***Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland***

***Chapter 11***

***Summary:***

The entire court has gathered for the trial, including the King and Queen, the rabbit, the courtiers, and all the animal creatures. In the center of the courtroom stands a table with a plate of delicious-looking tarts that Alice looks forward to eating after the trial. The King presides as judge wearing his crown over his judge's wig; "Look at the frontispiece if you want to see how he did it," adds the narrator, presumably in answer to the reader's puzzlement.

The jurors are all busy writing even before the trial begins, a fact which Alice criticizes so loudly that the rabbit calls for silence. Meanwhile the jurors dutifully write down Alice's criticism of them. One of the jurors is Bill the Lizard, who Alice earlier kicked out of the chimney. His pencil squeaks and when Alice grows tired of its sound, she snatches it away from him.

The accusation is announced: apparently a young knave has been accused of stealing tarts. The king asks the jurors to consider their verdict immediately, but the rabbit reminds him there are witnesses to hear first. The Hatter arrives as the first witness, nervously carrying his teacup and bread. He remains too intimidated by the King to say very much, except to tell how poor he is. The questioning becomes ludicrous, with denials happening before statements are even made, and more puns, until the Hatter is dismissed.

Alice meanwhile realizes she has started growing again and gets into an argument with the dormouse, who asks that she stop squeezing him and grow at a reasonable pace like anyone else.

The second witness is the Duchess, who carries her pepper box with her. When asked to give her evidence, she simply refuses. Then she asserts the tarts are made of pepper. To this, the Dormouse pipes up "treacle" and is immediately thrown out. Curious as to whose name will next be called as a witness, Alice is surprised to hear the rabbit cry out the name "Alice."

***Analysis:***

The theme of self-referentiality reaches a high point in this chapter, with several examples. The King's wearing of both crown and wig is described, and then the (presumably puzzled) reader is told to look at the cover picture. This complex move points to two separate issues. First, it reminds us of Alice's own fondness for pictures in books; since this book is for her, there will of course be lots of pictures. Even though Alice is inside the tale, Carroll is conflating her with the real-life Alice who will read the book about herself. Second, the actual reader's own reaction to the text is anticipated and addressed.

Alice's sudden new growing phase has not been triggered, for once, by eating or drinking anything. This can be interpreted various ways. Perhaps it is a sign that she is growing as is normal for a child to do, without stimulants. Also, it can be read as a sign that she is soon to leave Wonderland. In either case, her increase in size works to increase the tension and suspense just before the end of the story.

***Detailed Summary***

Alice arrives in the courtroom and finds the King and Queen of Hearts on their thrones, surrounded by a large crowd of animals and the whole deck of cards. The Knave lies chained before them. Alice surveys the room and takes great pleasure in identifying the various features of a court of law that she has read about. Alice notices that all of the jurors are writing down their own names, which the Gryphon explains that they all must do lest they forget their names before the trial’s end. Alice calls the jurors “stupid things,” and the jurors immediately write this down. She snatches a squeaking pencil out of the hand of the juror Bill, last seen as the servant of the White Rabbit, and he promptly begins writing with his finger.

The White Rabbit, serving the court as a herald, reads the accusation that the Knave of Hearts has stolen the Queen’s tarts. The Mad Hatter comes forth as the first witness, bearing a teacup and a piece of bread and butter. The King bids the Hatter remove his hat, but the Hatter refuses, explaining that he does not own the hats, he merely sells them. As Alice watches, she finds that she has started to grow again. The Dormouse becomes upset by Alice’s growth and storms off to the other side of the court to avoid being crushed by Alice. The Hatter delivers a bungled testimony, nervously suggesting that the March Hare said something. Before he can relate what the March Hare said, the Hare denies that he said something. The Hatter tries to explain that the Dormouse said something, but the Dormouse doesn’t reply because he has fallen fast asleep.

A juror asks the Hatter what it was the Dormouse said, but the Hatter cannot remember. The King insults the Hatter’s stupidity, which prompts a guinea pig to start cheering. The guinea pig is immediately “suppressed” by being tied up in a bag and sat on. Once the guinea pig has been suppressed, the King commands the Hatter to stand down. The Hatter replies that he can stand no lower, so the King bids him sit down. Another guinea pig begins cheering and is similarly suppressed. Finally, the King permits the Hatter to leave, and he sneaks off before the Queen has time to order one of the officers to chop off his head.

The King calls the Cook as the next witness. The King asks her what the tarts are made of, and the Cook replies “Pepper.” The Dormouse sleepily calls out the word “treacle,” and the courtroom flies into chaos. Amidst the frenzy, the Cook disappears. The King demands that the next witness be called, and the White Rabbit calls Alice to the stand.

***Detailed Analysis:***

Alice has failed to find meaning in Wonderland but hopes that she will find logic and order in the trial. She sees the Wonderland court as a true court of justice, viewing the institution of law as a refuge of sanity in which an objective and undeniable truth will prevail. She excitedly identifies the various components of a court of law, such as the jury box and the jurors. The similarities of the Wonderland court to an aboveground court reinforce Alice’s faith in the sanctity of law. Alice takes great pleasure in recognizing the elements of a courtroom given the degree to which her expectations and perceptions have been confounded throughout her travels. Alice desires meaning and order and the trial becomes to the last opportunity to realize her need for coherence and sanity.

Alice quickly realizes that in a world without meaning, the search for truth and order can only be a sham. The King repeatedly demands a verdict but one never materializes. The trial mocks the legal process. The importance of trivial points supersedes core issues of right and wrong, innocence and guilt. The absurdity of the legal trial recalls the ridiculous Caucus Race, in which pointless activity serves as a means to arrive at conclusions that have nothing to do with the intended purposes of the institutions. Just as the Caucus Race has no clear winner, the trial fails to determine the culpability of the Knave. Several critics have pointed out that the concept of law itself, rather than the Knave, is on trial in this scene. As with the Caucus Race, Carroll indicts the legal system in Wonderland as a way of critiquing the legal system in our own world.

***Critical Study:***

Back on the croquet lawn, [Alice](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Alice) and the Gryphon learn that the Knave of Hearts has been charged with stealing a plate of tarts. The bewigged King of Hearts is serving as judge in the trial, and 12 creatures make up the jury. The [White Rabbit](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#White_Rabbit) is acting as herald.

"Consider your verdict," the King tells the jury before the trial even begins. It's clear the whole proceeding will be a shambles. In the midst of the confusion, Alice realizes that she's starting to grow again. The next witness is the [Duchess](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Duchess)'s Cook, who refuses to give evidence and slips away in the confusion. Alice is startled to hear her own name being called as the third witness.

The action in this trial scene is based on the famous nursery rhyme that begins, "The [Queen of Hearts](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Queen_of_Hearts) / She made some tarts / All on a summer's day." The first stanza of the poem is familiar; the next three, about the other Kings and Queens in a card deck, are surprisingly violent and never appear in modern Mother Goose books.

[Alice](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Alice) finds the trial ridiculous from the beginning; she's becoming impatient with her long adventure. Note that this time she starts growing without eating anything special—she is literally growing out of Wonderland, a reflection of her dawning awareness that she's dreaming and is starting to wake up. She wonders if she should leave but decides to stay as long as there's room—an accurate portrayal of the way dreams seem to dissipate as the dreamer gradually pulls away from sleep.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

The arrive at the court, where the King and Queen are seated on thrones and the kingdom is assembled and there is a table of tasty-looking tarts in the center – the court is just as [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) remembers courts described in the books she’s read. She can tell that the man in the wig is the judge. It also happens to be the King.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The court looks real and official to Alice—just as she thinks it should look based on the things she's learned and read. She seems to think, too, that it will run like a real court, dispensing justice impartially, providing a logic and fairness—a rules were rules exist and are followed—that are absent in the rest of Wonderland. That the King is the judge clues the reader in that this will certainly not be the case. By presenting a trial that Alice thinks will finally provide order and justice, and then making that trial ridiculous, Carroll suggests that law in the real world, too, may not operate as purely and cleanly as Alice naively and innocently thinks it does.

***Summary part2***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) points out to the Gryphon the twelve jurors, who are all birds and other creatures and are busy writing things on slates. They are writing down their names, [the Gryphon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) tells her, else they might forget them before the trial is over. “Stupid things!” says Alice, and [the King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) calls for order in the court. The jurors proceed to write “stupid things” on their slates in all kinds of spellings. She also notices that one of them has a squeaky pencil, which won’t do at all, so she sneaks up behind him and steals it so that he must write with his finger for the rest of the trial.

***Analysis part 2:***

The image of the jurors writing on their slates conjures the idea of serious people taking notes in order to ensure they are ready to give a fair verdict. The reality that they are writing down their own names puts the lie to that initial image, and severely outrages Alice's sense of how a trial should be. Alice steals the one jurors pencil in order to maintain the decorum of the trial, to make the trial seem more like what she thinks a trial should be.

***Summary part 3***

[The King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) finally calls the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) to start the proceedings. The Rabbit unravels a scroll and reads the accusation that the [Knave of Hearts](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) has stolen the tarts that the [Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) made. He calls the first witness, the [Hatter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters), who comes in still finishing his tea and bread. The King tells the Hatter to remove his hat. The Hatter explains that the hat is not his to remove, as he doesn't own the hats but instead sells them. The King and Queen are very suspicious of the Hatter. The King warns him not to be nervous or he will be executed on the spot.

***Analysis part 3:***

The trial begins normally enough. But with the Hatter's entrance as a witness the sense of the trial as a logical, justice-infused affair immediately disappears. First the King and Hatter become confused over the word "his," which the Hatter interprets over-technically. Yet the King's response is over-the-top and impossible—to threaten to behead someone if they act nervous is certain to make them nervous, of course.

***Summary part 4:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) feels a strange sensation and realizes that she’s [growing](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking) again. [The Dormouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) notices the bench becoming tighter and tells her to stop. She retorts that he is growing too, but the Dormouse insists his kind of growing is normal, and skulks away from Alice. Meanwhile the [Hatter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) is getting terribly nervous. The [King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) orders him to give his evidence at once. The Hatter begins, saying that he is a poor man, and describes a particular tea party, and the thinness of his bread and the twinkling of the tea. The March Hare anticipates that he will soon be accused of something and proactively denies it.

***Analysis part 4:***

Alice’s growing is no longer determined by her eating and drinking or by some other catalyst object like the White Rabbit’s gloves, her body suddenly grows of its own accord – this is the scary part of growing up for any child, the feeling of being out of control of your own body. Meanwhile, the animals such as the Doormouse are all anxious to avoid drawing attention to themselves while the Hatter becomes visibly nervous on the stand and the March Hare proactively defends himself against what seems like it will be a false implication from the Hatter to save himself—in other words, the very violent "justice" promised by the court warps the testimony of those in the court.

***Summary Part 5:***

[The Hatter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) continues describing the tea party in question. When he claims he can’t remember what the [Dormouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) said, the [King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) orders that he must remember or be executed. The Hatter says again that he is a poor man. The King says he is a poor speaker, to which there is a cheer from the guinea-pig section of the court and officers have to sit on the guinea-pigs to suppress the noise. The King is unimpressed with the Hatter’s testimony and tells him to stand down and be gone before the Queen’s officers can behead him.

***Analysis Part 5:***

The Hatter’s difficulty in remembering and recounting the events of a particular tea party reminds us of Alice’s own difficulties remembering. Just like nightmares tend to do, this dream world shows Alice her anxieties exaggerated. This time, she feels acutely the danger of forgetting and being removed from the rhymes and innocence of childhood when the Hatter is told that if he doesn’t remember, he’ll be killed. At the same time, those running the trial again turn to violence as the means of controlling the actions of witnesses (even if the witnesses themselves can't control those actions).

***Summary Part 6:***

The next witness is the [Duchess’s cook](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters). The cook carries with her a pepper pot and has the whole court sneezing. She refuses to give evidence, and the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) tells the King that he must cross-examine her. So reluctantly, the King asks the cook about the composition of tarts. [The Dormouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) interjects that the tarts are made of treacle and is ordered to leave, but in the flurry of his removal from the court, the cook disappears, so the White Rabbit calls the next witness. To [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice)’s complete surprise, her own name is called.

***Analysis Part 6:***

The cook and the Doormouse offer a moment of levity in the trial—the cook with her characteristic obstinacy (which shows the King's constant threats of violence to be all show and no actual bite) and the Doormouse's characteristic trait of seeing treacle as the only meaningful detail. The comedy of the situation also serves to make it more impactful when Alice is suddenly chosen as the next witness. As a witness, Alice will be not just a watcher of the trial. She will be part of it, experiencing its administration of "justice."