

A Small Family Business

by Chris Rose

“One last job”, thought Jack Robino. “One last job, then I’ll finally retire.” Jack already knew that it was time to retire, to give up working and go and collect his pension like other people of his age. He’d been doing this job for a long time now, as many years as he could remember, and he had to admit to himself that he was getting too old. This was a young man’s job. He wasn’t as quick as he had been in the past. Now he moved more slowly. He had a pain in his knee which he thought was probably arthritis. Now Jack found it difficult to understand all the latest technological advances. And then there was all the pressure, the stress and the risks that a job like his had. Now there was much more pressure, stress and risk than when he had started. Such a long time ago, Jack thought to himself, more than thirty years now. I started doing this job before my son was born. The job was so much easier in those days, thought Jack. It was always much more simple, quick and easy to get a job done then. No, he thought again, now it was definitely time to quit. But before I quit, I’ll do one last job.

With the money he had earned he had bought himself a big house up in the countryside, a long way from the city where he worked, up in New England. Sometimes he went up there at weekends, and spent time in his big country house enjoying the peace and quiet. He was looking forward to spending his retirement there. The money I make from one last job, thought Jack, will be enough to make it possible for me to drive up to my big house in New England and never have to come back again. Think of that! Even though the risks and the pressure and the stress of his job were so much greater now, Jack had to admit that – at least - the pay was so much greater too! Now he earned nearly ten times what he earned when he started. His pay had risen ten times over. This, of course, had made him a rich man. A successful businessman, that was how he thought of himself.

In his house in the country, Jack planned to spend more time with his son, Jack Junior. “I hardly know my son”, thought Jack to himself. “I’ve spent so much time with my job and my work that I’ve neglected my son. That’s a terrible



thing, and I must change it. Now that I’m going to retire I can spend more time with my son, that’s important.” Jack knew that his son had recently got married. Jack was hoping to have grandchildren soon.

“It’ll be nice to have the grandchildren up at my big house” he thought. “I’ll be able to spend lots of time with them when I retire, after this last one job.” He heard from his son once a month or so. It was usually just a quick telephone call. Jack didn’t even really know what his son did. He knew that he hadn’t finished university. That didn’t matter so much to Jack. He himself had never been very good at school. Jack was proud of the fact that everything he knew he had taught himself. There was no university that could teach you to do his kind of work anyway.

Jack Junior always seemed to have lots of money, though. That was important. He also seemed to be travelling a lot. When he phoned his father, he was always in some faraway place. Sometimes he was in California, in Los Angeles or San Francisco, sometimes he was in Texas, or Chicago. Once he was in Mexico, and another time he even called from London. Jack was happy that his son was seeing the world, even if he couldn’t spend much time with his father. One last job. Today was the day. For the last time, Jack went to the cupboard where he kept the equipment he needed for his job. He opened the cupboard and took out everything that was in it. Two rifles, each with a silencer. One very small pistol which he could put in his pocket, and one larger one that he put in a holster under his

jacket. The larger pistol also had a silencer which he took with him. He cleaned the pistols and the rifles carefully, loaded them with bullets then put the rifles in their cases and went outside and put them in the boot of his car. He made sure he had the small pistol in his pocket, and that the bigger one was safe in his holster. Safety was very important in his line of work. Then Jack Robino drove off into the middle of the city to do one last job.

Jack parked his car at the usual place. He always stopped at a telephone box on the corner of Madison Avenue and West 42nd Street, near the Grand Central Station, just next to a bar that he liked. He knew that his employer was going to call him on that phone in exactly five minutes. He checked his watch. He sat in the car for three minutes. Then he got out of the car and stood next to the phone. Two minutes later, the telephone rang. He picked it up immediately. There was the usual voice on the end of the line. It was his employer's voice. It was the voice that always called when there was a job to be done. He had heard this voice now for more than thirty years, always telling him what to do, where to go, who to look for. He had never met the man who owned this voice. Jack didn't care. It didn't matter. It wasn't important who owned the voice. The voice told him what to do, he did it, the money arrived later. It was a good business arrangement. The voice spoke. "Single white male. Aged 32. Short black hair. He'll be driving a black Mercedes sports car. He will be alone. He will drive past Central Park South in precisely one hour, then go into the car park of the Seadale Building approximately ten minutes later." The phone went dead. Jack had as much information as he needed.

He now had one hour to choose the best position to do the job. It wasn't too difficult. The Seadale Building was only a few minutes drive from where he was now. He knew it well already. He had worked there before. It was a big building full of lawyers' offices, and some very expensive apartments. It was the kind of place a lot of people in Jack's line of work lived or worked. To go into the car park of the Seadale Building it was necessary to stop at a barrier first. There was a barrier across the entrance. To open the barrier, you had to stop your car, roll down the window and put a ticket in a machine. When you

put your ticket in the machine, the barrier went up and you could drive into the car park. It was a good spot. The barrier was automatic. Nobody worked there. The car park was underground, so it was quite dark, and there were very few people around. Jack could easily wait until the right car came, wait for the driver to roll down his window, and then...well, one shot would be enough. It would be quick, clean and without problems. Nobody would see him. He could easily put the gun back in his pocket and disappear. Nobody expected a respectable 65 year-old man to be a killer.

He chose the gun he needed. The large pistol would do the job. Perfect. He put it in its holster under his jacket, and put the silencer in his pocket. He had an hour. He went to the bar he liked near Grand Central Station where he sat down to read the newspaper and have a coffee. He couldn't spend too much time there, he knew. He didn't want anybody to remember seeing him there. Still, it was a busy place, and because it was next to the station, there were lots of people coming and going all the time. He checked his watch. He still had lots of time. He got up and took the bus to its stop just outside the Seadale Building. He was still early. He walked around the block, stopping every now and then to look in a shop window. He checked his watch again. About 30 minutes to go. He wasn't nervous. He didn't get nervous anymore. He was used to it. He just felt tired now. Still, this was the last one, he told himself again, this one was the last job. He was thinking more about his nice big house in the country, and the days he wanted to spend with his family.

It was definitely time to retire. The job had become more violent over the last few years. Before, he thought of himself as a businessman who did jobs for a client. It was always quick and efficient. Today, he found things more difficult. It wasn't only because he was older and not as quick as he was when he was young. He had had enough of violence. Some of the people around today seemed to enjoy what they did far too much. It wasn't really an enjoyable job, thought Jack, but it was usually a necessary one. For Jack, it was just a job. A job similar to any other. No job is really morally innocent, he thought. People who work in banks take money from poor people. He knew a lot of lawyers who

defended people they knew were guilty. Politicians were all corrupt, he thought. His job was no worse than any other. Jack never worried about the people who were his targets. That was how he thought of them “targets”, “objectives”, “goals” even, but never “people”. Most of the people who were his targets were gangsters or corrupt politicians. Perhaps they had some family, but he wasn’t really getting rid of any good people. Jack thought that the world was probably a better place without a lot of the people he worked with.

He checked his watch again. Only ten minutes to go now. He decided to take his place. He knew exactly where the entrance to the car park in the Seadale Building was. It was on a backstreet, not one of the main streets, so there were no people around to see him as he walked along the small road which went under the building into the basement car park.

Five minutes to go. He found a good place in a dark corner at the entrance to the car park. From here he could see everyone who was coming into the car park. A couple of cars passed. A red sports car, a big grey 4x4. He was sure nobody could see him. Jack Robino was a professional, an expert. Then it came. A black Mercedes sports car. Jack touched the pistol in its holster. He was ready. He took one step forward out of

the shadows. He put his finger on the trigger. Now. He began to pull the gun out of its holster. But. No. Wait. Stop. Stop!!!

This wasn’t a single white male. It was a woman. She was blonde. She had a child on the seat behind her. Jack stopped immediately and took one step backward, back into the shadow of the corner. He hoped the woman hadn’t seen him. Be careful. Be very, very careful. Jack had never once made a mistake in his job in over thirty years. You couldn’t make mistakes in a job like Jack Robino’s. One mistake meant you were finished for ever. Jack breathed carefully. He had nearly made a terrible mistake. He was getting too old for this job. He knew it. Still, this was the last one.

Next car. Again. A black Mercedes sports car. Here it was. This was the one. Driving the car was a 32 year-old white man. He had short black hair. It was him. And Jack Robino recognised him. This was his man, his target, his goal, his objective. But Jack Robino didn’t do anything. He looked again at the driver of the car. He held out his gun but he didn’t shoot it.

“Hi Dad!” said the man driving the car. Jack Junior looked surprised to see his father. “What are you doing here?”