

Bangs John Kendrick

Alice in Blunderland: An Iridescent Dream



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CHAPTER I

OFF TO BLUNDERLAND

IT was one of those dull, drab, depressing days when somehow or other it seemed as if there wasn't anything anywhere for anybody to do. It was raining outdoors, so that Alice could not amuse herself in the garden, or call upon her friend Little Lord Fauntleroy up the street; and downstairs her mother was giving a Bridge Party for the benefit of the M. O. Hot Tamale Company, which had lately fallen upon evil days. Alice's mother was a very charitably disposed person, and while she loathed gambling in all its forms, was nevertheless willing for the sake of a good cause to forego her principles on alternate Thursdays, but she was very particular that her little daughter should be kept aloof from contaminating influences, so that Alice found herself locked in the nursery and, as I have already intimated, with nothing to do. She had read all her books – The House of Mirth, the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli – the operation for appendicitis upon her dollie, while very successful indeed, had left poor Flaxilocks without a scrap of sawdust in her veins, and therefore unable to play; and worst of all, her pet kitten, under the new city law making all felines public property, had grown into a regular cat and appeared only at mealtimes, and then in so disreputable a condition that he was not thought to be fit company for a child of seven.

"Oh dear!" cried Alice impatiently, as she sat rocking in her chair, listening to the pattering of the rain upon the roof of the veranda. "I do wish there was something to do, or somebody to do, or somewhere to go. The Gov'ment ought to provide covered playgrounds for children on wet days. It wouldn't cost much, to put a glass cover on the Park!"

"A very good, idea! I'll make a note of that," said a squeaky little voice at her side.

Alice sprang to her feet in surprise. She had supposed she was alone, and for a moment she was frightened, but a glance around reassured her, for strange to say, seated on the radiator warming his toes was her old friend the Hatter, the queer old chap she had met in her marvellous trip through Wonderland, and with him was the March Hare, the Cheshire Cat, and the White Knight from Looking Glass Land.

"Why – you dear old things!" she cried. "You here?"

"I don't know about these others, but I'm here," returned the Hatter. "The others seem to be here, but I respectfully decline to take my solemn daffydavy on the subject, because my doctor says I'm all the time seeing things that ain't. Besides I don't believe in swearing."

"We're here all right," put in the March Hare. "I know because we ain't anywhere else, and when you ain't anywhere else you can make up your mind that you're here."

"Well, I'm awfully glad to see you," said Alice. "I've been so lonesome – "

"We know that," said the White Knight. "We've been studying your case lately and we thought we'd come down and see what we could do for you. The fact is the Hatter here has founded a model city, where everything goes just right, and we came to ask you to pay us a call."

"A city?" cried Alice.

"Yep," said the March Hare. "It's called Blunderland and between you and me I don't believe anybody but the Hatter could have invented one like it. His geegantic brain conceived the whole thing, and I tell you it's a corker."

"Where is it?" asked Alice.

"That's telling," said the Hatter. "I haven't had it copyrighted yet, and until I do I ain't going to tell where it is. You can't be too careful about property these days with copperations lurkin' around everywhere to grab everything in sight."

"What's a copperation?" asked Alice.

"What? Never heard of a Copperation?" demanded the Hatter. "Mercy! Ever hear of the Mumps, or the Measles, or the Whooping Cough?"

"Yes – but I never knew they were called Copperations," said Alice.

"Well, they ain't, but they're no worse – so they ought to be," said the Hatter. "Listen here. I'll tell you what a copperation is."

And putting his hat in front of his mouth like a telephone the Hatter recited the following poem through it:

THE COPPERATION

A copperation is a beast
With forty leven paws
That doesn't ever pay the least
Attention to the laws.

It grabs whatever comes in sight
From hansom cabs to socks
And with a grin of mad delight
It turns 'em into stocks

And then it takes a rubber hose
Connected with the sea
And pumps em full of H₂O's
Of various degree

And when they're swollen up so stout
You'd think they'd surely bust
They souse 'em once again and out
They come at last a Trust

And when the Trust is ready for
One last and final whack
They let the public in the door
To buy the water back.

"See?" said the Hatter as he finished.

"No," said Alice. "It sounded very pretty through your hat, but I don't understand it. Why should people buy water when they can get it for nothing in the ocean?"

"You're like all the rest," groaned the Hatter. "Nobody seems to understand but me, and somehow or other I can't make it clear to other people."

"You might if you didn't talk through your hat," grinned the Cheshire Cat.

"Then I'd have to stop being a public character," said the Hatter. "I'm not going to sacrifice my career just because you're too ignorant to see what I'm driving at. I don't mind telling you though,

Alice, that outside of poetry a Copperation is a Creature devised by Selfish Interests to secure the Free Coinage of the Atlantic Ocean."

"Little drops of water,
Plenty of hot air,
Make a Copperation
A pretty fat affair,"

warbled the March Hare.

"O well," said Alice, "what about it? Suppose there is such an animal around. What are we going to do about it?"

"We're going to gerraple with it," said the Hatter, with a valiant shake of his hat. "We're going to grab it by its throat, and shake it down, and shackle it so that in forty years it will become as tame as a fly or any other highly domesticated animal."

"But how?" asked Alice. "You aren't going to do this yourself, are you? Single handed and alone?"

"Yes," said the Hatter. "The March Hare and the White Knight and I. We've started a city to do it with. We've sprinkled our streets with Rough on Copperations until there isn't one left in the place. Everything in town belongs to the People – street cars, gutters, pavements, theatres, electric light, cabs, manicures, dogs, cats, canary birds, hotels, barber shops, candy stores, hats, umbrellas, bakeries, cakeries, steakeries, shops, – you can't think of a thing that the city don't own. No more private ownership of anything from a toothbrush to a yacht, and the result is we are all happy."

"It sounds fine," said Alice. "Though I think I should rather own my own toothbrush."

"You naturally would under the old system," assented the Hatter. "Under a system of private ownership owning your own teeth you'd prefer to own your own toothbrush, but our Council has just passed a law making teeth public property. You see we found that some people had teeth and other people hadn't, which is hardly a fair condition under a Republican form of Government. It gave one class of citizens a distinct advantage over other people and the Declaration of Independence demands absolute equality for all. One man owning his own teeth could eat all the hickory nuts he wanted just because he had teeth to crack 'em with, while another man not having teeth had either to swallow em whole, which ruined his digestion, or go without, which wasn't fair."

"I see," said Alice.

"So it occurred to Mr. Alderman March Hare here," continued the Hatter, "that we should legislate in the matter, and at our last session we passed a law providing for the Municipal Ownership of Teeth, so that now when a toothless wanderer wants a hickory nut cracked he has a perfectly legal right to stop anybody in the street who has teeth and make him crack the nut for him. Of course we've had a little trouble enforcing the law – alleged private rights are always difficult to get around. Long-continued possession has seemed so to convince people that they have inherent rights to the things they have enjoyed, that they put up a fight and appeal to the Constitution and all that, and even when you mention the fact, as I did in a case that came up the other day (when a man refused to bite on another chap's cigar for him), that the Constitution doesn't mention teeth anywhere in all its classes, they are not easy to convince. This fellow insisted that his teeth were private property, and no city law should make them public property. He's going to take it to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile his teeth are in the custody of the sheriff."

"And what has become of the man?" asked Alice.

"He's in the custody of the sheriff too," said the Hatter. "We couldn't arrange it any other way except by pulling his teeth, and he didn't want that."

"I can't blame him," said Alice reflectively. "I should hate to have my teeth taken away from me."

"O there's no obfuscation about it," said the Hatter.

"Confuscation," corrected the March Hare. "I wish you would get that word right. It's too important to fool with."

"Thank you," replied the Hatter. "My mind is on higher things than mere words. However, as I was saying, there is no cobfuscation about it. We don't take a man's teeth away from him without compensation. We pay him what the teeth are worth and place them at the service of the whole community."

"Where do you get the money to pay him?" asked Alice.

"We give him a Municipal Bond," explained the Hatter. "It's a ten per cent. bond costing two cents to print. When he cracks a hickory nut for the public, the man he cracks it for pays him a cent. He rings this up on a cash register he carries pinned to his vest, and at the end of every week turns in the cash to the City Treasury. That money is used to pay the interest on the bonds. The scheme has the additional advantage that it makes a man's teeth negotiable property in the sense that whereas under the old system he couldn't very well sell his teeth, under the new system he can sell the bond if he gets hard up. Moreover, the City Government having acquired control has to pay all his dentist's bills, supply tooth powder and so on, which results in a great saving to the individual. It hardly costs the city anything, except for the Tooth Inspector, who is paid \$1,200 a year, but we can handle that easily enough, provided the people will use the Public Teeth in sufficiently large numbers to bring in dividends. Anyhow, we have gone in for it, and I see no reason why it should not work as well as any other Municipal Ownership scheme."

"I should love to go and see your city," said Alice, who, though not quite convinced as to the desirability of the Municipal Ownership of Teeth, was nevertheless very much interested.

"Very well," said the Hatter. "We can go at once, for I see the train is already standing in the Station."

"The Station?" cried Alice. "What Station?"

But before the Hatter could answer, Alice, glancing through the window, caught sight of a very beautiful train standing before the veranda, and in a moment she found herself stepping on board with her friends, while a soft-spoken guard at the door was handing her an engraved card upon a silver salver "Respectfully Inviting Miss Alice to Step Lively There."

CHAPTER II

THE IMMOVABLE TROLLEY

"What an extraordinary car," said Alice, as she stepped into the brilliantly lighted vehicle. "It doesn't seem to have any end to it," she added as she passed down the aisle, looking for the front platform.

"It hasn't," said the Hatter. "It just runs on forever."

"Doesn't it stop anywhere?" cried Alice in amazement.

"It stops everywhere," said the Hatter. "What I mean is it hasn't any ends at all. It's just one big circular car that runs all around the city and joins itself where it began in the beginning. We call it the M. O. Express, M. O. standing for Municipal Ownership – "

"And Money Owed," laughed a Weasel that sat on the other side of the car.

"Put that fellow off," said the March Hare indignantly. "Conductor – out with him."

The Conductor immediately threw the Weasel out of the window, as ordered, and the Hatter resumed.

"We call it the express because it is so fast," he continued.

"You'd hardly think it was going at all," observed Alice, as she noticed the entire lack of motion in the car.

"It isn't," said the Hatter. "It's built on a solid foundation and doesn't move an inch, and yet at the same time it runs all around the city. It was my idea," he added proudly.

"But you said it was fast," protested Alice.

"And so it is, my child," said the Hatter kindly. "It's as fast as though it was glued down with mucilage. There's several ways of being fast, you know. Did you ever hear of the Ballade of the *Nancy P. D. Q.*?"

"No," said Alice.

"It's a Sea Song in B flat," said the Hatter. "I will sing it for you."

And placing his hat before his lips to give a greater mellowness to his voice, the Hatter sang:

THE BALLADE OF THE *NANCY P. D. Q.*

O the good ship *Nancy P. D. Q.*
From up in Boston, Mass.,
Went sailing o'er the bounding blue
Cargoed with apple sass.

She sailed around Ogunkit Bay
Down past the Banks of Quogue,
And on a brilliant summer's day,
Just off the coast of Mandelay,
She landed in a fog.

So brace the topsails close, my lads,
And stow your grog, my crew,
For the waves are steep and the fog is deep
Round the *Nancy P. D. Q.*

As in the fog she groped around —
The night was black as soot —
She ran against Long Island Sound,
Out where the codfish toot.
And when the moon rose o'er the scene
So smiling, sweet and bland,
She poked her nose so sharp and keen —
'Twas freshly painted olive green —
Deep in a bar of sand.

So splice the garboard strakes, my lads,
And reef the starboard screw —
For it sticks like tar, that sandy bar,
To the *Nancy P. D. Q.*

O the Skipper swore with a "Yeave-ho-ho!"
And the crew replied "Hi-hi!"
And then, with a cheerful "Heave-ho-yo,"
They pumped the bowsprit dry.
"Three cheers!" the Mate cried with a sneeze
"Hurrah for this old boat!"
She sails two knots before the breeze,
But on the bar, by Jingo, she's
The fastest thing afloat!"

So up with the gallant flag, my lads,
With a hip-hip-hip-hooroo,
For the liner fast is now outclassed
By the *Nancy P. D. Q.*

Alice scratched her chin in perplexity, but the Hatter never stopped.

"I got an idea from that ballad," he rattled on. "If you want trains fast you've got to build 'em fast."

"Yes, but if they don't go – how does anybody get anywhere?" asked Alice.

"They can get off and walk," said the Hatter. "And it's a great deal less dangerous getting off a train that doesn't move than off one that does."

"I can see that," said Alice. "That weasel, for instance, would have been badly hurt if he had been thrown through the window of a moving car."

"That's it exactly," said the Hatter. "As Alderman March Hare puts it, we M. O. people are after the comfort and safety of the people first, last and all the time. Everything else is a tertiary consideration merely."

"What's tertiary?" asked Alice.

"Third," said the Hatter. "To come in third. It's a combination of turtle and dromedary."

Just at this moment a man walking through the car stopped and requested the Hatter to crack a filbert for him, which the Hatter cheerfully did. The passer-by thanked him and paid him a cent, which the Hatter immediately rang up on a small cash register on his vest, as required by the laws of Blunderland.

"That's the way the Municipal Ownership of Teeth works," said the Hatter as the man passed on, and then he resumed. "This street railway business, however, was a much harder proposition

than the Municipal Ownership of Teeth. When we took the railways over of course we had to run 'em on the old system until we'd learned the business. The first thing we did was to get educated men for Motormen and Conductors – polite fellows, you know, who'd stop a car when you asked 'em to, and when they started wouldn't do it with such a jerk that in nine cases out of ten it was only the back door that kept the car from being yanked clean from under your feet, letting you land in the street behind."

"I know," said Alice. "Like a game of snap the whip."

"Exactly," said the Hatter. "Under the old method of starting a car you never knew, when you were going home nights, whether you'd land in the bosom of your family or in a basket of eggs somebody was bringing home from market. So we advertised for polite motormen and conductors, and we got a great lot of them, mostly retired druggists, floor-walkers, poets and fellows like that, with a few ex-politicians thrown in to give tone to the service, and we put them on, but they didn't know anything about motoring, unfortunately. Somehow or other good manners and expert motoring didn't seem to go together, and in consequence we had a fearful lot of collisions at first. I don't think there was a whole back platform in the outfit at the end of the week, no matter which way the car was going."

"Must have been awful," said Alice.

"It was," said the Hatter, "and the public began to complain. One man who got his nose pinched between two cars sued us for damages and we had to return his fare. Finally one day one of the old bobtail cars got running away, and the first we knew it banged into the car ahead and went right through it, coming out in front still going like mad after the next car, and we knew something had to be done."

"Mercy!" cried Alice. "I should think the passengers in the first car would have sued you for that."

"They would have," said the Hatter, "if they could have scraped enough of themselves together again to appear in court."

"It was a hard problem," said the March Hare.

"The hardest ever," asserted the Hatter. "But the White Knight there gave me a clue to the solution – he's our Copperation Council – and I put it up to him for an opinion, and after thinking it over for two months he reported. The only way to prevent collisions, said he, is to cut the ends off the cars. That was it, wasn't it, Judge?" he added, turning to the White Knight.

"Yes," said the Knight, "only I put it in poetry. My precise words were

"The only way that I can find
To stop this car colliding stunt
Is cutting off the end behind
And likewise that in front."

"Splendid!" cried Alice, clapping her hands in glee. "That's fine."

"Thank you," said the White Knight. "You see, Miss Alice, I made a personal study of collisions. The Mayor here ordered a fresh one every day for me to investigate, and I noticed that whenever two cars bunked into each other it was always at the ends and never in the middle. The conclusion was inevitable. The ends being the venerable spot, abolish them."

"A very careful and conscientious public servant," whispered the March Hare aside to Alice. "When we have Municipal Ownership of the Federal Government we're going to put him on the Supreme Court Bench. He means vulnerable when he says venerable, but you mustn't mind that. When we have Municipal Ownership of the English Language we'll make the words mean what we want 'em to."

"Then of course the question arose as to how we could do this," said the Hatter. "I got the Chief Engineer of our Department of Public Works to make some experiments, and would you believe it, when we cut the ends on the cars, there were still other ends left? No matter how far we clipped 'em, it was the same. It's a curious scientific fact that you can't cut off the end of anything and leave it endless. We tried it with a lot of things – cars, lengths of hose, coils of wire, rope – everything we could think of – always with the same result. Ends were endless, but nothing else was. As a matter of fact they multiplied on us. One car that had two ends when we began was cut in the middle, and then was found to have four ends instead of two."

"That's so, isn't it!" cried Alice.

"It unquestionably is," said the Hatter, "and we were at our wits' ends until one night it came to me like a flash. I had gone to bed on a Park Bench, according to my custom of using nothing that is not owned by the city, for I am very serious about this thing, when just as I was dozing on the whole scheme unfolded itself. Build a circular car, of course. One big enough to go all around the city. That would solve so many problems. With only one car, there'd be no car ahead, which always irritates people who miss it and then have to take it later. With only one car, there could be no collisions. With only one car we could get along with only one motorman and one conductor at a time, thus giving the others time to go to dancing school and learn good manners. With only one car, and that a permanent fixture, nobody could miss it. If it didn't move we could economise on motive power, and even bounce the motorman without injury to the service, if he should happen to be impudent to the Board of Aldermen; nobody would be run over by it; nobody would be injured getting on and off; it wouldn't make any difference if the motorman didn't see the passenger who wanted to get aboard. Being circular there'd always be room enough to go around, and there'd be no front or back platform for the people to stand on or get thrown off of going round the curves. The expenses of keeping up the roadbed would be nothing, because, being motionless, the car wouldn't jolt even if it ran over a thank-you-marm a mile high, and best of all, a circular car has no ends to collide with other ends, which makes it absolutely safe. I never heard of a car colliding with itself, did you?"

"No, I never did," replied Alice.

"Nor I neither," said the March Hare. "I don't think it ever happened, and therefore I reason that it ain't going to happen."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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