

Is This Seat Taken?

A one act romance

by Sean Baker

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Is This Seat Taken?

Characters:

Laura, early 30s

Andy, 40s

Will, early 30s

Carrie, 40s

Scene: A hotel bar. LAURA is sitting at a table, empty glass in front of her, reading a book. ANDY is behind the bar. Enter WILL. He crosses to the bar, orders a drink and turns to see LAURA. He approaches her.

Will Is this seat taken?

Laura No.

Will Do you mind if I . . .

Laura No, no, please . . .

Will Thanks.

Pause

 Not been here before. Nice place.

Laura Yes.

Will Have you . . . ?

Laura Once or twice.

Pause

Will Like it here?

Laura Er..

Will Is it a good hotel?

Laura Yes, it's fine. Friendly you know.

Will Yes.

Pause

 Here alone?

Laura Yes.

Will Business or . . . ?

Laura Business.

Will Same. *(Pause)* I'm in lingerie.

Laura I beg your pardon?

Will Sales. I sell lingerie. Oh you didn't think . . . ?

Laura Well, you do get all sorts don't you?

Will Do you?

Laura So I've heard.

Will I suppose you do, yes. Not my thing though.

Laura What isn't?

Will You know, wearing, um...

Laura Glad to hear it.

Will You'd be surprised how many of our customers are men though.

Laura Birthday presents, I suppose. Guilty presents.

Will Oh no, for themselves.

Laura Weirdos.

Will Yes, as you say . . . weirdos.

Pause

Can I get you a drink?

Laura Bacardi and coke please.

Will Bacardi—?

Laura Double.

Will Right.

Laura Is that a problem?

Will No, no, just never had you down as a Bacardi and coke kind of girl.

Laura What are Bacardi and coke girls like?

Will Um, well, you know . . .

Laura I'm not sure I do.

Will It doesn't matter.

Will goes to the bar

Double Bacardi and coke please. And have you got any single malts?

Andy Glenlivet? Glenfiddich? Laphraoig?

Will Glenlivet's fine, water, no ice.

Andy Take a seat, I'll bring them over.

Will goes back to the table, sits. Pause.

Laura Are these on the company?
Will Yes, you don't get many perks, but hotel bar tabs are one of them.
What business are you in?
Laura Pharmaceuticals.
Will Oh right. Sounds interesting.
Laura No it doesn't, don't lie.
Will Alright, no it doesn't. Unless they're recreational obviously.
Laura Er..
Will You know . . . (*mimes drawing on a joint, smiles. LAURA stares at him. He then mimes snorting a line. She still stares, so he mimes an injection into the arm*)
I suppose you get that a lot.
Laura No, you're the first.
Will One to me, then.
Laura If you say so.
Pause
Will You have a husband?
Laura Yes.
Will Happy?
Laura I am, yes.
Long pause
Will Look—
Laura I can't / do this—
Will No, / it's my fault—
Laura No, / it's me—
Will No, you were great!
Laura I just feel / a bit self-conscious.
Will Pharmaceuticals? Where did that / come from?
Laura I know. First thing popped into my head.
Will And what does lingerie say about me?
Laura It was all I could do not to laugh.
Will I'm glad you didn't, that really would have killed it.
Laura Aren't we supposed to have fun?

Will Well, yes . . .

Laura I'm just not very good at thinking on my feet.

Will I know – Bacardi & coke!

Laura I'll probably have to drown it in coke.

Will I'll get you wine.

Laura It's ok. Might as well try and stay in character.

Will As long as it doesn't make you ill.

Laura I'll be fine.

ANDY brings the drinks, puts them on the table. Goes back to bar.

Will What did you mean by 'I am'?

Laura What?

Will When I asked if you were happy, you said 'I am'. You stressed the 'I' – do you think I'm not?

Laura I don't know – would you have suggested this if you were?

Will Yes. It's just a bit of fun. Don't read anything into it.

ANDY returns with bill pad for WILL to sign.

Laura Can we start again?

Will Good idea. Shall I come in again?

Laura I'll try and loosen up a bit more.

Will No, no, you were great.

Laura I was just being myself.

Will That frostiness, / very g—

Laura Are you saying I'm frosty?

Will No, no, of course not. I just meant in the scene, you know.

Laura Nerves. I'll do better this time.

Will Right, I'll come in again.

Laura Ok, I'm feeling a bit more relaxed now.

WILL walks away, pauses and returns.

Will Excuse me, is this seat taken.

Laura Yes.

Will Eh?

Laura Sorry, sorry, forgot. Try again.

Will I'm not going to do it if you're not taking it seriously.

Laura I am, I am, I promise. Try again.

WILL walks u/s, pauses and returns.

Will Excuse me, is this seat taken?

Laura Look, maybe it would be better if you said something different.

Will What like?

Laura I don't know. But you sound like you. I thought we were supposed to be role playing.

Will I am role playing.

Laura Well, say it differently.

Will Eh?

Laura Like in an accent or something.

Will I can't do accents.

Laura Try. It might help me get into it.

Will Ok.

He retreats and returns

(in a bad Scottish accent) Excuse me, is this seat—

Laura *(laughing)* What's that?

Will An accent.

Laura Where from?

Will Scotland.

Laura Not like any Scottish I've ever heard.

Will Oh, you've heard a lot of Scottish accents have you?

Laura A few. *(pause)* Why don't you try and say something different?

Will Such as?

Laura Don't say 'excuse me' for a start. That's so you. Be a bit more, I don't know, assertive.

Will Assertive?

Laura You know, say something like 'alright darlin, tonight's your lucky night'.

Will How do you know I've never said that before?

Laura Have you?

Will No. Anyway if I said that, you'd crack up.

Laura I don't mean exactly that obviously.

Will Ok, ok, I'll try again. But you're in danger of killing the mood, you know that, don't you?

Laura Right, serious face. This is it, we're going to do it this time.

Will Tell you what, why don't you start this time.

Laura Alright.

He moves u/s, pauses and returns. He sits down next to LAURA. Pause.

 Oh, it's me. Right, um...busy day?

Will Yes, hectic. You?

Laura Yes, quite busy.

Will Are you here on / business?

Laura Business, yes. You?

Will Yes. Alone?

Laura Yes. You?

Will Yes.

Laura And what line are you in?

Will Oh this and that. Import-export, you know the sort of thing.

Laura I've never really understood that.

Will What?

Laura The whole import-export thing. What does it mean? Exactly.

Will Well, I expect it—

Laura Expect? You mean you don't know?

Will Yes, yes, I know, of course I know. It means I, er, import things and er, export other things.

Laura Not the same things?

Will Sorry?

Laura Well, wouldn't it make sense to import something to then export it again?

Will I don't know, would it?

Laura You tell me.

Will Well, I—

Laura After all, you're the expert.

Will I never said that.

Laura You are the fount of all knowledge.

Will Now hang on—

Laura He who knows everything.

Will Where's this coming from?

Pause

Laura Do go on.

Will I er, import whisky. Yes, whisky, that's it. I import whisky from er, from South America and Australia and France.

Laura France?

Will Yes.

Laura And what do you do with this whisky?

Will Sell it.

Laura Who to?

Will Oh you know, off-licences, supermarkets, wine warehouses—

Laura Wouldn't wine warehouses do their own importing?

Will Sometimes. Possibly. Ok, not wine warehouses. Definitely off-licences though.

Laura Hmm. And what do you export?

Will Er..

Laura You said you were in import-export. We've established the import bit, which you've already said you don't then export. So what do you export?

Will Other . . . things?

Laura Such as . . .

Will Shoes.

Laura Shoes?

Will Yes, I source shoes from factories and then sell them in bulk to various countries around the world.

Laura Shoes and whisky?

Will I have eclectic tastes.

Laura All sounds incredibly boring.

Will Oh thanks. So you're saying I'm boring?

Laura Well, if the cap fits. Or in your case, the shoe.

Pause

Will That went well.

Laura I don't think I'm cut out for this.

Will You're not giving it a chance. You need to loosen up a bit.

Laura It's all my fault isn't it?

Will Relax a bit more.

Laura I knew this was a bad idea.

Will We can try again.

Laura What's the point? It'll just descend into another argument.

Will I would hardly call that an argument.

Laura What would you call it then?

Will A mis-step.

Laura Oh more middle-management speak.

Will Where did that come from?

Laura You. You can never just say the truth can you? It's always euphemisms and coded language designed not to hurt anyone.

Will It wasn't an argument. It might be turning into one—

Laura And whose fault is that?

Will Not mine.

Laura No, it never is, is it? *(Pause)* You wanted me to pretend to be a prostitute didn't you?

Will What?

Laura How many have you been to?

Will You've asked me that before.

Laura Well, how many?

Will You know the answer.

Laura I know what you told me.

Will You didn't believe me?

Laura I don't know.

Will You know I have – once. Just before Uni. In Amsterdam. It didn't mean anything.

Laura I should bloody hope it didn't. So is that what you wanted – for me to pretend to be her. A common tart?

Will No.

Laura Yes it was. That's exactly what you wanted. You wanted me to dress all tarty, act all tarty, be all over you like a bloody rash, stroking you—

Will Get off.

Laura Doing all those things prostitutes do?

Will I said get off.

He storms off. She looks after him, looks at her drink, thinks, goes to the bar and sits down.

Laura White wine please.

Pause.

I knew this wasn't a good idea. If it's not working when you're relaxed and at home, it's hardly likely to work in a strange hotel is it?

ANDY passes her a glass of white wine.

Thank you. Do you see that a lot?

Andy What's that?

Laura People storming off.

Andy You see all sorts. I try not to pay too much attention.

Laura He can be such an arsehole sometimes. I didn't really want to come you know. It was all his idea. It usually is. I don't mean I only do things to please him. It isn't like that. Not at all.

ANDY continues wiping glasses, tidying up

I wanted to come, to try something different. We used to all the time. Experiment. But it sort of changes over the years doesn't it? For everyone really. So I've read. You must see it all the time. Couples. Arguing at the end of the evening. I used to think it was just people of my parents' age. I said to him once, don't let us ever get like that will you. All arguments and rows and no love. He said as long as we keep working at it . . . Trouble is, his working at it and my working at it are two different things. *(Pause)* You married?

Andy Girlfriend.

Laura Do you ever role play?

Andy What do you mean?

Laura You know, pretend to be different people.

Andy Everyone does, don't they?

Laura I think I'm always myself.

Andy You don't think you're a different person with different people?

Laura No. Why would I be?

Andy People often are, aren't they?

Laura I don't think I am. I like to think I'm the same with everyone.

Andy Are you sure?

Laura Yes. I like to think it makes me natural, genuine.

Andy Let me give you an example. You're flirty, affectionate with your husband right?

Laura How do you know he was my husband?

Andy Call it a guess.

Laura Go on.

Andy You're flirty and affectionate with him?

Laura Sometimes.

Andy But I'm guessing you're not with your mother?

Laura Wow, you're good aren't you?

Andy There you are. You're a different person with different people.

Laura That's a rubbish example.

Andy Why? It's a perfectly good example.

Laura Everyone's different with their mother. It doesn't prove anything. If you asked me what books I like or what films I like or about my music tastes, you'd get the same answers as I give Will.

Andy So what are your favourite books?

Laura Are you hitting on me?

Andy I have a girlfriend.

Laura And that would stop you would it?

Andy It doesn't stop me asking what your favourite books are.

Laura Do you ask men the same question?

Andy Depends if I fancy them or not.

Pause

Laura My favourite book ever is *50 Shades of Grey*.

Andy Seriously?

Pause

Laura No. Sometimes I wish it was. It's actually *The Master and Margarita*.
Bet you've never heard of it.

Andy *(pause)* 'love leapt out in front of us like a murderer in an alley'.

Laura I'm impressed.

Andy You thought because I'm just a barman I couldn't possibly have read it?

Laura No.

Andy You get it all the time in this job. People think 'he's just a barman, he can't have much of a brain'.

Laura I didn't think that.

Andy They never think you do it because you enjoy it.

Laura I didn't think that.

Andy It's ok.

Laura But I didn't! I only said that because it's quite an obscure book and no-one I know has heard of it. You're the first person actually. Will thinks it's unreadable. Do you know any other quotes?

Andy Just that one. Why did you say *50 Shades*?

Laura I don't know. I think Will wishes I'd read it.

Andy I've read it.

Laura You haven't!

Andy More assumptions. My girlfriend's got it so I read it as well.

Laura What did you think?

Andy Rubbish, but it did give me lots of ideas.

Laura I told Will he's got another think coming if he wants me to get any ideas from it.

LAURA has finished her drink.

Andy Another one?

Laura I ought to go and find him really.

Andy He was the one who stormed off.

Laura I thought you didn't pay any attention to what went on.
(Pause, before pushing glass towards ANDY) Yes please.

Andy How long you been together?

Laura Fourteen years. Known each other a lot longer.

Andy Kids?

Laura Not yet.

Andy You want them?

Laura I do, he doesn't.

Andy What never?

Laura So he says.

Andy But you do?

Laura I just said.

Andy Big decision.

Laura You and your girlfriend have children?

Andy She's got a daughter from a long time back. Seventeen. Bit of a handful.

Laura I'd like a daughter.

Andy Just a daughter?

Laura And a son.

Andy I can't imagine being a dad.

Laura What about your girlfriend's daughter? Aren't you a dad to her?

Andy Not really – I've only known them a year or so.

Laura How did you meet?

Andy Online.

Laura Like a dating website?

Andy Sort of.

Laura What does "sort of" mean?

Andy A specific kind of dating site. *(Pause)* For people who just like to meet online, but you never plan on actually meeting.

Laura Why . . . ?

Andy But we seemed to get on and then we found we both lived in Brighton. What are the chances eh?

Laura Hmm.

Andy And here we are, just over a year later.

Laura We met at school. Will and me.

Andy Childhood sweethearts? Isn't that what they call it?

Laura We didn't start going out together till we were twenty.

Andy What took you so long?

