on a light. The time for my response was close.

"It's not unanimous, but we do have a clear majority", declared Dawn. "We must act now. Let's do it. Come on!"

With that she turned and moved towards me. Michael and Hazel were close behind her. Several others also moved in my direction. Dawn was about two metres from me when I decided it was time for me to respond. The ropes securing me to the chair, binding my hands and feet were confining initially, but now, thanks to the setting sun, they may as well have been strands of cotton wool.

As I rose quickly from the chair the ropes snapped and fell to the floor. I darted towards Dawn. Within a moment I felt the ecstasy as my fangs slid deep in to her neck and the warm nectar I craved slipped down my throat. She writhed and quivered. Her wooden stake fell to the floor.

With my arms wrapped around her I ascended high towards the roof of the old barn. The others were now screaming and shouting. They threw pieces of wood, crucifixes even shoes at me. This, I thought, was rather silly and futile.

It was unfortunate it had turned out this way. I liked Dawn. I would have preferred to just bite her lightly and allow her to join me on my escapades, but it was not to be.

Soon enough she had stopped all her squirming. I allowed her limp lifeless body to fall.

I presume their holiday in a quiet country retreat had delivered a little more than the travel agent would have promised. But they only have themselves to blame. Had they not been so tardy in their decision making they could have spared themselves this unpleasantness. But then again, I am such a charming and engaging gentleman, how could they honestly have believed I was the one who ripped Peter's throat apart?

I left through the loft opening behind the hay bales. It was going to be a glorious night.

**The end**

Thank you for reading my Short story. I hope you enjoyed it. Any feedback you have would be most appreciated.

I started writing in 1987 in a remote area of the Northern Territory in Australia. I was working as a remote area nurse in an Aboriginal community at the time. I have had over 30 years experience in the field of mental health work within hospitals and community settings. I enjoy writing (of course) as well as lawn bowls, chess, poker, cards and mahjong. My music taste is as varied as you can get from Al Jolson to Led Zeppelin and Beethoven to the Beatles – without forgetting Maroon 5 and Jet.

I have also written some screenplays, one act plays, shorter plays, short stories and one novel – “A Time for Evil” available at <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/15965>

Bob Goodwin