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

***Chapter 12***

***Summary:***

Meanwhile Alice has grown much larger, so that she accidentally tips over the box of jurors when she gets up. She places them back in the box hastily, and even upside down, until the King points out her mistake. The jurors note down the accident on their slates.

Asked what she knows about the tarts, Alice says "absolutely nothing." The king suddenly announces rule 42, anyone more than a mile high must leave the court. Alice denies being this tall, but the Queen concurs with her husband and says it's more like two miles. Alice accuses him of making up the rule, and refuses to leave.

A letter, which is actually a poem, is suddenly produced as evidence. It is thought that the letter was written by the prisoner, even though there is no name on it and it is not his handwriting. Using his usual strange logic, the King claims the prisoner disguised his handwriting and deliberately left off his name, behaving quite unlike any honest person would do. The cryptic verses are read aloud; they mention gifts and secrets but contain almost no names or specific references. Alice declares there is not even "an atom of meaning" in them. But the King reads them again, especially the phrase, "they all returned from him to you" and sees that the tarts are indeed returned to him, as they are on the table.

He asks for a verdict of guilty or not guilty to be given, but the Queen wants the punishment to be announced first. Alice loudly tells her this is nonsense, and then reminds them that they are "nothing but a pack of cards" after all. At this, the "whole pack rose up into the air and came flying down on her" as she screamed and beat them off. Suddenly she wakes up from a deep sleep, realizing that her sister is next to her, brushing away the leaves that had fallen on her face. She tells her whole dream to her sister, who then sits alone by the river and falls into her own reverie, one based on Alice's recent adventures. While reliving it, she is aware, unlike Alice, that the sounds in the dream (the queen's voice, the rattling teacups, the pool of tears) all correspond to real sounds in the farmyard around her. Finally she imagines Alice as a grown woman, still able to remember her wonderland adventures and her happy childhood whenever she recounts her adventures to eagerly listening children in the future.

***Analysis:***

Surprisingly, the jurors note down not just the events of the trial, but the events that happen to themselves, such as their being turned over by Alice. This is another example of nonsense caused by too much self-reference. Alice tries to stop it by removing their pencils, thus restoring some order to the court.

Alice herself has reached a stage where she is quite confident and sure of her own mind; she is not afraid to tamper with the jurors, and begins to grow much larger than they. Indeed, they are now only toys in comparison to her, as seen when she accidentally tips their box over. Moreover, she is no longer an onlooker, but the chief witness, taking on an important role. She is on the way to becoming a real adult.

In the end, she sees that all the figures who had intimidated her are nothing but a set of playing cards, seemingly very grand, but in reality quite thin and insubstantial. Even when they try their most frightening tactic, flying directly onto her in a pack, she wakes to find they were an illusion contained within a dream. Yet even though the tale is revealed as merely a dream, it remains a very powerful one, able to be very clearly imparted to Alice's sister. Indeed, the dream gains some reality when it is spread, as a story, to so many others.

***Detailed Summary***

Alice jumps to the White Rabbit’s call to the stand. She forgets that she has grown larger and knocks over the jury stand, then scrambles to put all of the jurors back. Alice claims to know “nothing whatever” about the tarts, which the King deems “very important.” The White Rabbit corrects the King, suggesting that he in fact means “unimportant.” The King agrees, muttering the words “important” and “unimportant” to himself.

The King interjects with Rule 42, which states, “All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.” Everyone turns to Alice, who denies she is a mile high and accuses the King of fabricating the rule. The King replies that Rule 42 is the oldest rule in the book, but Alice retorts that if it is the oldest rule in the book, it ought to be the first rule. The King becomes quiet for a moment before calling for a verdict. The White Rabbit interrupts and declares that more evidence must be presented first. He presents a paper supposedly written by the Knave, though it is not written in the Knave’s handwriting. The Knave refutes the charge, explaining that there is no signature on the document. The King reasons that the Knave must have meant mischief because he did not sign the note like an honest man would. The court seems pleased by this reasoning, and the Queen concludes that the paper proves the Knave’s guilt. Alice demands to read the poem on the paper. While the poem appears to have no meaning, the King provides an explanation and calls for a verdict. The Queen demands that the sentence come before the verdict. Alice chaffs at this proposal and criticizes the Queen, who calls for Alice’s beheading. Alice has grown to her full size and bats away the playing cards as they fly upon her.

Alice suddenly wakes up and finds herself back on her sister’s lap at the riverbank. She tells her adventures to her sister who bids her go inside for tea. Alice traipses off, while her sister remains by the riverbank daydreaming. She envisions the characters from Alice’s adventures, but knows that when she opens her eyes the images will dissipate. She imagines that Alice will one day grow older but retain her childlike spirit and recount her adventures to other children.

***Detailed Analysis:***

The chapter title “Alice’s Evidence” refers both to the evidence that Alice gives during the trial, and also the evidence that she discovers that Wonderland is a dream that she can control by waking up. Alice realizes during the trial that it all “doesn’t matter a bit” what the jury records or whether the jury is upside down or right side up. None of the details or orientations in Wonderland have any bearing on a coherent or meaningful outcome. Alice’s growth during the trial mirrors her growing awareness of the fact that Wonderland is an illusion. She starts to grow when the Mad Hatter bites into his teacup, and she reaches full height during the heated exchange with the Queen when she points out that her antagonists are “nothing but a pack of cards!” Alice exposes Wonderland as an illusion and her growth to full size comes with her realization that she has a measure of control over the illusion. Once she understands that Wonderland is a dream, she wakes up and shatters the illusion.

Alice fully grasps the nonsensical nature of Wonderland when the King interprets the Knave’s poem. Alice disputes the King’s attempts to attach meaning to the nonsense words of the poem. Her criticisms are ironic, since throughout her travels she has continually attempted to make sense of the various situations and stories she has encountered. Alice finally understands the futility of trying to make meaning out of her adventures of Wonderland since every part of it is completely incomprehensible. This message is meant not only for Alice but for the readers of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland as well. Just as the court complies with the King’s harebrained readings of the poem, Carroll sends a message to those who would attempt to assign specific meanings to the events. Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland actively resists definitive interpretation, which accounts for the diversity of the criticism written about the novella.

The final scene with Alice’s sister establishes narrative symmetry and changes the tone of Alice’s journey from harrowing quest to childhood fantasy. The reintroduction of the calm scene at the riverbank allows the story to close as it began, transforming Wonderland into an isolated episode of fancy. Alice’s sister ends the novella by changing the tone of Alice’s story, discounting the nightmarish qualities and favoring a dreamy nostalgia for “the simple and loving heart of her childhood.” The sister’s interpretation reduces Alice’s experience of trauma and trivializes the journey as little more than a “strange tale” that Alice may eventually recount to her own children. Even in the comic chaos of the trial, readers can see that [Alice](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Alice) has come a long way since she first fell into Wonderland. She's no longer inhibited by timidity or politeness; she's able to speak up for the Knave in open court. She may have fallen into Wonderland, but she's standing on her own two feet when she makes her exit. As seen from her reaction to "Rule Forty-two," she has also learned to differentiate between rules that make sense and rules that make no sense at all, and she is ready to apply reason to defend herself against nonsensical rules.

The dream motif is present again in the way the cards throwing themselves at Alice turn out to be leaves drifting onto her face. This is typical of how dreams can incorporate and reinterpret things that are sensed in reality just before the dreamer awakens.

After Alice wakes up, the tone changes, becoming soft and sentimental—in typical Victorian manner—as [Carroll](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/author/) neatly winds up the story. As Alice heads home to take her tea, her sister stays by the river, daydreaming about the younger girl's adventures.***Critical Study:***

Alice's major problem with Wonderland continues to be her inability to completely penetrate what she thinks exists — that is, its "logic."

The Queen has a soldier fetch the Duchess at the close of the last chapter, and Alice finds the Duchess in a surprisingly good mood. Alice attributes, logically, her previous ill-temper to the Cook's pepper. "Maybe it's always pepper that makes people hot-tempered," she thinks, very much pleased at having believed that she has discovered a "new kind of rule," a rule of logic that exists in this strange world of Wonderland.

The Duchess, very much in the mold of a proper Victorian, finds a rule in everything, but they are rules and precepts which are nothing more than improvised absurdities: ". . . flamingoes and mustard both bite. And the moral of that is — 'Birds of a feather flock together.'" As this conversation takes place, the Duchess has seductively dug her hideous chin into Alice's shoulder, but their silly dialogue underlines the fun — and the entire world of nonsense — in Wonderland's satire on the nature of all "rules."

The mad Queen appears, and her presence — just her presence — is intimidating. The Duchess cowers and flies away from the garden. This form of bullying is a humorous evocation of the world of power relations. The Duchess flees from the Queen — and at that moment, all the croquet players and hoops have been placed under custody and sentenced to death! Only Alice, the King and the Queen are left to play the insane croquet game. Presumably, the Duchess could challenge the Queen's power at this point. But the Duchess is like Alice; each of them respects rank. So the "more humane" Duchess yields to the Queen of Hearts.

Next, Alice meets two of the most incredible creatures in Wonderland; the Gryphon (Griffin) and the Mock Turtle (whose name comes from veal soup). The two creatures listen sympathetically to Alice's story of her adventures in Wonderland. The Gryphon finds her story merely curious, but the Mock Turtle thinks that her verse is "uncommon nonsense." Alice quickly finds out the false nature of their initial sympathy. The Gryphon's intense, selfish sorrow is revealed finally as being just a fancy, and the Mock Turtle's sensitivity is a reflection of his fearful name — a reminder of his eventual fate as something's or someone's meal.

Carroll's satire in Wonderland is once again brought into play in the Mock Turtle's education. As a "real tortoise," he studied such things as: "Reeling and Writhing . . . and the different branches of Arithmetic — Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision . . . and Mystery . . . Seaography; then Drawling — the Drawling-master was an old conger-eel, that used to come once a week: he taught us drawling, stretching and fainting in Coils." A classical teacher taught the Mock Turtle "Laughing and Grief." And finally lessons were called lessons "because they lessen from day to day."

Chapters IX and X, thus, break with the pattern of Wonderland. At last, Alice finds one character who displays an absence of hostility. The Gryphon, for instance, is often tart but his intentions are at least outwardly sympathetic. The Mock Turtle and the Gryphon seem to confirm Alice's sense of Wonderland's peculiar disorder, and in Chapter X, "The 'Lobster-Quadrille,'" we have another sad account of a meal and a dance, told in mock heroic couplets.

Chapter XI ("Who Stole the Tarts?") and Chapter XII ("Alice's Evidence") reduce the above-ground facsimile of justice to a travesty. The one constant factor in the "enchanted garden" — the Queen's furious demand for executions — turns out to have always been ignored, as Alice learns from the Gryphon. In Chapter XI, the Knave of Hearts is brought to trial and accused of stealing tarts. Eating again becomes the method of someone's downfall.

The Knave of Hearts' trial becomes a pointless formality as soon as we hear the Queen's directive: "Sentence first — verdict afterward." The White Rabbit serves as Herald of the Court, thus fulfilling the symbolic role which he plays in introducing the story. The members of the Mad Tea-Party and the Duchess' cook are all brought in to give evidence. But the trial is completely lacking — in rules, evidence, and justice. The trial becomes yet another humorous illustration of Wonderland's assault on real-world semantics and linguistic principles.

"Take off your hat," the King tells the Hatter.

"It isn't mine," the Hatter says.

"If that's all you know about it, you may step down," the King tells him.

"I can't go no lower," says the Mad Hatter, "I'm on the floor, as it is."

All during this time, Alice is beginning to grow to her original size. When she reveals this to the Dormouse, he replies: "You've no right to grow here." Part of the fun at this point is that Alice seems to know all about court proceedings and the names of things, although she has never been in a court of justice. The purpose of the narrator in letting us know this fact is that it prepares us for her discomfort at the absurdity and insanity of the court proceedings.

In the final chapter, ironically entitled "Alice's Evidence," it is Alice who gets all the evidence she needs to rebel against the cruelty of Wonderland's trial. After observing the jurymen scribble nonsense as they take testimony, she decides that the nonsense has gone far enough. (In one funny scene, she takes juryman Bill the Lizard's pencil away from him, but he continues to write with his finger.)

Alice dramatically demonstrates her new subversive attitude. The Queen asserts without any evidence that the Knave has been proven guilty by the "evidence." "It doesn't prove anything of the sort," replies Alice. The only thing offered in evidence for the prosecution is the White Rabbit's vague poem, which (as Alice observes) no one understands. The Queen makes her usual command: "Sentence first — verdict afterward." Alice retorts: "Stuff and Nonsense!" The Queen sentences Alice, but by then Alice has grown to her full height. "Who cares for you?" Alice says. "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"

This loud proclamation signals her flight from Wonderland's anarchy to the sanity of above-ground. Alice emerges finally from her confused doubts about this mixed-up world of Wonderland. She rebels, and she leaves the world underneath the ground for the world of common sense and consciousness. Her "lesson," if it can be called that, is that she learns what she has already known. That is, she imposes her order on chaos, and, in consequence, her world of wonderful but unreal and strange and fanciful, glorious things is destroyed. After all, one cannot live long in a dream world. Such things as identity, sanity, laws, logic, and self-preservation have a price. To sustain them, Alice had to reject endless, timeless "possibilities." Her dream, in effect, ends just before a nightmare begins.

The narrator concludes the Wonderland dream: "So Alice got up and ran off, thinking while she ran, as well she might, what a wonderful dream it had been."

Alice wakes up on the lap of her sister filled with the images of Wonderland from her "curious dream." Thus, fantasy is transformed into memory; and any memory can seem real, and it will seem real, in its own way, to Alice, always.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) forgets that she has been [growing](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking) all this time, and as she hurriedly leaves her seat, she sends the jurors flying, which reminds her of an incident with some goldfish she once had, so she feels that the jurors must be replaced quickly before they run out of air. [The King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) orders the jurors to be immediately replaced. In her panic, Alice has put the lizard juror in upside down. She puts him back and, though the jurors are in a great deal of shock, they rush to try to catch up with their slate writing.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Alice continues to play by the rules of the trial. Even though she knows that the jurors are useless as jurors—that they can't even remember their own names—it is important to her that they be in the right place (and right side up).

***Summary part2***

[The King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) begins by asking [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) what she knows of this affair. Alice says she knows nothing. The King thinks this is very important and the jurors scribble frantically. The [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) intercedes, commenting that the King actually means “unimportant.” The King agrees, muttering the words “important” and “unimportant” to himself.

***Analysis part 2:***

The King repeats the words “important” and “unimportant”, considering which to use, even though they are opposites, showing that he really has no concept of meaning as Alice understands it. To him, a word that it only two letters different must be very similar.

***Summary part 3***

The [King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) has also scribbled something in a notebook – he calls for silence and announces that anybody more than a mile high must leave the court. He protests that [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) is a mile high but Alice refuses to leave. She says she will not abide by rules that people make up on the spot. The King tells the jurors to make a decision.

***Analysis part 3:***

With the King's sudden new rule about height and the court, suddenly Alice is the subject of the arbitrary nature of the court. In response, she makes a major step: she refuses to obey the rules, having now recognized just how arbitrary the rules are, how much they are designed simply to maintain control and not to offer any kind of fairness.

***Summary part 4:***

But the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) has further evidence to show, in the form of a letter, which he takes to have been written by the [Knave](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters). He opens the letter and finds that the paper holds a set of verses, not in the Knave’s handwriting. [The King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) believes the knave must have imitated someone else’s hand. The Knave insists he did nothing of the sort, and anyway, he protests, there is no signature. The King takes this to be a sure sign of guilt, and [the Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) agrees. The crowd at the trial applauds.

***Analysis part 4:***

The way things appear and sound is far more important in Wonderland than the meaning behind them, for example when the King suggests that the Knave’s not signing the letter proves his guilt, because an honest man would have put his name to it, he receives applause from the court because it sounds like an intelligent comment even though it is actually illogical.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) sticks up for the [Knave](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) – she thinks they must first read the verses to see what they are about. So the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) reads the verses. They seem to be entirely unrelated to the case, but the King thinks they sound very important so he asks the jurors again to consider their verdict. Alice is now [big enough](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking) that she is not scared to interrupt the King and proclaims that the evidence is meaningless.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Alice has spent the novella trying to figure out and play by the rules of Wonderland in order to understand it. But now as the trial reveals the full illogic of those running the court even as a character's life hangs in the balance, Alice asserts that there is no meaning to the poem read at the trial. It is unclear if she feels emboldened to make such a proclamation because of her great size, or if her size is a function of her gaining the understanding that Wonderland is meaningless and that she, as its dreamer, can see that meaninglessness.

***Summary Part 6:***

[The King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) ponders this idea, but senses that there is some meaning in it. He picks a phrase from the verses, about not being able to swim, and asks the [Knave](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) if this is true. The Knave, being a playing card, obviously cannot swim, and the King is satisfied. But then he picks out another phrase that seems to suggest that the Knave gave the tarts to someone. [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) finds another that suggests the tarts were returned. At this, the King spots the table of tarts in the center of the court and is convinced. He also finds another line about the “she” in the poem having a fit, which, he claims, doesn’t “fit” [the Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) at all.

***Analysis Part 6:***

The way the King and Alice pick apart the piece of evidence, which on the face of it doesn’t seem to have anything to do with the Knave stealing the Queen’s tarts, is reminiscent of a kind of literary analysis of a poem or a difficult piece of text. Each phrase can be fit to the situation at hand. The King fits each “I” and “she” and “they” to characters in the court but this connection is entirely invented. Working in such a way, the King could connect any text to the circumstances of the trial, picking and choosing evidence that "fits."

***Summary Part 7:***

[The King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) tells the jury to yet again consider their verdict. [The Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) thinks the sentence should come before the verdict, to which Alice complains that she is talking nonsense. The Queen orders Alice’s head to be cut off, but Alice, now quite a [giant](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking), has no fear and shouts “You’re nothing but a pack of cards!” At this she tumbles into a fight with the cards and wakes up on the bank, as her [sister](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) brushes some fallen leaves from her face.

***Important Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

 Lastly, she 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.

***Explanation:***

This quote is the very final sentence of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. Alice has gone inside for tea, leaving her sister by the riverbank to muse over Alice’s wondrous dream. This passage has a tone of long winded, golden nostalgia and differs dramatically from the rest of the story, which is generally economical in words and nightmarish for Alice. This tonal shift results from the shift in perspective from Alice to her sister, which in turn alters the reader’s perception of Alice’s adventures. While she experiences her adventures, Alice finds her journey to be confounding and nightmarish. On the other hand, Alice’s sister sees her story as a strange tale from a simple heart. She trivializes Alice’s identity shattering journey, distancing the trauma Alice experienced in her dream with her own aboveground faith in an orderly universe. In a story studded with subversion, Alice’s sister becomes the ultimate subversion who undermines Alice’s search for meaning and identity as she imagines Alice growing up and mystifying other simple‑hearted children with her stories.

This quote also serves as Carroll’s commentary on the character of Alice, the fictionalized version of his muse Alice Liddell. Carroll became deeply preoccupied with the dissolution of his friendship with Liddell as she reached maturity and grew apart from him. This final line has a nostalgic, wistful longing for “the happy summer days” in which he would visit with the Liddell sisters and delight them “with many a strange tale.” Ultimately, Carroll realizes that these happy summer days cannot last, and like Alice’s dream or even Alice’s sister’s dream, the simple hearted love of a child will fade, leaving him only with memories of “child‑life.”