

THE FLOWER TRICK



MICHAEL WEISS



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ISBN-13: 978-1-966168-79-9

Book Interior and E-book Design by Amit Dey (amitdey2528@gmail.com)

INDIE BOOKS INTERNATIONAL®, INC.
2511 WOODLANDS WAY
OCEANSIDE, CA 92054
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PART I

THE SOVEREIGN EXPERIMENT

PROLOGUE

THE FLOWER TRICK

Janet Dwyer sat facing her lawyers in the anteroom just outside House Hearing Room 1 in the Rayburn House Office Building, with the full roll of the House of Representatives present. She could have been put off by the spectacle of these proceedings, but was braced and ready to answer all questions, energized by her convictions. She was already committed to keeping her head high during this process, feeling she had the facts on her side. She awaited her time to be called to give her account, under House subpoena.

Inside, the house judiciary chair glowered at the bullpen of journalists who were allowed entry to the House galley. “Not a sound will be heard from any member of the press. Not one utterance, or I will clear the entire room and make this a closed session.”

The chair continued, turning her attention to the other elected officials in the chamber. She was well aware that the cameras were rolling and returned to her practiced cadence.

“The people’s business will take place in this room today. Amid perhaps the greatest one-time erasure of wealth, a financial cyclone so vast we are still finding scattered ruins.

“The cryptocurrencies and gold—how did we ever get in so deep? How did we get here, what was the timeline of events, and where did we suffer from mass hypnosis—this is going to be the picture we are trying to recreate. There are layers of facts to uncover, lessons to be learned, and lots of answering

to the American public about what are we going to do going forward. So, we must keep our eyes and ears open, so we can answer the question, the question that we as a body seem to have lost sight of.

“What was the chief executive doing as the warning lights blazed red?”

There was a pause, and then the chair continued. “What is power, if not accompanied by absolute, but verifiable, trust? For centuries, nations have traded on promises underwritten by gold, oil, and military might. The true currency of the world since the end of the Second World War has been our shared faith in a prosperity for humankind.

“But the twenty-first century introduced a profound shift. The ledger became digital, trust became an algorithm, financial systems were gamified, and the foundations of global financial order were cracked open. When that trust falters, my dear colleagues, and the code bends to the will of ambition, and greed, the resulting collapse is not merely academic or economic. It is a fundamental unraveling of sovereignty itself.”

She looked across the room at the members of Congress, looking from one side to the other, divided only by political affiliation.

The chair took a long dramatic pause. “With that said, the House would like to call the first witness to be sworn in, the former secretary of the treasury, Janet Dwyer.”

CHAPTER 1

PUTTING UP GUARDRAILS

One year prior to the congressional hearing, in the office of the secretary of the Treasury, at the Treasury Building, 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC

“I still can’t believe it, Janet,” Patrice Boyer stated, her voice a low, insistent pitch, controlled but undeniably firm. She stood by the window of the treasury secretary’s sprawling office, her tall, lean frame silhouetted against the morning light. Even in a simple pantsuit, her runner’s legs, honed by countless miles, were evident.

“That we are working for this administration.” The statement hung between them, sounding almost like an unanswered question. She stood staring at the entrance to the West Building, the building connecting the Treasury Building and the White House, not sure how she was feeling about being so connected to the people in power.

Janet Dwyer, seated at her desk, merely smiled, a slight, knowing curve of her lips that didn’t quite reach her eyes. She tilted her head slightly, a subtle signal of quiet confidence before she spoke. At sixty-eight, with her neat silver hair often pulled back, she could easily pass for a kind, albeit exceptionally sharp, schoolteacher in her early fifties. It was a disguise her colleagues often underestimated. Her reputation as a banking legend, the

architect of solutions for the last mortgage debacle, had not been earned by accident, however. She was bright, fiercely so, but she never flaunted it. She was someone who believed in paying her good fortune forward.

In fact, Janet had established a flourishing foundation that empowered women to achieve education in financial literacy and job skill development and provided placement in finance-related occupations. Patrice had been so moved by the glowing stories from the graduates of the program at a event she had attended that she had even started volunteering there about five years ago. As Dwyer's program and foundation grew, she expanded it and had opened brick-and-mortar locations in ten different cities, the last one being in Patrice's hometown of Cleveland, naming a tech lounge after Patrice's recently deceased father.

Janet picked up a stray file, tapping it idly on her desk. "We've worked for Democrats and Republicans, Patrice. You know that our loyalty is to the mandate, not the man, or a party." Her voice was soft, even toned, never once raising above a conversational volume; that was something few could recall ever witnessing.

"But this is different, Janet. The polarization—the sheer spectacle of it all." Patrice turned from the window, her gaze direct, unwavering.

A straight-talking girl from Cleveland Academy, as she liked to put it, she was the tactical counterweight to Dwyer's strategic brilliance, her organized efficiency the ballast to Janet's occasional clutter of a genius who moves too fast for the backfilling. Patrice saw the world in sharper relief, less inclined to grant the benefit of the doubt where Janet Dwyer often would.

"The president's motives, for one. I still believe he's in this purely for the money."

Janet leaned back, her chair creaking faintly. “Perhaps,” she conceded, “but the bigger picture, Patrice, is precisely why *we’re* here. If not us, then who? Who takes the call on this?”

Her analytical mind, honed by decades of navigating financial crises, demanded service. It was that simple. Janet Dwyer had practiced this justification to herself multiple times before this live enactment with Patrice.

She gestured around the elegant, yet still functional, office. The view of DC held a special significance for her; the cabinet position had become vacant just as the midterm elections were shaking the establishment. The familiar intellectual sparring settled into brass tacks: cryptocurrency.

Janet had been a staunch skeptic, wary of the volatility and anonymity of digital currencies outside the formal banking system. But the world was moving this way, and for the nation to remain relevant, she knew a real investment in this future was unavoidable.

Guardrails, however, were paramount. It was the central digital dilemma.

Janet rose, walking to the whiteboard that dominated one wall. She uncapped a marker.

“Let’s skip the technical definitions,” Janet said, drawing a hard vertical line down the center of the board. On the left, she wrote *The Treasury*. On the right, *The Wild West*.

“The president’s executive order isn’t just asking us to acknowledge the right side of this board, Patrice. He wants us to merge them.”

She drew a bridging arrow. “He wants a ‘Strategic Bitcoin Reserve.’ He wants to take twenty thousand seized coins—assets we usually auction off—and hold them and then grow from there.”

Patrice leaned against the bookshelf; arms crossed. “A digital Fort Knox. It’s a narrative nightmare, Janet.”

“It’s a start,” Janet corrected, writing *Volatility* and *Collateralization* over the arrow. “But the unspoken goal is a stockpile worth hundreds of billions of dollars. That isn’t a toe in the water. That is a new foundation for the dollar and the economy.”

Patrice raised an eyebrow. “So, you’re telling me my first task, Ms. Professor,” she asked, a hint of playful sass in her voice, “is it to create the picture board presentation for him? To explain how we stabilize a currency that can swing twenty percent in a week?”

Janet smiled. “Precisely. A gap analysis. We need guardrails, Patrice. Specifically for the three leading cryptocurrencies: Bitcoin, Ethereum, and Solana. If we don’t build them, the president, or the Congress, or both, could drive this economy off the cliff.”

She moved back to her desk, picking up a thick binder. “The ‘Strategic Bitcoin Reserve’ is his way of putting a toe in the water. But I’m the pace driver here. The ultimate, unspoken goal is to mirror gold reserves, but I am aiming for eighty-five to a hundred billion dollars to start, in a slow-walk fashion, to see where our ongoing research takes us as well.”

Janet put the binder down, a thoughtful expression on her face. Her long-held skepticism hadn’t entirely vanished, but her analytical training compelled her to engage. She still believed in the US, believed she could help, and that meant embracing uncomfortable truths, driven by logic and sound strategy, not by fear of “missing the boat”—or rushing into an overcrowded boat either.

“So,” Janet said, looking at Patrice, a quiet resolve settling on her features. “My conclusion, for now, is that we begin slowly. We engage, we study, and we build those guardrails.”

Patrice pushed herself off the bookshelf, her expression still unconvinced, a subtle frown marring her brow. “But for the

George Headings administration, Janet,” her gaze lingered on the whiteboard, “it still sounds like a digital divide to me. You’re talking about a path that’s going to create as many problems as it solves.” She paused, her eyes locking with Janet’s. “Although, I suppose the midterm election results might make our course easier to maneuver.”

Janet Dwyer gathered her scattered papers on the desk, bundling them into a neat stack. “If not us,” she replied, her voice soft but steady, “then who might be here making this call?” She handed the stack to Patrice. “Make sure this whiteboard is copied, too, please. All the notes.”

Patrice took the papers, already sorting them instinctively. This was her wheelhouse: organizing the brilliance into actionable steps. Time, she knew, was of the essence to have the policy agenda, both the picture version for the president and the numbers version for the financial world, ready soon. She set off for her office, already mentally sketching the first slides.

As Patrice disappeared, Janet leaned back in her chair. The familiarity returned as her mind was already racing ahead of the work on the whiteboard. There was still the president’s other “big idea”—the sovereign wealth fund.

She pulled a fresh legal pad from her drawer and wrote *Week 2* at the top. Underneath, she scrawled a single acronym: *SWF*. She stared at it for a moment, a faint, knowing smile touching her lips, before getting up to turn off the office lights.