

Alice in Wonderland

CHAPTER 12 ½

A Head Full of Dreams

Arthur Wortmann

Alice had been walking through the wood for some time now. Away from that strange game of croquet and that disagreeable Queen of Hearts who was so fond of beheading people. She had taken another nibble from her mushroom so that she had grown a bit taller again and was making better progress.

Just when she was on the point of wondering how far the woods stretched and whether she shouldn't ask someone the way so as not to get lost, she heard a menacing, rumbling noise. 'Take care now,' she thought, 'I must investigate this cautiously' – and she walked warily from tree to tree until she reached an open place in the wood. And although Alice was sure that she was back to her right size, she was quite astounded by what she saw.

There before her, in the clearing, stood a gigantic head, almost as high as the trees in the wood and nearly filling the clearing – which of course raised the question of whether it could still rightly be called a clearing. If it hadn't been for the fact that the awful rumbling had given way to a pleasant tinkling, Alice would certainly have given it a wide berth and continued on her way. The head's body was nowhere to be seen, which was fortunate because it was surely so enormous that a few movements might have uprooted the entire wood. But such a head on its own seemed to be fairly harmless.

'Excuse me, Head', Alice ventured politely, 'what are you doing standing here all alone in the wood?' And added sympathetically, 'No doubt the Queen of Hearts did this to you?' But she had scarcely spoken when she regretted her question, because there was another burst of furious rumbling. It struck her now for the first time how spiteful the Head really looked. High above her flashed an unpleasantly fierce eye that had turned in her direction while she had been speaking, and whose gaze now seemed to bore right through her. The Head's mouth glinted with sharp teeth – or what was left of them, for he had obviously done quite a lot of gnawing in his time – and he was drooling. His face was made up of glittering scales and on every side there were pointed objects sticking out of his skull. Alice shrank back and was on the point of running away, when she recalled that a head on its own couldn't do her much harm.

At first somewhat timidly, and then, when the Head remained silent, with renewed curiosity, she walked around the Head, which also meant that she was hidden from the eye's gaze – a gaze, if the truth be told, that made Alice quite nervous.

'Curious,' she thought, 'the further I walk around the Head, the less it looks like a Head. Here at the back it looks more like some kind of machine.' Her gaze fell on a heavy steel door. It was behind here, Alice knew, that the brain was kept. She knew from school that the brain was a very useful and complicated machine, where everything you learned was stored and where everything you wanted to say was first thought up. If she could just get inside through this door, she would finally see exactly how it was done.

'Let me just turn the handle,' thought Alice, and lo and behold, with a creaking of hinges the door opened a crack. When the opening was wide enough, she slipped inside. She was standing at the foot of a wide staircase. 'Come then, Alice,' she told herself encouragingly and tripped upstairs.

'So, there you are at last!' Alice was startled out of her wits. Above her head hovered a fairy who was looking at her impatiently. 'Welcome to the Cyclops, m'lady,' said the fairy. 'I'm Coralie, your guide. The tour can begin.' Alice was too surprised to reply. The fairy had obviously mistaken her for somebody else, because Alice had never before been addressed as 'm'lady'.

But she had no more time to be surprised, for the fairy had gone on ahead, up the stairs to the next room. 'Follow me,' she called. 'No dawdling, there's another group of visitors due shortly.' Alice saw in a flash that she was standing in the mouth of the Head – for she could look outside through his teeth – but then she had to follow the fairy who was calling to her from a distance with growing impatience. So she had no time to examine the huge switchboard from where the Head was obviously operated, or to try out the curious pin-ball game that was installed in the cavity of the mouth. But perhaps that was for the best after all, because she never could resist switches and she was really not very good at games.

She ascended the stairs and for a moment thought that she had come to another steel door, for her way was barred by a system of metal pipes. 'Come along now,' called the fairy, and only then did Alice notice that the pipes were hanging freely and that it was quite easy to push them aside. She started to make her way through the forest of pipes, but while she was doing this the Head started to make a tinkling noise again. But the sound was much louder than the first time and Alice stood stock still. At once the tinkling ebbed away.

'You can see how ingenious this construction is.' The fairy Coralie circled above Alice, in between the pipes, and started to explain in a typical guidish tone. 'Anybody walking through this forest causes the pipes to hit against one another, thus producing tones. The pattern of sounds changes according to the size, speed and location of the visitor. The visitor is the carillonneur of his own sound picture.' Alice could make out only half of this and understood even less, but she was somewhat reassured by the fairy's tone. She walked quickly on, to another burst of tinkling.

At the end of the pipe forest was another room. 'Now the Head is going to think,' announced the fairy and stuffed her wings in her ears. Alice couldn't help laughing, it was

such a funny sight. But while she was laughing so hard, there was an enormous humming noise above her head, which quickly swelled to a roar. Before she knew what was happening, one, two, no three cannonballs were whizzing past her ears, only to vanish as suddenly as they had appeared. When the second volley was on the way, Alice ducked behind the gesticulating fairy, but was almost crushed by a hammer that without any warning appeared from nowhere and started making whacking movements. Metres-high revolving wheels, coupled to one another by drive belts, made her giddy. 'Yes, well,' said the fairy when the racket had died down a bit, 'when such a huge head starts to think, the electrons do tend to fly about your ears.'

And they passed on to the next floor which, to Alice's astonishment, contained a theatre. 'Who ever had a theatre in their head,' she thought to herself, 'quite as if all your thoughts were not true, but only imagined,' and found this idea so complicated that she promptly forgot it. Anyway, the fairy was signaling that the performance was about to begin. Alice quickly sat down on one of the chairs and stared expectantly at the stage.

'Interval!' cried the fairy... This was the queerest performance she had ever seen, one that began with an interval! She was about to get up and see where they were selling ice-cream, when suddenly everything started to shake. An invisible hand lifted Alice up and threw her backwards. But just when she was thinking that she was going to fall and hurt herself badly, the movement ceased. That is to say, instead of falling backwards, she now tilted alternately to the left and to the right. It was only with difficulty that she managed to keep her balance by holding tightly to her chair.

'It's the chairs,' the fairy informed her matter-of-factly. 'They shake the public up a bit. Their movement symbolizes resistance to the passive, consumerist attitude of the modern audience.' Before Alice could ask her what she meant by this, the curtain rose and the performance began.

And there was the hammer again. This time it didn't try to crush Alice – for which she was very thankful – but danced around a large spherical bottle of water. It was obviously up to no good. Alice saw how the bottle tried in vain to protect itself from the impending blow. But what could it do? Alice couldn't watch the scene a moment longer and before the hammer had shattered the bottle with a well-aimed and merciless blow, she had already crawled through a trapdoor that bore an uncanny resemblance to a skylight she had noticed in the side wall of the theatre.

She looked around her. To the right against the wall stood a bed, a table, a chair and a bookcase, all very ordinary, and yet there was something odd about it. The furniture was not standing *against* the wall, but *on* the wall, neatly arranged on a red carpet that also lay *on* the wall. And in front of her was a washbasin, but it, too, was tilted. The tap was on the left, so the water would have to fall to the right. 'No ordinary person can live here,' thought Alice. Yet everything pointed to the room's being occupied. The bed had recently been slept in and the remains of the evening meal still lay on the table. 'Wine, eggs and walnuts – an odd combination,' thought Alice. She put a few leftover walnuts in her apron pocket; one never knew when they might come in handy.

She tried to climb onto the bed. She would very much like to meet the owner when he returned. Once before she had almost been to visit the Antipathies, who live on the other side of the world and walk with their head downwards, so she was also quite interested in the occupant of this room, who probably came from the side of the world. After falling off the bed several times, Alice finally succeeded, half hanging in the bedspread, in keeping her balance. 'And now to wait,' she thought.

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'Confound it, here you are!' shouted the fairy, her voice breaking with fury, at Alice, who was just waking up. 'Where ever did you get to, I've looked everywhere. Another tour started long ago. You'll have to pay double. This isn't a hotel, you know!' And she dragged Alice out of the bedspread in such a fashion that she connected violently with the floor, which was actually the wall. It was astonishing how much strength the tiny fairy had in her wings, for Alice could struggle all she wanted, she was forced to go along, up another flight of stairs, to the roof, and tag along behind the new group of visitors.

There wasn't all that much to do on the roof, in Alice's opinion. Due to a forgotten rainpipe, the roof was covered with a large pool of water. You could walk around it along a narrow path and continue the tour on the other side. Still, the new visitors gave her a terrible fright. They looked like the playing cards. She thought she recognized the Knave of Hearts and the King and Queen were also among the party. Fortunately, they were much too busy being shown around to notice her. Just think if she had to play croquet again!

So Alice wandered rather warily along behind the others, downstairs, upstairs, and when she spied a railway carriage – 'Curious, really, at this height,' she thought to herself – she slipped inside. The fairy, who was keeping a better eye on her now, sprang after her and snapped: 'Oh, yes, there you go straying away from the route. You have no respect at all! This train carriage is not a toy. Trains can be used for terrible things, as you are about to find out!' She shut the carriage door and Alice could hear how the irate fairy slid the bolt to. In the dark she thought she could make out frail figures with hollow eyes. Alice was in an agony of terror. This was like a bad dream. She had landed up in the Head's nightmare! She heard the station master's whistle and the carriage started to shudder and shake. 'O heavens, we've left,' stammered Alice, 'how will this end?' The train gathered speed and started to pitch heavily.

'Wake up, Alice.' Her sister was shaking her vigorously. 'I suppose you were in dream-land again? Tea's ready, didn't you hear the kettle?' And as she dashed ahead of her sister she added: 'Mother has brought us some walnuts!' When Alice stood up to follow her a couple of walnuts rolled over the floor. For once she was unusually silent during tea.

Le Cyclop, hidden away in the woods near Milly-la-Forêt, is the life work of the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely, who died in 1991. Construction began in 1969, the artwork was gifted to the state in 1987 and has been open to inspection since 1994. Tinguely, together with a number of friends, assembled the more than 22 metre-high structure over a period of twenty years. Many of his artist friends contributed to it. Nikki de St.

Phalle took on the cyclops' face, Bernhard Luginbühl fashioned the 'safe door' at the entrance, the 'pin-ball machine' and the 'ear', Sepp Imhof created the 'Méta-Merzbau' reminiscent of Schwitters, Daniel Spoerri made the tilted 'chambre de bonne' modelled on his own first room in Paris, the group of living-dead in the train carriage, dedicated to the Jews deported during the Second World War, are the work of Eva Aeppli, Jesus Rafael Soto made the pipe forest, Larry Rivers the panels commemorating 'May 68', Giovanni Podesta set up a 'piccolo museo' in the stair well, Jean-Pierre Raynaud placed a 22.5 metre-high ruler next to the cyclops, and so on. The flat roof with water reservoir, that reflects the blue of the sky and the tops of the trees, is a tribute to Yves Klein.

Milly-la-Forêt is an hour's drive south of Paris. It is necessary to book. Information: office de tourisme de Milly-la-Forêt, tel. +33-1-64988317.

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