

The First Graft  
by Chris Zell

A guy comes to see me and we're talking price for my services. Now, as far as my services have gone recently, it hasn't been a bad week. I've sold ten greeting cards (short money but it was crap that had been sitting there for awhile. No new writing! All new money! I kinda like that) and had an offer to write fluff pieces about movies and movie type people that will probably ruin the reputation and livelihood of one damn fine human being.

'So, that's the price?' He asks. I nod and mumble yes. 'Your very best price?' I nod and snarl yes. 'You could drop the price. I know you can do better.' I remain silent and massage the inside of my skull with my occipital lobe. You all know how much I love negotiating my worth.

Now the guy looks up at me and explains that my service is, in reality, not for him but the newly minted mayor of a neighboring city (a city, by the way, I do not live in). So, if I were to, how do you say?, bring my price down to that of a third world Nike worker, it may be worth my while, '...down the road.'

I look at the guy with 'that look of mine'<sup>TM</sup>. You know, it's the one that says, 'Why are you in my face, you phlegm of a rabid rodent?'

But I guess he took this as a need for further clarification. Or that I knew the score and was playing hard to get until he got to my sell point. 'You know, for future, you know, possible considerations.'

He continued to, so obliquely, try to tempt me with riches beyond my wildest dreams. Treasures that only a megalopolis of this city's stature and culture could truly offer (all the pizza, chest hair and Aquanet I could ever dream of is just within my reach). I fade off and think the thoughts of the amused, the bored, the guy who has absolutely no need for Aquanet.

So, I think while he prattles on about how it would behoove me to '...get on board with the new administration. . .', on a lovely fall Wednesday morning the denizens of this city awoke to a new mayor. A new future. A new bunch of patronage jobs.

Remember, he hasn't taken office yet. He's the mayor-elect. But, if by my negotiation with this guy is any indication, it took only five days for this administration to get right up to speed. I especially loved his world class 'this nods means nothing. Wink, wink.' nod. Truly stunning.

After a few more rounds of 'Wheel Of Trans Am Parked In Two Spaces At The Mall During Christmas Shopping Season', where he continually ups the ante (my own personal faux gold bubbling oil fountain!), I weaken at times (mmmmmmmm, three cheese lasagna) but maintain my composure during this deluge. I am steadfast. I am resolved. I am wishing I had narcolepsy instead of sleep apnea.

He gives me one last forlorn look with a sad head nod and quick cluck of the tongue when he realizes that I cannot be tempted by the riches of this foreign land. It's the kind of look you give a

person who just doesn't understand the power of cheese. Then, as quickly as he arrived, he vanishes in a puff of Brut and a cloud of canoli.

But he also left with my proposal.

I may not get this job but I hope this new administration learned that not everyone can be bought for a mere pittance. That not everyone can be tempted by the glitter of future riches. That not everyone considers a bathtub Jesus the height of yard decor.