

Copyright © 2005. Anne Phelan. Sample. **MUSHROOM IN HER HANDS**: A Full-Length Play. Based on Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland." With Songs by Nick Moore & Anne Phelan. For scripts and CDs, and performance rights, contact anne@annephelan.com

Characters (in order of appearance):

Alice	Alice Liddell at 14 years old
Charles Lutwidge Dodgson	a Fellow at Christ Church, Oxford
The Mouse	an itinerate ballet teacher
The Dodo	a deacon in the Church of England
Cedric Caterpillar	an aesthete caterpillar who's about to be a butterfly
Father William	his father, a country squire
Older Alice	Alice Liddell Hargreaves, in her late 20s
Frog	a Victorian melodrama villain
Duchess	strong as an ox, brutal, but strangely sentimental
Cook	drunk, violent and suspicious
Cheshire Cat	an innovative photographer
Pig	a spoiled rotten schoolboy
Mad Hatter	an escaped mental patient with a penchant for inventions and grave-robbing
Dormouse	an overgrown baby, dressed in Doctor Dentons, has narcolepsy
March Hare	omni-sexual and voracious

This play is written for four (two men and two women) actors. The actor who plays DODGSON also plays the DODO, the CATERPILLAR, the CHESHIRE CAT, and the MAD HATTER. The actor who plays FATHER WILLIAM also plays the FROG, the DUCHESS, the PIG and the DORMOUSE. The actress who plays the MOUSE also plays OLDER ALICE, the COOK and the MARCH HARE.

A twenty-minute version of this play was performed as part of the American Living Room 2001 at HERE, in conjunction with Lincoln Center Theater, on July 17-18, 2001. A ten-minute version of this play was presented as part of "The Alice Project" of the Lab (Julie Fei-Fan Balzer, Director) at the Looking Glass Theatre in May 2001. The playwright received an Edward F. Albee Foundation Fellowship in 2002 to work on this play. A staged reading of the full-length version was presented by the Milk Can Theatre Co. as its inaugural piece in its "Scene, Heard Uddered" development series, directed by Artistic Director Julie Fei-Fan Balzer, at the Red Room, New York City, on January 28, 2004. The play's first professional performance was Friday, April 29, 2005 at the Sande Shurin Theatre, New York City. It was produced by the Milk Can Theatre Co., directed by Julie Fei-Fan Balzer, with original music by Nick Moore.

Act One

(ALICE and DODGSON are center stage. ALICE is about 4 years old. SHE wears an old-fashioned little girl's dress with a pinafore over it. HE wears a suit with a short black academic robe over it. SHE climbs up onto HIS lap. HE kisses HER forehead)

ALICE:

Let's play a game.

DODGSON:

So we shall. Let's play "Where Are the Lemon Drops?"

(SHE starts to get up)

Cold.

(SHE sits back down)

Warmer.

(SHE touches HIS jacket pocket)

Warmer still.

(SHE touches HIS breast pocket)

Cooler.

(SHE touches HIS waistcoat pocket)

You've won.

(Takes the tin of lemon drops out of HIS pocket and hands them to HER)

ALICE:

Thank you, Mr. Dodgson.

DODGSON:

(As SHE opens the tin)

It's a prize, Alice.

(SHE offers HIM one)

You needn't thank me.

(Takes one)

You're the one who's won the game. Shall we play another?

ALICE:

(Rises, and puts the tin in HER pocket)

Yes, please.

(SHE's older, about 10 years old)

Though I'm too old for baby games.

DODGSON:

You're nearly a young lady. Twenty Questions.

Animal? ALICE:

Yes. DODGSON:

Does it crawl? ALICE:

No. DODGSON:

Is it man? ALICE:

Man crawls as an infant. DODGSON:

It's a bird. ALICE:

Yes. DODGSON:

Flamingo? ALICE:

No. That's five questions. DODGSON:

Is it extinct? ALICE:

Yes. DODGSON:

It's a dodo. ALICE:

Yes. DODGSON:

It's you. ALICE:

DODGSON:

Yes.

ALICE:

(Older, now 14)

Your students call you that, I've heard them. "Do-do-Dodgson." But you don't stutter if we're alone. Only if Mama is near.

DODGSON:

You've won the game.

ALICE:

So I don't have to pay a forfeit.

DODGSON:

What would the forfeit be?

ALICE:

To kiss you.

DODGSON:

Is that such a horrid forfeit?

(SHE gives HIM a peck on the cheek)

Another game? Discover the key to the sequence: bat, cat, rat- finish it.

ALICE:

Sat, mat, tat.

DODGSON:

No.

ALICE:

Bet, set, let?

DODGSON:

You're not attending. Look for the key.

(Pulls a small door key out of HIS pocket)

ALICE:

There it is.

DODGSON:

Yes, but what is it key to?

ALICE:
 Knowledge. And something else?

DODGSON:
 Somewhere else.

ALICE:
 A door to

DODGSON:
 Magic.

ALICE:
 A clue?

DODGSON:
 “And the Lord God planted-”

ALICE:
 A garden! Is it lovely?

DODGSON:
 Lovely.

ALICE:
 Behind a door, a garden filled with flowers-

DODGSON:
 And fountains. A willow with a brook beside it for company. Cherry trees blossom in the same week as roses and asters. All the flowers at their height in the same season.

ALICE:
 It’s enchanted! I must see it.

DODGSON:
 Once you have the key, you’ll get the key.

ALICE:
 But I want to see it now.

DODGSON:
 Patience, my dear. Don’t rush hugger-mugger to the end of the story. Begin at the beginning and go on until you’ve done.

ALICE:
 You’re speaking in riddles.

DODGSON:
You like riddles.

ALICE:
Not when I've no idea of the answer.

DODGSON:
(Suddenly full of emotion, HE takes HER hand)
You are the brightest, best girl I've ever known.

ALICE:
Shall I be the best lady?

DODGSON:
There's no better age than what you are now. I remember it from my own childhood.
You'll learn. I've spent my life learning the same lesson over and over again.

ALICE:
(Withdrawing HER hand)
That sounds tiresome.

DODGSON:
I can only hope that you will prove an apter pupil.

ALICE:
Can you tell me what the lesson is, then?

DODGSON:
That - That love does not come easily. If you build a cage for it in your heart, it flies
away.

ALICE:
What is the answer?

DODGSON:
(Pulls HIMSELF together)
That is the answer.
Now I must go.

ALICE:
Must you?

DODGSON:
(Puts the key on a table, and kisses HER hand)
Don't fret.

DODGSON (CONTD.):

When you look for me, I'll be there.

(Exits)

ALICE:

(Takes the key off the table. Looks under the table and sees the door, too small for HER to get through. SHE lays down on the ground and unlocks the door. SHE looks into the garden)

Such a lovely place!

(SHE's much too big to fit through the door)

I don't like this game. It's a riddle with no answer.

(Closes the door and replaces the key on the table. Sees the smelling salts. Picks up the bottle)

Smelling salts- just the thing!

(Takes the bottle and removes the cap. SHE inhales and starts to shrink. A clock starts ticking- the more ALICE shrinks, the louder the ticking gets)

Not one clue. I've no idea who I am or how to, how to....

(Calling)

Hello! Is there anyone about? Anyone at all? I'm smarter than the governess, but not so smart as my brother. My own dear brother, and I can't recall his name. Why can't I be the best lady? Who am I to be?

(Bursts into tears)

I am so very tired of being all alone here.

(SHE crosses to the door, which is now the perfect height for HER to get through. SHE goes back to the table, but it now towers over HER- SHE can't reach the key)

How will I find the answer to the riddle? Why am I shrinking? What if I shrink until I vanish. I don't want to be nothing!

(Looks at the bottle in HER hand and puts the cap back on. She stops shrinking, and the ticking stops. ALICE jumps for the key- it's hopeless. HER foot slips and SHE falls to the floor. As SHE rises, a blue drape, the pool of tears, is pulled up to HER chin. SHE sticks out HER tongue and licks the drape)

I wasn't anywhere near the sea when I woke up this morning.

(Starts to go under)

But there's not a single ship!

(Swims, looking for a way out. Looks out into the audience)

A day so clear as this, yet I can't see a bit of France. It must be my tears. I know it was foolish to cry but to drown in my own tears!

ALICE (CONTD.):

(We hear a big splash. SHE swims towards it)

Is it a walrus? A hippopotamus?

(MOUSE swims on, carrying a large stick and dressed in dance rehearsal clothes. SHE goes upstage of the drape, using the stick like a bargepole. ALICE grabs the other end of the pole)

MOUSE:

I've caught a crab!

(Yanks on the pole and ALICE lets go)

ALICE:

(Falls below the drape, and then bobs HER head up above the water)

I've lost my way. Could you help me find it?

MOUSE:

Not so much as a nod in my direction! I keep order in my class!

(Bangs HER stick)

You must curtsy twice. First to me, then to the pianist. No talking.

ALICE:

What sort of class is there in the water?

MOUSE:

Water ballet, *bien sûr*. Where do you wish to go?

ALICE:

Somewhere?

MOUSE:

All must be somewhere. Steps in time. Moving through the space with the beat.

(Thwacks HER stick on the floor with a bang)

ALICE:

(Jumps at the bang)

What is your profession?

MOUSE:

A sailor has a profession. I espouse a vocation. I am an itinerant dancing mistress.

(ALICE laughs)

I'm on my way to minister to a churchman. He needs my direction. But this storm blew me off course.

ALICE:
 Might I come with you? To be somewhere?

MOUSE:
 What's your best step?

ALICE:
 The polka, I expect.

MOUSE:
 Demonstrate.

ALICE:
 But I'm swimming.

MOUSE:
 One may swim and dance at the same time. Everyone knows that. Though *barre* work is *plus difficile*. Prepare ... and, *allegro!*

(MOUSE beats cut-time with her stick as ALICE polkas downstage of the drape)

ALICE:
 Is that enough?

MOUSE:
 When I say so.

(ALICE keeps dancing)
 A reel?

ALICE:
 (Dances back behind the drape)
 You can't dance a reel with one person.

MOUSE:
 You could if you put your heart in it.

ALICE:
 Impossible.

MOUSE:
 I'll determine what's possible. You're not at the head of your class, are you? Your toes do not- how you say- *twinkle*.

(As ALICE dances back upstage of the drape)
 You don't know what's in your soul! The waltz, for mercy's sake. Three is everything! The Three Graces, the Holy Trinity, the Blind Mice. I don't know how there were weddings before the waltz.

(SHE executes a heart-stopping waltz with HER stick as a partner. ALICE watches, mesmerized)

ALICE:

I wish- I wish I could float like that.

(MOUSE grabs ALICE's hands and dances HER to the other side of the blue drape. The drape falls, and THEY'RE on the land)

What can you teach me?

MOUSE:

My *specialité* is bird dances. The speckled grouse-
(Imitates)

The dodo-

(Imitates a dodo as the Dodo enters. HE wears a black cassock without a surplice or collar)

DODO:

Do I behold the dancing mistress?

MOUSE:

La même chose.

DODO:

But you're a mouse.

MOUSE:

To the naked eye. But I have worlds within me.

DODO:

(Eyeing ALICE)

Who's she?

MOUSE:

Mademoiselle-

ALICE:

Alice. I'm a student. I mean, I wish to learn.

DODO:

(To the MOUSE)

Will she remain? For my ... I'm not sure what you call it? Confession?

MOUSE:

I prefer "un-earthing." We dig, we find, *et voilà!*

DODO:

You d-d-didn't say in your letter you'd have a *secrtaire*.

MOUSE:

You request my talents, I drop everything to come to your aid. If I wasn't willing to excuse your ignorance, your appallingly bad manners, you'd be banned from my class forever.

DODO:

Sorry. D-d-didn't understand.

MOUSE:

Now, why have you no collar? You ought to be wearing your uniform.

DODO:

It is proper, for me. I'm not a p-p-priest. I'm a d-d-

ALICE:

Dodo?

DODO:

Yes, but-

ALICE:

Deacon?

DODO:

Yes.

MOUSE:

Why?

ALICE:

You're awfully old to be only a deacon. Didn't you pass your examination?

DODO:

Tisn't that. I can't do it.

ALICE:

Why? My father did.

MOUSE:

C'est vrai, Mademoiselle. Pourquoi?

DODO:

I don't know. Doesn't seem ... p-p-proper.

MOUSE:

That is to say, you're improper. Unworthy. A pitiful sinner.

DODO:

Yes.

MOUSE:

We all are.

DODO:

Yes.

MOUSE:

So why are you more special than the rest of us?

DODO:

I never said-

ALICE:

But you would have to be-

(To the MOUSE)

This is fun!

MOUSE:

Have you tried?

DODO:

With every fiber of my being. I flap and flap my wings. Am I meant to suffer this humiliation? Is it God's will that I never fly?

MOUSE:

Nonsense. It's all in the choosing. First position. *Demi-plié*.

(Dodo attempts a feeble *demi-plié*. To ALICE)

I've no patience with observers. Are you not in this class?

(Bangs HER stick. ALICE looks at the DODO and tries to imitate HIM)

Broad, broad shoulders. *Port-de-bras*.

(MOUSE pulls back DODO's shoulders. Strokes HIS sternum)

Tuck in that offending chin. Your arms are atrocious!

(SHE yanks on ALICE's elbows)

Now?

DODO:

It feels most unnatural.

MOUSE:

Mon Dieu! If we were to be as nature intended, the Lord wouldn't have given us hairdressers.

ALICE:

Or whalebone corsets, or sealskin muffs-

MOUSE:

Order!

(Bangs HER stick. To DODO)

Rise up!

(DODO comes out of the *demi-plié* and into a wobbly *relevé*. ALICE does better)

DODO:

My My word. Everything looks different from up here.

MOUSE:

Exactement! What do you feel?

DODO:

My feet-

MOUSE:

No, your heart. What do you feel?

DODO:

Different.

(DODO comes out of the *relevé*)

Am I cured to be a curate?

MOUSE:

Answer that yourself.

DODO:

I still can't give up going to the theatre.

MOUSE:

The English! Why should *le théâtre* have *le diable* in it?

DODO:

The drama fills my heart.

MOUSE:

You're closer to flying.

How long must I wait? DODO:

Je ne sais pas - I'm a dancer, not an oracle. MOUSE:

Now- ALICE:

I did not elicit your opinion. This is my class. MOUSE:

I asked a question- DODO: