

WHIZ TANNER AND THE STOLEN SCULPTURE

Tanner-Dent short

I don't have much time and I'm out of breath, so let me jump to the introductions—I am Joey Dent. I'm out of breath because I've been running down the bike path toward Indian lake. My goal is to get to the Triple C Park ahead of my partner, Whiz Tanner.

You see, Whiz and I are detectives and today we are on a training exercise. It's a clue-based scavenger hunt which I have finished and now I must get to the finish line at the park. I'm the third fastest sprinter in Jasper Springs Elementary School, but long distance runs are not for me.

As I arrived at the park, I couldn't see anybody—no sign of Whiz. It's not often that I get one over on our Chief Investigator. I picked a nice shady bench, upwind from the primitive restrooms, and sat down to wait.

And I waited. But soon I decided to brave the smell and use the restroom. As I approached, my heart sank. Between boards of the men's door, was a folded piece of paper addressed to 'Agent K'. I am Agent K. Whiz must have gotten here before I did and left the note.

I unfolded it and read. 'Agent K, Crime Lab.' It was signed, 'Agent M'. Whiz!

The Crime Lab is in Whiz's back yard. After another exhausting run, I arrived and made my way to the back of his shed. Keeping an eye out for spies, I bent down and pressed the fake knot near the bottom of the wall. A computerized voice responded.

Name.

"Agent K," I answered back. The voice continued.

Password.

"Tomato is a fruit."

A section of the back wall opened and I rushed in and down the stairs—entering the Crime Lab.

"Good of you to make it, Agent K. I hope the hunt was not too taxing."

"No problem, Agent M," I replied. "But I thought I had you beat when I arrived at the Triple C."

"You may have," Whiz said as I sat down. "I never finished."

"So I did beat you. Woo hoo!" I exclaimed with my fist pumping up and down above my head. "So why did you quit?"

"A mystery presented itself so I halted the training exercise to begin working on it. I rode my bike out to Triple C, left you a note, and then came back here to begin."

"So what's the mystery?"

"A sculpture is missing from the Springs Park."

“Not the statue of Lewis Jasper on his horse?”

“No, Agent K... the small modern one, near the parking lot.”

“That’s just a rock. Who would want to take that?”

“That is the mystery Tanner-Dent must solve. I have already begun with an examination of the crime scene and some interviews.”

“What did you find?”

“The sculpture is not as heavy as you might think. At 148 pounds, two individuals... or one strong guy... could reasonably load it into a vehicle.”

“That still brings us to who would want to take it? It can’t be worth anything.”

“It is worth quite a bit to the Jasper Springs Founders Society.”

“Why?”

“The Society gave it to the town on the 50th anniversary of their founding. When I passed by the Springs, this morning, about a dozen of them were gathered around, wearing their funny hats and colorful vests. I thought they were performing a ritual so I eased closer to get a look.”

“So, what were they doing?”

“Nothing... they were standing around the empty pedestal.”

“Was Thorny’s dad there? He’s one of their officers.”

“Mr. Rose was not in attendance, but I am quite sure he was quickly notified, along with all the members.”

“Well, did you find any clues?”

“Yes indeed.”

“What?”

“Tire tracks. Whoever perpetrated this theft backed a vehicle up to the sculpture. The bumper actually chipped the pedestal, leaving behind a bit of chrome. And as you know, there is a patch of dirt around much of the parking lot in that area and the getaway vehicle left marks. The right rear tire is nearly bald. The left rear tire, however, left a very distinct tread mark.”

Just then a buzzer sounded—someone inside the Tanner house was calling us. Whiz hit the intercom button.

“Yes?” he spoke into the microphone.

“Wilson, Arnold Rose is on the phone for you.”

Whiz’s parents always used his real name.

“Thank you, Mom,” Answered Whiz as he picked up the Crime Lab phone extension.

“Good morning, Thorny. What may the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency do for you today?”

He listened for a moment as Thorny spoke. I couldn’t hear what he was saying but a smile was growing on Whiz’s face.

“Of course, we would consider looking into this affair, Thorny. Founder’s Lodge... fifteen minutes... got it.”

I could hear an enthusiastic ‘thank you’ come through the earpiece as Whiz pulled the phone away from his ear.

“Thank you for calling Tanner-Dent.” And he hung up.

“So, what did Thorny want?” I asked.

“We are officially on the missing sculpture case. Thorny convinced his dad to hire us.”

“What are we waiting for?” I exclaimed. “Let’s roll!”

With that we both rushed for the Crime Lab exit. Once outside we jumped on our bikes and rode like the wind. We skidded to halt in the parking lot behind the lodge and began walking toward the door.

As we passed by a dark blue pickup truck, Whiz pulled on my arm. “Look at that truck, Agent K.”

When Whiz calls me Agent K in public I know he’s all business. I looked at the truck... nothing special.

“Yeah, there’s no tailgate,” I responded.

“What about the bumper? Did you notice the chip in the center?”

I glanced over at the truck, and sure enough, there was a chip of chrome missing from the bumper.

“Do you think that has significance?”

“In crime detection, there are no coincidences. Examine all clues.”

He walked over to the truck and examined the back tires. I did likewise.

To my surprise, the right rear tire was quite worn. The left rear tire, however, looked brand new.

“Chipped bumper, tires matching the tracks... I think we have a potential getaway vehicle, Agent K. Based on the height of the truck bed, one guy could probably roll the sculpture right on.”

We continued into the building. Thorny was there with his dad and several others. They all looked sad and angry. Thorny saw us and came over.

“Hey guys, thanks for coming. I told my dad that you could solve this in a flash. You can do it, can’t you?”

“Have no fear, Thorny, the firm of Tanner-Dent has a stellar success rate for these types of crimes,” responded Whiz.

“Yeah, that’s what I told my dad. He said he would pay your going rate.”

“We will discuss our fee later. For now, would you know who owns that blue pickup in the parking lot?”

“Yeah, Mr. Ward. He’s the grumpy guy over there in the green shirt.”

“I see him,” I said. Then, for effect, I added, “don’t look at him... he might get suspicious.”

Thorny turned his head quickly just as his dad came over.

“Hello boys. I’ve heard quite a bit of good things about you this morning. Do you think you can help?”

“I am quite certain we can shed some light on this problem,” began Whiz. “Can you think of any reason someone would take the sculpture?”

“My guess is vandalism since it has no real value. It’s just a bit of carved granite. The

bronze plaque would have some scrap value but it would be much easier to remove it than to take the whole stone.”

“A vandal would probably just damage it rather than take it. Can you think of any other reason someone would take it?”

“Only to make us mad,” Mr. Rose replied with his teeth clenched.

“Does anyone have a grudge against the Founders?”

“No. We have many friends and no enemies.”

“What about Mr. Ward?” suggested Whiz.

“Oh, he’s one of us. In fact, he has been vying for President for many years. Also, he’s the one who donated the sculpture.”

“May I have a few minutes to confer with my colleague, Mr. Rose? I think we may be able to solve this rather quickly.”

“Uh, sure,” he seemed surprised as he walked away.

“What’s up, Whiz?” I asked. “Are you going to mention Mr. Ward’s truck?”

“So far we only have circumstantial evidence. We need more. Thorny, do you know where Mr. Ward lives?”

“Yeah, on Hudson Street.”

“Great, could you two head over there and snoop around? Thorny, you can take my bike. In the meantime, I will stall here. Come back as soon as you can with any information you may dig up. If we cannot find anything we will have to fall back on circumstantial evidence alone.”

“Right... Chief.” I almost said ‘Agent M’ but caught myself before spilling the beans in front of Thorny.

Whiz started asking questions of the men as Thorny and I ran out.

It was a quick ride to Hudson Street. Thorny and I turned up Mr. Ward’s driveway. We then made a quick check of the surroundings. That’s when I saw a small pile of broken stone. It looked like a big rock was dropped and some pieces chipped off.

There were scrape marks leading from the pile to the garage door. We looked in the garage window and froze! In the middle of the floor was an object with a sheet over it—just the right size for the sculpture. What’s more, the floor had scrape marks leading to the object.

“That must be the sculpture,” I said.

“Let’s get back and tell Whiz,” exclaimed Thorny excitedly.

“Right.” I picked up some of the chips. Thorny and I then jumped on the bikes and rode like mad to the lodge.

Whiz was still interrogating the men as I walked over and casually handed him the chips. He looked at them carefully.

“Driveway,” I whispered.

He nodded.

“I am ready,” he announced.

“Ready for what?” asked Mr. Rose.

“The Tanner-Dent Detective Agency knows the culprit.”

“What? You haven’t left the room. How can you know who did it?” asked one of the men.

“He can’t know anything,” scoffed Mr. Ward. “He’s just a kid.”

“Mr. Ward,” began Whiz, turning toward him. “Is it true that you have been passed over for the office of president of this esteemed lodge several times?”

“That has nothing to do with this!”

“Establishment of motive, sir. I would think that being rejected by your comrades would make you angry.”

“My anger at them is not the question.”

“Then can you explain these?” Whiz dumped the chips on the table and stood back to watch.

“What’s that?” asked several men at once.

Mr. Ward growled.

“If I am not mistaken, gentlemen, those are chips from the missing sculpture.” Whiz turned toward me. “Joey, as Director of Field Operations for the Tanner-Dent Detective Agency, please inform these gentlemen as to the circumstances surrounding these chips being in our possession.”

I stood a bit taller and strutted up to the table. Picking up the largest of the chips I explained what I saw at Mr. Ward’s house. Thorny was quick to back up my story as Mr. Ward was trying to say something about trespassing.

Everybody was quiet. They all turned toward Mr. Ward.

Mr. Rose said, “Well?”

“It was my sculpture anyway, you ingrates!” Mr. Ward shouted as he stormed out.

Mr. Rose turned toward the society’s president and said, “Can we prosecute him? He did donate it... and the pedestal.”

“After donating it, it became town property,” the president answered. “But we can definitely kick him out of the Society.”

Mr. Rose then turned to us. “Well, well. I never thought you boys could do it... and so quickly,” he remarked.

“Tanner-Dent aims to please, sir. If you ever have need for detective work in the future, please keep us in mind.” Whiz then started passing around business cards to everyone.

The End