

Chapter Twenty-Three in which the banking system is explained poorly, James cures his anxiety very poorly, and Sylvia remembers his poor old mum.

James Donald was a high level money-manager for Blankenfields, a super bank for want of a better word. It was connected inexorably with the United States Treasury Department, one of the major banks that helped them create money through security trading, buying up the treasury bills and notes that the **Federal Reserve had somehow bought from the Treasury**. It was a profitable business but there was always an element of an offer you cannot refuse when it came to the Treasury and the Federal Bank. And indeed, the communication was often through a fellow James knew only as Tony, but he seemed to have walked right out of the Sopranos and into James' life.

However, through an endless revolving door between the two organizations, the goals were the same for both really. Keep the golden goose laying eggs or they both would go down. Blankenfields cozy relationship with the Treasury also brought it split second preference when it came to news about the direction the Federal Reserve was going to take with interest rates. And when the Treasury or the Federal Reserve needed advice, they naturally turned to Blankenfields for that advice, and so the whole cozy machine had been grinding along quite well for decades.

But lately there had been an acceleration that was felt in all areas of his work, but most importantly to James, because he simply lived to make money, was the speed with which quotes and trades could now be made. The volume of their trades brought them split second advantages with both quotes and execution of trades, and with over **25,000 trades made per second**, they were making more money than ever before. His nerves were frayed though, hence his bitter mood towards his third wife, Sylvia. He didn't have time to think about that now, eyes glued to the screen to see if any news about the company's latest gamble had leaked out. They were involved in overnight currency trading, a strange game of sloshing money around the world, with governments printing more and more money, and lately he had gotten a little ahead of himself and his department had suffered a staggering loss. He was

sure, as all gamblers are, that by morning it would have righted itself, but he had left too much money on the table, and he knew it.

The night before he hadn't slept, hadn't done anything other and stare at screens and pray, even though his Catholicism was a thing of the past. Tonight he just had to sleep. He felt the anxiety build in his chest and drained his scotch. A commercial came on for bladder incontinence and he grunted as he got up and went to the bathroom to pee and get an Ambien. Back in the living room he poured another double, or possibly triple, scotch and popped the pill. The news was back on, but they had moved from their top stories to the stories they ran to make their audiences come back for more, keeping them in a state of false anticipation, usually of a disaster just about to happen.

Sylvia had heard James' motions, and correctly assuming that he would not notice, she put on her jacket and picked up her purse and an over-night bag. It was not tonight that she was going to leave, no. This was a practice run. She was waiting until she had managed to get access to the files on her husband's lap-top. He hadn't brought it inside tonight, but one day he would and she had a portable drive ready to go and thought she might have finally figured out his password. He was a secretive man, and she had tried the obvious. Ex-wives, children, etc. But she had forgotten about his mother, Margaret. He rarely mentioned family but he had been more forth-coming when they first met and she had been scouring her brain for any details she might have missed. His beloved Maggie, who passed away when he was nine. How could she not have tried maggie as his password. She shut the door quietly, and went down the stairs, avoiding the elevator and going straight to the basement. No one noticed her as she walked out of the parking garage and melted into the crowd leaving the baseball game from the nearby astrodome.

