

Wonderland: A One-Act Play
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CHARACTERS

ALICE, DORA, AL, HORACE, RED, THE WOLF, GIRL

SETTING

It is night on a dark street near the French Quarter in New Orleans. The buildings that make up the backdrop are old, brick, and in need of repair. From off-stage left comes the sounds of the city – inaudible voices, music heavy with bass, passing cars in the distance, etc, etc.

Down-stage right stands an old-fashioned light pole, one of those modern electrical pieces modeled after the old in an effort to add to the city's ambiance. The light it emits is dim and slightly yellowed, seeming to give more merit to the dark than make a true attempt to overcome it.

A metal trashcan, overflowing with litter, and a few wooden shipping crates make up the rest of the set.

The city sounds fade softly to the background. The bulb of the lantern grows slightly brighter, then flickers and goes out, leaving the stage in complete darkness.

There is a moment of stillness, then a soft and uncertain voice is heard.

ALICE: Hello?

The lamp flickers back to life. Stage right of the street lamp, Alice has appeared. She is dressed in the blue dress and white pinafore associated with her character, with a ribbon in her blond hair.

ALICE: (*cont.*, *uncertain*) Mr. Rabbit? Hello?

Alice moves about the space for a few moments, looking around in bewilderment. There is a crash off-stage left. She gasps and moves toward the noise.

ALICE: (*cont.*) Mr. Rabbit! Is that you?

She hurries away after the sound, disappearing off stage. A second later, there is the sound of squealing tires and a blaring car horn. Alice screams and runs back on-stage, the indistinguishable curses of a male driver calling after her. Trembling, she reaches the light pole and attempts to hide behind it.

ALICE: (*cont.*) Oh dear, oh dear . . .

Dora enters, stage right. She wears a light black coat which conceals the whole of her outfit. Her hair is done in two braids, complete with blue bows at the end. She carries an open black umbrella decorated with red hearts and wears bright red, sequined shoes. Seeing Alice, she pauses mid-stride.

DORA: Well, who do we have here?

Alice gives a startled yelp and spins around to face Dora, pressing her back against the pole.

DORA: (*cont.*) A little jumpy, aren't we?

ALICE: I beg your pardon, milady. I've just had such a fright!

DORA: You beg my pardon?

ALICE: Yes, very much so.

Alice curtseys.

ALICE: (*cont.*) I assure you I mean no offense by my reaction to your appearance. May I presume that you are the Queen of Hearts?

DORA: (*Bewildered*) The Queen of – Child, are you out of your mind?

ALICE: I truly don't know, your majesty. I seem to be out of my world at the moment. Might I inquire as to where we are?

DORA: Well, I'm in New Orleans. I'm not sure where you are right now.

ALICE: New Or-lee-ians?

Alice looks around in wonder.

ALICE: (*cont.*) How strange that the rabbit hole would lead me here.

DORA: What have you been smoking?

ALICE: Smoking? I've never done any such thing.

DORA: Okay, well . . . have you eaten anything special recently? Did someone give you a funny drink?

ALICE: What? No, no, no . . . that doesn't happen until much later.

DORA: Excuse me?

ALICE: Oh, this will never do. Allow me to begin at the beginning . . .

Alice clears her voice with a loud "ahem," then continues with an air of great importance.

ALICE: It was a bright and beautiful day and I was sitting on a riverbank, dreadfully bored, when I happened to catch sight of a white rabbit hurrying by. It was the most curious thing, for he was dressed in a coat and carrying a pocket watch – something I've never heard of as typical in a rabbit's behavior –

At the mention of the white rabbit, Dora's confusion vanishes and is replaced with annoyance.

DORA: (*Groans*) Oh. My. God. Not another one!

ALICE: Begging your pardon? Another what?

DORA: Oh, stop “begging pardon,” would you? (*To herself*) Why is it always me? For once I wish it were Peter or that damn fish girl who would stumble across one of these people. (*To an unseen force, above*) I mean, I have a job! I really don’t have time for this!

ALICE: Your majesty? Have I caused offense? I really didn’t mean to.

Dora looks back at Alice with an exasperated expression.

ALICE: (*cont.*) Oh, please don’t cut off my head!

DORA: Oh, come on! I’m not going to cut off your head. I’m not the Queen of Hearts, dammit!

Dora turns away from Alice and unbuttons her coat to retrieve a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from the inner pocket. To the audience, her clothing beneath the coat is revealed to be a modified version of the character Dorothy costume, with a very short skirt and plunging neckline. Dora lights her cigarette and inhales deeply in an effort to calm herself.

DORA: (*cont., over her shoulder*) You’re Alice, aren’t you?

ALICE: Why, yes! But how did you –

Dora turns back toward Alice, revealing her costume to the other girl for the first time.

ALICE: (*cont.*) Oh my goodness! I know who you are! I’ve heard all about you!

DORA: Really?

ALICE: Yes! You’re Dorothy Ga—

DORA: It's just Dora now.

ALICE: You're the girl who goes to Oz!

DORA: Not anymore, I'm not.

ALICE: What do you mean? And what are you doing in a place such as this? I thought you and your family lived on a farm?

DORA: Oh, honey, no. We're not in Kansas anymore.

ALICE: But why not?

DORA: Auntie Em's little farm would stand a chance in this world! That slice of the "Bread Basket" went stale long ago.

ALICE: I'm afraid I don't understand.

DORA: (*Sighs*) Listen, I could get on my soap box and rant for hours about agricultural price supports and loan deficiency payments, but what's the point? It would only confuse you more. The point is small-town America is fading away, dying. (*To herself*) Like a forgotten fairy tale . . . (*To Alice*) We just couldn't go back to planting, okay?

ALICE: So, you came to this place?

DORA: You got it.

ALICE: But, what of your adventures? Did a cyclone not fly your house to a wonderful, far-away land?

DORA: When a tornado hits around here, it's usually on the arm of a hurricane.

ALICE: And have there not been hurricanes to hit New Or-lee-ands?

DORA: What? Are you kidding? No. Of course you're not . . .

ALICE: There was a storm, then?

GAMBIT

DORA: The mother of all storms, honey. But when a levee breaks, houses are washed away, not flown off. In the real world people don't end up in Oz. They end up in the Super Dome, fighting for bottled water.

ALICE: Is that what happened to you?

DORA: Something like that.

ALICE: And your little dog, too?

DORA: Well, no . . . shelters don't allow pets, so . . .

ALICE: (*Gasps*) That's awful! Oh, but this is all wrong! Your house is meant to land on and kill a wicked witch, isn't it?

DORA: I guess so.

ALICE: And it never did?

DORA: Nope, it just went down the drain.

ALICE: Well, then, you need another!

DORA: Try telling that to FEMA.

ALICE: Who?

DORA: Never mind . . . Look, what do you expect me to do? I can't just click my heels together and wish for a home!

ALICE: (*Genuinely surprised*) You can't?

DORA: (*Indicates her shoes*) There's a big difference between rhinestones and rubies, kid. These aren't the real deal. Like the rest of this get-up, they're just for show.

ALICE: But that means . . . the witch! She's still alive!

DORA: Yeah. She's doing pretty well for herself, too.

GAMBIT

ALICE: You mean she's here? In – in this world?

DORA: Sure. She's running for Vice President.

A transient, Al, dressed in rags, enters from stage left at a slow pace. A table lamp, complete with shade, is clutched in his hands. The long cord trails behind him. While unnoticed by Alice, Dora sees him enter and watches his progression as he walks against the back wall, muttering to himself excerpts from Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth.

ALICE: I don't understand.

DORA: Neither do I. (*As Al passes behind them*) Hey, Al. How's it going with the lamp?

Alice notices Al for the first time. The transient takes no notice of either of them and continues on, at an even pace. He moves off stage with both ladies watching.

ALICE: That was . . . curious.

DORA: Yeah. People come and go quickly here. He's been here for years but never could get used to a world that used fossil fuels instead of flying carpets . . .

ALICE: You mean, he's . . . like us?

DORA: You never read Arabian Nights?

ALICE: I suppose I should have paid more attention to my lessons.

DORA: Maybe so. Poor guy went mad trying to get people to switch to fluorescent light bulbs –

ALICE: I don't understand any of this!

DORA: Well, they increase energy efficiency and have a longer lifespan –

GAMBIT

ALICE: No, I mean THIS. None of this is right! We're not supposed to end up here!

DORA: Things don't always turn out they way they're supposed to.

ALICE: But my story has been the same for years and years! Why is it all wrong this time?

DORA: You mean where's the Cheshire cat and all that?

ALICE: YES!

DORA: Gone. Forgotten.

ALICE: They can't be gone!

DORA: Why not? A story lives only as long as the last person who remembers it and, with all the entertainment mediums available today, it's rare for a person to pick up a book.

ALICE: So, what, if people forget about someone, they just "poof" out of existence?

DORA: Pretty much. Though the main characters don't seem to. I think it has to do with having a registered trademark, or something.

ALICE: But children have always loved my adventures!

DORA: Sweetie, unless you're in an X-box killing zombies or running over pedestrians, the kids today don't give a s—t. If you want to be known again, you'll have to get cast in a violent video game of your own.

ALICE: Or what? I'll lose my wits and wander the streets like that . . . person?

DORA: Well, frankly, that's up to you. Al couldn't adjust to the way things are here so he went on this big crusade trying to change things. He wanted to save the world, buck the system and all that. Pointless,

really. There's no way one man can change the whole of society. If you just accept things for the way they are and don't go around fighting against the world, you'll be fine.

ALICE: I don't want to fight against anything.

DORA: Good.

ALICE: (*Fiercely*) But I don't want to accept this awful place, either!

It's loud and it's smelly – there's no magic shoes or flying carpets – and if there's no getting to Oz then I must conclude that there's little chance of getting to Wonderland, either! I don't want to stay in a land where there are no white rabbits or quaint farms – and I don't want to know what in the world a FEMA or a Z-BOX is! (*Voice breaks*) I just want to go home!

Alice bursts into tears, sobbing loudly. Dora simply stares at the other girl, in shock, for a moment, then seems to come back to herself. She takes a handkerchief of blue and white checked gingham from her pocket.

DORA: Hey . . . hey. None of that. (*Offers the handkerchief*) Here.

ALICE: (*Takes it*) Th-thank you.

DORA: Jesus, I haven't seen anyone react this badly since Rumpelstiltskin . . . You're not going to rip yourself in half, are you?

ALICE: N-no.

DORA: Well, good. That was a real mess . . . Oh, stop crying, would ya? So you can't get to Wonderland again – so what? What's so great about tea parties and talking caterpillars, anyway?

Unseen by both, another man enters stage-right. He is Horace, a remarkably short man wearing a dark suit and tie with a white

shirt. He has a picketing sign, which reads "Fight for White!" slung over one shoulder, in his pocket are fliers of the same nature. On seeing the girls, he moves toward them.

ALICE: Oh, I don't know . . . but I don't know what to do here. How do I say goodbye to the adventures I was meant to have? How did you?

Dora is a bit taken aback by the question. There is a moment of pause as Alice, tears forgotten, stares intently at the other girl.

DORA: I . . . well, I don't know. (*Stronger*) I got over it, that's all. I realized that there was no use in living in the past, and I moved on. I found a way to survive.

ALICE: And what, exactly, do you do here to survive?

DORA: I'm an exotic dancer.

HORACE: And she'll burn in Hell for it, too!

Alice jumps in surprise, then spins around. At seeing the speaker, a delighted expression comes over her face. Dora gives Horace a nod in greeting. Through nightly encounters they've formed a tentative friendship of sorts. The banter between them is more playful than malicious.

ALICE: Why, Dora, look! A dwarf!

HORACE: What did you call me?!

DORA: (*To Alice*) I believe the p.c. term of the month is "vertically challenged." (*To Horace*) Forgive her. She just crawled out of a skunk den.

ALICE: Rabbit hole.

DORA: Whatever.

HORACE: That's no excuse for rudeness.

GAMBIT

DORA: Like your telling me every ten minutes that I'm going to "suffer His terrible wrath" is perfect courtesy!

HORACE: It is not out of kindness that I strive to save your immortal soul from eternal damnation?

DORA: Oh, Jesus Christ!

HORACE: Exactly. (*To Alice*) From down a rabbit hole, you say? Then that would make you Alice, from the land of wonder?

ALICE: I . . . guess so?

HORACE: Well, my dear, I have but one question for you. Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

ALICE: I'm . . . what?

HORACE: If you died right this minute, would you be ready to stare the Lord Almighty in his glorious face?

DORA: Give it a rest, Horace, it's her first night.

ALICE: (*To Dora*) Horace? (*To Horace*) Your name is Horace?

HORACE: What of it?

ALICE: It just doesn't seem like a very fitting name for a dwarf. Maybe something like "Jolly" or "Smiley" –

DORA: Or "Flaccid."

HORACE: (*Shaking his head*) I'll weep for you when the Rapture comes.

DORA: You do that, Padre.

HORACE: Anyway – as entertaining as this is – I can't waste any more of my time trying to lead the two of you from sin. There's a White rally at St. Louis Cathedral tonight!

GAMBIT

DORA: Huh. I didn't know the Klan was still around these days.

HORACE: What? Oh, no no no! (*Hands both girls a flier*) It's a candle-light vigil, protesting the attempted murder of young Miss White . . . pitiful creature. If only she'd stayed under our care.

DORA: You knew her?

HORACE: A lost lamb from the flock, the poor little run-away. Our mission took her in but not before she'd been corrupted by the evils of New Orleans' streets! Mere days after leaving our care, a . . . ahem . . . chemical overdose caused her to slip into a persistent vegetative state, nearly three months ago.

DORA: Three months as a veggie?

ALICE: What does that mean?

DORA: Basically, she's . . . asleep.

HORACE: But alive! As the Lord intended! Now it's up to us to prevent them from removing her feeding tube and starving her to death.

ALICE: Oh, dear!

DORA: Oh, Jesus.

HORACE: I must go. Don't want to keep the others waiting . . .

ALICE: There are others?

DORA: Six more just like him.

HORACE: (*Moves to leave*) Tireless crusaders for the Good Lord!

DORA: (*Under her breath*) Oh, lord . . .

Horace makes his way across the stage, shouting all the way.

GAMBIT

HORACE: Praying for those who seek redemption!

DORA: (*To Alice*) Annoying the s—t out of those who aren't.

HORACE: Hearken-all! Sodomites! Abortionists! Satanists! Adulterers! HE KNOWS! He watches! He sees you when you are sleeping! He KNOWS – when you're awake! He knows when you've done bad, or good –

DORA: (*Calls after him*) That's Santa Claus, s—t-for-brains!

Red enters from stage left. She wears a skirt even shorter than Dora's, a midriff top, fishnet stockings, and heels – an outfit that just screams "hooker." She also wears a bright red "hoodie" sweater, left open to display her body, with the hood pulled up over her head. As Red and Horace pass one another, they call out greetings but do not break stride.

RED: Hey, Half-pint!

HORACE: Hi, hoe!

Horace exits, whistling, his sign once again slung over his shoulder. Red approaches Dora, lowering her hood.

ALICE: I really don't like this place.

DORA: You'll get used to it. Just be careful. There is danger around every street corner . . . pimps and beggars and thieves –

ALICE: Oh, my!

RED: Hey, Dora! Thought you'd be on stage by now.

DORA: Not till midnight. How's tricks?

RED: Eh, the usual. What was the priest peddling this time?

Dora hands her flier over to Red.

RED: (*cont.*) Jesus, not this s—t! Explain to me why the world gives a damn about some junkie b—h who ODeD?

DORA: White woman syndrome.

RED: (*Waves her flier*) Ha! Literally. Idiot girl. Couldn't say "no" to "snow." I wish they'd just pull the plug already.

DORA: Oh, real sensitive, Red. Whatever happened to hookers having hearts of gold?

RED: It got expensive.

Red notices Alice for the first time.

RED: (*cont.*) Hey! Who's this?

DORA: She's Alice. Alice, this Red.

RED: Alice? As in?

DORA: Yeah.

RED: Well! How are ya, Alice?

ALICE: I honestly don't know. Do you . . . dance exotically, as well?

RED: Me? Oh, no . . . I'm more of what you might call a "professional" girl.

ALICE: Oh?

DORA: (*Darkly*) Red is one of the Wolf's girls.

ALICE: The Wolf?

RED: The Wolf is my man. He takes care of me, ya know. Protects me.

DORA: Sure he does. (*To Alice*) Don't listen to anything she says about him.

ALICE: But, is he really a wolf . . . like, from the stories?

RED: (*Overlapping*) Well, not exactly . . .

DORA: (*Overlapping*) Yes, exactly.

Dora's and Red's eyes meet; their gazes hold, in some soft of silent challenge, as Dora begins to speak again.

DORA: (*cont.*) There are two kinds of wolves in this world, Alice. There are those you hear howling in the dark, announcing their intentions to the world. You take just one look at them and just know what they're about . . . but there is another kind; the kind that gains the trust of their victims with soft whispers and kind words.

RED: Now, just a minute, Dora!

DORA: These wolves are the most dangerous of all. A wolf like this won't just nip at your heels or gnaw on your leg a little . . . oh, no. A wolf like this will swallow you whole.

RED: Well, now, are you done being dramatic? You're scaring the girl!

DORA: She should be scared of that beast, and so should you! Do you know what he's going to do to you when he finds out you've left your turf?

RED: Ugh, nothing, because I'm meeting him here. I'm moving uptown!

DORA: Why, Red, you've been promoted.

RED: Well, yeah. With snow-girl in the hospital sleeping her life away, someone had to move up.

DORA: Wait! You mean – White? The vegetable was one of the Wolf's girls?

RED: Sure. She came to us right after leaving the seven dorks. Guess she got sick of cooking and cleaning all day to earn her keep.

DORA: And, what, she thought it would be easier earning her keep with HIM? Jesus!

Enter the Wolf, stage left. Attractive in a sinister way with dark, wild hair and ravenous eyes, he wears a long, dark coat with a fur collar and cuffs, that reaches almost to his ankles. The rest of his clothing is dark, nondescript. His every movement should be fluid, controlled; every action just a little feral. He is a wolf, cunning and dangerous, but he is able to mask his nature (slip on sheep's clothing) at will. He is able to slip, seemingly without effort, from one persona to another without missing a beat.

DORA: Come on, let's get out of here before we run into the beast, himself.

Dora takes hold of Alice's arm and moves to pull her off-stage, but turns right into the Wolf's path.

THE WOLF: And why, may I ask, would you wish to deprive me of making the acquaintance of so fair a maiden?

DORA: Because she is a maiden, and I think she'd like to stay that way.

Dora moves to leave again, but is effortlessly blocked.

THE WOLF: Really, Dora, those country-girl manners of yours need much improvement. The least you could do is make a simple introduction before pulling the young girl away from us.

DORA: Alice, the mangy mongrel you see before you is the Wolf. Don't bother to offer your hand. I don't believe the flea-bag ever learned to shake.

The Wolf smiles, and moves to stand behind Red. He casually takes hold of Red at the nape of her neck, a move that is both tender and possessive.

GAMBIT

THE WOLF: Charming, as always. (*To Alice*) Well, my dear, judging by your attire and little Dora's vested interest in keeping us apart, I assume you are a new arrival?

ALICE: I . . . am . . .

Red looks over her shoulder at the Wolf, adoringly.

RED: She's Alice.

THE WOLF: So I see. (*To Alice*) Tell me, darling Alice, how have you found your new world, so far?

ALICE: I don't know how I found it. I only wish I could lose it again.

THE WOLF: You're right to feel nervous, here. This is a dangerous place for one as beautiful as you to journey alone.

DORA: She's not alone. I'm taking care of her.

THE WOLF: Indeed? And will your new foundling be joining in your profession, as well? Another recruit for The Heart's Desire?

DORA: One less recruit for you.

THE WOLF: Perhaps, but don't you think young Alice should have a say in her own future?

DORA: Oh, give it a rest, flea bag.

*Dora takes hold of Alice, once again, and begins to lead her off stage.
The Wolf calls out to Alice.*

THE WOLF: Go, if you wish, my dear, but you should know there is no magic on stage with Dora. Dancing for dollars is not the way to Wonderland.

Alice stops short, causing Dora to halt, as well.

ALICE: What do you mean?

The Wolf moves away from Red. He prowls the stage as he speaks; the low, dangerous tone of his warning words slips, seamlessly, into a gentle tone of coaxing, as he offers Alice her choice.

THE WOLF: This world is far more dangerous than you can imagine, my dear. There are hidden cameras that watch your every move, depriving you of any privacy . . . all the better to see you with.

DORA: Alice . . .

THE WOLF: How can you feel safe when there are people who watch your every move? Tracking your life, tracing your calls . . . Alice, don't you know? They listen to every word we say. Our wonderful little government can drop in at any time. They've tapped every line . . . all the better to hear you with.

DORA: Shut up! You're scaring her!

RED: (*To Dora*) Wasn't it you who said she should be sacred?

THE WOLF: And who watches? Who listens? Why, our lovely leaders, of course . . . those who have been brought to power in order to protect us. Oh, but we've been fooled, Alice. Our charming politicians have straightened, and strengthened, and whitened their teeth not just to charm you – not just the better to please you with . . . but all the better to eat you with, my dear.

Alice watches, as if hypnotized, as the Wolf approaches Red and tenderly embraces her from behind. Red closes her eyes and melts against her "protector."

THE WOLF: (*cont.*) Oh, yes, there are terrors in this land . . . but you don't have to be afraid. Not here. Not with me. I can take care of you, Alice.

DORA: Don't listen to him, Alice.

THE WOLF: You wouldn't have to worry about anything every again.

DORA: He's lying. Just look what he did to White. She goes to sleep and he abandons her!

THE WOLF: Your fairytale doesn't have to end, my dear.

DORA: Life isn't a fairy-tale! There's no good prince to save the day! There's no magic potion to set things right!

THE WOLF: Oh, but there is.

The Wolf moves to stand in front of Alice. From his pocket, he takes out a thin small plastic bag. He takes a small square of paper from the bag and offers it to Alice.

THE WOLF: (*cont.*) There is something that can make everything seem wonderful again. Isn't that how it works in your story, Alice? A bottle that says "drink me" or a wafer saying "Eat me?" Isn't this little offering of mine exactly what you know, and love? Isn't this what you really want?

Alice takes a step toward the Wolf, a quizzical gaze fixed on the offering in his hand.

DORA: Alice! Don't!

At her call, Alice turns toward Dora.

DORA: If you're going to get by in this world you can't live in the past. You can't just dwell on what was.

ALICE: Exactly what do you think you are doing, then, with your faux-ruby slippers? Do you go through every night of your life dressed like this? A sad mockery of your former self?

DORA: It's an illusion, Alice. It's not real, and nothing he can offer you is real, either.

ALICE: Well, maybe I don't want to be real! I was happy in my illusion before, why should life be any different now?

Alice walks over to the Wolf.

THE WOLF: Happily ever after.

The Wolf places the square in her mouth, and smiles. Silence. Alice stands motionless, eyes closed, as Dora, her shield down for the moment, stares at her with a look of total and complete loss. From off-stage, the bells of St. Louis Cathedral begin to chime; the typical song which tells of a coming new hour. Midnight approaches.

RED: It's almost midnight.

The Wolf and Dora both look at her.

RED: (*cont.*, to Dora) Don't you have to work?

Dora's mask of indifference slips back into place as the chimes begin their first of twelve tolls.

DORA: Yeah. I do.

Dora retrieves her umbrella, and calmly exits, stage left, calling out behind her.

DORA: (*cont.*) See ya around, Alice.

The Wolf and Red exchange a look. She nods once then, and following his unspoken orders, exits stage right. Alice opens her eyes and stares, adoringly, at the Wolf, who offers her his arm.

THE WOLF: Better?

ALICE: Oh, so very much.

The Wolf smiles and leads Alice off-stage, right. The street light begins to flicker again and goes out. The stage is black for just a moment as the bells begin to ring the last of their twelve tolls. At the stroke of twelve, the lamp returns to full brightness, revealing a Girl who has appeared in much the same way as Alice. Though dressed in rags, she sports perfect makeup, opera gloves, and a glittering tiara . . . and is noticeably missing one of her glass slippers. As she hobbles on her one shoe to the center of the stage, a pumpkin can be seen at the base of the light pole.

GIRL: Hello? . . . Hello?

Blackout.