

## **Chapter 26**

### **Winter**

Sometime during the late morning, a nurse tapped Doug on the shoulder to tell him that his father was awake. He sat up groggily, not realizing he had been asleep.

Rich and Vanessa were slumped in the chairs next to him, fast asleep. Doug wondered when they had arrived, and decided to let them be. He followed the nurse to his dad's room. It was just down the hall on the same floor.

The nurse told Doug that his father's surgery involved repairing two vertebrae with metal pins. Whether there was spinal damage remained to be seen. Either way, it was likely that Jonathan would require several months of rehab.

"Dad," Doug said upon entering the room. It was a standard hospital room, and was dimmed by the window blinds, and the ceiling lights were low. Doug decided to leave the lights the way they were.

"Doug, is that you?" Jonathan asked. He was very groggy and his voice was thin and gravelly.

"Yes, Dad."

Jonathan blinked and looked around the room, as if thinking deeply about how he got here. Finally, he remembered. "Did I tell you I met Currier?" He tried to shift his weight, then realized it was too painful.

"Yeah, you did. Settled a score," Doug said.

Jonathan smiled. It was a weak smile. "So the markets are devastated. He got what he wanted," he said.

"Yes." Doug was surprised that Dr. Currier, the man who once preached about globalization had helped bring about total economic destruction. "It doesn't make sense," he said.

Jonathan became more animated as he awoke. "Doesn't it?" he asked. "Currier thought everything was inflated. He wanted to restore a truly equal global market."

"There are better ways to do that. He could have been a business leader, a politician."

"He tried. He saw that as being too slow. He wanted to make an immediate change."

"Well, he did. He crashed the whole world economy."

"Not really," said Jonathan. "This nation had the furthest to fall. But many other countries were so poor, they are now on a level with us."

"You're not for this?" Doug asked.

"No, but globalization supposedly meant bringing everyone up to the same level. Currier brought us all down."

Doug sat down in a chair, and Vanessa and Rich came in. "You should have said something," Vanessa said.

"Hello, guys," Jonathan said in his weakened voice.

"We failed," Rich said.

"You didn't fail," said Jonathan. "It was rigged against you."

"So what happens now?" Doug asked.

Jonathan smiled. “Oh, massive depression. And probably some strife-” Jonathan tried to suppress a cough.

“Dad?” Doug asked.

“I’m okay,” Jonathan said.

“What will we do now?” Vanessa asked.

“Well, the first thing you do is get the hell out of Dodge. This is not a city you want to be in tomorrow.”

“What are you guys going to do?” Vanessa asked Rich and Doug.

“Find a new job, I guess,” Doug said.

“A new job? Where, in banking?” Rich asked.

“There’ll be massive unemployment,” Vanessa said.

“Competition is going to be nuts,” Rich added. “This will make the depression look like a friggin’ harvest festival.”

“I can’t move back home,” said Vanessa defiantly.

“Damn,” said Rich. “My moms would get going with the dishes and the trash and the laundry.”

Jonathan laughed painfully. “How about law enforcement? Jacobs said he was impressed with you guys.”

“Great, maybe that’s our next job,” Vanessa said.

“Growth industry,” said Rich brightly.

Doug shook his head silently.

“Guys, I think you’ll be fine,” Jonathan said. “I actually have an idea you might think about.”

The three of them looked up.

“I understand Molin told you about the Singapore gold trade,” Jonathan said.

“He did. Not in time, though,” Rich said.

“Well, the dealer was a front for Shangzhen-Yi.”

“I thought so,” said Vanessa. The others nodded.

“The Chinese government was selling the gold, using Shangzhen-Yi’s many tentacles as the channels. PMW and Molin were among them.”

“They planned to distribute the gold a year before the macro crashed the market,” Doug added.

“They used the Free Majority to write the modeler, and used it to hack the market. They skimmed stocks, and used the profits to pay for the gold sale.”

“They basically embezzled the world,” Rich said, sounding impressed by the scheme. It was hard not to be.

“Did Jacobs find out about your gold?” Doug asked.

“Yes. Research purposes.”

Rich and Vanessa gasped. “You were in on it, too?” Rich asked. “I can’t believe I missed this!”

“Well, it has to do with my idea,” Jonathan said. “In a few months, I can tell you more.”

After visiting hours were over, Doug and his friends got a ride back to Boston with some Federal officers. They were heroes, after all. Doug felt terrible about leaving his dad there, but he needed rest.

The next few weeks bore out Jonathan’s prediction. The major companies that formed the backbone of the US economy were starved of capital, and started dropping like flies. Millions of people found themselves out of a job within a week of the

crash. Eventually, Doug read that the number reached 42 million in the first three weeks.

The stock markets didn't open for a month or more. New York City's financial district became a ghost town. Interestingly enough, it became harder to get news. Cable networks were shutting down all over the country, and dozens of newspapers went under, though a ton of independent pamphleteers popped up.

Predictably, bankruptcies soared.

The only reliable broadcast news in the early winter was from public stations, and Doug read that many of those shut down as well. Some companies began to gouge customers before they succumbed. Cell phone companies and gas stations, in particular, did this, as did some internet providers.

Everywhere, there was outrage, despair, and hardship. Hospitals became clogged with people who could not keep warm in their homes. People held Thanksgiving by candlelight. And Doug read that many were eating Spam instead of turkey.

Supermarkets that were still open were mostly bare of food. People cleaned them out with their last dollars, but the stores could not restock because of the outrageous cost of shipping groceries.

Harvests spoiled in storage all over the country. Doug read about farm villages that were flush with food that they could not get rid of. People were doing whatever they could to get to these towns. Cars were being left by the side of the road when they ran out of gas.

There seemed in some pockets of the country to be a strong sense of community, but these stories were far outnumbered by a massive increase in crime. Cops were finding themselves out of work, and the result was a perfect storm of looting, stealing, and killing. The major cities were to be avoided at all costs.

Government services all but disappeared. Trash went uncollected. Roads went unpaved. Schools were shutting down. Tax revenues were nonexistent. Some states tried to raise rates, and Doug read about violent anti-tax uprisings around the country. A mayor in Alabama, who happened to be a Klan leader, was actually lynched over a property tax hike. Doug had to admit to chuckling a little over that.

Rich moved out of Boston, abandoning his apartment. Despite his loathing of mom's chore-driving, Rich moved back in with his family. It took him two weeks to reach California. The airlines that were left were impossible to get a seat on, and rental cars in drivable condition were scarce. Rich took a bus until it broke down in Chicago, and then found a seat on the train to San Francisco, where his brother picked him up.

Vanessa kept her place in Cambridge, and got her bike out of mothballs. She was frugal to begin with and probably had a few years' rent saved, even before she came to work at PMW. It took a little while for the massive rate of inflation to reach renters, primarily because so many houses were given up for the banks, who suddenly found themselves with too much inventory to deal with.

She visited Doug on her bike for a couple of weeks, before it got cold, and before the crime became too dangerous for her to leave the apartment.

Doug heard that Brey was back in Atlanta with his family, nobody was buying their product anymore.

The federal government finally had to declare martial law, but many members of the military had deserted to help their families. Those who were left had proved a little overzealous, and a lot of people felt that it was justified. There was no money for military recruiting, so what martial law amounted to was a curfew, after which one was likely to get killed if found outside.

Doug kept his apartment until the weather got really cold, and then he moved back home to Maine. Jonathan needed a lot of help anyway. He got out of the hospital on a wintry day in early December. Doug moved out of his apartment and drove to New York with a Federal escort to pick him up.

Doug never found a moving van to rent, so he packed his belongings into enough boxes to fit in the truck, and decided to abandon the furniture. He knew if he made a second trip, his stuff would not be there.

Doug drove through the Maine toll booth at high speed. The toll-takers were gone, but people were using the booths for stopping unsuspecting drivers and taking everything they had. Some of the people in the booths were people this had happened to.

Jonathan tried to keep from using any of the gold. He sent Doug to the coin dealer to exchange a coin or two every few weeks. They were doing brisk business, and could charge incredibly high fees to exchange the commemorative gold-plated coins people kept bringing in. The premiums were lowest on solid bullion like Jonathan's, which was easier to deal with and was being accepted by many as currency.

Naturally, Doug learned how to carry and use a gun.

One cold night while sitting at the house in Bangor, Doug asked his father about his plans. The idea he had mentioned in the hospital.

"Well, I think it is about time to talk about that," said Jonathan. "I wanted to show you something." He hobbled into the kitchen to grab the latest newspaper. It now arrived only weekly at the store in town.

"You keep looking through the real estate section. Why?" Doug asked.

"Remember a few years ago, when your mother and I bought a horse farm?" Jonathan asked.

"Yes, I do," Doug answered. The memory was closely tied to his mother's death, which caused his father to back out.

"Well, I have put some plans together to start a farm."

"A what?" Doug asked incredulously.

"A farm," Jonathan said. "C'mon, it doesn't have to be a hillbilly outfit like you're thinking."

Jonathan was right about what Doug was thinking. But Doug had to admit he was open to any idea by this point.

“Where is this farm?”

“The first one will be in Weymouth, Mass.”

“Weymouth?” Doug asked.

“At the old Naval Air Base,” Jonathan said with a grin.

“How did you swing that?”

“Well, when Molin lost the bid years ago, it was locked out of auction for five years. It went back on today. The Feds were more than happy to exchange it for some yellow metal.”

“Singapore gold, right?” Doug asked.

“Good as any other.”

“And what do you know about farming?”

“Ha, ha,” Jonathan said. “The question is, what do you know?”

“Me?” Doug asked. It was crazy that his dad thought he had any intention of taking up farming! Then after a few seconds, Doug realized he could be on to something.

“You’re going to need a lot of people,” Jonathan said.

“People like who?” Doug asked.

“What about your friends from PMW?”

“Rich? Vanessa? They would have nothing to do with it,” Doug said. He lied. He had talked to Rich by choppy cell phone only a few days before, and he was miserable. Vanessa could not leave her apartment. After her mastery of the database, Doug could see her accomplishing anything.

“Well, maybe,” Doug said.

“Speaking of PMW, did you read about them?” Jonathan asked.

“Yes.” Doug had read that the company and its connection to Shangzhen-Yi was being broken up by the government, or what was left of it. Investors sued the firm after the story of Molin’s plot was revealed. Shangzhen-Yi liquidated the PMW division, took a bath, and everybody at the company lost their jobs.

Doug read about suicides, about bankers jumping out of windows, but these were becoming old wives’ tales by now. He suspected that a lot of it was true, however. Most of the PMW bigwigs fled the country, like Bart Hawes, who was found decapitated in Morocco, and Randall McNeil, who sailed away with Malii, his wife from Singapore. Their yacht was found adrift in the Solomon Islands, raided and empty.

“You know, a lot of this is my fault,” Doug said. “If I had only told you about the database when it happened—”

“Not your fault. These are criminals who have been plotting for years,” Jonathan told him.

“Still, you would have connected the dots right away.”

“Well, if you feel guilty, you might not mind giving something back by opening this farm,” Jonathan said.

Doug agreed. Before the weekend was over, he talked to both Rich and Vanessa.

“Get me out of here. I’ll do anything!” Rich told him.

“Are you kidding? I’ve run out of detergent. It’s disgusting!” Vanessa howled. They both wanted out. The farm sounded to them like a chance to make up for their mistakes.

Both of them came to Bangor for the rest of the winter, and Jonathan helped them get in touch with Beth from the Free Majority. Their particular case was one that the shrunken Federal justice system was very keen to prosecute, but Currier and Jim took the brunt of the punishment, each going to Leavenworth for several lifetimes. Beth had killed nobody, and was given immunity for helping the prosecution.

In the spring, 25 people moved into a boarding house at the base in Weymouth. The Hispanic couple still living in the house nearby had been farmers in their home country, and the group needed them to teach the rest of the city slickers how to grow edible things. They became full partners in the venture.

The farm began to attract attention, and more people from the community wanted to join. The new farmers learned to defend the farm. They also discovered that there were similar efforts going on all around the country.

Doug tried to come up with a name for the farm. He looked up the coordinates to try to get some ideas. The place turned out to be at 42 degrees, 9 minutes, 50 seconds latitude, and 289 degrees, 3 minutes longitude. Or 429502893. That was its location on the global grid. It became the farm's name.

Doug knew Kand would approve.