

"CUSTOMER SERVICE" (StageMilk, 2025)

By

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INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

A sparse, fluorescent-soaked interview room. At the grey table, suspect BEVAN sits alone: tapping out a rapid rhythm with his fingertips, and pausing every now and then to wipe his perpetually sweaty brow.

The door BUZZES open and his lawyer, CLIFF enters. BEVAN takes one look at the man and smiles.

BEVAN

Sight for sore eyes, counsellor!

CLIFF

Bevan Ross? It's been a while.

BEVAN

Yeah, I know the feeling: you like me well enough you never want to see me again!

CLIFF

Something like that. What have you said to them?

BEVAN

Nothing at all. Just to call my good man at law Mister Cliff and send word of his arrival.

CLIFF

Good, then. What's the trouble?

BEVAN

No trouble. Honest!

CLIFF

So you weren't harassing and coercing six elderly women?

BEVAN

Jesus! Is- is that what they're saying? 'cause that sounds fucked. Like I'm not going to come across well at all if that's the charge...

CLIFF

Why don't you tell me what happened?

BEVAN sits up and prepares himself to tell a story: the only thing he truly excels at.

BEVAN

As of late, I have been frequenting the Royal Hotel in Scotch Crescent. It's a quiet place off the main drag, practically empty from two 'til seven.

CLIFF

And what is it you do there?

BEVAN

Drink. And think. Mostly think. Out the back, they have this little room for the pokies. Now I don't touch the fucken things, but I like it in there because I can smoke indoors, and on the weekends they put on a spread.

CLIFF

A spread?

BEVAN

Tea, coffee, few bickies. I'd go in there, have a smoke and address my blood sugar. So I'm in there one day making tea and I hear this little voice say "*Mine's a milky one with two!*" I nearly shit myself because I thought I was alone. But I turn around and there's this little lady. Gladys. What was I supposed to do?

CLIFF

What do you mean?

BEVAN

Do I *not* make tea for Gladys? When I'm right there and she's asking so politely? So I make her a milky one with two and we get to talking. She's telling me about her son, her late husband, putting her pension down the pokes. Pretty soon I'm making us another round and I'm looking at photos of grandkids.

CLIFF

This is Gladys Bowers?

BEVAN

Hey you know what'd clear this up? If you called Gladys yourself.

CLIFF

I fully intend to.

BEVAN

Call them all! Because I promise you this is a put-up job. Where was I? Photos of grandkids. Gladys has six. There's Cody, Tyrone-

CLIFF

Bevan, I'm going to stop you there. Did you harass or coerce Gladys Bowers into giving you money?

BEVAN

Absolutely not.

CLIFF

Did you harass or coerce any of Gladys Bowers' friends into giving you money?

BEVAN

They gave me that money! Freely! First it was just Gladys: said it was a cut of her winnings and I was her good luck charm. But then the next week she brings a few of her girlfriends along. Suddenly I'm making tea and coffee for the C.W.A. and playing host. Like a concierge-

BEVAN snaps his fingers.

BEVAN (CONT'D)

That's it! It wasn't coercion: they were tips. For my customer service at the Royal!

CLIFF

But you don't work at the Royal, Bevan.

BEVAN

Beg to differ. I was there every weekend for six weeks to take care of those ladies. And it's not just tea and coffee and good luck. I listen to them, I look at their photos and hear about their doctor visits. I'd have been there today if it weren't for...

CLIFF

For Mark Bowers making a complaint?

BEVAN

It's not his fault, Cliff. He's not present in her life: he's got those six kids to raise.

CLIFF

Okay. I'm going down the hall to have a word with the constable, and then I'll try my best to speak to Gladys directly.

BEVAN

I wouldn't hurt them, Cliff.

CLIFF

I believe you.

CLIFF stands and nods his goodbye. Before he can leave:

BEVAN

Cliff? If you speak to Gladys ... can fib about where I am?

Beat.

CLIFF

I'll try to avoid specifics.