

DIGGER SPAETH, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR
by Dave Biscella

There was a knock on the door.

He tried to ignore it as he laid there sleeping on the couch in his office, the effects of last night pounding hard against his head still. At least, he assumed it was last night's alcohol causing the pain, although he accepted that it could be the result of something else that could have happened after he blacked out. His decision making skills always seemed to get worse once the memory gave out.

The knocking continued. Consistently knocking slightly off to the left of the center of the door, about three fourths of the way up, each knock hitting directly next to the lettering on the door that said "Digger Spaeth, Private Investigator".

Based on the placement of the knock, and the gentle power behind it, he assumed that it was coming from a female, probably around 5 foot 1 inches tall. With that assumption, the next logical conclusion was that this is another jaded housewife that believes her spouse is cheating and needs proof. These cases were a dime a dozen. Sure, they were easy money, but they were a slap in the face to a former police detective that had built an impressive resume while doing actual detective work. His head was pounding and he needed a drink. He could ignore the knocking for now. More work will come along at some point.

The knocking not only continued, it got louder and more intense. "I know you're in there, I can hear you moving around," a small but serious voice said from the other side of the door.

"You're lying," he screamed from the couch without thinking. "I haven't moved since you started knocking." Dammit. He instantly realized that he had given himself up. His head was

pounding so violently that the lazy part of his brain wasn't able to relay the message to the rest of the brain that they were ignoring the knocks. This happened far too often.

"Then let me in!" the voice said more loudly with even more annoyance.

He finally stood up from the couch and immediately regretted that decision. The room was spinning, as was his head, but in the opposite direction. Somehow, he managed to make it to the door, opening it up while his eyes were still most of the way shut. "Happy?" he said, the smell of alcohol escaping his mouth with each movement of the lips.

"Are you Digger Spaeth, the private investigator?" the voice asked, now attached to a pretty blonde woman standing 5 foot 1 inches, probably weighing around 110 pounds if he had to guess.

"Probably," he answered, finally able to open his eyes all the way. "I mean, yeah, that's me."

"Great," she said, that tone of annoyance still present. "So you're just another cliché private investigator that drinks themselves to sleep each night, never leaves the office unless they're getting paid, but are too much of a mess to actually find steady work due to completely giving up on life?"

"That sounds about right," he answered, moving aside and motioning for her to enter his office, closing the door behind them. "But, the thing about clichés is that they're consistent, and consistency makes money."

She looked around the office, mostly disgusted, but still highly determined. She knew it was a bad idea to be here, and thus far, nothing had changed her mind. She watched him stumble through his office like a blind man walking into a room for the first time. He eventually made his way behind a desk and motioned for her to take a seat across from him.

“Alright,” he said grabbing an envelope from a pile of mail and a pen. “What’s his name, and where are some of the places he goes?”

“I’m sorry, what?” she asked, confused.

“I assume you’re here because you believe your husband is cheating on you, which, it’s safe to say, he is, or else you wouldn’t be here. Yes or no isn’t the fun part of my job, because I’ll be honest, it’s always yes. The fun part is whether it’s with a man, or your sister, or that he’s into some really weird stuff, or if maybe animals are involved. In that case, I guess that could also be classified as really weird stuff, but whatever, I don’t judge.”

“Are you done?” she asked annoyed while watching him talk for what seemed to be the sole purpose of entertaining himself.

“Just getting started,” he said with a smug smile. “Let me take a stab at this. You have a friend that went through this same thing a while back, and she referred you to me because I was able to provide her with the proof she needed to take him for as much as possible in the divorce for a reasonable price. And, since I’m not the kind of hero you need or deserve, but rather the one that you can afford, you come knocking at my door needing me to do the same for you.”

“Does it even matter if I’m here or not? Do you deliver this monologue to yourself in the mirror every morning in an effort to obtain the world record for saddest affirmation?”

He chuckled. “I like you, you have spirit. And since I like you, I’ll be completely honest with you. Here’s how this will play out. You’ll pay me to do the job you want. I’ll then proceed to do said job and obtain the proof you’re asking for, and hopefully along the way witness some really weird stuff. But, instead of coming to you with that proof, I’ll present him with the proof, which will lead to him paying me even more money than you are. He’ll be so freaked out and scared due to almost getting caught that he’ll stop cheating, I’ll then come back to you and say that I wasn’t able to find anything, you then get a non-cheating husband and peace of mind and

I get paid twice, so everybody gets a cliched happy ending. Or, should I say, a consistent happy ending with a nice payday?”

She looked on in disbelief, staring at him in silence for a few moments. “Oh, I’m sorry, I just assumed there was more, since every time you open your mouth it doesn’t seem like it’s going to stop. It’s no wonder you’ve given up on life at this point. I’m exhausted after just a few minutes with you, I’m ready to jump off a damn bridge. As annoyed as I am by you, I’m even more impressed somehow and consider you a survivalist. I really have no idea how you do it.”

He broke out into a mocking laughter from the other side of the desk. “You really need to stop flirting with me if you expect us to get anything accomplished.” He was trying to hide his disbelief with fake arrogance. Any other client would have been out the door already. He’s pulled this schtick before, and it’s worked every time. They come in, turn on the arrogant asshole switch, they leave angry, and you’re back on the couch in no time. Sure, it was a lost payday, but the pounding going on in his head needed that couch.

Her patience was wearing very thin at this point. Every ounce of her wanted to turn around and walk out that door, but she knew that’s all he wanted and she’d be damned if she gave him that satisfaction. It took her weeks to gain the courage to finally come here, and here she was, despite knowing that it wasn’t the best idea she’d ever had. She knew she had come too far to not get what she came for. “Can we stop playing now and talk about what I came here for? My name is Vanessa Ravenclaw...”

“As in Bradford Ravenclaw, the billionaire?” he interrupted with a genuine interest.

“Yes,” she answered, feeling that progress was finally being made. “He’s my brother in law. I’m married to his brother Stan, who is not cheating on me, thank you very much. He’s a wonderful man, but I think he’s become involved in something he shouldn’t be due to his loyalty to his brother.”

He was intrigued by this. Why was she coming to him with it? “Bradford Ravenclaw is the most respected man in this town. He has no history of any wrongdoing, and has never even been accused of anything. To accuse him of anything would be laughed at unless you have undisputable proof to back it up.”

“I know,” she answered seriously. “It’s almost like I’d need to hire somebody to investigate it and gather proof so that something could be done about it and keep my husband’s name clean. Somebody who could investigate it, privately. Do people like that exist?”

“What is it you think is going on?”

“I believe he is involved in some type of human trafficking and is using my husband’s boats without his knowledge,” she began to explain. “I think Stan is suspicious that there’s something not right going on, but he’s afraid to say anything because he doesn’t want to believe it, and he’s scared to tell his brother he can’t use his boats. I’m scared that he’s using the boats and doing everything in my husband’s name so that he can pin it all on him if it ever comes crashing down. I need you to dig deeper into what I have so far and confirm that it’s all being ran by Bradford and that Stan has no knowledge of exactly what’s going on.”

He sat back and let it all sink in. Human trafficking was quite a big accusation. Bradford Ravenclaw was a respected, fairly powerful, extremely smart man. If all this is true, it’d take some digging. Bradford Ravenclaw has a squeaky clean image, so he knows how to keep things hidden. This would require a lot of work, actual detective work. The type of actual detective work he’d done for nearly two decades before being ran out of the police force seven years ago. The type of detective work he loved, the type he took pride in. This was the type of detective work that made him feel that life was worth living. “Why me?” He had to ask.

“My maiden name is Bedford, Vanessa Bedford,” she answered, knowing that name would ring a bell, no matter how bad of a hangover he was dealing with. “My father was Jonathan Bedford.”

Jonathan Bedford definitely rang a bell. Digger Spaeth was still a uniformed beat cop when he was called to the scene of a murdered man found by his young daughter. It was seventeen years ago, but he remembered it like it was yesterday. He remembered the nine year old blonde girl running up and hugging him the second he showed up on the scene. Scared and in need of a hero, she held him tight. He remembered the smell, the sights, as terrible as they were. He remembered the lazy detectives assigned to the case, Jones and Hawkins, and how they jumped on the first lead they had, even though it was wrong. He remembered making his mark and establishing himself by investigating it independently and providing his captain with the evidence he'd find, which ended up putting the right man behind bars for it and got him on the fast track towards that promotion to detective he wanted so badly.

“That was so long ago, Vanessa,” he answered, feeling awake for the the first time in years. “I’m not that detective anymore. I’m not sure I’m the right guy for this.”

“I disagree,” she said confidently, feeling like she was finally seeing the detective she tried for weeks to convince herself to come see. “You came through me then, and like you said yourself, you’re consistent.”

He smiled, genuinely. It was the first smile that felt real for a very long time. He pushed aside the envelope he hastily put in front of him earlier and grabbed a notepad. “Alright, let me know what all you have so far and we’ll go from there.”

For the first time in years, Digger Spaeth, Private Investigator was on the case.