

# **Alice's Adventures in Under City: Downward Spiral**

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SMASHWORDS EDITION

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PUBLISHED BY

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## **Preface**

Welcome to the introduction to the Alice Zombie Series. This series is a short work series of ebooks based upon the novel Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll. While not simply a rewrite, the overall tone of the book attempts to adhere to the spirit in which the original work was published. The Alice Zombie Series is planned to encompass three ebooks which will then be compiled into one final ebook.

This particular series details the journey of a young, but not quite so young, Alice as she encounters a myriad of strange occurrences counter to her upbringing which challenge her ideologies. Whereas this would normally take place during a marvelous trip into fantasy land, this particular journey includes voracious zombies.

Lewis Carroll originally penned and delivered as a gift a predecessor of what would become the iconic Alice under a different title, namely, Alice's Adventures Underground. On the timeline of Alice events, this ebook occurs prior to the revised version which was distributed to the public. Since the content for Lewis Carroll's work is similar, great liberty was taken with this series of short works in order to differentiate between Alice underground and Alice in Wonderland.

### **\*Parental Note\***

While this ebook is based off of the Alice genre, it is not intended for adolescent readers. This ebook does not contain nudity or profanity. It does; however, relate the exploits of a teenage Alice and as such may contain discussions of mature subject matter.

### **After Preface**

Last but not least, the author would like to express his extreme gratitude to the Gumpery Commission, the pitiless peer reviews, hate mail, and the many furry animals that inspired this ebook.

### **After After Preface**

The characters, incidents, and names in this ebook are all fictitious excluding those names that are real names for people; however, the characters that bear those names are not named after those individuals that are named thusly. This is to say that even though a character may have a real person's name the character is still a work of fiction whereby making the character and the character's name fictitious, even though the name is real. Regardless, these names bear no resemblance to any persons living, dead, undead, altered by military genetic experiments, or any other mad sciencery.

Any resemblance to any person in history or the future of history is entirely coincidental and should anything of this social nature manifest, the author reserves the right to be hailed as a clairvoyant and paid large sums of the then most fiscally lucrative monetary exchange and worshipped as a prophet.

Hitherto and finally, here is presented another ebook completely different from the rest of the ebooks out there which are most likely a far cry from the lunacy that unfolds in daily life to

which you are most likely reading this ebook to escape and have subsequently fallen into my trap. Of lunacy....

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### **Alice's Adventures in Under City: Downward Spiral**

Alice sat in the park hovering over her digital device with a sheepish smirk that was only broken by the consistently shocked expression she made every time she received a message. Her sister, Lorina, rolled her eyes and glowered, annoyed with Alice's behavior; however, a reassuring glance from her mother reminded Lorina that she too had been there once and with an exhausted sigh she gave the unwitting Alice reprieve. Edith, the youngest of the three daughters, giggled in her own youthful spirits at Alice's behavior unsure of what was so important but curious to find out for herself once she reached Alice's age.

Upon receiving the last text message, Alice looked up and scanned the tree line a short distance away visually appearing to be able to look straight through the other laughing and happy families that attended the function in which they were now involved. Her father scowled, knowing that his daughter was coming of age and that it seemed, although not entirely true, that boys had occupied Alice's cloudy thoughts more than her family or, rather, perhaps he was feeling the pangs of another of his girls dawning on the age to begin searching for someone to settle down with in her later years.

Regardless of the reason for her father's disapproval, Alice detected the fleeting brown hair of her blue eyed romantic interest peeking over some shrubbery in the distance. She smiled enthusiastically and with a finger on her chin, pondered a plausible excuse to get away from her family members.

"Dear," her loving father began in earnest, "You seem completely obsessed with that Robert Cole fellow. Even though you may have intentions for him, I should like to remind you to keep your behavior as that of a lady."

"But of course Father," Alice remarked over her shoulder then looked down at the blanket she sat upon timidly hoping that when she abruptly excused herself she wouldn't encounter resistance.

For, you see, Alice was caught between the ages of blossoming into her own femininity like her sister Lorina. This was an event which her father often scorned because he was losing yet another precious daughter and because of the changes young women went through during this sacred time. To him she was still his little girl and to be forced to accept her independence through disruptive behavior and frustrated indifference was quite trying. Alice was a different matter altogether from Lorina's stern temperament and often his derisive scowl was melted away by one of her youthful giggles like her younger sister, Edith, which caused him to grin like a beaming sun as he recalled Alice's innocence.

The same could be said for young Robert Cole, with exception, who had taken quite a fancy with Alice. Although not a middle child, he too was caught in the early stages of adolescent romance. Alice's present and most immediate concern was her first kiss despite the admonishing of her father. As a productive member of Second City she had every desire to avoid being the last person in her class to receive a kiss. Aside from her feelings of utter dread over the act of kissing a filthy, repulsive boy, her social standing had never been of so much importance to her and the butterflies in her stomach told her she wasn't sure whether or not she was quite up to the task.

In her heart; however, she was anxious to have a greater understanding of love. Of course the Second City state schools had tried, miserably of course, to explain and define love which came across rather dull as it was delivered in rhetoric as another lesson on the duties of a consumer rather than a true explanation. Overall the lesson was related in a manner that was altogether quite confusing. While they were expected to have their first kiss in the near future, many of the girls were also preparing for their vows of celibacy until after marriage.

Alice decided that propriety was her main concern. She wanted to do what was proper and ensure the happiness of her father while meeting the demands of her consumerism, no matter how confusing. Summoning up her reserves she prepared to deliver her alibi to the family. Calming herself as best she could, she felt her shoulders relax as she exhaled deeply. She looked about furtively, sighed once more, and then opened her mouth to speak.

"Alice, perhaps you should take a moment to look about the events for today on your own." Her mother kindly interjected. Alice was quite confounded at the sudden intrusion into her thoughts but agreed readily with a hearty nod of the head causing her short blonde hair to dance

emphatically against her neck and the bow placed on top and slightly to the side to tumble about her strands as it attempted to stay planted to her scalp.

“Be back within the hour dear,” Alice’s mother advised which satiated her father’s need to intervene and Alice’s need to escape the boundaries of her adolescence. Feeling the desire to at least partially oblige her parent’s request as she did still reside under their custody at the very least but more so because she loved and cherished them, Alice made a brief tour of the events, perhaps viewing each for a split second, and then made for the clearing.

“Are you sure she’ll behave?” her father asked her mother as he keenly looked after Alice but not so much as to be obvious that he was watching and once she was out of ear shot, to which her mother replied, “More than you did when you were her age.”

“Which is precisely what I’m afraid of,” He concluded with a loving grin toward his ever so level headed significant other which displayed both his trust and enduring affection for his choice in romantic partnership. Motherly intervention had assisted on more than one occasion between father’s wishes and child’s potential temper tantrum.

“Can you ever settle Henry little, I’m sure our children will without fail become productive consumers of Second City.”

“Is it not a Father’s duty to have the utmost concern for his young children?” Henry answered inquisitively as he hugged Edith close prompting her to giggle most furiously.

“Not so much that you smother them, besides I should think that with your habits you’d worry yourself sick Headmaster Little.” Edith little, not to be confused with Edith Little the elder, for whom Edith was named which could sometimes be quite confusing, responded quite tersely but in jest none the less.

“Yes father, I should think you have enough to concern yourself with other than the affairs of your properly raised children. I’m sure you’ll hear all about the event for days regardless much to the distress of everyone else in the household.” Lorina, imposed testing the limits of her age.

His eldest daughter’s nervous yet confident response resonated with the approval he needed to accord her stature and being the dynamic and ever present father figure he was Henry obliged her comment lovingly with, “Oh and that is what I’m most afraid of my dear!” and the family enjoyed a reassuring chortle at Alice’s expense.

Alice believed she had once spotted her father staring in her direction but with her parents engaged in idle conversation and entertaining her sisters, she plunged into the brush and appeared on the other side feeling quite disheveled and dismayed that she did not immediately see Robert. Stomping her foot in frustrated excitement she carefully peered and wandered about whispering his name. Full of vim and vigor and never wanting to fully admit that he too was nervous as it may affect the appearance of his confidence, Robert enjoyed her stumbling about as he contemplated that this first kiss might lead to many more.

Robert watched Alice frown in frustration with tickled amusement. Her expectant manner demanded he present himself so that she may riddle him with inquiry and a list of conditions for him to meet in the proper manner of consumermanship. Alice walked about searching for Robert momentarily before getting flustered and smoothing the back of her ploom dress, she sat and down. When she became frustrated Alice had a penchant for analyzing statistics to determine her opportunities and assessing her current state.

Recently, Second City had seen an increase of high school romance success. She was sure that her first kiss would be telling. In fact, recent reports had indicated that after her first kiss, she would have an eighty-two percent chance of marriage. She wondered if she was ready for such a major step in her life. She didn't need to wonder about Robert being trustworthy because she knew there was a chance, thirty four percent according to statistics, that he would remain faithfully committed throughout marriage. That was okay for Alice; however, because twenty three percent of women stayed faithful throughout the length of their commitment.

Truthfully, Alice was curious about the average two point three partners she would encounter while she remained under her vows. The concept of infidelity seemed outrageous to her yet facts were facts and they did not lie. She pondered dreamily about how her romantic liaises would occur. How would they attempt to persuade her to forsake her vows? While statistics were informative, she was intrigued by undertaking the actual experience. She contemplated whether or not she would resist or consent. She pondered whether or not there marriage would end in divorce given the statistics that one hundred percent of divorces were begun by marriage. Finally, she tried to discern whether or not she and Robert would have successful employment as higher income often contributed to more leisure time which could result in infidelity. Facts, equations, and statistics spun in her mind until, "Boo!"

Alice let out a not so quiet yelp that caused her to leap to her feet in her excitement.

“Robert Cole,” Alice yelled as she stood rigidly with her fists jutted out to her sides and her heels pressed together with her toes pointing at a thirty degree angle in an attempt to mimic her mother’s angry posture while glowering at the youth who was rolling on the ground laughing.

“How dare you, I shan’t be kissing you today young man!” She threatened full of pomp and turned her head to the side while sticking her nose in the air and placing her hands upon her hips. The sudden resistance had an immediate effect.

“Alice, don’t be mad, I’m ever so sorry,” he pleaded to no avail.

“Alice, please don’t be cross with me. You seemed so lost in thought day dreaming,” He pleaded which caused Alice to flush with rage, or rather more appropriately, disappointment.

“How dare you, how dare you, how dare you!” She stomped her foot, a telltale sign that she was severely distressed, “You know very well that I detest such trickery and the mere fact that you would mention such a hurtful utterance to someone you intend to give your first kiss is utterly unbearable. I have half a mind to depart these premises and leave you to your infantile whims and fancy while you completely disregard your consumermanship!”

You see, Alice had often been reprimanded for her daydreaming by both her peers and authoritarians. Unbeknownst to her, Robert had frequently stared in her direction smiling softly to himself while admiring her distracted appearance. Her engrossment in her own concerns gave him the freedom to study every feature of her face from her hair, which had deep dark roots and lightened to a translucent light yellow, to her deep warm dark blue eyes that seemed to draw him in until he felt he was swimming in them. Which, coincidentally, he happened to be doing despite her immediate anger.

“Robert, have you heard a word I’ve said?” Alice inquired as she noticed his soft smile and a look that he himself was day dreaming.

“Yes, Alice, every word.”

“I said I was leaving, Robert...”

“Oh, don’t do that! I’m sorry Alice.” Robert entreated.

“What were you looking at?” Alice questioned forgetting her rage for a moment.

“Your eyes, I look at them all the time. They’re simply unfathomable.” And to Young Robert his whimsical oration wasn’t something he hadn’t considered previously. Indeed, under her full attention her eyes seemed even more brilliant as the sun frolicked through the leaves and

illuminated wisps of Alice's golden mane, accentuating the contrast between her angelic face and bottomless gaze.

"Stop," Alice demanded suddenly feeling the discomfort of her changing perspective again.

"I'm sorry," Robert repeated and turned away flush.

Forgetting her own uneasiness while seeing Robert's anxiety and confusion, she sat next to him. Alice was nurturing above all and the thought had crossed her mind that even young, confident, boisterous Robert Cole may feel some shame for the feelings and changes occurring internally as well. There was a somber moment between them as they tried to reason what to do.

It was Alice who broke through silence's thickly filled with butterfly butterflies disquiet when a flitting snapping dragon gracefully adorned her finger.

"Robert," she whispered scarcely breathing, "Turnabout slowly."

Robert moved by stalled degrees until he saw the green metallic hued creature lighted upon her finger. In their amiable moods, nature had settled about them. Something which Alice noticed and found intrinsically curiouser and curiouser.

"Slowly look to your left," Robert instructed as Alice heard both a sweet and somber tone reach her ear.

When she looked, she saw two humming birds dancing in the air together not more than a meter away. The two birds seemed to take notice of the other couple present and stopped to inspect them. The snapping dragon lifted in the air once more and flitted away after its repose ending the inquisitive nature of the two birds that departed as they continued to serenade each other with different tones. Alice looked at Robert who turned away in the interlude and reached for something slightly behind him. When he turned round he presented Alice with a flower and gently slid it under the digital visor adorning her hair.

"You're very beautiful Alice, I should like very much to kiss you," He stated as he put his hand on hers. Alice looked fondly into Robert's eyes but recalled his earlier shenanigans which brought doubt, in her mind, about the sincerity of his intentions.

"Thank you Robert; however, we've still not settled the matter of your earlier buffoonery."

"Whatever shall I do to convince you that my heart is true Alice?" Robert retorted in affirmation that he indeed was ready to commit himself to their twenty five percent chance of remaining lifelong partners.



“Hmm, I know!” Alice was excited about the revelation that he should pay a price similar to hers, “I shall hide and you shall find me! If you do not find me then I may kiss you and if you find me I shall allow you to give me a kiss.”

With the odds in his favor, Robert sprang to his feet without another word, turned his back as he leaned against a tree, and began to count. Alice both astounded and enthused by his immediate reaction sprang to her feet and absconded into the foliage not at all a short distance away. When she happened upon a large dark tunnel like entrance she was skeptic that she may have gone too far. Unfortunately, she could hear Robert’s feet in the distance approaching the direction he’d heard her depart and she could hear his changing voice calling her name. Having suddenly run out of options, she decided to disappear behind a large tree and wait to be found as these were the conditions to determine who was to give and receive their first kiss.

Robert observed his surroundings and quickly discovered the large tunnel as well. Deciding that Alice might think that he wouldn’t have the gall to enter such a dark and foreboding cavern he plunged in with little forethought. Alice grinned to herself with satisfaction. Robert would no doubt have his digital device with him which would allow him some light in the darkness. There was very little to be concerned about in Second City so she had no need to be alarmed about him wandering into the cavern. In the interim she could wait for him outside and surprise him when he returned. Alice sat and looked about her to see what wonders nature would bring to her.

She wasn’t aware of the time until her wrist vibrated, she’d set it to silent while she waited in order to avoid detection, with a note from her mother.

“Mind the time Alice,” it stated and Alice felt a pang of panic as she’d still not received nor given her first kiss. Alice reviewed her memory and was certain she hadn’t heard Robert leave the cavern. Bracing herself, she entered the dark edifice and switched on the flashlight application of her digital device. The path she took was long and seemed to curve gently from left to right, then right to left. She cautiously scanned ahead occasionally calling softly for Robert as she was too afraid she may disturb someone else who had snuck away to engage in their first kiss. At least this was Alice’s reasoning as she was quite afraid of her surroundings and seemed to get a sense of general foreboding.

Unbeknownst to Alice, Robert was searching for his way out or Alice, but by of far more importance to him was finding his way out as he suspected Alice was not there at all. He’d become quite confused in the cavern and his digital device didn’t seem to be getting a good

signal. Robert lamented that he hadn't had the good sense to download a maze tracking device prior to entering the runoff cavern; however he couldn't be concerned with such novelties at a time like this. He decided to stick to the left hand side of the cavern and see if he couldn't retrace his steps.

Alice's heart raced. She had long ago abandoned any notion of finding Robert. The tunnel seemed to overwhelm her and at this particular junction she decided that Robert's foolishness far exceeded his desire to give her the first kiss she required for good consumermanship before taking her vow of chastity until marriage. Frustrated, alone, and feeling a sense of abandonment she concluded it may be best for her to depart the cave all together.

Robert's heart leapt for joy as his digital device's beam caught a figure before him.

"Alice?" he called to the feminine figure before him that stood unsteadily yet in a dress similar to Alice's. Then Robert coughed and covered his mouth and nose. A mephitic essence had struck his senses in short order nearly causing him to double over. As he contended with the maleficence, the figure before him turned around and Robert gave a muffled cry as something strong wrapped around his torso and restricted his lungs capacity to inflate.

Alice heard a sound similar to Robert's voice. She plunged ahead with renewed vigor. Perhaps Robert had hurt himself. She was running low on time as well and didn't wish to return without her first kiss as she wasn't sure when she'd have another opportunity. She concluded that should they make it out of the runoff tunnels together, she would scold him first then give him a kiss. A section of the tunnel loomed ahead and she could hear scuffling. Scritch scratching echoed in her ears along with the sound of wetness and... and was that chewing? She couldn't be sure. She did however see the faint light of a digital device beam. Deciding that she should extinguish her torch app, Alice crept closer with the possible intention of repaying young Robert for his earlier surprise.

The walls of the cavern were smooth and clean, no doubt the industrious work of Second City mechanical assistance and the water that ran at this point was clear. Alice knew because when she'd had her torch lit earlier, she could see to the bottom unassisted. The clean impression she had of the tunnel was compounded by the fact that in this particular section the lights were very dim but as her eyes adjusted she could still see. She realized now that her torch was off that there were lights in the center section of the floor where the water was, and she could run on

either side with ease as there was a walkway that extended a meter and a half or two meters from each side.

She supposed the walkway was for maintenance. Perhaps maintenance hadn't been called to this particular section because the smell that emanated was almost overpowering. Alice's eyes watered and she fanned her face with no effect as the putrid stench wormed its way to her stomach. She would have forsaken this area entirely had it not been for the thought that she'd seen Robert's light. She concluded that must be the reason for the odor as there was no doubt a robot would have been called when the olfactory sensor picked up the reek she currently found herself encompassed. With her teary eyes, she was unsure of whether or not she'd seen Robert's torch cutting through the darkness. She turned her head in the direction she'd trotted and considered returning when she heard the sound again. She hesitantly moved closer to the source.

Yes she had definitely seen a flashlight app. It moved against the wall lazily. Robert must have gotten turned about in the tunnels and had relinquished his pursuit to exit the tunnels all together. It was Alice's turn to return the charade. She crept quietly closer and prepared to startle her unwitting companion. Easing herself against the Second City tunnel wall, she took a breath and peeked quickly confirming her suspicion but seeing little else. Without the bravado, she took a breath and prepared herself to casually make her appearance and demand a kiss.

Alice turned the corner and froze in shock. Young Robert Cole was lying prone on the ground with several figures bent over him. The arm that held the digital device was being feasted upon and had been detached from Robert all together. Alice took note of a growing pool of blood surrounding Robert and in her state of delirium was more fascinated at how much of the human organism contained liquid. She began to speculate the approximate amount when one of the figures turned in her direction and released a most wicked snarl that brought Alice back to her immediate senses.

She observed, in the most austere manner of which one observes immediate danger, that the wretches that devoured what remained of Robert Cole's corpse had the sickly appearance and wax like skin of the dead. The veins upon their skin were a dark color and seemed to ooze rather than carefully network like normal veins. They seemed over filled as if the blood that had settled there had turned gaseous and rounded the tendrils into rubbery elongations that would burst upon the slightest agitation.

Their clothes were tattered and blood stained and seemed to be made of fabric instead of foam. Any bruising that had occurred in life resembled a pustule. Some of the fingers had been rubbed down clean to the bone. The figure that had turned its face to her didn't have the presentation of an individual from Second City who was healthy and diligent in their grooming. The hair was disheveled and seemed to be caked with detritus. The eyes were sunken and where the orb should have been placed, although Alice granted that she was in the dark, it appeared they were to dark cloudy places over a blackened bulb.

As another detestable creature approached and sank to its knees taking a large bit out of Robert's calf, Alice concluded that the scritch and scratch sound was the approach of the being. The sound that reached her ears presently was much louder than the approach of the singular diner. It appeared to be a group of the wretches and Robert's corpse seemed to offer little more sustenance. Alice didn't want to contemplate the statistical average of the number of cannibals it would take to consume a human corpse. As the other figures rounded the bend she proposed another course of action overall.

"I shan't like to have a conversation with you left and right," she began in reference to her feet," yet I'd be most appreciative if you moved in the most expedited of manners and carried me swiftly away from here."

Her calm conclusion seemed to ring quite loudly to her feet and they obeyed forthwith. Alice bolted away from her menacing interlopers at a speed with which even she was amazed. Her feet could be heard echoing off of the concrete walls. Her menacing companions gave chase further panicking Alice so that she was unsure of which turns lead where or which direction she was taking as her hostile intruders began to gain ground in the midst of her exhaustion. Chancing a look back as the roof of the tunnel she was in seemed to disappear into the ground in what most would call a wall, but in Alice's grief and panic stricken state the concept simply eluded her, she saw that the horribly disfigured minions of homicide were mere centimeters from her and seemed to be spurred on by the hunt.

Presently, as she was distracted by her concern of imminent and mortal peril, she slipped and fell into the center of tunnel with a great splash. She was barely able to begin a brief shriek that was yanked from her lungs as she collided and was pulled forward much to her relief. Her attackers, not wishing to embark on the same route and apparently trying to capture their prey before it escaped, quit their chase with the most animated activity they seemed to be able to use

to express their disapproval with her escape and simply left once Alice Was out of their sight and unable to be intimidated by their horribly fierce antics.

Down, down, down Alice slid as if she were in a hidden water slide. She quickly forgot her terror and calmed down, her mind too preoccupied with wondering what was at the bottom of her destination to be concerned with the terror shed experienced. She tried to comprehend why she hadn't heard a rush of water as it cascaded but Second City was a quiet humble place and such matters were best left to the engineers who designed the tunnels initially.

It had been to Alice's relief that this section of Second City was artificially lit with each light turning on as she approached and shutting off as she passed. The gentle yet elusive light assuaged her fear of the unknown and she began to time the on and offness, as she called it, of the matter. In fact, to be completely truthful, Alice slid for so long she became quite bored. She was; however, very impressed with the consumermanship of Second City, for as she fell she began to notice various objects which had been discarded by the Second City residents.

She had no fear of being hurt by the wonderfully created and designed multitude of contraptions for they were made of ploam. Ploam, the durable lightweight material Second City consumermen used to create household objects such as plates, forks , knives, clothing, or whatever else they needed was created from recycled materials and sent down a special chute to be disposed of once the item had outlived its usefulness.

As she continued her hand brushed against a clock. She picked it up and wondered for how long she had been sliding. She was quite damp all over and although the water was cool, she decided she'd much rather be dry and warm since she had left the sunshine of the park. Alice wondered how her parents were doing as well. In her rush, the thought of contacting them had leapt from her ear and escaped the creatures long before she had the intuition to run. Thinking of her guardians she tried to contact them but when she retrieved the digital device connected to her arm she found it was damaged by the water and most certainly inoperable. She wasn't sure if she'd have been able to get a signal regardless. The tunnel didn't seem to allow for repeaters and communication would have most likely been limited at best.

"Poor father," She intoned, "He must be ever frightful of where I'm at by now. I wonder if he will exercise his consumer rights and if he has called the Peace Officers yet for I have been sliding diagonally for some time now. He must be in distress either worried about my lady hood or harried by my unexpected disappearance. How shall I ever make this up to him? I'm sure

I'll simply have to set firm and relay the events to him as they occurred. I'm sure he'll understand."

When it came to the notion of what specifically had attacked and killed Robert and had chased her to her current local, Alice found she was at a loss. Proper consumerism dictated she refrain from using the term zombie, although that is what the creatures resembled. Alice couldn't be sure because she'd never personally seen a zombie and hadn't a definition for the being. She could vaguely recall the term zombie as well. When the matter had been brought to her attention by friends, she'd promptly been told that it was the imaginings of children and best to be forgotten. As she aspired to be a proper consumer, she'd forced the term from her mind and admonished her friends for distributing such propaganda. In Second City, zombies did not exist nor any other city for that matter. The officials of Second City would most certainly know what was best for its citizens so such absurdity was left for children and those who were of lesser mental constitution who worked the more unsavory occupations.

With that Alice let the matter drop in her mind for she really had no other choice as she plummeted off of a ledge herself. As she was thrown from the precipice, she managed to be spun around and landed six or perhaps six point five meters below in a large pool although she couldn't tell as much as presently she was under water. At that very moment she came face to face with a decrepit deteriorating visage. As her body decelerated and before she began to resurface, the water swollen face rolled its eyes downward and stared at Alice before opening its mouth and reaching for her.

Alice's body had twisted as she fell into the Second City water and she kicked furiously propelling herself upwards. She screamed then remembering where she was, held her breath as she wasn't sure how far down she'd gone. The pool was just deep enough to keep the grasping hands that beckoned her to be a part of a meal slightly out of reach. However, there were others down there tall enough to nick at her legs as she broke the surface of the water. Alice gasped breathing in water and air, choking and muttering, she saw trees and immediately started for them. She could feel brushes against her leg and unsure as to whether it was her imagination, water, or the walking terrors, she fled for the safety of anything but where she was at.

Land wasn't far away and she hoisted herself up the side and looked down at where she had landed. As if they were walking in slow motion, things with the shape of humans piled toward her with their arms outreached and their fingers twitching for her skin. The ploom seemed to be

congesting as the ripples of the ploam waterfall carried them away into the ploam river. The inhuman carnivores could still be seen below and Alice decided that as the case may be she might want to exit the river all together since she now had the capability of deciding which direction she would like to wander.

“For it cannot be exploring,” Alice determined, “Because one cannot explore what someone else already has knowledge of but however shall I get home?”

Waving her hands in the air and wringing her hair, Alice tried to think of the best way to get home. She was quite unsure as to which direction to take after escaping a most horrific fate but thought she would prefer to do so post haste and without another breath she began to step in the first direction that didn't look like it was inhabited by what no proper consumerman would call the undead as they most certainly did not exist.

“Would it be reasonable to presume that there may be some sort of facility about?” Alice asked herself unsure if she wanted to advance into the new scenery around her as she danced from side to side trying to determine if she might end up in the hands of certain peril. There were benches by the waterfall and having moved past these, she found herself surrounded by trees having completely overlooked the path that was just behind. She had a general sense of her surroundings. She strongly speculated that she was currently located in the remnants. Then she corrected herself.

“Alice, it is rude and thoughtless to think of the past culture that birthed Second City as backwards and contrary. They were merely ignorant and hadn't been properly educated in the ways of consumerism.”

She nodded her head with certainty at her own reprimand and then looked to her left and right wondering how she was going to navigate through the thick growth that sprawled before her. She was surprised to see that there was such a wealth of foliage on the banks of the ploam river and then considered that the vegetation may purify the water from Second City that assisted the ploam on its journey to the recycling plant.

She looked back over her shoulder with reservation and considered the pool of things she couldn't name. She would have been more than happy to at least attempt to climb back the way she came despite the trouble but then she pondered that if she slipped then she may slide all the way back down and it would have hardly been worth the effort, especially if she were near the top. Beyond that, the horrible fate that she may not be so lucky to escape a second time might

strip the flesh from her bones. In regards to the top, she wasn't sure how she arrived at her destination either and that would mean attempting to wind her way back to the entrance she slipped through with Robert.

"Poor Robert," she sighed and then remembered that those troglodytes, a word her father used in reference to the remnant's inhabitants but had strictly forbade her to use so she only said it in her mind, might still be about and that particular meeting would be most unsavory indeed. All of which left Alice still dripping wet and hesitant to enter the lush greenery before her or turn back to the slide which had brought her to the place she was standing at that moment.

That was until a large splash that didn't sound like ploam erupted behind Alice and she became quite convinced it would be in her best interest to conclude her brainstorming session and decide on a course of action.

"Well, left and right, I suppose I have need of you again," and before she could finish her sentence, Alice dashed off into the garden of trees before her on another path hidden by tree limbs. Unfortunately, Alice didn't know the path behind her would have shortened her journey through the forest by a considerable amount. Fortunately for her, the path was guarded by pig cards that were looking for someone else. Unfortunately for Alice, they delighted in hurting and torturing those that wandered into their midst.

"No time to consider the origin of such a welcome site, best be on my way!" She muttered to herself as she careened over the path and she didn't shorten her strides until she was quite sure that the rushing sound of ploam, water, and whatever landed in the pool behind her were well outside of hearing distance. She continued on at a brisk pace constantly pausing to look about her and ensure that no one was following. When she was sure she was far away from danger she stepped off of the trail and hid behind a tree to catch her breath.

Upon doing so, Alice found that the situation had solved itself and she was quite dry. Her ploam attire didn't retain water very well at all but during the interlude she'd been able to think or recall very little at all. She patted herself to knock off any dirt and inspect her condition. Alice had on a long blue dress that stopped short above the knees. The material at her shoulders was light and the dimensional printer she'd used had been able to condition the material at the bottom to be more rigid allowing for the dress to flare where it stopped. While her dress didn't hug her figure entirely, it was slimming and hung from her shoulders in two large straps.



The opening for the head was quite large so Alice wore a nice white shirt underneath that contained short frilly patterns down the center. It was short sleeve and being fond of frills she'd designed it to have ruffles along the edge. Contrary to her mom's sensible footwear, Alice had chosen to create a pair of ploom boots mostly because she did a lot of walking, but because it was the trending fashion at school as well. While the base design was sturdy, she'd been keen to add patterns of brightly colored flowers along the toes and up the sides that led to her legs. The sides also contained ruffles that resembled petals. There was no need for laces, buckles, or zippers as ploom could be either rigid or elastic depending on the need of the individual who created the item.

As she inspected herself for damage, nothing beyond minor scrapes and nicks from her run through the woods, she took another look at her digital device hoping that it may have returned to life. Removing it from her wrist, she pulled the back from the front and saw that the moisture indicator was thoroughly sodden.

"Heavens me, the poor thing has been thoroughly saturated! I shan't be located by the authorities in the near future without a proper connection."

She spoke the command to turn it on but she was sure it wouldn't respond. Good consumerism dictated she should dispose of the object and buy a new one from a vending machine; yet, she was unsure of where a vending machine would be located in her current local. Nevertheless, she was sure the device was quite broken and she had no means of connectivity or the option to accessorize or purchase a new device. "Now what am I to do?" She gave in futilely sliding her device back into its location on her arm and collapsed on the ground with the useless device free of her hands and her hands in her lap with a tear ever ready to spring from her eye.

Indeed, a tiny silver pearl of sadness was just about to leap from her lower eyelid when, much to Alice's astonishment, she could just barely discern the sound of sobbing creeping its way through the woods and landing lightly upon her eardrum as if it were a butterfly carried on a delicate breeze. Doubting her own senses, Alice wiped her tear away, sniffled rather audibly, neatly tucked away her own distraught, and craned her neck in the direction she thought she heard the sound from intensely listening for the sobbing once again. She heard nothing and her doubt grew. Surely, she thought, her mind was hearing the sound of her own sobs before they'd issued from her mouth but then there it was again! Reassuring herself and mustering her confidence, Alice stood up as quietly as she could and, positive she had heard someone else's

lamentations, she faced the direction she thought from which she heard the sob. She heard it again and took a step. It was a low pitiful moan that communicated all the loneliness and despair she felt with her current predicament. Unwilling to let another poor soul suffer in silence, Alice felt it was only reasonable to investigate the source of the sadness. At the very least perhaps they could share each other's discontent and recover.

Alice, timorously yet with determination, continued toward the mournful soul. As Alice got closer she couldn't tell whether the unknown individual was genuinely upset or hysterically laughing. She was able to comprehend that whoever the ruckus noise belonged to, they seemed incapable of controlling their emotions and could possibly be stark raving mad. She concluded it might be best to observe them for a moment to ensure they wouldn't possibly harm her since she was in, well, she didn't quite know where she was but she knew it was beneath Second City. Ahead of her was a small clearing with several downed trees. She couldn't see her possible companion at first until he sprang into view and seemed to be in a fit beside himself in what course of action he should take next. First he would walk in one direction, and then he would stop and go in another direction. When he'd frustrated himself with indecision, he'd settle for a moment, then sob, then spring back into the air as if he knew what he wanted to do.

Currently, there was a bit of mumbling, some angry words expressed with ferocity instead of audibly, then a settling, and finally a resigned forlornness followed by sobs. In appearance, his skin was a medium tone of brown and the hair atop his head was black and braided along the scalp down the sides and to the back like two long black ears. At least they seemed to resemble ears as they kept moving up and down but in truth had they not have done so, Alice would have been opined that they were simply pony tail braids.

From her vantage point, along with his incessant hopping and prancing about, she was of the mind that he resembled a rabbit. Rabbits were all together quite harmless in Alice's point of view even if they were taller than her and muscular as this one appeared. It occurred to Alice that he could be an anthrobot and if that were the case she would be able to contact her parents for assistance. An anthrobot would be happy to assist her even if it were malfunctioning as this one seemed to be. Timidly, for she still wasn't sure the nature or purpose of the individual she was about to approach, Alice crept from behind her hiding spot and gave a cautious wave in the spirit of consumermanship.

The person in the clearing gave her a very uninviting scornful scowl in reply to her greeting and stared at her as if to ask what exactly was she doing there and furthermore who gave her permission to approach. Alice looked around the clearing as words had escaped her mind for the moment.

"Don't be sad mister bunny," Alice spoke remembering she'd followed the sound of his tears, "I'm sure that whatever is troubling you we could perhaps put our heads together and come to a resolution!"

She concluded giving a cheery Second City smile. The boy, who could have only been a few years older than her, dropped his jaw in shock and then appeared to become quite indignant.

"Who are you calling a bunny!" he quipped in an arguably dreadful tone demanding that she recant her previous statement. Alice was beside herself and altogether disgruntled that he'd declined her sincere attempt to assist with his displeasure.

"I suppose that since I'm in a group of trees that you didn't think I'm a jungle bunny," he continued growing ever more displeased with his own rhetoric, eschewing her gentile greeting.

"Well, perhaps. However since this section of the woods is penetrable, I would have guessed that you were more of a forest or wood bunny." Alice concluded with a smile hoping to avoid offense.

"I can't believe you! You happen to see someone in the woods and based off of appearance alone decide they are a jungle bunny! Did I see you in the woods and call you a snow bunny? You didn't even ask my name, you just assumed I was a bunny. Did I assume you were a snow bunny? Did I call you paper mache girl? No, I did not. You're rude and quite frankly I'm not sure I enjoy your company, so I say good day to you madam!" he interrogated and seemed to dismiss Alice all in one breath to which she felt quite perplexed. She had neither ears nor resembled a bunny in any way by hopping about seemingly distraught. Alice decided it was best to apologize immediately whereby she hoped to stop his abrupt departure as she was in much need of assistance.

"Excuse me sir, I apologize for my earlier misgivings but I'm in need of assistance I thought you may be able to help."

"Yeah, everyone is sorry when they need something," The angry youth commented as he continued to walk away.

“Yes that is true, sir, however I thought you may have been an automaton and I’m in desperate need of assistance.”

“Uh, huh, suppose I’d be a robot bunny in that case.”

“You see I need to call my parents as I’m sure their desperately worried about me as I haven’t returned to the park.”

“Yeah, whatever!”

“Could you possibly direct me back to Second City?” Alice called as he rounded about a tree and disappeared from view.

“Right then, I suppose not.” She said to herself and sat on a nearby log contemplating. As she began to contemplate how she found herself in her current state, the death of Robert at the hands of the most insidious of beasts, how she missed her parents, and how she was lost with no hope of returning, she began to cry. It was quite unintentional at the beginning. A silent drop cascaded down one cheek and then the other. However, after a moment when she became frustrated over her predicament, the torrents welled up behind her eyes and plummeted freely. Alice lowered her head and cried while hugging her knees.

“Woe is me; I don’t think they shall ever find me. I was simply trying to follow good consumermanship and I have landed here.”

Alice intended to cry until she was exhausted but suddenly she found her balling quite unbecoming and although she kept crying she declared, “I must buck up and try my best as anyone with good consumermanship would!”

“Did you say Second City?” I startling familiar voice asked. Alice looked up in mild panic and gave a light yip, as she thought she was bereaving alone, but couldn’t find the voice.

“To whom am I speaking?” she asked politely after recovering her senses.

“To whom? To me!” the voice responded incredulously, “We were just talking.”

Alice looked left and right and stood up without seeing anyone then said, “You sound familiar like the bun... the person I was speaking to before” she corrected herself, “but when I look left or right I can’t see you.”

“Have you tried looking down or more importantly in this case, up?” he asked.

Alice glanced downward furtively as she wanted to ensure she was thorough then upwards and saw the person who resembled a rabbit on a tree limb. It wasn’t that he was on the limb of a

tree, rather, it was the manner to which he was attached to the tree limb that caused Alice to utter, "Curiouser and curiouser!"

For, he was quite a height above her and seemed to be attached to the tree by his feet instead of using his legs in a proper Second City manner to anchor the back of his knees to the branch from above. This did not seem to bother him in any way whatsoever and he simply seemed to grow frustrated that she found his position to be so awkward and at some point decided he didn't look quite authoritative enough and abandoning his crouch with his hands and feet on the bottom of the branch, decided to stand. Now that he was standing in a most expectant manner on the underside of a tree branch, Alice waited patiently as she wasn't sure exactly what it was that he wanted and could recall little else except to be amazed at his ability to stand wherever he wished.

"I really need to know if you're from Second City," he demanded rather bluntly shaking Alice to her senses.

"Why yes, yes I am." She reluctantly answered, "But what concern is it to you seeing how mere moments ago you were prepared to abandon me."

Alice had taken note of his eyes on this occasion which, when not furled in defense, seemed warm and gentle and quite pleasant to look at.

"You didn't say you were from Second City, you simply called me a jungle bunny. You were rude and offensive." He, as he was the only he that was about, answered as he walked down the trunk of the tree. Alice wasn't as surprised as his first reappearance now. She thought to herself that if he could crouch on the underneath of a tree limb, stand on the underneath of a tree limb, then he should be able to walk down easily and this seemed to follow some substantial reason in her mind.

"I apologize for my earlier affront," Alice answered sincerely as she truly was sorry and had never intended to insult him.

"Whatever, you don't know no better bein' from Second and all." He answered affluently despite his improper use of grammar.

"Oh, well, I suppose I hadn't considered it that way," Alice answered feeling rather confused.

"What's your name? That's how it's done for future reference," He asked and Alice shook her head trying to understand exactly how he, being from where he was, could correct her, being

from Second City, on how to introduce oneself to another. She felt herself growing angry but calmed herself as he could, with all truthfulness, simply walk away once more.

“My name is Alice,” she answered and forgiving him in her mind she asked, “May I ask your name?”

“Yes,” he answered with a shrug.

“Well, what is it?”

“What’s what?”

“Your name,” She answered with some consternation.

“Well you didn’t ask, you said may you ask to which I said yeah then you never asked,” He rolled his eyes and looked back at Alice as if she were on the border of insanity.

Alice sighed deeply and composed herself, “May I…” then she thought better of her phrasing and asked in a different manner, “Tell me your name please.”

“My name is March,” March answered ostensibly with a large smile and cordial disposition.

“March,” Alice asked quizzically as if she wasn’t sure that could be someone’s first name.

“Yes, March Hare, nice to meet you.” He answered.

“March Hare?” she asked glad of the fact she hadn’t voiced her second opinion that he was a rabbit instead of a bunny but amused none the less.

“What’s so funny?”

“Well, it’s just that your last name is Hare and I said bunny which isn’t a far cry away from rabbit or Hare,” Alice answered explaining herself.

“Did you know that prior to asking my name?” March asked questioningly.

“Why no of course not,” Alice replied still amused.

“And that’s why you’re rude. Jungle Bunny is an offensive term and Jangala, the Sanskrit origin of the word Jungle, means woods or forest. Hence you’re presumptions were incorrect and could be misconstrued as a slight which they were.”

“Oh,” Alice was taken aback by her ignorance.

“See, you seconds don’t know nuthin,” March repeated then strolled to where she was previously sitting and sat down himself. He stretched and twisted, and then settled and looked at her with a dreadful sternness that caused her to feel she were under scrutiny.

“Well, I suppose there’s no other recourse to the matter but to switch my directives and consider you my priority of responsibility.” He concluded with finality and threw up his hands.

March had been trying to discern whether or not Alice was speaking honestly and upon considering her dress, manner of speech, and accessories had decided she must have been telling the truth. March wiggled his nose in a most rabbit like manner, sniffed, waved his hands in the air, and then brought his elbows to his sides.

“Are you hungry?” he asked in a pleasantly excited tone, “It’s time to eat.”

Alice was not altogether excited about participating in a meal as she recalled that hitherto meeting March Hair, she’d been chased by zombies and voiced her concern.

“I was being chased by zombies just a moment ago, are you sure it’s safe to eat here?” she asked as she craned her head behind her and listened for any abstract zombie wanderings.

“Of course it is! The things you call ears are antennae and if there was a zombie nearby, I’d kill it as that was my previous directive.”

“Directive?” Alice asked perplexed at his constant mentioning of the subject.

“Yes, my directive.”

“Are you in the military or the police?”

“No and most assuredly no!” March replied seemingly offended once more to her latter inquiry.

“Oh, then how is it that you will be able to help me?” she requested in earnest.

“You know you ask a lot of questions without answering the ones that matter,” March frankly objected then sighed deeply to which Alice blushed and looked down at the ground while tracing her foot in the dirt.

“Do you see any military or police looking for you? This isn’t Second City you know.” He explained as he pointed out the obvious.

“No, this isn’t Second City and things don’t seem normal around here at all.” Alice replied mystified by her surroundings.

“What makes things so perfect in Second City? Things down here were fine before Second City started experimenting with people trying to create super soldiers and ended up creating a zombie army instead.”

Alice was aghast at March’s unequivocally untrue, at least to her knowledge, revelation. Things were fantastic in Second City and she aspired daily to be the best consumer she possibly could. In fact this was so much so, that had she not been interrupted by the zombies she would

have been well on her way to her goals after having received her first kiss. However, the fact that neither the police nor the military had come searching for her did seem odd to Alice.

“Well, I’m sure someone will come looking for me.” She replied sorrowfully.

“You’re looking at him,” March answered.

“Why, whatever do you mean?”

“You’re looking at the person who is looking for you,” March answered pointing a thumb at himself.

Beyond feeling passably ashamed of herself, Alice took note of March’s attire. He had on a brown leather vest with tassels over his chest, a black t-shirt, blue jeans, a pair of relatively odd looking boots, and his hair was indeed finely braided as she had noticed before. Aside from this, a medallion swung loosely over his t-shirt and a braided headband adorned his head. Alice was certain he wasn’t from Second City at all.

“Why you don’t look like you’re from Second City at all,” she quipped.

“Second City people don’t come down here since they screwed up their super soldier program. That happened about twenty or so years ago.”

“That seems like a rather large gap in time,” Alice replied enthralled with March’s regale.

“I don’t personally keep track of Second City mess ups. Now do you want something to eat or not?”

Alice was certainly juxtaposed about accepting March’s offer due to his revelation. Second City couldn’t be responsible for the plight of others. If people choose to stay down here then it wasn’t the fault of Second City in Alice’s opinion. Yet, when she considered how often her parents told her she was lucky to be in Second City and that her great grandparents had been specially selected to inhabit the city many years ago she began to wonder what comprised the criteria for the determination to be included exactly. Alice’s stomach growled and her body seemed to make the decision about nutrition for her as she sat down.

“Ah, let’s see what we have,” March exclaimed seeming to forget his earlier statement altogether but Alice suspected it was still at the back of his mind. March opened the left lapel of his vest and reaching behind him withdrew a sandwich and, upon placing the food item between them, repeated the action on his right pulling bags of fruit and a thermos. Alice wasn’t sure where he retrieved the sustenance from but it seemed edible and she was positively famished. March took a half sandwich for himself and offered her the other half and split the fruit and



poured her cup of drink first. Despite their bumpy greeting, she found him all in all pleasant and sociable to be around.

“You have a different perspective on the wholesome state of Second City I find rather curious,” Alice inclined as she finished her half sandwich.

“Second City tells you what they want to tell you. History is told by the victors Alice. Not the people they trod upon.” March keened as he drank directly from the thermos.

“If you wouldn’t mind, could you please enlighten me as to how you were informed that I may be down here and where exactly is here?”

“Wonderland for all I know, I know it used to be a city in its own right. The only names that come to mind start with a New. Maybe it’s New Orleans, or New Hampshire, or New York. I’m not really sure anymore and I don’t think anyone really cares. They’re too busy trying to survive.”

Alice nodded gravely, concerned at present with her own survival. After she finished some fruit from the bag she discarded the container on the ground which March promptly scooped up and placed in a bag.

“Seconds,” he muttered to which Alice replied, “No thank you I’m quite full.”

March shook his head and ignored her for a moment before continuing.

“As to who contacted me to determine whether or not you were alive, Second City contacts the Tea Masters, of which I am an apprentice being both tested and watched. As such, I’d appreciate it if you placed your scrapping in the proper locale due to the fact that Tea Masters do not leave a trail for zombies to follow.”

“Have you no anthros capable of containing such debris without the need to sully yourself with the bother?”

March shook his head ostentatiously and gave Alice a derisive scowl.

“Are you in Second City?”

“No,” Alice had already gathered, “I am perhaps in wonderland or some other New-unknown locale.”

“Then don’t behave as if you are. You’ll live longer,” March cautioned Alice to which she swallowed a suddenly large and imagined lump in her throat.

Wishing to change the subject Alice probed, “how old are you?”

“Eighteen, what’s it matter?”

“I’m sixteen, thank you very much. I just wished to further make acquaintance and change the ghastly subject we seem to be mired.”

“Too bad, your habits are atrocious. You’re sloppy, and you’re liable to get yourself killed out here. I’m surprised you’ve lasted this long honestly. Regardless, I’ve contacted the Tea Masters regarding your whereabouts. You’ve been entrusted to me for the sake of your comfort. You Seconds seem to be a tad skittish. I’ve planned the best route for us to take to get you home. That’s the good news. The bad news is it’ll take a long time and because I’m on my testing, we will be in and out of contact with the Tea Masters. For you, that means I’ll be reporting our progress, and you should behave as there will be no reinforcements should we get into the thick of it.”

Alice nodded, not altogether confident with the proposition but without much choice she had no other option but to agree.

“Fortunately for you, I’ve planned a route that brings us to my friends and my first home. They will welcome you directly and assist you with any need a Second,” March spoke that particular word very snidely, “may have.”

March stood up, brushed himself off, checked the ground for any bits, pinched at it as if he were compulsively obsessed and stuck his hand behind his back discarding whatever he felt he’d cleaned.

“You ready?” March asked as Alice contemplated her curious companion. She stood smartly, brushed off her dress in the same manner as March. Pointed in the air as if a sudden and delightful thought had caused her to shout eureka! Pinched the ground and placed what she thought might be a bread crumb in March’s waiting hand which disappeared behind his back once more.

“Aight then, this way.” He too pointed took a few steps then swung around and went in the opposite direction. The woods looked formidable but Alice speculated that if March could be trusted with her safety he was reasonably well qualified if not most assuredly curious. She was most excited to meet his friends and see if they were equally as curious and whether or not they agreed with his sentiment. Nevertheless the most pressing question on her mind was about his earlier antics.

“Excuse me Mr. Hare,” she asked as they jaunted along at a considerable pace.

“Just call me March,” he interrupted.

“My apologies, March,” she corrected herself.

“You said it once. You have my attention,” he quibbled.

“Yes, right. Well, I was curious about how you stood on the tree earlier and if you’d care to explain it.” She asked.

“You seem awfully curious all the time and if you’ll pardon the correction,” he imitated Alice’s accent once again and she was beginning to wonder if he was indeed mocking her or not, “I wasn’t standing on a tree, I was standing under the underneath of a limb.”

“Yes,” Alice resisted the temptation of repeating his bouncing if not somewhat confusing sentiment, “How did you do that?”

“This is military grade equipment. You Seconds are wasteful. You throw away things that are still good and make another one. A fellow apprentice and I were able to scavenge one and a half suits. I wear a half and a half of a half. These handy boots were part of the bargain.”

“Ah,” Alice responded seemingly satisfied until she began to become inquisitive about the function of his special shoes as the thought of reviewing statistics appeared unfavorable.

“Do they do anything else?”

“More questions?”

“Yes, if you please.”

“Yes they make me faster than as fast as I already am. Okay? No more questions. I need to concentrate.”

Alice agreed readily although she wasn’t sure what March needed to concentrate on as he walked because it seemed he was simply walking and turning about.

On a small grass covered hill outside of the artificial woods, several mysteriously cowled figures and one patron who, by appearance, contradicted the formality of the cowled figures, stood waiting to see March and his package walk out as the timers on the artificial lighting began to dim. As they analyzed copious amounts of information from the comfort of their elaborate masks, minus of course the figure who did not look like the others, they seemed as still as statues with only the artificial air systems used to ventilate the lower levels of the unnamed city below Second City revealing they may indeed be alive or at the very least well-dressed mannequins.

One may presume, quite erroneously, that these still, mysteriously cowled figures had only a minor interest in the affairs of March or Alice. In fact, the sole purpose of the mysteriously

cowled figures was to observe the actions of March in particular and ensure the safe return of Alice.

“Brother Dodo approaches, friends,” Sister Lory announced pulling off her cowl, as was her constant habit when the necessity of darkness wasn’t needed to read the lines of information or view data links to video and sound. Locks of blue hair tumbled free and she ruffled them with her fingers in an expression of her mortality and desire to be comfortable.

The person who didn’t look like the others turned and acknowledged his presence without registering any expression on her face. At most she was apathetic about the event at hand. She was more concerned with attaining her formal titling.

“Good evening family, how does our latest apprentice fair, siblings?” Brother Dodo asked in regard to March as he too removed his cowl and the mysteriously cowled figures followed suit revealing masks of varying birds and animals.

“His progress is hampered by the acquisition of the package.” Sister Eaglet who had the most interest in the affairs of March and his companion offered, “The package is of all importance dear friend and sister. The Under City is in shambles and zombies wreak their havoc willy nilly. Improved relations with Second City may allow for the better care of the citizenry that abide here.”

“Your pupils have had the most interesting time with the completion of their apprenticeship. They still seek to retain their ties to their former lives as well.” Brother Duck both commented and complimented Sister Eaglet.

“Has that not come as an advantage in this ordeal? March’s route takes him through several areas with which he is well acquainted.” Sister Eaglet retorted contemplatively. Prior to accepting her two latest pupils, she had not been fond of them at all. Truthfully she’d detested her appointed duty and had seen it as a punishment.

“These two have been unorthodox since their inception,” Brother Dodo acknowledged with a distaste that seemed to permeate through the mysteriously cowled figures.

“I hope you don’t expect me to just sit here and listen to you banter on about me and March as if we didn’t exist. Regardless of your opinion, we’ve accomplished your tasks and we are due our entitlements.” Said the one who didn’t look like the others grinding through her teeth.

“No matter your accomplishments, you’d do well to address your family with the proper respect daughter Madeline Hatter. March still has not completed his assessment and his course, albeit safer than the alternatives, will take a day to complete.”

“But Mother! How can I just sit here,” Madeline began then corrected herself despite her rage and relenting in her usual adolescent manner which was the most the group had come to expect since the side effects of the duos augmentations she said, “Fine!”

“Notwithstanding Sister Eaglet, the two have accomplished great deeds with their abilities. I was sincerely in doubt of their chosen method of acquiring the necessities they needed through ill-gotten manners; however, it would be prudent to note they have succeeded where others have not. They are both resourceful and charismatic in light of their inconsistencies. I expect March shall complete the tasks at hand with no further delays than should be expected. I’d also add that one shouldn’t underestimate their allegiance with the Cheshire. She has assisted them to great effect on more than one occasion that I’m aware.” Brother Dodo concluded.

“The affairs of Second City are of little concern in light of the zombie manifestation, disregarding the source. I for one would not shed a tear if the package were not delivered. We shall need assistance in the form of a trained military attaché in order to guard the inherent safety of the public or what is left of them.” Sister Lory chimed in with a sullen response.

“With the failure of the suits the situation has become exacerbated. Such is the tendency with politics, religion, and commercialism. Those in power seek merely to stay in power, friends.” Sister Eaglet pointed out and the mysteriously cowed figures nodded in agreement.

Madeline Shook her head as her distemper grew. “March always comes through. We are bonded. Package or not he will complete his training. Had we have been treated differently perhaps you would be able to expect more loyalty.”

While her diatribe was cutting, this time Sister Eagle did not chastise Madeline for her remarks. They were given training counter to Brother Dodo’s normal standards as was directed and they had succeeded by sheer determination alone. They had been tested in fire and prevailed while honing and refining their standards. Indeed even Brother Dodo felt a pang of shame as he acknowledged the truth of her statement.

“Your point is taken and understood. I cannot disagree with the truth of the matter. You will become family. Now it is time to see if March can live up to his end of the bargain.

Remember young Madeline, we cannot purely have the sake of our own interests in mind as we are accommodating your unique bond with young March Hare.”

Madeline pulled a wisp of red hair from her eyes and studied Brother Dodo, which she referred to as Father Dodo for the time being. She could see he spoke the truth.

“Look yonder friends, March exits the forest with package in tow. Let us see how he handles his next trial. Keep in mind daughter Madeline, it is unacceptable to witness another apprentices reckoning.” Sister Lory exclaimed and cautioned as March left the woods with Alice. Madeline settled herself as she stood next to Sister Eaglet.

Alice found it difficult to keep up with March which she blamed partially on the fact that he had better foot wear and partially because she felt March still had some distaste for her general ideology. The truth was that neither thought was accurate nor and March had great difficulty paying attention to the directions he set upon causing him to get distracted only to have to completely change his course at unspecified intervals. Be that as it may, he kept Alice within site at all times and never neglected to ensure her personal safety. The cause for the distraction was that March was monitoring several activities at once including, of course, Alice.

“What did you mean earlier when you said that dirty Prince of Diamonds?” she asked as she was once again curious and had already asked about their course on several occasions only to have either reminded March that they were supposed to be going in a certain direction or to be told one thing later to be told something else.

“Oh, him? He’s just jealous is all. Thinks he can buy whatever he wants and is mad at me because I did the Princess of Spades a favor.” March replied absentmindedly vaguely remembering his earlier comment.

“I’m not quite sure why that would be such a problem. I mean doing someone a favor hardly seems like any reason to be upset or jealous.”

“Well, she kinda started digging on me after that.” March admitted reluctantly.

“Seems quite the painful experience if you ask me,” Alice replied unsure of what digging meant.

“You don’t know what digging someone is do you,” he asked detecting a mild hint of ignorance.

“That is an excellent observation,” Alice responded still trying to keep her Second City consumer mentality pleasant despite her grudge and the fact that she was struggling.

“It means she started liking me,” he answered with the slightest hint of a smile.

“What favor did you do for her exactly?” Alice asked beginning to get suspicious.

March paused for a moment, checked his map and turned slightly to the left before taking another step.

“A kiss,” he answered, “Her first kiss.”

Alice frowned somewhat. She remembered the intensity in March’s eyes when he was under the limb under the tree and upside down and how deep his brown eyes seemed to be as they drew her in. She’d contemplated, still having yet to receive her first kiss, receiving a kiss from March as a substitute and the thought of him already having his first kiss caused her to wonder if giving him a kiss was such a good idea after all.

“Oh, I could see how that would make him jealous,” she answered somewhat dismayed.

“It was a bigger deal to him and her than it was to me,” March informed her and that gave Alice pause for a moment while she ruminated over the conversation.

“It was a bigger deal to him and to whom?” she asked uncertain of his earlier statement.

“The Princess of Spades.”

“I didn’t know there was a Princess of Spades, I was sure there were only kings, queens, and jacks of whom I would suppose you are referring when you say Prince of Diamonds.”

“We’re talking about people, not cards. Besides, what sense does it make to have a Queen and no princesses? Where does the queen come from, thin air?”

Alice mulled over the comment and it did make sense.

“You know what happens when you have a bunch of men and no women? They fight each other because they have nothing better to do with themselves. Men need women and women need men. The world is silly. Anyway, he’s upset about me giving her a kiss.”

“Oh, was that the favor?”

“No, of course not. That was the reward. The favor was that she wanted me to find her cat.”

“I thought being a princess she would have plenty of people to help find her cat.” Alice speculated aloud.

“Nah, this cat is special. She’s a Cheshire cat and she didn’t like being stuck in the Princess of Spades company. So I let her go.”

“Well then how did you receive the reward?”

“You sure do ask a lot of questions,” March replied disgruntled.

“Your answers are confusing,” Alice retorted out of frustration.

“The Princess of Spades has a special cat, the Cheshire cat,” March started.

“I’ve heard as much,” Alice blew a damp wisp of hair from her eyes that had fallen into her vision.

“Just listen instead of asking questions. Anyway, the Cheshire cat ran away because she didn’t like how spoiled the Princess of Spades is. I was tasked to go find her. I found her and agreed to let her go for three more days. I went back to the Princess of Spades and told her I was on the job but I would need three more days because she was elusive. The Princess told the Queen and they agreed to give me three days to find her. On the third day we met up and I walked into the place with her. Everyone got what they wanted and the Princess was so happy she gave me a kiss. The Prince of Diamonds, who had been courting her found out and he got jealous because he’s been spending a lot of money to woo her and just like that she didn’t want to be bothered with him anymore. He’s been causing me grief ever since. Aha! Here we go!”

Alice looked up in alarm and saw that they were at the edge of the forest.

“That is simply fantastic! I thought we’d never get out of the woods,” She clapped and laughed in excitement.

“Before we leave, I need to do something though so I need you to come closer Alice.” March instructed her and Alice became suspicious.

“Would you mind telling me what it is you plan to do before I come over?”

“Yes, I would. Now if you please?” March asked in a statement that sounded more like a demand. Alice stepped over and before she could disagree yet again, March politely scooped her up in his arms that seemed far stronger than she anticipated. He deposited her on a sturdy tree branch faster than Alice had time to cause alarm. He then held his finger up to his mouth and shushed her. Alice had nary a moment to protest before she heard the snap and crunch of deciduous trees on the forest floor. The footsteps sounded laborious and measured. She realized very quickly that they were being followed and March had brought her to safety. Terrified that in all the wandering the zombies had caught up with them, Alice covered her mouth with both hands and didn’t utter a sound.

“Stay here,” March whispered, “I’ll deal with this.”



Alice worried that he too would end up the same way Robert had but there was a sense of calm about March to which she prescribed. She nodded her head in consent, and March took vigil on his branch, stepping lightly away but no further than a meter. His arms twitched and there appeared two long barrels held in each hand with a piece of metal that stuck up at the end. Alice's concern for March quickly faded as she realized that he'd created some antique weaponry. Alice had little appeal for such affairs but was fascinated with the event as she'd never seen such apertures before nor had she seen anyone who could cause such events to occur merely by flicking their wrists and have such items be assembled in their hands.

The scrunching crunching sound of footsteps came perilously close and finally, they sounded as if they were directly under them then all about. She could hear tiresomely loud breathing and grunting as if the dead were struggling with the effort to move. March sat hunched like a feline about to pounce then he stepped off into the air and disappeared from view. There was a long moment of silence and then a thunderous wet cracking sound followed by a squeal and the sound of a body hitting the ground.

"That didn't sound like the zombies I encountered earlier," Alice contemplated aloud, "It sounded rather more like a pig."

Alice didn't have long to debate the topic in her head before the air rippled with the sound of electro charges that coursed through the air like a large built up static charge. More squealing climbed up through the canopy of leaves and peppered against her ear drums. Birds shot into the air in distress.

"I'm quite certain zombies don't shoot," Alice said aloud once more and furrowed her eyebrows in an expression of her curiosity. Cautiously, she crept closer to where March had disembarked from the tree and peered over to see a form resembling a rotund individual but with a face that looked like it could be a cross between a person and a pig, wearing tan cargo pants, a navy blue shirt, a helmet, and a scarlet metallic badge resembling a diamond.

"My word," Alice announced shocked, "those are the police here!"

The police in Second City had always been most helpful and polite so March's actions had confused her. She couldn't fathom for the life of her why March would attack them. March on the other hand was prancing about almost as if he was joyfully dancing. When she looked in his direction, he'd hopped on the back of one of the pig like officers and shot him with one of the tubes on his arm. The pig officer fell unconscious forth with and before he could hit the ground,

March had already leapt to another position as streaks of blue light flashed and crashed on the tree he'd hid behind carving the bark away like tooth picks tossed in the air.

"Why, he must stop this at once!" Alice declared and set about trying to remove herself from the tree which was far more complicated than she anticipated and she quickly found herself clinging to the limb for dear life with one leg propped on the tree trunk and the other dangling helplessly.

"Oh deer," she moaned then as she noticed March once more, "Behind you officer! He's behind you! March you must cease at once!"

Enthralled and amused by her defenseless position the pig officer grunted in a tone that could be mistaken for a laugh and aimed his rifle at her.

"What are you doing officer?" Alice shouted as she clamored to maintain her grip. He was completely oblivious to March, who tapped him on one shoulder then the other and as he turned about to find the source of the distraction, March shot him in the stomach causing him to squeal profusely before crashing to the ground in silence. He was definitely unharmed but it seemed as if he'd done a dance before his fall like he was being jolted under an electrical influence.

"My goodness!" Alice cried as March laughed and bounced away standing in front of one officer who seemed thoroughly perplexed as to what to do now that his target was directly in front of him. He hopped about grunting and squealing in excitement as a pig officer further away aimed his rifle at his fellow pig officer. March seemed to know exactly what he was doing and shot at the offensive officer who seemed to go rigid as electricity coursed through his body before slumping to the ground. March used his barrel to smash into the face of the confused officer behind him breaking through the clear visor and sending the large figure on a short trip through the air as he squealed and grabbed for his snout. Off March jumped again jumping, smashing, and humming as he went along.

"Is that little bunny foo foo he's humming?" Alice asked to know one in particular.

"Go on, and take your friends too!" March shouted in protest, "You can let go now if you'd like."

"Are you sure? I feel as if I'm in certain peril."

"The sooner you let go the sooner we can move along," March advised and having little other choice, Alice let go of the limb, fell a short distance, and landed squarely on the tummy of one of the abandoned pig officers much to March's delight.

“I cannot believe you! How dare you have me assault an officer! I apologize sincerely mister officer for landing on you.”

“I don’t think he can hear you Alice, I believe he’s gone to sleep on the job.” March laughed aloud.

The connotation sent Alice into a rage and with her face taking on a bright hue of red she burst forth and declared, “I didn’t want to see you bopping the pig officers on the head! You’re not a Hare, you’re a goon!”

Offended March stopped laughing and glared at Alice before they both heard someone singing a song that went to the tune of:

“The Tea Master March Hare  
Went hopping through the forest  
Jumping on the card pigs  
and bopping them on the head  
Down came mislaid Alice and **she** said  
Tea Master March Hare,  
I don’t want to see you  
Jumping on the card pigs  
And bopping them on the head,  
You’re not acting like a Hare, you’re a Goon!  
Then Tea Master March Hare bopped mislaid Alice on the head!  
And the Moral of the story is: be careful what you ask for!”

Which was followed by an uproar of laughs and giggles which were male, and obviously from the March Hare, but also female and Alice couldn’t tell to whom they belonged.

“Reveal yourself at once!” Alice stamped her foot and the knuckles of her fingers turned white as they jutted from her sides.

A somewhat plump pink and purple hair covered figure lighted on the limb that Alice had recently inhabited and grinned at Alice with a toothy cat like grin. Alice was more shocked by her appearance then she was when she saw the pig officers that the song had indicated were card pigs.

“Oh deer, who or what are you?”

“I am Cheshire,” Cheshire stated as she hopped down on all fours close to March, “Could you be ever so gracious and do me the favor of helping me get this crick from my back? It’s rather difficult being such a wondrous creature at times.”

She brushed against March’s hip and flitted her tail in front of Alice’s face in doing so. March, knowing very well the spot she wanted scratched, gently reached down and began to rub her lower back.

“Oh, that’s the spot, right before the tail. Puurrrrrfect, to coin a cliché,” Cheshire giggled and arched her back which responded, eventually, with an audible clicking.

“Now that that’s complete, I see you’ve garnered the package. Quiet a shame she doesn’t have a better sense of humor about Under City affairs but what can be expected of a Second?”

“Now see hear!” Alice, quite over her surprise, responded but she stopped her tirade when Cheshire stood to her full height.

“I shall ask you dear Alice, to whom does the responsibility of policing the police fall?” then she spake sideways to March, “It appears this one be not so savvy, yarrrrr. Oh rolling a good r is such a delight!”

Cheshire rubbed her elbows together as she twitched her tail and squiggled in a dance of delight while Alice tried to deduce to whom the responsibility fell and found she wasn’t quite sure. In a state of frustration she resolved that the police should call the police and stated her answer forthwith which caused the pair to chortle to themselves.

“This is precisely the thinking the suits employed when they began their despotism. When there is no justice in the justice system complications will naturally arise.” Cheshire answered and Alice felt more a fool in her presence than she had in March’s.

“How could there be no justice in the justice system?” Alice cried, “The idea in and of itself is preposterous!”

“Simple, when there’s money to be made that outweighs the fairness of judgment. Those card pigs were on the orders of the Prince of Diamonds. Did you not see their badges?” March asked.

Alice looked back at the pig that was still unconscious and saw his badge and helmet were missing.

“Quick March, bop her on the head! I’m sure you could make your journey much faster!” Cheshire cried as she placed the helmet on her head haphazardly and hastily pinned the badge on her dress.

Having grown dispassionate with their jests and the reality of her situation, Alice grew flush and then tears sprang from her eyes.

“You’re both rude despicable creatures and I have a mind to depart your company altogether! You have no respect for proper consumermanship! Had I not been with you I may have been able to ask the police pig men to escort me to safety instead.” She bawled as she tried to restrain her tears.

The Cheshire laughed mercilessly, “Have you not heard a word I’ve said? The card pigs are corrupt simple minded creatures that would sooner have you for dinner before assist you. The only reason they were even this far from their roost was because they were on orders to avenge the Prince of Diamonds fickle pride by capturing March Hare.”

Having heard the truth straightforward, Alice composed herself, “I suppose calling the card pigs, as you’ve termed them, would be of little use then.”

“Trust me, dearr, you’re much better off with March although I have not yet determined what his interest is in you, beyond stealing another first kiss.” Cheshire crooned assisting Alice with her plight while using comforting tones.

March gawked and it was Alice’s turn to laugh as she asked, “And just how many first kisses have you stolen young March?”

“None at all thank you very much, they were all given to me,” March attested defensively as he became the laughingstock of commentary.

“Oh he stole mine and the Princess of Spades that I know of and Madeline would have given him her first kiss if he would stop kissing others.”

“Hush you,” March shushed Cheshire.

“Are you sure you want me to be so quiet? I’ve things to tell both Alice and you,” Cheshire teased March who gave in with determined silence but stuck his tongue out in indifference.

“The Tea Masters are aware you’ve acquired the package and have given you leniency regarding your time limit based upon your route.”

“I knew as much,” March replied keenly noting, much to his relief that Madeline only knew that he was delivering a package not a person.

“But did you know your admission is not based upon delivery of said package? The choice is entirely up to you.” Cheshire grinned at Alice ruefully.

Alice instantly felt an inherent fear as she considered her demise at the hands of the Prince of Diamond's card pigs, zombies, or whatever else may lie beyond. Looking to March for reassurance, she saw his face set in grim determination. She realized the mission was a risk to his wellbeing and took time away from his goals. He seemed to be weighing his options.

"Anything else?" He asked as Cheshire leapt to a tree.

"The rest you know already for which there is none for the weary. Take care Alice and good luck," she crooned and disappeared from site although Alice observed a trail that capered through the trees and disappeared as the artificial air, although she didn't know it was artificial air, made the leaves frolic.

"Let's go," March uttered and set off at a pace that was much slower than before.

Mysteriously cowed figures surveilled March and Alice's exit from the woods.

"He has conquered his first trial, friends" Sister Eaglet reported.

"His journey will be most interesting in deed. As for us it is time we were off and within distance for his next encounter," Brother Dodo advised and as if they'd never been there the mysteriously cowed figures vanished into the waning light.

Alice followed behind March until she couldn't contain her angst any further.

"What does that mean?" she asked feeling her time was limited.

"What do you think it means?" March asked without stopping.

Alice thought about what Cheshire had said and with trembling lips answered, "I'm not entirely sure but it sounded as if she said that my life didn't matter much or at all. It matters to me though. You might not consider Second City a great place but I consider it home and I should like very much to return and be done with this place."

"That's your problem, Alice. Nothing is that simple. Cheshire did more for you than you know right now," March answered without the jubilation he once had or the kindness he'd entreated her to when he shared his lunch. March stopped and his ears twitched. He turned to Alice with a smile and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"That card pig had a video surveillance lens on him. He recorded our conversation and it went to the Prince of Diamonds. We need him to think twice about sending someone else after us. A Tea Master without restraint is a dangerous thing. At least they won't be trying to capture

or attack you now. He'll direct his vendetta against me alone. As for me, I know the Tea Masters better. It's just another test. I told you I will bring you home Alice and now I'm going to tell you this. Be careful for what you wish. Second City may not be the same when you return."

With that March relinquished her shoulders back to Alice.

"Cheer up though; we're going to meet some of my friends. It's getting late. The zombies will be out soon and we can start our journey tomorrow. Fair enough?"

Alice wasn't sure what to say. She missed her family. She wanted to know the fate of Robert although she was sure he was dead. Mostly, she just wanted to be somewhere safe.

"Fair enough, March, I shall trust you have my best intentions in mind," she agreed and without further delay the two set off.

The end

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Thank you for reading the Introduction to the Alice Zombie Series. Your participation is appreciated and it's the author's extreme wish that you were not bitten by any harvestmen, commonly known as daddy-long-legs or Opiliones, during this distraction. My sister-in-law was bitten by one once. No, really. Regardless, be on the lookout for more Alice's Zombie Adventures in Under City during the coming weeks.

...And watch out for daddy-long-legs.

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