

CORRESPONDENTS

By Christian Flynn

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“It is my thesis that certain specific origins of the inhuman, of the crisis of our own time that compel a redefinition of culture, are to be found in that long peace of the nineteenth century and at the heart of the complex fabric of civilization. ”

“Accept, even momentarily, the conventions of literate linguistic exchange, and you are caught in the net of the old values, of the grammars that can condescend or irritate.”

- George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle*

PLAYERS

CHRISTIAN

DASHA

SET

A table. A chair.

PROPS

A typewriter. Paper.

COSTUMES

Christian should wear whatever the actor playing him is wearing that day. Dasha should wear the vaguest suggestion of 19th century attire, possibly thrown on over whatever the actor is wearing that day.

NOTES

Christian shouldn't be an entirely reliable transcriber. In the typing sections, he might bait the audience into saying something they don't mean, or purposefully twist their words to make them more perverse, pessimistic, indefensible, etc.

Christian enters to a song and sets up a typewriter on a table.

CHRISTIAN

Alright. I want you to imagine a woman. Alone. Isolated. Not in a cabin. In an attic this time. Not left there by a friend. She locked herself in. The house is empty. She lives at the end of the 19th century. The end of a culture. She lives in England. Before we're swept by the wars, the bombs, the camps, the disillusionment, the fire, the trauma — before we're swept by the new flesh: nick mullen, nick land, Pynchon, John Coltrane, Johnny Rotten. She has a choice to make. She might marry somebody. She might marry someone else. She might kill herself. Three options. Fuck, marry, kill: fuck the guy who makes her want to kill herself marry the guy she wants to fuck; kill herself so as not to have to fuck or marry either. You're going to help her make that decision. I don't care if you don't want to. You're going to help her make that decision. Are you ready? Cool.
DASHA?!

DASHA enters and hits a melodramatic pose.

Christian sits with the audience and watches.

CHRISTIAN

Begin.

DASHA

I have just met the most extraordinary person. No doubt you've all been in love before. No doubt—

CHRISTIAN

Hold.

Less.

Dasha breaks the pose.

DASHA

Betrothed, as fate would have it. I find myself the wife-to-be of a terribly bourgeois man. A marriage date approaching like the reaper. A marriage to a stunningly boring gentleman. The reaper fast approaching. The reaper of the lifelong Sunday. An everlasting church service. A boredom like a broken neck.

He's a man of some wealth and stature. Wealth like a split skull. Stature like a disease. He's a rich, kind man and I love him and if he walks through *that* door I'll throw myself out of *that* window.

I've had my share of suitors. They come by train, by foot, by carriage, each of them bringing their own strange adventures. I've lived. I am not some naive child falling in love for the first time. I know how easily feelings corrupt language — how easily language corrupts thought...

...and yet something is different this time. Something is wrong. There's a black spinning void at the center of this love affair. It's as though I'm not in love but discovering love, again, for the first time again. I have studied people. I have read the great books. I know how naive I sound. So why does this man strike me as no person I've loved before? Why does he strike me as a shout out of hell? — a cry from the future? — a portal to a lost-future, to a world in which a person mig—

CHRISTIAN

Dasha...

DASHA

The other week I attended a ball hosted by a distant cousin — one of those relations we must say we love but couldn't care less for. I went not out of obligation or love but to spite my fiance. He's the nicest man in the world and that does me violence.

I retired to the library which helped me recover my gaiety in life almost instantly. I browsed the shelves, lingering, I always linger, lingering at bookshelves pleases me. I needed something phantasmagoric to compete with my excited nerves so I settled on a leatherbound volume of some Greeks. I opened it to The Bacchae and who walked in but my aforementioned extraordinary being. Had you seen this gentleman walk into the library you would find it quite understandable that I dropped that colossal volume to the floor. I wanted to break something. He didn't appear to be a man at all but a ghost: some vision of a past lover... I could not pin down which. How did I appear to him? Was I solid flesh? Or was I too shifting... we began talking and —

CHRISTIAN

Hold.

BEGIN: FIRST LETTER TYPING

(Christian explains that Dasha is about to receive a letter, and that the person who's writing it is the very *dashing*, magnetic, handsome figure described above. To help him out, he asks the audience who the audience thinks the most dashing person in the audience is. He has the audience applaud for the most dashing person in the audience.)

Here's an example of what that might look like).

CHRISTIAN

Okay so Dasha is about to receive a letter. It's from the suitor she just described — you heard about him, he's this charming, refreshing, *dashing* figure. So I'm going to need something from you. What I'm going to need... I'm basically... I'm looking for... there's gotta be one... one of you... someone in the audience... I need the most *dashing* person in the audience to help me write this letter.

You? Alright brilliant, folks give it up for the most dashing person in the audience.

Christian sits behind the typewriter.

(Christian asks the most dashing person in the audience for some sort of “sign-on” that a dashing person from the victorian era might use. He records. He then asks what attracted this person about Dasha sitting in the library and reading. He then asks this person to get into character as this victorian hot-man and update Dasha on what he's been up to lately. Then he asks this person for an innuendo. Then he surprises them by asking them to implore Dasha to run away with them. Then he asks for a sign off that somehow relates to the character.

The specifics of the letter should change, but the structure that Christian should use on the audience should always be:

- 1. A greeting.**
- 2. What caught your eye about Dasha,**
- 3. Update on what you've been doing.**
- 4. An innuendo.**
- 5. Imploring of her to run away with you.**
- 6. A sign off.)**

Here's a sample letter...

The first thing I noticed about you was that you read. I love it when a woman reads. Cultivating a fine mind is the first step on the way to cultivate a fine body. Yes indeed I also think that you have a fine body. Lately in my life I have been playing lots of polo and looking at horses. There's nothing better than the look of a horse — but perhaps the look of you! You know doubt smell much better. Ahahaha. There's an expression where I come from: save a horse ride a cowboy. I might not be a cowboy, but I'm close enough.

Run away with me! Come away with me my dear!

*Mysteriously yours,
The Wind.*

CHRISTIAN

Alright we're all set! Folks give it up again for the most dashing person in the audience.

END: FIRST LETTER TYPING

CHRISTIAN

Dasha... Resume.

DASHA

Yes, we talked for hours upon hours in that library, even closing the door so we would not be heard by any passers-by... or seen... or otherwise interrupted. He put a hand...

Christian drops the letter in front of Dasha.

She looks up in the air.

DASHA

Either I have forged a new kind of madness or am being played with by some sick deity. Do I read the letter? — or tear it to pieces? Tearing this letter is swearing my allegiance to this world. Do I read? Do I roll the dice?

Yes. For what is my other option? Cushioned afternoons? Let the words write me.

Dasha reads the letter.

BEGIN: FIRST LETTER READING

Dasha reads the letter and spontaneously reacts to it. The specifics of the reaction should change based on the letter, but the structure should always be:

- 1. Be charmed by the header.**
- 2. Be excited by the compliments**
- 3. Be turned on by the updates on his life.**
- 4. Be confused by the innuendo and make the most dashing member of the audience to explain the innuendo.**
- 5. Be surprised by the offer to run away.**
- 6. Be let down by the sign off.**

END: FIRST LETTER READING

She puts the letter down.

DASHA

Well... he certainly leaves much to be desired in the realm of comprehension. But what magnetism arises out of incomprehension!

She reads a line from the letter.

DASHA

What *visceral magnetism!* But can one live with someone they don't comprehend? Isn't it best to keep incomprehensibility on the side — like a glass of wine with dinner? But what sort of coward chooses a life they despise? But can someone love someone they don't understand? But —

CHRISTIAN

Dasha...

DASHA

When I came home by carriage a few hours later I found my philistine fiance had called on my parent's house to surprise me. He was sitting there in the drawing room, talking to my crass dullard of a father and parsimonious hag of a mother — all three looking like a perfect painting of the bourgeois. They were sitting and — what else — drinking tea. (Oh

these interminable cups of tea! Oh the terrible evenings spent draining cup after cup! If I could I'd pour boiling tea on the hand of everyone who ever offered me a cup.)

CHRISTIAN

American protestant.

She drops the English accent and picks up general American English. Still upper class, but American.

DASHA

When I walked into the room and interrupted their bored orgy they all looked to me and noticed I had a smile on my face — a genuine, stupid, uncontrollable smile — not the mask I normally paste on. I was worried my genuine passion would betray my wandering. Or maybe I wasn't worried. Maybe that prospect excited me. Maybe I wanted to see blood on the floor — for someone to lose their temper — anything — anything but this prison of correctness. But no. What my fiance has in wealth and status he makes up for in a lack of perception. He noticed nothing. The benevolent tyrant. The academic.

CHRISTIAN

Backstory.

DASHA

Once upon a dying era, there was a young woman named Dasha. She pursued the affections of many despite the wishes of her parents. But men began to bore her. So she pursued the art of friendship, taking up no small share of close women acquaintances. She caught the affections of the sweetest girl. A flower of autumn. Dark. Soft. A painter. A student. Waifish but gorgeous. The two of them gazed beyond a curtain into eternity.

CHRISTIAN

Better metaphor.

DASHA

The two dulled the knives of each other's existence.

CHRISTIAN

Cut the metaphor.

DASHA

The girl offered everything — her mind — her companionship. Then she offered her strength, her body... caught a terrible fever and died slowly.... Throughout the whole

affair, Dasha's parents were pushing her to marry a gentleman of means, status, and terrible taste. Finally, after her best friend died... she agreed.

CHRISTIAN

Hold.

BEGIN: SECOND LETTER TYPING

(Christian explains that Dasha is about to receive another letter, and that the person who's writing it is the much more financial stable and aristocratic man described above. To help him out, he asks the audience who has a particularly stable white collar job. He has the audience applaud for the most boring person in the audience.)

Here's an example of what that might look like).

CHRISTIAN

Cool so Dasha is about to get her second letter. This one is from her fiance, who, as we've established, is a little bit different from the other lover — he's a much more stable, refined, man. So what I'm going to need is someone with... basically someone that has a really standard stable job.

He points to the most dashing person in the audience, who, we've established, is also the most boring person in the audience.

CHRISTIAN

Folks give it up for the most boring person in the audience.

He sits behind the typewriter.

(Christian, with the audience member, writes the second letter.

He starts by coming up with a name for this very rich, boring man with the audience member. A good way to do this is to ask the audience for a stereotypical rich person's first name... or two... then to break the last name into two parts: ask for a food or a fruit for the first half of the name, and a one-syllable generic last name for the second half of the name. This will give you something suitably ridiculous but believable like "Rutherford Cornelius Berrysmith". He then asks the audience member to get into character and describe what this rich boring man admires about Dasha and their domestic

life. He should update her on the sort of aristocratic old-money things he has been up to lately. Then he should implore her to come back to him in his eloquent way. Then he should sign off.

The specifics of the letter should change, but the structure should always be:

1. From the offices of (*the victorian name Christian and the audience come up with*).
2. What he likes about domestic life/Dasha.
3. What he's been up to lately (high-status).
4. Imploring her to come back.
5. Sign off.

Here's a sample letter...

Fom the offices of Rutherford Cornelius Berrysmith.

What i like the most about our domestic life together is just how stable and boring it all is. oh it is all so stable and it is all so boring. I like boredom because it means i can control things. Lately i hae been doing many things; mostly things that are very rich and very boring. you would not be very uninterested in them. Please come back to be and we can live so bpringly together.

Undoubtedly yours ,

Rutherford Cornelius Berrysmyth

CHRISTIAN

Alright we're all set! Folks give it up again for the most boring person in the audience.

END: SECOND LETTER TYPING

He picks up the letter.

CHRISTIAN

Resume.

DASHA

When you're confronted with such a devastating loss...

Christian tosses the second letter to Dasha.

She startles a bit.

DASHA

Oh... a letter.

Dasha reads the second letter.

BEGIN: SECOND LETTER READING

(Dasha reads the second letter

Overall she should be bored of the letter, and at one point look at the audience member who suggested this with a sideways disparaging glance.)

END: SECOND LETTER READING

DASHA

There is not an ounce of irony in the man. And the lord knows I can understand him. It's plain to see that he's the logical choice, the ethical choice... but could there be anything more boring?

She reads a line from the letter

DASHA

But I need it. And I need him. Just as much as I need the excitement. So it's a simple question of either/or. The one impels me forward and the other impels me to stay in my place. Having read Kierkegaard—

CHRISTIAN

Dasha...

DASHA

When my best friend was alive and well she took a trip to France to study the great paintings.

CHRISTIAN

Simile.

DASHA

A painter must study painting as a lost woman must study lost things.

CHRISTIAN

Good.

DASHA

Until then our friendship had been to the end that most friendships are — to make life beautiful.

CHRISTIAN

More pessimistic.

DASHA

To waste idle hours in ways marginally less dreadful than if we'd spent them in the company of people we hate.

CHRISTIAN

Good.

DASHA

But when she went to France we were forced to close our mouths and open our pens; we built masks out of language; became correspondents. The written word provided us more intimacy than any impotent expression of the body.

CHRISTIAN

More Christian.

DASHA

The relationship was dangerous because it was rarely one of body — and he was best in essence, not in body. In body, he is clumsy, clownish, often unshaven, often too long without a haircut, sometimes offensive, cynical, offputting. But the limit to the bodily content let him spin a verbal matrix — allowed him to shroud himself in a wave of language to cover his body. This buoyed him so efficiently that it carried over to the meetings in person — as long as they stayed brief and far between.

CHRISTIAN

Back to Dasha.

DASHA

It happened naturally — a witticism here, a cynical remark there, a compliment, a jab, a jest, an argument, an exaltation. We found the kindest solace in the most wretched things.

CHRISTIAN

More perverted.

DASHA

I wanted to put my fingers in her.

CHRISTIAN

Less perverted.

DASHA

I wanted to tell her *save a horse ride a cowboy**.

CHRISTIAN

The bohemian woman.

DASHA

She wrote to me one day describing in exquisite detail the qualities of a bohemian woman she saw at a cafe.

CHRISTIAN

More Christian.

DASHA

The body forever deteriorating, forever aching more and more, forever forcing him inside. Forced to write more and more. Forced to construct the world from words. To put a person on a stage. To put words on a body.

CHRISTIAN

Back to Dasha.

DASHA

Anya came home and I was happy to have her again with me... that was her name — dear, I hadn't uttered it yet. Strange... She died soon after...indeed there are some days when I think she was the only one I...

CHRISTIAN

Hold.

CHRISTIAN

Alright folks — thank you Dasha – Dasha is about to reach the end of her story and receive her third letter. She’s found the one person that she could have lived happily with, but can’t run off with this person because this person is dead. The trick of the ending is that though she can’t live with this person, she can still communicate with her. She can tell her dead best friend’s story, and as a reward for that, this dead best friend... a lost potential lover... can write a letter to her from beyond the grave.

DASHA

More direct.

CHRISTIAN

So what I need from you is something that a ghost might say. Not necessarily a literal ghost but... I heard a definition of a ghost once as something that can *act* without being materially present —

DASHA

Christian...

CHRISTIAN

I’m going to need something that you wish someone from your past could say.

DASHA

Less vague.

CHRISTIAN

Something you wish an old lover would say.

DASHA

More personal.

CHRISTIAN

A half-friend-half-lover. The type that always ends up not speaking to you.

DASHA

Good.

CHRISTIAN

Because keeping those relationships alive means keeping alive a certain amount of tension, life, sex, all within the safety of friendship; it means keeping open several worlds of possibility. And we're young, aren't we Dasha? Why shouldn't we have access to many worlds?

DASHA

More personal.

CHRISTIAN

Because how much longer do you have access to many worlds of possibility? You're 24 but you're losing energy. You have more life ahead of you than behind you but the past is stronger. Faster. It's gaining on you. The future doesn't stand a chance. You become a better writer but a worse friend. You become smarter but less sexy. You have the hunger but lose the magic. And now you understand why people go to church. And now you understand why people join the communist party. Possibilities die. The future closes. You're stuck in bluebeards castle opening doors...

DASHA

Confess something.

CHRISTIAN

I love you.

DASHA

That could mean so many things.

CHRISTIAN

Sorry.

DASHA

Finish the play.

BEGIN: THIRD LETTER TYPING

(Christian writes a third letter, sort of to Dasha, sort of to himself. It references the previous letters and interactions with the audience. Maybe it

even references some of the audience interactions from Candyland. It should begin and end on a note of pessimism directed at himself. He signs it with just a “sincerely”...)

END: THIRD LETTER TYPING

He takes the letter and hands it to Dasha. She reads it. Right after she says “sincerely...”

CHRISTIAN

Hold...

Blackout.

END OF PLAY