**Working without a Net**

by karrenia_rune

Summary

The White Queen saves the day or the night; or whichever comes first.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

Disclaimer: Alice in Wonderland and all of the characters who appear here are the original creations of Lewis Carroll and are only borrowed for the purposes of the story.

"Working without a Net" by Karen

Things had a distressing habit of going missing. Most often, these instances occurred when no one was paying attention, or, if they had been paying attention these instances occurred and were then quickly forgotten in the crush of other events.

A plate of tarts, for instance, or the grin on a Cheshire Cat. 'Well', reflected the White Knight, 'disappearing cats and plates of freshly baked tarts were minor events, and the Cat, well, he just indulged in his mercurial feline propensity for disappearing.'

He knew as well as anyone who dwelt in their corner of the great chessboard landscape of Wonderland that every creature had the need for both solitude and community as it suited their various personalities; someone really should have been paying the poor dear better mind.

Lily, the daughter of the White Queen had not been seen or heard from in days, although in the course of his solitary ramblings days did have a distressing habit of slipping by without his being aware of it.
He had already gone to see the March Hatter and the March Hare, engaged as always in their endless tea party and made his inquiries regarding for the whereabouts or happenstances of the missing Lily,

With no luck there, he had then gone to see the Caterpillar, who barely even remembered that the White Queen had a daughter.

The smoke from the Caterpillar's hookah wafting on the evening breeze and directly to where he stood with one hand wrapped around the bridle of his horse. The aromatic and ever so slightly acrid aroma of the smoke made his eyes water and his mustaches droop down even further than they usually did; the White Knight decided he would go directly to the source.

If anyone could help find Lily it would most likely be her mother. 'In fact,' he reflected further once more mounted and clip-clopping down the road. "she might even be out looking for Lily.'

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At that very same moment, her hands in constant motion over her knitting needles, the skirts of her dress fluttering around her in the wind of her passage over the landscape of alternating black-white squares the White Queen was indeed searching for the missing Lily.

Upon discovery that Lily was missing at first she had not been overly worried because Lily often disappeared for stretches at a time, usually playing hide and seek with her nannies and guardians, or climbing trees, or finding somewhere out of the way to day-dream. Most often Lily would afterward return hours later, dress torn, face dirty and hands and feet bare, but perfectly unharmed.

The White Queen knew that she herself had a propensity to be a bit scatter-brained and it was entirely within the realm of possibility that her own inattention this time had been the root cause of her daughter's disappearance, but as she had told another little girl who had been lost in their world, "You can have jam today, you can have jam tomorrow, but you can't have jam yesterday."

In other words, there was very little sense in crying over the milk which was spilled but to let the cat lick it up and move on.

So that was exactly what she would do, move on and find her daughter. In the back of her mind, she thought, "I do hope the poor dear is all right. Although I do not believe that anything would harm her, she is still far too young to be out roaming by her lonesome.'

No sooner than that thought crossed her quicksilver mind the White Queen caught a glimpse of something rather large and ungainly rapidly approaching her position along the road.

The ungainly figure was, in fact, the White Knight, and being both unable to reduce the speed of his horse or correct his course immediately slammed into the White Queen, knocking them both down into the dust of the road.

"You dunderhead!" exclaimed the White Queen as she rose to her feet with all the dignity that she could manage under the circumstances. "I was on a very important mission!"

"My Queen," the White Knight muttered from his prone position on the ground looking like nothing much more than an over-turned turtle in his ill-fitting armor. Finally with a groan and a few false starts he managed to stand upright once more. "I am sorry, but I do have urgent business with you."

"Indeed," the White Queen remarked, "well, then, please make it quick as I have little time to spare."
He sighed and figured it would be best to say it quickly, rather than beat around the proverbial bush, and said: "Lilly is missing."

"I knew that already," she replied.

"Then I propose that we look for her together," he said.

"Nonsense, I travel faster alone."

"As you wish, but I still think..." he trailed off, unable to come up with a better solution, knowing as he did that they were very few folks who could travel faster than the Red and White Queens.

"Then it is settled," remarked the White Queen, and with that, she nodded to the Knight and once more resumed her search.

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At that moment the object of their search lay in a field of poppies flat on her back, eyes closed and deep in the midst of a dream of flying among the high-flying geese, completely oblivious to anything else. Lily's blond hair and white dress showing up to the dome of the wide blue sky as patches of paler color among all of the more vivid oranges, reds, yellows, and greens.

In her dream she imagined flying among the geese, but she did not have two arms and legs, instead, she had feathers, and a beak, and flew in formation with all of the others, and dove and swooped in and out among the feathery clouds. It was a pleasant dream and one she was very much reluctant to wake up from. Time passed as morning became afternoon and afternoon became evening, Lily did not even notice.

*** The White Queen glanced up at the sky, growing gradually darker as evening came on. She frowned and wondered. "I do hope that I am not going to this searching business all wrong. I have already searched all of the likely places, all of Lily's known haunts. I have questioned anyone she would have been likely to encounter and nothing."

Just then she topped a rise and below lay a field of poppies stretching out to the horizon for as far as the eye could see. The White Queen had been to almost everywhere in Wonderland that she could reasonably expect to reach in her diagonal travels and she had seen much and learned much about the world.

However, as her memory tended to not work in an ordinary manner; she would still have remembered a field such as this. The fact that she did not was a concern as it was out of place and it did not belong here.

In fact as she descended the low rise, knowing somewhere at her twitching nerve endings that she had, at last, come to the end of her search: Lily was here, somewhere.

There was something in the air, some palpable yet indivisible presence in the air, like a heat shimmer at the height of high summer that sapped her strength, her will and even her resolve.

She shrugged and squaring her shoulders resolved to ignore it and find Lily. Plunging forward through the waving flowers the White Queen almost tripped over the prone figure of Lily flat on her back in the very center of the field, fast asleep.
The White Queen stopped and bent over to touch her forehead. Damp from morning dew but still cool to the touch. She felt for the pulse of life in the tiny wrist of her daughter and heaved a great sigh of relief, reassured on the count that Lily was still very much alive. But frowned a few seconds later, when Lily did not respond to her repeated attempts to wake her up.

Looking around as if something was out there that would pounce if she made a false move the White Queen reached into the satchel that she wore around her waist and pulled out a leather packet that contained her smelling-salts. It was not untoward that someone caught within a dream would be then unable or unwilling to wake up from it; so she had to be prepared to deal with that situation should she be confronted with it.

She uncorked the vial of and waved the acrid stuff underneath the delicate nostrils of her daughter, hoping against hope that nothing direr was afoot than simply her daughter lost in a dream.

There was no response for a few heart-stopping seconds before her daughter's back arched and with her eyes still tightly shut, she began coughing, before her eyes fluttered open.

It was at least three or four minutes more before she could sit up, look around and recognize her mother. "Where am I?"

"Here, obviously," replied the White Queen. "And soon we will be gone from here. Do you feel up to traveling?"

"Yes, but Mother, I've had the most wonderful and strange dream."

"No doubt, but I would rather be home as soon as possible."

Lily nodded, seeing the sense in that for dreams were one thing, and the dream that she had experienced had indeed been strange, but she was a sensible girl and wanted to go home now.

"Let us go, then."

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End Notes

Also written and posted for Minerva McTabby's request during Yuletide 2008

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