

Humble
PI'

The
Case
Of
The
Disappearing
Dagger

By A.R. FOOTIE.

© 1993.

f

The phone in my office rang. I did that sometimes. I picked it up.

"Humble!" said a voice.

"Speaking," I replied.

"It's Dan pal, I've got a problem. Everyone here is stumped + I thought you might be able to help."

"Fine," I replied helpfully. "What's the problem?"

"Well, last night I got a call from a man who said that a woman had been murdered. I went down there with the forensic people and sure enough, a dead woman lay face down on the floor. With me so far?" he asked.

"Yep, carry on."

"Well, after preliminary investigations, we picked up Johnny Smit. He's known to us, and we found his fingerprints on her purse. He maintains his innocence. He said that the woman was already dead when he got there. He admitted stealing the money from the purse, but denies killing the woman. We searched the whole place and surrounding streets for a murder weapon, but nothing showed up. The thing is Bruce, I believe Smit's story. We tested his clothing for traces of blood. Nothing.

"How was she killed?" I asked, interested.

"Stabbed," replied Dan "there was a small puncture wound to the heart. Whoever did it tried to wash away the blood with water, or spilled it on her. The wound + the clothing in its vicinity were soaking wet. We tested it and found it was only water. I've gotta admit it pal. I'm stumped."

"What sort of weapon was used?" I asked him.

"The coroner says a round sharp object, I suppose like a screwdriver or similar."

"I'll be there shortly," I said + hung up the phone.

Well, nothing had come up since the bonds
 obtain over a week ago. And I had nothing
 else planned. So I gulped down a shot of
 whiskey, lit a cigarette and went out of
 the office. As I shut the door + turned
 the key. The plane song. You never seem to
 get to it in time, so I didn't bother.

Down at the station, Dan greeted me with
 a cup of coffee.

"I know it's not your usual, but that's the breaks,"
 he said laughing. I took the coffee. We sat
 down at his office. I lit a cigarette.

"Jesus Humble, those things will kill you yet!" said
 Dan, lighting one of his own.

"Yeah probably. I've been meaning to quit. Never
 say, what you mean then you won't have to
 go through with it," I said, taking a drag.

Dan laughed. "I'll come to your funeral, and throw
 a carton of smokes in with you. You know
 the time when everyone likes post + throws
 dirt in? We both laughed.

Dan fluttered through four of five files
 on his desk.

"These, are files of unsolved murders. All
 women, and all with the same interesting
 characteristics." Said Dan.

"What have they got to do with this
 case," I asked.

"I think they were all done by the same
 murderer, with the same weapon." he said.

"Phil O'day brought them to my attention
 just before you arrived. The last one
 happened back in '63". The one thing
 that makes me think they're connected, is
 the same small water soaked area around
 the wound - on clothing in that area.
 This whole thing has a very sinister
 note to it. Why the water? I can't

quite figure that part out." He stared at the files for a moment.

"Any ideas?" he asked.

"Not off hand," I replied "could I take those files with me? Maybe you've missed something."
 "Yeah, sure. We've booked Smit on Murder. He's in the cells. Would you like to see him?" said Dan.

"Suppose I'd better. Did you get anything out of him?" I asked.

"No, nothing really. You might have more luck." I took the files with me to the cells in the basement. ~~As~~ I was let in the security gate, and shown to a cell with Smit sitting dejectedly inside.

"Smit?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Humble, Bruce Humble, I'm a private investigator. Would you mind answering a few questions?"

"I didn't kill that woman," he said shakily.

"The detective doesn't think you did either Smit. There may be something you can tell us to help solve this."

He thought for a moment, and nervously agreed.

"Look Smit, I'm gonna lay it on the line. You were in the dead woman's home. The coroner says she died about 11:45 pm. You were there at about the same time. You were seen coming out. They've charged you with murder based on that evidence. If you didn't murder Miss Grate, then you may well have seen who did, or something that may help us find out who did. Start from the beginning, don't leave anything out."

Smit nodded.

"Go on," I said.

"It was about 11:30 pm last night," he began.

I was leaning on this tree on the sidewalk,

opposite her house."

"Miss Grater house", I interrupted.

"Yes. I was waiting for her lights to go out, to break in and. Well you know, take her money. She's a rich old woman, everyone knows that. At about 11:40, she turned out the lights. I walked across the street, and flicked the last of my cigarette into the gutter on the other side. I stopped & looked around, there was no one around. Just a few cars and a van.

"What kind of van", I asked.

"A Ford Transit. It had something on the side of it "Dale's Party 'something' service". I didn't take much notice. I walked up the steps to the front door of her house, slid a credit card between the latch & opened it. The place was quiet as. I looked around in the darkness with a torch, I found her purse and took the money."

"How much money?", I asked.

"Around a thousand bucks", he said.

"Go on", I prompted.

"When I tried to leave, I almost tripped right over something on the floor. I shined my torch on it. It was the old lady. I shook her, but she was dead. As I stood up and left, I heard an engine start. When I got out side, the van was gone. As I ran to the ~~gate~~ street, A woman yelled "Stop". But I kept running right past her. I swear I didn't kill the old lady". he was crying by this time.

"Don't worry", I comforted him "I don't think you did either. But I'm interested in the van you saw there. Think very hard, this may be very important. What was the missing word on the sign.?"

He thought hard but couldn't remember.

He did remember that the van was red. Though, the sign was red and yellow

lettering on a white background. I thanked him for his co-operation and left him to his thoughts. I went back up to Dave's office.

"Find out anything," Dan asked.

"Maybe," I said "What do you know about a red service van?"

"Van? He didn't mention that last night; what've you got?"

"Well, he told me this van was there when he went into the house, he heard it start up and then leave just as he was leaving. ~~the~~ woman was dead, so he says, when he got there." I said.

"What did he give you on the van?" asked Dan.

"Not much. Red Ford Transit. No registration, white sign on the side with red & yellow writing.

It read "Dale's Party 'something' Service". He didn't remember the missing word. How difficult could it be though. There can't be that many vans or businesses around with that name. I was wrong. Dan flicked through the phone book as I spoke.

"Thirty seven actually," he said "Trouble is, none of them have the word 'party' after the name. Dead end I'm afraid."

"Maybe not," I said "Get me a printout on all those companies. And what about ~~the~~ yellow pages?"

"Shit, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. We'll see what's on the computer," said Dan, scratching his head. "Be here for a month or Sundays otherwise."

I agreed. We went into the computer room.

There was a young woman tapping on the keys of an expensive looking computer.

"Janey," said Dan. "Got a minute?"

"Sure, anything for my favourite Detective," she smiled.

She smiled ~~at~~ me and winked. We'd met

before under more intimate circumstances. Still not forgotten either. I could tell by the way she pursed her lips into a kiss and winked.

"And anything for Bruce", she said seductively.

"Oohh, Bruce is it? Have I missed something" said Dan.

"At your age babe, you probably have," she laughed.

"Actually, this is business," I said.

Dan showed her what we wanted, and in seconds, everything in the city, prefixed with the word "Dales" flashed onto the screen.

"I'm impressed," I said as the printer did its work, spewing out pages of "Dales". Dan took the filled pages & said "Thanks love," to Janay. We turned to leave the room.

Janay winked at me "Later babe", she said.

"Later," I replied with a smile.

Back in Dan's office, we went over the lists.

There were one hundred and sixty four companies beginning with the name 'Dales', still it is a big city. After going carefully through them all, seven came up as possible.

- Dales Party supplies and services
- Dales Party catering service
- Dales Party equipment service
- Dales Party Ice service
- Dales Party Ice suppliers
- Dales Party Live service
- Dales Party planning service

But which one. I decided to head back down to the cells to see our friend Smit, and did so. I believed that if one of these names prompted his memory, we could well have our killer. Halfway down the stairs to the basement which contained the cells, I had to stop aside for a very strange looking man. He seemed to be in a big hurry. His icy blue eyes staring straight ahead of him. I got a distinctly strange feeling from him as he

pushed past me. He might have been some kind of attendant or tradesman judging from his white overalls. I carried on down the stairs, and into the watchhouse where the cell guard sat in front of a bank of monitors.

"Hey Buddy, I want to see Smit!" I said.

There was no reply and the security gate to the cells was open.

"Hey, wake up," I said tapping him on the shoulder. He fell over into a crumpled heap, off his chair and onto the floor. He was dead ~~er~~ than

a dobermann under a train. I rushed to Smit's cell, he ~~was~~ dead, lying on the dirty grey cell floor ^{on his back}. There was no sign of injury, so

I rolled him over. There was a small amount of blood coming from his nose, and he was secreting water drops from there. I guessed he'd be unable to tell me anything now, so I went back to the dead guard. He had also died without any sign of injury, except a very slightly bleeding nose, and drops of water coming from it, mingling with the blood. I was puzzled. Picking up the phone, I pressed Dan's extension. It rang.

"Dan, get your ass down here right now, and order the building sealed up. Parkinson + Smit are dead." I put the phone down.

Within seconds, Dan and a couple of other officers were down there.

"Seal the building off?," I asked.

"Tight as hell, nothing gets in or out without my say so. What happened here?," asked Dan.

"On the way down here a few minutes ago, I passed a strange looking bloke on the stairs. He was in a bit of a hurry. Older man, late 40's, yellow-blond hair and the most chilling icy blue eyes. We've got to find him. I think he's our killer." I said.

Dan detailed three officers to guard the cells, and to not let anyone except himself

on me in. We went back upstairs to where police had gathered everyone in the building. None of them was the guy on the stairs. He couldn't have just vanished. He must be in the building somewhere. After the people had been evacuated one at a time from the police station, the doors were sealed. Four officers were detailed to stand outside & watch for any signs of the killer trying to escape. One of them ~~was~~ walked to a red van, got in and drove away. Nobody noticed.

"Jesus, Christ," said Don, looking into a ~~cupboard~~ ^{locker} in the locker room, "It's sergeant Phillips." Don looked away. I looked & saw a very dead man, with his throat cut, and uniform gone. He'd been changing out of it to go off duty. "Shit," said Don "This means one of the cops in uniform is a murderer." All police were called in and checked off the list after identification. "They're all present and accounted for," Don said. Chief Lane arrived from lunch to the sight of panicking officers.

"What the hell is going on," he said. We filled him in on events, and as Don got to the part with the four officers detailed to the outside, three of those remembered the fourth disappearing. There was no doubt that he was the murderer.

The chief, Don, and I went back down to the cells. The only hope of getting a quick end to this was that the video monitors may have recorded the killers actions.

"Jesus," said the chief, "Call the dead officers wives and notify all next of kin."

The videotape was rewound, and played. It took a while for anything to be seen, then suddenly; A man appeared. He was on the stairs looking down, so we couldn't see his face. The

shot changed repeated by as cameras flicked on and off. There were eight of them, we were viewing them in succession. Each one had a full uncut recording on one of the eight tracks on tape. No camera was on the guard in the watch house, but camera four was on Smith's cell. Dan flicked the switch for camera four. Smith appeared, he seemed frightened and was holding the bars on his cell door. He was saying something, probably shouting for help, he backed away from the cell door as the back of an overall clad man opened it. We watched as he took something from his pocket, held Smith by the hair and thrust his hand, containing the object, forward, obstructing the camera's view. As Smith dropped to the floor, the man turned to leave the cell, the camera caught only a brief glimpse of his face as he fled the scene. Don rewound it and paused the frame.

"That's our man," he said,
 "Yeah, but what did he kill him with?" asked the chief. "I didn't see him take anything out of Smith, and his hands were empty as he left".

I thought for a moment. If he killed the victims with a blade, we'd have found it. It's like the weapon just melted away - "melted!" I said excitedly "I've got it. That bastard did the murders with ice, probably pinnacles of it. No wonder there was water around the wounds and they didn't bleed much, if at all. The cold ice would have congealed the blood quickly, and the ^{murderer} weapon simply melted away.

"Jesus I surprise myself sometimes," I said, "Yamé a Genius Thumb", said the chief.
 "I know," I replied sardonically, but jokingly.

"Back to our list," said Dan, annoyed that he hadn't made the connection. "That now leaves two possibilities," he said.

"Going by what Smit said, I interjected, "only one possibility. 'Dad's Party Ice Service'." I said.

"Humble's got a line on it Dan, you go with him. I know where this place is. 34 Rosemount Rd., and Humble,

"Yes sir,

"Try and bring him in with as little mass destruction as possible. The mayor went apeshit about the rocket launcher episode."

I didn't reply, just smiled. I saw the look of an ease on Dan's face. He shook his head.

"Here we go," he said. "Something tells me I'll regret this."

We left the station, and I went to my car. Dan wanted to take the unmarked 'Falco', but we took my Patriot instead.

"Jesus Humble, when are you going to get a new car. This one looks like babyshit on wheels," Dan snorted.

The engine roared into life and the wheels spun under the immense torque of the 440 cubic inch V8. Dan gripped the seat.

"Nothing wrong with this one!", I said laughing at Dan who was considering changing his underwear. I slowed down to a moderate 50 miles per hour.

"How do you like them horses?," I said jokingly.

"Christ Humble, you're a bloody maniac," he replied.

I only took twelve minutes to get to Rosemount Road. I pulled the car into the parking lot. A quick scan showed no sign of the red Transit. We went in. A woman sat behind a desk in the reception area of the old but quaint brick building.

"Help you?" she said briskly.

"Maybe", I said.

"Were' looking for one of your employees," said Dan.

"Which one?" she asked.

"This one," said Dan, showing a photo likeness from the video at the station. Soney zapped it up on her video enhancer.

"Not one of ours anymore," she said.

"Any more?" I enquired.

"Used to work here, actually used to own the place. He's not here now though."

"What colour are your cars?" Dan asked.

"Were' got seven trucks, not cars, and they're all red. Used to have cars, but sold them all when business boomed," she said helpfully. "Actually, he bought one."

"Do you know where we might find this guy?" asked Dan.

"Piata Dalziel?, yeah sure. He's got a small diner in Holloway road, number 1094."

"Thanks ma'am," I said.

"You're welcome," she replied.

On the way over to Holloway road, Nothing was said until Dan happened to glance into the rear seat. He leaned over to look.

"Oh Jesus No Humble," he said.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Tell me your not going to use this stuff,"

"It's surplus," I said. "I'd found the two rocket launchers and ancillary toys."

"Surplus, haven't you blown up everything yet. Jesus, your getting a bad reputation."

"Only lun Dan, only lun." I said, lighting a cigarette.

Dan turned back to the front, and folded his arms. He was seriously regretting coming along. If only he'd brought his own car, he could distance himself from humbles innihilistic activities, that way he wouldn't get the blame when something get

blown off the face of the earth.
"You watch too much TV Dumbk", said Dan shaking his head.

"Yeah your right. I used to watch the news, now I make it", I said laughing.

The little diner appeared ahead on the right hand side of the road. We drove up to it and stopped at the doors. It was getting later in the day now, and the crowds were getting thin. There were only six or seven diners in the place. A man stood behind the counter pouring a cup of coffee.

"Can I help you gentlemen?", asked the Mexican.

"Yeah pal, one you Piata Dalziel?",

"Nor I am Siguel Mender, I own this please. Who ees looking fore thees Dalziel?", he asked in a very recognisable accent.

"Police", said Dan "this man is a killer. We have to find heem, I mean him before someone else dies", said Dan.

"OK, I tell you. I buy thees please from heem two month ago. He ees a strange man D0! He leave a + log, the motor brome caamp in Bedford Row OK?", he said.

"OK, thanks", I replied.

On the road again. This time we were in luck though. As we approached the motor camp, it was getting dark. I could just see the red Transit van parked alongside a long silver caravan.

"No Rough stuff Dumbk", said Dan waving his finger at me.

"OK!", I said.

I pulled the car to a halt some fifty yards away. Dan got out. Just to be on the safe side, I stuffed a smoke grenade into my pocket and took the small black radio controlled explosive device

out of the bag.

"Simon Humble, what are you pissing about with?" said Dan impatiently.

"Coming", I said with a snicker.

"You go up and around the other side, and cover the back", I said "I'll take the front."

Dan ran quickly around the back, to cut off Dalziel's escape if he tried to get out there.

I ran along the front and stopped at the rear of the van. The explosive device was magnetic. I flicked the switch to "ARM" and reached up under the back of the van, sticking the device to the inside of the bodywork.

Dan shouted "Come out Dalziel, this is the police!" Nothing happened. Again Dan shouted.

"This is the police Piata Dalziel. Come out or we come in." Still nothing.

I took out the smoke grenade from my jacket pocket, pulled the pin and lobbed the grenade through a side window. A small "Fool" could be heard, as the smoke shot forward and filled the caravan. The door suddenly burst open. Dalziel came rushing out, firing wildly with some sort of automatic weapon. I was forced to retreat, as he managed to get in the van and speed away.

"Back to the car", shouted Dan.

"No need to shout", I replied "People are trying to get some sleep."

The whist roared into life, and yet another chase in the saga of this crazy life was on.

"Whod'd he go" asked Dan, straining his eyes to see in the dark.

"Can't tell", I said "He's running with no lights". And he was. I was surprised that

the old van could go that fast. Then, in an instant, I caught a flash of his brake lights. I turned mine off, so he'd think I'd given up the chase. It worked, as the voliant thundered along the main road, Daniel thinking that we'd given up, switched his lights back on. We drew up alongside him. Dan ordered him to stop, but naturally he didn't. Instead, he took a shot at us. Damn bullets went through my side windows.

"Don't worry Mumble, the department will replace them," said Dan, returning a shot at the van. We'd gone more than five miles. The road we were on took us out into the country side. As the last house disappeared behind us, I said to Dan, "Give him one last warning, tell him he stops now, or I blow him up!"

"What," said Dan "You can't be serious".

"Tell him, he's on your side!"

I pulled up alongside the van again, & Dan spat through the window.

"This is your last ch... Aagh!", Dan cried. He'd been shot in the shoulder.

I stopped the car quickly, to take a look at Dan's wound.

"It's OK Mumble, you don't get rid of me that easily, he's getting away!"

"No he's not. You did warn him".

"What do you mean "he's not"?"

"Just what I said!" I replied, taking out the remote control unit from under my jacket there was a ^{switch} red light, a green light and a button on it, I pulled the aerial up, and flicked the switch to "ARM". The red light came on.

"No, ...shit Mumble--"

"Yes...shit," I said, pressing the red button on the unit, there was a bright yellow

Flash up ahead. The silhouette of the van tumbling across the road amid showers of sparks and flame brought a smile to my face. I laughed.

"You did warn him," I said to Dan.

"How're we gonna explain this to the chief?" asked Dan.

"Just tell him we found Dalziel driving an old 'bomb'," I laughed. "We'll better check it out. Dalziel wasn't dead, more horribly stunned than anything else, although he had a few broken bones and a selection of cuts and scratches to his bodies entirety.

Two ambulances arrived. The first one took Dan. I made sure Dalziel waited, albeit in terrible pain. My mind flashed over the pain he'd caused those he'd murdered, the terror that was their dying few moments. I took my .38 out of its holster and put it to his head as we waited for the second ambulance. How terrified he looked; how much I wanted to pull that trigger and splash his brains all over the road. I pulled back the hammer. He really thought he was going to die. He stook; he shit his pants. I pulled the trigger. "Click...!!" he screamed just as a cop car with the other ambulance pulled up.

"Hah! sucker," I said pulling the uzi out from its place. "I use an Uzi now," I laughed.

"Holy shit, Humble, when you're finished playing around we'll get this asshole to hospital. Not that he deserves it," It was the chief. Dalziel was arrested for the 6 murders.

"Dan's OK Humble," he said "He wants your ass over at the hospital. Something about 'old bombs' or something. I think he's deteriorating." "Ok, I'm out of here," I said heading for the Valtout.

I went over to Melrose Hospital. Dan was sitting in bed, ~~with~~ talking to a man from Internal Affairs.

"And the van" slid sideways, tipped over and burst into flames, you say?" said the I A man.

"Yep, that's what happened," I said. I was there.

"Oh Christ!! Humble said the man from I.A. I thought, no I prayed you'd left the force by now,"

"I did Jenkins, just helped the chief out a bit."

Dan laughed. I laughed. The man from Internal Affairs shut his book and said "I don't want to know!". He said goodbye to Dan, grimaced at me and left.

"Some people have long memories" laughed Dan.

"Sure Do," I replied.

"Hey, listen, thanks Humble." said Dan.

"No problem," I replied "Call me".

I left the hospital and went visiting. You guessed it. Janey..

the
End

J