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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Lewis Carroll

Alice in wonderland (5/12): a caterpillar tells Alice what to do

The Caterpillar looked at Alice, and she stared at it, but did not speak. At last, it took the pipe from its mouth and said, "Who are you?" Alice said, "I'm not sure, sir, who I am just now—I know who I was when I left home, but I think I have been changed two or three times since then."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the Caterpillar.

"I fear I can't tell you, for I'm sure I don't know, myself; but to change so many times all in one day, makes one's head swim."

"It doesn't," said the Caterpillar.

"Well, maybe you haven't experienced it yet," said Alice, "but when you have to change—you will some day, you know—I think you'd feel strange, won't you?"

"Not a bit," said the Caterpillar.

"Well, you may not feel as I do," said Alice; "all I know is, it feels strange to me to change so much."

"You!" said the Caterpillar with its nose in the air. "Who are you?"

Which brought them back to the point from which they started. Alice was not pleased at this, so she said in as stern a voice as she could, "I think you ought to tell me who you are first."

"Why?" said the Caterpillar.

As Alice could not think what to say to this and as it did not seem to want to talk, she turned away.

"Come back!" said the Caterpillar. "I have something to say to you!"

Alice turned and came back.

"Keep your temper," said the Caterpillar.

"Is that all?" asked Alice, while she hid her anger as well as she could.

"No," said the Caterpillar.

Alice waited what seemed to her a long time, while it sat and smoked but did not speak. At last, it took the pipe from its mouth, and said, "So you think you're changed, do you?"

"I fear I am, sir," said Alice, "I don't know things as I once did—and I don't keep the same size, but a short while at a time."

"What things is it you don't know?"

"Well, I've tried to say the things I knew at school, but the words all came wrong."

"Let me hear a poem," said the Caterpillar.

Alice folded her hands, and began.

"That is not said right," said the Caterpillar.

"Not quite right, I fear," said Alice, "some of the words are changed."



"It is wrong from first to last," said the Caterpillar; then did not speak for some time. At last it said, "What size do you want to be?"

"Oh, I don't care so much as to size, but one doesn't like to change so much, you know."

"I don't know," it said.

Alice was too much vexed to speak, for she had never, in all her life, been talked to in that rude way.

"Do you like your size now?" asked the Caterpillar.

"Well, I'm not quite so large as I would like to be," said Alice; "10 centimeters is a bit too small."

"But it is a great height!" said the Caterpillar, and reared itself up straight as it spoke. (It was 10 centimeters high.)

"But I'm not used to it!" pleaded poor Alice. And she thought, "I wish the animals wouldn't get so mad at me."

"You'll get used to it in time," the Caterpillar said, and put the pipe to its mouth, and Alice waited till it should choose to speak. At last it took the pipe from its mouth, yawned once or twice, then got down from its perch and crawled off in the grass. As it went it said, "One side will make you tall, and one side will make you small."

"One side of what?" thought Alice to herself.

"Of the mushroom," said the Caterpillar, just as if it had heard her speak; soon it was out of sight.

Alice stood and looked at the mushroom a long time and tried to make out which were the two sides of it; as it was round she found this a hard thing to do. At last she

stretched her arms round it as far as they would go, and broke off a bit of the edge with each hand.

"And now which is which?" she said to herself, and ate a small piece of the righthand bit, to try what it would do. The next moment she felt her chin strike her foot with a hard blow.

She was in a sore fright at this quick change, but she felt that there was no time to be lost as she was shrinking so fast; so she set to work at once to eat some from the left hand bit.

"Come, my head's free at last!" said Alice, with great joy, which changed to fear when she found that her waist and hands were nowhere to be seen. All she could see when she looked down was a vast length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her.

"What can all that green stuff be?" said Alice. "And where is my waist? And oh, my poor hands, how is it I can't see you?" She moved them as she spoke; the green leaves shook as if to let her know her hands were there, but she could not see them.

As there seemed to be no chance to get her hands up to her head, she tried to get her head down to them and was pleased to find that her neck would bend like a snake. Just as she had curved it down and meant to dive in the sea of green, which she found was the tops of the trees which, a sharp hiss made her draw back in haste. A large bird had flown into her face, and struck her with its wings.

"Snake! snake!" screamed the bird.

"I'm not a snake," said Alice. "Leave me alone!"

"Snake, Snake!" cried the bird, then added with a kind of sob, "I've tried all ways, but I cannot suit them."

"I don't know what you mean," said Alice.

The bird seemed not to hear her, but went on, "I've tried the roots of trees, and I've tried banks, and I've tried a hedge; but those snakes! There's no way to please them. As if it were not hard work to hatch the eggs, but I must watch for snakes night and day! Why I haven't had a wink of sleep these three weeks!"

"It's too bad for you to be so much put out," said Alice, who began to see what it meant.

"And just as I had built my nest in this high tree," the bird went on, raising its voice to a shriek, "and just as I thought I should be free of them at last...Ugh! Snake!"

"But I'm not a snake!" said Alice. "I'm a—I'm a—"

"Well! What are you?" said the bird. "I can see you will not tell me the truth!"

"I—I'm a little girl," said Alice, though she was not sure what she was when she thought of all the changes she had gone through that day.

"I've seen girls in my time, but none with such a neck as that!" said the bird. "No! no! You're a snake; and there's no use to say you're not. I guess you'll say next that you don't eat eggs!"

"Of course I eat eggs," said Alice, "but girls eat eggs quite as much as snakes do, you know."

"I don't know," said the bird, "but if they do, why then they're a kind of snake, that's all I can say."

This was such a new thing to Alice that at first, she did not speak, which gave the bird a chance to add, "You want eggs now, I know that quite well."

"But I don't want eggs, and if I did I don't want yours. I don't like them raw."

"Well, be off, then!" said the bird as it sat down in its nest.

Alice crouched down through the trees as well as she could, for her neck spun around the branches, and now and then she had to stop to get it off. At last, she thought of the mushroom in her hands, and set to work with great care, to take a small bite first from the right hand, then from the left, till at length she brought herself down to the right size.

It was so long since she had been this height, that it felt quite strange, at first, but she soon got used to it. "Come, there's half my plan done now!" she said. "How strange all these things are! I'm not sure one hour, what I shall be the next! I'm glad I'm back to my right size: the next thing is, to get into that garden—how is that to be done, I should like to know?" As she said this, she saw in front of her, a small house, not more than four feet high. "Who lives there?" thought Alice, "it'll not do at all to come on them this size: why I should scare them out of their wits!"

So she ate some of the right hand bit, again and did not dare to go near the house till she had brought herself down to twenty centimeters high.