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

***Chapter 8***

***Summary:***

At the garden gate, three gardeners named Two, Seven, and Five are hastily painting a rose tree, turning the white roses red. Seven faces the threat of decapitation, having made a small error confusing tulips and onions. Asked why they are painting the roses, they report that the Queen had ordered a red one in that place. As she suddenly approaches, they all fall flat on their faces and become indistinguishable.

Alice isn't sure whether to lie down on her face or not, and decides bravely that since the whole company is merely a pack of cards, she need not be very concerned about them. She remains standing and tells the Queen her name, but is unable to give her any information about the gardeners. In response to her ignorance and impudence, the Queen orders Alice's head to come off. "Nonsense," Alice replies in a firm voice. The Queen also orders the execution of the gardeners but these men, aided by Alice, manage to simply slip away.

Alice is told to join the croquet game, a social promotion that earns her the sudden fawning attentions of the white rabbit. He informs her that the Duchess battered the Queen about the ears, and is under sentence of death, like many others.

The game proceeds with great difficulty, since the balls are hedgehogs and the mallets are flamingos; even the arches were made of bent-over soldiers. Faced with numerous disputes and confusion, the Queen solves each of them by ordering someone's head off. The Cheshire cat appears from nowhere and listens sympathetically to Alice's complaints about the company. The King notices Alice talking to a grinning cat and grows interested, but then decides it must be removed. The queen orders its head off and for once the King agrees, going for the executioner himself. However, the cat's head can't be cut off since its body has never fully appeared. Alice suggests they consult the imprisoned duchess, since it is her cat.

***Analysis:***

Immediately the irrational, violent authority of the Queen is made clear through the image of the poor gardeners desperately painting a rose bush to hide their rather innocent mistake. When they fall on their face and become "indistinguishable," the reader has a first clue that these are not people, but a deck of cards. The author also seems to be mocking the extreme conformity in any branch of the court, or other governmental organizations, where people are reduced to numbers just as Two, Five and Seven are merely that.

Alice has grown brave enough to defy even the Queen, refusing to lie on her face and even telling the woman she's full of nonsense. She makes some ethical decisions of her own when she helps the oppressed soldiers to escape the Queen's tyranny.

The croquet game, like the caucus and the later trial, proceeds contrary to the very rules that normally constitute it. The balls and the wickets both "get up and walk away," the mallets are living birds, the furrowed ground prevents aiming one's shots, etc. Yet if it is only a game and the rules all arbitrary and made up, does it really matter if we change them completely? Carroll seems to be asking the same question about both games and language.

When Alice reaches the garden, she hopes that it will fulfill her desires, but her experience in the garden proves to be as frustrating as the rest of Wonderland. Alice has sought out the garden since she first glimpsed it in chapter one. The garden occupies a central role not only in Alice’s quest but also in Wonderland. The garden is the seat of power for the King and Queen of Hearts, and the use of the card suit of hearts underscores the idea that the garden is the heart of Wonderland. Alice quickly discovers that the garden provides no great experience of enlightenment. The rules and practices of the garden are just as idiosyncratic and maddening as the rest of the locales she has visited. The beds of bright flowers she pined for are nothing more than ridges and furrows, and the roses are painted red rather than being naturally beautiful. The garden is not an idyllic place of calm pastoral beauty, but an artificially constructed space that becomes a source of anxiety and fear for Alice.

Alice has grown accustomed the unusual social hierarchy of Wonderland, but the discovery that an inanimate object rules as Queen shakes Alice’s fragile understanding of her surroundings. Before her arrival in the garden, Alice experienced an inverted hierarchy in which animals have a measure of authority and treat her as an inferior. Alice has become accustomed to following the orders of the likes of the White Rabbit. She discovers in the garden that all of these animals are the subjects of an inanimate object, a Queen who is a playing card. In Alice’s world, inanimate objects register below animals in the social hierarchy (assuming that inanimate objects would fit into a “social” hierarchy at all). The Queen acts not only as a ruler, but as a ruthless authoritarian with a penchant for ordering her subjects’ beheadings. She utilizes living creatures as objects, playing croquet using hedgehogs, flamingos, and her playing-card subjects as equipment. Wonderland completely reverses the conventions of the aboveground world, so that inanimate objects rule the land and use living creatures as tools.

Alice starts to realize that she may have more power in Wonderland than she realized. Once she figures out that the Queen and her procession are merely a “pack of cards,” she demonstrates a previously unseen courage. She talks to the Queen with great insolence, attacking the illusion of Wonderland’s power. Though she stands up for herself, she doesn’t yet attempt to assert control over the Queen. However, the fact that the gardeners, the king, and the executioner have deferred to Alice and asked her for help in mediating conflict indicates that they believe she has some measure of authority. Ultimately, Alice only has to wake up to destroy Wonderland and all of its inhabitants. However, she remains “uneasy” as she plays croquet with the Queen, since a dispute might bring an early end to her dream and prohibit Alice from ever figuring out the point of Wonderland.

***Detailed Summary***

Alice enters the garden and meets three gardeners in the shape of playing cards. The gardeners Two, Five, and Seven bicker with each other as they paint the white roses on the rose trees red. Upon noticing Alice, the gardeners explain that they have planted white rose trees by mistake and must paint them red before the Queen of Hearts finds out. Just then, the Queen arrives, surrounded by a great entourage of living playing cards. The gardeners scramble to their bellies to bow before the Queen, who asks for Alice’s name with great severity. Alice answers the Queen graciously and realizes she should not be afraid, as they are simply a pack of cards. The Queen asks Alice about the trembling gardeners. Alice responds flippantly, prompting the Queen to call for Alice’s beheading until the King calms her down. Upon discovering what the gardeners were doing, she orders their decapitation and moves on. Alice saves the gardeners by hiding them in a flower pot and going off with the Queen to play croquet. When she arrives at the croquet match, Alice finds out from the White Rabbit that the Duchess is under sentence of execution for boxing the Queen’s ears.

Alice has a difficult time adjusting to the curious version of croquet played by the Queen. The croquet ground is ridged, the croquet balls are live hedgehogs, and the mallets are live flamingos. The various playing cards stand on all fours to form the arches that the balls are hit through. As she plays, the Queen apoplectically shouts for everyone’s decapitation. Alice attempts to slip away from the croquet match, but catches sight of the Cheshire Cat’s grin. The Cheshire Cat asks her how she is getting on, and Alice begins to complain about the Queen’s unusual behavior. The King notices the conversation and attempts to bully the Cheshire Cat, but it refuses to give in to the King’s taunts. The King becomes aggravated and calls for the Queen to remove the Cheshire Cat. The Queen carelessly orders its decapitation, but the executioner and the King cannot agree on how to execute the Cheshire Cat, who at this point is only a head floating in midair. They appeal to Alice, who suggests that they get the advice of the Duchess, who owns the Cheshire Cat. By the time the Duchess arrives, the Cheshire Cat has completely vanished.

***Detailed Analysis:***

At last, Alice finds herself in the garden that she has so long sought to explore. Far from being a wild Eden, though, the garden is well cultivated and tended. And now Alice meets a whole set of new creatures — this time, several animated playing cards. Immediately, she finds out that the Spades are, of course, the gardeners. And in spite of the Eden-like appearance, the garden has an aspect of "fear" in the air. Alice overhears three gardeners — the Two, the Five, and the Seven — talking about the Queen's threat to behead the Seven of Spades. They are painting the white roses red, an ominous color in view of their discussion.

Suddenly, the Queen and King of Hearts appear. They are followed by a suit of cards which represents the "royal retainers." The Clubs are the "police," the Diamonds are the "courtiers," and the Hearts make up the royal "peerage." The Queen sees Alice and the three Spade gardeners (who have thrown themselves flat on the ground so as to try and conceal their identity). The Queen asks Alice who the three cards are, and Alice replies tartly: "How should I know?"

This flippant answer throws the Queen into a rage; instantly she explodes with her infamous and beastly command: "Off with her head!"

"Nonsense," says Alice, very loudly.

The frequency and roaring of the Queen's threats reveal the terrible rule underlying the world of Wonderland. Execution, or the threat of execution, is indiscriminately announced — and canceled — in whimsical moments, with automatic reprieves. One may be sentenced to death without having committed a crime — indeed, without having received a verdict. In contradicting the Queen, Alice confronts the system of Wonderland directly, as a leading participant-actor; she is no longer a detached observer. Wonderland is now a world of cruelty, destruction, and annihilation, and Alice sees this, and already we can see the possibility of her emerging from it, smiling and unscathed.

The Queen orders the gardeners to be executed. Alice manages to save their lives, however, by hiding them in a flower pot. (Her fear seems to have been unfounded. The Gryphon tells her that nobody in Wonderland is ever executed.)

There is more humor in the subsequent scenes. Note, too, that Wonderland is a "Queendom," instead of a Kingdom because the King is subordinate to the Queen. Now, familiar characters like the White Rabbit, the Duchess, and the Cheshire-Cat enter the croquet-garden. The croquet game again reverses the real-world division between life and inanimate objects as hedgehogs form the balls, the flamingoes the mallets, and the card-soldiers the hoops. The White Rabbit apprises Alice of her inherent danger in a whispered conversation. Even the Duchess, he says, is in jail under a sentence of execution for having boxed the Queen's ears. Alice learns all this but she seems not to be intimidated. In the next scene, the Cheshire-Cat demonstrates the violently repressive regime of Wonderland.

Because the cat is impertinent to the King, it is sentenced to be beheaded. But only the cat's head has materialized so the decapitation cannot be performed. The failed execution marks the slow disintegration of Wonderland in Alice's estimation. Within the character of the cat, Alice recognizes a fair and open mind. But he is fair and open — only to a limited degree. She tries to explain to the cat that the croquet game doesn't make sense because the game has "no rules." The cat, however, replies in such non-sequiturs as "How do you like the Queen?" Clearly, the cat can no more understand a game with no rules than he can understand a world where cats could not disappear and reappear in thin air. Alice mistakes the Cheshire-Cat for a friend and someone with whom she can relate on a real-world, logical level. Her assumption is wrong.

***Critical Study:***

At the garden entrance, [Alice](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Alice) sees three gardeners painting some white roses red. Before they can finish, a royal procession begins filing in. Last to arrive are the most important: the King and [Queen of Hearts](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Queen_of_Hearts) and their court. All of these characters take the form of animated playing cards.

Furious at everyone and everything, the Queen of Hearts constantly orders beheadings. Fortunately, the Queen is distractible, and Alice—along with the Duchess—joins the croquet game everyone has come to play. The game is thoroughly confusing; no one is following the rules. Alice complains about this to the [Cheshire Cat](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Cheshire_Cat) when its head shows up in the sky above her. The Queen orders that this head also be cut off, but the Cheshire Cat disappears before anyone can decide how to carry out the order.

In [Chapter 8](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/chapter-8-summary/), [Alice](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Alice) meets the book's angriest character, the [Queen of Hearts](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/character-analysis/#Queen_of_Hearts). [Carroll](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/author/) later wrote that he pictured her "as a sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion—a blind and aimless Fury."

Alice stands up to the Queen. As soon as they meet, Alice tells herself, "They're only a pack of cards, after all." When the Queen asks who the gardeners are, Alice answers, "How should *I* know? ... It's no business of *mine*"—the first time she's been openly rude to a Wonderland character. And when the Queen screams, "Off with her head!" Alice interrupts her by saying, "'Nonsense!'" In [Chapter 7](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Alice-in-Wonderland/chapter-7-summary/), Alice grows angry with the rudeness of the animals at the tea party and reminds them of the rules of etiquette. In this chapter, she takes the next step and responds to rudeness with rudeness. Alice comes from a middle-class home where people follow rules and try to behave well toward one another. Wonderland is a constant challenge to her concepts of etiquette and good behavior.

In its first half, *Alice in Wonderland* is episodic. One adventure follows another without much discernible progress. Alice grows, shrinks, and wanders around meeting talking animals. In the second half, Alice turns more assertive, and the plot becomes more linear. In the early chapters of the novel, Alice doesn't question the reality of the characters she meets. In Chapter 8, her realization that the royals and courtiers are "only a pack of cards" suggests that she may be starting to wake up from her dream.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) enters the beautiful [garden](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/symbols/the-garden) and sees a rose tree, full of white roses, and a busy group of gardeners, painting the white roses red. They address each other by numbers, Seven accuses Five of splashing the paint and an argument escalates until the gardeners notice Alice and bow to her solemnly.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Alice's goal from the moment she looked through the little door, her purpose through all of her growing and shrinking, has been to get to the garden. It symbolizes the realization of her dreams. Now that she has entered the garden though, it is something less than paradise. It is tended by argumentative playing cards and flowers that looked so beautifully red from a distance are revealed to be painted that color. It is interesting that Alice is suddenly treated with respect by the cards (perhaps because she has a face and so is treated like a royal "face" card?).

***Summary part2***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) wants to know why they are painting the roses. The gardeners become very sheepish. Two admits that they planted a white rose tree by accident and are trying to amend their mistake before the [Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) arrives. At that moment, they spot the Queen approaching and spread themselves on the floor before the Queen’s entourage arrives. This entourage is comprised of ten soldiers carrying clubs, ten courtiers wearing diamonds and ten royal children decorated with hearts. Next comes a slew of royal guests, with the [Knave of Hearts](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) and the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) and, lastly, the [King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) and Queen of Hearts follow.

***Analysis part 2:***

Further, it's made clear here that the gardeners are painting he flowers out of fear of the Queen. The social hierarchy that was hinted at by the White Rabbit's initial nervousness about the Queen now comes into view as the Queen and her royal procession, following a strict procession of rank, comes into view. Once again, as it is depicted in the novella with a bunch of cards playing the roles this hierarchy comes across as ridiculous, but the "real" world follows similar hierarchies.

***Summary part 3***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) decides not to genuflect like the gardeners have done, and the [Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) notices her and asks for her name. Alice decides she needn’t be afraid of a pack of cards and introduces herself. The Queen then asks who the cards on the floor are, and Alice boldly says that she has no idea. The Queen is outraged and orders Alice to be beheaded, to which Alice merely responds with “Nonsense!”

***Analysis part 3:***

Alice has become bold – she thinks that the playing cards are a bit ridiculous spreading themselves on the floor and tells herself not to fear the Queen, who herself is paper thin. The Queen's threat reveals the foundation of her power—violence. At the same time, Alice's unpunished response reveals that the Queen's actual power is not so much in violence as the threat of violence.

***Summary part 4:***

The [Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) lets the matter go and orders the gardeners to be overturned and to explain themselves, but before they can explain, she has ordered them to be beheaded. The cards run to [Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) for protection and she puts them in a plant pot. The three soldiers whose job it is to behead are suitably confused and tell the Queen that they have done the job. The Queen then invites Alice to play croquet and takes her along with the procession. Alice walks beside the [White Rabbit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-white-rabbit) and asks him if he has seen the [Duchess](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-duchess). The Rabbit swiftly shushes Alice – the Duchess has been sentenced to execution for boxing the Queen’s ears.

***Analysis part 4:***

The Queen is the personification of injustice – she has no interest in reason or emotion, only in mindless killing of those who annoy her. Though there are comic moments in this scene, the sight of the playing cards cowering in a plant pot for example, and the Queen’s manic accusations too, there is a serious threat of death behind the comedy. That the Queen would then follow up her threats with invitations to play croquet hints at the way that violence and civilized pursuits are closely linked in the adult world.

***Summary Part 5:***

As the Rabbit starts to explain the strange series of events, he is interrupted by the [Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) ordering everybody to their places and a flurry of excitement as the cards double themselves over to make the arches and the flamingo that are the mallets and hedgehogs that form balls get ready. Alice has some trouble getting her flamingo tucked under her arm to strike the hedgehog, who also keeps rolling away. The rules of the game are also difficult to establish. Everyone plays at the same time and fights break out immediately and soon the Queen has ordered many beheadings. Alice wonders how anybody is left alive in the palace and tries to look for a way to escape.

***Analysis Part 5:***

This game of croquet is comprised of players and props that are similar to the paraphernalia of real croquet but awkward and unruly because the mallets and balls have wills of their own. What should be a light-hearted, fun activity becomes a cruel spectacle, as flamingoes and hedgehogs are man-handled and beaten. And without rules or an endpoint, the game is even more of a confusing mess for Alice as she is pressured to join in.

***Summary Part 6:***

Just then, the [Cheshire Cat](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-cheshire-cat) appears, and Alice waits for its ears to arrive, before telling it her qualms with the [Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts)’s version of croquet. The Cat asks what she thinks of the [Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts), but the Queen passes at that moment so Alice compliments her on her skill. The [King](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters) is curious about the Cheshire Cat, so Alice introduces them, but when the King offers his hand for the Cat to kiss, the Cat is uninterested and the King asks the Queen to have the creature removed. The Queen is happy to do so and orders its execution.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Alice is still careful not to offend the Queen—even though it is clear she does not like the Queen—whether out of fear or politeness is not clear. The Cat feels no such inclination, and is irreverent towards the King and doesn’t seem to really care about the threats of execution that are being fired at him. His constant mischievous smile is a sign of his refusal to play by the rules.

***Summary part 7:***

[Alice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/alice) goes back to the game and, finding the Queen’s accusations flying, goes in search of her hedgehog instead. She finds it fighting another hedgehog. She tries to get her flamingo so she can bat one of the hedgehogs away from the other, but it has taken refuge up a tree.

***Analysis Part 7:***

The chaos of the croquet game has reached a height now. There were no rules to begin with but now there are hardly any players and the animals are completely unruly to the point where they are almost wild again.

***Summary Part 8:***

In the end, she gives up and goes back to the Cheshire Cat, who is causing quite a stir between the executioner, the King and [the Queen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-queen-of-hearts) because it's body has disappeared, leaving only its head behind. The executioner thinks he can’t behead something without a body, but the King thinks that you only need a head. The Queen, meanwhile, would like to behead everybody. Alice suggests getting the [Duchess,](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland/characters/the-duchess) since she owns the Cheshire Cat, but by the time the Duchess is fetched, the Cat has disappeared and everyone is searching for it.

***Analysis Part 8:***

The characters essentially have a debate about the meaning of the word “behead”. The King is a very literal man – he doesn’t understand nuances of meaning, he thinks everything is the sum of its parts. The Queen doesn’t care about meaning at all, she just wants to satisfy her bloodlust. Alice is the only one to make a reasonable suggestion. Though it's worth pointing out that Alice's reasonable suggestion would just allow the Queen to blame someone else—the Duchess. Alice is being logical, but not ethical. To put it another way, Alice is still playing by the crazy rules set by Wonderland and the Queen. The Cat, in contrast, is not.

***Important Quotations***

***Quotation 1:***

"You shan't be beheaded!" said Alice, and she put them into a large flower-pot that stood near. The three soldiers wandered about for a minute or two, looking for them, and then quietly marched off after the others. (Wonderland 8.27)

***Explanation:***

Sometimes confinement can be protective, as in this scene, where Alice saves three foolish soldiers-turned-gardeners from what seems to be certain execution by hiding them in a flowerpot. Maybe Alice's own feeling of being trapped as she grows larger (or perhaps older) is also unfair; perhaps the restrictions she feels are also for her own good.

***Quotation 2:***

A cat may look at a king," said Alice. "I've read that in some book, but I don't remember where." (Wonderland 8.58)

***Explanation:***

Every time Wonderland seems to provide some kind of philosophical wisdom ("a cat may look at a king," or, in other words, "it's free to look") it's immediately undercut. Alice knows she's read this idea somewhere, but she doesn't know who said it or why it might be true.

***Quotation 3:***

The executioner's argument was, that you couldn't cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it off from: that he had never had to do such a thing before, and he wasn't going to begin at his time of life.  
  
The King's argument was that anything that had a head could be beheaded, and that you weren't to talk nonsense.  
The Queen's argument was that, if something wasn't done about it in less than no time, she'd have everybody executed, all round. (Wonderland 8.67-69)

***Explanation:***

What at first seems like a reasonable debate between the King and the Executioner is rendered ridiculous by the Queen's bloodthirsty reaction. Different points of view can coexist in discussion unless one person doesn't want to play fair – or nice.

***Quotation 4:***

Alice began to feel very uneasy: to be sure, she had not as yet had any dispute with the Queen, but she knew that it might happen any minute, "and then," thought she, "what would become of me? They're dreadfully fond of beheading people here: the great wonder is, that there's any one left alive!" (Wonderland 8.45)

***Explanation:***

The same could probably be said of the world at large. People are so fond of hurting each another, of war and murder and general unpleasantness, that it's amazing our species is still around. This is definitely one of Lewis Carroll's darker moments, where faith in the human race is in short supply.

***Quotation 5:***

The Queen of Hearts

The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, began screaming "Off with her head! Off with – "  
"Nonsense!" said Alice, very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent. (Wonderland 8.18-19)

***Explanation:***

The Queen of Hearts is bloodthirsty, and execution is the only response she has to any situation or problem that presents itself. Strangely, a single word from Alice is enough to put her in her place.

***Quotation 6:***

A large rose-tree stood near the entrance of the garden: the roses growing on it were white, but there were three gardeners at it, busily painting them red. (Wonderland 8.1)

***Explanation:***

The height of madness is to pretend to be what you aren't. Instead of enjoying the white roses, or pulling out the tree and planting red roses, the gardeners simply try to paint over their mistake.