After Alice had vanished through the looking glass, Hatter stood in the waiting hall for hours. He watched the other Oysters disappear the same way the beautiful woman with the long black hair had what now seemed like a life time ago.

Ever after the last Oyster had went home, Hatter still stood at the same spot where Alice had left him. The new King Jack walked over to him and put a hand on Hatter's shoulder.

"Come." He said in a soft voice. "You can stay with me Hatter. As long as you want to."

The "As long as you need to." hang silently in the air. Like a sword on a hair above their heads. Once spoken out loud, the sword would fall down and demolish the lies in Hatter's head. The lie that he didn't need anything. That he didn't need Alice. That he wasn't lost without her.

And once again the king spoke.

"Come Hatter. I owe you my kingdom."

Hatter didn't bother pointing out that Alice had saved everything and even Charlie the lunatic knight had done more than he did. Hatter was sure the king knew that but he wanted him to feel like the loss of Alice had been worth at least something. That he had the right to have been with someone as special as Alice.

Jack smiled at him in a sympathetic way.
"I mean it Hatter. You've done as much as Charlie and Alice did."

Hatter couldn't quite believe him. It hadn't been enough. Or otherwise she would be here now. By his side. Where she belonged. Wouldn't have left him on on his own in this chaotic world. Without any backing. Without her warmth. Her soft hair. Her sparkling eyes. Her laugh.

He staid with the king as long as he could stand the ever-growing hollowness inside of him.

He helped rebuilding the castle of hearts. Watched Jack knight Charlie for real. He even was Jack's best man when he eventually married the duchess.

He often wondered how many hours, days, weeks had already passed in the real world.

If Alice missed him. As much as he missed her.

The morning after the marriage, Jack approached him. He handed Hatter a wallet full of money, his bank card and a backpack full of his clothes from the real world.

With a gruffer voice than he usually addressed Hatter in, Jack said "Go after her you idiot. There's no use in both of you being miserable for no reason."

That's how Hatter ended up standing in front of Alice's mother and saying "Hello...I'm David. Could I talk to Alice, please?"

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