

In mid-June I made up an excuse for not being at work and hopped on a Metroliner to New York to meet with potential publishers. Two months earlier I'd been just another suit on the morning train to an office tower in Philadelphia. And now here I was, a suit on the train to Manhattan to pitch a book about the last ten years of his life. The whole day was surreal, like I'd stepped through a wormhole into a different world. But the odd thing was, it seemed more real than anything I'd done in the office in the last decade, as though all the years in law had just been a long coma, a hibernation I'd fallen into after college.

At one point in the morning we met with a publisher who said she had a friend practicing at a law firm in Philadelphia. "So a lot of lawyers would like to know who you are." She grinned.

"Really? What do they think of my stuff?" I half expected her to laugh and admit something like, "Well, they don't really like it," assuming it asked the sorts of questions people coping with the career would rather keep buried. That, or most didn't read it at all, Philadelphia being pretty much resigned to its situation, and most locals not too interested in being reminded about it.

"From what I know, I think most of them would like to buy you a drink."

If I had any doubts left about what I was doing, that was the end of them.

After finishing the meetings I grabbed dinner with friends, then caught a late train home. Alone, somewhere between Newark and Philadelphia, rolling through the desolate Pine Barrens and dingy strip malls of central New Jersey, the adrenaline rush of the day finally faded, replaced by the realization I'd now done all I could. If I got an offer, I was one step closer to a jailbreak, using all the rotten and silly shit I'd seen in the job to buy a ticket out of it.

"How'd it go?" Lisa called me.

"I think it went well. How are you doing?"

"He's kicking a lot, but nothing's happening yet. Did any publishers buy the book?"

"I don't know. We won't know until next week or so."

"How did it feel?"

"It felt good . . . Liberating."

"That's positive then, isn't it?"

"That's the therapeutic side of it. Whether I made a sale is a different issue. I don't know how to read these people. They're totally different from lawyers."

"Someone will buy it. It'll work out."

"It better." I didn't know what I'd do if I didn't get a book deal. There was no way I could pimp legal paper in Philadelphia for the rest of my life. Writing about the scene had destroyed me for the career, at least in a place like Philadelphia. But all I could do now was wait. Go back into the office and act like everything was normal. Sit across from Janus and take his directives, listen to him talk about his cases and pretend to give a shit. It's a strange thing to work at a job as demanding as law, acting like you're a lifer, totally invested in the career, all the time knowing at any moment the phone might ring and someone would offer you a pile of money to write a book savaging exactly what you were doing.