

DISCLOSURE

A novel by Michael Crichton

DISCLOSURE

A novel by Michael Crichton

ISBN: 0-345-39105-5

ISBN: 978-0-345-39105-6

Publisher: Ballantine Books

* * * * *

For Douglas Crichton

It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer: (r) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin or (a) to limit, segregate, classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Title VA Civil Rights Act of 1964

MONDAY

Power is neither male nor female.

Katharine Graham

FROM: DC/M

ARTHUR KAHN

TWINKLE/KUALA LUMPUR/MALAYSIA

TO: DC/S

TOM SANDERS

SEATTLE (AT HOME)

TOM:

CONSIDERING THE MERGER, I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD GET THIS AT HOME AND NOT

THE OFFICE:

TWINKLE PRODUCTION LINES RUNNING AT 29% CAPACITY DESPITE ALL EFFORTS TO

INCREASE. SPOT CHECKS ON DRIVES SHOW AVG SEEK TIMES IN 120-140 MILLISECOND

RANGE WITH NO CLEAR INDICATION WHY WE ARE NOT STABLE AT SPECS. ALSO, WE

STILL HAVE POWER FLICKER IN SCREENS WHICH APPEARS TO COME FROM HINGE

DESIGN DESPITE IMPLEMENTATION OF DC/S FIX LAST WEEK. I DON'T THINK IT'S

SOLVED YET.

HOW'S THE MERGER COMING? ARE WE GOING TO BE RICH AND FAMOUS?

CONGRATULATIONS IN ADVANCE ON YOUR PROMOTION.

ARTHUR

Tom Sanders never intended to be late for work on Monday, June 15. At 7:30 in the morning, he stepped into the shower at his home on Bainbridge Island. He knew he had to shave, dress, and leave the house in ten minutes if he was to make the 7:50 ferry and arrive at work by 8:30, in time to go over the remaining points with Stephanie Kaplan before they went into the meeting with the lawyers from Conley-White. He already had a full day at work, and the fax he had just received from Malaysia made it worse.

Sanders was a division manager at Digital Communications Technology in Seattle. Events at work had been hectic for a week, because DigiCom was being acquired by Conley-White, a publishing conglomerate in New York. The merger would allow Conley to acquire technology important to publishing in the next century.

But this latest news from Malaysia was not good, and Arthur had been right to send it to him at home. He was going to have a problem explaining it to the Conley-White people because they just didn't

“Tom? Where are you? Tom?”

His wife, Susan, was calling from the bedroom. He ducked his head out of the spray.

“I'm in the shower!”

She said something in reply, but he didn't hear it. He stepped out, reaching for a towel. “What?”

“I said, Can you feed the kids?”

His wife was an attorney who worked four days a week at a downtown firm. She took Mondays off, to spend more time with the kids, but she was not good at managing the routine at home. As a result, there was often a crisis on Monday mornings.

“Tom? Can you feed them for me?”

“I can't, Sue,” he called to her. The clock on the sink said 7:34. “I'm already late.”

He ran water in the basin to shave, and lathered his face. He was a handsome man, with the easy manner of an athlete. He touched the dark bruise on his side from the company touch football game on Saturday. Mark Lewyn had taken him down; Lewyn was fast but clumsy. And Sanders was getting too old for touch football. He was still in good shape still within five pounds of his varsity weight-but as he ran his hand through his wet hair, he saw streaks of gray. It was time to admit his age, he thought, and switch to tennis.

Susan came into the morn, still in her bathrobe. His wife always looked beautiful in the morning, right out of bed. She had the kind of fresh beauty that required no makeup. “Are you sure you can't feed them?” she said. “Oh, nice bruise. Very butch.” She kissed him lightly, and pushed a fresh mug of coffee onto the counter for him. “I've got to get Matthew to the pediatrician by eight-fifteen, and neither one of them has eaten a thing, and I'm not dressed. Can't you please feed them?”

“Pretty please?” Teasing, she ruffled his hair, and her bathrobe fell open. She left it open and smiled. “I'll owe you one . . .”

“Sue, I can't.” He kissed her forehead distractedly. “I've got a meeting, I can't be late.”

She sighed. “Oh, all right.” Pouting, she left.

Sanders began shaving.

A moment later he heard his wife say, “Okay, kids, let's go! Eliza, put your shoes on.” This was followed by whining from Eliza, who was four, and didn't like to wear shoes. Sanders had almost finished shaving when he heard, “Eliza, you put on those shoes and take your brother downstairs right now!” Eliza's reply was indistinct, and then Susan said, “Eliza Ann, I'm talking to you!” Then Susan began slamming drawers in the hall linen closet. Both kids started to cry.

Eliza, who was upset by any display of tension, came into the bathroom, her face scrunched up, tears in her eyes. "Daddy . . .," she sobbed. He put his hand down to hug her, still shaving with his other hand.

"She's old enough to help out," Susan called, from the hallway.

"Mommy," she wailed, clutching Sanders's leg.

"Eliza, will you cut it out."

At this, Eliza cried more loudly. Susan stamped her foot in the hallway. Sanders hated to see his daughter cry. "Okay, Sue, I'll feed them." He turned off the water in the sink and scooped up his daughter. "Come on, Lize," he said, wiping away her tears. "Let's get you some breakfast."

He went out into the hallway. Susan looked relieved. "I just need ten minutes, that's all," she said. "Consuela is late again. I don't know what's the matter with her."

Sanders didn't answer her. His son, Matt, who was nine months old, sat in the middle of the hallway banging his rattle and crying. Sanders scooped him up in his other arm.

"Come on, kids," he said. "Let's go eat."

When he picked up Matt, his towel slipped off, and he clutched at it. Eliza giggled. "I see your penis, Dad." She swung her foot, kicking it.

"We don't kick Daddy there," Sanders said. Awkwardly, he wrapped the towel around himself again, and headed downstairs.

Susan called after him: "Don't forget Matt needs vitamins in his cereal. One dropperful. And don't give him any more of the rice cereal, he spits it out. He likes wheat now." She went into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

His daughter looked at him with serious eyes. "Is this going to be one of those days, Daddy?"

“Yeah, it looks like it.” He walked down the stairs, thinking he would miss the ferry and that he would be late for the first meeting of the day. Not very late, just a few minutes, but it meant he wouldn't be able to go over things with Stephanie before they started, but perhaps he could call her from the ferry, and then

“Do I have a penis, Dad?”

“No, Lize.”

“Why, Dad?”

“That's just the way it is, honey.”

“Boys have penises, and girls have vaginas,” she said solemnly.

“That's right.”

“Why, Dad?”

“Because.” He dropped his daughter on a chair at the kitchen table, dragged the high chair from the corner, and placed Matt in it. “What do you want for breakfast, Lize? Rice Krispies or Chex?”

“Chex.”

Matt began to bang on his high chair with his spoon. Sanders got the Chex and a bowl out of the cupboard, then the box of wheat cereal and a smaller bowl for Matt. Eliza watched him as he opened the refrigerator to get the milk.

“Dad?”

“What.”

“I want Mommy to be happy.”

“Me too, honey.”

He mixed the wheat cereal for Matt, and put it in front of his son. Then he set Eliza's bowl on the table, poured in the Chex, glanced at her. "Enough?"

"Yes."

He poured the milk for her.

"No, Dada" his daughter howled, bursting into tears. "I wanted to pour the milk!"

"Sorry, Lize--"

"Take it out-take the milk out-" She was shrieking, completely hysterical.

"I'm sorry, Lize, but this is--"

"I wanted to pour the milk." She slid off her seat to the ground, where she lay kicking her heels on the floor. "Take it out, take the milk out!"

His daughter did this kind of thing several times a day. It was, he was assured, just a phase. Parents were advised to treat it with firmness.

"I'm sorry," Sanders said. "You'll just have to eat it, Lize." He sat down at the table beside Matt to feed him. Matt stuck his hand in his cereal and smeared it across his eyes. He, too, began to cry.

Sanders got a dish towel to wipe Matt's face. He noticed that the kitchen clock now said five to eight. He thought that he'd better call the office, to warn them he would be late. But he'd have to quiet Eliza first: she was still on the floor, kicking and screaming about the milk. "All right, Eliza, take it easy. Take it easy." He got a fresh bowl, poured more cereal, and gave her the carton of milk to pour herself.

"Here."

She crossed her arms and pouted. "I don't want it."

"Eliza, you pour that milk this minute."

His daughter scrambled up to her chair. “Okay, Dad.”

Sanders sat down, wiped Matt's face, and began to feed his son. The boy immediately stopped crying, and swallowed the cereal in big gulps. The poor kid was hungry. Eliza stood on her chair, lifted the milk carton, and splashed it all over the table. “Uh-oh.”

“Never mind.” With one hand, he wiped the table with the dish towel, while with the other he continued to feed Matt.

Eliza pulled the cereal box right up to her bowl, stared fixedly at the picture of Goofy on the back, and began to eat. Alongside her, Matt ate steadily. For a moment, it was calm in the kitchen.

Sanders glanced over his shoulder: almost eight o'clock. He should call the office.

Susan came in, wearing jeans and a beige sweater. Her face was relaxed. “I'm sorry I lost it,” she said. “Thanks for taking over.” She kissed him on the cheek.

“Are you happy, Mom?” Eliza said.

“Yes, sweetie.” Susan smiled at her daughter, and turned back to Tom. “I'll take over now. You don't want to be late. Isn't today the big day? When they announce your promotion?”

“I hope so.”

“Call me as soon as you hear.”

“I will.” Sanders got up, cinched the towel around his waist, and headed upstairs to get dressed. There was always traffic in town before the 8:20 ferry. He would have to hurry to make it.

He parked in his spot behind Ricky's Shell station, and strode quickly down the covered walkway to the ferry. He stepped aboard moments before they pulled up the ramp. Feeling the throb of the engines beneath his feet, he went through the doors onto the main deck.

“Hey, Tom.”

He looked over his shoulder. Dave Benedict was coming up behind him.

Benedict was a lawyer with a firm that handled a lot of high-tech companies.

“Missed the seven-fifty, too, huh?” Benedict said.

“Yeah. Crazy morning.”

“Tel me. I wanted to be in the office an hour ago. But now that school's out, Jenny doesn't know what to do with the kids until camp starts.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Madness at my house,” Benedict said, shaking his head.

There was a pause. Sanders sensed that he and Benedict had had a similar morning. But the two men did not discuss it further. Sanders often wondered why it was that women discussed the most intimate details of their marriages with their friends, while men maintained a discreet silence with one another.

“Anyway,” Benedict said. “How's Susan?”

“She's fine. She's great.”

Benedict grinned. “So why are you limping?”

“Company touch football game on Saturday. Got a little out of hand.”

“That's what you get for playing with children,” Benedict said. DigiCom was famous for its young employees.

“Hey,” Sanders said. “I scored.”

“Is that right?”