

## **Chapter 25** **From Here**

Doug leaned back and wiped his forehead. He never realized how damp it was. Everyone in the room felt incredible relief, and Doug could even see it in the faces of Beth and Jim. Jim put his gun down on the floor, knowing what was coming.

Within a minute, the building flooded with heavily-armed officers dressed in black. They demanded that everyone hit the floor with their hands behind their heads. After a few minutes of the officers yelling and stomping around, Doug and the rest were allowed to stand again.

After searching the building, the agents discovered it mostly empty, except for a couple of brave souls in the media who stayed behind to get everything on camera. Doug figured these guys had trumped any sacrifice ever made by the poor suckers who had to do hurricane coverage from the maelstrom.

A bomb squad came in and set up shop in front of the suit of armor. They were busy finding the magnetic arming device that Eric had talked about. Doug made sure to mention it to an officer, but was told that they had it under control.

Jim and Beth were both put in handcuffs and were marched out the building. “Wait! She didn’t do anything!” Doug yelled at the officers. They didn’t stop, but Beth looked back over her shoulder.

“I was with them,” she said.

“You didn’t know what they were going to do,” Doug protested. He felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Vanessa.

“It will work out,” she told him. “You’re not helping.”

Rich came over and stood next to Doug and Vanessa.

“Van, that was incredible,” he said to her.

“It didn’t work,”

“No, it did. We didn’t know it was already rigged,” Doug said, trying to comfort her.

“But how?” she asked.

“Something you guys didn’t know,” Doug said. “Molin was working for Carrier. He was supposed to discover this stock market macro, maybe it would be described as a virus, and we would be his workers who stopped it.”

“And like Eric said, he would look like this big hero,” Rich mentioned. “That must be why he gave us the project in the first place. So we would figure it out.”

“And his son would look like the criminal mastermind. Molin would use this to run for office,” Doug said.

“And the real mastermind Carrier would get away,” Rich added. “And stay there, with a wink from Molin.”

“Oh my God,” Vanessa gasped.

“This was set up years ago. That’s why we were hired by PMW. You for your detail and IT background,” Doug said to Vanessa, “You for your stability,” he said to Rich.

“And you for intuition,” Rich answered Doug.

“And maybe for something else,” Doug said, thinking of his father.

As they stood in the middle of the trading floor, Doug looked at all the blood left by Kand, Colin, and the guards. The floor wasn't going to be the same for a long time.

There was probably going to be a lot more blood. Dr. Currier had kept Eric from his mission, which was to divert attention from the sudden crash to a terrorist attack. Eric's diversion might have worked.

Going simply by the numbers, this was a far worse crash than even 1929. But at least in those days people could still believe in the idea of the market itself. It had a chance to grow again, once commerce could support it.

This crash was different. Now that an economic virus was discovered, the jig was up. Faith in the very idea of a stock market would be destroyed. This crash was going to be permanent.

With all that gold and his network of power, Currier would have gained from a market's collapse or a terrorist attack. To him, it never mattered what happened.

Doug saw several men with Coroner's jackets enter the building. They collected the guards who had been killed on the mezzanine first.

Jacobs and another agent appeared on the floor, and walked over to Vanessa, Rich and Doug. It was time to remember everything that happened, and in what order. "Glad you got out of this, aren't you?" Jacobs asked. "So are we. Let's take a walk."

They walked toward the control room just as the Coroners were working on Kand's body. They attended to his massive wound, and upon seeing it for the first time Doug thought he was going to wretch. Vanessa turned away. The coroners picked up his grid icon to remove it. Doug told them to leave it with him.

As they put him in the bag and closed it, Doug let out a full sob. Kand was an interesting man. He had saved Doug's ass several times in the last few days, and he displayed mental capabilities that Doug thought were beyond human measure.

He knew the Free Majority was wrong in whatever they were trying to do, but he knew still more. There was a lot that he could have told Doug and his friends that he was never able to. Doug wondered where he had put all his gold. He said this to nobody.

"Where's my father?" Doug wondered aloud.

"He was brought to the hospital," Jacobs answered. "He'll be okay. That's a brave man, chasing a guy like Currier."

"I know," Doug answered.

"Because of your dad, Currier is going to cool it for the rest of his life," Jacobs said.

"I only wish he was younger," said Doug.

"So do I."

"What about Brey?" Rich asked, looking around.

"He was brought to the hospital, too. He's been through a lot," Jacobs said.

Rich laughed. “Been through a lot, the poor kid!” he said with a chuckle.

“I wouldn’t be too tough on him,” said Jacobs. “I’ve seen rookies suffer complete breakdowns and come back to be top agents.”

Rich nodded, but still smirked toward Doug, who barely suppressed a smirk back. Vanessa smacked him on the back of the head.

They followed Jacobs down the escalators and out of the building, following Kand’s body bag to the van. The three of them put a hand on the bag, and helped the coroners lift it inside. They watched as the techs shut the doors and pulled away.

Doug turned and saw something that suddenly perked him up. A stretcher was being carried down the stairs of a nearby building. It was the building with the George Washington statue.

The medics were carrying his father, Jonathan. Doug ran over to him, followed by Rich and Vanessa.

“Dad! Thank God. What happened?”

Jonathan lay on the stretcher looking older and more gaunt than Doug thought he should have looked.

“Nothing, just bumped into an old friend,” he said.

Doug could not believe it. “So it was you who found Currier?”

“Sort of,” Jonathan said with a slight nod.

“Where is he?” asked Rich.

“Oh, they’ve got him. In there,” Jonathan said as he nodded toward one of the police vans. He winced in pain.

Doug looked at his father lying on the stretcher. “What happened to you?” he asked.

“Crushed vertebrae,” Jonathan said. “Just a little surgery, and a lot of traction. No big deal.” Jonathan smiled painfully as the EMTs put him on the ambulance.

“Sorry, folks,” the EMT said. “No room. Going to Presbyterian.” It was a hospital in Manhattan.

“I’ll be there, Dad,” Doug said. The EMTs shut the door and drove off in a hurry. The next half hour was spent answering questions from Jacobs and another agent.

After debriefing, Doug and his friends looked up and down the street. There was nothing but mayhem. Federal and NYPD officers were busy funneling traffic and managing the body recovery. Media people were lined up with their cameras and bright lights across the street. There were fire trucks and police cars and government SUVs, and several media trucks parked haphazardly up and down Broad Street.

Doug, Rich and Vanessa picked out a path up Nassau Street to get away from the brouhaha more quickly. They walked for a few blocks through Manhattan’s financial district, where there were a lot of people milling around. The city seemed colder and darker than it should have been. Most people were standing still, looking dumbstruck. Tickers on the walls of buildings read ridiculously low numbers.

A lot of people stared off into nothing. These were the bankers and businesspeople. They knew the gravity of what happened. The rest were tourists, who had no idea, but could only match the mood of the New Yorkers they came to watch.

The three walked by a bar & grille, where the patrons inside were quietly glued to the televisions overhead. They were tuned to the financial news. Normally, they'd be tuned to sports, and the sound would be drowned out by revelry.

They walked quietly for a few minutes.

“So your Dad is some kind of PI, huh?”

Doug shook his head. “Just a researcher, really, I think. He was looking into Currier and the Freemasons in particular.”

“But why? He didn't know about the database.”

“No. There's another reason.” Doug was suddenly saddened by something, and Rich stopped asking.

“What I don't get is why Molin thought he needed this to run for office,” Vanessa wondered aloud.

“Maybe he wanted a stronger story than just ‘successful businessman runs for governor,’” said Rich.

“No. He was just a patsy for Currier and the Chinese,” Doug said.

“But for what? He already had all kinds of money at his fingertips,” Vanessa said.

“Power,” Doug said.

“You mean, like, the poor man wants to be rich, the rich man wants to be king,” Rich said. It was the only explanation that made sense.

“I don't understand it,” said Vanessa.

“We were chasing the same dream,” said Doug.

“Yeah, puts things into perspective, huh?” Rich added.

Vanessa stood and looked at the two of them. “It's just good to be alive, isn't it?” she asked.

They walked a few more blocks, and the cold began to make Doug shiver through the ill-suited trader's jacket. He was sure the others felt the same.

“Where is this hospital, anyway?” Vanessa asked.

Rich looked at Doug's face and stopped. “Van, we're not going,” he told her.

Doug turned and smiled. Amazing friends, they were. Rich and Vanessa were the kind of people Doug could talk to for hours, and they'd keep him laughing, put up with his bullshit, and walk through fire with him.

“Find you at the hospital in the morning?” Rich asked.

Doug nodded and turned. He kept walking. The sun began to redden the sky, and Doug watched the city's rush hour shudder to life. He thought about what kind of anguish everybody would go home to. Doug wondered how many of these commuters would ever see their desks after today.

Doug wondered if the world would be a better place, or a much worse one. Would it devolve into civil war, or would leaders emerge who could hold the people together? Would knowledge of the Global Grid be useful at all?

Tears streamed down Doug's cheeks, and he wiped the wet trails they left before they froze. The people he walked by also looked grief-stricken, but it was for a different reason.

Doug now knew that Dr. Currier had killed his mother, and he could finally grieve the way he should have two years before. He walked for hours, thinking of everything she had taught him. Everything she had ever done with him. Now that Doug knew the truth, the void in his life only seemed larger.

The last lesson she taught him only became clear now. She smiled at death, because she knew her life had been a full one. A balanced one.

Suddenly, Doug knew what his mother meant to say. Her life was never about gathering and hoarding things. It was more about giving, and teaching, and leading. It was what she did every day. It was what she wanted him to do.

Doug smiled, not because of the life he had led, but the one he was about to.