

**Bad Man's Woman**  
A short story by Austin Mitchell

My friend, Elroy Reid was relating to me what had happened between him and his longtime girlfriend, Carline Weston. They had been friends from high school. They lived just a kilometer apart in Keswick. It all started when Carline decided to go to a commercial school in Kingston.

"I told her to take the morning bus and come back with it in the evenings."

"So what did she say?" I asked.

"She said that she wouldn't get any time to study."

"Maybe she's right. She would have to get up too early in the mornings and come home too late at nights."

We were sheltering under a shopping plaza as it was raining cats and dogs.

I was getting the impression that maybe Elroy didn't want Carline to go and live in Kingston. Maybe he feared that she would find some other guy down there.

Anyway, above strong objections from Elroy, Carline went to live with her aunt in Kingston. Elroy swore that he wouldn't have anything to do with her, but changed his mind when she started coming up on weekends. Elroy couldn't be happier and they went to dances and parties together. Carline would stay at his house as he had built a one bedroom addition to his parent's house coupled with a small kitchenette and bathroom. So they had their own convenience.

But it all ended about three months later. Carline would still visit her parents, but it would be every month.

"By the time I hear that she came to the country, she's already gone," he told me one day.

That was because Carline would come up on a Saturday or Sunday morning and return the same evening.

He told me that she was working and going to school part time.

Elroy was now operating a shop in an adjoining district. One of his uncles had recently come from England and bought a thirty acre farm nearby. I understood that it was this uncle who had given him the money to open the shop. Elroy was operating both businesses for him. He bought a pickup and would go to various towns to sell produce from the farm. When he was returning, he would buy things to sell in the shop. He was especially generous to Carline's parents. He would give them loads of produce from his farm. All in vain I thought as Carline wasn't coming back to him.

I remembered seeing him one day. He was driving his van with produce to sell in Linstead. As he wasn't passing, Carline's parents, Hepburn and Miss Fay's house, he asked me to take some goods to give them on my bike. Among the produce was a huge bunch of ripe bananas which I took for myself. A month later he gave me the largest breadfruit I ever saw plus two dozen ackees to give his supposed in-laws. We did make a feast of that breadfruit and those ackees. My two brothers and I all agreed that anything Elroy gave us to give Carline's parents, we would keep most of it for ourselves. This continued for another six months or so.

Somebody told him about what we were doing. He cursed us off. He even threatened to go to the police. We scoffed at that, we hadn't taken all the things he gave us for his supposed in-laws. So as not to raise suspicions we always gave them some of it. Elroy was stupidly accusing us of causing Carline to leave him. Of course, nobody believed him.

Elroy's farm was so fruitful that he could throw some tomato seeds outside his windows and be picking tomatoes the next morning. The girls were rushing him, but he ignored them. He believed that Carline would return to him.

I saw one of Elroy's friends one day and he said to me.

"Butler, I think Elroy is wasting his time hoping that Carline will come back to him."

"I believe Carline has left him, Vance."

We were drinking beers in Chappie Chung's bar in the Keswick Mountains.

"That guy's too stupid. How can you still love a girl, who doesn't want to see you again?" I asked.

A girl, Viviene, had joined us. She was an assistant teacher at the primary school. She was short and round. I bought her a soda.

"I thought you and Elroy were going to Kern's dance tonight, Viviene."

"Elroy and I, no sir. He still loves Carline. I don't know when he's going to get over her."

Another young lady, Lita, had joined us. She was a clerk at the local branch library. Vance bought her a soda.

"Carline is along with a Don, that's what I heard," Lita told us.

That's what I had heard too.

"That's what I heard too. But Elroy won't believe it," I said.

Elroy did believe it because he started going around with Justine, a practical nurse, at the local clinic.

As he and my entire family weren't on speaking terms after he accused us of stealing his goods, I didn't get to ask him any question. I only heard those stories on the grapevine.

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"I hope Elroy isn't using my daughter. I have a feeling that he'll leave her if Carline comes back to him," Miss Julie, her mother, said to me one day.

"Don't say that I told you so, but Carline isn't coming back to Elroy. She's along with a Don in Kingston."

"What!" Miss Julie expressed her surprise. She knew all about Dons and their reputation. She had spent her early years in one of those inner city communities. As a matter of fact, she still had relatives and friends living there.

"I knew that girl was no good. Look who she has gone and picked up. My God, I wonder if her parents know."

**“I doubt it,” I told her as we parted. I could see her holding her head in disbelief at what I had told her about Carline. But I was apprehensive that she would spread it all over the village.**

**My apprehension proved correct when Elroy confronted me in the village square a few days later. He called me a liar and accused me of spreading rumors about Carline. I told him that I had gotten the rumor on the grapevine. He asked me for my source, but I refused to tell him.**

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**Elroy was still fooling around Justine. Although he was sneaking around with other women. I’m not condemning him or play self righteous for as young guys we all did it.**

**Easter was rainy and we had to keep all our festivities indoors. The cricket match planned for Easter Monday was rained out. We had to be content with playing board games like dominoes, ludo and checkers. We managed to borrow two table tennis boards from the local high school and staged a tournament. In the night we had a huge dance where two heavy weight sounds from Kingston clashed. So that was how we spent that Easter.**

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**As far as Elroy was concerned, things came to a head that August. Carline’s uncle, Stanley was a promoter of dances. In fact, that was how he made his living, when he took a break from operating his taxi. It was he who had put together the festivities in Easter. So Stanley had placards printed advertising his dance that Independence Day. There would be a cricket match followed by the dance as two heavy weight sounds would clash. One was from May Pen and the other was from Port Antonio. We understood that both sounds had a huge following. The cricket match and dance would be held on the grounds of the local high school.**

Stanley and Elroy were mortal enemies. I wonder if I'm exaggerating. It all happened because Stanley, although in his late forties still considered himself something of a ladies man. He had fathered six children, but only two with his wife. He had this girl whom he was sending to school. She was doing a six month cosmetology course. One day in late May he had just driven off his taxi with a load of passengers when he saw her getting into Elroy's van.

I took another drink of my beer. We were in Diana's beer joint up in the Keswick Mountains.

"After I let off my passengers, I drove to her school, but everybody I asked said that they hadn't seen her."

I took some more swallows of my beer. Stanley was half way through his beer.

"When I saw her later that evening, she told me that he had taken her to pick up some things."

"She said that she came out there and didn't see my taxi so she begged him a ride."

Dorene, the girl he was talking about was around twenty five years of age. She had a five year old son living with her.

"So what do you plan to do?"

"I'm watching the situation. Right now she's depending on me. If I find out that she and Elroy are friends, I'm going to drop her," he said as he finished his beer and left to do some more trips.

In June, Stanley and Elroy nearly had a confrontation over Dorene. In July they had a punch up and persons had to part them. Stanley swore that he was going to do Elroy something bad if he didn't leave his woman alone.

And so August came around and we couldn't wait for Independence day and the festivities. The day would fall on a Monday. So at last the day arrived and we all attended the cricket match. It was being played between our local club players and a team from St. Mary.

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