Ten years after her adventures in Wonderland, Alice once again finds herself trapped in a nightmare. Only this time, it isn't a dream.

Breathing deeply of the earthy scents of the woods surrounding her, Alice looked furtively around her. Seeing that she was entirely alone, she grinned and began to skip along the path, then tried hopping as far as she could, first on her left foot (only eight hops) and then on her right (twenty-three!). When she reached the old gate at the edge of the woods, she stopped, straightening her clothing and smoothing her golden hair before opening the gate and stepping into the large back garden of the old family home.

She walked eagerly towards the door into the rear hall of the house, but as she reached for the knob, she hesitated. Something suddenly didn’t feel right, though she couldn’t put her finger on it. Stepping back, she looked at the still-dark windows of the house. No lights were lit yet, though it wasn’t that long past sundown and the shadows of the trees had not quite reached the house. She sniffed—no delicious savory and sweet scents emanated from the house, though it was just about time for tea. Looking up at the chimneys, she saw smoke at only the kitchen chimney, despite the cool evening air. And even that was just a thin wisp—a black smudge that trickled out of the stack, oozing slowly towards the ground as it meandered away, as if too burdensome for the light breeze that tickled the fine hairs at the back of her neck. She shivered, then pulling herself sternly together, she strode back up the steps and opened the door.

“Alice? Is that you?” a familiar voice called from within as she stepped through and pressed her back to the door, feeling it shut firmly behind her as she peered into the dim interior of the house.

“Mary?” she replied as the dark figure of a woman bustled towards her, long skirts swaying from the quickness of her steps as she approached with her arms held out.
Enfolding Alice in a warm embrace, she smiled broadly and said in a strange voice, “You were gone so long, Alice, dear. I was beginning to think you were never coming back!”

Alice tried to pull away, but her sister’s grasp tightened until she could barely draw breath. Looking up to protest, the words died on her lips as she saw the unnatural grin and the twisted, contorted expression on her sister’s face. She struggled, desperate to get away, but her sister pulled her even more tightly to her. Alice felt a hand clamp down over her face, felt the roughness of coarse cloth, breathed in deeply of a sickening scent, and then her sister’s face swirled and wavered hideously before her as the blackness overtook her.

Groaning, Alice struggled to open her eyes, fighting against the overwhelming vertigo that made the room spin sickeningly around her. Finally, everything settled in place and remained there, and she took a look around.

The first thing she noticed was that she was bound to her chair at the family dining table. Squirming, she tried to get free, but she was tied too securely. Across from her, at her customary place, sat Mary. She wore a hideous, enormous hat, garnished and festooned with flowers and feathers and leaves and fall vegetables and even a stuffed bird. She was just leaning forward, lighting the candles on the centermost of three massive candelabra. Looking across at Alice, another unnaturally large grin spread across her face. “You’re finally awake,” she commented as she lit the last candle and sat back in her seat. “I was starting to wonder if I’d used too much ether.”

Alice looked around the room, still dazed. Her parents sat at the head and foot of the table, her younger brother was in his place next to her and her youngest brother was seated across the table from him, next to Mary.

Their throats had been slashed, the crimson stains already darkening on their clothing, and they were tied upright in their chairs.

Shrinking into herself with a stifled scream, she asked “Mary? What… what’s going on? What happened?”

Mary didn’t answer, just turned and began to adjust a small object on the table next to her place. Following her sister’s gaze, she saw a dead rat sprawled on its back and gasped. Looking quickly up at her, Mary shrugged, her mouth twisted into a half-smile. “That dormouse is always falling asleep. I don’t know what I’m going to do with him.”

A sudden movement on the other side of the rat’s corpse caught Alice’s eye, and she peered around the candelabra to find a terrified rabbit dressed in doll’s clothing and tethered to the table by a nail through its hind foot. Alice turned to stare at her sister in speechless shock, and her sister leaned back in her seat.

“Did you know that Arthur rejected me?” she asked suddenly. Alice remained silent, slowly shaking her head after a moment. Mary stood and walked over to the fireplace, stirring the coals with the poker, her back to her sister. “They say that madness runs in families,” she sighed. “Arthur’s mother decided I was not a suitable match for her precious baby boy. Doubtless she’d heard your stories of your little dream world and thought it was better to avoid an alliance with our family all together.” She replaced the poker and turned back, her eyes glittering and cold in the candlelight. “It’s your fault, Alice. No one will marry me, because you’re insane!”

Alice opened her mouth in surprise. “I’m not insane! Everyone knows those stories are nothing more than dreams I had ten years ago! You’re the one that’s mad! Look at what you’ve done!”
Mary slammed her fists down onto the table so hard that the china rattled, sloshing tea from the cups onto the snowy whiteness of the cloth. To her horror, Alice saw that the spreading stains were crimson.

“I’m not mad! How dare you!” Straightening up, she looked down at Alice with disdain. “I’m a genius, but no one understands—no one sees it!”

“Genius?” Alice cried in disbelief, resuming her struggle against her bonds. “What makes you think you are a genius?”

“The Cheshire cat told me so,” she replied, gesturing to the far end of the table. There, near the end of the table, she saw Kitty. She whimpered when she saw that her pet was dead, her small black body arranged artfully in repose, her mouth slashed into a wider grin. “She also told me that we’re all mad, but I don’t believe her.”

Alice thought hard, desperate to escape. To buy time, she said, “Why did you kill Mama and Papa and Clarence and Frederick? What did they do to you?”

Mary scowled as she looked around at the silent figures collected at the table. “I didn’t want to do it,” she complained in a petulant voice. “They made me do it. Papa was going to take me to the asylum, you see. I don’t belong there—why couldn’t he see that? You belong there, with your rabbit holes and your looking-glasses—not me!”

She reached out absently and picked up the cup before her, taking a sip as Alice watched on in horror. Dabbing the red from her lips, seemingly oblivious to what she’d done, Mary continued. “So I used ether on them, just like I did with you. Only Papa fought so hard, and he kept shouting and yelling, and I just had to make him be quiet. The Cheshire cat was the one who told me how. And then the others started yelling and screaming and crying—you just wouldn’t believe the noise! Luckily I’d already gotten rid of all the servants, or who knows what might have happened. But then my head started to hurt. Oh, how it hurt! And they wouldn’t be quiet. They just kept screaming and screaming. They were all so selfish! So I had to quiet them all. What else could I do?”

Tears filled Alice’s eyes, and she began to cry, her shoulders shaking as she sobbed. Mary snapped, “Don’t you start! Don’t you remember what happens when you cry? People die! How many creatures do you think you drowned in your sea of tears, you little monster?”

She leaped from her chair and darted around the table, grabbing Alice by her shoulders and shaking her so hard the chair legs thumped dully on the Turkish rug and she bit her tongue, the coppery taste of blood spreading throughout her mouth. Mary grabbed a red-stained knife from the table, and pressed the tip against the slender whiteness of her sister’s throat.

Alice froze, not even daring to breathe, as her sister snarled at her, their faces only inches apart. “Stop it, stop it immediately, you selfish, insane little brat!” Then she drew back and sliced through the ropes that bound her to the chair.

Flinging the blade across the room and into the fireplace, she jerked Alice up from the chair. Still nauseated and dizzy from the aftereffects of the ether, Alice wobbled, falling heavily against Mary, who shoved her away before grabbing her wrists. She strode towards the darkened kitchen, dragging Alice stumbling behind her.

She dragged her to the wash basin at the back of the kitchen, shoved her head down, and began to pump water into the basin over her head. Alice struggled, fighting to get free and raise her head out of the water, but her sister was too strong. Mary shoved against her, pushing her body against the stone with her own as she held her down by the back of her neck. The pressure on her
stomach was too much, and Alice vomited as the water swirled around her head. She gagged on the water that rushed into her mouth, and through the sound of water rushing against her ears, she could hear her sister scolding her for being so thoughtless as to callously kill innocent bystanders with her excessive grief.

As the realization that her sister was going to drown her set in, terror lent her strength, and she renewed her efforts to free herself. Flailing wildly with her leg, she managed to kick her sister in the shin hard enough that she loosened her grip for a moment, crying out in pain as she stepped back.

Alice jerked free in that moment, and ran as fast as she could out the kitchen and towards the door, half-blinded by the mixture of water and acid in her eyes as she fled, tripping over the hearth.

She made it to the front door, but it had been bolted shut. She tried desperately to unfasten the bolts, but hearing her sister approach, she abandoned her efforts and instead darted towards the stairway leading to the upper floors, pausing only long enough to wipe her eyes clear with a sleeve.

As she ran up the stairs, Mary followed, standing at the bottom of the stairs and smiling a feral smile as she watched the retreating figure of her terrified sister.

Racing down the dark hallway towards her room at the back of the house, Alice tripped on the carpet, and to her surprise, she found herself falling, falling, falling down into a deeper blackness as she screamed.

Then with a loud crash and a painful thud, she hit the floor. Feeling around, she determined she was in one of the many small storage closets found throughout the house. Judging by the shards of shattered pottery stabbing into her legs and hands, she was in the china closet next to the dining room.

Rising painfully to her feet, she felt around the dark room until she found the door. It seemed to have been locked or barred from the outside, though, as it refused to budge, no matter how desperately she pulled. Choking back a sob, she tried to think. She knew that somewhere to the left of the door were boxes of candles, but she had no fire with which to light them. She knew that the butler kept a tinderbox in the closet, but she wasn’t sure where, nor if she could make a flame with it in the dark. Still, it was the only way she could think of to get a light, to try to escape that house. So she began to carefully feel around the shelves.

Candles, candles, and more candles, their waxy surface leaving an oily feel on her fingertips as she brushed over them. The cold hardness of silver candelabra, then the sound of footsteps on the stairs close by, slow, heavy footfalls as her sister climbed the stairs—thud! thud! thud! she felt them shuddering through her.

The thumping footsteps faded slightly, then grew louder as they approached the hole overhead. A flicker of light from above, and Alice felt her fingertips brush the tinderbox. Quick as a rabbit, she snatched it up and dropped it into her pocket as the face of her sister peeped over the edge of the hole.

Mary set a candlestick down on the floor near the edge of the hole, then seated herself on the floor, leaning over to leer at Alice. She reached into a pocket, pulled out a deck of cards, and fanned them out in her hand. As she began to speak, she pulled the cards out one by one and dropped each, allowing it to flutter down to the floor below before sending another to follow.

“Have you heard the story about my Daddy?” she asked, nonchalantly, though she watched
Alice’s face closely. Squeezing her eyes half shut like a smiling cat at her baffled expression, she continued. “No. I can see you know nothing of him. You probably didn’t even know that your ‘papa’ wasn’t my Daddy. Did you?” Alice shook her head, flabbergasted, and ducked as a card nearly hit her face.

“It’s true. Mama was married before she married your father. I remember the night Daddy died quite clearly. I was seven at the time. In fact,” she mused, tapping her chin, “it was exactly twenty years ago tonight that he died. You do know what tonight is, don’t you, Alice?”

Alice thought, her mind racing. Then she recalled the conversation at breakfast that morning—a hundred years ago at least, it felt like. “H-Hallowe’en, isn’t it?”

“Oh, good. You are paying attention. One never knows with you, does one? Yes, it’s All Hallow’s Eve—the time when the veil between the living and the dead is at its thinnest, and sometimes—just sometimes—both the living and the dead may cross from one side to the other for a time.”

Alice stared, slack-jawed, for as she spoke, her sister’s voice seemed for a moment to deepen, and as the candlelight and shadows flickered across her face, her visage appeared to flicker as well.

Appearing not to notice Alice’s reaction, Mary went on, staring with unseeing eyes down into the closet below as she continued slowly dropping cards down. “It was a night such as this that my Daddy died—killed, in fact, by your own dear papa.”

Drawing herself up, Alice exclaimed loudly, “Murder? Papa would never do such a thing!”

“Wouldn’t he?” Mary replied, her lip curling into a disdainful smile. “You see, we lived in a great, lonesome house way away on a moor just north of the Scottish border. Daddy was Scottish, you see. He was quite a bit older than our mother—his hair was nearly all gray, anyway. We were all very happy there together, though sometimes mother looked a little lonesome when we were out on our daily walks.

“Then your papa moved into a house some little distance from us. He was sent there to recover from war wounds, as the climate was considered ideal for one returning from the heat of the tropics. Afterwards, mother no longer looked so lonely, but Daddy began to behave strangely.

“That night, twenty years ago, Daddy and mother fought. He accused her of impropriety with the Major, your father, although she denied any unseemly behavior. He didn’t believe her, though, and after quite a lot of yelling, he grabbed both of us by our wrists and dragged us out onto the moor.

“It was dark and cold, lit only by the moon above, and no one for miles around. Daddy let go of us, then turned and told my mother quite calmly that he’d had enough, he couldn’t take any more. Then he wrapped his hands around her throat and began to squeeze. I looked on—some part of me was horrified, but another part of me was rather excited by this display of strength and passion.

“A moment later and the Major appeared from nowhere. With a shout, he lunged at my Daddy, and hit him across the back of his head with his great, heavy walking stick. Daddy let go of mother, staggered, and fell. He landed on a stake of some sort, driven into the ground who knows how long ago—probably left behind by Gypsies. It tore through him, but as he lay dying, he screamed some wild, strange words at mother and the Major. Then the Major took mother and myself away. They married a year and a half later, in the spring, and we moved here, far away from that lonely moor where my Daddy was left for dead.”

“Why… why wasn’t I told? I had no idea… why did Mama and Papa keep it a secret? He always
treated you just as though you were his own dear daughter!” Alice cried in a shaken voice, edging farther back from the hole above, pressing herself into the shadows at the edge of the circle of flickering light, wincing as cold, rough-edged iron cupboard handles dug into her waist, catching and rending the finely-woven woolen fabric of her dress.

Mary glared at her. “Like his own? You don’t know what you’re saying! He never treated me like he treated you! Both of them, Mother and your father, wished I was somewhere else far away from them from that night on! I made them feel guilty—a living reminder of their crimes!”

“But surely if your father had taken you and your mother out to the moor in the middle of the night, he intended to harm you both?” Alice asked as she edged along, trying to stay out of view while seeking to lay her hands on a candle.

“Daddy would never have hurt me! If mother was misbehaving, well, then she deserved to be punished for treating him so poorly. But Daddy loved me!”

Again, Alice noticed a sudden change in the pitch of her sister’s voice, and glancing back up, startled, she saw for a fleeting moment another face staring angrily down at her. She blinked in surprise, and when she looked again, only Mary’s gaunt face appeared in the flickering light above.

Mary stood and smoothed her skirts, then picked up the candle and walked away. A moment later, Alice heard a muffled sound, as of something being set on the floor of the hallway above her. Then a scraping, metallic sound, and then the outline of her sister’s head appeared in the dim light, the candle evidently some ways behind her.

“Now, sister dear, a… pet. To keep you company and help you pass the time.” Then she dropped something through—something long and twisty but with fluttering wings. Muffling a scream, Alice leapt as far away as she could, and banged into the silver candelabra near the door. She quickly felt around until she found the candles, her sister cackling eerily from above all the while.

“Wh-what is it?” she cried, her voice sounding high and thin to her ears as she strained to hear any sign of motion.

“‘Beware the Jabberwock!’” she sang out in a dreadful voice, made all the worse by the childish giggling that accompanied it. Then she swiftly rose, chuckled as she muttered “Callooh, callay, indeed!” Then she turned on her heel and stalked away, the thumping of her footsteps receding before once again echoing as she descended the stairs.

Meanwhile, Alice remembered the tinderbox in her pocket. She pulled it out with trembling hands—was that a hiss? It took several tries—surely that was scales sliding over the tiled floor!—before she managed to light the sliver of wood she held shakily. She grabbed a candle, fumbling slightly—oh, if only she could see where that… that thing was!—and held the weak flame to the wick. As soon as the wick flared up, she raised it high, dropping the tinder box in her fearful haste.

Slithering wretchedly across the floor was some abomination that appeared to be at war with itself. At first she thought somehow it was a jabberwock, though in miniature, somehow dragged from her dream world into the realm of the living. Then she realized it was her pet parakeet, bound to the writhing body of an infuriated adder. The bird flapped its wings in terror and agony, and the snake squirmed and twisted about, attempting to eat or at least dislodge its unwelcome burden. So tightly were they bound together, that the twine dug into the serpent’s body, and it left smears of blood wherever it slithered over the smooth tiled floor.

She stared in horror at the wretched sight, then remembering the line about the vorpal blade, she turned and fumbled about, opening this drawer and that as quietly as she could until at last she
found the great, old carving set—the one with the hart’s horn handles and the great, sharp blade, that her Papa used to carve the Christmas goose every year.

Placing the candle in a candelabrum and turning back, she gave a sob of pity for the poor creatures, then first whispering a tearful apology, she swiftly beheaded first the viper, then the small bird. Then, their mingled blood splattered across her clothing and dripping from her fingertips, she rose and turned to look around, the knife clattering to the tiles as it slipped from her fingers.

She filled the remaining cups of the candelabrum with candles and lit them. Opposite the door and above a sturdy, large table was the little door through which the cook would slide the dishes to be served. It was very small, just barely large enough for a fat goose or a saddle of beef, and for a fleeting moment she wished that she had a taste of the magic potion from her old dream, to better fit through. But she was slender, though the fullness of her skirts might hinder her somewhat. After a moment’s thought, she carefully removed the petticoats from beneath her skirt, and leaving them on the floor next to the corpses of the snake and her parakeet, she picked up the candelabrum, set it on the table next to the door, and slo-o-o-o-owly opened it, unsure what might await her on the other side.

She held still, listening intently, once the door was fully opened, but not a sound did she hear. So she carefully hoisted herself up onto the tabletop and shimmed through. Once she was through, she stood and pulled the candelabrum carefully through and had a look around.

There fallen across the large oak work-table, she spotted the body of the old family cook. Her cap and hair were dark and sticky and matted with dried blood, and on the floor beside her was the heavy brass pepper grinder, dented and stained.

Alice whimpered to herself at the sight, then quickly darted to the door that led out to the kitchen garden. She fumbled at the door—the latches were fastened, each and every one of them, and oh! Why did they stick so?

Footsteps, heavy and deliberate, approaching from the dining room. Stifling a sob, Alice snatched up the candelabrum and again fled through the only other door—the one that led to the long hall to the foyer of the house.

Footsteps, heavy and deliberate, chasing her footsteps, quick and desperate. She ran down the hall, no longer concerning herself with silence, and ran to the front door. Again, all the latches were fastened, and hampered this time by the candles she still held, her fingers slippery and fumbling and clumsy, she tried to unlock them. Oh why had Mama insisted on so many bolts!

From the shadows, a deep chuckle echoed through the hall. “Alice, my dear girl, you may as well give up. Don’t you see you can’t escape me? My Daddy’s death will not be avenged nor my anger be appeased until every last one of you lies dead, your life’s blood staining the ground just as his did. Then at last his spirit can lie at ease, and I can finally live the life I was meant to lead—that I should have led, were it not for your father!”

Alice turned to see her sister, wild-eyed and deranged, stepping from the hall into the foyer, slowly walking towards her. She held a cloth in one hand and a bottle in the other, and Alice knew she meant to render her unconscious once more. Terrified, she flung the only thing she had to throw—the candelabrum. By luck or mercy, it shattered the jar.

She had completely forgotten that ether was highly flammable.

The resultant conflagration tore through the entry of the house, singing Alice as she finally loosed the last bolt, flung open the door, and sped out into the cool darkness of the night, fleeing the
inferno behind her.

Standing still in the same place, looking through the flames that devoured her clothing and out the door, Mary chuckled throatily. “So, we’ve reached the endgame at last, have we, my dear little White Queen?”

Then as the fire engulfed her and the room around her, she turned and looked at the huge mirror hanging opposite the door. The heat of the flames shattered the glass as she stared into it, and it broke into a hundred pieces or more. Then the reflection in the shards shimmered, wavered, and changed, and instead of the burning house, it instead showed fragments of a heather moor, cool and misty in the moonlit night.

A gray-haired man, with a face not unlike her own, stepped out from the mists and reached out a hand towards her, then through the glass.

She clasped his hand and stepped through, just as the house around her began to collapse.

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