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

***Chapter 4***

***Summary:***

Alice's tears are interrupted by the White rabbit, who mistakes her for his servant Mary Anne and orders her to fetch him a new pair of gloves and a fan. She obediently runs to where he has pointed, enters his little house and only momentarily reflects at how odd it is to be following orders from an animal. Finding the gloves and fan, she notices a bottle from which she can't help drinking, out of curiosity. Just as one might expect, she immediately feels her head against the ceiling and her arm out the windows. Such things usually only happen in fairy tales, she reflects and thinks there ought to be a book written about her, as she seems the middle of fairy-tale herself. She makes a note to write a book about herself when she grows up, then realizes she's already very large and can't grow any more. She debates the pros and cons of being all grown up already, taking on two voices again, until the rabbit interrupts her with his demand for his gloves. At first she trembles with fear, but then remembers she is many times larger than the rabbit, and so when he comes around to the window she grabs at him with her free hand and sends him crashing into a little plant box for cucumbers.

The rabbit consults his gardener, Pat, and they both agree that the giant arm should be taken out of the window. Much commotion ensues outside as ladders are brought and strategies hatched to best lay hold of the arm. Alice overhears that a certain lizard named Bill has been chosen to go down the chimney to confront her. Though she pities him for having to do the difficult work, when he enters the chimney she nevertheless executes a swift kick that sends him flying. The other animals catch Bill, listen to his report of "something that came at him like a jack-in-the-box" and comfort him with brandy. The rabbit declares the house must be burnt down, but Alice responds by threatening to set her cat Dinah loose on them all.

After a long silence, the creatures come up with the plan of throwing tiny pebbles at her. The pebbles turn into magical little cakes that make her small again, and she runs out of the house, straight into the safety of the wood. Her only concern is to return to her right size again, for it seems that she is far smaller than normal, as shown when a friendly puppy nearly tramples her. Searching for something to eat that will change her size, Alice finds a mushroom almost exactly her height. On top of it, she discovers a large caterpillar, sitting with folded arms and smoking a hookah (an eastern water pipe).

***Analysis:***

The question of changing and mistaken identity surfaces again when the Rabbit mistakes Alice for his servant, who never appears. Alice is still new enough to Wonderland that she obeys the Rabbit's commands, instead of standing up for herself. Unfortunately, her obedience leads her into a sort of trap, when she finds herself stuck in the Rabbit's house with no way out. The theme of eating and drinking to introduce changes in height becomes a little predictable, as Alice herself notices; this is why, after all, she drinks what she finds in the Rabbit's house.

Once she finds herself a large size again, she reflects upon the merits of being "grown up," as if being larger was all there was to being an adult. Her conversation with herself reflects her uncertainty and lack of awareness about what it really means to be an adult. On the other hand, she is on the way to making some progress towards being a genuine adult in this scene, for she learns to defend herself against unfair aggression. For example, she does not remain docile when she is backed into a corner (literally, with her arm out the window and foot up the chimney); rather, she defends herself by giving the little lizard, Bill, a swift kick. Her newfound ability to defend herself, both physically and psychologically, will grow stronger in the chapters ahead.

***Detailed Summary***

The White Rabbit approaches Alice, looking for his gloves and fan. Alice searches dutifully but cannot find them. The White Rabbit mistakes Alice for his housemaid, Mary Ann, and commands her to go to his house and fetch his things. Startled by the Rabbit’s demands, Alice obeys and soon finds his house. As she walks, she thinks about how strange it is to take orders from animals and imagines that her cat Dinah might start ordering her around when she gets back home. Inside of the house, she finds the gloves and fan, as well as a little bottle labeled “DRINK ME.” Curious to find out what the contents of the bottle will do, Alice drinks the liquid. Before she can finish, she begins growing rapidly and can barely fit in the room. Her arm dangles from a window and her foot becomes wedged in the chimney.

Alice decides that her adventures are like a fairy tale and imagines writing her own stories once she grows up. Given her new size, she reasons that perhaps she has in fact grown up and will never age. The White Rabbit interrupts her train of thought by calling for his fan and gloves. He tries to storm into the house, but Alice’s giant arm prevents the door from opening. The Rabbit tries to climb through the window, but Alice bats him away with her giant hand. The Rabbit calls out for his servant, Pat, and the two begin to plot a way to deal with Alice when she swats them away again. The Rabbit and Pat recruit another servant, a lizard named Bill, to climb down the chimney, but Alice launches him into the air with her foot. A crowd gathered outside calls to burn down the house. Alice threatens to send Dinah to get them and they begin hurling pebbles through the window at her face. The pebbles transform into cakes, and reasoning that the cakes might cause her to become smaller, Alice eats one and shrinks. She leaves the house and encounters a mob of animals ready to rush her. Alice flees and heads into a wood where she thinks about how she might return to her normal size and find the garden. A sharp bark causes her to look up at an enormous puppy standing over her. Afraid it might be hungry, Alice tires it out by teasing it with a stick. She then sets off, wondering what she might eat or drink to return to her original height. She comes across a giant mushroom and climbs to the top, discovering a blue caterpillar smoking a hookah with an air of indifference.

Detailed Analysis:

In a dramatic, magical shift, Alice suddenly finds herself in the presence of the White Rabbit. But the glass table and the great hall have vanished. There is a clear contrast between the calmness of Alice and the nervous, agitated White Rabbit, looking frantically for his lost fan and gloves. Typically, however, the White Rabbit is always fretting over his appearance and the time, while Alice's problem concerns her physical size changes and her identity crisis. In a way, the two characters embody concerns of youth and age. For youth, the question is to establish an identity; for an older person, there is usually a constant wish to have the appearance, at least, of an identity, and there is usually a "fretting" about time, since one is more and more aware of the little time left for living as each day passes.

Alice's central problem in this chapter is accentuated very suddenly. The White Rabbit mistakes her for his house servant, Mary Ann, and he orders her to fetch a spare pair of gloves and fan at his house. His air of authority makes her obey him even though she resents her new status: "How queer it seems to be going on messages for a rabbit! I suppose Dinah'll be sending me on messages next!" Alice clearly knows the difference between herself and servants. But in Wonderland's bewildering anarchy, she is forever trying to make sense and order — in social status. It is her very Victorian class-consciousness that makes her reasonable, self-controlled and polite; yet her sense of class also makes her resent the creatures' nasty, insulting treatment. Class, in the end, distinguishes Alice from the eccentric creatures of Wonderland; whereas she always seems reserved, they seem ever at the mercy of their whims; and they are usually either ill-mannered, or grotesquely inept (the Mouse, for example).

At the White Rabbit's house, Alice finds the fan and the rabbit's gloves, and yet she is seemingly, uncontrollably drawn again to yet another bottle labeled "DRINK ME." She takes a nip of the liquid, and suddenly she is too large to leave the room; again, her curiosity and appetite have gotten her into trouble. However, this is no longer just "curious": Growing too large is becoming a nightmarish theme; in this instance, Alice's growing larger — and then smaller — form a sort of internal rhythm that most children connect with time — that is, sometimes time seems long; sometimes, it seems short. Yet the consequences of eating or drinking the wrong things never result — in the real world — in one's becoming suddenly very wee or truly gigantic. Alice's size here brings her to regret her adventure: "It was much pleasanter at home," she thinks. Seemingly, she has "grown up," something she has long wanted to do; but now she laments the fact that growing up has not made her any more of an adult: "Shall I never get any older than I am now?" She's very big, but she's still a child. "Well, that'll be a comfort, one way — never to be an old woman — but then — always to have lessons to learn!"

The White Rabbit, meanwhile, has lost his patience and followed Alice to his house. He is in a furious mood, which frightens Alice, so she prevents him from entering the house. The humor here is due to the fact of Alice's being many, many times larger than the rabbit and, logically, she should have no reason at all to fear him. Nonetheless, the White Rabbit's angry, brusque orders are terribly intimidating to her because the White Rabbit sounds like an adult. For Alice (a well-trained child), no matter how impolite an adult is, an adult must be minded and must be feared. Adults may be a puzzle (and rude) but, to a child, their domination must be accepted at all times. Alice's real world society, then, is responsible for her behavior here and is further enforced by her class consciousness.

Prevented from entering his own house, the White Rabbit calls to his gardener, Pat. Here, note that whereas the White Rabbit speaks in standard, formal English, Pat has an Irish brogue (as does Bill the Lizard and the "card gardeners" in the "enchanted garden"). Pat recommends that "little" Bill (see chapter title) the Lizard enter the house through the chimney and evict Alice; because of his shape, Bill should have no trouble squeezing down the chimney. So Bill goes down the chimney, but Alice kicks him fiercely back up the chimney as soon as he reaches the fireplace.

Suddenly, there is a heavy, claustrophobic feeling within Alice, but she is by no means helpless. In contrast, it is the "tiny creatures" who are truly frustrated, and we see now a direct basis for Alice's disillusionment with "growing up." At last, she is physically large enough to control Wonderland's creatures, but she is unable to do so because her enormous size has her trapped in the rabbit's small house.

Without warning, the irate White Rabbit and his servants begin pelting Alice with small pebbles. More trouble! But as the pebbles land on the floor, they magically turn into cakes! Remembering that cakes had previously had an opposite effect to liquid, Alice eats a cake and is suddenly small again. Then, however, the creatures outside promptly attack her and chase her off.

Alice is now so small that she has to hide; all the creatures whom she sees are loathsome, especially a "monstrous" puppy, which nearly crushes her. In Alice's words, the puppy is "a dear little puppy" but because of his size, he might as well be "the villainous Fury" of the Mouse's tale. Alice does her best to escape from the puppy because since he is so big and she is so small, she is in just exactly the kind of jeopardy that the Mouse described. The puppy, friendly as he seems to large adults, is a brute to Alice, and the life of a tiny little Alice is certainly of no consequence to him. This impression is strengthened by the puppy's constant delight in almost trampling on her.

After she escapes from the puppy, Alice finds herself under a large mushroom, and on top of the mushroom sits a large blue caterpillar smoking a water-pipe (a "hookah").

The White Rabbit’s status as an authority figure forces Alice to adjust her perception that humans sit at the top of the animal hierarchy. Alice wonders if her experiences in Wonderland will affect the way she conducts herself when she gets back home, since she imagines that she will have to start taking orders from her cat Dinah. Alice accepts the inversion of the natural order with the same faith that she might accept new information in her normal day-to-day life. Wonderland breaks down Alice’s beliefs about her identity and replaces those learned beliefs and understandings of the world with Wonderland’s nonsensical rules. Alice understands this identity displacement in terms of a fairy tale. She states, “When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!” Fiction has intruded on her own sense of reality, and she finds herself unable to keep the two separate. Alice is no longer the Alice she knew at home and is not altogether sure of who she is anymore.

Alice continues to have problems with her size, which exacerbates her confusion over her identity and once again alludes to the painful transition from childhood to adulthood. In Chapter 1, her changing size became a source of anxiety for Alice, revealing her desire to remain a child and avoid the pressures of adulthood. In this chapter, she identifies as a growing girl too large to be shut in by forces that seek to constrict and repress her. The focus on physical space in Chapter 4 emphasizes a child’s emerging feelings of claustrophobia as he or she grows and changes. The house represents domestic repression, an idea underscored by the fact that Alice enters it as a servant girl. When Alice literally outgrows the house, her body manifests her desire to transcend the boundaries of her confined existence.

When Alice meets the puppy, she finally discovers a Wonderland creature that behaves in a way that she expects. Unlike the other creatures Alice encounters in Wonderland, the puppy behaves the way a puppy would in the real world. Alice isn’t the only one who recognizes this aberration in the logic of Wonderland. In a later chapter, the Cheshire Cat tries to prove to Alice that it is “mad” by comparing itself to a dog, which it views as being quite normal. The fact that the dog is the only thing in Wonderland that resembles Alice’s reality at home may be a function of the fact that Carroll hated dogs. Carroll reveals his disdain for canines by giving the dog none of the magical qualities of the other animals in Wonderland.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

It is instead the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit), looking for his fan and gloves. He is very worried about being late, thinking the [Duchess](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-duchess) will have him executed. [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) tries to find his things but the room has changed out of all recognition. The rabbit spots Alice and calls impatiently to her to fetch another pair of gloves and a fan from his house. He has taken her for his housemaid, she thinks, but she runs off in the direction of the rabbit’s home nevertheless.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The White Rabbit’s fears about execution raise the specter of both death and social hierarchy within the realm of Wonderland. That this is a rabbit worrying about such things makes it funny, but nonetheless the Rabbits fear is well. And then the Rabbit turns around and asserts that hierarchy against Alice, thinking she is a servant and ordering her around.

***Summary part2***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) soon arrives at a little house with ‘W. Rabbit’ on a plaque next to the door. Alice goes in without knocking. She considers how strange it is to be a rabbit’s messenger. She imagines what [Dinah](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) would say if she could order Alice around. She makes her way to a little dressing room and finds several pairs of gloves.

***Analysis part 2:***

Alice finds it strange that she has wound up a rabbit’s servant, and that a rabbit should have a nice house and nice gloves. But Alice’s surprise raises a deeper question: why is anyone in the real adult world a servant to someone else; why does anyone have nice gloves?

***Summary part 3***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) also finds a [bottle of liquid](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking) – it is unlabeled but sure to make something interesting happen so she drinks it down. She hopes it’ll make her [larger](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking) again. It certainly does, but she soon regrets drinking so much at once, because in a mere moment, she has filled the room and has one foot up the chimney. Alice thinks she would much rather be back at home. Everything is so very strange. She thinks she ought to write a book about it when she grows up, but then, confusingly, she is very big already.

***Analysis part 3:***

Note how Alice conflates the ideas of size with the idea of growing up. For a child, the two are interchangeable, and the child tends to think that when they “get big” they will naturally become wiser and more knowledgeable too. But now Alice is big, and she’s just as confused as she was before. It’s also worth noting a deeper observation here, too, which is that even for real adults wisdom doesn’t necessarily come with size or growing up. Note also how, whenever Alice is particularly upset, she wants to go home, to regain the comfort of being a protected child as opposed to an adventurer out on her own in the world.

***Summary part 4:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) has a conversation with herself about the pros and cons of never growing older, until she is interrupted by the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) impatient for his gloves. She hears the little feet pattering up the stairs and then hears the rabbit try to open the door, but Alice—huge now—is blocking it. She hears the rabbit mutter that he will instead try to go through the window so she puts her hand through and bats him away so that he falls into his vegetable garden. Alice hears the Rabbit angrily asking the gardener to remove the giant person from his house.

***Analysis part 4:***

Growing up is occurring to Alice like a choice between two lives. She wonders if she will stay large but not get older. She thinks that she would like not to get old, but what if she will always have to learn lessons like a child? Both lives are unsatisfactory. Just as she is being attacked from the outside when the White Rabbit sees her as an intruder, she also attacks herself and sees herself as a kind of foreign object.

***Summary Part 5:***

After a brief silence, [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) hears the sound of a cart and a group of the gardener’s animal friends getting out ladders and ropes, and someone called Bill being chosen to go down the chimney. Alice feels sorry for this Bill, having everything charged to him, but nevertheless, she puts her foot as far as it can go down the chimney and gives Bill a kick.

***Analysis Part 5:***

The similarities continue between the animal world of Wonderland and Alice’s world – the White Rabbit, like a country gentleman, has a number of animals in his employ for household tasks and these all have their positions in the food chain, Bill the lizard being the lowest.

***Summary Part 6:***

The [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) suggests burning the house down, but [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) threatens to set [Dinah](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) on him. Then the animals try throwing pebbles in through the windows. To Alice’s surprise, some of the pebbles start turning into [cakes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking). She thinks that eating one would surely make her [smaller](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/eating-and-drinking-growing-and-shrinking). She is delighted when she starts shrinking immediately. She runs out of the house, past Bill and the other animals, into the forest. She plans to find something to make her a little larger so that she can finally get into the [garden](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/the-garden).

***Analysis Part 6:***

Notice how Wonderland revolves around Alice and her experience. Edible, magical things seem to be planted for her at each new location, for example. We never see the other characters eating and becoming larger or smaller, this is a phenomenon reserved for Alice—Wonderland, as a product of her dream, is something that is focused solely around her.

***Summary Part 7:***

But [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) doesn’t know how to become the right size. As she considers the problem, she is beckoned from a nearby tree, by a giant puppy. She coaxes the puppy down but then she realizes that such a giant and probably hungry puppy might rather eat her than play. She picks up a stick instead and the puppy leaps down and is very entertained by the stick, charging at it until he’s tired and closes his eyes, giving Alice the perfect getaway. Now Alice turns her attention to finding something to eat. She sees a huge mushroom, and thinks it might do the trick. She gets on tip-toes to see the top of it. Sitting on the mushroom is a [Caterpillar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-caterpillar), smoking a hookah pipe.

***Analysis Part 7:***

Alice meets characters that contradict themselves, which helps her to puzzle out her own contradictions as she is a child and growing up at the same time. The puppy is a good example of one of these characters. Alice encounters him only briefly but he immediately embodies two different identities, one a cute baby animal that Alice is probably used to petting, and the other a giant, threatening creature that could eat her. She is beginning to understand that the puppy can be both things at once, just as Dinah the cat can be her beloved pet and a bird-killer.

***Important Quotations***

***Quotation 1:***

"The first thing I've got to do," said Alice to herself, as she wandered about in the wood, "is to grow my right size again; and the second thing is to find my way into that lovely garden. I think that will be the best plan."  
  
It sounded an excellent plan, no doubt, and very neatly and simply arranged: the only difficulty was, that she had not the smallest idea how to set about it. . . . (Wonderland 4.35-36)

***Explanation:***

Alice tries to set about her adventure in a businesslike, organized way, but it's simply not that kind of place. She's going to have to explore haphazardly, taking things as they come instead of trying to follow a prescribed path. There's a reason that it's impossible to make a map of Wonderland.

***Quotation 2:***

By this time she had found her way into a tidy little room with a table in the window, and on it (as she had hoped) a fan and two or three pairs of tiny white kid-gloves: she took up the fan and a pair of the gloves, and was just going to leave the room, when her eye fell upon a little bottle that stood near the looking-glass. There was no label this time with the words "DRINK ME," but nevertheless she uncorked it and put it to her lips. "I know something interesting is sure to happen," she said to herself, "whenever I eat or drink anything: so I'll just see what this bottle does." (Wonderland 4.5)

***Explanation:***

Alice's sense of adventure sometimes borders on the reckless. The author is careful to explain that Alice usually makes sure the things she eats and drinks aren't marked poison, but in this case she seems particularly careless. Isn't it likely that a bottle beside a mirror in a bedroom would be filled with cologne or some other toiletry that wouldn't be a good idea to drink?

***Quotation 3:***

She went on growing, and growing, and very soon had to kneel down on the floor: in another minute there was not even room for this, and she tried the effect of lying down with one elbow against the door, and the other arm curled round her head. Still she went on growing, and, as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney, and said to herself "Now I can do no more, whatever happens. What will become of me?"  
  
Luckily for Alice, the little magic bottle had now had its full effect, and she grew no larger: still it was very uncomfortable, and, as there seemed to be no sort of chance of her ever getting out of the room again, no wonder she felt unhappy. (Wonderland 4.7-8)

***Explanation:***

Alice's feeling of confinement in this scene is created by her sudden growth spurt. Even though it's magically induced, we're starting to wonder whether the normal process of growing up might also make her feel trapped.

***Quotation 4:***

"It was much pleasanter at home," thought poor Alice, "when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit-hole – and yet – and yet – it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what can have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one! There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one – but I'm grown up now," she added in a sorrowful tone: "at least there's no room to grow up any more here." (Wonderland 4.9)

***Explanation:***

Alice explicitly compares her experience in Wonderland to a fairy tale. Of course, we know that this is a meta-joke – she feels like the protagonist in a fantasy story because she is the protagonist in a fantasy story.

***Quotation 5:***

"How queer it seems," Alice said to herself, "to be going messages for a rabbit! I suppose Dinah'll be sending me on messages next!" And she began fancying the sort of thing that would happen: "'Miss Alice! Come here directly, and get ready for your walk!' 'Coming in a minute, nurse! But I've got to watch this mouse-hole till Dinah comes back, and see that the mouse doesn't get out.' Only I don't think," Alice went on, "that they'd let Dinah stop in the house if it began ordering people about like that!" (Wonderland 4.4)

***Explanation:***

Alice can't even imagine a complete Wonderland-style reversal of roles with her pet. She's able to imagine her cat ordering her around, but she can't extend this fantasy to cats ruling the world. Being in Wonderland is helping her imagination develop, but only to a certain extent.

***Quotation 6:***

"But then," thought Alice, "shall I never get any older than I am now? That'll be a comfort, one way – never to be an old woman – but then – always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn't like that!" (Wonderland 4.10)

***Explanation:***

Perpetual youth is not only an impossibility, it doesn't even make practical sense. Would someone who was eternally young in body also be young in mind?

***Quotation 7:***

"We must burn the house down!" said the Rabbit's voice. And Alice called out, as loud as she could, "If you do, I'll set Dinah at you!" (Wonderland 4.29)

***Explanation:***

Both the Rabbit and Alice respond with radical violence to a situation that just needs some clever engineering. A few chapters ago, Alice was sad that none of the creatures she met liked the idea of her cat Dinah, but as soon as she feels threatened she's only too ready to threaten them back.