What if instead of 1870s London, Alice's story took place in the city of Rapture? With Bumby dead and Wonderland restored, Alice must prepare for her greatest challenge yet: The Rapture Civil War. Inspired by TheObsessor11294's "Wondershock" on DeviantArt. Rated T for violence and occasional language.
November 16, 1958.

“Ah, Alice, we can’t go home again. No surprise, really. Only a very few have found the way; and most of them don’t recognize it when they do. Delusions, too, die hard. Only the savage regard the endurance of pain as the measure of worth. Forgetting pain is convenient. Remembering it, agonizing. But recovering the truth is worth the suffering. And our Wonderland, though damaged, is safe in memory… for now.”

After listening to Cheshire’s speech and wandering through this strange combination of the real world and her beloved Wonderland, Alice finally laid down for a rest in the odd mish mash of her neighborhood and the Vale of Tears. She was exhausted. Within the past few days (or was it hours? Years?), she had once again defeated her madness and now solved the mystery of the fire and her family’s deaths. After all this time, it had been Dr. Angus Bumby, one of the most respected figures in the city and the man to whom Alice had bared her soul, who had been responsible for everything that she had been forced to endure. The fire, the burns, her insanity, Rutledge, and the close return of her madness. The man had nearly destroyed her and Wonderland twice, and his body had just been pulverized by a public transit vehicle. So ironic, he had been killed by the real version of her mental construct of his corruption.

She had gone to the station with just the intent of telling him exactly what she knew and what she thought of him before going to the authorities. Smiling, he had told her that no one would believe her. He also hinted that if anyone did, they wouldn’t care. When she had grabbed Lizzie’s key from him, she had suddenly been absolutely filled a combination with rage, fear, and despair. Turning around, she had pushed him right onto the tracks. She didn’t feel one iota of guilt about any of it.

She couldn’t help but wonder: ‘What would happen now?’

The orphanage would be sure to be shut down and who knew what would happen to its occupants? Alice had heard about children disappearing around the city, especially little girls. How many partners in his depraved business did Bumby have? Was he the mastermind, or merely a supplier to a much larger monster?

Alice shivered and felt her brain begin to go fuzzy. She hadn’t truly rested in…she didn’t know how long. As she leaned against the wall of the Duchess’s kitchen, Alice sleepily decided she would think about it all after some rest.

It was hours later when she woke up to the sounds of people talking and passing by along with a much more melodious song. She squinted past the lights to spy a whale floating past the glass roof of Pauper’s Drop. The city was back to its normal look.

Alice sighed. “Good morning, Rapture; city without God or king, just man.”
The Liddell family had come to Rapture in 1946. Their old home had been destroyed in the London Blitz and her father’s job as the Dean of Oxford University hadn’t been going well. One day, in late 1945, a man by the name of Andrew Ryan had knocked on the door of her aunt’s home in London. Her father took Ryan to his study and closed the doors behind them, something which he only did when discussing matters of great importance. He was thoughtful the rest of the evening and so was her mother the next day. It was soon afterwards that they announced that the family would be moving to a new city soon, one that would have need of a university for its young people.

Alice didn’t remember much from that time; she had only been six years old. She remembered being excited that they were moving to a new place, where her father could work without troublesome peers to answer to. The only reason that neither she nor Lizzie had told anyone of their move was that they had been absolutely forbidden to. The city was to be a secret one. Alice had wondered how any city could be a secret when there would be so many people in it.

In November 1946, she had gotten her answer in the form of a solitary lighthouse in the northern Atlantic off the coast from Iceland. The trip there had been in Mr. Ryan’s private plane and boats along with quite a few people. Inside the lighthouse, they were greeted by an imposing statue of Mr. Ryan and a crimson banner that proclaimed in gold letters: “No gods or kings. Only Man.” They had entered the “bathysphere” with a few others and descended into the depths of the ocean. A video clip “From the Desk of Ryan” had begun to play then. Alice had wondered why London hadn’t been mentioned, and why Mr. Ryan was so interested in sweat.

When the screen had moved aside, Alice’s mouth had dropped open. There, under the sea with the whales, the squids, and all the other mysterious sea creatures, was a city that looked like photographs of New York in America. The lights from the tall skyscrapers (or “surfacescrapers”) glowed blue-green in the seawater, illuminating the fantastic shapes of the passing sea life. Lizzie had been told just before the trip where they were really going to, but their parents had decided to leave it a surprise for Alice. And surprised she had been.

“Lizzie, look!” Alice said excitedly. “It’s just like Wonderland!”

Lizzie and her mother and father smiled at her amongst the odd looks she received from the other passengers. “Yes Alice,” Lizzie agreed. “An underwater city would fit inside Wonderland perfectly.”

Alice’s younger self had decided that she would imagine one up the next time she visited, and that was how the fish-inhabited town of Barrel Bottom had come to exist under Wonderland’s waves. She had danced to the tune of the Lobster Quadrille for the first time there in between the buildings made of sunken ships.

The only people that Alice had ever told about Wonderland was her parents, Lizzie, and Nanny, who would be arriving shortly. Alice had bad experiences with other children who hadn’t liked her because of her quiet, thoughtful demeanor and huge eyes. They had considered her to be a freak, and so she hadn’t opened up to anyone outside of her family prior to living in Rapture.

They had spent a few hours in Rapture’s welcome center waiting for Nanny. After lunch in the Kashmir Restaurant and a movie in the Footlight Theater, she had arrived and they went to their new home in Mercury Suites. It was one of the nicer places to live in Rapture, and her father had just enough money from the trip left over to afford it. Arthur Liddell’s position as the future Dean of Rapture University benefitted him and his family from the beginning.

They had been happy. They had a new home, a new city, and a future ahead of them. Every day,
Rapture became more and more the Wonderland that it was promised that it would be. Luxuries were available at the markets that never would have made it to London, and technologies that none of them had ever imagined possible were commonplace. The wonders that Rapture presented, both that of nature outside and of man inside, served to challenge even Alice’s vivid imagination.

Compared to her parents and Lizzie, Alice didn’t have many friends outside of Wonderland, except for one. His name had been Aster Bunnymund. He was an Australian boy a few years older than Lizzie, with forest green eyes and a pair of buck teeth that gave him a roguish charm. His business/home was located in the Farmer’s Market in Arcadia, which was appropriate considering he ran a small indoor chicken farm. Eggs weren’t that common in Rapture, and he ran a good business. What he kept a secret was that on Easter he would go hide colored eggs for free in Arcadia, creating impromptu Easter egg hunts in the process. That had been how he and Alice had meet. Oddly, she had seen past his taciturn and grumpy exterior to the person he was on the inside.

She had trusted him enough that she had told him all about Wonderland. When he had listened intently to her describe it and didn’t make fun of her imaginary friends, he truly earned her friendship right then and there. The other members of the Liddell family had begun to like him as well, and when they weren’t conversing at the Market, they would be buying his eggs at the special discount that Aster reserved for his friends.

Alice remembered that one of the things that she had loved to do with her father was to find a good-sized window to the ocean and take photographs of the passing marine life. Her father always had a love for photography (along with new types of transportation), and the pictures he developed would have been impossible anywhere else. Alice and Lizzie often went with him; Lizzie to explore and to meet new people, and Alice to stare at the passing fish and other creatures. The cost of regaining these happy memories had been high and painful, but more than worth it.

Even though the campus for the “Rapture University of the Arts and Sciences” was still in the making, the professors and instructors taught classes in their homes to anyone who was interested (for a price of course). These “students” were a varied lot, from all walks of life and countries, with new ideas and innovations to flood all of Rapture. Her father invited quite a few of them into their home for tea, asking about their lives, their interests, and their dreams. He honestly cared about them as people, not as a source of revenue. Lizzie hadn’t cared for any of them on account of their kissing up to her father and flirting with her. There had been one though, who Lizzie, and later Alice, had come to abhor.

That one was a tall, bespectacled young man from England, Angus Bumby, who was quite eager to study the field of psychology. His main focus was the effect of memory upon the personality and the brain. Lizzie hadn’t liked him from the start. She didn’t care for the other “toadies”. But Bumby she disliked with a passion, which didn't help with the fact that he was infatuated and obsessed with her.

It started out alright, but the more and more Lizzie refused him, the more persistent he became. From what Lizzie told Alice, he had begun stalking her and doing his best to corner her in private. She had even caught him spying on her while swimming at Adonis. Another such incident had been when he had followed her into the ladies room at the Atlantic Express and she had to call for an attendant for help. She had asked her father not to invite him for any more tea, though she only gave a tamer version for why. She confessed to Alice that Bumby made her feel dirty and she didn’t want Mama or Papa to know about any of it.

Nearly a year after they moved to Rapture, it happened. Alice remembered how she had been awoken by something in the night, only to fall asleep again. The Hatter’s tea party had been interrupted by the smell of smoke, which caused her friends to wake her up. The only reason she
had survived was because Diana had crawled up a ventilation shaft, showing Alice the way out. That didn’t prevent Alice from getting badly burnt. Her hands and most of her arms were burnt from opening her door, and the walls of the ventilation shaft conducted the fire’s heat very well. She had been in agony crawling through the shaft on her hands and knees, forced to choose between continuing on the searing metal or certain death. She had crawled out into their floor’s hallway and watched as the flames consumed her home and family. It was ironic in the most horrid form of the word; they lived in a city at the bottom of the ocean and her family had perished in a fire.

Along with burns, she developed severe mental problems. She was shaken terribly by the fire, and as a result, she became catatonic through a destructive combination of trauma and survivor’s guilt. After recovering from her burns thanks to the miracle of Rapture medicine, she had been sent to the Rutledge Private Clinic and Asylum in the Medical Pavilion. The Liddell’s solicitor both in London and in Rapture, Wilton J. Radcliffe, sponsored her stay in Rutledge, hoping to get part of her inheritance once she recovered her mental faculties, no doubt to sate his liking for antiques from the Far East, a rare commodity in Rapture even with his extensive collection.

After ten years, ten long years in which almost none of the treatments that Dr. Heironymous Q. Wilson prescribed even came close to affecting her, Alice recovered miraculously in 1957. Starting in 1956, she had slowly come back. Dr. Wilson couldn’t figure out if she had healed on her own or if the ADAM treatments from 1953 had finally kicked in. Whatever the cause, Alice Liddell had returned to the land of the living and the sane once again.

For Alice, the cause of her return to sanity was another journey through Wonderland, but it wasn’t the childhood retreat it had been. Her beautiful little dream world had been transformed into a hellish nightmare realm. The Red Queen, originally a symbol of Lizzie’s perceived tyranny, had become a monster in every sense of the word. Her tentacles had grown throughout the land like a cancerous growth, marking it as her own. The landscape became a twisted caricature of what it once was, inhabited by deranged monsters and their unfortunate victims. Some of Alice’s dearest friends had become enemies, others had been killed.

It was only after a bloody battle in the Red Kingdom and Alice’s defeat of the Red Queen that Wonderland, and Alice, were saved from destruction. Alice had smiled upon her resurrected friends and restored dream world before coming out of her decade-long catatonia to face the world she had left for so long.

Returning to sanity was almost as painful as leaving it. For an entire decade, she had laid helpless in her cell. Her body had grown from an eight-year-old girl’s to that of a young woman of eighteen. She had always been mature for her age, so she had adjusted quickly though painfully on an intellectual level. The emotional toll had hit her just as hard. Waking up only enabled her to remember the fire and her family’s deaths. Sobbing was something she did often in the days after her recovery.

Thanks to one of Rutledge’s former employees, Nurse Priscilla “Pris” Witless (a name that her enemies loved), Alice was able to get a job as a maid at the Houndsditch Home for Traumatized Youth. There she was employed, housed, and able to get mental help from the proprietor, Dr. Angus Bumby. The Rapture University had gone ahead without her father, and Bumby was one of its first graduates with a Doctorate in Psychology. He was one of the city’s most respected scientists and social architects, even though he had most of his business interests based in Pauper's Drop. He had claimed that it was easier to find and diagnosis potential patients in such a slum as the Drop was.
Alice’s memories of life before the fire were locked away within her psyche, little things and secrets that held the truth. Bumby was an absolute stranger to her when they met in his office for the job interview. There was a lot of pressure on her to be productive. Andrew Ryan’s hatred of the “parasite” had filtered down into the mainstream Rapture culture, which indirectly earned her a bad name. She had spent ten years in a mental hospital draining Radcliffe’s bank account when it turned out that her inheritance wasn’t really worth as much as he had originally thought. The debts that Mr. Liddell owed drained it a bit, and Radcliffe hadn’t been happy about the situation. Earning her keep in the capitalist-based society was a must.

Things had changed in Rapture in both her lost decade and the last year. The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. As Rapture made the transition into 1958 and was now approaching 1959, it began transforming far more quickly than anyone would have liked. Andrew Ryan had absorbed Fontaine Futuristics into his own company Ryan Industries after exposing Frank Fontaine as a smuggler and killing him, receiving the monopoly on the plasmid business.

There was also this “ADAM”, and if Witless’s addiction, which had earned her the sack from Rutledge, wasn’t a strong warning against it, nothing was. Alice had worried initially that she might develop something from the ADAM treatments she had received at Rutledge, but nothing had come of it (yet). That didn’t stop some people from becoming ADAM addicts, or “splicers”. There was also the “Big Daddies” and the “Little Sisters”, both of which Alice thought to another prime example of man’s inhumanity to man. A political reformer, “Atlas”, and his followers had been imprisoned in Fontaine’s Department Store, which had been sank right off a cliff onto the ocean floor. Alice thought the situation as a whole didn’t look promising for Ryan. One thing she had learned from the Red Queen was that tyranny only got one so far before it came back to bite one’s rear.

Nan Sharpe had been forced to leave the occupation of nanny for a more risqué job. The demand for nannies in Rapture had been low when she had arrived and it hadn’t improved with time. Low demand coupled with low supply didn’t bode well for that profession, and the fire that had killed her former employers didn’t help her prospects at all.

With no other options, she had finally taken up the “world’s oldest profession” and risen to become the owner of “The Mangled Mermaid” in the Mason’s Quarter, which was starting to go by another, more suggestive name: Siren Alley. Alice cared deeply for her former nanny, but whenever she had suggested that Alice should join the Mermaid’s payroll, the answer was always a quiet “no” or an excuse that Alice cooked up on the spot. Now that Jack Splatter had burned the Mermaid down, Nan would likely have to beg one of her former competitors for employment. Eve’s Garden in Fort Frolic was probably the best chance that she had for employment. She definitely wasn’t going to find it at the Mermaid Lounge; the contention between her and the owner of that establishment was too great, all because people had begun to associate his lounge with her brothel.

It wasn’t until a few hours ago that Alice remembered anything about Aster Bunnymund. She supposed that was because she hadn’t known him that long, therefore there weren’t as many memories of him, nor was he as deeply imprinted in her mind as her family had been. Alice realized that nobody had said anything about him since she had recovered. Where was her Australian friend, and why hadn’t anybody mentioned him? This was something that she was going to have to investigate.

‘I have no intention of losing any more of my loved ones through inaction.’ she thought to herself.

Alice got to her feet and looked up. She had fallen asleep against the Fishbowl Diner, a rather shabby establishment, though the crab cakes and chowder were certainly tasty. She noticed quite a
few people walking towards the spot where she had pushed Bumby to his death, craning their 
necks and gawking straight forward as though to catch a glimpse of something sensational, and 
hurried her own gait. She had better things than to get caught for murder, though he had certainly 
deserved it, that oozing sore of depravity.

Another year had gone by at Houndsditch. Alice remembered as she had continued her therapy 
sessions with Bumby, her nightmares had gotten progressively worse and worse along with her 
hallucinations, which consisted of both warped faces that had once been friendly and the new ones 
that had only hatred towards her. To make it worse, the memories of her family, the good times she 
had wanted to keep had been starting to vanish along with those of the fire. All this time, Bumby 
had been poisoning her mind, causing her to create the Ruin, the Dollmaker, and the Infernal Train 
that tore Wonderland and its inhabitants apart, an evil that outstripped the Queen’s in its foreign, 
destructive, and repulsive nature.

Her new journey involved traveling throughout Wonderland unraveling the mystery of her fraying 
mind. Learning the cause and gathering her forgotten memories helped her to realize the truth: Dr. 
Angus Bumby, her employer and trusted mentor, had murdered her family because Lizzie had 
wanted nothing to do with him, and he couldn’t just leave her alone. She had confronted him at the 
Atlantic Express and threatened to expose him to Rapture Security for what he had done. She 
remembered all too well his parting words to her.

“You monstrous creature…Such evil will be punished.”

“By whom? By what? Psychotic, silly bitch. Even if you can prove that I’m trafficking children, 
nobody will care. This is Rapture, Alice; Ryan built this city so that a man could enjoy the sweat of 
his brow. At the worst, people may know my real profession, but all you’ll really accomplish is to 
finally earn the moniker ‘parasite’ along with ‘lunatic’. Your madness will be punished. Now 
leave. I’m expecting your replacement.”

Her fury and despair at his words was only matched by the discovery that the key he used for 
hypnosis was the exact same key to her sister’s room. She had walked forward, grabbed it from his 
hand, and turned away. As she did, something happened in her brain. It felt like someone had 
opened the floodgates to some kind of dam, flooding her with power. She had turned back to face 
him, hardly noting the look of incredulity he wore and only briefly aware that she was wearing her 
blue Wonderland dress. She had walked up to him and pushed him as hard as she could. He had 
gone sprawling off the platform into the water below. She learned a fatal fact about the creep right 
then: He couldn’t swim. As he floundered in the water, the Atlantic Express had pulled into the 
station, dripping wet. She had hurried away from the scene, but not before she had heard both his 
scream and a wet, squishing crunch. The water had been stained red with his filthy blood.

In hindsight, it wasn’t the smartest way she could have whacked him. She was lucky that the 
stationmaster had been on break, that no one had been looking out the windows of the amphibious 
train, and that no one else had been on the platform. Murder wasn’t punishable by capital 
punishment in Rapture (though smuggling was), but Alice didn’t want Rapture Security keeping 
tabs on her. She also didn’t want any business associates of Bumby’s coming after her or Nanny.

Alice couldn’t help but look around in a paranoid manner as she continued on her way. She noticed 
the odd looks she was getting. Did they know, suspect? Or where these just the looks she got on a 
normal basis and she was now just noticing because her mind was now functioning as it should? 
Alice forced herself to a normal pace and to look straight ahead like she typically did.

‘As soon as I get back to Houndsditch, I’m going to take a peek through Bumby’s office and see if I 
can’t find anything. If Rapture Security can’t or won’t help for fear of treading on Ryan’s precious
ideals, then I’m on my own. With any luck, Bumby kept his business partners to a minimum, or the cream of Rapture’s rotten crop weren’t involved.’

Alice came up on the Houndsditch Home for Traumatized Youth. She had used to look upon it as a refuge and something of a home. But now, she just saw the place where Bumby had destroyed so many young lives and where he had tried to destroy her mind. It wasn’t the most charming place, not by a mile. Its rare, sea-silt brick walls, even rarer iron fence, and more recent construction made it stand out from the rest of the neighborhood, despite the fact that it only needed a few months of neglect to bring it down to the same degradation that its neighbors suffered. Alice couldn’t help but shudder as she walked up to the door and rang the buzzer. The first chance she got she was moving out. That would at least be expedited by the discovery that Bumby was dead.

The door was answered by Helen, the other maid employed at Houndsditch. She was a tall girl, with a narrow face and equally narrow nose. She could be overbearing at times, but she could be comforting when she needed to be, especially to the children. “Alice, where in Rapture have you been? It’s been almost two days since you left for the chemist’s. I was worried sick. And now the doctor hasn’t come back. Honestly, I deserve a day at Adonis….”

Two days, that was all it had been? Two days, during which she had nearly lost her mind again, during which she had explored the breadth of Wonderland and probably Rapture, during which she solved the mystery of her family’s deaths and brought justice to the perpetrator? It felt like two lifetimes ago.

Alice was so deep in thought she just missed a question that Helen just asked. “My apologies Helen, I’m not feeling very well and my mind wandered. What was your question?”

Helen snorted. “Your mind’s wandering alright. Where have you been this whole time?”

Alice gave her a look. “Helen, I suffered a relapse when I went out,” she began. “For the past two days, I’ve traveled from Pauper’s Drop to the Mason’s Quarter to Neptune’s Bounty to Arcadia and back here again. I have no idea of my exact path was while in the throes of my hallucinations, and frankly, I don’t wish to know. I believe I’ve actually made some progress in my recovery, far more than Bumby’s treatments have been. Now, may I please come in?”

Helen studied her for a moment before stepping to one side. “I hope for your sake that the doctor won’t be angry about the pills you were supposed to buy,” she muttered.

“Thank you,” Alice glared as she hurried inside. She glanced in a mirror in the hall as she walked by it. She certainly didn’t look like someone who had just killed their own psychiatrist, though how would she know what one would look like? There she was, with that ridiculous black-and-white dress, the off-white waist belt, the poorly-made stockings about to come apart, and the water-damaged shoes. The only thing of value that she had on her was her Omega pendant; made of pure silver, it would fetch her a good price at a pawnshop or allow her to buy some of the pricier items at a Circus of Values, though she’d rather lose a hand than part with it.

What was different was herself: her emerald eyes seemed to have gained a glow that almost made them dance, and her cheeks glowed, giving her a subtle, healthy look that she hadn’t seen in that mirror for months. It would appear that the healing of her mind had also improved her physical health, if only by a little. That would explain some of those looks she had received while on the way; the admiring kind.

“Breakfast will be ready soon,” Helen told her as she walked past. “Plain oatmeal today.”

“I’ll be right there,” Alice answered. Houndsditch oatmeal was a dish that one didn’t look forward
to. It tasted of fish when hot and could be used as sealing wax when cold. It was best to avoid it when possible, and she also wanted to be in private for a moment.

Alice made a beeline for her room, dodging the children who were in the hallways, either just getting out of bed or emerging from the loo.

“How are you been?” “We thought you was dead.” “Did you go crazy again, Alice?” “Alice, Ollie pinched me smalls again!” “Had a good time stumblin’ ‘round Rapture?” The questions came fast and thick as they began to crowd around her.

“Not now, I’ll tell you all later,” Alice huffed as the automatic door closed behind her. She sat down on her bed and held her head in her hands. Her room wasn’t much: Just a small space with the same green, patterned wallpaper that covered the rest of Houndsditch’s walls, the unmade, tousled bed that she theorized was made of coral, the book case full of Ryan-approved propaganda novels, the rare wood-carved wardrobe where she kept her nearly identical dresses, and the cheap rug on the floor. Take away all this “finery”, the photograph of her family, and her poor drawings of Wonderland and its inhabitants, install padding on the walls and grimy tiles on the floor, and it became her cell at Rutledge. It wouldn’t be her room for long, thank goodness.

Feeling something dig into her side, she reached into a side-pocket and brought out the key, Lizzie’s key. It was a genetic key, meaning that the lock it was made for would open for that key, and only that key. Their father had enough cash to throw around that he had astronomical symbols inscribed onto their bedroom keys. Lizzie’s bore the sign of Venus, representing femininity and beauty, as well as love. It was a fitting symbol for her sister, even though she had never used the key itself. The idea that Bumby had been hoarding it as a keepsake or trophy, not to mention using it to put his victims into their trances, made the bile rise in her stomach.

Forcing the rising nausea back down, Alice looked down at the key in her hands. The memories of Arthur and Lorina Liddell and Lizzie Liddell played out her in her head: her father fuming on the indignity that taxidermy visited upon animals, her mother instructing her on her piano lessons, and Lizzie telling her that her heart was an open door, it had neither lock nor key. And for the first time since those first few days of awakening at Rutledge, she allowed herself to cry. Tears splashed down on her dress and on the key, the cloth absorbing the salty liquid while the metal merely glistened from it. Alice’s shoulders shook while she silently cried, mourning over the tragedy that was the story of the Liddell family, over the good and beautiful thing that had been her and her family’s lives.

When she had cried her tears, Alice carefully hid the key under her pillow. There were sure to be questions if someone saw her with the key Bumby used to hypnotize them with. And right now, questions were sure to be flying through the air at breakfast. She couldn’t help but groan at the prospect. And when word came of Bumby’s death….

“However am I supposed to answer those ones?” Alice groused. “‘How did Dr. Bumby die, Alice?’ ‘Are Garcia and Dennis happy in their new homes?’ If there’s one thing that Wonderland didn’t teach me, it was how to lie. Even if I told people the truth and was able to prove my accusations, it might not bring any posthumous rage down on Bumby, if those Little Sisters are any indication.”

“The first signs of insanity often include talking to oneself, in addition to asking your surroundings questions which are easily answered. In this case though, it can be justified.”

Slowly, Alice brought her head up and looked towards the foot of her bed, where the far too familiar voice originated. As soon as she caught sight of the intense, orange eyes and wide, blood-splattered grin, she whispered a single word, a name.
“Cheshire.”
Chapter Notes

In case anyone is wondering why there were no notes at the beginning or at the end, it's that on AO3 whenever there are notes, the ones in the beginning chapter are repeated in the following chapters.

One time I was on DeviantArt and I came across a piece by nancy-freaking-drew, known as TheObsessor11294 on Fanfiction and YouTube. "WonderShock" allowed for this story to come to fruition within my mind. With the right weapons and plasmids, Alice would do very well in Rapture before, during, and after the Civil War. After everything she's been through in Wonderland, her mind is well-prepared for the horrendous depravity created by Ryan and Fontaine. You can view my inspiration for this on DeviantArt. An excellent piece of fan art for this would be the poster for Burial at Sea Episode 2 with Alice instead of Elizabeth. As Scorpiofreak and I agree, there are a lot of parallels between Alice and Elizabeth. Let's just hope Alice doesn't meet the same fate.

I hope that you're all excited to see just why Cheshire is in Alice's bedroom. Has she finally gone mad? Or has he actually managed to find his way into the real world?

Before I begin, I just want to say something about crossovers. The ones that come easiest to the mind are those with similar settings or characters, such as Star Wars and Star Trek. From both my reading and writing, I've come to the conclusion that the best crossovers are those that share similar themes. For example, the fic Other Gods is a crossover between Coraline and the Cthulhu mythos; heroes fighting against impossible odds and monstrous aliens. Scorpiofreak's Winter Wonderland deals with characters that wish to protect the innocent from the evil. As for WonderShock, in both BioShock and in the Alice series, the hero and heroine respectively fight for survival in a world gone mad. Even if the stories used are completely unlikely, a shared theme can make all the difference.

Ok, enough yapping. Ladies and gentlemen, I present Chapter 2 of WonderShock!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 2: Leads

November 17, 1958

“Cheshire!”

Alice jumped off of her bed and stared. The Cheshire Cat sat on the floor at the foot of her bed, his skeletal and mangy frame showing off every rib and vertebrae in his body, his devil tail flicking in the air as though in amusement, grinning with those human blood-spattered teeth of his. It was one thing to see him in Wonderland; she was used to seeing him there. But seeing him now, in her room in Rapture… Alice was struck with just how huge he was, for a cat. Sitting down, he was at least as tall as she was.
“How the deuce are you here?” she hissed, remembering that the walls weren’t that thick. “I’m not insane. I rid myself of the Infernal Train, the Dollmaker, the Ruin, and Bumby. You shouldn’t be here.” She glared at him, waiting for an answer.

Cheshire casually lifted a paw and began to lick it. “Tell me,” he said between licks, “just how would my appearance here qualify as a symptom of mental instability?”

Alice stared at the cat, exasperated. This was just like him, evading a direct answer and instead giving tidbits of seemingly useless information. Typical. It was enough to nearly drive her mad in Wonderland when she had already been in the throes of insanity.

“Because,” Alice started slowly and enunciating every word, “you are a figment of my imagination, the product of an old childhood daydream. Your place is in Wonderland with all my other imaginary…acquaintances.” Friends wasn’t quite the right word for most of them. “You shouldn’t be here. The fact you are calls my sanity, or lack thereof, into question. Now answer me.” She started tapping one foot impatiently.

Cheshire put his paw back down on the ground and rolled his eyes. “For someone with such an imagination as yours, you can be quite narrow-minded at times Alice. I’m here, because you are allowing me to be here.”

Alice thought her mouth would clatter on the floor. “How am…."

“Alice, are you alright?” Helen chose that moment to walk through Alice’s door and into her room without waiting for permission. Alice expected her to scream when she saw Cheshire, but to her surprise, Helen had just stood there. Alice sneaked a glance back at Cheshire to find that he had pulled off his vanishing act.

“I…I’m fine Helen,” Alice answered awkwardly. She was rarely caught off guard like this; it wasn’t an experience she was familiar with. Drat that cat.

“I thought I heard voices.” Helen was glancing around the room now, especially at the wardrobe. What did she think was in there, a boy?

“That assumption would be warranted, if I was any other “normal” girl.” Alice was attractive, but her stay at Rutledge had a tendency to scare male admirers off, not that she was actively seeking any.

“I was talking to myself,” she lied. There was a strong possibility she wasn’t lying. Cheshire was probably a hallucination and talking to a hallucination could qualify for that, right?

Helen gave her a look that was halfway between ‘you’re lying’ and ‘I’m concerned’. She considered Alice with her usually-disinterested, ice-blue eyes before she replied. “Ok. You’d best come to the kitchen. Oatmeal that tastes like cod is better than oatmeal that glues your teeth together.”

“I’ll be there in a minute,” Alice said. Helen turned around and the door seemed to take its sweet time closing behind her, allowing her to eye Alice the whole time. The instant the door closed, Cheshire reappeared with the orange outline that preceded his body.

“Fish-flavored oatmeal,” he mused, licking his lips. “Sounds quite appetizing.”

“For a cat, yes,” Alice said wryly. “Now, how am I allowing you to be here?”

Cheshire narrowed his eyes at her in thought. “Let’s see how much your memory has recovered.
What was one of the things that your father taught you about emotions?"

“What does that have to do with your presence?” Alice crossed her arms over her chest angrily. Cheshire was being quite difficult this time around.

“Answer the question, and I’ll lead you to the answer you desire,” he purred.

Alice considered throwing something at him, but decided she didn’t want to test how solid he was. She thought back to when her father would teach her and Lizzie. In both their London and Rapture homes, they had been homeschooled in their library. Alice remembered the smell of paper, the camera equipment laying around, and the sound of her father’s voice as he taught them about the sciences. Mother had been in charge of writing and grammar, while Nanny had taught them French and music. As Alice dived back into those happy, old days, she knew it had been worth it. Recovering her broken memories and piecing them together had been well worth the cost.

One suddenly came to the surface. “As far as the brain is concerned girls, emotions are nothing more than chemical reactions. It’s what we do with them that matters.” Her father’s deep, kindly voice faded back into the depths of her mind, ready to be recalled with a single thought, unlike forty-eight hours ago when she couldn’t even remember the fact that Lizzie never locked her door.

Alice looked up at Cheshire. “He said that emotions are just chemicals in our brain, that it was what we did with them that mattered,” she answered, smiling.

Cheshire nodded. “Nicely done. Now, what were the emotions that you felt very strongly not over twelve hours ago?”

The answers came almost instantly to her. “Anger, that Bumby was so sure of his power over me and the other orphans,” she said slowly. “Fear, that he was going to have me murdered and my body left in the streets or out in the ocean. Despair, that after everything I had done to recover my broken memories and save my mind, he was going to continue his heinous activities.”

“You're almost there now,” Cheshire grinned. “One more question. What chemical was also present in your bloodstream and your brain when you experienced that emotional mixture?”

Alice searched her memory. “I have no idea. Sorrow that the deaths of my parents and Lizzie would go unavenged?”

“That was there, yes,” Cheshire conceded. “But that wasn’t what I meant.”

“I honestly have no idea, Cat.” Alice gave him a look that bordered dangerously on a glare.

Cheshire sighed. “Very well. Let’s make this simple, for your cranium’s sake. What chemical was injected directly into your bloodstream while you were at Rutledge?”

Alice’s eyes shot open and her breath hitched. She said the name in fear and apprehension a few moments after her heart rate reached the apex of its spike. “ADAM.”

“Yes, ADAM,” agreed Cheshire. “The discovery that made Brigid Tenebaum one of Rapture’s elite, the chemical that allows for the rearrangement of the building blocks of life, the substance that allows for the genes to repurposed as one sees fit. It has lain dormant within you all this time, only to finally react with the inferno of rage, the mind-numbing freeze of fear, and the soul-crushing depths of despair.”

Alice walked over to her mirror and stared at her reflection. “The dress on the platform, my return to health, you.” It all made sense now.
“Yes,” Cheshire said. “For a few moments of time, there was no difference between the real-world Alice and the creator of Wonderland. Your Wonderland self is how you wanted yourself to be and there it was. You can call certain aspects of your imagination into the real world. Including me,” he finished smugly. “You wanted someone with whom you can freely discourse, and here I am.”

Alice had a mental image of the Walrus rampaging through Rapture in his quest for oysters, along with the Mock Turtle taking a ride on the Atlantic Express and the Mad Hatter running amok in Hephaestus. If her new ability was that strong, it would be pandemonium and she would be in deep bilge water with the authorities. Even those two constables that treated her decently wouldn’t be able to help her.

“Which aspects, and what’s going to happen to me now? I have no desire to wind up an ADAM addict like Witless.” Alice had seen what eventually happened to those who threw caution to the currents and spliced themselves recklessly. First, lesions, tumors, and growths would appear on the body and face of the addict (Witless’s massive nose for example), followed by mental instability and finally insanity. Alice shivered; She had not gone through all that pain and suffering to go mad because of a DNA-altering drug. The only way to combat the drug’s side effects was to take more of it, which would only make it necessary to take more and so on. That was a vicious cycle that she wanted no part of.

“I think that you would have developed ADAM sickness by now,” Cheshire replied, studying her. “The how of that is a mystery that needs solving. We can investigate that later. Your breakfast is getting cold.” He vanished without a sound, as usual.

Alice left her room with a huff and hurried to the kitchen. She managed to get the last bowl of the disgusting mixture and sat down to eat with Helen, who was still giving her concerned looks. Alice mulled over the new information as she rolled the stuff around in her mouth. Of all the strange things that had happened to her, this pretty much took the “Eat-Me” cake. For years now, a drug that could alter one’s very genetic code had been swirling around in her body doing absolutely nothing (apparently), then she felt that whirlpool of emotions and feelings, and the resulting concoction gives her the ability to bring things from Wonderland into the real world?

That made Wonderland and its inhabitants seem almost normal, which was a truly disturbing notion. At this rate, she would be marrying into Andrew Ryan’s family, which was practically impossible, as well as disconcerting. She had never really liked Ryan, not even as a child whenever he came to visit her family, and she didn’t want to call him a relative. Besides, she had never heard of the man having any living family.

Her new ability would need to be tested. The last thing that needed to happen was for the other Wonderlanders to start coming out as well. They would be pretty much useless in normal life, let alone in a fight or anything like that. Oh, she supposed that Mock-Turtle would make a good conductor for the Atlantic Express and that the Carpenter could rival Sander Cohen with his equally-terrible plays. The only reason that Ryan sponsored the man was that Cohen constantly sang to Ryan’s tune. “Rise, Rapture, Rise” was proof enough of that.

‘Now if I can bring my weapons into Rapture, that would save me quite a few dollars.’ Alice was tired of being helpless. Not in Wonderland, no. She had proved that with the hundreds of foes she had vanquished in her mind over the past few days. In the real world, she was defenseless against the likes of men like Bumby and Jack Splatter. The former wouldn’t have been so smug at the station with the Hobby Horse about to strike his face, and the latter wouldn’t have dared to strike her if the Pepper Grinder had been leveled at him. She had to admit, that last mental image was incredibly amusing.
Helen explained to Alice over breakfast that they had been expecting a newcomer, but when the girl’s parents had been unable to find Dr. Bumby, and had seen Houndsditch for themselves, they immediately taken their daughter back home, declaring that private sessions with Dr. Wilson would be more expensive but worth it. Alice smiled at the fact that she had just saved one person right there. One less victim for Bumby to ravage and destroy.

After she had managed to get the oatmeal in her system and the dishes washed, Alice set out to finish the rest of her and Helen’s chores. She had gotten away with two day’s absence, and part of her felt guilty for leaving Helen to shoulder the work while she was gone. After she was done with that, and with answering the children’s questions about her latest relapse, she was going to Bumby’s office. She had some investigating to do.

**BS+AMA=WS**

“And what exactly are you doing here? This seems like a place you’d rather avoid, Alice.”

Alice turned to face Cheshire as she closed the door behind her. “Detective work. I need to know if Bumby was the mastermind of this wretched business, or if he was one of the suppliers, or perhaps both.”

Cheshire flicked his tail. “I’d make it quick then. They’ll eventually identify his body and everyone here will know that he’s gone and will want to get this building for themselves. It wouldn’t do if you were caught in his office.”

Alice had to agree with him there. “I’ll make it quick then. Besides,” she held up a feather duster in her right hand, “I have a valid excuse for being in here.” She set the duster down on the couch and sat at Bumby’s desk. She began to ply through his drawers. “Out of curiosity, if Helen could hear you, could she see and touch you as well?” She found a thick ledger and began to leaf through its pages.

Alice assumed that Cheshire was shaking his head. “She would have seen me, which is why I turned invisible. She wouldn’t be able to touch me however. As far as the real world is concerned, I’m nothing more than a visible and audible ghost.”

“Most certainly audible,” Alice replied as she started leafing through Bumby’s account book. “Curiouser and curiouser.”

“What is?” Cheshire asked, giving Alice a slight glare.

“Bumby must be keeping another ledger somewhere. The final balance here wouldn’t be enough to support all this.” She gestured to the office, which was the best part of the entire structure when it came to furniture and decoration. The desk inlaid with coral, the bookcases full of psychology books and medical journals, the globe detailing both the continents on the surface and the immediate area around Rapture, the red velvet couch that his victims lay upon, and the various, expensive nick-nacks such as the teal vase right next to the couch. The totaling sum in the book for that month wasn’t small, but it could in no way support the moderate opulence sported here.

“For someone who lives in Rapture he certainly liked to keep secrets,” Cheshire mused.

“Even in Rapture, there are enough people that would want nothing to do with him if the truth came out,” Alice answered as she began to study the bookshelves. “Quite a few women seemed to fancy him. If they knew how he truly brought the sea-weed in, they’d scorn him at every turn.” Alice gave a short laugh. “They might even have killed him for me, if anyone would have believed me.”
Cheshire shrugged. “If he’s that secretive, why not try that safe over in the corner?”

Alice had never really taken note of that particular safe before. It was like any other safe she had seen: a large, solid-looking, metal box with a door and a combination lock on it. Now however, it was a source of great interest.

She leaned down in front of it and studied it. She had never seen it open before and with what she now knew of Bumby, there was a part of her that didn’t really want to know what it contained. “I haven’t the faintest idea of what the combination is,” she muttered. “Maybe I can hack it.”

“What do you possess the knowledge or natural skill for that?” Cheshire peered over her shoulder at the lock. “I don’t recall the art of lock-picking being part of your curriculum.”

Ignoring him, Alice removed a panel next to the combination and took a look inside. Most of the machines and devices in Rapture utilized a hydraulic system for their mechanical workings. As she stared at the network of pipes and wires running through the safe's innards, Alice realized that she didn’t have an inkling of what to do. She quickly put the panel back in its place.

“I thought not,” Cheshire grinned.

Alice gave him a glare. “If you’re so smart, why don’t you tell me how to open this idiot lock?” she hissed.

“Take a look around,” the Cat advised. “It’s possible that he recorded the combination somewhere, though certainly not probable.”

Alice began looking through some of Bumby’s papers and notes for something, anything, that looked like a lock combination. Most of it was just numbers for the pneumo lines or notes for his clients’ sessions. Alice even up-ended his wastebasket in her increasingly-fruitless search.

She was about to give up when she saw something poking out of his bookcase that wasn’t a book. Slipping it out from between a copy of Steinman’s Aesthetics of the Human Body and Mind and Fontaine’s Don’t Let Them See You Sweat, Alice realized that it was an audio diary. It was dated December 12, 1957, about a few weeks after she came to live at Houndsditch and Bumby had labeled it “Extraordinary Results”.

‘This likely won’t be of any help, but it could divulge something of interest.’ Alice pressed the play button and Bumby’s hated voice sounded in the room.

“The results from the latest round of tests have yielded some very extraordinary results. The cells are inundated with the treatments but they don’t seem to reacting adversely, or beneficially. If I play my cards right, Alice will be a two-fold source of income. I believe that a certain Korean doctor and his German assistant will be very interested in this. Unfortunately, Alice cleans my office and I’m afraid she’ll stumble across my research, so I’ve changed my safe combination to protect this little secret. It’s now 1-9-2-9.”

“I wonder what that was about,” Alice mused.

“It can await pondering,” Cheshire yawned. He had taken up a position on the patient’s couch, dozing. Alice wondered if his new presence in the real world was as beneficial as he seemed to think. Now that he was here, he seemed to be acting like any other cat. Or had she only seen him while giving her advice and riddles?

Alice entered the combination and was rewarded with the sound of the locks clacking open. She was about to open it when she realized just what the combination was. “1-9-2-9. 1929. That was
the year of Lizzie’s birth!” For an instant, Alice saw pure red. Bumby had absolutely no right to use anything that belonged to Lizzie; not her, not her bedroom key, not even the year she was born. “If he wasn’t already deceased I would, I would….” For the first time in her life, Alice couldn’t think of a thing to say.

“If you’re going to lose your temper every time you come across some evidence of Bumby’s warped nature, I’d suggest leaving that safe alone,” Cheshire said. “My opinion of him was already so low, I’m surprised that he hadn’t tuned that lock to the genetic frequency on that key.”

Alice silently admitted to herself that the Cat had a point. Thinking of Bumby now, she wouldn’t have been surprised if that had been the case, though the idea of it still made her sick. She steeled herself and opened the door, prepared for anything. It was almost anticlimactic. There were a few ledgers, several more audio diaries, a cashbox, and a drinkable-plasmid bottle, along with a few bottles of EVE. The last items were what truly piqued Alice’s interest. They could wait though.

She grabbed the ledgers and began leafing through them. She found what she wanted quickly, much to her stomach’s regret. “F-7” and “M-7” referenced to the cards that Bumby had the other orphans wear around their necks. There was two of each, one for a boy and one for a girl. The columns afterward really made her blood boil. They were notes about how much money each one “earned”, the expenses they “incurred”, and how many times each had been on an outing before they had been bought. Alice shoved the folder back into the safe angrily and grabbed another ledger and the cashbox. The amount of money in the ledger’s “Profits” column was far more than what Bumby made off of his psychiatry business, which was further proved by the large bundles of “Ryans” in the box.

Alice wasn’t able to find a mention of permanent business partners beyond the names of the people he had sold to and was about to call her investigation closed when she noticed something. Over the past few month about a dozen of the younger girls, ages 5 to 9, had supposedly found homes and left the orphanage. In this particular folder, it recorded them leaving, but not to a new home and family, or to a new “owner”. Instead, it was a morbid collection of sales receipts for the little girls to a “Dr. Suchong” and a “Brigid Tenenbaum”.

Alice recognized the names of course. They were two of Rapture’s foremost scientists. Tenenbaum had discovered ADAM back in 1952, and Dr. Suchong had been hailed as the “Greatest Genius of Rapture” for his work with plasmids. Ever since Fontaine had gone down Suchong had worked for Ryan, while Tenenbaum had vanished from the public eye. Ryan and the Rapture Tribune had assured the people that she was merely working hard in her new laboratory. Rumors were that she had apparently kidnapped a few Little Sisters for their ADAM and vanished.

“What would those two want with a dozen little girls? From what I’ve heard of them, they don’t seem like the type that would buy from Bumby. Wait a moment…..”

Alice felt a chill run up her spine as she remembered the rows of Little Sisters that she had seen outside a “Little Wonders Educational Facility”, listening to a woman drill them using a childish rhyme for directions: “Red means stop! Green means go. This is the rule all little girls know.” That was want those two had wanted with those dozen little girls.

The dark and sinister truth behind the color and child-like nature of the Dollhouse came into Alice’s mind as she reviewed that memory, now with the dark undertone of exploitation covered by the cheerful and happy disguise of the Little Wonder’s bright depictions of children’s toys. The exploited “services” were very different, but they were both just as vile: Bumby’s warping of innocent minds to make them into “playthings”, and Ryan’s genetic technologies twisting little girls into “ADAM factories”. As the realization of how big the evil beast of Rapture was and how
many tentacles it had throughout the city dawns on her, Alice began to feel small and powerless against it.

She had heard that Sander Cohen had done charity work for the orphaned girls that had been turned out on the street after Fontaine’s orphanages had been shut down. Only it was never mentioned what happened to the little girls after they had been “helped”. Was all of Rapture’s elite in on this horror? Bumby had been very close to making it onto a poster as one of Rapture’s greatest minds. Were the so-called best of Rapture in on this child-trafficking business? It was obvious that it had started with Fontaine, but Ryan seemed to be just fine with the grotesque method of ADAM production, while Bumby had been apparently supplying them both with little girls while turning others into child-prostitutes.

A few days ago, she hadn’t truly cared about the little girls with the strange, grey eyes and almost clown-like make-up. They were the product of someone else’s business and not hers to meddle with. Now though, she had seen what happened when she had minded her own business. She had concentrated solely upon her own miserable situation and ignored the pain and abuse that Bumby had heaped upon the other orphans. And now, not even twenty-four hours after his death, she had become aware of the fact that she had barely made a dent in the exploitation of the innocent and helpless for profit.

‘Then again, this wouldn’t be the first time I’ve faced an opponent so powerful and so evil,’ Alice thought. If the cream of Rapture’s crop had to be reaped early in order to stop this new abuse, she had the experience of fighting against impossible enemies and odds. A ray of hope struck Alice’s spirit and she felt her spirits rise once more, along with the corners of her mouth as they morphed into a dark half-smirk.

“Now there’s a juicy tidbit,” Cheshire commented. He had been reading over her shoulder. “That and the plasmid. What is it specifically?”

Alice picked the bottle and studied it. It was still sealed shut, meaning he’d been planning to take it. It was a lurid green and made to look like some sort of dancer, the inappropriate type. A picture on the front showed a sly-looking man winking and holding a finger to his lips. Alice read the label out loud. “Peeping Tom. Turn every room into a…Peepshow! Invisibility and X-ray vision.” Alice’s mouth dropped open as she realized just what the plasmid’s intended use was.

“He was planning to…that perverted…oh!” The walls in Alice’s room weren’t that thick to begin with. It would be easy for someone with X-ray vision to spy on her, not to mention any other woman. The idea of him spying on her while she was changing… Alice shivered in disgust and wondered just where Bumby had got the plasmid. She’d like to strangle whoever had sold it to him.

“I was starting to believe that my opinion of Bumby had hit bedrock,” Cheshire had his ears pinned back against his head, signaling his displeasure. “Maybe you should have opted for making his death a little more painful, and for it to have taken a longer duration.”

“When it comes to the deaths of oozing sores like him, I prefer irony to agony,” Alice retorted. Bumby would have loved this plasmid, this disgusting thing. She prepared to throw it back into the safe.

“I would hold onto that if I were you,” the Cat interrupted. “It might prove useful.” Alice slowly turned around, her eyes wide open in shock and disbelief.

“Cheshire Cat,” she said slowly, “I have two things to inform you of. First, even though I already have ADAM floating around in my genetic code, I don’t desire anymore. Second, I am not some Khaki-wacky share-crop!” She almost screamed the last bit.
“I never said that,” Cheshire answered back. “What I meant was that it could prove useful in combat. The ability to see through walls and turn invisible is a great advantage to wield. I would know about the latter.”

Alice scoffed. “This isn’t Wonderland, Cat. There are no Red Queens or Dollmakers here.”

Cheshire narrowed his eyes. “This is the real world, Alice. It’s worse. Here, there are Jack Splatters, Angus Bumbys, Frank Fontaines, and a host of other vile characters out to get you if you’re not careful. Take the plasmid with you.” He cocked an ear and looked up. “There’s someone at the front door. It sounds like those two constables who regularly confine you to that cell in Neptune’s Bounty.” He nodded towards the ledgers before vanishing. “Now there’s a golden opportunity if I’ve ever seen one.”

Alice muttered a few incoherent insults as she gathered up the items. ‘That feline is impossible sometimes,’ she thought grumpily. After peeking into the hall to make sure that none of the children were passing by, Alice hurried to her room with the duster, the ledgers, the plasmid, the EVE bottles, and the audio diaries.

‘I wonder what Bumby meant by referring to me as a “two-fold source of income.” Besides my body, there’s nothing else he could sell. Unless he thinks that some scientist would want my cadaver for an experiment.’

Alice couldn’t help but shudder as she entered her room and shut the door behind her. This whole concept of thinking of people as a commodity to sell was incredibly revolting. It was especially nauseating if one knew that someone had been planning on selling one or using one’s body for their own perverted pleasure. If she had been born in the early 1800s in America, she likely would have been an abolitionist. Among other things.

Alice set the items down on her bed and considered her next move. She now had evidence of Bumby’s abuse in her hands and the only two constables who had ever treated her with any kindness, Bobby Carmine and Fred Taggart, were right outside the front door. They had escorted her to a cell in the makeshift jail at Fontaine Fisheries several times over the past few months whenever she had suffered a psychotic episode in public. Out of all the men employed in Ryan Security, they were the most decent out of all of them. A golden opportunity indeed.

She stuffed the plasmid, the EVE, and the first audio diary under her pillow. Gathering up the ledgers and the audio diaries that she hadn’t had a chance to listen to, Alice hurried to the front door. Only two days earlier, she had walked the same route after complaining about her room. The Alice of two days ago and the Alice of today were truly different from each other. Not even she could have imagined just how quickly things could change in just two days.

Helen was already at the door, speaking with Bobby Carmine. Alice could see the top of Fred Taggart’s cap from where he stood at the bottom of the stairs. Both of them had muscular builds, complemented by the thick grey trenchcoats, black boots, gloves, and low-laying caps they wore. The shoulder holsters, complete with a full ammo belt, finished painting the picture of the average constable of Ryan Security.

Bobby looked up at Alice, his blond hair easily fitting the boyish smile he sent her way.

“’Ello Alice, back in the land of the livin’, I take it?” Alice gave him a quick half-smile; the only times she really interacted with Carmine and Taggart was when they let her in and out of “her” cell at the makeshift jail at Fontaine’s Fishery. Hardly a place to cultivate a decent friendship. He and Taggart were the only members of Ryan’s security force to treat her with any respect; most of them just sneered at her and made snide comments about her one day waking up to a permanent cell in
“Much better, Constable Carmine, thank you very much,” she said. “I hope I didn’t cause you too much trouble last time. I hope Jack Splatter is enjoying his new accommodations.”

“Other than when you fainted, you were no trouble at all. Can’t say the same for Splatter, rotten little bugger.” Bob frowned. “Hasn’t stopped denyin’ the fact he gutted that heavy outside the Mermaid, even with that camera that caught ‘em in the act. Nastiest bloke down ‘ere since Fontaine kicked the bucket.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Alice said.

Helen turned around to face her right then, her usual bored expression replaced by a melancholy sorrow. Helen wasn’t prone to expressing her emotions very much and it was hard to gauge what she was feeling sometimes, though not now. She was sorrowful about something, and Alice had a good idea what, or rather “who” it was about.

“Helen, what’s the matter?” Alice asked, concerned.

Helen looked at her hollowly. When she spoke, she could barely hear her. “Dr. Bumby’s dead. They managed to identify his body after he was killed last night in an accident at the train station.”

“Took a while,” Carmine coughed. “The Express did a number on him, took a few ‘ours to get his body out, or what was left of it. Never seen such a mess since the raid on Fontaine’s. It was them glasses of his that finally told us who he was. Real sorry ‘bout him, Alice.”

“Oh,” Alice said quietly. Bumb’s final words kept repeating themselves in her head. “Who would believe you? I can scarcely believe it myself.” With all the evidence she held in her hands, it was no longer impossible to show Rapture just what kind of man Dr. Angus Bumby had really been.

“They don’t know what happened,” Helen murmured. “They’re saying he either jumped, was pushed, or slipped.”

“Hard to tell right now,” Carmine offered. “Didn’t seem the suicidal type, bloke didn’t seem to have anyone who’d want ‘em dead. The platform can get slippery though, all that sea water sloshin’ about.”

Alice almost smiled. So she was in the clear, for now. She could feel the truth screaming in her heart and mind to be let out, to scream to the world that Angus Bumby was a fraud and a supplier to vile appetites. That he was the one responsible for the fire that destroyed her home, that roasted her parents, and that covered up what he had done to her sister. It was time for the truth to triumph at long last.

“Constable,” she began, “I was dusting Dr. Bumby’s office just now, and I noticed his safe was ajar. These,” she held up the ledgers and the diaries, “slipped out and I think it would be best if you had a look. They’re…the smoking gun, as the Yanks say.” She held out the first ledger. “Dr. Bumby was far worse than Fontaine could ever hope to be.”

Helen gaped at Alice while Carmine, hesitating at first, took the ledger from her hand and began to look through its pages. His eyes squinted as he studied them. When the realization of what he has looking at came crashing down on him like a thunderbolt, his eyes shot so wide open that Alice was surprised his cap stayed on. His mouth hung open for a few moments before he said the only thing he could think of to express his disbelief.

“Bloody Hell!” he yelled. “Fred, get up ‘ere and take a look at this. You’re not going to believe
what Bumby was up to.” His face had turned a positively hideous shade of green.

Taggart came up the stairs at a gallop at his partner’s summons. “What are you yellin’ about, Bob?” he asked as he took the ledger from Carmine’s outstretched, shaking hands. “Let’s see: Name, number, expenses, number of outings, date bought, profits....” Unlike his partner, Fred’s face drained of color completely as he quietly came to the realization of Bumby’s true business.

“Dear Lord,” he finally breathed. “Is... is this a joke? You’re tellin’ me that Dr. Bumby was sellin’ kids as slaves?!”

“What?!” Helen was looking at all of them like they had all grown gills and a third eye. “Alice, what’s this all about? What was the doctor doing?” Alice could see the frantic look in her eyes, like she could sense her world about to end and she was hoping that it nothing more than a poor joke or a bad dream.

“Helen,” Alice went directly to the point, “Dr. Angus Bumby was using hypnotism to wipe the orphans of their memories and condition them to do his bidding, which was to be sexual slaves, before he sold them to their new ‘families’. I believe he intended to do the same to me. I was losing my memories of my family along with the fire not two days ago, just before my latest episode.”

Helen’s face lost all expression. She stumbled backwards until she came to a chair and settled down in it. Alice had thought that Helen’s face was usually expressionless, but now she knew that she was wrong. Handing off the rest of the ledgers and the audio diaries to the constables, she knelt down by the shocked girl and hesitantly put a hand on her shoulder. Comforting people had never been her forte; the only experience she had was with her family, and that was far different from Helen, an acquaintance with whom she had worked for just a year.

Behind her, she heard the distinctive click and whirring of an audio diary coming to life just before she was once again subjected to hearing Bumby’s arrogant tones.

“It’s been a year to the day since my ‘tryst’ with Lizzie, and I still can’t forget the girl. That alabaster skin, that chestnut hair, and those emerald eyes. Those eyes were the only things I didn’t like about her: They seemed to judge me all the time, picking me to pieces. Even when I gave her what she wanted, she still looked at me that way, like she hated me. She was a tease, through and through! I hear her sister Alice managed to survive, currently in Rutledge. With any luck, she’ll never remember what happened that night.”

As the diary whirred to a stop, Alice’s memory of that night came crashing back into her mind. She remembered hearing the odd noises coming out of Lizzie’s bedroom and she had gone to investigate. In Lizzie’s room, she found herself staring at a tall man tightening his belt as he stood over her sister’s bed. Lizzie lay unmoving on the bed as the man turned to face Alice, his glasses reflecting the light from her little torch, making him look like some inhuman monster come to torment them in the night. Alice had ran back to her room in a fright, the dead-eyed creature almost on her heels. She could remember him looking down at her with a predatory look on his face, just before she had passed out on her bed. One visit to Wonderland later and she had awoken to the fire, which had consumed both her family and her memory.

“October 19, 1948. One Year Anniversary,” Taggart read the diary’s label out loud. “Hey Alice, what was the date when your ‘ome burnt down?”

“October 19, 1947,” Alice answered, trembling as the memory subsided. “I remember him now. He wanted my sister back then, and she wouldn’t have him. And when he couldn’t have her willingly, he...he had his way with her before killing her and burning my parents alive!” she almost screamed. A few hot tears made their way down her face as she stood, breathing hard in her
anger. Helen was the only one present who didn’t take a few steps back from her. She looked and felt the incarnation of Wrath right there, her green eyes flashing in her face, her breath coming out through her clenched teeth and flared nostrils, and her fingers curled into fists.

“Never liked Bumby that much,” Carmine muttered. “Always seemed to have such ‘igh opinions ‘bout himself, for someone who lived in the Drop. No offense meant,” he added, looking at the girls. “But I never would ‘ave pegged him as the bloke who was supplyin’ all those traffickers I’ve cracked over the ‘ead.” He glanced over at Alice and Helen. “Either of you girls know ‘bout this?”

Alice gave him a scathing glare. “I had no idea,” she answered stiffly.

“I always thought it was odd that he would take the orphans on those outings to see potential families,” Helen said in a quiet tone. “I figured that it was better than having them come to Drop to see the children. Now….” She hung her head.

“Slippery, little eel,” growled Taggart. “I ‘eard that Ryan suspected Fontaine of something like this with those girls-only orphanages of his. Guess the boss was lookin’ in the wrong place. Come on, Bob.” He gathered up the ledgers and diaries and headed out the door. “Ryan needs to see this stuff. The Tribune’s gonna have a field day when it catches current of this.”

Bob paused by the door and looked back. “Will you girls be alright?” he asked.

Helen let a tear form in the corner of her eye. “Houndsditch was my first real home,” she answered. “My life on the surface was a nightmare and I couldn’t find anywhere else in Rapture to stay besides Pauper’s Drop.” Dr. Bumby gave me a home and a job and now he’s gone and a child-pimp to boot, Houndsditch will be closed down, and they’ll send both us and the orphans away.”

“How long do we have?” Alice asked.

“Until Bumby’s solicitor reads his will,” Carmine answered, “If he ‘ad one. All those ledgers and diaries he kept of his…business though, bugger probably figured he’d be around for a while. I ‘ope Ole Nick had something special for him when he reached Hell’s gate. Take care, Alice, ‘ope you get better now that he’s not messin’ with your ‘ead.”

“Thank you, constable,” Alice answered. “I’ll be fine now, just make sure people learn the truth.” Carmine nodded and winked at her before departing.

“Alice, I have no idea what to do.” Helen just sat there, staring at everything and nothing. Alice wasn’t good at situations like this. Defending herself verbally or physically (well, mentally)? That was a snap. Comforting someone she had worked with for a year with but wasn’t friends with? Much harder.

Alice awkwardly put her arms around her. “It’ll be alright. We’ll find homes and work elsewhere.” She tried to convey a sense of confidence to the girl, knowing full well that she was likely botching it.

Helen hugged her back and then pulled away. “Alice, the whole reason that we’re in Pauper’s Drop is that we have nowhere else to go.” A few tears were sliding down her face now. “We’re the lowest of the low here in Rapture. We’re never going to be better off, even with that man,” she spat the word as she thought of Bumby in the new light he had acquired, “dead. The one thing we can do, however,” she stood to her feet with a new light in her eye, “is get those tags off the orphans’ necks.” She ran out of the room, leaving Alice alone.

Alice watched the door close and then sat down on the chair Helen had just vacated. This was
something that she hadn’t really given any thought to. What would become of her, Helen, and the orphans? Rapture wasn’t a kind place to the destitute or the unlucky; Alice was both of those unfortunately. Tomorrow she would go and find other work and a place to stay. Now, she would care for the orphans as best as she could and finish up what chores needed doing around the place. At least the orphans were out of Bumby’s clutches. It couldn’t get much worse for them, unless certain parties took an interest in their helpless state.

After dinner and dishes, Alice went to her room and this time she locked the door. All day she had done her best to catch up with her chores that Helen hadn’t been able to do in her absence, rid the children of their tags, reassure them that Bumby wouldn’t be taking them to the “nasty men” anymore, comfort them and listen to their personal stories of Bumby’s cruelty, and help with dinner and cleaning up. Plus, she had to get up early in the morning and go out for work and a new home. If she had any luck, she’d be able to find a place.

This was Pauper’s Drop, the queen-mother of all slums. Those who didn’t live in the squalid, often over-crowded housing slept out in the streets. The only charities that had ever operated in Rapture had been the “Fontaine’s Little Sister Orphanage,” and “Fontaine’s Home for the Poor” and those hadn’t ended well. All buildings that had housed one of those had been closed down, though people still lived in the decaying poor houses.

Alice was no fool. She now knew what the orphanages had been for (basically a way to cut out middlemen such as Bumby), and she doubted that Fontaine cared anything for the destitute. The rumors that she heard suggested that he was just as bad as Ryan, along with a real vicious streak. She wasn’t sure what Fontaine wanted with them other than to gain support and sycophants, but she knew that they had been going over to Atlas until Ryan got rid of him too. Rapture had used to be a melting pot, a nation of immigrants like America. But now, that pot was threatening to boil over.

Alice massaged her forehead. She was physically and emotionally exhausted, she honestly needed to go to bed, but there was something that she needed to do first. Sitting down on her bed and closing her eyes, she thought about Cheshire Cat in her mind, recalling his every whisker, every tooth in his disconcerting grin, every rib in his skeletal frame, every tribal stripe in his grey fur, and willed him to appear in front of her.

“I must say, you don’t need to pull that hard. About a fourth of that effort will do.” Alice opened her emerald eyes to look into Cheshire’s glowing orange ones. It was still a little hard to believe, that he was out in the real world. Alice had created him soon after the Liddell family had taken in Diana. Mr. Liddell had been able to convince Ryan to let them bring Diana and Snowball, her remaining kitten, down with them to Rapture. Her father had used to joke that he would probably have to wait until 1957 to ask another favor; that one had taken quite a bit of wheedling. Alice imagined the look on Ryan's face if he ever saw Cat and half-smiled.

“In a good mood for once?” Cat asked.

“I was just speculating on Mr. Ryan’s facial expression if he were to ever see you,” Alice replied, giving him a full-out smirk.

Cheshire gave her an annoyed ‘humph’. “Yes, that would be quite amusing. But the ensuing chaos and explanation would not be humorous.” He sat down and yawned. Alice was forced to endure the sight of his gigantic mouth and throat before he closed them. He honestly needed to clean his teeth; it looked like a biological hazard in here. “Now, what is my presence required for?”
“I want to see if I can draw anything else from Wonderland into the real world.” Alice answered. “This new ability could be quite dangerous, or useful.” On one hand, she could let someone particularly disagreeable out. On the other, it would be a good thing if she could bring her weapons into reality. No need to carry them around; she could just store them in her imagination.

“Hmmm, no time like the present.” Cat responded thoughtfully. “Let’s try someone relatively tame. The White Rabbit is a good candidate.”

Alice focused on the first Wonderlander that she had ever met. The White Rabbit with his waistcoat, battered top hat, and ever-present watch. His off-white fur, frantic, twitching nose, nervous eyes, and high-pitched voice constantly telling her that she was late. He had died twice, once during the Red Queen’s reign, the second time when the Dollmaker had been corrupting her mind, and had come back twice. Alice willed him into existence as she had Cheshire and opened her eyes.

The White Rabbit wasn’t anywhere in sight. Repeating the process didn’t bear any fruit.

“It appears that I’m the only one that can enter the real world,” Cheshire mused. “An earlier hypothesis of mine has been proven correct.”

“What hypothesis would that be?”

“That I’m exceptional,” he purred.

“Exceptionally infuriating and puzzling, yes,” Alice snorted.

Cheshire gave her a look. “If we’re done here, I want to be on my way.”

“One moment please.” Alice now concentrated on her Vorpal Blade. The weapon, which resembled a large kitchen knife, had been of great use to her during both adventures to defend her mind. She remembered its smooth, almost mirror-like blade with the ornate etchings in its surface. The beautifully-designed handle which fit her grip like a hand in a glove. Its balance, its speed, its deadly edge.

Alice felt a weight in her outstretched hand and smiled as she opened her eyes. The Vorpal Blade glinted in the lamplight and Alice gave it a swing. She could hear it cutting through the air with a zing. Now that was a welcomed and comforting sound.


Alice tried bringing up her Pepper Grinder, or the Tea Cannon. The smell of hot peppercorns in the air, the distinctive pop as the Grinder spat out its deadly projectiles; the shrieking of the whistle, the splat and sizzle of the scalding, green tea. No matter how hard she tried, none of her other weapons from either of her adventures appeared before her.

“Pity,” the Cat observed, “though a knife that can appear out of thin air is quite the ace in the hole.”

“I’ll make do until I can acquire a gun,” Alice replied.

“So,” Cat continued, “you can summon the Vorpal Blade, a useful item, and me, without whom you are lost. It could be worse, I suppose.” He grinned wickedly.

“Yes, it could be just you, Cat.” Now it was Alice’s turn to receive a dirty look. “I don’t have any of my Wonderland abilities either. I tried to dodge earlier to increase my speed.”
“That was exceedingly foolish,” the Cat chided. “If you had succeeded and someone saw you, you would have to explain where you got the money to purchase the plasmid. You’re not much of a liar, which is something you once claimed of me.”

“Never had the chance to cultivate that skill set. Besides, the hallway where I tried was void of witnesses.” Alice yawned. “Cat, I slept last night on the street and I’ve had an incredibly taxing day. Eight or more hours of sleep are a requirement.”

“I concur,” Cheshire yawned again. “Sleep well, Alice. I’ll prepare Wonderland in case you decide to visit.” He gave her one last smile and then vanished.

Alice went into the shared bathroom to change and brush her teeth. She changed from her dress into a nightgown. She did quickly since the Peeping Tom plasmid had been on her mind all day. The thought of someone using it to spy on her made her tremble in both rage and embarrassment. When she was a child, people had said she would be attractive when she got older. Turned out, they were right. Alice just wished that she that didn’t attract the wrong sort. That is, the perverted sort that would use an X-ray vision plasmid to spy on her while in the loo or changing. At least she had the sense to close the curtains on her window, which looked out into the Drop.

Tomorrow she was going out to look for a new place to live and new work. Hopefully, she would be able to find something. She had seen the kinds of things that people did to survive in Rapture and none of it was pretty.

People were getting angry; angry because of what they saw as Ryan’s inability to make good on his promise. He had promised that they would be able to make something of themselves. The conditions created by absolute freedom in the marketplace allowed for some to completely stamp out their competition, ruining livelihoods and lives. No labor laws allowed for the horrific working and safety conditions present in so many workplaces. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer, turning Apollo Square and Pauper’s Drop into slums. Alice missed her family, but at least they didn’t have to see what had become of Rapture.

People took too many things to distract them from their troubles. Alcohol, recreational drugs, places like Eve’s Garden and the Mangled Mermaid, those got most of their business from the hopeless. ADAM, too, was used as an escape. Apparently, the act of splicing gave the user a sense of euphoria and empowerment, the last of which was augmented by the gain of actual powers. The cancerous tumors and growths along with the insanity and need for more ADAM made it unattractive. However, as conditions worsened and a sense of powerlessness pervaded through the populace, many turned to it to gain back that power.

Alice picked up the plasmid from Bumby’s safe and considered it for a moment. Would she have to use this and possibly other plasmids? The stir that Atlas had caused had been stifled since Ryan had turned Fontaine’s Department Store into an underwater prison. He had already set up a special prison for “parasites”, but he apparently wanted them gone with no chance of escaping, period. Alice knew things from the streets though, and one of those things was that the powder keg needed only a spark to ignite one big mess. Quite a few Atlas supporters were still out there, hoping and preparing for his return.

There was also the support that Dr. Sofia Lamb had garnered just before her arrest at the hands of Rapture Security for her “subversive, collectivist beliefs”. With her arrest came the reveal of Persephone, a massive prison for criminals, madmen, and anyone deemed a “threat” to Rapture’s security (and to Ryan’s objectivist philosophy). It was ran by Augustus Sinclair of “Sinclair Solutions”, one of the most infamous businessmen in Rapture. Many believed that Lamb would come back to save Rapture and its “Family”. Quite a lot of her support came from Pauper’s Drop.
Her collectivist philosophy sounded like a far better solution after so many felt cheated by Ryan’s empty promises of capitalism’s power and success.

Alice didn’t care for any of them. Arthur Liddell had taught his girls that extremes on any issue were bad. It was a part of human nature to believe that any situation was either/or, this way or the other way, black or white. Extreme capitalism resulted in a dog-eat-dog mindset, while communism zapped human initiative. Alice was a cynic after everything that had happened to her. Attempting to recover some of her life and sanity had also left her little time for politics. She didn’t know how any of this was going to end; she just knew it wasn’t going to be peaceful.

Alice set the plasmid down under her pillow with the diary, the EVE bottles, and Lizzie’s key and slipped between her thin covers. After the question of housing and work was settled, she intended to go visit Dr. Suchong’s Free Clinic in Artemis Suites. She needed to see what had happened to those little girls and if it wasn’t good, well, it was about time he went under a knife. Alice had heard some very disturbing things about him and she didn’t have high hopes for his continued health if they were true.

She trusted Bob Carmine and Fred Taggart (up to a point), but she knew that Ryan wasn’t going to do anything to Suchong or Tenenbaum for buying orphans to be made into Little Sisters. The ADAM business was far too profitable for him to give up; as long as there was demand for ADAM-based products, he was going to supply the cursed drug. In a way, he was no better than Bumby, though she wasn’t about to announce that.

Alice felt her mind begin to slow along with her heart rate. That was always a pleasant sensation, especially for her. Natural sleep meant being able to escape from the world without resorting to a mind-wrecking hallucinations, without taking pills that would threaten to bring her stomach’s contents back up. A whale sang outside and Alice took the song with her into her dreams, into Wonderland. For the first time in a year, she slept soundly.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to thank Scorpiofreak and TheObsessor11294 for their help in betareading and proofreading this fic. I really appreciate it.

The plot thickens already. Why is Alice still "normal" with ADAM in her mind? What was in Bumby's research that he didn't want Alice knowing? This is getting interesting.

When I started writing this fic, Scorpiofreak told to look up slang from the 1940s-50s, as Rapture's downfall took place in the year of 1959, only about a month away for Alice. "Khaki-wacky" means boy-crazy, and a "sharecrop" is a sexually-promiscuous girl. Also, Rapture would develop its own slang, so "seaweed" equals "money," my own invention.

I hope you all enjoyed my second chapter, and the third is close behind (for once). Please leave a comment for me. Again, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. Until next time!
Chapter Notes

Wow, this had got to be one of my longest chapter yet. Over 10,000 words. Believe me, I certainly didn't mean to go for this long of a chapter. With my multi-chapter stories, I usually aim for about 5,000 to 8,000 words a chapter. I was basically on a roll with the last chapter and this one. On to Chapter 3!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 3: Dr. Suchong's Free Clinic

November 18, 1958

Alice hummed to herself as she exited the “Limbo Room”. She had just managed to get employment at the jazz club as a waitress on the evening shift. It wasn’t a good-paying job (there were none in the Drop), but it was better than nothing. Earlier, she had been able to find a just-barely affordable room at “Sinclair’s Deluxe Apartments”. She personally thought that anyone who could call that place “deluxe” either needed to get their eyes checked or that they had a terrible sense of humor. The owner, Augustus Sinclair, struck her as an opportunistic, cheap, smooth-talking con/businessman, but he was one of the few people in the Drop with available housing to rent out.

Alice briefly considered going back to Houndsditch to start moving what few things she had to her new room at the “Deluxe”, but instead turned towards the Atlantic Express. Houndsditch was in Skid Row, only a short walk away from the Limbo, but Alice had other things in mind. Ever since she had woken up, the fact that a certain Korean business associate of Bumby’s operated a clinic only a train ride away had been eating away at her. The idea was simple: Go in like a normal customer, take a look around, find out what happened to the little girls, leave. And if things got ugly, she had her Vorpal Blade.

Speaking of weapons, perhaps she would start investing in a firearm or two. The blade was deadly, but judging by the predatory looks she was getting from some passersby, it would be best to show that she was packing some heat. The only language that some people understood was a pistol or shotgun at the ready. Alice knew of a good gunsmith at Market Street that was really popular with those that had little money. She would probably head over there when she had enough dough to purchase something.

After making it to the station in one piece and buying a ticket, Alice sat down and studied the place where she had pushed Bumby to his death. There was nothing truly remarkable about it; it was a train station platform, sturdy, made of concrete. It was a platform that was in an underwater city that serviced an underwater train, but that was ordinary for Rapture. For Alice, it was the place where she had truly killed someone in the real world (the victims of her mental crusades didn’t count as real kills). There, she had vanquished both the Dollmaker in her mind and Dr. Angus Bumby in reality, ridding the world of the worst kind of predator. The kind that preyed off of children and their helplessness.

‘What kind of creature preys off of the young of its own kind for monetary profit?’ Alice knew of
creatures on land and sea that would cannibalistically kill and eat the young of their species, but they didn’t exploit them for cold, hard cash. *How can good and evil coexist on such a level within a single species? That surgeon Steinman asks “why are the plain allowed to mingle with the fair?” I ask “How can the wretched mingle with the righteous yet walk unnoticed in their midst?”*

Alice was roused out of her reverie by the sound of the dripping-wet train pulling in. The Atlantic Express wasn’t like any of the trains on the surface that she could remember; it was shaped more like a submarine to survive the crushing depths of the ocean, and it was much shorter than the trains topside. She wondered if it more resembled the underground trains in the tube stations; those would certainly have to be much shorter because of the tunnels. She was reminded of the repaired, amphibious Looking Glass Line as she boarded and found a seat. Mock Turtle loved it even more than the old one. She smiled to herself as the other passengers boarded and the train descended into the waves with a whirring, bubbling noise.

Things had changed in Wonderland since the Infernal Train had been derailed and its conductor destroyed. It was now a combination of Rapture and its old self. All of Wonderland was now under the sea just like Rapture. Glass ceilings hung over the major areas, letting in sunlight from above the waves and revealing the fantastic ocean life that populated Alice’s mind. The Vale of Tears had combined with Pauper’s Drop. Alice found the hybrid quite pleasing. None of the Drop’s grime and decay, and with the fresh smell, the air, and the odds and ends of the Vale. Hephaestus and the Hatter’s Domain were now one and the same. Persephone had found itself combined with Queensland. The Welcome Center and the Village of the Happy (formerly the Village of the Doomed) had been joined together quite nicely. The only area that wasn’t underwater was, ironically, the Deluded Depths, which had been mixed together with Fort Frolic.

The town of Barrelbottom was now floating above the rest of Wonderland with the icebergs that made up the ceiling of Tundraful. The marine life that consisted of its citizens wore diving suits full of sea water and entered their houses from the top, and the Carpenter’s career as a playwright had taken off, whenever the Walrus wasn’t consuming oysters. Alice felt pleased with herself for coming up with that one.

She figured that the Red Queen was now some gigantic octopus that lived somewhere beyond or below Wonderland in an ocean trench. Her tentacles would suit her now very much.

Alice continued to daydream about Wonderland while studying the passing oceanic scenes outside the train. A group of seals played and gamboled overhead before an orca whale gave chase. An octopus sat on a rock, watching the Express pass by with its strange, human-like eyes. Seaweed stalks oscillated in their strange dance amongst the coral as the oceans currents played with them like wind. After stopping at the stations along its route, the train finally came to a halt. Alice disembarked and found a tram headed to Apollo Square.

There were three main types of transportation in Rapture: The Atlantic Express, the trams, and the bathyspheres. Alice didn’t and couldn’t own a bathysphere, so she was confined to the Express and the trams. She supposed that she could start investing in a deep-sea diving suit, but it would probably take too long to arrive at a location. Though it would be nice to swim alongside the marine life, to explore the beautiful, alien environment outside the walls and windows of Rapture.

“Daydreaming again, Alice? Not a good idea with your black errand.” Alice wasn’t too surprised to find Cheshire appearing two feet away from her seat. They were alone in the last car of the tram, which Alice was thankful for. She could see people milling about in the next car through the windows, too busy to notice the gigantic feline in the car behind them.

“Cat, you need to choose more opportune times to pop in,” Alice chided. “If someone sees you,
they’ll most likely think you’re some sort of spliced-up leopard or other big cat.” Cheshire did have his tribal-looking stripes, but they weren’t noticeable enough on his grey fur to warrant him being mistaken for a tiger.

“Alice, you honestly have no idea how easy it is to get around unnoticed, especially when you can turn invisible.” Cheshire reached over with a paw and batted open her bag. “Whether you’re going to Suchong’s for reconnaissance or simply to kill the good doctor, I would suggest learning that trick for yourself. Be warned; I hear the drinkable plasmids have a bad habit of temporarily altering your visual and auditory perceptions of the world. Though it’s nothing like the first time with an injectable.”

Alice had brought the Peeping Tom plasmid with her in her bag. She had brought it with her along with the EVE bottles. She hadn’t wanted one of the children in the orphanage going into her room, finding, and then drinking it. That was the last thing she needed to do; start off a splicer young. Though, she had to admit to herself that she was curious about the bottle’s contents.

“Cat,” Alice started, “I believe it was only yesterday that I told you I don’t want more ADAM. It’s bad enough that they injected ADAM without my permission at Rutledge, I don’t want to start ingesting the repulsive mixture.”

“And yet you brought it along with you,” Cheshire snorted. “Come now Alice, we both know that you didn’t bring it along for the express purpose of keeping it out of a prying brat’s hands. It’s human nature to be intrigued by the idea of wielding power. You are no exception to that rule.” He grinned. “Besides, you’ve always wondered what it would be like to be invisible ever since I first demonstrated that ability to you.”

Alice was about to retort that she didn’t desire power of any sort, but she stopped herself. Deep down inside, she did desire power. The power to keep herself safe, to turn the tables on her enemies, to take the power she wielded in Wonderland and make it a facet of her material existence. It was possible in Rapture with ADAM, plasmids, and EVE. The downside was that those who indulged the human hunger for power via genetic manipulation often wound up deformed, mad, and desiring more ADAM fixes. But if she could live for years with who knew how much ADAM floating around in her DNA….

“Very well Cat,” she relented. She fished the bottle out of the bag and popped the stopper off. “But I’m warning you, if I go mad and Wonderland goes to rot again, I’ll be sure to tell everyone that it was you who advised me to take the first drink towards insanity and deformity.”

Cheshire shrugged. “Fair enough, but I believe that you’re not going to be disappointed.” He looked up towards the front of the tram. “You’re coming to your stop. I’d get to drinking that if I were you.” He vanished again.

Alice rolled her eyes at his typical behavior and then turned her attention to the bottle. The winking man seemed to promise an excellent deal; nothing more than an advertising trick. Alice squared her shoulders back and without giving herself time to think herself out of doing it, put the bottle to her lips and tipped it back. The liquid sloshed into her mouth and down her throat, tasting like a concoction of fermented lime juice and octopus ink with a strangely sensual aftertaste. Resisting the urge to gag, Alice stuffed the emptied bottle into her bag and waited for the hallucinations to begin.

For a brief second, nothing happened. Then the edges of her vision began to blur and a loud humming came out of nowhere. It grew steadily in pitch and volume until Alice thought it would soon break her eardrums or crack open her skull. She brought her hands up to her ears, but stopped short in horror.
The skin on her hands was flickering in and out of existence. It finally stopped, revealing the stark white bones of her hands and arms. Alice watched as her skeletal hands flexed the fingers without any muscles to command the movement. On an intellectual level, she knew she was hallucinating but it looked and sounded so real, just like her old hallucinations. She looked up to find that the walls of the tram car had turned invisible, and she could see into the next car without any hindrance. Everyone had turned into a standing, gesturing skeleton, a truly ghastly sight. The humming came to a roar that Alice could barely stand and then, it ended. The humming ceased, the grisly hallucinations faded, and Alice was in the tram car with solid walls, normal people in the next car, and hands covered with flesh.

She sat there breathing hard for a few moments, staring down at her hands and at her surroundings. Now that that part was over with, she could feel the euphoria pulsing in her head. She felt incredible, like she could learn the most forbidden secrets while walking in full view of her enemies, could walk unnoticed by the most watchful eyes and that nothing could be hidden from her own. The thing was, she now could. Invisibility and X-ray vision, to be both unseen and to see through solid walls. She now wielded a power secretly desired by many, and which was available (and abused) in Rapture.

Alice felt the tram slowing to a halt and looked up to see that they had arrived at the Apollo Square tram station. As the other passengers began to prepare for departure, Alice shook her head to clear it and gathered up her things. That was one of the most bizarre things she had ever experienced, and that was saying something.

She had created her own little dream world when she was nothing more than a little girl, and had fought her way twice through a nightmare version of that world in order to combat the insanity that had been eating away at her mind. She had fought monsters and nightmares of the worst caliber in a world that was bizarre in her innocence and insanely horrifying in her trauma. Tea with a Mad Hatter, a March Hare, and a Dormouse. Stomping on the Red Queen’s atrocious Executioner as a giant. And now she was consuming drinks that gave X-ray hallucinations along with actual X-ray vision and invisibility to the drinker. Wasn’t life in Rapture grand?

Alice made her way off the tram and onto the platform. No one looked her way as they hurried off on their business. She walked over to the elevator and managed to get on with only two other people. Alice was pretty sure that the elevator could only take a maximum of five people at a time and she didn’t want to be squashed in that small space with four others.

‘Would it have hurt Ryan to have made the transports and elevators a little larger? Oh right, it would have hurt his pocketbook.’

Upon the elevator’s arrival to the level above, Alice was the first one off. She maneuvered her way past the people jostling their way to the elevator. From there, it was only a short walk to Apollo Square.

Apollo Square: The main transportation hub of Rapture as well as the second largest slum in the city. To think, only a short tram or bathysphere ride away was Olympus Heights, the best living space in the city and the Liddell family’s former home. Two different worlds, so close yet so far apart. Alice had long learned that distance wasn’t the only separator between two locations.

She looked around the Square. It reminded her of a slightly smaller version of Grand Central Station in New York City (which she had only seen in pictures). The other thing that differentiated the Square from Grand Central was all the people walking around that obviously were going nowhere. Some of them were simply lying against the walls and in the corners. Others were walking around just because they had nothing better to do. They were those who didn’t have a
home over their heads, didn’t have a job to support themselves with, or didn’t have both. There
were plenty of the same unfortunates in Pauper’s Drop.

Alice made her way to the tram station to Artemis Heights. It seemed foolish to her that two trams
were made for a distance that could easily be walked. Might be a bit more effort on the part of the
walker, but there was nothing wrong with a little exercise.

As the tram began to shudder its way forward, Alice planned how she was going to infiltrate and
investigate Suchong’s “Free” Clinic. It was simple enough: Walk in the clinic, take a seat if the
“good” doctor was there to greet her, begin her investigation when his back was turned or if he
wasn’t there, see if there were any clues as to what had really happened to the little girls and/or to
whatever it was that Bumby had sold to him, and then leave. She was pretty certain that the Little
Sister program was heavily involved, plus she wanted to know what tests her former psychiatrist
had been so interested in. Cat was right that the plasmid might come in handy.

Alice was the first off the tram when it came to a stop. When she stopped to get her bearings, she
wondered for an instant if she had suddenly teleported back to Pauper’s Drop. The “Suites” in
Artemis Suites seemed to promise some level of comfort. From what Alice could make out, there
was little difference between the Drop and this. There was the litter, the decay, the downtrodden
people, and the general sense of hopelessness. It wasn’t as ramshackle or crowded as the Drop, but
it was still a slum.

There was another difference, more subjective than objective. Beneath the slumped shoulders of
the passing people, there seemed to be a bubbling resentment. Resentment against the man that had
tempted them down to this city with its merciless elitist structure, where they were at the mercy of
their employers with no way to move upward; where they were crowded together in rooms just so
they could have a roof over their heads; where the luxuries promised to them had degraded to
cheap, low-cost products created by corner-cutting producers. All that resentment needed was a
spark to turn it into a raging inferno.

Ryan had promised them a better life beneath the sea in a city where you could advance yourself
without the fear of big government and organized religion taking away what you worked so hard
for. Instead, he had dragged them down to this claustrophobic metropolis which was established
off of a “dog-eat-dog” mentality. He had engaged Dr. Sofia Lamb in a series of debates to better
prove who had the better ideals, only for her to be taken away to Persephone after she had been
revealed to be a closet pinko. He had taken down his most powerful rival on the pretense that
Fontaine was smuggling in contraband from the surface, only to absorb Fontaine Futuristics into
his own company. He had taken Atlas and his men, the only hope that people had any more, and
locked them up in Fontaine’s Department Store before sinking the whole building into an ocean
trench. The main difference between Pauper’s Drop and Artemis Suites was the atmosphere of
writhing anger just below the surface that permeated throughout the Square.

Alice had never really cared about Rapture’s politics. She had been far too involved with her own
problems to listen to recordings of the Ryan/Lamb debates or to the men who first declared
Fontaine as the “man with the helping hand” and later Atlas as the “Voice of the People.” Now that
she knew just what Bumby had been really up to in their sessions, she would be even less inclined
to listen to those who made such empty promises. Ryan’s “Great Chain” only pulled for those who
had the ruthlessness and opportunities that he himself had. Fontaine and Atlas’ handouts would
only make one dependent on them. And Dr. Lamb’s collectivism simply wouldn’t work because of
the fact of human selfishness. As far as Alice was concerned, she was on her own.

She found her way to the 2nd floor of Artemis Suites, where Suchong had his clinic. It didn’t seem
that the doctor was very busy at the moment considering the small amount of traffic entering and
Exiting, which was very ideal with what Alice had in mind.

She paused outside the door, thinking. 'It's for the best if I make sure this plasmid works before proceeding.'

Alice walked over to the corner beside the door and leaned against the wall. She wasn’t entirely sure how to activate the plasmid and she wanted some room and as much privacy as currently possible to practice. She hadn’t taken the stuff just so it would fail her at the moment she needed it.

Making sure that nobody was looking her way, Alice held her hand out in front of her and willed it to become invisible. To her shock, her hand became completely translucent. She could just barely make out its outline. Looking down at herself, she realized that the rest of her had turned invisible as well. Alice looked up as a man and his family walked by, not noticing her at all. She observed a woman walking up to a support column. As she turned the corner, her figure became a white outline instead of a skeleton (thankfully). The white outline became a normal person once she came into “sight” again. Looking around, Alice noticed that certain items had turned pink and blue. She wasn’t sure why. Perhaps it was an indication of usefulness?

Turning around, Alice suddenly couldn’t see through walls anymore. ‘Ah, movement must disrupt the X-ray vision.’

She willed herself to become visible again. She didn’t want to drain her EVE now that she knew that the plasmid worked. The drinkable plasmids gave one a dose of EVE with the first one. Alice wasn’t sure if taking more plasmids added to the EVE reserve in a person’s body. She knew that she still had quite a bit of the blue fluid in her body, along with the other bottles in her purse. She thought about the huge hypodermic needles she had seen scattered around Nurse Witless’s home and was suddenly grateful that she would only have to experience revolting tastes instead of piercing pains.

She activated her powers again and took note of the people within the clinic as she turned invisible. Six people in the waiting room, two on the recovery beds, a woman she assumed was a nurse bending over a recovery bed, and three figures towards the back. Alice could just barely make them out. A little girl on a gurney, a man bending over her, and what looked like a large man in a strange diving suit.

‘What’s a Big Daddy doing in the back of Suchong’s clinic?’

Alice dismissed the question from her mind for the present and deactivated the plasmid. She’d best get to the job at hand. She walked over to the clinic entrance and the door opened for her.

“Dr. Suchong will be with you momentarily,” the nurse called out from behind the wall separating the beds from the waiting room. She didn’t even bother coming out to see who it was.

“Dr. Suchong will be with you momentarily,” the nurse called out from behind the wall separating the beds from the waiting room. She didn’t even bother coming out to see who it was.

Alice didn’t think it was a good idea for recovering patients to be so close to those waiting for treatment. There was the matter of hygiene, as well as the somewhat discomforting moans of the recoverees. It didn’t bother Alice much, but she could see some of the waiting room’s occupants looking toward the wall nervously. They were strangers to anything pertaining to blood, while Alice had seen plenty of the stuff in her defenses of Wonderland, and worse.

She took a seat as instructed and looked around the room. The others were minding their own business as usual. Looking down at their hands, reading a book, looking up towards the recovery room; they all kept to themselves out of pure nerves. Alice wondered to herself just how Ryan had picked out people to invite them to Rapture. How strongly had the trait of “keeping-to-oneself” factored in? Because it seemed pretty prevalent amongst most of the population.
Alice noticed that some of the attention was being paid to a doorway on the other side of the room. She assumed that lead to Dr. Suchong’s office. When she had used the X-ray vision, it would looked like there was a larger area behind the room she was currently in. Now then, how best to enter Suchong’s office without making a scene?

She had noticed a door across from the doorway she wished to explore. If that was a restroom, all she had to do was enter it, turn on the plasmid’s effect, hurry across recovery, and hope the doors that opened and closed without anyone in front of them wouldn’t draw too much attention. It sounded like a plan that Cheshire would mostly approve of.

Alice got to her feet and went over to the restroom as nonchalantly as she could. Subterfuge wasn’t something that she was particularly gifted at. She could never get away with lying to anyone. As her sister Lizzie put it: “Even one of those toadies that Father invites to tea could tell when you’re telling a falsehood Alice. You’re just not a good liar.”

In her mother’s opinion, this was an incredibly good thing. Alice supposed it would be as long as she didn’t need to lie.

She didn’t turn any heads as she marched into the restroom. She had already seen into that room while outside and there had been no one inside, for which she was thankful. Alice turned invisible, and walked up to the door. It opened and she struck out across the recovery room. She realized that the plasmid also masked the sound of her footfalls, allowing her to quicken her pace and avoid using up her EVE. She passed by the nurse and the recovering patients. She noticed a large number of small bandages all over their upper arms, like someone had been at them with a needle.

‘It appears this “free clinic” has a price after all.’

She entered the doorway to find herself in a corridor with two doors in the same wall. Alice knew she was draining her EVE reserve and decided to explore the door further down the hall to remain out of sight. Once out of eyeshot, she “decloaked” and entered through the door.

As it closed behind her, she found herself in a single room. The other door seemed to open into some kind of chamber behind the large mirror that took up the opposite wall of the office. The hall was longer than the office was, so that was pretty likely. Either Suchong’s ego was about the size of a blue whale, or there was something behind it; from what she knew of the man, it was probably both. Alice turned her attention to the part she was in. It was like any other doctor’s office: A desk, filing cabinets, and a couple of bookshelves.

Alice crouched by the filing cabinets and began to leaf through them. Even though they were alphabetized, they were incredibly disorganized. Scraps of paper with chemical symbols on them were mixed with plasmid reports, papers crumbled into balls, and even candy and gum wrappers littered the papers. She even found a few test tubes in the “T” drawer. Alice didn’t consider herself a rabid supporter of cleanliness, but this was appalling.

It was under “B” that she found something. It was a folder dedicated to any business dealings with Bumby. Alice found written methods for psychological conditioning, more receipts for the orphan girls, and what looked like a series of test results. Behind the folder was an audio diary labeled “Very Useful” and dated December 24, 1957.

Alice sat down at the desk and hit “play”. Suchong’s heavily accented voice filled the air.

“Clinical Trial, ADAM Sickness Vaccine. Plasmid Lot 188. Dr. Suchong. Client: Fontaine Futuristics. First tonic applied to Baby was success. Fontaine wants weapon that can take plasmids without side effects, this will do trick. Bumby good business partner. First mental
conditioning for Little Sisters, now genetic sample that stop ADAM sickness. Suchong would open
own orphanage, except Fontaine already do that. Suchong has to wonder, what is Bumby using
memory conditioning for?"

Alice stared at the diary as it clicked off. Baby? Mental conditioning for the Little Sisters? Alice
didn’t know which was worse: The fact that Suchong had been injecting ADAM into a baby to
create a weapon, or that Bumby had had a hand in the Little Sister’s situation. She wasn’t really
surprised at the revelation of Bumby’s involvement. When it came to him, nothing surprised her
anymore.

‘Supplying little girls for the Little Sister project and inventing the means for their mental
conditioning, now that has Bumby written all over it. As for that genetic sample…wait. A
vaccination against ADAM sickness?’

Alice remembered what Cheshire had said about the ADAM in her genetic not effecting her
adversely, about what Bumby had said about the tests on her cells, and now Suchong had
developed an ADAM sickness vaccination gene tonic from Bumby’s research. Alice’s eyes
widened as the pieces of the puzzle fell into place in front of her. It couldn’t be that….

‘Yes, it is,’ she realized. She, Alice Pleasance Liddell, was immune to ADAM sickness! This
explained everything: The unresponsive ADAM, its activation with all those emotion chemicals,
Bumby’s interest in keeping it a secret, and Suchong’s use of it in making a vaccine tonic. Anyone
who could take ADAM without the side effects would be a step above those who would eventually
succumb to its effects. And Suchong had used her own DNA to make a living weapon out of a
baby.

Gritting her teeth, Alice stuffed the papers and the diary into her bag and stood up to leave. She
had found what she was looking for. She wasn’t sure where that beast Suchong was. She had seen
him behind these first few rooms, but had no idea how to reach him (X-ray vision didn’t reveal
doors). She knew where he lived and worked though. Hunting him would be easy.

As she headed out the door, Alice just managed to hear it: a creaking that seemed to originate the
huge mirror. She went through the door quickly and crossed the hall to the other door. Hoping that
she wouldn’t draw any attention from the recovery or waiting rooms, Alice grabbed ahold of the
door handle and forced it to stay in place. She peered through the door’s window to see what
would happen next.

The mirror showed itself to be one of those two-way mirrors she had heard about, a mirror on one
side, and a window on the other. She could see into the office she had just vacated, a close call
there. The creaking revealed itself to be the opening of a large two-door entrance, hidden by the
mirror but with a perfect view into the office. A small form came into view from within. A little
girl stood there, looking around in a combination of caution and wonder. Alice couldn’t see
anything wrong with her until she looked towards her. Alice realized with a shock that she
recognized the little girl. Her name was Susan and she was one of the orphan girls that had left
Rutledge only two weeks ago. Her soft brown eyes were now an unnatural shade of grey, and her
skin was a pallor that only a corpse could attain.

“Where are the lollipops, Papa Suchong?” Alice could just barely make out her voice and she felt
sick. It sounded like a younger, innocent version of the Red Queen’s two-tone speech. The similar
noise coming out of a real child was an atrocity. Susan, an innocent little girl that had been sent to
Houndsditch for care, had been spared the fate of becoming one of Bumby’s doll only to become
one of Suchong and Tenenbaum’s Little Sisters.

“Move out of the way, you filthy brat,” a now-familiar, accented voice broke in. The Little Sister
was pushed forward onto her hands and knees by someone behind her. As the little girl that used to be Susan cried out, a man emerged from the entrance. Alice recognized him immediately as Dr. Yi Suchong, a monster revered as a genius.

Alice remembered what Bumby had done to all those innocents, what Suchong and Tenenbaum had done to turn a bunch of little girls into “ADAM factories”, and the baby that Suchong had apparently given an experimental gene tonic to. She stared at the man towering over the cowering Little Sister and she realized that she wasn’t walking away now. It was no surprise when her blade appeared in her hand almost instantaneously.

She released the door handle, allowing it to slide open.

“Hey, you can’t go back there,” the nurse called out. Alice shot inside, ignoring the woman. If she interfered, Alice would have no problem giving her a new patient: herself.

Suchong started to look up as Alice strode towards him. “You enjoy cutting the weak open, you brute? Let’s see how you like it!” she screeched as she brought the Vorpal Blade up and swung it towards his eyes.

The only thing that Suchong saw was a knife on a collision course with his face. He managed to duck, losing only a few hairs to the razor-sharp edge. He turned and ran shrieking back into his lab. Alice charged after him, the cries of the nurse and Little Sister in her ears.

“Dr. Suchong!” “Papa Suchong!”

An image of her loving Poppa came to Alice’s mind. The father that educated his own daughters in order to see them achieve their full potential. The man who listened to her fantasies of Wonderland and encouraged her in its creation while warning her against making it her whole world. The man that sacrificed himself attempting to save a daughter that was already dead. And this pathetic excuse for a man running away from her like a coward had seen fit to make his victims call him “Papa”?

Alice raced after the man as he disappeared around a corner, ignoring the entrance that would lead to a more direct route to the back. “We reap what we sow doctor, and you’re going to reap a bloody ending!” she cried out in a voice that would given a splicer pause. The only answer she got back was a mixture of yelled English and what she guessed was Korean. In his fear, Suchong was slipping back towards his roots.

Alice rounded two more corners, gripping the blade’s handle hard. Bumby had faced his doom underneath the real-life, modern version of the Infernal Train. Now Suchong, a man who specialized in scalpels and needles, would briefly feel the sting of the razor-sharp Vorpal Blade before joining Bumby in Hell. Irony before agony again.

“Time for your…,” Alice began as she rounded yet another corner, looking over a small lab space and then froze. Suchong was hiding behind an island in the middle of the room, and standing in front of the island was the Bouncer-type Big Daddy that she had spied earlier. The lights on its helmet glared a deep red and its drill whirred to life as it turned to face her. Alice couldn’t remember the last time tables had turned this quickly against her. “Oh drat.”

“Kill her!” squealed Suchong, cowering from behind his refuge.

The Bouncer aimed its drill at Alice and began to spin it, moaning like a deep-throated mummy brought back in a deep-sea diving suit. Alice remembered the preparations of the Menacing Ruin whenever one was about to charge and jumped off to one side. As the drill shot from the Daddy’s
arm and just barely missed impaling her, Alice could make out the edges of the drill spinning almost in slow-motion as it passed her to impact the wall behind her. The Bouncer made a grunting/moaning noise and yanked the drill back on the long cable it was attached to. This time it charged her, shoulder first. Alice dodged like a normal person and was rewarded with the satisfying sound of the armored monster impacting the wall yet again.

Suchong might not die today, but he would have to pay for the damages done to his precious lab. With the Daddy in the room, killing Suchong was too much of a risk. As she ran by his hiding place, Alice spotted another audio dairy lying on the countertop. She grabbed it as she ran past.

“Stop her, kill her!” Suchong yelled as he watched her run towards the back.

“Oh stuff it,” Alice replied over her shoulder as she continued her retreat. If a man like Suchong had a secret lab behind his clinic, it would mostly likely have a secret entrance at the back, right? In any case, the Bouncer now stood between her and the way she had come in. At least she had the plasmid if she had to sneak around the brute.

She nearly ran into a Big Daddy suit hanging from the ceiling. Judging by the suits and by the equipment laying around on the floor, this was the part of the lab dedicated to Big Daddy research. The bellowing behind her signaled that the Bouncer was catching up to her. Alice willed herself to disappear from the visible spectrum and turned to see the Big Daddy charge into the room, its drill spinning for her blood.

The Daddy’s red gaze pierced the room, illuminating the components for its future brethren. Alice got a whiff of it for the first time and felt like losing her breakfast. The thing reeked of stagnant sea water, oil, rust, dead marine life, and other odors that she didn’t want to identify.

The Daddy continued to scan the room, jerking to look at the suits whenever one of them swayed on its perch. Alice had the strange experience of having the lights blind her, only to turn around and see no sign of her shadow on the wall behind. Speaking of the wall behind her, there was the door she had been hoping for.

The Daddy’s red lights turned back to yellow. Groaning in a voice not unlike a whale, it turned around and began to make its way back to the main part of Suchong’s lab. Alice breathed a sigh of relief.

‘Now that, was rather stupid on my part. What I wouldn’t give for my umbrella instead of the knife.’ She willed the blade to vanish back to wherever it went and turned to go.

A few steps later, two things happened at once. The first was that Alice's EVE finally gave out, leaving her completely visible. The second was the bucket that she accidentally knocked over, sending it clattering down some stairs. Alice cursed under her breath and hoped that the Big Daddy would ignore the noise.

It didn’t. With a loud groan/growl, the cybernetic workman came thundering back, its red glare fixing upon Alice like a prison spotlight. Alice summoned her Vorpal Blade back as the Big Daddy revved up its drill.

‘After everything I’ve been through, this is how I kick the bucket? A Big Daddy with a drill in the back of Dr. Suchong’s Free Clinic? Could be much worse, I suppose. Could be a wrench.’

As Alice steeled herself for one last battle, a large, familiar feline form suddenly interposed itself between her and the Daddy.
“What a big drill you have, my good sir. Surely you can find a better use for it than to menace young girls.”

Alice gawked for a moment at the Cheshire Cat as he sat between her and the rumbling giant. She almost yelped when the drill shot through him and into the ground directly behind him. “Alice,” he addressed her, “I can only hold his attention for so long. Kindly remove yourself from the premises through that door. The way to life is straight ahead.”

The Big Daddy yanked its drill back and began swinging it at Cheshire’s head, rumbling in confusion and anger when he just sat there, grinning and letting the drill pass through his body. Alice banished her blade and took advantage of the distraction, running through the door.

She found herself running through a short tunnel to what looked like the back of a small store. Alice leapt over the counter, startling those around her and upsetting a stack of the daily edition of the Rapture Tribune.

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing?” “Someone call the constables!”

Alice ignored the shouts and calls of those manning the newspaper kiosk and ran straight ahead, right into a bathysphere. Apparently someone from New York had the idea of using their bathysphere for a taxi business.

She just managed to get inside before it could start. The other passengers, five in all, either hadn’t noticed her entrance from the kiosk or didn’t care. “Where’s this bathysphere headed to?” Alice asked, out of breath.

“Where do you need to go?” the man sitting by the controls asked. He pulled the lever, signaling the sphere to begin their trip.

“Is Pauper’s Drop an option?” Alice asked back as the bathysphere’s hatch closed behind her. She got several looks at that reply, but nobody said anything. Artemis Suites wasn’t that far off from the Drop socially.

“Looks like it’ll have to be the last stop. The Drop’s out of most of our ways,” the man replied. Alice nodded and took a seat by the hatch. Right now, she needed a rest and some time to think.

She barely noticed the sights of the city and the ocean life as the sphere followed the radio signals to its destinations, too wrapped up in her own thoughts. The conversations between her fellow passengers barely registered with her in the light of all that she had learned that day.

BS+AMA=WS

It was late afternoon by the time Alice made it back to the Drop. The sight of the dingy, decaying neighborhood was somehow able to bring a sigh of relief from her throat. She had spent most of the day going back and forth on that bathysphere, waiting to go home. Whenever they stopped at a place, more people would get on. Alice quite envied those who possessed their own private bathysphere. Going places would be a snap then. As it was, she just tried to get some physical and mental rest while awaiting the trip back to the Drop. The incident in Suchong’s clinic had only taken a few minutes, but it had given her plenty of things to think about.

Suchong would have been dead if not for that Big Daddy. Ryan and the others involved in the Little Sister business would be sure to have guards around them, even more when word got out on the attempt on Suchong’s life.

Human beings, though not as physically monstrous or horrifying as the creatures that Alice had
faced in her own mind, were still dangerous in their own right. They could think, they had guns, some of them would have plasmids, and most of all they were just as human as she was. All she had was a walk-through Cat, a big kitchen knife, and a Peeping Tom plasmid. If she wanted to get anywhere with stopping the abomination of the Little Sisters’ abuse, she would have to improve her game.

One variable in her favor was this ability of her DNA to keep her safe from the horrific side effects of ADAM. If she could avoid those, she could splice herself up on all the dangerous plasmids and gene tonics. She could potentially become one of the most dangerous people in the city. All she needed was money with which to buy the plasmids. Unfortunately, plasmids cost quite a bit of money, money which she didn’t have. She would also need more EVE, as demonstrated in Big Daddy section of the clinic.

‘Well, it wouldn’t be the first time I’ve had to work hard for something. First time I’ve actually done it to earn money.’

She had worked for money before, but never to buy something essential to her survival. In Wonderland, whenever she had completed a task for someone, payment had always been in information or a much-needed item. And there had also been those teeth she used to improve her weapons the last time around. Now she would be working for money for much-needed items.

It also wouldn’t hurt her to secure a few firearms. From what she’d heard, it was harder for conventional weaponry to put down a splicer. Besides, there was no real heavy weaponry in Rapture. No one had thought that they would need it when they had come down here. Tommy and elephant guns were perhaps the biggest firearms in Rapture, and while they were dangerous in their own right, Alice had heard rumors of much more dangerous weapons used during World War II. She supposed she would have to make do with whatever she could get.

As she walked back to Skid Row and to Houndsditch, Alice thought about what moving into the Deluxe meant. She wasn’t sure if she would ever see Helen again. It was a city after all, and people could lose contact with each other even if both parties were still alive.

However, it wasn’t Helen that she was truly worried about. It was the orphans, specifically the orphan girls ages five to nine, that she felt true concern for. Now that their “caretaker” Bumby was out of the way they would be turned out onto the streets of Rapture, where they would easy pickings. People in Rapture didn’t really care what happened to the random orphan. It wasn’t their business whether they disappeared or died or anything.

Alice found herself hating the phrase “mind your own business.” Most of the time it could be sound advice, but in a city like Rapture, it seemed minding your own business just got others hurt. That was the problem with the small lacking the ability to constrain the great: nothing could stop the great from trampling on the small.

Alice didn’t wish for any harm to come to the boys at the orphanage, even though they were obnoxious brats at times. They just weren’t being targeted for conversion into ADAM factories; they wouldn’t be in as much danger as the girls in that regard. Though Alice knew that if she had the means, she would help them too.

Rapture was turning out to be a horrible place to raise a child. Alice had heard mothers discussing the things that they wished they could shield their children from down here. Why, she had even heard of a pornographic book store right next to the “Ryan the Lion Preparatory Academy,” Alice was just fine with the idea of societal laissez-faire, (she didn’t want people snooping in her business and she wouldn’t snoop in that of others if they weren’t up to something wicked). That though, was just too much. Alice was sure that something like that never would have been
approved of in 1946 London.

She couldn’t help but remember the words of the Red Queen in their battle in the Red Kingdom.

“This realm is for grown-ups alone; Raw, well ordered, ruthless, careening on the jagged edge of reality. Self-pitying dreamers are not wanted here; They cannot survive here.”

Something told her that Ryan and the Red Queen would have gotten on famously if they had ever met. That thought with the fact that Ryan was the big fish of Rapture made it all the more disturbing.

She found herself in front of the Houndsditch Home for Traumatized Youth, her home for the past year. At one point, it had felt something like a true home for her. Now, she knew that all that had been based on a lie. Houndsditch had been no more her home than Rutledge had ever been.

As she started to walk up the stairs, she was startled when the doors opened ahead of her to let Wilton J. Radcliffe, her family’s former solicitor, and Bobby Carmine out of Houndsditch. The former didn’t seem too pleased to see her. The last time they had met, she had been in his office accusing him of stealing her rabbit. She wasn’t sure if she had forgotten it at Rutledge or if he had taken it from her. She couldn’t help but wonder why he had kept the thing. Perhaps his childhood had been downright rotten and this manifested itself in a mild form of kleptomania, one that targeted the toys of those just as, or more unfortunate than, himself. Whatever it was, she and Mr. Radcliffe would never be on the best of terms with each other.

“There you are, Alice. I thought I had come down here for nothing. Staying out of trouble, I hope.” This was probably the best greeting she could hope to get from the fat, old goat.

“Very well, Mr. Radcliffe. Much better than I was before my last visit,” she replied evenly. “I take it I’m late to the reading of Dr. Bumby’s will?”

“Not today,” Radcliffe replied. “I’ll be back in a couple of days at the least to read his last wishes. There are some legal matters that need cleaning up before we can get that part of this unfortunate business done with.” He gave her a look, as though he blamed her for Bumby’s heinous activities. She gave him a piercing look in return, the type that made people feel like she was looking directly into their soul and seeing who they really were.

They continued this for a few moments before Radcliffe withdrew his gaze and began to rummage around in his coat pocket. “Actually, I came to give you this. With the bad turn my business has taken, I want nothing more to do with either of these things.” He finally found what he was looking for and thrust the items into her hands. Alice stared down at her old stuffed rabbit and at the envelope with her full name on it. As Radcliffe walked past her, Alice ripped the envelope open to reveal a large roll of dollar bills. It was her inheritance.

“But Mr. Radcliffe,” she called out after him, “I’m not supposed to receive this until I’m twenty-one.” She still had two years to go before she became a legal adult and therefore eligible to receive anything left her by her parents.

Radcliffe turned to her with a cross look on his face. “I honestly don’t care. I’ve wasted enough money on you and your case, and I thoroughly want nothing more to do with you, Alice Liddell. Thanks to this whole debacle, I’m now moving from Athena’s Glory to Apollo Square of all places. To the fifth floor of Artemis Suites if you must know. If you ever need anything, feel free to take your business elsewhere.” He turned again to leave.

“And what is going to happen to the orphans?” Alice called out again.
The look on Radcliffe’s face would have curdled fresh milk. “I have no clue, and I honestly don’t care. After the will is read, I suppose they’ll go out onto the street. It’s none of my business, and none of yours.”

Alice glared ferociously at his disappearing figure. “Don’t you presume to tell me my business, you chrome-domed miser.” He kept on walking this time. She hadn’t thanked him for either the rabbit or the inheritance; he hadn’t given her much of a chance.

She turned to Carmine, who had watched the exchange in silence. “I don’t suppose you have anything to say about this?” she asked, holding up the envelope, the bills poking out of it.

The constable just shrugged his broad shoulders. “Far as Ryan’s concerned, Rapture’s inheritance laws serve more as guidelines than anythin’ else.” He poked a finger towards her bunny. “What’s that all ‘bout?”

“This is a toy from my childhood,” She explained. “I received it during my first Christmas in Rapture. As for why Radcliffe was holding onto it, I’m in the dark as same as you on that point.”

Carmine looked after Radcliffe’s retreating form before turning back to her. “Alice, you know I like you, right?”

Alice gave him an odd look. “I never really gave it much thought, considering the fact that our interactions are limited you and Fred escorting me in and out of a makeshift cell.”

“Well, I do,” he affirmed. “Not sure if you remember it or not, but you gave Jack Splatter a real piece of your mind before you fainted. One of the best speeches I’ve ever ‘eard.” His expression turned grave. “So, I’m only askin’ this cause it’s my job. Did you have anythin’ to do with Bumby’s death?”

Alice knew that sooner or later someone was going to ask that question, though she honestly wished that it wasn’t him. She forced herself to look him full in the eyes as she answered. “I was in the throes of a psychotic episode at the time, so I can’t really say. You yourself said that he likely slipped and fell.” Her first real lie. And to a constable of all people.

He looked at her for a few moments before nodding slowly. “That I did, Alice, that I did. Radcliffe’s payin’ me and Fred to escort him to the Square. Have a good day now.” He hurried after the man.

“Good day to you too,” Alice called after him. She walked up to the Houndsditch front doors and walked in, frowning. She had failed to kill that coward Suchong, Radcliffe was finally showing his true colors, and she had just lied to one of the two constables that she liked. At least she would never have to see Radcliffe ever again. Whatever had possessed her father to take on that man as the family solicitor? He had tended to be an idealist when it came to people, so that was probably a factor.

The children that saw her coming stepped out of her way. That was fine with her, she didn’t particularly want to hear any of their complaints or sorrows at the moment.

Helen met her out in the hall. “How did getting another seaweed supplier go?” She caught sight of the look on Alice's face. “Not that well I take it.”

“Actually, I got a job as a waitress at the Limbo Room, and a room at the Sinclair Deluxe. I just met Radcliffe leaving.” Alice replied, calming down somewhat.

“That explains the look on your face. Whatever did that man want?” Helen looked disgruntled.
“Looked like a descendant of Ebenezer Scrooge. Though I certainly wouldn’t mind seeing that constable again.” Her face took on a dreamy look. “I wonder what they feed them over at Ryan Security to get that size.”

“That is perhaps the most accurate description of Wilton J. Radcliffe I have ever heard,” Alice snorted, ignoring Helen’s musing about Bobby Carmine. “He sponsored my stay at Rutledge just so he could get part of the inheritance from my family. It didn’t turn out as nicely as he would have liked and he decided to just be rid of it.” She held up the rabbit and the envelope.

“Well, congratulations on the inheritance,” Helen commented, turning her attention back to the vase she was dusting. “Just do me a favor and wish me luck on getting a roof and a job. Some of us aren’t as lucky as that.”

Alice sighed. “If I was lucky, my father never would have left London, and my family would still be alive.” She didn’t blame her father for what happened, but she did wish that he had decided to turn down Ryan’s offer when he had the chance. If only he had had a moment of clairvoyance right there when Ryan had told him of Rapture and of its need for a university.

Alice walked away before Helen could reply. She needed to pack her things and take them to her new apartment at the Deluxe. It was Apartment 211. It was nothing great, just the “affordable housing” that Augustus Sinclair set up in order to take advantage of the huge housing demand in Pauper’s Drop. Alice knew that a businessman needed to look for opportunities, but Sinclair seemed to enjoy finding them amongst the poor and destitute to line his own pockets. One of the worst examples of this was his inclination to sell cheap, dangerous, low-quality liquor to those in the Drop who would have been better off without it. Alice decided that one day she was going to tell the smooth-talking American southerner just what she thought of him.

She walked into her room and began to gather what few things she had. The photograph of her family (she still had no idea who had sent it to her), the drawings from her time at the asylum and here, and what few clothes she had went into the bag that Helen had set out for her earlier. On the bright side, it would be a quick move.

Alice set the notes and audio diaries from Suchong’s out on her bed. She picked up the notes and began to look over them. The first ones detailed the methods that Bumby had created for the memory conditioning of young children, turning them into slaves for whatever purpose their handler’s desired, determining their behavior down to the littlest habits. There were also the receipts for the purchases of the young girls from Suchong and Tenenbaum’s side of the deal. Alice resisted the urge to tear them apart.

She turned her attention to the test results next. She hadn’t gotten a better look at these while in Suchong’s office. Turned out, Bumby had requested a number of tissue samples, her tissue samples, from Rutledge Asylum. Like he had reported, her cells weren’t responding to the ADAM surrounding them. The last bit of paper was a record of the purchase of a vial of her blood with a description of a unique gene hidden within its genetic code. Alice remembered when Bumby had taken that blood from her. He had said it was to make sure that there wasn’t a bloodborne disease that could interfere with any drug treatments she might need. Lying rat.

She picked up the audio diary she had snatched in her flight from the Big Daddy. It had the same date as the last one. The maker was Brigid Tenenbaum and it was labeled “Another Wunderkind”. Morbidly interested to hear the woman’s thoughts, Alice clicked it on.

“I do not care much for Bumby; he reminds me of slimy eel. Still, his latest deal has proven to be immense discovery. The ADAM gene, the A-gene. A gene that allows for immunity from the side effects of ADAM. No addiction, no cosmetic damage, no insanity. Whoever has the A-gene can
become true übermensch; ‘superman’. The gene is present in one out of every one million people, and to think, one of these wunderkind is here in Rapture. What we could learn if only we knew who it was.

Alice had a good idea of how they would learn from her, by strapping her to an operating table with their scalpels and their needles and their other instruments of torture. Being at the mercy of the staff of Rutledge, she had developed a great distaste for the bad apples of the medical and scientific occupations. Who knew what would have happened if she hadn’t possessed this “A-gene” when her brain had been bombarded by the ADAM treatments.

One out of a million people? Her mother had always said that Alice was one of a kind. If only her dear mother had known how unique she was. She possessed a hereditary factor that would allow her to take all the plasmids and gene tonics she desired without the cloud of ADAM sickness falling over her. The only limitation on this gift would be the money needed to purchase said ADAM-based products, a problem now solved in part by the inheritance that her parents left her and by the job she would be working at.

Alice stuffed the notes and diaries into her bag and hefted it towards the door. She smiled to herself as she strode out into the hall.

‘They have no hint of who I am, what I want, or what I can do. These villains have brutalized the innocent and the helpless, and they shall pay for it, dearly. My greatest inheritance isn’t the money; it’s this gene in me. Thanks to you, Mother and Father, they will never see me coming.’

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I took that last line from the evil ending for BioShock 2. Don't worry though, I'm not going to turn Alice Liddell into some kind of monster. As Scorpiofreak told me, Alice has fought hard to get out of her mental darkness and I'm not about to throw her back, even if it was to avenge the Little Sisters.

So Alice is immune to ADAM sickness. This could get very interesting. I assume everyone knows who the baby was that Suchong gave the ADAM sickness vaccine plasmid to. I always wondered to myself why Jack never develops ADAM sickness (I'm assuming hormones were used to accelerate his growth). I thought, "What if there was a rare gene that prevents ADAM sickness and it was made into a plasmid for Jack when he was being 'made'? And since I wanted Alice to avoid becoming a splicer, I made her the original owner of the gene.

I portrayed Suchong as a coward in the face of true danger because that's how he always struck me: A bully who couldn't stand up to someone by himself. He's nothing but a twisted brain with no morals or ethics.

I hope you all enjoyed that and I will write some more for this and my other stories once finals are over with. Please leave a comment to tell what you thought of the chapter, have any questions, or any suggestions. That really tickles me. Happy reading and writing!
Settling In

Chapter Notes

Hello to you all again. I hope you're enjoying this crazy crossover. My last chapter had plenty of action in it and I hope you all liked it. This chapter won't have nearly as much action, if any. I'm sorry if you were looking forward to more, but I can promise you that there will be plenty of action when the Rapture Civil War starts up.

Alice will meet Delta soon in the story. I have no intention of her and Jack appearing when Delta is journeying through Rapture in 1968. Jack didn't make an appearance in that game (though he was mentioned) and I do intend to closely follow BioShock canon. With that said, here is Chapter 4 of WonderShock.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 4: Settling In

November 18, 1958

“My word child, I’ve never seen anyone gather more tips than you did tonight. Jenkins made a good call hirin’ you.”

Alice had to smile at the older, black woman. Grace Holloway had a way of making anyone like her, a charisma that even she wasn’t immune to. She was about equal to Alice in height, her caring, brown eyes resting in an equally brown, oval face, ringed by black curls poking out from underneath her signature cap. Most of her ensemble was either a calming green or a pleasant yellow that brought memories of the sun to mind. They had only met a few hours earlier and Alice had found it surprisingly easy to talk to her. It was a much nicer change of pace from most of her interactions with people. Also, the singer for the jazz club was one of the best that she had ever heard (right after her sister of course).

Right after moving her things into the new apartment, she had reported for her first shift at the Limbo Room. The interview with Ken Jenkins had been surprisingly quick earlier that day. Alice suspected that his decision to hire her had less to do with her skills as a waitress and more to do with her looks. He had probably made a job opening right then when she had walked in the door inquiring about one. At least the uniform she wore for the job was modest, though she would prefer the skirt be just a little longer.

“Thank you, Mrs. Holloway,” Alice replied. It was nice to converse with someone who wasn’t out to get either her, or something out of her. Those people were few and far between, and Cheshire didn’t really count. He was more of a taciturn advisor.

“Your singing voice could easily rival Elizabeth Comstock’s,” she added. Alice had been to one of Sander Cohen’s shows where his “Songbird” had performed. The raven-haired girl had a voice that could make a Big Daddy stop in its tracks to listen. Alice usually tried to forget that night. Not because of how sad Elizabeth Comstock’s song had been, but because of something that Alice had seen afterwards in Fort Frolic’s Atrium. Something that brought up memories so painful, and at the same time, possibilities of what could have been that were so joyful, she couldn’t bring herself to ever listen to Elizabeth Comstock again; it brought up memories that were too raw.
“First, I’m not married, so you can drop the ‘missus’.” Grace said in a faux-serious voice, catching Alice’s attention. “And second, please child, call me Grace.” She smiled while adjusting her trademark hat, which seemed to hug her head and short hair.

“Very well Grace,” Alice replied in her own “serious” voice. “In that case, please call me Alice. I’m hardly a child anymore.”

‘A pity,’ she thought to herself. In the back of her mind, she couldn’t help but wince at what she had said. She wasn’t a child anymore, physically or mentally. Her childhood had ended far too early; the fire had thrown her into the world of adulthood in a city where if one didn’t or weren’t able to look out for oneself, one became a target for exploitation. No, she was no longer the little big-eyed girl who had loving parents and an older sister, whose only problems had been loneliness, who had dreamed up Wonderland and all of its inhabitants. That little girl was gone.

Grace’s response drew Alice back into the present.

“It’s a deal, Alice. You’re just funnin’ me,” she suddenly added. “That Comstock girl’s singin’ has put her on every radio and stage in Rapture. Me, I’m just the singer of the Limbo Room in Skid Row.” Grace narrowed her eyes in thought for a moment.

“Then again, I don’t have to work with that Sander Cohen. He may be Rapture’s favorite artist, but there’s somethin’…wrong about him. I can’t exactly figure out just what it is for the life of me.”

Alice nodded in agreement as they entered the tunnel that connected Skid Row to the Deluxe and the rest of the Drop. “I have to agree. Artists can be quite peculiar in their habits, but Mr. Cohen seems to be another category entirely.”

She thought back to some of his most recent works, along with the gossip and rumors surrounding him. His artworks had begun to take such dark undertones that they would have fit in the art collection of the Red Queen (if she had one) or some of Wonderland’s shadier characters. The sense of hopelessness and despair that mixed with the ever-increasing disturbed nature of his paintings had many questioning the sanity of the man. She was hardly one to gossip, but she couldn’t help overhearing some rather disturbing rumors about the man: people getting hurt or even dying when they couldn’t match the desires and whims of Cohen’s Muse. There were the wild parties and outings that he threw with his “disciples” that rivaled those of Oscar Calraca’s, one of Rapture’s most infamous playboys, in their debauchery and ADAM usage. And there was also that little tidbit about his “charity work” with those orphans to consider….

“If he’s not careful, he’s likely to earn a cell in Rutledge,” she added.

“Isn’t that the truth,” Grace answered with an emphatic stamp of her foot. She watched a group of jellyfish swim by the tunnel’s glass roof. “The special treatment he gets from Ryan probably had a hand in that. Seems everything that Ryan touches either dies or gets twisted into a former shadow of itself.” She had lowered her voice when she got to Ryan’s name, brown eyes fliting from one passing face to another, watching for any eavesdroppers.

Alice huffed in agreement. “I couldn’t agree more. My family wasn’t even here a year before they died in a fire, caused by a man that Ryan invited down to this wretched place,” she added.

Grace looked at her sadly. “Honey, I’m so sorry to hear that. Seems that everyone here had either lost someone topside, or down here in this leakin’ bathtub to some greedy low-life with no respect for human life.” She sighed heavily as they continued on.

Alice remembered how she and her mother had been working on her singing just before she had
gone to bed on that fateful night. It was one of the things that she could do better than Lizzie. A
couple of months after arriving at Houndsditch, she had stopped by the Room to hear Grace sing.
She had heard of her singing voice and even though Alice’s own was far out of practice, she had
wanted to hear a professional do it.

She hadn’t been disappointed. Grace’s singing had been superb, each note floating through the air
to describe the sorrows of all who heard it, awakening the one emotion that Alice hadn’t felt since
she got out of Rutledge: hope. Hope that one day, somehow and someway, she would find the
means to sort out her problems with her mind, with her life, and with her personal demons. It was
only a temporary feeling, fading away after she left the Limbo, but that was one memory of Grace
and that one elusive emotion that she was glad to hold on to.

Between each song (each rang of Dr. Sofia Lamb's altruistic beliefs), copies of Lamb’s
“Metamorphosis and Unity” had been handed out. Alice had took one just to be polite (she had
come to hear Grace Holloway sing after all). Her curiosity satisfied, Alice hadn’t heard Grace sing
again except in passing. Ever since Lamb’s arrest, Grace had been careful with the songs she sang
and who was listening on her songs. A smart move in Alice’s opinion.

A thought came to her mind as they came up on the Deluxe, where they both resided. “Grace,” she
began, “would you mind instructing me on how to sing? My mother taught me some of the
essentials when I was a little girl, and I think she’d like it if I finished learning how.”

The smile on Grace’s face rivaled Cheshire’s in size. The only differences were that Grace’s smile
was the right size for her face, and her teeth weren’t blood-stained. “I’d love to honey, and don’t
you worry. It won’t cost you a nickel. Why, I bet little Eleanor would just love to meet you.”

Before Alice could reply, a fine, red mist appeared out of nowhere in front of the Deluxe’s
entrance, coalescing into a man with a soft crackling, as though the air was being forced out of its
place, giving way to the mass of a much denser object.

“Good evening ladies,” he greeted them with an easy smile. “I’m with the Rapture Tribune, would
either of you know where I can find Ms. Alice Liddell?”

Alice had just barely stopped herself from whipping the Vorpal Blade out of Wonderland and
slashing the throat of the potential threat. Her mind was still on the watch for anyone or anything
about to kill her; the adrenaline rush from Suchong’s earlier hadn’t worked itself completely out of
her system, and her mind was more or less in the kill-or-be-killed state it had adapted to while
fighting in Wonderland. The last time, it had taken two months for her to work off her instincts to
fight off the smallest things that startled her.

“Yes,” she said, giving him a frown for startling her and Grace so. He wore a worn, brown jacket
with bulging pockets; she could spy an audio diary poking out of one of them, threatening to rip it
open. A heavily-modified camera hung down his front, a testament to hours of fine-tuning it for the
perfect picture. Both his tie and his white shirt were stained various colors by the assortment of
quick meals and coffee breaks he had hurried through. His cap had a card labeled “Press” stuck in
it, and a limp cigarette hung from his smiling lips. His blue eyes were bright, bright with the light
of a predator that’s cornered its hapless prey, his weapon of choice the audio diary he held in one
hand.

“I am she,” she continued, knowing full well that he knew who she was. “What do you want me
for?” Of course, the press would be hounding her now with all that evidence that she had presented
to Ryan’s constables on Bumby, hoping for the scoop on the latest of Rapture’s scandals.

“I’m Nathan Presley,” he introduced himself. “The Tribune’s heard about your involvement in this
story about Bumby and his real work, Ms. Liddell, and I was hoping to get your perspective on this. This is great stuff.”

Alice couldn’t help but bristle at the words “involvement” and “great stuff”. If she had any idea what was really going on earlier, she would have stopped Bumby much sooner. And anyone who actively sought out such sordid occurrences as newsworthy events had a questionable moral compass at best. And was this who she thought it was?

“Aren’t you that one reporter that wrote all those articles about me before?” she countered. “What was that you called me when I was transferred to Rutledge? ‘Battered and crispy self’, wasn’t it? And that Dr. Wilson might need a suit of armor?”

Presley’s smile wasn’t so wide, and Grace was actively glaring at him now. He coughed loudly before replying. “The public likes some humor mixed into sad stories, keeps from depressing them to death, you see. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions about it?” He held up the audio diary, his smile struggling under the looks he was receiving from the two women. “You’ll be compensated for your time, of course,” he nervously added, holding up some bills in his other hand.

Alice raised an eyebrow in thought before turning to Grace. “I’ll catch up with you in a moment, Grace. It’s time the public heard a first-hand account of who Bumby really was.”

Grace gave her a searching look before nodding. “I’ll be waiting in the lobby, Alice,” she said, walking ahead.

As soon as Grace was out of earshot, Presley visibly relaxed. “Well then,” he clicked his tongue, “let’s get started.” He held up the audio diary and clicked it on. “Nathan Presley, Story on Dr. Angus Bumby, Interview with Alice Liddell.” He began actively pointing the device from her mouth to his and back again. “Ms. Liddell,” he began, “did you have any suspicions before his death of Dr. Bumby’s role as a supplier in child-trafficking?”

“No, and I wish I had found out earlier,” Alice replied. “It was abominable what he was doing to them.”

“Are there any indications that he was planning a similar role for you?”

“I was undergoing therapy with his ‘sessions’; all they did was give me splitting headaches and make me forget my own childhood like he was with his other victims, so yes.”

“Is it true that he was involved in the fire that killed your parents and sister?”

“I’ll say he was!” Now was her chance to denounce him as the monster that he truly was. “I couldn’t remember him before the fire due to his machinations with my mind, but I remember him now. He wanted my sister Lizzie, and when she wanted nothing to with him, he snuck into our home, had his way with her before killing her, and then burned our apartment down to cover up his crimes! He intended to use me as a surrogate ‘Lizzie’ whenever he wasn’t selling me as a ‘high-class’ prostitute.”

He stared at her, bugged-eyed, his cigarette dropping from his now-gaping mouth. “Holy crap… Can you prove any of that?”

“I’m positive that the audio diaries I supplied to Ryan’s men will collaborate with my story.”

Presley went on with the interview, Alice answering every question he asked. They went over everything the reporter could think of: how she had escaped the Liddell’s burning apartment, how
clouded her memory had been after she had been released from Rutledge, the investigation into her possible involvement with the fire, the hallucinations that had still plagued her, Bumby’s actions and attitudes towards the orphans and herself, the memory-destroying effects of his therapy sessions, the identities of his buyers, her sudden relapse only a few days earlier, and her slowly improving mental state.

In hindsight, Alice couldn’t believe all the signs that Bumby had been up to something abnormal, all the indications that she ignored in the face of her own suffering. If Caterpillar was right about her punishment for disregarding the orphans still on its way, it was going to be something horrible, something that would add itself to the pain still tormenting her soul.

“And he also sold some of the younger girls to Suchong and Tenenbaum, correct?” he reaffirmed.

“Yes, that’s right. Though those two don’t strike me as the type that would harbor appetites that Bumby was interested in satisfying,” she answered. With any luck, that would be enough to draw the reporters and Ryan Security off her tail when they caught wind of the attack on Suchong. It would also get at least some people thinking about those two and drawing the connection between them and the Little Sisters.

“Alright Ms. Liddell, that’s all the questions I had for you.” He clicked off the audio diary and held out the money to her, which she accepted. “Would you mind if I took a quick picture for the Tribune?”

“Very well, if you feel obliged to,” Alice said in a bored tone. She jumped when the man suddenly vanished in a burst of red light and black shadow, accompanied by a sound that oddly brought the image of a knife slicing through air to mind, leaving behind some shrinking substance that looked like rose petals of all things before those disappeared entirely.

The crackling behind her caused Alice to instinctively turn towards the noise, only to be momentarily blinded by the flash from the camera’s bulb.

“Perfect!” Presley called out.

He slipped a few more bills into Alice’s hand as she blinked, trying to rid her vision of the afterimages generated by the sudden light now plaguing her.

“You were very helpful today. Oh, and Alice? I honestly meant what I said when we at the Tribune wished you well in that last article.” Alice’s eyes readjusted themselves enough that she was able to catch his reassuring wink before he vanished in a burst of red, black, and rose petals.

“Teleportation plasmid,” Grace said as she got up from her seat in the lobby a few minutes later. “I’ve heard it just tears you apart and puts you back together again. They call ‘em Houdini splicers.” She grimaced and shook her head. “I prefer walkin’ to the idea of being ripped up and put together like some piece of cloth. What if I lost somethin’ while I was doin’ it?”

“I’m sure that they covered that part while they were still testing it,” Alice said wryly. At Grace’s revolted expression, she added, “Everyone knows that they maim or kill their test subjects, the buyers just don’t want to think about how much pain and blood went into making their plasmids and gene tonic.

“Now do you mean Eleanor as in Eleanor Lamb?” She had heard that Dr. Lamb had asked Grace to take care of her daughter while she was in Persephone. “What is she like?” ‘There’s no telling how the progeny of someone like Lamb will act,’ she thought.
“Oh, she’s just the most precious child you ever did see,” Grace almost gushed as they entered the Deluxe’s elevator, more than happy to get off the topic of plasmid test subjects. “She’ll be a real beauty when she grows up, and she’s cleverer than they come. She can even do that numbers work with letters.”

“Algebra?” Alice offered, a little surprised. She remembered adults saying similar things about her writing and poetry skills before the fire. After Rutledge, both her writing and artistic skills had flatlined, while her atrocious mathematics had remained the same. She got as far as long division, and then her brain shut down. She only knew of algebra and calculus thanks to Lizzie’s stronger aptitude in that skillset.

“That’s right, and she even does it in fractions,” Grace said with a hint of pride in her voice. Alice had to admit that was very impressive. From what she had heard, Eleanor Lamb couldn’t be more than seven or eight years old, and she was already at that level of mathematics?

“I’ll have to meet her then. It’s not every day one gets the opportunity to meet a child prodigy,” Alice replied. “Would tomorrow work by any chance?”

“Drop by any time before your shift begins,” Grace answered. “Oh, and don’t let anyone outside the Drop know I’m teachin’ you for free. The scandal would ruin me,” she joked.

Alice gave a short laugh as she disembarked from the Deluxe’s elevator. “Only in Rapture is that a scandal. Good night, Grace.”

“Good night, Alice,” Grace answered as the elevator began its ascent to the third floor where the singer made her home. As Alice made her way to her new apartment she couldn’t help but wonder at how quickly she and Grace had built up rapport. They were from completely different backgrounds and had entirely different lives, yet they seemed to get along very well. Grace seemed nice enough that Alice had felt that she could ask her for singing lessons. It was certainly refreshing to find an individual like Grace in Rapture.

And then there was Nathan Presley and his mixed signals. On one hand, he had no problem showing that he was out looking for the most horrible of stories to report on and that he had no issues with making light of others’ misfortunes. On the other, he had listened to every word she said without questioning her mental state at the time, and he would be reporting on Bumby’s abuse and exploitation. He had also paid her for the both the interview and the picture, and she desperately needed the money.

‘Now I just have to make sure that I don’t completely muck up the meeting with Eleanor.’

Alice always felt a little uneasy around children. Her own childhood had been ruined so completely that she had a hard time empathizing with them, and with adults in general. How many people, adults and children, were there that knew what she had been through? The loss of her family, her home, her sanity, and the revelation of her psychiatrist’s true nature was simply something that most people had no conception of. No one ever had a perfect childhood, everyone had lost at least one person they loved, some had suffered in their own minds while some writhed in agony at the will of others, but how many others knew her own experience firsthand? All of those one after the other?

And to top it off, Eleanor was very different from most of the children that Alice had interacted with at the asylum. She apparently had never known her father (Alice had never heard of Dr. Lamb being married or even having a lover), her mother was gone but not dead, and she sounded like a very intelligent little girl. Alice could put on a smile for ordinary children and maybe tell them a story about Wonderland’s happier times, but how was she was she supposed to act with a little girl.
that could already figure out the value of X in an algebraic equation?

Alice continued to ponder this as she walked the short distance to her apartment, 211. She had to admit, the rooms were much better than anything else in the Drop. One could tell though, that everything in the rooms was dirt-cheap. Sinclair seemed to have a talent for cutting corners in order to make a profit. Alice wondered if that was something that he was naturally proficient at, or if he stayed up late at night thinking up ways to make money through morally ambiguous methods. Either way it made him quite a dislikable character, at least in her eyes.

The genetic scanner set above the Securis door to her apartment beeped and the door opened to admit her. Alice sighed heavily as she entered her new home and looked around. Like she had thought earlier, it was nicer than anything else in the Drop, but still dirt-cheap. The lights flickered intermittently, threatening to go out at the slightest provocation. The counters were cheap coral, a far cry from the craftsmanship lined Bumby’s desk; all the wood furniture, floors, walls, and ceiling stunk of the dried salt that clung to the wood taken from old sunken ships as opposed to the wood that was grown in Arcadia or brought down from the surface; the appliances were rusting, and every single “window” was actually a salvaged submarine porthole. Better than the Drop’s other options, but still cheap.

She decided that she would have a quick bite to eat before calling it a day. She had worked hard that night, waiting tables, delivering orders, helping drunken patrons out the door, and many other tasks that came with being a waitress at the Limbo Room. At least her tips had been pretty nice, for patrons that lived in the Drop. The payments for both the picture and the interview were also nice additions for the day.

“Getting used to the ‘normal life’, Alice?” Alice looked up from the cold fish she was heating up on the stove to see Cheshire grinning at her over the kitchen counter, his front paws clasped together right on the edge.

“Blasted Cat, where have you been?” she scolded. “I’ve been worried about you ever since I left Suchong’s clinic.” The last time she had seen the feline, he had been distracting the Big Daddy. “I appreciate your intervention with the Bouncer, but you couldn’t have shown up sooner?”

“No, I couldn’t,” he replied. “I thought I would wait until you had a spare moment for me to properly reprimand you for your recklessness.”

“Recklessness? Now you see here-,” Alice began.

“You had what you wanted, but no sooner do you see Suchong as he truly is then you fly off the handle and attempt to murder him in front of everyone in that clinic,” Cheshire interrupted. “There will be an alert out for a knife-wielding madwoman. With any luck, the description of you will be too general for anyone to properly connect the dots. Your supposed ignorance as to why Suchong wanted those little girls in the first place will help to deter any investigators that question Mr. Presley, a clever move I will admit. Overall however, your actions were rash, even for you. A loose cannon damages itself more than anything or anyone else.”

Alice was about to protest again, but she stopped and sighed. “I hate to admit it Cat, but you’re right. That was foolish of me and I could have gotten killed or put in a cell.” Her head popped up as she realized something with a shudder. “Or even put back in Rutledge.”

“Yes,” Cheshire agreed. “Your successful slaying of Bumby was due more to dumb luck than to any real skill on your part. Tell me Alice,” he paused and gave her a searching look. “Do you honestly have it in you to kill a fellow human being? Not some mindless pawn of the Red Queen or the Dollmaker’s, or simply pushing some monster into the path of an oncoming public transit
vehicle, but killing a human being and watching the life fade from his eyes?”

Alice sat down on a nearby stool and considered the question. ‘With Bumby, I merely pushed him. Yes, I did kill him, but I didn’t deal the death blow personally. The Atlantic Express did. With Suchong, I would have had to finish him personally. Could I do that? Would I see his humanity in his last moments? Or would there be nothing but the monster? Worse, would I be the monster?’

“I…I don’t know, Cat,” she finally admitted. “In hindsight, all I did was to endanger myself, both in the lab and possibly now. I’ll have to be careful now that Rapture Security will be looking for a black-haired woman with a gigantic kitchen knife.”

Cheshire nodded, narrowing his orange eyes. “Hmmm. That’s as satisfactory as any answer I’m going to receive from you. Now,” he ignored the glare she was giving him, “let’s establish a few ‘guidelines’. If you’re going to kill someone, a sane human being, do it as stoically and as impersonally as possible. Nothing sadistic. I don’t care if you get creative with your methods, just don’t do it for fun.

“Also, it would be good for you to start investing in plasmids now that we know for certain you’re immune from the side effects. If I hadn’t provided a target for that big oaf to focus on, you would be a blood smear on Suchong’s lab floor. Invisibility will only get you so far.” He got down from the counter and sauntered over to the door, picking up a catalog by the door with his mouth. Sinclair had apparently put it in the apartment for advertising.

Cheshire set it down on the kitchen counter in front of Alice. On the cover, a man lit up a neon sign proclaiming *Evolve Today!* with a bolt of lightning from his fingers. “I believe that a good deal is on page 22. I’d send them a letter via pneumo before going to bed.”

Alice glanced at the clock and then sighed. “Very well, Cat. I’ll make it a quick one then.” The scent of something burning came to her nose and she looked back towards the fish on the stove. “Confound it all!” she yelped as she hurriedly shut off the burner. Thankfully, the fish wasn’t too burnt. “Care for half of a too-well-done fish, Cheshire?” she asked, holding the pan up for his inspection.

Cheshire rolled his eyes. “As if I would lower myself to dine on anything but a Wonderland fish. Do you have any idea what that fish has been swimming in outside of Rapture?” He managed to wrinkle his nose.

“I try not to think about it,” Alice replied as she got cut a small slice off of her half and put it to her mouth. “See?” She swallowed it.

Cheshire simply rolled his eyes before yawning again. “Good to see that you still need me and my advice; I’d be of little use to you otherwise. I’d best be off. Good night, Alice.”

Alice gave him a half-hearted “good night” of her own as he vanished. She finished eating the fish and found the page that Cheshire had recommended. Apparently, the business was a one-man operation that specialized in going from door-to-door selling plasmids “in the comfort of your own home”. The prices were slightly higher than that which you would find at a store, but then again, the man came directly to one’s door and Alice had a little bit of money to burn from her inheritance.

She penned a quick letter expressing her interest in purchasing some “defensive” plasmids. She gave her address and the times she would be available to see their options. After hurrying to the pneumo office in the Deluxe’s lobby to send the letter off, Alice went back to her apartment and to her new bed. After changing into her nightgown and turning off the lights, she stared up at the
ceiling and thought about her day.

It felt like a lifetime ago. She had gone out looking for evidence on what had happened to those young orphan girls (when it was pretty obvious what had happened to them), wound up drinking her first plasmid, learning she was immune to ADAM sickness, attempting to kill a man, receiving her inheritance, working at her first real job, and agreeing to meet Eleanor Lamb, the prodigy daughter of Dr. Sofia Lamb.

Why did her life have to change so suddenly all the time? It was getting so tiresome.

Alice closed her eyes and began breathing deeply and regularly to relax. She still had some things to do, but worrying about them right now wouldn't help.

‘I hope that plasmid salesman gets here soon. I can’t help but sense I’m going to need as many as I can get my han….’

BS+AMA=WS

November 19, 1958

At about eight o’clock, an hour after Alice finished preparing for the day, the salesman appeared at her door. He introduced himself as “Matthew Fink of Fink Door-to-Door Plasmids”. Alice could honestly say that she didn’t care for him. His suit was just like Jack Splatter’s: its look of purported opulence so glaringly obvious. His darting eyes and expression reminded her strongly of a rat, a pack rat to be more specific. His tone of voice, and its volume, reminded her of the Carpenter, which didn’t help his attempts to build rapport with her at all. She also didn’t care for where he cast his gaze when he thought she wasn’t looking. She wondered to herself just how he had obtained his wares. He and Sinclair would have gotten along famously.

“Now here are the defense plasmids you expressed an interest in,” he said animatedly as he lined them up on her counter. They were all drinkables, though Alice could see some injectables poking out of the large briefcase he carried his merchandise in.

“This little number is called ‘Old Man Winter.’” He pretended to shiver as he picked up the bottle. “It’s the drinkable version of Winter Blast. Need ice for a party? With this plasmid, you can just hold your hand over your guests’ glasses and the problem is solved. It’s also good for if something is burning on the stove or if a young, attractive lady such as yourself needs to hold off the hordes of young men at her door.”

Alice groaned inwardly. ‘Oh no. Not one of those salesmen, the type who use flattery for potential customers. Attempting to give me an exalted opinion of my looks or intelligence will you nowhere.’ “I’ve heard that the Old Man Winter ice is dry ice. Is there any accuracy to that rumor?” she asked.

“Oh that,” Fink made a dismissive gesture with his hand. “I can assure you, they’re just rumors. Old Man Winter creates pure ice water. Not a trace,” he frowned as carbon dioxide was the lowest of all gases, “of carbon dioxide or any other-.”

“I’ll take it,” Alice said before he could go into further detail. She didn’t care if the ice was carbon dioxide or water or helium. If it froze things, that was all that mattered.

Fink looked surprised at being interrupted and blinked before going on. “This next number is called ‘Possession’. This one actually combines the effects of several different plasmids for a truly spectacular result.”

“Which ones?” Alice asked, her eyes sparking with interest. Multiple plasmids combined into one
would help her save on money and on time spent looking for those plasmids individually.

Fink’s lips twitched into a grin that said ‘I have you now’. “You can only hack machines with this one initially, but with the purchase of its upgrade,” he continued, “you can even make people respond to your whims, like Hypnotize. If through some bizarre set of circumstances you don’t have a man in your life, miss, now’s your opportunity to get one.” He winked suggestively while miming a hypnotized man walking.

Alice did not appreciate forward advances and the look she gave Fink conveyed what she thought of that. His own expression showed surprise and offense that she wasn’t taking the bait. He hurriedly put his smile back on and turned back to his plasmids.

“T’m usually hesitant to show this next one to the ladies but you strike me as something special.” He put down Possession and lifted a familiar green bottle, “Peeping Tom grants the double-power of invisibility and X-ray vision to the-,”

“I already have that one,” Alice interrupted. ‘Your intuitive impression of me is more correct than you can begin to imagine.’

An affronted frown struck Fink’s face for an instant before his salesman smile returned. “Oh, but do you have the upgrades for it? The Cloak and Vision modifications remove the EVE cost for the invisibility and X-ray vision, respectively. You have to be standing still for that to be in effect though. Perfect for turning the tables on the boys and spying on them for a change.” He winked at her again.

‘Oh for… if dealing with this flirtatious, gutter-minded rat of a salesman is Cheshire’s idea of a joke, it is in incredibly poor taste,’ Alice thought with disdain. “I’ll consider those,” she replied coolly.

“Shock Jockey,” he jumped as though shocked when he touched the purple, lightning-topped bottle, “is Electro Bolt’s drinkable counterpart. Oh, did I mention that the drinkable versions allow you to lay down traps?”

“Traps?” Alice was interested at this.

“Let’s say someone’s chasing you.” Fink began to quicken his gait and his words. “He’s bigger than you, has plasmids, and there’s no one around to help you.” He did his best to imitate what he thought a chased, panicked Alice would look like (very badly). “You round a corner, and remembering the Shock Jockey plasmid you so intelligently purchased from Fink Door-to-Door, you lay down a trap. When he rounds the corner and steps on your trap, zap!” Fink convulsed his hands, imitating an electric-shock victim. “He won’t know what hit him.”

“That explains the higher price,” Alice mused.

Fink looked concerned for a moment. “Well, yes,” he conceded, “but the drinkable plasmids have a lot more ADAM than the injectables.” He reached over to the counter and held up a brown bottle with a horse-and-rider-stopper for her inspection.

Alice read the label. “Bucking Bronco? Why is Ryan Industries giving these drinkable plasmids such odd names?”

Fink shrugged. “With the threats of Fontaine and Atlas gone, Ryan wants the new ones to have ‘friendlier’, more catchy names to appeal to buyers. It’s all advertising. These things can still be lethal, no matter what you call them.”
“What does Bucking Bronco do? Give one the power of a mule’s kick?” Alice asked snidely.

“From what I can make of the description,” Fink chuckled, “it allows you to levitate objects or enemies in the air. Similar to telekinesis except you shoot it out like a projectile,” Fink explained, fluttering his fingers in the air before jerking his hand forward like he had thrown a ball. “It’s quite the plasmid to have for lifting heavy objects, or people.”

“I like the sound of that one,” Alice commented.

Now,” he picked up a red-colored bottle with a demonic woman for a stopper. “I have one here that’ll go along with your fiery personality. Devil’s Kiss allows you to lob a fiery grenade at your enemies, exploding and setting them aflame. With thi-,”

“No!” Alice said emphatically. “I’m not interested in that one.”

Now a look of clear annoyance spread across Fink’s face. He obviously wasn’t used to potential customers talking to him like she was. “But miss,” he almost growled, “if I can just explain the psychological advantage you’ll have over your enemies-,”

“I said NO.” Alice had been sitting down for the sales pitch, but now she stood up. She only came up to Fink’s shoulder, but her glare more than made up for the height disadvantage. The green of her eyes was acidic as she glared at him. “My family was killed in a fire. I have no interest whatsoever in wielding the element that destroyed them.”

Fink backed down real quick, straightening his jacket nervously. “Oh, I'm so sorry. I never would have mentioned it.” He seemed to be mentally scrambling for a recovery, or else lose her as a customer. His eyes lit up as he remembered something. “In conciliation, there’s this plasmid that I would be happy to sell at a discount to you.” He reached over to his briefcase and picked out a brochure, holding it out to her. “There is a plasmid in development that I’m sure you would love. I had to cut a special deal with Ryan himself to receive the first bottles of this one when it comes out. It’s on page three if you’re interested.”

Alice took the brochure after giving him one more look. On page three, she found herself studying an advertisement for “Undertow”. The EVE-blue bottle featured octopus motifs: a picture of a red-eyed, grey-skinned octopus on the front, silver tentacles sheathing the bottle in a protective embrace, and a tentacle-themed cap to top it all. “The power of the sea at your fingertips,” she read aloud. “Yes, this sounds much more to my taste. Is there any way to order this one ahead of time?”

“As soon as Ryan makes good on his deal, I can bring one to you personally.” Fink’s eyes lit up as the wheels in his head began to churn out a new deal. Judging by the way the muscles in his arms and legs spasmed, Alice knew that he had just resisted the urge to dance. “Normally, I would charge full price to make a profit on that kind of deal. But for you, how does a mere decrease of fifteen percent sound for this particular beauty?”

“That’s still quite a lot of money,’ Alice mused. ‘Let’s see if I can haggle my way for a better deal.’

“I’ll take the rest, except for that fire plasmid, if you’ll sell me the Undertow at half price.”

Fink’s entire face lit up. “Is there anything else I can pique your interest with?” He steepled his fingers together with excitement at the thought of even more of Alice’s dollars making their way into his wallet.

“Yes, do you have any gene tonics that allow for more efficient EVE usage or physical upgrades?” Alice inquired. She had no desire to run out of ADAM in the middle of a situation again, and she really needed to develop some body strength. The differences between her real body and her
Wonderland boy were more than just looks, it was strength and stamina too.

“Miss, I have both,” beamed Fink. “EVE Saver and SportBoost. I recommend buying both the usual and the upgraded versions of each. I should warn you, the tonics are injectable only.” He plunged an invisible needle into his arm, grimacing. “They haven’t come out with drinkable versions of those yet.” Now he was downing an invisible glass.

“Pain in the short term equals gain in the long,” Alice half-smiled. “How much for the Old Man Winter, Possession, Shock Jockey, Peeping Tom upgrades, Bucking Bronco, gene tonics, and the Undertow as soon as Ryan delivers it to you?”

Fink was grinning as he told her the amount, as he counted the bills and pocketed them, and as he left the apartment, reminding her that he was only a pneumo line away. “Remember, splice responsibly, and you won’t have any worries about ADAM sickness,” he managed to get in before the door closed behind him.

“Oh, I’m positive that I won’t experience any problems with that, thank you very much,” Alice sniffed at the door. “And I’ll go to a store next time; most managers don’t resort to such forward, inappropriate advances.”

‘I’ll have to wait for a little while before I buy any more plasmids. That purchase cost me over half of the inheritance money,’ Alice thought, checking the now thinner envelop. “It appears I’ll have to tighten my belt before I can splice up anymore,” she said aloud. “At least I have my job.”

She picked up the Old Man Winter and studied it. “I believe I’ll start with you,” she said as she popped the top off. She felt goosebumps rise along her neck as the fluid washed down her throat. Although it was at room temperature, it tasted cold. Like someone had managed to bottle the very essence of cold itself; the snowflake, the glacier, the iceberg and the icicle made into a drink.

Alice watched as the hallucination commenced. Permafrost crept up her arms to her hands. Once her hands were completely covered, needle-sharp icicles sprouted painlessly from the back of her hands and from her knuckles. Ghostly vapor first drifted off her hand, and then began to form in a whirlwind. It sounded like an Arctic wind was blowing through her apartment, or her head, she couldn’t tell which. Her vision was obscured by pure white. She felt like she could be as indestructible as a glacier, as swift and dangerous as an avalanche, and as sharp and deadly as an icicle. These sensations of empowerment, now that was what she could get addicted to. She had been powerless for so long and now… the ice and the wind subsided suddenly.

Alice could still feel the cold along with the EVE flowing through her veins.

‘Well, that answers the question about the drinkables replenishing your EVE. Maybe the injectables are a better option economically. The high price of these drinkables is justified but still too high.’

Deciding to test her new plasmid, Alice poured a glass of water, walked across the room, and then turned and shot a white projectile at the glass, her hand covered in frost. In an instant, the glass was covered in ice and its contents were frozen solid. Alice approached the glass and tapped the water with a forefinger, satisfied. ‘Carbon dioxide or dihydrogen monoxide, it works perfectly for my purposes.’

The application of the gene tonics had no hallucinatory effects, but they were much more painful, even if the rush brought on by the ADAM made her feel good. This was due mainly to the size of the needles used, as well as the volume of substance that was injected.
“Ow! Bloody hell. If I ever find the complete idiot that decided it was a good idea for the needles to be this size….” Alice growled as she flung the last of the needles into the trash can. She could feel the SportsBoost affecting her body already, making her stronger. When she was in Wonderland, her body had become much less frail, the body needed to dodge and fight against the horrors in her mind. She would done nothing but embarrass herself if she had tried to lift the Hobby Horse in the real world. And now with the enhancements….

Alice entered her bathroom to get out a First Aid Kit for the massive, bleeding holes left by the needles. To her surprise, she just had to clean up the blood. ‘That’s right, ADAM has extensive healing and antibacterial properties.’ The holes left from the needles were now just scars, which she could hide with long sleeves or a little makeup.

Curious at the ease with which she moved and felt, Alice stood in front of the mirror and stripped her clothes off. She couldn’t help but stare at her image in the mirror. Her muscles were much more defined now, not bulging, but definitely larger. Alice felt her bicep, smiling at how firm it was. ‘If only I could have pushed Bumby with this. He would have suffered a concussion against the other side of the train tunnel before getting ran over.’

Alice got dressed and decided to head over to Grace’s. There was no time like the present for meeting Eleanor and getting started on her singing lessons. After that, she had one thing that was imperative she accomplished.

“All right,” Grace said in surprise. “I wasn’t expecting you until later.” She wasn’t wearing her hat, so Alice took a moment to study Grace’s normally-covered head. The only real difference between her hair and Alice’s was its shorter length and its curls; the color and gloss was almost the same as hers.

“I can come back later if you like,” Alice started to say.

“Come on in,” Grace interrupted. “No time like the present, I always say.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Alice replied as the door shut behind her. Apartment 307 was practically identical to 211 except in layout. Ahead of them was a kitchen/dining room with a room to the left and an entryway directly across the room from them.

“Eleanor’s in her room. Eleanor, someone’s here to see you,” she called. To Alice, “How about you two get acquainted while I get tidied up?”

“Sounds agreeable to me,” Alice replied as she headed over to what she assumed was Eleanor’s room.

She had to smile at the difference between this room and the rest of the apartment. It was pink for one thing, very pink. One wall was taken up by bookcases and a dresser; instead of the toys that would normally take up space on the floor, books on physics, psychology, sociology, and other scientific disciplines were scattered here and there. A black-board covered with mathematical equations stood in one corner, next to a little height chart that detailed Eleanor’s growth and that of her “Teddy”. She had evidently lived with Grace for the past few years. A bedside table added its own solid shade to the pastel ceilings, walls, and tile floor. The only thing thing that wasn’t any shade of pink was the blue bedspread. Eleanor sat at the short, round table in front of the bed, staring into a microscope.

Her hair, which trailed down her back in two little pigtails, was just as dark as Alice’s. Her forehead was broad for a child’s, as if adding a visual clue to her intelligence. Just like any other child of Caucasian descent in Rapture, her skin was pale as ivory. When she looked up at Alice,
her eyes were a pale blue, reminding the older girl of the sky she herself had gazed upon as a child. The intelligence in her bright eyes was only matched by the smile she gave Alice, revealing milk-white teeth, a few of which were crooked, but didn’t detract from its brightness.

“Are you Alice, the waitress who wants to sing?” the little girl asked, her bright eyes going over the older girl with interest.

Alice forced herself to smile; it was something that she really didn’t do instinctively, especially with children. She just couldn’t identify with them (as Dr. Lamb would probably put it). “Yes, and you’re Eleanor?”

“I am,” she piped up, “and this is my mum’s microscope. Do you want to take a peek?” Eleanor moved off to one side and pushed the microscope towards Alice.

“I’d love to.” Alice knelt on the floor and moved her hair out of her face as she put her eyes to the device. “What exactly am I looking at?” Remembering the microscope that her Poppa had brought down to Rapture for her and Lizzie, she adjusted the controls for the microscope’s focus, attempting to get a better look.

“Fish scales. They’re much more colorful than I thought they would be.”

Alice had to agree with the younger girl as she finished focusing. A rainbow of colors leapt out from the scales, imitating the rainbow of a rainy day turning to sunlight, a sight that she hadn’t beheld in years.

“You know,” she said, “these colors remind me of a rainbow, a rainbow underneath the sea.” She glanced over at Eleanor. “Do you know what a rainbow is?”

When Eleanor shook her head ardently, Alice proceeded to describe one as Eleanor showed her more and more specimens underneath the lenses of the microscope. A few yards away, Grace smiled as she listened to the two girls, so alike despite their age difference and upbringings.

“Can you guess what this is?” Eleanor asked, sliding another glass cover in front of the scope for Alice to examine.

“I have absolutely no idea.”

“That’s a cell from an ADAM slug. Mum told me to be extra careful with that one.”

Alice studied the cell with renewed interest. Somewhere within this cell was the secret to ADAM, something that gave ADAM slugs the ability to secrete this substance that could do so many interesting and varied things to DNA, to the genetic code that decided everything about a species and about an individual. The cell itself resembled any that one might find inside of a living thing, but for some strange reason, it was this living thing in particular that had the power to literally alter the building blocks of life.

Alice was interrupted from her musings by Grace. “I’m ready for your first lesson, Alice. Let’s hear you sing so I know where to start.”

BS+AMA=WS

Alice spent the next hour and a half learning from Grace. The older woman was impressed by what Alice could remember from childhood and helped her to refine her rougher and inexperienced points. When lunch came around, Alice accepted Grace’s invitation to the meal and conversed with her about singers both in Rapture and on the surface while alternately listening to Eleanor talk.
about the things like the microscope and other technical devices she liked to play with.

“Have you heard about this ‘rock-and-roll’ that’s becoming popular on the surface?” Alice asked after swallowing a bite of her sandwich. Grace seemed to be really good at making those.

“Yes, and I hope it stays up there.” Grace made a disgusted face. “That’s not music, that’s just noise. If that’s what finally causes World War III, I won’t be one bit surprised.”

“I like it,” piped up Eleanor.

“Where did you hear it?” asked Grace, looking puzzled.

“I think I heard some the last time I snuck out of Mum’s,” answered Eleanor, looking a little guilty. Only a little.

“You snuck out of your house at your age?” Alice gave Eleanor an odd (and admiring) look.

Eleanor shrugged. “I used to do it all the time. Mum even installed security systems, though they didn’t do much good. They were easy to hack.”

“Eleanor,” chided Grace.

“I’ve never tried to sneak out of your home, Aunt Grace,” Eleanor said innocently.

Alice’s head popped up as soon as she heard the word “hack”. One of her newly-bought plasmids, Possession, would allow her to hack machines. But it would be a good thing to be able to hack machines using her own two hands, save her a lot of EVE.

Alice put the last bit of her sandwich into her mouth and wiped her hands with her napkin. Swallowing, she stood to her feet. “Thank you kindly for the meal, and for the lessons, Grace. I believe I’d better go. I have…an errand to run.”

“Pleasure to have you for a student, Alice,” Grace replied. “Same time tomorrow?”

“I now have something to look forward to.” When Grace got up with the dishes and her back was turned, Alice leaned down to whisper in Eleanor's ear. “Would you mind instructing me on how to hack electronic devices?”

“Only if you tell me more about the surface,” Eleanor whispered back.

“Deal.” Alice picked up her bag and strode to the door. “I’ll see you tonight at the Limbo then, Grace?” she asked aloud.

“That you will, Alice,” Grace said above the sound of the dish water running. “Tell her bye, Eleanor.”

“Bye-bye Alice,” Eleanor piped up, already headed towards her microscope.

“Goodbye Eleanor. See you tomorrow.” Alice heard the door close behind her and began to make her way back to her apartment. She had to grab a few things before going out, namely a bottle of EVE and enough cash to buy a gun. She honestly needed to sit down and write up a budget for the rest of her inheritance, as well as her waitress’ salary, tips, and any other cash she came across. At this rate she would be penniless again at the end of the week.

‘I wonder what Momma and Poppa would think of all this. Me, all on my own, and using the money they left me to buy plasmids and pistols. And Momma was so horrified the time I found
Poppa’s bottle of scotch in his study. I believe she gave him quite the earful over that. This would leave her quite speechless.’

Alice smiled at the memory as she entered her apartment and gathered what she needed. Bumby had been so wrong about memory. At one point she had swallowed every lie that man fed her so that she could forget the painful memories of the fire and its aftermath. What a fool she had been to ever listen to that man. If only she had remembered his involvement in the fire sooner. Then again, it might not have ended as well. She would never know, and it was just as well that she didn’t.

Cat would advise against her considering what could have happened. She could almost hear that gloating voice of his telling her: “It is useless to consider what could have happened, Alice, for it could have gone an infinite number of directions. Best to concern yourself with what is than what could have been, lest you want to eventually end back up in Rutledge.”

As if the fact that she knew a figment of her imagination better than she did most people wasn’t maddening enough.

One of the things that she had recovered in her childhood memories were those of Aster Bunnymund, who sold eggs in the Farmer’s Market in Arcadia and set out Easter eggs for children to find on Easter Sunday. He was the only one outside her family who listened to her tales of Wonderland without ridiculing her about them. She had completely forgotten about him in the aftermath of the fire and no one had mentioned him. She had been to the Market several times over the past year and she had walked by his old place, which was now a fruit-and-vegetable stand.

As Alice left the Deluxe, she knew one thing for certain: She had no intention of losing anyone else she cared for and loved. She going to find Aster and make sure he was alright. She had the memories, now she just needed to affirm that the flesh-and-blood person was still in the land of the living.

‘Out of all my loved ones, only Nanny and Aster now remain. Radcliffe no longer counts; he made that quite clear yesterday. I’ve lost so much. My family, my childhood, and my faith in humanity. Truly, there is only one thing worth fighting for in this cruel world, and that is the people we love and cherish.’

Chapter End Notes

figured that since Grace and Alice worked in the same place, they would meet and Alice would be introduced to Eleanor. As for Matthew Fink, I couldn't resist the quasi-cameo from BioShock: Infinite. Jeremiah Fink would have loved Rapture and definitely would have fit in more than he did in Columbia. As he would be elderly or possibly dead by the time Rapture was founded, I thought that a descendant of his would be great for the story. Do you think I did a good job with him?

Don't worry, Alice will have to use the injectable plasmids as the war starts and the drinkables are tossed out due to their ADAM requirements. The idea of including Bucking Bronco and Undertow was brought on by A Dream's End by Star Tours Traveler.

The reason why she bought so many is this: She's been at the mercy of others for so long and she's had enough of being helpless. I'm not going to make her overly powerful on plasmids; probably around the same strength as Good Jack when he
comes in. She will definitely be a force to be reckoned with when the war starts and in its aftermath. Feel free to leave a comment below. Happy writing!
An Old Friend

Chapter Notes

Game cheat: To obtain Bucking Bronco in the first episode of BioShock Infinite: Burial at Sea, find the pool of electrified water and freeze it with Old Man Winter. Then just walk across the ice to obtain the Bronco and an audio diary. You've got to love video game walkthroughs. Now, onto to Chapter 5!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 5: An Old Friend

November 19, 1958

“The phrase ‘a needle in a haystack’ never seemed applicable until now. Especially considering I’ve never seen a haystack before.”

For over an hour, Alice had been combing over the Farmer’s Market. Aster’s old egg business/home now sold fruits and vegetables, and its current owner, a small man with the nervous tick of rubbing his hands, had never met the man he bought the space from. Alice resisted from asking around because if there was one thing she knew about the business owners of Rapture, it was that they didn’t care for questions that weren’t about their business or products.

She had to admit, the Farmer’s Market was one of her favorite places in Rapture. As it was part of Arcadia, it had some trees, paved cobblestones, grassy areas, and sweet-smelling air. That, combined with the almost-quiet energy of the vendors and customers, made for an environment that Alice could have enjoyed for hours on end, if it wasn’t for the fact that she was here on “business”. The business of finding an old friend.

From what Alice could tell, Aster Bunnymund had completely vanished into thin air. What she needed to do was to corner someone that knew him and see what knowledge they had of his whereabouts. The problem was that Aster had been a bit of a loner, and surly to boot. He hadn’t had many friends in Rapture, and it seemed he didn’t have very many topside, either. The only people that he seemed to open up with were Alice and other children. He especially liked “ankle-biters” as he called them. If the impromptu Easter egg hunt he had been setting up when she found him wasn’t proof enough of that, nothing was.

For some reason she couldn’t divine, Easter had been his favorite holiday. His favorite part was setting out colored eggs (very beautiful ones, by the by) for the children to find and then watch from an excellent hiding spot as they searched and shrieked in joy whenever they found one. He did it for free, and that worried Alice. That could be construed as altruism, and if there was one thing that Andrew Ryan hated (and there were many things he did), it was altruism. Alice didn’t know if Ryan’s dislike for philanthropy was extreme enough to warrant arresting a man who arranged Easter egg hunts for free. She didn’t allow herself to ponder what had happened to Aster if that was true and Ryan had found out.

Alice considered her next move as she sat on a grassy knoll and nibbled on some cheese she had bought with an apple. Amongst her once-errant memories was the recollection that this was one of her favorite snacks: an apple with some Rapture cheese. She wondered to herself just where the
cows that produced the milk for the cheese, and for drinking, were kept. Probably some other area connected to Arcadia; the Market by itself wasn’t big enough to house any bovines.

Arcadia. That was the place where she had first found Aster. He shared her liking for the green, fresh-smelling glades and small fields of Arcadia. Rapture had its beautiful areas and Arcadia was at the top of the list. Ryan had started charging for the “privilege” of walking in its woods a few years before Alice had awoken. She personally thought that a breath of fresh air and the sight of calming green shouldn’t be a luxury to be bought. She had heard rumors that Ryan had burned down a forest he owned on the surface in order to prevent its nationalization. If that was true, Alice couldn’t help but wonder what measures Ryan had planned for Rapture’s discovery by the outside world, if that ever happened.

She had heard about “Johnny Topside”, a man who had found Rapture all by himself in a diving bell. Ryan had suspected the man of being a “government spook” and Sinclair Solutions, the same legal firm that found the evidence against Sofia Lamb, had managed to “prove” that Johnny was an agent for the US government and then the man himself had vanished. Alice noticed that Sinclair always seemed to be nearby whenever a person vanished in Rapture. As the man was now her landlord, she’d best stay low and hope that nobody figured out it was her that tried to kill Suchong. She had no intentions of getting familiar with the interior of Persephone.

As Alice finished her snack and stood up, a very familiar and unwanted voice sounded a few feet away.

“Alice Liddell, fancy finding you here.”

Mentally cursing her luck, Alice turned to behold the gigantic olfactory organ that was Priscilla “Pris” Witless’ nose. Alice had heard that Witless had been an alcoholic on the surface. Here she had continued her drinking thanks to the many businesses that sold the mind-numbing liquid to the masses. She had also discovered ADAM, hence the scraggly hair, filthy clothes, and huge nose. Most people that developed growths or tumors from ADAM usage did their best to hide them. Not Pris. She was either proud of it, or she pretended it wasn’t there. She had gotten Alice her clothes and her place at Bumby’s after Rutledge, only to start bothering her for money for ADAM. She believed that Alice owed her and used some of her ramblings from Rutledge to blackmail her. If Ryan had known, he would have labeled the woman a “Parasite”, and Alice would have agreed with him.

“What rumors?” She asked innocently. She didn’t care two cents what the rumors were. It was only a matter of time before Witless asked her for some cash for ADAM; she was just stalling.

“I came down to see if the rumors about Worley were true or not.” Witless had a sour look on her face. Alice decided that either she knew the woman too well, or that Witless was one of the few one-dimensional people that existed in the world.

“What rumors?” She asked innocently. She didn’t care two cents what the rumors were. It was only a matter of time before Witless asked her for some cash for ADAM; she was just stalling.

“The man has been watering down his wine. I prefer gin myself, but that should be a crime.” Witless’ alcohol preferences were gin in first place. “You might as well just pour it all out on the ground if you’re going to do that.”

“That is a shame.” Alice didn’t really care, though she did find the idea of mixing water with wine disgustingly cheap. ‘At this rate, they’ll be using fish teeth to make forks in a few years.’ “Out of curiosity, have you seen my Nanny around, nurse? I need to ask her a few questions.”
Nanny had been one of Aster’s most faithful customers, which had allowed Alice to spend a lot of time with the Aussie. In fact, there had been a few times when Nanny had left Alice with Aster while she shopped around the Market. She was one of the most likely people to know of his whereabouts. Alice couldn’t help but wonder why she hadn’t mentioned him sooner though, or why she hadn’t thought of asking her in the first place.

Witless sniffed though her large snozz. “Yes. In fact, I saw her going into the apiary just now.”

Nanny loved honey, especially from the Silverwing Apiary. Alice remembered one time they went there she had tried to examine one of the bee boxes only to get stung. Now that she thought about it, that was just before Nanny had started dropping her off at Aster’s. She probably figured his chickens weren’t as dangerous as Tasha Denu’s bees.

Alice saw her chance. “Thank you very much, Nurse Witless. I’d best leave you to your business. Ta-ta.” Alice turned and started to leave, hoping that Witless would just leave her alone for once.

“Not so fast, dearie.” She had that wheedling tone in her voice that Alice knew all too well. “I need some money for a little ADAM.” Alice turned to find Witless holding her hand out expectantly, greedily. “I heard that you came into some recently,” she grinned.

‘A little splicing? Right, and I’m a Madcap,’ Alice growled, holding back her gag instinct at the sight of Pris’ neglected mouth and teeth.

Slowly, Alice reached into her bag and counted out some bills. She held them out to Pris, who grabbed for them. Alice jerked her hand out of the way at the last moment. “Uh-uh. Before I give you that, I have something to tell you.” She leaned down until her face was in Pris’ and glared hard. “I’m grateful for what little good you did for me after Rutledge, even though you became a leech in my side. I have my own place, my own clothes, and my own job now.” She narrowed her eyes. “Just to be completely, frightfully clear: I don’t owe you a damn thing anymore, so leave me be.” She finished the last word by stuffing the money into a sputtering Witless’ hands before turning to leave again.

“And if I go to the constables and tell them about your confessions?” Pris finally shot at Alice’s back.

Alice turned and gave her a contemptuous look. “Then I’ll tell them that you’re a bloodsucking Parasite leeching off the ramblings of a poor, mad girl. I imagine how they’ll react to that tidbit of information, along with all those times you blackmailed me into satisfying your craving for ADAM.”

As Pris stared angrily at her and grounded her teeth, Alice walked towards the Silverwing Apiary. With any real luck, Nanny would still be there.

She couldn’t help but feel especially smug. Part of her had always wanted to tell Pris Witless where to get off. She had to put up with the woman’s hunger for money and ADAM addiction for about a year now. It felt good to finally be rid of her. ‘I wonder why she didn’t threaten to use my association with Bumby as new blackmail material. She either can’t dip into her ADAM fund enough to buy a newspaper, or she can’t find anything in the article to use against me.’

‘I doubt that she’s going to do anything about it now. Every person like her is fearful of being labeled a Parasite. I suppose Ryan’s fanaticism is good for something after all.’

With Fontaine, Atlas, and Lamb gone, maybe the paranoid man would relax his vigilant and ever-distrusting watch over the city. Many people were rethinking their initial opinions of Andrew
Ryan. He was an excellent businessman with an incredibly charismatic and powerful personality, but that didn’t mean that he was immune to the power he now wielded.

‘Quite a few people, chiefly here in Rapture, seem to think that political power is the primary corruptor of the human species. The truth is that all power is corrupting: financial, technological, even genetic power. All power, if abused, leads to the ruination of its wielder.’

“I’d best watch myself lest I let the A-gene’s properties go straight to my head,” Alice said to herself. “It’ll hardly matter that I can’t get ADAM sickness if I go mad from the power bequeathed to me by my genetic inheritance. Besides, insanity comes in many forms, all of them undesirable.”

A speaker mounted on a nearby wall boomed to life with a jangling tune, nearly making Alice jump.

“What’s the matter, Frank?”

“It’s this thinning hair, Jim! Every day there’s less and less.”

“You know the problem’s not in your hair, it’s in your genes.”

“Hey, I don’t go in for all that splicing stuff, my buddy says it’s not safe.”

“Shows you what your buddy knows. Go over to Genetic Horizons for a trial of Fresh Hair. Fresh Hair not only gives you a full head of thick hair, but it’s 100% safe.”

“Full head of hair? And 100% safe?! Maybe it’s time for me to get a little Fresh Hair!”

“Forget about power driving me mad,” Alice muttered as she hurried off before another advertisement could start. “Those inane advertisements will be the cause of any future relapses.”

Nan Sharpe was exiting the Silverwing Apiary with a small jar of honey poking out of a bag just as Alice walked up. The look on her face when she saw Alice could only be described as overjoyed. The last time she had seen Nanny, Alice had been dirty, disheveled, knocked out, and nearly burnt alive (again) in the fire that consumed the Mermaid. Considering how she looked now in comparison to then, that expression was very appropriate.

“I believe you warned me against making odd faces for danger of the wind blowing and freezing my face,” Alice said, smiling as she stopped a few feet away from Nan.

Nanny abruptly shut her mouth and hugged Alice like she would have if Jack Splatter hadn’t slugger them both in the face and set that electrical fire. There was still some bruising around her right eye, showing where Splatter had struck her before Alice had entered her office. As she hugged back, Alice hoped that he was rotting away in Neptune Bounty’s makeshift jail like Carmine said he was.

“My word, Alice! I heard all about what Bumby was doing to you and all those tykes. If I had any idea what he was up and what he had done to your sister and parents…can you ever forgive me?” Nanny cried when she pulled away from her. Alice was shocked to see some tears threatening to spill out of the usually reticent older lady.

“There’s nothing you need to be forgiven for, Nanny,” Alice said, fixing her with a look. “He had everyone fooled: you, me, the constables, everyone he interacted with saw only a doctor on his way to becoming one of Rapture’s best, not a purveyor of abuse and perversion. Everyone knows the truth about him and his atrocious interests now, and that’s what matters.” ‘And the fact he’s dead, of course,” she mentally added.
“Thank you, dear.” Nan took out a handkerchief out of a pocket and dabbed briefly at her eyes. “Still, it’s infuriatin’ to know that I was not only letting you work and live with that spider of a man, I was practically encouragin’ you to give in to his memory erasin’ when I told you it was time to move on.” She sniffed and put the handkerchief away. “Maybe now you can finally find some peace of mind.”

“Thank you, Nanny,” Alice replied. “I’m no longer hallucinating, though Wonderland has certainly changed, for the better this time,” she quickly added. Best to get to the point right away. “I’m sorry to bother you with something else, but I’m truly concerned. Whatever happened to Aster Bunnymund? I remember you always swore his eggs were the best in Rapture.”

Nanny’s face fell somewhat. “Well,” she sighed, “at least you’re not askin’ about that rabbit of yours again.”

“Radcliffe gave that back to me along with Poppa and Momma’s money,” Alice explained. “That was perhaps one of the few halfway decent things he’s ever done in his life, especially after the path he started you down. Now, what happened to Mr. Bunnymund?” she pressed. Nanny looked over her shoulder. “Let’s talk where we’re less likely to be trampled.” She and Alice began walking back to the main marketplace. “Why the sudden interest in Bunnymund? You haven’t mentioned him once since you were discharged from Rutledge.”

“The reason for that is simple,” Alice answered. “All my memories concerning him finally came back to me about a day after we last conversed.”

“…You mean you didn’t remember him at all?” Nanny stared at her for a moment. “The fire and Bumby’s ‘treatments’ must have damaged you more than any of us realized. Honestly, I’m not sure what’s happened to him or where he’s gone off to.”

“And why is that?” Alice continued. She wasn’t backing down from this.

“You’re too direct for your own good, Alice. Maybe you should consider becoming a detective when you’re on firmer ground.” Alice raised an eyebrow, waiting. “Very well,” Nan sighed as they entered the door to the main part of the Market. “Bunnymund was one of your most faithful visitors while you were in Rutledge, even more than I was. He was heartbroken over what had happened to you and your family. He was never the same, or he become more so than ever; more reclusive and surlier than I’ve ever seen him.”

Alice had to admit that Aster had a grumpy exterior to him. Then again, she couldn’t criticize now, could she? If asked for one word to describe her, “surly” would be one of the most common that others would use.

“When he wasn’t at Rutledge visitin’ you,” Nanny continued, “he could be found in his egg stand caring for the chickens or at the cabin in Arcadia he bought back in ’54.”

Alice remembered that Aster had told her of his dream: a cabin in Arcadia where he could look outside and imagine that all the world was a peaceful woodland. He loved plants, which made Alice wonder why he didn’t sell vegetables instead of eggs. He had also told her that he loved spring, calling it the “Season of Hope”. In Rapture, Arcadia was the only place where any spring existed. Now, Alice wondered to herself why Aster had ever left the surface if he loved spring so much. That was definitely something to ask him when she located his whereabouts.

“He was doing well until ’56, when someone decided that it was ‘good business’ to poison most of his chickens.” Alice started at that and began to seethe. She had liked his birds, and Aster had
always been attached to them. “What few survived weren’t enough to support him, and when he began to have troubles with a few investments he had made, he was forced to close his stand and work at what odd jobs he could find. It was shortly after that he became really secretive. There were a few rumors that he was working with Fontaine’s smuggling.”

At Alice’s expression of horror, Nanny quickly added, “They was just rumors. There was never any proof. Well, any proof that was found, that is. It was shortly before you recovered that he just vanished. All his disappearance did was fuel more tales that he was working with Fontaine. No one could find him and those who tried soon quit. No profit in it.”

Alice could only snort at that. At least the greed of those searching for Aster was stronger than any determination to find a suspected accomplice or betrayer of Fontaine’s. It helped that most of his and Ryan’s men were (or in Fontaine’s case, had been) mindless thugs who only did as they were told. Not an ounce of initiative in any of them.

“And his whereabouts are unknown to this day?” Alice asked.

Nanny nodded. “It’s like he never even came to Rapture in the first place.”

Alice was reminded of similar things said about men and women who disappeared in Rapture. She had heard that Grace used to have a man in her life who came to every single one of her performances. The Limbo’s star singer used to blatantly sing about life in the Drop and when he had vanished, she had started singing “Rise, Rapture, Rise”. When Dr. Lamb came along, she had apparently given Grace new courage to sing her mind. If she ever came back, Grace would definitely return to Lamb’s tune with a vengeance.

“I’ve already been to his stand,” Alice said. “Please, do you know where his cabin is?”

“Oh no,” groaned Nanny. “Don’t tell me that now you’ve gotten your rabbit back you’re going to get fixated on Bunnymund.”

“I don't fixated on objects or people,” Alice snapped. “I know I was insistent on learning what had happened to my rabbit, and I apologize for any aggravation that I caused. Please Nanny, if that’s all that you know about Aster Bunnymund, I won’t bother you again about him. I promise.”

Nanny regarded Alice for a moment before sighing loudly. “Focusing entirely on the past won’t help you when there’s only the future left, Alice. But if it will make you feel better, I do know where Bunnymund used to hang his hat. Just don’t be surprised if someone else has already bought the property.” She told Alice where she could find Aster Bunnymund’s old cabin.

“Thank you, Nanny,” Alice said, smiling. “I just want to make sure he’s alright. I don’t want to lose anyone else I care for.” Alice suddenly remembered something. “Oh, I forgot completely. Do you have any place to stay? I recently moved into the Sinclair Deluxe in the Drop. It’s not Mercury Suites by a fathom, but it’s better than nothing.”

“I’ve been staying with a friend,” Nanny answered. “I don’t want to be any trouble.” She looked hesitant when Alice mentioned the Drop.

“You won’t,” Alice responded. “I have a job as a waitress at the Limbo Room, a jazz club. Don’t worry, it’s respectable, for the Drop,” she added quickly. “You took care of me and Lizzie when we were children; the best way to show appreciation for that is to assist you now.”

Nanny was silent for a moment as she considered what Alice was saying. They had stopped right in the middle of the marketplace and were receiving a lot of dirty looks from passing shoppers for
being in the way.

“I suppose,” she finally said, “that I could move in with you, after I had a day or two to gather my things together.”

Alice smiled at her. “If you need any aid with moving, I’ll be more than glad to help you. Now, I think I’ll go have a look at Aster’s old residence. Good day, Nanny. See you soon.” Alice hurried off, her step a little chipper than before.

“All right, Nanny!” she called after her, “take care now! Just because Bumby’s dead doesn’t mean there aren’t more of his ilk slinkin’ around Rapture!”

BS+AMA=WS

Nan Sharpe continued to go about her shopping in the Farmer’s Market, buying groceries for herself and her friend, a fellow worker in their occupation. Nothing had disgusted her more than when she had had to turn to the world’s oldest profession in order to eat. She remembered one time in her life when she had looked down on “working women”, even sneered at them. Only a few days earlier, she had been the owner and manager of the Mangled Mermaid: a Prostitute of prostitutes.

There were times when she would think back to the good old days when she and Mrs. Liddell taught the girls in the little “schoolroom” just down the hall from Mr. Liddell’s study. He would sometimes pop his head in the door and then just as quickly pop back out to hear the girls giggle at his antics. The three of them, Mr. and Mrs. Liddell and herself, they had made a good team when it came to raising and educating first Lizzie and later Alice.

They had been through so much together. Lizzie’s growth from a little girl into a beautiful, young woman, Alice’s birth, the education of both of them, the Blitz, and then Rapture. Mr. Liddell had lost his beloved father during the Blitz, a saint of a man who had managed to die peacefully in a bed surrounded by his loved ones instead of being the recipient of a German bomb. The loss of his last living blood relation had been one of the factors that convinced Arthur Liddell to move his family down to Rapture. To their own fiery deaths, of all the cruel ironies.

Nan couldn’t help but wonder if the Liddells would be ashamed of her for what she had become after their passing. She could just imagine the looks on their faces if they were to somehow come back to life and learn all that had happened in their absence. There had been no demand whatsoever for nannies in Rapture; people were perfectly content raising their children without help from a stranger. A stranger whose last employers had died in a house fire. And then Radcliffe had come along with an “offer” and her new career had taken off from there.

She had been in no way a suspect in the fire and the subsequent deaths of the Liddells and their eldest daughter; she had been on the other side of the city the night it happened. It was just that she didn’t really serve a purpose in Rapture anymore. She had been “the Liddell’s Nanny” since the first day. Thankfully, no one had suspected her of setting the fire out of some jealous fit brought on by an attraction for Arthur Liddell. That had never come up at all. At the least, he was her employer; at the most, a good friend.

Nan finished the rest of her shopping and began to work her way to the bathysphere station. She couldn’t help but wonder what Alice would find at Aster Bunnymund’s cabin. It was a nice place; she had come across it while on a rare walk though Arcadia’s woods and he had been polite enough to invite her inside. She had declined at the time, but from what she had seen through the open door, it looked like a very homely place to live. What had surprised her were the plants growing in the window boxes. Then again, he could have much worse hobbies than growing flowers and other green things.
Coming to the bulkhead that separated the Farmer’s Market from Arcadia, Nan couldn’t help but worry about Alice. Seeing the young girl in Rutledge Asylum had been heartbreaking, even more so because if she recovered, she would have no family to return to. Her recovery had been bittersweet, especially now that Bumby’s real intentions towards her had been revealed. She was sane again, but the little girl she had been, and the young woman she could have become, were gone. One had died in the fire and at Rutledge, the other never had the chance to exist. At least, it seemed that Alice was starting to get her feet on stable ground after all that had happened.

It was still a little hard for her to wrap her head around it all: Dr. Angus Bumby, respected scientist and social architect, had been responsible for the Liddell’s deaths, Alice’s descent into madness, and the destruction of so much innocence and so many young lives.

Personally, she had never really cared for him, even when he was coming to the Liddell’s for tea. She remembered Lizzie’s dislike for the man, but had assumed that he had finally got tired of chasing her. However, now that she thinking of it, it all made sense. Lizzie had been a very sweet girl, and her utter loathing for Bumby had seemed quite out of character, except that it perfectly fit the feelings that the girl would hold against someone capable of the evil that the Tribune had written of. What was infuriating was that ever since his graduation from Rapture University, she had heard nothing but good things about him. His work with psychology was paralleled only by Dr. Lamb’s, and he had used it to line his pockets with the suffering of the innocent.

The PA system chose that time to play a message. “Rapture citizens, please be advised: Dr. Yi Suchong was attacked in his clinic yesterday morning by a Parasite wielding a large kitchen knife. The Parasite has been described as a woman with shoulder-length, black hair. If such an individual is spotted acting strangely, please alert your local constabulary. This Parasite is very dangerous. Remember, this Parasite has her eye on Rapture’s finest. Keep your eye out for the Parasite.”

“Oh dear,” muttered Nan. “Now some maniac is out tryin’ to kill people. We don’t need that, even if Suchong is a bad egg. Alice will surely be targeted. Black hair. As if it wasn’t enough that she….” Nan nearly stopped short in her tracks as a thought came thundering across her brain. What if Alice…?

‘Now you’re just getting senile, Nan Sharpe,’ she chided herself. ‘Alice wouldn’t do something like that, not even if she was mad again. Attacking Suchong, ha. Then again, Bumby’s death sounds too convenient, don’t it? Slipping from a train platform to get ground to a pulp under the train, and there are all those rumors about Suchong’s experiments. And those Little Sisters….’

Nan shook her head as she came up on the bathysphere station. Alice would always be an odd girl, but she wasn’t that daft. Then again, it might be a good thing that she would be moving in with her former charge. The girl needed a steady figure in her life, and Nan Sharpe was nothing if not steady.

BS+AMA=WS

“A Rapture reminder: Your actions may be monitored, but they will never be judged.”

“That is the most nonsensical statement I’ve heard yet,” muttered Alice as she left the main part of Arcadia. She had heard the message concerning her little adventure at Suchong’s yesterday. It would appear that Cheshire’s warning was coming true and that her foolhardy actions were coming back to bite her backside. When she began receiving the suspicious looks of the “Ryan philosophy” fanatics and the greedy stares of those out to make a reward from turning in Parasites, Alice simply ignored them and acted as she usually did: Aloof and indifferent. That, and the absence of any sharp kitchen utensils on her person, seemed to satisfy them that she wasn’t the Parasite to be
Alice entered through the Securis door that led to some of the larger, out-of-the-way parts of Arcadia. There were several areas that branched off from what some called “Rapture’s Lungs.” These areas were usually extra spaces for growing trees and plants. A few of them had cabins built on their grounds for the purpose of housing those who wished to “get away” from the hustle and bustle of normal city life.

Alice could remember Aster telling her that one of his goals was to save enough money to buy a cabin and live away from the Market. He slept, ate, and lived in the stand where he worked, and she could tell that he had been miserable. City life, which was pretty tame in the Farmer’s Market, was not Aster Bunnymund’s cup of tea at all. He had been a jumpy one, bursting with energy and nerves. Some of the other shopkeepers had jokingly asked him if his father had been a rabbit; his last name seemed to suggest it. She couldn’t help but smile at that memory. He hadn’t been amused with them in the least and had let them know it.

She was glad that Aster had been able to realize his dream of a peaceful and quiet home amongst the buzz of life in Rapture, if even for a little while. Whenever he had spoken of the Australian ranch where he had grown up, his eyes had lit up and that rare smile of his would show. It was there that he had learned his expertise with all things living, whether they be plant or animal. He had told her stories about the scrapes that he and his father had gotten into, of the cattle drives and nights spent staring at the “Bush Telly”, or stars. Alice could barely remember the stars, or anything else topside.

He had told her about the times he and his parents would drive to the nearest towns. He had loved those trips to the city. And then there had been that one trip to the coastal city of Darwin. The city had sounded like a strange and wondrous place to the young Bunnymund. His stories ranged from as far back as he could remember up to that particular event. From there however, he clammed up and wouldn’t tell her anymore. Even as a child, she knew that there were some things that people didn’t want to talk about, and so she had left Aster alone when he grumpily refused to continue talking about his past during the war. Now, she was sure that something terrible had happened in Darwin, something on the scale of her own tragedy.

Not surprisingly, Aster had bought the cabin that was the farthest away from Arcadia’s heart. It was a bit of a walk between his cabin and his old stand, but Alice could see why he had put up with it. She was almost there, and if it wasn’t for the glass-metal alloy overhead shielding the glade she was in from the cold and pressure of the Atlantic Ocean, she could have easily forgotten that she was in Rapture. She could barely hear any of the street chatter she was accustomed to, and in the case of the bothersome advertisements, announcements, and other such rubbish, it was a relief.

The fresh air, the moisture, the smell of the soil, and the sound of a nearby brook occupied all of her senses to her delight. Someone even had songbirds brought down for the express purpose of making Arcadia’s glades and woods seem even more authentic. She paused in the middle of the glade and just closed her eyes. She let the calm sink into her nerves and slowly began to relax. This place was pure bliss.

‘I believe I’ll take a page from Aster’s book and come live here,’ Alice mused. ‘This location is so serene, one would think they had died and left the ocean for the heavens.’

A child’s laugh interrupted her thoughts. She turned to find the child only to stop short. There, a few yards to her left and under the shade of an oak tree, was a shimmering something in the air. A door or a window, she couldn’t tell which. From within came the sounds of a child’s happy laughter, innocent and joyful. Within it, she could just make out a field of large, bright flowers.
Flowers that she had never seen before, either in London or in Rapture.

Alice turned and hurriedly left, her good mood spoiled as she remembered her first encounter with the “portals”, as they were called. They had started appearing all over Rapture about a month or so earlier. She had looked into one before and she didn’t want to think about what she had seen in it. It was too painful, even more so now that she knew the truth about Bumby.

It had been a month ago on October 19, 1958, exactly eleven years since the fire. Dr. Bumby had suggested that a distraction would be the best thing to help her forget the pain from the fire and had given her some money to go enjoy a night out at Fort Frolic. After wandering the halls advertising the casinos, clubs, and other vices the Fort had to offer, Alice had settled on listening to Elizabeth Comstock, Sander Cohen’s Songbird, perform at Fleet Hall.

All the things she had heard about the newest disciple of Sander Cohen’s were true. Her voice was of a beauty born from pain and sorrow, each note flowing from her throat, putting the audience into a trance that Alice wouldn’t have minded staying in. The girl who bore her sister’s name possessed the voice of the angel that Alice was sure Lizzie had become. Like Lizzie, Elizabeth was beautiful; unlike Lizzie’s chestnut locks, Elizabeth’s hair was much darker, and her eyes were blue. There was something…off about those eyes however, like they had seen far more than other person ever had, and the result was that those eyes shone with the cold and aloof attitude of a Tundraful glacier, even more cynical than Alice was.

After seeing the rest of the show (the applause for Elizabeth had been enough to shake the roof), Alice had gone out onto the Fort’s Atrium to find a crowd of people grouped around something right in the large room’s center, gawking and chattering away at it. Her natural curiosity piqued, she had elbowed and pushed her way to the front of the ring, stopping only when she was in front of the thing. She had never seen anything like it before, like a rippling tear in the air itself. Looking into it, Alice was stunned to find herself looking right into the eyes of none other than her older sister.

The inside of the “tear” was black and white like the few TV monitors that she had seen. As close as she was, Alice could hear Lizzie speaking, along with other things. Lizzie was standing and talking animatedly to a handsome young man, their arms linked as they walked down a London sidewalk, her mouth in a stunning smile, her eyes dancing with mirth and joy. A large diamond ring adorned her right hand, matching the plain one that the smiling, curly-haired man sported on his own. Coming up on a house, the door burst open to admit a stranger, smiling and laughing as she ran up to Lizzie and the young man, her hair flying behind her, her emerald green eyes flashing with a joy utterly alien to Alice. It was only after Alice saw her parents smiling down on the scene from the house’s front door that she realized who the stranger was: it was herself.

Backing away from the impossibility she was seeing, Alice could feel a roaring start up in her head as her vision blurred and vertigo took over. Next thing she knew, she was in the Land of Fire and Brimstone, in the burning ruin of her house with the broken, smoking remains of the Jabberwock screaming at her. “You selfish, misbegotten, and unnatural child!”

She had awakened in her cell at Fontaine Fisheries, suffering from the headaches that often followed her psychotic episodes. Since then, she had avoided any places where one of those portals were rumored to be, along with the entire area of Fort Frolic. A new conversation had later been added to the Jim and Mary propaganda playlets, with Jim reassuring Mary that the portals were just a consequence of so much genius in Rapture plumbing the absolute reaches of physics and science. Alice had no idea what they were and she wanted nothing to do with them.

She shooed those thoughts away as she came upon the cabin that Aster had once called home. It
was the most remote of all the cabins in Arcadia and this was proved by the absence of all noises, smells, and sights associated with civilization. The only man-made things in sight were the cabin, the vine-covered walls, and the transparent ceiling. It was the perfect place for someone like Aster Bunnymund, someone who was truly a child of nature.

As Alice came closer, she studied the structure keenly. It was a nice-sized cabin, two stories, windows, some space behind it that allowed for a backyard. However, it seemed to be abandoned. The grass that grew right next to its walls was up to the windows. One of them was broken and another had a shudder about to fall off. One whole wall had been swallowed by vines, and the window boxes were full of dirt and dead plants, something she doubted that Aster would have liked. The whole place had an air of abandonment and deterioration.

Alice peered through the first-story windows, trying to spy any activity. The interior, shrouded in darkness, revealed nothing to her. Taking a step back, she turned her attention to the door. It was an old-fashioned door with a knob that had to be turned to open. Alice tried turning it, only to find it was locked. She considered it for a moment, and then simply kicked the door open. The door flew open with a loud bang in the quiet solitude, almost causing her to jump guiltily. When no angry voice or gun barrel came out of the gaping doorway, she entered.

‘Brute force, augmented with SportBoost, is all one needs occasionally,’ she smirked to herself. She only hoped that Aster wouldn't be too peeved with her if, no, when she found him. A broken door was not the best way to rekindle a friendship.

After stumbling around in the dark for a few minutes, Alice found the light switch and clicked it on. Even so far out here, there was all the comforts of a modern day dwelling. Electric lights, an oven, a refrigerator, all the modern conveniences in this rustic cabin. There was even a television and a radio in the corner. Alice recalled Aster played classical music to his chickens, but would always change the station or turn the radio off completely whenever one of Sander Cohen’s pieces was broadcasted. Aster disliked the man’s music, and that was before Cohen had gotten bizarre.

Finding nothing in the kitchen, the den, or the bathroom but dusty furniture, Alice took her search to the second floor. She knocked on the master bedroom’s door.

“Aster,” she called out before opening it. Besides a chest of drawers, a bedside table, and a bed with a bare mattress on it, there was nothing in the room. The closet held nothing besides a few mice which scurried away and an audio diary in the corner.

It had been made on September 17th, 1957 by “E. Aster Bunnymund” and titled “So Long”. When Alice flicked the play button, Aster’s familiar Aussie accent came out of the diary’s speakers. “If the twerp that’s sneakin’ around my house is listenin’ to this, I’ll tell you now that there’s nothin’ here worth stealin’. And if you’re one of Ryan or Fontaine’s show ponies, I have two words for ya: Rack. Off. I’m done with the trap that the two of them laid for me, and for everyone else in Rapture. And if you’ve got any brains left in your heads, you’ll do the same.”

“It’s a comfort to see he hasn’t changed a bit,” she muttered.

Alice checked everywhere before going back down to the kitchen. Besides the diary, there was simply nothing to be found anywhere. Alice slumped down in the chair and sighed heavily. A dead end.

‘This isn’t the worst setback I’ve ever suffered,’ she told herself. ‘Remember when the Hatter was so unserviceable after all the work I did fixing him and going after the Hare and Dormy?’

She thought back to when she had retrieved the Hatter’s arms and legs from his former friends,
both of which were hungry for revenge after the horrors that Alice had unconsciously subjected to them all and that Hatter had knowingly done to them.

She remembered the things that the Dormouse had spouted out from the loudspeakers of “Smelling & Regurgitation”, the part of Hatter’s Domain that he had been in control of.

“A good worker is a live worker, paid to live and work. A bad worker is a dead worker, and vice versa. Don’t be a bad worker. Bad workers are slaves and dead.”

“Payday for good workers has been postponed indefinitely. Payday for bad workers has been cancelled.”

These and other things he had broadcasted through the factory. Alice wondered if the damages done to the Hatter’s Domain through her subconscious doings had been a warped reflection of her thoughts about the workers’ conditions in many of Rapture’s workplaces and of the propaganda that Ryan spoon-fed its citizens. The last time she had been to Wonderland after the Dollmaker’s fall, the Hatter, the Hare, and Dormy were still cybernetic, but they were happy friends again. The Hatter’s Domain had meshed with Hephaestus, a very logical combination given the Domain’s affinity for machinery.

Alice shook her head back to the present moment. Where was she going to go for answers now that her only source, Nanny, had been exhausted? She couldn’t go to the authorities; they might arrest Aster if they managed to find him. There was nowhere else for her to go. No one really cared for anyone else’s welfare in this blasted, selfish fishtank.

Alice got up and began to stomp her way angrily back to the door when she noticed it. The floor beneath her sounded hollow, like there was something beneath it. She kneeled down and narrowed her eyes at the floor. She hadn’t seen any doors that would lead to a basement. Had Aster constructed a secret hideout beneath his cabin?

Hope springing up in her breast, Alice turned on her X-ray vision. There, underneath the kitchen table, was a familiar, white form, crouching down and looking up at her. As she looked around, Alice realized that loose objects showed up as blue and that movable objects, such as the door, turned a pink/purple. There, under a rug, was what looked like a trap door. Alice yanked the rug off and couldn’t help but smile as she saw the finger-sized holes meant for opening it.

Turning off her X-ray vision, Alice stuck her fingers into the holes and pulled. The trapdoor swung open with a protesting, grating sound that made her head ache. “Aster,” she began to call into the darkness. She was stopped short by the sight of a .45 Automatic shoved up from the hole and into her face.

“You’ve got five seconds to tell me who ya are and what ya want before I blow your noggin right off, mate.” Bunny’s voice came out of the gloom, hard as diamond and twice as sharp. Alice could see his green eyes narrowed at her in distrust and concentration.

She almost lost her voice in shock. This potentially tragic scenario hadn’t presented itself in her mind whenever she thought how her reunion with Aster would turn out. The tragic potential of this situation would be horrible unless she could defuse it.

“Aster,” she managed to gasp out. “It’s me, Alice Liddell.” When he blinked at her name, she added, “My Nanny would drop me off at your egg stand while perusing for necessities. Have you forgotten me?”

Aster slowly lowered his gun and stared at Alice for a moment. His eyes widened in recognition
and amazement as the .45 clattered to the ground beneath him.

“Al...
openings which apparently lead to other caves. Lights glowed in some of them as well.

“Not that I really need to ask,” Alice said, turning her attention to the twin boomerangs on the workbench, “but what is this place?”

“Undersea cave, one of many connected underneath Rapture. I found it ‘bout a year and a half after I bought the place,” Aster explained as he carefully picked his gun off the cave floor and cleaned it off before placing it in a shoulder holster underneath his vest. “Welcome to the Warren, which has been my home for the past year now.” He pulled one of the chairs out and took the other one. “Have a seat. We’ve got a whole lot to talk about.”

Alice took her seat and tried to find something to converse about. From the look on Aster’s face, he was trying to do the same thing. The silence, awkward from the start, was beginning to increase in intensity. As the moments began to crawl by, Alice become cross with herself.

‘Well, this is a fine situation. A single day spent locating the Prodigal Aussie and now I can’t conceive a single conversation topic for my one of my oldest companions. Wait, what of his poultry?’

“Nanny told me about your chickens,” Alice began sympathetically. “I’m sorry about them. What happened to the survivors?”

Aster pointed towards one of the tunnels that had light glowing within. “They’re in there and doin’ well. Jumpy as a bunch of ‘roos though.” He pondered something for a moment. “How are you makin’ out in the city of Man?” he finally asked.

“Well enough,” Alice replied. “I have a job and a place at the Drop. It’s no lark, I won’t be the last to say that, but it’s better than nothing.”

“Pauper's Drop?” Aster grimaced. “Now you have my sympathy. I’ve heard horror stories about that place. Isn’t there anywhere else you could go?”

“I’m afraid not,” muttered Alice. “Even with my inheritance, which wouldn’t allow for anything opulent when I received it, I won’t be leaving the Drop within a definite time period.”

“I’m surprised that Radcliffe parted with it at all,” Aster murmured. “That selfish, greedy wanker wanted nothin’ but your family’s seaweed. Aren’t you underage still?”

“Yes, but with his business meeting a greatly-deserved bankruptcy, he decided that he wanted nothing more to do with me.” Alice sighed. “To think, we used to play chess together.”

It was odd that Radcliffe had gone bankrupt after that trip to Wonderland that had begun in his office. She had found herself in a decaying, neglected version of his office and apartment at Mercury Suites, the Asian antiques broken or gone, his desk in disrepair with no sign of her stuffed rabbit, bits and pieces of rubbish here and there, the entire apartment in a shambles. Outside in Mercury Suites, it didn’t get any better as she had walked through its abandoned corridors, looking for all the world like the Judgment Day had come and gone. Which it had, for Wonderland at least. For some odd reason, it had somehow struck her as prophetic.

“You see who a person really is during hard times, or when they’ve got power,” Aster muttered, drawing Alice’s attention back to him. “In this case, Radcliffe is a self-serving drongo. Perfect for this ratbag city.”

Alice nodded in agreement, then frowned. “Aster, Nanny said there were rumors you were helping Fontaine smuggle contraband into Rapture. And I found that audio dairy in your closet. Do you
wish to elaborate on that?"

The look on Aster's face and the ensuing silence said it all. He sighed heavily and rested his head in his hands. "You want to hear my side of the story?"

At Alice's nod of affirmation, he began. "When my birds were poisoned, my business went south real quick. And when a few investments I made turned out bloody wrong, I had to sell the stand to keep the bank off my back. I was talkin' to a friend at the Fighting McDonagh's and he told me about a meetin' at Fontaine Fisheries. There, I heard Fontaine's business offer as a smuggler under him. Things were gettin' bad, Alice, and I was pretty fed up with Ryan and his beliefs. I was just a battler tryin' to make a livin', and Fontaine's deal sounded better than any of that tight-fisted mongrel's.

"It was alright at first. I laughed at the guys that told me I should have stayed out. The goods we smuggled weren't bad or anythin' like that: Beef, letters to and from families outside Rapture, even Bibles and crucifixes. We did smuggle in guns and other weapons; that's where I got these." He lifted his vest to reveal another .45 automatic in an opposite shoulder holster.

"Fontaine revealed his true colors as a crim as he had done to the others; he took eighty percent of our cut and threatened to turn us in to Ryan if we didn't go with it. One guy, Sammy, decided that he would go to the constables about it; he wound up dead. We were caught between a rock and a hard place, as the Yanks say. Between Ryan and Fontaine, a true lose-lose if I ever saw one.

"What finally convinced me to get out was a delivery to a Little Sisters Orphanage. I noticed that some of the little girls looked, off. Their skin reminded me of a cold corpse and their eyes...they looked like they belonged in a ghost's face," he shivered. "Their voices sounded so wrong, especially when they were singin' children's rhymes and songs. I spied on them during supper and I saw that Tenenbaum kraut give them something that made them vomit. The smell was just awful, and when I realized that they were somehow makin' ADAM from the girls, I knew I had to do somethin'.

"I wrote a note to Sullivan, Ryan's security head-honcho, tellin' him to watch the Little Sister's Orphanages and sent it via pneumo line. I already had this place ready in case something happened. Over a few months, I had brought most of my rubbish and things down here, and after I sent that note, I just came down here and stayed.

"A couple times I've heard people rummaging around up there, lookin' for me no doubt. I didn't dare come up. If it was Fontaine's men, I would be dead the instant they saw me. And if it was Ryan's, I don't want to die at the end of a bloody rope just for working for the wrong man." He stopped there and looked up at Alice. "And here I am. What's been goin' on up there?"

Alice sighed. "Fontaine's dead, and his smuggling business has been broken up. Ryan took over Fontaine Futuristics after killing him. I hate to reveal this to you, but he's continued producing more of those little girls. They call them Little Sisters, and they make ADAM from an ADAM slug implanted in their stomach lining. The new ones are being altered mentally, to keep them compliant and docile."

Aster looked like he was going to be violently ill. "Crikey," he breathed, "I never liked Ryan but I never thought...is anyone doin' anythin' about them?"

Alice shook her head. "As far as I know, the only people that care for the Little Sisters' plight are in this cave. Welcome to Rapture, city without god or king" she added bitterly.

Alice also told Aster about Atlas, about the portals, and about anything else she could think of or
that he asked about. She didn’t mention anything about Bumby or Houndsditch, deciding that he had enough of Rapture’s rottenness for one day. When she tried asking him his reasons for leaving the surface, he merely said that he didn’t want to die in a nuclear war, but neither did he want to survive only to live in a destroyed world without hope or life. She could tell though, that was only part of his reason for coming to Rapture. When she was done, he groaned and rested his head completely on the table.

“Rapture’s gone to the dogs even more than I ever thought possible,” he muttered. He looked up at Alice. “Somethin’s going to happen, you know. And it won’t be pretty when it does.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Alice responded. She glanced at a clock that rested on Aster’s workbench. To her surprise, it was almost supper time. She felt the familiar gnawing sensation that heralded hunger, plus she needed to get ready for tonight.

“I’m sorry, Aster,” Alice said as she stood to her feet. “But I need to go. My shift will be commencing in a few hours.”

“That’s alright,” Aster replied as he got to his feet and opened the trapdoor for Alice. As she began to ascend, he spoke again. “Alice.” When she turned, she could have sworn she spied a tear coming out of his eye. “It was great to see ya again, and please take care of yourself, half pint.”

At the sound of his old nickname for her, she smiled back at him. “If there’s one thing I’m well-educated in, Aster, it’s that particular skill-set. Please do the same for yourself. I’ll tell Nanny you said hello.”

“Just her now,” Bunny called after her as she stepped out of the trapdoor and began to close it behind her. “I don’t want it broadcasted that I’m still kickin’.”

“Of course, Aster,” Alice replied. “See you soon.” She set the door down carefully and replaced the rug over it. She made sure that the door was somewhat closed behind her before leaving.

She couldn’t help but crack a half-smile as she made her way back home. Aster Bunnymund was alive and well, even if he was in hiding from Ryan and his goons. And soon, Nanny would be living with her in the Deluxe. It seemed that some stability was returning to her life once again.

Alice stopped by the pneumo office in the Deluxe’s lobby to pick up any mail, as unlikely as she was to receive any.

“Hello Doris, any mail for me today?” she asked. Her reasons for doubting she’d receive anything were well-founded. She was practically a nobody in Rapture; the only thing she had ever received through Bumby’s pneumo line was the photograph taken of her family just prior to the fire; there were no people that she knew of that had need to send her something. In short, she had no real reason to expect any.

“Four items,” Doris replied, barely looking up. “A catalog, a copy of the Rapture Tribune and two letters. That’ll be two dollars, please.”

Alice blinked in surprise before handing over the money and taking her items. She had two things from Mr. Fink: Another plasmid catalog, this one exclusively dedicated to Fink Door-to-Door, and a letter from him, asking her to send him a letter on her satisfaction. She made a note to do that after she had ingested the rest of her plasmids.

The newspaper was from Nathan Presley, a very surprising gesture considering Rapturians didn’t typically send each other things unless it was Christmas or some other holiday. She promised
herself she would look at the article on Bumby later.

The last item nearly made Alice stop in her tracks in front of the elevator. It was from Mr. Radcliffe. Alice ripped it open and read it on the elevator.

Ms. Alice Pleasance Liddell,

Tomorrow is the reading of Dr. Angus Reginald Bumby’s last will and testament. Please be present at his former office at the Houndsditch Home for Traumatized Youth, No. 12 Skid Row, Pauper’s Drop. Your presence is not required, but is greatly advised.

Wilton J. Radcliffe, Solicitor

Alice remembered what Radcliffe had told her the last time they had met. The will would be read after a few legal matters were cleared. She could recall all too well what he had said when asked about the orphans.

“I have no clue, and I honestly don’t care. After the will is read, I suppose they’ll go out onto the street. It’s none of my business, and none of yours.”

Alice knew what would happen to the girls if they were thrown out into the street; the memory of Susan with her new gray eyes and corpse-like pallor came to mind all too readily. There was no such plight for the boys. Instead, they would be subjected to the usual horrors that abandoned orphans the world over suffered: Neglect, abuse, and eventually, starvation. And if one of Bumby’s former customers found them….

Alice’s brow furrowed as she left the elevator and walked to her room. She had ignored the suffering and abuse of others in the sedative of her own pain, and she had no intention of doing so again. She had the will and the means to protect the innocent from all persecutors and tormentors, present and future. She wasn’t sure how she would save the remaining orphans from their fate, but she was going to save them this time.

‘Tenenbaum, Suchong, and the rest can wait their turn. Their punishment is meaningless if the blameless are subjected to their tortures and abuse before their tormentors are stopped. Bumby has tasted his just desserts, and they will too, once the children are safe.’

Chapter End Notes

And the Easter Bunny aka E. Aster Bunnymund is thrown into the BioShock universe by yours truly. There’s either something wrong with me, or I just love the entire friendship thing between Alice and Bunny. Scorpiofreak’s "Winter Wonderland" will always be canon to my mind. How many of you can guess how far I'm going to take this?

And if any of you are straining at the bit for some action, believe me, you're going to get some in the next chapter. It's time for the plasmids to fly.
Chapter 6: Rescue

November 19, 1958

Alice’s mind was on anything but her job as she worked through her shift at the Limbo. As a result, she nearly got the orders wrong twice and came close to spilling a customer’s drink on him. Alice knew that Ken wasn’t happy with her and she would likely get a lecture when she hung her uniform up. She doubted that he would fire her over something this trivial given how eagerly he had hired her, but she knew that he had standards, even for the owner of a club in Pauper’s Drop.

Ever since receiving that letter from Radcliffe, Alice had been trying to think of some way to save the orphans of Houndsditch. If they went out on the street, the girls would disappear and then reappear as Little Sisters. As for the boys, they would be subjected to the neglect and eventual starvation that orphans in slums the surface over suffered. That was the best case scenario; the worst was if one of Bumby’s former “clients” found them. And Alice had no intention of either occurring.

She could remember the article the Tribune had printed about the entire affair perfectly: “Scandal in Pauper’s Drop! Dr. Angus Bumby Mastermind of Child-Trafficking Ring. Exclusive Interview with Would-Be Victim Alice Liddell!” The article had gone on to list the various crimes that she had accused him and the confirmations of those crimes in the ledgers and audio diaries that she had given to Ryan Security. There was nothing in it to suggest that she was responsible for his death, but neither was there any mention of the services rendered to Tenenbaum and Suchong. Other than that, it was Nathan Presley’s best work yet; she had the article pinned onto her wall along with the drawings and photograph.

The ledgers she had given to Bobby and Fred had included a list of the people that Bumby had done business with, along with Suchong and Tenenbaum, so they now had a list of people to arrest, and with each arrest that was one less person she had to worry about. If she had discovered those ledgers and diaries while Bumby was still alive, he would be on the run from both Ryan Security and his clients, the latter furious and murderous about the records. That didn’t mean they would all face punishment though. And therefore, she needed to find a safe place from them.

The question was, where could she accommodate the orphans until they were old enough to rely on themselves? Self-reliance was a virtue (or so Cheshire said), but that wasn’t an option at their age. They hadn’t matured enough, physically or mentally, to survive in any city, let alone Rapture. If they were, she wouldn’t even be thinking about this at all. She’d probably be pondering how she would accommodate Nanny into her room, or how she would scrimp and pinch to get some more plasmids and gene tonics.

There was also the question of those little girls unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of Suchong, Tenenbaum, and the rest. What was she to do about the already-existing Little Sisters and their creators?

‘I don’t have an inkling how to reverse whatever malicious treatments or conditionings they were subjected to. And if I attempt to avenge them, all I’ll accomplish is to identify myself as the woman who attacked Suchong, and a Parasite to boot.'
'Then again,' She mentally continued, ‘Tenenbaum is both missing and reputed to have turned Parasite. Finding her would be a good start, though a difficult goal to attain. For such an isolated city, people who don’t want to be found in Rapture manage to do so very easily. A good thing to remember, just in case the occasion arises that I myself have to go into hiding alongside Aster.’

Alice managed to get through the rest of her shift without any more near misses or mishaps. Just as she thought he would, Ken pulled her off to one side just as she was about to leave. “Just a piece of advice, kid. When you’re on the job, you’re on the job.” He scrutinized her closely. “I know this ain’t the Kashmir, but I do have some expectations of my employees.”

“Yes, Mr. Jenkins,” Alice replied. “I’ll remember that.” Alice had decided that Ken Jenkins was a halfway-decent man; he respected her as an employee and a person, which couldn’t be said for quite a few people in the Drop.

As Alice turned to leave, he added. “One more thing, kid. If it’s some fella you’re moonin’ over, make sure he treats ya right. I’ve seen too many pretty girls sportin’ a black eye in Brooklyn and in this tub.”

“I can assure you, Mr. Jenkins, it’s not a boy I’m pondering,” Alice answered a little tersely. “But I’ll be sure to retain your advice.”

Jenkins grunted and then turned back to the cash register as Alice exited the Limbo. She met Grace waiting for her outside and together they departed for the Deluxe.

“Alice, are you feelin’ well?” Grace questioned. “You seemed distracted tonight.”

“I just had some things on my mind,” Alice shrugged. “Nothing you need to worry yourself about.” Alice wasn’t used to keeping things like this to herself. That was one of the few positive qualities that the Wonderlanders possessed: one could be as brutally honest as one liked. That was something that Alice found very nice.

She and Grace walked the rest of the way to the Deluxe in a comfortable silence. As they were waiting for the elevator to descend, Alice decided to ask for Grace’s advice, indirectly of course.

“Grace,” she began. “I was just wondering, if you knew that you weren’t going to be around or be able to take care of Eleanor, where would you send her?”

Grace gave her a measured look before answering. “Instead of asking ‘where?’, I’d ask ‘who?’.” Before Dr. Lamb’s arrest, she came to me to take of Eleanor. Thank God she chose me instead of that pervert Bumby. She was only five years old then.” Grace smiled as she thought back to those days before her expression turned serious. “Why do you ask?”

“No special reason.” Alice stepped into the elevator and waited for Grace to enter before tapping the buttons for the second and third floors. “Just a random thought obscuring my mental functions.”

Grace raised an eyebrow. “Glad I was able to help.” The elevator stopped at the second floor and Alice dismounted from it. “Alice, not many people live in Rapture that I would leave Eleanor with,” Grace added. “Very few in fact. In this town, you got to be careful with who you trust, especially with children.”

“Who said anything about children?” Alice asked innocently. “Thank you, Grace. Have a good evening.”

“You too, Alice.”
Alice could feel Grace’s eyes on her until she was out of view of the elevator. Either she was too obvious with her questions, or Grace could see more than people gave her credit for. Either way, Alice figured that she should be careful with what she said around Grace. As nice as her singing teacher was, she didn’t trust her quite yet.

‘Not that she’s given me a reason to distrust her,’ Alice told herself. ‘But the saying “better safe than sorry” is one that Cheshire would approve of.’

Someone instead of someplace, hmm? If possible, that just took Alice’s choices and limited them even more. There was no shortage of hiding places in Rapture, the problem was finding and securing them. Now, finding someone who she could trust with the orphans of Houndsditch? There were only a few people she trusted in the world and she could count them using the fingers of one hand.

In her situation, it was nearly impossible for her to do it. She couldn’t adopt all of them; even if it was legal, she couldn’t provide for them, let alone pay the rent for having that many children in one apartment. Nanny was already moving to the Deluxe, and Sinclair would be sure to charge enough for her. Grace already had Eleanor to care for, and Aster….

For the first time in her life, Alice had to resist the urge to squeal. She was able to contain the elation she felt to a mere smile. Once inside her apartment, she allowed herself to flop on a nearby chair in a very undignified, lazy manner. She knew exactly what to do now.

She would simply steal over to Houndsditch when everyone else was asleep or indoors, gather the orphans together, and then take them all to Arcadia to Aster’s cabin. He had said that the Warren extended underneath all of Rapture. What better place to hide them until they could look out for themselves than there?

‘It’ll be problematic, of course,’ Alice mused, eyebrows narrowed in thought. ‘I’ll have to convince them to come with me, manage to get them out of Pauper’s Drop and to Arcadia without being stopped and questioned as to my ends, and then I have to convince Aster to take them in until better accommodations can be made. Thankfully, that last bit shouldn’t be that hard; Aster loves children, though I can certainly imagine his apprehension at so many in one place.’

Alice hummed to herself as she fixed herself a sandwich for a snack and sat down to enjoy it. Today had been a good one in terms of her goals. She had some plasmids on the counter just waiting for her to unlock their powers, she had located her childhood friend Aster Bunnymund, and she now had a place where the Houndsditch children could be sheltered. Right now, nothing could dampen her mood.

“Hello, Alice. Feeling good about ourselves, are we?”

Alice jumped about a foot in her seat and waited for her heart to stop beating a tattoo against her chest’s interior. It seemed that Fate had decreed that her mood was to be spoiled anyway, if there was such a thing as Fate. If there was, Alice had every intention of one day giving it a piece of her mind.

“Bloody Cat,” she burst as soon as her green eyes had latched onto him. “Is it too much to ask that you wait until after I’m done eating, and to also alert me to your presence by not converting my heart into a jack hammer?”

“That’s two things, so yes, that is too much to ask.” Cheshire smirked at her from his place on the couch. Alice was severely tempted to test his intangibility with her Old Man Winter powers. She refrained from doing so since she didn’t want to damage the cheap furniture he was lying on. He
Alice watched, and she could see it in the self-satisfied way his tail leapt and curled through the air, as if his grin and slouching posture weren’t enough.

“You were right about them being on the watch for me.” Alice was attempting to change whatever subject the Cat had in mind. “I’m now a Parasite that ‘has her eye on Rapture’s finest’. They haven’t figured out it’s me just yet.”

“A small mercy in the grand scheme of things,” Cheshire replied haughtily, as though he had been responsible for her current state of freedom. “And now here you are, the invincible Alice Liddell, plotting how you’re going to single-handedly save the orphans of Pauper’s Drop from the vile clutches of Andrew Ryan and his oceanic metropolis. Typical. Always jumping straight into the fray without any proper strategy or planning involved.”

Alice glared at the feline before taking an extra-large bite of her sandwich. “Allow me to make one thing transparently clear to you, you bag of bones and hairballs,” she snapped after swallowing the bite. “I wallowed in self-pity while the innocent were exploited and used by a foul, odious, misbegotten thing that claimed to be their protector and guardian against the cruel world. If this is merely the first step in redeeming myself, I’m perfectly willing to accept the risks involved.” She stoically waited for his response.

Cheshire regarded her with his unsettling yellow eyes before speaking. “The path to redemption, even for the slightest transgression, is a hard one to tread. Luckily, you won’t travel it alone.” Cheshire slid off the couch and padded up to the counter. “I was your savior in Suchong’s laboratory, and I will be your guide tonight and tomorrow and until you are safe.”

Alice caught herself staring at him in surprise before answering. “And why are you feeling so altruistic now, Cat? Didn’t you once say that self-reliance was a virtue?”

“It is,” Cheshire replied. “And my intentions are hardly altruistic. If you die in the real world, your Wonderland and all who live in it, including myself, will cease to exist. If there is an afterlife, and I hope for your sake that yours is a happy one, you will live on. We, on the other hand, will not. I approve of your decision to protect the innocent, but I have no intention of experiencing oblivion because of a single, careless mistake made by a single, careless girl.”

Alice considered him before replying. “And just how do you intend to make yourself useful? Distracting a Big Daddy is one thing, but escorting a group of children from Pauper’s Drop to Arcadia is another.”

“I will function as a second set of eyes. I will scout ahead, make sure the way is safe, and then signal when it is. And if we run into trouble.” Cheshire nodded towards the bottles that lined the counter, waiting for their contents to be consumed. “I would hardly consider those to be desserts, but their ingestion will provide the means to defend yourself and the children. I will be ready when you are, Alice.” Cheshire disappeared without another word.

Alice finished her sandwich without any more interruptions and then studied the plasmid bottles quietly. Having the Cheshire Cat actually assist her for once was a big change. Other than the time the Red Queen beheaded him, he never performed any true action besides giving her cryptic advice and mind-numbing riddles (which she always solved, of course). With him serving as a diversion and as a scout, and with all of these plasmids at her fingertips, getting the children to safety wouldn’t be nearly as hard as doing it all by herself.

What was that Cheshire said? “The path to redemption, even for the slightest transgression, is a hard one to tread.” Well, her sins were of omission. She hadn’t done it on purpose, not remotely. Still, by burying herself in her grief and sorrow, who knew how many more had suffered because
she had been so focused on herself and her past? Now, she could make a difference for the better. She could shield the small from being trampled on by the great. She could look evil in the eye and spit. She could take on the role of those who were truly great; those who didn’t exalt in their own strength for personal gain, but who protected the weak from the powerful.

‘I believe that one should be left to one’s own devices, but when those devices threaten the liberty and freedom of others, then it is time for the those who have the will and the ability to act, and to give it their all if necessary. It’s time Rapture perceived true altruism!’

In a surge of energy brought on by the side of her that desired justice above all else, Alice snatched up the Bucking Bronco and downed the bottle's contents. The taste of the Wild West’s drive and power filled her as horrendous blisters coated her hands and the sounds of a horse neighing, of a stampede, and of a thunderclap echoed in her ears.

Gasping and grinning from the power she felt rising within her, Alice reached for the Shock Jockey. Purple crystal growths sprouted from her hands as the power of Zeus and of Thor flowed through her veins, promising destruction for those who preyed on the innocent. The green, seductive glow of Possession filled her vision as the power to manipulate her enemies became known to her.

Gasping on the wooden floor from all the euphoria and power from the splicing splurge subsided, Alice smiled her signature smirk, the one that promised she was going to keep her word. Her true empowerment had begun that night.

BS+AMA=WS

November 20, 1958

It was a few hours after midnight and Alice was standing just across the street from Houndsditch. From the outside, it looked just like any of the buildings that occupied the Drop (albeit not as dilapidated), but now, with what she knew its former owner had been up to and the dimmed lights that signaled Rapture’s night, it resembled a sinister face with a gaping mouth, hungry for innocence. Alice suppressed a shiver before checking to make sure she was alone.

Those out on the street were those who lived and currently slept on it. There were a few lights shining out of the windows (and in some cases, the walls) of the nearby buildings, but no faces or eyes stared out on Skid Row at this hour. Alice gathered her wits and her nerves and hurriedly crossed the street.

She walked up the steps to the door, tapped in the door code (Bumby had changed it once a week but since he was dead, that wasn’t a problem), and entered, praying that the grinding door wouldn’t wake anyone up. For the first time, Alice was aware of just how much the boards squeaked underneath her feet as she tiptoed across the foyer, and just how many toys and rustling paper were underfoot. Passing by her old room and coming up on Helen’s, Alice remembered the silencing effect that Peeping Tom had on her footsteps. She turned invisible and proceeded to run past Helen’s room, through the hall, and up the stairs.

At the top, Alice stopped running and turned visible, smiling at how much easier that was with her powers. An entrance to the girls’ room was just to her right, allowing her to avoid the cluttered hallway. The first bed she approached was occupied by two little girls named Janet and Danielle. The ratio of children to beds was about to two to one in Houndsditch; those who weren’t able to squeeze into one found themselves on the floor. Given how cold the Drop was, bedtimes at Houndsditch were a battle for the beds until either they were either broken up or the fights were won before they escalated.
Alice gently shook Janet into consciousness.

“Alice?” The little girl blinked up at her. “What are you doin’ here? Are you robbin’ us?”

Robberies weren’t that uncommon in the Drop since it was practically the worst neighborhood in the entire city.

“A robber wouldn’t wake the inhabitants of the abode he was robbing,” she whispered back.

“Wake up Danielle, and go down to the foyer very quietly. I’ll explain once you all are down there. Oh, and take a change of clothing if you’re able.”

As Janet nodded sleepily and turned over to shake Danielle, Alice continued to the next bed and to the one after until the girls were tiptoeing out the room. Alice repeated the procedure with the boys, who were so much louder than the girls that Alice wouldn’t have been surprised if Andrew Ryan suddenly burst in, demanding to know what was going on. Like the caboose of a surface train, Alice followed the last pair of boys down the stairs, shushing them all from the rear and wishing she could treat them all to a dose of Peeping Tom. She only breathed a sigh of relief after passing Helen’s room.

The groups of nearly two dozen orphans crowded to her as she came into the main room, their eyes glittering with confusion and fear in the dark. “Alice, what’s goin’ on?” “Is there a big leak somewhere?” “Have the Parasites found Rapture?” “Are the bad men coming?”

Alice held up a hand for quiet, silencing the little mob around her before their questions gained more volume. Once they had quieted down, she began in a tone just above a whisper.

“Children, it’s good to see you all again.” That wasn’t entirely true, but they needed to be kept calm. “A few hours from now, Dr. Bumby’s Will is scheduled to be read and there’s no certainty that you’ll be allowed to stay at Houndsditch. I’ve found a place for all of you to stay until you can find families of your own. I want you all to be as quiet as dormice until we get there. It’s best if each of you brought one toy. We’ll be leaving in one minute so please hurry.” She turned towards the door.

“Alice? What are you doing?” She turned back to find a semi-awake Helen coming out of the hall, clad only in her nightgown, her left hand grasping a torch and the other behind her back. Alice had a good idea what she was concealing; it was something that she didn’t want the children to see, a weapon or something of the like.

“Helen,” Alice said aloud, the need to whisper suddenly gone. “You know what will happen to these children once the Will is read; out on the street with no home or anyone looking after them.”

Helen squinted at her. “And just where are you taking them that’ll give them those things?”

“To a friend’s,” Alice replied. When she saw the look that Helen was giving her, she added, “I’d trust him with my life, and he has the required food and space for them.” She began to walk slowly towards Helen, the children parting in front of her out of awe and a little bit of fear.

“Why the secrecy then?” Helen demanded. “Why not just take them in the daylight?” Her right arm was starting to come out from behind her, and Alice thought she saw a glint of something black and small.

“Because my friend doesn’t want to bring undue attention to himself and I can identify with that,” Alice answered. “Helen, I am not letting these children out on the street when I am in a position to help them, especially with some of Bumby’s former customers still about.” She stopped directly in front of Helen and lowered her voice. “And we both know that the Little Sisters weren’t born that
way.” She looked into Helen's eyes and narrowed her gaze. “Do we?” ‘If she’s concealing a knife, I’m well within reach. A pistol, only the Playwright Octopus could miss at this range.’

Helen stared blankly at her for a few more moments, her half-awake brain processing the words, before sighing and stepping back. “If this goes badly, Alice, I wasn’t involved. It was all you, alright?”

Alice nodded and smiled darkly. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Managing to keep whatever it was in her right hand hidden, Helen turned around and began making her way back to her bedroom. Alice sighed quietly and then turned back to the wide-eyed children. “I hope you all have your toy. You’re going to wish you had otherwise.” Alice smiled one of her rare, true smiles when the children practically trampled each other trying to find a suitable plaything.

After checking to make sure the coast was clear, Alice began to lead them, two by two, across the street. Her conversation with Helen seemed to have had a quieting effect on them, the seriousness of the situation dampening the questions that usually would have disturbed the quiet that currently reigned over the Drop. What disturbed Alice the most was the look in their eyes that some of the children adopted as soon as they left the orphanage doors. Lifeless as a doll’s eyes. If Bumby had a hand in the mental conditioning of the Little Sisters, how much had he altered the minds of the children directly in his twisted hands?

Alice pushed those thoughts away to the back of her mind. ‘I can’t afford to be distracted at this point, and neither can they.’ She waited until they were all across the street before poking her head around the corner. No one was in sight, but that could change in an instant. ‘Cheshire said he would assist me as a guide and scout. If so, where is he? And how does he intend to fill his role without the children seeing h--.”

Alice’s thoughts were interrupted by the strangest sensation that she had ever experienced. Her vision, along with her mind, oozed from her head before exploding out and exploring ahead of her body, which she could somehow still feel. It was like her spirit or ghost decided to take a holiday from her frame and had taken her eyes with it. Her “ghost” proceeded to “walk” down the street and peer around the next corner; a huge, unkempt man drunkenly stumbled around a garbage can with a fire in it before collapsing on the remains of a mattress, the bottle in his hand shattering on the ground. His snores filled the air a moment later, while some blood crept out of the newly-made cuts in his hand.

Her vision suddenly shot backwards the way it came into her body, which hadn’t moved a muscle. Blinking hard from the bizarre sensation of her mind and sight squeezing their way back into her head and trying to figure out what had just happened, Alice was surprised to spy Cheshire standing in the very spot where “she” had witnessed the drunk fall over. He grinned at her before vanishing. Alice’s pink lips quirked upward in a quick smile before she ventured out, signaling to the children that the way was clear.

As they made their way through the Drop, the station, and eventually to Apollo Square, Alice used a combination of her Peeping Tom’s X-ray vision and of her new “Cheshire” ability to spy out the way. It seemed that she could now see through Cheshire’s eyes and direct his body to wherever she needed it to go. According to the children, her body became both transparent and intangible when she was using it, almost scaring them the first couple of time.

There were limitations: She would find herself looking through her physical eyes after a period of time, there was a distance limit, it used up EVE like her other plasmids, and the connection between her body and “Cheshire” had to be clear of obstacles. She learned about the last one when
they had started using the bathyspheres; leaving behind her mental representation when the hatch had slammed shut resulted in a nasty headache. She could almost hear Cheshire laughing as she massaged her forehead.

‘Smirking, pompous feline.’

It was when they were leaving Apollo Square for Arcadia that disaster nearly struck.

Alice had decided to send the children on ahead in separate bathyspheres. She couldn’t fit all of them into a sphere safely and it was the last leg of their journey. She was busy counting the children and downing a bottle of EVE as they climbed into the sphere when she heard a scream behind her. Without a second thought, Alice turned and ran back to the station’s entrance, calling to the rest to get on and wait for her. The bottle shattered on the ground behind her, the small amount of EVE left spilling out.

At the entrance, she saw the cause: Charlie, the boy who had the session after hers, and one of the younger girls had fallen behind, and three adults, two men and one woman, were currently trying to carry off the girl. Charlie was beating on the man who was holding the girl with his small fists; she on the other hand was just staring straight ahead at nothing, her eyes listless and lifeless. Alice had an idea that she was one of Bumby’s advanced “patients”.

“Let her go, ya big pervert!” Charlie shouted as he continued assaulting the man. His answer came in the form of a backhand which sent the small boy stumbling to the ground, holding his face. Alice felt her plasmids begging to be let out as her vision turned red and her heart rate increased.

“What do we do with the boy?” the woman asked, eyeing him speculatively.

“Put a bullet in him,” the other man snapped. “They don’t make Little Brothers.”

As the woman raised her pistol and aimed it at Charlie’s head, the world seemed to slow down for Alice. The woman’s thumb eased back her gun’s hammer at a snail’s pace, Charlie looked up in fear and horror at a hundredth of his normal speed. Even the flicker from some nearby lights was sluggish. The only thing in the world with any speed was the bolt of Shock Jockey which shot from Alice’s right hand into the woman’s face. The world returned to normal as the woman screamed and convulsed in agony and the men turned their shocked attention to their new attacker. Alice’s eyes narrowed with a predatory anger as she surveyed her opponents, the purple shards in her hand dancing with electrical arcs.

“Let the girl go and walk away,” she ground out. As greedy and wretched as these people were, they were still human and capable of reason, unlike the Red Queen’s Card Guards and the Dollmaker’s Insidious Ruin. They had a choice in front of them, not like those evil creatures had.

They chose wrong.

The burly man carrying off the girl dropped her and brought up his shotgun. Before he could let off a spray of buckshot, he joined the woman in her jerky dance with the electrons. Making a face at the odor of ozone, Alice turned her attention to the last man who, oddly enough, was smirking at her. He leered at her and struck a flirtatious pose. “Give me your best shot, doll.”

That did it. Of all the things that Alice didn’t like to be called, that was the insult she detested the most, the thing that Bumby would have turned her into, a mindless, purposeless plaything for that monster and his customers. The same thing that Bumby had wished Lizzie to be, and which she would not become.
“I’M NO ONE’S DOLL!” she yelled as she brought both hands up to let loose a double dose of Shock Jockey right into him. Alice fully expected him to either fly backwards or to drop dead from cardiac arrest. To her surprise, he just stood there as the electricity flashed and zapped off his body, grinning.

“Tell me, sugar,” he drawled as the blue arcs calmed down, “have you ever heard of the gene tonic, Electric Flesh? Really popular with electricians.” It was right then that Alice saw he wasn’t equipped with any firearms. Just as the alarm bells went off in her head, he brought up his own hand and a bolt of electricity impacted her right in the chest.

In her recent Wonderland adventures, Alice had been burned, stabbed, slashed, shot, and nearly swallowed; this was a whole new level of agony. Her muscles constricted, her ears and eyes buzzed, she couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe, and couldn’t stop screaming. She slumped to the floor when it wore off, suddenly exhausted. The smell of ozone was much stronger now that she was a source. She glanced over at Charlie; he watching the whole thing with wide eyes. This was probably the first time he had seen plasmids in action. The girl was beginning to pick herself off the ground, and Alice’s first two combatants were groaning on the ground, half-conscious.

The man clicked his tongue as he walked over to Alice and stood over her. “Always wanted to fry one of you Jockeys. Thinkin’ you’re something else just because of those drinkable plasmids. I had to use needles to get my powers, doll.” He now glowered down at her, the blue glow in his pupils making it all the more sinister. “I’m gonna show you how a Bolt does it.” He began to gather a massive charge of electricity in his arms, managing to snarl and grin at the same time.

Alice gave him a smile of her own before vanishing from sight. The splicer yelled before electrifying the ground where she had just been. Alice rolled again to the right before reappearing. The new ghastly blisters on her hands were accompanied by the sound of a horse neighing as Bucking Bronco took effect on her would-be killer.

As he shouted and floundered about in midair, Alice jumped and ran towards the girl, scooping her up in her arms. “Charlie, run!” she cried. His stupor broke and he was up in a flash with Alice following him. She was careful to watch her passenger’s head as she ran; no need to give her a brain or neck injury after all this.

The man’s cries were interrupted by a loud crash and a yelp of pain. A moment later, a bolt of electricity flashed between Alice and Charlie, leaving a burn mark on the wall. ‘Well, that’s one way to make the acquaintance of a fellow splicer,’ Alice thought wryly. To Charlie: “Keep running, don’t look back!”

Alice thanked her stars she had already set the sphere to go to Arcadia as they came up on it. Charlie shot through the hatch as Alice tried desperately to keep her own balance and that of the girl’s, her muscles aching from the Electro Bolt. The orphans began to cheer her on as she approached.

“Come back here, you little rat! You’re going to look like a roasted chunk of meat when I’m done!” Alice could hear the running footfalls of the splicer gaining on her and pushed herself to run faster. SportBoost was a good ally to have on one’s side right then.

“Someone pull the lever!” she shouted as she cleared the entrance. Several pairs of hands yanked harder than necessary on the sphere’s lever, and as the hatch came down, another bolt of electricity zapped the glass. A little sooner and it would have hit her head.

The children screamed as the man came into sight, his eyes blazing blue and his face snarling. “I’ll get you for this, you little b-.”
The closing hatch and following descent into the waters cut him off, to Alice’s relief. Setting down the girl on a seat, she slumped down to the sphere’s floor and let out a gasp of laughter. “Well, that was a hair-raising experience.”

The smell of ozone soon tainted the air of the bathysphere.

BS+AMA=WS

Thankfully, Arcadia was a big place and it was much easier to guide the children around any passersby. Most of the businesses were twenty-four hours, seven days a week as Andrew Ryan made it clear that Sundays were not to be a day of rest unless it was by choice. Alice wondered how Ryan had been able to find so many people that agreed with his personal beliefs. What had he done? Sent out a questionnaire and took notes on who chose which answers, or had he found out firsthand by going out incognito and raising the topic he was so fond of in business places and the like?

‘One thing is for certain: he didn’t go to any churches to identify recruits.’ Alice smirked at her thoughts as the last child entered the hills of Arcadia away from the more populated regions of the place.

Now that it was night, Alice couldn’t help but notice that the glades and fields of Arcadia now possessed a dark and sinister air about them. While the lights that lit the main part of Arcadia were merely dimmed to imitate the surface’s night while allowing enough to see by, here the only light came from the ocean above. Judging from its pale, weak quality, she had to guess that it was moonlight that was piercing through the Atlantic to shine down on Rapture and Arcadia.

She could just barely remember the moon: a glowing, white saucer that hung in the night sky, reflecting the sun’s light onto a dark world. She felt conflicted about it. There was the pleasant memory of her father showing them the full moon in all its glory and explaining to her why it shrank and grew again and shrank again. And then there was that lullaby that Bumby had taught the children which described a train with the “Man in the Moon” as its engineer. Alice remembered singing that to a sleepy Susan and wished she could just flush that horrid rhyme from her mind.

She noticed the children were all bunched around her as she led them to Aster’s cabin. What little noises they made consisted of frightened whispers and near-gasps of surprised fear. Looking around at Arcadia under the black guise of night, Alice couldn’t blame them. Right now, the trees resembled gigantic mutated octopi that had crawled right out of her warped imagination, watching them and waiting ever so patiently to grab them in their wood-armored tentacles and bear them to their hidden mouths. What little breeze was present whispered through the tall, gently-swaying grass, which seemed to conceal all manner of ravenous monsters. She found herself wishing she had taken that Devil’s Kiss plasmid of Fink’s. Or at least a torch.

Alice knew that this intimidating walk through Arcadia’s usually beautiful woods must be completely terrifying for the young ones around her. She heard stories of children raised in Rapture screaming out in fear upon seeing trees for the first time, believing them to be monsters. And that had been in daylight, not in this light and atmosphere. Alice did her best to reassure her charges as they came closer and closer to their goal.

At one point, Alice thought she spied someone watching them from underneath a tree. When she had turned with a plasmid bristling under the skin of her hand, there was no one there. Before she turned back, Alice could have sworn she had seen something like rose petals floating down under the branches, accompanied by a strange laugh. Alice kept a sharp lookout the rest of the way, not willing to be ambushed by some crazy stalker or a splicer.
When they finally came upon Aster’s cabin, the children shrank back from it. At this hour, it resembled a huge, hulking creature that was buried up to its neck, glaring out at the world with its broken window-eyes and waiting for something to walk into the black hole of its mouth. Forcing herself to walk forward and ignore the screeched warnings of her subconscious mind, Alice walked towards it, the children now edging behind her.

‘Come now Alice, you little fool. It’s no different than when you were here only a short few hours ago. During the day. And not in the dark of the night when you can barely see anything—oh, stop that!’

Alice managed to enter the cabin without stumbling over anything. Her charges stopped just short of the door and peered in fearfully. It was pitch black inside and before she succeeded in locating the carpet over the trap door, Alice was sure that her shins were just as black with some blue added in. Every piece of furniture seemed to have made it their mission to get in her way, which also kicked up a lot of dust in addition to the bruises. She yanked off the carpet from the door and began to pound on it.

“Aster? Aster, it’s me, Alice. I’m sorry to wake you at this unholy hour, but I need your assistance,” she called out between raps. Glancing over at the children, Alice was able to see that they were all staring at her like she had lost her mind. She certainly looked and sounded like it; dragging them all over Rapture in the middle of the night, walking through a sinister, dark Arcadia, and finally banging away on the floor of a decrepit, abandoned cabin, calling for someone. Yes, she looked insane. She just prayed that Aster didn’t come up with a gun in hand.

She gave the door a few more bangs. “There’s a matter at hand that’s more than I can handle on my own.” A light suddenly shown through the floorboards, drawing a gasp from the little crowd. Alice could hear him practically charging up the ladder and just managed to get out of the way as the door swung open to reveal a wide-and-bleary-eyed Aster, clad only in only boxers and a white nightshirt.

“Alice, what’s wrong?” he asked worriedly, his eyes struggling to adjust to the sudden alternations between light and dark. She could hear the fear in his voice, as though someone was about to charge out of the shadows at them, or she was about to reveal some horrendous wound.

Alice began to feel a twinge of guilt forming in her chest. No sooner had she found one of her oldest friends than she came back with a gaggle of children on her heels to shove them onto him. Then again, there was nothing else she could do for them, and this was the best option available.

“I’m not the one at risk, Aster.” Alice looked away for a moment before turning to the door. “They are.”

Aster looked to his still-broken front door and held up his torch, squinting hard before he realized just what he was looking at. His green eyes shot wide open when he realized that about two dozen children were staring back at him. He blinked several times in disbelief and shook his head hard, as though trying to get rid of some remnant of a dream. He finally looked back to Alice with a hard, questioning look.

“Alice,” he said slowly. “Why are there a bunch of tykes in my doorway?”

“That’s a bit of a long story,” Alice said quietly, wishing she didn’t have to meet his gaze.

Aster frowned. “Let me get dressed, then we need to talk.” He vanished back into the Warren, closing the door behind him. Alice looked back towards the children and gave them what she hoped was a reassuring smile. They probably couldn’t see it in the dark, which was just as well.
She didn’t have that much practice when it came to smiling anyway.

When Aster reemerged from the Warren, he and Alice went to another room and closed the door behind them. They both remained standing as he surveyed her. She couldn’t imagine what was going through his head right now, and that was impressive given just how creative she could be. It also helped that he had a poker face that would have won him card game after card game at Sir Prize.

“Alright,” he suddenly said. “I give up. Why have ya brought a bunch of ankle-biters to my doorstep, Alice?” He cocked his head to one side and raised an eyebrow. “You haven’t adopted any of them, ‘ave ya?”

“No!” she said, a bit too quickly. She looked at the ground again before looking him in the face. “I would have taken them elsewhere, but this was the only safe place that I knew of, the only place where they have a chance.”

“Alice,” Aster interrupted, tapping his foot against the ground. “Just what is goin’ on? I would hardly call leading a gaggle of kids across Rapture to my hidin’ place safe. If someone saw you….”

“No one did.” Alice said quickly. “Well, to be honest, three hooligans tried to carry off one of the little girls, but that was back in Apollo Square.” At the rather horrified look on Aster’s face, Alice decided to start at the beginning.

“After Rutledge, I was sent to the Houndsditch Home for Traumatized Youth. The proprietor, Dr. Angus Bumby served as my landlord, employer, and therapist in my continued recovery. I knew him before the fire, but I had forgotten him and what he had done.

“It was a few days ago after an…episode that I remembered who he was and what he had done.” A hint of disgust and anger crept into both her face and voice as she continued. “Before the fire, he was attempting to woo Lizzie, but she wouldn’t have anything to do with him. And instead of leaving her be like any other decent human being, he crept into our apartment one night, had his way with her and then killed her, before setting our home on fire!”

Alice was yelling now, trembling with a fury that Aster had never seen before. Aster couldn’t help but stare wide-eyed at the girl and the horrendous tale she was telling.

“As if that wasn’t enough, after receiving a Doctorate in Psychology and opening Houndsditch, he took the orphans entrusted to his care and destroyed their memories, conditioning them to be child-prostitutes! When I came along, he saw the chance to finally cover up what he did to my family and gain a ‘high-class’ prostitute to use as his own when I wasn’t ‘busy’!” Alice stood there panting in anger, a trickle of sweat making its way down her brow. It was the first time she had put her emotions into telling the dark story of her life.

“Crikey,” Aster managed, still trying to wrap his head around the truth of the Liddell’s deaths and the true evil of this doctor. “Where is that…thing now?” he asked with a glint of anger flashing in his eyes, obviously thinking about the twin pistols he was wearing.

“In Hell, I hope. On the same day I remembered everything and discovered the truth, he slipped and fell in front of the Atlantic Express.” Alice wasn’t able to meet Aster’s eyes for a moment, a detail he noticed but didn’t bring up.

“His Will is going to be read later today,” she continued, “and the children are most likely going to be put out on the streets. The boys will be left to suffer the fate of any orphan on the surface’s
slums, and Heaven help them if any of Bumby’s customers find them. And the girls…” Alice paused before continuing in a low voice. Aster had to lean forward to hear her. “They’re still making Little Sisters, and those muggers at the Square intended to sell the girl for just that purpose. In fact, Bumby was responsible for the mental conditioning that’s used on them. You are the only person in Rapture I know who won’t turn them over to Ryan, not for money, not even to save yourself. Aster,” she looked at him pleadingly, “they need you.”

Aster’s expression had changed from attentive to horrified through the course of the conversation and it now changed to sorrowful. The first thing he did was to embrace Alice for the second time in as many days. “I’m so sorry, Alice,” he said into her ear. “If I had known that he was responsible for it, I would have stopped at nothing to see him face justice. Face punishment for what he took from you, and those kids.”

“I know you would have,” Alice said, closing her eyes and leaning against his chest, allowing herself to be comforted. Finally, they parted. “And that’s one of the reasons why I care for you, Aster,” she added. “Now, some of the children will be wary around you at first, but Charlie can advise you on how to avoid making them uncomfortable and eventually win them over. He’s the blond boy with the sharp nose, oh, and-.”

“Alice,” Aster interrupted, sighing heavily. “I…I’m sorry for what these kids have been through, but I can’t look after them. I don’t know how.” He seemed to be in the midst of an internal struggle. “I’ve never taken care of one kid before, let alone a few dozen….”

“There are twenty-two of them, twelve boys and ten girls.”

“That’s not helpin’. And the Warren is hardly the place to keep a bunch of kids all the time. I’ve managed to live down there for more than a year by myself, most of the time, without goin’ insane. No offense,” he added. “Keepin’ all them down in there? I’ll be madder than a march hare after a few days, or dead.”

Alice’s eyebrow had twitched at the mention of going insane, and again at the inadvertent mention of the March Hare. Frowning now, she marched up to Aster, somehow managed despite their height difference to shove her face in his, and turned her worst, acid-green-eyed glare on him. “Ethan Aster Bunnymund, you are the only hope these children have. There is nowhere else, and no one else for them to turn to. Without someone to look after them, they. Will. Not. Survive.” Her expression softened and she took a step back. “And we both know you’ll never forgive yourself if something happens to them.”

Aster stared at her, the ground, and then back at her before groaning out loud and throwing his arms up in defeat. “Alright, I’ll look after the little blighters. But, if anthin’ happens, I’m officially blamin’ you. Got it?”

Alice crossed her arms and gave him a look. “You and my former co-worker have much in common, you realize that?”

Aster snorted as he walked over to the door and opened it. He jumped back as a cascade of children fell through from their listening positions against the door. He stared down in surprise at the wriggling mass of yelping and squirming childhood while Alice just barely managed to suppress a smile. It was a true pity that she wasn’t going to be around to witness Aster’s introduction to child care. Though she knew that she was going to hear plenty about it.

**BS+AMA=WS**

She stayed to help Aster settle the children down in the Warren. Thankfully, he had plenty of
space, blankets, and heat lamps to go around. Alice promised to get him supplies if and when he needed them. He had a nice stockpile of food already, but with twenty-three mouths to feed instead of just one, that pile of canned goods would disappear much more quickly now. And since they were children after all, it was a given that more First Aids Kits and other medical supplies would be needed shortly. Though he had reassured her that he still some “friends” he could get supplies from.

Alice mulled these things over an early-morning bowl of clam chowder at the Fishbowl Diner. It seemed her rescue plan had worked after all. The children wouldn’t be put out on the street after Bumby’s Will was read, and Ryan had been cheated out of about ten new Little Sisters (she only wished that he knew that fact). She had even had the chance to use her new plasmids, though she had to admit to herself that she needed to vary the ways she used, get creative when need be. And she would be on the lookout for this “Electric Flesh” gene tonic. The sensation of being electrocuted was not one that she wished to experience again.

On her way back to the Deluxe, Alice decided that she would take a nap before going to see Grace and Eleanor and then the Will’s reading. As she entered the main atrium of the Deluxe, she noticed a man standing right in the middle of the room and looking up at the third floor. There was no one else around, and judging from the way he looked around nervously at the other floors and the entrances to the apartments, he seemed to be hoping it stayed that way.

Alice walked up to him and simply said, “Can I help you?”

The man jumped straight up in the air like a Jack-in-the-Box and shot around, allowing Alice to get a better look at him. He was a gaunt man with hollow eyes and ear that jutted away from his head. He wasn’t at all attractive (not that Alice had been hoping that he was). All-in-all, he was very sickly-looking; she wondered briefly if he was one of those that really liked to binge on drugs and alcohol when they got the chance or if he was just sickly. Possibly both. However, he had a look in his eyes like that of a cornered rat, ready to strike at the readiest opportunity.

He tried to smile pleasantly, failing in a most ghastly manner. “Why, hello there. I was just wondering where Grace Holloway lived. I’m a fan of hers and, and I’d just love to get her autograph.” He had the most nasal voice she had ever heard, and he was trying to smile again. What did he do, practice in a funhouse mirror?

Alice knew something was up about him, and she didn’t like it one little bit. That smile was a transparent attempt to be sincere, and the way those eyes of his kept jumping from her to every door in the place only raised her suspicions.

She didn’t smile back at him when she answered. “Miss Holloway is still asleep at this time of the day, or so I believe. And she usually doesn’t give out autographs to obsessive fans who spy on her apartment at the crack of dawn.”

The man’s reaction was priceless. His eyes bugged out of his face, making it look even thinner than it already was. Alice was reminded briefly of a fish in his panic.

“I, I wasn’t spyin’, I swear,” he babbled. “I was just curious, that’s all. I’ll ask for it at the Limbo later.” He turned and hurried off in the direction of the lobby, gone within a few seconds.

“I don’t care for that one, Alice. He reminds me of a rat with a bit of Ice Snark.”

“On that, I can agree with you, Cheshire.” Alice glanced at the large feline that had suddenly appeared at her side. “Thank you for your help last night, though I would have appreciated being told that you literally intended to be my eyes and ears.”
Cheshire shrugged before beginning to vanish. “I thought that was the best way to teach you one of your new abilities. Astral projection through a construct of your imagination; how useful. Oh, and next time, I would suggest attempting to use one of your plasmids while in that state. You may like the results.”

Alice shook her heard at the now-gone cat before climbing into the elevator and tapping the button for the second floor. If she ever got the chance, she was going to take that cat down a notch or two. Right now, she was going to get a few hours of well-deserved slumber. “The sleep of the just,” as Lizzie would have so artfully called it.

The Will showed just how ill-prepared Bumby had been for his death. He must have believed that he would be alive for the next few decades or so. Alice was surprised that he had bothered with it at all. Houndsditch was to be sold and the money used to pay off any debts or bills that remained. There was no recipient for any seaweed that was left from the debts, and no mention of what was to become of the orphans. She and Helen received one week’s pay on which to live off until they found a new situation. Alice decided that she would have a look at some upgrades for her current plasmids, right after she bought a firearm, of course.

Radcliffe looked mildly astonished at the absence of the children, but he didn’t ask what had become of them. He left in a hurry after reading the Will and paying them the week’s salary. Alice supposed that he either wanted to get far away from the now too-quiet structure, or that he intended to set up Houndsditch in an upcoming auction and pocket as much of the money as he could. Space was in high demand in Rapture, and he was likely to skin the poor fools that came to buy the property. Greedy sod.

The singing instruction with Grace and the impromptu hacking lesson from Eleanor had gone well. Thankfully, Alice had rested enough so that she could function, for the most part. Getting zapped by Eleanor’s hacking device had finally done the trick of fully awakening her (Grace had been warming up her own vocal cords and she had no idea that Eleanor had a hacking device stowed away). Alice intended to practice her hacking to avoid future electric shocks. She wondered at the time if there was some higher power in control of her life that just enjoyed messing around with it. First she was electrocuted at the hands of a splicer, then she received another, much smaller shock from Eleanor’s hacking apparatus. If so, she intended to give it a few shocks of her own if they ever crossed paths.

Alice decided to skip the funeral. Bumby’s wretched, rotten corpse was to be cremated at the Eternal Flame Crematorium after a brief service at the Twilight Fields Funeral Homes. As much as she enjoyed the irony of his filthy, abominable body burning just as her parents had in their own home, she had better things to do than to revel in her satisfaction at his death. His ashes would be either be dumped into the ocean to mix with her family’s, or recycled for a purpose that she didn’t wish to find out.

She currently found herself in a corner of Market Street, only a little ways away from the hustle and bustle of the shoppers making their way through one of Rapture’s more subtle icons. The business owners showed off their wares, the customers considered how best to spend their Rapture dollars, and they all pulled on Ryan’s “Great Chain” as one. Market Street was far more open-air than most of Rapture’s other locales, with the exception of High Street, which was situated just above her current position. Both places specialized in a wide variety of businesses for Rapture’s mid-to-high classes, though if you had the money, the shop owners didn’t care where you were from.

Right now, Alice was studying the shop directly in front of her. “Chen Firearms: Quality Guns
Standard and Modified” read the large sign just over the door. It was a nice-looking place. She supposed that it was positioned farther from the rest to avoid the panic that gunfire near a crowd would cause. From what she had heard of William Chen, he was a third-generation gunsmith who specialized in creating high-quality guns and also modifying any weapons brought to him to their owner’s specifications. In fact, the “Power to the People” machines that dotted the older parts of Rapture were the direct result of a brief deal between Fontaine and Chen. Now that Fontaine was gone, Ryan (of course) had assumed ownership of the machines, though he had yet to remove Fontaine’s name from them.

Alice entered and almost immediately stopped short in wide-eyed amazement at the sheer volume of guns that lined the walls and cases of the store, hardly noticing the electronic chime of the door. They consisted mainly of pistols, shotguns, and tommy guns, with a few rifles here and there, of all shapes, sizes, and calibers. For a moment, Alice reconsidered the hearsay that Chen strived for quality; the quantity of guns was surely too impressive for any attention to be paid to superiority. On closer examination, she could make out how smooth the wood was, the shine of the metal, and how seamlessly their parts all fitted together, as if they had never been separate. She was reminded of the weapons that she had wielded in Wonderland against the Dollmaker's Ruin.

“Be with you in one moment, miss.” Alice looked up to see Mr. Chen behind a sheet of what she assumed was the same glass used in Rapture's windows, enclosing the entire register area and most of the counter in a cage of bulletproof protection. As his surname implied, Mr. Chen was of Chinese descent, but unlike most of the Chinese immigrants in Rapture, he had the build of a Westerner and blue eyes to boot, signaling his mixed roots. He was currently showing another customer, an older, white-haired man, different Rapture brands of ammunition for the large pistol on the counter. Picking up the gun and a box of bullets, the man strode towards a miniature gun range at the back of the store.

Curiously, Alice followed. The man loaded his gun, took aim at the man-shaped target on the far end of the range, and proceeded to send six shots directly into the silhouette’s heart. Holding her head with both hands, her ears still ringing from the first shot, Alice could only stare at the display of marksmanship. The man grunted in approval and turned back to buy some more of the ammunition. Alice eyed the gun and noticed an odd tattoo on the hand holding it: The letters “AD” and nothing more. Biting back her curiosity, Alice turned her attention back to the matter before her.

Alice spoke up. “Excuse me?” When he turned back to face her, she continued. “Might I enquire as to what model of firearm you use?” She pointed towards it.

He raised an eyebrow at her before answering evenly. “It’s a Hand Cannon. Chen over there makes them special, some old design of his grandfather’s. Packs a real punch, just to warn you.” To Chen, “I’ll two more of that ammo in the red box, Chen.”

“Thank you for your business, Mr. DeWitt,” Chen told the man in his slightly-accented voice as DeWitt left the shop after paying for his gun's ammunition. “That DeWitt, he’s quite the character,” he said to Alice.

“How so?” Alice asked, wondering what made Chen say that.

“He talks like someone back during my grandfather's day, and he’s very good with a gun for someone his age,” Chen started. “Another thing, you hear of those Infusions and Gears?”

Alice nodded. The Infusions were some sort of drink that had come out about a month earlier along with the so-called Gears, which were odd bits and ends of clothing. They were both based off of some quantum mechanics technology. The Infusions could increase one’s stamina, make one’s
EVE usage more efficient, or create a “magnetic repulsion shield” around one’s body. The Gears allowed for a variety of minor, passive upgrades, very similar to gene tonics. However, when the first customers to consume the Infusions had fallen over dead, their bodies cooked from the inside out, the demand for both the Infusions and the Gears had dropped before it could get off the ground.

“Well, he is the only man who has ever taken one of those things, and survive. He’s got a magnet shield protecting him right now.” Chen shook his head. “Some guys, they have all the luck. So, is there anything that caught your eye? I hear purse pistols are all the rage with young woman.”

Alice made a face before replying. “Actually, I was wondering about these ‘Hand Cannons’ of yours. If Mr. DeWitt’s demonstration was any example, that’s more to my liking.”

Chen gave her a quick once-over before shrugging. “Only fair to warn you: your hand will feel like a mule has been kicking it.”

He wasn’t joking. When Alice finished testing the Hand Cannon she picked out (she had trouble holding the thing before she learned how to balance it and she had nearly dropped it upon firing the first shot), her hand ached all over. She was certain that a bruise was beginning to form directly on the palm of her hand. She knew though, that the Hand Cannon was the pistol for her. Its size most certainly wasn’t for show, and she wanted something that both looked intimidating and fulfilled its lethal promise. All she needed was a little practice (another service that Chen provided).

When Chen was ringing up the amount she owed him (for one Hand Cannon and a box of thirty rounds), Alice noticed a crate of gun parts on the floor behind him. Barrels, triggers, chambers, and other miscellaneous pieces lay in it. The image of her Pepper Grinder flashed before her eyes as she spied a few barrels lying on a similar handle. An idea popped into her mind, making her heart race.

“Just out of curiosity,” she asked as she dug her final salary from Houndsditch out of her pocket and counted out the bills, “Could you create a weapon based off of someone else’s ideas? If they gave the designs to you, of course.”

Chen wrinkled his brow in thought. “It’s been a while since I did work like that, making a gun based off of someone’s ideas, but I suppose I could do it. If I had the ‘prints for the guns, along with incentive to make them….”

“I’ll drop by in a few days with some drawings, and I’ll pay you for the costs incurred in making the guns plus ten percent.”

“Deal.” Chen rang up the sell while Alice put her gun in her bag and her ammo in a paper sack. “A pleasure doing business with you, Miss….”

Alice turned back from the door. “Liddell, Alice Liddell. Good day to you, Mr. Chen.”

Walking through Market Street back to the bathysphere station, Alice smiled to herself. Thanks to her A-gene, she had powers just like she did in Wonderland (not the same powers, but still). And if she could have guns similar to the ranged weapons she was familiar with, such as the Pepper Grinder and the Teapot Cannon, well that would just make things all the easier. If she could become the Amazon she had been in her own mind in the real world, there wouldn't be a Big Daddy or splicer with any chance of killing her. For once in the uphill climb that was her life, things were looking up for Alice.

Chapter End Notes
Can anyone guess who the apparent stalker is? He plays a pivotal role later on in the BioShock story. In case anyone is wondering, in Chinese culture the surname is the first name. That's why Chen Lin's grandson's name is William Chen. I hope you all liked the BioShock Infinite references.

And Alice has her first real fight in the real world. Also, the Cheshire Cat now plays the role of two plasmids: Decoy and Scout. I hope you all liked that little twist, and this story. I think I'll work on a chapter for another of my projects after this one; that could be subject to change though. Have a good one, everybody!
Innocence is Chrysalis

Chapter Notes

Well then, here is the third version of Chapter 7. I tacked on a bit more onto the end, and I also wrote Alice a little more faithfully to her character. I hope this chapter 7 makes up for the one I published on my birthday. I think I just got tired and decided to end that chapter there (not really a good idea).

I hope you all enjoy this chapter. Feel free to tell me what you think, along with any questions or suggestions, in a comment.

Alice's life has been in her control so far, but unfortunately, terrible truths and events have a bad habit of seeking her out just when she's starting to feel somewhat good about life. If the BioShock series had a motto, it would be "Exploring the Upper Limits of Human Depravity". With that cheery note (irony here), here is Chapter 7 of "WonderShock".

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 7: Innocence is Chrysalis

December 9, 1958

“How many times must I tell you, Mr. Sinclair? I’m not interested in dinner with you!”

“Now there, Gloria, it’s just a little evenin’ refreshment. Nothin’ to get worked up over. And when was the last time you received some attention from a man?”

Alice could feel a headache coming on as she stalked towards the source of her annoyance. Augustus Sinclair, the owner of the Deluxe and of many other businesses in Rapture, was trying to get a date with Gloria Parson, Alice’s next-door neighbor. While he possessed that “Southern charm” and was rather handsome, Alice found his personality and mindset to be wanting. He was a combination of a businessman and a conman, ever on the lookout to make an easy profit through many of the business ventures he managed. What truly rankled Alice was his ability to target groups of people, particularly the poor and dispirited, and sell them cheap, low-grade products and services for far more than they would be worth elsewhere. The dangerous liquor of Sinclair Spirits was perhaps the best example of this.

Add in the fact that he thought that he was God’s Gift to Women, and there was someone that Alice disliked with a passion. And right now, he was attempting to convince Gloria Parson to have dinner with him. The nerve of him, asking one of his tenants, and a married one at that.

“Good day, Mrs. Parson,” Alice greeted her with a smile, making sure to emphasize the “Mrs”. Gloria shot her a grateful look as Sinclair turned to her. Her smile promptly vanished as his own appeared for her.

“Why, Ms. Liddell, how are you this fine day?” And now he was turning that 1,000-Watt smile, which must have been Steinman’s work, on her along with all his Southern charm. At least he wasn’t boorish enough to believe he could get away with using her first name. She had no idea
why Yanks thought it acceptable to toss first names around like they were confetti. Then again, Heaven help her if he ever found out her second.

“Mr. Sinclair,” she answered as though the words were something tasteless in her mouth. “Sinclair Solutions must be doing quite well if you can find the time to visit the Drop in person.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I was in the neighborhood. And since the Deluxe is my biggest interest in the Drop, only good business to drop by and see how the ole place is doin’.” He glanced back to Gloria and winked. “Not that business is my only interest, of course.”

Alice rolled her eyes. She was surprised that he hadn’t made any advances on her yet. That would probably change on her 21st birthday. She could see it now: A card in her mail on May 4, 1960 from Augustus Sinclair, offering her a night out on the town for her birthday. Personally, she’d rather clean out the sewers of both the Drop and the Square then go out with him of all people.

“You know, Mr. Sinclair,” she began, “now might not be the ideal time to ask Mrs. Parson out.” A sly gleam appeared for a moment in her eyes before continuing. “If Mr. Parson should suddenly return and find out that you were bothering his wife of all people, I highly doubt that he’ll be pleased.”

An annoyed look briefly passed over Sinclair’s face as he looked back to Alice. “What makes you think that Parson will be comin’ back?”

“What gives you reason to think he won’t?” Alice countered. A thoughtful look came over her face. “Unless you have knowledge of his whereabouts.” She pretended to be confused for a moment. “But how could you know where he is? It’s not like you’re in the business of making people just vanish into thin air.” The lack of sarcasm in her words only made it all the more sarcastic by the mocking look that Alice was giving him.

Sinclair’s confidence deflated like a popped pufferfish. He gave Gloria a weak smile. “Perhaps some other time, Gloria.” As he passed by Alice, he whispered, “Watch it kid. You wouldn’t want Sharpe to lose her job.” Alice glared fiercely at his retreating back as he headed back to the lobby.

Once he was out of earshot, Gloria burst out. “Thank you so much, Alice! He’s been doing that since I moved in the Deluxe. It’s been driving me crazy!” Anger suddenly flared up in Gloria’s face. “If that awful Sinclair’s done something to Harold, I’m going to-.”

“I already know who’s taken your husband, Mrs. Parson,” Alice interrupted. “Andrew Ryan. As much as the well-off all like to deny it, everyone knows he’s the one responsible for the disappearances. They’re just too afraid or too comfortable with their own place to speak out against him.”

Harold Parson used to run a bookstore before he disappeared. Alice had been to it a couple times when it was still operating and she could figure out why: Mr. Parson had included Lamb’s “Metamorphosis and Unity” along with a number of similarly themed and worded books in his inventory. It seemed that Ryan believed in the freedom to choose one’s own beliefs and philosophy, except when those tenets one chose deviated from Ryan’s own philosophy. She hadn’t met Mr. Parson enough to decide her opinion on him, but she had liked his store and she pitied his wife and young son.

Gloria looked defeated at her words. She turned and quietly walked back into her apartment. About to close the door, she looked back at Alice. “Billy’s excited to be spending Christmas with you and Ms. Sharpe, Alice. She’s very sweet, by the way.”
Alice smiled at her. “Thank you, Mrs. Parson. Grace and Eleanor will be joining us as well.”

Mrs. Parson smiled at that. “It’ll be nice for Billy to be around Eleanor. That fascination of his with those Little Sisters worries me.” Alice was silent as the Parson’s door, the entrance to Apartment 213, closed shut behind its resident.

The Little Sisters had been steadily increasing in number. Alice had heard people discussing the disappearances of the orphan girls off the street ever since the Fontaine’s orphanages were closed down. She couldn’t believe that they weren’t making the connection between the missing girls and the new Little Sisters, all in rows like grotesque factory-made dolls with their pinafore dresses and made-up faces.

Alice winced at the comparison she had just made in her mind. They weren’t truly like dolls, the Little Sisters. They still acted somewhat like little girls; it was just that they weren’t. Suchong and Tenenbaum had turned them into the sad creatures they were today with Bumby’s conditioning. Only he had intended for her to become a lifeless doll with no sense of reality. Whatever reality they lived in, at least it was better than none.

Alice had managed to save those ten little girls from suffering that fate, but whenever she saw a group of Little Sisters being instructed in how to act, she couldn’t help but feel that she hadn’t truly made a difference. True, she couldn’t really take anymore to Aster, but deep down, she couldn’t help but think that if only she had found a way, they wouldn’t be the way they were. If only she had done something sooner.

Aster had his hands full with the children currently in his care. Alice visited whenever she could, and she could tell that Aster was definitely out of his comfort zone. He was adapting though, and she could tell that deep down under that gruff and surly exterior, he was a natural with “ankle-biters”. When she had asked him if there was anything she could do for Christmas for them, he had told her that he already had an old friend on it. Apparently, he had reestablished contact with some friends of his since she had found him. She only hoped that they could be trusted.

A few days after the “Rapture Rescue”, as Aster called it, Alice had helped Nanny move into her apartment. To keep rent from going up, Nan had applied for a job as one of the Deluxe’s housekeepers. Basically, she worked for free so that the rent didn’t go up. Having Nanny move in with her just in time for Thanksgiving, had been more than worth it.

Unfortunately, right after Thanksgiving the banks had all crashed. The value of the Rapture Dollar had declined exponentially. The Limbo had to be shut down and both Alice and Grace had been laid off. Alice had taken up several small jobs around the Drop to keep paying for the rent; her meager salary was stretched so much that she had only been able to buy one upgrade for Old Man Winter (an area effect to freeze multiple enemies) and one for Possession (people could now come under her control). Most of her money went into paying her and Nanny’s own expenses and into helping Grace. The older woman hadn’t been able to find any work and was using what little savings she had into taking care of Eleanor.

Entering her apartment, Alice looked around for her old caretaker. ‘Must be cleaning up some part of this one-structure slum. She’s the only employee here that actually cares for how this hovel looks.’ She set down the groceries she had just bought and began to prepare dinner.

“Fish again, Alice? I have no inkling what was in that ‘meat’ last time, but it certainly was from no animal I’ve ever sampled.”

Alice had long gotten used to Cheshire’s appearances and disappearances, the intervals of which varied from hours to days. At least he had the sense to avoid visiting whenever Nanny was around.
One good look at Cheshire and Alice was sure the older woman would suffer a heart attack, or something else equally crippling or life-threatening.

“I’m pretty sure it was the leftover pieces of a cow that no one would eat if they knew what it was.” At his look of disgust, she added, “I’m not swimming in the seaweed, Cat, so if you’re going to criticize my foodstuffs, why not make yourself useful and catch some Wonderland fish for me?”

Cheshire rolled his eyes as he used his claws to cut open a can, revealing the mixture of small, whole fish and grease inside. “I doubt that would work, as evidenced by your utter failure to bring anything else out of Wonderland. Also, I’m no fisherman; what I catch myself, I eat by myself.” He sniffed at the mixture and wrinkled his nose. “Thankfully, I never caught these.”

“As I would expect from you, Cat”, Alice smirked. “Now, you usually don’t appear unless I’m either brooding about myself and life, or if there’s some life-and-death matter at hand. Which is it?”

“Oh, it’s both.” Cheshire grinned. “That, and to reassure your insecure self that you have made a difference in the cruel world, even if it’s just for the short term.”

Alice poured some water into a pan and set it on the stove to boil. She got out a cutting board and summoned her Vorpal Blade, using it as an ordinary kitchen blade. “I’m listening.”

Cheshire shook his head at the use of the Blade. “That is the most insulting thing you can do to that weapon, Alice.” When she ignored him, he sighed. “Whenever you ask yourself ‘how could things be better if I had done something?’ stop, and instead ask ‘how could they be worse if I hadn’t done anything, or if I had instead taken the quick and dark path?’ As I’ve said before, she who saves a single soul, saves the universe. Your father taught you the inverse, did he not?”

“‘Whoever destroys a soul, destroys the world.’ Yes, I remember, Cat.” When she didn’t get a reply, Alice looked up to behold nothing up an opened sardine can.

“Typical Cat.”

An idea came to Alice’s mind and she quickly summoned him back. Judging by the way his ears were laid across the back of his head, he wasn’t pleased. “Yes, Alice?”

“Cat, I have an errand for you that I believe you’ll enjoy immensely.” The smirk on her face intrigued him.

“Now I’m the one listening.” Alice leaned forward and Cheshire inclined his head towards her to catch her whispers, His tail began lashing in a blatant display of pleasure as his grin widened and his eyes somehow brightened. “That is a task I will relish in undertaking,” he winked before vanishing.

A few minutes later, a shout sounded through the Deluxe, followed quickly by a gunshot. Alice smiled in glee. If Sinclair was still in the lobby, Cheshire was to appear right in front of him and ask if he had any cream with him. He had reacted the very way that Alice had hoped he would. Now, if only she could orchestrate a face-to-face meeting between Ryan and Cheshire. That would be entertaining.

She went back to slicing vegetables. Her mind wandered to Cheshire’s advice. Simply ask how the world would be different for the worse? Well, imagining it would be easy enough.

*A world where I chose to take Radcliffe’s mindset and let the orphans of Houndsditch out into the street. A world where each of those little girls became a Little Sister. A world where those little*
boys either died of starvation or exposure to the elements, or where one of Bumby’s customers found them. Such a world…'

Alice’s mind dipped into this other world. She saw herself walk away from Houndsditch without a care in the world as they were thrown out. The little girls’ eyes turned grey and lifeless as their voices took on the strange two-toned sounds of the Little Sisters. The boys turned thin, dying of hunger and cold, or they cowered underneath the leering grins of Rapture’s perverts and pedophiles. Add in the real world’s own tragedies and she found herself in a true nightmare, because if it was real, there would be no waking from it.

Alice shook her head and hurriedly dumped the vegetables into the now-boiling water. Cheshire’s advice could be helpful, once one was able to decipher it. That imaginary world…she was going to do her best to forget it so that it didn’t infect her Wonderland. That was the last thing she needed. The point was, she had saved those who were in her power to be saved and that was what mattered.

‘The next time cream goes on sale, I’ll be sure to procure some for Cat. If only I could obtain get the genuine article and not some watered-down mixture.’

She jumped when someone began banging on the door. She hurriedly dried her hands as the blows began to intensify, rattling the door in its frame. “One moment, Nanny! I’m not in danger of expiring at any moment,” she called out as she almost ran to the poor door and yanked it open, making it squeal as it rolled into the wall. “Grace?”

Grace Holloway stood in her doorway breathing hard and rubbing her right hand, which had apparently been her knocking hand. She was breathing hard, and not just from almost breaking down 211’s door. Below her sweat-soaked hair which clung to her forehead like wet seaweed, Alice could see her eyes, filled with fear, despair, and desperation. She was trembling all over, like she had ran all the way from her apartment to Alice’s. Her labored breathing finally brought Alice’s attention to the woman herself.

“Grace!” she cried out, clasping the older woman’s hands in her own. “What’s wrong?”

“Is Eleanor here?” Grace finally gasped out.

Alice shook her head in mounting horror. “No, I haven’t seen her since yesterday. Is she….” This couldn’t be happening.

“She’s gone Alice!” Grace’s eyes began to overflow with tears. “Baby Eleanor is gone and I can’t find her anywhere!”

It was happening.

BS +AMA =WS

December 24, 1958

Early evening in the Drop usually found people walking back home after the day, or what passed for home in Rapture’s worst slum. Only a few people walked against the sparse traffic towards their workplace or the nearest liquor store. Among those headed home after some errands was Grace and Alice. They were walking together in silence, heads down as they separately contemplated the hole that Eleanor’s disappearance had left in their lives.

In the weeks since Eleanor’s disappearance, most of the Drop’s population had turned out to search for the little girl, but to no avail. “Father” Simon Wales led large prayer gatherings for the “Lamb”. Alice searched everywhere for her: The Drop, Dionysus Park, Ryan Amusements, Arcadia, Fort
Frolic, as well as every Little Wonders Emporium. She even risked being identified when she went back to Suchong’s to see if he had gotten ahold of Eleanor. She was nowhere to be found.

Alice became so desperate that she even went to Aster for help. He told her that he would search all of the cave system and every location in Rapture that it opened out on. He also told her that he would get his friends on the case. Alice wondered where in Rapture such good people existed; she just prayed that Aster knew what he was doing.

As the days turned into weeks, more and more people quit the search until it was just Alice, Nanny, Grace, and a neighborhood boy named Amir. And the two older ladies didn’t possess the energy that Alice did, so now it was just her and Amir, a nineteen-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy searching an underwater city of twenty thousand people for one little girl.

It wasn’t just the energy of youth that drove Alice; she had come to like and even care for Eleanor. She reminded Alice of herself at that age. She was an intelligent, thoughtful, lonely little girl out to face the world. That, and Alice wanted to take her mind off just how angry she was with Rapture and with herself. Rapture, because it seemed that it was out to snuff out all innocence and good in the world. Herself, because she hadn’t considered it a possibility that something like this would happen. She just knew that the Little Sisters project was involved, she could smell it. And after she had done to protect the Houndsditch girls from Suchong, Alexander, and the rest, she couldn’t have stopped Eleanor from being taken.

She had told Grace about the man who had been spying on her apartment and she had received a name: “Stanley Poole”. Seeing his picture in the Rapture Tribune confirmed it. Alice had gone to the Tribune’s office to discover that Poole hadn’t been heard from in weeks. Presley revealed that Poole was currently in Dionysus Park. All of Alice’s attempts to find him and whip some answers out of him were met with bitter failure. Besides, most of Lamb’s followers said that he couldn’t possibly have done it; he was a member of the Rapture Family.

Alice wisely kept her opinions of the “Family” to herself. None of them were flattering. Besides, she had heard of the wild ADAM, alcohol, and drug-fueled parties that Poole had thrown in Dr. Lamb’s absence, practically turning quite a few of Lamb’s followers into animals. She remembered the look on Eleanor’s face whenever Poole was mentioned, like she suspected something about the man.

Through all this, Amir followed her. He was an Arabic boy, around the same age as Eleanor. From what she had been able to put together, he was perhaps the only friend that Eleanor had that was her own age. He had shown himself to be smart concerning both the streets and hidey-holes of Rapture, and about many subjects as well. One time, he had brought this book with him, told her that it was Eleanor’s favorite. It was a rare book from the surface that had information on many of the country’s that dotted the earth’s continents. He had read the entire section on Great Britain to her, describing the island nation where she had been born.

Alice couldn’t help but like the sharp-eyed boy. She hoped for his sake that Ryan or one of his lackeys never learned about the book. It was practically contraband down in Rapture.

She had spent the last few days preparing for Christmas whenever she wasn’t out looking for Eleanor. She could remember the few Christmases she had spent with her family when she was a little girl. Thanks to her decade long catatonia in Rutledge, her early childhood memories were clearer to her than they were to most. Since she had been a year old when the Blitz started, their Christmases had never been “fancy”, even on the salary of an Oxford dean. The simple affairs had been happy ones, though, and one of Alice’s fondest memories was of her father picking her up so she could put the angel on their Christmas tree. That had been on their last Christmas on the
surface. She had received her rabbit, her favorite childhood toy, on her first Christmas in Rapture.

The gifts she had saved for and bought weren’t expensive, but they were perfect for the people she was buying them for. A wood-carving knife for Aster to pass the hours (when he got them), a knitting set for Nanny, who had always loved to knit, a song book for Grace (Alice had glued a piece of paper over “Rise, Rapture, Rise”), a book for Gloria, a stuffed octopus for Billy, and finally, a stuffed rabbit for when Eleanor came back. It was practically the same as her own rabbit, though that was most likely because she had bought it and the octopus from the same place where her father had bought hers: “The Workshop” in Market Street. It was probably one of the most popular toy stores in Rapture.

Looking around the Drop, Alice knew that the Christmas gathering at Apartment 211 tomorrow would clash with the mood of its location. The rest of Rapture was preparing to celebrate the holiday. Posters advertising “A secular Christmas is a merry Christmas” were up everywhere (more of Ryan’s propaganda), shoppers flocked to the stores to purchase gifts for friends and loved ones, and Andrew Ryan’s canned speeches about “enjoying the fruit of your labor” sounded over the PA systems. Even Apollo Square had a large decorated tree right in its center (the one at Olympus Heights dwarfed it, of course, and both were plastic). No amount of “holiday cheer” would ever brighten the Drop, or its downtrodden inhabitants.

‘I shouldn’t bother Grace about coming tomorrow. She has the most excellent reason to avoid celebrating, but still. Ignoring her pain could possibly make it worse.’

“Grace,” she began quietly, “were you still planning on coming to my apartment for Christmas tomorrow? If you changed your mind, I understand.”

For a few moments, Alice wondered if Grace had even heard her or if she was being ignored. Grace finally looked up from her steady plodding. Her sorrowful eyes said everything, but she spoke anyway. “I’m sorry, Alice, but celebrating just don’t seem right to me now. Dr. Lamb trusted me with her only child, and I failed her. If I ever find that baby snatcher….” Grace’s face hardened for a moment before sorrow overtook it again. “I pray Eleanor is alright.”

“As do I,” Alice sighed.

Alice was not a religious person (she had never really given it much thought), but in the wake of Eleanor’s kidnapping, she began praying, even if it was to comfort herself with the thought that Someone was hearing them and looking out for the Eleanor.

“I’ll present you with your gift after my shift then,” she added. “It’s not much, but I hope it helps.”

Grace gave her a half-hearted smile. “For that, I thank you kindly.” They were approaching the Limbo when she spoke again. “Nan told me about that stuffed bunny you got for baby Eleanor.”

‘Note to self: Find a better hiding place than under my bed. Good thing I got rid of those plasmid bottles.’

Alice hoped that she hadn’t offended Grace through the gesture. “I…I just thought that when we learn Eleanor’s location and take her back, it wouldn’t be fair to her if she missed Christmas in its entirety.”

Grace just shook her head sadly. “Alice, I wish I had your hopeful spirit. I just don’t know anymore.”

For that, Alice had no answer, and the silence returned for the rest of their walk. They were passing
the stairs that led down to the Limbo, their former workplace, when it happened.

“I smell an angel, Daddy. This way!”

The voice didn’t sound right, but both Alice and Grace recognized the child’s warble behind it, and the child it belonged to. They shot around to see Eleanor running around a corner, grasping something large in one hand. Grace gasped out in joy, and began running towards Eleanor as quickly as she could, bumping into indignant passersby without a thought except to reach the little girl. Alice followed behind, hesitant. Something wasn’t right with Eleanor, but at this distance, she didn’t know what.

“Eleanor child, where have you been?” Grace dropped to her knees and pulled the un-expecting Eleanor from a run into a hug, unaware of her grocery bags hitting the ground and splitting open. “I was worried sick.” Alice could practically hear the joyful tears beginning.

“Let go!” Eleanor screamed in a voice that sent chills down Alice’s spine. “Daddy, help me! There’s a bad lady here!”

“Girl,” Grace pulled out of the hug and held Eleanor's shoulders in place just as Alice came to halt behind her. “What’s the matter with-.” Her eyes widened as Grace finally got a good look at her ward. “You?” she finished in a whisper.

Alice’s heart almost skipped a beat when she saw Eleanor. The girl’s pale skin now had a grey shade to it, the dress she was wearing was one of those horrid little things the Little Sisters wore, and her eyes were dull grey with a yellowish light beginning to glow forth. Her voice was a two-toned inflection that no normal child or even adult should be able to make, and the object she held was a huge syringe made of rubbish and spare parts. Alice’s stomach churned as her brain made the horrific connection between the intelligent little girl she knew and this…creature. Eleanor Lamb had become a Little Sister.

Grace seemed to be in shock as she held the screaming Little Sister. Alice’s own stupor was suddenly broken by the sound of booming footsteps and a familiar roar. People yelled and jumped out of the way as a large form barreled past them and stopped right in front of Grace and herself. Alice had to crane her head to the meet the gaze of the seven-foot-tall Big Daddy.

It was an Alpha Series, the newest model of Big Daddy. Alice had heard of them; they were supposed to be some sort of “Protector”, though she hadn’t heard what it was they were supposed to protect. Judging from their suits, they weren’t as altered as the Bouncers and the Rosies, though that could easily be a mistake. On its gloves, Alice spied the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet, Delta. The yellow porthole on its helmet turned a blazing red as its gaze fell on Eleanor and Grace, and a growl boomed out of whatever passed for its mouth.

Alice’s eyes flickered to the huge drill on its right arm before widening in horror.

“Grace, watch out!” she cried. Grace snapped out of her trance just in time to see the Big Daddy’s arm flying towards her face. Thankfully, he opted for backhanding her instead of using the drill. Unfortunately, he was far stronger than the ordinary man and Grace was sent sprawling to the ground, cupping her mouth and groaning.

Alice ran to her side and knelt by her in concern. Propping Grace up, she could see the streams of blood dribbling out of Grace's mouth and nose, staining both her clothes and the ground. A massive bruise was forming over the left side of her face, and her eye was beginning to swell shut. She was groaning in pain, unable to talk. Judging by the way she was gingerly holding her jaw, it could be broken, along with several other facial bones. “Grace, keep as still as possible. I’ll make sure you
receive medical attention,” Alice tried to comfort her, her own mind awhirl with what just happened. Grace just moaned in reply before a tooth fell out of her mouth.

“Bad lady! Next time, Daddy will x your eyes!”

Alice glanced over at Eleanor, who was now atop the Big Daddy’s shoulder, a grotesque imitation of the pose her own father had taken in lifting her to reach of the top of that Christmas tree.

“Daddy, there’s an angel close by.” The Alpha began to lumber forward, the traffic ahead either moving to make a path or to stop completely. Those who had witnessed the attack fled the scene, afraid of the Big Daddy’s temper and greater strength. Those who came onto the scene looked down at Grace before hurrying on. A few of them even grabbed some of her groceries from off the ground, taking advantage of the injured woman. Alice glared at them as she gently lifted Grace to her feet and began guiding her to the nearest doctor, pausing only to retrieve the singer’s cap, dropped in the commotion, and the errant tooth.

As soon as the white-coated (or rather grey-coated) man had Grace sitting down and was carefully studying her jaw and face with a First Aid Kit from a Circus of Values, Alice raced back to the scene and began to track down the Big Daddy. It wasn’t that hard. People always gawked in the direction a Big Daddy went after one soon passed, some in curiosity, others in disgust and trepidation. It helped that his footsteps were so heavy and that he kept uttering one of those distinctive, whale-like groans every few minutes.

The scene kept repeating in Alice’s head as she ran through Skid Row’s street. Eleanor’s bizarre grey-yellow eyes, staring at Grace in unrecognition. Her warped voice crying for her “Daddy”. The brute’s hand connecting with Grace’s jaw, throwing her to the ground. Eleanor’s sickening delight at the spectacle. Alice had suspected that something like this had happened to the young girl, but to see it and have it confirmed…it was too awful for words.

She finally caught up to them, right in front of Houndsditch of all places. When she came close enough to see what they were doing, she froze in confusion and apprehension at the sight unfolding in front of her. The Alpha was apparently guarding Eleanor, standing over her with that gigantic drill of his, his yellow porthole glaring out at anyone who got too close, and somehow managing to make a groan sound threatening. Eleanor was happily jabbing that syringe of hers into a corpse, humming the whole time. The word “disturbing” didn’t quite give the morbid picture service.

Every once in a while, a fight or domestic dispute would break out and a body would wind up in the streets for hours before being removed. ADAM was usually the cause of such disputes. Even from the safe distance that Alice put between herself and the pair, she could see the massive tumors and scars of ADAM sickness on the body.

Eleanor drew her syringe out of the corpse and studied it in case she missed anything. Alice saw the large amount of blood in the syringe’s container right before she realized something. The clear part of the makeshift syringe that held the blood was in fact a repurposed baby bottle, with the rubber nipple still attached. She started to wonder why they were sending out Little Sisters to take blood from dead bodies using such an odd syringe.

‘Seems to serve almost the same purpose as the White Knight’s lunchbox. Turn the syringe to the wrong side, and the blood will spill out. What is she doing now?’

Eleanor, apparently satisfied that she had stabbed the corpse enough times, held up the syringe up, put the bottle’s nipple to her mouth, reared back her head, and downed the ADAM-laden blood in a few gulps. Letting out a held-in breath in pleasure, she turned back to the Alpha. “All done, Daddy. Time for beddy-bye.”
Alice’s mouth dropped open in disgust. Her brain momentarily froze, trying to absorb the atrocity she had just witnessed. Of all the horrors that populated the real world, this particular one came the closest to rivaling the crazed and twisted things that had lived and existed in the traumatized imagination of her youth.

‘This, this is monstrous! They somehow managed to take the Little Sisters project and make it even more despicable. How is it humanly possible that even here in Rapture, depravity is fertile enough to breed and give birth to such wretched practices and creatures?!’

Alice leaned against a convenient wall in an attempt to calm her racing mind and watched as Eleanor began to lead her “Protector” away. He leaned down and picked her up, placing her gently on his shoulder while she giggled the whole way. Alice was struck with a recollection of her own beloved father doing the same for her (though she had never much of a giggler). This, this, mockery of the bond between father and daughter was far too much to ignore.

She took her Hand Cannon out of her bag and sighted it at the Alpha’s back, brow furrowed in concentration and mouth set in a sneer. For a few moments she stood there, the Alpha far too big to possibly miss at this range. Then she quietly put it back down.

Alice’s mind revolted at the thought of letting this monster, this taskmaster, walk away with Eleanor in tow, but what could she really do? She wasn’t sure if any of her plasmids besides Shock Jockey could be used offensively against the cyborg, and her Hand Cannon was far more effective against a human being than something of that size and stamina. Even if she somehow managed to kill the rumbling creature with her handful of plasmids and gun, what was she supposed to do with Eleanor now?

As far as the girl was concerned, Grace was a “bad lady” and she wouldn’t want to come home. Since she was a Little Sister now, and it was Ryan Industries that made the Big Daddies, there would most certainly be legal ramifications that would affect her and those close to her. The rumors of the “interrogation methods” used by Ryan’s constables on Fontaine’s smugglers were too brutal to be ignored. That was not the method through which she wanted herself or Nanny to expire.

Alice bowed her head, turned around, and very quietly began to walk back to Grace. She glanced back at Houndsditch, which was slowly degrading along with its neighbors, reflecting on how it so fitting that she discover the Sisters’ newest function in front of Bumby’s wretched training house. This couldn’t possibly get any worse.

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\text{BS+AMA=WS}
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\text{December 25, 1958}

‘Christmas this year is, as the Yanks say, a “bust”. I wonder how they coined that phrase; it’s perfect for this whole situation.’

After the Big Daddy’s assault on Grace, what little “Christmas Spirit” Alice had (she could remember her mother using that term) withered and nearly vanished. The only reason she hadn’t cancelled the Christmas gathering altogether was that she didn’t wish to disappoint Billy, who, in her opinion, truly needed a decent Christmas in the wake of his father’s disappearance.

In a few hours, most of the Drop and the Family knew what had become of Eleanor Lamb. What they didn’t know, or at least weren’t sure of, was what she had been doing there in the first place with her Protector and that huge syringe. After that Alpha had so easily broken Grace’s jaw, most people had gotten out of the way when they saw him coming, so Alice had been perhaps the only one to witness that horrendous scene at Houndsditch. She had told no one about it, as though it
wouldn’t be so horrible if she was the one of the few who knew of the Little Sister’s new function.

When she had gone to give Aster his gift and to check up on the children there earlier, he had asked if anything was wrong. When it came to the people he cared for, he was truly perceptive. She had told him about Eleanor’s return as a Little Sister, but nothing more. She didn’t know if he suspected that she had only told him part of the story. He had been disgusted by the mere fact that there were more Little Sisters than ever; she didn’t want to make it worse by informing him of their occupation. The only thing that had made her feel better was the sight of the Houndsditch girls examining one of Aster’s tomato plants.

‘I wasn’t able to save Eleanor, but at least I protected them from suffering such a grisly fate. If only I had known. I didn’t ignore anything this time; I just didn’t think that she was in any peril. Poole, you’d better pray the Family learns your role in her transformation before I find you, I can be infinitely more terrifying than any mob.’

The scene in what passed for her living room was an awkward one. Grace, who had changed her mind about coming for some odd reason, sat in a chair with a bandaged jaw and a hollow look in the eye that wasn’t swollen shut, her new cane laying in her lap. Nanny bustled around the apartment in an attempt to keep herself busy, trying to put on a smile for the rest of them and failing miserably. Gloria stood by Billy’s chair, looking both afraid and guiltily relieved at the same time (Billy was in no danger of being kidnapped since there were no Little Brothers), while the little boy sat on a chair, munching on a cookie and playing with his new toy octopus, his usual happy chatter subdued by the atmosphere. Alice was currently leaning against the kitchen counter, surveying her apartment and occasionally sipping from a glass of what was supposed to be eggnog (very questionable down in Rapture).

The Christmas tradition of gift-giving had started as soon as Alice had gotten back from Aster’s and concluded about an hour later. In the half-hour since then, they had been trying and failing to enjoy themselves. Well, most of them; Grace had sat down in that chair as soon as she had arrived, mumbled a “hello” and “thank you” as well as she could through her wrappings, and began staring forlornly into space. Only Billy, whose innocence prevented him from understanding, had attempted to engage her. He had been disappointed from that until he saw Alice’s gift to him.

Her gifts from the others were simple and modest, but well-received. A ring with an Omega symbol that matched her pendant from Nanny. A very small bottle of perfume from Gloria. From Billy, a puzzle box, the contents of which rolled around inside (that had piqued her interest). Grace’s gift had been both the strangest and the most sorrowful: Eleanor’s Hack Tool. Of all those present, only Alice knew its significance and its meaning; Grace had lost hope that Eleanor would ever return as the intelligent, curious little girl who hacked her mother’s security systems to sneak out. And she couldn’t blame the poor woman.

Alice’s gift from Aster was delivered by a beaming Nan, who had peeked before giving the large box to her. It was one of the most lavish and beautiful outfits she had ever seen in her life. A red and black, silk satin brocade cocktail dress, with metallic gold accents and a jeweled neckline. A pair of black evening gloves and a pair of red kitten heels completed the outfit, and a brass hairpin with a red heart on it added a Wonderland flair to it. Alice found herself looking at what could be a real world version of the Red Suit, the dress she had changed into the last time she had visited Queensland and the Red Kingdom. As the others had crowded around it in admiration, she had wondered just how much cash Aster had in the Warren in order to afford it. This was definitely something she was going to save for the most special of occasions, and something she was going to thank him profusely for the next time she saw the Aussie.

“Mommy, is it true that Eleanor is one of those little girls with the yellow eyes?” Billy suddenly
piped up in his haltering, almost-accented young voice. From what little Alice knew of Mr. Parson, Billy had heard two different languages in his short life and he was experiencing difficulty in separating the two. She noticed Grace had taken a sudden interest with what Billy was saying.

Gloria was obviously flustered. “Well dear, I’m not really sure…” she trailed off, “I think we should talk about this later, alright?”

“She is,” Alice broke in, surprising everyone. “She’s a Little Sister now,” she continued bitterly, taking a sip from her eggnog. ‘And there was nothing I, or anybody else, could do about it. Damn you, Poole.’

Billy’s face brightened. “Does she have one of the big, suited men with her?”

Now that the relationship between the Big Daddies and the Little Sisters was practically public knowledge, stories of other sightings of the bizarre pairing were springing up all over. Alpha Series were paired to a single Little Sister and escorted them around Rapture on what Alice now knew to be a ghastly errand. She honestly needed to start paying attention to gossip; most of it was rubbish, but at least she would have some idea of new developments in Rapture.

When she nodded and replied to the positive, Billy’s face lit up. “The big, suited men look like comic-book superheros, don’t they?”

Alice’s jaw clenched at that thought. ‘They’re not heroes, they’re monsters, made to keep the Little Sisters from being rescued by the ones that truly love them,’ she wanted to scream at Billy. At Grace’s sharp intake of breath, Alice looked over at her and was able to spy an anger she had never witnessed before blazing forth from the singer’s eyes, directed at the unsuspecting boy, before disappearing behind an even deeper sadness. How would the little boy with the toy octopus and stuttering voice learn what kind of world he lived in, how wretched the city of Rapture truly was as it devoured the innocence and energy of youth, and warped the relationship between father and child?

While Gloria told her son that they would talk about this later, Alice realized just how close she had come to breaking the glass she was holding, she had been so upset. One of Ryan’s sales pitches for Rapture was that it would be an excellent place for children to grow up, a place where only the parents would have any say in the growth and development of their children.

‘What of the Little Sisters, Mr. Ryan?’ Alice roared in her mind. ‘Even if their parents are gone from this world, what right have you to turn them into the abominations that your rival helped create? What right to bond them to those lumbering brutes in a hideous parody of the father-daughter relationship? What of the children who are going to mature in this place only to recognize how much of a hell it is?’

Alice drained the rest of her eggnog and began cleaning the glass in the sink before Nanny could do it for her. It was a wonder the glass didn’t break under the vigorous scrubbing she was giving it. This was pathetic: putting the frustration she felt into cleaning a glass? Maybe she should tell Nanny and the others about her immunity to ADAM withdrawal. If they could all pitch in and help her acquire more plasmids and gene tonics, perhaps she could finally make progress on ending the Little Sister tragedy before it could get worse, if that was somehow even possible.

Someone chose that exact moment to begin banging on the door. Unlike when Grace had been knocking on the door a few weeks ago, these blows weren’t as rapid, but the strength behind them threatened to bring the poor thing down. Nanny beat her to the door this time. She pushed the button just as someone forced it open, nearly breaking the rollers. “What’s the idea, nearly breakin’ the door dow—Bunnymund?”
Alice was suddenly at Nanny’s side, letting out a gasp at the sight of Aster. He was pale and haggard, his mouth open in an endless pant. His clothes were ripped, torn, and even burned in a few places. The rips in his clothes revealed bruises and cuts. The most alarming part was the makeshift, blood-soaked bandage that covered his left shoulder. Almost slumping over, he looked up at Alice and managed a smile, almost delirious from blood loss. “Hey Half Pint,” he began, “I hope I’m not interruptin’ anythin’.” He tried to take a step only to pitch forward on his face in front of a staring Nanny and Alice.

His fall broke them out of their stupor. That and Gloria’s screech.

“Aster!” Alice cried as she hurled herself by his side and began to prop him up (something she was starting to get good at). “What happened? Where are the children?” As she began to get him up, the bandage on his left shoulder partially fell off, revealing a large bullet wound which began bleeding profusely. Gloria screeched again.

“Alice.” Nanny was at Aster’s other side, helping her pick him up. “Let’s get some medicine and bandages on him and then you can ask questions without the possibility of him dropping dead.” That spurred Alice into action.

Billy stared at Aster as Alice and Nanny practically dragged him to the table. “What happened? Is he dying?”

That last question made Alice’s heart jump into her throat. Of all the things that could happen to her, losing either Nanny or Aster or, Heaven forbid, both of them was the absolute worst. A world without them would be a truly dark and lonely one.

Gloria hurriedly ushered Billy out of his seat. “Of course not honey, he’s just hurt,” she said, obviously trying not to panic. “Alice, Nan, thank you very much for the presents and for the good time, but I think it’s time we left.” She kept staring at Aster nervously.

“You’re welcome, and have a merry Christmas,” Nan replied as she and Alice lifted Aster and placed him on the kitchen table as carefully as they could.

Alice didn’t say anything as she desperately began to search the cabinets for a First Aid Kit. Right now, she had better things to do than to answer Gloria Parson’s farewell. Etiquette was the farthest thing from her mind.

“Merry Christmas,” Billy called out just as his mother pulled him out the door. Alice barely noticed as she finally located a First Aid Kit and brought it to the table. In her haste to get it open, she sent several bottles and bandages flying onto the floor. Nanny was about to pick them up when Grace suddenly appeared and began to help the other woman gather them up.

“Thank you,” Alice breathed as she took the cloth that Grace offered to her. Soaking it in alcohol, she began to wipe at the edges of Aster’s wound as gently as she could in her haste.

That brought Aster out of his dead faint. “Bloody..!” he began to yell before biting his tongue. “Any of you ladies know ‘ow to YOWCH!” Alice cringed in apology. “Know ‘ow to fish a bullet out of a fellow’s flesh?”

Grace looked up. “I can,” she managed to whisper out through her own bandages. She motioned towards Nan and Alice. “Give him something to bite. He’s gonna need it.”

Alice stuffed a dry washcloth between Aster’s jaws before taking up her position at Aster’s left side. Nanny took the right and they both prepared to hold Aster down. His eyes widened when
Grace pulled a pair of pliers out of the First Aid Kit. Alice could feel just his muscles tense and knew that he was fighting to stay put.

“Once that bullet’s out, wrap him real good,” Grace instructed as she brought the pliers closer to the wound. “He’s lost too much blood already.”

The next few minutes were full of Aster’s muffled screams, Alice and Nanny’s grunts as they struggled to hold him down, and the metallic clacking of Grace’s pliers. It finally ended with Grace holding up the bullet in triumph while Aster groaned on the table and Alice wiped a splatter of blood off her face before bandaging the wound.

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A few hours after the impromptu surgery and Grace’s departure, Alice was sitting in one of the cheap easy-chairs and waiting for Aster to wake up. After she and Nanny had finished bandaging him, he had fallen asleep on the ratty, cheap couch that took up what passed for their living room. Given how much blood he had lost, that wasn’t surprising. If it wasn’t for the tell-tale rising of his chest, Alice wouldn’t have been able to tell if he was dead or not, he was so pale. Good thing Rapture’s First Aid Kits were enhanced with special medicines and bandages; Aster would possibly be in a worse state than he was already if not for that.

Her mind was whirling with the questions she wanted answered. What had happened? Why had Aster been shot? Where were the children? Were they safe? Were a bunch of Ryan’s lapdogs about to break the door down and shoot the place up? Alice couldn’t help but jump at every little sound, expecting a hailstorm of bullets and plasmids at any moment. She had her Hand Cannon loaded in her hand and her EVE reserves at their maximum in preparation.

She could hear Nanny’s gentle snores coming out of her bedroom. After cleaning up the blood up from the carpet, the kitchen tile, and the table, Nanny had decided to go in for a nap. Before turning in, she told Alice that she wanted a full explanation when she awoke. Alice knew at this point that that was the least she owed her. She also decided that it was time to tell Nanny about the A-gene and her plasmids. If Nanny learned she was taking plasmids before she told her, that wouldn’t carry over well. At all.

“G’day, Half-Pint. Did I miss anythin’?” Alice nearly jumped five feet and turned to find Aster giving her a lop-sided, sleepy smile from his place on the couch. “Sorry if I cut your Christmas short.”

Alice was on her feet and standing in front of Aster in a flash. “What happened? Why were you shot? Where are the children? Who-.“

“Hold up Alice!” Aster held up both hands in a halting gesture, though he quickly dropped the left one while stifling a yelp. “I’ll explain as soon I’m awake. My brain still feels like I got cement in it.”

“My apologies,” Alice said quietly as she sat back down. She fidgeted as Aster rubbed his forehead before finally sitting up.

He got right to the point. “‘Bout half an hour after you left, a whole bunch of Ryan’s thugs suddenly came crashin’ down through the ceilin’, grabbin’ the girls, and puttin’ up a show with their guns and plasmids. I stabbed one of them with the knife you gave me, and that earned me the bullet in my shoulder. I managed to herd what kids I could into one of the longer tunnels before cuttin’ the Warren off from the rest of the system with explosives.”
“Explosives! Are you mad?” Alice exclaimed.

“I set ‘em up as a last resort,” Aster protested. “I didn’t want to lose that entire cave to Ryan. Right now, there’s sixty feet of rocks and dead thugs between the Warren and the rest of the cave. We can still use it to hide if we need it.”

Alice was afraid to ask the next question, but she needed to know. “Aster, how many…of the little girls…?”

Aster hung his head and stared at the ground for a long moment. “All of them,” he finally said.

“All?” Alice whispered, trembling. On the inside, her heart felt like it was shattering very slowly, the pieces falling one by one into oblivion.

“I was only able to get three of the boys out,” Aster went on. “I got them to another hideout of mine in the caves before I came ‘ere. All my medical stuff got roasted by some fire-slingin’ splicer.”

Alice was staring straight forward, unmoving. Her eyes held no emotion. On the inside….

‘I did everything I could. I saved them before Houndsditch was auctioned off. I took them to the safest place I knew of. And all I did was put one of the few friends I have left in mortal danger. To think, I actually believed I could accomplish the impossible, that I could protect innocence in Rapture.’

Alice was suddenly jolted back from her guilty musings by Aster.

“Alice, I’m so sorry. I tried everything I knew of.” Aster was hanging his head in shame. “I used my guns, my boomerangs, your present.” He gave a short laugh. "I even killed one drongo with my Tai Chi skills, and I still failed those kids in the end. They’ll let the boys go, but the girls…oh crikey, what have I done?” He clutched his head in his hands. “What have I done?”

“You nearly died for those children, Aster, that’s what you’ve done,” Alice said vehemently.

“The question is, what have I done?” She was standing now, and gesturing to herself. “I put those children, and you, in danger by escorting them to your home. I honestly believed that I was taking them to a safe place, when all I did was force Ryan’s hand. You could have been killed in that raid, and they could have been killed too.” She forced herself to meet his gaze. “If only I had stayed a little longer, I could have helped you save them, Aster.”

“What? You?” Aster let out another barking laugh. “Alice, you look much healthier than I imagined you would after leaving Rutledge, but I doubt you could go toe-to-toe with Ryan’s wankers, even with that cannon of yours.”

Alice winced a little as she remembered how weak, frail, and bedraggled she had been just before her fight against the Infernal Train and the Dollmaker, just before the SportBoost she had taken. Aster was closer to the truth than he knew. Maybe it was time that he learned the truth.

“Actually Aster, I haven’t been entirely truthful to you and Nanny. That is,” she faltered, “I haven’t informed you of the whole truth, just parts of it.” She held up her right hand and some crystal shards, arcing with electricity, emerged from her skin. “I’ve been splicing.”

“What!??” Aster tried to get up, only to lie back down with a pained yelp. “Splicing! Alice, do you ‘ave any idea how dangerous that is? I don’t care what those dang advertisements say, there’s no such thing as ‘responsible splicing’. Once you’ve started, you only stop when you’re dead.” He
was starting to yell now.

“You think I’m that ignorant, that I don’t know that?” Alice countered in raised tone, the electricity in her hand began to arc wildly and in more erratic patterns. “If I wasn’t immune to ADAM withdrawal, I wouldn’t be splicing at all!”

“Then why are you—wait.” Aster's eyes began to pop out of their sockets as Alice's words started to compute. “Did you just say, ‘immune to ADAM withdrawal’?” he said slowly.

“That I did,” Alice replied rather primly. The Shock Jockey shards disappeared back into her hands.

“But, but, how?” he began to stutter, staring at her in confusion.

Alice held up a hand to quiet him. “I’ll explain to both you and Nanny when she rises from her nap. Until then, I’ll be in my own bedchamber. Try to get some more rest, Aster.”

Aster gave her the “raised-eyebrow” before nodding reluctantly. “Alright, though I don’t think she’ll be happy to ‘ear you’ve been splicin’,” He mumbled as he lay back down.

Alice was silent as her door closed behind her and she sat down on her bed, her gift from Aster taking up most of the bed. The photograph of her family stared down at her from the wall. Her father’s wise eyes, her mother’s strict but kindly face, Lizzie’s wavy, chestnut brown hair, and her younger self when she was still a little, imaginative girl sheltered from the horrors of the world. Whether they looked upon her now with sympathy or accusation, she didn’t know.

Her room was better than the one at Houndsditch, but only just. It was bigger for a start (Nanny’s was only a little larger), and the bed didn’t squeak like the Dormouse whenever she sat upon it. The lights didn’t flicker (at least not as much), and she had more closet space (not that she really needed or used it). The wallpaper’s designs caught her attention at night with their twisting patterns, fueling her train of thought as she followed their ordered chaos. Her favorite feature was the porthole window that looked out onto the sea, filling the room’s interior with the blue glow of sunlight passing through ocean water. The only real attempts at personalizing the space was the Liddell Family photograph on the wall along with her drawings from the asylum and from Houndsditch. She had added some higher quality ones since she had left Houndsditch.

She reached under the bed and pulled out the rabbit she had meant for Eleanor. Except in age, it was much like her own bunny: Soft, gray “fur”, little blue vest, two button eyes (matching in this case) that reflected the light. It had caught her eye immediately at the Workshop. At Rutledge, Dr. Wilson had theorized that her old bunny had a hand in bringing her back from madness. Alice couldn’t help but wonder if she had associated the rabbits with the concept of returning, and that was why she had bought the thing, to bring Eleanor back home. Well, Eleanor had returned, as one of Tenenbaum’s little Frankensteins with a hulking brute for a “father”, and now, all the girls from Houndsditch were going to suffer the same fate as Susan and Eleanor. The atrocity of the Little Sisters was continuing despite her best efforts.

Alice stared into its black button eyes and allowed herself to remember the little girls as they had been. Eleanor congratulating her on her first successful hack, Susan singing a lullaby to a bedraggled doll, each and every single one of the Houndsditch girl doing or saying something that had imprinted them indelibly on her mind. Some of the Houndsditch orphans had been absolute brats or worse to her, but they didn’t deserve whatever treatment they were currently receiving at the hands of Ryan’s men. The girls would be made into Little Sisters, each with a Big Daddy, and the boys would be abandoned somewhere in the city. All her fears were coming true.
Alice bowed her head and closed her eyes. A small stream of tears began to slowly make its way down her face, something that hadn’t happened since the day after Bumby’s death. Some of them splashed down onto Eleanor’s rabbit, wetting its cloth face and button eyes.

Alice wiped her eyes and set Eleanor’s rabbit next to her own before standing and looking out of her window to the aquatic environment outside. A few jellyfish floated by the window before a school of fish passed by. Alice jumped when a shark came out of nowhere and bit one of the silvery fish in half, sending the rest into the a panicked flight in its blood-tinged wake.

‘Ryan chose a very appropriate foundation on which to build Rapture,’ she thought bitterly. ‘Where else does nature imitate the ethos of the great trampling the small so utterly than the bottom of the ocean?’

A realization suddenly bloomed in her mind; it had always been there, but now it truly revealed itself to her conscious mind.

‘Andrew Ryan,’ Alice practically spat his name in her mind. ‘This is all his fault. Everything is his fault. If he hadn’t lured us all down here to be part of his dream, to have a life free of God and kings, my family would still be alive. They never would have met Bumby, and Lizzie and my parents would be alive and well. I never would have succumbed to insanity. That…whatever it was in Fort Frolic, that would be a reality.’

Alice’s jaw clenched as she continued her inner tirade. ‘Tenenbaum, Suchong, and Frank Fontaine never would have created the Little Sisters, and Ryan wouldn’t be making more of them. The evil of the monster who initiates suffering is exceeded only by the evil of the one who continues it. The only way any of them will be saved is when he dies. The only way the nightmare of Rapture and the Little Sisters ends is with his death.’

Alice turned from the window, a hard glint in her eyes. It was time that Andrew Ryan saw just how fragile “Man” could be.

Chapter End Notes

The true horror of Rapture: Turning an innocent little girl into a genetic freak that feeds off the blood of corpses, all to recycle ADAM. Ryan points out how many disasters and catastrophes were caused by thinking and acting in one’s own interest: None (at least on a grand scale). Thank you, Mr. Ryan, for sullying that track record with your city of horrors and death.

The chapter title is from the evil ending for BioShock 2. Innocence is chrysalis, sadly. However, one should never seek to destroy their own innocence; leave that to the world and to the evil forces in it. The events of the chapter are mentioned in BioShock 2 when Delta confronts Grace. I don't think Alice would care for what Grace was standing for in that moment.

Well, I hope you all enjoyed this emotionally-exhausting chapter of WonderShock. Feel free to express your opinions, ask questions, and/or make suggestions in a comment. Have a good one, everybody, and happy writing!
Chapter 8: Madness Begins

December 31, 1958

Alice stood by herself brooding while trying to ignore the music of the nearby band. She had never cared much for jazz music, far too raucous in her opinion. Though it certainly fit with the environs: The New Year’s Eve Party at the Kashmir Restaurant. Men wore their best suits, while their wives or girlfriends dressed in their finest dresses and jewelry.

Alice was wearing the brocade cocktail dress she had received from Aster for Christmas. The gold accents and jeweled neckline helped to draw both admiring and envious looks (the latter from other women). The black evening gloves adorned her arms, while the red kitten heels gave her a few more inches of height. The brass hairpin kept her hair in a relaxed up-do, and she had added red lipstick to the eyeshadow she now wore regularly. Gloria’s gift of perfume had also come in handy. She fit in the scene perfectly.

The jazz band played as couples danced and laughed on the dance floor, while others enjoyed a scrumptious dinner or cocktails consisting of Rapture-produced alcohols. Ryan’s constables stood around as security, sipping champagne and making small talk while still managing to look intimidating. She, on the other hand, stood by one of the large windows that overlooked the city, brow furrowed in thought.

‘Nanny and Aster would both suffer a fit if they learned my intentions behind my “little New Year’s Eve stroll”. And if my parents and Lizzie somehow found out…their rolling in their graves would generate a tidal wave.’

Alice glared across the room (as well as she could with the hideous statue of Altas holding up the globe in the way) at the little table where the silver-clad Diana McClintock sat, a glass in her hand and an audio diary on the table, the woman’s eyes on the Kashmir’s entrance. Ryan’s mistress had been sitting there for an hour now, waiting for the man himself to show up. She had already drank a little more than she should have, and her mask was in serious danger of falling off.

Alice fingered the bottle in her bag as she went over her plan. Get into the Kashmir Restaurant during its annual New Year’s Eve Party using Peeping Tom (done); wait for Ryan to make his appearance (in progress); wait a little more for him to ingest some alcohol and relax; use Peeping Tom to approach his table and pour the bottle’s toxic and fast-acting contents into his glass; and then walk out the Kashmir’s entrance in the chaos that Ryan’s poisoning was sure to create. It was an underhanded plan in her taste, but it was far better than using her gun and/or plasmids to earn herself the position of “Rapture’s Most Wanted”. Nanny and Aster had enough on their minds without her doing something as empty-headed as that.

They had taken the news of the A-gene and her splicing rather well, after she had showed them the audio diaries from Bumby, Suchong, and Tenenbaum as evidence she wasn’t going to end up a splicer. Nanny didn’t approve of the use of her inheritance money to obtain the plasmids, or of the risk in her ultimately-vain attempt to save the orphans of Houndsditch (Alice had come clean about that as well), but she accepted that this was part of Alice’s life now. She supposed the shock from their calamitous Christmas had steeled them for the surprise that she possessed the one-in-a-million
ability to overdose on ADAM-based products without the usual side-effects.

Aster had even promised that he would get her some more stuff once he recovered and he could get in contact with these mysterious friends of his (much to Nan’s consternation).

As for the Aussie, he was healing quite nicely from his brush with death. He had given Alice a map detailing the cave system that ran underneath Rapture (a very handy item) and asked her to check on the three boys that were currently holed up in a smaller, less-well-stocked cave. The boys (one of them was Charlie) were physically fine, though something told Alice they were going to have nightmares about Christmas 1958. The raid on Aster’s cabin was told off as a fruitful attack on some Parasites that had managed to sneak into Rapture, not as the kidnapping spree that it truly was. When Aster had heard the news, she practically had to smother the bed-ridden man with a pillow to keep him quiet.

She had held off from telling them that she had pushed Bumby in front of the Atlantic Express. Aster had expressed some suspicions as to how Bumby had died, claiming that his “mishap” at the train station seemed too convenient. Aster had shown himself to be a human lie detector on several occasions, and so, Alice tried her best to avoid bringing up the subject. She didn’t want them to know what she was: a murderess.

And now here she was, about to attempt a second by poisoning her intended victim, who had yet to make an appearance. When she had confronted Bumby, she had planned to go to the constables and have him arrested. When he had pointed out that it was his word against hers, the word of a respected scientist and social architect against that of a former madwoman and near-Parasite, she had been at a loss as to her next action. It had only been after she turned from him and experienced that massive flash of emotion that she had known what she had to do. And here she was, ready to commit a second through such a low method as poisoning Ryan’s glass. Then again, if Ryan didn’t die, then there would be no end to the Little Sisters, no end to the anger and unrest that was slowly building up in Artemis Square, the Drop, and the other low-class areas of Rapture.

She had left an audio diary, addressed to Nanny and Aster, on her pillow in case something happened to her. It was a confession of how Bumby had really died, her visit to Suchong’s, and her mission to the Kashmir Restaurant. She planned on its discovery if she didn’t come home soon. She knew that when someone goes missing, the first thing done storming their bedroom in search for clues (she had learned this just after Eleanor’s kidnapping and from all the times someone just vanished in Rapture).

She just hoped that they wouldn’t discover the diary prematurely. She had recorded it in the event that her plan went awry and she either ended up dead, in a cell, or on the run from Ryan’s security forces. She could only imagine the homecoming she would receive if her plan succeeded and she then came home to find they had discovered and listened to the diary.

‘That occurrence would be exceedingly awkward, for lack of a better term.’

“Happy New Year’s Eve, Sandy!” A heavily-accented voice boomed out behind her, giving her a good jolt. “I hope you are being ready for New Year’s Eve special. You did not handle last year’s well.”

Alice turned around to find two height contradictions headed towards the Kashmir Restaurant’s Cocktail Lounge. The speaker was a very large, older man with white hair and the beginnings of a beard on his face. The majority of his prodigious mass looked to be a large amount of muscle covering a tall frame rather than fat. He had to be forty to fifty years her senior, yet his face and eyes seemed to possess some child-like qualities, like he could never tire of viewing the wonders of the world. His tux was a solid red with gold lining, which looked surprisingly good on him.
Judging by his accent, he was of the same Russian ethnicity as Ryan.

His companion, on the other hand, came up to about Alice’s waist in height. He was a short man, and proportionally rounder than the apparent Russian. His yellow hair was slicked back in a trim cut with product. It went well with the yellow suit he wore. His eyes seemed to be fighting back sleep even as he smiled up at his much larger companion. Alice found herself liking his smile; it was a sincere, happy smile, very unlike the fake or sneering ones she usually witnessed in Rapture. Instead of speaking back, he moved his hands in what Alice realized was sign language.

“What!” the Russian boomed again, drawing the attention and glares of nearby party-goers. “Sandy, this cocktail you like so much, it is water compared to McDonagh’s vodka!”

“I’ll take that’s a right compliment, North,” an English-cockney accent broke in from a nearby table. “I make it ‘specially for you and any Russians that frequent the Fighting McDonagh’s.”

Alice suddenly found herself studying its occupants, Mr. and, apparently, Mrs. Bill McDonagh. Bill McDonagh was Andrew Ryan’s general contractor and one of his top employees, basically the man who helped him build Rapture. Looking at the both of them, Alice couldn’t help but think that their faces were two of the nicest that she had seen in Rapture; they seemed very different from most of the people that worked for Ryan.

“It hardly matters if they appear more decent than most of the scum that Ryan employs,” Alice reminded herself. “Mr. McDonagh is being paid by Ryan and that’s enough for him to be a suspicious character. His wife likely collects her paycheck from him too.”

As the Russian laughingly assured McDonagh that it was a compliment and that he would be dropping by the tavern later with the “yetis”, she suddenly recognized the smaller man, whose current tidy haircut was suddenly very out of character from the messy strands that usually stuck out from his head while he alternated from napping to manning his shop.

’Sanderson Mansnoozie, the owner of “Dreamsand Island” here at the Kashmir; what an interesting coincidence. And would this “North” be the Nicholas St. North of “The Workshop”? I have to say, that’s an odd name for someone of Slavic ancestry.’

Alice couldn’t help but notice just how amiable the two were to each other as they walked to the Cocktail Lounge, the larger man slowing his usually-energetic gait to allow his smaller companion to keep up. She had rarely seen two business owners this friendly. Usually whenever two or more business owners met together, they would be civil, but their talk would always be of their businesses, their products or merchandise, and their business deals. These two seemed glad to just share a cocktail for New Year’s. It wasn’t something that one usually saw in Rapture.

‘I believe that I’ll celebrate as well. I’ve always been curious about the Cocktail Lounge’s stock.’ With that thought, Alice followed the two men to the bar, which had several locations spread throughout Rapture.

“My comrade and I will have two New Year’s Eve Cocktails, pozhaluysta,” Mr. North announced to the bartender, who began to laboriously set out the glasses and drinks.

“I’ll have the same, please,” Alice intoned, coming up behind the pair and approaching the bar. When the bartender saw her, he hurried his efforts at preparing the cocktails. She rolled her eyes at his display of fake industry.

They both turned to survey her. North raised an eyebrow before turning his attention back to the alcohol. “Thank you, miss” he said, quietly enough that the bartender wouldn’t hear. “I do not
believe we would be getting drinks this quickly.” He gave her a humorous smile, as did Mansnoozie.

Alice didn’t know what it was, but she felt inclined to smile back. “Your welcome, sirs, though I certainly didn’t hurry his efforts on purpose. Mr. North and Mr. Mansnoozie, I believe?”

They both looked at her in surprise. She couldn’t help but feel a bit smug that she knew who they were while they didn’t have a clue as her identity.

Mansnoozie signed to her and North nodded. “Da, and what would your name be, miss..?”

“Liddell,” she answered. “Alice Liddell.” A look of recognition passed over both their faces, which puzzled Alice. How could they recognize her name? Perhaps they were acquaintances of her parents? She was positive that she had her memory intact, and she didn’t remember meeting these two. They didn’t seem the type one forgot easily.

To their credit, they both regained their composure without a hitch. “It’s a pleasure to be meeting you, Alice Liddell,” the Russian boomed, while Mansnoozie nodded eagerly before signing some more. “Sandy agrees, and he would be liking it if you called him Sandy. He was never one for formality.”

The little man gave his larger friend a mock glare, which caused Alice’s mouth to hitch up in a half-smirk before she could catch herself.

The bartender chose that moment to produce their cocktails. He seemed a little disappointed that all he received from Alice was money and a terse ‘thank you’.

North raised his glass. “To a Happy New Year,” he proclaimed. Sandy and Alice raised their glasses in agreement (Alice’s current definition of happy was “minus Andrew Ryan”), before the men downed theirs in almost a single gulp. Alice decided to take her first real alcoholic drink more conservatively.

As the strange-tasting liquid burned a trail down her throat to her stomach, Alice nearly choked. She had no idea that liquor could get that strong. Best to avoid McDonagh’s if his alcohol was stronger than this concoction.

“Are you sure that is not being too strong for you?” North asked, concerned. Sandy nodded his agreement.

Alice shrugged as nonchalantly as she could with the alcohol still tingling in her throat. “After the utter debacle my Christmas was, I believe I’m entitled to some of the more questionable creature comforts.” She took another drink from her glass. “Just takes getting used to, is all,” she gasped out a moment later.

North frowned and then began conversing with Sandy on some subject or other. Alice waited a few moments before walking back to the window, glass still in hand. She couldn’t help but like the two of them. She just hoped they wouldn’t get in the way once Ryan made his blasted appearance.

Back by the window, Alice watched as a squid swam by the window, its huge eye seemingly focused on her while drawing exclamations from the Kashmir’s partiers. As it shot away, trailing its tentacles behind itself, she turned her attention back to Rapture itself. There were times when the city was quite beautiful, and she had to admit as she took sips from her glass, this was one of them.

Almost a replica of New York City back in the ‘20s and ‘30s, the lights of Rapture’s
surfacescrapers glowed an eye-pleasing shade of green-blue through the sea water, giving the city a ghostly, mysterious air (or water, technically). The surreal atmosphere was only made more so thanks to the various ocean life swimming around and above the buildings. The Art Deco style in Rapture’s architecture that Ryan favored so much announced that this was a city of man and his creations (though Alice didn’t care much for the statues positioned around Rapture; far too gaudy for her taste).

‘It’s intriguing that before I came to Rapture, Wonderland had none of those floating islands that are so common now. I wonder if the animals swimming above aided in inspiring those. The Red Queen’s tentacles could have drawn inspiration from an octopus or squid. It’s interesting how the real world influences the imagination… I say, what building is that in the distance?’

The object of her attention was a structure on the very outskirts of Rapture. It consisted of three main towers joined together by trams. Alice wasn’t sure what it was all about, yet it seemed like it shouldn’t be there and yet it clearly was. Squinting her eyes, trying to get a clearer look through the glass and seawater, she realized that the middle tower was made to look like the sea god, Poseidon. Her eyes widened as her eyes focused on the huge vertical, neon letters that made up the name on the front and realized what the building was.

It was Fontaine’s Department Store, and it was now back in its original position before Ryan sent it to the bottom of an ocean trench with Atlas and his supporters in it. The eyes of Poseidon, the same green-blue as the “Fontaine” sign, seemed to glare balefully on the city as though the sea god himself was angry with Ryan’s intrusion in his kingdom and his banishment.

“Dear Lord,” Alice said aloud. “When did Fontaine’s Store come back and how?” She couldn’t think of any method or anyone who could have brought that structure back to Rapture without Ryan noticing them.

Looking around at the partygoers, Alice realized just how much they were staring out the windows towards Fontaine’s worriedly and just how much the reappearance of the building factored into the conversations. One could tell just how worried they all were despite their attempts to concentrate on the dancing, the food, the liquor, anything but the whale in the room. Alice remembered hearing something about a “seaquake” when she had disembarked from the bathysphere and some building inexplicably rising out of the trench. She had originally ignored both because they weren’t important to her plans, and the second because she doubted even Rapture could create technology to effectively raise a building after sinking it into an ocean trench. Even her imagination had some limits, at least when it concerned the physical world.

‘This would explain Ryan’s absence. He’s probably in his office thinking of a way to keep Atlas and his men from attempting something diabolical. I wonder how long it’ll take for Atlas to announce he’s returned.’

Fate chose that specific moment to give Alice a buzzing sensation though her skull, effectively ending her ability to articulate her thoughts. The buzz from the conversations she had suddenly found an interest in only added to the unpleasant feeling. Wincing and rubbing her forehead, Alice turned and made her way up the stairs to the loos, setting her half-full glass down on the Lounge’s bar. Once in the ladies’, she looked at herself in the mirror and grimaced.

‘Perfect, just perfect,’ she berated herself. ‘You come here to assassinate the most powerful man in Rapture and you end up getting buzzed on a whim to try one of the most abhorrent substances in the world. After ADAM and certain other drugs, of course.’

She could barely continue that line of thought, her mind was so clouded. It was an extremely uncomfortable feeling for Alice, not being able to think straight. She liked being able to think
straight; it was a sign she wasn’t going insane. Either that alcohol was even stronger than it tasted,
or she was just a plain lightweight. Given her size, the latter was the more likely option.

“First ADAM, and now alcoholic beverages. Whatever will you experiment with next, Alice?”

“Cat, I’m in no mood for another of your verbal duels,” she answered dully, not even bothering to
look up. “I have a most atrocious headache approaching, and I can barely think.”

“All the better for me then. The best time to strike an opponent is when their defenses are down.”
She could hear the mockery in his voice. “I will admit, this plan of yours to rid Rapture of the
infamous Andrew Ryan is quite ingenious: Peeping Tom with poison. With such a mixture, a less-
scrupulous type could come to rule the world. If the world was worth ruling, that is.”

Alice leaned her head forward until it rested on the mirror and closed her eyes. “Now if only the
arrogant, little arse would show himself, then it would actually work,” she retorted.

“And there’s the question: Would you really be making a difference by killing him? Would you
really be saving the Little Sisters?”

Alice cocked her head towards him while keeping her eyes closed. “Pardon?” was all she could
say.

She could practically hear the oversized feline rolling his eyes. “How many people do you suppose
believed that the horror of the Little Sisters would end with Fontaine’s death? How many idealists
believed that Ryan would find a way to cure and rehabilitate them to be ordinary, happy, little
girls?”

“I’m hardly an idealist, Cheshire,” Alice intoned tiredly.

“No, but you certainly act like one,” he retorted. “If Ryan dies and his company is left scrambling
for a successor to take the reins, do you honestly believe that Ryan’s heir will act any better
towards the Little Sisters?” He was probably shaking his head by now. “It would be quite pleasant
if all evil could be eliminated by striking their instigators down, but there is always someone
waiting to pick up the pieces, especially here in this glorified fishbowl.”

Alice sighed heavily. “You are aware, Cat, that you’re in the ladies room, and you’re most
certainly not a lady?” She had no intention of drinking alcohol ever again if meant Cheshire would
take the opportunity to berate her. There were some things that she just couldn’t tolerate; a one-
sided argument with Cheshire was one of them.

Cheshire actually growled at that one. “Red herrings are most unbecoming of you, Alice. I rescind
my earlier statement: A discussion with alcohol clouding your intellect is not entertaining at all. I
will take my leave, after I’ve left you with something to sharpen your dulled wits.”

Alice opened one eye and looked dully at the Cat. She was most certainly a lightweight. And if all
the rumors she had ever heard about hangovers were true, the next morning was going to be one
she was going to wish she didn’t remember. “If you must, then do so,” she growled.

Cheshire narrowed his eyes before beginning. “Something has changed. One who does not belong
here has altered history’s course. Something terrible is now coming that wouldn’t have taken place
for years if there had been no interference. Ready your weapons, Alice, for it is upon us.”

Alice removed her head from the mirror and gave Cheshire a good, long look. “What is upon us,
Cat?”
The instant the question left her mouth, there was a thunderous roar of noise below in the Kashmir, followed closely by a shockwave that had Alice stumbling to keep her balance. The lights flickered wildly and the mirrors rattled sharply, threatening to fall off their frames. As soon as she had righted herself, she became aware of more noises downstairs: Screaming, yelling, and gunshots. Her mind finally clearing, Alice yanked her Hand Cannon out of her little handbag, sending the bottle of poison clattering onto the ground, and checked to make sure it was loaded. “What the deuce was that?” she yelled as she snapped the gun back together, pulled the hammer back, and began to hurry out of the loo, not noticing the bottle rolling into a stall.

“That?” she just managed to hear Cheshire behind her before she exited the room, “Why that’s the beginning of the Madness that will engulf Rapture.”

BS+AMA=WS

The scene that greeted Alice’s eyes as she ran out onto the stairs could be described with a single word: Chaos.

Along with a few others such as “bloody”, “barbaric”, “horrible”, and “traumatizing”.

The Kashmir Restaurant had turned into a warzone, the front doors blown in by the explosion. Men and women wielding guns, knives, plasmids, and explosives were attacking the party’s guests viciously. They were wearing masks: Party masks, paper masks made from advertisements, even boxes with eye holes. Judging by their yells of “Long live Atlas!” and “Death to Ryan!”, they were Atlas’ fighters, fresh from Fontaine’s Department Store and from Fontaine’s poor houses. The partygoers were fighting back with formerly concealed weapons, while Ryan’s constables unloaded their own guns into the nearest attackers. Bullets flew, women screamed, men grunted in pain, electricity crackled, and fireballs flew.

A man dressed in a filthy doctor’s coat threw a makeshift explosive right into the cowering band members; their screams of alarm were cut off by the blast, their blood, clothes, and mangled instruments flying through the air in a macabre shower.

Mr. and Mrs. McDonagh were taking cover behind their upturned table, Mr. McDonagh taking a pistol out of his jacket pocket. Diana McClintock had apparently been thrown to the ground; she was now trembling under her table, blood running down a large facial wound. The Kashmir’s owner, Brenda, was standing just behind her kitchen’s door, blasting away at any splicers that came too close with a shotgun and cursing at them the entire time. Mr. North and Sandy had taken shelter behind the Lounge’s counter, loading their guns and peeking over the bar cautiously.

A bullet whizzed over Alice’s head into the wall and she dropped down to avoid getting shot. She fired off a bullet of her own, the sudden excitement and racing pulse resulting in a miss of a foot, to her chagrin. The shooter, a man dressed in a worn, blood-spattered business suit, laughed and then proceeded to fire off his remaining ammunition far faster than he should have been able to. “Step right up, boys and girls!” he cackled. “Hit the girl, win a prize!”

Alice’s second shot didn’t miss.

As the man’s body crumbled to the ground, a bleeding hole in his chest, Alice glanced at the five new bullet holes that adorned the wall where she had dropped down. ‘No ordinary man can shoot a gun that quickly. He must have had gene tonics for speed and improved reaction time; a “Leadhead” splicer, I believe.’

As she reached the bottom of the stairs, Alice looked around again and realized just how many splicers there were amongst Atlas’ followers: A lot. A man vanished in a puff of red gas to
reappear behind cover and begin slinging fireballs at a hapless constable; Houdini splicer. A woman in a ragged yellow dress sporting a large growth on her chin knocked a screaming woman to ground before beating her with a crowbar, ranting the whole time; Thuggish splicer. Alice grimaced in disgust at the sight of a Spider-Splicer slicing a man’s neck open with a curved fish hook, laughing at the spurts of blood showering from the horrified and dying man’s throat.

‘Note to self: Don’t let those ones come within slashing range.’

Waiting for Brenda to reload her shotgun, Alice began looking for a way to get out of this bloodbath. She could go back upstairs, but that was practically a dead-end with only the Welcome Center and eventually the Lighthouse to run to. If she could somehow make it through the main floor of the restaurant and out the doors, the city itself would provide much more cover and places to retreat to. Now if there only wasn’t the bloodthirsty Atlas splicers and other combatants between her and the door. At this point, invisibility wasn’t going to help her; Too many fighters running and stumbling around, not to mention the lead projectiles flying everywhere. Alice began to cycle through her plasmids in preparation; she was going to have to fight her way out of this mess.

“Teper’!” A somewhat-familiar voice boomed above the sound of gunfire, explosions, and splicer shrieks. Alice watched as the large Russian leapt out from behind the Cocktail Lounge, a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun in one hand, the other preoccupied with carrying Sandy by the back of his collar like he was an enormous house cat. The little man was brandishing a pair of purse-pistols, perfect for his size. The two of them began blazing away at any encroaching splicers, hurrying to find cover to reload.

A distorted roar filled the air, and a lot of heads, Alice’s included, turned towards the source. A splicer strode out into the middle of the room, and he was unlike any splicer she had ever seen. He was blue for a start, with a beard and hair apparently made out of ice, and large blue crystals growing from his shoulders, arms, and the back of his head. Looking at his distorted face, the words “ugly” and “gnome” came to Alice’s mind instantly. The glowing blue eyes didn’t improve his looks at all.

“I cut my strings! You can do it too!” he cried in a painfully distorted voice. His hand came up and a burst of blue-white projectiles shot out. One of them struck a woman, freezing her solid. A moment later, the splicer’s fist shattered the new statue like glass, the frozen pieces of what was once a living, breathing person skittering across the floor. A large chunk grazed Alice’s shoe; the frozen half of a hand glittered, promising to cut deeply if one picked it up.

‘Old Man Winter,’ Alice realized. ‘It appears there was no false advertising on the “Old Man” part.’

The splicer caught sight of North and Sandy as they emerged from their cover, ready to sprint (as fast as the big man could) to new cover. Alice’s eyes widened as the splicer grinned and raised his hand. “Behold entropy’s power!”

Alice shot out from her hiding place and let loose a green, spectral woman at him. “Behold my power, fiend!” The Possession blast struck the splicer before he could let out another round of Old Man Winter. He stopped, the green woman appearing by his side, whispering into his ear. He turned and began shooting his Old Man Winter at some Spider-Splicers, forcing them to take cover. “I’ll hold ‘em off, sister!” he yelled to Alice.

“My thanks to you, Miss Liddell,” North said as she came by his side. Sandy nodded as best as he could.

“Not that I don’t appreciate it, Mr. North,” Alice ducked as a fish hook whizzed overhead and she
put a bullet in the thrower’s shoulder, “but let’s save any congratulations once we’re well away from here.”

“Sound advice,” North replied. He bashed a Leadhead over the head with the butt of his shotgun. “Let us be going then.”

The next few minutes kept bringing up memories of her battles for Wonderland and her own mind: her labored breathing, the kick of her weapons, the slowing of time, the aggression of her enemies, the constant movement and thinking. It was like she had been preparing for this her whole life. She had been fighting tooth and nail for her sanity, and now, she had the experience to defend herself and her allies in the real world. The weapons were different, the enemies were altered, but the combat itself, that hadn’t changed. And in the back of her mind, Alice knew that she partly enjoyed it.

Bullets from a Tommy gun narrowly missed North, and Alice silenced the shooter with her sixth bullet. She let out a bolt of Shock Jockey to buy herself time to reload. Sandy’s pistol discharges brought her head up, just in time to see a Nitro splicer hit the ground, his lit explosive sending two more flying right into one of the unbreakable windows. Alice nodded to him as she brought her own gun back to bear and unleashing her own blast of Old Man Winter, allowing her to shatter the splicer with a single bullet.

The “Frosty” splicer chose that moment to come back, the Possession now worn off. He was seething, the blue glow in his eyes intensifying with each exhalation of angry breath, his nostrils flaring like an enraged, savage animal’s, steam billowing off his hands. “You’re goin’ to pay for that, you little, backstabbin’ bitch!”

Alice raised her hand at the same time he did, ready to give him a taste of his own medicine. The roar of North’s shotgun cut her off, as well as a significant portion of the crystals that adorned the Frosty’s head. The anger and rage on the splicer’s face vanished gradually, his body processing that most of his brains were suddenly gone and beginning to spasm. Ice blue blood began to dribble down his face as he crumbled to his knees, freezing instantly as it dripped onto the ground. The blue glow in his eyes faded to a more natural shade as the rest of the splicer’s body crashed to the ground, blood now streaming onto the ground from the massive head wound. North glared down at the splicer angrily.

“That is no way to be speaking to young lady.” He threw in what Alice was sure was a very nasty Russian insult before ducking behind a support pillar. Alice ducked beside him and hurriedly downed some EVE.

North poked his head out for a moment. “We are not far from entrance,” he reported, his breath starting to come out in gasps. “What is needed now is diversion, and good one too.”

“You want a diversion?” Alice gave him a half-smile. “Ask, and you shall receive.” Ignoring his and Sandy’s looks of confusion, Alice focused on the area directly in front of the Kashmir’s entrance, which could be seen by everyone in the room. Alice imagined a certain feline taking up that space and then willed him to appear with a gesture.

“I have to say, what an interesting party game,” Cheshire voice brought the battle to momentary and startled pause. “A few acquaintances of mine would absolutely love this.”

The pause was broken by every weapon and plasmid coming to bear on the bizarre apparition. As the floor and furniture around Cheshire was torn up by bullets, fireballs, and explosives, Alice began to sneak around the wall, followed closely by North and Sandy.
“Miss Liddell,” North was just able to be heard above the ruckus, “Sandy, and I, wish to know, what in world is that thing?”

“New plasmid, designed specifically for distractions,” Alice called back. She stepped over a constable’s dead corpse. “I like to keep up on the latest plasmids.”

“How many are you having?”

“… A few.” North was silent after that, or she just couldn’t hear him.

Cheshire was beginning to flicker when they finally came up to the entrance. North went first to check for danger. Alice looked back to see a man with a paper mask covering his face come running up to Cheshire, yelling and wielding a shotgun. Alice’s eyes were instantly drawn to the powerful weapon. The Hand Cannon had done her service this night, but if there was one thing she had learned while fighting in Wonderland, it was that new weaponry was always a must.

“I hate kitty-cats!” the splicer yelled as he prepared to let the shotgun off in Cheshire’s face.

“And now, I won’t feel one iota of guilt for this,” Alice quipped. A burst of Bucking Bronco sent the man floating into the air, screaming. Ducking a blow from a wrench, Alice leapt forward, grasped the shotgun, and yanked it out of the man’s stunned hands. The last of her EVE went into some traps as she ran out the door, experiencing the odd sensation of attempting to hold an object that desired to float six feet off the ground. It was truly a violent, and strange, world that Alice now found herself in.

At that precise moment, the automated PA system’s broadcast of the very out-of-place music stopped abruptly and a woman’s perky voice echoed out instead.

“And now, for a special message from Andrew Ryan.”

Alice and her companion’s ears pricked up even as they continued their flight.

“Good evening, my friends. I hope you are enjoying your New Year’s Eve celebration. It has been a year of trials for us all. Tonight, I wish to remind each of you that Rapture, is your city. It was your strength of will that brought you here, and with that strength, you shall rebuild. And so, Andrew Ryan offers you a toast: To Rapture, 1959! May it be our finest year.”

As the PA finished Andrew Ryan’s canned New Year’s Eve speech with that annoying sound-off, Alice somehow knew that the New Year, 1959, was going to be the year that destroyed Rapture.

BS+AMA=WS

January 1, 1959

The fighting didn’t stop outside the Kashmir; it merely diminished. Alice, North, and Sandy fought their way towards the nearest Metro Station. The casualties of war soon made themselves apparent: The bodies of splicers, Ryan’s constables, and civilians littered the way, to be tripped over and momentarily gawked at before running again or being attacked. A spider-splicer continued to hang from the ceiling by his hooks after Alice put a round of buckshot in his back. A man’s body protectively laid over the dead corpse of a girl around Alice’s age in a final act of defense; whether she was his daughter or sister or lover, Alice wasn’t sure. A woman stood screaming in the middle of a group of dead friends, her face and dress drenched in blood, eyes wide in terror and trauma.

A few others joined the group of three as they moved through the halls and stairways, dodging attacks and shooting back. More than a few of them stared warily at Alice whenever she fired off
one of her plasmids, looking at her as though they suddenly expected her to sprout ADAM scars and growths. Most splicers only used one or two plasmids for self-defense (or offense), and here she was sporting at least three different plasmids in addition to the shotgun and large pistol.

Thankfully, Alice had brought along her supply of spare EVE bottles and Hand Cannon ammo, so she was able to conserve her newly-acquired shotgun’s buckshot. At one point, she was downing a bottle of EVE and a Leadhead decided to shoot her bottle mid-gulp. If it wasn’t for Sandy’s brace of pistols, the distraction from her coughing fit would have given the splicer the opening to kill her.

‘Come now, Alice,’ she mentally reprimanded herself as she wiped her mouth off and swallowed what EVE hadn’t gone down her windpipe. ‘Take what you learned while struggling for Wonderland and continue to absorb the skills you need for this battlefield. The game hasn’t changed, but the tools and pieces have.’

They finally arrived at the Metro Station and, as if this were any normal day where there were no ADAM-addled splicers or raging radials running around killing people, they had to wait for a bathysphere to emerge from the water and take them somewhere safe. The fighting had settled down by now and they only had to kill off one or two Atlas fighters who were wandering around looking for someone, they didn’t care who, to kill.

Alice’s body began to come off of its adrenaline rush. She had practice with that from all her battles in Wonderland, so her “withdrawal” wasn’t as extreme as it used to be. Her hands only shook slightly as she reloaded her Hand Cannon with the last of her ammunition and checked on the last shotgun shell in her newest weapon. She became aware of the line of sweat that had gathered on her brow, and of all the little cuts and bruises that she had just managed to accumulate within the last ten-to-fifteen minutes. Feeling a draft on her left arm, she discovered that somewhere along the way a bullet had grazed her dress sleeve, leaving a furrow of shredded cloth behind. Her muscles began to ache, and she began to feel the need to breathe as much as possible, gasping for air.

“Are you alright?” Alice looked up at the blond-haired girl, probably only a few years older than her, the blood-spattered, white rabbit mask in her hand reflecting the cut on her forehead. Alice smiled inwardly at the genuine care that was reflected in the girl’s blue eyes.

“I’m fine, thank you kindly,” she replied. “I’ll be better once we’re quit of this place.”

The girl nodded as she reloaded her own pistol. “This isn’t how I expected my New Year’s Eve to go,” she muttered. “How in the Atlantic did Fontaine’s Department Store come back? Ryan sunk it five thousand fathoms. I used to shop there before Fontaine was killed.”

The girl began to ramble on, talking about the monopoly that Ryan had on plasmids, to the mask she was wearing, made popular by Sander Cohen and his private parties. Alice started paying more attention to her surroundings and the others than to the girl, nodding and saying “quite” whenever she sensed she had to.

‘Her method of dealing with stress, I suppose. Better than going into a hysterical fit or catatonia. People who react as such either survive by some miracle to later adapt to their new hostile environs, or they’re killed, usually taking a would-be rescuer with them.’

“There is bathysphere coming,” North spoke up from his post at the controls. “Everyone be getting ready to leave now. Sooner we’re gone, the better.”

The small group of people took a more active stance as they prepared to quit the station, more people were coming now, bloody, burned, or somehow unscathed. Quite a few of them were
peeling off in the direction of the Medical Pavilion, seeking aid for their injuries. The doctors there were going to have their work cut out for them.

The bathysphere surfaced and the hatch opened, allowing them entrance. The spheres usually had seating for a maximum of six. Since Sandy was a midget (a well-proportioned one), there would be no difficulties getting them all on board. The three others in the group, a couple whose evening wear had somehow remained untouched by the violence, and a young man with a trembling hand and searching eyes, went first. North and Sandy followed the blond girl inside while Alice watched their rear. Seeing no one who looked like a threat, Alice turned and put one foot inside the sphere.

“Where do you think you’re goin’?!”

Alice’s hand was suddenly seized in iron grip and yanked back. She found herself staring into the maddened eyes of a splicer. His right ear had been engulfed in a large, red growth that looked ready to pop at any moment. His hot breath blasted in Alice’s face, causing her to grimace with disgust at the rank smell. Judging by the rotting teeth in his mouth and the revolting conditions of his gums, he hadn’t seen a toothbrush in months. The splicer’s most hair-raising feature was the huge, blood-stained meat cleaver in his left hand.

“Lucy, you little wench!” he bellowed. “You ratted me out to Ryan, and after everything I did for you!”

Alice was aware of North’s deep voice yelling to let her go as she tried to reason with the man. “Sir, you’ve mistaken me for someone else. My name is Alice, and I have no inkling who Luc--.”

“LIAR!” The splicer yelled loudly. “I poured my heart and soul out to you, and you betrayed me to Ryan!” He raised his cleaver above his head, its brutally sharp edge shining in the light wherever it wasn’t stained with blood. “I don’t care how many times I have to kill you, you’re not getting away with it!”

Behind her, Alice could hear North trying to maneuver out of the sphere, the opening of the hatch impeding someone of his larger-than-average size. His shotgun was useless as the splicer was practically using her as a shield. None of the people on the platform seemed willing to intervene in saving her from the madman, and her Hand Cannon was in the hand he was gripping too tightly, preventing her from effectively using it. One option left at this close range.

The adrenaline rush kicked back in. The world slowed again, the deadly edge of the cleaver shining in the light, the splicer’s mouth open in a savage roar. The Vorpal Blade appeared in Alice’s other hand, its familiar handle fitting her hand like a glove, the light reflecting off of the ornate designs on its blade. With a single swipe that zinged through the air, Alice brought the Blade up and sliced through the splicer’s neck, sending a spurt of blood flying with a flash of red and black light emanating from the blade during the milliseconds of contact with his flesh.

Trembling and wide-eyed in shock, the splicer dropped his meat cleaver to the ground and let her go, his hands attempting to staunch the river of arterial blood suddenly flowing from his neck. Amidst the stunned silence that followed, the splicer fell on his back as he continued to dam the bleeding, no one offering to help him as they all alternated between staring at him and at Alice in disbelief. Flicking the blade to get rid of any excess blood, Alice turned and began to embark on the sphere.

“Why, Lucy, why?” the splicer gurgled as the crimson fountain blossoming on his neck continued to spew his life onto his clothes and the ground. “Why?”

Alice turned around on her heel and fixed the man with a cold glare. “My name is Alice. Alice
She turned back into the sphere, brushed past a staring North and the other passengers, and sat down on the last available seat. Pretending to put the knife in her bag when it really just vanished back to Wonderland, Alice looked up at everyone and quietly asked, “Does anyone else have business they need to conduct at Market Street?”

Only Mr. North and Sandy got off with her at the High Street Metro Station, from where they would find their way down to Market Street. As their homes were located in their businesses, they would likely head there as soon as possible. The whole trip there had been one uncomfortable, tense silence with the other passengers looking at Alice cautiously from the corners of their eyes, as if she was going to attack them at any moment with her plasmids and knife. The only ones that hadn’t stared at her in fear and apprehension were Mr. North and Sandy; the only thing she could discern in their expressions was, oddly, puzzlement. Something told her that they too had seen some action in their day, unlike the others in their temporary group.

Now that she was in a relatively, quiet place (meaning there was no one around actively trying to take her life or anyone else’s), Alice realized just what she had done in the last half-hour: she had killed multiple people, using her Hand Cannon and plasmids for the first time, her Vorpal Blade for the first time in the real world, and her new shotgun. She had killed real people, in the real world, and she didn’t feel the least bit guilty about any of their deaths.

They had all been trying to kill her, to turn her living, breathing body into a rotting corpse. It was her or them, kill or be killed. The only reason she had been able to do it so easily was because she had plenty of experience under her belt when it came to defending oneself against maniacal atrocities of nature. The fact that most of the splicers no longer acted human only made it easier to dispatch them; no humanity, no hesitation, no regret.

Alice ducked to the right and glared after the man who had nearly knocked her down, his arms loaded with canned food and ammunition. Market Street’s traffic was much more crowded than it would usually be at this hour. People rushed around in a hurry, their jovial expressions of not half an hour ago replaced by ones of fear and anxiety. Glancing past Mr. North, she was able to make out the Kashmir in the distance. Despite the visual irregularity created by the glass and the seawater, the damage was easy to spy: fires burning, people still stumbling around, lights flickering. The restaurant was now a testament to Atlas’s return to Rapture and Ryan’s inability to contain him.

‘If only the Man himself had been present. Taking him out in the confusion would have been as easy as putting Dormy to sleep. Or better yet, one of those splicers would have dispatched him for me! A far more fitting end than what I had in mind.’

When they passed by both Mr. North and Sandy’s businesses/residences, they didn’t go in as she expected, she turned to them in curiosity. “I know that it’s not my business, but we have already passed both your homes,” she stated. “Wouldn’t you both rather go home after tonight’s… debacle?”

“We use up lot of ammunition in fight,” North answered. “Chen is man to go to for good bullets and shotgun shells.”

Sandy signed to North and the Russian nodded. “Da, Sandy and I both be wondering, why aren’t you going home? We’ve only seen you walking in Market Street, not living here.”
Alice nodded. “I live in Pauper’s Drop with my old Nanny. I also have business with Mr. Chen.”

They both gave her looks of surprise, something which she had been receiving much of that night, before continuing on their way.

‘I believe that they haven’t met many young women with my skill set,’ Alice thought to herself. ‘Then again, who has?’

Alice dodged more people bearing firearms and ammunition as they neared Chen’s Firearms. With Atlas’s attack on the formerly secure city looming large and loud in the distance, the gunsmith was going to make a killing off the heightened demand for guns and bullets. Alice just hoped that the man would have the time and resources to finish the designs she had given him; the weapons she wanted were rather unusual. She would never forget the look on Chen’s face when he saw her idea for a grenade launcher, the Teapot Cannon.

North held the door open for her, to which Alice gave him a quick smile and a “thank you”. The man that came through the door just then and nearly knocked her down received a glare from the three of them before she entered.

The store had about half a dozen people browsing the selection of guns and ammunition. Alice, North, and Sandy joined them in perusing the shelves and racks. Sandy found more bullets for his diminutive but deadly pistols, while Alice and North both found buckshot for their respective shotguns. North’s sawed-off shotgun sported two barrels, while Alice’s had a single barrel with a loading-mechanism that reminded her of a Winchester rifle. It held three shells as compared to North’s two. She also selected more bullets for the Hand Cannon.

When North and Sandy were done making their purchases, Alice approached Chen’s glass protection and placed her choices on the counter. “Mr. Chen,” she began as he rang up the total, “Have you completed any of the special projects that I requested, by any chance?”

“As a matter of fact, Ms. Liddell,” he reached beneath the counter and pulled one of the strangest weapons ever made out onto the counter. “I have,” he declared proudly.

It was the real-world version of her Pepper Grinder, from the four barrels that peeped out from within its innards to the handle that adorned the back and acted as the trigger. It wasn’t made of wood as the original had been, nor did it sport that “one-piece” look made possible by consisting of a single piece of wood. As soon as Chen had put it in the large drawer that was the only connection between his bulletproof counter and the rest of his store, Alice hefted it and carried it to the range.

A minute, and one shredded target, later, Alice was happily asking for the price. When Chen rang up her final total, including the Tommy gun ammunition that went with the Pepper Grinder, Alice’s face fell. With this purchase, her parent’s inheritance money was about to become almost nonexistent. For a moment, Alice held one of the last gifts she had from her deceased parents before putting it in Chen’s drawer.

‘I believe Mama and Papa would rather I live than die with their money held to my breast. It would speak rather badly on their part if they didn’t, and they most certainly wouldn’t.’

Shouldering her new weapons, Alice bid William Chen adieu before leaving the shop. North and Sandy were waiting outside for her. “I wish that our first meeting had gone better,” North told her, “but some things are beyond our control. We wish you good luck, Alice Liddell. If we meet again, may it be in better times.” Sandy nodded.

Alice gave them a tired smile. “We can only hope that we do. Good night, gentlemen.”
They left for their respective homes as she did for hers. Looking at a nearby clock, Alice picked up her pace. It was getting close to one in the morning and she was going to get an earful for being out like this, let alone coming home with a shotgun and a pepper grinder-themed machine gun. That last one was most certainly going to draw questions.

If she was lucky, they hadn’t found her recording. That would be the cherry on top to a night like this.

**BS+AMA=WS**

They had found the audio diary.

When the apartment door had opened to admit her, Alice had expected to find the two of them waiting for her, Aster ready to yell at her for worrying them to death, Nanny either ready to do the same thing or just give her that silent disapproving look from her childhood days, the one that rivaled her and Lizzie’s piercing, green eyes with its simple disappointment.

Instead, the apartment was empty, everything in its place, with the exception of the diary lying on the kitchen counter. Putting down her weapons, Alice picked up the diary that, if found by someone loyal to Ryan, would damn her to a public hanging, the same fate as those smugglers that had been found guilty of “risking Rapture’s shield of secrecy”. Here it was, her confession to killing Dr. Angus Bumby, her attempted murder of Dr. Yi Suchong, her plan for assassinating Andrew Ryan, and her reasons for all of them. She had also written down where Nanny could find the rest of her money if she had failed in the worst possible way.

Setting down the diary, Alice was about to throw it into the waste basket when she noticed someone’s handwriting scrawled on the back. Holding it to the light, Alice recognized Aster’s messy handwriting. ‘*At Grace’s. Eleanor is back. Will talk later about your “walk”.’*

The diary clattered on the counter as Alice hurried out the door towards Grace’s apartment on the top floor. The elevator seemed to be especially slow today. As soon as it came to a halt, Alice was out its opening doors and hurrying to Apartment 307. She came to a halt just long enough to knock on Grace’s door before being let in.

“Nanny? Aster?” She stopped short as she made eye contact with Aster. Judging from his set, thin-lipped expression and blazing green eyes, he was just holding back from all-out screaming at her.

“I saw you found my audio diary,” she said evenly.

“Yes, that we did,” Aster continued to glare at her before a scream sounded behind him.

“Bad ladies! You’re going to be sorry! Daddy’s gonna…he’ll…Daddy, where are you?!”

Eleanor’s distressed and inhuman calls were very similar to the disturbing two-toned voices of the splicers she had been fighting and killing not so long ago. An involuntary shiver ran up Alice’s spine at the realization as Eleanor continued to shriek and cry for her Big Daddy, the pitiful sobs of a child mixing with a splicer’s crazed rambling tones for an unnerving effect that she had only heard before with the Red Queen.

Wincing at the sound, Aster cocked his head towards Eleanor’s bedroom briefly, the fire in his eyes dying briefly and his voice subdued. “She’s ‘ere, though she definitely doesn’t want to be.” When Alice passed him to see Eleanor, he whispered, “We’re are discussin’ all that later.” Alice could hear the promise behind his calm words and could only nod in reply.

Nanny and Grace were in Eleanor’s room, both attempting to calm down the Little Sister. Eleanor’s
bed was a mess, her sheets thrown off as the girl kicked and scratched against the women trying to comfort/hold her down. Teddy lay against the wall opposite from the bed he had been thrown from, his button eyes somehow taking on a sorrowful, abandoned expression. The girl in question was crying and struggling against Nanny and Grace (mainly Nanny, as Grace was still recovering from the Big Daddy’s assault). Her face was streaked with tears, and judging from how subdued her cries were from a normal child’s, she had been at it for a while.

“Eleanor,” Alice tried to put as much care as she could into her voice. The Little Sister looked up at her, her eyes now glowing a full-blown yellow, the tears leaving her eyes gleaming with the same shade of light before edging further down her face. Her white little pinafore was blackened with dirt and grime, her strange, two-toned voice cutting through the air with a sorrowful lilt.

“Daddy! I want Daddy!” Eleanor cried as she fell back onto her bed.

Nanny managed to put the covers over the girl before stepping back cautiously. The lump under the covers continued to shake and cry for “Daddy”, but that was all. Eleanor had come home, and it was hardly the happy reunion it should have been. The scene was heartbreaking. Three woman and one man watching a little girl, twisted into a creature with an ADAM slug in its belly, crying for a brute that was only her father thanks to some unscrupulous businessmen and their ethically-challenged scientist employees. They only needed violins in the background to complete the tragic picture.

“How did you get her away from her Big Daddy?” Alice asked Grace, still staring at the crying lump.

“I, members of the Family, and a thrill-seeker, snuck into Adonis Resorts and took her from her Protector,” a new voice broke in, causing Alice to jump and spin around.

A tall, blond-haired woman in a simple, light-blue dress and black cardigan stood behind her. Apparently, she had been in Grace’s room when Alice had entered. Her height gave her something of a graceful elegance. It was her eyes, though, that truly drew one’s attention. The icy blue orbs, cold and calculating in her face, seemed to be able to pierce one’s body and mind and look directly into the soul even with her cat-eye glasses, something that most people attributed to Alice’s emerald irises.

Looking into her piercing gaze, Alice couldn’t help but feel a twinge of unease at the back of her mind, like the woman’s eyes were plying her soul, and learning everything about with her just a glance. She didn’t like the feeling, imaginary or not, at all.

“We were able to dispose of her Big Daddy, Subject Delta, and leave before we were noticed,” the woman continued. “Atlas’ timely attack on the Kashmir served as a distraction, giving us time.”

The woman’s voice was pure velvet, despite the fact she was speaking of killing a Big Daddy of all things, and describing the very altercation that Alice had just survived as a convenience. The bits and pieces began to come together: The woman’s somewhat familiar face, her piercing gaze, her smooth voice and cultured British accent (very similar to Alice’s), her involvement in Eleanor’s rescue, and her presence in Grace’s apartment, specifically her room.

“Dr. Sofia Lamb, I presume,” Alice held out her hand. Lamb gave her and her hand another look before taking it.

“You presume correctly,” the British psychologist replied, releasing Alice’s hand. “And you would be?”
“Alice Liddell,” she replied, ignoring the slight throb in her hand. Dr. Lamb had a good grip.

Dr. Lamb’s eyes lit up with interest when she heard Alice’s name. “Alice Liddell? Ah yes, I recall you now: The catatonic girl in Rutledge.” She now surveyed Alice with an analytic air. “I last saw you four years ago. Dr. Wilson had asked for my opinion concerning your case. Quite perplexing: Years in a catatonic state, interrupted with brief periods of verbal and physical violence, those drawings of strange, otherworldly creatures, and no response to any of the methods employed to cure you, not even ADAM.” Lamb cocked her head. “And yet, here you are, your mental faculties in order. I’m most curious to hear how Wilson did it.”

Alice cocked her own head in imitation. “Nothing much to tell actually. I simply realized that my guilt over my family’s deaths had no real basis in reality, and from there, it was relatively smooth sailing.”

‘If only you could see the hell I endured to realize that truth, that I was innocent of their demise.’

“And who was the doctor paid,” Lamb said the last word with evident disdain, “to monitor for future relapses?”

“Dr. Angus Bumby,” Alice answered, not hiding her own contempt for the man. “I’m afraid you won’t be able to ask for his professional opinion concerning me, or Eleanor. He died in an accident at the Atlantic Express station last November. And if he hadn’t, he would be rotting in a cell in Neptune’s Bounty. He was taking the orphans entrusted to his care, destroying their memories, and twisting them into slaves, if you get my meaning.”

Lamb raised one of her eyebrows, then spoke again. “Hmm, Bumby was quite brilliant, a true master behind the mysteries of the human mind. I had originally considered sending Eleanor to him; now I’m quite glad that I sent her to Grace instead. It’s a pity that he pulled on Ryan’s Great Chain along with the rest of the egoists. He could have made such contributions to the Family, instead of being bound to the self.”

“I feel no need to argue on that matter,” Alice replied, bristling at Lamb’s calm reaction to Bumby’s evil. She glanced back to Eleanor. “He also assisted Suchong and Tenenbaum with the Little Sister’s mental conditioning. If he were still alive, I have doubts as to if he would be willing to aid you in curing Eleanor even if he was available.”

Lamb walked into the room and looked down at her daughter. “I have my methods, both for compelling him to cure her, and to rehabilitate her myself. Thank you, Nan Sharpe, for your assistance in calming Eleanor down. I’ll start on Eleanor’s rehabilitation in the morning.” Lamb sat down on the bed and surveyed the shivering Eleanor. Her crying had come down to quiet, odd-sounding whimpering and hiccups. Alice couldn’t help but think that Lamb was looking at her daughter as more of an odd patient to be cured than as her own offspring.

“What I want to know,” Aster piped up, “is how you’re ‘ere and not in Persephone.”

“Simple: I led a prisoner revolt not twelve hours ago and took Persephone as my own. Sinclair’s private think-tank and laboratory is now my new…headquarters, and the birth chamber for Rapture’s transformation.” Lamb didn’t even spare him a glance, which earned her a disgusted look from Alice.

A thought suddenly came to Alice. “Would you know the whereabouts of one Harold Parson? His wife and son live next door, and he was selling your book before his disappearance.”

“He hung himself on Christmas Day,” Lamb answered without pausing. “The strain put upon him
was too great; send his family my condolences.”

The calm of her tone belied her words. Alice knew that anyone in the medical field, whether it be to heal the body or the mind, had to be clinical in their outlook, but this was too much. Alice suddenly found herself disliking Dr. Lamb, the woman who sat looking at her daughter and didn’t try to comfort her, even if it would prove futile. “I’ll let them know,” she said quietly.

Nanny and Aster turned towards the door with her, Grace’s quiet thank-yous following them. As the apartment’s doors started to close behind them, Alice caught one more glance of the young Lamb and her mother, sitting there on the bed. She couldn’t but feel that, in that little room in Pauper’s Drop, the consequences of that night would echo beyond the attack on the Kashmir Restaurant, even beyond Rapture itself.

Chapter End Notes

And there it is ladies and gentlemen! The beginning of the Rapture Civil War. Alice has fought against her own mind twice now, and defeated the man who destroyed her life. This time, however, even if she saves herself, she cannot save Rapture. Madness has come to Rapture.

And on that note, I have an important announcement to make. Scorpiofreak, the creator of "Winter Wonderland" and my betareader for this fic, has offered to co-write "WonderShock" with me. Once we get to the point in the story where Jack comes in, she'll be writing the chapters that are from his POV, while I write the ones for Alice. We'll alternate between the two until they meet. I am very excited about this. Feel free to tell me what you think in a comment for me or Scorpiofreak.

Hope you all enjoyed chapter 8 of "WonderShock"! Happy reading and writing everybody!
Tragedy Strikes

Chapter Summary

Fire has come to Rapture, and to Alice.

Chapter Notes

Interesting thing about the characters that are created by authors or used in Fanfiction: They're pretty much at the mercy of the person writing the story or fanfic. And I'm not talking about subjecting them to poor writing (as painful as it is). I'm talking about the horrors that some characters are subjected to. The villains they fight, the people they lose, the wounds both physical and mental they suffer; that is all on the person writing the story. In a way, authors, both original and fanficcers, are gods to the characters they create and/or borrow.

Why am I philosophizing on this? Well then, this chapter had me thinking before I posted it. Anyway, here's chapter 9 of "WonderShock"!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 9: Tragedy Strikes

January 1, 1959

As soon as they got back to the apartment, Aster rounded on Alice and looked her full in the eyes, his forest green blazing into her acidic emerald.

"What Were. You. Thinkin'?" he asked through gritted teeth.

Before she could answer, he whipped back to the kitchen, picked up the audio diary labelled "To Nanny and Aster", made hours prior on December 31, 1958, and clicked it on. With its soft whir, the audio diary came to life and Alice's own voice rolled out of it to betray her.

"Nanny, Aster, if you are hearing this, it is likely morning on the first of January, 1959. If you haven't heard from me since last night, then I'm either on the run, in prison, or dead. If such is the case, these are my last confessions to you, the secrets that I believe you should be privy to.

Bumby didn't slip to his death at the station; I pushed him into the path of that train. When I confronted him on the abuse of the orphans and his crimes against my family, I fully intended to turn him in to Ryan Security. He merely laughed at me and then proceeded to dangle Lizzie's bedroom key in front of me. After I snatched the key from him, I was overcome by emotions, and I killed him in way of the Atlantic Express.

I'm sure you've both heard of that woman who attempted to knife Suchong in his own clinic; that was me. He and Tenenbaum bought some of the Houndsditch Orphans from Bumby for use as Little Sisters. I saw one of them in his clinic, a little girl named Susan, and I attempted to slay that
And finally, I'm sure you're both wondering why I'm either on the run, in prison, or dead. At the Kashmir Restaurant tonight, the Annual New Year's Eve Party will be commencing and Andrew Ryan is sure to be there. It is because of him that your home was raided, Aster, and the children taken; from Bumby's frying pan to Ryan's fire. It is because of him that Eleanor is a Little Sister, it is because of him that Bumby met Lizzie and set in motion the series of events by which I lost my family, by which Wonderland was transformed into a living Hell twice, and by which the Little Sisters now exist.

Will I be killing him in the name of vengeance? Yes, and more. By continuing and expanding the abuse and the horror of the Little Sisters, Ryan has become no better than Bumby, if not worse. He may not be using them to gratify the appetites of the depraved, but he is abusing and exploiting them for a heinous purpose, and he will never stop. In order for this nightmare to end, Andrew Ryan must die. No matter what happens, know that I love you both as the only family I have left. Take care, both of you."

As the diary clicked loudly in the silence, Alice wondered for a brief moment at how strange her own voice sounded to her. What a stir the first recording devices must have caused with the recordees unable to believe their fellow listeners that that was how their own voices truly sounded after a lifetime of hearing their own through both the air and their jawbone.

Alice was ripped from her musings by Aster's raised voice. "What were ya thinkin'?! Tryin' to kill both Suchong and Ryan? Crikey, if I didn't know any better, I'd say you'd gone-" He stopped midsentence.

Now her ire was raised. "Gone what, Aster? Gone mad again?" Judging from how she was clenching her fists and breathing so hard, she realized for a short moment that she probably looked insane from anger, but she banished the thought. "If you think for one moment that I was just going to stand by and let Ryan continue his vile business after putting Bumby's to an end, then think again! If doing the right thing meant that I would lose my own life, then so be it. It would be madness to do otherwise!"

Aster was about to argue when Nan stepped in, both literally and figuratively.

"That's enough, both of you!" Both Alice and Aster both stared at her; Aster had never heard her raise her voice before, and it had been a while since Alice had.

Nanny gave both of them a hard look. "Now, before someone overhears the two of you, calm down. The last thing we need is for some accidental eavesdropper to spill the beans on all of us."

Both of them could see that she was trembling with emotion, almost bursting at the seams and itching to bite into Alice as Aster had, but she had a much cooler head on her shoulders then the Aussie did. They both stood where they were for a few moments, allowing the tension to bleed out somewhat through their breathing.

"Good," said Nanny, "Now that you're both calmed down, what were ya thinkin'?!" Alice jumped while Aster glared at Nanny for taking his role as interrogator. "You've worked so hard, gone through so much to get where ya are now, why risk it all?" Her tone was much gentler by the time she was halfway through her second question.

Alice attempted to look Nanny in the eyes before giving up and staring at the ground. "When I was living at Houndsditch, I knew something wasn't quite right, but I outright ignored it, wallowing in self-pity and my own pain. How many innocents suffered because I didn't act sooner? I killed
Bumby because I knew he would never stop, and that I couldn't prove him guilty. That, and he also said that no one was going to stop him because it would be going against Ryan's ideals." She looked up at both of them with a shamed expression. "And now, you both know that I'm a killer, a murderess." She looked up at them, expecting disappointment and shame.

"Oh Alice," Nanny said, giving her a sad look instead. "Ryan wouldn't have let Bumby's crimes slide if he had still been alive when you turned that evidence over to the constables." At the disbelieving look on Alice's face, she added, "I'm not bein' naïve here, I know full well the Little Sisters are his doin'. It's a double standard to be sure, but Ryan's not goin' to condone the likes of Bumby, even if what he's doin' is little better.

I'm not sayin' that ya should have let Bumby live; you might have never gotten anything to prove him a child abuser." Nanny paused, looking a bit bewildered. "I'm not sure if what you did, killing Bumby, was the right thing, though. Seems like such a grey area."

"Doin' the right thing sometimes isn't the same as doin' the good thing," Aster broke in. "Murder isn't the right thing, but bumpin' off Bumby was the good thing." He snorted when he realized his accidental wordplay. "Can't believe I said it like that."

Alice smirked at him before Nanny spoke.

"First Bumby, then Suchong, and now Ryan…Alice, why are ya trying to kill all these people?" A spark of fear and concern was in Nanny's eyes as she regarded her former charge.

"Because they are evil men that will never realize how evil they are and therefore they will never stop their wretched activities," Alice said as though it was obvious. "That," her voice took on a lower quality as her eyes slid back to the floor, "and after everything I went through in both of my last visits to Wonderland, that's the only way I know how to deal with evil."

"Wonderland?" Aster arched an eyebrow and cocked his head to one side. "What are you talkin' 'bout, Alice?"

Alice sighed and looked to him, sorrow tainting her eyes while somehow staying out of her set mouth. "Wonderland didn't weather the onset of my madness well," she said in a tone so quiet that Aster almost couldn't hear it. "My childhood retreat became a nightmare realm, crawling with hellish monsters, twisted caricatures of my friends, and horrors beyond even that of the Little Sisters. I had to fight my way through all manner of hideous creatures, including the Duchess, the Tweedles, the Mad Hatter, the Red Queen, and every single one of the minions they sent to kill me."

Alice gritted her teeth in pain as she remembered the horror she had witnessed. "I watched as Hatter ruthlessly crushed the White Rabbit underfoot, saw the results of his horrendous experiments on the Mad Hare and the Dormouse, witnessed my old home burning as the Jabberwock taunted me, cried over Gryphon's body after he finished off that monstrous lizard, and then shed some more tears over Cheshire's severed head." Her voice began rising. "After that, I was forced to battle against the atrocity of the Red Queen, who wore my own face! It was only after that foul monster fell that Wonderland was restored, my false guilt was absolved, and I began to recover in earnest."

"Crikey," whispered Aster, beginning to understand just what horrors Alice had been through as she had laid there in Rutledge.

"And if that wasn't enough," she continued bitterly in louder tone, "after a year of Bumby's attempts to erase my memories of the fire and my family, I found myself back in Wonderland,
which was under siege by an oily, oozing black substance, Ruin, and by the Infernal Train, a monstrosity of a locomotive. Both served to corrupt Wonderland and its inhabitants."

It all began to spill out from her lips then, the horrors she had endured the second time around. "The Ruin killed the White Rabbit from the inside out, the Hare and Dormy created the Train to spite both me and Hatter in return for their own suffering! They and the Hatter were killed when his Domain began to collapse, the Carpenter was luring the inhabitants of Barrelbottom to their doom at the flippers and maw of the Walrus with his horrible shows before the Train killed them. After confronting the Queen again, who this time had Lizzie's face, I found myself back at Rutledge with everyone telling me how much I deserved to be there, my fears of what would happen to me if I went back to that terrible place! I remembered who Bumby really was, what he had done to Lizzie, and then I met the Wonderland version of him: A gigantic, crooked marionette of him, Ruin oozing from his eyes, from his evil mind. I only saved Wonderland and myself after killing both the imaginary and real versions of Angus Bumby."

Alice stood there now, breathing hard after her rant and staring off into space as she remembered her second battle for Wonderland a little over a month earlier, much fresher in her memory than the first. "And now you both know what I am: a killer, skilled only in the art of war, who can only see one way of fighting evil, by killing those who perpetrate it."

For the longest moment, she waited in dread for their reactions. The nice, sweet girl she had seen in that portal had died long ago, starting with the fire and finally expiring in Rutledge. She was all that was left: a jaded, cynical, emotional shell of a woman with a hair-trigger temper and hands spattered with the blood of enemies both mental and physical. She had only told them of the things she had done; what would their reactions be if they witnessed her brutal fighting skills in person? And Heaven help her if they ever saw her in the throes of Hysteria!

Aster finally responded, by embracing her. She froze in pure shock for an instant before returning the gesture. A hand gently fell upon her shoulder, and Alice looked up to find Nanny close to tears, something she had rarely seen the older woman, well-versed in the ways of the world, do. The three of them stood like that for a few minutes before separating, Alice's breathing and heart rate now abating.

"I had no idea," Aster said, his former anger having collapsed into a bitter sorrow. "If I had any idea of what you were sufferin', I never would 'ave gone into hidin'. I should've stayed up here, waitin' for you. I'm sorry, Alice."

Before she could reply, Nanny broke in.

"Oh, don't go actin' like you're only one at fault here, Bunnymund," she chided sharply. "I was up here, and I was hardly the most supportive person to Alice, when she needed me the most. If the Liddells could see me now, it wouldn't be the hookin' they'd be upset about, it'd be my failure to look after their daughter. Those who witness the sufferin' of others and do nothing to relieve it pay a penalty." She sighed heavily and looked down at the ground. "Something tells me this whole city is about learn that lesson the hard way."

The words of Caterpillar's warning floated into the forefront of Alice's mind before retreating back into her subconscious. "I believe that Rapture's reckoning may be at hand as we speak, Nanny. Somehow, Fontaine's Department Store has risen from the depths and disgorged Atlas and what's left of his men. They attacked the Kashmir while I was waiting for Ryan. I had to fight my way out with a few others. And I highly doubt that Atlas will consider that assault to be his endgame."

"Well," Nanny said, eyeing her clothes, "that explains why your nice new dress is about torn to shreds."
Alice glanced down at herself, embarrassed and acutely aware of the rips, tears, and blood spatters spread out over her beautiful brocade dress, not even a week in her possession. Assuming that he hadn't stolen it (and she knew he hadn't), Aster must have gone through an extraordinary amount of risk and money to have acquired it for her. And here it was, ruined.

"Aster," she said, her eyes downcast, "I'm sorry for ruining your Christmas gift. It was truly the most beautiful dress I've ever owned."

"Ah," Aster waved off her apology, "It's alright, Alice. A dress can be fixed. You, on the other hand, can't." He paused, before narrowing his eyes in thought. "We all felt a seakeake 'bout an hour before midnight," he muttered, sitting down in a chair and resting his head on his chin. "Heard some blokes sayin' that Fontaine's had risen out of that trench, didn't believe them until now. What in the world could 'ave brought that buildin' up five thousand fathoms? Thought for sure that was the end of Atlas and his movement."

"I haven't the faintest idea as what could have caused that," Alice replied, kneeling down by her purchases from Chen and rummaging through them. "Atlas must have had quite the ace in the hole to have accomplished that. Pity-" she grunted as she hefted the Pepper Grinder to her shoulder, "that Ryan wasn't there. One of Atlas' splicers could have finished him off, sparing me the trouble. At least I know my plasmids and Hand Cannon work as advertised."

She noticed the looks that Nanny and Aster were sending towards her new weapons now that the state of her dress had been explained and held the Grinder out to them for a better look. "I dropped by Chen's to purchase more ammunition and found that he had completed one of the weapon designs I gave him," she explained as Aster took the weapon to inspect it. "It's based upon a Pepper Grinder weapon I wielded last time in Wonderland. As for the shotgun, I took that off a splicer."

Aster was almost reverent as he handled the Grinder, testing its balance and examining the action, chamber, and the handle that acted as its trigger. "Dang," he whispered, "I've seen some of Chen's workmanship before, but this is...he must have burned the midnight oil for this beauty several times if not for a whole week." He handed it back to her, reluctance evident in his eyes. "Alice, you should honestly write down everything from Wonderland, it'd make quite a story."

"I'll consider it," Alice replied in a sarcastic tone as she set the gun down. "And yes, Nanny," she gave the woman a half-apologetic look, "it was expensive. My parents' money is now completely gone. Other than the money I've received for the odd jobs around the Drop, I'm as broke financially as I was mentally. Though with the way everything is going bottom-side up, I'd say it was well worth it."

"...I can't really argue with that," Nanny sighed heavily. "With any luck, this Atlas business will be over before we know it. A war in Rapture wouldn't end well for either side." She yawned heavily and looked at apartment's clock. "It's almost two in the mornin' and I'm spent. Let's all go to bed. We can discuss what to do if this blasted city finally decides to collapse in on itself in the mornin'." She was practically dragging her feet as she walked over to her room. Glancing back at them, she gave them a tired smile. "Good night, Alice, Aster, and happy new year."

As her door closed behind her, Aster cracked both his back and his neck, groaning as his vertebrae popped loudly, sounding something like a line of miniature firecrackers. "That's sage advice if I ever heard any." He looked over to the guns and the ammunition surrounding them. "You want any help with that?"

"I think I can manage, Aster," Alice replied as she gathered up her latest tools of destruction and ammo with a grunt. "SportBoost has been my most helpful tonic to date."
Aster nodded and lay himself on the couch. His eyes were on the verge of closing completely for the night when they popped back open. "Hey, Alice?" he half-whispered as she turned off the lights, the only source of illumination being the weak light that shone in the windows from the ocean. "Just wonderin', how were you plannin' on whackin' Ryan?"

"I would use Peeping Tom to poison Ryan's champagne glass right under his nose," she answered, just managing to get both of her guns through the door without bashing either of them.

Just before the door closed, she could hear an admiring, "That could have worked!"

Struggling a little under the combined, awkward weight of the Grinder, her shotgun, her bag, her bullets, and her shotgun shells, Alice mentally kicked herself for not accepting Aster's offer of help. She succeeded in finally tossing her new inventory on the bed and going over it, which included emptying out her bag, counting her remaining Hand Cannon bullets with the new ones along with her EVE bottles. It was then that she noticed that she was missing one bottle in particular.

'Blast it all! Where could I have dropped it? Oh, it likely fell out during the debacle at the Kashmir, when I was taking out my gun, more bullets, or EVE. Well, that's a purchase from the High Street chemist's that's not going to be used. If only the same could have been said of all those revolting pills Bumby had me ingest.'

Alice looked upon her gathered weapons, smiling before suddenly frowning. In Wonderland, she could summon and, well, "banish" her weapons as she saw fit, making it quite easy to carry an expanded arsenal on her person wherever she went, enabling her to use whatever tool was necessary to vanquish the diverse array of enemies she usually faced. Now if it wasn't for that annoying law of the real world, that an object couldn't vanish into thin air when it was no longer needed, she wouldn't have to worry about fumbling around with her weapons and possibly damaging one of them for the sake of another.

'Now if only I could store my weapons and supplies in...whatever and wherever my weapons go when I'm in Wonderland. At least the Vorpal Blade has the sense to leave whenever I have no need of its services. Wait...I may not be able to bring my Wonderland weapons into Rapture, but what if I can take my real weapons and...'.

Hesitating at first, Alice picked up her Hand Cannon and studied it. It was basically just a large, powerful six-shooter, one which would have turned any American cowboy green with envy. The light reflected off the silver and yellow-colored portions of metal that made up the barrel, cylinders, hammer, and trigger of the weapon, which was only smudged by the powder burns around the muzzle. The wood that made up the gun's grip was smooth to the touch, protected by an extension of the trigger guard. It was beautiful, which some saw as regrettable considering its bloody purpose. In her opinion, a beautiful, well-made weapon was the best kind. Just because the purpose of something was to kill, that didn't mean its aesthetic value had to be detracted from.

Holding the Cannon up, Alice willed it to join the Vorpal Blade wherever it was. The Hand Cannon vanished without a sound or a trace, leaving no indication that it had ever even existed. She waited for a long moment before willing it back, hoping that she hadn't just lost one of the nicest pistols she had ever used (albeit the only one). The Hand Cannon reappeared in all of its six-cylindered glory, ready for use.

Alice smirked as she willed it back into storage, as she did the Pepper Grinder and her shotgun (which happened to be called a "China Broom") along with all of the ammunition and EVE bottles. She would have to experiment with it later to see what kind of items she could "store" and how much. One thing she knew about power, there was always some kind of natural limit set in place.
Smiling at her much clearer bed, Alice changed into her nightgown, carefully put her dress away for later cleaning and repair, and settled in for the night, watching the faint light, twisted and oscillated on the photo of her family. She smiled up at them and closed her eyes, knowing that if something did happen to her in the chaos descending upon Rapture, she would find herself reunited with them at long last.

BS+AMA=WS

January 20, 1959

It had been almost three weeks since the "Rapture Civil War" had begun, and there were no signs of it ending any time soon. Along with the demand for conventional weapons, the demand for plasmids had skyrocketed mere hours after the attack on the Kashmir. As amateur weapon developers began to sketch up designs for the tools of war that hadn't made it down to Rapture, Ryan Industries had begun installing new vending machines around the city alongside the Circus of Values and U-Invent machines, both of which now sported items useful in a warzone. The "El Ammo Bandit" machines served to distribute ammunition to those willing to pay the exorbitant prices, and the other machine….

It was the other machine that raised Alice's ire: The "Gatherer's Garden", a dispenser for all things ADAM-produced, with the exception of EVE. With the machines spouting their advertisements, lines formed in front of the machines as ordinary citizens sought to supplement their arsenal with plasmids and gene tonics. With the demand for plasmids practically exploding, Ryan Industries had gone back to the injectables, looking to conserve their ADAM supply.

Dodging a spent plasmid bottle, Alice glared at its user before turning her attention to the machine. As much as she hated the advertisements that promised power and vitality and those idiotic little girl statues meant to dull the horror of the Little Sisters, she still needed as many powers as she could get, even if that meant jabbing those huge needles into her arms to get it. And the Gatherer's Gardens cut out the middleman, making it more convenient and cheaper to get spliced than the stores whose inventory had long since run out.

At least she had brought along her own hypodermic needle. Even if ADAM did kill off germs and other infectious microbes, she found the idea of a used needle in her skin to be utterly revolting.

"Hey lady! Hurry it up, will ya? Some of us don't have all day!"

Alice turned around to silence the complainer with an acid-green glare before going back to studying the options available to her. She had been waiting in line for half an hour now, and she was noticing the time slip away as well. She had promised a recovered Aster that she and Nanny would meet him and a friend at the Fishbowl Diner for lunch, and to discuss what they would do if things got really bad. That would be in fifteen minutes or so, and she had only gotten to the front of the line about a minute ago. At least the Garden was just behind the Fishbowl, so she had some time before everyone else got there.

Looking over the prices for "EVE Upgrade", "Health Upgrade", "EVE Link", "Armored Shell", and "Telekinesis", Alice was pleased to see that while the reduction wasn't much, cutting out the middleman did mean the customers didn't have to pay quite so much. The EVE Upgrade would maximize the amount of EVE she could carry, the Health Upgrade would increase her stamina, EVE Link would increase her EVE whenever she used a First Aid Kit, and the Armored Shell would shield her from physical damage. She had decided to wait on any more plasmids, she had enough of those (for now).

Settling on the EVE and Health Upgrades, Alice began searching for the cash slot on the machine.
Rapture vending machines always took the money first before allowing for a selection, a "precaution against accidental parasitism". Translation: We don't want someone getting something for free by accident. Besides an odd spout-like thing, there was nothing on the machine that indicated an entry point for either bills or coins.

"That's odd," Alice muttered. "Where do I put the money in?"

"You don't," the man behind her piped up. "Gatherer's Gardens don't take no money."

"What do you mean?" she asked, turning to give him an inquiring look. "Surely they take some form of payment."

"Sure they do." He held up a large vial of something green and nasty-looking, bubbles slowly working their way from the bottom to the top. "It takes ADAM."

"It takes what?" Alice asked, disbelief marking her features.

"See that little spout-thing?" He pointed at it and she nodded. "To get something, you gotta put in the amount of ADAM it costs. EVE Link costs twenty grams of ADAM, so you got to put in twenty grams of ADAM to get. Unprocessed, natural ADAM is usually the best," he explained, holding up the vial. "But it'll also accept the processed stuff and used ADAM too."

"Hey pal, you're holdin' up the line. Move it!"

"Thank you for the explanation," Alice told the man before walking away, not interested in getting involved in some foolish altercation.

"In the garden we are growin', Many changes will be flowin', If you want to be amazin', See the flowers we are raising" the Garden played its jingle as she headed towards the diner.

A Jim-and-Mary playlet began airing out from the PA system.

"I don't know, Jim. Everyone's splicing these days. I just don't think it's safe."

"Whoa there Mary, you know who "everyone" is? Criminals. What's dangerous is the idea that a gun is enough to protect what's yours."

"Goodness, I didn't even think of that! Splicing keeps us safe, and Rapture safe as well!"

"It would," Alice muttered to herself, "if everyone in Rapture possessed the A-gene! To think, Suchong possessed the means to create an ADAM sickness vaccine. Ryan wouldn't let him make it, that's for certain. Too much money to be made when ADAM is addicting, but now…."

Alice glanced around as she came up to the Fishbowl's entrance. Not too long ago, ADAM hadn't been that common, usually a product for those who had money to throw away on the drug and keep ADAM sickness at bay, those who used it because they wanted to get away from everything and feel empowered, and those poor, first users who had no idea what they were signing up for when they first shoved an ADAM needle into their flesh. And every once in a while, a splicer would go completely crazy and kill someone before they were put down, though the incident never seemed to reach the headlines of the Tribune.

Now, about every nine out of ten people sported a plasmid or two of some sort. Permafrost covered a man's hands as he walked along, his fists clenching as he likely imagined getting his hands on some Parasites. A woman with a little girl following behind was practicing her new telekinesis, staring with wonder at the tin can she was levitating in the air. Two young men strolled lazily by,
one of them showing off the electricity jumping from purple crystal to purple crystal, while his friend laughed and balanced his shotgun against his shoulder to show his friend the blue energy that coursed through the veins in his own hand. A young couple came out of the Fishbowl, the boy lighting the girl's cigarette with Devil's Kiss to her delight, while Alice winced at the sight of flame flaring out of his fingers.

'What's going to happen when all these people begin to suffer the symptoms of ADAM withdrawal? Start wearing masks to hide their deformities like those splicers who attacked the Kashmir? Begin trading in ADAM? And when the cosmetic damage gives way to insanity? I may become the only sane person left in Rapture if this madness continues, and that thought itself is maddening.'

Alice ran a few fingers along her hair line to make sure her new hairdo was still in order. She had finally decided to do something about her hair with Aster introducing them to this friend of his. That, and she was tired of her hair resembling a rat's nest. Nanny had helped her even out the choppy locks with a careful trim that morning. When they got it as even as they could without cutting too much off, Alice had given her hair a thorough wash and twisted the wet strands into curlers, making sure they held tight and then blow-dried them. When she had taken the curlers out, her hair bounced up like springs to frame her face in thick, wide curls, coming to rest just along her jawline. She found the new look very becoming, along with most of the males that passed her by. Now if she could only find an outfit to go with the new look.

"G'day, Half-pint!"

Alice turned and gave Aster a genuine smile as he walked up. When she caught sight of the stranger besides him, she couldn't help but raise an eyebrow. Aster's friend was a small woman, about an inch or two shorter than she was. Her skin tone was much darker than the typical Rapture citizen, perfectly matching her brown hair. A set of unique fuchsia eyes looked out with a friendly spark from her heart-shaped face, fitting perfectly with her energetic gait.

It wasn't the woman who caused the raised eyebrow as much as it was her attire. It wasn't immodest or anything like it; it was just so colorful. A pair of dark blue capri pants adorned the woman's wide hips, held up with a purple belt. She wore a teal long-sleeved, off the shoulder shirt, with a yellow scarf tied around her neck. Her footwear consisted of a pair of blue ballerina flats, enabling her to easily keep up with Aster. Her hair was done up in that "Rosie the riveter" hairstyle, held together with another scarf, this one of vibrant green and blue with a stripe of yellow the same shade as her neck scarf down the middle. Her jewelry consisted mainly of gold: dangling earrings hung from her ears while bangles clicked rhythmically against each other on her wrists. The ornate designs of the jewelry combined with the small red jewel that hung down her forehead on a silver chain identified her as a women of Indian descent.

"Alice, this is Toothiana Fae, one of my best mates down here in Rapture. Tooth, this is Alice Liddell," Aster introduced them as they came to stop in front of her.

The woman, Toothiana, walked right up to Alice and presented her hand while balancing the green bag she wore from one shoulder, smiling widely and showing one of the most perfect smiles Alice had ever seen. "It's so good to meet you, Alice. Aster has told us so much about you." Her movements reminded Alice of a small, energetic bird.

She managed to smile back and shook her hand. "Likewise. It's a pleasure to finally meet one of Aster's mysterious friends, Ms. Fae."

Toothiana giggled, closing her eyes and showing off her bright pink eyeshadow. The little Indian
women was practically an explosion of bright, vibrant colors. Alice never would have thought that anyone could possibly wear so many different colors and pull off the look without making it look absolutely ridiculous. She could see the admiring looks that the passing males gave Toothiana as they passed by along with the jealousy and envy that radiated from the eyes of the feminine, all of which the woman was seemingly oblivious to.

"Please," she said, looking up from her giggle, "call me Tooth. Toothiana's a mouthful, and only my boss calls me 'Ms. Fae'. Is it all right if I call you Alice?"

Alice usually preferred for strangers to call her by her surname, but looking at the kindness and joy that practically shone from Tooth's eyes, she couldn't quite bring herself to refuse the woman. "Usually, I only let friends and family address me by my first name, but a friend of Aster's is a friend of mine," she answered. She noticed Aster breath out a sigh of relief and gave him a look before getting cut off by Tooth's enthusiastic thanks and her compliments on her own smile.

Nanny joined them a few minutes later, was introduced to the bubbly young woman (she gave Aster a sly wink when Tooth wasn't looking, much to the Aussie's embarrassment and Alice's amusement), and they all went into the Fishbowl for lunch.

The Fishbowl wasn't high dining by any stretch of the imagination; like most of the Drop's structures, it was a cheap, third-rate place, drafts coming in from the doors and windows, the dirty tiles of the floor almost enough to banish the appetites of its customers. The service was good however, and the food was better than one would expect for the low prices offered for it.

"Did you hear what happened to Dionysus Park?" Aster asked as they settled into a booth and looked over the menu. "The Tribune's makin' it out to be some kind of cult mass-suicide. The whole place is flooded, so unless Ryan sends a Big Daddy or someone in a divin' suit to investigate, nobody'll know for certain."

"If the Tribune is reporting that Lamb's followers committed suicide in the name of her return, it's likely the doing of Ryan or someone else with a grudge against Lamb," Alice said out loud, not raising her eyes from her menu. "The Tribune is in Ryan's pocket like the rest of Rapture's news sources."

Tooth stifled a gasp with her hand and looked around with wide eyes, only to find most of the Fishbowl's customers in hearing range of Alice nodding their heads in agreement. Aster chuckled at the expression on her face.

"You can say whatever you like 'bout Ryan and his cronies here in the Drop, Tooth," he grinned. "It's the only thing I like about this dump; everyone here hates the wanker, and his policies. They're all here because of him."

Tooth smiled at that idea. "I always loved freedom of speech. I only moved from America because I couldn't find any work." She snorted in derision. "Two years of dental school, and nobody would hire me as a dental assistant so I could pay my way for two more years, all of because of my skin color and my heritage, not because of my education and ability. So when I got Ryan's application in the mail, I fell for it, hook, line, and sinker."

"Hold up," Nanny looked up from her menu, giving Tooth a questioning look. "Your name is Toothiana, and you work as a dental assistant?" Alice gave her the same kind of look, while Aster desperately tried to hold his laughter at their faces in.

Tooth smiled in mirth with a touch of embarrassment. "Yes, I work at the Dandy Dental in the Medical Pavilion." She glanced down at her menu for a moment. "I've always had a thing for teeth,
I guess. I was looking to eventually taking over the place after I finish dental school at Rapture University, but that was before the war began. These days, everyone comes to the Pavilion with bullet, knife, and plasmid wounds. Dental hygiene has been placed on the back burner," she added with a touch of regret.

The Fishbowl's waitress came over to them then and took their orders. Alice mulled over what she had seen of Tooth so far. Colorful clothes and Indian ancestry aside, she appeared to be the typical Rapture citizen: A hardworking, talented person who had gotten tired of the ways things were on the surface and had jumped at the chance to live in a utopia where it was their ability that was recognized, not their race, sex, or nationality. However, she could detect something in Tooth's eyes, a hard glint not unlike the one in Aster's, but better hidden. It was the look she herself bore, the look of one who knew what it was like to lose everything they cherished and survive, trying to make something of their life now in a futile attempt to replace what they had lost. How the little woman had managed to keep up such a bubbly persona was beyond her. Judging by the absolute absence of the telltale signs of her personality being forced, it was apparent that Tooth's talkative, friendly nature was deeply ingrained into her.

They continued to converse when their food arrived, Alice not adding much while she ate and stared off into space, only speaking when one of the others managed to get her attention. Both Aster and Tooth had apparently gone through something in their lives that was similar to her own experience, something that had torn away everything they had ever knew and loved. Yet, they hadn't become embittered and jaded like she had. Instead, they had somehow buried it and put on a genuine smile for the world (or a neutral frown in Aster's case).

'How can they manage to be so...so optimistic in the face of the world and the horrors it spawns? And why can't I seem to do the same? Am I just an antisocial malcontent that has lost the will to put on a happy face for the world, or are they just two people unwilling to accept that the world is an ugly place where the innocent are helpless before the monsters that prey on them? Wait...now that I think of it, both Mr. North and Mr. Sanderson had the same look in their eyes....'

"Well, well, well, if it isn't Ladybird and her little defender," a familiar and unwelcome voice brayed, ending their conversation. The four of them halted their conversation and looked towards the interruption's source, leaning against Aster and Tooth's side of the booth in his fur-lined coat, suit, and large bowler hat, leering at her and Nanny from across the table. "Didn't think you'd be seeing me again so soon, did ya? I was told I could find the both of you in the Drop."

"Jack Splatter," spat Nanny as though she was speaking the name of a wretched, infectious disease, which she was. A social disease, that was. "What are you doin' out of jail? After what ya did to Long Tim and to the Mermaid, I figured that I would never see your ugly mug ever again. Pity."

"A loyalty oath to Ryan can get ya out of a lot of tight spots, along with a little extra." Splatter didn't stop grinning, even when Nanny insulted him.

Looking into his sneering eyes, Alice could see a glimmer of pure, raw hatred glaring out at them. That murderous light combined with that smile sent a tremor of unease through her, signaling that he believed that he had the upper hand. And that was not a pleasant thought.

"Look, mate," Aster began, a nervous look on his face as his eyes switched rapidly from her and Nanny to Splatter, "I don't know what this is all about, but none of us want to cause a scene here, do we?" Next to him, Alice could see Tooth nodding enthusiastically to Aster's attempt at prevent the suddenly-tense situation from escalating.

"Piss off, 'mate'." Splatter didn't even look at Aster even though he was sitting directly to his left. "This is private business, between me, Ladybird, and the Loon," he added in a derisive tone, his
unnerving gaze never leaving her and Nanny.

"What do you want, Splatter?" Alice put as much venom into the question as she could. "I highly doubt the last thing you want is to go back to that leaky, drafty prison at Neptune's Bounty."

That murderous light leapt into his eyes in full force for a moment before dying back down again. "I'm here for one thing and one thing only, you little minx—an apology."

"What?!" Nanny yelled. "What do we have to apologize to you for?!"

Acutely aware of Nanny's volume, Alice glanced around the diner. Most of the other patrons were watching the exchange, their features a mixture of anticipation, fear, and curiosity, knowing that they should leave but were too enthralled in this scene to do so. A few people walked out the door and she could see them warning others who were coming to the diner. The waitress disappeared into the kitchen and the cook came out a few moments later, brandishing a shotgun in his meaty hands.

Splatter made a fine show of ignoring them all. "For getting me thrown into cell at Neptune's in the first place, ya fat whore," he sneered. "If you had just made them girls work like we had agreed, none of that would have happened."

Before Nanny, Aster, or Tooth could say a word, Alice halfway stood up, her eyes boring into Splatter like a Big Daddy's drill. "She won't be apologizing to you, Jack Splatter, today nor any other day. Would you like to have the reasons for that explained to you?"

"Not really, you interferin', little slag."

Now that brought a collective gasp from everyone in the diner familiar with British insults. Aster literally bared his teeth as he clenched his fists, but before he could light into Splatter, Alice began iterating her points in a tone that dared anyone to interrupt her.

"First, you murdered a man who was merely doing his job." She ticked the reasons off with her fingers, watching Splatter from underneath her eyebrows. "Second, you physically assaulted Nan Sharpe when you refused to hold up your end of a business deal. Third, you destroyed her means of business and livelihood through arson. Fourth, you hit me in the head, knocking me into unconsciousness in the midst of a fire." (Aster was livid now, the darker side of his emotional range beginning to take over.) "Oh, and here's my fifth point." Alice held out her hands and the Pepper Grinder appeared in them, aimed right across the table at Splatter. Everyone in the Fishbowl jumped about a foot at the inexplicable appearance of the strange gun in her hands, even Aster and Nanny who knew of her latest ability. Splatter shot back, his eyes wide and staring at the weapon she had leveled at him, her own smiling gaze somehow fitting into the picture.

"Now," she began in a saccharine tone sweet enough to give Rapture's healthiest citizens diabetes, "you're either going to apologize to us for the misdeeds you perpetrated, get out of my sight, or become the first living target for my Pepper Grinder. Well," she cocked her head to one side and fully smirked at him, "what's it going to be, you maggot?"

Splatter's eyes shot between her own and the multi-barreled weapon threatening to drill him full of holes several times before he turned on his heel and marched straight for the door. Alice quietly blew out a held-in breath and the Grinder vanished without a sound. She sat back down and picked up her spoon, poking it back into her cod soup and ignoring the stunned glances sent her way. As everyone returned to their meals or newspapers, Alice felt her heartbeat go down, unaware that it had risen at all. Well, that was one fantasy she had actually made into reality. Just a few more to go.
The spoon was halfway to her mouth when something clattered across the floor, drawing her gaze. It's a spent EVE hypo, laying against the stool where it fell. Splatter's voice once again broke the silence, his strident tone filled with hate.

"Tell Bumby it was me that sent you!"

For an instant, Alice's auditory and visual senses struggled to make sense of both stimuli before the two pieces popped into place. Before she could open her mouth to warn the others, bring the Grinder back to stop him, anything, the table exploded into scorching, red flames.

Every memory of the fire came roaring back into her mind, forcing her to relive the crackling of the flames in her ears, the searing heat on her hands and legs, and the horrible, destructive dance of the fire itself before her eyes. Alice's mind gave in entirely to instinct, turning her into an animal fighting for its life. She was barely aware of the booth as she shot out of it, upsetting the meals and patrons of the table directly behind her; of Aster as he pulled Tooth to safety and of Nanny as she shot sideways from her side of the chair; of Splatter's cursing at his poor aim.

Covered in food and gasping on the floor, Alice struggled to make her mind think again just before she heard the second whoosh of Splatter's Incinerate! plasmid. She looked up just in time to see Nan Sharpe spontaneously combust right before her eyes.

The rush of the traumatic memories of the past gave way to the impossibility of the present. Her mind now went into overload, screaming that this couldn't be happening, that it was all a dream, that she was hallucinating the whole thing, that it was real and that someone had to stop Jack Splatter before he killed them all. All that went through her mind, just before the thump of Nanny's body on the ground and the screaming of the now-blazing cook snapped her out of her stupor.

She looked down to find Nan Sharpe looking up at her, the right half of her face partially spared from the inferno, the cause of which was explained by the wet glass that fell from Aster's hand and shattered on the ground. Nanny looked to Alice, gave her one last smile, and then laid still.

Alice's vision splintered at the edges like breaking glass, the cracks tinged red as red, just as her mind threatened to splinter. She looked back up to find Aster yanking both of his firearms from their holsters and Tooth struggling to get what looked like a makeshift crossbow of all things out of her bag. Standing at the Fishbowl's door was the murderer of Nanny and the Fishbowl Diner's cook, the latter who now lay dead in his burned cook's hat and apron beside his unfired shotgun. Jack Splatter's grin was now laced with the mania that shone out from his eyes, the mania that came from a long-stewing hatred that been given the power to act out its violent desires, his fingertips glowing a dull red with thermal energy as it raced through the veins in his wrists and hands.

Alice realized his new targets the instant she saw his eyes; he was going to kill Aster and Tooth next before he set her aflame. The only thing that terrified her more in that instant than being burned alive was if he let her live. Alone. With everyone she ever loved dead. In a city that cared not for the unfortunate. In an asylum where she would live out the rest of her days. Raving as the deaths of her father, her mother, her sister, her nanny, and her best friend played out in front of her again and again until she died.

And she screamed.

BS+AMA=WS

Toothiana Fae had seen many things over the course of her life: Love, prosperity, betrayal, invasion, war, suffering, death, an underwater city, corruption, and superpowers. But nothing could
have prepared her for the sight she was now witnessing.

Rapture was in the throes of a civil war, but today she had hoped to have a respite from the chaos, death, and destruction. A nice lunch with Aster during which she would finally meet the mysterious Alice Liddell of whom she had heard so much yet so little at the same time. She thought it hilarious that Alice had fought alongside North and Sandy at the Kashmir and they were such close friends of Aster's, but she didn't know. Both had spoken highly of her skills with a gun, her huge kitchen knife, and her plasmids. Aster had told them some of her history, along with her immunity from the side effects of ADAM, and Tooth had just been dying to meet her.

It had all happened too quickly. One moment they had all been eating a nice, albeit cheap lunch in the Drop, enjoying the food and conversation. The next this "Jack Splatter" had barged in, insulted, and then attacked Alice's old nanny with his Incinerate! plasmid. Trying desperately to get her homemade crossbow out of her bag so she could put a steel-tip bolt right between that madman's eyes before he could kill anyone else, Tooth hadn't expected the snapping of Alice's mind to physically throw her over the Fishbowl's counter.

Recovering from the unexpected blow, Tooth pulled herself up away from the dead cook using the counter and looked over the edge to find the diner in chaos. Most of the windows on their side of the building were shattered. People were pouring out the door and out the new exits in a bid to escape the chaos, creating their own in their stampede. Aster had been sent flying out a window, breaking it before the wave of pure force had. Food, condiments, glasses, plates, and silverware lay splattered and/or scattered on the ground, or embedded in the walls and furniture. And there, at the very center of the destruction, was Alice.

Remembering the beautiful girl who she had been talking to not a few minutes before, Tooth could only stare in a combination of fear and amazement at the demon that stood in her place. Her black and white dress had been replaced by a stark white one that matched the unnatural pallor that her skin had taken on, looking like a Japanese death spirit out for vengeance. Blood spattered her dress, covering her hands and forearms like a pair of macabre evening gloves, and seemed to pour from her eyes and from her chest where her heart was. Her hair, now alternating between black and an abhorrent shade of green, lashed around her head in an unseen gale as her eyes, now a devilish red, stared out upon Jack Splatter.

"What the bleedin' hell?!"

The latter, who was picking himself up from where he had been thrown, began to curse like a sailor in fear when he caught sight of his intended victim. His eyes wide with terror, Splatter gestured frantically with his flame-throwing hands. For a few moments, Alice was engulfed with flames, going out as quickly as they had been ignited, revealing that she had somehow sustained no damage from the attack. Her blank, red eyes focused with a frightening clarity upon the madman, and with another earsplitting shriek straight from Hades, Alice charged at Splatter, utterly ignoring the frantic, fiery barrage that he sent at her.

Splatter's second EVE hypo was sent flying to shatter and spill its contents against the wall as Alice lit into him. Tooth had seen her fair share of fist fights, but they paled in comparison to the utter beating that the young woman was dealing to the wretch. Her fists pummeled Splatter's frame, lashing out like a vicious wasp or snake as the man desperately tried to get away. As slight as Alice was, she seemed to have developed the strength of a giant in her rage. Bones cracked, flesh tore, and blood exploded from Splatter's nose and mouth as she continued to pummel him, taking her rage and pain and channeling it into her fists.

Finally, Alice landed a blow to Splatter's jaw that sent at least three teeth flying through the air and
forced his neck into an unnatural positon, signaling his death with a loud crack. As his body slumped against the wall, blood pouring from his mouth, nose, and one destroyed eye socket, Alice stood back, breathing hard.

Tooth hadn't moved from her spot behind the counter, staring with trepidation at the physical incarnation of madness, pain, and rage. At the back of her mind, she wondered if this was the "Enrage" plasmid at work. A week after the war started, Suchong had supervised an experiment involving that plasmid in the Kure-All. It had ended with two people dead: Roland Wallace, who had taken a shotgun blast to the face, and her friend Caroline Yancy, whose body was still in the shutdown facility. She wouldn't admit it to anyone, but when she had heard that Suchong had been killed by one of his own Big Daddies not a week later, she had felt a swell of satisfaction at the news.

"Alice!"

When a disheveled Aster came bursting in through the door, Tooth had to bite her tongue to keep from crying out. She had no idea what Alice would do. The young girl she had taken a liking to had become a wild card; completely unpredictable and very lethal. Aster froze when he caught sight of Alice and Splatter, the former looking like a vengeful demon straight out of Hell, the latter a crushed shell of a man. He caught Tooth's eyes and raised a finger to his lips, before he slowly began to advance on Alice. Tooth watched with a morbid fascination as one would an inevitable animal attack.

Alice continued to stare down at Splatter's corpse until Aster was right beside her. When he hesitantly reached out and touched her shoulder, she wheeled round, her nostrils flaring and fists clenched, glaring out at Aster with her red eyes. Aster sadly took in the sight before he closed the gap and embraced the trembling girl. From her position behind the counter, Tooth couldn't see Alice's face, but as her arms turned a much more human shade of white and went up to return Aster's hug, she breathed a sigh of relief.

When they separated, Tooth spotted two tears making their way down Alice's face as she looked upon Nan Sharpe's body. After setting down the money for their meal plus some extra for the damages done to the now-abandoned diner, Aster managed to gently pick up Nan's body and together, they made their way back to Alice's apartment at the Deluxe, ignoring the stares from passersby. Those who had witnessed Alice's transformation shrank back from her, fear radiating from them. The only thing that the object of their fear radiated was sorrow.

When they reached the Deluxe, the girl on duty at the lobby attempted to stop them from bringing Sharpe's body into the building. She shrunk away under the force of their combined glares.

Aster set Nan down on her bed, making an effort to show how much he was struggling with her body. Covering it with a blanket, he stood beside Alice as they looked upon the mortal remains of Alice's last link to her family. Tooth reached up and rested a hand on the poor girl's shoulder. A few moments later, she felt a hand settle on hers, sending her a quiet "thank-you" for the comfort.

She finally broke the silence. "A friend of mine works at the Twilight Fields Funeral Home. I can get him to lower the price for her, that is, if you don't want her buried at Arcadia."

When Alice slowly nodded, Tooth knelt down and opened her bag, taking out a Telekinesis plasmid bottle and a dental health kit. "We had a root canal yesterday, and the customer wasn't into splicing, and I remembered what Aster told me about your DNA," she said as she pushed the bottle into Alice's hands. "Be sure to use a clean needle, ADAM may kill germs, but better safe than sorry." She was beginning to ramble as the shock of Alice's loss and transformation began to wear off. "Oh, and here's a Dandy Dental Healthy Teeth kit. Your dental health is very important. The
instructions are inside, and...and I'm so sorry, Alice!

Dropping the kit in a way that would have gotten her fired if her boss witnessed it, Tooth jumped up and wrapped her arms around Alice, tears streaming down her face as though it was her nanny who had been killed. She knew what it was like to lose family, and despite everything that she had lost and gone through, she was never going to lose her empathy for her fellow human beings.

After an awkward silence, broken only by her sobs, she felt Alice's own arms gently break the hug. Her emerald eyes were a whirlpool of emotions as she regarded her. "Thank you," she finally managed, "for everything."

That was how she and Aster left the girl, standing there, staring at everything and nothing, the shock just waiting to wear and expose the girl to her new reality. The burned body of Nan Sharpe lay on her old bed underneath its blankets, waiting to be moved soon to its temporary home at Twilight Fields before vanishing forever into the Eternal Flame.

As soon as the door had closed behind them, Tooth turned to her Aussie friend. "Aster, what exactly was that...thing that Alice did back at the diner?" The question had been eating at her, but she had enough tact not to mention in front of Alice, especially right after what just happened.

Aster shook his head. "I've no idea, never heard of a plasmid or gene tonic that works like that. Could be some product of her 'experiences' at Rutledge and the ADAM they put into her then." He sighed. "I should have just shot that wanker, it was obvious that he was gonna do somethin' like that."

"No, it wasn't," she countered. "And it's more my fault than yours. I was the one who wanted to meet Alice, your best friend and the 'Angel of the Kashmir' as North called her." She gave a short laugh. "None of that would have happened if I had just listened to your concerns."

"I was concerned that they would get caught in the crossfire if Ryan learned I was in the Drop, and sent his show ponies to whack me," Aster argued. "I had no idea this Splatter character existed until fifteen minutes ago. Sounds like the type that decent folk stay away from unless they 'ave no choice." He cast his eyes to the ground. "He would 'ave found them anyway even if we decided not to 'ave lunch at the Fishbowl."

Tooth glanced back to the apartment door. "Will she be alright?" she asked.

"No," Aster answered promptly. "After losin' her family to that arsonist Bumby and then watchin' her old nanny burn to death at the hands of that drongo Splatter, she won't be alright. She's a very strong and resilient girl, but." He looked at the door, his face set in a silent frown. "I'll stay for a bit, make sure that she's not gonna do somethin' desperate or stupid." He glanced back to her, concerned. "Will you be alright goin' back home on your own?"

She held up her crossbow. "I think I'm set," she answered back, smiling. "You be careful going back home yourself, Aster," she told him in a more serious tone.

"Will do," he grunted, looking for something to lean on during his watch.

Giving him one last smile, Tooth turned and began making her way back to the lobby and eventually the Drop's train station. If there was one thing that Toothiana Fae was not, it was a pessimist. She always tried to find the silver lining behind life's troubles and hurts; it was just instinctive for her. Now however, she couldn't find the lining in any of this mess. And something told her that it was only going to get worse.
Please don't hate me. I didn't do this to purposely hurt Alice. I hate to say it, but I highly doubt Nan Sharpe would be able to survive something like the Rapture Civil War. I could be wrong, but that's just my opinion.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. The first meeting with Tooth and the reveal of Alice's Hysteria in the same chapter as Nan Sharpe's demise. Feel free to tell me your thoughts, suggestions, and ideas in a comment. Things are heating up now for WonderShock! Happy reading and writing everyone!
Chapter Notes

Wow, it's been ten months since I last updated. Sigh...the things you have to do for college. Just to warn you all, it might be another two months or more before I update again with my workload. You've been patient, and since this is probably my longest chapter yet, let's get started!

(Re-edited as of 8/20/2017)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 10: Hope Born of Redemption

January 20, 1959

Alice stared up at the ceiling from her cot, thinking about nothing and everything at once. The fire that had taken her parents, sister, and nanny from her raged in her mind, the guilt of surviving the horror when they had not eating at her heart and mind. She couldn’t remember the exact cause of the fire. Three images presented themselves: Dinah knocking a lamp over in the library, Angus Bumby throwing the same lamp into the library to cover up what he had done to Lizzie, and Jack Splatter wielding a fire plasmid.

Witless came in riding on the Jabberwock’s back, threatening to go to the constables if she didn’t get her ADAM money. Jabbing an ADAM syringe into her arm, she smiled as her face twisted and warped into something that made the Duchess’ look like a supermodel, just before the Jabberwock ate her whole.

The Carpenter, now sporting a painted-on mustache like Sander Cohen’s, waved to her from outside her window before Andrew Ryan chased him and the Walrus away, bleeding from the head and wielding a golf club.

Both Bumby and Splatter appeared in front of her, leering before their faces were stricken with death’s convulsions. Before they could hit the floor, their bodies were covered in some odd white substance and they had been positioned like grotesque statues. Cohen circled them, taking pictures with a camera.

A shapeless figure was led in by Elizabeth Comstock, Suchong, and Tenenbaum. The former two were clad in bloodstained clothes and appeared to have suffered injuries which looked certainly fatal. The leaders vanished, leaving the figure whose body changed almost constantly from hulking, threatening shapes to that of a wailing baby. The figure left after a while, chasing a cocker spaniel puppy, whose barks were suddenly cut short.

When Radcliffe, wearing a hangman’s noose around his neck like a tie, told her that he now suspected her of setting the fire, citing her fascination of it and her violent nature, she set Cheshire on him in retaliation.

She knew that she wasn’t guilty of their deaths, though she wasn’t sure who was if someone was to blame. She couldn’t remember if the fire had taken them when she was eight or nineteen. People
couldn’t die twice from the same cause. Or was it that they couldn’t die once from two separate causes? Or maybe it was both? Maybe one of her visitors knew? Or were they the ones who wished to know?

Alice pulled her rabbit towards her, unable to tell if it was her real rabbit or the surrogate that the Rutledge staff had provided her with. Odd; it seemed to be getting heavier as she pulled, and bigger.

She slowly turned her gaze from the ceiling to her rabbit, the fire mercifully retreating into her subconscious. As soon as she laid eyes on her rabbit, she froze, unable to move or avert her gaze.

In place of her aging toy, a Little Sister was encircled by her left arm, looking up at her with a mixture of fear, hope, and pleading in her yellow eyes. The ugly pinafore dress was ragged and tattered, far more fitting if the pale body that wore it was a corpse rather than the mutated, exploited child playing the role that had been forced upon her. Locking eyes with her, the Little Sister opened her mouth and cried out.

“Save us, Alice!”

Alice awoke with a start, sitting up fast and breathing hard. She glanced down at her rabbit, laying upside down on the floor where it had fallen from her arm. Her fevered dreams settling into her subconscious, she got up from her still-made bed, picked her rabbit up, and set it back on her pillow. Pausing to fix her hair and check the time, she came out of her room and turned to Nanny’s to help her get supper ready.

She remembered the events of that lunch just as her knuckles made contact with the door. Lowering her hand, she stared at the door, trembling as the memories of her newest loss washed over her.

Not only was the last remnant of her family gone and Nanny’s burned corpse lying just beyond the door, but she had lost every facet of control and let her Hysterical side out. She had no idea that was even possible in the real world, but the damage was done. Both her best friend and an absolute stranger had seen her true self, that mad creature that lurked just beneath her collected façade, waiting at the slightest injury to explode out and wreak havoc upon the focus of her pain and rage.

And as if it wasn’t enough that Aster and Tooth had witnessed her transformation into the physical incarnation of her madness and her brutal counter-attack on Splatter (her memory worked just fine while in the throes of Hysteria), but everyone in the Fishbowl had seen the attack. By now, the entire Drop would know about her, and tomorrow, Rapture would know that she harbored a monster within herself, a demon born of her suffering that showed no mercy to anyone that opposed her. At least she wouldn’t be on the receiving end of Ryan Security for killing Splatter. Self-defense was the right of every Rapture citizen, after all.

She just couldn’t believe that…that Ryan had let Splatter out of prison after he was convicted of murder and “parasitism”! He wasn’t going to be hanged (capital punishment was for smugglers), but taking a “loyalty oath”, one of Communism’s many evils, should not have given him a free pass! Let alone a plasmid.

And of the vast stockpile that was slowly building at Rapture Industries, he had to choose an Incinerate plasmid. Splatter had either been a pyromaniac, or he had chosen that plasmid especially for her.

It was that thought that finally triggered the end of her shock over Nanny’s death.
Her lungs suddenly devoid of oxygen, Alice collapsed against the door, fighting for air as her increasing heartbeat thundered in her ears. Her dear Nan Sharpe, the last living link to her family, had been roasted to death at the hands of a spliced maniac (whose mania was there before he touched ADAM). Even though the fault was entirely Splatter’s, her brain automatically cycled thought the entire series of events, searching for a way that made it her fault.

After mental hours (actually minutes) of this excruciating subconscious mental exercise, Alice forced it down and forced herself up. Still trembling, her heart feeling like it had been ripped out of her chest a second time, she made her way to the bathroom, mechanically fixed her hair and took the telekinesis plasmid, before going out the door. Even though it was about six hours since lunch, she wasn’t hungry, the pain in her heart overpowering any in her stomach.

She found Aster sitting cross-legged outside her door, snoring softly, his head bowed forward and his arms in his lap. Alice laid a gentle hand on his shoulder before continuing on her way.

As far as the world was concerned, she was one of Hatter’s automatons, no thoughts or musings forming in her mind as she left the Drop entirely and continued her unthinking tour into Rapture. Her only interactions were when she automatically bought tickets for the Atlantic Express or paid for using a Bathysphere. Those people who recognized her, and who had heard of what happened at the Fishbowl, swerved away from her, not that she really cared. At one point, she walked right past a Big Daddy and his Little Sister, utterly ignoring his warning groan/growl and his whirring drill. There were few things that could have broken her out of her stupor.

It was the bolt of electricity that streaked right by her face that brought her back into the land of the living. And the soon-to-be dead.

Reflexively taking cover, she peeked out from behind the fire-damaged bench to find two splicers duking it out in the middle of Arachne’s Web, not far from Market Street and High Street, and home to most of Rapture’s textile businesses. A “Jockey” Splicer, purple crystal growths sprouting out of random points in his arms, legs, and torso, hurled bolts of electricity at the security bots that encircled the “Controller” Splicer, the type who enjoyed using Possession and Security Bullseye to take control of any machine that came within eyesight. Rolling her eyes at the Jockey’s idiotic targeting of the flying robots when he could have ended the fight by simply killing the opposing Splicer, Alice activated Peeping Tom and crept away from the fight.

Arachne’s Web, like most of Rapture, had changed since the war had begun. Splicers were coming out of the woodwork as lethal plasmids became more acceptable and more available. The “Are You in the Know” theaters were spouting more pro-Ryan propaganda than ever. Every single shop now sported at least one Ryan Security Turret, and security cameras were starting to become commonplace, such as the one whose watchful gaze skirted the side of the plaza.

The Controller had enough of his mind left to throw a Security Bullseye globule at the Jockey just as the latter stepped into the camera’s line of sight, spattering his opponent in foul-smelling blue ooze and photoelectric insects. Before one could say “ADAM and EVE”, the cameras alarms went off, summoning even more security bots to the scene, filling the air with their piercing whistles and rattling machine-gun fire. With the reinforcements assisting the Controller’s remaining bots, the Jockey went down under a hail of bullets, his crystals shattering in a shower of sparks as he toppled to the ground.

It was then that one of Ryan’s goons showed up in the signature puff of red Houdini particles, the tongues of a Devil’s Kiss plasmid licking at his fingers. Dressed in a thick, grey trenchcoat and wearing a welder’s helmet over his face, he bellowed out, “Wat’s goin’ on here? Fightin’ in places of commerce is not allowed!”
The Controller’s reply to the Houdini was a Possession spector. As the Houdini now turned to a family cowering in front of an ice cream parlor, he laughed, a high-pitched manic chuckle.

“I’m no longer bound by the laws of king, God, or man!” he cried. “Both the machine and the flesh obey me now! No one controls me, I’m finally fr--”

The rest of his sentence was drowned out by the blast of Alice’s Hand Cannon and the spattering of his brains, blood, and skull fragments on his surroundings. The Houdini crashed to the floor, his Devil’s Kiss grenades dissipating and the ghostly green woman departing from him. The family scurried away, most of the spectators following their example. In a few moments, Arachne’s was quiet save for the murmurings of the customers taking shelter in shops and the dying sputter of electrical sparks from the Jockey.

Still hidden from all eyes with the aid of Peeping Tom, Alice put her gun away and began to walk away. It was foolish of her to use up her EVE reserve like this, but she didn’t really care. Whether she got thanks, reproach, eyes full of gratitude or fear, or nothing at all, it was no matter to her. All of her powers, all of her weapons, and she couldn’t stop Nanny from dying. No matter how much she had destroyed the bodies of Bumby and Splatter, no matter the fact that their victims had been avenged, it didn’t change the fact that her family was still dead, that the orphans entrusted to Bumby would always bear the mental and physical scars of his abuse, and that Nanny’s corpse still lay in her bed, burned to a crisp and never again to rise. All of the things she could now do in both Wonderland and Rapture, and despite that, she was still like the helpless, confused girl who had been released from Rutledge more than a year before.

She ducked inside the nearest store as her EVE ran out, which turned out to be the burned and gutted Selina’s Clothes and Shoe Emporium. Selina lay dead across the counter, the emptied cash register in her hands. Bodies of both customers and employees lay around in various positions, most of them shot, slashed, or burned. Little merchandise was still in its proper place, most of it ripped and torn on the ground, or burned entirely. The remains of a turret lay in a corner, a broken security camera a few yards away. The store had evidently been the scene of a robbery; Atlas’ splicers would have ransacked the entire area instead of just one store.

Finding a chair in the mess, Alice settled down. She glanced over at the body of a young woman lying next to a fallen mannequin, both of them riddled by bullets, her blood staining their clothes and faces. Just like Nanny, she had been going about her life, possibly shopping with her friends, maybe even dragging a reluctant and impatient boyfriend or husband along. And here she was, gone, her life taken by the Reaper far sooner than she had expected and far sooner than what should have been fair.

Alice knew he was there before she saw or heard him.

“Yes, Cat?” she asked, her voice subdued. When no answer came, she looked up to the usually talkative feline.

His eyes glowed as they always did, but they were passive, no hint of crazed and illogical mirth in them to be found. His tail lay limply on the ground like a dead thing, while his grin was almost nonexistent, only there thanks to the structure of his face. The only time he had remotely looked like this was just prior to his death at the hands of the Red Queen.

“Hello, Alice.” He looked around the store, eyeing a bit of gore next to his paw with disgust. “The surroundings, as macabre as they are, are appropriate for mourning, I suppose.”

“What are you here for, Cat?” Alice asked in a cross tone. “Unlike Rabbit’s first death, this is not the place for a curt and rude reminder that I must hurry, nor am I in the mood for one. Besides, I
have no destination that I must hurry to, not anymore.”

Cat nodded his head with her words, before shaking his head. “The first part of that statement is correct, while the latter is not. You do have a destination that you must travel to, it is just more advisable to proceed with caution this time.” He looked outside the store window and up. Following his gaze, Alice found herself looking at the glass ceiling of Arachne’s Web, straight up through the ocean and to….

“The surface,” she said in a low tone, as though it was something taboo and not to be spoken of lightly.

“Yes, the surface,” agreed Cat, “filled with all manner of parasite and doubter, if Andrew Ryan is to be believed. Your destination, and that of those whom you save.”

Alice’s head snapped back to stare at Cheshire. “I can’t save anyone, Cat!” she burst out. “My family, the orphans, Eleanor, I couldn’t save any of them! Even with all my plasmids and weapons, I was helpless against Splatter, and he used that to murder Nanny!” She deflated visibly and stared at the ground, beyond the comfort of crying now. “I can save myself, and Wonderland, but I can’t do anything for anyone in Rapture.”

“You saved that family just now from that Possessed Houdini splicer,” Cat countered, “and a few days ago, didn’t Aster tell you that his friends were able to gather the male half of the Houndsditch orphans from the various corners and rabbit holes of Rapture after Ryan determined that they were of no use to him? They’re safe from the likes of Bumby now, thanks to you.”

“You saved that family just now from that Possessed Houdini splicer,” Cat countered, “and a few days ago, didn’t Aster tell you that his friends were able to gather the male half of the Houndsditch orphans from the various corners and rabbit holes of Rapture after Ryan determined that they were of no use to him? They’re safe from the likes of Bumby now, thanks to you.”

“My family, the orphans, Eleanor, I couldn’t save any of them! Even with all my plasmids and weapons, I was helpless against Splatter, and he used that to murder Nanny!” She deflated visibly and stared at the ground, beyond the comfort of crying now. “I can save myself, and Wonderland, but I can’t do anything for anyone in Rapture.”

“Circumstances, both of them,” Alice replied bitterly. “When did you become so altruistic, Cat. Is self-reliance still a virtue to you?”

“To the bitter end,” he growled, startling her. “However, all virtues, if taken to an extreme, become vices. Too much chastity can breed a Puritanical pride, too much thrift turns one into a miser. And too much self-reliance, as Ryan and his sycophants have demonstrated, creates a selfishness and a disregard for human life such that the world has never seen before.

That old fool Wilson recognized your ‘hero complex’, your urge to help others as you cannot help yourself. Altruism is a virtue, the ability to have compassion on those weaker and poorer than yourself and help them. Capitalism and free enterprise are suitable as an economic system, not as the morals that guide the hearts of an individual and a society.

Your failures are not marks against you; you gave it your best effort and that’s all that can be asked of you, no more, no less. But if you lose hope now, if you embrace fatalism and the lack of hope and will that comes with it, then you will have lost everything for nothing. Take up your blade, take up your guns, take up your plasmids, and show Andrew Ryan and Rapture what true altruism looks like!” He stopped short in surprise at himself. “My word, I’m not sure if I’ve ever been that vehement before.”

Alice had listened with varying emotions as Cheshire had delivered his monologue to her. This time around, he had managed to address her current internal struggle without coming off as uncaring, commanding without giving way to being overbearing. And he was right.

She rose from her seat, her smile grim and promising a multitude of deaths to any who stood in her way. “Time to raise some havoc,” she quoted, “the dogs of war are loose!”

Cheshire’s grin stretched from ear to ear as his tail lashed the air with renewed vigor and his eyes regained their manic light. “I couldn’t have said it better myself,” he said as he disappeared.
Alice got up and was about to exit the store when she stopped short and eyed the surviving inventory of Selina’s Emporium. Checking to make sure no one was passing by, she began rifling through the few racks of dresses that survived the pillaging of the store. The hooks of the hangers screeched as they ran along the railing of the rack, clicking together loudly in the silence of the boutique. Most of the dresses were already soiled with soot from the fire and she had yet to come across one that was in her size. They would hang awkwardly off her svelte frame.

She was on the last rack when she finally hit pay dirt with a blue dress. She pulled it off the hanger and held it against her body, turning towards a nearby dressing room mirror to model it and gauge how well it would fit. It was a full circle swing dress with short sleeves and a modest, scooped neckline. The dress came with a standard white petticoat and a matching belt that would wrap tightly around her stomach and add dimension to the dress’ solid blue coloring.

When the dark-haired woman was satisfied with her finding, she moved on to another section of the dress store, searching through the wreckage once again until she found a pack of intact stockings and a pair of heels from the shoe department and headed off towards the dressing rooms.

Once she finished changing, Alice pulled back the privacy curtain of her stall and stepped out into the open, tugging on the belt of her dress until it was centered and smoothing out the wrinkles in the dress. She spent more time than she was comfortable admitting modeling the dress in front of the full length mirror adjacent to the dressing rooms, turning this way and that and admiring the way the dress complimented her figure and the hypnotic swish of the dress’ skirt.

The ensemble closely resembled her blue Wonderland dress, with the same blue color and a white belt in place of her apron. She even managed to find a pair of black and white striped stockings to adorn her long legs as they did in Wonderland. Her luck fell short with her boots, unable to find any in her size, but with the positively chaotic condition the shoe section had been left in, she was lucky to have found a matching pair of any type of footwear. Instead of her boots, she had on a pair of black, T-strap swing pumps with a reasonable heel, giving her a few more inches of height.

She left her old dress behind in the stall and was about to leave the store when she caught sight of some coins shining amongst the spilled contents of an upset purse, its owner only a foot away. Alice hesitated only for a moment before she began picking up those coins and continuing onto the pockets of those who had met their ends in Selina’s. She began searching the place for anything of value: first aid kits, money, jewelry, and even some nicer pieces of ladies’ footwear (the vending machines would take almost anything). The downed turret yielded a few rounds of ammo for the Grinder. In Selina’s office, she found a safe which she was able to hack, granting her a small bar of gold, fifty dollars, and a bottle of drinkable EVE that brought her reserve up to half full.

She exited the shop a little richer, with her EVE up to a good amount, looking and feeling like the Alice who had thoroughly trounced the Red Queen and the Dollmaker, and with a discount can of Fontaine Futuristics Beauty Hairspray, the exact same that Nanny had used earlier that day. The tin can with the little white sprout on top guaranteed an unstoppable hold for even the most active women—girl power in a convenient can. It was written in swirly, feminine print across its bright label.

Searching the bodies of the Jockey and the Controller, Alice let out a small scoff as she re-read the slip, wondering if she could really get her money back if she proved the advert wrong. Combat certainly fell under the “active” category, but so far it seemed to be holding up its promise, considering her curls were still in order after everything.

Alice gave the can and the smiling woman on it another look, sneering at the woman’s blissful expression as she fumigated her beehive hair with her own can of hairspray, before storing it with
the loot from the splicers. Instead of heading straight back to the Drop, she instead opted to check up on Chen’s progress with the Rapture version of her Teapot Cannon, and took a bathysphere to the tram station connected to High Street.

If one ignored the turrets and the security cameras being installed in the shops there, along with the subdued, suspicious atmosphere, High Street hadn’t changed that much. Alice was just starting to wonder why people were out and about when the PA decided to spout out the newest and most idiotic playlet made thus far.

“Hey Mary! Going to the big game tonight? I heard Ryan’s Raiders are playing.”

“No way, Jim. It’s not safe. Haven’t you heard? Atlas’ bandits are everywhere!”

“Hold on a second there! Remember what Andrew Ryan says! If you do that, the bandits win! Take your family to Fort Frolic and Arcadia! Go out and shop! It’s the Rapture way of life!”

Alice didn’t know which annoyed her more about Jim and Mary: the utterly transparent and obvious fact that it was propaganda and therefore something only an absolute fool would take seriously, or the way they portrayed “Mary” as the stereotypical, scared-of-her-own-shadow woman who constantly needed a man to reassure her. Stepping into the elevator just in front of the open bar, Le Temps Perdu, she glanced back at the bar’s patrons making a show of enjoying their liquor and rolled her eyes. Fools, the lot of them.

As soon as the elevator began its descent downward, something strange began to happen. The world turned grey and assumed something of a static quality, like an old television monitor without the white noise. For a moment, Alice thought she was about to go hysterical right there in the elevator. Then the ghosts appeared.

There were two of them, a man and a woman. Stepping away from them and towards the elevator’s right wall, she studied them with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension. Their faces were too blurry for her to recognize, but their voices were as clear as day.

“Where are you taking me?” the man asked, his body rigid with suspicion. Alice realized with a start that she knew his voice from somewhere.

“When’s the last time you saw Sally?” the woman said, facing the man while adopting relaxed but ready stance.

Over the man’s reply of “What?” Alice realized that somewhere, she had heard the woman’s voice as well. It was dancing just as the edge of her thinking mind.

“She was taken from you, wasn’t she?” the woman asked, her cigarette never once wavering.

“How do you know this?” the man asked in an accusing tone, his blurry right hand almost tightening into a fist.

“She was taken. Down at Sir Prize,” the woman continued, gesturing towards the man with her free hand. “You were playing the tables and-”

“She disappeared,” the man interrupted abruptly, glancing away from her.

“And…” She continued.

“Cop friend of mine, Sullivan. Says they found her floating in the docks,” he explained, still looking out the window, apparently at the passing ocean life.
“You see the body?” she asked.

“Look-” he started to say, looking back to her and raising an arm to point.

“Did you see…the body,” the woman persisted, lowering her cigarette. “This world values children, not childhood. There’s a profit to be made and men who make it.” She tossed her smoking cigarette to the floor and ground it out with her foot. “I’m taking you to one of them,” she finished.

They began to fade away as the elevator came to a stop, their last words fading with their forms. Looking out into Market Street, Alice had a faint, ghostly impression of Le Temps Perdu and High Street which too faded away. Pressing a hand to her head, Alice hurried towards Chen’s.

“What the bloody hell was that? This can’t be a relapse into madness; a random hallucination of two ghosts in an elevator. That’s tame compared to my old hallucinations. Boring even. Ghosts are hardly something that my fevered mind of old would conjure. Still, what were those things? And why did their voices sound familiar?”

When the sound of gunshots suddenly rang through the air, causing most bystanders to jump before remembering who kept shop nearby, Alice’s run slowed to a walk. It wasn’t uncommon for gun fire to escape the soundproof walls of Chen’s whenever someone entered or exited the shop, but this didn’t sound like the precise shots of someone testing a new gun. Too erratic, too quick, and there were too many different weapons involved (different firearms made different “bangs”).

Something was wrong at Chen’s.

Coming up to a corner, Alice peeked around to find a man wearing the hockey armor and ammo belt that quite a few of Atlas’ fighters favored. He was standing in front of the entrance to Chen’s shop, a carbine in his hands, keeping watch. Turning on Peeping Tom’s X-ray vision, she looked into the shop, counting four white figures inside along with dozens of blue ammo boxes. One of them was crouching behind the counter, that would be Chen. Two of them were watching his spot while the third was positioning something that also glowed white. It was a turret, she realized.

Turning invisible, she crept up on the Atlas fighter standing guard and hit him on the back of the head with the butt of her shotgun. The thump of his landing went unnoticed by his compatriots. From what Alice could see as she crept inside, the Atlas fighters had been trying to get at Chen before she had arrived, judging by the huge spiderweb cracks in the bullet-proof glass that kept him separated from the rest of his shop. Right now, their plan was to use an RPG turret and a makeshift grenade launcher to destroy the glass and get at Chen.

“How we botherin’ with this slant?” the man pushing the turret into place growled, glaring at his friends for not helping him. “We can take every gun in the place and he can’t do nothin’ to stop us.”

“We’ll be takin’ the guns, Shorty, after we’ve had a chat with Mr. Chen,” the man wearing a box over his head answered, the box muffling his voice. “Word is this gunsmith has made some kind of new grenade launcher, a special one, and the boss is really interested in it. And Chen here keeps his best stuff in the back, so pipe down and get that turret set up.”

“That,” the other watcher added, “and he’s got skill with gunsmithing, ain’t no point in denin’ that. We could use someone like him.”

“We’d be walkin’ out of here with the slant, the launcher, and what else he’s got back here if you guys would help--ah, there! Hand me the launcher, Charlie. I hate bulletproof glass as much I hate
With the man’s back turned to the turret, Alice took cover and turned off Peeping Tom before shooting Possession at the turret. The first RPG shot past the startled complainer and detonated between his friends, killing them in a blast of blood and fire. The second RPG flew over the man as he threw himself to the ground, a rack of guns exploding into a shower of burning splinters and glowing metal shards. The third RPG never left the turret thanks to the survivor’s use of Electro Bolt and his shotgun.

Breathing hard and staring at the twisted hunk of metal that had been an RPG turret only a few seconds before, Shorty’s beginning euphoria at being alive was cut short as a Hand Cannon was pressed against his head.

“Drop your weapon, get up, leave, and you will live,” Alice said in a tone colder than Old Man Winter. “Try to kill me and you will die. It’s your choice to make.”

Shorty tried to bring his shotgun up and around. The Hand Cannon barked and Shorty’s headless body collapsed to the ground, quivering, his shotgun having only made it a few inches off the ground.

“And your choice has made you.” She rolled her eyes at the man’s idiocy and turned to the counter, summoning a medical kit. “Mr. Chen, are you all right?”

Chen poked up from behind the counter, almost hidden from the spiderweb cracks spread across the glass, clutching something to his chest. “Other than a graze wound, I am fine, Ms. Liddell. Those idiots came in here and shot the place up before I could get behind the glass. If they came back here, I was planning on testing my newest weapon on them, the pigs. Speaking of which….”

The slot pushed out with something in it, something with a very distinctive shape. Walking over to it, Alice found herself staring down at the Rapture version of the Teapot Cannon, not as smoothly put together as the one in Wonderland, but there was no mistaking what it was. Alice took it out of the slot and it replaced with the medical kit before examining it, finding its balance and design to be exactly like the original.

“I finished your ‘Teapot Cannon’ yesterday,” Chen explained as he began to bandage his arm. “My finest work yet, on par with your Pepper Grinder. Built to your specifications, it can shoot anything that a grenade launcher can, and you can fill those pods, which can be made at any U-Invent, with napalm, liquid nitrogen, and anything else you can put in a chemical launcher.

Went out to celebrate and I must have blabbed about it. I woke up with a bad hangover, and these idiots knocking on my door, offering to buy it. I told them it was for a custom job requested by a specific customer and not for sale. They came back with that turret, and now look at my shop!”

Alice looked up at the shop, seeing the destruction the turret had unleashed. Boxes of ammo lay scattered on the ground, bullet holes were everywhere, and what had once been high-quality guns was now splintered wood and cooling pieces of metal. Chen continued, an accent not unlike Suchong’s ruining his grammar in his rant.

“First Ryan sends thugs to intimidate me for making Power to People machines for Fontaine and now Atlas’ goons are destroying my shop for single weapon! Enough is enough!”

Alice waited for him to calm down before asking, “How much will that be, Mr. Chen?”

He jumped as though he had forgotten she was there. “Take it free of charge, on the house! And
take whatever ammunition you need! I’m going underground until this is over. Good luck to you, Miss Liddell,” he added. “Thanks to your imagination, the Pepper Grinder and the Teapot Cannon are my finest works yet. Take care of them, and they’ll take care of you.”

Alice gave him a smile though the glass. “Thank you, Mr. Chen, for your weapons and for your generosity. I’ll repay the favor if I ever find the opportunity.”

Chen disappeared into the back of the store, and Alice began looting the bodies. She found a few EVE hypos, shotgun shells, and three frag grenades from the launcher, which had somehow survived the turret’s attack. The Teapot Cannon already had four pods of napalm ready, along with a note detailing the components necessary for a U-Invent to make more pods and how to program the design into the machine by hacking it. Apparently, Chen had also helped in designing the U-Invents.

Alice discovered that her personal storage had its limits; for example, she couldn’t hold more than three hundred and sixty rounds of Thompson Machine Gun ammunition for her Pepper Grinder and more than forty rounds for her shotgun. She briefly wondered what other limits existed for her other inventory.

Just as she was about to head out the door, Alice realized just where she had heard the ghostly man in the elevator before. “Mr. Chen,” she called out, “can you tell me how Mr. DeWitt is faring?”

“He went missing on New Year’s,” he called from the back, tools clinking and banging against each other as he gathered them. “I saw him and a girl, really pretty one, go into Cohen’s up on High Street. No one’s seen either of them since then, and I don’t think anyone ever will again. That Cohen is a madman.”

Alice frowned in thought as she left Chen’s, headed towards DeWitt Investigations.

‘From what Mr. Chen just told me and from that, “vision” in the elevator, that woman was taking Mr. DeWitt to see Sander Cohen about this little girl, Sally. “This world values children...there’s a profit to be made and men who make it. I’m taking you to one of them.” Looks like my suspicions about Cohen’s “charity work” were correct. His finger is in that rotten pie along with Ryan’s. But why was that woman taking DeWitt to see Cohen about this particular girl? It’s not like they were going to outright accuse him of kidnapping her. Were they?’

Alice’s thoughts were interrupted by yet another burst of gunfire just up ahead, this time in front of the Little Wonders Educational Facility. Nearly getting knocked down by a fleeing couple, she came across a sight that she would not soon forget: five people, all of them armed to the teeth with guns and plasmids, attacking a Big Daddy and his Little Sister.

Two people already lay upon the ground. One of them, a black-clad, blonde woman, had apparently been caught in the crossfire, her body riddled with bullets. The other was a man wearing a shirt and overalls. His distinct lack of a head, which was smeared in a hole on the wall and on the Bouncer’s drill, prevented any further identification.

“Come on! Give her up, you fat whale!” one of the splicer’s yelled, firing a Tommy gun.

The Little Sister’s sudden shriek caught Alice’s attention. While the Bouncer was attempting to avoid the electro bolts of its attackers, one of the combatants, a thirtyish man wearing a business suit, had grabbed the little girl and was making off with her. Conveniently, he was headed right towards her.

Alice brought her Hand Cannon to bear as she stepped into his range of vision. “Put the girl
“Go get your own Little Sister, you dizzy twist!” Other than the feral expression on his face and the erratic twitching of his left eye, he could have passed for any ordinary businessman.

“You won’t find anything in the daycare if you’re that desperate for an ADAM fix!” he added, sneering at her as though she was an ADAM addict with no ability to control her craving.

Alice’s first shot sent him stumbling backwards, a look of surprise on his face. The surprise remained on his face after the second shot, dropping him to the floor. The Little Sister scrambled from his dead grasp, crawling into a corner and crying for “Daddy”.

Alice turned her attention to the remaining four splicers. The most obvious Splicer of the group, and the biggest threat, the Frosty, froze the Big Daddy, allowing the others to begin closing in on him. Trading in the Hand Cannon for the Pepper Grinder, she opened fire upon them.

For an instant, Alice thought that she was firing the original Pepper Grinder again. The feel of the gun in her hands, the kick as it unloaded its chambers, the popping bangs as the glowing bullets left the twin barrels and flew towards their targets. For a moment, the scent of burning peppercorns filled the air before the real smell of gunpowder reached her nose.

One of the splicers succumbed immediately to the surprise attack, falling to the ground screaming bloody murder with a dozen holes in his back, all of them gushing red. The other Splicers took cover, each of them sporting a few wounds from the barrage.

One of them clambered up the wall and looked down at Alice with a snarl, her face yet unscarred by ADAM withdrawal. “You’ll pay for that!” she hissed as she threw two very sharp, large knives at her. If the woman’s evolution continued, she would eventually come to use the huge hooks that Spider Splicers were so fond of.

Throwing up her arm in an instinctive attempt at self-defense, Alice accidentally caught the knives with her new telekinesis, the light glinting off their sharpened edges and reflecting her green gaze. She very purposely threw them back. One of them impaled the Spider through her shoulder, while the other cut a furrow in her face, giving Alice a window to shoot her full of holes while she frantically tried to staunch the bleeding from both places.

She came down with a sickening thud, one hands still clutching her bleeding face, the other trying to wrench the knife out of her shoulder.

The Frosty fired at her now, prompting her to duck the icy projectiles, one of them tracing her shoulder and sending a cold chill through her. The Teapot Cannon came out for the first time and she fired a pod of napalm at the Splicer, the Cannon spitting out the pod with a liquid gurgle. The projectile shattered against the Frosty, instantly engulfing him in fiery napalm instead of boiling hot tea.

As steam billowed off the Frosty amidst the flames and his screams (“Fire! I’m in Hell!”) Alice held down the Cannon’s trigger and was rewarded with a burst of steam and a shrieking whistle. The next pod exploded when it hit the Frosty, ending his tortured screams.

If the smell of the burnt corpse had been that of burning flesh and not subliming carbon dioxide, Alice would not have noticed the final opponent in favor of nausea. He came at her from behind with a knife in hand, his loud footsteps the only indication that she should duck. At such close quarters, she instinctively went for her own blade, the flashes of blue, red, and black flaring like fireworks with streaks of crimson as she worked the Splicer over. The final slash sent a shower of
ADAM-laced blood to spatter against Alice, adding a splatter of red to the white of her belt.

As the body collapsed to the ground, Alice caught sight of her reflection in the broken glass of the Little Wonders’ front door. She looked exactly like she did in Wonderland after she had successfully battled and destroyed a band of enemies sent to fight her; the Vorpal Blade dripping with blood, her eyes flashing with the fierce, primal joy birthed from victory, her enemies laying around in various positions of defeat, her breathing shaky and her heart rate settling as the adrenaline began to wear off. The Alice who had fought for and saved Wonderland twice was finally in the real world.

When the Big Daddy broke free of the ice, Alice quickly left her position between him and the Little Sister, not willing to test her mettle against a Bouncer so soon. She watched the pair reunite before getting to the business of draining her former opponents of their ADAM. If the bond between the Daddy and the Sister wasn’t a biochemical concoction in their brains made for the purpose of recycling ADAM from dead bodies, Alice would have found their reunion heartwarming. As it was, her heart felt cold and heavy as she headed towards DeWitt’s.

Before leaving, she had managed to scrounge some money and an audio diary from the woman in black. Claudia Brown had recorded her thoughts on the diary, labelled “Sinclair’s Idiocy” and made just the day before the war started.

“That fool Sinclair is going to get us all killed! With Ryan’s approval, he’s gone ahead with that idiotic ‘Home Consumer Rewards Program’ of his. A bunch of splice heads running around with guns and plasmids trying to kill each other while Sinclair’s people take notes! I’ve heard that they even involve taking a Little Sister from her Protector just to put her in one of the vents! What if the splicer decides to keep her for himself? If we lose any of them to these morons, at least it’ll be Sinclair’s head that rolls, not mine.”

Alice had heard of something of this sort starting about the same time as the war. It was absolutely insane the things that went on in Rapture. A company testing “defensive products” in the field in the midst of a war while providing its clients with newer plasmids and ADAM rewards? It was madness. The worst part was that she wasn’t surprised by anything of that caliber anymore. When it came to disregarding life in the name of profit, Rapture would have taken first place out of all the nations in the world.

Alice discovered two things when she came upon the former home and business of Booker DeWitt. First, the notice on the door declaring that the private investigator was dead, his business liquidated, and his belongings confiscated by Ryan Industries as no Will existed to distribute them. She wasn’t going to find anything there to explain the mystery of the Elevator Ghosts.

The second was the audio diary on the stairs that had somehow escaped notice. To her surprise, the diary had been made by Elizabeth Comstock on New Year’s Eve. Wondering what Cohen’s Songbird had to say, Alice pressed the play button of “The Trap is Set”.

“Of all the cities that Comstock would take refuge in, this is the one I least expected. A city as opposite in its ideology to Columbia as its elevation. What angers me, besides forgetting about Anna, is how far he’s gone to become Booker DeWitt; taking his name, his vices, even tattooing Anna’s initials on his hand. I’ve taken his true name as my own to avoid suspicion, but after tonight, there will be no need to keep up this charade, no need to stay in this city of Man. The trap is set, the bait is ready, and Zachery Hale Comstock will finally pay his debts.”

The more clues Alice found, the more confused she became. Mr. DeWitt had really been posing as someone else? Why? If he was seeking a new life in Rapture, why hide his identity? What was this Columbia? If Elizabeth Comstock, or whoever she was, was the woman in the elevator, as
evidenced by her matching voice, what had she been doing? Taking DeWitt to Cohen to find a little girl? Using her as bait to make him pay for something?

Hearing the utter hatred in her voice as she talked about Mr. DeWitt, or Mr. Comstock, Alice was just able to keep a chill from coursing down her spine. While her hatred for the likes of Bumby and Splatter could burn as hot as a raging bonfire, Elizabeth’s seem to be of the opposite kind, a cold, bitter loathing that waited until the perfect moment to make itself known, to wound its targets mentally and emotionally before going for the physical. Whatever Comstock had done, the Songbird hated him for it, and he had apparently paid his debts, with his life.

Putting the diary away with the last, Alice began making her way back to the Drop. Aster would panic if he discovered that she was gone, and Nanny’s funeral needed to be arranged. That, and the hunger pains that came from an unfinished lunch were making themselves known. What mattered now was her own survival and that of the few friends she had left. The mystery surrounding Mr. Comstock and Elizabeth could wait for another day, if any more clues popped up at all.

In a way, the Rapture Civil War was a blessing. If she had possessed any power over the forces that caused it, she would have stopped it from happening. As things were, it gave her a motive to finally escape the enormous trap that Rapture was turning out to be, along with the excuse to finally be herself; a warrior conceived of her imagination and brought forth into reality.

BS+AMA=WS

January 22, 1959

Nanny’s funeral had taken place about twenty-four hours after her death. Tooth had been true to her word and had managed to arrange a small but beautiful service for Nan Sharpe at Twilight Fields. There had only been a handful of people there: herself, Aster, Tooth, and a few of Nanny’s friends and former employees from the Mermaid. Afterwards, her body had been taken to Eternal Flame for cremation, and there, they committed her remains to the ocean. From the first speaker at the service to the moment when the ashes came to rest on the floor of the Atlantic, Alice shed no tears externally. Internally, she wept rivers.

Afterwards, she had cancelled her apartment contract with Sinclair at the Deluxe, gave Nanny’s belongings to her friends and former employees (with the exception of an audio diary that she stored away for a “rainy day”), and moved into one of Aster’s safehouses in the Warren.

According to Aster, there were about a dozen of the caves-turned-refuges in the massive cave system beneath Rapture, most of them housing the Houndsditch boys. Alice’s cave was an offshoot from one of the main corridors. It was smaller than her cell at Rutledge, with only enough space to stand with the bed taking up most of it. The rough walls and ceiling were low and the floor was hard and cold, but it was dry and private. There was a small supply of first aid kits and foodstuffs underneath the bed; Aster had offered more but Alice told him that she was more than capable of finding her own things now. The things that made it a home was the photograph, her old drawings, and the fact that Aster’s new home was only a short walk away.

At the moment, Alice was standing at a tram station in Olympus Heights. Aster had come to her a few hours before and told her that his source (she had made a snide joke about most rogues having multiple sources) had told him that a woman matching Tenenbaum’s description had been sighted in the area. It wasn’t much but even if it turned out to be a false lead, it gave her something to think about other than Nanny’s death and funeral. And something to think other than the fact that she was only a tram ride away from her first home in Rapture.

Alice yawned despite the coffee she had drank only two hours earlier at the Bistro. It was getting
late, and she found herself wishing for a watch. Aster had told her that he and Tooth would be meeting with their other friends. It was time that she officially met them. He had also hinted at something else that would take place at the meeting. She frowned as she thought about it. It wasn’t like Aster to be mysterious like that; he usually opted for a straightforward approach. It sounded like something of great importance, and she’d rather not be late for it.

It was a faint, cranking noise that broke her thoughts. If it wasn’t so out of place, she wouldn’t have noticed it. Looking around, she realized that she was practically alone. The last tram had pulled away half an hour ago, and the hour was so late that the chatter back at the Bistro had subdued to a low hum. She was the only one present to hear the cranking and see who was responsible.

She noticed that it seemed to be coming from beneath her the same moment that she spied the incline that lead down to the sewers. The cranking abruptly ended and the quiet tapping of footsteps took its place, prompting Alice take out her shotgun and use her Peeping Tom. She saw the woman before she made it beyond the overhang above the sewers. Beneath her, she could make out the pink outline of a door. Alice cursed herself for not using Peeping Tom earlier before turning her attention to the woman.

She was wearing a burgundy dress, her shoulder-length brown hair hiding her face from view. She spun the cylinder of a revolver as she looked around for any one still out. Seeing no one, she turned (Alice turned invisible as she did so) and allowed her sole observer a look at her face. It was a heart-shaped face, her brown eyes projecting an intelligence uncommon even in Rapture. In a way, it was a lovely visage. Any charm that she possessed was lost on Alice, who knew the face of Brigid Tenenbaum from the many posters and the theaters that she had seen since getting out of Rutledge. Here was the woman responsible for the discovery of ADAM and the surviving co-author of the horror story of the Little Sisters.

Alice waited for Tenenbaum to pass her before she stepped from her hiding place, still invisible, and spoke.

“Brigid Tenenbaum.”

Tenenbaum shot around, the gun held in both hands and looking for the speaker. The muzzle was a few inches from Alice’s, affording her a look right into Tenenbaum’s steely, concentrated gaze. The sights of the gun lined up perfectly with the German scientist’s vision, following her gaze as her eyes flitted everywhere, trying to locate her target. Alice hoped her breathing wouldn’t give her away, especially not at point-blank range.

Finally, Tenenbaum lowered her gun, deciding that she had been hearing things. That was when Alice struck it out of her hands and decloaked right in front of her. Before Tenenbaum could reclaim her gun, Alice put her foot on it and stuck her shotgun right into the scientist’s surprised face.

“Riddle me this: why I shouldn’t turn your brilliant mind into a mixture of broken bones, brain matter, and lead?” Her voice was an icy venom, her eyes twin pools of green acid. “I’ll give you the answer: I have a question for you. Where are the Little Sisters you took from Ryan Industries?”

Tenenbaum’s expression turned from fear and surprise to a caution masked by boredom. “And why would I be telling you that?” she replied with a marked accent. “So you can take them back to Ryan, yes?”

“No, so I can take them to a safe place beyond your abuse and exploitation, you selfish, misbegotten, depraved monster!” Standing there, her teeth bared and her nostrils flaring, she waited for Tenenbaum to protest her accusation.
“Monster?” Tenenbaum’s eyes left Alice’s and fell upon the ground, her mouth and voice taking on a sorrowful note. “Yes, monster. That is good word for me.”

Alice blinked, before resuming her hard look. For all she knew, Tenenbaum was a talented liar and manipulator along with being an accomplished geneticist.

“Here in Ryan’s city,” she continued, looking at Alice with a new expression, “is one who wishes to help the little ones, not for her own gain, but for them.” Alice gave a slight nod, never taking her eyes off of Tenenbaum once. “Follow me,” the woman motioned, back towards the incline where she had emerged.

As Alice followed Tenenbaum into the sewers of Olympus Heights, she wondered what she was going to find, besides the horrid smell. A laboratory where the Little Sisters’ remaining humanity was burned away? A horrible shrine dedicated to the macabre acts that the German woman had committed to the horrors her hands had made? A storeroom where Tenenbaum drowned her guilt with liquor of the surface and of Rapture? Or would she find something that would give her something she had not known in a long time?

They came to a door which Tenenbaum rapped upon in a simple sequence. For an instant, nothing happened and then the door began to open from the inside. Turning on Peeping Tom, Alice looked past the door the instant before it fully opened.

She could imagine all the doors, and what was behind all the doors. And behind this door, incredibly, she could see them.

**BS+AMA=WS**

In the darkened room, a watch was examined by the poor light of a television monitor before its owner turned his attention back to the monitor. On it, Bunnymund, Fae, North, and Mansnoozie made idle conversation at their “war table”, a map of Rapture superimposed with a map of the Warren, their voices laced with static thanks to the jury-rigged camera he used to attend meetings.

They were underneath North’s Workshop, at the main headquarters of their little group. Four individuals, five including himself, and maybe a sixth, against one man who built a city at the bottom of the ocean and another man who aspired to conquer that city, both of them uncaring for those poor innocents caught in the crossfire. Things didn’t look bright for the odd group.

“Then again,” the man watching the monitor thought as he sipped coffee from a thermos, “when have things ever looked bright for any rebel group? There are so many examples throughout history of individuals pooling their knowledge and abilities to fight an impossible enemy. I just hope they can survive this city, let alone succeed in this mission.”

When he had first come down to Rapture, the city had proceeded to destroy the very limits of his imagination. An Art Deco style utopian metropolis built on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, housing the best and the brightest of humanity, producing wonders and technology that would have astounded the world. He had come to Rapture at the very height of its progress and prosperity, but now he could only watch as the forces that had driven it forward show their true colors and destroy the city and its people.

Ryan thought of altruism as a blight upon humanity, the source of all its grievances and atrocities. The business tycoon considered property rights, capitalism, and social Darwinism to be the only forces behind humanity’s ascension as a species.

From his own standpoint, it was the lack of altruism in Rapture that was contributing to the de-
evolution of its citizens. Social Darwinism, no matter if it was based on racial superiority or economic competition, would always have one end: true Darwinism, Survival of the Strongest, the Great trampling on the Small.

“Adam Smith was a genius, but he never meant for his economic system to be the foundation upon which a society is based. The dog-eat-dog morals of free enterprise are prefect for economics, not as the values that guide the morals of an individual or a society.” He took another sip of coffee. “If I ever get to writing my memoirs, I shall include that as my official response to Atlas Shrugged”.

He glanced back at his watch and sat up. The first real meeting of their little group was about to begin and it looked like Alice Liddell wouldn’t be joining them. He liked the girl; she had been dealt a hand that he wouldn’t wish upon any of his enemies (and he had some real doozies when it came to that facet of his life), and yet, here she was, fighting for her loved ones as well as herself. She would have made out like a bandit in his line of work, along with quite a few others.

She chose that moment to explode through the entrance into the North’s safe house. Speak of the devil.

“Aster, Tooth, I’ve found Tenenbaum and she’s been…..” She stopped midsentence and midstride as soon as she caught sight of North and Mansnoozie. “Mr. North, Mr. Mansnoozie, what are you doing here?” she asked, staring at them.

“What am we doing here? We are right underneath my Workshop!” North answered, laughing as he strode over to Liddell and picked her up, kissing her on both cheeks before setting her down. The watcher grinned at the look on her face, like she wanted to simultaneously smack the Russian and smile back at him. He almost laughed when Bunnymund face-palmed over the whole thing.

Both North and Mansnoozie were dressed in their working clothes. North was in his usual black slacks and red shirt that bared his arms, showing off the tattoos written in Cyrillic. Mansnoozie’s working outfit consisted of a pair of overalls over a yellow shirt that would have been painful to look at, if the camera could show color. His blond hair sticking out in all directions, he smiled and waved at Liddell, who mirrored the gesture.

“Alice, you found Tenenbaum?” Fae interrupted. “Where is she? What has she been doing?”

“I swear if that kraut laid a finger on those little girls she took-” Bunnymund began to growl out.

“She’s done no such thing,” Liddell declared. “She’s had a change of heart, as hard as that is to believe. She’s taken those Little Sisters under her care, and she’s even discovered a way to cure them of their condition!”

He leaned back in his seat in surprise and considered what she had told them while the others exclaimed their surprise and wondered aloud how it was possible. They were wondering how the Little Sisters could be cured, while he was wondering how Tenenbaum could have changed in such a short time. It didn’t surprise him that Tenenbaum was able to cure the Little Sisters, she had helped to create them after all. He knew of the horrible things that the “Wunderkind” had committed in the concentration camps where, instead of finding monsters and torturers, she had discovered her first true friends in the likes of Mengele and the other Nazi doctors and scientists. Why change her ways now?

“I’m not certain of the exact process,” Liddell admitted. “From what she told me, she employed a method where she broke the Sisters’ dependence on the slug, thus killing it and allowing her to extract the loathsome thing and some of its ADAM without killing the child. I’ve seen the results:
healthy, normal little girls, and jars containing their slugs.” She paused. “Well, the girls’ mental conditioning is still in place, but Tenenbaum is working on curing that as well.”

“I will admit,” North said as he settled back into his chair, “I did not see this coming. Tenenbaum turning from monster into mother; maybe there is hope for Rapture.”

Liddell made a face at that as she and the others took their seats. “She would disagree with that statement, no offense meant, Mr. North, and I would be inclined to agree with her. The six of us appear to be the only people in this Godforsaken city that care anything for the plight of the Little Sisters, and I believe it’s going to stay this way.”

“No argument here,” Bunnymund said, wiping his boomerangs with a handkerchief. “So what do we do? Go out there, bump off every Big Daddy we come across, and take the tykes to Tenenbaum, is that it?”

“Ideally, yes,” Liddell replied, glaring down at the map of Rapture, “if Tenenbaum had enough supplies to perform the procedure on every Little Sister in Rapture, and the supplies to feed and take care of them until we can organize an escape from Rapture, that would be the case.”

Mansnoozie began gesturing with his hands while Fae translated. “Sandy says that we can help with the supplies and housing issue. We’re already doing that with the Houndsditch boys.” She rubbed her chin in thought. “How’s this sound? While Tenenbaum is gathering the things she needs to cure a Little Sister, we help the Big Daddies in protecting the Sisters? Act as guardians to them until Tenenbaum can work her magic, then we take down one of the Daddies and take his Sister to Tenenbaum?” She winced as her words left her mouth. “I know it sounds heartless, the Daddies just want to protect the Sisters, but…. ” she trailed off.

“We will be doing them a favor,” Liddell finished. “They’re slaves, the Big Daddies and the Little Sisters, and this is the only way that they will be freed. The Little Sisters by Tenenbaum’s hands, and the Bouncers and Rosies at ours. We’re saving the Daddies from an existence of bondage to a master that cares not for their humanity, we’re saving them from slavery.”

Yes, Alice Liddell would have done well in the service of his organization. She wished to do what was right, while seeing and acknowledging what needed to be done in order to accomplish her goals.

“Wait a minute,” Bunnymund broke in, “that could take years! There are dozens of Little Sisters out there, and if Tenenbaum can only do one of these surgeries at a time, we could be doin’ this after one of those drongos Ryan and Atlas win the war. And if you think savin’ the Sisters under the cover of war is gonna be hard, it’ll be worse when the winner can devote his resources to takin’ us down!”

“It might not take as long as you think, Aster,” Liddell replied, her lips twitching up in a smirk. When they all look to her, she continued. “Tenenbaum has been toying with the idea of a plasmid that could cure a Little Sister in mere seconds instead of an hour. When I told her that I was the ‘Wunderkind’ that couldn’t suffer from ADAM withdrawal, she was ecstatic. If you can protect the Little Sisters as secondary guardians, I can assist Tenenbaum with gathering the components necessary to create this plasmid. Once I can save the Little Sisters, we can cut off the supply of ADAM and cause enough turmoil to find a way back to the surface.”

They were all silent, until North began applauding her. “Ms. Liddell, I would hate to have you as opponent,” he boomed out. “With ADAM gone, Ryan and Atlas’ armies will go mad and that will give us window! Brilliant!” He jumped up and began to dance a jig. “We will all be free!”
“Guardians,” Fae muttered out loud. “That’s what we’ll be! Guardians to the Little Sisters and those who wish to escape Rapture!” She was smiling now too, looking fit to pop.

“I came across a…recording of Elizabeth Comstock the other day,” Liddell added, reluctantly he noticed. “To quote her, ‘This world values children, not childhood. There’s a profit to be made and men who make it.’” Through the grainy picture of the monitor, he caught sight of the light that burned in her eyes and in her soul.

“I believe it’s time someone proved her wrong, proved to her and to Rapture that it is altruism and not selfish ambition that ensures humanity’s survival.”

Smiling at her words, he pressed a button next to the microphone in front of him. On the other side of Rapture, a monitor set above the camera in the war room crackled and flickered to life, displaying an illustration from a child’s storybook. “Hear, hear, Ms. Liddell!” he spoke into the mike. “Does ‘The Guardians of Childhood’ suit your fancy?”

In the next instant, he found himself, or rather the camera, looking down the barrel of the “Pepper Grinder”, her chair laying up-ended on the ground, and the girl herself staring at the unnoticed camera and the monitor that just spoke to them, ready to shoot both.

“Who are you? How long have you been spying on us?!” she yelled, the weapon never once wavering.

“Hold up, Half-pint,” Bunnymund cut in. “That’s the bloke that told me ‘bout Tenenbaum. He wants to help us.”

“How do we know that, Aster?” she asked, not taking her eyes off the camera. “How do we know that he’s not a double agent for Ryan or Atlas?”

“You don’t,” he replied evenly. “Looks like you’re just going to have to take a leap of faith and see where my instructions take you and your friends, Ms. Liddell. From what I’ve seen and heard of you so far, you seem more than capable of escaping any ambush I set up, and of hunting me down if I do betray you.”

“Alice,” Fae added, laying a hand on the girl’s shoulder. “He’s the reason that we’re even here at all. He’s the one who found us, saw that we were good people, and brought us together to stand against Rapture’s corruption. We trust him.”

Hearing the others confirm this, Alice lowered the Grinder, which vanished without a sound. “Very well, I will take your word on him, for now. I care not for those who feel the need to hide behind a mask, whether it be an actual mask, or a camera. Would he at least have the decency of giving us his name?”

“I cannot disclose my name at the present time, Ms. Liddell,” he replied, “but I can provide you with a codename. Feel free to call me, ‘The Man in the Moon’, or ‘MiM’ for short.”

The illustration of a cow jumping over a smiling moon brightened on the Guardians’ screen as though in affirmation.

Chapter End Notes
That...was a long one. It's hard to write a good story without a lot of words. I hope you all enjoyed this new chapter of Alice's adventures in Rapture. I thank Scorpiofreak for her role in proofreading this story, for deciding to become WonderShock's co-writer, and because I haven't mentioned her in my author's notes in a long while. Feel free to tell me what you thought of this chapter in the comments section, along with any ideas or suggestions. Have a great day, and happy writing everyone!
Chapter 11: Rapture University

February 2, 1959

"Disgusting things, are they not?"

Looking down at the ADAM slug on the dissection tray, Alice had to agree with Tenenbaum; it was downright revolting. It was a brownish-black thing, about a foot in length, with two rows of bioluminescent spots running across its body from its thick head to the tapering tail. The spots were a sickly orange, the two large ones at the front resembling a pair of grotesque eyes. Along the edges of its mouth was a row of razor-sharp teeth, perfect for latching onto a host and injecting ADAM from the pouches behind its mouth into the unfortunate's bloodstream, forcing it to allow the slug to stay or suffer the consequences of ADAM withdrawal.

With its belly cut open right down the middle, revealing its nasty, slime-covered innards, the sickening-sweet smell of the green, unprocessed ADAM filling the air alongside the slug's flesh, Alice could now say that she knew of a creature that was foul on both the outside and the inside. The only thing worse than the smell of the freshly-killed slug and its ADAM that she could remember was the utter stench of the Red Queen's biomass. That smell would have cleansed Fort Frolic of all its iniquities, before taking over and forcing Ryan to quarantine the area.

"Certainly," Alice agreed. Taking a closer look and almost regretting it, she stood back up and glanced at Tenenbaum. "I saw a few of these slugs at an aquarium when I was readjusting to life after my time in Rutledge, and they weren't near this repulsive." She toyed absently with the spare scalpel that she had been ordered to hold, taking care to avoid slicing her fingers on the sharp end.
"Ach, that was because those slugs had no host," Tenenbaum replied, her face set in concentration as she deftly manipulated her dissection scalpel and rod through the slug's organs. "Those slugs turn white, and their spots bright red, all to attract host. They feed off bottom until they latch onto passing fish or shark. Then they turn into this disgusting thing."

"Not much of an improvement," Alice noted wryly, rocking back on her heels in boredom. She snorted as a thought came to mind. "Ironic, is it not? That for all of Ryan's speeches and manifestos against parasites, his city now depends upon one to get their daily fix of plasmids."

"I'm not one for irony," Tenenbaum said, her eyes still on her work, "but I can appreciate this instance of it." She pushed the slug's mouth open wider with her scalpel, running its edge along the teeth. "I almost classified the ADAM slug as symbiote, until I realized the damage caused to the host by removing the slug. In the case of the Little Sisters, the relationship is so close, removing the slug can kill the little girl." She shook her head. "What a monster I was, forcing such a thing on a child."

Alice agreed wholeheartedly, and let her silence on the matter speak. Instead, she asked, "Then how did you cure the little girls?" She glanced out the window of Tenenbaum's room/lab into the interior of her hideout, where the six cured Little Sisters were playing ring-around-the-rosie, giggling and singing the whole time. "They look very alive to me," she added as they all fell down.

"My process forces both the slug and the girl to reject each other, destroying her dependence on its ADAM, and its dependence on her nutrients," the German scientist explained, pointing towards a jar holding a yellow substance. One look at its thick consistency and nauseating, dull glow, and Alice knew she didn't want it anywhere near her.

"Unfortunately," Tenenbaum continued, "the process is very costly, drains both supplies and time to make single dosage for one little girl, which is why I now work on Little Sister Antidote Plasmid." Satisfied with her probing of the slug, Tenenbaum put down her tools, covered the slug with a cloth, and walked over to the sink to wash her hands, Alice right behind her.

"Once plasmid is ready, you will be able to cure the Little Sisters in mere seconds, with minimal to no cost to your EVE," Tenenbaum ratted on, her explanation going into autopilot. "You won't be able to get optimal amount of ADAM from slug, but I have stockpile from the Little Sisters that I cured, so don't worry when getting new plasmids."

"Make sure you store that ADAM somewhere the splicers can't smell it," Alice said, grimacing as she remembered her first encounters with the ADAM addicts. "They're like bloodhounds when it comes to the scent of ADAM," she added, giving the scalpel a quick swing before setting it down.

"Was first thing I did," Tenenbaum said, wiping her hands off on a threadbare and crusty towel. Setting it down, she picked up her tools and began to clean them. "That slug was my last one. I need more to continue my experiments, and you need to get them for me."

"Why are more slugs needed?" Alice asked, arching an eyebrow at the scientist. "And where would I obtain them?"

"I need the slugs to study the rejection process and adjust it for plasmid," Tenenbaum said, nearly slicing open her finger with the scalpel. She put it down with a glare and began scrubbing pieces of slug gut off of the rod. "The easiest place to get slugs would be Biology Department at Rapture University. I hear that some of students have created some equipment that you may find helpful. And speaking of new equipment…." Laying the rod down and giving her hands one final dry, Tenenbaum reached into a pocket and drew out a radio.
It was a service model one would find on a bathysphere. A shortwave radio, its range wasn't powerful enough to be picked up outside of Rapture, a true pity in her opinion. However, it would be sufficient for communicating across the breadth and width of the city. Taking it out of Tenenbaum’s hand, Alice was surprised at how light the thick communications device was. Running a finger along the yellow speaker on its front, she gave it an appraising smile. Taking an easily accessible device and using it for inner-city communications; she had to admit Tenenbaum was certainly resourceful.

"Any chance you could get one or perhaps four for the Guardians?" she asked, a trace of a joke in the question.

Tenenbaum had been happy to learn that Alice was both the bearer of the A-gene, and also dedicated to protecting the Little Sisters. When she had learned of the Guardians, a group of well-armed people who had previous experience in combat (or so Aster hinted), she had been ecstatic. Of course, Alice hadn't told her about the "Man in the Moon" as instructed by the Guardians, which made sense in that they didn't want their primary source of intel found by Ryan. Until she found evidence of the man's true intentions, however, she was going to remain suspicious and cautious of him. She hadn't survived this long from pure luck after all.

"I am afraid that is the only one I can spare," Tenenbaum said, her eyes beset with regret and some exasperation. "But I can also give you this," she added, walking over to a safe and opening it with a well-practiced number pressing. Before Alice could get a look inside, Tenenbaum had it closed, with a jar of green and vile-looking fluid in hand. She walked back to Alice and stuffed it into her other hand, forcing her to put the radio with her weapons in order to get a grip on the glass jar.

"This is about one hundred ADAM. I would be suggesting you spend it on gene tonics. Now go," Tenenbaum turned her attention to disposing the eviscerated slug. "Those sea slugs will not fetch themselves, and the sooner I can start work on this, the better. Good luck, wunderkind."

"Thank you very much," Alice replied. Her thanks fell on deaf ears as the scientist focused on taking the removed organs from the slug and slipping them carefully into more glass jars and test tubes. Alice snorted in amusement as she exited the lab and entered the main room of the safehouse.

'I wonder what Tenenbaum's water bill would amount to if she had to pay one for her handwashing habit,' Alice thought to herself, smirking. 'That sounds like something from one of those plays that Lizzie was so fond of. Something by Shakespeare, I think.'

The girls broke away from their game to wave and smile at Alice, peppering her with questions.

"Where are you going, Alice?"

"Is that ADAM?"

"Be careful of the bad men!"

"Tell us a story about Wonderland, Alice!"

"I want to hear about the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon."

"Not that one again!"

She was quite popular amongst the former Little Sisters, especially when telling them about Wonderland. Her stories were mainly about the Wonderland of her youth, and the one that had emerged in the wake of Bumby's demise. Her stories about Wonderland during her time in
Rutledge and under Bumby's care were heavily abridged. The last thing the girls needed to hear was a full description of the Red Queen's monstrous form, or the man that inspired the creation of the Dollmaker. They all had enough trouble with nightmares as it was.

"I'm on an errand for Momma Tenenbaum, children," she answered, putting on a smile for them. "I'll tell you a new story when I get back."

After being forced to promise that she would, Alice was shown out the door and into the Olympus Heights sewers. Becoming friendly with the children had been a bit of a struggle at first for her. Seeing the joy her stories brought to the girls' faces, she had finally conquered the boundary that kept her from identifying with the young ones. One of the reasons why she had never really connected with the Houndsditch orphans was because of how badly they had treated her. Though from what Aster had told her of the vastly improved behaviors of the Houndsditch boys, she could guess who was responsible for forgetting their manners. She hoped the Houndsditch girls had given Ryan's men a lot of trouble.

A quick use of Peeping Tom at the entrance to the sewers showed that the few people milling around the tram station weren't close enough to notice her. One disadvantage of her new clothes were that they marked her as someone who had money to spend, and therefore someone who had no business climbing out of stinking sewer systems. Maybe it would be a good idea to "borrow" some work clothes, though finding a maintenance worker with her sizes would be a chore, even if said worker was a woman.

After waiting fifteen minutes for the tram headed to the University and paying her way onto it, Alice stood near one of the windows and watched the scenery outside of the tram tube go by. As a manta ray passed overhead, its "wings" propelling it through the water like a very large, slow bat, her thoughts turned to the Rapture University for the Arts, Sciences, and Industries.

The University had been the brainchild of both Andrew Ryan and her father, Arthur Liddell. Her father's position as the Dean of Oxford had allowed him to voice his ideas for the education of Britain's children and young adults. Unfortunately, his stances on education weren't popular with his peers. Considered to be "too unconventional", "too liberal", or "too American", her father's attempts to reform the United Kingdom's educational system were stonewalled. His success in obtaining permission to educate first Lizzie and then herself at home had been a slap to the system's face, one of the few he had been able to get in.

After coming to Rapture, Alice could remember Ryan coming to dinner and afterwards he and her father discussing the education system that would best suit Rapture and the philosophies that it embodied. Her father had spent hours in their apartment's study, working out a system that would supplant all others in history, one worthy of a city where individual achievement reigned supreme. Just before the fire though, her father had developed a worried look in his eye whenever the University or any other school was mentioned, and his discussions with Mr. Ryan had begun to border on arguments.

Alice hadn't been in any of the schools since she had left Rutledge, and her education since then had been from Houndsditch, very poor and easily forgotten (thank goodness for the latter). Bumby had told her that it would take some years before she could begin taking classes at RU. While that was probably true, he had obviously been counting on his "treatments" to remove any desires for higher education. And something told her that there had been a very good reason for her father to be upset with the way Ryan was setting up the college.

As the tram began slowing down, Alice got up and stood by the tram door. Now that she was storing everything she needed in Wonderland (or so she assumed), it was much easier to move
around. It was also much less conspicuous than wearing her entire arsenal out in public. Even in war-time Rapture, where most had at least one firearm in view, the sight of her walking around with the Pepper Grinder, Teapot Cannon, shotgun, hand cannon, and Vorpal Blade hanging off her would have drawn more attention than she wanted to deal with. She settled for having the hand cannon appear in one of her apron pockets, the large handle poking out as a signal that she was packing heat.

Stepping out of the tram as it slowed to a halt, Alice stopped for a few moments to study the entrance to the Rapture University of the Arts, Sciences, and Industries. Like all of the buildings in Rapture, it was designed with the Art Deco style that Ryan favored so much. The badge booths that controlled the flow of traffic into and out of the university were dominated by a massive arch, with the university's name emblazoned on it in large, brass letters. Above the arch were three large insignias, one for each of the values that the University and Rapture embraced according to Ryan's philosophy: Art, Science, and Industry. A faint memory of three identical insignias in the Lighthouse around the bathysphere that lead down to the city surfaced in her mind.

The memory slipped back into her subconscious as she mounted the flight of stairs that lead to the badge booths, under the watchful eye of two security cameras. Looking at them from the corners of her eyes, Alice wondered what the reasoning was for two cameras right at the university's entrance. She banished the line of thought as she came into view of the badge vendor.

The badge system came with the security cameras and turrets. There were certain areas where these were needed for authorization. Cameras in public places like Arcadia, High Street, and Market Street were set to identify the genetic code of anyone not registered as a Rapture citizen and set the security drones on the infiltrator. A vital area such as Hephaestus was closed to everyone who didn't work there. The only way to get into some areas was to get a badge authorizing their presence in the area. The only people that held access to the entire city, minus the Lighthouse, was Ryan's inner circle, with Ryan himself holding the keys to all of Rapture. If Alice was to get into the University, she was either going to need to get a badge or find a way around the cameras and what other security measures existed in the area.

And since they scanned genetic information instead of relying entirely on visuals, it was likely a better strategy to go along with the badge system than to slip in using Peeping Tom.

"Current student, incoming student, or visitor?" the badge vendor droned as Alice came up to the window. He was a rather large man, with a cigar clamped in his teeth and an incredibly bored look on his face. The Walrus and the Carpenter could have paraded in front of him and he wouldn't have batted an eyelash.

"Visitor, please," Alice answered after a second of thought. The vendor grunted and bent down to retrieve the badge, the slipping of his brown hairline revealing that he wore a toupee. Putting away her grimace and taking out her wallet (she had gotten rid of her bag after some experimentation with her storing abilities), she paid the exorbitant fee for the badge. Looking around at the vendor stands while he calculated her change, Alice noticed that they didn't match the age of the surrounding arch or the ground.

"I take it that these badge stands are relatively new?" she asked, accepting the money he handed to her.

"Yeah," he snorted. "Ryan got these booths up in areas that he deems 'high-risk'. A buncha kids get on Atlas' band wagon, cause a ruckus, and here I am, makin' sure that no suspicious characters or known Atlas sympathizers get onto campus." He took a closer look at her. "Do I know you from somewhere? Ya look familiar."
Know that she shouldn't be on a watchlist for Atlas supporters, Alice took a calculated risk.

"My name is Alice Liddell, if that rings any bells," she answered.

A dim light brightened in the man's eyes for a moment. "Your ole man was settin' up the place back in '47 before that fire, right?"

She bristled at the "ole man" comment. "Yes, yes he was," she answered. "I thought it would be beneficial for me if I came to see how the University he helped to create has come along."

"The brochures on 'How Rapture University fosters Industry and Creativity' are inside," the vendor went on. "Plus, I hear that they dedicated the biggest lecture hall on campus to your ole man, a bust of him's by the entrance."

Caught between annoyance at the "ole man" remark and some level of gratitude towards the effort made to remember him, Alice thanked the man and walked inside.

The main atrium of the university was, in a word, colossal. The floor opened up into a huge plaza, lined by benches and dominated by the massive statue that held up the thick-glass ceiling. The statue's feet were planted firmly in a large, rectangular fountain, the large fountainheads of which represented the Arts, Sciences, and Industries: A woman wearing a beret with a paintbrush in her hand and the tools of a stone carver in the belt around her waist, a bespectacled scientist complete with lab coat and uplifted test tube, and a business tycoon that looked suspiciously like Andrew Ryan, a rolled schematic in hand. All three, arrayed in a semicircle around the statue's feet, had water spouting out of their right hands as if they had taken the Undertow plasmid.

Staircases and a few elevators allowed access to the second and third floors, more arches acting as the entrances to the various departments of the university. Students and faculty made their way up and down the stairs and through the arches, on their way to or leaving their classes. Three students gathered around a professor as he explained some advanced theory of Ryan's to them, while a young couple sat on a bench nearby, eating lunch while looking over study notes. Some tables were set up between the arches, advertising the different clubs and associations available at Rapture University, along with the prices for joining that particular organization.

Noticing the directory right ahead, set between the local vending machines, Alice strode over and began scanning the listings for "Biology Department". Rapture University was a large place, sporting the various colleges, labs, lecture halls, and other facilities necessary for a university to function. She located the Biology Department on the second floor, right next to the Psychology Department. Her eyes ghosted over to the area on the map before snapping right onto one particular room: The Angus Bumby Conference Room.

She remembered Bumby pointing out the naming of the conference room in the Tribune, pride oozing from every pore. Getting one's name plastered on a building or conference room was an important facet of Rapture culture, something of a status symbol. It was certainly encouraged by Ryan, who believed strongly in the idea that one should trumpet their accomplishments and exalt in their pride. Alice could understand the want for recognition, but to utterly disregard humility as part of an actual philosophy? That was just taking it too far.

'Honestly, with the way that Ryan deifies mankind and its accomplishments, it's a wonder that he just doesn't build a temple dedicated to the human race. He'd probably put his face right on the idol along with a gigantic chain in its hands.' She smirked at the mental image of Ryan, dressed in a Roman toga, leading a worship ceremony for a huge statue of himself.

'Then again,' she noted, 'he might have been doing just that when he had Rapture built. Hmm, I
wonder what I would find if I investigated that room....'

"Alice?"

Alice jumped and turned to find Aster standing behind her, a hat pulled low over his head, not that it made him any less noticeable thanks to his exceptional height. Even more surprising than his presence was that of Tooth's by his side. Compared to the practical business and work clothes of the passing students and others, her rainbow clothing looked like she had stepped right out of the studio of a drunken artist.

"Aster? Tooth? What are you two doing here?" Alice asked, surprised. "Did MiM send you here for ADAM slugs?"

"That's what Tenenbaum has you doing here?" Tooth said, making a face. "MiM heard that there was supposed to be some kind of Atlas rally held here today. He sent us to make sure it didn't get out of hand, especially if there are splicers in the crowd."

"That, and two Little Sisters will be here with their Big Daddies," Aster added. "If there's one thing I know for certain, it's this: A person is smart, people are stupid. Ya get a bunch of young drongos together, whip them into a frenzy with some half-baked speech, and while the Daddies can probably handle themselves against a bunch of Atlas show ponies, some innocent people are sure to get hurt."

"Not to mention it'll give Ryan an excuse to put more security here, ship more people off to Artemis Suites," Tooth piped in. "We'll also be checking out the Engineering Department for any equipment that might come in handy. Some of the best tech in Rapture has been produced here, like the Air Grabber." She shifted her bag so that the gleaming metal claws of said device poked out. "You would not believe how useful it is."

Alice remembered seeing some kids using them to ride along the pneumo lines. She'd never admit it, but she had wished that she could join them. That, and the Grabber looked like it would make an excellent weapon.

"All that and he sent only you two?" she asked, popping an eyebrow up.

Aster's eyes drifted pointedly around the plaza to two separate spots before coming back to her. Glancing in those directions, Alice spotted North, sitting on a bench and pretending to read a newspaper. Sandy was on the second floor and gave her an enthusiastic wave over the railing, which she returned. Both were armed with their signature weapons, Sandy with his little pistols and North with his twin shotguns. Only in Rapture could one walk around with weapons in full view anywhere without fear of reprisal. She wondered for a moment if her approach with hiding all of her weapons was really the wisest. She was in no way vulnerable, but looking the part would be sure to draw in the unsavory type. A crazed splicer wouldn't notice the deterrent either way, but at least the weapon would be more readily available.

"He must think those attending this rally to be quite dangerous if he saw fit to send all of you," Alice observed. Personally, the Guardians didn't seem the type to keep a covert eye on a "powder-keg situation", as Aster called them. They seemed more the types to start a situation or barge into an ongoing one and stop it. Besides, they all had a tendency to stick out like barnacles on a whale, what with North's bulk and booming voice, Tooth's flamboyant style sense, Aster's height, and Sandy's lack thereof.

"Tensions are high here at RU," Aster explained. "From what I've heard, the students are divided right down the middle. Half of 'em are on Ryan's bandwagon, while the other half thinks that Atlas
walks on water. Our main goal is to protect the Little Sisters, but if we keep a bunch of young idiots from killin' each other, that's definitely a win in my books."

Alice nodded before her mouth morphed into a half-smirk. "You know," she said in mock hurt, "most of the students are my age, Aster. Do I count as a 'young idiot'?"

Aster sputtered for a moment while Tooth giggled. "Not hardly, Half Pint," he finally growled. Reaching behind his back, he unclipped a radio identical to the one that Tenenbaum had given her. "Ya got anything that can pick up short-wave frequencies? I'd get you one myself, just haven't got the chance yet."

"Tenenbaum did," Alice answered, holding up the radio. "If you need my aid, think nothing of contacting me. I'll be more than happy to help if things take a turn for the worst."

"And we'll do the same for you, Alice," Tooth said. "You know, not that you'll really need our help, but if you want it anyway, we're just a radio call away. And if we hear about anything going down in the Biology Department, we'll be sure to let you know."

"Likewise," Alice said. "Take care, Aster, Tooth. I'll see you tonight at North's."

While they walked off, Tooth pretending to be enamored with the giant statue holding up the ceiling, Alice turned back to the map and took note of both the Biology and Psychology Department's locations. The slugs would likely be located in one of the labs, and Psychology was located on the same floor, allowing for a quick detour to Bumby's conference room.

There was likely nothing in the room that would be of any interest to her, and if there was any more condemning evidence against him, it wouldn't really matter. However, ever since she had learned the truth about Bumby, the urge to go through anything that belonged to him had been stronger than her distaste for him. It wasn't macabre curiosity that drew her; it was a desire to find out the truth, no matter how sordid or disturbing. Bumby has once told her that light was useless if what it revealed caused pain and suffering. Now, she would always seek out the truth no matter the cost. A pleasant reality built on a lie was little better than a miserable existence founded with truth.

Before she left for Bumby's conference room, she checked out the selections available on the Gatherer's Garden located just behind the directory. Besides the usual Health and EVE Upgrades, there was quite a selection of gene tonics, such as BrainBoost and SportBoost. Each one had specialized advertisements pointing out how they were perfect for a university setting.

After some thought, Alice bought Speedy Hacker ("Excellent for Understanding the Basics of Rapture Technology!"), Electric Flesh ("Budding Electricians No Longer have to Fear Live Wires!"), and Human Inferno ("Perfect for Lab Experiments Gone Awry!") leaving her with 40 ADAM left. The latter two were from experience. Alice didn't appreciate being electrocuted, and the idea of possessing a degree of immunity from fire sounded heavenly.

Smiling at the euphoria granted by the tonics, Alice discarded the syringes and headed towards the nearest flight of stairs, pointedly ignoring the disgusted looks sent her way, supposedly by those who either abstained from splicing entirely or sought to control their intake. She paid them no mind, long used to expressions of judgement. And besides, those trying to space out their splicing, the majority, would ultimately find the effort futile without an A-gene. A few stared at her hungrily, and not in the way she was used to. She gave those ADAM-hungry passersby a glare and made sure that they could see the Hand Cannon poking out of her pocket. They scurried away, deciding that she wasn't interested in sharing any leftover ADAM.

Approaching the staircase, Alice noticed something. At the sides of each staircase and elevator,
there were two large potted plants, the greenery they supported meant to provide a calming environment to the students passing by. The pot ahead, easily three feet tall, had something poking out through its leaves. As she passed by the pot and mounted the stairs, she discreetly removed the offending object, revealing it to be an audio diary by a "Jasper Daley". The date following the diary's title of "First Day at RU" was August 19, 1956.

"Well, my first day at Rapture University for the Arts, Sciences, and Industries went far better than I expected. Class requirements aren't as hard as I thought they would be...yet. I think I actually made a friend in one of my classes, guy by the name of Chester Rodfield. Got some interesting ideas for electricity. We're lab partners in the same class, so maybe we can work together on project ideas in our spare time. For now, I should probably finish looking over the syllabus' and get ready for tomorrow. Or would it be syllabi? Heh, there's a reason I'm studying engineering and not English."

The American-accented voice went out with the click of the audio diary. The diary itself wasn't really useful for anything, yet there was something nice about hearing about a time and life in Rapture which wasn't about the war or splicing or any of the madness eating the city from the inside out. Alice stowed the diary away, reasoning that she would return it to Jasper Daley if she happened upon him. That diary had been made in 1956, so he was likely finishing his senior year at the University.

Reaching the second floor, Alice thought back to the directory's map and turned towards the direction of the Psychology Department. Taking the radio out of her pocket, she pressed the side button and spoke into the device.

"Tenenbaum, I'm on the second floor of the University. I'll be making a quick detour before I go to the Biology Department. Do you have any notion where I can find the slugs?"

"The slugs will most likely be living in a tank in one of the labs. Why are you making detour?" the German scientist questioned.

"Dr. Angus Bumby had a conference room named after him and I'm going to investigate it," Alice replied. She about jumped at the explosion of static that exploded from the radio's speaker.

"Scheisse, why are you doing that? There is nothing to gain from going through Bumby's things!" Tenenbaum sounded very perturbed. "We need those slugs, dummes Mädchen!"

Alice didn't know a word of German, but she knew an insult when she heard one.

"First," she almost growled into the radio, "the biology labs are practically next door to that conference room. A delay of about ten to fifteen minutes isn't going to destroy your antidote plasmid." Bumby's involvement in the Little Sister project came to the forefront. "And second, I know that Bumby helped you and Suchong with your nasty little experiments, so there might be something that helps us with your current research."

The radio was silent for a moment, then a loud sigh came across.

"Fein. Sorry, I am...what is word? Anxious. Go where you need to, just be careful and be hurrying back when you are done. When I am not being busy, I start thinking about my old research."

Alice could guess what she meant by "old research", and she could understand not wanting to think about the past.

"Try doing something to pass the time," she advised. "Play solitaire, read a book—preferably
nothing on the subject of genetics. You could even try playing a game with the girls or reading
them a story."

"I will be taking your advice into consideration," Tenenbaum replied after a moment. "Take care,
wunderkind." The connection broke off with a static-filled whine, and she put the radio back in
Wonderland.

"It appears that Tenenbaum has no issues with the stereotype of the 'antisocial scientist'," Alice
thought to herself. "If that's the way she operates, best to humor her when possible, and set my foot
down when it's not. I've dealt with more eccentric, ruder personalities after all. Compared to the
Hatter or the Carpenter, Tenenbaum is much easier to deal with. If only I knew what her German
insults meant."

The walkways of both the second and third floors ran the length of the plaza, and the archway
leading to Psychology was flush with the side of the support statue. The wall leading to the arch
was covered with various posters and bulletins. Glancing at them as she passed, Alice spotted
concerts events and art exhibits sponsored by Sander Cohen, a medical demonstration at RU's
Medical Theater featuring Dr. Steinman, a special lecture at the Botanical Wing with Julie
Langford officiating, and many other activities for the elite of Rapture to show themselves off to
the student body.

It was an old, tattered bulletin on the end that made her stop short and take a second look. Right
next to a schedule of tours to Hephaestus was an announcement of a guest speaker event on
November 21, 1958, the Friday just before the week of Thanksgiving, and also the one after her
discovery of Bumby's true nature. Ripping the sheet of paper from the wall, Alice glanced over it
to confirm her suspicions.

**Special Guest Speakers at Arthur Liddell Hall.**

**Date:** November 21, 1958.

**Time:** 6:00 PM.

**Speakers:** Dr. Heironymous Q. Wilson on "Alternative Treatment Methods in Psychiatry
and their Validity" and Dr. Angus Bumby on "The Benefits of Memory Manipulation in
Degenerate Children and Adolescents."

**Rates:** $5.00 for students. $7.50 for students majoring in Psychology.

A large "X" had been drawn over Bumby's name and speech, along with a very nasty obscenity
with which Alice agreed wholeheartedly. The idea of Bumby giving a guest lecture in a hall named
after her father was just appalling. She could just imagine the self-satisfied smirk on his face as he
stood in front of all those admiring students and belted out his own praises while inwardly laughing
over the horrid irony of the lecture hall's name. Crumbling the bulletin into a ball, Alice stuffed it
into a nearby garbage can before continuing on her way.

The entrance of the Psychology Department, once the "Sofia Lamb Psychology Department", came
into view, along with some construction equipment. Walking by the open tool box and various
tools spilling out onto the ground next to the arch, Alice's foot smacked something right into her
path. The object proved to be another audio diary. She managed to pick it up without breaking
stride.

"Honestly, why do the idiots who make these leave them lying around for the random stranger to
pick up?" she mentally groused. "It's like they're begging for others to know any personal
Alice considered putting it back for a moment until she caught sight of the diary's title: "Slug Tank Lock", and it was by Jasper Daley from the day before.

"Then again, if Mr. Daley is going to conveniently leave information vital to my errands just lying around for me to find, he and the other diarists can do it to their heart's content," she smirked in thought. She tapped the play button and held it up to her ear.

"Whoo boy, this last job was a doozy! It may be a compliment to have the Dean of a college come to you with a job, but it gets old fast. The Dean for the Biology Department, Dr. Jemmings, gave me the job of fixing and reinforcing the locks on the ADAM slug tanks. The slug tank key code is 4554. Bunch of spliceheads tried to break in and steal the slugs. Not like they'd get that much ADAM from the slugs alone. Idiots. Right now, I've the lock for the door to the 'Angus Bumby Conference Room' done and that's set to 8743. They're keeping all of Bumby's things in that room until they can figure out what to keep and what to throw out. Personally, I wouldn't care if any of his stuff gets vandalized, the bastard."

"Well," Alice smiled, "that's a turn of luck, two key codes for the price of one."

The arch opened to a tunnel where a large, red octopus lay sprawled all over the glass, allowing passersby a look at its large beak and its eight long arms of suckers leaving prints all over the glass. As Alice walked underneath it, the soft-bodied creature craned his head, watching her pass with its pure black, inhuman eyes, which gleamed with what she swore was recognition. Glancing back at it before the curve of the tunnel, she could have sworn that an old bottle was wrapped in one of its tentacles.

The Securis door at the end of the tunnel slid open, allowing access to the Psychology Department. It was basically a scaled-down version of the atrium, about half as long and only two stories, with a giant head in place of the large statue and fountainheads, water flowing down its sides like shifting, stringy hair. Between each arch was a portrait or bust of a famous psychologist with a list of their accomplishments printed in brass underneath them. Spread around the Department were diagrams and models of the human nervous system, carefully pointing out the different sections of the brain and its functions.

Alice couldn't help but repress a shiver as she passed by one of these diagrams. When she had been fighting her way through the Dollmaker's Workshop, she had seen similar diagrams portraying horrendous and disgusting aberrations such as a uterus somehow existing inside the human brain. Thinking back on the horrifying and revolting things that had populated both Queensland and the Dollhouse, she wondered just how a psych analyzation with one of the students or faculty here would go.

"Probably send me back to Rutledge wrapped in a straitjacket," she thought darkly. Not that she would really blame the hypothetical student or faculty member.

Passing by the classrooms and the offices of the instructor's, the air filled with ideas and theories such as "the use of Freudian slips to detect Parasites", "how Pavlovian conditioning is used by the Parasites to target the great", and "how Gestalt psychology could be used to reinforce Ryanism", she couldn't help but notice that Aster was right about the students. Here, it was veiled behind academic objectivity, but the divide between the students that supported Ryan and those who supported Atlas was clear to see. And all that was needed to ignite physical violence was a single spark.

The door to the Angus Bumby Conference Room was sealed shut with a very new, very imposing
lock. A lock which surrendered at the first application of "8743". Alice slipped inside as soon as the door opened and let out a sigh as it closed behind her. When the lights came on, she almost jumped out of her stockings. On the wall opposite the door was a life-size painting of the man himself, resplendent in his fine suit, those wire-rim glasses, and that insufferable smile.

Alice glared at the picture and then at the rest of the room. As conference rooms went, it was very nice: the table was all-wood, a luxury where the only sources of lumber in Rapture were the saplings in Arcadia and the shipwrecks spread along the ocean floor. Smoothed-down coral that would give Tooth a run for her money in the color department were inlaid into the legs and sides of the table. Eel skin leather had been used to make the chairs, the light reflecting off of it enough to make one want to touch it. Bumby must have halved his bank account in order to furnish his conference room so lavishly.

The table was currently the resting place for a veritable mountain of books, papers, and cardboard boxes, all of them holding the intellectual property of one Dr. Angus Bumby. The audio diary lying right on top was the first object to go under scrutiny. Jasper Daley had seen fit to leave this one, titled "The Bastard" and dated November 21, with Bumby's things since it eloquently expressed his thoughts and feelings on the passing of the doctor.

"What a conniving, wretched bastard! I never liked the man, he always seemed to think he was so much smarter than the rest of us, especially if you weren't a psychology major, but damn. I never would have pegged him as a child trafficker, let alone a rapist and an arsonist! Poor Joyce isn't taking this well at all. She really looked up to Bumby, thought he was the crème de la crème of psychology, especially after Ryan knocked Lamb off her pedestal. Maybe an evening at the Tea Garden will help cheer her up, and a show at Fleet Hall afterwards to make sure."

Judging from his tone whenever he mentioned this "Joyce", it was easy enough for Alice to divine that between the first diary and this one Jasper had managed to find himself a girl, one he cared for very much.

The cabinets in Suchong's office had been a mess. The boxes' contents were much more organized, but that hadn't been the intention of whomever had packed them with Bumby's papers and lecture notes. The orderliness had been part of the storage system Bumby had used prior to the relocation of his things to the conference room. Sorting through the "L", "S", and "O" sections (Little, Sister, and Orphan), she would occasionally find a paper on the fallacies of Anna Freud's psychoanalytic child psychology, or a pamphlet on recognizing the language of Parasites. Or another audio diary by the man himself.

This one, she noticed, lacked a date. It wasn't missing Bumby's name, or its title, "Suchong's W-Y-K". She clicked it on, wondering what Bumby had to say about his "business associate".

"Of all the great minds here in Rapture, the one closest to my own is that slant Yi Suchong. Normally I wouldn't assign such acclaim to an oriental, but praise is due where it is due after all. My former transactions with him garnered enough trust that he told me about this 'W-Y-K' plasmid. He didn't share what the letters meant, but he did tell me what the plasmid itself did: it conditions the mind of the user to be susceptible to a certain command phrase! Just a single injection, and you can tell the subject to do whatever you want! Here's a nice, little fantasy: Beautiful Alice Liddell, under the thrall of the W-Y-K conditioning. Ooh, that is a nice thought."

Alice glared down at the offending diary as it clicked to a stop and had to restrain herself from smashing it against the table. She settled for telekinetically ripping Bumby's portrait from the wall and slashing it to ribbons with the Vorpal Blade, pretending to live out one of her own fantasies. When the portrait was nothing more than ribbons barely hanging on to the frame, she let it fall to
the ground and resumed her search, feeling a lot better.

After exhausting the L, S, and O sections, Alice was about to leave when she remembered the organ imperative to the studies of all psychologists: the brain. The "B" section was found and thoroughly sifted through, her eyes darting over the everything she could find on the human brain.

"If I can find anything of Bumby's pertaining to the human organ of thought, I just might be able to give Tenenbaum an edge in curing the Little Sisters of their conditioning!"

The six that Tenenbaum had rescued had only been in the Little Sister program for a few weeks, long enough to be implanted with the slug and on the initial steps in the mental conditioning. The conditioning had been easily overcome at that stage, with only their memories wanting. But when she and the Guardians started bringing in those Sisters who had been converted months or even years ago, they were going to need all the help they could get.

Flipping through the pages, Alice was starting to get frustrated. For all she knew, Ryan's people had already gone through these and took out everything that pertained to the Little Sisters. It would be just like Ryan to do that too, to cover up his footsteps of anything that could turn Rapturites against him. One thing was certain, Tenenbaum wasn't going to like the idea of her going off on a wild salmon chase, if she didn't find anything for her troubles.

She was almost done with the stack and with the entire situation when her eyes caught the words "pre-frontal lobe of the brain". It was a research report that Bumby had written on "one of the most important lobes of the human brain". It apparently was the part that coordinated behaviors such as stubbornness, free will, creativity, individuality, and personality. Included with the sheaf of papers was an article from a medical journal that Bumby had regularly written to.

As he put it in the article's summary: "The pre-frontal lobe is responsible for everything that makes an individual unique, makes them a person. Take that away, and they become nothing but an empty void to filled. There are myriad ways of applying this knowledge to change or affect an individual's behavior, ranging from my hypnosis techniques and various drugs, to the crude yet effective method of a trans-orbital lobotomy."

As she recognized what the words "trans-orbital lobotomy", meant, Alice felt a chill ghost up and down her spine, almost like someone had walked across her grave. Rather, it felt like she was one walking across someone else's grave. Shaking off the feeling, she quickly gathered up the papers on the pre-frontal lobe and stored them away, exiting the conference room as quickly as she had come.

"Tenenbaum," she lowered her voice to avoid attention, "I didn't find anything on the Little Sisters directly, but I did find Bumby's research on the pre-frontal lobes of the brain. It appears that he was especially interested in those of young children, both male and female. Once I get the slugs, I'll work my way back to the safehouse."

"Wunderbar," Tenenbaum breathed through the speaker. "I hope that that eel Bumby is rolling in his grave as we use his research to be saving the Little Sisters. Be hurrying back as soon as you can."

The Biology Department, formerly called the "Brigid Tenenbaum Biology Department" for her discovery of the ADAM slug but now just know as the "Biology Department", was only a little further down the hall from the Psychology Department. Walking past an alcove, Alice almost didn't notice them. Stopping and peering into the darkened space, Alice noticed several objects slumped in the shadowed corners. Other than the Circus of Values and the pneumo tube, there was nothing else in the area, and with the objects hidden behind the pneumo and the vending machines,
it wasn't surprising that no one else had noticed them.

"I should just ignore them," Alice thought to herself. "For all I know, the slug display room will be occupied with students staying there for the duration of the day, which wouldn't bear well with my 'stunted sense of patience', as Bumby used to put it."

The mysterious lumps continued to sit behind the pneumo tube and the machine, both inviting her to investigate and warning her to ignore it and go on her merry way. The invitation won out over the warning.

"And my habit of following furry creatures into dark holes has returned," Alice muttered, thinking back to the dark surroundings that preceded a trip to Wonderland. "And no animals this time to give me an excuse, just mysterious lumps in the dark. Likely nasty lumps as well."

As it turned out, they were nasty lumps, just not in the way she had expected.

By the time she was five feet from the things, her eyes had adjusted enough to the dark to realize that the nearest one was wearing shoes and that there was a red puddle staining the carpet all around it, as did the others.

The three bodies were that of two young men and a young woman, their clothes stained red, their eyes lifeless. She studied the body of the closest one. His throat had been slit, his body left crumpled next to the pneumo tube, which itself was spattered red with his blood. His brown eyes were frozen in an expression of surprise, one hand clamped around his throat in a vain attempt to stop the bleeding. The fingers of the other hand were almost clasped into a fist, like someone had forcefully removed something from his death grip.

The other boy was slumped against the Circus of Values, his dead expression an odd combination of shock and resignation, his glasses about to fall off his face. An audio diary lay next to him, probably his last. The cause of his death was a stab wound in his side where, judging by the amount of congealed blood spreading out from it, an artery ran through that specific location.

The girl was a fetching redhead whose brilliant green eyes were only dulled by death. A bloodied knife lay in her left hand, though it had likely started in her right. She has slit her own wrists and then lay against the bespectacled boy while the life had drained out of her.

Alice studied them first in surprise and then with a resigned sorrow before taking a quick look around, and then going through their pockets. Insensitive? Yes. Wrong? Probably. Could there be a clue as to why they were all dead, or could one of them have something that could prove useful later on? Possibly.

The search through their pockets yielded money, a pep bar, an audio diary from the first boy, and their Student IDs. Examining the IDs, Alice almost dropped them all when she found the names inscribed into their sides: Chester Rodfield, Jasper Daley, and Joyce Roberts.

'What happened here?' Alice wondered, looking down at the dead trio. 'Did someone murder you all and slice Joyce's wrists to make it look like a double murder/suicide? A love triangle gone horribly wrong? Or were you caught in something beyond your control?'

Ducking down behind the vending machine as a group of students passed by, Alice sighed and flicked the first audio diary on, made by Chester Rodfield two day earlier about "Business vs. Friendship".

"Well, talking with Jasper didn't go as planned. He kicked me out of our workshop and revoked
my access. For Ryan's sake, can't he see that selling the weapon schematics to Webster will help Rapture to stand against Atlas and his bandits? Plus, we'd be making a metric ton of cash at the same time. And then there's the whole situation with Joyce. As much as I value Jasper's friendship, I can't let her steal them. Hopefully, the engineering tonics I just took should be enough to hack the workshop door. Jasper, if you're listening to this, I'm sorry, but it's time I added my weight to the Great Chain."

"A believer in Ryan's Great Chain, and a thief at the same time." Alice looked down her nose at Chester Rodfield's body, shaking her head. "I wonder if you found your beliefs worth dying for."

Glancing down at the young man that used to be Jasper Daley, Alice reached over to gently move his arm off the diary. Besides his name and picture, the diary only held a title, which was literally: " #$%/&* Idiot!"

"I can't believe it! Chester went ahead and took the weapon designs! And the prototype buckshot! I told him that we weren't selling anything to that Lloyd Webster. He'll start selling them through his vending machines, both Ryan and Atlas' people will get their hands on it, and then they'll be killing each with our inventions! Proximity mines, electric gel, exploding buckshot, trap-bolts; it'd be a massacre! First going behind my back with that Webster creep, then having the gall to say that Joyce is an Atlas supporter, and now this! If he's not dead by the end of the day, he's either lucky or invincible."

"Idiot," she muttered halfheartedly. She had an idea how it went down: Rodfield had come to the pneumo tube to send these schematics and prototype to Webster where he had been ambushed, before or after he had sent off his stolen goods she couldn't tell. There had been a struggle, which ended with Daley and Rodfield dead and Roberts committing suicide. Evidently, Daley's death hadn't been a part of her personal agenda. The only way this could be any more tragic would be if she had seen them as ADAM "ghosts".

MiM had explained the phenomena to her after she had witnessed a very gruesome murder. Now that she wasn't having troubles with her memories, those of the dead saw fit to torment her. She honestly would have preferred real ghosts to memories not her own.

The vending machine next to her came alive with a whirring grumble and clownish laughter, startling her.

"Fill your cravings at the Circus of Values!" it proclaimed. Alice spitefully shot a Possession specter right into the impish face of the machine's clown face. She collected the cascade of coins that came shooting out of the machine's mouth before leaving the tragic scene behind her.

The rest of the trip to the Biology Department was a hurried, uneventful affair. She noted absently that the Biology Department's main floor was dominated by a massive display of shark jaws in place of the fountain. The slug tanks were even easier to find. They were advertised as a display all over the department, after all.

After locating the display ("Come see the Unique Creature Responsible for the Wonders of ADAM"), Alice waited for the room to clear before hacking the room's security camera and turning it off. Unlocking the slug tank with the code "4554", she took one long look at the tank's red-spotted inhabitants and radioed Tenenbaum.

"Hello Tenenbaum, I have a quick question concerning the slugs: do you need them alive?"

"No, the slugs do not need to be living. Why-, " Before the scientist could finish her question, Alice fired a bolt of Shock Jockey into the water, killing the slugs instantaneously. ".- do you ask? Are
"You alright Alice?"

"I'm fine, Tenenbaum, I just need a vessel to hold the slugs in and I'll be on my way back," Alice answered, noticing a cabinet of large, glass jars perfect for transporting the slugs. Picking one up and hefting it experimentally, she found it too heavy and placed it back on the shelf.

"I hope you don't mind if the slugs are a bit crispy," she added. The arcs of electricity hadn't quite finished their dance on the water's surface. "I didn't care for the idea of attempting to catch them alive."

"How would they be crispy? Oh, never mind," Tenenbaum muttered. "The girls are looking forward to your return. See you soon, wunderkind." She signed off as Alice found a jar that wasn't too heavy that would be able to contain all the slugs. Stuffing them in with some water, she stored the jar away as she left the display room.

About halfway back to the atrium, Tooth's voice came in over the radio with a screech of static.

"Whoops, sorry about that. Alice, would you be able to help us with something?"

"I've acquired what I came for," Alice answered into the radio. "What do you need my assistance for?"

"Well, I was talking to this kid who sold me this hacking dart that works like those automatic hackers when he mentioned this huge theft of EVE hypos earlier. Either the perp is the biggest EVE addict in Rapture, or something's going down that requires a whole lot of plasmid usage." Tooth sighed heavily. "We were afraid that something like that might happen. The Big Daddies were sighted a few minutes ago, and the boys went off to make sure that nothing happened to the Little Sisters. Killing the Daddies and taking the Sisters would whip the crowd into a frenzy."

"I'll stay alert," Alice answered. "How many of the protector/gatherer pairs are there, and where are they?"

"There are two, and both of the protectors are Bouncers," Tooth replied. "Aster and Sandy are tailing the Daddy and Sister that wandered into the Economics Department, while North's pair is in the hallway leading into the Biology Department."

Alice mentally retraced the route from her current location outside the Display Room to the tunnel connecting the Biology Department to the RU's atrium and considered the slow pace of the Daddies.

"I believe that I'm going to meet up with him soon given my current path," Alice told her. "I'll stay with North until the rally is over. If they're trying to make a statement by killing the Big Daddies, they'll likely leave them alone once the rally is over. Though they could try again at a later date."

Before Tooth could answer, a cry unlike any Alice had ever heard rang throughout the Department. Pain and rage mixed together in a voice that could have come from a beached, mechanical whale. As the cries of said whale were mixed with the echoes of gunfire moments later, Alice's quick walk turned into a run.

"Tooth," she said haltingly into the radio, her speech jostled by both her run and the students not quick enough to get out of her way, "there's a disturbance up ahead, and North's Bouncer sounds like it's in its death throes! I'll contact you in a moment!" She banished the radio before Tooth could reply and ran harder, afraid of what she would find at the end of that unending roar of pain and anger.
About forty yards from the tunnel to the atrium, the roars abruptly ended and the guns abated soon after. Cursing her inability to Dodge in the real world, Alice was so focused on the tunnel that she didn't see the leg set out to trip her.

Sprawling forward on her front, just barely able to bring her arms to prevent smacking her face on the tiles, Alice scrambled to her feet, too focused on her goal to chew out her tripper properly. Before she could start running, a hand gripped her shoulder, stopping her short.

"Well now, little lady, where are you off in such a hurry?" a smooth, suave voice asked her. She turned to find a young man in suspenders and a hat pulled low over his eyes, which glinted dangerously. If he was spliced, he wasn't showing it yet.

"Let me go!" She batted his arm off, turning back to the tunnel. When he grabbed her and attempted to wrench it and bring her to the ground, she brought out the Vorpal Blade in her other hand and slashed him from shoulder to thigh with one cut.

As he jumped back, screaming in pain and clutching at the huge cut that would have bisected him if the entire blade and more force had been used, she caught movement in her peripheral vision. Two more suspendert-wearing thugs advanced on her, bringing out their firearms and aiming them.

Bringing out her telekinesis, Alice hurled the Vorpal at the one with the shotgun, impaling him through the neck. Before she could pull the blade back and hurl it at the other, he opened fire with his pistol in a frenzy of fear, fanning the hammer until his last bullet hit her in the left shoulder.

Spinning from the blunt force of the bullet, Alice came to a stop and brought the Hand Cannon to bear on the shooter, who was attempting to reload his pistol while fumbling with the bullets. A single shot to the heart brought him down.

Before the pain from the bullet had a chance to register, a bellowing voice echoed from the tunnel, English interspersed with angry Russian. More gunshots rang out, followed by a burst of blue light which abruptly ended both the voice and the gunshots.

"North!" Alice retrieved her blade from the downed man struggling to crawl in his own blood, and with a flick of her wrist, opened the wound further. Ignoring both his gurgles and his slashed comrade's continued screams, she shot down the tunnel as the adrenaline from the fight set into her veins.

Racing down the tunnel, she almost ran into the corpse of the Big Daddy. Her gag reflex came up as the scent of burnt metal and flesh added itself to the cyborg's usual stench of dead fish, stagnant water, and oil. Stepping around the massive corpse, which took up most of the tunnel, Alice found two more bodies, both of them ordinary people, and North.

The big Russian was struggling to his feet, clutching his hand to his chest as smoke rolled off him and his hair all stood up on end. If not for the circumstances, the sight of his hair and beard standing straight up in the air would have been amusing.

"North!" Alice ran forward and supported the older man as he climbed to his feet, coughing terribly. Up close, Alice could smell burnt flesh and clothe radiating off of him. This time, she had to work hard to keep from vomiting, the smell of North's burns bringing up unpleasant scenes and thoughts in her head that the Daddy's metal overtones couldn't.

"What happened?" She managed to gasp out, helping North to lean against the wall while she summoned a first aid kit.
"They came out of nowhere," North grunted. "They lured Little Sister in with corpse, with electric crystals for Big Daddy. They shocked him with electricity while others used tommy guns and shotguns. Cowardly ublyudki," he spat.

"And your wound?" Alice asked, dapping burn medicine from the kit onto any exposed, burned skin, making North inhale sharply.

"They grabbed the child," he managed to grind out. "I shot two of them before stepping on little crystal, clumsy idiot that I am. It is good thing that I am so big." He stood up and groaned. "Do not want to do that again."

Before Alice could say anything, North's radio turned on with a whine of static.

Tooth's voice cried out from its speaker in a panic. "North, what happened? Where are you?"

Alice grabbed the radio and answered. "North's Big Daddy was slain and the Little Sister taken," she reported brusquely. "North was wounded when he intervened. Where's Aster and Sandy's Big Daddy?"

"Dead," Tooth replied bitterly, "and the Little Sister taken. They sowed the corridor with Shock Jockey traps and tricked the Daddy into running through them while they shot at it from a distance. Cowards. Aster and Sandy are cornered by some traps. Head to the atrium; we'll be there as soon as I get them out!"

North pushed himself from the wall and began to run forward, his face twisted in obvious pain. Alice ran beside him and grabbed his shoulder, supporting him as they ran. She ignored his protests that as an "old soldier", he didn't need her help, and he was just slowing her down. Alice just growled to him that they would likely need both her and the Guardians in the plaza, so would he just let her help him? He grunted in affirmation.

The rally was in full swing by the time they got down to the main floor. Behind the statue on the far end of the fountain from the entrance, a stage had been set up. A man in working clothes stood on it, expounding on the vices of Andrew Ryan and Rapture and extolling the virtues of the system that Atlas would create; a combination of the various brands of socialism found on the surface. The crowd consisted of students and some faculty members, Alice noted with a little surprise. Most of them were openly armed with various firearms, while others sported ammo belts filled with EVE hyps. Only a few had obvious signs of splicing. The rest of the plaza was almost empty, the few students that were out hurrying for shelter. Ryan Security would have been on its way, if it wasn't for the armed men guarding both the telephones located at the directory and the entrance.

The other Guardians arrived at the first floor as soon as Alice and North did. They met at the archway leading to the "Adam Smith Economic Department". None of them looked the worse for wear, though Tooth's forehead shone with a sheen of sweat from destroying the traps.

"North, what happened? Are you alright?" the small woman asked as soon as she caught sight of him. "One of those electric splicers did this to you?"

"He stepped on a Jockey trap," Alice answered, wincing as the adrenaline began to wear off and the wound on her shoulder screamed in pain. "It was a small one, and given his physique, I believe that he'll be fine."

"Alice, your shoulder!" Aster yelped. Alice glanced at her left shoulder to find blood oozing in a steady stream from the bullet wound.
"Make it quick," she ordered Aster as she handed him a first aid kit. "We can extract the bullet later when we've saved the Little-"

"Oh no!" Tooth screamed out. "Stop!"

Following Tooth's horrified gaze and outstretched hand, Alice and the other Guardians noticed the screen set up on the stage and the makeshift surgeon's table set up behind it. The surgeon himself came into focus just as he removed his hand from within the abdomen of the Little Sister strapped to the gurney, a large ADAM slug wriggling in his grasp. The Little Sister's struggles against the straps ceased as the slug came out, the light from her eyes going out with her life.

"This is what we can do when we work together!" the speaker bellowed as he took the slug from the surgeon and held it out to the crowd, their cheers almost blocking his own voice out.

"Together, we can take back what Ryan has stolen from us!" he continued even as the girl's blood dripped down his arm. "We will take the power that he has hoarded for himself and his friends, we will put down their lapdogs and break down their doors, and then Rapture will be ours! Are you with us? Are you with ATLAS?!"

As the crowd screamed back "YES! YES!", Alice only had eyes for the unmoving form on the gurney. An innocent life had been taken on that stage. Enslaved by Ryan, and now murdered by Atlas. And they had been so close to saving it. And then her eyes fell on the surgeon as he prepared his scalpel for the other Little Sister, strapped to her own gurney.

"NO!" she screamed. The Pepper Grinder materialized in her hands and she opened fire on the surgeon. His surprised scream abruptly ended as the bullets burrowed their way through his body and then out, his body crashing to the stage with the screen, the Little Sister screaming at the newfound chaos. The speaker threw himself to the ground, protecting the slug from the onslaught.

"Ryanists!" he screamed to the crowd as they ducked and hollered in confusion and fright. "Kill them!"

The Guardians already had their weapons out, a determination that Alice had only seen on North and Sandy's faces at the Kashmir on their faces, along with a fury that matched the one coursing through her veins. The crowd had known of the atrocity going on behind that screen, and still they believed in Atlas' cause. They were not going to let these people slide.

"Sandy, Aster, get the little girl!" North boomed as he raised his shotguns. "Tooth, get to high place and snipe! Alice, you and I teach lesson to these heathens!"

And with that, chaos broke loose.

The armed members of the crowd opened fire while those without weapons ran for it. Aster and Sandy jumped into the fountain, taking shelter behind the three fountainheads, their respective pistols coming out to take shots at the crowd, a shotgun taking bits and pieces out of their brass cover and bullets sending water shooting up in spurts.

Alice caught sight of Tooth flying straight up through the air, her Air Grabber extended on her arm, her face a startling combination of fury and joy. A Shock Jockey bolt missed her by inches as she flew upward, coming to rest on the head of the statue, from which she began sniping using her crossbow.

Both she and North ran for the cover that a nearby archway provided, the boom of his shotguns and the rattle of her Grinder filling their ears while bullets whistled by. Taking cover, Alice poked her
head out to scope the situation while North reloaded his shotguns. The crowd had shrunk down to about two or three dozen people, all of them armed with firearms and/or plasmids, and they were conveniently grouped together.

"Amateurs," Alice said in disgust as she traded in the Grinder for the Teapot Cannon. Jumping out of cover as a lull in the gunfire presented itself, she aimed the Cannon and unloaded the four frag grenades within into the crowd. Screams took the place of gunfire as the grenades detonated, sending broken bodies flying while disintegrating others. The Guardians took advantage of the surprise attack to unload their weapons into the survivors, using the chaos to even the odds.

The guards at the entrance and telephones charged forward, firing their tommy guns from the hip. One of them attempted to shoot a bolt of electricity into the fountain, missing the water and striking the side instead. A crossbow bolt sprouting in his head prevented him from a second attempt.

"Time to see if my investment with Mr. Fink was worth it," Alice growled from her cover by the fountain. Bringing up the plasmid she had received from said salesman the day before, she charged it and then let it out.

A tentacle of water sprouted from her sucker-covered hand and shot over to the guards, capturing them in its liquid grasp and bringing their struggling forms to rest in front of her and North. Caught in the watery tendrils, the guards were helpless against the two of them, and a few moments later, their buckshot-ridden corpses lay on the ground, the water from the Undertow tainted with their blood.

"Alice!" North yelled as he pivoted and shooting an attacking Jockey before it could shoot at them, sending fragments of purple crystals to shatter on floor in arcs of electricity. "Use water plasmid to ensnare attackers! Get strongest ones first! Understand?!"

"Got it!" she yelled back, readying another tentacle and unleashing it towards a splicer who was using an Air Grabber in an attempt to reach Tooth and bludgeon her to death with it.

A quick pattern developed: Dodge enemy fire. Run for cover. Reload weapons. Replenish EVE. Ensnare. Kill. Repeat. North switched to the tommy gun on his back when he ran out of buckshot, spraying enemies from longer range with an uncanny accuracy. Tooth continued to rain down bolts from her perch on the statue's head, her violet eyes the color of death for those who fell into her sights. Aster and Sandy had gotten out of the fountain after the nearly fatal electrical attack, ducking in and out of cover as they worked their way towards the stage and providing support to Alice when she was reeling in those same splicers for punishment. Aster flicked out his boomerang when his guns ran dry, the blade that popped out on its outward flight cutting the throat of a climbing spider-splicer.

At one point, Sandy jumped back onto the fountain and whipped a woman who was aiming a grenade launcher at Alice and North right across the eyes. He put her out of her blind, shrieking misery a moment later, her hands covering her eyes and her mouth open in a scream.

The fight seemed to last for hours, when only a few minutes had passed by the time that the former attackers were running for their lives. One moment they were being attacked, the next they were spraying bullets at the retreating forms of the survivors. Aster and Sandy made it up to the stage and, after shooting a man trying to wrestle the Little Sister from her gurney, released the girl from the confining straps.

"We got the kid!" Aster yelled to the others. "Now get that ratbag! OW! Kid, we're trying to help you!"
The ratbag in question was running towards the exit, clutching the slug to his chest. Alice started after him, running through the fountain to get to him before he escaped. This was not a man she was going to let get away.

"Kill them!" he roared to the two surviving guards as he ran by. "Kill them or I'll feed you both to the sharks!"

They both took aim at Alice, but before they could open fire, a multi-colored blur came flying down, her mouth opened in a savage war-cry and her Air Grabber primed for the kill. The Atlas guard yelled in fright as he tried to bring his shotgun to bear. Tooth's Grabber met his face before he could get a shot off, sending his body flying backwards into a wall. As his body slid down the wall, his shattered skull leaving a massive blood trail, the other guard turned towards the smaller woman, unable to believe his eyes. Before he could shoot her, Alice's hand cannon boomed and his head exploded in a wet cloud of grey and pink.

"He's getting away!" Tooth glanced down at her empty crossbow. "And I'm out of spare bolts!"

"He's not escaping." Reaching into storage, Alice pulled out her latest additions to her arsenal, something she had started working on since her last Wonderland dream. Tooth's eyes popped at the two enormous playing jacks that Alice telekinetically threw at the escaping man.

The sharpened ends of the jacks went in the backs of the man's knees and out the fronts, bringing him to ground, screaming in surprise and pain. Focusing on the points of the jack protruding from the man's knees, Alice grabbed them with her mind and drew him back, ignoring his screams the whole while. When he came to a stop in front of her and Tooth, he held the slug up, now just weakly squirming.

"Take it!" he begged. "Take it, the ADAM's all yours!"

Alice glowered down at him, her hand clenching as though the Vorpal Blade was begging her to use it.

"We don't want the damn ADAM, you drongo," Aster growled as he arrived at Tooth's side, the other Guardians right behind him. The man caught sight of the Little Sister somehow sleeping in North's arms.

"You wanted both the Little Sisters?" he managed to gasp out. "L-look, you've got skills, easily the best I've ever-er seen," he continued to jabber as he painfully raised himself to a sitting position, "and I'm sure that Atlas would be willin' to...to let you have any Little Sisters you capture. What do you say? I doubt Ryan's payin' you that good."

He managed to smile up at them. He. *Smiled.*

That did it for Alice.

"If you think that for one moment we're only interested in the ADAM, you mammon-filled wretch," Alice growled out, her eyes flashing with anger. "you are more than tragically mistaken—you're a dead man." The hand cannon was out again, its barrel pressing against the man's forehead. "Send Fontaine our regards, would you kindly?"

"Wait," a soft, English-accented voice piped up behind them. The Guardians turned to find a pale man with blond, almost-white hair walking towards them. What drew their eyes was the body of the other Little Sister tenderly held in his arms, the wound in her stomach leaking blood all over his suit. He didn't appear to notice.
"My daughter went missing soon after the New Year's attack," he said, his eyes almost as dead as the little girl he held. "I searched everywhere for her. She was the last living member of my family, here and on the surface. Ryan fired me yesterday for 'using company resources without authorization' and I came here to think, and here she is. Dead."

He looked down at the little girl, who could be mistaken to be asleep if not for the cut in her belly and lack of breathing. A tear trickled down his face before his gaze locked onto the speaker; his tears fled away as a cold rage crept into his eyes, far colder than the little body in his arms. He held out one hand towards Alice.

"Let me," he said quietly.

Alice looked at him, then at his hand, her gun, and the man cowering at her feet.

"My father didn't get the chance to avenge my sister," she answered in the same tone. She flipped the gun in her hand, so that the father could take the Cannon by its handle. "All yours."

"What?" the man screamed. "Listen, take the kid, take the slug, take whatever you want! Just let me live, please!" He attempted to get into a begging position, only for Alice to telekinetically force him back down with the jacks. Crying in fear and pain, he looked up at the glowering Guardians, before turning to the mourning father. "Look, I-I'm sorry about your kid, but I was just followin' orders! I can make it up to you, I can give you whatever you want!" He nodded animatedly as though it was the best thing he had ever heard. "You want it, you got it!"

The anger never once left the father's eyes as he cocked the gun's hammer and stuck it in the man's face, his face suddenly twisted by rage.

"I want Jane back!" he roared, pulling the trigger.

The blast from the gun was easily one of the loudest that Alice had ever heard, and the silence that followed the quietest.

The father gave the Hand Cannon back to Alice, and then knelt down, the little girl still cradled in his arms. He quietly began to sing a lullaby to her, rocking her little body gently. The Guardians looked down at the sorrowful scene and then prepared to leave. Ryan's security forces would be there soon.

Patching up the shoulder wound with a kit before it got worse, Alice looked back as they approached the exit. The scene was pure sorrow. The father was still mourning over his daughter, her face peaceful in death. The body of the Atlas speaker lay a few feet away, his head destroyed and the slug twitching in its last moments in his hands. Only in Rapture.

"I'll meet you all at the rendezvous point later," Alice called out to the Guardians. "There's something that I need to do first."

Chapter End Notes

WOW. That got dark really fast. I think this is my most violent chapter yet. I was basically trying to match the level of violence we see in the games. Funny thing I noticed in my last BioShock playthrough: Blood tends to spray whenever anti-personnel ammo is used. Hmm, I wonder how the design of a "normal" bullet differs
from that of an anti-personnel bullet? In real life that is. In a computer game, all you need is some lines of code.

I hope you all enjoyed this latest foray into the universe of WonderShock. Have a great day everyone, and happy writing!
Rise of the Saturnine

Chapter by MartyrFan

Chapter Summary

The end of Alice's adventure in Rapture University, and her brief return to Arcadia.

Chapter Notes

Finally! I finally got done with Chapter 12! In my defense, I had a job which took up most of my time. Plus, my downtime didn't seem to have the right environment for writing. I think and write better in different places, I guess.

I just saw the date for when I first published WonderShock on FanFiction, and the second year anniversary of writing this fic will be in two months. I had forgotten that I've been writing this fic for so long. I remember that I was posting chapters relatively quickly when I first started. Life caught up to me, and I had to slow down to deal with the new facets of my life.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this latest chapter into the world of WonderShock. I hope that you are all enjoying this fic. Feel free to leave a comment with your thoughts on this chapter or a kudos, would you kindly? Enjoy!

(Re-edited as of 8/20/2017)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 12: Rise of the Saturnine

February 2, 1959

Alice picked her steps carefully through the bodies left behind in the battle between the Atlas supporters and the Guardians. A girl armed with a pipe wrench lay slumped on the ground with a crossbow bolt sticking out of her head. A woman who looked like the very personification of a housewife held a grenade launcher, her chest riddled with bullet holes. A man with two belts of EVE hypos worn Mexican style over his shoulders had collapsed against one of the benches, the shattered hypos leaking EVE to mix with the puddle of blood surrounding the buckshot-torn corpse.

If she hadn’t known what they were doing prior to their deaths, Alice might have felt sorry for them. As it was, she ignored them as much as she could.

“There’s no point in mourning the deaths of the wicked,” she told herself. “No matter who cared for them or their reasons for joining Atlas, there is no excuse for the condoning the deaths of the innocent.”
Alice continued past the corpses, to the end of the RU atrium opposite from the entrance. There, she stopped and quietly studied the large, double doors that greeted her silently. From what she could remember of the Lighthouse, they were almost identical, down to the bronze plating and the lack of automation. The name of the room behind the doors was engraved above in bronze.

**The Arthur Liddell Lecture Hall.**

Alice turned her gaze from the hall dedicated to her father to the small statuette standing to the left of the doors. It was a bust, quite the opposite of the massive statues that dominated the aesthetic of Rapture. The style of its creation was probably the only compromise that Andrew Ryan had ever made.

It was a near-perfect replica of her father. His heavy eyebrows, the strong nose, the full beard and mustache that some people would call “old-fashioned”. The artist had somehow managed to capture Arthur Liddell’s distinguished bearing in the way the bust’s bronze eyes looked out on the world, even the glint of kindness behind the stern expression. The only difference between the bust and the photograph hanging on the wall in her room in the Warren was the dimensions of the mediums.

The plating underneath the bust read: “Dedicated to the memory of Arthur Liddell, the mind behind Rapture’s higher education. May his legacy continue as a beacon of knowledge in a sea of ignorance.”

Alice stood there for a few moments, wondering if what she intended to do was just plain foolishness. Then again, wasn’t caring for the helpless in the city of the strong foolishness?

“Hello, Father,” she finally said, her emerald eyes meeting the bronze ones of the bust. Her father’s eyes had been blue in life. Not blue like the ocean, blue like the sky they had all left behind.

“I thought it was high time I came to see the University you worked so hard to create,” she continued, a small part of her hoping that nobody was watching. “I don’t know if you picked the artists and the architects, but they did an excellent job creating the university.

“I-I don’t know whether or not you and mother and Lizzie can learn of what’s happened in Rapture since…since the fire.” She was starting to stumble over her words. She should have ignored Bumby’s advice to avoid visiting the family tomb. This wouldn’t be so awkward then!

“Bumby was the one who started the fire, if you hadn’t pieced it together yet. He’s dead now. He did it all to cover up what he did to Lizzie,” she said bitterly. “I spent weeks in the Medical Pavilion General’s Burn Ward before I was admitted to Rutledge. I was there for ten years, trapped in a nightmarish parody of Wonderland by my own misplaced guilt.”

“After I finally realized your…deaths weren’t my fault, I was able to break out of my comatose state. After leaving Rutledge, there was an investigation into my possible involvement in the fire! Radcliffe did help me, but now, I can’t say that I’m impressed with your taste in solicitors, father. He’s done with me now that I have what’s left of the family fortune, and I with him.”

“Nanny…” Alice had to swallow before continuing. “Nanny’s dead. We made an enemy of one Jack Splatter, a horrid man, and he murdered her. If she’s with you, let her know that he’s dead too.”

A gunshot suddenly rang out behind her. Startled, Alice shot around, Pepper Grinder out and ready. She was just in time to see the father of the harvested Little Sister crumble to the ground, a smoking pistol from one of the corpses in his hand. On the ground, a pool of blood formed around
his head, signifying the extent of his grief. The Little Sister lay cradled tenderly in his other arm, positioned so that he wouldn’t fall on top of her.

Alice put the Grinder away, staring at the sorrowful scene. She took in the scene around her with a different set of eyes. Her father had come to Rapture with the ambition of making an educational system that would exceed all on the surface, allowing for young minds to expand and grow beyond anything that humanity had ever seen before. Rapture University was supposed to be the crown jewel of this system, perfect for the vision that Andrew Ryan had for his city.

Instead, it was caught in the grip of the madness that was possessing Rapture. Students murdering each other in the halls. A conference room dedicated to the man who had destroyed Arthur Liddell’s life and family before going on to ruin so many young lives. A little girl murdered to the cheers of students and faculty with her father committing suicide soon after. And now, the last of the Liddell family line had actively participated in a battle with said students and faculty, staining the university’s halls with ADAM-riddled blood.

She looked back at the bust, a tear threatening to slip down her cheek.

“Father…Rapture is going to hell, and fast. Rapture’s lower class citizens are following this man named Atlas. The war that he and Ryan are waging, it’s destroying the city, even your university. People are killing each other in the streets. There’s a new substance that was discovered in ’53, ADAM, that allows for one to alter their genetic code, even to the point of granting powers. Nanny was killed with a fire plasmid, mirroring how you and mother died.”

She swallowed again before continuing.

“The side effects are horrifying to say the least. The ‘splicers’ give in to disfigurement and insanity without ADAM. Somehow, you and mother passed on an immunity to ADAM withdrawal to me. I can splice without the usual consequences, making my survival far more likely. I’ve fallen with a group of good people, who want to save as many innocents as we can before this war ends.”

She walked up to the bust and placed a hand along its cheek, wishing that the cold metal would give way to her father’s beard, a source of comfort in her younger days. The other hand soon followed, and then she placed her forehead to the bust’s.

“I swear father, I will save as many as I can. I will not give in to the selfishness that has infected Rapture. I will escape to the surface with my friends, and live as best as I can in whatever world greets me, whether the Russians or the Americans rule, or whether they destroy each other and the world in an atomic firestorm. And I will never forget you, mother, Lizzie, or Nanny. I love you all.”

With that, she straightened up and left the bust behind her. She stopped to fish what supplies, ammo, and EVE hypos she could find from the corpses. Pausing by the bodies of the father and daughter, she respectfully covered them with a banner that had been torn down. It’s proclamation that “The Great Will Not be Constrained by the Small” was almost hidden by blood stains. The shouts of Ryan Security in the distance, Alice grabbed the dead ADAM slug and stowed it away as she made her exit from the scene.

That little girl’s death wasn’t going to be for nothing.

BS+AMA=WS

February 4, 1959
Alice stood outside of the Langford Research Laboratories in Arcadia and took a deep breath of the natural air exuded by the trees. If she closed her eyes, she could pretend that the heat on her skin was from the sun of her childhood and not the special lamps that radiated light specifically tailored for photosynthesis. One of the details that kept this small island of paradise in a sea of hell from truly being a forest was the utter lack of an insect’s whirring wings and a bird’s warbling song.

Alice cast off her idle attempt to pretend that Arcadia was a forest on the surface and opened her eyes, looking over the newest gaggle of visitors to the park and trying to spot a specific individual within the lot. Failing that, she straightened up from leaning against the entrance to Langford’s and strode inside. Pointedly ignoring the security’s cameras inquisitive whir, she turned to the El Ammo Bandito machine in the corner and looked over the available selections.

She was surprised to find an upgrade for her shotgun available. Before the war, the El Ammo Bandito machines had sold weapon upgrades exclusively to counter Fontaine’s Power to the People machines, which wasn’t very effective considering that the Power to the People machines gave out their upgrades for free. Since the war had started and people began conserving their money as much as they could, the Circus of Values company had gotten tired of losing money because people weren’t buying the upgrades and began selling ammo through the machines instead.

Glancing warily at the security camera, Alice opened a panel on the machine’s side and looked over the configuration of pipes inside before making the necessary connections. Quite a few of the machines in Rapture relied on a network of insulated pipes and electric gel to facilitate their inner workings. The machines could be hacked by either rearranging the pipes to allow the gel access to the proper channels, or by using a hack tool to electronically bypass the machine’s safeguards, which promised a better hack overall. Both carried the risk of getting a nasty electric shock, with the hack tool promising a slew of security bots if the wrong channel was selected.

Alice wished to avoid having the bots after her, plus she wanted to try out her new hacking tonics. After a few minutes, and a few close calls, she nodded as the gel flowed into the port and the machine chimed its acceptance of the new input. The selections showed price reductions along with some new options. After getting the upgrade for her shotgun (double ammo capacity), Alice bought some more shotgun ammo and some frag grenades for the Teapot.

“¡Muchas gracias, señor!” the machine sounded as she finished up with it. Refraining from responding to the inane chime, Alice went back to the entrance and resumed her post, her green eyes flicking over the newcomers with increasing boredom.

“At least if Aster doesn’t show,” she mentally groused, “this won’t be a complete waste of my time.” She could feel her modified shotgun wherever it was she kept her things, ready to make use of the three extra shotgun shells she had loaded into it.

Yesterday, North had gotten a letter in the pneumo from Julie Langford, the woman in charge of running and maintaining Arcadia and the Farmer’s Market. Apparently, she had heard about the battle with the Atlas supporters the day before, and she was willing to pay top dollar (or ADAM) for any protection they could provide for a very important experiment. The splicer population of Arcadia was becoming more and more aggressive and the experiment was supposed to be very important.

She and Aster had volunteered for the job, mainly because they both missed Arcadia with its green glades and natural air. Of all the people that regretted coming down to Rapture, they were the ones homesick for the natural surroundings of the surface. The blue cold of the ocean with the alien marine life that glided through its icy depths couldn’t compete with the warmth, the green
environment, and the furry creatures of the world above.

“Good day, Half Pint!” a familiar voice called out behind her, making her jump about a foot in the air. Alice whirled around to find Aster Bunnymund himself holding back a laugh. He was dressed in his usual clothes with the addition of a dark-brown trenchcoat, fitted for a person as tall and thin as himself. “Sorry, I couldn’t help myself,” he added, giving her a rare grin.

“Aster!” Alice gave her eyes a tremendous roll for his benefit before hugging him. “When did you get here? I didn’t see you come out of the Metro,” she asked after releasing him.

“I got here through some ‘alternative routes’,” Aster lowered his voice, eyes glancing around him quickly while his hand moved a little closer to his pistols, giving Alice an odd impression of a rabbit and a predatory animal at once. “Plenty of ways in and out of Arcadia if you know them,” he finished.

“Ah,” she answered, thinking back to his old occupation. “Do you think it’s safe if you’re here?” she asked, matching his lowered tone with her own. Arcadia was the last place where Aster had officially lived, and if there wasn’t a reward out for him for working as one of Fontaine’s smugglers, she was a Madcap.

He shrugged and made sure the collar of his coat reached up to his ears. “Eh, I wouldn’t worry about it, Half Pint. I was never that social. Only real friends were some of the other smugglers and the Guardians. None of Ryan’s people knew me that well. Speaking of which, did that Langford sheila show up yet?”

“She should be here any minute,” Alice began to reply, stopping as the clanking whir of the Securis door that kept Langford’s sanctum safe from prying eyes opened.

She and Aster glanced towards the opening, watching as four figures emerged from within. The first two were workmen, both of them hauling crates full of the supplies that Langford was going to need for the experiment. They weren’t armed that either of them could see, obviously meant to be the pack mules of the job.

The two following them were both women. The older of the two was Dr. Julie Langford herself, a teal dress underneath her signature lab coat. She was a tall woman with golden blonde, bobbed hair. The most noticeable features of her narrow face were her chin and her eyes. The chin was very pointed, likely magnifying the tales of the doctor’s brutal honesty and direct way of doing things. The eyes seemed to be the biggest contrast to her reputation, their sleepy appearance belying the way she bustled around the workmen, making sure that they didn’t damage the equipment and the specimens. She seemed exactly the type that Andrew Ryan valued; driven with a love for their work.

The other woman resembled Langford only by the identical white lab coat she wore. Her long black hair was done up in a bun to prevent interference with her work. Her heart-shaped face was long, yet lovely, her eyes a stormy shade of gray. She was taller than Langford by a few inches and seemed to be much quieter than the older woman, though just as busy and driven. Her dress under her lab coat was the same shade of gray as her eyes, yet looked quite attractive on her figure. It wouldn’t have surprised Alice to learn that she possessed the blood of London’s old nobles in her veins.

Alice heard Aster curse under his breath, turning to find him attempting to bring the upturned collar of his coat farther up around his face. She gave him a questioning look, silently asking an explanation when Langford’s voice interrupted.
“Are you two with the group we hired for protection?” she all but barked. She wasn’t even looking in their direction, preferring to rearrange the contents of a box while its carrier looked on.

“Sorry,” Aster answered, his voice suddenly devoid of his Australian drawl, drawing another look from Alice. “We’re the only ones today. The others had their own business to attend to.”

“What?” Her head snapped up towards them now. “I was expecting all five of you!” She stood to her feet, her hands on her hips. “Your budget taking a cut, or was that confrontation at the University with those Atlas supporters all just talk?” A sneer had entered her voice with that last bit.

Alice was about to reply with a scathing remark but Aster beat her to it.

“There’s a load of difference between a well-armed and spliced crowd and a bunch of pagan splicers,” he growled back, still without his signature accent. “If you’re that afraid of the Saturnine, maybe you should just stay in your comfy lab while your assistant here does the real work.” He gestured absently toward the gray-eyed woman, who looked a little surprised at his acknowledgement. “Or would you rather just call it off altogether?” he added, making a show of turning back towards the bathysphere station.

Langford glared at him for a moment before huffing and turning back to the repacking of the crate. “If you think you can handle the security for this little expedition, don’t disappoint me,” she finished. The gray-eyed girl gave them a look of sympathy before Langford could catch her, her expression turning indifferent as she made sure a microscope was correctly packed.

Once the crates were repacked as per the doctor’s expectations, they set out. Alice and Aster led the group forward, eyes out for trouble. Langford was right behind them, muttering under her breath about the war, the splicers, how little progress her latest project was making, and especially on how Ryan was driving her like a slave these days. The workmen kept their thoughts to themselves, concentrating on carrying the crates and packages while their eyes were wide open and alert. Finally, the assistant trailed behind them all, watching their trail while keeping a hand close to the satchel she carried.

Most of the people they passed gave them a wide berth, mainly because of Aster and the gun-shaped bulge that took up the entire right side of his coat. There was one man who Alice recognized from the Drop; he took one look at her and did a ninety-degree turn into an alcove. She could feel Aster’s eyes on her after that encounter.

The few passersby who didn’t swerve out of the way called out greetings to Langford. Judging by their reactions to her short, absent-minded responses, they knew her well.

The walk through Rolling Hills was uneventful and pleasant. The fresh smell of the air and the green of the plants drew Alice’s senses whenever they weren’t on the lookout for potential threats. Arcadia would never cease to be her favorite part of Rapture, the only place where the familiar nature of the surface was allowed to thrive. The coral and seaweed that grew on and around Rapture was beautiful in its own way. A cold, alien beauty, that is.

“If I was made to live on the bottom of the ocean and not in a glorified fish tank,” Alice mused to herself as they passed the ceiling-high windows that graced the top of the “hill”, giving them a view of the city outside and said plant life. “I would find such beauty natural, and the trees of the surface to be the alien. Rapture is still on Earth, but it’s like it was built on an entirely different world.”

After passing through the doors that led to their destination, Alice leaned over to Aster and
whispered, “Just who are these Saturnine, Aster?”

Aster glanced back at Langford and her people before answering in his normal, albeit whispered, voice.

“They’re the local splicers,” he answered. “They’ve organized themselves into some kind of a cult. From what I hear, they worship the old Greek or Roman gods, paint themselves red. The worst rumors say that they practice human sacrifice, drink human blood to get the plasmids. Most of ‘em are Houdini splicers.”

Alice made a face at the thought of drinking blood. “Why hasn’t Ryan done anything about them? They kill people, they’re an organized religion, such as it is,” she added, “and at the very least, they’re squatters.”

Aster shrugged. “Word is, he was plannin’ on it right after the New Year. Atlas’ return put that plan on the back-burner. They’re getting more and more aggressive, so Langford wants our protection while she sets up an experiment of hers.”

Alice nodded as they came up on the Waterfall Grotto. The owner, a Mr. Gregory Sandsworth, greeted them at the entrance, a holstered pistol next to his hand as his eyes darted around at the tiniest creak and loud voice. While Langford passed him the fee for using his business space to perform an experiment, Alice noticed a Gatherer’s Garden further down the wooden walkway. Tenenbaum had given her the ADAM from the Little Sister they had rescued from the rally at the University, so a stop there would likely be a good idea.

The inside of the Grotto was interesting to say the least. The air was moist with water vapor, smelling strongly of both plant life and the water that fell from the massive waterwheels that dominated the Grotto’s ceiling. The water poured from the wheels in continuous streams, thus earning its name. Vines covered the walls and the walkway that spiraled down into the pool formed at the bottom, leaves and flowers sprouting from their wandering tendrils. The centerpiece was a large rose bush in front of the lowest waterwheel, the opposites of its red flowers and green leaves captured beautifully by one red-hued light. The place was meant as a relaxation spot for those who enjoyed the soothing sounds and smells of a waterfall.

Alice had only been to the Grotto once before, during a family outing a few months before the fire. She had managed to sneak in without Mr. Sandsworth noticing her and then snuck back out when she heard her parents calling her name. Even as a girl she had loved Arcadia, back when it was small and fledgling, not the huge, rural area that it had evolved into.

A small part of Alice quivered with sorrow as she noted the security camera panning over the Grotto. Even Arcadia couldn’t go untouched by Ryan and Atlas’ war.

Langford, her assistant, and the workmen trooped down the walkway while Alice and Aster made sure the surrounding area was secure. When Aster gave her the all-clear, Langford and the assistant began studying the rose bush while the workmen began unloading their equipment. She and Aster took positions by the entrance to watch for splicers and other intruders.

After a silence spent watching Langford and her cohorts working and glancing around the premises, Aster cleared his throat.

“Half Pint,” he said, his voice low, “mind if I ask ya somethin’?”

“You just did, Aster,” Alice answered, giving him a half-smirk. “What’s on your mind?”
Aster was silent for a long moment before he sighed heavily.

“Do ya remember what happened in the Fishbowl, after that drongo killed Sharpe?” he finally asked.

Alice glanced sharply at him. She could remember all too well what had happened. “Yes Aster,” she answered tersely, “I do.”

“Well,” he continued, stumbling to find the words. “I was wonderin’... when that happened... oh drat it all!” He looked her right in the eye before saying, “What in the bloody world was that thing you turned into?”

Alice was taken aback with how vehement he had asked the question. Honestly, she was a little surprised that he hadn’t asked her sooner. The incident had taken place about two weeks earlier and she had been expecting the question every time she was alone with Aster or Tooth. They did have a right to be curious; people didn’t turn into deathly-white, blood-soaked monsters in the blink of an eye, even in Rapture.

“The edge of my sanity,” she answered. At Aster’s raised eyebrow, she continued. “When I first remembered the night my family died, I wasn’t... stable. I was beset on by enemies immediately afterward, and I could feel this ‘switch’ in my mind. I turned it on, and I became that thing for the first time.” She paused, and then continued with her explanation.

“I call it Hysteria. It’s some kind of defense mechanism. Afterwards, whenever I was on the cusp of dying, I could become that thing, strong enough to take any damage hurled my way while dealing out double what I could usually do. I would also absorb the health of my enemies as they fell, gaining strength from their deaths.

“Watching Nanny die like that at Splatter’s hands,” her voice trembled before she soldiered on. “It brought my Hysteria to the real world. Whenever I’m at death’s door, I’ll be able to become that thing. A monster to end all monsters.”

Aster nodded in understanding. “That’s why you didn’t go... Hysterical at the rally then. I kept expecting you to turn into that thing, especially when that poor ankle-biter was killed.”

Alice glanced away, not wanting to meet Aster’s eyes. “My A-gene, the ADAM treatments, they’ve brought my madness into the real world. The Hysteria, being able to store my things without carrying a bag, it’s all part and parcel to what I am.” She lowered her voice so that it could barely be heard. “I’m a lunatic.”

Aster’s response was automatic.

“No,” he said urgently as he placed his hands on her shoulder, making her look up at him in surprise. “You’re not a lunatic, Half Pint. A dyed-in-the-wool loon wouldn’t break down at the sight of her loved ones dyin’, nor would she fight someone who had hurt an innocent. Your Hysteria isn’t all you are. It’s a part of ya, a part that’ll keep ya alive when ya need it.” He took his hands off her shoulders and smirked at her. “If that was all ya were, there wouldn’t be a splicer left in Rapture,” he added.

“That wouldn’t be a bad thing though,” Alice responded, giving Aster a smile. “I’ll be sure to warn you next time my madness comes out.”

“I’d appreciate that.” Aster grinned. “I’m not one for flying out windows in the middle of a fight.”

They both chuckled at that and went back to watching the proceedings. Langford was taking
measurements of the bush’s crimson blossoms while her assistant was taking notes as directed. The workmen were taking a break from hauling equipment and supplies and were standing off to one side. Their heavy boots protected their feet from the cold water as they smoked and gossiped when they weren’t studying Langford’s assistant.

Aster snapped his fingers, drawing Alice’s attention. “Got an idea, you see that U-Invent over there?”

Following Aster’s pointed finger, Alice saw the machine. She had seen a few of them beginning to pop up here and there.

“I see it,” she said. “I haven’t had the chance to use one though. What is their purpose? The Circus and El Ammo Bandito machines seem to be doing a sufficient job with supplying Rapture with snacks, drinks, first aid kits, and bullets.”

Aster let out a laugh. “True, but the U-Invents are different. They’re craftin’ stations. Ya put in odd items, such as pieces of hose, screws, and whatnot, and it spits out this specialized ammo. It’s basically that bloke Lloyd Webster’s solution to Ryan’s resource problem. Back in World War II, they had theses scrap drives where a town’s scrap metal would be donated to the Army so that it could be used to make tanks, planes, bullets. And since Ryan wasn’t a fan of the practice back then, Webster decided to supply Rapture citizens with special ammo in exchange for certain items.”

Alice snorted. “As much as I dislike the fanatical hold onto the idea of exchange, it does work out in our favor. What kind of ammo do the machines provide?”

Aster brought a bag out of his coat and tossed it to her. Catching it, Alice was surprised by its weight and even more by what it held.

“Kerosene, screws, and shell casings?” she questioned, hold up a handful of the latter.

“Those will get you some explodin’ buckshot,” Aster explained. He glanced down at Langford to make sure she wasn’t listening. “Tooth found out hackin’ the U-Invents brings down the cost of the ammo, so I recommend hackin’ it first.”

“I’ll be only a few moments,” Alice said as she hurried over to the machine. After hacking it (with the hack tool this time) and figuring out how to insert the supplies that Aster provided, Alice looked over the ‘exploding buckshot’ before putting six rounds into her shotgun and storing away the rest.

“Exploding buckshot,” she thought to herself, shaking her head. “Only in Rapture would someone come up with ammunition as destructive as this.”

Before heading back to Aster, Alice remembered the Gatherer’s Garden that she had seen earlier. Glancing back at Aster, she signaled that she would only be a moment before she headed out to the Garden.

After some consideration, Alice got the Enrage plasmid, guaranteed to “make your victim forget what side he’s on, and attack anyone nearby”. Since the Saturnine were a cult, it would make sense for them to work in groups, and Enrage would help break what little cohesion they had. Alice made a face at the red growths that poked out of her hand as she hefted the dark red globule. She hoped that tactic would work. The latest injectable plasmids hadn’t been made with “product quality” in mind.
She also got the tonics Armored Shell for protection, Vending Expert to save money, and EVE Link to get EVE whenever she used a first aid kit. She topped it all off with a Health Upgrade before heading back to Aster.

She found him attempting to get out of a conversation with the assistant. It was impressive how he could tone down his Australian accent, exchanging it for something that sounded American or something very close to it - Canadian perhaps? He seemed to be doing his best to avoid making eye contact with the woman, along with answering her questions as short and as gruff as possible.

“Oh, hello there,” the assistant said as she caught sight of Alice walking back in. “I was just asking Mr. Jackman here a few questions about splicers. I’m something of a biologic photographer and frankly I’m curious about how ADAM interacts with their genetic structures, how it eventually leads to their degeneration. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

Her eyes had an odd gleam in them, a combination of sorrow and curiosity at the same time. Alice studied her for a moment before nodding her assent.

“I believe I have time for a few questions,” she answered, getting out a new audio diary. Behind the assistant’s back, “Mr. Jackman” gave her a grateful look before retreating back to his post at the door. Alice gave him a look that promised a brisk questioning in the close future.

“May I have your name, miss?” was the assistant’s first question.

“Alice Liddell,” she replied. She noticed that the assistant didn’t react beyond a faint flicker of recognition as she started the new diary.

“I understand that you have experience with splicers, yes?” the assistant continued after making sure the diary had gotten her name.

“If you mean experience putting them out of their misery, then yes.” What other kind of experience was there?

The assistant gave her a look before continuing. “At what point does an ADAM user become a splicer? What symptoms are present?”

“The first visible symptoms of ADAM sickness are strange growths, like benign tumors, and odd marks appearing near the injection sites. Before this, the user could experience dizzy spells, along with minor hallucinations,” she added.

“And later on?” the assistant persisted.

“The growths continue to spread through the body, particularly the face,” Alice continued. “They can be held back by more injections of ADAM, but that only increases the need for more later on. Anger and aggression increase along with the hallucinations until the user can no longer distinguish reality from illusion, while their minds deteriorate considerably. From that point, they’re a splicer. The only relief from this state is when they come into possession of some ADAM, and then they can only think of getting more.”

“Are there any differences between the splicers who take the injections as compared to those who spliced with the drinkables?” the assistant asked, her thumb rubbing a circle into the diary’s handle.

“The growths of the splicers that drank their plasmids are much more prominent, most likely due to the greater amount of ADAM needed to make the plasmids drinkable,” she answered. “They are crystalline in their structure, and the environmental effects vary as the plasmid most taken by the splicer. Shock Jockeys will have electricity arcing off their shards, while a Frosty splicer’s growths...
spew out cold mist.”

“How effective are splicers at using their abilities?” The assistant was looking pretty satisfied with her answers. Hopefully, she’d be done soon.

“The further along they are with ADAM sickness, the less effectively they’ll use their plasmids,” Alice scoffed. “They’ll often get stuck with just one or two, using them exclusively while their other abilities lay dormant. That doesn’t make them any less dangerous, though.”

“One last question, Ms. Liddell,” the assistant said, a cheerful note in her voice. “What is the easiest way to kill a splicer?”

Alice thought back to the splicers she had killed so far. “The element of surprise can tip the fight in favor of whoever has it,” she started. “While a bullet or two to the chest can bring down most normal humans, a splicer can be more resilient depending on their gene tonics and how many health upgrades they’ve taken. The best option is to hit them as hard as possible, as fast as possible. The head remains the best area for a quick finish.”

The assistant nodded and flashed her a brief smile. “Thank you, Ms. Liddell, that will be all.” She clicked off her diary and consulted her watch. “I’d best get back to work. Langford can get testy when one is tardy.”

Alice bit back a snort at the quip as the woman turned back to the interior of the Grotto. As the assistant passed Aster, she gave him a hard, searching look.

“Good day and thank you, Mr. Jackman,” she said, putting emphasis on his fake surname. Aster nodded to her and went back to fiddling with whatever it was he was hiding in his coat.

As soon as the assistant was out of earshot, Alice walked up to Aster and gestured towards the woman. “An old flame, I presume?” she asked, smirking.

Aster gave her a look and rolled his eyes. “No, she’s someone I knew back in the day. Used to come and talk with me at my stand, almost as much as you and Sharpe did. We went to the Tea Garden a couple of times, nothing much came of it. I think she wished somethin’ had, though.”

“Why don’t you speak to her then?” Alice asked, a hard edge in her voice. If nothing bad or good had come of the Tea Garden dates, why ignore her?

“Langford and I never got along,” Aster explained. “You’d think that we’d be great mates, with our likin’ for anything green and our….” He paused for a long moment. “Experiences in the Pacific,” he finally finished. “The woman’s smart when it comes to plants; the problem is she knows it and she looks down on everyone else for not knowin’ as much as she does, except for Ryan. I called her out on it once, and I’d think she’d like nothin’ more than for Ryan security to come down on my head. She could have been the one to lead Ryan’s men to me.”

Alice looked down into the Grotto’s pool where Langford was fussing over the rose bush and the clipboard she was holding. Her fist tightened and crackled with electricity as the crystals of Shock Jockey slid out of her knuckles, her eyes studying the situation. The assistant and the workmen had yet to get into the water; Langford’s rubber boots wouldn’t be enough to keep the electricity at bay for long. If Langford was responsible for the capture of the Houndsditch girls, then why not?

Before she could make a decision, Aster put his hand on her shoulder and shook his head when she turned to look at him.

“If Langford was the one to sic Ryan’s goons on me, she woulda done it to get rid of a parasite for
Ryan,” he told her. “She’s got a kid of her own; she wouldn’t put the Houndsditch kids in danger on purpose.”

Alice glanced back down at the woman and let the crystals slide back into her hand. The assistant and the workmen had joined Langford in the shallow pool, adding collateral damage if she were to take the shot anyway. She sighed and turned away from the Grotto’s interior. The real world could be so complicated when it came to war. In Wonderland, there were three types of people during the Red Queen’s Reign and the Dollmaker’s Siege: There were her allies, her enemies, and the bystanders.

In Rapture, the lines were blurred. There was Tenenbaum, the Guardians, and the Man in the Moon for her allies (the latter was still suspicious though). Her enemies were Ryan, Atlas, their respective supporters, and the occasional crazed splicer. Ideally, the bystanders would be everyone else, but no. Most of the bystanders were people trying to get along with their lives while paying Ryan lip service (those who agreed with Atlas could be found in Apollo Square for the most part). Langford did more than pay Ryan lip service, but she was a bystander, one with a child none the less.

“Wonderland is truly the land of my childhood,” Alice grumbled mentally. “No matter how dark it gets, that childish simplicity will always be there until the day I die or Wonderland ceases to exist within the confines of my mind.”

A sound distracted her from further mental complaining. Alice started towards the sound, her upgraded shotgun ready to blink into existence at her need. Glancing back to Aster to make sure he could handle himself solo, she stepped out of the Grotto and looked around.

It took her a few moments to realize just what was wrong: there was nobody in sight. When they had arrived there was about a dozen people milling around the walkway, walking, talking, laughing, arguing as they enjoyed the sensory sensations that Arcadia provided. There had even been a few waiting in line at the Gatherer’s Garden after her when she had the machine. Now though, there wasn’t anyone in sight.

Alice had heard the expression “the calm before the storm” before, even experienced it several times while in Wonderland, but never had the feeling of impending doom been so strong before in the real world. The silence seemed to thicken until it was a tangible substance that she could cut with the Vorpal Blade. The upgraded china broom slid into existence, the handle and grip in her hands and the butt of the gun against her shoulder providing something to hold onto in the dead quiet.

After a few moments, Alice took a deep breath to calm her racing heart and lowered her shotgun. Just because there was an unexpected absence of customers in a certain area of Arcadia didn’t mean that anything sinister had occurred. Had all gone to the Tea Garden or back to Rolling Hills? Yes, that was a far more likely scenario. After all, wouldn’t there had been some noise? Especially if splicers had been involved?

“Wait a minute.” Was that a blood spatter on the plants across from her? And at the end of the walkway, at the door that led down to the waterway below them—was that a leg sticking out of said doorway?

Creak. Alice froze, her senses going into overload.


Turning ever so slightly towards the sound, Alice found herself looking at the Gene Bank across
from the Grotto. There was absolutely nothing there, not even a fly buzzing around. Then again….

Alice glanced down at the wood that made up the walkway, looking for the telltale sign. There, a plank of wood shifting down just as a new creak echoed through the still air.

Alice brought her shotgun up, pointed it about five feet above the plank and fired.

With a screech, a splicer materialized in thin air (literally) as the exploding buckshot lodged itself in his chest and sent him flying backwards, his clothes aflame as the buckshot lived up to its name. His cry of surprise and pain ended abruptly as he came to a landing just short of the Bank, a huge, gaping, charred hole taking up his chest, the plants next to his fallen corpse turning brown from the heat of the fire. An axe landed next to him, its sharp edge gleaming where it wasn’t stained crimson.

Her ears still ringing from the shotgun blast, Alice almost didn’t hear the much louder and closer pouf that signaled the use of a certain teleportation plasmid. Right behind her.

She whirled around to find the Houdini splicer standing there. He was wearing a suit that the young business class of Rapture was so fond of, only the lopsided tie had a splash of blood marring it. He hefted a Hand Cannon in his right hand, while the other was twitching at this side. A mask made of twigs and bark hid his face but not his eyes. They gleamed with an odd combination of madness and...flirtation?

“Hello beautiful!” he yelled before vanishing in a puff of red smoke. The second shotgun blast went off a tenth of a second too late, some of the rose petals left behind in his wake getting shredded by the buckshot. The huge, metal pellets bored themselves into the greenery next to the Grotto’s entrance before exploding in a spectacular shower of wood splinters and burning leaves. Whoops.

“Alice!” Aster came flying out of the Grotto, his coat flying open to reveal a grenade launcher?

“What the bleedin’ hell’s goin’ on out here!?” he barked in his revived Australian.

“Splicers!” Alice barked back as she loaded two more exploding buckshot cartridges. “There’s not a soul out here! They must have killed them while we were in the Grotto!”

Aster swore loudly and vehemently before running back to the Grotto, Alice close behind him, watching their backs.

“Langford, pack it up! We gotta go, now!” Aster yelled down into the Grotto. Langford, the assistant, and the workmen were already looking up, the shotgun blasts likely startling them before Aster had even opened his mouth.

“What’s going on up there?” Langford demanded. Even with her hair damp from the moisture in the air, she still cut an intimidating figure. That is, to people who didn’t take on splicers on an almost-daily basis.

“Splicers!” Aster yelled back. “They’ve killed everyone who was up here earlier. We need to get out of here!”

“I thought I hired you people to kill splicers!” Langford argued. “Why is it so hard to get good help these days?” she said, rolling her eyes to the ceiling as though the answer was up there.

Aster bristled. Before he could launch into an argument, the assistant piped up.

“Everyone, QUIET. What is that sound?”
She had both an impressive set of lungs and a tone that made something even in Alice quail.

Alice decided to obey the assistant and perked her ears up. For a moment, all she could hear was the sound of the water trickling down into the pool and the creaking of the huge water-wheels above. Then she caught it.

It was a horrible sound, a raging cacophony of intermixed howls and screeches, made all the worse by the echoes created by such noise. The door on the opposite end of the Grotto’s entry opened up, allowing for a collection of shadows to pour through, resembling some Eldritch horror with a profusion of limbs growing from it.

And then the splicers came pouring in.

The red globule of her Enrage plasmid sprouted out in her hand, and Alice pitched it into the oncoming hoard. It burst as it impacted on a splicer, covering her in red goo. The splicer, dressed in overalls and wielding a shotgun, somehow managed to scream even louder than before. Spinning around, she began attacking her own allies, firing her shotgun right into the midst of them. When she ran out of ammunition, she resorted to hitting them with the butt of her gun.

With the Enraged splicer causing havoc right in front of the far door, Alice ran through the near one out onto the walkway, Aster yelling after her to get back. The main body of splicers was streaming right towards her as the other door was blocked by their errant comrade. Their clothing varied; amongst the work clothes a few suits and high-quality dresses stood out, their owners apparently deciding that the cult was more important than their old lifestyles. The only constant in their attire were those masks made out of twigs.

Alice began throwing more Enrage globules into the oncoming crowd, only stopping when she ran out of EVE, but it was enough. The hoard, which really numbered about two dozen, were thrown into chaos as their foremost splicers turned on them, attacking their fellows with a primal rage that was only superseded by her own Hysteria. Guns fired, knives flashed, pipes and wrenches thudded dully against heads and bodies. Alice made a face as she watched an Enraged woman knock a man to the ground and pummel his head with the butt of her gun, smashing it in just before her throat was slit from behind. Enrage was an effective but messy plasmid.

Hopefully, the chaos would be enough to give Langford and her men the time to pack up and get going. Alice shot back into the Grotto, tossing an empty EVE hypo to the ground.

“Alice,” Aster barked, “what were-”

“Later Aster,” Alice snapped, rushing by him. “Langford, I hope you’re packed and ready to go!”

“One moment please!” Langford snapped, trying to make some jars fit into a crate. “There!” she crowed triumphantly. She somehow managed to pick up the whole crate and begin making her way to the stairs. “Damn these Saturnine bastards, we’re leaving!” she yelled to her assistant. “We’ll come back to perform the Rosa Galica experiment later!”

With a whoosh of displaced air and a cackle, a Houdini splicer materialized on the other side of the walkway, a rifle in his hands. “Arcadia is the home of the Saturnine now!” he yelled.

“Get out of here, you freak!” Gregory Sandsworth’s voice came bellowing from the Grotto, just out of Alice’s sight. A pistol barked, its bullet whistling right by the splicer’s shoulder to hit the wall. The Houdini brought up the rifle and fired at the source of the pistol, which was followed by an aborted cry of pain and a thump as something came to rest against the wall.
The splicer vanished before Alice could get a shot in. She swore under her breath as she reloaded. “Langford, if you don’t start moving, we are going to become ADAM ghosts!” she yelled.

“We’re coming!” Langford yelled back as she mounted the stairs with her assistant and the workmen right behind her. “Hold them off!”

Alice ducked back to the entrance just in time to see Aster’s grenade launcher lob a frag grenade right into the mob, killing at least half a dozen of them. The survivors retreated back towards the Tea Garden, screaming expletives and shooting back with their own firearms, forcing Aster to retreat back into the Grotto’s entrance.

“What’s going on out there?” Alice asked as she brought her shotgun back up and pointed it towards the splicers’ retreat.

“That Enrage plasmid was the best thing to get for this,” Aster told her, keeping his launcher trained on the retreating crowd. “The Saturnine ain’t that organized, and those little red balls were the final straws on the camel’s back for most of ‘em.”

Most of the splicers went to the left towards the Tea Garden while others streamed down into the waterway on the right. A few brave ones however went for the health station between the two. Ryan had the stations installed all over Rapture during the initial conflict with Fontaine along with the Vita-Chambers. What purpose the latter served was beyond Alice’s field of knowledge. Eyeing the station and remembering some stories she had heard about hacking them, she summoned the hack tool from Christmas and fired a dart right at the station’s red cross.

As the man right in front of it struggled to get his money in, Alice tapped away with the tool. With a final click, the station was hacked, just as the man’s money went through.

Instead of an injection of healing solution, the station spat out a dense cloud of sickly-green gas right into the man’s face. He screamed in pain and collapsed to the ground, two of the braver splicers following his lead while the others took off. The three writhed on the ground, convulsing wildly before going still as the gas dissipated.

“Bloody hell,” Aster gaped. “Ryan put bleedin’ poison gas in the health stations!?” His voice had risen in pitch as his disbelief turned to outrage.

“And you’re surprised?” Alice asked, smirking at his facial expression as he remembered that it was something that Ryan would do.

Langford and the others chose that moment to appear at the top of the Grotto’s stairs, arms straining from holding their crates of supplies.

“I thought you said there were splicers up here?” Langford asked, her glasses about to fall off her face.

“We drove them back,” Aster growled as he checked over the grenade launcher. His accent was gone again. “They’ve got numbers on their side and they’ll be back. Let’s get you back to your lab.”

Langford surprisingly didn’t say a word. Her eyes popped when she caught sight of the bodies, leading Alice to smile as she remembered how disappointed Langford had been when she learned they were the only ones there.

She and one of the workmen took point with Langford and the others right behind her, Aster watching their back. These people were spliced, but they had enough brains on them to be a threat.
Alice wondered about that form she had seen in the trees when she had been guiding the children to Aster’s cabin. The Rapture Civil War had stolen yet another beloved thing from her.

The next splicer appeared right in front of them in a puff of red particles, a huge rifle aimed right at them. Before either he or Alice could fire, the workmen next to Alice grew a globule in his hand, blue instead of Enrage’s crimson sheen. He chucked it right at the Houdini, spattering him in blue goo and blue…insects?

The Houdini splicer forgot about shooting them completely in favor of trying to bat away the insects. Alice could hear the assistant’s camera clicking as the splicer screeched at the insects.

“Gah, not bugs! They’re crawling everywhere! Get ‘em off me!”

With a loud *whirr* and the ringing of a bell, a security camera focused its glaring white on the splicer. The Houdini was too occupied with the insects to notice. However, his head popped up when the camera began emitting a blaring alarm, followed by the shrill whistling of the two security bots that descended on the scene. Alice had to duck to avoid one of the bots as it careened crazily towards the Houdini, its machine gun spraying bullets.

Between the two bots, the splicer didn’t stand a chance. His dead body came to a rest against the wall, cut down before he could teleport away.

“Bullseye!” the workman crowed. “That’ll teach the damn, dirty-”

A lasso shot out from the waterway and tightened itself around his neck, cutting off his victory speech with a loud “Gurk!” The rope tightened and the man was pulled off his feet and into the space below, a loud splash following. From the sounds of struggling and more splashing, his attacker was attempting to drown him.

“Billy!” the assistant screamed as she rushed past Alice and began to jump down into the dark waterway. “I’m coming!”

“No!” Alice grabbed the back of the assistant’s coat, pulling her back. “You’ll only die with him. We need to go!” Alice gave her one last yank, finally getting her to run alongside her. She could feel the anger radiating off the woman as she ran alongside her.

In Rolling Hills, they were ambushed again. Saturnine jumped or teleported down from the ceiling. Alice used Enrage to send one splicer wielding a blowtorch against his fellows before zapping one of his intended targets with Shock Jockey. Upgrading the shotgun’s ammo capacity was really showing its value as she threw Shock Jockey traps right in front of more attackers. The electricity coursing through their muscles from setting off the traps made them easy pickings for the exploding buckshot.

Just as the area ahead of them was clear, Aster stepped forward and shot another grenade into a tall clump of grass in the corner of the hills opposite them. The blast sent three bodies, previously unseen flying through the air. They landed in little, broken piles, dead.

Aster snorted. “Invisibility is no good if you stand in tall grass, show ponies.”

They weren’t attacked during the rest of the flight back to Langford’s lab. Alice noticed that they encountered no civilians on the way back, when they had been common as cockroaches on the way to the Grotto.

“Those not killed by the Saturnine must have left as soon as they heard the gunfire,” Alice thought as she mentally calculated how much exploding buckshot she had left in her china broom. “Ryan
isn’t going to be happy when he hears about this, that’s for certain.”

It was at the entrance to the lab that their momentary calm was shattered.

Feet away from the stairs in front of the entrance, the air shifted as another Houdini splicer appeared five feet in the air, coming down right on top of Alice. Knocked to the ground, she only had enough time to note that her shotgun was laying a yard away from her before her ear were assaulted by a mechanical roar. Her eyes shot up to see her attacker starting up a chainsaw, a cloud of methane and other gases pouring out of its back as its roar smoothed into a feral purr.

Alice instinctively summoned the Vorpal Blade as the chainsaw’s spinning teeth descended. She caught it on the edge of the Blade, sparks spraying off as metal met metal. Past the sparks, Alice could see the madness gleaming in the eyes of her attacker through his mask. She knew that if he wasn’t wearing the mask, he’d be wearing a face-splitting grin.

One hand gripping the handle of the Vorpal while the other supported the tip of the blade, Alice glanced to her right in search of help. Aster was on the ground, wrestling with a splicer for control over the grenade launcher. The other workman was screaming in pain as a swarm of insects, wasps or bees, she couldn’t tell, flew around and stung him. A third splicer was watching him and laughing. His hands were swollen with huge, red growths. The stinging insects crawled in, around, and back into the growths, making it strongly resemble a hive made of human flesh.

As the workman continued to scream and flail around, the splicer looked past him, his eyes lighting up as he undoubtedly spotted Langford and her assistant. The sadistic light in those eyes confirmed what his next actions would be.

Alice pushed off against the chainsaw, pushing her attacker off just enough for her to telekinetically summon the china broom to her hand. Holding the shotgun like a pistol, Alice pointed it at the bee splicer and squeezed the trigger hard. The resulting blast sent the gun flying out of her hand again while the splicer’s head exploded. Alice uttered a short cry of pain as she felt something in her wrist give, firing off all its pain receptors.

The shotgun gone again, Alice brought the Vorpal back up as the chainsaw came back down. The sparks flying again, Alice glared up at her attackers in a silent challenge while her wrist throbbed, the strength of her Vorpal Blade against the power of his tool-turned-weapon. The mask had slid off to the side, revealing a grin far too wide and toothy, the man’s cheek receding from his mouth thanks to splicing.

The chainsaw descended slowly but surely, its teeth just inches from her forehead. The splicer’s smile somehow widened, just before a gunshot cracked through the air. The chainsaw was withdrawn as its owner was sent stumbling backwards, a spot of red blossoming on his front. A second shot threw him to the ground, the mask coming off to reveal a surprised expression, all life gone from his eyes.

Alice glanced back to find the assistant lowering her smoking Hand Cannon. She nodded her thanks before looking towards Aster. The grenade launcher was abandoned to the side, Aster now on top of his attacker and pummeling him with his boomerangs. The splicer finally managed to teleport out from under Aster, to reappear at the entrance to Rolling Hills to run inside, screaming. The workman lay still on the ground, what skin she could see pocketed with swollen sting marks, the bodies of the insects laying around him as their “hive” was dead.

Aster put his boomerangs back in their holster before collecting the grenade launcher. He glanced at Alice and the others to make sure they were alright. Satisfied at their health, he glared at the retreating splicer and spat.
“And stay out, you blasted rat-bag!” he yelled. Turning, he marched right up to Langford and helped her to her feet. “Alright, Langford, Alice and I kept your stuck-up arse safe, so pay up!”

“Hello Bunnymund,” Langford deadpanned. “You’re alive, I see.”

“Alive, kickin’, and as parasitic as ever,” Aster growled. “You can go ahead and—you’re not surprised at all,” he cut himself off.

“Do you honestly think wearing a trench-coat and changing your accent would hide your identity?” Langford snorted. “A visit to Steinman is the only thing that would keep me from recognizing you of all people. I just need your protection right now more than I need Ryan’s approval.”

Before Aster could reply, a roaring started up, a subdued version to the wild screaming that the whole mess had started with. Alice retrieved her shotgun before trading it for the Pepper Grinder while Aster hefted the grenade launcher and the assistant brought her Hand Cannon up. The splicers came streaming out of the Rolling Hills entrance, angrier than ever. As Alice and the others psyched themselves to continue the fight, she realized what the sound was.

The splicers were chanting Langford’s name over and over again. Their maddened eyes, spliced and just angry alike, were trained on her, ignoring her and the others to their own peril. Alice grit her teeth and tightened her grip on the Grinder as she made the connection.

The Saturnine were here for Julie Langford, their only obstacle to ruling Arcadia, the lungs of Rapture.

Just before the splicers began their inevitable rush forward, their smarter fellows taking cover by the trees and walls, a voice piped up above their maddened chanting.

“You’re here for Langford, I take it?”

Alice turned to find the assistant addressing the crowd, her Cannon still aimed at them. An odd look was on her face, like she was the one about to unleash a storm on them and not the other way around. Try as hard as she could, Alice couldn’t see a bit of fear or nerves on the girl, her gun hand as steady as a rock.

“Yes, we want Langford!”

“Give the infidel over to us!”

“She will be offered to the gods!”

“Arcadia will be ours at long last!”

The Saturnine mob spit out their demands, their lust for bloodshed shining through their masks, frothing at the mouth to get at Langford.

“Do any of you know how to calibrate the sprinklers?” the assistant asked, somehow reaching above their volume without appearing to yell.

The mob went quiet before they began turning to each other, trying to find one within their number who could.

“Do any of you know how to correctly cycle the air through Rapture?” she continued, not giving a chance. “What about fertilizer mixtures? Or air/water equilibrium? What about maintaining the lights for photosynthesis?”
As the Saturnine grew more and more confused about her questions, the assistant nodded.

“Only Langford knows how to do all of that. If you kill her, you kill Arcadia! If you want to keep breathing, I suggest that you leave her, and anyone with her, alone! Understand?”

The several dozen splicers that made up the Saturnine cult stood there for a moment, mulling over her words. Finally, one of them, a heavy-set older man dressed in the remains of an expensive business suit, stepped forward.

“We’ll leave Langford alone. Arcadia still belongs to the Saturnine, no matter what Ryan thinks,” he declared. Stepping back, he turned and weaved through the crowd back into Rolling Hills.

“I doubt Ryan agrees with you or your cult,” Alice thought at his retreating back.

The man must have been a leader within the Saturnine, because the others began following his lead. Even the ones already deep in the throes of splicing departed, after snarling at Langford like an animal of course.

Langford just stood there, trembling until the Saturnine were gone. As soon as the last one had disappeared back into the hills of Arcadia, she exhaled in relief. Turning to Aster, she took her wallet out of a coat pocket and counted out the money into his palm.

“Thank you, Mr. Jackman,” she said stiffly, “your assistance was much appreciated, but it won’t be necessary anymore.”

Aster nodded in understanding. “A pleasure doin’ business with you, Dr. Langford,” he replied in a Texas twang. They shook hands before Langford headed back to the lab, forgetting for the moment the crates they had dropped, contents spilling everywhere.

Aster blew out a long breath before glancing over at the assistant.

“Good day, Jane,” he said, “Langford’s not keepin’ you too busy, I hope?”

“Not more than usual,” ‘Jane’ answered. “It’s good to see you again, Aster.”

“That’s good,” Aster said, cracking a smile. “Much better than hating my guts.”

“Not that you certainly haven’t tried,” Jane replied. “Can we talk in a moment, Aster? I need to show Alice something.”

Alice raised an eyebrow at the woman’s request. What could the woman need to show her?

Aster nodded. “Sounds good. I’m going to see if any of these ratbags had anything good on ‘em.” He walked over the bodies of the bee splicer and the chainsaw splicer and began to rummage through their pockets.

Jane turned to Alice and held a small packet of papers out to her. Taking it with the hand whose wrist wasn’t throbbing, Alice found it to be a stack of photographs of herself, fighting off the splicers. Most of them were of the ambush in Rolling Hills. Shots of her throwing Enrage globules or Shock Jockey traps, using her shotgun against incoming splicers.

Alice looked up at Jane, one eyebrow raised. “What are these supposed to be?”

“The camera identified you as an ADAM-positive organism,” Jane replied. “The findings are on the back.”
Alice flipped the photos over to find descriptions of the photo’s subjects, reporting the various bonuses gained from multiple subjects and those subjects in action. The readouts on her were remarkably different from the others.

“According to the camera,” Jane began, “you have far more ADAM than most other splicers, yet you have no genetic degradation whatsoever. In fact, your plasmids are far more stable in comparison.” Jane paused for a moment before adding, “I just thought that you should know.”

Alice nodded. “Thank you for sharing this information.” She glanced down at the camera. “Would your camera happen to expose the weaknesses of its subject, by any chance?” she asked.

“It can be calibrated for that, yes,” Jane answered.

“How much?” Alice asked, summoning her pocketbook.

Jane glanced back at the lab entrance before handing the camera over to Alice.

“Seeing as neither Langford or Ryan are here, take it,” she said. “Langford has a spare hanging around somewhere.”

“Thank you,” Alice replied, surprised. Most people would jump at the change to make extra cash. Maybe she and the Guardians weren’t alone in Rapture after all. Or Jane was a closet Atlas supporter practicing altruism just to spit in Ryan’s face. Either way, she had herself a new research camera.

“Hey, Half Pint! Here’s somethin’ our bee-keepin’ friend had stashed away.”

Alice turned just in time to catch the plasmid bottle that Aster tossed her way. She held it up to inspect the label. A beehive with about half a dozen bees greeted her scrutiny before she read the name.

“Insect Swarm?” she asked.

“You can generate a swarm of stinging insects from your arms,” Jane explained. “Before the war, it was used here to create honey-bees to pollinate flowers. This is the weaponized version.”

“Dang,” Aster muttered, glancing from the bottle to the body of the poor workman. “I used to think that stuff like Incinerate was nasty. Now, this Insect Swarm and those globule plasmids, those are downright disgustin’.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Alice muttered. The drinkable plasmids were so much more elegant than the injectables. Ryan Industries wasn’t paying as much attention to plasmid quality now that quantity was on the demand.

“There’s your share of the money, Alice,” Aster added as he passed half the money over to her. “You go on ahead. Jane and I, we need to have a talk, settle some things.”

“Of course, Aster,” Alice answered. “Take care, Jane, and thank you for the camera.”

Jane smiled after her before she and Aster headed over to the crates and began to both talk and clean up the spilled contents. After injecting some healing formula from a first aid kit into her wrist, Alice headed back to the Metro Station.

The station was just as abandoned as the rest of Arcadia, the customers not in the Grotto long gone after the gun shots echoed through the hills, glades, and vine-covered hallways. The garbage cans
laying on their sides and the abandoned hats and briefcases attested to the haste of the fleeing civilians. Alice took the time to go through the briefcases for cash before summoning a bathysphere and saying a last farewell to Arcadia. Knowing Ryan, Arcadia would be locked down to contain the Saturnine until the problem they presented could be dealt with.

“And there goes another piece of my childhood, taken away by the great and awful metropolis,” Alice brooded. Arcadia had been much smaller before the fire, but it had been more than big enough for the younger Alice Liddell. Now, Ryan charged for a walk in the woods, and a cult that supposedly drank human blood and worshipped the Roman/Greek gods infested the area. If only her father had a moment of clairvoyance before agreeing to come down here!

Alice took out the Insect Swarm plasmid as the sphere submerged, for once not interested in the passing sea life.

A plasmid that would turn her arms into living bee-hives. Ugh.

Well, it wouldn’t be the first time she had done something she didn’t want to do in the name of survival. A swarm of stinging, flying insects from her arms would make for a great distraction for any foe. Wait a minute…swarm?

Alice remembered a very different swarm that had proven very useful during the Dollmaker Siege and smiled. Putting the Insect Swarm plasmid down, she changed the sphere’s destination to Olympus Heights. She had a few questions concerning plasmids for Tenenbaum.

Chapter End Notes

One thing I need to do right now is to give credit to the writer Solarmech on FanFiction for the idea of someone meeting Langford back when Rapture was in the early stages of its Civil War. In his fic, "BioShock Infinite: Union", he has plenty of good ideas for the events during the Rapture Civil War. I definitely recommend his fic for those of you who want an idea of what Rapture was like between Burial at Sea and the original BioShock game, and who want more resolution for Elizabeth.

Also, the credit for proofreading my fic goes to the amazing Scorpiofreak. Thanks Scorp!

I hope that you all liked the latest chapter in WonderShock. I’m open to hearing your thoughts if you have any ideas for how to improve it. Have a good one, everybody, and happy writing!
Chapter Notes

I am...mildly ashamed that I let WonderShock go for so long. I'm not too ashamed, as I had a great reason for doing so: College. I started WonderShock during the opening years, before things got really hard. A couple months ago, I graduated with a Bachelors degree. In between my summer job and job applications in my field, I've been working on this and I'm proud to sat, welcome back to WonderShock!

Always, WOULD YOU KINDLY leave a kudos and/or a comment with your thoughts and ideas? Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 13: Happy Birthday

May 4, 1959

"What's the matter, Alice? Does this demented dance of love and death not assuage your concerns for romantic love in the afterlife?" Cheshire purred. "Or is there something missing perhaps? Maybe a dash of crimson red to liven up this dreary monochrome of the breathing and the breathless?"

"Do keep quiet, Cat," Alice whispered from the corner of her mouth. "I'm trying to enjoy the play." She was silent for a few moments and then leaned just enough to whisper again in Cheshire's ear. "And I would hardly call it dreary. It is one of Sander Cohen's after all."

"Patrick and Moira, The Story of Love After Death", was the cream of Rapture's crop of musical productions. It was one of Cohen's earlier works back when the city was still young and most people had appreciated Cohen's work before it became strange. It wasn't in production before her sojourn in Rutledge, and since it hadn't been playing in theaters through popular demand during her last visit to Fort Frolic, now was as good a time as any.

It also helped that today was her 20th birthday, and the Guardians' main gift to her had been a mandatory, one-day "vacation" to Fort Frolic, along with a sizable amount of cash to spend. Personally, she thought it was all a bit much, especially the money.

The crossbow that Tooth had given her as soon as she had walked in the door, on the other hand, was a prize indeed. A five-bolt chamber, easy to carry and aim, and all without the recoil and noise of a gun. Perfect for a silent kill.

She had ripped up some practice dummies at North's range with it before Aster had shooed her out the door and to the bathysphere station. He was likely just jealous that his and the other's gifts weren't ready yet.

So far, she had shopped in Sofia Salon High Fashion (50% off!) and the Gardner Delux Modern in the Southern Mall, checked out the selections at the Rapture Records store in Poseidon Plaza,
gambled a hundred dollars each at Sir Prize and Pharaoh's Fortune (and won the jackpot of two hundred and fifty dollars at the latter), and checked out Cohen's most recent additions to his Collection. The finale was the earliest showing of *Patrick and Moira*, heralded by Tooth as the last of Cohen's great works before he met his current muse. Ryan's ban on censorship had done wonders for Cohen, and strange things to most of Rapture.

As the curtains went down and the actors and actresses took their bows, Alice stood and clapped with the rest of the audience. From what she had gathered, it wasn't nearly as romantic as Cohen's supporters claimed it was, and not nearly as unnerving as his detractors, including Anna Culpepper, believed it was. In her taste, it was a blend of the two, and it could have done well to have more of both.

Cheshire politely tapped his paw on the other in a feline version of a clap. "Now that that's done," he yawned, "shall we return to North's little subterranean and submarine kingdom?" He grinned wickedly. "Unless you wish to sample the alcoholic wares of ones Sinclair and D'Epoque, maybe even dare to try Robertson's own burning brand of addiction?" "ADAM is more than enough for me, thank you Cat," Alice murmured softly, "and don't you worry; we are heading straight home and you can sate your own addiction of North's store of milk."

The crowd filtered out of the theater, some steering off for the other businesses and stores of Fort Frolic, while most headed down the Atrium staircase towards the bathyspheres. Alice was among the latter group, Cat padding along behind her. The afternoon was fading into evening, and she preferred to spend it at North's with the others.

At the bottom of the stairs, she glanced to her right. Months earlier in October, she had arrived at this exact same spot after exiting the exact same theater after seeing the exact same show. There had been a small crowd gathered around then, staring and gaping at something glowing…

"Now what's going on here," she muttered, raising an eyebrow at the dense group clustered at the bottom of the stairs. Despite all of the entertainment these idiots were allowed here, they always wanted more. Granted, she had fun today (a modicum considering Bumby had practically ordered her to go and enjoy herself as a reward for improving so much), but moderation was a virtue (as her mother used to say - or had it been her father?).

From the way they were all staring, one would think an Eve's Apple strippers had decided to put on a show right in the Atrium, if it wasn't for all the women starring as well. Statistically, it was unlikely that there would so many women who batted for the other team in one group. Judging from how many were arm-in-arm with their husbands/boyfriends, it was something other than carnality.

Her curiosity piqued, Alice pushed her way through the group. She noticed the impromptu attraction glowed a blue-purple. Odd sounds were also emanating from the source - low piping or whistling. When she came to the front row of the group, she couldn't help but stare too.

It was...she had not idea what it was. Flickering in mid-air a few feet off the ground was a...hole in the air? It was like someone had taken a knife and cut a vertical slit through a quilt or blanket, a tear that kept trying to close itself only for another part of it to open up. Wisps of something trailed along the edges of the tear. Whether they were from within it or without, she couldn't tell. Peering in was like looking through a static-afflicted television screen at the same scene, showing a distorted version of the Atrium directly behind it.

*After moving around the Tear and seeing that it was the same from all angles, Alice did what any*
one cursed with her curiosity would do; she hesitantly reached up and touched the Tear. A
sensation like an electric shock traveled up her arm, making her yelp and jump back, rubbing her
hand. With a strange hum/shriek, the Tear opened wider, showing more of the distorted Atrium.
The other onlookers shouted and backed up in a hurry, leaving solely Alice to witness what the
Tear had to show.

Rubbing her arm and grumbling, Alice didn't notice the Tear's expansion until a familiar voice
came out of it.

"Alice dear, come along. Mother and Father will be wondering where we are!"

Even with the distortions of the Tear and the passage of time, Alice recognized the voice with a
start. In an instant, she was as close to the Tear as she dared, straining around and looking for the
voice’s source within. She found it standing at the same spot where she had first spied the gaping
group. It was her long-dead sister, Lizzie, alive, well, and as beautiful as ever.

"Coming Lizzie!" If she thought her shock couldn't be greater, it just did. The girl who came down
the stairs after her sister was her double in every way except in health and clothes. Her hair was
clean and even, her eyes were bright and alive, her face flush with health, her fine, quality clothes
a far cry from the ugly striped dress Witless had scrounged up for her.

"Of all of Anna Culpepper's plays, that one was the finest I've seen yet!" other-Alice said. "Far
better than that hack Cohen." Not only did she look better, she was far happier than she had any
right to be.

"Alice, be nice," Lizzie lightly scolded her. "Sander Cohen may be just that, and Fort Frolic may
be Culpepper's, but you shouldn't speak ill of the missing."

"Isn't it 'speak ill of the dead'?” other-Alice asked.

Before Lizzie could answer, two more voices came into the conversation.

"There you two are!" Lorina Liddell appeared with her husband Arthur Liddell right next to her.
Both were visibly older, but were also alive and healthy.

"How was the play?" her father asked, his eyes twinkling. "Not too much propaganda, I hope?"

"There were...overtones," Lizzie replied. "I somewhat miss the days when Sander Cohen was
Ryan's main artisan. Ever since Culpepper jumped on Ryan's bandwagon and Cohen jumped off,
she seems to have gotten a little...Cohenish, herself."

With that, the Tear closed. Alice could only stare at the place where it had occupied. Her parents
were alive, no they were dead, she had just seen them, it wasn't real it was an hallucination, who
was that girl who had her name and face, why did she have Lizzie and her parents, they were hers,
it wasn't fair!

And with that, her vision shattered in a shower of bloody glass, and her world turned into fire and
chaos.

Bumby hadn't been happy about her "relapse", even when it became known that other Tears were
appearing in Rapture, showing impossible things. Alice shook her head and continued walking
towards the metro station. That particular memory wasn't pleasant, even if she had every intention
of keeping it.

Cheshire quickened his pace until he was abreast of her. "Alice, there is something that you should
consider whenever you recall that one instance-." His subdued tone stopped her short, allowing her to evenly stare at him. For once, no mischief danced in his eyes; she had no idea what was in its place.

"Two variations of the same saying in fact," Cheshire continued. "'She who saves a soul saves a universe', and 'Whoever destroys a soul, destroys the world'. Think on that, if you care to." He vanished as he always did.

Alice recognized both sayings. Cheshire had said the first himself, and he had quoted her father for the second. Like most of his advice, it was a riddle, but unique. He hadn't mocked her for one, and there was a visual for it. A hole in the air with another her, Lizzie and her parents, all alive and well.

Ironically, the oddest bit was Culpepper and Cohen. Culpepper was one of Ryan's most vocal critics, and Cohen his most vociferous supporter. The idea that they would switch roles was ludicrous, especially considering that they hadn't. Whatever that Tear had been, it didn't make any sense whatsoever.

Then again, when did anything in her life make sense?

There was a small crowd at the metro station, milling around the bathysphere. Approaching, Alice could hear them complaining loudly, the high expectations that came from a middle-to-high class lifestyle in Rapture surfacing.

"Where is that bathysphere? I'm going to be late for my appointment with Steinman!"

"Hey, hey, I got a reservation at the Tea Garden. Five minutes late, and they give the slot to somebody else!"

"Really, you'd think that with all the money that Austen charges for his bathyspheres, running on time would be simplicity."

"The guidance system on those things was whipped up by Fontaine Futuristics, what do you expect?"

"Ain't nothin' wrong with Fontaine products, just the old owner."

Alice rolled her eyes and turned around. Opposite the metro station was another bathysphere dock, one which lead to Arcadia. Most of the bathysphere docks connected multiple destinations depending on the control options; a few could only allow travel to one specific destination. It all depended on the layout of the city and the expected traffic for those two areas. It was a detour, but at least it would be a pleasant one.

Alice had memorized all the one-way docks a long time ago, seeing as not many opted to use those and they were a relatively discrete way of getting around. Most of Rapture's higher-ups didn't use them as they had the aire of being maintenance areas, somewhere they didn't want to be seen and also a chance to muss their fancy clothes.

Before she was halfway across the hall, Alice spotted them. Standing by the entrance to the other dock were two of Cohen's stage performers, the ones that usually danced out front at his club in High Street. These two were very different though; they were built far more like the football linebackers at Ryan Stadium. One of them sported twin handcannon pistols in shoulder holsters and a tommy gun in his hands, eyes scanning for anyone who got too close. The other sported the crystals growths of a Frosty on one arm, while the other was coal-black with fiery-red veins.
"What in the Atlantic?" Alice muttered, one hand rubbing the Vorpal Blade's handle gently. Something was wrong here, and likely about to get worse.

The PA system came to life with a short-lived screech of static before a soft melody began playing. Alice heard the crowd in the metro station quit their jabbering and perk their ears up. The voice that echoed throughout Fort Frolic was one very familiar to Rapturites from every part of the city.

"Good evening, fair patrons of the arts!" Sander Cohen crooned. "The struggle of the artist has never been greater in Rapture, all thanks to this war between Atlas and Ryan. Ryan and Atlas, who can only struggle against each other." A note of scorn came into his voice with their names. "My friends, the true enemy is not the petty Parasites or the belligerent Ryan Security. No! It is the doubters, those vile little insects who've dogged the minds and hearts of the artist since civilization arose from the muck!" His voice arose to a scream after mentioning the doubters.

"Forgive me for that outburst; artistic temperaments can easily upset at the best of times." Cohen cleared his throat with an exaggerated 'ahem'. "With the authority granted to me by the Rapture Council, I am declaring Fort Frolic off-limits to all bathysphere travel, incoming and outgoing. This old bird has one last frolic in him, and you are all my guests!"

With that, the PA system clicked off.

As the meaning of Cohen's words penetrated her understanding, Alice barely resisted the urge to smack her head with her palm. "Oh, damn," she swore.

She and every other soul in Fort Frolic was trapped and at the mercy of a mad artist and a purported madman. From what she remembered of the Warden, there were no entrances to Fort Frolic. The closest point was about a hundred yards off from Cohen's Collection, through a hundred yards of ocean bedrock. Doable, if she had far more explosives than she currently did, and if she wasn't in a fishtank of a city where every blast was an invitation for the ocean to come in.

She snapped back to reality as a cacophony of shouts and running feet broke out behind her. While she had been realizing her plight, the crowd at the metro station had decided to turn into a mob and make a mad rush for the alternate dock.

"Wait, stop-," Alice jumped out of the way of a particularly large man as he barreled past. From her new spot in the hallway to the Atrium, she could only yell warnings and invectives at the crowd streaming past.

"Stop! You imbeciles, can't you see that-"

A burst of tommy gun fire roared out, followed by screaming. A burning ball of magma soared through the air and detonated right as it fell among the crowd. The four caught in its range howled in pain and floundered around as the fire consumed them. Alice averted her eyes, trying to contain the images that flashed through her brain at the sight.

Two more people were suddenly frozen in place before bullets shattered them into crystalline pieces. The rattle of the tommy gun was replaced by the blasting of two hand-cannons. A man's head exploded, while the woman by his side was thrown on her back, blood streaming in an arc from the huge wound in her chest.

As the survivors streamed past her in a broken column, the miraculously untouched ignoring the wounded with the exception of loved ones, Alice could only groan.
Of course madness would break out on her birthday.

BS+AMA=WS

"Irony is the fact that the Deluded Depths is more orderly than its counterpart, this fortress of frivolity and madness," Cheshire smiled, proud of his wordplay.

"Cheshire, you have been making light of our present situation for the past three hours," chided Alice. "If you have nothing to contribute in the way of escaping from this madhouse, I suggest you keep quiet!"

Cheshire smirked as he disappeared, his mission of finally getting a rise out of her a complete success. Alice rolled her eyes and huffed as she realized that she had played right into his paws. Not surprising considering her present situation.

She had explored almost every inch of Fort Frolic looking for a way to get out, even visiting Eve's Garden in desperation. She had left with the owner yelling that anyone remotely associated with Nan Sharpe was banned from his "establishment" and that he'd better never see her "skulking" around ever again.

Fort Frolic had just been cut off from the rest of Rapture by one of the worst of the city's madmen and he was worried that the former ward of his former competition might be spying on him? Either he was lost in the depths of delusion far below the Dreary Lane Theater, or he was in shock and had continued on as though everything was normal.

That hadn't stopped her from scouting out Eve's Garden for any possible escape routes. Thank goodness for her ability to astrally project herself using Cheshire. With him, she had literally covered every square inch of Fort Frolic. She had also scouted any routes to get to Cohen with. If things got truly desperate, she would go straight for the man himself and make him let her out. She hadn't yet because Cohen had a direct line to Ryan and she didn't want to draw attention to herself and the Guardians.

Some part of her, the absolute darkest part of her, wished that Rapture would just go to hell already, complete and utter social breakdown like what Wonderland had gone through. In a (somewhat) functioning society where even a few citizens supported the ruling establishment, killing off the guards and beheading the monarch would only backfire on her and her friends. During both the Queen's reign and the Dollmaker's siege, she had been actively at war with both enemies and their armies. Here, she was sneaking around, trying to do some good without attracting the wrong kind of attention.

She shook her head. There was one last place for her to check out: Sinclair Spirits. If that wasn't ironic-

"It is," chimed in Cheshire. "In fact, the irony is greater considering who is currently behind the counter in that particular store."

Alice gave him another glare and huffed again as she mounted the stairs to Sinclair Spirits. She swore to herself that if Sander Cohen himself was behind the counter, she was going to blow his brains out right there and then take anything resembling a key off his body. She needed to get out of this place before either she got caught up in one of Cohen's mad art projects, or the Guardians decided to storm the place.

She froze and stared at the familiar face that was chatting up the two people at the bar. It was only a few moments but it was enough for her former landlord to spot her.
"Well, I'll be a sea monkey's uncle!" Augustus Sinclair, Esq. flashed his thousand-dollar Steinman smile at her. "Alice Pleasance Liddell! Of all the people to be trapped in this loony bin, you are the last one I would have ever pegged to be in here."

It took a moment for Alice to get over her surprise, a moment more to get over her horror that Sinclair of all people knew her middle name, before she could speak.

"I could say the same of you, Sinclair," she finally replied. "How does the biggest grifter in Rapture come to be trapped with the rest of us plebs in Fort Frolic?"

One of the bar goers glared up at Alice from her bottle of wine at the word "plebs". She likely would have said something if Sinclair hadn't cut her off.

"Shrewd businessman, my dear," he corrected. "I was checking up on my business interests here in the Fort when Cohen finally decided to flip his lid for good." He shook his head. "Found my manager going through the cash register, hoping he could bribe Cohen's pretty boys into letting him go. I let him try it, then got my cash back when they blew his head off. Got blood all over my money, though."

Alice gave him one of her patented looks.

"We are currently trapped in Fort Frolic at the behest of a man who was obviously losing his mind before he even touched ADAM," she said, maintaining eye contact, "and you're worried about money?"

Sinclair shrugged. "There's still a good number of people here who haven't caught onto that just yet. And if I manage to get out, I'm goin' to make sure that I'm takin' whatever I can get out of this particular branch of Sinclair Spirits. Won't be getting anythin' from this one when everything's said and done."

Alice nodded and then took a moment to study the bar's occupants. She recognized both of them. The man was Suresh Sheti, one of Fort Frolic's performers, a master "mentalist", his shows of supposed clairvoyance and mind-control dazzling even the most skeptic of audiences. He wore a white suit with a matching turban wrapped around his head, a sash as red as the rose pinned on his breast wrapping around him from shoulder to hip. His back was to her, blocking any view of his supposedly bi-colored face.

The woman was Mlle Blanche de Glace, an actress famous on both the surface and in Rapture. Her talent on the stage was renowned for its emotional depth and power. The oddest thing about her was the bipolarity of her social interactions: She spent half the time in total and absolute reclusion, eschewing all human interaction, and the rest of the time being extremely sociable, her need for human contact eclipsing that of Rapture's most active social butterflies. She had turned back to her drink, wrapping her brown fur boa around herself. Her steel blue, strapless dress suited her, contrasting sharply and elegantly with the strawberry blond hair.

Why two of Fort Frolic's best were drowning their sorrows (and barely doing much of that as evidenced by the high level of alcohol in their glasses), Alice had no idea.

"So, any of my fine wares today tickle your fancy?" Sinclair asked, taking advantage of her silence.

Alice sighed.

"Seeing as it's my birthday, and I'm stuck here, I might as well enjoy a glass of Arcadian Merlot," she decided. Cheshire smirked up at her, his barb about trying alcohol or nicotine turning out to be
true. Alice ignored him.

Alice took a seat away from the performer and the actress and laid down the money for a glass of wine while Sinclair poured it out and set it down in front of her. She nodded her thanks and took a sip of it. If there was one thing Rapture spirits had going for them, it was the fact the majority of them were watered down to stretch the actual stuff as far as possible. Both Aster and North decried the practice of watering down alcohol, but Alice preferred it this way; much easier to get down and it wouldn't affect her nearly as much.

Alice contemplated the deep red of the merlot, idly swishing it around her glass between sips. She shouldn't really be drinking this; not only was it alcoholic, but it would drain her EVE reserve, even if only by a little. She had heard of a gene tonic that reversed the effect of alcohol on EVE, replenishing it instead. "Booze Hound", wasn't it? Witless would have loved that; she would've probably been one of the first to splice up with it, if she was still around.

Alice was on the last dregs of her wine when Sinclair saddled up to her and leaned in. "Listen kid, now that Sheti and de Glace are gone, I'm gonna let you in on a secret, just for your birthday, you understand?"

Alice glanced down over at the seats that the aforementioned individuals had filled and froze when she saw that they were still there, nursing their drinks and paying no attention whatsoever to their surroundings, or each other for that matter. When two people sat next to each other at a bar, even a high quality one such as a Sinclair Spirits in the nicer areas of Rapture, there was usually some conversation. But no, Sheti and de Glace just sat and sipped at their drinks.

She felt a chill race up her spine at the unreality of the scene and situation and looked back at Sinclair, hoping that he hadn't noticed that anything was amiss. He didn't show any physical symptoms of splicing, but one didn't need to splice in order to go mad, she knew that firsthand. Either he was somehow hallucinating that they had left, or she was imagining them still there. Judging by their behavior, the latter was more likely.

"Are you sure that you haven't been dipping into your wares, Sinclair?" she asked. "Generosity is not something I would have expected of you."

"Believe me Liddell, I'm not doin' this out of the goodness of my heart. There's a 'Power to the People' machine down in the cellar, only one in the entire Fort." He reached down beneath the counter and pressed something, a button. At the grinding sound behind her, Alice turned to see a door sliding open. "Consider this a trade: I scratch your back, you scratch mine when it starts itching. Sound good?" he finished.

Alice eyed him for a moment before answering.

"As long as I or my friends don't get a knife in the back," she finally stated, "I accept your offer, Sinclair."

She got off her seat and started for the door. She noticed Cheshire rolling his eyes at her and stopped. Turning around, she gave Sinclair one final warning.

"If this is a trap, Sinclair, this won't end well for you."

Sinclair raised his hands in a faux-surrender.

"I understand. No tricks, I promise," he crossed an x over his heart. "Cross my heart, hope to die."

Alice snorted in derision at the poor word choice as she turned back to the door. Going down the
stairs, she glanced back at the couple. They remained at their bar stools even as Sinclair removed their empty glasses and began cleaning them.

Cheshire was waiting at the bottom of the stairs, sniffing at a bottle of Arcadian Merlot.

"If this was served in London, the producer would be laughed out of business," he snarked, wrinkling his nose. "Is there any particular reason for your sudden trust in Sinclair? I don't recall any instances of his honesty, if he has any, shining through."

"Sinclair is a greedy, dishonest, money-grubbing con artist," Alice said, "but he is not stupid. Making an enemy out of me is stupid, insane, or both."

Cheshire straightened up and stretched luxuriously, each individual vertebrae in his nearly-exposed spine popping.

"A fair point," he conceded, "though his sanity is in question at the moment."

Alice paused, then pointed back up the stairs. "Be a dear, Cat, and keep an eye out for him."

Cheshire rolled his eyes and sat down like a guard dog. "The things I'm forced to do," he bemoaned. Alice ignored him pointedly.

A safe sat next to the Power to the People station. Alice eyed it for a moment before mentally shaking her head. Sinclair was allowing her to use one of his stations for free, she wasn't going to repay him by stealing from his safe.

The Power to the People stations were an embarrassment to Ryan. Fontaine had them installed throughout Rapture to give away weapon upgrades for free. Thankfully, Ryan hadn't gotten around to getting rid of them, mostly because even his most loyal supporters knew free was sometimes better than not, as was the case with the older El Ammo Banditos. Sadly, the upgrades were standardized to the weapons that were readily available in Rapture, such as the Tommy guns and the Webley Mk pistols, whereas her real-world Teapot Cannon and Pepper Grinder couldn't be upgraded like the Wonderland versions could be. At least the real ones were designed to be like the fully-upgraded fantasy guns.

The choices available to her were for the Hand Cannon, the China Broom, and her new Crossbow (Tooth must have learned how to make them from the original producer). The Hand Cannon's upgrades would result in a faster firing rate and a larger ammunition capacity. The China Broom's allowed for a larger ammunition capacity and easier reloading. And the Crossbow's were a lesser chance of the bolts breaking and an increase of the damage they caused.

After some thought, Alice chose the larger ammunition capacity for the China Broom, doubling the original three shells to six. She placed the weapon into the open slot of the machine, hurriedly jerking her hand back when it snapped shut. As the machine whirred and buzzed, she rocked back and forth on her heels with her arms behind her back.

When the machine finished with a loud whizzzz and opened up, Alice tested out the modification by loading six shotgun shells into the gun. When it tested true, Alice gave it her smirk of approval and turned around.

Sheti and de Glace were standing right behind her.

The China Broom was brought up to her shoulder almost instantly, the bead aiming directly over Sheti's turban. To his credit, he didn't even blink.
De Glace, on the other hand, had a pistol aimed right at Alice.

"Jeune femme," she trilled in a chilly French accent, "kindly be putting that weapon down. If we had wished you dead, we would have struck when your back was turned."

Alice considered that for a moment before lowering the butt of the gun from her shoulder, keeping it at the ready. De Glace did the same, cold eyes watching her every movement. The French actress reminded Alice of a predator that wasn't hungry enough to strike, but would if provoked.

Alice glanced around the pair to find Cheshire lounging at the foot of the staircase. At the very brief glare she sent his way, he just grinned saucily and resumed grooming.

The urge to skin him had increased by several magnitudes.

Sheti had barely moved, his eyes boring into Alice's with an intensity that made her uneasy. It wasn't lust that gleamed out at her from his brown depths; it was a burning curiosity, like she was a particularly odd insect specimen. The colors of his face were split halfway down the middle: Pure white on his right side and almost pure black on the left. His facial features gave no clues as to which side was his true pigment, if either truly were. Odds were it was a shade somewhere in between.

"Alice Pleasance Liddell," he finally said, giving her a short bow. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am Suresh Sheti and this lovely lady of taste is Mlle Blanche de Glace, if you already didn't know of us."

Alice inwardly groaned at Sinclair's reveal of her middle name while dropping down into a small curtsy. She kept her gun at the ready.

"Yes, I am aware of who the two of you are," she answered. "Sadly, I never had the opportunity to witness your theatrical careers here in Fort Frolic. However, this isn't exactly how I imagined meeting with any celebrities. That is, in a cellar in a shop at the back-end of a locked-down Fort Frolic."

She gave them a moment to answer her unasked question, and when none came, she went ahead and asked it.

"What do you want?"

"My apologies for answering a question with another question, but how familiar are you with my show?" Sheti responded. The intensity of his gaze had died down, but the curiosity was still there, still studying her.

Alice frowned at him. "You're the 'Mystic of Rapture'. Your show is essentially that of a mentalist's. You perform feats of 'magic' in front of an audience, showing them something that they've never seen before. I'm familiar with the concept."

Now, Sheti smiled. "Another of my more common talents is the ability to divine inflections in tone." At Alice's momentary look of confusion, he explained. "You don't think that my mental capabilities are real, that they are just as much of a fiction as a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat."

A thin veil of annoyance had entered into his voice by then. Alice tightened her grip on the China Broom and allowed Old Man Winter to begin coating her hand. Better safe than sorry, especially these days.
"Feel free to correct me if I'm wrong," Alice began cautiously, "but there is only one real power in this world, and that's the almighty dollar. All other sources of power in this world are tied directly or indirectly to money, even Plasmids."

"That last commodity could be changing all that soon," de Glace said, "but that is not what Monsieur Sheti is talking about. He means the true power of the mind."

"I swear to God if you just let a madman and a madwoman pass you by, Cheshire, I'm going to skin you and wear your fur as a coat," Alice mentally growled.

"The human mind is capable of more than just thinking, Ms. Liddell," Sheti continued, "it is rare, but there are individuals who possess mental abilities that allow them to read, manipulate, or even control the minds of others. Sadly, I am limited to only one of those three, but my skill with what I can do is exceptional."

Alice took stock of both of them. If what she said next brought on an attack, an Old Man Winter trap right between the two of them would freeze them both solid, and then the China Broom would finish them off.

"If what you're telling me is true, and I highly doubt it," Alice said, casting the bait, "then why tell me?"

A flash of anger appeared in eyes both brown and blue/grey, but only for a moment in the former. Sheti smiled, a very odd smile like he was about to tell Alice the secrets to the universe.

"Because, Ms. Liddell," he said, "I cannot divine your thoughts no matter how hard I concentrate, and I wish to know how and why."

He moved fast, stepping towards Alice and raising a hand to her head. Alice raised the gun, pressing the barrel right into Sheti's chest and began to pull the trigger. Before her finger could complete the action and send buckshot through the performer's chest, his hand touched her forehead.

The ground opened up beneath her feet in a burst of blue-green light, and she fell.

BS+AMA=WS

By the time Alice regained her faculties, she was floating gently down to the green verdant floor of the fusion of the Vale of Tears and Pauper's Drop. Over the trees and the buildings of Skid Row, the trains of the Looking Glass Railway screeched from one end of Wonderland to the other, as a Shipwreck Shark glided overhead with the grace of a predator in its element.

As soon as Alice touched down on the ground, a voice spoke out of midair.

"Ms. Liddell, if you can hear me, may I have permission to enter your mindscape?"

Alice easily recognized Suresh Sheti's voice. It would have been melodic had the situation not been so bizarre. She was silent for a moment before answering.

"If you will explain what exactly is going on, then yes," she finally said.

Without a sound, Suresh Sheti appeared before her. As soon as he had finished blinking from the light, his eyes went wide as he took in the surrounding environment.

"Dear God," he whispered, "now this is a mindscape!"
Alice cleared her throat, bringing his attention to her. He blinked again before bringing his hand up to cup his chin in thought.

"You continue to surprise, Ms. Liddell. It is rare for one's mental image of themselves to match their physical appearance."

Alice glared at him in frustration. "I am getting very tired of your wordplay. Mindscape? Mental image? And what did you do to me? How did you send me to Wonderland and how are you here?"

Sheti raised a hand in an attempt to calm her. "Everything I said earlier is true; there are an infinitesimally small number of people with powers that have no connection to ADAM, mental abilities that can be very useful when utilized correctly.

"My talent is being able to read the minds of others. Somehow, you are able to block me out, and you aren't even aware that you are doing it. You don't even register my attempts. Of course, you drew my interest."

"I trust that your interest is friendly?" Alice asked, sensing a window to interject. "Because if it is not…"

She reached out to Wonderland and clamped down on the connection to the real world. It was strange, manipulating Wonderland on this level. The barrier between her dream world and the real one was like a membrane, thick and strong in the majority of Wonderland. The entry and exit points were incredibly thin, able to come apart to let her in or out before closing up like they were never there. When Bumby's influence had finally been exorcised from her mind, she had slowly become aware of the control that she wielded over the fabric that of Wonderland's existence.

She had let Sheti into Wonderland, and just now she had thickened the divider at the entries and exits to the point that Sheti would need a drill bigger than a Big Daddy's to get out. And even if he was able to figure out how to escape, he would be at point blank range from her China Broom in the real world. Either way, the cards were stacked in her favor.

Sheti must have sensed her alterations to Wonderland because he froze for a moment, fear and amazement briefly dancing in his eyes.

"Rest assured, Ms. Liddell," he quickly answered. "My intentions are honorable. I merely wish to ascertain your abilities and provide any advice if necessary. It is very rare to come across another of our own, and I firmly believe that talents such as ours should be refined and fully realized. Would you be interested?"

Yes, yes she was interested. Yet another tool for her to utilize in her fight for survival in Rapture. However, they were in Rapture, so it was certain that there was a price attached.

"What would I be giving in return for your services?" she asked.

He waved a hand. "Merely to know the basics and limits of your own power. I didn't feel you probing my own psyche, so you either don't know how or you simply can't. Would you allow me to discern what your true power is?"

Alice considered it for a moment. On one hand, he would know how her mental "power" (if she even had any) would work. On the other hand, the more power she wielded, the easier it would be to protect herself and her friends. If Sheti went back on his word, or betrayed her later...well, she would cross that bridge if she had to.

"Very well," she decided. "You may divine my mental abilities if you will tell me how to best use
them."

Sheti nodded, and then closed his eyes.

The most curious experience washed over first Alice and then the surrounding area, stretching out to engulf Wonderland. It felt like being a bug pressed right against the glass of a microscope, and then remaining in its view as it zoomed back to see one's environment.

It ended right as Sheti opened his eyes. Gasping lightly, he took out a handkerchief and dapped carefully at his brow.

"This...is easily the largest and most complex mindscape I have ever had the privilege of studying," he managed. "A mindscape is essentially your subconscious mind. It's a representation of the parts of your mind that you are normally unaware of. Most are usually the size of a residence to the size of a small town. The smallest I've ever seen was the size of a safe and was created by a very paranoid and fearful man. Most are never aware of their mindscape, and fewer still understand theirs.

"From what I can divine, your psychic abilities are very internalized: You can create and control your own mindscape on a level I've never seen before, and you are immune to telepathy. You can also bring that enormous cat of yours into the real world and use it either as a distraction or use its own eyes and ears." He smiled.

"Your 'Cheshire Cat' gave me quite a start when I first saw him. Most 'familiars' as they're called are much smaller and not nearly as detailed. He even appears to have his own personality and mind separate from your own."

Alice couldn't help but smile. "I can most certainly say he does. He annoys me to death half the time and gives me cryptic advice for the other half."

"Hmmm," Sheti rubbed his chin in thought. "He must represent the part of your psyche that represents your internal monologue.

"As for your active powers, you do have one: You can mentally enter the mindsscapes of others, just as I did. You simply place your hand on the other's head, and the rest will come naturally. I strongly advise you to ask permission of those whose minds you wish to inspect as I asked for yours. The mind is the most private and safe place we know; violating it is just as bad if not worse than violating a body."

"I am glad that you think so," Alice said. "I'll always be sure to ask first."

Sheti smiled and then looked up. "When we return to the real world, would you be so kind as to not shoot me in the chest? Mlle. de Glace wouldn't take kindly to it at all."

Alice nodded. "I'll make sure not to, Mr. Sheti."

He mimed tipping his turban and disappeared from Wonderland. Alice closed her eyes and willed herself out right after him.

\[BS+AMA=WS\]

With a start, she was back in the real world. Sheti jumped back as she jerked the China Broom towards the ceiling and hurriedly took her finger off the trigger. Alice was breathing hard from the effort of not killing someone for once.
Suresh Sheti straightened his suit and nodded to Alice while De Glace slowly put her gun back into her handbag.

"I trust that, in return for the revelation of and advice about your abilities," he said as he adjusted his turban, "that any future encounters we have will be less...hostile?"

"That is perfectly reasonable," Alice replied, checking over the China Bromm to make sure it was in order. "Please refrain from sneaking up on me though, I don't react well to that."

"We will take that into consideration," de Glace said. She placed her arm around Sheti's shoulders and began steering him to the stairs. "I look forward to your future performance on the stage of life, Mademoiselle Liddell."

Sheti gave Cheshire a little bow as he and de Glace passed him at the foot of the stairs. Alice strode right up to the oversized feline and glared down at him.

"Cat, what in the Atlantic was that?!" she hissed.

"I sensed that they meant you no harm," Cheshire replied. "If they had, I would have alerted you to their presence."

"Meaning no harm or not, they almost gave me a heart-attack," Alice retorted.

Cheshire have a cat's equivalent of a shrug. "When you're not on edge…" he began.

"You're taking up too much space," Alice finished, rolling her eyes. "You're going to drive me to an early grave, Cat."

"To the contrary, I'm driving you to a late one," Cheshire smirked as they mounted the stairs. "If you undo all my efforts and die in this sinking cesspool of a city, the blame will sit entirely on your shoulders, Alice."

BS+AMA=WS

Another few hours of searching through For Frolic for an escape, Alice found herself back at the Atrium. Besides ammo and some food, she had found nothing of any real value. She resisted the temptation to begin stealing from the shops. It hadn't gotten bad enough that such behavior would be found acceptable, but that wouldn't be the case for long. She had long spent the cash given to her and won at the slots for more ammunition.

Tempers were flaring, and people were starting to get desperate. The line at the Gatherer's Garden reached down to the bottom of the stairs; that meant more plasmids, which meant more splicers later on.

Alice had no intention of waiting around for Fort Frolic to go to hell ahead of the rest of Rapture. It wouldn't take long for her to become the apex predator of this particular habitat, but judging by the madness that Cohen spouted every now and then from the PA system, he was likely spliced to the nines and very dangerous, to say nothing of the present and future splicers.

There would be more predators at large in the rest of Rapture, but in a far bigger pond than Fort Frolic.

Alice finished loading her guns and injecting a fresh EVE hypo as she entered the Atrium. Her target was just across from her, behind the doors that lead out to the Apothecary shop and the Bathysphere station.
Killing Cohen's guards wouldn't get her access to the Bathyspheres, but it would get her on Cohen's radar. He was dangerous, but the Red Queen had been too, and he didn't hold a candle to her tentacles.

Emerging from behind the staircase, Alice noticed for the first time the crowd that was gathered around the atrium stage. Frowning, she sheathed the Vorpal Blade and joined the crowd, carefully making her way to the front.

The crowd was oohing and awing over the apparent realism and masterful work of Cohen. From the compliments attributed to their captor, he was likely close by or watching, and they didn't wish to anger him.

The focus of attention were two plaster-of-paris statues. A man and a woman, set up as though to admire one of Cohen's paintings: The woman was clutching her hands to her chest as though her heart was about to beat out of it from sheer adoration, while the man's hands were flung out like he had discovered the secret to life and it was beautiful.

Alice snorted quietly at their positions before realizing something about their expressions. They didn't match their posture; instead of amazement and admiration, they were of horror and terror. They were so real that Alice felt a shiver go up and down her spine. This type of realism wasn't the perfection that artists sought; it was too real to be art. A horrid feeling welled up in her stomach as suspicion flooded her brain.

Getting as close to the statues as she could, Alice tilted her head and looked up at their noses. Instead of two indentations that would have signified nostrils when looking at the statues straight on, she saw two gaping holes. Breathing holes.

Her fears confirmed, Alice glanced around, her mind racing to expose Cohen's newest depravity. Her eyes alighted on a Victorian-style hat worn by an upper-class woman and its ridiculous adornments. The light reflecting off a hatpin leaped out at her and she acted, striking like a snake, grasping it and yanking it from the hat.

Before the owner could even turn and reprimand her, Alice took the pin and jabbed the sharp end into the man's left foot.

The result was instantaneous. The man's arms jerked hard from their positions, sending bits and pieces of broken plaster flying over the heads of the stunned crowd. A muffled scream accompanied the action and the plaster around his mouth cracked.

"They're real!" someone screamed out. The crowd began a small, contained stampede to get away from the stage.

"Cohen's gone off his knocker!"

"We need to get out of here!"

"He's going to kill us all for his art!"

"Why isn't Ryan doing anything about this?!"

The Atrium lights suddenly dimmed except for red ones that gave the environment a hellish glow focused on the stage. With a whoosh of displaced air, Sander Cohen himself appeared on the stage, rage contorting his face.

"Doubters!" he roared. "Screw all you fucking doubters! You can't paint a portrait without soiling
His rabid eyes spied Alice jumping away from the stage, her grasp on the hatpin pulling it out of
the man's foot and prompting another muffled scream.

"YOU!" he screeched, pointing at her. "You've ruined my art!"

Before Alice could retort or bring a gun or plasmid to bear, Cohen vanished in a swirl of red
particles and rushing air. A moment later, he reappeared at the head of the staircase, breaking up
the line and scattering the people.

"Whoever kills that fucking doubter is free to go!" he raged, pointed at Alice. "I'll even throw in a
plasmid and ADAM if you make it threatric!"

All at once, everyone in the Atrium had eyes only for Alice. The desire for freedom mixed with the
greed for ADAM in their faces as weapons came out and fire and lightning began dancing on
fingertips. Cohen smiled viciously down at Alice and vanished again.

Music began playing over the PA system as the former members of the crowd began to walk
towards Alice, their fear gone, replaced by bloodlust. She couldn't recognize the song, but she
knew which play it was from: The Nutcracker, one of Momma and Lizzie's favorites.

Before Alice could say a word, they attacked. Sidestepping a baseball bat, Alice targeted her first
assailant with Possession. He stumbled forward, barely missing her as he tried to change course.
He recovered from charging her, turning to attack the people who had been right behind him,
wailing on them with his bat. The woman whose hatpin Alice had taken brought a pistol up, only
to have it returned to her courtesy of Telekinesis, right through her hand.

Her hand free, Alice whipped out her hand cannon and braced herself for the onslaught.

Within moments, the Atrium was enveloped in chaos. Thanks to Possession and Enrage, Alice was
able to take the huge numbers advantage her assailants had and turn them against each other.
Spider-splicer hooks and elemental projectiles flew through the air alongside bullets and buckshot.
Mr. Baseball Bat lay dead on the ground, chest riddled with bullet holes, his killer now trying to
gun down a back-flipping splicer, only for a hook to slice through his throat.

Alice carefully picked her targets, shooting those not Possessed or Enraged with her hand cannon.
When that ran out of ammo, she switched between her newly-upgraded China Broom for close
targets and her new Crossbow for more distant enemies. If only there had been Wonderland
versions of these weapons, things would have been smoother than they had been with just the
Pepper Grinder and the Tea Cannon.

A part of Alice was horrified with how easily she was killing and who she was killing. These
weren't mindless Ruin or braindead Card Guards, nor were most of them even spliced. They were
just people.

And they were trying to kill her at the behest of a madman. Sane or no, imaginary or no, an enemy
was an enemy, and she had no intention of letting these toothed and clawed sheep slaughter her.

When the number of the living had been cut in half, and those Possessed passed out and the
formerly Enraged ran away instead of attacking her again, it happened.

Just as both the China Broom, the Crossbow, and her EVE reserve were out and she was digging an
EVE hypo and her Pepper Grinder out, a massive explosion rang out. Alice's body lurched forward.
Confused, Alice put a hand to her back to steady herself, only to find feel something wet trickling down it. Her hand came back red, dripping with her blood.

She turned around as quickly as she could to face her attacker, only for a perfect barrage of buckshot and bullets to perforate her chest.

Alice recognized her attackers as she fell back, three of Cohen's disciples, their names escaping her. Staring up into a spotlight, she was only vaguely aware of Cohen's disciples being attacked to keep them from finishing her off. Her limbs grew cold as her ADAM-laden blood leaked out onto the floor, her vision cracking at the edges. Shadows gathered around her, resolving into human predators who looked down at her with no pity. They stood only to gain from her death.

Alice sneered up at them, and then let loose.

Black and white. Spatters of red.

Shouts. Screams of rage, pain, fear.

Others, sprawled around her. Enemies, would-be killers.

Fire. Lightning. Small projectiles peppering her sides.

Under attack. FIGHT, SURVIVE.

Blade out and ready.

More red. More screams.

Life flowing out of enemies, flowing into herself.

No more enemies.

Victory.

Alice came back into reality with a jolt, heart racing, head pounding. Gasping for breath, Alice bent down and rested her hand on her knees. As air was inhaled and exhaled, she became aware of what was lying on the ground in front of her. It took her a few moments to realize just what it was: A severed human arm, its fingers wrapped around a still-glowing hook.

At the end of the trail of blood that started from the open end of the arm was the rest of the body. The woman was a spider-splicer as evidenced by her hooks. Her expression, the parts still recognizable as human anyway, were twisted in a combination of amazement, fear, and horror. Her mid-section was a mess, criss-crossed by a number of huge and bloody cuts, all leaking massive amounts of crimson blood. If she hadn't already been dead, she would have been shortly.

The Vorpal Blade glinted in Alice's right hand, a single faint sliver of light surrounded by the hot, thick syrup of Dracula's favorite beverage.

Alice steeled herself as she realized what had just occurred, and stood up to survey the battlefield. What she saw wasn't that different from some of the more macabre stuff from Wonderland when the Dollmaker was on the loose.

The only difference was, these had once been people in the real world, not the imaginings of a mentally-ill individual.

Surrounding her and the spot where she had fallen were the freshly dead corpses of about a dozen
people. It was "about a dozen" because of how many pieces there were.

Various weapons lay around, firearms and melee, all soaked in blood. Arms, legs, and, in one case, a head, were completely severed from multiple bodies. The intact torsos bore multiple lacerations and cuts that came very close to completely bisecting the target, allowing the innards of her...victims to spill out on the ground. Blood was still copiously pouring out of the wounds, steam rising up from the bodies as Rapture's cool air came into contact with the still-warm viscera.

The closest thing in comparison from Wonderland was when she had killed a Madcap. The only difference was that their humanoid bodies disintegrated soon after death and their blood disappeared shortly after staining the ground. Apparently, unlike enemies in Wonderland, real enemies were much more fragile and susceptible to a high-speed, ultra-strong blade.

The only person in the room still standing was her. Outside the circle of mutilation and death, there were multiple bodies, results of her usage of Possession and Enrage. The few still breathing were likely the ones who she had hit with Possession and who had been knocked out as soon as it had worn off. Judging from the far-off sounds of running feet and screams, those who had any sense had run off as soon as she had unleashed her Hysteria.

Alice tensed as the lights turned completely off, save for a spot-light at the head of the Atrium's staircase. A drum-roll accompanied the spotlight's activation, ending with a twin bursts of white smoke. Striding out from the smoke was Sander Cohen himself. As he descended the stairs, glitter shot out from the railings at specific intervals.

"Oh my god, oh my god, OH MY GOD," Cohen said with a tone of reverence as he neared the bottom of the staircase, stepping over a body without breaking step and stopping not six feet away from her. He had been staring at Alice the entire time of his descent, not with the leering lust of the men who used to visit the Mangled Mermaid, or the cross of pity and disgust from the middle and upper classes. This was pure, unadulterated awe.

Alice couldn't help but feel a shiver shoot up her spine.

"That...was...BEAUTIFUL!" Cohen yelled, making Alice jump. "That scream...that burst of power...the blood...your attackers falling before you like wheat before a scythe." He inhaled and exhaled deeply as he remembered her Hysteria. "You're not a Doubter," he almost whispered, "you're an angel."

That was the first time anyone had called her that. Another shiver swept up her spine.

"In return for such a gift for my muse," his tone turned all business in a moment, "I grant you a teleportation plasmid and all the ADAM on my person."

Reaching into his coat pockets, Cohen pulled out a plasmid bottle marked "Teleportation" and a very large flask of glowing, red ADAM. He held them out to her.

"And in addition, I grant you a boon of me," he added. "Anything you want, I'll give it to you."

Alice didn't have to think twice as she wiped her blade clean and tucked it under her arm.

"I would like to leave Fort Frolic," she said as she reached for the bottles and put them into her bag, one hand instantly going back to grip the Vorpal Blade's handle. There was no telling how Cohen would take that request.

"But of course," Cohen replied graciously. "I'll order the bathysphere up straight away and tell my guards. You can come and go from Fort Frolic as you please, my Angel of Death. In the
meanwhile, I will begin creating a painting, one to supersede all of my past works, commemorating your victory here. I will eagerly await your return to see it."

As he turned to leave, Alice remembered what she had heard of Sander Cohen about his "charity work", which resulted in the disappearance of multiple little girls. They either wound up as Little Sisters or became victims of Bumby's clientele. Alice gripped the Vorpal Blade, imagining herself plunging it into Cohen's back again and again until he laid dead on the floor.

Before she could enact this, Cohen disappeared in a flash of red. Alice darted forward, swinging for the petals and catching nothing but air. She scowled and considered tracking Cohen down in his theater and ending his mad, repulsive life.

Weariness suddenly overcame her. It was late, she had almost died, and she had used Hysteria to come back from the brink, along with killing a number of normal Rapturites and splicers. Cohen was making himself at home in Fort Frolic and had no apparent interest in continuing his previous "charity". Should it become evident that he was or worse, she'd come back and finish him off then.

Alice visited the Gatherer's Garden on the Atrium's second floor. There was enough ADAM in the flask for her to get several more slots, a Health Upgrade and an EVE Upgrade, Wrench Lurker and Wrench Jockey (overkill was guaranteed kill in her opinion), and Cyclone Jockey and Sonic Boom. She held off from splicing in the Teleportation plasmid; her project with Tenenbaum required it.

As Cohen had promised, the bathysphere surfaced at the metro station. She was alone as she boarded the sphere. She set the destination for Market Street; it was best that she warned the Guardians of Cohen's takeover of Fort Frolic and Cohen's dive into new madness.

As the hatch closed on the sphere, Alice saw the two of them standing by the stairs: Mlle Blanche de Glace and Suresh Sheti. They both applauded her, de Glace now eyeing her with respect. Alice took a bow as the sphere descended down into the water.

Chapter End Notes

My proofreader really liked my depiction of Hysteria from Alice's POV, and I hope you did too!

The real Alice Liddell's birthday was on May 4th, just to let you all know, and her mother's name was Lorina. I hope you all enjoyed my newest chapter for WonderShock. It is so great to be back! Have a good one, and happy reading and writing!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!