

QUEEN OF HEARTS

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Based on Events, Both Real and Through the Looking Glass

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Slowly, over black, the lines of a poem appear in careful handwriting:

A Boat beneath a sunny sky
Lingering onward dreamily
In an evening of July
Children Three that nestle near
Eager Eye and Willing Ear

Pleased a simple tale to hear--
Long has paled that sunny sky
Echoes Fade and memories die
Autumn frosts have slain July
Still she haunts me phantom-wise
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes
Children yet, the tale to hear
Eager eye and willing ear

Lovingly shall nestle near
In a Wonderland they lie
Dreaming as the days go by
Dreaming as the summers die:
Ever drifting down the stream
Lingering in the golden gleam
Life, what is it, but a dream?

- *Lewis Carroll*

As each line appears, the lines above fade, leaving only an acrostic of the first letters which spell the name:

ALICE PLEASANCE LIDDELL

O/S: The sharp screech of a TRAIN WHISTLE rises over the sigh and pop of COOLING PISTONS.

FADE IN:

EXT. OXFORD RAILWAY STATION- 1898- DAY

We move through a churning CLOUD OF STEAM to reveal a train pulling into a overcrowded platform choked with several groups of men, women and children. Mothers take the hands of their little ones, leading them towards waiting horse drawn carriages.

From the air, we see the coaches depart in turn; thick arteries of black converging on a distant skyline of dreaming spires and sunlit pinnacles. A fairyland rising from the endless rolling green.

INSERT: OXFORD UNIVERSITY 1898

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD- OXFORDSHIRE- DAY

The carriages make their way in slow procession down the road. Each carries several CHILDREN, all silent, all dressed in Victorian black.

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH LAWN- JANUARY 1898- DAY

The crowded funeral of a beloved man. An unusually large number of small CHILDREN are in attendance, clutching the hands of their governesses. We focus on faces aged six to twelve as an elderly DEACON delivers a dry eulogy, shouting to be heard over the January wind.

DEACON

...distinguished academically by the publication of "A Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry", which was followed in 1864 by "The Formulas of Plane Trigonometry", then by "A Guide to the Mathematical Studentship in Reading"...

A row of REPORTERS sit near the back of the crowd. Among them is ELLIOTT SHEPHERD, handsome at 28, head down, taking copious notes.

A GUST OF WIND blows a page from his notebook onto the lawn. It's handed back to him by a SMALL BLONDE GIRL, her eyes red and swollen from crying. Her other hand is held tightly by her GOVERNESS.

DEACON (CONT'D)

...And then, in 1865 "The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland" burst upon an astonished world. Few would have imagined that the quiet, reserved bachelor, who all his life was remarkable for his shyness and dislike of publicity, possessed the quality to produce a work which has stood the test of more than 30 years and still captivates young and old alike with its quaint and original genius.

The Deacon takes a pause. A row of OXFORD DONS stare stoically ahead.

DECAN

(closing his book,
addressing the crowd)

Today we regretfully say farewell
to England's *Patron Saint of
Children*.

The SMALL BLONDE GIRL turns back around, nestling herself to her governesses' side.

Thick ropes lower a pine coffin into the earth with a startling racket. It rocks slightly in the wind.

As the Deacon leads the crowd in prayer, a hundred heads bow at once. The smaller children clutch their hands together as if kneeling at their own bedside.

THE BELLS of CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL slowly toll.

AN OLD WOMAN in the front row (72, still clinging to a bit of her former beauty) keeps her head up, bright eyes fixed on the casket. This is LORINA LIDDELL.

As the casket descends beneath the green, Lorina spies a family of WHITE RABBITS emerging from a nearby warren. A few rise up on their haunches, pink eyes alert, like little soldiers in salute.

Lorina SMILES.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY-STAIRCASE 7 EVENING

Elliott climbs a tight spiral staircase with a MAID. TWO FOXHOUNDS run down the opposite way.

MAID

We've never had so many reporters
and well wishers milling around
here before. You'd think the
Archbishop himself had dropped dead
in the middle of the Quad.

At the landing, the maid unlocks the door to ROOM 3 labeled "PROFESSOR C.L. DODGSON". Several FUNERAL WREATHS have been laid at its base.

MAID (CONT'D)

Good luck to you. Lord knows I
tried to clean up after him, and I
would have done, weren't for him
always telling me to have off,
ornery old codger...

MAID (CONT'D)

(crossing herself)
...God rest his soul.

Elliott enters the cramped quarters of Dodgson. It's just the sort of mess you'd expect from an eccentric bachelor: notebooks and drawings strewn about- the familiar caricatures of Tenniel's illustrations from "Alice in Wonderland". Unwashed tea cups and half eaten pastries. Charts depicting exotic Flora and Fauna, dusty illustrated volumes of Natural Curiosities. All the while, a CLOCK ticks loudly.

MAID (CONT'D)

Five minutes. And mind you the
family'll be along within the hour
so don't touch anything. I'm only
doin' this outta respect for the
Professor. So the world can know
his story and all that.

ELLIOTT

(placing a three pound
note in her open palm)
Of course, I won't be a minute.

Elliott surveys the room.

MAID

(pocketing the money)

It's no wonder the poor thing wrote
on rabbits in waistcoats and
teapots all day long, locked up in
this mess, it'd drive any Christian
mad as a hatter.

The Maid closes the door behind her.

Elliott pulls back the drapes, flooding light into the dusty air. He peers down into a pretty little garden below.

At a cluttered desk, Elliott removes a teacup from a stack of PHOTOGRAPHS. Several images, all of little girls, dressed as characters in a makeshift studio: Harlequins, Arabian thieves, girls in Kimono dresses holding silk fans. They are at once haunting and sad.

He pockets the photos and opens the desk drawer. Inside is a DIARY. On the first page, in careful handwriting:

The Diary of C. L. Dodgson 1856-1865

Elliott turns to the last entry.

ELLIOTT

(reading aloud,
dramatically)

5th of September. I saw her again
this morning, as I was drawing on
the lawn. Sitting in the waning
light, she is the star of perfect
womanhood. My lady, the.. Queen of
my Heart..

EXT. TOM QUAD- OXFORD - FANTASY- FLASHBACK

YOUNG LORINA LIDDELL, bathed in a white light, sits alone, reading. Across the lawn CHARLES DODGSON, 25, young and slender, eyes her as he draws. The sketch is of her, dressed as The White Queen. She is ravishing.

Lorina makes extended eye contact with Charles before a bullish MAN appears beside her, leading her inside. The man is her husband, HENRY LIDDELL, the Dean of Oxford.

INT. DODGSON'S STUDY- PRESENT

Elliott flips the page to find that a large section of the DIARY has been RAZORED OUT. It picks up again in JUNE 1865.

ELLIOTT
(sotto)
The year he published "Alice".
Curiouser and curioser, eh
professor?

Elliott pulls open the other drawers. Not sure what he's looking for...

He examines a few charcoal sketches of characters from both "Alice" and Carroll's later poems: The Caterpillar, the Mock Turtle, the Jabberwocky.

He pulls out a carefully folded NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from the London Times dated May 1873.

"Commissioner in Lunacy Murdered" Subtitle: "Attacked by Madman at Fisherton House Asylum During Routine Inspection". Underneath, a photo is captioned "Robert Wilfred Skeffington Lutwidge, Uncle of Famed Children's Author Lewis Carroll"

Elliott opens the paper and out falls yet another PHOTOGRAPH. But this one is more striking than the others-- a small, blonde girl, about seven years old, dressed as a shoeless beggar maid. She leans up against a garden wall, one shoulder exposed, her gaze dreamily fixed at a point past the photographer. Elliott flips it over to see in the same careful handwriting:

Alice Liddell, aged 6. Beggar Maid.

ELLIOTT (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Alice.

A sharp knock at the door

MAID
Aren't you finished in there yet?
Mind you, I said don't touch
anything!

Elliott pockets the photo and diary.

ELLIOTT
Be out in minute Mrs. Steadson!
Just packing it away.

Elliott heads for the door, doubles back and grabs the rest of the photographs, attempting to replace the desk as it was.

The Maid bursts in.

MAID

Hurry up, hurry up! The five o' clock is due any minute, those nieces of his will have my head if they find you here. Go on! Shoo!

INT- TOM QUAD DORMITORY- DAY

Elliott hurries down the spiral stairwell and out onto the lawn.

INT- TRAIN CAR

Elliott sits, staring out the window as the English countryside flies past.

He takes out the haunting photo of Alice. Stares at it. Turns it upside down, so that Alice looks as if she's falling down.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Sometimes I really believe I did fall down that rabbit hole.

INT. ALICE LIDDELL'S GARDEN- CUFFNELLS, HAMPSHIRE- 1898

Alice, late 40's, deep blue eyes and a classic kind of beauty that has aged softly and gracefully, sits trimming a white rose bush. Elliott sits next to her. An unfinished tea sits between them. Alice turns the photograph carefully in her white gloved hands.

ALICE

I remember this day. I remember most days I spent with him. He was.. very dear to me.

ELLIOTT

(excitedly)

Well, Carroll immortalized you. To scores of future generations, you'll always be Alice.

ALICE

Yes, I'll always be Alice. I'll always be two sizes too big or too small, forever trapped in Wonderland, chasing rabbits. Forever in a dream.

A servant, EDITH, picks up the empty tea pot.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Why exactly is it that you've come
here, Mr...

ELLIOTT

Shepherd. Elliott Shepherd.

ALICE

Mr. Shepherd, you should know very
well I've made it my business never
to discuss my personal affairs with
the press.

ELLIOTT

Yet you agreed to see me.

ALICE

And now that I have my photographs
back in my possession I don't
believe there's anything left for
us to say.

ELLIOTT

Mrs. Hargreaves, the year Carroll
wrote "Alice" has been.. Well
there's hardly any record of it at
all. You were there- you helped
inspire his, well, rather unlikely
genius. You, your sisters, your
father, your mother...

ALICE

(sharply interrupting)

My mother, Mr. Shepherd, reigned
over every man woman and child in
Oxford in those days. And that
includes your Patron Saint of
Children. And all I could do was
watch them all fall under her
spell.

Edith sets down a new pot of tea.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

(to Elliott)

It's getting late. I'm afraid we'll
have to leave it there. Edith will
show you out.

ELLIOTT

Mrs. Hargreaves, I...

ALICE

Thank you very kindly for returning
my photographs to me, Mr. Shepherd,
they mean the world to me. I wish
you a very pleasant stay in
Hampshire.

Edith escorts a reluctant Elliott back towards the house.
Alice turns back.

ELLIOTT

Wait.

Elliott goes back to Alice. He hurriedly writes an address on
a sheet of his notebook, tears it out.

ELLIOTT (CONT'D)

I'm staying at the Queen's Head. In
town on Harrington Street. That is,
if you should think of anything
else.

He allows Edith to lead him back towards the house. Alice
watches him go.

INT. ALICE LIDDELL'S DINING ROOM- CUFFNELLS, HAMPSIRE- 1898-
EVENING

A grand country estate. Alice eats her dinner in silence at
the end of a long table. Her husband, REGINALD HARGREAVES
(46), a magistrate with a tall, athletic build, sits at the
opposite end, equally silent. Edith refills their wine. After
a moment:

REGINALD

Everything alright?

ALICE

(distracted)

Oh. Yes.

REGINALD

Edith said you had a caller today.

ALICE

Hm? Oh, the reporter. Pleasant sort
of fellow. Came down from Leeds I
think.

REGINALD

Well, pleasant or not I expect we'll be getting a lot of that racket around here now the old bastard's dead. I don't want you indulging any more of them. Do you understand me?

ALICE

Yes, of course. He just- caught me off guard I suppose.

REGINALD

Well, I won't have you mixed up in any more of that nonsense. You know full well our affairs are none of their business.

Silence.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Do you hear me, Alice?

ALICE

Hm? Oh yes. Nonsense.

REGINALD

Good girl.

They continue to eat in silence.

INT. ALICE LIDDELL'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Alice lays awake next to her husband, bathed in moonlight. Suddenly, she sits up and takes the PHOTOGRAPHS from the back of her bedside table.

EXT. ALICE'S GARDEN- NIGHT

Alice walks down a winding garden path, wearing only her nightdress, her hair in a long plait.

We hear the nocturnal sounds of a garden: crickets and the singing of stone fountains.

Alice comes to a clearing and sits in the grass like a child, examining THE PHOTOGRAPHS in the moonlight. She pauses on the picture of herself dressed as the beggar child. The more we examine the image, the more haunting it becomes.

And at once the garden becomes eerily quiet.

The night darkens and the low stone walls close in around her.

The RISING SOUND of an angry and boisterous crowd rumbles in the shadows. The yowling and screeching of a hundred voices getting closer and more distinct. We can just make out the words:

VOICE #1: VOICE #2:
The Queen! The Queen! She's (singing)
coming! Twinkle Twinkle little bat

Alice backs herself against a tree as the flora around her begins to GROW at an unnatural rate. Mushroom caps expand like swollen sponges, green tendrils snake their way up the garden walls. Caterpillars swarm up out of the mossy peat like locusts, inching quickly up the groaning fence posts.

VOICE #3:
(singing)
*The Queen of Hearts, She made
some tarts all on a summer's
day*

VOICE #4:
WHO are YOU?

VOICE #2:
...How I wonder where you're at

VOICE #3:
The knave of hearts, he stole
the tarts and took them quite
away!

VOICE #1:
Get to your places! Everyone
to your places!

(CONT'D)

VOICE #6:
We're ALL mad here

VOICE #1:
Execute them! Execute them
all!

VOICE #5:
(female, rising over
rest)
OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!

Close on Alice's terrified eyes, covering her ears, as the din of the crowd RISES and we hear:

The BANGING OF A GAVET.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. OXFORD UNIVERSITY- TOM QUAD- 1856- FLASHBACK

A final BANG as two massive oak doors swing open. Two ELDERLY DONS in billowing Oxford black, walk briskly down a long, cloistered arcade. Their footfalls break the peaceful quiet of academia.

INSERT: OXFORD UNIVERSITY 1856

As they round the corner, a NOISY CLASSROOM causes them to stop in their tracks.

INT. CLASSROOM- DAY

They enter into:

A classroom in disorder. A half dozen robed YOUNG MEN talk rauously, some sitting on their desks. There is no authority present. The room goes quiet.

ELDERLY DON
Where is your tutor?

The students stare blankly. No idea.

ELDERLY DON (CONT'D)
Where is...
(consulting a list)
Professor Dodgson?

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- CHARLES' ROOM- SAME TIME

An UPSIDE DOWN image of a simple wooden chair in front of a white sheet. The image goes in out and out of focus.

CHARLES (O.S.)
Remarkable.

CHARLES DODGSON, tall, lithe and handsome at 24, wavy hair and soft grey eyes, emerges from the black hood of a Double Folding BOX CAMERA. He wears a clergyman's dress: black broadcloth and white tie. His UNCLE SKEFFINGTON, 54, struggles to read a primitive boxed LIGHT METER and a MANUAL. The two are surrounded by a mess of amateur photographic equipment: jars of chemicals, glass plates, trays, dishes, scales and water. Charles' hands are covered in black residue.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You said forty five seconds?

SKEFFINGTON
 (reading between the meter
 and manual)
 An approximate measure of forty
 five seconds, dependent on
 conditions of weather, sky and the
 quality of daylight.

An excited Charles runs to the windows, throwing them open, flooding the room with light.

CHARLES
 (snapping his fingers)
 Here, grab her.

SKEFFINGTON
 If you expect the cat to sit still
 for forty five seconds you're mad.

CHARLES
 Dinah! There's a girl.

SKEFFINGTON
 Oh, for Christ's sake, use a bowl
 of fruit. Or me. Or anything that
 won't claw your damn eyes out.

Charles grabs a resistant DINAH off the back of an old sofa.

CHARLES
 (carrying Dinah, speaking
 slowly)
 No, uncle, I'll need you to keep
 the time.
 (placing Dinah gently on
 the chair)
 Now, be a proper lady and sit
still.

Charles slowly backs away and carefully gets under the hood.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 (slowly, quietly)
 Alright. Mark the time. Starting.

SKEFFINGTON
 Oh for Heavenssakes, this is non...

CHARLES
Now.

SKEFFINGTON
 (sighing, extracting a
 pocket watch)
 (MORE)

SKEFFINGTON (CONT'D)
Half past three, half past three
and one..

Charles BURSTS OUT from the hood, knocking over half the equipment. Dinah yowls and leaps onto a shelf.

CHARLES
Half...WHAT?!

Charles grabs his robe, frantically searching for his books.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I'm late!

SKEFFINGTON
So I should see myself to the station, then?

CHARLES
I'm late...I'm late...

Charles throws his robe halfway on, checks his pocket watch.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Christ! I'm late!

SKEFFINGTON
Yes, you've said that.

CHARLES
Uncle, I'm sorry.. here--
(handing him money)
Go to the Rectory, they'll arrange
a coach.

He stops at the door.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
And thank you for the gift, it's...
remarkable.

EXT. OXFORD GROUNDS

Charles runs at full tilt across the yard. Lounging students turn to watch as he barrels past, leaping over fences and garden gates, checking his GOLD POCKET WATCH as he goes.

EXT. CLOISTERED HALL

Charles runs full speed, footsteps echoing loudly through the corridor.

INT. CLASSROOM- DAY

Charles bursts in, a complete mess.

The ELDERLY DON looks up from the desk: he and the class are quietly reading. Charles tries to exude some semblance of composure.

CHARLES

Thank you, Proctor, I'll take it from here.

On his way out, the Proctor checks him at the door, looking him up and down. Charles lets him pass without comment. Adjusting himself, goes to the front of the room.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(clears his throat)

Good afternoon gentlemen. I'm Professor Dodgson. And I will be your tutor for this term.

An awkward pause.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Right.

He turns and writes on the blackboard:

- "a) All children are illogical
- b) Nobody is despised who can manage a crocodile
- c) Illogical persons are despised
- d)?... "

The students look at each other.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

In this class we will be examining the subject of logic.

(dropping a book on a student's desk)

Would you read aloud please? Page seventy-four. 'Logic as a Mathematical Device'.

STUDENT

Logic can be a recreational tool that can hone both one's mathematical and reasoning skills.

(MORE)

STUDENT (CONT'D)

Once you have mastered the machinery of Symbolic Logic, you will have clearness of thought- the ability to see your way through a puzzle, the ability to detect fallacies and to tear to pieces the flimsy illogical arguments which you will continually encounter in books, in newspapers and even in sermons, and which so easily delude those who have never taken the trouble to master this fascinating Art.

CHARLES

Thank you. Now. Who can answer this riddle?

After a moment:

STUDENT

Well...it's nonsense, isn't it? I mean, there's no answer at all.

CHARLES

Isn't there? That is to say, if there isn't, then by all accounts the answer is not a logical one, and you, being not a child and being not despised (or so I can assume from our very brief acquaintance) you should by process of elimination lack the very faculty to come to such an illogical conclusion.

The student is at a loss.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

And, incidentally, you're quite right, there's no answer.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

There is utility in logic. That much is rather obvious to anyone. But in the course of this lecture, I would ask each of you to remember that truth can oftentimes be found where logic cannot. That is to say, in nonsense. In the unanswerable. Even in madness.

A pause as the students take this in, slightly confused. Just then the clock tower strikes and the students pack up.

As they file out, Charles' friend, ROBINSON Duckworth ("DUCKS"), 22, sticks his head through the doorway.

DUCKS

Well they look inspired. Another stimulating lecture, professor?

CHARLES

(packing up)

It was my first lecture. And I was half an hour late so it'll be my last if Gaisford hears about it.

Charles crosses the room to embrace his friend. They haven't seen each other all summer.

DUCKS

Well unless you were doing long division in here with St. Peter himself, I'd say that's unlikely. The 52nd Dean of Christ Church College is dead.

CHARLES

Dead?

DUCKS

As a doornail.

CHARLES

Christ. When?

DUCKS

A few weeks ago in Sansford Lock. Inflammation of the brain, or the liver, or.. whatever.

Charles goes for the door, Ducks follows him out.

CHARLES

Well at least someone had a less productive summer than I did.

INT. CHRIST CHURCH DINING HALL- EVENING

A carved hammer beam ceiling arches over a noisy hall looking much as it has for the past eight centuries. Stained glass and portraits of the college founders dating back to Henry VIII look down upon rows of polished benches and a bustling sea of black gowns. The benches run perpendicular to the "High Table" where the only proper dining chairs are reserved for the Dean of Christ Church and his family.

Charles and Ducks seat themselves with the rest of the faculty.

CHARLES

I'm meeting my father tonight. Half past seven and 'don't be late'.

DUCKS

Good God. Why on Earth would you do a thing like that?

CHARLES

(with disdain)

To go over the 'stipulations of my impending ordination'.

DUCKS

Which are?

CHARLES

Piety, Sobriety, Penitence, Abstinence... they all sort of rhyme together now that I think about it.

DUCKS

Abstinence. No women forever and ever. You really did waste your summer.

Charles gives him a look as the room goes SILENT. They bow their heads with the rest of the hall.

SENIOR SCHOLAR

(chanting)

Benedic, Domine, nos et dona tua quae de largitate tua sumus sumpturi et concde, ut illis salubriter nutriti tibi debitum obsequium praestare valeamus, per Christum Dominum nostrum.

DUCKS

(whispering)

Honestly I can't understand why you're even going through with it. I mean, really, there's got to be a way to keep your studentship that doesn't involve sacrificing your immortal soul.

SENIOR SCHOLAR/ENTIRE HALL

Amen.

The hall erupts with the scraping of silver on pewter.

CHARLES

Ah, but I'm a Dodgson. It's expected of me.

Suddenly, EVERYONE STANDS to face the front of the room. Unsure what's happening, Ducks and Charles follow suit.

HENRY LIDDELL (44), a tall and imposing man with a formidable bearing, has entered the hall. He takes his place at the table with his three daughters, EDITH (4), INA (9) and ALICE (6). They are joined by his wife, LORINA HANNAH LIDDELL (29). Lorina seems to suck the very air out of the room. She is stunning.

Ducks emits a LOW WHISTLE.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Who is that?

A YOUNG PROFESSOR leans in:

YOUNG PROFESSOR
Our new Dean. Henry George Liddell.
Came down from Westminster
yesterday.

DUCKS
(to Charles)
Well, things just got a bit more
interesting around here didn't
they?

But Charles is FOCUSED INTENSELY on Lorina. She's the most beautiful woman he's ever seen.

Charles' POV:

Lorina sitting at the end of the table, correcting Alice's posture.

Fantasy sequence:

TIME SLOWS DOWN for Charles and THE HALL IS SUDDENLY EMPTY, LEAVING ONLY THE PAIR OF THEM.

LORINA BEGINS TO TRANSFORM INTO A DRAMATICALLY GLAMORIZED VERSION OF HERSELF.

The blue pigment of her dress literally melts onto the floor, leaving it a pure, shimmering white. Her hair falls from its pinning, spilling around her breasts in waves of white blonde. Her lips become red and full, her skin more porcelain.

The posts of her chair RAPIDLY GROW AND SPLINTER, forming a kind of gnarled throne. Beyond her, SNOW FALLS in SLOW MOTION against a blue dusk.

As her right hand lifts a SCEPTER made of white birch, she turns to LOOK DIRECTLY at Charles; a vision of beauty: THE WHITE QUEEN.

DUCKS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(distant)
Dodgson?

Lorina stands, eyes fixed on Charles.

Gathering her dress, she descends from the platform, gliding towards him down the nave. She is light, ethereal.

CLOSE ON CHARLES. Mesmerized.

DUCKS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Dodgson? Charles!

We are back in reality. The hall is filled with the scraping of chairs as everyone takes their seats.

CHARLES
Yes?

DUCKS
Are you hearing this nonsense?

ELDERLY PROCTOR
(muttering into his plate)
Amending the Greek to English
Lexicon...of all the half-cocked,
vulgar--

Charles looks back at the Dean's table. Lorina is silently eating. Nothing is out of place.

Ducks smirks at the Proctor.

PROCTOR
(pointing his knife,
agitated)
Laugh if you will, but there hasn't
been a liberal in the Deanery for
three hundred years. He'll undo
what his predecessors--

CHARLES
(interrupting)
Who is she?

PROCTOR
What?

CHARLES
His wife

PROCTOR
(annoyed at being
interrupted)
Oh, no title to speak of.

CHARLES
Well where's she from?

PROCTOR
Oh, a rather third rate provincial
family down in Lowestoft I think.
Still. Beautiful creature. Bit of
Spanish blood I'd wager.

DUCKS
Not bad for an old Headmaster, eh?

CHARLES
(still lost)
No...

Lorina makes brief eye contact with Charles. Just as quickly
she looks away.

DUCKS
(low to Charles)
Is everything alright?

CLOSE ON Charles, stealing a last glance at the Dean's table.

CHARLES
Yes. Fine.

INT. OXFORD- CHRIST CHURCH-CHARLES' CLASSROOM- NIGHT

An empty classroom. Charles stands at his BLACKBOARD, now
filled up with an endless string of mathematical forumlae.
Illuminated by candlelight, his hand glides across the board
with swiftness and precision. He is focused, confident, in
his element. He pauses.

CUT TO:

Charles collapses in his chair. Exhausted, he runs his
fingers through his hair and checks his WATCH: A quarter past
seven. Charles leans back and stares at the rows of empty
desks before him. The watch ticks softly...

TICK TOCK

TICK TOCK

TICK TOCK

Charles gets up and takes a walk between the aisles.

As his fingertips glide along the desktops, we hear the RISING SOUND of CHILDREN CHANTING:

CHILDREN'S VOICES (V.O.)

DoDo Dodgson! DoDo Dodgson!

DoDo Dodgson! DoDo Dodgson!

CUT TO:

INT. RUGBY SCHOOL- CLASSROOM- 1846- FLASHBACK

We are in a different classroom in the middle of a FIGHT. It's chaos as several boys, aged twelve to fourteen, some standing on desks, continue to chant:

CLASS

DoDo Dodgson! DoDo Dodgson!

INT. RUGBY SCHOOL- HALLWAY- 1846- DAY

We follow a black robed SCHOOL TEACHER running down a long vaulted hallway. At the classroom door, he fumbles with his keys before opening into:

INT. RUGBY SCHOOL- CLASSROOM- 1846- DAY

It's pandemonium.

CLASS

Dodo Dodgson! Dodo Dodgson!

TEACHER

Stop this! Immediately!

The TEACHER runs to the center of the room, pushing aside chanting boys as he goes.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Move aside! All of you!

CLASS

(faster, louder)

Dodo Dodgson! Dodo Dodgson!

The TEACHER pulls two boys apart

SECOND TEACHER
Stop this at once! STOP IT.

The room goes silent. The two boys glare at one another. The bigger of the two, WILLIAM, smirks as the smaller boy, YOUNG CHARLES, wipes blood from his nose and teeth. He SPITS a bit of BLOOD onto the floor.

Furious, the teacher grabs both boys by the ears, pulling them towards the door. The class re-ups the chant adding in CAWING bird-like sounds:

CLASS
DODO DODGSON! DODO DODGSON!

INT. RUGBY SCHOOL- HEADMASTER'S HALLWAY- DAY

Charles and William kneel facing the wall, their hands clasped overhead as if chained up in irons. Neither one looks at the other. After a moment:

WILLIAM
(turning to Charles,
whispering)
Oy. DoDo Bird. Why don't you fly
away, eh?

Charles ignores him.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
What's the matter? Something wrong
with your flappers?

A pause.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
So is it true? What they say about
your father?

A pause. Without looking up:

CHARLES
DoDo birds can't fly you half wit.

INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE- DAY

The room is huge, even by adult standards. Light streams through leaded glass above a handsome pine desk. HEADMASTER THOMAS ARNOLD sits writing in a LEDGER.

Charles enters cautiously.

ARNOLD
(not looking up)
Close the door.

Charles closes the door.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)
Come forward.

Charles walks to the desk and clasps his hands behind his back.

The headmaster still doesn't look up.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)
Charles Ludwidge Dodgson. Says here, your father's a man of the cloth. A High Churchman in fact. Is that correct?

Charles eyes a small GOLD KEY on a high GLASS SHELF next to the desk.

CHARLES
Yes headmaster.

ARNOLD
And do you think he'd be pleased to know his eldest son is an aggressive little agitator? A sinful boy flouting God's law? Hm?

CHARLES
No headmaster.

HEADMASTER
(closing the ledger,
looking up)
No. I expect he would not.

Arnold takes the key and walks over to a cupboard, unlocking it. He takes out a LONG WOODEN BOX. The floor creaks beneath him with each careful step.

He places the box on the desk and opens it, extracting a long thin RATTAN CANE.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)
Assume the position.

Charles places his trembling hands down on the desk.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)
Aloud.

WHACK. The headmaster canes Charles' hands. HARD.

CLOSE ON: Charles face, eyes shut tight in agony.

CHARLES
One.

WHACK

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Two.

The Headmaster eyes Charles. Comes down harder.

WHACK

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Th-Three.

CLOSE ON: Charles' trembling hands, white knuckles beginning to spot with blood.

CLOSE ON: Arnold's face, tight with focus.

WHACK

WHACK

WHACK

WHACK

EXT. RUGBY SCHOOL- COURTYARD- DAY

Charles sits alone on a stone bench. A few BLACK RAVENS strut and peck around his dangling feet.

In his lap he holds a SKETCH PAD and SATCHEL.

CLOSE ON: Charles' bandaged hand as it draws. A bit of blood seeps through the white gauze.

While far from perfect, his technique is surprisingly good. A charcoal nub sketches Headmaster Arnold as a BAITED BEAR in a medieval arena. Other figures surround him- all clever, whimsical caricatures of authority figures: TEACHERS WITH ELONGATED NECKS, FAT SOMERSAULTING NUNS, ETC.

FOOTFALLS echo across the courtyard as a NURSE approaches.

INT. TWO HORSE STAGECOACH- SUNSET

Charles rides in silence. He stares out at a red orb falling fast beneath the passing moorlands. Walls of crumbling stone divide long sheaths of foxglove laid low by centuries of a ceaseless wind. Over it all, a long shadow advances into night.

EXT. DODGSON PARISH GROUNDS- TWILIGHT

Charles walks down a pathway ending in a large VICTORIAN GREENHOUSE. He pulls the doors and enters into another world: a glass cathedral of Amazonia in artifice.

INT. ARCHDEACON DODGSON'S PALM HOUSE

The air is oppressively humid. Soaring white rafters carry the rapid tick of insects and the occasional sharp fluttering of sparrow's wings. Charles walks up a wide avenue of palms to where THE ARCHDEACON DODGSON (46) sits trimming a crop of WHITE TIGER LILLIES. He is surrounded by a cloud of tobacco smoke so that we BARELY SEE HIS FACE.

CLOSE ON: Powerful hands, one ornamented with a heavy GOLD SIGNET RING, carefully trim the white blooms.

When the Archdeacon speaks his tone is honeyed, languid and dangerous. He commands the room as if he were speaking from the pulpit.

ARCHDEACON DODGSON
(without looking at down)
Explain yourself.

CHARLES
They called me a name sir.

ARCHDEACON DODGSON
What sort of a name?

CHARLES
(softly)
A DoDo Bird.

ARCHDEACON DODGSON
What? Speak English.

CHARLES
(louder)
They called me a DoDo Bird, sir.

The Archdeacon nips off a bloom. Studies it.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
It's extinct, sir. Endemic to the
Mauritius islands. From the family
Raphinae. Like a pigeon or a dove,
or--

ARCHDEACON DODGSON
Enough.

Charles looks up as the FLUTTERING OF WINGS crosses overhead.

CLOSE ON: The Archdeacon nips another flower.

ARCHDEACON
Why would one call you such a thing
on your first day of lessons?

CHARLES
I don't know.

ARCHDEACON
You're lying.

CLIP. Another bud falls.

CHARLES
When the teacher asked my name I--

ARCHDEACON
Speak up!

CHARLES
(loudly)
It came out: "D-Do-Dodgson". Sir.

ARCHDEACON
You mean to say that you stammer.
Like a damned fool.

CHARLES
I'm not a fool!

ARCHDEACON DODGSON
(shouting)
Keep your temper!

Charles swallows his objection. The smoke around the
Archdeacon thickens.

ARCHDEACON DODGSON (CONT'D)

Your mother would have me pardon such-- unnatural behavior. She'd say that you're only a child. An innocent boy speaking in riddles. But I know that soon enough you'll be a man. A helpless and pitied man. Reliant on the charity of better men. Crying nonsense in the dark.

But Charles isn't listening. The humidity and the cigar smoke is making him dizzy and unfocused. His eyes wander to:

...An Amazon Water Lily floating across a black pool.

...Thick beads of water dripping from a white Hibiscus flower.

...CATERPILLARS and EARTHWORMS slithering through a crop of mushrooms.

...The Archdeacon's long black robe, forming a SLUG-LIKE TAIL draped over the garden wall.

...Fingerlike curls of TOBACCO SMOKE lingering around his SLOW MOVING LIPS:

ARCHDEACON
I said do you understand? Charles!

CUT TO:

INT. LAMB AND FLAG PUBLIC HOUSE- NIGHT- 1856

MALE VOICE
 I said can I help you with anything Professor?

Charles is back in reality. He's in the doorway of a cozy pub, filled with an equal measure of rowdy young men and the staunch "Old Guard" of Oxford, all seeking refuge from the snow.

BARTENDER
 Sir?

DRUNK STUDENT
 Oy! Shut the door, eh?!

Charles squeezes inside, dusting off snow.

CHARLES

Yes. I mean no. No, I'm meeting
someone, thank you.

Charles removes his hat and scans the room.

Across the room, The ARCHDEACON (56) sits alone by the fire.
Ten years later, he's still a cold and polished man.

Charles watches the precise way in which he strains his tea:
the slow, calculated movements of a life built upon order and
tradition.

Charles crosses the room and takes a seat across from his
father.

ARCHDEACON DODGSON

(not looking up)

You're late. You've lost the watch
I gave you.

Charles extracts his pocket watch, shakes it.

ARCHDEACON DODGSON (CONT'D)

Then you should have it repaired.

Charles puts it back in his vest. He'll let this one go.

ARCHDEACON

Tell me. How are your studies? I
trust you're prepared for your
upcoming examinations.

CHARLES

Exams aren't for six months.

ARCHDEACON

And your lectures? How do your
pupils find you?

CHARLES

Dull as ditchwater, I'm sure.

(leaning in)

Father, why exactly are you here?
Or should we debate the weather
next or perhaps the state of my
finances? Both are rather abysmal,
if you want to know the truth of
it.

The Archdeacon takes out his date book, puts on his reading
glasses.

ARCHDEACON

As you are very much aware, you are approaching the date of your diaconal ordination.

Charles leans back. He is very much aware.

ARCHDEACON (CONT'D)

If you are to retain your lectureship, residence at Christ Church and three hundred pounds per annum salary, then you must take the holy orders by the coming summer and, a year hence, priest's orders. Otherwise...

CHARLES

Otherwise I'll be out of a job.

ARCHDEACON

This new Dean. Liddell. He'll expect your full compliance on both counts. And beyond that, I need to be sure you understand exactly what's involved.

CHARLES

(pouring his tea)

Mmm, the end of my life as I know it. Yes, I think I've about got it.

ARCHDEACON

Don't be stupid. Entering the priesthood is no less than a rebirth. Passage out of the wilderness into a life of--

CHARLES

Restriction.

ARCHDEACON

Order and financial stability.

CHARLES

Starvation.

ARCHDEACON

Salvation.

CHARLES

A life without love--

ARCHDEACON
Living with Christ and--

CHARLES
 (loudly)
Dying alone!

A few of the older patrons look over. The Archdeacon closes the book.

ARCHDEACON
 I'll be back tomorrow to make preliminary arrangements with the diocese. In the meantime, I suggest you make good use of your time. Study. Pray. Don't undo all the good work I've done on your account.

CHARLES
 I won't sir.

The archdeacon stands, gripping Charles on the shoulder as he goes. Charles stays, losing himself in the dying fire.

EXT. OXFORD GROUNDS- RIVER THAMES- DAY

CHARLES and DUCKS walk along the sparkling water under a cloudless sky. Boats full of FIT YOUNG MEN: teams from various colleges: Magdalen, Balliol, Exeter, glide past, COXSWAINS shouting time as they go.

DUCKS
 But didn't he renounce his own studentship to marry and settle down?

CHARLES
 Yes, well, it's a bit more complicated than that. Once I'm ordained, it'll secure my post here and I'll be-- set for life I suppose. I won't be his problem anymore.

DUCKS
 Yes, but set for what sort of life?

CHARLES
 I don't know. That's what I'm afraid of.

Charles picks up a stick, throws it into the river.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

But, knowing my father I'm sure he
has it all worked out in one neat
little package.

DUCKS

Oh that reminds me.

Ducks rustles through his bag, extracts a SMALL PARCEL.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

Before I forget.

CHARLES

What's this?

DUCKS

Think of it as an early wedding
present.

CHARLES

You know, didn't we just go over
this? Yes, that's right, I'm not
getting married. Ever.

DUCKS

Well, you know, married to Christ
and all that.

CHARLES

You're thinking of a nun.

DUCKS

Am I?

They turn a corner into a long, cloistered passage. Charles
starts to unwrap the package.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

No don't open it now! Save it for
your birthday, you ponce.

Charles stops in his tracks.

CHARLES

Alright, I told you-- I don't want
anyone making a fuss over my
birthday this year. You remember
what happened last year.

DUCKS

No, I can't say that I do.

CHARLES

My point exactly. And I don't want you going about announcing it to everyone within earshot again.

DUCKS

I didn't announce it.

CHARLES

The Archangel Gabriel should have been taking notes. I mean it. Tomorrow can come and go like any other day.

DUCKS

Oh come on, it'll be fun! We'll get a few of the lads together, round of cards, have a few drinks...

CHARLES

The lads?

DUCKS

You know, your friends.

CHARLES

I don't have any friends.

DUCKS

Can't imagine why...

They walk under the stone archway of Tom Gate as the bell tower above marks the hour.

EXT. BODLEIAN LIBRARY- DAY

Charles and Ducks walk up the steps of the library, a domed rotunda in the Gothic style. Suddenly, from behind:

WOMAN'S VOICE

Excuse me, gentlemen!

They turn to see MARY PRICKET (30's, would be prettier if she weren't a little tired around the eyes) coming up the steps.

MARY

I'm terribly sorry, but could you tell me where I might be able to find the library? I'm afraid I seem to be a bit lost.

DUCKS

What Providence! We just so happen to be standing outside of a library at this very moment.

CHARLES

What he means to say is this is Bodleian Library. Is that the one you're looking for?

MARY

(rustling through her bag)
That'll do fine. Just needing to pick up some poetry for the girls'...

Mary looks up at Charles. She's struck momentarily by his soft eyes, wavy hair.

MARY (CONT'D)

...the girls' lessons.
(extending her hand)
Forgive me. I'm governess to the Liddell girls. Mary Prickett.

CHARLES

(shaking)
Professor Dodgson. And this is Mr. Robinson Duckworth.

DUCKS

Just Ducks. No professor.

Mary's eyes linger on Charles.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

(uncomfortable)
Well, shall we?

The three of them enter into:

INT. BODLEIAN LIBRARY- DAY

The monastic quiet of one of the world's oldest research libraries. A domed rotunda filled with rows of leather bound volumes shelved beneath round portals of stained glass. Their footfalls echo on polished marble.

CHARLES

Poetry, poetry-- this way I believe.

DUCKS

(to Mary)

So. How is our new Dean and Mrs. Liddell settling into life up at the Deanery so far?

MARY

Oh rather well, I think. The house is first rate compared to Westminster. Of course Mrs. Liddell insists it be immediately refashioned top to bottom all the same.

Ducks looks Mary up and down as they walk, sizing her up.

CHARLES

Here we are. Poetry.

They arrive at the Poetry Section. Charles peruses the shelf.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Anyone in particular?

MARY

Well. I was thinking I'd begin with Ovid or Virgil, you know, the Greeks to start them off. Perhaps Keats and Blake next. Then Shelley and Tennyson if they've got any recent editions in from London. That's probably enough for now I'd say.

Charles pulls down the books, handing them to Mary.

CHARLES

And I'd say these poor girls have got their work cut out for them.

MARY

Well, that last set is for me.

Charles looks at Mary, impressed with her academic prowess.

DUCKS

Say, um- Miss Prickett was it?

MARY

If you like. The girls call me Pricks.

DUCKS

Alright then, Pricks. If you're interested, Charles here is having a little

(mock whispering)

Birthday party down at the Bird and Baby on Saturday next. On St. Giles Cross. Do you know it?

Charles looks at Ducks: "What are you doing?"

MARY

The Eagle and Child? I think so, yes.

DUCKS

We'd be delighted to have you if you're free. Eight o' clock. And bring a friend. Or two. You know, scullery maids, kitchen girls, et cetera--

MARY

I've only just arrived. I'm afraid I haven't got any friends.

DUCKS

Well all the more reason for you to come! Right Charles?

CHARLES

(forced)

Oh yes. Absolutely.

MARY

Well. In that case. I suppose I could steal away for an hour or so.

(suspicious)

Thank you.

DUCKS

Splendid! We'll see you later, then. It was lovely meeting you Miss Prickett.

CHARLES

(shaking her hand)

Likewise. A good day to you Miss.

Mary holds Charles's gaze a bit too long.

MARY

And to you.

Charles and Ducks walk off, Charles whispering to Ducks as they go.

CHARLES
Are you actually incapable of
listening to anything I say?

DUCKS
Come off it, are you blind? She
fancies you, it's bloody obvious!
Besides we couldn't very well have
it be all stags could we? It'd ruin
my reputation.

Mary watches Charles go, smiling to herself. When they're out of sight she takes another POETRY BOOK off the shelf. She looks around and slips it covertly into her pocket.

EXT. OXFORD- CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL- DAY

Charles crosses the lawn, carrying a BUNDLE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT under each arm.

In swift, confident motions, Charles sets up his CAMERA on the lawn. Attempting to look professional to whomever might be watching, he holds his LIGHT METER aloft, noting the measurements in a SMALL NOTEBOOK.

Satisfied, he disappears under the hood.

CHARLES' POV (through viewfinder): The UPSIDE DOWN CATHEDRAL goes IN AND OUT OF FOCUS.

Suddenly, something PASSES IN FRONT of the lens, blocking his view.

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)
What are you doing under there?

Charles throws off the tarp. The little blonde girl from the Dean's table, ALICE LIDDELL, is standing in front of the lens with arms crossed.

CHARLES
I'm making a photograph.

ALICE
What's a photo-graph?

CHARLES
It's uh.. Well, here.

He lifts her up to look into the lens.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
The daylight goes into this box
here, and it's reflected off a
little mirror, right about...here.
The mirror copies the cathedral
onto a plate of glass and once
that's done, the cathedral is
trapped inside.

ALICE
Trapped? For how long?

Charles sets Alice down.

CHARLES
Well... forever.

ALICE
That's impossible.

CHARLES
I assure you Miss--

ALICE
(extending her hand)
Liddell. Alice Pleasance Liddell.

CHARLES
Very pleased to make your
acquaintance, Miss Liddell. Charles
Lutwidge Dodgson

They shake, curtly.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
And I assure you it's entirely
possible. In fact, I swear it. On
my life.

ALICE
(in awe)
It's magic then.

CHARLES
A sort of magic. Yes, why not?

ALICE
(excited)
Do you know any other magic?

CHARLES
I know all sorts of magic.

ALICE

Show me!

CHARLES

Oh, I'm afraid I can't do that.
It's top-secret fairy magic. For
royal eyes only.

ALICE

But you must show me! My father's
the Dean of Oxford. That's like a
King.

CHARLES

Goodness gracious, I had no idea!
Then you must be a princess.

ALICE

Yes!

Charles makes a grand bowing gesture.

CHARLES

Your majesty, I must apologize for
my most heinous transgression.
Please spare me whatever horrible
punishment I so justly deserve.

Alice giggles. Charles looks up from the ground.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Well, go on then...

ALICE

Go on with what?

CHARLES

(whispering)

My punishment.

ALICE

Oh! Erm...Let's see..

Alice raises her hands, makes a grand sweeping gesture.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Off with his head!

LORINA (O.S.)

Alice!

Lorina comes bounding through the gate.

LORINA (CONT'D)
Alice! My Goodness--

Lorina sweeps Alice up in her arms.

LORINA (CONT'D)
Where on earth have you been? Poor
Pricks is in hysterics.

LORINA (CONT'D)
(to Charles)
I'm so sorry, sir.

ALICE
Mother, you spoilt it! He was about
to show me some magic.
(to Charles)
Go on, sir! Please!

LORINA
I'm terribly sorry if she bothered
your-- well whatever fascinating
experiment you seem to be
conducting.

CHARLES
Not a bother at all. Alice and I
were just about to make a
photograph, isn't that right?

Alice nods excitedly.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(extending his hand,
removing his glove)
Uh, forgive me. Charles Lutwidge
Dodgson.

LORINA
Lorina Hannah Liddell. I'm sure you
know my husband.

CHARLES
Of course.

An awkward pause. Charles can only smile. This woman makes
him incredibly nervous.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Erm- so how is your family enjoying
our little corner of the world?

LORINA

Very much, thank you. It's quite
lovely here.

Lorina sets Alice down, fusses with her dress.

LORINA (CONT'D)

Dodgson...Mathematics. Algebra and
Euclidian Geometry. From Croft,
yes?

CHARLES

I'm afraid you have me at a loss,
Mrs. Liddell.

LORINA

How's that?

CHARLES

It's just that you seem to know
quite a lot about me and yet I know
next to nothing about you.

LORINA

(embarrassed)

Forgive me. I have a habit of
familiarizing myself with the
faculty.

CHARLES

How very diplomatic. In that case I
should like to return the favor and
become familiar with you as well.

A moment of electricity between them.

ALICE

(tugging on Lorina's
sleeve)

Mummy, may I please help Mr.
Dodgson with his photo-graph now?

LORINA

Mind your manners, Alice. I think
we've bothered Mr. Dodgson quite
enough. Besides, we haven't the
time.

Lorina marks the disappointment on Alice's face. And beyond
that, there's something about this man that causes her to
blurt out quite without thinking...

LORINA (CONT'D)

Though, perhaps---Mr. Dodgson would like to come round for dinner tonight? I'm sure your sisters would enjoy having their own lessons in, uh--

CHARLES

Photography. But I--

Charles look at Alice. Then to Lorina, stunning in the waning light. He loathes dinner parties. But...

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I should be delighted.

LORINA

Splendid. Shall we say eight o' clock?

CHARLES

Looking forward. Until then, Mrs.

Liddell.

(to Alice)

Goodbye, Your Majesty.

Alice courtesies and hops alongside Lorina as Charles watches them go.

ALICE

(distant)

He knows magic, mummy, the real sort!

LORINA

Does he?

EXT. DEANERY HOUSE- EVENING

Charles walks through a little garden gate leading up to a grand estate. He stands at the door, anxiously fussing with his suit. He checks his pocket watch. Waits. After a moment, he knocks. From inside, we hear the barking and scuffing of LARGE DOGS.

INT. DEANERY HOUSE- EVENING

Mary hurries down the foyer. She stops to check herself in the mirror. Smooths out her dress. Takes a deep breath.

EXT. DEANERY HOUSE- EVENING

MARY
Mr. Dodgson.

CHARLES
At your service. Lovely to see you
again Pricks.

Charles kisses Mary's hand and cautiously makes his way down a long foyer which is HEAVILY UNDER CONSTRUCTION. Two massive BLOODHOUNDS circle and sniff at his feet. WORKERS paint the ceiling on high ladders. Tarps cover expensive French furniture and imported art. A SPIRAL STAIRCASE in the French style is under construction-- the pet project of Lorina's to put her stamp on the medieval residence.

LORINA
Mr. Dodgson! Right on time!

Charles trips over a roll of carpet.

LORINA (CONT'D)
Careful, mind your step! Scylla!
Charybdis! Come!

Lorina, dressed to the nines, glides through the chaos. The dogs trot back to her side.

LORINA (CONT'D)
Please, you'll have to forgive this
horrid mess, we've got them working
'round the clock I'm afraid.
(turning back)
Well, come in, come in!

Charles looks up as if something might fall on him at any moment and proceeds with caution.

INT. DEANERY HOUSE- DINING ROOM- EVENING

Close on: Sherry is poured from a decanter into a crystal glass.

HENRY (O.S.)
You'll have to excuse this racket.
My wife would have you believe
English staircases unfit to courier
fashionable company from top to
bottom.

A hand gestures for the pour to stop. Two servants, BETTY (20's) and AGNES (40's) move around the table clockwise.

A BOWL of mud colored soup with questionable square chunks is placed in front of Charles.

BETTY
(whispering)
Mock turtle soup, sir.

HENRY LIDDELL tucks into his dinner, aggressively sawing at a cut of meat.

LORINA
Please, Henry. The old place just needed a bit of life is all. I find pre-Jacobean architecture frightfully serious and, well, predictable. Don't you agree Mr. Dodgson?

Charles' attention is focused on the large slobbering dog baying for scraps in his lap. Charles tosses it a bit of meat. It scampers off.

CHARLES
Hm? Oh, yes. Certainly.

Lorina gives Henry a satisfied look.

HENRY
I should very much like my staircases to be predictable, my dear.
(taking a drink, looking up at Lorina)
I should like anything that holds my house aloft to be "predictable".

Lorina glares. Henry goes back to sawing at his plate.

An awkward pause. Agnes fills Charles' wine glass.

CHARLES
Well. I for one think that making room for a bit of-- innovation-- is sometimes called for in, well, certain circumstances. Especially now days what with the world changing so very quickly. I think sometimes we find that rather difficult to remember holed up with our heads in books and cloistered away here such as we are.
(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

We forget that every day there are any number of exciting new theories and extraordinary new devices to be kept up with.

Lorina smiles at Charles, grateful to have someone on her side.

LORINA

Well said Mr. Dodgson.

Charles smiles back.

HENRY

(not looking up)

Here's a theory for you Professor: if this house was good enough for fifty two women since the days of Henry the Eighth it is certainly good enough for my wife.

Alice and her sisters look at one another. Suddenly:

The SOUND of a SAW and SOMETHING CRASHING UPSTAIRS. A little rain of PLASTER falls onto Charles' dinner plate. He looks up.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Now. Tell me, Mr. Dodgson: you'll be taking your Deacon's orders before long am I correct?

CHARLES

(eyeing the falling debris on his plate)

Yes, that's right sir.

HENRY

Then onto the priesthood is it? Your father must be very pleased. I've read his sermons, of course. Remarkably intelligent, articulate man.

Charles attempts to push the plaster off his venison with a fork.

CHARLES

He is that, sir.

HENRY

Quite a legacy to follow, wouldn't you say?

CHARLES
Uh- Indeed. It is. Sir.

A beat.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I'm um- I'm a great admirer of your
work as well. I sent away for your
"Greek to English Lexicon" when I
was a boy at Rugby. Cost me a whole
summer's wages.

Henry continues eating, no comment.

Another CRASH upstairs followed by a bigger rain of plaster,
this time down onto INA's plate. Lorina motions for Charles
to get up. Everyone follows suit and moves one place over.
They sit back down, switch plates and resume eating as if
this is all quite routine.

ALICE
Papa, Mr. Dodgson showed me how to
make a photo-graph today!

LORINA
Yes, it seems our young Mr.
Dodgson's somewhat of a savant with
modern mechanicals.

HENRY
You've a Daguerreotype?

ALICE
Father, it's called a photo-graph!

HENRY
(hiding excitement)
May I see it?

CHARLES
It's a--slightly different process.
But, yes certainly, I'll bring it
by tomorrow. If it's alright with
Mrs. Liddell, of course.

ALICE, EDITH AND INA
(in chorus)
Yes, mama, please!

A shower of plaster falls near Henry's plate. Everyone gets
up and moves one place down. Sits, switches and resumes.

LORINA

It's settled then. We'll set it up over at the Guest House and make a day of it. That'll be a good bit of fun, won't it girls?

Alice and her sisters squirm with excitement.

Lorina smiles, her eyes lingering on Charles. He smiles back, unsure what to make of this family.

INT. DEANERY KITCHEN- EVENING

Agnes backs in with a tray of dishes, dropping them off beside a red faced COOK scrubbing furiously at the wash basin. Mary sits at the table, eating her dinner. Exhausted, Agnes plops down across from her. They eat in silence for a moment.

AGNES

He's a pretty one in't he?

MARY

The professor? I suppose so.

AGNES

I wouldn't mind an hour or so of some private instruction. Brush up on me figures.

Agnes saws off a piece of meat, looks up at Mary.

AGNES (CONT'D)

You know?

She takes the bite, smiles. Mary smiles too, throwing them both into a fit of giggles.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY

...A white sheet is shook out with a snap.

...An iron stand clicks together in 3 swift motions.

...A lens is adjusted, wiped, adjusted again.

The Deanery Garden has been converted into a makeshift studio. Charles fusses with his equipment as Edith and Ina run about the yard.

INT. ALICE'S BEDROOM- DEANERY- DAY

Mary pulls Alice's dress over her outstretched arms. It's a ragged beggar costume, rather hastily hand sewn. Alice squirms impatiently.

MARY
Hold still!

ALICE
Oh please hurry up Pricks! I'm missing it!

MARY
You know you must be the first little girl in history that couldn't wait to hurry up and sit still all afternoon. There, all finished.

Alice goes to inspect herself in a FULL LENGTH MIRROR.

ALICE
How do I look?

MARY
(rummaging through the costume pile)
Common. And ridiculous. Now don't forget your--

She looks up to find Alice gone.

MARY (CONT'D)
--shoes.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY

CAMERA'S POV: An UPSIDE DOWN ALICE dressed as the shoe-less beggar child. Her face quivers with the effort of feigning a calm detachment well beyond her years.

CHARLES
Forty three, Forty four and forty--five! Bravo, Alice, well done!

Alice hops off the wall. She strains to see inside the viewfinder, but isn't quite tall enough.

ALICE
Let me see! Let me see!

CHARLES

Well, go on then. Take a look. It's right in here.

ALICE

But I'm too small! Please lift me up!

CHARLES

Well that is a bother isn't it? If only you could make yourself a little taller.

ALICE

How am I to do that?

CHARLES

(looking around)

Oh, I'm sure I saw a potion around here someplace for the growing up of little girls. Well, in the meantime--

Alice giggles as Charles lifts her up to see inside the camera.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Now. Who's next!

Edith and Ina jump up and down, vying for their new friends' attention.

A few yards back, Lorina watches from the gate; the easy way this strange young man has with her girls. We see the hint of a smile before she disappears inside. Charles looks back to find her gone.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- EVENING- LATER

A chorus of CRICKETS fills the garden. The camera is abandoned. Charles and the girls play a game. Alice runs barefoot about the yard.

MARY

Girls! Time for supper, come on!

Mary smiles at Charles before noticing Alice running barefoot through the mud. Horrified, she runs over, grabs her by the arm.

MARY (CONT'D)

Look at you! My God, you look like a grubby little street urchin.

ALICE

But I am! I'm a beggar maid. I live
in the West End, under a little
treacle shop. My mother's a
seamstress and my father's--

MARY

Your father's the dean of Oxford
and you're late for supper. Come
along, let's get you out of those
rags.

Mary bustles towards the house. Alice doesn't follow.

MARY (CONT'D)

Well come along then! Don't keep
your father waiting!

Alice runs back, gives Charles a kiss.

ALICE

Thank you for my photograph.

CHARLES

Alice!

Alice runs back.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Don't listen to Pricks. She's just
cross because she doesn't have the
power to be anything she wishes.
But you do. And you've got it in
spades. If you fancy yourself under
a treacle shop, you'll not let
anyone tell you otherwise. You'll
remember that, alright?

Alice smiles and runs into the house.

Charles starts to pack up his equipment. Lorina comes out the
back, carrying a cup of steaming tea with a slice of lemon
which she hands to Charles.

LORINA

You know, I don't think I've ever
seen Alice sit quite that still for
anyone. I was afraid you had her
under some kind of spell.

CHARLES

Yes, well I have that effect on
people.

(taking the tea)

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You should come by my lectures
sometime.

Lorina laughs, dropping her guard a little. She sits down next to him.

LORINA
You have quite a way with them, you know. It's wonderful. To see them having a little fun for a change.

CHARLES
They're extraordinarily bright. Mr. Liddell must be very proud.

Lorina just sips her tea. After a moment:

LORINA
One doesn't collect many playmates when the school yard is one stodgy university after the other. Moving about every summer like a little tribe of gypsies. At least today they got to dress the part. I'm afraid it can get rather lonely. For them.

Charles stops packing, sensing her brief vulnerability.

CHARLES
Tell me, Mrs. Liddell. Do you play croquet?

EXT. TOM QUAD LAWN- MORNING

A mallet hits a ball straight across a smooth lawn. Charles holds the follow through. Beside him, Alice holds her mallet awkwardly, unsure how to play the game.

CHARLES
Now, look here: hold it like so. Put your thumb here-- there you've got it. Now swing.

Alice swings and misses.

ALICE
I can't do it.

CHARLES
Nonsense. You've just got to hold it straight up. Like it's a--

Charles looks over to where a few WATER FOUL are feeding in a nearby pond.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Like it's a stork. Straight up like
a Marabou stork. Or a--

ALICE
A flamingo!

CHARLES
A flamingo?

ALICE
I saw a picture of one in Boldeian.
They live all the way in the
Caribbean and they eat shrimps for
breakfast, lunch and supper. That's
why they're so pink. And they stand
on one leg all day long like this.

Alice attempts to balance on one leg, nearly falling over.

ALICE (CONT'D)
It's quite beyond me how they
manage to keep from falling over.
But either way, they stand
perfectly straight up-- I think
they'd make a wonderfully excellent
mallet!

CHARLES
Very well. Flamingo it is. So
you've got to hold your flamingo
straight as an arrow. Don't let it
flap about. And you've got to be
quick and accurate because the ball
shan't stay still for very long.

ALICE
Why not?

Charles bends down to her level, presenting the ball.

CHARLES
Because it is in fact not an
ordinary ball at all, but a very
nervous, tucked up little door-
mouse.

ALICE
No it isn't, it's a hedgehog!

CHARLES
Hedgehog. Hm. Not bad.

Charles positions Alice in front of the tee.

CLOSE ON: Her face steely with concentration. Suddenly...

FLAP FLAP FLAP.

A burst of pink feathers as Alice struggles to control her mallet that's turned in a LIVE FLAMINGO. Laughing, she shakes out the disgruntled bird and takes a SWING at a SPINY LITTLE BALL, sending it flying. The curled up hedgehog soars over the green and is CAUGHT by Lorina. She opens her fist, revealing an ORDINARY STRIPED CROQUET BALL.

ALICE
Mummy! Put my hedgehog down at once! You'll frighten him to death.

Confused, Lorina sets the ball down. Alice grabs it up and runs off, stroking it like a pet.

LORINA
We're having fun I see. How's she doing?

CHARLES
Coming right along. She'll be a regular little expert by teatime.

Two STUDENTS walk past. One waves in Charles' direction, shouting:

STUDENT #1
Happy birthday professor!

STUDENT #2
Happy birthday, sir!

Charles pretends not to notice and lines up his next shot. Lorina lights up.

LORINA
Why Mr. Dodgson! Is today your birthday?!

CHARLES
(quickly)
No.

As Charles is about to swing, Ducks comes up from behind him, clapping him on the back.

DUCKS

Ah! There you are! Been looking for
you all over.

(noticing Lorina)

Oh, excuse me. Good afternoon Mrs.
Liddell.

LORINA

Mr. Duckworth.

DUCKS

(whispering to Charles)

Just wanted to remind you to bring
that...

(whispers in Charles' ear)

...for tonight. Actually, come to
that, better bring two bottles. And
I've invited the Rutledge sisters,
but not Rutledge so don't say any--

Lorina furrows her brow. Ducks stops himself.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

We'll catch up about it later.

Lovely to see you Mrs. Liddell.

Ducks braces Charles and walks off.

LORINA

So it is your birthday then.

CHARLES

No, it isn't.

A ELDERLY GROUNDSKEEPER walks past, pushing a wheelbarrow.

GROUNDSKEEPER

A happy birthday to you professor!
See you tonight!

Lorina looks back at Charles.

CHARLES

Well--it is and it isn't.

Lorina raises an eyebrow.

LORINA

It is... and it isn't?

CHARLES

What I mean to say is that it's
sort of my un-birthday.

LORINA
Your un-birthday.

CHARLES
Yes.

LORINA
So you mean like-- every other day?

CHARLES
Well, no, not exactly--

Alice comes running up and tugs on Lorina's dress. Charles rolls his eyes at his himself, trying to pull it together.

ALICE
Mummy! Did you see! I got my hedgehog all the way there, twelve yards I'd wager! Look!

LORINA
Alice, Mr. Dodgson and I are speaking, don't be rude.

Alice stomps off.

LORINA (CONT'D)
You were saying?

Charles just looks at her and smiles, completely tongue-tied.

EXT. HIGH STREET- NIGHT

Charles and Ducks ride together in the back of a coach.

DUCKS
Your un-birthday? What the hell does that even mean?

CHARLES
I don't know alright! She's so damned beautiful I couldn't think!

DUCKS
So you invited her? The Dean's wife? To the pub? Alone? Are you mad?!

They coach stops outside THE EAGLE AND CHILD PUBLIC HOUSE. They step out. Ducks tosses the cabbie a tip.

CHARLES

Not to worry, she declined ever so politely. Seems the Dean's away in London at the moment and it "wouldn't be proper".

They stop outside the pub door. Ducks gives him a look.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Oh, come on, let's get this over with.

Charles follows Ducks down the steps and enters into:

INT. EAGLE AND CHILD PUBLIC HOUSE- ST. GILES, OXFORD- NIGHT

A noisy pub complete with foggy stained glass, low timber rafters and a roaring stone hearth. A LARGE GROUP of men turns to raise their pints and CHEER. A few clap Charles on the back, putting a pint in his hand and shoving him up to the bar. A little BAND in the corner strikes up an Irish drinking song.

CHARLES

(shouting)

One or two of the lads, eh?

INT. MARY PRICKET'S BEDROOM- DEANERY- NIGHT

A bedside clock ticks softly.

Mary sits at a vanity mirror in a quiet room. She stares expressionless at her own reflection. She pinches her checks to illicit a little color. She pins her thinning ash blonde hair up. Thinks better of it, lets it down again. Frowns. She reaches into a drawer, pulls out the BOOK OF POETRY she pocketed earlier.

Mary wraps the BOOK in brown paper, tieing it up with a bit of string.

INT. EAGLE AND CHILD PUB- NIGHT- LATER

The party is in full swing. We follow a TAP BOY carrying A TANKARD up from the cellar and pushing his way through the thick crowd. He goes behind the bar, passing Charles and his friends who are all three sheets to the wind.

EXT. EAGLE AND CHILD PUB- NIGHT

Mary, hair pinned up and dressed in the finest clothes she could borrow, steps down from a coach and hesitates outside the door. Steeling herself, she enters into:

INT. EAGLE AND CHILD PUB- NIGHT

Charles, Ducks and a small group laugh hysterically at the bar. Hardly anyone notices as Mary makes her way through the crowd. She comes up behind them.

MARY

Happy birthday, professor.

CHARLES

(turning)

Ah! Mary! My God, what a-- here,
have a drink! It's on the house,
right Avery?

THE BARTENDER, AVERY, gives Charles a look. Charles sits/falls down next to Mary, brushing the hair out of his face.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Christ. Mary. So good of you to
come.

He reaches to pour her a drink from a nearby pitcher.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Now tell me, how ever did you
manage to escape our little eaglets
tonight?

MARY

Oh, not to worry, sir. They're safe
in the nest. They've all been fast
asleep since supper. Thanks to you.

CHARLES

Excellent! Anything I can do to
make your job a little easier I
will do, Mary, you know that.

Charles takes a drink.

MARY

(extracting the package)
Oh! I almost forgot. This is for
you.

CHARLES

Mary!

(kissing her cheek)

Well this was wholly unnecessary.
But. I will open it all the same.

He unwraps it.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Byron! Brilliant! I'm glad you're
educating me, I'm afraid I'm rather
helpless when it comes to Ro...

(eyeing a passing girl)

Romantic, um

(looking back)

the Romantics.

MARY

You like it then?

CHARLES

Love it.

A beat.

DUCKS

Oy! Charles!

Charles turns. Ducks is making his way across the room.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

(indicating THE RUTLEDGE
SISTERS in the corner)

Huxley and I are trying to add two
to three over here and we um --

Ducks eyes Mary. She pretends not to be listening.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

Need an expert in the mathematical
arts.

He claps Charles on the back and returns to the girls.

CHARLES

What an idiot. Unbelievable.

MARY

He's quite the charmer isn't he?
What's his concentration?

CHARLES

Bachelor of Arts in Fox Hunting.

Mary smiles, not sure if he's joking.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(refilling his drink)
With honours in gin drinking and
card playing I think. It's a four
year program, very exclusive.

Mary laughs.

MARY
I, um-- I heard you're coming by
again tomorrow? Taking the girls
over to Godstow for a picnic is it?
Down the river?

CHARLES
Indeed I am. Bright and early!

MARY
You know, they don't often get the
privilege of such a little
adventure. Not if Mr. Liddell has
anything to say.

Charles' demeanor darkens a bit.

CHARLES
Well. That's certainly a shame
isn't it?

Charles takes another drink then suddenly struggles to focus
on Mary intensely.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Have you done something different
with your hair?

HUXLEY
Dodgson! You coming or not!

CHARLES
Christ, I'm terribly sorry. Excuse
me darling.

Charles heads over to his friends, leaving Mary alone at the
bar. She self consciously takes a sip of her pint.

EXT. EAGLE AND CHILD PUB- NIGHT- FOUR HOURS LATER

Charles is being helped along by Ducks and Huxley.

CHARLES

I'm going to walk straight up to my father's room right now and tell the old bastard that I'm a grown man, and that my decisions are between me and God, and Christ, and the Blessed Virgin--

DUCKS

Let's save it for the morning, shall we?

CHARLES

God, Ducks, she's so beautiful.

DUCKS

(lighting a cigarette)

The Virgin Mother?

CHARLES

Lorina!

Ducks stops. He spins Charles to face him.

DUCKS

Alright, now listen. I know what you're thinking. And you'd do best to forget it. No, listen to me! I've been watching Liddell. And I've heard things. And I'm asking you to be careful. He's a dangerous man. Do you understand me?

CHARLES

I'm not afraid of him.

They eye each other for a moment. Ducks takes a drag on his cigarette.

DUCKS

If he's the man I think he is. You should be.

Ducks walks ahead. Charles salutes him and follows.

From the shadows, Mary watches them go.

INT. DEANERY HOUSE- MORNING

A knock on the door. Lorina walks down the long foyer, pinning her earrings as she goes. She opens the door to find a disheveled Charles holding a picnic basket.

LORINA

And how did your un-birthday leave
you?

CHARLES

Quite under-the-weather, I'm
afraid. Shall we?

EXT. FOLEY BRIDGE- DAY

A perfect, golden afternoon. Charles, Lorina and the girls walk in single file over a narrow bridge which runs over a fast moving river. Charles has exchanged his black clergyman's attire in favor of white flannel trousers. Lorina and the girls are in their Sunday best.

EXT. ISIS RIVER BANK- DAY

Spread out on a picnic blanket, Charles shows the girls how to make little PAPER BOATS.

CUT TO:

Charles shoves off and hops into a little rowboat with Ina, Edith and Alice. Lorina stays on the bank, waving as they float off down the river.

INT. ROWBOAT- DAY

Charles rows while nursing a pounding headache in the bright afternoon light. Edith makes a daisy chain while Ina, wearing reading glasses, is engrossed in a book.

Alice plops her paper boat into the calm water and pushes it along with a stick. Chin in hands, she watches it lazily float off.

Bored, she climbs over to peer into her sister's book and wrinkles her nose.

ALICE

Mr. Dodgson?

CHARLES

Hm?

ALICE

Tell us a story.

CHARLES
(rubbing his temples)
What sort of a story?

ALICE
A good story.

Charles looks around. The paper boat floats past a group of passing water foul nipping at algae and water bugs. The air is hot and still.

CHARLES
Alright. Let's see. Once upon a time. There was a little girl named Alice.

Alice smiles, liking this already.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
And. And she was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the river bank and of having nothing to do. Once or twice she peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations.

Ina looks up from her book.

ALICE
Well what is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?

CHARLES
Precisely. So she was considering in her own mind (as well she could for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid) whether the pleasure of making a daisy chain was worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daises when something ran very close by her.

Charles stops rowing. He looks over to the bank to where Lorina sits reading, wearing a WHITE DRESS. She looks up at Charles, shielding her eyes from the sun.

EDITH
Well. What was it?

CHARLES

...A rabbit. A snow white rabbit with pink eyes. And there was nothing very remarkable in that, nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the rabbit say to itself "dear, oh dear! I shall be too late!"

INA

But rabbits can't be late if they've nowhere to go.

ALICE

And they certainly can't speak!

CHARLES

But this one could. And when Alice thought it over afterward, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural. But when the rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket, looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet. Burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge. In another moment, down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

Edith and Alice look at each other, smiling. Ina takes off her glasses and puts her book down.

FADE TO:

INT. WONDERLAND- RABBIT HOLE- DAY- FANTASY

Alice falls slowly through a dark well. The sides of the well are filled up with cupboards and pictures hung on pegs.

CHARLES (V.O.)

"I wonder if I shall fall right through the earth! How funny it'll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downwards!

(MORE)

CHARLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But I shall have to ask them what
the name of the country is."

INT. ROWBOAT- DAY

Charles continues to row while telling the story.

CHARLES
'Please ma'am is this New Zealand
or Australia?' And she tried to
curtsey as she spoke. Fancy
curtseying as you're falling
through the air!
(to Alice)
Do you think you could manage it?

Alice laughs, shaking her head.

INT. WONDERLAND- PASSAGEWAY- FANTASY

A WHITE RABBIT in a red waistcoat runs down a long passage.

CHARLES (V.O.)
There was not a moment to be lost.
Away went Alice like the wind, and
was just in time to hear the rabbit
say, as it turned the corner:

INT. ROWBOAT- DAY

CHARLES
(mimicking the rabbit)
Oh my ears and whiskers how late
it's getting!

The girls giggle. The boat glides past us down the river, its
bow gently parting the sunlit waters as we cut to:

EXT. GODSTOW RIVERBANK- EVENING

Charles continues the story on a picnic blanket under the
shade of a haycock. The blanket is strewn with poached
chicken, half eaten cakes and ginger beer. As he talks, the
golden evening light moves slowly over the girls, each
hanging on his every word.

CHARLES

Alice opened the door and found
that it lead to a small passage,
not much larger than a rat-hole...

FADE TO:

INT. WONDERLAND- PASSAGE- FANTASY

Alice pulls a heavy velvet curtain aside, revealing an ornately carved little red door. She kneels down to its level, feeling its surface with her hand.

CHARLES (V.O.)

...She knelt down and looked into
the loveliest garden you ever saw.

Alice pushes the door open, revealing a BEAUTIFUL LUSH GARDEN.

CHARLES

How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander among those beds of bright flowers and cool fountains, but she could not even get her head through the doorway...

EXT. GODSTOW RIVERBANK- EVENING

Charles continues to talk as the girls listen, spellbound.

FADE TO:

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- NIGHT

Alice, Edith, and Ina nestle in to Charles' side on a plush red sofa by a roaring fire. As his soft voice continues the story he gracefully sketches an image of THE WHITE RABBIT.

CLOSE ON: Alice, Edith and Ina peering over to look at the drawing.

CLOSE ON: Charles flips through the pages of his SKETCHBOOK revealing other drawings: Alice reaching up on tip toes towards a high glass table and a golden key, Alice with an elongated neck. The girls point, looking up at Charles, asking questions.

Lorina sits across, knitting. She smiles, not able to take her eyes off Charles. Charles looks up, meeting her gaze and smiling back.

INT. ROWBOAT- THE NEXT DAY

Charles, and the Girls row along again, this time with Lorina bringing up the aft. We move across the girls' faces as they react to the twists and turns of the story. Lorina listens, no less captivated than her girls.

CHARLES

(rowing)

'You ought to be ashamed of
yourself' said Alice to herself.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(aside to the girls)

For you see, she often found that
she gave herself very good advice,
though she very seldom followed
it...

We move down past Charles, past the boat, past an oar cutting the glassy surface of the water. We continue moving under the water as it becomes...

INT- WONDERLAND- CHAMBER- FANTASY

...Rapids running through a narrow passage. We fly over the stream till we come to Alice, sitting head tucked into knees next to the little door. She is crying GIANT TEARS.

CHARLES (V.O.)

But she went on all the same,
shedding gallons of tears, until
there a large pool all around her,
four inches deep and reaching
halfway down the hall...

As the water rises, the DRIP, PATTER, SPLASH of gigantic tears escalates at a torrential rate. The floodwaters rush through the chamber, rising, rising. A DORMOUSE swims by, thrashing in the waves. Alice's eyes widen in concern.

Suddenly, a CRACK OF THUNDER brings us:

EXT. RIVER -DAY

We are back in the boat. A SUDDEN DOWNPOUR rocks the little vessel as a thousand raindrops break the calm surface of the river. The girls SCREAM in delight. Lorina laughs in spite of herself. Charles grabs his satchel, holding it over the girls' heads with one arm, struggling to row to shore with the other.

EXT. RIVERBANK- DAY

Charles ties up the boat, straining to see past pounding sheaths of rain.

Together, they run back towards the college, Charles shielding the girls with his jacket as they go.

EXT. DEANERY GATE- EVENING

The rain has stopped. Soaking wet, Charles, Lorina, and the girls open the garden gate. Charles and Lorina laugh, sharing a joke as they wring out their jackets, books, etc.

EDITH

Mr. Dodgson can come inside, can't he? To finish some more of the story?

LORINA

I think Mr. Dodgson's story shall have to wait until next time.

INA

But it is next time!

ALICE

Please, just till bedtime!

LORINA (CONT'D)

Another day. We've had quite enough excitement for this one anyway.

The girls march grumpily inside the house. Charles and Lorina walk in silence, stopping at the door.

CHARLES

Well. Goodnight, Mrs. Liddell.

LORINA

(conflicted)

Oh get in. You'll catch your death in that.

INT. DEANERY GUEST HOUSE- NIGHT

Charles towel dries his hair vigorously. A spare set of clothes have been laid out for him on the bed. He finishes rubbing his hair, leaving it wildly askew. He tries on the jacket. It's much too big.

INT. THE GIRL'S ROOM- NIGHT

Lorina tucks in an exhausted Alice.

ALICE
Can't Mr. Dodgson stay with us?
Till father gets back?

LORINA
Alice. You know that wouldn't be
proper.

ALICE
But I don't care about proper. I
want him around always. Like
Pricks. Here for breakfast, tea and
supper.

LORINA
Get some sleep.

Lorina kisses Alice, Edith, and Ina in turn. Blows out the
lights. She lingers a moment, lost in thought.

INT. DEANERY GUESTHOUSE- NIGHT

Rain comes down hard against heavy leaded glass. Charles
stands over his camera, still in his own wet clothes, fussing
with the lens. He doesn't notice when Lorina comes through
the door.

LORINA
Henry's bigger than you.

Charles looks up, suddenly self conscious of his clinging
white trousers.

LORINA (CONT'D)
In the shoulders.

CHARLES
Ah, yes. Well. I'll manage.

Charles kneels down, checking underneath the camera.

LORINA
All in all, another excellent day
for a boat ride, wouldn't you say?

CHARLES
Yes, well. An ark might have been
preferable this time around I
think.

Lorina crosses in front of the camera and sits on the chaise.
She sits straight up, ankles crossed.

LORINA

You know I never got my turn.

CHARLES

I'm sorry?

LORINA

My turn. That day in the garden.
You never took my photograph.

CHARLES

No. I suppose I didn't.

LORINA

I should very much like to see what
all the fuss is about.

Charles continues to clean the camera. Lorina doesn't move.

CHARLES

What, right now?

LORINA

Why not?

Charles stops tinkering, focuses on Lorina.

CHARLES

Alright then.

He takes off the lens cap.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

But you can't move. Not one inch.

LORINA

So I suppose that means I'd need to
be perfectly comfortable?

CHARLES

That's right.

Lorina shifts a little so that her dress falls a bit off her shoulder. Her soft features rest on the sidearm of the chaise.

Charles stares for a moment. Then, remembering himself, ducks under the hood.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

You're out of frame. Here.

He walks over to the couch to position her. They're closer than they've ever been.

Charles adjusts her so she's sitting up a little straighter. Using two fingers, he creases the crinoline hem in her dress along the floor in one long, slow motion. He gently places her hands just so: one on the sofa arm and one in her lap.

All the while, his heart races.

His hand lifts her chin by a degree. He looks her straight in the eyes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Now. Don't. Move.

He goes back behind the lens. The room is silent save for the sound of the pattering rain.

CLOSE ON: Lorina's eyes. Clear and focused on Charles.

CLOSE ON: Charles under the hood: grey eyes fixed on her image.

After a few moments:

LORINA
You're changing them, you know.

Charles straightens up.

LORINA (CONT'D)
You have a gift. You do. You show
them something I never could.
Something my husband wouldn't find,
even if he had the pure heart to
look for it.

Lorina stands, walks towards him.

LORINA (CONT'D)
You show them a way out.

She nears Charles.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

We move over the girls, all fast asleep.

LORINA (V.O.)
A door without a lock.

INT. DEANERY- GUESTHOUSE- NIGHT

Charles stands transfixed as she moves around him.

LORINA

A door they can push aside and suddenly, everything is different. There are no more storm clouds, no more rain.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

The row of paper boats sit drying on the window sill, laced with handmade chains of wildflowers.

LORINA (V.O.)

No more loneliness. Just the promise of an endless golden afternoon.

Alice squirms, dreaming.

LORINA (V.O.)

You breathe a single word into their ears and suddenly, this life, this place. All of it falls fast away. A pinhole, getting smaller and smaller. And, in that moment, even in its smallest measure, all of this becomes the dream.

INT. DEANERY GUEST HOUSE- NIGHT

She walks towards him, eyes full of intent.

LORINA

You show them that. Everyday before my eyes.

She brushes his wet hair from his eyes.

LORINA (CONT'D)

Is it wrong? To envy your own children?

Their faces almost touch, dripping with a few beads of sweat and rainwater.

A CLOCK CHIMES. Five notes.

Charles kisses her. Slowly and deeply.

They stumble backwards, Lorina struggling to undo Charles' clothes. Charles lifts Lorina up, not knowing or caring where they will land. They fall onto the sofa, almost laughing.

MUSIC UP OVER THE FOLLOWING MONTAGE:

EXT. OPEN FIELD- EVENING

Flying overhead, we soar over Oxford's golden domes and sunlit spires and out over an open field divided by tilled squares of farmland. We fly down to Charles, sitting under a tree with the girls, speaking with animated gestures.

He gestures to the field where GIANT STONE CHESS PIECES have appeared on the checkered "board". A WHITE KNIGHT slides powerfully up and across, cutting down grass as it goes. Suddenly, the knight and his horse COME TO LIFE. The horse rears up as the knight savagely cuts down a COWERING RED BISHOP.

Alice and her sisters watch in awe.

INT. DEANERY GUEST HOUSE- NIGHT

Charles and Lorina kiss passionately at the door, Charles fumbles with the knob. They back into his room and the door slams shut again.

INT. DEANERY CLASSROOM- DAY

We circle around Alice and her sisters nearly falling asleep at their desks as an ELDERLY TUTOR recites FRENCH LESSONS.

Alice spies a WHITE RABBIT in the doorway. She perks up and smiles. The rabbit scampers off. The tutor strains to see what she's looking at...

EXT. OXFORD- PARK- DAY

A dreary afternoon. The girls walk together up a hill, brought up by Lorina. Charles comes along from the opposite direction.

Giggling, the girls conspire to hold hands across the path, forming a barrier.

Charles charges the line, popping open his BLACK UMBRELLA at the last second. The girls scatter, laughing and clinging to his coat. Alice and Edith each take his hands and chatter away with him over the hill.

Lorina follows, smiling to herself.

INT. DEANERY GUEST HOUSE- NIGHT

We move slowly across a disheveled bed. He and Lorina make love.

EXT. RIVER BANK- DAY

Charles and the girls reenact the Battle of Hastings with wooden swords. Suddenly, from behind, a cavalry of white horses gallop along the rocky beach, golden banners whipping in the wind. One SOLDIER, his face covered in FULL ARMOR stops his horse and canters around to face Alice. He lifts the visor from his eyes.

An honored Alice smiles and curtseys.

EXT. OXFORD UNIVERSITY BOTANICAL GARDENS- DAY

Charles talks as the girls stare with rapt attention. Lorina and Henry sit apart from them, reading. As Charles speaks, scores of WHITE ROSE BUSHES around the garden quiver and become saturated with thin red veins until their color is completely crimson. As the roses multiply, the girls look around the garden with delight.

Henry cranes his head around, unsure what everyone is looking at. To him, the garden appears completely normal.

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH LAWN- DAY

Charles sits in the grass, his SKETCHBOOK at his side. He watches Lorina from across the lawn. With long, careful strokes, he starts to draw.

CLOSE ON: The sketch of Lorina, forming the hauntingly beautiful image of the White Queen.

EXT. RIVER BANK- DAY

Charles and the girls walk along the river under a canopy of autumnal colors. As Charles speaks, various characters pass them along the way: first THE DUCHESS, ugly and squat in a massive V-shaped fur hat and veil, then THE KING OF HEARTS, followed by THE TOAD FOOTMAN and FISH FOOTMAN, both dressed in livery and white stockings.

An excited Alice turns around to watch them go, to find they have transformed back into regular black robed students and professors. An OLD PROFESSOR looks back, sensing her gaze. Embarrassed, she runs to catch up with Charles and her sisters.

INT. OXFORD UNIVERSITY NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM- DINOSAUR GALLERY- DAY

Two massive oak doors open to reveal a sprawling gallery of prehistoric skeletons. Charles and the girls walk past cast iron pillars, meandering through the various displays. A domed glass roof spills light onto the majestic creatures, all towering high above a wonder stricken Alice.

Charles and Alice come to the massive winged SKELETON OF A GREAT ANDEAN CONDOR.

Holding Alice's hand, Charles whispers in her ear. At once, the skeleton COMES TO LIFE. It shakes it's head and spreads it's leathery wings: evoking the dragon-like image of the JABBERWOCKY. The skeletal creature rears up on his haunches, arching it's long neck towards the ceiling and BREATHING a massive burst of FIRE.

CLOSE ON: Alice's face. The fire is reflected in her blue eyes, wide with disbelief.

END MUSIC

EXT. DEANERY HOUSE- LORINA AND HENRY'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Lorina blows out her beside lamp and climbs into bed with Henry. Henry continues reading a book, not acknowledging her. After a moment, he blows out his own lamp and turns away.

Lorina stares at the ceiling, wide awake.

EXT. DEANERY- DAY

Lorina, Henry, Charles, Mary and The Girls take HIGH TEA on an enclosed patio. Henry reads a NEWSPAPER.

ALICE

Mr. Dodgson, can you guess what today is?

CHARLES

(checking his watch)

I'll do better than guess... today is the 4th of November.

Alice cranes her neck to look at THE WATCH.

ALICE

What a funny watch! Does it tell
you the day of the month instead of
the O'clock?

CHARLES

It tells me both. In fact it even
tells me what year it is. I'd wager
your watch can't do all that.

ALICE

I haven't got a watch. And besides,
why should one need to remember
what year it is? It stays the same
year for such a long time together.

CHARLES

Well, sometimes I need reminding.

ALICE

You must be dreadfully forgetful.

MARY

Miss Alice. Don't make such
personal remarks. It's very rude.

ALICE

Forgive me Mr. Dodgson. You see,
what I meant to say is that today
is my half birthday!

CHARLES

Is that a fact?!

HENRY

Alice don't be ridiculous. One
doesn't celebrate one's half
birthday.

LORINA

Oh now Henry. I'm sure half
birthdays must be celebrated in
some parts of the world, someplace
or another.

Henry sips his tea, flipping the page of his newspaper.

HENRY

(into his cup)

Mmm. In the madhouse probably.

INT. DEANERY HOUSE- AFTERNOON

We hear the off key banging of A PIANO. Alice practices while a TUTOR beats the time. There is a KNOCK AT THE DOOR. Alice hops off the bench to run and answer it.

She finds a ENVELOPE slid under the door SEALED IN WAX. She opens it to find an INVITATION.

"You are hereby cordially invited to celebrate the HALF BIRTHDAY of Miss Alice Pleasance Liddell, 6 1/2 as of this week-end.

Deanery Garden- 3 O'clock. No persons of whole ages shall be admitted "

Alice smiles.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY

An outdoor tea party has been set up under a tree with a handmade banner reading "HAPPY 1/2 BIRTHDAY ALICE!"

Charles, Ducks and Lorina set the table while Alice, Edith and Ina run about with the dogs. Mary brings a tray of TEA and BISCUITS out from the house. She sets it down, looking rather put off that she has to wait on such a thing.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY

The tea party is in full swing. Alice sits at the head of the table, wearing a TOP HAT that's much too big for her and looking delighted. Everyone else wears PAPER HATS.

Ducks clings the side of his teacup with a spoon.

DUCKS
Here, I've got a riddle!

The table settles down.

ALICE
Oo I love riddles! I can always
guess them.

DUCKS
Alright then here it comes- why is
a raven like a writing desk?

Everyone thinks. Edith goes to answer, then thinks better of it.

After a moment:

LORINA
Alright, I give it up. What's the answer?

DUCKS
(pretending to think)
You know. I haven't the slightest idea.

The girls giggle.

INA
(passes Alice a tray)
Would you like another biscuit
Alice?

ALICE
Well I haven't had my first biscuit yet so I can't possibly take more.

CHARLES
(helping himself)
You mean you can't take less. It's very easy to take more than nothing.

Alice tries to work this out. Lorina smiles.

EXT. DEANERY GATE- SAME TIME

Henry walks towards the house with two SENIOR STUDENTS who take notes as he pontificates about college business.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY- SAME TIME

CHARLES
Now. I vote the young ladies tell us a story. Ina, you'll start.

INA
Oh. I'm afraid I don't know any.

CHARLES
Alright then, I'll start. Once upon a time there were three little sisters.
(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)
And their names were Elsie, Lacie
and Tillie. And they lived at the
bottom of a well.

EDITH
A well? What were they doing down
there?

CHARLES
Not much of anything I'm afraid.

INA
What did they live on?

CHARLES
Whatever they could get.

ALICE
And what--

CHARLES
Well, it wasn't a What Well!

INA
Well if it wasn't a What Well, what
kind of well was it then?

Ina looks confused by her own question.

ALICE
Mr. Dodgson?

But Charles is now pretending to be fast asleep, snoring
loudly.

Edith goes to poke him cautiously. Suddenly, Charles JOLTS
AWAKE, causing them all to jump with delight.

CHARLES
Where was I?

Underneath the table, Lorina squeezes Charles' hand.

EXT. GARDEN GATE- DAY

Henry and the Students open the gate and continue into the
garden. Henry stops in his tracks at the SOUND of SINGING.

Charles is standing up on a chair leading Alice and the girls
in singing "Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat". Alice is wearing the
TOP HAT, Edith is standing on the table. To add to the chaos,
the DOGS run about the table BARKING excitedly.

HENRY
What's all this?

Everyone stops to look at Henry and the Students.

HENRY (CONT'D)
(to the students)
That'll be all for today.

The students leave, eyeing the strange scene. Henry goes over to Alice, takes the hat off her head.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Is this my new hat? I bought this
in Godstow just last week. Where
did you get this?
(looking around)
And why is our good china and
silver all out of doors? Lorina,
what's the meaning of this?

Lorina is at a loss for words.

HENRY (CONT'D)
(to Mary)
Is this what I pay you for? To let
them run about, wild as they
please?

MARY
I beg your pardon sir, I--

CHARLES
Now look, this wasn't her doing. We
were just having a little fun, for
Alice's half birthday--

HENRY
(turning on Charles)
I say, do you ever go home?
(indicating Ducks)
And who the bloody hell is this?

DUCKS
Duckworth, sir. Third year Master
of Arts in--

HENRY
Oh, nevermind.
(to Mary)
Clean this up. And have that lot
help you.

Henry goes inside, snapping for the dogs to follow him. Lorina runs to his side.

LORINA

Henry--

HENRY

Are you out of your mind? What if I'd been along with the Chancellor? People will think we're running a goddamned circus up here instead of a university.

Ducks starts to clean up the table with Mary.

Alice sits staring down at her tea, looking as if she might cry. Charles goes to sit next to her. They're quiet for a moment.

CHARLES

You know, Alice. Sometimes, when we see things a certain way. Others-- well, they might not always see them exactly the same. But that doesn't mean it's wrong.

Alice looks up at him, eyes filled with tears.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Sometimes you've just got to believe that you're the one who's got it right. No matter what anyone says.

Ducks looks up from his cleaning. Alice stays quiet.

Charles takes his pocket watch and dips it in an empty teacup to make her smile. Then he pretends to butter it like it's a biscuit.

ALICE

(smiles)

That's not a biscuit, silly, it's a watch.

CHARLES

Is it? Oh dear, I've gone and mixed them up again, haven't I?

From the house, Lorina watches Alice laugh with Charles. Mary walks by with a TRAY of dishes, stopping beside her. They watch Charles together for a moment.

MARY

I'd take mind to what Mr. Liddell said if I were you ma'am. A young man up here day in and day out. Soon enough it's not just the children who'll be making up the stories.

A pause. Lorina continues to watch Charles.

LORINA

My husband asked you what it is we pay you for. I'd advise you to try and remember it.

Lorina looks at Mary before walking away.

Stung, Mary looks back out into the yard. She keeps her eyes fixed on Charles.

INT. DEANERY GUEST HOUSE- AFTERNOON

Charles and Lorina lie in bed, post-coital. Charles gets up, dressing himself.

CHARLES

You know, I always thought I knew exactly how my life would end up. As if I were reading some frightfully dull book and I'd snuck to the last chapter to save myself the bore of reading the whole thing. I'd lecture here till I was too decrepit to stand and then I'd retire, some fossilized old don, shuffling from quadrangle to corridor. Just another bachelor in black to be pitied or ignored by younger, richer men.

LORINA

And now?

CHARLES

And now. Well, I don't know what's going to happen. And this time I don't care to.

Lorina almost laughs. Charles climbs on top of her.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

What?

LORINA

This isn't one of your fantasies, you know. We're not playing at some invented world without convention or consequence. Every good family in England has an ear to the ground in this place. People will talk. And when they do he'll do whatever he can to ruin you. Henry may have the personality of a lobster, but he's ruthless. And he thoroughly enjoys wielding his power, even if it is only bureaucratic.

CHARLES

Well that's a thoroughly critical assessment of one's better half. Although--

Charles kisses her neck.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

He's not the most social or convivial sort, I'll give you that.

Charles brushes the hair from Lorina's eyes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Did you ever love him?

LORINA

Once. Or, I suppose it may have been the idea of him. This brilliant man, this accomplished self-assured pillar of--

Lorina laughs, no idea what word comes next.

LORINA (CONT'D)

You know, come to that, I think I would have loved the back of a turnip cart all the same if it had carried me away from Lowestroft.

Lorina wraps her arms around Charles.

LORINA (CONT'D)

When the whispers start, and they will do, there will be a chorus of chattering, squawking old birds in his ear, everywhere he goes. And he'll do whatever he can to quiet them.

CHARLES

You mean he'll have both our heads
on the chopping block.

LORINA

Unless we've already gone away.

CHARLES

(laughing)

Now who's the fantasist?

Charles gets up, dressing.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Look at us. I'm ready to risk the
only life I've ever known and now
you're abandoning your own
children.

LORINA

You know I'm starting to think you
don't quite understand the sort of
man my husband is. If they do start
singing in his ear, I'll lose more
than just my children.

Charles puts his jacket on, does up his collar.

LORINA (CONT'D)

The governess. She's a pretty bird.

Charles looks back.

LORINA (CONT'D)

I've seen the way she looks at us.
At you. Thirty pounds a year
doesn't exactly buy discretion.

CHARLES

And so what if you're right then?
What if this is all just another
game of mine that can't really be
won? Or not by men like me anyway.

Lorina gets out of bed, walks towards him.

LORINA

Perhaps it is. And perhaps men like
you should learn their place.
Because, like it or not, men like
Henry Liddell always get what they
want. In the end.

CHARLES
Right.

He gathers his things to leave. Lorina pulls him back again.

LORINA
But. Then again. So do I.

She pulls him back into bed, undressing him again.

HENRY (O.S.)
Lorina!

Charles and Lorina look up. There's a RAP at the door before...

INT. DEANERY GUEST HOUSE- DAY

Henry comes straight into the room. Lorina is lying on the bed.

HENRY
Where the hell have you been?

LORINA
(feigning grogginess)
Darling. Just having a bit of a lie down. It's so wonderfully quiet here away from the house.

HERNY
(lighting a cigarette)
Yes, well I should think that's because your daughter has been bloody well squalling at the nursery door for nearly an hour no thanks to you. And I can't find the damned nanny anywhere.

Henry shakes out the match. His eyes go to Charles' camera in the far corner of the room. He walks towards it.

LORINA
(going to his side)
I'll have the kitchen warm up a bit of milk straight away, that usually does the trick.

Henry bends down to inspect the camera, momentarily fascinated by the device. He breathes smoke into the lens, staring at his own reflection.

In the reflection, we can just see something MOVING behind him. Henry turns to look...

LORINA (CONT'D)
Nightmares?

Henry snaps back around.

HENRY
What?

LORINA
Edith sometimes has terrible
nightmares. Poor thing. I'd imagine
that's why she's carrying on.

Henry stands up, still eyeing the camera, exhaling smoke.

HENRY
You'll tell that professor I'm not
running a god damned store house in
here. Have him come and get this
nonsense by the end of the week.

Henry KICKS at the camera, causing A PART to fall clattering to the floor. He leaves, closing the door behind him. Lorina exhales.

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH LAWN- DAY

Charles walks at a rapid clip away from the Deanery garden walls, dusting off his suit and adjusting his cufflinks as he goes.

PRE-LAP: A BRASS BAND plays the up-tempo Patriotic tune "The March of the British Grenadiers" from a BANDSTAND.

EXT. HERTFORD BRIDGE- DAY

We come down from a blue sky to a footbridge arching over spring blooms and a street swarming with people and activity.

INSERT: THREE MONTHS LATER

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- MORNING

Ina, Edith and Alice run up the tight winding stairs, taking them two at time, nearly running over a STUDENT coming down the opposite way.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- MORNING

The girls burst through the door and run over to Charles who sits at his desk surrounded by a mess of open text books, engrossed in the preparation of a lecture. Alice jumps on the bed and throws open the curtains as Ina and Edith run to him, shutting his books and grabbing his hand.

EDITH

Mr. Dodgson! It's happening! It's today!

INA

Come quick! Hurry up!

CHARLES

What's all this? How did you---

ALICE

The Prince and Princess of Wales!
They're here! A real princess! In Oxford! Come on!

Ina pushes Charles out of his chair as Alice drags him towards the door by the arm. Edith hops along excitedly.

EXT. BAZAAR- DAY

Charles walks on either side of the girls through a noisy bazaar decorated with flowers, patriotic flags and feathers. The girls are dressed in their finest.

A variety of stalls have been erected to celebrate the royal visit. The girls gape as they pass an OX being ROASTED WHOLE.

Charles stops at a stall to buy a DOLL for Alice and picks up a NEWSPAPER and DECK OF PLAYING CARDS for himself.

EXT. TOM QUAD GATES- DAY

Scores of onlookers are assembled in a U-shape on either side of the road and in front of a COVERED DAIS under a STRIPED RED AWNING.

A red carpet leads to the dais where HENRY, LORINA and the girls stand alongside the assembled CANONS OF CHRIST CHURCH, ready to welcome the Royals to Oxford.

A ROYAL GUN SALUTE rings out as the ROYAL CARRIAGE enters the gate. The crowd, including Charles, Mary and Ducks, CHEER and WAVE.

The carriage comes to a full stop at the end of the road.

Lorina bends down to the girls' level, fussing with their dresses.

LORINA

(whispering)

Remember, when you meet Her Royal Highness, you must curtsey while thinking what to say. Open your mouth a little wider when you speak, turn out your toes, and you must answer in French if you can't think of the English for a thing. And always say--

ALICE, EDITH AND INA

"Your Majesty"

The band strikes up a DRUM ROLL. Lorina, Henry and the girls stand as straight up as they possibly can.

In the crowd, Mary eyes Charles, thoroughly enjoying being so close to him. She grabs his arm, leans in to his ear:

MARY

(whispering)

Can you imagine it? Being a little girl and meeting a real live Prince and Princess.

DUCKS

Course he can. Charles imagines being a little girl all the time, don't you old boy?

Mary and Charles turn to look at Ducks as the drum roll finishes and A FULL ORCHESTRA AND CHILDREN'S CHOIR launches into the National Anthem "God Save the Queen". Charles and Ducks remove their hats and sing with the rest of the crowd.

Note: The verses are first sung by a Children's Choir, then repeated by the crowd.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

God save our gracious Queen. Long live our Noble Queen. God save the Queen

VOLUNTEERS present arms as the Prince and Princess make their way up the aisle towards Henry, Lorina and the girls.

Mary looks up at Charles. Charles keeps his eyes on Lorina.

CROWD AND CHOIR

*God save our gracious Queen/Long
live our Noble Queen/God save the
Queen*

We move across Henry, Lorina and the girls, each curtseying to the royals in turn. Alice curtseys so low she looks as if she might fall over.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

*Send her victorious/Happy and
Glorious/Long to reign over us/God
Save the Queen.*

Lorina takes Alice's hand. Squeezes it.

Mary looks down at Charles' hand. Her fingers reach out a bit, hesitating. She grabs it. After a moment, Charles gently pulls it away. He looks at Mary. She looks mortified.

CROWD AND CHOIR

*Send her victorious/Happy and
Glorious/Long to reign over us/
God Save the Queen*

Henry and Lorina talk with the Royals, shaking hands. Henry takes the Princess by the arm, leading her and the Prince off the platform. Lorina and the girls follow.

CROWD AND CHOIR (CONT'D)

*O Lord Our God Arise/Scatter her
Enemies/And make them fall.
Confound their politics/Frustrate
their knavish tricks/On Thee our
Hopes we Fix/God Save us All*

Mary pushes her way through the crowd, tears streaming.

The song ends with a grand flourish of steel drums and the crashing of SYMBOLS

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH HALL- NIGHT

A long WHISTLE before a BURST OF COLOR illuminates the night sky as several FIREWORKS explode over the hall. Several wooden benches have been set up on the lawn. Gas lamps illuminate a lavish banquet filled to capacity.

Henry and Lorina dine with the royals. Charles sits apart with Alice and her sisters.

CHARLES
 (voice low)
 Look over there. See those guards?
 Over by the hedge?

Charles nods his head towards TWO UNIFORMED FOOTMEN standing by the bushes, looking bored.

The girls all turn to look.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 No, don't look now! They're hiding.
 Scared out of their wits.

INA
 They certainly don't look it.

CHARLES
 Well they can't show it now can
 they? If the Queen comes and finds
 out what they've done she'll be in
 a terrible state.

ALICE
 (eyes wide)
 What have they done?

Charles looks across the table at a plate piled high with TARTS.

CHARLES
 (leaning in, whispering)
 They stole some tarts. The Queen's
 tarts. Right from under her nose.
 And if she catches them, it'll be--

Charles makes the "beheading" gesture across his neck. Alice gasps.

EDITH
 Oh, how dreadfully savage! What a
 horrid queen.

INA
 What Queen? Not Victoria, she's in
 London. What's she the Queen of
 then?

Charles gives Ina a "please don't spoil the game for your sisters" look.

He looks up at Lorina, gorgeous in the flickering gaslight.

CHARLES
The Queen of Hearts.

Charles takes out the pack of cards. Lays down the QUEEN OF HEARTS CARD.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
The Queen of Hearts, she made some
tarts all on a summer's day...

Charles flips over THE KNAVE OF HEARTS CARD and slides it next to the QUEEN OF HEARTS

CHARLES (CONT'D)
The Knave of Hearts, he stole the
tarts and took them quite away.

Another FIREWORK goes off, illuminating the table and cards.

Alice looks up to see that all the GUARDS flanking the Royals have turned into a row of faceless PLAYING CARDS, fanning out before her eyes.

The Prince and Princess of Wales have turned into the KING AND QUEEN OF HEARTS. The Queen laughs wildly with the King in the light of the fireworks. As her laughter dies down, she turns to look right at Alice.

Alice stares back, eyes wide. The queen's face hardens with a kind of furious recognition. She POINTS at Alice, opening her mouth wide, forming the words:

QUEEN OF HEARTS
OFF WITH HER---

The clinging of crystal.

Everything is as it was. The lawn goes quiet as Henry stands to make a toast.

HENRY
To Britannia. The Empress of Isles,
where freedom inhabits and commerce
still smiles. And happiness to the
royal pair. On behalf of all Christ
Church College, I hereby welcome
their royal highnesses to Oxford.
(raising his glass)
To Church and Queen!

CROWD
To Church and Queen!

A round of applause. Lorina and Charles smile at each other from across the table. Lorina's eyes linger on Charles.

Mary watches the subtle exchange, her face hard with determination in the flickering firelight.

INT. DEANERY HOUSE- MARY'S BEDROOM-NIGHT

Mary searches frantically through her bookshelf. She pulls out a LITTLE RED VOLUME. She flips to the first page.

"Enoch Arden by Alfred Tennyson, D.C.L. Poet Laureate"

Mary looks up at the sound of barking dogs as Henry, Lorina, Charles and the girls come in downstairs. Mary slips the book into her dress pocket and goes down to greet them.

LORINA

(taking off Alice's coat)

Ah, Mary! There you are. We were looking all over for you. I couldn't imagine where you'd got to.

MARY

Pardon, just-- a little tired is all, ma'am. Came in to have a lie down.

LORINA

Well, if you're feeling quite better, could you be a dear and put the tea on?

INT. DEANERY HOUSE- PARLOUR- EVENING

Henry sits by the fire, reading, while Lorina occupies herself with needlework. Charles and the girls sit together on the sofa playing a game. Mary serves everyone a round of tea.

As she passes by a BOOKSHELF, she slips the RED BOOK in amongst the leather bound VOLUMES.

LORINA

(putting down her sewing)

Well girls. I think we've all had quite enough excitement for one day. I think it's time to tell Mr. Dodgson good night.

ALICE

No! Please! I couldn't possibly go
to sleep now.

LORINA

Alice, don't argue.

ALICE

But I met a princess today!

INA

Really mummy, we're not tired at
all.

EDITH

One more game with Mr. Dodgson,
please!

MARY

(handing Edith her tea)
Oh, now Edith, let's do something
you father would enjoy too. We
can't let Mr. Dodgson have all the
fun.

ALICE

(whispering to Mary)
But papa doesn't like games. He
only likes boring old poetry.

INA

That's an idea Alice. Let's hear
some poetry. Just one before bed.
That'd be alright, wouldn't it
Mummy?

LORINA

Yes alright. But just one. Then off
to bed.

(to Henry)

Henry--

Henry is engrossed in his book.

LORINA (CONT'D)

(louder)

The girls would like you to read
one of your poems aloud, dear.

Henry takes off his reading glasses, suddenly flummoxed by
the attention.

HENRY
(re: his book in hand)
I see. Ovid?

ALICE
No, papa, something modern!

HENRY
(going to the shelf)
No Greeks. Alright--

MARY
(loudly)
What about Tennyson?

Everyone turns to look at Mary, standing at the back of the room holding the tea tray.

MARY (CONT'D)
It's just--Well, I should think
Tennyson modern enough for Miss
Alice's tastes. That is, if it
pleases our guest.

HENRY
Tennyson. Our poet laureate. Very
good.

Henry searches for Tennyson in his collection. .

MARY
"Enoch Arden"

Again, everyone turns to look at Mary.

MARY (CONT'D)
It's-- quite new.

LORINA
Why, Mary. I'd no idea you'd an
interest in poetry.

MARY
Only a passing interest, ma'am.

ALICE
What's it about?

MARY
(nervous)
It's about-- a sailor, Enoch, who
goes missing. And-- and he's
thought to be dead.
(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

But after ten years he comes home to his old house and looks in the window and sees his wife--and his three children-- in the company of a man, Phillip, who's taken his place.

Charles looks at Lorina, nervous, unsure what's happening.

MARY (CONT'D)

(to Henry)
"Enoch Arden"

Henry finds the little RED BOOK, pulls it out. He settles down in his chair by the fire. The dogs stretch out at his feet.

HENRY

(putting on his glasses)
"Enoch Arden". By Lord Alfred
Tennyson.

Mary sets down the tea tray, her eyes fixed on Henry.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm; And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands; Beyond, red roofs about a narrow wharf...

FADE TO:

HENRY (CONT'D)

...Enoch cast his strong arms about his wife, And kiss'd his wonder-stricken little ones; waved his hand and went away; Ev'n to the last dip of the vanishing sail; She watched it, and departed weeping for him...

...We move across the girls' faces as he reads.

...Across the woodcut illustration of Enoch embracing his wife on the wharf.

...Alice getting sleepy, resting her head on Charles. On his other shoulder, Edith does the same.

FADE TO:

The illustration of Phillip, reaching out towards Annie, children at her side.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Then Philip coming somewhat closer spoke; 'O' Annie it is beyond all hope, that he who left you ten long years ago should still be living; Perhaps you know what I would have you know-- I wish you for my wife. I train would prove a father to your children: I do think they love me as a father. And I have loved you longer than you know...

...Charles and Lorina glace at one another...

...Mary, eyes fixed on Henry...

FADE TO:

As the poem comes to and end, Henry slows down, realization taking over.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Now when the dead man come to life beheld his wife; his wife no more, and saw the babes; Hers, yet not his; Upon the other man's knee...

Henry looks up at Charles nestled between his three daughters.

....At Alice and Edith, asleep at Charles' side.

....Then at Lorina, her face betraying her.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(voice breaking)

And all the warmth, the peace, the happiness; And his own children beautiful; And him, that other, reigning in his place; Lord of his rights; And of...

He looks up, eyes filled with tears.

HENRY (CONT'D)

And of his children's love.

Henry closes the book, takes off his glasses. He rubs his face and stares into he fire.

A long moment. Everyone is quiet.

INA
Papa, are you alrig--

Suddenly, he leaves the room. Lorina runs after him.

LORINA
Henry--

The girls look at one another. Charles looks at Mary.

MARY
I think it's time for you to be
going now Professor.

INT. DEANERY HOUSE- STUDY- NIGHT

Henry sits at his desk, writing. Lorina approaches.

LORINA
Everything alright?

Henry ignores her, continues writing.

LORINA (CONT'D)
Henry?

HENRY
(folding a letter, not
looking up)
They used to say that our marriage
was like something out of the old
comedies. Did you know that?
'What's he doing, that great man
taking a third rate provincial
wife?' they'd say. 'First rate in
beauty' I'd say.

Henry casually melts a stick of RED WAX onto the envelope.

HENRY (CONT'D)
And you know, at the time I
actually believed that was enough.

Wax drips onto paper, forming a little crimson pool. Lorina
is silent.

HENRY (CONT'D)
(coolly)
I want to know why that man is in
my house. Day after day. Playing
father to my children. You can tell
me if you wish. Or I can find out.
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)
Either way, it will all come out
the same.

Henry presses the wax, sealing the letter. He stands and walks around the desk, pausing to whisper in her ear:

HENRY (CONT'D)
And you'd do well to remember this
my dove: I made you all those years
ago. And so help me, if it comes to
it now, I will unmake you all the
same.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- NIGHT

Henry sits, smoking on the lawn. Lorina comes to sit beside him.

LORINA
I didn't want to alarm you. Not
until I knew for sure.

Henry ignores her.

LORINA (CONT'D)
It all seemed an innocent bit of
fun at first, didn't it? The girls
liked him well enough. But then. I
started to notice. Little things.
The way he looks at Alice.

Henry looks at Lorina, his interest piqued.

LORINA (CONT'D)
He's in love with her, Henry. Don't
you see it? Even to being, well,
obsessed I'd say. Why, it's
absolutely absurd, a grown man and
a child. Just tonight Alice told me
herself that he's begun to frighten
her, poor thing.

Lorina takes Henry's hand.

LORINA (CONT'D)
So, you can understand now. Why
I've had to watch him so closely,
why he hasn't given us a moment's
peace. You must do whatever you
have to my darling. Whatever it
takes. For the sake of our family.
He must never come near our
children again.

Alice watches from the hall, clutching the DOLL Charles bought her at the bazaar.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- DAY

Charles comes up the stairs leafing through mail and unlocks his door. He finds THE SEALED LETTER has been slid underneath.

CHARLES (V.O.)
I've been summoned.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- DAY- LATER

Ducks paces. Charles sits on the couch, reading the letter.

CHARLES
In two weeks. I'm to appear before
The Electors.

DUCKS
The Electors?

CHARLES
Liddell, the twelve Cannons of
Christ Church and the Senior
Students.

DUCKS
Christ. For what?

Charles sits, rubbing his hands through his unkept hair.

DUCKS (CONT'D)
Charles. Look at me. What exactly
have you done?

CHARLES
(almost laughing)
I fell all the way down. All the
way down to the bottom.

DUCKS
You're not making sense, mate.

CHARLES
No. But that's finally the point
isn't it? Nothing's made sense for
months. I can't hardly tell up from
down.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Every truth I've ever known has
gone from peculiar to paradoxical.

DUCKS

Alright, now you're making less
sense.

CHARLES

(tossing him the letter)
They're expelling me, Ducks. I
didn't take the Orders.

DUCKS

What?

(reading the letter)
They can't just expel you! Where
would you go?

Charles stands up again, starts to pace.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

Look, I'm sure this is all just
some arcane formality. Tell them
the truth. Tell them how you feel
and ask for a pardon.

CHARLES

A pardon? You'd have me go before
The Electors and ask to waive a
binding statue set down by a
thousand year old institution for
my personal convenience? They'll
think I've gone mad.

DUCKS

Well, you've said it yourself
haven't you? In your lectures.
"Sometimes the greatest truths can
be found even in madness."

Charles sits, considering this.

CHARLES

I need to come up with a better
lecture.

INT. HIGH STREET SHOP- OXFORD- DAY

Charles enters a tiny shop. He picks out a few items. As he
pays, he notices:

...A woman staring at him, then averting her gaze.

...Two students whispering.

...The shopkeeper eyeing him with contempt.

Disturbed, Charles pays and exits onto the street.

EXT. HIGH STREET- OXFORD- DAY

As Charles walks along the road, students and professors pass him on both sides, whispering, turning to look.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- STAIRWELL- DAY

Charles climbs the stairwell. TWO STUDENTS stop talking to stare daggers at him from the landing.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- CHARLES' ROOM- DAY

Charles enters with his groceries, visibly disturbed.

INT. CHRIST CHURCH- CHARLES' CLASSROOM- DAY

Charles erases the chalkboard as a few STUDENTS stand and filter out-- nearly two thirds of the classroom is empty.

Charles stands at his desk, writing in a ledger.

Lorina enters, closing the door carefully behind her. Charles looks up, then continues writing.

CHARLES

Turns out not many people care to learn Euclidian geometry under a known solicitor of young girls.

Lorina walks towards him.

LORINA

If Henry knew the truth things would be much worse. For both of us.

Charles starts to pack his satchel.

CHARLES

Really? Worse than forfeiting my very stature and reputation? Losing the only life I've ever known? Your dear husband is sacking me based on some outdated, trivial statute.

LORINA
As is his right!
(forced)
He's my husband. I owe him
everything.

CHARLES
And yet he's given you nothing.
Nothing to you, and nothing to your
girls. And he never will.

LORINA
And who exactly do you think you
are? You're a grown man who plays
at fantasies! There are rules in
this life and there are
consequences. Even my children know
that.

CHARLES
Yes and what of your children?

Lorina turns, going towards the door.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
What exactly are you going to tell
them? More lies is it?

Lorina reaches the door.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(loudly)
Are you blind? He looks at them--
and sometimes I swear he doesn't
even recognize them!

Lorina stops. She turns, walking back towards him.

LORINA
I told you there was a time I
believed Henry could ride in, cut
through the brambles and carry me
away. Away from my little house in
the country and everything that
frightened me. But he only carried
me off to places much worse.

She brushes the hair from his eyes.

LORINA (CONT'D)
Then I met you. I met you the first
day you made my daughter smile.
(MORE)

LORINA (CONT'D)
 And every day after that I thought,
 finally here is my White Knight.
 And you were, for an afternoon. But
 the day's nearly over now. My
 children are growing older and so
 am I.

She wipes her eyes, puts on a stiff upper lip.

LORINA (CONT'D)
 Anyway, we've both had our share of
 fantasies haven't we? But. I woke
 up from mine.

She kisses him on the cheek. Charles doesn't move. She whispers in his ear:

LORINA (CONT'D)
 Wake up Charles.

She goes to the door, closing it without looking back.

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH LAWN- DAY

A grey afternoon, just before a rain. Charles walks over the little hill. Once again, Alice and her sisters are coming the opposite way, with Mary bringing up the rear. Smiling, Alice starts to run to him but Mary guides her and the girls off the path, away from Charles.

MARY
 (calling back)
 Come along! Come on, Alice.

Alice, Edith and Ina follow Mary, stealing glances back at Charles.

INT. THE GIRL'S ROOM- NIGHT

A rainy night. Lorina reads a typical Victorian children's book. Preaching, unimaginative and didactic.

Bored, Alice looks out the window. Rain falls in rivulets behind the lineup of little PAPER BOATS.

CANON (V.O.)
 You swore on your knees to comply
 with the statutes of this university
 when you signed the Thirty-nine
 Articles of the Creed of the Church
 of England.

INT. RADCLIFFE HALL- DAY

Henry Liddell, dressed in black, sits at the top center of the room, flanked by SIX CANONS. At the side of the room, TWELVE SENIOR STUDENTS are assembled in a stall, holding little BLACK SLATES.

Charles stands below them, hands clasped behind his back.

CANON

In neglecting your sworn duty, you have hereby forfeited your Studentship at Christ Church college and all the rights and privileges therein. Have you anything to say on this account?

Charles looks at Henry, who looks straight ahead.

CANON (CONT'D)

Mr. Dodgson?

CHARLES

Yes?

CANON

Have you anything to say in your defense?

CHARLES

I'd like to appeal--

As he speaks, the sound of squeaking pencils on slates echoes throughout the chamber. The twelve students hastily scribble away.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I'd like to appeal to the Electors that my studentship be considered a "Lay Studentship".

HENRY

A what?

CANON

(leaning in to Henry)

According to the statue of 1858, the holders of the Lay Studentship shall not be required to take the Holy Orders.

Charles looks to the stall. The cacophony of squeaking pencils stops, save for one student who continues, oblivious to his gaze.

HENRY

That is a very interesting assessment of the statute Mr. Dodgson. However, I will remind you that you were nominated for a Clerical Studentship by Cardinal Pusey in the year 1852. In that year the general statute reads thus:

Henry looks to one of the CANONS who jumps a little and unfurls a PARCHMENT SCROLL.

CANON

No person shall be eligible to a Clerical Studentship who shall not either be a Priest or Deacon of the United Church of England and Ireland--

As the Canon reads, Charles hears the sound of FLUTTERING WINGS. He looks around to see:

The student's box full is now full of TWELVE LARGE RAVENS in WHITE BARRISTERS WIGS. They sit, twittering and dithering away.

CANON (CONT'D)

--Or declare that he intends to take Holy Orders in the said Church. Every person who shall have made such declaration or who at the time of his election shall be in Deacon's Orders--

Charles looks straight ahead. Dean Liddell now wears a WHITE BARRISTER'S WIG as well, topped with a GOLD CROWN. To the right of HENRY/THE KING OF HEARTS, LORINA has appeared as the QUEEN OF HEARTS. To Henry's left, the ARCHDEACON DODGSON has also appeared in wig and gown. On either side of them, the Canons have turned into a row of FACELESS PLAYING CARDS. The ELDERLY CANON is now dressed as a FOOTMAN in archaic livery.

FOOTMAN

--Shall be required to take Priests' Orders within four years after the time at which he shall be of sufficient standing, according to the Statues of the University, to take the Degree of Master of Arts, and--

(rolling up the scroll)
---and in default thereof shall vacate his Studentship.

The FOOTMAN steps down.

HENRY/KING OF HEARTS
There you have it. There's the
evidence.

(raising his GAVEL)
And now for the sentence!

CHARLES
What? That's it?!

LORINA/QUEEN OF HEARTS
(to the King)
No my dear! It goes first the
sentence, and then the evidence.

CHARLES
But that's nonsense!

LORINA/QUEEN OF HEARTS
I beg your pardon!

CHARLES
The idea of having a sentence
first. Besides I haven't got any
evidence.

HENRY/KING OF HEARTS
(to the Jury)
Write that down.

CHARLES
Wait, I didn't mean--

The squeaking of the slates becomes louder. The "jury" begins to flutter and squawk, a din that rises throughout the chamber.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Now hold on!

LORINA/QUEEN OF HEARTS
Give your evidence then. And don't
be so nervous, or I'll have you
executed on the spot.

CHARLES
But---

HENRY/KING OF HEARTS
You heard the Queen!
(to the Footman)
Call the first witness!

The "Jury" caws and flutters with more excitement.

CANON
FIRST WITNESS!

CHARLES
But I haven't got a--!

The footman blows THREE BLASTS on a GOLD TRUMPET.

The RAVENS squawk louder and louder.

The KING OF HEARTS calls order with the GAVEL.

INT. CHARLES DODGSON'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Charles wakes up. He reaches to his bedside table and looks at his pocket watch: 4:00 AM.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- HALLWAY- MORNING

Ducks knocks on Charles' door, holding a BASKET OF BREAD AND CHEESES. Charles answers. He looks like hell. Behind him, his room is in a similar state.

Ducks enters and reacts to the mess.

DUCKS
(handing him the basket)
The maid says you haven't left for days. Have you been living off tap water and--

He picks up an open jar, sniffs it.

DUCKS (CONT'D)
--jam?

CHARLES
What are you doing here?

DUCKS
I can't stay long. Just making sure you're not going to off yourself over this business. When's the hearing anyway?

CHARLES
Tomorrow.

DUCKS
Are you going to... bathe?

Charles sits, rubs his face in his hands.

CHARLES

What's the point? What's the point of even showing up? It doesn't matter what I say. He'll get exactly what he wants in the end. Men like him always do anyway.

DUCKS

Well, life's just not fair now is it?

CHARLES

No. It certainly isn't. It's cruel. And it's ridiculous. And it's governed by-- by backwards people and backwards principles. And there's sod all I can do about it.

DUCKS

Yes, I suppose you're right.

Ducks goes to leave.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

But, you know, I always find in times like these when things don't make any kind of sense at all--

Ducks puts on his cap.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

Sometimes you've just got to believe you're the one who's got it right.

Charles looks up.

There's a KNOCK at the door as a small ENVELOPE is slid under it. Ducks goes over to open the door. He looks around. No one's there.

Charles opens the LETTER addressed to "Mr. C.L. Dodgson". It's written in a child's tremulous hand.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

What is it?

CHARLES

Alice. She misses...our adventures. And-- she wants me to write it down for her.

DUCKS
(putting on his gloves)
Write what down?

Charles pockets the letter, sees Ducks to the door.

CHARLES
Nothing. Just a little girl in want
of a bedtime story.

Ducks claps Charles on the shoulder.

DUCKS
As if you didn't have enough
problems.

Ducks closes the door behind him. Charles takes out the letter, turns it over in his hands, thinking.

INT. CHARLES' BEDROOM- NIGHT

Charles sits at his desk, illuminated by candlelight. He's laid out a few pages of THICK BLANK PAPER before him. He dips his pen in ink. Pauses.

Then, slowly, he begins to scratch out in careful handwriting:

Chapter 1.

The pen underscores this with a curly trail of ivy leaves.
Then:

Down the Rabbit Hole.

Charles pauses. He begins to sketch an illustration.

Note: As Charles draws by candlelight, fluid veins of India ink bleed and curl, forming text and other illustrations. The following are formed in montage over music:

...Alice, sitting bored at her sister's side.

...Alice pulling aside a curtain to reveal a door the size of a rat hole.

...Alice swimming in the pool of tears.

...The Fish Footman handing the Toad Footman a sealed letter at the White Rabbit's doorstep.

...The Ugly Duchess, clutching a bawling baby

...Alice at the head of the Mad Tea Party.

...The Hatter's top hat complete with "In this Style 10%" tag

...Alice holding a flamingo and stepping on a balled up hedgehog

Charles stops. He opens his diary and takes out a FOLDED UP PIECE OF PAPER. He unfolds it, revealing the creased drawing of Lorina as THE WHITE QUEEN.

Charles dips his pen in RED INK, slowly transforming her into THE QUEEN OF HEARTS, mouth wide open, pointing an accusatory finger.

INT. CHARLES' BEDROOM- NIGHT

Charles paces, reading over the papers and drinking a cup of tea.

He sits at his desk. He begins to write again, but his pen's gone dry. He opens his drawer, searching for a spare inkwell.

He pulls out the LITTLE WOODEN SWORD. He smiles, remembering the day on the river bank. Then, he notices something else...

From the back of the drawer, he pulls out a single PHOTOGRAPH.

INT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY

Henry and Lorina host a lavish garden party. Alice sits bored by the gate.

DUCKS
Psst. Alice. Over here.

Alice turns to see Ducks standing hidden beside a wall.

ALICE
Ducks!

She runs to him. Ducks places a LETTER in her palm.

DUCKS
Give that to your father, alright?

ALICE
Who shall I say it's from?

DUCKS
Anyone but me. Here give us a kiss.

Alice kisses him on the cheek.

DUCKS (CONT'D)
Now go on!

She scampers off. Ducks watches her go.

Henry and Lorina stand chatting amongst a group of black robed academics. Everyone turns to look as Alice makes her way through the crowd, parting Dons and Students like the Red Sea.

ALICE
Pardon me...Excuse me...

Alice tugs on Henry's trousers and hands him the letter. Henry looks thoroughly put off.

ALICE (CONT'D)
It's for you.

Alice runs off. Curious, Henry opens it. A few Dons try to catch of glimpse of its contents.

He unfolds the drawing of LORINA as the QUEEN OF HEARTS. Inside the drawing is the PHOTOGRAPH OF LORINA LAYING ON THE CHAISE, shoulders exposed, gazing seductively into the camera. The photo is signed "C.L.D".

LORINA
Darling? What is it?

Henry flips the drawing over to find a letter written on the back.

CHARLES (V.O.)
My Dear Mr. Liddell...

INT. CHARLES' BEDROOM- NIGHT

Charles draws Alice reaching up to a tall table, straining to reach a little vase.

CHARLES (V.O.)
I often try to remember the simple rules of life: such as: a red hot poker will burn you if you hold it for too long; and that if you cut your finger very deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds; but it seems I'd all but forgotten that very simple rule: if one drinks uninvited from another man's table it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later.

Charles writes in the words "DRINK ME" on the vile's label.

CHARLES (V.O.)

I cannot undo what I have done to fall permanently out of your good graces. But in return for my silence on that matter, I must ask with my whole heart, that you remember why men should covet you. Because you have something of great value. Three girls that need a father's love.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY

Henry looks up from the letter to see his girls, playing near the garden gate.

CHARLES (V.O.)

You must always gather them around you and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale.

INT. CHARLES' BEDROOM- NIGHT

Charles writes "THE END". He closes the handmade book, binding it with a bit of string.

CHARLES (V.O.)

Feel all their simple sorrows and find pleasure in all their simple joys. So that when they are grown, they may keep that loving heart of childhood. And within it, the memory of you, those Lands of Wonder and these happy summer days.

Sincerely, Charles L. Dodgson.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY

Henry folds up the drawing. A few of the Dons whisper and crane their necks, trying to get a peak.

LORINA

(laughing nervously)

Henry? What is it?

INT. CHARLES' CLASSROOM- MORNING

Charles sits writing at his desk. There is a knock at the door.

CHARLES

Come.

Ducks enters.

DUCKS

Aren't you supposed to be someplace
begging for your livelihood right
about now?

CHARLES

The hearing was cancelled.

DUCKS

Cancelled?

CHARLES

It seems The Dean had a change of
Heart.

DUCKS

Hm.

A pause.

DUCKS (CONT'D)

You wanted to see me?

CHARLES

Oh. Yes. I need you to do me a
small favor.

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH MEADOW- DAY

Charles sits under a large Oak tree next to a little pond. In the distance, a two horse carriage comes clopping up the road. The carriage comes to stop. Ducks helps out Alice, dressed her familiar blue dress and white pinafore.

She runs to Charles, hugging his neck and nearly knocking him over. Ducks stays by the carriage.

ALICE

Mr. Dodgson! You've no idea how
boring things have got without you.
(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)

Pricks hardly ever plays games and
she's doesn't know how to make
drawings or paper boats or daisy
chains or anything fun!

CHARLES

In that case, I've got something
for you. And whenever you're
feeling bored again, you're to look
at it and you're to remember how to
have fun.

ALICE

What is it!?

Charles presents her with a GREEN HAND-BOUND MANUSCRIPT.
Typed block letters spell the title:

"Alice's Adventures Underground".

ALICE (CONT'D)

Alice's.. Adventures.. Underground.
My story! You wrote it down!

She eagerly flips through the pages: takes in the neat
handwriting, the whimsical drawings.

ALICE (CONT'D)

You never told us how it ends.

CHARLES

(calling to Ducks)

How long have we got?

DUCKS

I gave the old bat five quid. How
much time does that buy?

CHARLES

Just enough!

(to Alice)

To begin at the beginning.

Alice plops down next to Charles. He opens the book.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Chapter One. Down the rabbit hole.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH MEADOW- EVENING

The evening light filters through the trees. The shadows of fluttering autumn leaves dance over Alice's eyes, nearly closed. Ducks is asleep in the carriage.

CHARLES

So she sat on, with closed eyes,
and half believed herself back in
Wonderland, though she knew she had
but to open them again, and all
would change to dull reality--

Alice looks about her. At the long Cotton Grass, rustling a little in the breeze. At the sheep and cattle grazing in the fields beyond.

CHARLES (V.O.)

The rattling teacups would change
to tinkling sheep-bells and the
Queen's shrill cries to the voice
of the shepherd boy, and the lowing
of the cattle in the distance would
take the place of the Mock Turtle's
heavy sobs--

Alice shifts a little, nestling herself to Charles' side.

In the carriage, Ducks wakes up and checks the time.

CHARLES

Lastly, she pictured to herself how
she would, in the after-time, be
herself a grown woman; and how she
would, through all her riper years,
keep the memory of her own child-
life and the happy summer days.

Charles closes the book. Alice looks up. Her face is contorted in confusion.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Well? Out with it.

ALICE

It's wonderful.

CHARLES

But. You don't like the ending.

ALICE

Well-- it's just quite unlike any
fairy tale I've ever heard.

CHARLES

How's that?

ALICE

Well, for instance, why does no one come down to rescue her?

CHARLES

Well. That's simple. Alice didn't need any rescuing. She outwitted the lot of them all by herself. Even when things made no right sense at all.

ALICE

But it's not a proper fairy tale without a prince in the end.

(yawning)

Or even a knight!

CHARLES

Then it's not a proper fairy tale. Alice made it through Wonderland quite well enough. All on her own. Without anyone to carry her.

ALICE

She must have been very clever then.

CHARLES

Yes, very clever. And very brave.

Charles kisses the top of her head as the sun sinks fast over the open field.

INT. CARRIAGE- EVENING

Charles places Alice in the back of the carriage. She's nearly asleep and still clutching the BOOK.

The carriage clops away. Charles stands under the Oak Tree, waving as it goes. Alice sits up and looks out the back, waving back to him.

When she sits back down, she runs her hand over THE BOOK before closing her eyes to sleep again.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. ALICE'S GARDEN- HAMPSHIRE- 1898- MORNING

REGINALD

Alice!

Close on ADULT ALICE's eyes fluttering open. She looks about her. She slept out in the garden all night.

REGINALD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
What the Devil are you doing out
here? Get up!

Alice squints up at Reginald in the bright morning light.

ALICE
I'm sorry. I don't know how ---

REGINALD
Are you quite aware that God and
everyone from Southampton to
Basingstoke can see you out here?
They're liable to think you're
drunk or-- hysterical. Or both! In
case you hadn't heard, the whole
world's got its eyes on us at the
moment and that'll be the last
thing we need.

Reginald heads towards the house. He stops and looks back.
Alice hasn't moved.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Well come on then! Do you expect me
to carry you?

Alice looks at her husband: red faced and pointing towards the house. Something clicks.

Alice gets up and walks straight past him towards the house.
A trace of defiance in her stride.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
(adjusting his cufflinks)
Right.

INT. ALICE'S BEDROOM- DAY

Reginald enters the room to find Alice changed and pinning her hat in front of a MIRROR.

REGINALD

What's gotten into you lately? Was
it that reporter fellow? What
exactly did he say to you?

Alice ignores him.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

You know, I'd half hoped now that
he's underground we might finally
put all this behind us.

Alice goes to cupboard, lifts a panel. She takes out a
PACKAGE WRAPPED IN SILK.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Maybe have a go at a normal life
for a change.

Alice walks past him, carrying the PACKAGE.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Alice?!

EXT. ALICE'S ESTATE- CIRCULAR DRIVE- DAY

Alice gets into a coach, helped in by a valet.

ALICE

(to the driver)

The Queen's Head Inn please,
Thomas.

The coach takes off. Reginald comes running out of the house.

REGINALD

Alice! Where are you going?! Come
back here! Do you hear me!

INT. QUEEN'S HEAD INN- ELLIOTT'S ROOM- HAMPSHIRE TOWNSHIP-
1898- DAY.

Elliott sits at a table, typing on a TYPEWRITER. Newspaper
articles, notes and books are strewn about him. He looks up
at A KNOCK at the door. He goes to answer it. Alice stands
there, holding the package.

ELLIOTT

Mrs. Hargreaves.

ALICE

Now. What exactly did you want to know?

CUT TO:

INT. QUEEN'S HEAD INN- ELLIOTT'S ROOM- LATER

Alice sits across from Elliott, drinking tea. She unwraps the SILK PACKAGE. It's the original manuscript of "Alice" Charles gave her. She runs her fingers over the BOOK.

ALICE

He gave this to me on the last day we ever spoke. Of course, we'd pass each other in town on occasion, or in the corridors, on and off throughout the years. We'd always be polite, say hello, how's the weather. But. It was never the same.

Elliott comes around, refills her tea.

ELLIOTT

In the last years of his life, Carroll was quoted as saying his greatest regret was that he wouldn't live to know the children of future generations who would take their own journeys down the rabbit hole. What do you think he'd tell them if he could? What I mean to say is-- what I think we'd all like to know is-- Well, what's it about?

ALICE

About?

ELLIOTT

Well it can't be just nonsense can it? Like The Duchess said: 'every story's got a moral if only you can find it.'

ALICE

Why Mr. Shepherd, I should think a highly educated man such as yourself would have worked all of that out already.

Elliott leans forward, notebook in hand, all ears.

ALICE (CONT'D)
It's about fun.

Alice smiles to herself, takes a sip of her tea.

INT. QUEEN'S HEAD INN- ELLIOTT'S ROOM- LATER

Elliott shows Alice out. On her way out the door she picks up Elliott's copy of "Through the Looking Glass".

ALICE
Through The Looking Glass. And What
Alice Found There. You know, after
all these years I never even got a
copy of this one. Reg would never
allow them in the house.

Alice runs her hand over the cover.

ELLIOTT
And what did she find?

ALICE
She found. Exactly what she was
looking for.
(handing him the book)
A friend. A very dear friend.

Elliott follows her down the stairs and out into:

EXT. QUEEN'S HEAD INN- DAY

Alice gathers her dress and goes down the front steps. She is helped back into the coach by THOMAS.

ALICE
(calling back)
Good luck with your story Mr.
Shepherd!

The coach takes off through the crowded streets. Elliott watches it go.

The coach clops along. A MOTOR CAR passes it along the way: the mark of a new century just around the bend.

Alice looks out the back of the carriage. She sees Elliott still standing on the steps. Suddenly we see SILENT FLASHES of:

INT. CARRIAGE BACK WINDOW- OXFORD MEADOWLANDS- DAY- FLASHBACK

Charles standing under the oak tree, waving as the carriage rattles away from him down the road.

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH GROUNDS- DAY- FLASHBACK

Charles runs over the hill towards the girls, a flash of his black umbrella breaking their ranks, their little hands finding his.

EXT. CHRIST CHURCH GROUNDS- DAY- FLASHBACK

Charles lifts Alice up to look in the camera's viewfinder.

EXT. DEANERY GARDEN- DAY- FLASHBACK

Alice, Charles and Ducks singing at the table of the 1/2 Birthday Tea Party.

INT. TOM QUAD DORMITORY- NIGHT- FLASHBACK

Charles, nestled between Alice, Ina and Edith as he tells the story, leafing through his drawings.

INT. STAGECOACH- HAMPSHIRE- DAY- 1898

Alice turns around to face the front.

After a moment, she smiles.

CUT TO BLACK

FADE UP:

Charles Dodgson published "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" on December 22, 1865 under the pen name "Lewis Carroll".

After the Bible, the Koran and the collected works of Shakespeare, it is the most frequently quoted and best known piece of literature in the world.

*Charles never took Priest's orders.
He died a bachelor on January 14,
1898 at Christ Church, Oxford.*

*"Now...let's consider who it was
that dreamed it all. He was part of
my dream of course. But then...I
was part of his dream too."*

*- Lewis Carroll "Through the
Looking Glass"*

THE END