**Lewis Carroll – Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland – Chapter 8 – The Queen’s Croquet Grounds**

Alice, a young girl, follows a white rabbit down a rabbit hole and enters a magical world very different to her own. At this point in the novel, Alice visits the Queen’s gardens and finds living cards painting white roses red.

19th Century prose-fiction

An extract from a novel written in 1865.

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. Alice thought this a very curious thing, and she went nearer to watch them, and just as she came up to them she heard one of them say, ‘Look out now, Five! Don’t go splashing paint over me like that!’

‘I couldn’t help it,’ said Five, in a sulky tone; ‘Seven jogged my elbow.’

On which Seven looked up and said, ‘That’s right, Five! Always lay the blame on others!’

‘*You’d* better not talk!’ said Five. ‘I heard the Queen say only yesterday you deserved to be beheaded!’

‘What for?’ said the one who had spoken first.

‘That’s none of *your* business, Two!’ said Seven.

‘Yes, it *is* his business!’ said Five, ‘and I’ll tell him—it was for bringing the cook tulip-roots instead of onions.’

Seven flung down his brush, and had just begun ‘Well, of all the unjust things—’ when his eye chanced to fall upon Alice, as she stood watching them, and he checked himself suddenly: the others looked round also, and all of them bowed low.

‘Would you tell me,’ 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; these were all shaped like the three gardeners, oblong and flat, with their hands and feet at the corners: next the ten courtiers; these were ornamented all over with diamonds, and walked two and two, as the soldiers did. After these came the royal children; there were ten of them, and the little dears came jumping merrily along hand in hand, in couples: they were all ornamented with hearts. Next came the guests, mostly Kings and Queens, and among them Alice recognised the White Rabbit: it was talking in a hurried nervous manner, smiling at everything that was said, and went by without noticing her. 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 QUEEN OF HEARTS.

Alice was rather doubtful whether she ought not to lie down on her face like the three gardeners, but she could not remember ever having heard of such a rule at processions; ‘and besides, what would be the use of a procession,’ thought she, ‘if people had all to lie down upon their faces, so that they couldn’t see it?’ So she stood still where she was, and waited.

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.

‘Idiot!’ said the Queen, tossing her head impatiently; and, turning to Alice, she went on, ‘What’s your name, child?’

‘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. I needn’t be afraid of them!’

‘And who are *these*?’ said the Queen, pointing to the three gardeners who were lying round the rosetree; for, you see, as they were lying on their faces, and the pattern on their backs was the same as the rest of the pack, she could not tell whether they were gardeners, or soldiers, or courtiers, or three of her own children.

‘How should *I* know?’ said Alice, surprised at her own courage. ‘It’s no business of *mine*.’

The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, screamed ‘Off with her head! Off—’

‘Nonsense!’ said Alice, very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent.

The King laid his hand upon her arm, and timidly said ‘Consider, my dear: she is only a child!’

The Queen turned angrily away from him, and said to the Knave ‘Turn them over!’

The Knave did so, very carefully, with one foot.

‘Get up!’ said the Queen, in a shrill, loud voice, and the three gardeners instantly jumped up, and began bowing to the King, the Queen, the royal children, and everybody else.

‘Leave off that!’ screamed the Queen. ‘You make me giddy.’ And then, turning to the rose-tree, she went on, ‘What *have* you been doing here?’

‘May it please your Majesty,’ said Two, in a very humble tone, going down on one knee as he spoke, ‘we were trying—’

‘*I* see!’ said the Queen, who had meanwhile been examining the roses. ‘Off with their heads!’ and the procession moved on, three of the soldiers remaining behind to execute the unfortunate gardeners, who ran to Alice for protection.

‘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.

‘Are their heads off?’ shouted the Queen.

‘Their heads are gone, if it please your Majesty!’ the soldiers shouted in reply.

‘That’s right!’ shouted the Queen. ‘Can you play croquet?’

The soldiers were silent, and looked at Alice, as the question was evidently meant for her.

‘Yes!’ shouted Alice.

‘Come on, then!’ roared the Queen, and Alice joined the procession, wondering very much what would happen next.