

# **Perfect Altruism**

By Lauren Henderson

## **Characters**

**Eleanora**     Ambitious social butterfly. Annoyingly persistent. 16 female.  
**Riley**         Socially awkward genius. Thinks she's mysterious. 15 female.  
**Joelle**        Optimistic dreamer. Sees the good in everyone. 15 female.  
**Corey**         Sarcastic and stubborn. A real piece of work. 15 female.

## **Setting**

A high school dance. One half of the stage is a balcony under a starry night sky, the other half is inside the dance next to a snack table.

## **Note**

The dialogue from the two conversations should overlap. Underlined words are said in unison.

*Lights up on the balcony. RILEY leans against the railing and looks up at the sky. After a few moments, ELEANORA walks outside.*

**ELEANORA**

Oh, there you are! I thought I lost you.

**RILEY**

...Hey.

**ELEANORA**

What are ya doing out here?

**RILEY**

Needed fresh air.

**ELEANORA**

Got it, got it.

*She turns to Riley.*

**ELEANORA**

It's really beautiful tonight.

**RILEY**

Mhm.

*Riley nods, won't meet her gaze.*

**ELEANORA**

...Riley, do I bother you?

**RILEY**

What?

**ELEANORA**

I just feel like you don't really like me.

*Lights up on the dance. JOELLE and COREY stand next to each other, drinks in hand.*

**ELEANORA**

If I'm doing something wrong, I really want-

**JOELLE**

Wanting to do something doesn't make it selfish.

**COREY**

But you always get something out of helping people.

**JOELLE**

That's not true!

**COREY**

It is. If you give money to a homeless guy, you're not just doing it out of the *kindness of your heart*. You'd either feel guilty if you ignored him, or giving him money makes you feel good about yourself. Either way, selfish.

**JOELLE**

That's a horrible way to think about it.

**COREY**

Horrible or not, that's reality. And you-

**RILEY**

You don't have to pretend that you want to be friends with me.

**ELEANORA**

What?

**RILEY**

I know you think you're a saint for taking me under your wing, but I'm not a charity case, Eleanora.

**ELEANORA**

I never said you were-

**RILEY**

Well, it feels like it. Pestering me for small talk whenever you see me, trying to make me get along with all your friends, it- it's so forced. You don't have to save me from loneliness or whatever, we can just be lab partners.

**ELEANORA**

That's not what I'm trying to do, I- you think it's forced?

**RILEY**

I'm not stupid, Eleanora. We are just fundamentally different people, and the only reason you waste your time on me is to make yourself feel like a good person.

**ELEANORA**

...Riley, me being friends with you isn't transactional-

**COREY**

Transactional relationships are what the world is built on.

**JOELLE**

Ours isn't transactional.

**COREY**

Yeah it is. We both get something out of being friends.

**JOELLE**

Bullshit. I just like you.

**COREY**

Nah, you like what I do for you. You use me for my comedic genius and my willingness to confront people that you're too shy to stand up to.

**JOELLE**

I don't *use* you. I appreciate those things, but I like you outside of what you do for me.

**COREY**

Yeah? Like what?

**JOELLE**

Uh, I love how strong-willed you are. Once you set your mind to something, you'll stop at nothing to get it, even if it means beating this stupid argument into the ground.

**COREY**

Hey, we can stop as soon as you admit I'm right.

**JOELLE**

Not a chance. But seriously, I really admire your determination. I wish I was as confident as you.

**COREY**

...Oh, shut up.

*Joelle takes a step closer.*

**JOELLE**

So, what about me?

**COREY**

Huh?

**JOELLE**

What do I do for you? Why are you so *selfishly* friends with me?

**COREY**

...I dunno.

**JOELLE**

Oh, come on! I wanna hear it.

**COREY**

...I guess I-

**ELEANORA**

I'm not trying to be your friend out of pity. I genuinely like being around you.

**RILEY**

Why?

**ELEANORA**

Because, you're- interesting! You're super smart, and innovative, and- and you don't kiss my ass.

*Riley stifles a laugh.*

**RILEY**

I- what?

**ELEANORA**

Dude, everyone I know is a yes-man! I have a whole group of creepy little henchmen always following me around who agree with everything I say. I mean, if I'd been working on that egg drop experiment with anyone else, I would've failed.

**RILEY**

Yeah, I don't know why you thought a paper airplane was gonna work.

**ELEANORA**

A girl can dream.

*She looks up at the sky longingly. Riley chuckles.*

**ELEANORA**

Everyone else would've just gone along with whatever I said. But you came in and told me I was being stupid, and then you worked with me to make an actual plan.

*She moves closer.*

**ELEANORA**

You call me on my shit, you push me. No one else does that.

**RILEY**

...I'm sorry, I don't know why-

**JOELLE**

Why do you have to be a smartass all the time?

**COREY**

What? It was funny!

*Joelle puts her drink down.*

**JOELLE**

I'm serious, Corey. What do you like about me?

**COREY**

...You're nice.

**JOELLE**

That's a start.

**COREY**

That's all you're getting.

**JOELLE**

*Really?*

**COREY**

I can't boost your ego too much. It'll make you cocky.

**JOELLE**

Oh my god.

*Joelle crosses her arms, looks away.*

**COREY**

Are you like actually mad, or-

**JOELLE**

I'm not mad, I just- I'm kinda sick of this tough guy act.

**COREY**

It's not an act, I'm tough as hell.

**JOELLE**

Corey, I need you to be real for like five seconds.

**COREY**

Oh my god, I don't know what you want me to say.

**JOELLE**

Why can't you be sincere with me? Why does everything have to be a joke?

**COREY**

This is so-

**ELEANORA**

So just to be clear, you don't mind me bugging you all the time?

*Riley laughs.*

**RILEY**

No, yeah, you're good. I...I like being around you.

*They share a look. Smile.*

**ELEANORA**

Hey, do you want to head back inside? I'm gonna request a few more songs before they shut this thing down.

**RILEY**

Yeah, sure. As long as you don't try to make me dance with you.

**ELEANORA**

No promises.

*They head to the door. Lights fade on balcony.*

**RILEY**

I'll make a run for it, don't-

**COREY**

Don't push it, Joelle.

**JOELLE**

I have to push you.

**COREY**

Why!?

**JOELLE**

Because I care about you! And I think deep down you care about me, too, but it's really hard to tell with all your sarcasm and mocking and- and meanness!

**COREY**

...I'm not mean.

**JOELLE**

You can be!

*Corey shifts back.*

**JOELLE**

I just- I need you to let me in. Stop being so concerned with looking cool and just...say something real.

*Corey looks at her, lets out a dry laugh. She storms off through the doors as Eleanora and Riley walk inside.*

**ELEANORA**

Woah. What was that, is she good?

*Joelle throws up her hands in defeat.*

**JOELLE**

...I dunno.

**RILEY**

Joelle?



**JOELLE**

Corey can just be so...frustrating. I want her to open up, and I- I don't know how to get through to her.

**ELEANORA**

Well, you know how she can be.

**JOELLE**

Proud?

**ELEANORA**

I was gonna say "a dick."

*Joelle laughs.*

**JOELLE**

No, she's just...scared, I think.

**ELEANORA**

I'm sure she'll come around eventually.

**JOELLE**

I hope so.

*Lights fade on dance, lights up on balcony. Corey stands at the railing, sighs. She begins to talk to herself, or God.*

**COREY**

I really do think you're nice. You do everything you can to help people, to make them happy. You're very thoughtful, and annoyingly perceptive. I feel like I can't keep anything a secret from you for long. You're super hard working and talented, and you'd be way more confident if you could see what I see. God, I sound...

*She shakes her head.*

**COREY**

...You probably would give that homeless guy money out of the kindness of your heart. I think it's in your nature.

*She looks to the door.*

**COREY**

It really is beautiful out here.

END OF PLAY.