

## **RETURNS**

A 10-minute one-act play

by

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### **CHARACTERS:**

**MAN** (CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE): any age. Distracted, bored, caustic, quick to judge.

**WOMAN** (CUSTOMER): young-ish. Blind. Forthright, patient.

**SYNOPSIS:** RETURNS skewers the election process in America through a deceptively simple encounter in a department store: a woman attempts to return something she's bought to a customer service representative. He refuses to take it back, then interrogates her unsympathetically about her poor decision to buy it in the first place. His arrogance evaporates at the end, when he and the audience discover she is blind.

### **CONTACT INFO:**

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*Lights up on a Customer Service counter.*

MAN

Next.

*WOMAN does not step forward.*

MAN (CONT'D)

Um, hello...

WOMAN

Oh! Me?

MAN

Yes, you.

WOMAN

Great.

*She steps up to the desk, a little awkwardly.*

MAN

Hi-how-can-we-help.

WOMAN

Well, I have a return--

MAN

Receipt?

WOMAN

What? Oh, no.

MAN

Gift?

WOMAN

No, it wasn't a gift. I--

MAN

You bought it.

WOMAN

I -- yes, I--

MAN

So...

WOMAN

So...

MAN

The item.

WOMAN

Oh! Ha! Of course.

*She feels in her bag and takes a box out. Puts it gently on the counter.*

Here.

*He sighs, opens the box, looks inside.*

MAN

Oh.

WOMAN

Uh huh.

MAN

Is it broken?

WOMAN

No.

MAN

Defective?

WOMAN

Possibly.

MAN

Huh. No, we can't take this back.

*He closes the box, pushes it back to her.*

WOMAN

What? No? Why not?

MAN

We just can't.

*He gestures to a sign behind him.*

See?

WOMAN

See... what.

MAN

(sighs)

The sign. "Some sales are final."

WOMAN

What does that mean?

MAN  
C'mon, really?

WOMAN  
"Some sales"? Why "some"? Isn't that... arbitrary?

MAN  
I don't make the rules, lady.

WOMAN  
Well, I think they're arbitrary.

MAN  
Think whatever you want.

WOMAN  
Thank you, I will.

MAN  
Great!  
(pushes the box toward her,  
calls out:)  
Next!

WOMAN  
Wait, I'm not done here--

MAN  
Actually,--

WOMAN  
No. I'm not.

MAN  
Look, there's nothing--

WOMAN  
I'm not happy with this thing!

MAN  
Okay...

WOMAN  
And I don't want it.

MAN  
You bought it, didn't you?

WOMAN  
Yes, but I didn't know that much about it.

MAN  
Why not?

WOMAN

I was too busy. And--

MAN

Ha! Too busy? With what? What someone wore on the red carpet? Losing weight? Who won the football game on Sunday? Pumpkin spice lattes? Fighting with your insurance company? Cyberbullying? Honoring the military? The prison-industrial complex? The surveillance state? Some mass shooting?

WOMAN

(surprised)

Yes!

MAN

Oh, please...

WOMAN

And I have two little girls, one is autistic. She needs extra help.

MAN

Two? Aren't you a little young?

WOMAN

I don't think that's any--

MAN

So. You were "too busy." Do you work?

WOMAN

Some. It's been hard to find a job that pays enough to support us.

MAN

Where's your husband?

WOMAN

Fighting in Iraq. No, Syria. Yemen. Wait-- Libya. Sorry. Somalia.

MAN

Uh huh. Okay, well, we're sorry you were "too busy" and you don't like this thing now, but you could've read reviews about this BEFORE you bought it.

WOMAN

I tried to, but it got really confusing. All the reviews said something different, and then one reviewer said that I shouldn't trust the other ones, and then THEY said that that reviewer was a phony... I didn't know who to listen to.

MAN

Well, that's too bad. But we can't take it back.

WOMAN

What am I going to do? My neighbors hate it! And they all think I'm a terrible person for buying it!

MAN

Maybe you are.

WOMAN

What?

MAN

Maybe you are. You really should've known better. Were you drunk?

WOMAN

No.

MAN

Drugs?

WOMAN

No. I'm on medication--

MAN

Aha! What for?

WOMAN

High cholesterol, high blood pressure, anxiety, insomnia, and depression.

MAN

Oh, those. Are you stupid?

WOMAN

No, I-- I went to school. I sat in my seat all day and filled in all the little bubbles. I got excellent grades.

MAN

Did you cheat?

WOMAN

Of course.

MAN

What about art? Did you draw or paint? Sing? Dance?

WOMAN

Nope.

MAN

Write stories? Read poems?

WOMAN

In school?

Yes! MAN

Was I supposed to? WOMAN

Absolutely not. MAN

How does all of this-- WOMAN

Just doing my job. MAN

Oh. WOMAN

Do you believe in God? MAN

I go to church every Sunday. WOMAN

Even better. MAN

MAN (CONT'D)  
Well. You're not a terrible person, that's clear. But you still didn't have to buy *this* one. It's not the only one we had on sale.

No? WOMAN

No. MAN

I couldn't see any other options. WOMAN

Well, they were there, alright. Lots of them. Hundreds. At least four. Realistically, two. MAN

Two. WOMAN

Yep! So you didn't have to buy this one. MAN

I guess not. WOMAN

MAN

You really should have known better.

WOMAN

There were a LOT of ads--

MAN

Well of course there were! Our job is to sell! That's what this place is all about!

WOMAN

I know--

MAN

And that's what makes it great! The greatest place on Earth! You can buy whatever you want here. Anything! Everything! All the time!

WOMAN

Yes--

MAN

And just because we pour billions and billions of dollars into proven tactics that convince you to buy something you don't want or don't think is good for you doesn't mean you should buy it!

WOMAN

Okay--

MAN

Right? Do you smoke?

WOMAN

No.

MAN

Even though we pushed it on you?

WOMAN

You did?

MAN

Exactly! Thank you!

WOMAN

What does--

MAN

Let's recap. You came in here, saw something you thought you wanted and bought it. And now you want to return it. Bottom line? Not our problem.



WOMAN  
No, I didn't.

MAN  
You what, you didn't buy it?

WOMAN  
Yes, I did--

MAN  
(sighing exasperatedly)  
Then what. What. WHAT?

*Pause.*

WOMAN  
I didn't see it.

*Pause.*

MAN  
Lady, I don't--

WOMAN  
I didn't see it. I couldn't... see it.

*He stares at her. Then he slowly waves one hand in front of her face. She does not respond. She reaches for the box, fumbles for it, takes hold of it.*

WOMAN (CONT'D)  
So, that's fine. I'll just take it back home. Some sales are final, right?

MAN  
This one-- I'm sorry--

WOMAN  
I get it.

MAN  
I really am, I... I'm just doing my job.

WOMAN  
Of course you are.

*She takes out a cane from her bag, extends it, and turns to go, using it to guide herself. Stops, turns back.*

WOMAN (CONT'D)  
"They who have put out the people's eyes, reproach them of their blindness."

MAN  
What does that mean?

WOMAN  
Have you ever read Milton?

MAN  
No...

WOMAN  
(to herself)  
I guess I'm not the only one who's blind.

MAN  
...was I supposed to?

WOMAN  
No. But you could.  
(pause)  
After all, it's a free country.

END OF PLAY