

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Visit**

Columbus Day weekend came, and Doug was scheduled to visit his dad in Maine. He had not been home since arriving in Boston to start the program at PMW. There was a lot of moving to do, and dad came down from Maine to help. They brought a few items back to the house in Bangor, but Doug was only there for one night. There was no chance to relax. He had to forgo some visits to the clubs with Rich, but he had been looking forward to this trip.

He met Dad at the train station in Portland. Having no car, he had grabbed a cab from his Back Bay apartment to North Station. Doug took the Saturday morning Amtrak DownEaster to Portland. He saw Dad on the platform even before the train came to a stop. When he stepped off the train, it was from the door closest to where he was standing.

“Hey! The train was on time for once,” said Doug’s father as he stepped onto the brick platform. He had been on the train only once, while visiting from California. He visited Boston during a break from school, and took the train to Portland. Because of renovations at North Station, it had run a few minutes late. Every other time he visited Maine he had flown directly to Portland.

“Hi. Thanks for coming down here to pick me up,” Doug answered.

“Well, I had business in Portland this morning. Do you have any luggage?” Dad asked.

“Nope. Just this,” Doug said as he hiked up his duffel bag. He had only brought that and his work attaché. He had enough for a couple days’ visit.

“So, how was the trip?” Dad asked as they started walking. They moved to the opposite side of the platform to avoid dodging other people unloading from the train.

“Nothing much happened,” Doug answered. “Just took a cab from the apartment and now I’m here.”

“Well, it worked in your favor. The leaf-peepers jammed up the pike this morning. It’s probably still backed up.” He was referring to the vacationers coming to Maine to see the northeastern landscape in all its fall colors. The fall in New England is often bright, crisp, and dry enough to take a short hike to a vantage point. People brought their families to view hillsides covered in impressionist strokes of red, yellow, auburn, and orange. It was as if Monet had painted the earth itself. It also made traveling a pain in the ass.

“How’s the road back to Bangor?” Doug asked, making small talk.

“Oh, it wasn’t too busy going that way. We’ll be fine,” answered Dad. It was a three-hour drive to Bangor, too far for most day-trippers, and the leaves were probably past peak anyway. Northern New England treated Columbus Day as the last big vacation weekend. Every town bristled with craft and

jewelry shops, and roadside farm stands selling the last of their harvest, apples and pumpkins, Indian corn and gourds.

After that, they would board up the buildings and hunker down for winter. The next time hordes of cars headed north there would be skis on the roofs.

“Any news from Boston?” asked Dad.

“No, nothing new. Work is good.” Doug answered.

“What do you think of the Fed?” Dad was talking about an interest rate hike that took place the previous week. Doug had only paid it scant attention. The macro issues of interest rates and inflation were left to the VPs, while the trainees were constantly mired in the minutiae of individual returns and market sector research. From the office chatter, Doug gathered that the rate hike had been greater than expected, and it caused the markets to plunge a little before stabilizing.

“Oh, I guess it was larger than expected. Didn’t help us much,” he said.

“I’m betting you moved to bonds a little more,” guessed Dad.

“Most likely. The VPs are predicting decent growth next year,” Doug told him.

“I imagine they’re not worried, but I don’t know if I agree. I see things getting out of control,” Dad said. He generally had a negative view of the economy. It is not as though he had any reason to.

Dad’s name was Jonathan, and he was a successful businessman. He opened a bookstore at 22, Doug’s age, and had a small local chain going with a few years.

He had sold much of his stake at 53, and seemed to be doing quite well financially. He kept up with repairs to the house, but hired out for bigger fixes. The last thing done to the house was an addition with a deck and a large great room. This was only a few years ago, before mom died.

Doug seldom ventured into talk of economics, but was feeling a little bolder now that he had a few months’ time in the real world. “So why do you think there’s a problem?” he asked.

“Well, national debt, for one. Not only that, but the only thing propping up the economy is consumer spending, and people are going to the mat for that. The savings rate is zero.”

“Well, it’s cheap capital. My industry thrives on it,” Doug told him, though he knew.

“Yes, but it is not sustainable. Any business, and you know this, has to start making more than its debt service or the loan gets called.”

“Actually, debt service should not reach more than a certain percentage of revenues,” Doug said.

“Right, but if every consumer started being seen as a business, most of them would be way beyond that percentage already.”

“So what happens if they quit spending? We’d have a disaster,” Doug cautioned.

“You’re right. That’s why it’s untenable. What needs to start growing is wages,” said Jonathan. It was hard for Doug to see any problem with wages, since he was making six figures.

“That would start driving up prices, though, and you’d have inflation.”

“Well, that’s driven by currency, and ours is heading toward inflation even without it,” answered Jonathan.

“Hmm,” Doug was out of arguments.

They weren’t arguing to win, but Jonathan took the high road anyway. “Right now we’re just not diversified as a national economy. Everything is in residential real estate, real estate construction, and real estate financing. It’s a dangerous position.”

“Well, yeah, we try to keep balance in our funds,” Doug said, referring to the general strategy at Prichart, Molin and Weaver.

They were well along the highway now, and marinas and suburbs had given way to cornfields and forests. The highway exits in Maine begin to get further apart as you drive north, and Doug realized he had not seen one in some time.

Out of the blue, Jonathan asked a question about politics. “How is your governor doing down there?” he asked.

Massachusetts was in the middle of a heated governor’s race. The incumbent, a Republican, was polling narrowly ahead of the Democratic contender. Doug knew this only from headlines. Practically everybody in the office who was outspoken about it was also a Republican. He remembered

thinking it was funny that in a state that had a reputation for being a leftist nirvana, the loudest political idealists were always the conservatives.

“He seems to be doing okay,” Doug told him.

“Interesting,” dad mused, “how that state keeps doing that.” Massachusetts had been electing Republican governors for decades.

“Actually,” Doug said, “I was with some co-workers at lunch, and we bumped into a bunch of protesters. Their issue was the free-market.”

“For or against?”

“They were for,” Doug said, “Definitely for. They talked about Globalization.”

“Ah,” Jonathan mused.

“They actually invited us to a seminar in a few weeks. I have the flyer in my bag.” Doug had brought some paperwork for the weekend. One of his projects required some reading, and the flyer and invitation just happened to be in his attaché.

They continued driving, and it was mid-afternoon before they arrived in Bangor. There was enough time to visit Jonathan’s latest projects, including a fence that he was repairing. Most interesting was the sailboat he was re-finishing. He hoped to have it painted and moored the following spring. After a tour around the yard, he dragged out a barbecue and started heating the coals for dinner.

Doug sat back on one of the patio chairs and pulled out the flyer and the invitation. He had not read much of the flyer.

It was dense with economic theories and charts. There were numbers going back several decades. Most of it was in support of Globalization, and a lot of the charts were correlations showing things like rising public school funding vs. slumping average test scores. A chart showed average wage spikes that followed diminished corporate regulations. Another showed how lower interest rates led to higher rates of home ownership.

The point made by Dr. Currier and his Army of the Free Majority was that Globalization was a trend that would only happen once, and nations could not afford to resist its effects. That was why the country needed to continue to relax regulations and limit taxes. This, the flyer said, would give investors enough free capital and leeway to take advantage of global trends. They saw that prosperity could flourish once the entire world operated in the same economic realm.

Jonathan came out of the house with a couple of steaks on a platter, and set them down on the patio table. He noticed the flyer.

“The Army of the Free Majority,” he bellowed in a mock basso profundo. Doug looked up at him curiously.

“Have you ever heard Currier speak?” he asked, drifting into the low, loud voice again. “He has this loud, booming voice.”

“No. That’s what he sounds like?” Doug asked.

Jonathan slipped back into his normal Maine tone. “He used to. It was unbearable in the 70’s. I assume he’s aged, but I’ll bet he’s still tough to listen to.”

“I’ve never heard of any of him, or his group.”

“They’ve been kicking around. I’m surprised they still exist. Can I see?” Jonathan asked, reaching for the flyer. Doug handed it to him.

“Hmm. They’re still on message,” he mused. “They were talking about Globalization long before it was popular.”

“Did you run into them before?”

“Run into them? Actually, yes. I was once a member.”

“Are you kidding?” Doug gasped. “When?”

“I did some campaigns with them. I even took part on their committee. I was in college, before I met your mom. We followed Currier around the country and cheered him at every lecture. He could go for hours talking about Globalization. Of course, he barely registered in the polls.”

“I didn’t know you did that. The guys we met were pretty intense. Were you like that?” Doug asked.

“Oh, we were. Very. We held signs that said stuff I can’t believe, stuff I regret,” he answered.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s not like we were profane. Too cerebral for that,” dad said. “Our stuff was more, well, narrowminded socially. We had evil stuff against the poor, against the working class.”

“Like what?”

“Well, like, ‘Poverty is a state of mind’, ‘Prisons are homes too’, and ‘Reward owners, replace workers’, stuff like that,” Jonathan said. “I’ve changed my mind since, but have never forgotten those angry campaigns.”

“So you don’t like this Globalization trend?”

“No. It’s not that any one person can do much about it. It’s just that I think there are ways to use it to enrich every citizen, and the current powers are blind to all ideas. They see it as an excuse to get rich at the expense of others.”

“But doesn’t it do that anyway?”

“No. There is still a need for fairness. You see, Globalization causes communities all over the world to change drastically. Industries that have driven local economies for centuries are destroyed, while American businesses take them over as sources of cheap labor. Our own corporations are the slave merchants of our times. We the people drive it, because we like cheap junk, and we own stock in these companies.”

“But those other countries grow, too,” Doug offered.

“Not really. The poorer civilizations disintegrate into tribal conflicts, and our government allows it, because the worse the conditions, the easier it will be to reap the benefits later. Then, we offer aid, but only with certain requirements, like a limited political structure, few if any business regulations, and a technology-oriented school system.”

“But we improve the situation,” Doug said.

“Well, we will have taken a sovereign nation, a society that existed for millennia, and we strip it of everything that made it unique,” Jonathan said. “So it’s better? Strip malls and fast food, where there were once thriving insular villages. All they really become is consumers dependent on the same junk.”

“But we create wealth here as well, don’t we?”

“For a few, yes. You see, at the same time, we exploit our own workers by driving down wages, destroying union power, and homogenizing our society. Fewer and fewer people are making the decisions for more and more.”

“As long as I’m one of the people making the decisions,” Doug said.

“Well, that’s how it works. You trick people into believing they are in charge of their lives, and they’ll keep buying in.” Jonathan suddenly realized he was undermining Doug’s entire purpose in the investment banking business.

“But I am proud of you, Doug,” he said. “The requisites for success were written by others, and you have met them. Maybe you will have the chance to rewrite them someday.”

Doug found that a little deep. He was getting hungry, and he looked at the steaks. Jonathan noticed, and went to check on the coals. They were ready to start cooking.

After a large steak dinner, Jonathan announced that the next day, he needed to clean some junk out of the garage to bring to the church. Doug instantly knew why he had been summoned north. Gracious hospitality was a singular Maine custom, but so was backbreaking weekend labor.

A few times a year, Dad’s church collected stuff for their fundraisers. It was sold during their bazaar sales, or donated to charities. This time of year, they were raising money for holiday dinners.

Sometimes the church sold scrap metal, which could be found in abundance in northern Maine. Everybody had an old

barn or garage with antiquated tools, or some old farm implements. There were probably tons of steel and iron sitting within a square mile of Dad's house. His garage alone probably held enough junk to feed a family or two for a year.

The next morning, they were up for a breakfast of blueberry pancakes and some bold coffee. Then Doug put on some old workboots that were a size too large, and followed Dad out to the garage. The day was bright and warm. He saw a neighbor skimming his pool, and realized the weather really wasn't warm enough for that.

Jonathan punched the door opener and watched the door lurch open. The door was not opened often. He did not normally leave the car in the garage, and Doug could see why. The car would have to be the size of a doghouse to fit. Dad kept a lot of stuff.

The garage was darker toward the back, and Jonathan turned on the light to help. Doug saw several empty boxes that were marked from Singapore, the same country that the boxes in Kand's store had come from. The boxes even looked similar to the ones in the store. Jonathan saw him notice them.

"Those carry books," he said.

Doug did not say anything about the boxes. He remembered that his dad had owned a chain of bookstores before he retired. Jonathan went back to ignoring them. After they sidled along a narrow row between stacks of junk, they got to the workbench. The garage had a workshop and many tool chests along one wall. If the garage was useable, it would

make quite a craftsman's haven. Jonathan turned on a lamp that was hanging over the workbench. He pointed out a few tools he had bought online. Some of them were antiques.

He reached to the wall where one tool was hanging. It was a rusty old spindle, and Doug had never seen anything like it. It had a handle, a spike, and a round flange with a symbol on one side. He could not figure out what it was for.

Jonathan pulled it down and said it had belonged to his father-in-law. Mom's dad. He kept it while cleaning out the house after her death. She had inherited the tool from her parents. After she died, Jonathan could not bear to get rid of it, so he put it in the garage workshop with most of his other tools.

Jonathan still did not want to talk about what happened to Mom. Showing Doug the old tool on the wall was the closest he had ever come. The pattern on it looked familiar, like one of the symbols Doug had seen on the knight's chest, and on Kand's necklace. It was like a stick and a round ball, or a wheel. Maybe it was a lever of some kind.

"I've seen that," Doug said.

"Oh, seen what?" Jonathan said, surprised.

"That symbol. The lever."

"This. Yes, it's a lever. A kind of universal symbol for the simple machine," said Jonathan. "Where have you seen it?"

"A couple places," Doug told him. "There was a knight's suit of armor in Boston, and it had this grid on it. This was one of the symbols."

"Ah. The Global Grid."

“It has a name?” Doug asked.

“Right. It’s an ancient symbolic work of art. It illustrates all the building blocks of a human civilization.”

“Oh,” Doug said. “It looks like a tic-tac-toe board.

“Well, it was once used as a game,” said Jonthan.

“A game?”

“Yes. As I understand it, people used to try to create combinations of three symbols. Some symbols were said to be worth more, but also less than others, depending on the combinations.”

“Kind of like rock-paper-scissors,” Doug said.

“Yeah, something like that,” said Jonathan. “This symbol was for a tool, which meant it could be combined with a resource and a means of communication, and the inventors could use it to build a house or a road. They would combine with other symbols to assist trade between people who did not speak the same language. It was kind of an early hieroglyphic.”

“So it was also a language.”

“Right. From what I understand, it comes from Asia, and there are people who still use it today.”

“These other symbols, do you know what they are?” Doug asked.

“I do not remember. It’s not exactly a mainstream ideology. There was a tree, and a scroll.”

“We saw those.”

“And the symbols have changed over the centuries, too,” finished Jonathan. He paused for a second, then put the

tool back up on the board. “Anyway,” he said, “your granddad hardly ever used it. I don’t know why I kept it.”

They got to work filling the back of Dad’s car. It would have been nice if he had prepared the items he planned to bring, but they spent a lot of time bogged down with indecisive reasoning. Should they bring the broken lawnmower or could it be fixed? Did Dad still need it in the spring? Did he need all six snow shovels? They finally decided on delivering four of them, and keeping, Doug noticed, two.

After taking two hours loading up the car, they went to the church. Around back, the church ladies had set up a table to catalogue all of the incoming junk. The men had set up a system to remove everything from the cars and pickup trucks that came in, and put everything in the church basement.

Dad and Doug helped them carry stuff in, but they were clearly in charge. They had a system. Doug’s B-school training helped him understand what they were doing, and where they could make changes. MBAs have a way of trying to improve processes wherever they see them, sometimes to a fault. He saw the stern faces and the steadfast manner of the men, and kept his mouth shut.

After four rounds of cleaning out the garage, loading the car, and being ordered around by guys who normally replaced telephone poles, they were done. They had a bean dinner at the church, followed by several rounds of homemade pies. The whole time, some guy named Walter dominated the conversation with stories about hunting. Doug listened,

laughed, and also kind of observed the scene from outside it. If he had to tell anyone what his weekend in Maine was like, this was so cliché that nobody would believe it.

When they got back to the house, it was pitch black outside. The garage was still open and lit up. Jonathan went to the garage door and flicked on an outside light. He pressed the button to lower the garage door, and they left through another door on the side of the garage. The door opened onto the patio where they had had dinner the night before. The night air had cooled by now, and it was time to get inside.

Jonathan read through a section of the day's paper, while Doug watched television. Law & Order was always on somewhere, so he watched half an episode while Dad finished the paper and went upstairs to bed.

Doug soon turned off the television and picked up the section of paper his dad had been reading. There was an article about an old dilapidated hospital in a nearby town. Apparently the people in town were outraged because the building was slated to be rebuilt as a business incubator, but an out-of-state condo developer won the bid instead. There was suspicion of kickbacks to the selectmen, but not in so many words.

Another article noted the new terminal being built at the airport. It was supposed to be used for housing terror suspects, but its primary use was to inspect large cargo shipments that came into the country from the east. Others like it were being built around the country. People hoped this would bring some of the large shipping companies into the area, while

environmentalists worried that it would cause massive land-clearing and destruction of the land around the airport. Still another group of anti-globalization activists were outraged about the terminal, and unlike the greenies, they were known for creating violence.

Doug had never noticed stories about anti-Globalization before, but he figured this was a coincidence, because of the discussion Rich, Vanessa and he had had with the Army of the Free Majority people. He was bound to notice these types of stories a little more.

Doug shut off the light and climbed the stairs to the guest room. He had to be on a train at 11AM, so the next day was going to be an early one. They were three hours from Portland, so they needed to be on the road before 8.

Doug opened the door to the room and started packing for the morning. He noticed a photo of Mom on the dresser. It was taken before he was born, and was in the grainy, pale color of a photo from the 70's. She was standing in a parking lot, in front of her father's green Plymouth Fury, and she looked no older than 20, which was likely. Doug's mother was younger than Dad by about 15 years. Her name was Elaine.

Because she was so young, Doug felt that allowed them to be very close. They shared a taste in music, and she kept up with the fashions of Doug's generation pretty well. She taught him to play tennis and paddle a kayak. She also knew when to back off, when Dad would press Doug for information on what he'd been up to. Jonathan and Doug did not always see eye-to-

eye, and she served the role of moderator. She helped Doug understand his dad, and vice-versa.

Mom passed away during Doug's first semester in business school. He never forgave himself for not being here when it happened. He had to fly back for the funeral on a weekend, and then fly out again on Monday. There were so many family members around, and he did not really have time to grieve with them. It was the holidays before he could come home and really start missing Mom. That was a tough year.

She had died in an accident, one that Dad walked away from. He never really told Doug the story, and Doug never pressed him for it. From the news clippings, the car had plunged through a guardrail into the Penobscot River. Dad had tried to get her out of the car, but the seatbelt buckle would not open, and the car filled with water too quickly for him to breathe. The car sank to the bottom within seconds, and Mom died in 12 feet of frigid water. The authorities thought there was a brake malfunction that was undetectable by inspection.

The next morning, Doug was up early to grab breakfast. Jonathan was in the kitchen preparing toast and bacon. He asked Doug if he wanted eggs. Doug glanced at the clock before answering, but they had plenty of time. Not wanting to be too much of a burden, he asked for scrambled. Jonathan reached for the eggs and broke two of them into a bowl.

"Dad, did you put that photo of Mom in my room last night?" Doug asked.

"You mean the one from Kollings' Restaurant?"

Doug did not realize the photo was taken at that restaurant, though he knew the place. "I guess. It was taken there?"

"Yes, it was taken the day we found out she was pregnant," answered Jonathan. He had started whipping the eggs with his fork.

Doug paused. When it was open, the restaurant was often used by the family to celebrate good news. "So you went to Kollings' to celebrate?"

"Right. I think she had the chicken teriyaki salad. I had the ribeye."

Kollings' was known for its steak. The restaurant had burned a year before, but Doug had had some birthday parties there in grade school. "You remember what she had?"

"Of course," said Jonathan. "Your mom was a sucker for chicken teriyaki." This was the most he had said about Mom since she died.

Doug decided to press. "So, what exactly happened?"

"What happened? Oh, you mean the night. Right." Dad paused and looked out the window. Then he looked at the clock. He finished beating the eggs and poured them onto the griddle. "We were actually coming from that restaurant." He paused again.

Doug looked at the clock to see that there was still time to get to the bottom of this. He pressed on. "What did you celebrate?" he asked.

“Well, we had gotten word of a deal that went through. I was already retired, but we were looking at some property, and we won a bid that day.”

“Property, where?”

“Well, it doesn’t matter now. We were going to build a farm and start raising horses.”

Doug was not terribly surprised. Mom had had models and paintings of horses all around the house ever since he was small. “You never mentioned this to me.”

“You were going to be my first call once we got home. It was late here, but with the three hour difference for you, it would have been about 7 at night.”

Doug realized that the night Mom died, he received a voice mail from Dad while he was at the police station. It was about 9 at night by then, and he was at a party. This was another thing he would always regret. Dad’s message had said simply, “Doug, please call me.”

“I know,” Doug said hesitantly. “I was at a party.”

“That’s alright,” said Jonathan. He poked at the eggs. They were nearly done.

“I would have rather heard about the new farm. What happened?”

“Well, I had three days to back out of the deal. Standard procedure.”

“No, I meant that night.”

Jonathan looked up from the eggs. “Oh. We were on the road coming back. I think we went that way because of a

detour on the bypass. I was just trying to beat traffic.” Dad was not a leadfoot, but he did like to keep the car moving. “We wouldn’t even have been on that damn road.”

“Was it wet?” Doug asked.

“No, the brakes just went out, and I didn’t have time to throw it into park.” Jonathan always told Doug how to stop a car. He remembered the days when brakes were not as reliable.

Jonathan continued, “The car flew down the embankment into the river. It just plunged to the bottom. Just plunged.” He was starting to tear up.

“You don’t have to keep going,” Doug said.

“It was the damn seatbelt. Mine opened right up, but not hers. The water was too cold. Cold water like that, it just takes away your strength. I couldn’t do it.”

“Sorry, Dad.”

“Doug, the most important part, I never told you,” Jonathan said. “You remember her smile?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, it was the last thing she did. She knew she was about to drown, and she just smiled,” Jonathan said as his eyes welled up.

Doug sat silently, wondering at the strength something like that would take. His own eyes were watering.

“I swear I was ready to stay with her until I died, but she just smiled at me. I knew what she meant.”

“What do you mean?” Doug asked.

“She said, a long time ago, that when she died, she wanted to be smiling. She said if she had lived a full, complete life, it was worth enjoying, even with her last breath. I thought she was nuts.”

Jonathan paused again. “But she meant it. When she smiled at me, I knew it meant, ‘I have had a full life. I am happy. I love you.’” He could barely get out the words.

“Oh, my God.”

“Anyway, I swam out of there.”

The eggs were done, and Jonathan scraped them off the skillet and put them on Doug’s plate. They drove out a few minutes before 8, to get to the train on time. The road was wet from the drizzle that had started overnight, and the sky was grey and featureless. They got to the station, and Doug pulled his bag out of the back seat.

Jonathan watched him remove the bag, and said, “By the way, I am going to be in Boston in a few weeks for business.” Though he was retired, he still met with some of his friends in the business world. He had periodically traveled to Boston since Doug was little.

“Oh, well, let me know. I’ll be around,” Doug said.

Jonathan motioned toward the ticket booth. “Got your ticket?” he asked.

“Uh, yeah,” Doug said as he rifled through his attaché. He pulled out the flyer from the Army of the Free Majority and handed it to Jonathan. Dad chuckled and said, “Ha! Maybe I will check in on them to see what they are up to these days.”

“Oh, actually,” Doug said as he reached into the bag again. “They are having some kind of meeting soon, maybe when you’re in town you can use this.” He found the invitation and handed it to Dad.

“Yeah, this is the same week,” Jonathan said.

“Alright. See you then. Thanks, Dad,” Doug said as he closed the bag and slung it over his shoulder.

“Yup. See you soon.”

Doug walked up to the platform and turned to see Dad drive away. He climbed onto the train and found a seat.

He thought for a minute about the Free Majority. It was a big surprise that Dad knew them. He hoped to never see them again, and he was glad to be rid of the invitation and flyer.

On the way back to Boston, Doug thought about the way Mom died. He hoped his own death was a long way off. Doug decided that he, too, when he met his death, would try to stare it in the face and smile, just like Mom.