



Alice Leaves Wonderland

By Eliza Wyatt

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There once was a girl with an Alice curl in the middle of her forehead, so she was called Alice. Her mother and father met with a natural disaster while travelling abroad, leaving Alice an orphan. Everyone said over and over again how lucky, how fortunate and how blessed she was to have survived. She was too young to understand much at the time, but she did feel special and sometimes in a nice way and sometimes in a not-so-nice way.

She was looked after by a rather old professor who liked to wear his university's cap and gown. He called his cap his 'topper' and this made Alice call him the Mad Topper or the Mad Hatter. When he came

to care for Alice, he had just married so he brought his young wife with him. She was called Mary Ann, a round, plump woman, with red hair, and a curious affliction. She sniffed on every possible occasion and ‘tutted’ after every other sniff. Alice said she looked like a rabbit and the Mad Hatter said if he was the Mad Hatter, she must be the White Rabbit and perhaps they were all living in a book by Lewis Carroll called Alice in Wonderland.

Alice had never read this or any other book but she agreed like she usually did, by stamping her foot and crying, “No! No!” Then going along with his suggestion. Her substitute parents were very kind to Alice but there were complications. The Mad Hatter, who was old, sometimes forgot she was there or where she came from. This caused him to be surprised to see her on some mornings, which Alice found very tiring.

And then there was the problem of eating. The White Rabbit, as Alice called her, was not a very good cook. If she remembered to light the stove in time, she invariably forgot how long everything took to cook. They regularly had over-boiled toast, burnt potatoes with charcoal edges and for desert raw cabbage cakes with hot ice cream.

But she did know how to make a nice cup of tea when she remembered to put the water in.

They lived in the middle of the country and neither of Alice's substitute parents could drive; so the Mad Hatter taught her school lessons. He was a retired professor of Advanced Maths with another doctorate in English Literature, more than qualified to teach Alice except that he was inclined to confuse his two subjects which sometimes made him sound like a batty poet and other times like a profound philosopher. Since Alice never knew any other teachers she did not know the difference.

At first everything in the garden was lovely, especially when they got the weeds under control but there was a difficulty that Alice's substitute parents found troublesome. She would keep growing, no matter how many times the White Rabbit sniffed or the Mad Hatter talked about 'constants'. According to them, she grew three feet a second which Alice found hard to believe because she still could not reach the latch on the other side of the garden gate. That latch on the other side of the garden gate was a source of worry to Alice because it meant she could not escape.

Not that she wanted to escape but it would have been nice, she thought, to have the option. As time went by and every day she grew a little taller, the garden grew smaller and smaller. The White Rabbit now referred to her as 'my plum giant' although, personally, Alice never felt very plummy. It seemed to her that the taller she grew, the more unpredictable life became. Her height seemed to upset the balance between the three of them, but there was nothing she could do about it because every day she grew taller and taller. When she reached Mary Ann's shoulder, Mary Ann suddenly decided to wear more red. This was a colour Alice found disconcerting, especially when worn on a Sunday which was Mary Ann's least favourite day of the week.

"I don't want to upset Alice," she told her husband in the privacy of his study, "but she can't expect me to stop wearing a colour just because she doesn't like it."

Toby Green touched the top of his mortar board for assurance and had no reply to this. The word 'colour' made him think of primary numbers and he was off on a journey of calculation.

"I like red, and I love the little red hearts that I can sew on my clothes. There's so little else to do in the middle of the country," Mary Ann protested, adding, "much better than hemming curtains."

Toby Green was not listening or he may have pointed out red hearts are pleasant enough in small numbers but too many on a shirt or skirt were a little off-putting. He would have said that, if his mind was not on the Pythagorean comma which he felt the gardener should apply to the fencing that was being repaired along the north side of the garden.

Mary Ann was used to his preoccupations and never minded when he failed to appear for dinner. She simply wrapped it up in a tea towel and took it upstairs to his study, which was kind of her but a bit messy when there was gravy. Still, it was Mary Ann who had to wash everything and she was determined to do her best with running the house even though she had little practice at it, having been born in an orphanage herself. “We have a lot in common,” she often told Alice. Alice did not believe her, but was too polite to say so.

Mary Ann tried her best to help by telling Alice orphanage stories. “Oh yes, I had a great many girls and boys for sisters and brothers; all of them from different countries and what a fun time we had pretending we were Kings and Queens. But we voted the most to play Happy Families.”

“That sounds like fun,” sighed Alice, “but I have no brothers or sisters who are orphans like me.”

“You have me,” said Mary Ann, “I’m here to help you. Help’s my middle name, and how can I help you today Missy?”

“I don’t even have imaginary friends,” moaned Alice who felt she must be somewhat lacking in imagination.

“Nonsense,” said Toby Green, who was just passing by to sharpen his pencil. “You have imaginary friends. There’s me the Mad Hatter and, of course, the White Rabbit.”

“But you are real!” protested Alice.

“Oh not a bit real, I can assure you.”

“Goodness no!” Mary Ann replied, and they both laughed longer than Alice thought necessary.

She was confused. “Then how can I tell what's real?” she asked.

But Toby Green had a horrible habit of answering a question with a question. “How do I know you’re real?” he asked back.

“And don’t forget,” Mary Ann added: “You don’t have to be real every day.”

“Then how do I know whether it’s a day I’m real or a day I’m not real?”

Mary Ann screwed up her little nose and could not answer.

“That’s to be decided,” said Toby, “And only if we know what date it is. I’m afraid I’ve lost the calendar.”

“Then how do you know how old I am?” asked Alice.

May Ann drew herself up to all her five feet and said in a voice louder than usual: “We know you are young, a young child, perhaps a young lady, but all the same a very very young lady.”

Alice did not like the sound of this, or the implication that she had a long way to go before becoming a grown-up. She began to try out numbers on them both, “nine, ten, eleven, twelve?” This sent them into 'oohs' and 'ahhs' making them sound wise but no one gave Alice a satisfactory answer and as soon as someone mentioned a number, the Mad Hatter went into a whirlwind of delight and threatened to teach her about infinity.

“Oh no,” cried Alice. “I just want to know today’s date, so that I can work out my age.”

“Only too happy to help, Mary Ann and, as usual, was no help at all. “Let me think! Perhaps you'd like a change of scene? Perhaps you'd like to move?”

“She can’t,” objected the Mad Hatter: “I haven’t taught her chess.”

But Alice thought this a great idea.

“I would like another house! A house much closer to the sea.”

Alice had heard about the sea, but had never seen it.

“What size?” asked the White Rabbit helpfully. “Too small a house and you’ll soon outgrow it, too big a house and a girl your size would get lost in it.”

“Not very satisfactory!” Alice pronounced in the same way the Mad Hatter sometimes did over his abacus.

This imitation sent Toby and Mary Ann into half an hour of laughter, both of them imitating the imitator and the imitated. Alice got bored and left them to it!

“What can we do for her?” Mary Ann said at last.

“She doesn’t seem interested in learning,” Toby complained. “I offered geography for a change this morning and tried to teach her about Chimboraz, Cotopaxi and Popocatépetl, and all she said was; ‘I’m lonely’.”

“I’m afraid we have to do something better this summer,” Mary Ann suggested. “Perhaps I’ll read that cookery book you gave me seven years ago and try one of the recipes.”

Toby frowned as hard as he could but he made a point of never contradicting his wife, only ignoring her.

For the next few days, Alice was even more lonely because Mary Ann buried herself in the kitchen. Toby retreated to his study, ignoring not only Mary Ann but Alice as well. He was working on a mathematical formula to explain the science of Everything, which everyone agrees badly needs explaining. He had been working on this formula most of his life and now and again felt it almost

within his grasp. When he got discouraged, he comforted himself by writing down the names of all the other mathematicians and scientists who had failed to explain it. This left him feeling in very good company.

* * *

Dory was a bright boy who lived in the city on the seventh floor, with a fire escape out the back: sitting on that fire escape was what he liked to do best. He loved his parents but felt they worried too much about his health. He was the youngest of his family and had many older

brothers and sisters who were married and sometimes re-married. He often had trouble remembering who was a brother and who was a sister-in-law. who was a sister and who was a brother-in-law. Not that anyone seemed to think it was important, they kept saying they were 'all a big happy family'.

Unfortunately, when he was eight years old, Dory got what they thought was the flu and then discovered it was tuberculosis. His parents said they would never forgive themselves for sending him to school in the first place, when he would have done much better to learn a trade.

“If only he could have come to the racecourse with me,” his father sighed. “I can always use a runner. All this learning I never had, and I can add 7 and 2 together.”

“But he was lucky enough to get a scholarship!” His mother always stood up for him. “We’ve just got to be careful from now on.”

Their idea of ‘being careful’ was to take him out of school and when the truant office came round, he was informed that Dory was going to be sent to a sanatorium in Spain for the sake of his health.

“Better for your lungs!” his mother scolded him when he protested that he liked school.

Dory did not know what to say. He knew that his parents secretly loved Spain where the sun always shone and were just making him an excuse to go there. On the night before they were to take the boat and move with most of their belongings to Spain, Dory decided to run away. He packed a sandwich and a flask of orange juice and wrote them a long note to his parents explaining what he was doing and telling them not to look for him. He did not want them worrying. It was dark and rainy the night he chose, which made Dory reluctant to leave his cosy warm bed but the thought of Spain made him get up. He climbed quietly through the window and jumped off the ledge, but then had to climb back up because he'd forgotten his sandwiches.

Once on his way the first thing he met with was a responsibility. The dog next door insisted on following him. The dog, who looked like a shaggy black Labrador with spaniel ears, was called Griffen. He told Dory, in a funny Labradorean accent that he was “sick and bored of being cooped up all day and he dreamed of adventure too.” All very well, but Dory did not want a companion and told him so. Griffen took off in a huff but a few hours later and a few miles later appeared at a bus stop.

“I’m not taking the bus,” Dory warned him. “I don’t have the bus fare and I want to take off across the fields.”

Griffen, who liked the bus, was disappointed but followed Dory through the freshly ploughed fields and into the bare woods just about to burst into leaf. They walked twenty miles that day. Dory shared his sandwiches with Griffen and when the night grew colder Dory curled up next to Griffen to share his heat.

That night he dreamed of a fair-haired girl who enticed him into her garden. This made him feel a little uncomfortable because at school he had once disliked a blond-haired girl. Nevertheless, he soon discovered his dream would come true. Walking a dusty mile alongside a brick wall topped by a luscious hedge, he heard a girl singing and knew she must live behind the wall. “I can’t see a gate,” he complained: “If only you could climb that wall like I could.”

Griffen sniffed, offended: “Why not find a gate and open it for me?”

They walked on another half a mile and then they saw a large wooden door with a disused keyhole and a rusty iron latch. Someone had left the door invitingly open for them. Dory was wary of this obvious

invitation but, Griffen bounded through, and Dory, who now considered the dog his special friend, felt he should follow him.

* * *

Although Dory and Griffen did not know it, this was the door to Alice's garden. Alice was not having a good day. She was trying to play cards with the Mad Hatter who seemed extra mad that day. He did not like cards and to keep himself amused while Alice tried to think of which card to play next, he began to dance. Alice liked dancing but only by herself in the moonlight, so she was not amused. The trouble was that Mary Ann had been in the kitchen for two days trying out recipes and they were both extremely hungry.

“You're not supposed to be dancing,” she remonstrated: “This is a game, not a dance.”

But you could never get the best of the Mad Hatter. “A game is a dance,” he replied, “and a dance is a game!”

Alice could not argue with this, so she dropped her cards instead. She was on her knees picking up her cards when Alice first saw Griffen, although she did not know who Griffen was, never having

met him. She thought it was a curly black horse that flashed past.

Then she saw Dory.

When she first saw Dory she thought he was the gardener's son because he was frowning like the gardener always did when she wanted to pick Gloxinias. She stuck her legs out and imitated the stiff walk of the gardener marching across the lawn, which made Dory laugh because he didn't know what she was doing and thought he'd interrupted her in some play she was acting in.

Alice didn't mind him laughing at her and waved her hand like the gardener did with his hat.

Dory thought she was saying hello, which she was in a way.

"Sorry to interrupt you," he said: "I'm just passing through, to find my dog."

"Where are you going?" she wanted to know.

But Dory could not answer that question, which made her say, "I suppose you're lost!"

"No," he protested: "I can't be lost because I haven't left yet!"

Alice liked that turn of phrase and invited him to stay for tea, immediately warning him there may not be any tea.

"Have you seen Griffen?" He asked.

“Was that a dog? He's under the Hydrangeas.”

Dory did not know what she meant but was afraid to ask. He could not see Griffen through the picket hedges.”

“I thought he was a horse,” she continued. “I've been introduced to horse and dogs, but I've never met a fish.”

Dory was surprised by this formal speech and decided not to reply. Alice went to order tea from Mary Ann in the kitchen without much hope but because the invitation had been proffered, she felt she should at least try to procure some. When she returned they both waited in silence.

“You're different from everyone else,” Alice noted. “You're quite ... quite ... quiet.”

Dory took this to be a compliment. He liked the fact that she had given him some thought because she looked like a girl who only thought of herself and how clean her dress was. He shyly touched her on the shoulder, and they began a lengthy and involved game of tag.

Toby Green, who was more like a owl than any other sort of bird, watched over this game of tag from the top of the oak tree. He had climbed up there to keep a better eye on their visitors. If there had

been any acorns he would have had fun throwing them down but it was too early in the year.

Back in the kitchen, Mary Ann was so flattered to be invited to make tea for Alice's visitor that she immediately took time off from making tea to stick red velvet hearts all over her particularly pink petticoat which hung from her waist and ended in a hoop.

“We’re thirsty,” Alice called from the door.

Mary Ann was sent into a nervous flurry by this and rushed out into the garden with three cups and saucers and a teapot. She handed round the cups and saucers but when she tried to pour the tea, she had not only forgotten to boil the water she had forgotten to put in any water at all.

Alice was embarrassed. “You’re worse than the Mad Hatter,” she said accusingly, which made the Mad Hatter fall out the tree.

Everyone came to his rescue but he claimed only to have sprained an ankle and since it was obvious he liked hobbling around with a stick, no great harm was done.

Until that is, Mary Ann flew out of the kitchen in a rage. “Who’s stolen my tarts? I baked some strawberry tarts with gold rings on them and they’ve vanished! It must be one of you, I won’t rest until I’ve found

the culprit. I will turn over every rock in the rockery, I will dig up every square inch of lawn until I've found them."

This was bad news for everyone except for Toby Green who was tired of being the Mad Hatter.

"Wonderful!" he clapped, "I will be Sherlock Holmes and you can be the Red Queen."

"What does the Red Queen do? I forget."

"She says: 'Off with their heads'!"

"Oh no," cried Alice: "Don't go into that book again. We have a visitor from Reality, the least we can do is make him feel at home."

"Nonsense," replied Sherlock Holmes, "People who live in Reality like nothing better than a fantasy."

"But I don't want to play murder mystery."

Dory said nothing but his silence was obviously in support of Alice's outcry. It looked serious, the children against the adults.

"Off with her head!" said Mary Ann in the mean spirit of the Red Queen.

"Or at least, off to bed!" Toby Green added, never able to resist a rhyme. "Off to bed without any supper."

“Wait! That's a bit hasty!” Dory was disturbed by what sounded like a punishment. He tried out his most grown-up voice. “How can we have no supper when we haven't had no tea?”

Mary Ann clapped delightedly and Toby Green said seductively: “Have you ever thought of studying advanced mathematics, my son? The concept of infinity?”

“Oh! Oh!” yelled Alice, annoyed to be reminded of that again.

“Splendid,” Toby Green clapped again. “She's got it! OO! double zero, that's how we represent infinity. You know all about that, I'm sure, my son.

“I'm not your son.” Dory thought he better make that clear.

Alice thought this had gone far enough. Drawing herself up to her full height, which was a little above average for her age, she told them: “We are going somewhere else for tea.”

“We are? Where?” Dory asked.

“We are going to the sea!”

“She's going to the sea for tea,” Toby added, again unable to resist a rhyme, even a banal one.

But Mary Ann paled and pulled off her Queen's wig. “No!” she cried: “The Queen won't allow it.” And out of her enormous pink

petticoat she drew a crown of jewels which she immediately placed on her head.

“Why don't you go somewhere better than the sea?” She demanded.

“Ah yes, why don't you go to the sun?”

Dory thought this was a bit ridiculous. “I think too much sun isn't good for you!” He said sarcastically, but they did not guess he was trying to insult them.

“Then go to the moon,” Mary Ann was good at alternatives.

“Yes, the moon,” Toby knew all of Lewis Carroll's poems, “because the moon gets jealous of the sun.”

“How can that be?” Mary Ann asked, pleadingly.

Toby Green took off his cap, always a bad sign, and launched into a recital of the poem.

*The sun was shining on the sea
Shining with all his might.
He did his very best to make
the billows smooth and bright
And this was odd, because it was
The middle of the night.*

*The moon was shining sulkily
Because she thought the sun
Had got no business to be there
After the day was done-
It's very rude of him, she said,
to come and spoil the fun.*

Alice, who had heard this all before, was not impressed. "Goodbye," she said: "I've had an interesting childhood but it's time for me to go." Then she soberly shook them by the hand.

This really upset things. Mary Ann screamed. "Someone's stole my tarts and has to be sentenced."

"That's very serious, you mean it's a court case?"

"And make it legally binding," said Mary Ann with dignity: "Pretend we are playing some sort of sport."

Toby responded by digging into the pocket of his gown and drawing out a judge's wig. "The sport of the court! Yes, and if there's to be a sentence, I'll have to pronounce it in a wig. Wonderful fun! I do like really long sentences." He was making a pun, but Alice did not appreciate it.

"Oh no," Alice moaned, "Stop playing this stupid game."

“Someone has to be arrested and convicted.” Mary Ann wrinkled her brows and pointed her finger accusingly, almost as if she meant it. Whether she did or didn’t mean it, Alice tried to take control of the situation.

“Please change back,” she pleaded, “I don't want a court case.”

“You can’t be convicted without a trial,” Dory put in.

This pleased the Judge, who adjusted his wig and put on his glasses. “He's right, we need a jury if I'm to be the judge. And who's going to conduct the defence?”

“I refuse to be accused,” Alice cried, but no one was listening.

“To begin with, “Dory objected: “We have no evidence there were any strawberry tarts with gold rings on them.”

Alice thought this clever of him, but dangerous. She wanted to stop the whole game.

Mary Ann, who was enjoying being the vicious Red Queen, ran and got the stone gnomes that were standing in the garden.”

“The jury,” she told them.

“What time do you want to begin?” Toby Green asked solemnly as the Judge.

Mary Ann, who did not know the day of the week, the month, the year or even noticed what time the sun rose and set, was perplexed.

“Yes, where are the clocks? A court runs on time.”

At last she remembered something from her childhood in the orphanage and collected some dandelions and stuck them in the ground. “Blow on them to tell the time.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Dory countered: “They’re still in flower, it only applies when they’ve turned to seed.”

“You can’t reason with them,” Alice told him, “They are now officially mad.”

“Thank you, thank you for the compliment.” Boomed Toby as the judge: “We consider madness an art and a science.”

May Ann sniffed and tutted and even sneezed. “It’s only a game.”

“Oh yes, I forgot. Madness is also a game. If not the greatest of games!”

Just then Griffen bounded into view, looking very pleased with himself.

“He’s eaten the tarts!” Dory could tell from the crumbs still hanging from his shaggy coat. “There, I’ve solved the crime.”

Toby Green and Mary Ann exchanged looks that said they were sorry if that meant the end of the game, but Alice was still upset at being unjustly accused. She shouted back with a lot of guttural emphasis. "I'm too old to play these silly games!"

"Too old to play games?" Mary Ann sneezed so hard her hair fell out of her curl. "She's younger than I am!"

Toby Green was also upset. So taken aback he sat down backwards on the grass.

"Too old to play games?" he muttered: "How can that be? It's not possible, everyone plays games into advanced old age." Despairingly, he removed his judge's wig and turned into a man with a shining bald head.

Dory and Alice did not notice his distress because Griffen was behaving strangely by walking sideways, like a crab.

"I think he's going to be sick."

And then the dog bolted to the far end of the garden and began frantically digging under the gate.

"He wants to get out."

"So do I. But where? I don't know the way to the sea."

“Neither do I,” whispered Dory, “But we can always ask someone.”

Alice was surprised she had never thought of that, not knowing that people who grew up with their real parents trusted more easily.

“Look!” Dory saw that Griffen had now dug a hole under the gate, “We can escape.”

“I better say goodbye.”

Alice ran to find Mary Ann and Toby Green still debating the merit of games.

“We’re running away to sea,” Alice informed them.

“But you can’t, you haven’t had lessons in running.”

Very happy to be needed once again, the Mad Hatter jumped to his feet and grabbed her hand and began to run with her as fast as his tall legs could pump up and down on one spot. Alice soon got out of breath. Dory wondered if this was a strange form of exercise. “You’re not going anywhere,” he pointed out: “If you want to go anywhere, you have to run twice as fast.”

On hearing this Alice leaned hard, pulled her hand away and fell into Dory's arms. When she did this, they both blushed.

Mary Ann reluctantly took off her crown and in her more normal voice said, "I think it's time for dinner, how about some fish and chips?" The judge clapped his hands and banged his head on the chalkboard using his bald head instead of a gavel.

"I'm not sure," Alice replied. "We are going to visit the fish, not eat them."

"Don't hold your breath!" Mary Ann said, not believing her.

"I won't," Alice retorted, "because if I did that..."

"You'd be a plate of bread and butter." The Mad Hatter was back again.

"Really," Alice said tearfully, "you're so crazy you embarrass me. You really are insane!"

"Only if I want to be," Toby cunningly replied.

"Listen!" Dory wanted to impress Alice that he was on her side.

"And look here. It's mad to want to be mad, which proves you're mad!"

Everyone was astounded at the logic, including Alice herself.

"He's right!" She cried, a shade too eagerly.

Toby Green, who was at heart a sensitive eccentric, stroked his non-existent beard and pondered magnificently. "I'll have to research that." He said mistrustfully, and took off into the house, his black gown

blowing out with rightful and wrongful indignation. He desperately needed the comfort of his library.

“We’re alone,” Alice cried joyfully, “Now we can go.”

Griffen was waiting for them, his haunches on high and a doleful look in his eyes. “What took you so long?” he sighed.

* * *

The one thing that surprised Dory on their walk to the sea was how little he was coughing. It was as if his lungs had forgotten about the TB and had begun to expand. Dory felt Alice was a bit precious but liked her spirit. He felt much stronger in her company, especially after he showed her the best way to find the sea was to follow the seagulls.

Alice thought Dory a little too quiet for her liking but applauded his courage. She was happy skipping alongside him even if he was two inches shorter than she was. After being solely in the company of grown-ups this made her feel she had more powerful legs. She was also thrilled to be out of the garden and in such enjoyable company. She stretched her hands out as if she could grab the sky, the whole effort culminating in a kind of dance which Dory called the ‘Alice’ dance.

Griffen also thought it was a good idea to follow the seagulls and chased them whenever they touched down. The hill began slowly but they soon became aware of a steep climb up a grassy slope and with every panting breath they noticed how bad the smell was and it got worse and worse. When they reached the top they discovered why: they were atop a rubbish tip where the seagulls were scavenging mouldy bits of food. They had reached the summit of a gigantic tip. The good news was that from their peak they could see the road that led to the sea.

A few hours later they arrived. Miles of sand greeted them and a gentle refreshing wind. They ran a number of races with Griffen along the white lacy edge of the sea, but he won every time. As the light dimmed, the three of them curled up together to keep warm and all fell asleep. Alice dreamed of her cat, Mr. Cheshire, and in the dream she asked Mr. Cheshire, who liked his food, what they were going to eat. Mr. Cheshire smiled from ear to ear and said, ask the fish.

The brightness of the moon woke them. As if aware of Lewis Carroll's poem, it seemed the moon was vying with the sun that night. And they forgot to be hungry because they found themselves surrounded by many weird creatures, most of whom were encased in

shells. “Lobsters!” Dory pointed out. “Crabs!” Alice recognised.

“Shrimps: and what are they?” They did not know all the names of the sea creatures who were playing in the sand but they could see the creatures were having fun. The starfish in particular were flopping along on their star ends, some of them managing a flip. They all seemed to be dancing to some music that Alice and Dory could not hear and Griffen was a little frightened of them.

“Don’t you know how to dance a Quadrille?” a tall grey- shelled lobster asked them in a lofty tone.

“Teach us,” Alice replied.

Reaching out a claw the lobster was careful not to pinch her.

Dory, who had measured the size of those claws, chose to copy the crabs who were doing cartwheels on all their legs.

There was something about the cavorting with creatures encased in shells, that Griffen did not like. He began to bark but this had the opposite effect he intended. Instead of stopping their crazy dancing it seemed to make the dancing get even wilder. Of course they may not have interpreted his barking properly, a lot can get lost in translation.

“Stop!” Griffen yelled at last in brutal English, but no one could hear because now the wind was howling and blowing sand into their faces.

The lobsters and crabs, the winkles and dancing shrimps did not seem to mind, their solution was to dig themselves into the sand deeper and deeper until they disappeared.

When Dory and Alice finally flopped on the sand exhausted from dancing, they were alone with Griffen, who was not afraid to tell them: “I don’t like it here. I’m leaving.”

“We’ve come to the sea, but now it seems to have vanished,” Dory moaned, upset when he saw Griffen bound away in the direction they had come from.

“Maybe we should go home too,” murmured Alice: “I don’t think it was very nice of everyone to bury themselves in the sand just as we were getting to know them. I suppose we did something to insult them. I wish I had a book of shellfish etiquette.

“Pooh!” Dory said forcefully. “I was beginning to feel like a clown trying to interest them.”

“You’re right,” Alice agreed. “They had no interest in us at all.”

Neither Dory nor Alice could understand this. They had excited interest of some sort all their childish lives.

“Where has the sea gone?” Dory wanted to know. “I haven’t even gone paddling.”

Neither of them knew enough to know about low and high tides but they did notice there was a noise. “What's that noise?” Alice had very sensitive ears, perhaps because they were a nice shell shape.

They looked up to see a giant wave approaching. “Wow! That must be what is called, a tsunami.” Dory said this with a touch of pride at knowing what it was called.

Alice was afraid and hid behind him, hugging his back just before a gi-normous wave came crashing down on them. In one sweep of a tsunami wave they went from feeling homesick and uncomfortable to being swept underneath thirty feet of water.

Now sometimes in stories, like in dreams, unexpected things happen. Maybe because they held onto each other so tightly Alice and Dory were not drowned but were suddenly whooshed to an ancient kingdom under the sea. There they found they could magically swim and talk to each other; rather like the astronauts in outer space, they floated slowly, weightlessly, gracefully.

“I love this!” Alice admitted.

“Let’s go exploring.”

Dory was fascinated by the ruins of an old city so far beneath them they tripped over the top of walls and had to tread water over a decaying amphitheatre where people used to gather to discuss politics and hear poetry. The only performers now were Alice and Dory with bubbles coming out of their mouths, which were wide open in amazement.

“I wish I hadn’t eaten my sandwiches,” Dory complained, “And how do we eat under the sea?”

“That must be the question we ask the fish,” Alice said excitedly and suddenly the whole underwater scene was thick and dark with millions of tiny fish. They had appeared to answer Alice’s question with the motion of their tails, swishing through the water, carving out a sound that could only be heard by the inner ear. The fish were saying, “open your mouth and drink – drink.”

“I’m doing that already,” Alice objected: “And it doesn’t compare to munching a piece of pie filled with blackberries and apples.”

“Or chips,” Dory felt forced to add. “Look, there’s an old bottle with something in it. Let’s hope it’s food.”

Unfortunately it was not food, but there was a message. “One day,” the message read, “A terrible tsunami came and took half of us to the bottom of the sea. The other half was saved. No one knows why half of us were drowned and half were saved, but from that time on we lived the rest of our lives at the bottom of the ocean.”

This worried Alice. “Does that mean we are drowned?”

“I should think so,” Dory replied, not making Alice feel any better.

“I’m getting tired treading water,” Alice complained. “Can we sit down like we do in the garden?”

It was not easy to find somewhere to sit down. Every time they found an old wall, the water pushed them off it and made them move along.

“I think I’m getting homesick,” Alice confessed, “or at least garden-sick.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Do you really want to go back?” Dory asked sympathetically.

It was the sympathy in his voice which reached some nearby whales, who are known for their sympathy. They swam up to investigate making the sea grow dark with the bodies of three enormous ten-ton whales. The whales introduced themselves with a

great bellowing, “How do you do?” Alice and Dory were too frightened to reply. This distressed the whales even more because they knew how much humans usually flapped their mouths. They swam round and round in an effort to protect them, a manoeuvre that sent a signal to nearby whales to join them.

A great many whales swam up, which caused the water level to dip, the water being displaced by the bodies of all those anxious whales. This enabled Alice and Dory to climb on their backs and break through the sea in order to breathe pure air.

“Look, the sky!” Alice cried, as if she had never seen it before, “I’ve never seen anything so beautiful! Not a cloud in the sky, nothing but the beautiful colour blue!”

“And look, there’s the beach,” Dory measured the distance. “If you can swim I think we can reach it.”

“But I can’t swim,” cried Alice.

“You were swimming under water.”

“Oh?” said Alice, surprised: “If that was swimming, I suppose I can swim.”

And that’s how they reached the shore, slowly paddling like two tired dogs. When they reached the beach they were so happy they did not

even mention the rocks underneath which hurt their feet. Exhausted but triumphant they stretched out on the sand, to dry off in the sun. “What an adventure!” They kept saying to each other. They said it a couple of hundred times, and then realised they must go and tell someone else.

They just had to. But this meant they both had to go home.

* * *

While this adventure was going on, Mary Ann was despondent. She sat on the grass making a daisy chain to stop herself worrying. Toby Green went back to wearing his cap and gown and hauled his blackboard out into the garden so as not to miss the first sight of Alice on her return. When she did not return, he gave up his search for a formula which would explain Everything and started on an equation which explained Nothing. They never told anyone Alice was missing because they were afraid to be blamed. Each day the grocer’s boy delivered Alice’s favourite cheese and crackers and Mary Ann fed them to the birds. Word soon got round the bird kingdom, so Mary Ann was kept busy feeding all sorts of birds and the flurry of wings at dinner time could be seen for miles around if anyone looked up at the sky. Mary Ann became famous for feeding the birds.

It must be said that Toby Green and Mary Ann were not very happy with each other during Alice's absence. They both became grouchy and grumpy and blamed each other for being boring. Mary Ann knew all of Toby Green's nonsense rhymes and never listened to his scientific explanations. Toby Green complained, under his breath, that Mary Ann always said the same thing. Whenever he spoke to her, she always said, 'if you wish', which gave him very little to protest. Their boredom reached such a pitch, they both felt something dramatic had to happen.

It began innocently with people wanting her recipes for bird food, since it was obvious the birds enjoyed them. She confessed to anyone who would listen that she never liked cooking and preferred raw food with ketchup and sometimes without ketchup, with peanut butter instead. This attracted people's attention, which is always there when you start talking about food. People wanted to hear more. She was asked to provide some samples and did so by inviting people into the garden, sitting them on blankets and feeding them things like sunflower seeds and raw broccoli. Her fame increased and Toby decided to intervene.

“No more raw food parties.”

“As you wish.”

Toby, as usual, did not hear what she said. He had decided the best thing to do to find the children was to invent a map which would lead them to the sea.

“We can buy a map!” Mary Ann said, sensibly.

“Not such a good one as I can invent. Why buy anything when you can make it up in your head?”

Mary Ann had no answer to this. She said, 'As you wish' a couple of times, once to Toby and once under her breath. She then asked the gardener and the garden's son to help serve her special concoctions, which the public, at least, seemed to appreciate.

* * *

Alice and Dory had to go in different directions to reach their homes. They said goodbye at the crossroads. Alice tried not to cry.

“I have to go home to tell them I’m cured,” Dory insisted. “I haven’t coughed since I met you and I’m sure the sea air has made me taller, or perhaps all that swimming.”

Now they had nothing more to say to each other, which was not said with a farewell hug and a tearful kiss.

At first Alice thought she would not be able to find her way back to the garden, but a pair of magpies and a pair of love-doves chirped and flew ahead of her. Alice only had to follow them. When she arrived at the fence she found she was at the end of a long queue of excited people, waiting to get into her garden. She dutifully waited until it was her turn and took a chair at the nearest table. The gardener's son delivered her a plate of raw potatoes and spicy corn, topped with a dollop of raw oat porridge. This was the kind of food Alice grew up eating because Mary Ann did not like cooking. Now everyone seemed to be enjoying it and Toby Green and Mary Ann were so busy serving they did not see her!

She sat very still until everyone had gone and then stood up and cried, "It's ME!"

Toby Green twirled her off her feet, and began to dance and waltz with her even though he often tripped over his own feet. Mary Ann began to scream and could not stop even when they hit her quite hard on the back.

"Thank you," she said: "I had a piece of hard apple stuck in my throat."

Toby Green whirled Alice round and round until she got dizzy.

Mary Ann tried to make him stop but couldn't and they soon all fell to the ground.

"You missed your exams," Toby said: "Which makes your results very poor, so no prizes for you."

"What about a prize for surviving?"

"There is no prize for that," she was informed.

"Off to bed without any supper," Mary Ann said gaily, so relieved to see Alice she immediately reverted to the standard punishment for running away.

Alice frowned but no one noticed. She felt she was too old for such punishments?

"I'm so glad you're back," Toby Green gushed. "Now Mary Ann won't have to feed all these wretched people rotten vegetables."

"They're not rotten," Mary Ann said more fiercely than Alice had ever heard her speak. "They are the freshest of the fresh, just picked out the kitchen garden at the back."

"Now you'll give up this constant Mad Hatter's tea party."

Mary Ann sniffed, and sniffed again. "You're the only Mad Hatter here!"

Alice was amazed to see real tears pouring down Mary Ann's face as if all her sniffing at been in preparation for this. "Be careful of what you say," she warned Toby. "Mary Ann wants to continue with the restaurant."

"It's not a restaurant, it's a Tea Room," Toby Green corrected, but the idea of expanding into a fully staffed restaurant appealed to him. If that happened he could go back to mathematics and solve the problem of Everything.

"All right," he said graciously. "If you really want to." Then he had to step back because Mary Ann threw her arms around him, but stepping back was no good because she simply stepped forward and squeezed him tightly in a bear-hug.

"Not in front of Alice," Toby gasped.

"That's all right," Alice assured him, "After our adventure Dory and I had a big hug, bigger than that, a massive mega hug."

The two grown-ups laughed and Alice turned away discreetly, so that she did not see the shower of kisses Mary Ann bestowed on Toby, until at last he kissed her back.

Walking to the very end of the garden and swinging on the very gate through which Dory first made his entrance, Alice suddenly felt

very alone, more alone than she had ever felt in her entire life, including the sad time she was orphaned. Where did this awful feeling come from? And how could she stop feeling it?

* * *

Although Dory had left a note explaining in detail why he was going away on an adventure, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Dumferlain, immediately phoned the police to say he was 'missing'. This set up a chain of events that involved not only the police but the local magistrate, the juvenile delinquent officer, the local television station and later, when Dory was still not found, the national radio and television stations, all of them mentioning his disappearance and the fact that he was suffering from tuberculosis. The whole nation was on the lookout for little boys who were coughing.

Mr. and Mrs. Dumferlain had never been on this sort of rollercoaster before and consequently suffered tummy pains and headaches. They both woke up feeling like opening their mouths and screaming from the top of their lungs and went to bed feeling the same way. Their grown-up children, who were all married with children of their own, came to stay with them as if the over-crowded house could

compensate for the absence of Dory and perhaps stop it from being noticed. Of course it did no such thing.

The first sign that Dory may be returning was the good news from their neighbour that Griffen was no longer missing. They could not understand a word Griffen said, which was just as well because he tried to tell them about the gigantic wave and that would have worried them even more. But they did take comfort from the fact Griffen did not look mournful or depressed; even they realised Griffen would have looked differently if Dory was dead.

They kept the hall light on at night in case Dory had forgotten the floor he lived on. They did all look the same in that building. One chilly night they awoke to the sound of a little creak of the door. Dory had returned.

Unfortunately his parents decided to alert the authorities immediately, so Dory never even got a chance to reach his bed before the police, television crew and magistrates arrived. Apparently he had broken some law by running away and he was now under some kind of arrest. Two policemen arrived and put him in a police van to take him to a school for Juvenile Delinquents with bars on the windows. He was given a small cell and a hard bed and told to rest.

“Send for my parents,” he protested.

“They are fine, my lad,” a burly policeman assured him. “Now that you’re found they can get a good night’s rest and I’m sure you can understand you have to pay the penalty for giving us so much trouble. We don't want any other other children to go missing.”

The policeman's serious tone made it impossible to reply to this. But Dory did not have a good night’s rest. The springs of the bed poked his ribs and outside in the corridor there was a speaker which announced every hour on the hour in a loud, nasal voice.

The next morning was no better. Someone called a Carer arrived in a long raincoat and pushed him to hurry up. He was taken to a huge hall, hung with sombre portraits of men in wigs and a dozen policemen stood to attention while a little old man entered in a black gown. He was called the Magistrate and reminded Dory of Toby Green as The Judge, but this man's back was bent and he was so short-sighted he kept bumping into things as he climbed up to a high stool on a high platform, from which he peered down at Dory but could not actually see him.

Dory kept remembering the mad scene with the judge and the red queen in the garden. He wished he was back there because this event

did not look as though it was going to end in an invitation to fish and chips. The Magistrate began to talk down to him, but Dory refused to listen, he was planning his escape. The opportunity he was waiting for came when an untidy looking woman with unwashed hair informed him: “I am going to be in charge of you from now on.”

Dory pretended a smile and shook her hand.

“Thank you, ma’am,” he said in a pleasant tone: “Glad to meet you. Can I be excused to use the Boys’ Room?”

“That way,” she pointed, rather rudely.

Dory pushed through the heavy oak door and, as if he had imagined it in advance, he found a small window already open. It only took him thirty seconds to climb out and be free.

* * *

Although there was a two-day celebration on her return and free nuts and raisins for all the customers, Alice did not feel like celebrating. She was glad Mary Ann had given up boiling bread and no longer turned the potatoes to charcoal, but she felt lonely. Toby Green had been inspired by her return to invent a brand new board game to play with Alice. To do this, he shut himself up in his study with great

devotion, but Alice had no great faith his board game would be entertaining. She was afraid it would like his favourite game, which was chess.

“Nonsense!” He assured her.

“You mean, it's nonsense kind of chess?”

“No, no, it is a game that is the exact opposite of Chess.”

“What kind of game is that?”

“I'm creating a game in which a modicum luck is needed but most of all spontaneous improvisation, which is scored by the other players. Very like life, in fact.”

Alice sighed. Sometimes he used words like these to force her to use a dictionary but in this case she was wrong. He used them naturally. It was the best way to describe his game.

Neither Toby Green nor Mary Ann, happy in their pursuits, noticed Alice droop. Her only friend was Griffen who had come to the garden to look for Dory. Not finding Dory there, the dog was as depressed as she was.

As if the weather sympathised, it suddenly grew colder. Alice forgot to put on a coat and began sniffing and sneezing. “I sniff more

than the White Rabbit used to,” she told herself but it didn’t do any good and then she started coughing.

Not that anyone noticed because Toby Green swept into the garden that very day with news that his board game was finished. He waved it in the air, scattering the rules and the dice in all directions. “It's ready! You and me or the whole world can play. I'm calling the game, Mindshare.”

But Alice was not enthusiastic. She did not want to share her mind with him or anyone, and said so.

This did not make her very popular with the customers. They began muttering that Alice was an ungrateful girl, which made her feel quite ill. Just as it seemed life in the garden could not get any worse, she heard a click of the garden gate and Dory walked down the path. They ran to kiss and hug and scream with delight until they attracted the attention of the whole restaurant.

“I am so happy to be here,” Dory told her: “Believe me, it’s madder out there than it is in here.”

“But does that mean you want to stay in the garden?” Alice asked, surprised.

“I don’t think it matters whether we go or stay.” Dory said in a most charming and poised manner. “I think the adventure is being together.”

Alice, looking at Toby Green and Mary Ann, nodded her head in agreement.

The End

Mary Ann’s recipe for RABBIT SMOOTHIES

Take one fresh head of lettuce

One cup of apple juice

Finely sliced pieces of fresh ginger

One tablespoon of peanut butter

Blend and ENJOY!

