

## **PART III**



*It always happens that way: when you're happy and unsuspecting.*

Back at Logan, Kate and I rode the new moving walkway, basking in the recorded welcomes from Ted Kennedy and Tom Menino. "That's true," I was saying, "This town really *does* have world-class colleges and universities."

Then, in flash, someone came up alongside, gave me a sharp push and ran off with my shoulder bag.

Trapped in the slow-moving crowd, all I could do was yell "stop," but to no avail. The shadowy figure dashed ahead past the blue pay kiosks and disappeared into the garage.



After just 30 minutes in that same dingy security station, we were out in the central garage, Paul Revere level. My mouth had a bad taste of old coffee, Cremora and Equal.

O'Malley lifted the police tape as Kate and I ducked under. "I have to ask you two to look at this: I'm sorry," he said.

I stared for a full minute. "That's my bag all right," I sighed. Unzipped, turned inside out, clothing scattered every which way.

"Anything missing?" he asked.

"Just *every single one* of my draft manuscripts."

"Not *those*?" O'Malley shook his head bitterly. "After all that trouble. . ." We were getting to be like old friends.

I kept staring: and the longer I looked, the *stranger* it looked.

It was just a pile of clothing, and yet—it also looked like *two people*, mirror images leaning apart, waving their sleeves; or mirror image clouds; or a pair of serpents; or a grotesque, grinning face. It was captivating; I couldn't decide *what* it looked like.

"Something wrong?" Johnson asked.

Kate signaled me with her eyes: *don't say anything*.

Recovering quickly, I said nonchalantly, "just realized: you'll be holding my *second-favorite shirt* as evidence. Damn."

Johnson laughed, put a hand on my shoulder, and we headed back to the terminal.

At my other side, Kate whispered: "*Rorschach!*"



I signed the report, O'Malley offered condolences, and Johnson led me to the door.

"We'll do everything we can to find your papers," Johnson said. "But don't get your hopes up: there's a lot of police work and just so many of us."

As soon as he closed the door behind me, he turned to the Chief.

"You thinking what I'm thinking?" he said.

O'Malley straightened in his chair: "I think so . . . are you thinking '*ritualistic*'?"

"Yeah. Listen, we'd better get Washington: this could be *big*."



O'Malley took the receiver and pressed a preset number. As he waited, he looked with regret at the neatly-packed fishing rod and tackle box in the corner.\*

Johnson watched in admiration as O'Malley cut through the DC bureaucracy with a few *choice words*.

“You heard me right—how many Michael Chertoffs do you *have* there?” . . .

“Just tell him it's O'Malley, and it can't wait.” . . .

“Don't worry, he'll know. I'll be here.”

After slamming down the receiver, O'Malley took a few deep breaths to relax.

Regaining his composure, he said to Johnson:  
“Nice work, by the way. How'd you track down that bag so fast?”

“Easy. I figured there's *no way* this guy leaves the garage without prepaying his ticket.”

---

\* *Dan, I think I forgot to mention that O'Malley had a fishing trip planned for the end of the week: his first vacation in years. He was so excited that he brought his gear to the office to throw a few practice casts. Anyway, that's why he had fishing gear in his office. Hope this helps :-)*



*Now we were back home—but . . .*

The apartment was a wreck—bookcases emptied on the floor, papers scattered, not a CD or flash drive to be found—and my laptop *gone*.

I was about to call the police when the phone rang. It was Ken.

Kate grabbed the phone. “Daddy, it’s Kate: would you mind telling me what is going on? Suddenly The Unconscious is all over us.” She was pacing and talking.

“*Yes!*” she said: “stole a bagful of manuscripts. Trashed the house and took Tom’s laptop . . . yes, right. . . . Uh-huh . . . Rorschach image; yes . . .” she glanced around. “. . . yeah, here too.”

She stood still listening for a while.

“Daddy, *I don’t care* if they’re a splinter group. Can’t you communicate with them? . . . Look, I’m too angry to talk. I’ll call you back.”

With a groan, Kate slumped into an armchair. “He says it’s not ‘really’ The Unconscious” (she waved her fingers around *really*)—“it’s The Undermind.”

“That’s the ‘splinter’ group?” I said. “Hey, you don’t need to give me that look; just say ‘yes’.”

“Sorry . . . Yes.”

“So what do we do?” I asked.

“I think we run. These guys sound *scary*.”

But, dangerous as it was, we decided to get my manuscript from the publisher, and *then* run. The copy I’d mailed was the last one left.



Deep in the menu of the InFocus projector, the Publisher was discovering unexpected features. He smiled as he reset the resolution and his “Week 1” slide got all scrunched in the corner of the screen.

The Executive Team had nitpicked *everything*.

“How can we sue Dan Brown if his book came out first?”

“What makes you think you’ll get onto Weekend Edition?”

“You’re going outside your Mission and Core Competency: these don’t sound like *Adventure Novels for Boys*.”

“Are these books *good enough*?”

He’d carefully answered them all. The authors had plenty of evidence, the art history titles were aimed at the NPR crowd, the books were *updated* Adventure Novels for Boys. And no, not all the titles were top-notch, but it didn’t matter.

Thankfully, the publicist stood by him. “This barrage of announcements just clears the way for the one book that will tower over everything: *The Buonorotti Anagram*.”

Finally the Chairman spoke. “But Douglas, if I understand correctly, you still don’t have *The Buonorotti Anagram*.”

“I do have it,” he’d lied. “It’s under lock and key.”



But the Chairman wasn't satisfied. "Twenty lawsuits—that's a huge risk."

"Don't worry," Douglas reassured. "*We control the cases*, so we can quietly drop them after the publicity dies down."

Corporate counsel chimed in with lukewarm support: "Oh, we can probably handle that."

"Baloney," the Chairman huffed. "The authors will fall apart during their depositions and we'll have a countersuit on our hands."

The Publisher explained the authors were solid: he'd done mental profiles of them.

Oddly, that was when the Chairman really lost his temper. "Douglas, your amateur lawyering is bad enough without amateur mindology on top of it. I'm bringing in a real professional: *Dr. Ken*."

Looking around, he said "We'll resume this discussion a week from today."

And that was it. Somehow it felt like a death sentence.



At the Prudential Center, the rental car agent was sympathetic but brusque. “I’m sorry; we simply don’t have any cars. I wish I could help you.”

“Can’t you check again?” I asked. “I’m a regular customer; just rented an Ion this week.”

As I fished in my wallet for the receipt from Detroit Metro, Kate spoke up.

“Hands on the counter – *Robbie L.!*”

Kate was brandishing a dark object toward his head. “Do you know what this is?”

He raised his eyes. “A Blackberry?”

“That’s right: good. Now, Robbie, keep your hands on the counter and take a closer look. What do you see?”

“A complaint to my supervisor . . . about me.”

She backed away a step. “Robbie, all I have to do is press SEND, and your career at Dollar is up in smoke. You don’t want that, do you?”

Kate was bluffing—when there’s a customer service problem, she always blames *management*—but she sounded convincing.

“No,” he said, almost in a whisper.



“Tom, watch the door; don’t let anyone come in. We’re going to take this again from the top.”

My mind in was turmoil. I couldn’t help thinking *Ugh; if anyone shows up I have to tell them some stupid story.* Yet I knew the stickup was Kate’s idea, so she really deserved to do that part. I half wished we’d given up that street space on Marlborough and taken our own car.

Sure enough, Robbie quickly “discovered” a midsize and even gave us the economy rate.

“When do you plan to bring the car back?” he asked.

From the doorway, I said in my best strong voice: “*Never!*”



“Never,” I repeated. “I want to *return it in Manhattan* tonight.”

Robbie gave me a long stare as this sunk in.

“A *one-way rental*: we don’t usually do those,” he ventured. Glancing at Kate’s handheld, he added, “but I think it can be arranged.”

As the keyboard clattered, Kate said, “Robbie, can you excuse us a minute?” and took me aside.

“What are you *thinking?*” she hissed. “They’re going to whack us with a drop-off fee!”

I was firm: “Tell him to *waive* it.”

“*No*; Robbie could get in *trouble* for that.”

“Fine,” I said. “Pay the drop-off fee. It’s better than being charged for a second or third day. Plus we save on overnight parking. You know what garages in New York charge these days?”

“\$37.98 a night, as I recall,” she came back.

“Try *forty-five dollars*—once you add the 18½% tax,” I corrected. “The posted rates have a *secret code*.”

As we left, Kate put a hand under Robbie’s chin and said gently, “Don’t try anything funny. I still have that message saved.”

“No way,” he promised.



As soon as he opened the door, Zak noticed the difference. “*Nice* outfit,” he said as she walked in. He pointed to the plaid bag. “I like the bit of irony too.”

Angela grabbed his iPod and dangled it in front of his eyes. “You are getting sleepy . . . *very* sleepy” she said, marching him backwards.

When he flopped back sitting, she kneeled astride him on the sofa. “Now you are in my power,” she droned. *Where was all this coming from?*

“And?” he asked, nuzzling her neck. “What do you want me to do?”

She pushed him back. “Show me your *weapons cache*.”



In practically no time we were at the Mass Pike Sturbridge Exit. Kate was driving, wearing that pair of black shoes with the chunky heel. The forsythia were in bloom and we were in good spirits.

“It’s funny how doing something *bad* can make you feel *good*,” I said.

She shot a glance over at me and laughed: “Is there something I should know about?”

“No,” I said. “Well, except that you can change lanes here.”

“Aren’t *you* full of surprises today,” she said as I waved my FAST LANE transponder at the toll gate.



We passed the FOOD AND BOOKS sign. “Could we turn off the radio? The DJ’s getting to me.” Kate was being polite: she’s never been big on soft rock.

“But that last ad reminds me,” she went on. “Mother’s Day card: can you write that on your list?”

This was an annual family ritual. Isabelle would be a wreck if we ever forgot.

“What’ll it be this year?” I asked. “Gift in her name to *Medecins san Frontieres*, the DNC, or the ACLU?”

“ACLU. Definitely ACLU.”



*Zak looked terrific—like an armed Nick Cave.* Joining The Undermind had been great for his appearance.

He and Angela had a simple plan:

She'd deliver *The Buonorotti Anagram* to him instead of her father.

At the next APA meeting, The Undermind would break the discovery as their own, stage a Mass Disorientation, dissolve the APA and declare the Collective Unconscious.

After that, Zak would liberate the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Unconscious, ousting Angela's father. And Angela would stop being daddy's little messenger-girl!

“What could be more surreal than firing a revolver into a crowd?” he asked, aiming at the window.

“But just *blanks*,” she added.

“Right,” he said after a moment. “Right; just blanks.”



On that really dull stretch of Connecticut, I asked Kate for a writing opinion. I read her a passage where I'd used *dialogue* as a technique to work in some of my *research*:

"He lives at 417 Park Avenue," Kush said.

"Whoa," Blanchard exclaimed. "Sounds like a white-glove prewar co-op. Must be nice."

"Is it ever! I was there for a party once," Kush said. "As I recall, it was a classic 8 with fireplaced reception, 2 master suites, 2 maids and state of the art kitchen."

Blanchard gave a low whistle. "Wonder what a place like that sells for."

"That's good, 'fireplaced reception' is good," Kate said in a stagy voice. "No, really; I like it."

"Now here's my question. Ready? Blanchard says 'wonder what a place like that sells for'—here's choice one:"

"Oh, about 4.25 million," Kush estimated.

"Got it? Now choice two:"

As it happened, Kush had just recently seen a Stribling ad in the *Times* for an *identical* unit at 417 Park Avenue. "I think they're going for about 4.25 million," he recalled.

Kate thought a bit. "I see how you're going for *plausibility* in choice two," she said hesitantly. "But . . . I'd go with *choice one*—more direct."



We gassed up, Kate shopped in the mini-mart, and I started driving. It was really cloudy now and I had the wipers on intermittent.

“Look,” Kate said. “Barnum’s Animal Crackers! Here’s a lion for you. Watch out: he might *bite* you.”

We played Bridges of Merritt Parkway. “Your turn,” I said.

“The eagle. The one with the eagle is next.”

“You keep guessing the eagle and you keep being wrong,” I warned her.

“This time I think I’m right.”

“Okay, but you’re going to end up with only one point again.”



In the late afternoon light, O'Malley looked out the window at the Capitol dome. *Jesus, Mary and Joseph, do I hate this town*, he thought.

In his hardened view, Washington DC was kind of a self-absorbed place, one that had become *insulated* from the rest of the country.

The FBI mindologist droned on, pointing to photos of other scattered luggage, elaborate graffiti, burning oil slicks, and fields strewn with slain and mutilated animals—all with that same creepy symmetry. “We call him the ink-blot murderer,” he explained.

“That’s right,” Johnson cut in, “blame The Black Man.”

“No, no, no,” the mindologist said, and launched into the history of ink-blot tests.

After a couple minutes, O'Malley caught Johnson's eye and they both burst out laughing. “Can't you see he's jerking your chain?” O'Malley explained. *With friends like these Ivy dweebs*, he thought cynically.

“Here's the real question,” Johnson said. “Why call him the ink-blot murderer if he hasn't killed anyone?”

“We think it's just a matter of time: he's seriously unbalanced.”



The mindologist left the room to get more material.

“Well,” said O’Malley, “you think Young Bowtie here knows what he’s talking about?”

“It’s amazing, but I think he’s on to something,” Johnson said.

“Me too,” O’Malley agreed. “Pretty bright kid, actually. But God help him if he ever meets up with a live criminal,” he sniffed.

“He’s not telling us everything, is he?”

“They never do.”

“Is his name really Brownie?”

“No one would make that up.”



Near Stamford, Kate found a classical station; she put her feet on the dashboard and leaned back. “It *is* the Mozart Clarinet Concerto,” she beamed.

I glanced down at the readout on the radio. “Karl Böhm conducting,” I noted approvingly. “I think the LP was DG-3285.”

“You’re making that up.”

When we got to the dreamy Adagio, even the wipers sounded good. Kate leaned her head to the window.

“Oh . . . crap” she said slowly in a low voice. “I wasn’t paranoid: we *are* being followed.”

Trying not to move my head, I glanced at the mirror. “You’re right.” I agreed. “Pretty dumb, tailing us in an American sedan.”

*“But I meant the BMW.”*

We were both right.



At the end of their meeting, O'Malley asked, "What do you want us to do?"

"Just be on the alert," Brownie replied. "The ball's in our court. We'll have some agents keep an eye on your Kush fellow, for his safety."

Johnson said coolly, "So *he's* your suspect."

The silence was deafening as Brownie pondered what to say.

"At first, I was on the fence, but yes," he explained.

He opened a file folder containing just two items: a security camera photo of a stickup, and a copy of a car rental agreement.

"He—I mean *they*—are becoming violent."

**END OF PART III**