

Chapter 10

The Program Accelerates

On Monday morning, Doug arrived at work early, to collect his thoughts about the visit to Weymouth. He and the other trainees were scheduled to have a meeting with Franklin mid-morning, to get their new assignments. He sat down at his cube and turned on the monitors.

Doug still had the address for the modeler, but he did not dare to open it. It might have helped him figure out what business was located in the building in Weymouth. This kind of info could only be found at the town hall, and that was if the business was legit. Doug had every suspicion that it wasn't.

At about 8:30, Rich came by with a look on his face that showed a little curiosity, but a lot of concern.

“So, did you go?” he asked.

“Yeah, I did.”

Rich moved closer and leaned on the desk. “Tell me you're kidding,” he whispered.

“No. I was there,” Doug said. He was now concerned.

“I came up the garage elevator this morning. Molin was out on the landing.”

“Did he say something?” Doug asked.

“Well, not to me. I heard him when the elevator opened. I would have walked right out, but I heard your name.”

“What do you mean?”

“I heard, ‘Doug Wilson... something something... kid was snooping around in shit he had no business in...’ stuff like that,” Rich said. It was clear he had not heard enough to know what was really going on.

“Shit. What else?” Doug asked.

“I heard, ‘never should have gotten him involved...’ What did that mean?”

“If he was talking about me, I think I know. Anything else?”

“No. The elevator door closed. I went down a floor and came back in through reception,” Rich said.

“Do you think he was on to you?”

“No. He may have seen the doors open, but not me. What did you do?”

Doug instantly regretted ever telling Rich and Vanessa what he was doing. This would be much easier if it was only his problem.

Rich did not wait for an answer. “You told us about the modeler. Does this have anything to do with that? We may as well know everything.”

“Okay,” Doug said. “I told you about the modeler. We think it's some kind of thing that can manipulate the market.”

“Mm hmm,” Rich agreed, “and we think somebody plans to use it to make a ton of money.”

“Well, I wanted to find out if there was anything to that address we got at the Free Majority seminar.”

“You got,” Rich corrected him. “We did not all take the folders.”

“But you gotta understand, the address was the same as in the binder I found last week.”

“The binder Brey got caught with,” Rich said.

“Yeah. I got it in the fileroom before the office opened. I was looking for the database instructions, because the code and the address had the same numbers.”

“You never found those, though,” said Rich.

“Right, but I found the binder for the Naval Base, and it had the address. I had to find out why.”

“Damn, Doug. I think you fucked up.”

Doug slumped in his chair and looked at the floor. “So, do you want to know what I saw?”

At that moment, Vanessa came over. She still had her coat on. “Guys?” she asked, nodding toward Molin’s office. “Something’s up.”

Rich and Doug motioned for her to duck into the cube.

“I went to Weymouth,” Doug said.

“I don’t want to know,” Vanessa said. She stood up and held up one hand. She walked briskly out of the cube and ducked into her own. Rich and Doug watched, and then Rich ducked down again.

“What was there?” he asked.

“The address was for this broken-down house. I knocked on the door, and some lady answered.”

Rich listened without making a sound. They both knew he had little time to tell the story.

“The husband came home and berated me. They were sick of being bothered.”

“By people looking for the Free Majority?”

“Probably,” Doug said. “There was an office building across the street. It was empty.”

“You think there was some underground business going on there?”

“Not at the apartment,” Doug answered. “But the office building was suspicious. I’m going to look-”

“Guys. Shut. Up,” they heard Vanessa’s voice whispering harshly on the other side of the wall.

Rich and Doug looked up. Franklin was walking their way. Doug sat up straight and Rich kind of straightened as well. They watched Franklin walk directly toward Doug’s cube and stop.

You two are needed in the conference room,” he said. Then he craned his neck toward Vanessa’s cube. “Vanessa?”

“Yes,” Vanessa answered as she stood up.

“You, too,” Franklin said as he walked away.

Rich and Doug looked at each other. They stood up and followed Franklin. It seemed they were starting to make this trip a little too frequently. Vanessa walked behind them. Doug did not expect her to distance herself, but clearly she was thinking of her career. He realized that Rich probably should hang back, too, though he didn’t.

Franklin stopped at the door to the conference room and gestured for them to enter. Molin was already in there, sitting at the opposite end of the table.

“You kids have a seat,” he said.

The three sat down. Molin looked for a long minute as if he was waiting for them to say something. There was nothing for them to say. Doug was pretty sure Molin would stop him if he started to talk. Franklin did not sit, but leaned against the credenza behind us.

Molin began, “We are accelerating your program.”

The three trainees looked at him in amazement. This sounded like good news.

“You are supposed to be here for about three more months, and then you’ll move to another office,” he said.

The three nodded.

“Instead,” Molin continued, “you will be moving out this week.”

Molin waited for us to nod lightly, and then went on. “You were all going to be sent to Hong Kong. At least that was my recommendation, until about last Monday.”

This no longer sounded like good news.

Molin looked up at Franklin, and asked, “Joe, they have no assignments right now, right?”

“Nothing important,” answered Franklin.

Looking back at the trainees, Molin said, “Good, you will take whatever personal items you have in your cubes and take off today. Your tickets will be sent to you at home.”

They were stunned. Something was terribly wrong, and Doug knew it was his fault. He had not wanted to get the other two into this.

Doug started shaking his head. Molin noticed.

“Question?” Molin asked him.

“I did not tell them anything. They had nothing to do with this.”

“Doug, it’s done,” Franklin said, walking over. Rich and Vanessa looked like they were pissed.

“No,” Molin said. “It doesn’t matter now. This is out of our hands.”

Doug’s eyes went wide. “What do you-?”

Molin held up a hand to interrupt him. “It means the ball is now rolling. You guys have to be out of here within an hour.”

Rich was through being passive. “Sir,” he asked. “What city are we going to?”

“Cities,” said Molin. “We have to break you up. Rich, you’ll be going to Denver. Vanessa to San Francisco, and Doug...” he paused as he looked at a page in front of him, “to Washington. As in D.C.”

Vanessa and Rich now glared at Doug. He could feel their stares, but continued looking at Molin.

“Mr. Molin, I swear, they were out of it,” he stammered.

Molin held up his hand again, as if to calm Doug as well as stop him. “It doesn’t matter,” he said.

Franklin sat down in front of them and said, “Also, I would recommend you stay around Boston until you get the tickets. You’ll need a day or two to pack.”

Molin paused again, and then continued, “I do not recommend hanging around together.”

The three sat with their heads held low. They had a good thing going, and now it was blown to hell.

“This is not a bad thing,” said Franklin. Doug was completely unconvinced.

They sat there for a long minute waiting for Molin to talk again. Finally, he did.

“If you need boxes, we’ll bring them to you.”

The trainees were being treated like criminals. Rich and Vanessa had no idea why this was necessary, and Doug probably should have known, but didn’t.

Franklin stood up and motioned toward the door. They stood up and filed out in front of him. Doug never saw Molin look up from the table.

They walked back to the cubes, with Rich and Vanessa following Doug a few yards. Other people in the office never even looked at them as they walked by. Doug felt like everybody knew what was going on.

Franklin stopped at the reception desk and asked for a few boxes, then he walked over to Doug’s cube. Doug opened his top drawer and started emptying it. He took his books from the shelf and took his posters down. Rich and Vanessa stood and watched as he pulled pins out of the cubicle wall.

“Vanessa, you can go and do the same,” said Franklin. “Rich, you ,too. I’ll be over in a few.”

They left, and Doug continued to remove stuff from his desk.

“Do you have any desktop files?” asked Franklin.

“No. They’re on the server,” Doug answered.

“They will be available in D.C., then.”

Doug was almost done cleaning out the top drawer. He had a couple coffee cups, and most of his belongings were the books, photos and posters, his hockey calendar, the golf balls, and a couple of Matchbox cars. The receptionist brought the boxes over at that instant. It took a moment to pass the boxes to Joe, and Doug saw her arch her eyebrows at the sight of him cleaning out his desk.

He started to fill the box, and Franklin passed a box over the wall to Vanessa. Doug got the impression that Joe was mostly interested in watching him instead of the others. At least they knew who was the culprit, whatever misdeed had been done. He decided to ask.

“Joe, what is this about?”

“Shhh,” Franklin shushed him.

Doug continued filling the box. It did not take very long. He looked at his email window, which was open on one of the screens. There were unreturned messages that he knew would not be returned this week.

Joe leaned in. “This is about your little detour the night of the party.”

“At the convention center?”

“Shhh,” said Joe.

When Doug was done filling the box, he closed it and turned to Franklin.

“So the seminar we went to really was some kind of subversive organization?” he asked.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, but somebody else probably does.”

“This is really out of your hands,” Doug said.

Franklin nodded and walked out of the cube. He went to Vanessa’s cubicle.

“You ready?” he asked her. She was almost done. Vanessa had fewer tchotchkes than Doug did.

Franklin walked over to Rich’s cube with a box. Neither Vanessa nor Doug came close to Rich, who kept all sorts of junk. He had several pairs of shades, golf balls, toy cars, action figures, and all sorts of posters hanging from the walls. There were baseball figurines, mugs, and even a couple of wine flutes. He was done emptying his desk, but he needed more than one box to hold all his stuff.

Doug took the time to try to talk to Vanessa. She stood in her cubicle and glanced at him, but mostly looked away.

“Vanessa, I will talk to them,” he said.

She folded her arms.

“This won’t happen. I’ll fix it.”

She looked at Doug and said nothing. Franklin came back and she looked away. He had seen her in the zone when

she was focused on a task, but he had never seen her so pissed. Doug had really blown it for all of them, and he could not blame Vanessa or Rich for being furious. This was his fault.

“Guys, you ready?” asked Joe. By now, a few people had popped up out of their cubes to see what was going on. Some appeared to go back to their work, but the trainees could tell that they had more than a cursory interest in them.

Rich came over with his boxes, and his coat draped over one arm. Vanessa had already put hers on. Doug realized that his was in the closet in the reception area.

They walked to the office doors, where he grabbed his coat and put his cell phone in the inside pocket. Rich took the opportunity to put down his boxes and put his coat on. Vanessa realized that her phone was in the box she was carrying, and she started to open it, when Joe interrupted her.

“Never mind that,” Franklin said, looking around at the rest of the office. Doug could see people prairie-dogging in their cubes. Joe held the door open for them as they walked through, and then rang the elevator. Doug wondered if he was going to come down with them.

The elevator came, and the trainees got in. Joe hesitated, then stepped on and pressed the button for the lobby. Doug figured he was doing them a favor, but it still felt like they were being escorted out of the building like criminals. Doug half-wished he could pull his coat over his head.

On the way down 14 floors, nobody said a word. They went to the revolving doors, where Franklin realized that

carrying the boxes would make things awkward. He opened one of the regular doors and they stepped out. Doug heard one of the security guards yell, “Hey!” just before the door shut. They hated seeing the doors open in cold weather. It was no longer Doug’s problem.

The three walked toward the corner and crossed the street. Once they were on the other side, Rich broke the silence.

“Well, anyone need a ride?” he asked, chuckling.

“Oh, shit, you’re in the garage,” Vanessa said.

“Yeah, I forgot,” he said.

“Franklin never took our security badges,” said Vanessa. “You could get back in,”

“Yeah, I’d better go now before they shut them off,”

Rich said as he started crossing back to the building. The other two followed him.

There was silence during the walk back. Doug could tell the other two were uncomfortable about being in a car together with him, and he stopped at the revolving doors.

“I don’t need a ride, Rich,” he said.

“Okay,” he said. Rich was not as pissed as Vanessa, but seemed more upset than Doug had seen him in a long time.

Vanessa would not look at Doug, but he could tell that she was disgusted and eager to get a few last words in.

“Guys. I’ll do everything I can to fix this,” he said.

“You can’t fix this,” Vanessa yelled. Rich and Doug stood back a little. “This was out of their hands. We... you got involved in something that goes beyond this company.”

“What do you mean?” Doug asked her.

“I mean you tampered with the goddamn stock market!”

Rich was silent, but he looked like he wanted to say something.

Vanessa went on, “They had to get us out of there. There was probably some kind of inquiry, and they need to keep this software a secret. The last thing they need is for somebody to come and question us about it.”

Doug and Rich stood in the cold and listened to Vanessa. Doug realized she was right. Molin and Franklin may really not have had a choice in what was going on right now.

“I never wanted to get us in trouble,” Doug said.

“Well, you did. We said don’t go to Weymouth. I knew there was more going on. I knew there was somebody watching. How could you not know that?”

“It was just a trip. I did nothing.”

“No, obviously this thing was illegal. Whether Molin knew what it could do, I don’t know, but now somebody in power has a clue about it.”

Rich stood silent as Vanessa vented. Doug could not tell where he stood on this.

“You gave them that clue, Doug. You fucked it up for PMW as well as us,” she said.

“Then why are they keeping us?” Doug asked.

“I don’t know. I guess we got a second chance to keep our careers. It’s how they weed out the deadwood.”

Rich looked at the ground. The look on his face told Doug that he agreed with Vanessa.

“I could tell them this was my fault. I could take the fall,” Doug said.

“You will anyway,” Vanessa said. “I guarantee you will not be at this company long.”

“I’m sorry,”

“No, I’m sorry,” said Vanessa.

Rich looked at Doug. “Sorry,” he said quietly. Doug was not sure what he was sorry about. He turned to enter the building.

“Have a nice fucking life, Doug,” Vanessa said, her eyes glaring right through him. She turned to follow Rich, and in a second, she disappeared behind the blue mirrored glass.

Doug stood in the cold and looked around. The day had actually brightened up a little. It was one of those frigid, bright days, without a cloud in the sky. He watched his breath crystallize in the cold air. Despite the freezing air, he decided to walk the blocks back home.

Whether Doug wanted to admit it or not, their time in Boston was over. Vanessa was probably right that PMW was weeding out the deadwood, and the bosses in Washington would probably be watching Doug like a hawk. He had to prove that he was not the deadwood. None of them were.