

## Chapter 1

Jessica Harper sat at the top table, smiling politely as one of the sponsors of the charity luncheon event thanked her for making the event so successful. Jessica was the organiser on this occasion and it was gratifying to be acclaimed for her efforts, in front of all those present at these very expensive tables.

“It should be successful at \$1000 a plate!” she thought, “What a bunch of sycophants and blow-ins!”

She rose, elegant in a clinging green satin gown, resplendent with tasteful jewellery. She humbly thanked the sponsor for his very kind words.

“I’m sure you all know that it takes a team of dedicated people to make sure everything goes well on nights like these. I’m only the organiser and without the assistance from your own members and your very kind donations, we could never have raised anything close to the \$0.5M that we did tonight!”

There was thunderous applause as the wealthy, and the reasonably well-off wannabes, rose to their feet with huge smiles on their faces. She handed the microphone back to her stage manager with a grin and slowly made her way towards the exit behind the curtains to the right of the large conference room, acknowledging individual’s praise on the way.

She could still hear the buzz of excitement generated in the convention centre as she left the venue to make her way home, which thankfully, being in her home town, wasn’t far away at all this time. She couldn’t wait to get back home and change into something more comfortable. She was also looking forward to her next real job that she had coming up in a couple of days!

She drove her 5 series midnight blue BMW from the Dubbo city centre to her 4-bedroom low set home on Hennessy Drive. The property had cost her a packet but it was only one of several properties she owned around Australia. She turned off the A32 into Wheelers Lane and all the way to the end before turning into Hennessy Drive.

Approaching her home, she activated the remote and the metal gate slid sideways, allowing her to coast up the driveway before another sensor opened the roller door of one of the two attached garages, where she parked. The sliding gate and the roller garage door returned securely back into place as she opened the internal door to her dining area, with its Italian tiled floor and stylish cherry wood dining room suite.

She kicked off her high heels and idly checked for messages on the answer phone. A couple of neighbours were having a party tomorrow night and they wondered if she would like some excitement over a couple of drinks. They had a blind date set up for her.

“Excitement! They wouldn’t know what excitement was if it bit them in the keister!” She laughed to herself as she typed in her 11-character login password on her laptop keyboard. She was meticulous in changing her password every week. Jessica highlighted her

Manifesto program and clicked Enter. She entered a different password to login. There on the screen was her next job.

She read:

*“**Date** – 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2014 (three days away); **Time of day/night** – in the morning between 8:00 am and 12:00 pm; **Location** – Perth, WA; **Murder weapon** – garrotte (hmm interesting – she hadn’t used a garrotte since her early kills); **Type of victim** – elderly white male; **Method of travel to the murder scene** – local air charter; **Characteristics for the murderer** – female office worker; **Accommodation for the murderer** – mid range hotel.”*

She checked out Google Maps and Google Search for the information she needed for when she was in Perth; how to get around the city; where to stay as a lowly paid office clerk, and any likely spots to commit her 16th murder.

For after the kill, she noted possible problem areas and safe areas with good escape routes. She noted the location of possible charity bins where she would dump her clothing that she would wear while carrying out the kill.

She would head off tomorrow to Perth and after settling in, she could scope out potential locations for the murder. Her flight left at 9:30 am from the Dubbo Airport and wouldn’t get her there until nearly 4:00 pm. A hell of a journey, but thankfully the app hadn’t stipulated car travel this time!

Jessica undressed, carefully hanging her expensive gown in the walk-in robe. She removed all her expensive jewellery and locked it in the floor safe under a rug in the study area. Walking naked across the hall, she went to the utility cupboard where the cleaning materials and vacuum cleaner were stored.

She slid aside a panel in the rear wall, revealing a simple 4 shelf storage area about 1.5 metres wide and 0.5 metres deep. The rear wall of the now revealed storage area formed a similar hidden panel in the back of an adjoining cupboard, so that the storage area wouldn’t easily be discovered by any casual examination.

She selected a set of nondescript underwear, blue jeans, a thin woollen jumper and a pair of cheap trainers, a functional watch that wasn’t flashy, and a gold-plated crucifix on a gilt chain and finally some simple clip-on ear rings. Next, she picked up a dark brown shoulder length wig. She topped everything off with a three-quarter length faux leather jacket. From the top shelf, she lifted down a locked cash box, opened it and removed credit cards, driving licence, Medicare card and a couple of family photos, portraying her as Maggie Webb. Placing all her documents into a purse, she locked the cash box and placed it back on the top shelf. She slid the false panel closed and closed the utility door.

Returning to her bedroom, Jessica Harper transformed herself from a blonde haired, sophisticated socialite to an auburn haired, everyday working woman. Pleased with the result, she added a little foundation, accentuated her cheeks with a bit of blush and darkened her light-coloured eyebrows to add to the effect she wanted.

Now Maggie Webb, Jessica Harper’s cleaner, she picked up a set of car keys to her 9-year-old, but completely serviceable, dirty red Toyota Corolla in the other garage. Operating the

garage door and then the gate she drove away from Hennessy Drive. Anyone watching her leave would believe she was Ms Harper's cleaner finishing off her duties for the day.

She turned right onto Darling Street past the KFC takeaway and left into Cadell Street. She parked in the bay outside her ground floor, 2-bedroom apartment.

Throwing open the metal security screen door and then the sturdy solid wooden front door, she stepped inside her tiny apartment and wrinkled her nose at the comparative squalor. It couldn't be helped, she thought. This is exactly where Maggie would live. No one from Jessica's world would recognise her in a place like this. She made herself a coffee and after sitting down on the two-seater settee, she booked a taxi to the airport for 8:30 tomorrow morning.

She got an early night, thinking about the plans she had to fulfil over the next few days. She had used a credit card in Maggie Webb's name to book her return flight to Sydney, and then another return flight from Sydney to Perth in the name of Heather Andersen, using Heather's credit card. The flights had cost over \$1,800 but she wasn't concerned. The money had been hacked from someone else's account.

She had already let a neighbour know that she would be away for a few days, so that they could pick up junk mail and put the garbage bins out for her. It's the small details you had to think about in this game. She didn't want anyone breaking into her apartment in her absence, not that they would have an easy time getting through that security screen and solid front door or the shuttered and locked windows.

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Maggie awakened bright and early so that she could prepare herself for the flight. She ate some toast and drank a cuppa and then washed up her plates. She was a creature of habit.

She walked across the 2 metres that separated her small kitchen/dining area from her spare bedroom. She unlocked the triple secured lock on the painted steel door and opened it onto a work area and storage area. There was a large walk-in robe along the whole of one wall which contained a variety of clothes and shoes, male, female, both young and old. This is where Maggie routinely packed a disguise for her alias before going on to the next kill.

To one side, there was a locked steel cabinet that contained a selection of all weapons that were identified in the Manifesto application.

There was a small number of handguns namely a Springfield Armory 191 which was chosen for its power and accuracy, a Kel-Tec P-3AT with a built-in laser for accurate firing, and finally a Sig Sauer P200 with its built-in laser sights and silencer attachment. Jessica had become expert in all three weapons and practised regularly at the local gun club.

There was also a selection of knives for throwing, slicing and stabbing, a mini crossbow and bolts, and odd items such as a blowgun and darts, garrotes, coshes and several poisons of different types. Jessica added to these when she saw something new, and later added these newly purchased items to her Manifesto App.

In a more secure container than any of them, Jessica had stockpiled a small quantity of C4 explosive. C4 was very handy with a detonator and a remote timer. It consisted of a mixture

of explosive, a plastic binder, and a chemical plasticizer which made it capable of being moulded like modelling clay. The beauty of C4 was that it was safe as houses, until exposed to a combination of extreme heat and a shockwave, generated by the use of a detonator.

On one wall there was a set of shelves which contained theatrical makeup, facial inserts such as cheek pads, chin inserts to go over the bottom teeth, wigs of all colour, style and size, shoulder pads, and shoe inserts to change height or way of walking. There was just about everything for the complete disguise.

The remaining area housed a top of the range PC and a photographic quality printer. Maggie produced a variety of documents and IDs to help her with new aliases. She was able to produce realistic looking licences and credit cards by using filched information from hacked websites and personal accounts. She was able to apply for different official documents like birth certificates. She effectively stole people's identities, discarding the cards long before anyone got suspicious. The system had worked so well for nearly three years now.

She packed a medium sized suit case with enough clothes for several days. If the job took any longer than that, she would buy other items as she needed them. Her choice of outfits was suitable for an office worker, which was what her app had decided she would be for the Perth kill. She selected a set of documents for her new alias which she placed in a separate wallet and put that into the side pocket of her carry-on luggage. She was ready to go.

Oh, one last thing before she forgot. She selected a thin strip of leather, similar to a shoe lace, which she would use as a garrotte. She would have preferred a steel wire with handles but she couldn't easily explain that away if her baggage was searched for any reason.

She changed into jeans and T shirt, keeping the shoulder length dark wig on and 15 minutes later, she climbed into the taxi that had pulled up outside her apartment. Anyone watching would see Maggie Webb leaving for places unknown.

The taxi left Dubbo along the Mitchell Highway heading north until 10 minutes or so later, the sign for the Dubbo City Regional Airport appeared. Turning right into Coreena Road, the cab accessed the airport road leading to a single-story building. This building housed the combined airport arrivals and departure lounge. It was a small building for an airport, which was just as well as there were rarely more than twenty passengers leaving at any one time.

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Inside the airport building, she walked past the five hire car counters and approached the small booking-in counter. She was greeted by a grey-haired airline clerk, who also doubled as the baggage handler at this rural airport. "Good morning, ma'am." he said cheerily. "Do you have some ID please?"

She handed over a driving licence in Maggie's name. He checked her off his list, handed her a boarding pass and took her suitcase which he stacked next to a small pile in the corner. "Your flight to Sydney should be leaving in about 35 minutes from this gate. I hope you have a good flight, Ms Webb!"

She smiled as she knew that there was only one departure gate. In fact, it was the same gate that passengers arrived through when disembarking from their flights into Dubbo

Airport. She chose one of the black plastic seats at the rear of the room, facing back towards the entrance to the building. She took out a magazine and pretended to read.

In reality, she was people watching. First, she surreptitiously glanced around the departure area to see if anyone was taking any notice of her. She was satisfied that all passengers were suitably occupied with doing their own thing. She continued to turn the pages of her magazine, glancing up whenever anyone new came in.

Early on in her career, she had had a shock when one of Jessica Harper's friends arrived for check in and sat near to her. She needn't have worried. In her then role as a backpacker, her friend had hardly noticed her.

She boarded the small QANTAS twin engine Dash 8 by the steps at the front of the aircraft. The Dash 8 could seat a maximum of 36 passengers and today it was only a third full. She found her allocated aisle seat, 6B, placed her hand luggage in the rack above and sat down and left her seat buckle unsecured, until she knew if she would have company in the window seat. She always booked an aisle seat so that she could stretch her legs. It wouldn't matter too much for this hour leg to Sydney but would be more important for the six-hour flight to Perth.

Ten minutes later, the captain announced his name and that this flight, QAF 2380 to Sydney, was ready for take-off. The aircraft moved with that surreal effect when you think that it's the outside view that is moving, and not the aircraft. It taxied left towards the runway and trundled to the end for take-off. Briefly halting, the Dash 8's propellers increased speed and the whole aircraft started to shudder. The brakes were released and the aircraft seemed to catapult itself along the runway, bumping and shaking as it went. The aircraft lifted, causing the small stomach dropping sensation as it slowly clawed its way into the sky. The buildings down below became smaller and smaller and a long length of the Mitchell Highway and the rural city of Dubbo itself appeared through the port side of the aircraft window. Soon, they were in the clouds and aircraft levelled off.

Maggie dutifully listened to the air stewardess's prepared demonstration about flight issues, regardless of the hundreds of times she had heard it all before. Within 5 minutes, she was being offered a beverage and a snack. She took a white coffee and a pack of two digestive biscuits, settling down for the duration of her brief flight to Sydney. She was the epitome of the average, no problem passenger. No one took the slightest bit of notice of her and no one would remember her when they left the plane to go their separate ways. That's just the way she liked it.

Before long, she had arrived at Sydney airport. She entered the Ladies toilets and changed her appearance once again and emerged as brown curly haired, middle-aged Heather Andersen, administrative officer, heading to Perth for a job interview. She had put on extra makeup, added a jumper and changed the way she walked. She knew that people paid attention to how you stand and walk, which is how many people could be recognised by their friends from the back.

She found the correct gate and eventually took her seat on a larger 60 metre wingspan Airbus A330 which would take her to Perth, arriving in the late afternoon. She had booked the aisle seat, 45B, because of the extra leg room near to an exit. It was also right next to the toilets. Once settled, she put on her airline supplied earphones to listen to music, using

the headrest and closing her eyes. This effectively cut off most chances of being bothered by the rather large male passenger in the window seat next to her.

She reviewed her plans once more for the job when she eventually arrived in Perth several hours later.