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Design Flaws of the Human Condition



A NOVEL

DESIGN FLAWS of the HUMAN CONDITION

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAs can only happen in New York, two strangers find themselves railroaded into an anger-management class, where they soon become fast friends. Iris is there because of an eminently justifiable meltdown on a crowded flight, whereas Ken got caught defacing library books with rude (but true!) messages about his former boyfriend. The boyfriend that he caught in bed with another man. Needless to say, Iris and Ken were cosmically destined to be friends. What follows is a strikingly original comedy as Ken enlists Iris to infiltrate his ex-boyfriends life in the hope of discovering that hes miserable. And Iris reciprocates, dispatching Ken to work himself into the confidence of her own boyfriend, whom she suspects of cheating. But what if Kens ex isnt crying himself to sleep? What if hes not the amoral fiend Ken wants to

believe he is? And what should Iris do when her worst suspicions start to come true? Exactly how perfect do we have the right to expect our fellow human beings to be? Anger, betrayal, loyalty, and friendship

Design Flaws of the Human Condition explores these universal themes with wisdom, compassion, and a wickedly irreverent sense of humor.

Extrait Chapter One. In Which Kens Really Great Day, as Preordained by a Starbucks Employee, Fails to Materialize

Have a really great day. Ken Connelly never treated himself to anything from Starbucks except on those rare occasions when he worked all three of his jobs on the same day, and this was one of those days. Ken started off in the morning as Professor Connelly, since his real job, as he liked to think of it, was as an adjunct professor of English at City College where he taught composition. He taught two different sections, which was enough to require his presence at City College almost every day of the week. Unfortunately, it wasnt enough to qualify him for a permanent position on the faculty or for any kind of health insurance, which was too bad given that hed started to develop a strange headache that appeared every time the words faculty and meeting passed into each others orbits and wound up anywhere near each other.

Job number two was at the reference desk in Cohen Library, the main library at City College. Taking that job had raised a few eyebrows in the English Department, but a person has to eat, and Kens two composition sections didnt pay diddlysquat, so he applied and became a parttime reference librarian, sans benefits, naturally. Still, it was a pretty good gig because nobody ever asked the reference librarians for anything other than change for the photocopiers. For eleven months out of the year, the job was entirely benign, the only exception being January when Sports Illustrated released its Swimsuit Issue, which went directly from the cataloging service to the reference desk where, along with anything else that was likely to be stolen, you had to leave ID to borrow it. On some level it was a little amusing that Ken Connelly served as the gatekeeper to the Swimsuit Issue since he had relatively little interest in sports and absolutely no interest in photos of scantily clad women. Yes, the rumors were true Professor Connelly was gay. Stage direction: gasp.

Job number three was totally offthewall, but, for all its flaws, it paid better than the other two combined and it provided benefits: Ken Connelly was a night proofreader at the law firm of Leighton, Fennell Lowe. Leighton Fennell was one of those huge New York law firms thats so big that they have everything: their own cafeteria; their own travel agency; a battalion of wordprocessors who typed away twentyfour hours a day, seven days a week downstairs in the basement; and, tucked away in a room just off Word Processing, a team of proofreaders. The job of the proofreaders was to take documents that Word Processing had just finished and compare the new version with the old version to be sure that the word processors, who typed at warp speed and barely had time to breathe, let alone think, didnt make any errors. Which is impossible, and which is why the firm employed proofreaders to go through the documents line by line, page by page, to catch stray errors and correct them. Occasionally an attorney would ask the proofreaders to read an entire document all on its own just to be sure there werent any mistakes in it, which was tedious, but nowhere near as bad as the attorneys who came downstairs to hover and get in the way of anything ever getting finished. Generally speaking, though, the attorneys stayed upstairs in their own world, their canopy of treetops far above the jungle floor, where they could shriek and throw tantrums and fling feces at one another to their hearts content.

Ken got the job when he was still a starving PhD candidate up at Columbia, thinking, incorrectly, that hed quit the minute he finished defending his thesis and hed walk right out of Leighton Fennells door and right into a plum tenure track position in some namebrand English department at a university that had a facultyonly hour three times a week in their glitteringly clean, Olympicsized swimming pool. His lackluster brown hair would turn blond from the chlorine, and hed trade in his otherwise unremarkable chest for a set of those pectoral muscles that suddenly seemed to be all the rage. Well, that didnt happen. So all these years later, Ken was still going downtown to Leighton Fennell five evenings a week five-thirty to midnight where hed pick up a project from the wire basket at the front counter as he came in, go over to his cubicle, and start proofing. Well, hed start proofing after he adjusted the little photo frame on his desk. It was this nifty triangular Lucite photo frame that the day proofreader, Maeve, had bought, sort of as a joke, for all three people who shared that particular cubicle: day shift, swing shift, night shift. Each of them had a photo on his or her side of the triangle, and the whole thing spun around like a lazy Susan in a highend Chinese restaurant. Ken twirled it around so that he could gaze, time permitting, upon the picture of Brett, his beloved. Maeve wrote poetry and performed at openmike nights all over New York, and the photo on her side of the frame was this very artsy, very dramatic shot of her and her poet boyfriend embracing. The photo for the graveyard shift showed this handsome guy and his equally handsome boyfriend who were flashing all fiftysix of their gleamingly white teeth. Hugged between them, there was a big, bouncy yellow Labrador, the kind of dog that gets to sleep in an expensive, L.L. Bean doggie bed. And

then one afternoon Ken came to work only to find that the boyfriend's head had been covered up with a Post-it. That lasted for about a week until Ken came in and found that the Post-it along with the boyfriend's head had disappeared altogether. And that lasted for about a month before the dog got ripped out of the picture too, meaning that somewhere in Manhattan, a graveyard shift proofreader had just lost a gay, canine custody battle.***In any event, Ken arrived at work for the third time that day the Friday of Labor Day weekend and he swiveled the picture frame around so he could see Brett smiling at him from out at Jones Beach where they'd taken the photo, and then he got down to brass tacks. Or tried to, rather. Unfortunately, there was an almost palpable sense of tension coming from the bunkers in Word Processing and Ken guessed, correctly, that one of the lawyers had found his way downstairs to screw everything up. He went over to the counter at the front of the office to see what the deal was, and it wasn't pretty. Dina, the evening supervisor for both WP and Proofreading, was standing on one side of a cubicle, and Crayton Reed, ostrich-faced partner and asshole of truly pharaonic proportions, was standing on the other side. And in the middle, poor little Bonnie Grohs was trying to make sense of Crayton Reed's pile of gibberish. Bonnie would finish a page of corrections, and as she took it off her little easel, Crayton would snatch it out of her hands and plunk himself down at the empty cubicle next to her and stare at it with his ostrich face and swear under his breath and then start rechanging things and trying to shove the paper back onto the easel. Crayton, it would seem, was about to wet his pants. Apparently, they were working on a prospectus for an initial public offering worth hundreds of millions of dollars, which sounds complicated, but a prospectus is really just a description of what's being put up for sale. Only it's a description that's several hundred pages long and written in terms carefully designed to say absolutely nothing. Unfortunately, Crayton Reed had turned this relatively simple exercise into a long, slow, secretarial death march. He had crossed out huge parts and then changed his mind and jammed them back in. He had riders and attachments all over the place. He had clutter. And above all, he had horrible handwriting. He had horrendous handwriting. Plus he kept trying to read over Bonnie's shoulder as she typed each letter, and when Dina chased him away, he'd pace around the room wringing his hands and screaming into the telephone at some group of junior nobodies whom he was apparently holding hostage upstairs in a conference room. He kept telling anyone who'd listen that the client was on a plane and she wanted this thing waiting for her when the plane landed. Do you understand that? Do you understand what a plane is? Am I the only person here who is capable of grasping the fact that the client is on a plane and that she is waiting for this fucking document the second it lands? And then he spotted Ken. What's he doing? he asked Dina, so Ken grabbed the first interoffice envelope out of the wire basket and beat it back to his cubicle. Only he didn't even have time to open the envelope because Dina was suddenly right in front of him, taking it back out of his hands. Sweetie, she whispered, don't give me a hard time about this, but he doesn't want you working on anything else. He wants you to be ready for his document when it comes out. He what? Ken said. He doesn't want you working on anything else. He wants you ready to proof the document the second that's what he said the second it comes out of the printer. You're kidding, Ken said. Do I look like I'm kidding? No, I guess you don't, Ken said. But if you're okay with me sitting here doing nothing, it's definitely okay with me. Dina was in the...*Revue de presse* *Design Flaws of the Human Condition* contains the kind of pitch-perfect observations that make you want to phone the author, crying, Yes! Yes! Yes! I feel exactly the same way! A searing satire of every imaginable inconvenience and indignity, Schmidtberg's novel of ill manners shimmers with wit, whimsy, and wisdom. Marc Acito, author of *How I Paid for College* In New York a city of coincidence and contradictions Iris and Ken are the quintessential couple, the straight woman and her gay best friend. And what a pair they make. Their adventures bubble with humor but never become absurd, and the story of their friendship charms without becoming sentimental. Shari Goldhagen, author of *Family and Other Accidents*