

# **The Art Forger Study Guide**

## **The Art Forger by B. A. Shapiro**

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# Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide refers specifically to the following version of this book: Shapiro, B.A. *The Art Forger*. Algonquin Paperbacks edition, 2012.

*The Art Forger* is a novel by B. A. Shapiro in which painting reproductionist Claire Roth is hired to duplicate the Degas painting *After the Bath*, one of 13 paintings stolen during the infamous Gardner Museum heist more than two decades before. Claire is a down-on-her-luck painter who makes a living by creating exact copies of masterpieces for the website Reproductions.com. Claire has been shunned by the art world ever since the death of her former professor and lover, Isaac Cullion, by suicide, after she tried to go public with the fact that his most famous paintings were her own work. Although Claire does have some defenders, most have written her off as “The Great Pretender.”

When her acquaintance and Markel Gallery owner Aiden Markel pays her a visit, Claire is surprised. She is outright stunned when Markel enlists her help in creating an exact forgery of the fifth painting in the *After the Bath* series by Degas, stolen from the Gardner Museum and not seen since. The painting features three nude women, and must be copied so that Markel may act as a broker between an unknown seller and a buyer named Patel from India. For her work, Claire will be paid \$50,000, plus expenses, in addition to receiving her own one-person show at Markel’s Gallery, which Markel will personally hype up. When Markel explains his ultimate goal is to return the original Degas to the Gardner and that Claire cannot legally be held responsible for copying a painting because it is not illegal, Claire agrees to help.

Claire sets to work and over several weeks reproduces the painting to such exacting lengths that Markel cannot tell the difference between the original and the forgery. However, Claire discovers during her work that the original *Bath* is itself a forgery, for it differs in small but obvious ways from Degas’s known work. Claire keeps this to herself, however. Patel is soon after caught trying to leave the country with Claire’s forged *Bath*, and is arrested. Markel is soon after arrested, and suspicion comes to fall on Claire when she and her friend, Rik, who works at the Gardner, are caught by the police searching the basement for a subbasement room that shows up on blueprints but cannot be found in person. Claire, who believes the real Degas is being kept in the hidden room, reveals this information not only to Rik but to the museum director and the FBI. While Claire is confirmed as the forger of the painting Patel is caught with, the subbasement room is found to be empty. Claire becomes a prime suspect in everything going on.

However, it is revealed that the *Bath* painting believed to be authentic is actually a forgery by Virgil Rendell, the artist and lifelong lover of Amelia, a sort of step-niece to Isabella Stewart Gardner, the woman who put together the Gardner Museum collection. As Claire learns from research and Gardner’s sole surviving relative, Sandra Stoneham, Gardner was painted nude by Degas but did not want the painting made public until after her death due to the scandal it could cause, so she had Rendell forge the painting to exclude her so that it could be hung in the museum, while the real painting was



stowed away in the secret subbasement room. But when Isabella died, Amelia kept the real Bath and passed it down through her family descendants. Claire is cleared of all suspicion and charges, and goes on to have a wildly successful show of her own original work. Markel remains in jail, awaiting trial for his role in the brokerage of the Rendell forgery.



# Chapters 1 – 10

## Summary

A March 17, 2011 Boston Globe article detailing the twenty-first anniversary of the largest art theft in history from the Gardner Museum is reproduced in which two thieves, disguised as police officers, stole 13 paintings worth more than \$500-million, including paintings by Degas, Vermeer, and Rembrandt.

Chapter 1 – Thirty-one year-old Claire Roth, an incredible artist who makes a living precisely reproducing the work of famous artists for Reproductions.com, is working on a series of her own original paintings of Boston's windows. Claire arranges many of these paintings in her studio for the visit of wealthy and famous art dealer Aiden Markel of Newbury Street's Markel Gallery, an important visit because Claire is largely shunned in the art world due to her living making reproductions. Claire has rarely seen Markel since she broke up with Isaac. Markel reports that Isaac's painting "Orange Nude" (a portrait of Claire) has sold. Markel is impressed with Claire's window series, especially because he believes realism in oil is not dead. Markel also compliments Claire on her talent at reproductions, especially her reproductions of Degas's work. Markel explains he has been given an opportunity of a lifetime to do real good, and wants to extend the opportunity to Claire. Markel then offers Claire \$50,000, plus expenses, to forge a painting, in addition to her own show at his gallery. He will not give her details unless she signs on, and explains he will check with her again in a week.

Chapter 2 – Claire is stunned by the offer, begins to consider it, then heads over to Jake's Bar for drinks with her friends, including Maureen, the owner, the gossipy Rik, the tactless Danielle, the boundary-pushing Crystal, and the morally-conscious Mike. Rik has just landed a job in curation at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Rik and everyone else are interested in what Markel could possibly want with Claire, whom they all like. They all know that "Orange Nude" has sold. Danielle does not believe Isaac painted it. Rik and the others wonder if it has anything to do with Isaac. Claire snaps that Isaac is dead, and wants to know why everyone thinks Markel's visit has anything to do with Isaac.

Chapter 3 – The novel steps back in time three years. Claire comes home to find Isaac, depressed and in a slump, in bed. Claire encourages him to keep at his painting to have it finished in time for the show Karen Sinsheimer has organized at the Museum of Modern Art for the world's top 25 rising artists. Claire goads Isaac into beginning a painting by beginning a painting with him. The idea is time, with painting styles being used on the painting itself as a layer of time. For a week, Claire paints while Isaac watches, offering an occasional suggestion. At the end, Isaac signs his name to Claire's work and returns to his depression.

Chapter 4 – The novel returns to the present day. Claire has difficulty sleeping that night, considering Markel's offer and what her own show might mean for her. Claire



Googles how art forgers work and make money, and is impressed with the amount of money and fame they can achieve through their efforts. There is nothing illegal about copying a painting, only selling a copy as an original. With the idea that the seller, not the painter is the crook, Claire takes a step toward accepting the job. Claire heads out to teach her regular art class with a pretty young woman named Kimberly at Beverly Arms, a juvenile detention facility. Xavier, a youth of about 18, is unhappy because there is no silver paint to work with due to the state budget only allowing for primary colors to be purchased. Claire considers that she will be able to buy extra supplies for the kids if she takes the forgery job.

Chapter 5 - On the phone with Markel, Claire learns that potentially millions of people will be helped by their forgery. When Claire learns that Markel is considering someone else, she immediately agrees to do the job. A six-by-six foot crate is delivered not long before Markel arrives with a downpayment of \$17,000, with \$9,000 in cash and \$8,000 by official check from Markel Gallery. Markel cautions Claire to set up multiple accounts with the cash, and not to deposit more than a few thousand in each account. Markel then unpackages the painting Claire is to forge. It is Degas's "After the Bath." Claire is stunned by the beauty of the painting, that she has a real Degas in her presence, and that the painting before her is one of the most valuable paintings stolen in the greatest unsolved art heist in all history – the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum theft.

(Chapter 6) - A letter is presented from Isabella Stewart Gardner to her surrogate daughter Amelia, dated June 10, 1886. Isabella apologizes for just missing a visit with Amelia and her groom on their travels in Europe. Isabella and her family have come to Paris, where she has met Edgar Degas, determined to purchase one of his paintings. She and Degas hit it off, and Degas invites her to his studio.

Chapter 7 – The novel returns to the present. Claire worries about having the original Degas in her apartment, and worries about her abilities to reproduce it accurately. Markel reassures her that she will do well. He explains he will be selling the copy while returning the original to the rightful owner: the museum. Markel's intent is to make money off the copy, but knows the buyer will not be able to come after him because the buyer cannot pursue legal action for purchasing a stolen painting. He reveals he does not know where the other Gardner paintings are, but does explain that, through a series of meetings with people under fake names, he has come into possession of the Degas that now stands before Claire, as Markel is to act as broker between the seller and the buyer. The alternative is that another broker will sell the painting and keep it underground. Things have been tough at the gallery, Markel explains, so he cannot bring his name or his gallery's name into the public. Additionally, the gallery needs the money because the economy has been bad, and Markel himself is making alimony payments. Claire does not believe she is good enough, but Markel once again reassures her that she is. He then leaves. Claire studies the painting of three young women, having just emerged from their baths. She finds the painting beautiful, and names the girls Simone, Jacqueline, and Françoise.

Chapter 8 – Claire considers the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, unassuming and simple from the outside but lavishly beautiful within, as she arrives there to meet Rik for



lunch. Claire visits the empty frame where *After the Bath* once rested. It makes her feel ashamed, but she reminds herself she will be partially responsible for the painting's return. Rik meets with Claire, asking why she is suddenly interested in the heist. She explains she has always been interested. Rik believes the heist was European in origin, and that black market paintings are used as collateral for everything from drugs and weapons to prisoner exchanges. This encourages Claire to double-down in her desire to reproduce *After the Bath* so it will not have the same fate. At home, Claire studies *After the Bath*. Claire begins trying to find the three models in Degas's other paintings. Markel comes to visit, and knows Claire has fallen in love with the painting, just as he has.

Chapter 9 – The novel steps back in time to three years earlier. Markel and Karen Sinsheimer view a completed painting, 4D, while Isaac and Claire look on. It is Claire's work to which Isaac has signed his name, a gift to him from Claire to get him through his rough patch to carry him to his next piece. Claire secretly hopes Markel and Karen will love the painting, and is glad when they say they do. Isaac contends Claire is an amazing artist as well, which catches Karen's attention. She looks forward to seeing some of Claire's work sometime, while she is interested in Isaac exploring similar themes and subjects to 4D. She declares it to be Isaac's best. When they leave, Isaac thanks Claire, telling her he will never be able to repay her. Claire is just genuinely glad to have helped the man she loves, and is also glad that Karen is willing to look at her work.

Chapter 10 – The novel returns to the present. Claire opens up different bank accounts, buys a phone with a camera, writes a check to the landlord, pays down some of her student loan, and pays down some of her account at Al's Art Supply. While at Al's, Claire picks up silver paint for Xavier.

At home, Claire begins to research *After the Bath*, including trying to find where else the three girls have been used as models. Claire heads to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts where she studies the more than 70 Degas paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures on display. She carefully begins to study Degas's composition techniques, how he handled brushes, the patterns of the brushstrokes themselves, the thickness of the use of the paint, his use of colors, light, and so on. Using a Nikon camera, Claire takes incredibly close-up photographs of the paintings for their multiple important details.

## Analysis

When B.A. Shapiro's novel begins, Claire is a down-on-her-luck painter who, shunned by the art world, makes a living by producing high-quality reproductions of paintings for Reproductions.com. From the very start, a subtle but important theme can be determined in Shapiro's novel: art belongs out in the open, and belongs to the world; it is not something that should be kept locked away or gone unenjoyed and unconsidered by the people. Claire's work at reproducing famous masterworks for others to purchase to enjoy is demonstrative of the idea that art is not something that can actually belong to any one individual, per se. This is also to be gleaned from the way in which Claire helps her professor and lover, Isaac, to prepare for his upcoming show. She creates paintings



for him with the idea that she is helping him, and that the beauty she is creating, once created, does not belong to her in a sense of exclusion. This is in turn contrasted with the paintings that have been stolen from the Gardner: these paintings can no longer be enjoyed by the people of the world because they have been stolen, and are now being kept underground or used for dark purposes, such as collateral in drug exchanges.

When Claire accepts the job to reproduce *After the Bath*, she is doing so with the idea that the painting will be returned to the Gardner where it can once again be enjoyed by the public at large. Claire also accepts the job because it will lead to her own show, and her own chance to truly break out into the art world to show the rest of the world the beautiful and original work she can do so that it too may be shared. Claire's decision to engage in the forgery is representative of the thematic idea that the ends justify the means in life. Claire will be an accessory to a criminal act in order to ensure a previous crime (the original theft of the painting) is remedied.

As Claire considers how to begin the copy of Degas's painting, the idea that history remains relevant and influences the present in ways rarely suspected or expected becomes central through the letters of Isabella Stewart Gardner. There are many similarities between the past and the present which the past bears upon the present – such as Claire's work in realism while other movements in art are considered prevalent, compared to Isabella's own love of realism over the emerging movement of Impressionism. This, in addition to Claire's own personal history (her affair with her professor, Isaac, which will be revealed over time through the course of the novel) and her ability to paint reproductions so exactly puts Claire in a prime position to forge *After the Bath*. Isabella's letters themselves are not mere filler for the novel, nor are they simply about context. Rather, they are deliberate historical anecdotes which will matter greatly to the course of events of the novel.

The idea that Claire should be shunned in the art world – for what reason, readers do not yet know – also highlights an important and quiet theme in that the art world (and later, the Gardner Museum) have lost their purpose. The art world is not meant to be about cliques, popularity, and money, but this is what the art world has become dependent upon. Rather than focusing purely on art, money, fame, and influence are considered more valuable. True, artists must make a living – but there is a difference between a living and losing sight of purpose by investing oneself more heavily in only things like money or prestige. Claire wants to be accepted into the art world in order to make a living.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Markel turn to Claire to paint a forgery of *After the Bath*? What about Claire in particular makes her perfect for the job?





## Discussion Question 2

Why does Claire initially hesitate, but then ultimately accept the job to paint a forgery of After the Bath? What in particular convinces her to accept the job? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Markel explains that by accepting the forgery job, Claire will be helping to bring about something good. What does he mean by this? Do you believe this is worth Claire accepting the job? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

ubiquitous, breadth, reproduction, provenance, monologue, luminous, realism, pretentious, requisite, vigorously, authentication, interpretation, rejuvenation, impasto, technique, serpentine, methodically, capricious, allude, semantics, adjacent



# Chapters 11 – 20

## Summary

Chapter 11 – At home, Claire sits in front of *After the Bath*, and worries that it itself may be a forgery. She carefully studies everything about the painting, from the canvas to the way the paint has crackled over time. She tests to make sure the paint itself is thoroughly dry, and becomes reasonably sure, but not fully convinced she is looking at an authentic Degas. Claire then heads over to meet her friends at Jake's, and specifically asks Rik about Isabella Stewart Gardner. Rik explains she was the first great American art collector in history, because of her love of beauty, her studies, her great eye, and her help from Bernard Berenson.

Chapter 12 – It is three years earlier. Claire does not attend the Museum of Modern Art opening with Isaac, for she has to study for an art school exam. Claire has difficulty concentrating knowing one of her paintings is hanging at the MOMA. She learns that 4D is the hit of the show, which in turn makes Isaac famous and a good talker to the press. At home, Isaac is unable to produce the paintings he tells the public he is working on. Ultimately, he and Claire begin to fight. He eventually breaks up with her, telling her she needs someone younger than he is, and someone who will appreciate her and love her the way she deserves to be loved. Claire realizes that Isaac is doing this because she knows the truth about 4D, *Orange Nude*, and the other paintings that have made him famous – that he has had nothing to do with them.

Chapter 13 – The novel returns to the present. At home, Claire continues to consider *After the Bath*, knowing a painter's brushstrokes are as unique as a person's handwriting. Claire compares the photos of Degas's brushstrokes from the MOFA to the brushstrokes on *After the Bath*. They are very similar. She is still not completely satisfied.

At the detention center, Claire continues to instruct the youths on drawing and the painting of murals. The new silver paint has cleared screening. Xavier and Manuel get into a fight over their painting, which leads to the class being shut down and guards rushing in. Claire discovers this is because Manuel is left-handed, and painting in the opposite direction as Xavier, which in turn leads to a fight. At home, Claire realizes that the Degas painting is not real, because many of the brushstrokes are painted left to right, whereas Degas painting right to left. Claire now believes that *After the Bath* is a fake, painted by a left-handed artist rather than a right-handed artist.

(Chapter 14) A letter from Isabella Stewart Gardner to Amelia is presented, dated July 1, 1886. Isabella reveals she has gotten to know Degas well, and that Degas is a true artist but worries that Degas is tending too much towards Impressionism and toward using pastels rather than oils.



Chapter 15 – The novel returns to the present. Claire begins to see evidence of forgery everywhere, from the direction and lack of refined brushstrokes to the stiffness of the models. She believes that even Isabella Stewart Gardner herself, in addition to countless experts, artists, critics, and historians have been duped. She knows she must tell Markel the truth, even if it destroys her chances at success. Claire then meets Markel at the Oak Room in Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel but avoids telling him what she has learned. Markel talks about Claire's future show, saying it will make everyone forget what happened to Isaac Cullion.

Chapter 16 – Claire knows the only way she can escape being a pariah of the art world is to have her own show and to ensure her own show, she cannot tell Markel what she suspects about *After the Bath*. A massive oven is delivered so that when Claire's forged painting is finished, it can be aged by being baked. Claire prepares a canvas by destroying an authentic painting by Meissonier to use his canvas so that carbon-dating tests will be fooled and authentic aging on the canvas and stretcher bars will be present. Claire then draws the outline of the painting, which she nicknames *Bath II*. Markel stops by for a visit. He tells her that if they are caught, the cover story they will use is that the Degas is a copy, but that in reality, he and she both know the painting is as real as they come.

Chapter 17 – The novel steps back in time three years. Claire is devastated by her breakup with Isaac, while all of the paintings Claire has created for Isaac continue to be praised and garner fame for Isaac. Claire is stunned to learn that *4D* has been acquired as part of a permanent museum collection, then calls Isaac to tell him she wants him to confess the painting is hers. He tells her it will not happen.

Chapter 18 – The novel returns to the present. Claire begins work on *Bath II* with the underpainting, a monochromatic wash. As Claire works, she wonders about the origin of *After the Bath*, and whether or not Degas and Isabella Gardner were in on the forgery, perhaps together. While waiting for the wash to dry, Claire goes for a walk and then researches Isabella Gardner and Degas online, but nothing of substance can be found of the two together. Claire goes to the Gardner Museum to meet with Rik once more, revealing she will be writing a book about Degas. Rik explains that five of the stolen 13 works from the Gardner were from Degas. Even Rik can find nothing about Isabella and Gardner in the museum's archives. Rik suggests that Claire try visiting Gardner's only living relative, Sandra Stoneham, granddaughter of Jack Gardner's niece, who lives in Brookline. Rik tells Claire to gush about Gardner and bad mouth the museum to get Sandra to open up.

(Chapter 19) – A letter from Isabella Stewart Gardner to Amelia is presented. Isabella asks how Amelia's baby, Jack, is doing, and says she is thankful for Amelia named Jack after Isabella's own lost son. Isabella reveals that Edgar Degas had invited her and Amelia's uncle to his studio for a second time, but that Amelia's uncle could not attend. Isabella reveals that Degas offered to paint her a traditional work using the multilayered technique in realism if Isabella stood in as Degas's model. Isabella explains that she believed herself to be too old, but Degas argued that Isabella's beauty defied age and that such a painting in his *Bathers* series would confound the critics because it would



mark a return to the style of Degas's youth. Isabella reveals that Degas offered her the painting as a gift in exchange for her participation, but that she declared she was married, could never do such a thing, and left the studio.

Chapter 20 – The novel returns to the present. By complaining about the Gardner Museum on the phone to Sandra Stoneham, Sandra is very willing to talk to Claire. She is in her seventies or eighties, very healthy, very attractive, and very independent. Sandra explains her grandmother, Amelia, was Isabella's niece. Sandra explains the museum has no interest in her, her great-great Aunt Isabella's legacy or the collection of art, but only in their artist-in-residency programs, Isabella having affairs, or Isabella being friends with gay people. Sandra explains what matters is what Isabella accomplished, specifically her collection of art. Sandra herself has an extensive collection of modern and traditional art. She explains she was on the museum's board of directors until recently when the museum decided to add a glass walkway, a larger café, a larger bookstore, and so on, changing the very nature of the place Sandra's Aunt Isabella once called home.

Sandra asks about Claire's own work, and is impressed to know that Claire was a student of Isaac Cullion's. She also tells Claire that she has heard her name before, and that her MOMA friends have made her aware that things are not all they appear to be. Claire then asks about Degas, and his friendship with Isabella. Sandra explains she knows more than anyone about Isabella, but knows nothing about any such friendship. Sandra does promise to look through some old family memorabilia for Claire.

Claire returns to her apartment to continue work on Bath II. She holes up for a week, working 14 hours a day on the painting. The only reason Claire leaves her apartment is to teach the art class at Beverly Arms. During a class, a vial of white powder is found on Xavier by the guards, which Xavier blames on Claire, saying she supplies him weekly. Kimberly defends Claire, but Claire must still go along with the guards.

## Analysis

As Claire commits to working on Bath II, she heads to a museum where she can study the craft of Degas – everything from his use of color and light down to the directional sweep of his brushstrokes. This is possible for Claire to do because the artwork is available to the public in a museum, underscoring the theme that art belongs out in the open, and to the world. This is in sharp contrast to the original Bath's current situation in which it is being kept underground, unenjoyable by anyone because it has been stolen. As Claire works, she thinks about how she will be a small part of the restoration of the original Bath to the public, so that the public itself might once again enjoy it honestly out in the world.

Here, the thematic argument that art forgery is sheer hypocrisy is made. Tragically and hypocritically – and without much concern from Claire, frustratingly enough – Claire thoughtlessly destroys a genuine Meissonier painting in order to use the canvas to forge Bath II. Claire has become complicit in denying the world a Meissonier painting with



utilitarian vindictiveness: Meissonier, a celebrated French artist during the time of Napoleon, is clearly not considered worth enough in and of itself not to be destroyed. Although the painting belongs out in the open to the world, it is clearly not important enough to Claire or to Markel not to have it destroyed. There is great irony in destroying a genuine painting to forge another. What is just as tragic is that Claire believes the Bath from which she is painting Bath II is also a forgery.

The idea that an original Meissonier painting may be sacrificed in order to create a forgery of *After the Bath* underscores the theme that, to many, the ends justify the means. This is clearly the case for Markel and Claire. They are willing to do whatever is necessary in order to forge *After the Bath*, and then to find a way to return *After the Bath* to the Gardner Museum. As Markel previously explains, uncomfortable things must sometimes be done in order to bring about a greater good. Sometimes, these things are outright bad – such as the destruction of a nineteenth-century painting in order to forge another so that a suspected original may be returned to a museum. To restore on one hand means to deprive on the other. This is especially disheartening given the juxtaposition of Claire's own past, in which her work is being taken for use by another (the paintings she made for Isaac which have catapulted him into the forefront of the art world).

The theft of the original Bath from the Gardner Museum, as well as Claire's work on its forged copy, brings her into contact with Sandra Stoneham. Here, history remains relevant and influences the present in ways rarely suspected or expected by way of Isabella Gardner's sole surviving descendent, who absolutely hates the Gardner Museum and what it is has become. Sandra makes the case that the Museum was originally about showcasing art and exposing the public to beauty, for art belongs out in the open, to the world. However, the Museum has narrowed its focus to things such as adding Modernist touches (like a glass walkway, something of which Gardner would never have approved), expanding the gift shop, and patronizing artists who work in contemporary, rather than traditional movements. The Gardner Museum has become a locus for wealth, power, and influence, not the art itself.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Clair seem largely unconcerned with the destruction of a Meissonier painting in order to forge *After the Bath*? Do you believe she should be more concerned? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you believe the destruction of one painting for another (in such a situation as the Meissonier being destroyed for the forgery) is ever justified? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Claire seek out Sandra Stoneham? How does Claire gain access to Sandra, and get her to talk? What relevance does this have not only on the situation with the forgery, but with the Gardner Museum in specific and the art world in general? Why?

## Vocabulary

envision, craquelure, desaponify, insufferable, iconic, continuum, precognitive, gullible, guilelessly, luxuriant, maudlin, monochromatic, nonchalantly, conceptual, dearth, indecorous, fanatical, memorabilia, juxtaposition



# Chapters 21 – 30

## Summary

Chapter 21 – The novel steps back in time three years. When Claire discovers a photo of Isaac sitting in a hotel lobby with a much younger and very sexy female art student on his lap is published in the Boston Globe, Claire has had enough. She decides to tell Karen Sinsheimer the truth about Isaac's paintings. Karen asks for evidence. Claire explains that Isaac works wet-on-wet, whereas Claire is capable of working wet-on-dry, as well as the fact that the hourglasses in his paintings are painted in her style. Karen immediately calls Isaac, who denies everything and says Claire is just a hurt, lost kid who cannot get over her love for him or the fact that he has decided to work on his marriage. Karen says she will give Claire the benefit of the doubt by asking her to paint another 4D.

Chapter 22 – The novel returns to the present. Two guards escort Claire to a dimly-lit room and Kimberly quickly reveals that no one ever suspected Claire of doing anything wrong, and that it was obvious Xavier was lying the entire time. Claire heads home, embarrassed and hurt. Markel comes to visit to see how things are going. Markel is very impressed with Claire's progress, and her skill. Markel offers to sleep with Claire, but Claire says perhaps when everything is over.

Chapter 23 – September comes on. Bath II continues to come along nicely. Claire devotes nearly all of her time to working on the forgery. At long last, Bath II is finished, and Claire signs Degas's name to the painting. Claire carefully checks the Bath II to the actual Bath, but feels as if something is off. She cannot place it exactly, but thinks it may have to do with shadows to the left of Francoise. Markel comes to see the finished product. He is immensely impressed. Markel cannot tell the difference between Bath and Bath II. Markel reveals the next step is to have the painting officially authenticated. Markel makes plans to come back the following day for the original and the forgery, to put the original into safe storage until its return to the museum and to bring the forgery to the authenticator. Claire now begins to consider her own original paintings.

Chapter 24 – Claire heads to Markel's house at his invitation for dinner. Markel reveals Bath II has been authenticated. Markel passes along the last payment installment to Claire, including a bonus. Markel also reveals he has already sold Bath II to a fanatical nut from India anxious to collect any artwork he can. Markel explains it is like an addiction, owning a piece of artwork just to own it. Markel and Claire then kiss. Markel then confirms that Claire will have her own show, either for December or March depending on how fast she can wrap up her new paintings. Markel also begins to consider how the original Bath can be returned to the Gardner, one he has his fee for brokerage and once Bath II is out of the country. Markel and Claire then sleep together.

Chapter 25 – The novel returns to the events of three years earlier. Claire heads to Karen's office for the painting demonstration, which will be watched by Beatrice



Cormier, a wealthy art historian and expert without peers. Claire has also brought along some of her completed paintings for the purposes of comparison. Claire paints a similar picture to 4D, is congratulated by Beatrice, and must wait six weeks to hear the verdict.

Chapter 26 – The novel returns to the present. Claire purchases a bed so that when Markel spends the night, he does not have to sleep on the floor. Claire spends her days working on the paintings for her show and meeting up with Markel for sex. Suddenly one night, CNN breaks a story that a painting presumed to be Degas's *After the Bath* has been discovered during a security sweep on a ship bound for New Delhi, India. Markel scrambles out to head home, saying he will not let anything happen to Claire or him. When Markel returns, he explains that the buyer, Ashok Patel, has been arrested, and that the painting is indeed *Bath II*. Markel believes he and Claire are safe because Markel used a number of middlemen to broker the painting. Further, Markel is the only one who knows Claire is involved, and he will not do anything to compromise her. Claire worries what will happen if the authorities figure out *Bath II* is a forgery – or worse, if they do not figure it out. Markel tells Claire not to get ahead of herself.

Chapter 27 – Claire and Markel follow news of the recovery of the *Bath II* closely, waiting to hear more details. Claire worries about going to jail now more than anything. Markel says he is working on options to protect them both. Claire throws her emotions into painting, and realizes she is on track to do a December show. She then goes to see Markel at his gallery to confirm this. Markel confirms the show, noting it to his assistants, Chantal and Kristi. To celebrate, Claire and Markel go to Markel's house to have sex. At Jake's Bar, Claire tells her friends about her upcoming show. They congratulate her, and are very happy for her.

Chapter 28 – The novel returns three years to the past. Karen calls Claire to inform her that a committee has determined that 4D is the work of Isaac Cullion.

Chapter 29 – The novel returns to the present. Markel calls Claire to reveal to her that authenticators have declared *Bath II* to be the missing Degas, stolen during the 1990 Gardner Museum heist. Markel explains this means the authorities will be all over Patel, but that he and Claire should be safe. Claire begins distancing herself from Markel, worried about being seen too much with him in case he is fingered in the events surrounding *Bath II*.

Markel urges Claire to be at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel to help promote her upcoming show at a Halloween party. Claire reluctantly agrees. While there, Claire is introduced to numerous important members of the Boston arts community, all of whom promise to be at Claire's opening. At the party, Rik reveals to Claire that Patel has pled not guilty, saying he never believed the painting to be authentic. Rik finds it amusing, even joking that it would be funny if Patel believes he purchased the painting from [Reproduction.com](#), and that Claire painted it. This unnerves Claire greatly, but she pretends nothing is wrong. Claire learns from Kimberly that her classes are suspended indefinitely while Xavier and his buddy Reggie are headed for Walpole, a maximum security prison. Kimberly tells Claire that one should not do the crime if one cannot do the time.





(Chapter 30) – A letter from Isabella Stewart Gardner to Amelie is presented, dated June 17, 1895. Isabella, staying in France, congratulates Amelie on the birth of Amelie's new daughter. Isabella notes that the art market is not good, and that the Gardner fortune is dwindling rapidly. Isabella reveals that she has reached a compromise with Degas: she will model for a painting in a see-through silk gown. As such, Isabella contends she preserved her honor as a woman while Degas remained the gentleman while he committed to sketches.

## Analysis

History remains relevant and influences the present in important ways as the novel continues to unfold. Claire is essentially now at war with Isaac over the paintings she has made that he has claimed credit for. Isaac is willing to say anything to discredit Claire, but Claire is willing to put her skills directly to the test. Yet, even Claire's skills are not enough to convince a panel of experts that she is the real genius behind 4D. Claire's challenging of Isaac's creatorship has already made her something of an outcast, but what will occur in coming chapters will turn her into an outright pariah. Here, the subtle theme that there is great hypocrisy in art forgery is given important vetting as Claire has essentially had her own work stolen by another, whereas she has now not only destroyed an authentic painting for the purposes of creating a forgery, but she should know better given that her own authentic work was claimed by another.

Still, to Claire and Markel, the ends justify the means when it comes to work that does not personally concern them. It is one thing for Claire to want credit for her own painting, but it is quite another for Claire to destroy someone else's work for use in a forgery. At the same time, Claire is more and more convinced here that the After the Bath from which she is painting Bath II is itself a forgery. Claire, in adhering to the idea that the ends justify the means, continues not to tell Markel what she has discovered – that she is forging a forgery. At the same time, Claire is given a brief glimpse of what could be her fate when she is falsely accused of smuggling cocaine into Beverly Arms – but is quickly and clearly found innocent of any wrongdoing. This serves as an omen of things to come regarding Claire and her forgery, as does Rik's lighthearted joke about Patel and [Reproduction.com](http://Reproduction.com).

Even then, the ends justify the means for Claire. The destruction of a painting, aiding and abetting in the illegal sale of a stolen artwork, and now conspiring to cover things up are all worth a \$50,000 payout, and a one-person show at Markel Gallery. Claire has truly lost sight of things at this point, focused only on her own image and improvement rather than the importance of the art itself. There is no denying that Claire has a passion for her own art, but her sense of moral bearing has been undone by money, and the promise of prestige. Art reproduction is one thing, but forgery and the destruction of other genuine art is something else entirely. Yet it is proof that, for Claire, the ends really do justify the means despite whatever misgivings she may have about things along the way.



## Discussion Question 1

Despite Claire's past and present – her situation with Isaac and 4D, especially – she remains committed to carrying on with the forgery. Why is this so?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the accusation of cocaine smuggling unnerve Claire so much? How does it affect her | her current work in forging?

## Discussion Question 3

What comes to give Claire pause regarding her work on the forgery? Why is this enough to cause her concern, but not enough to stop her?

## Vocabulary

sentinel, cordially, rudimentary, Herculean, famished, smarmy, vigilant, melodramatic, extradited, utmost, diaphanous



# Chapters 31 – 40

## Summary

Chapter 31 – The novel returns to the present. Rik asks Claire to meet him for a drink. They decide to get together at Clery's. Rik wants details about Claire's upcoming show, and her relationship with Markel. Rik tells Claire she will soon be known as an accomplished and professional artist, free from the shadows of Isaac. Rik then reveals that After the Bath is going to be officially reinstated with great ceremony at the Gardner Museum just after Thanksgiving, and two weeks before Claire's show. Rik reveals that hopefully by then, more information about After the Bath will be forthcoming, and that perhaps more information will be available about the other missing paintings. He also reveals that Patel is contemplating an FBI offer of immunity.

When Claire relates this information to Markel later, Markel dismisses it. Markel reminds Claire of their cover story should anything happen: Markel brought Claire a high-quality reproduction from which to create another reproduction for Markel to sell as a reproduction. Claire is worried that Markel is being too calm and too complacent. Claire worries Markel knows something she does not.

Chapter 32 – The novel steps back in time three years. Claire is still stunned that a panel of people could declare 4D to be Isaac's, and not hers. Claire meets up with Beatrice Cormier. Beatrice reveals it is her professional opinion that Claire painted 4D, and that she told this to the others. She reveals she was not at the vote, but that not everyone agreed with the majority decision. Beatrice explains there is a lot of money at stake, in addition to the reputation of the MOMA. Beatrice advises Claire try to move on. Claire agrees to try.

Chapter 33 – The novel returns to the present. Claire continues to prepare paintings for her show. As she paints, she continues to wonder about the After the Bath Markel believed to be real. Claire begins researching more art forgers, and learns that their primary motivation has to do with revenge for their own work being dismissed, overlooked, or ignored. Markel tells Claire to get her emotions in check and focus on her upcoming show. Still, Claire persists in her research, learning about an American art forger who committed suicide after getting caught, whose name she recognizes: Virgil Rendell. Claire realizes he is the artist who painted the portrait of Amelia that hangs in Sandra Stoneham's home.

(Chapter 34) – A letter to Amelie from Isabella Stewart Gardner, dated January 1897, is presented. Isabella explains she has been down with a cold, and that she has purchased several more important paintings from artists such as Botticelli, Peter Paul Ruben, and Martin Schongauer. Uncle Jack complains about all of the money being spent, but Isabella is more focused on the collection that is being amassed for a museum, of which Henry James and Edgar Degas are both impressed. Isabella returns



to model for Degas once more, this time without the see-through robe. Isabella says she shall never feel sorry for such a thing.

Chapter 35 – The novel returns to the present. Markel is completely invested in publicity for Claire's show. Patel has been arraigned, pled not guilty, and is being held at Nashua Street Jail. Claire visits Markel to tell him that her paintings will be done in a week, while Markel reports his framer, Templeton, is already at work on framing the paintings Claire has already completed. Markel reminds Claire to dress well, even for radio interviews, because appearance makes a difference no matter where it is done. Markel then gifts Claire with a three-day, two-night stay at Canyon Ranch, a beautiful spa, telling her she needs to get away for a bit before things get crazy. Within a week, Claire has completed her paintings. The night Claire finishes, CNN carries a report featuring video of Markel being arrested at his gallery.

Chapter 36 – The novel steps back in time three years. Rumors about 4D circulate and then explode. Claire is accused of trying to wreck Isaac's career because he did not want to be with her anymore. Claire is dubbed "The Great Pretender" by the press. Others defend Claire. One night, at 3:24 in the morning, Martha, the wife of Isaac, calls Claire to tell her she is responsible for his having just committed suicide. The funeral for Isaac is a circus, with the press everywhere. Martha rails against Claire's claims of having painting 4D and the others. As Claire finishes up school and steps into the art world, she finds herself shut out because of what happened with Isaac.

Chapter 37 – The novel returns to the present. Claire realizes Patel either knew more than Markel believed he did, that the middlemen were easier to trace than Markel thought, or that the FBI is far better at solving crimes than Markel considered. Regardless, things do not look good for Markel. Claire goes to visit Markel at the Nashua Street Jail. Markel is angry with Claire for coming to see him, telling her to get away to protect herself. He tells her that he still owes money in the brokerage deal, and has had his finger broken as a reminder that he owes someone money. If the money is not paid, his finger will be cut off and used to gain access to the Markel Gallery vault, to compensate for the money. Claire realizes her only option now is to prove the "original" After the Bath is actually a forgery. Claire then goes to see Sandra Stoneham who has begun looking through old family memorabilia. She allows Claire the chance to look through it as well. Claire learns that Amelia was once set to marry Virgil Rendell, but that she married Sumner Prescott instead because Isabella interfered and would not let Amelia marry Virgil.

(Chapter 38) – A letter to Amelia from Isabella Stewart Gardner, dated January 1898, is presented. Isabella reports heading to Degas's apartment to see his fifth and final installment in his After the Bath series. Isabella finds it beautiful, as though God Himself had touched the painting. Degas is thrilled that Isabella loves the painting and will accept it for her museum. Only later does Isabella come to realize one of the nudes is her. Isabella does not know what to do, as the painting is meant for display in the museum, but cannot be displayed with her in it.



Chapter 39 – The novel returns to the present. Claire heads to the Markel Gallery to help unpack her now-framed paintings. Despite the negative publicity, sales at the gallery have actually increased. She then heads to Sandra's house once more to look through old things. She discovers the sketchbook of Virgil Rendell, which includes sketches of *After the Bath*. The original sketches show casual, delicate women while the later sketches are of women that are more coarse and sturdy looking. Claire now believes that Virgil Rendell had something to do with *After the Bath* that Markel brought to her. Claire receives permission to bring home the sketchbook, then uses its sketches to compare to the sketches Degas made in his *After the Bath* series.

Chapter 40 – Claire visits Markel in jail to tell him that *After the Bath* is a forgery, just like *Bath II*. She says she has the evidence to prove it, and says Virgil Rendell is responsible for it. If Claire can make a reasonable case for the painting being a forgery, Markel can at least be let out on bail, during which time he can pay off the people he owes. Claire then asks Rik for the original blueprints of the Gardner Museum, which he sends along. Claire discovers a small room entitled "subbasement" which is large enough for a painting and isolated enough to keep a secret.

## Analysis

History remains relevant and influences the present in ways rarely suspected or expected, Shapiro continues to argue in her novel. Isabella's modeling for one of Degas's *After the Bath* series paintings leads Isabella to a challenging situation – what to do about being included as a nude model in the painting itself when the painting itself is set to go on display in her museum? At the same time, Claire becomes convinced that Virgil Rendell, the lover Amelia was forced to abandon by Isabella, had something to do with the forgery of what was believed to be the original Degas. The past is continuing to catch up to the present, influencing it in ways Claire herself had not expected.

Claire ultimately awakens morally and tells Markel the truth about what is believed to be the original, genuine *Bath*. This moral awakening comes only as a result of Markel's being arrested, and may have more to do with fear of punishment and fear for Markel than genuine moral concern. The reader will have to decide this on his or her own. Claire's confidence in the idea that the ends justify the means has, regardless, now been shaken. However, this extends only so far as the *Bath II* is concerned. Claire's focus on money and fame through her own show is unabated. She worries about whether or not she will even have a show now that Markel has been arrested.

The situation in which Claire finds herself can be recognized as a place in which Claire has lost her focus completely. Like the art world and the Gardner Museum, Claire's focus is no longer about the art itself, but about her own reputation, and now her freedom. Granted, Claire was horribly treated by Isaac and the art community, and does deserve her own day in the sun in which the true genius of her work can be recognized. However, to rely on means (immoral means at that) other than her own merit is to undermine the very nature of her potential success and the potential recovery of her



reputation. However, Claire will ultimately come to have a genuine moral awakening by the end of the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

What evidence has Claire collected that suggests Virgil Rendell is responsible for the original After the Baht forgery? What possible motives does Claire suspect Rendell might have for the forgery? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

When Markel is arrested, what is Claire's primary concern? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Is Claire's decision to tell Markel the truth about the forged original Bath painting an act of genuine moral concern, or a fear of punishment? Explain.

## Vocabulary

amicably, complacency, equanimity, inextricably, hyperbolic, illustrious, masochism, nefarious, euphoric, derivative, renegade



# Chapter 41 – Epilogue

## Summary

Chapter 41 – Rik escorts Claire to the reinstallation at the Gardner Museum. Rik explains the painting will be unveiled to attendees by the Museum Director, Alana Ward, who will then carry it upstairs to the Short Gallery where the painting was originally placed. From there, the attendees will be allowed up to see the reinstalled painting. Claire is still shocked by the unveiling, even though she is expecting to see her painting unveiled. Standing before the reinstalled painting, Claire tells Rik they need to talk.

Chapter 42 – Claire confesses everything to Rik in the privacy of his office. Rik is willing to believe Claire because he knows Claire so well. Claire tells Rik they need to get to the subbasement, and Rik agrees to get her down there in the morning. The subbasement is accessed through the basement floor the next morning, and is full of old furniture, file cabinets, books, and so on. Three Boston police officers suddenly appear.

Chapter 43 – Rik reveals who he and Claire are to the police officers. Rik calls Alana to have things straightened out. Alana arrives at the museum and demands to know what Rik and Claire are doing at the Gardner Museum early on a Sunday morning. Claire says she is working on a book. When Alana begins to put pressure on Rik, condemning him for violating rules, Claire interjects and reveals she painted the painting reinstalled the previous night. Claire goes on to explain everything, including that the After the Bath brought to her by Markel was a forgery. Alana calls in FBI Agent Jonathan Lyons, to whom Claire repeats her story. Lyons is particularly interested in the part of the story concerning Virgil Rendell's forgery. Claire explains the forgery she painted from was a copy of Rendell's original forgery, and that the original Degas must be in the subbasement. Alana admits to not knowing there was a subbasement. Alana and Lyons agree to verify Claire's theory, saying she will be responsible for the cost if she is hoaxing them.

Chapter 44 – At 8 a.m. the next morning, Alana, Lyons, and two academics show up at her apartment to watch her paint one of the of the After the Bath nudes. Claire is told to explain everything she does as she does it, layer after layer, and round of baking in the oven after round of baking in the oven. The process continues the next day. Alana gasps in shock at Claire's skill. Claire later learns the FBI and the Museum are conducting a ground-penetrating radar survey of the basement. Meanwhile, Claire helps Kristi and Chantal set up Markel Gallery for her show.

Chapter 45 – As Claire leaves the gallery, she is apprehended by Detective Farrell and Officer Rodriguez of the Boston Police Department, and taken to police headquarters for processing. Claire calls her friend from Jake's, Mike Dannow, who is a lawyer in addition to being an artist. Mike agrees to be at headquarters within the hour. Claire is put into a holding cell until Mike arrives, at which time she reveals the situation to Mike. Mike reveals the arraignment will take place at nine the following morning at Boston



Municipal Court. In the morning, Claire learns that the Markel Gallery has been closed down. When Claire arrives at court, she is stunned to see the media has come out in force. Mike explains that, unfortunately, December is a slow news month.

Chapter 46 – Mike and his partner, Emma, bring Claire in through the press and media that have assembled outside of court. Claire appears before Judge Zwerdling. At Mike's instruction, Claire pleads not guilty to all charges. The judge is not satisfied by the evidence accumulated by the state, so Claire is to remain under arrest but free of her own recognizance while awaiting a probable cause hearing to occur on Monday at 8 a.m.

Chapter 47 – Claire walks home from court, needing to clear her mind. Agent Lyons calls. Lyons says the Boston Police have jumped the gun. He explains he wants to talk to Claire, but Claire says only under the advice of her attorney. Lyons agrees to meet with Claire with Mike present. Lyons explains he is interested in finding the missing paintings, not in harassing a young woman like Claire trying to make a living. Lyons confirms there is some kind of closet or room behind the wall in the subbasement, and consents to allowing Claire to be on-hand for its opening. Lyons cannot believe the painting that Claire copied from is a copy, but Claire insists people only see what they want to see. When Lyons leaves, Markel explains it seems as though Lyons believes Claire and Markel used the original *After the Bath*, and know where it is.

Chapter 48 – Rik calls Claire in the morning to reveal the public has swarmed the FBI with demands the Markel Gallery be opened for Claire's show. People care less about Claire's involvement with the forgery than they do about her original works. Claire and Mike are present with Lyons when the wall of the subbasement is broken through, revealing two doors. The doors are opened, and the chamber is revealed to be empty.

Chapter 49 – Claire is now being considered a person of interest by Lyons and the FBI under suspicion of distracting their attention from her guilt with a wild goose chase story about a hidden painting. Markel later confesses to Claire he never had any intention of returning *After the Bath* to the Gardner, that he always intended to keep it for himself. Claire is deeply hurt by this confession, with Markel saying it is an obsession to own paintings, even if no one else ever sees them. It makes her think of something similar that Sandra has told her, so she goes to see Sandra. At Sandra's house, Claire steps into an empty room while Sandra's back is turned. She opens two doors over a fireplace before which sits a single chair. Inside the doors is Degas's original *After the Bath*. Sandra sees what Claire has done, and begins to cry.

Epilogue – It is six months later. Claire's delayed first show at the Markel Gallery is a hit, and she already has requests for additional shows in London and Tokyo. Many ask about Claire's role in finding *After the Bath*, to which Claire explains that the original *Bath* was kept secreted away in the subbasement by Isabella, under condition it would not be displayed until after her death by Amelia, but because the museum director was so opinionated and unkind, Amelia kept the painting for herself, passing it down through the generations to Sandra. Claire reveals that Sandra has voluntarily given up the painting to the Museum, and no charges will be pressed. It is revealed that Virgil painted





a replacement Bath in order to protect Isabella, and this is the painting that Isabella originally had hung. Claire also reveals that testing has confirmed Bath II as her work, and a reexamination of 4D has found it to be Claire's work as well. Claire also reveals that Virgil's sketchbook was found among the Prescott/Stoneham memorabilia because Amelia and Virgil continued on a lifelong affair despite the marriage Amelia was forced into, an affair that resulted in the birth of Sandra's mother.

In the present, Markel is still in jail, awaiting trial, because the Rendell forgery is the actual painting stolen from the Gardner. Claire now looks ahead to her life as an accepted and popular artist.

## Analysis

As the novel comes to an end, Claire has a genuine moral awakening. Whereas Claire has been operating under the premise that the ends justify the means throughout the course of the novel, it is clear by the end of the novel that the ends do not justify the means. Claire, due to her involvement with Markel and his plot, is eventually zeroed in on by the police, while Claire voluntarily agrees to speak with the FBI about everything that has transpired. Claire's shift toward moral honesty pays off: the subbasement chamber and the possession of the original *After the Bath* by Sandra Stoneham are enough to clear Claire, though are certainly not enough to clear Markel. Markel will have to serve out time for his own actual crimes and conspiracies to commit crimes.

However, by confessing her part in things, and by bringing to light important history (here, the thematic idea that history remains relevant and influences the present in ways rarely suspected or expected returns front and center), Claire is able to ascend to prominence in her own right. Claire is able to demonstrate, along with Sandra's help, that Rendell forged the original *After the Bath* to protect Isabella. Because of Claire's confession, honesty, and in helping bring the past to light, Claire is rightfully rewarded and celebrated. At the end of the novel, however, Claire seems to have reached an important balance between the love of her art, and her embracing of her new status as an artist well-loved in the art world. Whether Claire herself will ultimately lose focus of what is important, like the art world and the Gardner Museum, remains to be seen.

Ultimately, the thematic idea that art belongs out in the world where it can be enjoyed, is upheld. Claire's show leads to other shows, and leads to important exposure for her work where it is roundly complimented and praised. However, readers should not forget that, in lieu of Claire's own staggering success and celebration is the fact that she has still destroyed a Meissonier painting for her own purposes. She still does not seem to be bothered by this, and remains the one difficult spot of the entire situation. She has deprived the world of a painting, no matter how insignificant or unknown in the present day, which is utter irony given that until recently, Claire herself was unknown.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Claire ultimately confess the truth about everything relating to After the Bath, Bath II, Markel, and her suspicions about the subbasement? What does this ultimately result in? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

How is Claire cleared of any wrongdoing in connection with Markel and Bath II? What does this ultimately mean for both Claire and Markel?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Claire's show so successful? Are people more concerned with her art or her celebrity status surrounding Bath II and the Gardner Museum? Why?

## Vocabulary

guttural, aggrieved, parental, sheepishly, righteous, ostensibly, hubris, preamble, non sequitur, dissociation, penance



# Characters

## Claire

Claire Roth is a 31-year-old artist with wild red hair looking for her break in the Boston art world. Having been shunned and dubbed “The Great Pretender” after attempting to rightfully claim original artwork falsely claimed by her professor and lover, Isaac Cullion, Claire now makes a living reproducing exact copies of masterworks for Reproductions.com. Claire is stunned when acquaintance Aiden Markel brings her into a plot to reproduce the stolen Degas masterpiece, *After the Bath*, in exchange for her own show at Markel Gallery and in exchange for \$50,000.

Believing initially that the ends justify the means, and wanting to see the original reinstalled, Claire commits to the job, and becomes lovers with Markel. In the process, she discovers that *After the Bath* is itself a forgery. Claire loses sight of her morals in the process, but recovers them when Markel is arrested for his part in the scheme. She confesses everything to the FBI, the police, and the Gardner Museum, while simultaneously helping to recover the original *After the Bath*. Claire’s own show is a hit, and her future in the art world looks bright as the novel ends.

## Aiden Markel

Markel is wealthy father, divorcee, art dealer, and owner of the Markel Gallery in Boston. Markel moves to act as a broker in a black market art deal for *After the Bath*, needing the money due to a bad economy and his difficult divorce. Markel determines that the brokered painting should be a forgery, so that he himself may keep the original. Markel then brings Claire into things for her help based on her skill and technique, and becomes lovers with her. When the buyer of the forgery is caught trying to leave the country, Markel is arrested and refuses to say anything at all about Claire’s involvement. When the novel ends, Markel is still in jail.

## Isaac Cullion

Isaac Cullion is an art professor and the former lover of Claire. Having sunk into a depression prior to an important show, Claire creates a series of paintings with Isaac’s input, which she then allows Isaac to claim as his own out of love. But when Isaac breaks up with her because he cannot stand the truth that he did not create the paintings, Claire has had too much. She goes to war with Isaac over ownership, a war that Isaac narrowly wins but eventually leads him to commit suicide out of shame. His death seals Claire’s fate as a pariah of the art world.



## Isabella Stewart Gardner

Isabella Stewart Gardner is a wealthy Boston heiress who is acknowledged as the first great American art collector in history. Her letters form a part of the novel as she travels to France to secure a painting from Degas for the museum she is envisioning. Ever the realist, Isabella intensely dislikes then-modern art movements, and urges Degas to paint a work for her museum in the traditional way. He agrees only if she models nude for him, to which she consents. However, she cannot display the finished painting in her museum without causing a scandal, so she has the lover of her niece, Amelia, create a forgery to hang in its place until after her death.

## Degas

Edgar Degas is a French artist whose fifth painting in his *After the Bath* series becomes a central part of the plot. Degas is befriended by Isabella Stewart Gardner in Paris in the late 1800s, where she convinces him to paint her a picture for her museum in the traditional style. Degas agrees to do so provided Isabella model for him, a task to which she ultimately consents.

## Rik

Rik is one of Claire's closest friends. A curator at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, gay, and gossipy, Rik becomes Claire's closest confidante through the course of the novel. She tells him the truth about *After the Bath*, and it is Rik who agrees to help Claire search for the subbasement room she discovers on old museum blueprints.

## Patel

Ashok Patel is an art collector from India who agrees to purchase *After the Bath* by way of middlemen working on behalf of Markel, believing it to be a genuine piece of Degas's artwork. Patel is apprehended trying to leave the country with the painting, and is arrested. In jail, Patel confesses everything he knows, a decision that achieves immunity for him.

## Amelie

Amelie Sumner Prescott is a sort of pseudo-step-niece to Isabella Gardner, who maintains a relatively close relationship with Isabella until Isabella forbids Amelia from marrying Virgil Rendell. From thereon in, Amelie distances herself from Isabella, especially after Amelia is made to marry a family-approved man. Still, Amelie carries on a long affair with Virgil while married, and is sought for help by Isabella regarding the Degas painting meant to hang in the Gardner Museum.



## **Virgil Rendell**

Virgil Rendell is an American artist from the Boston area who is the lover of Amelia, her one-time fiancée, and the forger of the Degas painting, *After the Bath*. Virgil is sought out to help protect Isabella's reputation by creating a precise replica of *After the Bath*, though one that omits Isabella as a nude model. Rendell agrees to help, and his painting comes to take the place of Degas's original at the Gardner – something undiscovered until a century later by Claire.

## **FBI Agent Jonathan Lyons**

Jonathan Lyons is the FBI agent in charge of the investigation into the recovery of *After the Bath*, Markel, and Claire. Lyons is receptive but business-oriented, willing to hear Claire out about her role in things, but determined to find the facts and evidence associated with the case. Lyons allows Claire enough leeway to explain herself, but must come to consider Claire a person of interest when the subbasement room is found to be empty.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Reproductions

Reproductions symbolize in this novel that impersonating someone else can still reveal great talent, although not talent living up to its full potential.

Reproductions of masterworks are created by Claire for Reproductions.com for a living. These reproductions are the only way that Claire can keep a tenuous foot in the art world while making money and being able to produce her own original, but ignored artwork. Claire is mocked and derided for her reproductions, but they are of such a high quality and caliber that they are noticed by Markel, which in turn leads him to offer Claire the After the Bath forgery job.

## After the Bath

The After the Bath painting in this novel symbolizes how difficult is sometimes to tell what is true and what is fake.

After the Bath is a painting by Edgar Degas in the realist style, and is the fifth and final painting in his After the Bath series. Created as a deal struck by Degas and Isabella Stewart Gardner in which the painting is done in the realist style while featuring three nude women, including Isabella, emerging from their bath, the painting is considered too scandalous for Isabella to display. Instead, she has the painting locked up in a subbasement vault while Virgil Rendell creates a forgery to replace it until after Isabella's death. The real painting, passed on to Amelia, is never displayed, but continues to be passed along from one generation to the next until Claire discovers it at the home of Sandra Stoneham.

## Rendell's After the Bath

Rendell's After the Bath symbolizes how people will often only see what they want.

Rendell's After the Bath, painted by Virgil Rendell, is intended to protect the reputation of Isabella by ensuring a Degas-like painting goes up in the museum while shielding her from the fact that Degas's original painting features her nude. Rendell's forgery is an almost-exact copy of Degas's, featuring three nude women emerging from the bath but excluding Isabella as one of the women. It is Rendell's Bath that goes up on display at the Gardner Museum, and is stolen about a century later during the Gardner Museum heist. It is this painting that Claire is given to work from by Markel, and it is this painting which Claire discovers is not a Degas.



## Bath II

Bath II also symbolizes how people will often only see what they want.

Bath II is the forgery of the Rendell Bath painting that Claire creates for Markel. It is an exact copy, and is produced by destroying a genuine Meissonier painting for use of the canvas. Bath II is such an exact copy that Markel himself cannot tell the difference between the original and the forgery. Bath II is brokered to Patel, who is caught trying to leave the country with it. Bath II is then initially put on display at the Gardner Museum as the returned and reinstalled original.

## \$50,000

The payment Claire is offered to reproduce a famous painting symbolizes how the temptation of money can bring people to do things they normally would not agree to.

Fifty-thousand dollars, plus expenses, is the payday Claire receives for the creation of Bath II. Though Claire is not poor, she is not exactly solvent either, so the money is a strong consideration to do the job. For example, not until the first installment of pay is Claire able to purchase a camera with a phone. Claire uses the money to pay down student loans, credit debt, and to purchase an actual bed as well.

## Gardner letters

Fictionalized Isabella Stewart Gardner letters are interspersed throughout the novel, and symbolize the important relevance history has on the present. The letters are written to Amelia by Isabella, and reveal Isabella's efforts to gain art for her museum and to solicit a piece from Degas. The letters also reveal Isabella's agreement with Degas, and her need to hide Degas's finished painting.

## Black market paintings

Black market paintings symbolize to Claire deprivation of art and art appreciation from the public, something she finds unacceptable.

Black market paintings are used for collateral for weapons, drugs, prisoner exchanges, and so on. It is believed that many of the paintings from the Gardner Museum heist are currently being used in such ways on the black market. It is the chance to release After the Bath from the world of the black market that in large part prompts Claire to commit to painting a forgery for Markel.

## 4D

Clair's 4D painting symbolizes the corruption of power and fame in the novel.



4D is the painting that Claire creates for Isaac, and temporarily ruins her life. In a depression, Isaac is unable to paint for a show, so Claire lovingly steps in and allows Isaac to take the credit. But when Isaac attempts to deny Claire's efforts by breaking up with her, Claire goes to war with him over credit for the painting. Claire is initially ruled against by a panel at the Museum of Modern Art, and only later verified as the artist.

## Orange Nude

In the novel, Clair's painting Orange Nude symbolizes a past she must deal with in order to move forward with her career and life.

Orange Nude is a painting featuring a nude Claire in washes of orange. The painting is beautiful and is known as one of Isaac Cullion's greatest works, though in reality, Claire is responsible for the painting. The painting ultimately sells early in the novel, which causes Claire to confront the ghosts of her past through the failed relationship with Isaac, and his stealing of credit for her paintings.

## Rendell's sketchbook

Virgil Rendell's sketchbook symbolizes the truth in the novel.

The sketchbook is found among Sumner/Prescott memorabilia at Sandra Stoneham's house in Boston by Claire, and demonstrates that Rendell is indeed the painter of the Bath that hung in, and was stolen from the Gardner that Claire believes to be a forgery. The sketchbook contains several drawings of Degas's original *After the Bath*, and several evolutionary sketches in which Rendell changes aspects of the painting to exclude Isabella. Claire uses the sketchbook as evidence to demonstrate to both the law authorities and the Gardner Museum what must have happened to the original Degas.

## Gardner Museum blueprints

The Gardner Museum blueprints symbolize the secrecy and potential for lies in the art world.

The blueprints are sent to Claire from Rik, and help to prove Claire's argument about Rendell's rendition of *After the Bath*. The blueprints show a secret chamber in the subbasement, unknown to all except Claire thanks to her diligence. The chamber is confirmed to be the location the original Degas was kept until it was spirited away by Amelia, confirming Claire's theory and ensuring her innocence.





# Settings

## Claire's apartment

Claire's apartment, located in Boston's SOWA area (South of Washington) is where most of the novel takes place. Claire's apartment is spartanly furnished, as most of the money she makes goes to rent or toward her painting. The apartment's primary function is that of an art studio, and it is at Claire's apartment where she comes to paint Bath II. When Claire is at work on Bath II, she only ever leaves the apartment to teach art to juvenile offenders. When Bath II is completed, Claire spends some of her money on a new bed and other small additions to make the apartment more comfortable and more homey as Markel is around more often.

## Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is located in Boston, and was founded by Isabella Stewart Gardner to house her art collection and allow the public the chance to see the works she had collected. The Gardner Museum, on March 18, 1990, was host to the greatest art robbery in history, in which two men disguised as police officers stole 13 paintings, including Degas's *After the Bath*. Claire visits the Gardner a handful of times through the course of the novel, to learn more about the Museum, Isabella, and to visit with Rik, who works there in curation.

## The subbasement

The subbasement is a forgotten area of the basement of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and is rediscovered by Claire when she consults old blueprints. The subbasement has a secret chamber which has been walled over, wherein Isabella kept the original Degas before her death. The FBI confirms the chamber in the subbasement, but finds nothing inside. Until Sandra provides corroborative evidence, the subbasement makes Claire a person of interest until she is made a hero through the rediscovery of the subbasement.

## Sandra's house

Sandra's house is located in upscale Boston, and is visited several times by Claire in her quest to learn more about Isabella Stewart Gardner and Rendell's version of Bath. Sandra's house is beautifully decorated with traditional and contemporary artwork, but is curious for a single empty room except for a single chair and with a cabinet-like feature above a fireplace. There, Claire discovers the original *After the Bath* by Degas.

## Paris

Paris is the capital city of France and an artistic and cultural center in the world. It is in Paris that Degas primarily works, and it is to Paris that Isabella Stewart Gardner travels to solicit paintings for her museum, including one by Degas. It is in Paris that Isabella comes to model for Degas, and he completes his painting series *After the Bath*, with the fifth piece, *After the Bath, going to Isabella*.



# Themes and Motifs

## Art belongs out in the open, to the world

Art belongs out in the open, to the world, argues B.A. Shapiro in *The Art Forger*. Although art is usually created by one individual, it is not something intended to be kept hidden away. Instead, it is meant to be considered, reflected upon, enjoyed, and embraced for its beauty. Such is the case in the novel, with Shapiro taking sharp aim at those who would deny the world such a chance at such enjoyment.

Shapiro's primary targets are art thieves. Art thieves not only squirrel away art that the public is deprived of, but do not value it for its beauty, merely its monetary worth. Stolen art is used on the black market as collateral for drugs, weapons, and other similar kinds of criminal activities in which money is leveraged, used, or needed. These criminals use the paintings as a commodity to back up money, whereas the public itself never gets to see the paintings again. This is in large part what prompts Claire to paint *Bath II*, in the hopes that the original *Bath* will be secured from the black market.

Shapiro also takes sharp aim at art collectors who work in criminal circles, and deny the public the chance to view the artwork in their possession. People like Patel are to be condemned because they do not care about the art for the beauty of the art, but because of an obsessive need to own such artwork. While some collectors may indeed appreciate the beauty of the work, they still deny honesty and public observance. Others, like Sandra Stoneham, are not criminals but refuse to let anyone else in the world see at least certain pieces in their possession, such as *After the Bath*. Claire exposing Sandra allows *After the Bath* to be returned before the public.

Finally, Shapiro takes aim at art forgers like Claire. In order to create carbon-datable painting, Claire must literally erase a timeless painting from Meissonier in order to forge *Bath II*. By forging *Bath II*, Claire is denying the world the right to see one of Meissonier's paintings. This is in many ways even worse than the criminal theft and black market use of paintings, because it not only deprives the public a chance to contemplate the paintings, but actually destroys a painting. Troubling is Claire's relative lack of concern about doing such a thing, but it is clear that what she has done is indeed wrong.

## The ends do not justify the means

The ends do not justify the means, argues B.A. Shapiro in *The Art Forger*. While much of the novel appears to operate on that thematic premise – that the outcome matters more than the steps to get there – this is not the case in the end. In the end, only by a moral reawakening is a nightmarish situation made right once more.

When Claire is first approached about forging *After the Bath*, it is explained to her that, although what she is doing is not necessarily moral, it is necessary because it will bring



about good ends. Forging Bath II will not only mean a payday and a one-woman show for Claire, but will also mean the reinstallation of the original Bath at the Gardner Museum. This means that After the Bath will be rescued from black market circles and black market transactions.

When Claire commits to forging Bath II, she realizes she must paint on a canvas that is legitimately old. This is because the canvas will unquestionably be carbon-dated. She therefore uses a Meissonier painting given to her by Markel to use for Bath II. Claire destroys Meissonier's painting by literally erasing it from the canvas with chemicals, and then using the newly-remade blank canvas to paint her forgery.

All of Claire's actions, lies, and refusal to openly confess the truth initially cause her to become a person of interest, ultimately, in the investigation. Only by revealing the full truth of things, exposing Sandra, and being corroborated by Sandra, does Claire regain her moral standing. With her conscience clear (except for the Meissonier), and with the truth fully known, Claire turns to her own show and a first wave of success in her career.

## **Hypocrisy and irony in art forgery are rampant**

Hypocrisy and irony in art forgery are rampant, argues B.A. Shapiro in *The Art Forger*. The entire nature of art forgery itself – the copying of a painting in order to pass it off and sell it as an original – is ironic because the work being done is not in pursuit of beauty, as art is intended to be, but in pursuit of money. The methods used in art forgery, especially where Claire is concerned, are hypocritical.

Claire's own background should be a bulwark against her decision to commit to art forgery. Reproductions are one thing, but forgery is something else entirely. Forgeries are often done with the intent to keep the original hidden while profiting off the copies. This keeps the original paintings, and its original intent – beauty - hidden, and is ironic because the painting is now being used for what it never was intended for. Such is the case with Bath II and Markel's desire to keep what he supposes to be the original Bath to himself.

At the same time, keeping an original painting hidden is denying the talent of the artist and denying the right of the artist to have his or her work seen. There is hypocrisy in allowing a false painting to be shown while the true painting is being kept sequestered – especially in the case of someone like Claire, who has had her own work stolen in a sense, with the credit being claimed by someone else. Claire should know better in such a situation, for she knows what it is like to have her own artwork denied to the public.

The greatest form of hypocrisy on Claire's part comes from the literal destruction of another artist's genuine work in order to satisfy her own ends. Just as Isaac denied Claire credit for her paintings in order to satisfy his own ends, Claire denies Meissonier credit for his painting she destroys to create Bath II. Disturbingly, Claire shows little



concern and no remorse about destroying Meissonier's painting in order to serve her own ends.

## **The art world, and the Gardner Museum, have lost sight of their purpose**

The art world, and the Gardner Museum, have lost sight of their purpose, argues B.A. Shapiro in *The Art Forger*. Initially, the purpose of the art world and the Gardner Museum are to spread beauty and bring beauty to the public by way of artwork. However, by the time of the novel, this core purpose has been corrupted and in many cases, outright ignored.

Claire desperately yearns to break into the art world of Boston. The art world of Boston is not an open-minded social group dedicated to creating, cultivating, and spreading beauty, but has been closed off by clique-like inclusion or exclusion, money, power, and influence. Claire has been shunned by the art world for daring to reclaim credit for her artwork from Isaac, and because many accuse her of instigating Isaac's suicide. Claire, without inclusion in the art world and despite the sheer beauty of her own original work, is made a pariah.

Claire's decision to forge the painting she will come to call *Bath II* is made in large part out of self-interest. While artists must make a living by selling their paintings and their craft, and should not be blamed for doing so, what Claire is doing is something else entirely. It is out of her desire to break into the art world of Boston, to be accepted and praised among the art elites, rather than in genuine pursuit of beauty based on merit, that compels her in part to commit to forging the painting.

Artists and the art social circles themselves are not the only ones exempt from losing sight of their true purpose. Sandra Stoneham explains the Gardner Museum no longer cares about its collection or Isabella herself, but care only about things like updating architectural features of the building, zeroing in on salacious aspects of Isabella's life, and doing whatever it can to retain a cutting edge place in the elite circles of the art world. Because of this, the beauty of the artworks of the Gardner are largely ignored, making the art itself secondary to, rather than primary in, the Museum's purpose for existence as originally conceived by Isabella. When Claire sought credit for her work against Isaac, the Museum of Modern Art denied her not on actual evidentiary grounds, but because money was at stake and the Museum did not wish to see its reputation suffer.

## **History remains relevant and influences the present in ways rarely suspected or expected**

History remains relevant and influences the present in ways rarely suspected or expected, argues B.A. Shapiro in *The Art Forger*. History is consistently present in the



novel, both recent and distant. Both come to affect Claire's life in immensely important ways.

Claire's recent history has haunted her for the past three years. As an art student, she began an illicit love affair with her much older professor, Isaac Cullion, which went south when Isaac broke up with her because he could not handle the truth that the work he had become most celebrated for had, in fact, been created by Claire. When Claire went to war with Isaac over credit for the paintings, Isaac committed suicide and Claire found herself promptly declared a pariah and "The Great Pretender" by the art community of Boston.

It is because of Claire's being shunned that she must take reproduction jobs to make a living while having her own beautiful artwork denied acceptance in the art community. It is because of Claire's status as a pariah that Markel first approaches her about painting a forgery of *After the Bath*. It is because of Claire's status as a pariah that Claire agrees to paint the forgery, with the promise of having her own show at Markel Gallery. It is because of Claire's recent history that she ultimately comes to determine that the supposedly authentic *After the Bath* is in fact a forgery by Virgil Rendell.

Sandra corroborates Claire's assertions with all the evidence that is needed from the distant past. Sandra explains that Isabella, painted nude into Degas's original work, knew a scandal could erupt over the picture. As a result, she had Rendell produce a forged copy meant to be displayed until her death. Yet, it was then that Amelia decided to keep the original in the family to spite the Museum. It was therefore believed, because Isabelle herself had the Rendell version installed, that the Rendell version was the authentic Degas. Claire's exposure of this helps to restore her reputation, and secures a place of prominence not only in Boston's art community, but throughout the world.



# Styles

## Point of View

B. A. Shapiro tells her novel *The Art Forger* in the first-person limited-omniscient narrative mode from the point of view of Claire. The novel recounts not only Claire's forgery of Degas's *After the Bath*, but her discovery that the painting stolen from the Gardner Museum is itself a forgery. Claire serves to tell her own story because she is an outcast from the art world, and has important and intimate information to relate (especially regarding Isaac Cullion) that no one else has.

Yet, because of the first-person narrative mode, the reader is given unparalleled and uncensored insight into Claire's thoughts, feelings, and considerations, access which no other characters have for much of the novel. This is immensely important given Claire's discovery that the Bath from which she is forging is itself a forgery. This is also important given that the language of the novel is very contemplative: Claire overthinks, considers things from all possible angles, and puts tremendous effort into discussing things in her mind, such as when she examines the painting techniques employed in *After the Bath*. The narration also assumes a limited-omniscient aspect in that Claire obviously does not know everything, but as she learns things, she relates these things to the reader, who thus has unique access to the information Claire uncovers.

## Language and Meaning

B. A. Shapiro tells her novel *The Art Forger* in language that is contemplative and educated for several reasons. The novel is told in the first-person perspective, in which the reader gains unique access to all of Claire's thoughts, feelings, questions, and considerations. It is only natural that the language be contemplative. Consider, for example, Claire's thought process in Chapter 4: "What if I did do it? What if it all worked out, and Markel and I did something good? What if I did get my own show?" (29). Or consider Claire's thought process in Chapter 16: "And there are other things to consider. Like my decision not to tell Markel about Bath's origins" (106). The educated aspect of Claire's language comes from the fact that she is not only college-educated, but is applying her education and experience in her chosen career field as an artist. Larger words that do not always find themselves in common, casual conversation find their way into Claire's thoughts, especially relating to art, such as ubiquitous, provenance, luminous, realism, and impasto. This adds a sense of believability to Claire's characterization as an educated artist, and creates a more authentic atmosphere to her overall narration.

## Structure

B.A. Shapiro divides her novel *The Art Forger* into 49 numbered chapters, preceded by a news article clipping and succeeded by an epilogue. The news article that precedes



the book is a Boston Globe snippet that briefly recounts the March, 1990 Gardner Museum heist so the reader is familiar with the background to the book, and why Claire's decision to forge *After the Bath* is so consequential. The succeeding 49 chapters take the form of both traditional chapters, and unnumbered chapters which take the form of letters from Isabella to Amelia. The letters provide historical background, while the traditionally-constructed chapters alternate between Claire's current life and the events of her life three years before. The chapters, which occur three years before, are written in bold print and provide important background information regarding Claire's life in the present time. The multilayered time elements of the novel reflect Claire's own painting, *4D*, which suggests the presence of time through the layers that the painting uses while also creating a sophisticated and rich depth of plot.





## Quotes

Reproductions.com pays me to paint them, then sells the paintings online as 'perfect replicas' whose 'provenance only an art historian can discern' for ten times my price.

-- Claire (Chapter 1)

**Importance:** Early in the novel, Claire lays out her work and life. She is an artist struggling to make it on her own through her original paintings, but must paint reproductions of famous paintings in order to make a living. Because of this, she is shunned in the art world. It is why she is all the more surprised when Aiden Markel pays her a visit.

The end is good. It's just the means that are a bit iffy.

-- Aiden Markel (Chapter 1)

**Importance:** Markel's visit is brief and to the point. He offers Claire \$50,000, plus expenses, and her own show at his gallery in return for her forging a painting. While he will not offer her any details because she has not signed on yet officially, he is willing to check back in a week to see if she has considered the offer worthy.

What if I did do it? What if it all worked out, and Markel and I did something good? What if I did get my own show?

-- Claire (Chapter 4)

**Importance:** Claire, who has been struggling to gain a good reputation in the art world because she reproduces paintings for a living, realizes she may now have a chance to make a name for herself by accepting Markel's deal. Claire is less concerned about the money than she is about the idea of having her own, one-person show at Markel's famous gallery. She ultimately decides to go through with the forgery, because she knows she will be able to help people in the process.

In front of me stands one of the most valuable paintings stolen in the greatest unsolved art theft in history.

-- Claire (Chapter 5)

**Importance:** Claire at last learns what painting she will be forging. It is Degas's *After the Bath*, stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum heist 20-some years before. Claire is stunned by the fact that she now has an original Degas in her apartment, let alone one connected to the most famous unsolved art theft in history.

After the Bath, back in its rightful place at the Gardner Museum. Millions of people are thrilled. The seller gets his money, and the collector gets what he believes is a Degas, at least until he finds out the truth in the press, and then it will be too late. You and I get to feel really good about ourselves. Not to mention your own work gets the exposure it deserves.

-- Aiden Markel (Chapter 7)



**Importance:** At last, Markel reveals the full details of what is to happen. Markel, acting as a broker, will have Claire reproduce the stolen Degas, while the reproduction is sold and the original is returned to the Gardner Museum. Markel needs the money, and does not want the painting to continue to be kicked around on the black market. Claire ultimately agrees to do the painting even knowing the entire scheme, wanting more than anything for the painting to be restored and her own work to be known through a gallery show at Markel's.

And there are other things to consider. Like my decision not to tell Markel about Bath's origins.

-- Claire (Chapter 16)

**Importance:** Claire comes to discover that After the Bath appears to be a forgery rather than a genuine Degas. She realizes that if this is so, than Isabella Gardner along with countless experts have all been proven wrong about the origin of the painting. Still, she refuses to tell Markel so that she may in turn still get her one-person show, and have a chance at finally breaking into her own as an artist.

It is impossible.

-- Isabella Gardner (Chapter 19)

**Importance:** When Isabella meets Degas, she is horrified to find him moving away from realism and oils toward impressionism and pastels. Degas offers to complete a picture in his Bathers series in the traditional way Isabella loves as a gift for Isabella, provided Isabella herself serves as a model. Initially, Isabella says no because she is married, believes herself to be too old, and because the entire arrangement would be indecent.

What if they figure out it's a forgery? Or, maybe worse, what if they don't?

-- Claire (Chapter 26)

**Importance:** When the buyer of Bath II is caught with the painting, the story makes headlines. Claire and Markel are stunned. Claire does not so much worry about getting caught at first as she worries about whether or not the authorities will figure out Bath II is a forgery. Worse, she worries they may not figure it out – and that a fake painting will be assumed to be the real thing, and put up on display to fool millions.

Apparently, Patel knew more than Aiden thought or the FBI was better at working its way through the levels that Aiden believed would protect him.

-- Claire (Chapter 37)

**Importance:** When Patel is caught with Bath II, Markel believes he and Claire are completely safe. However, as it turns out, the FBI is able to finger Markel as being involved, and this leads to his arrest. Markel is in danger, not of going to jail for life but of being harmed by the people he owes money to from the brokerage sale, but has been unable to pay because he has been in prison. Claire then commits to finding a way to help Markel.



Then I notice a small plan in the corner of the blueprint. 'Subbasement' is written under a drawing of a space a fraction of the size of the basement... Big enough to hold a large canvas; isolated enough to hide a secret.

-- Claire (Chapter 40)

**Importance:** When Claire discovers sketches of *After the Bath* in Virgil Rendell's sketchbook, she comes to fully believe the *After the Bath* painting she copied is indeed a forgery. Although she does not know how or why such a forgery could have been mistaken for the real painting, Claire is determined to find out. Looking through old blueprints of the Gardner Museum, she discovers a subbasement room that she believes could be big enough for a painting – the real painting.

It was very good – but it was a copy.

-- Claire (Chapter 43)

**Importance:** When Claire convinces Rik to sneak her into the basement of the Gardner Museum, they are caught by the police and brought before Alana, the museum director. Claire then confesses the truth of everything to Alana, who brings in the FBI. Ultimately, this leads to Claire's arrest when the Boston Police jump the gun and take Claire to court with insufficient evidence. Still, Claire must defend herself by arguing that the painting she copied from was a fake.

For it appears Rendell did forge it, but not because he stole it or was blackmailing Belle; according to Sandra, it was Belle herself who didn't want it seen.

-- Claire (Epilogue)

**Importance:** At last, Claire gets to the bottom of the Bath mystery. The painting stolen from the Gardner, which Claire copied, was indeed a forgery. It was a forgery made by Virgil Rendell, an artist and lover of Amelia's, who painted the forgery at the request of Isabella and Amelia to protect Isabella from the scandal of appearing as a nude model in Degas's final *After the Bath* painting.