

THE BUCKFAST BOYS

The crowd of youths gathered around the shop as the pub shut its doors that night, bottles of Buckfast clutched tightly in their hands, the bravado growing with every swig until they were shouting and swearing at the few brave souls who chanced a look through their windows. One flat in particular seemed to hold their attention, the woman who lived there must have been fifty, but these boys singled her out every night. Hazel had no idea who the woman was, but she was grateful in a twisted, macabre way that it was someone else and not her who was the victim. Hazel just wanted to be left alone. Wasn't it bad enough she had left everything behind and travelled all the way from her home in Warrington to this isolated Scottish village in Midlothian?

An empty bus drove past the shop a few minutes later and Hazel stepped away as one of the youths tossed an empty bottle at the vehicle. It shattered against the bus, which slowed abruptly and then came to a dead stop.

The driver got out and walked around to the rear of the bus, he shook his head and turning to the youths let loose with a torrent of abuse that was returned in due course as one of the kids extended his middle finger in the universal sign of contempt.

Hazel held her breath, willing the driver to take affirmative action and thrash these insignificant morons to within an inch of their miserable, wasted lives, and yet hoping he would get back in his bus and drive off before they jumped him. She had seen a taxi driver savagely beaten three weeks ago when he had dared to confront the youths after they urinated on his cab while he was buying cigarettes. By the time the ambulance arrived however the kids had disappeared.

The police had been interested in her eye witness account. She had given a full description of the youths responsible and dutifully waited for an arrest to be made. Now at last justice would prevail and sanity would return to the village.

But the next day the youths were still there, and the next, and the next until finally Hazel read in the local paper that no arrests had been made due to sketchy eyewitness reports.

She hadn't thought her report had been that sketchy.

The bus driver was talking on the phone and Hazel swallowed nervously, sensing the growing resentment as the youths continued taunting him. No one could touch the buckfast boys, even the police seemed helpless in the face of alcohol fueled rage, a mindless anarchy that ate away at the fabric of all she held dear. When she was their age she had answered a teacher back, the resulting encounter with the leather strap had humiliated and shamed her, but she had never dared question authority again.

The kids were approaching him now and sensing the danger, the driver strode back to the bus and closed the door as he entered. A red headed kid she knew as Dave, thumped the rear of the bus as the others lifted the rear cover. A few seconds later the engine spluttered and died. Two kids wrenched open the emergency door and clambered inside. They raced down to the front of the bus and Hazel thought she saw a flash of steel. A gasp escaped her throat as the youth slashed the driver's arm. He was struggling vainly as they slashed him again.

Her hand dropped to the phone, she hadn't been aware she had stepped across to the table until she felt the hard surface at her back.

She picked up the phone and was just about to dial the emergency button when she heard two shots in rapid succession. She stared in mute amazement and horror as an older man she knew only as Tom raised the pistol again and fired twice more. The impact of the bullet slammed one of the

youths against the window and she felt instantly sick as blood mixed with what must have been brains splattered the window.

The others were now alerted to their mortal danger as their two comrades lay dying or dead. A mad scramble ensued, one kid was felled by a carefully aimed shot that took his throat out, then they were running up the road using the bus for cover.

Tom lowered the pistol and then turning around, marched back to his car and tossing the gun onto the front seat, drove off.

Hazel dropped the phone and sank to her knees as the bile filled her throat. For an instant she thought she was going to paint the walls with multicolored vomit but then the nausea passed.

Hazel stayed down for at least five minutes and then she heard the sirens in the distance and slowly rose to her feet to look down on the scene of carnage.

Hazel's report to the police was sketchy half an hour later. She answered the door rubbing her eyes and complaining of a headache. The officer apologized for waking her and asked her if she had seen the massacre that had taken place outside her flat.

"Massacre?"

She frowned, "I heard firecrackers, although they were loud."

"So you saw nothing?"

"No," she bit her lip, "God, how awful, who was killed?"

"Three local youths were gunned down and a bus driver was stabbed, we're still waiting to question him."

"God," she stared past him. "I was asleep in bed, I heard loud noises but thought it was just firecrackers."

"This is March," the cop grimaced, "a bit early for letting off fireworks, don't you think?"

"Not around here," she sighed, "they let them off whenever they feel like it, keeps the neighbors on their toes."

The cop stared at her and eventually nodded.

"Well, if you think of anything, even if you have an idea who might have killed them, will you please phone the station?"

"I will," she smiled bravely, "but if this is the kind of thing that happens here I'm afraid I won't be around much longer, maybe I'll head back to England."

She made a mental note as she closed the door to put Tom on her Christmas list.

Written by Alastair Rosie 2006 ©