

Rediscovering Alice

SISTER Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do:

A VOICE Once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it.

ALICE What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?

Everyone points at one of the actors who has put on white rabbit ears.

ALL Look!

The sister continues reading. Alice looks up at the rabbit.

RABBIT Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!

The rabbit pulls out a pocket watch and looks at it. As Alice stands, the other actors physically form a rabbit hole. Alice follows the rabbit, who disappears into the rabbit hole.

All the actors, including Alice, suddenly stand and begin to spin around. Alice continually shouts out the word 'Falling', whilst others shout out the names of objects that Alice sees as she falls down the rabbit hole:

'Bookshelves', 'maps', 'pictures', 'orange marmalade'.

Everyone lands with a thump. The actors remain lying on the ground. The rabbit gets up and hurries over them. As Alice stands he disappears to the ground saying:

RABBIT Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting.

Alice walks forward looking around her. The actors form a tunnel behind her. She continues to walk on the spot and the tunnel moves forward around her, gradually dispersing and standing to form individual doors. One actor kneels down at the front of the stage to form a small door. Another actor becomes a table and holds a small key, a bottle and a cake. Alice tries a number of doors but they do not open. She finds the table which hands her the key. She tries it in the doors, but none opens. She kneels down by the small door. The key opens it, and Alice looks out over the audience.

ALICE It's quite the loveliest garden you ever saw.

The actors all sigh affectionately.

Alice closes the door, stands up, and goes back to the table with the key. The table takes the key and hands her a bottle.

TABLE Drink me!

A VOICE Look first, and see if it's marked poison or not.

Alice looks at the bottle, shakes her head, and drinks. In mime, she starts to shrink. The other actors all stretch upward – including the small door and the table.

Alice goes to the small door only to find it locked. She goes back to the table, which holds the key up beyond her reach. Alice sits down and cries.

A VOICE Come, there's no use in crying like that!

A VOICE I advise you to leave off this minute!

The table reveals the cake, which is clasped between its feet. Alice takes it.

TABLE Eat me!

Alice starts to eat, then mimes growing larger. The other actors melt to the ground saying:

ALL Curiouser and curiouser.

Alice scrambles to collect the key again, hurries to the small door – only to find it even smaller. Hand sized. She begins to cry again.

A VOICE You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

A VOICE A great girl like you to go on crying in this way!

A VOICE Stop it at once, I tell you!

The rabbit suddenly stands up again. Alice looks at him.

RABBIT Oh! The Duchess, the Duchess! Oh! Won't she be savage if I've kept her waiting!

ALICE If you please, Sir –

The rabbit drops a fan and some gloves and then drops down to the ground again.

Alice picks up the fan and gloves and starts to fan herself.

ALL Dear, dear! How queer everything is today!

ALICE I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Who in the world am I?

A VOICE Ada?

A VOICE No, her hair goes in such long ringlets.

A VOICE Mabel?

A VOICE No, she knows so very little.

ALICE I'll try if I know all the things I used to know.

A VOICE Four times five is twelve.

A VOICE Four times six is thirteen.

A VOICE London is the capital of Paris.

A VOICE Paris is the capital of Rome.

ALL How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
With gently smiling jaws.

Alice bursts into tears again. The other actors all cry with her as they stand up tall. Alice puts the gloves and fan down and suddenly looks up at the other actors.

ALICE I must be growing small again.

Alice runs over to the door, which is shut. She runs over the table, which is holding the key too high. She bursts into tears again! The other actors move around the stage as if they are swimming, gradually they take on the mannerisms of different animals. Alice starts swimming too.

ALICE I wish I hadn't cried so much! I shall be drowned in my own tears.

An actor with mouse ears swims next to her.

ALICE O Mouse, do you know a way out of this pool?

The mouse looks at her but doesn't respond.

ALICE Perhaps he doesn't understand English. I'll try something out of my French phrase book. (*To Mouse.*) Ou est ma chatte?

The Mouse quivers with fright.

ALICE Oh, I beg your pardon! I quite forgot that you don't like cats. Our cat, Dinah is such a dear thing.

MOUSE *(Shrill and passionate.)* Not like cats! Would you like cats if you were me? Nasty, low, vulgar things! Don't let me hear the name again! Let us get to the shore.

Everyone mimes swimming forward until they are all standing along the front of the stage.

DODO The best thing to get us dry would be a Caucus race.

ALICE What *is* a Caucus race?

DODO Why the best way to explain it is to do it. The race is run in a circle. You can begin when you like, and leave when you like.

Everyone starts running around in a circle, each with their own animal characteristic. After a while the Dodo calls out:

DODO The race is over! *Everybody* has won and *all* must have prizes.

ALL But who is to give the prizes.

DODO *(Pointing at Alice.)* Why she of course.

ALL Prizes! Prizes!

Alice pulls a small tin of pastels out of her pocket and hands them round.

MOUSE She must have a prize herself you know.

DODO Of course. What else do you have in your pocket?

ALICE *(Pulling out a thimble and handing it to him.)* A thimble.

DODO *(Returning it.)* We beg your acceptance of this elegant thimble.

ALICE Thank you. Oh, I do wish Dinah was here.

DODO And who is Dinah?

MOUSE *(Crossly.)* Her cat.

Everyone gasps and scurries away whispering about what terrible things cats are and how rude Alice is. They stand with their backs turned on Alice.

ALICE I wish I hadn't mentioned Dinah. Nobody seems to like her down here. Oh, my dear Dinah, I wonder if I shall ever see you anymore.

Everyone becomes trees and flowers, stretched high above Alice, who weaves her way through them. Someone becomes the Caterpillar. Alice approaches.

CATERP Who are you?

ALICE I hardly know, Sir. I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I must have changed several times since then.

CATERP Explain yourself!

ALICE I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir, because I'm not myself you see.

CATERP I don't see.

ALICE I can't understand it myself. Being so many sizes in one day is very confusing. When you have to turn into a chrysalis, and then after that into a butterfly, you'll feel a little confused, won't you?

CATERP Not at all. Who are you?

Alice is fed up and walks away.

Come back! I've something important to say!

Alice turns and comes back.

Keep your temper!

ALICE Is that all?

CATERP So you think you're changed do you?

ALICE I can't remember things as I used – and I don't keep the same size for ten minutes together!

CATERP What size do you want to be?

ALICE I should like to be a little larger. Three inches is such a wretched height to be.

CATERP It is a very good height indeed. *(Starts to slither away.)* One side of the mushroom will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.

Alice mimes nibbling on bits of the mushroom and growing again.

Alice watches as two actors become footmen.

FOOT 1 For the Duchess. An invitation from the Queen to play croquet.

FOOT 2 From the Queen. An invitation for the duchess to play croquet.

Alice steps in between the two footmen.

Suddenly an actor becomes the Duchess, another, the Cook and another, the Cheshire Cat. The Cheshire Cat holds a false grin on a stick, the Cook stirs with a wooden spoon, and the Duchess cradles a 'baby' in a blanket. They are arguing. The Duchess sneezes. Alice jumps.

DUCHESS Pepper! Pepper! There is too much pepper in that soup!

COOK Be quiet! There most certainly is not!

DUCHESS Don't you tell me to be quiet! There *is* too much pepper!

COOK There is not!

DUCHESS Is!

COOK Is not!

DUCHESS Is! Is! Is!

COOK Oh, be quiet!

DUCHESS How dare you!

ALICE *(Politely to the Duchess.)* Please would you tell me why your cat grins like that.

DUCHESS It's a Cheshire Cat. That's why! You don't know much, and that's a fact! *(Shouting at her baby.)* Pig! Pig!

Suddenly the Cook starts hitting the Duchess and the baby with her spoon. The Duchess takes no notice.

ALICE Oh, please mind what you're doing!

The cook stops and returns to stirring the stew.

DUCHESS If everybody minded their own business the world would go round a deal faster than it does.

DUCHESS *(Flinging the baby to Alice.)* Here! You may nurse it a bit, if you like! I must get ready to play croquet with the Queen.

The Duchess walks away, followed by the Cook. Alice rocks the baby. She looks at the baby's face and is clearly alarmed.

ALICE Why you *really* are a pig!

She puts the pig down and turns to see the Cheshire cat.

- CAT Do you play croquet with the Queen today?
- ALICE I should very much like to, but I haven't been invited.
- CAT You'll see me there.
- ALICE Would you tell me please which way I ought to go from here?
- CAT That depends a good deal on where you want to get to. In that direction lives a Hatter and in that direction lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad.
- ALICE But I don't want to go among mad people.
- CAT Oh, you can't help that. We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.
- ALICE How do you know I'm mad?
- CAT You must be or you wouldn't have come here. Bye the bye, what became of the baby? I'd nearly forgotten to ask.
- ALICE It turned into a pig.
- CAT I thought it would.

The cat vanishes.

- ALICE I've seen hatters before. The March Hare will be the most interesting, and perhaps, as this is May, it won't be raving mad – at least not as mad as it was in March.

The Cat reappears

- CAT Did you say pig or fig?
- ALICE I said pig, and I wish you wouldn't keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy.
- CAT All right.

The cat vanishes in slow motion behind a stage block leaving only its grin on a stick held up.

- ALICE Well, I've often seen a cat without a grin, but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life.

3 actors come forward and become the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse. Other actors crouch down to become a very long table – the Hatter and Hare may put a large white table cloth over the table. The actors sit behind the table on one corner. The Dormouse is asleep between the others. Alice approaches.

ALL No room! No room!

ALICE (*Sitting*) There's *plenty* of room.

HARE Have some wine.

ALICE I don't see any wine.

HARE There isn't any.

ALICE Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it.

HARE It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited.

HATTER Your hair wants cutting.

ALICE You should learn not to make personal remarks. It's very rude.

HATTER Why is a raven like a writing desk?

ALICE I believe I can guess that.

HARE Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?

ALICE Exactly so.

HARE Then you should say what you mean.

ALICE I do. At least I mean what I say. That's the same thing, you know.

HATTER Not the same thing a bit! Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same as 'I eat what I see.'

HARE You might just as well say that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like!'

DORM You might just as well say that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'.

HATTER It *is* the same thing with you. (*Pause*) What day of the month is it?

ALICE The fourth.

HATTER Have you guessed the riddle yet?

ALICE No, I give it up. What's the answer?

HATTER I haven't the slightest idea.

HARE Wake up Dormouse.

DORM *(Feebly)* I wasn't asleep. I heard every word you fellows were saying.

HARE Tell us a story.

HATTER And be quick about it or you'll be asleep again before it's done.

DORM Once upon a time there were three little sisters, and their names were Elsie, Lacie and Tillie. They lived in a treacle well.

ALICE There's no such thing.

DORM If you can't be civil you'd better finish the story yourself.

ALICE No, please go on.

DORM Treacle. *(Yawns.)* and they drew all manner of things – everything that begins with an M –

ALICE Why with an M?

HARE Why not?

DORM Such as mouse-traps, and the moon, and memory and muchness – did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness!

ALICE I don't think –

HATTER Then you shouldn't talk.

Alice is very offended. She stands up and walks away. The Dormouse falls asleep instantly and the Hare and Hatter take no notice of her leaving.

ALICE I'll never go *there* again!

The actors come out of role and scatter across the stage.

A VOICE Make way for the King and Queen of Hearts!

Actors become the Queen, the King, the Knave and the white Rabbit. The Queen notices Alice.

QUEEN Who is this? What's your name child?

ALICE My name is Alice, your Majesty.

QUEEN *(Furious)* Off with her head! Off with her head!

ALICE Nonsense!

KING Consider, my dear: she is only a child!

QUEEN Can you play croquet?

ALICE Yes.

QUEEN Come on, then!

The procession moves off around the stage.

RABBIT It's – it's a very fine day.

ALICE Very. Where's the Duchess?

RABBIT Hush! Hush! She's under sentence of execution. She boxed the Queen's ears.

Alice laughs.

Oh, hush! The Queen will hear you!

QUEEN (*Loudly.*) Get to your places!

Everyone rushes to their places to play croquet.

ALICE Why the croquet balls are hedgehogs! And the mallets are flamingos!

The Cheshire Cat strolls over to Alice.

CAT How do you like the Queen?

ALICE Not at all. She's so extremely –

The Queen approaches.

Likely to win the game.

The Queen smiles and moves on.

KING (*To Alice*) Who are you talking to. I don't like the look of it at all. However, it may kiss my hand if it likes.

CAT I'd rather not.

KING Don't be impertinent. And don't look at me like that. (*Calling the Queen.*) My dear, I wish you would have this cat removed.

QUEEN Either you or your head must be off! Take your choice!

The Cheshire Cat scurries away.

QUEEN (To Alice) Have you seen the Mock Turtle yet?

ALICE No. I don't even know what a Mock Turtle is.

QUEEN It's the thing Mock Turtle soup is made from. He shall tell you his history. (To everyone.) Call the Gryphon!

A VOICE Call the Gryphon!

A VOICE Call the Gryphon!

A VOICE Call the Gryphon!

An actor becomes the Gryphon.

QUEEN Take this young lady to see the Mock Turtle.

The game ends and everyone scatters.

An actor becomes the Mock Turtle.

GRYPHON (To Turtle.) This here young lady. She wants for to know your history, she do.

TURTLE I'll tell it to her. Sit down, both of you, and don't speak a word till I've finished.

They sit down and the Mock Turtle tearfully tells his story.

Once I was a real turtle. When we were little we went to school in the sea. The master was an old turtle – we used to call him Tortoise. We called him tortoise because he taught us. We had the best of educations. We did ten hours the first day, nine the next and so on.

GRYPHON That's the reason they're called lessons, because they lessen from day to day. Tell her something about the games now.

TURTLE You may not have lived under the sea, so you can have no idea what a delightful thing a Lobster Quadrille is.

GRYPHON You first form into a line across the sea shore.

TURTLE Two lines. Each with a lobster as a partner. Would you like to see a little of it?

ALICE Very much indeed.

TURTLE Come, let's try. We can do it without lobsters, you know.

Everyone on stage has formed two lines. They begin to dance and sing as they swap places with the partner opposite them:

"Will you walk a little faster?" said a whiting to a snail,
 "There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail.
 See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!
 They are waiting on the shingle -- will you come and join the dance?"

Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?
 Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?

"You can really have no notion how delightful it will be
 When they take us up and throw us, with the lobsters, out to sea!"
 But the snail replied "Too far, too far!" and gave a look askance -
 Said he thanked the whiting kindly, but he would not join the dance.

Would not, could not, would not, could not, would not join the dance.
 Would not, could not, would not, could not, could not join the dance.

"What matters it how far we go?" his scaly friend replied.
 "There is another shore, you know, upon the other side.
 The further off from England the nearer is to France -
 Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the dance.

Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?
 Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you joint the dance?

A VOICE The trial's beginning!

GRYPHON *(Grabbing Alice's hand.)* Come on!

ALICE What trial is it?

GRYPHON Come on!

Everyone on stage forms the courtroom. The King and Queen are seated. The Knave stands before the, under guard. The White Rabbit stands close by. Alice stands/sits next to the Dormouse.

RABBIT Silence in court!

A VOICE Silence in court!

A VOICE Silence in court!

KING Read the accusation!

RABBIT The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts,
 All on a summer day:
 The knave of hearts, he stole those tarts
 And took them quite away!

KING Jury, consider your verdict.

RABBIT Not yet, not yet! There's a great deal to come before that.

KING Call the first witness.

RABBIT First witness!

A VOICE First witness!

A VOICE First witness!

The Hatter steps forward.

KING Take of your hat!

HATTER It isn't mine.

KING Stolen!

HATTER I keep them to sell. I have none of my own. I'm a hatter.

KING Give your evidence, and don't be nervous or I'll have you executed on the spot.

HATTER I'm a poor man, your Majesty, and I hadn't begun my tea and what with bread and butter getting so thin and the twinkling of the tea. And most things twinkled after that. Only the March Hare said –

HARE I didn't!

HATTER You did!

HARE I deny it!

KING He denies it. Leave out that part.

HATTER After that I cut some bread and butter. I'm a poor man your Majesty.

KING You're a very poor speaker. If that's all you know you may stand down.

KING Next witness!

RABBIT Next witness!

A VOICE Next witness!

A VOICE Next witness!

The Cook steps forward.

KING Give your evidence.

COOK Shan't.

A VOICE That child is growing so fast!

A VOICE The girl keeps growing so!

A VOICE Cross examine the witness!

KING What were the tarts made out of?

COOK Pepper.

DORM Treacle.

QUEEN Turn that Dormouse out of court! Suppress him! Pinch him! Off with his whiskers!

KING Never mind! Call the next witness! (*To Queen.*) Really, my dear, you must cross-examine the next witness. It quite makes my forehead ache.

RABBIT Alice!

A VOICE Alice!

A VOICE Alice!

ALICE Alice? (*Awkwardly*) Here!

She knocks over some of the jury in her flurry.

Oh, I *beg* your pardon.

A VOICE Hasn't she grown?

A VOICE Why, only five minutes ago she was such a little girl.

KING What do you know about this business?

ALICE Nothing.

KING Nothing *whatever*?

ALICE Nothing whatever.

KING *(After consideration.)* Silence! All persons more than a mile high are to leave the court!

ALICE I'm not a mile high.

KING You are.

QUEEN Nearly two miles high.

ALICE Well I shan't go. That's not a regular rule. You invented it just now.

KING *(Uncomfortable, but hasty.)* Jury, consider your verdict.

RABBIT There's more evidence to come your Majesty. A letter written by the prisoner.

QUEEN What's in it?

RABBIT I haven't opened it yet.

KNAVE Please, your Majesty, I didn't write it!

KING If you didn't sign it that only makes the matter worse. You must have meant some mischief, or else you'd have signed your name like an honest man.

QUEEN That *proves* his guilt, of course, so, off with his –

ALICE It doesn't prove anything of the sort! Why you don't even know what the letter's about!

KING Let the jury consider their verdict!

QUEEN Sentence first – verdict afterwards!

ALICE Stuff and nonsense. The idea of having sentence first!

QUEEN Hold your tongue!

ALICE I won't!

QUEEN *(At the top of her voice.)* Off with her head!

ALICE *(Standing taller than the others)* Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!

Everybody rises up and then scatters on the floor around Alice, apart from the actor playing Alice's sister. Alice screams and lies down.

SISTER Wake up, Alice dear! Wake up sister dear! Why, what a long sleep you've had!

ALICE *(Rising and stretching.)* Oh, I've had such a curious dream.

Alice walks away, after handing her sister the book (through audience).

SISTER *(reading)* Her sister pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago; and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days. *(Exit)*

1. Alice
2. Sister
3. Rabbit
4. Table
5. Dodo
6. Mouse
7. Caterpillar
8. Footman 1
9. Footman 2
10. Duchess
11. Cook
12. Cheshire Cat
13. Hatter
14. Hare
15. Dormouse
16. Queen
17. King
18. Knave (1 line)
19. Mock Turtle
20. Gryphon

+ numerous Voices