



# Famous Blue Raincoat (by Leonard Cohen)

Level: High. Language: Informal letter, email, personality, relationships

The following song is a letter which Leonard has written to his friend, Michael. It concerns Jane, Leonard's ex-wife.

**Task 1:** Listen to the letter in the form of a song and fill in the gaps, using the clues in brackets to help you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohk3DP5fMCg>



(Dear Michael),

It's \_\_\_\_\_, the end of December (what time?)  
 I'm writing you now just \_\_\_\_\_ (why is he writing?)  
 New York is cold, but I like where I'm living  
 There's music on Clinton Street all through the evening.

I hear that you're building your little house \_\_\_\_\_ (where is he building it?)  
 You're living for nothing now, I hope you're keeping some kind of record.

Yes, and Jane came by with a lock of your hair  
 She said \_\_\_\_\_ (what did she say about the hair?)  
 That night that you planned to go clear  
 Did you ever go clear?

Ah, the last time we saw you you looked so much older  
 Your famous blue raincoat was \_\_\_\_\_ (what was the condition of the coat?)  
 You'd been to the station to meet every train  
 And you came home without "Lili Marlene"

And you treated my woman to a flake of your life  
 And when she came back she \_\_\_\_\_ (how had Jane changed?)

Well I see you there with the rose in your teeth  
 One more thin gypsy thief  
 Well I see Jane's awake --  
 She \_\_\_\_\_ (what did Jane tell Leonard to do?)

And what can I tell you my brother, my killer  
 What can I possibly say?  
 I guess that I miss you, I \_\_\_\_\_ (what does Leonard admit?)  
 I'm glad you stood in my way.

If you ever come by here, for Jane or for me  
 Your enemy is sleeping, and his woman is free.

Yes, and thanks, for the trouble you \_\_\_\_\_ (what did Michael do for Jane?)  
 I thought it was there for good so I never tried.

And Jane came by with a lock of your hair  
 She said that you \_\_\_\_\_ (see above)  
 That night that you planned to go clear

Sincerely, L. Cohen



**Mini-dictionary**

to keep a record = to keep a written list of details

to come by = to visit somebody in an informal way

a lock of hair = a piece of hair which has been cut from your head

to go clear: the meaning of this expression is ambiguous. Some interpretations of this expressions are to tell the truth, to disappear, to escape. In interviews, Leonard Cohen himself admits that the expression is ambiguous.

to meet the train = to go to the train station to meet a person who is arriving by train

Lili Marlene = the name of a famous song from World War One. Lili Marlene was the love of a German soldier.

a flake = a little piece

to stand in somebody's way = to obstruct somebody

for good = for ever, permanently

**Task 2:** Use the mini-dictionary above to help you to interpret the song. Then discuss the questions below with your classmates or your teacher:

- a. What is the basic story which Leonard describes in the song?
- b. How would you imagine the three characters to be? Use adjectives of personality.

Leonard seems ...

Jane seems ...

Michael seems ...

- c. How do you think Leonard feels now?

**Task 3: Writing:**

Imagine that you are Michael. Write your response to Leonard and explain your side of the story. Remember, the style should be an informal letter or an email (approx 150 words).

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