



THE LOST

ART

OF

NINA WOULDN'T NORMALLY VIDEOTAPE HERSELF HAVING SEX WITH a stranger. But a few years ago, the 35-year-old film producer's boyfriend began openly having an affair with a married woman. When Nina protested, her boyfriend, Bill (not his real name), said the woman's husband allowed the extramarital activity and that he was "obviously more enlightened" than Nina. Nina decided to look the husband up. Turns out this was the first he'd heard about his wife's infidelity. Nina and the husband met for dinner at an Italian bistro and then moved on to his place. The intercourse wasn't exactly smoldering. "It was like work," Nina says. "But the look on my boyfriend's face when he saw the tape was worth it."

Revenge executed with that kind of creative gusto—and major-

their own house. In the end, all they returned was a floor polisher.

So Tom began plotting revenge. He bribed local officials, promising them that if they destroyed the couple's home, which is on land that is technically illegal to build on, he'd help pay for the construction of a new police station. If the plan works, it could set Tom back as much as \$15,000, but he doesn't care how much it costs to get his former friends' home torn down. "It is my total objective," he says gleefully.

If tales of revenge in love and real estate don't inspire you to get out from behind your desk and do some score-settling of your own, perhaps an example from the business world will. Countless companies have been launched by canned employees taking vengeance on

REVENGE

Why turn the other cheek when swift, clean vengeance can be yours?

league balls—accounts for some of the most indelible moments in entertainment (*The Godfather!* *The Count of Monte Cristo!* *The Dukes of Hazzard!*) and reality (John Wilkes Booth! Bobbitt! A diaper-clad astronaut!). What's the Bible without smiting? Shakespeare scrubbed clean of comeuppance? Mere pamphlets. But lately, it seems, our Prozac-pushing, lawsuit-loving society has gone a little limp in the payback department. And that's a shame, because as history—and Nina—can attest, revenge is sweet.

"When someone is plotting revenge, you see the same neurological activity you see in someone playing a game for money and getting close to winning," says Michael McCullough, a professor of psychology at the University of Miami who's writing a book about revenge and forgiveness. "The stereotype is that it's people operating from a neurological deficit, but it's actually as goal-driven an activity as going to McDonald's." According to McCullough, the temptation to cross the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior when you're wronged is powerful. Humans are hard-wired to hit back.

This means you aren't necessarily bat-shit crazy if you're obsessed with evening the score. What's more, indulging in a little retribution might even make you feel good, giving you the kind of natural high gambling does without the risk of lifelong addiction.

Tom P., 57, a real-estate developer and self-made millionaire, has the rosy glow of a man plotting revenge. Tom splits his time between Manhattan and El Cuco, a tiny fishing village in El Salvador (his glow might also have to do with the fact that he's a big-wave surfer and dates an 18-year-old with "the most perfect pair of boobs in the world"). Three years ago he became fast friends with an American couple who live there year-round. When Tom bought a chunk of beachfront property and renovated a house on it, the couple built one on a nearby stretch of land. A short while later, Tom enlisted the husband to do some construction on his place. Soon, though, Tom grew unhappy with what he says was the husband's increasingly erratic, booze-fueled behavior. He suggested the two cut business ties to save the friendship. The couple would return all the equipment—including a \$1,000 saw—they'd borrowed from Tom to do work on

their bosses. Sometimes it works out: A fortysomething exec named Bernie Marcus, spurned by Handy Dan Home Improvement Centers, went on to help found a little shop called Home Depot. Sometimes it doesn't: Muse Air, anyone?

A few years ago, a group of Manhattan financial analysts labored under a truly awful boss—a senior banker who took conspicuous pleasure in assigning his underlings so much work that they had to regularly pull all-nighters. "This was a sadistic guy," says Alex (not his real name), a former analyst who worked in the same office as the vengeful group. One day the abused bankers fought back. They poured flour into several plastic bags and duct-taped them so they looked like packages of cocaine. They put the bundles into a cardboard box and had it delivered to their boss's Upper East Side apartment building. A couple of days later, one of the analysts got someone he knew to call the boss at home, speaking in a South American accent. "We know you have dee pack-eege," he said. "Where's our fucking moh-nay?"

At the office, the one-time hardass was reduced to a shuffling, twitchy shell of a man. "He was living in terror," Alex says. "He couldn't get his work done."

Alex recalls this heady time at the firm fondly. He says his colleagues were "thrilled to see their boss in anguish. They got little giggles out of it every day."

Because he left the company a few months later, Alex doesn't know whether the vengeful analysts were ever caught. But even if they had been, the long-term consequences might not have been life-altering. These days, you can toss off a roman à clef (*The Devil Wears Prada*, *The Nanny Diaries*) or sell your story of woeful mistreatment as an actress's assistant to the tabloids and emerge from the scandal relatively unscathed—if not richer.

So why not take revenge against an undermining lover/boss/friend? You might even be doing your fellow man a favor by keeping the art alive.

"You see retaliation in everything from fish to birds to primates," McCullough says. "It's useful to our survival as a species." ■