

The Legend of Willie van Tonder

“IDB? Well IDB stands for Illicit Diamond Buying. Yes, Willie’s story revolves around it,” answered Oom Klaas when young Danny asked him about the legend of Willie van Tonder.

“You know,” Oom Klaas continued, “human greed always seems to control things. When diamonds were discovered the big players saw that there was a fortune to be made, just as long as the market for diamonds was never saturated. So they lobbied the government to control the sale of the stones and to charge anyone else who traded in diamonds with IDB, which carried stiff jail sentences. However,” Oom Klaas went on, “people being what they are, the small players could still take a chance and make some money on the black market. That’s just what Willie did.”

There are many stones to be found here in the Vryburgh area. In fact, the municipality used to employ a bloke to watch when they dug furrows. The diggers used to turn up diamonds and his job was to collect them and hand them over to the Town Clerk. But this bloke also wanted to make a bit on the side and so he sold some small stones to folk like Willie.

Willie was basically a good bloke, not greedy at all. However, he’d acquired a sexy young wife who had only two ambitions in life, sex and money.

As time went by, her demands for both began to increase. I don’t know how he coped with the sex, Danny my boy, but the money was easy. He turned to small time IDB. Most of the people in this town have dabbled in IDB at one time or another.

Unfortunately for Willie, there were people who craved his wife’s body and wanted him out the way and so they tipped off the cops that Willie was into IDB.

One night a detective from Kimberley, unknown to the locals, approached Willie in the bar and as the tongues were loosened brought the subject around to diamonds.

“I have a very good stone,” the detective said, pulling a truly magnificent diamond from his pocket.

Willie’s knuckles reflected red off the glass.

After a long while he said, “Please don’t display that in public. You’ll get us all into trouble. I’ll you what; meet me at my house on Thursday night if you still want to talk.”

Oh course, Willie very much wanted to talk. Just as much as the detective wanted to trap an illicit diamond dealer. The Area Superintendent had been pressing him for more arrests. Because of the recent low IDB arrest ratio he was beginning to suspect that some of his outlying staff may be in on the racket.

On that fateful Thursday the detective and a colleague were ushered into Willie’s lounge by his young wife. After serving them coffee and beskuit she excused herself. When she had left the senior detective broached the subject of their meeting.

Willie had said, “Please, my wife knows nothing of my business life. Let’s go into my backyard and talk there.”

Shielded from the eyes of the young wife, the detective handed Willie the magnificent stone.

Willie stared at it for a long time before he spoke, “Why do you okes want to trap me for IDB with this worthless piece of glass? Please don’t play these silly games with me.”

With that, he tossed the diamond over the seven foot wall that enclosed his property.

For a moment the detectives stared at him incredulously – then they ran for the front door.

The next morning Willie went round to his old buddy Jan's place to talk about their future, but Jan wasn't at home.

"That's funny Willie, he went out early this morning saying that he was going to meet you," Jan's wife said.

Willie went cold. Had Jan tricked him or was somebody trying to trick Jan?

These thoughts fought each other in his head as he stood in Jan's living room when suddenly there was a knock on the door.

Jan's wife was greeted by two young policemen.

"Good morning Mrs Merwe. I'm afraid we have very bad news."

"Oh my God." exclaimed Jan's wife, stepping back and cupping her hands around her face, "What is it?"

"I'm sorry, but we have just found your husband's body in the quarry, he has been shot several times," the young policeman said.

Turning to Willie, she screamed, "You bastard. You've double crossed him. You've killed him."

Willie's trial was an interesting one.

Jan's wife had confirmed that Jan and Willie had contrived to steal the police diamond.

However, Willie could not be found guilty of murder.

The young detective blushed as he took the stand and testified as follows: "Your honour, when we could not find the diamond my superior ordered me to watch the accused and follow his every move. I had climbed a tree so I could see into the whole property. The lights were on and the curtains open and the accused and his wife began to make – er – do – have sexual intercourse."

"And then?" asked the magistrate as the young man had fallen silent.

The young detective's voice lowered and he hung his head, "Your honour they continued to do this until the accused fell asleep."

"And then?" prompted the magistrate.

"Early the next morning the accused left the house and I trailed him to the deceased's house."

And so it was that Willie was given five years. Five years for obstructing the ends of justice.

On returning to Vryburgh from Pretoria Central, Willie was surprised to find that one Henk Potgieter was newly ensconced as the mayor. Henk who had always been in debt was now apparently a rather prosperous gentleman and well respected in the community. Because of his wealth and altruism he had become the darling of the town giving money to this church and to that charity. And so they elected him mayor – though rumour has it that he bought most of the votes. Money talks, you know.

Now Willie knew Henk's background and so he began making some discreet enquiries.

Henk had always been up to his eyeballs in debt. Then he disappeared from the scene for a while. Everyone said it was to escape his debtors. But he reappeared a little while later. Before he did though, it seems that all his debts had been settled, as were those of a few others, more notably, those of the Superintendent of Police.

After satisfying himself that he was sure of his facts, Willie decided to confront Henk. He thought that the mayoral office would be a good place as Henk would feel secure there.

Thus it was that, settled in an impressive chair, Willie faced Henk, sitting across an imposing desk in an even more impressive chair.

With iron self-control, Willie casually said, "Henk you really stuffed up my life."

Henk did not protest at all. Rather, he pulled open a drawer and handed Willie an envelope.

Opening it Willie found pictures showing himself passing diamonds and receiving cash from IDB dealers.

Smiling at Willie's surprise, Henk said smugly, "Willie, I'm sure that those pictures will be good enough for a twenty-five year stretch,"

"You bastard," exclaimed Willie.

"Relaaaax," said Henk, "There's more."

He pulled out a letter from another drawer. Waving it in the air he said. "Willie my boy, you had better hope that I outlive you. This letter, my insurance policy, is safely lodged with two lawyers, and is to be opened on my death. Guess who will be the prime suspect if I died unnaturally."

He sat back and smiled smugly.

Willie stared at him, long and hard. Finally he spoke.

"As you can imagine, as soon as I was behind bars and without money, that nympho bitch shackled up with a rich 28 year old stud." Willie shrugged, "So, I can deal with that - life goes on. There are many less demanding women out there. Even without money, one can work. But last week my life changed – forever."

Henk cocked his head sideways, and waited.

"Last week," began Willie, "Last week I learned that I have three months maximum. The cancer is that far."

As the implications dawned on him, Henk went white. He turned and reached for his secretary's bell push.

"Don't bother," drawled Willie.

Henk turned back to find Willie holding a Colt forty-four. "Willie don't do anything stupid . . .," he managed to choke out before his voice failed.

"Stupid? Stupid? Not only is my life is over. I wasted five years of it in jail while you lived in luxury off my diamond – my diamond, do you hear? And you, you bastard, you killed my best friend and drove my wife away."

Then, it seems, Willie leant back, slowly placed his feet on the desk, and crossed them. Then very deliberately, he lifted up the colt - and tucked it firmly under his chin.

"And that, Danny my boy, is how the mayor says it all ended."