

Do You Want a Woman

SPRING 1979

“Do you want a woman?” the lawyer asked.

“Yes. Get me a woman.” I responded

I was sitting in the bar at the Walnut Creek’s, California, Marriot Hotel with our company attorney and company accountant. We were bar hopping for hours and the three of us were too drunk to function normally. The last stop’s only redeeming feature; I was staying at this hotel and didn’t have to drive. I was only required to make it upstairs to my room. Thank God for elevators!

Another hour and many drinks later Brian asked again, “Do you want a woman?”

“Yes. Get me a woman.” I repeated.

“I’m going to get you a woman.” Brian staggered across the early morning nearly empty barroom and out the door. We didn’t see him again until at the following morning. Actually, our meeting was only a few hours later.

John, the accountant, and I had another drink before he decided to report home. Luckily, I found my room numbered key in my coat pocket and swayed upstairs.

I attended the new assistant manager’s meeting at Longs Drugs Stores General Offices for the past two days. This morning was our final meeting before I flew back to Southern California.

All forty-something newly promoted assistants, from throughout our retail chain, attended. En masse, we showed up for dinner with our company president, a couple of vice-presidents, the company attorney and the company accountant earlier that evening. The banquet broke up shortly before nine o’clock after which, I continued drinking with the two upper management professionals.

These two men conducted most of the meetings previous two days and our last get together wasn’t planned any different. We congregated in the assigned headquarter educational room just prior to the nine o’clock start time.

I was hung-over and already thrown up my previous evening’s dinner and libations numerous times. Still, I made the meeting on time; showered, shaved and dressed in a clean suit. I looked considerably better than I felt. I was confident I could get through the next couple of hours if I did not have to speak, eat, or move.

I entered the room and grabbed a black coffee. Locating an empty inner-middle row chair a couple of rows back from the front stage area, I plopped down between two unsuspecting assistants.

I previously learned, never to sit in an aisle seat at any meeting. If you fell asleep or passed out you would crash into the walkway. To save yourself from being publically chastised and humiliated you desired to sit deep within a row where persons on either side of you would bump you back up as needed.

Our group sat patiently as the clock slowly ticked minute by excruciating minute; nine-o-one...o-two...o-three...before finally hitting nine-thirty; my expected magic starting time uneventfully passed. The clock’s hand continued to move slowly but steadily forward until nine-forty-eight.

Brian and John entered the room quietly through a back door and made their way to the front. They never removed their eye covering dark sunglasses. Neither one spoke. They stood

swaying silently for minutes surveying the crowd. Everyone in our group, except me, wondered what was happening.

Finally, John eked out a couple of sentences, “This is more or less a question and answers session. We’ve already covered everything. You’ve already asked all the questions. And we don’t have any more answers. Catch your planes and go home.” and they both walked out the nearby side exit. The meeting was over.

Inquisitive buzzing immediately escalated around the room. I gulped my last swallow of cold coffee and alone, headed for the door.

I waited in the parking lot for Hector. He was the new assistant in our Calexico store located fifteen miles south of El Centro. We traveled to the meetings together.

When Hector finally emerged from the building, I tossed him our rental car’s keys, “You’re driving.” and wobbled across the parking lot.

On the drive from Walnut Creek to the Oakland Airport, he tried to drill me on what just occurred. I told him I had no idea and promptly went to sleep.

My newfound association with Brian and John became invaluable for the remaining years of my Longs employment both as an assistant and store manager. Whenever I needed any information, confidential or not, I picked up my Batphone and called their direct numbers.

All our stores took complete inventories every three months. Six weeks after taking inventory, each district manager received their store’s quarterly figures. They were required to meet individually with each store manager perusing the numbers.

These were not social visits and usually degrading. No store ever achieved an acceptable report. The manager, on the hot seat, forced to come up with reasonable explanations and improvement forecasts on the spot.

From the time of our shared indiscretions, I always phoned John four weeks after the close of each quarter and got my store’s figures prematurely. Mark, my store manager and me, after promotion, were always well prepared ahead of time for our meetings. There are no secrets!

I also felt free to phone Brian for any legal advice I might need. He was always helpful.

One instance after the shoplifting laws changed I was in dire need of his counsel. Previously you refrained confronting a suspected shoplifter until after they exited the store with the merchandise. The new law stated if a person concealed any merchandise on their person and passed a checkout area you could retain the suspect within the store’s perimeter and make a citizen’s arrest.

I was still an assistant manager when I busted two young adult women stealing cosmetics. They were still on our sales floor when I detained them and called the police.

Once an officer takes custody of a suspect he has determined the incident a legal arrest and assumed all responsibility; relieving the store’s liability.

One or both of these women filed a complaint. My district manager phoned me and chewed me out for making a bad bust claiming I hadn’t known what I was doing and screwed up; putting our company at risk of a lawsuit.

I explained the situation to his deaf ears. He ended our conversation telling me to fix it or heads were going to roll. He specifically meant my head was going to roll!

I phoned Brian.

He told me I was completely right and he would call my district manager.

I never heard another word about the incident.

