

PART I



Writing an open letter started innocently enough.

April 12, 2006 dawned in Boston as a pleasant day. By 11AM, the online edition of the venerable *Boston Globe* was reporting clear skies and 58 degrees.

The Real Feel— which is how sometimes you say, “58? It doesn’t *feel* like 58!” – the Real Feel was even higher: 60 degrees and rising!

The famous tower lights on the John Hancock Life Insurance building beamed a steady blue, signaling “steady blue skies.”

Looking out the window I was grateful for the day’s weather. I had my work cut out for me.



Inspired by Kate, I've started writing out daily lists of things to do. This day's list was daunting, but I was ready for it:

1. Mail final manuscript to publisher
2. Pick reviewer quotes for dust jacket
3. Write An Open Letter to Dan Brown

Mailing the manuscript seemed simple enough. After all, there was a U.S. mailbox just yards away, a reliable blue presence on the northwest corner of Exeter and Marlborough.

I went out to see what time the next pickup would be. But on reaching the mailbox, I saw a warning message from the Department of Homeland Security.

Now there was a complication. I knew I had to *weigh* the package; but if it was over a pound, I'd also have to take it to a *Post Office*.



Back in the house I balanced the bulky envelope on our kitchen scale, a reciprocal-action Polder 238C.

The Polder 238C had a remarkable feature; a dial that showed the actual weight of an object and also “metric,” which is something they have to use in Europe instead of the weight.

I’ve always liked the Polder. Just seeing those metric numbers makes you feel sophisticated. And Kate can tell you how often I’ve astounded our guests by saying, “let’s see how much that would be in grams.”

The numbers get to be *huge*: sort of like “your weight on Jupiter.”



At Logan Airport, Security Chief O'Malley frowned. Once, things were simple: a lost child now and then; maybe an argument over bags that look alike.

Not any more.

This had been another tough week. Two belligerent drunks pulled off transatlantic flights. A purse snatching. A detainee who'd tampered with the smoke detector on an A340, in violation of Federal Law.

But most of all it was tough being the first line of defense for Homeland Security. They'd built a cage in his office to hold all the contraband: bins of cuticle scissors, children's pen knives, exact-o blades, *barber shears*. Even a loaded pincushion.

What were people thinking, bringing things like that on a plane?

Why, your Jihadists could waltz through security completely clean, get on board, and find a ready-made *arsenal* waiting for them to grab from the tray tables. *And then what?*



By mid-afternoon my list looked like this

- ~~1. Mail final manuscript to publisher~~
2. Pick reviewer quotes for dust jacket
3. Write An Open Letter to Dan Brown

Don't worry just now about how the manuscript got mailed. I'll get to that later, in a dramatic flashback.

I thought the back cover of *The Buonorotti Anagram* would look good with praise from other authors of future New York Times #1 Bestsellers, and several of them had read my manuscript.

The best quote by far was "Jack Russell does it again." (Jack Russell is my *pen* name). And some of the others looked workable too. Dan, let me ask you, author-to-author: is it okay to take "Colossal" as a one-word quote if the reviewer used "colossally"?

But as I made my way through the stack, I noticed something that would *turn my world upside down*.



The comment was negative all right, but it was also mysterious.

A nearly blank sheet of paper with two short sentences in 20-point Arial bold, or maybe Helvetica 21.

Another Dan-Brown-wannabe effort.
When will these chuckleheads ever learn?

Even more mysterious was the handwritten note in the margin:

Why not wise up, "chuckle"-head?
You can get a "chuckle" from the World-Wide Web

It didn't rhyme perfectly, but this note seemed like a riddle just the same: the kind of riddle that can't be understood until you've solved it.

What could it mean? "Chuckle," "head," and "wise" were all obscure. "World-Wide Web" – well, *that* could be a place to start.

Little did I realize it *would* be a start: and more. Much, much more.



Soon I was browsing the World Wide Web. The web, also known as the Internet, is a sort of net-like connection that covers the globe. Part telephone, part computer, part magazine rack, it almost defies description.

I like to think of the web as an “information superhighway” that can take you anywhere you want to go. But really you don’t go anywhere; you just sit where you are. It’s the *information* that zips back and forth on *this* superhighway.

That’s why you won’t see any mini-marts along the way, or those blue signs with the stick figure sleeping in a hotel bed.

Hours later, I was fighting exhaustion. I’d Googled just about every combination of “head,” “chuckle,” “wise,” etc. to no avail.

This code was *one tough nut to crack*.

Then by chance I tried “Chuckle and Dan Brown” and immediately saw two things: first,

The "AND" operator is unnecessary – we include all search terms by default

Next, that elusive result—the one I’d been looking for but not finding!



“Oh Christ – were you surfing the web all night again? What is it *this* time?” It was six in the morning and Kate had found me asleep at the keyboard.

“Here,” I said, handing her a pad covered with my notes.

“I don’t get it” she said, in that tone people use when they do get it only they’re pretty sore.

I started flipping through the pages in her hand. “Look at this. Dan Brown and Chuckle: *three hundred twenty thousand* Google results. All other writers, *zero*. No one has ‘chuckled’ in a novel for at least *fifty years*. Dan *owns* that word.”

Kate looked confused.

“Now” I continued, “Here’s a scene from *my* book.”

“Amazing,” Kush said.

“Pretty simple, really” Andrew chuckled.

“Image Processing 101. . . .”

After I showed her a dozen more “chuckles” in *The Buonorotti Anagram*, Kate asked darkly, “What are you getting at?”

That’s when I dropped the bombshell.

“*Copyright violation*,” I hissed. “Something – or some one – has been making me put *Dan Brown material* in my book.”

We stared at each other a long time. “Poor sweetie,” she said. “Look, we’ve got a plane to catch. Did you put ‘pack for Detroit’ on your list?”



Officially, it's the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Some call it the MBTA. But for most Bostonians, it's simply – “the T.”

The T: for over a hundred years, a fixture and a lifeline in Boston. And Kate and I were riding the T, after negotiating a bidirectional turnstile in Copley Station Inbound.

Ingeniously designed, these bidirectional turnstiles are like two monodirectional turnstiles in one, allowing passengers to go through in either direction, just not at the same time.

Dan, you could set an entire adventure novel on the T, which is like a world in itself. Or better still a movie. Imagine the sound track: Irish folk tunes at Government Center, whale-song at Aquarium, mariachis at Maverick in East Boston. Picture this: Tom Hanks steps from the Orange Line into the teeming streets of Chinatown, to the sounding of a gong!



High in a Manhattan office tower, far from the noise of the streets, The Publisher Douglas McGregor looked across his grand desk to a credenza on the far wall.

He smiled inwardly as he gazed at his arsenal: nineteen manuscripts lined up like so many MX missiles, armed and ready to deploy.

But his mood soured as he remembered the nagging truth: the keystone of this arsenal was missing!

Impulsively, he picked up the phone and called the receptionist.

“Yes, Douglas,” she sighed.

“Has the mail come yet?”

“Same as five minutes ago—*no*.”

“Well, let me know as soon as it comes.”

“Yes” she sighed again. “I’ll tell you ‘when it comes, and whether there’s a *package from Boston*,’” she mimicked.



As we got off the escalator in Terminal E, Kate rubbed her shoulder.

“I guess I overpacked today: this weighs a ton.”

“No, you didn’t overpack,” I chuckled. *Chuckling was going to be one tough habit to break.* “I just put some of my early drafts in your bag.”

“I can’t believe it; you actually did!” Kate was kneeling beside her open bag, tossing manila envelopes on the floor around my feet. “I am not carrying these another step.”

With the past day’s events, my mind was an exploding whirlpool of thoughts and feelings. On the one hand, it was embarrassing to have Kate yell at me in the airport. At the same time, I liked the way her knees looked in navy tights.

But soon she was headed to the gate and I was gathering my papers.



If the T is a world in itself, then the cavernous space of Logan's Terminal E is like a "crossroads of humanity." People scurry about speaking just about every language known to man, their hands clutching passports in a rainbow of colors.

Heading to the security line, I paused to admire the fluorescent logos of the world's great air carriers and savor the romance in their names: SAS. KLM. Air Canada.

Soon enough, though, reality would come crashing down.



“Sir, this isn’t a boarding pass. It’s your rental car reservation.”

Here I was, facing the elite guard of airport security – solo! – and already off on the wrong foot. I had to recover, and fast.

Quickly I went through my papers and produced the correct document, handing it over with just a bit of a half-smile—as if to say “that was foolish of me, but don’t think I’m not taking this seriously.”

The situation stabilized as we went through the standard drill.

“Did you pack your bag yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Your bag has been with you at all times?”

“Yes.”

Then it hit – and in a flash I could see it coming even *as* it hit – like an inevitable destiny.

“Did anyone ask you to carry anything?”



From the shabby anteroom of the airport security station, I looked through the glass into Chief O'Malley's office. One of my guards was explaining the situation to him.

How striking to see those two officials—one Irish, one black—working together on my case. A real symbol of Boston: proudly traditional, yet ever-changing!

Now they were laughing. I could imagine the repartee: poking good-natured fun at each other's part of town, just to relieve the day's tension.

But then their expressions changed. It was time for business.



They came in and O'Malley sat across from me.
"Mr....*Kush*, is that right, Johnson?"

"Right, Chief."

"Mr. Kush—you say *your wife* asked you to carry these envelopes."

"That's correct," I said.

"And *why* did she ask you to carry these, Mr. Kush?"

"They were too heavy for her. Anyway, they were mine to begin with."

"She asked you to carry your own packages."
O'Malley looked over at Johnson and shook his head slowly—*was it in disbelief?*

"She had more room in her bag, so I put them there; but it made her shoulder hurt."

O'Malley sighed. Peering distractedly under some of the flaps, he asked "Mr. Kush, do you think it's a *good idea* to just put packages in your wife's bag?"

"Honestly, I don't know," I said. *Stick to the truth and you can't slip up.*

"It strikes me as *inconsiderate*, Mr. Kush,"
O'Malley said. "I bet you're bigger than she is, and stronger. . ." Now he was smiling just a bit.
"Johnson, where is. . ."

"*Mrs.* Kush, Chief. She's on Northwest 1311, too. We have an agent bringing her from the gate to make a positive ID."



Dan, I didn't actually witness this next part, but from what I know I can picture it clear as day.

In a dim subterranean chamber deep underground, a large bearded figure sat at a desk, writing. From time to time, he consulted a book that was big enough to be a tome.

Tentatively, a slender figure approached in the shadows.

“Yes?” the man boomed, not looking up.

“Father, it is I,” said a tremulous voice.

“Daughter, did you not think I would know?” he intoned. After a pause, he added “And what have you brought me?”

The young woman approached, took a heavy parcel from her bag, and dropped it on the desk.

“Good, good.” he said, and at last he looked up at her. “But is this ALL?”

She reached into her bag again, and strewed CDs on top of the package. “How could Father believe I would not fulfill his entire wish?” she protested.



Twenty minutes later, Kate and I were walking to the gate at a brisk pace. Not that we needed to rush; they were holding the plane for us.

“Okay,” she finally said. “I’m being *really calm*. Explain again why you told them I was a terrorist.”

“I didn’t – I said you ‘asked me to carry a package.’”

She took time to reflect on this.

“You know?” she said, “I’m thinking.” She really *did* sound calm. “Right this minute, we could be in the back of a Gulfstream. Heading to some CIA interrogation center. In oh I don’t know Uzbekistan?”

“Exactly. That was the risk: it was like Game Theory.”

Her heels clicked on the terrazzo.

“I knew I could lie about the package,” I continued, “and maybe get away with it. B-u-t... why did he pick *me* to ask those questions, *today*? Maybe they’ve *seen us in the terminal*, and it’s a test. Then if I lie, we’re both in the slammer like *that*. But, if I tell the truth, then just maybe *you* can get us out of it.”

“Me?” she asked.

“You were our only chance.”

“That’s crazy. I’ve never been so scared in my life.” We were walking more slowly now.

“It didn’t show. You handled it perfectly.”

“Well. . . . I *did* have the truth on my side.”



After takeoff, Kate read *The Structures of Everyday Life*, the one by the celebrated French intellectual Fernand Braudel. I delved into my earlier drafts of *The Buonorotti Anagram*.

At first, apart from some superficial resemblances in the plot and storytelling, the only evidence of copying was all those darned chuckles. Working backward, though, telltale signs began to fit together like the pieces of a detective story.

Item: some months earlier, I had systematically removed twenty occurrences of “thunderstruck.”

Item: in another draft, I had changed “symbology” to “semiotics,” gone back to “symbology” and finally settled on “puzzleology.”

Item: bits of dialogue had emerged and disappeared:

“Thirty thousand Euro: *Madre de Dios!*” Father Diego exclaimed. “How much that is that in dollars?”

And it got even worse.



In the final version of *Buonorotti Anagram*, it's just part of a sentence. I explain how, after her stint as a fighter pilot in the Israeli Air Force, Donna

“... threw herself into French culture and wrote a very popular book called *La Vie en Rose*, about a great French *chanteuse*, the singer Edith Piaf.”

But in an earlier draft, there was an entire *scene*: one involving Donna, Kush, and an urbane older man wearing an ascot and smoking jacket:

. . . “Edith Piaf?” Kush asked.

“Come, come, my good man,” Lord Alton chided, handing Kush a snifter of 100-year-old brandy. “Surely you’ve heard of The Great Piaf.”

Raising an eyebrow, he added “you *do* know what a ‘chanteuse’ is, don’t you?”

“Well, I think I used to,” Kush replied, “but maybe you should refresh my memory” . . . etc. etc.

There it was – a signature Dan Brown scene right in my own book! And this turned out to be just one of many: each one inserted and later modified or removed. Soon my head was clanging with a tidal wave of smoking guns.

And most disturbing– I had NO MEMORY of writing these scenes. OR OF REMOVING THEM EITHER!



The Publisher paced in the boardroom. In two days, the media conglomerate's executive team would be sitting at the great table. *This PowerPoint talk would make or break his career.*

He looked out the window. The boardroom was on the top floor, a dozen stories above his office. *674 feet in the air*—exactly 119 feet higher than the Washington Monument, he recalled.

Now The Publisher imagined the Washington Monument was outside the window, and he was looking at it 119 feet below. The Monument was slowly patrolling the Avenue of the Americas, shooting death rays from those blinking red lights.

He turned away and picked up the remote control. *Patience*, he thought: *practice makes perfect.*



The car rental agent slid the keys and folder toward me. “Excuse me,” I said, “but I couldn’t help noticing; I bet you’re *not from California*.”

He looked startled. “Why, that’s right,” he said. “I’m a native Detroiter. How did you know?”

“The way you described how to get onto ***I-94***. It’s a dead giveaway: if you were from California, you’d say *The 94*.”

Before long, a crowd had gathered around me.

“I’m from Florida,” a woman said. “We have I-75, but my sister just moved to Anaheim. How do I talk with her?”

“Just remember,” I explained. “If she says ‘*The 75*,’ she means *I-75*. Say, did you know *that same road* comes all the way here to Michigan?”

“Can you help me out?” a man said. “I’m traveling on business, from Washington.”

“Which Washington?” I asked. “There’s a city and a state, you know.”

“Why, that’s right,” he laughed with embarrassment. “I meant the city.”

“Now, *there’s* an interesting case,” I noted. “Because in Washington, DC, you have ‘***The Beltway***.’”

“Yes, yes, I know, but I’ll be going to L.A. and San Diego. What should I do?”

“You’ll probably be driving on *The 5* and *The 405*,” I advised, writing a note on a 3x5 card. “Here. Practice with this, and enjoy your trip to the Golden State.”



Eventually, Kate gave me one of the secret signals we've developed over the years. She pointed to the dial of her wristwatch—meaning *it's getting late*.

This had been a nice break in a trying day, but she was right. I winked back—signaling *message received*.

“Sorry, but we need to be going,” I said.

“Just once more,” a voice piped up. “Is it *The I-405*, or just *The 405*?”

“You tell me,” I chuckled.

We made our way out to the lot, waves and handshakes all around.



Now Kate and I were driving north toward her parents' palatial home in Farmington, Michigan, deep in conversation.

The rented Ion's 1.1-litre plant was purring—and with just 3,298 miles, the car smelled new.

"You have no recollection at all?" she asked.

"None. It's a blank. And, on top of that, I haven't had a single clue or riddle since yesterday."

"How about this?" she asked, pointing to a billboard. "*Easter is the season. And Jesus is the reason.* That could take you someplace you didn't want to go."

"No, no; this is something mental," I sighed. "I wish someone could help me. Help me understand the inner workings of the mind."

"If that's it," Kate said mysteriously, "you may be heading the right way already."

I gave her a blank look.

"Ken Davidson?" she hinted. "*Doctor Kenneth S. Davidson?*"

Of course! Her father, *the eminent mindologist!*

Immediately I pictured the dark recesses of Dr. Ken's study, the walls covered with diplomas and certificates, shelves sagging under the weight of his many Emmy awards.



The great bearded man set aside the CDs and unwrapped the parcel. Inside were six heavy manila envelopes. “Good; very good,” he repeated.

Pushing these aside, he put another stack of envelopes on his desk. “I am finished with these manuscripts,” he said to the girl. “You know what to do.”

“Is there nothing more I can do for Father?” she asked.

He pulled a wad of bills from his pocket and peeled off some fifties. “Go to Burberry and buy yourself one of those nice plaid bags,” he said. “Your Hello Kitty is driving me nuts.”

“Does Father understand this is irony?” she asked.

“That,” he said, “is exactly what I don’t like about it.”

She took the money, lowered her gaze, and left.



After hearing my problems, Dr. Ken mused, stroking his beard.

“It sounds to me like you’ve developed some *bad habits*,” he offered. “Like ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING: you copied SOME of Dan Brown, so now you think you’ve copied ALL of Dan Brown.”

“Why, you’re right. I - I do think that.” I was thunderstruck.

“Maybe you’re MAGNIFYING, too. Have you ever thought ‘I’m such a LOSER’?”

“Yes . . . I’ve been thinking that nonstop *all day*.” You could see why gets to set his own hours and vacation schedule with the network.

“Here’s what I suggest. Take a copy of your manuscript and this highlighter. Mark all the words that you DIDN’T take from Dan Brown. You’ll feel better afterward.”

I was grateful for the help. “You really pulled me out of a nosedive there.”

“*C’est mon boulot*,” he twinkled, adding “It’s my job.”



Leaving his magnificent study, I paused at the heavy oak door.

“There’s one thing I still don’t get,” I said. “It’s like I couldn’t let myself *know* I was copying. Why would I do that and be unconscious?”

Now it was Ken who looked thunderstruck.

After looking around, he quietly closed the door. In a hushed voice, he asked “How do *you* know about . . . THE UNCONSCIOUS?”

END OF PART I