

## *Entering Wonderland*

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- Must include direct quotes from Rowling, Burgess and Moriarty

The bookshop resonated with calm, studious dignity. Gentle jazz in the background. Ordered, full shelves. A bookish oasis.

The man behind the counter looked up slowly when the doorbell announced my arrival. ‘Who are you?’ he said.

I assumed he spoke to me; there was no one else in sight. And the rudeness of his words was softened by his inquiring tone.

An Alice poster caught my eye and, in a flash of inspiration, I answered: ‘I hardly know, sir, just at present. At least, I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.’

My reward was a gentle smile. ‘Keep your temper,’ he said, and returned to his book.

Feeling like a kid in Wonderland, I wandered to the ‘classics’. A hardback caught my eye: a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *A Clockwork Orange*.

His voice interrupted my thoughts: ‘What’s it going to be then, eh?’

I was startled, but understood the reference. I was there, at the Korova Milkbar, surrounded by violence and bad fashion. I tucked the book under my arm, and returned to my search.

I’m fascinated by the definition of ‘classic’. In this shop, Anthony Burgess shared the space with the likes of Harper Lee, F. Scott Fitzgerald and George Orwell, as you’d expect.

But I wondered when Harry Potter earned the ‘classic’ status. Maybe when that first edition sold for upwards of \$50,000. No first editions here, but quality hardbacks. I selected a copy of *The Philosopher’s Stone*.

The voice boomed professorially: ‘It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution’.

This time, I was on solid ground. I know my Potter. I snapped the book closed and said, ‘I shall answer your questions unless I have a very good reason not to, in which case I beg you’ll forgive me. I shall not, of course, lie’.

Between the Potters was a narrow volume, clearly out of place. It was *Lady Susan*, the manuscript Jane Austen didn’t intend for publication. Just a raised eyebrow from the bookseller this time. I took it as disapproval, and returned *Lady Susan* to the shelf. Hours later I realised he had nothing to say: epistolary novels have no dialogue.

The arrogantly labelled ‘holiday reading’ section promised little to interest me. But maybe I should try? Perhaps Liane Moriarty, if only to see what the fuss was about.

'He's never done anything like this before,' came the voice, almost before *Big Little Lies* was in my hands.

Handing over my books, I mustered my courage and spoke: 'My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.'

He hesitated, seemingly unsure how to respond. Then he selected a small book, slipped a card inside, and added it wordlessly to my collection.

At home, I discovered a 1942 Everyman Edition of *Pride and Prejudice*. And his phone number. I swooned.