

# After the Drums

A one-act play  
By Chuck Lipsig

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## Cast of Characters

<b>ALF</b>	A high-ranking functionary in the government Ministry of Security. About 40 years old.
<b>LIA</b>	A former comrade and a former lover of Alf's. Married to Dorin. About 40 years old.
<b>DORIN</b>	A former comrade of Alf's. Married to Lia. About 40 years old.
<b>MICHEL</b>	(pronounced mi-KEL) Dorin and Lia's oldest child. A young man, about 19 years old.
<b>OLIVIA</b>	Dorin and Lia's second child. A young woman, about 16 years old.
<b>JAN</b>	Dorin and Lia's third child. Age 8 to 11. May be either a boy or a girl.
An <b>INFANT</b>	Dorin and Lia's fourth child. Represented at the end of the play by a doll.

### CHARACTER NOTES:

The key to this play is Alf. He must be played with a calm demeanor. If he's a monster, he's the scarier for being a quiet one. With Dorin and Lia, he is matter-of-fact, even slightly tender, when alone with Lia. With the children, he is avuncular and apparently open. Most importantly, Alf does not lie. Everything he says is either true or, at least, he believes to be true.

### LOCATION:

The capital city of a medium-sized nation, where there was major political upheaval, about twenty years previously. More specifically, the living room of the home of Dorin and Lia.

### SET:

The front door and entrance area are to one side of the stage and the exit to the rest of the house is to the opposite. There is a staircase, as much as there can be on the set, on the back wall. The bottom of the staircase is near the exit to the rest of the house. The furnishings are neither wealthy nor poor, but there is a dull functionality to them. Somewhere, there is a telephone.

### TIME:

Sometime when the telephone is commonplace.

*(Lights up on LIA. She is very nervous as to what has happened to her son. She paces the room. Perhaps she exits briefly to the front door and returns. She goes to the phone several times, picks it up, as if to call someone, then changes her mind. After an appropriate time, the front door unlocked and opened. LIA rushes towards it, as DORIN enters.)*

**LIA:**

Did you find Michel? What did you find out?

**DORIN:**

Not much. Several of his friends saw the police drag him off. He was alive and didn't look badly injured. But the police won't say anything, except they're sorting things out. I guess we wait.

**LIA:**

What do they mean, they're "sorting things out"? Who gets to go home, who goes to jail, and who gets disappeared?

**DORIN:**

It's not like that anymore.

**LIA:**

It's not? It's happening, right now.

**DORIN:**

It's not happening. This is not twenty years ago. We've had reforms we fought for.

**LIA:**

Not as much as we hoped for.

**DORIN:**

I know that, dear. Look, I don't want to argue politics with you, when Michel is out there.

**LIA:**

Is this how our parents felt about us twenty years ago? I thought my father didn't give a damn about me, when I joined The Movement. "Well, I guess we raised you wrong," he said. Now I wonder if he was just worried.

**DORIN:**

It was my mother, who gave me grief.

*(Imitating his mother.)*

"I don't understand why you need to take these risks when there are so many others out there doing so."

*(His own voice.)*

By then, though, I was in it for you, as much as the movement. That rally, where we met. You holding that flag on the steps. Your long hair streaming out like the flag. I had to meet you.

**LIA:**

So you wrote me a song.

**DORIN:**

I wrote a song for the Movement.

**LIA:**

That's what everyone thinks.

*(She smiles, forgetting her worry for a few seconds)*

I knew it was for me.

**DORIN:**

Yeah. It was. 'Course, then I got you pregnant.

**LIA:**

Did we do the right thing – dropping out of the movement to protect our baby?

**DORIN:**

We'd all but won and took a less active role. We got the reforms we wanted.

**LIA:**

I don't know ...

*(Someone knocks or a doorbell rings. Both LIA and DORIN startle).*

**DORIN:**

That has to be about Michel.

*(He goes to the door.)*

**LIA:**

Please let him be all right. Please let him be all right.

*(DORIN opens the door ALF enters, walking past DORIN without acknowledging him. He takes several steps into the room, then there is pause as ALF's and LIA's eyes meet.)*

**ALF:**

Lia. It's been some time.

**LIA:**

*(She takes a moment, too surprised to speak, at first. She barely gets out:)*

Yes.

*(Then she gathers herself.)*

Yes, it has.

**ALF:**

You look well.

*(He takes a quick look at DORIN, then adds, almost perfunctorily:)*

So do you, Dorin.

**DORIN:**

Thank you. Why are you here?

**ALF:**

No welcome?

*(Beat.)*

No, I suppose not. You have more serious concerns.

*(Beat.)*

I'll have you know that Michel is well. I recognized his name in the list of those arrested and have taken steps to ensure his safety.

**LIA:**

As in, otherwise his safety would not be assured.

**ALF:**

Our treatment of the prisoners is vastly improved from twenty years ago. But there are still incidents where the security service ... gets carried away. The point is that Michel is safe.

**LIA:**

Fine. Michel is safe. What about—

*(She would continue with “the others who’ve been arrested?” but DORIN interrupts)*

**DORIN:**

Thank you, Alf. Lia and I both appreciate this. Don’t we, Lia?

*(Pause. At last.)*

**LIA:**

*(Brittley)*

Yes. We do. Thank you.

*(She leaves the room.)*

**DORIN:**

I’m sorry. She never got over you turning in Nadia.

**ALF:**

Or the rest of them.

**DORIN:**

Yes, but especially Nadia. They were close.

**ALF:**

And you? You have gotten over it?

**DORIN:**

*(Considers what to answer, then:)*

No. Not really. Explain it to me.

**ALF:**

What’s there to explain? We won the reforms we wanted – all right, most of the reforms we wanted – and would have lost them, had the bombing the more radical faction planned been successful.

**DORIN:**

If they were planning it.

**ALF:**

They were.

**DORIN:**

How do you know?

**ALF:**

I was in on the plan.

**DORIN:**

You were?

**ALF:**

How do you think I knew? Did you think I just randomly chose some of our comrades to turn over to the compromise government as a peace offering?

*(He looks at **DORIN** who doesn't reply verbally, though his answer is clear.)*

Ah, I see you do. And Lia must, as well. Their plot was that I would be the ones to place the bombs in Government House. After all, as one of the negotiators, I had access.

**DORIN:**

And as one of the most radical members—

*(Continuation: “of the movement, they figured you would support them.”)*

**ALF:**

I wasn't a radical. I just believed in driving a hard bargain.

**DORIN:**

A hard bargain for who? For the Movement? Or for yourself?

*(The phone rings, before **ALF** can respond. **DORIN** goes to answer. As he does, **ALF** says:)*

**ALF:**

It's probably the local station house. I told them to call here, when Michel was delivered there.

**DORIN:**

*(Answers the phone.)*

Yes?

*(Pause for: Is this the residence of Lia and Dorin—“)*

Yes, it is.

*(Pause for: “Has the Assistant Minister arrived?”)*

He has. Do you want to speak to him?

*(Pause for “Yes.”) (To **ALF**:)*

It's for you.

*(**ALF** takes the phone.)*

**ALF:**

This is the Assistant Minster.

*(Pause for: “We have the prisoner you wanted, sir.”)*

Excellent. Does he have any visible injuries?

*(Pause for: “His left shoulder is injured, sir. Dislocated, I think. Otherwise, no, sir.)*

You will treat the shoulder then. He is not to be harmed any further.

*(Pause for: “But if he does not cooperate—”)*

You will explain to him that he’s being taken home.

*(Pause for: “He really should be questioned, sir.”)*

No, he should not be questioned.

*(Brief pause for: “But—” ALF interrupts.)*

No. Understand what I am saying. He should be taken home. Immediately.

*(Pause for: “Do you have a personal interest in this boy?”)*

Yes, I have a personal interest in him. So, let me explain something to you, Captain.

You will free the boy and have several of your men escort him home. He will have no further injuries. There will be no cuts nor bruises on him. If there is even a cowlick in his hair, Captain, I will bust you down to patrolling the garbage dumps. Do you understand?

*(Pause for: “Yes, sir.”)*

Good. He will be here within fifteen minutes, then.

*(Pause for: “Ten if I can.”)*

Ten minutes is better. Very good, Captain.

*(ALF hangs up.)*

Michel will be back shortly. I would like a word or two with him – alone – once he gets back.

**DORIN:**

Twenty years out of our lives and you just step back in and take over the situation.

**ALF:**

Without me acting on his behalf, Michel could be in a lot of trouble. This “New Movement” he’s in, they’re taking risks like we did. And some of the people who were in the security service when we were the ones in the street still are.

**DORIN:**

But now, so are you.

**ALF:**

Yes. Now, so am I. So I do what I can and I can protect Michel. But that does mean I “take over the situation.”

**DORIN:**

Lia will like it less than I do, but I don’t see we have a choice.

**ALF:**

You have a choice. You can accept my help or you can refuse it. Most of those who get arrested don't have families who will have that choice. I am here to help you. How much of that help you accept is up to you and Lia.

**DORIN:**

*(Long pause. He's not happy, but he doesn't see any other choice.)*  
I should tell Lia.

*(He starts to exit. ALF starts to follow. DORIN stops.)*  
Alone, if you don't mind.

**ALF:**

This is your home. I will wait in here, if that is what you want.

*(DORIN exits. ALF is left alone. He perhaps examines the room or sits on the couch. After maybe 5 to 10 seconds:)*

**OLIVIA (O.S.):**

*(Singing)*  
"And the city is golden at..."  
*(There is a pause, as she unlocks and opens the front door, then she enters.)*  
"Dawn!"  
*(She realizes ALF is in the room.)*  
Oh! Who are you?

**ALF:**

I'm an old friend of your parents. My name is Alf—

**OLIVIA:**

The mystery man!

**ALF:**

The mystery man?

**OLIVIA:**

That's my name for you.

**ALF:**

Your name for me ... have we met?

**OLIVIA:**

Oh, no, we've never met, unless it was when I was very young and can't remember, of course. But sometimes when I hear my parents talking over when they were younger, they mention "Alf." And if they realize that I – or any of the kids – are listening they

**OLIVIA (continued):**

change the subject. Once I asked, who Alf was and ... well, the look my mother gave me, I'm not going to ask again. But ever since then, I've thought of you as The Mystery Man – like in capital 'M,' capital 'M.' Now here you are, right here in our parlor and I'm just chattering away like a squirrel who drank too much coffee. But Mom says I'm always doing that. And I really—

*(“Try to stop,” would be the next words.)*

**ALF:**

And you must be Olivia. Lia and Dorin's oldest daughter.

**OLIVIA:**

Oh, right, I'm sorry. Where are my manners? I'm—

*(“Very pleased to meet you” would be next.)*

*(Enter LIA)*

**LIA:**

That's enough, Olivia. What are you doing home, so early? I thought you had choir.

**OLIVIA:**

Choir practice got cancelled, Mom. Too much excitement out there. Too many of the choir at the protests, as well.

**LIA:**

I guess that's not too surprising. Why don't you go make some tea for the minister?

**OLIVIA:**

The minister?

**ALF:**

Assistant minister, Ministry of Security.

**OLIVIA:**

Oh, my. You really are a mystery man.

**LIA:**

Olivia. Tea.

*(OLIVIA thinks to protest, then thinks better of it.)*

**OLIVIA:**

Right away.

*(She exits. Pause.)*

ALF:  
She is a lovely young lady.

LIA:  
Don't let her hear you say that. She has high enough an opinion of herself already.

ALF:  
She would have to be lovely, considering her mother.

LIA:  
Let's not go there.

*(Another pause, this one quite awkward.)*

ALF:  
So.

LIA:  
So.

ALF:  
So.  
*(Beat)*  
Michel. Is he mine?

LIA:  
Is that why you're protecting him? Because he might be your son?

ALF:  
I am protecting him because he is your son. I would protect him whomever the father is, but I would like to know if he's mine.

LIA:  
*(Pause, as she decides how to answer. Finally:)*  
No. He's not your son.

ALF:  
Are you sure?

LIA:  
I would have to have been pregnant for eleven months for him to be yours. Yes. I'm sure.

*(DORIN enters.)*

**DORIN:**

*(Abruptly, before he can change his mind.)*

You may in charge of this situation, but I will speak with my son, before he speaks with you.

**ALF:**

Of course. He is your son.

**DORIN:**

*(Off-balance – he was expecting an argument.)*

Well, then. Right. I – I'll wait out front.

*(He starts to exit, then turns back.)*

Thank you.

*(He hurries out, before anything can change.)*

**ALF:**

You made the right decision, you know, choosing Dorin over me.

**LIA:**

I don't require your approval about it.

**ALF:**

Nonetheless, it was the right decision. He's a better husband than I ever could have been. I never could have made such a commitment to you – or to any person – as he has. And to raise four children. No, I couldn't have done that.

**LIA:**

*(Unbending, despite herself)*

Well, the last child was a surprise.

*(Beat.)*

So, what about you? Has there been anyone in your life?

**ALF:**

I've had a few inamoratas in my time. One very expensive mistress – expensive on my pay, at least – who, thankfully, soon traded up to a higher ranking and better paid official...

**LIA:**

Many men would see that as the ideal life: Riches, power, women.

**ALF:**

It has its charms, I admit. But, no, the stresses there are not for every man – and those who see it as a fantasy would be the first to collapse from the stresses.

**LIA:**

So why don't you collapse?

**ALF:**

It's what I was made for. Yet, sometimes I wish I were not.

**LIA:**

What do you—?

*(She about to say, "mean?" when the baby starts crying. It does not have to be too loud – after all, the baby is upstairs – but loud enough for the audience to hear.)*  
And the baby wakes up.

**ALF:**

I'm sorry. I was too loud.

**LIA:**

No. It was about time she woke up. I'm sorry. I need to go take care of her.

**ALF:**

Of course.

*(LIA hurries off, upstairs (or off left). Give her enough time to climb the stairs, plus two seconds. Then, JAN enters. They pause and look in the kitchen, then put a finger to their mouth, as a signal for ALF to be quiet. They cross the stage and exit to the front door. A few seconds later, they reappear.)*

**JAN:**

Okay, Mommy's with the baby. Olivia's still is making tea. Daddy's waiting for Michel, outside. You can tell me what's really going on.

**ALF:**

What's really going on?

**JAN:**

Yeah. The real reason you're here. Michel's really spying on the New Movement for you, isn't he? And he's going to pass some info on to you.

**ALF:**

No. Michel is his own man. I'm just here to see him home safe.

**JAN:**

Okay ... then you're here to impress Mom so much that she goes back to you.

**ALF:**

Where did you get that idea?

**JAN:**

I heard everything you said.

**ALF:**

You heard everything?

**JAN:**

Yeah.

*(Beat.)*

Can I tell you a secret?

**ALF:**

*(Amused and playing along.)*

I am trusted with all sorts of secrets.

**JAN:**

But I'm just a kid. And you might tell my parents.

**ALF:**

I promise not to tell your parents, as long as it does not put any of your family in danger or endanger state security.

**JAN:**

Swear?

**ALF:**

By the National Charter.

**JAN:**

Okay. This house is old, see? When they rewired it for electricity or phone or something, they cut a hole in one of the closets to run the wires through. But they just wedged the wood they took out, back where it was. They didn't nail it or glue it or nothing. Well, that closet is the one in my room. So, I can sit in the closet and hear everything said down here. I can see, too, if I take the wood out. I saw and heard everything down here. You're the Assistant Minister for Security – there must be something you're up to.

**ALF:**

I hate to disappoint such an ambitious and venturesome young spy, but everything I said is true.

**JAN:**

Everything was on the level?

**ALF:**

Yes, on the level.

**JAN:**

No exaggerations?

**ALF:**

The threat to the police captain may have been slightly more than I am capable of. Otherwise, none. Not to your family.

**JAN:**

No omissions?

**ALF:**

Where did you get such a large vocabulary?

**JAN:**

I told you. I spy on what goes on down here. When I don't understand a word, I look it up.

**ALF:**

That's very clever.

**JAN:**

And you didn't answer my last question.

**ALF:**

No. I didn't.

*(Pause. Then.)*

**JAN:**

I wish you were my dad.

**ALF:**

Why is that?

**JAN:**

Because there is a kid in my class who's a big bully. And anytime anyone says anything to him about it, he says, "My daddy is a minister in the government," so he gets away with it. But if you were my dad, I could say, "My daddy is, too." Then you could arrest his father and then the bully wouldn't be able to bully anyone anymore.

**ALF:**

Well, I don't know if I could arrest the minister. I'd have to have a suspicion that he'd done something illegal, first. However, I could have a word with him and tell him it would be wise to straighten his kid out. And I don't need to be your dad to do that.

**JAN:**

You don't?

**ALF:**

I'm your parents' friend. That's good enough for me. Does he say who his dad is?

**JAN:**

Yes. He says he's—

*(Continuation would be "the minister for," and it has to end by that point.)*

**ALF:**

No. Let me guess. The minister for agricultural trade.

**JAN:**

How did you know?

**ALF:**

Because when school is out, he sometimes brings his son to work, and the boy is an unmitigated brat. I'll have a word with the minister tomorrow and we'll see if we can solve your bully problem. By the way, if the bully does give you a hard time, before I can talk to his father, tell him you know who his father is and that his father is only an assistant minister.

**JAN:**

But you're an assistant minister.

**ALF:**

True. But I don't have a bratty son using that to be a bully.

**JAN:**

Thank you.

*(Beat. They hear something.)*

I better go now.

**ALF:**

Why is that?

**JAN:**

Olivia just finished making the tea and I don't want to be seen with you. Not yet. So, I better leave. See you!

*(JAN exits.)*

**ALF:**

I'm sure you will.

*(OLIVIA enters with the tea.  
She puts it down.)*

**OLIVIA:**

I forgot to ask. Do you take milk with your tea. Or lemon?

**ALF:**

Neither. Tea is to be tasted, as it is, judged on its own merits.

*(OLIVIA hastily puts down  
the lemon and milk.)*

**OLIVIA:**

Oh, I agree. Absolutely. But Daddy likes milk in his tea, so I thought you might too.

**ALF:**

Milk in his tea was the only luxury your father allowed himself, during his time in the Movement. "Choose one luxury," he said. "And keep to it. For a moment you won't feel the deprivation of where you are."

**OLIVIA:**

And what was your luxury?

**ALF:**

I had none.

**OLIVIA:**

Not one?

**ALF:**

No. You must understand. I was raised in a well-to-do, well-connected family. Luxury was part of my upbringing.

**OLIVIA:**

But you abandoned that because you believed in the Movement.

**ALF:**

I knew that the government must change. I knew that it would not do so without being forced. Therefore, I acted. And eschewing luxury became my luxury.

**OLIVIA:**

And my father parents?

**ALF:**

Your mother's upbringing was much like mine. But her motivations were much more idealistic. She entered the Movement expecting to create a utopia. Your father wasn't so well off, but he was a utopian, too.

**OLIVIA:**

And you?

**ALF:**

I believe in what's possible. Not to say anything is wrong with how your parents saw the struggle. Without dreamers, no one would have a goal to move towards.

**OLIVIA:**

I don't think mother is a dreamer anymore. But father ... I love my father, I really do. He's the nicest man in the world. But sometimes ... he seems just ... so airy ... and it makes him seem weak.

**ALF:**

You underestimate him, Olivia. Your father is a very brave man. However, he is not an aggressive one. He was not a fighter nor would he have been someone to sit at the negotiation table – he would have been too conciliatory. And he went to the protests as his duty, not as something he wanted to do. But he was a brave man and one of the most important people in the Movement.

**OLIVIA:**

Why? What did he do?

**ALF:**

He was the Movement's poet and songwriter.

**OLIVIA:**

Father was? I mean, I know he likes to sing. And sometimes he takes his guitar and goes to play at a coffee shop or something. But what did he write? Anything I know?

**ALF:**

I heard you singing "The City at Dawn" when you came in.

**OLIVIA:**

It's really a hokey song. We sing it at every anniversary of the uprising. But I like it.

**ALF:**

Your father wrote it.

**OLIVIA:**

But L.P. Veritati wrote it.

**ALF:**

That was your father's *nom de plume*. He took it from the Latin, *Legis pro veritatem*: "Law for the truth."

**OLIVIA:**

My father? Daddy wrote that?

**ALF:**

That and many more. Your father is a good man, Olivia. A brave man. But he is also a humble man – too humble for his own good.

**OLIVIA:**

And you're not. You're not humble.

**ALF:**

I'm not someone who needs his name splashed all over the newspapers. But, no, I am not humble.

**OLIVIA:**

Daddy could stand to be more like you.

**ALF:**

But he is not. Love him for what he is, Olivia. What you might want – well, maybe you should look for that in a husband ... in a few years, I would suggest.

**OLIVIA:**

Maybe I should.

*(The front door opens and closes, off-stage. ALF retreats to the far side of the room, taking OLIVIA with him. Enter MICHEL.)*

**MICHEL:**

I'm not going to do what the government's chief thug tells me to.

*(Enter DORIN.)*

**DORIN:**

Just listen to what he has to say. He was my comrade, so he understands how you feel.

**MICHEL:**

If he understood how I feel, he wouldn't be in the government.

*(ALF approaches from the far side of the room.)*

**ALF:**

And what do you plan to do, if your New Movement succeeds? Go home and call it a job well-done or take your role in the government?

**MICHEL:**

*(Thrown for a second, but recovers)*  
Take part, of course.

**ALF:**

Which is what I did.

**MICHEL:**

You didn't do enough. Or you did it wrong.

**DORIN:**

We did what we could.

**MICHEL:**

You didn't do enough. Or you didn't want to.

**ALF:**

May I speak with Michel alone for a moment?

**DORIN:**

I think—

**ALF:**

Please, Dorin.

**DORIN:**

*(After a pause.)*  
Alright. Olivia, let's go make some more tea.

**OLIVIA:**

But, Daddy, I just —  
*(She's going to continue with "Made tea.")*

**DORIN:**

Now, Olivia.

*(DORIN and OLIVIA exit.)*

**MICHEL:**

Well, sir, you have me alone.

**ALF:**

Do you have something to say to me?

**MICHEL:**

*(Surprised. He was expecting a lecture.)*  
You are a traitor.

**ALF:**

Not exactly the "Thank you," I had hoped for, for getting you out of jail, but it will do. No, Michel, I am no traitor.

**MICHEL:**

Then why did you turn on the Movement? My parents failed it, but they did not turn on it.

**ALF:**

First off, your parents did not fail the Movement. They had to choose whether to remain active, when they realized your mother was pregnant with you. It would have been difficult for them, especially, once you were born. But we were well on the way to victory and I think they chose wisely.

As for myself ... Michel, there were two main factions in the Movement: Radical and Reform – no clear boundary between them. You'll find there often are no clear boundaries between factions, just gradients. When it became clear that the goals of the Movement could be obtained through peaceful means – by way of Reform – I acted to help achieve those goals by those means. When I heard that some of my friends in the Radical faction planned to commit violence, thinking that would speed the pace of change, I turned them in.

**MICHEL:**

You turned traitor and were rewarded with a position in the Ministry of Security.

**ALF:**

I prevented an action that would have resulted in more civil strife, at a time it could be ended. And, yes, it earned me a place in government.

**MICHEL:**

The goals of the Movement were not fully achieved and the old dictators were not punished.

**ALF:**

The old dictators lost power. For most of them that was punishment enough. And in peaceful reform, there is always compromise. That's how the reform is obtained. But we have freedom to speak out. We elect our leaders from a variety of parties. Everything else is detail.

*(Beat.)*

Ah, but it is the details you dislike. And that is the point of the "New Movement" you are in.

**MICHEL:**

We will defeat you.

**ALF:**

Defeat the current government? Quite possible, especially if your New Movement starts fielding candidates for office. Defeat me, personally? No, I assure you, whatever the outcome. Status quo, sudden change, or, most likely, another round of reform, I will remain where I am, if not a bit higher.

**MICHEL:**

How? How could anyone stay on-top, no matter the government.

**ALF:**

I am like cork. Whatever the waters, whatever the strength of the storm, I return to the top. It is what I know how to do best. My parents were wealthy under the old regime, but I knew it would not last, so I joined the Movement. I saw that reform was the immediate future and I helped facilitate that. Now ... Well, I doubt the radical wing of this New Movement shall win out, but if they do – if I see you leading a successful charge up the steps of Government House, be assured that I will be the one who opens the door and politely bids you enter. Unless one of my fellow corks beats me to the door. There are always a few of us – not too many, but we exist in every society. You probably know one or two among your own friends.

**MICHEL:**

There is no one like that in the New–!

*(He stops and thinks for a second.)*

You're right. There are.

**ALF:**

I bet if we wrote down the names, our lists would be the same. But you're not one of them.

**MICHEL:**

*(Fiercely.)*

No, I am not.

**ALF:**

A shame. Very well. Let me give you a piece of advice, personal, not political. Do nothing where it is likely you could get yourself killed. No matter what happens, I will do all I can to protect you from the worst consequences of your actions.

**MICHEL:**

I don't want your protection!

**ALF:**

Nonetheless, you have it. If you need my help, ask and I will give what I can. And if you never ask, I'll still be there for you.

**MICHEL:**

Why? Why do you do this for me?

**ALF:**

*(Pause.)*

For the sake of your mother.

*(Beat.)*

Now then, if you insist on continuing your present course of action and leaving your parents' home, I will not stop it. Indeed, I will advise you. If you go out the front door, you will likely be followed. The captain of the local station is neither clever nor subtle, but he is persistent. So, go out the backdoor and stick to the alleys and smaller streets, until you are well clear of your home. But before you go, there is one thing I insist you do.

**MICHEL:**

Here it comes. What's the price of my freedom? What do you want me to do for you?

**ALF:**

Nothing for me. However, I insist that you say goodbye to your parents. A loving goodbye, in which you show none of the resentment or anger you may feel for them. They love you, they'll miss you, and no matter what I tell them, they will be worried about you so much that it will keep them up at night. You owe them a kind leave-taking.

**MICHEL:**

I'll do that.

*(MICHEL starts to leave, then turns back, wanting to say something, but cannot find the words.)*

**ALF:**

*(After several seconds.)*  
Is there anything else you wish to say?

**MICHEL:**

I do have one question.

**ALF:**

Ask.

**MICHEL:**

Why did the police captain give me a comb?

**ALF:**

Ha!  
*(It is a genuine laugh – but just the one sound. Then a beat.)*  
There are some things in life that will just have to remain a mystery. Now on your way, young rebel.

*(MICHEL looks at him, nods, then exits.)*

**ALF:**

And Godspeed.

*(JAN enters. ALF doesn't realize until he/she speaks.)*

**JAN:**

Am I going to see my brother again?

**ALF:**

*(Slightly startled. The next is said out of amusement and admiration. There is no anger nor ill-feelings in it.)*  
You are a good little spy! How much did you hear?

**JAN:**

Everything from, “Not exactly the ‘Thank you,’ I had hoped for.”

**ALF:**

And what did you think of the conversation between your brother and myself?

**JAN:**

I think I'm not quite old enough to understand it all, but when I get older, it will be very important to me.

*(Beat.)*

If get in trouble, when I get older, will you protect me, like Michel?

**ALF:**

Somehow, I don't think you'll ever need me to protect you. But if you do, yes, I most certainly will.

*(LIA enters. She sees JAN near Alf and runs over to PULL the child away.)*

**LIA:**

Jan, don't bother Alf.

**JAN:**

*(Gone is the wise beyond his/her years child and in his/her place is the little kid his/her parents know.)*

Mommy! I just wanted to see who he was.

*(DORIN and OLIVIA enter. Either one may be carrying the aforementioned baby, if wanted.)*

**ALF:**

You have a most charming family, Lia. Jan had a concern – quite legitimate – at how Michel's activities would affect the family. Quite beyond Jan's years, in fact. You should be proud. I promised that I would be as protective of anyone in your family as I am towards Michel.

**OLIVIA:**

Do we need protection?

**ALF:**

The nation is heading for rough waters. There are enemies from outside and those within who would work with them and undo what we've done over the last twenty years. Idealists, like your brother is – like your parents once were – may get caught up in the turmoil.

**OLIVIA:**

So, you're going to protect us?

**LIA:**

Olivia, be quiet!

**ALF:**

I am here to offer my services, as a friend of the family, to do what I can. I have ... I have neglected our friendship and I hope to begin to make up for that with this.

**DORIN:**

I must say that you have done much to help Michel today. I cannot overlook it.

**ALF:**

A down-payment. Nothing more.

**DORIN:**

No, it is more – it is something that someone who was not a friend would not do. It is something that someone without your position could not do. You are offering to do much, if needed.

**ALF:**

No more than I'm capable of.

**DORIN:**

Is there anything we can do for you?

**ALF:**

Just one thing.

**DORIN:**

Name it.

**ALF:**

I would be most grateful, if you would allow your children consider me their honorary uncle.

**JAN:**

Yes!

**OLIVIA:**

*(Starting at the same time as JAN's line.)*

Yes, Daddy may we? I'd like that, Mother.

**DORIN:**

Yes ... yes, I think that would be good.

**LIA:**

Dorin, I don't know ... I mean Nadia ...

*(ALF moves to LIA and takes her hands. His body language is protective, not romantic. But LIA remembers why she was attracted to him.)*

**ALF:**

Nadia is in the past. Your family, that is now.

**LIA:**

*(Not entirely convinced, but accepting for now.)*

Yes ... yes that is true.

*(LIA hesitates a second. Then, assents with a nod of her head.)*

Yes, you would be a good uncle for our children.

**ALF:**

Thank you, Lia

*(JAN runs to hug ALF. Only because she is trying to act adult does OLIVIA not do the same. She does show affection, placing her hand on ALF's shoulder. After a second of hesitation, DORIN shakes his hand. Finally, seeing the rest of her family there, LIA slowly joins them. They freeze into a tableau like a family portrait.)*

*(Lights down. End.)*