

Curiosity Killed the Cat by Thomas Bolger

Characters

White Rabbit – *A rabbit that is late*

Inspector Lewis – *A man looking for a missing girl*

Mr Dee – *A builder who enjoys a ponder*

Mr Dum – *A builder who doesn't*

Butterfly – *A butterfly that was once a caterpillar*

Cheshire Cat – *An advisor to the queen and prosecutor in court*

Mr Hatter – *A policeman with unorthodox interrogation methods*

Alice – *A missing girl far away from home*

Scene 1

(‘Dream a little dream’ by Nat King Cole is playing. Empty stage. Suddenly a white rabbit streaks through the audience, running across from stage right to left at full pelt.)

White Rabbit – Nononononono, I’m late!

(10 seconds later Inspector Lewis runs on shouting)

Inspector Lewis – Wait, stop, I need to ask some...

(Trails off, panting for breath, whips out a Dictaphone and starts talking hurriedly)

Inspector Lewis – Entry one, possible suspect, tall, male, white, very white, may have some sort of deficiency, big ears and um, suspect appears to be a um, talking, very fast. Rabbit.

(Pauses to think about what he has just said)

Inspector Lewis – Or maybe a hare. Suspect was spotted at last known location of the missing girl. I tried to apprehend said suspect but lost him in pursuit and fell down a large hole *(pause)* I may have bruised my coccyx. Will continue the investigation without support.

(Pause. Puts away Dictaphone, feels his coccyx, looks around, confused)

Inspector Lewis – Where am I?

(White rabbit runs on from behind, clearly he has looped round in a circle)

White Rabbit – I’ve run in a bloody circle!

Inspector Lewis – Halt, in the name of justice!

White Rabbit – But I’m late

Inspector Lewis – Come here

White Rabbit – I’ll miss my appointment!

(Circle each other, rabbit tries to dodge round Inspector Lewis but he is pinned to the floor)

Inspector Lewis – It’s a matter of great importance

White Rabbit – Okokokok, you’re squashing my ears!

Inspector Lewis – Apologies, my name is Inspector Lewis

White Rabbit – I thought you said it was justice?

Inspector Lewis – Shut up – I have a number of questions that you will answer, Number 1 – Where am I? Number 2 – Who are you? Number 3 – (*takes out photo*) Have you seen this girl?

White Rabbit – Number 1 – You are here, Number 2 – I am me, Number 3 – (*looks at photo, eyes widen*) Yes

Inspector Lewis – Wait, you have?

White Rabbit – Why yes, everyone knows her. Now if you don't mind I have a very important appointment...

Inspector Lewis – This girl has been missing for a number of months and I have been charged to find her, you will tell me where she is right this second

White Rabbit – I don't have seconds to spare!

Inspector Lewis – What do you know?

White Rabbit – Where do you want me to start?

Inspector Lewis - Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop.

White Rabbit – How delightfully logical

Inspector Lewis – Look here...

White Rabbit – Ask the queen, she'll know

Inspector Lewis – Who?

White Rabbit – The queen

Inspector Lewis – Where can I find this queen?

White Rabbit – Well, for a start, not here, on top of me. Please, you're squashing my kidneys.

Inspector Lewis – Oh sorry, but where? (*gets off rabbit*)

White Rabbit – She lives in a garden, not far from here. Now, if you'll excuse me...

Inspector Lewis – Wait wait wait, so she's here? wherever here is

White Rabbit – She's not here, she's there

(Points behind IL, he spins round, WR runs off)

White Rabbit – I'm very sorry but I'm very late!

Inspector Lewis – Hold on! I need to ask... *(IL takes out Dictaphone)* A new lead in the Alice inquiry, a queen who lives in a garden. I realise this sounds ridiculous, but I just had a conversation with a rabbit *(pause)* or a hare.

(IL runs off stage left after rabbit)

Scene 2

(IL runs on stage to find two bins and a tiny door stage left. Stops, looks around, more bemusement. 'What a waste' by Ian Dury is playing and fades)

Inspector Lewis – Curioser and curioser... *(Dictaphone)* Followed suspect into a house that seems to be half built by M.C Escher on crack. *(looks at tiny door)* who also owns a cat with opposable thumbs *(Dictaphone away)* He must have gone through this tiny door somehow.

(IL tries to open door and fit through it, cannot. A head pops out from one of the bins)

MrDee – Alright guvna'

Inspector Lewis – Jesus Christ!

MrDee – Actually it's Mr Dee

(Another head pops out)

MrDum – And I'm Mr Dum

Inspector Lewis – What are you doing in those bins?

MrDee and MrDum – This is our place of residence, state your name and business

Inspector Lewis –Um, Inspector Lewis, I'm looking for a little girl, well, Im looking for a rabbit who ran by here, have you seen him?

MrDum – A rabbit, corr blimey, ain't seen one of those in ages

MrDee – Haven't seen one in bird-lime

Inspector Lewis – Bird lime?

MrDum – Time

Inspector Lewis – Oh, well do you know where I could find the queen?

MrDee – THE QUEEN! That berk!

MrDum – Don't get us started on the queen!

Inspector Lewis – Why, what did she...

MrDee – She’s the one who cut off my loaf!

Inspector Lewis – Loaf?

MrDee – Of bread

MrDum – Head

Inspector Lewis – Oh

MrDee – It’s a bloomin miracle we’re not brown bread

MrDum – Dead.

Inspector Lewis – I see. Why did she cut off your heads?

MrDum – Well this must have been about two donkeys ago

MrDee – You see, we’re both building contractors, client asks us to build somethin’

MrDum – Like a house

MrDee – Exactly, we go in, bish bash bosh, job done

MrDum – However

MrDee – However this job the queen wanted us to do didn’t go very well.

MrDum – Nah

MrDee - You see, I’m more of a finking man, can’t articulate words or sentences and the such-like very well, prefer to sit in silence with a brew and fink about stuff. Really fink.

MrDum – With this job Mr Dee fought too much, clouded his judgement somewhat in the building of the house.

MrDee – I’m telling the story – shut up

MrDum – Or what? You gunna come over ere and sort me out?

MrDee – God elp me I will nut you in your chevy chase

MrDum – Oh do me a favour! I’ll sink my hampstead heath into whats left of your severed Gregory peck you ginger beer!

Inspector Lewis – I have no idea what you're saying and I just want to know where...

MrDee & MrDum – Leave it. Don't you get involved with this bull and cow!

Inspector Lewis – What?

MrDee & MrDum – Row

Inspector Lewis – Oh

MrDee – Now where was I? Oh yes, the queen wants this expensive detached house which is both modern and traditional. Like a mix between the ephemeral and eternal, modernity in house form. The transient and the constant, the ghosts of the past intermingling with the here and now...

MrDum – (*interrupts*) So we stuck in some PVC windows and Victorian fireplaces

MrDee – But then half-way through the building process I had a cup of rosie lee and really fought hard. I fought, less do something different, you know, something that engages with the queens reality and breaks routine, presents a problem and makes her FINK

MrDum – Ere we go

MrDee – Mr Dum fought I was being a twat and said it couldn't be done, he said, "you can't translate..." wait, what did you say?

MrDum– It's difficult to translate abstract notions of Existentialism into building construction

MrDee – That's the one, well, all I was hearing was *why?* And I fought *why not?* So we built it didn't we? (Pause, deadly serious) Now I came up against a bit of criticism in the construction, many people said that a staircase what leads to nowhere is both pointless and a safety hazard

MrDum – It had a 8 metre drop!

MrDee – Don't you see! Its more than that, it was meant to challenge the queens perceptions of her actions, to take stock of where she was, evaluate her life's trajectory. Is my existence pointless? Does the path I'm taking lead to nowhere? What is my purpose?

MrDum – Well what about the windows that have brick walls directly behind them!?

MrDee – So she had a good view

MrDum – Of what!?

MrDee – Introspective like, of herself

MrDum – Blaady ‘ell, and the water pail that led to a bottomless well!?

MrDee – Fought that was quite a nice metaphor actually

MrDum – It took ages to build!

MrDee – Look, I just wanted her to take a break from her tedious monarchic life wherein she got caught up in unimportant fings – I tried to displace her centre of safety – thereby getting her to have a good fackin’ ponder. Gain a greater understanding of oneself. Nonetheless she did chop our heads off on account of the houses err...

MrDum – Absurdist nature

MrDee – What with the huge costs of creating a house, within a house

MrDum – Within another house

MrDee – She was really quite angry and ordered our execution, said it was a complete waste of bread and honey

MrDum – And we’ve been here ever since, on our collective jack joneses, wondering whether it was all worth it

MrDee – It fink it’s a lovely place to let the mind wander. Nah, I don’t regret the construction one bit. *(Pause)*

MrDum – What about carpeting just the ceilin’s?

MrDee – Yeah, actually, I can’t justify that, that was an error. *(Pause)*

Inspector Lewis – That is quite a story gentlemen, rest assured I will report this ‘queen’ to higher authorities for attempted man-slaughter

MrDum – Oh my old china plate there is no higher authority than the queen

MrDee – If you have business with her you need to go through that door there

Inspector Lewis – It's far too small

MrDum – *(To Mr Dee)* I told you we would run out of size enhancing drugs

Inspector Lewis – What?

MrDee – *(To Mr Dum)* Shut it, well, that's your own fault, being that big an all.

MrDum – There is another way, but you'll have to scarper before the current bun goes down.

MrDee – You take a left from where you was before, then go backwards, turn right, stop when you see a boat on a river with tangerine trees and marmalade skies

MrDum – Go right, then left, then diagonal for a bit, you should come to an octopus's garden. If you do – you're going the wrong way.

MrDee – Yeah, you wanna find a yellow submarine and then spin in circles for a bit. And if you're stuck at this point try and find a lizard called Bill, good friend of mine, he'll directly direct you in the right direction

MrDum – He still owes me a tenner

Inspector Lewis – Ok, I think I got most of that. To start – just head this way? *(both nod at same time)* Thank you very much for your help, your assistance in this inquiry has been noted

MrDee – All the best

MrDum – God bless

(IL exits from whence he came, short pause)

MrDum – Well he seemed nice

MrDee – Yeah

MrDum - *(pause)* My nose is itchy *(pause)* Fancy a game of scrabble? *(pause)*

MrDee – We don't have any vowels

Mr Dum – Or hands

Mr Dee – I know. I know. *(withdraws into bin, Dum follows suit)*

Scene 3

(IL wanders on stage to find a butterfly meditating on the floor, doesn't want to interrupt)

Inspector Lewis – Excuse me. Sir. Excuse...Ahem

Butterfly – mmm?

Inspector Lewis – Um, I'm a bit lost

Butterfly – This is true

Inspector Lewis – I'm looking for the queens garden, well, I'm looking for a little girl

Butterfly - Alice?

Inspector Lewis – How did you...?

Butterfly – She was also lost. She found herself

Inspector Lewis – Where is she?

Butterfly – She resides in the queens garden, south of here

Inspector Lewis – Ohh, thank y...

Butterfly – Stay awhile

Inspector Lewis – I haven't the time

Butterfly – A broken watch is right twice a day

(IL looks at his watch)

Inspector Lewis – My watch *is* broken

Butterfly – Right

Inspector Lewis – No its wrong, wait

Butterfly – It is not often that I have visitors, sit down. Alice will still be waiting for you.

Inspector Lewis – She will?

Butterfly – Please sit down. Tea?

(Offers the inspector a cup of tea, this is unbeknownst to him mushroom tea (the hallucinogenic kind))

Inspector Lewis – Why yes, I am rather parched. Goodness it's lovely!

Butterfly – It's the stuff dreams are made of. Who are you?

Inspector Lewis – I am Inspector Lewis, of the branch division...

Butterfly – Forget all that. Who. Are. You?

Inspector Lewis – I'm

Butterfly – You rightly said you are lost. I once was too. You are in denial.

Inspector Lewis – I am not!

Butterfly – Listen.

(Gymnopédie no.1 by Eric Satie starts to play)

In another life I didn't know who I was too, my mind an empty open book with brilliantly white pages. I look back on my past now with an awareness, I am not close to being content, but I am closer. When I was younger I was a fool, wasting my days in bodily gratification, gorging myself, fulfilling only my most basic needs. In that chapter of my life my fault, my failure was not the passion I had, but its lack of direction.

Inspector Lewis – I really don't see the relevance...

Butterfly – One week I truly lost myself and changed my life's path. I was very hungry, famished actually. On Monday I had an apple yet I still felt an emptiness. On Tuesday I had two pears. Wednesday, three plums. Still looking for something that would fill me with a sense of worth I had four strawberries on Thursday, Friday, five oranges. At this point I was out of control, an animal. Saturday – a piece of chocolate cake, one ice cream cone, a pickle, a slice of swiss cheese, salami, a lollipop, cherry pie, a sausage, one cupcake and one slice of watermelon. That night, I lay beached, dazed from my binge. Something stirred within me – bowel movements perhaps – but I sensed something much deeper awakening. Suddenly, the world seemed to be closing in on itself. Yet I was not afraid. Time lost meaning, I grew tired of such constraints. In the beginning there was darkness, and the darkness was without form or void. And in addition to the darkness there was also me, and I moved upon the face of the

darkness and I saw that I was alone. I thought, what a beautiful way to die, like a star burning out. Then suddenly as the star was collapsing into itself there was a neon rainbow. The world ran awash with colour as I stretched out of the burning spectrum, nearly tearing me asunder. I had left myself behind and had found another. I then flew out under the moon and smiled, truly acknowledging it for the first time.

(Pause)

You see things and you say ‘why?’ but I dreamed things that never were and I say ‘why not?’ Sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast. Death is not an unhappy thing once you discover birth.

(During the course of this speech, IL has slipped into a trance like state, the mushrooms have worked their fast insidious magic)

Inspector Lewis – Birth. I have a daughter.

Butterfly – What is she called?

(Pause)

Inspector Lewis – Celia. I miss her. Here, I think I have a photo of her.

(Takes out the photo previously shown to WR at beginning)

Butterfly – Why she’s beautiful, but such sad blue eyes.

Inspector Lewis – Yes.

(Pause)

My name is Lewis and I don’t know where I am.

Butterfly – You wouldn’t believe me if I told you

Inspector Lewis – I’m too comfortable to move and go to the garden. My watch is broken.

(Comfortable silence)

Inspector Lewis – What?

Butterfly – I didn’t say anything

Inspector Lewis – Oh.

(Pause)

Inspector Lewis – That cloud looks like a bird

Butterfly – It is a bird

Inspector Lewis – Oh. Everything is warm and glowing. What was in that tea, it tasted funny.

Butterfly – Psilocybe Semilanceata

Inspector Lewis – Is that a new flavour by Tetleys?

Butterfly – Mushrooms. Magic ones.

(IL is panicked)

Inspector Lewis – What?! You've poisoned me!

Butterfly – Now don't worry their quite harmless. They only make you bigger. Or was it smaller...

Inspector Lewis – Dear God

Butterfly – Embrace it, ride it

Inspector Lewis – I've never taken drugs before, I once licked a pritt-stick but, I thought you were being nice when you gave me the tea!

Butterfly –Who are you?

Inspector Lewis - I — I hardly know, just at present — at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.

Butterfly -What do you mean by that? Explain yourself

Inspector Lewis - I can't explain myself I'm afraid, sir, because I'm not myself, you see

Butterfly - I don't see.

Inspector Lewis - I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly, for I can't understand it myself to begin with

Butterfly – Have you the time?

Inspector Lewis – It's broken

Butterfly – What does it say?

Inspector Lewis – It isn't right

Butterfly – Yes but what does it say?

Inspector Lewis – 12 o'clock

Butterfly – I'm late! I'm afraid I've got to see a man up at Lexington 125 now so I'll say goodbye

Inspector Lewis – Wait, don't go – what if I think I can fly and jump off a cliff or something, or try and eat my hands

Butterfly – You're not an idiot. Good luck in finding Alice.

Inspector Lewis – Thanks

Butterfly – You're welcome. Peace out holmes.

(Butterfly leaves)

Inspector Lewis – But what about finding myself?

Butterfly – Are you familiar with Kerouac?

Inspector Lewis – Is this another type of tea?

Butterfly - "Happiness consists in realizing it is all a great strange dream"

Inspector Lewis – Ahhh! *(touches his face with new found interest then with great difficulty gets out Dictaphone)* Possible delay in Alice inquiry, can't really move my arms, feel quite cold, no, warm. Both. Tongue is bitter and the floors moving. That bloody butterfly, never mess with an Englishman's cup of tea. What is this world coming to? For that matter, where in the world am I?

(A voice without a body has the next piece of dialogue with Inspector Lewis, seemingly coming all around him, this is the Cheshire Cat)

Cheshire Cat – Where men come to die

(Pause, IL stares at Dictaphone, then talks to it)

Inspector Lewis – You can speak?

Pause

Inspector Lewis – This isn't happening. I must be imagining this,
Someone's playing a joke...

Cheshire Cat – Or taking the piss?

Inspector Lewis – Are you hidden in there? How small are you?

Cheshire Cat – I'm smaller than a single hair, but first ask who?

Inspector Lewis – Well, who am I talking to?

Cheshire Cat – You.

Inspector Lewis – I'm talking to myself, can this be true...?

Cheshire Cat – You're talking to a tiny part of you,

Deep in the recesses of your mind,

It's called your subconscious I think you'll find,

It dictates what you feel and do.

The Id, ego and super battle it out,

Striking a balance for your pleasure,

Trying to find the perfect measure,

Of happiness and doubt.

It's telling you, 'you are dreaming,

That this substance and void is fake,

There's a decision you must make,

If you wish to wake, eat this cake'

(A cupcake is thrown at IL's head from nowhere)

Inspector Lewis – Ow! But I'm not dreaming, I need to find Alice.

Cheshire Cat – Is it not Celia that you miss,

Want nothing more than to kiss?

Inspector Lewis – I'm looking for Alice, not her

Cheshire Cat – Whatever you say Mr Lewis, sir

(IL is speechless)

Inspector Lewis – I've gone mad

Cheshire Cat – Celia wants her dad

Inspector Lewis – Shut up! Shut up sub-conscious! I am not dreaming, I am on duty and I have a job to do regardless of family.

Cheshire Cat – I'm ever so sorry, but understand we're one and the same,

This information I'm giving, is from your own brain.

The cake will bring you round to normality,

And shake this mushroom mentality.

Inspector Lewis – If I eat the damned thing will you leave me alone, let me continue my case?

Cheshire Cat - Yes Inspector, that would make me happy, put a smile on my face

(Pause)

Inspector Lewis – Okay fine. What flavour is it?

Cheshire Cat – Blueberry

Inspector Lewis – My favourite

Cheshire Cat – I do know you quite well

Inspector Lewis – True. My stomach, I'm not sure it can take it, I'm feeling quite funny, not ha ha funny, sort of, poisoned, funny. Urrgh, it tastes terrible, you said it was blueberry sub-conscious. Sub-conscious! Fine, go away then. You can trust no one, not even yourself. I'll just take a nap then continue the investigation. Just a little cat-nap. Sleep is important! Sleep maketh the man, sleep sleep perchance to dream. Who said that? Some guy probably. Sleepy sleeping. Nobody is anybody when they sleep, away with memories there's to keep, stills of life whilst they're framed, a collage of colours, people can't be named. Time is trivial, faceless space that at the time seemed real. Anybody is nobody when they sleep, lost in thoughts dark and deep. That wasn't that bad. I'm a poet and didn't, realise it. Maybe if I just lie down here, everything will become clear. *(Yawns)* You've got yourself in a mess Inspector. I know, I know.

(The Inspector lies on the ground asleep and the Chesire Cat walks out with a megaphone, smiling)

Cheshire Cat – Well that was just too easy

(Whistles to an unseen figure off stage that comes on and drags the Inspectors body off. This is the Mad Hatter. Blackout)

Scene 4

(Lights up. IL is blindfolded and unconscious in a chair, his hands tied. 'Comfortably numb' by Pink Floyd plays and cuts off just before chorus. Enter mad hatter. Mad hatter has two distinct schizophrenic personalities, The Mad Hatter and The March Hare. At the beginning of this scene he is The Mad Hatter. He walks slowly on stage, looping round the chair drinking a cup of tea, stops, then sprays it into IL's face)

Inspector Lewis – Ahhhh!

Mad Hatter – You're awake. I didn't think anyone was home. I assume there is someone home, Charles...

Inspector Lewis – Who? What?

Mad Hatter – When?

Inspector Lewis – How?

Mad Hatter – Perhaps

Inspector Lewis – Help! Help! Where am I?? I can't see, I'm blind! I've never taken drugs before, I once licked a pritt...

(Shaking IL violently)

Mad Hatter – SILENCE

(There is silence)

It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited. Relax, I need some information, just the basic facts.

(IL struggles with rope around hands)

Inspector Lewis – There must be a misunderstanding, I am an officer of the law, an inspector actually...

Mad Hatter – Your jurisdiction has no place here Charles, so far from home. It does not override the queens, and there is no higher authority than the queen.

Inspector Lewis – My name is not Charles, you are making a huge mistake – when my chief in command hears about this there'll be hell to pay! Untie me this instant.

Mad Hatter – Or what?

Inspector Lewis – Or I'll have you arrested for abduction and getting my face wet!

(Slowly, grabs throat)

Mad Hatter – A man's windpipe can be crushed quite easily with the correct placement of the thumb and forefinger. Do you really feel in a position of power Charles?

(Pause, lets go of throat)

It is you who is under arrest

Inspector Lewis – Me?! For what?

Mad Hatter – I don't know

Inspector Lewis – You don't know what I've done wrong?

Mad Hatter – No

Inspector Lewis – Well then what am I doing tied to a chair, charged with a non-existent crime!

Mad Hatter – Can you prove your innocence?

Inspector Lewis – I don't know what...

Mad Hatter – Then you are guilty

Inspector Lewis – I have done nothing that would warrant

Mad Hatter – I do not know what you are charged with, nor do I care. But your guilt is undeniably there, noosed around your neck. A man is not brought to trial by the queen without adequate reason

Inspector Lewis – The queen?

Mad Hatter – Correct, your trial will be conducted in her highnesses garden

Inspector Lewis – The queens garden... Alice! I'm looking for a missing girl called Alice, my name is inspector Lewis and I'm looking for Alice

Mad Hatter – Then you have wasted what precious time you have left

Inspector Lewis – It's only because of your stupidity you're able to be so sure of yourself

Mad Hatter – You should say what you mean

Inspector Lewis – I do. At least, I mean what I say – that's the same thing you know

Mad Hatter – Not the same at all. You might as well say 'I see what I eat' is the same as 'I eat what I see', that, 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like' You might just as well say that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same as 'I sleep when I breathe'

Inspector Lewis – You're a raving lunatic

Mad Hatter – I AM NOT MAD

*(Goes to attack IL but is pulled back by himself/March Hare, hand on shoulder by his other half and alter-ego, the Mad Hatter is now represented by **bold** and the March Hare in normal text)*

No. What have I said about manhandling suspects. They can't talk with broken jaws. **But he made a personal remark.** Settle down. We must co-operate with Inspector Lewis, **Charles**, so we get exactly what we want.

Inspector Lewis – I'm sorry, who else is there?

Mad Hatter – The names Hare – so nice to meet you.

(Shakes hand)

I believe you've already met my partner. You'll have to excuse his behaviour, he's very sensitive about his mental health. **Lets not discuss my**, Now, Mr Hatter is going to ask a few questions in relation to your trial, **why did you bring up my**, that's enough! These questions that he's about to ask should be taken very seriously. I advise you answer as truthfully and as accurately as you can so that your trial runs smoothly. Are we clear?

(Pause)

Inspector Lewis – I suppose so

Mad Hatter - **Question number one - What is your favourite colour?**

Inspector Lewis – Um. Blue?

Mad Hatter – **Are you trying to be funny?**

Inspector Lewis – No

Mad Hatter – Can you be a bit more specific please

Inspector Lewis – Marine blue?

Mad Hatter – Marine blue very good. **Question number two – How many fingers am I holding up?**

Inspector Lewis – How am I meant

Mad Hatter – Try harder Inspector, this relationship is give and take

Inspector Lewis – I'm blindfolded!

Mad Hatter – A likely story. This is very disappointing, co-operation is key Inspector.

Question number three – what size shoe am I?

Inspector Lewis – This is MAD

Mad Hatter – **Try and put yourself in his shoes**

Inspector Lewis – I don't know, nine and a half!

Mad Hatter – Good very good, you have a keen eye for mens feet size, this will help your case

Inspector Lewis – Mr Hare, I could answer a lot more easily if Mr Hatter wasn't breathing down my neck

Mad Hatter – Would you co-operate better if it was just me in the room?

Inspector Lewis – Yes

Mad Hatter – You heard the man, **but im helping with**, go and put the kettle on, **i don't want a cup of tea**, put it on now.

(Walks himself to the door, pushes himself out, then turns)

Just you and me Charles, how cosy

Inspector Lewis – My name –

Mad Hatter – Your name is not important. Your crime however, is.

Inspector Lewis – So *you* know what I'm held here for.

Mad Hatter – I do. But I haven't the authority to give details. Only the queen's court will read out your sentence. There is no higher...

Inspector Lewis – ...authority than the queen, I know. It seems I'm not only being condemned in innocence, but ignorance too.

Mad Hatter - The law was made for one thing alone, for the exploitation of those who don't understand it, or are prevented by naked misery from obeying it.

Inspector Lewis – What nonsense

Mad Hatter – What business do you have here?

Inspector Lewis – A little girl has gone missing and it's my job to find her

Mad Hatter – I see. And how long has she been missing?

Inspector Lewis – 5 months, 2 weeks and 4 days

Mad Hatter – An awful long time. How do you know she's alive?

Inspector Lewis – I-I don't. But she is.

Mad Hatter – Here's hoping. I have one, last, crucial, question. I ask all my suspects this question. I will ask it slowly - I do not want a slow answer.

Inspector Lewis – Ok

Mad Hatter – Why is a raven like a writing desk?

Inspector Lewis – What?! You're not making sense you raving lunatic. Untie me!

(MH goes to strangle IL)

Mad Hatter – I AM NOT

(Composes himself)

I can assure you I am quite sane and in control. My partner however, is a little unhinged...

Inspector Lewis – I can tell

Mad Hatter – Yes. Unhinged and itching to grab your throat. Now I would never dream of brutally strangling a suspect but if I were to leave the room and the door just so happens to be left open – who knows. Someone might walk in and not bother having a polite conversation, they might crush your oesophagus. I am merely theorising Inspector – but stranger things have happened.

Inspector Lewis – Are you trying to good cop bad cop a good cop?

Mad Hatter – What nonsense

Inspector Lewis – I am not saying another word until I get a lawyer in here, I know my rights

Mad Hatter - Why is a raven like a writing desk? Maybe we should invite Mr Hatter back in.

(Silence. Laughs)

Do you want to know why Mr Hatter is...unhinged? I'll tell you . A long time ago, Mr Hatter and his lovely wife owned a little shop making the most marvellous hats. His father and grandfather before him ran the shop and had built it up from nothing. Alas, they had died and business wasn't good, in fact it was non-existent. No one wore hats anymore. He and his wife were poor, but happy. So when a gentlemen walked in and asked for his bowler to be fixed they worked night and day, day and night for it was a very expensive hat and would fetch a handsome sum when finished. Mr Hatter was so exhausted after days of feverish work that when his lovely wife asked for a well-deserved cup of tea in the workshop, he absent-mindedly put mercury in, instead of milk. Now mercury is an important process in the curing of felt, and therefore commonplace in a hatters home – however the human mind does not react well to it. No. It breaks down. Mr Hatter was forced to watch his mistake fester and

bloom in a matter of months. His wife's mouth could no longer form the words 'look after me', now she looked out the window all day and no longer recognised her husband. This made him very sad. After a number of years there was talk around town that she should go in another home far away. Mr Hatter made a decision before putting her to bed one night. He kissed her goodnight, stroked her hair till she fell asleep and strangled her. She stayed very still, her eyes wide and empty. The bruises around her throat looked like a necklace. He then picked up his hat, tapped the crown and said, 'Nothing to be done'.

(Knock on the door)

Speak of the devil.

(Walks to the door, opens it)

Can I come in now? Yes

(Comes back with a boiling kettle)

Has he been co-operative? He's a good listener. Only problem is we need him to talk. We need him to find out why a raven is like a writing desk, don't we? Mr Hatter has been kind enough to put the kettle on, Inspector, would you like a cup of tea? Oh, I forgot, you're mute until a lawyer magically appears because you know your rights? Do you know how hot water is at 101 Degree Celsius on naked skin?

Inspector Lewis – If I tell you will you let me go?

Mad Hatter – Sure, sure, if you talk you can walk out of here unscathed, **unscalded**

You have 5 seconds, why is a raven like a writing desk? 5-4-3-2-

(Kicks IL's chair over and is about to pour the water over his face, IL is crying out for help and is interrupted by the Cheshire Cat)

Cheshire Cat – It's time.

Mad Hatter – One moment please

Cheshire Cat – It's time.

Mad Hatter – But I was just about to...

(CC walks over, unties IL and walks him to the door, IL then stops and turns)

Inspector Lewis – Because Poe has written on both of them

Mad Hatter – Who??

Inspector Lewis – The poet

(The Cheshire Cat takes off the Inspectors blindfold, Lewis is stunned to realise that he was being interrogated by a singular man)

Inspector Lewis – Impossible

(The Inspector is walked off stage, his head turned, looking back)

Mad Hatter – Impossible. There's not meant to be an answer.

(MH is lost in his thoughts, taps the crown of his hat, then puts it on)

Mad Hatter – We are all born mad. Some remain so.

(Pause)

Let's go. Yes, let's go.

Scene 5

(A picnic has been laid out. Two guards suited with respective card emblems stand beside a throne. The Cheshire Cat bowls on with his megaphone and a beaming smile. He addresses both the dollies sitting at the picnic and the audience as if they were attending the trial)

Cheshire Cat – Roll up roll up ladies and gents, sit down and pour yourself a cup of tea. The sun is high in the sky and today is our weekly picnic trial! That’s right; justice will be laid out over gingham squares, the truth served with jam sandwiches and cakes so good you feel guilty just looking at them. Settle down, speak when spoken to and welcome the accused, Inspector Lewis!

(Everyone claps, smiling)

Very good, very good. We are gathered here, the queens garden, to decide whether this man is guilty or innocent. Without further ado, the queen! All must bow before the queen!

(One of the guards attempts to play a trumpet to mark her entrance but what comes out sounds like MPARP. The queen enters and takes her place on her throne, her feet dangling above the floor. Inspector Lewis is shocked when he sees the queen)

Inspector Lewis – Alice?

Cheshire Cat – You will address your queen by either your highness or your scrumptiousness

Inspector Lewis – Alice

Cheshire Cat – You will speak when spoken to

Inspector Lewis – Alice what are you doing here? Where’s the queen?

Cheshire Cat – You will revoke the right to jam sandwiches!

Inspector Lewis – Alice you need to come home

Cheshire Cat – I am warning you sir

Inspector Lewis – Alice tell them who you are, who I am

(The Cheshire Cat bangs a croquet bat whilst the two guards place their hands over the Inspectors mouth and restrain him)

Cheshire Cat – There will be order in the picnic court. Order, order! If you speak out of turn again you will be restrained again

(Pause)

Alice – Hello Inspector. I am the queen. I am also the judge, jury and executioner. You are the accused and I sit in judgement of you. You will stand. Welcome to the picnic. Welcome to the trial. Cheshire Cat will be prosecuting today and your lawyer is...is, where is White Rabbit?

Cheshire Cat – He's late your highness

Alice – Again? I see. It looks like you are on your own Inspector. But don't worry, we'll be nice. Before the trial begins, have you anything of importance to say that may help with your case?

Inspector Lewis – Come home Alice, your parents miss you

Alice – But I like it here, I can play all day. Begin the trial.

Cheshire Cat – Inspector, please take to the stand. Very good. You stand before the jury accused of a serious crime. You are here today, charged with the murder...

Inspector Lewis – Murder??

Cheshire Cat – Of your daughter, Celia.

(Pause)

Inspector Lewis – How dare you. My daughters alive and well, this trial is ridiculous. My business here is to take Alice back home where she belongs. This is a waste of police time, I demand you give up this ruse and let me go!

Cheshire Cat – So is that a guilty or a not guilty?

Inspector Lewis – Not guilty!

Cheshire Cat – Not guilty ladies and gents, not guilty. With the queens permission I will proceed to question the accused. Inspector, what exactly are you inspecting?

Inspector Lewis – The disappearance of that girl

Cheshire Cat – I see, can you provide any credentials proving you are an inspector?

Inspector Lewis – My papers, my papers are not on me right now

Cheshire Cat – So you have no way to prove your authority or place

Inspector Lewis – Well...

Cheshire Cat – No way at all

(Pause as Inspector tries to grasp at an answer)

Inspector Lewis – I'm wearing a tie?

Cheshire Cat – I think we both know that's not good enough. Sir. What is your name?

Inspector Lewis – Lewis

Cheshire Cat – Just Lewis?

Inspector Lewis – Just Lewis

Cheshire Cat – Strange, I have here your name is Charles Dodgson. Is that correct?

Inspector Lewis – No

Cheshire Cat – Curiouser and curiouser. This was provided by a very reliable witness. If I may your honour, bring out Exhibit A.

(A small book is handed to him by one of the guards)

Exhibit A is a charming book about a little girl, it's called, **Celia and the Deep, Dark Woods.**

Inspector Lewis – Please stop.

Cheshire Cat – It starts very simply. Once upon a time there was a little girl called Celia who lived with her daddy Charles and her mummy Rebecca. Sadly, Celia's mummy was very

ill so both Charles and Celia had to take turns looking after her. Celia had to wash her, feed her and after that give her her medicine. This would take all day and meant that poor Celia had no time to play with her friends. She dreamed of kicking pinecones, chasing squirrels and playing hide and seek in the local woods, not far from her house. But there was little chance of that happening when she had to look after her mummy all the time. She thought it was awfully unfair that her mummy was a child and she an adult who had no fun. Her daddy always made her stay in. After months of being stuck in her house Celia had had enough. She marched into her daddy's study and said

(Both Alice and The Cheshire Cat say this line in unison)

'I've had enough of looking after mummy. She never talks and is ever so boring. I want to play outside but you won't let me. I wish mummy didn't exist!'

This made her daddy Charles very angry, he stood up and shouted quite loudly

(Both the Inspector and Cheshire Cat say this line in unison, much to the surprise of the Inspector, it's like he can't help it)

'Your mummy is very sick and needs to be looked after. If you don't care then get out. Leave and go play with your stupid friends you ungrateful little girl'

Celia's daddy had not shouted for a long time and big tears fell down her face. She ran out of the house and heard Charles calling after her, for her to come back, but she ran. She ran up the path and into the woods. She never wanted to go home again! She ran and ran until her chest hurt and she had stopped crying. Celia looked up, not recognising where she was in the woods. Everything was dark and cold, her friends were nowhere to be seen. She thought she could hear them laughing so ran in that direction but she only got more and more lost. Celia was scared and regretted leaving her warm safe home. She missed her daddy, she even missed her mummy. But then she remembered him shouting at her and felt miserable and angry. It was his fault she was lost and alone in the deep dark woods, not hers. Again, she heard her friends playing, laughing, and so went deeper and deeper to find them. Celia's daddy was worried when she didn't arrive for supper and went out the house to look for her again. Charles searched everywhere but couldn't find her. The day after, and the day after and the day after that she still hadn't come back. Every day he would search the deep dark woods, swearing he could hear her laughing and playing. He had lost his little girl and all he wanted

was for her to come home. To this day he still looks for her, racked with guilt and sadness. Celia, his only child, lost and alone. THE END.

(Pause)

What have you to say in your defence Charles? Do you deny the contents of the story?

Inspector Lewis – It is only that, a story. More fiction and fantasy. Who wrote these lies?

Alice – I did

Inspector Lewis – My daughter is at home

Cheshire Cat – With your wife?

Inspector Lewis – My wife is dead

Cheshire Cat – She was sick?

(Pause)

Inspector Lewis – Yes

(Pause)

Cheshire Cat – What does your daughter look like?

Inspector Lewis – She has blonde hair, blue eyes

Cheshire Cat - Have you any evidence of this?

Inspector Lewis – Yes! Yes I do, I have a photo of her right here

(Takes out a photo only to have it snatched away by Cheshire Cat)

Cheshire Cat – But this is a photo of the queen

Inspector Lewis – Is it? I must have mixed up the photos. I still have the other one of Celia. Its, I have it. Right here. It's not here, someone's taken it. Who took it? Where is she? Where is it?

Cheshire Cat – Charles calm down

(The guards advance towards the Inspector)

Inspector Lewis – Where, where...I had it. Right here in my pocket

Cheshire Cat – Ladies and gentlemen, the final piece of evidence that im sure will bring this case to a close. Bring out Exhibit C

Inspector Lewis – You missed Exhibit B

Cheshire Cat – You provided it Mr Dodgson.

(Waving the photo in his hand)

Exhibit C is simple, it starts with a C.

(A large blackboard is brought out. Cheshire Cat writes C, then E, L, I, A. C E L I A is written out)

There.

Inspector Lewis – Is that it?

(Cheshire Cat crosses out the A in C E L I A and writes below it A, then crosses out the L in C E L I A and puts it next to the A. With painstaking slowness all the letters of C E L I A are crossed out and below is spelt out A L I C E. Charles starts to cringe and stutter)

You're, you're mad. They're different girls. Different. Alice is missing. Celia's home. Shes safe, waiting for me. I need to bring back Alice. Alice. I talked to a butterfly and chased a white rabbit and and, Through the looking glass...I'm an Inspector and need...

Alice – Charles. Listen to yourself

(Silence. Charles is a broken man)

Inspector Lewis – Celia?

Alice – I'm no longer called that

Inspector Lewis – If you're Celia than you're here, you're alive. You're real

Alice – Am I?

Inspector Lewis – I can see you. Come home. Your daddy misses you

Alice – But I like it here. I can play all day

Inspector Lewis – You're safe. I'm here now

Alice – Are you?

Inspector Lewis – You're not lost anymore

Alice – I'll always be lost. You'll always be looking

(Silence)

Cheshire Cat – You stand before these people as a condemned man, someone who contributed to the disappearance and death of his own daughter. How do you plead?

(Pause)

Inspector Lewis – Celia...But I can see her...

(Pause)

Guilty.

(Silence as he gently sobs)

Cheshire Cat – Charles Dodgson this picnic court finds you guilty and therefore sentences you to death

Inspector Lewis – To death? Under what authority?

Alice – The queens

Inspector Lewis – Celia, tell them to call it off, I'm your father, remember? Don't let them kill me

Alice – I can't come home, you know this, I know this. I did not decide this. I'm sorry daddy but blood must be shed to wash away the pain. There must be payment. A pound of flesh will suffice.

Cheshire Cat – An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth

Inspector Lewis – Celia, Alice, your highness, please, I'm not ready

Alice – People rarely are. Don't worry; dying is just like waking up

Inspector Lewis – I don't want to wake up

(Pause)

I don't want to. I'm sorry I made you run away. I am. I let you go, but I don't deserve this. I have to live with this every day, every night, the same dream, the same thoughts. The same actions spiralling out in front of me. I'm lost. So I construct reason, drown myself in fantasy. I have purpose, I have you. I found you.

(Pause, he realises something)

I know this. This has happened before. I've stood here, you stood there. Everyone's watching me. Judging. I don't want to wake up. This dream, this nightmare is better than what happens to me when I wake up. Alone. This is when I get to see you. And you are beautiful. But such sad blue eyes. Let this moment hang still so I can see you, just a little bit longer, just for a while. Let me lie. Let me live out this lie. Let me live. Let me sleep.

(Moves towards Alice, no one stops him. He hugs her)

Let me touch you. Everything is going to be ok, I found you. We can write a happy ending together.

(Pause)

Alice – Off with his head

(The Inspector/Charles is dragged off, screaming and Alice/Celia is left on stage, alone. She starts whistling 'Dream a little dream of me' whilst wiping the blackboard clean. She writes 'THE END' and walks off slowly. 'Sprout and the Bean' by Joanna Newsom starts to play. Lights fade to black)