
The Old Cadet Guns

a short story

by Austin Mitchell

I was coming down the Nelson main road that morning when I heard voices. It was still dark, that Friday at the end of July. I was coming from playing dominoes up the road when I saw them or rather heard them.

They turned into the gate of the Glenfield High school. I knew that they could be up to no good. I waited until I knew that they were a good distance away and went into the churchyard which was above the school.

From there I could make out the shadows of four men. Neither the church, nor the school had guards in those days. I watched the men's stealthy approach. There was nothing at the school of value that they could be interested in stealing. I should know, since I had been a student there up to seven years ago.

They had stopped before a wall and I realized that was where the school's armory was!

Voices floated up to me.

"Bucky, once we burn off the grill, we can get the guns them."

I knew who was speaking. It was Reds.

It seemed that they had brought their own equipment. They would have an electric torch with them. I didn't know anybody in the area having an electric torch.

"Stone, are you sure you can fix up these guns to make them fire again?" a man whose voice I recognized as Sammy asked.

"Nothing don't wrong with them, Stone. It's just through it's training they were using them for. Once we get live bullets you will see that they are good guns," Reds replied.

I didn't agree with Reds. They had taken out the firing pins from those SLR rifles, so they would have to find those firing pins to make those guns fire again.

They were now trying to remove the grill. After they did that they would probably torch off the door to get at the guns. They were running wires to connect to the door of the armory.

I went and looked for a big stone. I found one, I threw it down there and heard them cursing.

"Somebody knows that we are down here, Bucky," Reds stated.

"I must kill that man tonight," Stone threatened.

"You want me to come with you, Stone?" Sammy asked.

"You guys stay and finish digging down the place. I am going to look for that guy," Stone stated and set off.

I knew he was coming the school way up the steps, to the teacher's cottages and church.

I went to hide behind a wall. Presently I heard Stone approaching. He had a gun in his hand. I knew he would shoot me if he saw me.

I took up a stone and threw it at one of the primary school buildings. Stone cursed and fired a shot in the direction the stone had dropped. Then I saw him running and I threw a piece of stick between his legs and he fell. I ran down the school steps hoisted a wall and disappeared into some bushes. I let myself into my house through a back door, certain than nobody had seen me.

The next day I heard that the high school's armory had been broken into and several guns stolen.

"Those guns can't be fired," Roydel, a middle-aged villager and restaurant operator remarked.

"If they pointed one of them at you, how are you going to know that it can't fire?" I asked.

The next night Willie Lewis and Vernal Carey were held up at their shops by masked men pointing long guns at them.

"It's one of those guns they used to rob me. If I'd known that it couldn't fire, I would have used my machete on them," Willie declared.

I was down by Willie's shop and heard him talking. It was a fairly large establishment that he had inherited from his parents.

Vernal Carey had also stopped by after reporting the robbery to the police.

"There are too many idlers about the place," he opined.

I had to agree with Vernal. There were dozens of idle youths around the place. Some of them had found jobs in Kingston but as soon as they lost the job they were back in Nelson.

I operated a small ten-acre farm. I did mostly fruit trees like mangoes, apples, pears and ackees among other tree crops. I also

planted pineapples and some cash crops. I sometimes had a hard time getting people to help me harvest my crops.

We were drinking beers as we sat on a bamboo bench outside of Willie's shop that Friday morning.

"What I notice is that they don't like to work but they always have money to spend," I remarked.

"The police are no use. They could raid a few of their houses to find out where they get money from to spend," Vernal stated.

"I want them to try after me," Bull Liston declared. He operated a shop and bar at the end of the village square. We all knew that he had a gun.

He had shot at least three robbers who had tried to hold him up at his establishment. None of these shootings had been fatal but the robbers had picked up long prison sentences.

"They would never try after you, Liston," I declared.

*All of us agreed that they wouldn't dare try Liston. He was simply too dangerous. And they knew of his reputation as a man who shot first and ask questions later. Liston was a former United States army ranger. He returned to the island ten years ago to start his shop and bar operations. I left to go to my farm. I knew I had a guilty conscience. I could only get rid of it by reporting what I had heard to the police. **But would they** believe me, after all it was hearsay evidence. They would probably ask me if I had seen the men stealing the guns before chasing me out of the station.*

After I finished working on my farm, I went out to the village square and had lunch in Roydel's small restaurant. I was half way through my lunch when Stone, Bucky and Sammy came in.

They ordered lunch and went to sit at a table away from where I was seated. I noticed Stone scrutinizing me so I turned around.

"Something wrong, Stone?"

"Where were you the other night, Pablo?"

"Where I was on any night is my own business, Stone. What the hell, that's got to do with you?"

Bucky pulled back his chair but didn't say anything. Roydel came into the dining room.

"If you guys are going to create a scene, you'd better do it outside. As a matter of fact, I'm not serving any of you," he warned.

"Relax, Roy. We wouldn't think of starting any trouble in here," Stone assured him.

Roydel nodded and returned to his kitchen. I continued eating my food. The three men were giving me hostile glances and I wondered what I had done them. Did they suspect that I was the guy who saw them robbing the school's armory?

I continued eating my food. Presently Roydel brought them their food and they started eating. When I was finished eating I stood up.

"Stone, all of you guys know where I live. If you have a grouse with me, you know where to find me."

"We'll find you Pablo," Stone assured me.

As I walked out of the restaurant, I wondered what he meant by that.

Stone and his cronies should know that I wasn't afraid of them. I had done my time as a bad man in Kingston. I had robbed, been caught, did time for it, then decided that badness didn't pay. So, I had packed up, moved to the country and started farming the five-acre plot my father had left me. I had rented other lands nearby and was able to feed myself, my woman and send my two children to school.

After I returned home some of the old gang members showed up, wanting me to go on hits with them but I turned them down. Nowadays one or two of them might pass through, giving me news about my old colleagues. It seems that I was right by the amount of them either killed by the police or gunmen.

So, Stone should know that I wasn't scared. What was still a mystery to me and several others is how the police were unable to find any of the guns. True, they had raided the houses of several young men, but didn't find anything.

A week later, Earle Morgan was held up just as he was locking up his bar by masked men pointing guns at him.

Two days later a butcher named George was held up at his house, George had his gun on him and fired shots at the masked men who ran away.

This led most persons in the village to believe that it was the old useless cadet guns the men were using to hold up people. The fact that they wore masks meant they were locals trying to hide their identity. Something still worried me and that was the fact that the holdup men be hiding the guns somewhere. Also, it appeared that they had not been able to fix up the guns to make them fire live bullets.

The holdups ceased after the police started night patrols. I was at my farm working when a middle aged villager named, Craig came to see me.

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