

Wonderland



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Chapter One

The bus dropped Arnold at the turn off for the lake. It was new and so very different from his world on the edge of the city. Arnold and his mother were beginning to make an independent life. His bullying father stormed out one rainy November night. Relief tempered by guilt swept over the abused mother and son when a police officer came to the door to tell them that they were rid of him; "Died instantly when the car struck a stone fence." Mother's parents tried to control her, treated her like she was a baby or simple minded but she finally had it and moved to a new town.

They had moved before but were never able to establish a life for themselves and so returned humiliated once more to his mother's family. It was worse each time it happened. Arnold began to wonder if his grandmother was intervening behind the scenes, sabotaging his mother's efforts to break free.

His father's family had tried to get custody of Arnie as he was called in the family circle. They failed but it gave his mother some leverage. If she were unsuccessful in establishing an independent life for the two of them, she would take a job with her late husband's family and allow them to raise Arnie.

Things were tough at first but after a year or two they began to fall into place. Mother's sister, the black sheep of the family, located her.

"Mother, look at this letter. It has the same name as your dead sister. Can there be two Alice Riordans?"

"Arn, sweetie. Aunt Alice is very much alive. Grandmama treated her as if she were really dead. We weren't allowed to talk about her. Aunt Alice was the rebel and I was the good girl. You see how much being the good got me until I finally moved us here.

"Alice was very talented but defiant, independent. She earned a

grant to go to New York to study painting. Grandmama and her husband called Alice all sorts of nasty names. Alice had enough of their brutality. She fought back when Roger tried to beat her, went wild and really hurt him.

"Roger had been doing nasty things to her. He even took pictures of that nasty stuff. Alice sent the pictures to the authorities. Our family connections squelched the case but Roger lived in terror of exposure. Maybe nothing could have been done anyhow 'cause Alice wasn't a kid when it happened. I'm not sure if that hastened his death or drove him to kill himself. Either way it was no loss.

"I'm sure he would have done those horrible things to me too, but Alice promised she would keep him interested in her all the time so that only one of us would have to go through those tortures.

"Now let's see what's in that envelope."



Alice had found out through old friends back home that her sister had left to live on her **own** in an outlying section of a nearby city. It was time, she wrote, to resume contact with the sister who was proving she would no longer be the 'good girl' regardless of the cost to herself. Arnold agreed silently that Mother was at long last becoming her own person. And yet with each step toward adult independence Mother had become more withdrawn, spent more evenings in a brooding silence.

Alice had distinguished herself as a photographer and painter of avant-garde, often exotic, and always controversial work. She was wealthy, adventurous and completely her own person.

Alice's letter included a generous 'loan' to allow Mother to furnish a good sized apartment and to buy new clothes for herself and for Arnie. She also offered to host Arnold at the artist colony where she had a summer home. There would be tons and tons of exciting creative things for Arnold. After all, coming to live in a new place so late in June

didn't allow Arnold an opportunity to register in school and make friends.

Mother's always-fragile emotional health was more delicate than usual. She needed space. Perhaps it would be better for them both if Arnie spent the summer with Alice at her lakeside retreat

"Wonderland" was just about the stupidest name Arn had ever heard for a lakeside artists' colony. Mother, in her brittle, overly inhibited style explained that this was the name of a summer camp for girls that had long since closed. "Remember, darling, that 'Alice In Wonderland' was a favorite of yours. You'll be staying with Aunt Alice!"



The bus pulled away leaving Arnold standing alone and bewildered at the turn off. There was nothing around except for a cluster of buildings on the opposite side of the road.

There was an odd looking store with three gasoline pumps out front. The sign announcing the "Wonderland Village Bus Station" also advertised groceries, camping supplies, hunting and fishing licenses, of course bait and ammunition. A second sign offered home cooked meals, cabins or rooms. There was also a sign indicating this was a ticket agency for the bus company. The blue bell in a white circle ringed in blue, so common back in the early fifties, was attached to a post pointing to an outdoor phone booth on the porch. The store also offered "Western Union Telegrams."

As Arnold's eyes adjusted to the glare he realized he was being watched by a skinny figure sitting on the porch of the store.

"Well hello," called the figure with a circular wave.

Whoever this was sat along the rail of the porch with their back propped against the post. Long legs extended from very short shorts. A straw hat concealed the features. A sort of dress shirt was tied at the

waist rather than tucked into the waistband.

The figure swung around to face Arnold.

"I take it you're Arnold, Miss Alice's nephew." The accent was anything but American. It had a hint of the British Isles but might have been rural Canadian.

Arnold nodded and spoke. "Yes, I am."

By this time the figure was halfway across the road. The hat, which was tipped forward, framed a delightfully elfin face. Green eyes went with the wine red hair. The smattering of freckles enhanced rather than marred the fair skin. The shirt was open almost to the knot that kept it just above the waist. A too short tank top undershirt gleamed pure white in the mid afternoon sun. Like the shirt worn over it, it didn't quite make it into the waistband of the shorts leaving a tiny bit of tan tummy skin showing. The flat waistband of white underpants showed above the shorts.

Arnold wasn't sure if the approaching figure was a boy or a girl. The shirt overrode that critical part of the tank top that would have shown what sort of boobs this creature might or might not have. The introduction didn't clarify Arnold's wonder. The teen extended a hand in greeting. "I'm Robbie Hargreave. Nice to know you. Let me help you with your gear."

The slender, almost insubstantial figure grabbed a heavy suitcase in each hand and easily lifted them and carried them across the road. "Come with me. Might as well keep cool while you wait for a ride."

Arnold followed watching the sway of the young teen's hips. He realized the slender figure concealed surprising strength. He noticed that the waistband of the underpants was the polished cotton of the pants apparently sewn over a narrow elastic band. "Girl," he thought. "Has to be... wearing underwear like that. Panties. Girl for sure!" Arnold could now relax and admit to himself that this attractive being had resonated a sexual response in him even before he was sure it was a

girl.

They left the bags on the porch as Arnold followed Robbie through the store and to the office beyond. A woman sat at a large table sorting some invoices. She was anything but the hefty outdoorsy woman Arnold would have guessed would be running this business.

"Mum, this is Arnold who's come to spend the summer with Miss Alice at the artists' colony. Arn, this is my mum, Mrs. Hargreave."

"Hello Arnie. Welcome to our part of the world.

"Please don't look so puzzled. I know the accent throws everyone off. Obviously we're not originally from here. We were both born in India... British Raj and all that sort of thing. Not at all glamorous except in films and novels. I took advantage of the change to independence to get out and so in forty-eight we came here to make a new life for Bertie and me in a new place. Offered a job as business manager here. Took it.

"I hope you like it at the lake. Lots of different things to do. And girls your age."

A car honked from the gas pumps. "I'll see to it," offered Robbie whose mum had just called her Bertie! "Come along. We'll get a cold soda on the way back in.

"Confusing isn't it? To some people I'm Robbie while Mum and few others always call me Bertie. Robbie's from the first half of my name. Bertie's from the second half."

"Got it," laughed Arnold. "Roberta, right?"

"Close enough," giggled Robbie. Mum hates when I call myself Robbie. She calls me Bertie so therefore she thinks everyone should do the same. Mum insists Robbie is too much of a boy's name. Silly but I really hate to cross her especially when she's in a mood."

Robbie started the gas pump and checked the oil. She stood on tiptoe to reach across the windshield as she wiped it clean. The hem of her panties was plainly visible as her shorts rode up. The man eyed

Robbie very appreciatively. His female companion elbowed his ribs. He paid for his guilt by giving Robbie a dollar tip!

This oddly spontaneous and almost too open girl rewarded the donor of the generous tip by pulling down the waistband of her shorts far enough to allow a glimpse of her belly-button and to stash the dollar in the waistband of her panties!

"Did you see him look? He practically drooled. He'll be back with more tips for me. Pathetic fool but fair game all the same!"

Arnold was more and more fascinated by this Robbie or Bertie or whatever the name would finally turn out to be. She looked about thirteen or perhaps even younger. Much too young to be the girlfriend of a guy who would soon finish high school, but her smile set his pulse racing. Her nearness stirred unknown sensations in his groin, an electric animal sensation he had never known.

Arnold was never really one of the guys. His mother had tried to protect Arn from the grasp of his father's family and the oppressive control of her own family. She kept him close to her. He had identified closely with this frail woman who was the source of everything good and safe in his world.

Bertie's voice snapped him back to the moment. "Miss Alice said you're to stay here until she phones.

"Let's have a catch! I've got an extra glove I'm going to call you Arnie. Arnold's just so stuffy."

Her accent made his nickname sound like ^Ahnnie' which was more like Annie than Arnie.

"You throw like a girl," said Bertie in shocked surprise. She returned the baseball to him with a peg that was as fast, as powerful, and as accurate as a rifle shot. His hand stung despite the baseball glove she had given him. Bertie certainly didn't throw like a girl!

"I just never played ball very much." He avoided eye contact

while making this confession of his athletic ineptitude. He realized more than ever how much he had been over-protected by his very neurotic mother.

"Try to step forward with your left foot as you throw with your right hand."

He followed Bertie's suggestions and was soon throwing better than he had ever thrown in his life.

They sat on the back steps sipping cola. Bertie had removed her shirt. The tank top clung to her sweaty body. Arnie saw her breasts through the thin cotton and felt reassured that this lithe, adorably sexy little amazon was indeed a girl. Conical nipples pushed the white cotton as it clung to the tiny peach sized orbs of her breasts. Sad she's so young. Perhaps her mother wouldn't allow her to spend time with Arnie who for the first time in his life was instantly intoxicated by an attractive, sexy teen however young.

"Split a popsicle, okay?"

"Sure," responded the smitten Arnie.

"Cherry?"

Arnie would have agreed to anything Bertie suggested.

Bertie returned in a moment with a double cherry popsicle. Her eyes twinkled.

"Chattie is so silly sometimes."

"Who's Chattie?"

"Chatterjee. She's Indian, like from India. Came to America with us. She was my amah. That's a sort of nurse for babies and tots. Now she takes care of the store. Cooks for us some of the time. Still really keeps an eye on mum and me."

Bertie unwrapped the icy confection, broke it in half giving one side to Arnie and keeping the other for herself. Droplets ran down the

popsicle as Bertie studied it in front of her face. Her tongue darted forward and caught the droplets as she licked upward along the icy shaft. Arnie stared in rapt attention.

A provocative smile from Bertie as she leaned against the banister post. The tip of her tongue circled the top of the red shaft of ice as her mouth opened to envelop it. She sucked gently but firmly. She slid it from her mouth to reveal cherry reddened lips.

Bertie extended one leg along the edge of the porch as she dropped the other leg to the lowest step it could reach. She smiled at Arnie as she again turned her attention to the popsicle. Arnie's eyes darted from the very erotic oral performance to Bertie's open thighs where the crotch of her white panties showed under the leg openings of the very short shorts.

Bertie's attention was diverted from her toying with Arnie by the approach of someone along the porch. Arnie looked over his shoulder to see an Indian woman. She was tall and dressed in fashionable but conservative American style; no sari for this exotic beauty. She wore a wrap around tan twill skirt that just reached the middle of her knees. Sandals showed her high arched feet and the deep crimson polish on her toe nails. Her graceful fingers had long well-manicured nails done with the same polish. Her rings, bracelets and earrings were the only items that were clearly Indian. The jet black hair was pulled back in a ponytail. When Arnie rose to be introduced he saw that her short sleeved blouse was unbuttoned far enough down to reveal her cleavage nestling in the low white lace cups of a very American bra.

In introducing him to Chatterjee, Bertie further truncated his name to Arn or as she pronounced it Ann as if it were spelled Ann!

"Your mum wants you both in the office now."



Mrs. Hargreave's beauty registered on Arn for the first time. It

was obvious where Bertie got that wonderfully rich mane of deep wine red hair. Mrs. Hargreave's was done in the popular page boy style, parted on the side. Emerald stud earrings showed in the tiny lobes barely visible beneath her hair. Green eyes shaped like large almonds were piercing in their intensity. A scoop neck tee showed just enough of the swell of her breasts to let you know that this was no frigid English snob.

Mrs. Hargreave turned her swivel chair to face Arn and Bertie. She leaned back slightly and crossed her legs causing her skirt to rise higher over her knees than was considered seemly in those days. As she recrossed her suntanned legs, Arn noticed that she was wearing green panties, the perfect color for her delightful claret red hair. Mrs. Hargreave tilted forward but made no effort pull her skirt lower. Arn immediately gave her full eye contact lest she think him a boor for staring at her panties.

"Ahrn," Bertie's mum used the same strange pronunciation Bertie used; a pronunciation that blurred his name so that it would be unclear if he was Arn or Ann. "Your Aunt Alice telephoned. She's unavoidably delayed in Philadelphia. Apparently she's met a possible new model. In any event, she'll not be back until tomorrow. She's awfully upset at having to disappoint you."

"We're used to that, my mother and me. I just hope I won't be in anyone's way or put anyone to much trouble."

Mrs. Hargreave got to her feet and pressed Arn to her. She lay his head against her shoulder as she stroked his back. The very comforting hug reassured Arn but at the same time allowed him to weep openly.

"Now that's a bit silly but really quite okay to let out your feelings. We could drive you to Alice's lake house but I think it would be more fun for you to stay here tonight and have dinner with us. Chatterjee can whip up a special dessert. Something sinfully delicious. Have you ever had a trifle?"

Arn shook his head through his tears as Mrs.

Hargreave dabbed at his cheeks with a tissue.

"You might just love it. Settled then! You'll have dinner and spend the night with us."

Mrs. Hargreave hugged him again even as he nodded assent. The pressure of her full breasts against him was both sexy and reassuring.

"Bertie, put Arn's bags in the woody (author's note: Ford woody, a "town and country station wagon" with wooden door panels) and drive down to Alice's lake house so that the bags can be brought up to Arn's rooms. Arn, just keep what you need by way of toilet articles. We'll have some things **for** you for the night and the morning. And Bertie, be sure you have your driver's license with you."

Arn was relieved to find that Bertie was old enough to drive legally. He was feeling better and better about the attraction he felt toward this pixie.

Bertie ran to the barn that doubled as a garage for the vehicles needed to operate and maintain the multi-faceted business that Mrs. Hargreave managed.

Bertie pulled the Ford woody around to the front. A middle aged man loaded the bags into the back of the woody. He introduced himself to Arn in a New York City accent. Arn took a liking to the matter of fact but friendly manner of the man who was called by his odd nickname, "The Skipper."

"Be sure to introduce yourself to my daughter, Marion. She's out at the lake for the summer. Sort of a general clerical and secretarial aide for the artist ladies. Keeps an eye on the wee ones when there are any around."

"Will do, Skipper," promised Bertie cheerfully as they started the woody and headed across the road and down the turnoff.

"Marion's his daughter. She really is spectacular. That girl's so

bright and so driven. Finished high school at the head of her class. Top field hockey player too. Going to Radcliffe with tons of scholarship money. You'll just love her. Everyone does. She's a real girl..."

With that observation Bertie suddenly stopped chattering. It was as if she said something she shouldn't have. Arn wondered what she meant by calling this girl a "real girl." Probably just means that she's really feminine despite her being a big time scholar and a super athlete to boot.

Bertie changed the subject to Skipper. "He's a really neat guy. War hero too. He does all kinds of things for everyone and makes sure there are no intruders or trouble makers lurking about."

"Why is he called The Skipper?"

"He was a high ranking officer in the New York City Police Department before he retired. He commanded lots of special operations so, like the commander of a ship, they called him 'Skipper.' Maybe someday he'll tell us why he left New York for the rustic life. There has got to be a great story behind that move."

"What about Marion's mom?"

"Died giving birth to her. There was a woman who helped raise Marion but she died somehow. They never talk about it. Painful I should think."