The Queen's Special Tea

by foxtwin

Summary

The Queen of Hearts invites herself to tea.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

The Queen of Hearts was angry. She had not received her weekly invitation to tea. As it was already Thursday – and the end of the year was rapidly approaching – the Queen was rather obliged to invite herself to the occasion.

“Serve my tea,” she ordered, as she unceremoniously sat across two chairs. “Or I’ll have someone’s head!”

The Mad Hatter, fumbling with his hat and the teapot, said nothing and unsteadily managed to pour some strong tea into the Queen’s cup. Her impromptu visit to his cottage – the twenty-sixth that year – had set his mind in a whirl. And that ungrateful Hare would have to be looking at him with urgency, which vexed him even more.

The Queen looked at the Hatter suspiciously, but nodded not unkindly toward Alice.

Alice, who fancied she should curtsey, managed only to nod her head in the Queen’s direction. “For it wouldn’t do to get up from my chair just as I’ve sat down,” she reasoned to herself.

The Hatter, having poured the Queen’s tea, quickly sat down next to Alice and poured more tea into both of their cups. He would not pour for the Hare, who gave him another disdainful look. In an aside to Alice, the Hatter said, “She won’t like the tea, you know. She never does. Not on Thursdays, anyway.”
“Sugar!” the queen demanded.

“Treacle,” the dormouse goggily squeaked from his place inside an empty teacup.

“Pardons, Your Majesty, but we only have treacle at this table,” the March Hare replied.

“That is, we only have treacle at this table,” the Hatter said with a sideways glance at the Hare.

The Queen of Hearts, nonplussed, screamed all the louder, “Sugar! Sugar! Off with their heads!”

“I’m a poor man, Your Majesty,” the Hatter whined, feeling that the Queen’s words had been meant for him. “I’ve not had funds for sugar for oh, so long! Since Monday, at least.”

“SUGAR!” The queen roared.

The Hatter, quaking violently, began searching the table for something – anything – that might appease the Queen. The March Hare handed him the only granulated substance he could find, and handed it to the Hatter.

“Here, Your Majesty. Try this. It has a strong resemblance to sugar.” The Hatter shook some salt into the Queen’s tea cup. Then, without a second thought, offered some to Alice, who refused.

The Queen, seeing Alice’s refusal, glared at Alice, who was then obliged to add some of it to her tea as well. The Hatter fixed his own cup, sprinkling salt into his tea, with the March Hare doing the same.

“Drink child,” the Queen prompted, raising her own cup but not taking the first sip.

“But Your Majesty...” Alice began to protest.

“Drink! Or I’ll have your head!” The Queen shouted.

Alice raised her own cup in deference, and gave her tea a tiny sip. The Queen, however, downed the drink in a single gulp.

“More tea!” she demanded. The Hatter obliged, as the March Hare had not yet moved. Of course Alice, not eager to drink salty tea, decided to leave her cup alone.

“Did Your Majesty enjoy the tea?” Alice allowed herself to say, preferring to start the conversation.

“Quite. It was more than satisfactory. Indeed, the tea has a particularly special taste today.” Alice stifled a giggle, then replied, “Yes. Quite a special taste.”

“If it has a special taste,” the Mad Hatter added, “perhaps it has been poisoned.”

“This tea has been poisoned?” The Hare said hoarsely, grabbing his throat.

“Poisoned?” Alice said, glad she had not taken a large dose of it. “I don’t think it could be, you know.”

The Queen, on the other hand, was much shaken. Regaining her composure, she set suspicious eyes on the Hatter. “Poisoned with what, Hatter? And by whom?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, Your Majesty. But the tea has been poisoned all the same.”

“Oh dear,” Alice said, now doubting her own logic. “Is it deadly?” For if it was fatal to drink the
tea, she was sure she would not drink another drop.

“Deadly,” said the Hatter. “‘Twill kill a gnat instantly.”

“What about a queen?” the Queen asked, eyes narrowing.

The Hatter, seeing the look the Queen gave him, began trembling violently. “N-No, Y-Your M-

Majesty. The p-poison does not seem to affect Q-Queens...” The Hatter looked to Alice and her
worried face. “…or little girls. Perhaps it only kills gnats. Or fleas.”

“How can the poison flee?” asked Alice, perplexed.

“By a fly getting into it, you know. They always do, seeking out the cream and sugar,” the March
Hare said. “Do have another cup, Your Majesty.”

The Queen smiled their way while grabbing seven teacups from the long table, setting them in
front of her, and pouring tea into all of them.

“Come, that’s a good thing,” thought Alice. Then, wanting to bring the Hatter into conversation,
injected quietly, “How do you know the tea has been poisoned? I’ve seen no one here to poison
us.”

“Then it must be so!” The Hatter whispered back. “For if you’ve seen no one once, he’s sure to
return to finish the deed.”

Alice thought a moment. “I am not so sure you’re right,” she finally said.

The Hatter leaned over, close to Alice’s ear. He pointed his finger gently in the Queen’s direction.
“Then she may have poisoned it, you know.”

Alice looked at the Hatter dubiously. The Hatter responded with a dubious look of his own at
Alice before whispering with her again. “Didn’t you see how she looked at me while I was
pouring her tea?” he asked. “Her looks alone may have poisoned it. That or her tongue, for it’s
difficult to know for certain.”

“Perhaps queens are immune to the effects of poisons,” Alice whispered back.

“Yes,” the Hatter replied. “It must be the salt. In the tea. Or the tea in the salt.”

"Indeed,” the Hare replied. "For without the T, it wouldn't be salt, would it? It would be Sal, and
she's off running errands at the moment."

The Queen gulped her tea. “Who are you talking about?” the Queen asked, not unkindly.

“No one,” Alice responded politely.

“Just so,” said the Queen, and continued to gulp her tea. "I thought you were talking about Sal.”

“I suspect the Queen will assault us sooner...or later,” the Hatter continued. “Though she may also
use a salty tongue, which will only make matters worse. For if she uses anything other than her
English tongue, I doubt I’d understand her...or she me.”

Alice had been half-minding while inspecting the teapot in front of her for now the third time – or
was it the fourth? – for signs of tampering.

“Perhaps it was the Cheshire Cat,” Alice added.
“No,” the Hatter replied. “A cat wouldn’t, you see, because Curiosity would have killed it first. But a salty dog would. As it would dog us with its assaults,” the Hatter continued before noticing Alice’s inattention. “What is it you are doing?”

“I’m looking to see if someone has opened the pot and put something else inside,” Alice remarked.

“Yes,” thought the Hatter quietly. “Perhaps instead of tea, the assassin has inserted wine.”

“That seems doubtful,” Alice said more loudly than she ought. “For then the poison would not have been detected.”

“Ah,” replied the Hatter. “But perhaps the assassin was so sad that he would whine, and shed a tear in sorrow. Which would also account for the salt. And so it would taste like tea. For many people become stupid rather quickly when they choose a higher tier of wine.”

“But I don’t understand why the assassin would be sad,” Alice said, a little softer now.

“Because of his sin, you know,” the Hatter replied. “So he’d have to do penance.”

Then, lifting his head so as not to seem impolite, the Hatter inquired of the queen, “More sugar?”

“Of course, damn you!” the Queen boomed. “What the hell do you imagine I’d want any better?”

Alice was shocked at the Queen’s epithets. But the Queen drank her tea quickly while upending the entire shaker of salt into the last cup. She smiled a rare smile, to which Alice and the Hatter both warmed.

Come, she’s settled herself, Alice thought. “Are you enjoying your tea, Majesty?”

“Yes, you no-good, addle pated child,” the Queen replied with a hearty smile.

“She’s gone salty,” the March Hare said, lifting his paws. “And it isn’t even summer, yet.”

“Distinctly savory,” the Hatter added, sipping his tea. “Not worth it, though. Her words won’t redeem her. Not like a bank note, anyway.”

“She’ll soon want to visit the Duchess for pepper, I shouldn’t wonder,” the Hare added.

“Is that any better?” Alice whispered, “I’m not interested in hearing more foul language from her.”

“As to that, you might consider the ducks. She’ll need those to avoid the pots and pans, you know,” the Hatter said. “Of course, chickens wouldn’t venture to see the Duchess as they’re afraid the Cheshire Cat would get them.”

It was then the Queen rose from her seat. “Thanks for the damn fine tea!” she shouted. “I had a bloody good time.”

The March Hare covered his ears as he whispered loudly to the Hatter. “And you must remember to get sugar for the next time she comes. Sweetens her disposition, you know.” The Hare then hopped from his seat and goosed the Queen on her royal bum.

The queen squealed with delight, shoving the Hare aside and waving adieu. “I must see the Duchess,” she said. “For some goddamn pepper!”

Alice waved, glad to see the queen and her rude words gone. Something inside Alice wondered which was better – a hot temper or a salty tongue. She upended her tea onto the grassy ground,
smiled at the Hatter, and poured herself a fresh cup of tea. And at the suggestion of the dormouse, she added a touch of treacle.

End Notes

For the curious, this piece indeed uses certain elements/ideas from my first ever Alice story, "Of Cups and Boxes" (Yuletide 2009). I tried, however, to bring other story elements from the book into play this year (see the chapter "Pig and Pepper" and the discussion of characteristic temperaments with the Duchess) that might also be able to affect the Queen of Hearts. I find Wonderland infinitely charming and emotionally more diverse than Carroll may have been able to (reasonably) include.

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