

THE RECIPROCITY LAW
A Dark Satire in 2 Acts, 6 Scenes

by Arwin Ascendi

Revision 4.01

Outline

*(with dialogues of the first and last scenes, and
one in the middle)*

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Registered with WGA, East
Reg. No. 129965

1107 E COX AVE
Peoria IL 61616
Contact via email: lasz@brinkster.net

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Characters

- SAM:** Late 20's, white male. The WAITRESS's son. Smart but uneducated. Poverty doesn't destroy his dignity. Shows off as a macho guy but sensitive inside.
- DIANE:** Early 20's, female. MURRAY's daughter. The rich punk girl with strong manly character: energetic, not afraid of picking a fight with SAM. Also, his equal partner being vulnerable and sensitive.
- MURRAY:** Adult, male. Smooth-talking, behaves as a gracious person in public, until he loses temper. Then he can (and does) kill.
- BRUTE:** Adult, male. Another bully with no moral reservations. Sneaky as MURRAY, and he also represents brute power.
- JUDGE:** Adult, gender-indifferent. An honest character, slightly rigid.
- THE PRESIDENT:** Late 50's, male. A W-type character, in a bad sense. (Video replay.)
- THE WAITRESS:** Late 40's, female. (This short role can be played by an extra or by the same female actress, with an aging make-up, who plays DIANE.)
- Extras:** 5 to 20 people. They participate in the think tanks session well dressed; in the bar scene and at the tag distribution scene poorly dressed; in the restaurant scene as non-smoking by-sitters and as the company of MURRAY's table; in the club scene as elegant club members. Some have one or two-liner parts.

Notes

- Economical choice of actors is always an issue. Although there are seven main characters, it's not too difficult to direct the play with 3 actors and 1 actress. Merging MURRAY's and BRUTE's characters in one is trivial. The director may also consider to cast the waitress's and DIANE's roles to one actress. The President's role fits well in a pre-taken video, played on a screen. The billboard of stock prices and the display of the chessboard would require a big screen display anyway.
- This play can be directed with the concept of **progressive play**. It is not only progressive as opposed to conservative, but also as evolving, improving. The (old) idea came to my mind when I was thinking about the economical solution of having 5 to 20 extras who fill the restaurant, stay in the line, etc. Actors, even to-be-actors don't like to show up every night just to sit in a restaurant scene or stay in line in another scene as background. Everybody and anybody **from the audience** can do that. What if we could motivate the audience to participate and do minor jobs, with letting them feel important and let them tell just a one-liner? Both in the restaurant scene and in the staying-in-line scene couples can tell jokes to each other. The only rule is that all the jokes are about the government.
- The performances would be advertised as an opportunity to tell a joke on stage. Active visitors can suggest jokes or just willing to tell one that has already been successful. As the repertoire of good jokes grows, people revisit the play just to listen (or publicly tell) new jokes about the government. An Internet site, even a TV show can list the new jokes heard in **The Reciprocity Law**.
- Otherwise the writer's intention is to maintain the play as a **dark satire** with a happy ending, and without completely turning it to a comedy.

Time: Early 21st century

Place: A country between Canada and Mexico

Act One.

Scene I.

Setting: Shoddy bar called 'To the Proud Servants'.

SAM: *(In T-shirt/jeans/biker's leather jacket. Standing in the middle of the bar's walkway. Loud to everybody)*

Whose Corvette is blocking my bike?

(No reply)

SAM: *(Louder and slower)*

I won't ask it again. Whose Corvette is blocking my bike?

(He spreads his stand, hands on waist.)

DIANE: *(In mix of fancy and punk dresses; fake rags vs. expensive purse...)*

You just did.

SAM: *(Turns his head 90 degrees where the voice is coming from)*

Did what?

DIANE:

You asked it again.

(She stands up and imitates his fighting stand with a girlish touch.)

SAM: *(Less aggressively, beckons toward the entrance)*

Is it your car?

DIANE: *(Loosening up a little, too)*

Is it red?

SAM:

Miss, it's the only Corvette ... the only Corvette I've seen in this dirty parking lot in the last couple of years.

DIANE:

Then it must be mine.

SAM:

Would you mind moving it? I'm in a hurry.

DIANE:

And I am Diane. Hi, In-a-hurry. *(Reaches out for a handshake)*
Nice to meet you.

SAM: *(Accepts her hand but confused)*
Sorry. I'm Sam.

DIANE: *(Searching her keys in her purse. Understanding)*
Going to a late date? Your girlfriend doesn't like to wait?
(She looks up from the purse and smiles impishly.)

SAM:
I don't have a girlfriend... *(Relaxed already, too, and smiles back)*
How about you?

DIANE:
I don't have a girlfriend, either. *(She keeps smiling at SAM.)*

SAM:
I mean, boyfriend.

DIANE:
No, not really.

(The dialogue stops. Both are perplexed.)

DIANE:
So, are you late from your job then?

SAM:
I don't have a job. I've been unemployed in the last two years.

DIANE:
Sorry to hear that. May I buy you a drink, Sam?

SAM:
You may if you can. You must be rich. Driving a Corvette when the gas is *four*
bucks a gallon.
(He waves to the bartender and gives the sign of 'two, here'.)

DIANE:
Do you ride your bike a lot?

SAM:
More than I want. About six hours a day.

DIANE:

I didn't notice that the gas is four bucks a gallon, but if you are unemployed and still can afford to ride a Harley six hours a day, you shouldn't be too poor, either.

SAM:

The Harley is not mine.

DIANE:

Oh, yours is the other bike, the Honda, right?

SAM:

Actually, none of them. Mine is the bicycle, next to them.

DIANE:

Oh, that bike? You must be really poor then.

SAM: *(Proudly)*

I'm not poor! I just want to protect the environment. You know, air pollution and stuff.

DIANE:

I see. And you still can buy your beer ...

SAM:

I thought you were going to buy my beer. *(With a smile)* Just kidding.
(He friendly bangs his shoulder to hers.)

DIANE: *(Bangs back, stronger than expected from a girl)*

It's good to talk with you.

SAM: *(Regaining his balance.)*

Yeah, same here. You're not the kind of girly girls, you know... Except, you know... *(He flustered follows her curves with his hand in the air.)*

NEW GUEST: *(Black male. Approaches SAM)*

Hi, Sam. How ya doin', servant?

SAM:

Hi, Tim, my servant friend! *(They shake hands firmly and friendly.)*
Same old.

NEW GUEST: *(Pats SAM's back and moves on. As new guests show up, 'Hi, servant' greetings here and there in the bar.)*

DIANE:

How come you guys call each other 'servant'?

SAM:

'Cause most people work in the service industry. It started since service became more and more humiliating. You know, before that, all these friends of mine were respected middle-class people, doing business as usual. Or, they thought they were middle-class. Like Josh, the black guy in the corner. He's been a mechanic in his own garage. A good specialist, hard-working, honest businessman. He is still honest, still a mechanic, but not a businessman. He doesn't own his shop anymore.

DIANE:

What happened?

SAM:

Nothing that he could have done about it. Inflation, hidden tax hikes, increasing interest rates. Just before bankruptcy a nationwide repair chain gave a pathetically low offer on his shop. He made a "free choice", as if he had a choice. He works as before. If he makes a profit, he makes it for the company. If he loses, he loses his job.

DIANE:

So, he's not an entrepreneur but a middle-class employee now, right?

SAM:

How can you call someone middle-class, when he doesn't have any control of his life? The middle class has been disappearing. They are the servants now.

DIANE: *(Loud and careless)*

To the servants! *(She raises her drink with a naïve smile and looks around.)*

SAM: *(With anger and under his breath)*

Stop it!

DIANE: *(Points at the neon billboard that shows the name of the place)*

What? You can call the whole boozier 'Servants' and I can't utter the word?

SAM: *(Changes his voice to forgiving.)*

You know, these people will never get out of their situation. Same as with blacks, who know that they always will be black. The latter proudly call each other 'Nigger' as if they said 'brother', but of course, from a white person's mouth the same word just doesn't sound friendly, no matter what. My friends Josh and Tim call each other 'Nigger'; each of the three of us can call the other Servant but no other combination would be appropriate.

DIANE:

You said 'these people'. What about you? Aren't you one of them?

SAM:

I am. (*Proudly*) I am a Servant.

DIANE:

Now I got it. When you say servant, you say it with a capital S.

SAM:

You have a good ear. (*Slowly approaches to her as if examining her ear.*)

I always wanted to be an ear doctor.

(*Looks at the other ear, too. Seriously hemming, like a doctor*)

Actually, you have two adorable ears.

(*Slowly kisses DIANE at the earlobe.*)

DIANE: (*Lets him first but stops him going further. With banter*)

Don't distract me. Where were we? Oh yeah. The difference between you and them.

SAM:

The difference is that I will get out of this misery. It can happen. You know, like Michael Jackson. A black man who wanted to become white, and he made it.

DIANE:

If I were him, I wouldn't be so proud of my new skin.

SAM:

OK, bad example. But you know what I mean. People shouldn't be pre-ordained by birth.

DIANE:

You can emerge. You can work more and make more money.

SAM:

More than what? My mother works ten hours a day as a waitress. After closing she does the cleaning, too. Should she work more? Should she work harder? I would take any job. What more can I do?

DIANE:

Well, you can study. Or whatever.

SAM:

Right. Tuition fees go up like rocket. My mom's daily income is less than the price of one book. I want to study. I was serious when I said that I wanted to be a doctor. Let's not talk about it.

(Suddenly changes the subject and tone.)

So, Diane, what do you do when you don't drive your Corvette?

DIANE:

Not much. Spend my father's money.

SAM:

What does your father do? Does he work hard? I mean, like a real worker. Do his hands get dirty?

DIANE:

He doesn't work hard in a sense you define hard work. But his hands definitely get dirty. Figuratively, of course. Once he wrote a book about how to become a multi-millionaire.

SAM:

Must be a best seller. How much is your father's book?

DIANE:

About 25 bucks but don't buy it. It's trash, but good advertising can sell trash well. People are dumb and buy it.

SAM:

You mean "poor people are dumb"? I thought so. I don't think that anyone can become a multi-millionaire from nothing, without cheating, stealing or lying.

DIANE:

Well, rich people don't need to buy books to tell them how to become rich. I haven't heard back any success, either. Except my father's, of course. He sold millions of copies and he became a multi-millionaire. And the book is about cheating, stealing and lying. But he calls them differently: salesmanship, advertising tricks, hiding information. Everything is legal.

SAM:

And he started from zero, right?

DIANE:

Well, he started from six zeros, because he inherited his first million at an early age. Then he spent all the million on the ad campaign of the book. The book sale quadrupled his wealth.

SAM:

So, he's worth four million now, at least.

DIANE:

Actually, closer to a billion. He reinvested the money in another campaign. In the presidential.

SAM:

What could he get out from a political campaign?

DIANE:

Just a little favor from the President. He got a concession for establishing the Federal Charity Fund. 80% of all charities in the country go through the Fund. He takes 10% of the proceeds as his fee for "management" . He pays a bookkeeper \$12 bucks an hour and about thirty data processors \$6 bucks an hour, and he keeps the rest. Well, except the money he donates to make sure the minimum wage isn't increased. –And, it's all naturally tax-free, according to the law.

SAM:

You may think that I'm impressed, but I tell you what. I hate your father without knowing him. First, he collected money from millions of people, without giving them what he promised. Then he steals from the needy.

DIANE:

You are not alone, who hates him. One reason I'm here is, because he wants me to circulate in the high society only. He wants me to marry to a billionaire. Any billionaire.

SAM: *(With sarcasm)*

Poor baby.

DIANE: *(She didn't notice the sarcasm in SAM's voice. She looks up with tears in her eyes.)*

Do you feel sorry for me?

SAM: *(Indecisively)*

...Yes...

DIANE: *(Hugs him)*

Do you love me?

SAM:

...I like you...

DIANE:

I like you, too.

(They kiss.)

I like you more than my Corvette.

(They kiss again.)

And my yacht...
(They kiss again.)
And my credit card...
(They kiss again.)
... with unlimited credit line...

SAM:
Did I just call you poor baby?

DIANE:
... and my private ski resort ...

SAM:
Stop it!

DIANE: *(Removes her hands from SAM and raises them)*

SAM: *(Drives her hands back under his jacket.)*
Not that. Just stop talking. Please.

DIANE: *(Smiling but still emotional, tears in her eyes)*
I thought you might like me to talk dirty.

SAM:
I may, but not that dirty.
(They laugh together.)

Scene II.

Setting: Think-tanks session in a White House meeting room. Five or six people –men with their sleeves rolled up, ties loosened. Empty food boxes on the table, one person standing with an easel with paper to write the others' ideas.

The first topic is ideological: How to handle the new trend that those working in the service industry call themselves servants. It makes the establishment look bad. The conclusion is that “We cannot let them use the term ‘servants’ in a free society!”

The second topic is the sluggish economy. They recall the boom of the 90’s when the dot-com phenomenon created billions from nothing. A participant of the brainstorming brings up the idea that treating human life as commodity can result in trillions of dollars appearing in the exchange market. If convicted criminals can pay for their crime, instead of going to jail, economy gets another boost. Also, it takes off an enormous burden from the government’s shoulder. Speaker talks about government statistics –such as California spending more on prisons than on schools.

(Music reflecting passing time. Later)

Big screen display as TV. The rest of the stage gets dark.

The President gives an enthusiastic and optimistic State of the Union speech. He talks about the improper use of the term ‘servant’, and about the new laws that broaden the definition of marketable possessions as a triumph of free economy; “... an important step toward the bright future, when the government shall not intervene in the individual’s life. One’s life is one’s property, and the free citizen has disposal with his or her possession. On the other hand, convicted persons will serve the sufferer’s family as real servants. They lose certain freedom rights as prisoners have lost some before. The institution of personal servants will take the burden from the government’s shoulder. We can eliminate 90% of the prison system once for all. Save our prison dollars for only the most corrupt and unstoppable rapists and murderers.” He also declares that he will balance the budget in three months, despite of the huge deficit and of the ongoing war. His sentences are well rounded until he has to improvise to the reporters’ questions. “Isn’t this just slavery?”

“No, it’s free choice –that’s what we’re all about.”

Then it turns out that his English is poor. He rages against the terrorists, communists and ‘democratists’. “I mean Democrats, ... no, I’m not against Democrats..., I meant anti-democrats.” He messes up with more confusing remarks. Finally, the president says “Well, I have to go. God Bless us.” One of the presidential aides steps to the podium and tells the press the same thing the president said, but with perfect English, and makes a correction that the President meant to say those who are against democracy.

Scene III.

Setting: Courtroom. Long line waiting.

Father and son enter and stay at the end of line. They disdainfully talk about the “Support our troops. Bring them home now.” bumper sticker of a car parking next to theirs. The young conservative is for-war but wouldn’t go to fight because he has a lucrative broker business. The owner of the car with the questioned bumper sticker talks back. He is anti-war but has a son in the army. Who stole whose yellow ribbon slogan? The former father and son represent the conservative demagoguery. Who is the better patriot? More and more people get involved in the conversation. Opinions clash about war, freedom, law vs. righteousness, justice and moral. Law obedience vs. civil disobedience. Where would we be without civil disobedience? i.e., no revolution, no country. Also, jokes are told about the administration, like:

“Have you heard that the government reinvented the Roman Emperors’ policy?”

“Yes. It gives us the bread and the circuses, without the bread.”

At the other end of the line the government distributes necklaces with “Life Stock tags” for \$1000. It generates an instant \$200 billion federal revenue. As the value of Life Stock tags go higher day-by-day, trillions of dollars emerge in the stock market. The sudden boom results in an all-time high popularity of the President. Later it turns out that those who borrowed the \$1000 for buying their tags have to pay so high interest that they lose their virtual money fast, unless they sell their tags and potentially become real servants, a worse situation than being a ‘free servant’, who works in the service industry.

The new law, the reciprocity law, says that the victim or the victim’s family sets the monetary price of the punishment, similarly to the price of food set by the seller. If the price is too high to the convict, he has the choice to become a real servant of the sufferers. This kind of voluntary slavery is in accordance with the principles of “free society”. Besides, it is part of the small government concept; the government puts the burden of imprisonment on the citizen’s shoulder as it did with the burden of education previously. On the other hand, prior tendency of the disappearance of middle class seems to stop. Social mobility regains momentum, as poor families are willing to accept monetary compensation from rich convicts.

New people are arriving. As they overhear the talk about bumper stickers, a debate starts to evolve between A (atheist) and B (believer) about their fish-shaped stickers. A has the text "Darwin" in a fish, B has "Jesus" in it.

B:
Do you believe in God?

A:
No. I don't believe in God. Neither in Santa Clause. First I have to know of someone's existence, then I may believe him.

B:
Why do you think that God does not exist?

A:
I know that Santa Clause does not exist, do you?

B:
Let's talk about God.

A:
OK. Let's talk about the existence of God.

B:
There are proofs of His existence.

A:
Like the proof of the Great Deluge? The see shells found on the top of the Ararat? I rather believe that millions of years ago, before its emerging, the surface of Ararat was in the see bed. For me it is a more obvious explanation than the Biblical Noah and his menagerie.

B:
Actually, they found the remains of Noah's Ark on the Ararat.

A:
Now **that** I don't believe.

B:
So, you are an atheist materialist.

A:
Sure, and a protacutomentist.

B:
What's protacutomentism?

A:

I don't know. I just made it up. Something that does not exist. Like God...

B:

You may not have a heart to accept Jesus.

A:

I accept some principles of Jesus. I may not have a mindset to accept God.

B:

You accept Jesus and you don't accept his father, his Creator. Your Creator.

A:

Are you talking about God or Joseph?

B:

You are hopeless, skeptic and cynical. Do you hate believers?

A:

Not at all. Take the initial E. Take the very middle of the twentieth century: 1945 to 1955. Two of my idols from that time are Elvis and Einstein. Two wholehearted believers, whom I love. Now, name two non-believers that you love. Not with a given initial; not from one particular decade but from thousands of years; the whole history of mankind. Can you name one atheist you love? Who has a smaller heart of acceptance? You or me? Do you hate atheists?

B:

I don't know atheists but I definitely know and love Jesus. Atheists disagree with Jesus.

A:

Not necessarily. I, for one atheist, agree with most of his teaching. Even though I don't think that he was God's son. Is this the point where good Christianity makes or breaks? To believe in certain principles or in a story of a person, who might have evangelized those principles?

B:

They are about the same.

A:

No. Jesus and Marx are about the same, in a sense that they both realized: The poor and defenseless are screwed by the rich and potent.

B:

These are not exactly the words of Christ...

A:

Neither that of Marx. I'm sorry that I used the unfair advantage of non-believers that we can swear and you can't. But you get the point, don't you?

B:

Are you saying that you are a Marxist?

A:

No. I'm saying, though, that Jesus may have been a Marxist today.

B:

Nonsense. If Marx said the same then Marx was a Christian. Or at least one who accepted Jesus' message. Not vice versa. But Stalin and Pol Pot of the Khmer Rouge were Marxists and they were mass murderers.

A:

So were the Christian Crusaders and the Inquisitors. They killed millions of believers and non-believers. The bloodshed during colonization of the world was carried out in the name of Christianity, too.

B:

They were not good Christians.

A:

...And Stalin and Pol Pot were not good Marxists... Why labels are so important? Why shouldn't we talk about principles without putting them in an '...ism' box? Why the question, whether Jesus was resurrected or not, is more important than the ideas that he preached? I'd be happy to know that Elvis is alive but for me it makes no difference in the recognition of his music.

B:

I know that religion makes me a better, moral and ethical person.

A:

And I know that believing wouldn't make me better. The crutches of religion may help some people but hamper others in the right thinking. Again, what is superior? Being moral and ethical by having the promise of Heaven and the fear from Hell, or, doing right things without considering these consequences?

A:

People need spiritual support.

A:

You mean crutches.

B:

Yes. The week need spiritual crutches, if you wish...

A:

I agree. I'm strong, so, I don't.

B:

So, you never need help. How arrogantly self-content you are. Like an atheist...

A:

Again, I don't take labels. In your terms I may be an atheist. In mine, I'm neither a Marxist, a skeptic, a cynical, a materialist, nor an atheist. I am a ...

B:

Nihilist!

A:

I am an ...

B:

You said 'Amen'!

A:

Yeah, right. That's the word I was looking for.

Scene IV.

Setting: Restaurant with one central table and a few, distance tables in the back.

A table company enjoys picking on the WAITRESS [pinching her, lifting up her skirt, rude & crass remarks. They think that everything is allowed for their money. When WAITRESS politely notifies them that they smoke in a non-smoking section, they force her to remove the non-smoking sign and make the non-smoking guests leave the section.

MURRAY sends back a tray of crackers several times because some crackers are cracked. After he gets the perfect set of crackers, he smashes them with his fist and pours the crumbs in his soup with laugh. The others guffaw with him. The tired (pregnant?) WAITRESS dares to say “Jackass”. MURRAY pulls his gun. WAITRESS begs “Please don’t!” but he shoots her three times. WAITRESS collapses. Laugh suddenly stops. A few seconds of silence before

CURTAIN

Act Two.

Scene V.

Setting: Courtroom, same as Scene III, but during session.

The murder case gains high publicity because a witness heard MURRAY, the Charity man saying that his act was righteous because a waitress, who made \$5 an hour, could not insult him, the billionaire.

The President, MURRAY's friend doesn't know what to say in the situation. He doesn't respond immediately to the reporter's question, if there is class war in the country. Later he refuses any idea of class conflicts. He blurbs something about the price of freedom, his heart being out there with the victim's family, etc. (The speech can be edited from actual presidential speeches.)

MURRAY doesn't care much about the enactment of the reciprocity law that enables the victim's family to set the monetary price of the punishment arbitrarily. First he tries to pay a hundred dollars to hush the poor family. After he realizes that he cannot pay off the family with a hundred million, he calls the President to find a solution. First the call stops at the President's secretary, then MURRAY offers a large contribution to the election campaign. After the secretary takes the transfer of the contribution, the President picks up the phone and says that he cannot help because it would contradict with his previous speeches that the government should not intervene in the individual's life.

The legal problem arises when MURRAY does not want to lose his financial situation, nor become a slave. The waitresses family want is "all" –nothing less. Mixed demagogue messages about free trade and individual freedom confront. In a previous case a murderer offered a fragment of his possession, a million for buy-out. The victim's family accepted it. 30% of the money was immediately deducted as war tax, another 30% as the lawyer's fee and the rest as their back payment of loans. The poor family remained poor. Since the fact has been exposed that, unlike earnings gained by trading Life Stocks in the stock market, selling a personal life tag is taxable, proud servants are reluctant to accept any monetary compensation less than all the convict's possessions. Even in this case, the poor cannot become richer than one third of the convict's total worth because of the taxes and the lawyers.

Legal institutions, courts lost their budget and their power to make detailed decision. Many judges become unemployed. The job of the remaining "judiciary workforce" is limited to bring a guilty/innocent verdict, as it was the job of the juries before. The rest is up to the private parties. The wealthy establish their own "private courts" –instead of supporting government for all, they support government for themselves. It was the same when they ruined the public school system by refusing to pay taxes and spending their money on private schools to keep out the poor people. The private courts hire the best legal minds in the

country to solve the legal problems of the wealthy, while the poor have to wait and get justice from those who barely made it through law school. In MURRAY's case the presiding judge orders that the private negotiation on the punishment should take place in the presence of JUDGE, who has to escort MURRAY until agreement. In the meantime, MURRAY's Life Stock tag goes to the possession of the sufferer's family. JUDGE is also disgusted by MURRAY's arrogance. He feels sympathy toward the victim's family but strictly represents the new law and lets things happen without interfering with a more specific sentence.

MURRAY is sure that "these low level people" have something he can count on, and it is stronger than law: morality; aversion against death penalty and against slavery. He offers money again, with plenty of zeros but way less than his wealth. SAM becomes aggravated and he raises his gun about to shoot down MURRAY. In the last minute it turns out that MURRAY's daughter is the girl he met last night. The 'sentence' is postponed. JUDGE is appointed to escort MURRAY everywhere until final decision is made between the parties.

Scene VI.

Setting: An exclusive club. The scene can be the same restaurant as in Scene IV, with some extra accessories such as elegant curtains, tablecloth, a couple of armchairs at the center table. A billboard continuously shows the momentary price of Life Stocks.

(SAM and DIANE enter the club. They both are much better dressed than in the bar.)

SAM: *(Points back with his thumb)*

Did you just tip the doorman with five hundred bucks?

DIANE:

Does it matter? You're in.

SAM:

But five hundred?

DIANE:

Would you rather want to apply for membership? It's fifty thousand.

SAM:

Fifty thousand?! My best ever annual income was less than half of it!

DIANE:

High entry fee is the simplest means to exclude people like you. See, they think that you don't belong here but you must think the same, too.

(Changing tone and subject)

So, why did you want me to get you in the Investor's Club?

SAM:

My friends are in big trouble. They are about losing ground. They can't pay their monthly installments and they need to sell their Life Stocks. I heard that in this club you can tell when to sell.

(He points up to the running billboard)

See? That's the momentary exchange rate of the tags. I also heard that they can manipulate with the rate by dumping and withdrawing large amount of Life Stocks in the market in short periods. I just have to wait for a tide wave and mount it.

DIANE:

Like surfing?

SAM:

Almost. I am playing with dozens of lives now. If I fail, I put my friends in a long slavery. If I'm lucky, they can get back their tags loan-free.

BRUTE: (*Approaches DIANE*)
Diane, my love! How are you?

DIANE: (Reserved)
I'm fine. Except for the fact that an asshole just called me his love.

BRUTE:
Don't be so cold to your father's best friend.

DIANE:
Let your friendship stay between you and my father. I don't want to be involved.

BRUTE:
Be involved with me, or in general? Involvement can be exciting.
(*He winks at SAM*)
Sorry, Sir, we haven't met. I'm Brute Fryer.

SAM: (*Tries to avoid handshake. Politely bows a bit but keeps his hands behind.*)
Sam. Sam Kovalsky.

BRUTE:
Are you related to Jack Kovalsky, the President's aid in the Unemployment Affairs?

SAM:
No, I'm not. I...

DIANE: (*Waiving 'no' behind BRUTE*)

SAM:
...I'm also involved in the Unemployment Affairs, though.

BRUTE:
Running an Unemployment Agency, right? One of the most lucrative businesses nowadays.

SAM:
Yes. Running ... Unemployment Agency. In and out ...

BRUTE:
Exactly. Knowing when to go out of business is as important as knowing when to go in. In between you give some papers to the unemployed to fill out, juggle with the papers, a little statistics here, a little administration there and the government rewards you with more than what the unemployed get. Been there, done that, made big bucks (*grinning*) paid my club dues, and some more.

SAM: *(Makes a fist, almost hits BRUTE, while BRUTE looks away. DIANE gently hooks on SAM's arm to stop him. When SAM tries to break open, she grabs his arm stronger and holds him back. In the meantime, BRUTE is preoccupied with setting up a chessboard on the center table.)*

BRUTE: *(Turns back to SAM)*
Sam, can I call you Sam?

SAM:
Sure, Brute, sure. Everybody calls me Sam. Even the unemployed people in the office.

BRUTE:
That's very generous of you. Would you like to play chess?

SAM:
I'd love to. Boris Spassky once said that chess is like life.

BRUTE:
Fischer said that chess is life.

SAM:
And these days Fisher's approach is more correct. Since Life Stock is introduced in the exchange market, people play with others' lives.

BRUTE:
I'm not a Darwinist but isn't it wonderful that always the strongest survive?

SAM:
Ask the weaker ones. There may be more Darwinists among the weak but they would disagree with the trend that natural selection should rule human society, too.

BRUTE:
Fortunately we don't have to worry about the weak since you and I are among the strong, aren't we?

SAM:
We'll see. Why don't we start the game?

BRUTE:
Sure. You don't like to talk about philosophy, right?

SAM:
I'm a practical man. But I don't mind wrapping up our conversation about the

similarities between chess and life. I think that there's a big difference that makes the game better than life. In chess you can't change the rules to suit yourself.

(SAM and BRUTE sit down in the armchairs, politely wait for each other to have a seat. People gather around, including MURRAY. JUDGE follows MURRAY everywhere, as he's been appointed to do so.)

BRUTE: *(To the crowd)*

Gentlemen, may I introduce you a new member of our club, Mr. Sam Kovalsky, the successful entrepreneur?

MURRAY: *(Fearfully pats BRUTE's back, calling him to the side.)*

BRUTE:

Sorry, just a minute.

(He stands up, walks away with MURRAY, who talks to BRUTE with suppressed voice, flinging his arms about. He obviously reveals SAM's identity.)

BRUTE: *(Walks back, sits down. No more politeness.)*

I'm White. *(Turns the chessboard to his favor.)*

SAM:

Shouldn't we flip a coin to decide, who's White?

BRUTE:

No, we shouldn't. This is my club, where I set the rules.

SAM:

Fine. As long as your rules are consistent.

BRUTE:

Damn I am consistent. Here we consistently play for money.

SAM:

How much?

BRUTE: *(Looks at the display.)*

As I see, Life Stock is at around \$100,000. You bet your tag and I match it with \$100,000.

SAM:

Consistency, heh? Forget about the stock market. I bet my tag against your tag. *(Removes his necklace and puts it down.)*

BRUTE:

You think you can outsmart me, don't you.

(Takes off his tag, too, and smacks it next to SAM's.)

Minor change in the rules. We can double the bet before the opponent's move.

SAM:

You can't change the rule after the game started!

BRUTE:

The game has not started yet. You can leave now but your tag stays.

SAM:

OK. I accept your new rule. *(He turns to JUDGE.)*

Judge, could you keep track of the bets and watch out for swindles?

JUDGE: *(With sarcasm.)*

Certainly. I'll be the judge.

BRUTE:

Do you think I would cheat? I'm the President's friend, a well-respected member of the society.

SAM:

One more reason that I shouldn't trust you.

BRUTE:

I take it as an insult.

SAM:

Good. I meant it as an insult.

BRUTE:

Then show me another tag because I'm doubling the bet right now. I'm sure you have my friend's, MURRAY's tag with you. *(BRUTE throws in another tag.)*

SAM: *(Reluctantly pulls out MURRAY's tag. MURRAY and BRUTE throw a glance at each other and smile.)*

But you said that one can double before the opponent's move. You doubled, so, it's my turn. It means that I'm White. You know, consistency. Or do you want to change the rules of chess, too? *(SAM slowly turns the board back that white pieces go to his side again.)*

BRUTE: *(Looks at the JUDGE with anger, who nods assent, acknowledging SAM's argument.)*

SAM:

e4 *(He moves the Pawn. The big screen follows the actual positions)*

DIANE: *(Steps in and shows a bank-roll.)*
... and double!

BRUTE: *(Easily matches the money.)*
e5 – and double. *(He moves the Pawn.)*

SAM:
Knight to f3 *(He moves.)*

DIANE:
And double. *(She steps in again with a roll of money.)*

SAM: *(anxiously looks at DIANE.)*

BRUTE:
Get-ting in-te-res-ting. *(He smiles, matches the bet and moves.)*
... Knight to c6. And evidently, I'm doubling the bet.

(Sounds of chess moves. The screen displays the game:
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Nxf7 Kxf7)

BRUTE:
Aaaand double.

DIANE: *(to JUDGE)*
May I write a check?

BRUTE:
No. If you're out of cash, you're out.

DIANE:
I'm asking the JUDGE.

JUDGE:
As long as you have money on the account, yes.

MURRAY: *(intervenes)*
No, she doesn't. I'm the primary holder of that account and I am freezing it right now.
(To DIANE with anger.)
You can't bet against your father!

(Silence. It seems that the game is over.)

BRUTE: *(breaks the silence)*

Well? Isn't it time for White to resign? No money, no game.

SAM:

Not so fast. *(He pulls out the bundle of tags that he got from his friends.)*
Can you match these?

BRUTE:

Sure. How much is it? Ten millions? A hundred million? Of course, I can match it!

SAM:

I don't know. But one thing I do know. It's not ten millions and it's not a hundred million. Again, they're Life tags that you can match with Life tags only. You know. Consistency.

JUDGE: *(to BRUTE)*

Fair enough. You started the bets with Life tags, he can keep on betting with Life tags.

BRUTE:

Give me a minute.

(He calls the pack of club members with a hand wave, and walks in the corner. The others follow him. After a short whispering encounter, clanging noise of tags. BRUTE returns with an exultant smile on his face and with a bundle of necklaces with tags in his hand.)

I can always find investors in a good deal.

*(SAM and BRUTE continue the game. The scene dims. Sound of chess moves. A display board shows the consecutive positions of the following moves:
7.Qf3+ Ke6 8.Nc3 Nd4 9.Bxd5+ Ke7 10.Qf7+)*

SAM:

Check.

(The scene brightens.)

BRUTE:

King to d6 – and double.

(He throws in tags. JUDGE and SAM count them. The display shows the position after 10. ... Kd6.)

BRUTE: *(to SAM)*

I don't think you can match this. You don't have enough tags at hand.

SAM: *(after counting, with resignation)*

I'm short with one.

JUDGE:

No, you are not. *(He takes off his necklace.)*

BRUTE: *(grabs JUDGE's wrist.)*

Judge, you should be impartial.

JUDGE: *(Moves back his hand disdainfully from BRUTE's grip.)*

You are right. As a judge, I can't influence the scale-pans. But I don't want to be a judge in an unjust system that favors crooks like you. *(He takes off his rob.)*

I've been a judge too long. I served the government and those who are represented by the government. I thought I served the people. Now I am what I am, a proud servant. *(He utters the politically incorrect, deprecated phrase, drops his rob and throws his tag in the pile.)*

BRUTE:

You are a fool. You've lost with the other losers. He can't place more bet anyway, so, I won. *(BRUTE stands up to collect the pile.)*

It's been a really fun game.

SAM: *(Stands up, too)*

Really fun? You're right. I can't raise the bet anymore. Again, you're right. This game has been real and fun, unlike your games with fictitious values of human lives. But it's not over yet. It's my turn. *(He slowly moves the Knight.)* Checkmate!

(The display blinks: 11.Ne4#.

Pause, most likely the audience applauds anyway.)

SAM: *(To BRUTE)*

I guess we have nothing to do with each other but you're going to have an unpleasant conversation with your lenders.

(He beckons toward the pack of club members.)

SAM: *(to the club members)*

By the way, your tags are for sale. The starting price is a hundred billion dollar each, just to make sure that nobody has that kind of money. But, according to the reciprocity law, you can pay with lifelong service.

MURRAY:

You mean, we have to be your slaves?

SAM:

All the others maybe, but not you. You and I can't be even that simply. *(He pulls a gun and aims at MURRAY.)*

De'ja vu?

MURRAY:

What is this? Execution? I thought you were against the death penalty.

SAM:

Yes, I still am against the state executing people. But not against revenge.
(Slowly moves the gun toward DIANE.)

MURRAY:

No –no. You’ll never get away with it. What do you want? I’ll give you anything.!

SAM: *(Ignores MURRAY. To DIANE)*

DIANE, you stupid rich bitch! All that money and no damn brains. You almost ruined my plan.

DIANE:

Please, don’t!

SAM:

I want to hear it from your father!

MURRAY:

Please, don’t!

SAM: *(Aiming at DIANE but talking to MURRAY)*

Thank you! Now, remind me, what happened after my mother said “Please, don’t”?

MURRAY: *(Doesn’t answer. Looks at the floor.)*

SAM: *(Shoots three times at DIANE, in the same rhythm as MURRAY did to the WAITRESS.)*

DIANE: *(Collapses)*

SAM: *(To MURRAY with dry voice without emotions)*

You killed my mother, I killed your daughter. Simple trade. Now we are even. By the law you may become my slave and I may become yours.

(More vividly, with a smile)

Unless one of us can outbid the other. *(He looks at the pile of the won tags, then up at the billboard that shows the actual price of Life tags. The price continuously go up to astronomical levels while club members, who lost their tags, place nervous calls on their cell phones.)*

I think I’m in a much better position now. And I’m not sure that your friends, including the President, will help you out.

(Siren sounds. Ambulance people pick up DIANE’s body and leave.)

Music reflects passing time. Scene darkens, big screen works as TV.)

REPORTER ON TV:

The Supreme Court declared that the recent laws constitute unresolvable inconsistencies. The Supreme Court called for an immediate action of the lawmakers to withdraw the reciprocity law. The Congress and the Senate held a joint emergency meeting. The assembly almost unanimously passed a bill on the immediate withdrawal of the reciprocity law. Only a couple of Texan representatives voted against.

DIANE: *(Walks in unharmed)*

SAM:

Are you OK, honey?

DIANE:

I am. I didn't know that blank cartridges could sound that loud, though. I had to see an ear doctor.

SAM:

What did he say?

DIANE:

He seconded my primary doctor's diagnosis. He said that I had adorable earlobes.

(DIANE and SAM hold each other while listening.)

REPORTER ON TV: *(Reading news)*

The stock market closed for an indefinite time, to avoid serious financial consequences of the law changes.

All banks temporarily closed and refused any monetary transfers for those who can't show their life tags.

The President resigned. In his resignation speech he expressed his intention to continue his political crusade for the free market economy in his home state, Texas.

DIANE:

Is it possible that he still doesn't get it?

SAM:

I think we've got things to do in Texas. *(He gently moves out of DIANE's caress; puts the chessboard under his left arm and follows DIANE.)*

DIANE:

Didn't you forget something?

SAM:

Sorry. (He returns to the table, removes the gun from his pocket and places it on the table in front of JUDGE. Picks up the cash, leaves the tags on the table)

Would you take care of these? Would you give back the tags to their owners? To my friends for free, to those betting against me, for 50% of their full possessions. I'm sure they'll all accept my offer.

DIANE:

Thank you, honey. I thought you were going to kill me again.

SAM: *(To DIANE)*

Life is too short to kill each other.

(He points his finger at MURRAY)

Although, you're going to feel life too long ... in jail.

(DIANE and SAM smile at each other, he puts his right arm around her shoulder, she puts her left arm around his waist while they walk out; the chessboard is facing to the audience under SAM's left arm.)

CURTAIN