

ALISHA

ALISHA

Alisha girl, teenager

Terry man, 40 something

ACTION TAKES PLACE BETWEEN TWO VOICES: ONE ON THE ENGLISH
COAST AND ONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. DURING A SINGLE EVENING.

Email exchange.

ALISHA

Dear Mr and Mrs Kitcher, first of all I want to inquire about your good health and then, if you ask me, tell you that I am keeping well, for which I thank God, and hope it is the same with you. May God keep you always well, and grant you every happiness and joy. With great eagerness I was looking forward again this month to receiving a message from you but unfortunately I have not received one. So I am worried about you, for I am longing to hear about you, dear English Parents. You show such a great interest in me, and every month I receive your help. Over here it is very hot at this time of year, for we are in the middle of summer. The work out in the street is very tiring, as I hear the older people saying. As for me, when I have no work at home I go down to the sea for a swim, and enjoy the sea with my friends. For this time of the year the sea is lovely, So much for my news. Holidays continue, until it is time for the schools to re-open, when, with new strength and joy, we shall begin our lessons again. Today that I am writing to you I received again the ten pounds that you sent me, for the month of June, and I thank you very much. With all my heart.

(MORE)

ALISHA (CONT'D)

With this money I shall buy whatever I need, and we shall buy some flour for our bread. In closing, I send you greetings from my brother, and hope that my message finds you in good health and joy. I must hurry as a storm is arriving so we must take shelter. I shall conclude this email later but looking forward to receiving an email from you, to hear about you and how you are spending your spring. I greet you with such affection. Your daughter, Alisha.

TERRY

Dear Alisha, We're all sorry that you should worry about us because you haven't got any emails. But that's the way it works. You describe your summer very beautifully. Although the storm you mention sort of worries me. It's spring here so everything to look forward to. The snowdrops are in abundance and daffodils, as always, seem early. Did I tell you about my hyacinth? I'm looking at it right now on our kitchen table. And when it's ready I shall plant it in my garden. Our little town is becoming busy again with the long weekends. And there are plenty of bargains in the Saturday market. It's one of those old fishing villages that now has a railway and a huge marina which builds and repairs boats. And lots of pubs because it's England. At last, we're a bit warmer. It's lighter, too, and evenings are longer. Mrs Kitcher and little Liberty and Clive are all well. Liberty's just started at the local kindergarden but she goes about a lot dressed as a boy which Mrs Kitcher doesn't like. It makes her angry but there you are. But Liberty's excited about her new school. On Sundays she plays mostly in the muddy grass around the close with the children next door. And Clive?

(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

He's just started to walk and doesn't like his sister teasing him. Well, who does? Mrs Kitcher was asking after you, by the way. She says she'd write herself but she's not very good at it. I know she loves you very much. And was particularly happy to hear about you planning to begin school with "renewed joy". There's been much excitement over a visit made the other day by the President of the United States. The President is a very talkative and self-confident man and in meeting some of our own talkative and self-confident local people there has been some friction, much of it on local television which everybody could see. My main worry is someone might say something not very nice to him but I don't think that anymore. His being here has been quite strange, a funny feeling, we just feel it best not to upset him and everyone's going to be "nice" when he visits the marina, if that means there's any chance it will do any good. He's here to launch a very big boat of a friend of his. It's enormous, it casts a shadow over the water that'd you expect from a friend of the most powerful man on earth but because it got built locally we're all behind the project. I mean there's a hope that if we're nice to him he'll just leave us alone. I am troubled as you may be asking where is that nice Mr and Mrs Kitcher who sent me such happy greetings from England and a photograph of their children, and a dress and a doll at Christmas amidst all this excitement? Please don't worry. Perhaps in your own small town you have husbands and wives who quarrel. Perhaps they quarrel but like us continue to live together but here, in England, we have so many nice things, I think you'd call them modern conveniences, that we've forgotten to live any other way. I mean take our cars: we love our cars.

(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

The other day someone broke into our car and Mrs Kitcher was very upset indeed; very upset she was. We called the police and when forensics came round she started crying in front of them like the time young Clive got a baby rash. Anyway, I think despite everything you should really concentrate on your new school and do well there. But it's probably fair to say that Mrs Kitcher, Liberty and Clive are really quite happy the way it is and that's the truth. Please keep sending your emails, I can share them with Mrs Kitcher and we can all enjoy them. We shall continue to send you the money for which you say you are grateful though the money we send you is a drop in the ocean to what we spend on ourselves. If I think of what we spend on clothes: I mean if we're honest Mrs Kitcher and I like clothes. If I think of all those personal grooming bills and the credit we get to buy the latest thing. It's a scandal, really. We have many friends, of course, who you would probably like. They would certainly like you more than they like me right now. Sometimes I think the walls of our house are paper-thin and the neighbours can hear us every night bickering. Mostly, it's over nothing and no-one can remember in the morning anyway. I am so happy you are by the sea where you can swim and relax. With all those storms you mention you must be careful though. I was brought up on the tide, you know. I'm what's called local and proud of it. A proper Estuary sort. It's not much our place but we're proud of it. We're actually a town with a pier. Or, are we a pier with a town? I don't know really. Anyway, we're definitely a resort town. The local joke is we're the last resort.

(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

But don't try saying that to the landlord of the Charles Dickens on Saturday night when he's closing up, that's all. Oh yes, we have a small train that clings to the side of the hill for dear life. It's evening here so I should probably end but not without telling you we both like being your mum and dad very much. My best wishes to your brother who has taken such good care of you since your mother died.

Do you know us?

Stop.

We're famous - in our own way.

Stop.

Your Dad, Terry Kitcher.

PS I must just mention the excellent organisation that first put us in touch, which made possible our friendship, which has produced such fine messages from you, which Mrs Kitcher and I, despite our differences, are always happy to receive. We read and re-read these in the comfort of our home. I know you feel we haven't written more, it is our fault and we ask you to forgive us.

Alisha and Terry talk directly giving the impression of being in the same room.

ALISHA

Tell me about the sea, Dear English parents.....

TERRY

The sea? It's quite beautiful in the evening, there's a place I go with the dog, along the banks of the estuary, and just there is our pier, it stretches forever, it's so peaceful. It's good for your health the sea, isn't it? Being close to the city, loads of people used to come to the pier. In the old days.

(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

Not so long ago we were the destination of choice for people looking for that special break. A sort of stop-over for, well, the town next door. I shall say no more.

Stop.

Mind, I'd like to sit there looking at the pier just wondering about all the things it must have seen. Sitting on the beach - somewhere between a sandbank and a huge mud flat - as the sun sets, just wondering. Do you wonder? Some nights it's red which is a good omen and occasionally a plane or something flies over and the dog barks, chasing after the shadow he sees and it's sort of fun to think the dog believes he can make everything go away.

ALISHA

I love the sound of your sea. You must take me there. And this 'pier' it sounds magical. Is it magical?

TERRY

It can be: some nights the stars are so clear. Like they sit there in the sky protecting us despite their better senses. They're so clear you could almost touch them. And you imagine just how small everything is, like a grain of sand and you can never imagine even the half of it. And all you have to do is look up.

ALISHA

And what do the stars tell you?

TERRY

I'm staring and staring and still nothing comes.....

ALISHA

Some of the people I know, here in my town, would laugh at you. What else do you see? Or not see, English Dad!

TERRY

I see, well, I see a lot of water.

ALISHA

That's stupid,

TERRY

No, water that's real although I can't explain it, it's just there, watching, I think they might be some kind of warning. Yes, a warning to boats and ships. The Titanic passed through here and saw, well, everything, the Titanic saw us, it sounds funny, but suddenly....we were.....

ALISHA

Who is the Titanic?

TERRY

Some enormous floating palace not unlike the pier; it was full of people and then it sank, with everyone laughing as they went to the bottom.

ALSISHA

Laughing?

TERRY

There was some party on,

ALSIHA

I don't understand.

TERRY

The boat, I mean it must have been a ship, it was probably a bit unexpected but then there you are. I mean can anyone tell the difference between a boat and a ship?

ALISHA

I can come in a boat, it would be easy,

TERRY

How would you do that?

ALISHA

Just like the others....

TERRY

What others?

ALISHA

The others, you've seen them.

TERRY

No I haven't. There's been no boats we don't know about in our town for as long as I can remember.

ALISHA

You make me laugh, Dad. You're my English dad right and you haven't heard about the boats? You're having me on.

TERRY

Name one,

ALISHA

I'm serious, I could come on one and we'd end up in your beautiful marina. The mayor would greet us and all the town councillors. People would line the streets to welcome us, wouldn't they? Wouldn't they?

TERRY

We're very hospitable, everyone says how nice we all are. Completely natural, no prejudices at all, we take it as it comes. It's one of the reasons people come to live in the town.

ALISHA

And I'd give an interview to the local paper. With my picture. It would be nice. What would everyone say about that?

TERRY

Well, the local yacht club might have something to say about it, and the coastguard and the harbour master, he's very important around here. They'll all ask for money.....I mean nicely because they're nice people.

ALISHA

What about this Dunkirk of yours,
Terry?

TERRY

What do you know about Dunkirk?

ALISHA

It's when everyone helps everyone
else.

TERRY

Dunkirk has nothing to do with it,

ALISHA

In my town the older people talk
about this 'spirit of Dunkirk',
where's that in all this paying for
stuff?

TERRY

It's completely different, the
yacht club and your town. There's
no comparison, none at all.

ALISHA

Tell me about other things?

TERRY

You'd love the people, the people
are what make the
place.....they're
everywhere.....

ALISHA

What people?

TERRY

The people, you know the people....

ALISHA

Are you imagining this?

TERRY

Probably, I mean its highly likely
but no, I mean, no. We've got more
people here than the whole of
everywhere. They're all quite
famous, each of them.

ALISHA

Are they on TV?

TERRY

The lot.....they're so many faces that, well, you'd like it right now.....every spring all our neighbours seem to get a new car and you can see them driving around like crazy with the mums and the kids in the back. All having a laugh. It's spring, you see.....and there's this park....where the kids and the mums play....we're actually quite proud of that, too. It might not be much but ask me about a rose and I can name the family.

ALISHA

Hey, Terry. We like mums, too. All the women in our town they drive with the men and now they drive without the men, they're actually better at driving than the men. Will you teach me to drive when I come? So I can be your daughter? We can ride together to the park. Would you like to take me to park one evening in a fine car and look at the stars together, is that what you'd like, Terry?

TERRY

(distracted)

Sorry, I got distracted just then, I...I... was just thinking the trouble is nowadays it's in the middle of nowhere, it's nothing.....

ALISHA

But the park, Terry, are there many flowers there?

TERRY

Flowers? Yes! Brilliant crocuses everywhere. And bluebells, hundreds of them....they're like a carpet.....and wild garlic, primroses, flowering orchids and wood anemones. This place is a paradise. But almost my favourite, after the rose that is, the azalea which have such a sweet smell. And later in the year amongst the bracken the rare gladioli.

(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

You must think I'm making this
up...

(laughs)

ALISHA

I would love you to show me all of
these one day.....

TERRY

The whole of this county is at your
disposal,

ALISHA

And your streets, Dear Father, are
they really paved with gold?

TERRY

Who told you that?

ALISHA

My Uncle Aly. My Uncle Aly told me
when he came to your country,

TERRY

What country?

ALISHA

Your country, he came to your
country, you invited him to be
English, and you cared and loved
him as one of the family, my
family. He ran a business in your
town, a little business mind, first
as a guest and then he became
important and you were slow to love
him but when you did, he became
everything you wanted and everyone
talked about Uncle Aly. A great
man.

TERRY

This gold he mentioned,

ALISHA

He said the streets were paved with
gold, and we must come.

TERRY

That's a fairytale,

ALISHA

No, it's true. I mean it was true
once in a place....

TERRY

Never,

ALISHA

I've seen it, in pictures your own
mayor with a gold chain,

TERRY

The mayor? I don' think so,

ALISHA

And there's a welcoming group and
even the postbox is no longer red,
it's gold!

TERRY

It doesn't exist all this gold you
talk about. We don't look out for
each other the way we used to.

ALISHA

What about in your prayers? Surely
in your prayers you look out for
others.....in your famous English
churches you say your prayers for
others? Do you say your prayers
for us? Do you? It seems there
are many churches in your town but
what good to do they do?

Stop.

TERRY

(ignoring remark)

This storm of yours, shouldn't you
be taking cover?

ALISHA

The storm, hah, we're used to it.
Every night it comes at first a
rumble and then closer and closer
until one enormous crash and you
can't think. You're shivering
there with your brother with only
the protection of the leg of a
broken table. And everyone else is
dead or dying. We had a man in the
town like you Terry, he asked
questions, he tried to do things,
he was kind to us like you but one
day they came and took him. He
disappeared. Like everything we
know, he just disappeared.

(MORE)

ALISHA (CONT'D)

A few months later, some soldiers were here and we asked them about him and they said it was all taken care of. That we shouldn't worry and it was best not to ask and just get on with going to school and swim in the sea.

TERRY

(animated)

That's what you should do, my Dear Daughter, swim out to see and I would find you there in my boat. And I shall bring you to England and we shall sail down this estuary of ours in a glorious armada.

ALISHA

Just like in Dunkirk?

TERRY

Just like in Dunkirk.

ALISHA

May I bring my brother?

TERRY

Bring your brother.

Stop.

Emails exchange resumed.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Dear Alisha, News.

ALISHA

News? The news I'd been longing for,

Alisha and Terry talk directly again, giving the impression once more of being in the same room.

TERRY

Yes, news.

ALISHA

We should celebrate with fireworks over your famous pier when the great yachts you speak of are in regatta to show us the way to the new world. That would be fine, wouldn't it?

TERRY

It's, well, fine for some but you must know you won't be able to come here, My Dear Daughter. I know neither you nor your brother who is blind in one eye have blood on your hands but still you can see this has all become a bit inconvenient, an inconvenience given everything you understand, your mother would, I'm sure, if she was still alive.....understand..... that it's all just a bit awkward, the timing I mean. Mrs Kitcher's neighbours, I mean our neighbours, they're not happy. Not happy about it.

ALISHA

What are they unhappy about? Are they unhappy about me? About me and my brother?

TERRY

My Dear Daughter, I must tell they're just about the unhappiest lot of people I've ever met. And it's making me unhappy telling you the rotten truth about this town of ours that those things I mentioned earlier....our marina, the yacht club famous for its kedgerees and the fine yachts ploughing the estuary in their annual regatta, well, it's all made up and....yes, there's never been any US President here, nor any Titanic. It might say so on a postcard but it's not true. All we've got is a spot of bother,

ALISHA

(surprised)
Is it about me?

TERRY

Not about you but, well, about you. We used to say it's alright but now, well, there's this thing on, it used to be nothing but now, you see, it's alright, it's alright...isn't it?

ALISHA

But our regatta, what about our regatta?

TERRY

It will have to wait.

ALISHA

For better weather?

TERRY

For better weather.

ALISHA

I must believe you.

TERRY

There's no sense in it. It doesn't make sense but there it is.....

ALISHA

The storm has arrived there is no more time to speak.

TERRY

Alisha, Alisha, wait.....

ALISHA

Uncle Aly told me it would be like this. There is no more summer in this great country of yours Mr Terry Kitcher and now the storm is over both our heads.

Stop.

TERRY

Let me email you next month with your ten pounds: Mrs Kitcher will be so pleased we spoke.

ALISHA

Goodbye, Mr Terry Kitcher.

Ends