

**The Serial Burglar  
by  
Austin Mitchell  
Chapter One**

Las Marriot was in disbelief that Monday morning in April that his shop and bar had been broken into. He was a medium sized man going on forty. They were living in the village of Keswick down in north east St. Catherine.

“I can’t believe this,” he said to his wife, Vita, who was also looking on in consternation.

Vita, was the same age as Las and was a chubby woman. She had borne him four children, two girls and two boys.

It was about six o’clock in the morning and Vita had woken up to get the children ready for school. She had gone into the shop to get some things to make breakfast. She had turned on the lights and noticed things flung all over the floor. She immediately alerted Las and the children. Juby, their yard boy, had been sent to get the police.

Las could think of several persons who might have robbed his establishment. Two names came to mind, Bender and Latty.

“Las, I don’t think it would be a wise idea to send the children to school today,” Vita stated.

“They must be shaken up by all this. As a matter of fact, we could all be dead now,” Las opined.

The children had gone back to sleep. Las and Vita went out to the front of the shop. They could see where the bars at the top of the two large front doors of the shop had been plied apart enabling a small child to climb through. The heavy doors had been pushed back in. Las regretted putting bolts on the doors instead of padlocks.

**“That’s how it happened Las, somebody used a crowbar to widen out the steel bars and then pushed a young boy through,” Vita stated.**

**Several persons had come onto the scene now.**

**Jack Distant who lived across the river, came up to them.**

**“I heard about it Las, last week they went in on Mundle, cleaned him out,” he told them.**

**Suddenly they saw the police car coming up the road. Out of it came Sergeant Whitely, Corporal Morris and Constable Ellis. Dick Lamey, the local district constable, must be the only one left at the station, Las thought. He was surprised as normally the police didn’t start working so early. Maybe it was the spate of break-ins that had spurred them to start working earlier than usual.**

**“What happened here, Las?” Sergeant Whitely asked.**

**“Vita went into the shop to get some things to make breakfast for the children to go to school when she came upon the break-in.”**

**The Sergeant took out his notebook and began to write.**

**“There has been a spate of break-ins. They robbed Mundle and Miss Trina and Mister Deacon both had their shops broken into during the past week,” Whitely reported.**

**“We suspected Latty and even went for him, but he had nothing on him. We searched his house, even put Dalby to watch him, but with no luck so far,” Corporal Morris reported.**

**Whitely looked sharply at Morris. He didn’t know why Morris should be bleating out that Dalby was one of their spies when he knew of the contempt most persons had for informers and the dangers the job carried with it.**

**“Let’s go into the shop and bar, Las. I’ll warn you not to touch anything. I’ve phoned Spanish Town and they’ll be sending a detective up here to do some fingerprinting,” Whitely told Las as they made their way into the shop.**

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Las turned on the lights in the shop. It could be observed that things were strewn all over the floor.

"They took all my cigarettes and all the liquor they could find," Las reported to the policemen.

"You can bet that somebody will buy those things from these robbers," Corporal Morris stated.

"I'll have to get Dick Lamey to go around to a few of the shops and bars in Keswick, Nelson and Howell's Content. I'm sure that he'll pick up something," Sergeant Whitely said.

They made their way over to the bar and could observe that what Las had said was true.

The three policemen stopped to eat some of Vita's breakfast before heading back to the station in Keswick.

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Las was left in a quandary as to what to do. The next day, he put in stronger burglar bars and padlocks. He was now sleeping with his machete. He had hired Dalby to help him and Juby watch the shop and bar.

Dalby was sleeping in an out-house with a machete. Juby was in another room, also armed with a machete. Las had been encouraged to buy a gun and was giving serious thoughts to doing so.

Two weeks later Las was at home when Dalby came in with the news that Bender had been caught breaking into George Chin's bar and grocery. Immediately, they set off for the police station. When they reached there they saw people milling around.

"We went to his house, but didn't find any of your stuff there Las," Sergeant Whitely reported.

George Chin was also there along with his wife, Alice and their eldest son, Chunkie.

"Police don't know what they're doing. They have Bender locked up, I'm sure that it was he, who broke into your shop Las," George said as he drew him aside.

**“I think it was he, who broke into my shop and bar,” Las agreed with George.**

**“He has a lot of children to feed. He uses some of them to help him break into people’s houses and their shops,” George stated.**

**“I hope the police don’t let him escape this time,” Las remarked.**

**Bender was slapped with several charges by the police that day. Las didn’t know what the charges were. He heard that they were going to raid his hideout, which was a cave above the Dawson river.**

**As Las walked home that evening he knew that it was unlikely that the police would find anything in Bender’s cave. The man was known to have a lot of women and children. He knew some of the women. Some of them had been to school and were even working. He wondered how such women got involved with a man like Bender.**

**Bender was a reputed praedial thief, going into people’s fields and stealing their produce. He was also a goat thief. Rumor had it that he operated mostly at nights. He would then end up either in Kingston or Linstead to sell the goods he stole. Rumor also had it that he had a butcher’s license. Several persons had reported seeing him selling meat in the Linstead market. Las had been surprised about two years ago to see him with a stall at the same market and he was selling like the devil.**

**When Las reached home, Vita had his dinner ready. As he ate, he updated her about Bender. A little later that day a police detective came from Spanish Town to take fingerprints. He also took photographs of the shop. Las felt that it was a waste of time. However, the detective said that the robbers’ fingerprints were still fresh despite the lapse of time.**

**Things calmed down for the next few days. Las**

suspected that the police were doing the paper work for Bender to be transferred to the Spanish Town lock-up.

Two days later Las woke up to the news that Bender and another man named Leslie, had broken out of jail. Las went out to the police station to find out what was going on.

Leslie was even more dangerous than Bender. He was suspected of holding up several buses plying the area. Last year he was the main suspect in the murder of a local butcher, Toosie, over in Nelson district. He was being held on that charge, Las suspected.

“They dug a hole in the roof and escaped,” Denny, a local farmer, told him.

“I can’t understand why they have that kind of material holding up a police station,” Las remarked.

Three days later Las heard that Leslie had been recaptured but Bender had avoided capture by fleeing into the woods of Lobban’s ridge.

“Nobody is safe, while Bender is out there,” Las remarked to Vita.

“What can we do?”

“We have to hope that they re-capture him soon. I think that he was the burglar who broke into our shop and bar last month. I just hope the he doesn’t try to break in on us again.”

Two mornings later, Las heard a strange sound coming from outside the shop. It must be minutes after four o’clock, Las thought. He grabbed up his machete, went to the out-house and woke up Dalby and Juby. They crawled out to the front of the shop. As they reach it, they saw a man and two young boys running down the road. Both Las and Dalby sprinted after them, hoping to capture one of the boys, but they jumped down into a gully. They stood at the edge of the gully and heard them rolling down it. Juby on Las’s instructions, had remained behind to guard the shop and bar.

“Let’s go after them, Las. We could capture one of those boys and let him tell us what they were doing out here.”

They both jumped down into the gully. They ran down to the Keswick river, but saw the boys and Bender floating downstream.

They ran on the banks of the river and waded into the water. Bender jumped out of the water and sped into the bushes.

“Let’s hold these boys, Dalby. We can catch Bender another time. Maybe these boys can tell us what they were doing out here at this time of the morning.”

The two boys were trying to escape, but Las and Dalby were too fast for them. They grabbed both boys and dragged them out of the water. Both Las and Dalby knew the boys. The taller boy was called Lippy and the shorter boy, Fred.

Both boys looked to be the same age, around twelve years, Las thought.

“What are you boys doing out here at this time of the morning?” Las demanded.

Both boys remained silent. Dalby went for a huge piece of stick lying on the river bank.

“Talk or else I’ll beat both of you with this stick,” he threatened.

“We’ll take them to the police station. Maybe they will get them to talk.”

Neither of the boys seemed frightened by his threat to take them to the police station, Las realized. He noticed that the expression on neither boy’s face had changed.

“The police can’t do us anything. We didn’t steal anything from anybody,” Lippy protested.

“Why are you guys holding us? We haven’t done anything wrong. My father has gone for his gun. He told us that he was going for it. If he comes back and sees you holding us like this, he’s going to shoot both of you,” Fred warned.

“He’s bluffing you, Las. Bender doesn’t have a gun as far as I know,” Dalby countered.

**“We’re taking them to the police station.”**

**“Let’s beat them.”**

**But Las would have none of it. So they marched the boys up the road. It was still early so they left the boys tied up at Las’ house.**

**Las and Dalby were in for a shock when they took the two boys up to the police station. They claimed that Las and Dalby had kidnapped them. They had gone to the river for an early morning swim and to catch shrimps when Las and Dalby came down there and held them.**

**Las accused them of trying to break into his shop and bar. He said they and Bender were going to do the burglary. When Corporal Morris asked Las if he saw the boys committing the crime, Las shook his head.**

**Dalby said that they saw the boys and Bender running down the road.**

**The corporal told them that there was nothing with which he could charge the boys. In the station yard both boys threatened to stone Las and Dalby when they were going home.**

**Las decided to remain at the police station, talking to the policemen. He told them that the boys’ real intention had been to break into his shop and bar again. Las felt that the policemen were more interested in capturing Bender. They had no interest in arresting his sons.**

**Just as he and Dalby came out of the station yard, Dex, a local farmer, drove up and offered them a ride in his pickup.**

**They had driven a quarter of a kilometer when Las saw Lippy and Fred on a hill, piling up some huge rock stones.**

**The boys had seen Dalby in the back of the pickup! They started raining down stones on him.**

**Dex stopped the pickup and rushed out of the vehicle.**

**“Hey, you boys, are you mad or what?”**

**He had drawn a machete out of the back of the pickup. Las had also come out of the pickup.**

**“Fling any more stones down here and mash up my vehicle and see what I’ll do to you boys.”**

**“It’s Las and Dalby we’re after, Dex,” Lippy shouted.**

**“Drive away and leave them to us so that we can hit them down with our stones,” Fred advised Dex.**

**Las and Dalby took a pickaxe and a digging bill out of the van back respectively. Together with Dex, they raced up the hill after the two boys. Lippy and Fred had seen them coming and jumped down into a gully and raced away into the bushes. Las and Dalby threw stones after them. Las doubted if any of the stones hit either boy.**

**When Las reached home, he told Vita about what had taken place at the police station. He didn’t tell her about the confrontation with Bender’s sons.**

**News came two days later that Bender had been sighted but he had again escaped into the bushes.**

**Las was thinking of going after Bender, himself, but he would need help. He spoke to both Vita and Dalby about it. Dalby was enthusiastic, but Vita was cautious.**

**“I heard that Bender has a long gun, Las. He will shoot you with it. I heard that Hep Johnson lost his gun. I don’t know if it’s that gun, Bender stole. Don’t go, Las. I don’t want him to kill you.”**

**Las assured Veta that he didn’t think Bender had a gun. True he had heard that Hep had lost his gun, but he didn’t think it was Bender who had stolen it.**

**Over the next several days, Las discretely discussed his plans to run down and capture Bender. Several of his friends warned him about the imminent danger in such a scheme. Las assured them that he wasn’t afraid of Bender. He told them that he didn’t want word getting out to Bender about him trying to capture him.**

**So Las began to plan the adventure. He decided to take**



Dalby with him. Dalby was a very fast runner, although he was short in stature. As far as Las knew, Bender was fast like lightning. He had once out sped a police jeep, before jumping down a gully and disappearing into deep bushes.

They planned to leave from that Friday morning and to return by Sunday evening with or without Bender. Las had been a scout in primary school and a cadet in high school. He had therefore spent a lot of time camping. They would take sleeping bags with them, food to last them the three days and cooking utensils.

Both Las and Dalby took a machete and a well cured piece of pimento stick with each of them. They also took a rope with them to tie up Bender should they catch him.

Vita's eldest sister and her two teenaged boys and little girl came to stay with them from Thursday evening. They would help her in the shop in Las' absence. Juby would guard the shop and bar during the three days.

## Chapter Two

So that Friday, Las and Dalby set off for the woods of Lobban's Ridge. Lobban's Ridge was about five miles away from Keswick. Las and Dalby had to walk all the way to the Woods.

They had walked a mile when suddenly some huge stones rained down on them.

"What the hell, it's Bender's boys attacking us," Las shouted.

"Let's get behind those trees, Las!" Dalby in turn shouted as they sprinted for a nearby grove of trees.

They made the trees, but the stones were getting nearer now.

"What do we do now, Las?"

"If we don't attack them, they'll keep us penned in here until tonight," Las opined.

"Let's get some stones to throw at those boys. They're two of them as far as I can see," Dalby stated.

They began to gather up stones as there were stones behind the grove of trees. Both Dalby and Las would then throw stones at the boys before darting back to their hideout.

They had thrown several stones before they heard one of the boys burst out, crying. Then another also started crying before they heard running footsteps.

Both Las and Dalby rushed out of hiding intent on capturing the boys and beating them.

They ran to where the boys had been but saw only a heap of stones. They saw the boys jumping down some gullies.

"Let's go after them and give them a beating for stoning us. It's Lippy and Fred," Las stated.

Suddenly they saw two bigger boys running towards them. Both boys were armed with clubs. These boys looked like grown men, Las thought as he and Dalby turned to face the

**new threat. Nevertheless, they knew the boys' names. The bigger boy was named Boysie and the smaller boy, Delly.**

**“Las, you dirty fucker, you and Dalby threw stones hitting down Lippy and Fred. We’re going to beat you up for that,” Boysie shouted and attacked Las. Delly attacked Dalby with his stick.**

**Las and Dalby were fighting the two boys who were holding their own against them. Las knew that they could not afford to let these boys beat them up. If Boysie and Delly beat them, they would almost kill them. They would leave them for Bender to finish them off.**

**Las began to fight more aggressively and Dalby also began to push back the boys. Suddenly Boysie turned and ran. Delly followed his brother by jumping down a gully. They heard both boys breaking twigs as they raced through the thick bushes.**

**“We’ve got to go after them, Las. They deserve a beating for all the trouble they’ve caused us,” Dalby opined.**

**“Those boys are a distraction. I wonder if Bender is using them to throw us off his trail. We’ve lost about four hours already. Let’s go about what we came here for,” Las advised.**

**“I didn’t know that Bender had so many children. No wonder he has to steal so much to feed them,” Dalby opined.**

**Las couldn’t understand these women having so many children for Bender. He and Dalby went and got their packs and set off on their journey once again.**

**They reached the Woods without further incident. Those boys would have realized that they were no match for them. Las had gotten some hard blows in their latest fight and so too had Dalby. Those boys too, had gotten some hard blows. Las knew that they had injured both sets of boys, forcing them to flee.**

**They reached the Woods at around two o’clock that**

afternoon. The Woods ran for several miles. There were several rivers and springs all around. There were fruit trees, several such as mangoes and apples were in full bearing.

Dalby climbed an apple and then a mango tree and picked some fruits. He and Las sat in a shade and ate some of the fruits before moving on.

They trudged on, deciding not to cut down any trees or bushes to give their whereabouts away. Las knew that they had to get to the Dawson river and lay in waiting to capture Bender.

They stopped by a river to have lunch of roasted breadfruit, fried pork and ackee. Dalby climbed the respective trees to pick the ackees and the breadfruits.

After they had eaten and filled their canteens, they set off again. As they moved through the bushes, Las was wondering if Bender had been alerted. They found no signs of the man. He was wondering if they would return empty handed.

Las was also worried about his family. Suppose Bender slipped through and went to attack them at the shop. He knew they couldn't turn back. He was glad that Vita's sister and her children were staying with them, although he knew they would be no match for Bender and his boys. Juby was useful, but he too would be no match for them.

They bedded down in a grove of trees that night. Dalby took first watch. The next morning after breakfast they set off again.

They had gone about a mile when they came upon a larger grove of trees and voices floated over to them. Las signalled for Dalby to remain quiet. They crawled nearer to a clearing. Some men were sitting on some big rocks having breakfast. They were Clinch Salmon and his sons, Welly and Macky! There were two other men there, Fuller and Luddy. So this was where the Salmon gang had its base, Las thought.

Clinch had a huge axe at his feet plus a long gun! Las

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didn't know what kind of gun it was. Welly and Macky had long machetes, Las wasn't sure if they were carrying any firearms. Fuller and Luddy both carried steel clubs and short machetes.

Las knew that it would be certain death if he and Dalby were caught.

Las believed Clinch Salmon to be in his early fifties and his sons were in their early twenties. Fuller and Luddy were men in their mid thirties. Clinch was a legendary robber and cut throat. He had robbed in all the villages and had even done time for robbery. His boys had grown up in reform schools. Fuller and Luddy were bare faced criminals who had done more than one term for robbery.

"We'll raid Juville's and Toby's places tomorrow and clean them out. That should net us about fifty thousand dollars," Clinch told them.

"When are we going after Noddy's place?" Welly asked.

"You've seen the kind of stuff, Noddy has on his farm. Lots of goats, pigs, cows plus a lot of produce and tree crops, but he guards them like a hawk. He has about three guns on that farm. We couldn't go up against him with only one gun."

"So we're leaving that one alone?" Luddy asked.

Clinch burst out laughing. He took a huge bite out of an ackee and saltfish sandwich, chewed on it before washing it down with some coffee.

"I never said that. All of you know that I never give up on anything. Either those farmers pay me protection money or else I raid them. As far as Noddy is concerned, once we get some more guns we'll attack and clean him out."

Even from where they were hiding, Las and Dalby had to cover their noses. They had to hold their bellies for fear of throwing up their latest meal. The five men simply stank. Their clothes were ragged and dirty. Their hair was knotty and dirty too. With so many rivers around, it was hard to imagine men walking around smelling that way, Las thought. Soap bush was

also available. Las hadn't brought any soaps with him, preferring to use soap bush instead. He knew that Dalby had done the same thing too.

In another ten minutes the meal was over. During this time Clinch and his gangsters revealed a lot of information. They revealed that the gun, Clinch had, was the one stolen from Hep Johnson. Clinch also told them the names of everybody in the village who had a gun. He also revealed that he wanted some of those guns to be in the hands of his gangsters.

Las was waiting for his name to be called as a future victim. That Clinch hadn't said anything about him, gave him no assurances. Maybe Bender had given him some of the things he had stolen from him.

As soon as the meal was over both Las and Dalby crept away. They were about a mile away when Las spoke.

"I don't think we can get Bender out of these bushes. I don't see how we're going to get past Clinch and his boys."

"We have got to try. Once we grab Bender, we can move him out at night," Dalby said.

They continued the trek. About a mile further they came upon the remains of a fire. Las examined the ashes. They were cold and the fire was a small one, certainly nothing compared to that lit by the Salmon gang.

Las had to assume that Bender had stopped to have a meal and it was either late last night or early this morning. They saw some tree limbs cut down and knew that the man was travelling fast and maybe didn't know that he was being pursued.

They had a late dinner and decided to sleep in a valley. They were so tired that they dropped asleep almost immediately. When they woke up Sunday morning it was in bright sunshine.

Immediately, Dalby set about looking after breakfast. After they finished eating they loaded up with their gear and set off.

An hour later they reached a clearing. There was a man on a hill some distance away. It was Bender!

“Las, it’s Bender!” Dalby shouted.

“We have to leave our gear if we hope to catch him,” Las advised.

“They’ll steal them.”

But Las said that they had to hide their stuff. They hid them in some bushes before setting off after Bender. They had only gone a short distance when they realized that he had seen them and he started sprinting. Both Las and Dalby started after him. Las knew that they couldn’t allow Bender to reach the Dawson river and get to his rope ladder.

Both Las and Dalby were poor swimmers. Las knew that they couldn’t handle that river. Bender was increasing the distance between him and his pursuers. Las was sprinting, leaving Dalby behind. Dalby soon caught up with him. They were a few yards behind Bender when the man flew around a tree, Dalby went with him, but went over an edge and fell into a spring. Las went around the tree after Bender, but the man sped away.

Las knew that it was he alone against Bender. They were about a mile from the river. Bender was now leading him by about a quarter of a mile. Las doubted if he would be able to catch him.

Bender was moving away, but he was tiring and Las was gaining on him.

Dalby had come out of the spring now, but he was too far behind. Las knew that he couldn’t allow Bender to reach the low banks of the river from where he could chuck off into the water.

Bender was now a few yards from the low banks of the

river. Las knew that he had to make his move. He made a huge dive at the man's legs, but Bender spun away. But just as he was about to chuck off into the river, Dalby dived at his legs. The two men rolled to the edge of the bank and then went over. Las had jumped over the river bank and he and Dalby were holding Bender.

Bender fought the two men, but they finally got the ropes on him.

"You won't get away with this, Las. And you, Dalby, wait and see what I'm going to do to you when I get free. I'm going to murder both of you."

Then he started laughing.

"You boys are really stupid. Clinch Salmon controls this forest. He's my friend. You won't get me past him and his boys. The best advice I can give both of you is to take these ropes off me and try and get out of here before Clinch and his boys know that you're around."

"We're taking you in, Bender. We intend to get past Clinch and your boys," Las told him.

He and Dalby took Bender to where their packs were. They loaded up their packs and moved out, pushing their prisoner in front of them.

Las saw the worried look on Dalby's face. He knew that the man was worried about meeting Clinch and his boys. Bender would be sure to alert Clinch about their presence in the Woods.

They had supper that evening and bedded down by a grove of bamboo trees. Both Las and Dalby decided to take turns watching. In the morning they had breakfast before moving on again.

Las and Dalby, along with the reluctant Bender, moved through the bushes, when they came upon some thick woods. Las went and peered through the trees. There was a building there, it looked like a shack, Las thought.



**“You’ve found Clinch’s house,” Bender shouted.**

**Las motioned for him to shut up, but the man continued shouting.**

**“Only Clinch, his boys and I know this place. He’ll kill you if he finds you here.”**

**Las threw the rope binding Bender at Dalby and went to have a look inside the house.**

**The front door of the house wasn’t locked. Las pushed it open and went inside. He opened the board windows to get some more light. There were four lofts with ladders made for climbing up to them for sleeping, Las thought. There was a table with some roughly made chairs. There were two bancras with clothes sticking out of them. The room was sparsely furnished. Las made his way outside. He signalled to Dalby.**

**“It’s a hideout all right. If it’s Clinch’s, then we’ve got to get out of here as fast as possible.”**

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