Alice on the Bench

by Senji

Summary

A brief return to Wonderland for Alice

Notes

Written for Max Jive

Alice tried to maintain an expression of dutiful attention, as her father was expounding upon what seemed to her to be the subject of the correct behaviour of little girls during the Christmas Morning Service.

So far she had managed to avoid the looks that her mother had been directing at her younger sister, but feared that she would never, ever, manage to attain the appearance of actual enjoyment that her elder sister was showing.

So intent was she upon this that when she noticed a smile hanging in the air behind he father she almost jumped out of her skin (she always wondered what she would look like if she actually did jump out of her skin, and whether she'd have to get special clothes from then onwards).

As she watched the grin (for indeed it was truly too great to really be called a smile) filled out into first the head, and then the body of the Cheshire-Cat that she had not seen for what seemed like an age, during her trip down the rabbit hole.

"I'd pick up your crown," said the Cat, "before the Queen notices that you've dropped it. You'll be in no end of trouble if she forgets who you are."
Alice was just about to reply, pointing out that she had not brought any crowns into the withdrawing room with her, and besides, after dinner on Christmas day was not a time for dressing up, when she noticed that there was indeed a crown-like object on the floor by the leg of the drawing-room chair in which she was sitting.

Her arms, however, were not long enough to reach it so, having entirely forgotten her parents, she pushed herself off the chair and bent over to pick it up. Upon close inspection it appeared to be very similar to the crown that she had received upon reaching the eighth row -- it had nine spikes around a central ball, and the whole arrangement was in ivory white.

Standing up again, she discovered that she was in a room not entirely dissimilar to the one that she had thought herself to be in before. The wooden panelling on the walls was still the same, but the fireplace now found itself at one end of a long and wide corridor with doors on both sides. Sitting above the fireplace, on the mantelpiece, the ornaments had been replaced with two candlesticks, which upon close inspection weren't quite the same as each other somehow, but the Cheshire-Cat remained.

And, in place of her father, stood another familiar figure of whom she was still somewhat afraid, the Queen of Hearts.

"There you are. I see the Cheshire-Cat has found you. We've had to look for you absolutely everywhere!" Turning her back on Alice, she berated the Cat, "Why didn't you bring her straight to us, rather than wasting time talking? To the kitchen with you!"

If Alice had previously thought that the sight of the Cat vanishing and leaving only his grin strange (and indeed she had) then the sight of the Cat vanishing grin first was if anything ten times more disturbing.

"Come on then. The court's this way."

"What would I want to do there," Alice paused, uncertain, then added "your Majesty?" just in case, since she really didn't want the Queen of Hearts losing her temper with her.

"The trial, of course!" The Queen motioned as if to imply the shooing of Alice along the corridor and Alice, remembering the Queen's choleric disposition, hurried along.

Alice was rather troubled; the last time she had been in court with the Queen it had all ended up in chaos and confinement and she really didn't want a repeat of the whole thing. Worse, she didn't want to be locked up as a result of that experience and the Queen might well be the type to keep a grudge. As a result she barely noticed as the corridor morphed into a mahogany paneled courtroom, and was rather surprised to find herself being directed into a Judge's chair.

"Still," she thought, "Professor Paean always says that it is important to react well to changing circumstances. Oh, look, there is the White Rabbit, all dressed up with his trumpet again. And unless I'm very much mistaken, that is the Red Queen over there." (Naturally, as despite all her other flaws one could never call Alice unobservant, she was not mistaken. It was indeed the Red Queen; looking very bedraggled and not at all the confident self that she had appeared when Alice had first met her.)

Alice's train of thought was interrupted, and then firmly derailed, as the White Rabbit tootled on his trumpet ("I'm sure that there's an appropriate word for that...") and announced boldly, "The court will rise for the Queens". Upon this command all the benches and tables struggled on their legs, succeeding only in tipping the people sitting upon them onto the floor. After a short while everyone succeeded in disentangling each other, however, and the Queens (for the Queen of
Hearts was standing to Alice's left and the White Queen had joined her on the right) seated themselves, which inevitably led to more confusion as everyone replaced themselves.

"Court is in session," continued the Rabbit, "hearing commenced at ...". He trailed off and fumbled for his watch, which wasn't in his waistcoat pocket for the simple reason that he was wearing his Herald's uniform, then found it in one of his trouser pockets, "twelve minutes after thirteen." The court recorder, which was a long-legged bird with a regal expression, noted this down carefully.

"Your Majesties," the Rabbit addressed Alice, "we are here to try the Red Queen for the crime of attempting to depose the White King dur..."

"Off with her head!" interrupted the Queen of Hearts, only to herself be interrupted by the White Queen reaching over Alice to warn that "the proper process must be observed, my dear".

A macaw sitting at an elaborate desk to the left of the Red Queen took this as a cue to proceed, "The prosecution submits that the court already knows the substantive details..." but before it could get any further was interrupted by Humpty Dumpty from the other side of the accused.

"Well, you see, it all hangs on what you think the substantive details mean."

The Red Queen glared at the oversized egg, managing both to imply in one withering look that his job was to stop her being beheaded, not to blather on about the relativity of language, and to stop him in the trail of his argument.

The court was silent.

The peace was broken, however, by an argument between Humpty and the Queen about how the court recorder had described their exchange (being "the defendant silenced her counsel with a look that would have cracked a lesser man"; neither one felt entirely flattered).

This was quickly followed by the Queen of Hearts bellowing out once again, "Off with their ...!" before she herself was silenced by a well placed (if rather untraditionally ladylike) punch from the White Queen, who had had more than enough of her co-justice's ways.

Alice pushed herself back in her seat to avoid the argument taking place around her, barely hearing the flustered Rabbit trying to call the courtroom back to order.

"Your Majesties? Queen Alice, are you all right?"

"Queen Alice?"

"Alice?"

"Alice! Do please wake up, dear!"

Alice opened her eyes to the distinctive smell of Epsom salts and the sound of her mother standing over her.

"Are you all right, Alice? We were worried, I fear you may have had rather too much to eat at dinner...."
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