

**The Redwood Writers**  
**“I Made A Terrible Mistake” Contest 2021**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner**

**“A Good Guy with a Gun”**  
**By Foy Minson**

A glance at the clock on his nightstand assured Todd he still had several minutes before the school bus was due at the corner.

Turning back to the dresser, he hunched his shoulders to settle the harness of his new shoulder holster over his shirt. He made slow half-turns back and forth and smiled at his cool image in the mirror with the empty holster hanging beneath his left armpit. He looped the retaining straps on both sides through his belt and snapped them before standing straight again to be sure they and the back strap were adjusted correctly. Seemed about right. He picked up his weapon, a sweet, little 9 mm Beretta his dad had helped him pick out last year, cracking the slide enough to confirm that a cartridge was in the chamber. When he slipped it into place, the spring-loaded pieces of molded leather made a soft *snick* as they clutched it, and then he let it hang.

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The holster lay snug against his side a few inches below his armpit, in easy reach, but where it should give his arm plenty of freedom of movement without too much discomfort—but it didn't. Unless he wore a long sleeve shirt or jacket all the time, he'd have to walk, stand, and sit with his arm bowed out or he'd probably wear a blister on it. The thing was already against his side, so he couldn't see how adjusting any of the straps would help. Maybe if he put on some weight—no, he'd have to lose weight...or put on weight in just the right places. Hell, what he needed was to develop a body with a wedge torso. Maybe he'd just leave it for now and work on it tomorrow.

He made eye contact with himself in the mirror and grimaced. *Or maybe I should just admit that I have made a terrible mistake.* Before undoing the belt straps, he turned left and right for a last look, visualizing how it should fit but didn't. *Oh, well, It's not like I make more than one really dumb move per day. I'll let this count for today's...or, no, I bought it yesterday. So, I'm still good for one for today.* He snorted a laugh.

It would probably fit next year. He'd just have to make sure he didn't bloat up from the beers he and the guys managed to get once in a while. With another snort, he considered how the coach would make sure that didn't happen. He really wanted to wear it this year, though. He was a senior; he had to look good. Besides all the other things, the prom was coming up in a couple of months, an occasion for making impressions, and shoulder holsters looked so cool. Maybe by that time he could figure out how to wear it without wearing blisters.

Anyway, he had no problem carrying his weapon at his waist. It was comfortable, and that's the way most people carried. He didn't even know why he thought he might like the shoulder rig better. Probably that good-looking girl on the commercial with her

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hands all over some dude wearing one. How could he have just stood there ignoring her like he did, just looking off into the distance like on some old TV movie? Damn, she could have sold him an ankle holster for his AR-15. Cringing at the thought of the bucks he had paid for the shoulder holster, he soothed his conscience with a promise to give it another try later when he had time to play around with the straps. Maybe this weekend.

It was almost as much trouble shrugging out of it as it was putting it on. After putting it away in a bottom dresser drawer with an old revolver holster he no longer used, he slipped his usual pistol holster onto his belt, snugged the weapon into it and closed the safety snap. As he reached for the door, he snagged his backpack with one hand and headed for the front door where he paused long enough to get a, "Bye, dear," response from the kitchen to his, "I'm goin', mom."

As Todd boarded the bus, Missus Rafferty eyed him the way she always did with the upperclassmen, like they were all a bunch of rapists, like if she didn't watch them closely, they'd get some unsuspecting, freshman girl into one of the back rows and ravish her before they rounded the first corner. He smiled at her like he always did, even included his standard wink, mainly because he knew it irked the hell out of her.

"Hey, Todd," Roberto called from half way back. "Thought you were gonna use your new shoulder rig."

Todd raised his hand to Roberto, aka Doof. "Still thinkin' about it." He dropped his backpack on the window seat of the empty row ahead of Doof and plopped onto the aisle seat.

"You oughta get a tie-down like mine," Doof said, patting the blued Colt hugging his thigh. "Cuts draw time in half, man."

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Todd’s sneer was in fun, and Doof knew it. “Yeah, if I carried a single action and wanted to blow my toe off. My draw time is just fine, and I can get off three more with my Beretta while you’re still reaching to cock for number two.”

This time it was Doof that sneered. “Yeah, and walk ‘em up the wall. Each one of mine is aimed and goes where I want it. One target, one bullet.”

“Hey, I only need the first one of mine to hit the X. The others are just insurance, to hold the bad guy’s attention and keep him occupied jerking and twisting instead of aiming while he’s goin’ down.”

The conversation on the bus devolved into shouted questions ranging from what chapter the test was on in history class to who had sneaked taking pics during the slide show from yesterday’s sex-ed lecture and how many days suspension Little Mikey faced for the felt tip art-work he had created in the girl’s locker room. The usual stuff.

After the bus spewed its cargo onto the high school campus, Todd walked with Doof to the hallway lockers where he dumped the contents of his pack except for the book and binder for Business Math, his first class. He had just slung one strap over his shoulder when a sudden spate of shouting silenced most of the talking in the crowded hallway.

“I told you to stay away from him! Remember? Didn’t I warn you?”

Todd turned toward the voice and recognized Rob Rowes, a junior. He didn’t know much about Rowes, only that he was moody and liked to spit between his teeth like a bad ass. He also knew that Rowes had a girl that he was in the process of losing to another guy, a senior. It was the girl, a little beauty with dark hair named Vonnie that was the receiver of his present rant.

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"Did you think I was kidding when I told you you'd be sorry?"

"Robby," she started. "I told you I wanted to—"

"And I told you I didn't care what you wanted! *I* didn't want it! You're mine!

Can't you get it through that thick head of yours? You're mine! Mine until I say you're not! Mine until I throw your ass out! Is that what you want? Huh? You want me to toss you away? 'Cause when I do, you ain't gonna be good for anyone else afterwards!

'Cause you're gonna be dead! You hear me? Dead! Dead! Dead!"

Before Todd or anyone else in the hallway realized what Rowes was doing, the boy drew the weapon from his holster and accented each of his last three words with nine-millimeter hollow-points. The first two slammed into Ronnie's chest like blows from a heavy hammer, slamming her back against those gathered behind and around her. The third round and the three more following it tore into the observers, knocking them into yet others.

Screams and shouts replaced the pounding thunder of the shots echoing through the hallway and added to the rumble of pounding feet as everyone tried to flee in every direction. In the panic, many tripped over those already on the floor and were also trampled.

Todd stood where shock had rooted him to the floor. Only when someone bumped him, knocking him sideways and to his knees so that he lost sight of Rowes, did he regain himself. When he scrambled back to his feet, he saw Rowes run through the door to his right, a door that went outside to the quad. The creep still held his gun, and he was crazy enough to just start shooting whoever was out there. Todd had to stop him.

After all, that was the main reason Todd carried, along with practically everyone

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else, so he could stop a bad-guy with a gun. That was why the law had been changed allowing anyone to carry, anywhere, at any time. The more good-guys with guns there were out there, the less chance the bad guys could create the havoc, suffering and heartbreak they had been allowed to do for so many years.

By the time Todd burst through the quad door, Rowes was fifty feet away and stuttering his steps, first one way then the other. His weapon was back in his holster and his hands fluttered like wind-blows leaves. He didn't seem to know where he was or which way he wanted to go. A dozen or so other people in the quad, students and faculty members, were stopped and gazing back at the building behind him like a bunch of deer caught in headlights. They had obviously heard the shots. More than half of them began scrambling for cover.

Todd closed to within twenty feet of Rowes and stopped. He drew and aimed. He took the time to debate with himself whether to fire without trying to take him alive. He'd let Rowes call it.

"Rowes!" he shouted.

Rowes spun and looked back at him, ducked, and took off running as he drew his weapon.

"Yeah," Todd muttered with a sneer. "Like I'm gonna give you a chance to shoot me, too."

Todd's Beretta bucked in his hand as he squeezed off four quick rounds. The first one looked like it hit Rowes, causing him to jerk sideways on his next step, but he hadn't even gone down when the other three whizzed past him. One ricocheted off a concrete bench and whined off into the distance. One chipped bark from the limb of a crepe

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myrtle and buried itself in the wood. The last one hit Missus Lester, an English teacher that was due to retire at the end of the current semester. A bright red rose bloomed in the middle of her white blouse and she toppled backwards.

Four people around her, a teacher, a custodian, and two other students, all convinced that the shooter from inside had emerged and was extending his rampage to the quad, drew their weapons and opened fire.

Rowes crouched with his arms folded over his head with his pistol still in his hand, and he peered out as a fusillade of lead tore into Todd.

Rowes gripped a hand over a line of red traced by Todd's first bullet on the outside of his left biceps. A few drops of blood seeped between his fingers and ran slowly down his arm. He rose to his feet and gaped at the people around the quad. No one paid any attention to him, so he tucked his weapon back into his holster. While the four shooters, all good guys with guns who had stopped a bad guy with a gun, gathered around Todd's body, Rowes ejected a line of saliva through the gap in his front teeth and headed for the parking lot.

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