



# THE CORRESPONDENT

BY KEN URBAN



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THE CORRESPONDENT was presented at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater (David Van Asselt, Artistic Director; Brian Long, Managing Director) in New York City, opening on February 13, 2014. It was directed by Stephen Brackett; the set design was by Andrew Boyce; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Eric Southern; the sound design was by Daniel Kluger; the production manager was Eugenia Furneaux; and the production stage manager was John Crotty. The cast was as follows:

PHILIP GRAVES ..... Thomas Jay Ryan  
MIRABEL ..... Heather Alicia Simms  
YOUNG MAN ..... Jordan Geiger

## THANKS

I would like to thank directors Stephen Brackett, Trip Cullman and Melia Bensussen; Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, The William Inge Theatre Festival (Peter Ellenstein, Artistic Director), Huntington Theatre Company (Peter DuBois, Artistic Director), and The Lark Play Development Center (John Eisner, Artistic Director); and all the actors who worked on the play during its development. Thanks to Brian Rogers for telling me about the “afterlife telegram” services that inspired the play.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

The Young Man possesses the kind of beauty that Philip — though straight — could find attractive. He is androgynous, not simply boyish.

The Young Man does not alter his voice to sound like Charlotte. He possesses some of her mannerisms and yet does not act like her; he speaks the way she would (i.e. formally) and yet sounds like himself.

Punctuation, capitalization, and the general layout give a sense of a line's delivery: its rhythm, cadence, and meaning. Stage directions written underneath a character's name function as a line of dialogue.

A slash ( / ) indicates that the following lines begin to overlap at that point.

The score for the song in Scene 7 can be found at the end of the script.

## A NOTE ON STAGE DIRECTIONS

A great deal of the play's meaning comes from small actions. That accounts for the lengthy stage directions in the script. A few were amended for the play's first production at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater. Some will need to be modified for future productions to suit a different space. What is crucial is the meaning of those actions.

I realize the stage directions in Scene 11 could be shocking. I have included them not to scare potential directors, actors, or producers away. The details are there to remind readers that it is not simply a sex act on stage. It is an emotionally fraught moment in which Philip negotiates and maps his wife's body onto the young man's. And to naysayers who think such a scene is unstageable, the bravery of the original cast and director in making such a moment moving and tender proves otherwise.

## **CHARACTERS**

PHILIP GRAVES, a husband, in his mid-50s, white.

MIRABEL, late 30s, she might look younger but she's not, Roxbury-tough, black.

YOUNG MAN, in his early 20s, boyish to the point of looking androgynous, white.

## **PLACE**

The sitting room of a three-story Federal-style row house in Boston's affluent Beacon Hill neighborhood. This is the third unit in the building, top floor (i.e. the most expensive). The room (described in more detail in the opening stage directions) should feel like a tomb. For Philip, the room is haunted by memories. The set design should aim for complete naturalism, while still conveying those metaphorical qualities.

## **TIME**

Fall.

October – November.

Present day.

The action of the play takes place over the course of four weeks.

## Scene List

- 1 — Sunday evening.
- 2 — The next evening. Monday.
- 3 — Sunday evening. A week later from Scene 1.
- 4 — Sunday evening. A week later from Scene 3.
- 5 — The next morning. Monday.
- 6 — A week later. Monday afternoon. Three weeks from Scene 1.
- 7 — Next morning. Tuesday.
- 8 — That Tuesday afternoon.
- 9 — The next evening. Wednesday.
- 10 — That Wednesday. Middle of the night.
- 11 — Almost dawn. Thursday.
- 12 — An hour later. Thursday.
- 13 — A few hours later. Thursday morning.

(This timeline is for the actors and directors. It should not be printed in programs or projected for the audience.)

# THE CORRESPONDENT

## Scene 1

*Sunday evening. An expensive sitting room: a couch, reading chairs, a coffee table. Built-in bookcases and cabinets line the walls. In addition to the books and photographs, there is a cordless landline phone on a shelf. There are windows with wooden plantation-style shutters on the outer walls. On the right is an alcove with a small dining table. By the table, an entryway leads to the kitchen and master bedroom. On the room's left side, there is an entryway leading to a hallway. Down this hallway are three additional doors: the first opens to the stairs leading to the building's street-level entryway; the others, a closet and a guest bedroom.*

*While the objects in the room display their affluence, there is a general level of untidiness. On the dining table, a place setting — the remains of a meal eaten weeks ago — with a woman's cardigan sweater on the chair. Elsewhere in the room: dying flower arrangements with cards still attached, scattered stacks of mail and newspapers, open bottles of wine. The room is in a state of neglect.*

*When the play begins, the room is empty and dark for a few moments.*

*Two sets of footsteps can be heard on the stairs.*

*The sound of a key in a lock, then a door opening and closing.*

*From the hallway, the audience can hear the following exchange:*



PHILIP. Let me take your things.

MIRABEL. Nah, I'm OK. *(Philip enters into the sitting room through the left entryway. Mirabel enters behind him. They have both come in from the outside. Philip wears an overcoat, dressed casually but smartly. Mirabel wears an old down jacket with a backpack. Philip turns on the lights. There is a palpable nervous tension between them.)*

PHILIP. Would you like something? I'm having a glass of wine. There's water or might be some / soda or some, I don't —

MIRABEL. Nah, nah, I'm good. Thanks. *(Philip pours himself a glass of wine and drinks quickly. His drinking continues throughout the scene.)*

PHILIP. I know you wanted to meet in public. But I couldn't talk there. The people. Sunday evening, I assumed the place would be empty. I haven't left here since the day of her —

MIRABEL. 'Course. Not a problem.

PHILIP. Please. Sit down.

MIRABEL. Nice place, Mister Graves.

PHILIP. Philip's fine. I apologize. It's a mess. *(Mirabel remains standing.)* I meant to ask before. You didn't park on the street cause they'll ticket you.

MIRABEL. Nah. The 28.

PHILIP. Sorry, I don't follow.

MIRABEL. The bus.

PHILIP. Lived in Boston most of my life. Never taken the bus.

MIRABEL. Lucky you.

PHILIP. Lucky is the last thing I feel right now.

MIRABEL. Guess that's a thing we share. *(Pause.)*

PHILIP. Mirabel, you don't, you don't look sick.

MIRABEL. There's good days.

PHILIP. If I saw you on the street, I would think ...

MIRABEL. Think what?

PHILIP. That you're a healthy young woman.

MIRABEL. Is that what you'd think?

PHILIP. Someone with decades of life ahead. That's what I'd think. *(Mirabel senses Philip's sincerity.)*

MIRABEL. I'm not young. But thanks.

PHILIP. You can't be dying.

MIRABEL. Just the way it is.

PHILIP. The email didn't say what it was. There must be another option or treatment you haven't explored.

MIRABEL. I appreciate, but. Tonight's about you. Not me.

PHILIP. I just want to get to know you. When I contacted the service I expected someone —  
I don't know what I expected to be honest. (*Mirabel finds her footing. She is more confident than when she enters.*)

MIRABEL. Why don't you take a seat? We can begin. (*Philip takes a seat.*)

PHILIP. Been two weeks, I guess, since the funeral. It was a small event. Her family. I didn't want ...  
The days leading up, gave me something to do, things had to get done, arrangements and, uh. But then. Nothing but my thoughts. Thought this might ... Part of me keeps thinking I don't know if I can / do this, tell you —

MIRABEL. This will help. Make you feel better knowing that by hiring me you'll be able to tell her what you didn't get to.

PHILIP. You believe in heaven?

MIRABEL. Yes.

PHILIP. Have to hope there's something better this.

MIRABEL. Don't you?

PHILIP. Yes. Guess I do. Guess I've always believed in ...  
But since it happened. I don't know.

MIRABEL. Everyone has moments of doubt.

PHILIP. How do you deal with it?

MIRABEL. I don't know. I just do.

PHILIP. Why do you still believe? (*Pause. Philip gestures for her to sit.*)  
Please. It would be nice to have someone to talk to. Someone who's not ...  
They pity me. People at work. Hear it in their voices. Can't stand it. (*Mirabel sits down.*)

MIRABEL. I was really angry. But then I felt this energy, some kind of power around me. This wasn't the end. There's something after. 'Cause God's got a plan.

PHILIP. Was it God's plan for Charlotte to be killed?

MIRABEL. He knows things we don't.

PHILIP. Feels like I'm being punished.

MIRABEL. Punished for what?

PHILIP. I ... (*Pause.*)

MIRABEL. What?

PHILIP. Since she died, I find myself questioning things I never thought I believed in the first place.  
I worry, being here, left with just these thoughts.

MIRABEL. Days like these, you gotta remember the good times too. Tell me how you met.

PHILIP. A party. She musta been about your age then. Someone introduced us, he said —

Doesn't matter what he said. I saw her and I knew. I just knew. Saw our whole life play out in front of me in that moment.

Just celebrated our anniversary. In August. Twenty-five years.

MIRABEL. Long time.

PHILIP. Do you see spirits, or do you / talk to — ?

MIRABEL. Nah. It's not like that.

PHILIP. How does it work? (*Mirabel is back on script.*)

MIRABEL. Y'know, how it is in a dream? You know who a person is even if they don't look like them. It's like that in heaven. You just know.

PHILIP. How will I know that she's gotten my message?

MIRABEL. You'll be notified.

PHILIP. I don't understand.

MIRABEL. An email. You'll get an email telling you the message has been delivered.

PHILIP. That, that means you've died?

MIRABEL. This sickness is a gift.

PHILIP. I don't want, I don't want you to die.

MIRABEL. I'm gonna walk right into heaven and find your wife, tell her, your husband Philip, he loves you, and he has a message for you.

PHILIP. I can't.

MIRABEL. If it makes it easier, imagine she's here. Talk to me like I'm her.

PHILIP. Not as simple as that.

MIRABEL. You wanna get a message to her, this is the way.

PHILIP. Never felt further from her.

MIRABEL. Is there something that reminds you of her? A picture? A book, or — ?

PHILIP. We had a fight. The night before she died. We fought.

MIRABEL. Couples fight.

PHILIP. We didn't.

You don't know how it is. You couldn't. You love someone for decades, things have a way. It's not like it is at the start. The lows aren't there, true. The highs, well, are less ...

But there's comfort in knowing. On the outside, it could look dull, I suppose. That couple sitting in the restaurant in silence. People might think ...

But they'd be wrong. Young people, you fill up / silence out of fear  
MIRABEL. I appreciate the compliment. But let's get real, I'm not  
some kid.

PHILIP. Then you know. How young people, how they fill up any  
silence out of fear, fear that some feeling might go unsaid. When  
you have time with a person. Time gives you security. Things don't  
need to be spoken.

MIRABEL. You had a fight. It happens.

PHILIP. Christ, don't think we ever fought like that. But she started  
on me about some stupid thing or other.

MIRABEL. Yeah, women are good at that. Pushing buttons.

PHILIP. The next day, I come home from work. The whole meal,  
the tensest of silences. We hadn't spoken since the fight ...

I sat there, she was here. I apologize, promise her I'd never —

I suggest the cinema. Let's go see a film, Charlotte. It was Friday  
evening, why not go out? It was chilly. Not cold. She says she wants  
to walk. And then as we ... *(Silence.)*

The car didn't slow down. I should've seen it coming. She stepped  
into the street and and she ... *(Silence.)*

If I hadn't suggested —

If we hadn't fought —

If I didn't / didn't —

MIRABEL. You couldn't know. *(Philip, on the verge of tears, pulls it  
together. He refuses to break down in front of her.)*

PHILIP. You'll give her my message?

MIRABEL. I swear.

PHILIP. I I I wrote it out. *(He takes a piece of paper from his pocket.)*

MIRABEL. It's time. *(Silence. Philip can't speak the words. But then  
he knows what will help.)*

PHILIP. Excuse me. *(Philip exits through the right entryway toward  
the bedroom. When he is gone, Mirabel looks around the room. She looks  
at the cardigan sweater. She finds a framed photograph. She picks it up.  
It is a photo of Charlotte. She turns and looks at the entryway where  
Philip exited. She quickly returns the photograph, not to its original  
place. She takes out her cell phone and begins to text. Philip returns. He  
has taken off his shirt, wears only an undershirt, carrying a bundled  
white shirt. Mirabel does not see him; her back is to him as she texts.)*

Mirabel. *(She shoves her cell in her pocket.)*

MIRABEL. Sorry didn't hear you come in. *(She turns to Philip.  
Philip puts on the bundled shirt. It is covered in dried blood.)*

# THE CORRESPONDENT

by Ken Urban

2M, 1W

A grieving husband hires a dying woman to deliver a message to his recently deceased wife in the afterlife. When he receives letters describing events that only his wife could know, he must determine if the correspondence is from a con artist or if his wife has returned from the grave.

*“WOW! It was dramatic and twisty and an exciting work that will leave you in awe! How dare the critics not recognize the stunning, well-crafted THE CORRESPONDENT?”* —**Joan Rivers**

*“A sharp new play that takes a stormy look at desire beyond the grave. Four stars!”* —**Time Out (New York)**

*“Do you believe in ghosts? What about the afterlife? Chances are, after a viewing of Ken Urban’s unsettling drama THE CORRESPONDENT, you’ll be left questioning many of your deeply held beliefs. You don’t want to miss this disquieting play, the specter of which will likely linger in your thoughts for days after.”* —**TheaterMania.com**

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