

Am I Right?

by

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AM I RIGHT?

CHARACTERS:

Sean - 20-30ish male

Kate - in her 20s (also plays Waitress, Pet Store Clerk)

Roger - 20-30ish male (also plays Gas Station Attendant, Restaurant Manager)

SETTING: Kitchen table in an apartment in the state of Oregon. Three empty chairs. In front of two of the empty chairs are cups of coffee, with the usual collection of spoons, sugar, non-dairy creamer. In front of one of the cups is an ashtray, with three or four cigarettes in it. An unopened bottle of champagne and a couple of pizza boxes are on the table.

TIME: A few minutes before midnight on New Year's Eve.

AT RISE: SEAN shuffles in. We hear the sound of first a car door shutting, then the sound of a car driving out of the driveway in a hurry, tires squealing.

SEAN passes the table, grabs the unopened bottle of champagne and sits.

Beat.

SEAN

(to audience)

What's happened to customer service in this country? You know what I mean? Used to be the customer was always right. Now it's as if businesses hire people that don't have a clue. They think that the customer who just walked in is keeping them from doing something else. They think, too bad we can't run our business without customers. Am I right?

Check this out. I stopped to get gas this morning. There was an empty car next to one of the islands and a bag over one of the pumps. So, I think maybe it's a sign, their way of saying "Out of Gas," so I drive to the next island, maybe ten, fifteen feet away.

SEAN pulls his chair away from the table, and moves it closer to the front of the stage. He sits down.

GAS STATION ATTENDANT enters and walks over to the SEAN.

GAS STATION ATTENDANT

You had to go to THIS pump! What? You like to watch people get exercise?

SEAN

Shut up, you grease monkey. I'm the customer. You got to treat me with respect. You low-life, minimum-wage loser piece of animal dung. Don't lecture me. Just do your job. Make the customer feel good, not bad.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Am I right? But I really don't say anything to the guy because I want the gas and I'm running late.

SEAN gives attendant his card;
ATTENDANT pumps gas; SEAN gets his card
and receipt. ATTENDANT exits. SEAN
returns the chair back to the table and
sits, facing audience.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Thirty seconds later that jerk's back inside reading yesterday's USA Today and drinking something that's more like transmission fluid than coffee. It didn't matter to him at all. I'm out of his mind forever, not that I was ever in there in the first place. Which is my point. But he starts my day off on the wrong note.

Complaints I don't need. I can't quit thinking about him and swear never to go back because he doesn't know how to treat a customer, which is his loss or his boss's loss because I figure I can spend my money anywhere. Am I right?

And he's not the only one. Today must be Piss On Customers Day. Right after I get gas I go to this twenty-four-hour restaurant to get breakfast. Because it's cheap. I'm running late. And I'm hungry. I can eat breakfast three times a day. They serve it all day there. So, I'm there, right?

WAITRESS and RESTAURANT MANAGER enter.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

But they're busy. It's the early afternoon of New Year's Eve. So there should be a lunch rush? Where's bars? Go figure. Anyway, they can put my name on a list for a booth or I can sit at the counter. Some people are counter people. Some like chairs and tables. Me? I'm a booth man. Always have been. Even back home in New York. You know what I mean?

You can stretch out, take your shoes off, throw your arm across the back. But I say okay to the counter and sit there.

The WAITRESS rushes all over the place, working the counter and some booths. The RESTAURANT MANAGER comes over to SEAN.

RESTAURANT MANAGER

Would you like some coffee?

SEAN

Yes. Thank you.

(to audience)

I'm thinking, now here's someone who understands customer service. But he only sort of gets it because he doesn't bring me a menu. No water, either. And there are dirty dishes next to me. On both sides. I feel like I'm sitting inside a commercial dish washer. Kawhoosh. Kawhoosh. Kawhoosh. I mean for Christ sakes, I'm a customer. That used to stand for something.

I worked in restaurants as a bus boy when I was in high school. I know from restaurants. Here's a tip for all you morons who don't get it. Put down something, anything right away. If it's breakfast time, give 'em coffee and water. Dinner time, give 'em bread and water. You go into a restaurant today and sometimes you think you've dropped into a black hole. Am I right? Just let the customer know you know they're there. That's all. It's not rocket science.

One time when I was a bus boy I watched a waitress pick up a plate of food from the ledge over the stove, look at the food, and say, "This is over-cooked. I'm tired of serving crap like this to my customers." She threw the plate back at the cook. Now, THAT waitress knew how to look after her customers. That's what I mean by customer service. That's looking out for the customer, man. Am I right?

WAITRESS

Are you ready to order?

SEAN

I'll take the "two-by-two."

WAITRESS exits.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

It's two eggs, two strips of bacon, two pieces of toast, something someone somewhere thinks is ham, hash browns, and coffee. They call it a "two-by-two." It's all together, all one price.

WAITRESS returns and mimics putting a plate of food in front of SEAN.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Food comes right away, so I know the bacon's been sitting out for a while in a pan under some dim heating light. Ditto the hash browns and the ham. The toast is burned on one side. I mean, they give burnt toast to people who've swallowed poison to induce vomiting or something. Am I right? So, why would you think someone wants to eat burnt toast if the idea is to keep food down, not bring it back up? Besides, how'd they burn the toast on one side but not the other?

Beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

But I don't say anything. I just eat and go to pay the bill.

SEAN and RESTAURANT MANAGER stand facing each other, across from the table sideways.

SEAN (CONT'D)

I think there's a mistake. You charged me for the coffee. I had the two-by-two and it comes with coffee.

RESTAURANT MANAGER

That's only if the waitress pours the coffee.

SEAN

What?

RESTAURANT MANAGER

The waitress has to pour the coffee. Otherwise you have to pay. Since I poured the coffee, we have to charge you.

SEAN

That doesn't make any sense.

RESTAURANT MANAGER

Maybe, but that's the rule.

SEAN

(to audience)

I keep saying it doesn't make any sense. He keeps arguing with me, taking the I-don't-make-the-rules-I-only-follow-them approach. I take the let's-be-reasonable-about-this approach. I get nowhere.

The WAITRESS comes over, and stands next to the manager.

SEAN (CONT'D)

All right, then deduct the cost of the coffee from the price of the "two-by-two" meal.

RESTAURANT MANAGER

Can't do it. It's a set price. No changes. It's coded that way in the system.

SEAN

(to audience)

Again I point out the obvious. It's only a seventy-five cent difference, but it's a matter of principle. Am I right? I refuse to pay the extra. They refuse to change the bill.

SEAN (CONT'D)

I want to speak to the manager.

RESTAURANT MANAGER

I am the manager.

SEAN

(to audience)

What're you gonna do? I pay the bill and leave, then sit in my car and stew. I'm mad. You know what I mean? I start jotting down notes for a letter to the chain headquarters, maybe even to the chamber of commerce and the local paper, about the appalling condition of customer service today. I scratch the idea and think at least all that bad karma was behind me.

Beat.

I was wrong.

KATE brings a chair over to where SEAN is sitting and sits next to him. They're very close at this point.

SEAN (CONT'D)

You think after three years of living with someone. Eating. Sleeping. Making love. Snoring. Bathing. Dealing with each other's relatives, not to mention friends. In-laws? Don't get me started. She thinks my family's strange?

(beat) There's shopping. Movies. Complaining about work. Life. Getting the flu at the same time.

(in a very sick voice)

It's your turn to get up and get more water.

KATE

(also in a sick voice)

If you really loved me, you'd do it for me.

SEAN

(to audience)

Like I said, you'd think after three years you'd know someone better. Maybe she tried to tell me. And I didn't listen.

Beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

I'm the first to admit I'm not the best listener. My parents used to talk constantly, both at the same time, non-stop, so I picked up this habit of looking as if I'm listening when I'm really not. It's a basic skill that's gotten me through more than one boring date, and in some hot water, as well. Sure, our marriage had its share of problems, disagreements, fights. But we had good times, too. I mean, that's a marriage. Am I right? Ups and downs. Ins and outs.

Both stand and walk a few steps to another side of the table. SEAN places something on an invisible refrigerator and returns to his chair. KATE looks at it, removes whatever it is and throws it to the floor. She frowns, then returns to her chair.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Of course, she never quit smoking. That was the number one problem between us right there. A huge bone of contention. I tried to help, but like all my best intentions, I went too far. First, I would cut out these pictures of people dying from lung cancer, you know, and post them on the fridge, with a magnet from the American Lung Association.

KATE mimics smoking throughout SEAN'S next speech.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Then, I would buy books on How to Quit Smoking And Not Put On Weight and motivational junk like that. I tried hiding her cigarettes. Tobacco industry? Don't get me started. But nothing worked.

Beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

I removed the tobacco from the end of her cigarette and stuffed the end with the tips of matches so when she'd light the cigarette the tip would flare, then die out quickly. Once I even turned up her cigarette lighter without her knowing. Not good. She almost lost her eyelashes.

KATE panics, waves at her eyelashes.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

But I was desperate. You do what you have to do to save someone you love. Am I right?

KATE moves her chair to the other side of the table, where it was originally. SEAN enters and sits down on a chair across the table from KATE.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Then, there's my closest best friend. Roger. I've known him since grade school. He even followed me out West. We've been through everything. Fights. Girl friends. Term papers. All kinds of silly-ass, no-brainer, low-paying do-you-want-fries-with-that shitty jobs. We lived together for a while. But, did I really know him?

Sounds of horns honking, firecrackers going off, people shouting O.S. It's midnight. SEAN opens the champagne, salutes the audience, and takes a swig.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Check this out. I took time off from work this afternoon and went to this pet food store where you can get a no-frills dog for free, nothing with papers or anything you'd see winning a dog show on cable. Just dogs given one last chance to avoid the gas chamber, remaindered, free-to-good-home, as-is dogs. Make that just about free. You have to pay for shots. Then you get the dog and you end up buying a lot of other things while you're there, lease, collar, food, toys. Kind of like the give them the razor and sell them the blades approach to doing business. It's the American way.

My wife had been in a bad mood for weeks and I thought maybe she was going to start talking about having kids again, but she never did. Not this time. In fact, she had not brought it up in over six months. Which, in hindsight, should have tipped me off. But I'm slow on the up-take sometimes and didn't see it coming.

Still, I thought I'd hold off any possible repeat discussion about having kids by getting her a dog. She loves animals, is crazy about them. I don't want to have to pick up giant mounds of dog shit every day and I don't want a yapper, definitely no yappers. Though, the good news with one of those tiny yapping laptop suckers is you never really have to pick up after them. Hell, most of the time you can't even see it.

PET STORE CLERK brings her chair closer to Sean.

SEAN (CONT'D)

I select a medium-sized mix of some kind with a manly bark and motley black and gray markings. Looked like a paint bucket had fallen on it. I take him for a test walkie around the store a few times to see if we'd bond, which we did, and then sign two release papers and write out the check.

PET STORE CLERK

Do you have a fenced yard?

SEAN

No. We live in an apartment.

PET STORE CLERK

Are you planning on moving to a house that has a fenced yard?

SEAN

Not any time soon.

PET STORE CLERK

You don't have a fenced yard?

SEAN

That's right.

PET STORE CLERK

What are you going to do if the dog wakes up in the middle of the night and has to relieve himself?

SEAN

Excuse me?

PET STORE CLERK

I mean, dogs have to go in the middle of the night, sir. I don't think you're going to take him to your neighborhood park at two a.m. You can't just ignore it.

SEAN

Ignore what?

PET STORE CLERK

When a dog has to go. How are you going to handle that? Especially late at night.

SEAN

He'll do what I do: he'll pee in his bed.

PET STORE CLERK

I'm sorry, but we can't let you take the dog.

SEAN

Why? It's an indoor dog. He'll have his own room. He'll watch television all day. I'll take him to the park for exercise, it's two blocks over.

PET STORE CLERK

I'm sorry, sir. That's our policy. It's for the dog's benefit.

SEAN

Look. I'm from New York. Do you have any idea how many dogs are in New York City that don't have fenced yards?

PET STORE CLERK

I'm sorry.

SEAN

Let me see if I understand you correctly: you would rather let this dog risk getting put to sleep, you know, killed, than let me take it, simply because I do not have a place for the dog to take a leak after hours?

PET STORE CLERK

Those are the rules.

SEAN

Why don't we ask the dog how he feels about it.

PET STORE CLERK

I'm sorry.

SEAN

He'll wear a diaper.

PET STORE CLERK

I'm sorry.

SEAN

You're kidding me.

PET STORE CLERK

I'm sorry. Rules are rules.

PET STORE CLERK returns chair to its original spot.

SEAN

(to audience)

Okay. No dog. But I do bring home a bottle of chilled Cold Duck and two U-Bake pizzas, combos with everything on them. Roger was joining us for a New Year's Eve celebration and I wanted the three of us to have a good time, especially since I always thought my wife and my best friend never really got along with each other, which is putting it mildly. I work a swing shift and usually get off around midnight but tonight I left early. I was pumped. New Year's Eve, man. Talking about the past. Making plans for the future. Toasting each other. Kissing.

There it was. The eternal triangle. Wife. Best friend. Yours truly. A winning combination, you'd think, for a good time to be had by all. Am I right? But when I got home and walked in the kitchen to put the food away, I caught them both. Red-handed.

KATE and ROGER hug and cry.

SEAN (CONT'D)

You will not believe the kind of crappy day I had. First, this loser gas jockey gave me a ration of shit for nothing. What the hell happened to customer service. You know what I mean?

No answer. He finally stares at the other two.

Beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)

Hey, what's the matter here? What's going on? Who died? Somebody talk to me! Hello!

KATE and ROGER pull away from each other, both still crying.

KATE

I want a divorce. You take me for granted.

SEAN

What?

KATE

I'm very unhappy. Very, very, very unhappy. You never think of me. Not once. It's always about you. I want out.

SEAN

What?

KATE

I said I'm very unhappy. Very, very unhappy. I want out.

SEAN

I got the unhappy part. What do you mean out?

KATE

You can keep everything, even the furniture my parents bought us. I just want out.

(Pause)

And the Subaru.

SEAN

Out? Why now? What's different today than yesterday?

KATE

What better time to reinvent your life than the beginning of a new year?

SEAN

(to audience)

I have to admit, that "reinvent" comment really hurt. I wanted to tell her, Hey, I got your reinvent right here. But I didn't say anything. Instead, I turned to my friend.

SEAN turns and faces ROGER.

SEAN (CONT'D)

What's your problem?

ROGER

I'm unhappy with my life, too. Once Kate started telling me how unhappy she was, I started feeling the same about my life. Everything sucks. I mean everything. My job. My sex life. What's the point? I do the same things every day. There must be something just for me out there, something I was meant to do.

SEAN

Join the club.

ROGER

I feel like I'm on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

SEAN

What verge?

ROGER

I can't take this anymore. I can't take this. I'm a failure. I'm going back home and take some time off to get my life back together.

SEAN

Come on, get a grip. Go in the other room and get a hold of yourself and we'll talk later. Right now, I need to try and work something out, here, with my wife.

SEAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

But I couldn't.

And that was my New Year's Eve. I got badgered by a gas jockey, bullied by a restaurant manager, and obfuscated by a stupid pet store rule in a mall.

The big news, of course, is my wife left me to return to Radio Free Idaho or where ever she ends up. And my best friend, Roger, is getting in touch with his feminine side, after which time he will most likely leave on a jet plane for the East Coast and then move back in with his parents or, if we're all lucky, a hospital.

Beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)

I mean, if you can't make it here in this namby-pamby West Coast state where they won't even let you pump your own gas, you can't make it anywhere. And I mean anywhere. Am I right? Wussy state.

Me? I'm going nowhere. No wife. No friend. No dog. No future. Nada. Nothing but an unplanned opportunity to reinvent myself and a few pieces of pretty expensive furniture. Nice stuff, though. Too nice for this crummy apartment. I'll probably sell it on Craigslist the first chance I get.

Beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)

Don't get me started about the cigarettes. But here's the thing. You think if you're married to someone, if you really love them, then you would know if they're unhappy. Am I right? And if you have a best friend who's unhappy, you should be the first one to know it. That doesn't mean you can do anything about someone else's unhappiness. Or should.

Beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)

Okay, maybe you should, if you can. But at the very least, you should know when the people closest to you are unhappy. Am I right?

Beat.

Am I right? SEAN (CONT'D)

Long beat.

Aw, what the hell. SEAN (CONT'D)

(END OF PLAY)