

Dark Alice

excerpts from the book that never was



To begin with, and this must be clearly understood, Dark Alice was not really dark. That is to say, although her hair was dark, what was really dark about Alice was her moods. She wore a perpetual frown and seemed to scowl at everything. This reflected her dark inner self. You see, Dark Alice felt cheated by life. While her two sisters were content to do womanly things, young Alice only wanted to be away in the woods, hunting and discovering the secrets of the forest. But, because of the time and place of her birth, Alice felt doomed to the life of being a girl on her father's assart.

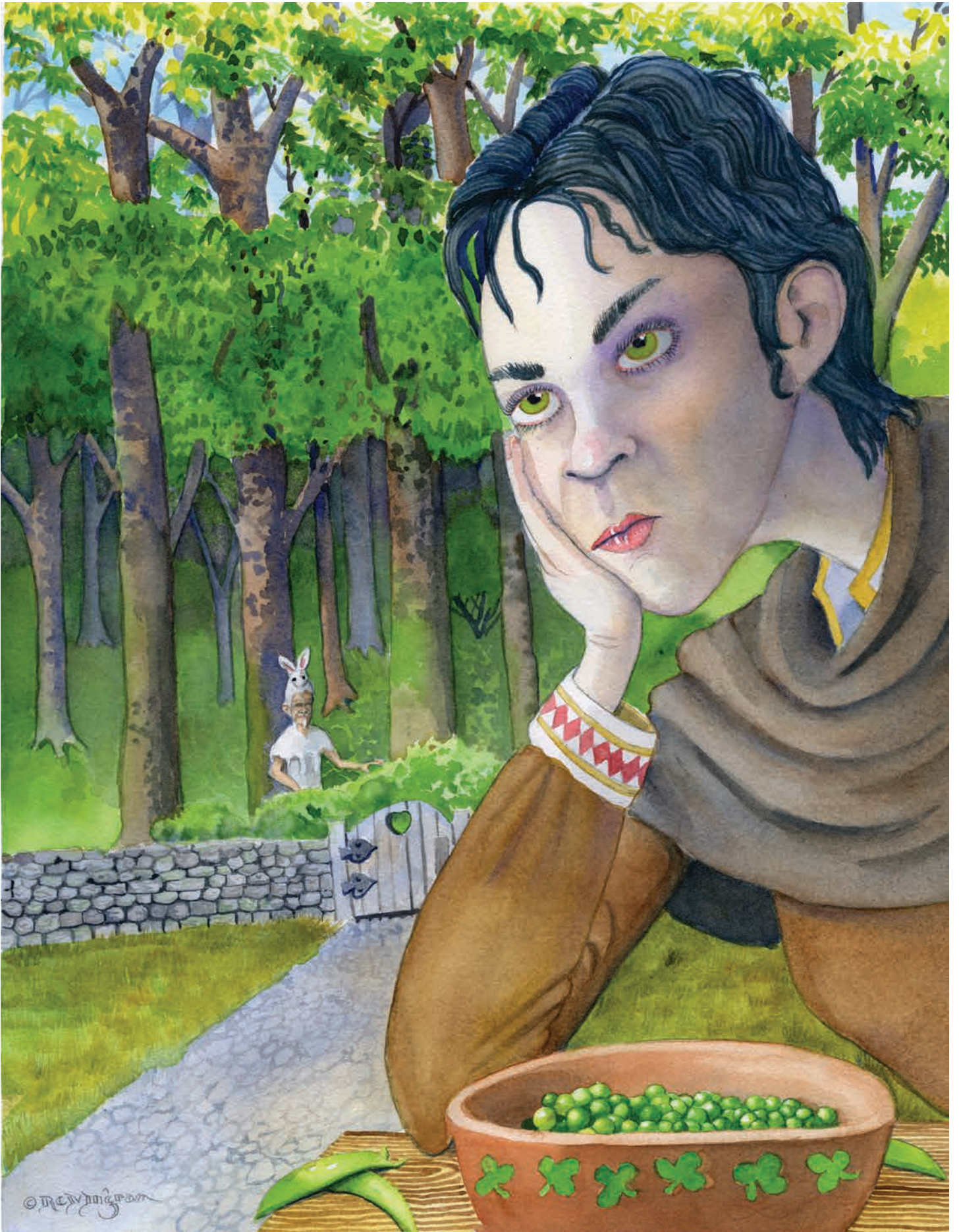
One day, while her two sisters chatted amiably and shucked peas, and Alice scowled at the bowl of peas before her, she caught a flash of white from the corner of her eye. Snapping her head toward the woods, she saw two large, white rabbit ears disappearing into the trees.

"A white rabbit in the middle of summer?" thought Dark Alice. "And huge!"

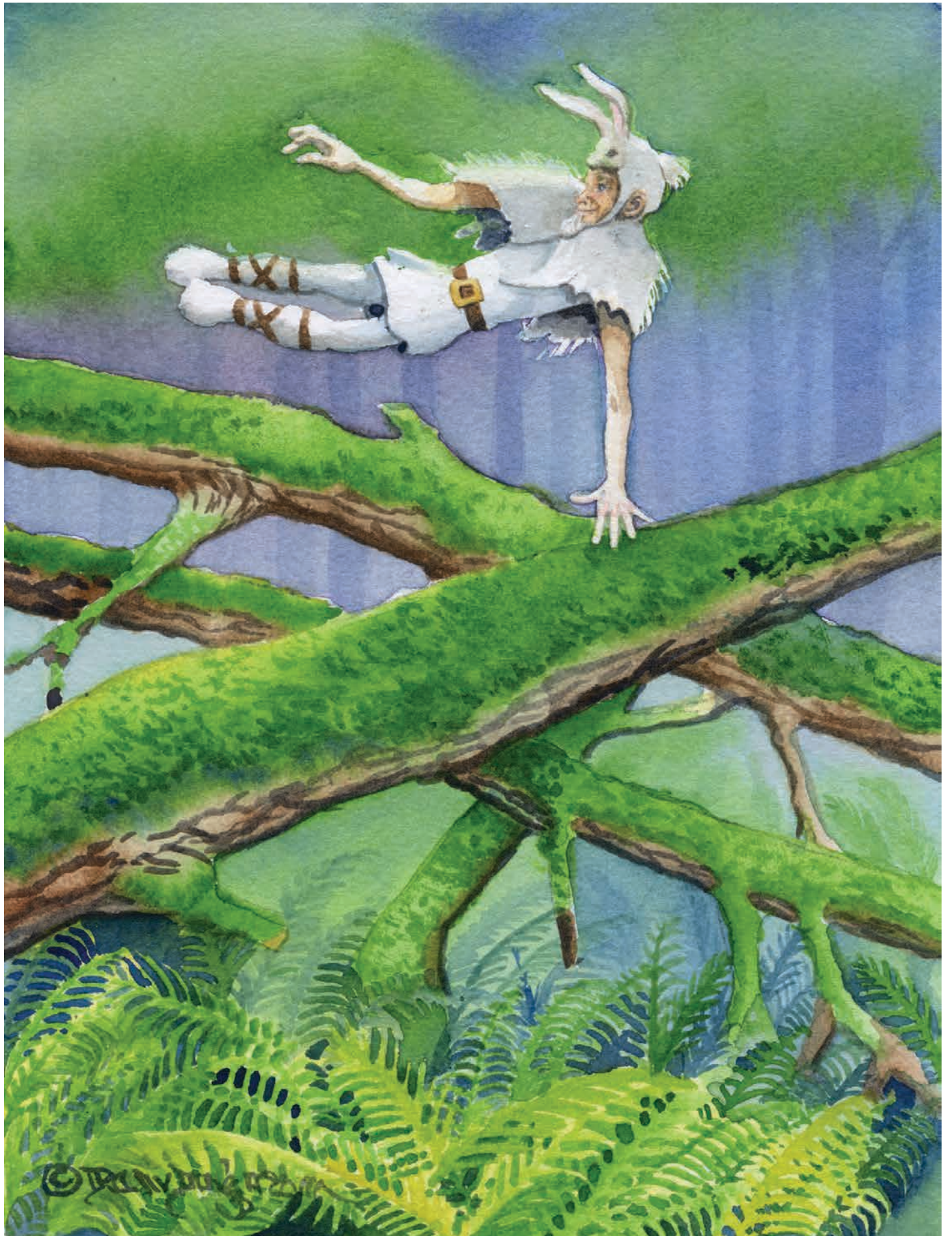
Forgetting the peas, Dark Alice grabbed up her bow and quiver of arrows, that were never far away. Without a word to her sisters, she sprinted in the direction she had last seen the rabbit. As soon as she entered the cool shade of the woods, Dark Alice felt truly at home. She moved silently through the trees, chasing the rabbit that should not be there.

Far ahead, she caught the wink of white moving quickly through the wood and Dark Alice sped in pursuit. But no matter how fast she moved, and Dark Alice was long-legged, the rabbit seemed to be getting farther and farther ahead. The hunt was on and Dark Alice increased her pace.

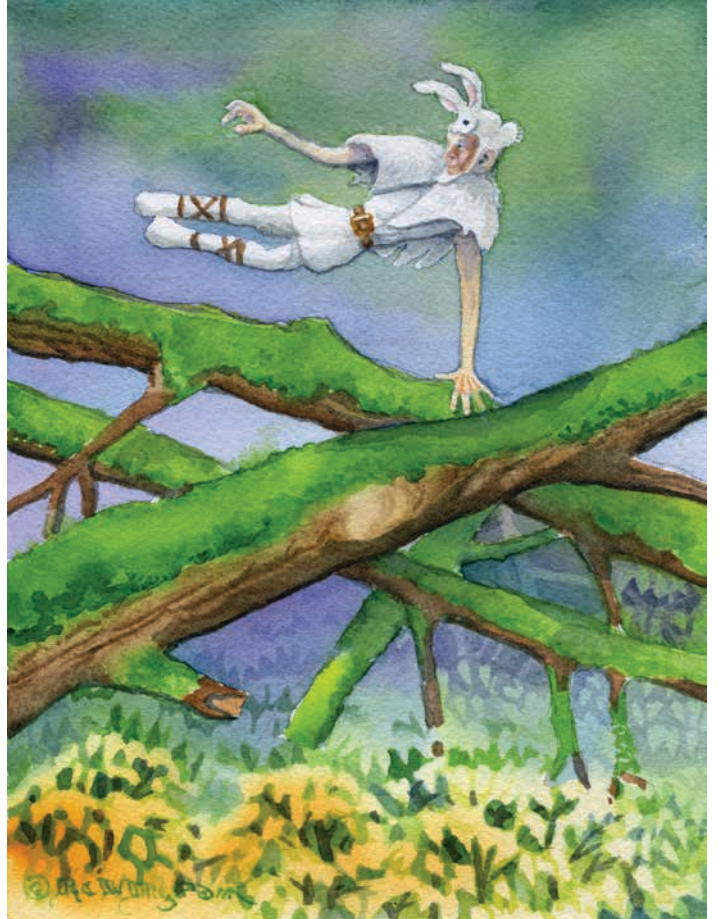
All through the warm afternoon she ran with the bobbing white phantom leading her on, always just out of bow shot. Eventually, she had to stop for a breather. Looking around, she frowned her usual frown, black brows nearly meeting in the middle of her pale forehead. She did not recognize this part of the woods and she was intimately familiar with the forest for many miles around her home. The trees were huge and ancient, moss covered and gnarled with age. There was another flash of white and Alice sped off in pursuit but, after only a few steps, she stopped. There before her was the ruin of a stone church. She had never heard of a ruined church near her home and definitely not one buried deep in an ancient forest. But that is where she had seen the rabbit go and so she followed, more puzzled than ever.



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These are three different versions of the White Rabbit, leading Dark Alice a merry chase through the deep woods.



assing through the half collapsed arch of the front door, Dark Alice entered a cool and silent space of moss-covered stone and young trees amidst large ferns. Near what was once the apse, the ferns quivered as if something had brushed them in passing. Nocking an arrow, Dark Alice rushed forward. Suddenly, her feet met nothing but air.

Down she fell and she braced for the shock of landing. But she did not land. She kept tumbling down a long, well-like cylinder of dirt and stone. Tree roots twisted and wove around the walls and she noted odd things sitting on them. An orange and blue cat. A steaming tea pot.

“What a queer place this is!” thought Dark Alice. “I wonder who or what lives here.”

Her attention was suddenly turned downward when, far below, she heard a quiet splash and saw a faint white blob shake and then head off into the darkness.

Quickly, Dark Alice grasped the corners of her cloak and spread her arms to slow her descent. Soon she too splashed into the small pond at the bottom of the well. She stood up in the waist-deep water and wrung out her soaked cloak. While she was about this, a group of ducks gathered around her. Then a frog and a turtle swam up. Most remarkably, several sparrows and two ravens bobbed up, floating comfortably like the ducks themselves.

“Hello,” said the ravens together. “And what brings you here?” they asked in their croaky voices.

“I’ve been chasing that white rabbit,” she said, wringing the pond water from her hair. “Did you happen to see which way it went?”

“Oh him!” said one raven. “He’ll be headed to the Birchess’s,” squawked the other, and they both began bobbing their heads vigorously.

For some reason, Dark Alice didn’t think it odd that she was standing in a pool at the bottom of an impossibly deep well having a conversation with birds. She hauled herself out of the water and ran off in the direction the ravens had pointed, somewhat hampered by her sopping wet clothes.



he raced down a long tunnel. Far ahead, she saw a white smear bobbing along in the dark and picked up her pace. Dark Alice gained on the white rabbit but, just when she thought she might catch up, it dashed through a little door in a stone wall and slammed it shut. She soon arrived at the door which didn't even reach her knees.

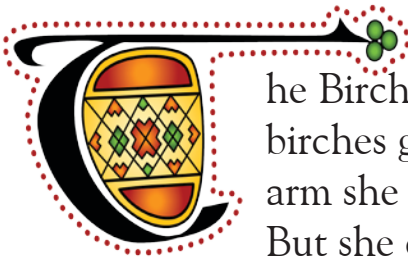
“God’s blood!” she shouted, then dropped to her knees and tried the door. But it was locked and there was no way she could have squeezed through the opening. Bending further to peer through the keyhole, she saw the loveliest forest of tiny trees with leaves of every colour. Little deer grazed placidly in a meadow of pastel coloured grasses. Far off in the trees, the white rabbit was bounding away down a path. Oh she wanted to get in there. But how?

As she stood and brushed off her breeks, she turned and saw a small stool. On it was a small sweet bread loaf, a key, and a bottle of glowing red liquid with a tag that said, “Drink me.” Alice flipped over the card and read, “...but not all if you would be small, and a little bit of bread when you would be tall.”

Dark Alice didn't know what potion this might be but, since she must be having a strange dream, what did it matter? She tucked the tag, loaf and key in her pocket, then plucked up the bottle and took the tiniest, daintiest sip. Suddenly she was looking up at the underside of a giant table. No, it was the stool and she was tiny. Fortunately, her clothes and bow had shrunk with her. Thinking no more about this, she raced to the door which now towered above her like the entrance to some grand cathedral. Fishing the key from her pocket, she turned it in the lock and heard a satisfying click. Dark Alice pushed on the door then, recalling the mishap at the ruined church, cautiously stepped through into the miniature forest.

Of course, now the forest seemed quite normal-sized. In the pastel meadow, she slowed and then stopped, gaping at the rainbow colours of the trees. Turning around, she saw that the door had disappeared. She ran back but found only a deep bed of ferns. After a moment's panic, she realized that now she really had to catch up with the white rabbit to find out how to get out of this place.





he Birchess was a strange old hag, a walking hill with a grove of birches growing out of her back. She ruled these woods. Beneath her arm she held her baby which was, in reality, a boar in a pink bonnet. But she cuddled and cooed to it like it was her own wee bairn.

“What are you doing in my woods?” she croaked.

“I really don’t know,” said Dark Alice in exasperation. “I was following the White Rabbit and he came through here.”

“What do you want with the White Rabbit?” asked the Birchess.

“I really don’t know that either. I just needed to follow him is all.”

“Don’t know much, do ya,” rasped the Birchess.

“I know how to fletch an arrow and skin a rabbit,” replied Dark Alice. “I can do sums and write a fair hand.” She began ticking things off on her fingers. “Saddle and groom a horse. Clean and sharpen a blade. Embroider. Well I am really terrible at that. Cook a stew.”

“Cook?” queried the Birchess. “I need a cook. What happened to the last one Catherine?”

“Lost her head,” said Catherine.

“Good!” cried the Birchess. “She made terrible plum pudding. Hard as a rock. Do you make a good plum pudding?”

The Birchess glowered, pointing a stick-like finger at Dark Alice.

“I wouldn’t say so. No,” replied Dark Alice truthfully.

“Off with her head!” screeched the Birchess and drew her finger across her throat with a “KKKKkkkkk” sound.

Catherine of Cheshire smiled her giant, toothy smile and tried in vain to hide the bloody axe behind her back.

“Don’t worry,” she said through her teeth, not losing her grin, “She does this just for show. Hardly anyone ever loses their head.”

Alice whipped her bow off her shoulder and had nocked an arrow in a twinkling.

“One more step, my toothy friend, and I will put an arrow through that big smile of yours.”

Catherine of Cheshire unwisely took the step, her smile unflinching.

Dark Alice had not been bluffing and her arrow flew. By the time it arrived, however, all that remained of Catherine was a transparent grin, floating in the air.







Dark Alice had drunk the last of the shrinking potion to escape the Birchess and, mores the pity, dropped the bread somewhere in her flight. Now, in her tiny state, it was quite a chore walking through the deep mosses of the forest floor. Nearly exhausted, she came to the base of a huge pine tree surrounded by mushrooms the size of cottages. In front of the largest purple mushroom, stood a tall, thin man, dressed all in blue, carefully placing leaves in a large tub full of fat blue caterpillars. When he saw her, his eyes widened and his mouth fell open, forcing him to snatch at his pipe.

“Who in the Blue Blazes are you!” he squeaked.

“Everyone seems to be asking me that,” sighed Alice. “I am Dark Alice and I followed the White Rabbit down a hole and have been trying to catch up with him ever since. But I drank this potion and became tiny and now I worry I shall never catch the White Rabbit or find my way out of here and did you drink a potion and is that why you are so small?” Dark Alice ran out of breath and paused to inhale.

“I’m not small,” said the man all in blue. “I am just the size I should be to look after my charges,” he gestured to the tub of caterpillars. “But, I am being rude. My name is Gorm de Capilar, but everyone calls me the Blue Caterpillar because my work is making sure these lovely creatures become blue butterflies. As for you being too small for your quest, that is easily remedied.”

“What do you mean easily remedied?” asked Alice.

“Oh,” he said holding out an orange mushroom and a large blue caterpillar. “You nibble one of these and you will grow taller and the other will make you smaller.”

Alice looked again at his hands with a mushroom in one and a wriggling blue caterpillar in the other. Oh surely he couldn’t mean . . .



f she was ever going to discover where she was and find the White Rabbit again, she had to get up high where she could see. Dark Alice craned her neck and looked up at the tall, tall trees. Thinking about climbing them made her tired all over. Then she recalled the mushroom the Blue Caterpillar had given her and took it from her pocket.

“One side will make you grow taller and the other make you smaller,” she recalled. But which side was which?

She turned it this way and that but, not being able to tell one side from the other of this round mushroom, she shrugged and took a nibble.

Dark Alice felt a rushing in her head, which was immediately being smacked by branches and leaves as it shot up through the forest canopy. She spat leaves from her mouth, shook her head, and opened her eyes. Spread before her, as far as she could see, was a sea of treetops. They were all in fall colours, although it had been summer when she left the ground. It had been midday below, but it was now a starry night. Her neck was very long, high above her body. Reaching to wipe another leaf bit from her face, she was startled by a long, snake-like thing rushing toward her. Alice shied back and sucked in a sharp breath. But it was only her hand.

She laughed and said, “Hello hand. Where have you been?”

The hand patted her face, then obligingly shaded her eyes as she stared into the distance. She could see a remarkably long way.

A cool breeze sprang up and Alice could feel her cape and long hair billowing out behind her. Now this was odd as she distinctly remembered having short hair.

When she turned, she could see that her cloak had changed as well from dingy brown to a rich black. And she had pauldrons. And a sword! When had she acquired those? Curiouser and curiouser.





After the long day and night wandering in the woods, Dark Alice was fierce hungry and thirsty. She heard laughter ahead. She thought that, after all her trials, it would be grand to have something to laugh about. So she gathered her sagging spirits and tired body and hurried toward the sound.

As she entered a clearing, she beheld a strange sight indeed. A woman with violent pink and yellow hair, topped with an elaborate chaperon, sat at a large wooden table, roaring with laughter at something her companion had just said. The companion – and Dark Alice had to rub her eyes and look again – was a large hare. It sat upright at the table, wearing a checkered waistcoat, with a slice of bread and cheese in its paw. While alarmed, Dark Alice was so hungry that the sight of bread and cheese emboldened her. She stepped closer to the table.

“About time you arrived,” said the woman, like they had been expecting her.

“Um, sorry to be late?” said Dark Alice.

“Never mind that now. Sit and have some bread and ale. The cheese is quite good too.”

Alice did not need a second invitation. She grabbed the knife then carved off a large piece of bread and a hunk of cheese. The hare regarded her with large golden eyes, then calmly grasped the ale jug and began pouring into the mug nearest her.

“Oi!” squeaked a little voice and a dormouse popped up out of the mug, dripping with ale.

“Watch what you’re doing Hare. I was fast asleep in here.”

“Terribly sorry old thing,” replied the hare in an oddly urbane voice. “Didn’t see you there.”

The hare hooked over another mug, checked inside, and poured the creamy brown ale. It was all Dark Alice could do not to snatch it from him, but manners first.

“Thank you ever so much,” she said and downed the mug in a few swift gulps.

“Now that you are finally here,” said the woman, “I am Hattie, this is March Hare, and the dormouse is, well, Dormouse.”

“I am Dark Alice,” she replied.

“Well Dark, hang onto your mug.”

With that, the table, chairs, and everyone in them shot into the air like they had been thrown by a giant hand. Hattie whooped and the March Hare looked nonplussed. Dormouse simply lowered himself back into the mug, now floating a foot above the table.





his was the gloomiest part of the woods so far, but up ahead, Dark Alice saw the faint glow of a lantern and heard the mutter of voices. As they drew nearer, she saw a wizened old woman leading a group of very large men. The old woman had two large branches tied to her head which was, in turn, covered with a deer skin hood complete with ears sticking out. The hulking men behind her also had antlers though theirs seemed to be real. The lantern was a deer skull, its eyes glowing mysteriously.

“Hello!” chirped the old woman. “And who might you be?”

Alice was lost for words but the old woman moved right along.

“I am the Queen of Harts and these are my subjects,” she said, puffing herself up and standing a little taller. Did everyone have a title in this place? Well Alice thought she should have one too.

“And I am Alice of the Dark,” announced Dark Alice, spreading her feet wide and putting her hand on her sword hilt.

“Are you now?” said the old woman. “How did you come by that name?”

“It is for my dark nature and the dark deeds I have done,” replied Alice in her most mysterious and menacing voice.

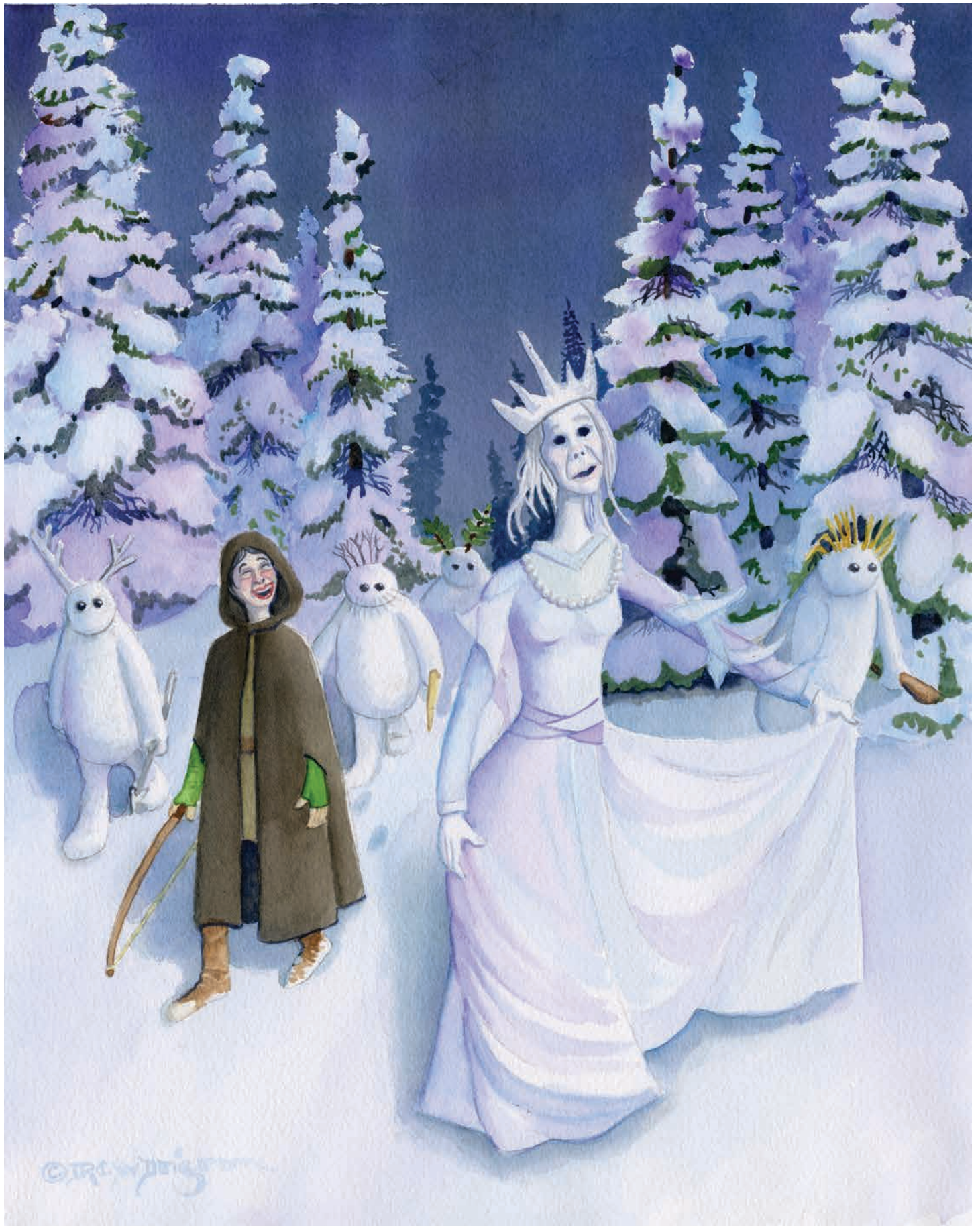
The Queen smiled and said “You look like a young girl to me. Too young to have done dark deeds.”

“And you look like an old crone with branches on her head,” said Alice defiantly, if somewhat unwisely.

The crowd of men behind the Queen stirred and growled deep in their chests. Alice swallowed and continued quickly.

“So looks can be deceiving, as you are obviously the Queen of Harts and I am indeed Alice of the Dark.”





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uddenly, there appeared a hulking white figure with a spear leveled at her chest. She was startled for a moment then laughed out loud. It was a snowman with two dark stones for eyes and sticks for hair.

“Well, you scared me there for a moment, my friend,” she said in relief drawing closer to the snowman to have a better look. The snowman raised the spear higher and pointed it at her face as she approached. Then more snowmen appeared from the snow and gloom of the woods, all carrying spears or clubs. They said not a word but slowly encircled her until she was surrounded. She raised her bow and nocked an arrow. Would it even do anything against a snowman?

Before she could answer her own question, a tall, white, cadaverous figure swayed into sight, waving her hands languidly. She was all white. Her skin, her hair, her dress, all had the faint colours of the snow in moonlight and shadow. On her head was a tall crown of ice. In a gentle high voice that sounded oddly hollow she said “Harm her not my faithful guards. This is a guest to our realm. And who are you, young guest?”

Alice was so startled for a moment that she forgot to reply. “I”, she began and then recovered, “I am Alice of the Dark. Hunting the White Rabbit, or a way back home, whichever might come first.”

“A knight on quest!” breathed the tall figure. “How delightful!” she said slowly bringing her hands together like she was clapping underwater.

“And who might I be addressing?” asked Alice politely, mindful of the crown and snowmen with weapons all around her.

“I am the Wight Queen,” replied the figure, sliding into a curtsy like she was floating on the wind.

“Is that because of your colour?” asked Alice.

“No, no dear. Not white. Wight. The Queen of the Undead, The Cold After Life, The Snow and Lost Souls. My realm is the winter forest and my subjects are those who have passed but have not moved on. Lost souls. I am a wight.

“Come walk with me lady knight and we shall talk and see if I can help you along on your quest.”



rain poured onto the grassy meadow turning it into a marsh. Dark Alice scowled at the Queen of Harts who smiled back with such a smarmy smile, Dark Alice knew that she was up to something.

“Three teams?” scowled Alice. “There are only two teams in hurling. Everyone knows that!”

“Not on my field,” said the Queen of Harts with the blandest, most innocent look ever. “On my field there are three teams and three goals. My Harts against you and yours, and the Wight Queen’s Snowguard.”

“How is that supposed to work?” asked an exasperated Dark Alice. “How do we know which goal to score on?”

“Oh that doesn’t matter dear,” replied the Queen. “It’s the hurling and yelling and battery that are important. If you put the ball through anyone’s goal, so much the better,” she said with a satisfied nod.

Dark Alice went over to Catherine, Mad Hattie and the other women of the forest.

“Seems we are to play against both the Harts and the Snowguard,” grumped Dark Alice.

The women all nodded like this wasn’t odd at all.

Catherine grinned her wide grin and clapped her hands together several times. “Oh good, good, goody good good,” she trilled.

“Just hurling sticks,” warned Dark Alice. “None of your knives or axes Cat.”

“Oh pooh,” pouted Catherine prettily. But she brightened immediately and smiled wickedly. “But we still get sticks.”

The White Rabbit bounded to the middle of the triangular clearing, cupping the ball in both hands. It was Dormouse, fast asleep again.

“We’re supposed to whack Dormouse?” squeaked Dark Alice. White Rabbit nodded.

Alice, the largest of the Harts, and the captain of the Snowguard put their sticks on the ground, nearly touching, while the White Rabbit walked a little ways off then threw the gently snoring Dormouse into the midst of their sticks. The giant




Hart ignored Dormouse, shouldered Dark Alice into the Snowguard, then scooped up Dormouse with his stick, and tore off toward the women's goal cackling like a crow.

"Going to be that way is it?" scowled Alice, gritting her teeth and racing after the Hart.



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ou cheat!” screeched the Queen of Harts. “You only won because you cheated and you hurt my harts. My sweet wee men.”

“I cheated? I did?” growled Dark Alice, growing angrier by the second. “Your great brutes started the cheating right from the start AND they melted all the Snow Guard AND no one ever heard of three-sided Hurley. You’re the bloody great cheat!”

The harts began to growl, picking up sticks. She lifted her bow and nocked an arrow. The March Hare scurried behind her and hid under her cloak.

“There, there Marchy,” she cooed. “No bloody great hart is going to have you for his stew as long as I can help it.”

Dark Alice turned to the harts but pointed her arrow at the Queen.

“Tell them to draw back Your Majesty or you get the first cloth yard right in your royal heart.”

“You dare! You dare threaten the royal personage?” screeched the Queen, her eyes turning blood red. Then all the harts’ eyes turned red and they began to yell and stalk forward. From nowhere, a wind sprang up and rose into a steady roar, whipping up leaves and billowing Dark Alice’s cloak out behind her. The Queen made claws of her hands and, with an inhuman yowl, she raced forward. Dark Alice loosed the arrow, dropped the bow, and swiftly drew her sword.

The wind was now blowing so hard, Dark Alice had to shield her face from the storm of leaves. One of the harts reached her but, when she stabbed him, she met nothing but blowing leaves. The Queen was still running toward her but she was flying apart. All the harts were dissolving into the wind!

Dark Alice could no longer see. The wind and leaves buffeted her so hard she was knocked over and woke with a start. She had fallen off the bench with the bowl of peas on top of her. A dream. It was all a dream. She put her hands beside her to push off the ground and there, half hidden in the grass, was the sword.

“Oh. Oh my,” thought Dark Alice. Maybe not a dream after all.“

– The End –
(maybe)