

Chapter 1

Brisbane

Justin

Justin Kipps can only laugh.

The way this land is governed is lunacy on so many levels – a tragic comedy, if it wasn't so serious. No wonder Justin's generation scoffs at the gridlock of politics and those who profess to be experts in it.

Self-important media commentators endlessly trawl through each other's political opinions – as if by stirring and re-stirring the mud on the bottom of the pond, they might somehow bring clarity to the water.

And yet to solve it all is hardly brain surgery. They just have to stop doing *same old, same old*.

As a soon-to-be history/economics honours graduate, Justin Kipps feels somehow qualified to tell them there is no future in the past – only the past. Not even the present is the same as the past, let alone what it might become.

He is strolling in the direction of his parents' house – not where he lives anymore but a place of belonging nevertheless. Then he stops, puzzled – jolted from his thoughts. He is sensing a rolling thunder. He can't hear it but he feels it ominously moving towards his youthful frame.

Justin looks normal, as he should; like a fairly conventional twenty-one-year-old Australian – if on the favoured side of normal.

Perhaps that is why he gets twinges of guilt, why he questions the way the world is organised, why he gets so frustrated at the mindless theatre that passes for political or mass media *entertainment* priorities.

He has a suburban upbringing. Comfortable parental home. Executive secretary mother taking time-out until all the children finish school, while managing to squeeze in a game of bridge once a week to stay mentally sharp. Accountant father, who is a member of the golf club; younger brother and sister still in high school, while Justin himself is just waiting to graduate from uni.

They are a family who discuss issues and tell him to follow his dream. *You can be whatever you want to be* is the mantra. He knows it is just aspirational bullshit but they keep saying it and seemingly think that anything is possible. Or is it just the devil peeking over the window sill, winking, *If you believe it, it can't be a lie*, before ducking back like a chortling puppet-show character?

He glances up at the sky – is the atmospheric pressure changing?

Back to his thoughts. Political charades. Maybe he should stand for parliament – show them how it could be done. Maybe he should go all the way and become Prime Minister while he is young enough to see the answers. Actually it doesn't seem that hard – at least from the outside looking in.

Meanwhile, in Canberra ...

Chapter 2

Canberra

Police

The man's body looks peaceful, just pulled from the water at the base of the Scrivener Dam and shielded from any prying eyes by police privacy screens.

Detective Sergeant Sarah Power from Australian Capital Territory Policing, Criminal Investigations section, watches the pathologist, Dr Barry Cotter, make a preliminary examination.

Beside DS Power, newly appointed Detective Constable Luke Dexter, experienced in general policing but fresh from detective training college, asks, 'What do you think, Sergeant? Suspicious?'

'All deaths like this are suspicious, until proven otherwise,' comes the DS's over-the-shoulder reply. 'Just watch, listen and look around. Tell me what you see.'

'Caucasian male. Dark hair. Around 180 cm, at a guess. In a water pool at the base of the dam that holds back Canberra's huge lake. Clearly broken neck from the misshapen angle of the skull. No obvious wounds on the face or front. Clothes not cheap by the look of them – leather jacket, quality leather shoes, dress trousers, designer shirt, gold chain on neck, no rings.'

'So, how did he get in the water?'

'No flow over the top of the dam from Lake Burley Griffin, so he wasn't washed there from the lake. Given the broken neck – a fall from the pedestrian walkway above seems likely.'

The doctor turns the body over ... to reveal the back of the skull significantly distorted by an impact.

DS Power nods at the revelation with a wry smile. She gives a pointed look to the walkway above, where police motorbikes at each end have closed off public access. Forensic specialists in white overalls check the railing for possible evidence. She turns to Dexter. 'So, when?'

'By the look of the body, no obvious significant decomposition ... and near a lookout with a well-used car park. If it was here yesterday, in daylight, surely it would have been noticed. So, overnight?'

'That Lady Denman Drive going along the dam top would have cars crossing regularly during the night. He would be obvious standing waiting to jump, don't you think?'

'CCTV? Dash cams?'

DS Power nods again. 'Entering or leaving the bridge area in the past twenty-four hours. Anyone driving through, with or without dash cams. We need whatever we can find, to rule things in or out.'

The body bag is loaded into a police van to go to the morgue, the Forensic Medicine Centre in the suburb of Phillip. Dr Cotter moves towards the detectives, slowly pulling off his rubber gloves.

'First impressions, Doctor?' DS Power asks.

'Suspicious, I'd say, Sarah. I'll know more after an autopsy. No identification in any of the pockets. That's unusual. The wound at the back of the head looks too specific to be caused by hitting one of the concrete teeth in the spillway, even with water flowing from any normal release. That scenario is possible ... but the injury could just as easily be caused by a blunt instrument ... like a hammer, perhaps.'

Power turns to look at the watching DC Dexter to acknowledge the suggestion. 'And then falling or being pushed over the rail of the walkway, Luke. What do you think?'

'Curious ... a puzzle.'

Chapter 3

Brisbane

Wheels in motion

‘What have you done, Justin?’ his mother asks. ‘They were talking about it at the bridge club. “Is that your Justin that was mentioned on Sydney talk-back radio?”’

‘Sydney?’ A long way from his Brisbane home. ‘What are you talking about, Mum?’

He can feel it again – coming for him; like a road-train rolling down a dusty track, sensed but not seen for the cloud of dirt enveloping the apparition. Would it emerge like the *Horsemen of the Apocalypse*; dramatic, inspiring, threatening?

‘Dai Evans – only the most influential right-wing commentator in the land – has been going ballistic about what a Brisbane youth has written on social media. Justin Kipps. So, is it you?’

‘I posted a blog about greed and human nature. That’s all. A political statement.’

‘Was it called *The Manifesto*?’

‘Yes. But ...’

‘Oh, Justin. What have you done?’

‘It’s only a blog, Mum. Just to get people to think outside the square. What’s the fuss?’

‘The fuss is that *The Voice of Australia* is gunning for you and broadcasting your name all over the land. Oh, wait till your father hears about this.’

‘Slow down, Mum. Cool it. It was just a blog. That’s all.’

‘Did you use your own name?’

‘Yes. I’m not ashamed of my name. Should I be?’

A chatter of lorikeets heads like a cloud of darts from the tree in the back yard, screeching loudly, easily heard even through the kitchen window pane – spooked by something, as mother and son vaguely focus on the outside distraction. Justin can grasp it, the sense – it isn’t just the birds.

‘Mum, have you read what I wrote?’

‘No. Let me read it. Can you find it for me on my computer? I don’t follow anybody’s blogs – but maybe I’ll be reading yours. Do you know what *manifesto* means?’

‘Yes, Mum. I know what it actually means – and I’m not hung up by all the connotations others choose to put on the word. There ...’ He passes the seat at the computer over to his mother, who adjusts her glasses to focus on the text.

‘Yes. It is definitely on your blog,’ she says, as if checking her sanity before she starts to read. ‘It has your name on it ... Justin Kipps. I don’t believe this is happening. I just don’t believe it. And that you would use your own name. Oh, Justin ...’

The Manifesto. Part 1a – Economic Security

It is just unchecked human nature.

If there were no social rules and you said to people, ‘Take what you like.’ They would go through the place like a plague of locusts.

No rules – no checks and balances.

Greed – wanting more.

Fighting – for the scraps or to prove who is most powerful.

Sick – minds and bodies out of balance.

These are consequences. Even in nature, animals have social rules to survive. But man can often ignore the rules of survival evolution.

Isn't this what history teaches us?

That the strong and brutal conquer and colonise the weak. **It continues because it can.**

The catch comes when the wealth of the Earth has been squandered; and when the land turns into a wasteland unable to produce more sustenance. No?

In the wider modern world, it is more subtle.

The powerful make the rules and spin the narrative so that we are all led to believe that our place in life is just the natural historic order of things.

Progressively, we extract the finite resources of the planet and stuff the productivity. We are on a spiral of mindless destruction, heading like lemmings for the cliff.

I have a dream for lifting us out of the rut.

It has three planks: economic security, physical security and social security.

Let's start to peel the onion layers off the first part.

There seems to be less and less left to plunder; not wealth, not resources, not even space. So unhealthy scenarios take over – pillaging the remains of the fossil fuel and uranium resources which have the potential to wreck the planet. **You can see polluted skies with your own eyes.** In many of the countries around, people are walking with filtration masks. **I want clean air and uncontaminated water.**

We have to break that cycle of dependency on finite fuels.

It is just like a narcotic; we have been led to believe that there is no other way – that we can't escape from its addictive clutches.

Logically, electrical power will eventually have to be generated in a sustainable way from recyclables and by

using natural power: falling water, wind, sun, temperature and tides. This is not rocket science, but it *is* science.

It is just that the powerful vested interests who control the fossil fuel industries mount massive publicity campaigns to stifle all other commentaries and to control the decision makers.

Shock jocks spout sensational rhetoric as if it were true. The peddlers of that line cannot be allowed to ruin our lives.

We must call them out!!

These dealers tried the same technique with tobacco and asbestos, even with the African slave trade – and they lost all those arguments, eventually.

Their style is to ridicule and marginalise the objectors.

Wait for it to happen.

This is just the first onion layer of the first plank.

Watch this space for the next installment of *The Manifesto!*

Sally Kipps lifts her eyes from the screen and slowly shakes head. ‘I love you, son, but you’re too young to understand the complexities associated with this.’

‘Mum, I’m about to graduate with an honours degree in history and economics. I’m twenty-one, nearly twenty-two – an adult.’ He looks at his mother with accustomed peaceful eyes. ‘I’ve done my homework. I know what I’m writing about.’

‘Justin,’ she shakes her head again. ‘I’m not talking about economics or history. I know you are extremely bright but this is not like being president of the students’ union or debating for Queensland. I’m talking about power – nasty power. Politics is a dirty business. Your unflappability will not be enough. They will soon be investigating you – us – and even what your grandparents were like. You said it yourself in your blog. You don’t understand what they are

capable of. They are dirt diggers ... and the public will be happy to suck up any salacious rubbish that they write or speak. That's what you don't understand.'

'Hey, Mum. It's just a blog. What's the worst that can happen?'
And he stiffens to the ominous sense.

Chapter 4

Brisbane

Dai Evans

‘Justin, you’re on the breakfast show. Some dude called Dai Evans ...’ The voice of his sister carries up through the house.

‘Pause it, Jenny. Be down in a minute.’

Justin Kipps rubs his eyes. He hadn’t really intended to stop the night at home, but the evening conversation had needed some working through. His brother, Harry, had been right with him. He’d read the blog and had seen no big deal. He’d even suggested that Justin should run for parliament – a joke, of course. ‘You’ll have my tick in the box,’ he’d said, ‘when I’m old enough to vote later in the month; and I’ll get the footy team on-side, and the Year 12s, when they’ve all passed the magic birthday, too.’

His sister, Jenny, had just screwed up her face as fourteen-year-old girls can do, with ‘Hey, have you ever watched that parliament stuff? Drab men in suits either talking to empty green leather benches or else they’re shouting like some primary school rabble at break.’

His father hadn’t been aware of what had been going on when he’d eventually come home after a long day at work, but he’d picked up quickly on his wife’s waves of dread. ‘Can I read what you’ve written then, Justin?’

The sheet of A4 paper was flicked across the table – it had been printed out for maternal and filial analysis.

‘So, what’s wrong with that, then?’ his father had asked at last, with a puzzled frown.

‘Dai Evans is what’s wrong, Howard,’ his mother asserted. ‘He was ranting away on his talk-back show yesterday about this upstart Justin Kipps and young kids bagging the fossil fuel industry.’

‘Did he know anything about Justin?’

‘Only his name – but since when have facts mattered to him? I found out from Joan Wilkins at bridge. She’d heard it on morning radio and asked if it was our Justin who was being talked about. Kipps isn’t a common name.’

‘Tis in this house,’ Harry quipped, as his father gave a tolerant wince.

Howard turned to Justin. ‘Can he tell where you live from your blog?’

‘Only that I live in Queensland and that I’m a uni student.’

This drew a paternal laugh. ‘Well, that would get him going for a start. But your mother’s right. You have to watch that this doesn’t blow up into something bigger.’

‘I didn’t expect the shock radio or the tabloid TV to pick it up. I was just trying to write something to get people thinking and discussing. I thought maybe two men and a dog might give it a passing glance.’

‘But why do you have to write it at all, Justin?’ his mother had asked.

‘Because *politician speak* scores 10 on the BABS scale.’

‘What’s the BABS scale?’

‘Boring as Bat Shit. A ten point scale where 10 is the highest.’

‘That language is not appropriate, Justin,’ his mother had said.

‘It is more meaningful to my generation than the meaningless babble that comes from politicians.’

‘No, Justin. Many politicians work very hard and know what they are talking about.’

‘So why do they put the talking robots on mainstream media then. Okay. I accept what you say. You are probably right, Mum ... about some of them.’

His father intervened, 'Maybe just stop at this blog and it will all pass over.'

'But I've already posted the next one, Dad.'

'The next part of *The Manifesto*? Oh. Right. Okay. Well, we'd better read that one too.'

'I'll print it off.'

* * * *

It is back in Justin's brain – just pressure building – but, as he looks out onto a blue morning sky, it doesn't make any sense. The others are moving ... and heading for the stairs. This is today.

'Well, are you all coming?' shouts Jenny from downstairs. 'I don't want it stuck on pause for ever.'

Justin's brain clicks in.

'On our way,' Harry calls from the next room and his brother rumbles down the stair.

'Let it roll, Jenny,' Howard Kipps instructs, looking his usual business self in a long-sleeved blue shirt and dark pin-striped suit trousers as he tousles Harry's unkempt sandy hair at the breakfast bar. 'Still half asleep, son? All well, Sal?' He looks across at his wife, who is steeling herself, with the arm of her big son Justin now round her shoulders, for whatever is about to emerge on the television.

Well, what's your beef with The Manifesto, Dai? the presenter asks.

Just start with the title. If that's not the club colours of commies and lefties then I'm not a fair dinkum Australian. He's a student, for goodness sakes – hardly out of nappies and purporting to tell our business leaders that they are some evil horde of plunderers, drug dealers even, narcotics peddlers, when they are the very backbone of the standard of living that whelps like Justin Kipps take for granted ...

'Hardly out of nappies! A whelp!' Sally Kipps' anger burns in her eyes. 'How dare that opinionated creep make comments about my son? He doesn't know any of us. Why does he get air time?'

'Easy, Mum,' Justin soothes, his arm cuddling her shoulders. 'I'm not bothered.'

‘But I am,’ his mother asserts. ‘How dare he? Howard? How dare he?’

‘I agree. It’s not on. That’s tabloid TV at its worst.’

Let them get a job before they start commenting on how the world works. We don’t need such ill-considered undergraduate piffle floating out on this social media, as if they were giving us intelligent facts. Someone might be tempted to believe this lunacy. That’s the weakness in this whole social gossip thing. It is a very dangerous phenomenon. Anyone can write what they like. There’s no editorial oversight...

‘Who’s overseeing **him**?’ Jenny calls out. ‘He’s just shooting his mouth off ... and through those pouty lips. He’s just miffed.’

‘Jenny, Jenny.’ Her father’s voice is always measured. ‘He’s paid to provoke. That’s his job – unpalatable as it is. So that people will want to watch the show – waiting for the next blow-up. Controversy sells. That’s the way it works these days – and people must fall for it, if you believe the ratings.’

‘Bogans, maybe,’ his daughter replies with a snort.

And his second blog questions our fundamental values and about how to sort out Australia’s revenue stream. Where do they get off, these young ones? They haven’t lived and suddenly they are experts on tax law and revenue streams ...

Well, thank you, Dai Evans. We’re out of time this morning. We’ll save the tax dodgers for another time. I’m sure many of the viewers will be listening in to your talk-back later today to hear how this story develops. You should get Justin Kipps on your show – to see what your listeners would think ...

‘I’ve had enough.’ Sally Kipps’ tone is instruction enough to mute or kill the program – and perhaps all who are involved in it. ‘How dare he?’

‘Are you going on his show then, Justin?’ Harry asks, pretending to shadow box. ‘I’ll be your protection team.’

But Justin says nothing. He is listening to a rumble that no-one else can hear.

Chapter 5

Canberra

Hetty Fry and Malcolm McGlashan

The Prime Minister's chief of staff, Hetty Fry, phones from her office in the House of Representatives to Liberal Party headquarters in the Canberra suburb of Barton. She wants to draw the matter to the attention of the organisation's leader, Malcolm McGlashan.

'What? Some kid's blog on social media? Haven't we got more important things to do?'

'Usually, yes, Malcolm. It's called *The Manifesto*, Part 1a. That got Dai Evans going. He spoke about it as only he can on his talk-back show in Sydney yesterday – and he was on breakfast TV this morning.'

'And?'

'And ... there's a lot of interest in the matter.'

'So, something and someone that no-one had heard of has become an issue because bloody Dai Evans gave it some oxygen?'

'That's what it looks like.'

'He should know better. I'll speak to him. It'll be old news by the time the next drama hits. We'll come up with something to distract.'

'Perhaps not, Malcolm. The blog is linked to a Twitter feed – not the boy's personal account. After yesterday's talk-back, there were 23,000 retweets.'

‘These are just phantom followers. It’s the way Twitter is set up. It’ll pass.’

‘And after Evans appeared on the breakfast show this morning, the retweets have hit 500,000; that was in the next three hours. That’s hundreds of times more than the numbers of followers the kid had on his personal account. That’s big. It’s going viral.’

‘Damn. Damn. Damn. What’s the kid’s name?’

‘Justin Kipps. Student from Queensland. That’s all we know at this stage. His personal Twitter and Facebook have been made inactive.’

‘Alright. I’ll contact Peter. He’ll do some work on the kid and get some alternative comments jamming his blog.’

‘That’s the catch. There is no provision on his blog to make comments. It’s just a website. The word is spread only by Twitter and Facebook – and the youth grapevine. You can’t comment on his inactive personal accounts, either.’

‘What? Okay. It’s a flash in the pan, Hetty. But thanks for the heads-up. Peter and his team will neutralise this annoyance. Oh, do I need to be aware of what the kid is writing? Is there anything in it?’

‘I’ll copy them over to you as attachments. Malcolm, he may be young and naïve but I don’t think he’s an idiot. Even now, the international protest organisations are taking an interest. Peter can see it all if he goes on Twitter.’

‘Bugger!’

* * * *

Malcolm McGlashan finishes reading *The Manifesto* Part 1a while he splutters in confused annoyance, ‘Undergraduate piffle, alright! Why the fuss? Damn Dai Evans for giving air time to this rubbish.’

He opens the second blog. *The Manifesto* Part 1b Economic Security.

The Manifesto 1b – Economic Security

Our value system is all wrong!

When accumulating money is the desired end point of so much social activity, we have missed the plot.

‘What is this? Some set of leftie uni discussion topics?’
McGlashan mutters.

When **your value** is determined by how much money you can get, we have serious value problems.

Have we become prostitutes – being sucked into a seedy world by the lure of lucre?

There are many other human and social values like **decency, honesty** and **helping others**. Can’t we learn to be content with sufficiency – not to be greedy?

Where are our role models?

Politicians, lawmakers, chief executive officers, business directors, church leaders, sports people, media hosts ...

What values are they promoting?

Certainly, we need to collect revenue or money to pay for services – and we need to collect more than we spend.

That is just arithmetic!

How it is done needs to be **equitable** – not equal, **but fair**.

A fundamental underpinning principle of Australian life is *the fair go*.

It is conventional wisdom that every earner should pay a fair level of tax. But it has also been another type of conventional wisdom in Australia that people should find legal ways to minimise their tax bill wherever they can.

The underlying implication is that governments are ripping off people’s hard-earned.

To change an attitude, we need to stop the rip-offs, starting with public representatives using shonky rules to behave without moral integrity.

Book it up to the company or the government has been the get-out for centuries.

But the government is actually **us**, the tax payer – and it is us, the other tax payers, who are being ripped off ... not some anonymous government.

And the irony appears to be that the laws actually allow global corporations to minimise their tax contribution to next to zero – but there are no rules like that for you and me.

It is arithmetic.

The more rip-offs, the more the rest of us have to pay. Now, I'm a rebel. I freely admit that the stifling blanket of the status quo does nothing for me.

The attitude must change, starting with politicians perks, as an example to us all that no-one is getting special treatment. Follow that with removing legal loopholes on companies and people who avoid their fair level of tax.

Ah ha! The critics will cry. If you take away perks and loopholes, no global corporation will do business in Australia.

Twaddle (I'm being polite).

They do business here because they can make a fortune from resources and a cashed-up market.

The reason the loopholes exist is because weak-kneed lawmakers from the past and present have given into **lobbying intimidation**.

It is bribery, dressed in business suits and carrying legal briefcases.

Let them know that we won't put up with being conned
any more.

Do what I suggest and then see how the revenue part of
the ledger balances up!

Wait for more in the next edition of *The Manifesto!*

And McGlashan picks up his phone, 'Peter, we have an issue
for you to fix.'