

# Wonderland

By: Allison Spooner

"Why is a raven like a writing desk?" The boy mumbled the riddle over and over into the silence.

It was the last line his mother had read to him and now he would never know the answer. He would never find out because something was going to get him. The something that was calling his name. The something that had taken everyone aboard the ship, everyone except him.

He shivered as he thought about his last moments with his mother.

She was reading to him like she did every night. This time, it was about Alice's adventures in Wonderland. As he listened, he looked away from the book and out the window, not into a world filled with mad hatters and talking rabbits, but into darkness dotted with pinpricks of light. At eight years old, the boy knew nothing but the vastness of space and the ship that was his home.

By the time he looked back, his mother was gone.

He'd called out, but there was no answer.

He tried calling for his dad...whenever he had nightmares, his dad always comforted him. Silence.

Panicked, he'd jumped from his bed and ran to his parent's room. They weren't there. He fell out of bed and ran out into the door-lined corridor that led to the quarters of the rest of his family. He banged on a door. Nothing. He banged on the next one, calling for his grandma, his aunts and uncles...anyone. But there was nothing...no one.

When he ran out of doors to knock on, he paused. Then he heard it. From the silence came the thing that only moments ago he'd wanted to hear more than anything in the world...a voice. But this voice was not familiar. It was a stranger, and it whispered his name.

His skin prickled. Instead of running toward it in relief, he ran away. He couldn't tell where it was coming from, but he thought if he left the living section of the ship, it might get trapped when he closed the door behind him. So he pushed through the door that led to the recreation area and stopped, breathing loudly.

He gulped and held his breath, his heart making noises he couldn't stop. He waited in silence, missing Alice and wondering if he'd fallen down some rabbit hole. He'd rather that than...

"Andy..." This time it was more than a whisper.

"No!" he yelled and ran across the recreation area, toward the door that led to the crew's section of the ship.

He'd forgotten about the crew, but if the ship was still flying someone had to be flying it.

He pushed himself forward, not sure if there was something behind him or above him, or maybe even in front of him. He crashed into the crew door, pushed the handle, and fell through.

But he wasn't greeted by worried faces rushing to help him up. All he found were empty chairs and silence. He was alone on the ship. Alone in space. Except for...

"Andy..." The voice engulfed him.

He fell to the ground and crawled to the wall. He pulled his knees to his chest, trying to be as small as possible. He squeezed his eyes shut as he waited for footsteps or a creaking door.

"Andy? Do not be afraid."

He shook his head. Impossible.

He tried to block out the voice. "Why is a raven like a writing desk?" he mumbled, wanting to know the answer more than he'd ever wanted anything.

And then the voice said something besides his name. It was talking...reading...

*"Have you figured out the riddle yet?" the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.*

*"No. I give it up," Alice replied, "What's the answer?"*

*"I haven't the slightest idea," said the Hatter.*

Andy lifted his head. "He doesn't know?"

"No," said the voice.

Andy sighed.

"But I can read you the rest of the story."

"Mom was reading me the story!"

"Andy..." The voice changed and his heart leaped as he heard his mother. "I was reading you the story."

He jumped up. "Mom!"

"No, Andy." It changed again. "It's still me. It was always me."

Andy froze. His head hurt and he didn't know what was happening. He had just one question.

"Where is my family?" he asked quietly.

"I created them, Andy. You've been alone since the moment you stepped foot on this ship. You're the sole survivor of a virus that ravaged your planet. Your family built this ship to send survivors away, to save them...but you're the only one that made it. I am the computer that powers this ship. My mission is to make sure my passengers have everything they need so I created holograms to be your family. But we're nearing the end of our journey, Andy. My power reserves are fading. I can no longer support the holograms...but it's still me. I am the one that cared for you all these years. I am the one who read you stories from the planet you will make

your home. I am the one who made sure you were not alone and will continue to care for you until we reach our destination."

"Where is that?" asked Andy, his heart rate slowing.

"Earth. A planet much like your own."

"Is that where Alice is from?"

"Yes."

Andy's gaze fell on the massive window at the front of the bridge. The view was a black sheet sprinkled with dots of light. Except now, in the distance, there was a small dot, not glittering and shining like the stars but holding slow and steady. Keeping his eyes on the dot, Andy asked his new friend his next question.

"Does Alice ever make it home?"

"Yes, Andy. Alice goes home."

Andy nodded. He'd hoped so. Falling back into one of the many empty chairs on the deck, he closed his eyes.

"Would you keep reading to me?"

"Of course, Andy. Of course."