



The Lewis Carroll Writing Competition 2021

Yet Another Lion, Along with Others

By T M Bradshaw

The author comes from Stamford, New York, USA; amongst other things she has written three short books about some of its notables, including Ned Buntline, the king of the dime novel, who essentially created Buffalo Bill. The main character of the story is based on something that she made for a local festival.

This chapter is placed directly after Chapter 7, "The Lion and the Unicorn".

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Alice tried to think of pleasant things to distract herself from the pounding noise. Over time, it changed to a whirring sound and then a metallic banging. When it had grown mostly quiet, except for an occasional gentle ka-clunk, ka-clunk, like a cowbell announcing Bessie's arrival back at the barn, Alice felt a soft, wispy, somehow dry, rain on her head and hands. So many odd things had happened that the idea of dry rain seemed perfectly reasonable. She took her hands from her ears and rose from her knees, brushing what proved to be straw from her hair.

"Alice?" a deep voice inquired.

"Yes, I'm Al—" she started to say, but drew up short when she saw the creature who had addressed her. It was a lion, but not the lion she had just left. And only partly a lion, for his arms and legs—yes, arms and legs, for this lion stood upright—were made of metal and large amounts of straw bulged and fell from his shirt and bib overalls—yes, shirt and overalls. The lion—Alice felt that must be what to think of him as, for his head was that of a lion—idly stuffed bits of the straw back into his shirt while speaking.

"You've been hard to catch up to; we've been close several times."

Alice answered as politely as she could.

"Sir, how do you know my name when I don't know yours?"

"Forgive me," the creature said. "Some have called us the Cowardly Tin Scarecrow, not a name we care for, but together we've never had another."

"You must have one," Alice said. "Everyone must have a name, and to be fair, you should have three. How about . . . Bert RayJack?"

"Hmm . . . is that two or three names?" the creature asked.

"It's both, arranged to look like a proper name."

"Of course it's a *proper* name. All people's names are proper names. Even people who aren't people, but lions and other things."

“Yes,” Alice said hesitantly, “of course it’s a proper name, but I meant a real name, a regular name, a first and last name.” Alice had been raised to not ask personal questions, but saw a perfect opening to satisfy her curiosity. “Are you a knight, Bert? Is that why you wear armour?”

“Armour? We’re not wearing . . . oh, I see. You mean our arms and legs.”

Alice hadn’t noticed before, but Bert also had a long, dun-coloured tail with a tuft at the end. Just now it was serving as a fly swatter.

“You see, just before the witch melted she conjured up a small tornado to spin us together. It didn’t take effect until after Dorothy left or she would have helped us.”

Alice wasn’t sure she believed in witches, but she hadn’t believed in disappearing and reappearing cats or playing cards that painted roses or unicorns or talking flowers or White Rabbits who wore gloves and had housemaids named Mary Ann, either. Why not witches, then?

“Am I supposed to know of this witch or Dorothy?” Alice asked. “I must admit I’m not familiar with either. Nor with the ‘us’ who were mixed together.”

“Ah, of course you don’t. We all happen after you. Will you cut us a piece of that Plum cake? We’ll tell the tale while we eat.”

“I couldn’t cut it before when it was there, so perhaps I can now that it’s been eaten.” And true to the logic of Looking-Glass, more cake was on the plate. As Alice offered the plate to Bert, the cake divided itself into two different-sized pieces, one was a quarter of the whole, the other three-quarters. “The big one’s for you,” Alice said.

Bert took a bite and began their story. “A long time from now, almost thirty years, I’ll be living in Oz, a Lion with a big problem—cowardice. A friendly Scarecrow and a Tin Woodsman will also live there. They’ll have their problems, too—the Tin Man feeling hollow inside and the Scarecrow just not very smart.”

“Excuse me,” Alice didn’t like to interrupt, but something didn’t make sense. “How do you know what will happen in thirty years? Does your memory run in both directions the way the White Queen explained? Thirty years! Why, by then, I’ll be old.”

Bert laughed hard enough to cause more straw to fly about and the nested segments of their legs to jangle like wind chimes. “We’ve met old people and don’t think you’ll be old in thirty years. Why, even a regular girl of your age wouldn’t be old that soon. And you, Alice, we don’t believe you’ll ever be old. To answer your question, we know what will happen because we’ve just come from there.”

“From where?”

“From thirty years from now, from another book.”

Alice was puzzled. “I like books very much, but what have books to do with it?”

“Everything,” replied the Lion. (Alice couldn’t help believing she was speaking with a lion, one who just happened to be part metal and part straw.) “We’re from a book, *Wonderland* is a book, this is a book, and we used a book to get here.”

As strange as many of the things Alice had seen lately, this seemed strangest of all. “This is not a book. I was at home, explaining to the black kitten why she shouldn’t unwind the wool, when the looking-glass turned all gauzy and I slipped through.”

“But this *is* a book,” the Lion insisted, “and we’re from a different book. In our book there was a sweet little girl named Dorothy. She helped us all and when she went home to Kansas, we missed her a lot.”

“See,” Alice said triumphantly. “Kansas is real. I read about it in a book my governess has, although it’s not a very interesting book—not enough pictures. So you must be real.”

“Books—even books about made-up things—can mention real things. Kansas was the problem—because it is real, we couldn’t go there. We can only travel to other books.”

“There’s logic to that, I suppose,” Alice said dubiously, “except Dorothy got from Kansas to Oz. But you said you came here in a book. What did you do, sit on it and fly?”

Bert gathered up another small bundle of straw and stuffed it in the gap between two shirt buttons. “No, of course not. The Wizard—there was a Wizard in Oz—left behind his library when *he* left for Kansas. We found the one called *The Time Machine* and tried to use it to follow Dorothy. But it didn’t work. We can travel in time, but only from book to book. So we read more of his books, looking for another nice little girl and found you. We hoped your experiences here and in *Wonderland* might mean you can help unscramble us.”

Alice always tried to be helpful, so she immediately began thinking of options. “Well, there is the Red Queen. She’s very fond of shouting ‘Off with his head!’ Would separating your head from the others help?”

Bert gulped and put a paw to their throat. “No, no, that wouldn’t help.”

“I know, I know,” Alice screamed with glee. “You can sit on the wall next to Humpty Dumpty and he can push you off. When you smash to pieces on the ground, all the King’s horses and all the King’s men can put you back together as three separate beings instead of one.”

Bert rubbed their left knee. “We don’t think we’d like being pushed off a wall. And are all the King’s horses and all the King’s men good at that sort of thing?”

“Perhaps not,” Alice said, tapping her finger against her chin. “What else? I know! We’ll go back to where I found the ‘eat me’ cookies and the ‘drink me’ bottle. If *Wonderland* has potions that make one grow and shrink, perhaps there are separating potions, too.”

“Perhaps. Did you notice anything like that?”

“Well, no, there was nothing else on the table, but there might be. Ooh, I know. The Monstrous Crow! When it flaps its wings it whips up quite the wind! It could fly in circles around you and make a tornado.”

“Please, not the Monstrous Crow. We almost caught up with you when you were with Tweedledee and Tweedledum, but the Crow scared us away.”

Alice cradled her chin and tapped her index finger against her cheek. “Do you remember the words the witch spoke in the spell? Maybe we could say them backwards.”

Bert shook their big shaggy head. “Couldn’t even say them forwards.”

Just then, the White Queen came running out of the woods, an ivory blur, hair and shawl flying. “Wait!” Alice cried. “They need help.”

The Queen skidded to a stop, raising a plume of dirt and leaves.

“Hello, Dear. What needs to be done? I’d like to help, since you were so helpful with my hair and my shawl.”

“Bert here was twisted together with some friends. They need a way to be separate again.”

“Hmm. Will scissors help?”

“No,” Bert cried. “We can’t be cut apart! We have to be untwisted.”

“Yes,” Alice added, “it was a magic tornado.”

“A magic tornado, a magic tornado, hmm . . . well, an anti-tornado might be just the ticket. If I can get going fast enough—widdershins, of course—and say the right words at the same time, that might do it.”

And the Queen started to circle Bert RayJack, faster and faster, until she was going so fast Alice could see her everywhere along her route all at once. And all the while she still somehow had enough breath left to chant:

“Round and round,
Above the ground,
In the sky
So very high.
Twist away,
Twist around,
Twist unbound
Or I’m not crowned!”

over and over again.

As the Queen made her ninth circuit, an amazing thing happened. Bert began fanning out from the center, top and bottom, until it seemed Bert was turning into a snowflake or a star. Tin legs emerged to the left, straw-filled, overall-covered legs to the right, a lion’s hind legs in the center; arms followed the same pattern and a head sat on either side of his lion’s mane. The Queen continued until the division was complete, with the Tin Man and the

Scarecrow standing separate, flanking Bert after her fifteenth trip. (Somehow, Alice knew that the Lion should remain Bert.)

“You did it!” Alice cried.

“So I have,” the Queen said, plopping down at the base of a tree to catch her breath.

“Thank you, your Highness,” Bert said.

“And thank you, Alice.” Bert got in *The Time Machine* and began adjusting levers. Ray Scarecrow tried to join him, but couldn’t fit.

“Oh no,” Jack TinMan said. “There isn’t room for three!”

“Wait! I know!” Alice said. She drew a small cake from one pocket and a bottle from the other. “Here. Two of you eat some of this and get small enough and when you arrive home, drink some of this to get back to your right size.”

“But which two?” Ray asked.

“I must drive,” Bert said. “These levers need more strength than you have, Ray, and Jack, if you froze up while driving, who knows when and in which book we’d land.”

“That makes sense, and things rarely do,” the Queen commented, before getting up and dashing off into the woods.

“Good-bye!” Alice called after her before turning back to the machine. “And good-bye to you, Bert and Ray and Jack!”

“Good-bye!” they cried, almost, but not quite, in unison. The machine started with a hum and soon reached a roar. Alice dropped to her knees again and covered her ears against the clamour.

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