Mad? it's all fine

by Keepofthegrass

Summary

John falls down a rabbit hole in Afghanistan and meets Sherlock hatter. They team up to get John back home and for Sherlock to escape the Queens axe...
First crossover ever, please leave feedback if you like it.

Notes

Mostly inspired by Carroll, with perhaps some traces of Tim Burton's/Johnny Depp's creation. Will also borrow from the wonderful Once upon a time tv show. I do not own - property of Carroll,Moffat/Gatiss etc. Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoy it. Oh kinetic is army talk for a situation that has rapidly gotten bloody and out of control.
Falling down

John Watson blinked sweat out of his eyes as the hot Afghan sun glinted off of the metal of guns, made as warm and moist as a well-used whore by the gloved grip of the men who held them. Some John noticed were trembling but the majority were still. His own didn’t waver in the slightest and as always he briefly wondered what that said about him. But there would be time enough for navel gazing later; right now he needed to focus.

The commanding officer made a series of hand gestures and the men headed out. Right or wrong John couldn’t stop himself grinning as the sound of bullets whistled through the air.

Dodging enemy and friendly fire alike, John quickly realised that the situation had gotten kinetic as he found himself cut off from his team. Taking deep breaths he forced himself to remain calm; to take shelter and assess. Hearing voices behind him he swore and started running, only to trip down what looked like a rabbit hole.

“Yep a sprained ankle is just what I need” soon turned into “What the fuck?!” as said rabbit hole was big enough for his entire body and went on and on without end, twisting and turning this way and that until John couldn’t say what was up and what was down. All things come to an end however and so John’s journey came to a rather abrupt one as he was spat out into a strange world while the hole closed up behind him as though it had never been. Groaning he thanked his lucky stars that he was at least wearing a helmet, and wiggled and flexed various parts of his body. Satisfied that nothing was damaged by his fall he began to look around him and saw that he was in a kind of clearing in a wood with large brightly coloured flowers. And a mushroom. A very big mushroom that he was standing behind. Shaking his head John figured he might as well check out what lay on the other side of the fungi. In doing so he discovered a tall slender man wearing a long dark coat (that looked much too warm for the sunny weather) and a hat that was neither purple nor maroon but somewhere in between, with a pink satin sash around it and a sign which read 10/6 (that looked much too silly for any kind of weather). On catching sight of the other here is what they did: John raised his gun and the tall man toppled over in surprise.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you! Look, I’m putting the gun away”

The tall man, whom John noticed was rather pale, scrambled up the mushroom and started talking, but as too whom he was addressing he couldn’t say.

“Absalom, wake up you stupid caterpillar!” heaving a long suffering sigh he slid down from the mushroom and stood in front of John. In the army or not John still found himself taking a small step back from the cool eyes that regarded him.

“You came from up there didn’t you?” he asked pointing skyward with long elegant fingers.

“Yeah I suppose I did. Um, where am I now?”

The man cocked his head on one side and considered. “Well you’re there” he indicated the space in front and around John “And you’re here” he spread his arms showing a wider space.

Count to five John “Yes but I mean what is this place called? Are there no sign posts?”

“Why would we need any? You are where you are and you can’t be where you are not.”
“Then what do you call places?” Why am I even having this conversation? I must be dreaming, God maybe I’m dead?!

“Well there is my house and Hare’s, and there is always here and there…”

John was trying to absorb this while spending more of his energy on the idea that he may no longer be in the land of the living (although this certainly wasn’t his idea of heaven or hell) when he felt a sharp pain in his arm. “Oww! What the hell?” he narrowed his eyes as he saw the tall man slide a pin back into his hat.

“I was under the impression that you may think you’re dreaming this, so I thought if I rid you of the notion you could digest things faster” he explained with no hint of guilt or shame.

John reluctantly nodded; it was after all the most logical thing he had heard since he got here, where ever here was.

“You haven’t drunk anything from a bottle that said ‘drink me’ have you? Because I must say you are rather on the small side”

“What? No I haven’t and that’s a bit rude isn’t it?!” John groused half-heartedly as he set about taking off his helmet—if he was dead he may as well be comfortable.

“Your hair needs growing” he remarked once John’s sandy military styled strands came into view.

The two men looked at each in silence for a while until the sound of a trumpet rent the air and a shrill cry of “Find him!!” could just be heard. The tall man seemed to come to his senses and rummaged in his coat pockets withdrawing a teapot.

Great the tardis coat, what next?

“People tend to avoid Absalom so we’ll be safe for now. We’ll sleep for a bit then move on when it’s dark” as he spoke he set the teapot down in the hollow of a tree and broke off some chunks of the mushroom from both sides.

“What do you mean we?” John was starting to get a bad feeling.

“If you want to get back up there, to your home, then trust me you need to stay away from the Queen. Eat this” he handed a piece of mushroom over which John looked at dubiously. His eyes widened in surprise as he watched the tall man rapidly shrinking as he nibbled at his own bit of ‘shroom. Once it was all gone he hopped into the teapot and John shrugged before eating and then doing the same.

Once inside the teapot he found the man mopping up some old tea with a handkerchief.

“There at least it will be dry now. I must remember to tell the March Hare that we oughtn’t to put Dormouse in teapots anymore; it isn’t very comfortable. Although he has the advantage of being round which we do not. Set your watch for four hours if you have one”

John, used to taking orders does as he’s told then removes the most bulky of his gear and kit and tries to settle down as best as he can.

“How is a raven like a writing desk?” the man asks turning to face him.

“Hmm? Well they both produce notes, but not musical ones” John was already beginning to feel tired, strange as the day had been.
“Tip top” he looked pleased “I’ll sleep much better knowing that”

John drifted off to sleep to the sound of gentle snoring and fragments of nonsense: ‘tea time change places’, ‘I can’t make hats for a head that big’, curled up with a stranger who smelt like tea, felt and strawberry jam.
The hatter's tale

Beep beep beep the peaceful silence was shattered by a shrill alarm.

“Tea time!” The tall man sat bolt upright, elbowing John in the face as he did so.

“Ow. Again” John rubbed at his sore cheek as he blinked into wakefulness.

“Sorry. I didn’t expect it to be so loud. We need to get out of the teapot now!” the man advised as he noticed his arms and legs growing.

They both scrambled out just in time as they soon went back to their normal sizes and the stranger put the teapot back in his pocket.

“Doesn’t last long does it?”

“Depends how much you eat, but no it doesn’t. We should get moving. We’ll swap stories as we go yes?”

“Sounds good. I’m John by the way, John Watson” he held out his hand after fastening his helmet and checking his gun.

“Sherlock, but everyone calls me the hatter.”

“Is that because you wear a hat?” John asked.

“No stupid I make hats, speaking of I could make you one! Yours doesn’t really flatter your little head…” the hatter smiled at him, seemingly unaware or unconcerned with his rudeness.

“It isn’t supposed to look good” John tapped his helmet as he rolled his eyes. “It’s meant to protect my head”

“Oh I see” the hatter nodded wisely. “I could still decorate it for you though” he added.

John gritted his teeth and was about to say thanks but no thanks when a loud growling derailed his train of thought.

“Was that your stomach?!” he laughed.

The hatter scowled “I’m on the run; doesn’t leave much time for tea you know”

“Well that noise will alert the enemy in no time. I don’t have much but we should definitely eat something before we start out” John rummaged through his kit and sighed-he didn’t have much and his rations were for one. Still he had eaten breakfast; who knew how long the hatter had been without?

“Here, it’s not the best but it’s better than nothing. You can have a chocolate bar after.”

“Thank you John Watson. I shall make you a Sunday best hat” the hatter gave a little bow then set to it like a dog with a bone, grimacing at the unfamiliar taste of army food but swallowing with determination.

“You don’t have any tea do you?” he asked hopefully.
"'Fraid not. Just water. Listen we should get going yeah? Any idea where?"

"To the Duchess; she’s no friend of the Queen after she had her imprisoned. Plus we can get food there"

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"So tell me your story John Watson, for I fear if I tell mine first I may cry and miss yours"

"Just John is fine. Well I’m a soldier, or at least I was. In her Majesty’s British army—"

"You don’t look like any soldier I’ve ever seen” the hatter interjected dubiously.

"Well nothing here looks like anything I’ve ever seen either, so if you don’t mind…as I was saying, we’re at war with terrorists. I got separated from the others and next thing I know I’m falling down a fucking rabbit hole in Afghanistan and then I ended up here. End of story”

There was a pause before the hatter said rather mournfully, “You’re not very good at telling stories are you?”

"That’s what happened. So what’s the deal with you then? Why are you running?”

The hatter took a deep breath and launched into what John could only call a full scale verbal attack.

“Once upon a time there was a happy little hatter, happy as only a hatter could be and as happy as ever a hatter could be. Do you see?”

“Er I’m not sure—"

The hatter carried on as though he hadn’t heard John or the question was a rhetorical one in which case John had no right answering.

“Oh how lovely those days were; my hats were admired by all and I had tea parties with Hare and Dormouse and sometimes I talked with the Cheshire cat or the Caterpillar, but mostly it was Hare and Dormouse, but one day the Queen had a concert and I sang ‘Twinkle twinkle little bat! How I wonder what you’re at!’ Do you know it?”

“I’ve heard something like it” John replied slowly

“Well it goes on, ‘Up above the world you fly, like a tea tray in the sky’ I was singing away quite content when the Queen says I’m murdering time so off with my head—"

“Is that why you’re running?”

“No! Do let me finish. The Queen orders a hundred executions a day; the trick is either hope she forgets or the King pardons people behind her back, else there would be no one left. That’s what happened for me but for some reason Time is thick as thieves with the Queen and took offence at my escaping the axe. I suppose I could have been a little off key” the hatter sniffed “but it was rather extreme to say the least! Now Time won’t work for me: my watch is two days slow and it’s always six o clock. Poor old Hare and Dormouse were with me at the concert so they suffer too. Our tea parties aren’t the same now; we don’t have time to wash up in between so we have to
keep moving round the table…they’ll be ever so pleased that I know the answer to the riddle, I must let them know.” The hatter fell silent and started walking faster so that John was obliged to jog to catch up. “Well? If that isn’t the reason you’re running what is?” he prompted.

“Hmm? Oh yes! Part two. Well life went on as well as it can when it’s always tea time, when one day the Queen came to see me. ‘Hatter’ she says, ‘why is it that you have never made me a single hat?’ ‘Why’ says I, ‘it is because I lack the skills needed to make a hat for such a wonderfully large head as yours’ and she says ‘but the Duchess has a big head and yet you make them for her’, to which I replied ‘if I may be so bold your Majesty, the Duchess actually has a small body and thus it makes her head appear larger than it is’”

“And? What did the Queen say to that?” John found himself as curious as a child.

“She said I had better try, got her guards to seize me and then kept me shackled to the foot of her bed”

“Oh. um bit harsh.” Well I wasn’t expecting that.

“I did try, I really did, but there is no style that worked on her boil of a head” the hatter explained wringing his hands nervously. “The chain was nice and long so I had plenty of room for my hands but other than that it was far from ideal… I fear it may have driven me extra mad.” He shivered though it was far from cold. “She has this way of looking at a person as though she’s imagining how much better we would all look minus our heads. One day she got tired of the make me a hat game and got right down to what she really wanted.” By the moons light John could see the hatter’s eyes lose focus and when he next spoke it was in a cold female voice.

“I know it was you at my concert, murdering time. Do you take me for a fool? As if I could forget that face. I suppose my idiot husband let you go?, for once I’m glad because I need you to make me a very special hat and if you don’t then this time I’ll take your head off myself!”

“What if I can’t?” he said in his own voice.

“Then I’ll hurt you before I kill you”
“That was weird and creepy, but mostly creepy” John muttered before shaking his head a little as if to clear it of any recollection. “But what happened then? I mean you’re here so clearly you got out, and what do you mean she wanted you to make a special hat?”

“You ask a lot of questions” the hatter commented, but he still puffed his chest out with pride, pleased with the attention both his story and storytelling skills were receiving. “The King let me go, and as for the hat—“ he turned to John with grave sincerity. “She is looking for a way up there, that’s why it is vital that she doesn’t find out about you!”

“Why can’t the King sort it out for you then? and why does she want to go to my world?” John asked in tired confusion.

“Because he is gone and no one knows where. And how should I know? Probably wants to rule up there as well, running out of heads here…”

The hatter stopped and John bumped into his back.

“This is the Duchesses’ home” he said by way of explanation.

“We won’t fit in there, it must only be four foot high”

“One word John: mushroom” he sighed and though John couldn’t see he would have bet money on him rolling his eyes if the tone was anything to go by. “And you will be waiting outside” he added

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John was crouched by a hedge waiting for the hatter, and taking advantage of the time to mull over the question of whether he was dead/unconscious/victim of new terrorist drug/finaly cracked, when seemingly from nowhere a curious voice asked who he was. John snapped to attention immediately; gun raised and hands steady he demanded they show themselves.

“As you wish, though you still haven’t answered my question” from thin air a striped tail appeared, then a mouthful of wicked looking teeth, until bit by bit a large crazy cat popped into existence causing John to stumble back

“What the hell are you?!” he spluttered

The cat looked down at his tail pointedly “A cat obviously, a Cheshire cat if you want to get technical”
“I have never seen a cat that looks like you!” John argued.

“Why thank you; I am rather special. But anyway, we were saying-your name is?”

“We weren’t. I don’t think the hatter would like it…” John subtly shifted backwards only to find that the cat just vanished and reformed, so that his grinning face loomed as close as when they first met.

“Ah the hatter, he does seem to find the waifs and strays. Nice enough chap I suppose, terrible singer though and he’s quite mad you know”

“Really? I never would have guessed” John didn’t personally think the cat was so sharp himself.

“Of course he is madder than he was, what with the trouble with the Queen, but that isn’t to say he wasn’t mad before, but then I’m mad, you’re mad, we are all mad here” Cheshire grinned insanely upside down.

“I am not mad!” John automatically denied.

“You must be otherwise you wouldn’t have come here” John was saved from having to reply by the reappearance of the hatter who was carrying a satchel and two tea cups. Which was all to the good as he honestly didn’t know how to respond to the cat’s claim.

“John! Didn’t I tell you it was important no one knows you’re here? That means no talking to people!”

“He was talking to me! I didn’t really have much choice when he just…just appears! And well done brain of Britain; now he knows my name”

“Your name doesn’t matter to Chess, or to the Queen. It could be Sally for all the difference it would make. What matters is that people know you are here!” The doctor briefly wondered if the hatter would be so angry if he wasn’t mad. Either that or he himself was massively underestimating the seriousness of the situation, and he really didn’t want to go there.

“Don’t blame him Sherlock; you know how it unnerves people until they get used to me”

“You know you’re the only one who calls me that”

“And you’re the only one who calls me Chess” so that makes us even was implied. “So on the run then? I hear Rabbit is away with the Queen, his place would be a good hole to hide in for a couple of days”

The hatter’s eyes widened then narrowed “I would say thank you but you aren’t usually so helpful…”

“None of us like the Queen Sherlock; you would be much less interesting without your head, although it would stop you singing so perhaps there is some merit to the idea” he mused

“Then you have my sincere thanks” the hatter gave a little bow, which considering he had a tea cup in each hand, was no small feat. “Please tell your mistress that I’m sorry I’ve taken some food
Oh and borrowed her cups, but I’ll bring them back. Hopefully….”

“Yes I’ll tell her. Just one more thing before you scurry off like mice–don’t lose this one like you lost Alice”

“John take this,” he handed him one of the cups. “Be a sweet kitty and lend me a whisker “ the hatter didn’t wait for a reply before yanking out one of the hairs, and if he perhaps pulled a little more than was necessary, well none of them mentioned it.

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It was beginning to get light as they walked to Rabbits home and John nervously glanced from left to right.

“You can drink that you know, I made it for you. Milk no sugar” the hatter pointed at the cup he had given to John, his own long since squirreled away in one of his many coat pockets.

“How did you know how I take it?” John sniffed before taking a cautious sip. “Oh that’s good! It’s better than good, it’s perfect”

“The hatter beamed “Nothing beats a cup of tea” Suddenly his face fell. “Wanted posters. That’s not good” They were surrounded by trees that all carried a sign. “And it’s a terrible likeness as well! I don’t look like that, do I?” he turned to John who gave him a quick once over before declaring that he did indeed look like that but it wasn’t bad exactly.

The hatter tore a poster down and studied it closer. “Hmm yes, quite handsome really. Maybe, sort of…”

“You look fine” John said impatiently. “You look unique”

“And you look average” the hatter treated John to his first experience of insane tittering which John quickly cut off by pointing out that as it was now day they had better get moving.

“There’s something I have to do first” the hatter produced a small wooden flute and sounded a few notes of pretty music. A plump pigeon fluttered down.

“Serpents, serpents!” she twittered flying round their heads.

“Shush pigeon! I have never once seen a serpent here; it’s all in your head.” He scribbled a few lines with a short old-fashioned lead pencil, the kind that only work if you lick them, while whispering to John that she was a few worms short of a picnic. “Be a dear and take this note to Hare’s house”

They both watched her fly away until she was just a speck in the pink and gold sky.

“What was so important?” John asked as they picked up the pace.

“I had to let them know about the raven and the writing desk; I might not get the chance anytime soon. My parent’s died when I was a year you see, Hare and Dormouse’s family raised me so they are like brothers to me really. Hare was picking berries when he found me in the hollow of a tree, a note giving my name and date of birth, the usual stuff. We’ve been inseparable ever since”
“I’m sorry.” John started to trot out the usual lines but the hatter brushed him off unconcernedly.

“Rabbit lives here. We’ll have to shrink ourselves to fit in” he chewed his bottom lip “We’re running out of mushroom…when is your birthday?”

John blinked a couple of times at the abrupt change in topic. “March 17th”

“Merry un birthday to you and me”

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The hatter whistled as he took everything in “Well Rabbit certainly has a nice set up! Still if it means being at the Queen’s beck and call I’d rather not”

John hummed in agreement “Where do all these doors lead?”

“Couldn’t say. maybe no one could. Should we have something to eat before we sleep?” the hatter joined John in front of an ornate wooden door.

“Sounds good” John watched him set table for a while before broaching the subject that had been bothering him. “You um do have a plan right? You can get me home?”

The hatter looked up. “For some reason the Queen believed I could send her there, and while I don’t pretend to know why she thinks that, she must know something. I almost did it I’m sure I did, there was just always something missing before…But yes I have a plan; you just have to make sure the Queen’s soldiers don’t get us first”

“Fair enough. Pass the butter” they ate in companionable silence, the only interruptions coming from the hatter making tea or insisting on switching places or occasionally wondering off to look at something that had caught his eye.

“I’m for bed” the hatter yawned with a stretch. “Let’s go look for a bedroom”

John sniggered and got a questioning sideways glance. “Nothing. Do you ever take that hat off?”

“When I’m asleep. Or washing my hair. Why?”

“No reason, just wondered if you were hiding a dodgy haircut or something”

The hatter removed said hat revealing slightly flattened dark curls that somehow suited him perfectly. “Curiosity satisfied? This hat happens to be an advertisement of my skill. And besides, I rather like it”

“Fine, fine. We should share a room, safer if we stick together. This one looks as good as any” John did a sweep of the room just in case the cat had led them straight into a trap. Finding it to be a normal bedroom, as normal as a bedroom underground in a rabbit warren could be anyway, he began removing his backpack, helmet and gloves, shoving the gun under a pillow.

“So what happened to Alice then?” he gently asked once they were both lying down.

“Haven’t the foggiest. I meet her one day, much as I met you, and somehow I became her unofficial guardian. She was happy to have a guide and I was happy to be that guide. She was such a bright little girl; full of questions. I lost her at the Queen’s Croquet party, careless of me…I promise I won’t lose you, you’re bigger than Alice after all…”
John startled awake half way through the day, finding his hand encased in the hatter’s own, as though in sleep he had tried to find a way to anchor them together and thus keep his promise.
“I think we’ll be safe here for another day” the hatter thoughtfully declared as he munched some toast.

“Agreed, and if not… I’ll be ready for them” John patted the gun that lay on the table.

The hatter looked as though he wanted to say something, something right there on the tip of his tongue, but he held back only to release a dramatic sigh.

“Being on the run is boring! I need something to do… I might as well make you that hat I promised” He pulled out a dazzling array of items from his magic coat; tape measure, pins, chalk, scissors, material and more.

“Do you always carry all that with you?” John was genuinely curious.

“Most of the time yes; it calms me when I’m nervous, keeps me occupied when I’m bored, and of course one never knows when one will meet a potential client.” As he spoke he took measurements with a gentle touch and set to his work.

“Is it a surprise? because I’d like to watch if you don’t mind. Never seen anyone make a hat before”

“I make hats anywhere and everywhere, there is no secret in it. If you want to watch I’d be happy for you to”

There may not be a secret trick to it but to John’s eyes it still looked like magic, as from nothing much something resembling a hat began to take shape. The hatter’s quick nimble fingers danced and John couldn’t help but compare his own stubbier ones. “Your hands are more like a doctor than mine” he wistfully commented.

“I thought you were a soldier?” the hatter looked up, a questioning look upon his face.

John sighed; if he had a pound for every time he had been asked that question he’d be much better off then he currently was.

“I am. But I’m also a doctor. It’s complicated”

The hatter shrugged as if it made no difference to him, and went back to his hat. Soon he had what reminded John of a bowler hat, but wasn’t (in the same way that the hatter’s hat reminded him something of a top hat but yet was different) in his hands, in a small check pattern that one minute
looked dark grey and the next dark blue.

“Is it finished yet?”

“I need to add some decoration first” He started sewing delicate curlicues and vines in silver thread around the brim. “Talk to me while I sew; I know next to nothing about you compared to all you know about me”

“Not much to say really” John started taking apart his gun, cleaning each piece as he went. He wasn’t fond of talking about himself-half the time he couldn’t explain his motivations to himself let alone anyone else. “I grew up in a dull town where nothing happens except other people’s tragedies. I watched my mother piss her life away drinking until the day she died, the neighbours were right there too but not in a friendly helpful way no, just audience members in their own soap opera” As John spoke he realised how bitter he still was, even after all these years. He took these feelings and threw them in a box labelled Not True

“Drinking?” the hatter questioned.

“Alcohol. You do know what that is?”

“Liquid made from sugary fruit?”

“Something like that” John nodded

“We don’t have it here. It was banned a long long time ago by the King who found it didn’t go well with madness” the hatter explained waving his hand to encourage John on.

“Now the same thing is happening with my sister and there’s nothing I can do to stop it, not a single damn thing!”

“There is always hope John. As long as you are both still alive there is hope.” The hatter got up to make tea leaving John to his thoughts. Once made he placed a gentle hand on John’s shoulder to indicate that it was ready.

“Do you want to go on?” he asked resuming his sewing in between sips, or rather gulps, of tea.

“Pretty routine after that. I became a doctor but got bored so I signed up with the army.” John sipped his drink and couldn’t help the content smile that followed. “You make a cracking cup of tea you know”

The hatter leaned forward, gazing intently at John “I must confess I don’t understand that; it’s true I don’t know much about soldiers-I’ve never seen half of what you carry and I’ve never seen a gun, but I do know the first rule of medicine is do no harm. So I ask; how can you hurt with one hand and heal with the other?” as he spoke his eyes got wider and wider until John feared they would pop out of his head.

“I don’t know alright?! I just needed more; I had some friends who joined up and they seemed alive in a way I’d never felt. I like the bond with the boys in the unit, and the adrenaline when we go on patrol…maybe I’m messed up in the head. Haven’t you ever done something you shouldn’t just because it felt good to do it?” John paused in his work of slotting the gun back together, waiting on the hatter’s reply.

“Not really”
John sank back in his seat deflated.

“Although I do know how to pick locks. I haven’t done anything I shouldn’t with the knowledge though.”

John grinned as wide as the Cheshire cat. “First time for everything. Let’s go and explore”

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Firstly they looked into the rooms that were open; parlours, guest rooms and the like. There was nothing much of any interest until a room with a framed portrait of a Queen hanging on the wall.

“This must be what’s his names room” John remarked going over to look at the picture.

“The white rabbit, yes. I didn’t know he regarded her so highly”

“Well this box is locked, looks special. Fancy trying out your skills?” John challenged.

The hatter worried at his lower lip and mumbled about not being sure, but he took a set of black velvet wrapped tools out of one of his pockets never the less. After a while the satisfying click sounded and John smiled.

“Nice job. Feels exciting huh?”

“It feels like I’m stealing” the hatter chewed away at his lip

“Still feels exciting though” he elbowed the hatter gently in the side “You can admit it to me. Come on”

“Maybe just a little bit”

“What’s he got in here anyway?” To John it just looked like a bunch of papers.

The hatter’s hands fluttered over the boxes contents like nervous birds before diving in decisively. “Letters, journal, poems about the Queen” This had the hatter tittering. “Concerning her pinnacle of cranial glory” This had him cackling so much he doubled over, tears of laughter leaking from his eyes. “Can’t breathe, too funny” he hiccupped.

“Hello. What’s this, rabbit pornography?” John pulled out some sepia photos of a black and white rabbit holding a feather fan in suggestive positions with a coy expression.

“Urgh my eyes! I need to wash them.” The hatter shrieked.

“Well you know what they say about rabbits” John laughed “It is a bit weird though”

“Good for rabbit that there are so many of his kind. There is only the Duchess, her cook and of course the Queen, like me. I don’t have any overwhelming desire to sow my seeds or to have children, although Alice was sweet…if I make it through this perhaps I should encourage Hare to nest then I could be an uncle…” the hatter lost his train of thought and ambled down another track.

“There was a but in there somewhere before you got side tracked” John prompted.

“Oh yes. I was just trying to say it gets lonely sometimes, surrounded by furry faces. I don’t look
in the mirror much but if I did I’m sure I could spend hours noting the differences. We are quite useless really, what with our ears on the side covered by our hair, and our smooth skin…useless but interesting. Do you ever feel like that?”

“Not exactly but I know what it’s like to feel lonely. There are 7 billion odd humans on Earth but we still feel lonely.”

They were both silent, each trapped in their own thoughts before John shook himself out of it and suggested they try the rows of doors that lined the hallway.

First they tried the doors on the right. Several stubbornly refused to open no matter how much the hatter manipulated them.

“I’m sorry. I never said I was an expert lock picker to be fair” the hatter chewed on his lip again, something of a habit of his John noticed.

“It’s not the end of the world, just something to pass the time if I’m honest. And I suppose I’m hoping that one of these doors might lead to home”

The hatter moved on to the last door which submitted, and he stepped back letting John gently press against it. Sounds of ringing steel on steel came through the crack making John knit his brows.

Opening the door wider they saw a fair haired boy sword fighting on a ship with a man with a hook in place of a hand.

“Stop flying about my head and fight like a man” hook growled.

“I’d still beat you Hook. In fact I could beat you with one hand tied behind my back”

“Can people fly where you come from?” the hatter whispered to John.

“No they can’t” John quietly shut the door and went over to the row on the left.

Personally the hatter did not think this was a good idea, but he dutifully got to work opening a door at random.

Peeking in John saw lots of snow and trees like a forest.

“Is this where you live?”

“Could be, I haven’t been everywhere on Earth but there are places that look like this…” John refused to get excited-after all if it turned out to be Canada they would still have to get to his home.

“Its cold” the hatter stated, scooping up some snow and forming a snowball.

“Don’t even think of throwing that at me” John warned.

“Hello?”

John spun around at the sound of a strange voice and blinked several times as he just couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

A small man with goats legs and what looked suspiciously like horns among his curly hair, was standing under an old fashioned lamppost wearing a scarf.
“Hello!” the hatter smiled. He began walking over but John pulled him back.

“This isn’t my home. We should go now”

“He might be helpful though, and he’s wearing the most amazing furry trousers” the hatter argued.

“I don’t think there his trousers hatter”

“Oh. Oh! That’s all sorts of wrong…” the hatter looked faintly green and John was pleased to know he wasn’t completely mad.

“I’m sorry we took a wrong turn. We’ll be leaving now” he hurriedly addressed the little man and swiftly shut the door behind them.

“I really can get you home John and I know this place like the back of my hand. I think it will be safer if we stay here rather then go somewhere we’re both unfamiliar with” the hatter wrung his hands, another nervous habit.

“You’re right I’m sorry. Well I think we’ve had enough excitement for one day. What say we have lunch then a kip?”

“And I can finish your hat” he smiled gratefully.

John made sandwiches while the hat was finished and they made light small talk.

“You can try it on now. I can make a matching tie if you like? If we were at my house and time wasn’t an object I could make a whole suit. But right now I’m sleepy” he yawned.

“It’s beautiful” John examined the neat fairy like stitching and the way the colour seemed to change under the light. Putting it on felt strangely right. “How do I look?”

“Very smart. It suits you. You certainly don’t look average now”

The hatter was dreaming about the day he met Alice. It was a pleasant dream and it went like this: he was taking a walk one fine spring day when he spotted some daffodils which are his favourite, so he was about to pick some to cheer up his abode when he heard a tiny voice cry out.

“Was that you flower? It’s quite alright I won’t pick you if you don’t want me to”

“It wasn’t the flower. Down here, by your foot”

“Curiouser and curiouser” he bent down and picked the little thing up and placed it on his palm. “What are you?” he whipped out a magnifying glass thus all Alice could see in her current tiny size was a big grey eye which naturally made her tense as she was only young.

“Alice”

“And pray tell what is an Alice? And are they all the size of caterpillars?” the eye widened and Alice noticed that it was in fact quite a pretty eye, with traces of blue and green among the grey.
“I’m a girl. My name is Alice I meant. I thought that’s what you were going to ask me, everyone always says what’s your name, not what are you. And no I’m not this small”

“Well you really shouldn’t assume things, or presume either, but to be honest I never know the difference between the two. Ride on my hat and I’ll take you to Absalom. We’ll soon have you normal sized”

From happy beginnings the dream soon became a nightmare as at the croquet party the hatter dreamed that Alice was surrounded by the Queen’s card army, all swarming round in dizzying circles like angry bees while the Queen yelled off with her head. He jolted awake and opened his mouth to scream but a hand came out of nowhere and cut him off. So naturally he bit down.

“Bloody fuck!” John hissed “I heard noise up above, didn’t want you yelling the place down.”

“I’m sorry. Have they gone?” the hatter whispered.

“I think so. We’ll have to move on tomorrow”

“Let me look. I really am sorry, I was having a bad dream…terrible way for one to wake up you know”

Mostly there were just a few dents; little flesh memories of the impression of teeth, but a couple had broken through and drawn beads of blood. The hatter licked them and John jerked his hand back.

“What? Saliva is a natural antiseptic”

“And a humans mouth has more germs then a dogs!” John counter argued.

“Bit late to worry about that now” he went and fetched a dark glass pot. “Maybe you would prefer this” he said applying some of the cream the pot contained. “I make it myself as I’m always pricking my fingers on needles or pins, it’s just healing herbs. And a kiss for luck”

“Were you dreaming about Alice? Whatever it was its made you cry” John brushed at the hatter’s cheek with his uninjured hand.

“It is all my fault, if I wasn’t such a selfish coward I Wouldn’t have lost her! She was just a child John and she trusted me but I let her down”

“I’m sure that’s not true. Blaming yourself won’t solve anything, believe me I know. Go back to sleep, I’m right here with you, not going anywhere” John petted and cajoled until they both fell into an uneasy sleep.
John woke early, left foot tingling with the beginning stages of cramp. Careful not to rouse the hatter, who was still sleeping, he wiggled his toes as best he could to bring some life back into them. Resigning himself to the fact that it wasn’t going to improve much until he had room to really stretch, he instead took stock of his surroundings; still in a rabbit hole, check, still sharing a bed/experience with a mad man, check. Said madman was peacefully curled up next to John and he was loath to wake him after the nightmares he had had earlier concerning Alice. Instead he dropped a hand down to smooth his hair, stretching the curls out and watching them bounce back into shape. His mother had curly hair, as did his first boyfriend, and John had to admit to a slight fascination with it.

The hatter made an innocent sleepy noise and John drew his hand back.

“Morning” he greeted.

“Morning” the hatter yawned “Were you playing with my hair? No one has ever done that before…”

“That’s cause you’re always wearing a hat” John quipped to disguise his embarrassment at having been caught.

“Do you enjoy touching people’s hair?” the hatter probed.

“You aren’t going to let this drop are you? “ John sighed “You had a rough night; it’s what we do to soothe people where I’m from. I was just trying to help” The best piece of advice John had ever been given was to hide a lie in the truth.

The hatter scoffed “I do know that, mothers do it here with their children, I’ve just never personally experienced it. Was I supposed to enjoy it?”

John felt a pang of pity for the hatter and tried to imagine what it would have been like to grow up in a world populated by talking animals. He simply couldn’t even begin to wonder. “Some people don’t but most do, it’s meant to be relaxing. Did you like it?”

“Not sure, I was more asleep than awake. Can you do it again sometime?”

John nodded grimly and got off of the bed. “We should get a move on, I don’t think we’ll be safe here any longer.”

“Tea first?” the hatter enquired.

“Quickly. I’m going to find somewhere to wash” John took a basic bar of soap and small towel from his kit and headed off.

John found his way back to Rabbits kitchen after only one or two wrong turns and found the hatter fastening the satchel he had taken from the Duchess.

“My turn. I’ve packed food, you grab some bottles labelled ‘drink me’ and cakes that say ‘eat me’” he swirled off, no less dramatic despite the lack of coat. For the first time John noticed what he was wearing: slim cut black trousers and a fitted, too tight looking, dark purple shirt. John blinked at the normalcy of it-here he was in a world of beheading Queen’s and beneath a fancy coat and funny hat, the hatter was dressed for a posh London bar!
“You didn’t tell me he had a sunken bath!” the hatter exclaimed on his return; a whirlwind of wet hair and shiny pink nakedness. “Makes my house look a total dump, I think I haven’t been charging enough for my hats…”

“That’s because I never found any bloody sunken bath, wish I had” John grumbled staring morosely into his tea before looking up. Quickly he looked down again “Could you put some clothes on?” he spluttered “Couldn’t you find a bigger towel?!?”

“Easy for you to say, you’re much more rabbit-shaped then I am” the hatter retorted as he dressed “Shame we couldn’t wash our clothes as well” he sighed.

“Such a drama queen” John remarked as he led the way out, gun at the ready.

The hatter continued to worry at his bottom lip the whole way, until John was convinced he would wear a hole through it.

“I don’t like travelling in the light” he whispered.

“Neither do I, do you know of anywhere we could go till it gets dark?”

The hatter stopped and took a good look round, satisfied he had his bearings he nodded “Look for a tree with yellow ribbon tied round”

John had long since stopped asking questions so he just kept his eyes peeled.

“Here. Now what?”

“Give me two bottles of drink me please” the hatter cryptically supplied.

John handed them over and the hatter placed them in his coats outer pocket. “Now we climb”

“What?!”

“The tree John, we need to climb it. If we are lucky the nest is still empty, and I don’t know about you, but I can’t think of anywhere safer”

He started climbing and John had no choice but to follow. At the top he peered over and reported that the nest was indeed still empty. Handing John a bottle he downed his own and hopped into the nest.

“What are you waiting for John? The view to change?”

“I’m coming just give me a second”

Once inside John focused on his breathing; deep calming breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth.

“I’ve never been this high up before. I quite like it” the hatter commented breezily. “Are you all right John? You look a bit funny”

“I’m in a nest. In a tree. A really really high tree, no I’m not all right!” John’s breathing became erratic as panic set in.
“You don’t like heights”

John laughed “Excellent observation”

“Look at me John, just at me. I’m not wearing my hat”

“So what?”

“So you can stroke my hair, might calm you” the hatter shrugged

John agreed and he sat in the middle, well away from the sides, with the hatter’s head in his lap.

“Tell me about your home”

“Well it’s nothing like here that’s for sure. I live in London which is the capital city of England. I find it hard money wise but I’m frugal and I don’t want to live anywhere else. London is alive and vibrant and dangerous and evolving, while still honouring the past…it’s indescribable” John lost himself in talking about home and forgot about how high up he was, and yes, petting the hatter’s freshly washed hair was pleasant.

“But what is it actually like, the world where you live?” the hatter’s question was a deep rumble muffled by John’s legs.

“Well…” John considered “I don’t think it’s as bright as here. People can’t shrink and grow and animals don’t walk and talk like people—rabbits are pets and cats can’t grin…we have a Queen but she doesn’t order executions anymore, no one does in England nowadays. There are all kinds of food because it’s so easy for people to travel to other countries now; we have cars and planes and ships…do you have a body of water here?” John asked suddenly.

The hatter nodded “I won’t tell you to stand but you can see it from here, past the mountains in the North. Where we are going next” he yawned. “Carry on, it’s interesting”

“Flat screen TV, pointless fashion, modern art, mobile phones…that’s it! Mobile phones, why didn’t I think of it before?” John leapt up, sending the hatter sprawling in an untidy heap. Hastily apologising he rooted through his stuff and dug out his phone. “Actually got some signal…let’s see if ET can phone home” he mumbled to himself.

“Harry, Harry listen I don’t have much time. I’m stuck in this weird place, this wonderland, but I’m trying to get home. I will get home and I’ll make things right between us…”

“John, John is that you? I can barely hear you…their saying you’re MIA…where are you?…”

“Shit the signal is gone. Still at least I managed to get through…I hope she heard me”

“What just happened?” the hatter demanded.

“I tried calling my sister” John explained.

“That thing lets you talk to people who aren’t here? Amazing!”

“Yeah it’s just like magic” John said “Guess we had better have some food then try and get some sleep so we can travel once it gets dark”
“I was getting sleepy until you got up” the hatter pointed out.
“I don’t want to risk your alarm…dear tree could you possibly wake me when night falls?”
Nothing happened for a while then suddenly a branch snaked out, a leaf at its tip tickling the hatter’s face. “Perfect. Thank you” he smiled.

“You can talk to trees and you think a phone is magic?” John shook his head in bewilderment.

“I can’t talk to trees; I asked and she listened. If anything she can talk to me” the hatter settled himself back in John’s lap as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

“Same thing” John argued

“No it isn’t it. You may as well say I like what I eat is the same as I eat what I like”

“So we’re headed North you say?”

“Yes, we seek a tear from the mock turtle. The gryphon takes people but he works for the Queen so we’ll have to hope pigeon will carry us”

“None of that made any sense but I’m guessing it has something to do with why you took a whisker from the Cheshire cat?” John asked, resuming petting the hatter’s hat.

The hatter leaned into the touch with a contented sigh “Very good John, I’m impressed”

“Gee thanks. Is it a long journey?”

“Very, we may face many perils too. Your skills may come in handy”
Winter is coming

Chapter Notes

Chap title nicked from the amazing game of thrones.
Thank you to those who have read and left kudos. I would be super grateful if you could leave a comment if you have time to let me know what you like or don't like etc. It really would mean the world to me and give more confidence to continue writing. Also do you think I could do with a chapter/section from the queens perspective?
Thanks again.

“So why did you tie a ribbon to that tree?” John asked as they began their journey that night. He doubted that the answer would make any sense but he figured it would most likely be amusing.

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“Two reasons John; firstly so I could find it again and see if anyone had used the nest, and secondly, to make the tree feel special if it had stayed empty”
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“Two reasons John; firstly so I could find it again and see if anyone had used the nest, and secondly, to make the tree feel special if it had stayed empty”
John smiled; only the hatter would think that was logical.

“Good thing I did to, she treated us rather well” the hatter added.

“Yep can’t deny that” John thought back on how the branches seemed to help carry him down the length of the tree, taking less time then climbing would have. “So um what exactly can we expect on this journey north then?”

“I do not really know; I went on a school trip. The Gryphon came and took groups of us. Stories talk of giant bears and carnivorous fish and flowers that snap shut like trapdoors…”

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The hatter made a polite but non-committal hum and John suddenly recalled something from the Hatter’s tale about Alice that had confused him.

“You know you said you lost Alice at the Queen’s party because you got scared and left her? Well you haven’t been on the run that long so why did she frighten you then?”

“You know you said you lost Alice at the Queen’s party because you got scared and left her? Well you haven’t been on the run that long so why did she frighten you then?”

“I didn’t explain myself very well; for some reason the Queen seems to have had her eye on me for a while. One time she said I painted her roses white; at the time of the croquet party she blamed me for stealing her tarts, which was ridiculous because everyone knows that was the knave of hearts!”

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“And all this was how long ago?” John replied.

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“About fifteen summers I suppose” the Hatter shrugged indifferently.

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“And you’re how old?”

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“I’ve seen thirty summers”
“So you would have been 15, 16…you can’t blame yourself for what happened Hatter, you were a child too”

“While I appreciate the sentiment, with all due respect you are wrong—I was old enough to protect her, old enough not to be a coward”

“I’m sorry that you have carried that burden so long” John awkwardly patted his shoulder. “Since you haven’t really been out this way, and we can’t say who might be working with the Queen, unless we know a place is empty I think we might have to sleep in shifts in the open…I don’t fancy climbing trees every day”

The Hatter nodded “Whatever you think best John. I defer to your expertise”

xxxx

A couple of days later brought no change except an increasingly short tempered sleep deprived Hatter.

“Eat something, that always cheers you up” John advised.

“Can’t, foods running out”

“Crap” John muttered. Foraging had never been one of his stronger points. “Is that robin following us?” he had noticed the bird flying ahead of them, and it now observed them, head cocked in a happy sort of way before warbling a few notes.

The Hatter laughed and John sighed “What am I missing?”

“He thinks we are love birds” the Hatter explained with a soft smile.

“No. God no”

“There you are Mr Robin; an un-equivocal statement I would say” The smile was gone from the Hatter’s face and he looked sad. The robin trilled some more. “No offense caused. Yes you have a good day too, thank you” The robin flew off and John stared open-mouthed.

“You can talk to birds! Who don’t speak words…wait why didn’t he talk like that pigeon did and the cat?”

“Perhaps he’s a mutant or perhaps he came here the same way you did” the Hatter replied curtly as he lengthened his strides.

“That’s a good idea! Shame we didn’t get to ask him…doesn’t change the fact that you could talk to him. That’s amazing! Abnormal but amazing”

“It’s only abnormal because it’s outside of your little scope of normality!” The Hatter poked John in the chest with a long finger. “And do you have any idea how rude that is? Is that how you see me? As something abnormal? I thought you liked me John Watson, but the truth is I’m just your ticket home!” Eyes blazing with anger and unshed tears the Hatter strode off leaving John standing like a lemon until he came to his senses.

Finding an empty barn gave them an uninterrupted sleep but John was unable to take any joy in it as the Hatter was refusing to talk to him. Waking from poor rest and with a crick in his neck,
John went to relieve his bladder and had to blink several times at the fat white flakes drifting lazily by.

“Hatter wake up!”

“Leave me alone; I’m sleeping”

“Look I know you’re pissed at me but this is serious! What month is it? Summer right?” John urgently questioned.

“Middle of June there abouts. You know my watch doesn’t work”

“But only two days out, so it is June. Can you tell me then why the hell it’s snowing?!”
Winter has come

Chapter Notes

Thanks to those reading, please leave me a comment if you like. Sorry if a bit shorter then usual.

The Hatter sat bolt upright then promptly slid back into being horizontal once more as his madness made itself apparent yet again in discordant tuneless laughter.

“The look on your face!” he hiccupped “It’s so ‘earnest’” the Hatter intoned in a gruff voice as he pulled a serious face.

“Piss off” John was fed up to the back teeth; the last thing he felt like dealing with right now was a loon. After all he wasn’t that kind of doctor.

The Hatter raised one dark brow and widened his eyes to comic proportions before leaping up like some kind of graceful clown and wandering out the door, where he peered out at the snow and gnawed at his lip.

“Alice told me how she was learning about freak weather conditions at school. Maybe this is the same?” he turned to John, all trace of mad humour now erased.

“We’d better hope so” John replied grimly.

Several hours and the anxious twittering of various animals later, John’s optimism was beginning to fade. At the voices all hope totally evaporated. Pushing the Hatter against a tree John placed a finger against his lips in the universal gesture of silence.

“It’s so cold me fronts sticking to me back” voice number one complained.

“Well it won’t get any better until we find the Hatter” voice two replied.

“Yeah about that; I only started working ‘ere yesterday, why ‘as winter come so early?’ one asked.

“Because we haven’t found him yet; the Queen talked to Time who sped things along, hence winter is here early. She hopes to smoke him out with snow so to speak” voice two explained.

“What if ‘e freezes to death? Thought she wanted ‘im alive?” voice one pointed out.

“Good point two, good point”

“Thank you seven”

There was silence for a while then two said something about good on the Hatter for evading capture for so long, which seven agreed with but said it would cost them their lives if they didn’t find him soon; the Queen being very fond of beheading and getting her own way.
“Still” seven said “the snow will make it easier to track him so that’s something”

The Hatter whimpered and John clamped a gloved hand over his mouth.

“What was that?” seven said looking around

“I didn’t hear nuffin, probably just an animal” two dismissed. A robin flew past them and two beamed “Just a bird see?”

Seven relaxed “That’s all right then. Let’s go back; we’ll come back tomorrow with five and nine and examine all the lovely prints we’ll find”

John cautiously poked his head round the tree, relieved to see the figures walking away but confused but what he saw: two playing cards (of the club suit) carrying spears. But unlike cards back home they were large, man sized really, with human heads and arms and legs.

“Their playing cards” John muttered to himself in bewilderment. He was brought back to the present moment by the sound of the Hatter hyperventilating and automatically went into doctor mode.

“Put your head between your knees, deep breaths. Everything is going to be fine”

“We’re doomed! There’s nothing we can do…” as the Hatter’s panic increased, a sudden wind appeared sending up flurries of snow. John frowned at the abrupt change but pushed it to the back of his mind for the time being.

“Look; if it snows more, which I think is likely, than our tracks will be covered anyway…either the card guards aren’t very bright or the Queen has bitten off more then she can chew. Either way the only thing we can do is keep moving, cover as much ground as we can so we have a head start. Sound good?”

The Hatter sniffed and nodded and the two started walking, John setting the pace at a moderately fast march.

The snow continued to fall. Half way through the day it covered their ankles and they ran the risk of tripping over the many creatures that ran in front of their path; scurrying to and fro muttering about food and not enough time. Several stopped to point at the Hatter and angrily shake their heads, some even went as far as to say ‘this is all your fault’. Each time the Hatter flinched as though he had been physically struck and silent tears began to flow.
The forbidden fruit speaks the truth

Chapter Notes

Not a very good chapter I'm afraid but wanted to get it posted for mad hatter day... so my magic fruit make one forget ones purpose and can reveal what is hidden...inspired by the poppies in wizard of oz. the dwarves mining fairy dust comes from once upon a time

By the end of the second day the snow was even higher up their legs, of course being shorter it affected John more, but he noted with a wince that the Hatter’s long coat was rapidly soaking up moisture from brushing up against snow covered bushes.

Suddenly the Hatter tripped sprawling face down in cold snow flurries. John bent to help him up and heard ‘It’s all my fault’ repeated several times like a chorus in a bad song.

“I’m going back” he announced “I’m turning myself in on the condition she stops the winter”

“Are you out of your mind?!” John demanded.

“Innocent people are suffering because of me! Because I didn’t die when I was meant to… Dormouse will die because of me! I can’t let that happen”

John sighed, defeated. “Ok I get it, I really do. If it was my friend I would feel the same. I can’t help but feel you’re walking into a trap though-this is exactly what she wanted you to do…and I’ll be honest, I can’t help but think of the innocent lives that will be at risk when she makes it to my world”

The Hatter wrung his hands and chewed ever more ferociously on his lip. “I don’t want another Alice on my conscience and I did promise you I would get you home…but how can I leave poor dormouse when there is a chance, however slim, of saving him? Yes that’s true he has Hare whereas John would be all alone without me…I will help you John Watson as I said I would, but we must hurry!”

John gave his most winning smile (which he had on good authority was rather charming) “Thank you so much! You have no idea how much I appreciate your help. I was thinking maybe we should eat whatever will make us grow? I know we’ll stick out more that way but we should get there quicker, plus our clothing won’t get so wet…”

xxxx

“Ooh I’m so hungry I could eat the mock turtle right now” the Hatter groaned in between blowing on his hands to try and warm them.

“What’s that over there?” John pointed “Looks like some kind of fruit tree right?”

The Hatter had picked one and bitten into it before the words were barely out of John’s mouth.
“Umm, you should try one! It’s like a peach but better. I say isn’t it funny how you get apricot jam but not peach?” the Hatters contented smile soon turned to a blank frown. “Why are we here?” he asked “it’s cold and boring, take me home”

“Are you being serious?” John gaped, but the Hatter was already talking over him as though he hadn’t heard or didn’t care.

“…do you remember when I said you had an ordinary face and I laughed? Well I don’t mean it anymore; I like your face and your voice…I like the way your hair and eyes can’t seem to decide what colour they want to be…you look and sound kind. That’s why I was mad you know? Not because you thought I was abnormal but because you seemed to find the idea of being love birds with me so disgusting…this is an odd place isn’t it? Please take me back home, although I might have a little rest first, feeling sleepy” the Hatter crumpled to the floor.

xxxx

“Urgh why does it feel like dwarves have been mining for fairy dust inside my head?” the Hatter woke with a wince clutching at his head.

“Welcome back” John peered into his face concern written on his features.

“Turns out that fruit wasn’t the best thing to eat. You remember why we are out here now?” John handed over some water, paracetamal and half an energy bar.

“Of course I know why we are here” the Hatter scowled at John’s smirk.

“We still have some distance to go if we wish to reach the mountains any time soon” he said reaching for earlier dignity.

They hadn’t been walking long, the Hatter complaining all the way, when they were stopped by a large male polar bear wearing armour.

“Halt! I am to take you to my king.” He rumbled.

“Says who?” John toughed it out.

“The prophecy; when the sorcerer and the stranger come then the true king will be revealed. It is foretold”
John turned to the Hatter “You never said anything about demanding polar bears!”

The Hatter shrugged and addressed the bear “I don’t think we are the people your king had in mind, but um, seeing as you are here, could you possibly carry us over the enormous sheet of ice all around us? We need to get past the mountains to the mock turtle…”

“I have no interest in what you need or want sorcerer. You may tell my king Great Bear but I doubt that he will care either”

“Now look here…” John started.

“Climb on now or later; one way or another you are coming with me” the bear sniffed in a superior manner.

The Hatter conferred with John. It was agreed that as it would get them across quicker they would go and deal with whatever came after as it happened.

“Can you take our weight?” John asked incredulously.

“I am a warrior, the one they call hunter. Two puny humans will be as naught” the bear tossed his head impatiently and they both scrambled on, John in front.

As the bear bounded along John could tell that the Hatter was wrong, though it looked similar from a distance; the broad stretch of land was not ice, simply snow covered frozen ground. To the left a dense forest loomed and where the earth ended John could make out a ribbon of sparkling silver on the horizon that he assumed was the body of water the Hatter had mentioned. Beyond that lay the majestic snow-capped mountains. It was strangely beautiful and familiar-if he hadn’t been riding on the back of a talking polar bear, John thought he could have been somewhere on his own planet. The frigid wind whistled past him and he caught a snowflake on his tongue. His own peculiar brand of insanity, the unknown potential of danger, made its self-known and he grinned suddenly (looking not dissimilar to the Cheshire cat). He had a strong urge to fling out his arms and yell ‘I’m the king of the world’

Hunter skidded to a stop and more bears slunk out from the woods. As they slid off his muscular back they found themselves surrounded. The ground shook to thunderous paws and the crowd parted at the arrival of the king. A mighty bear, he was twice the size of hunter and several hands taller. With a booming roar he silenced the crowd before addressing them all.

“The stranger and the sorcerer have come, just as was prophesied. Now we will all see that small
bear speaks false!”
The bears growled their approval and stamped their feet.

“Yes about that; you have the wrong people I’m afraid. I’m a hatter not a sorcerer. Would you like a hat? I could certainly make you a hat”

“Silence! Show them to their new lodgings and explain what they must do” the king padded back to the forest while the other bears nudged the Hatter and John along until they had reached their destination.

Unnoticed by John earlier due to its well camouflaged shades of silver and white, stood a high narrow castle close by the water, and this was where the bears pushed them. Inside was a carpet of snow and icicle spires while the centre piece was a frozen lake on which rested hundreds of fragments of ice.

“Arrange those pieces, make them fit together perfectly and the true king will be revealed” Hunter pointed to the lake before leaving, the ominous sound of the doors being sealed shut echoing in the large space.

“What is this place?” John asked as he spun in a slow circle looking in awe at his other-worldly surroundings.

“Absalom told me that elves used to live here before they died out. I guess this must have been their castle”

“Gives me the creeps” John shivered. “So what the hell do we do now?”

“No idea. I can’t be a sorcerer…”

“Why not?”

“Because no one here has magic! It must be because of the elves that there is magic in the land, but no individual has it anymore. The bear is wrong, king or not” the Hatter explained firmly.

“All right fine” John strapped his knife tighter around his calve and re-assembled his gun. “But I’m not staying here because some smelly bears tell me to!”

“What are you doing?” the Hatter asked, an edge of panic in his voice.

“I’m getting out of here”

“You can’t do that! You don’t get to just turn up in someone else’s world and start killing things because they get in your way!”

John spun on his heel and rummaged through his backpack. “See this?” he held out his mobile showing a candid shot of himself, a woman with short blonde hair and a man with black curly hair. All three looked happy and healthy. “That’s my sister during one of her sober spells. Being stuck here has made me realise she’s all the family I have. I want to help her get better and to do that I have to get home to her!”

The Hatter closed his eyes briefly before opening them “Can we at least try? we’ve only just gotten here after all. Please John? I know we can do it”

“One day, that’s all” John warned.
John watched the Hatter trying and failing to fit the pieces of ice together, numb fingers scrabbling to get a grip. After watching him drop one particularly small piece three times in a row he went over to the lake.

“Not going very well is it?”

“Maybe you should try helping then!” the Hatter snapped before sniffing.

John crouched down beside him “Look at me. Are you crying?”

“So what if I am?”

“Because it’s too cold in here, they’ll just freeze. See?” he brushed away tears with a thumb then opened up his hand to show what he had collected. “They look like diamonds”

“Are you planning on helping then?” the Hatter asked after a heavy pause in which they both stared at each other, neither one speaking.

John rubbed the Hatters hands between his own to bring some warmth back. “Use your magic” he softly said.

“I don’t have magic!...”

“Yes you do” John interrupted “Think about it; the Queen knows you have abilities, and you said yourself that you thought you had almost managed to make her hat work…then there’s this prophecy, not to mention that while you were having your panic attack after we heard the cards, something weird happened. It was calm I swear and a wind whipped up out of nowhere…”

“Flimsy evidence wouldn’t you say?” the Hatter exhaled shakily.

“Perhaps, but I think it’s true none the less. Just try please? Else there will be a few dead bears I’m sorry to say” John gave a quick grin and kissed the back of the Hatter’s hand before standing up.

The Hatter followed suit, holding out his hand over the pieces with a look of painful concentration on his face.

Nothing happened for several hour-long minutes then suddenly they rose into the air, re-formed and then dropped back down.

“Yes!” John whooped. “Are you all right?”

The Hatter was staring at his hand as though he had never seen it before.

“Hatter?”

When that got no response John tried Sherlock a couple of times until he looked up in dazed confusion.

“I’m fine. Just tired”

“Good, good. So ‘thorn paw is the true king’, I don’t get it” John shook his head before going over and banging on the door “Hey! We solved your puzzle so you can let us go now thanks”
The door opened and Hunter led the king to the lake. Reading the message the Great Bear threw back his shaggy head and laughed until the icicles rattled.

Lifting a paw he showed them the thorn buried deep in the pad “I have had this thorn stuck since I was a cub. Hunter go to small bear and tell him his claims to the throne are as weak as he is”
John shook his head in good-humoured bemusement, a smile rapidly turning into full on laughter.

“What’s so funny?” the Hatter asked, the bridge of his nose creasing in confusion.

“That was the most mental experience of my life! Pity I can’t tell the blokes down the pub about it…”

“So if mad is funny then it is good?”

“Not exactly, it just depends” John tried to explain “Hey I never thought you being mad was not good you know” John caught the Hatter’s sleeve and didn’t let go until he faced him. “Besides it isn’t just you-the cat said everyone was mad here”

Hatter smiled “And he should know. I wouldn’t be too happy yet though; we still need to get to the mock turtle”

“Thanks for reminding me”

“Fish eagle”

“Come again?”

“Fish eagle. Maybe he would fly us over?”

The Hatter pulled out the wooden flute he had used to call down pigeon in what seemed a lifetime away, and produced a sharp cry like a bird of prey hunting. The eagle circled them a few times, hovering in the air before diving down.

“Can I help you human?” great yellow eyes blinked and a curved beak clicked as it spoke.

“Good day” The Hatter warmly hailed as though chatting up birds of prey for favours was an everyday occurrence. “We were wondering if you could carry us across the mountains to the mock turtle?”

“And what would be in it for me?” the eagle enquired, head cocked on one side.
“What would you like?”

“I need food. The water is frozen so I cannot fish”

“We would be happy to do that” The eagle arranged to meet them the next morning in the cave and the Hatter sketched a small bow.

xxxx

“Please tell me you can both melt the water and know how to fish?” the Hatter murmured as the eagle flew off.

John rubbed his neck with a long suffering sigh “I can probably melt it but finding fish might be trickier. Try and find a long stick will you?

As it happened the fish were either surprised by the sudden loss of their protective shield or luck was on their side. Their stick harpoon which John had sharpened to a wicked point was actually proving quite effective.

It was while aiming for the sixth fish which John rather fancied for his dinner, that lady luck turned tail and ran. A combination of leaning too far forward and the ice he was standing on cracking pitched John head first into the icy water; the needle-point shock of which caused him to gasp and swallow said water. Cold and panicking he flailed and thrashed until confident arms pulled him to shore.

“Cup and saucer that was cold!” The Hatter shivered and dripped while John coughed and spluttered.

“You saved my life” he stuttered between shaking teeth.

“I was hardly going to let you drown” the Hatter stated giving John a curious look. “We should get to the cave”

“Agreed. Five fish will have to do; we need to get out of these clothes before we catch our death”

Once inside the reasonably cosy, and considerably warmer, cave, John set about trying to make something to prop the clothing up on. Satisfied that it wouldn’t immediately fall down he started removing his uniform and from the rustling behind him he figured the Hatter was doing like-wise. He jumped suddenly as a fire burst into life before relaxing as he recalled the Hatter’s new found ability.

“Handy” he quipped as he moved his ‘clothes line’ closer to the fire. “You did say you wanted to wash your clothes so I think you have to agree it’s worked out for the best” John joked as he held out his hands for the Hatters discarded clothing.

“I’ll do it. You, um, set up a bed”

“You’re not the first naked man I’ve seen you know”

The Hatter blushed like the flames themselves “Yes well I haven’t…no one has ever…”

John said nothing, but nodded in understanding.

As the Hatter crawled into bed John tried to think of a non-creepy way to express how beautiful
he was naked and how he had nothing to worry about or hide. Giving it up as a lost cause he huffed at the annoying draft he could feel from somewhere.

“You’ll have to come closer unless you want us to freeze” he pointed out matter of factly.

Hatter wriggled until John’s knees were touching the back of his legs.

They lay for a while in thick silence until John couldn’t take anymore.

“At the risk of sounding stupid or insensitive, but when you say mock turtle, do you mean what the soup is made from?”

“Yes John that is exactly what I mean. I mean what I say and I say what I mean”

“And we’re getting a tear from it? Why does it cry?”

“He John, not it. And he’s sad because he used to be a proper turtle and now he isn’t”

“That made about as much sense to me as it would if you said it in Japanese.”

“Maybe it would make more sense after you’ve slept”

“No tired” John whined “Let’s talk about something else. I’m guessing you forgive me for the abnormal comment? Although I know for a fact it was the love bird thing that upset you…”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about” the Hatter played dumb.

“You said some stuff after you ate that fruit, you don’t remember?”

“No I don’t and I would prefer it if we didn’t talk about it please. Unless I said something horrible?” he added.

“No, no it was nice” Now that he thought about it John realised it may actually have been one of the nicest things anyone had said about him. “I don’t see why you don’t want to talk about it”

Hatter sighed and turned to face him “Because you make me feel something I don’t understand … you make things topsy turvy, and one day soon you will go home and we’ll never see each other again and things can go back to normal.”

“I don’t know what to say” John admitted.

“I don’t want you to say anything. Just hold me please?”

John nodded and pulled him in tight “Bit different then being hugged by a hare” he said gruffly.

“Yes. Yes it is”

John’s heart clenched and he fought down a lump in his throat. He resolved then and there that when he went home he was taking the Hatter with him.

xxxx

John surfaced from sleep due to uncomfortable prickly heat. While this was partly due to a scratchy army blanket, it was mainly due to the Hatter draped over him. In fact waking up may
have had more to do with the snoring in his ear than the heat. John’s hand seemed to have a life of its own as it brushed back soft curls before dropping down to stroke even softer skin. The Hatter twitched slightly and made a snuffling sound in John’s ear. Smiling John drew nonsense on the Hatter’s back while steadfastly refusing to give into the urge to kiss his shoulder. Or any part of him really.

“What are you doing?” Hatter rumbled in his ear but didn’t move away.

“Doodling. I love to doodle”

“I’ve never seen you doodle before”

“Ah that’s because I haven’t had any paper” John’s smile kept growing.

“You John Watson are a terrible liar—you could doodle in the soil or the snow…you don’t doodle”

“You’ve caught me; I only like to doodle on skin”

The Hatter surprised John by laughing, a genuine amused laugh that was wonderfully melodic when not tainted by madness. It was a sound John rather thought he could get used to.
The fish eagle wasn’t overly impressed by their meagre haul but five fish were better than none
John reasoned so they had made it past the mountains after all. John almost wished they hadn’t as, fear of heights+flying on a bird=John throwing up what little food he had eaten.

“Oh God I need to sit down” John groaned as they landed back where they started.

“Suck on some snow, it will take the taste away at the least” the Hatter advised.

Ten minutes later John’s stomach finally felt more settled. “What happens now?”

“No I am to take you back”
John and the Hatter both whipped around.

“Hunter! Thank Christ. Polar bear is a much better mode of transport” John declared.

“Tell your King we are grateful and I am in his debt” The Hatter intoned.

“He considers this to make you even” Hunter informed him, patronising as ever.

xxxx

“So what is the plan now?” John asked quietly; alert again now that they were back in Wonderland proper. The snow was still falling and the woods were eerily silent.

“Our last stop, my house.”

“What will happen to you, once I’ve gone home?”

The Hatter considered “Her rage wins over reason so I imagine she’ll kill me”

“And you’re ok with that are you?” John felt irrationally angry.

“Of course I’m not but what can I do? She can’t keep it winter for ever, that’s something…” he shrugged.

“Come with me! I don’t want you to die Sherlock” John urged.
“Why do you not call me Hatter anymore?”

“Because you are not an animal and you have a name!” John said more harshly then he should.

“I’m sorry. It’s just so fucking unfair!” he fumed.

xxxx

John decided it would be safest to travel small by day and big at night, but security had been tightened to such a degree that he was forced to kill some guards; if kill could be applied to playing cards…subsequently he didn’t feel any regret or guilt over it.

The Hatters house was strangely round with a tall chimney perched on the side; the effect being similar to a head wearing a jauntily placed top hat.

“Do you like it?” he asked strangely nervous.

“It suits you perfectly” John smiled.

“It is a bit messy I’m afraid” the Hatter confessed as he attempted to tidy up somewhat. There were hats, scraps of material and books piled haphazardly as far as the eye could see. And that was without mentioning the odd cup and spoon lying around in unexpected places.

“It’s fine, really. Has a sort of lived-in charm” John reassured him.

“Should we have something to eat? It would be our last meal together…”

They ate thickly buttered crumpets and toast with marmalade. The Hatter was putting a full tea service into a bag to John’s confusion, when he looked up suddenly.

“She’s coming”

“How do you know? Never mind. Leave the house as soon as she comes, I’ll wait here-use your magic to create a storm and then I’ll come out all right?” John ordered.

“What if I can’t do it? I’ve spent my whole life not even knowing I have magic!”

“Just try. I have faith in you”

“Hello Hatter dear. I knew you would come back here eventually. I must say it’s been awfully clever of you to evade capture this long” the Queen nodded to the two cards on either side of her and they seized the Hatter by the arms forcing him to his knees in front of the Queen.

Perhaps you aren’t just a pretty face after all” she mused. “I find myself in need of a King” she paced up and down, dress billowing and rustling like a lady in the court of Henry the eighth. “Wealth, power, blah blah blah. What say you? I think a crown would look rather fetching on those curls”

“I don’t want wealth or power but I’m sure the white rabbit is just dying to sit by your side”

“Fine. I don’t need a King anyway. Look at me Hatter” she held his chin roughly and jerked his head towards her “I made winter come early to get what I want. How many do you think will
perish because of that? When will people learn that life will go easier if they just give me what I want?! Honestly why do you care if I go to Alice land?"

“Because it’s the right thing” the Hatter simply said.

“The right thing… tell me Hatter would it be the right thing to kill Hare first or Dormouse? Which would hurt you more I wonder? She questioned in a voice soft as poison.

“How do I know you won’t just kill them anyway?”

“You don’t!” she laughed gleefully.

The Hatter blinked back tears of anger and frustration and gritted his teeth, concentrating with all his might. The sky burst open drenching them and a veritable tornado carried the playing cards up and away.

The Queen clapped her hands together like Christmas had come early “Finally! I’ve waited years for you to do something interesting! Perhaps if I drain you of every drop of blood I can take your magic then I won’t need you anymore”

“Keep your hands where I can see them and don’t move an inch” John trained his gun on the Queen. “Sherlock do what you have to do”

“You weren’t smart enough to hide on your own after all” she sneered. “Is that thing meant to scare me?”

John shot the ground by her foot “No it’s meant to kill you actually”

Sherlock removed his hat and set it down in front of him before tipping items in. “Whisker from Chess, tear from the mock turtle, full tea set for luck, some blood from me” he cut the palm of his hand and let it drip in the hat.

“You would help this stranger over your friends?” the Queen wheedled “I solemnly swear I will not hurt them”

“Don’t listen to her Sherlock! She’s lying and you know it”

The Hatter shook his head then nodded. “And the missing ingredient-something from an up-worlder” he pulled some of John’s hair out and dropped it in the hat with the rest before placing both hands around it and giving it a spin.

The three of them watched in silence as it spun like a top, growing as it moved, forming a whirling vortex.

“Concentrate hard on your destination John! I have no idea if it will work…so good luck”

“I’m not leaving without you, she is bat-shit insane!” John insisted.

“You have to! Go now before it closes!”

Focused on Sherlock John no longer pointed the gun at the Queen, seizing her chance she pulled a knife from the folds of her dress. John, trained to see everything as a threat in hostile environments, saw the light catch off the blades edge. Grabbing the Hatter’s arm roughly he jumped into the hat pulling the Hatter with
him.

“No!” the Queen screamed throwing the knife as the portal began to close.

xxxx

John and the Hatter landed with a thud on concrete pavements, the hat not far behind. Taking in his surroundings John grinned.

“You did it Sherlock! You bloody did it! We’ll have to take a cab to Baker Street but we aren’t far”

“It’s more grey then I expected” the Hatter blinked.

“Welcome to London” John laughed.

“I didn’t think triumph would feel so…painful”

“What do you mean? What’s wrong?” John immediately started checking the Hatter for injuries. Pulling aside his long coat he found the dagger with a heart shaped hilt.
John hailed a cab to Baker Street, helping the Hatter into his spare room off the kitchen before grabbing his wallet and dashing out to pay the driver. On his return he scrubbed his hands and arms as best as he could and grabbed his well-stocked first aid kit.

"Coat and shirt off please then lie back" he instructed coolly, slipping on purple gloves and popping open the case.

"Stupid stupid stupid." Hatter declared "You shouldn’t have brought me with you. She’ll be so angry…if she does anything to Hare or Dormouse I’ll never forgive myself…”

“I’m sorry but I couldn’t leave you there with her. I just couldn’t. On reflection I suppose I should have killed her before I jumped in the hat, but hey; you bulked at the idea of me killing a polar bear, let alone a woman! John defended his decision.

“You’re lucky; it’s just caught in T9, if it had been higher or lower we might have been in some trouble…good thing all doctors are expected to know their stuff when it comes to the rib cage. Now this will hurt I’m afraid” John grasped the heart handle and gently pulled. The Hatter screamed and John frowned.

“It doesn’t seem to be coming out as easily as I would have expected. I’m going to make an incision either side and try and wiggle the blade out ok?”

The problem proved to be that the head of the blade was arrow shaped and not straight like a knife as John had been expecting. The result was that anyone pulling it out would catch on any muscle or organ in its way, ripping and tearing and causing much more damage than a simple puncture wound.

“Nasty bitch” John muttered. “Good thing she has a lousy aim. You’ll have a painful couple of weeks but you’ll mend. I’m going to give you something for the pain and something to help you sleep all right?”

xxxx

John looked around the apartment and sighed. Everything seemed surreal now that he was finally
home. If it wasn’t for the very large reminder in his spare room, he could easily imagine his time in wonderland as a strange dream. He was shaken out of his thoughts by timid footsteps and a nervous “Coo ee, is that you in there John?”

“Mrs Hudson! I thought you would be at bingo today”

“It was cancelled but never mind that! What are you doing here? Harry said that everyone thinks you went missing in action…presumed dead they said. Oh you haven’t run away have you?” one frail hand fretfully fluttered to her throat.

“No nothing like that. If I tell you, you have to promise to keep it to yourself and don’t dismiss me as being crazy!” John gave her the abridged version and then showed her the Hatter.

“Isn’t he lovely, but what’s wrong with his colour?” she whispered.

“He’s not a cute puppy I picked up-what do you mean his colour?”

“Well he’s all sort of…bright” she tried to explain “Not like one of those silly vampires; more like when Dorothy goes to Oz and it’s all Technicolor”

“You’re right, I just hadn’t noticed, guess I got used to the brightness of everything when I was there. It isn’t just him”

Mrs Hudson made tea, the English answer for all life’s problems, and John allowed himself a smile: it was good to be home even when the future was unclear.

“There was a girl at school once, swore a boy used to fly into her room at night” Mrs Hudson said thoughtfully as she nibbled a biscuit.

“What happened?” John asked.

“I think one or two of the teachers got concerned that some funny business had been going on, you know, so they told the parents. They collected her from school one day and that was the last I heard. Makes you wonder though if she was telling the truth after your wonderland story…”

They carried on this way for a while, just making small talk and catching up, then Mrs Hudson left to make a spot of dinner for the both of them and John had a long awaited hot shower and change of clothing. He was just slipping on his socks when he heard the Hatter calling.

“I woke up and you weren’t there” he accused.

“I was washing; I have technically been here the whole time” John chided as he bent to look at the bandage. “Take it easy, go back to sleep, just shout if you need me”

xxxx

The Hatter slept most of Tuesday and all Wednesday. When he woke John handed him a cup of tea, and smiling, told him to check his watch.

“July 25th. Is that right?”

“Yep. Time has no control over you here.”
“You mean I can have breakfast and luncheon?” The Hatter said excitedly.

“You can eat what you want when you want. What do you fancy for brekkie?”

“Eggs please!”

“Stay with Mrs Hudson while I do some shopping”

“Who?”

“She raised me and Harry; she’s more like my mum then my own mother was…in other words a very important person.”

“You want me to meet someone that special to you?” the Hatter asked wide-eyed.

“Yeah. Yeah I do” John considered. “No getting around it anyway as she’s my landlady” he grinned.

John was carrying the shopping back when he became aware of a long black car following him. Resolutely ignoring it he carried on until the door opened and a smooth voice told him to enter.

“I was watching the CCTV footage recently when what to my wondering eyes should appear? A miniature soldier and a hatter.” A tall well-dressed man informed a stoic John.

“I don’t have a clue what you are talking about” John shrugged.

“You are very loyal, that’s good.” He smiled.

“Sorry but who are you?”

“In another time and place you would have called me Your Majesty, but now I find Mr Holmes suffices.”

“Wait; you’re the King of Wonderland?!” John exclaimed.

“Is that what you call it?” he laughed. “I was yes, now I occupy a …minor position in your government and as such I am able to help you. Looks rather odd does it not that you were fighting a wretched foreign war one minute and the next you are back in London as though nothing had happened? I took the liberty of producing some documents; what actually happened was this, you were injured and declared unfit for active duty. An honourable discharge with a full pension. Sadly that isn’t saying much so you should seek employment Doctor. I get the feeling the Hatter has a shocking appetite”

“Why would you help me?” John kept his voice neutral despite his suspicion.

“Consider it an exchange for taking care of a former subject of mine. You will take good care of him won’t you John? By the by has he done anything magical yet? My wife had such high hopes regarding his inherited potential…goodness look at the time! We’ll continue this another time
Yes?"

John gathered his shopping in mute bewilderment as the car stopped outside Baker Street.

“One more thing; don’t let the Hatter know you’ve seen me. It will be easier for him to adjust to being here that way. Good day Doctor”
When hearts collide

Chapter Summary

The Hatter's first (and last?) kiss.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is the longest, too long I think but hey let me know what you think! :) Original character oh my! I see Nick as being younger than John but not by gross amount.

The lines mentioned are of course not from Carroll's twinkle twinkle song but are my own regarding the fact time can't control him here like it does in wonderland. Sing it in this tune and it should fit well http://youtu.be/HM-z63EQQ00

I was originally thinking of the Hatter being vegetarian because so many animals live there but I read this on the wiki alice page; I don't believe it as such myself because a) as far I recall no one tries to eat her even when she is small and b) its only cannibalism if its your own species so the oysters don't count lol. I do get the undertones of predation obsession though (so surely must be Chris Packham's favourite book)

Carina Garland notes how the world is “expressed via representations of food and appetite”, naming Alice’s frequent desire for consumption (of both food and words), her ‘Curious Appetites’. Often, the idea of eating coincides to make gruesome images. After the riddle “Why is a raven like a writing-desk?”, the Hatter claims that Alice might as well say, “I see what I eat…I eat what I see” and so the riddle’s solution, put forward by Boe Birns, could be that “A raven eats worms; a writing desk is worm-eaten”; this idea of food encapsulates idea of life feeding on life, for the worm is being eaten and then becomes the eater – a horrific image of mortality.

Nina Auerbach discusses how the novel revolves around eating and drinking which “motivates much of her [Alice's] behaviour”, for the story is essentially about things “entering and leaving her mouth”. The animals of Wonderland are of particular interest, for Alice's relation to them shifts constantly because, as Lovell-Smith states, Alice's changes in size continually reposition her in the food chain, serving as a way to make her acutely aware of the 'eat or be eaten' attitude that permeates Wonderland. Most of the creatures in Wonderland are carnivores, and, furthermore, they eat each other. An alarming example of cannibalism is found in the Tweedle Twins’ poem, ‘The Walrus and The Carpenter’, where the two characters befriend then eat the anthropomorphised oysters. As Boe Birns points out, “the eaten object is not simply ‘eaten alive’…but is endowed with affective and intellectual attributes – a ‘soul’ that resembles that of the creature eating it”. There are many examples in the Alice books of the fear of being eaten, and so the large hovering image of the Cheshire cat’s grin, becomes more of a threat: a constant reminder of death.

Think that's it, if there are any questions just ask.
A week had passed, in which the Hatter was healing well, John had made headway in mending relations with his sister, and the King had been proven right—the Hatter was eating him out of house and home.

John tossed and turned on an unusually hot night only to be pulled fully into wakefulness by his door opening and the lanky form of the Hatter crawling over his bed.

“What are you doing?” he groaned.

“I can’t sleep on my own anymore; I got used to being with you all the time…please can I stay? I’ll be at the bottom, you won’t notice I’m here”

It was too dark for John to see but he was willing to bet a fortune on the Hatter wearing his biggest puss in boots wide eyes look.

“Fine, but make sure you do stay at the bottom! It’s too hot for anything else” John didn’t want to admit that he was finding it weird sleeping apart also after having spent every day together back in wonderland.

John lay in the dark grinning as the Hatter’s snores soon filled the small room, and he was reminded of that poem: ‘Cats sleep anywhere, any table any chair’. It would appear it applied to Hatters as well he thought to himself.

When he woke it was to find the Hatter staring at him from the bottom of the bed. He blinked and rubbed his eyes, more from the strangeness of seeing Sherlock in pyjamas sans hat then for being stared at.

“I would have made tea but your electric is curious. I brought up a cup. It has everything except water in it…I suppose I could use the hot tap…” he stated ponderingly.

“No thanks, I’ll boil the kettle. You just have to flick a switch Sherlock; you don’t need to understand how it works.” John yawned as he padded downstairs.

“I’ll have to do another shop today and look for a job soon” John sighed as he handed over a mug. “Stop eating so bloody much!”

“I’m making up for lost time” he shrugged but he did have the nerve to look sheepish. “There’s that picture again, the same one that’s on your phone thing” the Hatter picked up the photo from the bedside dresser.

“Your sister looks like you.” He remarked “Is he your brother?”

“No it’s just me and Harry; that’s Nick, my ex-boyfriend”

“Boyfriend?” the Hatter frowned

“Um, we used to be lovebirds” John explained in a term he knew the Hatter understood. “Oh. I see”

“Problem?”
“No no problem. It isn’t encouraged at home as you can’t produce offspring, but it does happen” the Hatter handed the picture back and drank his tea.

“So what about you? What do you like?” John asked.

The Hatter mumbled something that sounded suspiciously like ‘I just like you’, before asking why they were no longer together.

“I don’t know, we just drifted apart I guess. He didn’t like me being in the Army and I didn’t like his partying…”

“I’m bored” the Hatter sighed flopping down next to John and looking at him expectantly. It was rather like having an over grown dog or child John noticed.

“Well you haven’t been out of the spare room much so explore the sitting room or Mrs Hudson’s place, and now I’ve got my licence sorted out again, if you’re very good I’ll introduce you to the wonders of television” John laid out the options.

A shower and some toast later, John left the Hatter to peruse his bookshelf while he nipped out to the shops.

xxxx

It was while carrying his bags home and wishing he could spare the cash to have taken the bus, that John became aware of the ringing telephone boxes. It seemed that every time he passed one it would begin to ring. At first he wasn’t even aware of it but by the time it had seeped into his consciousness he began to think that there was no way it could just be coincidence. He even crossed the street sooner that he normally would have to test it. Sure enough the phone rang and John picked up.

“Hello”

“Finally Doctor, I was beginning to think you would never pick up. So sorry I couldn’t give you a ride this time” the King of wonderland intoned.

“Can I help you?” John huffed in perplexed annoyance

“Just checking in. Do you know how the caged bird sings Doctor Watson? Let me tell you; it doesn’t. Are you planning on letting our bird out of the cage anytime soon? To clarify, as I do so hate misunderstandings; the Hatter is the bird and your humble abode is the cage”

“I never would have guessed” John dryly replied. “For your information Sherlock has been recovering after your wife threw a knife at him! And another thing; I don’t know what you said or what you bribed them with, but most people wouldn’t be able to walk out of wonderland and straight into the British government! Your world may be a bit eat- or- be- eaten but it isn’t London, Sherlock isn’t ready yet”

“Sherlock is it?” the King silkily enquired causing John to flush slightly despite the irrationality. “The name given by his late parents and seldom used…I do hope your intentions are honourable”

“What happened to his parents? And don’t try and fob me off, I can tell that you know”
The King sighed like an autumn breeze. “They were outsiders, I suppose they got there the same way you did. The Hatter’s mother was already with child when they came and I think they hoped to build a new life…well they would have to really, wonderland isn’t so easy to escape from”

“What went wrong then?” John knew the Queen was no doubt involved but what about the King? What role did he play?

“They set up home in the woods curing ailments and bringing rain when it was dry. They were nice, they were helpful, but people talked, said they had magic so they must be elves come to take their land back. Word got round to the Queen, fearful and jealous she…” The King paused.

“She what?”

“She waited until after the baby was born and then she had them killed. She planned on raising the Hatter herself so that any magic he had would be wielded for her”

“And you let her do that? You let her leave a baby orphaned?” The contempt was clear in John’s voice.

“I didn’t know when she planned to strike, she didn’t discuss things with me. I warned them they weren’t safe but she was due to give birth any day, it wasn’t practical to move her. I told them the best place to hide the baby, where one of the hares would come across him, I’ve kept the Queen from harming him all these years haven’t I?”

“I suppose you did. And then you did a Houdini and pissed off when he needed you most!” John slammed the phone down with a satisfying thud.

“Most of your books are medical! While I would like to learn more about humans I don’t mean their insides. This is the only story I could find” the Hatter waved Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* around. “What happened to you? Do you always look like that when you go shopping?” he looked up and caught sight of John’s face.

“Don’t ask. Help me put the stuff away would you?” They packed away the groceries in companionable silence until John couldn’t help but ask.

“Sherlock”

“Hmm?”

“Do you have pointy ears?”

“Do I look like a rabbit to you?”

“Not a rabbit no, several other animals but definitely not a rabbit”

The Hatter scowled “Well you happen to look like a hedgehog”

They both dissolved into giggles and John forgot about his unpleasant talk with the King.

“A day later Sherlock finished Austen and denouncing it ‘dull’ flounced off to annoy Mrs Hudson
leaving John circling job advertisements in the paper. An hour later he was back again.

“That didn’t take long”

“She was on her way out with Mrs Turner? She said I might like Dickens so I chose *Oliver Twist* because it sounded funny.”

“Trust me it’s not”

“-but the majority of her books are worse than yours; they all have pictures of long haired girls on beds…”

“Stop! I get the idea and I really didn’t want to know that” John interrupted quickly before fetching his laptop to email his sister.

“You were right; how can someone be called twist and not be funny?!?”

John burst out laughing, he just couldn’t help it. “Sometimes you are a rare and unparalleled joy”

“Really?” the Hatter asked with an uncertain smile.

“Really. And sometimes you are a pain in the arse but today is the former. Right then TV time I think since you’re so bored”

The Hatter leaned forward expectantly then quickly moved back as the TV flashed into life. Tentatively he touched the screen with a finger, and when nothing happened, his whole hand.

“What is it?”

“Do you mean technically speaking or in general?” John asked. “Basically it’s just a way to pass the time; it can amuse us or teach us, even scare us. The point is it is meant to entertain us”

“So tiny people are in boxes for your entertainment?”

“No” John laughed “they aren’t really there. If you really want to understand it then we’ll get some kids science books but for now just know that no small people are suffering and most of what you see isn’t real—there just stories”

By the time six o clock rolled round John realised that an alarming amount of children’s shows featured talking animals.

He changed over to some pointless quiz show with some pointless celebrity no one had ever heard of and the Hatter wondered off to his favourite place, the kitchen. When he returned he was singing the twinkle twinkle little bat song in a roundabout operatic fashion.

“Tiny timey why do you cry? I’m eating roast chicken at six o clock that’s why”

John shook in silent laughter “Nice lyrics but you are a truly awful singer”

“I want to go outside” the Hatter said as he gazed out of the window. “I want to see the sky, some grass would be nice too”

“Sure you feel up to it?”
“I’m fine! Come on John, show me around the home you love so much”

“Fine but you are not wearing that hat!”

xxx

The Hatter’s keen eyes seemed to take in everything but John had no idea if he found what he saw good. He stayed close to John’s side, visibly baulking whenever the traffic passed by or they had to go through a crowd of people. Being gay John had no problems taking Sherlock’s hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“Big issue ladies and gent’s” a man thrust the magazine at the Hatter who thanked him and carried on walking.

“Oi you tosser you have to pay for it!”

“He’s not from here all right. Here’s your money” John stepped in between the two.

“You’d better teach him the rules then” the homeless man advised.

“If he wasn’t giving it to me then he shouldn’t have held it out to me!” the Hatter pointed out.

“Let’s get some tea in a café yeah? People watch from a distance, and then when it’s darker we’ll wonder along the Thames. It’s pretty when it’s dark, you’ll like it” John thought this was the least problematic course of action but he hadn’t figured in all the variables that could occur.

“Why is there music coming out of that girls head?!?”

“Keep your voice down unless you want people to think you come from outer space! It’s just earphones from a music player” John hissed feeling like an embarrassed parent in the supermarket checkout line.

“Eurgh this tea is ghastly! I can’t drink it”

“Don’t then” John gulped down his to show that it was perfectly acceptable and therefore drinkable (even if truth be told it wasn’t that nice)

“John why does he have metal bits sticking out of his face?” the Hatter whispered into John’s ear making him shiver in a most delightful way.

“What?” the question had gotten lost somewhere.

“I said why does he have metal sticking out of his face”

“Oh. Erm some people think it looks attractive or something, I dunno”

On the way back to Baker Street, joined hands swinging loosely between them (and boy was John painfully aware of the height difference) John asked what he thought of London.

The Hatter was silent for a while gathering his thoughts. “I suppose it is too early for me to say” he settled on. “I think I’ll go to bed now if you don’t mind”

xxxx
The Hatter was quiet over the next week, mostly watching kids TV or looking out of the window. As he was gazing forlornly into a bowl of soup John took the bull by the horns.

“You don’t like it here do you?”

“It’s fine. It’s just very very different and I miss my friends, my family” the Hatter tried and failed to smile.

“I promise you there are nice things, it’s not all concrete and skyscrapers; we even have green spaces you know. Over the weekend you me and Mrs Hudson will go to the park ok?”

They fell into a routine: John was over qualified for a GP but managed to get work taking some classes at Bart’s as luckily he had friends there. The Hatter helped Mrs Hudson or watched cartoons during the day and in the evening he curled up on the sofa like a giant cat while John stroked his hair and watched rubbish films. The weekends were park time.

John was mulling over how to get the Hatter some kind of independence in order for them both to have a life, but mainly because John had alternative plans that weekend, when the Hatter kissed him. Just a fleeting press of his lips to John’s but an unmistakable kiss nonetheless.

“What was that for?”

“Well people seem to do it all the time on TV, and for everything. So, hello” this was followed by a small kiss. “Thank you” as was this. “I like you” and again.

“Finally” John exalted, knocking off Sherlock’s hat and deepening the kiss. The Hatter ended up on his back on the sofa while John smirked above him “You taste like tea” he said affectionately before diving down for more.

“John stop” the Hatter pushed at John’s shoulders “Let me up”

John scrambled back as though someone had thrown scalding water over him. “Shit! I’m so sorry Sherlock. I thought you…I’m sorry” he grabbed his wallet, phone and keys and practically ran out the door, ignoring the Hatter’s entreaties.

The sound of a key being fumbled in the lock and muffled laughter woke the Hatter from the light doze he had slipped into.

“You’ve been gone for ho-” the rest of the word disappeared as the Hatter saw that John had a human barnacle attached to him.

“Nick this is Sherlock my new flatmate I guess. He totally saved my life once!” they both gave a giggly cheer. “Sherlock this is Nick as in love bird Nick” more snorts of laughter and a sloppy kiss from Nick.

“Hi pet” Nick beamed “Thank you soo much for saving my Johnny kins!”

“Anyone would have done the same” the Hatter stammered.
“Isn’t he sweet?” Nick said “You are sweet, and tall. John I’ll be in the bedroom-don’t keep me waiting! Night Sherlock. That’s a funny name isn’t it?”

John stood around awkwardly for a few minutes before mumbling good night to the floor and then he climbed the stairs to his room and was gone
Hello my old friends

Chapter Notes

Not graphic but in case it's a trigger for some people; mention of date rape drug. The hair changing colour is of course Tim Burton's hatter; I liked that idea of a physical manifestation of madness...got to make it work while surrounded by hats comes from once upon a time. Just noticed it looks weird, on word starter where I write the xx's are reasonably central and here they are not, and my...short time space line break is a whole line, here it looks like half! what do I do?

Breakfast time saw the Hatter nodding off at the table while Nick was clearly still suffering the effects of being glued to John. As for John he looked mildly shocked by the scene.

“How do you get your hair to look like that?” Nick asked. “I’m a hair stylist and my curls are never that perfect! I’m dead jealous”

“I don’t know; I don’t do anything to it” the Hatter yawned. “I drink a lot of tea perhaps that helps?”

“No thanks; I’m a coffee man” Nick shuddered in mock horror.

“Bacon and eggs ok with everyone? Sherlock?” John asked as he set a steaming mug in front of Nick.

“Toasts is fine, and tea- just half a cup! And some oysters, oysters and jam…”

Nick chortled quietly “Oh my God he’s fallen asleep! Where did you meet him?!”

“Long story. Help me carry him to the sofa would you?”

xxxx

When Nick left for work John sat on the sofa and took advantage of the silence. Like a heat seeking missile the Hatter wriggled over until he was snuggled against John, who stroked his hair automatically and distantly noted that it was much softer than Nick’s. By the time the Hatter woke a couple of hours later John was starting to nod off himself; the effects of a late night that involved alcohol, emotion and sex, rearing their heads and reminding him he wasn’t that young anymore.

“Where’s Nick?” the Hatter stifled a yawn.

“Huh? Oh, he went to work”

“Will he be coming back?”
“Probably” John turned to face the Hatter who stared right back. “Are you ok with that?”

“Why wouldn’t I be? Besides it’s your home not mine” the Hatter shrugged and picked at a loose thread on the union jack blanket that covered John’s sofa.

“We’ll probably end up going out anyway knowing Nick”

“Fine” the Hatter mumbled.

“We could go back to his if you want?”

“Do as you wish John, it really makes no difference to me”

John fled to the sanctuary of Mrs Hudson’s, unable to escape the sense that he had done something very wrong back home. At least Mrs Hudson was pleased for him, practically planning his wedding as she was.

He only went home once he had picked up Nick from work, as a pit stop to get changed and grab a bite to eat.

The Hatter was where John had left him, the only difference being the fact he was thoughtfully spinning the Queen’s knife around while repeating ‘twinkle twinkle’ in an offhand fashion.

“We’re off out, Mrs Hudson said you could have dinner with her” John informed him as he snatched the knife away.

“You don’t have anything to read do you?” the Hatter asked Nick making John laugh.

“Nick isn’t the reading type” he smiled.

“I can read for you; palms, tea leaves and tarot cards” Nick proudly listed. “We’ve got time! I’ll do a reading for you”

John took a shower as Nick insisted on doing all three mediums for ‘the most accurate picture’. He hovered in the doorway as the results were revealed.

“Your love life is a bit vague I’m afraid; maybe rocky or non-existent? I can’t really tell. I do however see a lot of adventure and travel and some new additions to your family. There will be obstacles but you will come out of it all happier then you have ever been. I also see a position of power and authority in your future so go you!”

“Do you see anything about going home?”

“Isn’t here home for you?” Nick asked making John jump in.

“That hat is amazing!” Nick squealed. “Where did you get it?”

“Sherlock made it”

“No way?! I bet you anything you could sell them at the salon where I work. I’ll talk to the manager if you like, see if we could do a trial run”

“That would be fantastic right Sherlock? Thanks Nick” John nudged the Hatter until he murmured his thanks.
“Let’s get going, why don’t you come too Sherlock?”

“I don’t know…” John interjected.

“Oh come on; he’s like a better looking version of me! He’ll be fighting them off with a stick” Nick reasoned.

“I don’t really want to be fighting anything off with a stick” the Hatter muttered.

xxxx

At the ridiculously named Rainbow Cat John stayed close to the Hatter who looked around him with the widest eyes John had yet seen; together with his chewed on lip John thought it made him look adorably vulnerable and he found his heart gave a weird flutter which he resolutely ignored.

“Lets get drinks” Nick said heading towards the bar.

“Just water for Sherlock”

“Water?”

“He’s Amish” John improvised.

“Yeah but he’s left otherwise he wouldn’t be here”

“Water Nick” John sternly advised.

As they sipped their drinks Nick nibbled on John’s ear.

“Are you ok?” John asked the Hatter.

“It’s very loud and people are dressed…strangely and they all seem to be…” he blushed and waved his hand around, lost for words.

“Yeah it’s not really my scene either. Do you want to go home?”

The Hatter’s reply was cut off by John’s sudden moan as Nick sucked on his neck.

“Not now Nick” John half- heartedly groused.

“I was gutted when we broke up Johnny; now I want everyone to know you’re mine” Nick pouted until John kissed a smile back into place. Suddenly Sheryl Crow’s I shall believe filled the air, and declaring that he loved this song, Nick dragged John up to dance with him, leaving the Hatter alone at the bar.

“Yeah I know that feeling” A muscular man with a blonde ponytail watched the Hatter watch John until he was swallowed up by the crowd. “Let me get you a drink”

“I don’t think John would like that” the Hatter stated.

“John your father?” he scoffed.
“No. I don’t have a father”

“That’s sad. Have a drink on me” ponytail slid over a glass with a clink of sliding ice in dark liquid.

“Taste like liquid fire!” the Hatter coughed.

“It’ll put hairs on your chest” ponytail smiled “Drink up”

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One dance turned into another and John tried not to think about the Hatter as Nick slow danced them into a corner with sinfully wicked moves honed by years of experience at nightclubs.

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“I feel strange” the Hatter slurred. “Where’s John?”

“I think he left already”

“No he wouldn’t leave me…”

“Maybe he stepped outside” ponytail suggested as his hand crept up the Hatter’s thigh “Shall we go see? You look like you could use some air; you can’t hold your drink but I’ll take good care of you” he hoisted the Hatter up from the stool and turned around straight into John’s fist.

“Keep your filthy drink-spiking rapist bastard hands off of him!” John pounded the guys face until his nose crunched and blood spurted out. Panting he drew back his fist to land another blow while Nick and a bouncer pulled him off.

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Nick helped John get the Hatter up the Baker Street steps in guilty silence.

“I’m really sorry John” he said before taking the cab back to his place.

“It’s my fault, not yours” John admitted. “I should never have left him on his own, not without telling him not to take drinks from strangers! What kind of fucking idiot am I?!”

John agreed to let Nick know how Sherlock was recovering, and with plans made to have dinner at his the next day, Nick took his leave while John curled protectively around the Hatter as the sting of his cut knuckles reminded him of his blame.

xxxx

July soon turned into August and John resumed taking the Hatter to the park, sometimes with Mrs Hudson as before, and sometimes with Nick; whom the Hatter grudgingly had to admit was actually reasonably nice. Or at least he used to think so until the day Nick took him aside and politely enquired when he would be moving out as he himself wanted to live with John.

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John toed off his shoes after a long day teaching, or rather trying to teach, know-it-all kids. He really wasn’t suited to the job he reflected.
“Sherlock” he called out, expecting to find him watching TV. Getting no reply he checked every room including his own before going to Mrs Hudson.

“I haven’t seen him since yesterday dearie when I dropped in some books for him; *Black Beauty* and *The Borrowers*. He’s a bit…I don’t want to say simple, naïve I suppose, and he didn’t like Dickens…”

“Shut up!” John snapped “He’s missing and I don’t need to know what bloody book he might have taken with him!”

“Well I never…” Mrs Hudson’s incredulous spluttering was derailed by her phone ringing. Picking it up she told John it was for him.

“Our Hatter can be found at the police station. Ask for Gregory Lestrade.” The King informed without preamble.

“Call me back if any charges need to be dropped or monies paid”

“He’s only recently left an Amish community” John gave Lestrade his most charming smile.

“Please whatever he’s done, let him off this once? I swear he won’t be going off on his own again”

Lestrade sighed the sigh of the very long suffering and underappreciated. “Frankly I don’t need the hassle of the paperwork; as far as I’m concerned he wasn’t even here ok? You might want to let a doctor look at him though-I think he’s a bit-” he twirled his finger around in a loop by his temple.

“You’re free to go kid” Lestrade unlocked the cell door and held it open.

“What did he do then?” John asked.

Lestrade flipped through his notebook. “Let’s see where shall I start? Threw a stone at a kid-”

“He threw one at me first” the Hatter explained.

“-kicked a vending machine”

“I saw some other people do it! How was I to know that it doesn’t work that way?”

“-talked to a tree with a bird on his shoulder and a squirrel on his hat” Lestrade continued.

“I didn’t talk to the tree, I merely tried to” the Hatter grumbled “and I can’t help if the animals are friendly. Is that really against the law here?”

“It is if someone else considers it disturbing the peace I’m afraid. Now get out of here before I change my mind”

“What were you thinking going out on your own like that?” John demanded once they were back
at Baker Street. “Anything could have happened to you Sherlock!”

“I was trying to find employment if you must know!” the Hatter snarled.

“What? Why?”

“Because Nick wants to move in with you so I have to find somewhere to go—it isn’t like home; I can’t find an empty cave or build a home in the woods!”

“You listen to me not Nick, you don’t have to go anywhere”

“He’s right though; I can’t rely on your kindness forever. I hate it here! You shouldn’t have brought me back with you. I would rather die then be stuck here forever!”

xxxx

The Hatter stayed in his room for a week solid prompting John to take matters into his own hands. When he entered he couldn’t see the Hatter at first for the stacks of hats that filled the room of all shapes and sizes.

“I have to make it work I have to make it work” the Hatter chanted in a desperate tone. John closed the door quietly and contemplated calling the King.

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That night the Hatter took several hats into the kitchen and attempted to make a way home.

“Knife from the Queen, old bit of mushroom; a bit mouldy but still, a hair from my head and my blood…” he threw it all into a hat as he had to get John back. “Come on come on…do something!” The hat stayed still, just a hat with an odd collection of things sitting in the bottom of it.

“All right fine. Try this hat then…” and on through several hats, contents transferred from one to the other until his palms were scored with cuts that dripped bright droplets everywhere. The Hatter stood for a moment, unsure of what to do next when an idea struck him. He boiled the kettle and made a full cup of tea then tried to cut the cup in half lengthwise. When nothing happened except a few flakes of china coming away from a small chip he threw the cup at the wall with a howl.

“What the hell’s going on?” the noise brought John rushing into the kitchen.

“You can’t make half a cup of tea here…I can’t go home” the Hatter sobbed.

“Let me look at your hands” John said calmly leading him to the table and bandaging his hands.

“I can’t make it work John. There is no magic here”

xxxx

John had to leave Mrs Hudson with the Hatter before he went to work as he didn’t feel safe leaving him alone and locking the door just seemed cruel. He came back one day and found Sherlock building a house of cards, his hair a lurid shade of
orange.

“What happened to your hair?”

“The earth goes round the sun you know, or is it the other way around? Alice taught me but I can’t remember” if the Hatter heard John he gave no indication.

“Pigeon thinks anyone who eats eggs is a serpent … we all just eat things don’t we? If we can we will. Even you tried to devour me when I kissed you… do we eat the things we like? Is I like what I eat the same as I eat what I like? Does it even matter? Someone might eat poor Dormouse without me there…” the Hatter mused before blowing the house of cards down.

xxxx

“I can’t right now John, I’ve got the doctors for my hip” John had to pop into work to pick up some papers he had left behind and needed Mrs Hudson to watch the Hatter. As it was he had no choice but to take him along.

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“Molly I’m here to pick up those papers”

“Just give me a second” Molly called from the back room.

“Don’t touch anything” John told the Hatter.

“Sorry about that” Molly came out drying her hands “I would have brought them over, you didn’t have to come on your day off”

“Alice?” the Hatter stepped forward “It is you! I’d know my Alice anywhere!”

“Hatter?! Oh my God what are you doing here? What happened to your hair?!”

“Never mind about that; it will all be fine now that you’re here!” as he spoke his hair was already turning a rich dark brown.

“I don’t know about that… we have so much to talk about though! I never thought I would ever see you again. You still have the first hat you made”

“You mean the first one that turned out right” the Hatter smiled and turned to John. “This is Alice, my Alice”

“No this is Molly Hooper”

“My middle name is Alice; when I was ten my neighbours had a dog called Molly so I didn’t like using it” she explained. “Listen I finish work in a couple of hours, stay with me tonight and you can tell me everything” she gave the Hatter a tight hug and noticed with concern the look on John’s face.

“Why don’t you stay here while John and I go make tea?”

“You don’t mind if he stays with me do you?” Molly asked John at the vending machine.

“Why would I mind? I’ve only tried to look after him, I’ve only tried to keep him alive, you knew
him what? Couple of days when you were kids? And there’s no way he’ll drink tea from a vending machine!” he added.

“You’re jealous?” she guessed. “Oh John you can’t fall in love with him! The people there they aren’t like us, and the Hatter he’s child-like in a way… I know he’s your type but you can’t charm him into bed”

“What the hell? And how would you even know; did you go ‘Hey Mr wonderland fancy a shag’?” Molly blushed and John had a horrible thought “Not the King?!”

“Mycroft is nothing like the Hatter! He’s fitted in really well here, something the Hatter clearly hasn’t. He’s innocent John, leave him that way”

“Do you have any idea how lonely he was when I found him? It’s not innocence it’s ignorance- you would have him live his life alone?!”

xxxx

The Queen had indeed talked to Alice when she discovered that she was an up-worlder; fearing for her safety the King had taken her to a mirror in a secret room and smashing a corner he had given a broken piece to Alice and told her to hang onto it for the rest of her days. Once he had sent her through to her world he had broken the rest of the mirror bar one so that the Queen would never find it.

Years later tired of the Queen’s rages he had shrunk himself down, and praying that Alice still kept the other piece, walked through the mirror.

“I put the other piece above the mushroom itself in case I ever needed to go back; hidden in plain sight as it were” the King told John, Molly and the Hatter a few days later.

“Oh so that’s what that sparkle is” the Hatter said “I just thought Absalom had tried decorating” The King handed the mirror to the Hatter who put it up to his eye. They all watched in silence before suddenly in an excited voice the Hatter said he thought he could see the March Hare. Putting his mouth through the mirror let him talk to the Hare.

“Hare it’s me Hatter! I realise this must look ridiculous but trust me please. Why is it still snowing? And how is Dormouse? I’m coming back Hare; we are getting rid of the Queen once and for all- I’ve got the King here and Alice!”

“Yes I see. At least he is alive that’s the main thing, I’m so happy you are both well! Four pieces of mushroom please, shrinking side” It was like hearing a one sided telephone call.

“Alice you have the smallest hands” the Hatter handed her the mirror and she managed to thrust three fingers through. Eventually she got all the pieces across.

“It is time for me to do the right thing and assist the Hatter. Will you come with me my dear?” the King humbly requested.

“Of course I will” Molly earnestly ate her mushroom and departed with Mycroft leaving John alone with the Hatter who handed John a piece.

“I can’t come with you Sherlock. My life is here, my sister, Mrs Hudson…Nick”

“I didn’t think you would…say goodbye to Nick for me, he’s a good person really. Thank you John, for everything” The Hatter held out his hand then changed his mind and hugged John with
all his might before he too was gone as though he had never been.
John found an envelope addressed to him when he went to work. In it he found a cheque from the King with a note saying it was to be used to put his sister through a decent rehab centre, as thanks for taking care of the Hatter and for making him see the right path. There was also a note from Molly encouraging him to use the mirror anytime he wanted to get in touch.

Life went to back to some kind of normal for John, who’s only worry lay in adjusting to civilian life now that there was no Hatter to distract him. But still he resisted the urge to look into the mirror.

It was October, leaves falling fast in thick droves of glorious fire and sunset shades, when Molly and Mycroft returned back to London; tumbling out of the piece of mirror and onto John’s bedroom carpet.

“What are you two doing back? Have you killed the Queen?” John was so excited and curious he didn’t even care that he was in his underwear.

Molly peeped over the bed as she started to grow bigger.

“Yes we did! Well Mycroft did really; there was a battle and everything”

“Really dear it was a minor skirmish. And anyone could have dispatched the Queen; I merely felt that it was my duty to do so, to make up in some small way for my earlier cowardice” Mr Holmes explained coolly.

“So what are you doing back here? Why aren’t you enjoying the fruits of your labour?”

“I find your world rather suits me Doctor. I am respected here”

“And I never spent enough time to really get used to it there” Molly shrugged apologetically.

“Everything is fine now; no more winter, no more evil Queen and Mycroft made the Hatter king! Everyone is happy”

“And we can always go back should we wish it. Guard it with your life Doctor” Mycroft nodded towards the mirror before smiling broadly at Molly. “Time we were off I think”

John just had time to gather his wits enough to thank the former King for the money before they were away.

After that whenever he had had a particularly tough day and Nick wasn’t around, John would stare into the mirror. Not literally pressing his face against it, just observing from a distance. Many times he saw darkness as though the wonderland mirror was being carried around in a pocket, and sometimes he saw golden fur and a beady eye which he gathered must have been the Dormouse. Of late he had seen pale flashes of elegant fingers as though the Hatter was playing or fidgeting
with the mirror, and one time he had seen dark green alternating with white-feeling bold he had pressed an ear to the mirror and gathered from what he heard that the Hatter must have been in a garden.

“It doesn’t matter what colour they are, get rid of the roses! I want lots of trees and a maze, and honeysuckle for Dormouse. And perhaps a lake with a fountain…”

Pulling back John couldn’t contain his grin: he may not chop off any heads but the Hatter certainly seemed to be throwing his weight around and letting his bossy side have free rein.

One bored night when he was having trouble sleeping and there was nothing good on telly, John hit the jackpot. The Hatter must have propped the mirror up on a bedside table and John could see part of his torso as he undressed for bed, the t9 scar calling to John’s fingers. He waited until he figured the Hatter must have been asleep then turned his mirror landscape so he could just put both eyes in. He watched the Hatter sleep and wished that he could touch him one last time.

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One night after an enthusiastic session with Nick, (fuelled by glimpses of the Hatter’s pale skin and sleep tousled curls) Nick idly traced patterns on John’s chest in an uncharacteristic way.

“Johnny kins”

“Yeah?” John could barely get the word out; choked as he was by the memory of the time he had doodled on the Hatter’s soft warm skin.

“We’ve been back together for a while now and things are going well with me living here right?” Nick asked nervously.

“Sure” John replied warily.

“Well I was thinking about the next step…”

“You want to get married?!”

“Not right away no! I was thinking we could get engaged first…only if you want to”

“Ok. I mean it won’t really be any different to how it is now I suppose” John contemplated before getting the life squeezed out of him.

“We’ll have the best wedding ever!” Nick promised (or threatened as John saw it)

xxxx

Nick was driving John mad with his wedding planning, so much so that he actually used the mirror proactively.

“There is someone in the looking-glass Hatter” Dormouse yawned.

“Is it your reflection again?” the Hatter sighed coming over anyway. “John! You’re the last person I expected to see. Dormouse go and take some mushroom through”

Once John was through the other side he found the Hatter sitting on a throne, eager curiosity in every line of his posture but hesitation in his sharp eyes.
“Didn’t fancy the crown then” John joked.

“It didn’t go with my hat. I’ll make us some tea shall I?”

Over tea they discussed the changes that had taken place: John’s sister finally getting her act together thanks to Mycroft’s generous help, Mrs Hudson being her usual self—she missed the Hatter but knew it was for the best, and the changes the Hatter had made.

“It’s called Wonderland now thanks to you; there are sign posts and everything”

“You are enjoying being King then? If this room is anything to go by your palace is amazing!”

“I prefer my house but I have no right to complain. Would you like to look around? I’ve changed the gardens”

“I’d love to, thank you”

As the Hatter showed John around the many rooms he continued his narrative of the changes.

“Dormouse has been left weakened by the early winter but he’s slowly getting stronger. He lives with me now, don’t you Dormouse?”

“Yes Hatter. You don’t even put me in teapots anymore”

“Tut. That was harmless fun”

The Hatter looked thoughtful “You know everything Nick said has come true; I’m King and Hare has children so I do have additions to my family…does he have magic?”

“I suppose some people might call it that, but not really” John shook his head. “What else has been happening? Do people like you being King?”

“I made Hare and Dodo footmen, I encouraged the mock turtle to go back to the water because you have sea cows in your world, we all have to collect and share food for this winter to make things equal after before…Time will do anything I say now which is nice”

They had reached the lake with the fountain and the Hatter set Dormouse down on a sunny patch of the bench where he curled up and went to sleep.

“Chess was jealous and Absalom his usual indifferent self, the White Rabbit is still grieving for the Queen so he may be trouble…the old one’s remember my parents and say I’m an elf so they aren’t particularly happy. I hope in time I will be accepted if I’m fair and just and don’t chop off anyone’s head” he said with a wry smile.

“That’s a bonus yep. I’m sure that will win them round.” John nodded before becoming serious “Listen about that time when you kissed me, I’m really sorry I pushed you too far”

“I understand; Alice explained things to me. It isn’t that I didn’t like it; just that it was too much too fast. It was my first kiss after all, my last to I suppose. Why are you here John? Have you come to stay or are you visiting?”

“I thought it would be nice to pop in and say hi” John mumbled rubbing the back of his neck.
“Things are a bit mad at home…”

“You wanted a distraction” the Hatter interrupted. “I could stop time for you; it could be as it is now-sunny late afternoon in a beautiful garden—for as long as you want”

“That would be really nice actually but it wouldn’t stop time in London” John gently and reluctantly admitted. “Nick would be wondering where I am”

The Hatter sighed and looked out over his garden. “Do you see that maze? When I’m with you I feel like I’m trapped in that maze going round and round in circles…please give the mirror to Alice. You’re moving on with your life; please leave me to do the same”

xxxx

But John couldn’t make himself forget. It was as if the more unattainable the Hatter was the more his heart ached for him. He missed it all; the crazy laughter and nonsensical round-about conversations, the jaw-dropping magic of talking to trees, the constant tea drinking and of course wild curls and artistic hands.

xxxx

“Are you ready for this Dormouse?” the Hatter asked as he flexed his fingers and popped his knuckles.

The Dormouse poked his nose out of the Hatter’s coat pocket “You won’t learn about your magic here”

“You’re right…I owe it to my parents to try and find someone to teach me. But what if the Cheshire cat won’t relinquish the throne on my return?” he chewed his lip in agitation.

“Set the polar bears on him” Dormouse suggested sleepily.

“Excellent idea!” the Hatter perked up immediately and was about to open the first of the many doors-to-other-worlds that lined the rabbit hole hall when a voice piped up from his other pocket.

“Don’t even think about opening that door without me!”

“John?” the Hatter fished him out of his pocket and placed him on the ground. “How did you get here?”

“Found a bottle of ‘drink me’ in my army bag” John grinned.

“I thought I told you not to come here anymore?! My home is not your home!” the Hatter folded his arms and looked petulant.

“I dunno I reckon it has everything I want really; adventure, heart-pumping unexpected excitement with a touch of danger…and you”
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