

# Operation: Uncover - Part 1

For Halima Abdi

By TheSpiralledEye

*Ines is struggling to live her new life as a journalist thanks to her secret agent alter ego, L'ombre, who just wants to seduce or fight her way through life. After being dragged back to help with the kidnapping of a famous scientist she is paired with Dahlia, a beautiful transformed woman who seems to get along with her own passenger much better. Love and understanding blooms but danger awaits around every corner, threatening to take the happiness Ines fought so hard to achieve.*

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The Louvre at night truly was a spectacular sight; the main hall was illuminated with golden light and inside the precious treasures and paintings sat in gilded frames to be admired by all. Guests dressed in the finest couture France had to offer existed luxury vehicles and mingled inside the gilded halls, sipping champagne and talking excitedly; all giddy to be part of the exclusive guest list for the event of the year. Everywhere posts and banners celebrated the work of Dr. Monroe, the genius scientist who it was said had invented a brand new energy-saving technology that, after its unveiling tonight, would rocket France to the forefront of renewable energy production.

It was in this elegant and glamorous place that Ines Yoshida, famed Parian reporter, found herself; champagne flute clutched delicately between her manicured nails and a soft smile on her lips. Covering this event made her the envy of her entire office but it came to nobody's surprise. Since fully embracing her new life as a jetsetting journalist, Ines had made a name for herself, more of a name that her former agency would have liked. The entire point of a sleeper agent was to be untraceable, and yet she kept appearing in award winning bylines.

Ines couldn't bring herself to care though; she enjoyed her work too much. In fact, this night would have been totally perfect, were it not for the fact she was *also* undercover. Ostensibly, she was here to write a report on the new technology Dr. Monroe was here to unveil, as well as get an exclusive interview. But she was also here as extra muscle; or rather, L'ombre was.

The Agent, the remnants of Roanoke inside her that still possessed all his old skills and ruthlessness was still there, hiding in the shadows of her mind, and now going by that

new moniker. Ines secretly wished the alternate personality would just disappear, then the agency would have no choice but to leave her alone to live her life in peace. But of course, the Alter never did fade. In fact, she seemed to revel in teasing and distracting Ines at the most inopportune of moments.

*'I bet we could get even more information out of Monroe if we seduce him.'*

Ines took a deep sip of her drink and turned to face a painting so that she could whisper under her breath without being heard.

"We do not need to resort to that every time we are after a good story."

*'But all your most famous articles got written because of me.'* L'ombre taunted, *'me seducing more information out of the targets! Remember how they moaned our name? Look at this body we have, Ines. It's a waste not to use it to its fullest potential.'*

Ines' grip on her glass intensified to the point that she had to focus on not snapping the neck.

"I still wrote the articles, that's what won people over, not you getting people into bed!" She whispered under her breath.

*'You loved it. Don't try to deny how much pleasure it gave you. You felt everything I did...'*

"Shut up."

Ines grit her teeth, trying to focus instead on the beautiful artwork in front of her; once the scientist arrived she wouldn't have time for enjoying the work.

"I've never seen a painting make somebody look so angry, not a fan of impressionism?"

The voice made her turn to see a beautiful, dark-skinned woman in an expensive looking white pantsuit. She was wearing simple, gold jewellery that accentuated her natural beauty and high cheekbones. Even her eyeshadow had a slight golden shimmer to her; Ines

couldn't help but think she was just as beautiful as the art on display. Put a frame around her and she'd fit right in on the wall.

“On the contrary, the picture is beautiful. I was just...elsewhere.” Ines replied with a charming smile, offering her hand. “Ines Yoshida, press.”

“Dahlia Dubois.” The woman took her hand warmly, “art restoration, slash historian.”

Dahlia's hand in hers felt warm, her grip was firm and somehow grounding and Ines felt her heart give a little flutter. She wondered if Dahlia felt the spark fly between them as well, as she didn't let go for a few seconds longer than a normal handshake but Ines tried not to read too much into it.

*‘She’s lovely...it’s been a while since we had a woman over. If she works here I bet she knows all sorts of secrets.’*

Ines badly wished L'ombre had her own body just so she could throttle her.

“I must say, you're a might better dressed than most press here.” Dahlia said, eyes searching Ines up and down.

Ines felt her cheeks flush; the dress was a simple, silk gown that trailed slightly behind her on the floor. It was deep wine red with a heart neckline that showed off her clavicle, and a small amount of cleavage without being obscene. Next to Dahlia's practical yet beautiful pantsuit, she suddenly felt like a little girl being confronted with a businesswoman.

*‘Should have worn the mini dress,’ L'ombre taunted, ‘The one that shows off those big tits of yours. Why you insist on hiding them I will never understand. They are our biggest asset in more ways than one. If you were wearing that, we would already have this lady wrapped around our finger.’*

Ines felt a tingle in her fingers, the first sign that L'ombre was starting to take over. So far she had ruined every relationship by making them move too fast. Turns out people don't always react well when sweet, clever Ines suddenly turned into a dirty talking, domineering sex fiend, seemingly out of nowhere. *Even if the sex itself was fantastic.* Ines clamped L'ombre down, determined to at least enjoy Dahlia's company even if nothing could come from it.

“I believe that’s the man of the hour.” Dahlia noticed, nodding to something over Ines’ shoulder.

Indeed, Dr. Monroe, a bespectacled man in his forties with hair that was going prematurely grey, had just made his entrance. He was surrounded by cameras and well wishers, the man had barely let go of one hand before another thrust against him to shake. Ines smiled; this would be easy enough; once he was overwhelmed, she would swoop in with her most charming smile and offer him a quiet, one-on-one chat. After all the attention he was sure to accept; that exclusive was practically writing itself.

Just as she stepped forward, L’ombre made her freeze; a shiver ran up her spine and fear flooded her veins. She knew this feeling, her Alter had just picked up on something with her spy instincts, and all hell was about to break loose. Ines tried to squashed her back down but it was no use, L’ombre took control and deftly rolled across the floor; an action that would have looked silly given their outfit and setting were it not for the fact a second later several windows smashed and people in dark outfits began to descend on ropes.

Women screamed, photographs flashed, and L’ombre was already racing them right toward danger with a wicked smile on their face.

*‘Stop! What are you doing, you’re going to get us killed!’* Ines screamed mentally, trying to force the Alter to stop, all she managed was to slow her down.

“They’re going for Monroe!” L’ombre ground out through gritted teeth, “let me work!”

Reluctantly, Ines let L’ombre go and she dove into the crowd, expertly weaving through the panicked bodies to where the honoured scientist was being accosted by one of the black clad assailants. L’ombre expertly swung a punch right to the sternum and knocked the assailant off balance before delivering a high kick to the jaw.

Ines could feel the adrenaline rushing in their veins, and the joy L’ombre felt at knowing that kick was showing off their panties at the same time as being useful. She loved to fight in a way that showed off their body, which was probably why she chose not to stop the grasping hand that ripped the top of their dress.

The top of the dress tore away at the seam, revealing one half of their strapless bra and that was just too much. Ines surged forward taking care to try and hide their modesty.

*‘What are you doing?!’*

Ines realised her mistake as soon as she made it, trying in vain to fix the dress only to receive a rounding smash to the temple. Suddenly she was on the ground, one of the kidnappers pinning her hips to the ground. Ines could tell this one was a woman, despite the mask and heavy build. She was more muscular than her, and no matter how much she struggled, Ines couldn't break free.

*'Idiot.'*

L'ombre took over, twisting their hips to flip the position, but it was a struggle, the Alter reached for the combat knife on the woman's belt and grabbed the shaft.

*'No killing!'* Ines screamed.

"Somebody tell them that!" L'ombre hissed under her breath, the momentary distraction of the mental conversation giving their attacker the opening they needed to push them off and get to their feet.

The scientist was being swarmed now, forced into a jacket attached to a hook and dragged upwards towards the broken window; outside Ines could hear the thumping of helicopter blades.

*'They're getting away!'*

"And whose fault is that?" Ines ground out under her breath, fighting off yet another attacker.

She had no regard for their modesty and seemed to almost take pleasure in fighting rough enough that their dress began to come apart in places. Ines felt her temper flare; could they not have a little respect? A camera flash in the corner of their vision made her burn with humiliation; pictures of this scantily, now barely dressed, reporter fighting masked mercenaries was sure to make it into tomorrow's papers.

She could feel L'ombres' irritation too, Ines' embarrassment was distracting her, as if that was important right now! The former spy ran for the scientist, meaning to jump and drag him back down to Earth, but one of the other enemies grabbed her ankle at the last second, and they went tumbling to the ground. Ines could feel L'ombre snap a little, her hand twitching to close around the assailant's throat when suddenly a sharp chop landed on the enemy's shoulder and they slumped to the ground, unconscious.

Dahlia stood over them with a steely look in her eye before offering a hand to L'ombre. Ines reasserted control immediately and took it, not trusting the Alter at all. She was about to ask how a museum worker knew how to fight when Dahlia's eyes went wide and Ines found herself thrust to the side just in time to miss another hit. Their unconscious assailant was apparently not so unconscious.

In a manner of seconds she was gone, along with her colleagues and, most importantly, the scientist. It all happened so quickly Ines couldn't keep it all straight; it felt like one second she was fighting, the next everything was eerily silent before the aftermath chaos began. People were calling police and rushing this way and that, including Ines, but not of her own volition. Somebody was dragging her through the crowd, Dahlia, her grip on Ines' wrist tight as she sequestered them away in a small bathroom and locked the door.

"Well, that could have gone better." She sighed, "When the agency told me the former Roanoke was on the case, I was expecting things to go a lot smoother."

Ines felt her heart sink.

"You're an agent? Nor an art historian?"

"I'm both." Dahlia smiled, "or should I say *we're* both."

Understanding washed over Ines in an instant; that explained the steely cold gaze Dahlia had possessed while fighting. The one that wasn't present at all in her current, warm eyes.

"You're...like me? A transformed agent."

"Yes, and I have a little voice in my head just like you." Dahlia grinned, "Though, judging from the one sided conversation I heard tonight, I get along a lot better with mine than you do yours."

Ines' cheeks burned; she felt like a small child being scolded by a teacher for not getting along with her classmates.

"Come on, we should report in." Dahlia said.

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The feeling of being a schoolgirl called to the principal's office only intensified when they reported in. Their handler was pissed off to say the least.

"What a waste it was, turning Roanoke into you." He sighed, "I thought you were still capable, but clearly I was wrong."

Ines grit her teeth; L'ombre was chuckling in the back of her mind. She could feel waves of arrogance wafting off her. She loved it when this sort of thing happened.

*'I keep telling you, you need me.'* She giggled. *'Your incompetence is the proof.'*

Ines did her best to ignore her, but she was very glad this conversation was happening via video chat. It meant she could white knuckle her phone without the handler seeing. Plus she could imagine squashing his tiny little head between her fingers.

*'See, that's the sort of thing you should fantasize about more often...'*

"I don't even want to be an agent anymore." She said, trying her best to keep her voice level. "Clearly I am not suited to it anymore, thanks to the procedure the agency insisted on, I might add. Why not retire me entirely?"

There was a flash of emotion from L'ombre; frustration, anger and...was that fear? Ines couldn't help but hope so, it was comforting to know that sadistic monster was capable of more human emotions.

"You're far too valuable an asset I am afraid." Her new handler sighed, "but maybe you have a point. Tell you what, we don't have any other agents available to take over right now so, investigate Dr. Munroe's kidnapping. Find out who took him, why and retrieve him without incident and maybe I will consider the possibility of your retirement."

Ines' heart leapt; real agent retirement. All she'd have to worry about was being a globe-trotting reporter; no more spy work on the side, no more violence and most importantly, no more L'ombre. She had been sure for a while now that if she were fully out of the secret agent game the alternate personality would fade away entirely, like a muscle atrophying from lack of use.

“Based on your and your Alter's performance last night, you obviously can't be left to your own devices. So I am sending you a partner who can hopefully be a good influence.”

Ines' heart leapt again for an entirely different reason; if there were no other agents available that would mean her new partner would have to be Dahlia, the woman from the museum.

“Agent Dubois is already in Paris, I believe you've met.”

“Why didn't you tell me I had backup at the museum?” Ines asked, “I could have prepared better.”

“That's my business.”

In the back of her mind, L'ombre laughed.

*‘You were being watched, like a newborn kitten, or a green recruit. How embarrassing! If you just let me take over we wouldn't be in this situation.’*

Ines bit back a comment in response, if she let L'ombre be in charge every interaction she ever had would end in murder or sex. Finally, the awkward conversation came to an end and Ines let out a breath she hadn't realised she was holding.

The sun was rising outside, she'd been up all night. And what a disastrous night it had been. All Ines wanted was to fall into bed and get a few hours of shut eye before Dahlia inevitably arrived to start their work.

*‘What? Sleep?! We have a mission, they could be torturing that scientist right now for all we know!’*

“It's 5:30 in the morning, I have been awake for more than twenty-four hours. If we are going to function I need sleep.”

*‘We used to go three or four days between naps.’ L'ombre grumbled, ‘A bit of makeup over those baggy eyes and we'll be fine. In fact, it might even help, we can lay it on thick, pretend to be a lady of the night down in the red light district...put out some feelers if you get my drift.’*

“I do and no.”



*'You're no fun at all.'*

~

"What's wrong, cherie? You've barely touched your dinner."

Ines looked up from where she had been pushing cabbage around her plate to see her mother looking at her with worried eyes. She was ageing gracefully, her hair was barely even grey yet and her high cheekbones spoke of high European breeding. Ines swallowed; thinking of all the memories she had with her mother, of how excited she was to bring her little girl to the place of her birth after being raised Japan. How she had shown her and her father around her hometown; excited to finally be back after almost ten years living abroad.

Her as a little girl, crowds of people with faces like her mother's, going to the fancy bakeries and experiencing genuine French pastries for the first time along with her Japanese father never developed a taste for French cuisine, despite his wife's best attempts. Even that pet name, cherie, French for 'darling' her mother had always called her that because she dreamed of returning to France one day. When her dream came true she had started using it all the time. Ines had so many wonderful memories with this woman.

Except none of it was real.

Her French Mother, her Japanese father; neither of them had existed even two years ago. Their entire history was a fabrication. For months now she had been living as Ines and most of the time, she bought into her own fantasy. But L'ombre's constant interference made it impossible. She was a constant reminder of her 'real' backstory, and ever since that night at the Louvre, Ines had found it harder and harder to ignore her taunts.

She looked over at her mother and was suddenly struck by the knowledge that this woman had been a totally different person two years ago. Maybe she'd even been a man, transformed into a Japanese woman just like her.

She felt L'ombre stir in the back of her mind; she could almost feel her smug, satisfied smile. Sometimes she swore her alter just enjoyed making her squirm.

"Ines?"

"Sorry, what?"

Her mother put down her fork and reached across the table, taking Ines' hand in hers.

"Is something the matter, cherie?"

"No, I'm just tired. That incident at the museum really tired me out." Ines lied smoothly, "It was all a bit much, but I'll be fine."

"That's our girl. You've got real hustle." Her father smiled.

Normally a compliment like that made her beam with pride; now it just made her guts twist. Actually, it was more than that, she could feel L'ombre pushing forwards, so much so that she swore she could feel the woman's sadistic laughter in her mind.

"I'm just going to the bathroom." Ines excused herself quickly, heading for the bathroom at the far side of her parents house, so that she couldn't be overheard the moment her alter inevitably took over.

She had just enough time to close and lock the door before Ines felt her body shift and her mind recede, as L'ombre took over; Ines now just a passenger in her own body. L'ombre shook out their long hair and smiled confidently and coldly at their reflection.

"You really need to stop moping." She cooed, "Just because you can't accept reality as it is. Being sad about it isn't going to change anything. Besides, that attack was the most fun I've had in months."

Ines stayed silent, not wanting to give her alter any ammunition. Something that seemed to irritate her greatly as she clicked her tongue and rolled her eyes.

"Come on, stop being a baby." She sighed, "Can't you see that we have the perfect set up; I lived as nothing more than a blunt instrument, and now have been distilled down into a perfect, elegant weapon! You get the boring, normal life you want and I get to be your dirty little secret! It has all the wonderful illicitness of an affair without that exhausting love business."

She leaned into the mirror, forcing Ines to look at her own face, fair skin with brown, almond-shaped eyes and high cheekbones, wearing L'ombre's calculating, cold smile.

“We’re perfect now.”

*‘What if I want love? I just want you to go away.’*

“You can’t get rid of me, darling. Remember, cherie, I’m the **real** you.”

The taunt made anger flare inside Ines and she forced herself back in control. She fixed her reflection with a hard stare, glaring deeply into the darkest part of her own eyes.

“No, you’re the old, **dead**, me. And when this mission is done, that’s it, no more field work, and you fade away into nothing!”

So long as L’ombre stayed quiet, she could just be Ines, it was only when she flared up that those memories of Roanoke, of her old life became stark. If she could just repress her long enough, Ines was sure she could forget her old life entirely, and truly, completely become Ines Yoshida; Roanoke nothing but a forgotten dream; a fiction. And L’ombre along with it.

A knock at the door made her startle.

“Ines, cherie, are you alright?”

“Yes, mama!”

Ines realised her jaw and knuckles were aching; she’d been gripping the sink so hard her knuckles had turned white and her teeth ground against one another in frustration. She forced her body to relax; loathe as she was to admit it, L’ombre had a point. This was her life now, warts and all, and really, the warts were few and far between. She needed to focus on the task at hand and enjoy her normal life. At least while she had the chance.

She couldn’t be sure, but as she left the bathroom, thinking those hopeful thoughts of a life without her split personality haunting her every waking moment,, she was sure she felt a stab of fear from the alter. Maybe she did have some fear of ‘death’ after all.