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**Chuck Wright: Male, Republican**  
**by Ray Weyandt**

Everyday, before sunset, I slide five once-folded one dollar bills into my coat pocket. I walk alone to the station on the corner and trade three bills for one pack of cigarettes. I light one cigarette and cross the street toward the coffee house. I trade one bill for one cup of coffee and one bill for promptness. I sit outside at one table with two chairs, light another cigarette, and read politically misguided literature, every day, as the sun sets.

Today, Chuck Wright, one of Dallas' infamous commercial real estate moguls and owner of the city's most profitable firm, poured his ass into my foot's chair and chuckled the wittiest greeting he could whip up: "How are you, my politically misguided young friend?" He beamed and rewarded himself with a long sip of coffee.

Chuck is nearing fifty, and his doctors have begun altering his latte preferences to ensure he avoids suffering for a few more years. His shirt is always white and a different tie is always pinned with the same black tiepin. There's always too much pomade in his hair, and he's always freshly shaven. And for a reason unknown to me, every time our paths cross, Chuck gravitates to this sloppy, unshaven, beady-eyed booknerd who slouches and smokes beside the corner table. He understood, long before we were formally introduced, that we would rarely agree when assessing the performance of our country's leaders, and yet he insists on baiting his weekly hellos with overcooked Republican ribmeat.

I prevented myself from frowning at his arrival by smiling at my chosen rebuttal, "Politically misguided?" I gasped. "Certainly not!"

"You know Ray, I like this look," he said, drawing attention to my appearance by pointing with an open, upturned hand, as an attorney does to evidence. "I really think they'd like you in Europe, you know? They really-- embrace your people there. Have you thought about Europe?" Chuck was always asking if you knew at the end of

sentences, and anything that was ever happening was really happening. "This is the time in your life when you should really think about things and maybe move to Europe soon, you know?" Of course his diplomatic call for my immediate deportation was nothing more than a bad joke, but it was something to go on, a reason to send out the first pawn.

I pulled another half-inch of a miniature American flag out of my breast pocket and into view, retained it for a moment between my thumb and forefinger, studied it silently, and then rolled my eyes slowly in Chuck's direction, formally drawing his attention. "The less Europeans..." I paused, pretended to search for the predicate, and started again, slower this time. "The less Europeans... the better... you know?" I beamed and rewarded myself with a fresh cigarette.

These little meetings were obligatory; I saw them as payments on a debt of gratitude. A few months earlier, when my wallet had thinned out, Chuck made a noble effort to find some work for me. A client of his had come across some big money customers, doubled the size of his office, and needed people to answer phones in the records department. I faxed a resume, but nothing ever became of it. Turns out the company had been contracted by a few government agencies to compile extensive personal data on different groups of people, on account of the war, you know?

Honestly, if I had tapped every resource I have developed in this part of town, every Republican male to whom I've served coffee in the last three years, I could be running mail at the Pentagon or handing out fresh towels in an executive bathroom somewhere. We could have had somebody on the inside two years ago, and I entertain conspiratorial thoughts every time Chuck brings up my unemployment.

His smile rested and he made like a mentor. "So, who have you been working for?" He filled every question with statements of his expectations, a successful business strategy that he had mindlessly applied to reality. Instead of asking if I had been working, he would assume I was employed and request the employer's name. I suppose

it was also a high society quirk, because in high society, everybody is employed at all times, and the icebreakers are modified accordingly.

"You're a smart guy, Ray. You're smart enough to really do something with your life." Each sentence, each move, was always more predictable than the last, but I always feigned interest and played along.

"You've convinced me Chuck!" Truth is, I had been convincing him the whole time.

"You think different. I've seen you do it. You talk like a crazy person sometimes, but you're not crazy, and if you could just get someone to show you how to arrange all those creative, investigative thoughts into a plan, into some kind of action plan."

"You're right Chuck, and as soon as I—" He had stopped listening; he was suddenly on the world's sales floor.

"Ray, I own a business. I know who knows how to own a business, and you could own your own business." He spoke with the whiny vigor of an Evangelical camp counselor. "You really could. You've got that mind, you know?"

"I don't know what I would do with a busine---" Chuck's phone bellowed a synthetic hallelujah chorus, interrupting me to announce that there was trouble at the office. Chuck's new assistant was having trouble with the copier, something about the machine demanding that the poor girl decide between standard and legal sized paper, and how was she supposed to know that paper came in two sizes?

Chuck had always been the hiring manager at his firm, and as an employer, he had never asked much of his assistants. Breasts, diploma: welcome aboard! I had realized early in this era of unemployment that Chuck's seminal need for a submissive assistant was one that I could not meet due to an unfortunate surplus of credentials and an even more unfortunate lack of breasts. Chuck would not hire me, but it hardly seemed to matter. It made more

sense to foster the relationship as it was. Most Republicans are terrible lunch-dates, and Chuck was most Republicans, but his mind was filthy enough for me to yield a half hour here and there. I could tell that he used to think different, when he was twenty-two; I guess that explains, at least partially, why he engages me so often, and it also explains why I listen, at least partially, to every word he says. We are a pair of limping lions, weathered representatives of warring factions, circling and slobbering, and keeping an eye out for the sore spots, the sloppiest translation of the timeless, archetypal conflict betwe--

Chuck was away from the table, goose-stepping to the aid of his damsel in distress. My inane inner monologue had robbed reality of my attention; I convinced myself to apologize, sat up, and made a promise. "I will start a business, Chuck!" He slowed and half-turned in my direction, his eyebrows raised, inviting my brainstorm. Perched forward in my chair and fully unaware of the easy-believers around me, I tabled the proposition. "I will buy Medicaid! I will make your dream of privatizing social welfare a reality!" I dropped back into the chair, grinned, and finished confidently. "We will buy shares of our poorest fellow citizens' needs and feast on the dividends. We'll be fat sons-of-bitches, Chuck."

He held his phone near his belt, his secretary forgotten, his arms defeated, his mind engaged, the corners of his lips and eyelids bending slowly upward.

I made a final vow. "And I promise, for the rest of my days, to purchase all of my office space... from Chuck Wright... male, Republican."

The sun was dropping. Chuck poured himself into his Mercedes. I lit a cigarette and thumbed through the editorials.

### **About The Author**

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