"I 'ad a niece once," the March Hare began, only to be interrupted by the Mad Hatter.

"That should be 'I ad some niece once', my dear Hare," the Hatter said, pouring yet another cup of invisible tea.

"I'm certain I 'ad the right of it!" the Hare protested.

"How can you have 'a' niece, when niece is to noose as geese is to goose?" the Mad Hatter reasoned most logically. "Of course, why anyone needs more than one noose... of course, take a Cat; I suppose you'd need nine niece for those ilk," he continued, quite forgetting that the Hare was to tell a tale, but then the March Hare had quite forgotten as well.

"As if a noose could remain, for how can you knot a noose when no neck naturally nets the knot?" came the cheerful words from an equally cheerful, if disembodied, smile.

"Cheshire Cat! How good of you to join us today!" the March Hare declared, pouring an empty cup of tea and passing it along to the place where the smile hovered a good long moment before the striped body joined it in place.

"CAT?!" The panicked word erupted from what had been the somnolent Dormouse, who reacted to the word with a panic that was both unbecoming and perfectly in order in a mad, mad world such as their own. "Oh, wait...mustn't continue to see the Mouse. He's giving me bad habits..." the Dormouse said, slowly drifting back into sleep's warm embrace.
"More tea?" the Mad Hatter offered.

"Oh quite," the March Hare said, becoming quite unruffled as one ought when offered a tea cup, even if it was quite empty to all appearances.

"Oh a tea party!" came the delighted voice of their itinerant advenutreess. All four of the inhabitants of this demesnes turned to gaze upon her, deciding if they should be cross, for she was but a girl and intruding on their chosen club, or if they should celebrate more heartily, for now they had a whole girl to entertain all at once!

"Right right! A tea party!" the Mad Hatter declared, pouring an empty cup and placing it within the hands of the brightly spirited girl.

She raised it to her lips, aware it seemed so light, without looking, and sipped naught but air. She spluttered and coughed, having expected rich, dark liquid to course down her throat, and then stared at the offending tea cup. "But there's no tea!"

"Of course there's tea," the March Hare insisted. A hiccup from the Dormouse echoed the sentiment heartily before the March Hare could continue. "It's just not here."

"How can you have a tea party with no tea?" Alice demanded, looking to the Cheshire Cat in hopes of something approaching a sensible answer.

"Perhaps one must merely 'Bee' at the party to 'C' that truly 'T' is not the end all, 'B' all of existence? 'R' you quite certain you wish to find the answers of the tea, or will you merely 'C' what may 'B'?" the Cat mentioned, his peculiar pronunciations making Alice imagine her grammar school teacher over the buzzing of a bee hive. His body began to fade out, leaving the smile to linger for some few moments more before it vanished away as well.

"What a strange cat. I do hope Dinah never begins acting in such an odd fashion," Alice said, mostly to herself as the other party guests had clustered around the other end of the table for Tweedledee and Tweedledum had appeared to partake in the invisible tea as well. This did not set quite well with Alice, who wished to know just why the party had no tea whatsoever. She glanced about until she found the path from the glen, and made her way along it, ignoring the butterflies that made things a mess, and trying hard to not think of what might lay outside the path she was on, for she had learned Wonderland was not always fun and games.

The path was curving around, and slowly came to a bend where a carter was pulling a barrow, with it full to the brim and then some of canisters marked with simple crosses. Alice looked at the carter, then the canisters, and noted he looked rather flustered in all things.

"Pardon, sir, but I am Alice, and if you will be so kind as to introduce yourself, we need not be strangers, and I might speak with you," she offered as politely as she ought.

"I am the Carter, missus, so yes, indeed we are no longer strangers are we?" he answered her. "But could all my problems be solved with the simple whisk of a word and a dash of a name."

"And what troubles could you be having, good sir Carter, that you may not whisk them away with at least a thought, for a thought is as good as a deed, or so I am told," Alice told him in a kindly manner.

"See, missus, I've a delivery to make, only the delivery must be made before the correct time of day. Yet, where the delivery is to be, the time is never correct, and so I may not ever been done with this task," he explained to her, which, in the absurdist view of this land possibly made quite good sense, save that for Alice it made none whatsoever, for time marched on with no account of
any or all objections made to it.

Alice countered with what seemed a sensible question. "What time of day would the delivery need to be made at?"

"It must be before tea-time, or else I'd be intruding, you see?" the Carter told her clearly, making the issue less visible, because surely it couldn't always be tea-time. She looked at his wares again, and the little crosses seemed to make more sense, if she squinted at them, as markings of a 'T'. Which, she reasoned, was a short way to explain that he carried the very tea needed to make the tea party a legitimate one rather than the mockery she had just left.

Alice considered the conundrum at hand, for it was quite the truth that one did not just come to a tea-party on business, when it was meant to be a social event. The Cat's words came back to her once more, about end-all, be-all, which was a pointed little equation that tallied up to mean the rules which were. Sometimes, as had been shown to her throughout her stay here, rules were meant to be challenged, with new variables placed deftly into play for different results. She brightened, causing something of a glow in the area, and she looked upon the Carter, most enlightened.

"I have the perfect solution! While it is true you may not come to a tea-party on a bit of business, there is nothing at all that says you may not arrive as a guest to one! And in so doing, if the other guests acquire the makings of your business, then two birds have been netted, wouldn't you say?" she inquired of him, her ingenious plan unfolding before them.

"Well, missus, I am not certain I could object, but what if them see me as an uncultured lout, and have me tossed upon my ear?" he objected, politely, for it was serious business, this matter of being tossed upon one's ear.

Alice linked her arm in his, as a lady would a gentleman. "You shall be my escort, and then they will see you are no lout, the tea will get where it should be, and you may be acquitted of your full duty, good Carter."

The Carter brightened and accepted her guidance, while jiggling the barrow to get it up and still keep her hand on his arm. "Off to the tea party, missus!"

The girl felt her pride in her self grow, and somewhere above her head, another smile glowed among the branches at the resolution to two problems in one.

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