

Alice's Adventures in Under City: Downward Spiral

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Preface

Welcome to the introduction to the Alice Zombie Series. This series is a short work series of ebooks based upon the novel Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll. While not simply a rewrite, the overall tone of the book attempts to adhere to the spirit in which the original work was published. The Alice Zombie Series is planned to encompass three ebooks which will then be compiled into one final ebook.

This particular series details the journey of a young, but not quite so young, Alice as she encounters a myriad of strange occurrences counter to her upbringing which challenge her ideologies. Whereas this would normally take place during a marvelous trip into fantasy land, this particular journey includes voracious zombies.

Lewis Carroll originally penned and delivered as a gift a predecessor of what would become the iconic Alice under a different title, namely, Alice's Adventures Underground. On the timeline of Alice events, this ebook occurs prior to the revised version which was distributed to the public. Since the content for Lewis Carroll's work is similar, great liberty was taken with this series of short works in order to differentiate between Alice underground and Alice in Wonderland.

Parental Note

While this ebook is based off of the Alice genre, it is not intended for adolescent readers. This ebook does not contain nudity or profanity. It does; however, relate the exploits of a teenage Alice and as such may contain discussions of mature subject matter.

After Preface

Last but not least, the author would like to express his extreme gratitude to the Gumpery Commission, the pitiless peer reviews, hate mail, and the many furry animals that inspired this ebook.

After After Preface

The characters, incidents, and names in this ebook are all fictitious excluding those names that are real names for people; however, the characters that bear those names are not named after those individuals that are named thusly. This is to say that even though a character may have a real person's name the character is still a work of fiction whereby making the character and the character's name fictitious, even though the name is real. Regardless, these names bear no resemblance to any persons living, dead, undead, altered by military genetic experiments, or any other mad sciencery.

Any resemblance to any person in history or the future of history is entirely coincidental and should anything of this social nature manifest, the author reserves the right to be hailed as a clairvoyant and paid large sums of the then most fiscally lucrative monetary exchange and worshipped as a prophet.

Hitherto and finally, here is presented another ebook completely different from the rest of the ebooks out there which are most likely a far cry from the lunacy that unfolds in daily life to

which you are most likely reading this ebook to escape and have subsequently fallen into my trap. Of lunacy....

Alice's Adventures in Under City: Downward Spiral

Alice sat in the park hovering over her digital device with a sheepish smirk that was only broken by the consistently shocked expression she made every time she received a message. Her sister, Lorina, rolled her eyes and glowered, annoyed with Alice's behavior; however, a reassuring glance from her mother reminded Lorina that she too had been there once and with an exhausted sigh she gave the unwitting Alice reprieve. Edith, the youngest of the three daughters, giggled in her own youthful spirits at Alice's behavior unsure of what was so important but curious to find out for herself once she reached Alice's age.

Upon receiving the last text message, Alice looked up and scanned the tree line a short distance away visually appearing to be able to look straight through the other laughing and happy families that attended the function in which they were now involved. Her father scowled, knowing that his daughter was coming of age and that it seemed, although not entirely true, that boys had occupied Alice's cloudy thoughts more than her family or, rather, perhaps he was feeling the pangs of another of his girls dawning on the age to begin searching for someone to settle down with in her later years.

Regardless of the reason for her father's disapproval, Alice detected the fleeting brown hair of her blue eyed romantic interest peeking over some shrubbery in the distance. She smiled enthusiastically and with a finger on her chin, pondered a plausible excuse to get away from her family members.

"Dear," her loving father began in earnest, "You seem completely obsessed with that Robert Cole fellow. Even though you may have intentions for him, I should like to remind you to keep your behavior as that of a lady."

"But of course Father," Alice remarked over her shoulder then looked down at the blanket she sat upon timidly hoping that when she abruptly excused herself she wouldn't encounter resistance.

For, you see, Alice was caught between the ages of blossoming into her own femininity like her sister Lorina. This was an event which her father often scorned because he was losing yet another precious daughter and because of the changes young women went through during this sacred time. To him she was still his little girl and to be forced to accept her independence through disruptive behavior and frustrated indifference was quite trying. Alice was a different matter altogether from Lorina's stern temperament and often his derisive scowl was melted away by one of her youthful giggles like her younger sister, Edith, which caused him to grin like a beaming sun as he recalled Alice's innocence.

The same could be said for young Robert Cole, with exception, who had taken quite a fancy with Alice. Although not a middle child, he too was caught in the early stages of adolescent romance. Alice's present and most immediate concern was her first kiss despite the admonishing of her father. As a productive member of Second City she had every desire to avoid being the last person in her class to receive a kiss. Aside from her feelings of utter dread over the act of kissing a filthy, repulsive boy, her social standing had never been of so much importance to her and the butterflies in her stomach told her she wasn't sure whether or not she was quite up to the task.

In her heart; however, she was anxious to have a greater understanding of love. Of course the Second City state schools had tried, miserably of course, to explain and define love which came across rather dull as it was delivered in rhetoric as another lesson on the duties of a consumer rather than a true explanation. Overall the lesson was related in a manner that was altogether quite confusing. While they were expected to have their first kiss in the near future, many of the girls were also preparing for their vows of celibacy until after marriage.

Alice decided that propriety was her main concern. She wanted to do what was proper and ensure the happiness of her father while meeting the demands of her consumerism, no matter how confusing. Summoning up her reserves she prepared to deliver her alibi to the family. Calming herself as best she could, she felt her shoulders relax as she exhaled deeply. She looked about furtively, sighed once more, and then opened her mouth to speak.

"Alice, perhaps you should take a moment to look about the events for today on your own." Her mother kindly interjected. Alice was quite confounded at the sudden intrusion into her thoughts but agreed readily with a hearty nod of the head causing her short blonde hair to dance

emphatically against her neck and the bow placed on top and slightly to the side to tumble about her strands as it attempted to stay planted to her scalp.

“Be back within the hour dear,” Alice’s mother advised which satiated her father’s need to intervene and Alice’s need to escape the boundaries of her adolescence. Feeling the desire to at least partially oblige her parent’s request as she did still reside under their custody at the very least but more so because she loved and cherished them, Alice made a brief tour of the events, perhaps viewing each for a split second, and then made for the clearing.

“Are you sure she’ll behave?” her father asked her mother as he keenly looked after Alice but not so much as to be obvious that he was watching and once she was out of ear shot, to which her mother replied, “More than you did when you were her age.”

“Which is precisely what I’m afraid of,” He concluded with a loving grin toward his ever so level headed significant other which displayed both his trust and enduring affection for his choice in romantic partnership. Motherly intervention had assisted on more than one occasion between father’s wishes and child’s potential temper tantrum.

“Can you ever settle Henry little, I’m sure our children will without fail become productive consumers of Second City.”

“Is it not a Father’s duty to have the utmost concern for his young children?” Henry answered inquisitively as he hugged Edith close prompting her to giggle most furiously.

“Not so much that you smother them, besides I should think that with your habits you’d worry yourself sick Headmaster Little.” Edith little, not to be confused with Edith Little the elder, for whom Edith was named which could sometimes be quite confusing, responded quite tersely but in jest none the less.

“Yes father, I should think you have enough to concern yourself with other than the affairs of your properly raised children. I’m sure you’ll hear all about the event for days regardless much to the distress of everyone else in the household.” Lorina, imposed testing the limits of her age.

His eldest daughter’s nervous yet confident response resonated with the approval he needed to accord her stature and being the dynamic and ever present father figure he was Henry obliged her comment lovingly with, “Oh and that is what I’m most afraid of my dear!” and the family enjoyed a reassuring chortle at Alice’s expense.

Alice believed she had once spotted her father staring in her direction but with her parents engaged in idle conversation and entertaining her sisters, she plunged into the brush and appeared on the other side feeling quite disheveled and dismayed that she did not immediately see Robert. Stomping her foot in frustrated excitement she carefully peered and wandered about whispering his name. Full of vim and vigor and never wanting to fully admit that he too was nervous as it may affect the appearance of his confidence, Robert enjoyed her stumbling about as he contemplated that this first kiss might lead to many more.

Robert watched Alice frown in frustration with tickled amusement. Her expectant manner demanded he present himself so that she may riddle him with inquiry and a list of conditions for him to meet in the proper manner of consumermanship. Alice walked about searching for Robert momentarily before getting flustered and smoothing the back of her ploom dress, she sat and down. When she became frustrated Alice had a penchant for analyzing statistics to determine her opportunities and assessing her current state.

Recently, Second City had seen an increase of high school romance success. She was sure that her first kiss would be telling. In fact, recent reports had indicated that after her first kiss, she would have an eighty-two percent chance of marriage. She wondered if she was ready for such a major step in her life. She didn't need to wonder about Robert being trustworthy because she knew there was a chance, thirty four percent according to statistics, that he would remain faithfully committed throughout marriage. That was okay for Alice; however, because twenty three percent of women stayed faithful throughout the length of their commitment.

Truthfully, Alice was curious about the average two point three partners she would encounter while she remained under her vows. The concept of infidelity seemed outrageous to her yet facts were facts and they did not lie. She pondered dreamily about how her romantic liaises would occur. How would they attempt to persuade her to forsake her vows? While statistics were informative, she was intrigued by undertaking the actual experience. She contemplated whether or not she would resist or consent. She pondered whether or not there marriage would end in divorce given the statistics that one hundred percent of divorces were begun by marriage. Finally, she tried to discern whether or not she and Robert would have successful employment as higher income often contributed to more leisure time which could result in infidelity. Facts, equations, and statistics spun in her mind until, "Boo!"

Alice let out a not so quiet yelp that caused her to leap to her feet in her excitement.

“Robert Cole,” Alice yelled as she stood rigidly with her fists jutted out to her sides and her heels pressed together with her toes pointing at a thirty degree angle in an attempt to mimic her mother’s angry posture while glowering at the youth who was rolling on the ground laughing.

“How dare you, I shan’t be kissing you today young man!” She threatened full of pomp and turned her head to the side while sticking her nose in the air and placing her hands upon her hips. The sudden resistance had an immediate effect.

“Alice, don’t be mad, I’m ever so sorry,” he pleaded to no avail.

“Alice, please don’t be cross with me. You seemed so lost in thought day dreaming,” He pleaded which caused Alice to flush with rage, or rather more appropriately, disappointment.

“How dare you, how dare you, how dare you!” She stomped her foot, a telltale sign that she was severely distressed, “You know very well that I detest such trickery and the mere fact that you would mention such a hurtful utterance to someone you intend to give your first kiss is utterly unbearable. I have half a mind to depart these premises and leave you to your infantile whims and fancy while you completely disregard your consumermanship!”

You see, Alice had often been reprimanded for her daydreaming by both her peers and authoritarians. Unbeknownst to her, Robert had frequently stared in her direction smiling softly to himself while admiring her distracted appearance. Her engrossment in her own concerns gave him the freedom to study every feature of her face from her hair, which had deep dark roots and lightened to a translucent light yellow, to her deep warm dark blue eyes that seemed to draw him in until he felt he was swimming in them. Which, coincidentally, he happened to be doing despite her immediate anger.

“Robert, have you heard a word I’ve said?” Alice inquired as she noticed his soft smile and a look that he himself was day dreaming.

“Yes, Alice, every word.”

“I said I was leaving, Robert...”

“Oh, don’t do that! I’m sorry Alice.” Robert entreated.

“What were you looking at?” Alice questioned forgetting her rage for a moment.

“Your eyes, I look at them all the time. They’re simply unfathomable.” And to Young Robert his whimsical oration wasn’t something he hadn’t considered previously. Indeed, under her full attention her eyes seemed even more brilliant as the sun frolicked through the leaves and

illuminated wisps of Alice's golden mane, accentuating the contrast between her angelic face and bottomless gaze.

"Stop," Alice demanded suddenly feeling the discomfort of her changing perspective again.

"I'm sorry," Robert repeated and turned away flush.

Forgetting her own uneasiness while seeing Robert's anxiety and confusion, she sat next to him. Alice was nurturing above all and the thought had crossed her mind that even young, confident, boisterous Robert Cole may feel some shame for the feelings and changes occurring internally as well. There was a somber moment between them as they tried to reason what to do.

It was Alice who broke through silence's thickly filled with buttery butterflies disquiet when a flitting snapping dragon gracefully adorned her finger.

"Robert," she whispered scarcely breathing, "Turnabout slowly."

Robert moved by stalled degrees until he saw the green metallic hued creature lighted upon her finger. In their amiable moods, nature had settled about them. Something which Alice noticed and found intrinsically curiouser and curiouser.

"Slowly look to your left," Robert instructed as Alice heard both a sweet and somber tone reach her ear.

When she looked, she saw two humming birds dancing in the air together not more than a meter away. The two birds seemed to take notice of the other couple present and stopped to inspect them. The snapping dragon lifted in the air once more and flitted away after its repose ending the inquisitive nature of the two birds that departed as they continued to serenade each other with different tones. Alice looked at Robert who turned away in the interlude and reached for something slightly behind him. When he turned round he presented Alice with a flower and gently slid it under the digital visor adorning her hair.

"You're very beautiful Alice, I should like very much to kiss you," He stated as he put his hand on hers. Alice looked fondly into Robert's eyes but recalled his earlier shenanigans which brought doubt, in her mind, about the sincerity of his intentions.

"Thank you Robert; however, we've still not settled the matter of your earlier buffoonery."

"Whatever shall I do to convince you that my heart is true Alice?" Robert retorted in affirmation that he indeed was ready to commit himself to their twenty five percent chance of remaining lifelong partners.

“Hmm, I know!” Alice was excited about the revelation that he should pay a price similar to hers, “I shall hide and you shall find me! If you do not find me then I may kiss you and if you find me I shall allow you to give me a kiss.”

With the odds in his favor, Robert sprang to his feet without another word, turned his back as he leaned against a tree, and began to count. Alice both astounded and enthused by his immediate reaction sprang to her feet and absconded into the foliage not at all a short distance away. When she happened upon a large dark tunnel like entrance she was skeptic that she may have gone too far. Unfortunately, she could hear Robert’s feet in the distance approaching the direction he’d heard her depart and she could hear his changing voice calling her name. Having suddenly run out of options, she decided to disappear behind a large tree and wait to be found as these were the conditions to determine who was to give and receive their first kiss.

Robert observed his surroundings and quickly discovered the large tunnel as well. Deciding that Alice might think that he wouldn’t have the gall to enter such a dark and foreboding cavern he plunged in with little forethought. Alice grinned to herself with satisfaction. Robert would no doubt have his digital device with him which would allow him some light in the darkness. There was very little to be concerned about in Second City so she had no need to be alarmed about him wandering into the cavern. In the interim she could wait for him outside and surprise him when he returned. Alice sat and looked about her to see what wonders nature would bring to her.

She wasn’t aware of the time until her wrist vibrated, she’d set it to silent while she waited in order to avoid detection, with a note from her mother.

“Mind the time Alice,” it stated and Alice felt a pang of panic as she’d still not received nor given her first kiss. Alice reviewed her memory and was certain she hadn’t heard Robert leave the cavern. Bracing herself, she entered the dark edifice and switched on the flashlight application of her digital device. The path she took was long and seemed to curve gently from left to right, then right to left. She cautiously scanned ahead occasionally calling softly for Robert as she was too afraid she may disturb someone else who had snuck away to engage in their first kiss. At least this was Alice’s reasoning as she was quite afraid of her surroundings and seemed to get a sense of general foreboding.

Unbeknownst to Alice, Robert was searching for his way out or Alice, but by of far more importance to him was finding his way out as he suspected Alice was not there at all. He’d become quite confused in the cavern and his digital device didn’t seem to be getting a good

signal. Robert lamented that he hadn't had the good sense to download a maze tracking device prior to entering the runoff cavern; however he couldn't be concerned with such novelties at a time like this. He decided to stick to the left hand side of the cavern and see if he couldn't retrace his steps.

Alice's heart raced. She had long ago abandoned any notion of finding Robert. The tunnel seemed to overwhelm her and at this particular junction she decided that Robert's foolishness far exceeded his desire to give her the first kiss she required for good consummation before taking her vow of chastity until marriage. Frustrated, alone, and feeling a sense of abandonment she concluded it may be best for her to depart the cave all together.

Robert's heart leapt for joy as his digital device's beam caught a figure before him.

"Alice?" he called to the feminine figure before him that stood unsteadily yet in a dress similar to Alice's. Then Robert coughed and covered his mouth and nose. A mephitic essence had struck his senses in short order nearly causing him to double over. As he contended with the maleficence, the figure before him turned around and Robert gave a muffled cry as something strong wrapped around his torso and restricted his lungs capacity to inflate.

Alice heard a sound similar to Robert's voice. She plunged ahead with renewed vigor. Perhaps Robert had hurt himself. She was running low on time as well and didn't wish to return without her first kiss as she wasn't sure when she'd have another opportunity. She concluded that should they make it out of the runoff tunnels together, she would scold him first then give him a kiss. A section of the tunnel loomed ahead and she could hear scuffling. Scritch scratching echoed in her ears along with the sound of wetness and... and was that chewing? She couldn't be sure. She did however see the faint light of a digital device beam. Deciding that she should extinguish her torch app, Alice crept closer with the possible intention of repaying young Robert for his earlier surprise.

The walls of the cavern were smooth and clean, no doubt the industrious work of Second City mechanical assistance and the water that ran at this point was clear. Alice knew because when she'd had her torch lit earlier, she could see to the bottom unassisted. The clean impression she had of the tunnel was compounded by the fact that in this particular section the lights were very dim but as her eyes adjusted she could still see. She realized now that her torch was off that there were lights in the center section of the floor where the water was, and she could run on

either side with ease as there was a walkway that extended a meter and a half or two meters from each side.

She supposed the walkway was for maintenance. Perhaps maintenance hadn't been called to this particular section because the smell that emanated was almost overpowering. Alice's eyes watered and she fanned her face with no effect as the putrid stench wormed its way to her stomach. She would have forsaken this area entirely had it not been for the thought that she'd seen Robert's light. She concluded that must be the reason for the odor as there was no doubt a robot would have been called when the olfactory sensor picked up the reek she currently found herself encompassed. With her teary eyes, she was unsure of whether or not she'd seen Robert's torch cutting through the darkness. She turned her head in the direction she'd trotted and considered returning when she heard the sound again. She hesitantly moved closer to the source.

Yes she had definitely seen a flashlight app. It moved against the wall lazily. Robert must have gotten turned about in the tunnels and had relinquished his pursuit to exit the tunnels all together. It was Alice's turn to return the charade. She crept quietly closer and prepared to startle her unwitting companion. Easing herself against the Second City tunnel wall, she took a breath and peeked quickly confirming her suspicion but seeing little else. Without the bravado, she took a breath and prepared herself to casually make her appearance and demand a kiss.

Alice turned the corner and froze in shock. Young Robert Cole was lying prone on the ground with several figures bent over him. The arm that held the digital device was being feasted upon and had been detached from Robert all together. Alice took note of a growing pool of blood surrounding Robert and in her state of delirium was more fascinated at how much of the human organism contained liquid. She began to speculate the approximate amount when one of the figures turned in her direction and released a most wicked snarl that brought Alice back to her immediate senses.

She observed, in the most austere manner of which one observes immediate danger, that the wretches that devoured what remained of Robert Cole's corpse had the sickly appearance and wax like skin of the dead. The veins upon their skin were a dark color and seemed to ooze rather than carefully network like normal veins. They seemed over filled as if the blood that had settled there had turned gaseous and rounded the tendrils into rubbery elongations that would burst upon the slightest agitation.

Their clothes were tattered and blood stained and seemed to be made of fabric instead of foam. Any bruising that had occurred in life resembled a pustule. Some of the fingers had been rubbed down clean to the bone. The figure that had turned its face to her didn't have the presentation of an individual from Second City who was healthy and diligent in their grooming. The hair was disheveled and seemed to be caked with detritus. The eyes were sunken and where the orb should have been placed, although Alice granted that she was in the dark, it appeared they were to dark cloudy places over a blackened bulb.

As another detestable creature approached and sank to its knees taking a large bit out of Robert's calf, Alice concluded that the scritch and scratch sound was the approach of the being. The sound that reached her ears presently was much louder than the approach of the singular diner. It appeared to be a group of the wretches and Robert's corpse seemed to offer little more sustenance. Alice didn't want to contemplate the statistical average of the number of cannibals it would take to consume a human corpse. As the other figures rounded the bend she proposed another course of action overall.

"I shan't like to have a conversation with you left and right," she began in reference to her feet," yet I'd be most appreciative if you moved in the most expedited of manners and carried me swiftly away from here."

Her calm conclusion seemed to ring quite loudly to her feet and they obeyed forthwith. Alice bolted away from her menacing interlopers at a speed with which even she was amazed. Her feet could be heard echoing off of the concrete walls. Her menacing companions gave chase further panicking Alice so that she was unsure of which turns lead where or which direction she was taking as her hostile intruders began to gain ground in the midst of her exhaustion. Chancing a look back as the roof of the tunnel she was in seemed to disappear into the ground in what most would call a wall, but in Alice's grief and panic stricken state the concept simply eluded her, she saw that the horribly disfigured minions of homicide were mere centimeters from her and seemed to be spurred on by the hunt.

Presently, as she was distracted by her concern of imminent and mortal peril, she slipped and fell into the center of tunnel with a great splash. She was barely able to begin a brief shriek that was yanked from her lungs as she collided and was pulled forward much to her relief. Her attackers, not wishing to embark on the same route and apparently trying to capture their prey before it escaped, quit their chase with the most animated activity they seemed to be able to use

to express their disapproval with her escape and simply left once Alice Was out of their sight and unable to be intimidated by their horribly fierce antics.

Down, down, down Alice slid as if she were in a hidden water slide. She quickly forgot her terror and calmed down, her mind too preoccupied with wondering what was at the bottom of her destination to be concerned with the terror shed experienced. She tried to comprehend why she hadn't heard a rush of water as it cascaded but Second City was a quiet humble place and such matters were best left to the engineers who designed the tunnels initially.

It had been to Alice's relief that this section of Second City was artificially lit with each light turning on as she approached and shutting off as she passed. The gentle yet elusive light assuaged her fear of the unknown and she began to time the on and offness, as she called it, of the matter. In fact, to be completely truthful, Alice slid for so long she became quite bored. She was; however, very impressed with the consumermanship of Second City, for as she fell she began to notice various objects which had been discarded by the Second City residents.

She had no fear of being hurt by the wonderfully created and designed multitude of contraptions for they were made of ploam. Ploam, the durable lightweight material Second City consumermen used to create household objects such as plates, forks , knives, clothing, or whatever else they needed was created from recycled materials and sent down a special chute to be disposed of once the item had outlived its usefulness.

As she continued her hand brushed against a clock. She picked it up and wondered for how long she had been sliding. She was quite damp all over and although the water was cool, she decided she'd much rather be dry and warm since she had left the sunshine of the park. Alice wondered how her parents were doing as well. In her rush, the thought of contacting them had leapt from her ear and escaped the creatures long before she had the intuition to run. Thinking of her guardians she tried to contact them but when she retrieved the digital device connected to her arm she found it was damaged by the water and most certainly inoperable. She wasn't sure if she'd have been able to get a signal regardless. The tunnel didn't seem to allow for repeaters and communication would have most likely been limited at best.

"Poor father," She intoned, "He must be ever frightful of where I'm at by now. I wonder if he will exercise his consumer rights and if he has called the Peace Officers yet for I have been sliding diagonally for some time now. He must be in distress either worried about my lady hood or harried by my unexpected disappearance. How shall I ever make this up to him? I'm sure

I'll simply have to set firm and relay the events to him as they occurred. I'm sure he'll understand."

When it came to the notion of what specifically had attacked and killed Robert and had chased her to her current local, Alice found she was at a loss. Proper consumerism dictated she refrain from using the term zombie, although that is what the creatures resembled. Alice couldn't be sure because she'd never personally seen a zombie and hadn't a definition for the being. She could vaguely recall the term zombie as well. When the matter had been brought to her attention by friends, she'd promptly been told that it was the imaginings of children and best to be forgotten. As she aspired to be a proper consumer, she'd forced the term from her mind and admonished her friends for distributing such propaganda. In Second City, zombies did not exist nor any other city for that matter. The officials of Second City would most certainly know what was best for its citizens so such absurdity was left for children and those who were of lesser mental constitution who worked the more unsavory occupations.

With that Alice let the matter drop in her mind for she really had no other choice as she plummeted off of a ledge herself. As she was thrown from the precipice, she managed to be spun around and landed six or perhaps six point five meters below in a large pool although she couldn't tell as much as presently she was under water. At that very moment she came face to face with a decrepit deteriorating visage. As her body decelerated and before she began to resurface, the water swollen face rolled its eyes downward and stared at Alice before opening its mouth and reaching for her.

Alice's body had twisted as she fell into the Second City water and she kicked furiously propelling herself upwards. She screamed then remembering where she was, held her breath as she wasn't sure how far down she'd gone. The pool was just deep enough to keep the grasping hands that beckoned her to be a part of a meal slightly out of reach. However, there were others down there tall enough to nick at her legs as she broke the surface of the water. Alice gasped breathing in water and air, choking and muttering, she saw trees and immediately started for them. She could feel brushes against her leg and unsure as to whether it was her imagination, water, or the walking terrors, she fled for the safety of anything but where she was at.

Land wasn't far away and she hoisted herself up the side and looked down at where she had landed. As if they were walking in slow motion, things with the shape of humans piled toward her with their arms outreached and their fingers twitching for her skin. The ploom seemed to be

congesting as the ripples of the ploam waterfall carried them away into the ploam river. The inhuman carnivores could still be seen below and Alice decided that as the case may be she might want to exit the river all together since she now had the capability of deciding which direction she would like to wander.

“For it cannot be exploring,” Alice determined, “Because one cannot explore what someone else already has knowledge of but however shall I get home?”

Waving her hands in the air and wringing her hair, Alice tried to think of the best way to get home. She was quite unsure as to which direction to take after escaping a most horrific fate but thought she would prefer to do so post haste and without another breath she began to step in the first direction that didn't look like it was inhabited by what no proper consumerman would call the undead as they most certainly did not exist.

“Would it be reasonable to presume that there may be some sort of facility about?” Alice asked herself unsure if she wanted to advance into the new scenery around her as she danced from side to side trying to determine if she might end up in the hands of certain peril. There were benches by the waterfall and having moved past these, she found herself surrounded by trees having completely overlooked the path that was just behind. She had a general sense of her surroundings. She strongly speculated that she was currently located in the remnants. Then she corrected herself.

“Alice, it is rude and thoughtless to think of the past culture that birthed Second City as backwards and contrary. They were merely ignorant and hadn't been properly educated in the ways of consumerism.”

She nodded her head with certainty at her own reprimand and then looked to her left and right wondering how she was going to navigate through the thick growth that sprawled before her. She was surprised to see that there was such a wealth of foliage on the banks of the ploam river and then considered that the vegetation may purify the water from Second City that assisted the ploam on its journey to the recycling plant.

She looked back over her shoulder with reservation and considered the pool of things she couldn't name. She would have been more than happy to at least attempt to climb back the way she came despite the trouble but then she pondered that if she slipped then she may slide all the way back down and it would have hardly been worth the effort, especially if she were near the top. Beyond that, the horrible fate that she may not be so lucky to escape a second time might

strip the flesh from her bones. In regards to the top, she wasn't sure how she arrived at her destination either and that would mean attempting to wind her way back to the entrance she slipped through with Robert.

"Poor Robert," she sighed and then remembered that those troglodytes, a word her father used in reference to the remnant's inhabitants but had strictly forbade her to use so she only said it in her mind, might still be about and that particular meeting would be most unsavory indeed. All of which left Alice still dripping wet and hesitant to enter the lush greenery before her or turn back to the slide which had brought her to the place she was standing at that moment.

That was until a large splash that didn't sound like ploam erupted behind Alice and she became quite convinced it would be in her best interest to conclude her brainstorming session and decide on a course of action.

"Well, left and right, I suppose I have need of you again," and before she could finish her sentence, Alice dashed off into the garden of trees before her on another path hidden by tree limbs. Unfortunately, Alice didn't know the path behind her would have shortened her journey through the forest by a considerable amount. Fortunately for her, the path was guarded by pig cards that were looking for someone else. Unfortunately for Alice, they delighted in hurting and torturing those that wandered into their midst.

"No time to consider the origin of such a welcome site, best be on my way!" She muttered to herself as she careened over the path and she didn't shorten her strides until she was quite sure that the rushing sound of ploam, water, and whatever landed in the pool behind her were well outside of hearing distance. She continued on at a brisk pace constantly pausing to look about her and ensure that no one was following. When she was sure she was far away from danger she stepped off of the trail and hid behind a tree to catch her breath.

Upon doing so, Alice found that the situation had solved itself and she was quite dry. Her ploam attire didn't retain water very well at all but during the interlude she'd been able to think or recall very little at all. She patted herself to knock off any dirt and inspect her condition. Alice had on a long blue dress that stopped short above the knees. The material at her shoulders was light and the dimensional printer she'd used had been able to condition the material at the bottom to be more rigid allowing for the dress to flare where it stopped. While her dress didn't hug her figure entirely, it was slimming and hung from her shoulders in two large straps.

The opening for the head was quite large so Alice wore a nice white shirt underneath that contained short frilly patterns down the center. It was short sleeve and being fond of frills she'd designed it to have ruffles along the edge. Contrary to her mom's sensible footwear, Alice had chosen to create a pair of ploom boots mostly because she did a lot of walking, but because it was the trending fashion at school as well. While the base design was sturdy, she'd been keen to add patterns of brightly colored flowers along the toes and up the sides that led to her legs. The sides also contained ruffles that resembled petals. There was no need for laces, buckles, or zippers as ploom could be either rigid or elastic depending on the need of the individual who created the item.

As she inspected herself for damage, nothing beyond minor scrapes and nicks from her run through the woods, she took another look at her digital device hoping that it may have returned to life. Removing it from her wrist, she pulled the back from the front and saw that the moisture indicator was thoroughly sodden.

"Heavens me, the poor thing has been thoroughly saturated! I shan't be located by the authorities in the near future without a proper connection."

She spoke the command to turn it on but she was sure it wouldn't respond. Good consumerism dictated she should dispose of the object and buy a new one from a vending machine; yet, she was unsure of where a vending machine would be located in her current local. Nevertheless, she was sure the device was quite broken and she had no means of connectivity or the option to accessorize or purchase a new device. "Now what am I to do?" She gave in futilely sliding her device back into its location on her arm and collapsed on the ground with the useless device free of her hands and her hands in her lap with a tear ever ready to spring from her eye.

Indeed, a tiny silver pearl of sadness was just about to leap from her lower eyelid when, much to Alice's astonishment, she could just barely discern the sound of sobbing creeping its way through the woods and landing lightly upon her eardrum as if it were a butterfly carried on a delicate breeze. Doubting her own senses, Alice wiped her tear away, sniffled rather audibly, neatly tucked away her own distraught, and craned her neck in the direction she thought she heard the sound from intensely listening for the sobbing once again. She heard nothing and her doubt grew. Surely, she thought, her mind was hearing the sound of her own sobs before they'd issued from her mouth but then there it was again! Reassuring herself and mustering her confidence, Alice stood up as quietly as she could and, positive she had heard someone else's

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