

Alright, Min, I'm ready, pull up the next one and— Oh! Good... Well, morning I suppose. It's nice to see you again, wanderer. Don't worry, you'll get used to the artificial time flow soon enough. I wonder if you'll have to get used to the feeling of how time usually flows when you get back to your reality... It's not as though we have a sun here on the fringes to guide our day, after all, just the clocks that Minerva sets for me so that I know when to take a break. I'm rambling again, aren't I? You're just in time for another job if you want to sit in on this one again. Who knows, maybe it'll be you! The last few weren't, just so you know. I've done... How many today, Min? (beeps) Oof, I'm definitely slipping, I can usually get through more than that... No matter, next one is ready for us! Take a seat if you'd like, there's some food on the table that I left out for you.

...You're giving me quite the look right now, wanderer, is everything okay? Oh, the food? I mean, I need to eat as well, you know. What? Oh, is this about the whole magic thing? I mean, magic does create the food for me thanks to Alasdair's care, but... Minerva, can you try sending another message to Guillermo and Opal about getting our language filter fixed? Thanks, love. Anyway, wanderer, I'm... Well, I'm not quite sure what I am but I *do* need to eat, hence the food. Don't worry, it's all safe. I wouldn't let anything harm you, don't worry.

(beeps) Yes, yes, I know, Minerva. I'm getting back to work, don't worry. Feel free to join us if you'd like, wanderer. Otherwise... I think I've got a few books that Guillermo brought me? But I'm not sure they'll be in the language you speak... Alasdair did bring me some puzzles as well if those take your fancy. (more beeps) Alright, Min, I'm coming.

Who did we find this time, Minerva? Amie Chen, she/her, from... 38 B-C. Alright, let me just pull up the file... Got it. Wait, Min... Have I heard this name before? No, I know that there are plenty of people out there with the same name I guess I just... (beeps) Right, no, I get it, Minerva I was just a little concerned. I could've sworn I had done a file on Amie Chen recently... It doesn't matter, let's just get into it. Amie Chen, she/her, from 38 B-C.

Amie woke up in her bed alone which, while it had happened before, was not a usual occurrence now that she had her cat Starfruit. Usually Starfruit would either be curled up against her side or standing on her stomach, demanding to be fed. To find that Starfruit was not there with her in the morning concerned her, but it was easy enough to assume that the cat had just wandered out of the room when Amie failed to wake up. Unusual, yes, but nothing so out of the ordinary as to be concerning.

Stepping out of her bed to feel carpet beneath her feet was concerning, though.

Amie had never been a fan of carpets and rugs, preferring the smoothness of wooden or tile floors over the various textures that carpets and rugs could bring. To see a bright blue carpet

staring up at her was alarming, especially since she was already slightly on edge due to her missing cat. She tried to shake it off, walking out of her room and into the kitchen only to find someone else there staring back at her in alarm.

“Who are you?” she demanded, wishing she had stopped to change out of her pajamas before having to confront this stranger— though she hadn’t known the stranger would be there so it’s hardly as though she could’ve planned ahead.

“Shouldn’t I be asking *you* that,” the stranger countered, glaring at Amie. “I mean, you are in *my* house after all.”

Looking around the room, Amie saw that she really, truly was not in her home. But that didn’t make any sense as she *knew* she had gone home last night. Vivian had offered to take her for drinks to celebrate her promotion, but she had declined, wanting nothing more than to crawl into bed and forget that she had gotten promoted at all. Starfruit had curled up on her stomach, purrs soothing her to sleep after such a rough day at work.

She was *certain* that that had been how her evening went, and yet here she was, in a stranger’s house, having woken up in their bed without her cat in sight. It was clear that she should address the stranger, try and figure out how she got her and where she was, but something in Amie’s soul was telling her that she didn’t want to know the answer.

So she ran.

The door, thankfully, had been within her sights from the moment she entered the kitchen so she was able to bolt out without so much as thinking. It wasn’t until she got a few blocks away from the house that she realized just how weird everything looked.

When she had been in the house with its blue carpets and its plain slate walls, she had thought it to be fairly modern looking. But upon stepping outside and actually taking in her surroundings, she didn’t know how anything here could *possibly* be modern looking at all. All of the houses— if you could call them that— seemed to be more like huts. Some even looked like they were impossibly large mushrooms with doors carved into them, like something out of a fairy tale. The ground beneath her looked like the sidewalks she was used to, and yet they rested on either side of a dirt road with wagon wheel grooves and hoofprints a plenty.

It was like she had somehow found her way into a children’s novel and there was part of her that wondered if she was still dreaming. But she knew she wasn’t, she felt certain of that. Because fear like the fear gripping her chest right now would’ve woken her up if this were a dream. That only left the startling possibility that this was real.

Part of Amie was considering turning around and walking back to the house she woke up in that was not her home, but she couldn't do that. Not when she ran out instead of answering perfectly reasonable questions. So she held her robe more tightly to her instead, walking down the street and taking in the sights of the city that had transformed around her in her sleep. It was so much more beautiful than the crowded city she had lived in her whole life; the city was beautiful in its own way, but this place was mixed with nature and construction and felt like each building was a living entity.

For all she knew, they were.

Eventually she wandered off far enough that the houses faded away to nothing but impossibly tall trees with leaves that looked as though they were pure gold. She tried her best to climb up one of them, pulling herself higher and higher into the sky until she felt she was high enough to see the whole world.

It wasn't really the whole world she was seeing, of course, but that was always how Amie described working in one of the high rises in the city. She could stare out the office window and see the entirety of Greenwood stretching out ahead of her. Unlike the Greenwood of her hometown, this place she was in now *was* actually green and wooded as opposed to the metal and concrete of a city that never seemed to end. She could see the barest twinkling of lights in the distance, almost like the fireflies she used to catch when she was out of the city to see her grandparents. There was something almost magical about this place with its mushroom houses and impossibly tall trees, something that made her wish that magic was real.

"If only you could see this, Viv," she murmured into the empty air. "It would definitely convince you that there was magic out there to be harnessed for stories."

The sun was high in the sky when Amie realized that she needed to eat and put on more sturdy clothing than just her pajamas, the cool breeze of the day causing her to shiver and almost lose balance on the tree branch. Making her way back down, Amie thought about heading back into the little city she had fled from, perhaps asking the person whose home she woke up in for help.

Turns out, she didn't need to worry about that.

"Why in the name of Riverbend would you decide the best course of action was to climb one of the Snailwood trees?" someone called to Amie as she made her way down to the forest floor below. As she disembarked from the safety of the tree, she saw it was the same person whose home she had essentially invaded earlier. "How did you find me?"

“Tracking spell,” the person answered, arms crossed. Her face must’ve betrayed her confusion, because the person rolled their eyes. “What, you’ve never heard of a tracking spell before?”

“They don’t have those where I’m from,” she answered defensively.

Another eye roll, this one accompanied by an extended hand. “Mike.”

She shook it warily. “Amie.”

“Well, Amie, what do you say we get you some food and some clothing that can withstand the winds of Winter’s Edge?”

Mike led Amie back out of the forest and into the city of Winter’s Edge, waving hello to people as he went and trying his best to draw attention away from Amie. His clothing looked like something straight out of a fantasy novel— tunic and puffy pants in greens and creams with an honest to Creation knife holster on his belt. Upon closer inspection, his house looked almost like a little log cottage complete with puffs of smoke coming out of the chimney. And yet when he opened the door, Amie could almost believe she was back in an apartment in Greenwood City, ready to look out the window to see the concrete jungle surrounding her.

It wasn’t until she was sat down at the small wooden table in the kitchen that Amie realized Mike had been staring at her oddly. Before she could question it, he stuck out his hand, swirling it in the air and conjuring a blue light around his finger tips. When the light faded, Amie realized her pajamas had been replaced with a tunic and a sturdy dress. “There, that should be better for you if you decide you want to climb any more Snailwood trees.”

“How did you do that?”

“You’re acting like you’ve never seen magic before,” Mike said with a laugh, tapping his hands on the table and making a sandwich appear in front of her. Her disbelief must’ve been evident as Mike slumped back down in his chair, looking at her aghast. “How have you never seen magic before?”

She barely resisted the urge to shout ‘because magic isn’t real!’, choosing instead to look at the facts of the situation: clearly this wasn’t a dream and clearly magic had been done. Amie didn’t know why or how, but this was her life now until she could figure out how to get home. “There’s no magic where I’m from. And before you even bother to ask, I don’t know how that’s possible. I don’t know how you doing magic is possible. I’m terrified and hungry and tired and would really just like to lay down and close my eyes and hope that I’m back home when I open them. Is that something I can do?”

“I’m sorry. I... I shouldn’t have phrased things like that. Let me get you some food and then you can take a nap on the couch. Are... Well, I suppose you might not know the ingredients I’m talking about if they’ve got any magic in them. Is soup okay?”

Amie looked up at her companion, feeling a deep sense of gratitude and a deeper sense of shame at how she reacted. “Soup is great, Mike. Thank you. I... It’s a weird day when you wake up in a stranger’s bed and you don’t know how you got there. Also when you find out that magic is real.”

Mike nodded thoughtfully before heading over to an honest to Creation cauldron over a firepit in the kitchen that Amie hadn’t noticed when she fled earlier. “If you’d like, I could take you to the magicians guild later today. They might have some idea of how to get you home.”

“Magician’s guild?” Back home, that meant guys in top hats and bow ties who did card tricks on the street and hypnotists who swore that they knew her cat’s name was Starfruit and just said ‘Fruit Bag’ as a joke. But here, where magic was real and was used to track her location in impossibly tall trees, Amie couldn’t help but think that the magician’s guild was nothing to be trifled with.

If Mike sensed any hesitation in her voice, he didn’t comment on it, passing her a bowl of soup and pulling out some sort of glowing rock. He muttered something into it, causing a burst of light to spring from the rock’s surface. “Yes, Miccaphone, what do you want?” a voice from the rock called, echoing around Mike’s little living space.

“I’ve found a girl—”

“About time,” the voice muttered. “Is that all this is about?”

Mike’s face grew frustrated, teeth clenched in a way that Amie knew had to be painful given how sharp they looked. “She’s lost, Lionella. So lost that she doesn’t even know what magic is.”

The voice— Lionella, apparently— sighed. “Why is this my problem, Miccaphone?”

“Do you think anyone at the guild might be able to do something about it? Help her find her way home?” Mike looked awkwardly at Amie, as if he was also uncomfortable with talking about her while in sight of her.

“We’re a magician’s guild, Miccaphone. Not a band of miracle workers.” Another sigh, this time less cutting than before. “Bring her by. I’ll see what I can do.”

Mike set down the rock as the light that seemed to burst from it before faded away. “Sorry about her. Lionella is one of the greatest casters I’ve ever met but she can be a bit... brusk.”

“It’s fine, Miccaphone.” Mike cringed at that, giving Amie a glare that didn’t last long before he broke out into a smile again. “You really think she can get me home?”

“Only one way to find out. Go ahead and take a nap, I’ll get everything ready for us to go to the guild after you wake up.”

Alright, Min, that’s it. We seem to have caught this one pretty early on, that’s where the file cuts out as far as memory of new reality goes. If we’re fast, she might even think it was all a dream from a nap she didn’t remember laying down for...

Let’s look at what we know: this reality intersects heavily with the plane of magic to the point where it’s uncommon for people to have no idea about magic. And then there are those trees... First flowers then trees, it seems like you bring a great deal of nature themed jobs with you, wanderer. Min, can you do a quick scan through our files for Snailwood trees?

I know I’ve heard of them before, so they’re not going to be the rarest, but maybe we can narrow it down from there... Eighty-five realities? That’s too many to quickly do a file check... She kept saying they were impossibly tall. How many realities have giant Snailwood trees Minerva? Twenty-seven, okay getting closer. Of those twenty-seven, how many are on the plane of magic? Thirteen. And how many of those have mushroom houses? Hm... What about a Miccaphone, anything on that front?

Minerva, you marvelous piece of magic, I think you’ve found her!

Reality 7274, can you pull up a picture please Minerva? I’d definitely say that matches the description! Pulling up 7274’s file... And there’s Amie Chen! Let’s get you home, Amie.

Min, can you do me a favor and keep an eye on her for a little bit? I know we need to get back to work soon but I’ll probably grab a quick nap before we get started again. You were right earlier, it’s been a while since I’ve actually slept; they’ve waited this long in another reality, they can wait a little longer so I can do my job properly. But I do want to keep an eye on Amie, make sure she adjusts back okay after all of that.

That’s the thing about non-magic people falling into magical realities, wanderer: it always has the potential to go a little wrong. From what Alexandria and Guillermo have told me, people don’t remember what they experience in other realities. Their memories are stored in our files

here, sure, but they don't exist for these people anymore, not in a tangible way. It feels more like a dream than anything else, from what I understand. But with magic realities... Those are more likely to have people latching onto them a little harder, especially if the person comes from a place with no magic in it. It's always best to watch them for a little while after and make sure they didn't accidentally cause a magic leak in their reality. Usually I'd do that myself but Minerva is right, I need to sleep. You're free to stick around when I'm back to working if you'd like or... Or you can hang out in the other room, I don't mind. It's a heavier day today, after all, and I'm not going to be very good company. Choice is yours, though. I'll see you in a little while.