

Humble

PI'

The case
of the
missing
Diamond

By A.R. FOOTE

© 1993

f

Night time is the worst part of any day. There was crime going on everywhere and I had nothing to do with it. I was sitting at the bar in the grand when an old friend came over & sat on the stool next to me. "Brother, how the hell are you?", he asked. "Jesus, Sam. Where have you been hiding," I replied. "I thought you were dead!" "Long story. What're you drinking," he said. "Anything I don't have to pay for." Sam ordered a couple of Doubles. The drinks arrived and we got to talking. Sam was a nice guy, not a particularly good guy, but nice enough. I'd busted him when I was on the force. Sam had an affinity for diamonds. Other people's diamonds. He'd been out for a couple of years after a seven year lag in the state jail. He had no hard feelings. It didn't bother me anyway. I had a job to do. This was the last job I had on the force. I caught him red handed, doing a job at Macays Gem Exchange. I kind of got carried away. The next thing you know, old Sam's spread all over the bonnet of my car, which was parked through the stop window. Boss wasn't happy. He kicked my ass out of the force. Something to do with straw and camels backs. Sam recalled to me the funny side of it. He laughed. I laughed. "So what are you up to now Sam?", I asked. "Well, since you're not a cop, I suppose I can tell you. You remember the Cornwall Diamond?" he said. "Yeah, I do. It was never found." "That's right. It was beautiful. The biggest stone I ever saw. Well I planted it somewhere, now I can't find it. Worth a cool two million bucks." he seemed annoyed.

"You don't mean to tell me it was you who heisted it Sam?" I said.

"Yeah. me and two others. Lachie Grant and Phil Macguire. They think I stiffed them, I've been running ever since." he seemed worried, I couldn't help him. If I had any part in the recovery of the 'Cornwall', I'd have to turn it in, along with Sam and cohorts. He understood that. We finished our drinks, and Sam said "See you later", and left. Thirty seconds later, there were two gunshots from outside the Grand. I walked quickly outside to find Sam spread across the ground. He wasn't quite dead, but near as damn it. He reached his right hand up and grabbed by jacket.

"Bruce, it was Grant; he said, struggling to get the words out, "Diamond, --- ~~hiddly~~ --- Calamity park --- under --- under --- Oak"; He died. His eyes open, he lay cold as a fish on ice on the concrete sidewalk. I heard sirens. Two minutes later the place was swarming with cops.

"Shit Humble, did you shoot him?" asked Det. Wills.

"Piss off. I know who did though." I answered.

"Who was it?"

"A fella by the name of Lachie Grant."

"How do you know?", asked the detective "Did you see it?"

"He told me."

"Sure he did. The man's dead."

"You're beginning to piss me off bettles. Watch your mouth!" I snapped

"Or what? Humble", grimaced Wills as he walked up to me. face to face,

"Or I'll kick your ass shifted." I replied.

Wills didn't like me one bit. Ever since I made a fool out of him on the Swindon rape case. He'd gone so hard out to convict the guy, that he'd taken no notice of the fact

the poor guy had been a Viet Nam Vet, and in an explosion had ^{lost} his nuts. He was so embarrassed when ^{he} ~~the~~ chief this that he stormed out of the room. If he'd not been so obsessed, he wouldn't know that the woman was lying. Wills was suspended for three months. He hadn't forgotten it.

He stood there, face to face with me, over the body of Sam. I blew him a kiss to show him he was a pussy. He retaliated by taking a swing. It was a lucky shot and his fist connected with my jaw.

"Still an asshole Wills," I said, turning to walk away. Wills had been itching to fight it out with me for the last 18 months. I'd steered clear of him to avoid any unpleasantness. This time though, I had the suspicion he would cross the line ~~the line~~.

"Humble, your under arrest!," said Wills

"Yeah, No shit," I kept walking

Wills pulled his gun. "Stop or I'll shoot!," he shouted. Naturally I stopped. I don't mind pushing my luck, but it aint worth getting shot for, know what I mean?

"I'm arresting you on suspicion of murder," he said. I was cuffed & searched. He found my gun and put it in a plastic bag. With red/blue lights flashing in my face, I said,

"You'll be sorry Wills,". All that did was piss him off even more.

"Yeah, well how does 'threatening a police officer' sound," he said smartly.

"Not as good as shooting one asshole!," I retorted. I was tossed into the back seat of a police car and taken Downtown.

"Jesus thumb, what goes on?," asked Dan as I was wheeled into an interrogation room. I told him. He asked if I wanted a lawyer.

I told him all I wanted was 10 minutes alone with Wills 'Off the record'. He smiled. &

"Don't worry, I'll sort it out," said Dan removing the cuffs. I rubbed my wrists.

"Christ those things are uncomfortable!," I said.

Dan smiled, leaving the room.

From there it was purely academic. Forensic said the bullet came from a .22. My handgun was a .38. Wills would be pleased. I'd been sitting in that room for seven hours while Forensic had done a quick check. Dan brought me the report, along with the chief. I'd given them all the information I could, excluding the whereabouts of the diamonds. Grant was picked up and charged with Sam's murder. Without the diamond, McGuire couldn't be picked up. It was about 2:30 am when I got away from the station. Wills got his ass kicked by the old man, and was ordered to surrender his badge and gun pending a disciplinary hearing. As I left the main doors of the police station, Wills stepped out of the shadows.

"You think you're hot shit thumbk," he said.

"Kiss my ass Wills. You screwed up once to often,"

Wills took a swing at my face. This time he wasn't a cop. I swung back, my fist connecting with his jaw. He fell onto a car in the lot, denting the bonnet. With head down he charged like a bull at a gate. I stepped aside as he forced his head through the closed window of a small van. He stood up dazed. He went for his gun. It wasn't there. He had to hand it in to the chief.

"I'll kill you thumbk!" he shouted. I have guns of my own.

"You'll try!" I said as a cab pulled up. I got in and went to pick up my car.

I was too tired to think. So I picked up the Valiant and drove home.

I woke late the next morning. Everything that had happened the night before flashed through my mind. I had two things to consider. One was the diamond. Why did Sam tell me it was 'under the Oak' whatever that means, when he said he couldn't remember where it was, which was what ultimately caused his premature death. And the other, would Wills really go so far as to try and kill me. He was pretty steamed and made a fool of himself yet again. ~~He~~ I'd cross that bridge if I came to it.

I lit a cigarette. The first one always makes you choke your lungs out. This was no exception. I quieted the cough with a snort from my whiskey bottle, which by now was getting low. Old habits die hard. I looked up Calamity park. It was a frontier type tourist place with all the old buildings & bits & pieces. It took half an hour to get there. It was Sunday. It was closed. But for a few workers cleaning up and doing a bit of maintenance, it was deserted. Mine was the only car in the parking lot. The sun was high and it was around 28 degrees already. The gate was unlocked so I went in. A guy sweeping off verandahs on the shop fronts asked if he could help. I said "Yeah, I'm looking for something but I don't know what it is".

"Ain't we all," he said.

"Is there something around here called 'The Oak'?" I asked.

"Ain't no trees around here man," the sweeper replied. "Ask old Joe, he's been here for years. He might know," he said pointing at a man. I thanked him and walked towards an old gentle man sitting in a jeep.

"You Joe?", I asked.

"Bet yer ass" he replied.

"Names Humble, Bruce, Humble," I said.

"Glad to know you," he replied. "Can I help?"

"I'm looking for something called the Oak," I said.

"The Oak? Ain't no oak trees around here. Come to think of it, ain't no trees around here."

"What, no trees?" I said.

"Used to be; Cut 'em all down," he said, pointing to a picnic area. "There's tables now," he said laughing. He walked off still laughing. "What an old fool," I said to myself as I walked to the picnic area. As I walked over the roadway I noticed a red car in the parking lot. It was a bit far away to identify the driver, but one thing I did know; It wasn't Wills. Far too short and there were no sparks in the air. There were seven tables in that picnic area. The stumps supporting them all looked the same. They'd been painted brown and I couldn't tell one from the other. I thought that this was a possibility as far as Sam's explanation went. He said he didn't know where Ted had hidden the diamond, but knew it was under the oak. I'd have to dig half the place up if that were the oaks he was talking about. However if it was under one of them, there was a hundred thousand dollars reward waiting for me. I decided to take a look around the place to make sure I'd missed nothing. It was quite a large township. The old man was right. Not a tree in sight. I walked around for half an hour. I looked into every place I could see. Nothing. Then I saw an old decrepid looking utility shack. It had once been used to store building materials in. I walked over to it. There was no door on it, but there was a lot of old junk inside. Paint tins, rusty nails, bits of wood and two or three

old signs, of the hanging, swinging type. I took a quick look. The first one was covered in dust. "Saddlery", it said. The second was far more interesting. "The Oaks". That rang bells in my mind. I went back to the Old Tinan.

"Those old signs in the shed," I said.

"Yeah, what about em?" he asked.

"There's one with 'The Oaks' on it. Where did that come from?"

"Well, it used to hang outside the Hotel. You see, over there," he said pointing "then we changed the name of the hotel to 'Calamity James'." he said.

"How long ago?" I asked.

"Couple of years," he answered "What's this about?"

"Did you put it in the shed then?" I asked.

"Hell no! Went up yonder to the boarding house. Signs cost money you know," he said.

"When did you take it down from there?" I asked.

"Why right when we finished building the saloon," he said proudly.

"Then you put it there?" I said.

"Hell, you catchin on sonny," he said. "last year it was."

"Then why's it in the shed. What's the saloon called now?" I asked, confused at all this.

"Nothin. It burned down a couple months ago."

He laughed again as he walked off.

"Shit," I said aloud. What a stomp. I was beginning to wish I hadn't asked. No wonder Sam couldn't find it. They moved the sign. With elementary deduction, I reasoned that the ~~hotel~~ hotel was where he'd hidden the diamond. The sign had been moved only a short while after he'd stashed the diamond, and placed on the boarding house. The two buildings looked almost identical and were next to each other. Sam must've come here at night and identified

the sign as indicating that as the buildings under which he'd hidden the diamond. I glanced back up the roadway at the parking lot. The red car was empty. I walked towards it. It was not a car I'd come across very much. A red Fiat sports. Not many around. I walked close enough to get the registration. HP 7177. I wrote it down. I'm lousy with numbers. I wondered where he'd gone. He might work here on something, but I had an feeling. That uneasy feeling you get when you realise you're about to step out in front of an oncoming truck. I turned my head, just in time to see him disappear behind the blacksmith's stable. It struck me as peculiar. In his black suit and hat with Blues Brothers sunglasses, he was completely out of place & looked rather like something out of a gangster style movie. I went over to the Hotel. It was closed naturally since the place was shut. The old greaser told me to leave. I turned to the gate, thanked him for his cooperation and went back to my car. The red Fiat was gone. I looked left & right but there was no sign of it. I had no right to be here at the closing of gates, so I thought I'd do the honest thing. Break in later. When it was dark. I drove to the nearest diner and ordered a Giant burger, fries, egg salad and Coke. While it was coming I went to the phone booth. I put in the required charge & rang Dan's number. "Police" said a woman. "Yeah Gimmie Dan's line," I said. There was a click and it rang. "Through now sir," said the operator. "Yeah!" said Dan. "Dan, it's Bruce. I need a favour," I said.

"What is it?" Don asked.

"I need you to check out this car registration for me,

"What is it?" Don asked

"HP 2177," I said.

"Hang on," said Don putting the receiver on his desk.

"Orders ready sir," said a woman at the counter.

"Right with you," I said.

"Yeah Bruce, back. That car's a Fiat 600 special. It's registered to our friend John Thomasino," he said.

"From the Ace detection agency?" I asked.

"Yep, the same," came Don's reply.

"Thanks pal, I owe you one," I said.

"You mean another one," said Don laughing.

"See ya round," I said hanging up the phone.

I picked up my order and went back to the car. I found the burger greasy and delicious. As I struggled to contain its entire thickness wise, in my mouth, egg yolk found its way onto my white shirt. Well it's not as bad as having egg yolk in your teeth and smiling at people. I scooped it off with my car keys and wiped it on the window cloth. All the time wondering what Thomasino was doing out at Catamity Park. The answer wasn't very far away. I spotted his car half a block ahead, nosed out at a corner and parked. He was following me. I laughed to myself. "I'll give this clown something to follow," I said to myself. I kept it in the back of my mind that I didn't want him to know I was ~~not~~ leading him on a wild goose chase. I wanted him to think I didn't know he was

following me.

I finished my food and turned the key. The Vulture fired into like, as always, and I turned out onto the road. I drove right past him but didn't look. It was as I'd thought, I'd gone a couple of hundred feet past him when he drove out on the road behind me. He was following me, but I didn't know why. Thomasino was a bum, but didn't miss a lot, Sam was a one time snout at his. Maybe he'd heard that I was with Sam when he died & thought I might have been told the whereabouts of the Cornwall Diamond with Sam's dying breath. Well, if he thought that, then he was smarter than I thought. Whatever the reason, he ~~was~~ sticking to my ass like glue. I drove out along the parade, he stuck to me. I turned up Naylor; Still there. Just to piss him off, I drove into town. He followed like a lamb. I stopped at the station ^{and wait in}. "Dan" was still on Duty.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Well, it's Thomasino. He's following me all over town. I don't want him to know he's rumbled. Can I borrow your car. I'll go out the back exit," I said.

"Jesus thumb, last time you borrowed my car, they had to peel it off the road, after it'd been run over by a Dio Dorer."

"Aw go on, I promise, that was an accident, I promise I'll take care of her," I grovelled.

"Shit, you better. It's the wife's car." he said, tossing me the keys. "Bring it back driveable!" he said.

"Thanks Dan," I said. "See you round."

I went down to the parking lot. Thomasino couldn't see my car from where he was

parked, but I didn't want to take the chance I reached into the Valiant and grabbed my bag from inside. I walked over to Dan's Chevy, actually his nicks, opened the door and threw the bag over the back. I looked up. Dan was shaking his head. He'd seen that bag before. I started up the Chevy and headed onto Route Road, turned left & drove to the office. I had to pick up a few things. It would be dark in an hour or so; I needed a torch & some more ammo clips. Not to mention a new bottle of Scotch. I swallowed the last two rips from the old bottle & that was the end of it. Suddenly. "Humble yer Bastard!", It was Wills. He was pissed as a fiddlers bent & waving all over the place.

"Wills!", I said surprised.

"I oughta play you right now!" he shouted.

He had a .38 pistol. It was pointing more or less in my direction, but ^{it} wavered with him. I gathered up the things I'd come for and walked towards him. He held up the gun to shoot me, & pulled the trigger, he missed and fell flat on his back unconscious. Too much liquor.

"Shut the door on your way out," I said as I left. "No time to piss about!"

"Tch Tch", I said "Yanie shot my clock". This guy was a serious asshole. No house manners at all. I got back into the car. Thomasino would have been getting suspicious by now, and realised he'd been dumped. On the other hand, maybe not. I didn't know for sure as I headed back out to Calamity park. I sat at the same diner, for a short while until darkness fell, drinking coffee. There was no sign of Thomasino yet, but it was only a matter of time. Finally it was dark. The day

with lights off.

pulled quietly into the parking lot. I took the
 torch & jemmy bar to the gate. A quick twist
 with the bar opened the lock and I went inside.
 I made directly for the hotel. A quick tap on
 the glass with the jemmy, broke it. I put my
 hand in and turned the latch. The door
 opened and I went in. I put a couple of old
 bottles behind the door as I closed it. If any
 one came in, there'd be no surprises for me.
 I looked around for a door to the basement.
 I found it. I turned the handle. Locked! The
 jemmy made quick work of it though as
 the door swung open, I was pitch black
 down there but for the narrow beam of
 light emitted by my torch. The basement was
 empty. There was nothing but dust, and plenty of it.
 I looked in all the likely places, but nothing. I put
 myself in some place. Where would I hide something
 in a hurry, and make sure it wouldn't be found.
 There was nowhere in there to hide something. I
 searched the rafters on and in every part of
 the basement but still nothing. I finally turned
 to walk back up the stairs. The first and
 second steps were solid. But the third rocked
 a fraction when I stood on it. I stepped back
 and bent down to take a closer look. I reached
 out and took hold of its edge. It tilted with
 relative ease. Beneath it was a small canvas
 bag. I opened it in anticipation of finding the
 diamond in there. I wasn't disappointed. It
 was there all right. Big, bright and beautiful.
 I closed the bag and put it in my jacket
 pocket. It felt heavy. I bent down to replace
 the step. Suddenly, I heard the bottles
 by the door tink. Someone was coming
 in, and I was stuck in the basement.
 I had to get out before I was trapped.
 I ran up the stairs. Straight into the

gun barrel of a .44 magnum.

"Hold it! Don't do anything stupid!", said a man's voice.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Where's the rock?" he replied.

"I don't know, I didn't find it." I said; I was lying.

"Get your hands up smartass," he said nervously.

I complied. I knew it wasn't Thomasino. I'd heard his voice before & that wasn't it. He reached into my pocket. He found nothing, then he reached into the other one. I could see 100 k's sprouting wings and flying away. I took a wild swing in the dark with the torch. It struck the man in the face & he took a step backwards. I turned to one side as he fired. There was a second voice now.

"Put it down shithead," it said.

He didn't, instead he turned to the voice at the door & fired. There were two shots fired in quick succession. One came from the guy who'd shot at me. The other from Thomasino. His shot struck home as the other guy lay on floor; A bullet in his chest.

"Jesus thanks Thomasino!", I said.

"Don't mention it. Christ man, I've been following you ^{all} around the city. I waited at the poker station for 1 1/2 hours before I realised you'd slipped out," he said.

"Well it goes to show, you're not ~~very~~ good at tailing people, eh?" I said with a smirk.

"Yeah, well anyway thumb, where's the Cornwall diamond?" he asked putting his gun away.

"Right here" I said.

"I'll take it!" said Thomasino, holding out his hand.

"No way," I said "this baby's worth 100 k's to me in Indus fees."

"It's worth more than that thumb," I said.

Thomasino, "the Inders fee is 200k's. The insurance company doubled the bounty," after they'd paid out 2 mill to the owners.

"Yeah, maybe so, but I did the digging, I collect the bounty."

"Suit yourself thumb," he said. "But remember you're the one who broke in here, think of your licence. Still I saved your ass. Macgwire would have blown you away in a second if I hadn't shot him first," he said, and was really annoyed.

"Ok, fine. I'll return the diamond. We go

50/50

"Yeah, that's fine. I've been hunting this thing for years, and you lucked onto it. I was staking out the por. I've been following Sam for ages, trying to track it down. I saw his mates gun him down. Both of them were there. Macgwire must've followed you as well," he said. "Let's get out of here," I said.

"What about this asshole?" said Thomasino.

"Better take him with us," I said. "He'll live."

We bundled him up & put him in the back of Don's car. Thomasino went one way; I went the other. I took the scumbag to Mercy hospital & deposited him. He was in bad shape, but he'd make it. I called Don, who came down in my car, with two officers behind him in a marked car. He arrested Macgwire, although it probably made no difference to him. The charges were, murder and robbery. A cop stayed there to guard him. Don took his car. When he threw the bag out of the back seat, he noticed his car's seat was covered in blood.

"Jesus, the nitell love that," he said.

"Don't ask to use it again thumb. You never bring it back the same as you get it, he got in & drove away."

I wondered if Wills was still at my office. I soon found out he was. He was the worst son mean slough. He'd crawled up onto my couch and crashed out. I kicked his ~~feet~~, and took his gun. "Wakeup wakey shithead", I said. "Ooh!!... sheeitt!!" he exclaimed, getting up quickly, "Which way", he said putting his hand over his mouth. I pointed to the bathroom. He moved quickly in there. I heard him puke his guts out. I smiled, opening the new bottle of scotch I picked up on the way home. I poured two glasses. One for me, and one for Wills. He staggered out at the bathroom. "Here, drink this", I said. He took the glass and said "Thanks", swigging it down with a grimace. "Listen Wills, you gotta lighten up a bit pal. It's-- it's just that you get up my nose every time I set eyes on you." Wills put down the glass. "They look funny, about the gun before-- I--", "Forget it Wills. You're your own worst enemy. just go lightly or you'll really get hurt". He said nothing, but nodded. "Go home & get some sleep", I said "I'll call a cab." "Don't bother though, the walk will do me good", he said, walking out the door. I gave him his gun back the next day. He was OK. As for Thomasino, he got his money, but is still a lousy detective!

the
End.

f