

## John Dowse – The Zircon Transplants

A dark-suited security man hurried across to the raised dais in the center of the room; he looked worried; he whispered urgently to the head supervisor.

“Get rid of them,” the headman said. “Blame the air conditioning.”

The minion walked quickly out of the room and within moments, a gentle bell-like sound could be heard over the communication system.

“We regret we must ask all our customers to evacuate the salesroom straight away. There is no cause for alarm, but a failure in the air conditioning system has been noted. We do apologise for spoiling your visit to us and hope you will be able to join us again on another occasion.”

Despite the moans of complaint, gradually yet firmly, the security men around the room herded the fifty or so ‘guests’ through the exits. As soon as the room was empty and the doors securely shut, the staff gathered around the supervisor for an explanation.

He turned to the salesman. “Now tell us all what you’ve found,” he said, walking across to a table still ablaze with rainbows of fire from the cut diamonds scattered over the baize cloth.

“We had a request from an American buyer to see some F1, ten carat, rose cut, blue-whites. He’s done business with us before, so we took special care of him. He and his wife sat around the table and I obtained a sample of the gems he wanted to see from the vault. I emptied the contents on to the center of the table. The diamonds were counted; there were twenty in the sac. Immediately, it was apparent to everybody, including the American customer, that there was one diamond which was a ‘wrong-un’. It was hazy and clearly different from the others. It was then I called my supervisor who confirmed my opinion. Apologies were made to the customer and he, appreciating our embarrassment, left, promising to return to view the diamonds at a later date, before his return to the States. That’s when I called you.”

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“ What do we know about this particular lot?” the boss asked.

“ Well sir, as you know, ten carat diamonds are not the run of the mill type of stones requested. This particular sac of diamonds was last examined two months ago, but nothing abnormal was recorded as being found then.”

“ But for changes as marked as these to have occurred, this fake must have been in and out of the bag dozens of times.” He turned to his assistant. “ How many handlings d’ya reckon would have been necessary for this degree of hazing?”

“ It’s quite impossible to say, but I would have thought it would have to be fifty or more, maybe many times more, but it could well be that even at the last occasion this lot was examined, two months ago, the changes in this stone were present but for some reason or other were not recognised then.”

“ Who controlled the last occasion this lot was out?”

“ The deputy director, as a matter of fact. The client, an American politician, was an old customer of his.”

The supervisor hesitated, mulling over the possibilities. Could this be an inside job, even including the deputy? Could he have colluded with his customer in effecting an exchange of a zircon stone for a real diamond? But a high flying American politician? It seemed very unlikely, but it would be extremely easy to turn a blind eye for a moment while the customer switched the stones; it would only take a moment. Mind you, it wouldn’t be easy to make the switch with all the closed circuit televisions around the room, but it could be done. Or was the fake stone swapped months, even years ago and the gentle friction of time produced the now very apparent hazing to be seen.

“ Well, there’s a number of things we’ve got to do and do quickly.

Firstly, every collection stored in the vault and I mean every one, will have to be carefully checked and every stone examined in case there are any other fakes present and that has to be done overnight. We can then open tomorrow

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without any angst of this sort hanging over us. Secondly, we have to know the number of times and the dates this particular sac of stones has made it to the tables. That shouldn't be difficult as the bag is logged out each time it leaves the vault; it should be possible to link the passport names of every person who has had access to this collection of stones over a number of years. That too has to be done overnight. Then, in the morning, we will have a list of all the people who have possibly handled these gems. We may strike lucky and recognise a name, a potential thief who would have the capability of producing a zircon stone of such remarkable quality as this. Gentlemen, this dud, while being a fake has been perfectly made; the quality is in no way less than the best of our stones. Whoever made that was a pro with some skill. If we draw a blank after all that, we had better get our 'ears' out; find out who has over the last few years acquired quantities of the superlative zircon needed to make this. Again, the guy who made this had access to the best on the market as well as all the facilities for cutting and polishing this. You all know what you have to do, so get to it, thoroughly and quickly."

When all the staff of the Jerusalem diamond center had left the room to start the marathon task he had set them, the boss lifted his phone and tapped in a number. The call was answered at once; it was as if someone was waiting for the call.

"We've got a problem." Quickly, he summarised events of the last hour or so and his proposed management.

"How much money is involved?"

"In excess of \$50K."

"So much? Well, keep me posted." The line clicked; the chat was over.

The boss slumped back in his chair. He could have done without this. It was a unique problem, but it had been considered before, when, some years ago,

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a young British author had visited the showroom and asked whether an idea of his, namely that of swapping a zircon substitute for a real diamond, was possible; apparently he was writing a novel, 'The Diamond Scam', about it. He remembered it well, as it had been to him the author had come for advice. He had been told that it was theoretically possible to switch a phoney for the real thing. He remembered too the increased security at the time of this chap's visit, when it was realised that this had been something considered by a visitor, but none of the bosses had taken it too seriously; perhaps they should have. Even so, the number of closed circuit television scanners had been increased manifold and their positions revised, but unfortunately, they had not adopted any long-term storage facilities for the records of these television cameras over the years. Perhaps now this had happened, they would consider downloading all the records on to large capacity discs for permanent storage; this would enable their keeping records for years and years; anyway, for a long time. He knew it would require considerable skill to palm a fake stone of this size and make the switch without being observed and a hell of a lot of nerve; quite a sleight of hand. He sighed deeply; there was nothing else for him to do here now. He locked his office door, aware of, but able to ignore the frenetic activity going on all around the building.

Everyone was present when he walked in a few minutes before eight in the morning.

“Who's going to kick-off,” he asked.

A bespectacled cutter from the workshops stood. “I was delegated to examine all the stones in this particular bag. I regret telling you that there was one other zircon substitute present. This was confirmed by my senior.” There was an audible inrush of breath from everyone; a double switch.

“What's the damage?”

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“ Two matching stones of this sort must be worth at least \$100,000, probably more.”

A young executive stood holding a sheaf of papers. “ I was not aware of that finding, sir, but this bag of stones had been examined on thirty-two occasions during the last ten years and on thirty-one of those times, one or more stones were sold. While on each of the thirty-two occasions the switch could have been made, I concentrated on the one time when the person who examined the stones did not make a purchase. We have a printout of the visit. It happened five years ago; the person was a woman and from her passport information, she was a British subject, named Miss Rosalie Haynes from London. She was an accountant by profession. At this time, we know no more. We have printouts too of all the other thirty-one visits.”

“ Well done; do we have records of who else may have been present in the showroom at the time that no sale was made? She would have needed an accomplice there to receive the diamonds once the switch had been made to get it out of the building.”

“ We’ve listed everybody present that day.”

“ Good, that’s a very good start. We’ll get someone to check her out.” He phoned the line he had called yesterday evening. “ Two stones had been switched; must have cost us in excess of \$100K. We’ve got a woman’s name to check on. She doesn’t sound the sort who would have such a perfect substitute available, but then maybe she was the switcher, someone else having made the stone.”

While he was still talking, thinking about the information they had found, he was presented with another file of papers. “ These are the details of those present in the showroom that day during the failed sale.”

He scanned the names quickly.

“ Gotcha,” he cried out, pointing to a name on the list. “ I’ll bet a pound to a penny this is the team we’re looking for. Nicholas Royle; this guy’s a

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well-known diamond dealer with offices in London, New York and Johannesburg. If he's linked in any way with Rosalie Haynes, we've cracked it. Well done, chaps."

He packed the info into his case and left the room. Outside, his car was ready to speed him across town to St David's Hotel. He walked through the plate glass doors into the atrium and entered a small office on the ground floor. There, he changed his appearance completely. The papers from the briefcase were folded into his inside pocket and he left by a small doorway which opened into a nearby corridor. He walked out of the hotel and hailed a taxi and within minutes, he was dropped outside a dull, uninspiring building, the headquarters of Mossad.

On the first floor, he was welcomed by an attractive secretary who led him to the controller's suite.

"Shalom, Simon." The head of Mossad shook his hand. No other pleasantries.

"Fill me in with the latest."

The director of the Diamond Center summarised the happenings of yesterday and the overnight discoveries.

"Your team has done really well. It would seem that you think you know who carried out the switch and who masterminded the whole thing. The problem is that I've met this guy, Nicholas Royle a few years ago; he's been a good friend to us over many, many years, working on many occasions with Sammy Goldstein, who now runs our New York office. I've met Miss Haynes too, so it doesn't really fit though it sure puts them in the frame; I just don't believe they would do this to us. What I suggest is that we approach him through Sammy; he knows him well enough to broach the subject direct and he'll get the truth. Leave the rest with me; I'll set the ball rolling."

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Sammy Goldstein was climbing out of his bath in his New York home when the call from Jerusalem came through. “Hi there, Sammy. How’re ya doing?”

“Gees, Joseph, it’s been some time since we talked last. What’s up? You only call when there’s trouble and you need something done.”

“How right you are.”

He recounted the story of the diamond switch and the discoveries the director had made.

“I’d like you to find a reason to fly to London and meet up with your old pal, Nick Royle. Tell him straight what’s happened and what we’ve found out. I can’t see him doing this to us, but the evidence does incriminate him. Ask him straight out. You know him well enough and you know he won’t lie to you. If he’s clean and I sure hope he is, get him to help work out who robbed us and framed him; sure as hell, someone wants us to believe it was him.”

“I’d bet my mother’s life on Nick being clean. He wouldn’t do this to us, I know he wouldn’t; to others maybe, I’ve heard him talk about this, but not to us. Gimme a couple of days.”

“Yeah, okay, but don’t take too long. Solong Sammy.”

Rosie was putting baby Peter to bed when the front door bell of their home in West London suburbia rang.

“I’ll go,” Nick called out. “Holy cow. It’s Sammy. Rosie, it’s Sammy. What brings you here, you old villain? Why didn’t you let us know you were coming, I could have picked you up from the airport.”

“Wanted to wrong foot you, Nick, I guess. Hi there Rosie, as beautiful as ever; still putting up with this bum?” Sammy said, giving her a peck on the cheek as he hugged her.

“Are you on your own”? Rosie asked.

“Yeah, just me. Gotta talk to you, seriously, Nick.”

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“ Sounds ominous, Sammy. Anyway, come on in. Junior’s just gone to bed, hopefully. You’ll stay with us, okay?”

“ No Nick, thanks, I’m only in the country for a short time and my orders are to report to the embassy tonight.”

“ What’s wrong, Sammy, you’re beginning to worry me. What’s on your mind?”

“ Nick, we’ve known each other for a long time and you know I love you like you were my brother and I’d trust you with my life. That’s why I hate saying what I have to say, but I’ve got my instructions; that’s why I’m here. Nick, remember some years ago you switched the Geneva diamond? It went well until that sheik put the kybosh on the whole thing when he stole it from you. I’ve got to ask you, Nick, have you ever done the switch again?”

“ No, just the one time; that was enough. It was only the possibility of carrying out the switch which fascinated me. But why do you ask?”

“ I knew it and fortunately, so did my boss; I was sent, just to ask.” He then recounted the happenings in the diamond center a few days earlier. “ One thing is certain, Nick, the passport of the woman who carried out the switch five years ago at the center was in the name of Rosalie Haynes, an accountant and in the showroom at the same time there was a guy called Nicholas Royle.”

“ Well, one thing is certain, Sammy, it wasn’t us.”

“ I can truthfully say, Nick, that nobody in the department who knows you considered it even a possibility, but y’know how it is? Someone always questions the facts. Now we have to think who could possibly want to incriminate you so completely.”

“ The only person who hated me enough to do this was the sheik, but we know he’s dead, out there in the desert.” He paused. “ Maybe he had a son who knew about me.”

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“ We’ll check it out.”

“ But if the son looked anything like his father, he’d never get into the diamond center. They’d never let him past the doors.”

“ I guess so,” Sammy grunted.

“ You said two diamonds were switched? Now that would require real skill and a great deal of nerve; I suppose someone with those skills could be hired.”

“ Perhaps we ought to start looking for these people.”

“ Not a chance, Sammy. If the person who planned this behaves anything like the sheik, they’re a long time dead; alive they may have talked. No, they’re almost certainly dead and buried.”

“ Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“ Well then, what are we going to do about it?”

“ We, we? You’re not going to do anything, Nick. This is the department work, it’s what we’re paid for.”

“ But it was my name they sullied, mine and Rosie’s and I’m damn sure I want a bit of the action to clear it.”

“ But Nick, right now, we haven’t a clue if there is a son or where he may be.”

“ Well, you’d better get your guys on to it straight away, hadn’t you?”

It took the agents of Mossad only a few hours to determine that the sheik had one adult son and having his father’s love of gambling, they knew which casino he was likely to be visiting.

“ What’s the plan?” Nick asked.

“ Now remember this is our job, Nick. We are going to make it as simple as possible. Tonight, when he leaves the tables, a pick-up team will abduct him, blindfold him and take him to the airport where one of our private planes will take him to Jerusalem, straight to the center before we remove the

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blindfold. We hope he will be sufficiently unnerved by that time to be talkative. A squad of marines has already landed in the desert in much the same way as we did when we visited his father's camp back all those years ago and with luck and just a little persuasion, we'll find his safe and well, let's wait and see; I've got a hunch the diamonds will be there, still in the safe. It would sure save a lot of effort on our part and pain on his if they were found there. So you see, Nick, there's not a lot you are going to be able to do."

"Okay, Sammy, but let me in on the questioning."

"If the bossman agrees, okay."

Nick and Sammy left Heathrow the next morning on an El Al flight to Jerusalem and were picked up and whisked away to the diamond center within minutes of landing. There, they were met by the chief who shook Nick's hand vigorously. "Good to meet you again, Nick. You won't remember me: I lead the attack on the desert camp all those years ago."

"Yeah, I sure do remember you; fewer grey hairs then," Nick laughed.

"And smaller around the waist too." They both enjoyed the reminiscence.

"They brought the young man in a few hours ago; he's the spitting image of his old man; probably has all his vices too. We're waiting for the call from the desert squad. They arrived at the encampment some hours ago and the latest report said they had found the safe; I guess they'll crack it any moment now."

Nick was taken to an observation room where, though concealed from view, he could watch the interrogation about to start. His captors removed the blindfold cruelly. The prisoner screwed his eyes up against the bright light. "What the hell d'you think you're doing?" He tried to look as arrogant and unconcerned as he could.

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“ Now then, we’re going to ask you a few questions; please don’t lie to us. You see, we would rather not inflict any pain on you, but you can be sure it will be very unpleasant if we have to. Do you understand?”

“ You don’t frighten me,” he said.

“ Do you know where you are? No? Well, this is the diamond center in Jerusalem. Does that ring any bells?” He paused. “ No? Well, have you ever acquired stolen property, property of the Jerusalem Diamond Center?”

“ I’ve never been to Jerusalem,” he said cockily.

“ That wasn’t the question I asked. Have you ever obtained diamonds stolen from the Jerusalem Diamond Center?”

He hesitated. “ No, as I said, I’ve never been to Jerusalem.”

The interrogator sighed. The phone on his table rang. For a few moments, he listened intently. An officer came in through a side door carrying a small leather sac.

He tipped the two diamonds on to the tabletop. “ Can you tell me where you bought these diamonds?”

The young man’s face became suffused with anger. “ You bastards; how many did you have to kill this time to rob my home?”

“ We killed no one. Strange as it may seem, these stones aren’t yours, they’re ours, straight out of our safe. So, I repeat, where did you acquire those stones in your safe?”

The young sheik’s son remained silent.

“ You haven’t answered my question.”

He remained silent.

“ Where are your accomplices now?”

The young man leered. “ Go find them, if you can.”

“ So you have had those that helped you, killed?”

Realising his lapse had admitted his guilt he said, “ those greedy fools tried to cheat me.”

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“ So, you admit your guilt. It is my duty now to pronounce judgement. You are a Saudi and therefore a Wahhibi. As you know well enough, the Shari’ah law, which is a divinely prescribed fixed punishment based on the Quran, is applicable to everyone, without discrimination, regardless of social status. Theft is only permitted when hungry or the guilty person is unable to earn a living. The Shari’ah would have much to say about your gambling and drinking alcohol too. As a jail sentence is not part of the Islamic penal code, it is considered an inhuman form of punishment----.”

While the interrogator had been speaking, the colour had gradually faded from the young man’s face. He knew what was likely to be coming.

“ I understand that the object of your penal system is that while punishing the offender, society is protected from any recurrence of the crime. In our law, we consider an eye for an eye to be a suitable code of punishment, but you’re not a Jew; we must adhere to your law, mustn’t we? Through the right wrist, I believe. Take him away.”

His limp body was dragged from the room.

“ No, not that,” he whimpered, “ not that.”

Nick turned to Sammy. “ Your people won’t do it, will they?” he asked.

“ I don’t know, Nick. He needs to be taught a lesson he will remember for the rest of his days, but maybe, not that.”

“ You think that’s too severe, Nick?” the interrogator asked. “ Well, had it been you caught thieving from a Saudi showroom, they wouldn’t have hesitated amputating your hand, you can bet on it. I don’t fancy cutting his hand off, but he’s asked for it. We’ll let him stew for a couple of weeks in solitary and then make a decision. But we’ll clear his safe in the desert out of everything worthwhile, that’s for sure and from what I’ve heard from the squad that raided his camp, there were lots of goodies there, probably purloined

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from around the world. I would guess it would be quite impossible to return them all.

“ But breathe a sigh of relief, Nick, you’re in the clear.”