

Down a Little Dirt Road  
by  
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## CHARACTERS

ALICE - Female, 9. An adventurer, storyteller, and a kid.

DAD - Male, 30's. A scientist who studies earthquake prediction, and father of Alice.

MOM - Female, 30's. Artistic, athletic, and mother of Alice. She gets lost, but is not one to panic.

MCKAY - Male, 30's.

TIME: Now-ish

PLACE: A small home in Parkfield california, dream-space, and somewhere that is neither here nor there. Occasionally we visit Dad's office, and Alice's classroom.

(Dad sits on a bench outside, reading. The sounds of a ball being hit, off. Someone yells from offstage: Heads up!)

(Dad looks up. A moment of panic. He shields his head, and a baseball lands in his hand. He is shocked. He caught something.)

(Mom enters with a bat. She sees Dad with the ball.)

MOM

Am I out?

(They look at each other. A moment.)

(The moment is broken by Alice, in bed, listening to the story. Her bedroom is all in boxes. She protests.)

ALICE

That isn't right.

DAD

What do you mean, it isn't right?

ALICE

That's not the Real Story of how you met.  
Do the Real story.

DAD

Okay. The Real story,

(Mom and Dad confer.)

MOM

Do you want to do the coming in, or should I be the one who-

DAD

Yeah, where I'm here and you-

ALICE

No talking in between!

I'll do your transition music until you're ready.

(She does her own version of something vaguely reminiscent of 'Peter and the Wolf' as Mom and Dad get into position. Dad gets work, and sits, working. Mom exits.)

ALICE

Ready?

MOM AND DAD

Ready!

ALICE

Okay.

Action!

(Mom enters with a pile of books, and looks around for an empty seat. The only one is next to Dad. She approaches.)

MOM

Is this seat taken?

DAD

No.

MOM

Do you mind if I share your table?

DAD

Not at all. Have a seat.

MOM

Thanks.

(She sits and reads. They read. And read. Alice protests.)

ALICE

Then what happened?

MOM

Nothing. That's it. That's the whole story.

ALICE

Really?

DAD

Pretty much.

ALICE

Okay, well that story is Boring. You guys could really use a better one.

DAD

We could, huh?

ALICE

That one is Completely Boring.

DAD

Well, what would your story be, if you were telling it?

(Alice thinks)

ALICE

Can I get up and show it?

MOM

Is it short?

ALICE

Yeah.

(Alice gets out of bed.)

ALICE

Dad, you get in bed and pretend to be me listening to it, okay? Just sit there and don't say anything.

DAD

How can I possibly be you and not say anything?

ALICE

Dad!  
Just pretend, okay?

DAD

Allright.

(He gets in her bed.)

DAD

I'm you, listening.

ALICE

Okay good.  
Mom, you pretend to be yourself and go over there and I'll be Dad and I'll whisper to you what to do and if there's anything to say, alright?

MOM

Over here?

ALICE

Yeah.  
Pretend like you're hiking in the mountains, only don't move anywhere.

(Mom pretends to hike without moving anywhere.)

ALICE

Okay.  
So Mom is hiking in the mountains a long time ago before I was born. And so was Dad. But they don't know each other and are both by themselves.  
Mom was higher up the mountain, but she was tired and slower so Dad eventually caught up to her.

(Alice catches up to Mom)

ALICE

But! Before they can say Hello or start to kiss or anything, there's a Giant Earthquake!  
(Pretend there's a giant earthquake)

MOM

(Like this?)

(She shakes)

ALICE

(yeah that's good. Keep doing that for a long time)

MOM

I'll do it for ten seconds.  
Ten, nine, eight,

(She continues to count down under  
Alice)

ALICE

The Giant Earthquake Epicenter was exactly under Mom's feet! And  
right then the earthquake made the earth split wide open!  
And Mom Fell In!  
(Pretend to fall!)

(Mom pretends to fall)

DAD

Earthquakes don't usually split the earth open, Alice.

ALICE

Dad! You're pretending to be me! Stop being scientific!  
Mom is falling inside the earth that was split wide open because  
of the earthquake, and Dad is right there, so he sees it all  
happen! And he runs forward! And takes a long rope off his  
backpack! And ties one end around a tree and the other end  
around his waist, and dives straight into the earth after Mom!  
He is at the very end of the rope when he catches her, and  
together they pull themselves back up to above ground again. And  
when they get there the sun is setting. And they sit and watch  
the sun set.

(Pretend to watch the sun set.)

MOM

(O.K.)

(Mom puts her arm around Alice,  
and pretends to watch the sun  
set. Beat. They begin a game  
they know and play often. For  
each line they speak, they mime  
doing the action after.)

Take a breath,  
Blow a wish,

ALICE

Pluck a chord,

MOM

Fish a fish.

ALICE/MOM

Cross a lake,  
Swim a stream,

MOM

Climb a tree,

ALICE

Dream a dream.

ALICE/MOM

(They pretend to sleep with their  
heads resting on the other.)

And then, you started to fall in love.  
(Dad! Switch.)

ALICE

(Alice and Dad trade places. Alice  
sings their transition music.)

(fall in love)

ALICE

I love you.

MOM

I love you too.

DAD

How much?

MOM

A Richter scale ten.

DAD



MOM  
How is that different than a regular ten?

DAD  
It's more violent!

(He bites her neck.)

ALICE  
Dad, this is serious!

MOM  
Alice,

ALICE  
What.

MOM  
You forgot one thing.

ALICE  
I did?  
What did I forget?

MOM AND DAD  
The Kissing!

(They dive at Alice, and kiss  
and tickle her. It is a game they  
play almost every day. Laughter  
all around.)

ALICE  
Stop! Stop! Stop! No more tickling!

(It calms down. Dad gets out of  
bed.)

DAD  
Alright, Alice. I'm done being you. Back in bed.

(Alice climbs in.)

ALICE

Did you like my version better? Wasn't it Way more interesting?

DAD

It was definitely entertaining.

ALICE

From now on can we tell that one as the Real Story?

DAD

We'll see.

(He kisses her on the forehead)

DAD

Goodnight, Alice.

(Mom kisses her on the forehead)

MOM

Sweet dreams.

ALICE

Night.

(Mom and Dad turn out the light.)

(Mom and Dad sing together, in a well-practiced harmony.)

MOM AND DAD

Down a little dirt road  
on a little oak tree  
sits a little red bird  
who sings to me,  
Alice, Alice, Alice,  
Alice, Alice, Alice,  
Alice, Alice, Alice,  
Alice, Alice.

MOM AND DAD CONT'D

The little red bird  
on the little oak tree  
down the little dirt road  
who sings to me sings  
Alice, Alice, Alice,  
Alice, Alice, go to sleep  
Alice, Alice, Alice,  
Alice, dream deep.

(The song turns into a recording  
of Mom and Dad singing. It ends.  
We come out of the Story to Alice  
at school. Mom and Dad are gone.  
She stops the tape, and addresses  
her class.)

ALICE

So that's the whole story of how my parents met.  
I don't remember what year they said it was, so I left that part  
blank. Is that okay, or should I find out and turn it in later?

(A shift. We transition to Alice  
and Dad at home. They eat dinner  
in a kitchen that is still mostly  
unpacked boxes.)

ALICE

Everybody thinks I'm weird.

DAD

Sometimes it takes a while for people to warm up to someone new.

ALICE

I don't think they even want to try to warm up though.  
They just think I'm weird.

DAD

What makes you so sure?

ALICE

Because they all stare and don't talk to me. And they've all  
known each other forever like a family and I'm just some weirdo  
from weird San Francisco who doesn't know anything about  
anything.

DAD

Being different is never easy.

ALICE

Nevermind.  
You won't understand anyway.

(beat)

ALICE

They don't even have different grades! How can you be in school and not have different grades?

DAD

There are different grades, just not different rooms.

ALICE

Well sitting next to kindergartners is stupid. We even had to do a dumb lesson all together today about remembering to remember things.

(She holds out her finger. There is a string tied to it.)

ALICE

Some of the little kids don't even know how to tie a knot yet. Will you help me get it off?

(Dad starts to work at the knot on her finger.)

DAD

What is your string a reminder for?

ALICE

Nothing.

DAD

There isn't anything you need help remembering?

ALICE

No.

(Dad works at the knot.)

DAD

Maybe I should have you tie it onto my finger then.

ALICE

Do you need reminders to remember things?

DAD

Mmhm. I need reminders for Meetings, Deadlines, Schedules, Talks,

ALICE

Dad, that's all boring stuff.

DAD

So?

ALICE

Nobody ties a string around their finger to remember a meeting. Anyway, you're not supposed to. It's mostly meant to be for important stuff you need to remember not to forget.

(Dad still works at the knot. Alice tries to think of something she needs help remembering. He gets the knot undone.)

ALICE

Actually, can you re-tie it?

DAD

Think of something?

(He begins to re-tie it)

ALICE

Mmhmm.

DAD

What's that?

ALICE

Just some details about things.

DAD

What sort of details?

They're secret.

ALICE

Top secret?

DAD

Mhm.

ALICE

(Dad finishes with the knot.)

Thanks.

ALICE

(Dad stands up, and clears the table. He starts putting away food and doing dishes.)

(Alice plays with her string. She hums the Alice lullaby from earlier to herself.)

Alice?

DAD

Hm.

ALICE

Will you bring your plate?

DAD

(She clears her place. A shift.)

(Dad at work, Alice at school. She talks to her classmates.)

ALICE  
Why did we move to Parkfield?  
Because my Dad got a really interesting job here on a one year special assignment to run these tests that he knows a lot about to measure different kinds of earthquakes. So he asked my mom if we could live there for a year and she said okay.

(Dad gives a lecture at work.)

DAD

Earthquake prediction is the analysis of stress.  
Where does it come from, where is it being held, when is it  
going to be released.

Some of this is measurable. Our technology today is good enough  
to measure stresses, compressions, tiny movement and changes in  
the rock that we can point to and say with certainty: Here. Here  
is a breaking point.

The question is, When?

What I am working to find is a universal indicator, a pattern of  
stress that will allow us to look at any fault in the world and  
say: We expect a seismic event of significant size to occur  
Here. In ten minutes. Get out of the building.

For the first time ever, we have data for continuous monitoring  
of the San Andreas fault at Parkfield, California. Still, it may  
not give us sufficient data for reliable prediction.

Each fault zone moves differently, and reacts as differently to  
stress as different people do. The outcomes can be almost as  
unpredictable as the course of your own life.

(Blackout. Dad enters the space  
with a flashlight, searching. He  
calls out as he finds his way to  
the stage.)

DAD

Alice?  
Alice?  
Alice!  
Are you in here?  
Alice!  
Hello?

(Alice, unseen in the dark, from  
all sides.)

ALICE

Are you in here?

DAD

Alice?

Hello?	ALICE
Alice!	DAD
Alice!	ALICE
Where are you?	DAD
Are you here?	ALICE
Alice?	DAD
Alice?	ALICE
Hello!	DAD
Hello!	ALICE
Stay where you are. I'll find you.	DAD
Stay where you are.	ALICE
Alice?	DAD
Alice?	ALICE
Alice?	DAD
Alice!	ALICE



DAD

Alice!  
Are you in here?  
Alice?  
Hello?

(Dad searches, and comes upon his own bed. He pulls back the covers to get in, and is petrified by what he sees. He drops the flashlight, and opens his mouth to yell out. The sound of an alarm clock.)

(Lights up. It is morning. Dad is in bed, asleep. Alice stands at his bedside, holding the buzzing alarm.)

ALICE

Dad?  
Dad?  
Dad!  
Are you awake?  
Dad!

(He rolls over, turns off the alarm.)

ALICE

Guess what?

DAD

Hm.

(She jumps on the bed, and sits)

ALICE

Guess what I saw out my window the second I woke up.

DAD

What?

ALICE

Guess!

An airplane?  
DAD

No, an animal. Guess what kind.  
ALICE

Squirrel?  
DAD

Dad, squirrels are Everywhere. This was something Really Cool.  
ALICE

A deer.  
DAD

Nope!  
ALICE

I give up. What was it.  
DAD

Keep guessing.  
ALICE

What was it, Alice?  
DAD

Dad, you have to-  
ALICE

Sorry.  
Out of guesses.  
DAD

Okay fine,  
It was a whole entire family family of Wild Turkeys!  
ALICE

Huh.  
DAD

(He gets out of bed and dresses)

Isn't that cool?  
ALICE

DAD

Pretty cool. What do you want for breakfast?

ALICE

Can we make pancakes?

DAD

Pancakes?

ALICE

I'll help!

DAD

Oh yeah?

ALICE

Definitely.

Can we do a double batch?

I'm hungry.

DAD

How hungry?

(Dad exits for the kitchen. Alice follows him out.)

ALICE

Super Hungry.

Really Super Hungry.

(A shift. We transition to Dad at work, and Alice at school. Dad talks to a co-worker.)

DAD

Why did we move to Parkfield?

Because I was offered the opportunity of a good job at a time when good jobs weren't easy to come by.

(Alice at school. She tells a secret story to another kid at recess)

ALICE

Okay. You want to know what really happened?

(Alice stands, and acts out the story as she tells it.)

ALICE

After my Dad and I left our old apartment and got in the U-haul, my Mom got in the car and started it and drove away too, following us. A block away she thought it would be nice to go back to the apartment for one final look by herself because she knew she would miss it. So she turned around, and went back. But!

When she got there, the house had disappeared!

You know why?

Because we had left, and all of our stuff was gone, so the apartment didn't have anything to do anymore and it disappeared. But my Mom went right up to where it used to be anyway, and just when she was putting her hand on the spot where the front door should have been, there was an earthquake.

It was so small that nobody felt it, but it confused the apartment and it un-vanished for a second and right then my Mom saw the door and opened it and went in but then the earthquake stopped and everything vanished again, with my Mom trapped inside.

So that's where she is.

She's trapped in the place my old apartment vanished to. It's like a whole different universe sort of, but not really.

And you know what else? Nobody ever found her car because my Mom didn't think she was going to be there very long and she parked it in a Friday street sweeping spot which meant it got towed almost right away and then somebody lost the paperwork so nobody knows that the car got towed and it just looks like it went missing.

But you know what?

I hired a guide to help her find the way back which means she should be home any day now.

(Dad at work, talking to a different co-worker)

DAD

Why did we move?

Because we were ready for a change.

You can only live in a city for so long before it starts to wear you down.

(Blackout. Dad enters the space with a lantern, searching. He

whispers for her as he finds his way around the stage. Her voice is a whisper back, from the darkness.)

Alice!	DAD
Alice!	ALICE
Where are you?	DAD
Are you here?	ALICE
Alice?	DAD
Alice?	ALICE
Hello!	DAD
Hello!	ALICE
Stay where you are. I'll find you.	DAD
Stay where you are.	ALICE
Alice?	DAD
Alice?	ALICE
Alice?	DAD

ALICE

Alice!

DAD

Alice!  
Are you in here?  
Alice?  
Hello?

(Dad searches, and comes upon his own bed. On top of it sit Alice with Mom. They snuggle together and sing the Dirt Road Lullaby. It sounds a bit strange and dream-affected though.)

(Dad tries to reach them, to join them in their moment. But there is an invisible solid barrier between them, and the harder he fights to reach them, the more solid the barrier becomes.)

(Lights up. It is morning. Dad is in bed, asleep. Alice stands at his bedside, wrapped in blankets. She is holding the alarm, and prods him awake.)

ALICE

Dad!  
Are you awake?  
Dad!

(He rolls over, turns off the alarm.)

ALICE

Do you know where my book is?

DAD

What?

ALICE

Where my book is. I have to give a report but I can't find it anywhere.

DAD

Oh.

(yawn)

DAD

Didn't you put it in your backpack already?

(She thinks)

ALICE

I don't remember putting it in,

DAD

Have you checked?

ALICE

No,

DAD

Go take a look.

And put a sweater on. How many times have I asked you not to drag blankets around the house?

(Alice runs off to check. Dad gets out of bed, and dresses. Alice yells from off.)

ALICE

Found it!

(She runs back on, still with the blankets.)

ALICE

What's for breakfast?

We have enough eggs for pancakes, I checked.

DAD

Go put a sweater on.

ALICE

Can we have pancakes?

DAD

Go put on a sweater and we'll see.

ALICE

Okay!

(She drops the blankets where she stands, and runs off to get a sweater. Dad carefully picks up the blankets, shakes them out, folds them, and puts them on the bed before exiting.)

(A shift to Mom. She is in a space that is neither here nor there.)

MOM

Something changed.

To make it different  
than it was before.

A Shift? Maybe?

Some Shift, but I don't remember.

I can't remember Anything

But I know it was Different Before.

There was a feeling.

A feeling that, I don't know the name for it.

If I knew the name for it, I could find it.

that Feeling.

If I could name it, I could Remember it.

Maybe.

But I don't know where my-

I lost them.

Some of them, the important ones.

(A shift. We transition to Alice at school, and Dad at work. Alice gives a book report presentation.)