

Oliver L Landreth  
[o.landreth@gmail.com](mailto:o.landreth@gmail.com)  
+44 7973 784 854 or + 1 202 361 6945

# The Decision

*A play in two acts by  
Oliver Landreth*

*v. 12 May 2007*

Oliver L Landreth  
[o.landreth@gmail.com](mailto:o.landreth@gmail.com)  
+44 7973 784 854 or + 1 202 361 6945

*In remembrance of my mother*  
1923 – 2007

*And with special thanks to Julie Moreton and Andrew Haslam-Jones, who have painstakingly critiqued, commented and advised throughout these past months. Both of you have actually allowed me to believe that I might in fact one day be a writer.*

*Act I – A scene in Alex’s Paris apartment. It is late.*

*Act II – A scene in Alex’s Paris apartment. It is very late at night, the same evening.*

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*Cast*  
*(In order of appearance)*

*Alex*

*Jacques*

*Maria*

*Alex's Mother*

*Scene: A Paris apartment, August 31, 1997.*

## *ACT I*

*The stage sets out a well appointed living room of an apartment in central Paris. There is a wall of books in which there is a shelf with bottles of wine. A couple of large abstract paintings are on the walls. The room is furnished in neutral colors. The furniture is simple and tasteful. There are expensive objects from around the world around the room. On one side, there is a desk with a computer on it. The back of the stage, where there should be a wall with a window, is used as a large window to the street below and the skyline of Paris in the back..*

*When the play opens, Alex is sitting at his desk, writing on his computer. There is music by Serge Reggiani ('La Solitude') playing loudly. Lamps are on. It is quite bright. The stage is empty. This is a very intimate stage setting. The audience must feel like they are in the living room.*

*He finishes typing. He leans back and looks at the ceiling and then slowly gets up and walks to the window where he looks out. Almost absent mindedly, he looks for and grabs the remote and lowers the volume of the music. The song has finished. It becomes background music. Alex sips his wine, first looking at the ceiling and then looking at the audience.*

*Alex (Pausing, pensive, to the audience)*

Did you enjoy the evening? I hope you did. I hope someone did. I didn't. Nothing worse than being a host, is there!

*He resumes looking at the ceiling for a minute or two. Then looks back at the audience. The monologue is filled with pauses. He is speaking to the audience, but really to himself. It is stream of consciousness. Slow, but deliberate.*

How stupid of me. You weren't actually here. I don't often have people over, but you wouldn't know that.

I used to. But not lately. Tonight was a special night.

Ah, you wouldn't know that either. You're not to blame. How could you? You weren't invited.

But you ARE invited now!

This is the best part of the evening, don't you think? When the guests have gone, it's late, the city seems to have gone to sleep. You are alone with your thoughts. You are in your own private world. No one can touch you. None of the vulgarity of daylight, with its garish colors and sounds. No. Just you and your thoughts. You can imagine a world filled with excitement...danger...hell, maybe even romance.

The world takes on a special, deeper more intimate quality late at night. Things seem more real. To me anyway. The banal can even become mysterious. You can make the night fraught with danger lurking in every corner, or you can fill it with romance and intrigue. Hmm, funny, I always seem to imagine romance and intrigue as inseparable. I must have seen too many movies. Come to think of it, I haven't seen a movie in ages. Too much violence these days. I never could take the violence. And the stories all seem so trite. The plots are all so predictable. I fear Hollywood has created a saccharine world of happy endings that makes us feel good for a nano second, and then the ugly reality of the world we live in sets in. Anyway, I digress...it must be the wine!

Ah, sorry...you must be wondering what the occasion is tonight? Why have I invited you here?

Be patient. You won't be disappointed. All shall be revealed in due course. Even in the short time we have together. Very few people know me. I mean truly know me. But how many of you really know yourselves, let alone anyone else? You see, we all have walls around us. Some more. Some less. But make no mistake, we all have them. Those who think they know me would say I have an interesting life. What do they know! But maybe you should be the judge? ... and jury? Everyone is a member of the jury. Much easier to judge other people's lives than one's own.

*Alex gets up from his chair and walks to the shelves. He looks at the books and the photographs. He pulls one off the shelf.*

Ah, yes.....the good 'ole days' ....Graduate school. I went to INSEAD, you know? The elite of the global business world! I have no idea how I got in. I always believed it must have been a mistake. And they probably regretted it when they saw my grades!

I remember this professor of accounting. Can you think of a more deadly subject than accounting! Possibly only rivaled by statistics. Anyway, this professor was a tiny rotund man with no hair and bulging little pig eyes. He was the kind who would wear his oversized pants too high with the belt pulled tightly. He was from Egypt and supposedly brilliant. I wouldn't know. I could never understand a word he said! I used to ask my classmates for their notes, but they couldn't understand him either and so had nothing to give me. The difference was they read their text books. I would read a page and fall asleep. So I failed that course. Oh and then there was this insane professor of European politics. He was English. Who else would have a moustache 'a la David Niven' ...you know, the kind waxed on the ends. He was right out of a movie. Bad teeth, and the clothes always just a little too dirty. The spotted tie, the striped shirt with the striped suit. Only the English would ever do that to others. After all, we're the ones who have to look at it!

*(Putting the photograph back on the shelf, and leaning against the shelves)*

There were some good times. I was so surprised that I got in. But I did. I lived on the campus and shared the apartment with 3 other people. They prided themselves on having over 30 nationalities there. But the biggest groups were the Germans and the French. Who would have thought it?! The Germans and the French, the two power house groups of Western Europe, when they would gladly have annihilated each other only 50 years before!

One room mate was a German who corresponded to every possible stereotype imaginable! Slightly overweight, with a sense of humor that always seemed to land like a ton of bricks on any conversation. He always wore a tie and lace up wing tip shoes. He was the only one who ever laughed at his own humor. I know it's not politically correct to talk in stereotypes, but to hell with political correctness! After all, there are stereotypes for a reason: they are more

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often than not true! He used to drive the rest of us crazy with his booming voice and his little manias. He had to have his own shelf in the fridge, and he always showered at exactly the same time....as if he were in the army! He even came in once in lederhosen!

One day, Helmut (that was his name), another friend Elaine and I went for a drive in the countryside. We were roaming aimlessly, when suddenly we had the urge to sit in a garden sipping a good bottle of wine. We had no idea where we were. I have no idea why we ever let Helmut come along, but anyway, we did. Elaine and I were more than happy to just go wherever the roads took us, but no...no way. Helmut ordered us to stop the car and out he got. Suddenly I turned around there he was, (*mimicking*) map on the hood of the car, glasses on, pencil in hand, looking like he was planning the invasion of France all over again. Stereotypes?! God damned right there are!

And then there was Jacques. We hit it off the first day we met. We were both more interested in good meals and wine than we were in making the Dean's List. I think we both ended up there by accident. We thought it strange that professors talked to us as if we were the next ministers of finance. We just could not imagine they were talking to us!

We used to sneak off for long lunches in nearby Fontainebleau or outings into Paris. God, I do love Paris.

But even Paris has lost its charms lately. Or has it? Maybe it's me. I mean look at that city – isn't it absolutely spectacular? (*pointing to a night skyline out a window at the back of the stage*). This is a city for the romantic, the intense, the lover of beauty. But it is also a city whose soul is under attack. People seem to have lost their joy of life. The routine and stresses of every day life have cast a grey shadow across its residents' faces. And yet you still find that neighborhood feel even at the heart of it. There is a humanity to this city that still lingers on, despite itself almost. (*Pause*) Who knows for how much longer though?

But where was I? Ah, Jacques. It's hard to describe. Our friendship that year became the kind I had always wanted. We became inseparable. As the year was coming to an end, we could not imagine not having our lazy Sundays and endless dinners over a bottle too many. There was a group of four of us, but Jacques was my favorite. He was real. I would have trusted him

with my life. The others – Paul and Henri – were nice guys and we had fun, but they had their lives planned out already. They knew who they were going to marry, what they were going to do, the house they would buy, the kids they would have... You get the picture. It always seemed to me they had nothing left to discover about the world. But Jacques seemed to share my lack of direction, my desire for more to life than a job and a salary. Looking back, maybe Paul and Henri were the lucky ones. I wonder where they are now.

Jacques went to work in Luxembourg, and I stayed in Paris. But we talked almost every day and met every weekend. I hated my job, but I loved Paris and I was exploring it with my closest friend in the world.

*(Very pensively)* Alas, all good things must come to an end though, mustn't they? What? You don't agree? Shame on you. You should know by now that life is as much about endings as it is about beginnings. Life is a succession of endings. The question is whether we are sensitive enough to recognize them and to prepare ourselves for the beginnings that necessarily follow. Even death is followed by a beginning. You'll see.

Jacques met a woman and fell in love. Annette. I met her and pretended to like her because he seemed so ridiculously happy. But I was so jealous. I've never said this to anyone, but I loved Jacques. I truly loved him. I would have done anything he asked. And so I laughed with her and befriended her. But she wasn't stupid. She knew what the deal was. And sure enough, Jacques called me on a Friday night. It went something like this:

*(The following conversation is heard over a speaker system)*

*Jacques*

Hi buddy. How is life?

*Alex*

Not bad. Looking forward to the weekend. When are you coming up?

*Jacques*

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You know, I'm really sorry to call you so late, but I've been so busy and well you know how it is time just flies. Anyway, look, I'm really sorry but I have to cancel this weekend.

*Alex*

OK. I understand. Well I'll book the restaurant for next weekend.

*Jacques*

Well, actually Alex, look, this is really hard for me. I don't know how to say this. You know how much our friendship means to me, but...

*Alex*

But what?

*Jacques*

I...I...just don't know how to say this.

*Alex*

Say what?

*Jacques*

Look, there's no easy way for me to say this. I can't see you any more.

*Alex*

What are you talking about? What do you mean you can't see me anymore?

*Jacques*

Buddy, please try to understand. Please. I really...I am torn up about this...I

*Alex*

I still don't understand. I mean, OK you can't make it this weekend. No big deal. Right?

*Jacques*

I...I mean...I...Look, Annette asked me to break off our friendship. It was either you or her. I don't know what has gotten in to her, but she is adamant. And I love her Alex, I really do. I am so sorry. I have to go. Take care of yourself.

*Alex*

That's it. A fucking 'take care of yourself' and you are out of my life?

*Jacques*

Alex, please. I really don't want to lose our friendship. You mean the world to me. But so does Annette. I haven't slept in 3 days thinking about this...

*Alex*

Just tell her! Just tell her we're best friends. I am part of the deal, Right? Tell her, you son of a bitch!

*Jacques*

I...I tried. She won't listen. I don't know what got into her. I mean it. Look, maybe she'll calm down in time.

*Alex*

Fuck you!

*Jacques*

I am so sorry.

*Back to Alex's monologue.*

*Alex*

And that was that. I was shell shocked. But I think somehow I knew that it was bound to happen. The friendship was too good to be true. And it hurt because I could never tell him how I felt about him. I didn't think he knew. But then about 10 years later, I received a phone call. It was Jacques. He had tracked me down somehow. God only knows how because I have always been terrible about leaving tracks, and I have moved around so much. But he called to tell me his marriage was falling apart. He had fallen in love with another woman and I was the only one he could talk to about it. I listened. I don't think I said much, but he said he would call me again the next day. He never did. He did send a letter though. He wrote that he had come to his senses and he was going back to Annette. He put a PS at the end in which he wrote 'you will never know how sorry I am that I had to end our friendship and you should

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know that if I ever wanted to experiment with another guy, you would be the only one'. He had done it again. I was floored.

How cruel can you get?! I don't know where he is today. I don't think I want to. That's not true...of course I do. And the sad thing is he was/is a great guy. He just never managed to confront some pretty tough issues. He always listened to me, when I was trying to sort things out. I tried to get him to open up but there was always a point beyond which he just wouldn't go.

But whatever made me go off on that tangent? See, the night can be a friend as much as a traitor. Which is it tonight?

Yes, yes, I know. You want to know what the occasion is tonight. Well, relax, because I am not ready to tell you. You'll allow me to indulge somewhat won't you?

*Alex looks at more of the photographs on the shelves. He then sees a statue and pulls it off to look at it before returning it to the shelf.*

You see that little statue? Not particularly beautiful. I found it in a tiny hole of a shop when I was walking down a dark, filthy street in Bangkok. Probably a fake. But this tiny frail woman who barely spoke English swore it came from an ancient temple in the North. I was living in Bangkok for a while. Ah, that's right...you don't know that yet either. There is so much you don't know and so little time. You see, I have lived in a lot of places. Bangkok, Singapore, Rome, the list goes on. Even Beirut. I managed to be there a year when the bombs didn't fall. I usually lived in furnished places wherever I was, but I always made sure I brought back some piece of sculpture or art to remind me.

I'm not one for photos. Seems most like to look at photos of people, but I prefer mine without people in them, though lately that is changing...anyway, I certainly hate pictures with me in them! My brother always said I was ugly in photos. Some things stay with you for life, don't they?

I really should make sure I have everything ready.

*Suddenly Alex walks over to his computer and opens a file which he sends to print. It comes out of the printer on the same desk. Alex takes it and starts to read. Alex signs the paper, folds it and places it in an envelope he has taken from his desk. He places the envelope on the desk.*

It's better to be organized don't you think? I would hate to leave loose ends for other people to clear up.

But I haven't told you about Maria Helena! You'll like her. *(Pulling a photo off a shelf)* She is a wonderful, spirited woman. She hasn't had the easiest of lives, but she has taken it all in stride. She's my hero, my confident and my best friend. I know that if I ever needed her, it would only take a phone call. We don't see each other as much as we would like to now. She lives in Lisbon. We used to be neighbors. That's how we met. We hit it off right away. The first time we met, we talked until 4 in the morning...and trust me I am not a night person! But her life has gotten busy, what with grand children, her job, her partner. Life takes on a tempo of its own. We talk as often as we can, but distance doesn't lend importance to the little every day things that one goes through, so our conversations tend to be somewhat weighted towards the bigger events in our lives, and there aren't too many of those lately,.....Well, you know how it is.

My God though, we did have fun in those years we lived next to each other!

She's a doctor. She used to tell me all the insane things people would tell her. We used to be in stitches.

One day, a farm woman came in complaining of cramps. Turns out that she was pregnant. Maria asked who the father was, to which the one replied 'I don't know. It must be the horse!' This woman actually believed that she had been impregnated by a horse while she was sleeping as she didn't know of any man who would have done it. To this, Maria replied 'I can believe that, but be that as it may, I promise you it was a man'.

We laughed ourselves silly.

You see this photo? 10 years ago, we went with friends on a sailing trip through the Greek islands. It was a boat that had supposedly once been owned by Mussolini. We somehow got a kick out of that. It was the most wonderful holiday I had ever had, or have had since. And we certainly had our adventures.

*As Alex is speaking, a woman comes and sits down. She is the same age as Alex. She is casually dressed. It is Maria.*

*Alex (talking to Maria)*

Do you remember our trip to Greece. I never felt so relaxed!

*Maria (She speaks with a very slight accent)*

It was wonderful. Even when that horrible man came on board. Do you remember him?

*Alex*

How could I forget! Big, fat loud and obnoxious!

*Maria*

You know, I am sure he was part of the mafia!

*Alex*

Too true. I mean, he was best buddies with Berlusconi for God's sake!

*Maria*

And that stupid bimbo of his. I'll never forget. She showed up on a sailboat with spiked heels. I thought Massimo was going to have a stroke!

*Alex (laughing)*

His mole! She was so unbelievably stupid! And when she suddenly decided to give me a massage I thought I'd throw her overboard!

*Maria (Laughing)*

I remember. I couldn't believe what she was doing. I mean we had just met them and there she was trying to massage your back with the don looking on!

*Alex*

It was a good trip, wasn't it? We should do it again some time.

*Maria*

Oh I know. I would love to. But you know how it is. Now with the grand children I just don't seem to have any time.

*Alex*

You work too much. You should slow down.

*Maria*

I know, I know. Well once I can hand over my practice to Luisa, I will. But I'm not ready to retire yet! I still have things to learn, things to do!

*Alex*

Retire?! Don't be silly. I'm counting on you for my old age! Remember, we were going to grow old and gray together!

*Maria*

And so we shall. But you should come visit more. There is always a room in my house for you. You know that. And there always will be.

*Maria gets up and walks to the door. She leaves the room. As she leaves, she says:* We will always be there for each other. That is a promise!

*Alex (to the audience)*

We did lots together. We traveled, we talked, we cooked and some times we just sat and read in the same room. We haven't done that in years. I miss those days.

She called tonight, but we couldn't talk as my guests were arriving.

I will miss her.

*(Getting up from his chair)* Now where did I put it? Ah, here it is *(taking a bottle from his desk drawer and putting it on the desk)*.

Yes, there have been good times. It's unfortunate that they are always the ones we remember least clearly though. Difficult times seem to cast a larger than life shadow. And I have let those demons win. I never wanted to. I tried to fight them. Honestly. But for every road of opportunity I seemed to go down, my darker side had a will of its own.

You see, the enemy of life is solitude. I firmly believe that. We humans are social creatures by nature. We thrive on interaction, physical affection, shared dreams and fears. Don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise. They are just fooling themselves. But our world has lost sight of that. It is so easy to go missing in today's world.

*(A long pause)*

One grows impatient. I can feel it. Impatience has become a product of my world. It's my GNP. We never want to let things happen in their own time. Our world teaches us to gain control and to keep it, no matter what. But that goes against all the immutable laws of nature, I fear.

Alright. I will let you in on a secret. Tonight was a farewell party. I invited over a few friends, but mostly acquaintances.

My closest friends are scattered around the world.

I wanted to bring a few people together to spend the evening with. I think they enjoyed themselves. I like to see others enjoy themselves. I always hope it is catching!

There was Paul and his wife. I work with him. A nice man really, but unabashedly dull. I envy him though. He absolutely adores his wife. One day, I caught her in a long tongue-in-

mouth embrace with a man half her age. They were at a corner table in the same restaurant. Rather risky if you ask me. I mean Paris is big, but one can't be too careful can one? Funny thing is I actually do believe that she loves Paul. I never did tell him about her affair. None of my business. Knowledge and truth do not necessarily breed happiness. And for all I know it was a one night stand. None of us is perfect.

And then there was Jack with his lover Mathieu. Good God, they have become two old queens. Kind enough, if you don't cross them. But vicious in their attacks on any one once out of ear shot. I don't like Jack. Never did from the first time I met him. But Mathieu fell head over heels, so I kept my mouth shut. If you ask me, Jack is in it for the money. Jack is a would-be actor who has never made it beyond a TV commercial for some completely unknown detergent. Mathieu however is a well established producer. He has made quite a name for himself. He has no illusions about Jack, but he liked his energy and enthusiasm, with his almost puppy like come hither look. And I think Mathieu was just very lonely, so he settled.

Oh and there was Louise. Now I do like her. We're not close friends, but she is always up for a good meal or a day trip out of town. She sent her husband packing a month ago and I have never seen her so happy. Everyone adores her. Except her husband that is. He was an idiot. Always off cavorting with some teen age girl somewhere. I'd be surprised if he didn't end up in jail one day!

One day last week, she wanted to meet for dinner. It wasn't an unusual request, but I did sense there was something on her mind. That was when she told she had just been diagnosed with inoperable cancer. I don't think she has told any one else, except her son, who is devastated. She's only 55. Yet she was so calm, and matter-of-fact. I really do admire her.

Hey You up there (*looking up*)...If You really do exist, can't You try to deal a fairer deck? I mean really, what has Louise ever done to You?!

She was the one who suggested I get some people over and so I did. I think it was more that she wanted to be around people, to have fun with others, but who weren't going to have any idea about her situation. And that suited me just fine.

Who else was there? I can't remember. Oh, wait...I know: Gabriela! This big buxom Austrian woman I met in Hong Kong once. We met at the airport and for some strange reason, we have stayed in touch. I have absolutely no clue what she does in life, but she is incredibly vivacious...larger than life really.

When I meet people like her, I can't help but think that they are covering something up. Some unresolved sadness that they don't want the world to see. Gabriela strikes me that way. All I know is that she is divorced and has a son. But that's it. I think she was off to Dubai tomorrow. Today actually. Getting late, isn't it?

Well, I think we can stay up late tonight, don't you?

*(Looking out the window)*

Where was I? What was the point of this? Actually, what was the point of any of this?

I don't know if I can explain it to you...the emptiness that fills you...It envelops you like a warm blanket, slowly taking you over until that is all you feel. It becomes a part of you even when you are in a room full of people. Possibly even more then. You walk the streets as if you were disembodied from yourself. You watch, you observe, you see, but you don't feel. You ache so deep down inside and yet you're there, functioning in the day to day, but not really. Only no one can see your emptiness.

*Alex is sitting in his chair. There is a loud crash of a car accident outside, followed by sirens.*

There is so much waste in this world. So much lost hope. So many shattered dreams, and still we are told to soldier on.

*The house lights dim. A spot light comes on Maria who is standing stage left. Alex is visible in the darkness. He is sitting in the chair. One sees him lighting a cigarette.*

*Maria (to the audience)*

He has always been such a dreamer. He has always had such great ambitions. But something inside him doesn't allow him to make them reality. It's almost as if he feels he doesn't deserve success.

I remember the first time we met. I had been through a horrible time and I remember feeling like I didn't have a friend in the world. Everything had just crumbled. But then I met Alex. We talked and talked. About life, love, friendship. About ....well, about why we're all here. Oh I knew right away he was gay. But once he opened up to me our friendship was free to grow, and grow it has. He gives so much, but sadly he doesn't believe that.

I don't think he realizes how much he helped me in those years. And I know I have helped him. That is what friendship is about, isn't it? Giving and receiving, sharing.

But lately he worries me. The past always seems to haunt him. It's like voices in the deep recesses of his mind that he can't turn off. He has seen so much and sadly many things that scar one for life. And yet I can't help but think that he has wonderful possibilities ahead of him.

*Curtain goes down on Act 1.*

## *ACT II*

*Alex walks in slowly from the kitchen. He appears distant, deceptively relaxed. He looks a bit tired, as if it has been a long evening. There are glasses in the room indicating that other people were there earlier. Alex is humming to the music. He grabs a remote control and turns the volume way up. The song is again 'La Solitude'. He goes on collecting the dirty glasses. It is hard to tell what his mood might be. He is pensive, far off. After making a couple of trips to the kitchen, he stops and stands in the middle of the room. He looks around slowly. He then leans against the wall/door to the kitchen, gazing at nothing. There is a mirror next to him. He looks in it, then looks at himself up and down, then back at the mirror. There is no outward physical reaction. The audience cannot tell what he is thinking. He goes into the kitchen again. As he comes out, he turns the light in the kitchen off. He looks in the mirror again. He seems to be studying his face, its lines, his hair, which is graying at the temples. He smiles as he plays stretching the lines out. Alex is in his mid 40s. He turns to turn a lamp off. He lights a candle that is sitting on the table in front of the sofa. He then walks over to the book shelves and opens a bottle of wine, pouring himself a large glass. He turns, sighs and leans back against the shelves. He looks at his watch. He unbuttons a few buttons of his shirt. He shrugs, takes his wine and walks over to the wing chair that is next to the sofa. The chair is positioned so that Alex is facing the audience.*

*(Throughout Act II, there is the intermittent sound and lights of distant sirens back and forth outside).*

*An elegantly dressed woman appears on Stage Right. It is Alex's mother. She speaks to the audience.*

### *Mother*

I love my children. I truly do. But it is so hard trying to understand them. Neither of them ever told me anything. I know they blame me for much of their misfortunes. Am I to blame? I don't know. You tell me. I was simply trying to protect them from a very cruel world. I never wanted either of them to see what I have seen or experience what I have been through. I wouldn't wish that on my enemies. But I could never tell them that. They wouldn't have understood why. They just thought I nagged them. *(Smiling)* they were always so impatient.

Always wanted to charge ahead. I tried to tell them that in this world very few things matter. Money. Security. Position. I taught them to command respect and to never rock the boat too much. Nothing good ever comes of that. They needed those before anything else.

*Pausing.*

And of course art. Yes. Art. Art and beauty make everything else seem so insignificant. I think Alex has the most aesthetic sense. We always had a special bond. But then he grew away from me. He grew angry with the world and I seemed to personify the world. What can a mother do? Except hope that the anger passes. I do wish I could have done more for him. But what?

*Full stage lights come on. Alex's mother is no longer on stage.*

*Alex (to the audience)*

So where was I? Ah yes, I know. I was wondering what the fuck I am doing here. *(Pausing)* I suppose you should meet my mother. You know, unresolved issues and all that. I mean Jesus, how many of us don't have unresolved issues with our mothers?! *(Pause)* I wonder why it's always with the mothers and not with the fathers? Must be biological! Of the same flesh and that type of thing. I think mothers get a bum rap these days, don't you? I mean it's so easy to blame everything on them. She loved me too much, she smothered me...or she didn't love me. That's why I am what I am. Or she abused me. Yes that's it. Fuck, how many times do you see that in the papers. Mothers! The root of all of our problems!

Let's see. My mother was a stunner. She could walk into a room and stop everyone in their tracks. Tall, elegant, poised...always seemed to know the right thing to say. She could work a room at a party better than anyone I know.

*(As Alex is speaking, an elegant woman in her 40s comes in to the room. She is expensively dressed, she looks at herself in the mirror, then pours herself a glass of wine and then walks over to the sofa)*

*Alex (turning towards the woman)*

Ah, there you are.

*Mother (sipping her wine)*

Where did you think I was?

*Alex*

I didn't know. I thought you might have gone out.

*Mother*

Not yet. Tom is picking me up a bit later.

*Alex*

I see.

*Mother*

You really shouldn't drink so much, you know. It doesn't suit you.

*Alex*

What's the problem? I'm hardly drunk. Just pleasantly inebriated. Does a world of good every now and then. One sees the world in a whole different light. And anyway, I haven't seen you turn a glass down recently! Speaking of which, I saw Allan today. He says hello.

*Mother*

How is he? Haven't seen him in ages. You should see more of him. He's a nice man. Does he drink a lot?

*Alex*

What? No. Why?

*Mother*

We were talking of drinking. You mentioned Allan.

*Alex.*

Oh. No. Oh well, I guess life gets in the way. He's always so busy. You have to plan months ahead to get on his diary!

*Mother*

Well, he has an important job. You can't expect him to be free at the drop of a hat!

*Alex*

You implying mine's not important... God, I hate it when you do that! You always do that!  
When are you going to stop?!

*Mother*

Do what? I haven't done anything. But it's true. He has a busy life. You should be more tolerant.

*Alex*

That's a good one! You know what I mean. Always putting me down.

*Mother*

Nonsense. There you go imagining things again.

*Alex (going to get himself another drink)*

I'm not imagining things at all. You always seem to respect more what my friends do than what I do.

*Mother*

Don't be ridiculous. I just don't think there's enough security in what you do. In today's world....

*Alex (moving back to his chair)*

There we go again. 'In today's world' you need security and money. I know. I know. I've heard it all before

*Mother*

You may have heard it, but you hardly seem to have absorbed it!

*Alex*

Absorbed it?! My God, it's ingrained in my head. Do you have any idea how hard it has been for me to get where I am, when all I hear from you is you wish I had a life like Allan's, or Karen's, or God knows whom!

*Mother*

You're being ridiculous.

*Alex*

Am I? What about when I decided to take some time off to travel? I never heard the end of it from you.

*Mother*

You were irresponsible. You left a perfectly good and, I might add, well paying job, to go gallivanting around countries that most people haven't even heard of. And for what? I had sleepless nights worrying about you, but I'm sure you never thought about that!

*Alex*

If only you knew. But I did that trip for me. Strange as that might seem. And I called you. I always did.

*Mother*

Yes. 30 seconds every week or two. How thoughtful.

*Alex*

Phones weren't always easily found.

*Mother*

No, I guess not. Well, I should go.

*Alex*

Why? Why is it that whenever the conversation gets a little emotional, you run off? Why can't we ever talk?

*Mother*

Oh honestly, you're always so dramatic. We are talking.

*Alex*

No, not really.

*Mother*

Well, OK. Talk then.

*Alex*

Right! You really don't get it do you?

*Mother*

Get what?

*Alex*

Why can't we just talk to each other? Why is it always at each other?

*Mother*

I don't know what you mean.

*Alex*

No, I guess not. You and Dad never really talked, did you? I mean, you talked, but I don't think I ever really heard you have a meaningful exchange. It was always about the weather, or he was drinking too much, or driving too fast....

*Mother*

Oh, please. We talked plenty. *(getting up)* Now I really should go.

*Alex*

See, there you go again, always escaping.

*Mother*

What do you want from me Alex?

*Alex*

Don't go. Please stay. I...I...I really need to talk to you tonight

*Mother*

You what?

*Alex*

Nothing.

*Mother*

Don't be ridiculous. You're just drunk. It'll wear off in the morning.

*Alex*

*(Going over to the window, looking away from her)* Mother, can I ask you something?

*Mother*

What?

*Alex*

Were you ever happy? I mean, really happy?

*Mother*

What a ridiculous question! Don't be a bore.

*Alex*

No I mean, I am serious. When were you happiest?

*Mother*

Happy? Is that all you and your generation think about? Happy? (*handing Alex her glass*)  
Here, can I have some more?

*Alex*

(*Mumbling almost*) I thought you were leaving?.... (*Pause*) So, were you? ..... Happy, I mean? (*Getting irritated*) Just answer the damned question. It can't be that hard!

*Mother*

Don't you use that tone with me, young man!

*Alex*

'Young man'! I'm 45! I am not a child anymore. Is that so hard for you to absorb?!

*Mother*

I'm leaving!

*Alex*

There you go again. Whenever the conversation gets a little more touchy, you run off. You always avoid the difficult. Don't you?! What is it in your life that you are avoiding?

*Mother*

I don't know what you're talking about!

*Alex*

Don't you?! Something happened to you, didn't it?

*Mother*

You're drunk!

*Alex*

Not drunk enough, trust me. (*Quietly*) I know something happened to you. I just can't put my finger on what it was.

*Mother*

I have to go (*starts to walk to the door*)

*Alex*

Don't you dare walk out on me! You never answered my question. Were you ever happy! I want to know. What could possibly have happened to you to make you so cold?! I mean, were you ever happy to the point that you loved to wake up in the morning, you loved the day ahead of you,....I want to know!

*Mother*

(*Shouting almost*) Why do you want to know!

*Alex*

Because I want to know how to get that feeling back!

*Mother*

Oh please Alex. Stop being so melodramatic. We had a life. We simply got on with it.

*Alex*

So you settled? So the answer is 'no'?

*Mother*

Everyone settles Alex. It's just taken you longer than most to figure it out. I don't know what you expect from life? We have it easy compared to most.

*Alex*

What about Tom? You're happy with him aren't you?

*Mother*

Of course I am.

*Alex*

Why of course?

*Mother*

When are you going to settle down? It's about time, don't you think? What about, oh what's her name, Eileen? Yes, what about her?

*Alex*

There you go again. God forbid we ever talk about you! And Eileen?! Please. You must be kidding? Are we still playing this game after all these years?

*Mother*

What game? I have no idea what you're talking about....

*Alex*

You do, but you prefer to look the other way. Tell me mother (*almost teasing her in a nasty tone*), what happened to you to make you the way you are?

*Mother*

You're drunk. Leave me alone.

*Alex*

I can't do this any more. I don't want to talk about me. I want to know the truth. I want to know what it is that happened to you. Something must have. For God's sake, to put up with the lies and the abuse from Dad for 40 years! There has to be a reason. I can't play games any more. (*Up close in her ear*) I want to know.

*Mother*

(*Looking away*) What are you talking about? Now where's my coat?

*Alex*

Whenever things get uncomfortable, you walk away

*Mother*

Alex, I wasn't brought up to bear my soul to the first person whom I run into. Leave me alone.

*Alex*

I'm hardly the first person you run into. I'm your son. And no I won't leave it alone. You're not leaving here until we have talked.

*Mother*

I don't see the point of talking about some things. No good comes from it. For God's sake leave me alone (*Shouting but almost in tears*)

*Alex*

Why can't we have an honest conversation for once?!

*Mother*

(*Sitting down, tired, worried, afraid*) Have I ever lied to you?

*Alex*

No.....but there's a difference between lying and not being honest.

*Mother*

Now I must...

*Alex*

Go. Yes, I know. But you're not leaving this time. There's a lot I want to tell you.

*Mother*

There are things it's perhaps best I not know. We all have our secrets

*Alex*

Secrets? My God, my whole life has been a secret. And I don't want it that way any more. I want to be free to be me

*Mother*

Oh Jesus. Free to be me. Can't you think of anything better than that?

*Alex*

No. I can't. It may sound like a show tune, but it's the truth. Why do you always belittle things I say? I am trying to bare my soul to you for once and you keep on running away.

*Mother*

What do you want from me? What? I don't know what you're after? You're a grown man. I can't help you anymore.

*Alex*

Yes. Yes you can. I want to know that it was all worth it. I want to know that you were happy once. I want to know that happiness is possible. I want some honesty. A chance to talk. A chance to know who you really are and for you to...

*Mother*

You need to slow down the alcohol!

*Alex*

That's a good one coming from you! The truth can't be worse than the lies and the pretending....can it?

*Mother*

The truth? I don't even know any more. For so many years, I pretended to be happily married, because that's what I was taught to do. I followed your father around the world. I put up with his drinking, his tempers, his violence....I put up with it because I was taught that you stick with what you have. And I had to think about you and your brother. What would I have done on my own?

*Alex*

Did you ever love each other?

*Mother*

Love? Is that all you think about? ....Yes, there was a time. Before the drinking, before the affairs...

*Alex*

The affairs?

*Mother*

God yes. Your father couldn't keep it in! And I knew about all of them.

*Alex*

So why didn't you divorce? Why put up with the fighting and the abuse?

*Mother*

Divorce? And then what? Bring you up on my own? A middle aged woman alone with two children? You have any idea what that's like? And your father gave us a good life. We never needed anything.

*Alex*

There's more to life than possessions. ...So you settled for a loveless marriage?

*Mother*

You make it sound so awful. Guess what, most couples are in that boat. I'm not one of those career women you see now. They have it easy. I wanted a certain standard of living. Your father provided that. You certainly can't complain. You always had more than you needed.

*Alex*

Material things, yes. But there's more to life than that.

*Mother*

Is there? You've never had to go without!

*Alex*

No and for that I thank you.

*Mother*

Don't you dare condescend to me!

*Alex*

I...I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

*A long silence*

*Alex*

So, why won't you tell me? (*Almost jokingly*) We can play a game! 20 questions! I tell you something about me and then you tell me something I don't know about you.

*Mother*

I know what I need to know.

*Alex*

Do you? I mean...

*Mother*

You mean what? Pour me another drink.

*Alex*

Now who's having too much?

*Mother*

Oh for God's sake.

*Alex*

No really, I mean it, you drink too much. You start earlier and earlier whenever I see you.

*Mother*

Ridiculous.

*Alex*

OK. If you say so. You know, you really don't know much about me. I guess that is my fault though. There is so much I should have told you. But I was always afraid to. A quality we seem to share.

*Mother*

You never want to talk. You never tell me anything. You treat me like I'm a stranger. So I stopped asking.

*Alex*

So you know what it's like! Maybe I wanted you to ask. There were times when I thought I couldn't go on.

*Mother*

Don't be ridiculous. You always land on your feet, almost despite yourself it seems! Honestly, you act like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders. How dramatic you are. Why don't you just get on with your life?

*Alex*

Who says I'm not? But you have no idea what I've been through.

*Mother*

Like what? You have an easy life. Look at you...

*Alex*

Easy? Easy! How dare you? You have no idea how much I have kept from you. I wanted to protect you. Like I always did growing up. Remember all those times Dad abused you? I was always there trying to stop him, to make sure you were OK. How many times did I get beat up because I was trying to stop him. There were times I thought he was going to kill you...or me.

*Mother*

I could protect myself. I didn't need you.

*Alex*

Could you? Then I guess I am the weak one, because I needed you, but I never asked.

*Mother*

Like when?

*Alex*

Like when? Like when I lost my partner in a car accident. Like when I was told I wouldn't get promoted because I was gay. Like when I lost my best friend because his wife didn't approve of me, like...

*Mother*

Didn't approve of you? What a stupid woman. And not being promoted for being, how did you put it? 'gay'? How absurd. All you had to do was tell them they were wrong. Really.

*Alex*

But they weren't wrong.

*Mother*

What in God's name do you mean?

*Alex*

I mean, they were right. I am gay. I tried to tell you so many times, but

*Mother*

You're saying that just to be mean. No son of mine is a homosexual. My God, what will people think?

*Alex*

What will they think? They probably know. We're talking about me, not some God damned group of socialites. I don't give a fuck what they think. I want you to see me for who I really

am. I want you to talk to me. I want you to be MY mother! To acknowledge me as a person, not as a trophy son. Not your security blanket. But as me, your son, a grown man, with all the imperfections of the next person. A man who is trying to make it in this world and who is so close to the edge that he might not. I want you to hug me just once in my lifetime. God damn it, I want you to be a mother! Why is it so hard for you to hug me?!

*Mother*

How dare you speak to me like that?! (*beginning to cry*)

*Alex*

My God, is that a tear I see. Maybe it is possible to get blood from a stone after all.

*Mother*

You bastard!

*Alex*

If this is what it takes to get us to be honest to each other, then so be it

*Mother*

(*Angrily*) Honesty. Maybe I don't want honesty. Maybe I want to pretend that life is better than it is. You think I don't know how hard life can be. You have no idea. But I did the best I could. You say you're not perfect, well then neither am I. And how could I know what your life has been like if you never told me. You were always off 5000 miles away. I can't read minds. You think I don't care about you. That all I care about is what others think. But I'm just trying to hold on to the world I have. I never looked back when I left Holland and married your father. And I never looked back on anything. But I always cared about you. I always worried about you. You were always on my mind. And I hated the fact that I couldn't do anything to help you.

*Alex*

You could have been there for me. You could have talked to me. You could have just taken me in your arms every now and then. What was so terrible that you couldn't look back? What was so awful that caused you to shut down emotionally?

*Mother*

Nothing that matters anymore. You? A homosexual. How ridiculous. Oh my God, I don't need this in my life. Why can't you leave things alone?!

*Alex*

Yes, me, a 'homosexual'. My God, you met my partner and you never even know it. You even liked him.

*Mother*

Who?

*Alex*

Steven

*Mother*

Steven? He was your...? How absurd. He couldn't have been a homosexual. He was such a nice man...

*Alex*

Well that says it all, doesn't it? Yes, Steven. I loved him. My God, you have no idea how much. For 15 years, I have looked for someone like him. Someone who would accept me as I am. No questions. Unconditional love. No one since has even come close. And you have no idea how far I have looked, to what depths I have sunk, what risks, stupid risks, I have run all for even one tenth of the affection and love Steven gave me. When he died I thought the world had ended. But I spared you then. I didn't think you could deal with it. And I guess I was right.

*Mother*

But you picked up and moved on. You got over it. I'm sure it was just an adolescent phase. I mean most men go through it...though they usually grow out of it!

*Alex*

Fuck you are cold. How dare you?! I never got over him. Never. I just take up space. I go through the motions, I'm surviving. That's it.

*Mother*

Ah. What nonsense. You have everything you could want. Life goes on

*Alex*

My God, what does it take to get you to accept that I went through hell?

*Mother*

Hell? You have no idea what Hell is. Try growing up during the war

*Alex*

The war again. 60 years ago. What hell have you known? I know life with Dad was no picnic, but I wouldn't call it hell.

*Mother*

Yes the war. 60 years ago and I never want to...

*Alex*

What happened to you? Tell me. I want to know. For God's sake, you didn't even mourn when Dad died. I never saw a tear. Tom was already in waiting.

*Mother*

Leave Tom out of this. He has nothing to do with any of this.

*Alex*

But he does. And you know it. He's the only one I've ever seen you touch, express emotion, laugh with. But with him, you shut us out. We never had a chance. You did everything possible to keep us away from him. What were you afraid of? That we'd find out he's gay?!

*Mother*

What are you talking about? Tom is all I have. He is not homosexual. He is nothing of the sort.

*Alex*

Trust me. It takes one to know one. He is. But maybe that's what you wanted. No threat. The perfect companion.

*Mother*

How can you be so cruel?! What did I ever do to you?

*Alex*

Do? DO?! Nothing! That's just it. NOTHING! I wanted to be a part of your life and for you to be a part of mine, but you never allowed that to happen. The world revolved around Tom, and before him, it was parties, climbing the social ladder, being someone you're not.

*Mother*

You have no idea who I am. That much is clear. Now let me go.

*Alex*

No one is stopping you. ....What about me? What about my brother? Were we so awful, such a disappointment that you couldn't let us in. Such an embarrassment that...

*Mother*

You wouldn't understand.

*Alex*

Try me. I mean, Jesus, what did happen to you?

*Mother*

I have a right to privacy! Some things are none of your business!

*Alex*

But Maybe life is easier if you manage to move past some things instead of keeping them bottled up for decades! I mean, what was so bad? Did some German rape you or something?

*Mother*

I...I....I...don't...I...how could you?.....What?.....I....What have you done! (*Crying*)

*Alex*

(*Very quietly*) Oh shit. That's it? Isn't it? That's what happened to you. That's why you never want to look back. (*Pausing, thinking*) I've seen you react to love scenes in movies. You're disgusted. I never understood. It makes sense. Your father was arrested for being in the underground. You were a beautiful young woman. They must have harassed you day and night...

*Mother*

Stop!

*Alex*

That's why you're disgusted by emotion, by people touching each other, by...I've seen you. Oh my God, and Tom....Tom is the love of your life isn't he? He is the perfect companion. He really is. Unconditional love. Always there. He's the one. (*Pause*) Well, I guess you're lucky after all. You found happiness, didn't you?

*Mother*

Why did you have to? WHY?

*Alex*

I'm sorry. I truly am. I never imagined, I mean I thought, but I never really imagined...

*Mother*

Stop. Oh God, yes. I know about Tom. But I never cared. He is everything to me your father wasn't. He is everything to me. I know you hate him. I couldn't let you come between us. I need him. Now Stop (*starting to cry*). STOP!

*Alex*

Does Tom know?

*Mother*

No. And he never will.

*Alex*

(*coming over to hold her, but she pulls away*) I am so sorry. I honestly didn't know. I never would have said it if I had known.

*Mother*

Too late now. Are you happy now? Is this what you wanted? You have no idea what hell I went through. You want the truth (*Shouting*)? You want it? They were like leeches, They wouldn't leave me alone. They threatened to kill my father if I didn't do what they wanted. And one day they got their way. Coming home from school. I was 18. Three months later I was sent out to a cousin's farm so that my mother didn't have to explain that her 18 year old daughter was pregnant by a German! The day the baby was born they took it away and I have never seen her since! Truth? Is that really what you wanted?!

*Alex*

(*Very slowly*) Yes. It is.

*Mother*

(*Embarrassed by her display of emotion, she breaks down. Alex tries to comfort her but she recoils but he hugs her*) Damn you. Why? Why did you have to?

*Alex*

Do you know this is the first time we've hugged each other in 30 years. It's not that bad is it? Mom, I'm here. I will always be here for you. I'm your son. I love you.

*Mother*

*(whispering)* I'm sorry

*Alex*

Don't apologize. Please.

*Mother*

What do you want from me?

*Alex*

You can help just by being you. You're my mother. Nothing will ever change that.

*The lights dim and then come back up again. Alex's mother is no longer there. He is in his chair. He is emotionally drained.*

*Alex*

My mother. She had a lot of guts. She lived her life as best she could and never looked back. But I think her life could have been better. And I should learn from that. Her last gift to me.

*The lights dim. To the side of the stage, a man appears under a dim spot light..*

*Jacques*

I've never told any one this, but I was in love with Alex. I didn't realize it until I met my wife. He and I had spent so much time together that when he moved away, I fell apart for a week. That's when I knew. And that's when I proposed to Annette. I never told him. I couldn't. I was too ashamed. And I was a coward.

I called Alex some years ago when I was thinking of breaking up with my wife. I told him I had met another woman. And it was true. But more than anything, I wanted to know what had become of him. I think part of me expected him to just pick up where we had left off, but

I know now that was impossible, unless I had opened up to him. But I had to think about my family, my parents, my colleagues. I couldn't risk it.

As luck would have it, Annette has left me now. She went off with her fitness instructor. I mean how clichéd can you get? And my parents have passed away. On her deathbed, my mother asked me if I was happy. I of course said yes. She looked at me straight in the eye and said 'Liar. You stopped being happy the day you married Annette. You should have listened to your heart. Whatever happened to your friend Alex? He was such a nice man, and the two of you were always having so much fun together. But I never heard about him again.' My jaw dropped. I think she knew more than she let on. It was her way of saying 'be true to yourself'. That was the last conversation we ever had.

But I don't know where Alex is now. And so much time has gone by.

*The light on Jacques goes dark and he is no longer on stage.*

*Alex*

*(Pensively, in somewhat of a stream of consciousness mode)* So what is it that makes us who we are? I mean, for example...look at that painting. I see beauty. I see some torment mixed with the sublime. And yet you might hate it. You might just see some horrible colors on a canvas and say a child could have done it. And so who is right? You? Me? Maybe neither of us. What do you say my friend, shall we fight over it? And so it is. We are all different. And yet we spend our lives trying desperately to fit in. To belong.

I tried. I traveled the world in search of a soul mate only to come up empty handed. And the sad thing is there is no one to blame. God knows, I tried to blame my mother. She's always been my fall guy. What a cop out!

I wonder if my mother ever realized that you cannot blame someone else for one's own misfortune. Unresolved issues?! Fuck yes. I have them. She had them. Jacques must have them. But is my mother to blame for all my failures and disappointments? Not a chance. She had her own demons to deal with. I just wish she had resolved them when she had the chance. I mean, *(pause)* she must have had the chance some time? She must have wanted to? Mustn't

she? Her one big mistake in my view? Blaming others for her unhappiness. She spent her life doing that. Then again, maybe she dealt with her issues in the only way she knew how.

There was so much we had to say to each other.

The night draws to a close. Look, the sun (*Alex opens the windows to reveal a spectacular clear blue sky as the sun rises over the Paris skyline. He looks at it and smiles*).

It is beautiful isn't it? You're thinking I might change my mind. You're wondering how I can be immune to such beauty. But I'm not. And I don't think I will.

None of this makes sense. Beauty, destruction. Love, hate. Crowds...loneliness. It seems for every wonderful thing in this world, there exists its counterpart, only stronger. Some of us are lucky to only see the sublime. The rest of us see the world as it really is. We all hide behind our fears, we prey on each other, we pretend and when we can't pretend anymore, the foundations come tumbling down. Mine have tumbled, and there is no one and nothing to blame, (*almost angry*) but my own fear...fear of life itself...a fear so deep that the only possible outcome is loneliness, and with loneliness nothing is possible.

My mother pretended for so long that life was as it should be. She sacrificed love for security, for appearance, for the known. She made a decision and lived with it. Under a hard exterior, maybe she was fragile. Maybe she did do what was best. I'll never know. One day she was here, and the conversation we never had always seemed possible. As long as it was possible, I hoped, I believed, I remained angry and hurt, but I believed change could happen. There was hope that all could be put right. The next day, she was gone. A short illness, and then gone. Just like that. She didn't even recognize me in her last days. And with her went any hope of true peace.

She took refuge in life's aesthetics. Beautiful art, beautiful clothes, beautiful houses. Who's to say she was wrong. But when she died, her illusions died with her. No. Wrong. They died before her and when they did she soon followed. She gave up. So many years of illusions and walls don't tumble without a heavy price. I can't help but think that she could have had a better life.

What is the point of the sublime if you witness it alone? You can even come to doubt if there is any beauty there at all. In a world in which nothing matters except one's personal gain, at any cost, such beauty is wasted. She took refuge in beauty for the sake of beauty and her own sanity. I have tried to do the same. But I am one of those less fortunate creatures whose sense of being and of beauty only exists if shared with a true, earth shattering, love. The kind that aches if you are not together.

I can't do this any more. My emotions have run their course. I am numb. No medication, no trauma will get them back.

I've seen what man has made of this world and I don't like it. There is no 'we' in our world any more. If there were, would we really be killing each other the way we do every day of every year?

The despair that festers inside me like a cancer and the depth of my solitude know no bounds any more. They are crippling. They are evil friends who won't let go. And if they won't let me go,...well...I mean what options are left?

Good night my friends. I have intruded too long.

*Alex goes to the stereo, and puts on 'No one is Alone' sung by Bernadette Peters, full volume. He turns to face out the window. As he lights a cigarette in the near dark, looking out the window, back to the audience, Maria appears on Stage left. A spot shines on her.*

*Maria*

It has been too many months since he came here. I'll call him in the morning. Tell him to come down and visit. He can stay as long as he wants. I can't explain it really. We have a special bond. We always said we would grow old together. But we have many years before that comes to pass. And many good times to come. I am sure of it. Aren't good people supposed to have long lives, after all?

*Pausing.*

Oliver L Landreth  
[o.landreth@gmail.com](mailto:o.landreth@gmail.com)  
+44 7973 784 854 or + 1 202 361 6945

I can feel it in my bones. I know something is wrong. I should call him. But how absurd. It's 3 in the morning and he is so far away. What am I going to say? 'Sorry to wake you but I had a bad dream about you?!'. I'll call him in the morning.

*The curtain falls.*

*The end.*