Maddie Hatter

by Alicin_Wonderland

Summary

When Alice left Wonderland seven years ago, she came back with something precious: a daughter. Now, war has broken out in London so Alice must whisk her daughter away to safety. The only place she can go is Wonderland...but Wonderland proves far more dangerous than the world above.

If anyone has a suggestion for a better title, please, dear god, tell me.

I do not own Wonderland/Underland or any of the characters but Maddie Hatter.
Disclaimer: Wonderland and its characters are not mine, but I own Alice's daughter.

The world was at war. There was only one place I could think to go. Wonderland. However, I was not allowed back. All I can hope is that my daughter is. After all, she is the Mad Hatter's daughter. I knew where to go, back to the rabbit hole. If my daughter couldn't get us back in, the hole would not be there. If she could, we were safe.

"Mama, where are we going?" asked the seven-year old. Her green eyes were filled with curiosity. "Hush, baby. We'll be there soon." At least I hoped we would.

We darted along the cobbled roads of London, our shoes making a click-clack sound on the dismal gray road. More than once we had to press our backs to a building to keep from the soldiers seeing us. They marched in unison, at least twenty at a time, guns resting on their shoulders. My heart was hammering in my chest. Could they hear it?

Please don't hurt my baby, I begged silently.

We took off again, along the dirt road I traveled so long ago. We stumbled over the ruts driven into the pale dirt by carriage wheel after carriage wheel.

My daughter stumbled and cried out, "Mama!"

I picked her up. Her red curly hair was in sharp contrast to my own blonde. She was wearing a blue dress, while I wore white. Why is it always blue? I had not dressed her this morning, she had dressed herself.

"Hush, hush, you just scraped your knee."

I continued walking, I could not run while clutching a seven year old to my chest. In the not-so-far-off-distance I heard gunfire. I began to walk quicker. A little farther away, the sound of a bomb rang out. The earth shuddered beneath my feet and leaves on the trees rustled. The wind blew and brought the bitter smell of metal and smoke. I broke into a run, still carrying my daughter.

The cloth covering my shoulder became damp; my daughter was crying. I set her down, in front of the hedge maze. The last time I was here I had to endure a grueling conversation with Haymish's mother. I knelt before my daughter, hands on her shoulders, and then I hugged her.

"Not much farther, I promise," I reassured her and squeezed her tight. I grabbed her hand we plunge into the green depths of the maze. "Let's go."

We got turned around several times trying to find the exit. All the while the gunfire and bombs grew closer.

C'mon, Alice, you remember! I thought to myself. That way! I dodged to the left and we emerged in front of the tree. There was no hole.

"Maddie, do you see that hole in front of that big tree?" I asked my daughter nervously.

"Of course, Mama, can't you?" Maddie replied curiously.

I smiled sadly, "No, honey."

The gunfire gets closer. "There!" I hear someone shout in our direction.

"Maddie! Hold my hand and jump into the hole." I yelled over the gunfire, my hand grasping hers tightly.

"But, Mama…" Maddie protested.

"Now!"

And she did. I screamed as she disappeared beneath me, and then, I fell through solid ground. Still holding my hand, we tumbled through a tunnel of colors and swirls with random objects here and there. A pocket watch, a piano, a lamp, a bed, all things I remembered. I smiled.

I'm going back to Wonderland.
We fell and fell and fell. This time I was not scared, I knew that where I was going where my
daughter, Madeline Kingsleigh Hatter, would be safe. And she would finally meet her eccentric,
sweet father. I fell for the Hatter when we saw each other at the White Queen's palace and from that,
came Maddie. Seven years later, I loved the Hatter no less, but in a different way.
I slid out of my reminiscence and focused on my surroundings, a book and a bowl of candies. I
reached out and grabbed two candies, making sure there was none of Wonderland's curious labels
telling me I would shrink or turn into a frog by eating one. I popped them into my pocket after a
second thought. Best not to eat candy while tumbling end over end into a mystical land.
The colors began to fade and we were deposited unceremoniously onto the black and white marble
floor. The Upelkuchen cake sat in the glass box and the key was on the table next to the Pishsalver
potion. Just like last time the Upelkuchen was marked "Eat Me" and the Pishsalver "Drink Me". I
picked up the key and set it on the floor.
"Here, drink this, not too much, though." I handed her the Pishsalver.
"Where are we, Mama?" Maddie asked defiantly, refusing to take the potion.
"A curious, extraordinary place, where the things of dreams come alive, it's called 'Wonderland',' I
said and once again handed her the Pishsalver. She accepted this time, taking a small sip. She began
to shrink. Her blue dress becoming too big in moments, but she was only seven and did not have
much shrinking to do. I smiled at my tiny daughter.
"Mama!" she cried.
"It's alright, Maddie."
I decided to set everything up so I wouldn't have to spend time opening the door and moving the
cake while shrunken. These things are hard to do when you are not but the size of a newborn. I put
the key in the lock and twisted, but left the door shut. Then I pulled the Upelkuchen out of the glass
box and set it next to the door, and took a sip of the Pishsalver. I gagged, the taste was no better this
time.
I shrank down to my daughter's size. Shrinking, a curious feeling, really, not painful or pleasant, like
someone is sitting on your shoulders. I quickly pushed open the door for my daughter and I,
dragging the cake with me as we both remained swimming in our old dresses.
"This cake will make you bigger," I told my daughter. She takes a small bite and shot right up to her
old size. I did the same. "Well, that's better, darling, isn't it?"
I turned around to see the place I came to for refuge, but Wonderland was no longer the place I
remember.
The Wonderland I had left only a few years ago had been full of its curious life. This Wonderland
had been bled dry of the life that once hummed in the air. The fantastical mushrooms had lost their
bright colors and glossy luster. None of the butter-flies or horse-flies zoomed through the air, nipping
at each other's tails. My friends were nowhere to be seen, not even Tweedledee or Tweedledum. I
reminded myself that this time they weren't expecting any Alice, let alone the Alice, but you would
think that someone would be around.
I tugged my hand from my daughter's smaller one so I could pick up a dilapidated sign laying on the
ground. The board was damp and rotting and I could just barely make the words out.
I read the sign aloud, under my breath, "Downal wyth Bluddy Behg Hid."
"Mama, what does that say?" Maddie asked, unable to read the odd Wonderland spelling.
"It says "Down with the Bloody Big Head."
My daughter's eyebrows furrowed in confusion, "What's that mean?"
"Nothing we need to worry about these days." I set the sign back down, it must have been here even
before my last visit. The eerie thick silence in the air set my skin crawling. Something was not right. I
knew if I wanted to immediately travel to the White Queen's castle I had to go Queast whereas if I
wanted to try to find Hatter first I would need to travel in the opposite direction, Witzend. I decided to go Queast.
"Come, Maddie, would you like to meet some of your family?" I asked Maddie.
"They live here?" she asked in awe.
"Yes, baby."
Something dawned on me. Chesire could be around and he just hasn't shown his face yet. I really was not fond of those with invisibility powers.
"Chesire!" I yelled. "Chesire, are you here? Chesire! It's Alice!"
A thin form emerged, I could still see through the cat, but he was there. His voice was quiet and grave, "The Alice?"
"Is there another one I have yet to meet?"
Chesire form flickered to just his teeth momentarily. "You must leave, Alice. Just being here you are in danger."
"The Overworld is at war! I cannot go back! What has happened since I left, Chesire? Where is the White Queen?"

"Kitty!" Maddie shrieked, reaching for Chesire. Her hands went right through the flickering form and she looked crestfallen.
"Hush, Maddie," I said gently.
Recognition flickered in Chesire's eyes, "Is that Hatter's…"
I cut the mystical cat off with a hiss, "Yes! Now tell me what has happened to Underland?"
"I cannot explain in the few moments I have left, Alice. Do not travel to the White Queen's castle, whatever you do. Try to make it to Salazen Grum if you can. Be careful Alice; take care of your daughter."
I protested, "But Chesire! Salazen Grum belonged to the Red Queen!"
The Chesire tried to say something but he faded from sight with a few feeble flickers. The air returned to the thick silence that seemed to invade every fiber of my body, pushing into my ears, throat, and heart. It made me feel like something was going to happen at any moment. I grabbed my daughter's hand once more and took a step towards the path to Salazen Grum.
Immediately the air rippled. A thundering sound leached the silence from the air. I turned to face the deafening sound behind me. My daughter screamed. We ran.
Purple-Spotted Bandersnatches

Closing in behind my daughter me was a pair of Bandersnatches. I knew neither was the Bandersnatch whose eyes I'd gouged out because in place of black spots, the Bandersnatches had purple spots. Anyone else would've laughed at the mere thought of a Purple-Spotted Bandersnatch, but anyone else who had come face to face with one would've paled and cowered in fear. The horrendous beings were close enough that I could feel there hot, rancid breath on my back and smell their distinct rotting-flesh-and-wet-fur odor. They snapped their teeth and snarled behind us, my daughter started crying, and her steps faltered.

"No!" I shouted, urging her forward. "Come on, Maddie. We have to run!"

"Mama, I'm scared!"

I squeezed her hand tightly and sped up, determined to put a little more distance between us and the creatures looking to eat us. They bared their teeth again and howled. I felt air whistle pass my ear, the damn Bandersnatches were closing in. Even worse than that, the Bandersnatches were chasing us away from Salazen Grum, towards the White Queen's palace. Cheshire had made it sound like traveling to the White Queen's palace would be the end of me and my daughter. There was nowhere to turn back; the path was surrounded by the looming mushrooms and dying plant life. I decided to do something risky, I wrapped my arms around my daughter's small shoulders and tackled her to the side. We rolled over and over into the forest of mushrooms; I cracked my arm on something hard.

I scrambled to my feet, dragging my daughter up with me. I tried to ignore the throbbing in my arm, "Run, baby, through the mushrooms."

We tore through the foreboding fungi, the Bandersnatches ripped up plants and mushrooms in our wake. Dirt and moss was flung upward and bounced off our backs. Luckily for us, though, the thick vegetation was slowing down the ferocious beasts.

"Maddie," I yelled. She stopped. "I want you to run until you find a path and when you do run as far as you can."

"But what about you, Mama?" she asked, frightened.

"Just run." And she did as I asked.

I turned to face the huge furry beasts hurtling toward me, squashing down my fears for my daughter's sake.

"Hey," I screamed. "Over here you slobbering mutts!"

The Bandersnatches growled and hissed as the space closed. I picked up a rather large rock with my good hand and hurled it at the left Bandersnatch, nailing it in the head. It yowled in pain and stumbled to one side. It picked up another rock and slammed it into the other Bandersnatch's jaw with a satisfying crunch. I threw a few more rocks and took off after my daughter, hoping I had injured them enough so that they would slow down or maybe even leave us alone.
It's Raining, it's Pouring

I stumbled through the vegetation after my daughter. A huge cracking sound upset the repetitive thrumming of my footsteps. I peered at the sky in frustration in time to see a great flash of lightning tear the dismal gray world to shreds. Then the rain started. It came down in big drops that made the sad grass shiver in dismay. My hair was soon plastered to my face in clingy tendrils, wrapping around my throat and invading my gasping mouth. I spit out drenched hair and kicked my shoes off while running. My dress was growing heavier and heavier as the water pelted the cloth.

Something hard bounced off my chest, and then my shivering arms, and throat. Hail. It was hailing in Wonderland. I silently cursed every higher being I could think of as I slipped onto the road to Salazen Grum. I walked along the path like a silent ghost, I was no longer scared that the purple-spotted Bandersnatches would rip me to bits. They were too far away. My bare footsteps were dwarfed by the deafening rain that seemed to scream when it dived into the ground. The hail embedded itself within the earth, whistling past my ears as it went.

A chunk of ice the size of a golf ball bounced off my head. I muttered, “Ow. Dammit.”

I began searching for my daughter through the chaotic weather but it was too dark to see much. Lightning seared the sky and I got a good look for a few seconds. Maddie was nowhere in sight. Deafening thunder crackled overhead, briefly banishing the sound of rain and hail. I struggled on in my weeping dress and bare feet, the cold rain running down my body in rivers, causing me to shiver uncontrollably.

The path was beginning to flood; the rain had risen to an impressive depth of three inches with hail floating on top like frosty marshmallows. I slogged through even slower than before. My fingers were turning blue as the Cheshire cat’s strips and I could bet my lips were doing the same. My teeth chattered and my shivering was more like a tiny seizure.

I needed to find a way to stay dry. The only thing around was mushrooms and the decomposing bodies of trees. Now was the time to desperately wish for an umbrella. Umbrella. Of course, Alice, you idiot! I chided myself.

I found a smaller mushroom, about four feet tall and three feet wide. It was glistening purple with black spots. Poisonous. Dangerous. Deadly. I uprooted the poor thing from the ground with much difficulty, causing icy water to jump up and wrap its fingers around my ankles. The pulling sent a dull throbbing through my arm. The frigid air and water quickly drove away the pain.

I raised the ‘umbrella’ overhead with my good arm. I heard the thunking sound and felt the vibration as the angry hail tried to drive its way into the flesh of the mushroom. The gray rain ran off the mushroom in a thick sheet. All around, the sight was heartbreaking. Is this what Wonderland had been reduced to? How had the thriving world I left been reduced to nothing but monsters and an endlessly crying sky? I needed answers.

I suck my hand through the sheet of water, breaking the surface and clearing my view. I thought I saw a shadowy form moving up ahead, too tall to be my darling daughter. My throat tightened and adrenaline shot through me, banishing the icy cold from my bones.
"You're Late"

I stopped and stood stock still in the shuddering rain and forceful hail. The shadow moved. If only it wasn’t raining so hard, I might be able to see who it was. The curious shadowy form billowed and fluttered in the driving rain, in an almost delicate manner. Lightning tore the world in half again, bleaching away the gray, momentarily illuminating the figure. I still didn’t know who it was, though I was fairly certain it was a woman. I carefully edged over to the side of the path and moved forward as quietly as I could in the shin deep water. I held the mushroom over my head and stuck one hand through the curtain of rain and carefully watched the shadow. It was growing nearer, but between hail and rain (that was quickly turning into sleet, now), the figure was still obscured. I watched my breath escape my mouth in a frigid white cloud. The temperature had dropped nearly twenty degrees in the short hour since my daughter and I arrived.

I moved closer to the willowy form and squinted. I could make out a dress, hair, a face with makeup. A pale face. A face with black lipstick. The face of a certain queen I knew. I started running towards her, closing the distance as water jumped up my legs, so cold it stung the flesh.

"Your majesty!" I cried eagerly.

Her even pace did not falter, and I knew something was wrong. The White Queen’s once pristine white dress was covered in filth, streaked with dirt and grass stains. Her white hair was matted and dirty, even in the cold rain. Her perfect lipstick had smeared slightly, the teeth behind them rotting. And worst of all were her eyes, completely dead and blank. Her face was slack, with zero recognition, her mouth slightly open. Underneath the sound of the rain and hail, I could hear her mumbling quietly and nonsensically.

I frowned, "Your majesty?"

But she walked right past me. I grabbed her shoulder. The shell of the White Queen instantly came alive. She spun on my and shrieked, an ugly sound passing from between the smear of her lips and rotting teeth. The Queen placed her hands on my shoulders and pushed. Hard. I flew backwards and landed face first in the deep water. I slid over the ground, catching mud and grass in my mouth. Rolling over a few times, I stopped face-up, choking on water and mud. My arm screamed in pain and was now most certainly broken. I gagged and threw up all the mud in one watery brown stream. Coughing, I stood up, sleet was pouring from the sky like tiny needles. My mushroom umbrella laid about ten feet away, half submerged in a mixture of ice and water.

I retrieved my umbrella and continued forward, careful of anymore shadows ahead. I could only hope she hadn't seen Maddie. She must be so scared, trapped in this weather in a strange land. I can't believe I did this to my daughter, the war in the Overworld is better than this mess. I should've stayed there, or at least begged Cheshire for information when I got here.

"Mama?" someone said from behind me. Maddie crawled out from behind a mushroom, sopping wet. "Did the scary lady leave?"

"Oh, Maddie! Yes! She's gone. Come here!" I cried, kneeling down to capture my daughter in a hug. I stood back up and took her hand.

"Where are we going?"

I looked at her sadly. There was no way we could make it to Salazen Grum in this weather, Maddie was shin deep in water which meant the Crimson Sea would be raging much too badly for her to cross with me. "I don't know, sweetie. I'll figure it out."

We sloshed through water for another half hour before Maddie couldn't go on any long. "Mama, I'm cold! I can't feel my feet."

"Maddie, we just have to get a little farther down the - "

"Alice!" I whirled upon hearing my name, ready to protect my daughter from anyone who would dare come near. The White Rabbit came bounding out of a grove of depressed trees. "It can't be... Is it really you?"

"Nivens! Of course it's me! I'm so glad to see you," I told the rabbit. He looked a bit worse for wear,
with a tear in his waistcoat and some dirt on his fur but other than that, well, he had fared better than
the White Queen.
"You're late," Nivens said gravely.
Nivens McTwisp led my daughter and me through the grove of trees he had emerged from and slid some mushrooms aside, revealing another rabbit hole. "Jump in," the rabbit instructed. Maddie and I jumped down into the hole and landed in a rather large room with various creatures from Underland sitting in it. I recognized Absolem, Mallymkun, and... The Red Queen.

"What is she doing here?!" I cried and pointed to the Red Queen. I most certainly had not slain the Jabberwocky just so she could get off with a slap on the wrist. 

"Don't worry about her, I need to explain what is going on in Underland," Nivens replied. "Why don't you leave your daughter in the care of Mallymkun?"

I walked over to Mallymkun, who was sitting next to Absolem. "Alice!"

"Mally! How are you?"

"There have been better days in Underland," Mally sighed.

I nodded. "Can you watch my daughter, Maddie? I have matters to discuss with Nivens."

"But, Mama," Maddie interrupted. "She's a rat."

Mallymkun scoffed. "I am definitely not a rat! I am a dormouse, thank you very much."

"Maddie," I looked at my daughter and gave her a no-nonsense look. "Stay with your Auntie Mally. I'll be back shortly." Nivens pulled out his signature pocket watch and tapped the face, looking at me in exasperation. I kissed my daughter on the top of the head. "Be good."

"Right this way to my office," Nivens said, leading me to a tiny room in the back of the underground structure. He closed the door behind us. "Alice." He gave me a sad look and a hug. "I am so glad to see you. We were all hoping you would find a way to return."

"Well, I'm here. Will you tell me what's wrong with Underland?" I asked.

The White Rabbit pulled a map out of a desk drawer and pinned it to the wall. He began gesturing to several areas, starting with the White Queen's castle. "These are the red zones. Do not, under any circumstances, enter these areas."

"I just saw the White Queen, on my way here. What was wrong with her? She broke my arm." I held up the swollen, bruised mess my arm was.

"Did she break your skin?! Anywhere?!" Nivens asked, alarmed.

"Um, no, I don't think so...Nivens, what is going on here?"

"She has Hatter Syndrome." I gave him a questioning look. "It's madness, pure madness, spread through bites, scratches, anyway those stricken with it can draw blood."

"Why...why is it called 'Hatter Syndrome'?" I asked nervously as I silently fretted over what had become of my Hatter.

Nivens shook his furry head as he took the map down. "He developed it. He said, "Everyone will have a better time if they're just a little mad". I think he felt lonely and thought if more people were like him, he wouldn't be so lonely. He was a very sad person, you know? But he couldn't control what he created. It turned everyone who had it into these - these beasts! And from the original few, it spread quickly. Too quickly to contain and we can't find a cure."

"Doesn't the Hatter have a cure?"

"Maybe, but he has the Syndrome as well. There's no way to get it from him." My heart broke. My safe haven had been turned into Hell by the man I once loved. I shook my head in dismay. "We were hoping you would return, you know him better than the rest of us. Can you think of anything he might've used as a cure? We've tried everything, but it's hard to kill what you did not create."

"I don't know. I don't really know much about Underland medicine. He could've used anything. Mushrooms, tea, Jabberwockey blood - "

"That's it!" Nivens said. "He said, "What took my Alice away from me will return everyone's sanity," as the final stage took him over completely. You're a genius, Alice!"

I smiled at the rabbit. But his face became grave once more. "What's wrong?"
"You have to slay another Jabberwockey."
Long Live Alice! Long Live Wonderland!

Chapter Notes

I've been trying to sneak quotes in from the book, Disney movie, and Tim Burton movie so keep an eye out for those, guys!

Thanks for reading.

“Nivens, I can’t. I’m not a little girl anymore! I have a daughter to look after and care for, which is why I came back. Clearly, that was a serious mistake. I can’t slay another bloody Jabberwocky! Why does it have to be me? Why can’t you do it? Or the Red Queen? Or anyone else? I did it once, I did my part for Wonderland. It’s not my responsibility anymore,” I exclaimed, horrified and shocked.

“There are many other people in this land that can pick up a sword.”

“You are THE Alice,” Nivens yelled back. “Yes, you fulfilled a prophecy once, but a new one has been written.” Nivens removed a familiar looking scroll from his dirty waistcoat pocket and let it unravel on the floor. I read the whole thing from the time I left Underland up until the - “Acirassias Day. The day where you slay the Jabberwocky. It’s in three days, Alice. Three days, I tell you! You mustn't be late! It will take a day and a half to make it to the Endless Sea and then another half a day to climb the Talking Cliffs to the Cave of the Jabberwocks. We have to leave tomorrow! The entirety of Wonderland rests in your hands once again.”

“Nivens...Nivens - I can’t!” I threw the scroll to the ground in exasperation.

Nivens shook his head and flattened his furry white ears. He looked at me with a terrible sadness in his eyes. “Perhaps you’ve lost your muchness again,” He sighed emptily.

“Don’t you dare - Don’t you do that to me! Don’t remind me of the Hatter, I can’t think about him right now. He’s gone - Forever, do you understand that?” Tears pricked the corners of my eyes involuntarily.

“Alice, remember what I told you so long ago? ‘Sometimes forever is just one second’. He doesn’t have to be gone for eternity if you slay the Jabberwocky. We can find him and cure him with the blood of the Jabberwocky and you can have your Hatter back - Maddie can have her father for the first time in her life. Alice, don’t you see? You can be a family, you can save Wonderland, and you can be a hero!”

I shook my head aggressively, but at the air and not at the rabbit. “There was a time when you were a rabbit in a waistcoat, late for an appointment. And I was a girl in a tree with a flower crown and a silly cat named Dinah. And Wonderland was not but a dream...Sometimes, sometimes I wonder what it would have been like without any of this.”

“I know how it would be,” Nivens said and hopped to me tentatively. He rested one dirty paw on my hand. “You wouldn’t be Alice.”

“I suppose you’re right. You usually are, you old bat.” I looked up from the floor and smiled a goofy half smile through prickling tears.
Nivens furrowed his brows behind his spectacles and fake-frowned at me. “Why, young lady, I take much offense to that remark about being an old bat. I’ll have you know I’m only two-hundred and twenty-three!”

We giggled at each other like the old friends we were.

“So will you do it? Please, Alice.”

I took a deep breath and thought about Maddie, the Hatter, the war raging in the world above, and my current lack of a true home. This is where I belonged, and I knew that. And this is where I would make a home for myself and my daughter. There wasn’t another place, another world, another realm that would do. It had always been Wonderland. There had never been a doubt about that. “I’ll do it.”

Nivens and I emerged from the back office, where I was greeted by my daughter throwing herself into my arms. “Auntie Mally is mean! Make her go away!”

“Mallymkun, what in heaven’s name did you say to my daughter?” I exclaimed.

Mally pulled out her sword and picked at her fingernails with the shining tip. “I simply said I had never heard of this “Santa Clause” fellow and therefore I didn’t think he was real.” She looked up at me and said, “You shouldn’t lie to your daughter Alice.”

Oh, dear god, this is the last thing I need right now, I thought to myself. I scrambled for words. “Maddie, Auntie Mally doesn’t know about Santa Claus because he doesn’t deliver presents to Wonderland - But his twin brother does! His name is, uh -” I paused and felt like a deer in headlights. “Saint Nicholas! Right, Mallymkun?” I gave the dormouse a glare that could peel paint off walls and she nodded at me.

“Right! I forgot that Saint Nicholas has a twin brother. I’m sorry Maddie.”

“See, darling? Just silly old Auntie Mally.”

“Oh, okay. I understand now. I’m sorry I called you mean, Auntie.”

“It’s quite alright.”

“Maddie, I’m going to have to go away for a few days. I promise I’ll be back as quick as I can. I have to take care of some business and then I have surprise for you. Until then you’re going to stay with Auntie Mally and that nice lady with the big head over there.” I pointed to the sullen-looking red queen. “Her name is Iracebeth. I promise they will take good care of you or -” I paused for dramatic affect and looked at them both. “They’ll have to answer to me. And you know how that would go, don’t you, Iracebeth?”

She hrumphed in my direction and then sighed. “I will take care of the Hat -” I cut her off by sharply clearing my throat. “I mean, I’ll take care of your child if you’re going to save us all. I suppose it’s only fair.”

“Thank you,” I hissed through gritted teeth. I nodded towards the former queen’s ridiculous and filthy hat. “Don’t scare my daughter with that thing, I don’t, um, believe my daughter has ever known of a hat, er, quite like that.” I hoped with all my heart my clumsy hidden meaning wasn’t lost on her.

She blinked lazily. “I understand.”
I set Maddie down on the floor and clasped her hand. “Everyone, could I have your attention, please!” The fantastical Underland creatures stopped their chatter, tinkering, and sewing to stare at me hopefully. “I would like you all to know, I have decided to slay the Jabberwocky!”

The room broke out in cheers and everyone started talking. I hadn’t seen a happier-looking group of people in my entire life.

“This curse is over!”

“She’s going to save us!”

“I knew she’d come back!”

And then, off in the corner, there was a familiar flickering image, tinted purple with hints of pink, and an insane grin, saying, “Long live Alice! Long live Wonderland!”

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