

"Yes!" said Alice loudly.

"Come on, then!" roared the Queen.

"It's—it's a very fine day!" said a timid voice to Alice. She was walking by the White Rabbit, who was peeping anxiously into her face.

"Very," said Alice. "Where's the Duchess?"

"Hush! Hush!" said the Rabbit. "She's under sentence of execution."

"What for?" said Alice.

"She boxed the Queen's ears—" the Rabbit began.

"Get to your places!" shouted the Queen in a voice of thunder, and people began running about in all directions, tumbling up against each other. However, they got settled down in a minute or two, and the game began.

Alice thought she had never seen such a curious croquet-ground in her life; it was all ridges and furrows. The croquet balls were live hedgehogs, and the mallets live flamingos and the soldiers had to double themselves up and stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches.

The players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarrelling all the while and fighting for the hedgehogs; and in a very short time, the Queen was in a furious passion and went stamping about and shouting, "Off with his head!" or "Off with her head!" about once in a minute.

"They're dreadfully fond of beheading people here," thought Alice; "the great wonder is that there's any one left alive!"

She was looking about for some way of escape, when she noticed a curious appearance in the air.