Alice in Wonderland

by dreamingoutloud

Summary

Alice reads the kids a very familiar book while Hatter listens in with amusement. Apparently, he's been telling the children a whole other version of Lewis Carroll's classic tale...

Notes

A transfer from my ff.net account, but it's one of my favorites. Syrupy sweet goodness that I somehow can't turn away from.

Also, I OBVIOUSLY can't take credit for the first line...

"Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood: and how she would gather about her other little children, and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago: and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days," Alice finished, shutting the book in her hand. As she always did when she finished that particular story, she couldn't help the smirk on her face. If the kids noticed, they didn't say anything. Charlie bounced a little, untucking himself which meant Alice was only going to have to tuck him in all over again. Not that she minded. Perched on the edge of his bed, Alice eased him back under the quilt, smiling softly at the way he beamed up at her.
From the chair beside them, Carolyn merely smiled contentedly, as she always did after the book. "That one's my favorite," she said with a sigh.

Alice raised her eyebrows, a look of amusement crossing her face. "Oh yeah?" she questioned, reaching out to tuck her daughter's dark hair behind her ear. "I thought your favorite was Cinderella." Though the kids probably had no idea, she was only teasing. Carolyn had never been one for stories with princesses who needed saving. As far as she was concerned, the princesses could save themselves, thank you very much. Or at least help.

"Cinderella?" Carolyn yelped, looking appalled at the very idea. "She just sat around waiting for other people to help her out. She could've gone and been a maid in someone else's house for all the grief her stepmother gave her!" Shaking her head and undoing Alice's work on her hair, she winced. "Snow White was even worse. She just laid there and waited for someone to come save her. Too much running and screaming and crying."

Younger than his sister by two years, Charlie's tiny face looked thoughtful. He had his dad's dark eyes and they grew thoughtful more often than not. In him, Alice could easily see what his father might've been like as a child if only he'd been allowed to just be a kid instead of fighting for his very survival. Bright and clever and always questioning. "That's not the story Daddy tells," he complained a breath later, looking confused.

Stifling a laugh, Alice got to her feet, bending to press a kiss on her son's head. "Oh, yeah?" she asked, glancing towards Charlie's bedroom door where Hatter was leaning in the doorway, looking a bit smug, she had to admit. "What's his version?"

"Oh, it's much more exciting!" Carolyn declared, getting to her feet herself. She reached down to hug her brother goodnight before turning to her parents. "Daddy tells this version with gambling and kidnapping and Alice in his version can definitely take care of herself. No princess saving for her!"

It took everything in her not to burst out laughing. She tried to look at Hatter scoldingly, but he simply gave her those innocent eyes. "Is that right?" she questioned, reaching for the brush on the dresser to smooth Carolyn's hair into a ponytail before bed. "And how is that anything like this story at all?"

Charlie looked pensive. "Well, there's an Alice," he declared, looking up at his mummy. "Hey, that's your name!" he declared, as if the thought had only just occurred to him. "Only she's Alice of Legend. And a Mad Hatter."

"That's just Hatter, thanks," Hatter himself piped up from the doorway. Oh, what those kids didn't know. "The mad one was just plain crazy, see. The other one only got his name because he liked to take care of other people." Charlie, being five, had no idea how those two thoughts correlated, so he only waved Hatter over for his goodnight hugs and kisses, then beckoned Alice after him.

He wasn't done, however. "And there was a March Hare, only they called him Mad March. And he had a cookie jar for a head. And there really were cards, only they were people dressed up like them. Well, no, they might have been real people in the book, too."

As always, Carolyn seemed to sense her brother's confusion and jumped in. "They probably were. And the Queen of Hearts was in both stories and she was super wicked. No wonder Alice hated her."

"Can't argue with that," Alice muttered under her breath. She turned the bedside light off, making sure Charlie's superhero nightlight was on before she ushered the rest of her small family out the door and shut it, leaving it open just a crack in case he called out.
Unable to help herself, Alice asked on the way to Carolyn's room, "So, did Daddy mention the handsome prince at all?" She felt brown eyes boring into the back of her head as they walked down the hallway, but she merely smiled and helped the little girl into bed.

Wrinkling her nose a bit, Carolyn nodded. "Yeah. Said he was a big old prat, though. He didn't sound so bad but Daddy isn't a fan. I think he likes the Hatter better."

That time, Alice had to giggle, especially when Hatter at least had the sense to blush pink. "Guessing this isn't one of those stories where our heroine marries the prince and they lived happily ever after, is it?"

"Well, she didn't in the book, either," Carolyn reasoned in that manner that made her wonder how she'd come from either her or Hatter. The child was far too bright. Her grandparents, maybe. "She did find her dad, though. She lost him right after. He died in her arms and everything." The sensitive girl's eyes watered up, and Alice looked sideways at Hatter with an accusing glare.

Pulling down the bedspread, she waited for her daughter to climb under the covers before she tucked her in and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I'm sure she knew he loved her before that happened."

"Just like your daddy loves you," Hatter added, adding a kiss of his own. His eyes closed blissfully as Carolyn's arms wrapped around his neck in a tight hug. "And he'd do anything for you."

She'd never been a crier, but it was everything Alice could do not to tear up at that moment. She'd had so many issues where her own dad was concerned, and she knew neither of Hatter's parents had ever actually been around. To see him so completely in love with the little girl they'd created together was just enough to push every maternal instinct she had. He'd been so afraid he wouldn't know how to be a father, but in reality he was better than most every parent at the kids' school. There was never a single moment when Alice wasn't proud to have him as the father of her children.

"Sleep well, doormouse," he murmured, using his special name for her. Carolyn lit up at the very idea of being compared to a character in her favorite book and nestled under the covers as Alice turned her light off.

But before they could slip out the door, Carolyn's head popped up. "Mummy?" she called, causing Alice to pause just before she reached the hallway. "Do you think Alice lived happily ever after? Like all of those princesses?"

The barest hint of a smile crossed her face. "In the book or in Daddy's story?"

"In Daddy's story. When she doesn't go off and marry the prince at the end, even though he asked her to. Do you think?"

Good question. She looked across the hall, where Hatter was leaning against the wall, arms crossed in front of him. The smile on his face was impossible to miss. He was, clearly, waiting for her answer. "I think Alice was the happiest woman in the entire world. She didn't need a prince to save her. I bet she found an incredibly handsome man, just like Hatter, who loved her but let her fight for herself, too."

The answer seemed to appease Carolyn, who settled back down and closed her eyes. Alice shut her door behind her, too, and looked up at Hatter with a look that was meant to be scolding but looked more amused than anything. "I can't believe you told them that," she said, trying not to
laugh. "They'll look like fools if they tell that story in school while the rest of the kids are talking about a story with a Cheshire Cat and a proper Mad Hatter."

Hatter rolled his eyes before turning and leading the way into the bedroom. "Just wanted to be sure they knew that wasn't the only tale of Alice in Wonderland. Besides, mine's more exciting."

Alice attempted to huff but couldn't. Not when she was being pulled into a cuddle. There was only a brief moment when she fought it before she finally found herself nuzzling into the familiar planes of Hatter's chest. "They're still going to look silly. And the last thing I want is to be known around town as Alice of Legend." A breathy giggle escaped and matched the rhythm of the rumble of laughter in his chest.

Finally, he pulled away, beginning the nightly process of getting ready for bed. For a moment, she merely watched him, amazed at the domesticity of it all. She couldn't help herself. When he pulled off his shirt, she stepped forward, running a finger over his muscles. His eyes lit up a bit and that always mischievous smile crossed his face.

"But what's bothering me is, it's a children's book and you've turned it into some adult gathering!" she blurted, then grinned at the exasperation he showed in his expression and posture.

The annoyance fled quickly, however, and he scooped her into his arms and tossed her onto the bed. She muffled her squeal, desperate to not wake the kids, but her grin was wide as he jumped into the bed at her side. "Now, tell me, Alice of Legend. Does this look like a kids' story to you?"

It was impossible not to slide her arms around his neck and pull him down towards her. "And they lived happily ever after?"

As his lips met hers, he simply murmured, "Indeed they did."

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