

FALL CLEARANCE EVENT

By Jeremy Henderson

Sid entered Mike's office in The Tower. The Sales Manager looked up over his bifocals and gave Sid a signal to wait one moment and returned to his paperwork.

It wasn't really like a traditional tower at all. It was just a raised platform in the center of the Glen Haven Ford sales floor with four steps leading up to the desk where Mike sat. It allowed the new and used Sales Managers to look over everyone on the floor and gave an unobstructed view of the lot. In this way the Sales Managers could keep tabs on both the customers would and salesmen on the lot.

"How long have you been a salesman here," Mike asked as he looked up from the paperwork. He removed the bifocals and set them upside down on the paperwork he had just been reading.

"Almost 20 years. You know that, Mike," Sid replied.

"So I don't need to blow smoke up your ass about why you're here."

"It's because I haven't sold a car in ten days."

“Actually its been thirteen days, but just as bad. Mike, we rip people a new one after three days typically. With you I gave you break and waited a week. Now here it is another week later and you still haven’t sold anything.”

“Mike, it’s slow out there.”

“Don’t give me that crap! It’s nearing the end of the model year!” Mike stopped his attack sat back in his seat taking in a deep breath. “Look, we’ve been friends for awhile, so I’m gonna give it to you straight. The GM wants you to either sell a car and soon, or he wants you blown off.”

“You can’t fire me! I’ve brought in countless sales over the years!”

“I don’t want to have to fire you, so I’m going to give you a chance.”

“What do you mean?”

Mike stood up and scanned the lot full of new cars until he found what he was looking for. He pointed and let Sid follow his gaze. “Sid, do you see Vince out there on point?”

“The green pea?” Sid looked out the window

“Yeah the rookie. Been here three days and hasn’t made a sale yet, he keeps trying though.”

“What are you trying to tell me, Mike?”

“Look, Sid. I know you helped me out of a tight spot with my wife a few years ago, but I can’t cover for you anymore.”

“But, Mike--” Mike raised his hand and cut him off.

“I don’t know what is going on with you right now, and frankly I don’t care. All I want is you sellin’ again and then we can talk about your problems over a

beer. So here's the deal. If you don't sell a car before the green pea, Vince, you're outta here."

"What! Mike, you can't do that to me!"

"Yes, I can! And I will! Now get the Hell out of The Tower!"

Sid made his way down from the Tower. He tried not to meet the gaze of anybody as he walked out onto the lot.

He walked out into the cloudy, late morning air and was greeted by a surprise. Vince was no longer standing at point, but was greeting a customer by a red Ford Fusion.

Great, thought Sid. They pull me off point to read me the riot act and I miss a potential sale.

He retrieved his mug of coffee from a bush near the point spot and sipped it thoughtfully, eyeing up the competition.

Two hours later Vince and Sid were sitting at their desks on the sales floor with the rest of the salesmen. Vince's Up, his customer looking at the Fusion, turned out to have bad credit. That killed the negotiations by the time the test drive was over.

It had started to rain shortly after the green pea's deal busted and everyone came in to try and get some appointments set up from people that had left their number. Sid was running out of options. He had already called all of the other contacts he had, and was close to calling people he had sold to in the past to see if they were interested in trading in their current car for the latest model.

“Hey, Vince.” Sid stopped midway through dialing his next call at the sound of Mike’s voice and instinctively looked over at where Vince’s desk was. There was a potted plant partially blocking the view, but Sid saw Mike walk up and lean on the rookie’s desk.

“Hey, Boss,” Vince greeted him while hanging up his phone. “What can I do for you?”

“I just wanted to tell you to keep your chin up. I know how hard it is to get your first commission. So I wanted to give you a little motivation. If you can sell a car in the next day, I’ll give you a \$200 spiff right then and there.”

“What! Why would you give me that much out of your own pocket?” Sid nearly dropped his phone, but caught it before it hit his desk.

“I liked how you handled that roach that came in here before. Yeah it was a bust, but you’re technique is good. I think you’ve got the talent, but need a little extra kick to get that first sale.” Sid could almost see the grin on Mike’s face.

“T-Thanks, Boss! I’ll do my best!”

“That’s the spirit! Now get back to those phones.” Sid caught a glimpse of Mike as he headed back to the tower.

That son of a bitch is smirking at me, thought Sid. So much for being a friend! That green pea is going to be tripping all over himself to get a sale now! He hung up the phone and opened his desk drawer. From it he took out a folder containing the list of people he had previously sold to.

The next day was Friday and came with clear skies and a cold wind that signaled the coming of the new model year. Sid had managed to set up two appointments the previous day from his previous sales list. If either of them showed up he was certain that he could make a sale.

He dropped his keys off at his desk and grabbed some coffee before heading out to the point spot on the lot. Vince was already out there, with his coffee and a cigarette.

“Hey, Vince, mind if we call the Ups,” Sid asked as he approached.

“Sure. Green Toyota Carolla,” Vince replied, calling a car coming down the road the lot was off of. This was a little game salesmen played. They call out cars they spotted and if it turned into the lot, then they would get first stab at the customer.

“Heh, no chance they’ll turn in. Once you go foreign you never go back. Give me the red Taurus heading southbound.” Both cars passed each other north of the lot, neither turned in.

“I’ll take the black Chevy Malibu. Heard about the chewing out the Boss gave you yesterday.”

“Explorer, blue. How much did you hear?”

“Just that Mike threw you out after apparently tearing you a new one for your slump. White Dodge Caravan.”

“Well... The part you missed is that you and I are in a little competition. Silver Dodge Neon.”

“What do you mean, Sid?”

“I’m going to be blown off if I don’t sell a car before you,” Sid stated point blank.

“Jesus! How am I supposed to sell a car now!”

“You married, Vince?”

“Engaged. We’re going to get married after my fiancée finishes college.”

“Good thinking. I was married once, but neither of us had more than a high school diploma. I started working here the day after Terri, my ex, and I found out she was pregnant with my daughter.”

“I didn’t know you had a daughter. Black F-150.”

“Yeah, she’s 18 now. Two weeks ago I found out through the grapevine that Terri had remarried. It has been six years since our divorce, but it still surprised me.” Sid took a long sip off his coffee. For a moment he remembered every detail of how he had come home that night six years earlier to an empty house and a Dear John letter. He had never known she had been seeing another man prior to that. But that is what dealership business hours did to families.

“Why’d it surprise you, Sid?”

“Huh?”

“Why did it surprise you that your wife got remarried?”

“Oh-- Yellow Pontiac GT-- I guess it was because she had moved on past the divorce. Past me. While I kept burning my anger at her and the world by ripping the heads off of the customers here.” For six years now he had tried not to think about the divorce, and now here he was, gushing to this green pea. And

he realized that was why he had been in his slump. His attempt to avoid his past had caught up with him.

“So... why are you telling me all this,” Vince asked after lighting another cigarette.

“I’m not sure. Maybe to warn you.”

“Warn me?”

“Yeah.” Sid took another sip of coffee and regarded his partner on point. “Dealerships devour families. They tear them apart with the stress and long hours. Only stay as long as you have to, and find another job as soon as you can.”

“Ok, Sid. T-Thanks.”

The road was quiet and the silence engulfed both men standing on point.

“You know Mike and I started on the lot around the same time,” Sid said, breaking the silence.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah. He may not look it, but he’s a real womanizer.”

“What? I thought he was married.”

“Yeah, he is. He wouldn’t be if I hadn’t saved him about a decade ago from a surprise visit by his wife.”

“No shit?”

“Nope. Stefanie swung by one afternoon while Mike was off with his latest squeeze. Green Chevy Cavalier.”

“What’d you do?”

“I told her he was out picking up an order for a customer from another lot. Then I called him up after she left and filled him in on it. He stopped cheating for awhile after that, but couldn’t stay away.”

“So he’s still cheating?”

“Yup.”

“That poor woman. All these years behind her back.”

“Yeah...” Sid took another sip and thought about how he had felt when he found out how long Terri had been cheating on him. It boiled his blood. Yet now here he was protecting a guy that was actively trying to fire him.

“I’ll take the brown Escort. Is that an Escort,” Vince asked.

“No,” Sid said snapping back to the present. He examined the approaching car then gave a small laugh. “That’s a Ford Tempo, and I think its rust not paint.”

“Oh,” Vince said with a laugh. “Sorry about that,” Both laughed a little to themselves, but the laughing halted almost immediately as they were struck dumb by surprise. The Tempo had signaled to pull into the lot.

“Oh damn,” Vince said with surprise. “Sid, I don’t want to take any sales from you--”

“You called it. Its yours. Besides I think I need to go.”

“W-what?”

“Get over there and take that Up before mike blows you off. I’ll see you later.” Sid gave Vince a slight push that started him on his way. He picked up

steam and certainty as he made his way over to the elderly woman getting out of the car.

Sid turned and walked into the dealership and over to his desk. He picked up his keys and a framed photo of Terri, Heather, and him taken in Disney world eight years earlier and started out.

“What the Hell are you doing, Sid,” Mike yelled from The Tower.

Sid looked up at him and simply yelled back, “I quit!” The floor went absolutely quiet as he walked out the glass door.

The drive took longer than he remembered, but eventually he found his way to Mike’s house. He parked in the driveway next to Stefanie’s Ford Expedition. Stefanie opened the door with a surprised look on her face after the second knock.

“Sid? What are you doing here,” she asked him.

“Hi, Stefanie. I have something I need to tell you. It isn’t going to be easy, but I think you should know.”

“Okay. Well then why don’t you come in.” Sid walked into the house and Stefanie closed the door behind him. He wasn’t sure how she was going to take the news, but he figured at least Mike would have one hell of a night when he got home. And his wife would finally know the truth.

Then maybe tomorrow he would check out the Glen Honda down the street to see if they needed a salesman. He always liked the Civics.

THE END