

WELL DONE YOUNG MAN

John Boston

Joe Davis sat on the bench of the intake wing of the county jail. This was rock bottom for him. He couldn't believe this is what his life had been reduced to. He was now rubbing shoulders with thieves and murderers. Worst part is, he had done it to himself. This was going to be his new home. He had met with his lawyer, but there wasn't really much he could do. His charge was murder, he just didn't know if he was going to be charged with first or second-degree murder. The only real difference was the death penalty or life in prison at this point.

A kid sat down next to him and smiled at him.

"Whatcha in for?" he asked

"I killed somebody."

"So did I. Just never got caught," said Willie

"Lucky you."

"Name's Willie."

"I'm Joe."

"You got any smokes on you, Joe?"

"I don't smoke."

"Right. I'm guessing this is your first time in," he said looking around.

"Yup."

"You'll get used to it. It sucks at first. This is my second time in. I got nabbed on a parole violation. No biggie. I just have fifteen months left till my original sentence is up. They can't hold me a day longer than that. No more parole officer bullshit after that. I'm a free man."

"Not me. I'm pretty much screwed."

"Tell me about it," said Willie.

"You really want to know?"

"We got a couple of hours to kill before lunch," said Willie.

"Where do I even begin?" said Joe.

"I got sent to West Virginia my senior year of high school. God awful place. The sun hardly ever came out. It was cold and damp for nine months of the year. Everybody was poor and drunk. I got a girlfriend. My first one. Here I was eighteen years old and never had a girlfriend before. We went to her house one day and had sex. It was the highlight of my eighteen-year-old life. I went out to celebrate at a local movie theater and that's the first time I saw him. I was just sitting there outside the restaurant when he came up to me and patted me on the shoulder."

"Well done young man!" That's all he said and he walked away.

"What's so weird about that?"

"He was weird. He had a thick British accent and his clothes were like a hundred years old. How the hell did he know I just had my first sexual experience?"

"Yeah, how would he have known? Maybe he thought you were somebody else or something."

"Maybe.....maybe not."

"Anyway, several years passed. I went to college on a football scholarship. I thought I might actually take my career to the next level, until I got hurt my senior year, on a freaking field goal of all things. The doctor told me my only chance was surgery and never playing football again. That hurt. I loved football. I got my degree in finance and went to work for a big financial firm. The money was great. Life was good. I'll never forget the day. It was Memorial Day. Hotter than hell. I was in line at a movie theater. My girlfriend at the time wanted to see this movie, so I told her to meet me there. We were going to celebrate afterwards. I had just been promoted to assistant regional account manager for the company. My pay almost doubled. I got a company car, my own office. I was going places. That was the day I saw him. I had just bought my ticket when our paths crossed. I was going in and he was coming out. I almost shit myself when I saw him. He looked right up at me and smiled.

We both stopped right in our tracks.

"Well done, young man!" he said and shook my hand.

"Thanks," I said quietly.

"It was the same weird old British guy?" asked Willie.

"The exact same one. He was wearing the same hat and three-piece suit. It didn't look as if he had aged at all in ten years. I pulled away from him and went inside the theater. I only turned my back on him for maybe ten seconds. That was all it took. I ran after him, but I couldn't find him. He just seemed to vanish."

"That's weird. Are you sure it was the same guy?" asked Willie.

"I'm positive. I was shaking. I mean when the reality hit me, I didn't know what to do. I didn't say a word to my girlfriend about it. It was all I could think about for the next few days. I couldn't concentrate or anything. The last thing I wanted to do was to let down my new boss. "

The pressure was intense. Just being a good employee wasn't going to cut it. You had to be a superstar if you wanted to keep your job and move up the ladder. The people at the top were complete psychopaths. They would have sold their own mothers if it meant there was money in it for them. I was swimming with sharks, but the money was just too good. I mean, what was I supposed to do? Take a job that paid a fraction of what I was making, even if it meant less stress. I just didn't see the logic in it. Then, one night, I discovered how to really succeed at the company. It changed my life.

"How?" asked Willie.

"By committing securities and wire fraud. See, the government can only tax us on our profit. So, in theory, if we never showed a profit, we wouldn't have to pay any taxes. We would create fake accounts from names on tombstones, use fake social security numbers, and just hide our money in these fake accounts. The Securities and Exchange Commission had no idea these accounts existed. If we needed some money, we just took it out of the account. It was always done in cash. Pretty soon, I had over half a million dollars hidden away in one of these accounts."

"Damn, so you got money, huh?" asked Joe

"No. I had money. A bunch of guys in one of our offices got busted for doing the same thing. I had only two choices: turn myself over to the SEC and IRS, or simply delete the account. It was as if it never existed. There was a chance I could get caught, but I figured the risks outweighed the rewards. A few clicks on the keyboard and over six hundred thousand dollars just disappeared. The feds would have a field day trying to find any proof the account ever existed. The money was routed to a bank in the Bahamas. I thought that was the end of it. It was for a few weeks until I saw him again."

"The old man?"

"Yup. He was right on cue."

"You're sure it was the same old man?"

"Positive. I was stopped at a red light and he walked by my car on the crosswalk. He stopped when he saw me. He walked over to my window. I rolled it down and sure enough, same thing."

"*Well done young man!*" he said and walked off.

"It was difficult to follow him, but he stayed right on the sidewalk. I got through the light and turned around. I don't know how I lost him, but I did. The next time, if there was a next time, I was determined not to let him get away. This was getting ridiculous."

"Joe, that's the craziest story I ever heard," said Willie

"Just wait. It gets even crazier."

"Several of my colleagues were either arrested or fired, so I got another big promotion. I was now the regional manager in charge of accounts. I no longer had to do any actual selling, I just watched over our other salesmen. I had forty of them who all reported to me. It was my dream job. I could come and go as I pleased and no one questioned me. Everything was going along great, until it wasn't."

"What happened?"

"I hit somebody with my car. Totally by accident. I wasn't even drunk or anything. I panicked." said Joe

"Damn, that sucks."

"I shouldn't be telling this to you, Willie. I guess at this point it doesn't even matter. They got the girl's DNA off my bumper. I'm not going to win. I don't know how they got it, I scrubbed that damn car until it was brand new, especially the bumper. I guess I must have missed a spot."

"Well, you hit her. It was an accident. It wasn't your fault."

"When I hit the girl, no. Like I said, I panicked. See, they broke down right around this dangerous curve on Mulholland. That whole damn road is a death trap. I was speeding and as soon as I came around the corner, she was standing out in the middle of the road for some reason. I never even had a chance to hit the brakes. The next thing I knew, she was on my windshield. Her boyfriend had stopped to change the tire. Naturally, he was a little pissed. He ran over to my car. I got out and looked at the girl. I knew she was dead, just from the way her mangled body was lying in the road. Her boyfriend never said a word and came straight at me. I reached into my car and pulled out my tire iron. I have given it to my neighbor to help him change his tire. I left it on the front seat. I'm glad I did. He was a big guy. I swung as hard as I could and hit him on the side of the head. He dropped and I hit him again. I rolled his body off the cliff and watched it roll down the steep cliff slope. It was over so fast. I never had time to react. I didn't want to kill anyone. The road was deserted. I was coming back from Santa Barbara. I had taken all my salesmen out for a weekend retreat. I just sat there on the side of the road. Finally, I grabbed the girl's lifeless body and rolled it down the hill. At least she could be with her boyfriend. I was walking back to my car and I saw him. He was standing there by the side of their vehicle. I could see he was holding something. I ran right up to him. I was still in shock, but now I was more angry than in shock. I know somehow he was responsible for all of this. This was all his doing."

"Well done young man," he said softly.

"Who are you?"

He said nothing and just held up a small gym bag. I grabbed it and looked inside. I couldn't believe what I saw. They were sandwich bags filled with white powder. Then I think I understood what he was trying to do. If I left the bag of drugs there. Maybe the cops would think it was just a drug deal gone bad. It made sense at the time. I put the bag in the back seat underneath some

clothes. When I turned around, the old man was gone. He was gone and I was going to have to figure a way out of this thing. I'm living in a real-life nightmare. I had just killed two people. I just wanted to run away and pretend it never happened. For a while, that's exactly what happened. There was a little blab in the paper about two bodies being found. The cops had figured it was a drug deal gone bad. They didn't even have any suspects at this point. I thought I was home free.

"So, how did you get caught?"

"I'm getting to that. See, I realized at that point that everything I had done in my life was because of him. He was calling the shots. I had just never realized it. Everything in my life had been set up for me to be driving on that dark and deserted road that night. He had planned it that way. I was just his puppet on a string."

"Joe, this story just gets weirder and crazier. I mean, I've heard some crazy shit in here, but yours is the winner by a mile," said Willie.

I had to find him. I had to talk to him and ask him what he really wanted. Who was he? Why was he here? What did he want with me? I had to have answers. I couldn't keep going on this way, looking over my shoulder, just waiting for him to appear. Every time I saw him, my life changed. Sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. I had to know why he was doing this. It was driving me insane.

I didn't see him for a while. I helped some very rich, very criminal people launder money through one of my secret accounts at work. For my services, they gave me a hundred thousand dollars in cash. They literally just left it in a suitcase in my office. I was beginning to think that I could somehow avoid all of the drama I had caused. I wanted to live in a fantasy world and I was doing just that. I started carrying a gun with me. It was foolish. I didn't even know if the old man was real or not. I had no idea if a gun was even going to be effective against him. The feds were all over our company. I knew I should just get out and catch the next flight to Belize or something, but I figured he would just follow me there as well. I had been poor all my life and now I had hundreds of thousands of dollars in suitcases and pillow sacks. The problem was, you just couldn't take that much money with you. I booked a cruise on a no-name private charter to the Bahamas. I was going to stay two days in Nassau town where I would deposit the money and just never go back to the States. It all seemed so simple.

"So, why didn't you?" asked Willie.

"My mom got diagnosed with terminal cancer. I was all she had. I quit my job and moved back home to take care of her. She lasted for a year. She died on the same day she was diagnosed one year before. She died right in front of me. All I could do was try to make sure she wasn't in any pain. The moment she died, I could feel some kind of presence in her house. I turned around and he was standing there. I turned around and he was standing right there with his hands cupped in front of his chest. He walked over to my mom and made the sign of the cross, then seemed to pass some kind of blessing onto my mother. He seemed genuinely upset by her death. He put his hand on my shoulder. He never said a word. He walked out of the room and simply vanished. I was too upset to really care at that point."

"After your mom died.....why didn't you just leave then?"

"I'd be a fugitive for the rest of my life. I hadn't done anything wrong, not really. I had killed two people, but it was an accident. I didn't mean to kill anyone and that matters. You can be responsible for someone's death, but not be a murderer. I am not a murderer." said Joe defiantly.

"I never said you were."

"I went back to my condo and my money. I decided just to vanish and start over. I was in the middle of packing when the detectives showed up at my apartment. I almost shit myself when I opened the front door."

"Joe Davis?"

"That's me."

"Can we come in? We need to talk to you." said one of the detectives.

"Sure enough, someone had ratted me out. They gave a description of my car and my license plate number. I was screwed. Of course, I denied everything. I denied being there, hitting the girl and killing her boyfriend. They impounded my car. I knew it was just a matter of time until they found the body shop where I had it repaired. They told me not to leave town. We all knew I was screwed, they just needed time to build their case. I could have run, but they would just have convicted me anyway. My mind was racing. As much as I just wanted to get the hell out of town and disappear, I had to find out more about the old man. I had to know who he was and what he wanted."

I started back at my mom's house. The movers had pretty much emptied the house. I was hoping to sell it before I got arrested. They left a bunch of boxes with my mom's personal belongings in the living room. I appreciated that. Some people still have a heart these days. I was going through some old photographs when I saw it.

"What was it?"

It was a picture of my mom.....and him. They were hugging each other at some place with a giant roller coaster. The date on the picture was 1984. I would have been nine. Then, I remembered the old man. He used to show up at my house. For some reason, my mom must have gotten tired of him or something. He looked exactly the same. Underneath that photo, was a picture of my grandmother and the old man. He was kissing her cheek. Underneath that photo, were more of my family members and the old man. They spanned almost fifty years and the old man looked the same in all of them. He never seemed to age. This guy had some kind of a connection to my family. I don't know why, but he's always been there. I was just too young to remember him. I don't know if he was a relative of mine or not. He was just like this ghost or demon that only seemed to haunt our family.

"What did you do?"

"I knew I was never going to get away from him, no matter where I went. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in prison, but I had to know. I had to know who he was and what he really wanted. Turns out, life had other plans.

I was arrested the following week and charged with two counts of murder. I tried for a plea deal, but the DA was against it. I was facing the death penalty if convicted. I posted bond and was out. I knew I should just leave town and disappear forever. It's not like I had anyone counting on me or anything. I was completely alone in this world. I had no one. I searched and searched, even talking to some family members that would still talk to me. Most had simply vanished when I got arrested. No one wanted to talk to me about the old man. They said just to let it go and I didn't want to know the real truth anyway. I spoke to my cousin about him. He was a recovering drug addict who said the old man had caused his addiction.

"I haven't seen him in five years man. Five years he's been out of my life. I'm sorry he's zeroed in on you, but it's your turn to deal with him. We've all had to deal with him at one point or another."

"What the hell does he want from us?" I asked

"I think he just wants to be part of the family." replied my cousin.

"Maybe we should just let him be part of the family then."

"No way man. He's the devil. I don't want the devil as a family member. He's been tormenting us for over a hundred years. He just won't go away, not until we let him be a part of the family."

"This is insane!" I replied.

"It sure is, but it's also happening. Good luck with him."

I looked around the courtroom at my trial. My lawyer said we were in a very good spot. The DA had offered a plea deal, which I refused. I would still have had to go to prison for ten years. They didn't have any evidence on me at all. They never did find the repair shop that fixed my car. The only thing they had was that anonymous phone call that gave the cops all my information. That was all they had and the probability that I was on the road that night. I was feeling pretty good. I looked around the courtroom and saw him sitting on the bench behind me. He smiled at me, as if we were old friends or something. I knew this was not a good sign. Nothing he ever was for my benefit. It was always for him.

The trial came and went. The idiot jury found me guilty and here I am, waiting to be shipped off to prison. I should have just fled. I should be on a beach somewhere in South America. I just couldn't leave without knowing who he was or what he wanted. I realized that day in the courtroom that I am never going to be free of him. No one else could even see him. He's like my own personal demon that dresses well. He's going to be with me for the rest of my life. I am never going to escape him.

"Man Joe, that is quite the story. I mean everybody says they're not guilty. They were framed or something. You never said that. I don't know man, I hope you beat this guy. He sounds like a real nightmare."

"He is. See Willie, what I realized is that it's possible to give this demon to someone else. I just never know who I'm going to give it to. My mom got rid of him. My cousin got rid of him, maybe I can too. I just have to find the right person, you know what I mean?"

"WILLIE GOMEZ, FRONT AND CENTER!" shouted the guard in the hallway.

"Well, that's my cue. I got to go, man. Good luck to you, Joe. I hope you can survive prison." he said, trying not to laugh.

"You think this is funny?" I asked him.

"Joe, you're so full of shit it must be coming out your ears. It's a good story, I got to give you that, but come on man. You go telling anybody that crap in here, they're going to think you're a mental patient. They are going to think you're weak and you're someone they can take advantage of."

"I'm telling you the truth, Willie. I'm not making any of this up."

"Sure, Joe. Good luck," he said and walked out of the holding area.

Willie got his bedding and his prison uniform. This was no big deal. He even said hi to a few of his friends as he walked by. Willie got to his cell and the guard opened the door. He could see someone sitting up on the bottom bunk with his back turned towards him. This was not going to fly. Willie always had the bottom bunk.

"Hey, old man, how bout moving up top for me?" he asked and threw his bedding next to the old man.

The old man stood up. As he came closer to the light, Willie could see that he was not wearing his prison uniform. He was dressed in a suit and had a top hat. As the guard closed the door, Willie wasn't sure what was happening.

"Well done young man.....well done indeed."

"HEY.....HEY, SOMEBODY LET ME OUT OF HERE! LET ME OUT OF HERE NOW. HE'S IN HERE WITH ME! JOE.....JOE, YOU GOT TO HELP ME MAN.....JOE.....PLEASE!" said Willie as he began to sob.