2011 – Sydney Airport

Picking up a Very Important Person from the airport is a risky business. So many things can go wrong. Arriving late did not make a good impression. And it could easily happen. Traffic snarls. Roadworks. Wrong flight information. Wrong place at the terminal. Even waiting at the wrong terminal. Today I was careful to be a little early. Luckily, there were no serious traffic problems, and it wasn't that difficult finding a parking space within a ten minute walk of the terminal. The correct one, going by the information I was given. I was in the right place, at the right time. Even enough spare time for a quick coffee, before we set off on our trip to that meeting out west. I had a fairly simple role to play. Pick up the V.I.P. at the airport, drive him to the meeting, sit in on the discussions, and then return the V.I.P. to the airport in time to make the return flight. Still, in a place where things are notorious for going wrong, nothing could be taken for granted.

I was just one of the crowd - about thirty people - standing next to luggage carousel number one. Everybody portrayed a look of impatience. The carousel was running, but no luggage had come through. We all stared at the empty slats, following each other in an endless procession. Still nothing. I checked the information board again. Carousel number one. Correct. I also rechecked the flight indicator board. His plane had already arrived about ten minutes earlier. I wondered where he could be. He travels light, and he likes to

get things done quickly. Decision needed – done – next issue. His mind worked quickly.

The time was passing very slowly when I saw him. A tall, thin man, I guessed to be in his sixties. He walked straight into the terminal. In his right hand he swung a blind man's stick regularly from side to side, the small white ball on the end making a soft, almost musical 'tap 'tap' note on the solid floor. As I watched, he stopped in his tracks. Strangely enough, he appeared to be 'looking' around the room, by doing a half rotation, something like a radar antenna. Perhaps he can see shapes? He appeared to make a decision. He made a bee line directly for me. He walked past several other people, and stopped just in front of me. His eyes stared at a point somewhere in the distance over my left shoulder.

"Excuse me" he said, in a very elegant voice. "I am looking for the departure terminal. Can you possibly show me where it is?"

"Of course. You are in the arrivals area. You just need to go up to the departure area. I'll show you. This way."

I walked a tad slower than normal, my new friend close by.

"The escalator starts here." We both stepped on, and rode it up two floors.

"It stops now." We walked off, the white ball making the musical 'tap' 'tap' on the highly polished floor.

"The check-in area is this way." We made our way towards the queues of people at the check-in area.

"I rang them, they are expecting me." he said.

Luckily, I noticed a "Special Services" check-in counter, and adjusted my direction. My friend followed, close by. I stopped.

"OK, you are in a queue at the Special Services check-in counter, and there is just one person ahead of you. They'll call for you soon."

I looked over, and could see the check-in staff noticed what was happening.

"I thank you so much. You have been wonderful."

I could actually feel his warm appreciation, something real, and something tangible.

"No problem, buddy." Quite impulsively, I put my hand on his shoulder. "No problem at all."

I casually returned downstairs, with a puzzling, unusual feeling of elation. Turning off the escalator, I saw my V.I.P. standing next to the carousel, bags in hand, impatient to go, looking vainly for a familiar face.

"Hi! Peter!" I called out, briskly walking over to him.

He recognised me, and the concern vanished.

"I was wondering where you were."

"I was just taking a blind man upstairs."

Peter gave me one of his looks – a 'now I've heard everything' type of look.

It didn't matter. I didn't care.

That little incident just made my day.

Word count 735