

**Being of Sound Mind**

A Drama in Two Acts

by

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## BEING OF SOUND MIND

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# BEING OF SOUND MIND

## Characters

Elizabeth Ross	Author of children's books (Mid 30's)
Allen Ross	Her Brother (Late 30's, Mid 40's)
Diane Ross	His Wife (Late 30's, Mid 40's)
"Rosey" Neville	Elizabeth's agent (Late 50', Early 60's)
Georgina Lamott	Elizabeth's executive assistant (Early 40's)

## ACT 1

## BEING OF SOUND MIND

*(Elizabeth comes out on stage alone in a dim spotlight and addresses the audience.)*

Hello, my name is Elizabeth Ross, but you can call me Lizzy, all my friends do, and this is my story, my journey. I do not take the telling of it lightly. It was not what I had hoped for, but it is what I did. I cannot excuse it, but know that I tormented over it, cried over it, hated myself and my fate because of it, but in the end, I planned it, I engineered it. I set in motion actions with no way of stopping them, careening myself and those I loved to a place I once thought unimaginable. Or maybe, was I just too self-absorbed to cry out “Help me! Stop me, please!” and have it all end differently? Will where we end tonight be a place of fairness and solace for those whom I ensnare in my journey? I don’t know. Am I being fair? Am I being right? I will have to leave that to you ... please, do not judge me too harshly for my frail humanity.

*(Spotlight fades out and the play begins)*

*A secluded summerhouse in New Hampshire, with an abundance of memorabilia and collectables. It has a warm and comfortable feeling, with many books, photos and old trophies. The furniture is a collection of pieces selected for their comfort and charm, rather than any particular style. The set is empty, with a couple of small lamps burning, and sheet of paper conspicuously propped up on the typewriter. There is a knock at the door, but no answer. Another knock, and again, no answer. Finally, a third knock and a voice from outside the door. It’s Allen and his wife Diane. They are solid, basic people straight off the rack at Sears. Despite their bickering, they love each other and are trying to cope with their situation.*

**ALLEN**

*(Knocking.)* Liz? Liz, its Allen. *(He knocks again.)* You in there?

**DIANE**

Allen, try the door, please.

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**ALLEN**

Give her a minute, she may be in the bathroom or something. (*Knocks again, and again, no response.*)

**DIANE**

(*Opening the door and stepping in.*) Well, if she's in the bathroom, it won't matter, because she won't hear us. I didn't come all the way from Schenectady to stand on the front porch with my luggage while your sister is in the toilet. (*She takes a couple of steps farther in.*) Liz? Liz? Anybody home? (*No answer, so she drops her bags in a heap.*) There, you satisfied, no one's here. (*She starts to look about, while Allen hesitates in the doorway.*) Well get in or get out, but don't just stand there. God, you're worse than the kids. Would you look at this place? This is where she's holed up all summer?

**ALLEN**

It doesn't seem so bad. It's got a kind of rustic charm.

**DIANE**

You've got to be kidding. Besides, as I recall, your sister's idea of roughing it is a Holiday Inn with no AC. So, why would she bury herself out here, fifty miles from civilization? (*She sniffs the air.*) M-m-m, something smells good though. (*Heads for the kitchen door.*)

**ALLEN**

(*Stepping in and closing the door.*) Yea, if I didn't know any better, I'd say Lizzy was brewing up a batch of that famous stew of hers. Hey, where are you going? (*She waves him off.*) We should just wait here. Who knows what she might be ...

**DIANE**

God sakes, Allen, what do you expect, we're going to catch her in the sack with the gardener?

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**ALLEN**

No, because they don't have gardeners in New Hampshire, only farmers.  
(*As she heads for the kitchen.*) Diane?

**DIANE**

What? It's only the kitchen for Christ's sake. I'm not going to touch anything, O.K.? Don't be such a pill. (*She exits to the kitchen.*)

**ALLEN**

(*He starts to poke around, mocking her tone.*) Don't be such a pill ... right. (*He finds the note on the typewriter.*) Diane. Diane! (*With a sing-song tone*) She's not here.

**DIANE**

(*Appears at the door, with a soda in hand.*) What?

**ALLEN**

(*Waving the note.*) It says she's not ... (*Notices the soda and makes a face.*) here.

**DIANE**

Alright, so I touched, so what? I'm dying from the road. (*She drops into a chair.*) So, does it say where she is?

**ALLEN**

No, not really. (*She gives him a look.*) It says she went out for a walk at five-thirty.

**DIANE**

Five thirty? It's almost eight now. What the hell is she doing out in the woods for three hours? This is Elizabeth we're talking about. The one who goes nowhere, spends her life writing those kids books, and squirreling away the money so she can still go nowhere. So?

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**ALLEN**

Yea, well she's very successful at what she does. You know in the last four years she has out-sold....

**DIANE**

Please, don't tell me again, I know, out-sold every other author in the field, and bla-bla-bla. Typical. Great. She finally invites us up here, leaves a note, and disappears. Just great, I come all the way out from...

**ALLEN**

Diane? Can we call a truce? It's been a long drive, and we're both tired, so can we just ...I mean look, Rosey and Georgina should be here any minute, so if they get here, and she's not back, we can all decide what to do then, alright?

**DIANE**

*(Mutters after a pause.)* All this way, and she leaves a note. Probably walked half-way to Rhode Island by now. My mother comes over early to watch Todd and Allen Jr., and she leaves a note.

**ALLEN**

*(Snaps)* Give it a rest, huh?!

**DIANE**

*(After an awkward silence, DIANE breaks the ice.)* God, we're doing it again, Allen. I'm sorry. *(She goes to him.)* What's wrong with us?  
*(Beat.)* You love me?

**ALLEN**

Yes, I love you. *(Trying to be funny.)* God knows why, but I do.

**DIANE**

No, be serious!

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**ALLEN**

*(Taken back.)* Sorry. Yes, I love you. You know I do.

**DIANE**

Sometimes it all just gets to me. *(Indicating the note.)* Even the littlest things. Having to come up here to track her down... well it's just...

**ALLEN**

I know.

**DIANE**

Sometimes I just feel so helpless. Like we've got no control anymore.

**ALLEN**

I know. I feel it too. It's just... right now, it's hard to know what to do without someone getting hurt. Not a lot of good options for us to choose from. And now this. *(Indicates the note.)*

**DIANE**

I know, and I'm sorry. But this trip may also be our only opportunity to get your sister on board with our plans. And I know that's not something either one of us is looking forward to, but her behavior has forced us into this.

**ALLEN**

No, she hasn't made this any easier, that's for sure.

**DIANE**

But there are times when you can't avoid the inevitable. When the situation pushes you into a corner and there's no way out, but to make a decision and act. *(Beat)* You've got to tell her.



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### ALLEN

Tell Liz it's time to put mom in a home? How would I even start that conversation? We're lucky she finally invited us up here, and it took almost three months to get that much from her. We've written to her, so she knows what's up, and when things got really bad, what does she do? She disappears, leaving us to fight with mom about where she goes next. So how do I start?

### DIANE

First we've got to get her alone, which won't be easy with everyone here, but once we do we just calmly tell her how bad it's gotten and that she needs to speak up and back us on this. She's the one person your mother will listen to.

### ALLEN

You're right on that. Lizzy's got a knack for selling folks on anything she wants, that's for sure.

### DIANE

Right, so, we make our case. She can't argue the facts. Your mother lives in three rooms of an eight-room house, and she can't even manage that. She just spent thirty-three hundred dollars to fix a car she can't drive anymore, because they took away her license after that last accident. *(Beat)* And she needs to think of us too. We've struggled with this on our own for months ...and where's that left us? Exhausted, bickering, and worrying with no end in sight. It's clear what needs to be done.

### ALLEN

You're right. Lizzy's been spared making these hard choices for too long. She's not lived with the day to-day traumas and setbacks. And it has to end. As for mom, who knows why she does what she does anymore? Maybe we'd be just the same, hanging on to whatever we could if we ever felt our lives, our world, slipping away from us, one second, one memory, at a time, and were helpless to stop it.

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### DIANE

Maybe, but right now, we need Liz on our side to make this happen. And once she does, we'll all live better lives for it. You'll see.

### ALLEN

Let's hope so 'cause that's how Liz operates, alright. With her, it's always all or nothing. I ought to know. As a kid, I could always count on her to get me to do something I had no intention of doing. Now it's on me to get her to understand what the words "quality of life" really mean.