

SYNOPSIS

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ACT I

Oxford, 1862. A summer afternoon. Henry Liddell, the Dean of Christ Church, and his socially ambitious wife are about to host a garden party at the Deanery. Lewis Carroll, a lecturer in mathematics and friend of the Liddell family, entertains the three young Liddell daughters, Lorina, Alice and Edith, by reading a story and performing magic tricks. When Jack, the gardener's boy, brings in a basket of roses, Alice's mother - always pernickety about appearances - rejects the red one as being out of place among the white ones. Jack and Alice are friends. He gives her the discarded red rose and in return she gives him a jam tart that she has taken from a passing tray. This leads to disaster: Alice's mother seizes on it as a pretext to accuse Jack of theft and dismiss him. The clock strikes four. Guests arrive and the party begins. Alice is devastated to see Jack leaving the house in disgrace. Lewis Carroll consoles her by offering to take her photograph. He disappears beneath the camera cloth and, to Alice's surprise, emerges as a White Rabbit. When he bounds into his camera-bag and vanishes, Alice follows him, falls...

...falls further...

...and lands with a thump in a mysterious corridor.

Through a keyhole, Alice spies a magical garden. She longs to enter it but, to her dismay, all the doors are locked.

Unexpectedly Jack, transformed into the Knave of Hearts, rushes through the hall pursued by the Queen of Hearts, her guards and the White Rabbit: the Knave has been accused of stealing a plate of jam

tarts. Alice wants to follow them but the door slams in her face, and the only unlocked door is too small to let her through. A bottle appears: Alice bravely drinks from it and at once becomes so tiny that she can't even reach up to the door handle. She tries a nibble of cake, which has the effect of making her enormous. She cries with frustration and, by waving a fan, shrinks so drastically that her tears form a lake big enough for her to swim in.

She is joined in the pool by a variety of animals who swim about and finally collect on the shore. In the hope that the exercise will dry them off and cheer them up, Alice arranges a caucus race after which... leaving Alice with the invitation. She enters the cottage...

...the White Rabbit appears and, although in a hurry, leads Alice further into Wonderland.

Outside an idyllic country cottage a fish-footman appears, bringing an invitation to a Duchess to attend the Queen of Hearts's croquet party. The Duchess's footman - a frog - invites him into the cottage, leaving Alice with the invitation. She enters the cottage...

...to find a menacing kitchen where the Duchess is tending a squealing baby as the Cook makes sausages. The Duchess is delighted with the royal invitation, while the Cook is envious and resentful. The mood becomes increasingly violent, apart from a moment of tranquility brought about by the mysterious appearance of a Cheshire Cat. Fearful for the baby's safety, Alice rescues it, but when it turns into a pig the

Duchess takes it from her and carries it back to the kitchen for a future as a string of sausages.

The White Rabbit reappears, anxious about his forthcoming duties at the Queen's croquet game. He warns Alice not to follow him to the Royal Garden; it is notoriously dangerous to be anywhere near the bad-tempered Queen.

Without warning the Knave dashes in with the tray of tarts, still pursued by the Royal Guards. The White Rabbit has no choice but to hide Alice and the Knave in the Duchess's cottage. The Royal Procession arrive, out for the regular afternoon stroll. The ever opportunistic Duchess greets the Queen with a gift of her special sausages. Revolted, the Queen orders the procession to move on...

...and the White Rabbit gives the Knave the all clear to make his escape. Alice tries to go with him but the White Rabbit and the Knave agree it is far too dangerous for her. They blindfold her to prevent her from following.

ACT II

Confused as to which way to go, Alice asks the Cheshire Cat for directions, but his vagueness leaves her more confused than ever and she finds herself...

...at the bizarre tea table of the Mad Hatter, a March Hare and a sleepy dormouse. Alice escapes their crazy tea party...
...and finds herself alone and lost. 'What a strange place Wonderland is.' She wonders how to find the Knave, and longs to enter the beautiful garden. An exotic caterpillar, perched on a mushroom, lifts her spirits and, before disappearing, gives her a piece of mushroom.

Alice finds herself back in the hallway of doors where she first arrived. She remembers the Caterpillar's gift, nibbles the sliver of mushroom, and the walls and doors disappear. At last she finds herself in the garden she was searching for.

The Knave appears, still fleeing his pursuers, and is as delighted to see her as she is to see him. But their time together is all too short: the Queen of Hearts arrives flanked by her guards. Furious, she orders the capture of the Knave, but he escapes. The White Rabbit dashes after them, reluctantly taking Alice with him, even at the cost of leading her into danger.



Alice e il Bruco. Illustrazione tratta da *The Nursery "Alice"*, contenente venti ingrandimenti a colori delle illustrazioni di Tenniel per *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, con testo adattato ai lettori per l'infanzia da Lewis Carroll, Macmillan & Co., Londra, 1890.



Alice al tavolo da tè del Cappellaio Matto, con la Lepre Marzolina e un ghiro assonnato. Illustrazione n. 25 di John Tenniel da *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* di Lewis Carroll, Macmillan & Co., Londra, 1865.

ACT III

In the garden of the Queen of Hearts, Alice finds three nervous gardeners splashing red paint on the rosebushes: they have mistakenly planted white ones, which the Queen of Hearts detests.

The Queen arrives along with the King, the Court, the Duchess and the Cook. The gardeners haven't yet finished painting the rosebushes, so the Queen orders the gardeners to be executed. While the Executioner is distracted by the amorous attentions of the Cook, Alice and the White Rabbit smuggle the grateful gardeners out of sight.

The Queen displays her dancing skills to the Court, after which she and the Duchess pick their teams for the croquet game. Flamingos will be the mallets and hedgehogs the balls. To the Queen's dismay, the Duchess scores the first points: she's much better at this than anyone expected. Meanwhile the Knave, risking all by being there, catches Alice's attention from behind a hedge. As the game shifts to another part of the garden, the two are reunited. The Queen is so chagrined by her rival's success that she cheats at the game. The Duchess challenges her, whereupon the Queen orders her execution. The King, ever patient, calms the Queen down while Alice helps the Duchess to slip away.

The Knave rejoins Alice, but this time he is discovered and the Queen orders the guards to haul him to the castle to face trial. When the Cheshire Cat makes another mysterious appearance, Alice uses the distraction to follow the Knave. At the castle, the White Rabbit prepares the courtroom for the trial. The witnesses are brought in,

followed by Alice. The plate of tarts is displayed as key evidence, the

members of the Court take their places and the White Rabbit heralds the arrival of the King and Queen of Hearts. The Queen seizes her moment to exercise her authority over the proceedings, the Knave is brought in for trial

and the proceedings begin. The first witness is the Mad Hatter, followed by the Caterpillar, the March Hare, the Dormouse, the fish- and frog-footmen, the Duchess and the Cook. In a moment of total mayhem, they all accuse the Knave. The King finally asserts himself and offers the Knave the chance to speak in his own defence. When his testimony produces little effect, Alice intervenes with all the force she can muster. The Knave is innocent, she insists: if anyone is guilty, it is she. Together, they deliver a final testimony and win the hearts of everyone but the Queen.

Unmoved by the Court's entreaties, the Queen seizes an axe in order to strike the fatal blows herself. A chase ensues, during which the White Rabbit and the witnesses attempt to hide the Knave and Alice. But the Queen discovers them and does her best to turn the Court against them. With no escape in view, Alice pushes a witness over. He falls over on top of another, who then falls on another, which results in the collapse of the entire Court: they're only playing cards, after all. And in the midst of the chaos, Alice awakes.