



# The Lewis Carroll Writing Competition 2021

## The Gardens

By Alexander Hughes (under 16 Competition)

*This is the chapter after "The Croquet Ground" in the 'Alice in Wonderland' story. Alexander provides an insight into the life of the Knave of Hearts and a vivid description of Wonderland.*

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To Alice, who had certainly seen gardens of great beauty before, the gardens that surrounded the croquet ground were divinely beautiful. "Oh," she said to herself, "these gardens are pretty enough to eclipse the Hanging Gardens of Babylon" and observed the great, vibrant mosaic of flowers that stretched before her eyes. Like frilly domes of numerous, shining colours (though most of them were red, whilst white flowers were absent from the great cacophony of hues), these flowers climbed into the air, opening their petals to reveal a burning, star-like beauty that, almost as if it were screaming out to the world, echoed throughout its surroundings. The flowers lined the paved paths that wound their way – like a spider's web – around the hedgerows and wooden frames that the plants crawled over. They were banners of victory, laid out across the streets of Nature, to celebrate its mere existence. They sang and carolled – in their silent voices of beauty and their sweet smells of pollen – of joy and beauty. And, like some calm yet roaring inferno with many, many colours upon many more colours, these flowers shone away as if all the stars in the night sky had fallen from their pitch-black diadem onto their new thrones of emerald. The red flowers, in their unbridled passion, burnt in their unrivalled, brightest fires, raging against the day, brighter than even the sun that shone upon them. And thus, these red flowers blazed a vast, blinding ocean of fire, in such splendour that all the other blooms dimmed in their passion and receded into a background of a meeker yet still burning bright beauty. These blossoms, in their pale pink and dark purple garments, stood serenely beneath the raging conflagration of red, and glowed in their calm contrast to it.

And like great riders, the flowers rode upon their virescent stallions of branches and leaves that carved through the gardens like many veins. As Alice wandered about the garden, she observed these beautiful hedges, musing upon how exactly they had been cut and moulded to form their perfect shape. Occasionally, a flowerless tree would rise from the hedges, cut so that its conical roof would spiral and curve into the sky. "They are," thought Alice, "like statues, carved from this living, softer rock that breathes into these mighty monuments. I wonder what craftsmen could achieve the creation of such beauty! And yet, I feel that something sinister lies in their dark shadows. I feel like they are suppressed, under the gardener's sharp shears. They are stunted in their growth, enchained and blocked from prospering like the wild flowers in a forest. I can feel the fleshy chains of humanity's grip imprisoning the petals as if they were murderers and knaves, stuck in prison. Can a plant commit a crime I wonder? Maybe they did and that is why they are stuck here, being 'beheaded' with the very slow and precise axe of the gardener. Is he a tyrant or just a happy, old policeman, executing the law? I do not know." And thus, Alice's musings moved on from the question and returned to beholding and praising the garden's beauty.

As Alice continued to meander aimlessly throughout the garden, boredom began to creep up on her, silently at first but, after one or two minutes, she began to feel a slight, dull pain of ennui ache at the back of her head.

“Oh, I do hope there is someone else out here otherwise I will have to go back to that *dreadful* game of ‘croquet’,” she muttered, lacing the last word with a slight mocking tone to indicate how stupid she thought the game was. In an almost immediate response to this, she heard a soft pattering of footsteps from around the corner. Regarding this as very lucky, she walked quite quickly around the bend and recognised the Knave of Hearts admiring the rose bushes. The Knave of Hearts was a short, plump man with a round, unattractive face that sagged slightly around the cheeks. The most striking feature of the Knave was his unmoving, haughty expression that painted his face in a slight sneer. His nose, which was slightly red at the end, was wrinkled in the same expression of disdain. His eyes, which were large and brown, were, indeed, the only thing not captured in that pompous look. They flitted around, observing the sea of red roses before him. Below his upturned nose, the Knave sported a long but thin grey moustache that curved upwards at the end. Also, at the end of his chin, he had a slight, thin trace of a beard that matched the ashen colour of his hair.

As Alice approached, the Knave turned towards her and, in a slurred, aged voice, said, “Oh, I recognise you from the croquet game.”

“Oh yes, I was there. It was very fun,” replied Alice, who curtsied slightly, “did you enjoy it?”

“Yes, I particularly enjoy croquet,” answered the Knave, “but I also enjoy playing with my model soldiers: dreadfully fun, what!”

“Forgive me for asking, but why are you called the Knave of Hearts?” enquired Alice.

“I’m not, that is merely a title, given to me by Her Majesty, By the Grace of God, the Sovereign Queen of Our Land, Defender of Our Faith, the Queen of Hearts. My real name is Frederick-George of the House of Ackland-Arundel-Nalcaster-Goodson-Alnwick-Apsley-Bootington-Eastminster-Belnborough-Belnborough-Oxchester-Hampton-Yorkwall-Northsomershire-Melville-Grenville-Ackland, the Duke of Ackland-Arundel-Nalcaster-Goodson-Alnwick-Apsley-Bootington-Eastminster-Belnborough-Belnborough-Oxchester-Hampton-Yorkwall-Northsomershire-Melville-Grenville-Ackland.”

“That is a very long name!” remarked Alice in reply.

“No, it is rather short in comparison to some of my peers,” stated the Knave serenely.

“Why are there so many names though?”

“Well, those would be all of the times we divided our duchy. It started off as merely the Duchy of Ackland but then our first Duke had two sons so he divided the land into two. The eldest ruled from Ackland and his realm became ‘Ackland-Ackland’ and my ancestor got ruled his kingdom from Grenville castle so he ruled ‘Grenville-Ackland’. And so on, what!” he explained.

“But why do you keep on dividing your realm between yourselves rather than just letting the eldest son get it all? I think that is called primrose genetics” asked Alice.

“The Queen does not like primroses. Besides, the younger sons would complain!”

“But that just divides your realm into lots of little bits! How much land do you rule?”

“2.5 square miles and various castles dotted around the place: it’s one of the bigger ones!” remarked the Knave, proudly, “Besides I will get more land after my cousin the Duchess Katherine-Frederica of the Duchy of Lansdowne-Normond-Richfolk-Namchester-Beauton-Northshire-Belnborough-Oxchester-Hampton-Yorkwall-Northsomershire-Melville-Grenville-Ackland is executed. She offended the Queen at the croquet grounds. Did you meet her?”

“I think so. How much land does she rule?”

“Oh, only 1 square mile of land and a castle. Poor her, she can’t afford a proper cook: she puts a vast amount of pepper on everything, what! She never complains: I doubt she can recognise it’s her pepper that is causing all that sneezing, what!” laughed the Knave.

Alice thought to herself, “If he was there, I doubt he would even recognise there was a lot of pepper in the air!”

“Anyway,” continued the Knave, “Do you want a tart?” The Knave reached into his pocket and took out a tart, adorned with a small heart. Alice, who was feeling rather hungry, happily plucked it from his hand.

“Thank you,” she replied as she – in a calm and civilised manner – ate it. The Knave smiled but his nose was still sneering with disdain and Alice found the resultant expression to be somewhat odd. After finishing her tart, she looked up at the Knave and noticed he had returned to admiring the flowers.

“It was very tasty,” she said, “where did you get them from?”

The Knave looked up from the flowers and replied, “Oh, the Queen gave them to me. She had a plate of tarts and told me, ‘Why don’t you take these? They are awfully nice.’ And, knowing I could not refuse, I had to accept. I don’t even like tart but I do like having a head on my neck, what!” After saying that, he looked at Alice, expecting her to laugh, which she did after one or two seconds. “Anyway,” continued the Knave, “what do you think of these flowers?”

“I think they are very nice,” replied Alice, “I particularly like the red flowers but the garden, seems a bit artificial. One can tell it has been grown and moulded by gardeners.”

“What?” exclaimed the Knave in surprise, “You are wrong, little girl! It naturally grew here: a forest. The only thing the gardeners added were some of the statues but most of them occurred naturally. It is those forests that are grown artificially. I heard that peasants labour day and night to make the trees grow in exactly the right way and the fern bushes look nice. What a load of rubbish, what!” In response to this, Alice giggled. The Knave, therefore, continued, “I am being sincere, girl! You see this (the Knave pointed at a trellis that ran across a brick wall near them), it is trellis moss that grows upon the hard bark of brick wall trees! And that (he pointed at a statue) is a naturally growing statue! I should know since

my grandfather, Charles of Nalcaster-Goodson-Alnwick-Apsley-Bootington-Eastminster-Belborough-Belborough-Oxchester-Hampton-Yorkwall-Northsomershire-Melville-Grenville-Ackland, was a botanist. He even wrote a book about it, which I read when I was wrong.”

Alice thought he must be misremembering it but decided to move off the topic and therefore asked a question that had been stuck in her mind for quite some time, “Why do you all resemble a pack of cards?”

“We don’t. Maybe we resemble the cards that you play with wherever you come from but I am certain I don’t look like a card: I don’t wear a suit, what!”

“Well, what do cards look like here?”

“There are four suits: wool, tweed, velvet and linen. There are 13 cards in a pack with a King, Queen and Knave for each material and 10 cards made out of each material,” explained the Knave, “And everyone has to wear a suit made of one of the materials and they get all the cards from the material they are wearing.”

“I do not think that is how it works...” stated Alice.

“It is here, what!” remarked the Knave, “where do you come from?”

“The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.”

“I do not know about that,” replied the knave, “but I can tell you that there was a United Kingdom of the Netherlands before 1830. When will your United Kingdom end?”

“I don’t know: it hasn’t ended yet so I do not see how I would know,” replied Alice, who was puzzled at the Knave’s question.

“Well,” said the Knave, with a disapproving expression, “I would say it’s rather silly to not know when it’s going to end. Then, you can be prepared for it!”

“But, hopefully, it will never end.”

“Everything must end – or it never was!” quipped the Knave, “that’s what the old philosopher said.”

“What old philosopher?”

“I don’t know: it’s just what people say! Do I look like I know much about philosophy?”

“No one can *look* like a philosopher: knowledge does not change your appearance!” commented Alice.

Ignoring this, the Knave abruptly turned to the other side of the garden and remarked, “Oh look, there’s my cousin I mentioned, the Duchess of Lansdowne-Normond-Richfolk-Namchester-Beauton-Northshire-Belborough-Oxchester-Hampton-Yorkwall-Northsomershire-Melville-Grenville-Ackland.” The Knave pointed to a small arch at the other end of the garden. Through it, Alice could certainly see the Duchess, whose large, wrinkled face resembled one of those bulging balls that form on old trees, appearing like a wart on their trunks. The Knave gave an almost disappointed mumble before muttering, “I

thought she was going to be executed – what a pity she is still alive.” After saying this, he departed and Alice approached the Duchess.

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