

Wonderland - Lucy's Tale: Chapter Three

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The story continues, love slowly blossoms, foreshadowing of things to come.

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Funny thing. After all these years after revealing my secrets to Alice, I had forgotten one of hers, the very first one. Oh, I suppose it's only natural. After all, we'd never spoken of it again, never even mentioned it. And yet, had I been a better friend, I would have recalled her whispered admission to me. "Sometimes, I think they might be real outside of my dreams." One thing that neither of us had considered was that we might have been tied together in more ways than one. Alice stood in the doorway, staring, her fingers tightening on the cup she held. Staring at her through my eyes was a woman from childish nightmares, ones that had faded with my presence in her life, turning into mist and barely remembered memory. That night, just last night in fact, she had been present in the room as we made love. Present and yet so very quiet. Not that we had room for anything else in our thoughts as we clumsily explored each others bodies. Last night, she'd been content to wait her turn and now, her patience had worn off. "Come in, Alice." I don't know what it was that Alice saw in my eyes that night. She never would say. Only that it wasn't me staring out at her, but something cruel and evil, something that hungered. When she told me that the first time I loved her all the more for believing that those qualities, although housed in my 16 year old frame, weren't of me, that I was absent the dark hate that spilled from the regal creature who sat before her. "Where's Lucy?" she asked, and the smallest part of me peered out at her as if through someone else's eyes as if to say Here I am . But when words came again, they were not mine. They were hers. "I've been waiting for this moment forever, Alice. I knew it would come, and I've prepared myself for it." She smiled, or rather I smiled for her and yet it wasn't my smile. It felt wrong upon my face and it must have looked wrong as well for as I watched as my best friend took a step backwards towards the hall, a look of uncertainty painted upon her face. I wanted to say something, to reassure her that it was just me, but that would have been foolish and a lie as well. It was just as well that I couldn't speak. "Oh, don't be a bore." The words that came out of my mouth were mine and yet not mine. My voice but they sounded to my ears like a stranger talking. Short, sharp, powerful. Not at all like my normal mumbling or giddy excitement. They were the voice of a queen. Her voice. Oh, I'd heard them often enough to recognize them. After all, she'd been part of my life for close to 16 years now. And yet, to have them come out of me was new. Before she'd been a separate entity and to have her inhabit my body. Well, I can assure you that it was frightening. Fear lent me strength. Not just for me, but for Alice. I fought back,

struggling to eject her, not knowing quite how to do it but determined that it be done. I'm not sure what it must have looked like or sounded, seeing as how it all went on inside of my head. Alice later told me that it looked like I was having some sort of seizure and that my screams had silenced the people downstairs and brought them to my room to see what the matter was. Once again, the paramedics arrived at our house, this time for me. I went for a ride to the hospital for overnight observation after being subdued with sedatives. By the time Uncle Joe bundled me out to his pickup truck and brought me back home I was feeling more myself. The doctor had given him instructions to keep me calm and medicated, which was fine with me. Especially the medicated part. I felt serene. Sort of like I was floating about in my own body, and not really part of the world. Nothing could touch me. My mother's violent death was something distant and unreal. My father's lost stare was nothing to be concerned about. I was fine. Everything was fine. Only everything was not fine. Things went back to the way they'd been before. My companions would show up, making life strange in a way that I had become used to. The Queen was among them, giving me looks that I couldn't interpret, sizing me up as if she planned on making a dress for me. At least I hoped those were her intentions. Had I not been so doped up, I might have worried that she intended to poison me or perhaps smother me in my sleep. In my present state, I found it impossible to care if she chose to do either. There were two constants in my life the first two weeks. I mean, besides being doped up to my eyeballs. My father's absence and Alice's presence. I should explain something, so that you don't think him horrible. He loved my mother dearly. She was his sun, his moon, his stars, and he would dote on her in a way that was almost obsessive. Had I been a little wiser, I would have understood the possessiveness that he often showed towards her. Little things, like his suggestion that she might look nice with ribbons in her hair or a something more feminine than the slacks and turtle neck sweaters that she often favored. Nor did I take note of the haunted look in her eyes as she'd go back upstairs and change, his eyes following her every step. It wasn't much later, when it was too late, that I began to put all the clues together. I think I mentioned that there was a note. In it, she said she was sorry, told me that she loved me, but that she couldn't live like this anymore. I assumed she was referring to my madness. What else could it mean? You can't imagine how much that hurt. I read it several days after stopping my meds and then immediately went back on them. After all, this is what my life had been for 16 years now. Trapped inside a body with 9 other people floating around inside my head, sometimes coming, sometimes going, but always there. I spent a day loathing her for being a coward and weak and another hating myself for hating her. After that, I just stopped caring again. The pills had done their job all too well and I was numb and happy. Alice said that she'd come visit me after school, each time hoping that I would be looking back at her through my eyes instead of the vacant girl that I had become. She spent her afternoons laying in bed with me, just holding on to me, talking to me in hope that I would return to her, often crying herself to sleep. Her grades plummeted and her parents began to worry, almost stepping in and forbidding her to spend so much time with me. I finally woke up out of my daze on the very last day of spring. I'd spent months being lost in my head. It wasn't a sudden thing, where my eyes just snapped open and the fog lifted magically. It took a while before I was back to being Lucy again. That said, Alice noticed it. She later told me that she'd been sitting there with me

reading to herself as she'd taken to doing when I just sort of tilted my head over at her and smiled. Not that doped up smile that she had grown used to, but a sad smile, one that both broke her heart and yet lifted her feet off of the ground. "I'm sorry," I'd said, reaching out my hand for hers and she took it eagerly, letting her book fall to the floor. She'd been sitting on the edge of my bed for hours, not even realizing that I had been watching her, seeing her for the first time since that night we'd made love. At first I had been wondering who she was, but then it slowly began to come to me and I found myself wanting to hold her hand, to comfort her, to tell her that everything was going to be ok. I did all that. We lay there for hours, holding each other, laughing, smiling, crying. I felt loved. It was what I needed to draw me back out. I was ready to rejoin the world. What's more, I felt strangely empty, as if the vessel of my body was finally free of its passengers. Surely this was just a fluke. I hoped not for it felt wonderful, like a hot bath in winter, hot as I could stand, my skin scrubbed clean as the tendrils of steam rose about me. I wanted so sit there, soaking in this wonderful feeling forever, her arms around me, her voice the only voice that filled my ears. For one brief moment I knew what paradise must be. Summer arrived the next day. I'd missed most of the semester but my teachers had been understanding and had arranged for me to make it up over the break. Alice and I had scheduled most of our classes together, so she promised to help me with my assignments and reading. Really, it should have been a perfect summer. The first three weeks of it were, in fact. And then, the nightmares began. Surprisingly, it was she who suffered them and not I. Of what had transpired the night before my mother killed herself, we never talked about. Oh, it was there between us, and not in an uncomfortable way, but it was something that we both sensed we needed to give each other space to deal with on our own for a little while before confronting it. There was no doubt in my mind that Alice hadn't changed her feelings for me. The way she smiled, the look in her eyes, the way her face lit up at times while we talked. I didn't mind. Really, it was nice in a way. As I said, I wasn't in love with her the same way she was with me, but I did love her. It was perfectly natural for me to hold her hand when we talked or to lay in bed with her, stroking her hair after a long day as we waited for the air in her room to cool down enough to make sleep possible. Often, we would cuddle on the couch in our living room, watching a movie on the television set and feeding each other popcorn, intimate in a way that transcended friendship. And yet, I knew she longed for more and that we would have to address that at some point. Really, had I been so inclined, I couldn't have thought of a better choice. At 16 Alice was already a beauty. I knew that she'd been asked out more times than I could imagine at school. Even the senior boys had taken an interest in her and it was obvious to me that she had just begun to bloom. In two years time she would be stunning. Next to her I felt plain. Not that it bothered me. It was a fact of life. Besides, next to her everything seemed plain, even the most perfect sunset. Yes, these were things I thought about as we sat sipping on our milkshakes on a hot afternoon, mine always strawberry, hers always chocolate. Simple things that were complicated and vice versa. And I knew that she thought about them too. After all, we were closer than sisters. Twins in every sense of the words, save that we hadn't shared the same womb. That summer we'd even started to finish each others sentences. It hadn't been a planned thing, it just occurred one day and soon after, it was pointed out that it happened more and more often and we

took great joy in it. It seems, at least on the outside, that it was a perfect summer. And in ways, it was. Only the nights weren't quite so good to us. Dad hadn't come out of his absence like I had. Oh, he still carried on, going to his job everyday, coming home, staring at the television screen and smiling, sometimes even talking to me about little things. But I could tell that he was just going through the motions and the house felt empty. Alice felt it too and made a point of spending as much time as she could here, trying to liven it up and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. At times, I just couldn't take it anymore and I would spend the night at her house, up in her room just like old times, trying not to feel guilty at leaving my father on his own, even though he was quite literally a stone's throw away. The first night that I noticed it was a Sunday. We'd spent the day at the park, picnicking with a basket and a table cloth and a loaf of bread gone stale that we'd fed to the ducks. It had turned cool in the evening, and Alice's father mentioned that it felt like a storm was brewing. Sure enough, by the time night fell rain began to pelt the roof and Alice and I made ourselves comfortable upon her bed and watched the sky light up with lightning, counting out the seconds until thunder rattled the panes, squealing in delight as it came closer and closer. The lamps were all out, and it was eerie to see the room light up with each flash, casting strange shadows about the walls and turning our faces into monstrous things. After the storm had finally settled down, we pulled down the shades, stripped down to our underwear and cuddled in bed on top of the covers. Despite the storm, or perhaps because of it, the night was still balmy and her room was soaked in warmth. I remember wondering for the thousandth time if it was such a good idea to be sleeping together in a state close to nakedness considering our dilemma, but as always I didn't worry overly much about it. If something happened, then it happened and I would put a stop to it if it crossed any lines I thought better not crossed. I sure so naïve and full of surety in those days and yet so right. Nothing happened. Oh, we giggled a bit, kissing each other good night softly on the lips before I settled in, my back to her so that she could spoon me, one arm lazily nestled in the curve that was coming to be between my hips and my less than impressive boobs. I could feel her bury her face in my brown tresses, the intake of her breath a sigh of longing that made me want to turn to her and pull her close and give her what I knew she wanted. And yet, I didn't, thinking that it would be cruel to encourage her like that. So I just lay there, wide awake, my thoughts far away as she drifted off to sleep, our heads sharing the same pillow. Half an hour later I was frantically trying to rouse her from her sleep, understanding for the first time how she must have felt when I went into my 'seizure' the night my mother died. She was shaking and shivering, moaning wordlessly in her sleep. That wasn't so bad, but then she started thrashing about on the bed, striking out with her fists. I wasn't so much worried about being hit as I was about her hurting herself. Finally, I managed to pin her down, straddling her waist with my thighs while I held her wrists in my hands, calling out her name, trying to wake her up from her dreams. That was the worst part, that through the entire thing I couldn't wake her. I was about to move on to desperate means such as slapping her cheek or perhaps pinching her when she finally calmed down. Reaching over, thinking that it was safe to let go of her wrists, I turned the lamp upon her night stand on, illuminating the room. She was breathing hard, as if she'd been running a long ways, and the sheen of perspiration upon her skin had more to do with exertion and fear than it did with the summer heat.

Her eyes fluttered open, staring up at me in what I thought was relief, and her body, so tense a moment before, seemed to relax. "Lucy," she managed, tears forming in her eyes. The way she said it made it sound like a benediction. "I had the worst dream..." She looked so lost laying there against the covers, blinking away tears. It was so unlike her. She was the strong one, the one whom I always could rely upon. Suddenly I felt our roles reverse and was, for one surreal instant, falling down the proverbial rabbit's hole. "Lucy?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper. It was enough to pull me out of my nosedive. She needed me. She'd never needed me before, not like this leastwise. How could I fail her? "Hush, Ally," I murmured, relaxing so that the weight of my body pressed down gently on her, wrapping my arms around her, my cheek nuzzling hers. "It's just a dream. A nightmare. I'm here. Everything is going to be ok. I promise." Sometimes, when we make promises, we don't realize the full import of them, or how difficult they will be to keep. That doesn't change anything. The promise is made and we have a responsibility to uphold it. At least that's how I believe it should be. I made a promise that night. It was made from the heart. At the time I had no idea of how hard it would be to keep. If I had, though, still I wouldn't have hesitated. I meant it and even more importantly, Alice knew I meant it. It was enough for her. We sealed it in a rather unusual way that night. Not with a pinky swear or a mixing of blood, but with something for more potent and powerful. We made love a second time. This time, however, it wasn't her who initiated it. It was me. I knew her so well, and I knew that, for the first time in our long relationship she was too scared to say the words, to tell me that she needed me to soothe away the fear and chase the darkness from her heart. Words wouldn't suffice here. I knew it in my soul. I should mention, seeing as how I've expressed opinions about sin and God and heaven and hell, that while I was raised Catholic, we weren't a particularly devout family. Church was only attended at Easter and Christmas and there was no day of rest on Sunday. Nor were there sermons upon sin spoken over our evening meals. Still, there was a bible upon the bookshelves in our living room and I did believe in God, well enough that I did fear for my soul at times and guilt pricked at my mind whenever I told a lie or did something that I knew to be wrong. I knew that what we were doing was wrong, or should be, and yet in my heart, I also knew it was right. She needed this. I think that Jesus, at least, would understand even if Father O'Connor wouldn't. So, I put the thought that we were both going to hell out of my head and opened my heart to her. This time was much like the first. Desperate, clumsy, scary in some ways beautiful in others and over almost before it began. At least the first time was. We made love 3 times that night and, by the third time, we'd gotten pretty good at it, I'm somewhat embarrassed to admit. This time something entirely new happened. My first orgasm. I know, strange that at 16 years of age I had never experienced one before, but it was true. That first night neither of us had... gotten there. Oh, we'd made love, but I don't think either of us was brave or skilled or knowledgeable to help the other one take that final step of commitment. This time, the first time, Alice knew what she wanted and guided me along, breaking the ice so to speak. She shuddered into ecstasy as I held her, mostly her doing with me bearing witness to the miracle of pleasure. God, she was so beautiful and I felt this great outpouring of love and tenderness. Jealousy too, for what had happened to her was a milestone of sort. Afterwards, I shared those feelings with her and without a word, she took matters into hand and shared the gift that

I had just given to her. I have no words to describe that first time, only that it was a life changing experience in so many different ways. I've heard it called the little death before and really, I think I died at some point, or at least I became unaware of... pretty much everything but the feelings that washed through my inexperienced body. Afterwards I was left speechless, something that she seemed to understand, content to merely hold me in her arms, our hearts beating against each other, matching rhythms as my lungs greedily fought for air once more. That euphoria lasted a lifetime, or so it seemed and yet it was over all too soon and so, it was only natural that I - that both of us - sought it out once more, this time slowly, as if we needed to remember every small detail and perform them all to perfection. I'm not sure if we achieved it, but I do know that for what must have been close to an hour we explored each other's body with our lips, our noses, our hands and fingers, delighting in each new sensation, be it one of sound, or scent, or touch. This time, when she was lost in the throes of passion, I was not very far behind and reached a crescendo upon her heels, our cries twisting together until their threads were as one. Afterwards I wondered that her parent's hadn't heard, and as we lay there in each others arms, our naked bodies as one, I worried that at any moment we might be found out. Not enough to untangle myself from her embrace, but enough so that at every sound my heart would begin to pound like a frightened animal. Eventually I joined her, slipping into a deep slumber that ended only when she shook me awake just before dawn's light kissed the clouds over our quiet little sanctuary. We lay nestled under the sheets in a shared embrace, smiling sleepily at each other, our faces so close that it felt only natural and right that I kiss her. Not the deeply searching kiss of the night before, but a small peck upon the lips that was meant to reassure her of my regard for her, of my undying friendship and love. She returned it with just a hint of something in her eyes that spoke of disappointment and longing, as if she would have held that kiss for a lifetime, had she a say in it. It ended with a sigh, although whether it was the sound of my soul surrendering or hers, I couldn't say. After that, the spell was broken. A quick shower, me first and then her, washed away the evidence on our fleshly beings of the night before if not the stain upon our souls nor the sin that still lingered in her heart. Like the stray words and thoughts that covered my bare arms, written in the secrecy of my room at night, both the sin and stain remained stubbornly present. And yet, she didn't see it that way. It was palpable in her eyes as she turned her smile upon me, beaming softly as we sat side by side upon her bed and prepared ourselves for the breakfast meal where we would pass ourselves off as two ordinary girls who'd slept the night away. We were lies, but such beautiful lies lay between us. My hand found hers and I remember wishing that I could give her my whole heart such as she desired. Now, instead of thinking that it was wrong that she loved me too much, I began to consider that perhaps it was wrong that I couldn't love her enough. Maybe if I tried harder, I could be what she needed, not just friend but lover. It was something I had to solve on my own, in my own company and my own heart. Once again, thoughts of 'what would Jesus think' seeded their doubts within me. Looking over at Alice's face, radiant in the soft morning light of her room, the storm of last night long since fled, I wondered if perhaps it didn't matter whom you loved, as long as you loved them fully. It was only later that I realized what a break through that seed of a thought had been and how it would quickly flower into something beyond my expectations. At the breakfast table, everything

seemed so normal once again. No one seemed to suspect that Alice and I had spent the night in sin. No one but me noticed how close we sat, our thighs brushing, her foot upon mine as we giggled our way through bacon and eggs just like we'd always done when I'd spend the night. Soon after the table was cleared, her parents were off to work and we had the house to ourselves. A silence settled in around us, equal parts comfortable and uncomfortable. We had much to discuss, should we choose. Alice, as always, was braver than I. "Last night..." she began, and I could see the memory of it in the blush upon her fair cheeks. I nodded, looking anywhere that wasn't her eyes, my gaze travelling from the clock on the wall, to the refrigerator to the dishes piled carefully in the sink. And then it was drawn to the front door where I could, if I so wished, escape through if this brave new world suddenly became too big for one 14 year old girl. "Thank you, Lucy." Three words that spoke volumes and I recognized every meaning within them. Thank you for making love to me, for not turning me away, for loving me, for being there, for everything... I simply shrugged. There were not enough words in the universe to answer her with. I did the only thing I could think of, and that was to stop looking towards my sole means of escape and instead at her. Oh, she was breathtaking. Not in a perfect model-like way, but her beauty transcended that. Honey gold hair still damp from her shower framed her face, the last vestiges of childhood roundness having fled sometime unnoticed by me over the last year. Her eyes, the color of the summer sky, sparkled beneath her fair lashes, and her lips, those lips that had so recently feasted upon my flesh, quirked upwards in a smile to match her right brow as she regarded me in turn. "You're welcome." I replied, hating that it sounded so formal, but at a loss for words. She understood, I think, for she simply nodded as we continued to sit there, staring at each other. And then she broke the spell, for which I was grateful, pushing her chair back and going to the sink where she began to rinse the morning dishes. Soon we were side by side again, her washing, me drying, exchanging the playful banter that she was always able to draw out of me, even at during my most introverted and sullen swings of mood and all was right again with my world. We spent the day like any other day. In some ways nothing had changed, or so we pretended. Oh, it was there between us, but by unspoken agreement, we'd elected to let things be for a short while. I think we both realized that nothing would be the way it used to be and we wanted one last day to be all right with that. The rest of the day was spent in doing the things we'd have done on any summer day. We went shopping, caught a movie, hung out with some friends from school at the park. Nothing out of the ordinary. And that night, after dinner, Alice came knocking on my front door. My dad opened the door. After a while he'd gotten good at the day to day stuff again or at least made a good show of it. He greeted my friend with the facsimile of a smile and told her to come in, announcing her presence to me. From the top of the stairs I greeted her and she ascended, two steps at a time to take my hand. Pulling me into my room, she shut the door behind us, closing out the world and giving us privacy. I'm sure that my father, if he gave it any thought at all, assumed that we were giggling over boys or movie stars or something else perfectly girlish. The truth was, I would have been more comfortable with any of those subjects. As it was, our secrets stood between us like a dark and forbidding landscape. Of course, being Alice, she saw through the wall between us immediately and dismantled it with a minimum of words. "You're my best friend. Always and forever. That comes first."

We stood there, the awkwardness melting away and then I did the only thing I could think of doing. I hugged her and whispered into her ear, the words just slipping from my mouth without thought. "I love you." At the time, I wasn't sure how I meant them. Only that they were true. I did love her. Maybe not like she loved me, but I had to wonder if it really mattered. After all, in a way we were closer than lovers. Perhaps things would work themselves out. I took her hand and guided her to my bed and, backs to the wall, nestled among the unmade covers and a menagerie of stuffed animals, we cuddled together just like we always had and let the topics of our conversation ebb and flow as it would. Sure, there was an edge to it that hadn't been there before and at times I couldn't help thinking that at any moment she might lean over and kiss me and what would happen if she did. And then, she did. A soft, sweet kiss upon the lips, planting it there with the utmost care. It was there and gone in a moment and it was as if nothing had happened. Angels didn't come down and smite us, the earth didn't open up at my feet, I didn't suddenly feel the need to rinse my mouth or, on the other hand, to learn to ride a motorcycle. It was just a kiss. Smiling shyly, I decided that I rather liked it and tried it out on her, my eyes closing at the last minute. I felt her breath upon my cheek and then it was over and we both giggled a little, losing track of our conversation. Then, we were past it and it was as if nothing strange had happened. The rest of the evening went like that. At one point we'd gone down to the kitchen and helped ourselves to cookies and milk, sitting down to watch a movie with dad for a short while before trekking back upstairs to the solitude of my room once more. Dad never once had invaded my life, or at least never came to my room unannounced, at least not since we'd moved here, so there was little worry that he would start now. I left the door closed but unlocked and the curtains open, seeing as how the only person who might look in upon us from across the border between the two houses was in the room with me. The bedside lamp dimly illuminated us as we curled up together in my bed just like always. Only this time, it was different. This time, little things had different meanings. The way she held onto me, the cadence of her breathing, the scent of her hair, the sound of our voices as we whispered back and forth. It all had so much meaning, her hand brushing the hair from my face, the touch of her bare legs against mine, her tiny kisses, not stolen from me but given freely. They were nothing, really. Not soul searching Hollywood kisses. Just little questions, that I answered shyly. For someone who'd never kissed a boy before, it was quite overwhelming to me, and I think she understood this. I know that seems strange, seeing as how we'd already made love. Still, it was true and I loved her all the more for knowing this without me having to tell her. Yes, closer than sisters, than twins even. Really, had I been so inclined it would have seemed natural that we'd be lovers. I wondered if I was fooling myself by denying that we already were. After all, we had been intimate. And yet, I knew in my heart that it wasn't the same for me as it was for her. In fact, I rather wished it had. It would have been easier for both of us, and I felt a little sad that I couldn't give her what she wanted. Not just my body, but my heart. Not in the same way as she offered her, leastwise. Eventually, we drifted off to sleep, cradling each other, and all was well. Only all was not well. Dreams set their hooks into Alice that night. Not pleasant dreams of cotton candy and horses but dark dreams born of fear and anger, bred from the shadow realms. I am tempted to call them nightmares, but they were so much more than that.