

Alistair in Wonderland

By Patti Veconi

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DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to the Bay Ridge Prep 5th grade class of 2020/21 who overcame more challenges to make theatre than any of us ever thought possible.

SYNOPSIS

The Queen of Hearts has demanded a rematch with Alice on the croquet lawn, but instead of fetching the girl back to Wonderland as instructed, the easily addled Dormouse has returned with a very confused boy named Alistair. Luckily, Alice has also arrived, having learned of the Queen's summons from the Cheshire Cat, and it becomes her mission to get Alistair safely home while also enjoying a new adventure herself. Approximately 45 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(3 m, 3 w, 18 flexible, extras, doubling possible)

NARRATOR: Optional part.

MOTHER: (F) Maternal but firm in a timeless, motherly way.

FATHER: (M) A proper but gentle father with a teasing manner.

ALISTAIR: (M) A spirited boy who's open to adventure.

DORMOUSE: Childlike and funny with a desire to please others.

WHITE RABBIT: Anxious and burdened by a strong sense of responsibility as well as a genuine fear of the Queen.

HARE: Sardonic and dry with a penchant for winding the Rabbit up.

HATTER: Zany and unaffected by whatever excites other around her.

ALICE: (F) More mature than she was in her first two visits to Wonderland, she falls easily into the role of guide and cautionary companion to Alistair.

CHESHIRE CAT: Wise and confidant, showing up when needed and readily commenting on the activities of Wonderland's citizens.

CATERPILLAR: Direct descendent of a famous chain-smoker, this caterpillar has the much healthier habit of juggling.

BILL the LIZARD: Still sore about his earlier experiences with Alice.

DODO: Bossy emcee of the caucus race with a distinctive vocabulary.

TWEEDLE-DUM: Dee's comic friend. Together, they stir up trouble for Alistair.

TWEEDLE-DEE: Dum's comic friend. Together, they stir up trouble for Alistair.

GRYPHON: A gentle and solicitous friend to all, particularly the Mock Turtle.

MOCK TURTLE: Humble and self-effacing soul who thinks the best of others.

QUEEN of HEARTS: (F) As two-dimensional as a playing card: shrill, bossy, driven.

KING of HEARTS: (M) Bumbling and ever after claiming his own agency.

CARD 5: Servant to the Queen.

LORY: Dances at the cotillion.

DUCK: Dances at the cotillion.

EAGLET: Dances at the cotillion.

CARD 7: Announces at the trial.

*Feel free to use whichever pronouns are appropriate for your production.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play was originally produced during the time of social distancing protocols for Covid 19 in schools. Due to those restrictions, we performed outdoors in a grassy park area with trees as our scenery and simple plastic stools for necessary set pieces. Students were fully masked and wore body microphones. The possibilities for scenery in a traditionally staged production would be limited only by a director's creativity.

PROPS

Scene 1: Blanket and picnic basket (Mother/Father), book with bookmark or wand (Narrator)

Scene 2: Tea set (Hatter), pocket watch (Rabbit), puppets in likeness (Alice and Alistair). Note about the puppets: If not using a Narrator, Alice and Alistair can have their puppet images in a pocket. A simple and effective way to make puppets for the shrunk Alistair and Alice is to take a photo of the actors in costume and then cut them out to create stick puppets from the photos.

Scene 4: Scarves for juggling, chunk of toadstool (Caterpillar), butterfly on a stick (Narrator)

Scene 5: Clipboard, numbers* for caucus race, whistle (Dodo), food basket (Hatter)

Scene 6: Croquet balls and polishing rag (King)

*Note about the numbers for the caucus race: They should be random numbers, maybe some fractions, nonsensical commas, algebraic figures, etc. It may be easiest to have them on strings to quickly hang over the actors' heads.

Scene 1: Alistair

(AT RISE: A park or wooded area. MOTHER and FATHER enter. Father carries a blanket and Mother has a picnic basket. They freeze as NARRATOR enters.)

NARRATOR: Once upon a time, a girl fell down a rabbit hole and into a land of wonder – a veritable “wonderland” if you will – and ever since, her adventures have captured the imaginations of children the world over. But Alice wasn’t the only child to visit Wonderland. If you would like to know how it happened that an unsuspecting boy found himself in such a strange place, then listen closely. *(Reading.)* Once upon a time, a small family went out for a picnic... *(Looking up from the book.)* Actually, why don’t I just show you how it happened.

(NARRATOR waves a magic bookmark over MOTHER, who comes to life, then does the same with FATHER and exits.)

MOTHER: Why look, Reginald. Isn’t this a lovely spot? Let’s stop here to picnic.

FATHER: Good choice, Adelaide. It’s both shady and sunny.

MOTHER: You spread the blanket and I’ll set out the lunch. *(Looking around.)* But where is Alistair?

FATHER: Oh, he must have gotten somewhere or other. Alistair?

MOTHER: Alistair?

FATHER: Alistair!

MOTHER: Alistair! Where are you, darling?

ALISTAIR: *(Enters.)* Mom, Dad, please. Do you have to call me by my full name?

MOTHER: What else would we call you?

FATHER: It is your name.

ALISTAIR: But it’s so long. The other boys at school are just Mike or Chris or Ben – even two syllables are better than three.

MOTHER: My name has three syllables.

FATHER: So does mine, nothing wrong with a three-syllable name.

ALISTAIR: Well, I hate it. Johnny doesn't have to go by Jonathan and Nico doesn't have to go by Nicholas.

MOTHER: So, two syllables is better?

FATHER: You would prefer we call you Alice?

ALISTAIR: No!

MOTHER: Well, you're not making any sense, either you want three syllables, or you want it shorter.

ALISTAIR: Just Al. Can you just call me Al?

FATHER: Absolutely not!

MOTHER: Alistair was your great-great-great-grandfather's name.

FATHER: It's a family name.

MOTHER: It would break his heart to have it shortened.

ALISTAIR: How can it break his heart? He's been dead for decades.

MOTHER: It was his dying wish to have a grandson named after him.

ALISTAIR: Then why didn't someone do that a few generations ago? Why wait until the 21st Century?

FATHER: Because you were the first. Your mother always told me that if we ever had a son, he had to be named Alistair.

MOTHER: Alistair was my great-great-grandmother's father, but she only had daughters, and my great-grandmother only had daughters and my grandmother only had daughters and my mother only had me – so you were the first chance the family had to fulfill his dying wish.

ALISTAIR: Well, I sure wish he'd been named something normal, like Joe.

FATHER: Let's start lunch. I'm famished.

(NARRATOR enters and addresses the audience.)

NARRATOR: As Mother and Father began to set up for lunch, Alistair wandered off to the side, pouting. A dormouse appeared, confused and talking to herself.

DORMOUSE: *(Enters.)* Oh, if I don't find Alice soon, Rabbit will be so angry with me. Not to mention being late for the tea party. And they never save me anything if I'm late. *(Seeing the picnic.)* Oh, but what's this? A picnic! And it looks better than anything the Mad Hatter is planning to serve. There's fruit and bread and *(Gasping.)* cheese! I wonder if they wouldn't mind sharing just a little bit.

FATHER: Hey Alice! It's lunch time!

DORMOUSE: *(Looking around.)* What? Alice? Where?

ALISTAIR: *(Turning around to rejoin THEM.)* Very funny.

MOTHER: Your father is just teasing you.

DORMOUSE: That's Alice? My goodness, she's changed! But what do I know? Only that my head will be chopped off if she isn't back in time for her croquet match with the Queen. *(Running over to ALISTAIR.)* Excuse me, Alice? Sorry to interrupt your family time, but I'm supposed to get you back to Wonderland for some activities this afternoon and we really must hurry; you know how impatient they can be down there.

NARRATOR: Alistair froze, speechless. His parents, who could not understand mouse talk and only heard squeaking noises, reacted in horror to the intruder.

FATHER: *(Jumping up.)* Rodents!

MOTHER: *(Running off and calling as she goes.)* Grab the food!

FATHER: *(Grabbing the picnic basket and following her.)* Wait for me!

DORMOUSE: *(Looks after THEM, and then turns back to ALISTAIR.)* It's a shame they took all the food. But no matter, as I said, we really don't have much time to spare anyway.

ALISTAIR: *(Stunned.)* Did you? Are you...talking?

DORMOUSE: Yes. Now let's go!

(DORMOUSE runs off. ALISTAIR looks back in the direction of his parents for a moment before deciding to follow him.)

End of Scene

Scene 2: The Tea Party

(AT RISE: Wonderland. A table is set for tea. MARCH HARE and MAD HATTER sit. WHITE RABBIT paces next to them.)

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, down in Wonderland, the March Hare was hosting a tea party with her friends the White Rabbit and Mad Hatter. *(Exits.)*

RABBIT: How can the two of you sit there so calmly? It's getting late – very late – later by the minute in fact! Soon it will be too late!

HARE: Oh, not too late as all that. Relax, Fluffy.

RABBIT: Do NOT call me Fluffy!

HARE: Peter?

RABBIT: Stop it.

HARE: Oh, I know, Thumper!

HATTER: Ah, clever.

RABBIT: I'm the only one who takes anything seriously around here. If it weren't for me, you both would have lost your heads by now.

HARE: Well, technically, Hatter here is mad – so he's rather lost his head already, wouldn't you say?

HATTER: Ha-ha, quite right! Tea for either of you?

RABBIT: How can you drink tea at a time like this?

HATTER: *(Momentarily confused.)* Well, because it's teatime, of course.

RABBIT: I don't mean that kind of a time like this – I mean this kind of a time like this – a time when we have personally made a promise to the Queen --

HARE: And King! Don't forget him.

RABBIT: *(Continuing.)* Exactly! A time when we have promised both the Queen and King that Alice would attend their croquet game.

HATTER: Did we promise that? I don't remember making any such promise. *(Pouring tea for MARCH HARE.)* Biscuit with your tea?

HARE: Well, Energizer Bunny, technically only you promised Alice would be there. I don't much like the girl and therefore don't have any stake in the game.

RABBIT: Your head is at stake!

HARE: Maybe. But you know as well as I do that the Queen of Hearts is mostly bluster and the King of Hearts is mostly fluster. *(Realizing what he just said.)* Oh! That was clever of me, wasn't it?

HATTER: *(Clapping.)* Ha-ha, most clever! Bluster and fluster, what more can you muster?

RABBIT: Joke all you want, but... *(Checking watch again.)* Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear! Where is that lazy Dormouse? He should have been back with Alice ages ago!

ALICE: *(Entering.)* Hello everyone! Did I hear you say my name, Rabbit? What is the excitement?

(Upon seeing ALICE, the RABBIT becomes even more animated.)

RABBIT: You've made it! You're here! Oh Alice, what luck! And just in time – just minutes to spare – no time at all really. And look at that: you have a head! It's a very lovely head and – there it sits perfectly and just as it should on your shoulders – right where it belongs.

ALICE: *(Touching her head.)* I hope so.

HARE: There, you see, Bugs Bunny? The silly girl is here after all and there's nothing to worry about.

ALICE: Silly girl?

(Wanting everyone to have fun at his party, the MAD HATTER quickly jumps in.)

HATTER: Won't you have tea, Alice?

ALICE: *(Turning to the HATTER.)* Oh no, but thank you, Hatter. You know how sensitive my stomach is here in Wonderland.

HARE: Is that the problem? I thought you were just indecisive about whether you wanted to be the size of a caterpillar or a giant.

RABBIT: But where is Dormouse, Alice? Didn't you come with her?

ALICE: Dormouse? Why no. I haven't seen her since my last visit.

RABBIT: Then who brought you? How did you know to come?

ALICE: Cheshy told me.

RABBIT: *(Together.)* Cheshy?

HATTER: *(Together.)* Cheshy?

HARE: *(Together.)* Cheshy?

ALICE: Yes, Cheshy ...the Cheshire Cat? *(Explaining.)*

We've become quite good friends and she explained to me that the Queen wants a rematch of our game.

RABBIT: Oh yes, quite right. Of course, the Cheshire Cat would have known. *(Seeming a bit hurt.)* I just didn't realize you had become friends.

HARE: Don't be jealous. Alice has always been a cat person.

ALICE: Firstly, I like all animals. And secondly, I didn't come because the Queen asked to play croquet with me.

HARE: Well, technically, she demanded you play with her.

ALICE: Regardless, I came because I was worried about you, Rabbit. I like your head just the way it is. *(Turning to the OTHERS.)* And of course, you too, Hatter and Hare.

HATTER: Oh, that's so sweet of you! Isn't she the sweetest girl ever? How about chamomile? I'll brew it just for you.

ALICE: I really shouldn't.

(ALICE has her back to the entrance as DORMOUSE comes running in with a very surprised and confused ALISTAIR behind her.)

DORMOUSE: I'm here! We're here! I have Alice – she's right here. Here's Alice. I did it! I did just what you asked Rabbit. Here she is.

(ALL respond quickly, overlapping each other.)

HARE: Who is /that?

RABBIT: That's not /Alice!

HATTER: Alice is /here!

ALICE: You're a boy!

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(Pause.)

DORMOUSE: *(Seeing ALICE.)* Uh oh... hello, Alice.

ALISTAIR: Wait, did you think my name was Alice?

DORMOUSE: *(Sheepishly.)* That is what your father called you.

ALISTAIR: And that I was a girl?

DORMOUSE: Humans confuse me sometimes.

ALISTAIR: You think you're confused?

ALICE: What is your name?

ALISTAIR: Al – well, Alistair – but Al is what I prefer.

ALICE: Right then, Al. How did you get here?

ALISTAIR: Get here?

ALICE: Yes. Did you take the rabbit hole or a looking glass?

ALISTAIR: Neither. I just followed this little fellow. *(Indicating DORMOUSE. Then aside to ALICE.)* She can talk!

ALICE: I know. It's not a secret. Everyone here can talk.

ALISTAIR: I'm... confused.

HATTER: Would you like some tea?

ALICE: No!

ALISTAIR: No?

ALICE: Try your multiplication tables – see how they come out.

ALISTAIR: *(Considering carefully as he speaks.)* Four times six equals twenty-five. Three times seven equals fifteen. Five times eight equals seventy-seven.

HATTER: Quite right!

DORMOUSE: I admit, I thought he might have bumped his head on the way – but I'm not worried now.

RABBIT: What a relief.

HARE: Oh yes – this is a relief all right. We now have not one, but two Normal Land Alices with us!

ALISTAIR: My name isn't Alice! *(To ALICE.)* And was my multiplication really correct?

ALICE: Normally, no. But according to Wonderland logic, yes.

HATTER: Well, isn't this marvelous? I love a tea party with surprise guests. Won't you sit down? I'll fix you a little plate.

ALISTAIR: *(Sitting down.)* Thank you.

(EVERYONE from Wonderland becomes busy with tea as ALICE and ALISTAIR sit next to each other and talk quietly.)

ALICE: I wouldn't eat that if I were you.

ALISTAIR: But he just said that it was a tea party. And anyway, I missed lunch when my parents ran off with our picnic.

ALICE: I wouldn't drink that either – just a bit of advice.

ALISTAIR: Why not?

ALICE: Look, you're new here. But go ahead – don't take my word for it. Maybe you like shrinking and stretching and changing every time you eat something.

ALISTAIR: That sounds very uncomfortable.

ALICE: Which is why I'm advising you not to eat or drink anything. But you seem to be stubborn – so I won't argue.

ALISTAIR: I'm not stubborn! I'm hungry!

(ALISTAIR takes a sip of tea and then freezes, looking alarmed. ALL stare at him, equally alarmed. Alistair then turns slowly around. SFX: magical sounds as the NARRATOR enters waving his magic bookmark and holding a puppet/doll that is the very likeness of Alistair. After one turn, Alistair speaks.)

ALISTAIR: What's happening?

HARE: Oh, look at that. This one has the same sensitive stomach issue our first Alice suffers from.

ALICE: I warned you.

(As ALISTAIR turns a second time, the NARRATOR puts the puppet in his hands and walks away. As Alistair completes his second rotation and faces the audience again, he holds the puppet up and looks at it as he speaks so that the effect is that he has now shrunk to the size of the puppet/doll.)

DORMOUSE: Oh no! You're shrinking! But really, it's perfectly fine being small. Don't feel badly at all about it. Mice are small, you know. We have lived in the shadow of larger mammals our whole lives.

ALISTAIR: Help! Help me!

ALICE: Fine – but only if you promise to listen to me going forward.

ALISTAIR: Yes. Whatever it takes. Just... fix me!

ALICE: Rabbit, I may be late to the croquet match.

(ALICE drinks the tea that Alistair had and begins to shrink in the same way. She turns around. SFX: magical sounds. The NARRATOR returns, again waving the magic bookmark and holding a puppet/doll in Alice's likeness.)

RABBIT: Alice! Wait! No, no, don't shrink. We need you!

(As ALICE makes her second rotation, the NARRATOR puts the puppet/doll in her hand. She then takes ALISTAIR'S hand and the two of them, holding their puppets side by side, exit running.)

NARRATOR: Alice shrank just as quickly as Alistair had and then led him off to find the antidote that would put them back to size. *(Exits.)*

DORMOUSE: *(Looking after at THEM as they go.)* I can't imagine how it is that I mistook him for her. They really do look very different.

RABBIT: *(To OTHERS.)* What do we do now?

HARE: First, we finish our tea. Then, we go to the garden and watch some croquet.

End of Scene

Scene 3: Where Are We Going?

(AT RISE: Somewhere in Wonderland. ALICE enters, followed by a very confused ALISTAIR. They both hold their puppets, looking at them when speaking, as puppeteers do.)

ALISTAIR: Do you know where you're going?

ALICE: *(Stopping to stare at HIM.)* Me? Yes. I know where I'm going. Do you know where you're going?

ALISTAIR: I'm following you.

ALICE: All right then. *(Continues on.)*

ALISTAIR: But wait!

ALICE: *(Turns to look at HIM.)* What now?

ALISTAIR: You didn't answer my question.

ALICE: I most certainly did.

ALISTAIR: Well, if you know where we're going, aren't you going to tell me?

ALICE: You didn't ask me to tell you. Would you like me to?

ALISTAIR: Yes... *(More humbly.)* please.

ALICE: We're going to see the Caterpillar.

ALISTAIR: Who's that and what for?

ALICE: For someone who won't take advice, you're asking a lot of questions.

ALISTAIR: Are you kidding? Look around, this place is... a... a Wonderland! Of course, I have a lot of questions!

(Pause.)

ALICE: Caterpillar is just what his name says. He's a caterpillar. Most everyone you meet down here has sensible names that way – even if most things don't otherwise seem very sensible – and the what for is so that we can reverse the effects of Hatter's tea.

ALISTAIR: So this Caterpillar is a doctor?

ALICE: I wouldn't say that at all, but he'll have what we need to grow back to normal size. You're not allergic to smoke are you? Caterpillar has a rather bad habit in that regard.

(As ALICE is speaking, CHESHIRE CAT appears behind her and ALISTAIR is suddenly frozen in terror.)

ALICE: *(Cont'd.)* Why are you staring like that? Do you feel sick? *(Beat.)* Alistair? Al? I can't carry you all the way to Caterpillar, you'll have to...

(ALISTAIR just points in shock at the CHESHIRE CAT. As she speaks, ALICE turns to see her.)

ALICE: Cheshy!

CHESHY: So this is the new child from Normal Land? I heard Dormouse confused you with our Alice here. Whatever could she have been thinking?

ALICE: Hello, Cheshy, so good to see you again. Let me introduce Alistair – although he prefers to be called Al. *(Beat. AL is staring.)* He's a little bit overwhelmed, I think. Al, this is Cheshire Cat, a good friend of mine down here.

ALISTAIR: Where's your body?

CHESHY: Right here of course! You should know that you can't trust everything you see.

ALISTAIR: But I can't see you.

CHESHY: Exactly my point. If you can't trust what you do see right in front of you – then you certainly can't trust that what you don't see right in front of you! *(To ALICE.)* Rabbit told me about your little mishap with the tea. I'm surprised you would make such a mistake.

ALICE: We're on our way to see Caterpillar about it now.

CHESHY: Certainly, a bit of tasty toadstool is just the thing you both need. That's why I came to find you.

ALICE: I know the way.

CHESHY: I'm quite sure but Dodo is hosting a caucus race today: so expect delays. Even at your current size you're sure to be spotted and asked to join.

ALISTAIR: A caucus race? They have elections down here?

ALICE: Don't be ridiculous. Wonderland is run by a Queen and King, there's nothing democratic about this place.

ALISTAIR: *(Correcting HER.)* You mean a King and Queen?

End of Freeview

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