Alice and Wendy

by ctbideas

Summary

Wendy meets Alice at an AA meeting.

"My name is Alice. I’m an alcoholic, and I’m trying hard not to be," she’d said before heading back to her seat, her pointed chin held high, red brushed over sharp cheekbones, and lips pressed together. Alice never said anything more after that first time. Only snuck in after the meetings started to sit on the hard metal folding chairs, then disappeared through the YMCA door afterwards with minimal interaction.

Wendy didn’t know why she still came to AA meetings herself. While she still struggled most days, she’d found her steady footing, sober for over five years. Perhaps it was the familiarity, the routine. Perhaps she’d still been searching for something, someone, but hadn’t known it until Alice.

Alice. Wendy began watching for her silent presence, that head of bright blonde hair framing an elegant oval face. Alice looked out-of-place in the dim beige-carpeted room the AA meetings were held, but it wasn’t that which so caught Wendy’s attention. When she’d reached out that first night, unable to resist, to brush her fingertips against the silk maroon skirt swishing by her, Alice had glanced straight in her eyes. Wendy had had to bite back her gasp, trapping it at the top of her throat.

Alice’s clear blue eyes looked through the world, as if she could see something just out of reach, something beyond. The same eyes that looked back at Wendy in the mirror.

"Have you lost your shadow?" Wendy asked, following Alice out one night, much later, when she’d wrangled enough courage for once.

Alice stopped halfway out the door and turned, her brow furrowed, "What?"
"I’m quite good at re-attaching them, the shadows, I mean," Wendy continued, pressing her sweaty palms against her tailored slacks.

Drawing back, Alice said, "You’re crazy."

Wendy smiled, "Is it crazy if it’s true?"

Alice pushed her hair off her shoulder in one dismissive gesture, right eyebrow arched, "What do you know about truth?"

"I know more than most," Wendy said. "Have you heard of Never Never Land?"

"No. I haven’t," Alice replied, abrupt. Then, a small sweet smile curved her bottom lip, "But I’ve heard of Wonderland."

They met for breakfasts, brunches, lunches, and talked of nonsensical things. Wendy delighted in Alice’s wry sense of humor, all riddles and poetry and sarcasm. She didn’t know why Alice kept staid Wendy around, but Wendy never pushed for answers she didn’t care to hear. Not anymore.

"So I’ve an invitation to a friend’s wedding," Wendy waved the bright pink cardstock in Alice’s direction. "Want to be my plus one?"

"C’mon," she wheedled when Alice looked hesitant, "everyone loves a good party."

Alice pursed her lips in thought, "Will it be a mad tea party?"

"I can’t guarantee the tea, but it’s a wedding. Everyone’s a little mad at weddings," Wendy pressed, sensing an opening.

"Oh, well, in that case," Alice shrugged.

The morning of the wedding brought Wendy to Alice’s doorstep, jiggling the keys in her pocket with one hand while the other one knocked. A rush of warmth swamped her when Alice stood framed in the entrance. "You’re going to steal some hearts tonight," she said, admiring the way the silver embroidery of Alice’s dress brought out matching gray highlights in her eyes.

Alice cocked her head to one side, eyeing Wendy, "Is that so? Better hearts than tarts. You’re not so bad yourself."

Wendy blushed and tucked the words in the small treasure chest marked "Lovely Wonderful Thoughts" stashed at the base of her hippocampus. Alongside it, she stored the shape of Alice sitting beside her during the ceremony, the scent of roses drifting on the early spring breeze, and the deep comfortable sensation of not-aloneness.

"The hors d’oeuvres look scrumptious, don’t they?" Wendy murmured to Alice as they strolled among the other chattering guests streaming towards the awaiting spread.

"Go ahead," Alice responded, "I need to use the restroom. Freshen up a bit and all."

Wendy watched her go, then froze as a young man, brown hair and dimples and broad shoulders, handed Alice some champagne. She marched up to the cozy-looking duo as Alice lifted the glass to glossy lips, "What are you doing?"

"Who’s this?" the young man remarked, but Wendy ignored him aside from lifting the glass away from Alice’s grasp and pushing it back into his hand. She dragged Alice away, away from
temptation, away from the young man and his dimples and his poison-tainted cups.

"Don’t you know what sober means, Alice?" Wendy demanded. "It means not drinking alcohol. At. All."

"It’s a wedding, Wendy. A sip of champagne is only polite, something forgotten by tomorrow. Live a little. Enjoy yourself for once. Think of it as a pleasant dream."

"A dream? Dreams don’t have consequences to deal with the next day. Think of that."

Alice narrowed her eyes, "Oh, what a smothering little mother you are."

Mother. The word arrowed its way into Wendy to lodge in her ribcage, pain spiking with every breath, "We live in reality now. Don’t you understand? Reality. So deal with it."

"Are you so sure, Wendy? Perhaps I’ve long left reality and this is the twisted wonderland of someone’s nightmares. Life’s nonsensical enough, don’t you think?"

Wendy crossed her arms, "So I’m a nightmare, huh? Is that it?"

"Sometimes the worst nightmares start off perfect. The better to wrench someone’s heart out."

Alice clenched her eyes shut, turning away from Wendy. When she spoke again, her voice had softened, "I don’t know who I am most of the time or what I’m doing. I’d rather not drag you down with me. Perhaps it would be better if you left me as a figment of your past rather than as some future possibility." She sucked in a shuddering breath, "I’ll wait in the parking lot. Whenever you’re ready."

Wendy pulled down the driveway, away, Alice growing smaller and smaller in the rear-view mirror. She clenched her hands around the steering wheel and forced her eyes to focus on the road ahead.

The shrill rendition of "The World Is Not Enough" pulled Wendy out from the middle of an epic pirate battle. She fumbled for her cell phone underneath the pillow, "’lo?"

"Do you know an Alice?" a rough masculine voice asked.

Wendy blinked the sleep out of her eyes, "Y-yes? Is she all right?"

"She’s currently trying to drink her weight in wine. You’re her ICE contact. Can you come get her, or tell someone else to come get her?"

"I’ll come. What’s the address?"

The bartender nodded towards the back when Wendy rushed into the dim smoky jazz club.

"I’m trying to find my way back to Wonderland." The bottle fell from long pale fingers, splintering into jagged mirrors, reflecting tangled cornsilk hair and red-rimmed eyes. "I don’t know where to go," Alice cried. "I don’t know how. I can’t remember."

"Sometimes, it’s worse knowing how to get somewhere and still not being able to go," Wendy replied. "Come home with me. It’s no Wonderland, but it’ll do for now."

Alice staggered, clutching onto the front of Wendy’s leather jacket. "Why is a raven like a writing desk?" she asked.

Wendy shook her head, "I haven’t the slightest idea."
Alice smiled, "Yes, that’s exactly right," and followed Wendy home that night.

Wendy held her when Alice woke weeping, crying out for Cheshire grins and stoic playing cards. She whispered tales in turn, of lost little boys who never grew up and enormous ticking crocodiles, until Alice quieted again, forehead pressed against Wendy’s damp chest.

Wendy heard Alice’s footsteps behind her the next morning. She counted each familiar creak of the floorboards to gauge the distance between them, her palms cupped around chill glass. Alice sat across the table, slid the empty bottle out of Wendy’s hands to examine, "I don’t like whisky."

"I did," Wendy replied. "I still do."

"Thought you’d been sober for a while now," Alice said.

Wendy nodded at the bottle Alice held, "The last full bottle I ever drank."

"Why do you still have it?"

"So I don’t forget."

"Forget how far you’ve come?" Alice asked.

"Forget how far I fell," Wendy answered. "Remember when I told you about Never Never Land?"

Alice nodded.

"I couldn’t forget about it, just like you can’t forget about Wonderland," Wendy said. "My brothers, John and Michael, had forgotten, had grown up and moved on. Why couldn’t I? Until I realized one day how much I loved him. Loved him with such awful desperation, but he didn’t know how to love me back, beyond the love of a boy for his mother."

"My mother once said she’d heard a legend about Peter Pan," Wendy continued. “That when children died, he’d accompany them part of the way so they wouldn’t be frightened. And I remember what Peter had once said, ‘To die will be an awfully big adventure.’ I could feel my childhood slipping away from me with each breath, and I knew I couldn’t wait much longer. When I woke up in the hospital, I cried. Oh, how I cried. Because they hadn’t let me die, and I hadn’t any childhood remaining.” Wendy tapped her fingers against the smooth wooden kitchen table. "What point would there be to dying if Peter wasn’t coming? So, I turned to alcohol. I drank. I drank because I was all grown up and I drank to forget. Now, whenever I want to drink, I stare at this empty scotch bottle instead. Why do you drink?"

Alice huffed out an unamused laugh, "Me? I drink because every bottle of wine has a ‘DRINK ME’ sign on it."

"Aren’t we a pair?" Wendy sighed.

"A pair? Yes, we are," Alice answered. "Dying’s too easy. Living, now that’s something else. Can we begin again?" She reached across to grip Wendy’s hands in hers, and Wendy clutched back.

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Alice awoke with an abrupt start. Glancing around the room, she spotted Wendy leaning out the window, her long brown hair in a neat plait down her back. "Wendy?"
"It’s almost the end of spring," Wendy replied. "He’s forgotten again, my Peter, hasn’t he?"

Alice padded in her bare feet across worn floorboards and slid her hand around Wendy’s round shoulder, marveling at how similar the cool silk nightgown felt to the smooth glass of a bottle. Wendy turned, features lost in shadows, "It’s the second star to the right and straight on ’til morning."

Alice lifted her chin and kissed away Wendy’s longing, drawing it down her throat to warm her stomach. "Come back to bed," she murmured against ivory skin, and Wendy closed the window to follow.

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