

Chapter 47

Partying on the Run

Aboard the Equanimity, South Korea, November 2015

As the screws tightened, the *Equanimity* was sailing in the Northwest Passage, the famed iceberg-strewn route through the Arctic Sea that connects the northern Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. For years, Arctic pack ice made navigation almost impossible, but environmental changes had opened up the channel, and the *Equanimity*, with a steel hull designed to withstand contact with ice, became one of a small group of elite private ships to complete the journey. As it emerged into the northern Pacific around Alaska, the pilot set a course for the coast of South Korea. It was early November, and Low had arranged for friends and celebrities to fly into Seoul, before being whisked to the boat for a party to celebrate his thirty-fourth birthday.

Despite everything going on, Low's desire to be the center of an event and bestow favors had not diminished; in fact, those around the Malaysian saw that he looked forward even more to these immaculately concocted parties. The theme of this event was "togetherness," and celebrity guests auctioned items to raise money for the United Nations, before everyone sang "We Are the World." Guests drank fine wines, champagne, the Korean spirit soju, and espresso-flavored Patrón tequila, while the food included Beluga caviar, lobster bisque, and truffle pasta.

One room of the yacht was made into a "Rose Garden," the walls plastered with red roses with leaves plucked off. The guests, including Jamie Foxx and Swizz Beatz, wore cocktail dresses and tuxedos. This wasn't just another secret party, with phones checked in at the door: Low

also wanted to poke fun at the allegations against him, to make it seem like these falsehoods were water off a duck's back. At one point, there was even a slideshow of positive media articles about Low.

But another video he requested—a montage of world leaders including Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin wishing him happy birthday—even the top party planners could not have achieved.

The Obama administration's love of Najib was fast cooling. Later that month, President Obama traveled to Malaysia one final time, for a regional summit, a visit that had been scheduled long before the 1MDB scandal hit the headlines. After meeting behind closed doors with Najib, the president told journalists he had expressed to the prime minister the importance of transparency and rooting out corruption. With Anwar Ibrahim languishing in jail, and Najib's crackdown on civil liberties at home, the words rang hollow.

Low continued to act as if nothing was up. Just a few months earlier, the Malaysian told friends he had bid \$170 million for Picasso's *Women of Algiers* at Christie's in New York, but lost out to a Qatari buyer who paid \$179 million, at the time the most expensive painting ever to sell at auction. After eleven minutes of telephone bidding, Low dropped out. Along with the Nimes mansion in Los Angeles, this was another purchase that was beyond even him. It was hard to grasp how Low was even considering such purchases after the media stories about 1MDB.

In December, he traveled to Courchevel, a ski resort in the French Alps, for his usual end-of-year party with his closest friends. In a villa on the slopes of the Alps, Low appeared calm, as if none of the news was fazing him. After days of skiing and snowboarding, the group partied back at the villa. It was a routine his closest friends—Joey McFarland, Swizz Beatz, Alicia Keys, Jasmine Loo of 1MDB, Fat Eric, and Low's girlfriend, Jesselynn Chuan Teik Ying, had followed over several winter ski holidays around the world: Whistler, Aspen, Courchevel.

Like the other holidays, the itinerary was carefully planned out to include private-chef dinners, snowmobiling, massages, and drinks. But Low's business-as-usual mien was a facade, and aspects of the trip even took on a sinister undertone at times. Low confided in some of his gathered friends that he was even worried about assassination, although he never said by whom. As usual, Low continued to travel everywhere with his

bodyguards. He instructed Catherine Tan, his personal assistant, to ensure no one on the Courchevel trip posted pictures to Instagram, Facebook, or other social media.

His closest associates in the scheme—Eric Tan, Jasmine Loo, Yeo Jiawei, the former BSI banker, and Seet Li Lin, who worked at Jynwel—were too enmeshed in Low’s scheme to pull out now. But the decision of celebrities like Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys to continue to fraternize with Low, despite stories in the *Journal* and Singapore’s probe into the Malaysian, was more surprising.

The conversation during the skiing trip, and a subsequent few days in London, revolved around how to change the narrative on Low. Until the last, those who had benefited from his largesse seemingly refused to acknowledge the mounting evidence of wrongdoing. Perhaps Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys did not read the media, or they just discounted the stories about Low, or maybe they simply didn’t care if the money funding the trip was stolen.

Joey McFarland, who owed much of his Hollywood career to Low, was vociferous in the support of his friend. The coverage of Low was biased, a political hatchet job, he told the entourage. One evening during the vacation, he advised Low to publicize more of his charity work on Twitter to counter the negative stories. With the money still flowing, McFarland didn’t appear to have doubts. But he more quickly became angered, as the stress of the situation began to rub away at his normal happy-go-lucky persona.

Red Granite’s latest movie, *Daddy’s Home*, starring Mark Wahlberg and Will Ferrell, had just premiered and McFarland wasn’t yet ready to let go of the Hollywood dream. For now, the news about Low and 1MDB had not yet penetrated Hollywood, and Red Granite was still a going concern. On Instagram, McFarland kept up the appearance of a successful producer, although there were signs of trouble.

Some stars seemed to be distancing themselves. DiCaprio, for instance, had passed on taking the lead in *Papillon*, the company’s latest feature, which was in preproduction, with Charlie Hunnam playing the role instead. DiCaprio hadn’t even attended Low’s latest yacht party off the coast of South Korea, and was not present at the latest auction at Christie’s. Talk about Scorsese making *The Irishman* starring Robert De Niro with Red

Granite also had gone quiet.

It was a worrying sign; the slow peeling away of Low's coterie of famous friends had begun. But the Malaysian had other—bigger—worries to contend with. The FBI's probe was scaring his business partners. To save his empire, Low turned to China.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 48

China Connection

Shanghai, China, April 2016

From his residence in the Peninsula Hotel complex in Shanghai, Low's life of exile from Malaysia was not too shabby. Situated near the Bund, the city's old colonial heart, the hotel and residences boasted two Michelin-starred restaurants. From his rooms, Low enjoyed unbroken views across Shanghai's Huangpu River to the modernistic skyline on the other side.

It was here in Shanghai, China's financial capital, that Low was fighting hard to keep hold of his businesses. With the FBI asking questions, Low's empire in the United States was in peril. Major banks no longer wanted to touch him, and Wells Fargo was refusing to push through its loan to finance the purchase of the Park Lane, Low's flagship development project with the Abu Dhabi fund Mubadala and the U.S. developer Steve Witkoff near New York's Central Park.

The project was all but scuttled, but Low had hatched a plan in Shanghai. Unwilling to give in, his latest maneuver involved enlisting the help of Shanghai-based Greenland Group, a Chinese state-owned developer. On April 26, Low fired off an email to Khaldoon Al Mubarak, the chief executive of Mubadala, outlining how he planned to sell his stake in the project to a minor Kuwaiti royal. The royal was simply another old friend of Low—a nominee to keep the Malaysian's name off the books. The Kuwaiti would then sell a part of his stake to Greenland Group, which would help fund the project.

“In 2015, I have been faced with vicious, false and misinformed media attacks which resulted in challenges with respect to the [Park Lane]

financing,” he told Al Mubarak. But this deal, he added, solved the problem.

Low had again pulled strings with a state entity—this time in China—to solve a problem. His ability to enter the halls of power, getting to know the chairman of Greenland in Shanghai, held out a slim chance the project might not die—and he could get his money from the project out of the United States.

Fearing an imminent FBI action, Low was taking other actions to sell assets for cash. In April, he ordered Sotheby’s to sell *Dustheads*, the Basquiat painting, which he had pledged as collateral for a loan. U.S. hedge fund manager Daniel Sundheim paid \$35 million, almost \$14 million less than it had cost Low three years earlier. The Malaysian began to sell other pieces of his art, also at fire-sale prices. When he’d bought art, it was exactly for this kind of emergency. The mansions and companies were harder to divest in a rush.

As the Malaysian was trying to save his Park Lane deal, the *Wall Street Journal* published the most detailed story yet about Low’s involvement in Najib’s secret accounts and his behind-the-scenes role at 1MDB. After the story published, Malaysian Source, our secret contact involved in the scheme, stopped all communication. MS realized it was not so easy to influence our coverage.

The *Journal* then tried to locate Low. Bradley Hope flew out to Shanghai, where a female receptionist at the Peninsula confirmed that Low was a longtime resident at the hotel. But when Hope showed up at the entrance to the hotel apartments, a burly security guard insisted no one by that name had ever resided there. When he returned to the receptionist, she looked at her computer again and noticed all records of Low’s stay had disappeared. Hope then flew to Hong Kong, where the *Equanimity* had berthed for repairs. The captain said the owner wasn’t on board. Low was nowhere to be seen.

Low’s connections with Chinese state-owned companies proved helpful in another way. The 1MDB scandal had wrecked Najib’s relations with Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia. The attorney general had tried to pass off the money Najib received in his secret accounts as a donation from Saudi

Arabia. The Saudis had refused to publicly confirm this fiction, despite Malaysia's entreaties. The kingdom's foreign minister would only say he believed Najib did nothing wrong and that there had been some kind of donation to Malaysia, but he wouldn't commit fully to the false story being put forward.

What the prime minister needed now was a way to fill the 1MDB financial black hole. The fund had more than \$13 billion in debt and needed to repay Abu Dhabi for bailing it out. But its assets were worth nothing like this amount. In a series of deals, Chinese state-owned companies agreed to acquire the bulk of 1MDB's assets: land in Kuala Lumpur and power plants. If completed, the deals would raise about \$4 billion, still well short of wiping out 1MDB's debt, but a start to cleaning up the mess.

The troubles at 1MDB offered a perfect opportunity for China to supplant the United States in Malaysia—just the latest sign of America's declining power in the region.

It was no surprise then that Najib turned away from President Obama, who had lost faith in Malaysia as a model Islamic democracy, and looked instead to China's authoritarian rulers. Under President Xi Jinping, Beijing was extending its influence outside of its borders, whether through more aggressive territorial claims to islands in the South China Sea, or via a softer diplomatic approach, offering to build infrastructure like highways and ports in neighboring countries.

Najib was quick to claim victory, saying the deals, and the end to Malaysian investigations, put the fund's problems behind the country. The National Audit Department had finished its probe into 1MDB, but the government classified it under the Official Secrets Act, attempting to bury its contents.

The Prime Minister continued to instill fear in his political opponents. In April, police arrested an opposition leader who had gotten hold of the National Audit Department's report, which showed billions of dollars of 1MDB money was unaccounted for. He was sentenced to eighteen months in jail for breaking the Official Secrets Act. When the *Journal* reported on the secret document, Najib threatened the newspaper with a lawsuit. A leader of the Bersih protests also was detained under a new law meant to fight terrorism.

There had been intimidation—a murder, even—of those involved in

1MDB investigations, and people were frightened. Yet some patriotic Malaysians held out hope that authorities overseas would not let their investigations drop. At the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, which had recommended the prime minister's arrest, there was simmering anger over the mothballing of their investigation.

And so, a handful of investigators began to secretly feed information to the FBI. McMurry's team of agents had spent months disentangling the money flows. By July 2016, the Department of Justice was ready to take action. It did so in a way that caught Low, Najib, and other conspirators off guard.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 49

Glass Half Full

Washington, DC, July 2016

U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch stepped up to the microphone in a press room at the Department of Justice's offices on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC. Moments later, she announced the largest-ever asset seizure under the Kleptocracy Initiative. With the help of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, and other Malaysian officials who met FBI investigators in secret, the Bureau had pieced together the details of one of the biggest frauds in history.

Flanked by senior Justice Department and FBI officials, Lynch laid out how the U.S. government was seeking to seize more than \$1 billion in assets bought with proceeds stolen from 1MDB—the largest corruption case on record—from mansions in New York, Los Angeles, and London, to a stake in EMI, a private jet, and the future proceeds from *The Wolf of Wall Street*, to name just a few. For maximum publicity, the Justice Department filed its lawsuit—*United States v. The Wolf of Wall Street*—at the District Court for the Central District of California, where Hollywood is located.

“The Department of Justice will not allow the American financial system to be used as a conduit for corruption,” Lynch said. “Corrupt officials around the world should make no mistake that we will be relentless in our efforts to deny them the proceeds of their crimes.”

This was the largest kleptocracy seizure in U.S. history, and Heuchling's team, together with Justice Department prosecutors, had painstakingly laid out every twist and turn of the scheme in clear prose.

The lawsuit named Jho Low—the first time he had been publicly

referred to by a law-enforcement agency—as well as Riza Aziz, Khadem Al Qubaisi, and Mohamed Al Hussein. (Later addendums to the lawsuit would name Tarek Obaid and “PetroSaudi Officer,” a reference to Patrick Mahony.) Tim Leissner was referred to as “Goldman Managing Director,” and his interactions with Jho Low during the meeting with Sheikh Mansour in Abu Dhabi were sketched out. But most shockingly, Prime Minister Najib Razak was thinly disguised as “Malaysian Official 1,” the lawsuit describing him as a relative of Riza Aziz and holding a position of authority at 1MDB. (Later, the department would add Rosmah as the wife of “Malaysian Official 1.”)

The allusion to Najib shocked the prime minister’s entourage, which never thought the United States would take such a bold step. This was a civil lawsuit, looking to seize assets, but from here on Jho Low would avoid the United States, fearing criminal proceedings were also under way. Even Najib would keep out of the United States for a while, sending a deputy to the U.N. General Assembly in New York later that year.

The prime minister never expected the hammer of U.S. justice to land so close to his door. After years of privilege, of golfing with President Obama, of endless speeches to the United Nations, he felt untouchable. It was hard for Najib to even conceive of an independent justice system that would embarrass a sitting prime minister. It formed a stark contrast to his ability to shut down investigations at home.

In the days after Lynch’s press conference, Najib told family members he was not aware of the scale of Low’s theft. It was hard to believe—he knew for sure about the homes in Los Angeles, New York, and London that Low had bought and transferred to Riza Aziz. But it’s possible the prime minister did not realize the full extent of Low’s actions. The Justice Department said that at least \$3.5 billion had gone missing, an estimate it would raise by a billion dollars within a year. In the days after Attorney General Lynch’s announcement, the prime minister did not know what to do. There was no way out of this. A week later, in a feeble news conference, Najib pointed out that 1MDB did not directly own any of the assets named by the Justice Department. It was technically true, but beside the point.

The *Journal* had reported the Justice Department’s suits just ahead of Lynch’s press conference. When Low read the story, he thought it was a big mistake, because U.S. authorities had not served his lawyers with any legal

documents. The action scuttled Low's efforts to liquidate his stake in the Park Lane, or to sell any other U.S. assets. His mansions, art, even his Bombardier jet, were now frozen. Only the *Equanimity*, in the open ocean and out of reach of U.S. authorities, was still his to enjoy. But Low already had hundreds of millions—if not billions—secreted away in secret accounts around the world. And he remained free.

Watching from the sidelines, Bill McMurry, whose New York-based international corruption squad had led the investigation, perhaps felt this was a glass-half-full moment. Global Financial Integrity, a Washington-based anticorruption group, estimated that \$1 trillion was drained from developing economies in 2012 alone, especially poorly regulated places like Brazil, China, India, and Russia. But McMurry had a more optimistic take.

By mid-2016, the FBI was ratcheting up its cooperation with foreign anticorruption agencies, including Brazilian investigators looking into the Petrobras scandal, in which the state-owned oil company made illegal payments of more than \$5 billion to company executives and politicians. Brazil's attorney general already had secured convictions of scores of Petrobras officials, politicians, and businesspeople. And despite Najib's best efforts, the Justice Department was moving to punish those involved in 1MDB.

"There is undoubtedly a global push toward anticorruption that has never really existed, even just a decade or two earlier," McMurry told a seminar.

In a later news release, the FBI even praised the "tremendous courage" of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission in pursuing its own investigation. It was as close as the FBI could get to thanking the commission's staff for secretly helping the Bureau with its own probe.

There was a glass-half-empty way of looking at events. Hadn't the system of checks and balances at banks failed to catch Jho Low's malfeasance for seven years because of the greed of financiers? Wasn't he still at liberty to enjoy a life of ease in five-star residences in China and Thailand, where he lived in the St. Regis apartments in Bangkok, or on his superyacht berthed in Phuket? In Malaysia, Najib's position appeared unshakable. What sanction had anyone from Al Qubaisi to Leissner and the BSI bankers faced?

What remained to be seen was whether the U.S. government—or

Singapore, Switzerland, and Abu Dhabi—would launch criminal prosecutions against those involved. The U.S. kleptocracy action was a civil case—an attempt to claw back assets. But only jail time, not simply a slap on the wrist and a confiscation of assets, would serve as a real deterrent to this kind of transnational fraud.

OceanofPDF.com

Chapter 50

White-Collar Crime

New York, Fall 2015

In the fall of 2015, Goldman compliance executives sifted through Tim Leissner's official Goldman email account. After the 1MDB scandal hit the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* in July 2015, Goldman launched an internal investigation into its dealings in Malaysia. The German banker told Goldman executives conducting the probe that he barely knew Low. But they didn't take Leissner's word for it and carried out a review of his communications. Normally, Wall Street bankers are savvy about keeping sensitive business offline, either meeting in person or using private emails and phone messages.

But Leissner had been sloppy.

Earlier in 2015, the banker had prepared his unauthorized reference letter for Jho Low—to help him open an account with Banque Havilland in Luxembourg—from a personal computer. The letter never should have formed part of Goldman's internal inquiry. But someone on Kimora Lee Simmons's staff mistakenly sent the document to Leissner's Goldman email, and compliance executives uncovered it.

At Goldman's Manhattan headquarters, there was a heated debate about how to deal with the 1MDB issue, which was turning into a public relations debacle. Some executives cautioned against scapegoating Leissner. Pablo Salame, cohead of Goldman's securities division, rejected an internal suggestion that the firm's involvement in the mess could be blamed solely on him.

"Goldman Sachs did these deals," Salame told colleagues in one

discussion.

In public, Goldman Sachs stood by its actions, pointing out it had taken risks in helping 1MDB raise money and was fairly paid for its services. The bank said it had no idea of Low's role at the fund and could not have been expected to know what 1MDB would do with the money.

Despite high-level Goldman support of the 1MDB business, Leissner couldn't survive the evidence of his secret support of Low to open the Luxembourg account. In January 2016, Goldman put Leissner on personal leave, and the next day he quit, formally leaving the bank the following month.

In the following weeks, Leissner often was spotted at Club XIII, a futuristic-looking nightclub in Hong Kong's financial district, where he told friends he felt betrayed by Goldman. Sporting a graying beard and looking haggard, the banker complained it was unfair he was being singled out, arguing that senior Goldman executives in New York had signed off on these deals. Despite the bank's denials, many executives at Goldman were aware of Low's role in 1MDB but had not raised concerns, he claimed.

Andrea Vella, who structured the 1MDB bond deals and backed them internally, had been promoted to cohead of investment banking in Asia. Gary Cohn, Goldman's president and a big supporter of the 1MDB business, became director of President Donald Trump's National Economic Council in January 2017, a job he stayed in for a little over a year.

Leissner didn't go public with his grievances. He was still engaged in negotiations with Goldman over deferred pay worth millions of dollars. The banker had not expected to be fired, and it appeared he needed the money to finance his lifestyle with his new wife, Kimora Lee Simmons; around that time he even asked a friend for a cash loan of a few million dollars. Plus, there was the code among Goldman bankers to never talk about deals, even once you have left the firm.

He tried to build other businesses. With Simmons, Leissner had set up Cuscaden Capital, a British Virgin Islands-based venture capital fund. Cuscaden invested in Celsius, a U.S.-based energy-drink company, and he became cochairman. Leissner divided his time between Hong Kong and Los Angeles, where Simmons purchased a \$25 million mansion in the gated Beverly Park neighborhood, a twenty-thousand-square-foot estate with an olive-tree-lined driveway leading to a seven-bedroom mansion. Neighbors

included Rod Stewart and Denzel Washington. Simmons posted Instagram pictures with her husband on the ski slopes in early 2018. But the specter of legal proceedings continued to hang over Leissner.

FBI agents had begun to look at payments of hundreds of thousands of dollars by Jasmine Loo, 1MDB's former legal counsel and a close Low aide, into one of Leissner's personal accounts. The purpose of the transfers was unclear. The banker appeared to maintain other links to people close to Low. The *Wall Street Journal*, in November 2017, reported that Leissner and a Thai associate of Low's had attempted in late 2016 to buy a small bank in the Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius—but regulators there had blocked the acquisition.

Low's role in the Mauritius deal, if indeed he had one, was unclear. It also was unknown if Leissner kept in contact with the Malaysian. Once a ubiquitous presence at Hollywood parties and an international jet-setter, Low had seemingly fallen off the map as authorities tightened the screws. He was sighted in Bangkok and Shanghai, but his associates couldn't get hold of him as easily as in the past. No one seemed to be sure where he was at any given moment.

In early 2017, Singapore banned Leissner from its financial industry for ten years in connection with the letter he wrote to the Luxembourg bank on behalf of Jho Low. Later in the year, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, a U.S. body, barred him from the American securities industry, after he didn't respond to requests for documents and other information stemming from his departure from Goldman.

Then in August 2017 the Justice Department made a bombshell announcement: It was pursuing a criminal investigation into the 1MDB scheme.

The Justice Department's earlier legal actions were civil proceedings, an effort to seize assets, not to put people behind bars. U.S. authorities had filed a number of additional civil lawsuits, targeting a growing list of assets, including the *Equanimity*, the proceeds from Red Granite's *Dumb and Dumber To* and *Daddy's Home*, the \$8 million in jewelry Low had given to Miranda Kerr, and the \$13 million in art presented to Leonardo DiCaprio.

The civil action, however, was just a way to tee up the main event: a

criminal investigation. Before the judge in California could rule, the Justice Department, in August 2017, asked for an “indefinite suspension” of its asset-seizure suits to permit the FBI to focus on building a criminal case. It was a sign the U.S. government was seeking to prosecute individuals involved in the fraud, and did not want to show its hand in civil proceedings.

Jho Low, of course, was the central focus of the U.S. government’s investigation. It was unclear whether others involved—Riza Aziz, Al Qubaisi, Al Husseiny, Jasmine Loo—were possible targets of the criminal probe. The Justice Department continued to look at Leissner’s role in events. In almost a decade since the financial crisis, only one Wall Street banker—a Credit Suisse executive—had gone to jail, despite an economic collapse that had thrown millions out of work and lowered living standards. More than one thousand bankers were convicted for their roles in the savings and loan crisis in America in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2006, a court found Ken Lay, the former CEO of Enron, guilty of fraud. Since the crisis, though, the Justice Department had shied away from singling out individuals for white-collar crimes, preferring instead to reach deals with banks to defer prosecutions in return for hefty fines.

Goldman agreed in 2016 to pay up to \$5 billion in a civil settlement with U.S. federal prosecutors to resolve claims stemming from the selling of faulty mortgage securities to investors during the crisis. Wall Street banks, including Bank of America and J.P. Morgan, in total paid more than \$40 billion in settlements. Critics pointed out that Wall Street saw these fines as a cost of doing business that did little to alter behavior.

Now, the Justice Department was trying to determine whether Goldman had reason to believe the money it raised for 1MDB was being misused, which could lead to a steep penalty under the Bank Secrecy Act, perhaps in the quantum of the \$2 billion that J.P. Morgan paid for failing to stop Madoff’s Ponzi scheme. The Federal Reserve, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and New York State’s Department of Financial Services also were examining some of the bank’s actions.

Few observers of the scandal were holding their breath. In America in the twenty-first century, Wall Street bankers typically did not end up in prison.

After the release of the Panama Papers in 2016, detailing how the ultrawealthy use shell companies to conceal ownership of assets, there was a heightened global debate about anonymity in the purchase of multi-million-dollar assets. The United States was taking other measures to stop money laundering through its real estate sector. The Treasury Department launched a pilot program in 2016 forcing all-cash buyers of luxury properties in Manhattan and Miami to disclose their identities to the U.S. government. The rules targeted properties bought by shell companies and worth more than \$1 million in Miami and \$3 million in Manhattan. Title insurance companies, which are involved in most real estate deals, were ordered to carry out the checks.

More than a quarter of all home purchases made over a six-month period were flagged as suspicious, leading the Treasury Department to roll the program out in Los Angeles and other city areas, with a view to bringing in new, permanent regulations. Major loopholes remained—lawyers, for instance, could continue to cite client privilege to avoid giving up the names of beneficial owners involved in real estate transactions—but the United States was moving to deal with the problem.

Christie's, the auction house that sold Low many paintings, began demanding that agents looking to buy or sell works reveal the names of their clients. These rules were voluntary, but Christie's was taking action. There were still no regulations to effectively stop the flow of corrupt cash into nightclubs, casinos, and Hollywood movies, but the U.S. government hoped the shame of the 1MDB fiasco would make nightclub promoters, directors, and actors think twice before receiving money.

Leonardo DiCaprio and Miranda Kerr in 2017 voluntarily gave up the gifts they had received from Low to the U.S. government, and the actor even returned Marlon Brando's Oscar statuette, which was not named in the lawsuits. By then, he had a Best Actor Oscar of his own, for *The Revenant* in 2016.

Kerr had split with Low after the first stories about him began to emerge in early 2015. In May 2017 she married Evan Spiegel, the billionaire founder of Snapchat, cutting all ties with Low.

As for Strategic Group founders Noah Tepperberg and Jason Strauss, their interactions with Jho Low had played a role in building their business. In February 2017, Madison Square Garden Company paid \$181 million for

a controlling stake in a new company, TAO Group, which included their nightclubs.

Red Granite, in March 2018, agreed to pay \$60 million to settle the Justice Department's efforts to seize rights to the film company's future profits. Joey McFarland maintained a public presence, attending the premiere of Red Granite's *Papillon* in September 2017 at the Toronto International Film Festival. On Instagram, he posted pictures with Charlie Hunnam, the film's star, from the red carpet.

McFarland also appeared to keep in touch with some of his old associates. In March 2017, he posted an Instagram picture from the Batu Caves, just north of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. That was where Riza Aziz, the cofounder of Red Granite, had been cooling his heels since the Justice Department's asset-seizure lawsuit in mid-2016. Scared to travel back to the United States, fearing possible arrest, Riza was trying to do business deals in Asia with one of Najib's sons.

The exact whereabouts of Low remained unclear.

On March 27, 2016, Yeo Jiawei, the fund expert on whom Low had relied to hide money flows, arrived for a meeting at the Swiss Club in Singapore. Yeo was frantic as he made his way through the doors of the private club, a former two-story, whitewashed British colonial mansion with bright red shutters, and made his way to a café on a verandah out back.

There to meet him was Kevin Swampillai, his former boss at BSI, with whom he had conspired to take money from 1MDB. As they sat at the café, looking over the Swiss Club's lush garden, Yeo told Swampillai that he'd recently been arrested by Singapore police and let out on bail.

Fearing jail time, Yeo sketched out a plan of action. The pair should tell Singapore authorities that the 1MDB money they'd received into their personal bank accounts was actually investments from another financier. Swampillai was noncommittal.

The same month, Yeo used the encrypted Telegram instant-messaging service to contact José Renato Carvalho Pinto at Amicorp, whose Curaçao funds had disguised the flows of 1MDB money. In his Telegram message, Yeo told Pinto to destroy his laptop and avoid coming to Singapore in case authorities tried to interview him.

Yeo had made a huge misstep. Unknown to him, Singapore police were monitoring his actions, and now authorities had evidence that Yeo was obstructing the course of justice. He was soon back in jail.

As in the United States, Singapore seized assets: \$177 million in property and contents of bank accounts, about half belonging to Jho Low and his family. Authorities in the city-state revoked BSI's banking license, the first time it had shut down a bank for more than three decades. The Monetary Authority of Singapore levied fines of over \$20 million in total against eight banks, the majority to be paid by BSI and Falcon, with smaller penalties to Coutts, Standard Chartered, and others, for failing to stop money laundering. The financial penalties were paltry, but Ravi Menon, managing director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, defended the city-state's response to the calamity.

"When you fine a bank billions of dollars, it hurts basically shareholders and other stakeholders. It doesn't hurt the board and senior management, and it doesn't hurt the individuals much. And that is what, in my view, is one of the failings of the current regime globally, that people continue to do wrong things because they've not been held personally liable and responsible," Menon said.

But Singapore's criminal sanctions could hardly be called draconian. After cooperating with authorities, Yak Yew Chee, Jho Low's personal banker, was sentenced to eighteen weeks in jail after pleading guilty to forgery and failing to report suspicious transactions. He handed over a few million dollars in 1MDB-related bonuses to Singapore's government but was allowed to keep millions more. Haughty and defiant through his trial, Yeo was handed a thirty-month sentence for witness tampering and a further four-and-a-half-year term for money laundering and other charges.

Three other people, comprising a subordinate of Yak's at BSI, the head of Falcon's Singapore office, and a Singaporean broker, got short sentences of a matter of weeks. Prosecutors said Jho Low was a person of interest, but authorities had no idea where to find him. Singapore's central bank referred Hanspeter Brunner, who had retired as head of BSI in March 2016, and Kevin Swampillai, along with a number of other BSI executives, to state prosecutors for further investigation, but more than two years later, authorities did not appear to have taken any action against either man.

Switzerland's attorney general's office also launched a criminal probe

into the 1MDB affair. Investigators focused on the role of Jho Low and Al Qubaisi, but the office also named BSI as a target, and Swiss financial regulators ordered the bank to hand over 95 million Swiss francs in illegal profits. After 143 years in operation, BSI ceased to exist in 2017, its assets folded into another Swiss bank under orders from authorities.

Falcon Bank, owned by the Abu Dhabi fund Aabar, also was under criminal investigation in Switzerland. Like Brunner, Eduardo Leemann, the chief executive of Falcon who had complained to Jho Low about hundreds of millions of dollars of risky payments in 2013, before letting them through anyway, also retired in 2016. Unlike BSI, Falcon was allowed to remain in operation, but ordered to return over \$2.5 million in illegal profits.

Mark Branson, chief executive of the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority, the financial-sector regulator, worried publicly that Swiss banks were becoming more exposed to money laundering as they targeted wealthy clients in emerging markets. “Money laundering is no victimless crime. It allows criminals to profit from breaking the law. It also facilitates corruption and the abuse of power and privilege,” Branson said.

As in the United States and Singapore, the proof of Switzerland’s seriousness in combating white-collar crime would be in criminal prosecutions of Swiss bankers, not rhetoric.

Chapter 51

King Khadem Falls

Abu Dhabi, August 2016

In the fall of 2016, Abu Dhabi's police swooped, detaining Khadem Al Qubaisi. It was an unprecedented move for the Gulf emirate, where the dirty laundry of the elite is rarely hung out for public view. For years, Al Qubaisi had acted without boundaries, a seemingly omnipotent figure who had the authority to move around billions of dollars. The key to his untouchability was a close relationship with Sheikh Mansour.

The Justice Department lawsuits had forced the ruling Al Nahyans to take stern action. Al Qubaisi's role in the 1MDB scandal had been exposed for the world to see, bringing shame on Abu Dhabi. Someone had to pay. Al Qubaisi's tenure atop the world's financial system had come to a close with his dismissal from IPIC in 2015. Now he was taken into custody, along with Al Hussein, the former head of Aabar. Authorities did so without fanfare—there were no public statements—but the arrests nevertheless marked a rare moment of accountability in the emirate. Though the men's assets were frozen, neither was formally charged.

Both men were held in a detention facility meant for criminals on their way to prison. Given Al Qubaisi's closeness to Sheikh Mansour, it would have been difficult to sanction him without opening up the inner workings of the Persian Gulf state, and it appeared unlikely he would be handed a long prison sentence. The fate of Al Hussein, who was not even a citizen of Abu Dhabi, was unclear.

From his bases in Bangkok and Shanghai, Low had been working to reach a deal with Abu Dhabi authorities to brush the scheme under the

carpet. With Al Qubaisi's arrest, such hopes were fast ebbing away.

Instead, both sides became embroiled in a public scrape over who was liable to pay interest on 1MDB's bonds, which IPIC had guaranteed. The Malaysian fund defaulted, but Abu Dhabi was on the hook for payments, or would face cross-defaults by investors on its own debt.

The bigger issue of who should pay for the money Low and Al Qubaisi took remained unresolved. Abu Dhabi's negotiators argued this was not their problem, but they couldn't walk away because IPIC had guaranteed \$3.5 billion in 1MDB bonds. There was also the issue of the \$1 billion emergency loan that IPIC had made to 1MDB.

Abu Dhabi authorities had taken action against Al Qubaisi, but now the rulers wanted this embarrassment to melt away. IPIC took a \$3.5 billion provision, basically an admission to investors that it never expected 1MDB to pay its debts, and then was merged into Mubadala, bringing an ignominious close to the \$70 billion fund's thirty-two-year history. For years, Goldman, Morgan Stanley, and other banks had made huge profits dealing with IPIC, and now suddenly it did not exist.

The empire of Khaldoon Al Mubarak, the chief executive of Mubadala, which had done so many deals with Low, appeared to have grown even larger as IPIC now came under his control.

Abu Dhabi authorities and 1MDB continued to negotiate how to sort out the debt problem, but it was unclear how the Malaysian fund would come up with the money it owed. The hopes that China would bail out Malaysia seemed to have been misplaced. In early 2017, one deal for a Chinese state-owned company to acquire a parcel of 1MDB's land fell apart, after President Xi Jinping's government declined to sign off on the arrangement. It seemed that Beijing didn't want to get involved in this imbroglio, even if it helped bind Malaysia closer to China.

Low's efforts to cover up the PetroSaudi phase of the fraud also were failing. In November 2017, Prince Turki, cofounder of the oil firm, was detained in a consolidation of power in Saudi Arabia. His father, the former king, had passed away, and Saudi's new rulers detained scores of princes and cabinet members, ostensibly for corruption. Prince Turki's fall was another blow to Low's prospects.

PetroSaudi's role in the 1MDB affair was a focus of investigations in Switzerland. While Prince Turki was detained, Xavier Justo was let out

early, in December 2016, from jail in Thailand, and he returned to his family in Geneva. Angry over his treatment, he filed a criminal complaint in Switzerland against Tarek Obaid, Patrick Mahony, and Paul Finnigan, the former British police officer. Obaid and Mahony still ran the PetroSaudi business, although it had few real operations. Obaid continued to party and was snapped on a superyacht off the coast of Turkey in August 2016. Mahony was at home in London with his family. In May 2018, Switzerland's attorney general announced it had begun criminal investigations into two officers of PetroSaudi.

In June 2017, Bradley Hope received an intriguing message in his *Wall Street Journal* email. The message, from a mysterious group calling itself Global Leaks, offered him access to emails hacked from the computer of Yousef Al Otaiba, Low's associate and the UAE's ambassador to Washington.

"We have something extremely smoking gun and exclusive," the email promised.

The email was sent from `global-leaks@inbox.ru`, a suffix denoting Russia, but the location of the group was a mystery. Their motivation was crystal clear. Global Leaks approached a number of international news outlets at the time. In messages, they pointed out Ambassador Otaiba's role in Middle East politics, including his efforts in June 2017 to isolate the tiny Persian Gulf nation of Qatar.

Hope was interested in a different aspect to Ambassador Otaiba's life, one about which other news outlets had no clue: his connection to Jho Low. He asked the group to search their files and come back with anything related to Low or 1MDB. The haul was remarkable.

The emails gave a comprehensive picture of Otaiba's relationship with Jho Low and how the ambassador had benefited financially from 1MDB. They also showed how Otaiba, after the stories in the *Journal* and *Sarawak Report*, had cut off Low, who was desperately trying to get in touch with him.

The Abu Dhabi government attempted to discredit the emails, pointing out the hackers were backed by Otaiba's political enemies in the Middle East, but it did not go as far as to claim the documents were doctored.

Otaiba remained in his position, appearing on Charlie Rose's talk show in the United States to discourse on Middle East politics not long after the *Journal* published a story in July 2017 on his ties to Low.

Ambassador Otaiba was a survivor.

Prime Minister Najib started to act as if 1MDB had never existed. He disbanded the fund's board and placed it directly under the Finance Ministry, which he also headed. After the Justice Department suit, Deloitte Touche said it had resigned as auditor, and cautioned that 1MDB's 2013 and 2014 financial statements—accounts that Deloitte had earlier approved—could no longer be relied upon. The cost of the corruption was set to impact generations of Malaysians.

Moody's estimated the government would be on the hook to repay about \$7.5 billion of the fund's debt, a sum equivalent to 2.5 percent of Malaysia's economy. Foreign investors, worried over the 1MDB scandal, sold Malaysian assets, pushing the local ringgit currency down 30 percent against the U.S. dollar in just a few months.

About half of the fund's debt was in dollars, and a weaker ringgit made it even more costly to repay in local-currency terms. The fund was supposed to have created new jobs for Malaysians, but instead would be a burden on state finances for years to come. Most of the borrowings weren't due for repayment for a few years, but 1MDB's debt was a ticking time bomb, waiting to go off in the future.

Any hopes Malaysia would one day become a true liberal democracy were shattered. Many Malaysians, from top bankers to lawyers and officer workers, were tired of the direction of their country. The country's brain drain, a phenomenon which had pushed many of the country's brightest minds to live and work in the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore, or Australia, was unlikely to reverse anytime soon.

Sticking by her husband's side, Rosmah became more staunchly anti-Western after the Justice Department suits described how she had received jewelry from Low worth almost \$30 million. The attempts to use charity to burnish the images of those involved with 1MDB also did not stop. In September 2016, Rosmah was to have received a "Lead by Example" award at a gala dinner hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization and a U.S. charity at New York's Metropolitan Museum, in honor of her work for children's education in Malaysia. The organizers canceled the award at the last minute after queries from the *Wall Street Journal*.

Malaysia slipped more into China's orbit. To coincide with a visit to Beijing late in 2016, Najib wrote an editorial in the *People's Daily*, the Communist Party mouthpiece, saying former colonial powers should not lecture nations they once exploited. A few weeks later, at an Asia-Pacific summit that Najib also attended, President Obama, in his last few days in office, made an allusion to Malaysia, one that wasn't lost on its people.

"There are limits to our reach into other countries if they're determined to oppress their people," Obama said, "or siphon off development funds into Swiss bank accounts because they're corrupt."

The United States's influence was indeed constrained. As the Justice Department prepared its criminal case, it focused on Jho Low, the main target of its investigation. But ensconced in Bangkok and Shanghai, the *Equanimity* safely parked in waters nearby, he appeared out of the reach of American justice.

Epilogue

Phuket, Thailand, February 2017

From the jetty that jutted into the sparkling waters off Phuket, the southern Thai resort island, the hulk of the *Equanimity* was visible, even though the captain had anchored a few nautical miles from the palm-fringed shoreline to avoid scrutiny. Fishermen said the crew had recently come ashore for supplies. We had received a tip that Jho Low—despite the threat of arrest by the FBI and the jailing of his associates in Singapore—was planning a major party aboard the yacht.

As we continued to try to locate the Malaysian, it became clear that he had no appetite for a quiet life. Since early 2015, Low's world had narrowed considerably. Fearing arrest if he set foot in any Western country, he was living on the boat and in serviced apartments at the St. Regis in Bangkok and Pacific Place in Hong Kong.

Thailand, ruled by a military junta, was a safe harbor for Low. China, meanwhile, saw him as a strategic asset—a pawn who gave Beijing influence over Najib. He still had access to copious amounts of cash. It was a comfortable existence, if isolated.

Now married to Jesselynn Chuan Teik Ying and with a two-month-old baby boy, Low kept his new family hidden. He forced Chuan to remain for days on the boat or at the apartments, leaving only for shopping trips or endless Chinese meals in malls.

Low struggled with his pared-down life. He hated being alone in a room, even for a few minutes, and relied on high-end consultants, including London-based Concierge, to provide a full-time staff of more than forty for the boat, many of them Westerners, including a pediatric doctor, nannies, and cooks. Locked out of the global banking system, he depended on Chuan and others to pay.

There were signs of stress; he slept even less than normal—just a few

hours a night—and wore a sleep-apnea mask. On one family outing to Bangkok’s aquarium, he raced through the exhibits in minutes, eager to get back to never-ending business calls.

He had not hosted a major event since the dinner on the *Equanimity* off the coast of South Korea in November 2015. But after a miserable period, Low was regaining confidence. He thought himself untouchable. A huge party, attended by big-name U.S. entertainers, would be the perfect way to show he was back in the game.

As 2016 came to a close, Low had struck a chord of optimism in a New Year message to close friends and family.

“2016 was the Perfect Storm; but the calmness and resolve of our Captain, led his loyal Sailors whom placed their lives with utmost trust in his leadership weathered the storm,” Low wrote on WeChat, the Chinese messaging app. It was not clear whether Low was referring to himself, or perhaps Prime Minister Najib, but the intention was clear: He was ready for a fight.

Low’s grandiose message was a rallying call to those closest to him, associates like Seet Li Lin, who was holed up in Hong Kong, and Jasmine Loo and Casey Tang, former 1MDB executives who, like Low, also had been forced into exile from Malaysia. With international authorities closing in, Low had to keep them on his side.

And what better way to put himself back on the map than with a blowout celebration? With New York and Las Vegas off-limits, he’d have to make the party come to him. In typical fashion, he lined up some notable, if B-list, performers: Nelly, Ne-Yo, Nicole Scherzinger, and others.

We thought the event would be held on the *Equanimity*. Singapore had seized Low’s Bombardier jet, and he was keen to ensure the *Equanimity* didn’t suffer a similar fate. The yacht had sailed down to Australian waters. Every now and again, the captain appeared to switch off the transponder, making the boat virtually impossible to track. Then, in late 2016, the yacht appeared in Phuket, berthed at the luxury Ao Po Grand Marina on the northeastern coast.

We visited the marina in February 2017, but the *Equanimity* had left the facility only days earlier. It hadn’t gone far, just down the coast, where it

anchored offshore. We thought of ways to get out to the boat to view the party in person. But our tip had been wrong. The party would take place in Bangkok.

Located on the banks of Bangkok's Chao Phraya, the AVANI Riverside was a curious choice for Low to throw an event. The hotel was on the far side of the river, almost an hour's drive from the city center. But Low had a reason for choosing such a demure spot: He wanted the event to go unnoticed.

One of the party's planners, April McDaniel, an American who had done work for Tepperberg and Strauss, the U.S. nightclub owners, was clear about the need for secrecy given Low's very public troubles.

"With what's going on, they've got to be careful," McDaniel, who had started her own event-organizing company, told some guests.

It was clear the musical performers didn't really care about Low's track record, despite the U.S. lawsuits and extensive coverage in the *Journal* and other newspapers. For many of them, it was just another easy paycheck, courtesy of Low.

Nicole Scherzinger, the former lead singer of the Pussycat Dolls, who was due to perform after a dinner for more than fifty guests, had been picked up by a chauffeured car at the airport. On the drive into Bangkok, where Low still had some clout, he had organized for police to escort Scherzinger's vehicle through the city's infamously snarled traffic.

As the guests were seated for dinner, Low walked in accompanied by Swizz Beatz, the producer who had been by his side for years. Sitting around the room were his family, rich Thais, Chinese business associates, and a few celebrities.

After dinner, at around 9 p.m., Low grabbed a shot of Patrón tequila from the bar and surveyed his party. It was a pale imitation of his 2012 birthday in Vegas. There was no DiCaprio, no marquee names like Britney Spears. But he could still attract a crowd. And Swizz Beatz, of course, was on hand to help. The producer took a microphone and urged everyone to down their tequila shots, as the DJ turned up the music and guests filed out into an adjoining space-themed room for the after-party.

The party was ostensibly to celebrate the birthday of Low's elder brother, Szen, and a famous Chinese singer, Jane Zhang, was on hand to

belt out “Happy Birthday.” The whole Low clan gathered around as models brought out a birthday cake. Then, Nicole Scherzinger took to the stage to perform three songs. She was followed by two hour-long sets by singers Nelly and Ne-Yo.

Around midnight Cyber Japan, a group of female performers from Japan, emerged. As foam from a machine covered the dancers, they removed their clothes to reveal bikinis. Afterward, models who had been paid to attend jumped into the hotel’s pool, inviting guests to join them.

Low smiled as he looked on, a glass of whisky in his hand.

For years, corrupt rulers have been looting their states; Prime Minister Najib Razak was just the latest in a line that stretches back decades—to the leaders overthrown in the Arab Spring of 2011, and, even further, to Sani Abacha of Nigeria, Suharto of Indonesia, and Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines.

It’s tempting to see this kind of corruption as a disease afflicting poor countries, where kleptocrats live in splendor at the expense of their long-suffering populations. But Jho Low’s crime is a modern take on that old story. The money he took, by and large, was not stolen directly from Malaysia’s treasury or through padded government contracts. Instead, it was cash that 1MDB borrowed on international financial markets with the help of Goldman Sachs.

In our global financial system, where trillions of dollars move daily and huge institutional funds are looking for the next great investment, sovereign wealth funds can raise inordinate sums at the drop of a hat—in 1MDB’s case, even without a track record or a plausible business plan. Low’s genius was he sensed that the world’s largest banks, its auditors, and its lawyers would not throw up obstacles to his scheme if they smelled profits. It’s easy to sneer at Malaysia as a cesspool of graft, but that misses the point. None of this could have happened without the connivance of scores of senior executives in London, Geneva, New York, Los Angeles, Singapore, Hong Kong, Abu Dhabi, and elsewhere. Low straddled both these worlds—Malaysia and the West—and he knew exactly how to game the system.

Will Low ever be brought to justice? In 2018 the United States continued to build its criminal case against the Malaysian. As Low waited

to see whether the Justice Department would come after him, he drew strength from the life of Marc Rich. It was Rich's widow, Denise, who had given Low a big philanthropic award in October 2014, and Low had become obsessed with her deceased husband.

A Belgian-born U.S. citizen, Rich had become a billionaire in the 1970s from his oil-trading business. In 1983, however, Rich was indicted by a U.S. grand jury on more than fifty criminal charges, including tax evasion and trading with Iran despite sanctions. The FBI put Rich on its most-wanted list, yet he lived the remainder of his life in a sumptuous villa on Lake Lucerne, Switzerland. That sounded pretty good to Low. As time passed without action from the Justice Department, Low became less careful. He allowed the *Equanimity* to sail out of Thai waters down to the Indonesian resort island of Bali. Robert Heuchling, the FBI agent, and his team were watching, and they flew to Indonesia, persuading local authorities to seize the yacht. Low had lost control of his last major asset bought with 1MDB funds.

He had one final play to make, and again he looked to his hero, Marc Rich. On his last day in office—January 20, 2001—President Bill Clinton had granted Rich a pardon. It was a controversial move that led to a debate about the nature of white-collar crime and its victims. The story also kindled hope in Low's mind.

Low and Najib were looking for ways to lobby the U.S. government over the 1MDB issue. Low cozied up to Elliott Broidy, a venture capitalist, Republican fund-raiser, and close associate of President Donald Trump. Broidy's wife ran a law firm, and Low, in 2017, negotiated to pay tens of millions of dollars to the company in return for efforts to lobby the Justice Department to drop its probe. There was no sign of that happening, but the prime minister was making headway with America's new leader.

On September 12, 2017, President Trump welcomed Prime Minister Najib to the White House. Malaysia's leader didn't have a long journey. He was staying with his entourage at the Trump International Hotel, only two blocks away. In the meeting, in the Cabinet Room, just off the Oval Office, it became obvious the prime minister was hoping money, again, would buy him a way out of the situation.

Under the austere gazes of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, whose busts fill two alcoves at one end of the room, the prime minister and

his large entourage took their seats as journalists filed in for a photo opportunity. Ranged on the other side of the room's large, elliptical mahogany table sat President Trump and senior U.S. Cabinet members. Turning to Najib, the president mentioned the importance of trade.

The prime minister saw his opening and began to talk about purchasing Boeing planes and General Electric jet engines from the United States. It was as if he wanted Trump to see what a trusted ally Malaysia could be, if only the Justice Department would stop meddling in the 1MDB affair.

To make his case, he appropriated the global language of finance.

"We come here with a very strong value proposition to put on the table," Najib said as the cameras flashed on the two leaders.

It sounded like something Jho Low might have said.

Except that wasn't the end of the story for Najib—or Low. Just as these pages were being finalized in May 2018, the prime minister suffered a stunning defeat. Now ninety-two years old, Mahathir Mohamad led a coalition of opposition parties to an unexpected, landslide election victory.

At 2 a.m. on May 10, as the final election tally became apparent, Najib and Rosmah, surrounded by family and a few close associates at their private residence, were in shock. They had underestimated the anger of the Malaysian people.

Some aides counseled Najib not to give up; perhaps he could use money to entice opposition lawmakers into his fold. There was fear, even within his own family, that Najib might call on the army. In the end, the prime minister's resounding defeat meant that—finally—he was out of options.

For the first time in the nation's history, Malaysia's opposition was in power.

Many felt a new era was dawning, but there was a risk of more division and rancor. Mahathir had campaigned on a pledge to reopen the investigations into 1MDB, Jho Low, and Najib—and, in his first remarks, he made a broad threat.

"Certain people were aiding and abetting a prime minister who the world condemns as a kleptocrat," he said. "Certain heads must fall."

In the days after the election, Najib and his wife attempted to flee to Indonesia on a private jet, but protesters mobbed the airport after

immigration officials leaked details of the flight plan. Prime Minister Mahathir blocked the escape. In the ensuing days, Najib, Rosmah, and Riza Aziz were called in for questioning by the anticorruption commission.

Police raided Kuala Lumpur apartment units owned by Najib's family and carted out \$274 million worth of items, including 12,000 pieces of jewelry, 567 handbags, and 423 watches, as well as \$28 million in cash.

At 2:30 p.m. on July 3, 2018, exactly three years after the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the \$681 million that Najib had received, anticorruption officials arrested the former prime minister from his Kuala Lumpur mansion. The next day, Najib appeared in court to face charges, smiling wanly at a pack of reporters as a group of senior police officers marched him through the doors. It was a remarkable fall from grace for a man who, only eight weeks earlier, had operated outside of the rules set for ordinary Malaysians.

As a former prime minister, Najib was, however, spared the ignominy of handcuffs and the bright-orange prison garb usually forced onto corruption suspects. Instead, he stood motionless in a dark blue suit and maroon tie as he listened to the judge read out the charges: abuse of power—a reference to Najib's brutal cover-up in mid-2015—and three counts of criminal breach of trust. Each of the four charges carried prison terms of up to twenty years. He pleaded not guilty and was granted bail of \$247,000. The trial was scheduled for February 2019.

As this book was going to press, Rosmah Mansor and Riza Aziz looked certain to be arrested.

For Low, even as he maintained an outer serenity, the election defeat was a devastating blow. He had traveled to Thailand for election night and was preparing to pop champagne. Instead, he rushed to a suite in the Marriott hotel in Macau, where he summoned his extended family. They had spent the hours since the election in an increasingly hysterical atmosphere. Surely Low would be hunted?

The group, including Jesselynn Chuan—who by now had had another baby boy with Low—as well as associates like Fat Eric, and his mother, father, and brother, were panic stricken. Low ordered special precautions, including the use of inconspicuous side doors to exit hotels and apartments.

He began to plot an escape plan. Singapore announced it had sought a Red Notice from Interpol for Low's arrest in 2016—an international arrest warrant that Thailand and China had not acted upon. Now, with Malaysia's new government issuing its own arrest warrant for Low and exerting pressure on Beijing to get him sent back to face justice, Low knew his predicament was dire. Two burly Chinese nationals, who organized Low's security, took center stage.

In Macau, the men who greased Low's movements in China sat tapping on computers while staff organized for Tumi suitcases, stuffed with cash and documents, to move in and out of the hotel suite. As Low's family members huddled in the rooms, they helped pack up paperwork while aides wiped down countertops with alcohol to avoid fingerprints. The women sat around dressed in Gucci, eating fast food from McDonald's while checking Instagram.

After Macau, the family moved to Hong Kong, then to another Marriott in the gritty Chinese city of Shenzhen, before uprooting back to Hong Kong. Suddenly, about two weeks after the election, Low disappeared again, leaving his family behind. In the years since the scandal first broke, he had given up Las Vegas, London, and New York. Now, his only choice was to descend further into anonymity, presumably somewhere in China. Someone so gregarious seemed unsuited to an underground life. Maybe he'd paid adequate bribes to survive a little longer in China. Perhaps Beijing, valuing Low as a bargaining chip, would grant him safe harbor. But just in case, Low looked again to the sea. He pushed Jesselynn Chuan to join the prestigious Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, acting as his front, while he began negotiations to purchase a 120-foot yacht. It would be no *Equanimity*. As the dragnet closed, Low, finally, appeared to be running out of options.