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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Alice in Wonderland (8/12): The Queen's Croquet ground

A large rose tree stood near the garden gate. The blooms on it were white, but three men who seemed to be in great haste were painting them red. Alice thought this a strange thing to do, so she went nearer to watch them. Just as she came up to them, she heard one of them say, "Look out now, Five! Don't splash paint on me like that!"

"I couldn't help it," said Five, "Six knocked my arm."

On which Six looked up and said, "That's right, Five! Don't fail to lay the blame on some one else."

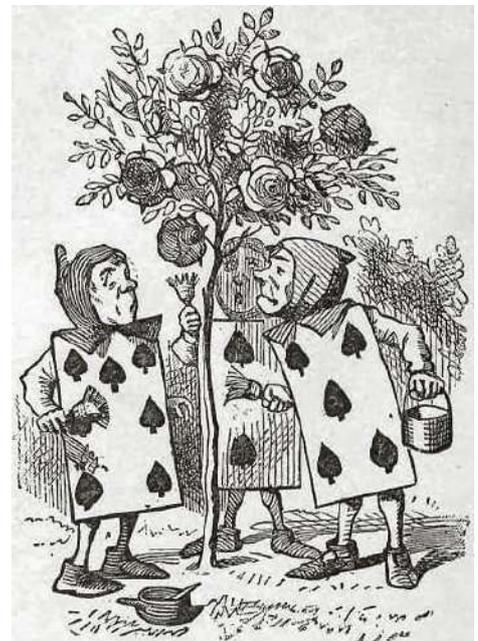
"You needn't talk," said Five. "I heard the Queen say your head must come off."

"What for?" asked the one who spoke first.

"What is that to you, Two?" said Six.

"It is much to him and I'll tell him," said Five. "He brought the cook tulip roots for onions."

Six flung down the brush and said, "Well, of all the wrong things—" Just then his eyes chanced to fall on Alice, who stood and watched them, and he checked



himself at once; Five and Two looked round also, and all of them bowed low.

"Would you tell me, please," said Alice, "why you paint those roses?"

Five and Six did not speak, but looked at Two, who said in a low voice, "Why, the fact is, you see, Miss, this here ought to have been a red rose tree, and by mistake a white one was put in, and if the Queen was to find it out, we should all have our heads cut off, you know. So you see, Miss, we are hard at work to get it painted, so that she may not—" Just then Five, who had stood and watched the gate for some time, called out, "The Queen! the Queen!" and the three men at once threw themselves flat upon their faces. Alice heard the tramp of feet and looked round, glad if at last she could see the Queen.

First came ten soldiers with clubs; these were all shaped like the three men at the rose tree, long and flat like cards, with their hands and feet at the corners; next came ten men who were trimmed with



diamonds and walked two and two like the soldiers. The ten children of the King and Queen came next; and the little dears came with a skip and a jump hand in hand by twos. They were trimmed with hearts.

Next came the guests, most of whom were Kings and Queens. Alice saw the White Rabbit, with

them. He did not seem at ease though he smiled at all that was said. He didn't see Alice as he went by. Then came the Knave of Hearts with the King's crown on a red velvet cushion; and last of all came The King and Queen of Hearts.

At first Alice thought it might be right for her to lie down on her face like the three men at the rose tree, "but what would be the use of such a fine show," she thought, "if all had to lie down so that they couldn't see it?" So she stood where she was and waited.

When they came to where she stood, they all stopped and looked at her, and the Queen said in a stern voice, "Who is this?" She spoke to the Knave of Hearts, who bowed and smiled but did not speak.

"Fool!" said the Queen with a toss of her head; then she turned to Alice and asked, "What's your name, child?"

"My name is Alice, so please your majesty," said Alice, but she thought to herself, "Why they're a mere pack of cards. I need have no fears of them."

"And who are these?" asked the Queen, as she pointed to the three men who still lay round the rose tree; for you see as they all lay on their faces and their backs were the same as the rest of the pack, she could not tell who they were.

"How should I know?" said Alice, and thought it strange that she should speak to a Queen in that way.

The Queen turned red with rage, glared at her for a moment like a wild beast, then screamed, "Off with her head! Off—"

"Non-sense!" said Alice, in a loud, firm voice, and the Queen said no more.

The King laid his hand on the Queen's arm and said, "Think, my dear, she is but a child!"

The Queen turned from him with a scowl and said to the Knave, "Turn them over!"

The Knave did so, with one foot.

"Get up!" said the Queen in a shrill loud voice, and the three men jumped up, at once, and bowed to the King, and Queen and to the whole crowd.

"Leave off that!" screamed the Queen; "you make me giddy." Then she turned to the rose tree and asked, "What have you been doing here?"

"May it please your majesty," said Two, and went down on one knee as he spoke, "we were trying—"

"I see!" said the Queen, who in the mean time had seen that some of the roses were painted red and some were still white. "Off with their heads!" and the crowd moved on, while three of the soldiers stayed to cut off the heads of the poor men, who ran to Alice for help.

"They shan't hurt you," she said, as she hid them in a large flower pot that stood near. The three soldiers walked round and looked for them a short while, then marched off.

"Are their heads off?" shouted the Queen.

"Their heads are gone, if it please your majesty," the soldiers shouted back.

"That's right!" shouted the Queen. "Can you play croquet?" she asked Alice.

"Yes," shouted Alice.

"Come on then!" roared the Queen, and Alice went on with them.

"It's—it's a fine day!" said a weak voice at her side. It was the White Rabbit who peeped up into her face.

"Yes," said Alice: "where's the Duchess?"

"Hush! Hush!" said the Rabbit, in a low tone. He looked back as he spoke, then raised up on tip-toe, put his mouth close to her ear and whispered, "She's to have her head cut off."

"What for?" asked Alice.

"Did you say, 'What a pity!'" the Rabbit asked.

"No, I didn't," said Alice: "I don't think it's at all a pity. I said 'What for?'"

"She boxed the Queen's ears—" the Rabbit began. Alice gave a little scream of joy.

"Oh, hush!" the Rabbit whispered in a great fright.

"The Queen will hear you! You see she came late, and the Queen said—"

"Each one to his place!" shouted the Queen in a loud voice, and people ran this way and that in great haste and soon each one had found his place, and the game began.

Alice thought she had never seen such a strange croquet ground in all her life: it was all ridges; the balls were live hedgehogs; the mallets were live birds,



and the soldiers bent down and stood on their hands and feet to make the arches.

At first Alice found it hard to use a live bird for a mallet. It was a large bird with a long neck and long legs. She tucked it under her arm with its legs down, but just as she got its neck straight and thought now she could give the ball a good blow with its head, the bird would twist its neck round and give her such a queer look, that she could not help laugh-ing; and by the time she had got its head down again, she found that the hedgehog had crawled off. Then too there was always a ridge or a hole in the way of where she wanted to send her ball; and she couldn't find an arch in its place, for the men would get up and walk off when it pleased them. Alice soon made up her mind that it was a very hard game to play.

The Queen was soon in a great rage, and stamped about, shouting "Off with his head!" or "Off with her head!" with each breath.

Alice felt quite ill at ease; to be sure, she had not as yet had cause to feel the wrath of the Queen, but she knew not how soon it might be her turn; "and then," she thought, "what shall I do?"

As she was looking round for some way to get off without being seen, she saw a strange thing in the air, which she at last made out to be a grin, and she said to herself, "It's the Cat; now I shall have some one to talk to."

"How do you do?" said the Cat as soon as its whole mouth came out.

Alice waited till she saw the eyes, then nodded. "It's no use to speak to it till its ears have come, or at least one of them." In a short time the whole head came in view, then she put down her bird and told him of the game; glad that she had some one that was pleased to hear her talk.

"I don't think they are at all fair in the game," said Alice with a scowl; "and they all talk so loud that one can't hear one's self speak—and they don't have rules to play by; at least if they have, they don't mind them—and you don't know how bad it is to have to use live things to play with. The arch I have to go through next walked off just now to the far end of the ground—and I should have struck the Queen's hedge-hog, but it ran off when it saw that mine was near!"

"How do you like the Queen?" asked the Cat in a low voice.

"Not at all," said Alice, "she's so—" Just then she saw that the Queen was behind her and heard what she said; so she went on, "sure to win that it's not worth while to go on with the game."

The Queen smiled and passed on.

"Who are you talking to?" said the King, as he came up to Alice and stared at the Cat's head as if it were a strange sight.

"It's a friend of mine—a Cheshire Cat," said Alice.

"I don't like the look of it at all," said the King; "it may kiss my hand if it likes."

"I don't want to," said the Cat.

"Don't be rude; and don't look at me like that," said the King.

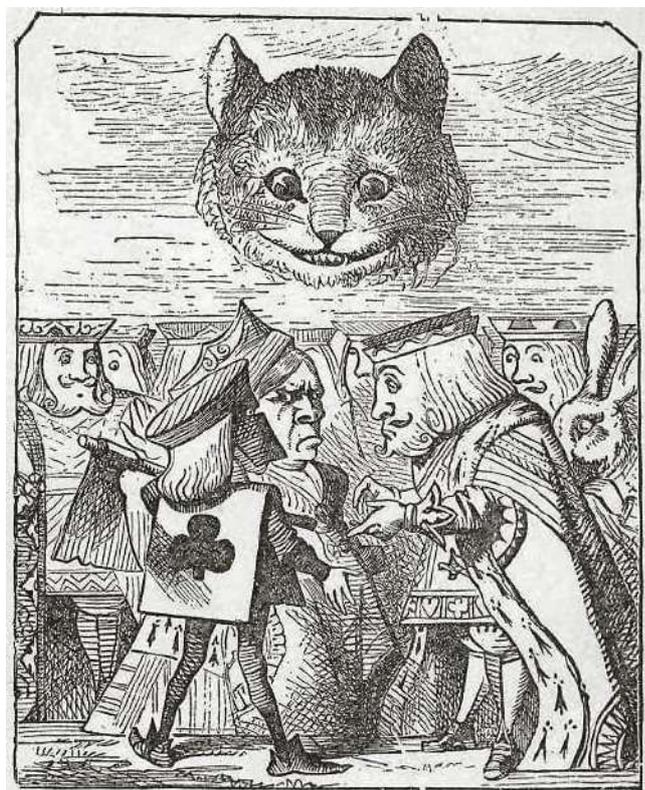
"A cat may look at a king," said Alice. "I've read that in some book, but I can't tell where."

"Well, it must get off from here," said the King in a firm voice, and he called to the Queen, who was near, "My dear! I wish you would see that this cat leaves here at once!"

The Queen had but one cure for all ills, great or small. "Off with his head," she said, and did not so much as look round.

"I'll fetch the soldier myself," said the King, and rushed off.

Alice thought she might as well go back, and see how the game went on. She heard the Queen's voice in the



distance, as she screamed with rage, "Off with his head! He has missed his turn!" Alice did not like the look of things at all, for the game was so mixed she could not tell when her turn came; so she went off to find her hedgehog.

She came up with two hedgehogs in a fierce fight, and thought now was a good time to strike one of them, but her

mallet was gone to the other side of the ground, and she saw it in a weak sort of way as it tried to fly up into a tree.

By the time she had caught the bird and brought it back, the fight was over, and both hedgehogs were out of sight. "I don't care much," thought Alice, "for there is not an arch on this side the ground." So she went back to have some more talk with her friend.

When she reached the place, she found quite a crowd round the Cat. The King and the Queen and the soldier who had come with the axe, to cut off the Cat's head, were all talking at once, while all the rest stood with closed lips and looked quite grave.

As soon as they saw Alice, they wanted her to say which one was right, but as all three spoke at once, she found it hard to make out what they said.

The soldier said that you couldn't cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it off from; that he had never had to do such a thing, and he wouldn't begin it now, at his time of life.

The King said that all heads could be cut off, and that you weren't to talk non-sense.

The Queen said, if something wasn't done in less than no time, heads should come off all round. (It was this last threat that had made the whole crowd look so grave as Alice came up.)

Alice could think of nothing else to say but, "Ask the Duchess, it is her Cat."

"Fetch her here," the Queen said to the soldier, and he went off like an arrow. The Cat's head started to fade out of sight as soon as he was gone, and by the time he had come back with the Duchess, it could not be seen at all; so the King and the man ran up and down looking for it, while the rest went back to the game.