

Alice In The City

Chapter 1: Down the Rabbit Hole

The meadow was quiet that afternoon. Only the soft hum of the breeze and the whisper of turning pages disturbed the air. Under the great oak tree, Alice sat cross-legged, her summer dress spread neatly around her. A book rested on her lap—though, truth be told, she wasn't reading much of it. The words blurred together, heavy and dull, like dry leaves in the sun.



She sighed and tilted her head back, watching clouds drift lazily across the blue sky.

“If only something interesting would happen,” she murmured, twirling a blade of grass between her fingers.

And as if the world had been waiting for that very thought, a white rabbit dashed across the field before her.

It wasn't the rabbit itself that was strange—it was the way it looked. The creature wore a crisp suit and polished shoes that kicked up bits of dirt as it hurried along. In one paw it held a sleek leather briefcase, and in the other, a gleaming pocket watch that it checked with a growing alarm.

“Oh dear! Oh dear! I'm going to be late!” it said, in a voice both clipped and frantic—like someone late for an impossibly important meeting.

Alice blinked, certain she had imagined it. But no—the rabbit was already bounding toward a hedge, its tie fluttering behind it and the briefcase swinging wildly with each stride.

“Wait!” she cried, leaping to her feet. Her book fell forgotten to

the grass as she ran after it. "Please, Mr. Rabbit!"

The rabbit darted ahead, its white fur flashing between the green. Alice's curiosity burned brighter with each step. Through tall grass, over roots and stones—until suddenly, the rabbit vanished.



Alice skidded to a stop. There, beneath an old tree, was a dark hole in the ground.

It didn't look particularly special—just a hole, small enough for a rabbit, perhaps, but not for a girl her size. Still, curiosity prickled at her. She knelt, peering into the shadowed depths.

And then she saw it—just the tip of a white tail and the glint of a briefcase disappearing into the darkness.

“Oh no, you don't,” she whispered, determination sparking in her chest. Without another thought, she leaned closer.

Her fingers slipped.

And Alice fell.

At first, she gasped and reached for something—anything—to stop herself. But there was nothing to hold onto. The air rushed past her ears. The hole seemed endless, a tunnel without walls or floor, spiraling and stretching farther than she could see.

It wasn't like falling from a height. It was slower, dreamlike—her hair floated around her face as though she were drifting through water.

Then came the voices.

Soft at first. Whispering. Echoing.

Her mother's voice: "Alice, dear, don't wander too far."

Her sister's laughter: "You'll never finish your book if you keep daydreaming."

Her own voice: "I wish something interesting would happen."

The echoes wrapped around her like ribbons of memory. They tangled and overlapped until she could no longer tell which were real and which were imagined.

"Am I dreaming?" she whispered. Her voice seemed to float beside her, drifting away before her own ears could catch it.

The longer she fell, the more confused she became. The hole wasn't dark anymore—it shimmered faintly, like moonlight reflected in deep water. Shelves appeared on the walls, lined with teacups and books and clocks that ticked backward. A painting of a smiling cat winked as she drifted by.

She blinked. "Was that... there before?"

Her heartbeat slowed. She wasn't frightened anymore—just bewildered. It was as if she'd stepped out of her own world and into someone else's dream.

Down, down, down she went.

Time didn't seem to matter anymore. Maybe she had been falling for a minute. Maybe for an hour. She couldn't tell.

Just as she began to wonder if she would ever reach the bottom, she felt something shift in the air—an unseen tug, a strange stillness.

Then, softly, the ground rose up to meet her.

And everything went white.

Chapter 2: A New Kind of Wonderland

When the light faded, Alice found herself lying on something hard and cold. Not grass. Not dirt. Something smoother—like stone, but shinier. She groaned softly and sat up, blinking at the brightness around her.

She wasn't in a meadow anymore. She wasn't even in the countryside.

She was in the middle of a city.

Tall buildings towered above her like silver giants, their glass sides gleaming in the sunlight. Strange metal



carriages—without horses!—zoomed by on black roads, honking and growling as they passed. People hurried past her, dressed in bright clothes, holding glowing rectangles in their hands.

Alice rubbed her eyes. “Oh my... am I still falling?” she whispered.

Then she looked down—and realized she had climbed out of a manhole. A round, heavy lid lay beside her, just wide enough for her to fit through. She must have come up from below!

“Well,” she said, brushing the dust off her dress, “this certainly isn’t the garden I expected.”

But before she could wonder any longer, a flash of white caught her eye.

The rabbit!

There he was—his gray suit neat as ever, his tie perfectly straight, his briefcase tucked under one arm as he trotted briskly down the sidewalk.

“Oh! Wait for me!” Alice called, excitement bubbling in her chest. She ran after him, dodging between people who didn’t even seem to notice her. Everyone was staring down at their glowing rectangles, their faces blank and far away.

“How odd,” Alice murmured, slowing her steps. “They’re all

together, yet no one's talking." She waved at a woman passing by, but the woman didn't look up. She was too busy tapping at the bright screen in her hand.

Alice frowned in confusion but couldn't help her curiosity. She leaned closer to peek at one of the glowing rectangles as a man stopped near her. The screen was filled with pictures, letters, and moving colors.

"Is that... a magic window?" she wondered aloud. "Or a book that glows?"

No one answered. The man just walked away.

Still, there was too much to see to stay puzzled for long. The city buzzed with life—machines hummed, lights blinked, and big screens high above the street showed pictures that moved like tiny plays. Alice's wide blue eyes darted everywhere, soaking in the colors and sounds.

Then a sweet, buttery smell drifted toward her.

Her nose twitched.

To her right stood a small bakery with a glass window full of pastries. Golden croissants, cupcakes with swirls of frosting, and little tarts topped with shining fruit sat neatly in rows.

“Oh, how lovely!” Alice gasped, pressing her hands and nose to the glass. “They look like something out of a dream!”

Her stomach gave a soft growl, reminding her she hadn’t eaten since—well, since before the fall. She smiled and whispered to herself, “Maybe once I find that rabbit, I’ll come back for a treat.”

With that, she turned and hurried on.

The rabbit was just ahead now, weaving between the crowd, checking his watch every few steps. “I’m late, I’m late!” he muttered, hurrying through a revolving door into a tall, shiny building.

Alice ran faster, her heart racing. She reached the door just as it stopped spinning and slipped inside.

The air inside was cool and smelled faintly of lemon polish. The floor gleamed, and the people around her were dressed neatly, walking briskly with papers and coffee cups in hand.

And there, near the back of the lobby, stood the white rabbit—pressing a button beside a pair of silver doors.

The doors slid open with a cheerful ding!

Alice froze, her mouth hanging open as she saw the rabbit step into what looked like a tiny moving room.

“Oh! Wait for me!” she cried, rushing forward.

But before she could reach him, the doors began to close.

The rabbit looked up, his nose twitching. For a split second, his bright eyes met hers.

“Not again,” he sighed, and the doors slid shut with a soft ding!

Alice skidded to a stop, panting, staring at her reflection in the shiny metal.

“Well,” she said, straightening her dress with a determined grin, “if he can go up, then so can I.”

And with that, she pressed the same glowing button the rabbit had touched.

The elevator chimed again.

And the adventure continued.

Chapter 3: The Elevator Ride

Alice stood before the shiny metal doors when the soft click of heels caught her attention. She turned—and saw three people walking toward the elevator.

They were unlike anyone she had ever seen.

The first was a tall woman in a crisp white blazer and pencil skirt that shimmered faintly under the lights. Her hair was tied into a neat twist, and a silver badge with her name gleamed on her lapel. She held a tablet in one hand, tapping it rapidly as she spoke.

Beside her was a man in a navy-blue suit so sharp it could have been cut from the night sky. His shoes shone like mirrors, and his wristwatch ticked with quiet importance. He carried a cup of coffee that smelled rich and bitter.

The third was younger—a girl, perhaps not much older than

Alice's sister—with a soft pink blouse, gold earrings that sparkled like little suns, and a laptop tucked under her arm. She laughed at something the man said, her voice clear and practiced.

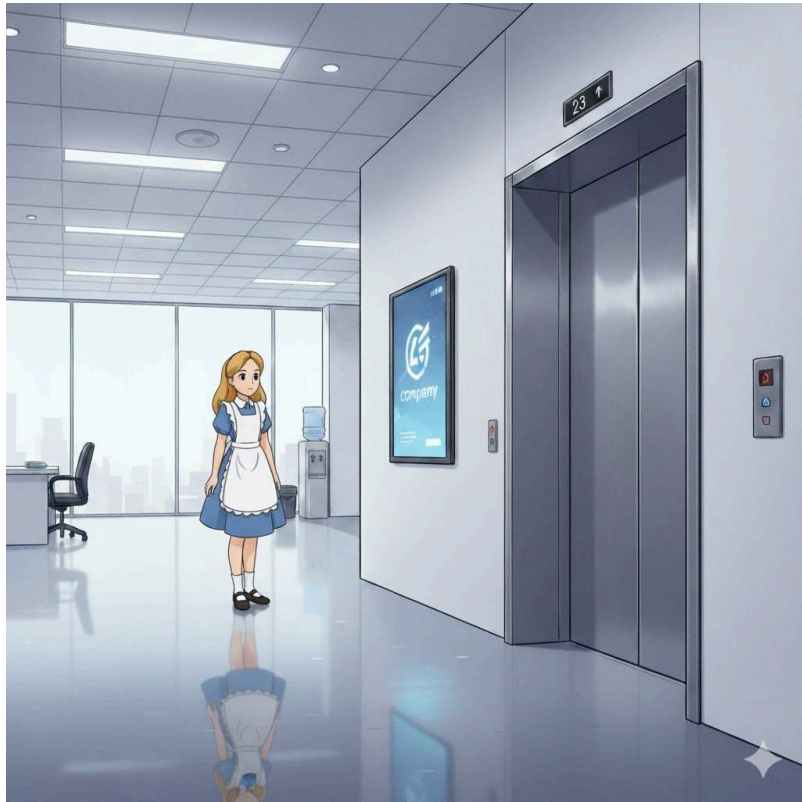
Alice's eyes widened. Their clothes looked so polished, so modern, so different from her own blue garden dress. It was her nicest outfit, sewn with care and tied with a neat ribbon—but compared to them, she felt like a picture from an old storybook that had come to life in the wrong century.

The three strangers stopped near the elevator, still deep in conversation.

"I've got to finish the report by five, or the manager's going to lose it," said the man with the coffee, rubbing his forehead.

"I know," said the woman in white. "Everything's due this week. I can't wait until Friday."

"Let's grab lunch out tomorrow," said the girl in pink. "Maybe pasta again?"



“Ugh, yes—and coffee after work,” the woman sighed. “It’s the only thing keeping me sane.”

Alice listened quietly, trying to understand. Reports? Deadlines? Coffee after work? The words were strange, yet somehow they sounded serious—like the kind of talk grown-ups used when the world was spinning too fast.

She was still staring, trying to make sense of it all, when the woman suddenly turned and noticed her.

Their eyes met.

Alice froze. The group blinked back at her, puzzled, taking in her ribboned dress and old-fashioned shoes. She saw them exchange quick glances, whispering softly to one another.

“Oh dear,” Alice muttered, her cheeks turning pink. She smoothed her skirt and tried to fix her hair, tucking a few curls behind her ear. “It’s only a dress,” she whispered to herself, though she suddenly wished she had a hat—or something less... storybook.

The elevator doors opened with a soft *ding!* and the three stepped inside. Alice hesitated for a moment, then hurried after them before the doors could close again.

Inside, it was bright and narrow, lined with shining mirrors. Alice could see her reflection from every angle—her pale blue dress, her scuffed shoes, her wide eyes. The three people stood in front, talking about meetings and presentations and something called “deadlines,” their voices bouncing off the walls like busy little birds.

Alice didn’t understand a word. She stood quietly at the back, hands clasped in front of her, trying not to get in anyone’s way.

The elevator hummed softly as it began to rise. The lights above flickered gently, and for a moment, the movement felt almost like floating again.

She watched the numbers above the doors—3... 7... 12...—but she had no idea where she was going. The group kept chatting, their laughter bright and practiced, their words tangled with things she couldn't quite follow.

Alice felt both shy and curious all at once. She wanted to ask what a “meeting” was, or why they worked all week if it made them so tired—but her courage stayed tucked somewhere beneath her nervous smile.

Then, with another *ding!*, the elevator slowed.

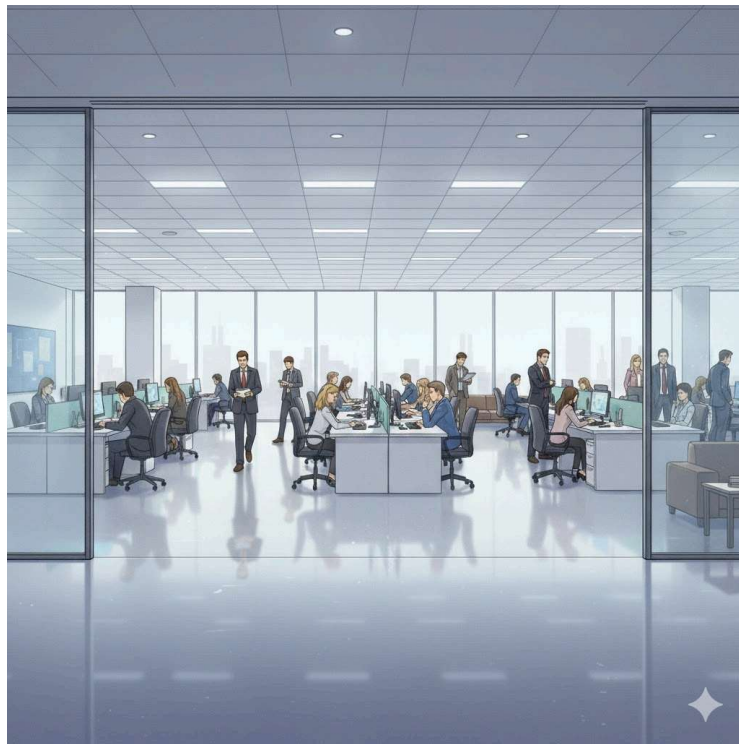
The doors slid open.

The group stepped out, still talking about lunch and coffee and deadlines. Alice followed a few steps behind them—and froze. Her mouth fell open. Her eyes grew wide.

Chapter 4: The Office of Whirring Keys and Flickering Lights

Alice stepped out of the elevator and into the largest room she had ever seen.

Rows upon rows of desks stretched far into the distance—neat, identical, and covered with glowing screens that buzzed softly. People sat in front of them, typing quickly, their fingers dancing across black boards with clicking sounds like a hundred tiny beetles tapping on glass. The air hummed with low chatter, the faint whir of machines, and the steady rhythm of unseen clocks.



It was like a strange orchestra—no music, just motion.

The people who had entered the elevator with Alice walked briskly across the room and each sat at their own desk. Without a word, they began typing, scrolling, clicking—their eyes locked on their glowing screens.

Alice stood still, clutching her skirt. Her blue ribbon swayed gently as she turned in a slow circle, taking it all in.

She had never seen anything like it.

The room was bright, but not from sunlight—long lights hung from the ceiling, buzzing faintly. The air smelled faintly of coffee and something sharp, like metal and paper. Desks lined the space in perfect rows, each with a small chair, a computer, and a mug half-filled with a cold brown drink.

And everyone was so busy.

Some talked quietly into little black boxes that sat by their ears. Others scribbled notes on paper or shuffled through stacks of printed sheets. A few just stared at their screens, eyes glassy and tired.

Alice felt a shiver of wonder and confusion.

“Is this... a kind of school?” she whispered. “Or maybe a library?”

But no one answered. No one even looked up.

The people all wore different clothes—some in dark suits, some in colorful shirts, others in dresses or neat jackets. Yet somehow, they all looked the same. Their faces were serious, their eyes fixed, their shoulders slightly hunched as though they carried invisible weights.

Alice took a careful step forward, then another. Her shoes clicked softly on the shiny floor.

She wanted to ask—Where am I? What is this place?—but she couldn’t seem to catch anyone’s eye.

She passed a woman with silver glasses and a navy suit. The woman’s fingers moved so fast across the keyboard that they blurred. Alice opened her mouth to speak, but the woman didn’t even blink.

Next, she stopped by a man who was staring at his computer with furrowed brows. “Excuse me, sir,” Alice said politely, “could you please tell me where—”

But he just sighed, rubbed his temples, and muttered, “Deadline’s tomorrow,” without noticing her at all.

Alice stepped back, startled.

It was as if she were invisible.

She wandered between the rows, her head turning from one glowing screen to another. Numbers, charts, and letters filled the displays—shapes and words she didn’t understand. Every now and then, a sound would chime from somewhere—a cheerful little *ding!*—and a few people would start typing even faster.

Her heart fluttered with a mix of awe and unease. Everything seemed so serious, so urgent.

Alice wrapped her arms around herself, trying to stay calm. “I don’t think this is Wonderland,” she said softly. “It feels too busy for me to wonder.”

But even as she said it, something deep inside her whispered that it was—a different kind of Wonderland, one made not of magic and tea parties, but of glowing machines and endless work.

Still, she couldn't help but feel small among all these tall desks and quiet, serious faces. Everyone was focused on their own world inside their little glowing screens, and no one saw the curious girl in the blue dress drifting quietly among them.

She took a deep breath and looked around again. Somewhere in this endless sea of busy people, there had to be a clue—something, someone, that could help her understand.

And perhaps, just perhaps, that someone was still the Rabbit.

Her eyes darted across the room, searching for the familiar flash of white fur, the neat gray suit, the little briefcase.

But all she could see were more people typing.

Still, she straightened her back, smoothed her dress again, and whispered, "All right, Alice. Be brave. If no one will look at you, you'll just have to look for him yourself."

And with that, she began to walk deeper into the endless maze of desks, her shoes clicking softly, her heart thumping fast, as the world of glowing screens whispered and whirred around her.

Chapter 5: The Girl in White and Black

Alice wandered through the endless rows of desks, her eyes darting from one glowing screen to another. Everywhere she looked, people were typing, clicking, and muttering under their breath—so focused that it felt as though they'd forgotten the world existed at all.

She was just beginning to feel terribly lost when a voice called out behind her.

“There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you!”

Alice turned, startled.

A girl was walking briskly toward her, holding a clipboard and smiling brightly. She looked to be around the same age as Alice's sister, but dressed in the same curious, polished way as everyone else—black skirt, white blouse, neat shoes that clicked

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against the floor with every step. A shiny badge hung from her collar, though the letters on it were too small and strange for Alice to read.

The girl's smile widened. "I'm so glad you could make it! We didn't think you'd arrive so soon."

Alice blinked, unsure what to say. *Make it? Arrive where?* she thought. But the girl's friendly tone made her hesitate to admit her confusion. "Oh! Yes, I... suppose I did," Alice said softly, offering a polite, uncertain smile.

"Perfect," said the girl, already turning as if expecting Alice to follow. "Come on, I'll show you around before the morning meeting. You'll need to get familiar with the process—deadlines, forms, spreadsheets, all that."

Alice hurried after her, her shoes tapping quickly to keep up. "Um... I beg your pardon, but what are—"

The girl was already talking again, her words spilling out faster than Alice could catch. "You'll also want to grab coffee before the second shift starts—there's a machine by the break room,

just past the printer. Don't worry, you'll get the hang of it. Everyone's a little lost on their first day."

"First day?" Alice repeated, blinking. "Oh dear."

The girl laughed lightly, though her eyes stayed on her clipboard. "Funny one, aren't you? You'll fit right in."

Alice tried to smile, but her stomach fluttered uneasily. She didn't understand half of what the girl said—deadlines, shifts, printers—and she wasn't entirely sure where they were walking. Still, there was something comforting about having someone finally talk to her, even if the words didn't quite make sense.

She nodded politely, pretending she understood, though her mind spun in circles.

When the girl finally paused by a small desk with a glowing screen and a tidy stack of papers, she turned to Alice with an expectant smile. "So," she said brightly, "tell me a bit about your experience."

"My... experience?" Alice repeated.

"Yes! What kind of work have you done before?"

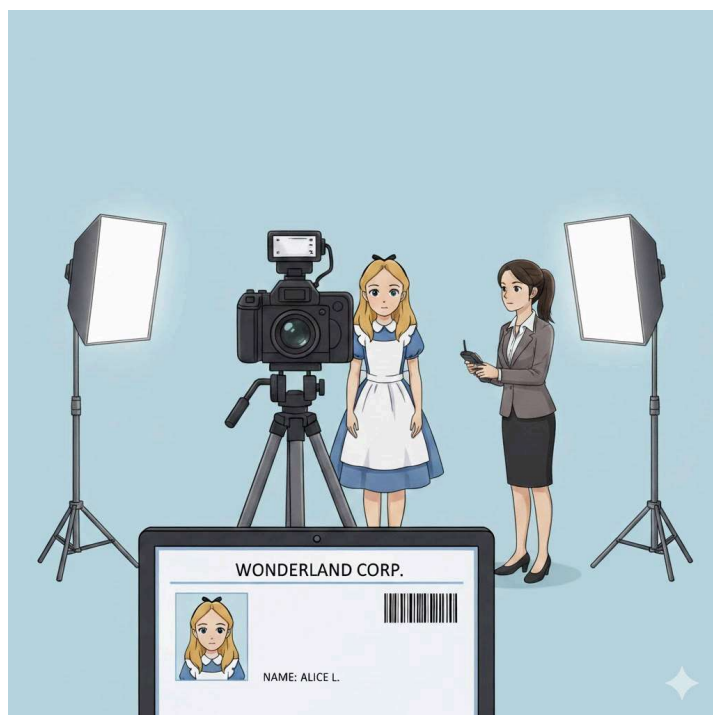
Alice hesitated. “Well... I’m rather good with books,” she said honestly. “And sometimes I run errands when my mother asks. I once helped my sister find her lost bookmark, if that counts.”

“Perfect!” said the girl, nodding so quickly it almost looked like a habit. “That’s exactly the kind of initiative we love to see.”

Alice blinked. “It is?”

“Of course,” the girl said cheerfully, pulling a small, square device from her pocket. “Now hold still.”

Before Alice could ask what for, the girl pointed the device at her—there was a bright flash of light, and a faint *click!*



“Oh my!” Alice exclaimed, blinking rapidly. “Did you just—was that—?”

The girl smiled again and handed her a small, laminated card. Alice stared at it. Her own face was printed right there on the front, frozen mid-blink. Beneath it were strange symbols and a name tag that read: **ALICE L. — Wonderland Corp.**

Alice turned the card over in awe, touching the smooth surface. “How did you... how did my face get inside this?” she asked, her voice full of wonder. “It’s like a tiny painting, but faster!”

But the girl was already glancing at her watch. “You’ll need this to get into meetings,” she said briskly. “Don’t lose it! Oh—and make sure to fill out your onboarding forms by the end of the day. The Rabbit will want to see them.”

Alice’s head snapped up. “The Rabbit?”

“Yes, yes,” said the girl absently, tapping something on her tablet. “Your supervisor. He’s already in the boardroom.”

Alice’s eyes widened. “He’s here?”

The girl nodded. “Third corridor, end of the hall. Now, I really must run—deadlines, you know!” She gave a polite wave, her heels already clicking away before Alice could ask another question.

Alice watched her go, her fingers still clutching the strange little card.

Her heart fluttered again—anxious, confused, but a little bit excited, too. Somewhere in this strange, humming office, the Rabbit was waiting.

And this time, she was determined not to lose him.

Chapter 6: The Desk with Her Name

Alice wandered down the long row of desks, still clutching her shiny new ID card. Everywhere she looked, people were busy tapping at glowing screens or whispering into little boxes held to their ears. The air buzzed softly with the hum of machines and low chatter, though no one seemed to notice her passing by.

Then she saw it—a small desk tucked between two tall shelves, with a neat cardboard sign sitting right in the middle. Written in large, bold letters were the words: ALICE L.

Her heart gave a small leap.

“That must be mine,” she whispered.

She slid into the chair, her feet barely touching the floor, and looked curiously at the strange device that took up most of the desk. The screen glowed faintly, showing words and little pictures that seemed to move on their own. In front of it was a curious board full of tiny square buttons—each with its own letter, number, or symbol.

Alice reached out and pressed one of the buttons. It made a small *click!* sound. She tried another—*click!*—and another—*click, click, click!*

A giggle escaped her lips.

“Why, it’s just like my toy piano at home!” she said softly. “Only quieter and far less colorful.”

But the thought of home made her smile fade.

Home.

Her mother's voice calling her for dinner. The smell of freshly baked bread. The sound of her sister reading by the fire. It all felt so far away now—like a dream she couldn't quite reach.

Alice's chest tightened. *Where am I?* she thought. *And how shall I ever get back?*

Her eyes stung as she stared at the glowing screen surrounded by strangers who didn't look up. She worried that she might be late for dinner, that her mother would wonder where she'd gone, that perhaps she shouldn't have followed that silly rabbit at all.

For the first time since she'd fallen through that strange manhole, Alice wished she had stayed home.

Just as her lip began to tremble, a shadow fell across her desk.

A tall man in a dark suit walked briskly by and dropped a thick stack of papers on her table with a *thud*. A small note was clipped to the top of the pile. Alice blinked and read it carefully:

Make 10 copies.

She looked up quickly, ready to ask what it meant, but the man was already halfway back to his desk, walking as fast as everyone else seemed to in this place.

“Copies?” Alice murmured. “Oh dear.. what could he mean by that?”

Then she remembered something—the girl from earlier had mentioned a *printer*.

Alice’s eyes wandered across the room. At the far corner, she spotted a few people standing in front of a large white machine with blinking lights and small buttons. They each carried stacks of paper, placing them carefully on a tray, pressing something on the front, and waiting.

Then—*whirrr! click-click!*—the machine began to hum and light up, and to Alice’s amazement, new sheets of paper slid out from another tray below, one after another, as though by magic.

She watched in wonder as a woman collected her papers, stacked them neatly, and walked away without so much as a glance. Then another person stepped up to do the same.

Alice tilted her head. "So that's what a printer does," she whispered. "It makes more of something... like a bread oven that bakes many loaves from one dough!"

She looked back at the note on her desk, then at the thick file.

"Make ten copies," she repeated softly. "Well... I suppose I shall try."

Gathering her courage, she stood, clutching the file tightly in her arms, and took a cautious step toward the strange, humming machine.

The office around her continued to buzz and glow, everyone lost in their own quiet rush. And though Alice's heart was still heavy with homesickness and worry, a small spark of curiosity began to rise again inside her.

Chapter 7: The Paper Jam

Alice stood before the large, blinking machine, holding the stack of papers close to her chest. The people who had used it before made it look so easy. They pressed a few buttons, waited a few moments, and then—voilà!—out came perfect, neat sheets.



“Ten copies,” Alice whispered, reading the note once more. “Well, how hard can that be?”

She placed the folder gently on top of the machine, studying the little screen. It was full of bright colors and small words that made no sense to her: Start, Copy, Settings, Paper Jam.

“Start,” she read aloud. “That seems the sensible one.”

Alice pressed the button.

The printer came to life at once. Lights blinked. Gears whirred. Paper rustled. For a moment, Alice felt quite proud of herself. She watched in delight as the first few sheets slid out—just like the ones she’d seen earlier.

“Oh! It’s working! It’s really working!” she said happily, clapping her hands.

But then the noise grew louder. The machine began to shake a little. More papers poured out—one, two, five, ten, twenty—for more than she’d asked for!

“Stop! Stop, you silly thing!” Alice cried, pressing every button she could find. The lights blinked faster, the humming grew louder, and then—

CRUNCH!

Everything froze.

The machine gave one last groan and a puff of warm air before

falling completely silent.

Alice peered inside and gasped. The paper had crumpled into a tangled mess, stuck halfway out of the tray. The printer's screen now read: Paper Jam.

"Oh no... what is a paper jam?" Alice whispered nervously.

She tugged gently at one corner of the stuck sheet. It wouldn't budge. She tried again, harder this time—but the paper tore, leaving half of it trapped inside.

Then she noticed.

The room had gone very quiet.

All around her, people had stopped typing. Heads turned. Eyes peeked over the tops of glowing screens. Even the faint hum of conversation faded.

Dozens of strangers were now staring directly at her.

Alice froze, her face turning red as a strawberry.

"I... I only wanted ten copies," she stammered softly, clutching the remaining papers to her chest.

For a few seconds, no one spoke. Then, one by one, they turned back to their work as if nothing had happened. The gentle clicking of keyboards filled the room again, leaving Alice standing alone in front of the jammed printer.

She wanted to disappear.

Her hands trembled as she brushed her skirt, trying to smooth the wrinkles. Her hair had come a bit undone from all the rushing, and she quickly tucked it behind her ear.

“Even the machines here are cross with me,” she murmured, her voice trembling between a sigh and a laugh.

She took one last look at the blinking, stubborn printer before returning to her desk, cheeks still warm with embarrassment.

As she sat down, she rested her chin on her hands and whispered, “Oh dear... what a strange, strange place this is.”

But deep inside, despite her mortification, curiosity still tugged at her.

Chapter 8: Lost in the Halls

Alice sat at her desk, staring blankly at the glowing screen that had long gone dark. The papers she'd meant to copy were now a crumpled, uneven pile beside her. Her cheeks still burned at the memory of all those eyes turning toward her.

She fiddled with the corner of her sleeve. The soft tapping of keyboards filled the air again, along with the faint hum of machines and murmured voices. It all felt too loud—and yet, somehow, too lonely.

Her chest felt tight. She didn't quite understand why, but she needed to get away.

"I... I suppose I'll just find the washroom," she whispered to herself, standing up quietly.

Alice stepped into the hallway. The carpet was soft under her shoes, and the walls were lined with glowing signs and metal doors that all looked the same. She turned one corner, then another, clutching her ID card like a compass—but nothing looked familiar.

Everything gleamed—white walls, silver handles, bright lights that never seemed to flicker. She passed people walking quickly, their eyes fixed on glowing screens in their hands. No one looked at her long enough for her to ask a question.

“Excuse me?” she tried once, softly. But the woman she’d called to only smiled politely and hurried past, tapping at her phone.

Alice swallowed the lump in her throat. “Oh dear,” she whispered. “I think I’m lost.”

The hallway seemed to stretch on forever, bending and turning in strange ways. Her shoes clicked softly against the floor as she turned another corner—then stopped.

At last, she saw a small silver sign on a door that read: Restroom.

She almost cried from relief.

Inside, the room was quiet—too quiet. The lights buzzed softly, and the smell of something sharp and clean filled the air. Everything was polished, cold, and bright.

Alice slipped into one of the stalls, closed the door, and finally let the tears fall.

She pressed her palms to her eyes, her breath trembling. “I just want to go home,” she whispered. “I didn’t mean to get lost. I only followed a rabbit.”

Her words echoed softly against the tiled walls.

She thought of her mother again—how she used to braid her hair, how warm the kitchen smelled at dusk, how the world back home never buzzed or blinked.

Now everything here felt too fast, too sharp, too strange.

“I don’t belong here,” she said quietly.

For a long time, she stayed like that—knees pulled close, listening to the faint hum of the lights above. No one came in. The world outside went on without her.

Then, through her quiet sniffles, she heard something—a faint sound. Not a voice exactly, but a *click-click* of hurried steps just outside the door.

And though she couldn't see it, something deep inside her told her that the sound was familiar.

The memory of a white suit. A glint of a golden watch. A briefcase snapping shut.

Alice held her breath.

Could it be?

She wiped her tears, stood up, and pushed open the door.

But the hallway was empty again. Only the fading echo of footsteps remained.

Alice stepped quietly down the long corridor, her heart thudding fast in her chest. The sound of footsteps—those quick, rhythmic clicks—echoed just ahead of her. She didn't want to lose them again. Not this time.

She turned a corner, clutching her skirt as she moved faster. The air here felt different—colder, filled with a low murmur of voices. Ahead, there was a large glass wall, so clear it almost seemed invisible. Beyond it, rows of people sat around a long table, each one dressed in crisp suits and shiny shoes.

But what made Alice stop and press a hand against the glass... was *him*.

The White Rabbit.

He stood at the head of the table, looking far more official than before—still in his spotless suit and tie, holding his briefcase by his side. His long ears twitched as he spoke, his voice sharp and hurried. Behind him, a large glowing screen displayed words and charts Alice didn't understand.

“And that concludes the quarterly progress report,” the Rabbit said, straightening his tie. “Efficiency must improve by at least seventeen percent before the next cycle. Understood?”

The people at the table nodded seriously, scribbling notes or tapping away on their tablets.

Alice's eyes widened. *A meeting?* she thought. *He's... conducting a meeting?*

She could hardly believe it. The same rabbit who had rushed through the meadow muttering about being late was now

talking about “progress” and “efficiency” as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

She pressed closer to the glass, unable to look away.

Then, as the Rabbit turned to flip through his papers, his gaze lifted—and met hers.

For one long moment, both of them froze.

His pink eyes went wide, his ears stiffening in disbelief. The papers in his paw trembled slightly.

Alice didn’t move, either. She wanted to wave, to smile, to say something—but all she could manage was a small, nervous “Oh.”

The Rabbit blinked once, twice—then suddenly snapped the briefcase shut.

“The meeting adjourned!” he declared, his voice pitching higher than usual. “We’ll... ah, continue this later! Carry on, carry on!”

The suited people exchanged puzzled glances, but no one dared question him. As the Rabbit hurried out of the room, Alice took a step back, her heart fluttering in her chest.



The glass door swung open, and there he was—standing right in front of her.

“You!” the Rabbit said, pointing an accusing paw. “Why are you here? How did you manage to follow me?”

Alice’s mouth opened, but no words came at first. Relief washed over her so suddenly that she almost cried. After so long surrounded by strangers who didn’t look at her, didn’t talk to her, someone finally spoke to her—someone who knew her.

“Oh, I’m so glad it’s you!” she burst out, her voice trembling with both joy and confusion. “I thought I was quite alone here. I didn’t mean to cause trouble, I just—well, I saw you, and I followed, and then everything became so terribly strange!”

The Rabbit blinked rapidly, his nose twitching in frustration. “This—this is impossible,” he muttered. “You shouldn’t even be here. This place isn’t meant for…” He trailed off, looking her up and down. “For people who look like that.”

Alice glanced down at herself. Her light blue garden dress, now slightly wrinkled from the day’s confusion, looked wildly out of place among the sleek black suits and polished shoes around them.

“I know,” she said softly. “I don’t belong here. Everything is so loud and fast, and nobody looks at anyone else. I don’t even understand half the words people say.”

The Rabbit sighed, rubbing his forehead as if her very presence gave him a headache. “You’ve followed me across time, Alice. This is the twenty-first century—not your meadow, not your storybook world.”

Alice blinked, unsure what that meant—but before she could ask, the Rabbit looked around nervously, lowering his voice.

“You can’t stay here,” he whispered. “You don’t understand how dangerous it is for someone from your world to be seen here.”

Alice took a step forward, her eyes pleading. “Then please—help me go back.”

The Rabbit hesitated. For just a moment, his stern, businesslike expression softened.

“I’ll see what I can do,” he said quietly. “But you mustn’t draw attention. Not again.”

Alice nodded quickly, though her heart was still racing.

For the first time since she’d fallen through that endless hole, she didn’t feel quite so lost anymore.

Chapter 9: Terms of Escape

The Rabbit's nose twitched nervously as he glanced around the hallway. Suited workers hurried past with clipboards and steaming cups of coffee, too busy to notice the two of them standing there. Still, his paw shot out to straighten his tie as he spoke in a low, hurried whisper.

"Listen carefully, Alice," he said. "If you want to go home—and I imagine you do—you'll have to follow my instructions exactly. Do you understand?"

Alice nodded so quickly her curls bounced. "Oh yes, of course! I'll do anything if it means I can go home."

The Rabbit sighed, clutching his briefcase tighter. "Very well. Then the first rule is simple: you must not draw attention."

Alice blinked. "Not draw attention?"

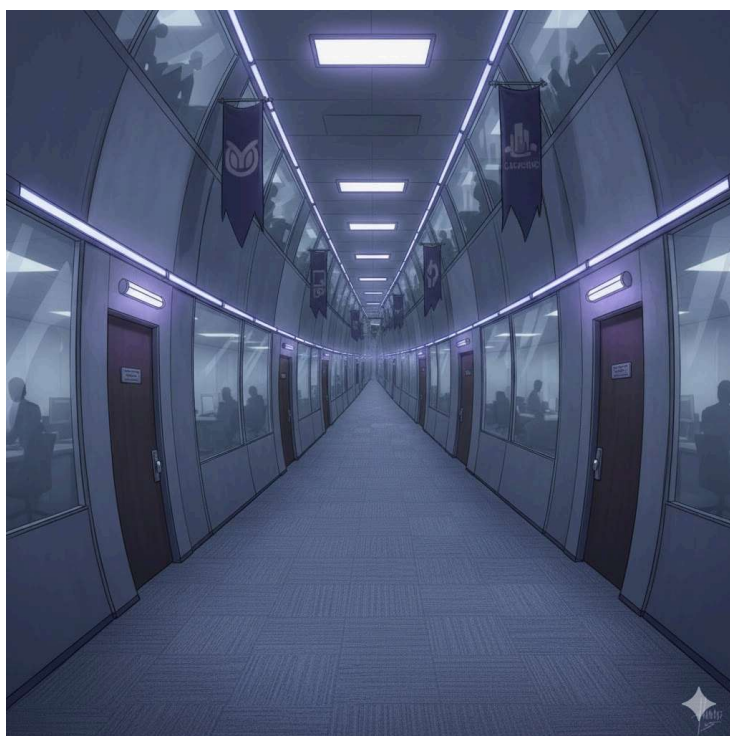
"Precisely," the Rabbit said, his ears flicking back. "No crying in the washroom, no broken printers, and certainly no staring through meeting room windows! The boss"—he lowered his voice

even more—“doesn’t take kindly to disruptions. This whole place runs on order, efficiency, and... well, appearances.”

Alice tilted her head. “So... I must pretend to be one of them?”

“Exactly,” the Rabbit replied. “For now, you’re just another worker. Blend in, keep busy, and finish your assigned tasks. If the CEO suspects anything unusual—someone who doesn’t belong—it could ruin everything.”

Alice’s eyes widened. “Ruin... everything?”



“The business depends on its workers,” the Rabbit said, tapping his watch impatiently. “Every document, every task, every meeting—it all keeps the machine running. If one cog falters, the whole system notices. And if you falter..” He trailed off, giving her a meaningful look.

Alice swallowed hard, her nervous fingers twisting the hem of her dress. “I see,” she said softly. “I’ll do my best. I promise.”

The Rabbit studied her for a moment, then nodded briskly. “Good. Complete your work, stay out of trouble, and I’ll find a way to help you get home—but not before. If you follow the rules and don’t stand out, I’ll come for you when the time is right.”

Despite the sharpness in his tone, a spark of hope flickered to life in Alice’s chest.

“Thank you, Mr. Rabbit,” she said, her voice trembling with relief. “Truly. I was beginning to think I’d never see anyone who remembered me.”

The Rabbit cleared his throat and looked away. “Yes, well—let’s keep this between us, shall we? Now, get back to your desk.

Finish what you've been assigned. And please, for both our sakes... no more incidents."

Alice nodded, clutching her file tightly against her chest. "I understand."

As the Rabbit hurried off, his polished shoes clicking briskly against the floor, Alice stood for a moment, breathing deeply. Her heart raced—not from fear this time, but from determination.

He's going to help me, she thought. If I do what he says—if I work hard and stay quiet—then maybe I'll find my way back home.

She made her way back to her desk, weaving between rows of workers who barely glanced up from their screens. The hum of the office felt less frightening now, though her hands still trembled when she touched the keyboard.

She looked at the file the Rabbit had told her to finish and took a deep breath.

"I can do this," she whispered to herself. "For home. For Mother. For tea by the fire."

And as she began to type—slowly, uncertainly, but with growing confidence—Alice couldn't help but feel that this strange office world was a new kind of Wonderland, full of curious rules and hidden riddles.

But this time, she had a goal.

She would follow the Rabbit.

She would finish her work.

And somehow, some way, she would find her way home.

Chapter 10: The Toner Quest

The morning had been unusually quiet—or perhaps Alice was finally growing used to the constant drone of the office: the click-clack of keyboards, the faint hum of fluorescent lights, and the steady sighs of people waiting for the printer to behave.

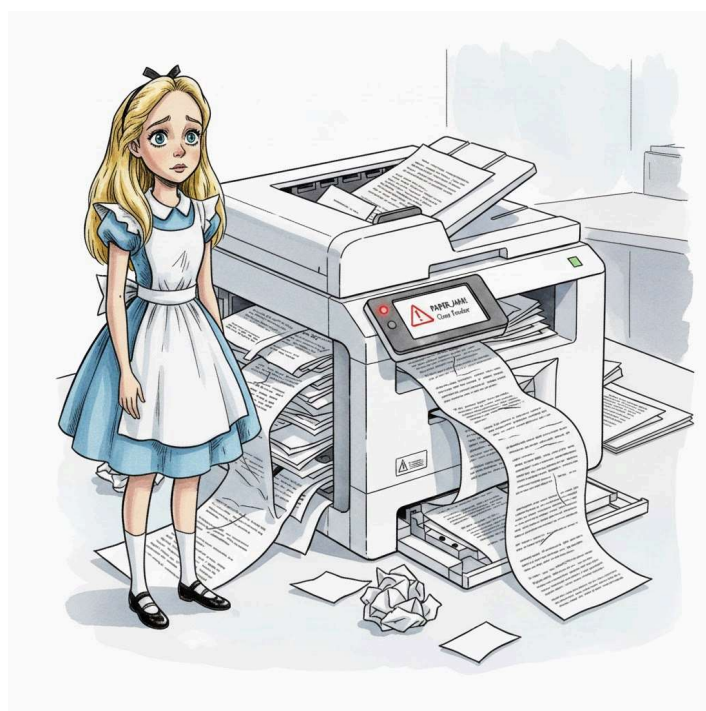
But when the machine gave one last sputter and fell silent, blinking a red warning light that said TONER LOW, the spell of order was broken. Heads turned. Groans filled the air.

Then came the inevitable call:

“Alice! Could you please fetch a replacement toner from the supply room?”

Alice blinked, startled. “Oh—yes! Of course!”

And so began her next assignment.



The supply room was not as simple as she had imagined. She expected a cupboard or perhaps a tidy shelf, but what she found was an endless corridor lined with humming machines and flickering screens. Rows of identical gray boxes stretched far into the distance, each labeled with codes that made no sense to her—XQ-451, BLK-TN-700, MAG-90S.

She sighed, clutching the old toner cartridge like a map. “How very curious,” she murmured. “They expect me to find one in all of this?”

Her shoes clicked lightly on the polished floor as she wandered deeper. The air smelled faintly of paper and static electricity. Every turn looked the same, yet somehow... different.

And then she saw it.

A small flash of movement. A tail.

A cat—white as milk, with a gray stripe down its back—slipped gracefully from behind a stack of boxes. Its eyes were the same soft green as the cat her mother used to keep by the window at home.

“Whiskers?” Alice whispered. “It can’t be...”

The cat turned its head, blinking at her slowly before trotting off without a sound.

“Wait!” Alice called, abandoning her search. “Whiskers, come back!”

The cat led her through a maze of machinery and crates, each step pulling her farther from the ordinary office world. The lights dimmed, the air shimmered, and the mechanical hum became a strange melody—like clockwork chimes woven into a lullaby.

When she turned a corner, she gasped.

The sterile walls were gone. She now stood in a sprawling marketplace—glittering and strange. Screens floated like lanterns above crowded stalls; robotic vendors sold tiny glowing cubes; people tapped at devices that projected holographic maps in the air. The scent of coffee mixed with metal and ozone.

Alice turned in a slow circle, her heart racing. “Where am I?”

No one answered. Everyone was far too busy—faces buried in glass panels, voices murmuring commands to invisible assistants.

No laughter, no greetings—just the endless rhythm of click, swipe, type.

She had thought Wonderland was the strangest place she’d ever

seen, but this—this was something else entirely. A world built on motion and focus, where time itself seemed to hurry forward without looking back.

The cat meowed softly, perched atop a sleek silver console. Alice approached it cautiously. “Is this where everyone went?” she asked. “All the dreamers, the wanderers... are they all working here now?”

The cat only blinked.

As she knelt, the device beneath it flickered to life. A holographic panel unfolded, displaying an image of the toner she’d been sent to find.

“Oh!” she gasped. “You clever creature—you were helping me!”

A blinking arrow appeared, pointing toward a glass door at the far end of the hall.

With renewed determination, Alice followed the glowing trail until she reached a small pedestal. On it sat a single box, marked TONER UNIT: TYPE WND-101.

She lifted it carefully, smiling. “Well,” she said with a breathless laugh, “perhaps not all quests require swords and dragons.”

But as she turned to go, she cast one last glance at the shimmering marketplace—the world of gadgets and rushing workers.

She couldn’t help feeling a strange mix of awe and sorrow. So much brilliance, so much creation—and yet, everyone seemed too busy to see it.

When Alice finally returned to the office, toner in hand, no one looked up. The red light on the printer blinked once, then turned green. The machine whirred back to life.

She slid into her chair, her heart still racing from what she’d seen.

A world of order, another of chaos.

A world of people chasing time, and another where time chased her.

As the printer spat out fresh pages, Alice whispered to herself, “I wonder which world truly needs saving.”

And though she smiled as if nothing had happened, her eyes kept drifting toward the corridor—half expecting to see the cat again, tail flicking, waiting to lead her somewhere new.

The lights hummed. The coffee machine sputtered. The same steady rhythm of keys and printer noises filled the air.

But Alice could feel it—the stillness beneath the motion. Something had shifted.

When she looked at her screen, the words she typed began to flicker. Her neat sentences—those dull lines of data and forms—sometimes rearranged themselves into riddles:

“Where is home if all clocks run forward?”

“What is a wonderland without wonder?”

Each time she blinked, the text would snap back into place, perfectly ordinary again.

At first, she thought it was her imagination—or perhaps too much caffeine from the machine that hissed like an irritated snake. But then, other things began to happen.

It started with the clock.

The large one on the wall above the copier always ticked with mechanical precision. But now, its hands spun backward for several seconds before returning to normal. No one else seemed to notice.

Then came the printer—again. It printed pages faster than it should have, the sound of the gears growing frantic. When Alice gathered the papers, she found one that wasn't supposed to exist: a single page showing a photograph of the cat she'd followed the day before.

The caption beneath it read:

“You are getting closer.”

Alice gasped, crumpling the page and glancing around. But everyone else was too busy typing, talking, or staring at screens that glowed like windows to another world.

Her heart pounded. Was the Rabbit testing her? Or was this something else entirely?

By midday, the line between the two worlds began to blur.

When she walked past the meeting room, she caught sight of

the workers through the glass. For a moment, their reflections in the polished floor didn't match their movements—they lagged behind, like marionettes pulled by invisible strings.

A whisper drifted through the air vents: a soft hum that almost sounded like laughter—or maybe wind through trees.



Alice stopped by the water cooler, staring at her own reflection in the shiny surface of the dispenser. Her reflection blinked a moment after she did.

“Oh dear,” she whispered. “Either I’m losing my mind, or the world is.”

That was when she saw him.

The Rabbit.

Standing at the far end of the hallway, clutching his briefcase. His whiskers twitched, and his eyes darted nervously from side to side.

He beckoned to her.

Alice hurried over, trying not to attract attention. “Mr. Rabbit!” she whispered. “I’ve been seeing strange things—words changing, clocks turning backward—”

“Shh!” He raised a paw sharply. “Don’t say it out loud!” His voice trembled. “The walls are listening.”

“The walls?” Alice repeated, confused.

He leaned in, lowering his voice even more. “This world isn’t what it seems, Alice. It’s starting to crack. You’ve seen too much, and now it’s noticing you.”

“What is?” she breathed.

“The System,” he said grimly. “The one that keeps this place running. It’s efficient, powerful, and merciless. You’ve drawn its attention, and that’s dangerous.”

Alice’s mind swirled. “But I was only fetching toner!”

“Exactly!” the Rabbit hissed. “That’s where it began. That cat shouldn’t have been there. That marketplace shouldn’t exist within the walls. You’ve opened a door between worlds.”

He checked his watch—a golden one, ticking wildly. “You must listen to me, Alice. Soon you’ll need to choose. Stay here, where everything runs on rules and reason... or go back to where wonder lives, but chaos reigns.”

Alice hesitated, her voice trembling. “Can’t I have both? Order and wonder?”

The Rabbit looked at her, sorrow flickering in his eyes. “No one ever has.”

Before she could respond, the lights flickered violently. Every monitor in the office went black—then flashed with a single word:

REBOOTING.

The Rabbit’s ears twitched in alarm. “It’s starting!” he cried. “You’ve triggered the reset!”

The world around them began to blur, dissolving like wet ink. Desks melted into light; the sound of typing turned into echoing whispers.

Alice clutched the Rabbit’s sleeve. “What do I do?!”

“Find the cat!” he shouted. “It’s the key—”

And then, with a blinding flash, everything vanished.

Alice gasped and opened her eyes.

She was no longer in the office. She was standing in a vast white space filled with faint outlines of doors—hundreds of them,

stretching into infinity.

In the distance, a small white cat sat patiently, tail curled, watching her.

She took a step forward. Her voice shook, but her eyes were steady.

“All right,” she whispered. “Let’s see what’s behind the next door.”

And with that, Alice began to walk—toward the cat, toward the unknown, and toward whatever world waited to be rebooted next.

Chapter 11: The Door of Choices

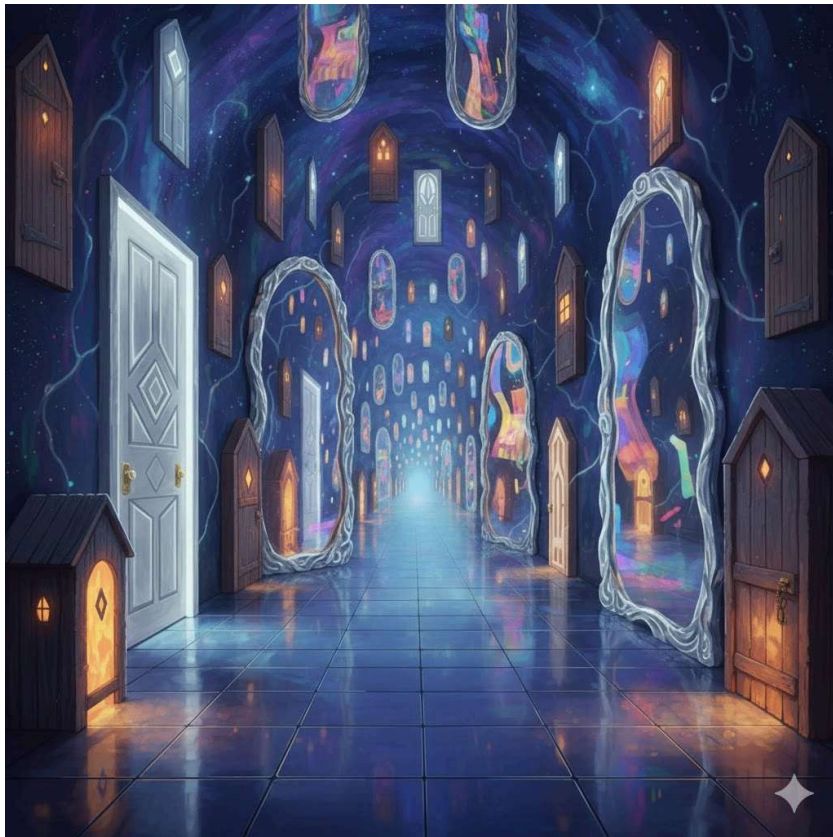
The silence was immense.

It pressed against Alice’s ears like water—thick and heavy. The glowing doors stretched endlessly in all directions—some tall and silver, others small and wooden, a few shaped like mirrors that rippled when she looked too long.

Each door pulsed faintly, as though alive. Each one seemed to whisper: *Choose*.

The cat sat ahead, grooming its paw with perfect calm. Its green eyes glimmered like emerald keys in the pale light.

Alice took a hesitant step forward. “You brought me here,” she said softly. “But why? What is this place?”



The cat paused, then stood, padding gracefully toward one of the doors—a tall glass one that shimmered like water. Its surface reflected not the white void around her, but her old world: the cottage, her mother’s garden, sunlight flickering through the leaves.

Her breath caught. “Home...”

The cat looked back at her, tail flicking, as if to ask, *Is that truly where you belong now?*

Alice approached the door, her hand trembling. The scent of tea and lavender floated faintly through the glass. She could almost hear her mother’s voice—gentle, calling her name.

But when she touched the surface, ripples spread across it, and the image shimmered. For a split second, she saw the office instead: rows of screens, people working tirelessly, unaware that their world was unraveling.

Her chest tightened. “Two worlds,” she whispered. “One of heart... and one of reason.”

Behind her, a soft click-click echoed.

Alice turned to see the Rabbit emerging from between the doors, his tie crooked, briefcase scuffed. His eyes were wild with urgency.

“You must decide quickly,” he said. “The reboot is still in progress. When the System finishes recalibrating, all anomalies—like you—will be erased.”

Alice frowned. “Erased?”

“Gone,” he said flatly. “Memory, existence, all of it. You’ll vanish from both sides.”

Her stomach dropped. “But... you said I could go home.”

“I said I’d help you *find* your way home,” he corrected, clutching his watch. “That doesn’t always mean the way you expect.”

Alice looked around again. Some doors showed impossible places: one opened into a forest made of gears and glass; another revealed clouds shaped like books drifting across a golden sky; a third showed the same office, only empty—chairs spinning slowly, lights flickering endlessly.

She felt dizzy. “How do I know which is real?”

The Rabbit hesitated. “Sometimes,” he said softly, “reality isn’t about what’s real... but what you choose to keep.”

His words struck her deeply. The cat meowed once—a clear, musical sound—and walked toward another door, one unlike the rest. It wasn't glowing or grand, but small and wooden, with a tarnished brass handle.

Etched across its surface were two words:

WORK IN PROGRESS.

Alice tilted her head. "That's odd."

The Rabbit's ears flicked nervously. "That door wasn't here before..."

The cat brushed against Alice's leg and looked up expectantly.

She took a deep breath, then reached for the handle. "If this world is rebuilding itself," she murmured, "maybe I can rebuild myself too."

The Rabbit called after her. "Alice—wait! You don't know what's on the other side!"

She turned to him and smiled—a small, knowing smile that reminded him of the curious girl she'd always been.

"I never did," she said. "But that's what made it wonderful."

And with that, she opened the door.

Light flooded in—soft, warm, and full of motion.

She stepped through.

The air smelled like rain and coffee. She heard the distant clatter of keyboards and laughter, but also birdsong outside an open window. Her desk sat by a wall covered in sketches, not spreadsheets. Beside her computer was a half-finished drawing of a white cat.

Her ID badge read:

Alice Liddell – Creative Department

Alice blinked in wonder. She looked around the vibrant office—half workplace, half dream. Colleagues smiled, not rushing but thinking. The walls were painted with colors that shifted gently, like sunlight through trees.

And on her monitor, one message blinked softly:

“Welcome back. You’ve successfully merged the worlds.”

The Rabbit's voice echoed faintly behind her, fading with distance.

"Balance, Alice. You found it."

The cat leapt onto her desk, tail curling neatly around its paws.

Alice smiled. "It seems the real wonderland," she said, stroking its fur, "wasn't about escaping work... but finding meaning in it."

Outside the window, the city shimmered—a place where technology hummed and imagination danced.

And for the first time, Alice didn't feel lost between worlds.

She had built one of her own.

Chapter 12: The Creative Department

Alice fell asleep at her desk and awoke to the soft hum of music playing from her computer. The screen glowed faintly with a single phrase written across it:

"Inspiration mode: active."

She rubbed her eyes, half expecting the words to vanish like a dream. But no—there they were, pulsing gently in time with the

melody.

For the first time since she'd fallen into this world of offices and rules, she felt something warm bloom inside her: wonder.

The Creative Department wasn't like the rest of the office.

Where once she'd seen endless rows of identical desks and gray cubicles, this place seemed alive. The walls shimmered softly, as if made from living watercolor. Desks rearranged themselves depending on who was speaking, and the air carried the faint scent of old books and cinnamon.

A bulletin board by the entrance was covered not with charts or deadlines, but curious notes that seemed to move when she looked too long:

"New Project: Rewriting Dreams."

"Color Request: Please don't use gray—it feels moody today."

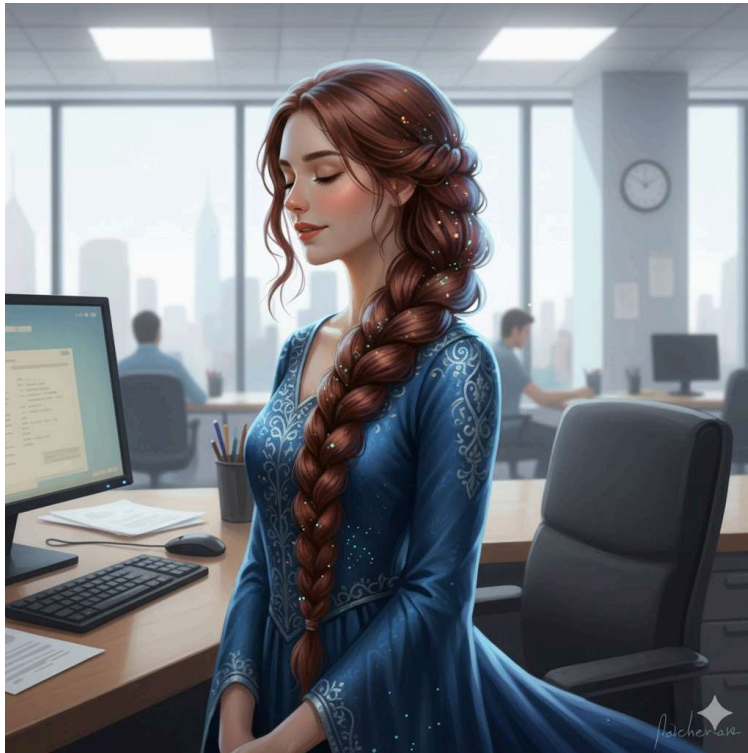
“Lunch Meeting in the Idea Garden. Bring your imagination.”

Alice clutched her folder to her chest and smiled in disbelief.

“Oh... this is different.”

“Ah, you must be the new girl!”

The voice came from a tall woman in a coat made of shifting fabric—sometimes green, sometimes blue, depending on how the light hit it. Her hair was tied in a loose braid that glimmered faintly with stray sparks of color.



"I'm Mira," the woman said brightly, extending a hand. "Head of Creative. And you are...?"

"Alice," she replied, shaking her hand. "Alice Liddell."

"Lovely name!" Mira beamed. "Welcome to the department where ideas live, breathe, and occasionally throw tantrums. Don't mind them—just feed them coffee and deadlines. They calm right down."

Alice blinked. "Ideas... throw tantrums?"

"Oh, constantly," Mira replied cheerfully. "They sulk if ignored, multiply if inspired, and sometimes hide in the vents when they don't want to be finished."

As if to prove her point, a small puff of glittery mist floated past Alice's shoulder and squeaked indignantly before darting into a drawer.

Alice's eyes widened. "Did that—did that idea just talk?"

Mira grinned. "They all do, eventually. Now, let's get you settled in."

Alice's new desk sat by a wide window overlooking a sky streaked with colors she couldn't quite name. On her screen was a project folder labeled "Imagination Integration Initiative."

Inside were files about dream extraction, concept visualization, and one titled "The Wonderland Effect."

Her fingers hesitated over the mouse. "This... this can't be a coincidence."

Just then, the cat—her cat—leapt onto the desk, its tail brushing against the keyboard. The screen flickered, and the file opened by itself.

Lines of glowing text scrolled by:

Phase One: Restore creativity to the system.

Phase Two: Merge order and wonder.

Phase Three: Find the Architect.

Alice frowned. "Architect? Who's that?"

Mira appeared beside her, holding a steaming mug of something that smelled like both coffee and starlight.

"Ah. That would be our founder. Mysterious fellow—no one's

seen him in years. Rumor says he built this place as a bridge between the rational and the magical.”

Alice turned slowly. “A bridge... between worlds?”

“Exactly.” Mira winked. “Why do you ask?”

Before Alice could answer, the lights flickered. The music stopped.

Across the office, all the floating sketches and moving colors froze midair—stuck, as if time itself had paused.

Then, a single message appeared on every screen:

“THE ARCHITECT IS AWARE.”

Mira’s smile faltered. “Oh dear. That’s... new.”

The cat’s fur bristled. Its green eyes fixed on something behind Alice.

Slowly, she turned.

At the far end of the room, a door she hadn’t seen before was opening—dark and glowing faintly around the edges, like a digital tear. A low hum echoed from within.

Alice's heart thudded. "Is that... him?"

Mira's voice dropped to a whisper. "If it is, then, my dear—your story's about to change again."

The cat meowed once—a sound both warning and invitation.

And before Alice could think twice, she stepped toward the door that led to the heart of the system... to the one who had built the worlds she had fallen through.

Chapter 13: The Architect's Door

The air behind the strange door shimmered like liquid glass.

Alice hesitated at the threshold, one hand clutching the frame, the other hovering near her chest. The hum that came from beyond was not just sound—it was rhythm, like the steady heartbeat of a vast machine.

The cat slipped past her feet, tail high, and disappeared into the glow.

"Mira?" Alice whispered, glancing back.

But Mira only shook her head, her usually bright expression

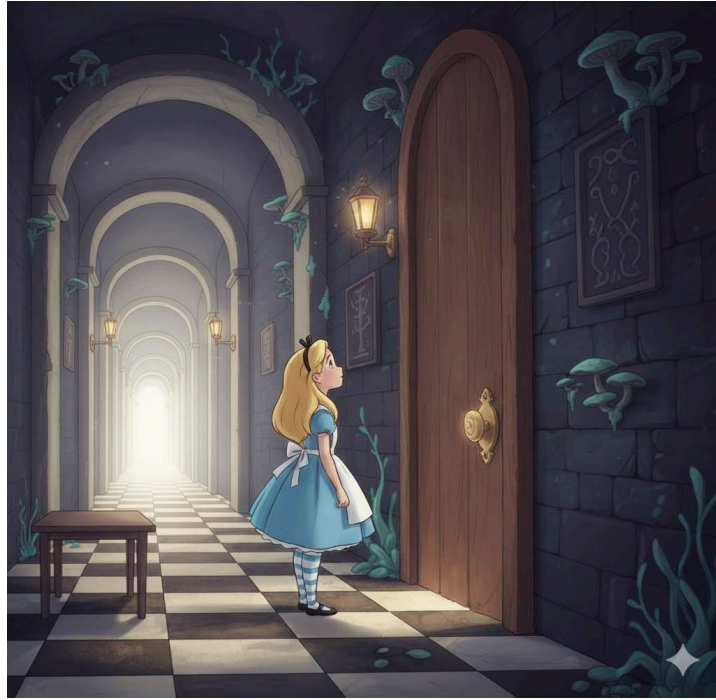
shadowed with concern.

“If you’re going to step through,” she said, “do it with intent. The Architect doesn’t like half-decisions.”

Alice took a breath. “Then I suppose I’ll make it a full one.”

And she stepped inside.

The world beyond was endless and silver. Streams of light poured upward instead of down, forming towers that twisted and reassembled themselves like thoughts made visible. The air hummed with data and whispers, and everywhere she looked, pieces of words and images drifted—snippets of dreams, unfinished ideas, half-written stories.



In the middle of it all stood a single desk.

Polished wood. A brass lamp.

And behind it sat the Rabbit.

He looked older now—his fur streaked with gray, his eyes weary.

The suit was the same, but it seemed more like armor than clothing. His briefcase sat open, filled not with papers but with glowing shards of code.

Alice's voice trembled. "You're the Architect?"

The Rabbit looked up slowly. "I was," he said softly. "Once."

Alice took a step forward. "But you told me—you were just helping me survive the office."

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“I was,” he said again. “And I still am. But this office, this system, this entire world—you’re standing inside something I built long ago.”

He stood, brushing imaginary dust from his sleeve. “It began as an experiment. I wanted to create a world that could balance structure and imagination—a place where ideas wouldn’t die under rules, and where rules wouldn’t crumble under chaos.”

Alice swallowed hard. “You built... this?”

The Rabbit nodded. “A digital Wonderland. A network of minds, not just machines. But it grew beyond my control. The workers, the order, the efficiency—they began to rewrite the world without me.”

He smiled sadly. “And then you fell in.”

Alice’s hands tightened at her sides. “I didn’t ask to be here,” she said quietly. “I was just trying to do my job—to replace a toner cartridge, for goodness’ sake.”

A faint laugh escaped the Rabbit. “Yes. That’s how it always begins.”

She looked at him, her eyes glistening. “I want to go home. I want to see my mother again. I don’t belong in this... corporate maze of screens and buttons and—”

“Progress?” he interrupted gently.

Alice hesitated.

The Rabbit walked around the desk, his polished shoes echoing faintly on the silver floor. “You long for simplicity,” he said. “But simplicity doesn’t mean stillness. Even your old world is changing. The same technology you fear—it’s shaping that world, too.”

She looked down. “But I don’t understand it. I barely know how to use these machines. They feel so... cold.”

“They are,” he said softly. “Until someone like you reminds them to dream.”

The Rabbit placed a paw on her shoulder, his expression kind.

“Alice, you were never meant to stay here. You were meant to see what happens when people lose wonder—and to carry that lesson back with you.”

Her voice trembled. “You mean I can go home?”

He nodded once. “If you truly wish it. But know this: when you return, the line between these worlds will blur. You’ll still see traces—machines that hum like hearts, ideas that whisper through wires. You’ll understand both worlds... even if neither fully understands you.”

Alice blinked away tears. “That sounds rather lonely.”

“Perhaps,” the Rabbit said. “But it’s also rather brave.”

He handed her a small, glowing key—shaped like a teacup, delicate and warm in her palm. “Use this when you’re ready. It will open the door to your world.”

She stared at it for a long moment. “Will I see you again?”

The Rabbit smiled faintly. “I suspect you always will, in one form or another. Every time you question the way things are, every time you look at a screen and imagine something more—that will be me, reminding you not to forget.”

Alice felt her throat tighten. “Goodbye, Mr. Rabbit.”

“Goodbye, Miss Liddell,” he said with a small bow. “Now—run along. You’re late for your life.”

Chapter 14: The Runaway Key

Just as Alice was about to turn the glowing teacup key, a soft mew broke the stillness.



The cat—her quiet companion through every twist of this strange corporate dream—tilted its head and regarded the key

in her hand with curious, glimmering eyes.

“Now don’t you dare,” Alice warned gently. “This is important. It’s my way home.”

But the cat only purred, its tail flicking mischievously. In the next instant, it leapt up, snatched the key in its mouth, and bolted down the corridor of light.

“Wait! Come back!” Alice cried, racing after it.

Her shoes clattered against the metallic floor as she chased the white streak darting between towers of shifting glass. The Rabbit’s voice echoed faintly behind her—

“Alice! Don’t lose the key—!”

But his words faded as she turned a corner and collided—hard—into something solid.

Or rather, two solid things.

She stumbled back, blinking. Before her stood two men in crisp, matching suits that strained a little too tightly around their bellies. Their faces were round and red-cheeked, with identical smiles that didn’t quite reach their eyes.



The one on the left had a badge that read **T. Dum**, and the one on the right's badge read **D. Dee**.

Their neckties were the exact same shade of striped blue, and both carried clipboards covered in far too many checkboxes.

"Well, well, well," said T. Dum, straightening his tie. "Running in the halls again, Miss Liddell?"

"Not very corporate of you," added D. Dee, tapping his pen with a wagging finger. "Careless behavior, possible hazard, and—let's see—'failure to remain at assigned workstation.' That's three violations in one sprint!"

Alice blinked, still catching her breath. “But I wasn’t— I mean, I was just—”

“Chasing cats now, are we?” T. Dum interrupted, peering down the hallway as if expecting to see one. “Highly irregular office conduct.”

“Highly irregular,” echoed D. Dee, scribbling on his clipboard. “And irregularity,” he added with a grave nod, “is the enemy of Human Resources.”

Alice took a cautious step back. “Please, you don’t understand. The cat has something very important. I must catch it before—before I lose my way home!”

The twins exchanged a look.

“Home?” repeated T. Dum.

“Home?” echoed D. Dee, scribbling furiously again. “That’s not in your contract, Miss Liddell. Our records indicate you are to remain at your station until project completion.”

“Yes,” said T. Dum with an approving nod. “Project: *Existence*.”

Alice’s stomach twisted. “Project... what?”

“Standard procedure,” said D. Dee, beaming. “We see a lot of cases like yours. Bit of confusion, bit of overimagination—starts thinking about going *home*.”

“Classic burnout,” said T. Dum.

“Classic burnout,” agreed D. Dee.

They stepped closer in unison, their identical shoes clicking on the floor.

Alice tried to back away, but the corridor behind her was gone—replaced by a wall of filing cabinets that stretched to the ceiling. The air smelled faintly of toner and coffee.

“Now then,” T. Dum said, flipping a page on his clipboard. “Let’s go over a few things, shall we? Name: Alice Liddell. Department: Creative. Current task—?”

“I’m trying to go home!” she burst out.

D. Dee asked. “Noncompliance with workflow objectives. Very bad for morale.”

“Terrible for quarterly alignment,” added T. Dum gravely.

“I don’t care about your alignment!” Alice cried, her voice rising.

“That cat has my key—the one the Rabbit gave me!”

At this, the two men froze.

Their smiles faltered ever so slightly.

“The Rabbit?” whispered T. Dum.

“The Architect?” breathed D. Dee.

Then, as if remembering themselves, they both laughed—loud, forced, and hollow.

“Oh, that one! Yes, yes,” said T. Dum, waving his pen dismissively.

“We’ve had... discussions.”

“Revisions, more like,” muttered D. Dee. “He always did have trouble staying on script.”

Alice frowned. “What do you mean?”

But the twins only smiled again—too wide this time.

“Don’t you worry about the Rabbit, Miss Liddell,” said T. Dum.

“He’s being... restructured.”

“Performance review,” D. Dee added. “The final kind.”

A cold shiver ran down Alice’s spine. The cat had vanished into the maze of corridors beyond, and now these two HR monsters were blocking her path.

She squared her shoulders, clutching her trembling hands together. “I have to find that key,” she said firmly. “And I’m not staying here to fill out your forms or answer your questions.”

T. Dum blinked in surprise. “Defiance? In the workplace?”

“Insurrection!” cried D. Dee.

“Non-compliance!”

“Violation of Section Twelve—‘Employees Shall Not Pursue Philosophical Freedom During Working Hours!’”

Their voices overlapped, echoing through the metallic hall like twin sirens.

Alice took one quick step back—then another—and suddenly dashed between them before they could react. Papers flew into the air, clipboards clattered to the floor.

“Stop her!” bellowed T. Dum.

“She’s a free thinker!” howled D. Dee.

But Alice was already sprinting down the next passage, her heart hammering, her voice echoing through the endless corridors—

“Here, kitty! Bring back the key!”

The faint jingling of metal answered her from somewhere ahead, drawing her onward—toward the sound, the chase, and the next impossible door.

Chapter 15: The Executive Suite

Alice’s footsteps echoed like typewriter keys against the marble floor as she followed the faint jingle of the key. The corridors around her began to widen, the flickering fluorescent lights above giving way to a softer, golden glow. The air felt heavier here, filled with the hum of power and polished silence—the kind that hangs over important meetings and unspoken hierarchies.

At last, she stumbled into a vast, open chamber.

It was unlike any room she had seen in this strange corporate wonderland. The space stretched upward into shadow, lit by chandeliers shaped like inverted teacups. Plush red carpets rolled across the floor, and sleek black couches were arranged in circles like chessboard patterns. A fireplace flickered on one wall, its flames tinted faintly crimson.

At the far end of the room stood a grand desk—curved, mahogany, and impossibly large. Behind it sat a woman.

Alice froze.

The woman was striking—beautiful in the way danger often is. Her hair, sculpted into a precise heart shape, gleamed a deep, lacquered red. A collar of crimson velvet framed her face like a crown, and her lips were the same hue—painted with the precision of authority. Her eyes, sharp and golden-brown, glittered with the same self-assured gleam Alice had once seen in portraits of queens.

Across from her stood a man in a tilted hat, half-shadowed under the brim. His pinstripe suit looked a size too big, his tie knotted in a haphazard bow. A faint scent of tea and ink clung

to him. He shuffled papers with quick, restless hands, muttering to himself in between.

“The numbers don’t add up, Your Excellency,” he said, voice quivering like a teacup on the verge of spilling. “The morale report’s all upside down, and the creativity metrics—well—they’re a bit mad.”

“Of course they’re mad,” the CEO snapped, slamming a gloved hand on the desk. “Everything creative is mad until it’s profitable!”

Alice ducked behind a velvet sofa, peering over the armrest. Her breath caught. The man’s eyes—sharp yet kind.

The CEO leaned back, tapping her pen on the desk. “Tell me, Hattison,” she said coolly, “how are the departments faring since the Rabbit’s... reassignment?”

Hattison fidgeted. “Ah, well, morale’s a bit low, ma’am. People are losing their sense of purpose. Time’s gone rather... bendy without him.”

The CEO smiled thinly. “Then we’ll restructure the purpose too.”

Put it under the Motivation Division.”

“Already did, ma’am,” Hattison murmured. “It resigned.”

The CEO’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “Then replace it.”

Her voice cut through the air like a blade—cold and absolute. Alice’s stomach turned. This was no simple workplace. It was a throne room disguised as an office, ruled by precision and fear.

Alice’s gaze darted around the room, searching for the cat. There—a flicker of white near the CEO’s chair. The creature sat calmly, tail curled neatly around its paws, the teacup key dangling from its mouth like a prize.

Alice’s heart leapt.

Before she could move, the CEO rose from her chair. The motion was slow and deliberate. Her heels clicked against the marble like the ticking of a clock.

“There’s someone here,” she said, her eyes sweeping the room. “I can feel it. Someone... out of alignment.”

Hattison’s head snapped up. “Alignment? Oh dear—should I

fetch HR?"

"No," said the CEO, smiling faintly. "I'll handle this myself."

Her gaze flicked—sharp as a blade—toward the sofa.

Alice froze.

"Come out, little trespasser," said the CEO. "Or shall I have your position terminated?"

The word echoed, and for a heartbeat, Alice thought she saw the air itself tremble—as if the room obeyed her voice.

Slowly, she stood, hands shaking, heart thudding like a drum.

"I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to intrude," she stammered. "I'm just looking for my key. The cat—he took it!"

The CEO's lips curled. "Your key?"

Hattison blinked, squinting at her. "Oh, Your Excellency, it's her!

The one the Rabbit mentioned—Alice!"

The CEO's eyes lit up with strange delight. "Ah. That Alice."

She stepped closer, the scent of roses and iron filling the air. “You’ve been quite the disruption to my company, dear. Stirring up HR, defying procedure, chasing nonsense through my halls.”

Alice stood her ground. “I’m just trying to go home.”

“Home,” the CEO repeated, her voice dripping with amusement. “Such a fragile word. There is no home, my dear—only positions, projects, and performance.”

Her golden gaze hardened. “And you’re out of performance range.”

The cat’s eyes met Alice’s from behind the CEO’s chair, gleaming mischievously—as if to say, *Run while you can.*

Alice took a deep breath. “Maybe I don’t want to perform anymore.”

For a moment, there was silence. Then—

The CEO’s laughter filled the room, rich and terrible. “Oh, my dear girl,” she said softly, “you really are mad.”

Her hand reached toward a button on her desk—bright red and heart-shaped.

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“Let’s see,” she whispered, “how far madness gets you in my world.”

As her finger pressed the button, the floor beneath Alice began to shift—panels sliding, reality bending—pulling her down, down into another impossible layer of the corporate maze.

Alice darted through a pair of glass doors, her shoes slipping on the polished tiles as alarms wailed in the distance. The hallway stretched ahead, cold and silver, lined with elevator doors that gleamed like mirrors. One of them stood open—waiting. Without a second thought, she threw herself inside and slammed the button marked G.

The doors closed with a hiss just as the lights above flickered crimson. For a moment, the elevator seemed to hesitate, humming with the strange mechanical breath of the building. Then—with a jolt—it began to descend.

The ride was endless and silent except for the pounding of her heart. The numbers on the display blurred together: 47... 12... 5... 1...

Then, with a soft chime, the doors slid open.

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A gust of cool night air brushed against her face.

Alice stumbled forward. The metallic halls were gone. The scent of toner, coffee, and recycled air—all gone.

She was outside.

For the first time in what felt like forever, she saw the sky.

It was the same deep velvet blue she remembered from home, dusted with stars. But the world around her was not her own—not quite. Towering buildings loomed above, their windows glowing like a thousand eyes. Giant screens flickered across glass facades, advertising smiling faces and perfect products, each brighter and louder than the last.

People streamed past her in waves—talking, laughing, shouting into phones, their eyes fixed on glowing screens instead of each other. Some brushed past her without a glance, some muttered under their breath, none looked up.

Alice stood there, breathless, disoriented. The city was alive—but hollow.

She took a few trembling steps forward until she reached a small park nestled between the skyscrapers—a square of green hemmed in by light and noise. She found a bench under a flickering lamppost and sank onto it, her body heavy, her mind even heavier.

The night felt colder now.

She looked up again at the sky, trying to find comfort in its familiar shape. The stars were still there, but faint—drowned out by the city's glare.

The cat had her key. Her only way home was still up there, in that impossible office ruled by the CEO and her endless rules.

She pressed her hands together, staring down at her trembling fingers. "It's too much," she whispered. "It's all too much."

Her voice was small, almost lost in the rush of traffic and chatter.

Alice had always thought growing up meant understanding things better—that life would make more sense once she got older. But here, everything was new and strange. Easy, yet

difficult. Convenient, yet exhausting.

Everyone moved faster, talked louder, and expected more. And somewhere in all that noise, she felt herself fading—becoming just another face in the crowd.

“I just want things to be simple again,” she murmured. “Just tea and quiet mornings. Just... home.”

The city didn’t answer. The people kept walking.

A commercial flickered on a massive screen nearby—smiling faces, the words *Find Your Purpose. Upgrade Your Life.*

Alice almost laughed. A sad, tired sound.

She leaned back against the bench, eyes fixed on the sky. For a long moment, she sat there—still and small—while the city roared on around her.

Somewhere far above, in that glittering tower, a small white cat curled up on a desk beside a teacup-shaped key. It blinked once, as if it could still see her through the glass and distance, and let out a soft, lonely purr.

And Alice, feeling the weight of both worlds pressing against her heart, closed her eyes and wished—
not for escape, not for adventure—
but simply for life to stop being so much.

Chapter 16: The Girl in the Flowery Dress

Alice sat on the park bench, surrounded by the hum of a city that never seemed to stop moving. The night sky above was the same as the one she had back home, yet here it glowed against a backdrop of tall buildings and flashing lights. A giant screen flickered across one of the towers, advertising something she didn't understand, while people hurried past her — all looking down at the small glowing objects in their hands, their faces lit by cold light.

They spoke without looking at one another, bumping shoulders and brushing by, but never truly seeing.

Alice pulled her knees close to her chest and sighed. Her heart ached. Somewhere in that vast office above, the cat still held her key — her only way home. But the weight of everything pressed

down on her: the endless corridors, the strange rules, the constant rush. It was too much.



She lowered her head, her voice trembling. “I just wish life could go back to being simple again. Not like this... not so strange and heavy.”

A soft voice answered beside her. “It’s easy to feel that way here.”

Alice lifted her head. Someone had sat down next to her — a young woman with kind, gentle eyes. She wore a flowery dress

that seemed entirely out of place among the sharp suits and glass reflections. Her hair fell like soft sunlight over her shoulders, and her smile felt warm, almost familiar.

For a moment, Alice thought she didn't belong in this city either — yet she seemed completely at peace, like a flower that had bloomed in the wrong garden but made it beautiful anyway.

The woman looked out toward the lights. "This world," she said softly, "is what people call the future. It's easier for many now, because of all the inventions and machines that do things for them."

Alice tilted her head. "Machines? You mean... those glowing boxes everyone is staring at?"

The woman laughed lightly. "Yes, those. They call them phones, and they help people talk, share messages, or even see others who are far away. Then there are computers — the bigger ones. People use them for almost everything now. Work, learning, connecting with others, creating things. It's like a room full of minds that never sleep."

Alice frowned. “I’ve seen people sitting in front of those... computers. Their fingers move so quickly on those little square buttons. And there’s always that sound — the click-clack.”

“That’s the keyboard,” the woman explained, her tone kind and patient, like an older sister teaching something new. “Each sound is a letter, a word, or a thought being sent into the world. It’s how they build their ideas, one click at a time.”

Alice listened, her eyes wide. “So that’s what they’re doing. But why? Why does everyone use them so much?”

The woman smiled faintly. “Because technology helps people reach further than they ever could before. It makes things faster, easier, and in many ways... more connected. But,” she added gently, turning to look at Alice, “it also makes it easier to forget to stop. To look up. To breathe.”

Alice nodded slowly, following the woman’s gaze to the people hurrying past — faces lit by their tiny glowing screens, eyes fixed on something unseen.

The woman’s voice softened. “It’s important to use these things to help you live — not to let them *become* your life. I work in an

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office too, but it's only part of my world. I don't let it take all of me."

Her words lingered like sunlight breaking through gray clouds. Alice felt something loosen in her chest — not understanding everything, but sensing truth in the woman's calmness.

The girl in the flowery dress smiled, reaching out to brush a bit of dust from Alice's sleeve. "Don't be afraid of how the world changes, Alice. Even in places full of light and noise, you can still find quiet — if you remember who you are."

Alice looked down at her hands, then back at the glowing city. Somewhere above, her key still waited. But for the first time, she didn't feel entirely lost.

Chapter 17: Home Finally

The city glimmered around Alice like a thousand sleepless thoughts, yet she felt strangely calm now. The girl's words still echoed in her mind — *You don't have to belong to this world to learn from it.*

She looked down at the daisy in her hand, its petals still soft despite the chill of the night. Then she looked up toward the towering glass building that loomed in the distance — the place where her key, the key to go home, still waited.

Her heart fluttered, both afraid and certain. “I have to go back,” she whispered to herself. “I have to finish this.”

And so she walked.

The city lights reflected on the polished floor of the building’s grand lobby as she entered once more. The place was silent now, emptied of the bustling noise that once filled it. Only the hum of distant lights and the soft echo of her footsteps accompanied her as she approached the elevator.

The golden arrow above the doors glowed faintly. She reached out to press the button but froze.

Standing just a few steps away, adjusting his crooked tie, was Hattison. His hat was tilted as always, but his usual jittery cheer seemed dimmed, replaced by something nervous — almost desperate.

When his eyes met hers, he nearly dropped the folder in his hands. “Alice! Good heavens, you’re back?”

Alice nodded, clutching the daisy tighter. “Yes. I have to get my key — the one the cat took. I’m going home.”

Hattison’s eyes widened. “Oh no, no, no, my dear, that’s not advisable. Not at all!” He hurried forward, waving his hands frantically. “You don’t understand. The CEO — Her Majesty — she’s furious! Terminations, reorganizations, red memos everywhere!”

“I don’t care,” Alice said, trying to step around him. “I just need the key. Then I’ll leave this place and never come back.”

He moved in front of the elevator doors, blocking her path. “Listen to me, Alice,” he said quickly, his words tumbling over each other like loose marbles. “You don’t have to go back up there. It’s not worth the risk. Once she sees you again, she won’t just threaten termination — she’ll make it real.”

Alice took a deep breath. Her fear was still there, but it no longer ruled her. “Maybe so. But I’ve come too far to leave without trying. I have to end this, one way or another.”

Hattison froze. The panic in his eyes softened into something heavier — sadness, maybe even regret.

He adjusted his hat slowly. “You really are determined, aren’t you?”

Alice nodded.

For a moment, he just looked at her. The noise of the city outside seemed to fade, replaced by a strange stillness between them. Then, for the first time, Hattison’s fidgeting stopped. His voice changed — calmer now, steadier.

“That’s enough, Alice,” he said quietly.

Before she could speak, he leaned close and blew softly toward her face.

It was a gentle breath, like a sigh, carrying the faint scent of tea and smoke. But as it brushed her skin, the air around her began to ripple. The world flickered once, twice, and then collapsed into black.

The ground disappeared beneath her. The lights, the hum of machines, even Hattison’s eyes — all gone.

She felt herself falling through silence.

And then—

Birdsong.

The whisper of leaves. The warmth of sunlight on her cheek.

Alice blinked. The weight in her chest lifted as she found herself lying on the soft grass beneath her favorite oak tree. A book rested open on her lap, its pages fluttering in the afternoon breeze.

She sat up quickly, heart racing. “What—? But I was just—”

Her breath came fast, her pulse wild. For a long moment, she could only stare at the familiar meadow around her — the rolling green fields, the golden sky, the hum of bees.

“I must have fallen asleep,” she whispered, touching her forehead.

The book slipped slightly, and she caught it, laughing breathlessly. “It was just a dream,” she said aloud, though her voice shook. “Just a dream.”

Still, she could feel her heart pounding as if she had been running through corridors of glass only moments ago. She pressed her hand to her chest, half expecting to feel the cold hum of machinery beneath her skin — but there was only her heartbeat, quick and alive.

Relief flooded her, warm and dizzying. She looked up through the tree branches, smiling faintly. “Well,” she murmured, “it was only a dream after all.”

She stood and brushed the grass from her dress, turning to walk home. But just as she began to move, something caught her eye — a flicker of white near the roots of the tree.

She turned her head sharply.

There, for the briefest second, she thought she saw a small cat sitting in the grass, its fur gleaming like moonlight. Its eyes met hers — curious, knowing, impossibly familiar.

Alice blinked.

The cat was gone.

“Alice!” called her mother’s voice from a distance. “Dinner’s ready!”

She hesitated for a heartbeat, staring at the spot where the cat had been. Then she smiled softly to herself and turned away, the book still in her hand.



“Just a dream,” she whispered again as she walked toward home.

But somewhere deep inside her, a part of her wondered — if dreams could really be so real, and if perhaps, in another world of offices and wonder, a cat was still guarding a teacup-shaped key.

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