

ALWAYS LATE

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

RABBIT	The white rabbit from Wonderland is high strung, and very welcoming to anyone she fancies as available, or not available, or simply dazed.
ALICE	A seven-year-old with a lot of therapy in her future.
MAD HATTER	A very stable, proper, but rather clueless hatter.
DORMOUSE	A small, furry-tailed squirrel-like rodent. Easily frightened.

SETTING

A strange room somewhere in Wonderland

SCENE

(Alice and the Rabbit are trapped in a strange room somewhere in Wonderland.)

RABBIT

Oh dear. Oh dear oh dear oh dear.

ALICE

Oh, Rabbit. What's the matter now?

RABBIT

Oh dear.

ALICE

Oh, please do get a hold of yourself. I know things look dark and hopeless here in the Winderplunderbrush, but I know we'll be alright if we just keep our heads about us.

RABBIT

I'm late.

(Rabbit looks at a pocketwatch.)

I'm definitely late.

ALICE

Yes, well, until we find our way out of here, there's nothing you can do about that. Now... we came in through that door over there, but of course now that door only leads to—

RABBIT

You don't understand. I'm *late*.

ALICE

Yes, you said that, but that strange cat said that he'd be off to have a word with Mr. Lewis. Or was it Mr. Carroll? Well, whichever, I'm certain that help is on the way.

RABBIT

Do you think they'll fetch an apothecary?

ALICE

No. No, I don't. Why would they?

RABBIT

I told you. I'm *late*.

ALICE

Yes, I—

RABBIT

Do you have even the slightest idea what the Hatter will do to me if he finds out? He's mad, I tell you!

ALICE

Do you have an appointment with him or someth—

RABBIT

Oh, for heaven's sake, you silly child. I'm... LATE. And if it turns out not to be just *one of those things*...

ALICE

I'm really not following.

RABBIT

Let's just say that... the Hatter and I... haven't spent any time together lately. If you know what I mean.

ALICE

I really don't—

RABBIT

Oh, how can I put it? (*With intensity...*) The bunnies won't look like *him*, if you catch my meaning.

ALICE

Won't look like... (*Suddenly she realizes...*) You mean... You mean you and,, and the *Mad Hatter*? He's mad. How could you—

RABBIT

Oh, he's going to be a lot more than mad if he finds out. Downright steaming, he'll be.

ALICE

I can't believe this. When...

RABBIT

About two days ago.

ALICE

But that means...

RABBIT

I know. I *know*! What was I thinking? But there was soft music, and wine, and when someone touches my ear just so and whispers—

ALICE

Please. You know I'm seven, right?

RABBIT

So? You could be a great great great great grandmother by now if you'd just applied yourself.

ALICE

I think I shan't. (*Beat, then crouching in for the gossip.*) So, who's the father?

RABBIT

I shouldn't say.

ALICE

Fine, then let's just concentrate on getting—

RABBIT

It was the Knave of Hearts.

ALICE

Oh my.

RABBIT

Or the Gryphon.

ALICE

What?

RABBIT

Or possibly the Dormouse.

ALICE

I don't believe this.

RABBIT

Oh, and there was also a *goat*. And I suppose there is a small possibility that it could have been the *King* of Hearts, but that was days earlier. Besides, he said that it wasn't possible to get pregnant if—

ALICE

Seven! I'm seven. I'm not ready for this.

RABBIT

I knew the Queen would be furious, but, well, he brought me these dandelions, and I just... I just melted. You know how I just adore flowers, and dandelions make me so... (*Rabbit clenches her teeth, and shakes her head while giving off a sound somewhere between a purr and a growl.*)

ALICE

You realize that I'm going to need therapy after this.

RABBIT

Oh, sweetheart, that train long since left the station. But I really don't think it could have been the King. It must be one of the other three. Or the goat. Though it couldn't have been the Dormouse, because we didn't get past a little friendly *cuniculus*, if you know what I mean.

ALICE

I most certainly do not.

RABBIT

It's when—

ALICE

And I'd rather keep it that way.

RABBIT

Your loss.

ALICE

Preferably. So, anyway. Speaking of escaping from the Winderplunderbrush...

RABBIT

Were we?

ALICE

Yes, we were. I was, anyway. Now that door (*points in one direction*) is how we got here, but now it just leads to that (*points in the opposite direction*)—

RABBIT

I really think it was the Knave. He's so wicked. It's just the sort of thing—

Seven! ALICE

You might enjoy— RABBIT

SEVEN!! ALICE

Prude. RABBIT

(From offstage...)

Hello? MAD HATTER (OFF)

Oh dear. Oh dear oh dear. *(A fierce whisper...)* It's him. RABBIT

The Knave? ALICE

No! The Hatter! Oh, he's going to be really mad. RABBIT

Hello? Where are you?! MAD HATTER (OFF)

Don't. Say. A word. RABBIT

Hello? MAD HATTER (OFF)

I wouldn't know what word to say. ALICE

We're over here! RABBIT
(Calling out...)

(There is the sound of a door opening, and the Mad Hatter enters.)

MAD HATTER

There you are. That supercilious cat said—

ALICE

Don't let the door—

(There is the sound of a door shutting.)

Oh no.

MAD HATTER

What's that, young lady?

ALICE

You let the door close.

MAD HATTER

Yes?

ALICE

Well, now you're stuck here as well.

MAD HATTER

Nonsense. We simply need to...

(The Rabbit has once again begun fixating on her pocket watch.)

RABBIT

(Muttering...)

Oh dear oh dear oh dear.

MAD HATTER

Oh, not this again. Look, Love Bunny, there's nothing to worry about. All we need to do is—

RABBIT

There's nothing to worry about! There's nothing to worry about! What makes you think that you know what there is to worry about?

MAD HATTER

I said there *isn't*—

RABBIT

Or not worry about! You're not the Master of Worry-Abouting! The Emperor of Empathizing! How dare you tell me what I should or shouldn't worry about!

MAD HATTER

What's gotten your goat?

RABBIT

WHAT??

MAD HATTER

I said—

RABBIT

What did you mean by that!?!

MAD HATTER

I—

RABBIT

You think this is some kind of inquisition!? I don't have to answer questions like that! How *dare* you insinuate anything about my goat! Not that I have a goat. Or that I've ever *had* a goat! Which I haven't! And if I had, then it would be none of your concern! Which it isn't! Because I haven't! And there isn't anything wrong with that!

(There is a long, uncomfortable silence, broken by...)

MAD HATTER

What in the world are you on about?

RABBIT

Nothing. Nice day, isn't it? Wonderful weather for a spot of tea, I think.

MAD HATTER

(Looking at Alice...)

Do you have any idea what she's talking about?

RABBIT

(Warning Alice...)

Not. A. Word.

(The Mad Hatter gives the Rabbit an “are you out of your mind” look, then turns to Alice again. Alice looks at him, then at the Rabbit, then back to the Hatter.)

ALICE

I’m seven.

MAD HATTER

(Confused and humoring ...)

Frabjous day to you.

ALICE

Not today, just...

RABBIT

We should have a party! To celebrate!

ALICE

But it’s not—

RABBIT

The Hatter is particularly fond of a good unbirthday, aren’t you. And what better weather for a proper tea party!

MAD HATTER

What in Carroll’s name has gotten into you?

RABBIT

Into me? Gotten... into me? Not a goat, that’s for certain. *(Pause, then an awkward...)* Ha ha.

MAD HATTER

Right. Well. That’s not at all a disturbingly random comment.

(Suddenly there is a sound of a door opening, and the Dormouse enters.)

DORMOUSE

Hello, everyone! The Cheshire Cat said that you might need a little help—

RABBIT

OUT! OUT OUT OUT OUT OUT!

(The Dormouse screams, and bolts off. There is the sound of a door slamming shut. The Rabbit is now clearly panicked, and starts hyperventilating.)

ALICE

Why can't anyone leave the door open?

MAD HATTER

And they say that *I'm* mad.

ALICE

We're never going to get out of here, are we?

MAD HATTER

Nonsense. You just need to take off the doorknob and move it to the other side.

ALICE

Take off the... You can do that?

MAD HATTER

Of course. Watch I'll—

(Suddenly the Rabbit grabs her stomach with both hands, her eyes grow wide, and she draws in a deep breath. Then her face softens, followed by an exhalation with a corresponding total body relaxation. She takes another look at her pocket watch, says...)

RABBIT

Whew!

(She snaps the watch shut and puts it away.)

MAD HATTER

Are you alright, dear?

RABBIT

Couldn't be better. You, dear?

MAD HATTER

Fine.

RABBIT

You say we just need to move the knob to the other side?

(The Rabbit exits. There's the sound of her fiddling with the door, and then the sound of it opening.)

RABBIT (OFF)

Oh. Well look at that.

(The Hatter watches her for a moment, then turns to Alice.)

MAD HATTER

So sorry. She can be rather high strung at times.

ALICE

Can she?

MAD HATTER

She's such a stickler for punctuality.

ALICE

Is she?

MAD HATTER

Looking at her watch and worrying about how she's late, she's late.

ALICE

Does she?

MAD HATTER

Poor thing. Always on about being late for an important date, but I've looked at her schedule, and she never has a single affair written down.

(He puts an arm around Alice's shoulder and begins leading her off stage.)

Isn't that the oddest thing?

ALICE

I'm seven.

MAD HATTER

So you said. Congratulations.

(Lights out.)