

# Private

By Ed Park

Over here. In the back. Watch your step. Let me get the lights.

Move that thing. Careful. The room should be empty. Don't trip on the cord. Don't lean on the cabinet. The panel will fall off.

There used to be a window.

Getting closer. Just a second. Hang a left. Watch your head.

Through the door. The lighting? The lighting is what it is. You'll adjust.

Not many folks have been this far back.

Here we are. Slide it open.

This is not the art. This is part of the art, but not the art itself. It can be hard to tell the difference, believe me.

You need all this in order to have the art. The paper in folders, the folders in cabinets, the cabinets in rooms like this. Sketches and specs. Insurance forms, receipts, a hundred business cards.

Transaction city, he called it. The annals of desire, in quarterly statements, he used to say.

Who do you think? Our founder himself. Long gone. I met him once, before I worked here. A legend. He had that terrible mustache and that insipid magnanimous grin. People took him for an easy mark but little did they know. Some say he came from nothing, a self-starter, and others claim the opposite. He liked it both ways.

Let me show you something. Go ahead. To the left. Wait for me.

Open the door. The smell will fade. No one comes here. Just need to air it out.

That's an 18th-century chessboard, pearl inlay. He wasn't good at chess, but in real life, he thought three moves ahead. Behind that famous facial hair was a steel-trap mind. He left his rivals in the dust. Kept careful records, did the math.

One more room to go. Watch your head. The lights don't work. You go ahead. Up the stairs. Let me catch my breath. Okay. All good. Turn that handle.

Cursed? This room isn't cursed. The opposite. This is where the real energy lies. No, this wasn't where his body was found. What kind of a question is that? Never mind what you heard. A tall tale planted by his enemies.

We had some mildew issues, but now it's fine.

Another rumor is that his body was never found. Lies, lies. People got jealous. Human nature. Say what you want about his mustache, but he had taste. He knew what he liked and would do anything for his artists. Rather, he would do anything for their *art*. Sure, there's a difference.

It's true that some complained when he destroyed their inferior work. He didn't think twice about taking a match to a painting months in the making. Even things he knew he could sell—*especially* things he knew would sell. This drove collectors mad, too, but that's just how he was wired.

He could only sell the things he was convinced would *not* sell. That might have been the whole point for him. I can't say. Don't quote me. Like I said, I only ever met him that one time.

The story is he would come up to this very room first thing every morning. Lock the door behind him. A desk, a chair. No one knew what he did. He kept no papers here. As you can see, the window looks out on a wall, but in those days, it had a clear view to the east.

Let me sit a second.

After a few hours, he would come downstairs. He swept the sidewalk in front of the entrance, making small talk with the neighbors. I bet half of them didn't know who he really was.

Other times, he wouldn't emerge till after closing. He might even have lived here for a year or two. Like I said, I only saw him once. It was before my time.

Speaking of time, it's getting late. We should leave. Hit that light for me.

My favorite story is that the man who spent so much time up here wasn't the founder at all, just a guy with a bad mustache. People will believe anything.

Watch your step. Go ahead, I'm right behind.