

# **Lucky Old Harry**

**By T.J. Beachs**

Jenny poked her head around the Fraud Squad door.

Detective Sergeant Sally Brooking, elbow-deep in witness statements, scanned the other desks, every one empty. She sighed. "What is it, Jen?"

"There's another one," Jenny wrung her hands. "I know you're busy, Sergeant, but it's really sad. Can you see him?"

"How much?"

"Thirty thousand dollars."

"Bloody hell." Sally searched for her notebook. "Send him around. I'll be in Interview One."

An elderly gentleman limped into the glass-walled meeting room. He wore a smart suit, a little too big for him as if he'd shrunk, and he used a crutch to take the weight off his left leg. "I'm Brian Wilkinson," he said, as he struggled to get into the visitor chair without falling over. "At least I think I am, if you know what I mean." A sad smile played on his lips. "My identity's been stolen. A lot of money disappeared out of my accounts. The bank says the withdrawals were all authorised, only they weren't."

A story Sally often heard. Rarely a tale with a happy ending. She sighed. "I'm sorry, Mr Wilkinson. The people who do this are parasites. I hate them. They take advantage of ..."

"Old people?" Mr Wilkinson raised his eyebrows but smiled to show he took no offence.

"The vulnerable," Sally said.

"Is there any chance? It's my life savings and since ..." He gestured towards his leg.

Sally cursed her compassion, wished for the detachment her colleagues found so easy. She really had to try for poor Mr Wilkinson. If only she had more hope for success. "Give me all the details," she said. "And thank you for coming in. It's embarrassing to admit you've been scammed, but we need all the information we can get to stop these vermin."

Phil Mendoza from the Electronic Crimes Section called Sally less than forty-eight hours later.

He had a prime corner desk with a wonderful view of the Swan River that he never saw because his eyes never left his computer screens.

"Hey, Phil," she said. "What've you got that's so important I had to drag my ass up four floors?"

"Hi, Sally." He squinted through his glasses and clicked his mouse to the screen he wanted.

"Here it is. Your Brian Wilkinson. We've got them." He pointed to the details of the receiving account.

Sally's hope disappeared. "Those Nigerian bastards. Poor Brian."

Phil clicked again, swept the window away. "But that's not what I wanted to show you. Have a look at this."

By the time they called Mr Wilkinson back the following Wednesday, Sally's mood had shifted completely. Adrenaline positively hummed in her veins. "Good news!" she called, as he bumped his way into the interview room.

"Oh, excellent." Mr Wilkinson's face lit up.

"This is Detective Sims," Sally nodded to a young man in the corner by the door. "We've tracked down the rotten so and sos who stole your identity."

"Fabulous, I'm so relieved."

"The bad news is we won't be able to get your money back."

"Oh," Mr Wilkinson slumped like a burst balloon. "That's devastating. Were you trying to be funny?"

"No. Sorry." She took a photo from the top of a pile. "Do you know this man? Harry McBride, a widowed farmer from Deniliquin, New South Wales."

Mr Wilkinson's eyes flashed surprise. "No, I don't think so."

"He's the one who stole your money. Our techno geeks traced the cash that went from your account. Harry's actually some Nigerian working for a gang we know all too well. They get your bank details, use that to find your social media, long story short, they contact your bank, pose as you, change your identification to get control of your account and bingo."

"But how?" Mr Wilkinson asked. "I've never given those details to anyone."

Sally smiled. Leaned closer. "Now that's what was so interesting. Our boys noticed that large sums of money were transferred into your account from this one." She pulled a bank statement out of the file. A couple of dozen lines were highlighted in yellow and pink.

"That's how they got to your account – look," she tapped her pen on a yellow highlight. "It shows which account each transfer's going to. Yours."

Mr Wilkinson fumbled for his glasses and peered at the statement.

"Do you see? Every withdrawal is matched by a deposit from another account." Sally tapped separate pink highlighted transactions. "So, the Electronic Crimes lads copied the Nigerians. They went to the social media for the account holder."

She took the second photo off the pile. A girl in a bikini. "Young Malaysian student.

Constance Yam. Studying at Curtin. She gave her details to Mr McBride."

"Oh, God."

Sally nodded. "We subpoenaed Miss Yam's email. Seems she's got a thing for older men. Rich ones, anyway. You wouldn't believe what she'd like to do to lucky old Harry. She wanted to meet him but she needed two thousand bucks to buy tickets. When Harry said yes ..."

Mr Wilkinson's mouth dropped open.

"You don't know Miss Yam, do you?" Sally asked.

"No. Absolutely not."

"Of course you don't." Sally waved away the idea. "How well do we really know ourselves?"

Mr Wilkinson scrambled to his feet. "I think I'd like to leave now."

Detective Sims blocked the door.

"Poor Constance." Sally shook her head. "She has a lot of travel issues." She fanned the rest of the photos on the table like a winning poker hand. "These gentlemen all sent money to her. More than eighty thousand dollars all told." Mr Wilkinson's jaw clenched so tight she could see his teeth. Sally stared into his watery eyes. "They want it back, Brian. And there are another thirty-seven victims we've still to contact."

"Brian Trevor Wilkinson, you are under arrest for fraud, obtaining money by deception, impersonating a gorgeous Malaysian call girl and stealing her pictures off the internet, and being a dirty stinking scumbag who preys on sad lonely old men."