

SETTING: *A river bank – and then, the amazing world of a young girl’s imagination.*

AT RISE: *Music under. ALICE enters with a basket. She crosses to an old stump and crouches down next to the base of it, picking mushrooms.*

FREDDY (O.S.)

Alice?! Alice, where are you?!

(FREDDY runs on and sees her.)

There you are. She’s over here, Lorina!

(LORINA enters behind him.)

What are you doing, Alice?

ALICE

Picking mushrooms. Look how big this one is!

(She holds it up.)

FREDDY

Mushrooms, smushrooms.

LORINA

Freddy wants us to play tag with him.

ALICE

Oh, Freddy – tag is for children.

LORINA

That’s what I told him.

FREDDY

But I *am* a child. And so are you, Alice!

ALICE

I’m older than *you*.

FREDDY

Barely.

LORINA

Well, I'm older than both of you! Today I turn twelve which means I'm practically a grownup.

FREDDY

It's not officially your birthday until we've had tea. Come on, Lorina – one game of tag. Please?

LORINA

What do you say, Alice?

(ALICE puts down her basket of mushrooms.)

I say...

(She tags FREDDY.)

Tag! You're it!

(An enthusiastic game of tag ensues. FREDDY gives chase to LORINA.)

ALICE

Watch out, Lorina!

(FREDDY tries to tag LORINA but misses.)

FREDDY

Tag! You're it, Lorina!

LORINA

No, I'm not.

FREDDY

Yes, you are!

LORINA

You missed me!

FREDDY

No, I didn't!

Yes, you did!

LORINA

No, I didn't. I tagged you fair and square.

FREDDY

Alice – did Freddy tag me?

LORINA

I did, Alice! Tell her I did!

FREDDY

No, you didn't! You're lying – and I have proof.

LORINA

What proof?

FREDDY

You're grinning.

LORINA

(FREDDY covers his mouth with his hands but continues to grin behind it.)

No, I'm not.

FREDDY

Yes, you are. I can see it through your fingers. You're grinning ear to ear – isn't he, Alice?

LORINA

I'm afraid he is.

ALICE

Which is how I know you're lying, Freddy. You grin every time you tell a falsehood.

LORINA

I do not!

FREDDY

Yes, you do.

LORINA

It's true, Freddy. Your eyes twinkle and you get a big, silly grin on your face.

ALICE

(He removes his hand and grins even bigger. ALICE points.)

ALICE (cont.)

See? There it is!

LORINA

You shouldn't be chasing me, anyway. It's my birthday, after all. You should be chasing Alice!

ALICE

What??

FREDDY

All right.

(He tags ALICE.)

Tag! You're it!

ALICE

Oh you!

(LORINA and FREDDY start running as ALICE gives chase. Suddenly MAMA and PAPA enter. PAPA smokes a big pipe. MAMA carrying a beautiful hatbox.)

MAMA

Children! Children, that's enough, now! No more game-playing.

ALICE

But, Mama – I haven't tagged Lorina yet!

MAMA

Nevertheless, it's time for Lorina to open her birthday present.

FREDDY

I thought we were waiting for Uncle Charles to get here before we opened presents.

PAPA

Your Uncle Charles is late – as usual. Someone needs to give that man a pocket watch.

MAMA

We *gave* him a pocket watch for Christmas, remember? It hasn't helped his punctuality one bit.

What's in the box, Mama?

LORINA

(MAMA holds it out.)

Happy birthday, dear girl.

MAMA

Oh, Mama...

LORINA

Open it.

MAMA

(LORINA takes the lid off the hat box and gasps.)

Oh, it's beautiful...

LORINA

(She pulls a beautiful hat out of the box.)

... the most beautiful hat I've ever seen!

You really like it?

MAMA

More than anything! Thank you, Mama!

LORINA

(She hugs MAMA.)

Don't forget your Papa – he paid for it.

MAMA

(LORINA hugs PAPA.)

Thank you, Papa.

LORINA

Happy Birthday, Lorina.

PAPA

Here, let's put it on you...

MAMA

(She places the hat on LORINA's head.)

MAMA

Oh my. Look at her, Henry. Isn't she lovely?

PAPA

She's all grown up.

(LORINA hugs him again.)

MAMA

All right, children – it's time to head back to the house. Freddy needs to take his nap.

FREDDY

But I'm not sleepy!

MAMA

Nevertheless...

FREDDY

But, I hate naps! Why do I have to take one?

MAMA

Because you're a little boy.

FREDDY

Why don't Lorina and Alice have to take naps?

LORINA

Because I'm all grown up – Papa just said so.

FREDDY

What about Alice? She's not a big girl yet!

ALICE

I may not be as big as Lorina, but I'm not as little as you, either, Freddy.

PAPA

It's true – Alice is somewhere in the middle...

MAMA

Enough! Freddy, it's time for you to take a nap and that's that!

FREDDY

But Mama...

MAMA

And when you wake up, we'll have our tea, plus a special treat.

LORINA

Special treat?

MAMA

Raspberry tarts.

LORINA

My favorite!

ALICE

I do so love raspberry tarts. May I have two tarts, Mama? Or perhaps three?

MAMA

Now, Alice, we've talked about this – enough is as good as a feast.

FREDDY

And after the tea party, we can play croquet, right? You said we could play croquet with Uncle Charles.

PAPA

If your Uncle Charles ever shows up, we shall play croquet.

FREDDY/LORINA

Hoorah!

MAMA

But first, young man – a nap.

FREDDY

All right, all right – I shall take a nap... as a birthday present to Lorina.

LORINA

Thank you, Freddy.

MAMA

Come along, now.

(MAMA and PAPA lead FREDDY off. LORINA starts to follow them. ALICE hangs back. LORINA notices and turns back.)

LORINA

Alice? Are you coming?

(ALICE turns away.)

Is something wrong?

ALICE

Today is your birthday.

LORINA

Yes.

ALICE

And everyone has given you a present. Papa bought you a hat. Mother made you raspberry tarts. Even Freddy is taking a nap in your honor. But I have nothing to give you.

LORINA

Oh, Alice...

ALICE

It's true! You are the best sister in the world and deserve all the best gifts a girl could dream of...

LORINA

Now that you mention it, there *is* something I would especially like – a gift that only you could give me.

ALICE

What is it?

(LORINA looks around to make sure that they are alone, then slips a small journal out of her pocket.)

LORINA

Here.

ALICE

A book?

LORINA

A gift – for you.

ALICE
But it's *your* birthday.

LORINA
Open it.

(ALICE opens the journal.)

ALICE
All the pages are blank.

LORINA
Yes.

ALICE
What kind of story has blank pages?

LORINA
The story *you* are going to write.

ALICE
Me?!

LORINA
Yes, you.

ALICE
I don't understand.

LORINA
Do you remember the time we sat here on the river bank and I read to you from that book...?

ALICE
Yes, I remember. I didn't like that story one bit. There was no interesting conversation.

LORINA
That's right. But you, dear Alice, are full of interesting conversation.

ALICE
I am?

LORINA
Oh yes – why, you are forever talking to yourself, saying the most imaginative things. That's why I want you to write a story as a birthday gift to me.

ALICE

But I've never written a story before!

LORINA

I know you can do it. I have faith in you.

(She pulls a pencil out of her pocket, hands it to ALICE then heads off.)

ALICE

Lorina, wait!

(LORINA is gone. ALICE stares at the book.)

A story? What kind of story could I possibly write?

(She sits down on the ground.)

Oh, I hate not knowing what to do! At times like this, I wish I was little like Freddy so that I could lie down, take a nap, and forget all my problems!

*(She lies down very dramatically, flinging her arm over her eyes.
A brief moment passes then...)*

RABBIT (O.S.)

I'm late!

(ALICE sits up and looks around.)

ALICE

Did someone say something?

(WHITE RABBIT enters, pulls a pocket watch out of the pocket of his waistcoat, and looks at it.)

RABBIT

Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear! I am so *very* late!

ALICE

(To herself)

Why, it's a rabbit – a white rabbit – wearing a waistcoat and carrying a pocket watch. I'm sure I've never seen a rabbit wearing a waistcoat before – and I certainly have never seen one carrying a pocket watch.