

La Fin du Silence

By Michael Walker

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by Michael Walker

Characters

Tami (19), an intern at *Journey Magazine*
 Nicole (24), the Assistant Editor
 Brian (47), the Editor and Publisher
 Simone (40), a woman in France
 Susan (28), a free-lance journalist
 (A Courier, offstage)

Setting

There is an open set presenting the sparse indication of three offices: **Brian's**, stage right; **Nicole's**, center; and **Simone's home office**, left. Brian's office has a desk and enough seating for four people. Nicole's office has at least one side chair for her desk. Simone's home office area is small, with her desk and possibly a side table with wine. Each desk has a computer screen and keyboard; the two magazine offices have desk phones. Brian and Nicole's offices are not connected but are near to each other along an imagined hallway. The "hallway" leads offstage-right, to the unseen front entry, Tami's office and the rest of the publication departments. The shape or size of the stage is not important.

Time and Place

The play takes place in the present in Newburyport, Massachusetts and somewhere in France.

Two Conventions of the Play

Email Conversations

Nicole and Simone converse almost exclusively through email. In performance, the director, actors and design staff will decide how much typing and "pings" of arrived email will begin the show before it blends into Nicole and Simone talking directly to each other as if they were in the same room. Even when Nicole or Simone moves to the other's office, the audience is to understand they are always communicating through email.

French to English

In readings and workshops no actor needs to be able to speak French. A complete English version of the script is available and a mild French dialect will suffice in development. In performance, Nicole and Simone must appear to speak fluent French for the little French spoken. If French-speaking actors are not available, the creative team can decide how to convey to the audience that the actors are speaking French in the first pages. In much the same way as the email blends into conversation, in performance the two actors will begin by speaking French to each other and then blend into English. In performance, the audience is to understand that the emails they send to each other are in French. The French-to-English translations of dialogue can be found in an Appendix to this script. The playwright is available to assist by providing suitable alternate dialogue for specific performance and theatre company situations.

ACT ONE

CURTAIN SPEECH

(The lights fade up to illuminate the three office areas dimly. If the theatre has an MC give a curtain speech, s/he will make the following announcement. If there is no curtain speech, a similar announcement to the one below is heard over the house speakers. A spotlight illuminates the MC, center on the apron.)

MC

...And now, it is my honor to bring Brian Scott to the stage to say a few words. Mr. Scott is the Editor of *Journey Magazine*, this year's winner of the Northeast Publishing Association's *Outstanding Internet Magazine of the Year*. Please welcome Brian Scott.

(BRIAN, late 40's, enters. He is dressed in a business suit.)

BRIAN

Thank you, [MC's name]. As many of you know, *Journey Magazine* is dedicated to illuminating life-changing, remarkable journeys of otherwise unremarkable people. Last year, the Board of Directors chose the journeys of the homeless as our theme and this year the Board is challenging the staff to illuminate the journeys those who have experienced the horrors of sexual violence against women and girls. Bold editorial choices and focuses such as these have always marked the magazine as unique, but in our journey this year, we are finding the women who live in fear and write to us are not unique at all.

It is, after all, these women who are sure to have keys in their hands as they approach their vehicles and homes – not to unlock the doors but to protect themselves. It is they who analyze every stranger's face; they who carry whistles and pepper spray; they who walk in pairs at night. Worldwide, women live in a constant state of fear which they have been trained to classify as “sensible awareness.” Every woman in this room knows of another who has been attacked or raped. Every young girl is in danger. It isn't sensible; it's outrageous.

(SIMONE, 40, enters with coffee and sits at her home computer. She is dressed in comfortable but professional clothes. She begins to type.)

For the next twenty-six issues we will be concentrating our efforts on promoting the healing process after sexual violence with a particular focus on the journeys of young women and girls. In the lobby, you will find information about how you can support other organizations striving to break the silence, take back the night and end the violence against women. Thank you for your support.

(The spot on Brian fades and he exits.)

SCENE ONE

(SIMONE'S VOICE can be heard over the HOUSE SPEAKERS.)

SIMONE (V.O.)

Cher M. Scott. Je vous ai déjà écrit trois fois pour demander si *Journey Magazine* s'intéresse à l'histoire de mon expérience. J'attendrai encore deux jours et puis je rechercherai d'autres publications. J'espère avoir de vos nouvelles bientôt. Cordialement, Simone.¹

(After a moment in the dim light, Brian's computer "pings," to indicate new mail. LIGHTS rise on the offices of Brian and Nicole. NICOLE, 24, enters and leaves her bag in her office before she takes a legal pad into Brian's office and sits on a side chair or sofa. She is dressed for a day at the office. She may take out papers to read. Nicole speaks in a pronounced French dialect. TAMI, 19, enters in a rush carrying paperwork she is bringing from home. She gives the impression of being a bright and cheerful young woman, who doesn't take time to breathe.)

TAMI

Oh, I didn't see you there.

NICOLE

Good morning. You must be Tami. I am Nicole Duvenet.

TAMI

I can't believe we haven't had a chance to talk yet; you've been here like weeks, right?

NICOLE

Just a little over one really, and most of it was part-time; I was only up here twice. I think you were down in Production.

TAMI

I am so sorry! We just finished putting together the next issue yesterday so we've been under the gun. We had the whole Cover Story plus FOUR follow up stories you know from previous issues. Did you figure everything out? I mean, if you need any help with the phones or computer or anything let me know. I'm pretty good.

NICOLE

Brian says you're a computer genius.

TAMI

Oh my God, no. Is he here?

NICOLE

Not yet.

¹ Translations for all French dialogue are in the Appendix. Speaking French is not required for readings.

TAMI

Oh my God - did you get coffee? I can make it – or tea – wait, we don't have any tea. Brian said you're French and you don't drink tea. That's right, isn't it? Do you? I can get some tea – I mean, if you want it.

NICOLE

(Laughing.) Are you all right?

TAMI

Yes. I'm just a little scattered this morning because I got behind and I'm late but not really because nothing's happened yet so nothing's wrong actually. It's just I'm late inside my head, you know?

NICOLE

I won't tell anyone.

TAMI

I just love your accent; you are from France, right? Brian wasn't joking.

NICOLE

Oui, je viens de France.

TAMI

Oh, my God. That is so cool. Brian said you go to Harvard?

NICOLE

I was accepted there for graduate school but I'm on a leave to do some research and work here.

TAMI

Grad school; I can't believe it. How old are you? Is that okay? I mean...

NICOLE

I'm twenty-four.

TAMI

You are so young and you've been traveling from France and everything. I haven't been anywhere like that. I mean I started part-time last year just before I graduated – but Brian made me a full-time intern this January – that's when I moved up here from Revere. So, I've just been in Newburyport and Revere – that's where I grew up. I never really went anywhere except for like business trips for the magazine.

NICOLE

Staying in one place is nice, too.

TAMI

Where do you live in France?

NICOLE

Lyon.

TAMI

(Savoring the word.) “Lyon.” Is that near Paris?

NICOLE

It is south of Paris – maybe the distance from here to New York. My home is closer to Switzerland than Paris.

TAMI

Switzerland and Paris. That is so incredible. How long have you been in the U.S.?

NICOLE

A little over five years. I graduated from Columbia and someone asked me to do some work for them and then this job came along.

TAMI

I didn’t even know if he was going to hire someone to replace Kathryn – she was the Assistant Editor before you. I mean I thought he would but I didn’t see anyone... Did you like interview?

NICOLE

I interviewed about a month ago but there weren’t any openings. When Kathryn left, Brian called me in and here we are.

TAMI

Brian says you were an Editor before.

NICOLE

It was a student magazine at university; nothing as big as what you’re doing here.

TAMI

I’m not doing it, thank God; I’m just doing background stuff for Brian – and I sit in on some of the interviews, too. That’s the business travel. I went to Montreal – really we went to Burlington, Vermont but then we went to Montreal because it was so close and you can drink up there at eighteen – I mean, I’m nineteen now but it was cool to be legal and all.

NICOLE

Do you like traveling?

TAMI

I don’t know; it’s okay sometimes. I’m not used to being in hotels and restaurants like that. The magazine pays for everything and all but some of the people we meet are...I don’t know... Some of the girls have gone through some ugly...stuff. It’s hard. Brian’s really great with them though, no matter how much ...stuff they’ve been through. Still, it’s sad.

NICOLE

“Ugly merde.” Say ugly merde and not many people will know you mean ugly shit. Go on; say it.

TAMI

Ugly merde.

NICOLE

(Laughing.) There! You see? I worked in a women's shelter in New York, Tami, and we all saw some ugly merde – but it was safe. We were helping women. *Journey Magazine* is helping them, too.

(BRIAN enters. He is a vibrant, L.L. Bean-well-dressed man in his late 40's. It is clear that he has more energy than any three people. He has an engaging smile to go along with a strong business-like demeanor, when required.)

BRIAN

Indeed we are! Good morning Nicole. Good morning Tami. I see you two have finally met. And I trust you have filled each other in on how much of a slave driver you think I am, yes?

NICOLE

Tami was just saying you are a terrific boss and she loves working here.

BRIAN

And what were you just saying?

NICOLE

I was just saying Tami was just saying you are a terrific boss!

BRIAN

And I'm just saying you're both right. Sorry I'm late – there was an accident on the bridge. So, let's get down to it. The reason I wanted us to get together this morning was that this is really our new Assistant Editor's first full day – so applause, applause, applause and welcome! And we should all be on the same page about who does what and when and so forth. So, let's begin: Issue 21 hits the internet tomorrow; Tami and I just finished up on that. You're all set to publish, right?

TAMI

Yes.

BRIAN

Tami throws the switch and “Presto!” through the miracles of science, 21 is around the world. 22 is about a week away from final draft. It's a bit of a mess now, so we have our work cut out for us 'til then. Did you see the outline?

NICOLE

22 is about the woman with twins, right?

BRIAN

Mary Harper. Fabulous story. She's eighteen. How she managed to bring those kids up with all the shit going down in her life is a true inspiration to anyone. But she's only the Cover Story; there are two follow-ups and all the normal departments to put together. Any new advertising?

TAMI

Geoff got *Blue Cross* to pick up Page Two, and *Johnson & Johnson* renewed their page for the year, so we're a little over nine thousand for the issue. Subscribers are up a hundred eighteen.

BRIAN

Excellent! Niki, you will see the near-final draft and then the three of us will go over any changes the Monday before we publish. Right?

NICOLE & TAMI

Right.

BRIAN

Okay, that's 22. Niki is taking the Cover Story for 23 but you and I will handle everything else and ease her into the fray. Do you like "Niki?" "Nix?" "Nicole?"

NICOLE

Nicole.

BRIAN

I had a girlfriend named Niki once so if I slip, don't be offended. Okay, Nicole, we have a few possible stories for 23's cover - the best of those is Margo Fleming in Ohio. If you have someone else in mind, let me know.

NICOLE

Anyone?

BRIAN

It can be whoever you like but 23 hits the web in less than four weeks – and, of course, I have to approve it. I need your proposal next week and your outline and roughs in two. If we agree, we will preview your issue in our 22. Questions?

NICOLE

I'm on my own?

BRIAN

Yes. Until 22 is in the can, Tami has to stay with me. If you need help and she has some free time, which she won't, I'll see what I can do.

NICOLE

I do need her to navigate the server. Show me where the Fleming story is, for instance.

TAMI

I can do that.

BRIAN

Good. Why don't you do that now while I get myself started? I'll need you back here in a few minutes, Tami.

(Tami and Nicole leave his office and go to Nicole's.
LIGHTS RISE on Simone's desk. Simone enters and sits at her computer. When Brian finds her email, SIMONE SPEAKS WHAT BRIAN IS READING.)

SIMONE

Cher M. Scott. Je vous ai déjà écrit trois fois pour demander si *Journey Magazine* s'intéresse à l'histoire de mon expérience. J'attendrai encore ...

(Brian mutters to himself as he shakes his head and closes the email and returns to his papers. Simone stays at the computer for a moment and then exits.)

BRIAN

Oh, for God's sake... (Calling out.) Tami?

TAMI

I'll be right there. (To Nicole.) Gotta go; are you okay for now?

NICOLE

I'm fine but come back when you can. I need more help and we need to talk!

TAMI

Will you teach me French?

NICOLE

I already have.

BRIAN

Nurse! I've fallen and I can't get up.

TAMI

(Sighs.) Merde. Right?

NICOLE

(Laughing.) Perfect.

(Tami enters Brian's office.)

BRIAN

All set to get to work?

TAMI

All set.

BRIAN

Good. First, how do you like Nicole?

TAMI

She's nice. She's teaching me French.

(He rises and moves to his "door.")

BRIAN

Hold that thought. Nicole? Can you come in for a minute?

NICOLE

Be right there.

BRIAN

(To Tami.) So you don't speak French, right?

TAMI

No...?

BRIAN

Never mind.

(Nicole enters Brian's office.)

(To Nicole.) Thanks. I know this will sound crazy, but you haven't been sending me emails in French, have you?

NICOLE

No.

BRIAN

I didn't think so. Do you have a minute? Take a look at this. I've been getting these emails in French for almost a month and I've been ignoring them because it's probably spam, you know? I don't know why...

(Nicole reads the email.)

NICOLE

It's from a woman named Simone. She says she's been trying to get in touch with you about publishing her story.

BRIAN

What's it say?

NICOLE

"Dear Mr. Scott. Previously, I have written three introductory emails asking if *Journey Magazine* would be interested in publishing the story of my journey." ...*(she reads ahead and translates roughly.)* She says she'll wait two more days before investigating other publications... and she hopes you'll consider opening a conversation... "Sincerely, Simone."

BRIAN

Simone who?

NICOLE

It doesn't say. "Simonedefrance@gmail." That's all there is. There's an earlier one here... This one says she is in France and doesn't want anyone to know who she is... She was in an orphanage and somehow was taken and raped.

In France?
BRIAN

NICOLE
I think so. She isn't giving out much information.

BRIAN
How old is she?

NICOLE
I don't know. There's nothing...

BRIAN
We don't know who she is, where she is, how old she is – we don't even know if she's a "she!"
Hang on...

(He begins to type a reply to Simone.)

NICOLE
She doesn't speak English.

BRIAN
Of course she doesn't. Beautiful. Okay, you write her and tell her we need more information before we decide what we're going to do.

(Nicole sends a quick reply.)

What did you say?

NICOLE
I said we'd get back to her in a few minutes.

BRIAN
See if she'll let you call her so you can check her out – maybe she calls you – whatever works. I don't have time for this; Tami and I have a world of shit to do. Let me know if you find anything out. This could be very big or nothing.

NICOLE
Forward her email to me and I'll follow up with her.

BRIAN
And copy me on the emails between you two, okay? I have to keep in the loop.

(Nicole leaves Brian's office for her own. Simone enters in her area and sees there hasn't been a response. She begins to leave when there is the "Ping" of Nicole's email from Brian's office.)

SIMONE
Enfin, M. Scott. Vous êtes donc vivant.

(Brian and Tami leave his office.)

BRIAN

We're heading downstairs; if you need us, just push the button for Production and pick up the phone – that's Tom's line.

(Brian and Tami exit. Nicole speaks as she types. Simone responds but neither looks at the other.)

NICOLE

Simone? Si vous êtes là, pourriez-vous me répondre?

SIMONE

Bonjour, M. Scott.

NICOLE

Je suis Nicole Duvenet.

SIMONE

Je voudrais traiter seulement avec M. Scott; je ne parlerai avec personne d'autre.

NICOLE

Je suis la rédactrice adjointe.

SIMONE

Je ne peux pas travailler avec un "assistant".

NICOLE

Il n'y a personne d'autre; M. Scott ne parle pas français et il a quelques questions à vous poser.

(Pause.)

SIMONE

Quelles questions ?

NICOLE

Où êtes-vous ?

SIMONE

En France.

NICOLE

Où en France ?

SIMONE

En France est suffisant à savoir.

NICOLE

Comment vous appelez-vous ?

Simone. SIMONE

Votre nom de famille ? NICOLE

“Simone” est suffisant à savoir. SIMONE

Etes-vous une femme? NICOLE

(The two will blend into speaking English but the audience is to understand that they are writing emails to each other in French.)

And you? SIMONE

Oui. NICOLE

Moi, aussi. SIMONE

How can we be sure? NICOLE

I am telling the truth. Et vous? SIMONE

Oui. NICOLE

These emails... sont-ils confidentiels? SIMONE

Only Mr. Scott and I will read them. NICOLE

What does he want to know? SIMONE

Writing email is slow – may I telephone you? Or you me? NICOLE

No. Is he there now? SIMONE

NICOLE

He is nearby.

SIMONE

You can tell Mr. Scott I will send some of my story and if he agrees to my terms, I will email it in three installments.

NICOLE

In English?

SIMONE

No. You are French, yes?

NICOLE

De Lyon. I can translate them word-for-word.

SIMONE

I am sending part of my story now and the rest of my terms. Reply when you know what Mr. Scott wants to do.

(Simone continues to write as the lights fade on Nicole.)

SCENE TWO

(The lights dim briefly and then rise on Brian in his office. Simone is at her desk in dim light. Tami enters.)

BRIAN

What's up?

TAMI

We have a problem. Mary Harper has a new boyfriend.

BRIAN

How do you know?

TAMI

She posted pictures of the two of them on Facebook. I just sent you a link.

(Brian checks his email. Nicole enters her office and checks her computer.)

BRIAN

Are you sure about this?

TAMI

I'm sure they're kissing and his hand is on her butt. He looks pretty scary.

BRIAN

Where is this?

TAMI

ZOZO. It's a heavy metal club in Boston. That's 1:45 Tuesday morning.

BRIAN

That's on Facebook?

TAMI

That and a lot more.

BRIAN

Dammit. See if you can get her on the phone. Either way, I'm going to Boston.

(Tami exits and Brian follows her to the "door.")

(Calling after her.) And send me all the pictures you can find of her and this Neanderthal.

(He goes to Nicole's office.)

NICOLE

Is something wrong?

BRIAN

It looks like Mary Harper was hooking up with the Hell's Angels at two in the morning. And if that's not enough, she posted pictures of herself with her tits hanging out on Facebook. Did you get anywhere with Simone?

(Tami enters.)

NICOLE

I did. We should talk. Do you want to do that now?

BRIAN

Sure, why not? My office, okay?

(Brian goes to his office. Nicole and Tami follow.)

(To Tami.) Did you get her?

TAMI

I had to leave a message.

BRIAN

Okay, new subject: Simone got back to us. Nicole, you're on.

NICOLE

She won't give any information about who she is or where. No last name or telephone. That being said, I'm pretty sure she's a woman in France with a story.

Because...?
BRIAN

NICOLE
Her French is very conversational with phrases and idioms only a French woman would use. I am sure she was either born there or brought up there.

TAMI
How old is she?

NICOLE
I don't know but it sounds like the rape was a while ago.

BRIAN
So she was actually raped?

NICOLE
She says she was in an orphanage and was taken off the street and raped by three men.

BRIAN
There has to be more than that.

NICOLE
There is but she has demands.

BRIAN
Of course she does.

NICOLE
She's offering to send her story in three installments and she wants us to print them in three consecutive issues. The first two will be free but if we want the third, the cost will be \$20,000.

TAMI
Holy...merde.

BRIAN
We get to see the first two and decide from there?

NICOLE
That's it.

BRIAN
So what's the "more to the story?"

NICOLE
She's going to expose who the rapists are in the third installment.

TAMI
That's a lot of money.

BRIAN

The good news is, it's looking like we won't be paying Mary Harper. When can we look at the first part?

NICOLE

I don't know; do you want to hear how it all begins?

BRIAN

Shoot.

NICOLE

She doesn't remember much about her parents. There was some problem with them and she ended up in a Catholic orphanage when she was about six.

BRIAN

Where?

NICOLE

She didn't say. Anyway, it turns out Simone was very smart, so the nuns sent her to a special school somewhere out of the country – also run by nuns – and that's when she was raped.

BRIAN

By three men?

NICOLE

That's what she said.

BRIAN

How old was she?

NICOLE

I don't know; that's all she told me. She said if you agreed she'd send the first part.

BRIAN

Why not? Let's see what it looks like. Okay, get out of here; I've got my own problems.

(Nicole and Tami leave the office.)

(End of "First Pages.")