SOME SCRUBBY LITTLE RUNT

By Steve Gray



A SIMPLE JOB BECOMES A THRILLING STORY.

MEL MEETS JEB, THEN IT ALL STARTS TO UNRAVEL.

- Some Scrubby Little Runt -

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Chapter One

How did I know what would happen? I had no idea of the events which would unfold on this journey. Don't get me wrong there were lots of wonderful things, that's for sure, but in the end no one could prepare me for what would happen and how I would feel about those things, good and bad. Somedays I still shake my head in some form of disbelief.

I was given a new client to work with, Jeb Nichols. My boss Alice suggested she would be there to introduce me at his place, but on the day, other things came up for her and I was on my own. That happened from time to time. I've been doing this job long enough now that it doesn't bother me. The first few times were nerve wracking…

I remember driving over there. It was a particularly average day, the weather was calm and all that, traffic was okay. I turned into McFarlane Ave and felt a muscle twinge in my upper back as I turned the steering wheel. That was a nuisance, it then put me a bit on edge, I hated having pain especially if I couldn't do my work well, or if it made me look like I couldn't do it.

I'm loaded with memories of different people I have worked for and with over the past few years. Supervisors who were a bit toxic, okay a LOT toxic… Then clients, some were nice, some angry at the world, some angry at their families, it all goes with the territory. The job is all about dealing with people, and I must say I am darn good at dealing with people.

I didn't always do aged care work, I have done payroll, a bit of bookkeeping for a smallish business, cleaned, stocked shelves you name it. Even a receptionist at a car dealership for a few years. Jobs were punctuated by having kids. I have two, Elsie and Bob. They provide their own challenges. Different challenges now, they are well and truly grown up, Elsie is working part time while studying. Bob went straight into work at a tyre shop and is now becoming an assistant manager.

Kids make you think about what's important and as well, can cause some of your darker thoughts. What would happen if they were in an accident? Each stage of their lives

provides different challenges, getting their licences and cars and all that, is different to them learning to ride a bike and negotiating with bullies at school and goodness knows what else.

My mind flips through various thoughts, kids, work, Jack my partner, holidays, good times, bad times, then back to work…

There were days when things went ok, but then there were the dark days. Times when you knew the old business you were working in was probably on its last legs, and the boss was trying to keep things going. In the middle of winter, cold, miserable, one guy and his wife I did payroll for, things had gotten out of hand and they were there standing in the back area away from reception bawling their eyes out, some of the staff didn't know what had happened, some had seen the writing on the wall. It was an incredibly bleak time.

I did the final payroll for those guys, there were tears, what next, where to from here. Hey they weren't alone, I was amongst them. Then it was about eight weeks before I got something else. It seemed like the longest eight weeks of my life. Occasionally I see some of these guys I used to work with when I'm out shopping. They have all seemingly moved on, settled into new roles, but each time I see them it can bring up that dark feeling deep inside.

I remember there were times the nausea would kick in, things felt so bad and then my breathing would become shallow, I actually had to get really mindful about taking deep breaths as if I had Asthma or some such.

Dark days, every so often I recall those down moments, Jack simply says, 'And this too shall pass.' He's a positive bugger, he's been lucky, his job has been rock solid for many years and he's happy doing it.

I drove past that business for many weeks, the boss's car was there, they had to clear out the place before handing back the keys to the building. That must have been hard for them, and they weren't young either, so doing some of that work must have literally been back breaking. Finally a 'for lease' sign went up and they were gone.

I did my best to not let on to Jack that I had down streaks, he would go off to work and I would be left to deal with my own thoughts, my own negativity, my own feelings of

inadequacy, some sense of guilt that I wasn't contributing enough some days. I could still function enough to do things around the house and all that. One day I jumped into things to do as Jack heeded off to work, got about three things done and then it was like a brick hit me.

My mind would trip me up somehow. I remember hearing the washing machine in the background. I had gotten that far, and wiped the kitchen bench, but now here I am in the bedroom, we have a chair in there that clothes get thrown on, I had taken those to the laundry. That's why the washing was on.

I sat there, sort of slumped in the chair like a sack, a big breath and not much happened. I watched old Mr. Thompson across the road, through our venetian blinds, as he slowly pulled out of his driveway in their car, then headed off down the street. It then rained, as if the rain was waiting for him to pull out, things went dark, it was about an hour and a half later the rain had stopped, and as an old song goes, 'Salt water welled in my eyes.' Something about the old guy across the road, the rain and the timing of it all, got to me. I felt terrible inside.

I hadn't had breakfast, just a cup of tea, as was our morning ritual. I got everyone else ready and then looked after myself. That was our usual routine. Back then the kids were big enough to look after themselves. They could sort their bedding, put their clothes out to be washed, even putting their own washing in the machine, and get breakfast for themselves.

In some ways I think Jack knew I was getting a bit down, he would have a quiet chat with the kids to make sure they didn't slip up. They were good, we were all good in our own ways, gees even the others have down days. 'And this too shall pass.'

That day things did pass, but it was well up to lunch time before my heart settled and my mind got into gear properly.

I guess I was lucky, I didn't go in for having alcohol to settle things, nor prescription or other drugs. None of that interested me much, not this early in the morning anyway. I then saw Mr. Thompson come back, the sun was out now and the paths etc were starting to dry out a little. Something about all that was a bit symbolic I guess, 'This too shall pass.'

I didn't have too many of these dark moments. Occasionally I would go for a walk and clear my head, that was sometimes very useful. Other times, bleh… I liked the useful times.

Well… Things change, things come and go. For this job, I did some aged care training and then when Alice put me on she suggested that it was more because of my communication skills, all from doing good customer service over the years. That was nice, but what about the other training I did? Anyway, it all comes in handy.

I mostly enjoy what I do, looking after the various needs of elderly clients, a bit of a chat, cleaning, shopping, sorting, and the occasional tech issue on the computer or phone. In amongst all that I get to watch the decline of clients, sad but inevitable. I take a deep breath and calm myself a bit, each new client is a new adventure, sometimes a little scary, but mostly okay.

Some of the clients I get aren't clients for too long, they may have hesitated getting support and by the time I come along they are fading fast. A couple of them have been moved on to aged care facilities within just a few weeks, some a few months, and some, well let's just say they skipped the aged care step. Those were difficult, you just get to know them and then they're gone. It's different to the long term ones, those you can get used to the idea they will pass on, you meet some of the family and experience them fading, the inevitable. Then it's different, the ones that go quick it's like they suddenly give up.

Some that moved on early were stubborn and some just didn't know they could move on, 'Oh I can't afford that…' They simply didn't know what was available. Some had stories of sitting alone in a cold cold house with nothing happening to make things better. I often walked in and turned the heater on, they mentioned they were waiting for things to 'warm up'. I remember for one old dear I suggested, 'It's the start of winter, it will be a long while before it gets warm again.'

I figured they would probably turn the heater off once I left, but for a short while I warmed up their life. One lady had her power bill about to be cut off, so I drove her to the post office to pay the bill. She had the money, she just couldn't get to the post office to pay it. Her daughter would drop in and say that she had run out of time, perhaps next week, and then the red letter arrives, pay or we cut you off. Seriously, some people.

Alice told me at one of our yearly reviews, that I handled the passing of clients the best. I indicated that, ‘We all come, we all go, it’s a matter of when, how and why.’ We chatted about that for a bit. One time she got the staff in for a meeting and we discussed clients passing and ways to handle that inevitability, she referred to me and mentioned that thing I said one day that was so relevant, ‘we come, we go etc.’ We brainstormed ways to handle that inevitability. A term came up ‘disconnected, connectedness’ it confused a few but it made sense to me.

Well, will you look at that, here I am so wrapped up in my own thoughts I’ve driven right by Jeb Nichols place. He’s at number seventy and I’m now at three hundred and something… Oops, how did that happen, well I guess it happened easily, oh good a round about up ahead, that’ll make the u-turn easy.

Number seventy, okay I’m here now, this is not an old neighbourhood, unlike some of the other places I work with older clients. I figure the suburb was about 8 - 9 years old, I still remember it as just being paddocks not that long ago.

Jeb’s house looked out over a small park by a lake, lots of people would walk past there with their dogs and kids, very pleasant. I learnt that Jeb would occasionally open the garage door and sit on a comfy chair on the edge of the garage and watch things go by, if the weather was bad, too cold or wet he would sit on the edge of his bed looking out the front window from his bedroom. He mentioned that he preferred sitting in the garage, people would see him and say hi. He was always up for a chat.

The front yard was well kept, small, with fake grass and rambling plants along the edges, easy to maintain. In the future I would occasionally go along the garden bed and pull out a few weeds, it didn’t take much.

I parked, partially tripped on the gutter by the driveway, then got to the front door and knocked. Jeb had one of those security cameras at the front door and it swivelled to follow me, it would cause his phone app to beep, so if he couldn’t hear my knocking he would hear the beep. I could see through the glass sections in the front door that someone was approaching.

A big smile welcomed me and a broad hand gesture indicated to enter. He introduced himself, Jeb Nichols. I knew straight away that here was a man who knew about happiness. I shook hands, he had a decent grip, arthritic yes, but one of those guys who knew how important it was to have a positive, solid, first impression.

I was just a bit taller than he was, I thought he moved very well for his age, now up to the top end of seventy something. Balding, silver hair, neatly kept, warmly dressed, lambswool slippers, it was winter after all.

We headed down the hall, my first thing was taking in all I can, the sights, sounds, smells, of the place. This house was generally in very good condition. I was trained and experienced at assessing people's living spaces and this was in very good condition. He chatted away merrily, 'You found the place okay, good good.' All that kind of thing. Walking past the bathroom which was off the hall, the door wide open, only one bathroom, it's a small two bedroom house, but it looked to be in good condition. I figure first impressions are everything.

Oh and the big thing with this home, it was warm, toasty warm. That's a good sign in my books.

We sat in the lounge and I mentioned how nice the place was. Jeb smiled and just uttered 'thanks.' He went on to say that Alice had rung to tell him I would be here on my own, therefore no formal introductions. He mentioned he would make a cuppa but having now sat down he was reluctant to get back up again in a hurry. He wanted to know all about me and what I would be doing with him. I gestured to get up and suggested that 'I can put the kettle on.' He hurriedly gestured to sit, so I stayed put.

I know better than to 'ruffle feathers' on the first meeting, or any meeting for that matter, unless it's absolutely necessary. 'There is a time for ruffling and a time to not ruffle, mostly the latter.' I would tell that to new recruits I sometimes got to work with.

His infectious smile and intent eye contact meant he was genuinely interested in me and he had me talking for a long while, he would ask questions and kept me going. I had to stop myself and say ‘Well what about you Jeb?’

He sat back a little in the lounge chair and took a slow breath, his face changed ever so slightly to a considered seriousness. The smile now faded a little as I could see his mind ticking over. I didn’t let on that Alice had given me a loose rundown already.

‘Well let’s see’ mentioned Jeb, ‘Multiple jobs, various experiences, independently financed, Happy-ish… and now about to begin a new adventure with you.’ His smile returned. He then mentioned, ‘So you get to vacuum, have a chat and a cuppa, take me shopping, if required, perhaps a Drs appointment or two and other bits and pieces. Is that how you understand things?’

I agreed, I had the paperwork with me that suggested much the same. In our world it went down on the invoice as Social and Community Support.

He leant forward in his chair and slowly got up saying ‘Now, about that cuppa, are you a tea person or a hot chocolate person?’ I suggested that, ‘Actually I’m a coffee person…’ He was now shuffling across to the kitchen, stopped, and directly mentioned, ‘I only gave two choices not three. So therefore your answer is?’ I went for hot chocolate, it was actually Milo, much the same for me. Jeb could be direct. Sometimes he was after a yes or no response to a question, and if you drivelled on and mentioned something else, he would say, ‘Yes or no?’

I casually got up and wandered over to watch how he moved and handled things in the kitchen, he did quite okay. He had Tim Tam biscuits, I thought that was rather good. My waistline didn’t necessarily agree but hey, that happens, you have to take the good with the bad, the ups with the downs.

Jeb talked about Alice coming to do the assessment. ‘There was another person with her, someone in training?’ He indicated, then shook his head as if he was annoyed at not being able to recall. I piped up with ‘Oh you probably mean Fiona?’ He smiled and uttered, ‘Yes, that’s it Fiona!’ He smiled widely and slowly mentioned ‘Don’t get old, you forget things…’ Then winked at me with a smirk on his face.

Our conversation continued and I learnt a few things. Most of the things Alice had either told me or they were written down.

Jeb's wife passed away ages ago and here he is in his house, her photo sat on the side of the kitchen bench in a small gold frame. I pointed to it and asked, is that your wife? He turned to look, his smile got wider, he slowly turned back and mentioned, 'Yes, yes it is… That was my gorgeous wife Gayle, she was the sort of girl you gladly took home to meet your parents. Dad suggested she was alright and Mum agreed, one of the strongest memories I have from way back then, it made me happy that they were happy, very happy.'

He took a slow deep breath and turned a bit further to attend to the boiling kettle. Cups and contents organised, I briefly saw in his fridge, organised and not cluttered, that's another good sign. We sat, this time at the dining room table, I could see it had been wiped, no dust, I wouldn't say the place was immaculately clean but in good order at this point, especially in comparison to some places I worked at.

Jeb asked me a few more questions, clarifying what I had mentioned earlier, my kids names and all that. I obliged and then all of a sudden on one long sip of his drink declared, 'Yep Gayle passed away two years back now', he slumped back into his chair.

'It was fairly quiet around here even when she was here, she read books and had headphones on as she watched movies on her ipad thingy, but when she passed it got quieter. It will be so good to have another person in the house to chat to.' Jeb's smile got wider.

I somehow felt awkward, the way he jumped into that information about Gayle and things being quiet, I looked up and noticed the artworks on the wall, a big painting which was some sort of wide landscape, another one of two kids in a boat.

I made mention of those to change the subject. 'Yes that one of the kids in a dinghy, is done by someone else, the landscape is mine.' he said, I was surprised. He noted my surprise and then told me about being at art school many years back, then taking photos, then painting and a bit of drawing.

He showed me other works by other artists in the area he called his office, a computer desk with bits of post it notes strewn all over the place, headphones and a printer covered in papers. He pointed and gestured for me to go and have a look while he sat.

The artworks presented like a small art gallery, four of the pieces were his and the rest a small collection of artists he had worked with, or admired and collected. His were two small photos of light streaming into a stairwell and a coloured landscape drawing which was rather expressive.

I told him I was impressed, and he thanked me for that comment. He then took me on a tour of his house, two bedrooms, a garage with his mobility scooter, no car. Back inside there were more artworks scattered across all the walls in the house and a bunch stacked up against the wall in the garage. At best my other clients had faded prints and family photos on their walls if anything at all.

We headed back inside and I mentioned that the house was not at all messy, but his office desk looked like a bomb hit it. He laughed, ‘Yeah it’s a bit like that,’ he suggested. He took me around to the desk and sat at the chair, started the computer from its sleep mode and mentioned, ‘So this is where it all happens, the stories, the share trading, the banking etc, it’s all here, isn’t that amazing!’

I agreed, he pointed to the post it notes. And explained they were notes on companies to watch on the sharemarket, watching for the ups and downs to happen. He mentioned ‘Buy low, sell high, that’s the basics.’ I thought his comment about the computer being amazing was like a really old geezer being befuddled by computers and not having any idea about what they could do etc.

The next thing he mentioned caught me off guard a little and it took a long while before I would figure out what it meant. He suggested that, ‘This thing is a goldmine, for those that know.’ He then turned and gave me a wink. I dismissed his comment, again I thought of an old geezer amazed by technology. However there were a few times over the forthcoming years, when he mentioned the computer being a goldmine.

Jeb mentioned the share market has kept things going for him, freakin' amazing I thought, another time he spent a couple of hours showing me how it all worked, simply amazing. I didn't know anyone who knew about shares and all that, I don't know, I guess perhaps I thought it was just for rich people. Jeb set me straight, he asked, 'How do you measure rich?' That had me thinking for quite some time.

He was clearly switched on. At retirement their collective superannuation was enough for him to do something with it, yes they did a bit of travel, Gayle apparently wasn't that keen, more of a 'homebody' he suggested, and even with all that money, she wasn't too pleased with him using any of it for 'gambling' on the sharemarket as she saw it. He would trade shares when she was busy watching the TV or reading, one year he allegedly made a thirty percent return on what he had invested.

He mentioned that it wasn't gambling, as there are clear systems you can use to make it work and work it did. He suggested one day that he started to slip a few extra dollars over into a savings account and Gayle didn't notice, all Gayle cared about was that she had enough money in the bank to buy food etc. He paid all the bills and looked after the dollars and cents.

Jeb mentioned he started way back before retirement, he advised that it was necessary to learn the skills and then put them in practice, then get used to the ups and downs of it all, apparently the psychology, mindset was important, who knew.

The house was paid off, I didn't understand but he mentioned he was paying rent… Something to do with the way his business interests were set up. The business earned money from the rent he paid and then he would be paid from what the business made. It went around in circles, it didn't make sense to me but he mentioned that it was a legal obligation thing.

It all started back when they had built a couple of houses as investments, then things started to make more sense.

He mentioned Gayle again, clearly he missed her. 'Gayle wasn't always a cheery soul, and there were times we argued, in the main she got her way and I just put up with things, don't get me wrong I loved Gayle dearly.'

The first meeting was loaded with information and I had a lot to take in. I remember leaving some time later and thinking wow, a person with a lot of knowledge, wit and intrigue, he mentioned writing but he got talking about shares and that was it. I wanted to remember to look his name up on the computer and see what showed up but I plain forgot until about 1 am in bed. I did get up and write his name in my diary and a quick note to search.

Chapter Two

By the time I got to him two days later to actually start to work with him, I had found out he had written some novels, a book on leadership and a book on business, all e books. Boy was this guy full of surprises. I downloaded one book and started to read, fascinating.

I can't say his novels were overly fantastic, an amateur for sure, but the basics were all there. Not that I'm any writing critic or anything, year ten English was about as far as I got. The first novel had a few funny bits and I could relate to the main character, Janey. I thought it was a bit odd at first, a guy writing a story that had a female as the main character. Jeb later explained he wanted to write a story a female could learn from and develop 'self defence' skills. I saw the point.

I got stuck into the cleaning. We carry our own products so we know exactly what we've got and don't run out etc. Jeb has a nifty Dyson hand held vac that worked much better than mine, so I used that, cutting my vac time in half.

In general I occasionally do the vacuuming then mop the floor for him and check things that I think need cleaning, mostly it's a real easy gig in that regard. Often he would have a shower while I was there, in case he fell or something, I thought that was wise thinking. Jeb mentioned that he doesn't shower every day, no need, he doesn't get very dirty these days.

Jeb can take a walk in the morning and afternoon, they used to have dogs but that's now over, they died just before his wife passed on. He spelt out clearly that he missed them all, and I feel sure he does. If he doesn't walk he takes the mobility scooter for a run.

At that moment as he stood and chatted I was getting the vacuum cleaner out to start work, All I saw was a frail old man. He wasn't frail at all, something about the light in the room, him isolated against a bare background made me think he was frail, yet he was far from it.

I did my cleaning thing, mopped the floor and all that, then sat for a cuppa. He mentioned thanks for all the cleaning and so on, he was always grateful. He then launched into 'How were things in your camp?' I chatted a bit and all that was good, I have to be really mindful of time and always did my best to not look at my watch too obviously. I often set a vibrating alarm on my phone, but I sometimes forget.

I mentioned I had made progress on reading his first book, the novel with Janey as the main character, he was delighted. As I suggested, the book was a bit amateurish, but his heart and soul was in there. It also meant I had a heap of questions to ask each time I went there, how come this happened and that and so forth. The other books followed Janey's exploits and they provided more information for me to chat about.

Jeb mentioned being part of a writing group locally and more of his writing was buried there in their website, some poetry, prose and the odd short story. I looked that up later on, yep he had added a few things. It was clear that over time his writing had improved.

He says he has ADHD and can't sit still for very long, although the reason I'm here is he can't do all the things he needs to do physically. I take him to the shops sometimes and other times he goes on his scooter. A couple of times he booked me out for a whole day and we went to art galleries in Melbourne, now that was a mind shift that one… I slept well after those trips I can tell you, yeah, nah it was good, Old man Nichols was able to give me a lesson in looking and sensing stuff.

I had a ton of questions as we walked around various galleries and then as I drove him home, he would plough through my questions with ease. I didn't realise he knew so much, so much more than any of the other old geezers I looked after. Maybe they knew a lot but didn't let on.

I got to know where a lot of these galleries are, tucked away down some miserable side street or up high in some building where I wondered how people would find these places or how they even continued to exist, some had been in place for generations. Then amongst all that there were others that came and went.

One weekend I took Jack and Elsie with me to see some exhibitions. They were also amazed at these places hiding away in some fascinating spots. They had a bunch of questions that I was able to answer, well to some degree…

At one point I was asked, as an auditing thing by the boss, to evaluate Jeb's diet. Now that's a fun thing, 'Okay Jeb, we need to check out your diet and keep a log for at least a week. It's all about your health and how that's going.' He sat and smiled, 'Yeah alright, go on, what do you need to know?' I started with, 'Well let's work backwards, what did you have for breakfast this morning?'

He mentioned, 'Peanut butter, a heaped teaspoon of that, my four fibre tablets, oh, not in that order. Wait it starts with a glass of water, the fibre tablets, my vitamin C gummy jube thingies, some more water to wash that all down and then the peanut butter. Now let's see, there is a bit more to that, oh yes a chunk of cheese.' he chortled with a smile.

I try not to judge and make comment at this stage but thought that was a little light on. He added, 'The peanut butter is my own mix, I add half a jar of smooth peanut butter with half a thing of crunchy, then a dob of butter, some garlic granules, a small splash of sesame oil, mix it up, and bingo, Jeb's peanut mix.'

I then asked about last night's meal… He sat blankly staring at this point, then finally mentioned, 'Leftovers, it had some veggies and chicken, I call it Mediterranean chicken. It has some spices etc.' I then went to the previous day's lunch. 'Mediterranean chicken,' I guess the leftovers had to start somewhere.

Breakfast was his usual, peanut butter and vitamin mix. Next on the list was to show him the log book pages, and how to fill them out. I mentioned we usually get a week's worth of information to start with. He then cast his eyes across the page and uttered, 'yep fair enough.' He went silent and flipped the page over, it was blank on the back. He mentioned,

‘Easy as my dear…’ and smiled widely. I asked, ‘I wonder what you were thinking just then?’

Jeb smiled and chuckled, saying, ‘No mention of snacks… Therefore your data will be a little light on…’ I indicated, ‘Okay tell me about your ‘snacks’ then?’ He mentioned, ‘Dark chocolate, the occasional chocolate eclair, but that’s rare, peanut butter of course, cheese, cheese and crackers perhaps a chocolate bickie… or two. Oh and sometimes some dip on a cracker. That’s about it, no wait I recently had a banana.’

I took a look in his fridge and pantry, with his permission of course. Just as I had noticed from day one, not a lot of contents and fairly organised, then I looked in the door of the fridge, there were about four types of cheese. Vintage cheddar, a brie, a blue brie, gruyere, and a chunk of parmesan. Ok so the guy likes his cheese. Then there was a big chunk of Salami, I mentioned ‘Is the salami one of your snack choices too?’ ‘Ah yes, I forgot that one!’ he added.

Into the pantry, a little bare in places I thought, but after all he is single, he went on to tell me that after Gayle passed away, one of the things he really enjoyed was cleaning out the pantry, ‘I think she may have been a bit of a hoarder’ he suggested. I looked more closely, things were neatly presented, no pasta, some rice, various condiments and seasonings. And beans in tins, along with a few other bits and pieces, garlic, onions and potatoes.

Then at the bottom and top… red wine and Scotch, and no not some cheapo scotch either, this was single malt 15+ year old stuff. Then the wines, a few bottles of shiraz and a pinot. I added in ‘I think we might need to add to the menu log, what do you think, we put it down as snacks?’ Jeb had a laugh.

Jeb went on to say Gayle's mother used to bring out cheese and crackers before a meal, and then after the meal as well, if any was left over, she called it ‘doings’ apparently she would say, ‘Who would like some doings?’ I now do the same, it’s a quaint way of saying ‘cheese and bickies.’ Jack especially liked this new habit.

A couple of visits later and I was at Jeb’s just before lunchtime, he bought out some ‘doings’ I thought how civilised is this! He offered me a wine but I can’t do that while

working. One reason I was there that early was to watch him prepare food, cook etc, he did okay. He mentioned he had started to think about ordering food occasionally, in order to change things up, ‘Two or three meals a week should be enough to provide some leftovers as well.’

The menu log he filled out was interesting, it turns out he likes to cook but he has to do it in sections, prepare some bits and pieces, sit for a while, then back into it, cooking and so forth. He mentioned that he didn’t want to stand for too long. So the menu went from Mexican tacos and enchiladas to Mediterranean, then Asian. Things he felt he could cook quickly enough and enjoy.

Jeb would occasionally flip through channels on the TV and check out various cooking shows and so on. If something took his fancy he would make that. Oh and Pizzas, there were a range of stories about Pizzas, he and a mate, way back before Jeb got married, used to go to parties, and his mate would check out the kitchen and see if they had the right kind of gear to make a pizza or two from scratch.

Apparently, rather famously the lady of the house on one occasion was sidetracked and held ‘hostage’ in the lounge room at the party as old Jeb and friend made a couple of pizzas. The lady of the house loved the food, but didn’t know it came from her kitchen, they cooked then cleaned up and the only clue was a warm oven. The things boys get up to hey…

Jeb had many stories, it was clear that he loved life, his wife and although things had been tough at times they were very in love and managed to break out the other side of life into retirement and have funds to do whatever they wanted, mind you he did say that wasn’t much, he didn’t want an expensive lifestyle hanging out with pretentious people and all that.

But he did want financial freedom, Jeb mentioned one day that he wanted to have enough money that he wouldn’t be eligible for the pension. He wanted to avoid having to go into the pension office and ask for money. It appeared that he was able to do just that.

On one of my visits we headed around to the supermarket, I suggested I take my car, but he suggested, ‘Nah, bugger that, the short walk will do you good!’ he had an infectious smile that sometimes you just couldn’t say no to. So I walked while he took the mobility

scooter. Up the road from his place is a roundabout, he's only allowed on the footpath mind you… but in true showman style he took off in front of me and then did a couple of laps around the roundabout.

I must admit it was rather funny. But I did have to tell him it wasn't good for him to use the scooter on the road. Then in the shopping centre he did some 'circle work' in the foyer area to make me laugh, okay at first I was a bit shocked and then had a solid giggle. I would then have to tell him off, well it was a bit more of an 'Oi! Jeb, cut that out!'

Chapter Three

Jeb remembered some dad jokes and from time to time would tell some stupid jokes, a few of those in a row and I would be giggling like crazy, a funny guy that's for sure. The good thing about that is you would know fairly quickly if he wasn't doing too well, his smile would fade fast. One time we had a quick chat and I could see things weren't great.

Jeb suggested that he felt a little seedy, nauseous and had not felt good for a couple of days.

I called his Doctor and thankfully they had a spot available in an hour's time. Jeb wasn't at all reluctant; he just thanked me and that was it. He even suggested for me to come in with him, which I willingly did. Got him there and waited for a bit, funny how a half hour wait can seem so long. I rang Alice and we shuffled a few of my clients so I could stay with Jeb.

The Doc did the usual things, blood pressure, too high, he ran the machine three times until he got a lower result. He organised a set of blood tests, asked some questions and so forth all good. He put him on painkillers, suggesting he was a bit sore and therefore inflamed so he then suggested rest, and then see the results of the blood work.

This happened a couple of times over many visits and I had to report it to Alice, that was all good, they kept the next of kin informed of how he was doing. Jeb did too, but he

mentioned being across the other side of the state they didn't visit or seem to care much. He then ran through his mental list of who had visited and who had not, yeah it's been a while, a long while.

I often thought I could understand people not visiting if the old person is a pain in the butt, vindictive, toxic and all that, but guys like Jeb, are too nice to ignore.

Along the way there were lots of good laughs, he gave me silly little gifts, an easter egg, and little things for Christmas and my Birthday, not sure how he figured out when my birthday was, but he knew. Sharp as a tack most days. Sometimes if he wasn't his usual self I would ask questions and soon figure out he had a cold or was just a bit miserable, as he suggested that, 'We all have ups and downs.'

I cooked for him once, yeah nah, that was an eyeopener, he knows a lot about food and he wasn't putting up with my bland cooking, he suggested a few things to add, and yep his version came up much better, more gutsy than I ever did, after that I cooked following his instructions, best thing I did. Jack declared that he was pleased Jeb taught me a thing or two about cooking. He liked a bit more spice and deeper flavours.

One arvo I went around to Jeb's place with Jack and we had a red wine or two. Jack had him laughing and I poured the wine, it was a fine time. We got a bunch of other stories and Jack shared one or two as well. On my next visit old Jeb told me he slept very well that night.

Jack asked a bunch of questions about things to do with work, old Jeb had a bunch of stories, it turned out he had a heap of different jobs over the years and learnt new things to do with management, leadership and all that stuff, we were amazed. You see Jack had worked his way up in the business and liked what he did but didn't realise that the higher you went the less you knew, sure you got paid more but the responsibility got bigger and so on.

Jeb pointed that out, and that you needed to be careful just how much you let on about things. Most people don't like a smart alec who tries to implement change as they go 'up the ladder'. Jack picked up on that and got some ideas about how to make changes at work. How to innovate was a big thing, all without big noting yourself. Often it was letting the staff think they had come up with the idea.

Jack tried a few things, did a bit of his own research and even downloaded Jeb's books on leadership and business. I've never seen him read so much. It meant that he made some positive changes and got some fantastic results, so his boss paid him more. NICE. Jack figured he saved the company a heap of money off just one of the things he implemented. He got excited, got to work a bit earlier and stayed a bit later.

All this resulted in a few more catchups, Jeb and Jack sitting back 'chewing the fat' about all things innovation and so on. I wasn't even there, Jack had a ball, I'm sure Jeb did too, well he told me so on my next visit, he complained the heartburn afterwards was a bit much, not sure if it was the snacks or the red wine…

Then one time Jack took Bob with him, Jack mentioned Jeb's ability to get responses out of Bob was amazing, Bob was usually fairly quiet, but this day he chatted away merrily. I guess the right questions can do that.

Jeb trusted me implicitly from day one, I knew where to find the spare key should anything go wrong and all that. And on the rare occasion I would be charged with paying a bill for him, he gave me his card and pin number.

Mind you he did that online generally, this time he had some excuse and let me do it at the post office, and I often wonder if it was a test to see if I would rip him off, nope, no way, he was too nice a man to rip off and I would like to think my morals would prevent me from doing that too.

I did his grocery shopping occasionally, usually with him on his scooter, the supermarket was fairly close by so that was easy enough. I figured out one day he was able to charm the checkout people and he stole a few things, things that he would be able to hide under his shirt, a block of chocolate or a thin block of cheese here and there. He would sometimes grab a small chocolate bar and eat it on his way round the aisles, so cheeky.

One day I quizzed him on it. All he suggested was, 'The big supermarkets make a fortune and everyone knows it, and yet the average guy has to pay more than they need to.' He mentioned that he wasn't worried about being caught, if they did catch him he suggested

that he would simply act all innocent and say he forgot, but you know what, they never did. I don't condone nicking stuff, god no, but in a funny way I loosely respected him for his stance and left it at that.

He loved asking me about how things were going for me. He always had a kind word and a happy 'disposition', that was one of his words he loved, 'Disposition'. I use it now, it seems to fit into a lot of places. Jeb suggested to use it in place of disability… or disorder… Go on try it, it fits!

One time we were chatting about teenagers causing trouble and going out on bail and all that, he mentioned, 'Those scrubby little runts, need to be sorted out.' I loved the term and use it myself now, 'Scrubby little runts…' I told him I had a few of these kids down the end of my street.

I then told him about some of the things they did down there, we had a laugh but we both agreed they would probably get up to no good in the end. We were both right, the cops were round there one morning and they got a mention in the news, stole a car and led the cops on a merry chase.

Jeb knew when I was 'up' or a bit down about things. I often went away a bit happier for having spent time with Jeb. I had my hair done one time and I wasn't really sure that it looked that great but Jeb noticed, strange for a guy, but he noticed and complimented me on it. I mentioned that I wasn't sure about it and next thing we had a conversation about something called the Golden Mean design principle and how it fits into many design things and is a way of making things look good in proportions and all that.

The next time I had it done I had found some pictures of a similar style that I thought worked better given the guidelines we discussed. I asked Jack, he was no good at that sort of thing, he let me do what I wanted, he suggested that the girly stuff was up to me. Jeb gave me feedback on the photos, he was right and the new style, it looked better than the previous one.

Jeb agreed, the last one was good but the new style was better, he was able to point out why it looked better. He then mentioned, 'And do you feel better when it looks good?' 'Yeah

it sure does' came my reply, he smiled widely and mentioned, 'There you go, remember that, look good, feel good!'

I compared Jeb to the other people I did work for, they were all pretty lame, they had often worked in one job all their working life and that was it, few ups and downs, then retirement and all the hassles of old age kicked in. Their conversations were average at best. Their grandkids and what they were up to and all that.

After a long while, about five years of working with him I think, I knew somehow he was on the decline. Weirdly one of his indoor plants that had done so well, it started to fade. I gave it some water but no that wasn't enough it seemed. The next week it was down to just a few main stalks I trimmed off the rest. I then noticed one of his other plants was fading too.

There were Drs appointments and so forth along the way, I even went in with him to make sure he knew what the doc had suggested.

Well of course all good things come to an end, I dropped in, it was a Tuesday, I had a sense something wasn't right, I wish I was wrong, but like Alice mentioned, the good times will go and then if you're lucky they will come back again, possibly through someone else.

I knocked, there was no answer, his front blind was not open so that usually meant he was still in bed, it was ten thirty, he was usually up and about by now, that was a bit strange. I grabbed the spare key from the meter box, it took me a few goes to remember the combination to the security key box thingy, I was all thumbs, my mind was racing.

In the front door, I was calling out as I went in. Jeb was in bed, he was gone… Nary a breath could be had, the poor old bugger, gees I liked that man, so full of life, until now, so sharing and caring and all that. Now no longer. We have a protocol to follow in these situations, I called the office Alice was out, but Lexie was in, she was great, came straight over and provided support, and we always called an Ambulance.

I called his next of Kin, I asked Lexi if I could do it, it seemed to be the right thing to do. I then sent an email to each of his friends, he set up a group of people to contact for when

he was a goner. Oh yeah that's right all that happened in between me bawling my eyes out. So freakin' sad.

He left me a note in a little yellow envelope, he told me it was there ages ago, 'When I pass, there's a note in here for you. Breathe deep when you read it Mel, you will need it to get through it all.' So there I was with this note, somehow I remembered it was there before the ambo's arrived to check things out. They were so good, I swear, the pair we got that day were on the ball and so reassuring.

Oh yeah the note, you want to know don't you. I took it home and sat bawling with Jack, he smiled widely all the way. I asked him why, he mentioned that 'Old Jeb suggested that this would happen and that you would get this note and how I was meant to act, he mentioned to keep on smiling right the way through you reading this note.' There was a memory stick for the computer in there as well.

There we sat, I sobbed and bawled, 'Dear Mel, thanks for your care and love, you are an angel, you put up with my stories, and all that. Jack has a box with some things in it for you, from me. I'm gone now and you can't say no! I suggest you don't tell anyone about it. I feel fantastic in passing on the contents to someone who despite being paid to do a job, you did more than that, you sincerely cared. Love, Old Man Nichols…'

Jack got out of his seat rather slowly and headed out to the garage, returning with a box, inside that was a plastic tupperware container round and tall. The box had a latch on it, a simple mdf box, nothing special. There was a short note on top 'To Mel. tell no one about the contents of this box, just enjoy it…'

There was a bunch of cash, I'm not saying how much, $50 bills in an envelope. Jack just smiled. There were a bunch of notes on A4 paper, little tips and hints about being happy, getting ahead. There were two old books in there as well, The Richest Man in Babylon and Think and Grow Rich.

He wrote a poem as well. I have had that framed now and it sits in pride of place in our hallway, I get to see it everyday.

Dear Mel

Thanks for the time, the grace you gave,
The gentle touch, the smiles, that wave.

Through busy days, through kind concern,
You made me laugh, and in return,
I send a wish, soft as a sigh:

That joy will follow when tears are nigh.
Your children bloom with the love you've sown.

And even when you stand alone,
You'll shine, your light is both kind and true.
(And don't let Jack out-cheek you too!)

Yep I bawled some more. It didn't take much.

The memory stick had his life story on it, over 700 pages thanks very much, that was fascinating reading. There was another file, but it turned out to be a blank document but the title suggested, 'Remember the Goldmine.'

One thing that was a bit of a mystery to me was there was a note for Jack too, he wasn't allowed to read it to me. I soon found out though, he went to the local florist with the note they had been given a bunch of cash and instructions, when Jack came in and gave the right 'password' to them the florist would then start to deliver flowers. I don't know how much old Jeb gave them but it was appreciated.

The florist kept their promise and delivered on time every week for a month. Man oh man do I love flowers! And not little stems either, big bunches.

Then there was the memorial service, Jeb's Nephews and Nieces were there along with some friends, and of course Jack and I. It was another thing old Jeb had organised with the local community centre and a good friend who had experience with public speaking. We all

sat and chatted for ages afterwards. There was no coffin wheeled in and all that it was just a nice get together for family and friends.

Jeb was clear that he was to be cremated and if the ashes were available by the time the memorial service was held he could sit on a table in a plain urn.

One of his nieces, Raelene, asked me a few questions. She knew who I was, Jeb had told her about me. She thanked me for my being there for Jeb. She then asked if he left me anything, I was sworn to the duty bestowed to me in the note, 'Tell no one…' all I said was 'I got paid to do my job and spending time with Jeb was more than enough reward, he was so kind and had done so much, his books and all that.'

She looked at me quizzically, 'Books?' she asked. I mentioned there were a few online, they had been there for years, he occasionally mentioned that he would earn a meagre amount of cash when one or two sold.

She sat back in the chair and suggested she was surprised and in the eulogy his writing was mentioned but she didn't think anything of it. She pulled out her phone and asked, 'How do I find these?' I was surprised she didn't know about them but gave her a clue or two about how to find them. There were nine books, seven novels and two non fiction books. She shook her head, she never knew. We swapped emails and then parted.

One of the nephews rolled up next, Graham, he said thanks etc, we had a bit of a chat, and I offered to help with the cleaning up of the house if he needed a hand. He also swapped emails and phone numbers. Graham kindly suggested that, 'We should be fine figuring things out but thanks so much for the offer.' I smiled and finished the conversation.

It would be a week later and I got a message. 'Mel there are things we need a hand with, can you call me please, Graham.'

Chapter Four

I got in touch, it turned out they couldn't access Jeb's computer and they were not sure about some legal bits. I gave them the details of his accountant, and then where they might find the passwords for things on his computer.

I dropped over to assist, they got into most things, I then mentioned his shares, Graham looked at me blankly, 'Serious? SHARES?' I had printed out the passwords by this stage, four pages of neatly formulated tables with the details recorded.

I opened the program to access the details and punched in the password. There was over seven hundred and fifty thousand in the account, various holdings of companies. The decision was made to sell all the shares and put the cash into the allocated bank account. We were then able to have a look at the bank accounts, he was no slouch with his money old Jeb, there were serious sums in there as well.

The accountant advised not to touch any account that mentioned his business name. That wasn't a lot, but it had to be dealt with differently or we would risk upsetting the tax office.

I was politely asked how I knew so much about his shares etc. I explained, Jeb showed me one day, he mentioned that it was one way he kept being able to pay his way. I later wondered if they thought I may have had access to his funds at some stage and tried to 'diddle' them out of some of Jeb's cash. Nope, not this little black duck!

The family had a hard time dealing with the bank bits because it was online and they had to get around the finger print access from Jeb's mobile phone. At this stage we were able to see the balances and that was about it. I guess the solicitor will deal with that.

There was a discussion about what to do with the artworks, a reading of the will was to be held in a few days so I suggested they hang on to everything. It turned out that some of the works had labels on them 'This is for person X'.

There were two artworks of Jeb's that were labelled for me. Two small photos of the shadows in a stairwell, I had mentioned ages ago that I liked them. He had explained how he

wandered into this gallery in the city and had to go up a set of stairs, and there was this lovely set of shadows.

There was some discussion about if I would help out with the clean up and advise on which agent to go for for the selling of the house, Graham suggested they would pay me to help out and all that. I was happy to help, but they were insistent.

Will reading was simple enough apparently, the accountant would wind up the business and divide the money amongst the family as requested, then there were the artworks, some were of value as it turned out, not a lot but some. They were offered to the local regional gallery but they declined, however they pointed the family in the direction of another regional gallery that accepted that style of works. That gallery was very grateful apparently.

There were other works created by Jeb, some were sent to a local auction house and others distributed to family. There were a few small drawings on paper that went into the bin.

The house was emptied, furniture donated or sold off. I got to do most of that, the family needed to be back in their part of the world. The old computer no one in the family wanted, too slow and all that. I scored that, I thought it would be useful to have a spare one. Little did I know then that it had so much on it. Like the story of the ‘Final Chapter.’ I found that by total fluke going through things he had written and in this case, started to write.

The computer had about thirty years of info stuffed in there, photos, lecture notes, teaching notes, business articles, books he had written, and all manner of info, family history notes that I emailed to Graham.

With the clearing out, things went fairly smoothly, the usual thing of waiting for people to turn up, they were late or didn’t show, typical. The place was empty now and all that was left were memories. The real estate agent got me to organise a few things in the back yard to neaten the place up, the family were happy with that.

The sale took a bit longer and there was some wrangling about the price. But it sold, that was the main thing.

Every now and then I go by Jeb's old place and lots of other places where my clients lived, all that's left are memories, thankfully they're mainly good memories.

I started to read 'The final chapter' story, as you might expect it was about his final few years. That made perfect sense. But judging from the other titles he gave to his books, it was a bit out of character, I thought that it was maybe a working title not the end product title, if you know what I mean.

It was more like a diary in the end, dates, places, numbers, and so on. Then one entry caught me by surprise. There was a line of text in capitals and a hyphen dash at either end. And it said 'MEL, READ THIS NEXT PARAGRAPH ACT ON IT AND DELETE THIS LINE AND THE PARAGRAPH - Well that was okay, the next paragraph mentioned that there was a secret backing to one of the pictures I was given, the two shadows in the stairwell.

Okay Jeb, you have my attention, I went straight to have a look, they were both the same size but on the back, one had less space between the backing on the frame and the back edge of the frame, there were two small tape tabs at the bottom, that was a bit different.

A bit of fiddling with the tape that held the backing in place and the false back slipped out of the way. Oh look, some papers. Neatly positioned to fit in the back in a way that if you shook the frame the papers wouldn't rattle about and give away their hidey hole. Then there were two keys, one like a standard house key and the other a smaller flat key, like the kind used to open a padlock.

Okay, so now I'm intrigued.

The information read. 'Mel, I hoped you would find this information one way or another. If you found this by finding the 'Final Chapter' story on my computer, then well done for being so detailed and remembering 'The Goldmine'. I somehow knew that Graham and Co wouldn't want the computer and I did say to you once there was 'gold' in the thing and in one sense I hope this is it.

I haven't been totally open with you, and I wanted you to think all along that I'm a nice guy, well in the main I was, but for a period there I wasn't. There was a time when I was questioned in relation to a legal case, there was some fraudulent activity that I inadvertently got involved in… I met this guy who needed to hide some 'stuff' and together we nutted out a way to hide the stuff, he suggested that it would only be for about six months, but it turned out to be rather longer.

He ended up in prison, he got set up and the cops pinned a murder on him, it wasn't him, and oh no, it wasn't me either. The guy had upset some people and they wanted to teach him a lesson, so he's doing time. Okay, a lot of time. When he gets out he will want these keys, they give him access to what is rightly his. Due to the way things worked out he didn't end up knowing, from me at least, where the 'stuff' was stashed.

That's where my little bit of naughtiness got caught up in the whole thing. My consulting job meant connections with various 'people' and them wanting to 'dodge' tax and do dirty deals, launder money and all that. Part of that arrangement for a really BIG deal meant I got a kick back, a place to hide a shipping container. There's other details but I won't bother you with all that.

Anyway my connection to Gary is so 'slim' that when the 'authorities' came looking, the only connection I had was through Facebook. He and I were part of a local community group and we caught up once or twice for coffee. It turned out he had a professionally interesting career, and it included high level fraud.

Anyway we kicked things off and had some things in common and so on. He mentioned that people wanted to catch up with him and get his 'stuff', but he suggested that it was his and there was no way they would get it. BUT to do anything, they had to have the keys, these keys.

No one has come looking for the keys, other than the 'authorities' looking for a shred of evidence, they wanted to know why he was pinged for murder. I knew nothing about that, I was just a loose connection, a one time mate if you will.

So at one of our coffee catch ups he mentioned he would drop off the keys into my letter box. After a long while, he went to do time in prison. It turned out those looking for the keys, then turned his house upside down and naturally enough they didn't find anything.

I remember the police were at odds as to why his house would be ransacked then probably put two and two together and came up with his connections to fraudulent activity. It showed up in the media for a bit and then like most things it faded.

I was a bit shocked because I had what they wanted, the keys. They probably didn't know what they were looking for, perhaps the 'stuff' or some other clue, I'm not sure. One thing I know is that he was not stupid enough to have the 'stuff' at his house. For a long while I was wary about strangers in my neighbourhood, I wasn't sure what they knew about him and me and would they come looking for me. Well so far so good.

As far as I was concerned, Gary was a nice enough guy, caring and all that, but his professional connections were a bit dodgy and so he came into possession of this 'stuff' and someone found out it was him who had it. But if they put pressure on him 'they' might not get it.

So, Mel, the ball is in your court. You now have the keys to Gary's 'stuff', if you follow on, one day he will come looking for me, and therefore the keys. We had made an arrangement that I would hide them somewhere and give him a clue as to where they are and I would be free of them.

In the meantime as I get older, I figure he will outlive me. My health, as you know, is not what it used to be.'

Okay I was interested in the information, I figured it wasn't as bad as Jeb made out, looking after some keys for a mate is fine, surely, after all he doesn't seem to know what the stuff is, or where it is. I wished I could have chatted to him about this and fill in some 'blanks' but alas that's not possible…

I was darn curious myself, what was it, how much of it was there and all that. I turned the page. In pencil was written Gary Turner and an address. I jumped onto google maps and

had a look, two suburbs away, in the street view was the sort of house that a ‘Scrubby little runt’ would live in, the grass was long, the house looked poorly maintained. I had a look at the other houses in the street nearby, they were all okay, it was actually a nice area, the worst house in a good street.

I then googled Gary Turner. There was an article about his house being ransacked, then an article about his court case for alleged murder. He pleaded not guilty apparently, but still got put away for some time. I had in my mind that he would look like trouble, like a scrubby runt would look. However the media pictures showed a well presented man probably a professional of some kind.

I wanted to tell Jack about this, but somehow I thought that if he knew about all of this and anything was to happen, he could be in trouble too. Therefore, I am going to keep this to myself. At least for now.

I dropped by a locksmith, just out of curiosity, and asked what these keys might fit. The larger key was for a front door type lock the other one was for a padlock, but a secure padlock. He showed me an example of the type of lock, hefty and secure looking.

Well I now had some idea of what the keys fitted, but no location as to where the locks are. I had no one I could ask anymore to get a location, Jeb was gone and I didn’t know if he knew the location of the locks anyway.

Two days later I’m out that way, where I had looked up Gary’s address online, so I drove by. The long grass had been cut and a few things tidied up, so the place didn’t look too bad.

I did an internet search a bit further, Gary would have now been about 70, he was still doing time, he had a bunch of years to go on his sentence.

Chapter Five

I didn't know it but there were other people involved in all this, Gary had 'other accomplices', the main person was a bad cop who had full access to Gary's files. He had followed the details of this case for a long while, he knew Gary was 'possibly' set up and had done his best to try and figure out who might know something from Jeb's side of things.

Apparently in the file on Gary, Jeb was mentioned, he was interviewed but showed up blank in the 'basic scheme of things.' This guy had his eye on things. John Morrison, now I didn't figure out his rank, but he was more than your average Detective type. He showed up in internet searches too, he was accused of a few things but always seemed to get away from his pursuers, he always had an alibi for issues relating loosely to possible fraud issues.

My gut instinct was that he had to figure out a way to keep himself squeaky clean, But I guessed the adrenaline you could have from being involved with things 'on the edge' would be a strong drawcard. Crooks might just leave some good things behind for a dodgy cop to scoop up.

I also figured that Gary might be the sort to have some goodies that might be 'scoop-upable' Although at the moment I had no idea what those 'goodies' might be.

I wondered if Jeb was the only loose person in the investigation of Gary? I went to the library to use their computer to do a search any further on that case, I didn't want things to trace back to my computer, or Jeb's.

It's funny I had a hint that the contents of Jeb's computer might do well to be copied, you know, just in case… I brought a small hard drive and copied the contents, then hid the hard drive, and NO I AM NOT telling you where I put it.

About three weeks after doing that we had a break in at home. All that was taken was Jeb's computer. I must admit I didn't go to too much trouble to hide the thing, it was on the desk in our study. Jack was really pissed off, it meant he had to fix the back door. He was home before me and called the police straight after walking in the back door. I had the two keys in my purse so that was interesting.

He figured out early on that Jeb's computer was the only thing taken. I arrived home a bit shocked to find a divvy van out front and two cops inside. Jack ran through the details and a forensic fella would be out soon to dust for finger prints and all that. The two cops already there, had a general look and established that whoever entered the house seemed to know what they wanted.

There were questions about the computer, I mentioned that it was a backup that I scored from a client who had passed away recently and I was in the process of checking it out, as it's a different operating system that I'm not used to. It was all fairly legit.

The forensic guy showed up and got the prints, and then checked out a few things. No one in our stretch of the street had cctv cameras, so that meant we had no idea about a person or a vehicle.

The back door had been easily accessed, something pried it open, simple lock, simple to access. To be honest we hadn't thought much about security up until that point. Jack was starting to get testy about having his privacy tampered with, not that we had anything of real value in the house. No cash or any of that, what cash we did have was with us, except for the cash that Jeb left us and that was not anywhere that anybody would find it. Some of it was put into the bank.

Well next thing Jack got a call from a detective type, and YEP guess who, John Morrison. He arrived one day when Jack was home and had a chat, he had a youngster with him learning the 'ropes'. They suggested that 'It's just a routine check up.' One of the questions was 'Any idea why this computer was taken?' Jack simply said what he knew, "Mel, my wife, was given it by a client who recently passed away, his family didn't want it and she thought it could be a backup for us.'

John left his card and after a bunch of questions he left. I came home and saw the card, I nearly fainted. It was a good thing Jack was in the garage fiddling about with other things at the time. It took me a bit to compose myself. I knew I had to play dumb as best I could. About ten minutes later Jack came in, a brief chat about my day, then about his day, and he mentioned the two detective types dropping in and asking questions. He pointed to the card. I gave it a brief glance and did my best to ignore it.

I thought for a moment that I would tell Jack that I had a copy of the computer's contents, but then I came to my senses, anything that could link us to any of this could mean bigger trouble. It would be better if Jack knew nothing, that way he wouldn't have to lie if anything went further.

I then thought I should probably find a safer place to put those keys. At work I had a lockable cupboard for my personal belongings, I rarely used it, but with a chunk of 'blu tac' I was able to hide the keys to the left of the door, out of sight. The only way you would find them would be by feel, or if you had a mirror to see around the blind corner.

Jack got all excited about securing the house and had CCTV cameras fitted, two at the front one at the back. After a while he got sick of the app on his phone beeping when the mail man dropped off a package, or the kids coming and going as well as myself, so he turned off the beeping sound.

It meant that he could review things later on in the day and not be bothered by the beeping. After a while, yep you guessed it, he didn't bother checking. I remember at two in the morning, not long after we had the system installed, his phone beeped, it was a possum in the front yard, then two nights later a cat walked past the back door. We still have a laugh about that.

'Mr Morrison' dropped in at work one day and had a chat with Alice about my work with Jeb, she didn't even know about the computer being given to me, until we had the break in. We were more interested in the mental challenge people face with a break in. Alice had had something similar years ago.

As far as Alice was concerned we all had a very professional relationship with Jeb and the computer was a legitimate gift.

I then had another thought, I hadn't gone through all of Jeb's files so what if there was something naughty in there? Explicit material and so on. I got out the copy I made and checked out the folders and went looking for any obvious things using the search function. Nothing there. Thank goodness.

Next thing I got an email from Graham, some guy had contacted him about Jeb's computer… They mentioned that they were from a local community group, and wanted a file that Jeb had on the computer. I looked the file up, it didn't exist.

On checking the details, dates and so on, the call to Graham was made just before the computer went missing from our place. I now figured that the 'crooks' simply wanted to know where the computer was. All Graham mentioned to them was that Jeb's support staff now had it.

It didn't take long for them to figure out that it was me, our agency got a lot of work in that area and on our website there was a promo picture of myself and old Jeb. I now figured they must have spent time either watching me arriving at the office or doing searches to find out where I lived. Either way, they found out where I lived and took the computer.

Whatever they wanted from it was clearly quite precious to them. I had another search, I checked out the word 'keys' and there were a number of entries. It showed up in some of his stories…

That then meant I had to read the story which was one of Jeb's last ones. There was an address there, and the main character in the story goes there to find something. It sounded very obvious to me, but would the 'crooks' figure that part out? The story even mentioned that, 'There were two keys…' The address was three one two Alexis street.

Another search of online maps, an old warehouse next door, then a big yard with a new building. I did an overhead satellite view of the place, there was a large shipping container out the back. Yep, three one two Alexis street. It was real and it was local.

I didn't dare do a drive by in any obvious way for about a week, I was way too scared! What would I find, if anything, and was that clue too obvious? I had no way of knowing.

Finally I had some time and the calmness of mind to drive by, yep the building was there and the big yard had now been turned into a car park. The warehouse next door had been demolished.

The building in question was a place that sold door handles, locking and access systems, I thought that was rather fitting. I then noticed that the elevated block out the back of the building was bare and I could access that from the next street over.

Yep one street away, no fence on that block, just a spot where someone had driven a vehicle and parked it in the yard, probably quite often I thought. There wasn't a lot of parking in that street so that made sense, one of the workers in that street probably parked there.

I looked across the yard and lo and behold there were three shipping containers in the block at the back. Just to confuse things! Later that week I had a Saturday client, that rarely happened and it was a simple job, it meant that I had the late afternoon all to myself so I dropped by to get a closer look. No one obvious in the street I kept on the lookout for CCTV cameras, at least no obvious ones.

I parked a few metres away in front of a plumber's business, you know the sort, it looks as though they never go there, overgrown and all that. Probably just a spot to put their excavator.

I walked down and onto the block, there were no cars when I pulled up, now, about four cars drove by. I did my best to look inconspicuous. At the back the cyclone wire fence was pretty ratty, and at the corner fence post the wire that held the wire mesh in place was not tied off. In fact it was quite easy to unthread the wire up to a point. I scratched the back of my hand in the process.

I looked around, no one to be seen, the gate of the business I was considering entering was locked, the car park clear, they were gone for the weekend. I squeezed through the gap I had created and had a thought that next time I would bring something to cut off the excess wire so I could make the gap bigger. The gap was JUST big enough.

On closer inspection the two newer containers were obviously just new to the space, the grass was pushed down around the edges. The other one had a big padlock, but not like the one the locksmith had showed me. I looked at it, it had a serial number that matched the one on my key. The locksmith was right to some degree but it wasn't a front door type lock.

I did have a brief thought that if there was something obviously worth a small fortune inside, this lock was not going to hold anyone back in any major way at least. I hadn't bought the keys with me, I may be silly at times but I'm not stupid either! I also remembered to wipe away any fingerprints.

Okay so I was out of there, the lock matched my key, at least by the serial number on it. The big question was clearly, what was in that container. I had a thought, what if the 'crooks' had put a tracing device on my car. So I was now becoming paranoid, and avoiding going back there with my car. It was funny because I made a bit of a game of visiting places with the same street number, Three one two.

I would drive up, park for a few minutes, look like I was on my phone and then leave. I did that at about five places. Usually near to a client's house, it was easy enough to do.

Jack noticed the scratch on my hand, I fobbed it off by saying 'I did it at work reaching into a cupboard under a sink to get out cleaning materials.'

Chapter Six

Things had settled down for a while, I got stuck into work and things were going just fine. One of Bob's 'mad mate's' as Jack called them, was Chris. He was an okay kid, a bit scatter brained at times, he did some silly stuff as a youngster, a bit of a daredevil, if there was someone who could be bribed to do some silly stunt on a skateboard, Chris was it.

His Mum didn't know how to handle him, but for me as an outsider, I could take him aside and 'have a chat', He would tell me things, all manner of things, he would just open up. Sometimes I found out his fears, then other times little things he had got up to. I just had to say with a wry smile, 'Chris come here and chat to Mrs B…' Then he would unravel, it was fascinating.

Chris had been in and out of jobs and at times he had the uncanny ability to lose one job today and pick up another one a day or so later. One thing about this guy was that he had figured out how to be street smart, he could sound stupid, or deaf, or both but he had his wits about him.

So one afternoon he rocks up to our place, I was out the front about to wash my car and I heard this voice 'G'dy Mrs Bob.' It was Chris, I was never quite sure if he couldn't remember our surname or if he thought it was some form of endearment calling me 'Mrs Bob.' Jack and I just thought it was funny and took it as a positive gesture.

I chatted a bit and the work he had recently done for about three months, working with a carpenter, had dried up. It was hard to know with Chris, it was possible that he had done something to upset somebody and was sacked, he could lie like there was no tomorrow, it was one of his survival skills. Therefore I knew to not stir the pot too much and simply asked 'Hi Chris, what up?' Always, but always, with a smile on my behalf, because you never really knew what he was up to or what might have really happened.

He mentioned that he was now looking for work again, he never seemed too fussed by that. I then had an idea, I suggested to him that I have a little project that he could work on for me for a small cash fee of course. And… it had to be top secret, 'hush hush.'

'Yeah no worries Mr B, you've helped me out a few times so I'll return the favour. I told him it was VERY top secret and to catch up with me tomorrow. He did, I had the big key from my locker, and I told him how to access the property after hours and all that, take a torch to have a look in the container and report back on what he found. TOP SECRET!

I put the key on the bonnet of the car, I didn't want to be seen handing him anything. We had an old biddy across the road who would see anything and everything and dob people in. Funny how the police interviewed her about the computer robbery and she saw and heard NOTHING. Anyway, I made it look like a casual chat and Chris picked up the key in a way that meant she couldn't see that part. One thing Chris had was street smarts.

It turned out there was nothing in the container, but Chris mentioned that the inside was a bit shorter than the length of the whole container. He said that down the back was a small door with another lock on it.

Interestingly, I wanted to know more, curiosity was getting the better of me and so I gave him the second key and suggested that this key might fit, again I mentioned to look and report back.

Two days later, yep, Chris dropped the two keys off to me, meeting me at the supermarket carpark this time, 'Yo, Mrs Bob, you were right, that smaller key fitted and unlocked the door. I took a look inside and there were packets wrapped in black plastic.' I thanked him and then as he walked away, he turned his back and I called out, 'You know sometimes people give into temptation and they might get something they shouldn't get… What about you Chris?

He smiled and suggested, 'Ah good on you Mrs B, Nah mate there were no Tim Tams…' I smiled and mentioned. 'Chris, temptation is different to Tim Tams…' He waved, turned away again and kept walking. I followed after him, I smelled a 'rat', he got into his car, I gestured for him to wind his window down, I was smiling like always, I knew he was lying flat out.

I then asked. 'So how big?' Without any hesitation, Chris showed me with his hands just how big. I smiled and said 'Thanks Chris.' They were about the size of a house brick. I could have asked more but I figured I was better off not knowing. Chris was street smart, but there were times I was as well, the look on his face when he realised he gave away an important piece of information, was priceless! It was one of those Homer Simpson moments that went, 'DOH!'

Stinking little liar. A few days later, Chris rocks up in a fairly new car. 'Nice' I suggested, followed by a loud whisper from me of 'Don't get caught…' Jack came out later after Bob and Chris had been chatting, he asked me, 'Okay I give up, how did he afford that?' I shook my head and declared, 'Who knows with that boy…" I left it at that and changed the subject.

Later on I took Bob to one side and suggested carefully that there are a number of ways to get a car like Chris had, and to make sure he didn't get messed up in any 'bad things…' He seemed to know what I meant and indicated something similar back to me, 'Yep I was wondering how he got that too. He's a funny guy, he's now got a new saying, 'Keep it brisk' dude.'

To Bob that meant keeping on the move, being nimble. Simple enough, but I asked Elsie what she thought, she indicated without giving it too much thought, 'Keep your wits about you, so you can live a long life.' Apparently it was a line of lyrics in a song by some gangsta rapper dude. 'Gangsta Puff Kiddo Molloy.' Well it was something like that.

The keys were back safely in my locker at work, each day I subtly checked that they were still there. About six months later I got a case of the guilts. I told Jack about everything, not sure why, just something in my head suggested that I should.

He sat and listened, then sat back in his chair and uttered, 'Well that would explain why Chris has a newer car and some other bits and pieces, as well as the computer going missing, glad you didn't tell me any earlier.'

Jack shook his head, then said 'Oh well dear, I wonder if this will turn into anything…' Clearly Jack had been thinking about all this, and that night in bed, about ten thirty, Jack starts posing 'what if' questions. 'What if this Gary guy gets out and comes looking.' There were a bunch of what if scenarios put forward and some discussion about possible answers.

Then probably the last major question, 'if the container has valuable 'stuff' in it, why would anybody use cheap locks, the outside one could easily be busted open with a pair of big bolt cutters?' I suggested that it might indicate to a smart break in person that the contents were not worth breaking in for. Perhaps it's a smart move.

I mentioned the possibility of a tracking device being fitted to my car, Jack mentioned that he would take a look tomorrow. Well he certainly did, up bright and early Jack took a look and guess what he found a tagging device thingy, okay I don't know what you call them but there was one there. Sneaky buggers.

Jack thought he would do a swifty, this tag was in a magnetic case, easy to remove, so later that night he went across the road and attached it under the old biddy's car in the dark of night. She didn't use her car as much as me, but it still got some reasonable distance. She was an active member of the CWA and attended meetings etc, all round the place.

Jack suggested that whoever put it there would probably have only wanted to see the first few weeks of its operation, I asked why he thought that, he replied, 'Oh I dunno, you know, these spy game thingies, hard to tell you know…' I had a laugh.

After a few weeks Jack moved the tagging thing and put it back under my car, then a few weeks later under his car and then back to the car across the road. He imagined some crook wanting to find out information becoming quite befuddled by tracking the cars. I then said, 'What happened to your theory about them tracking just the first few weeks?' He commented, 'Yeah… Nah who knows, it's a bit of a laugh either way, I was thinking that some scrubby little runt would be confused by all our travels.'

An email from Graham, the solicitor they are using has a query, one of the bank accounts has a direct debit out of it to a Company down our way and it was still active… any thoughts? It turned out to be Westside Access and Locks… at, you guessed it three one two Alexis street. That meant that things just got interesting.

They were being paid $50 per month for something, but it wasn't clear what. I mentioned to Graham, that's interesting, in one of Jeb's books he mentions that very address.

Well Graham gave them a call and had a chat. Apparently it caused a bit of an issue, the owner of the business, David Horn, didn't know old Jeb had passed on, 'Why didn't someone call me earlier!' was his response. Graham suggested words to the effect of, 'We didn't know you were someone who knew Jeb and that this arrangement was in place. Oh and by the way, what was the payment for?'

Graham mentioned that David hesitated, and uttered, 'Well, I'm not sure I can disclose that, at this point, anyway, you've caught me by surprise… I would have to make some calls, give me your details.'

Graham suggested that David wanted his phone number, address, full name, and email. Poor Graham didn't know what all that might mean in the scheme of things or where it might lead. So he gladly gave David the details. He mentioned that he would be in touch.

Graham asked if I knew anything, had Jeb mentioned anything about this. I couldn't lie and mentioned, 'Well Jeb never SAID anything about it.' That was true, the other stuff I knew I learnt from reading and so on.

Graham did a similar thing to me, googled the business, and then had a look at the online map out of curiosity. The solicitor suggested that the payments to that business went back a long way, a few years and that just before the payments started there was a larger sum put into Jeb's bank account, he wasn't sure that that had anything to do with things, he just noticed that it was there.

I wondered who else knew about the shipping container, David did, I did, oh and Chris… I didn't know if Gary did or not.

Graham never heard from David, and the bank account was finally closed off, therefore the payments to David's account would have stopped. I wondered if that meant the container would be sold off or other? I would drop by the street at the back of the container yard to see if it moved or if anything happened. It was easy enough to do. No change, I went past about six times.

Chapter Seven

For a long while things went quiet, life went back to 'normal', the only thing that happened was that Chris was starting to buy bits and pieces. Whatever it was that he got out of that container was clearly of high value. We had suspected cocaine, a block of that has got to be worth a bit.

He got some work, with another carpenter, but it was only part time. As he suggested 'It was to keep centrelink off his back.'

Out of the blue, John Morrison called me. He got my number from Alice at work. It came as quite a surprise. I played dumb, and suggested that he maybe wanted to talk to Jack, like he had done in the past.

No, not the case. He mentioned that ‘There’s been a development, the old guy you looked after, Jeb, well there’s a connection he had with this guy and I was wondering if he told you anything about him, Gary, Gary Turner?’ I told the truth, ‘Nope, Jeb never mentioned his name, any reason?’

John went on to say, new evidence has come to light, and it turns out that Gary Turner has been cleared of an alleged crime he was serving time for, and will now be released from prison. I thought that he may come looking for Jeb, based on some inside information we have from one of the other prisoners… Jeb’s name came up.

I chatted to Jeb’s family and now you, because you spent quite a bit of time with him, according to our records. Now this guy, Gary, doesn't know that Jeb has passed away, therefore we want to make sure that people are aware that he may be out and about and possibly wanting to catch up with Jeb.’

I asked, ‘So how did this Gary guy know Jeb?’ ‘Well we don’t really have much to go on with that,’ declared John, ‘What we do know is that they were part of a local community group on Facebook and caught up to have coffee occasionally, that was a LONG time ago. Then Gary goes into prison and the connection was lost, or so we believe.’

John gave me his card and suggested that I contact him if Gary somehow showed up. John then mentioned, ‘Oh, one last thing, Jeb actually had an interesting life, a number of jobs.’ I then added in, ‘Yeah I know, fascinating guy, he told me about a lot of the various things he did over the years.’ John then added, ‘Yes, yes he did, did he ever mention a few years as a consultant at Healy and Gretch? He wasn’t there too long…’

I hadn’t heard from Jeb about that one but I still had some way to go reading Jeb’s memoirs. I was about a third of the way through at a guess.

John added, ‘We’re not sure but some interesting things have come up with that company and it turned out that Gary Turner had dealings there too.’ John thanked me and headed off.

Well I was straight into the computer and had a look through Jeb's life story, I did a search for Healy and Gretch, yep there’s a section on that. I actually had to go back a few pages. There was a previous company Jeb did some freelance consulting for, and that led to this position at Healy’s. Things were starting to make sense.

Jeb mentioned in his writings that he was handsomely paid for his role there, but there were some things he wasn’t sure about and occasionally he would unearth some things that made him wonder. A business name came up that rang a bell, Westside Access and Locks.

Jeb mentioned that they were struggling for a while but things turned around and improved, but somehow Jeb got diverted away from that client, he was given something else to handle. He wrote ‘I’m not sure why I was taken off that job, but hey it happened.’ It was then noted that the company did very well through a merger and other acquisitions and they got to build a whole new building, showroom, workshop, and warehouse along with a big carpark.

Then something strange showed up, one of the managers at Healy’s needed a favour, some ‘slight tax dodge.’ They needed to make some money disappear, and on top of that the team at Healy’s needed to pay Jeb for services above and beyond. Nudge, nudge, wink wink as they say.

What that meant was fifty dollars per week was going to be paid to Jeb, it would show up on their books as a minor consulting fee of some kind, but don’t ask me about the technicalities, I’m no accountant. From what I can gather, now that I have done more research, was that somehow Gary had paid to store the shipping container there and they would be paid cash for that, a BIG sum of cash, and then the locksmiths would then pay Jeb. The two were connected but didn’t know it. There was something else going on but Jeb was not in on it.

It would be a while before the details came to light. Basically Gary got paid out for ‘services rendered’ by a load of cocaine, found on a beach down the coast, most of it went into ‘custody of the police’ but before they got involved, locals had picked up some of the packages. It must have been a big haul.

Anyway, it turns out that Gary got a bunch of it because a local crime boss was wanting to pay Gary for his services; that was done, but not with cash, with some of the cocaine instead. Then the crime boss had a thought, that if he had Gary implicated in a murder, he hoped that Gary’s stash would surface and he would be able to turn it into cash. A nice little scheme.

Well it all became complex and I now think that the crime boss got his guys to get Jeb’s computer and hope to locate the stash, they had rummaged through Gary’s house and found nothing. Jeb was their only connection and it took the police to figure that out, then they were now looking to find out anything they could, inside connections to crime bosses, nothing new there.

Lo and behold I held the key/s. Fascinating, how did I end up in this predicament? Some people knew there was a stash, some knew there were keys and others didn’t know much about how the two were connected.

I have since figured out that the crime boss didn’t know that the lock guys were part of a shifty arrangement, he only had some connection with Gary, then Jeb somehow got mixed up in the dodgy activities at Healy’s but Gary had some connection with the Healy thing, and had them hide the container through a deal with the lock guys. They got a new facility but had to look after the container.

I had to draw it all out on paper to make sense of it but it was feasible. You just had to figure out who may know what, and who knew very little. Clearly Gary wanted to cover his tracks and provide himself with a degree of ‘insurance.’ looking after his assets.

If the crime boss knew where the container was they might break in and be off with the ‘loot.’ But would they look at the lock and be fooled, just like Gary hoped? I’ve got no way

to know. It then struck me, apart from Gary, I'm probably the only one who knows how things are connected.

The funny thing is that it's sort of all laid out in the book, the one with the address in it.

So the facts are, I have the keys, Gary might get out early from Prison, someone wanted to track my car, there's a stack of drugs, hidden, but not well hidden. Part of me is pleased that I have figured this lot out so far and another part of me is petrified of what might happen. The last thing I want is to upset a crime boss and an ex con.

Chapter Eight

Things settled for a while, Gary's case surfaced in the media, 'Alleged Murderer to be Freed on New Evidence.'

I chatted to Jack about it. Should I just find out where Gary lives and deliver the keys, after all they are rightfully his? We would discuss the pros and cons of the whole thing, what if this and what if that, scenarios would be played out in our minds.

Eventually we discussed why I was given the keys? Then I remembered the note from Jeb, Gary will want these keys, they are his after all. That made things easyish, give the keys to Gary and let the whole thing be over and done with.

But how to get the keys to the guy? If I get caught handing the guy an item, I might become a target, I didn't want that.

I knew where his old house was, but that didn't mean he was going to live there, especially if a crime boss wanted to steal back the gift that was given to Gary. The road to Gary's house was a well used road, not main but it was a handy through road to get to places if the main road was blocked up with peak hour traffic, so if I drove by that way it wouldn't be a big issue.

I noticed the next week that the yard at Gary's had been cleaned up. So I sent a letter. I didn't put the keys in it, just a typed out note. I wrote, 'Old Jeb passed away, but he suggested to say hi...'

So, a few days later I'm in the supermarket getting our food and such. I'm about half way through my list of items, when a guy in dark glasses, black T'shirt and dark jeans walks up and follows me close by my side, I didn't really notice at first I've got my shopping list in my hot little hand and then this warm rumbly voice says, 'Ah, salt, you will find that over in the next aisle…' I look over and here's this guy a bit taller than me pointing at my list.

I'm looking at him like 'What the hey?' He looks at me with a neutral expression. He then says, 'Oh and by the way, thanks for the letter, short and sweet.' He then gave a wry smile.

I nearly fainted, I'm now face to face with Gary Turner. Well I sort of guessed it was. He then extended his hand to offer for me to shake it, which I did.

Gary then suggested, 'Jeb also had a good handshake, don't you think?' I agreed. I must say, Gary was a charming guy, infectious smile, well spoken, good manners and all that.

I then asked 'So how on earth did you find me?' He then suggested that, it's a long story and it starts with Jeb. But I'll save that for another time. What's important is that I make contact and let you know a few things. 1. I know you have the keys, that's a no brainer, 2. I know there are only certain people who know where the container is and what the contents are. Oh and 3. You have done a good job on not giving too much away… If you want to, give me your address. I'll let you know more.' He then gave a sneaky smile.

I then asked with one hand on my hips. 'You know my address, someone you know dropped around and took the computer!' Gary responded with, 'Correct, someone I know, but I didn't ask them to collect it. They probably thought they would get some information from it. And I bet there was nothing in it about the keys, otherwise they would have gone looking for those… but instead they turned my place upside down trying to find those… no luck obviously. Oh and people I know, aren't always friends my dear…'

I offered my phone number, but he refused to take it, he didn't want to implicate me in any way by having my number in his phone. Smart thinking.

I was caught off guard, in the supermarket, Gary had walked up, all these ideas about who did what, when to whom… Gees, I gave him my address, hey, be fair I was under pressure. Gary bid me 'Good day Mel' and promptly left. The rationale I had was that he would want to pick up his keys.

I was a bit rattled by that, I finished off the shopping, and yes the salt was in the next aisle.

I got home and realised I forgot a few things, but hey my brain was ticking over. Who knew what about this, and that, and what would happen next. I wanted to get things straight in my head.

I have the keys, I was given them by Jeb, Jeb knew the address of the container and I guess whoever took the computer didn't know the address of the container, nor did Gary. I was also left wondering how Gary found me in the supermarket of all places, was it the tracking device, who knew that was there apart from Jack?

Two days later, a letter arrives, addressed to me. It's so old school, but it meant we kept our distance. Yes it's from Gary, a simple note to catch up for coffee and discuss things further. I decided to hand over the keys and be done with everything. I'm not sure how he figured out Friday afternoon would be a time when I would be free but hey he somehow has contacts.

I told Jack, he suggested that he would be glad to see the end of all this.

Coffee, I had the keys, Gary arrived and was polite etc, we ordered drinks and all that was fine, I pulled out the envelope I put the keys in and slid it across the table. He ran his hand over it and said thanks then a bit later he carefully slid the envelope into his pocket.

Gary filled me in on some of the details, the consulting work he did was for a company he didn't know had 'bad connections' they wanted things to happen and found the usual way

of making those things happen slow and cumbersome. Some of the things required some pushing in the local planning section of the council, some state government pushing and so on.

So the crime boss got involved, they had a couple of building developments to get through and for some people to 'turn a blind eye' on things. Some things were easily rushed through, others needed to 'skip' a process and so on. It was quite complex, then in the middle of it Gery ended up knowing too much.

Along the way he met Jeb, a senior consultant at the time with Healy and Gretch, 'The thing about Jeb was he was squeaky clean and didn't want to get mixed up in wrong doings, so he left the company before he got too entangled in things. He suggested we stay connected, but at a distance and so the connection on the facebook page.'

That's when the payout via the 'stuff' was organised Gary wasn't happy and wanted to make noises. He was then framed for murder and things moved on.

Gary added, 'Things moved on, there were things built, special 'funds' were acquired to pay for these things and some laundering of goods to then create more cash happened. All that was while I was 'inside', now I get to pick up some pieces and move on. The funny thing is the crime boss does not seem to know where the 'stuff is' even though I have been told it's right under his nose. Oh and the payout for wrongful conviction meant I don't need the 'stuff' to pay my way in life. If I touch it I might just get in trouble, and that I don't want.'

It was all starting to make sense, some people in high places wanting to add to their assets, some two bit criminals wanting to get in on the action and there in the middle were two hapless guys. I asked about John Morrison and how he fitted into the scheme of things.

Gary sat back in his chair and sipped his coffee. And suggested that 'John was a dodgy cop for a while but then was starting to get caught out, I think he was hoping to get some extra cash on the side, from that big wash up that happened down the coast, a bunch of people got some of that action, but John wasn't one of them, well as far as I know. It is ASSUMED that John went clean on his dealings after naughty people started to make things messy, so he went back to real policing.

John’s been an important part of my situation, he was the one who followed the lead of the bad guys and got me framed for murder, However he mentioned to me, he smelled a rat, but it took the police a LONG time to figure out who had really done the deed. He actually apologised to me for getting things wrong.

Now, what happens next, well, I’m going to have to figure out the address of where the container is, and then hand the keys over to the crime boss, they need the contents more than me, and see what happens, I figure they will leave us all alone and get on with their dirty dealings. The whole idea was to keep the ‘goods’ hidden from the ‘boss’ until either I got released and compensated, or I accessed the goods to sell and build up my ‘superannuation’ but I really didn’t want to do that. That could have become rather messy.’

I sipped my coffee with interest all through Gary’s chat. And asked, ‘ Are you sure you want to know where the container is? If you know that, then it looks like you have a connection to it?’

He agreed, but how to get the crime boss off his back was his next statement.

I asked for the envelope back and grabbed a pen, opened the flap and wrote the address on the inside of the envelope. I tucked the flap inside the envelope and slid it back across the table.

I suggested, ‘There is enough information in what I have written for the crime boss to locate the container, then they have all they need to leave you alone, all going well.’

Coffee chat over, we shook hands and each went our own way. The sense of relief was immense!

Jack was also happy that all this was over, but there was one thing, one detail that plagued Jack, ‘If Jeb knew the location of the container, how come Gary didn't?’ The only thought we had was that they decided to have a fail safe system. If one doesn’t know and the other does, then ‘they’ need both, in this case the keys and the location. We then figured that

that was silly because Jeb had both, the location and the keys… We THEN thought that ‘they didn’t know he had both. It was messing up our heads just thinking about it.

A few weeks later the container was gone. It was now in the hands of some other ‘Scrubby Little Runt.’

It wasn’t long after that, I was doing a bout of supermarket shopping, Gary came by, I saw him coming this time. He nodded hello, and said hi. He then uttered, ‘Imagine having a container locked up in the yard of a locksmith and needing keys to open it… Silly really, it was a decoy, no one expected that the container would have such expensive contents… So the keys were not really required, they did however make things a bit easier.’

Gary winked, wished me a good day and went on his way.

Jack and I are off on a holiday next, a cruise and some time in Canada, Chris is looking after the finances for that one. What sweet kid.