

ALICE ON THE OTHER SIDE
A Musical for Young Audiences
Adapted from Lewis Carroll by Matt Buchanan

CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

Alice
A White Pawn
The White Queen
The White King
The White Knight
A Tiger-lily
A Rose
An Iris
Several Daisies
A Violet
The Red Queen
A Man in Paper
A Goat
A Beetle
A Train Conductor
A Horse
A Gnat
A Fawn
Tweedledum
Tweedledee
The Red King
A Sheep
Humpty Dumpty
Slithy Toves, Borogoves, and Mome Raths
An Old Man
A Hero
The Jabberwock
A Great Many Soldiers
Haigha
The Lion
The Unicorn
Hatta
The Red Knight
A Stork
A Frog
A Dormouse
Several Waiters
A Roast of Mutton
A Plum Pudding

SCENE 1—THE NURSERY

#01. OVERTURE—(ORCHESTRA)

Lights up on Alice's nursery. A fireplace UC. with a large mirror above it and an old-fashioned clock on the mantel. A small table set with a chess game in progress. Alice stands with the Black Kitten in her arms. (Perhaps the kitten is a hand puppet or a doll—or perhaps a real kitten can be found that will behave.) She scolds the kitten as she strokes it.

ALICE

Naughty kitty! Naughty, naughty! Just look at all the mess and mischief you've made! I've half a mind to open up the window and put you out in the snow. And you'd deserve it, too, you mischievous darling! Now don't interrupt me! I'm going to tell you all your faults. Number one: you squeaked twice while Dinah was washing your face this morning. Now don't try to deny it! Her paw went into your eye? Well, that's your fault for keeping your eyes open. Number two: you pulled Snowdrop away by the tail just as I put down the saucer of milk. Well, but how do you know she wasn't thirsty too? Now, for number three: you've unwound every bit of the yarn while I wasn't looking! That's three faults, and you haven't been punished for any of them. I'm saving up all your punishments for next Wednesday.

Pause.

Suppose they saved up all my punishments! What would they do at the end of the year? I'd be sent to prison, I suppose, when the day came. Or suppose each punishment was to be going without my dinner—why then I'd have to go without fifty dinners at once! (*Thoughtfully.*) Well, I wouldn't mind that—I'd far rather go without them than eat them all together! Oh, I do sometimes wish there weren't so many rules! It must be lovely to be a grownup, and in charge or everything. Like a Queen. Well, now, Kitty, it's time for your lessons.

She sits and takes up a great book. Opening it at random, she chooses a poem.

Here's a poem for you to learn, Kitty:

“Tweedledum and Tweedledee
Agreed to have a battle;
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee
Had spoiled his nice new rattle.
Just then flew down a monstrous crow,
As black as a tar barrel;
Which frightened both the heroes so,
They quite forgot their battle.”

That's very silly and alarming. I don't believe there was ever anyone called "Tweedledum" or "Tweedledee." Here's another:

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall:
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't put Humpty in his place again."

Well, that's very silly as well.

"The Lion and the Unicorn were fighting for the crown:
The Lion beat the Unicorn all around the town.
Some gave them white bread, some gave them brown:
Some gave them plum cake and drummed them out of town."

(Setting the book aside in some perturbation.) Kitty, can you play chess? I'm asking seriously. You know, I think if you sat there and folded your arms you'd look exactly like the Red Queen.

Alice takes the Red Queen from the chessboard and sets it before the Black Kitten, but the kitten won't cooperate.

Now, that's no good. It won't work if you won't fold up your arms. Really, if you're not good immediately I'll put you through into Looking Glass House. Now how would you like that?

Alice stands before the fireplace, still cradling the kitten, and gazes into the mirror.

I wonder if they'd give you milk in there? Perhaps Looking Glass milk isn't good to drink. It's very like our house as far as you can see, but it might be quite different on beyond. Kitty, don't you ever wonder what it's like on the other side?

#02. ON THE OTHER SIDE—(ALICE)

ALICE

THERE'S A ROOM THROUGH THERE
ON THE OTHER SIDE
AND IT LOOKS A LOT LIKE MINE.
THERE'S THE SAME OLD CHAIR
ON THE OTHER SIDE.
THERE'S THE CLOCK AND BOOKS,
AND THE WHOLE ROOM LOOKS
JUST AS FINE.
JUST LIKE MINE.
JUST LIKE MINE.

BUT I WONDER WHAT LIES DOWN THE HALLWAY—
WONDER WHAT'S BEYOND THE WALL.
IT MIGHT BE DIFFERENT IN SOME SMALL WAY,
OR IT MIGHT NOT BE THE SAME AT ALL.
PERHAPS THAT WORLD IS NOT THE SAME AT ALL.

THERE'S A GIRL I KNOW
ON THE OTHER SIDE,
AND SHE LOOKS A LOT LIKE ME.
IN THE THINGS THAT SHOW,
THAT YOU CANNOT HIDE,
LIKE HER EYES AND HAIR
AND HER CURIOUS STARE,
SHE IS ME.
JUST LIKE ME.
JUST LIKE ME.

BUT I WONDER WHAT GOES ON INSIDE HER.
DOES SHE THINK THE WAY I DO?
DOES SHE FEAR THE DARK AND SPIDERS?
DOES SHE LOVE THE SMELL OF MORNING DEW?

MAYBE LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE IS THRILLING!
MAYBE LITTLE GIRLS THROUGH THERE ARE FREE!
COULD IT BE THAT GROWNUPS THERE ARE WILLING
TO LET ME PLAY LIKE I WANT TO PLAY,
LET ME SAY WHAT I WANT TO SAY?
MAYBE THERE THEY SOMETIMES LET YOU BE
JUST THE PERSON THAT YOU WANT TO BE!

THERE'S A ROOM THROUGH THERE
ON THE OTHER SIDE
AND IT LOOKS A LOT LIKE MINE.
THERE'S THE SAME OLD CHAIR
ON THE OTHER SIDE.
THERE'S THE CLOCK AND BOOKS,
AND THE WHOLE ROOM LOOKS
JUST AS FINE.
BUT IT MIGHT NOT BE MINE.

How nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking Glass House and see for ourselves. I'm sure it's got some beautiful things in it! Let's pretend the glass has gone all soft like gauze, so we can get through.

Alice pushes the chess table up to the fire and climbs from it onto the mantelpiece, scattering chess pieces behind her. Upon arriving at this precarious perch, she finds that the glass, indeed, has become permeable.

Oh! It has! The glass is fading away! Oh, kitty! Let's see what's on the other side!

She pushes her way through as the lights fade to black. Music if necessary, but this change should take place very fast.

SCENE 2—THE LOOKING-GLASS NURSERY

When the lights come back up we are in a room superficially a mirror image of the nursery, with a few important differences. The clock on the mantel piece now has a human face, and the table and chessboard from the nursery have been replaced by scattered life-sized chess pieces, some of which, at least, can move and talk. Among them are a White Pawn, the White King and White Queen, and a White Knight, complete with wooden horse. The chessboard itself may be suggested by lighting. At first the chess pieces are still—though scattered about more than in the nursery. As the lights come up, Alice emerges from the mirror and climbs down into the room.

Well, there's a good fire, at least. I shall be as warm here as in the old room. Warmer, in fact, because there's no one here to scold me away from the fire. What fun it will be when they see me through the glass and can't get to me!

She looks around.

They don't keep this room so tidy as the other. Look at these chessmen everywhere! Oh!

Some of the chess pieces have begun to move about—sitting up, holding their heads, dusting themselves off, etc. A White Pawn suddenly begins squeaking loudly. The White Queen bursts into speech and action.

WHITE QUEEN

It is the voice of my child! My precious Lily! My imperial kitten!

And she rushes to the White Pawn, knocking the White King over as she goes. She clearly does not see Alice. She gathers the White Pawn in her arms.

My precious Lily! My imperial kitten!

WHITE KING

Imperial fiddlesticks! Now I'm all covered in soot!

ALICE

Oh, please, let me help you!

As she picks up the White King and dusts him off it is clear that he cannot see her and doesn't know what is happening to him.

WHITE KING

What?! What is happening?! Bless my soul!

ALICE

Oh, please don't make such faces, my dear! You make me laugh so that I can hardly hold you up! And don't keep your mouth open or all the ashes will get into it! There, now, I think you're tidy enough!

WHITE KING

Bless my soul!

And he faints. The White Queen abandons the White Pawn and rushes to him, fanning his face. He awakens and takes her by the arm.

Mind the volcano!

WHITE QUEEN

There, there, my dear, it's all over now!

WHITE KING

Oh, the horror of it! I assure you I turned cold to the very ends of my whiskers!

WHITE QUEEN

You haven't got any whiskers.

WHITE KING

I shall never forget it! The horror of that moment, I shall never, never forget!

WHITE QUEEN

You will, though, unless you make a memorandum of it.

The White King picks up an enormous pencil and begins writing in an equally enormous memorandum book. Alice, still unseen by the chess pieces, moves up behind him and takes hold of the back of the pencil. He struggles with it a while and gives up.

WHITE KING

Confound it, I must get a smaller pencil. This one writes all manner of things I don't mean to write.

WHITE QUEEN

What manner of things?

She reads over his shoulder what Alice has written. At the same moment the White Knight picks himself up and tries unsuccessfully to mount his horse.

“The White Knight is mounting a hobby horse. He balances very badly.” That's not a memorandum of your feelings!

WHITE KING

I must get another pencil immediately.

The King and Queen exit, shaking their heads in bewilderment, followed by the White Pawn, the White Knight, and various other chess pieces as available. Alice is left more or less alone.

ALICE

Well, that's very unusual.

She picks up the memorandum book and flips through the pages.

Well, I can't read this. It's all in a language I don't know. Or, wait! But of course! It's a Looking Glass book! If I hold it up to the mirror the words will go the right way again.

She carefully tears a page out of the book, holds it up to the mirror and reads:

“'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.”

Well, that hardly makes any more sense than the other way ‘round!

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite and claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub Bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!

“He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

“And as in uffish though he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgy wood,
And burbled as it came!

“One two! One two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock!
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!
He chortled in his joy.

“’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.”

It seems very pretty, but it’s rather hard to understand. Somebody killed something—that’s clear at any rate. But oh!—If I don’t hurry I’ll have to go back through the looking glass before I’ve seen what the rest of the house is like. Let’s have a look at the garden.

She folds the poem carefully and puts it in her pocket. She looks around and finally exits at one side. The lights fade to black. Music may cover scene change.

SCENE 3—IN THE GARDEN

When the lights come up the interior from the previous scene is gone and Alice is just emerging from the back door of the house into a garden planted with one large tree at the back and a number of very large flowers, including a Tiger-lily, a Rose, an Iris a Violet (asleep) and any number of Daisies. She closes the door and surveys the stage before her.

I could get a better view if I could get to the top of that hill—and here’s a path that leads straight to it!

She follows the “path,” which winds and twists in unexpected ways...

At least, no it doesn’t do that, but I suppose it will at last. How curiously it twists—it’s more like a corkscrew than a path!

...until it leads her right back to the door.

Well, there’s no use talking about it. I’m not going back in yet. I’ll just try this one.

And she sets off down another equally torturous path, but once again it leads her back to the door. (Or perhaps the door moves so that it is at the end of the path!)

Bother! I really shall do it this time!

But the door is once again at the end of the path.

Oh, I never saw such a house for getting in the way! Never!

In frustration she addresses the flowers.

ALICE

Oh, Tiger-lily, I wish you could talk.

TIGER-LILY

We can talk, when there’s anybody worth talking to.

For a moment Alice is too startled to speak. Finally she manages it.

ALICE

And can all flowers talk?

TIGER-LILY

As well as you can—and a good deal louder.

ALICE

But—I've never heard one talk before.

ROSE

It isn't manners for us to begin, you know. I was really wondering when you would speak. I said to myself, "Her face has got *some* sense in it, though it's not a clever one." Still, you're the right color.

TIGER-LILY

I don't care about the color. If only her petals curled up a little more.

ROSE

(Looking Alice over critically.) It would be nice if she had some thorns as well.

IRIS

(Sniffing Alice loudly.) Her scent's not too bad.

ALICE

Oh, I say—that's rather personal!

ROSE

We can't be too careful, dear. We've got to be sure you're the right sort.

ALICE

The right sort for what?

#03. FLOWER SONG—(FLOWERS)

ROSE

YOU'VE GOT TO BE A VERY PROPER KIND OF FLOWER
IF YOU EVER HOPE TO SHARE OUR BED.
YOUR BREEDING MUST BE PERFECT IF YOU'D JOIN OUR BOWER.
KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE INSIDE YOUR HEAD.
WE DON'T WELCOME EVERY WEED, YOU KNOW
THAT COMES INTO OUR YARD.
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO GROW,
YOU'D BETTER DISREGARD
ANY NOTION THAT IT'S EASY TO BELONG.
IF YOU THINK WE'LL TAKE JUST ANYONE, YOU'RE WRONG.

ALICE

But I don't want to share your bed—

IRIS

YOU'VE GOT TO BE EXAMINED VERY VERY CAREFULLY
TO SEE IF YOU WILL MAKE THE CUT.
YOUR REFERENCES WILL BE INVESTIGATED THOROUGHLY.
EXPECT TO HAVE YOUR ROOTS DUG UP.
THERE'S A PRINCIPLE AT STAKE, YOU SEE—
WE'VE GOT TO KEEP A TONE,
SO OUR SEEDLINGS AND OUR SPROUTS CAN BE
WELL SHELTERED 'TIL THEY'VE GROWN.
WE DON'T WANT THEM RUBBING ELBOWS WITH THE GRASS!
WERE NOT SNOBS—WE JUST DON'T LIKE THE LOWER CLASS!

Tiger Lily sizes Alice up. During the following, all of the Flowers subject Alice to a certain amount of poking and prodding.

TIGER LILY

ARE YOU TALL ENOUGH?
THAT COUNTS A LOT.

IRIS

IS YOUR STALK AS STRAIGHT AS MINE?

ROSE

ARE YOUR PETALS BROAD AND FINE?

TIGER LILY

ARE YOU GREEN ENOUGH?
I'LL TELL YOU WHAT—
WE'VE A WAITING LIST—YOU'D BETTER GET IN LINE!

Rose is peering into Alice's ear.

ROSE

ANY APHIDS, DEAR?
WE CAN'T ACCEPT
ANY ILL-BRED GARDEN PESTS.

IRIS

STILL, HER LEAVES ARE NEATLY PRESSED.

TIGER LILY

WELL, SHE DOES APPEAR

TO BE WELL KEPT.
YOU MUST UNDERSTAND—WE ONLY TAKE THE BEST!

DAISIES

YOU'VE GOT TO BE A VERY PROPER KIND OF FLOWER
IF YOU EVER HOPE TO SHARE OUR BED.
YOUR BREEDING MUST BE PERFECT IF YOU'D JOIN OUR BOWER
KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE INSIDE YOUR HEAD.

ROSE

BUT IF WE DECIDE YOU'RE WORTHY,
AND WE'RE PLEASED WITH WHAT YOU'VE GOT,
PLANT YOURSELF INSIDE OUR EARTHY
LITTLE SUNNY GARDEN PLOT
AND BE ENVIED AND ADMIRED FOR MILES AROUND
IN OUR REALLY MOST EXCLUSIVE BIT OF GROUND!

ALICE

Well, really, I'm most frightfully honored, but you see, I'm only visiting. Only everything is so strange here—not like my world at all. Do you know the way to the top of the hill?

*The Flowers all shake their heads in
perplexity.*

TIGER LILY

We've never been.

ROSE

We just stay planted, you know.

ALICE

Aren't you sometimes frightened at being planted out here with nobody to take care of you?

ROSE

There's that tree at the back. What else is it good for?

ALICE

But what could it do, if danger came?

ROSE

It could bark.

FIRST DAISY

It says, "Bough-wough!" That's why its branches are called boughs!

SECOND DAISY

Didn't you know that?

THIRD DAISY

Everybody knows that!

Suddenly all the Daisies are talking at once.

TIGER-LILY

Silence, every one of you! *(To Alice)* They know I can't get at them. Otherwise they'd never dare to do it!

ALICE

Never mind. Allow me. *(Whispering to the Daisies.)* If you don't hold your tongues, I'll pick you!

Silence, instantly.

TIGER-LILY

Thank you. The daisies are the worst of all. When one speaks they all begin together and it's enough to make one wither the way they go on!

ALICE

But how is it you all can talk so nicely? I've been in many gardens before, but none of the flowers could talk.

TIGER-LILY

Put your hand down and feel the ground.

ALICE

(Doing so) It's very hard. But I don't see what that has to do with it.

TIGER-LILY

In most gardens they make the beds too soft and the flowers are always asleep.

ALICE

I never thought of that before!

ROSE

It's my opinion that you never think at all.

VIOLET

(Suddenly waking up) I never saw anybody that looked stupider.

TIGER-LILY

As if you ever saw anybody. You keep your head under the leaves and snore away 'til you know no more what's going on in the world than if you were a bud!

The Violet goes back to sleep.

ALICE

Are there any other people in the garden?

ROSE

There's one other flower that can move about like you. I wonder how you do it.

TIGER-LILY

You're always wondering.

ROSE

But she's a lot bushier than you are.

FIRST DAISY

She's coming! The Red Queen is coming!

SECOND DAISY

The Red Queen! She's coming!

*And all the Daisies are talking at once
again, until Alice shushes them.*

ALICE

Shussh! (*Looking off.*) Why, so she is! She's grown a bit—she was only three inches tall when last I saw her.

ROSE

It's the fresh air that does it.

ALICE

I think I'll go meet her.

And she sets off along a likely path, but...

ROSE

That will never do. I'd advise you to go the other way.

...it takes her right back to the door.

ALICE

Bother again!

ROSE

I told you so.

ALICE

All right, then I'll go the other way.

And sure enough, by setting off in the opposite direction from that from which the Red Queen seems to be approaching, Alice manages to end up face to face with her quarry in no time.

RED QUEEN

Where do you come from and where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers.

ALICE

(Trying to obey all these instructions.) I'm sorry, ma'am. It's just that I've lost my way.

RED QUEEN

I don't know what you mean by your way. All the ways around here belong to me. Curtsey while you're thinking what to say—it saves time. *(Pause.)* It's time for you to answer now. Open your mouth a little wider when you speak, and always say "your Majesty."

ALICE

I only wanted to see what the garden was like, your Majesty—

RED QUEEN

That's right. *(Patting her on the head.)* Although, when you say "garden," I've seen gardens compared with which this would be a wilderness.

ALICE

And I thought I'd try and get to the top of that hill—

RED QUEEN

When you say "hill," I could show you hills in comparison with which you'd call that a valley.

ALICE

No I shouldn't. A hill can't be a valley, you know. That would be nonsense—

RED QUEEN

You may call it "nonsense" if you like, but I've heard nonsense compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary! Come along, child!

The Red Queen leads Alice to the front of the stage, where they both gaze out as if at a wide vista below.

ALICE

I declare! The whole world is marked out just like a chess board! There ought to be some men moving about somewhere—and so there are! It’s a huge game of chess that’s being played all over the world—if this is the world at all, you know. Oh, what fun! How I wish I was one of them. I wouldn’t mind being a Pawn, if only I might join the game. Though of course I should like to be a Queen best.

RED QUEEN

Well, that’s easily managed. You can start out as the White Queen’s Pawn, since Lily is too little to play. You start off in the second square—when you get to the eighth square you’ll be a Queen. Come on!

The Red Queen begins to run in place, slowly at first but gradually increasing her speed. Alice is forced to run to “keep up”—even though they aren’t going anywhere.

Faster! Faster! Don’t try to talk! Keep up! Faster!

ALICE

(Breathlessly) Are we nearly there yet?

RED QUEEN

Nearly there? Why, we passed it ten minutes ago! Faster! Come on now! Faster!

They run a bit more and then they slow to a halt and lean against the tree.

You may rest a little now.

ALICE

Why, I do believe we’ve been under this tree the whole time. Everything’s just as it was!

RED QUEEN

Of course. What did you expect?

ALICE

Well, in my country you’d generally get to someplace else if you ran very fast for a long time.

RED QUEEN

A slow sort of country! Now, here it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get anywhere you’ll have to run at least twice as fast as that.

ALICE

I’d rather not try. I’m perfectly content to stay here—only I’m so hot and thirsty!

RED QUEEN

Have a biscuit!

She produces a cookie from somewhere in her costume and gives it to Alice, who eats it, somewhat reluctantly.

While you're refreshing yourself, I'll just take the measurements.

She produces a dressmaker's tape and some little pegs and begins marking out the floor in yards.

At the end of two yards I shall give you your directions—have another biscuit!

ALICE

No, thank you—one's quite enough!

RED QUEEN

Thirst all quenched then? At the end of three yards I shall repeat them for fear you've forgotten them. At the end of four I shall say good-bye, and at the end of five I shall go!

She has finished marking out the floor and returns to the beginning to slowly walk along her marked path. She stops at the two-yard mark and faces Alice.

A pawn goes two squares on its first move, you know. So you'll go very quickly through the third square—by railway, I should think—and you'll find yourself in the fourth square in no time. That square belongs to Tweedledum and Tweedledee. The fifth square is mostly water and the sixth belongs to Humpty Dumpty. Why do you make no remark?

ALICE

I—um—I didn't know I had to make one just then.

RED QUEEN

You should have said, "How kind of you to tell me all this." However, we'll suppose it said. The seventh square is all forest—one of the knights will show you the way—and in the eighth square we shall be Queens together.

She advances to the third yard-marker.

Speak in French when you can't remember the English for a thing, turn out your toes when you walk, and remember who you are.

She moves to the fourth yard-marker.

Good bye!

And as the Queen, with a little hop, moves to the final marker, the lights fade out. In the dark, the rattle and roar of a passenger train.