

QUEEN OF HEARTS: Yes! In the Royal Gardens! Until further notice! Consider it... a... reflection period! *(The Queen dramatically collapses back into her throne, fanning herself with a playing card. The Knave looks at Alice, relief evident on his face. Alice, though surprised, lets out a small sigh of relief. FADE TO BLACK)*

ACT II, SCENE 3 THE ROYAL GARDENS - DAY

Alice, still slightly bewildered by the Queen's surprisingly lenient sentence, finds herself unexpectedly free in the Royal Gardens. Butterflies flutter around vibrant flowerbeds. A mischievous grin spreads across her face. She spots a small, hidden path winding through overgrown bushes.

ALICE: Well, this is unexpected.

(She glances back at the palace, where sounds of shouting and chaos are faintly audible. She quickly slips down the path, her footsteps muffled by the soft earth.)

ALICE: Time-out, huh? More like time to escape! *(Alice ducks behind a giant rose bush, its thorns glistening with morning dew. A frantic group of Card Soldiers, their uniforms askew, burst into the gardens, searching wildly.)*

CARD SOLDIER 1: She went this way!

CARD SOLDIER 2: No, she went that way! I saw her!

The soldiers dash past, their voices echoing through the gardens. Alice peeks from behind the rose bush, stifling a giggle.

ALICE: Silly soldiers. *(She continues along the path, moving with surprising agility through the dense foliage. She discovers a small, wooden gate hidden behind a weeping willow. Beyond it, lies a wide, open field.)*

ALICE: Freedom!

(With a final, determined glance back at the chaotic palace, Alice pushes open the gate and steps into the sunshine. The field stretches before her, a symbol of her newfound escape, a journey into the wider, unknown world beyond Wonderland. FADE TO BLACK)

ACT II, SCENE 4 - THE QUEEN'S THRONE ROOM - DAY

The throne room is opulent but chaotic. Cards litter the floor. The Queen, in a tattered crown, sits on her throne, fuming. Alice stands before her, arms crossed, unafraid.

QUEEN OF HEARTS: *(screaming)* Off with her head! I said off with her head! *(She brandishes a croquet mallet, its head gleaming menacingly.)*

ALICE: Not so fast, Your Majesty. *(Alice takes a step closer, her chin lifted in defiance.)*

QUEEN OF HEARTS: *(spitting)* You dare defy me? I am the Queen of Hearts!

ALICE: And I'm Alice. And I'm not afraid of you anymore. Your rules are silly, your temper is terrible, and your sentences are absurd! *(The Queen gasps, momentarily speechless. A nervous silence hangs in the air, broken only by the distant squawking of a flamingo.)*

QUEEN OF HEARTS: *(incredulous)* Absurd? My sentences are perfectly reasonable! Off with their heads is a perfectly reasonable punishment!

ALICE: For what? For not agreeing with you? For having a different opinion? That's not justice, that's tyranny! *(Alice steps closer, her voice ringing with conviction. She points at the scattered playing cards.)*

ALICE: Look around you! This is chaos! A kingdom ruled by fear and tantrums isn't a kingdom at all. It's a mess!

(The Queen's face flushes crimson. She opens her mouth to retort, but Alice continues.)

ALICE: Perhaps... perhaps it's time for a change. A real Queen, one who listens to her people, and isn't afraid of a little disagreement. *(Alice holds her gaze, unwavering. The Queen stares back, her anger slowly replaced by a flicker of something resembling... confusion.)*

QUEEN OF HEARTS: *(muttering)* A... a change? *(The Queen nervously taps her mallet against the throne arm. The air hangs heavy with unspoken possibilities. FADE TO BLACK)*

ACT II, SCENE 4a - THE QUEEN'S THRONE ROOM

The Queen of Hearts, speechless, stares at Alice. Suddenly, a flurry of brightly colored playing cards erupts from a nearby doorway, followed by THE MAD HATTER, grinning wildly, a top hat askew.

MAD HATTER: *(singing)* Have I got a riddle for you, Your Majesty! A riddle so grand, so perplexing, it'll make your head spin faster than a top in a hurricane! *(He spins around, scattering more cards. The Queen, momentarily distracted, turns her attention to him.)*

QUEEN OF HEARTS: *(irritated)* What is it, Hatter? Can't you see I'm busy?

MAD HATTER: Busy? Oh, but this riddle is far more important than mere executions! It concerns a very curious case of a disappearing Cheshire cat! *(He winks conspiratorially at Alice, who catches the subtle cue.)*

QUEEN OF HEARTS: A disappearing cat? Is it made of smoke and mirrors?

MAD HATTER: Indeed! But not just any smoke and mirrors, Your Majesty, this is the most perplexing case of disappearing feline-based illusions I've ever encountered! *(He pulls a ridiculously large pocket watch from his waistcoat, examining it with great seriousness. Alice subtly slips towards the door.)*

QUEEN OF HEARTS: I... I suppose I must solve this riddle of missing cats.