

Gary Duehr
9 Oliver St.
Somerville, MA 02145
(617) 628-1021
gduehr@comcast.net

I Hate Everyone

A full-length play in two acts

(Based on Moliere's *The Misanthrope*)

By Gary Duehr

The time: Now.

The setting: Washington, DC, at SAM's townhouse in Georgetown.

A note on the form. The play is set in rhymed couplets in iambic hexameter, based on Moliere's original Alexandrines: rhymed couplets with lines of 12 syllables each, including a caesura or pause in the middle of each line.

Cast

(Moliere's original names in italics)

LEE (*Alceste*), the title misanthrope who hates society's hypocrisy and lies, but who has a blind spot in his affection for SAM. (Male, 30ish.)

PHIL (*Philinte*), LEE's best friend from childhood, who urges reason and going along with social norms. (Male, 30ish.)

SAM (*Celimene*), the magnetic center about whom everyone revolves; she is flirtatious and strong-minded with a savage wit, more than a match for LEE. (Female, mid-20s.)

LIZ (*Eliante*), SAM's cousin; she is straightforward and articulate, and she admires LEE's honesty. (Female, mid-20s.)

GARRETT (*Oronte*), an aspiring poet and one of SAM's many suitors. (Male, mid-30s.)

CHARLEY (*Acaste*), another of SAM's suitors, who has a healthy ego, and who is very well connected. (Male, mid-30s.)

ANDRE (*Clitandre*), yet another of SAM's suitors, an eccentric power broker behind the scenes. (Male, mid-30s.)

CUTLER (*Arsinoe*), SAM's "friend," though several years older; she's a far-right talk show host. (Female, mid-40s.)

BLAKE (*Basque*), SAM's assistant. (Male or female, mid-20s.)

DREW (*Dubois*), LEE's intern, a comic bumbling figure. (Male or female, 20ish.)

Process Server (*A Guard*), who serves court papers. (Male, 40s or 50s.)

Act 1

(A cocktail party at SAM's townhouse)

PHIL

You don't look well. Are you okay?

LEE

Yes, I'm okay.

PHIL

But Sam will miss you, Lee. Her party—

LEE

Go away.

I need some time alone.

PHIL

For once you might just try
To listen to what's said, and not get so—

LEE

But why?

It's my choice to be deaf. It's my choice to get mad.

PHIL

Lee, listen, I'm your friend. That's why it makes me sad
To see you sulk like this. If you—

LEE

My friend? My friend?

Don't patronize me with this flattery; don't bend
Yourself in two for me. So far, yes, I've agreed
That I'm your friend, but what I saw back there, your need
To suck up to those sharks, makes me hereby withdraw
All my respect for you. We can't be friends. Your flaw
Corrupts you utterly.

PHIL

So you think I'm to blame?
Is that your story, Lee?

LEE

Go kill yourself from shame.
That's my advice. There's no excuse for what you do.
And everyone who watched should be disgusted too.
I see you almost choke someone you barely know
By hugging him too hard, and then you stop the show
By telling him how great his vision is, his views
On fiscal spending, how you'd like for him to use
Your condo any time. You won't release your grip.
You promise him your deep, everlasting friendship.
But later when I ask, discreetly, "Who is he?,"
You can't recall his name. That's what makes me dizzy.

As soon as he escapes to get a glass of wine,
 Your feelings for him cool: "He's just some guy." Your spine
 Is weak, you're such a wimp for social niceties.
 You don't know who you are. You grovel just to please.
 If I had acted in this way in front of them,
 I'd kill myself right now. And that's what I condemn.

PHIL

I don't agree that it's a crime worth dying for.
 That's why I'm asking you, though you think I'm a bore,
 To show some leniency. If it's the same to you,
 I plan to live a long and useful life.

LEE

You through?

You think it's all a joke?

PHIL

Then how should people act?

LEE

Be honest, be sincere. Don't spread a lie as fact.

PHIL

But when a stranger treats you like a long-lost pal,
 You should reciprocate, I think, for his morale.
 Just hug him back and match him thanks for thanks in kind.

LEE

No thanks. It's not for me. I can't turn off my mind
 So easily. If that's the way that things are done
 In Washington these days, I'd rather use a gun.
 There's nothing I detest so much as lobbyists
 Who regulate themselves, K-Street contortionists
 Whose ethics twist in knots; who always fly first class
 To stay above the fray—then kick you in the ass
 If you subpoena them. For what good does it do
 If someone piles on praise, says he believes in you,
 Vows he's your only friend; says he finds your ideas
 Original, so new; for your career he is
 A wild enthusiast, and shouts you to the skies—
 When he'll spew out the same to anyone likewise.
 No, no! No one who has the slightest self-esteem
 Would let himself be pimped like that; it's too extreme
 To share these compliments with half the universe.
 They're meaningless at best. And that they're false is worse.
 To say you love us all, means that you love no one.
 You can't just make it up, based on your opinion.
 Since you have joined the clique where lying is in style,
 You're not the friend for me. I know that I'm worthwhile.
 Do I require applause? Not really, I don't care.
 Still I think I'm unique. I like to lay things bare.
 I can't be friends, to cut the matter short, with one
 Who's friends with all mankind. I'm sorry, Phil, we're done.

PHIL

But we live in the world, at least I know I do.
We have to follow rules, which help us—

LEE

Good for you!

But these rules make no sense. I think that we should whip
Each person who pretends to counterfeit friendship.
I think a man should be a man, who holds his view
No matter what the times. Let's say what we find true
And never let our core give way to vanity.

PHIL

But what about when talk leads to inanity?
To say what's on one's mind would be ridiculous,
And brutal honesty would cause a major fuss.
Though being candid's nice, and has abstract appeal,
Perhaps we should conceal, at times, what we each feel.
Would it be right to tell some strangers on the street
Exactly what we think of them? And when we meet
Someone who we despise, should we then volunteer
Our feelings openly, and say we are sincere?

LEE

We should.

PHIL

You'd tell a Rep. who's up for his next run
That he's too vain, and he repulses everyone?

LEE

Without a pause.

PHIL

What of a judge who bores us all
About his knee repair, his back—you mean you'd call
For quiet in the court?

LEE

Point blank.

PHIL

You're joking, Lee.

LEE

I promise you I'm not. There is no dignity
In sparing anyone. It hurts my eyes too much
To see this widespread fraud; it drives me mad for such
Corruption to take hold. Moroseness fills my thoughts.
See how the swamp behaves? I'm miserable, I'm lost.
Self-dealing, ego, crass deceit—it blows my mind.
My plan is set at last: to break off from mankind.

PHIL

Your harsh philosophy is way too much for me.
It makes me laugh out loud, not for absurdity,

But at your gloomy moods. Do you recall the play
We acted in at school? How we both fought, the way
That brothers fight. You were always so serious—

LEE

Please drop this memory lane.

PHIL

Don't be delirious!

I'll stop it if you do. The world will never change
Because you yell at it. You always act so strange.
And when you preach about the truth, your rudeness makes
You look ridiculous. You're like a farce. Those fakes
You satirize all laugh behind your back at you.
You're their entertainment. I'm sorry but it's true.

LEE

So let them laugh, the more the better, go ahead.
Their scorn is what I want. They're like the walking dead,
So any sign of life is good; it makes me feel
That I'm alive for once! Most men are so surreal,
They're hideous to me. I like to watch them crawl,
No matter how they beg.

PHIL

You hate them, one and all?

LEE

I do. My hatred for mankind is fresh and pure.

PHIL

For everyone? Without exception? Are you sure?
Don't some of them, due to their circumstance, deserve
A second chance?

LEE

Not one. I hate without reserve.

They're all alike, bar none. I hate some men because
They're narcissistic jerks; they think the laws
Apply to someone else. And I hate all their aides,
The ones who've lost their shame and take part in charades
Of doing public good. How many people act
Complacent, how they bow to Brock, that far-right hack
Who's suing me in court because I told the truth.
I just said what I thought. Does that make me uncouth?
So be it. I've heard worse. Of course you can see through
His shtick: that honeyed voice, his gaze that pierces you.
We all get what he is: a criminal, a thug.
The only ones he fools don't know him. He's their drug.
Cue music for his tale: how he used dirty tricks
To climb up from the sticks, and now he gets his kicks
From making backroom deals. So why should people care?
Though nasty epithets could launch from anywhere
To shoot Brock down, no one defends his sleazy role.
Call him a crook, a cheat, a con, then take a poll:
The world will all applaud, and no one contradict.

His stupid, smiling face is welcomed, he gets picked
 As honorary chair; he's first in line at wakes
 To shake their soft white paws, and every camera makes
 Him look so dignified. He finds a way to crash
 Each photo op, each top black-tie affair, each bash.
 And if some prominent appointment can be got
 By calling in a debt, he'll get it; that's his lot.
 I'm telling you, dear Phil, it stabs me in the gut
 To see how meanness wins. Sometimes I want to put
 A million miles between myself and everyone.
 I'd build a little hut, and lie out in the sun.

PHIL

My god, could we torment ourselves a little less
 And give ourselves a break? It's not our fault. It's stress.
 Let's not interrogate with such severity
 Each little thing; instead, let's blame society,
 Since everyone could be a bit more flexible.
 Don't try to act so smart. Our fate is mutual.
 Be sensible. Avoid extremes. Get serious.
 That's what the worst of times, like now, require of us.
 If you try to be good by sticking to the rules,
 Then it will be a shock to all the local fools.
 Perfection asks too much. You have to go along
 To get along these days, and not right every wrong.
 Why try to fix the world? That's crazy. It's not fun.
 Each day I see some things that could be better done.
 But I don't get upset. I don't lash out at friends.
 Instead I take a breath and try to make amends.
 I make my peace with life and its uncertainty.
 I take things as they are. And my philosophy
 Works just as well as yours.

LEE

So you believe your mood,
 Its easygoing vibe, could not be switched from good
 To bad so suddenly? What if a friend betrays
 By stealing what is yours and leaves you in a daze?
 Or what if people leak fake news behind your back?
 Would you politely bow or go on the attack?

PHIL

I look upon these faults, about which you complain,
 As inextricably embedded in our brain.
 In short, I'm no more shocked to see someone act bad—
 Unjust or selfishly—than watching wolves who've nabbed
 A rabbit in their jaws, or vultures circling prey.

LEE

I have to let myself be lied to, turned away,
 Get torn to pieces, robbed—without a single peep?
 I'm done with reason, Phil. Your learning curve's too steep.

PHIL

Here's my advice. Stay calm, and yell a little less
 At all your enemies. Keep close watch on that mess

With Brock's nasty lawsuit.

LEE

Oh, that? Relax, I'm through.

PHIL

But who do you expect to be defense for you?

LEE

For me? Equality, and justice for a start.

PHIL

You'll represent yourself?

LEE

Not me, I'll play no part.

But do you think my side is weak or dubious?

PHIL

Of course not. We're agreed. But you know what a fuss
That people make—

LEE

So what? I'm either wrong or right.

PHIL

Don't trust in that alone.

LEE

I won't put up a fight.

I will not budge an inch.

PHIL

But Brock is powerful,

And he might try some things—

LEE

So let him try to pull

Some strings, I just don't care.

PHIL

You're making a mistake.

LEE

So be it. Let it end.

PHIL

But what—

LEE

I'll have my cake

And eat the icing too. The lawsuit will be done.

PHIL

You want to lose?

LEE

I do.

PHIL

But after all—

LEE

What fun

Is there in winning now? My satisfaction lies
In sheer, unvarnished loss. I'll see with my own eyes
How twisted men can be, how devious—meanwhile
The whole world watches as I crash and burn in style.

PHIL

You're such a strange one, Lee!

LEE

And never mind the cost.

It's worth it, every cent, to make sure that I've lost.

PHIL

But Lee, you know some guys will laugh you out of town.

LEE

So much the worse for them.

PHIL

Okay, let's nail this down.

Your sense of righteousness, your need for absolute
Integrity, which you command that we salute,
Do you believe that they're a quality of hers,
That goddess you adore? For me, all this refers
To your pathology. I'm stunned, it's out of place—
That you, who's waging war upon the human race;
That you, despite the list of what you call awful,
With Sam, you suddenly decide that it's all lawful.
Yes, Sam's the real surprise, your woman of the year.
Though Lizzie is sincere, and Cutler, she's severe—
And though they both admire your ethos (god knows why)—
You don't pick either one. It's Sam you're triggered by.
She toys with you, she flirts with others shamelessly;
She fires her deadly wit at targets aimlessly—
And cares not whom she hits. How is it you, who hate
These things so totally, could hang around and wait
To hear a hopeful word? Are flaws no longer flaws
When covered up with charm? Or is it just "because"?

LEE

I see just who she is. I offer no excuse.
When she looks back at me, then how could I refuse?
I'll be the first in line to prosecute her crimes.
But even so, I do confess to all the times
I turn weak in the knees. She knows just how to please.
I see her play her games, I watch how she can tease.
I blame her for her faults, and still I'm at a loss.

I hope my honesty will be the special sauce
That purifies her soul.

PHIL

My friend, that's no small task.
Does she love you as much as you love her?

LEE

Don't ask.
Of course she does! That's why I'm on this odyssey.

PHIL

But if her love's so strong, why does your jealousy
Flare up so dangerously?

LEE

Because a love that's real
Wants all love for itself. And that is why I feel
So deeply, utterly. I'll tell Sam she's my fate.

PHIL

If I could choose your mate, her cousin Liz should wait
To get a sign from you. For Lizzie is so fair,
So honest in her ways.

LEE

That's true. She's always there.
I know just what she means. But common sense is lost
On matters of the heart. No matter what the cost.

PHIL

I hope the days ahead, though difficult, will hold
A happy end for you.

(Garrett pokes his head in, then enters)

GARRETT

Excuse me, I've been told
I'd find you two out here, and Sam's out cold upstairs.
I'd like to tell you, Lee, though you are unawares,
How close I feel to you. That for the longest time,
I'm dreamt we could be friends, that I could somehow climb
Into your little club, if you'd consider me.
I've heard your name for years, though it's a mystery.
"It's not clear what he's done: CIA? NSC?"
Though you may not know me, my name is Garrett, Lee.
I pray our being friends will one day unite us.
I know I've had a drink. I feel a bit anxious.
I hope that someone who's a person of my taste
Will not be turned away too quickly, in disgrace.

*(All this time LEE has been lost in thought, seemingly unaware
that GARRETT is talking to him. He looks up only when GARRETT continues.)*

Excuse me, Lee, it's you that I am talking to.

LEE
To me?

GARRETT
Yes, you. Have I somehow offended you?

LEE
Not in the least. But I'm surprised at all this praise.

GARRETT
You shouldn't be. It's not just me. To coin a phrase,
The world hangs on your words.

LEE
But I—

GARRETT
We want to read
Your op-ed piece, we track—

LEE
But I—

GARRETT
Your Twitter feed,
Your Instagram, your blog.

LEE
But I—

GARRETT
May all the gods
Destroy me if I lie! And may the Vegas odds
Convince you, here and now, of my true feelings' depth.
And now if you'll allow—I'm almost out of breath—
To hug you as a friend. I'd like to shake your hand
To seal the deal.

LEE
But I—

GARRETT
What don't you understand?
Are you refusing me?

LEE
You give me too much cred.
You lay it on too thick. If half of what you said
Is half true, I should blush. Please try to use some tact.
I look at friendship as a kind of sacred pact.
Before we go too far, so there is no remorse,
Let's get acquainted first—and later we'll divorce.

GARRETT

That's so well put! I like you even more for it!
 You're right, let's give things time to settle down a bit.
 Meanwhile I'd like to help. You know how here and there
 I'm friends with everyone. I have ears everywhere
 To feed me inside dope. The White House Chief of Staff
 Invites me in for lunch, where we all have a laugh.
 In short, dear Lee, I'm yours if there's an urgent need.
 And since you wield a pen like me, I'd like to read—
 In honor of our bond—a memoir that I wrote.
 I made it up just now. I hope it gets your vote.
 I want to find out if, depending on your crit,
 I should delete it all or try to publish it.

LEE

I am not fit to judge. You'll have to excuse me.

GARRETT

Why not?

LEE

It's all my fault. But please don't abuse me.
 When asked, "What do you think?," I'm too sincere for it.

GARRETT

That's what I want from you! I'll protest if you split
 A hair or hold things back. Tell me the honest facts,
 So help you god.

LEE

Okay, if that is what you ask.

GARRETT

A memoir. It's in verse. "Hope." For someone whose hope
 Once prompted mine too. "Hope." You'll notice how the trope
 Of hope recurs, each line into the next. It's not
 Too long, I hope.

LEE

We'll see.

GARRETT

Where was I? I forgot.
 Right, "Hope." I hope you find the writing is as free
 And easy as you like.

LEE

We'll see, eventually.

GARRETT

And whether you approve the choice of words I used.
 It took just half an hour.

LEE

Just read! I feel abused.

GARRETT (*Reads*)
On my first day of work
As I passed through the gate,
I hoped that my one perk
Would be to meet my fate.

PHIL
 I like the start. It's nice. The rhythm has a flow.

LEE (*Softly to PHIL*)
 Come on! You can't tell me you like this rot. Let's go.

GARRETT (*Reads*)
With POTUS on the Beast—
Thick-armored and with glass
That's bulletproof—at least
My hope had come to pass.

PHIL
 How philosophical! Its details feel so real.

LEE (*To PHIL*)
 You moron! Don't tell me you like this doggerel.

GARRETT
If hope is like the wave
Of crowds that we pass by,
Then why try hard to save
This moment? Tell me why
That longing must go on
If hope so soon is gone.

PHIL
 It's brilliant, Garrett! Wow. The end brought me to tears.

LEE (*To PHIL*)
 It almost made me retch! You should clean out your ears.

PHIL
 Such rhyming, so well—

LEE (*To PHIL*)
 Ha!

GARRETT (*To PHIL*)
 Please stop your flattery.

PHIL
 It's not.

LEE (*To PHIL*)
 If not, then what? You batter me
 With your stupidity.

GARRETT (*To LEE*)

All right, time to confess.
Just give it to me straight.

LEE

These matters, more or less,
Are always delicate, a question of one's taste.
Aren't writers human too? Who doesn't want some praise.
But as I said one day to someone—just a guy,
Whose name shall be withheld—I told this guy that I
Suggest that he not scratch is versifying itch
When inspiration hits, because that itch's glitch
Could turn his verse from bad to worse. Don't lift a pen.
Keep strict control. Stay still. Don't think a madeleine
Will bring your childhood back. It's your anxiety
That makes you want to bare your feelings publicly.
Don't do it. Don't become the village idiot.

GARRETT

You think it's wrong of me to try to publish it?

LEE

I don't say that. But I told him that lack of style
Can be a bore, that there is nothing less worthwhile.
Just one bad line can lead a good man to disgrace.
We only think the worst, despite a dozen traits
That argue otherwise.

GARRETT

But in my verse were there
Some things you didn't like?

LEE

I don't say that. I'm fair.
And yet to make him quit, I told him that to write
Has harmful side effects.

GARRETT

Am I that bad?

LEE

Not quite,
I don't say that. In short, I asked him what desire
Was forcing him to rhyme, what drove him to conspire
With printers, publishers. We pardon those bad books
By starving authors. They need money, they're not crooks.
So don't be led into temptation, but resist
The urge to memoirize, to tell when you've been kissed.
No matter how you're asked, remember who you are:
Someone who has good sense, and won't be pushed too far.
I told him, stand aside. Let the greedy printer
Print the shabby author. Everyone's a winner.

GARRETT

Well, that's all well and good. I think I understand.
But in my poetry—

LEE

I now hereby demand
 You put it in your drawer. And that's my best advice.
 Your style's too trendy, too abstract and imprecise.
 Nobody talks like that; it isn't natural.
 "On my first day of work." What's that! It's very dull.
 "Would be to meet my fate." It's so contrived, genteel.
 "With POTUS on the beast." Just tell us what you feel.
 "If hope so soon is gone." This artificial mode
 That's selling books these days is written in a code
 That's fake, untrue, and trite, the latest thing that's chic.
 I hate the modern age. Some years ago, they'd speak
 With raw, unpolished words, but in a voice that's true.
 Much better than this fluff. Here's Abba, just for you.

(Sings)

*Waterloo I was defeated, you won the war
 Waterloo promise to love you, forever more
 Waterloo couldn't escape if I wanted to
 Waterloo knowing my fate is to be with you
 Waterloo finally facing my Waterloo*

The imagery is plain, the style is out of date,
 But doesn't it, compared to modern junk, talk straight?

(Sings)

*Waterloo I was defeated, you won the war
 Waterloo promise to love you, forever more
 Waterloo couldn't escape if I wanted to
 Waterloo knowing my fate is to be with you
 Waterloo finally facing my Waterloo*

You see? That's what someone who's lost in love would say.

(To PHIL, who's laughing)

Oh sure, just laugh at it! But listen to the way
 This old tune touches us, much more than puffed-up stuff
 That everyone applauds these days. I've heard enough.

GARRETT

And I maintain, despite your crit, my verse shows skill.

LEE

I'm sure you have your grounds. But I have mine, which will,
 If you'll allow, maintain their independent state.

GARRETT

That others like my work is all I need.

LEE

That's great.
 Because they all know how to lie, and I do not.

GARRETT

You think that only you have wit.

LEE

If I forgot
To praise this junk, then I'd have more.

GARRETT

I'll do just fine
Without your good reviews.

LEE

You'll have to, so don't whine.

GARRETT

I'd like for you to try a poem in this style,
Upon a similar theme

LEE

It might take me a while,
And turn out just as bad, but I would never share
My scribbling with the world.

GARRETT

So you've got guts to spare.

LEE

Find someone else at home to flatter you, not me.

GARRETT

Don't be a snob.

LEE

In fact, I'll be the one you see
In front of you. Now leave.

PHIL (*Coming between them*)

Come on, you two! It's gone
Too far. Shake hands, before you both pace off at dawn.

GARRETT

I leave the field to you. I'm wrong, I must confess.

LEE

And I, of course, wish you and yours complete success.

(GARRETT bows and leaves)

PHIL

Well, there you are. You see? By being too sincere
You alienate our friends. And Garrett needs, it's clear,
Some kind words. You refuse.

LEE

Don't talk to me.

PHIL

But you—

LEE

No more of your society for me.

PHIL

This is too much.

LEE

Leave me alone.

PHIL

If I—

LEE

Don't say

Another single word.

PHIL

But what—

LEE

Please go away.

PHIL

But what—

LEE

Again?

PHIL

If you—

(SAM enters)

LEE

I've asked you twice: get out!

PHIL

You're making fun of me.

(PHIL leaves)

SAM

What's all the fuss about?

LEE

Not much. I'm glad you're here. I'm so dissatisfied
With your behavior, Sam. I'm angry, I'm beside
Myself at your deceit. I think we have to split.
You know as well as I it's over, *fini*, done.
If I could make things different, I'd do it. You have won.
It's all unbearable, unthinkable, alright?

SAM

I see! So you hung out to start a stupid fight?

LEE

No, I don't want to fight. But I think you're too nice
With strangers, friends, et al. Let me give some advice.
Just like tonight, your doors are open to the mob.
They drink, they flirt, they fight, and you think it's your job.

SAM

Am I to blame because I'm open, likeable?
If it my fault they think that I'm desirable?
How could I change their minds? Should I pick up a stick
To drive them all away? You're so perverse, you're sick.
They only want to schmooze.

LEE

You can put down your stick.
But you could tone it down a little, Sam—don't lick
Your lips or touch your hair. I know the way you look
Is in your DNA, it follows you, a hook
That snags them in the gut. But don't tug on the line,
Just let them flop around. Your laughter is a sign
That you'll surrender soon. Maintain your privacy.
Be distant. Act aloof. Look tough. Don't let them see
The softer side I know, and watch how they retreat.
But tell me what Andre has done to raise the heat?
What traits, what qualities caught your discerning eye?
His ponytail? His rings? That he's the cool bad guy?
Do you, like all DC, lap up his campaign tales
Of wild debauchery? Or do his lacquered nails,
His neck tattoos of snakes, make your pulse race a bit?
Is it his three-piece suits, with pocket square, that hit
You in your pleasure zone? Does he say he's your slave
While grunting at your feet, an apeman in a cave?

SAM

How dare you tear him down! You know I tolerate
His presence for one thing: he's promised to donate,
Pro bono, all his fees to prosecute my case.

LEE

Then lose your lawsuit, Sam. I hate his smirking face.

SAM

You're getting jealous now of everyone on earth!

LEE

Because you let them see exactly what you're worth!

SAM

Ah. Ah. I get it now. So that's why you object?
Because I'm generous? Instead, you should respect
My evenhandedness. That I treat all the same
Should comfort you. Should I prefer just one? How lame.

LEE

But as for me, whom you accuse of jealousy—
What's left, when they're all gone, for me and only me?

SAM

The happiness you get from being my soul mate.

LEE

What evidence is there to prove that I'm your fate?

SAM

Because I told you so. And that should be enough.

LEE

But how can I be sure you don't say the same stuff
To all the other guys?

SAM

You sure know how to make
A pretty speech, my love. Don't try hard for my sake.
It's plain just what you think of me, and it's not nice.
I'm not a prostitute, but I still have my price.
To stamp out your mistrust, and ban all suspicion,
I now hereby retract all that I've said and done.
Congrats! No one but you is yours. You're free and clear
To do just what you like. You happy now, my dear?

LEE

My god, you drive me wild! If I survive this trial,
I'll drop and kiss the dirt. Although I try to smile,
I'll do my best to rip away your stranglehold
That chokes my bloody heart. Dear Sam, your hands are cold.
I love you for my sins.

SAM

It's true your loyalty
Surpasses anyone's.

LEE

How could those jerks beat me?
I challenge the whole world! No one has loved like me.

SAM

This strategy is new. You bicker endlessly
About the smallest things, and then your feelings vent
Explosively. No one can win your argument;
You're such a grumbling putz.

LEE

But you and you alone
Can wipe away these moods. Let's stop, let's both atone
For any past disputes. Let's try to end this sham
And deal more openly.

(BLAKE enters)

SAM *(To BLAKE)*

What's up?

BLAKE

But Charley wants—

Excuse me, Sam,

SAM

That's fine, please tell him I'm in here.

(BLAKE leaves)

LEE

Why can't we talk alone, without an extra ear?
You're always ready to play host with company.
For once please let him be, and focus just on me.

SAM

So you want me to fight with Charley now? I won't.

LEE

Your problem is that you like people, and I don't.

SAM

But Charley's not the type to pardon easily,
If he gets hurt or thinks that he's annoying me.

LEE

And what is that to you? A little awkwardness?

SAM

My god! You have to ask! Can you begin to guess
The circles he moves in? He knows the ones who know
The members of the Club. *(See Slate, Politico.)*
On Sunday morning shows, he can do good or harm.
So which one would you choose? You shouldn't raise alarm
With people in Town Cars. Someday you'll need a ride.

LEE

No matter what they do, you always take their side.
In short, you make—

(BLAKE enters)

BLAKE

Andre's here too.

LEE

Just what I mean.

(He starts to leave)

SAM

Where are you running to?

LEE
Some place I've never been.

SAM
Stay.

LEE
For what?

SAM
Stay.

LEE
It's late.

SAM
I want you to.

LEE
I'm done.
The gossip makes my ears get tired. You call that fun?
I'm out of here.

SAM
I want you to. I need you to.

LEE
That is impossible.

SAM
Get out! We'll have to do
Without your rudeness here. Just go. I don't care where.

(LIZ enters with PHIL)

LIZ *(To SAM)*
You know who's out there, Sam?

SAM *(Laughing)*
I do. My group daycare.

(To LEE)
You're not gone yet?

LEE
I'm not. Now tell me, if you dare,
Have you made up your mind? Them or me.

SAM
That's not fair.
Will you be quiet, Lee?

LEE
I will if you explain.

SAM
You've lost your mind.

LEE
Not me. I am completely sane.

SAM
Who, you!

LEE
Just take a stand.

SAM
You're toying with me, right?

LEE
I'm not. But you must choose. I'll wait here half the night.

(ANDRE and CHARLEY burst in, laughing)

ANDRE *(To SAM)*

My god, I've just come from the Hill, where on Fox News
Poor Leon made himself ridiculous, to use
The kindest term. Why won't he learn some couth?

SAM

That he's embarrassing is only half the truth.
They say that in DC the most endangered place
Is in between a lens and Leon's mugging face.
To share his microphone is pure futility,
Like a banana with a ravenous monkey—
He'll fling his feces right at you.

CHARLEY

You want absurd?
I'm thinking of dear Fred, who always gets last word
Because he's got them all. Just now he bored me stiff
With his slow Southern drawl.

SAM

His stories *are* a gift.
He finds a way, y'all, to say the very least
While wasting the most time. I swear that he's deceased.

CHARLEY

Maybe they'll prop him up with Ray Bans on his nose
Like *Weekend at Bernie's*.

SAM

He's got the tan, the clothes.

LIZ *(To PHIL)*

They're off to a good start! It's fun to watch them slam
Their colleagues, one by one.

ANDRE

And what of Kirsti, Sam?

SAM

A cipher, head to toe. But she's original.
 With hair striped like a skunk, she's anything but dull.
 Although she plays the host by rushing here and there,
 She never does a thing, but glance around and glare.
 With her it's all a big conspiracy, a plot.
 She'll kill a tete-a-tete by telling you what's what.
 And what's the state secret she whispers in your ear?
 It's nothing, nada, zilch. There's nothing there to fear
 But Kirsti's fear itself. And then she's off to schmooze
 Her next victims slash guests.

CHARLEY

What's Jerry got to lose?

SAM

My god, to hear his name out loud just makes me yawn!
 His stories last all night, as he drops names till dawn,
 Reminding us his pals are on the town's A-List:
 That judge or this anchor, that felon novelist.
 His status is his life, that's all he cares about.
 The funds he raised, the wives who staked his last blowout.
 And if you're on the front of *National Review*,
 He'll act like your best friend and suck right up to you.

ANDRE

They say he knows Nicole.

SAM

That silly, stupid thing!
 She'll put you right to sleep. When she drops by to cling,
 I nominate myself for abject martyrdom.
 What's left to say to her? She makes my teeth go numb.
 There's no thought in her head; her face is just a blank.
 You try to break the spell, but she is no think-tank.
 You offer any theme—rain, heat, travel—the most
 Mundane of subjects get exhausted. Yet as host
 I have to play the part, though she stays mute too long.
 The minutes drag, the clock slows down. But there's no gong
 To rescue me from her.

CHARLEY

So tell me what's the deal
 With Chairman Quinn?

SAM

His pride, his ego, it's unreal!
 He's so puffed up he's like a human piñata.
 He has to have the best corner table—what a
 Shameless jerk—at the Palm; then complains his dry-aged,

Bone-in prime rib's too rare. At slights he gets enraged:
 At every TV "ask" where he's not asked, at each
 Foundation board that's bored and kicks him off—that leech.

ANDRE

And what's the word on Ben, the kid who draws a crowd
 To his black-tie events?

SAM

His chef is what has wowed
 The "formers" this or that, the pundits and hired guns.
 He's such a lucky boy, like dads want for their sons.
 Yet when his star turn's done, they eat, they drink, they leave.

LIZ

He does lay out a spread.

SAM

That's true, but I believe
 His dishes would improve if he did not dish up
 Himself as well. Sweet thing. He's such a foolish pup.

PHIL

But everyone looks up to young Ben's uncle, right?

SAM

Yes, Justin is a friend.

PHIL

He's so well read, if trite.

SAM

If only he did not pretend to so much wit.
 It's such a bad habit. Right in the thick of it,
 While we're dissecting things, he'll try to outsmart us.
 Although he calls himself a critic, we're nonplussed.
 He's very hard to please. Nothing is good enough.
 He has to find mistakes, since being tough
 Shows his intelligence. The latest indie flick?
 An auteur's smarmy trick. The newest foodie pick?
 The crème brulee's too thick. He thinks that his attack
 On everything that's hot will make him less a hack.
 An ordinary chat is too low-brow for him.
 He'll cross his arms and sneer, and in a voice that's grim
 Pronounce his godly views like Moses on the Mount.
 He pities us, the fools, as he takes a head count.

CHARLEY

You nailed him, Sam, touché!

ANDRE

Your shrewd ability
 Brings them to life, mon chere!

LEE

Yes, Sam's hostility

Is positively chic! Go on, my clever friends.
 Spare no one; take a knife and twist it. No one ends
 The night without a turn. But if they should appear,
 The ones that you have jeered, you'd grab a hand and smear
 A sloppy kiss or two, and swear your allegiance.

ANDRE

Why lecture us? If you're offended, here's your chance
 To talk to Sam right here.

LEE

Not me! You're all the cause!
 It's you who egg her on with giggle and applause,
 Your slanderous remarks. Yes, Sam would be less prone
 To savagery if she could be left on her own.
 No audience, no stage. Take my advice: you'll see
 It's not mankind that's flawed but mindless mockery.

PHIL

Then why do you stay here and hang on every word?
 When you condemn their faults, and see them as absurd?

SAM

Look who you're talking to. He loves to contradict.
 He sticks it to the man, and then gives him a kick.
 He hates other people. He hates their opinion.
 To every *Pro*, he's *Con*. He will not be outdone.
 If there's a *Yes* he's *No*—including what he's said
 From someone else's mouth. He's just as soon be dead
 Than listen to a poll or to paid consultants.
 Provoking is his gift, his lonely life sentence.

LEE (*To SAM*)

So dumb and dumber here have signed up for your team.
 Just go and do your worst. I have no self-esteem.

PHIL

But isn't it a fact, you always lend a hand
 To fight what's popular? You're sulking. You can't stand
 When others hog the light.

LEE

Humanity's fair game.
 They're never in the right, no matter what they claim.
 They either rave with *Likes* or condemn too harshly.

SAM

But—

LEE

No, Sam, no! Though I may behave too rashly,
 I'll die on principle. And you have certain traits
 I cannot tolerate. But those fools tempt the fates
 And urge you to act out the things they blame you for.

ANDRE

Well, as for me, I don't see any sins. And what's more,
So far I've found that Sam is free of any flaws.

CHARLEY

She has a certain style that draws me to her cause.
I don't see any faults.

LEE

That's strange, to me they're plain.
That's why I do my best to carefully explain.
To each and every point, she listens patiently.
The more we love someone, the tougher we should be.
We shouldn't cut them slack. If it were up to me,
Those hangers-on who blog her every word would be
Bumped from her party list. Their mild complacencies
Bring out my worst despair.

SAM

So you say we should freeze
Our tries at tenderness, and make romance's aim
A series of complaints, which end in total shame.

LIZ

Politicos as well don't put up with decrees
But follow their own nose. Instead of faults one sees
What is electable. A flaw reveals a plus,
And missteps in the past are history: discuss.
Too dumb? Your mind is free. Too upscale, Harvard-Yale?
Your father's blue collar. The one who went to jail
Has street smarts; the Wall Street attorney sued big banks;
The demagogue, who has no use for truth, gives thanks
To 501(c)(3)'s that have an ax to grind.
The greedy show how they're resourceful, they don't mind
Free trips or gifts. Spendthrifts are generous to all,
The proud one is reserved, and showoffs have a ball.
The ludicrous is fun, the quiet one is lost
In contemplative thought. And that's the way the cost
Of doing business in the Capital is based
On mass duplicity, a smorgasbord of waste.

LEE

But I still say—

SAM

Please drop the subject. Come, let's go
Refill our drinks, shall we?

(To ANDRE and CHARLEY)

You leaving?

ANDRE and CHARLEY

Us? No, no!

LEE

Let them go. No one cares. You look like you're afraid

To stay here on your own. If everyone's delayed,
I'll be the last to leave.

CHARLEY

And I can stay all night.
I've got nowhere to be.

ANDRE

Unless there is a fight,
Please count me present too.

SAM (*To LEE*)

You're here until the end?

LEE

The very bitterest. You'll see who's your real friend.

(BLAKE enters)

BLAKE (*To LEE*)

There's someone here who wants to see you. It's urgent.

LEE

Tell him I'm busy now. Nothing's that important.

BLAKE

He says that it can't wait.

SAM

Show him in. Join the queue!

(BLAKE leaves as the Process Server enters)

LEE

Is it the noise?

PROCESS SERVER

It's not. I need a word with you
In private.

LEE

We're all friends. So we can talk right here.

PROCESS SERVER (*Handing him a paper*)

Here is a summons, sir, which asks you to appear
Before the court.

LEE

Who, me?

PROCESS SERVER

Yes, you.

(He leaves)

LEE (*To PHIL*)

But court for what?

PHIL (*To LEE*)

It's probably your feud with Garrett.

LEE

That crackpot?

SAM (*To PHIL*)

What's this?

PHIL

The two of them do not see eye to eye
On poetry, and Lee of course refused to lie.
When Garrett shared his verse, he got his feelings hurt
And filed a slander suit.

LEE

What of it—that stuffed shirt!

I won't apologize.

PHIL

But you must still obey.

Come on, let's get some sleep.

LEE

No matter what they say,

How can this settle things? How could a verdict make
Me like his writing more? It's terrible, it's fake.
I won't revise my view.

PHIL

Then try a lighter tone.

LEE

I won't retreat one bit. His verses make me groan.

PHIL

Just compromise. Let's go.

LEE

I'll go, but in protest.

PHIL

Good boy. Now say goodnight.

LEE

You're just like all the rest.

Unless the judge commands that I applaud his verse,
Which started all this mess, I'll testify they're worse
Than anyone can write, and he should get the chair.

(To ANDRE and CHARLEY, who break out laughing)

Stop laughing! He's that bad.

SAM

Thanks, Phil. You both take care.

LEE (*To SAM*)

Goodnight for now, I'm tired. But promise me that soon
We'll finish our debate.

PHIL (*Dragging Lee out the door*)

Come on, Lee. Goodnight moon!

ACT II

(The next afternoon; SAM's townhouse)

ANDRE

Don't you look happy with yourself, my Charley boy!
I'm glad that nothing scares or troubles you—enjoy!
But tell me, man to man, without false modesty,
What reasons do you have for smiling constantly?

CHARLEY

I tell you, honestly, that I can't find a thing,
When looking at myself, that's not worth noticing.
I'm young, I'm rich, I'm smart. The media all swoon
At my book megadeals, and my dad's silver spoon
Has got me megabucks. My client list can get
Me face time with the Pope. My future is all set.
What's not to like, my friend? When someone tries to steal
An author, I fight back. I counterpunch until
The other agent's crushed. Do I have what's called wit?
A bit, I think. Good taste? Enough to know a hit
When I scan Chapter One; I don't cram for finals.
At opera, which I love, after late arrivals,
I take my front row seat. As critic, I point out
The awkward parts, I weep at death scenes, clap and shout
Bravos at the curtain. I look good. I move well.
My skin? Smooth. My waist? Thin. Anyone can tell
I'm on a regimen. Although I won't say so,
I have my finger on the country's pulse, ergo,
That's why I'm treated to the best in everything.
Women love me. Men too. They pick up on one ring
When I drunk dial at night. With that, I rest my case.
I'm pleased with who I am, any time, any place.

ANDRE

Okay. But why do you, who win so easily,
Chase after Sam, who is immune to your CV?

CHARLEY

My god, what a question! My personality
Won't up with neglect. Let the ordinary
Despair and throw themselves down at their idol's feet,
Where they can moan and sigh: look how they each get beat
And still come back for more; how they devote their years,
Although they aren't worthy, and cry into their beers.
But men like me, my friend, don't place their only bet
To find a love on spec, then carry all the debt.
Her stock is rated high? That's great, remarkable.
But my stock trades high too. I am marketable.
To get return on my investment, there's a fee.
If there's a price on her, then there's a price on me.
In love, as in all deals, things should end up equal.
A romance either way should be reciprocal.

ANDRE
You think you know Sam's mind?

CHARLEY
I do, and for good cause.

ANDRE
Be careful, take your time; each one of us has flaws.
Don't fool yourself, my friend, with your egoism.

CHARLEY
It's true, I flatter me; it's my nepotism.

ANDRE
What makes you think that she's completely satisfied?

CHARLEY
By flattering myself.

ANDRE
What makes you sure?

CHARLEY
I've lied
Repeatedly to me.

ANDRE
But where's your evidence?

CHARLEY
I have none. I confess. I'm wrong. There's no defense.

ANDRE
Has there been any sign of Sam's inclination?

CHARLEY
No sign at all. That's why I know I'm mistaken.

ANDRE
Stop joking, what's the truth!

CHARLEY
She treats me terribly.

ANDRE
Okay, I give. A truce. But *why* Sam, just tell me.

CHARLEY
I am the one turned down, and you're the lucky one.
I'll have to shoot myself, if you'll loan me a gun.

ANDRE
Ridiculous! Why don't the two of us agree
To sign a mutual pact? Whoever, you or me,
Gets proof of Sam's intent, the other quits the field

And gives up all his rights.

CHARLEY

I promise that I'll yield.

(SAM enters)

SAM

You're both still here?

ANDRE

We are. It's you who make us stay.

SAM

I think I hear the door. Who's coming by today?

(BLAKE enters)

BLAKE

It's Cutler here for you.

SAM

What does that woman want?

BLAKE

She's talking now to Liz.

(BLAKE leaves)

CHARLEY

Perhaps some kind of stunt,
A gotcha for her show.

SAM

That woman's such a pest.

CHARLEY

She knows what her base likes. They think she's on a quest
To purge the Capital—

SAM

My god, that makes no sense!
She's just as radical. Take note how she gets tense
When her slot's ratings drop. She knows that her success
Is fleeting, at the whim of critics. It's the stress.
Unhappy, older, tired, she blames the modern age
For what's wrong with her life, and redirects her rage
At liberal elites. Behind a perfect mask—
Her short skirts, helmet-hair—she sees it as her task
To call out "Lock Them Up!" whoever spurns her show.
Yet she would jump at guests if they'd give her a go.
That Lee would talk to me, not her? A federal crime.
Each leak he leaks to me? She wants to drop a dime.
To her it's all a plot, everything's an insult.
There's nothing I can do to clear myself of guilt.

At every Happy Hour, she makes up dirty lies.
 She jealous of my life, and I can sympathize.
 I've never seen someone so mind-numbingly dumb,
 So petty, so unfair, so boringly humdrum.

(CUTLER enters)

SAM
 Come in, what brings you here? You worried me, you know.

CUTLER
 I've come to give advice. I couldn't just lie low.

SAM
 It's great to see you, dear!

(ANDRE and CHARLEY exit, laughing)

CUTLER
 I'm glad we're on our own.
 Their timing is just right.

SAM
 Would you like to sit down?

CUTLER
 No, thanks, I'll stand. I find in times like these, when friends
 Are all that you can trust, we have to make amends
 In matters which may be of consequence to us.
 And nothing has more weight that what I will discuss:
 What others think of us, that is, appearances.
 That's why I've come today to talk with you, and thus
 Convince you that I care, by sharing news that you
 Will want to hear at once. I know it isn't true.
 Just yesterday at lunch I heard some lobbyists,
 Those true suck-up artists, include you on a list
 Of people on the outs. It's all the messiness
 Of how your private life gets spilled out in the press.
 It's not a good thing, Sam. The socialites you let
 Drop by at any hour, the bloggers that you get
 To blog your late-night fetes, the drunken noise they make—
 These all were criticized much more than I could take.
 You know I am your friend. Just guess whose side I took.
 I told those sycophants that you are not a crook.
 I told them that you play by your own rules at times
 Yet always mean the best. These are not major crimes.
 But there are things in life much harder to defend
 No matter what I feel or how much I'm your friend.
 They forced me to agree that there's another side
 That they view differently. I listened hard. I tried.
 Apparently your life could arguably be seen
 As reckless, dangerous; that enemies of yours are keen
 To make up lies about your past that burn the ear.
 If only you'd tone down your politics, my dear,
 There'd be less cause for blame. Believe me, not that I

Agree with all their points—you are not the bad guy.
 I'd kill myself if I thought that in any way.
 And yet the thirst for news entraps a dupe each day.
 Who can live blamelessly? I hope you understand
 How much I value you. I want to take your hand
 In solidarity. I trust you have the sense
 To make use of my help. It's yours without pretense.

SAM

I thank you for your words, for which I'll pay you back.
 I know just what you mean. I think we share a lack
 Of information, which, with your kind permission,
 I promise to correct. It's your reputation,
 That by coincidence, needs someone to defend.
 I'll prove that I'm your friend until the very end.
 Since you gave me your news, I'll share some stories too.
 Why, just the other day, while chatting with a few
 Old friends of mine at lunch, we wondered how to lead
 A perfect, model life. And everyone agreed
 Perhaps you're not the best example for us all.
 They've really had enough of your persistent gall,
 Combined with your distaste for individual rights;
 Your endless preachiness, your slanderous sound bites
 When faking seriousness; your phony gasps and sighs
 At scandals, large and small, for which you can't disguise
 Your secret glee, while you let fall a phrase or two
 That sounds so innocent. All this charade as you
 Talk down to us, as if you're on a higher plane,
 That only you know what is what—and then you deign
 To pity us, poor slobs, while turning to the lens
 To give your Final Word, a how-to meant to cleanse
 Our socialist tendencies. Your life, if I may speak
 Quite candidly, was met with vehement critique.
 What is the takeaway, my boldface friends all said,
 Of looking good if she acts otherwise instead?
 Although she says her prayers exactly, word for word,
 At night she drinks so much her diatribes are slurred—
 Her husband has to hide. She's always first for Mass
 But sits down in the front, so others see her pass
 In her designer dress. And in her children's book,
 It's 1950 still, where all the white kids look
 Like little nationalists. But as for me, I fought
 For you against the throng, I argued you are not
 The same as on TV. And yet the verdict went
 Against you, just as charged. Your sentence: not to vent
 So much about our flaws, but focus on your own.
 Check out your last selfie that's sneering from your phone,
 And leave forgiveness for a minister or priest,
 Someone who's paid to do it. I hope you take the least
 Offense at what I say, and that it's useful counsel.
 My friendship makes me speak, and so I wish you well.

CUTLER

Well, Sam, I am surprised. I see how my sincere
 Suggestion's hit a nerve.

SAM

No, no, let me be clear.
 To be bipartisan, we'd have brunch every week
 To air our grievances, to pick at scabs and speak
 What's really on our minds. So what if it destroys
 Our egos in the mix? If each of us enjoys
 This strategy, we'll push ourselves to strip away
 All pretense and conceit. And we can start today.
 Let's vow to trade what we have each heard: you of me,
 And I of you, so that there's no more treachery.

CUTLER

I can't reveal my source. Besides, it's me they find
 So easy to insult.

SAM

If everything's maligned
 Or cheered on equally, then everyone is right.
 It's all just personal taste. If there's a time to fight,
 Then there's a time to quit, to run and hide your face.
 You can declare a win and fade away with grace—
 When younger versions catch the camera's close-up eye.
 One day I may agree it's time to say goodbye.
 But not at my age, no. I'm far too young for that.
 Experience is what I need; I'm still a brat.

CUTLER

Well, good for you! To take a minor selling point—
 Your lack of years—and make the most of it, anoint
 Yourself a hipster saint. But that ain't all that it's
 Cracked up to be. I know that TV biz is gliz,
 And everything expires. But why are you so mad?
 I'm at a loss. Explain. Why harass your comrade?

SAM

And I am at a loss at all your bitchiness,
 The way you heckle me and leak things to the press.
 Is it my fault that you're hungry for attention?
 How much should I pay back for nothing that I've done?
 If those who matter most—the big-shot journalists,
 Ambassadors and self-promoters, jihadists—
 If they think I'm the one with media appeal
 And her own personal brand: then honey, let's get real.
 Why try to shut me down? Again, it's not my fault.
 There's nothing I can do to stop or alter it.
 I leave the field to you, to do just as you like.
 So go ahead and shout your tirades to the mic.

CUTLER

You think I care about the Adulation Watch
 Who watch your every move? I've got a plane to catch.
 But what's the price you pay to sell proximity
 Like new perfume? Just ask: "Are they that into me?"
 Is it your intellect they want to get next to?
 Do those insider types want nothing back from you?
 Who's zooming who. They want whatever they can get:

Connections, money, fame. And then you're in their debt.
 No one is taken in by your flamboyant scene.
 I know some lefty wonks who aren't on CNN,
 Who don't skype Anderson. So then we may conclude:
 It's not your politics. Let's not, my dear, be crude.
 In this life, nothing's free. Each person has their price.
 Attention has its cost. I'll pay. You should think twice
 Of sucking up too much in this Suck-Up City,
 This Show Biz for Ugly People; it's not pretty.
 So what if you're young now? Don't hold yourself so high.
 Believe me, if I want what you've got, I'd just try
 Some gutless pandering, without my dignity.
 I'd be the worst I can. But better you than me.

SAM

So go ahead and try your secret recipe.
 See what your ratings do.

CUTLER

Okay, let's disagree.

If we keep talking now, we'll start to scream and shout.
 I should have left before.

SAM

No need to hurry out.

Please make yourself at home. Instead of more debate
 That frazzles both our nerves, I offer a rebate:
 Someone who's coming now, who'll keep you entertained.

(LEE enters)

SAM

I'll leave you two alone. I'm feeling pretty drained.
 Besides I have to send some texts that just can't wait.

(SAM leaves)

CUTLER

I guess you're stuck with me. Will you be my blind date?
 In fact, I'd love to pick your brain for your ideas.
 I find that people such as you attract a buzz
 From strategists and those who work behind the scenes.
 I'm just as interested to learn your ways and means.
 I wish that everyone could see your true merit
 And give you what you need because you deserve it.
 You should complain each day that nothing's done for you.
 You're out there all alone.

LEE

Poor me, you mean? That's true.

But what right do I have to ask the State for pay?
 All that I do is be my brilliant self each day.

CUTLER

Not everyone who holds a post has earned their place.
 You need some clout and luck as well, and in your case—

LEE

Enough with my CV! I'm just a malcontent.
What's in your concrete plan? Doesn't the government
Have plenty on its plate without a need to hire
Some renegade outlaw?

CUTLER

Don't make it sound so dire.
The helpless help themselves. Just yesterday I heard
Some power brokers break the news that you're preferred.

LEE

So what? We all get praise. Congrats, here's your gold plaque.
A dinner in your name. There's never any lack
Of jackals to pay back. It's just like high school here,
But now the nerds are cool—so let's give them a cheer!

CUTLER

If I could schedule you to guest on "Cutler Live"
You might have second thoughts on taking the big dive.
Assistant Deputy? An Under- This or That?
Some wheels could start to turn—see what I'm getting at?

LEE

But what is there for me to do that doesn't bore me stiff?
My instinct's telling me to go jump off a cliff
Before I push myself to breathe the dusty air
Of State bureaucracy; I'll rot if I go there.
My goal is not, airquotes, "success," or off-shore cash.
I am just who I am: sarcastic, honest, brash.
I can't perfect the art of lying face to face.
And if you can't mislead, the swamp is not your place.
Though anarchists don't get the usual cushy perks,
Yet on the other hand, you don't report to jerks
Who terrorize their clerks. And most importantly,
You're never forced to praise the latest poetry
Of Mr. So-and-So, or put up with a Ms.
And her annoying whims. It's none of their business.

CUTLER

I get it. Let's drop it. But I can't help but think
About your private life. I know I'm not a shrink,
But I have some concerns. I wonder if she is
The best choice you could make. It's not a pop-up quiz.
Lee, are you happy now? Is she your one true fate?
You have so much to give. I don't want you to wait.

LEE

But isn't Sam your friend?

CUTLER

She is. But I can't take
The way she fools around. This is for your own sake.
She is betraying you.

LEE

News flash: so Sam's a flirt.
Is this all that you got?

CUTLER

It is. And she will hurt
Whoever's in her path. Though I'm her confidant,
I tell things as they are. With Sam, it's all a front.

LEE

That's possible, I guess. I can't see in her skull.
And yet, someone who is more generous might pull
Their punches just a bit. What good is suspicion?

CUTLER

It's easy to stay mum, under one condition:
That you can't stand the truth.

LEE

I can. But taunting me
Is worse than anything—so please stop haunting me
And just lay out the facts. I want the evidence.

CUTLER

Okay, calm down. It's not a capital offense.
But I will show you what your naked eye can trust.
Just come to my house now. Then later, if you must,
Give me the third degree. I cave in quickly, Lee.
Her faithlessness will be out front for all to see.

Scene 2

PHIL

I've never seen someone who acts more difficult
Than Lee just now in court. Instead of an adult,
He's like a stubborn child. No matter what they tried—
Which deals, what arguments—he stuck to his own side.
I don't believe the judge has ever witnessed such
A curious display. "I'll never budge an inch!"
Cried Lee. "But I'll agree to all the facts but one:
Why Garrett feels slandered. It's just my opinion.
So what if he's a hack whose writing's not that good?
His status is intact. He's just misunderstood.
Respectability and talent aren't the same.
I'm sure that Garrett's name is met with much acclaim.
He's loyal, kind and true, and courteous to a tee.
But when he wields a pen, he lays waste to a tree.
Do any disagree?" Then Lee gave him his due.
"I'll praise his charity, his condo's harbor view,
His table at the Grille, his skill at rock climbing—
Plus boating, dancing, squash—but not once his rhyming.
If writers cannot write, then it's their right to quit.
Don't kill off literature, unless it's you or it."
And all they got from Lee was vague apology.
"You know I'm hard to please. I wish your verse could be

A little better made, so I could like it more.”
Then they shook hands and smiled, and vanished out the door.

LIZ

You know I kind of like his eccentricity.
It's charming when he sulks. I think his honesty—
Which he makes too much of—is almost heroic.
It's rare to find these days. Instead of being stoic,
More people should speak out.

PHIL

As for me, I'm awed
By all his fearlessness. To me he's like a god.
Who cares if they applaud? And yet, despite his moods,
He's fallen hard and fast. But does my friend choose?
The least likely target: your cousin Sam. Explain.

LIZ

Yes, life's mysterious. Sometimes to hide our pain
We mix in pleasure too. And any pet theories,
About those two, fall short.

PHIL

But do you think that she's
In love with him as well?

LIZ

The jury is still out.
How can we know her mind when it's filled with self-doubt?
I think sometimes that Sam is strangely unaware
Of who she loves or how; or else she doesn't care
And dives in recklessly, without a reason why.

PHIL

I think our friend's in deep. He's sure his every sigh
Is matched by hers, and can't imagine otherwise.
If it were up to me, I'd tell him that his eyes
Should gaze on someone else. On you, for example,
Who could reciprocate.

LIZ

My god, what an earful!
But I don't mess around. I cut straight to the chase.
I'll tell him how things stand, yes or no, in Sam's case.
And if her feelings run more hot than cold, I'll make—
If it were up to me—the two of them eat cake
Out of each other's hand. And you'll be his best man.
But if, since things may go awry in any plan,
Her feelings get a chill because of someone else,
Then happily I'll help deliver Lee's farewells.
I'd listen to him preach whatever, he's the boss.
So what if others turn their nose up? It's their loss.

PHIL

And as for me, I don't object to how you feel.
I see you look at him. But here's my final deal.

If Lee and Sam are joined, and you find you're alone,
I'll do my best to show how I'm a known unknown.
I'll happily transfer your feelings to an *Us*.

LIZ
You're joking with me, right?

PHIL
I'm not. I'm serious.
I'll wait here patiently until your heart is free,
And then, deliberately, give myself openly.

(LEE rushes in)

LEE
Oh Liz! Thank god you're here! Despite my loyalty,
I've been treated badly.

LIZ
What's wrong? What injury?

LEE
A treachery, that's what. It kills me just to think
How I have been misled. Creation could all sink,
And all the stars blink out, and it would not compare
To this disaster, Liz. This is my worst nightmare.
My life is over now. I'm mute. I cannot speak.

LIZ
You should calm down a bit.

LEE
How could the gods all wreak
Such tragedy on me? How can inhuman vice
Be joined to such a face?

LIZ
Do you want my advice?
Then tell me what—

LEE
It's done! It's over! I'm betrayed!
I'm dead, and all is lost. Still I must be repaid.
Can you believe it's true, that Sam has lied to me?
My cause of death is plain. It's infidelity.

LIZ
Do you have evidence?

PHIL
What if your jealousy,
Fueled by paranoia, is just a fantasy?
These things can get—

LEE
They're not. Please mind your own business.

(To LIZ, holding up his cellphone)

Her faithlessness is clear. I have proof. What is, is.
Here is a text she sent to me by accident,
Meant, instead, for Garrett. Her crime is evident.
I see it on the screen that's right before my eyes.
A note to dear Garrett. It caught me by surprise.
I thought that Garrett was the least I had to fear.

PHIL

A text can be misread. They aren't what they appear,
And sometimes not as bad.

LEE

Again, leave me alone,
And mind your own concerns.

LIZ

Try to calm down your tone,
That way the pain will be—

LEE

That's up to you, with thanks.
It's you who comforts me, who eases any angst.
You must help me avenge your caustic relative
Who spits right in my face. Help me, not to forgive,
But put that monster down.

LIZ

But how?

LEE

Accept the part
That Sam has thrown away, and we will show the art
Of lovers deep in love. We'll punish her with bliss,
We'll lock eyes tenderly, and shyly reminisce.
I promise you my soul. I'll worship at your shrine.

LIZ

I thank you for your pitch. But I think it's a sign
To take things slow at first. You know I sympathize
With all your suffering, but still I must advise
A step by step approach. What if the wrong is not
As bad as you once thought? You might forgo your plot.
When someone that we love inflicts such grief, we rant,
We seethe, we dream that we can make things right. We can't.
Instead we break it off. And instantly the one
Who's guilty's innocent. The harm is all undone.
Our anger vanishes, and now we wish them well.

LEE

No, Liz, no. My hatred is irredeemable
And her abuse too harsh. It's over, period.
I'm done with her. If I could change my mind, I would.
But then I'd hate myself forever. Here she comes.
See how my anger grows. Sound the horns, beat the drums!

I'll taunt her with her wrongs to watch her face get red.
And when our playact's done, I'm ready for your bed.

(SAM enters as PHIL and LIZ sneak out)

LEE *(To himself)*
I hope I can keep calm.

SAM
Why all the drama, Lee?
What's with those heavy sighs, those gloomy looks at me?

LEE
You know just what you've done. It's more than criminal.
It's monstrous, it's depraved. It's sick, warped, immoral.

SAM
What pretty compliments! I'll have to write them down.

LEE
Don't tease me, Sam. This is no joke, and I'm no clown.
Go hide your face in shame, because I have the facts
To prove your treachery. Remember that these acts
With which you tortured me, were just as I'd foreseen.
I have good cause to think your motives are obscene.
Although you scoffed at me for thinking you suspect,
I've tried to verify what my eyes could inspect.
Despite your art at fraud, I'm here to make my case.
Don't think you'll get away with lying to my face.
I'll make sure you get yours. It's true we can't control
Who, why or when we love, that it bursts from our soul
Spontaneously, and that you can't force how you feel.
Each heart is free to choose its object. That's the deal.
I'd have no real complaint if you had told me straight,
Right from the start, that I am not the one. It's fate.
Then I could lick my wounds and blame it on the odds.
Instead you led me on, you ridiculed the gods
With acts so blasphemous, so numerous in scope
No punishment's too harsh. That's why I gave up hope.
Now anything's allowed. Yes, you should be afraid.
I'm not myself. I'm crazed. My present life's been made
A living hell. Although you didn't knock me out,
I'm down now for the count. My senses are burnt out.
I'm not responsible for what I say or do.
I can't think. I can't speak. It all depends on you.

SAM
You're scaring me. What brought this on? You must explain.

LEE
Yes, I have lost myself. I feel like I'm insane,
And you're the reason why. Your first look poisoned me;
I've never felt the same. Instead of honesty,
You dosed me with your lies and made my head feel faint.
Your spell is powerful.

SAM

So what is your complaint?

LEE

How double-faced you are! How skilled at faithlessness!
But I'm prepared to cross examine. Next witness.

(Showing her a text on his cellphone)

Can you ID this text? Are these your phrases here?
This evidence, in black and white, will make things clear
Beyond a reasonable doubt.

SAM

So that's what made you mad?

LEE

You didn't even flinch.

SAM

Why should I?

LEE

Now you add
Denial to the list. Do you disown this note?

SAM

Why should I disown it? I'm the one who wrote it.

LEE

You look at it without the least surprise, without
A hint of any shame or shadow of self-doubt.
At least you could pretend.

SAM

You're such a curious one.

LEE

So this is it? You smile at my accusation?
The note speaks for itself. Don't try to outsmart proof
That's right in front of you. Don't try to act aloof
About that hack Garrett. Don't you feel any shame?

SAM

Did you say Garrett's name?

LEE

I did. It's not a game.

SAM

The poet? Tell me how he's tied to all this mess.

LEE

Just read the first few lines. It's obvious. Confess.
But even if it's meant for someone else, so what?
Are you less guilty then? I'm still mad. You're still caught.

SAM

But what if it's a "her" the note is for, not "him."
How could that injure you? No crime, so, no victim.

LEE

You're really something, Sam. An excellent excuse,
A brilliant lie! Brava! I didn't think you'd use
This strategy. I'm half convinced. But why such tricks
At all, why these extremes? Is it to get your kicks?
You think men are that dumb? Let's see what subterfuge
You pull from your sleeve next. Remember, I'm no stooge.
Please tell me how these words could possibly apply
To other than a man—such warmth, such depth. Don't lie.
Can you resolve these facts before I start to read—

SAM

I don't have time for this! It's ludicrous, to lead
The witness on the stand. And I won't stand for it.
I take the fifth. So there. I'll see you all in court!

LEE

Oh, no! You can't deflect by getting angry, Sam.
Explain just what you mean—

SAM

I won't explain, I am
Too busy for this trash. I don't care what you think
About my social life.

LEE

Just give me one small thing
To back your story up, and I'll be satisfied.

SAM

One thing? Okay. The note's for Garrett. See? I lied.
I like his attitude; he speaks so scholarly.
I like his flair, his air, and how he follows me.
That's all I have to say. I rest my case. I'll sign
Right on the dotted line. You win. And I resign
From our relationship. You're free to do and act
Just as you please. But don't harass me. Show some tact.

LEE *(To himself)*

My god, has anyone behaved more inhumane?
Has any human had more reason to complain?
When I get furious, she finds a way to fight.
My grief and jealousy are maximized for spite.
She brags, she boasts, she gloats, and I believe it all.
And yet I'm too attached; I still can't take a fall
And call it off, I can't work up enough contempt.
She treats me badly, yet—my feelings are exempt.

(To SAM)

You lying, shameless cheat! You know my one weakness
And how to twist my mood when I'm at my bleakest.
How you take all my love—my fatal, awe-struck crush—

And flip it upside down to turn my mind to mush.
 Defend yourself and stop pretending to your sin.
 Show me you're innocent: how I was taken in,
 How I misread your text. Please tell me, if you can,
 And I will take your side. Can't you stand by your man?

SAM

You're crazed with jealousy! Do you deserve me? No.
 I'd really like to know how low you think I'd go
 To fabricate and spin. I'd say so candidly
 If I loved someone else. Tell me why, in theory,
 That nothing from my mouth can penetrate your brain?
 Why my affection's not enough to dull your pain?
 Still you suspect, despite my lifetime guarantee.
 I have to say that this is slanderous to me.
 How can we two, with all of our adversity,
 Get to a cease-fire truce? And since society,
 On moral principle, stifles every female—
 Their passions, their desires—for us to jump this bail
 Should make a lover proud, and not so critical.
 Does he not share the blame, as he sees our struggle,
 To not believe our word—when some things can't be said?
 Your accusations hurt. They make me feel half-dead.
 Perhaps I should explore some other avenues.
 That way you could complain you've nothing left to lose.

LEE

You traitor! You coward! I know how strange I am
 For chasing you, I know your teasing is a scam.
 But all this back and forth is not important now.
 My fate awaits. I must give in, if you'll allow.
 My future's tied to yours. I'll see it to the end
 And taste its bitterness. Will you still be a friend?
 Or will your soul curl up and die, while I stand by?

SAM

Your love's not strong enough.

LEE

Come on! No one can try
 To match its eagerness. My love is dangerous.
 Sometimes I go too far, and dream up plots for us.
 I wish your looks were spoiled, I wish that you were stripped
 Of your inheritance—your status, wealth—and gripped
 By abject misery. So one day I could give
 A helping hand to you. I'd teach you how to live.
 I know that this is wrong. But in my fantasy
 I'd find such happiness. You'd owe your life to me.

SAM

Your story gives me pause; how strange your valentine!
 I hope it's all a dream, and that it's yours, not mine.

(DREW enters)

LEE

Drew, why are you upset? You're acting so anxious.
What's going on?

DREW

There—

LEE

What?

DREW

There was—

LEE

Don't be nervous.

There was?

DREW

A strange event.

LEE

How strange? What kind of thing?

DREW

It's hard to talk about. I've got a bad feeling.
Should I just spit it out?

LEE

Yes, spit.

DREW

Are we alone?

LEE

Please stop delaying. Talk.

DREW

If I had only known—

LEE

Just talk or I—

DREW

We have to leave right now. Come on.

LEE

What's happening?

DREW

We can't stay here. We must be gone.

LEE
But why?

DREW
I tell you we must flee this place, post haste.

LEE
The reason?

DREW
We must go, and leave without a trace.
Don't stop to say goodbye.

LEE
But tell me, what's the rush?

DREW
The rush for us, in short, is for us to vanish.

LEE
If you can't make more sense, I'll give your head a smack.

DREW
Okay. Here's what I know. A lawyer, dressed in black,
Knocked on the door to leave some legal-looking stuff,
Some papers with fine print. But I could read enough
To see it's all about that Brock, who's suing you.

LEE
But what's that got to do with leaving now? You through?

DREW
Just wait. I'll get to that. A friend of yours came by—
What was his name?—to say that you—who was that guy?
You know him, he's your friend.

LEE
Just tell me what he said,
And stop postponing it!

DREW
He told me I'd be dead
If I told anyone. That there's a warrant out
Right now for your arrest.

LEE
But what's this all about?
Did he give any clues?

DREW
No, but he asked to use
My pen to write a note—from which you can deduce
The meaning here within.
(He searches through his pockets)

LEE

Great, hand it over now.

SAM (*To LEE*)

What can this nonsense mean?

LEE (*To SAM*)

We'll see some day, somehow.

This waiting's killing me.

(*To DREW*)

Come on, you almost done?

DREW (*Giving up*)

It must still be at home.

LEE

And so should you, now run!

(*DREW runs off*)

SAM

Don't get yourself worked up. So what? It could be worse.
Now go unravel it.

LEE

It seems the universe,
Whatever else I do, conspires so we can't talk.
But let's not let it win. We'll talk soon, Sam, ad hoc.

Scene 3

LEE

My mind's made up. That's it.

PHIL

But why are you so sure,
No matter how you feel?

LEE

Because I know the cure.
And you may argue all you want, but I won't change.
The times in which we live are too perverse, too strange.
That's why I hereby plan to sever all my ties
With humankind at large. When truth turns into lies,
When decency's defunct and law's the enemy;
When everyone supports my claim, and yet my plea,
Though just, has been denied, I'm drowning in disgrace.
On my side stands what's right, and yet I lose my case.
So Brock, whose scandals fill the papers, claims a win
By outright lies; he won't apologize, just spin.
Good faith is out, replaced by ruthless arrogance.
He looks so innocent, as he slits your larynx.
The falsehoods all pile up, so crude and cynical
They skew normality. His evil's biblical.
Although the court destroys what's left of my good name,

Brock has the nerve to spread a rumor to defame.
 He says a tell-all book that's by anonymous—
 A work that's been condemned as being treasonous—
 He leaks it to the press that I'm the real author.
 Then Garrett piles on too, and helps that imposter.
 Yes, Garrett, who's the one that people love, to whom
 I have done nothing wrong; who forced me to assume,
 Despite my reticence, the role of chief critic.
 Because I didn't give him praise, I'm a cynic.
 Because I was sincere, refusing to tiptoe
 Around his writing's flaws, now I'm his greatest foe.
 I know he'll never give a real apology,
 Because I spoke the truth: his work's a travesty.
 My god, to think that he's a member of mankind—
 Whose thirst for fame makes them all ignorant and blind.
 Where is their moral sense, their shame? Give me a break.
 I think it's time to leave. It's hard for me to take
 Their level of deceit, their cut-throat savagery,
 Where men behave like wolves. This is my strategy:
 To leave this swamp behind and find a better place.
 You won't see me again among the human race.

PHIL

Don't act so quickly, Lee! And don't exaggerate
 The damage from Brock's case; it may not be that great.
 Look on the brighter side: so far you're not in jail.
 His rumors will all die of their own weight. He'll fail.
 And this will all hurt Brock much more than it hurts you.

LEE

Hurt *him*? He doesn't mind a brouhaha or two.
 He gets to be himself, propped up by his allies.
 Instead of suffering, he'll see his numbers rise.

PHIL

In short, I'm sure that few have noticed his campaign
 To pin the book on you. That's easy to contain.
 As for his case in court, that is more serious,
 You could, of course, appeal, between the two of us.

LEE

No, leave it as it is. The verdict is obscene,
 But I can live with it—since there's no guillotine.
 I waive my legal rights. I want to make it plain
 How justice can misfire, and leave my naked pain
 To warn posterity, as raw testimony
 To our time's viciousness. So it costs me money,
 What's twenty-thousand bucks? I'll have the right to yell
 At everyone I meet, and damn them all to hell.
 My hatred will be pure.

PHIL

But all in all—

LEE

Yes, all.

Since I hate everyone. Each person, wall to wall.
 Can you excuse the crimes of all humanity?
 Can you, right to my face, dispute its villainy?

PHIL

You're right. Of course you're right with everything you say.
 There's too much influence, and too much pay-to-play;
 Too much White House intrigue, with its revolving doors
 Between the Cabinet and special interest whores.
 We each should do our part to civilize the law.
 But is inequity a reason to withdraw?
 Though human beings fail, this gives philosophy
 A reason to exist—why we screwed up, how we
 Can use more common sense. If everything was fair
 And we could speak our mind, if every heart was bare,
 As well as honest, just—goodness would be useless.
 For what is being good than fighting, under stress,
 Injustice everywhere against the angry throng?

LEE

You speak so fluently. Your arguments are strong.
 But I'm afraid you waste your time; it's understood.
 My logic says that I should quit for my own good.
 I can't control my tongue. I'm prone to sudden fits,
 Which I cannot predict. And these are just the bits
 That's I'm aware of, Phil. It's bad. How many feuds
 Will I get into next? How many will I lose?
 Let me explain to Sam about my exit plans.
 I'll ask for her consent, and hope she understands.
 If she has love for me, then we can find a place
 Where we can be alone.

PHIL

Let's get Liz; we can pace

And wait for her.

LEE

You go. My mind is too undone.

My thoughts are dark, they grow beneath a blackened sun.

PHIL

Lee, what a mood you're in—strange thoughts for even you!
 I'll go and ask if Liz can join us in here too.

*(PHIL leaves as GARRETT and SAM enter, deep in conversation;
 LEE retreats into the shadows)*

GARRETT *(To SAM)*

It still remains for you to finally decide
 If I am yours alone. You know how hard I've tried
 To make you see my side. A lover hates suspense
 When everything's at stake. If there is an offense,
 Then let me know it, please. If you've been moved somehow,
 Then show me how you feel. The final proof, right now,
 Is not to let Lee in if he comes to your door.
 Don't sacrifice yourself. Don't see him any more.

SAM

But why are you upset? I thought you were his friend.

GARRETT

There's no need to explain. I only want to end
My curiosity. Which way do you incline?
Do you want him or me? I'm asking for a sign.

LEE (*Emerging into the light*)

He's right, Sam, you must choose or lose your chance with us.
We both want your thumb's up. We're deadly serious.
But we need more than words, we need some evidence:
Some cold, hard, concrete facts. Things can't stay on the fence.
The time has come for you to bare your soul. Confess.

GARRETT (*To LEE*)

I don't want to disturb your chance at happiness.

LEE (*To GARRETT*)

And neither do I wish, despite my jealousy,
To share one half with you.

GARRETT

If she prefers your plea—

LEE

If she leans in toward you—

GARRETT

I'll give up all my claims.

LEE

I swear I'll leave forthwith, and stop these party games.

GARRETT (*To SAM*)

And now it's up to you. Speak openly. Be clear.

LEE

Yes, please explain yourself. You have no need to fear.

GARRETT

And if it's easier, just point to who's the one.

LEE

No matter what, just choose. Do this and call it done.

GARRETT

You can't be at a loss.

LEE

How could you be unsure?
You can't take this much time, and be so insecure.

SAM

My god, how tedious all this persistence is.
 How paranoid you both appear. It's not a quiz.
 It's not that I don't know who I prefer. It's not
 My mind that fluctuates. I'm not at all in doubt.
 Nothing could be simpler than choosing one of you.
 Nothing could go faster, than splitting up you two.
 But truthfully, right now, I'm hesitant to speak
 In front of both of you. I feel that this critique
 Should only be behind closed doors, in privacy,
 Like a subcommittee's secret testimony.
 Why break up publicly? When you can offer more
 Specifics one to one? It's not about a score.
 One should let lovers down as gently as one can.

GARRETT

I'm not afraid to hear the verdict. I'm a man.

LEE

And I demand it, Sam. I don't need sympathy.
 In fact, I'd like to have the most publicity.
 You've always tried to be best friends with everyone,
 And now it's time to stop. The masquerade is done.
 You must explain yourself without contradiction.
 Or I'll take your silence as a final version.
 I know, for me, that your reluctance is the worst.

GARRETT (*To LEE*)

I thank you for your words; I second your outburst.

SAM

How tired you make me feel! How can there be justice
 In what you want from me? When you insist, "Trust us."
 Why can't you trust me back? You really need my vow?
 Let's see what Lizzie says; I hear her coming now.

(LIZ and PHIL enter)

SAM

Oh Liz, thank god you're here, you have to rescue me!
 They're persecuting me! This pair won't excuse me.
 They act as judge, jury and executioner.
 They both demand, with smiles, to know who I prefer.
 And like a firing squad, it must be face to face.
 Where's my last cigarette? And once I state my case,
 They want the one who lost to go into exile.
 Has such a thing been done? Please stay with me awhile.

LIZ

I'm not sure I'm the one to give advice on this.
 You know I speak my mind. Can't you make up and kiss,
 And let the world go on?

GARRETT (*To SAM*)

Give up. No more delay.

LEE

No more evasions, Sam.

GARRETT

Decide. And you must say
The whole truth, nothing but.

LEE

You can't remain silent;
You have no right.

GARRETT

One word.

LEE

And then we'll both repent.

(CHARLEY, ANDRE and CUTLER sweep in)

CHARLEY *(To SAM)*

We've come to help clear up a certain mystery,
If you would like us to.

ANDRE *(To GARRETT and LEE)*

I think your history
Will be a plus, since you are both involved as well.

CUTLER *(To SAM)*

No doubt you're shocked I'm here. That much, Sam, I can tell.
But these two men are why I rushed here to intrude.
They came to see me on a matter, which, when viewed
Objectively, looks bad: how someone who's so kind
As you could be at fault. My simple, trusting mind
Can't wrap itself around the facts. My eyes refuse
To say what they have seen. Despite our spats, I choose
To hear how you refute the charges they have brought.

CHARLEY *(To SAM)*

Let's let the suspect talk. The truth will be somehow out.

(Holding up his cellphone)

Here is the note you sent to Andre.

ANDRE *(To SAM, holding up his cellphone)*

Here's the text

You sent to Charley there.

CHARLEY *(To GARRETT and LEE)*

Don't tell me you're perplexed!
You know her style, I'm sure, her wordplay, her bon mots.
I'd like to share it now. Buckle up. Here we go.

(Reads)

"How strange, Andre, that you condemn my way of life
As shallow, frivolous. Memo: I'm not your wife.
How dare you badmouth me for being happier

Whenever we're apart. Is gloom what you prefer?
 That's so unfair. If you won't beg for clemency
 Down on your knees, right now, there won't be leniency.
 As for the Senate whip—" Too bad he isn't here.
 "As for the Senate whip you'd like to disappear,
 He's not my type. I watched him spit into a pool
 For half an hour, to make a falling drop of drool
 Into a perfect "O." He's such a simpleton.
 And as for Charley boy—" It's my time in the sun.
 "And as for Charley boy, who held my hand so tight
 It made my thumb go numb, it's time to say goodnight.
 His stature does fall short, as does his other part.
 When he stands up in court, his legs need a head start.
 And now we come to our chief critic—"

(To LEE)

It's your turn.

"To our chief critic here. He's fun. I've had to learn
 To take his wild ideas, his grumpy acting out
 As comedy, but there are endless times I'd shout
 From boredom if I could. He's best in small doses.
 As for the would-be wit—"

(To GARRETT)

That's you, one supposes.

"As for the would-be wit, aka 'The Poet':
 Despite his own reviews, none of us would know it
 If he didn't show it. And I can't stand to hear
 A word he says; his prose is worse—it hurts my ear.
 Andre, my dear, I don't enjoy myself that much,
 Not nearly as you think. At times I try to clutch
 At little pleasures here and there—but when I'm hauled
 To concerts or a play, I'm honestly appalled.
 When all I want, I now admit, is your presence.
 The ones we love fill up the void with their essence."

ANDRE

And now my share.

(Reading)

"As for Andre, whose lexicon

Of flattery is vast, I have no affection.
 In fact, he's very last. He must not think things through
 If he thinks I'm that thick. You must be crazy too
 To not see who I love. Come see me every day,
 And if he pesters me, help me chase him away."

(To SAM)

A lovely piece of prose; a diamond in the rough.
 And you as well as I know what it is: enough.
 Enough of your sharp fangs, wait till I show this sketch
 Around to everyone. Excuse me while I retch.

CHARLEY

I'd like to say a word. Although I'd like to be
 More angry than I am, you are, Sam, beneath me.

For my revenge I'll prove that someone else, somewhere,
Can fall for less not more, for one who's just and fair.

(CHARLEY and ANDRE leave)

GARRETT *(To SAM)*

So this is what I get? This murder in plain sight,
Despite what you wrote me? How do you sleep at night?
Do you treat all mankind the same, one at a time?
I know that I've been duped, the victim of a crime.
But that's the end of it. I thank you for your gift
Of showing your true self, like a backwards facelift.
I'm better for it now; my life has been remade.
Your loss will be my gain; I'm happy for the trade.

(To LEE)

I hereby formally relinquish my interest.
Now she's all yours, my friend. Do what you think is best.

(GARRETT leaves)

CUTLER *(To SAM)*

How ugly. How absurd. The worst I've ever seen.
I can't keep quiet, Sam. I'm so upset. Come clean.
Does everyone agree? I usually don't care
How others live their lives, but Lee has staked his share
Of future happiness in you. That this brave man,
This hero, that this saint, would be your biggest fan,
Would worship you beyond—

LEE

Please stop now. Leave it be.
My problems are my own. Don't worry pointlessly.
Why pick this fight for me? I can't repay your zeal.
And if I choose someone to spite her, here's the deal.
You won't be my first choice.

CUTLER

You honestly believe
I thought of such a thing? That my heart's on my sleeve?
That I'm so envious I'd move the earth for you?
What ego, what raw nerve. You're dreaming. Get a clue.
The scraps Sam leaves behind won't get me very far.
Take off your blindfold, Lee, and see things as they are.
You'll understand that chicks like me are not for you.
Keep chasing after Sam. Best wishes, Lee. We're through.

(CUTLER leaves)

LEE *(To SAM)*

So after all I've seen and heard here, I've kept mum.
I've let you all go first, and watched the glum outcome.
But now, if you'll allow, I'm going to let loose.

SAM

Yes, say just what you like, I'm ready for abuse.
 Complaining is your art, and I'm your blank canvas.
 I'm overwhelmed, I'm dazed. I'm wrong, Lee, I confess.
 I don't want an excuse. How angry others are
 I so don't care. I loathe their weakness from afar.
 But I admit my guilt to you and you alone.
 I'm sure your misery is just; I'll try to own
 My part in this. I see just how you look at me,
 How everything I am now reeks of treachery.
 In short, you have just cause to hate me, period.
 And I give my okay. Please hate me, go ahead.

LEE

How can I do that now, you crafty traitoress?
 How can you get the best of all my tenderness?
 Although I want to hate your guts, I can't. You've won.
 My feelings won't obey.

(To LIZ and PHIL)

You see how I'm undone
 By useless lust. I call you both to testify
 To my psychology. Although I mystify
 Myself sometimes, I swear that this is really it.
 Right to the bitter end, you'll see me finish it
 To prove mankind is flawed. No hugs and no regret.

(To SAM)

So yes, you lying witch, I'm willing to forget
 Your criminal intent. In my own heart I'll find
 Excuses for your acts and file them, underlined,
 As vices of our times—as long as you can stand
 To follow me at once into unchartered land,
 A vastness that's devoid of human company;
 To go without delay, and pledge our loyalty
 To no one else but us. And thus you can repair
 The harm that you've done here. Will I be free to care
 And love you as before? It's possible, I guess.

SAM

You want me to give up my life for wilderness,
 And dig a common grave?

LEE

Why do you need fake praise
 When you have my complete attention, my warm gaze?

SAM

I'm scared of solitude. I'm not as strong as you.
 But if I could say yes and marry you, in lieu
 Of exile, would that do?

LEE

No, your refusal's worse
 Than anything you've done. I loathe you. How perverse
 This situation is. Since you are not disposed

To give up all for me, as I find all reposed
 In you, get out. Leave now. Your offer is turned down.
 I hope my outrage lasts. I won't be kicked around.

(SAM hesitates then leaves)

LEE *(To LIZ)*

I feel your goodness, Liz, in everything you do.
 I've never seen someone who's half sincere as you.
 I've always held you high. Because my suffering
 Is mine to bear alone, I won't be offering
 Myself as your soul mate. I am not good enough.
 My heart is not designed for pleasure. It's too tough.
 But there may be someone—

LIZ

Don't stop there. Please go on
 You don't embarrass me. What of your friend, who's on
 A mission of his own. If he would think to ask,
 I'd probably accept.

PHIL

To sign up for this task
 Is more than I could hope; I'd die, pay any price.

LEE

May both of you, to get a taste of paradise,
 Preserve your current state of rapture in a kiss.
 Beat down by pettiness, besieged by injustice,
 I'll flee from this abyss, where vice is in the air,
 To find a quiet spot that's far away—somewhere
 Where I can live my life a free and honest man.

PHIL

Let's stop at nothing, Liz, to keep him from his plan.

THE END