

VIII—THE QUEEN'S CROQUET GROUND

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.

Suddenly their eyes chanced to fall upon Alice, as she stood watching them. "Would you tell me, please," said Alice, a little timidly, "why you are painting those roses?"

Five and Seven said nothing, but looked at Two. Two began, in a low voice, "Why, the fact is, you see, Miss, this here ought to have been a *red* rose-tree, and we put a white one in by mistake; and, if the Queen was to find it out, we should all have our heads cut off, you know. So you see, Miss, we're doing our best, afore she comes, to—" At this moment, Five, who had been anxiously looking across the garden, called out, "The Queen! The Queen!" and the three gardeners instantly threw themselves flat upon their faces. There was a sound of many footsteps and Alice looked 'round, eager to see the Queen.

First came ten soldiers carrying clubs, with their hands and feet at the corners: next the ten courtiers; these were ornamented all over with diamonds. After these came the royal children; there were ten of them, all ornamented with hearts. Next came the guests, mostly Kings and Queens, and among them Alice recognized the White Rabbit. Then followed the Knave of Hearts, carrying the King's crown on a crimson velvet cushion; and last of all this grand procession came THE KING AND THE QUEEN OF HEARTS.

When the procession came opposite to Alice, they all stopped and looked at her, and the Queen said severely, "Who is this?" She said it to the Knave of Hearts, who only bowed and smiled in reply.

"My name is Alice, so please Your Majesty," said Alice very politely; but she added to herself, "Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all!"

"Can you play croquet?" shouted the Queen. The question was evidently meant for Alice.

"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 anyone left alive!"

She was looking about for some way of escape, when she noticed a curious appearance in the air. "It's the Cheshire-Cat," she said to herself; "now I shall have somebody to talk to."

"How are you getting on?" said the Cat.

"I don't think they play at all fairly," Alice said, in a rather complaining tone; "and they all quarrel so dreadfully one can't hear oneself speak—and they don't seem to have any rules in particular."

"How do you like the Queen?" said the Cat in a low voice.

"Not at all," said Alice.

Alice thought she might as well go back and see how the game was going on. So she went off in search of her hedgehog. The hedgehog was engaged in a fight with another hedgehog, which seemed to Alice an excellent opportunity for croquetting one of them with the other; the only difficulty was that her flamingo was gone across to the other side of the garden, where Alice could see it trying, in a helpless sort of way, to fly up into a tree. She caught the flamingo and tucked it away under her arm, that it might not escape again.



Just then Alice ran across the Duchess (who was now out of prison). She tucked her arm affectionately into Alice's and they walked off together. Alice was very glad to find her in such a pleasant temper. She was a little startled, however, when she heard the voice of the Duchess close to her ear. "You're thinking about something, my dear, and that makes you forget to talk."

"The game's going on rather better now," Alice said, by way of keeping up the conversation a little.

"'Tis so," said the Duchess; "and the moral of that is—'Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love that makes the world go 'round!'"

"Somebody said," Alice whispered, "that it's done by everybody minding his own business!"

"Ah, well! It means much the same thing," said the Duchess, digging her sharp little chin into Alice's shoulder, as she added "and the moral of *that* is—"Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves."

To Alice's great surprise, the Duchess's arm that was linked into hers began to tremble. Alice looked up and there stood the Queen in front of them, with her arms folded, frowning like a thunderstorm!

"Now, I give you fair warning," shouted the Queen, stamping on the ground as she spoke, "either you or your head must be off, and that in about half no time. Take your choice!" The Duchess took her choice, and was gone in a moment.

"Let's go on with the game," the Queen said to Alice; and Alice was too much frightened to say a word, but slowly followed her back to the croquet-ground.

All the time they were playing, the Queen never left off quarreling with the other players and shouting, "Off with his head!" or "Off with her head!" By the end of half an hour or so, all the players, except the King, the Queen and Alice, were in custody of the soldiers and under sentence of execution.

Then the Queen left off, quite out of breath, and walked away with Alice.

Alice heard the King say in a low voice to the company generally, "You are all pardoned."

Suddenly the cry "The Trial's beginning!" was heard in the distance, and Alice ran along with the others.