

# Alice, For Real

In the Author's Note at the end of *When Audrey Met Alice*, I ask readers to consider my Alice a fictional character—because she is!

Alice's diary entries in the book come from a combination of research and my imagination, although the real Alice Roosevelt did keep a diary at various points in her life (and her maid actually snooped in it). While none of the real Alice's entries are reproduced in the fictional diary in *When Audrey Met Alice*, in some places I was able to coordinate events that she wrote about and dates from her actual diary. I also wove true details and quotes throughout Alice's story.

Creating my Alice character and imagining her diary would not have been possible without the work of several historians and authors of nonfiction works, and to them much credit is due. Barbara Kerley's vibrant and lovely picture book, *What To Do About Alice?* is the perfect introduction for readers of all ages to Alice and her shenanigans. It inspired and informed me. Michael Teague's *Mrs. L: Conversations with Alice Roosevelt Longworth* is another excellent book. Based on the author's interviews with Alice Roosevelt Longworth, it's told in a conversational style. The hours I spent reading it felt like speaking with Alice—I drank a lot of “piping hot” tea while doing this. The book contains pages and pages of photographs of Alice, her family, friends, press, homes, and travels. And finally, Stacy Cordery's *Alice: Alice Roosevelt Longworth, from White House Princess to Washington Power Broker*, which really deserves to be called groundbreaking, as the author had unprecedented access to a private collection of Alice's diaries, letters, and personal papers. The level of detail given to the events of Alice's life—including her emotional life—is amazing. *Alice* is an impressive scholarly work and a page-turner at the same time, and that's no easy feat.

In writing Alice's fictional diary, I had two goals: 1) Make it as historically accurate as possible, and 2) tell a great story with memorable characters. Most of the time, those two goals supported each other. In some cases, however, I had or wanted to stray from the facts to follow the character I created. In the annotated diary that follows, I've tried to point out what's true and what's invented. It might surprise you which details *aren't* fictional! I've also given the necessary credit to the nonfiction sources that provided details and quotations for the entries. Read on to get a behind-the-scenes look at writing Alice's diary.

—Rebecca Behrens

September 26, 1901

Dear Diary,

Now that I am the president's daughter, it seems like I ought to keep a diary. For the sake of remembering these momentous years, even though I think diaries are rather silly things. They're like writing letters to nobody, which seems like a waste of precious time. I have failed miserably at keeping a journal in the past. I will try better this time; perhaps more interesting things will happen to me now.

The lot of us just arrived at the "White House," which is the newly official name of this hulking whitewashed presidential shack. I'm glad that we aren't calling it the "Executive Mansion" anymore. That moniker takes on more airs than the building merits; I dare say it's not a true mansion. When I first visited it as a little girl, grizzled President Benjamin Harrison bent down and told me it was his "jail." Heh. This positively grim building somewhat resembles one—it's far from lavish. Crumbling walls, leaks, peeling paint, and decrepit furnishings. There are not nearly enough bathrooms on the second floor, at least for a family of eight. My stepmother will have her hands full fixing up the place, as per her First Lady duties. As though she didn't already have her hands full with my rambunctious siblings, and me!

Now the White House is full of young people and overrun it we shall. Ted, Kermit, Ethel, Archie, Quentin, and I have already discovered endless possibilities for mischief and merriment. Last night, we took some tin trays from the pantry and found them excellent as sleds on the stairs leading down to the main hallway. It was our Inauguration of Fun. That was, until Archie knocked his head on the banister and wailed like bloody murder. Stepmother wasn't pleased at that. She isn't pleased with much right now, between all the mourning for President McKinley and even more mourning for our family's precious "privacy." If she hated attention so, she had no business marrying Theodore Roosevelt.

All of us are all excited, though. I hope being the children of the president will make life in Washington grand, even though I know from personal experience that this town can be like a little Puritan village, at least when compared to life

Alice first tried to keep a diary at age fifteen, to "amuse" herself. She was upset about having to leave Sagamore Hill (her family's home on Oyster Bay in New York) for a summer in Boston (Cordery, p. 65). Alice did, in fact, keep a diary throughout her White House years. Many of the entries in *When Audrey Met Alice* correspond to events or feelings Alice wrote about in her real diary on those dates.

Alice visited the Harrison White House as a little girl, although the detail about President Harrison telling Alice that the White House was his jail is fictional (Teague, p. 63). President Harrison did, however, tell his family in 1892, when he lost the election, that leaving the White House felt like being freed from prison.

Alice really did describe the White House as "really rather ugly, inside at any rate." It had a musty smell and desperately needed renovations, which were done throughout the Roosevelt administration. Alice remarked that she always found it "curious" how fascinated people were by the White House—in her words, "We just thought of it as a house provided by the government for the man who happened to be President." (Teague pp. 61-63)

While Alice and her siblings did slide down the stairway on tin trays from the kitchen (Teague, p. 63), I imagined them calling it the "Inauguration of Fun," as well as Archie's head injury.

Footnote: (Cordery, pp. 41, 53)

in bustling New York City. It will be far better than Albany, where we lived while my father was governor. Albany was dreadfully boring. The places one is forced to live when one's father is such an Important Man! (And now he is the Most Important Man.)

Alice described moving from the family's comfortable home on Oyster Bay to the Executive Mansion in Albany as "anti-climactic." (Teague, p. 54)

Whenever we travel with Father, we create a whirling ruckus. Crowds and press and attention from all corners of the earth. I rather love the feel of it, but then again, I am someone who wants to eat up the world. I expect that I will be able to eat more of it now, for two reasons: 1) Being the eldest in my family, I expect freedom to do as I please here. The addition of a few security men to guard my father and our family should not hamper that. (And after the tragic assassination of McKinley, they are indeed necessary.) My father has a Secret Service man who is with him all the time, William Craig, and another one, Sloane, watches the little boys as they scamper around. But the rest of us don't see much of the Service at home. I don't mind when I do—most of the chaps are good sports. 2) I expect to have my society debut this year and I will get to have it in the White House. It doesn't get more exciting than that, does it?

Alice delighted in the "ruckus" of the early days of the Roosevelt presidency. (Cordery, p. 44)

This is one of my favorite Alice-isms. In retelling the story of christening the Kaiser's yacht years later, she recalled, "I enjoyed myself. I was only eighteen at the time and eating up the world." (Teague, p. 69)

The Roosevelts were the first family in the White House to have Secret Service protection—in response to President McKinley's assassination. (Teague, p. 65) Years later, President Roosevelt would be shot while giving a speech in Milwaukee—and he continued speaking, despite having a bullet wound! (A fondness for TR runs in my own family; my great-grandfather was actually present at that very speech.)

I am supposed to be unpacking my hatboxes and such now. More later.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

"'To thine own self be true' became the motto of a girl who was motherless. . . ." (Cordery, p. x) Alice and her family loved to quote passages from Shakespeare. A voracious reader, she once begged her father to "let me loose in your library." (Cordery, p. 55)

P.S. That Shakespearean allusion is my newly adopted motto for life, by the way. My father always has mottoes and such, and it seemed like a good idea for me to choose one to guide my life too.

October 5, 1901  
Diary—

I have been busy, trying to be helpful and watch my little siblings as we slowly settle into our new home. The first floor is formal and public, where we dine and entertain and the like. The second floor has the seven bedrooms, some sitting rooms, my father's library, and the president's offices, which are separated by glass partitions from the rest of the floor. A

musty smell abounds, the floors creak, and paint peels on the second floor, but there is a newly installed elevator. My stepmother has made our room assignments at long last. I came out fairly well. My bedroom is on the northwest side of the floor, next to my sister Ethel's room and catty-corner from my stepmother's sitting room. (Coincidence? Surely not.) It's a large room, though, with lovely windows. I can peer down from them and see Lafayette Square and the grand houses (mansions, really) of John Hay and Henry Adams. Last night I stood in here and watched the view as the sun went down, and the room was full of the most beautiful light. Unfortunately the furniture is not up to par. It's positively Spartan compared to what I have at Sagamore, our house on Oyster Bay, where my room is very fashionable and has nice chintz curtains and a happy floral pattern on the wallpaper. This room has big, cumbersome furniture made of black walnut wood. The pieces are ugly and dull. I have two inferior brass beds—couldn't they have one pleasant bed instead of two creaky ones? I'll have it redecorated, though. Renovations will start shortly, under the watchful and persnickety command of First Lady Edith Roosevelt. Shockingly, we are in agreement about something: that the private residence is in shambles. I know I'm belaboring the decrepit state of the White House, but it still shocks me how ramshackle it is. It reminds me of Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Miss Havisham's home—both are full of cobwebs and nostalgia gone awry.

In addition to our tray-sledding, my siblings and I have taken to racing through the upstairs hall on our stilts and bicycles. You wouldn't think, with my crippled history of orthopedic footwear, that I would be any good at stilts. The leg braces I had as a child prevented my feet from turning inward like those of a pigeon. It was a result of polio going undiagnosed. Those darned braces were terribly uncomfortable, and they used to lock up and make me pitch forward, face-first. But the challenges I faced early in life with my legs have only made me strong as a young woman. I practice yoga exercises, which help stretch my limbs, and I am so limber that I can put my leg behind my head. I find it oddly relaxing. It drives Edith mad; she thinks yoga is strange and

Alice remarked on the “lugubrious” furniture, “hideous dark rooms,” and “musty smell everywhere” of the White House. (Teague, p. 63)

“Ugly and inconvenient” was how Alice described the White House furnishings—she much preferred her family's home at Oyster Bay. (Cordery, p. 44)

And those renovations would take over a year to complete!

Considering what a reader Alice was, I bet she would've found the stodgy, musty White House a little like Miss Havisham's. Alice did enjoy reading Dickens and Twain! (Kerley, p. 21)

The White House was a “paradise for children.” (Cordery, p. 44)

Alice found another use for her braces—she would bonk her siblings over the head with them. And as a child, she loved how her braces made her different from others—and therefore special. (Cordery, p. 29-30)

horribly unladylike.

We and our stilts and bicycles are strictly forbidden from the first floor...when it is open to the public. Otherwise, we have the run of the house. It's already become the Roosevelt zoo with all the children and the animals. We are keeping some pets in the Conservatory, like our blue macaw, Eli Yale. The cumbersome stodgy furniture is remarkably good for playing hide-and-seek. Although I know I am getting too old for childish games, I can't help but join in from time to time. I believe I've found the secret to eternal youth, and it's arrested development. Yesterday, Archie and Ted were hiding behind chairs in the East Room, waiting for visitors to come to see Father so they could pop out and scare them. I couldn't stop laughing, though, and I am afraid my bark kept giving us away.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

Alice actually was jealous of her friend Nancy Astor for her ability to turn cartwheels. Alice remarked she "could always do yoga and pop my leg behind my head and things like that, but that's just relaxing." (Teague, p. 42)

Alice said that she "loved [the Conservatory] and so did a wonderful blue Brazilian macaw [she] had called Eli Yale." (Teague, p. 63) The Roosevelt family had many pets--at one point, Alice even had a pet monkey in the White House!

The Roosevelt children "pretty well had the run of the place," and loved to surprise each other and visitors by jumping out from the furniture. (Teague, p. 63)

Alice really called her laugh her "bark"! (Teague, p. viii)

October 16, 1901  
Diary—

Today I miss my Auntie Bye's joyous home in New York City, right at the corner of 62nd and Madison, and the time we shared there. I miss it even though she and her husband, Cowles, now live nearby on N Street and I am often at their home, basking in Bye's extensive and well-appointed library and drinking tea. Today I craved an afternoon tea, but when I went about getting a pot for myself, Stepmother insisted that I take it up to my room. Never mind that my room is a dreadful mess and no place for a proper English-style tea, taken like Bye taught me, with piping hot Earl Grey and plenty of buttery, paper-thin bread. I should have expected that the volume of rules surrounding me would only grow once we took up residence in the White House. I can't stand for them, though. I am positively allergic to discipline. I think I have mentioned that my aim is to eat up the world. Having a decent tea is part of that.

Perhaps the slew of rules are partly because the last time the Roosevelts took Washington by storm, four years

Entertaining was difficult for Alice at the White House, and if she wanted to have tea she had to go up to her room and sip from a thermos. So instead, she often went to Aunt Bye's. (Teague, p. 73)

Alice and her Aunt Bye had a close relationship, and Bye taught her everything from how to butter bread for tea to how to converse about taboo topics. With Bye, Alice always felt "a wonderful feeling of warmth and ease and hospitality." (Cordery, p. 19)



ago when Father became Assistant Secretary of the Navy, poor Alice proved to be too much storm for her family to handle. I would spend all day on my bicycle, riding the hills of Washington with my feet up on the handlebars. I broke my curfew more times than I could possibly count. I had my secret club of boys, and we ran riot all over and under and through. Usually I led them in the mischief, the little tomboy hellion that I was. Once I concocted a plan to get my friend Thomas in the house without my parents knowing. I gave him one of my old dresses, some girl's shoes, a hat, and gloves. That evening he came to the door dressed in my cast-offs and tried to gain entry as a girl. He said his name was Estella. It was harmless fun, but the poor thing didn't fool the housekeeper (who recognized the dress she'd laundered for years, of course—I've never had many of them) and then all hell broke loose. Father even called me a guttersnipe (the nerve!), which was a real slap in the face. So the day after my birthday he and Edith shipped me off to Bye's house in New York, despite my pleas to stay. As much as I don't like Father telling me what to do, I hated the idea of the rest of my family together without me—it validated, to me and the rest of the world, the notion that I'm only halfway part of the Roosevelt clan. There was no changing his mind, though, and poor Alice was cast out.

Life at Bye's was wonderful, though. I am certain that if Bye were a man, she would be president and not my father. I have always felt warm and safe and loved in her home, which is hospitable, refined, and always full of great and lively minds. Bye always calls me "Alice" when the rest of my family will not. (To my father I'm never "Alice," but "Sister" and "Sissy." He'll use any nickname to avoid uttering my name, which is also the name of my late mother, Alice Lee.) Bye took me in as an infant, and I know it broke her heart to give me back to my family at the tender age of three. I suppose it broke mine too, but I don't remember it. Every time we've parted since, even for only a few days, I feel a wrenching in my chest. I keep a letter from Bye in my jewel box, which reads "Remember, my blue-eyed darling, if you are very unhappy you can always come back to me." It gives me some comfort when I'm in the storm of a dark mood.

Alice really did all of these naughty things, but I've shaded in some of the details for the sake of this story. "Thomas" is a made-up name for the sneaked-in boy, and so is his disguise name of "Estella." A housekeeper didn't catch on via a recognized dress—but Alice did re-wear many of her dresses (to the point of wearing them out), so I think it's plausible that if a boy had been wearing one of her dresses, it might be familiar to whoever caught him and Alice! Theodore Roosevelt, exasperated at Alice's shenanigans, really called her a "guttersnipe" and shipped her off to Aunt Bye's, which hurt Alice's feelings deeply. (Cordery, p. 34)

Alice said this, as an adult! (Teague, p. 18)

Bye was also the only person to tell Alice stories of her late mother, who died shortly after giving birth to Alice. (Cordery, p. 19) According to Alice, her father never uttered her late mother's name and referred to Alice as "Sister" to avoid saying it. (Kerley, p. 45)

Bye always told Alice, her "blue-eyed darling," this to comfort her as a child (Teague, p. 12). Auntie Bye was "the single most important influence on [Alice's] childhood." (Cordery p. 19)

Now I must go, for I hear Eli Yale making a fuss in the Conservatory, and I want to make myself scarce in case the maids complain about his droppings again.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

November 14, 1901  
Diary—

At long last I've settled into life as a First Daughter, and I find it quite to my liking. I've reacquainted myself with some old Washingtonian friends. Our gang is called the Gooey Brotherhood of Slimy Slopers, quite a juvenile nonsense name, but I am rather fond of it. We all gather at Bye's for meetings. I'm lucky to have her, for it's very difficult to entertain at the White House. I lack a sitting room, and I am only allowed to entertain in the Green or Red rooms. They are in full view of all of the staff, not to mention my five siblings and parents. It's like throwing a party in a fish-bowl. So we go to Bye's refuge and meet in her parlor, where she holds such very intellectual salons for her friends. We Slopers do discuss literature and great ideas, but also try out all the new dances. The other day I taught my friends the hootchy-kootchy, which I first encountered when helping my father open the Buffalo Exposition. There I, totally transfixed, watched a troupe of female dancers swaying their hips in unison, as their arms moved in a serpentine manner above their heads. Edith clucked her tongue next to me, but I studied the scandalous steps and started practicing them in my bedroom when I got back home. I am quite the dancer, bum legs and all.

When I'm back at the White House, so much of my time now is spent with Stepmother making arrangements for my coming-out ball. I am enchanted by the prospect of a White House debut. It will be the most fabulous, glorious debutante ball Washington has ever seen, and loads better than any in New York. There may be many girls richer than I am, but none of them can have their debuts at the residence of the president. Stepmother just today arranged for Belle Hagner, party planner extraordinaire, to help us with all of

Alice's gang of friends all had nicknames (hers was Agile Ali, and she was the president of the "Brotherhood"), they had "tongue-in-cheek meetings with matching minutes," and created a spoof newspaper called *The Sloping Gazette*. Their meetings at Bye's house and around Washington were full of nonsense and jokes. (Cordery, pp. 45-46)

While acting as a goodwill ambassador at the Buffalo Exposition, Alice rode a camel and watched the hootchy-kootchy dancers (Kerley, p. 26). The Middle Eastern (belly) dance became a fad, and Alice practiced it over the summer at Oyster Bay (Cordery, p. 40). We know the Slopers liked to dance at their meetings, so I think it's only natural they'd try out the hootchy-kootchy!



the arrangements. Now I am about to make a list of all that I must have, so I can present her with a list of my essentials tomorrow. I know I am asking for the moon, but I am the First Daughter so quite frankly I do think that I am entitled to it.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

Alice's was the first debutante ball ever held at the White House, and she was "enchanted" by the thought of it. She, her stepmother, and Belle Hagner would plan it for months. (Cordery, p. 47)

November 28, 1901  
Diary—

I have an introduction to make to you! I have a new playmate in the White House. I've recently acquired a lovely little green garter snake, whom I have christened "Emily Spinach." Emily in honor of my aunt Emily, because both are unusually long and thin, like string beans. Spinach, naturally, because of my dear snake's bright green color. The endlessly entertaining Emily Spinach loves to wrap herself around my arm. She distinguishes me from your average girl, who would run away in fear of a snake and not wear it around her neck like a scarf or let its little flicking tongue lick her elbow gloves. I've had so much fun "introducing" her to guests of the White House. One visitor was so shocked and frightened upon seeing me wandering the White House with Emily looped over my shoulder that she fainted and had to be revived with smelling salts. How silly—Emily's just a harmless snake! (You can imagine my stepmother's reaction.) They tried to make me get rid of her, but I pitched a fit. I don't see what the issue is. When I'm not bringing Emily around the house for socializing, she happily stays in a little stocking box in my room. It's not as though I let her slither free through the East Room or the dining areas. Well, sometimes I do bring her around to parties, but I keep her tucked in my purse.

Although my father disapproves of how I am "deliberately trying to shock with that little snake," nobody is more of a champion of wildlife than him. Thanks to that, I know that there is little risk of me being forced to dispose of Emily Spinach. My father will even play with her too, on the rare

Alice remarked to her interviewer, Michael Teague, that "A lot of fuss was made about a pet snake I had. . . . It was an affectionate, completely harmless creature, which I used to carry in a stocking box because it was a garter snake. Well, the stories multiplied about Emily Spinach until one would have thought that I was harboring a boa constrictor in the White House. Friends wouldn't allow me in their house with it and then finally one day I found it dead in its box. It had been killed . . . I was so furious I couldn't see straight for weeks." (Teague, p. 69) Other pets in the Roosevelt White House include Josiah the badger, Maude the pig, and a small bear named Jonathan Edwards. Read about all of them here:  
[www.nps.gov/thrb/historyculture/the-roosevelt-pets.htm](http://www.nps.gov/thrb/historyculture/the-roosevelt-pets.htm)

This detail is fictional! But I bet Alice got a wide variety of reactions to her little reptilian friend.

This is true—later on in the story, Alice tells what else she kept in her purse to shock people.

This is an imagined quote from Teddy Roosevelt. Alice did love how carrying around Emily Spinach distinguished her from other girls, and her biographer suspects that perhaps that was a way for her to define herself apart from being a first daughter (Cordery, p. 91). I imagine such attempts at getting attention exasperated her parents. But considering the menagerie of pets in the Roosevelt White House, I think it's reasonable to imagine her dad playing with Emily Spinach, too.

occasions that he is home and not working. Then he'll go on wild tangents and tell me tales of buffaloes and bears and elk and the other beasts he's encountered out west. One day I wandered into his office with Emily on my arm as he was meeting with his journalist friend Mr. Wister. Mr. Wister was quite taken aback by my little snake and me, but my father simply said, "I can either run the country or I can control Alice, but I can't possibly do both." Emily and I laughed. Father picks his battles well.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

This is a real, and famous, quote from Theodore Roosevelt! Owen Wister, a writer for *The Virginian*, was speaking with President Roosevelt when Alice wandered into the room with Emily Spinach, prompting the remark. Alice later reflected that it was said "very mirthfully." (Teague, p. 84)

December 13, 1901  
Diary—

I took a break from the debut planning today for a lengthy pillow fight with my siblings. Kermit started it, whacking Ethel with a heavy down pillow as she came out of her bedroom. Those two tend to be at each other's throats. Soon we were all in the fray, winding up in the attic wing with feathers raining down on us. When the fat pillows had turned thin, Ethel suggested that we settle scores by racing stilts and bicycles. I beat them all on my trusty stilts. I had a leg up, literally, because of my years with those braces.

This is an imagined scene. The White House was full of rambunctious kids, and considering her playful spirit, I think Alice would've joined in the fun even as she got older and had debuted into society. After all, Alice did famously say, "I've always believed in the adage that the secret to eternal youth is arrested development."

It felt strange to wander down to the first floor after those activities and make debut arrangements. Of course I am excited to enter society. Yet it's tinged bittersweet, especially for me as the oldest in the family. I certainly hope a debuted young lady can still partake in an attic pillow fight, now and then. Then again, when have I ever concerned myself with the rules?

I was still flushed, with my hair falling out of my bun, and Belle Hagner asked if I intended to appear like such a "ragamuffin" in society. I rolled my eyes until Edith reprimanded me for my attitude. She and I have been battling about the specific plans for my party. Despite being the child of a World Leader, Rough Rider, Master of the Bully Pulpit, I shall not get everything I want. For example: the dance floor. I was told that I had to seek the approval of Congress to get the renovations necessary to make the White House ballroom presentable. I cornered a few congressmen and gave them my

Another imagined detail, but I'm sure Alice's antics made it difficult for more traditional staff members—such as the social secretary—to manage her.

very best Auntie Corinne “elbow-in-the-soup” treatment—feigning interest in every boring detail that they told me about their legislation, nodding and blinking my big blue eyes and exclaiming, “Oh! How absolutely fascinating!” and “Aren’t you just the cleverest chap,” at every chance. (Auntie Corinne was and is the master of faking enthusiasm in otherwise dull social settings. She leans in so close to whomever she is speaking to that her elbow tends to be precariously positioned next to, and almost in, her soup bowl. Hence the term “elbow-in-the-soup” treatment.) Perhaps that sly fox Corinne could have won where I lost, but sadly no money came through for poor Alice’s ball, and we will be having a slapdash linen-crash floor because the ballroom is without a hardwood floor. I find this personally humiliating.

True! Alice may have had the very first White House debut, but she had to face the restrictions because of the venue being a historic place and her father’s political needs. (Cordery, pp. 47-49)

“We were left speechless with admiration at [Auntie Corinne’s] ability to show interest in some bore’s discourse. With her elbow almost stuck into her soup plate, she would gaze at him—or her—intently hanging on every word. It was a magnificent performance.” (Teague, p. 26)

A direct quote from Alice on the linen-crash floor. (Cordery, p. 49)

Then there is the issue of refreshments. I begged and pleaded with Stepmother for champagne, which is the drink in fashion. All the girls having their debuts in New York City are serving it. But apparently those stuffy Women’s Christian Temperance Union biddies would drown in disapproval, so we will be serving punch. If they only knew that I have taken to smuggling bottles of whiskey (which I sneak out of the White House stock) into boring dinner parties at teetotaling houses—I hide them in my elbow-length gloves. It’s a great way to garner the attention of my male dinner companions, who are always so very grateful for a surreptitious sip.

Edith was concerned that serving champagne, even if commonly done in New York, would be “unseemly” in Washington. She was also concerned about pro-temperance voters. Alice tried to pay for champagne out of her own Lee family funds, but Edith wouldn’t allow it. (Cordery, pp. 49-50)

Alice was known to smuggle whiskey in her gloves for her male dinner companions—and I’m assuming here that she pilfered it from the White House. (Cordery, p. 78)

My gown makes me excited, though. It’s achingly beautiful: made of pure white taffeta, with a white chiffon overskirt. The bodice is appliquéd with tiny white rosebuds, scores and scores of them embracing my torso. I have a very elegant, very simple diamond pendant necklace. When the light catches it, it takes my breath away. (I will have to stash smelling salts in my elbow gloves, instead of a flask, for that reason.) After the alterations finally were finished, I sneaked the dress up to my room and put it on. Standing in front of my mirror, I got chills. For the first time in ages I didn’t see a homely little tomboy, a knock-kneed girl who spent years of her life in ugly metal braces, but a slender young woman. I looked beautiful, and whether I actually am or it’s simply the magic of this

lovely, breathtaking dress—I don't care. I will always know what I looked like in the mirror right then. —————→

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

This is what the dress Alice wore to her debut really looked like, but her emotional reaction is recreated here. Alice's friend Maggie Cassini later remarked that "Under the lights of the heavy chandeliers in the East Room, the tomboyish-looking girl I have seen around Washington is transformed into an assured, sparkling young woman." (Cordery, p. 50)

January 4, 1902 —————→  
Diary—

Alice's debut was held on January 3, 1902.

It's past noon, and I am still lying in my bed (although, as my father likes to comment, I rarely make any appearances before noon these days), reliving last night again and again in my memories. Diary, it was wonderful—every single shining moment. I have so much to write down now because I want to remember the night of my debut for the rest of my life.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Alice . . . generally only makes her appearance well after noon, having been up until all hours dancing the night before." He worried about her "life of social excitement." (Kerley, p. 45)

The receiving line began at ten o'clock in the Blue Room. And do you know how many people my parents and I received? Over six hundred! I might not have gotten a shiny new hardwood floor, but the decorations almost made up for that. We transformed the Blue Room into something like the hanging gardens of Babylon. Over two thousand flowers covered the room—roses, carnations, hyacinths, narcissus—and there was holly on every lintel. It was thrilling to walk in and see the room decorated beyond my wildest expectations. My gown made me look as lovely as when I tried it on before, which made it easy for me to be confident and proud and charming in front of so very many people. My hair was even done up so as to hide my gargantuan high forehead. —————→

Footnote: (Cordery, p. 50)

The first waltz played at eleven, and of course it was the U.S. Marine Band playing for me. (No "poor Alice" on that account.) I danced with the positively dashing Lieutenant Gilmore of the Artillery. I was nervous and sure that my gimpy legs would make me trip all over him, but he told me that I was "graceful as a swan." At which of course I had to snicker. —————→ It is quite a heady experience dancing at these events—the rooms get warm, and after a few rounds, the gentlemen tend to smell...not so gentle. It can get a little overpowering, especially when you are clutched tightly in a partner's arms, and at

Alice could be very insecure about her looks, and from an early age she was fixated on her high forehead. She would try to style her hair to hide it. (Teague, p. 28)

The first waltz was at eleven, the US Marine Band played, and Alice danced with Lt. Gilmore (Cordery, p. 51). But whether or not he remarked that Alice was graceful as a swan, I can't say.

times I couldn't tell if I was getting dizzy from all the twirling or from the strong scent of sweat.

After we danced, the buffet started. The only word for it is sumptuous. Finger sandwiches, oysters, aspics and jellies, escargots à bourguignonne, chicken fricassee, roasted beef, savory soups and consommé, puddings, crepes, éclairs, meringues, soufflé, petits fours, and ice cream! No champagne, though, for poor Alice. Just punch. That wish did not come true, and champagne can't easily be smuggled in elbow gloves.

It's silly how these things are set up—first you attack the buffet as though you were a Rough Rider in Cuba at a chuck wagon, then you find a gent and dance or stroll the promenade. More like roll the promenade, after all that food. But my sateen-and-whalebone health corset did not permit me to sample as much as I desired of the delicious spread. One of the dear kitchen maids put aside some goodies for me in the icebox, so whenever I finally drag myself from this bed I can start sampling what my guests enjoyed.

I don't much care for public speaking—actually I don't care for it at all; it makes me frightened and faint. The kind of attention I got last night, though, I adore. All those eyes on me in my gorgeous dress, specifically the male eyes. Many handsome lads attended last night, and I flirted like mad with them. Auntie Corinne remarked to me that there was a crowd “seven-men deep” around me, the whole night. I don't know if that is precisely true, but I did have a lot of admirers. I suppose because it was my fancy party and I was wearing an ethereal dress. There wouldn't be a crowd for me as I look this morning, puffy-faced and tired and entirely without fuss and finery. Don't think I'm playing “poor Alice,” though. It was a lovely, fantastic evening, and I felt the same: lovely and fantastic. Filled to the brim with happiness.

Now my stomach is growling in a very unladylike way (I am a lady now, I suppose—how strange) so I am off to raid the icebox.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

Recalling other dances and the boys her age at them, Alice told her interviewer, “It was before deodorants and being clutched in one's partner's arms and whirled around a stifling room could be a heady experience. They were frightfully nice and proper and respectable but they were not terribly interesting.” (Teague, p. 76) I loved this observation because we tend to think of the very fancy aspects of dances and debuts at Alice's time, and imagining not-so-fancy smells brings the situation back to reality. It also shows that teenage dances—with slightly stinky boys—are universal.

Alice's friends described the spread as “sumptuous,” but I couldn't uncover the actual food served. (Cordery, p. 51) These are some popular dishes at the time that I imagine could've been served. And, alas, Alice did not get her champagne.

Alice's debut started with dancing, then the buffet, and then strolls in the White House conservatories or more dancing. I imagined that Alice would probably have to wear some restrictive undergarments with her pretty dress, and perhaps she wouldn't be able to attack the buffet with as much gusto as she would've liked. So my Alice had food put aside to eat later—that's what I would've done in that situation!

Among her many complexities, Alice was “petrified of public speaking” for her whole life. (Teague, p. xvi)

Auntie Corinne's assessment of the evening: “Alice had the time of her life, men seven deep around her all the time.” Franklin D. Roosevelt called the event “glorious” from beginning to end. (Cordery, p. 51)



January 5, 1902

Diary—

All of those good feelings from yesterday have evaporated. Poof! The papers chimed in on my debut (some even on the front page!), and they've offered faint praise. First off with the little good: The New York Tribune did say, "A more charming debutante has rarely been introduced in Washington." They went on to tell that I was "attractive in my dignified simplicity and natural grace as I was beautiful. Tall, with a striking figure, blue eyes, and a fine fair complexion, she was certainly one of the prettiest girls in Washington." One of the prettiest girls in Washington! My cousin Eleanor will die when she reads that. Of course, that wasn't so much my figure as it was that of my undergarments, but I won't quibble.

The quotes from the paper is real; Alice's and Eleanor's reactions are made-up. (Cordery, p. 51)

Unfortunately, the New York Times called my decorations "extremely simple." I am livid. How could anyone enter the Blue Room and say that about it? Of all the people reported to have "simple" decorations—the girl in the White House should not. It's perplexing, but one of the papers actually raved about the linen-crash floor, saying that dancing on it was a delight. I would suggest that the reviewer had imbibed a little too much champagne, but I was not allowed to serve any. (I will quit lamenting that now, I swear on the Sloper handbook.)

The press reported that the linen-crash floor was "waxed so perfectly that dancing on it was a delight."

Adding insult to injury: a few years later at her little sister Ethel's debut, "buckets of champagne" were served. (Cordery, p. 51)

According to Stepmother, today's papers still buzzed about me, despite those lukewarm assessments. "Princess Alice" is what the reporters are starting to call me, and the readers are clamoring for more details about me. It is peculiar, isn't it? Interest in my father is understandable because of who he is and what he has done. But I am simply a girl whose father is a politician. If you ask me, there's comparatively little special about Alice. I suppose once all the details of my debut have been discussed ad nauseam the interest will wane.

Alice's debut was front-page news, and people started calling her Princess Alice. In a lot of ways, she became the first national celebrity. (Cordery, p. 51)

Now I have little to occupy myself with here. Partly I hoped that some gent and I would experience love at first sight at my ball (I was dressed appropriately for a run-in with Cupid's arrow, certainly) and now I could throw myself into writing torrid love letters and planning clandestine



meetings on the South Lawn or the stables. It might sound contrary, but a beau-turned-husband is a ticket to get out of my father's house and into the world on my own. Ironical as it may be, marrying may be my best shot at freedom. 'Tis a pity, but none of the boys at the ball made much of an impression on me. Lacking anything else to fill my time with, I suppose I'll return to learning Greek.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

These reflections belong to my fictional Alice, although Alice Roosevelt, like many girls at her time, saw marriage as a way to strike out in the world. "Finding the perfect spouse was her top priority . . . for Alice marriage meant—she hoped—independence and wealth." (Cordery, p. 83) Also, Alice really did study Greek.

January 30, 1902  
Diary—

Interest in me hasn't waned since my debut. People in this country have gone absolutely crazy for their "Princess Alice!" I've received hundreds of requests for my autograph—enough that White House staff now needs to open my mail for me. Photographers and reporters pursue me whenever I leave the house, and on many occasions small crowds have formed when I am out in public. There still isn't much automobile or carriage traffic when I cruise on my bicycle to Dupont, but there are people who point and exclaim. One morning I awoke to my stepmother all atwitter—some camera fiends were planted at the front door, hoping to get my picture. They weren't even reporters but "fans."

In real life, it wasn't so soon after Alice's debut that the letters started pouring in. But later on, the "sheer number of letters she received . . . prompted the family to deem it necessary for a White House secretary to open Alice's mail, read it, and pass it on. This hampered Alice's flirtations." (Cordery, pp. 80-81)

Large crowds would eventually follow her, too—at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 a crowd of thousands of women gathered to see her arrival. (Cordery, p. 80)

This is another detail from later on in Alice's fame that, for the purposes of the story, I included right after her debut.

It gets even more peculiar. The most popular songs right now were composed with me as the subject: "The Alice Roosevelt March" and "The American Girl." Probably my favorite homage to moi is the fabric color taking America by storm: "Alice blue," the precise blue-gray color of my eyes—supposedly. No dressmaker has verified it against my peepers. One of the maids told me stores are selling out of it; the papers reported it's the most popular shade for dresses right now. (How lucky for the ladies of America that my eyes aren't a muddy brown.) My photograph decorates tinted postcards and fancy French chocolate cards. It's wild. As one of my Sloper friends remarked, perhaps with a smidgen of jealousy, the world has become my oyster. If I had anything to be vain about, I suppose I would be getting very vain. Luckily for the world at large, my gargantuan forehead

The sheet music had a picture of Alice on the cover. (Cordery, p. 52)

French chocolate cards were like early versions of baseball cards; Alice's picture came inside a bar of Guerin-Boutron. Tinted postcards were collected by her fans, and some sent them to her for autographs. (Cordery, p. 52)

(among other attributes) prevents me from that sin. →

My parents do not think it is so “wild.” My stepmother’s constant refrain: “Beware of publicity!” “Do not talk to reporters!” She says nice girls do not get their pictures in the paper, much less on chocolate cards, except for when they are born, married, and buried. I say poppycock to that. Actually, I asked Edith whether she’d like to find me a husband then, or otherwise put some arsenic in my tea because I’ve already been born. My father had the audacity to accuse me of courting publicity. Of all the people to say such a thing—my father, who has to be the bride at every wedding, the baby at every christening, and the corpse at every funeral. He never met a form of public attention that he didn’t love. Why, at the inauguration, I remember him chiding me for waving gleefully to some friends in the audience while he spoke. I said, “Why shouldn’t I?” “But this is my inauguration!” → was his exasperated reply. For him, the master of publicity, to criticize me for having a little fun with the attention—it’s hypocrisy, pure and simple. →

So I am told I must never, ever, ever, ever speak to reporters and should avoid photographers at all times. Cover my face if I have to. And yet, there is interest in every move my family or I make! How absurd. My siblings share my bemusement—Ted even sent me a letter from school with a postscript reading “Five cents for the signature please.” I nearly died laughing. (I suppose Edith would’ve allowed my name to appear in the paper then.) →

But try telling any of this to my parents, with their fuss box ideas of how young ladies should behave. Things are rather strained between my father and me lately. There’s no distinction between when he is working and when he is in his home anymore. Even that handy glass partition between his offices and our residence doesn’t separate the two for him. I miss the time he used to have for us—did you know I used to demand that he carry me downstairs to breakfast every morning via a piggyback ride? I would stand at my doorway and bellow, “Now, pig!” and off we’d go. I’d sit in on his morning shave too, and in between swipes with the razor, he’d tell me tales of the wilderness out west. But he’d never tell me any stories related to my mother. He hasn’t spoken of her, to anyone, →

Alice could show great confidence, but she always displayed a certain insecurity about her looks. She remarked that she was “a rather pathetic creature, terribly homely and [people] were saying I was pretty because I was the President’s daughter.” (Cordery, p. 71)

Footnote: (Kerley, p. 26)

That was the Roosevelt family’s attitude toward publicity, and Alice found it “so ridiculous.” Particularly because while the children were being told to avoid reporters, “there was all this interest in our every move.” (Teague, p. 70)

This is a real quote from Alice about her father!

This is a real tiff that Alice and her father had. According to Alice, “There was he, one of the greatest experts in publicity there ever was, accusing me of trying to steal his limelight.” (Teague, p. 72)

It was actually her brother Quentin who sent the letter, but in this story the relationship between Ted and Alice was more developed, so I switched the sender. Quentin was only twelve at the time he sent that sarcastic request, but he had a “cynic’s understanding of First Family fame”—like Alice. (Cordery, p. 53)

I love picturing a tiny Alice standing in her doorway and yelling, “Now, Pig!” (Kerley, p. 8; Cordery, p. 25)

since the day she died. Bye told me once my father's peculiar silence is because he feels such terrible guilt for remarrying. I suspect I must bring out that guilt in him too.

According to Alice, "He obviously felt tremendously guilty about remarrying, because of the concept that you loved only once and you never loved again." (Cordery, p. 22)

So you can see that even before all the country wanted a piece of Alice, things between my parents and me were rocky. If anything, that discord spurs me to pursue what I want even more, and right now what I want is to eat up this attention with my silver spoon. And so I shall.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

P.S. One dollar for the signature please!!!

February 5, 1902

Diary—

Today I shan't be writing of any of the foolish, selfish, or girlish things that normally fill my silly mind. For once all my attention is not on the needs and wants of "poor Alice" (do take notice). My darling brother Ted, my boon companion, is gravely sick. Off at school, he has taken ill with pneumonia. Father and Stepmother assure me that he will overcome it ("Ted's a Tough, Alice. He'll pull through this."), but fear has stricken my heart. Perhaps I am prone to fearing that I will lose those whom I love—remember I never had the chance to know my sweet mother. I couldn't bear it if anything were to happen to my dear brother. The Roosevelt children are split into neat little pairs: Ethel has Kermit, and the little ones Archie and Quentin have each other. Who will I have if I lose Ted? I am absolutely sick with worry and fear.

This is imagined dialogue, although President Roosevelt did refer to people as being "toughs" frequently.

When Archie had the measles and was confined to his room, Quentin begged a coachman in the White House to help him bring our beloved family pony, Algonquin, up in the elevator. Quentin knew that nothing would cause Archie to rally like a little quality time spent with his trusty steed. And he was right—from the minute tiny Quentin led Algonquin by the reins into his room, Archie was on the mend. Edith was livid when she discovered that there was not only a pony but a few road apples in her invalid son's room.

Even if Alice often felt at odds with her half-siblings and not fully part of her own family, she did consider Ted her counterpart: "Inevitably there was pairing off. Ted and I, for instance, were boon companions and shared many of the same interests." (Teague, p. 43)

I want to do something similar for Ted—be the force

This is a true White House story! Although I can't confirm that the pony pooped inside Archie's room. I added that detail to lighten up an otherwise angsty entry.

that helps him heal. I begged Father to let me visit, but he refused. He said that Ted needs time to rest now and having visitors will only tire him. I will keep begging my father until I wear him into the ground. Perhaps, if no other option becomes available to me, I will steal Algonquin to get there.

—Alice

February 26, 1902

Diary—

First—Ted is fine and well now. My parents finally let me go to him. While he recuperated, he had great fun playing with Emily (whom I smuggled in my luggage) and me. We terrorized the poor nurses with Miss Spinach, slipping her in his soup bowl when they'd come to pick up his tray. We sent more dishes clattering to the floor than I could count. →

This is totally made-up, but something I could imagine Alice doing. Even if Ted's sickness was serious, Alice rarely stayed somber for too long. It wasn't her style.

Now—the past three days have been an absolute dream! Yours truly got the honor of christening the Kaiser's yacht. Can you imagine? The German Kaiser himself didn't come to America for his new purchase, but dashing Prince Henry did. He arrived in Washington on the twenty-third. I didn't see him then because I was far too busy preparing for my official duties, i.e., smashing wine bottle after bottle in Auntie Bye's backyard. You see, due to my international popularity those planning the visit decided that I should be the one to crack a bottle of fine champagne against the side of the Meteor as part of the official yacht-christening ceremony. (What a waste of the champagne.) I was terribly nervous about the whole event! I certainly didn't know what amount of force would be necessary to break the darned bottle. But an hour in Bye's backyard and a thorough drenching in sparkling wine left me much more confident about the whole affair. →

Alice really smashed bottles of champagne in Bye's backyard as preparation for the prince's visit. She also wrote an "effusive" diary entry afterward and said she had "bully fun" at the event, despite her nerves. (Cordery, p. 56)

On the day of the christening we rose early, almost before first light, so we (Father, Stepmother, and myself) would be in Jersey City promptly at seven. I doubt I could have slept later, I was so nervous about my performance. We ate breakfast whilst traveling, and I managed to lap up some tea and toast despite a jittery stomach. →

While Alice was practicing, her father held a "stag dinner" for the Prince. The dessert served was "colored ice cream molded into fruit shapes and served in spun sugar seashells with the German eagle on one side and American insignia on the other." Yum! (Cordery, p. 56)

By half-past ten we arrived at the grand boat. I nervously made my way to the yacht, praying that I would remember exactly what I needed to say. "In the name of his Majesty

the German Emperor I christen this yacht Meteor.” There, I still remember it, and I did then too, speaking clearly and confidently and with a great smile. Next I took an ornamental knife and sliced the last bit of rope that kept it tethered. Edith held her breath beside me, afraid I’d slice my hands. Finally, with a great flourish, I smashed that bottle of fine champagne smack on the bow, sending a joyous spray of bubbly onto the yacht and the cheering onlookers. My parents said that I did a fabulous job and I believe them. Prince Henry made a point of congratulating me right in front of Edith. Euphoric, I felt as though I’d nipped at Bye’s liquor cabinet. But I swear on Ted I hadn’t.

Actually, Alice smashed the bottle first, but I wanted to build up to it in this little description.

He gave Alice a bouquet of pink roses and a kiss on her hand. (Cordery, p. 57)

After the formal ceremony we went to the Hohenzollern, the emperor’s other yacht, and had a celebratory lunch. I sat next to Prince Henry, on his left, and had bully fun speaking with him. I didn’t even have to do Auntie Corinne’s elbow-in-the-soup treatment to hold his attention. Contrary to popular belief, not all princes are handsome—but Henry fit the dashing role. Before you get any ideas, Henry is much older than I and happily wed. Anyway, he took one of the lunch cards and drew a charming picture of his favorite stallion for me on it, signing it with his name. On behalf of the emperor, Prince Henry also gave me a beautiful diamond bracelet. He even fastened it to my dainty wrist himself, and I thought my stepmother would have to pull out the smelling salts. All of the fetching officers of the boat presented me with flowers as well. Even though the event intended to honor Prince Henry and the Kaiser, it sure felt as though everyone was honoring Princess Alice.

The details in this paragraph are all true, but Alice’s reactions are fiction.

The newspapers unanimously proclaimed that I did a tremendous job with my official duties. The New York Tribune said that I “seemed unaffected” by all the attention lavished on me (ha, ha) and that I “stood in the glare of the footlights without flinching.” As should a Roosevelt! The sole group unhappy with me is the WCTU. Can you believe that those dry nincompoops lobbied for me to use a nonalcoholic substitute for the champagne? You’d think the old biddies would be happy that all the drink went to waste.

An actual quote from the paper. Not all public reactions were so kind; Henry Adams complained about the weather and snarked about Alice’s “hideous” diamond bracelet. The New York Tribune also said that “It is only a few weeks since Miss Roosevelt left the schoolroom and in a day she has become one of the most regarded women in the world, replacing the young Queen of Holland in popular favor.” (Cordery, p. 57)

I am so proud that for once I could do something publicly that was a boon to my father’s presidency. Not that all of the attention I get for my debut or my social events is

The WCTU pleaded for Alice to use a substitute and wear a white ribbon as part of a temperance pledge. (Cordery, p. 58)



necessarily bad for him—despite what my stepmother thinks. It is, though, a distraction from whatever real work he does. I am pleased that I could be of diplomatic service. I also hope that now that I've proven what a charming asset I can be, this will be just the start of Alice's political endeavors.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

According to her biographer, "it was the first example of the First Daughter's usefulness in foreign relations, . . . and the first time Alice's fame proved a boon to her father's presidency." (Cordery, p. 58)

February 28, 1902  
Diary—

First, if any of my maids are reading this entry, I swear on my mother's grave that I will seek revenge on you! I caught a maid peeking in this very journal the other day. I was flabbergasted. I may scoff at my stepmother's obsession with privacy, but when it comes to my diary, I believe in it too! I refuse to censor myself, but perhaps I will have to devise ways to protect my most private confessions from prying eyes. Maybe you've noticed already (you'd have to be blind not to have), but I'm trying to use Bye's peculiar style of handwriting here. She slants her letters to an almost unreadable degree. It's an awful lot of effort, though, and so far I'm imitating her style with a singular lack of success.

This detail condenses several Alice facts. Alice caught her maid reading her diary once and afterward she "slanted her handwriting to an extreme and unreadable degree" to hide confidential information. (Cordery, p. 97) She also wrote secret vows in the back to hide them from prying eyes. (Cordery, p. 59) Auntie Bye did have a unique handwriting style, which Alice attributed to her time spent in England. "[Bye] spent a long time in England and picked up a number of English habits. For instance, she had accumulated a slightly different style of handwriting, which I valiantly tried to imitate with singular lack of success." (Teague, pp. 23-25)

I am so very glum today. Despite my fantastic job at foreign relations with our German friends, Father is not allowing me to attend Edward VII's coronation. When we received the invitation, I jumped and ran the long hallway upstairs and did somersaults, terrifying some of our menagerie (as evidenced by Eli's squawks) as I cartwheeled into the Conservatory. That giddiness was short-lived. As soon as the papers caught wind, the White House was besieged with mail, from constituents who found it "inappropriate" for me to be lumped in with royalty. My father was sorry for me, but he explained that although some (mainly those already in favor of his administration) would not care if I went, many (mainly the fools in opposition to him) would be very, very upset. I don't like feeling like a pawn in the chess game that is his administration. This is precisely why politics frustrate me—they have a nasty way of getting in the way of living. Sure, I want to be a boon to my father's presidency, but I bristle at his presidency hindering my life. He tried to

This is a fictionalized response to a real invitation.

This is a simplified explanation of the opposition to Alice attending the coronation. If she went, she would have sat with much of European royalty in Westminster Abbey. Some people thought she should be considered "a princess of the blood;" others bristled at the idea of treating Americans like royalty, even if it was only symbolic. Also, many Irish-Americans wanted Alice to go only if she took along a petition in protest of the English treatment of Ireland and South Africa. They thought her attending the coronation was showing support for England. The White House received hundreds of letters about this, and it was decided that Alice should not attend. (Cordery, pp. 58-59)



tell me that I was a great help with the Kaiser's yacht, and I can help again by not going to the coronation. But! Going to the coronation is the stuff of my wildest dreams. If I had the ability and the power to choose in this situation, I would choose for myself and go.

To Thine Own Self be True,  
Alice

Alice wrote a secret vow in the back of her diary: "I swear by all I believe in that if it is any way feasible I will go to the coronation of the next king." The same issues would prevent her going to Jamaica half a year later, because Jamaica was an English territory. Alice wrote, "Mother says I can't go, as it is English territory and they would make a fuss about me. I don't give a hoot if they did. It's all because the newspapers kicked up such a row about my going over to the coronation in the spring." (Cordery, p. 59)

March 2, 1902  
Diary—

My ashen spirits are rising like a phoenix. I may not be able to go to England for Edward VII's coronation, but I am about to embark on a "consolation trip" to Cuba! I'll spend a month on the island doing all sorts of diplomatic chores for Father. I leave in only a few days. I have trunks upon trunks to pack, and Stepmother is constantly fussing over me, making sure that I bring everything I ought to and also giving me little subtle suggestions of how I should comport myself when I am there. I will not give her the satisfaction of making this pledge aloud, but I do intend to make my family proud, so long as Roosevelt pride and great experiences are not in opposition to each other.

Once my ship has set sail, I will have more time to write. But for now, I must pack and prepare. And teach Ethel how to feed Emily Spinach bits of fish and earthworms from the South Lawn.

Be True, and Bon voyage!  
Alice

This entry is what I like to call "informed fiction." Alice never said or wrote any of these things, but using what I knew about her travels, her relationship, and what garter snakes eat, I pieced it together.

She packed six-dozen photographs of herself—quite a lot at the time! (Cordery, p. 60)

March 12, 1902

Diary—

I haven't had a dull moment since we chugged out of New York Harbor. Do you know how absolutely invigorating it is to stand upon the deck of a great ship and watch your country fade behind you? To let your arms trail in the briny breeze and feel the salty spray cover your face? To know that you are setting out to see the world and soak up all the liveliness and love it has to offer? It feels like freedom incarnate. Even after the harbor's crowds faded and the rest of the delegation settled into their compartments belowdecks, I stood out near the rails and watched the sea sputter and churn. This is what I have needed for so long—a chance to get away from all the rules of my household and the tiny sphere of Washington and eat up more of the world. A great, big, heaping helping of life. —————→

Another informed-fiction paragraph. I tried to imagine how Alice would feel in this situation, finally getting to go out in the world after a few uneasy months in which she and her family tried to adjust to the sudden burst of attention to their lives.

Forgive me for babbling; I am simply mad for travel. As I write, I am already on the island of Cuba. It is a lush, steamy, and wild place. Not that my escapades here are wild—they are mostly diplomatic and I am behaving myself. My chaperone is one of the governesses from the White House, Annabelle Alsop. While she's not the most fuss-box chaperone I've encountered, she keeps too close of an eye on me for my taste. —————→

While Alice did have a chaperone in Cuba, Annabelle Alsop is a made-up name and character.

My days are full of little State-business adventures, like visiting a school for poor little orphans. My heart ached for all those little motherless rascals, perhaps because I halfway share their losses. But I've also attended charity receptions, teas, and parties. The army gave a cavalry review in my honor, which made me blush terribly, but I managed to stammer out some words to the handsome soldiers. —————→

Alice did all these things, and by all accounts she did them well. She was a "faultless First Daughter" in Cuba. (Cordery, p. 60) She described it as her "best official behavior." (Kerley, p. 26)

Speaking of handsome—I hesitate to tell you, for fear of more snooping from my maids back in Washington—but I must or my heart will burst. I have a beau. Edward Carpenter, one of the aides to Major General Wood. I fell in love at first sight with his uniform, and it did not take long at all for his sense of humor to win me over too. His blond hair is cut in the typical military fashion, he has an almost perfectly straight nose, he has wonderfully broad shoulders, he is taller than I am, and he has beautiful sparkling blue eyes. One side —————→

Edward Carpenter was an early love interest for the real Alice. Her diary entries from her trip to Cuba "[consist] almost solely of the ups and downs of her relationship with Carpenter, and an ongoing log of how much money she won or lost betting on jai alai." She did fall for both his sense of humor and uniform. (Cordery, p. 92)

of his mouth, the right, curls up noticeably more than the left when he smiles. It makes his smile even more dashing. He is so proper that he calls me only “Miss Roosevelt.” I break with tradition and call him “Carpenter.” When he says “Roosevelt,” it sounds like an incantation—or at least it has put me in a trance. He slipped me a note at dinner the other night. Trembling, I unfolded it. What sweet nothings might it contain? It read: “As I have nothing to do, I’ll write. As I have nothing to say, I’ll close.” I burst out laughing amidst the stares of our dinner companions. I love Carpenter’s wit; Diary, I do think I may love him. I will keep you closely posted on my interactions with my dear Edward.

Lacking information about how the real Edward looked, I took some liberties in describing him. I figure he must’ve been cute, if Alice was so obsessed with him!

This is true! Alice loved to “defy convention.” She also had a nickname for him: Lazy Ape. (Cordery, pp. 92-93)

This is a made-up note and interaction, but Edward and Alice did exchange letters for two months after the Cuba trip, and Edward often tried to be funny and show off. (Cordery, pp. 92-93)

I found this on an image of a Victorian greeting card—I was trying to see what would’ve been period-appropriate humor.

Other than swooning over my darling, I have taken a great interest in the game of jai alai. It is the sport here in Cuba—players hurl balls between each other, catching them in these odd little baskets called cestas. The game itself is not as interesting as baseball, but gambling on games makes jai alai bully fun. I do adore placing bets on the matches, and I am doing quite well for myself.

Two things Alice loved: cute boys and betting. She found both on the jai alai fields. (Cordery, p. 60)

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

March 20, 1902  
Diary—

I have a moment free to write because my chaperone Annabelle has taken ill after we ate too much spicy Cuban food. Poor woman, she hasn’t got a cast-iron stomach like I do. I can’t help it—I insist that we indulge in the local delicacies at every meal. My favorite thing to eat is “Congri,” a mixture of red beans and rice. Father ate it when he was here with the Rough Riders and told me to try it. You eat it with ripe and sweet plantains. The best sauce I’ve tried is Mojo, which combines lime, garlic, onions, and oregano in oil. It’s delicious. Oh, and I’ve stuffed myself with more tamales than I can possibly count. As much as I love consommé and soufflé, this Cuban chuck might be better.

According to her biographer, Alice ate lots of spicy food in Cuba. I imagined her slightly stuffy chaperone wouldn’t take to it with the same gusto as Alice. While I don’t know whether Alice ate these specific dishes, they are authentic Cuban foods. Theodore Roosevelt did spend time in Cuba with the Rough Riders.

If I were a good daughter of the president, I would be filling you with tales of schools visited, sugar plantations toured, and yellow-fever mosquitoes swatted. Alas, I am

a somewhat naughty daughter of the president and all I can think to tell you about is my dear Carpenter. What a hold he has over me. Heaven is watching him break into his lopsided smile for me, as a shock of his blond hair falls into his blue eyes and he brushes it away. I spend every possible moment with him, although Annabelle is constantly present. (I know the rules that must be obeyed for a girl of my class and political situation—one mustn't even emerge from a dance hall with her hair disheveled or a button innocently askew lest the rumors fly. Nevermind that with the elaborate hairstyles du jour, it's frightfully tricky to keep up appearances even in the most mundane and innocent circumstances.)

Later in life, Alice admitted, "as the daughter of the President, I was supposed to have an intelligent interest in such things as training schools, and sugar plantations, the experiments with yellow fever mosquitoes." (Cordery, p. 60) But she was busy being a teenager set free on a tropical island—with a new crush.

I worry, though, that Carpenter will grow tired of me or that he will discover how contrary and difficult a person I am (just ask my stepmother for confirmation). When will he abandon me, as everyone in my life eventually does? He accuses me of having a temper, which is true, and then I grovel, grovel, beg, and plead, so terrified am I that I have driven him away. When I'm with him, and not distracted by his handsome shoulders or good-fitting uniform, all I can think about is this desperate need to make sure he finds me beautiful and charming. Doubt gnaws at me—what if he thinks that a courtship with me will lead to great things for his career? What if that's the real reason he's interested in a plain girl with a gargantuan forehead and formerly crippled legs? And then there is the constant threat posed by one of my traveling companions, the lovely (wretched!) Janet Lee, whom I can tell Edward fancies by how he looks at her porcelain face. Being the president's daughter can't get a girl Janet Lee's beauty. I can never truly tell whether anyone fancies me because of who I am or because my father is Father. Deep down, I fear I am not quite pretty enough, or witty enough, on my own to garner much attention. And so I cling to the crumbs that fall my way.

Alice told her interviewer, "Woe betide the girl who emerged from the conservatory at a dance with her hair slightly disheveled. As one's hair tended to fall down at the best of times it was frightfully difficult trying to keep up appearances." She cited a friend who arrived at a home with buttons askew. "Consternation! I was told I wasn't to see her in certain houses after that." (Teague, p. 66)

Alice's courtship with Carpenter was stormy, and she wrote about her anger at having to "grovel" for a message from him. She did feel that her friend Janet Lee was serious competition for her affection (Cordery, p. 60). I've taken liberties with some of the self-doubt she experienced throughout her life in this entry—and applied it to her tumultuous relationship with Edward Carpenter.

We have little time left in Cuba. I will tour another sugar plantation, attend another ball, and then back to the United States we shall go. I hope Carpenter's favor travels with me.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

March 24, 1902

Diary—

I have left the magical island of Cuba in my wake, quite literally. As my ship prepared to leave the port, a crowd of friends that I had made on this bully fun trip came to see me off. After all the others had said their merry good-byes, Edward hung back. We had a few precious moments alone on the boat (I had to wait until Annabelle and the rest of our entourage were busy attending to the luggage). Carpenter seemed as melancholy as I felt, sighing and struggling to keep the lopsided corners of his delightfully masculine mouth from turning ever downward. We stood on a secluded part of the deck, the breeze whipping our hair and the sun shining in our faces. “Here, Miss Roosevelt,” he said, as he pressed a few photographs of himself (in his uniform!) into my palm. “I beg of you to write me, and often.” I said I would, and with “yearning,” I spoke in jest, but I still blushed and so did he. Then it was time for us to set sail, and he disembarked. I retreated to my compartment, where I sobbed pitifully. Janet and Annabelle bid me to come out on deck, but I staunchly refused. I even missed watching us leave the harbor, which I do somewhat regret now. It would’ve been nice to see Cuba fade away on the horizon. —→

Carpenter came onto the boat with a group of friends to see Alice off, and he hung back to give her photographs of himself. (Cordery, p. 92) But these details and words of their good-bye are imagined.

Now, of course, we are near to America. Having been abroad and free, I imagine it won’t be easy to be back under my parents’ roof and abiding by their rules constantly. This trip, plus my excellent performance with the christening of the yacht, should show them that they should let me taste a little more of the world even whilst I’m at home.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

April 13, 1902

Diary—

Life has been a bore since I returned from Cuba. Yet I must have learned something while I was abroad because I am much more willing now to “fulfill my role” as the First Daughter. My father wrote me, saying, “You were of real service down there because you made those people feel

that you liked them and took an interest in them, and your presence was accepted as a great compliment.” I think my stepmother worries a smidgen less about my wild behavior. Thus far, it is making daily life in the White House a little more harmonious.

A real quote from Theodore Roosevelt—although this was in response to Alice’s 1903 goodwill tour of Puerto Rico. (Kerley, p. 45) The diary doesn’t include details of that trip, so I applied the quote to this trip to another Caribbean island.

Adding some heft to the idea of Alice as an asset and not a liability, the Ladies’ Home Journal published a most flattering profile of me once I returned. It took up a full page and even featured an illustration of me, which I imagine might be clipped and tacked to the walls of many young girls’ bedrooms. “The typical American girl of good health and sane ideas” was one gushing compliment. Little do they know about my actual degree of sanity. At another point, they called me “gracefully slender.” I chuckle reading that, ruminating both on the gobs of Cuban food I stuffed myself with last month and also those hideous leg braces. After all these years, I swear I still feel them clasp my legs.

These are quotes from the actual profile of Alice. “Alice began in earnest her life as the First Daughter” once she was back from Cuba, and had to manage the tricky balance of being a teenager and a celebrity. (Cordery, p. 61)

I read the article and pored over the illustration—which was beautiful, but really didn’t resemble me. It bore my features, for better or worse, but it was some other, more beautiful, more assured Alice. After I put it down, I took my Spanish white lace mantilla out of my trunk. At first just to run my fingers over the finery, but then something compelled me to put it on. I locked the door, because I would die of embarrassment if Ethel or one of the boys would barge in and see me playing dress-up like a little girl. But no one saw me. I struggled into my best dress (omitting my usual formal undergarments did not make it any easier) and sat in front of my vanity. I tamed my hair in some approximation of the Cuban styles I’d seen, and framed it with the lace dripping from my head onto my shoulders. Then I paraded in front of my mirror, watching the fabric move and marveling at how I looked wearing it.

From Alice’s real diary, on April 13, 1902: “I dressed up this evening in my Spanish white lace mantilla and wound my hair and dress with brilliant pink roses. No one saw me, I simply paraded up and down and looked at myself in the glass.” (Cordery, p. 61) What a wonderful moment! What teen girl doesn’t dress up in her best clothes, or new makeup, and watch herself in mirror—just to try to see who she really is, and might be becoming?

I know I must sound beyond vain. But I simply am trying to see what the world finds captivating about me—and even wearing roses and Spanish lace, I can’t see what the fuss is about. My vanity is all bluster. If I were not the president’s daughter, I simply would be another homely girl, even when dressed up in finery.

“‘Vanity of vanities,’ saith the preacher, ‘all is vanity.’ And I have absolutely no reason at all to be vain.” Alice, so fierce and proud and charismatic, was still a girl trying to figure out “what the rest of the world suddenly saw in her.” (Cordery, p. 61) It’s a universal feeling, but it must be heightened when magazines start running profiles about you, and you become an idol to all the girls your age in the country.

I wonder, too, what my Edward sees in me. Can I ever



trust his affection? In Cuba I would only just convince myself that he only had eyes for me when I would catch him admiring Janet or some trollop. Then doubt would creep into the corners of my mind. I put on the dress and wanted to see what Edward saw in me; I wanted to see if it could be true that it really was Alice alone that captivated him. —————→

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

This is classic Alice—in life, she was always searching for proof that she was special, and not simply famous and fawned over because of her family. Being conspicuous was a way to make sure the attention originated from herself.

April 25, 1902  
Diary—

Most young ladies ride around town in a carriage. I have long taken to careening down Connecticut Avenue on my bicycle (oftentimes with my legs up on the handlebars to shock the passerby). But as a modern and mature young woman, a bicycle is simply no longer enough. I used some of my generous Lee allowance to purchase a runabout, a bright-red little open automobile. I drive it alone on short jaunts around the city. Ladies aren't supposed to drive alone, but I won't have anyone handle my "Red Devil" but me. Try to stop me—you'll have to run fast. I am ace at driving it. I have already been stopped once for excessive speed (it scares the horses). —————→ I tried to talk my way out of the fine, but apparently even the president's daughter must obey the traffic laws.

Alice told her interviewer about life in DC before her father was president: "The pace of life was leisurely. We would careen down Connecticut Avenue on our bikes from the top of the hill at Dupont Circle without encountering any traffic at all." (Teague, p. 52) According to her biographer, this was often with her feet on the handlebars. (Cordery, p. 34)

I like to take my new friend Maggie Cassini out driving with me. I met Maggie, the niece of the Russian ambassador, at a State Dinner. I came into the room with Emily Spinach wrapped around my neck, and Maggie hurried right over to try her on for herself. I think it goes without saying that we hit it off immediately. —————→

Alice bought a "red devil" touring car, in 1904. She did get fined for excessive speed on multiple occasions. Auntie Corinne wrote, "It must be great fun to run an auto, but do think of the life and limbs of your victims." (Cordery, p. 65)

Maggie, despite being young, functions as the ambassador for her uncle. You can imagine the protests surrounding that—an unmarried woman as ambassadress—but Maggie overcame them. She hosts the liveliest Sunday evening dinner parties at their residence on Rhode Island Avenue. She's my only real competition for attention in our social circle, but I consider her a worthy opponent. —————→

This is a fictional meet-cute for Alice and Maggie. In fact, their friendship started in the summer of 1903. I've mixed and matched the timing of some events throughout Alice's diary in order to tell a better—and more concise—story.

I taught Maggie how to drive, and in exchange she has promised to teach me some scandalous new dances (like the hootchy-kootchy, but European, and even racier). Maggie is a

All of these details are true, but for Alice's observation that Maggie is her only real competition in their social circle. Later on, she and Maggie would compete over boys—and have a falling out over a love triangle. (Cordery, p. 106)

kindred spirit indeed, a fellow seeker of thrills and experiences. She's a breath of fresh air—unlike some of my Puritanical girlfriends (cough, cough—Janet Lee). They care about appearances and manners and comportment; Maggie cares about having fun. Nothing shocks her. The only trouble is that she is very beautiful and wealthy, a Russian countess, so I may have to dip more into my Lee funds to keep up with her. She is certainly someone I want to keep up with, though. Every girl needs a dear friend, as much for sharing secrets as for sharing in mischief.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

Alice and Maggie both worked hard to keep up with one another. "The friends became experts at escaping their chaperones. Alice's spending habits worsened as she tried to keep up with the seemingly unlimited [budget of Maggie]. . . . Alice taught Maggie how to gamble. Maggie taught Alice how to smoke. [Their friend Cissy] taught both to dance the newest, raciest dances. . . . [They] scandalized New York and Washington with their disregard for proper behavior." In Maggie's own words, their friendship was "a veritable reign of terror." (Cordery, p. 74)

May 12, 1902

Diary—

I'm afraid I've had a foolish temper fit with my stepmother. I acted more like little Ethel would, stomping my feet and storming out of the room. Then Edith snidely remarked that I should thank her for the use of my legs—referring to how she helped me stretch them every night when I wore the braces. I would moan and cry and resist, but Edith wouldn't take no for an answer, telling me that if I endured the discomfort, I'd have normal, ladylike legs one day. Stepmother loves to take credit for the fact that I am graceful now, and I hate to admit that she deserves it.

Our scuffle today wasn't my fault, though! Edith got absolutely livid about a newspaper story concerning me. It said two different men were in love with me and that I was "toying" with both. The story was full of downright lies, of course—the only man I have eyes for right now is my Edward, whom the papers have never written about. What the reporters write about me is primarily fiction, and I can't be bothered with it. (Frankly, the falsehoods are a lot more entertaining to read than the truth of my life.) My fuss-box father and stepmother, on the other hand—they are horrified by what the papers say.

Of course, I barely see my father these days. I know whom I can blame at present—the petulant coal workers finally went on strike today, and now both the unions and

In a May 1902 diary entry, Alice wrote, "foolish temper fit this morning with Mother. A newspaper paragraph saying [two different men] in love with me." (Cordery, p. 62)

This remark from Edith is made up, but she did stretch Alice's legs each evening as a child, five minutes on one leg and seven and a half on the other. (Teague, p. 30)

the mine owners are clamoring for my father to intervene. The bottom line for me is that he will be unable to intervene in his own family's lives for the time being, as he lives and breathes this crisis. My father abandoned me once before when there was too much in his life for him to pay attention to me, so I suppose it's not unreasonable for me to fear that he might again.

The Anthracite Coal Strike began on May 12, 1902. It would become a pressing political issue for Alice's father in the coming months.

Here, Alice is referring to how her father "abandoned" her as an infant and a young child, while he went west and dealt with his grief for her mother. That perceived abandonment, and the feeling that she was "other" compared to her half-siblings, troubled Alice for much of her life.

Bye tells me that I push boundaries because otherwise I fear nobody will notice me. (She's an astute judge of character.) I always have to fight for my father's attention, if not his love. This adoration and admiration from the public and the press—I don't need to battle for it. I simply have to step out the front door and wave. Toss them a smile, and they love me for life. Tell me, if you were me, which would you choose? A life spent quietly inside the White House or one played out on the world's stage? See, I am not so rotten and scandalous. I always say, "Fill what's empty, empty what's full, and scratch where it itches." I'm full up of disapproval at home and empty of sufficient love. Moreover, I itch for experience.

A real quote that Alice is famous for. She lived by this saying.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

May 16, 1902  
Diary—

A quick dispatch for you on the subject of: cigarettes. My marvelous friend Maggie recently has taught me the art of smoking. It took some instruction—the first breaths I took of tobacco smoke were shaky, leading to coughing fits as soon as I expelled the cloud from my otherwise hardy lungs. Honestly, the experience of cajoling smoke into one's mouth and throat conjures little pleasure in me. It's harsh, sticky, and acrid; it coats your mouth and throat in a very disagreeable way. Maggie is such an expert that she can blow the smoke out of her mouth in distinct lines and shapes. I'm not sure I'll become the aficionado she is, but I'm looking forward to the next time the men at a dinner party gather in a den or library for smoking and political discourse—I suppose I will join in, blow a smoke ring or two, and shock the lot of them.

To be honest, Alice seemed to greatly enjoy smoking. I don't know that she would've said anything negative about the experience. But while it was important to me that I include details of her smoking—because they are historically accurate clues to Alice's character—I didn't want her experiences to be seen as condoning cigarettes. I used language here to temper her character's enthusiasm for smoking. The real Alice loved living life to the fullest, and I like to think that if she knew how bad smoking is for a person's health and longevity, she wouldn't have touched the stuff. But she didn't know, and during her time she loved how smoking was another boundary she could push.

This is an imagined detail about Maggie—but a plausible one, I think!

No woman has ever smoked in public in Washington. But I'd shock those men with my ideas too.

To Thine,  
Alice

May 24, 1902  
Diary—

So many things to tell! A few days ago, as I moped around the house because I hadn't a letter from Carpenter in ages, I wandered into a spat my father and stepmother were having about a French delegation's visit. Edith hasn't been well lately, and she didn't want to attend all of the tiresome engagements. As I loped into the room, my father stood up and said, "All right! Alice and I will go! Alice and I are Toughs!" I was secretly very pleased, although I tried to act nonchalant in front of my parents. My father knows how much the French adore me, and how I return that feeling, and that in all honesty the delegation would probably rather dine with me than with Edith.

Early in the day we headed out to Annapolis with our French friends to see the ship *Gaulois*. It was a beautiful day, with a bright blue sky and hints of summer carried in the warm breeze, and getting out of Washington was refreshing and rejuvenating. Seeing the ship wasn't as thrilling as christening the Kaiser's yacht, but it was still fun to get on board. It reminded me of Cuba. I was a bit of a ham between photographs, but Father didn't seem to mind as I charmed the French with my antics.

We returned to Washington and went straight to the French Embassy for a formal dinner. And that, Diary, was delicious (perhaps my brother Archie is right to tease me about how much I eat—we've had quite a few brushes due to that topic). The cuisine wasn't really what piqued my interest, though. Sitting next to me was the most dashing, debonair Frenchman: Charles de Chambrun. He slyly flirted with me during the whole meal, and I shamelessly did the same. When I sneaked Emily out of my purse as a test for him, he giggled delightfully and seemed intrigued that I would carry a snake around with me. Our hands

At Alice's time, "cigarettes were occasionally found in the hands of 'gentle and distinguished foreign women,' but never American women, whose male relatives loathed the idea. Once again, the First Daughter changed the rules. The Washington Mirror blamed her for the increased use of cigarettes women in public." (Cordery, p. 77) It's lamentable that Alice made more people take up cigarettes, but her refusal to be limited by her society's gender biases is impressive. Alice's parents would eventually come to joke about her smoking habit, with Edith saying, "We can't have a fire [at Sagamore] because the chimney smokes like a daughter!" (Cordery, p. 77)

President Roosevelt really said that while "energetically 'kicking his heels in the air.'" Edith did find Alice very "useful" for entertaining, and Alice often served as hostess in the White House and at Auntie Bye's parties. (Cordery, p. 63)

This is made-up, but can't you picture Alice doing that?

Alice told her interviewer, "Archie and I had a few brushes when we were young. I recall once when I had gone down into the pantry at Sagamore to fetch something and Archie came in and said, 'Look at Sissy in the cupboard, eating.' So naturally when I climbed down my foot happened to hit his mouth and there were screams of rage." (Teague, p. 43)

Maggie once described Charles as having a "crazy giggle." (Cordery, p. 107)

“accidentally” brushed on more than one occasion while we buttered our bread. Being in Charles’s charming company wiped my mind clean of any traces of Carpenter, from whom I received a very angry, inflammatory letter recently. Seems he was mad that I danced a cotillion with some other boy. Well, he wasn’t there for me to dance with, correct? He can’t expect “Princess Alice” to stand alone at a ball.

Of course, I will see Edward again in only days. He will visit the White House on the twenty-seventh. Days ago I anticipated his arrival with such eagerness that I could barely sleep, but now I don’t feel excited. My cousin Helen wrote me once joking, “How many little heartlets have you broken since I last heard from you?” I suppose I’ve learned the hard way that it’s better to be the one who leaves first. Poor Carpenter, he will have to learn that bitter lesson on his own too.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

According to Alice’s biographer, Alice met Charles at this dinner and found him “particularly handsome.” (Cordery, p. 63) I’ve imagined the details of brushing their hands at the table and bonding over Emily Spinach.

He “plaintively” wrote her and asked, “What ever did you dance that cotillion with him for? In your heart I believe you are fond of him.” (Cordery, p. 93) Alice could be fickle, and apparently she wasn’t the only one to have some insecurities in that relationship.

Alice could be somewhat callous about boys once they were out of her favor. She kept a running tally in her diary of her crushes and took pleasure in writing down which hearts she broke. There may have been some competition among Alice’s girlfriends about breaking hearts—as evidenced by that question in a letter from her cousin Helen Roosevelt. (Cordery, p. 87)

May 29, 1902 —  
Diary—

I am going to have to ensure that no one ever finds this diary because if some person does read this, and tells my step-mother that I have been proposed to, it will be “Off with her head!” for poor Alice. Yes, I am the recipient of a marriage proposal. Actually, I received two. It is quite a long story.

Two days ago, Edward Carpenter, formerly known as my beau, currently known as a fool, arrived at the White House. Sadly for Carpenter but (given the tumultuous nature of our courtship) probably best for both of us, Charles de Chambrun and a Knickerbocker gent in my circle, J. Van Ness Philips, have already swept in and swiped my interest from Edward. All four of us attended a dinner, during which those three relatively handsome young men all vied for my attention. (A scene straight out of one of my wildest dreams.) We were seated far down the table from my parents, so fortunately they didn’t overhear when Van Ness, after a bit too much

These events really occurred May 27-28, 1902.



of the whiskey I had smuggled to the dinner inside my long gloves, loudly turned to me and proposed marriage. I hadn't imbibed the whiskey myself, but still I could not control my laughter. Poor Carpenter appeared stricken, slowly turning as red as the wheels of a steam fire engine as it dawned on him that he had real competitors.

Yup, he really did that—and it really bothered Carpenter. (Cordery, p. 93)

The next day Carpenter and I went for a long walk in the gardens. He stammered and stuttered, and it took him over two and a half hours to explain to me how he felt about me. Poor Carpenter, I did love him once upon a time, but now I can only see how twitchy he gets when nervous, how his nose is actually slightly crooked to the left (in addition to his woefully lopsided smile), and how his Adam's apple pops out of his neck in a most distracting and unappealing way. Recall that letter he slipped me at dinner in Cuba? I no longer think his admission that he "has nothing to say" is part of a clever pun. It's close to an unfortunate truth. Yet here are the points that he managed to sputter out:

This is true. "He started off by saying that he was in love with me and then he asked me to marry him. He said he would give me a year and a half to think about it for then he would be a captain of artillery and in command of a light battery. He wants to call me 'Alice' when we are alone together. On the whole, he behaved like two idiots . . . I said positively no." Alice described the whole events as "foolish." (Cordery, p. 94)

—That he wishes to call me "Alice" when we are alone together (not "Miss Roosevelt").

—That he is madly in love with me.

—That he would like to marry me. (Personally, I feel that this was brought on more by the spirit of competition more than anything else. I saw how he used to look at Janet.)

I invented these thoughts for Alice, as well as the description of Carpenter. I wanted the qualities that had made her so lovesick in Cuba to get turned around here and show Alice's (probably self-protective) coldness when love turned sour.

I told him positively no. I told him that we were behaving like two idiots and that he could not possibly ask me to marry him. He tried to interrupt me and make his case again, but I wouldn't hear it. I bid him adieu and wished him well, but sternly. If he hadn't acted so idiotically, I might have felt remorse. But I didn't then, even if I feel a smidgen now.

An invented thought for Alice, but a girl in her position would have to seriously question a suitor's motives—she was the daughter of a very powerful man, after all.

I received notes this morning from both Carpenter and Van Ness. It's all very foolish of them. Of course at my age I am not in a position to accept their proposals, much as I might welcome the attention of a White House wedding and a husband to help me escape out into the world. Further, our society set has rules about these sorts of situations. Once a lady refuses a proposal of marriage, the man must accept it at once and refrain from asking again or otherwise pursuing her. To continue writing her, practically



begging—it's simply not done. Those boys know that. For that reason, I really can't pity either of them. —————→

Who would have thought earlier this spring, when my stepmother read that newspaper article about dueling suitors and got so angry at me, that the article was prescient? Certainly I didn't. I will do my very best to make sure that Edith never finds out about this little incident, and God forbid my father does. If they were upset about fictive multiple suitors, I imagine if I had to admit that two men really did propose to me within twenty-four hours, my parents would never, ever let me see the world outside my room again!

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

June 7, 1902  
Diary—

Alice is in big trouble, Diary dear. Thankfully, however, it's not because my stepmother found out about the proposals. Trouble started last week when Maggie and her Murad cigarettes came over. The scent of the "Turkish delights" must've wafted out of my room and across the hall to Edith's sitting room. All of a sudden my door burst open and Edith stormed inside, shrieking something about "being unladylike" and "filthy cigarettes." She snatched them right out of my hands and threw open the window. Then she called my father in from his office. Similarly displeased, he gave me a very blustery impromptu speech about how "no daughter of his would be smoking under his roof." I snidely pointed out that it wasn't actually his roof—it belonged to the government and the American people and he and I were temporary tenants—but that only made him turn a redder shade and sputter. Finally, I adopted a chastened expression and professed that I would never smoke under his roof again. —————→

Maggie was set to return home, but I gleefully said, "Wait, Mags my dear—I am only allowed not to smoke for one particular preposition regarding the roof of the White House: under. Should I be smoking over, around, through, on top of, adjacent to, etcetera, I see no reason why that's

These were some of the rules of Alice's society. Alice looked on these poor boys with such "disdain" because their persistence was breaking the rules. (Cordery, p. 94) Alice had a knack for knowing exactly which ones couldn't be broken. (Cordery, p. 89)

President Roosevelt did tell Alice that "no daughter of his would smoke under his roof." (Cordery, p. 77) But the specific details of this scene—that Edith caught Alice smoking with Maggie and that Alice tried to twist her father's words to give herself an out—are fictional.

breaking the statute.” Maggie’s red-painted mouth curled into a grin. “How do you suppose we get on top of it, then?”

→ This is more invented dialogue between the girls.

All us kids like to climb out our windows down to the grounds below, so I figured that from the attic level it would be easy to climb out and go up. We hurried up into the attic and opened the first window we came across. I went first, being more limber than Maggie. I swung myself out, grabbed the edge of an eave, and had Maggie lean out and push as I pulled myself up. Once I was entirely on the roof, I pulled her arms as her legs kicked up the wall toward the roof. The roof of the White House is flat, much like an unfinished terrace, so there was little danger of us slipping and sliding off into the shrubbery below.

→ I’m assuming that all the Roosevelt children did that, but I know for certain that Ethel claimed she had to climb out her bedroom window to avoid Secret Service surveillance (Alice questioned the necessity of doing so). (Teague, p. 66)

We settled near to the edge and happily struck a match against some brick. However, one of the Secret Service men on the grounds happened to hear us laughing and looked up. Eventually my father and stepmother were called outside and stood, hands on hips, ordering us to come down immediately. (Well, Edith was wringing her hands.) Needless to say, another talking-to followed. It won’t stop me from doing as I please, though. My parents ought not to be so controlling of me and so concerned with my “public image.” Someone must teach them a lesson about letting a girl live her life!

→ Did Maggie and Alice climb out a bedroom window to smoke? I like to think they might’ve! But this is a mostly fictional scene. Alice did once say that smoking on the roof was a direct result of her father saying that she couldn’t smoke under it: “I smoked on the roof, outdoors, and in everyone else’s house. . . . I smoked to annoy the family.” (Cordery, p. 77)

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

June 19, 1902  
Diary—

I have escaped the melodrama surrounding Philips, de Chambrun, and Carpenter and the repercussions of my little protest on the roof—by escaping to my beloved Chestnut Hill! I was so eager to get away that I packed my steamer trunk days in advance of the trip to Boston. My father teased me by asking if I was adopting President Harrison’s view of the White House as a jail. I countered that actually, a jail hasn’t got the same staggering number of rules. Or watchful eyes. Or snooping maids. I might’ve hurt Father’s feelings.

→ Alice did escape to Boston in June 1902, and spent three weeks with her relatives there.

Now that I am away, I do miss my siblings, and I

→ This is a made-up exchange between Alice and her father, but I think it illustrates the real, complex dynamic between them.

suppose I miss my father and stepmother too. In some ways, I am able to feel more like a part of my family while I am missing them. It's normal to feel lonely when you are away from your loved ones, but it's queer to feel lonely while surrounded by family. That's often how I feel at home. Here in Boston I am rightfully the center of attention around my friends and my Lee relatives.

One wonderful thing about Chestnut Hill is that neither the press nor the Secret Service men trail me here. Those men have started paying more attention to my whereabouts in Washington—I suspect per Edith's request. It's really a bother to have them accompany me when I choose to walk into town to shop or go out for a dinner party. Lord knows I love how the reporters and photographers fawn over me, but there is a real freedom in being able to leave the house in Chestnut Hill without one of them around to extrapolate rumors from my choice of shoes or take a picture of me with mussed hair.

Last week, my friend Lila and I drove to one of the Pops concerts. We didn't go in my runabout but a larger automobile that Lila's father owns. How I love driving; I love the dusters one wears, I love the noises autos make, I love the freedom of traveling at the speed of a team of horses. Or more. I have gotten another speeding ticket.

I may have the funds to buy a fancier automobile because Grandpa Lee has agreed to raise my allowance. That's bully good! I will be able to shop madly and keep up with the likes of Lila here and Maggie back in Washington. You might think that because I am the First Daughter, I must not want for anything. It's true that I have received all manner of loot as gifts, from foreign dignitaries and my "fans" alike. But despite our pedigree, my family does not have the same wealth as many of my well-heeled friends, and I have spent through my allowance countless times already trying to keep up with them. It's hard for me, because I have to fill my role as "princess" and look fashionable and live lavishly. I am afraid of what people would say if the newspapers reported that I *re wore* an old garment. Edith and I have altered old dresses such that not even the sharpest newspaper columnist can keep track of

This is an invented detail, that Edith asked the Secret Service men to keep a closer eye on Alice. She told her interviewer, later in life, that the security situation was "casual" compared to today, and that she could usually still take a walk or go shopping easily. There were crowds of tourists and gawkers at the White House regularly, though. (Teague, pp. 65-66) I added this to create a stronger connection between Alice's and Audrey's experiences.

According to Alice, it was the social conventions of her time—and the gossip related to appearance and behavior—that were so limiting when she was a teen. (Teague, p. 66)

Footnote: (Cordery, p. 63)

Alice's allowance was raised from \$1500 to \$2000 per year. That increase was more than the average worker in 1902 earned in a year! (Cordery, p. 63)

According to her biographer, Alice worried about money and sometimes overspent her budget. "She never felt she had enough money. Her diary is full of promises to marry only very wealthy men." (Cordery, pp. 63-64)

what I'm wearing, which is important. People love thinking of me as some kind of American royalty. If I stopped being glamorous and worthy of breathless newspaper stories, I worry I'd revert to plain, lonely, poor Alice.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

Alice and Edith did rewear and rework a lot of their clothes. Sometimes Alice tried to rewear dresses as a sign of sophistication, like the wealthy Hay girls did. "I had tried to make a similar effect by wearing a bridesmaid's dress I had from the wedding of Uncle George Lee until it was virtually dropping off my back from overexposure." (Teague, p. 61)

June 22, 1902  
Diary—

Well, I know not whether he is fit to handle my predilection for fine clothes and chocolates (and fine automobiles), but I have met the man of my dreams: Arthur Iselin.

Allow me to describe my love: he is tall and broad-shouldered and has a very dashing figure. His features are classic—a strong jaw and nose, and such full lips (not lopsided, either). Arthur's eyes are dark and brooding, and he has lovely, chestnut-colored hair. As soon as I saw him at a dance a few weeks ago—the first time I had seen him in years—I was in love. Lila kidded that she would go and fetch her smelling salts for me, if need be.

This is one true detail of Arthur's appearance—a girlfriend teased her in a letter about his "classic features." (Cordery, p. 96)

This description of Arthur is made-up. I wanted to contrast his appearance to Carpenter's, for interest and to show a bit more of Alice's fickleness in matters of love.

You might think that this infatuation is silly, considering that I've been in his company only a few short weeks and rarely get a moment alone with him, away from all of our friends and the requisite chaperones. It's not, though, thanks to our intelligent and stimulating correspondence. By pen he is the most charming man I've met; in person he is infinitely more so. His mind matches mine; it might even match my father's. Arthur laughs at all of my silly jokes and outbursts, and he told me that my "beautiful" eyes are worthy of the thousands of dresses fashioned in their color.

They sent each other letters, including one in which Arthur wrote "I love you, love you, love you . . . Madly! Madly! Madly!" (Cordery, p. 95)

Diary, I swear by all I believe in that if I receive a third proposal, from Arthur Iselin, I would accept!

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

In an actual diary entry from July 1902, Alice wrote "I swear by all I believe in that if Arthur Iselin ever asks me to marry him I will." (Cordery, p. 95)

July 2, 1902

Diary—

I am too angry for a long entry today. Four of my girlfriends cornered me after dinner tonight and tried to persuade me that I like Arthur too much. They had the audacity to say that they were simply “trying to open my eyes to his character.” Well, I know Arthur’s character, and I love it. They might think that he is a flirt, but they are wrong. They said that Arthur only wants to get into the right political circles, but they are jealous. I know Arthur loves me. He must love me. I can tell by how his dark eyes search out mine in every ballroom, dining room, or regatta we find ourselves both at. I simply won’t listen to my friends—they must be envious of my good fortune in love.

In July 1902, four friends did corner Alice and “gave [her] fearful lectures . . . because [she liked] Arhtur Iselin so much. They [were] trying to ‘open [her] eyes as to his character.’” (Cordery, p. 95)

Lila was not one of those traitorous girlfriends, but she and I are in hot water of another sort. You see, one of the papers reported that after attending a fancy dinner party, I was witnessed dancing with another young lady on the roof. Wearing only our undergarments. You can imagine how apoplectic Edith is—actually, I have to imagine it too, as I was informed of her displeasure through telegrams and a sternly worded letter. I’ve denied that said rendition of the hootchy-kootchy ever occurred, and I’m smart enough not to admit to it in these pages. Should I have danced in my underwear with Lila on the roof after a dinner party, well, I expect that we would have loved the rush from dancing unencumbered at a great height. We also would have loved the good spirits and cheers it would’ve evoked from our fellow partygoers down below us. I would also point out that, really, the types of undergarments good little Knickerbocker girls like us wear (the knickers we Knickerbockers wear! Ha!) are so binding and modest that we may as well have been wearing nun’s habits, and any ensuing controversy would be silly. If I were foolish enough to admit to doing that, anyway.

Alice’s response to her friends here is fictional, although her actual diary showed real, deep feelings for Arthur.

Another thing annoying me at present is that one of my Lee uncles is intent on breaking me of my “scandalous” and “unladylike” smoking habit. I have the distinction of being the first woman in Washington to smoke in public. Not that many people could’ve seen me with a cigarette in hand, so

The kernel for this little scene was that a newspaper once reported that Alice was seen dancing on a roof in her underwear at a fancy party (Kerley, p. 45). I took that detail and expanded it here. For the record, later in life Alice claimed that the newspaper was incorrect.

I'm not sure how word has gotten around. Perhaps people know because I sometimes "accidentally" spill the contents of my purse at dinners, showing all the attendees the four things I always carry in it to parties: a strange, foreign fertility icon given to me in jest by a friend; a pocket copy of the Constitution; sweet Emily Spinach; and my taboo cigarettes. (No girl should be without those four items.) I don't know whether it's the garter snake or the cigarettes that shocks people more.

Alice really carried these "four essentials" in her purse (Cordery, p. 78)

My point being—my uncle decided the best way to return me to Washington free of tobacco would be to sit me down and force me to smoke two big black cigars in a row. I suppose he thought my eyes would water, throat would burn, and it'd turn me off the stuff for life. Wrong! Although a cigar is a nasty thing to endure, I smoked both with feigned great enjoyment right in front of him, grinning broader as his face screwed up in frustration. When I finished, I licked my lips with gusto and asked him for a third. He snapped the box shut and stormed out of the room. (Thank heavens—I don't think I could have stood it!)

An actual quote from Alice on this: "I smoked them both through with enjoyment. He was sure I'd be sick, but I wasn't." (Cordery, p. 77) I added the line "a cigar is a nasty thing to endure" and details like "feigned great enjoyment" because I wanted to lessen Alice's enthusiasm for smoking.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

July 26, 1902  
Diary—

I think my dear friend Lila wanted to distract me from my obsession with Iselin, so she suggested that I join her in Newport. I gladly went—Newport, the summer destination for the wealthy. My jaw permanently dropped at the opulent mansions. They put my family's home at Oyster Bay to shame; Sagamore looks like a shabby groundskeeper's cottage by comparison.

The real Alice escaped to Newport because of a spat with her parents about her frivolous interests. (Cordery, p. 64)

I became tired of mingling with society after a few days. It's always in such situations that I think of how Edith and I refashion my old dresses, and then I start to itch. Isn't it off that the daughter of the president can still feel pangs of inferiority? Power and wealth are not really the same thing.

This is a true sentiment—according to her biographer, Alice knew that she did not have the money to keep up with the wealthy families of Newport. (Cordery, p. 64)

Dying to get back to Boston, where Arthur was, I



begged Lila day and night to bid adieu to Newport. Finally, she conceded—but on the condition that we take off by ourselves, with no chaperone. I, of course, thought that was the most genius suggestion I'd ever heard. Two bold and rebellious young ladies, taking off in an automobile by themselves and driving all the way from Newport to Boston. I've never driven that far without a chaperone.

Lila and Alice really did this—but your guess is as good as mine as to whose idea it was!

We decided it would be best to leave at dawn to avoid having some stick-in-the-mud stop us “for propriety’s sake.” I'd hastily packed my hatbox and trunk the night before, so as soon as the sun started to creep over the horizon, I slipped out of my room and met Lila in the hall. We got to the automobile without being noticed but had forgotten how incredibly noisy they are to start. I thought I saw some window shades snapping up as the car sputtered and gagged to get going. We laughed gaily as we readied ourselves in the vehicle and took off down the bumpy lane. I never looked back, so I don't know if by that point anyone was watching us. I can picture the lady of the house running frantically into the drive, still in her dressing gown and slippers.

Getting back to Boston took most of the day. Lila and I took turns driving—I drove much faster than she did, of course. Every time we passed an intersection with another road, I honked the horn madly. We stopped along the road at lunchtime and ate a few roast beef sandwiches that Lila had sneakily packed in the kitchen the night before, taking long swigs of water out of her canteen. We were covered in so much dust from the road that my white duster was completely black. My face and hair were darkened with soot too—except for two large circles around my eyes where the goggles had been. What a sight we were.

The papers only reported that Lila drove—but I had to let Alice take the wheel, too.

When we finally arrived in Boston, tired but exhilarated, Mrs. Paul was waiting at Lila's home, absolutely livid. She shrieked about how terrible and scandalous we'd been, and about how unsafe it was for us to take off on a long car trip. I put on my sweetest face and replied, “But it's terribly difficult to have such bully fun when a chaperone is present, Mrs. Paul.” She retaliated by sending a telegram to my parents.

This joyride was big news! The New York Tribune wrote: “In a big red automobile which snorted and bounced its way along the country roads leaving a cloud of dust in its wake, Miss Alice Roosevelt traveled yesterday afternoon from Newport to [Boston].” The paper went on to describe Alice as “tired, but thoroughly delighted with automobile riding” upon arrival. *Motor* magazine in 1907 wrote that Alice's trip from Newport to Boston was the “edict from the White House” to establish women's driving. (Cordery, p. 65)

Now that I am back in Boston, I have heard from my

According to the paper's report, they actually arrived at Alice's grandfather's house. But I thought he might be sympathetic to Alice, and I wanted a minor character to take this opportunity to get Alice in more hot water with her parents.

father by letter about how “disappointed” he is that I chose to go for a spontaneous trip by automobile. Sometimes I wonder, though, if the man who led the Rough Riders in Cuba and tamed parts of the West is really that put out when his daughter does something unladylike. Yes, certain types of toughness are not considered proper for a woman, but I can’t help it that I, like my father, am a Tough. He’s said so himself. Sometimes I hope that although he chastises me when I do something outrageous, part of him is proud of my spirit. If not, that’s just another abandonment of Alice on his part.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

This is a made-up reaction from Alice’s father. I wanted to create more tension in their relationship in order to tell a good story, and I thought getting in the paper for taking an unchaperoned drive was a good opportunity to do that.

August 4, 1902  
Diary—

The summer is winding down, and I am back in Washington. It’s strange to come home to a house full of young children after such a long stint in polite society. (Not that my friends and I are always so polite.) I was ambushed walking into the East Room yesterday by the little ones. Quentin pelted me with his toy gun and then Archie came in and beat me with a cushion. I almost got angry toward them until I remembered the fun I used to have doing the same with them. So I got down on my hands and knees and hid behind the furniture with them, waiting for some poor unsuspecting staff to wander through and get assailed. Ethel wandered in and Archie hit her square in the face with a throw pillow.

Can you believe that my stepmother is still in the midst of renovations? It’s now been a year since our family found our way into the White House. I long to live in a place that is neat and settled and not constantly being disrupted and changed, even if the renovations were sorely needed. If my father doesn’t win the next election, we may never enjoy the fruits of Edith’s labor.

What is making me melancholy about being back home is Arthur. I suspect that he holds little affection for poor me. At the last party we both attended, he barely spoke to

This is a made-up scene, and one of my favorites. I love thinking about the rambunctious Roosevelts running around the White House.

It’s true—the remodeling of the White House was still going on. (Cordery, p. 65)

me and spent the whole evening swooning over a beautiful Southern girl. I heard that he was disappointed that associating with me hadn't meant more to his prospects. Oh, I hate that I am so plain and unlovable! If I weren't, he might still care for me. —————→

Alice really saw Arthur at a party and remarked that "Arthur is very much in love and intends to marry a beautiful Southern girl." (Cordery, p. 95) This crushed poor Alice.

All I can think of these days, as I sit in my room and listen to the noise of children playing, renovations, and staff and visitors constantly tramping through the halls, is whether I shall ever dance with Arthur again. If he will ever again take my hand. If I should ever be able to kiss his handsome lips. My friends tried to warn me that he was fickle, but I couldn't listen. One can't control whom her heart chooses to love, and mine has chosen to love Arthur. I simply wish his would love me for me. —————→

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

Arthur's disappearing love threw Alice into a depression that took months to get over. She started sleeping more, moping around the house, and writing "poor Alice" and "no hope for Alice" all over her diary. (Cordery, pp. 95-96)

September 5, 1902  
Diary—

I'm writing in a somber state. Two days ago something terrible happened, and it has shaken me to my core.

My father was away in Massachusetts, and while riding in an electric trolley car, they were hit by a carriage. One of the Secret Service guards with him, dear William Craig, was killed. The children and I were all so fond of him. So was our father, who was fortunate to escape with mostly superficial cuts and bruises. Losing a good man like Craig is a tragedy, but one that could have been much worse. Only a year ago, on September 6th, President McKinley was shot and killed. That incident changed everything—it's the reason why the president has these brave Secret Service men to protect him. I shudder to think that another American president could have been lost with this fatal incident. —————→

On September 3, 1902, President Roosevelt's carriage was hit by an electric trolley. William Craig was killed—the Secret Service man that the young Roosevelt children were very fond of. Alice's biographer remarked that her diary entry of that day wasn't very emotional, but that "the accident must have shaken her, for her diary is full of her father's activities for the next few weeks." (Cordery, pp. 65-66)

Things between my father and I have never been easy. How many times have I reflected on my father saying that he can be president of the United States, or he can control me, but he cannot possibly do both? Sure, I laughed upon hearing his quip, but truth is afterward I slunk out of the

room and back upstairs, red-faced.

This is a made-up detail; in fact, Alice seemed somewhat proud of that comment. But for story-telling purposes, I needed her to show a little insecurity here.

I love my father, and I believe that he is an exemplary person and great leader and politician. I want to make him proud; I do want his approval; most of all I want his love. Perhaps sometimes, when I'm all mixed up in my melancholic love for Arthur Iselin or busy wreaking havoc in polite society with Emily Spinach, I lose sight of that aim and don't really think about my actions.

Alice changed some of her behavior after the trolley incident. She wrote, "Have begun to get up for breakfast." Breakfast was the one family meal the Roosevelts tried to eat together, and Alice sleeping in and skipping it (because of her late nights partying) had been a source of tension between her and her father. (Cordery, p. 66)

Hence the past two days, I have gotten out of bed early like the rest of the family. The first day I padded down the stairs to the kitchen and joined them at the breakfast table; their wide eyes couldn't hide their shock. I'd rejected the family breakfast, long a Roosevelt tradition, since before we moved into the White House. I shook off their stares and took my place at the table, stirring cream into my coffee with my head down, and when I looked up, I saw a tired smile on my father's bruised and bandaged face. It was hard to tamp down the lump rising in my throat, but Alice is a "Tough."

The specific details of this scene are fictional.

I think I will keep meeting with my family at breakfast time, even if that means doing some of my nighttime reading during the day. I might complain about Edith, but I do think she loves me as much as a stepmother can and should and maybe a little more. I love Ted and Kermit and Ethel and Archie and little Quentin. The quiet moments in the morning with them (well, as quiet as breakfast for a family of eight can be) ground me, give me some perspective during the rest of the day when I am presented with fickle Iselin or another false report of my engagement.

Alice's biographer remarked that is "wasn't Alice's style to wax sentimental about her feelings for her father." (Cordery, p. 66) So these more somber reflections belong to Alice the character.

I am so thankful that my father is safe and that September this year will not bring another presidential death to the White House. I pray for the family of William Craig, and we will all miss him so.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

September 25, 1902

Diary—

I have been busy lately, helping my father recover from a medical procedure related to the accident. Sitting around and helping him recuperate, I've allowed him to talk ideas and politics with me for long stretches of time. I surprised myself when I found what he had to say about politics interesting, for once. Some things we agree on, and some we do not. For example, I am accepting of homosexual love. I've said so many times at parties—my favorite quote on the matter is that I don't care what anyone's proclivities are, so long as he or she doesn't "do it in the street and frighten the horses." I repeated that idea enough in conversation that word got around, and I actually received a letter inviting me to become the first "honorary homosexual." What a newfangled idea! I adore it. I was going to show Father the invitation—jokingly tell him that I've earned their votes for him—but when I brought up the subject, I realized very quickly that our opinions could not be more in opposition. I kept the letter to myself, perhaps wisely, because Father has very traditional ideas on the subject.

But here's something we did agree on. Father's still consumed by the coal strike. The miners in Pennsylvania haven't backed down and neither have the owners, and my father is wrestling with the idea of whether he (i.e., the government) should do something about it. Now it's not only the unions and the coal company who will be affected; winter looms for the East Coast, and if the strike goes on, people won't have coal to heat their homes. It could be a chilly winter for this country if someone doesn't sort this out in a way that is fair to both parties. I think it is time indeed for the government to do something about an issue that concerns so very many people. Father has set up a fact-finding commission to find a way for both sides to end the conflict. At times like these, I feel so proud of him. In his words, he will lead them all to a "square deal" for both parties. Father was quite pleased with my interest in the subject. My parents keep telling me that I need to take up interests "outside myself." I can practically hear them thinking, *Why can't Alice be more like her cousin Eleanor? So serious and studious and engaged in charity works*

After the accident, President Roosevelt had to have the bone of his left leg "scraped" by a doctor. Alice kept him company during this time, and wrote that they were "getting on splendidly." (Cordery, p. 66)

This is true! Alice once received a letter from a "Gay Liberation group" that offered to make her their first "Honorary Homosexual." She marked her father would have been "mystified" by that. Alice told her interviewer, "I've always been a supporter of people's sexual rights 'as long as they don't do it in the street and frighten the horses,' as Mrs. Patrick Campbell said." (Teague, pp. 81-82)



with the Junior League. In my defense, I have made public appearances for the sake of charity. I've simply made many more for parties and balls.

Lest you think I am turning angelic, when I haven't been by my father's side, I have been reading up on draw poker and dice throwing. I really wet my whistle for gambling in Cuba. Some friends of mine and I have little secret poker games after dinner, and I am bleeding them all dry with my winnings. Gambling on an actual race or game is my favorite, but poker and dice are the surest ways for me to amuse myself lately. I've told Maggie about my betting history and made her jealous. She's never gambled apart from poker playing, so I'm tutoring her in what little I know. One of these days, we'll escape to the Benning racetrack and make a mint. I have to admit that any time society labels an activity "unacceptable" for women, my interest in doing it, well and often, increases significantly.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

October 15, 1902  
Diary—

It is the wee hours of the night and I am still awake, sitting in my bed surrounded by books, unable to sleep but too agitated to read. I got a letter from a friend today and read all about how Arthur was seen flirting with some other girl. I suppose I was right, and the lion's share of his infatuation was with the novelty of my unique position as First Daughter. People always comment about what a charmed life I must lead because of that, but here's a confession, Diary: It's horrible at moments like this. I feel so foolish for believing that Arthur had eyes for me. Or for me only, I suppose. Compared to my friends, I am nothing. The countess and the belle, Maggie and Lila, are so attractive and bright and everyone likes them so much. They don't need titles like I do. It's hard to have beautiful friends like them while being a perfectly nondescript sort of person, physically.

Now I am so miserable, living in a world without Arthur's

An entry in Alice's diary at this time "contained what was for her then an unusual statement of position on a political issue," regarding the anthracite coal strike. Alice wrote, "I think it is time that the government should have something to say about a thing which so much concerns all the 'people' as the great coal industry does." Alice was trying to take an interest in something, on the suggestion of her parents. (Cordery, p. 67) "My father was always taking me to task for gallivanting with 'society' and for not knowing more people like my cousin Eleanor." (Teague, p. 77)

Although later in life Alice said she didn't start playing poker until she was married, her diary shows that at this time she started reading about it. (Cordery, p. 66)

This explanation of Arthur's fickle relationship with Alice is fictional, although Alice was sensitive about receiving attention for being Teddy Roosevelt's daughter.

Comparing herself to two friends, Alice said, "It is very hard to have friends like them and be one's self a perfectly nondescript sort of person. I don't think I have made an impression on anybody." (Cordery, p. 68)

affection. After all this heartsickness, I doubt I will ever marry. I don't want to be abandoned by anyone else in my life; Tough or not I can't bear it. So I'll be a fabulous old maid. I'll host parties for rich, powerful, and brilliant guests and be a Washington Grande Dame—on my own. Perhaps I'm lucky to be the child of a successful politician because I don't need a husband to gain entrance to these spheres of society. Bully for me.

To cheer myself up, I think I will scrounge up some friends for a day at the races. Maggie will surely be game. Technically, there's no harm in us attending Benning race-track; it's the betting that rankles the fuddy-duddies. I must ensure that no one (particularly those wily reporters) sees me exchanging money for a bet. The racetrack will be good medicine for my melancholy. Nothing lifts my spirits like earning some greenbacks through gambling.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

November 16, 1902  
Diary—

Well, lo and behold: Alice is in big trouble again. Maggie and I, along with some other friends, did head to Benning track last Saturday. After checking for reporters, I proudly stepped up to a bookie and placed several bets. I won plenty, Diary! I shrieked and jumped up and down, clicking my heels, letting out unladylike war whoops. One less dress I have to worry about refashioning for the holiday season.

However, some sneaky camera-fiend at the track managed to snap pictures of me placing that bet, and now hell hath broken loose. My father's advisers are wringing their hands, crying that this will ruin him politically, because "he has permitted me to become a 'scarlet woman.'" The words of the WCTU biddies, again. Oh, and apparently they have also taken issue with my public gum chewing—the advisers were moaning about that too. Would they rather my breath reeked of tobacco?

Anyway, although the papers reported my bet, they did so as a rumor, and some of my father's friends managed to

Alice wrote, "Arthur Iselin simply hates me...I should never get married, anyway not for a long time and then only for love." (Cordery, p. 96)

I wanted Alice to turn to the strong female role models in her life here—Auntie Bye and Auntie Corinne. I think her stepmother was a good role model, too, but in her teenage years, I don't think Alice would've agreed with me. Their relationship had too much tension.

Alice and friends did attend the races at Benning, and a journalist took her picture as she handed over money to make a bet. (Cordery, p. 78)

The Women's Christian Temperance Union did write Alice's father and ask how he could let her "become a scarlet woman." I tweaked things so the comment would come here as opposed to some of Alice's earlier shenanigans. (Teague, p. 84) Newspapers, not the WCTU, criticized the gum chewing and begged other women not to "emulate" Alice. (Cordery, p. 74)

stop the sale of the photographs and retrieve the images. I asked Edith if I might frame the snapshots and hang them in my bedroom. She frowned and ripped them to shreds. I am a bit disappointed. Betting becomes me. —————→

It's true that her father's friends stopped the sale of the photographs. (Cordery, p. 78). But it's fiction that Edith ripped the photos to shreds.

Also disappointed is my father. After the interest I took in the coal strike and the good work I've done charming Prince Henry, the French delegation, and all those people down in Cuba—he thought I was growing into a real asset for his political career. But now he says he's not so sure if I'm not another publicity fiend taking advantage of his important position. Diary, that stung. His own daughter out to take advantage of him! I profess, some of my greatest memories since we became the family in the White House were those I spent helping my father out. When he said we were both "Toughs" and could host the French together—well, moments like that are when I think that maybe I do belong in this family after all.

He remains highly annoyed about the whole betting debacle and although I've tried to stop by his office and inquire about politics or philosophy, he's brushed me off. Have I really crossed the final line? I know I've said that I want to escape my federal prison, but I wish to do so on my own terms. Not get sent off in shame once again. Did I make my fears of another abandonment by my father come true? Please let that not be so. —————→

The last two paragraphs are fictional, although these issues between Alice and her father are well-documented.

TTOSBT,  
Alice

December 12, 1902  
Diary—

What a mess I've made of things lately. I've alienated my father after working so hard to get into his good graces; I've let my heart be broken by Arthur Iselin; and I've even bet a bit too much in poker. The holiday season should be merry, but I feel bleak. No one has been paying much attention to poor me lately at all of the holiday parties and dinners. I have been bringing Emily Spinach out to play when I can get away with it, so I don't completely fade into the wallpaper. I also started eating asparagus with my fingers, while wearing

my elbow-length gloves, until my stepmother noticed and made a huge fuss. That detail made the newspaper gossip, which seems stupid. Shouldn't there be more important things for reporters to write about than my asparagus-eating habits? The East Coast isn't freezing this winter thanks to my father's Square Deal—maybe that's why the press has so much free time to report on my table manners.

Alice's asparagus-eating habits really were snarked about by commentators. (Cordery, p. 89)

"Square Deal" was Teddy Roosevelt's term for the solution he found for the coal conflict.

Today I went to Bye's house, my sanctuary, and visited with her and Cowles until evening. We had a nice fireside chat, during which she urged me to repair my relationship with my father. She suggested, in a gentle way, that it was time for me to find ways to be rebellious while being a lady. She also said, "Perhaps, my darling, you need to stop focusing so much on how you are separate from our clan and more on the ways in which you can integrate yourself with your family—even Edith." Loneliness and sadness and self-pity are like vines, according to Bye, and they have ways of overtaking whomever they are growing on. One must cut them off lest they grow unchecked. It reminded me of what the preacher likes to say, "God helps those who help themselves." Maybe they're both right.

This is a made-up scene, and the Auntie Bye quotes are invented. I wanted to create a bit of parallelism between Audrey's scene with Harrison in which she decides to write her essay.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

February 6, 1903  
Diary—

Since I last wrote, we celebrated Christmas and I have been to New York and back. Christmas was jolly enough—I slept in until noon and then went shopping on the eve. On Christmas Day, my father gave me a fascinating baby pistol, and I skipped out on church to practice target shooting on the glass garden houses on the South Lawn (they will be removed as part of the renovations, lest you think I was committing a federal offense by riddling them with bullet holes). Like my father, I am quite the shot. I also received an etiquette manual as a gift, which I have grudgingly studied.

Real details from the Roosevelt Christmas, 1902. (Cordery, p. 68) Alice loved playing with her pistols. She shoot one off the back of the train once.

I left for New York after the holiday, thinking I needed a change of pace to pick up my spirits. Despite a civil holiday,

my parents and I were still at odds. Yet social rounds in New York only made me feel homesick. In the midst of one dull dinner, I meditated on my last conversation with Bye. Then I had an epiphany—that I must work to find a home within my family. So I sent a telegram to my parents, telling them I would be home to them earlier than expected. I added, “Father: will make self useful as well as ornamental.” I hopped the next train to Washington. When I walked in, my family was waiting for me in the reception room. “My darling daughter, my little Tough is home!” my father cried as I entered the room. The little ones ran up to hug me. I said something barbed but witty, to distract everyone from the fact that their welcome brought tears to my eyes.

Alice did flee to New York after the holidays, but the rest of this paragraph is made-up.

Later that day, I marched into my father’s office. I told him I was ready to be of service to him, to help his political career and stop hindering it. His eyes twinkled in a way that suggested he didn’t believe me, but he said, “Go on. Tell me how you’d like to help.” Very seriously, I said that I am a real asset when I travel and that I can charm a crowd like few other women can. I wanted him to use “Princess Alice” as an ambassador. As a child, I begged him, “let me loose in your library.” Now I begged him to let me loose in the world, and let me spread goodwill for his administration.

Alice did beg her father with these words. His library “was enchanting.” (Teague, p. 55)

And then he gave me permission to go down to New Orleans for Mardi Gras! I can’t imagine anything more enthralling than a real New Orleans Mardi Gras—parties, parades, masquerades, balls, and the like. It will be bully fun. I will be staying in luxury at the McIlhenny home on Avery Island, right where they make the famous Tabasco pepper sauce. I expect I will get to indulge in spicy food again!

This is another made-up scene. But historians do think that Alice increased her father’s popularity and he appreciated her help. (Kerley, p. 45)

The best part is, my father said that this is a test—if I behave myself in the midst of Mardi Gras, he will send me on more trips abroad. Sometime soon, a delegation must go to meet the emperors of China and Japan. If I prove myself reliable and worthy, like I did in Cuba, I will travel to the Orient. I am so happy, Diary—happy that I will be getting a chance to eat up the world, and happy that my father’s trust in me is coming back at long last.

Alice had a great time on this trip—attending carnival balls, and coming out “ten ahead” on a bet. (Cordery, p. 72)

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

In truth, Alice’s trip to Mardi Gras, and the resulting publicity, led to some tension with her step-mother. (Cordery, p. 73) However, my story of Alice is winding down by this entry, and I wanted Alice to find some resolution with her parents—so I took the story in a slightly different direction than the facts.



February 12, 1903

Diary—

This was Alice's nineteenth birthday.

I think I may have fallen in love again.

Today was my birthday. The whole clan ate breakfast together, and I received some presents—a new dress (Alice blue, of course), a new purse (large enough for my four essentials), and some needlepoint materials from Edith. She said she will teach me how to make new pillows for my room. I know what I will embroider on one—"If you can't say something good about someone, sit right here by me."

These details about gifts are mostly fictional—I was looking for a way to bring up Alice's infamous embroidered pillow. I doubt she created it this early in her life (if she sewed it herself at all), but I wanted to include it because it has one of my very favorite witty Alice quotes.

My father took an hour on my birthday morning to sit in his library and talk with me—talk about great ideas, about great thinkers (whose books he gave me, including more Mark Twain). Someone stopped in while we were speaking, to ask him about some union issue, but Father actually told him he must wait until he was done conversing with me—and that he was busy teaching me to be an ambassador to his presidency. Father said I am the brightest young lady he's ever encountered and how proud of that he is. I had to struggle not to cry (again!), but I succeeded. The sadness I've been carrying around due to all of our scuffles the past few years—it just lifted a little more. He did say that while he knows I will always be high-spirited, if I want to help him I will have to choose wisely how I let my spirits carry me in public. I suppose I can be distinctive without shocking people for the heck of it. Well, most of the time.

As pointed out earlier, Alice didn't like to get sentimental about her dad in her diary. But I needed to resolve Alice's relationship with her dad in this last entry, so I worked in this fictional scene. (Also, the real Alice never really stopped shocking people for the heck of it.)

I spent the afternoon at Bye's, preparing for a dinner I would hold there for some friends in my social circle. Lila and Maggie attended, and a few Knickerbocker boys. But the most interesting (to my girlish heart) attendee was Nick Longworth. Nick is a Harvard fellow, and like my father, he was a member of the Porcellian Club there. That's why Nick attended my party—my father thought we might enjoy each other's company. I doubt it crossed his mind that I might be less interested in Nick's tales of Harvard life and more in his dashing figure and slick mustache. He's quite a bit older than I am but one of the most eligible bachelors in Washington.

The real Alice first mentioned Nick Longworth in a diary entry on this very birthday, after he attended her birthday dinner. (Cordery, p. 103)

I don't know that Alice's dad invited him to the party, but Alice did first hear about Nick from her father. (Cordery, p. 103)

Although I could be a ninny and wax philosophic on Nick's dapper clothing or his sparkling and smart eyes, I won't. Instead, I will tell you that I have met a chap who

likes to tell a joke as much as I do, who is known to be an excellent gambler (and he admitted to hearing tales of my impressive winning streaks and begged to see the photographs from the day at Benning), who loves travel and adventure, and who is as passionate about politics as my father. It's not often that I meet someone as tough, smart, brash, and lively as a Roosevelt. Nick is the sort of person who wouldn't be intimidated from a hunting trip with Father or a night debating politics with Bye.

And, you know, unlike most people I come across, he never once asked a question about my father. Instead, he wanted to know my opinions, why I loved Twain so, what my tales of Cuba were, and my secrets to gambling success. Me, Diary. He took an interest in me.

I always dream about finding a suitor who has a compatible spirit, someone who likes to be a little conspicuous and a bit renegade. But most of all, someone who will see me outside my father's formidable shadow. Dare I think that I may have found someone like that? I know I have cried "wolf" with matters of the heart before, but I think I might've found a person who can free me from fears of being "poor Alice," who won't help me escape the White House but will escape with me into the greater world, so I can really start living my life. We shall see, Diary.

To Thine Own Self Be True,  
Alice

I closed the diary with informed fiction. Although Alice did fall in love with Nick and went on to marry him, her thoughts here belong mostly to Alice the character.

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**More links and resources are available at the author's website, [www.rebeccabehrens.com](http://www.rebeccabehrens.com)**