

Basement Dwellers, Liars, and Dignitaries All Love Jesuit Propaganda (Regarding The Deepest Mysteries Occurring Between 1914 and

by Ivan Reyes

I suppose, let's see, it's been since 1985 so that makes it 35 years, and 35 good years. I suppose it started watching my father. He did it from home, though. Neighbors would drop off their clothes and if he hadn't measured them before he would, or if he felt a fitting was necessary, perhaps too much time had passed by or they had gained weight, he would.

He made me iron the clothes but I didn't mind.

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Eugene Travers owned this establishment, a suit store, Dapper Tapestry, the store's tag written underneath it's name outside the building in smaller letters, "the perfect fit to suit your needs", in glowing white bulbs. He first rented a space a few blocks down, in 1985 and called that small space Eugene's Suits. He had a small, versatile collection and was a wizard of a tailor, anticipating fabric and the customer's style of movement perfectly. If a man was fat and

mostly immobile, he designed the suit and fit to make him statuesque and royal. He also recommended haircuts upon request and sometimes books. He recommended diction and cologne, upon request -- only upon request.

Back then it was a hole in the wall. However, he was a tyrant when it came to aesthetics. Everything in the store must be a shade of brown, and all accents gold, without exception. Back then the store was lit by a single bulb. It dangled warmly from the ceiling, two feet from the customer's head.

Then in 1999 he moved to a larger location, keeping the name, then again in 2005 as commerce had swelled unprecedentedly and unexpectedly rapidly so that his income was overflowing into every area of his life, he got a Porsche, then he decided it wiser to ride this wave into a bigger store, informing his most important clients, and then putting a cardboard sign in front of his new location -- "Formerly Eugene's Suits! -- and eventually removing the sign. He had made a name for himself, in the suit community, among suit enthusiasts, a role model for fashion aficionados. He kept the brown and gold aesthetic.

It was a particularly slow day, though beyond the glass double doors traffic roared by, when Claire (or Henrietta) walked into his store with a vague mien signaling distress, though distant. Yes, he'd never forget that beautiful countenance.

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She must have been in her fifties, at least that was among my first thoughts, when she burst through my doors. She was beautiful. Gorgeous. Refined and dripping of the absolute promise of exotic and stimulating conversation.

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First of all, he looked nerdy. Like, uptight.

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"Can I help you, miss?" he asked, and took four steps towards her, yet she clutched her small purse even tighter so he ceased in his steps and tensed up himself.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I should ask you," said Eugene. "This is my store." He straightened his tie and touched his hair to make sure it felt all together. He swallowed but there was no saliva in his mouth, so his throat became even more dry.

"I'd like to buy a dress, then," she said and walked away from the door and towards the changing rooms.

"Don't go back there, please!" he said, and was met with a kind and unwavering gaze, as her face had slightly softened. "Please," he repeated, "we have no dresses," he waved his hand about, addressing the room, "I sell suits," he said in a way that reminded him of speaking to a child. She tensed up again.

"Well, what's back there?" she inquired.

"Changing rooms, ma'am," he said as if it were a plain matter of obvious fact to all normal human beings, except for morons.

She placed a cigarette between her lips, "Mmm."

"Ma'am, do not smoke in here!"

"Why?"

His face was full of pain and tragedy as he gestured to all that surrounded them, the suits. The store. Simply put, it was his life.

"Do not."

"So, no dresses, huh?"

"No."

"And no smoking, huh?"

He stared at her. She took four steps towards him. "Will you make an exception?" she asked. He remains silent. His heart is beating faster, now. "What time do you lock up?"

"10:30."

"So late." She moves the shoulder straps of her dress down towards her arms. With a lighter in her palm she gently mouths "One?" He quickly goes into his office, in the back, and comes back out with a fan. He plugs it in, and turns it on. "Smoke into the fan's wind, if you must."

She laughs at him, softly at first and then the laughter crescendos into a roaring apotheosis then subsides into general madness, until the mania subsides when she says, "You're a fastidious one, aren't you? I love it. Very well."

"Be careful of the ash!" he says.

"Hon," she says, "take it easy. I won't ash on your suits." She looks around, before lighting her cigarette. "Impeccable taste, hon, I must say." She lights her cigarette. She flips the lighter closed, and begins to pace the store, after she has shoved the small, metallic lighter

into her small, sequined purse. "Well," she begins, "what can I buy? I don't like suits."

He wrinkles his brow.

"I'm a woman," she continues, "and I like being a woman. A suit is for a man. Or, perhaps just a different woman. But I'm old fashioned. If only you sold dresses. You truly have impeccable taste," she says reaching up to the garments and running her hand through the pieces of clothing and running her hands softly through the inside of a jacket lined with sage-green silk, then with her finger tracing the stitching. "Truly."

He allows her to continue pacing in silence, only her foot falls reverberating in the stillness, her smoke gliding periodically into a whirlpool in the middle of the room, where the fan is directing it. Finally, he speaks.

"About two miles away, there is a dress shop, owned by my friend, Hugo. Sometimes I purchase fabrics off of him, because he would not reveal his source to me. I'll tell him I've sent you -- "

"So, I'm being kicked out then?"

"No, stay," he says, "I don't mind you here. Stay until we close for all I care." Nobody came in for the rest of the night. Eventually the moon captured the top spot in the dark skies, surrounded by stars and clouds -- dark ominous clouds, thick and sharp. All at once, the streetlights lit up and formed a net across the geography of the city, a blanket or a suit for the night. Cars still drove by, and with the same frequency and intensity, however now a listlessness pervaded their honks and their headlights likened them to ghosts, phantoms, and apparitions. He smiled at her. He removed his jacket and hung it on a peg behind his counter. He rolled up his sleeves and heaved a billowy sigh. He wordlessly thanked god, he appreciated the slow

customer traffic. Recently he had received people well until and then after he closed. Without his noticing Claire (or Henrietta) was toying with the keyhole to the lock for the double doors with her finger.

"How do you lock this thing?" she asked.

"A key."

She holds out her hand. He reaches into his trouser pocket and hands her a key. It is attached to a small, silver keychain. She takes the key and inserts it into the keyhole and turns the key so that it clicks a dull, hollow clicking sound and removes the key and gives it back to Eugene. She turns over the "Open" sign so that "Closed" is now exposed to the public. "What are you doing?" Eugene says mindlessly.

"What does it look like I'm doing? You're uptight."

"So?"

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I asked her, "What are you doing here?" once I came to my senses. I could have sworn I was drugged, I was in a fog. Worry not, I wasn't. It's just that, and this remained true for the remainder of the time that I knew her, unfalteringly, when she was close I felt that time slowed down and dreams became louder and space was electrified so that the senses rode upon this static. Thinking clearly was not in the cards when she was around, because whatever was happening didn't allow the room for it to exist, as something more miraculous was taking place. I can't explain.

She responded quickly, saying "It was the first store I saw." Then her head lowered and her hands became clasped together in her lap and softly she said, "I was running away from my husband. He's a bore

and he's a brute and he doesn't understand anything besides money. So, I am running away from my husband."

This woman confused me. As she always would. She told me they were getting divorced. I told her about a bar behind my shop, if you go out back and walk a little way down the alley.

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Like a perfect gentleman, he opened the door for me. We walked towards the bar and he winked at the bartender, and the bartender smiled and winked back, clicking his tongue. He was real friendly. The tailor ordered a whiskey, so I ordered a whiskey, too. The bartender brought our drinks, and he immediately took a big sip. I took a small sip. He began talking about himself, all manner of things. Dreadful things, too. Only he didn't realize it. Eventually he asked me what I did. By now, I'm a little turned off of him, he seems a bit needy. However, charm also bespeckled his presence. I told him that I used to be a writer. A novelist. He lit up, immediately, and said "I enjoy a good book, I enjoy reading. What have you written?"

The Dark Plague of Henry C. I reluctantly told him.

His eyes were incredulous, then whimsical. "Ha, ha!" he said, "I love that book. So that means, your name is -- It's Henrietta. Henrietta DuBois. Or, maybe a pen name..." He began to grow foggy and distant.

"My name is Claire. The other is my pen name."

"Well, whatever happened to The Personalities of Olaf? I was so looking forward to it. I read somewhere it was due September, two years ago, though. What happened to it?"

"I had a manuscript. But I wanted to punch it up. Added to that, I got married, our honeymoon lasted a year and a half. It lasted so long. I was trying to write it the whole time. Instead of punching it up, it just got all the worse. By the time I had got back home it had wilted into nothing and then I put it away and haven't truly picked up a pen again, not with my past vigor, at least."

"Hmm. I see. How sad."

"I would write and write in hotel rooms endlessly, while my husband was out cheating on me, and me writing. Thinking -- those were all business calls. And he'd come home absolutely drunk each night, I was a damn fool. I was so alone. I felt myself dying slowly, in those sun drenched getaways. And my words, they were never alive, then. They, too, felt like they were dying. It was supposed to be my magnum opus. However, things just kept getting even worse, so now it sits in a drawer. It's a source of pain to think of it."

"Yet, you still keep the manuscript."

"Oh, it's far from finished. It's a half done rewrite with a lot of gaps."

"Might I read it, someday?"

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He offered her free reign to come by the store and stay for as long as she liked, however this was a pathetic offer to such a vibrant woman. Her presence would be adored almost anywhere. Perhaps not a microbiologist's lab, where standards of seriousness are to be held high and aloft forever. He said, "We can drink every night if you like." She declined, of course.

Then he asked if he may hear, at least, what it was about, so far.

"It's about a man, an artist -- he makes beautiful works of art, sculptures primarily though he is known for his lush nature paintings as well. He will only sell his pieces of art if he believes the purchaser to be of good moral standing. He must meet you, he must look you in the eyes. If he approves of what he sees, you may buy whatever you like, if he does not approve, which is rare though it happens, you have no hope of acquiring one of his prized statues or busts or whatever you like. One day a man walks into his estate, claiming to be a wholesaler of industrial metals, who wishes to purchase a bust for his daughter. For her marriage, to a foreign entrepreneur. The man tells the artist of his deep and unending love for his daughter, and along the way boasts of his love of charitable acts. The homeless, he says, are a sizable thorn in my heart. The artist sells him a bust, quite a strange one, of a Russian dignitary. It is quite elaborate. The wholesaler takes the bust and thanks him, and hands him a check for double what the artist asked for. The artist accepts the gesture. Some time later it is revealed to him, through a mutual acquaintance that the industrial metals magnate is actually a lawyer by the name of Ken Reising, and this infuriates poor Olaf. He goes to Ken's office the very next day, and demands that he return the bust, as it was acquired through dubious, manipulative, if not evil, then at the very least vile, means, however, obviously, Ken refuses. Then Ken calls his security team to escort Olaf out. Some days pass, and Olaf cannot remove it from his mind, he is cursed by it. And one moonlit night, when it is cold and damp, Olaf acts upon his desires and sneaks into Ken's office to retrieve his precious work of art. He breaks a window into Ken's office with a rock. He exits soundlessly through the same window. When Ken finds out, he sends some hired muscle to once again get his bust back from Olaf, he tells them not to hurt him more than necessary and not too grievously either. During the scuffle one of the men bash Olaf too hard on the head with the bust in question, he is knocked unconscious. A housemaid finds him and calls an ambulance. He seems fine. Ken attempts to apologize, however it is beyond Olaf. He

no longer cares. Also he comes to find he can no longer sculpt, either. That talent disappeared with the wind, and it seemed also that that very same wind brought in a brand new talent in the form of musical acuity. All of Olaf's songs are about Ken ("Dishonest Ken", "Evil Ken", "Hellish Ken the Lawyer", etc.) and they are unforeseeably popular. They eventually drive Ken into madness. This is where the story ends. Anyway that's all I had so far."

"That sounds beautiful!"

"It may have been."

"Write it."

He finishes his whiskey and signals to the bartender for a refill. The bartender walks over and tops him off. They exchange nearly meaningless banter.

"Claire," said Eugene. "There's one thing I want to know."

"Yes?"

Eugene swallows half of his whiskey. He says "'Negotiations: Darkly", Terry is almost proved of his innocence, Pete even tells him he is 100% sure about the verdict tomorrow. Yet, Terry runs off with all of his files to do god-knows-what. Why does he think he can do better on his own? Why does he think he can do better than a lawyer as good as Pete? I always wondered, why didn't he just let the lawyer do his job? He was so close."

"Because Terry is guilty. His guilt haunts him. He runs off with everything that could prove his innocence to destroy it, before committing suicide. I tried to imply that, at least."

"I suppose that makes sense. It might be complicated for the conscience to justify being exonerated of a murder you did commit. He could have had his records expunged," and this last sentence was spoken in drunken reverie, almost as if he were simply reflecting to himself the story. "Want more whiskey?"

"No, thanks."

"Where will you go tonight?"

"A hotel."

"Nonsense. Come to my place. Please. I mean, I insist."

"Very well."

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My first instinct was to run away, however unfair that may be and however as unduly as it may be I think most people would consider I was justified in that remote assumption. Because he had many bookshelves in his small domicile, and my books lined a good portion of them. I should have been flattered, but I was scared.

"I just like literature," he said to me. "It's not creepy."

To be fair he had more Faulkner than me. That was reassuring. Perhaps the worst part of me gets the first say. Oh god, I don't know. It worries me oh very much. I want to be kind. He showed me a room he had all full of Steinbeck books. He was an odd sort. "Steinbeck is my favorite."

He gets into his pajamas and turns on the television. "Who do you prefer?" he says, "Leno or Letterman?"

"Letterman."

He turns it to channel three. He sits in a large brown chair with a small stand stood next to it and falls asleep almost instantly. The television drones on and it comforts me oddly. He was so peaceful asleep in his chair. I paced the apartment a bit then looked out the window. The wind was so cool. The bliss of this amazingly nascent situation was tugging at my soul. I was still fully dressed. I walked out and went for a walk. I was not alone. I would just go around the block once. The breeze grabbed me like an old lover. A couple walked past me, totally inebriated. He had his hands completely down her skirt and she was clutching his crotch. They spoke silently and only to each other. They did not notice me. They walked past me as they would any obstruction.

Then I spotted a hotdog man. I'll take one, I said. He loaded it with bacon and onion and ketchup and mustard. On the way home I ate it all. I walked back into his apartment and examined all his things as a mother might.

He was now in his bed. I took off all my clothes, except I found a large shirt of his that I liked in his closet. I wore it to bed, wearing nothing besides it but panties. Yet, it was not a sexual maneuver as men think of it. Men are sexual imbeciles.

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I woke up. The sun was bright. Goddamn, sun. I got up to close my blinds. I look back. Claire is asleep on my bed practically naked. I am tempted to make a move but something internal advises me not to, I trust it. I go to the bathroom to clean up, get ready for the morning, however I just end up yakking into my toilet. It is bad. I puke up the remnants of yesterday's salad. Small chunks of tomato. I flush the toilet. A hangover is unfamiliar. I usually take it easy on booze. She seems fine. She starts to stir so I purposefully start

making more noise to rouse her into awakening. She does. Her eyes blink placidly at the morning sun. She stretches. Heaves. Exhales abruptly. Rolls over then looks at me. One eye is buried in the pillow.

"You drank so much," she says.

"You seem ok, though."

"You got excited when you found out who I was."

"I did, didn't I?" I wipe a splash of vomit that was on my right hand upon my t-shirt. She grunts and finally sits up in my bed. She looks at me and says, "You have to open your shop, don't you?"

"I stay closed on weekend. How about breakfast?"

"Sure."

I get the skillet hot, crack four eggs into it, toss a handsome pinch of salt into it as I stir. I cover the skillet with a lid. I make some toast. I pour cereal into an empty bowl. Start the coffee. Peel bananas, throw them into a blender with peanut butter and blueberries, start it.

She picks up a copy of one of her books I own, opens it and drags her finger upon a page. From my peripheral vision I see her smile at my annotations.

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My god, my dick itches. I pull the Benz into the driveway. Open the door, there's wifey. I give her a kiss. "Hello, hon," I say. She's quiet but she's the quiet type. That's what I love about her. The killer body and not much to say. Whatever she has to say she writes in a book.

Not that I'd mind her talking. However an invisible strength seems to belie her silence. I admire that in her, among so many other things. She is my main, truly, my only, the other women are distraction. Distractions. Shut the fuck up. Stop judging yourself. What's done is done. Get in the shower. I get in the shower. Clean my cock. Scrub it. Wash up. The suds go swirling down the drain surrounded by elaborate mosaic tile. Just like I wanted. I get out she is in our bedroom. We fuck. I'm surprised we still make love good. The best lover. She says, "I'm going to take a shower."

"Is there any mail for me?" I ask. I rift through the letters.

"Nothing important." She takes a shower and I listen to the water and the music she plays while she showers. I pour a whiskey. She exits the bathroom in a robe. "Do you have a moment?" she asks.

I look at the time, "Not really. What is it?"

"Do you love me?"

Why is she asking me? This is a bad sign. This is a red flag. I don't know what it means but I do know that whatever it means it's a bad signal. In my mind I'm running through what I know about her. However, there is no answer.

"I do, is there a problem?"

"No, no problem," she says, walking into the bedroom, adjusting her moist hair. From the bedroom she says, "I just get lonely I suppose."

Ahh. She's insecure. She'll cheat on me. Or, perhaps. She's already done it. Divorce? Perhaps. In retrospect, I know that a woman never asks unless she's cheating or thinking about cheating. I should have known. A snake in the grass. A mole. A dark cloud. I should have seen it. I take a step towards her.

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He walked towards me. "Lonely?" he questioned. And I could feel his mind begin its elaborate process. I say, "Yes. Forget about it." I get up and kiss him. He heads out the door and he goes off.

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Clark goes off. Claire sees him leave the driveway in the BMW. She lights a cigarette, and when it is done she walks to her closet and pulls out a t shirt and sweater, a skirt and hat and sunglasses, she puts them all on and does her make up. She is an elegant woman with little need for frills and embellishments. She orders a car, and then it takes her to a bookstore. She enters the bookstore and says goodbye to the driver, for now, and inside the bookstore she is then greeted by the owner, his name is Gus and he is definitely gay. He's never said as much, however Claire has thusly concluded, anyway. He is a little over six feet. Claire walks by him, into a door behind his desk, and she wonders just how big his genitals are. Probably extremely big, she thinks. The door leads directly down.

It leads to a boiler room of sorts where there is another door. Then continuously downward until there is yet again, another door, very sturdy double doors made of steel, thick, and for this door Claire has a key. She pushes the door open, and is met by a huge elegant lobby, and one final door, heavily fitted with finely crafted ornamentation and affluence. On the other side of the door, which opens when she pushes on it, is a lavish and exaggerated gambling hall. She scans the room, her eyes are searching for the blackjack table. Upon finding it she begins to walk towards it. She finds a seat, sits down, puts two five hundred dollar chips down, black in color, and receives two cards, two nines. One of clubs, and one of diamonds. She asks for another card. She receives an ace and stands. The dealer busts. And the familiar feeling of outsmarting an impossibly, oppressively

intelligent system rushes through her smallish frame. This is the initial reason she fell in love with blackjack.

As stated in one of her favorite movies, *The Color of Money*, "Money won is twice as sweet as money earned," and this rung so golden and true in the bell tower of her heart. A rich, handsome young man walks up behind her and places a hand upon her shoulder and says into her ear, "Honey, I always see you in here, and I never see you anywhere else but this blackjack table," he kicks the table and the dealer leers at him quickly, "why not try that poker table, over there?" She looks over to it and says, "Poker is too complicated. Too much to think about. It lacks the grace of blackjack. Two options, hit or stand. I like that. You're only using deep intuition. It can be learned. You learn it's flow."

"Flow! Honey, that's bullshit."

"Well, what do you like about poker?"

"It's a game so unforgiving, you'd think satan himself invented it sometime in the universe's history."

Claire laughed.

He took a glass of champagne from a tray on the bar, "Bartender, may I have a whiskey with water." The bartender nods. He returns his attention to Claire, "Indeed, blackjack is a game of wits. But when you play poker, you ain't playing the other suckers at the table, you're putting down your cash against beelzebub." He drinks from the glass of champagne. "Call me a devil's advocate." He winks and walks away. Claire turns to the dealer and places two more black chips on the table, and receives two cards.

In a different side of town, Clark is arriving at a gated property. He is let through the gate and drives around to the back where there is

an airplane runway. There are armed guards surveilling the area. There are some cars parked on the runway. There is a large garage at the far end of the property and Clark drives to it. He goes in through an unlocked door. Sitting behind a desk is a decaying old man. He is roughly the size of a gorilla. He is sweating profusely. "Clark!" he screams. Clark points to a white 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO parked in the middle of the garage, "Is this it?"

"What the fuck do you mean? Of course this is fucking it!"

"Sorry, ease up, old man."

Frank sighs resignedly. "Five million," Frank says.

Clark paces around the car, places his hand upon the paint and says to himself, "Five million."

"Look," says Frank, "it's easily worth 30, I could probably sell it for 40. The only reason I got the damned thing was because you saw it in an old movie, and wanted it for yourself."

"How much did you pay for it?"

"What's the difference," Frank says. "A million. A little old lady didn't know what she had. It was her dead husband's. He was a fine old fella, I guess."

"Ok."

Clark hands Frank a check, signed, for five million dollars. Frank says, "Then it's settled."

"Ok."

"My guy Barry'll contact you tomorrow and send over any additional paperwork."

"Ok."

"How's the wife?"

"I dunno."

"Look, I was only asking as a formality, is something going on, is she cheating on you, what's happening, tell old Frank about it."

"I don't know, and that's the thing, I always know, ya know."

"No I don't know, however, you are obviously more enlightened than I," Frank stands up and walks over to the bar, "want me to make you a drink, how about a whiskey?"

"No thanks I gotta go."

"Fine, fine, I'll drink alone, like always."

"Poor, lonely Frank," says Clark.

"Fuck you," says Frank, and he pulls back on his glass of whiskey.

"Go fuck yourself." As Clark is walking out the door, he looks back at Frank. Frank is focused on paperwork, and the sun makes slanting bars across his body as it spills through the blinds. Clark gets into his car. His BMW purrs. He sets it towards the gate, driving passed armed men. The gates open and he makes a left. The trees are burning in the burning air. The sun oppresses all, unconditionally. You could fry an egg on the road.

Elsewhere, inside of his comfortable, air conditioned store, Eugene is working on a suit. He is looking at a notebook with measurements in it. A column of numbers: 32, 30, 31, 35 1/2, 14 1/2, 17, 20, 16 1/2, 8 1/2, 22, 32 1/2, 10, 9, 6 1/2, 25, 45. He is tapping his forehead. He is looking at fabric, intensely. He's taking the fabric then drawing on sheer paper and cutting according to his measurements in his notebook.

Eugene comes out of his work space and says, "Mr. Benedict, your pants are ready and I think you'll find they fit perfectly."

Mr. Benedict is standing in the dressing room in his underwear, and he puts on the pants.

"You've done it again, Eugene," he says. "These fit perfectly."

"The color compliments your eyes," says Eugene.

"Do they?"

"They also make your skin look more vibrant."

"Does it?"

Eugene takes a brown belt from the racks. "You must take this belt."

"Must I?"

Then he gently removes a tie from a rack. "This tie must be yours too, for these pants."

"You've never steered me wrong. Ring me up."

"I've added some suede shoes to your order, I hope you don't mind these are with laces."

"Add them sonny."

Mr. Benedict's bill is for 2,400 dollars.

"Thank you, thank you."

The day is now descending into the illustrious and magnanimous evening. Far away from Eugene's store is a detective's office. It sits atop a pet store. He pays 800 dollars a month for the space, which is a steal. The space is rented out by a young detective, Clint, with dark hair. He is 29, some would say he's a genius. He could have been anything. If he would have been a scientist he could have discovered the cures to diseases. But he has a guilt about him that prevents him from feeling he deserves nice things. So he became a detective. Being a martyr eases his frustrations. He is in amazing shape, despite drinking heavily and smoking since he was 15. His phone rings. He picks it up.

"Yes?"

"Is this Peters, private detective agency?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"I have a case for you."

"What's your name?"

"Clark."

"Name of the subject, please."

"Claire."

"Relationship to subject?"

"She's my wife."

"What would you like me to investigate?"

"Infidelity."

"What makes you think that?"

"Just start following her asap."

"Can you pay my fee, charges begin immediately."

"I can pay."

"Okay, I'll send you my first invoice at the end of the week. How can I contact you."

"I'll visit you sometime this week."

"Excellent. Any information would help. Places she visits, last name, address, etc., etc.."

"She spends a lot of time at home, here's my address."

"Ok thank you, I believe that's all I need to get started."

"Good."

Clark hangs up. Peters hangs up his phone and leans back in the chair and looks out of his window. He finishes up some Chinese noodles, he had in his fridge in the corner of the office, and stands

up. I wonder if that stanley kubrick marathon is still playing at the small cheap theater down by the beach, he wonders, I wonder if I can still call beth, no I know the answer is no, I stood her up and I never called after I called to apologize, women aren't worth it. There are so many in this city. So many women. So many men. All competing for the same position at the top of the totem pole some way or another yet, it's obvious that the position is plastic. Nobody really wants it. So what do they want. He pauses. He looks out of the window. They want to fuck, they want to be comfortable, and they want to sun to keep shining. That's all they want. He reaches for his keys and he heads out of the door.

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I've got to remember to call Rebecca. Maybe pick up some flowers. I think she liked daisies. I wonder how long that burger joint's been there. Since I was a kid. Used to go after school on the way home with mom. Before she went crazy. Used to live down that road. Keep it steady, you prick. Keep your hands on the wheel and your eye on the prize. One more left. Should be here. There it sits, pretty big house. I wonder how many cigarettes I have left. 8. Now, 7. I like how this car parks. A strong break. Let me get a closer look. Remember not to leave my keys in the car. Notebook in back pocket, check.

"Big gate out front. West end, 5 windows. Back door, 4 small windows and 1 large window. East, 8 windows. Front of house, 4 windows."

Let me finish drawing a diagram for each side of the house, in my notebook. Huge place. I place my key back in my ignition and use the cigarette lighter. Wish I had an ashtray. I hate ashing out my open window. Messes with the paint job. It doesn't look like she, or anyone for that matter, is home, should we take a look inside. Nah,

better not risk it. I take too many risks. Take less risks, it matters to Seb. Think of that fat little bundle of -- client is also not home.....

I wonder what he does. Better not. Keep your nose out of it. He pays too well. Stay out of it. Two stories, nice. Nice landscaping too. I see some beef jerky in the back seat. I start eating. I'll stay till 12. Enough cigarettes till then.

It's 12, where's my notebook? Ah. "It's 12, wife never came home, neither does client. Today was a bust. I can't wait to get home and shower and eat."

A week passes by and who comes through my door. Clark. He's wearing a spiffy, clean, pressed purple shirt, dark purple, like wine or Van Gogh's starry evenings, and a straight, slick white suit. Black shoes. Nice. Sunglasses. Nice touch. He's got about ten gold chains and a classy black belt. All in all, put together well. He asks how the investigation goes so far.

"She stays out late."

"How late?"

"All night sometimes. Seems to be twice a week. The rest of the time she's home by midnight."

"What's she doing? Did you follow her?" He's a real nervous type underneath all that nice stitching and the glossy mystique that is bestowed to men too long in the company of money more than the living and the breathing.

"Yes, here's the address to the apartment she's been going to when she stays the night. It belongs to one Eugene Travers. It seems like he owns a suit store, and is a tailor. However there is no evidence of infidelity, thus far."

"How do you know?" The sweat starts slithering down his temple, underneath his sunglasses.

"I bugged the place, they stay up late talking about books." He looks perplexed. "He falls asleep, she stays up longer, I'm still not sure what she's doing but I was going to further surveil the place to see if I can get a visual confirmation of what she does there."

"What will you do?"

"I'm the detective, we have ways."

"What will you do?" he says this time more severe, in a voice that let's me know not to fuck with him, I play along, the poor guy's had enough bullshit for one day even I'd admit as much. I take a deep breath. I light a cigarette.

"There are some buildings across from his with rooftop access. I'm going to climb up with a pair of binoculars."

"And if that doesn't work?" he says.

"If that doesn't work I'll sneak in and set up cameras in his house."

"Isn't that illegal?"

"Only if a judge finds out."

"What if he sees the cameras?"

"Impossible." I open a drawer and then extend a closed fist and open my fist. "This is an HD camera with automatically activating night vision."

"By god."

"I can put these all over the premises."

"It sort of scares me what we can do with technology these days."

"Don't be scared, in this case technology is helping us."

"Very well," he reaches into his back pocket and pulls out of it a small stack of hundred dollar bills and slowly places them on the desk.

"Sir, I need about half of that."

"Don't worry about it, son. Enjoy the excess." It felt like taking cash from a cobra's maw.

"A tip then, very well," I say.

"I'll be back in a week." He sounded grave and ephemeral. Like all his life were suddenly at jeopardy somehow.

"Very well." Clark walks out, slowly and in slow lurching steps. I throw that fat wad of money into a drawer, lock it, put the key in my wallet. I dial up my lawyer, "Bruce? Tell the old battle axe that I have the next three month's child support for her, and apologize to her for taking so long in getting it to her, okay? Thank you." I hang up, he hangs up. I stare at my office wall. There is, upon the wall, a dartboard with darts stuck into it. Something to pass the time. A relic of my youthful need to keep my hands and mind and soul busy on some trivial thing. The sun looks beautiful setting, making my office darker. Now darker.

Now dark. I take a sip of coffee. It is still hot. Last year I got one of these heat retaining mugs. The coffee stays hot all day. There is a

calendar on my wall. I am reminded of my bills and their due dates, by my calendar. I open my locked drawer again, remove the cash, stuff some into my wallet, close the drawer, lock it. I take the rest into the safe. Behind a false wall. Code 7 - 23 - 75. I close it, it makes a dull clanging noise. I've heard the noise elsewhere, my imagination stirring due to the moonlight. When I was put in jail, the doors closed with the same thud. I go home and take a nap. My sleep is restless. I stir, I have heartburn. The sun arises and I sleep. No need to wake up till evening. Everything is fine. I wake up and eat cereal. I go down to the liquor store, forty minutes away, to pick up a bottle of turkey. One zero one. I get ready to go out, get all my gear in place. Fill up the van, head out, park. The side of this building, there is a ladder leading all the way up to the roof. It's some kind of old maintenance building the city hasn't apparently used in a decade. Get to the top. Through my binoculars I can see Eugene. What's he doing? Trying to fuck? Get my notebook: "Not trying to fuck." The money is a cloud hanging over me, my gut tells me it's dirty but I need it. I try to imagine Clark's face, but all I see is a scruffy wolf face with glowing red embers set into eye sockets, horns, paws and claws, the fur all begging to escape his white suit and purple shirt, his monstrous claws through his torn shoes, him smiling, drooling all over his gold chains, black leather belt broken around his waist, but where are his sunglasses? Focus. He put the money down on my desk. He. Focus now. I put down the binoculars, they give me claustrophobia sometimes. The leather pressed against my eyes becomes painful. I take a pill, for anxiety. I raise once again the binoculars to my face and eyes. Thinking about his face startled me so I don't think about it.

* * *

Eugene crosses the floor once again. Peters can see him through binoculars. Peters is watching. Peters is watching him. There is an earbud attached to Peters' ear and the earbud is attached to a small device, a radio of sorts, and he reaches down to the device and

places his finger and thumb on some small rounded, etched knob and turns the knob and it is connected to the hearing devices he has placed in Eugene's apartment. He suddenly hears Claire's voice. He listens in. He listens deeply. He adjusts his knobs, till everything comes in like a bell.

"What's your obsession with Kerouac?" she says.

"You mean the greatest poet of his generation?"

"That's Dylan besides I never understood Mexico City Blues."

"What's not to understand about beauty?"

Peters smiles. He turns his transmitter's volume slightly downward. Slightly down.

He puts down the binoculars and pulls out from his back pocket his notebook. From his shirt pocket he pulls out a small pen. He writes "talking about kerouac today." We can see previous day's entries which read as follows: "talking about hemmingway today." and "talking about faulkner today." in the previous day's entry sequentially. Finally Eugene goes to bed.

Claire stays in living room at a desk near the lamp.

From the desk drawer she unlocks and pulls out a pile of pages he sees through his binoculars. He started using binoculars again when Eugene announced he was going to bed. She organizes the pages on the desk then removes one page from the pile and sets it on the desk apart from the rest and begins writing in it with a nearby pencil. She does this till daybreak. Peters is watching on and off. She steadily writes through the whole night. Excellent penmanship, a true old-school. When Eugene awakens she looks towards his door and hears him yawn and hears him open and close the door to his bathroom,

hears him shit and then flush and then take a shower. He yawns loudly in the shower. She carefully makes her pages into a stack again and then moves them inside the desk carefully slides it shut and carefully locks it. She walks off with the key and returns with her purse organizing her hair and placing the key in her purse. She fixes her lipstick in a small mirror in the living room then looks suspiciously about.

She is washed over with a feeling that she is being watched.

She walks over to the window and shuts it's blinds.

The transmitter catches the door opening and closing. She exits the building and gets into her car and drives off among the morning traffic and commuters. Peters writes in his notepad "Nothing happens."

He has tapes to corroborate this. He climbs down from the rooftop. And he goes down fifteen stories.

Nobody exits their doors.

But he can hear them all getting ready for the day as he passes their doors. He exits the alley and runs to his car and gets in and starts the engine; turns the key, drives to his home to sleep. He arrives at his office the next day after a break. All he has to do is wait for Clark to come and he will be paid. He takes a small amount of money (three-hundred) and goes to a gambling hole. He loses all his money and smokes a cigarette.

He walks around town. He walks with his hands in his pocket. People are complaining. His ears prick up. Future clients perhaps among the chatter of the day.

He continues walking around town.

Clark is at a bar. He is not nearby Peters. "It's unusual for you to be here this early sir, is everything alright?" asks the bartender.

"My wife is cheating on me." Clark is at a private, secret bar.

"I'm sorry, I'm divorced, she didn't cheat but it was bad," drones the bartender. He is boring Clark.

"I love her."

"There there pal." The bartender slides over another whiskey and takes his empty glass. "Just have another on the house. You'll feel better, pal."

"What's the use?"

"Just drink. Trust me. You'll feel better."

Clark leaves the bar and gets into his car. He is blind stinking drunk. The earth is spinning. He's seeing double and triple and quadruple. He is looking into the past and the future simultaneously. Present moment nonexistent. The ephemerality of life is clear. He turns it on and pulls out into the street and hits a Ferrari. The two cars swerve in opposite directions in the street. Clark steps out of the car and walks over stumbling to the sidewalk. "Hey buddy where the fuck do you think you're going oh no you don't," the man says before running over to Clark's Benz and snaps a photo of his license plate, he gets on the cell phone and calls the police.

Peters lights a cigarette. His wife sits opposite him. She counts the large wad of cash.

He puts his cigarette out in the ashtray. "It's all there."

"Yea it looks like it," says his wife.

"I want you to believe me, I want you to give me some leeway, if I don't pay. It's because business is slow, I only gamble for fun, you have to believe me."

"I believe you," says Rebecca.

"I love Seb."

"I know you do."

"I love you."

She looks up at him.

"What?" he asks.

"Don't say that you son of a bitch," she says. "You cheated on me. You were a lousy drunk. You left me alone so many nights to cry! I wondered why I wasn't good enough."

"I'm sorry." He hangs his head. His consciousness droops and shrinks.

"Those words, never again, to me, okay?"

"Okay." He stiffens his back.

"However, I know you love Seb, a mom can tell and in a way I'm glad we're apart, you've cleaned up."

"What can I say?" he lights a cigarette.

She curls her lips and says, "Hmph! I know you're a good man, you're just lazy when it comes to actually helping yourself -- you kill yourself for your clients." She looks over him with a true and a deep concern, as one might look upon their best friend or dog.

"Yea."

"Yea....." she says, pausing, looking. "Well I've got to pick him up from daycare. Wanna come?"

He looks at his safe. "Yes, I would."

She gets into her Honda Accord and him into his car. She observes him in her rear view side mirror and he gives her the thumbs up. She pulls off and he follows her. He muses about vague and manly thoughts. They are not in order, he is still immature however he loves his son.

* * *

The phone could not have rang at a more inopportune time.

"Yes? This is Dapper Tappestry."

"Eugene, do you still have my measurements in your notebook?"

"Mr. Benedict, yes."

"Be nice, and make me a suit, a stunner, and in a flash, would you?"

"Yes." But then I heard him sigh as a man in peril. Next the dam would burst. He was going to reveal to me his innermost soul, and then he would be my client for life. For I would become his brother, deep down.

"My client really fucked up. I need to get downtown within the hour."

"I'll have it ready, sir, Mr. Benedict."

"Please." He paused, then added. "He beat the shit out of some rookie cop who tried to arrest him once he got behind the wheel drunk. This is beyond anything normal for a man like him."

"Can you get him out?"

"Yea, I can do anything, I play golf with the judge, thank god!"

"Good."

"It's his goddamn wife's got his head up his ass."

"I'm sorry!"

"I told him not to marry her, novelists are unpredictable, creative writer types always got desires too big for one man."

"She's a writer?"

"Yea she wrote some hit, The Dark Plague of Henry C.."

All of my senses did a loop. "What!?"

"Yea anyway I'll be by in one hour, one hour, okay, have my suit ready!"

"Okay."

"Thank you, Eugene."

I put the phone on it's receiver.

* * *

Claire's eyes were lachrymose and truthful. She said to Clark, "I'm not cheating on you!"

"That's not what the detective says," says Clark, still drunk.

"He's lying, I'm not lying to you."

"What?" says Clark, with snot on his face running down from his nose and falling down onto his chin, his eyes red with booze but also a powerful, personal despair.

"I go to his house to write, he's a fan." She takes his hand and places it on her cheek.

"A fan?"

"Look I can't explain, it's bizarre but literally all I do at his house is talk and write." She pauses, and adds, "And perhaps have a wine, or two, perhaps."

"Why don't you talk to me?"

"Honey, you're so wasted, go lie down please, who's your detective, I'll get ahold of him and get to the bottom of this."

She calls the detective as he's sleeping like a baby on his bed. He is snoring gently

"Peters detective agency, leave all relevant info and I'll get back to you, *beep*." She hangs up. She looks through Clark's papers, and finds a cell phone for the man at the agency.

She calls the number.

Peters is in his car on the way to pick up his son at daycare, and his phone vibrates, he then looks at phone. He answers the call.

"Yes, Mr. Oldman I'm glad you called I've got some very important news for you -- "

"You son of a bitch, you rotting insidious human hemeroid, you dried up dog turd!"

"What?" He recognized her voice. "Misses Oldman?"

She is shocked and is temporarily put off balance. "How do you know my name?"

"It's a long story." He pulls into the daycare parking lot. "Look, inform your husband that I have very important information for him, it's classified however considering the nature of this situation, it's that you are not cheating on him, tell him to call me."

"You motherless carnie fuck how do you know what I'm doing and what I'm not doing!? Have you been watching me?"

"Just tell him, he owes me one final payment before the case is closed." He gets out of the car.

"Well I'll just tell him myself and I'll tell him to take your payment and shove it in a cow's shitter, how's that, hot shot ?"

"He won't believe you, he'll pay me." He hangs up. Claire is shocked still holding the phone. She defuses and hangs up as well.

"Daddy!" yells Sebastian, he is little.

A week later Clark walks into Peters' agency, with his lawyer, Larry, and Claire present. "The whole gang's here!"

"My wife insisted Larry here be present for this, he is my lawyer. She says this way we won't have to pay him twice, as he would call you to confirm whatever information you tell us now."

"Well this is uncomfortable."

"Be a professional."

"Don't tell me what to do." The room becomes tense. Clark tightens his fists. Larry breaks a sweat.

"Listen, fellas," says Peters and walks over to his safe, not the one he used before, a different safe, a less strong looking one upon his bookshelf. He opens it, "We're all friends here!" He reaches in and pulls out a file. He places the file upon his desk. Larry flips through it's pages. There within the pages lie various tapes. "You're wife never cheated on you. I can tell you right now. I've recorded all conversations between 5-5 and 5-15. I've provided a summary and a full transcript of all the tapes. You can listen if you don't want to take my word for it however I recommend you do, for comfort's sake."

"We are similar Peters, I also don't like being told what to do by the likes of you, so, with all due respect, don't tell me what the fuck to do."

"Fair enough the file is your to do whatever you please."

"You're fucking scum, you pathetic coward," yells Claire. Clark reaches into his pocket to hand him a giant wad of cash, Larry picks up the file and places it into his briefcase.

"If my lawyer finds any inconsistency in that file I'll expect a refund and more."

Peters searches his pockets, "He won't," he puts a cigarette in his mouth and lights it and he tosses the wad of cash into his desk drawer and locks it.

"Get bent you fucking shit kicking prick," says Claire. Peters winks at her.

"Let's get the fuck out of here," says Larry.

"Peters, I hope you get all that's coming to you."

"So do I, Clark. Have a nice life kids, tell your friends about me." He throws a business card at them, Larry catches it and hands it to Clark. Clark places it in his pocket and smiles at Peters and Peters smiles back at him. They are like two jackals.

The Oldman party walks out.

Eugene Travers never sees Claire again.

One year later, after a year of considerable loneliness, for he loved his friend and he loved her company and she only accentuated his loneliness to an extreme degree by leaving him -- he had always been a lone wolf, however having a friend and losing her made the pain unbearable for him, and this whole time he had been going about his routine and falling deeper and deeper into despair and eventually he did not sleep without first crying profusely, and the pain also worsened and highlighted all his other sadnesses, and some nights before sleeping he'd say in a low volume goodnight Claire, and certain nights he heard -- though he was aware of it's concrete impossibility -- her voice respond goodnight Eugene and

he'd shoot out of his bed and run to turn on the lights and flip on the switch and look into his living room then look into his kitchen then look out of the window, hoping her car would be parked at the curb, but it wasn't and it never was afterwards and it never would be ever again and so Eugene simply became a ghost because of all of this and he felt cold and echoey on the inside. And one particularly empty feeling dreary cold evening he passed a bookstore upon who's window was displayed an attractive and extravagant array of new books, who's author was none other than Henrietta DuBois, the title of which book was called "I Love Trevor: Sincerely". He entered the store and bought 3 copies. He took the books home and placed one on his bookshelf, one on his desk, and one in cellophane. The inscription read, to Eugene without who's hospitality I would be surely lost. He read the entire thing in one night. It was a psychedelic book about a detective who was investigating a murder, eventually he discovers that his client is god and the victim is jesus christ -- as an artist changes religious lore, it was not god who ordained the death of his son -- that was the work of another god, a bitter god of a different realm it turns out, however satan impedes every step of the detective's path, and he dies at the end however ends up in heaven. Which is more or less the next life, not the last life, leaving it open to a sequel or perhaps even a trilogy, however there is a crucial plot point from which the book derives it's title, there is an ancient bookkeeper deep in some other dimension's catacombs he reached through a london sewer, his name is Trevor and is a pivotal character for most of the book, he is a ghoulish clerk of sorts who only wishes for his deceased wife's remaining items, a pencil and manuscript paper, a brioche pin, a half empty bottle of perfume and a small mirror, and upon the retrieval of each item he gives him an additional hint which he needs to proceed upon arriving at each new horizon, his deceased wife is named Claire. Upon receiving all her items he leaves the otherworldly den to travel. He tells the protagonist he'd like to learn to fashion clothes.

Eugene closes the book, and goes to sleep. In the morning, he pours himself coffee, it is his off day, and he turns on the television and Claire is on morning news as a guest who is being interviewed. "So tell us about this book," the beautiful, porcelain interviewer says on the television.

"Well I can say it's very dear to my heart," says Claire, looking to the camera periodically, awkwardly.

"What took you so long to write it, you kept us waiting for so long, what gives?"

"Well the inspiration had to come, and it did."

