

Chapter 12

Caught

Doug woke up in a cold room that was clad entirely in metal. The bench he was on was metal. The floor was metal. The walls and ceiling were metal. The metal was reflective, but not like a mirror. It was enough to cause an overwhelming glare from the single stark lamp hanging from the ceiling. Doug squinted at it.

He had a throbbing headache. Doug had never felt anything like this even after massive bouts of drinking with Rich.

He sat up and immediately felt like puking. Doug laid back down so fast he hit his head on the bench he was lying on, and a boom echoed throughout the room. It hurt, but the nausea went away. Doug covered his eyes and rubbed them heavily.

“You have slept awhile.”

Doug lifted his hands but kept his eyes closed. He had heard a voice.

“You seem to be responding well to the chloroform.”

Doug lay still, and decided that if he was hearing voices in his head, he may as well get some answers.

“What is happening?”

There was a pause, which irritated as much as it scared him. “You have run afoul of the wrong crowd, I suspect.”

Doug opened his eyes. The glare had not gone away. He blinked and narrowed his eyes, then turned toward the voice. At least it was familiar.

“Who is there?” he asked.

“A fellow inmate. I think we have both crossed a line with somebody.”

‘Inmate,’ Doug thought. That didn’t sound good. His mind had gone through the forgetfulness of early morning before. Those moments when you wonder, ‘who am I?’, ‘What do I do for a living?’, then you remember, and it’s either good or bad. It had never lasted this long.

Then his mind started to clear. There were guys with guns, a dirty rug. Doug felt his face, and sure enough, there were specks of sand and dust in his cheeks. He rubbed it out. His wrists hurt, and he remembered the plastic ties that were pulled almost tight enough to break skin. Then he felt the pain in his back.

‘Inmate.’ Yeah. Doug was an inmate. He could open his eyes wider now, and he looked over at the voice.

“Good morning,” it said. “Actually, it’s probably late at night.”

Doug blinked again. The voice was coming from a person he knew. He had to turn his head upright to be sure. It was the guy who owned the store in Boston. It was Kand.

“Go ahead and sit up, slowly,” Kand said. “The nausea will go away in an hour or so.”

“What are you doing here?” Doug asked. “What am I doing here?”

“I know neither in detail,” Kand said. “I know my charges have something to do with suspicion of terrorist activity, but you don’t exactly look like me.”

Doug noticed his dark skin. He realized that it was definitely the hue the authorities usually associated with extremists. His long beard certainly didn’t help. He had never seen Kand with facial hair.

“Aren’t you Indian?” Doug asked.

“Well, I’ve got the look, I guess,” Kand said, smiling. He always had a very calm manner. Doug saw a delivery man knock over three rows of merchandise in the store once, a lot of it glassware. Kand simply smiled and said something profound. Then he got a broom. Doug remembers he still tipped the man.

But to be smiling in this cell, after being branded a terrorist, was weird. Maybe, Doug thought, Kand was not all there. Then he tried to sit up, as Kand said, slowly. It didn’t work. He lay back down on the bench.

Doug suddenly realized what was so annoying about the bench he was lying on, besides it being hard. It was freezing.

He looked over at Kand again, and a thought came to him. Currier had said something about Kand receiving explosive material from Singapore. How could the Free Majority have known about it? Kand averted his eyes, as if he knew that Doug’s mind had turned to him. He looked back at

the bright ceiling. If Kand was really a terrorist, Doug wondered why the hell he was in this cell with him.

Doug thought about all the news he’d heard about terrorists. They were sent to Gitmo, where their chance of getting out was about nil. The chance that anyone would hear from them again was zero. The issue was completely irrelevant to Doug until this moment. Were they there? He could see his breath in this stark metal cell, and figured there was no way Cuba is this cold.

Doug had always trusted Kand, but mostly because he was an interesting guy. No other reason came to mind.

“Do you have any idea where we are?” Doug asked Kand.

“Somewhere cold,” he answered. Could he possibly have been joking about this situation, Doug wondered? He had never pegged him as somebody shallow enough to seriously mean that response. He did not ask again.

“I read about a new Homeland Security installation in Maine, at the Bangor Airport,” Kand finished.

To think they were in Bangor was comforting to Doug somehow, even if it was only a whistle stop before Cuba. His mind was slowly clearing, and it needed information. He suddenly thought of a dozen questions to ask Kand.

“What makes you think we are in Bangor?” he asked.

“I did not say I thought we were in Bangor,” Kand answered. ‘Great, another semantic acrobat’, Doug thought. He was feeling pretty anti-semantic. The thought made him

chuckle aloud. The drugs or whatever he was on had obviously not worn off completely.

“So where do you think we are?” Doug asked.

“Bangor.”

Doug’s head hit the bench again, sending another loud ‘boom’ through the facility. It seemed to echo out in the hall for a minute and a half.

“Well, then what makes you think we are in Bangor?” he asked, this time knowing it was appropriate. Kand was playing with his mind, knowing it was weak at the moment.

“I am guessing only, but there are several clues. The drain in the floor, you see, is marked ‘Penobscot Plumbworks’, for instance.”

Doug looked at the drain, which was right in the middle of the floor, and like the rest of the room, had a shiny new cover. There was indeed raised lettering in the middle, but he could not read it, and wasn’t going over to look. He was very curious about the purpose of a drain in the middle of the floor.

Kand pointed to the ceiling. “If you look at the light fixture, there, you see a sticker in the dome that has a Brewer address. The supplier, I am guessing.”

Doug looked at the light. His eyes were still not ready to look directly into the bulb, so he would have to take Kand’s word for it.

“The guards have no accent I can tell, but the gentleman who brought dinner a few hours ago had one. I did

not see him, but he spoke to a guard about the Black Bears, a squad of some kind. ‘Bayuhs,’ he said it like that. ‘Bayuhs’.”

So they were in Bangor. Doug was beginning to think there were some holes in Homeland Security protocol, and as far as holes went, the reason they were in the cell together was real cause for alarm. That is, if he were still a free citizen on the other side of these walls.

“Why do you think we are in this room together?” Doug asked.

“I do not know. The facility is not complete. I also read about that. It could be this room is all they had ready.”

“They obviously did not get the heat working yet.”

“Maybe it is a questioning technique,” Kand said.

Doug looked at Kand. He had not been beaten, from what he could tell. Doug had heard that was a questioning tactic as well. Maybe they had not yet gotten around to that.

“So how long have you been here?” Doug asked him.

Kand sat silently for a minute. “It seems like a month,” he said finally. “Yes, a month.”

Doug looked around the room. There were no windows. If the light was always on, and he had been in this room that long, he was impressed. Kand was about right.

“A whole month,” Doug muttered as he shook his head.

“Well, it seems that way. I have rested only 26 times.”

“Have you seen a lawyer?”

“No.”

‘Well, this is bad news so far,’ Doug thought. “Have you been questioned?” he asked.

“A number of times. There have been no beatings,” Kand said. He looked at Doug’s face and could obviously tell the particulars of his concern.

“Okay, do you think we are being listened to?”

“Right now? Most likely, yes.”

Doug looked around the room. He felt like he could sit up straight. It was now that he noticed the toilet in the opposite corner, and a showerhead high on the wall next to it. He felt a little relief that the drain in the middle of the floor had a reasonable purpose. Of course, Doug felt none about what came next. He had to take a whiz.

Doug sat for a few more minutes. There was a lot more to ask Kand, whether guards were listening or not. He would tell Doug only what he wanted to.

“So what happened to you?”

“You mean when they came to get me?”

“Yeah.”

“I was home, in Brighton,” Kand said. “They came into the house late at night and I was taken out. I was quiet with them.”

“And you came here?”

“Not right away. I spent a couple of nights in a Federal building in Boston, but it was not a secure cell. It was an office.”

“What about the store?” Doug asked.

“As far as I know, all of the merchandise was removed. I do not know where it is. They have asked about it.”

“The stuff from Singapore?”

“I told them, it was how I did my business. I got most of my goods using a single shipper in Singapore. They got bulk goods, different things, and I sold them. Mostly junk. They had sports equipment, mugs, sunglasses, games, books, shirts, whatever you needed.”

“They had books?”

“Yes.”

“But you didn’t sell books,” Doug said.

“No, but people do. The company is the number one shipper of second-market books in the world.”

Doug remembered the box his dad kept in his garage. They carted loads of tools and other junk in them. They were the same as Kand’s boxes, and his dad had owned an entire chain of bookstores.

“Who is this company?” Doug asked.

Kand looked at the ceiling, as if he knew where the microphones probably were. “They are called True World Exports.” He was keeping his story straight.

“Is this why they shut you down?”

“It could be. I have done nothing wrong,”

Doug realized he had heard this in movie after movie, from people who had most definitely done something wrong.

“What about you?” Kand asked him. “Why do you think you are here?”

“I do not know,” Doug said, looking at the ceiling. “I have done nothing wrong.” Just like in the movies.

He figured it had something to do with Weymouth. If his weekend trip had drawn attention from the Free Majority, the Feds were probably on to him, too. Molin really did get rid of Doug and the others so they could be picked up at home, and Dr. Currier and the Freemers got to them just in time.

Of course, it didn't go that well for Doug. At least Rich and Vanessa weren't here. Not yet anyway.

All the mistakes Doug had made were no match for the thoughts he was having now.

“Did I really fuck up that bad?”

“What?” said Kand.

Doug had spoken aloud. “Nothing,” he said. “Nothing.”

The door opened. It was immediate. The sound it made was heavy and metallic, just like it looked. An equally heavy guard stepped in, carrying a rifle. He pointed to Doug with a gloved hand. “Wilson,” he said. Then he gestured with a thick thumb over his shoulder.

A second guard came in and stood over Kand, who sat perfectly still. Doug stood up carefully and one of the guards took his hands and bound them in another plastic tie. Doug winced as he realized how sore his wrists were. He followed the guard into the hall, where two more guards were standing, equally clad in heavy black clothing and carrying advanced weaponry. They had stuff Doug had not even seen in movies.

Doug was led by the two guards to a large room that was, thankfully, less bright than the cell. Plastic cloth was hung around the perimeter of the room, as if there was still construction going on. It was also cold.

A man sat at a folding table. He was dressed like a guard as well. He was holding Doug's cell phone.

“Who is Rich?” he asked.

Doug was silent. The man had obviously been going through his phone book. There were a lot of names before Rich's, so his first thought among many was ‘how did they guess my best friend first?’

Doug felt a rifle butt in his back. One of the men behind him gave a push with it and the other directed him toward a metal chair. He guessed it was as cold as everything else in the place.

“Please sit,” said the man at the table. He never stood up or even looked at Doug, who sat down across from him. Doug sat with his tied-up arms hanging behind the back of the chair, which was also freezing.

“I asked you who is Rich,” said the man. Then he looked up at Doug. His face was reddish and craggy, but Doug could not tell his age. He could have been anywhere between 40 and 70. His bushy salt-and-pepper hair stuck out beneath a black ball cap, and he had square-framed glasses that looked too large for his face. His black outfit had no markings at all.

“Rich is-”

“Who is he?”

“He’s a-”

“He’s who? Rich is who?” said the man, more demanding now.

“Rich is my-”

“Who is Rich? How do you know him?”

Doug was silent. The man sat and looked at him, still holding the phone in his left hand. He turned it toward Doug. The missed call list showed Rich’s name at the top. He had obviously tried to call sometime tonight.

Doug decided to try to answer the question again.

“My friend.”

“Good,” said the man. “How do you know him?”

“Work. Well-”

“Well what?”

“School.”

“Work or school, which is it?”

“School first.”

“Are you lying?”

“No. Both.”

“Both what? Lying about work and school?”

“Neither.” Doug felt his blood pressure rising, but he was trying like hell not to show it.

“Then how do you know Rich?”

“School.”

“But you said work.”

“Work now. School then.”

“When?”

“2005 and 2006.”

“What school? High school? Grammar school? Kindergarten?”

“B-business school,” Doug stuttered on purpose. Otherwise, he already knew, it was hard to say without sounding like a snob.

“B-business school? Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“What b-business school?”

“Stanford.”

“Stanford? Are you sure? You’re not lying?”

“No.” Doug was probably getting visibly angry.

“Calm down.”

“I am,” Doug lied.

The man nodded toward one of the guards behind Doug, and he felt a mass move immediately behind him. He lifted Doug’s arms until they were almost pulling his shoulders out of joint. He winced and shut his eyes. This was his first stress position.

Then the guard cut the plastic ties and dropped Doug’s hands. He quickly grabbed his right wrist and started rubbing it.

“So you want to take a swipe at me?” said the man across the table. He put the phone down and stretched his arms wide. “Go ahead!”

Doug continued rubbing his wrist and looked up at him. He had seen this ham-handed tactic in far too many bad cable

TV movies, and he decided not even to answer. The questioner put his arms back on the table.

Doug felt relief that at least one of these little games had been called. He had taken a little control, if short-lived.

“Thank you,” he said, looking at his wrists. The man kept sitting silently, looking directly at Doug. He looked back down immediately, knowing that a stare-down was definitely a battle to concede.

You and Rich went to b-business school together at Stanford, and now you work together?”

“Yes.”

“Why is he calling you?” he asked.

“I don’t-”

“Why?”

Doug wondered how long this man could keep this up. Probably forever.

“Unknown,” he answered.

“Unknown. Sure. He’s not calling to discuss your plot?”

“What plot?”

“Your terror plot. Your bomb.”

“Huh?” Doug tried to heighten his genuine surprise, but he wasn’t convincing enough. Even he couldn’t believe himself.

“Yeah, that plot. You’re working with that other guy, receiving materials from Singapore. Meeting with activists. Surveying military bases. Am I right? Is that part of the plan?”

Doug was silent. He had no answer for any of this. It was pure conjecture, but it was obvious that they had been following him for awhile. He realized that his silence only solidified the man’s suspicion. It was too late to say anything now.

The man sat still across from Doug for another moment, then he stood up, leaving the phone. He walked toward another guard and whispered something to him. Doug looked at the phone, which was the only thing in the room not looking back.

He wondered where Rich was. He tried to call again. That was good news. It meant he was captured by the Free Majority, and not by these guys. They might have been playing with his mind, but Doug doubted it. He preferred to think that wherever Rich was, he was okay.

If they had known everything he had done in the past month, then they knew what Rich was up to. Maybe it was Doug’s trip to Weymouth that sealed it for them. He was glad that Rich and Vanessa did not go with him. They were right. He was foolish to dig too deeply into the modeler.

Doug wondered how Currier got away so quickly. Where could he be right now? And why hadn’t these people asked about him yet?

Doug sank in the chair as his thoughts started to collapse on him. He had lost his job. His two friends were probably in danger, and he had given the keys to a really dangerous program to a complete unknown. Doug now sat in

custody with some Federal agents, probably under suspicion of terrorism. This was a pretty bad day so far.

“Beep-be-beep beep!”

It was the phone. It rang loudly and vibrated at the same time, pushing itself toward the edge of the table. The table practically shook with the phone.

The questioner started walking back toward Doug.

“Beep-be-beep beep!”

“Answer it!” he demanded.

Doug’s hands were just a little too slow. A guard picked up the phone and showed it to the questioner. He had no reason to worry about who was calling. Nobody was. The beeping told him there was a new voice mail, not a call.

“That’s a hell of a long message,” the man said as he pressed the volume keys to stop the ringing. Doug looked at him without any clue what he was talking about. It was probably obvious.

The questioner held the phone toward Doug. “This rang just before we came and got you,” he said. It was Rich, and he probably left a message when there was no answer. If it took this long to beep, it was definitely a long message.

Doug had known some people who left unbelievably long messages on his voice mail. Mom always did before she died. But Rich was not the type to leave an epic story on a cell phone. He usually said, “Dude, call me,” and often less. For Rich to leave a long story meant something was up.

The questioner sat down at his side of the table again. He pushed the phone toward Doug and sat back.

“Why not take a listen?” he asked, though it wasn’t really much of a question.

Doug picked up the phone and looked around the room. All of the guards had their eyes trained on him, and the questioner put his hands behind his head. He closed his eyes and tilted his head back to feign patience, which somehow let Doug know there was none.

He pressed the keys for voice mail. The phone told him he had one message, and he hit the key to start it.

It was Rich, and he sounded frantic. He was whispering, but so quickly that he clipped most of his words. Doug could hear traffic in the background.

“Doug, you’ve gotta get this. Listen- oh, shit.”

There was a long pause. Doug heard shuffling and the traffic suddenly got very loud. Then everything became muffled.

“This way,” said a voice. It wasn’t Rich. The traffic sounds went away, but there was now a lot of echo, as if the voices were in a chamber much like the cell.

“This is where it all happens,” said the voice. “And this is where we’re going to make sure it keeps happening.”

Another voice asked a question that Doug could not make out. “Yeah, it was in Boston, remember?” said a third voice.

“It was moved here as an exhibit,” said the first voice.

“How old is it?” asked another. Doug could not tell whether it was the second or the third voice. The echo was stronger.

“It’s a replica,” said another voice. It was Rich. “The original is in London. It’s from the 14th century.”

“Shhhh!” said a couple of other voices.

There was another long pause, and Doug could hear more shuffling and walking. The echo suddenly disappeared, and he could hear nothing more.

“We’re going to 20,” said the first voice. Doug heard a ding noise. “It’s all rigged up for us.”

There was another question that Doug couldn’t make out, followed by “leased under American Fund Management. Total cover.”

Suddenly, there was static, as the phone connection started to lose the signal. Then it went dead.

The voice mail ended, and Doug looked up at the questioner. He raised his eyebrows as if to ask him what he heard. Doug was fearful that the man would not believe him if he told him it was mostly jumbled words and static. But he couldn’t lie. If for some unjustified reason the agents were to listen to the voice mail, he couldn’t risk it.

In all the time he had been holding the phone, he had forgotten to look at the time. Doug put the phone on the table and quickly looked at the time. It was almost 11PM.

“It sounded like he was calling from a bar, but got cut off,” he said.

“Oh?” asked the man. “What do you mean, ‘got cut off’?”

“It sounds like he forgot to hang up.”

“Forgot to hang up? You guys are MBAs and you can’t work a cell phone?” the man said with a chuckle. A couple of the guards joined in.

“Guess he was having a good time,” Doug said, adding a grin of his own. The questioner immediately put on a sour look and leaned forward.

“Listen, here it is,” he said. “You are here because I need to get some information out of your friend here. Your cellmate, Kandreshi Srinisvargashian, if that’s right.”

Doug nodded. He had no idea if the man had Kand’s name right, but it was closer than he had ever gotten.

“Now we don’t really think you’re a part of his plan,” he said, lowering his head as if to get a positive response. Doug nodded slightly. “You’re just some kid, hanging out with some other kids, enjoying your new high-flying job, am I right?”

“Yeah,” Doug said without taking a breath. If the man wasn’t kidding, he was relieved.

“And you went to this guy’s store all the time to get Cokes and other junk.”

“Yes,” Doug answered, sounding like he was ready to hop on one leg if asked.

“And you only got involved with his little group because you thought they were a bunch of harmless activists?”

“Right,” Doug said, this time a little more perplexed. Did the agent think Kand was part of the Free Majority? Was he even talking about the Free Majority? Doug decided to go along with it. He had little choice.

“And the reason you were down in Weymouth was to do some work for their group?”

“That’s right. That’s why I was there,” he answered.

“You were doing some spreadsheet or something.”

“Yes, market research.” Doug could feel himself getting to like lying, as long as it worked.

“Market research for what?”

“Oh, they deal with economics. They wanted people to create spreadsheets to support tax reform ideas. Present to the government. Stuff like that.”

“Hmmm,” said the questioner. He narrowed his eyes.

“Who do you work for again?”

“PMW. Prichart, Molin, & Weaver.”

“Ah. Managing Director Todd Molin. Wants to run for governor, right?”

“Yes,” Doug said with a nod.

“I see why they were interested in you.”

Doug looked at the questioner with a curious expression. He was pretty sure the questioner could tell that he had no idea what he was asking about.

“And that’s why we are interested in your help. You have been unfortunate to find yourself at the confluence of organizations with complementary interests. Your company

wants to expand, its manager wants to spread his wings, and this activist group wants to use both of them to pursue its goals.”

“What are its goals?”

“That is what I do not know. We originally thought that this Kand guy was receiving explosive material in his shipments from Singapore, but we could find absolutely no evidence of that. However, we were aware that he had connections to these activists, and we had been hoping to use him to get to them. Then you started poking around.”

“So you thought I have some connection with all of this?”

“We still might. But for now, we’re interested in some bigger fish. Molin, for instance.”

Molin, Doug thought. No way. Could this be about the database? It had to be illegal, which was why Molin was yelling into his phone while Rich hid in the garage elevator. That must have been why he got rid of the trainees so quickly once he knew Doug had visited Weymouth.

“Of course, we’ll take the smaller fish if we have to,” the man said.

Doug realized that they did not know about the database. It was the key to everything. Molin, Currier, the Freemers, Kand. Maybe he could give them the information, and that would go a long way toward getting him out of this mess. Doug sat and thought about that for a moment.

The man then pulled an item from his shirt pocket. It was Kand's necklace. It had a metal ring, with an ivory carving of the Global Grid that Doug and the others had seen at the Free Majority seminar. It was a little different, but the idea was the same. Doug never understood what Kand meant when he said it helped him know where he came from, and where he was going.

"Do you know what this is?" asked the questioner.

"I've seen it before," Doug said. "It's kind of a religious icon."

"I thought so. Any idea what the symbols mean?"

"It's supposed to be the building blocks of civilization, or something like that."

"Bring it back to your cellmate," he said as he tossed it across the table at Doug. He was able to catch it by the thin leather strap. "And I'll take the phone back," he said, reaching for it. Doug handed it back to him. One of the guards came in closer behind him and nudged him to stand. It reminded Doug that he was still an inmate.

"What should I do?" Doug asked as he stood up.

"Just find out more about him. Break the ice with that," he said, nodding at the necklace. "We'll be working on getting more info about Molin. Do you know the name of that activist group?"

"Yes," Doug said. "The Army of the Free Majority."

The man chuckled and turned away. Doug was led back to the cell where the guards went through the whole routine of

going in, blocking Kand, and leading him in. They left and shut the door behind them. Even though Doug's predicament was not as dire as he originally thought, the door still had the severe sound of finality.

"Kand, they gave me your icon," he said.

Kand looked up and smiled. He probably knew why the questioner gave it to him. Kand seemed to know what was going on, even though Doug barely did. He began to toss it over to him, and suddenly paused.

The symbols were not the same as the ones Eric drew at the seminar, but they were identical to the ones he saw on the suit of armor in Copley Square, and his dad's metal plate.

"What's wrong?" Kand asked, still holding his hands out to catch the necklace.

"Nothing," Doug said. He threw the necklace back to him.

Doug knew where Rich had gone. He was in New York.