

WONDERLAND

Alicia was hoping for a romantic evening. Beckett would soon find her in the bedroom. She had heard him enter through the front door. He was now calling out her name, wondering where she might be. On the night stand was a bottle of champagne in a bucket of ice next to stemmed glasses and a box of chocolates. She was wearing a pink see-through negligee purchased for the occasion. She lay on top of the sheets, propped up against plush pillows.

Beckett was getting closer, about to discover her. It was a game she liked to play. She had nicknamed him the Big Bunny, even though his name was derived from an Old English word – “beo,” meaning “bee,” interpreted also as “beehive.” She came up with this name for him after his black hair had mysteriously turned prematurely white in his mid thirties. The buzzing in her head had come on strong one day and she envisioned him as a rabbit. A big bunny.

She heard a faint sound. The swarm of bees. Alicia wished for it to go away, biting her lip as the buzzing increased. Suddenly she was stung ferociously between the eyes. She pressed fingers against both temples to combat the pain and cursed the migraine.

This is how Beckett found Alicia when he entered the room. He was erotically delighted then shocked by the expression on her face. After he had seen her trail of rose petals leading him up the stairs to their bedroom, Beckett had guessed what he would find inside. And so, to surprise her as well, he discarded all his clothing at the door. He entered the room naked.

Alicia had her eyes squeezed shut. When she opened them and saw Beckett, she screamed. She cowered at the sight of him. He was huge, towering over her. His head touched the ceiling. She saw that he was naked.

“Don’t come near me! You’re too big. Stay away!”

He stood there, conflicted, wanting to approach and somehow help her through this episode. Except he felt helpless, unable to calm her whenever he became, in her mind, “big.”

Beckett sat in a chair with the hope her migraine would soon diminish. He saw the bottle of champagne sweating in the bucket. He wanted to pop it open, desperate for a taste of alcohol, in need of self-medication. But he knew the sound of the cork upon release would trigger more alarm bells in his wife’s head.

Alicia had covered her eyes. His mixed feelings of arousal and impotence left him confused. These bouts of her insanity arrived spontaneously and could last up to an hour or just a few minutes. So he patiently waited.

When Alicia cautiously opened her eyes, looking but no longer finding him in the room towering above her, she asked in a whisper, “Where are you?”

“Over here. Are you feeling better?”

She saw him sitting in a doll’s chair in the corner of the room. She giggled at the sight of him, naked and so tiny.

“What’s the matter now?”

“You. I’m gigantic and you’re so small. Come to bed. I want to play with you. I had a boy toy your size when I was a little girl. What happened to the Big Bunny?”

“Alicia, I am still the same size. I haven’t grown nor shrunk. You’re experiencing those weird afflictions again.”

“Can you climb up onto the bed? I can pick you up if—”

“Alicia, you’re hallucinating!”

She held out her enormous hands, staring at them for a moment in bewilderment, before covering her eyes to hamper the tears that gushed like waterfalls down her face.



Doctor Milliner listened attentively then nodded at Alicia.

“You are suffering from a neuropsychological condition called Alice in Wonderland Syndrome. That is my belief.”

Beckett and Alicia looked at one another before turning back to face the doctor. He was smiling broadly.

“Not to worry,” he said to reassure them. “It’s nothing serious. I, myself, had only recently learned about this oddity of a condition. And now you show up. A coincidence? Would you like some tea?”

“No, thank you,” said Alicia. Her eyebrows displayed a frown as she glanced over at her husband.

Milliner’s office had a homey feeling. It appeared to be his living room, because it was. They were all seated around a low coffee table in plush armchairs.

“I shall elucidate. Your symptoms are attributed to functional and structural aberrations of the perceptual system. The cause of this syndrome is unknown, yet it *is* associated with migraines. Which you stated you’ve had for how long?”

“Since I was young. I think I was around seven, eight, or nine when I had my first episode of this ...”

“Alice in Wonderland Syndrome,” said Milliner, removing his glasses and wiping the lens with his shirttail.

“I was too embarrassed to tell anyone. I was sure no one would believe me. Afraid I’d be punished for lying. Also, I didn’t want to worry my parents. So I’ve kept these visions a secret.”

“Oh, what a delightful child you are!”

“I’m thirty-six,” snapped Alicia. “Hardly a child.”

“I meant *then*, not now. Apologies.” Milliner reattached his glasses and stood. “I brewed us some tea. It should be ready.”

He walked to a taller table and brought back a silver tray. It held a ceramic teapot with cups and tiny spoons.

“You must have a cup of tea,” said Milliner, raising the pot and pouring tea into three cups. “Now, where were we?”

“My condition?” said Alicia.

Milliner sipped his tea. “Hum, yes, it’s fascinating, really. Those, such as yourself, who are afflicted with this rare condition are said to experience distortions in visual perception of objects, also people, appearing smaller (*micropsia*) or larger (*macropsia*). And perceived to being closer (*pelopsia*) or farther away (*teleopsia*) than they are in reality. Thus the name, derived from that fairytale book.”

Beckett interrupted to ask, “Is there a cure?”

“Oh, no, no,” said Milliner, removing his glasses, holding them up to inspect the lens for smudges. “There is no cure. It’s incurable. These odd perceptual distortions most commonly occur in young children. But, over time, as they grow older, the symptoms – *voilà* – go away. It’s a mystery.” He repositioned his glasses back on his face and smiled at his audience of two.

“Why haven’t mine?” Alicia was losing patience with this man whose grinning face began to annoy her.

“Yes, it *is* strange. Strange indeed. The good news is—”

“There’s good news?” scoffed Beckett.

“It’s a benign illness. The symptoms of this syndrome are not inherently harmful. But, yes, yes, often frightening to the recipient who experiences these hallucinations.”

Alicia sighed. “I thought I was losing my mind. Going mad.”

Milliner sipped his tea, nodding. “‘We’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad,’ so said the Cheshire Cat. But seriously, there’s nothing serious for you to worry about, my dear.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” said Beckett. “These sporadic bouts terrify my wife. And I *am* worried, doctor. Alicia sometimes thinks I’m a gigantic rabbit.”

“A big bunny,” said Alicia. “That’s what he turns into.”

“Zoopsia.” Milliner was delighted by this new discovery.

“Zoo—what? What are you saying?”

“It’s a related symptom. Do you not see the connection? As you become Alice, your husband becomes the White Rabbit. ‘Curiouser

and curiouser.' Who said that? The caterpillar?"

"No. Alice says that," said Alicia.

"Ah, so, then you *have* read the book," said the doctor.

"Years ago, when I was a child."

"At what age?"

"I can't remember. Eight or nine, maybe. Why?"

"Why does it matter?" Beckett shifted in his seat. "What the hell does any of this mean?"

"Zoopsia involves hallucinations of animals. It's an additional symptom associated with this other syndrome you have."

Beckett was losing patience. "And all this means, what?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. You see, because neither of these syndromes are commonly diagnosed or documented, it's practically impossible to know what the underlying causes are, if there are any. And, at present, there is no standardized plan for treatment."

The doctor noticed neither of them were drinking the tea.

"What's the matter, my dear, don't you care for tea?"

"We didn't schedule an appointment to have tea."

"Aren't there any prescription medications available?"

Milliner spoke to Beckett. "I could heavily sedate your wife with several drugs in an effort to counter her migraines. But I'm afraid they wouldn't make your wife a very happy—"

"Excuse me," said Alicia sharply. "You're talking about me – my life – as if I'm not even here."

"And yet you most certainly are." Milliner sipped his tea and smiled. "I would love to prescribe for you an *antipsychotic*, but they are rarely used in treating this syndrome. Why? Due to their minimal effectiveness. From what I've read. And so, well, there you are."

"Nowhere closer to knowing anything!" Alicia glowered at him and rubbed her forehead. "You're about to give me a migraine."

"Oh, dear, we can't have that. Try counting backwards from one hundred to one."

“Why?”

“To think of something other than your painful self.”

“That’s what I do. I’ve tried everything. I once tried to imagine as many impossible things as possible. Complete nonsense.”

“That is an *excellent* practice.”

“It didn’t work. Nothing *ever* works.” The room brightened as the stinging pain intensified. Alicia shut her eyes. She was hearing the buzzing of bees and the doctor’s voice from far away. She opened her eyes and saw he had become a caricature of himself – a Mad Hatter with his crazed grin, sipping tea, seated at the end of a long table.

“What were you saying to me just now?”

“Pure nonsense.” He poured himself more tea.

Her husband was looking at his pocket watch. He had become the White Rabbit. The Mad Hatter babbled on.

“If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be.’ Don’t you see?”

“Oh, my god,” said Alicia, covering her face. “I *am* going mad. What is happening to me? Who are you?”

“A friend, I hope.” The doctor raised his cup in a toast. “Please, I insist, you *must* drink the tea.”

Boiling over in anger, Alicia stood to leave but found her body growing taller and taller until her head bumped against the ceiling. Looking down, she screamed, “This is impossible!”

The Mad Hatter replied, “Only if you *believe* it is.”

The White Rabbit looked up at her, “Are you feeling okay?”

“No! Look at me. I’m too big and you’re both too small.”

Taking offense, the doctor set down his cup. “Why is everyone too large or too small? Personal remarks like that are rude. And, yet, it is a small world afterall. Would you like more tea, my dear.”

Alicia was experiencing vertigo. Her long legs became wobbly, unable to hold her up. Losing consciousness, she toppled over and

fell into her husband's soft, furry embrace.



Years had passed since their encounter with Doctor Milliner. On a balmy twilight evening, Alicia and Beckett were walking with their three-year-old daughter, Aly. The neighborhood was beautiful with its autumnal display of colorful leaves.

“Maybe it was the tea,” said Beckett.

“I didn’t drink any,” said Alicia.

“You did. You gulped the tea down fast, as if defiantly, before abruptly standing. Then you stiffened, looking down at us, startled. That’s when you collapsed.”

“It’s all a blur,” said Alicia. She held her daughter's hand as their arms swung back and forth playfully. “How did you find that man? Do you think he was really a doctor?”

“He was, or so he claimed to be, a psychiatrist who—”

“A psychiatrist? So you *did* think I was crazy.”

“No, just worried. I wanted to be discreet. I found him listed in a directory as one who treated unusual mental disorders. There were online reviews stating good things about him.”

“I can’t imagine what. I guess it doesn’t matter now since my presumed incurable illness was somehow magically cured.”

“Are you sure it’s wise we should be doing this? I’m concerned this theme party could trigger another—”

“I’ll be fine.” Alicia reached over to squeeze her husband’s furry paw to reassure him. “I have outgrown those afflictions.”

“As the doctor predicted you might.”

“Hum. Well, anyway, I’m no longer afraid. I refuse to be.”

They were passing a house that looked like a graveyard with its headstones and skeletons across the front lawn. Alicia looked away, up into the sky. She saw the crescent moon appearing as the sunlight

faded into darkness.

“Here we are,” said Beckett, leading the way up a walkway to another house. “I feel silly. How did I let you talk me into this?”

“You look wonderful.” Alicia’s eyes did a double-take when she found the Cheshire Cat. Its grin was illuminated, hiding within the branches of an oak tree. “Aly, go up and ring the doorbell.”

Upon the porch, their daughter reached up to press the button. She then stepped back next to her parents. Beside the front door was a sizable stone mushroom garden ornament. On top was a sculpture of a caterpillar. Next to both was a large glass hookah.

“Someone has a sense of humor,” said Alicia.

The front door opened. The Queen of Hearts greeted them with a boisterous laugh. “Off with their heads!”

Aly was startled and took a step backward.

“She’s joking.” Alicia brought her daughter to her side.

The hostess wore a large red and black dress and a gold crown. She held a staff with a red heart attached to its end. She reached out to tap Aly’s head with it. “So adorable. Harold! Come and take a look at who we have here!”

The Ace of Spades appeared beside the queen who then stepped outside. Her husband, dressed as a playing card in his stiff placard attire, could barely fit through the open door.

He clapped his hands. “Clever, clever, clever.”

Alicia, wearing a knee-length blue dress with puffed-sleeves, a pinafore over the top, long white stockings, and ankle-strap shoes, was dressed as Alice in Wonderland. Aly had on a matching outfit. Alicia held a bottle with a label hung from its neck and the words “DRINK ME” printed in bold letters. Her daughter wore a necklace with a cake-shaped pendant and words that read, “EAT ME.”

The Queen of Hearts touched her heart staff upon Alicia’s head, then her daughter’s, as if anointing them. “One makes you larger and the other one makes you small. I love each size of you.”

Beckett held up an oversized pocket watch. “Are we late?” He wore a full-body bunny suit with floppy ears, with an oval opening for his face painted with a black nose and whiskers.

“Yes, for a *very* important date, White Rabbit,” said the queen. “Since you work for me, abducting people from the real world into mine, I forgive your tardiness. You too may enter.”

The Ace of Spades said to Aly, “Little Alice, the other children are inside having a tea party and eating cake in the parlour. Hurry up and join them!”

Aly ran into the house.

Alicia wondered whether these annual theme parties were too excessive. Her neighbor orchestrated different ones each Halloween. She did appreciate the effort and commitment to detail.

In the foyer, Alicia stopped to scan the elaborate decorations and costumed guests. As she stepped into the living room, she was handed a glass of champagne by a roving caterer. She watched as her husband approached a group of men all dressed as playing cards. Beckett was received with laughs and pats on the back.

Alicia took a thoughtful sip of the sparkling wine and froze. The Mad Hatter was staring at her from a seat on the couch, on the other side of the coffee table. He rose to his feet upon seeing that she had noticed him and walked toward her.

The hostess saw her startled expression and came over. “Alicia, do you know the good doctor, our resident Mad Hatter?”

“We’ve met,” said Alicia.

“Nonsense,” said the Mad Hatter with a wily grin, removing his top hat in a flourish to greet her. “I have never met *this* lovely lady before. For you, my dear, *must* be Alice.”

“Welcome to Wonderland,” said the Queen of Hearts.