"There are questions I have to answer...things I have to do..."

On a quest to fulfill a dream, Alice travels the world with the Company but finds herself leading a double life with twice the complication, thanks to a certain butterfly and an increasingly emotional correspondence with the Hatter that leaves her torn between the two worlds.

Book One of the Alice in Underland trilogy.

Notes

Disclaimer: I don't own any characters or locations from Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass novels, nor do I own any characters or locations from Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland film. All rights go to Lewis Carroll, Tim Burton, Linda Woolverton, Disney, etc.

* I am aware Alice's surname is spelled Kingsleigh in the film but I prefer Kingsley so that's what I went with.

See the end of the work for more notes.
9 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

If you're reading this, that means you've actually received my letter. Isn't it wonderful? I can write to you now! I am so very glad about that, my dear Hatter. The truth is, I have been wanting to write to you all this time but I didn't know how I could possibly post letters to Underland. I've thought about it so many times but I could never come up with an answer on how to do it. Really, as I am writing this, it just occurred to me how rather curious today's events were. This afternoon I was sitting in the garden thinking about that very thing, about how I might be able to send a letter to you, and I had just been struck with what I thought was the rather inspired idea to write a letter and just drop it down the rabbit hole at the Ascot's Manor in the hopes that you would somehow find it.

But then, something extraordinary happened. The precise moment after I had that thought, Absolem suddenly appeared out of nowhere! You can imagine how startled I was at the sight of him! Well, really it was the sight of him and the fact that he appeared on my shoulder and whispered "Hello, Alice" right into my ear. Honestly, it scared the daylights out of me. It's a bit embarrassing to admit this but I think I may have actually screamed when he did that. I'm certain he did it on purpose. It amuses him to no end to provoke people, I think. And while that's more than a little obnoxious and rather horrid of him, I find there's something almost endearing about it. He had quite a laugh at my reaction, which of course he no doubt fully intended, and after I scolded him for frightening me, he finally explained why he'd come. He told me now that he has finally transformed into a butterfly, he is going to look after me whenever I need him. He said all I have to do is call his name and he'll come to me. And it's true. He made me try it, to test it out, and it worked. Can you believe it? It is peculiar though because when I asked him why he wanted to look after me, his expression changed and he grew rather mysterious and refused to go into detail - he just said it had something to do with Fate and my having a special connection to Underland. He was very secretive about it which I found strange so naturally, my interest was piqued and I tried to ask him more about it but he wouldn't answer. In any case, despite his not answering some of my questions, I was quite happy to see him. We had a rather nice visit. It was a lovely visit, really. But the best part about it was his telling me how I could write to you.

He said if I write a letter to you and place it on my writing desk at night before I go to sleep and then wish it to you in Underland, it will supposedly get to you before I wake up. I really hope this works because I want you to see that I haven't forgotten you like you said I would. Honestly! As if I could forget you! It made me so very sad that you could even think such a thing after everything we went through together. It makes me wonder now, have you been thinking that all this time, wondering if I'm here in this world, going on as if none of it ever happened, and believing that I've actually forgotten you? Goodness! What a horrible thought! Well, as you can see, I most certainly haven't. I've missed you, Hatter. More than I can say. I think of you often and I miss you terribly. I didn't want to leave Underland when I did, but I had to go. Do you understand that? I had to go because there are things I need to do here in this world, but I promise, I will come back to Underland again one day, as soon as I can. I do hope you know that. I told you I would come back again, before I left after the battle on Frabjous Day, and I meant it.

I asked about you, and about the White Queen and McTwisp, Chessur, the March Hare, the Tweedles, Bayard, Mallymkun, and everyone else, wanting to know how you all are faring now that the White Queen is back in power, but Absolem said he can't reveal too much about what's going on in Underland. He also told me you wouldn't be able to write letters back to me because it would
interfere with my life here. I told him that was silly but he was quite adamant about it. It still seems silly. Why shouldn't you be able to write to me if you want to?

But at least I am allowed to write to you, and I shall, and will continue to do so until the day comes when I return to Underland.

Since I got back to London, much has changed for me. I never had a chance to tell you about my life here because so much was going on, but on the day I came to Underland, I had just run off from what had turned out to be a surprise engagement party - for me. The man who proposed is a Lord called Hamish Ascot, and everyone thought I would marry him, that I would jump at the chance to do so. But when he proposed, I panicked and ran off without giving him an answer. Earlier at the party, I had seen McTwisp running around the Ascot's lawn and just as Hamish asked me to marry him, I saw McTwisp and he was holding up a pocket watch and tapping it as if to convey that I was late for something. So when I panicked and ran off, I followed McTwisp, who led me to a rabbit hole, and when I tried to look inside it, I lost my balance and that's when I fell down the hole and ended up in that room of doors in Underland.

At any rate, after I drank the vial of Jabberwocky blood, I suddenly found myself back at the top of the rabbit hole, and to my immense surprise, I soon discovered that it was only as if a few minutes had passed since I'd run off from the engagement party. I'd been in Underland for (I think) six days or so, but when I returned to this world, I returned to the time I had left it. (Isn't that strange and curious?) So, there I was, back in London at the Ascot's Manor, and as soon as I made my way back to the gazebo where Hamish was waiting, I immediately declined his proposal. It was quite a shock to everyone, but I didn't care. Lord Ascot, Hamish's father, took me to his study after I declined the proposal and I spoke to him about my father's plans for expanding the trade routes for the Company. (It had been my father's Company, but after he died, Lord Ascot bought it.) When I told him my father's intended plans and then shared a few ideas of my own, Lord Ascot invited me to join the Company as his apprentice. That is a very big thing in this world, because women here simply don't do such a thing as work, especially as apprentices for a large Trading Company.

I'm still in London at the moment, but I am about to take my first trip with the Company. We're going to sail on a ship to places far away from here, starting with Sumatra and Borneo (which had been my father's plan), then we're going to a place called China (my idea). It's all very exciting. I've taken trips before, to the continent called Europe, but where I'm going is on the other side of the world. As it's so far, we shall be stopping in different ports along the way, mostly around the continent called Africa, then after Africa, one of the ports we'll be going to is a place called Bombay, in India. I can't wait to see it.

Absolem assured me I'll still be able to write to you, even while I am travelling, so I shall, and I'll tell you all about my adventures. I hope you're well and that you are happy now that the White Queen is back in power. I wish I knew what was going on in Underland. I don't know why Absolem is being so guarded about everything. I miss it. And I miss you. I'll write to you soon, Hatter.

Yours always,

Alice


Dear Alice,

I might not be able to send you my letters, but I shall write back to you anyway, with the hope that you might read them one day when you return.
How very happy I am that you haven't forgotten me! And even if I am not permitted to write to you, or at least send my letters to you, I'm so happy that at least you can write to me. I miss you too, Alice, more than I can possibly express. Underland is going through big changes at this time, and yes, I am happy now that the White Queen has regained her crown. But I am also sad, I admit, because you are not here to see it.

I'm glad you declined that man's proposal. And I'm glad that you are going to be an apprentice at the Company that was once your father's. I'm not really sure what it means, but it does sound exciting. I look forward to hearing about your travels and adventures in the Otherworld.

Forever yours,

Tarrant

10 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

Did you get my letter, I wonder? I left it on my writing desk last night before I went to sleep and wished it to you and this morning it was gone, so I hope you've received it. I'll be asking Absolem next time I see him.

I have been very busy today, preparing for the trip. There's so much to do! Mother and I went shopping this afternoon. She's been rather supportive about everything, which I have to admit is a bit surprising. I know she would have preferred for me to have married Hamish but she seems to have accepted my decision and she told me today that she is very proud of me for having the courage to do what I'm doing. I sometimes get the feeling she wishes she could come on this trip too. Margaret, my sister, thinks I was wrong to have declined Hamish's proposal and she thinks I'm mad now that I've joined the Company. Most people think that of me so it doesn't bother me. I live my life the way I choose, and if people think me mad for it, so be it.

Tonight's letter will be a short one, I'm afraid, as I'm rather exhausted from all I've done today. 
Goodnight, dear Hatter.

Yours always,

Alice

Dear Alice,

Yes, I did get your letter, but you'd have known that already if I were allowed to send my replies to you. How I miss you, Alice! On one hand, I'm so happy you're writing to me, but on the other, it makes me miss you all the more. I wonder, are you really going to come back here to Underland? Or will your life in the Otherworld somehow make you forget us, forget me?

I hold on to the hope that you will return one day, just as you've said you would.
Forever yours,

Tarrant

11 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

I called for Absolem today because I had to know if you've been getting my letters. He seemed rather annoyed with me, calling me a stupid and foolish girl for 'bothering him with such trifles', as he put it. But he told me you are indeed receiving my letters, so let him be annoyed, because I got the answer I wanted. I just hope he was telling me the truth.

I had another busy day, preparing for the trip. I imagine it will be like that until we set sail. I won't bore you with the details about what I do for the Company, but instead will tell you about the rest of my day. The Chattaway sisters, Faith and Fiona, who remind me a bit of the Tweedles, came to visit this afternoon for Tea. They're rather flighty and full of gossip, and I tolerate them but I wouldn't exactly call them my friends. They came to talk about Hamish, as if I cared. They think my rejection of his proposal is quite scandalous and spent the whole time giggling about how he's a Lord and how could I pass up the chance to become a Lady? Honestly, it took all my patience not to snap at them and tell them to marry him themselves if they thought he was so wonderful. As they love to gossip, they also took it upon themselves to inform me that everyone is talking about me and saying I'm becoming more and more odd and that I shall most certainly be destined for spinsterhood, what with the mad choices I'm making these days. I thanked them for their concern then politely showed them the door. Well, maybe not so politely, but they're too silly to notice such things.

I find it very hard living in this world sometimes, Hatter. I don't care what others think of me, but it does annoy me that people are so short-sighted. How can they not see beyond the nonsensical rules of this society? And who decided what those rules are, anyway? And why does everyone follow those rules, without question? I can't understand it. Some of the conventions we are forced to live by are utterly ridiculous, yet it seems that I am the only one to see it. Women here are meant to serve one purpose: to marry and have children, and to devote their lives to their husband. That appears to be all that matters, at least in my social circle. Class is very important here. The station to which one is born determines the life that person will have. I am one of the "privileged ones" so it is expected of me to marry well and have children, as soon as possible. For the privileged ladies, after marrying and providing their husbands with children (and most importantly, an heir), it is their duty to support their husband in whatever he chooses, and to give parties and do frivolous, unimportant things like that. Can you imagine it? To be resigned to such an utterly boring and meaningless life? If I don't marry within the next couple of years I'll most definitely be considered "on the shelf" and no doubt be regarded as a dedicated spinster. Women of my particular station are in a rather precarious position if they don't do what is expected. And I have certainly chosen to do the unexpected.

I want to see the world. I want to carry out my father's dream of expanding the trade routes to Sumatra and Borneo, now that he is not here to do it himself. I imagine sometimes that he's looking down on me from the heavens and smiling, because I am so much like him. I have my own dreams too. It was my idea to expand the trading routes to China, to be the first British Company (the first independent Company, outside of the English East India Company) to trade with them. Thankfully, Lord Ascot is one of the few people who actually respects my mind and my ideas. But in the eyes of
the society to which I am indentured, I am considered mad because I want to do things women are not supposed to do. As I said, I don't care what people think of me. Honestly, I just find it irritating to be surrounded by such inanity and narrow-mindedness. My father was the only person who understood me, and he's gone. I feel quite alone now. It's as if everyone in this world sees in black and white and I'm the only one who sees in colour. Do you know what I mean?

Forgive me for rambling on. I am tired and I feel a bit despondent. It will be different once I get away from London and we're at sea. Perhaps then I'll feel happier. I miss you, you know. How I wish I could talk to you in person! I have the feeling that you could understand everything I just wrote about.

I think I shall go to sleep now, as my mood is so melancholy. Goodnight, dear Hatter (or should I say, Tarrant - Absolem told me that's your given name).

Yours always,

Alice

My dear Alice,

How sad your last letter was. If only I could send my letters to you, because I want you to know, I do understand, in my way. I know what it's like to be different and to feel apart from everyone. I think I've felt that way my entire life. I've felt quite alone at times. My mother died when I was very young so it was just me and my father. He was a Hatter too and taught me the trade, and when I was old enough, we worked together, yet we were never really close. The only thing we had in common was our love for making hats. Then he died too and I became the sole Hatter for the White Queen. I lived at the castle but never really fit in there, though I tried to.

After the Red Queen took over, things just got worse. We were all living in constant fear and everyone scattered. I, along with a few others, somehow formed the Resistance, but it wasn't easy and we accomplished little. I mostly spent my time with Thackery and Mally, making plans that we could never carry out, for everyone was either dead, or too scared, or enslaved by the Red Queen. Some fled to the Outlands. And the ones who stayed...well, they had all gone a bit mad by then, myself included.

I have found it hard living in this world sometimes, just as you find it hard living in yours. I still do.

How I wish you were here. But I understand you wanting to do the things you mentioned and I sincerely wish you all the best. Just try to come back soon, as I miss you terribly.

Forever yours,

Tarrant

12 September 1872

Dear Hatter,
I must apologise for my last letter. It was rather morose and probably quite depressing to read. I was in a mood. I sometimes get that way. I feel much better tonight, as I spent a productive day with Lord Ascot, working out our plans for the upcoming trip. It is so nice to be appreciated for my thoughts and ideas. I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have this. It’s so very important to me. I’m slowly earning the respect of the others in the Company, though there are some who still resent me (and probably always will). I don’t mind though. It’s nothing I didn’t expect, as a woman’s mind is not something highly prized in this world. But at least I’ve had the good fortune to have found someone who isn’t priggish like most people, and instead has granted me this wonderful opportunity to do what I want to do. Lord Ascot is a fine man and I find it very pleasant and interesting to work with him as his apprentice.

So now I am wondering about you. Are you in Marmoreal, installed at the castle and making hats for the White Queen? Are you having lots of Tea Parties with the March Hare and Mallymkun and Chessur?

I’m off to bed now. Goodnight, dear Hatter/Tarrant.

Yours always,

Alice

Dearest Alice,

I wonder if I should write what is truly in my heart and never show you these letters. Then I could be completely honest. I think about you all the time. Why did you have to leave? I know why, of course. I just mean...I wish you had stayed.

Forever yours,

Tarrant

13 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

Today while shopping in London, we stopped at a hat shop to buy some hats and all I could think about was how much I wished you were there to see it. How you would have loved it!

We’re leaving in just a few days. Though Absolem told me I shall still be able to write to you while I’m off on my travels, I am beginning to worry that you won’t get my letters after I leave London. That would make me so terribly unhappy. Once I’m at sea and writing to you from there, I suppose I shall have to annoy Absolem again to confirm you’re getting them still.

Seeing all the hats this morning has had me thinking about you all day. I was remembering all that we went through, and then I remembered how we said goodbye. You looked so sad, so convinced I wouldn’t be back and that I wouldn’t remember you. Thinking of it now makes me sad. Why didn’t I get a chance to at least hug you before I left? I wish I had.
I miss you.

Goodnight, dear Tarrant.

Yours always,

Alice

Dearest Alice,

Though I don't want you to be sad, I am very glad to know you miss me and are thinking of me. I wish you had hugged me too. You were standing right in front of me and then you just...disappeared. If and when you come back, I don't think I'll show you this letter because I am going to write something I'd only tell you if I knew you felt the same way.

On Frabjous Day, after you left, I spent that night alone at my house, feeling as if my heart were broken.

I'm still trying to put the pieces back together.

Forever yours,

Tarrant

14 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

I'm tired tonight, as I have just spent the evening at a rather tedious party, so I can only manage a short note. I just wanted you to know I am thinking of you.

Goodnight, dear Tarrant.

Yours always,

Alice

My dearest Alice,

I'm thinking of you too. Always.

Forever yours,

Tarrant
15 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

Another tedious party tonight. I can't wait to get out of this place. The Chattaway twins were quite annoying, as usual. They're still harping on about Hamish and my decision to become an apprentice for the Company. They don't understand how I could pass up the chance to be a Lady. If they only knew I was the Champion for a Queen! That would shut them up.

I'm afraid I can only manage a short note again. I have a headache. I wish you were here, or I was there. I miss you.

Goodnight, dear Tarrant.

Yours always,

Alice

My dearest Alice,

If only you knew you already are a Lady, here in Underland. The Queen has decreed that you're Lady Alice now.

Those girls sound horrid.

I wish the same thing. I don't care where, here or there, I just wish we were together.

Forever yours,

Tarrant

16 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

Tomorrow is the big day! I shall be leaving London and setting sail to distant lands I've only dreamt about. And finally I shall see them! I'm so very excited.

But I'm also thinking of you, and still worrying you won't get my letters. Please talk to Absolem and make him tell me if you don't get them.

Goodnight, dear Tarrant.

Yours always,
My dearest Alice,

I am happy to know you're happy about your trip. You're probably already off now. I hope it's everything you dreamed of.

Rest assured, if I stop getting your letters, I'll make sure Absolem tells you. I should be devastated if that happens.

Forever yours,

Tarrant

17 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

I'm at sea now. It's so wonderful. So liberating. Absolem came up to see me off. I didn't even have to call him. He just knew. It's very curious how he can do that. When I ask him about things like that, he refuses to tell me. He's so contrary sometimes. I'm going to call him tomorrow to make sure you got this letter, which I'm certain will annoy him, but I don't care.

I know my last few letters have been short but it's only because I've been so busy these past few days; by the time I get a chance to write to you, I'm tired. I'm afraid that's the case again tonight. Just know, I am thinking of you, and you are never far from my thoughts.

Goodnight, dear Tarrant.

Yours always,

Alice

My dearest Alice,

How relieved I am to have received your letter! Absolem popped by to make sure (at your request, he told me) and seemed a tad cross, but then, he's always like that, isn't he?

Am I really never far from your thoughts? I hope that will always be true. I worry that once you get caught up in your adventures in the Otherworld, you'll slowly start to forget me...and perhaps stop writing altogether. Please don't forget me, Alice. I couldn't bear it.

Forever yours,

Tarrant
18 September 1872

Dear Hatter,

I called for Absolem today and he told me you had indeed received my letter! He was rather vexed, telling me he's not our personal emissary, but I think I saw a hint of amusement in his eyes. When I asked him about you he wouldn't tell me anything. I admit I got a bit angry with him and said it's not fair and he should at least tell me if you're all right. So he relented and told me you were. Is it true, Tarrant? Are you?

Now that I'm at sea and shall be for several days before we see land again, I'll have more time to write. But what shall I tell you about? I wish you were allowed to write to me! I hate that this correspondence is so one-sided. I've no idea what you are thinking and feeling. Are you happy to get my letters? Do you miss me as I miss you?

I'll write a longer letter tomorrow, I promise. As there's not much to tell about what's happening in my life at present (being at sea is a bit quiet so there's not much to tell), I suppose I'll be writing more about myself, about me, about my past. I am a very private person so I'm not accustomed to opening up to people about that kind of thing, but I feel like you are the one person who I can talk to. I trust you. So I shall write more tomorrow.

Goodnight, dear Tarrant.

Yours always,

Alice

My dearest Alice,

Absolem told me the same thing yesterday when he came to see me, that he's not our personal emissary. I wish he would tell you more. I want you to know. Yes, I'm alright, though I miss you more and more each day.

Of course I'm happy to get your letters. Won't Absolem at least tell you that? Next time I see him I'll tell him he must let you know that I am. I hate that this correspondence is so one-sided too. I don't know if I miss you as you miss me. I suspect I miss you far more. Could it be the same? Can you possibly miss me as much as I miss you? I feel like half of my heart is missing. I doubt you feel that strongly about me.

I'm glad you feel like I'm the one person you can talk to and that you trust me. I can't wait for longer letters where you tell me more about yourself and your life. I want to know everything about you.

What would I do without these letters, Alice? If it's all I can have of you for now, at least I have that. One day I hope you'll come back and then I'll know if you feel the same for me as I do for you. Or maybe you'll give me a hint of how you truly feel in letters to come.

Forever yours,
This was originally posted at FF.net but I am beginning the process of importing it here. Please note that when I first wrote and posted this story, it was the first draft, written and posted while I was 'in the flow', and it has not been edited as of yet.

I do intend to edit it eventually but for now this is the rough version, though I am trying to do some polishing as I post it.

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