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Both Sides of the Story

Based on a verse in the song by Phil Collins.

In an apartment somewhere in a large city, two children sit, hanging over the edge of a loft, watching as their mother and father argue at the kitchen table below. The noise of their parents' bickering prevented them from sleeping and they came down here, curious as to what was going on. Now they watch, unable to take their eyes from the scene. The boy hears everything easily but his younger sister has to strain her ears to listen. They are still too tired to comprehend everything that is happening but they understand most of it.

"I had to tell you," the mother says to her husband. "I couldn't let something like this wallow inside me."

He sits at the kitchen table, rubbing his eyebrows in stunned disbelief. He looks up suddenly. "Why?"

"Why what?" she replies.

He is silent. She can see him mouthing the question again, to himself.

She asks herself the same question. Why is she doing this? Because she has to. She wouldn't feel right if she didn't. She couldn't live with the dishonesty. But this is the man she loved for so many years, perhaps still does. Yes. Yes, of course she still does, a little. Some love will always linger. But the other-- What about the other one? How could she refuse that? How could she deny that that love exists? She still could though. She could still go back on it all if--

No, no, no. She made her decision. It was for the best and she has to stick by it, whatever the cost.

The father slams his fist down on the table and throws his chair back. "Damn it," he bellows. "How could this happen? *Why?*"

"Please," says the mother. "You're going to wake the kids."

He turns away from her.

Silence. Neither speak for a long moment.

"What about them?" he asks.

"Who?" she says in something very near a whisper.

"The children of course. What about them?"

"They'll get along fine."

"You're just going to abandon them?"

"I'm not abandoning anyone."

He turns around now to look at her. She sits silently, staring blankly back at him. She is beginning to reach middle age. The lines on her face have recently begun to show. There are signs of all the years she has passed through. But to him, she is just as beautiful as she ever was. Just as attractive as she was on the day they met, so long ago. So very long ago. That was in another world, a world that seems a million years past, a world he knows he can never have back.

He feels his face tighten, as if he may begin crying right here in front of her. He turns away and finds that it is much easier to control himself when he is not looking at her. Staring now, out the window over the sink, he sees the corner of the building across the street and

beyond that, the bay, the shipyards. The blackness of the night outside seems somehow comforting, familiar. He stands a long time, staring.

"Are you okay?" asks the mother.

Are you okay? *Are you okay?* What a stupid question. Does she seriously expect him to answer that? How could he possibly be okay at a time like this? He does not respond.

"Honey?"

That word is like a dagger in his chest. Still, he does not respond, only stares across the kitchen, out the window at the shipyard.

Thoughts suddenly leap into his mind. He sees his wife in the arms of another man. Lying together, embraced, kissing-- They are making love... in much the same way as he made love to her only a few nights ago. That too, was in a different world.

"Who is he?" asks the husband.

He turns around when she does not reply. "Who is he?"

She shakes her head slowly.

He kicks the chair, standing a few feet back from the table. "*Who is he?*" he shouts. Suddenly realizing how loud he was, he looks up at the loft to see if his children are awake but he cannot see their tiny faces hiding in the shadows.

"It doesn't matter," she replies to his question.

"It matters."

"It's no one you know."

He turns away again. She stares at his back.

She's walking away from ten years, she knows. But what other choice is there? She just couldn't go on with the hiding, the lying. How this must be tearing him up! It's almost impossible to watch. It's such a painful thing to see yourself hurting someone you love. But she is content with the knowledge that her life can never again get as horrible as it is in this moment right now.

He walks to the counter and rests his arms on it's top. At first he wants to find out who it is his wife has been seeing and beat him. He can see himself punching and hitting this man until blood spurts and he's lying in a heap on the ground and some level of revenge has been taken. That would truly be satisfying. But this man, whoever he is, is only a man. He doesn't mean any harm. He doesn't want to see a marriage break up. But sometimes things just can't be helped.

"Could we just forget we had this conversation?" asks the father.

"What do you mean?" she replies.

"We could just go on like before."

"And I'd keep seeing him?"

"If that's what you feel you have to do."

"I can't believe I'm hearing this," she says.

He turns slowly and looks at her questioningly.

She shakes her head quickly. "No. How could you ask me to do that to you? I wouldn't be able to that to myself. I couldn't do that to--" She stops herself.

There is a long moment of silence.

"It has to be like this," she says finally.

"Yeah, I know."

She stands up and walks to where he is leaning against the counter top. She puts a hand on his shoulder. "You going to be okay?"

He steps away from her. "I think I need to get some fresh air." He turns and begins heading toward the door.

"Are you going to be okay?"

He stops, pauses a moment before answering, "Yeah. Yeah, I'll be okay. Don't worry about it."

"Where you going?"

"Out."

"Are you coming back?"

"Of course I'm coming back." But his tone doesn't convince her of that.

"I'll check on the children while you're gone." She goes back and sits down again at the kitchen table. She stares blankly towards the window above the sink.

He stops at the door, waits a long moment. "Hey."

She looks over at him. They regard each other from across the room as if for the first time.

"I love you," he says. "You know that? I always have. Whatever happens, I always will." He turns the knob on the door and steps out into the cool night air.

Above now on the loft, the little girl watches her mother, sitting at the table in the kitchen who has now begun to weep lightly. She hears her brother beside her, standing up. She looks up at him.

He shrugs to her and says in a flatly indifferent voice, "It looks like it's just you and me from now on, Sis." And content with the knowledge that there will be no more yelling this night, he heads back to his bedroom for some much needed sleep.

The sister now replies in much the same tone, "Looks like."