





# **CLEAN HANDS**

**Also by Patrick Hoffman**

*Every Man a Menace*

*The White Van*

# **CLEAN HANDS**

*A NOVEL*



# **PATRICK HOFFMAN**



Atlantic Monthly Press  
*New York*

Copyright © 2020 by Patrick Hoffman

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. Scanning, uploading, and electronic distribution of this book or the facilitation of such without the permission of the publisher is prohibited. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated. Any member of educational institutions wishing to photocopy part or all of the work for classroom use, or anthology, should send inquiries to Grove Atlantic, 154 West 14th Street, New York, NY 10011 or [permissions@groveatlantic.com](mailto:permissions@groveatlantic.com).

FIRST EDITION

*Published simultaneously in Canada  
Printed in the United States of America*

This book was set in 12-pt. Adobe Garamon Pro  
by Alpha Design & Composition of Pittsfield, NH.

First Grove Atlantic hardcover edition: June 2020

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available for this title.

ISBN 978-0-8021-2953-6  
eISBN 978-0-8021-2954-3

Atlantic Monthly Press  
an imprint of Grove Atlantic  
154 West 14th Street  
New York, NY 10011

Distributed by Publishers Group West  
[groveatlantic.com](http://groveatlantic.com)

20 21 22 23 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Reyhan, Edgar, and Lois





**1**

# **LOOSE IN THE WILD**



The footage appeared to show two men bumping into each other, exchanging a quick word, and then moving on. The pickpocket had been skilled enough to hide the theft; all you could see was the bump. The camera—mounted in a dome on the ceiling of the passageway in Grand Central Station—didn't have an ideal angle, but the picture was clear. It had been early in the morning; rush-hour commuters passed in both directions across the screen.

Michael D'Angelo—in-house investigator for Carlyle, Driscoll, and Hathaway—had been tasked with examining the video. He sat at his desk and watched the footage again and again, backing it up and playing it over, step by step. D'Angelo had spent eighteen years in the FBI; he knew this kind of thing took time and patience.

The victim of the pickpocketing, Chris Cowley, was a junior associate attorney at the same law firm that employed D'Angelo. He reported that the cell phone had been stolen from the inside breast pocket of his jacket. Upon discovering the theft, Chris had rushed to work and waited for his boss, Elizabeth Carlyle—the head of the firm—to emerge from the elevator. When she did, he told her that his phone had been stolen, and—far more alarmingly—that he had hot documents from the Calcott case on the phone.

Walk. Step. Bump. D'Angelo tapped the space bar and paused the video. He backed it up, this time a little further, and watched again. After the bump, the video showed Chris continuing toward the

turnstile, where a slight bottleneck of morning commuters had formed. This had slowed his progress. Once through the turnstile, the footage showed Chris patting his pants pockets for the first time. Two seconds later, the patting moved up to his jacket and became more urgent. Chris then turned and looked in the direction he'd just come from.

D'Angelo sighed, took a sip of coffee, and backed the video up again. He noted the time of the bump—08:12:41—and let it play right up until Cowley turned and ran after the thief. Sixteen seconds. He jotted the time down on a yellow legal pad along with his other notes. He watched the whole thing again. Something about it didn't sit right with him. For one thing, the lawyer and the pickpocket appeared to exchange a glance a few steps before the bump.

But that wasn't it—after the glance, they appeared to be drawn toward each other. Still, that wasn't it, either; it was the bump itself that bothered him. D'Angelo paused the video, closed his eyes, and tried to put himself into the young attorney's shoes. Would he, under similar circumstances, ever bump into someone like that? He didn't think so. Could he imagine performing an awkward dance? Sure. Maybe touch a hand to an arm? Yes. But to actually bump into another man, to have your legs, torso, and shoulder make contact with another person in the midst of rush-hour traffic? It didn't seem likely.

He paused the video; his mind drifted back a few hours and replayed the events of the morning. He'd just settled in at his desk when Elizabeth Carlyle stopped by and asked him to come to her office. She'd always been tough, but her voice sounded particularly flinty that morning. "I need you to come with me right away."

It wasn't every day that Elizabeth Carlyle came to summon you. In fact, D'Angelo couldn't remember it ever happening before. She wasn't the type to drop by in person; she'd usually send someone to get you.

She was in her late fifties. She dressed in tailored power suits, and always—except when she was in court—seemed to be in a hurry. She was cold, but it was hard not to be impressed by her. D'Angelo

studied her for a second and saw that she was stressed. Without asking what she needed, he pushed himself up from his desk, touched the knot of his tie, and followed her.

When they entered her office, D'Angelo observed Chris Cowley sitting on a chair in front of Ms. Carlyle's desk. D'Angelo didn't know him well; they'd never worked on anything together. Now D'Angelo looked at him as though for the first time. He was in his late twenties but was still skinny, like a teenager. He had a full head of light brown hair, and his face appeared to only need occasional shaving. A petulant expression hung on his face, and for a moment it made D'Angelo think that he, himself, was about to be accused of some misdeed. Before he could even begin to imagine what that accusation could be, Elizabeth spoke: "Michael, Chris's cell phone was stolen this morning."

*So what?* thought D'Angelo.

She then told him that Cowley had been carrying the Calcott hot documents on the phone, that the phone had been unlocked, and that his password had—inconceivably—been turned off. The hot documents were the most toxic emails, memos, chats, text messages, and other evidence at the center of the Emerson v. Calcott case. That case, a federal civil suit between two banks, represented the largest portion of Carlyle, Driscoll, and Hathaway's billable hours. It was, to put it plainly, their biggest case. Without the Calcott Corporation, the firm would not exist.

Anger rolled through D'Angelo. He found that kind of sloppiness personally offensive. It didn't take long for the anger to transform into suspicion. What the hell was this kid doing carrying hot documents on his phone? And what in the name of God was he doing walking around with his phone unlocked?

He studied Chris. The lawyer sat there with his elbows on his knees, bent over like a man waiting for news. His ill humor was still apparent. D'Angelo was in the middle of wondering whether it was genuine or not, when Elizabeth asked if he could wipe the phone remotely.

He thought about it. “Sure,” he said. “If it’s turned on and has a signal.”

“It’s not on,” said Chris. “It’s off. Fuck.” He looked like he might cry. “I checked.”

Hoping for some kind of guidance, D’Angelo glanced toward Elizabeth Carlyle. He didn’t have a particularly warm relationship with her. She wasn’t the type of person who joked around—it was a quality he actually admired—but her vibe right then was downright hostile. It scared him, and for a moment he patted at his own pockets, making sure he hadn’t lost his phone. “I’ll see how we can do it,” he said.

“Good,” said Elizabeth. “I need to tell Scott. I’ll be right back.”

She left the room, and D’Angelo again turned his attention to Chris. The younger man shifted in his seat and stared out the window. He kept shaking his head—a gesture D’Angelo interpreted as an attempt to express disbelief.

“It’s a company phone?” D’Angelo asked.

“Yes.”

“Verizon?”

“Yes.”

“iPhone?”

“Yeah.”

“Tell me the number,” said D’Angelo, taking a notepad off Elizabeth’s desk.

Chris told him the number. After that D’Angelo had him run through the basics of the incident. The thief had been Asian, maybe Chinese, midforties, wearing a black suit. Chris said that after he noticed his phone missing, he tried to chase the man to a downtown-bound 6 train, but he missed him. He said he was 90 percent sure the man had boarded the train.

D’Angelo took out his cell phone and scrolled through his contacts looking for someone who would know how to wipe a powered-off iPhone. He called Emily Nolan, an ex-colleague from the FBI. The

call went straight to voicemail. He left a message. Next he called Jerry Lamb, another colleague from the Bureau. D'Angelo—outlining the general scenario for Lamb—moved toward the window and looked down at Madison Avenue. Eighteen floors below, he saw people shuffling to their jobs. A feeling of well-being settled on him; he felt focused.

The feeling was short lived. First, Jerry informed him that as long as the phone remained off it couldn't be wiped—not without putting something on there first. *Yes, he was sure of that.*

Elizabeth, now trailed by Scott Driscoll, her closest ally in the firm, came back into the room. As D'Angelo tried to end the call, her face showed impatience.

He told her the bad news. He tried to soften it by saying the phone would probably end up getting shipped to China, where it would be wiped and sold on the black market. That didn't comfort her.

When she asked again, he confirmed that it couldn't be done. He watched her eyes close; she rubbed her temples. D'Angelo glanced at Scott Driscoll. He was skinny and normally walked around with his arms out like a weight lifter, but he now stood—arms crossed in front of himself—like he was going to throw up. He looked ashen. He was roughly the same age as D'Angelo, midfifties, but he looked older now.

*Calm down*, thought D'Angelo, forcing himself to take a steadying breath. In his mind, he began forming a sentence; the message was going to be that he should get over to Grand Central, contact the NYPD, and begin trying to track the thief. See if the cops knew this dude. Start working.

Before he could speak, Elizabeth had opened her eyes, turned to Scott Driscoll, and asked, “Valencia Walker?”

Driscoll nodded.

D'Angelo felt a pang of jealousy. He was standing right there—what the hell did they need to call her for? He knew better than to protest. Instead, he looked away, nodded like he agreed, and told himself they

were calling her in because they were going to ask her to do things that they wouldn't ask someone from their own firm to do. They needed a buffer. By the time his eyes went back to Elizabeth, she had already placed the call.

A moment later she spoke into the phone: "Valencia, we have a situation," she said.

Valencia Walker was twenty-one blocks south of CDH's office. She was glad to excuse herself from the meeting she was in. She'd been expecting a call from Elizabeth and acted amused that it would be about a lost phone. What would she think of next?

After hanging up, she sent a text to two of her colleagues and told them she had a job that needed immediate attention. Were they in the city?

Milton Frazier responded instantly: *Affirmative.*

*Me too*, replied Billy Sharrock a moment later.

On the elevator ride down, Valencia texted them that the billing name for the job would be Hopscotch. She told Billy to go to Grand Central and contact the NYPD sergeant on duty: *Have him stand by.* She asked Milton to pick her up in front of Credit Suisse as soon as he could. Then she texted her assistant Danny Tsui and told him to drop everything, sit at his desk, and wait for further instruction.

As soon as the elevator doors opened, she stepped out and called Wally Philpott, an NYPD detective she paid for jobs like this. "How busy are you?" she asked, when he answered.

"Never too busy for you," said the cop.

"Can you meet me at Grand Central in half an hour?"

"Oh boy," said Wally. "Here we go."

*Now it begins*, thought Valencia as she made her way toward the building's exit. All of the men in the lobby—the security guards, couriers, and men in suits—watched her. She could feel it. She knew



she was good-looking, and she dressed the part. She wore tailored suits, chic and expensive. But it wasn't her looks or clothes they were gaping at. They were staring at her because she carried herself like the most powerful person in the building, no matter what building she happened to be in.

That sense of power had been developed during her ten years as a case officer in the CIA. Her path to the Agency had been unusual. She had gone to college (University of Pennsylvania), bummed around New York for a bit after graduation, went to law school (NYU), and joined The Bronx Defenders. After five years, wanting to make more money and needing a change of scenery, she applied for a position on the legal team of a large consulting firm. They had offices in Istanbul. She'd spent her junior year of college studying abroad at Boğaziçi University and spoke some Turkish. The job seemed like a natural fit.

One of her first jobs in Turkey involved handling some negotiations with a large communications technology company. Her counterpart at the company was a man named Hugh Loftus, a loud, big-bellied Texan. He had a red face, and he drank constantly, even during business hours. They spent months working together.

One night, they were in Emirgan, a neighborhood on the Bosphorus, having drinks with some of their Turkish colleagues. They were seated outside, and the sun was setting. Valencia looked across the table at Hugh. His face had become serious, something that rarely happened. He asked her to join him for a cigarette. She didn't smoke, but she stood up and followed him to the sidewalk.

When they were away from the group, he lit his cigarette, looked over his shoulder, and pulled Valencia by the arm so she was closer. They walked away from the outside tables. She worried that he was going to hit on her.

"You know, I used to work for the government," he said. "Would you ever think of doing that?"

Valencia told him her last job had been with The Bronx Defenders.

He smiled, shook his head, and looked down the river. "I'm talking Government with a big G, you hear me, right?"

Valencia smiled and raised her eyebrows theatrically. "You mean spy?"

"I'm gonna recommend you."

She asked why, and he told her he liked the way she carried herself. "You seem comfortable in your skin," he said. "Your Turkish is decent. You don't have any damn relatives here. And you brought me a Killen's steak when you came to negotiate."

She smiled.

"You flew it all the way in from Houston."

She reminded him that she'd also brought a bottle of bourbon.

"And that," he said, tapping her shoulder with his fat finger.

Still, she thought he was joking, and she paid him no mind.

Two weeks later, he called and said that a friend was in town. Maybe she'd like to meet him? She didn't need to ask what the meeting was about. She understood now. Before then, she'd never thought of being a spy; she had never even considered it. But just like that, it all made sense. Her life clicked into place. She couldn't sleep that night. She was too excited.

She met Hugh's friend—a thoughtful man who introduced himself as Cunningham—took a walk with him, answered questions about her life, asked him about his. The CIA was never mentioned. It all seemed very informal. A month later, Hugh met back up with her. "It's time to take a leave of absence," he said. "It'll be good for you."

She returned to the United States and spent the next year taking tests, being polygraphed, psychologically profiled, and waiting for her background to clear. She did contract work to pay her bills. On February 21, 2000, she received a generic envelope in the mail.

When she opened it, she saw it was from "the Office of Personnel." It didn't say anything about the CIA, but it told her to report for duty in three weeks.

In March of 2000, she began her two-week orientation. From there she was assigned to a desk in the European Division, Turkey section, of the Clandestine Service. She spent her days reading intelligence reports, serving as an interagency liaison, and doing whatever her branch chief—a skinny, unassuming man, called Culpepper—asked.

After three months on the desk she was sent to The Farm for operational training. Her assessment had flagged her as a natural recruiter. Her charts showed that she was exceptional at winning people's trust. She would be trained to spot, assess, develop, recruit, and run foreign agents. Her training, of course, would also include all things operational: countersurveillance, weapons, disguise, counterfeiting, and communications.

Beyond normal spycraft, her lessons also included more esoteric things: acting (taught by an ex-Broadway actor), somatic regulation, and interpersonal manipulation (both taught by a husband-and-wife team of Rice University psychologists).

The ten months at The Farm was the happiest time of her life. After The Farm she did a monthlong crash course in Turkish at CIA University in Chantilly, Virginia. From there she did four two-year postings abroad (and one in the United States). Her first was at the legal office in the American embassy in Turkey. Officially, she was working for the State Department. Unofficially, she was recruiting and running agents, Turkish and otherwise.

She arrived in May of 2001. Four months later, on September 11, America was attacked. The world changed quickly.

Milton Frazier, one of Valencia's men, had also been an officer in the Agency. His path there had been more standard; he'd joined after being in the Special Forces. They had never met while they were overseas. He had heard of her, though, and he read her reports.

Milton joined Valencia's firm four years ago. He'd been sleeping with her for the last six months. She had initiated it. It was a strange affair. She was almost ten years older than him. They barely talked about what they were doing—which was fine with Milton, since he was married and had two kids.

As he pulled up to Credit Suisse, he saw Valencia standing near the door. She had her phone to her ear and her lips were moving, but her eyes tracked his approach. Right when he stopped, she ended her call and hopped in the front seat.

"Some kid had his phone stolen," said Valencia.

"What?"

"A lawyer at CDH."

"What kinda shit was on this phone?"

"The kind they'd rather not have floating around the toilet," said Valencia.

Milton watched her pull the visor down and check her lipstick. She cleaned her teeth with her tongue and then looked at him. The look told him to stop staring at her. His eyes went back to the road; he checked all his mirrors and noted the plate numbers behind him.

When they arrived at Elizabeth Carlyle's office, a security guard accompanied them in the elevator to the eighteenth floor. Elizabeth's assistant stood there waiting; after a quick greeting, he ushered them back toward a quiet conference room. Milton walked slightly behind the group so he could sanitize his hands without being observed.

When they entered the room, Milton saw Elizabeth Carlyle—who he'd met a dozen times—leaning on a table tapping at her phone. Elizabeth hired Valencia's firm whenever she needed a sticky situation taken care of. These jobs, by their very nature, usually fell into ethically gray areas. Standing there, Milton thought about the last thing he'd done for them. He'd been tasked with explaining the downside of testifying to a witness in a securities fraud case.

Milton had laid out exactly what refusing to testify would look like. The witness would be held in contempt of court. He might end up sitting in jail for the duration of the trial. But that was extremely unlikely, and still, wouldn't that be less bothersome than ending up on the wrong side of a lawsuit?

Milton delivered this message in a friendly way; he smiled and spoke like a buddy offering advice. It was, strictly speaking, witness tampering. And if any of it ever came back on them Milton knew he'd have to take the fall. Elizabeth Carlyle certainly never asked for him to do anything like that. Neither did Valencia Walker. He'd acted on his own. That's why he got paid the big bucks.

Still, with all the jobs they'd done for the law firm, Milton had never exchanged more than vague pleasantries with Elizabeth. Valencia always dealt with her. The two women didn't email. They'd meet for lunch, and Valencia would come back with the job.

Right then, when they stepped inside the conference room, Elizabeth looked up and shook her head as though trying to impart what a mess they were walking into. There seemed to be a shared bad mood in the room. It seemed worse than normal.

Seated at the table was an exhausted-looking young man Milton assumed was the lawyer who'd lost his phone. The third person was a white man in his fifties who stood up, walked over, and offered Valencia his hand.

Milton watched Valencia smile warmly and ask about his old boss in Newark, Donnegan. *Always working the crowds*, thought Milton. The woman was like a damn politician.

"Michael D'Angelo," said Valencia, motioning toward Milton. "You've met Milton Frazier? He works for me."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said Milton, shaking hands.

"Is this the kid?" asked Valencia.

Elizabeth closed her eyes and nodded. "Chris Cowley," she said, barely able to hide her distaste.

Milton walked around the table and leaned against the far wall to watch. He knew that's where Valencia would want him. It also allowed him to keep his eyes on the door, a remnant from his years abroad.

"Okay, sweetie, let's sit face-to-face so we can talk," said Valencia, smiling at the young man. "Pull your chair out." Valencia then set a chair directly in front of his and sat on it. Their knees were a few inches apart. "That's good."

Milton watched her stare at the young man in silence for a long moment. It was a two-step process: first she wanted to raise his blood pressure and then she wanted to see how he'd react to direct attention. The performance wasn't just for her interview subject, though; she was telling everyone in the room—particularly Elizabeth and her investigator—that she was in charge. This was her case now.

Milton's gaze returned to the kid. He didn't look particularly impressive. He was definitely young: a blonde lawyer, a little baby. A little white boy. Milton watched Valencia lean in and sniff the air between them.

"Have you been drinking?" she asked.

"Last night," said the lawyer.

Valencia took hold of his wrists. While she did this, Milton stole a quick glance at Elizabeth and the investigator. They both watched with rapt attention. Elizabeth was blinking, as if she had allergies. D'Angelo crossed his arms, apparently aware that Milton was looking at him.

Holding the kid's wrists in each of her hands, Valencia let an uncomfortable amount of time pass. She stayed still. Later she told Milton that the lawyer's pulse was fast—somewhere around ninety-five beats per minute. But she didn't say anything about it then.

Finally, she let his wrists go, and leaned back. The young man was nervous, Milton could see that from where he stood. But nervousness could be expected; at the very least, the kid was going to lose his job.

Valencia asked how he'd gotten to work that morning.

"I took the A train to Fulton, then the 4 to Grand Central." The words had a rehearsed quality. Milton marked it in his mind and filed it away.

Valencia made Chris Cowley run through the whole trip: where he boarded, where in the car he rode, where he got off.

When Chris finished, D'Angelo handed Valencia a manila folder. "This is the subscriber information, if you want that," he said. He then filled in a few more details: the location and the time of the incident. From the notes he'd taken, he read the description of the thief.

Valencia opened the file he'd given her, looked at it, and handed it to Milton. "I'm going to ask you all to stop doing anything more from here on out," she said. She turned to D'Angelo. "Nothing. No Find My Phone app, no calls to the target phone. No police. No nothing."

D'Angelo dropped his head.

Valencia turned back to Elizabeth. "Liz, sweetie, I want you to go on with your day. Go to the meetings you have to attend. If you have a lunch date, go to it. We'll keep you posted. Hopefully we'll have it all sorted out in a few hours."

She turned back to Chris. "All right, you're going to come with us," she said. "Show us exactly what happened." She stood, offered Elizabeth a small smile.

Milton nodded his goodbye to D'Angelo and shook Elizabeth's hand. "We'll get it back," he told her.

"I was right here," Chris Cowley said, pointing at the ground. He was showing Valencia Walker and Milton Frazier where the theft had occurred. They stood in one of the tiled hallways of Grand Central Station, where a seemingly endless crowd of pedestrians walked past without paying them any attention.

"I was walking this way, and the guy just bumped me. I said, 'sorry,' because I thought it was my fault, and kept moving." He pointed in the direction they'd just come from.

“Don’t point,” said Valencia. “Just talk.”

“Right here, then.”

“And after that?”

“Then I exited—sorry—I exited, noticed what happened, hopped that turnstile, and ran back over this way. First I went over there”—he pointed toward the 7 train platform—“’cause I thought I saw him down that way. But he wasn’t there, so I ran over that way to the 4-5-6, and missed a 6 train.” He pantomimed banging on the door.

“Downtown?” asked Milton.

“Downtown.”

“Did you see the man?”

“I think I saw him on the train when it passed, but I can’t say for sure.”

Chris then led them to where he’d missed the train.

“It was right around here.” He turned and surveyed the area for a moment. A few commuters watched them with a kind of grumpy midmorning nonchalance.

Chris wondered if anyone else was watching them. He pointed toward a movie poster. “After I missed him I looked at that poster, and then I walked toward that exit.”

Feeling suddenly hungover, Cowley stared that way before he glanced back at Valencia. He couldn’t place her exact age; she appeared to be in her late forties or early fifties. She watched him with a slightly amused expression on her face. She wore eyeliner and lipstick, but no other makeup. She seemed extremely capable, and Chris couldn’t help being impressed.

He then looked at her associate, Milton, who was listening with his hands behind his back. The dude dressed well, Chris gave him that—expensive suit, perfect shoes. He was black and had a shaved head. His face, to Chris, looked skeptical—a kind of professional skepticism. Even under the circumstances, Chris couldn’t help noticing how attractive he was. The man clearly worked out.



Their eyes met for a moment, and Chris tried to psychically convey his romantic feelings without being obvious. *I'm here*, he said to Milton in his mind, *if you're interested*.

"Call Danny Boy," said Valencia to Milton. "Tell him to contact Arty Jacobson at Metro Authority. Tell him to pull the tape from—where are we? Downtown 4-5-6, approximately sixty-something yards north of the south wall. Tell him this gentleman here"—she pointed at Chris—"ran for the train, missed it, and you said you hit the door?"

"Yeah," said Chris.

"Hit the door. And were you in that suit?"

"No, I was wearing a black leather jacket and jeans," said Chris, feeling slightly embarrassed as he said it.

"Black leather jacket. Track it all the way back to when he gets off the train here in Grand Central. Tell him we need the video right this moment," said Valencia, dropping her chin to emphasize the point. "Money is not an object. I don't care if he's in a meeting with the governor, we need it now."

"Got it," said Milton.

Right then another man in a suit approached the group. Valencia introduced him: "Chris, this is Billy Sharrock, one of our other associates."

They shook hands. Billy Sharrock, like Milton Frazier, appeared to be in his early forties: *a white version*, thought Chris. He looked more dangerous; he had rough skin and his brown hair was gelled straight back. His suit, like Milton's, was well cut, but he seemed somehow uncomfortable in it.

"We'll find your phone," said Valencia. She punctuated this by smiling at the group. Chris wasn't sure if anyone knew what that smile was supposed to mean. "Billy can find anything," she added, looking at her watch like she was pointing out his tardiness.

Suddenly bashful, Billy stood there gazing at his feet.