

Characters:

Alice Liddell - brunette, statue-esque at age 21

Lewis Carroll - tall, gangly, but not unhandsome at 41

The Cheshire Cat (female)

The Mad Hatter (male)

The March Hare (male)

The Dormouse (female)

Dr. Liddell - Alice's father, dean of Christ's Church, Oxford; played by the actor playing the Mad Hatter

Through the course of the play, the characters act out scenes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with parts as follows:

Alice - Miranda, Ariel

Lewis Carroll - Prospero

The Cheshire Cat - Caliban

The Mad Hatter - Antonio, Gonzalo, Stephano

The March Hare - Ferdinand, Sebastian, Trinculo

The Dormouse - Alonso

Characters in Prospero's Masque:

The Butterfly - played by the actor playing the Mad Hatter

The White Queen - played by the actor playing the Dormouse

The Red Queen - played by the actor playing the Cheshire Cat

SCENE TWO: A TEA TABLE IN WONDERLAND

Lights come up as slowly as consciousness comes back to Alice. She finds herself splayed out on the ground, her long dress transformed into the girlish short one of Tenniel's illustrations, a fact Alice notes with displeasure. Behind her, the MAD HATTER, and the MARCH HARE partake of their endless tea party while the DORMOUSE dozes.

ALICE

(sighs)

Back in Wonderland and short dresses. Ugh. My petticoats are soaked through. I suppose there's nothing to do but have some tea.

She gets up and heads to the table.

MAD HATTER, MARCH HARE

No room, no room!

ALICE

There's plenty of room.

MARCH HARE

Have some wine.

ALICE

And there's never any wine. Only tea. Remarkably good tea, I must admit.

MARCH HARE

Why must you admit that? I didn't ask you to.

DORMOUSE

(drowsily)

No one's forcing you that I can see.

MARCH HARE

You can't see anything with your eyes closed.

DORMOUSE

I can see it's dark.

MARCH HARE

Touche.

DORMOUSE

(drifting off to sleep again)

Or not touche, that is the question. Whether tis nobler in the mind to snore a bit too loudly, like so - (snore)

MARCH HARE

(poking the Dormouse)

What was the question again? I missed it.

The Mad Hatter stares at Alice, eyes wide, before finally speaking.

MAD HATTER

How is a hawk like a handsaw?

ALICE

I don't want anymore riddles. Not today. No one has the answers anyway.

MAD HATTER

Was that a riddle? I was just curious.

ALICE

So was I. And look where it's gotten me - stuck in time with the rest of you.

MARCH HARE

We're stuck without Time, actually.

MAD HATTER

I was never particularly fond of tea to begin with, but now - drinking from cup after cup, day after day, month after month, year after year! It's maddening, I tell you!

DORMOUSE

(drowsily, starting on the Mad Hatter's "never")

And ever and ever and ever
and ever and ever and ever...

MARCH HARE

But we're already mad.

MAD HATTER

Then it's sane-ening, how about that? Can you imagine, drinking nothing but tea whilst being horribly, vividly sane?! That same bitter, leafy taste crudely masked with sugar forever penetrating your perfectly unclouded mind? That taste - that taste! It haunts my very dreams!

MARCH HARE

(to Alice)

Personally, I've been leaving the bags out and just drinking water the last few go-arounds.

The Mad Hatter jumps up and points at the March Hare melodramatically.

MAD HATTER

Coward! You'll take your lumps and suffer like the rest of us!

He throttles the March Hare while alternately stuffing lumps of sugar down his throat.

MARCH HARE

You're just - ack - jealous you didn't - uff - think of it first! Excellent sugar, by the way.

MAD HATTER

(pausing mid-strangle)

Why thank you. I only buy the best.

MARCH HARE

Oh, it shows. But carry on.

MAD HATTER

Right.

The Mad Hatter goes back to throttling the March Hare. Alice gets between them, while the Dormouse regains consciousness just in time to see Lewis Carroll enter, wearing a grand robe made from giant illustrated pages of his Alice books. He stands to the side, watching, viewed only by the Dormouse.

ALICE

Come now, there will be no strangling guests at the table. Honestly, where are your manners?

MAD HATTER

Don't look at me. (points to the March Hare) He ate them all.

MARCH HARE

We ran out of biscuits.

ALICE

(to Mad Hatter)

Still, you'll just have to wait until after dessert, and strangle him on the veranda with everyone else.

DORMOUSE

(pointing at Carroll)

He's back.

ALICE

Who?

DORMOUSE

Time. Which you'd know if you paid any atten...

She falls asleep again, arm still pointing out at Carroll. Alice stares at Carroll in disbelief.

MAD HATTER

Time! Have you come to forgive us?

Carroll says nothing.

ALICE

That's the man who's kept you trapped at tea? That's Time?!

MARCH HARE

Don't you recognize Him? It's no wonder he hasn't been kind to you.

ALICE

What?

MAD HATTER

(to Carroll)

We're awfully sorry about everything. And we've been going around this table for so terribly long -

MARCH HARE

Without a moment to wash up. It's getting downright unsanitary.

MAD HATTER

What do you say? Shall we let bygones be bygones

DORMOUSE

(talking in her sleep)
Tarry ... tarry ... tarry ...
tarry ... tarry.

DORMOUSE

Tarry a little, there is something else. This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood.

MAD HATTER

You do heal all wounds, after all. So really, no harm done!

Carroll turns to go.

MAD HATTER

Don't go! Please! I beg you, just another moment!

Carroll exits. The Mad Hatter sinks into his chair dejectedly.

MAD HATTER

Accursed Time, never waiting for any man.

ALICE

Do you see him often?

MAD HATTER

Only occasionally, and then he goes skulking off again.

ALICE

Why haven't I seen him here before?

MARCH HARE

You just keep missing his Sneering Days, is all.

MAD HATTER

Ah!

The Mad Hatter takes out his pocket watch.

MAD HATTER

And what day is it?

ALICE

The 21st, I believe.

MAD HATTER

Two and a half days slow now!

The Mad Hatter shakes his watch up and down, listens intently.

MAD HATTER

It's getting worse.

ALICE

Worse, you say?

MARCH HARE

Try some more butter.

MAD HATTER

I told you, butter doesn't suit the works.

MARCH HARE

What about the preserves?

ALICE

Your watch is getting slower ...

MAD HATTER

We tried that too.

ALICE

... and he's suddenly appearing inside his own creation ...

MARCH HARE

Only the blackberry. I think the fig would work much better.

ALICE

... perhaps this isn't just the same old story.

MARCH HARE

Story?

MAD HATTER

Excellent idea! Tell us one.

ALICE

There's only one story on my mind at the moment, and it doesn't have an ending yet.

MARCH HARE

Then wake up the Dormouse. She knows loads of them.

The Mad Hatter and the March Hare pinch the Dormouse on both sides at once. The Dormouse slowly opens her eyes.

DORMOUSE

I wasn't asleep. I heard every word you fellows were saying.

MAD HATTER

Then tell the story about all the treacle. And be quick about it, or you'll be asleep again before it's done.

DORMOUSE

Hmm. How does it go? Ah yes. *O, for a muse of treacle that would ascend the brightest heaven of invention -*

MAD HATTER

That's not it. The other one.

DORMOUSE

Two households, both alike and treacle-y -

MARCH HARE

Wrong!

MAD HATTER

I know what this is!

He reaches for the Dormouse's seat, pulls out a large book she's been sitting on, and tosses it on the table.

MAD HATTER

You've been soaking up classical verse by osmosis again!

MARCH HARE

Honestly, if we've told you once, we've told you a thousand times -

DORMOUSE

A thousand times the worse, to want thy light.

Alice picks the book up off the table.

ALICE

"The Tempest and other plays by William Shakespeare". This is what he told me to do. "Don't wait to read The Tempest in alphabetical order". That was his advice.

MARCH HARE

Whose advice?

ALICE

Lewis Car- ah, Time's. I thought it meant he had no answers for me, but he told me something. I'd just forgotten the language.

MAD HATTER

What is she going on about?

DORMOUSE

Words, words, words.

ALICE

It was dreadfully hard for him to talk to anybody, much less adults! So he made up games for them instead, and for a few brief moments, everyone tried very hard to think like he did, and enjoyed themselves immensely. Of course he couldn't tell me directly! He had to put it into a riddle, one last game for me to puzzle out.

MAD HATTER

A puzzle?

MARCH HARE

A game?

MAD HATTER

Something to do besides drink tea?

DORMOUSE

Or sleeping?

ALICE

Yes. Inside this play, there may be a secret message for me - perhaps for all of us. All we have to do is act it out, and discover the meaning of this riddle, if it has one.

MARCH HARE

And if it doesn't?

ALICE

Then you've at least spent a few rounds of four o'clock doing something new for once.

DORMOUSE

Is there a part for each of us?

ALICE

(flipping through pages)

There looks to be quite a bit more than one a piece. Do you mind?

MAD HATTER

Mind?! That's excellent! I'll get the hats!

The Mad Hatter springs up and runs off stage.

MARCH HARE

Oh! Well, if the wearing of hats is involved, I shall be delighted!

ALICE

(to the Dormouse)

And you?

DORMOUSE

I suppose, so long as it's not a play about a mouse trap.

The Dormouse shivers.

ALICE

I believe we'll be safe on that account.

The Cheshire Cat appears from out of nowhere.

CHESHIRE CAT

You may be surprised.

ALICE

Have you read it before, or are you just trying to sound cryptic?

The Cheshire Cat keeps on smiling as the Mad Hatter enters with a tower of hat boxes.

MAD HATTER

Hats have arrived! The play can begin now!

He begins unpacking boxes and placing hats on the table.

CHESHIRE CAT

It took you long enough to start. I was beginning to wonder if we'd get to it at all.

ALICE

Start it yourself if you're so clever.

CHESHIRE CAT

It would be my pleasure. We begin on an uncharted island, inhabited by Prospero, a powerful magician -

The Mad Hatter produces a pointy magician's hat out of one of the hat boxes, and puts it on.

MAD HATTER

And what do you know? A perfect fit!

CHESHIRE CAT

- Prospero's daughter, the beautiful virgin Miranda -

MARCH HARE

You'll play her, of course.

ALICE

Will I?

MARCH HARE

It's rather obvious. I mean, look at you.

Alice looks down at herself, not sure how to feel about this.

CHESHIRE CAT

(gestures to the Dormouse)

- and Ariel, an airy spirit under Prospero's command.

MAD HATTER

I don't have a hat for an airy spirit.

MARCH HARE

I don't think spirits wear hats. They go in more for wings, I believe. And I have just the thing..

The March Hare grabs two tea trays and some twine, loops the twine between the handles, and starts tying it around the Dormouse.

MAD HATTER

From different places on the island, Prospero and Miranda both spot a ship -

The Cheshire Cat brings out a tiny paper sailboat, then grabs a teacup from the table, sets the boat afloat in the teacup.

CHESHIRE CAT

- at sea.

She hands the cup to Alice.

CHESHIRE CAT

Aboard that ship is Prospero's treacherous brother, Antonio -

MAD HATTER

Oooh! An evil twin? I can play them both!

He quickly switches hats.

CHESHIRE CAT

(picks up two crowns from the table, places one on the Dormouse)

Alonso, the king of Naples, (places the other crown on the March Hare's head) and his son, Ferdinand, a handsome prince, along with various councillors, jesters and servants, some good, some bad. Prospero then calls up Ariel, (the Dormouse quickly takes the crown back off) to summon a great storm to capsizes the ship as Miranda watches from the shore.

The Dormouse grabs a teapot, and pours water on top of the ship, drowning it.

ALICE/MIRANDA

(watching the ship sink)

Oh!

*I have suffered
 With those that I saw suffer: a brave Vessel,
 Dash'd all to pieces. O the Cry did knock
 Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish'd.
 Had I been any God of power, I would
 Have sunk the Sea within the Earth or ere
 It should the good ship so have swallow'd, and
 The fraughting souls within her.*

Behind everyone, Lewis Carroll enters,
 wearing a long cloak covered in the
 classic Alice in Wonderland
 illustrations by Tenniel.

CARROLL/PROSPERO

Wipe thou thine eyes, have Comfort:

MAD HATTER

Wait - did Time just start a scene?

MARCH HARE

I think he starts them all. Ask Aristotle.

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*The direful Spectacle of the Wrack which touch'd
 The very virtue of compassion in thee
 I have with such provision in mine art
 So safely ordered that there is no soul,
 No, not so much perdition as an hair
 Betid to any creature in the vessel
 which thou heardest cry, which thou saw'st sink. 'Tis time
 I should inform thee farther. Lend thy hand
 And pluck my magic garment from me -*

Alice helps to take off Carroll's
 Wonderland-illustrated cloak.

MAD HATTER

Magic garment - wait, I'm playing the magician. That's my
 part!

MARCH HARE

Shhhh! Do you want to make him angry again?

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*Lie there, my art. (to Miranda, an invitation, not a command)
 Sit down.*

ALICE/MIRANDA

*You have often
 Begun to tell me what I am, but stopp'd
 And left me to a bootless inquisition,
 Concluding 'Stay; not yet.'*

CARROLL/PROSPERO

The hour's now come.

CHESHIRE CAT

And from there, he takes over a hundred and fifty lines of poetry to tell a very simple story, so I'm sure even Time won't mind if we skim a bit.

ALICE

Yes, please!

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since,
Thy father was the duke of Millaine, and
A prince of power.*

CHESHIRE CAT

But a duke that preferred study to politics -

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*The government I cast upon my brother,
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies, dedicated
To closeness and the bettering of my mind -*

CHESHIRE CAT

And while Prospero is off with his nose in a book, his brother Antonio - (gestures to the Mad Hatter)

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*- he whom, next thyself,
of all the world I loved -*

CHESHIRE CAT

- gets tired of handling all the responsibility without the power and title that usually go with it -

MAD HATTER

I did claim the role first, after all...

CHESHIRE CAT

- and decides to overthrow his brother and take the dukedom for himself.

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*Mark his condition, and th' event; then tell me
If this might be a brother.*

The Cheshire Cat leads the Mad Hatter over to the Dormouse.

CHESHIRE CAT

But Prospero is still too popular with the people for Antonio to kill outright, so he plots with the King of Naples -

CARROLL/PROSPERO

An Enemy to me inveterate -

MAD HATTER AND DORMOUSE

(to each other, with over-the-top scheming hand gestures)

Plot plot plot plot plot!

CHESHIRE CAT

- to let the king's army through the gates and they, in exchange for -

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*Homage and I know not how much tribute
Should presently extirpate me and mine
out of the Dukedom and confer fair Millaine,
With all the honors, on my brother; whereon,
The ministers for th' purpose hurried thence
Me and thy crying self.*

The Mad Hatter and the Dormouse grab
Carroll and Alice and push them up onto
the table.

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*In few, they hurried us aboard a bark,
Bore us some leagues to sea, where they prepared
A rotten carcass of a boat, not rigg'd,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast, the very rats
Instinctively have quit it.*

MAD HATTER

Some rats should quit stealing parts, then.

MARCH HARE

Stop being sulky, and start being the sea.

The Mad Hatter and March Hare extend
the blue tablecloth on the table, and
make it billow like the ocean. The
Dormouse grabs a fan off the table and
fans at Carroll and Alice furiously.

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*There they hoist us
To cry to th' sea, that roar'd to us, to sigh
To th' winds, whose pity sighing back again
Did us but loving wrong.*

ALICE/MIRANDA

What trouble

Was I then to you?

CARROLL/PROSPERO

*O, a cherubin
Thou wast, that did preserve me. Thou didst smile
Infused with a fortitude from heaven
When I have deck'd the sea with drops full salt,
Under my burthen groan'd, which rais'd in me
And undergoing stomach, to bear up
Against what should ensue.*

ALICE/MIRANDA

How came we ashore?

CARROLL/PROSPERO

By Providence divine.

*Here in this island we arriv'd, and here
Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit
Than other princess' can, that have more time
For vainer hours and tutors not so careful.*

ALICE/MIRANDA

*Heaven thank you for't. And now i pray you, sir,
For still 'tis beating in my mind, your reason
For raising this sea-storm?*

CARROLL/PROSPERO

Know thus far forth;

*By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune
(Now my dear Lady) hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence,
If now I court her not, but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop. Here cease more questions:
Thou art inclin'd to sleep. 'Tis a good dullness,
And give it way: I know thou canst not choose.*

Carroll/Prospero waves his hand, and
Alice/Miranda falls asleep on the
table, next to the already sleeping
Dormouse.

CARROLL/PROSPERO

- Come away, Servant, come; I am ready now;

Carroll/Prospero steals offstage in
search of someone. The Cheshire Cat
approaches Alice, still "sleeping" at
the table.

CHESHIRE CAT

So tell me, what does Miranda dream about?

DORMOUSE

(in her sleep)

Dreams ...

MAD HATTER

Shoes?

MARCH HARE

Ships?

MAD HATTER

Sealing wax?

ALICE

Not sealing wax so much, but ships ... definitely ships.

DORMOUSE

(in her sleep)

And why the sea is boiling hot and whether ... whether ...

MARCH HARE

The weather already happened, remember? The storm -

ALICE

It's the first time Miranda has seen one since she was a baby.

MAD HATTER

A storm?

ALICE

No, a ship. It's sailing now across the surface of her mind. Herald of another world, with precious cargo in its hold. Miranda can smell it - a bountiful crop of fresh -

MARCH HARE

Cabbages!

ALICE

- possibilities. The promise of something beyond what she's known. Outside her tiny world of island trees and fruits and wild beasts. Outside her towering father, who is All and everyone. Outside this stern, monotonous sea that keeps her trapped with them. As Miranda watches that ship glide through her subconscious, she does something entirely new. She begins to hope. Before this moment, she didn't know what to want. And if she did, there was no way to get it. But now. Now there are ships. Great big wooden things that carry gifts across oceans. Gifts which could be meant for her. So she hopes carefully, trying it out. She hopes this ship was sent to bring her a life that is more than surviving. She thinks she's getting the knack of it. But then it dawns on her - to hope is to risk disappointment. She hadn't counted on that. The waters of her mind whip into a frenzy, toss the ship, capsize it, break it to pieces, strike it with lightning, run it into rocks. Possible calamities pour down on her, plentiful as raindrops. Still, she tries to hold on, hopes for calmer seas, sturdy ship planks, seasoned veterans in the rigging. It makes for difficult work, this believing in something you've never experienced. But then, that's why I'm still here, isn't it?

MARCH HARE

I don't know. Do you mean Miranda-you, or you-you?

MAD HATTER

Is there really a difference?