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

***Chapter 2***

***Summary:***

After finishing the cake that says “EAT ME,” Alice grows to nine feet tall and finds that she can barely get an eye down to the doorway. She begins to cry, and her massive tears form a sizable pool at her feet. The White Rabbit reappears and mutters to himself about keeping a Duchess waiting. Alice attempts to speak to him, but he scuttles away, leaving behind his gloves and fan. Alice picks up the fan and begins fanning herself. She muses on the possibility that she may not be Alice but someone else entirely. To determine if she knows all that Alice is supposed to know, she starts to recite her lessons. She finds that she gets the recitations wrong and considers the idea that she may not be Alice, but possibly a girl she knows named Mabel. Since Mabel knows very little, it makes sense to Alice that her confusion over the lessons must indicate that she has somehow become Mabel. If she is Mabel, there is no reason for her to find her way out of the well to rejoin society. Even though she’s confused about her identity, she knows that she must find a way out of the well and back to the world aboveground.

Alice realizes that the fanning motion causes her to shrink, so she fans herself down to a size that will allow her to fit through the door. Once again, Alice has forgotten the key, but before she can become upset, she tumbles into a pool of salt water. She thinks she has fallen into the sea, but quickly realizes that she is swimming in her own giant tears. As she swims, she comes across a Mouse, whom she asks for help. The Mouse doesn’t understand Alice, so she tries to speak French to him. She recites a line from her French lessons, inquiring after a cat. At the mention of the cat, the Mouse leaps with fright. Alice apologizes but then absentmindedly chatters about her cat Dinah. The Mouse becomes offended, so she changes the subject to dogs. The talk of dogs only frightens the Mouse more, and he begins to swim away. Alice promises to stop talking about cats and dogs if the Mouse will come back. The Mouse swims back to Alice, telling her to follow it to shore, where he will tell his history to explain his hatred for cats and dogs. Now accompanied by several other animals that have fallen into the pool, including a Duck, a Dodo, a Lory, and an Eaglet, Alice and the Mouse swim to shore.

***Analysis:***

Alice becomes confused about her identity as her size changes, mirroring the confusion that occurs during the transition from childhood to adulthood. The reality that she is too large to fit into the garden produces confusion over who she is, which Alice responds to with bouts of crying and self-reproach. Unable to accept the changes she is experiencing, she questions her own identity. Since she cannot remember her own lessons, she believes that she must not be Alice anymore. At first, Alice assumes that she may in fact be someone she knows. The comparisons she draws between herself and Mabel show her class-consciousness, as well as her ties to the material trappings of the Victorian world. Though she tries to use chains of reasoning suited to the aboveground world, the paradox of Wonderland is that she must accept the logic of nonsense or she will go mad with contradiction. Alice tries to deal with her predicament reasonably, but the episode in the pool of tears illustrates how easily Wonderland distracts her from reason and causes her to react emotionally. The sea of tears is like a punishment for Alice’s giving in to her own emotions. Alice vacillates between crying and scolding herself, going back and forth between emotion and reason. However, as she swims, she doesn’t notice that the landscape has transformed around her. The great hall has become an ocean, while the floor has become a dry “shore.” Instead of reacting to her predicament by rationalizing the problem or starting to cry, she distracts herself by trying to figure out how to address the Mouse. Alice has started to react with total detachment to the absurd situations in which she finds herself. As she proceeds throughout her journeys, she will continue to encounter problems that cause her to react with extremes of emotion or reason. However, in this scene, she has begun to take the absurdities of Wonderland at face value, allowing herself to become distracted so that she ignores the real problem at hand.

***Detailed Summary and Analysis:***

As things turn out, the magic cake has a delayed effect. Suddenly, Alice's neck shoots up like a telescope, unfurling until her head touches the ceiling. "Curiouser and curiouser!" she exclaims. But that is all she says; she isn't angry, and her ungrammatical outburst is merely indicative of her being a surprised child. Her emotion is one of awe. That is all, and it shows her inherent self-control. However, she clearly realizes again that a serious problem is going to be her new size. And because size is related to what one eats or drinks, her concern is to eat and drink properly, but that seems almost impossible down here. One can't trust what one reads on little signs.

Note that the extension of Alice's neck has had an inverse effect on the other limbs of her body. Her arms now appear to be small stumps, her head seems miniscule, and, without relatively-sized shoulders or hips, her trunk resembles a frame minus any curves. In the John Tenniel illustrations (as many critics have noted), Alice appears almost phallic looking, much like a totem figure. But whatever the connotations imply about Lewis Carroll's fantasies, they are certainly unknown to Alice. Nothing in the story suggests that the pre-pubescent heroine has any self-consciousness about her oddly elongated, phallic-looking neck.

If Alice has any serious hang-up at this point, it is related to food, because food always seems to produce trouble. Whenever Alice eats something, she becomes alienated from her body and her sense of who she is. After eating the cake, she wonders how amusing it will be to communicate by mail with her feet! Carroll is a master at reproducing the curiosity that can only surface in dreams. This is a child's world of the Absurd, and Alice is speculating on possibilities. Then, her Victorian training checks her whimsy: "Oh dear, what nonsense I'm talking!"

In despair again because the "proper" and rational side of her has come to the fore, Alice begins to cry, and again her "super-ego — the voice of Authority — intervenes: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a great girl like you . . . to go on crying in this way! Stop this moment, I tell you!"

There is often this two-voiced sense of herself in Alice's soliloquies; there is the sense of propriety, as well as the voice of a separate child-self which keeps emerging, the latter growing stronger and stronger. It is the voice of a slowly, gradually maturing Alice as she becomes more adult, but note that she is very much "her own" adult as the story unfolds. At this point, of course, Alice is not aware that this shifting identity is a problem. That awareness will come later, after many more confrontations in Wonderland.

The humor that manifests itself in her talks to herself is mainly produced by her solemn attitude, when compared to her child's attitude and reaction to whatever queer situation she finds herself in. In spite of what has happened to Alice, she tries very hard to be totally serious about it and to try and make sense out of all this nonsense. Nonetheless, the laugh is on her, for the narrator's third-person voice always plays up Alice's childlike, comic aspects. He makes Alice's credibility at trying to be rational — despite her deep curiosity — ridiculous. This, of course, is the core of Carroll's humor in the novel.

One consequence of this two-voice structure is that Alice has no terribly strong emotions either way; her responses to the creatures in Wonderland seem totally cerebral. But she tries, as we have said, to deal with them as though they were logical and thinking beings — even though they are "creatures" and although they make no sense at all.

Alice forms no lasting relationships with any of them. In fact, in the climactic last chapter, she displays inflamed anger toward the Queen of Hearts; her only real expression of sympathy is for the Knave of Hearts.

As French philosopher Henri Bergson once observed, laughter and emotions are incompatible — which is perhaps why jokes by people who laugh while telling them are seldom as funny as jokes told without expression or those which are told with deadpan expressions. And inasmuch as the mad creatures of Wonderland never laugh or ever seem amused (not even, really, the Cheshire-Cat), the comic effect of Alice's dream becomes highly enhanced — that is, the story becomes funnier to the reader, even though at times it must seem scary to a child. But when the creatures are the saddest (the Mock Turtle, for example), or anxious (the White Rabbit), or enraged (the Queen of Hearts), or frightened (the gardeners), they seem all the more amusing and comic.

The parenthetical comments that the narrator sometimes inserts into the text greatly assist the graphic relationship between comedy and horror. The style and tone of the narrative is usually lucid, calm, a bit condescending, and even snobbish at times, but it is also loving and indulgent. And then at other times, it is distant and hostile. The writing in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, you should note, is always on the edge of hysteria. So intense is it, that the split between humanity and nature is implicit in all of Alice's encounters with the creatures in Wonderland.

Part of the humor of cruelty — and the creatures of Wonderland are sometimes extremely cruel — is to maintain the balance between sadism and sentimentality. In this case, the split effect provides a proper tension and gives the writing a subtlety and a sober delicacy.

The double consciousness in the character of Alice is also a structural motif — a duality reflecting Alice's regression, at times, to a small child, and then a reversal, when she becomes a stern, Victorian moralist. At times, Alice's willfulness provides an escape from boredom. It irritates her to be corrected by creatures who sound irrational. Then, at other times, she wants to sink into the ground.

Here, Carroll sharpens the opposition of the two opposing impulses within Alice. Later, even Alice realizes that part of herself scolds and is very much like the critical creatures who live in Wonderland. Her search for true feeling and for some sanity in this strange world turns finally inward toward maturity, knowledge, and self-awareness, although she herself would (and will) not realize anything about herself unless it is involved in some sort of external experience. In order to know her true inner feelings, Alice will have to finally educate that other "scolding" Alice-voice which is confused by her estranged condition and trying always to cope with it rationally.

Alice cries until she is sitting in — what is to her — a gigantic pool of tears, even though in reality, the pool is only four inches deep. The White Rabbit reappears, bewailing his reception by the savage Duchess. Alice, with her long neck, startles him so that he drops his fan and gloves and scurries off.

Taking up the fan and gloves, Alice says: "Dear, dear! How queer everything is today!" Amid the fun, Alice is beginning to recognize something ominous; therefore, it is only natural that she tries to relate her present situation ("today") to the rigid, secure "order" of the past. She leapt down the rabbit-hole without any thought of how she would get out, and now her adventure has already begun to fragment her old structure of living a rather ordinary, boring, uninteresting day-to-day life. This disorientation is very much like a jarring fall — which she would have had if she had actually fallen down a truly deep hole. Her old world is collapsing fast. She must simultaneously attempt to discover how to begin to understand her dream while, at the same time, try to determine how it will end. She attempts to re-establish her identity by asking herself if she could have become some other child. But her sensibility as a proper Victorian little girl and also as an intelligent, educated middle-class girl make her dismiss any of the children who come to mind. "I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh, she knows such a very little." Nor is Alice helped in trying to figure out who she is by recalling logical certainties — such as arithmetic. When she attempts to establish who she is by reciting her multiplication tables from one to twenty, her uncertainty only deepens: "Let me see: four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is — oh dear! I shall never get to twenty at that rate!"

Alice finds her distress unrelieved. She has no resources to help her. Wonderland is one enormous puzzle, and her solitude and alienation have now made her unsure whether or not she really exists as Alice! Her familiar, comforting world of facts and learning are no longer mentally true, and she wishes desperately for people whom she left behind to relieve her boredom. She knows that "It'll be no use their putting their heads down and saying 'Come up again, dear!' I shall only look up and say, 'Who am I, then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person. I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else."'

The most crucial aspect of her sanity — her permanent self-identity — seems destroyed. But her lonely cry does express her horrible loneliness: "I do wish they would put their heads down! I am so very tired of being all alone here!"

All this while, Alice has been fanning herself and has put on one of the White Rabbit's gloves. Suddenly, she realizes that she has shrunk — and is continuing to shrink! In alarm, she drops the fan, and the shrinking stops. She realizes in horror that she might well have vanished into thin air if she had held the fan much longer.

As we have already noted, her trials have a serial nature, for no sooner has she stopped shrinking than she finds herself floating in the pool of her own tears. This is like a non-stop movie of horrors! In a single moment, she has passed from the threat of vanishing, and now she faces the prospect of drowning. Some critics have interpreted her sea of tears as a symbolic evocation of a Lethean bath from which Alice will emerge "reborn." But Alice does not change. She swims and frolics until she is joined by a Mouse. His appearance enables Carroll to now parody one of the Victorians' favorite pastimes in which they educated their children: by rote learning.

In a soliloquy, Alice addresses the Mouse: "Oh Mouse," a phrase which reminds her instantly of a Latin grammar exercise in her brother's Latin textbook: amo, amas, amat. Then she recalls the English translation rather than the Latin conjugation of the verb for love, and what follows is a confusing of a noun declension: "A mouse — of a mouse — to a mouse — a mouse — O mouse!"

All of this is absolute nonsense to the Mouse, and Alice's attempt at further communication with the Mouse becomes further complicated when she tries to converse with the Mouse in French. Tactlessly, she chooses the phrase "Ou est ma chatte?" Of course, absurdly, the Mouse understands "cat" (chatte) in any language, and his initial apprehension of Alice quickly turns to fear and distrust. He swims away, very offended and very discomforted. Alice then realizes her blunder, but she keeps blathering away, describing her cat, Dinah. Alice is clearly out of control. And when she does fully realize the extent of her offense, she tries to switch the subject to dogs — as if dogs might make the Mouse feel any better. Her tactless bungling then becomes a predominating pattern. Nonetheless, the Mouse offers to tell her his history and why he dislikes cats and dogs, and he forgives her. Curiously, his maturity and politeness is in sharp contrast with Alice's unthinking, cruel lapse of manners. Alice is redeemed here only by the Mouse's having an adult sensibility. He forgives Alice because, as a child, she does not know any better. Chapter II concludes, then, with the pool of tears becoming suddenly filled with a strange menagerie of Wonderland creatures: a Duck, a Dodo, a Lory (a parrot), an Eaglet, and "several other curious creatures."

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Alice suddenly feels herself starting to [grow](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking). She can see her feet disappear beneath her as she gets taller and taller. She begins to worry that her feet will have no one to dress them and tries to work out how she can send parcels of shoes to her right foot at one address and her left foot at another. She berates herself for talking nonsense, but soon enough, she has in fact filled the large hall and her head has hit the ceiling.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Alice grows so much and so quickly that she soon views her body as a foreign entity, with a life of its own. This is very upsetting for her – she has no control over her own growth and even her limbs don’t seem to be connected to her. This is a magnification of the problem of not feeling in control of one’s body during the strange transformations of adolescence.

***Summary part2***

Alice looks down at the tiny door. She can now only peer through the doorway with one eye. She starts to cry again. She tells herself off but she can’t stop – giant tears come pouring into the hall until she is standing in a pool of her own tears. Just then [the white rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) appears and scampers through the hall, beautifully dressed in a pair of white gloves. The rabbit is still worrying about being late – he says [the Duchess](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-duchess) will be very mad to be kept waiting.

***Analysis part 2:***

As Alice grows and the garden becomes smaller so she can hardly see it, she gets very upset – her ideal place, her hope is being lost, reminding her of her uncomfortable situation and her loneliness in this strange world. Her inconsistent size frustrates and saddens her as she can’t reconcile her identity as a sensitive young child and as a giant, independent and alone.

***Summary part 3***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice), in quite a state, thinks she must take her chance and ask [the rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) for help so she calls out to him. The rabbit is startled and drops his gloves and fan, so Alice picks them up and fans herself with them – it has become very warm in the hall. The Rabbit runs off and hides. Alice starts talking to herself again, trying to solve the puzzle of who she has become. She thinks of all the children she knows, but doesn’t think she has become any of them.

***Analysis part 3:***

Alice’s self-consciousness about her size and her self comes out here. She fills the hall and scares off the rabbit, who had initially provoked her curiosity. Feeling like a scary beast is not a nice feeling for a young girl and causes Alice to question whether she is even Alice anymore. This can be seen as a metaphor for how adulthood looms ahead of Alice.

***Summary part 4:***

Then [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) thinks of all the things she knows. She tries to remember a particular rhyme about a crocodile, but the words sound wrong and she starts to cry again, and imagines that if she got the rhyme wrong, she must be Mabel after all, and considers that if she is Mabel, she will stay in the rabbit hole forever, but then she wishes her family would put their heads to the hole because she’s feeling very lonely. She cries even harder.

***Analysis part 4:***

Alice’s changing body has made her question her identity. She looks for reassurance to her mind, to what she knows. But what she knows has also somehow been modified in such a way that she recognizes the shift. Now she wonders if really may have become a different person. It does not occur to her that she could change and remain herself.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) realizes that she is now wearing one of the [white rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit)’s gloves. She is [shrinking](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking) again. It must be the fan she’s carrying, she thinks, and tosses it away and sure enough, she stops shrinking. She rushes for the tiny door, being even smaller now than before, but the door is locked again. Alice despairs. Then she slips and finds she has fallen into a pool of salt water that she cried when she was a giant.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Now the growing and shrinking phenomenon isn’t reserved for edible and drinkable things. Just by holding the rabbit’s fan, Alice starts herself shrinking. The rules of Wonderland constantly change, leaving Alice at its mercy and having to adapt, and that she is even affected by the things she did herself when she was different.

***Summary Part 6:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) spots another creature in the pool, swimming far off. She sees that it is [a mouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters), who has also slipped into the pool of tears. Alice thinks she might as well try speaking to the mouse but he doesn’t seem to understand English, so she tries addressing him in French. The first phrase she thinks of is “Ou est ma chatte?” which means “Where is my cat?” The mouse is suitably unnerved. Alice protests that the mouse would like her cat, [Dinah](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters), and proceeds to list her virtues. The mouse is very offended.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Language is one of the things Alice is supposed to have mastery over. She loves riddles and songs and is a witty child, so when she finds these animals not just talking fluently but talking a language that she hasn’t learned, Alice is made to feel silly and offensive. Yet she is also learning about having empathy for other people—that she loves a cat is not enough to make a mouse love a cat.

***Summary Part 7:***

So Alice tries to talk about dogs instead, and recalls a particularly good specimen belonging to her neighbor. But the [mouse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) has had enough and starts to swim away. Alice calls to him and he turns sympathetically back and suggests that Alice listen to his “history”, and then she’ll understand the mouse’s feelings about cats and dogs. The pool is now full of other animals, and they all collectively swim to shore.

***Analysis Part 8:***

Throughout her adventures in Wonderland, Alice learns many lessons – one of them is sympathizing with others, including strange creatures with strange stories. Alice puts her affection for her cat aside and tries to imagine what the Mouse would like to talk about.

***Important Quotations***

***Quotation 1:***

1. "Perhaps it doesn't understand English," thought Alice. "I daresay it's a French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror." (For, with all her knowledge of history, Alice had no very clear notion of how long ago anything had happened.) (Wonderland 2.16)

***Explanation:***

Practical and theoretical knowledge are contrasted once again. Alice may know about "history" but she doesn't know "how long ago anything had happened." Yet if she truly mastered the theory, she'd have practical knowledge, too.

***Quotation 2:***

1. "Would it be of any use, now," thought Alice, "to speak to this mouse? Everything is so out-of-the-way down here, that I should think it very likely it can talk: at any rate, there's no harm in trying." So she began: "O Mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here, O Mouse!" (Alice thought this must be the right way of speaking to a mouse: she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen, in her brother's Latin Grammar, "A mouse – of a mouse – to a mouse – a mouse – O mouse!") (Wonderland 2.15)

***Explanation:***

Alice's humorous misapplication of her brother's Latin textbook is the first indication that the ways of communicating she's learned in school aren't going to be much help to her in Wonderland – although they are good for a laugh.

***Quotation 3:***

1. "No, I've made up my mind about it: if I'm Mabel, I'll stay down here! It'll be no use their putting their heads down and saying 'Come up again, dear!' I shall only look up and say, 'Who am I, then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else.'" (Wonderland 2.9)

***Explanation:***

Wonderland is a place of fluctuation and change. Alice determines to let her identity keep shifting until she's happy with it, and only then to return to the "real world" where identity is static.

***Quotation 4:***

1. "I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, that's the great puzzle!" (Wonderland 2.7)

***Explanation:***

The joke, of course, is that Alice wasn't the same when she got up this morning. Everyone is a little different every morning than they were the day before, and for a growing child the change is even more obvious. This creates a crisis for Alice – if she's not the same person she used to be, does that mean she's losing her identity?