

LEGACY

AN OFF-COLOR NOVELLA FOR YOU TO COLOR



CHUCK PALAHNIUK





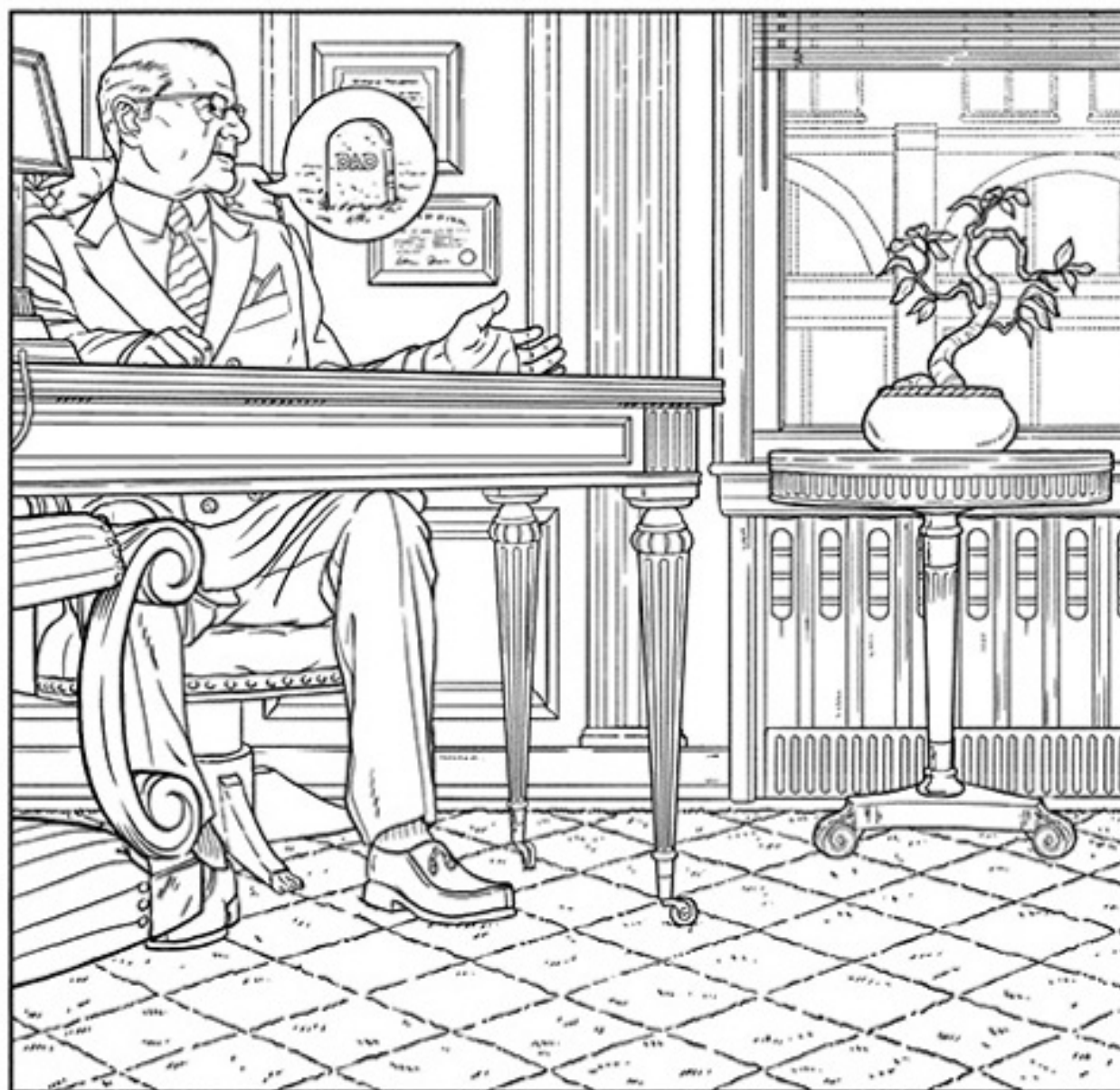
ne day everything changed for Vincent. A lawyer called and asked, “Am I speaking with Vincent Gregory Nelson?”

Over the phone, the lawyer asked, “Are you the only child of a Miss Alice Taylor Nelson?”

He asked, “Are you employed as a junior bond trader for the firm of Dunham, Wilson & Simms?”

Only after Vincent answered yes to all of his questions did the lawyer explain: He was an estate attorney, trying to locate an heir. He was handling a will in probate, and there was the matter of a bequest to settle. He asked if Vincent could stop by his office some time in the coming week. In passing, the lawyer mentioned the words “a parcel of prime real estate.” Vincent sprinted the city blocks and arrived there drenched in sweat, gasping, just a couple strides short of heat stroke.

The lawyer it turned out had a sense of humor.



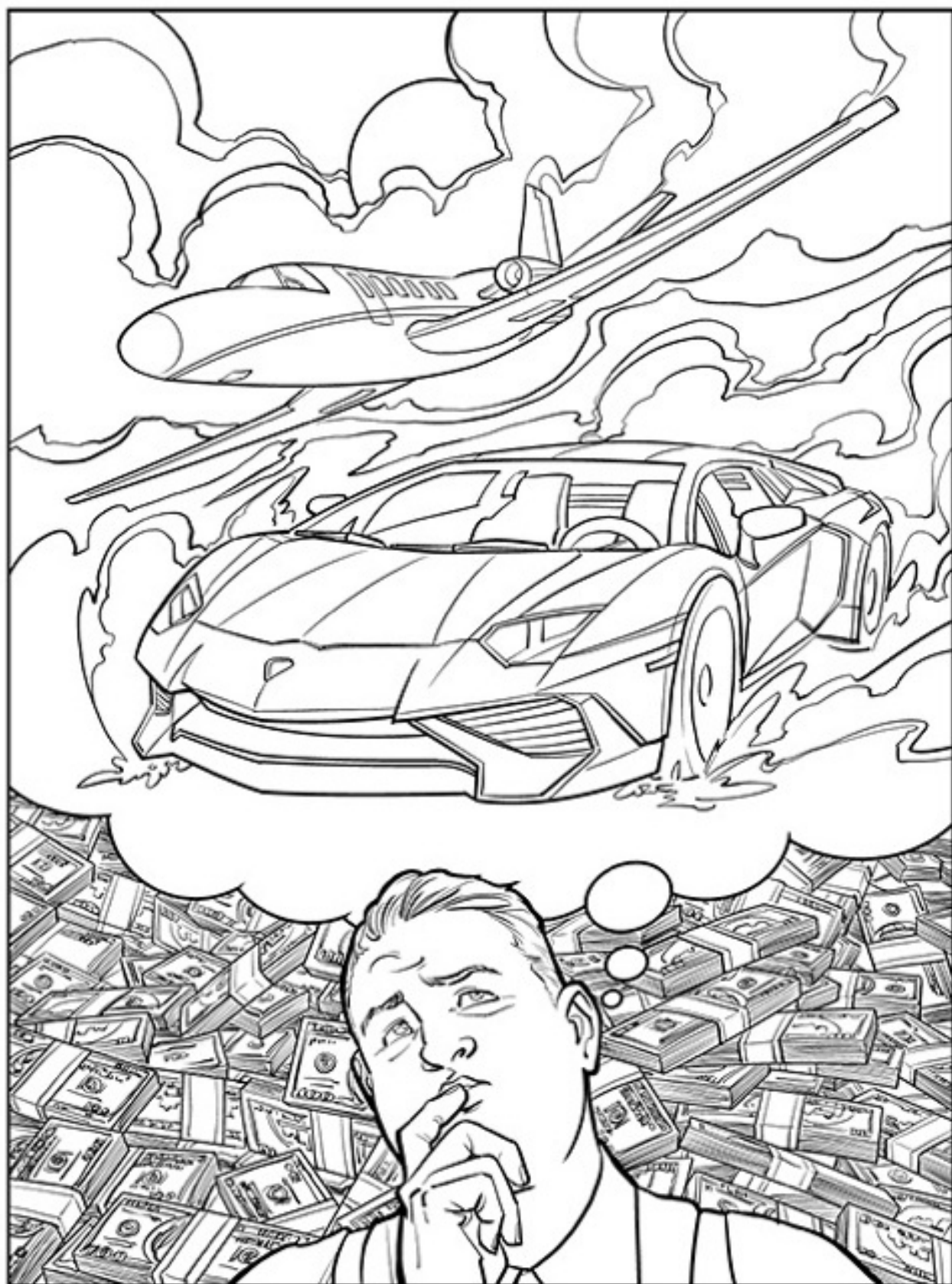
The real estate in question consisted of a dwarf tree growing in a low, round pot, planted in the center of a miniature landscape of green moss. A single fist-sized rock suggested a windswept crag. A bonsai. The whole thing was balanced on a small polished-mahogany table beside a window in the lawyer's office. Vincent

didn't laugh, he was too out-of-breath from running. His nose dripped sweat, and he wondered if a joke like that was actionable.

He shouldn't have said anything, but Vincent had already bragged to some of the douche bags where he worked. Junior douche baguettes. He'd told the farm team douche baggery about inheriting valuable real property and becoming a bonafide land baron. All the bond traders his age were douches. Punks and douche baggots with their dipshit douche buggery, they all just wanted to keep their numbers up until they sold out. Vincent was going to get crucified.

He looked at the stupid tree. Even the stupid pot the tree grew in, it was just a regular clay pot. The lawyer explained that it was from his father. Vincent's father had died.

"You're free to decline the bequest," the lawyer prompted. "But I'm legally obligated to inform you that, for the purpose of establishing taxable value, we had it appraised. It seems the item in question has a market value of approximately \$400,000. At auction it might bring a bid as high as \$700,000." The probate



attorney looked at the tree, dubiously. "Provided, of course . . .," his voice trailed off.

Vincent's head did the math. The tree equaled one-fifth the price of an eight-year-old Cessna Citation CJ3 525. It amounted to almost a year-old Lamborghini Aventador SV with four thousand miles on the odometer.

Vincent waited for the caveat. "Provided *what?*"

"Provided it doesn't die," the lawyer said.

As a tree it wasn't impressive, just a twisted stalk of bark sprouting a few leaves at the top. The little pot was smaller than a dinner plate in diameter. The whole thing wasn't taller than a fifth of Seagram's, but it was worth as much as a house on the water in Sagaponack. Well, near the water. Walking distance. It didn't weigh so much as a dumb bell, but it might as well be a whole ranch in Montana. A person could kill it with a sneeze.

The lawyer produced a letter written in gibberish on thick greasy paper. It came with the tree, to establish its provenance. While the lawyer explained that a bequest valued at under a million dollars wasn't



subject to federal inheritance taxes, Vincent lifted the pot carefully and carried it cradled in his arms. On the street, he flagged a cab and gave the driver an address in Midtown.

His father. Vincent hadn't known his father was alive, and now he was dead. A Schrödinger's cat thing. This thing, this tree was his legacy.

The cabbie eyed Vincent in the rearview mirror. "What is that, a cat box?" he asked. "You got a box full of dirt with a stick stuck in it?"

Despite Vincent explaining that it was a priceless family heirloom, the cabbie refused to ride him uptown. It took three more cabs before Vincent thought to wrap the front of his trench coat around the little branches. He looked knocked-up, but he flagged a gypsy cab. When he was finally headed somewhere, he phoned his mother.

Her law clerk said she was hearing a case, but they were about to request a recess. A minute later he heard the call transferred, and he asked, "Alice?" She preferred that to "mom." Years ago he'd asked what most people called her. She'd meant to say "your honor" but told the truth by accident; she'd said, "your owner."

On the phone she said, "What's wrong this time?"

"Answer me something," Vincent said, in the cab, the tree covered up on his lap. "Who was my father?" he asked.

"You don't have a father," his mother said. "It's like I always told you. You were artificially inseminated."

Vincent pressed his point. "Was his name Lloyd?"

The telephone stayed silent the whole way between