QUEEN OF HEARTS

Written by Stephanie Shannon

Based on Events, Both Real and Through the Looking Glass

Inspired by "In The Shadow Of The Dreamchild" by Karoline Leach

Contact:
Brillstein Entertainment Partners
Creative Artists Agency

WGA Registered #1648261

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 an 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 <u>don't touch anything</u>. 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 curiouser, 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 Jaberwocky.

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

“C*ommissioner 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 (O.S.)
Aren’t you finished in there yet? Mind you, I said <u>don’t touch anything!</u>

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. Elliott stops.

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:
The Queen! The Queen! She's coming!

VOICE #2:
(singing)
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 the 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 GAVEL

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 raucously, 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 <u>still</u>.

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
<u>Now</u>.

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 obesquium 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 <u>expected</u> 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.

<u>Charles' POV</u>:

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

<u>Fantasy sequence:</u>

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 Dodsgon!

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 though 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 curtsies 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 <u>swing.</u>

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 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 fowl 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.
(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 <u>is</u> next time!

ALICE
Please, just till bedtime!

LORINA (CONT'D)
<u>Another day</u>. 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 <u>this</u> 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 Oxfords' 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. Charles 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 SOLIDER, 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 its head and spreads its leathery wings: evoking the dragon-like image of the JABBERWOCKY. The skeletal creature rears up on his haunches, arching its 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 <u>today</u> 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 <u>some</u> 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 <u>less</u>. It's very easy to take <u>more</u> 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 <u>What</u> 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 <u>always</u> 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 to 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 CYMBALS.

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 find 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 frain 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 <u>him</u>, that other, reigning in his place; Lord of his <u>rights</u>; 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 <u>love</u> with her, Henry. Don't you see it? Even to being, well, <u>obsessed</u> 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 <u>our</u> 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 <u>even</u> 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 form Charles.

MARY
(calling back)
Come along! Come on, Alice.

Alice, Edith and Ina follow Mary, stealing glances back at Charles.

INT. THE GIRLS' 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 statues 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 statue 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 vile.

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;
(MORE)

CHARLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
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 in 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. 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 in the ground 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 <u>normal</u> 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 <u>about?</u>

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.

'Lewis Carroll' was born on a
summer's day on the River Thames
and is still very much alive.

THE END