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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Lewis Carroll

Alice in wonderland (3/12): A Race

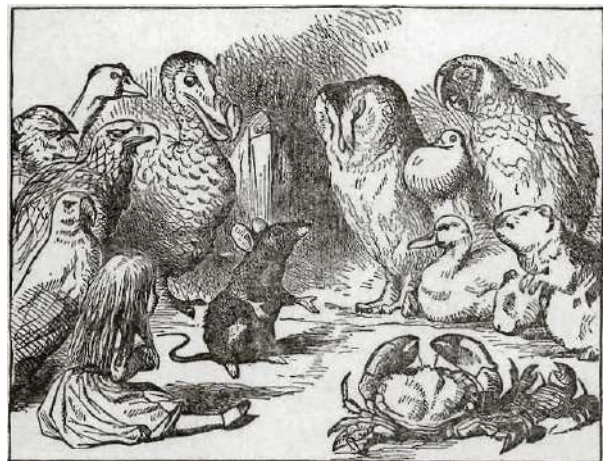
They were a funny looking crowd as they stood or sat on the bank—the wings and tails of the birds drooped to the earth; the fur of the beasts clung close to them, and all were as wet and cross as could be. The first thought, of course, was how to get dry. They had a long talk about this, and Alice joined in as if she had known them all her life. But it was hard to tell what was best.

"What I want to say," at last spoke up the Dodo, "is that the best thing to get us dry would be a race."

"What kind of race?" asked Alice, not that she much wanted to know, but the Dodo had paused as if it thought that some one

ought to speak, and no one else would say a word.

"Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to make it plain is to do it." (And as you might like to try the thing some cold day, I'll tell you how the Dodo did it.)



First it marked out a race-course in a sort of ring (it didn't care much for the shape), and then all the crowd were placed on the course, here and there. There was

no "One, two, three, and here we go," but they ran when they liked and left off when they liked, so that no one could tell when the race was ended. When they had been running half an hour or so and were all quite dry, the Dodo called out, "The race is over!" and they all crowded round it and asked, "But who has won?"

This the Dodo could not, at first, tell, but sat for a long time with one claw pressed to its head while the rest waited, but did not speak. At last the Dodo said, "All have won and each must have a prize."

"But who is to give them?" all asked at once.

"Why, she of course," said the Dodo, as it pointed to Alice with one long claw; and the whole party at once crowded round her as they called out, "A prize, a prize!"

Alice did not know what to do, but she pulled from her pocket a box of little cakes (by a strange, good luck they did not get wet while she was in the pool) and handed them round as prizes. There was one a piece all round.

"But she must have a prize, you know," said the Mouse.

"Of course," the Dodo said. "What else have you got?" he went on as he turned to Alice.

"A thimble," said Alice looking quite sad.

"Hand it here," said the Dodo.

Then they all crowded round her once more, while the Dodo handed the thimble back to Alice and said, "We beg that you accept this fine thimble;" and when it had made this short speech they all cheered.

Alice thought the whole thing quite foolish, but they all looked so serious that she did not dare to laugh, and as she could not think what to say she bowed and took the thimble, while she looked as serious as she could. The next thing was to eat the cakes: this caused some noise, as the large birds said they could not taste theirs, and the small ones choked and had to be patted on the back. It was over at last and they sat down in a ring and begged the Mouse to tell them a tale.



"You said you would tell us why you hate cats and dogs," said Alice.

"Mine is a long and a sad tale," said the Mouse, as it turned to Alice with a sigh.

"It is a long tail, I'm sure," said Alice, looking down at the Mouse's tail; "but why do you call it sad?"

"I shall not tell you," said the Mouse, as it got up and walked off.

"Please come back and tell us your tale," called Alice; and all joined in, "Yes, please do!" but the Mouse shook its head and walked on and was soon out of sight.

"I wish I had our Dinah here, I know I do!" said Alice. "She'd soon fetch it back."

"And who is Dinah, if I may dare to ask such a thing?" said one of the birds.

Alice was glad to talk of her pet. "Dinah's our cat; and she's such a fine one to catch mice, you can't think. And

oh, I wish you could see her chase a bird! Why she'll eat a bird as soon as look at it!"

This speech caused a great stir in the party. Some of the birds rushed off at once; one old jay wrapped itself up with care and said, "I must get home; the night air doesn't suit my throat!" and a wren called out to her brood, "come, my dears! It's high time you were all in bed."

Soon they all moved off and Alice was left alone.

"I wish I hadn't told them of Dinah," she said to herself. "No one seems to like her down here, and I'm sure she's the best cat in the world! Oh, my dear Dinah! Shall I ever see you any more?" And here poor Alice burst into tears, for she felt very sad and lonely. In a short time she heard the patter of feet, and she looked up with the hope that the Mouse had changed its mind and come back to tell his "long and sad tale."